


Chapter 9

Music, Culture, and Personal Reconstruction: Lessons From Mukudzeyi “Jah Prayzah” Mukombe’s Selected Songs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter used a few of Mukudzeyi ‘Jah Prayzah’ Mukombe’s selected songs to analyse the relationship between music, culture, and personal reconstruction. These songs include ‘Ngwarira Kuparara’, the title track from his 2011 album, and ‘Kwayedza’, from his 2020 album Hokoyo, respectively. Jah Prayzah’s artistic contributions were located and analysed using Asante’s analytic Afrocentricity. In pushing Zimbabweans to be proud of their culture, Jah Prayzah exemplifies pride in one’s identity, as this chapter has demonstrated. He exploits the creative potential of art to advance cultural norms and values that signify Africanness through the nuanced Shona language. Jah Prayzah reminds Zimbabweans that to rebuild their identity and regain their sense of self, they must return to their cultural norms and values. The chapter concluded that Jah Prayzah is a cultural revivalist who is dedicated to Zimbabwe’s cultural memory. The musician uses his songs to fight the inaccurate representations of Zimbabwean culture and decolonize Zimbabweans’ minds. The chapter makes recommendations for other musicians to use their music to defend fundamental African cultural values and solve societal evils.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is focused on Mukudzeyi ‘Jah Prayzah’ Mukombe’s commitment to preserving Zimbabwe’s cultural memory. Erll (2011) defines cultural memory as the collective methods societies employ to establish and maintain their connections to the past, maintain their way of life in the present, and plan for the future. For Klein and Nichols (2012), cultural memory defines how people comprehend who they are, where they fit into the world, and how they envision and influence the future. Jah Prayzah shows through his artistic output that he is a musician whose worldview is strongly rooted in advancing, defending, and supporting Zimbabweans’ cultural rights. His artistic endeavours magnify his cultural

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advocacy for an African renaissance against the backdrop of colonial global cultures that are determined to decapitate African cultural traditions and identity, proving admirably that ‘Man is Culture’, as stated by Ousmane (1979).

Through his compositions, Jah Prayzah reconstructs Zimbabwean culture. He uses Shona – one of the most widely spoken languages in Zimbabwe (Nhongo, 2013) – to convey his philosophical views. Shona is the first language of almost 75 percent of the country’s inhabitants. In the majority of his songs, Jah Prayzah exhorts Zimbabweans to value their cultural identities and to be proud of who they are to fight back against the devaluation of local languages and traditions. Jah Prayzah implies that his music shaped his life in the majority of his interviews with the mainstream media. He was influenced by his music to prioritise his African identity. The crooner considers himself to be a native of Zimbabwe, and he promotes Zimbabwean culture via his songs.

With this context in mind, this chapter analyses how music, culture, and personal reconstruction are related using two purposively selected songs from Jah Prayzah’s discography. The chapter’s timeline is as follows. A brief biography of Mukudzeyi ‘Jah Prayzah’ Mukombe is given in the first section of the chapter. The second section describes the methodological and theoretical foundation of the study. Asante’s analytic Afrocentricity informs this chapter because the main subject of the study, Jah Prayzah’s lyrical narratives, has an African reconstruction agenda. The chapter examines two purposively selected songs: ‘Ngwarira Kuparara’, the title track from his 2011 album, and ‘Kwayedza’, from his 2020 album *Hokoyo*. The two selected songs serve as the chapter’s main sources of information. Before examining how music, culture, and personal reconstruction are related, the chapter, in its third section, conceptualises each of these terms. It subsequently discusses the takeaways from two selected songs before offering a conclusion.

MUKUDZEYI ‘JAH PRAYZAH’ MUKOMBE BIOGRAPHY

Mukudzeyi Mukombe, also known as Jah Prayzah is a contemporary Zimbabwean music giant (Masuku, 2018). He was born at Nyadire Hospital in Mutoko, Zimbabwe on July 4, 1987. Jah Prayzah was raised in Murehwa and Harare in Zimbabwe. Shirely Savanhu and John Mukombe are his parents. In a family of five – four boys and one girl, Jah Prayzah is the last born. His other siblings are Joe, Chamu, Simba, and Lydia. Jah Prayzah attended Musamhi Primary School, Musamhi High School in Mashonaland East Province, and Kuwadzana High School for his formal education.

Rashid (2022) notes that Jah Prayzah enjoyed singing, playing the mbira, and writing as a child. He developed his vernacular poetic abilities by reading hundreds of Shona novels (Muzari, 2016). Jah Prayzah also wanted to join the military, and this is the primary source of inspiration for the distinctive military outfit used by his band, the Third Generation (Rashid, 2022). Mukudzeyi, his first name, which in the Shona language means Praise Him (God), morphed into his stage name, Jah Prayzah. His love for God made him adopt Jah, which is the Jamaican name for God. A fusion of the two meanings made his artistic name.

Jah Prayzah wrote his first song while still in high school (Rashid, 2022). He and his friends also recorded dancehall and reggae tunes during that time. In 2005, Jah Prayzah launched his musical career. His albums include *Chiremerera* (2023), *Maita Baba* (2023), *Gwara* (2021), *Hokoyo* (2020), *Chitubu* (2018), *Kutonga Kwaro* (2017), *Mdhara Vachauya* (2016), *Jerusarema* (2015), *Kumbumura Mhute* (2014), *Tsviriyo* (2013), *Ngwarira Kuparara* (2011), *Sungano YeRudo* (2010), and *Rudo Nerunyararo* (2007). He

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