

THE STATE, BETTERMENT SCHEMES AND DISPLACEMENT: RAS CALEB'S PUBLIC PEDAGOGY IN ZIM-DANCEHALL

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ABSTRACT

Using zimdancehall and rascaleb's tokwemukosi track, the paper examines the artists socially conscious lyrics in a genre that is often thought of as promoting slackness. The paper submits that he is a socially and politically aware artist who in this track addresses social injustice and structural violence amongst the displaced. Zimdancehall is a space and place where music and politics meet and intersect. It is a site where music, social consciousness, social activism and resistance meet. It presents not just an alternative space and sphere of discourses but a counter narrative to the elites and their narrative. It is a genre that confronts and challenges the status quo in terms of governance, the political economy, the post-colonial African state as well as various forms of direct violence and structural violence.

Key words: *Zim-dancehall, politics, displacement, music*

Introduction

The paper offers an examination of Zimbabwean political economy through the prism of music Zimbabwe dancehall popularly known as Zimdancehall. Music is communicative; it reflects and communicates both the positive and negative aspects of society. Its themes speak to society, speak about society, the condition of society and may shape public opinion and sentiment. According to Allen (2004: 1) ‘music functions as a trenchant political site in Africa...’ this statement is true particularly when one examines Zimdancehall which is not just a site of political contestation but a natural habitus and space where art, music and politics intersect. Though primarily regarded as a genre whose focus and lyrics focus on partying, and feel-good factor it is striking that it has an overt and sometimes covert political message. It speaks to and of the social, economic and political as well as material conditions of the subaltern within society which leads Sabelli (2011: 140) to describe it as voicing ‘...the global ghetto youth’s claim for

redemption and amplifies their local practices of resistance against the system.’ It is therefore a genre born of resistance both primary and secondary, a weapon of the weak who become strong through getting and amplifying a voice and agency from the artist who acts as the social critique and spokesperson, a genre of defiance, challenging not just the status quo and critiquing it but offering an alternative vision of economic, offering a counter-narrative and counter-discourse to mainstream and often government-controlled mediascapes, it speaks of political and social (in) justice. Daynes (2010: 202) reggae ‘...offers a global view of the contemporary world, which is above all marked by a negative finding.’ In the same vein, Hope (2006: 22) ‘...dancehall is a cultural dis/place of ongoing dialogue, confrontation and contestation with the rigid sociopolitical...’ With political spaces being closed, freedom of speech limited, the genre emerged as a political tool of ideological contestation, offering an alternative vision of life as well as opening up a space and avenue for self-expression outside the spaces controlled by the government. Dube(2016: 3) ‘...dancehall music may be described as the genre of music that creates alternative spaces of survival outside the traditional institutions of the state and household. It reflects and creates a third space for alternative identities.’ In urban spaces particularly the high density suburbs referred to as the ghettos, the genre has found expression as a form of protest critiquing, commenting and challenging the political economy of the post-colonial state, poverty, squalor and as a tool of social justice. Unemployment, corruption, underdevelopment, decadence by the political elite, expropriation of state resources by the leadership, greed by the chiefs, kleptocracy, kakistocracy abuse of power, violence both direct and structural by the government on its people are some of the myriad of ills that some of the artists address and aim their lyrics towards. Furthermore, it addresses the oppressive and exploitative conditions that the ordinary citizen finds themselves living under because of the ‘downpressorman’, the government, the neo-liberal order and the nationalists who have turned against the people they are meant to be serving and protecting who care about lining up their pockets at the expense of national development.

Reggae is arguably one of the most popular genres in Zimbabwe. Since independence the country has hosted a number of reggae artists, perhaps the most notable performance was Bob Marley’s performance in the country to mark its attainment of independence in 1980. Since then artists both reggae and dancehall artists and performers such as Maxi Priest, UB40,Eric

Donaldson, Culture, Freddie Macgregor, Shabba Ranks, BujuBanton, Red Rat, Beenie Man, Sizzla, Luciano, Busy Signal and Chris Goldfinger to mention but a few have performed in Zimbabwe. The country has also had a small but committed and vibrant reggae and dancehall scene as evidenced through a number of reggae outfits and artists, some of them not reggae artists per se but inspired by the genre. These have sung in both local indigenous languages and in English addressing a plethora of social and political issues such as corruption, social deviance, economic inequality, unemployment and joblessness, amongst other concerns. Outfits such as Transit Crew, solo artists such as Solomon Skuza, even traditional Zimbabwean artist John Chibadura dabbled in reggae inspired beats on a number of occasions.

Ras Caleb's track is militant, progressive and political telling the story that other artists in the established genre dared not tell, a story that his peers in the genre also shunned. He tells the story and speaks of the plight of the less privileged within society at large and various communities and experiences- this is the case with Ras Caleb's 'Tokwe-Mukosi.' The paper undertakes an examination of the analysis and thematic concerns, motifs in the track 'Tokwe-Mukorsi' by Zimbabwean artist Ras Caleb who deliberately chooses to be a conscious Zimdancehall artist. His choice makes it rather difficult to delineate between reggae and Zimdancehall as his style and conscious lyrics and message set him apart from mainstream Zimdancehall which is not overly conscious. His in-between style which fuses danceable music, fused with conscious lyrics and the Jamaican-Zimbabwean-style toasting which is done in the local Shona language give him appeal, and ghetto- credibility among the youth. Instead of viewing the genre as a fad, as irrelevant, a mimicry of Jamaican culture, accents, dressing and not having any relevance to the Zimbabwean context, one observes that the artist have emerged as lyricist who is not only relevant but speaks to the issues of the day, particularly as the voice of the urban youths in the ghetto and the downtrodden in society. The chanter emerges as storytellers providing a soundtrack and visual montage which offer a poignant portrayal of the material and social conditions of the post-colonial state. The artist through the spoken word speaks truth to power to confront and challenge head-on the malaise and condition of the post-colonial state. This often means that artists have to confront issues that touch on the political issues and concerns of the country.

The post-colonial state has been characterised by a democratic deficit, largely authoritarian regimes which shrink and close spaces of engagement, uses the repressive state apparatuses such as the army, police and various security services to securitise the state thus creating a securocratic state, a state which does not take too kindly to criticism. The dream of political and economic freedom which was promised upon independence has proven to be illusionary to the point that there is little difference between the colonial and post-colonial state. The repression that was characteristic of the colonial state seems to have been ‘perfected’ by the post-colonial state, the structural, direct violence and in some instances cultural violence is meted out on the general populace by the state. In a word, the post-colonial state has proven to be repressive, in this respect dancehall artists therefore find themselves in opposition to the state, since they do not have the repressive apparatus to challenge the state, their only recourse is the microphone, graffiti, and their potent lyrics.

It is also noteworthy that in conscious Zimdancehall, race and class remains at the epicentre of the critique of the state and the socio-economic conditions of the populace alongside exploitation, structural violence, poverty, social identity, Afrocentricity, African culture and material conditions of the down-trodden within society. Race may seem to be an odd theme in the Zimbabwean scene but here one evokes the twin notions of structural violence as propounded by Johan Galtung (1969) has seen the subaltern Black African living on the margins of squalor, power and poverty assume the double-burden of not only being Black African but poor within the post-colonial state. In this respect, one gleans the intersectionality of race, structural violence, the material conditions of poverty and state-sanctioned violence against the poor.

The study of Zimdancehall is still a relatively new and has not been explored sufficiently. It is still in its infancy as it is still developing at an embryotic stage, lingering on the periphery and sidelines of academia with very little being written on the genre in Zimbabwe. Matters have not been helped by the fact that Chimurenga music, urban grooves, rap and hip-hop, and a focus on what can be described as the ‘major’ artists in the country such as Oliver Mutukudzi, Thomas Mapfumo and Hosea Chipanga have occupied the attention of researchers and writers. Articles have largely looking at the common themes such as portrayal of women in music, the image of the soldier in Zimdancehall, socio-politico commentary appropriation of religious symbols in

Zimbabwean music. There have been few studies that examine political activism in the lyrics of the genre.

The paper uses the track ‘Tokwe-Mukosi’ by Ras Caleb (real name Caleb Tareka) an award-winning Zimdancehall artist whose tile-track won him an award for Zimdancehall Conscious track of the year in 2014 the year the Tokwe-Mukosi disaster occurred. His track, chant and toast weaves a narrative of oppression, despair and the poverty that looms over the flood victims yet at the same time is a ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’, as it confronts the issues of bad governance, corruption, greed and exploitation in the independent state. His track is a space where the subaltern of rural poverty and Blackness is expressed, where the downtrodden are given a voice, where the struggles and experiences of the Black are articulated and given expression, a medium which he employs to challenge the post-colonial state, to speak of the affairs in the country, this demonstrates that local Zimbabwean artists are not mere imitations of the Jamaican dancehall scene instead they address the biting social and political issues bedeviling society.

The paper contends that zimdancehall artists have a high level of sophistication in engaging with the state as they provide a critique of the socio-economic issues of the day. Instead of viewing the artists as mere entertainers, this paper views them as critical social and political thinkers who understand the social and political realities of the day and speak to these through their music.

The study used the qualitative research methodology. Our analysis treats the song as a text as opposed to analysing the instrumentation; performance neither is it about the reception of the song. Our focus is on the words, the lyrics.

Reggae, Dancehall and the post-colonial Zimbabwean state

Reggae and dancehall roots lie in the social and political conditions of Jamaica in the 1960s and 1970s. Tracy (2005: 22) reggae developed ‘...symbiotically and from a specific sociohistorical situation in Jamaica and the Third World generally that held alternating degrees of promise and peril from the late 1960s through the 1970s...’ In the same vein, Samper (2004: 42) describes it as ‘...part of a larger African diaspora...’, it is observable that the genre became international creating a reggae diaspora of sorts and this is manifest in the Zimbabwean dancehall scene where the artists engage in dialogue not only with the conditions of the local youth the less privileged in

society but they become a large part of the global dancehall diaspora network. The link with the diaspora particularly Jamaica is seen in that the genre is referred to as ‘dancehall’ but the fact that the chants and lyrics are in the local vernacular of Shona makes it a ‘uniquely’ Zimbabwean product speaking to the local context and conditions.

This inevitably makes the genre political where the artist engages out of a commitment to society with the political economy of the state. The genre became a medium to gaze, analyse and interrogate the condition of the post-colonial state. Here, artists could provide a critique of the political elite in the country whom he holds responsible for the malaise and corruption in the country. By so doing, he engages in discourse on culture, the state and society as well as the political economy, his music therefore becomes the site of struggle where he is the ‘spokesperson’ and the voice of the down-trodden and exploited in Zimbabwean society. The music and genre spoke for and about the cross-section of society, their experiences and the disillusionment with the post-independent state. He is well aware that as an artist, it is important to speak out on social and economic injustice, and by so doing he remains true to the roots of reggae and dancehall where the artist should not be blind to the social and political injustices around, they must speak out against these.

The genre speaks to and of the Black African and Black diaspora experience. Zimbabwean dancehall artists are faced with socio-economic realities such as poverty, squalor, economic inequality but crucially have access to global or transnational youth culture which enables them to localize the genre to speak to local conditions. This is an experience where violence, be it cultural, structural, indirect and direct have been a key feature and motif of the Black African experience. Race, racism, belonging, exclusion and the identity of the Black African, political repression, exploitation, economic inequality, greed and corruption are some of the issues that bedeviled the post-colonial state and as a result have been the targets of artists as well. Having inherited the repressive state apparatus of the colonial state, the post-independence state has somewhat continued on the same trajectory of various forms of violence, at the same time it has also had to be a ‘developmentalist’ state that meets and addresses the material and economic needs of its people.

The development of Zimdancehall is linked or related to the post-2001 era and the introduction of a ‘local content policy’ in broadcasting and entertainment by government. This policy witnessed the sprouting, mushrooming and development of producers, bedroom producers and artists of sorts. Further to that, the technological advancement and innovations meant that one did not need to go to music school and study music professionally but needed a computer and easy to use software to make and create beats. This has been critical to dancehall as a genre as its digital nature means that just about anyone can become a DJ or chanter. In addition, various rhythms (beats) could be created and various DJs could toast over these.

Tokwe-Mukosi

The track is based on the floods that affected the livelihoods of the people at Tokwe-Mukosi who were forcibly resettled at Chigwizi. The track speaks to the alienated, disenfranchised, disillusioned, displaced, homeless, neglected people of Tokwe-Mukosi in Zimbabwe. He laments what has befallen the people as he expresses his shock, hurt, pain that he feels, this is evident in his lyrics ;

‘*Hi hihihiamaiwekaniNdabudamisodziNdorwadziwa(ndorwadziwa) moyowanguTapindwanenjodzi*’ (I weep, my soul is pained as disaster has struck)

This disaster is akin to a death (njondzi) and this is what the downtrodden experience when the state displaces them. These find themselves living on the margins and periphery of society as economic opportunities for advancement and upward social mobility are limited by the post-colonial state. The track showcases or reveals Ras Caleb’s class consciousness as he identifies with the subaltern, their condition, and plight as well as why they are in such a position. He uses his voice to unsettle and disrupt not just the genre where some artists shy away from political consciousness and hard-hitting lyrics on socio-political commentary but dares to confront the hegemony of the state and its brutality through the means of music. These have been let down by the post-colonial state and to retain some form of agency for the youth.

He engages in a form of activism, social commentary and the politics of the word. He does not shirk from his responsibilities as an artist as he is aware that his music ought to speak to and of the tensions, despair and issues that bedevil society. These include social and economic

inequality, unemployment, poverty, corruption, structural violence and the brutalization of the youth and citizens at large. Not only does he engage in the politics of resistance but crucially he has a transformative outlook which can be read as the politics of social transformation, a politics which calls for the leadership to exercise a moral compass and responsibility towards the upliftment and betterment of society. Not only is he a politically and socially conscious artist but he identifies with Afrocentricity...By so doing, he emerges as a ‘chantervist’ who can be contrasted to the politicians who he holds responsible for the sad plight and state of affairs in the country.

Though not employing direct physical violence, the post-colonial Zimbabwean state has on numerous occasions engaged in euphemistically called ‘clean-up’ campaigns such as Operation Murambatsvina which criminalized poverty and in a sense targeted the subaltern within society. Developments in Tokwe-Mukosi are a reminder of the malaise that confronts citizens of the post-colonial Zimbabwean state, how it is criminal to be poor, how the government treats the poor thus racialising poverty and creating cartographies of both poverty and structurally-induced violence against the vulnerable within society.

To authenticate himself as a conscious artist and one who is sent to speak truth to power, Ras Caleb evokes the name of Jah. Consciously or unconsciously, the evocation of Jah already sets the track as conscious and not a mere description or prayer of lament of the plight of the Tokwe-Mukosi flood but as a critique of state power and economic relations. The social fabric and spirit of communalism appears to be broken, those with the means care not and the state which is meant to provide safety nets is doing little. This is evident in the lyrics;

Pane umwetakatsika-tsika Vayavanosi flasher flashernhasivaripii(where are those who like showing off their wealth by donating)

He shows that he is a committed artist with an ideology he is not a mere entertainer but realizes that his role is to empower, liberate, critique power structures, power relations, comment on issues of social (in)justice, he must speak truth to power, educate and be relevant to the experiences of the local community and broader society at large. This dovetails with who writes that Daynes (2010: 191) ‘the message contained in reggae music is above all a message of denunciation: the point is to show what is really happening, based on the fundamental distinction

made by Rastafari between Good and Evil, between Zion and Babylon. Within a world viewed as a permanent struggle, reggae music takes a position...’ Through such binary opposition and evoking Jah’s name one reads that the state and its actions mirror that of the Babylon system, the state is corrupt and corrupted with very little care for its people and their plight. As a Rastafarian he values life, he is empathetic hence he sings; *Pachirastatodararamosakavarumengatibatanidzeimaoko* (*in our religion we value life, let us come together to help the displaced*), an indication of his committed stance which is in sharp contrast to the state and its acolytes.

A major theme that runs through the track is that of displacement and loss of home, a theme that is found in conscious reggae and dancehall. Displacement is not just social, it is political and economic and in this instance state-sanctioned revealing discourses on power and the state’s attitude towards the less privileged in society. It is noteworthy that ‘...displacement becomes something more than a story of destruction and victimization. Displacement is undeniably destructive and traumatic in multiple ways, but these processes also have beneficiaries, and have created new configurations and practices of power and accumulation.’ (Hammar, McGregor and Landau 2010: 267). The displacement through flooding was unfortunate, but the state’s response was heavy-handed as it responded through violence such that ‘...the Chingwizi transit camp was transformed into a battlefield as the displaced villagers angrily protested against the government’s decision to compel them to relocate into small plots without monetary compensation.’ (Hove 2016: 147). The state action went in against the villagers with the full weight of the state apparatus led by both rapid reaction police and the riot squad. Here was a state turning against its people, particularly the economically vulnerable within society.

Further to that his music and the theme expressed in the track have a global message though primarily directed to the local population which was displaced by the building of the dam. The dam was meant to bring about economic development and solve water woes in the region, it was meant to be a ‘betterment scheme.’ However, as with all betterment schemes, displacement of the lower classes, the subaltern takes place, for every betterment scheme, the lower classes experience development in reverse or arrested development. The local population becomes victims as flooding not only destroys their property, government reaction to the disaster is slow, lacks decisiveness and when it eventually comes, they are dumped in areas that do not have any

infrastructure thus perpetuating their suffering and poverty. They are thrown into resettlements that can be read as metaphors of ghettos, ghettos of poverty something that the post-colonial state seems good at doing-creating a ghetto-poverty complex which traps the subaltern in a cycle of poverty.

The predatory and vampire-like nature of the post-colonial state perpetuates poverty and economic inequalities. Rent-seeking behaviour has created the rentier state which has contributed to massive corruption which in turn has led to a class of consumers who rely on their political connections, corruption-related activities to pillage the state. According to Mkandawire (2001: 293) ‘the state, once the cornerstone of development, became the millstone around otherwise efficient markets. It is now the ‘rentier state’, the ‘over-extended state’, the ‘prebendal state’, the ‘crony state’, the ‘kleptocratic state’, the ‘inverted state’, etc.’ Instead of providing succour for its people, the state turns on them showing little concern for their plight. Corruption further worsens the plight of the Tokwe-Mukosi victims as Human Rights Watch (2015: 24) note that ‘some aid was apparently diverted to the neighbouring towns of Triangle and Chiredzi where it was sold on the open markets for profit. In one instance, some Shelter Box tents donated through the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) wrongly allocated to government officials...’ At the bottom of the rung are the subaltern who not only are voiceless and appear not to have any agency but their material and economic conditions are made worse by the insensitivity of the state and the political elite who are in power. These are the people that Ras Caleb sings for and about because the bureaucratic bourgeoisie exploits the subaltern for their own selfish ends in direct violation and betrayal of the aims and objectives of the war of liberation which sought a fairer and just society, a society where positive peace and structural inequalities are addressed.

Tokwe-Mukorsi illustrates the cartography of poverty and structural inequality cuts across the world, it is a class issue which needs the artist to diagnose it but also to provide a prognosis and critique of the state of affairs. Tracy (2005: 22) ‘...reggae may be seen not only a widely acknowledged manifestation of deeper social and cultural tumult but also as a working class cultural phenomenon with immediate historical precedents in the first half of the 20th century.’ It analyses the social, economic, and political ills in the state such as underdevelopment, various forms of material deprivation, unemployment, death. Structural violence and state-sponsored violence has been a feature of the post-colonial Zimbabwean state, and the flood victims bore the

brunt of the repressive and coercive elements of the state. It is noted that ‘Flood victims said the government had subjected them to harassment, threats, physical violence, and used “cruel methods” to force them out of Chingwizi camp and onto the one hectare plots...’ Human Rights Watch (2015: 26). Further Stanley (2005: 55) writing on the importance of not only space but maps and cartography, asserts that ‘...maps can be envisaged as signs of relationships and not just the location of a subject...’ in fact, ‘...it speaks to territory as much as to reality, representation and articulation.’ This cartography rears itself in economic, material and social aspects amongst the flood victims becomes a site of class struggle between the subaltern poor and the state, where space and place become contested terrains. The state then uses its repressive state apparatus to forcibly (re)settle the displaced flood victims through force and coercion. The class divide is important in helping understand the militant nature of the genre, the material conditions which the artists emerge from and their commitment to telling the stories of their communities and their people often means that the middle class and educated within society view it with suspicion and as a less than sophisticated genre. The genre carries a political message and talks to inner city or ghetto youth and Zimbabwean. They view themselves as the authentic voice of the youth, the ghetto youth who is assailed with the everyday struggles of life and existence. The artists have sought to be relevant by speaking to and of the experiences of the local youth, their hopes, fears, and despair and material conditions in the ghetto. Ras Caleb therefore emerges as an artist who engages with issues of social justice and power relations artists who champion the cause and plight of those in the lower echelons of society

Zimdancehall chanters confront the Babylonian practices of corruption thus making them as a ‘new’ strand of revolutionaries. He is claiming his space as a youth, not just a youth but emerges as a nationalist youth who undertakes a class critique of the country and its politics. The nationalist politicians who fought against colonial rule, the unjust structures of colonial rule and administration where the African lived as a second class citizen confronted and fought this injustice through street protests, civil disobedience and when this failed they resorted to armed struggle. Some youths left the country to receive military training to enable them to fight against the oppressive system. However, today’s youths are not taking to the streets as the injustices of the post-colonial state require different weapons of engagement, these are the lyric, microphone and here the artist plays a critical role. Human Rights Watch (2015: 26) the office of the

provincial administrator was accused by flood victims of engaging in ‘....several practices in order to achieve this end, including: denying them food; limiting access to water; barring and diverting donations intended for their assistance; blocking toilets; and closing the satellite school and clinic near the camp. Through rhythm and poetry, he challenges this claim by pointing out to how their looting and corruption has betrayed the revolution which they sought to bring. Instead of social justice there is social injustice which manifests itself through class differences and class struggle brought about by the predatory nature of the post-colonial state. Though he does not explicitly refer to himself as a revolutionary and nationalist, his persona as the people’s spokesperson allows one to contrast this with the ideological and pedagogical vision which he sets out to espouse in the track as he confronts the ills perpetuated by the political elite in the name of revolution and nationalism.

Police, military, youth militia and other arms of the security cluster were deployed by the state to carry out direct and physical violence against ‘enemies’ of the state and ruling party. Human Rights Watch (2015: 27) ‘on August 3, 2014, over 200 anti-riot police indiscriminately beat and arrested close to 300 people...’ He presents a criminalized state where violence both direct and structural is visited upon the populace by these gangsters in suits who loot, whose politics is rooted in the ideology of lootocracy, are corrupt and expropriate state resources for themselves. He emerges as a teacher whose pedagogical stance is to educate the people because through education society is liberated. Furthermore, he can be described as an ‘artivist’ that is an artist and activist who views his art as having a responsibility to confront headlong the social inequalities, injustices and violence of the state and its apparatus. In a lyrical and poetic rhyme he refers to the calibre of political leadership in the state who are self-serving, corrupt.

Conclusion

The artists avoids direct confrontation with the state, therefore he confronts the state through music, lyric and beats. By so doing they are not only venturing into the public sphere of politics but expanding our understanding of socio-economic issues at they affect both the youth and the subaltern. He creates a space for conversation and dialogue where the socio-economic issues are presented. His lyrics paint a story using words which reflects the alienation, disillusionment and betrayal of the revolution. The political kingdom has been achieved but the politics are still

defined by the barrel of the gun and violence against those with different political outlook-something that has been characteristic of Zimbabwe during the Robert Mugabe-era.

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