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Commodified versions of Shona indigenous music: (re) construction tradition in Zimbabwean popular music

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Abstract

Commodified versions of Shona indigenous music: (Re)constructing tradition in Zimbabwean popular music

This thesis examines Shona commodified songs in order to develop a set of criteria for critically determining whether a Zimbabwean popular song has appropriated a Shona traditional song and whether this enables the song to be categorised as "commodified Shona traditional music". The study identifies and analyses Zimbabwean popular songs by selected musicians. It identifies strategies and patterns adopted by the musicians to reconstruct Shona traditional sources. The study also questions why the musicians draw from the indigenous sources in certain ways and how the commodified songs are meaningful to them and Shona community members in general. The analysis shows that there are certain cultural values associated with each of the distinct Shona musical genres namely *mbira*, *ngoma* and *jiti*. These determine how the songs are adapted. *Mbira* music is believed to be the product of ancestors and therefore all the popular songs that reproduce *mbira* traditional sources must retain "standard basic" structural elements. The melorhythmic patterns associated with *ngoma* traditional sources are usually maintained in popular music. While text constantly changes, traditional themes are usually continued. However, the perception and understanding of cultural values usually differ from one popular musician to another depending on varying personal backgrounds and compositional purposes. Generally, there are four strategies employed in the adaptation of Shona traditional music. These are imitation, sampling, combining two or more distinct indigenous styles and abstract adaptation. The inclusion and exclusion of Shona indigenous elements in popular music performance play an important role in the reconstruction and negotiation of cultural heritage and identity for contemporary musicians and audiences.