

The Intercessional Role of Music Among the Kalanga and Nyai- Shona People

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Abstract

This paper explores the intercessional role of music among the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona people found in Botswana and Zimbabwe, respectively. The main aim of the research was to examine how the Kalanga of Botswana and the Nyai-Shona people of Zimbabwe intercede for rain. The paper analyses the lyrics of “Mvura Ngainaye” by Thomas Mapfumo, a Zimbabwean Shona musician, and “Phondanyama” by Ndingo Johwa, a Motswana Kalanga musician based in Botswana. We argue that the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona are the same people, even though they reside in different countries and speak related language varieties. The two selected songs are the connecting thread for our argument. Anchored on the Afrocentricity theory, the study employed an emic-ethnographic approach and a qualitative research design. The two musicians and the two songs analysed in the study were purposively sampled. Data were mainly collected through the analysis of the lyrics of the two pieces. Additional information was sourced through interviews with Ndingo Johwa, since he sings in Kalanga, a language which is not spoken by the current researchers. The lyrics of the two songs were subjected to critical discourse analysis. Leitmotifs were identified and data categorised according to the identified leitmotifs. Findings reveal that musical practices serve as a medium for communication with the divine and offer a means of expressing individual and collective identity among the Kalanga and the Nyai-Shona people. There are several similarities in the way the Kalanga and the Nyai-Shona intercede for rain. For instance, they both make direct appeals to Mwari/Mngwali and intercede for rain through spirit mediums and ancestral spirits. These similarities, among others, seem to point to a common cultural origin. This study contributes to the literature on the role of music in society as well as the fields of musicology, anthropology and decolonial studies, among other benefits.

Keywords: intercessional role, music, music practices, Kalanga, Nyai- Shona, communication, collective identity

Introduction

Music permeates various aspects of the lives of Africans. For instance, recreational periods, suffering moments, happy ones like the birth of a child, initiation ceremonies, hunting, war, and prayer, are punctuated with music (Finnegan, 2012; Mbaegbu, 2015). According to Mbaegbu (2015, p. 177), “African music is one of the cultural characteristics that make the African who he is as a distinct cultural being in the world, for it binds Africans together and gives them common characteristics”.

This research paper examines the intercessional role of music among the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona people found in Botswana and Zimbabwe, respectively. It examines how musical practices serve as a medium for communication with the divine and offer a means of expressing individual and collective identity. The focus is on the lyrical content of two songs, namely, “Mvura Ngainaye” by Thomas Mapfumo, and “Phondanyama” by Ndingo Johwa. Thomas Mapfumo is a Zimbabwean Shona musician, while Ndingo Johwa is a Motswana Kalanga musician based in Botswana. We compare and contrast the two songs in order to establish whether there is a common cultural thread. We argue that the Kalanga in Botswana and the Nyai-Shona in Zimbabwe are the same people, even though they reside in different countries. This separation is a result of the creation of arbitrary boundaries by the colonialists. The two selected songs, which were sung by two different musicians from two different countries, are the connecting thread for our argument as both musicians are interceding for rain. Our argument is further strengthened by Ndingo Johwa’s other song, “Makamu”. In that song, Ndingo Johwa explicitly states “*Bamwe bedu vagele kuZimbabwe*” (Our compatriots reside in Zimbabwe). The similarity between the Kalanga in Botswana and the Nyai-Shona in Zimbabwe is also reflected in common place names. For example, there is Domboshaba Culture Centre in Botswana and a place called Domboshava, north of the capital Harare, in Zimbabwe.

Research gap

The surveyed literature shows that there is hardly any comparative literature that focuses specifically on the role of music in interceding for rain in times of drought in the two countries. There is therefore, a need for a study such as the current one which focuses on the intercessional role of music among the Kalanga of Botswana and the Nyai-Shona of Zimbabwe. This study is unique in that it compares two musicians from two different countries who sing in different but related indigenous languages.

Justification of the study

This study on the intercessional role of music among the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona people holds significant potential for enhancing cultural understanding and fostering social cohesion. In addition, music is a vital element of African cultural identity. It serves as a medium of storytelling, preservation of history and cultural expression. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution in terms of documenting and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, the study makes a modest contribution to the ongoing conversations among scholars on the role of music in society as well as the fields of musicology, anthropology and decolonial studies. Finally, global audiences can gain a deeper appreciation of African music, thus fostering greater cultural awareness and connection.

Background

The Role of Music in African Societies

Music is an African socio-political and economic tool to support or resist the status quo. The importance of music in the black African's life is emphasized by Finnegan (2012) who stresses that the Igbo sing in different contexts that include fighting, work, love, harvest and hunting expeditions, among other things. Music is therefore an Indigenous Way of Doing (IWD) things when Africans relate to both pleasant and unpleasant contexts in their everyday economic, social and political life.

Idolor (2002) cited in Mazrui (2018), postulates that 'No phenomenon of utility survives in a society; an indication that the presence of music in almost every African society has a formidable role to play.' This demonstrates that human beings, from time immemorial, used music to satisfy societal needs in different circumstances.

It is against this background that this paper examines Ndingo Johwa's "Phondanyama" and Thomas Mapfumo's 'Mvura Ngainaye' in their independent responses to adverse climatic conditions. Both artists rewrite history, by retelling audiences the musical sacred narratives to Thobela/Tovera through renowned spirit mediums, who are strongly revered to this day. This paper contends that, although music is the composer's story about his feelings and emotions, it does not express his or her worldview alone (Goldman, 2013). Through music, the inquisitive minds can discern a people's culture, views, values, beliefs and the society at large. Music therefore, helps to read beyond the surface of what is obtaining in a society. Like human stories, music and the related arts are found implicated in these stories. The two artists' songs are a rediscovery and reminder of the journey of the traditional coded lessons of communicative acts with the living Mwari/Mngwali in order to sustain livelihoods. The terms Mwari and Mngwali are used interchangeably throughout the paper as the equivalent of God.

Brief Historical Background of the Nyai-Shona and Kalanga people

It is pertinent to give a brief historical background of the Nyai-Shona and Kalanga people since they are the main subjects of this study. This backdrop is critical for understanding how the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona people request for rain through song.

The Shona people are the largest ethnolinguistic group in Zimbabwe (Owomoyela, 2002). They are comprised of various subgroups which include the Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika and Korekore. The Nyai-Shona people are predominantly found in Zimbabwe and in parts of Mozambique. According to Owomoyela (2002, p. 10), the Shona "believe in one creator, Mwari, and hold the propitiation of ancestors crucial since their involvement in human affairs is intimate and such things as rainfall and the health and prosperity of the living depend on their good humor".

The term "Nyai", which refers to the Shona, was deliberately chosen because it is the original name of the Shona people. The term was used by Solomon Mutswairo to

refer to the Shona people in his novel *Feso*, which was first published in 1956 (Mutswairo, 1980). *Feso* is an allegorical critique of colonialism and was the first novel to be written in Shona (Mandova & Wasosa, 2012). In a poem titled “Nehanda Nyakasikana” in the novel *Feso*, Mutswairo writes:

Nehanda Nyakasikana! Kunozove rinhiko
Isu VaNyai tichitambudzika?
Mweya unoera kunozove rinhiko
Isu VaNyai tichidzvinyirirwa?
(Mutswairo, 1980, p.43).

([Nehanda Nyakasikana how long will it take
While we the VaNyai are suffering?
Sacred spirit how long will it take
While we the VaNyai are under oppression?])

In the poem Mutswairo appeals to Nehanda, to deliver them from colonial oppression. Nehanda was a legendary woman whose spirit inspired Africans to fight against the white settlers during the First Chimurenga of 1896/97 in the present-day Zimbabwe (Mandova & Wasosa, 2012). Mutswairo acknowledges the role of traditional religion in the political struggle of the Nyai-Shona people.

The term “Shona” was coined by colonialists and entrenched by Clement Doke, a Bantu languages expert at the University of the Witwatersrand who was tasked to unify the Nyai dialects.

According to Dube (2020) and Matiza and Dube (2020), the Kalanga are an ethnic group mainly located in south western Zimbabwe, mostly in Bulilima and Mangwe districts of Matabeleland. The Kalanga are also found in modern Botswana. The main focus of this paper is on the Kalanga residing in Botswana.

Dube (2020) posits that the origins of the Kalanga can be traced back to the Kingdom of Mapungubwe and the Leopard’s Kopje culture, which significantly influenced their identity. The Kingdom of Mapungubwe (1075-1220CE) is considered to be a precursor to the Kalanga identity. The Kalanga occupied parts of modern-day Zimbabwe and Botswana around 1000CE (Dube, 2020).

According to Dube (2020) and Matiza and Dube (2020) Chief Chibundule, also known as Hamuyenanzwa, is recognized as the first notable Kalanga chief, and his reign marked the establishment of Kalanga identity. Hamuyenanzwa ruled in 1441 and became known as Nkalanga. The name “Kalanga” emerged during his reign. Prior to that, the term “Kalanga” was non-existent. Chibundule’s descendants played significant roles in Kalanga leadership and identity. The Kalanga however, experienced fragmentation due to civil wars and migrations in the 17th century (Dube, 2020; Matiza & Dube, 2020).

The Kalanga society was characterised by fluidity and assimilation of various groups, including the Venda and Rozvi, which contributed to the complexity of their identity. The Kalanga identity is thus marked by a blend of various cultural influences (Dube, 2020; Matiza & Dube, 2020).

Dube (2020) and Matiza and Dube (2020) assert that religion, particularly the Mwali cult, has played a crucial role in defining Kalanga identity and belonging. The cult's shrines and practices are integral to the cultural and spiritual life of the Kalanga people. Key shrines include Njelele, Dula, and Wililani. Similarly, religion has played a crucial role in defining Nyai-Shona identity and belonging. The Nyai-Shona, like the Kalanga, also worship Mwari.

According to Dube (2020) the Ndebele conquest in the 19th century significantly impacted the Kalanga, leading to cultural exchanges and changes in social structure. The Kalanga were incorporated into the Ndebele state which altered their traditional identities. For instance, there were changes in totems and clan identities as a result of the cultural exchanges that occurred. This seems to explain why the Zimbabwean Kalanga identify more with Ndebele than Shona to this day.

Brief biographical background of the selected musicians

Who is Ndingo Johwa?

In this section we had to rely on grey literature to find information on Ndingo Johwa's biography due to unavailability of published scholarly works on this musician. According to Grokipedia (2026), Ndingo Johwa, also known as Satjilombe, is a celebrated Motswana Kalanga musician, born on 4 April 1950 in Ramokgwebana Village which is located in the North-East District of Botswana. Ramokgwebana Village is close to the eastern border with Zimbabwe and is defined by the Ramokgwebana River. On the other side of the border crossing, is the Zimbabwean town of Plumtree.

Ndingo Johwa developed an interest in music from a young age. He started off by singing in church choirs as a baritone. He then taught himself to play guitar using an instrument made from old tin cans. He sang and played the guitar in the Francistown Baptist Church but as time went by, he discovered himself and decided to sing his own songs using his mother tongue, Kalanga. He has since established a new music genre that he has dubbed "Ikajazz", from the word "Ikalanga jazz" (Grokipedia, 2026).

His career took off when he released his debut folk album called "Phondanyama" which is the subject of this article. From there he went on to release eight more albums. He has established himself as a household name in Botswana and the wider Southern African region as evidenced by his participation at various national and international festivals including Domboshaba Culture Festival in Botswana, Grahamstown Arts Festival South Africa, Kumbule Khaya South Africa, Leswingo and Dzimbabwe Arts Festival, Masvingo in Zimbabwe, and Son of the Soil Arts Festival in Botswana (Grokipedia, 2026).

Who is Thomas Mapfumo?

Thomas Mapfumo, is a Zimbabwean musician who was born in 1945 in Marondera, a town in the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) (Eyre, 2015). He started his musical career at the age of 16 in Salisbury (now Harare) with a band called the Cyclones. He later went on to join other bands such as Springfields and the Cosmic Dots. During the early years of his career, Thomas Mapfumo mainly sang cover versions of Elvis Presley and Otis Redding tunes which were obviously in English. However, during the early 1970s, when many black Zimbabweans were beginning to resist white minority rule, Mapfumo began to write his songs and sing in his mother tongue, Shona (Eyre, 2015).

By shifting to composing and singing in Shona, Mapfumo was in fact effecting a revolution in popular music. He dubbed the music “Chimurenga”, which is the Shona word for “struggle”. Mapfumo used his music as a vehicle to carry thinly disguised political messages. Consequently, this brought him into conflict with the white minority Rhodesian government. His music was seen as a threat and was banned from state-controlled radio stations. In late 1977, at the height of the second Chimurenga war in Zimbabwe, Mapfumo was imprisoned for days in an attempt to silence him, but he never relented (Eyre, 2015).

Even after independence in 1980, Mapfumo’s music still maintained a socio-political edge. Consequently, he found himself in constant conflict with the government of independent Zimbabwe. This political friction eventually led him to go into exile in the United States of America in 2000, where he still lives to this day.

Statement of the problem

The Kalanga and the Nyai-Shona share a common cultural heritage, but have been separated by arbitrary colonial boundaries, leading to a lack of understanding and recognition of their shared identity and cultural practices. Specifically, the problem is that the intercessional role of music, which is a crucial aspect of Kalanga and Nyai-Shona culture, has not been adequately explored as a means of communication with the divine and expression of collective identity. This lack of understanding has resulted in a disconnect between the two groups, despite their shared history, language, and cultural practices.

Research questions

The research paper was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona intercede for rain?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the way the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona intercede for rain at least as reflected in the songs of the two musicians that are under focus?

Theoretical Framework

Overview of Decolonial Theory

The intercessional role of music is viewed through the lens of decolonial theory. The basic tenet of decolonial theory is that it is important to understand history from multiple perspectives, particularly those of indigenous and colonized people. The theory advocates for the recognition of different knowledge systems. It argues that Western knowledge, more often than not, has dismissed or suppressed other ways of knowing.

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015), Decoloniality is both a political and epistemological movement which is aimed at liberating former colonised people from the ongoing influence of global coloniality. It is a way of thinking, knowing, and doing which challenges the dominance of Europe and North America.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) further distinguishes between coloniality and colonialism. Colonialism refers to the historical period of direct political and economic domination by the colonial powers while coloniality refers to the enduring patterns of power, knowledge, and being that persist even after the end of colonialism. Coloniality perpetuates domination and exploitation under the guise of progress and civilization (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) there are three main concepts of Decoloniality. The first concept is coloniality of power which analyses how global power structures remain racially, culturally, and economically hierarchized, dividing the world into zones of the privileged and the marginalised. The second concept is termed coloniality of knowledge. This examines how Western knowledge systems have marginalised indigenous and endogenous knowledges, pushing them to the periphery. The third and final concept is coloniality of being, which investigates how colonialism dehumanized colonised peoples, questioning their humanity and subjectivity, and how the struggle continues to reclaim dignity and selfhood (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Afrocentricity and Indigenous Agency

According to Jackson (2010) and Adotayo (2021), the theory of Afrocentricity was developed by Molefi Asante. Jackson (2010, p. 12) defines Afrocentricity as “the critical analysis and interpretation of culture, economy, history, language, philosophy, politics, and society from a conceptual, methodological, and theoretical framework that centres Africa and privileges the agency of Africans and persons of African descent”. The theory is a critical response to the production and reproduction of knowledge that privileges the peoples, cultures, thoughts and experiences of Europe (Jackson, 2010; Adetayo, 2021).

The reason for the development of Afrocentricity as a theory can be traced back to the history of slavery in the Americas where Europeans marginalized and negated the agency of Africans and the histories of Africa (Jackson, 2010; Adetayo, 2021). Slave masters “invalidated and deemed illegitimate the cultures, histories, and thoughts of

Africa...” (Jackson, 2010, p. 12). The first step in this process was the removal of the Africans from the African continent, which was their physical centre, and relocated to various parts of the Americas where the process of dislocation and decentering continued. Africans were introduced to and forced to accept a new centre. African names, for instance, were replaced with European ones, while African spiritual practices and beliefs were dislocated. African languages were deemed inferior to those of the European colonizers and enslavers (Jackson, 2010). This whole process was repeated on the African continent under colonialism. Adetayo (2021, p. 80) therefore, asserts that “Afrocentricity calls for the reengagement and reassessment of information and knowledge production while taking into cognisance the inputs and perspectives of the black people.”

Afrocentricity and Indigenous Agency are interrelated frameworks which focus on centering African and Indigenous perspectives, history, and values in order to counteract Eurocentric narratives and colonial marginalization (Adetayo, 2021). The two frameworks emphasise analysing African experiences through an African perspective and empowering indigenous people to act as active subjects, rather than passive objects of study.

Indigenous Agency is defined as the capacity of indigenous peoples to act on their own behalf, thus shaping their own history, culture, and knowledge systems, especially after many decades of colonial rule (Jackson, 2010; Adetayo, 2021). Indigenous Agency advocates for validating and utilizing indigenous knowledge systems, challenging the idea that academic knowledge must come from European traditions. Furthermore, it serves as a tool for intellectual, cultural and political liberation, enabling communities to challenge oppressive histories (Jackson, 2010; Adetayo, 2021).

Application to this study

The role of Afrocentricity as a theory for this research is to support the value of indigenous knowledge systems and indigenous agency in solving problems from an African cultural perspective. Afrocentricity identifies agency as an aspect of African people’s lived experiences. Each of the selected musicians prays so that the omnipresent Mwari/Mngwali provides rain to sustain livelihoods. The worshipping for the rains is all inclusive and intergenerational in order to benefit the present and future generations. Thus, Afrocentricity serves to reinforce the fact that black people have the capacity to handle their own affairs, being agents of social, environmental, political and economic change. Mapfumo and Johwa, though products of different colonial tapestries, become a voice of the people through indigenous worship systems in order to avert adverse climatic conditions affecting the co-existence of humanity and fauna and flora.

Literature Review

The role of music in various spheres of life has sparked significant scholarly interest in recent years (for example, Finnegan, 2012; Muwati, Charamba and Tembo, 2018;

Mbaegbu, 2015). This literature review is structured to reflect the key issues concerning the role of music in society in general and the intercessional role of music in particular. Through the review, the researchers aim to show the current state of knowledge in the field and identify the research gap to be filled. We will begin by discussing the mediating role of music in various contexts in society in general. Thereafter, we will examine some empirical studies that provide some valuable insights into the role of music in society in general, and the intercessional role in particular.

Role of Music in Emotional Expression, Healing, Social Cohesion and Spiritual Connection

Music has the capacity to act as a mediator or facilitator in various contexts including emotional expression, social cohesion and spiritual connection. This capacity of music to mediate or facilitate is what is referred to as the intercessional role of music. We now explore some key themes and findings in the intercessional role of music. We draw on studies from psychology, anthropology, sociology and musicology.

We start by looking at the role of music as an intercessor in emotional expression and healing. Music has been recognized for its therapeutic potential for quite some time now. Bradt and Dileo (2014) underline music's ability to evoke emotions and facilitate emotional processing. In hospital settings, music therapy is used to support mental health, by helping individuals to express feelings that they may find difficult to state verbally. Thoma et al. (2013) assert that listening to music is an effective way to reduce stress and anxiety, and thus highlighting the role of music as an intercessor in emotional healing.

Furthermore, we look at the intercessory role of music in social cohesion and community building. Music is a very powerful tool for promoting social cohesion. According to Hargreaves and North (1999), communal music-making, such as singing in choirs or participating at festivals, engenders feelings of belonging and identity. In community settings, the intercessional role of music is apparent in cultural rituals and celebrations. In this context, music acts as a unifying force, bridging generational and cultural divides.

Apart from its role in social cohesion, music also plays an intercessional role in spiritual connection and transcendence. The spiritual aspect of music is covered extensively in ethnomusicology. For instance, Titon (2009) discusses how music functions as a medium for transcending the mundane, facilitating connections to the divine or the sacred (Mwari/Mngwali). This role is evident in various forms. Through a close examination of the songs "Phondanyama" and "Mvura Ngainaye" we seek to show how the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona intercede for rain through music. In many religious traditions, music plays a role in worship, serving as an intercessor between the faithful and the divine (Finnegan, 2012).

Cross cultural perspectives

The intercessional role of music tends to vary across cultures, reflecting diverse values and practices (Finnegan, 2012). According to Nettl (2005), context is important in understanding music's role within different cultural frameworks. In many indigenous cultures, music plays an integral part in storytelling and the transmission of knowledge (Finnegan, 2012). In this regard, music acts as an intercessor between past and present. This showcases the adaptive nature of music as a mediator across different cultural landscapes.

Empirical Studies

Finnegan (2012) has done extensive work on the role of music in African societies. Of particular relevance to this paper, is what she refers to as religious and lyric (sung) poetry. We take the view that music is poetry. According to Finnegan (2012) there is a wide variety of religious poetry in Africa. She states that there are hymns, prayers, praises, possession, songs, and oracular poetry, all with their varying conventions, content, and function in different cultures (Finnegan, 2012).

These range from the simple songs of Senegalese women in spirit possession rituals or the mystical songs of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), to the specialized hymns of West African deities or Ifa oracular literature among the Yoruba of Southern Nigeria (Finnegan, 2012).

She also argues that we should take into account the prevalence in certain areas of the religious literature associated with the influence of the world religions in Africa. For instance, there is the Arabic-influenced poetry of the Swahili in East Africa and the Islam-influenced poetry of the Fulani or Hausa in the northern portions of West Africa.

Apart from Finnegan (2012), there are many other empirical studies on the role of music in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular. These empirical studies include Mbaegbu (2015), Guzura and Ndimande (2015), and Muwati, Charamba, and Tembo (2018).

Mbaegbu (2015) investigated the role of music in Africa. His study was motivated by the fact that "music plays an indispensable role in the being of Africans at work, in politics, in their socio-economic engagements, in religious worship, integral development, in their moral life" (p. 177). He categorizes African music into traditional, popular and classical, with each one serving distinct cultural functions. Traditional music expresses cultural identity and is often performed communally, while popular music appeals to mass audiences. Political music reflects contemporary issues and engages with social and political themes.

In his article, Mbaegbu (2015) arrives at three main conclusions. First, he concludes that there is a symbiotic relationship between African music and morality, each influencing and reinforcing the other. Second, African music retains its cultural significance and continues to inspire and educate, despite Western influences. Third,

he concludes that music is essential for the moral and social fabric of African societies, as it promotes values and community cohesion. While this study by Mbaegbu (2015) highlights three specific roles of music in African society, it does not focus on how Africans invoke rain through song. This is the research gap that this study intends to fill.

While Mbaegbu (2015) focuses on the role of music in Africa in general, Guzura and Ndimande (2015) specifically focus on the political role of music in Zimbabwe. Their article explores how music has been used by politicians to disseminate political messages to the masses. Furthermore, it explores how popular musicians, and of late, youthful ones, have been deployed to spread the ideology of the ruling elite. The article also examines how music has been employed as an alternative to challenge the political ideology of the ruling class through critiquing the prevailing political dispensation. Guzura and Ndimande (2015) conclude that music can be used to prop the regime or subvert the status quo and reveal an alternative to the government in power. While Guzura and Ndimande's (2015) paper focuses on the political role of music, the present article, however, focuses on how music is used to intercede for rain especially in a period of drought.

Similarly, the study by Muwati, Charamba and Tembo (2018), also focuses on the role of music in politics. The three authors edited a book dedicated to the role of music in Zimbabwe in the period between 2000 and 2010. The book is appropriately titled, *Singing Nation and Politics: Music and the 'decade of crisis' in Zimbabwe 200-2010*, reflecting the close relationship between music and politics. The period spanning the years 2000 to 2010 in Zimbabwe has come to be known as the "decade of crisis" as it was characterised by unprecedented socio-economic decline and political turmoil. This unprecedented crisis became a fertile spawning ground for "cultural products of the nation, especially music" (Muwati, 2018, p. xv).

Muwati (2018, p. xvi) summarises the contents of *Singing Nation and Politics* in lyrical prose as follows:

The chapters in this book seamlessly concatenate to articulate a riveting story of the painstaking journey of 'becoming Zimbabwe'. This text vivaciously rallies intellectual memory, remembering the horrors of the decade of crisis, pinpointing contestations and overlapping points of view, but, above all, epigrammatically positing music as a veritable stakeholder in the political dynamics of the nation.

The themes tackled in the book include the prevalence of corruption among the elite, the land issue, protest and subversion, music as a tool for mass mobilisation and conscientisation, and the impact of the Zimbabwe crisis on people's cultural values, among many others. Once again, though related to the current article, this study does not specifically focus on intercession for rain, hence the need for the current study. Drawing on the methodological and analytical insights from the cited studies, we analyse how the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona evoke rain through music.

Gaps in the Literature

The surveyed literature shows that the intercessional role of music, which is a crucial aspect of Kalanga and Nyai-Shona culture, has not been adequately explored as a means of communication with the divine to bring rain and as an expression of collective identity. There is, therefore, a need for a study such as the current one, which focuses on the intercessional role of music among the Kalanga of Botswana and the Nyai-Shona of Zimbabwe to fill the gap. Having given a brief survey of the available literature, and identified the research gap, we now move on to the research methodology in the next section.

Research Methodology

Research approach

The intercessional role of music is looked at from an emic-ethnographic perspective. There are three basic tenets of the emic approach. First and foremost, it emphasizes internal understanding. The emic approach aims to understand how people within a particular culture make sense of their own world and behaviours. It seeks to unravel the internal logic and meaning creation processes of the culture. The current researchers are both Shona speakers trying to uncover from within how the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona people intercede for rain. The researchers are writing from within the society they are studying as members of that society.

In addition, the emic-ethnographic approach places importance on respect for cultural meaning. This means that it recognizes that cultures are different and therefore, have their own unique ways of viewing and interpreting the world, and that these interpretations are important to understand. The cultural context is therefore, highly respected and the imposition of external interpretations or biases is avoided.

Furthermore, the emic approach often relies on qualitative research methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups in order to obtain a deep and nuanced understanding of the culture from inside. For the purposes of the current study, interviews were held with Johwa in order to obtain a deeper and nuanced understanding of the lyrical content of the song “Phondanyama” since the lyrics are in Kalanga, a language which is not spoken by any of the current researchers, but which they can understand on further and deeper reflection. The interview technique and the qualitative research design used, align with the emic- ethnographic approach adopted for the study.

Research design

A qualitative research design was used for this research. This design was found to be appropriate for this research since it permits in-depth, nuanced insights into social phenomena by focusing on open-ended, contextual over numerical data (Creswell, 2014). In addition, findings are often based on the direct experiences and words of participants, ensuring high validity in exploring complex human experiences (Creswell,

2014). In this instance, the focus is on the words (lyrics) and experiences of the two selected musicians. Besides ensuring high validity, qualitative research also does not require large, statistically significant samples, making it particularly suitable for this study where we are looking at only two musicians and two songs (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research is also an excellent tool for developing new hypotheses and theories that can later be tested quantitatively (Creswell, 2014).

Data sources

The lyrics of the two songs, “Phondanyama” and “Mvura Ngainaye” were our primary data sources. Primary data were preferred for this research since they provide first hand, untarnished evidence directly from the source, thus ensuring authenticity, credibility, and originality in the study. A further advantage of primary data is that researchers interpret data themselves rather than rely on interpretations given by other scholars (Ajayi, 2023). Additional information was sourced from Ndingo Johwa since he sings in Kalanga, a language which is not spoken by the researchers. His input was required to enable the researchers to fully understand the cultural significance of his song “Phondanyama”.

Sampling Methods

The two musicians who are the focus of this study were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling, also known as judgemental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling which is defined as “the intentional selection of specific units (such as individuals, cases or events) based on their relevance to the research question” (Tajik, Golzar & Noor, 2024, p. 1). Both Ndingo Johwa (from Botswana) and Thomas Mapfumo (from Zimbabwe) are music and cultural icons in their respective countries. They are both great advocates for African culture and sing about cultural issues using their indigenous languages. They are, therefore, worthy of this scholarly attention. The two songs that are analysed in this study were also purposively sampled. The two songs focus on intercession for rainfall and were therefore, found to be most suitable for this study.

Purposive sampling was found suitable for this study because it offers a number of advantages, including the following. Firstly, purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who possess specific experiences or knowledge, ensuring the data collected are highly relevant to the study’s objectives. Secondly, it reduces the time and resources needed for sampling by narrowing the scope, making it ideal for small-scale, focused studies such as the current one. Thirdly, purposive sampling facilitates in-depth understanding of complex, nuanced, or specialised issues, producing rich, detailed data (Tajik, Golzar & Noor, 2024).

Data Collection Methods

Data were mainly collected through the analysis of documents (lyrics of the two selected songs, “Phondanyama” and “Mvura ngainaye”) as well as the extant literature. Data for the study were also partly collected through WhatsApp interviews

with Ndingo Johwa. The researchers first requested Ndingo Johwa to transcribe the lyrics of “Phondanyama”. The next step involved asking him to explain specific words and phrases that we could not understand on our own since we do not speak Kalanga. Such words and phrases included the title of the song “Phondanyama” (to kill by strangulation or twisting the neck), and “*Bakulukugwi Maka leba ino lilala ntondonto lindzo ndiho ntukunu*” (Our ancestors had a saying, the bird that used to cry/call now rarely calls/cries because of the drought), among others. His explanations helped the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the lyrics and the cultural significance of the song. The researchers did not need to do the same with Thomas Mapfumo’s song, “Mvura Ngainaye” since they speak and fully understand the Shona language.

Analytical Approach

The lyrics of the two songs, “Phondanyama” and “Mvura Ngainaye”, were first transcribed from audio format to text since written text is easier to work with. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyse the lyrical content of the two songs. The method involved the two researchers independently reading the lyrics of Mapfumo and Ndingo Johwa’s two musical pieces under study. A roundtable discussion that picked on the surface and hidden musical connotations then followed. Common leitmotifs were identified and information was categorised and discussed under those leitmotifs.

Analysis of “Phondanyama” and “Mvura Ngainaye”

A close analysis of the two songs reveals that there are a number of similarities in the way the two musicians use music to intercede for rain, thereby supporting our core argument that the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona are one and the same people with a shared history and culture.

Direct Appeal to Mwari/ Mngwali

Firstly, the two musicians acknowledge that the nation is at the mercy of the Supreme Being (Mwari/ Mngwali) and people have to ask for rain as it does not come naturally. This worldview is captured in the Shona proverb, “*Hapana chinouya chega urere*” (Nothing will come to you while you are sleeping; you have to work for it). Thus Ndingo Johwa sings:

*Bakalanga wee yendani
Ka Mngwali muno kumbila vula eine.
Bonani bana be yu bano lala baka sunga mabula.
Bonani mitjalo ye shango yaka Kuba bo.*

(Bakalanga go to Mngwali to ask for rain to fall
Look, the children sleep with a cloth tied round the stomach
Look, there are no fruits in the wild).

Ndingo Johwa exhorts Bakalanga to go to Mngwali directly and ask for rain. The fact that the children now sleep with a cloth tied round the stomach appears to be a reference to a practice where, in times of hunger, people who have not eaten any food, literally tie a cloth around the stomach so that they do not feel the hunger. Growing up in Shona society, this is something we saw usually done by the mothers in times of extreme drought. They would give the little food that was available to the children and then tie a cloth around their (mother's) stomach and go to sleep. Such is the love of a mother. To compound the situation, even the wild fruits which would sustain people in times of hunger are no longer available or out of season.

Similarly, Thomas Mapfumo sings:

Mvura ngainaye Mwariwo
Tiwane kuguta iye, iye
Mvura ngainaye Mwariwo
Tiwane kupona iyere
Mvura ngainaye Mambo woye
Tiwane kupona iyere
Mvura ngainaye Mwariwo
Tiwane kuguta iyere.

(Let it rain, oh God
So that we get enough food to eat
Let it rain, oh God
So that we can survive
Let it rain, Great one/King
So that we can survive
Let it rain, oh God
So that we get enough food to eat).

Mapfumo is making a direct appeal to Mwari/Mambo to bring rain so that people can have enough food to eat and survive. Without rain, people will perish. The lyrics are repeated for emphasis. Similarly, Ndingo Johwa makes a direct appeal to Mngwali in "Phondanyama."

The above finding aligns with the Indigenous Agency theory discussed under the theoretical framework which postulates that indigenous peoples have the capacity to act on their own behalf, thus shaping their own history, culture, and knowledge systems.

Intercession through Spirit Mediums

Secondly, both musicians intercede for rain through spirit mediums and ancestral spirits. They acknowledge the fact that you get your message to Mwari/Mngwali through intermediaries. This belief is encapsulated in the Shona proverb, "*Kukwira gomo hupoterera*" (When you climb a mountain you do not take a direct route straight

up the mountain; you have to go round in circles to reach the top. You negotiate the steep slope). A direct route would make the task very difficult, if not impossible. In real life, it means you do not normally address a senior person directly; you go through intermediaries. One has to follow a hierarchy. Mbiti (1985) cited in Mbaegbu (2015, p. 178) describes the hierarchy as follows:

God is the creator and hence the parent of mankind, and holds the highest position so that he is the final point of reference and appeal. Beneath him are the divinities and spirits, which are more powerful than man and some of which were founders of different societies. Next come the living dead... Among human beings the hierarchy includes kings, rulers and rain-makers.

Thus Thomas Mapfumo intercedes for rain through ancestral spirits Chaminuka, Kaguvi and Nehanda (Nyakasikana) as exemplified by the following two stanzas:

*Ikananaya tinopera iwe
Chaminuka woye, woye, woye
Ikananaya tinopera Mambo
Kaguvi woye, woye, woye
Ikananaya tinopera iwe
Nehanda woye, woye, woye
Ikananaya tinopera iwe
Nyakasikana iwe woye, woye, woye*

(If it does not rain, we will perish
Oh, Chaminuka
If it does not rain, we will perish
Oh, Kaguvi
If it does not rain, we will perish
Oh, Nehanda
If it does not rain, we will perish
Oh, Nyakasikana).

If it does not rain, the flora and fauna, which is the source of sustenance, will not thrive, hence people will die of hunger. Once again the lyrics are repeated for emphasis. Mapfumo goes further:

*VaChaminuka taurai naMwari
Tiwanewo mvura woye, woye
VaNehanda taurai naMwari
Tiwanewo mvura woye, woye*

(Chaminuka, may you speak to the Almighty
So that we can get rain
Nehanda, may you speak Almighty
So that we can get rain).

In the above stanza, Mapfumo is directly invoking the Nyai-Shona ancestral spirits, Chaminuka and Nehanda to talk to Mwari so that they can get rain. Mapfumo is clearly following the hierarchy as suggested by Mbiti (1985). One has to go through the ancestral spirits to take the message to Mwari. This aligns with Owomoyela's (2002, p. 10) assertion that the Shona "hold the propitiation of ancestors crucial, since their involvement in human affairs is intimate, and such things as rainfall and the health and prosperity of the living depend on their good humor".

It is pertinent to give some background information on Chaminuka, Kaguvi and Nehanda Nyakasikana. According to Asante and Mazama (n.d.), Chaminuka is an ancestor of the Shona people, who include VaZezuru, VaKaranga, VaManyika, VaNdau, VaKorekore, BaNambiya, BaVenda, and BaKalanga. These are dialect groups of the Shona as a family. The original Chaminuka belongs to the lineage of Tovera, the earliest known ancestor of the Shona according to their history. Tovera's son, Mambiri, is the father of Murenga Sororenzou, the founder-architect of Zimbabwe. Murenga's children include Chaminuka, Nehanda, and Mushavatu. Mushavatu's descendants are the preferred mediums of Chaminuka.

The first medium of Chaminuka was Kachinda, but the most famous was Pasipamire. His fame was associated with miracles and as a great prophet, healer, and rain intercessor. His powers were especially manifest during the conflict with Lobengula, the Ndebele king at the time when Europeans were invading southern Africa from Natal, forcing Africans to migrate northward and come into conflict with one another (Asante & Mazama, n.d.).

Kaguvi was a medium (*svikiro*), a traditional leader in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, and a leader in the Shona uprising of 1896-1897. He co-ordinated with Nehanda to help in organising opposition to the colonial administration (Asante and Mazama, n.d.).

According to Asante and Mazama (n.d.), Nehanda was a female *mhondoro* (lion) spirit residing in Central and Northern Mashonaland of present day Zimbabwe. She only possessed women who were prominent in their community and who, acting as her medium, communicated Nehanda's messages to the living. A woman chosen by Nehanda to be her medium received the title Mbuya Nehanda and was never supposed to marry.

Like Thomas Mapfumo, Ndingo Johwa also intercedes for rain through ancestral spirits. The chorus of the song "Phondanyama" illustrates this point. It goes thus:

Muti to kumbila ku muli Thobela to kumbila ku muli pondanyama. (Go to Thobela and say we are asking for rain; we ask you, pondanyama, to bring rain).

This is an appeal to the ancestors to intercede for rain. In the interview with Ndingo Johwa, he explained that "Pondanyama simply means to kill by strangulation or twisting the neck of an animal". He says their ancestors practised a spiritual ceremony

(mazenge/shumba midzimu) to purify their tribes or to chase away misfortunes from various clans. This was also attached to their religion (“*ku namata Mngwali ku dombo*”, for example, *kumbila vula kuti inee*”) meaning, they would go and pray to Mngwali at the mountain (*ku dombo*) so that the rain would come. Their beliefs and cultural practices are clearly very similar to those of the Nyai-Shona, pointing to a common origin. In our interview with Johwa, he made the following comment: “Am surprised that Bakalanga in Zimbabwe are closer to Ndebele yet the dialect suggests the opposite.”

The appeal to “Thobela” is particularly interesting in so far as it shows the connection between Bakalanga in Botswana and the Nyai-Shona in Zimbabwe. We believe this is the same ancestor whom we refer to as “Tovera” in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe we actually sing a song about Tovera. The first few lines of the song go as follows:

Tovera mudzimu dzoka
Aaa ayiyee mudzimu dzoka
Wona vana vanochema ava
Aaa ayiyee mudzimu dzoka

(Ancestral spirit Tovera come back (to protect us/provide for us)
See the children are crying
Ancestral spirit Tovera come back).

The existence of Thobela/Tovera in both Kalanga and Nyai-Shona tradition clearly points to a common origin of the two groups of people.

Interceding for significant others

Thirdly, both Johwa and Mapfumo ask for rain for everybody, not for themselves. The two songs’ intercessional approach to divinity is direct and simple, with the musical poetic effectiveness created through the use of simple everyday language. Mapfumo sings:

Tinokumbirawo mvura Mwari Baba (woye, woye)
Tinokumbirawo mvura Mwari Baba
Tiwane kuguta (woye, woye)
Tinokumbirawo mvura Mwari Baba
Tiwane kupona (woye, woye)
Tinokumbirawo mvura Mambo
Tiwane kuguta (woye, woye)
Tinokumbirawo mvura Mwari Baba
Tiwane kupona (woye, woye)

(We are asking for rain, oh God the Father
We are asking for rain, God the Father

So that we can get enough food to eat
We are asking for rain, God the Father
So that we may be saved from starvation
We are asking for rain, King
So that we can get enough food to eat
We are asking for rain, God the Father
So that we may be saved from starvation).

In the above stanza, the artist is clearly interceding for the whole community as evidenced by the use of the subjective “Ti-” (we). This aligns with the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* which is extensively discussed by Ramose (1999) cited in Dladla (2017). *Ubuntu* is Zulu or Nguni translation of a term which can be found amongst Bantu speaking peoples throughout Africa (Dladla, 2017). For instance, it is termed *Hunhu* in Shona, and *Botho* in Sesotho and Setswana (Dladla, 2017).

Ubuntu is a worldview centred on interconnectedness, community, and shared humanity. This worldview is best summarized by the Zulu phrase “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (a person is a person through other people). According to Nsengiyumva, Muhenda, Njuguna and Nyabul (2019), in traditional African society the individual was looked at as part and parcel of the community. His /her welfare was everyone’s concern. In other words, the individual existed because the community existed. In the words of Mbiti (1969) cited in Nsengiyumva, Muhenda, Njuguna and Nyabul (2019, p.16), “I am because we are, since we are therefore I am”. In African society, collective well-being takes priority over radical individualism. Sharing and helping one another are the way to live in the community (Nsengiyumva, Muhenda, Njuguna & Nyabul (2019). Therefore, the musicians ask for rain for the benefit of the whole community, and not just themselves.

Interceding on behalf of all creations

Ndingo Johwa goes a little bit further to show that the role of human beings is to intercede on behalf of all creations. Humanity and the physical environment are interconnected; they cannot exist alone. Johwa’s song sustains the argument that we are connected to nature. The following lines from the song “Phondanyama” illustrate this point:

Yendani ka manyangwa muno kumbila vula ine
Bonani bana be yu bano lala baka sunga mabula.
Bonani mitjalo ye shango yaka Kuba bo.
Bonani ngombe dza pela mpalo ne bhamba.

(Go to Manyanga and ask for the rain to come
Look, the children are sleeping hungry
Look, even the wild fruits are no longer available
Look, the cattle are dying of drought).

The artist is asking for rain so that the wild fruits and the cattle can thrive. When the wild fruits and cattle thrive, they provide food and sustenance for the people. Thus, humanity and nature are inter-connected. Johwa explains in the interview that Manyangwa is “the shrine where hosanna rain dancers assemble to pray for rain.” Manyangwa is also Mngwali’s prophet. Johwa goes further:

Bakulukugwi Maka leba ino lilala ntondontondo lindzo ndiho ntukunu.

Bonani bhamba la kula tjibi I vula.

(Our ancestors had a saying, the bird that used to cry/call now rarely calls/cries because of the drought).

In Shona it means “*shiri inochema asika kuchema kwayo kwave kushoma*”. This is a reference to the honey bird which cries to show you a bee hive or warns you of danger after spotting a huge snake while you are hunting. Growing up in Shona society, we were told that when the honey bird leads you to a bee hive, its expectation is that you take the honey and leave some for it to eat. This clearly demonstrates the co-existence of humanity and nature. In the song “Phondanyama”, Johwa seems to be suggesting that the drought is so severe that the bees are no longer even making honey (because there are no flowers and water), thus threatening the lives of people and the bird that needs honey for food. Consequently, the honey bird has gone silent. Johwa is using concrete imagery to paint a picture of the ravaging drought.

Mapfumo’s “Mvura Ngainaye” and Johwa’s “Phondanyama” are traditional African symbolisms that directly and indirectly plead to Mwari/Mngwali to intervene in climatic disasters. Both artists construct themselves as victims as well as potential champions of climate change. We also note that each artist is singing in his mother language as a means of resistance to colonial Christian alternatives of divination, showing evidence of cultural empowerment, identity, strength and resilience in shaping discourses about social class and relations in periods of crisis like droughts.

Conclusion

The article examined the intercessional role of music among the Kalanga in Botswana and the Nyai-Shona in Zimbabwe. This was done through the analysis of two songs, namely “Phondanyama” by Ndingo Johwa, a Motswana Kalanga musician, and “Mvura Ngainaye” by Thomas Mapfumo, a Zimbabwean Shona musician. The aim was to show that the Kalanga in Botswana and the Shona in Zimbabwe are one and the same people despite the fact that they live in two different countries. The two songs acted as the connecting thread for our argument. The analysis of the two selected songs reveals a close similarity in the way the Kalanga and Nyai-Shona use music to intercede for rain. The two musicians use music as a platform to communicate with the divine and voice the problems that are faced by their respective communities. This similarity in cultural practices seems to point to a common origin.

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