

Chapter 50

Zimbabwe Dancehall Music as a Site of Resistance

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ABSTRACT

The popularity and consumption of dancehall music in Zimbabwe has grown exponentially over the past few years. However, despite its popularity, Zimdancehall has attracted controversy for promoting violence and vulgar behavior among other ills. This chapter casts aside society's moral judgements in order to investigate Zimdancehall music's role as an alternative public sphere. Using Fraser's alternative public sphere and Bakhtin's carnivalesque as its conceptual framework, and Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis as its methodology, the study analysed the discourses that underpin Zimdancehall music. The chapter argues that Zimdancehall music has become a counter public that provides marginalised youths with a platform to resist the dominant state-sponsored patriotic discourse. The music genre has opened a liberating alternative communicative space, outside of state control and ZANU-PF's patriotic discourse, where marginalised youths can symbolically invert their reality, protest as well as articulate their needs and aspirations freely.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

Since 2000, Zimbabwe has suffered from protracted political and economic crisis (Ndlela, 2010). According to the World Food Programme (2012), an estimated 72% of the country's population lives below the national poverty line (World Food Programme, 2012). The country is facing a number of challenges that include poor service delivery, a failing economy and political disenfranchisement (Masunungure 2011, p.125). Although there is no consensus on the causes of the Zimbabwean crisis across the political divide, scholars have largely identified the controversial land reform programme in 2000, the disputed presidential election of 2000, and the contested presidential election of 2002, as the major factors that subsequently led to poor economic performance, decay in infrastructure, poor health and service delivery, and political repressions which have left most citizens, particularly the youth, disenchanted and disillusioned (Ndlela, 2010; Hodzi, 2014).

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The deterioration of the Zimbabwean crisis has been accompanied by contestation over communicative spaces. The deepening conflict polarised the public sphere with different constituencies in the country assuming different views on the causes of the crisis. While the independent media, the local opposition, sections of civil society and the former colonial power, United Kingdom (UK), attributed the crisis to misgovernance, the ruling party (ZANU-PF) and the government controlled media saw the crisis as resulting from a neo-colonial regime change agenda led by the UK, and its local 'functionaries', the newly formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and most of civil society. As local and international pressure mounted after 2000, and its legitimacy questioned, the Zimbabwean government became increasingly authoritarian. A key aspect of this authoritarianism manifested itself through protecting communicative space in order to cut off alternative interpretations of the crisis (Ndlela, 2010).

The raft of measures and policies adopted by the Zimbabwe government to monopolise the public sphere post 2000 are widely documented (Willems, 2010). In the run up to the 2002 presidential election, the government introduced several measures to monopolise the public sphere. New legislation such as the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001 and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002 were promulgated in order to stifle the growth of the media and to limit media access (Ndlela, 2010; Willems, 2010). The new legislation gave excessive powers to government officials to licence and close media institutions. This legislation has been used to curtail freedom of expression in the country on the pretext of protecting individual dignity, privacy, reputation and national security. Notably, the new legal measures have been used to close down at least five independent newspapers so that only 'patriotic' voices sympathetic with the ruling party can be heard (Ndlela, 2010). As communicative space shrunk in the country as a result of the new legislation, the government mobilised the state controlled press, radio and television to sell a narrow form of patriotic history in order to justify ZANU-PF's continued rule (Willems, 2010).

Over and above the legal constraints, extra-legal activities have also contributed to the shrinking of communicative space in Zimbabwe post 2000. The arrest and harassment of journalists and political activists in the country instilled fear and further promoted a culture of self-censorship in the media fraternity (Ndlela, 2010). Besides the mainstream media, other communication systems such as music and theatre performances were not spared from intimidation. Musicians considered too critical of the government have often had their music banned from the airwaves while others have been forced to practise self-censorship. Consequently, the communicative space in Zimbabwe became dominated by mainstream voices that echoed a narrow patriotic history built on official ruling party interpretations of the crisis unfolding in the country (Willems, 2010; Tendi, 2008). According to Tendi (2008, p. 379), this patriotic history, which became the lens through which the Zimbabwe crisis began to be mediated by mainstream media, drew from ZANU-PF's role in the liberation struggle. It is based on issues such as land, refusal of external interference and Western ideals such as human rights and good governance. It further divided Zimbabweans into either patriots or sell-outs, with ZANU-PF projected as the 'alpha and omega of Zimbabwe's past, present and future' while its opponents were variedly branded as 'puppets', 'un-African' and 'pro-colonial' (Tendi, 2008, p.379)

As such, the mainstream media in Zimbabwe after 2000 became dominated by elite voices sympathetic with ZANU-PF. Public intellectuals, who represent 'the old guard' (people who were born during settler colonial rule who either experienced or participated in the liberation struggle) such as Tafataona Mahoso, Claude Mararike, Vimbai Chivaura and Isheunesu Mpepereki were roped in by the largely state controlled mainstream media as expert commentators, columnists, analysts and panellists on to explain the Zimbabwean crisis and justify ZANU-PF's continued rule (Tendi, 2008). On the other hand, the

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