Deconstructing Colonial and Religious Interventions in Indigenous Musical Expression in Zimbabwe

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Abstract
This paper critically explores the interrelationship between colonialism, religion, cultural hegemony, and indigenous music within the Zimbabwean context. It examines how missionary-led colonial enterprises not only dismantled African religious systems but also disrupted indigenous musical and cultural traditions, promoting Western values as superior through religious indoctrination and education. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates that colonial and postcolonial institutions suppressed Zimbabwe's traditional music and performance practices, leading to a marginalisation of cultural identity. Drawing on postcolonial and decolonial theoretical frameworks, the paper advocates for a reimagined music education curriculum that integrates indigenous knowledge systems with Western methodologies. It argues that rather than rejecting modernity, this integrative approach would promote cultural inclusivity, preserve intangible heritage, and affirm epistemic plurality in Zimbabwe's educational and artistic spheres.

Keywords: Culture, Decoloniality, Indigenous Music and Dance, Religion, Subjugation

Introduction

The legacy of colonialism in Africa is deeply etched in the cultural, religious, and educational institutions inherited by postcolonial states. In Zimbabwe, the colonial project extended beyond territorial and economic domination; it was also an epistemological enterprise aimed at restructuring indigenous ways of knowing, worshipping, and expressing identity. Missionary activities, closely aligned with imperial agendas, played a central role in eroding traditional belief systems, reconfiguring cultural authority, and delegitimising indigenous practices. Among the most affected domains was music, a cornerstone of Zimbabwean social, religious, and communal life. Before colonisation, indigenous music in Zimbabwe functioned not only as entertainment but as a critical medium for spiritual expression, social cohesion, and political communication. With the arrival of European missionaries and the establishment of colonial governance, this music, along with associated dances, instruments, and oral traditions, was categorised as primitive, immoral, or idolatrous. Educational institutions institutionalised these

biases, promoting Western art music as civilised and marginalising indigenous knowledge systems.

This paper examines the nexus of colonialism, religion, hegemony, and culture by analysing how Zimbabwe's musical traditions were suppressed and how such erasure continues to affect national identity and cultural education. It argues that the revival and integration of indigenous music into Zimbabwe's curricula and cultural policies is essential for fostering cultural inclusivity, resisting residual colonial hierarchies, and promoting a hybridised model of knowledge that honours both indigenous and Western contributions. Through this lens, the study contributes to broader debates on decolonisation, cultural sovereignty, and epistemic justice in postcolonial African societies. Indigenous music that was suppressed under the Rhodesian regime must be re-centred in postcolonial Zimbabwe to redress the cultural and psychological subjugation caused by the imposition of colonial power. This paper poses the following question: *How did indigenous music become marginalised in Zimbabwe, and what interventions are required to decolonise the music curriculum and arts policy in the postcolony?* I argue that cultural reformation is necessary in Zimbabwe to restore indigenous music to its rightful status and reinforce cultural identity in contemporary society.

This paper adopts a qualitative approach, employing historicism as the guiding research method. It critically examines the violations of indigenous musical traditions from the time missionaries first arrived in Zimbabwe, followed by colonial occupation. A range of historical music sources is reviewed, as they offer vital representations of indigenous musical traditions from the past. These traditions were subjugated upon encountering British colonial power. I discuss how Zimbabwean indigenous music endured, despite attempts by colonial authorities to ban or erase it.

The paper illustrates how indigenous Zimbabwean music has significantly influenced political discourse by foregrounding issues of resistance and inclusivity. Music often propels political themes into national dialogue. The first section of the paper discusses the role of religion in the colonisation of Zimbabwe. The second examines how colonialism transformed local cultural systems. The final section engages with postcolonial developments, offering recommendations for reforming the music curriculum to decolonise Zimbabwean minds and cultural institutions.

Background

Music is a cultural phenomenon and a conduit for articulating discourses of political dominance (CHIKOWERO 2008) and identity in African history. It played a critical role in the liberation of Zimbabweans from colonial rule (GUZURA & NDIMANDE 2015) and continues to shape postcolonial cultural identity. Zimbabwe attained political independence following the Chimurenga liberation struggle, which gave rise to culturally expressive musical genres. Music served dual roles: reinforcing European hegemony on one hand, and mobilising indigenous resistance on the other. Preben Kaarsholm (1990) noted that popular culture has historically served both as an outlet for socio-political frustration and a forum for critiquing political leadership.

Today, the imperative to emancipate people from mental slavery remains. Indigenous music expresses divergent perspectives in times of tension between forces of domination, accommodation, and revolt. It remains central to decolonisation discourse, symbolising the people's enduring will to resist exploitation and assert autonomy. Songs allow individuals and communities to adopt heroic stances against domination. The significance of music in Zimbabwe's short but intense cultural history (1890 to the present) is thus undeniable. Kaarsholm (1990) observes that Rhodesia was a conquest society in need of legitimising its existence and values—both to unify the settler population and to project a civilising mission toward the African population, who were marginalised as 'primitive' and 'uncultured'. Colonialism affected both coloniser and colonised. This paper foregrounds the nexus of religion, colonialism, and culture.

Seminal African perspectives on how colonialism, Christianity and Western educational systems disrupted, changed, or in some cases preserved indigenous African musical practices have been proffered by leading scholars. The doyens on indigenous African music scholarship who have worked towards deconstructing colonial and religious interventions in indigenous musical expression include Kofi Agawu. Agawu (2003) raises important questions about the impact of colonialism on West African music that have characterised Africanism, ethnomusicology and anthropology over the years. Agawu laments how African music has been represented and misrepresented in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Documentation and examination of the intersection of indigenous African musical practices with colonial influences, and emic views on how colonialism affected African musical traditions includes works by Kwabena Nketia (1986) and Francis Bebey (1974). Meki Nzewi (1999) is particularly vehement about the decolonisation of African music education. Jacob Olupona (1991) also wrote extensively about the musical components in ATR, and touched on the impact of Western religion on indigenous spiritual and musical practices. The work of these scholars has been essential in recouping narratives on indigenous African music from Eurocentric academic interpretations, thereby steering scholarship towards decoloniality.

The Role of Religion in Enabling Colonisation

Christian missionaries played a strategic role in the surveillance and subsequent subjugation of indigenous Zimbabwean populations targeted for colonisation. As Robert Matikiti (2020, 176) affirms, "the close interaction between the church and imperialism in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the presence of Christian ministers of religion in the 1890 Pioneer Column that spearheaded the colonisation of Zimbabwe." Gwinyai Muzorewa (1985) similarly asserts that Christianity and colonialism arrived simultaneously, driven by parallel intentions. Missionaries were positioned as agents of 'civilisation', justified by the characterisation of African societies as savage and primitive, thereby rationalising European dominance. This so-called civilising mission included the systematic paganisation and delegitimisation of Zimbabwean traditional religions. As Mahmood Mamdani (1996) notes, missionary activity preceded formal colonisation under Cecil John Rhodes and the British South Africa Company (BSAC), effectively softening the ground for imperial conquest.

Colonisation entailed not only political and economic domination but also cultural erasure, including the suppression of indigenous expressive forms such as music and dance. Europeans sought to disempower local epistemologies, using religious doctrine as a tool for mental colonisation while employing violence to assert physical control. As Perminus Matiure (2019) notes, the Europeans used the Bible to colonise the mind and a gun to capture the land. Nonetheless, African communities did not passively accept this erasure. Moses Chikowero (2008) observes that many Africans utilised music as a tool for self-fashioning amidst the contradictions of colonial modernity, which preached universal civilisation while practising racial exclusion.

One of the central colonial objectives was to reconfigure indigenous spiritual consciousness. Missionaries recognised the transformative power of religion and targeted African Traditional Religion (ATR) as a threat to colonial control. David Maxwell (1995, 310) explains that "Christian exorcism and demonisation provided a new means of contesting the authority of patriarchal ancestor religion." The vilification of ATR as demonic served to sever intergenerational spiritual ties, undermining ancestral veneration and diminishing traditional authority. The baptism and co-optation of traditional chiefs eroded the guardianship of Shona cultural hegemony. Spirit mediums such as Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda, symbols of spiritual resistance, were eliminated, further consolidating colonial rule through spiritual dispossession.

The denigration of indigenous culture persisted throughout the colonial period. Asante Welsh (1985) argues that the arrival of missionaries marked the first wave of colonial infiltration. Through religion, aesthetics, and language, European norms were imposed upon Shona society, yet not without resistance. While the European influence was assertive, it was not absolute. The continued observance of *Mbende, Jerusarema* among the Zezuru, reverence for *Musikavanhu* (the Creator), and respect for traditional leadership underscore the resilience of Shona cultural identity. Nonetheless, missionaries, often seen as emissaries of European morality and civilisation—perceived African dance as 'licentious,' 'indecent,' and 'provocative.' Their efforts to ban expressive forms like the *Mbende* dance were vigorously pursued, with missionary appeals to native commissioners eventually leading to a formal ban by 1910 (GWEREVENDE & RWAENDEPI 2019).

Despite this, the Zezuru community resisted such cultural repression. In response to the proposed ban, the Council of Elders convened to defend the sacred status of the dance. A Zezuru chief approached the missionary with a vision he claimed to have received in a dream. In it, he had witnessed the birth of Jesus, celebrated by African chiefs through dance. Framing the *Mbende* as a divine tribute to Christ, the chief persuaded the missionary to permit its performance as a Christmas celebration (MASEKO, as cited in WELSH 1985). This strategy not only preserved the dance but recontextualised it within Christian symbolism, ensuring its survival under colonial scrutiny.

Over time, however, the *Jerusarema* dance evolved, particularly within beer halls. These venues transformed the sacred dance into a more secular form of expression. The sensual hip gyrations by women and exaggerated leg movements

by men created an atmosphere that reflected the duality of colonial life—moments of ecstatic release amidst broader despair. As spectators immersed themselves in the dance, *Jerusarema* became both an act of cultural resistance and a reflection of the emotional complexity of colonised life.

Thus, while colonial and missionary projects sought to extinguish indigenous religious and cultural practices, they ultimately encountered persistent resistance. Through strategic adaptation, symbolic reframing, and embodied performance, communities such as the Zezuru retained core elements of their identity. These actions underscore the enduring power of cultural expression as a form of spiritual and political resilience under colonial domination.

Musical Practices During the Colonial Era

Chikowero (2008) observes that the musical expression of Africans during the early colonial period came to reflect the profound transformations in their lived realities. As Africans transitioned from precolonial agrarian life to roles as labour migrants, urban dwellers, and cultural agents, their music evolved in tandem, embodying the experiences and tensions of historical epochs, from the urbanising 1930s, through the era of decolonisation, to the complexities of the postcolonial condition. According to Chikowero, African communities strategically adopted aspects of Western cultural forms, including music, as symbolic capital, enabling them to carve out new spaces and reimagine their futures. These cultural expressions were not only vehicles for performing and legitimising power but also served as platforms for contestation and subversion.

During colonial rule, the construction of Rhodesian cultural identity was reflected through music and other artistic forms. Rhodesians aspired to create a distinct national identity, separate from their British heritage, yet one that was seen as more legitimate and rooted in Africa than that of the indigenous population. Coralie Hancock-Barnett (2012) notes that, across the colonial world, indigenous peoples were subjected to widespread displacement and resettlement, resulting in a severing of economic foundations, disruption of resource access, and the erosion of cultural heritage. Within this context, traditional music in Zimbabwe was denigrated and marginalised, viewed as primitive and relegated to subaltern status.

Chikowero (2008) contends that, amid the silencing of indigenous voices by dominant colonial meta-narratives, music remained one of the few arenas in which subaltern populations could articulate alternative worldviews. The suppression of African identity in Rhodesia was evident across artistic disciplines, including music, drama, and poetry. The Rhodesian state selectively promoted apolitical African music, while expressions such as mbira music were viewed with suspicion due to their association with spirit mediums and the first Chimurenga uprising. Mbira was derided as primitive and inherently spiritual, characteristics feared by the colonial regime for their potential to mobilise resistance.

The colonial administration tolerated only those aspects of African music deemed innocuous. European-owned recording companies were often manipulated into accepting subversive content masked in symbolic language and indigenous rhythms. Artists like Thomas Mapfumo occasionally employed more overt resistance in their lyrics. Ironically, this counter-cultural movement flourished

within the colonial cultural industry itself, undermining white hegemony from within. Zimbabwean musicians fused Western musical elements—introduced by missionaries and settlers—with indigenous traditions, producing what Homi Bhabha refers to as cultural hybridity (KALUA 2009). This strategic synthesis allowed African artists to navigate colonial scrutiny while sustaining cultural continuity and innovation.

Maxwell Rani (2012) notes that modernity, Christianity, and migration have profoundly transformed African music and dance, contributing to a syncretic evolution. Thomas Mapfumo exemplifies this transformation. In the 1970s, he began experimenting with musical fusion, incorporating Afro-rock influences with traditional Shona forms during his time with the Hallelujah Chicken Run Band. This led to the development of the distinctive 'Hokoyo' sound and, later, the emergence of Chimurenga music through collaborations with The Acid Band and later The Blacks Unlimited. His work merged traditional instruments like the *mbira* and *hosho* with electric guitars and drum kits, crafting a sound that resonated with Zimbabwe's oppressed majority and articulated their socio-political grievances.

Mapfumo's music became a vehicle for political consciousness, especially during the liberation struggle. His lyrics addressed colonial injustices and advocated for self-determination, earning him both popularity and persecution. As Chikowero (2008) notes, Chimurenga music arose from the frustration with the ineffectiveness of appeasing colonial power, contributing to a surge in cultural nationalism. Songs like *Tumira Vana Kuhondo* (Send the Children to War) became anthems of resistance. In response, the colonial state banned his music from official media channels and imprisoned him in 1977. Upon release in 1978, he continued to produce politically charged music that galvanised the nationalist movement (MOYO 2017).

The Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) predominantly played Western music and visual content, reinforcing white supremacist ideology while suppressing indigenous cultural expression. Nonetheless, in a bid to project an image of inclusivity amid the global decolonisation wave, the colonial regime permitted limited African representation through popular figures like Mukadota and jazz bands such as the *Itai Cent Cent* singing band. These efforts were part of a broader strategy to portray Rhodesia as a multiracial society resisting communist influence.

Despite these gestures, Westernisation deeply altered Zimbabwean cultural practices, driven by the perception of foreign values as superior. For instance, traditional Shona ceremonies such as 'Kupururudzira Muroora' (bride welcoming), involving song and ululation to welcome a bride, have been displaced in some communities by the Western concept of the white wedding (MAGURAUSHE & MUKUHLANI 2014). Folkloric songs, historically central to Shona female identity and socialisation, have declined. Ceremonial symbols, such as the pierced blanket signifying non-virginity or the throwing of hot charcoal in celebration of virginity, have faded amid modern sexual behaviours that risk detachment from cultural values and increased exposure to sexually transmitted infections.

Colonialism also ushered in the superimposition of written forms over oral traditions, disrupting the intergenerational transmission of African musical heritage. Ratidzo Shanangurai and Wonder Maguraushe (2019) critique the misrepresentation of African music when transcribed using Western notational systems, which tend to be reductionist, failing to capture improvisational and non-metric qualities central to African music. Instruments such as the *mbira* and *marimba*, whose polyphonic and cyclic structures defy rigid notation, lose their essence in transcription. Paul Berliner (2020) recounts his surprise when live performances of *mbira* music diverged from Western transcriptions, illustrating the limitations of conventional notation in capturing dynamic African musical expressions.

Expressive features like ululation, whistling, and paralinguistic vocalisations, essential to the aesthetic and communicative function of African music, are also excluded from standard notation. Consequently, documentation practices risk stripping African music of its improvisatory and affective dimensions. Scholars and practitioners are thus urged to rethink methodologies that preserve the Africanness of music without subordinating it to colonial epistemologies.

This epistemic marginalisation extends beyond official records into daily social interactions, where colonial modes of categorisation persist. As Gayatri Spivak (1988) contends, even in contemporary Zimbabwe, local musical traditions continue to be constructed as the 'Other' through the lens of colonial legacy. Odyke Nzewi (2010) laments the erosion of oral indigenous knowledge systems, attributing their decline to the imposition of Western pedagogical frameworks during colonisation. The multiplicity of regional dialects and local variations in repertoires, such as *Nhemamusasa*, renders fixed transcription antithetical to the fluidity and freedom embedded in African musical traditions.

The trajectory of Zimbabwean music reveals an enduring tension between cultural suppression and creative survival. From missionary-imposed prohibitions to strategic hybridisation and political mobilisation, music has served as a resilient vessel for cultural memory, identity, and resistance. While colonial systems sought to erase or appropriate African musical forms, artists and communities continually reconfigured them, embedding within sound the struggle for liberation, dignity, and continuity.

The Postcolonial Scenario

The attainment of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980 did not sever the alliance between imperial power structures and the church. Rather, their synergy has persisted into the postcolonial era, now expressed through more subtle forms of neo-colonialism, including the rise of new African-initiated denominations that, while indigenised in form, often mirror Western ecclesiastical hierarchies and moral codes. This continuity challenges the assumption that political decolonisation has been matched by cultural or religious autonomy.

In recognition of the importance of cultural pluralism, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2009) has advocated for the documentation and preservation of cultural diversity in all communities, enabling global knowledge sharing and identity reclamation. Similarly, the UN's

2030 Sustainable Development Goals, to which Zimbabwe and South Africa are signatories, encourage the active promotion of cultural heritage as a pathway to sustainable development and societal cohesion.

Gilbert Pwiti and Webber Ndoro (1999) argue that colonialism alienated African peoples from their cultural heritage by coercively replacing their spiritual beliefs, governance structures, and traditional epistemologies. In Zimbabwe, the imposition of Christianity contributed to the internalisation of Western values, leading many to devalue and marginalise indigenous culture. True decolonisation, therefore, necessitates not only political sovereignty but also the revival and restoration of cultural pride and indigenous knowledge systems.

Recent efforts such as the formation of the Pakare Paye Arts Centre, National Dance Company, Mbira Centre, and Amakhosi Theatre reflect postcolonial attempts to reassert Zimbabwe's cultural autonomy. These initiatives aim to preserve and disseminate indigenous artistic practices, particularly in music and performance. However, the dominance of Western-oriented music education, particularly in state-run institutions, raises critical questions about the depth and authenticity of these efforts. The relegation of indigenous music knowledge to under-resourced private or community-based organisations suggests a lingering colonial hangover in cultural policy and pedagogy.

Following independence, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) emerged as the ruling party. However, Chikowero (2008) notes that the Mugabe-led government retained many of the colonial regime's authoritarian tendencies, especially regarding the political use of music. Initially a site of liberation and hope, Chimurenga music, which had galvanised support during the war, quickly became a terrain of protest, questioning the ambiguities and unfulfilled promises of independence. Chikowero argues that, despite disenfranchisement under both colonial and postcolonial regimes, Zimbabweans have continued to utilise music as a tool of political engagement, identity formation, and cultural resistance.

The post-2000 period, marked by socio-economic crisis, political repression, and the erosion of state legitimacy, has seen an increasingly strategic use of music by the ruling party. The state has commissioned songs, organised musical galas, and controlled artistic platforms to propagate its ideological agenda while suppressing dissenting voices. This instrumentalisation of culture underscores the state's continued reliance on symbolic forms to shape public sentiment and maintain control.

According to Bekhithemba Dube (2020), Zimbabwe's Second Republic is characterised by shrinking democratic space, selective application of the law, and the manipulation of religion to entrench quasi-authoritarian nationalism. This form of nationalism is measured by loyalty to the ZANU-PF regime and requires the adoption of its ideological framework. As a result, Zimbabwe has become politically polarised, dividing citizens into regime loyalists and opponents. Martin Mujinga (2018) identifies so-called 'regime enablers' as individuals who assist the state in preserving power, regardless of ethical or legal considerations.

Dube further explains that certain religious leaders have been co-opted to blur or neutralise the influence of religious dissent. These leaders serve as instru-

ments of the state, using theological narratives to legitimise political authority and confuse opposition within faith communities. Jacob Dreyer (2007) aptly notes that political consecration often opens the door for religion to be exploited in struggles over class, gender, race, and identity—boundaries that are frequently redrawn and manipulated by those in power or those aspiring to it.

Zimbabwe's postcolonial cultural landscape reveals an enduring alliance between political power and religious authority, shaped by colonial legacies and perpetuated through neo-colonial practices. While cultural revival initiatives exist, they are often undermined by state control, Western influence, and limited institutional support. A genuine cultural decolonisation will require not only structural reforms but also a critical interrogation of the political appropriation of religion and the revitalisation of indigenous knowledge systems in both public and private spheres.

Decolonising Through Indigenous Music

Music departments in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions have begun a critical transformation, shifting from colonial-era musicology-based curricula to models that assert a localised academic identity in teaching and learning (MAGURAUSHE & MATIURE 2017). University music programmes now adopt an eclectic approach, integrating elements of both Western art music traditions—such as Western music history, voice, guitar, brass, keyboard—and indigenous forms, including mbira, marimba, folk choir, and theories of African music. Institutions such as Great Zimbabwe University's School of Visual and Performing Arts also teach ethnochoreology, reflecting an intentional movement toward curricular pluralism that both deconstructs colonial knowledge hierarchies and acknowledges the value Western systems may offer.

Alejandro Madrid (2017) underscores decoloniality as a fundamental challenge to epistemic power structures, advocating for a reorientation of undergraduate music curricula that affirms diverse ways of knowing. This approach, in line with Bhabha's concept of *hybridity*, posits that cultural identity is not fixed but shaped through exchange. Zimbabwean music education can be decolonised by embracing a fusion of Western and African pedagogies, recognising that colonial contact was not unidirectional. Musical forms evolved through mutual influence, and postcolonial theory demands a re-examination of both traditions in order to develop a comprehensive and context-sensitive pedagogy for Zimbabwe's school and tertiary systems.

A second key strategy is the use of indigenous languages in music instruction. Language transmits cultural values; its exclusion from formal education equates to cultural erasure. As Obert Ganyatta (2017) argues, mother-tongue instruction enhances comprehension and fosters authentic engagement with indigenous music traditions. Where vocabulary is lacking, Shona linguists and cultural experts should collaborate with communities to develop new terminology, ensuring linguistic growth alongside musical preservation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) reminds us that language is not only a tool for communication but a carrier of culture.

Third, music education must combine oral and written traditions. In precolonial Zimbabwe, music was transmitted through oral methods such as storytelling, proverbs, myth, metaphor, and demonstration. The rote learning of music mirrored broader educational methods used by elders. Christianity and colonial rule marginalised these traditions, prioritising Western literacy-based approaches. Benjamin Izu (2024) affirms that blending oral and written modes ensures continuity and relevance of indigenous music across generations. Restoring the legitimacy of oral pedagogy is essential for nurturing an educational framework that values Zimbabwean musical epistemologies.

Policy interventions are crucial for sustaining this cultural revival. Section 16(2) of Zimbabwe's Constitution obliges the state and its institutions to preserve and protect the country's cultural heritage. The Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education, and Higher and Tertiary Education, should jointly develop initiatives to raise awareness of Zimbabwean music heritage. This includes integrating the history of local music and biographies of indigenous musicians into curricula at all levels. Such efforts will help instil cultural pride and challenge the disproportionate focus on Western music traditions in Zimbabwe's education system.

Effective implementation demands a collaborative, multi-sectoral approach. Government agencies, educational institutions, media outlets, artists, and local communities must coordinate efforts to mainstream indigenous music. Cultural policies should be revised to promote decolonial agendas, and national music strategies should be developed to reinforce these aims. Policy tools may include supporting local music through national broadcasting quotas, festivals, and awards systems. A decolonised musical arts sector requires holistic reform, encompassing production, performance, distribution, and recognition.

The Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, in collaboration with the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe (NACZ), should spearhead efforts to empower creative arts practitioners, culture bearers, and communities. Support for traditional musicians must be prioritised through investment in platforms, mentorship, and training programmes. Funding for recording studios, instruments, and other resources is vital for nurturing local talent and innovation. Moreover, the state must ensure fair remuneration, copyright protections, and equitable distribution systems to allow artists to benefit economically from their work.

Broadcasting policy plays a decisive role in cultural preservation. Media outlets, radio, television, and streaming platforms, should intentionally diversify their playlists to showcase Zimbabwean music across all genres, including traditional and contemporary forms. In 2000, Professor Jonathan Moyo's Local Content Policy, which mandated 75% local music (eventually 100%), catalysed the rise of numerous artists by increasing local airplay. A renewed broadcasting quota system could similarly enhance the visibility of indigenous musical expressions, providing youth with meaningful cultural references in their media environments.

Efforts to resist the marginalisation of traditional dance should also be prioritised. As Solomon Gwerevende and Fumisai Rwaendepi (2019) observe, dances like *Mbende Jerusarema* offer a compelling medium for decolonising performance spaces and contesting Western aesthetic dominance. Restoring such

practices challenges colonial legacies and reinforces the validity of local knowledge systems. Policy-making in this area should be community-driven, with inclusive stakeholder engagement involving artists, producers, scholars, and audiences.

Equally important is the need to redefine musical success. Western criteria, such as commercial sales, international awards, or Euro-American approval, must be complemented by indigenous frameworks of recognition, which value cultural significance, local innovation, and social impact. Honouring indigenous music achievements can boost confidence in cultural heritage and position traditional music as a cornerstone of cultural tourism and national identity.

Decolonising Zimbabwe's music education and policy landscape is a multifaceted task requiring structural, pedagogical, and ideological transformation. By integrating indigenous knowledge systems, revalorising local languages, combining oral and written traditions, and reforming institutional frameworks, Zimbabwe can reclaim the richness of its musical heritage. Success depends not only on curriculum reform but on a national commitment to cultural sovereignty, enabled by inclusive policies, collaborative practices, and sustained political will.

Anticipated objections

To critics who interpret the decolonisation of Zimbabwe's music curricula as anti-Western or ideologically driven, it is important to reframe the initiative as a pursuit of cultural inclusivity, rather than as reverse discrimination or political resistance. Decolonisation, in this context, does not oppose modernity, nor does it advocate a return to the past. Rather, it seeks to integrate the strengths of both Western and indigenous musical traditions in a manner that fosters hybridity and mutual enrichment. While Western systems offer structured frameworks and internationally recognised artistic standards, Zimbabwe's indigenous music represents equally rich, complex, and meaningful cultural expressions. A decolonised curriculum can incorporate both, ensuring compatibility with global music education standards while preserving local heritage.

The urgency of this integration stems from the fragility of oral traditions. As Doris Green (2019) notes, cultural practices risk being lost through generational discontinuity and the fallibility of human memory. Balancing oral and written modes of knowledge transmission is therefore vital for the preservation and continuation of intangible cultural heritage. While methodological challenges may arise, particularly around assessment and standardisation, oral transmission has repeatedly proven effective in cultural education contexts when properly supported. Concerns about authenticity can be addressed by ensuring that indigenous music is taught within Zimbabwe's diverse ethnolinguistic and cultural contexts, drawing on local practitioners and knowledge holders.

Implementation challenges, such as teacher preparedness, curricular coherence, and resource limitations—are legitimate but not insurmountable. These can be mitigated through stakeholder engagement, inclusive policy-making, and phased implementation strategies that allow for capacity building. Lessons must also be learned from the shortcomings of the recently introduced Heritage-Based

Curriculum, which faced criticism for being rushed and lacking both human and material resources. A more collaborative, bottom-up approach, involving educators, cultural practitioners, communities, and curriculum experts, is essential to ensure that decolonisation efforts are sustainable, inclusive, and contextually grounded.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the complex nexus of colonialism, religion, hegemony, and culture within the Zimbabwean context. It traced the trajectory of Western domination, local subjugation, indigenous resistance, and the ongoing process of decolonisation. In the precolonial period, Zimbabweans, like other African societies, deeply valued their cultural traditions, political systems, and indigenous musical forms. Traditional music played a central role in social, spiritual, and communal life.

However, the arrival of European missionaries and colonial administrators marked a profound disruption. Missionary-led Christian institutions became instrumental in the destruction of indigenous belief systems, contributing to the erosion of cultural self-worth among local populations. The imposition of Western values systematically undermined traditional practices; religious rituals, musical instruments, and dances were prohibited or stigmatised, and education systems privileged Western art music while marginalising indigenous knowledge. This facilitated a broader colonial project of cultural hegemony and mental colonisation.

The central argument of this paper is that the revival and institutional support of indigenous music is critical, not as a rejection of Western cultural forms, but as a necessary step towards cultural pluralism and epistemic justice. Indigenous and Western musical traditions need not be antagonistic; rather, they can co-exist and complement one another within a decolonised and inclusive educational and cultural framework. Recognising and elevating indigenous music is essential to restoring Zimbabwean cultural sovereignty and affirming the value of diverse knowledge systems in a postcolonial society.

Declaration

*The author declares no conflict of interest or ethical issues for this work.

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