

SINGING THE SECOND CHIMURENGA (WAR OF LIBERATION): AN AFROCENTRIC ELUCIDATION OF SIMON CHIMBETU'S SELECTED SONGS

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ABSTRACT

Oral sources such as proverbs, songs and folktales have been used to reconstruct people's identities. As a primary 'means of communication', music is often used to capture or record people's experiences in history. In Zimbabwe, Simon Chimbetu exemplifies one musician who is in search of his country's past in as far as he uses his music to record the history of the liberation struggle. This



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article provides an in-depth examination of Chimbetu's selected songs. Singing after the war itself is over, it is argued, the music functions as a reference point to the citizens because it is a transcript of their past experiences, something which is essential to the present and future generations. By insisting on educating his audiences on the liberation struggle, Chimbetu satisfies Sankofan approach. It is argued in this article that Chimbetu's musical reflections provide enriching experiences and reveal that it is historical music.

Keywords: struggle songs, Chimurenga, Sankofan approach, indigenous music, apartheid

INTRODUCTION

The Second Chimurenga is a treasurable defining chapter in Zimbabwean historicity. As a historic phase, it is celebrated and cherished by the entire citizenry. While the historiography of the Second Chimurenga has been celebrated and romanticised by many writers, critics have also responded by giving various narratives. The main thrust of this article, however, is to telescopically appreciate Simon Chimbetu's lyrical compositions vis-à-vis the history of the Second Chimurenga. Unlike novelists and critics who use the media of writing as a tool for communication, Chimbetu engages the oral mode. He sings mainly in the Shona language where he is proficient, though he has produced songs in Ndebele, Chewa, Swahili and Nyanja among other languages. In this way, he fulfils Mandela's assertion in one of his widely quoted speeches that '[i]f you speak to a man in his own language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart.'

The University of Leicester (n.d.) defines oral history as the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information based on the personal experiences and opinions of the speaker. This can include folklore, myths, songs and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth. Music has often been used to capture and record people's experiences in history. In South Africa, the contentious song, '*Dubuli ibunu*', has a lot of history in it. It narrates the concerns of the oppressed who is determined to shoot and kill the boer because of the latter's ill-treatment of indigenous people that included raping African women. Below is the song and its literal translation as it is sung:

Dubula! dubula! dubula nge s'bhamu (Shoot, shoot, shoot them with a gun)

Dubul' ibhunu (Shoot the boer)

Dubula! dubula! dubula nge s'bhamu (Shoot, shoot, shoot them with a gun)

Mama, ndiyeke ndidubul' ibhunu (Ma, let me shoot the Boer)

Dubula! dubula! dubula nge s'bhamu (Shoot, shoot, shoot them with a gun)

Ziyareypa lezinja (These dogs rape)

Dubula! dubula! dubula nge s'bhamu (Shoot, shoot, shoot them with a gun)

In Zimbabwe, Simon Chimbetu exemplifies one musician who is in search of his country's past in as far as he uses his music to record the history of the liberation struggle. Methodologically, the article primarily engages a discourse analysis of his songs, *Kure Kachana, Zimbabwe, Kurwadza and Pane Asipo*, respectively extrapolated from post-independence albums, *Hoko* (2002), *Lullaby* (1998) and *Survival* (1997). Our appreciation of these songs is premised on the realisation that the songs are largely active historical nuggets that are gravid with the Second Chimurenga historical narratives. The critical arguments averred in this paper are that Chimbetu's music is historical and also a valid and reliable transcript of the liberation struggle, to both pre- and post-independence generations. His music is a description of the Second Chimurenga for it 'speaks to the Zimbabwean identity ... and is inseparable from life' (Makina 2013: 51). Inherent in his lyrical narratives is the oral history from a reliable participant who participated in and witnessed the liberation struggle as a historical event towards nation building. Furthermore, we opine that, in these lyrical expressions, Chimbetu shifts back through memory lane to capture and give a credible oral narrative of the Second Chimurenga, since 'it is creative works of the artist that constitute pictures which guide men's lives, which make them human' (P'Bitek 1986: 40). We therefore advance that, as reflected by his music, Simon Chimbetu is an oral historian since he converses through active oral historical narratives to the present and future generations of Zimbabwe. By retrieving and re-engaging the history of the Second Chimurenga in the post-independence era, Chimbetu is conscious of the subtle and varied nature of the neo-colonial infrastructure, and also the need to engage in a continuous struggle, since WaMutahi in WaNgugi (2003:1) holds that, the struggle 'is not a one-time instant but an infinite process to tame the evils of exploitation and oppression'. In this article, we hold that Chimbetu is that type of ruler, 'namely, the artist who provides and sustains the fundamental ideas, the foundation of society' (P'Bitek 1989: 39).

THE JOURNEY MOTIF IN CHIMBETU'S MUSIC ON THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

In *Kure Kachana*, Chimbetu's version of the liberation struggle is aptly transcribed via the journey motif technique. As an artist of repute, Chimbetu engages his audience through the experiences of the liberation struggle, via an expedition experience. The title of the song, *Kure Kachana*, teaches the audience that the trek to national independence (State House) was a process and not a product. Chimbetu holds that the journey to freedom was indeed tiresome and gruelling. Just as a literary journey is undertaken with a destination in mind, the Second Chimurenga as a struggle is equated to a journey that had stumbling blocks. Chimbetu utilises symbolism of the journey to allegorically retell and relive the history of the Second Chimurenga struggle. The following excerpt vividly captures the genesis to independence:

Paive nerwendo, rwendo rwekufamba, (There was a journey, a journey to be travelled)
 Rwaitove rwendo, rwendo rwekufamba, (It was a journey, a journey to be travelled)
 Rwendo rurefu, rusingade makombi kana, (A long journey, not to be travelled on kombis,)
 Rwendo rurefu rusingadanidzire makumbo, (A long journey on foot)
 Idi kuState House kure, (Truly State House is far)
 Kure (It is far)
 Kurefu iwe(I tell u it's far)
 Kure, (It's far)
 kuState House kure, (State House is far)
 Chokwadi kure (Truly it's far)
 Kurefu iwe, (I tell you it's far)
 Kure (It's far)
 KuState House kure (State House is far)

As Chimbetu recounts and revisits the liberation struggle, he reminds his listenership that independence was not delivered on a silver platter. It was not donated but rather fought for. The persona in the song holds that liberators had to engage in an arduous journey, rummaging for freedom from colonial bondage in their quest for self-rule. As a long journey, the liberation struggle required endurance, resolve and above all, total commitment. As Mugabe in Martin and Johnson (1981: vi) posits, the road to independence 'was necessarily gradual for there was an absence of leadership with the requisite armed revolutionary orientation'. The absence of leadership, a critical factor in any revolution, exacerbated the endeavour of the struggle, hence Chimbetu recounts, melancholically. The ultimate destination of this onerous journey was to the State House, which signifies autonomy, power, control and authority. This route, above all, was not a pleasurable and enjoyable adventure, nor was it a bed of roses, for it was full of ups and downs.

To substantiate that the journey to State House was *No easy walk to freedom*, to use Mandela's words in a book by the same title, Chimbetu narrates the demanding nature of the liberation struggle. He further captures that there was rigorous planning, networking and coordinating within African allies and the diaspora communities for the present generation to have what they call national independence today. The following lyrical narratives capture it as follows;

Yes! (Yes)
 Dare rakaronga kuenda mberi nehondo(x2) (The High Command planned to continue fighting)
 Ah! Ah! (Ah! Ah!)
 Kukumbira rubatsiro kubva kuneshamwari dzedu (They solicited for assistance from our friends)
 Yes! (Yes!)

MaSocialist, vane mwoyo wegutsaruzhinji (Those Socialists bent on meeting everyone's needs)

Zvikanzi tumiraiwo vana venyu vauye (They suggested to house our trainee guerillas)

Vamwe! Vamwe KwaSamora (Some went to Samora Machel)

Vamwe! Vamwe kwaNyerere (Some went to Julius Nyerere)

Vamwe! Vamwe kwaKaunda (Some went to Kenneth Kaunda)

Vamwe! Vamwe kwaSeretse (Some went to Seretse Khama)

Kure (It's far)

Kurefu iwe (I tell you it is far)

Kure-e-e (It is far)

KuState House kure (State House is far)

Drawing from Second Chimurenga experiences, Chimbetu as a man of thought informs his audience that the liberation war was also fought from many fronts. In order to adequately confront the colonial system, the *Dare* (High Command) also played a pivotal role in ensuring that military expertise was acquired from frontline states such as Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana, with the help of the respective founding nationalists (fathers). By revisiting that past and drawing the relevant history to educate the entire neo-colonial citizenry, Chimbetu satisfies the Sankofan approach since he seems to proffer that the present independence being enjoyed is a joint result of other frontline states that offered military training and assistance. Mugabe, in Martin and Johnson (1981: v), concurs with Chimbetu since he avers that 'the struggle for Zimbabwe, though primarily a responsibility of the Zimbabweans, was also, albeit it secondarily, a responsibility of the whole of Africa'. By capturing these experiences, Chimbetu's education to the post-independent nation is that 'liberation does not come as a gift from anybody; it is seized by the masses with their own hands' (Fanon 1965: 2). By passing this history from one generation to the other, through musical narratives we are of the view that, like the griot, Chimbetu is a historical musician, since he 'occupies the chair of history' (Niane 1965: viii). From the lenses of an actor and not an onlooker, he unravels to his audience how the struggle was planned and executed.

Furthermore, Chimbetu's historical music unravels what actually transpired during the training of the combatants. He further offers a synopsis of what transpired in the training camps. Part of Kure Kachana's lyrics goes as follows:

Gwara rehondo rinoda vakashinga (The liberation struggle requires people of spine)

Gwara rehondo raida vakashinga (The liberation struggle required people of spine)

Yaingove fire, fire, fire (We were just firing)

Fire! (Firing)

Fire kuChimoio (Firing at Chimoio)

Fire! (Fire!)

Fire kuTengwe (Firing at Tengwe)
 Fire Morogoro (Firing at Morogoro)
 Fire NaChimweya (Fire by Chimweya)
 Vamwe! Vamwe kuChina (Some went to China)
 Vamwe!Yugoslavia (Some went to Yugoslavia)
 Vamwe! Vamwe kuLibya (Some went to Libya)
 Vamwe!Vamwe kuEthiopia (Some went to Ethiopia)
 Kure (It is far)
 Kurefu iwe! (I tell you it is far)
 Kure (It is far)
 KuState House kure! (State House is far)

For Chimbetu, the gunfire was the hallmark of the Second Chimurenga since ‘in a world where oppression is maintained by violence from above, it is only possible to liquidate it with violence from below’ (Fanon 1965: 3). However, this resistance as the musician orates was a result of a socialist path that was engaged for military training and aid. African Socialists and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries also were helpful in fighting colonial aggression. In teaching this aspect of unity in the face of imperialism to his audience, Chimbetu utilises historical truths so as to instil the values he cherishes for the development of a post-independent nation. In this instance, we therefore note that ‘history as a recapitulation and interpretation of our past has the power to release our energies and directing our initiatives’ (Chinweizu 1987: 75).

While in *Kure Kachana* Chimbetu utilises the journey motif to narrate the ordeal of the larger group in liberating Zimbabwe, in the song, *Zimbabwe*, the journey motif is utilised to exude personal experiences of how a Second Chimurenga liberation fighter joined the struggle and also the push factors that motivated and animated the struggle. Through dialoguing with community elders and other responsible authorities, in *Zimbabwe* Chimbetu clearly brings out that Zimbabwe was born out of a protracted struggle. The nation, Zimbabwe, as Chimbetu seems to point out, is a product of other people’s dedication, toil and suffering. The lyrics are as follows:

Zimbabwe iyoyi, yanga yanditora mwoyo (Zimbabwe had taken my heart)
 Zimbabwe iyoyi, yanga yanditora mwoyo (Zimbabwe had taken my heart)
 Ndaida kusvika Gairesi ndokuudza vabereki (When I got to Gaeresi I asked elders for directions)
 Zvikanzi famba so, mwanagu famba so (They said take this direction, my son go this way)
 Ukwire gomo uyambuke ramba uchifamba (Go over that mountain and keep on travelling)
 Pakakomo ako kamunoona ako, ndipo pane vana vaNicodemus (You see that mountain, that is where Nicodemus’s children live)
 Famba zvakanaka vanangu, ndimi munawoka masango (Safe journey my children in these forests)

For Chimbetu, joining the Second Chimurenga was more of a patriotic endeavour. Parental involvement and community guidance were vital, for the journey to the unknown demanded their blessings. Stumbling blocks typified by mountains and rivers characterised the journey. These natural features harbour deadly creatures such as lions and crocodiles, respectively, therefore the journey itself meant life or death. Navigating through the unnavigable in search of freedom was a risk worth taking. The colonial masters who had ‘nicodemously’ seized the country from its dwellers also ambushed the potential recruits so as to stop them from military training, hence a warning was given concerning their whereabouts. Concerned with the kind of history to be taught to the contemporary audience, Chimbetu seems to be of the view that ‘we need to be taught about people who fought, bled for freedom’ (Malcolm X 1967: 68). Chimbetu further posits that spiritual guidance through consulting spiritual mediums necessitated a safe journey. Perseverance was also a virtue upheld in the Second Chimurenga and, above all, the land issue was the pushing factor in this struggle, as Chimbetu sings:

Ndaida kusvika kuDorowa ndokuudza masvikiro (When I got to Dorowa, I asked for directions)

Zvikanzi famba so, mwanagu famba so (They advised of the directions to take)

Ukwire gomo uyambuke ramba uchifamba (Go over that mountain and keep on travelling)

Usanete kusvika tatore ivhu (Do not tire until we take back our land)

Nesu hatinete kusvika tatore dunhu redu (Even us we will not tire until we take our area)

Famba zvakanaka vananguwe (Travel safely my children)

Ndimi munawoka masango (In these forests)

Whereas Pongweni teaches that there are *Songs that won the liberation struggle* in a book by the same title, Chimbetu utilises the medium of music to educate his audience that spirituality also offered a formidable pillar for resistance in the Second Chimurenga. As authorities, spirit mediums enquired from the metaphysical world and exhorted the combatants for they were also marginalised by the *Land Apportionment Act* (1930) and the *Land Husbandry Act* (1957) as well as the *Land Tenure Act* (1969).

The common feature in these songs is that the challenges and hurdles of the Second Chimurenga are clearly dissected and for the posterity of the struggle. They are made clear for the audience, hence we contend that these songs are energised by the Second Chimurenga and are a valid and reliable transcript of Zimbabweans as a people who have a past of struggles. By proffering these historical teachings through musical expressions, Chimbetu seems to be aware of the fact that music as ‘art is and was always, in the service of man’ (Achebe 1975: 19).

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SECOND CHIMURENGA IN CHIMBETU'S SONGS

Although Zimbabwe got independence in 1980, Chimbetu's post-independence music still narrates the ordeal of the liberation struggle, precisely the Second Chimurenga. As a 'man of thought', and an active participant in the struggle, he seems to be more interested in preserving the uncaptured histories of the struggle and, in the process, edifies his hearers. His music seems 'to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience of its citizens' (Fanon 1968: 200). We are of the view that, by avoiding the 'burning issues of the day' and rather occupy himself with the yesteryear events, Chimbetu understands that the future springs from the past. As the Igbo proverb aptly posits, Chimbetu seems to be of the view that 'a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him does not know where he dried up'. In the song, *Kurwadza*, the musician captures the pains and sorrows associated and inflicted by the liberation war as portrayed in the following extracted lyrics:

Iripo nzvimbo iyo huru kunze kweino nyika yedu (There are places beyond our country's boundaries)

Kwavakafira vazhinji (Where many perished).

Tichavafungawo (We will remember them)

Isu hatizivi kuti kurwadza kwakadiniko kwekuurarirwa chokwaadi, iyo nyika yako (We are not aware of the pains of being killed for your country)

Dziriko nyika idzo zhinji, kunze kweino nyika yedu, kwavakafira vazhinji (There are many countries beyond our borders where many perished)

Tichavafungawo (We will remember them).

Dziriko nzvimbo idzo zhinji, mune ino nyika yedu mavakafira vazhinji (There are many places within our country where many people died for the cause of independence),

Tichavafungawo (We will remember them).

Isu hatizivi kuti marwadzo akadiniko ekuponderwa chokwadi, iwo musha wako (We are not familiar with pains of being killed for fighting for your home).

Riripo ropa iro zhinji, kunze kweino nyika yedu, mavakafira vazhinji (There is blood that was spilt outside the borders of our country, where many died)

Tichavafungawo (We shall remember them)

Unlike other contemporary artists, mainly Shona novelists, who celebrate and romanticise the liberation struggle, Chimbetu's war songs are sober in the sense that he gives a valid and reliable transcript of what actually transpired and also the people's memories about the liberation struggle. His musical narratives, as oral literature, help us appreciate and construe Zimbabwean history. Though, in the 'journey motif songs', Chimbetu gives the road to independence from the lenses of a victor, in these war songs he vividly captures that the Second Chimurenga, just as the first liberation war, also has its victims. As a survivor, in a wretched tone and

slow tempo, he informs his listeners that not everyone who embarked on the patriotic endeavour to free Zimbabwe survived. By going back to the historical archives and project this perspective, Chimbetu ‘lures his subjects by the sweetness of his song, and the beauty of his works’ (P’Bitek 1986: 39). As this historical musician proffers, some perished in foreign lands while others died in their motherland, Zimbabwe. By reiterating the past in a post-independent nation, Chimbetu is conscious of the importance of history in a new nation. As Chinweizu (1987:75) posits, ‘history as a recognition and interpretation of our past, has power to release our energies and directing our initiatives’. His music therefore becomes a potent medium of collective education, essential also for nation building. Chimbetu utilises it to evoke such memories so that they act as an antidote against neo-colonial dominance.

Considering that the Third Chimurenga was in its infancy at the time of these compositions, a recapture of a people’s history was therefore of paramount importance for it serves as a reminder and a spring board in accomplishing the then land redistribution assignments. Chimbetu, we proffer, ‘ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope’ (Fanon 1968: 200). This viewpoint is also reinforced in *Pane Asipo*, where Chimbetu seems to be preoccupied with both the past and the present. Part of the lyrics goes as follows:

Gungano ramaita iri, pane vamwe vasipo (As you gather like this, there are some who are not here)

Mabiko ataita aya, pane vamwe vasipo (In this on-going feasting, there are some who are not with us)

Kuguta kwataita uku, pane vamwe vasipo (We have eaten and now full but some are not here)

Tatadza kukanganwa isu, kukanganwa takoniwa (We have failed to forget, forgetting we have failed)

Jojo akasarako kusango, Molly akasarako ikoko (Jojo remained in the bush, Molly also remained in the bush)

Love akasara ikoko kuhondo, Jonah akasara ikoko (Love died during the war, and the same with Jonah)

While merry making and celebrations are indicators of a free and sovereign country, Chimbetu seems to be of the opinion that it is also essential to reflect on our past and in turn remember and honour our heroes. Jojo, Molly, Love and Jonah represent the unknown male and female victims of the Second Chimurenga, who lost their lives in the protracted struggle and did not receive proper burials. By exhuming this past, Chimbetu’s musicals, apart from teaching that there was a Second Chimurenga, the music also invokes the audience’s attitude towards that war and its participants. To Chimbetu, while the present generation may party and celebrate, it is also essential to teach them that the present-day, with all its benefits, is an upshot of the past.

Chimbetu seems to be communicating that, soon after a political revolution, there is also a need for a cultural revolution rather than partying. In one way or the other, it indulges in social cohesion and nation building. The unknown soldiers need to be given proper rest:

Mweya wadzungaira mweya (The soul is restless and wandering)

Mweya wadzungaira (The soul is restless and wandering)

Mavaudza amai vake here? (Have you told the victim's mother?)

Kuti mwana wenyu akashaikaka, Akafira kusango kure, nyika dzisina naniko (That your child died in the far away forests in foreign lands)

Makumbira kudzinza rake here? Kuti tambirai mwana uyu kani, Mupei pekugara azorore (Have you requested the victim's forefathers to receive the soul and give it rest?)

Igamba rehondo (The departed one is a hero of the liberation struggle)

As a man of thought, his historical musicals communicate to the man of action and eventually 'respond deeply and intuitively, to what is happening, what has happened and what will happen' (P'Bitek 1986: 39). By reverting back to the historical fossils of the Second Chimurenga and transcribing them through song, Chimbetu as an artist and oral historian becomes the ruler in this contemporary dispensation for he 'gives us a second handle on reality' to post-independent and upcoming generations (Achebe 1988: 170).

CONCLUSION

The article dwelled on Simon Chimbetu's lyrical compositions, namely Second Chimurenga songs. The article progressed from the proposition that Chimbetu's thematic concerns in his songs are entirely hinged on the second liberation struggle. By rooting his musical compositions in the best of Zimbabwean history, Chimbetu anchors his 'efforts in that past-gleaning the most instructive and constructive information from the [Zimbabwean] past, refining that information as necessary, and then utilizing the information along with one's particular [national] desires to achieve pro-[Zimbabwean] purposes in the present and the future' (Grey 2001:102). By recapturing a deep and rich history of the Zimbabwean past in a bid to educate the present and future generations, we hold that Simon Chimbetu is a historical oracle. His music therefore becomes the fossils that energise other neo-colonial struggles such as the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe. By taking his audience aback, through music, we therefore view the musician as a great history teacher, a historian and an archivist who preserves valuable treasures of historical experiences in his songs. His songs are therefore a transcript of the Second Chimurenga and also active oral historical nuggets, since the war thoughts and data can be retrieved for the benefit of the current and coming generations. In a nutshell, the historicity in Chimbetu's songs 'is of crucial importance for people like ourselves who underwent a period

of colonisation during which the cultures of our communities were suppressed, distorted and denied the opportunity to develop. We must know who we are in order to know how to relate to people of other cultures' (Akaviga and Odaga 1994: 2). Therefore, by going back into the immediate past through song, reinvigorate this untapped history, filling in gaps and correcting historical imbalances, Chimbetu's music is not only a reference to the past but also a launch pad that enriches and sustains future generations.

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