

RECONSTRUCTING MUSICAL PASTS

African Music, Power, and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe.

By Mhoze Chikowero.

Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015. Pp. xiii + 346. \$85.00, hardback (ISBN 978-0-253-01768-0); \$35.00, paperback (ISBN 978-0-253-01803-8).

doi:10.1017/S0021853717000603

Key Words: Zimbabwe, Central Africa, music, colonial, epistemology.

For decades, scholars of African music have examined the contested nature of song and dance during the period of European colonial rule. Such studies have not, however, always clarified the stakes of these musical battles. In *African Music, Power, and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe*, Mhoze Chikowero attempts to rectify this shortcoming, examining music not as a medium of artistic creativity or sonic enjoyment, but as a rich archive of Madzimbabwe self-crafting throughout the period of colonial rule (c. 1890–1980). As he interrogates music to access oft-marginalized articulations of cross-class African consciousness, he also employs *chivanhu* (cultural knowledge) and his own lived experience to critique Western epistemology and the colonial library that informs it. The result is a rich foray in Zimbabwean history and a provocative discussion about the process and prospects of reconstructing musical pasts.

Chikowero frames his discussion around two central concerns and corresponding claims. The first is how a range of colonial agents – government officials, missionaries, and early ethnomusicologists – used music and the production of musical knowledge to undermine African sovereignty and perpetuate a wider project of epistemic violence. He argues that such actors did more than promote European musical forms as ‘civilization’; they elevated colonial ideology and accelerated African cultural disarmament. The second is how Africans deployed music to complicate colonial designs, reclaim autonomy, and reconstitute understandings of self before and during the era of mass nationalism. While Madzimbabwe songs undeniably changed, Chikowero asserts that they remained steadfast repositories of indigenous consciousness immune from colonial registers and infrastructures.

The book’s ten chapters engage these two topics in a chronological, and often dialectic, fashion. The first three chapters document how European missionaries targeted African musical cultures to facilitate their evangelical efforts and the wider project of colonial subject-making. Chapter One outlines missionaries’ overriding concern with song, which they understood as a marker of ‘heathen’ practice and prospective means of recrafting ‘natives’ into respectable *vatendi* (converts). Chapter Two analyzes missionaries’ evolving use of hymn and appropriation of local music to further transform Africans’ ‘musical psyche’ (56). Chapter Three explores how their concerns with ‘night dancing’ – a trope for ‘dangerous’ musical activity – mobilized colonial authorities and African elders to repress young people’s musical innovation and self-expressions.

Chapters Four through Seven shift attention to colonial urbanity and African performativity. Chapter Four examines Zimbabwe’s early urban culture as a co-production of young men forced into *marukesheni* (native locations) and the Department of Native Social Welfare tasked with supervising their material consumption and sociopolitical compliance. Chapter Five interrogates the colonial state’s promotion of ‘tribal dancing’ as a

means of discouraging unwanted behaviors and emphasizing intra-African difference; projects early ethnomusicologists supported by trying to preserve ‘traditional’ musical forms ‘threatened’ by urban musicians’ ‘mimicry’ of European styles. Chapter Six portrays a few urban artists, revealing that they were pivotal to Africans’ efforts to reclaim space, create *chimanjemanje* (new cultures of today), and articulate transterritorial understandings of self. Chapter Seven, one of the book’s best, explores the history and varied readings of an iconic instrumental, ‘Skookian’: a sonic transcript of ‘underclass urbanity’ that became distorted in far off imaginations of a romanticized Africa (188).

The final chapters concern African musical cultures’ importance to Madzimbabwe self-liberation. Chapter Eight frames nationalism not as ‘self-making’ but pre-existing self-knowledge and reads 1960s Chimurenga music as an extension of earlier resistance and ongoing cultural rearmament. Chapter Nine extends this argument, analyzing a corpus of Chimurenga songs as a transgenerational archive of discontentment, defiance, and solidarity. Chapter Ten, another standout, is a transcription of Chikowero’s conversations with Jane Lungile Ngwenya about her life, song, and colonial Zimbabwe. By privileging her words and experiences, the chapter supports the above claims and models a form of cooperative self-authoring designed to decolonize Africanist scholarship.

The book is a great success. Chikowero clearly reveals how music mattered to generations of Madzimbabwe and skillfully situates his claims into existing scholarship on Zimbabwean music, colonialism, and African nationalism. His repeated emphasis on scholarly positionality and knowledge production offers much-needed food for thought and serves as a poignant reminder that writing about African music is an act of power. The book’s principal achievement is its analytical depth and detail, as Chikowero tenaciously pulls nuanced insights out of his varied source materials. The book’s richness does, however, make it a dense read. Those unfamiliar with Zimbabwe or its history might want a map, further elaboration about events mentioned in passing, or a glossary of its many non-English terms and concepts (translations can be found, however, in the index). Discussion of the compelling photographs, which appear in seven clusters throughout the book, would have enriched its attention to peoples’ experiences and furthered its effort to portray them as active agents rather than mere subjects of study. But these are minor quibbles. Chikowero has written a fantastic book worthy of wide and careful attention for years to come.

NATE PLAGEMAN

Wake Forest University

RULES FOR RACIAL INTERACTIONS

Manners Make a Nation: Racial Etiquette in Southern Rhodesia, 1910–1963.

By Allison K. Shutt.

Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015. Pp. xiii + 245. \$110.00, hardback (ISBN 978-1-58046-520-5).

doi:10.1017/S0021853717000615

Key Words: Zimbabwe, Central Africa, race, gender, nationalism.