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Risky dialogues: the performative state and the nature of power in a postcolony¹

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Abstract:

Arguments on the performative state often treat performance as a practice that the state forces upon its citizens in rather monologic fashion. However, this contradicts the fundamentally fluid nature of performance, always evolving, malleable and never fixed or static. Focusing on the state-sponsored televised music gala and the genre of ‘urban grooves’, which emerged in the context of a broader revival of cultural nationalism in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, I discuss the complex and ambivalent ways in which these spaces operated as platforms of co-optation and resistance. Performance therefore is an inherently risky practice that does not always prove reliable in furthering the status quo. While the state was able to discipline musicians to a certain extent, restraint was limited and musicians had the ability to shape events in their own way. The practice of performance did not only present risks to those in power but also offered opportunities to the state to solidify its affiliation with musicians, and to frame them as natural allies or supporters of the state. Ultimately, this proves that a dialogic understanding of power and resistance is crucial in order to make sense of the convergence between politics and performance in the postcolony.

Keywords: performance; power; agency; resistance; postcolonial studies; cultural nationalism; music and politics; Zimbabwe

Introduction

A number of political anthropologists have highlighted the dramaturgical and ritual aspects of power (Turner 1974; Balandier 1980; Geertz 1980; Kertzer 1988; Taussig 1997), while media and communication scholars have pointed to the symbolic nature of political communication (Edelman 1964, 1971, 1988) and the increasing blurring of politics, spectacle and popular culture (Street 1997; Kellner 2002; Van Zoonen 2005; Hermes 2006). Performance has not only been used to examine “bounded, intentionally produced enactments which are (usually) marked and set off from ordinary activities” (Schieffelin 1998: 194) such as theatrical plays but has also been deployed to examine everyday practices (Goffman 1959; Butler 1997). In the context of Africa, Mbembe (1992a: 21, 7) has argued that intentionally produced acts of performance should be treated as a crucial part of the exercise of state power in Africa: “[C]eremonies have become the privileged language through which power speaks, acts, coerces [...]. [I]t is the festivities and celebrations that are the vehicles, par excellence, for giving expression to the commandment and for staging its displays of magnificence and

¹ I am grateful to comments and feedback on earlier versions of this article from members of the ‘Performance and Social Meaning’ reading group that I was privileged to be part of during my stay at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. This article is very much a product of my conversations with members of the group in the past and present, and particularly with Liz Gunner, Maria Suriano, Innocentia Mhlambi, Anne Schumann, Jendele Hungbo, Neo Musangi and Kelly Askew.

prodigality". However, Mbembe offers a rather pessimistic account of the performative state in which rulers and ruled are locked together in a power vacuum that offers few escape routes. Performance, here, is treated as a practice that the state forces upon its citizens in rather monologic fashion (Karlstrom 2003). However, this contradicts the fundamentally fluid nature of performance, always evolving, malleable and never fixed or static. In this article, I emphasise the communicative and interactive nature of performance. I examine performance not in the first instance as a practice imposed on citizens by the ceremonial state but as an opportunity for citizens to participate and shape the rituals of the state, particularly in circumstances where alternative channels of communication for citizens to engage the state are absent.

With this background in mind, this article more specifically aims to make sense of the televised music gala — a genre introduced in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s — as a 'performative encounter' (cf Rosello 2005) between the state and musicians. The 'music gala' emerged as a new genre on the state-owned broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) in the early 2000s as part of government's cultural nationalist project of the Third Chimurenga (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009; Willems 2013). This project mediated a narrow national imaginary that served to legitimise continued reign of the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) over Zimbabwe. The music galas were broadcast live on radio and television and complemented the formal commemorative ceremonies of national day celebrations. In a context in which the urban electorate overwhelmingly supported the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the gala was introduced in an attempt to interpellate young, urban Zimbabweans as loyal supporters of the ruling party. In order to win the hearts of youthful, urban voters, the galas became a platform not only of government-sponsored musicians part of the *Third Chimurenga* music album series but efforts were also made to incorporate performers part of the 'urban grooves' genre and musicians critical of the ZANU-PF government. I discuss the complex and ambivalent ways in which the music gala and the newly emergent 'urban grooves' genre manifested themselves as platforms of both co-optation and resistance. In examining these highly contested genres, I argue for a more dialogic conceptualisation of performance so as to gain a better understanding of the convergence between formal politics and popular culture at various levels.

Spatialising the televised music gala

It is crucial to understand the broader spatial context of performance. The spaces in which performance take place shape the meaning of performative acts while performance in return also produces space (cf. Castryck and Sieveking 2014). The televised music gala started out as an initiative by the state-owned national broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), but the organisation of the event was soon taken over by the Ministry of Information.² The key aim of the gala was to commemorate historical events and national days, and to honour politicians who had played an important role in the liberation struggle. At Independence in 1980, the newly independent government had introduced a range of formal, highly militarised ceremonies to coincide with national day celebrations such as Independence Day and Heroes' Day. Normally, these celebrations take place in Harare's National Sports Stadium, and a typical ceremony comprises of an air show of Airforce of Zimbabwe jets, a military parade, mass displays performed by school children, mock drills by the Zimbabwe National Army, performances by the Police Band, and most importantly, a speech delivered by President Robert Mugabe.

² Interview with former CEO of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), Mr Munyaradzi Hwengwere, 31 January 2011, Harare, Zimbabwe.

The physical, spatial setting of the national day celebrations was that of a formal state ceremony that clearly sought to convey the grandeur, power and weight of the state, demonstrated by the heavy presence of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). The music gala, on the other hand, took place in a more informal and intimate setting, such as a conference centre, sport grounds or provincial sports stadium. It was set up like any other music festival with audiences facing a performance stage and a range of decorative banners that displayed images of liberation heroes or referred to symbolic, historical places such as Great Zimbabwe. While the music gala did not explicitly make reference to the ruling party, ZANU-PF, nor was it used by government politicians to make speeches, the galas were nevertheless strongly associated with government and the ruling party and its broader politics of reviving memories of the liberation struggle. As Barber (1997: 351) has argued, different spaces call into being different modes of address and appeal to audiences in diverging ways. While the formal state ceremony could be associated with Gramsci's notion of force, the popular music gala could be seen as a concealed attempt to manufacture consent. The music gala's political message was more subtle and served to indirectly support ZANU-PF's key ideological message.

Apart from the immediate physical space in which the music gala took place, it is important to situate the event within broader spaces of performance. It could be argued that in the early 2000s, performance spaces became crucial to the state and ruling party which in the face of a growing opposition party aimed to deploy the widest possible range of options to retain the loyalty of its constituency. Like Mbembe, wa Thiong'o (1997: 21, 28) considers performance to be a crucial aspect of the nature of power in the postcolony:

The nation-state sees the entire territory as its performance area; it organizes the space as a huge enclosure, with definite places of entrance and exit [...]. That is why the question of the politics of the performance space is germane to any theorizing about the postcolonial condition. For the politics of the performance space is much more than a question of a physical site for a theatrical show. It touches on nearly all aspects of power and being in a colonial and postcolonial society.

The exercise of politics is of course inherently performative; it is practiced on a stage and in order to appeal to voters, politicians often aspire to the same qualities as musicians such as charisma and an ability to connect with the audience (see also Street 1997). While the live stage may have been replaced to a large extent with a television studio in highly mediated environments such as Europe and the United States, political rallies, gatherings and direct physical encounters between politicians and citizens continue to play an important role in the Zimbabwean context. Rallies constitute a crucial component of election campaigns. In postcolonies such as Zimbabwe more specifically, performance and politics been intertwined even more closely because of the important role of music in the country's liberation struggle. In a context in which the state was keen to revive memories of the liberation struggle in order to legitimise itself, this literally brought musicians and politicians closer in performance spaces and together on the actual stage. Furthermore, the growing popularity of a newly emergent opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) meant that the stage literally became a battleground for the audience, a crucial space in which to retain the interest of an electorate that increasingly cast their vote to the opposition MDC. However, explanations for the growing convergence between politicians and musicians in the early 2000s should not only be sought within the historical context of political culture and the changing political climate but could also be found in new challenges posed to the music industry. As a result of the economic crisis and growing music piracy, live performance became a vital means of income for musicians who were faced with rapidly dwindling revenues of record sales. Many Zimbabweans were no longer able to afford authentic music

CDs purchased from formal music shops such as Spinalong or Crocodile Rock, and resorted to buying pirated copies. This meant that many Zimbabwean musicians came to rely on regular performance as a crucial means of income.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the music gala did not merely happen on a physical stage but was also broadcast live via the mediated space of radio and television. This offered musicians performing at the gala a rare opportunity to expose their music to a wider audience. While the older and established generation of Zimbabwean musicians enjoyed regular airplay on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), this was a privilege not always available to the younger generation of musicians who did not have the resources to record music videos and simply did not have the same level of access to the state broadcaster. In their struggles to penetrate the music industry, the gala offered a key opportunity to widen their reach and gain popularity which was crucial in order to attract audiences to live performance shows. However, musicians often faced a difficult decision whether or not to accept the invitation to perform at a music gala. Association with galas – and thereby with the ruling party – could be damaging to those fans supporting the opposition but not participating, on the other hand, could result in limited airplay on the national broadcaster. Before discussing the way in which musicians negotiated these dilemmas, the following two sections offers some context on two key music genres that were strongly represented at the galas, and which began to enjoy a particularly intimate relationship with the state: *chimurenga* music and ‘urban grooves’.

The revival of *chimurenga* music

The genre of *chimurenga* music originates from the period of Zimbabwe’s liberation war in the 1970s. Music was a crucial medium during the liberation struggle (Pongweni 1982; Turino 2000; Vambe 2004; Pfukwa 2007, 2008; Chirere and Mhandu 2008; Musiyiwa 2008), and the genre of *chimurenga* music was revived in the 2000s by government in an attempt to remind Zimbabweans of the fight against colonialism, and to emphasise the ruling party’s key role in the struggle (Thram 2006a, 2006b; Mano 2007; Chikowero 2007, 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009; Muchemwa 2010). A range of state-sponsored music albums were launched that were produced by commissioned artists or politicians-cum-musicians. The albums became known as the ‘Third Chimurenga Series’ and were frequently played on both radio and television. ‘Third Chimurenga’ was the term used by government to refer to the final chapter in the struggle for land, independence and sovereignty. It referred to the period since 2000 and emphasised that it was a continuation of the uprisings in the late nineteenth century (known as ‘First Chimurenga’) and the liberation war in the 1960s and 1970s (known as ‘Second Chimurenga’).

‘Hondo Yeminda’³ (“the struggle for land”) was the first in the music album series and was launched during an official ceremony in August 2001. A second volume was introduced in 2002.⁴ The launch ceremonies were attended by various government cabinet ministers and

³ In this article, all references to, and translations of, vernacular languages in Zimbabwe are to chiShona, which is spoken by the majority of Zimbabweans. The second most important language in the country is siNdebele which is the dominant language in the western part of Zimbabwe. Most of the songs part of both the *Chimurenga* and ‘urban grooves’ genre are sung in chiShona. Songs in the siNdebele language were not as visible at the music gala although contributions were made by musicians such as Sandra Ndebele and Albert Nyathi, and dance group IYASA, Music genres in Zimbabwe are strongly associated with certain languages which reflects the broader politics of ethnicity (see also Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009a, 2009b).

⁴ Apart from ‘Hondo Yeminda’, Moyo coordinated two more music albums: ‘Come to Victoria Falls Down in Zimbabwe’ which was launched in 2003 and sought to revive Victoria Falls as a prime tourist attraction, and ‘Back2Black’ which Moyo produced for the group Pax Afro and contained a number of Pan-Africanist songs. Other albums in the Third Chimurenga Series were ‘Mwana Wevhu’ (literally “children of the soil” but often problematically translated as “sons of the soil”, hereby failing to recognise the contribution of women to the

officials, and the albums themselves were the product of a collaboration between the Minister for Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, music groups such as the Police Band and musicians such as Marko Sibanda and Comrade Chinx Chingaira.⁵ According to the Minister of Higher Education, Sports and Culture, Dr Samuel Mumbengegwi, the album had “done the country proud by composing the songs that captured Zimbabwe’s thoughts about land”.⁶ Both albums included a number of liberation war songs whose lyrics were adapted to the particular context of the 2000s. For example, the second volume of ‘Hondo Yeminda’ included a revision of the popular liberation war song ‘Maruza Imi’ (“you have lost, you whites”) which was composed and performed by Comrade Chinx Chingaira. Chingaira was a popular musician during the liberation war and revised the song to make it more suitable to the new context of the ‘Third Chimurenga’. The original song sought to raise awareness about the history of exploitation and begins with a narration of the arrival of white settlers in Zimbabwe and urges them “to go back home” (Pongweni 1982: 18). The revised 2002 version reminds whites of their military defeat in the liberation war and heralds the 2000 land occupations as finally bringing an end to white privileges:

Kubva muna 1980 tikati slow track iri kutora minda
 Willing buyer willing seller
 Vakakwidza mari mangwana yava one million, 10 million, yave billion.
 Manje veZimbabwe takaramba.

Translation:

From 1980 we said the pace of land reclamation would be slow because we realised that the whites would not give up the land without a fight
 First the policy was willing buyer willing seller
 Then the farmers hiked the price of land to one million, then to 10 million, and then a billion
 That was when the blacks of Zimbabwe said no.
 (quoted in Vambe 2004: 176).

The song considers the land occupations of the 2000s as a continuation of the struggle for land during the liberation war. The emphasis on the war and the role of land served to provide a strong justification for ZANU-PF’s continued presence in Zimbabwe. As one of the liberation war movements, ZANU-PF had played an important part in enabling the country to become independent, and this was repeatedly brought up in order to legitimise the party’s continued rule of Zimbabwe. Opposition politicians were discredited by referring to their lack of involvement in the war. The focus on land in songs and television programmes served as covert advertising for ZANU-PF’s main campaign issue: the unequal distribution of land. *Chimurenga* musicians such as Marko Sibanda and Comrade Chinx Chingaira and music groups such as the Police Band were offered a prominent space in the music gala, thereby conveying key political messages in a subtle manner.

The birth of ‘urban grooves’

While the commissioning and revival of *chimurenga* music assisted the government to appeal to an older generation of Zimbabweans who vividly remembered the liberation struggle, the state was keen to reach out to a younger generation of largely urban voters who increasingly

liberation struggle) which was coordinated by the Minister of Youth and Employment Creation, Elliot Manyika, and musician Bryn Mteki; ‘Nhaka Yedu’ (‘Our Heritage’) by the Air Force of Zimbabwe Band; ‘Rangarirai’ (Remember how it was in the past”) by musician Peter Majoni; ‘Hoko’ (‘Peg!’) by musician Simon Chimbetu; and ‘More Fire’ by musician Andy Brown.

⁵ ‘Hondo Yeminda’ album doing well on local market, *The Herald*, 8 September 2001, p. 5.

⁶ Sibanda, Maxwell and Conrad Nyamutata, Generous airplay fails to sell Hondo Yeminda, *The Daily News*, 12 November 2001.

began to pledge their support to the opposition MDC. A new music genre ‘urban grooves’ began to cater for this group of listeners, and was largely brought into being through the introduction of measures to ‘localise’ radio and television content of the national broadcaster ZBC (Bere 2008; Chari 2008, 2009; Manase 2009, 2011; Mate 2012; Kellerer 2013). Section 11(3), 2(1) in the Sixth Schedule of a revised Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) stipulated that “a television broadcasting licensee must ensure that [...] at least 75 percent of its programming content [...] consists of local television content and material from Africa” and section 11(3), 5 stated that “a radio broadcasting licensee shall ensure [...] at least (a) 75 percent of the music broadcast consists of Zimbabwean music [and] (b) 10 percent of the music broadcast consists of music from Africa”.⁷ In 2003, Minister of Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, further increased the local content quota to 100 percent on all radio stations with the exception of Radio 1 which maintained the old quota of 75 percent (Thram 2006a: 78). The national broadcaster ZBC implemented the local content regulations on 30 November 2001 when it launched its new ‘Vision 30’ strategy.⁸ As a result of the imposition of local content regulations, a new generation of young Zimbabwean musicians received airplay on regular ZBC radio and television programmes and were also invited to perform at the music gala. Musicians such as Flash Gordon, Decibel, Sanii Makhhalima, Roy and Royce, David Chifunyise, Roqui, Leonard Mapfumo, Betty Makaya, Extra Large and Maskiri heavily drew from American music genres such as Rap, Hip Hop and RnB but song lyrics were mostly in chiShona or siNdebele.

While the genre of ‘urban grooves’ rapidly gained popularity among young Zimbabweans, the emergence of the genre and its association with the local content regulations also triggered a debate on whether this music could be seen as truly ‘Zimbabwean’ and often, ‘urban grooves’ were criticised for its hollow and superficial ‘love’ lyrics. In many ways, the debate over ‘urban grooves’ was a contestation over generational power, and saw young musicians increasingly challenge the hegemonic position of older musicians, and eventually also an older generation of politicians. For example, veteran Zimbabwean musicians such as Thomas Mapfumo and Oliver Mtukudzi, who had both been instrumental in popularising liberation struggle songs during the 1970s, expressed their disdain about the shallowness of the new genre and its poor imitation of American music. The lyrics of most ‘urban grooves’ songs were about love which the older generation of musicians considered superficial as compared to the highly moral, educational and symbolic content of their songs. For example, Mtukudzi argued that the lyrics of ‘urban grooves’ songs were “controversial to African culture” because “in African culture song lyrics are not acceptable if they are meaningless, and unfortunately the songs being churned out for urban grooves have nonsense lyrics that anybody can make up” (quoted in Thram 2006: 82). Mapfumo, who had been a vocal critic of the ZANU-PF government since the release of his 1989 album *Corruption*, argued that hip hop music could not be Zimbabwean: “I don’t want to hear Zimbabweans doing hip-hop. That is not their culture [...] Rap is not Zimbabwean

⁷ See Broadcasting Services Act, available from Kubatana website:

http://www.kubatana.net/html/archive/legisl/010404broa.asp?orgcode=par001&year=2001&range_start=1 (last accessed 9 February 2008).

⁸ Vision 30 also introduced six new strategic business units within ZBC’s overarching structure which now became known as Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH): Television Services, Radio Services, Production Services, Kidznet, Sportnet and Newsnews. As part of Vision 30, ZBC also renamed its radio stations: Radio 1 became Spot FM; Radio 2 was renamed to Radio Zimbabwe; Radio 3 was changed to 3FM and Radio 4 was now termed National Radio.

and so it is not true music”.⁹ A similar point was made by a contributor to the popular news website NewZimbabwe which carried a lively debate on the value of urban grooves:

If you will permit me to say so, urban grooves are not Zimbabwean. Singing over foreign music in Shona does not make it local. The fact that it is Zimbabweans singing the music still doesn't make it local [...]. The reason why urban grooves music will never make it commercially is because it is a poor imitation of the original, the original being the R'nB and ragga from overseas. This fact will not change no matter how many awards you give to the Flash Gordons of Zimbabwe, no matter how much Power FM [ZBC's popular music station] promotes the urban grooves genre.¹⁰

The entertainment editor of *The Standard* newspaper, John Mkwetsi, felt that the genre was popular simply “because it was the nearest thing to the international music they loved”.¹¹ Since foreign music was no longer being played on ZBC, ‘urban grooves’ most closely resembled music from overseas.

Others, however, considered urban grooves as a creative and dynamic music genre which combined traditional Zimbabwean sounds, languages and instruments with RnB. As a contributor to the NewZimbabwe website argued: “What amazes me about the criticisms levelled against our own stars, is how they are labelled copy cats because they sing RnB songs in chiShona or siNdebele, and hence they are said not to be original”.¹² Instead, the contributor proposed to celebrate the “creativity behind these groups coming up with a kind of music which is acceptable to their society by blending the backbone of RnB with local languages and indigenous beats”.¹³ Wonder Guchu, an arts journalist from *The Herald*, also advocated for more recognition of the genre and urged the organisers of the National Arts and Merit Awards (NAMA), which are held yearly to celebrate Zimbabwe's musicians and artists, to introduce a specific award for urban grooves music. He compared the debate around urban grooves to the introduction of rhumba music in Zimbabwe:

When rhumba music took root here, many people dismissed it as foreign and some musicians even lobbied the Government to ban it just in the same manner urban grooves music has been scorned. But years later, from the same denigrated rhumba genre, Zimbabwean musicians carved out their unique beat sungura, which is as original to Zimbabwe as is mbira music. Likewise, urban grooves music genre is still going through the same rigours and for Nama not to recognise the genre means a lot.¹⁴

Thus, while urban grooves music flourished as a result of the imposition of the 75 percent local content quota on radio, the genre triggered a lively debate on whether the music could actually be considered as truly ‘local’. Some commentators disputed the Zimbabwean nature of urban grooves and castigated it as merely a bad copy of American music. However, others

⁹ Mapfumo's exile - longing for home, *The Zimbabwean*, 9 September 2005, quoted in Bere, Fafi, W.G., Is hip hop African music or not?, *Itshbo* website, 23 September 2005, available from:

<http://www.itsbho.com/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=359> (last accessed: 9 February 2008).

¹⁰ Nyasha, Musavengana, Urban Groovers hopeless, *New Zimbabwe*, 3 November 2006, available from: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/urbangrooves.14188.html> (last accessed: 9 February 2008).

¹¹ Mkwetis, John, Urban grooves need Zimbabwean identity - Kawara, *NewZimbabwe*, 19 February 2007, available from: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/showbiz19.15978.html> (last accessed: 9 February 2008).

¹² Nyambiya, Isaac, Urban Groovers are not hopeless, the economy is, *NewZimbabwe*, 3 November 2006, available from: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/urbangrooves2.14189.html> (last accessed: 9 February 2008).

¹³ Nyambiya, Isaac, Urban Groovers are not hopeless, the economy is, *NewZimbabwe*, 3 November 2006, available from: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/urbangrooves2.14189.html> (last accessed: 9 February 2008).

¹⁴ Guchu, Wonder, Nama fail to recognise urban grooves, *The Herald*, 9 March 2006.

took a more dynamic and fluid view of culture and saw the genre as a creative and hybrid mix between local and foreign music.

The rapid success of the 'urban grooves' genre initially very much suited the state and it offered opportunities to young musicians to be heard. The dominant focus of the genre's song lyrics on themes such as love and relationships ensured relatively depoliticised local content that could be safely played on air. This was in stark contrast to the highly politicised – although not always in overt ways but often in a subtle manner - song lyrics of established musicians such as Oliver Mtukudzi, Thomas Mapfumo and Leonard Zhakata. The balance of power shifted somewhat in October 2007 though when *The Herald* reported that ZBH had banned a number of songs “whose lyrics are deemed obscene, mischievous, blasphemous, degrade women or view them as mere sex objects”.¹⁵ According to ZBH's Head of Radio Services, Allan Chiweshe, urban grooves was no longer considered “to promote and safeguard Zimbabwe's cultural values and norms through music”.¹⁶ Attempts to localise radio content ironically began to be perceived as undermining 'Zimbabweanness'. The contestations around the 'urban grooves' genre brought to the fore a new dimension of power: the generational politics within Zimbabwean music, and highlighted how young musicians both challenged the hegemonic position of long-time musicians such as Mapfumo and Mtukudzi while at the same time contesting established norms around 'morality' and 'decency' (see also Manase 2009; Mate 2012). This brought to the fore a new type of censorship that was not politically motivated but revolved around sexuality; it again confirmed the intimate dialogue and power play between musicians and the state (as represented by ZBH).

Hence, initially, the local content regulations offered young musicians airplay on national radio but their freedom was not unlimited and quickly cut back by the state as soon as the music was perceived to challenge their interests. The active state support of new music genres such as 'urban grooves' was envisaged to contribute to the broader project of cultural nationalism. However, the aesthetics of the musical genre - resembling American R&B and hip hop – as well as the controversial song lyrics threatened this very project. While ruling party politicians increasingly sought to win over a younger constituency of born fees (which most supported the opposition MDC), young 'urban grooves' musicians struggled to penetrate the music industry dominated by an older generation of superstars. The interests of the two parties neatly converged through the local content regulations which provided the state broadcaster with largely apolitical content and offered musicians a platform to publicise their music.

The risky nature of performance

As stated earlier in this article, two key genres featured at the televised music gala included *chimurenga* music and 'urban grooves', with the first genre appealing to history and memory and the second genre calling in the future and the new. The government-commissioned 'Third Chimurenga' albums sought to revive the liberation song genre and urged 'born-frees' not to forget the sacrifices their parents and grandparents had made to liberate Zimbabwe from its colonial yoke. The contestations around the 'urban grooves' genre between a new generation of musicians, an older generation of musicians and the state demonstrate the dialogic nature of the relationship between rulers and ruled. Participation in the rituals of the performative state clearly opened up a range of opportunities for young people to express themselves albeit within the constraints imposed by the state. These 'moments of freedom' (Fabian 1998)

¹⁵ Nyangove, Patience, ZBH bans abusive music, *The Herald*, 13 October 2007.

¹⁶ Nyangove, Patience, ZBH bans abusive music, *The Herald*, 13 October 2007.

challenge the monologic character of the postcolonial state described by Mbembe (1992a; 1992b).

Apart from involving *chimurenga* and ‘urban grooves’ musicians, the state also extended invitations to other key Zimbabwean musicians such as gospel¹⁷ musician Hosiah Chipanga, superstar Oliver Mtukudzi and popular *sungura* musician Alec Macheso to perform at one of the televised music galas. A number of scholars have already highlighted the various ways in which the postcolonial state – in contexts as diverse as Tanzania (Askew 2002; Edmondson 2007), Kenya (Nyairo and Ogude 2005), Democratic Republic of Congo (White 2008) and South Africa (Gunner 1994; 2009) – has made attempts to appropriate musicians and performers as part of its own agenda. The previous section demonstrated that the state’s attempt to support a new music genre occasionally backfired, subverted through the controversial lyrics of several ‘urban grooves’ songs. However, while these recorded songs could be censored relatively easily on the state broadcaster ZBC, the live performance space brought into being by the televised music gala posed more serious risks to both the state and performers. The very nature of performance is that it is part of a highly contingent process (Schieffelin 1998: 196-198). Strauss and O’Brien (2007: 4) distinguish three keys risks which may affect performers:

First, is the risk that performers can lose control of the message. Key symbols and evocations may either get lost in translation or understood in an entirely different way than intended, particularly by non-targeted secondary audiences [...]. Second is the risk that the performer may lose control of the process in a different way, as those in the audience may confuse the performance with reality, and possibly even be moved to action not anticipated by the performers [...]. Third is that the performance can simply flop – failing to draw in the audience and engage the emotions.

However, while the “burden of success or failure in a cultural performance is usually laid on the central actors”, “the real location of this problem [...] is the *relationship* between the central performers and others in the situation” (Schieffelin 1998: 198). The focus in this section is not on the relation between performers and the audience but instead on the relation between the performers and the organisers of the performance, i.e. the state.

In the context of a severe economic crisis, musicians faced a dilemma whether or not to accept an invitation to perform during the televised music gala. Agreeing to perform at the gala would associate musicians with the state which could provoke a negative response from fans and audiences but could at the same time also offer musicians increased exposure. Declining the invitation, on the other hand, could potentially result in reprimands from the state. As the following three examples demonstrate, musicians creatively this dilemma. For example, musician Hosiah Chipanga agreed to perform during the music gala ‘Heroesplush’ in KweKwe in August 2005 but actively challenged the political status quo by performing the song ‘Ndarota Mambo Afira Pachigaro’ (‘I Dreamt the King Had Died on the Throne’), which narrates the story of an ageing leader of an unnamed country who is vehement to rule the country until he dies despite calls from his subjects to resign due to old age.¹⁸ The song was an obvious reference the political situation in Zimbabwe. During the gala, Chipanga was summoned backstage by intelligence officers who requested him to refrain from playing

¹⁷ Hosiah Chipanga’s music is hard to classify within existing Zimbabwean music genres. While he is generally not associated with popular Zimbabwean gospel musicians such as Olivia and Charles Charamba, Fungisa Zvakavapano or Ivy Kombo, his music style is strongly inspired by *sungura* but he self-identifies as a gospel musician who actively spreads the word not only through his music but also through the church, known as Messiah Apostolic Prophetically Inspired Peoples Institution (MAPIPI), which he established in 2011 (see also Magosvongwe 2008).

¹⁸ Secret agents quiz musician over Mugabe jibe, *ZimOnline*, 12 August 2005.

songs that could be interpreted as being critical of Mugabe or government. However, in response to the intelligence officers, Chipanga defended himself in similar terms as Mtukudzi by maintaining that his music was “mainly social commentary with no political connotations and that it is the listeners who might attach their own wrong or correct meanings to the songs”.¹⁹

Despite the earlier reprimand, Chipanga again tested the boundaries during a music gala dubbed ‘Zimbabwe Oye’ organised around Independence Day in April 2006. The event took place in Harare International Conference Centre and was attended by diplomats and politicians. During the concert, Chipanga played the song ‘Kutendeuka’ (‘To Change/To Be Converted’) which criticises corruption and self-interested politicians as well as the song ‘Gushongo’ (Mugabe’s honorific clan name and his totem) which praises Mugabe but attacks greedy government officials who have enriched themselves.²⁰ A few weeks later, Chipanga was expected to perform at ZCTU’s Workers’ Day celebrations but after he received anonymous death threats, he decided to cancel the show. Thus, while Chipanga made attempts to subvert the purpose of the state-sponsored galas, he eventually was forced to cancel his participation in an event organised by the trade union movement, closely associated with the opposition party MDC. The state thus ultimately succeeded in determining what Chipanga could sing and where he could perform.

The state also made attempts to appropriate superstar Oliver Mtukudzi’s enormous popularity among Zimbabwean audiences for its own agenda. Mtukudzi is one of Zimbabwe’s most popular musicians or ‘superstars’. In the early 2000s, his hit song ‘Wasakara’ (‘You Are Worn Out’) was widely interpreted as a direct message to President Robert Mugabe, asking him to admit that he was old and should resign and hand over power to others. The song became the unofficial anthem of the opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), but Mtukudzi strictly distanced himself from any form of party politics and kept insisting that his music simply provides social – but not political – commentary (see also Sibanda 2004; Chirere and Mukandatsama 2008). When he unexpectedly agreed to play at an event in March 2005 to celebrate Joyce Mujuru’s appointment as Vice-President, ZANU-PF used one of Mtukudzi’s songs, ‘Totutuma’ (‘We Celebrate’), in a campaign advert. Mtukudzi’s participation in the event attracted significant media attention. The popular website NewZimbabwe published some of the emails it had received in which fans noted they felt ‘betrayed’ by Mtukudzi and pledged to auction off Mtukudzi’s records and CDs in their possession.²¹ His manager, Debby Metcalfe, said that she “was not part of the organisation of that function” and that she was “actually unhappy about it because it was without my consent”.²² Mtukudzi defended himself by arguing that he had not interpreted the event as a party event but as a family occasion. As he argued: “This was a show I did purely on the grounds that Amai Mujuru is my relative by virtue of us coming from Dande. I was celebrating the rise of a daughter from our clan. It had nothing to do with politics. I have relatives everywhere, in MDC and even in Zanu PF”.²³

Some fans also threatened to cancel their attendance of his traditional performance over the Easter weekend in London. With the rapid growth of the Zimbabwean diaspora in

¹⁹ Secret agents quiz musician over Mugabe jibe, *ZimOnline*, 12 August 2005.

²⁰ Nyathi, Magugu, State agents threaten top musician Hosea Chipanga, Association of Zimbabwe Journalists website, 1 May 2006, http://www.zimbabwejournalists.com/story.php?art_id=336&cat=9 (last accessed: 15 March 2008).

²¹ Outrage as Tuku backs Mugabe, *NewZimbabwe*, March 2005, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/tuku15.12411.html> (last accessed: 15 March 2008).

²² Oliver Mtukudzi sings for Zanu PF, *The Standard*, March 2005, available from NewZimbabwe website, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/tuku13.12407.html> (last accessed: 15 March 2008).

²³ Oliver Mtukudzi sings for Zanu PF, *The Standard*, March 2005, available from NewZimbabwe website, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/tuku13.12407.html> (last accessed: 15 March 2008).

the 2000s and the severe economic crisis in Zimbabwe, Mtukudzi had become more dependent on revenue from CD sales and performances in countries with significant Zimbabwean diasporas such as the United Kingdom. It was therefore not surprising that he issued a further statement just before the London show in which he clarified his position:

Following recent press reports, I wish to place on record and make absolutely clear that I am not a ZANU (PF) supporter. I am a loyal Zimbabwean who believes in a true and tolerant democracy [...]. A request to sing a few solo songs at what I understood would be a private gathering of relatives was turned into a ZANU (PF) event, and, without warning or permission, filmed and broadcast [...]. Furthermore, I understand that one of my songs 'Totutuma' has just been used, again without my permission, to promote a ZANU (PF) event in a manner that suggested I would be performing at the event or that the event had my support. Nothing could be further from the truth. I believe that this is a deliberate strategy to undermine my popularity as a singer, and to prevent my songs from being used as a rallying point for those who believe in a true and tolerant democracy. However, I hope that my fans are, by now, wise to such cynical manipulation, which so seriously undermines our collective belief in a better Zimbabwe. In return for my fans' loyalty, the band and I hope to put on unforgettable shows in our impending UK tour.²⁴

In the statement, which seemed particularly addressed to the Zimbabwean diaspora in the United Kingdom, Mtukudzi presented himself as a victim of the ZANU-PF government which, according to him, had tried to co-opt him into their politics. While he considered this as a strategy to undermine his popularity among a large group of fans, it can also be interpreted as a way in which the state tried to appropriate his standing as a popular musician for its own ends.

Popular *sungura* musician, Alec Macheso, also accepted to perform at a music gala in Gweru in 2004 to commemorate former Vice-President Joshua Nkomo. During the music gala, Speaker of Parliament, Emmerson Mnangagwa, encouraged the audience to repeat his slogans that called for a 'Third Chimurenga'. However, after the audience did not respond as enthusiastically as Mnangagwa had hoped, he tried to win them back by chanting the following slogan: 'Pamberi naMacheso, Pamberi nekufara' ('Forward with Macheso! Forward with Joy!').²⁵ Mnangagwa's slogan strongly resembled ZANU-PF slogans common during the liberation struggle. For example, in the war, the party used a range of slogans in order to mobilise support for its cause such as: 'Pamberi neKubatana' ('Forward with Unity'); 'Pamberi neKushinga' ('Forward with Bravery'); 'Pamberi neHondo' ('Forward with the War') and 'Pamberi neZanu' ('Forward with ZANU') (Kriger 1992: 98, quoted in Chitando 2002: 5). Macheso interpreted Mnangagwa's slogan as an attempt to appropriate his popularity for party political purposes. As Macheso argued in an interview after the gala:

The chefs should not try to use me. I was only hired and like an ordinary Zimbabwean I could not refuse to play at the gala because it is a national event for our Father Zimbabwe. I have never played at any political rally and I don't want to be associated with any political party. I will not fall in the foot steps of some musicians who have become politically excited. Ini ndinoda kuimbira vanhu ende ndinoda kuti ndisvike mberikwazvo ikoko ["I want to play music for the people and I want to end up there at the top"].²⁶

While Macheso was willing to participate in a truly 'national' event to celebrate the legacy of former Vice-President Joshua Nkomo, he objected to the partisan manner in which the nation was framed during the event.

²⁴ Mtukudzi, Oliver, Mtukudzi: 'I am not a Zanu PF supporter', 25 March 2005, available from *NewZimbabwe* website, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/tuku20.12423.html> (last accessed: 15 March 2008).

²⁵ Mnangagwa booed At Nkomo gala, *The Standard*, 4 July 2004.

²⁶ Musazulwa, Richard, Macheso distances himself from ZANU-PF, *The Standard*, 11 July 2004.

Conclusion

In the early 2000s, the arena of performance represented a crucial space for both Zimbabweans politicians and musicians equally keen to appeal to audiences. For the state, the stage – at both political rallies and the televised music gala - naturally was an important space through which political messages could be communicated. The longer history of performance in Zimbabwean political culture offered important currency that could be revived in an attempt to re-establish the legitimacy of the ruling party but newer, youthful audiences could also be engaged through freshly sponsored, emergent music genres such as ‘urban grooves’. For musicians, the stage emerged as a crucial source of revenue in the face of dwindling record sales because of both the economic crisis during which few Zimbabweans were able to afford official CDs, and the challenges posed by growing music piracy. Performance, therefore, was often the only way through which musicians could continue to secure a living.

As I have also demonstrated, the converging interests between politicians and musicians were expressed through the music gala which began to constitute an important public performance space in which musicians negotiated their relation with the state and challenged the political status quo while the state made attempts to appropriate musicians to suit its own agenda. The emergence of the new music genre of ‘urban grooves’ in the context of the introduction of local content regulations on radio and television further highlighted the constant negotiations between musicians and the state around what was deemed acceptable politically and morally. While the state was keen to appeal to a youthful voting constituency that was fast showing their support to the opposition MDC, ‘urban grooves’ musicians were initially grateful for the state’s support and happy to oblige and entertain with largely depoliticised song lyrics but soon began to use their freshly secured symbolic power to challenge an older generation of both musicians and politicians.

We can draw two broader conclusions from these intimate dialogues between politicians and musicians. First of all, they show that the performative state is not always a monologic state which imposes performance on the ruled to remind them of the state’s power and grandeur. The spontaneous nature of performance can offer space to citizens to participate in and dialogue with the state, particularly in situations in which there are few other avenues for citizens to engage the state. While it would be daring to disrupt a formal, heavily militarised ceremony such as the official celebrations taking place during national days in Zimbabwe such as Independence Day and Heroes’ Day, the highly informal character of the music gala ensured that careful challenges could be initiated as demonstrated by the subversive song played by Hosiah Chipanga.

Secondly, what also follows from the examples discussed above is the highly contingent nature of performance. Performance is an inherently risky practice that does not always prove reliable in furthering the status quo. While the state is able to retain reasonable control over the course of the day and may be able to discipline musicians to a certain extent if required, restraint is certainly limited and musicians have the ability to shape events in their own way. Their negotiating power depends both on their standing and power as musicians and on the nature of the state and the way in which it normally acts in relation to its citizens. However, performance does not just present risks to those in power but also offers opportunities to the state to solidify its affiliation with musicians, and to frame them as natural allies or supporters of the state. Ultimately, this proves that a dialogic understanding of power and resistance is crucial in order to make sense of the convergence between politics and performance in the postcolony.

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