

B A N N I N G   E Y R E

# Playing With Fire

FEAR AND SELF-CENSORSHIP  
IN ZIMBABWEAN MUSIC

**FREEMUSE**



**THE WORLD FORUM ON  
MUSIC & CENSORSHIP**

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Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwean Music  
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# Preface

Censorship of music has existed ever since the time of ancient Greece.

Plato distinguished between “good music” and “bad music” – suggesting that “bad” music had to be controlled or banned as it had the potential to divert people away from the “good life.”

Since ancient Greece it looks like this philosophy on “good” and “bad” music has been repeated throughout the history of musical censorship. In recent history we have seen this taking place in the former Soviet Union, in Nazi-Germany and in the former DDR in a violent and brutal way.

A less harmful kind of censorship has occurred in modern times in many European countries when pop- and rock music was introduced, e.g. the censorship applied to rap music in the USA of today. Severe censorship still exists in several countries, e.g. Algeria where many musicians have been forced to flee their country after serious threats and a number of musicians have been killed.

Music censorship has been implemented by states, religions, educational systems, families, retailers and lobbying groups – and in most cases they violate international conventions of human rights. Nevertheless very little research and documentation on music censorship has been done.

Why is it important to document and discuss music censorship in a world where wars, hunger, and the negative effects of economic globalisation seem so much more relevant?

For thousands of years, music has been one of the most essential cultural expressions. Music has been an important part of all cultures in their daily life, at celebrations, at ceremonies, for pleasure and serves as food for the soul.

When music is banned the very soul of a culture is being strangled. Ban a music culture for a decade and a whole generation grows up without an essential cultural reference.

Only through the documentation of music censorship can we discuss and understand the effects of censorship. Only through documentation can we support suppressed cultural expressions.

In a world where trans global industries market their cultural products – including music – through global media networks, small cultures need to support their cultural workers rather than censoring them.

In order to address the ever-present phenomenon of music censorship and to investigate the lack of interest in these violations of freedom of expression, the 1st World Conference on Music Censorship was organized in Copenhagen, Denmark, in November 1998. As a result of the conference Freemuse (Freedom of Musical Expression) – the World Forum on Music and Censorship, was established in 1999, and in year 2000 Freemuse received core funding from The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This report “Playing with Fire: Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwean Music” is written by Banning Eyre, an American writer and musician who has spent years in Africa doing music research and playing guitar.

During the past couple of years several media sources have reported cases of censorship of popular music in Zimbabwe. Freemuse sent Banning Eyre to Zimbabwe in March 2001 to investigate the cases, the underlying background of censorship and to describe the present situation in Zimbabwe.

His findings show that there are cases of censorship but actually no proof or evidence of governmental banning of music. The structure of censorship in Zimbabwe is far more refined and involves the recording industry, DJs and the musicians themselves of course. People don’t dare to speak out. The result is “self-censorship”, a form of censorship, which needs to be described, discussed and analysed as part of Freemuse’s work.

Johnny Clegg, the South African musician, shared his view on music censorship years ago with Freemuse, he noted; “Censorship is based on fear”, referring to the governmental censorship during the apartheid period. And fear seems to play an important role in Zimbabwe today.

I would like to express my gratitude to Al Green of Anonymous Records for donating 100 CDs of Thomas Mapfumo and The Blacks Unlimited’s *Chimurenga Explosion*. The CD will be enclosed with the first 100 copies of the report.

Marie Korpe  
Executive Director of Freemuse  
Copenhagen, September 2001

## Abstract

Zimbabwe is home to a rich array of traditional and popular music. This fact is all the more remarkable when you consider the obstacles faced by musicians and music professionals there. Government's complete control of broadcast media, and its notorious reluctance to support or facilitate development of the local music industry help to keep most musicians in a state of poverty. Now, as the country sinks more deeply into economic and political crisis, Zimbabwe's musicians face new problems. Long depended upon to voice the suffering, hopes, fears and aspirations of people in this country, musicians today are being subjected to scrutiny and intimidation that leaves many afraid to express themselves freely.

While censorship laws and the mechanisms to enforce them have always existed in Zimbabwe, official censorship of music occurs rarely if ever. Such direct measures are simply not needed. A climate of fear affects composers, singers, DJs, journalists and writers alike, muting and even silencing many artistic voices. Broadcasters are closely watched and often scripted to avoid any criticism of the state. Some have lost their jobs when they were judged to have crossed the line. At the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, the practice of posting lists of banned songs is now a thing of the past, but DJ's there know very well what can happen to them if they do anything to offend the sensitivities of their superiors. At a time when the government faces its first credible political opposition since independence in 1979, ZBC officials are more sensitive than ever before.

The record company Gramma/ZMC operates an effective monopoly for the distribution of foreign and domestic music in Zimbabwe. In the area of sexual content—or anything deemed vulgar in music—the company acts as a de facto censor, ensuring that music that might offend conservative social values never even hits the market, let alone the air waves. An aversion to public expression or discussion of sex goes back at least to the British colonial period when Zimbabwe was Southern Rhodesia, and few within the country complain about it. But the consequences have been tragic in modern times. Hesitant to broach sexual matters openly, Zimbabwe's leaders largely ignored the spread of HIV/AIDS during the 1980s and early '90s, a time when frank publicity about the

disease, perhaps involving popular musicians, might well have stemmed a staggering death toll. Zimbabwe's HIV infection rate, somewhere around 40% of the population, ensures that it will remain one of the world's most AIDS-affected societies for years to come.

Today, many musicians feel strongly motivated to address political realities in their music. Those who dare to do so take enormous risks. Musicians have been interrogated and threatened. Thomas Mapfumo, consistently the bravest popular singer in the country's history, has had songs restricted from radio play in the aftermath of the 2000 elections, which went badly for the government. Worse, he has now moved his family to the United States, citing concerns for their security and his own, and he does not feel that he can safely return to Zimbabwe under present circumstances. A recent report of yet another DJ being intimidated for playing a controversial Mapfumo song indicates that even in absentia, Mapfumo is viewed as a threat by some within the government. Another veteran singer, Oliver Mtukudzi, took substantial heat over the past year when one of his songs, "Wasakara," was interpreted as a call for aging President Robert Mugabe to resign. Mtukudzi has fervently denied this interpretation, but he's been forced to do a lot of explaining, and his fans have been victimized, sometimes brutally.

Random violence, often carried out by so-called liberation "war veterans," is rampant in the townships of Harare, the nation's capital, and in the rural areas. Similar tactics were used in Zimbabwe's hard-fought independence war, in which villagers were routinely terrorized by both guerillas and government troops. Southern Rhodesia was, of course, famous for its repression and censorship. Sadly, the leaders of "liberated" Zimbabwe have learned many bad habits from their predecessors, and now seem determined to stay in power through generating fear of dissent and change. Property destruction, farm seizures, beatings, and killings are reported daily in the nation's opposition newspapers. Meanwhile, the government appears more concerned with curtailing the power of the judiciary and parliament to intervene in these matters than with halting the growing violence and lawlessness. In addition, incidents involving musicians continue to arise. As this report was being prepared, a singer named Bekithemba Khumalo made international news when Zimbabwean producers refused to record his album because it contained a song called "The President is a Thief." Khumalo eventually made his recording, but then shops in his hometown of Bulawayo refused to sell it.

The result of all this is widespread self-censorship on the parts of artists, DJs, and others involved with the music industry. This report details the contemporary situation in Zimbabwe and examines three case studies: 1) the reported restriction of two Thomas Mapfumo songs during and after the 2000 elections, 2) incidents surrounding the controversial Oliver Mtukudzi song “Wasakara,” and 3) the failed effort to launch Zimbabwe’s first independent radio station, Capital Radio, in late 2000. The report concludes with recommendations about how those inside and outside Zimbabwe can help to reverse the effects of intimidation and self-censorship in the country’s music industry.

#### About the author:

BANNING EYRE is one of the United States’ foremost journalists on African music.

He writes for publications and broadcasts including the Village Voice, Guitar Player, and public radio’s All Things Considered. He is the author of two books, including the acclaimed “In Griot Time: An American Guitarist in Mali”, and is Senior Editor of [www.afropop.org](http://www.afropop.org), the website for the weekly public radio series Afropop Worldwide.



#### ZIMBABWE STATISTICS

**Area:** 390,759 sq km, (about 150,873 sq mi).

**Population:** 11,044,147 (1998 estimate).

**Capital:** Harare (population 1,184,169 —1992 estimate).

**Head of State and Government:**

President Robert Mugabe, elected 1980.

**Main Industries:** Agriculture (70% of the labor force, 40% of exports), Mining (only 5% of employment and GDP, but 40% of exports), and manufacturing.

**Ethnic composition:** Shona 80%, Ndebele 18%, white and other 2%.

**Main trade partners:** European Union

(especially UK, Germany, Italy), South Africa, Japan, United States, and Botswana.

**Infant mortality:** 61.75 deaths per 1000 live births (1998 estimate).

**Life expectancy at birth:** male 39.12 years, female 39.19 years (1998 estimate).

**Adult literacy:** male 90%, female 80% (1995 estimate).

*Source:*

*Africana, The Encyclopedia of the Africanan and African American Experience.*

*Ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah, Henry Louis Gates.*

*Basic Civitas Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 1999.*

# Introduction

*“ Zimbabwe doesn’t respect its culture. So being censored when the song comes out is even a very minute situation. There’s a bigger one: they have censored their own culture.”* Andy Brown, musician.

By any measure, Zimbabwe is a nation in crisis. Its once powerful currency has devalued precipitously. Government lacks the foreign exchange to buy sufficient supplies of such basic commodities as fuel oil, gasoline and medicine. It faces multiple health epidemics, most seriously HIV/AIDS, which has decimated a generation of workers and parents, leaving sick and abandoned children in the hands of aged relatives, or else overwhelmed government agencies, churches and charities. Zimbabwe’s widely hated government seems determined to hold onto power, whatever the cost, and its public institutions have been corrupted and undermined in the process.

To focus on the plight of musicians in such a society may appear frivolous to some. When people are dying, why should we be concerned about the intimidation or oppression of popular singers? This is a valid question, and one worth addressing at the outset of this report, which focuses on history, policies and practices that curtail freedom of expression in Zimbabwe.

My March 2001 visit to the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, was my fourth to the country since 1988. I have always gone there to research popular and traditional music. Central to my work, the *mbira*—an iron-pronged, hand-held lamel-lophone—has been a sacred instrument among the Shona people for centuries. In religious ceremonies, the instrument’s mellifluous sound summons the spirits of Shona ancestors who “possess” the living and guide them with ancient wisdom. In the 1970s, the *mbira* provided the basis for the music of Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited, probably the most important pioneers of African-based popular music in Zimbabwe’s brief and rocky history. Mapfumo’s music took its name from the liberation war, the *chimurenga*. It was revolutionary both

in its reclamation and transformation of tradition, and in its militant lyrics—lyrics that helped to bring colonial powers to heel in the 1970s, and that still decry the failures of the country’s leaders today.

In Zimbabwe, to consider music is to grapple with history, politics, religion and social reality. The centrality of music in the lives and culture of common people is remarkable. Witness the fact that although the country is near ruin, the national recording industry monopoly, Gramma/ZMC, still reports record sales of local music cassettes. Despite the fact that the Zimbabwean government has done notoriously little to support the arts in any form, the people demand a steady supply of fresh local music, and they rely upon its power to console and communicate.

Still, when I was asked to write a report on the censorship of popular music in Zimbabwe, I hesitated. I suspected that in a country with only one effective record company, and complete state control of broadcasting, direct censorship would be largely unnecessary. This turns out to be true. Although there have been reports of songs being “banned” from radio play, I found no convincing evidence that any such policy has ever been officially articulated in Zimbabwe, certainly not in writing. Many Zimbabwean musicians—now more than ever—are afraid to express themselves openly, or to use their music as a tool of protest. But it is not laws and edicts that enforce their silence. Rather, it is a complex cultural legacy, a culture of fear fortified by four generations of authoritarian Southern Rhodesian rule, and now exploited by a government that has nurtured the fear habit, and perfected its means of intimidation to create a system of de facto censorship, even as it presents itself as an elected, democratic administration.

The intimidation and suppression of musicians in Zimbabwe is not a straightforward matter. In over forty interviews conducted during my recent 3-week stay, I encountered widely divergent views of the situation. In this report, I document the country’s long history of discouraging open expressions of sexuality, including in music and dance, as well as a growing attention to the political content of art. I provide history, background and a number of first-hand accounts of government meddling in the creative process of contemporary musicians. The report culminates in three recent case histories that illustrate the Zimbabwean government’s various strategies for suppressing and curtailing free expression by musicians in the country.

As much as possible, I let the writers, singers, DJs, journalists, and officials I met speak for themselves. Because of the rampant violence in the country today, I identify few of my sources by name. I presented myself to many informants as a journalist researching music. It would therefore be unfair to provide their names in a human rights report. But I begin with a quote from one I can name. Musaemura Zimunya is a respected poet, a professor of literature and a keen observer of Zimbabwean cultural life. He has helped me enormously in my research for a book on Thomas Mapfumo and his music. Professor Zimunya has long championed the study of music in Zimbabwe, exactly because of its power to reveal things that observers of political events tend to overlook.

MUSA ZIMUNYA: *A lot of historians, all the way back to the earliest white historians in the 1890s, writing about the Africans of this country completely forgot a very vital dimension of the African spirit. And that is music. That is song. You will find that when people are under stress, colonial stress, as laborers on the farms, in the mines, in the domestic industry, or as peasants suffering the brunt of colonial oppression—colonial laws, such as the taxes, forced resettlement, so many things that peasants reeled under during colonial days—at every turn, Africans had recourse to one artistic medium. That is music. That is song. They sought to express their anxieties, their joys, their fears and hopes through music. For their satire against the colonial era, their mockery of the system, they used music, going all the way back to the first chimurenga war. As they were going into war, they played this music... These matters cannot be forgotten whatsoever. And it is a glaring gap in the entire history of this country that no one has sought to establish the role of music in the lives of the common people outside the colonial influence, in urban areas, in rural areas, and what this music is doing all the time.*

# 1. A Brief History of Zimbabwe

The nation of Zimbabwe was born in 1980, at the end of a two-decade nationalist struggle against the former white regime of what had been Southern Rhodesia. Although Zimbabwe was one of the last African countries to achieve independence, it actually experienced the progression from a pre-colonial society to a European colony to an independent nation relatively quickly. In the 1870's, when early British expeditions in search of gold and diamonds moved into the area, the Shona people were living in more-or-less independent city states. At a time when coastal African peoples, and the great majority of Africans in north and West Africa had been dealing with Arab and European traders, settlers, and interlopers for two centuries or more, the Shona had known only limited interactions with Portuguese and Arabs operating on the East African coast. The Portuguese had had such a difficult time trying to establish control over Mozambique, that Shona leaders mostly prevented them from gaining control over their lands.

The Shona's limited experience with the outside forces then besieging Africa made it easier for Cecil Rhodes and his followers to move peacefully into Shona lands during the 1870s and '80s, and to establish settlements and mining operations. At first, the Shona spirit mediums—key figures in their social and religious culture—did not object since their claim was to the surface of the land, not what lay beneath it. Before long, though, Rhodes's people began appropriating rich agricultural lands, establishing schools and institutions and setting up the beginnings of a colonial nation. Southern Rhodesian appropriation of land for commercial farms continued all the way to Zimbabwean independence in 1979.

Things were different south of the Limpopo River, where the Ndebele people had settled around the Matopos Hills near present day Bulawayo during the 1830s. The Ndebele—literally “those who carry long shields”—were considerably more militant than the Shona, having recently split from the Zulu, after a conflict with the legendary Shaka Zulu, one of the fiercest military leaders in modern African history. Under their own leader, Mzilikazi, the Ndebele forcibly incorporated the few Bantu tribes living in the area (the Nguni) and established their capital

just north of Bulawayo. Mzilikazi uneasily tolerated a certain level of British missionary activity and never came to blows with the British in Ndebele territory. That was left to his son. In 1868, two years before Mzilikazi's death, British explorers became the first Europeans to find the extraordinary ruins at Great Zimbabwe. These remains of an earlier Shona kingdom, mysteriously abandoned during the 1500s, were taken as further evidence of riches beneath the ground in Shona and Ndebele lands. The "discovery" triggered a rapid influx of British fortune hunters from South Africa.

The inevitable confrontation played out between Mzilikazi's son, Lobengula, and Cecil Rhodes. Rhodes' tactical skills and his ability to cajole and con Africans yielded fateful fruit in the Rudd Concession of 1888, in which Lobengula unwittingly gave the British—and not the Boers—mining rights to most of present day Zimbabwe. The following year, Rhodes formed the British South Africa Company and quickly set about establishing bases of operation in key cities: Fort Victoria (now Masvingo, near Great Zimbabwe), Fort Salisbury (today's Zimbabwean capital, Harare), and Umtali (now Mutare, near the eastern border with Mozambique). Lobengula never fully realized what he had signed away in the Rudd Concession. A minor Ndebele military action against the Shona led to a lopsided fight with the far better armed British, and by 1895, Lobengula had burned and fled Bulawayo, and died of smallpox. Though the Ndebele would continue to offer resistance, the nation of Southern Rhodesia was now a fait accompli.

In 1896, the Ndebele and Shona joined forces in a sustained effort to stop the formation of a British state. The Shona called this fight "*chimurenga*," a war for liberation. It was led by two spirit mediums, Nehanda (a woman) and Kaguvi, who both became martyrs—hung at the end of the doomed struggle—and powerful heroic symbols during the successful "*second chimurenga*" of the 1960s and 70s.

Southern Rhodesia moved further and further away from England in terms of its norms of government and its treatment of Africans. In 1965, Ian Smith won a majority of the parliament and brought in a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), meaning that they would answer to no outside power during the bloody, final 15 years of Southern Rhodesia's history.

In 1979, Ian Smith's regime was finally broken by the tenacity of the guerilla fighters, and the loss of all international support, save that of South Africa's

apartheid regime. In 1980, two new political parties, the Shona-dominated Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Ndebele-dominated Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) faced off in an historic election. Robert Mugabe's ZANU party won 57 of the 80 seats available to blacks. An agreement brokered by the British had guaranteed whites 20 seats in that first election.

Educated and articulate, with clear socialist sympathies, Mugabe seemed to begin well, focusing on health and education and making the most of the nation's natural wealth and strong infrastructure. But over the years, his regime became more and more corrupt and entrenched. Despite interventions by the World Bank and IMF, the economy faltered, sagged, and eventually plummeted to depths unimaginable in 1980. Increasingly remote and embattled, Mugabe has clung to power ferociously. Faced with raging poverty, malnutrition, a dire AIDS-epidemic, badly worsened by the government's slowness to read the situation early on, and mounting popular anger, Mugabe's first line of defense has been demagoguery. In efforts to divert attention from his government's misrule, he has attacked foreign meddlers, union organizers, gays and lesbians, and all form of dissenters, but his most powerful and consistent rhetoric has concerned the crucial issue of land redistribution.

To understand the power of this issue, it is important to remember how recently good land was taken from black farmers to make way for white commercial enterprises. People in their 40s can recall it happening to neighbors and relatives. People in their 70s or 80s can recall it happening to themselves, or certainly to their parents. All parties in Zimbabwe, including the white commercial farmers, have long recognized the unfairness of recent history and the need to redistribute land. But Mugabe has consistently chosen to preserve the issue rather than solve the problem.

That changed in 2000 with the emergence of the first credible opposition party in Zimbabwe since the 1987 demise of ZAPU. The year before, Morgan Tsvangirai had left his post as head of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) to form a political party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Building on popular discontent with Mugabe's regime, Tsvangirai led his party to near victory in the June, 2000 parliamentary elections, winning 57 of 120 seats. Immediately afterwards, so-called "war veterans" began seizing white farms. Mugabe cheered them on, attempting to rally public support for an aggressive, take-no-prisoners approach to land distribution. To date, some 1700 white-owned farms have been occupied. (New York Times: 6/5/2001).

Zimbabwe approaches its 2002 presidential elections in a state of growing lawlessness. Public institutions from the police and the army to the courts have lost legitimacy and come to be seen increasingly as extensions of ZANU-PF power. Many people with the means and education to leave the country have done so, including in July 2000 Thomas Mapfumo himself. Random acts of violence against people who even might support MDC are increasingly common, and those who cannot leave are hunkering down for an expected season of death before the election, and a very uncertain future afterwards.

## 2. General Background on Zimbabwe

The following sections provide basic information on some key areas of society and life in Zimbabwe.

### 2.1 RELIGION IN ZIMBABWE

Shona and Ndebele traditional religions are based on notions of communication with ancestors, who guide the affairs of the living. In Shona religion, rituals to appease the ancestors are thought to be critical to the success of annual harvests, personal health, domestic peace, and virtually all other human endeavors. As noted above, music—particularly *mbira* music—plays an important role in these rituals.

Christian missionaries and Southern Rhodesian educators took an extremely hostile view of African ritual practices as they sought to build the nation of Southern Rhodesia. Many living *mbira* players tell stories of missionaries discouraging and even banning *mbira* music, and of their efforts to work around such restrictions. As one prominent traditional musician recalls:

TRADITIONAL MUSICIAN: *White people at the school where I used to go in Rusape were very negative. They would always preach against anything like mbira, anything that sounded African... They would make sure that all the people who kept the traditions, their children suffered. At school, people were always insulting. "You people who are still doing that, you are old fashioned." I am one of the people who has gone through that, because my grandfather kept the traditions. So one of the head masters was very much against me because of what was happening in my village. My grandfather decided to take us from the school.*

In his landmark 1976 book, *The Soul of Mbira*, ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner noted that religious authorities of many denominations took control of education in Southern Rhodesia's rural areas and "*imposed European religious and esthetic values on Africans and condemned traditional forms of expressive culture, including music.*" Gradually, though, churches began to use traditional African music as a way to attract and keep African converts. As the pressures of African national-

ism mounted in the 1960s and 70s, Berliner noted that forms of African expression were slowly introduced into formerly hostile religious settings. *"As a result, some Christian religious associates have introduced such African instruments as the mbira and drums into their services and have encouraged the performance of religious works by Shona composers who utilize traditional elements of Shona musical style in their compositions."*

This process continues today. One educator and traditional musician has worked for decades to introduce Shona elements into his religious musical programs. Drums and call-and-response singing came first. Then the *karimba*, a type of hand-piano not associated with the spirit religion was allowed. Speaking in 1998, this musician reported that he had composed a complete mass with *mbira*, and that he was seeking to introduce the sacred *matepe mbira* into his school programs. *"I still have problems at the school,"* he said, *"Christianity is very rife in Zimbabwe now. I have some teachers who are trying to discourage the children from playing the mbira. I always tell them that they should not discourage the children. Because they are the parents of tomorrow, and this culture must be preserved."*

Many Zimbabweans, including traditional Shona culture's greatest popular champion, Thomas Mapfumo, have reconciled the fundamental beliefs and practices of Shona religion with those of Christianity. For others, the conflict persists. A recent opinion piece in the Zimbabwe Mirror, a weekly newspaper, complained about the number of overtly Christian broadcasts on the state-run Zimbabwe Broadcasting Company. *"For those of us who are not Christian,"* wrote Nicholas Zibiza, *"ZBC's Christian fervor is annoying. If religion serves a social function, why aren't other religions, especially the indigenous ones, given the platform too? Morality is not the preserve of Christianity if at all."* [Mirror 16-22 March 2001, "Our de facto Christian state."]

Traditional religion is still widely practiced, sometimes in secret, despite the history of suppression. To some extent, it is state approved, and even regulated by the official Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA).

In times of poverty, disease, and political instability, the country has seen a dramatic rise in the popularity of gospel music, a great proliferation of Christian sects, and many heartbreaking tales of opportunistic confidence tricksters playing on peoples' traditional beliefs in order to rob them. Religion in Zimbabwe is a complex and important subject, worthy of deeper study.

## 2.2 ETHNICITY AND POLITICS IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe is roughly 76% Shona, 18% Ndebele, 2% European, and 4% other, smaller African ethnic groups. Throughout the liberation struggle, tensions and even violence ebbed and flowed between Shona-dominated ZANU and Ndebele-dominated ZAPU. Since the Ndebele first encountered the Shona, the two groups have never been completely reconciled. The “*first chimurenga*” in the 1890s actually began with an Ndebele attack on the Shona, which the British interpreted as an attack on them. The Shona and Ndebele joined forces to fight the British, and later the Southern Rhodesians, but theirs was always an alliance of necessity.

Southern Rhodesia pursued divide-and-rule politics not unlike the approach used in South Africa, where ethnic differences and rivalries were stressed as a means of derailing any movement towards pan-African solidarity. To give just one example, Southern Rhodesian school books told the Shona that the British had saved them from the hostile Ndebele. This message served the dual purpose of encouraging Shona suspicion of the Ndebele and also bolstering the notion of the British/Rhodesians as protectors.

Despite this history, ZANU and ZAPU did join forces to win the struggle, and the two leaders—ZAPU’s Joshua Nkomo and ZANU’s Robert Mugabe—faced off in that first nation-wide election in 1980. Mugabe’s victory effectively ensured that the Shona majority would hold the upper hand in all national matters, a situation that remains true today, despite the celebrated unity accord between ZANU and ZAPU in 1987.

Zimbabwe’s white population, probably less than 2% at this point, and shrinking all the time, is the one that garners the most attention both locally and internationally. The government’s increasing willingness to vilify “whites” as the cause of all the nation’s ills has made an already hostile racial environment still worse. The seizures of white farms have occasioned a handful of brutal murders of innocent white residents. These events have received worldwide press attention, while more routine beatings and killings of blacks go largely ignored. The international press’s hyper-sensitivity to violence against whites only reinforces the tension, bolstering the government’s arguments that whites are pulling the strings of opposition in the country.

There are definitely ethnic human rights considerations in Zimbabwe today, and ethnic tensions have the potential to play a disastrous role in the nation’s future,

especially if Shona/Ndebele rivalry should ever become a dominant force in political disputes. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe's inter-ethnic problems seem secondary to a more basic conflict between the present government's increasingly dictatorial tendencies, and the growing popular call for openness, transparency and true democracy. For the purposes of this report on intimidation and censorship of musicians, ethnicity will not be a major focus.

## 2.3 POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Zimbabwe is technically a constitutional, parliamentary democracy. However, the ruling ZANU-PF party has consistently amended the constitution to strengthen its hand and codify its vision of a one-party state. During the 1990s, even the government acknowledged the need for constitutional reforms in order to check the power of the ruling party. The government appointed a constitutional commission involving a prominent newspaper editor and a highly placed ZANU-PF politician who had once been openly critical of the party in his writings. The commission made a series of tepid recommendations that were put to a national referendum early in February 2000. The voting public's rejection of the commission's tepid reforms marked the first time Zimbabweans had ever voted against ZANU. The defeat came as a shock and paved the way for further humiliation in the June 2000, parliamentary elections. These events set the stage for the government's actions against musicians that lie at the heart of this report.

As it has worked to steadily erode the freedoms guaranteed in the constitution, the Zimbabwean government has also preserved some of the most draconian and oppressive laws created by the Southern Rhodesian government. The one most often cited is the Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA). As an editor of the independent newspaper, *The Daily News*, Nyasha Nyamunu wrote on March 15, 2001:

*The Law and Order Maintenance Act, (Loma), inherited from Ian Smith's Rhodesian government remains on the statute books despite several rulings by the Supreme Court that certain sections of the Act are unconstitutional and impinge on freedom of speech and movement.*

The government's willingness to rely upon one of the most hated laws of the colonial era, and its failure to reverse its own corruption of the constitution, fuel

deep doubts about Zimbabwe's political structure. The existence of a constitution, an elected parliament and an independent judiciary suggest a democratic system. But more and more observers view these institutions as a friendly façade for an unchecked authoritarian regime.

## 2.4 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Zimbabwe's much amended constitution has always included a somewhat vague, unelaborated guarantee of freedom of expression. It appears in the Declaration of Rights, the embedded clauses near the beginning of the document. The essential paragraph of Section 20, "Protection of freedom of expression," reads:

*Except with his own consent or by way of parental discipline, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, that is to say, freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, and freedom from interference with his correspondence.*

A number of subsequent exceptions then appear for such matters as "the interests of defense, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State, public morality or public health."

The final clause of the section confers the right to exercise freedom of expression "in or on any road, street, lane, path, pavement, side-walk, thoroughfare or similar place which exists for the free passage of persons or vehicles." There is no mention of broadcast media, recordings, or performance venues.

### 2.4.1 Censorship and Entertainments Control Act

The Censorship and Entertainments Control Act dates back to the Rhodesian era, when by all accounts censorship of many kinds was common. It has been amended at least twice since independence, in 1981 and 1997. The act provides for the formation of a Board of Censors, defines its makeup and responsibilities, and goes into considerable detail about the characteristics of films and publications that can be censored. In general, concerns about lewdness, obscenity and personal defamation, rather than political content, seem to be paramount.

My research would indicate that the Board of Censors has not been used much during the post independence years, virtually not at all where music is concerned.

It seems to have played no role in the events surrounding Thomas Mapfumo's most controversial songs—"Corruption" (1988), "Mamvemve" and "Disaster" (both 1999)—nor Oliver Mtukudzi's controversial song "Wasakara" (2000) or any other locally produced song. The only reference to the Board of Censors I encountered came from the head of Gramma/ZMC, Julian Howard. Howard told me that he himself has decided not to release material because he felt it was too sexually explicit. On the local scene, Howard had this to say:

JULIAN HOWARD: *There is a Board of Censors. I'm not sure how operational they are. I know that in the last five years, maybe we've approached them twice, and said, "There's something. Give us your opinion." And on both occasions, they've come back and said there's no problem.*

Howard did say that the company is careful not to distribute international music that he and his staff consider to be obscene or offensive. This means that DJs would have to go outside the country to even get their hands on, for example, the more raunchy American rap releases. This de facto censorship tends to be overlooked because the society has little experience of such music, and there seems to be a general consensus that it is not desirable.

As stated at the outset, direct censorship is not the *modus operandi* the Zimbabwean government uses to intimidate local musicians and suppress their work. However, one Radio 3 DJ made a point of observing that the government would be completely within its rights if it did choose to ban a song. He said:

RADIO 3 DJ-3: *African governments are known to have done that, and I don't see why it should not happen here. Foreign governments can do that. They can ban a song if they wish. Because the way we operate is such that we report directly to a government minister. He simply issues an instruction through the chief executive of the broadcasting institution to say, 'Look, this song should not be played.' And that's about it. But it hasn't happened."*

#### 2.4.2 Freedom of the Press

Zimbabwe has kept a very tight hand on all broadcast media in the country. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Company (ZBC) is unabashedly an arm of government, still operating under the terms of the 1957 Rhosedian Broadcasting Act, last amended in 1974. ZBC broadcasts two television signals—including very little local music programming—and four radio signals, as follows:

RADIO 1: English language, mostly news and talk. By far the least popular station.

RADIO 2: The “vernacular” station. Mostly Shona and some Ndebele. Music, news, talk shows. This is by far the most popular station.

RADIO 3: English language pop station. Under pressure to include more local music, but most of the music is foreign pop just the same.

RADIO 4: Educational programming. Broadcasts in both vernacular languages and English.

All broadcast news is written and delivered by state employees, and its patent bias in the favor of the government is transparent and legendary. A 1999 report by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe had this to say about ZBC:

*In two decades the ZBC management has stumbled from crisis to crisis with director- generals sacked for corruption and mismanagement and boards summarily dismissed. The necessary continuity and independence has not been there. But even worse has been the continuing attitude on the part of government that ZBC is its mouthpiece rather than a vehicle for general matters of public interest. This could be seen in the intermittent sacking and suspension of broadcasters who display a degree of independence: from TV newsreader Derek Sones in the early years after independence, to Nyika Bara and Brian Shava in 1989 who interviewed a critic of government economic policy, to Geraldine Jackson in 1997, who took listeners’ phone-in calls on police brutality in the food price riots in Harare. It could be seen in the notices pinned on ZBC noticeboards prohibiting the broadcasting of interviews with certain critical public figures, such as independent MP Margaret Dongo and businessperson Strive Masiyiwa. And most of all it could be seen in the almost total absence of alternative voices on the airwaves themselves.*

Efforts to break the state monopoly on broadcasting—especially radio—have gone on for years. The most recent and significant effort, Capital Radio, will be the subject of a case study later in this report. Government officials have long paid lip service to the notion of opening up the airwaves, but their actions to date indicate no serious intention to allow private broadcasts.

In marked contrast, Zimbabwe now supports a vigorous print media. The government owned Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) publishes a number of papers, most notably the daily English language Harare edition of The Herald. Once viewed as at least marginally independent, Zimpapers publications are now transparently pro-ZANU-PF.

Independent print magazines and newspapers have proliferated in the past decade. The weekly *Financial Gazette*—generally seen as the champion of white financial interests—was the first to thrive. Publications like *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard* are also substantially white run, and plainly in opposition to the government. The newest independent daily newspaper, *The Daily News*, began publishing in December 1999, and it has had a major impact on public discourse, becoming the top selling periodical in Zimbabwe’s urban areas. The government has complained bitterly about *The Daily News*’s perceived editorial excesses, and has arrested, detained and attempted to prosecute the paper’s black editor in chief, Geoff Nyarota, multiple times, most recently in August, 2001.

Many observers feel that the government allows these independent newspapers to exist because they appeal mostly to the urban intelligencia, and have relatively little impact in the rural areas where elections are won or lost. An independent press appeases malcontents and allows the government to claim that freedom of speech is unhindered.

*The Daily News*, however, has worked hard to reach readers in remote areas and to challenge the *Herald*’s dominance there. In January 2001, Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo and the leader of the war veterans association, Chenjerai Hunzvi, delivered stinging verbal attacks on the paper. Hunzvi went so far as to announce a “ban,” effectively urging war veterans—and everyone else—to boycott the publication. Less than 48 hours later, on January 29, the *Daily News*’s Z\$100 million printing press was completely destroyed by a series of crippling explosions. A suspicious note, supposedly from an anti-intellectual wing of the opposition MDC party, claimed responsibility for the attack. A police investigation into the bombing has gone on in secret and yielded no insights to date, however virtually no one believes the MDC was responsible. *The Daily News* continues to publish, although in smaller print runs.

#### 2.4.3 The MDC Open Hand

Concluding this discussion of freedom of expression, I cite one contemporary controversy. At a February 2000, MDC congress in Masvingo, the party adopted the symbol of an open hand as a way for people to demonstrate support. The open hand presented an implicit contrast with the ZANU-PF symbol, a clenched fist. The clenched fist, once a gesture of defiance, now signified oppression and

crushed hopes when contrasted with the freedom and openness of the hand held flat and overhead. The open hand caught on instantly across the nation.

Thomas Mapfumo reports that during his concerts leading up to the June 2000 election, his crowd would often spontaneously raise their hands in the MDC salute. Although Mapfumo supports no particular political party, his concerts were seen by some as informal MDC rallies and may have played a role in MDC's good showing in the June elections. *"Since then"* writes Sandra Nyaira, political reporter for The Daily News (3/8/2001), the hand waving gesture *"has been ritually enforced at music concerts and football matches, much to the chagrin of the ruling ZANU-PF."* Nyaira further reports that the civil servant who first suggested that the MDC adopt this symbol has been forced into hiding following harassment by ZANU-PF and by the much-feared Central Intelligence Organization (CIO).

Another MDC election tactic was to encourage supporters to hold up a red card, the sign a referee in a soccer match uses to indicate a foul. *"The red cards were a concerted effort by the MDC,"* one informant told me. *"They were widely available in your newspapers. You could cut them out and stick them onto a piece of card, and that was your way of declaring tacitly your position without actually having to say anything. You could put them on your car windows and do all sorts of things with them, as people did."*

As the election campaign and aftermath turned increasingly violent, displaying an open hand or a red card became dangerous, cause for a severe beating if the wrong person saw you do it. Reprisals have been especially fierce in the rural areas, and even children well understand the implications. A 12-year-old boy on a small farm 40 km south of Harare spoke to me about politics. *"Give new ideas a chance,"* he said, trying out words he had no doubt heard from adults. He then showed me the symbol of the open hand, and the ZANU-PF fist. The boy clearly understood their meanings. *"But you can get in trouble,"* he warned. *"If the soldiers catch you, very dangerous!"*

Worried that people were becoming afraid to wave to a friend for fear that they would be seen as supporting the MDC, church groups and others began to complain. A petition circulated by a preacher in Bulawayo during my stay stated in part, *"It has now become difficult for everybody to wave hands at their loved ones as you would be associated with the MDC."* On March 13, 2001, ZANU-PF proposed in parliament the banning of the open hand symbol. Admitting openly that ZANU-PF supporters were beating people who made this gesture, ZANU parliamentarians moved that the solution to this problem was not to stop the

beatings, but rather to ban the use of the open hand to indicate support for the MDC. The MDC chief whip said he would not dignify the proposal by debating it.

## **2.5 LEGAL SYSTEM**

Zimbabwe's judiciary is modeled on the English court system. The Zimbabwean judiciary has traditionally been a credible, independent force in society. It has been instrumental in resolving highly sensitive disputes in the nation's history, from inter-ethnic and interracial conflicts, to the attempts of private businesses to establish an economic foothold in the face of government-backed monopolies.

During the 1990s, the judiciary has found itself more and more often in conflict with the ruling party. Since the defeats of early 2000, Zimbabwe's government has shown a growing willingness to thwart basic democratic principles. It has defied Supreme Court rulings on private broadcasting, electoral challenges, and the forced seizure of commercial farms, among other matters. During my stay in Zimbabwe, the government engineered the retirement of Chief Justice Anthony Gubbay. Many observers feel that Gubbay's retirement was the result of intimidation culminating in the government's claim that it could no longer guarantee Gubbay's personal safety if he stayed on in the job. The shape and character of the new court under the new Chief Justice, Godfrey Chidyausiku, remains to be seen. With a number of cases critical to the future of Zimbabwe's national politics in process, this is an area that will be closely watched.

## **2.6 HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD**

Both Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe have poor human rights records. In June 2001, Amnesty International officially blacklisted Zimbabwe for its repeated violations of press freedom and human rights. Here is a summary of some key areas of concern, with emphasis on the contemporary situation.

### **2.6.1 Southern Rhodesia**

The determination of white Southern Rhodesian leaders to remain in control of their land and privileged lifestyle, even as most of the continent reverted to the black African governance, led to extensive and well-documented human rights

abuses. From its education system, to its land resettlement policies, to its laws, judiciary and prisons, a full description of the human rights violations perpetrated by the Southern Rhodesian regime is far beyond the scope of this report.

White Southern Rhodesians were determined to preserve the privileged world they had built, and they were slow to realize that the fight was not winnable. The *chimurenga* guerillas fighting out of bases in Mozambique and encampments in the bush resorted to extreme measures of their own, and poor, uneducated villagers were brutally victimized by both sides in a cruel struggle for loyalty. This war, one of the longest and bloodiest independence struggles in modern African history, has left enduring psychic scars on all who experienced it.

### 2.6.2 Matabeleland after Independence

Some observers trace Zimbabwe's current troubles to the fact that the country's leaders came to power through violence and cunning, and have governed the same way. In any case, a willingness to abrogate international conventions of human rights was an early mark of Robert Mugabe's regime.

In the 1990s, after the government finally lifted the State of Emergency in Matabeleland, the extent of its violent, covert actions against the Ndebele people in the early '80s came to light. The infamous Fifth Brigade, trained by the North Korean military to "combat malcontents," wreaked havoc in Ndebele towns, farms and villages between 1982 and 1987. According to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, these years saw literally thousands of murders, disappearances, and incidents of property destruction, rape, torture and assault directed against unarmed Ndebele. Mass graves and other forensic evidence have provided a clear picture of systematic atrocities, but the government has never conceded the truth, apologized for it, or made any move toward reparations.

### 2.6.3 The Movement for Democratic Change

Today, tactics of random violence and intimidation reminiscent of those employed in Matabeleland in the early 1980s are being used brazenly against new enemies. The rise of a credible political opposition in Zimbabwe—the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)—has occasioned a growing campaign of government

sanctioned terror unleashed with special vigor in the rural areas—ZANU’s political base—but also increasingly in urban neighborhoods deemed to be unsympathetic to the government.

The seizure of white commercial farms that began after MDC won its parliamentary victories in June 2000 has been accompanied by a dramatic rise in acts of random violence by supposed “war veterans.” Although many of these perpetrators are legitimate veterans, others are too young to have even fought in the liberation war. Until his unexpected death at age 51 on June 4, 2001, Chenjerai Hunzvi led the National Liberation War Veterans Association. Hunzvi, who actually liked to be called “Hitler,” had always been a hard liner. In 1997, he led war veterans in their campaign for financial compensation from the government. Mugabe ultimately relented to Hunzvi’s demands, but the payoff triggered the most severe slide in the value of the Zimbabwe dollar since independence. Throughout and after the electoral setbacks of 2000, Hunzvi led his followers not only in seizing farms, but in attacking businesses, schools, restaurants, nightclubs, and individuals deemed unfriendly to the ruling elite.

The term “war veteran,” once a mark of pride in Zimbabwe, has become for many synonymous with “hooligan,” or to use the locally favored term, *tsotsi*. Here is a sampling of newspaper headlines involving violent actions by ZANU-PF supporters and war veterans from just the three-week period of my recent stay in Harare:

“War vets shoot two Epworth residents” (*The Daily News*, March 8)

“Woman loses houses to war vets” (*The Daily News*, March 10)

“Are war vets running the country?” (*Financial Gazette*, March 8-14)

“War vets storm club” (*The Standard*, March 11-17)

“War veterans gloat as farm goes to ruin” (*Zimbabwe Independent*, March 16)

“ZRP promotes more than 300 war veterans”

[ZRP is the Zimbabwe Republic Police] (*The Daily News*, March 20)

“Zimpapers workers enlist war veterans” (*The Standard*, March 18-24)

“War vets close two schools” (*The Daily News*, March 22)

“Army intervenes to rein in errant war veterans”

(*Zimbabwe Independent*, March 23)

“Rowdy war vets storm Harare children’s home” (*The Daily News*, March 23)

“War vets, ZANU PF supporters unleash terror in Mashava”

(*The Daily News*, March 23)

“Victims of political violence to sue government for terror”

(*The Daily News*, March 27)

Such reports of violence are commonplace in Zimbabwe. Complicity of the police and army often figure into the story. In fact, the army has been making regular night attacks on areas that voted for the MDC in the 2000 elections. The manager of a major Zimbabwean popular musician who frequently plays the Harare townships described it this way:

MUSICIAN MANAGER: *When the army deploys its units to enter into those suburbs overnight to create a terror campaign, they go in crocodile trucks. They're not trying to disguise the fact that they've arrived; they go in fully clad and looking as intimidating as possible. Of course, they naturally gravitate to areas where people congregate: nightclubs, restaurants, beer halls. And as many stories as you're going to hear about nightclubs, there have been as many in the restaurants, where you really do have a pretty random group of people, often with their kids and everything, made to lie down, all their drinks put on top of them, food thrown on top of them, squashed on the floor by soldiers' boots—and then beaten. Purely as an intimidatory exercise.*

Musicians and their fans do not seem to be particular targets, although in one widely reported incident in early 2001, a jazz band called Jabavu was badly beaten by soldiers, their car destroyed, and guitarist Timothy Makaya's hand deliberately broken by soldiers' boots after a show at the Royal Crescent Sports Bar in Chitungwiza. Chitungwiza is a poor, crowded city south of Harare, and home to many musicians, also many MDC supporters. The band had no political affiliations. They were simply unlucky. *"And that's the whole plan at the moment,"* said the music manager quoted above. *"It's the random nature of it. That, I believe, is what ZANU, the current party, believe in. It's the randomness that they're trying to inculcate into the people."*

#### 2.6.4 Press Harassment

Putting aside the bombing of the Daily News printing press in January 2001, which cannot be definitively blamed on the Zimbabwean government, the government has pursued a relentless campaign of harassment against journalists. In a widely reported case early in 1999, police detained, beat and tortured two journalists, Ray Choto and Mark Chavanduka, because they reported on an alleged coup within the Zimbabwean military. Clive Wilson, editor of The Standard, the paper that published Choto and Chavanduka's report, was also briefly detained, although not mistreated.

Soon after these events, Grace Kwinjeh, a writer for The Mirror, was charged with publishing false information. Geoff Nyarota, Editor-in-Chief of The Daily News, has been repeatedly charged with “criminal defamation,” for articles published in his newspaper. Nyarota was arrested and jailed along with three other journalists in August 2001. In May 2001, Bornwell Chakaodza, former editor of The Herald, admitted that as editor of the state daily, he had operated under strict government orders to publish only negative coverage of opposition parties, especially MDC.

In June 2001, the government announced new restrictive measures to limit foreign press coverage of events in Zimbabwe. Foreign reporters now require accreditation before they entering the country, and they must apply at least a month in advance. These events played a role in Amnesty International’s recent blacklisting of Zimbabwe. In July 2001, Zimbabwe suspended the accreditation of British Broadcasting Corporation correspondents. This is yet another major blow, as BBC has been one of the outside press organizations most committed to documenting current events in Zimbabwe.

#### 2.6.5 Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe

In 1995, President Robert Mugabe personally intervened to prevent a small local organization called Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) from participating in the annual international book fair. In a famous speech that he made several times around the nation, he declared that homosexuals had no civil rights in Zimbabwe and that they were “*worse than pigs and dogs.*” Amid the international furor that resulted, GALZ received substantial funding from international human rights organizations, and has mounted an uphill battle ever since to sway the hearts and minds of citizens and lawmakers. I met with the organization’s head, Keith Goddard, in March 2001, and he told me that GALZ is now principally focused on HIV/AIDS prevention, and on influencing the development of the pending Sexual Offences Act. GALZ feels that the bill contains many good measures. However, in its current form, it fails to distinguish between consensual and forced sodomy.

Summing up the current state of affairs for GALZ in Zimbabwe’s deteriorating political environment, Goddard said, “*The way it is done in this country is a low-level campaign of attrition. That’s what we’ve suffered, a general climate of fear. Our*

*voices are kept off radio and television. ...[And] of course, there is always the lingering threat of police with tear gas."*

#### 2.6.6 Witchcraft

In February 2001, the United States also listed ritual murders associated with witchcraft as a human rights problem in Zimbabwe. Grizzly practices, such as the exhuming of human bodies in order to secure decaying flesh for use in rituals, do occur. While it is tempting for outsiders to dismiss witchcraft as superstition, it plays a role a significant number of murder cases in the country. Even the most rational, Christianized citizens cannot easily dismiss the power of witchcraft in Zimbabwean life.

### 3. Music in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is home to an impressive array of traditional and popular music. This section provides a general overview of the music recorded, broadcasted and performed, particularly since 1960. Zimbabwe's best-known international export is the singer/songwriter electric pop music of urban, bandleader stars, most notably Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi, and Andy Brown. All these artists share at least some Shona ancestry. The traditional music of the Shona people, especially the sacred *mbira* music, is also well known internationally. It has a loyal constituency at home as well, but is largely unsupported by broadcast media, performance presenters, or recording companies. The sort of government cultural organizations that would support traditional music in other countries simply do not exist in Zimbabwe.

Among the Ndebele in the southern part of the country, there are counterparts to the popular and traditional music of the Shona. These artists have a following in their region, but not in the country at large, and with few exceptions, not in the international market.

Gospel music is increasingly popular during these difficult times when people have much cause to turn to religion for solace. But the biggest selling music in Zimbabwe is not *mbira* music, not the music of legendary figures like Thomas Mapfumo and Oliver Mtukudzi, not gospel, and not foreign music. It is the genre that has come to be known as *sungura*. *Sungura* is essentially a Zimbabwean adaptation of the guitar-driven "rumba" sound that blasted out of Kinshasa starting in the late '50s and early '60s, moved through east Africa and came into Zimbabwe during the 1970s and '80s via Tanzania and Zambia. If you go to the so-called "growth points"—residential clusters that lie between urban and rural areas—this is the music you hear most.

A more detailed, style-by-style treatment of Zimbabwean music genres appears in the final section of this report, *Appendix: Music Styles of Zimbabwe*.

### 3.1 AFRICAN MUSIC CULTURE IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA

Recalling Professor Zimunya's statement in the introduction to this report, the role of music has been substantially overlooked in Southern Rhodesian and Zimbabwean history, I offer a few observations about music culture under the white regime that ruled for the first eight decades of the 20th century.

It has often been observed that British colonizers in Africa showed little interest in or even tolerance for existing African cultures. The comparative health of indigenous African cultures in ex-French colonies such as Mali and Senegal provides general support for this thesis. But even within the world of Anglo-African colonies, the area that is now Zimbabwe received particularly harsh treatment in the cultural realm.

White Southern Rhodesians were determined to settle and raise their families in Africa. They had come to live, and to stay. In other British colonies — such as Ghana and Nigeria — the British were more interested in exploiting cheap labor and extracting resources than they were in settling. These governments sought to eliminate threats to their security and to educate African children, and of course, Christian missionaries sought to convert Africans throughout these countries. But beyond that, indigenous cultures in Ghana and Nigeria were left to operate substantially as they had before. Because the Rhodesians wanted to build a safe, stable society in which to raise their families, they felt the need to subjugate the local Africans to a more extreme degree. Southern Rhodesian education was hence one of the most insidious and systematic attempts at acculturation carried out in colonial Africa. Missionaries and educators together delivered a powerful message that local African cultures and religious practices—including music—were backward and evil. These attitudes have survived in the minds of some black Zimbabweans today, part of the phenomenon often described as the “colonial hangover.”

Southern Rhodesia's Land Apportionment Act in the 1930s barred Africans from owning the country's best land, and so disrupted a key aspect of Shona religion, which puts a premium on preserving contact with the land where your ancestors were born and buried. In word and practice, the Southern Rhodesian state mounted a sustained effort to erase ancient culture. In the 1950s, more enlightened forces within the Rhodesian Broadcasting System began to counteract this trend by recording and broadcasting indigenous music from around the

country. But by that time, Rhodesian education had taken a deep psychic toll on the country's African peoples. Some Zimbabwean artists and intellectuals believe that this alienation from African cultural foundations lies at the root of the nation's current woes.

Despite this history, music played a key role in the liberation struggle. Thomas Turino's landmark book, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (University of Chicago Press, 2000) provides the most comprehensive existing account of music in Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. Turino describes the 1962 celebration of the founding of ZAPU, the Zimbabwean African People's Union, a seminal event in the struggle. Before tens of thousands of people gathered in Gwanzura Stadium, this first ZAPU rally presented rock 'n roll, African rumba, Zimbabwean traditional dances and Shona *mbira* music associated with the traditional ancestor worship so reviled by Southern Rhodesian authorities. Turino writes:

*Although this event was to celebrate the founding of a new nationalist party, the main activities revolved around music, dance, and performative speech by the ex-chief, and only brief introductions and words by about the party by the deputy president. ...ZAPU's rally was carefully orchestrated to attract people to the party and to create emotion. For this reason, music and dance, rather than propositional political speeches, were the main activities programmed. (Turino, p.178)*

As we shall see, the new music that subsequently grew out of the liberation struggle, and that still colors much of Zimbabwean pop, got its power as much from its transformed and revived traditional melodies and rhythms as from the political rhetoric in lyrics. One reason that music was able to generate the emotion nationalist leaders were so keen to promote was that it flew in the face of Southern Rhodesian acculturation efforts.

Turino skeptically probes the often-repeated notion that traditional music, especially Shona *mbira* music, had been all but extinguished prior to its revival in the 1960s and 70s. He rightly points out that not all white Rhodesians sought to squelch indigenous music, and also that the Rhodesia Broadcasting Company's studios in Mbare—the oldest black, "high-density" township of Salisbury (now Harare)—played a "prominent role in diffusing the sound of localized indigenous musics to a wider audience." Turino argues that the music was there; it had not disappeared; and key decision makers at RBC understood the value of preserving and promoting it. Indeed, during my recent stay, I heard some embittered, black proponents of Zimbabwean local music grudgingly concede that RBC did

more to develop local music than ZBC has done since independence. Nevertheless, when the nationalist movement formally began in the 1960s, a reaffirmation of traditional music was part of the package. If RBC broadcasts in the 1950s and 60s helped this process along, it is safe to assume that this was not their intended purpose. The recollections of traditional *mbira* player Ephat Mujuru well illustrate the coalescence of cultural and political awakening that characterized the 1960s in Salisbury.

EPHAT MUJURU: *It was in 1962. That's the big explosion, because that's where our first African nationalism started and people wanted to know, "What has happened to our history?" People began to have the pride of their music. That time, you could go to Mbare and you would be surprised to see how many people were holding mbira. I'm telling you from what I saw with my eyes... That was the time, and we give credit to our nationalists, because they had brought the awareness to the people. They sang some of the songs, and they also began to wear African feather hats. That really brought an awareness. There was a time that the government that was there was trying to ban the mbira, because it was very powerful... I remember one time when we were playing at a particular place, and the police came and said, "No. No playing here." But we didn't stop! The more they said it, the more we played, because we were not afraid of anything. But then after that, they kind of ignored it, because even in the police force, the police people they began to be interested too. They could also come for the dancing. "You know, I am a policeman. But I like the music!"*

### 3.2 MUSIC AND THE POST INDEPENDENCE STATE

Although the nationalists made skillful use of music in service of their cause, the government they ultimately created has shown no commitment to nurturing music of any kind. Traditional artists today are especially bitter about this and consistently complain about the lack of school programs, television programming and national institutions dedicated to supporting and presenting indigenous musical traditions. The late educator and musician Dumisani Maraire fought the good fight in this regard, pioneering a traditional music curriculum at the Zimbabwe College of Music. Unfortunately, only a very small number of people benefit from that effort, and most traditional musicians in Zimbabwe feel abandoned and disenfranchised. As pop singer Andy Brown put it in the quotation that begins this report, *"They have censored their own culture."* I emphasize this point because although the focus of this report is censorship of music

based on its thematic content, far more Zimbabwean musicians have complained to me about the problem Brown cites than about any form of content-based censorship.

### 3.3 ZIMBABWE'S MUSIC INDUSTRY

This section describes key features of the music industry in Zimbabwe.

#### 3.3.1 Recording Industry

Prior to independence, recorded music in Zimbabwe was released on Teal Records, an arm of South Africa's Gallo Records. After independence, Teal became Gramma Records, and a second company Zimbabwe Music Company (ZMC) emerged. In 1994, the two companies combined operations, and although they claim to maintain "competition," they are administered out of a single office, and are for all intents and purposes a monopoly. No label has ever posed a serious challenge to Gramma/ZMC. A company called Record and Tape Productions (RTP) made an effort in the early '90s, but they now function as a part of the Gramma/ZMC machine. "We treat each other like brother and sister," an RTP spokesman told me. RTP uses Gramma's studio and CD duplication services, and focuses principally on a small catalogue of gospel acts.

The Zimbabwean public has demonstrated an impressive loyalty to its local artists. In many other African countries, foreign music—whether from the U.S. and Europe or from South African and Congo—has almost completely occluded local talent. Though foreign sounds grow more and more popular in Zimbabwe, and receive in the views of many disproportionate airplay on state radio, local music continues to sell well. The 1990s have seen two droughts in Zimbabwe, and severe economic hardship in general. But Julian Howard, director of Gramma/ZMC, says that local cassettes have remained a good business through it all. On my recent visit, he told me:

*JULIAN HOWARD: Traditionally during hard times, music here has tended to hold its own. It's very much an integral part of peoples' existence. We've seen the market grow fairly dramatically in the last couple of years, despite the really harsh times. Yeah, it's part of this tradition to music being essential to everybody, and also I would go back to our pricing policies, which make it easily affordable in relative terms. If you want go out and want to buy anything for 100, 120 dollars [less*

*than \$2 US], you're going to battle to find anything of any substance. But you can buy a cassette for \$120 in the flea market... In hard times, people need cheering up. That really I think accounts for it, because it's difficult to believe in people having battled to feed and clothe and educate themselves, that they're still going to go and spend that money on a cassette.*

This statement speaks to the power of music in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, in my research on the country's contemporary music, I have long felt that musicians and consumers would benefit enormously from competition in the recording industry. One reason that prices of local cassettes remain low is that no effort is made to promote or develop them. Journalists consistently report difficulties in getting review copies of new music, or copies for airplay—and this with only four radio stations to service. New artists rarely get the benefit of even a press biography, let alone any concerted effort to tell their story or introduce them to the public. Gramma/ZMC has made no effort to promote their artists abroad. All those who have succeeded in this have done so on their own. Any artist who can produce his or her own music and uses Gramma/ZMC only for distribution. Perhaps worst of all, artists who come in with new ideas are often told, *"That won't sell."* Gramma/ZMC holds onto a very static view of its customer base. Hence the perception by many journalists and DJs that most new Zimbabwean music is simply a rehash of things that have been done before.

Zimbabwe clearly has the inherent talent and the public interest to support a more vital music industry. But hindered by an utterly hamstrung state broadcasting monopoly, and a lethargic, self-satisfied recording industry monopoly, this potential is not being realized. While this situation cannot be called not censorship as such, it has a similar effect, because it dramatically limits the potential for musicians to break new ground by producing unconventional or experimental art.

There have been attempts at creating a competitive record company, but none has yet succeeded. One worth noting, however, is a young label called Shamiso Entertainment. At 35, the label's founder Gilbert Muvavarirwa says that he is pursuing a vision he's had since he was 15. Armed with an MBA from London Middlesex University, and equipment purchased during his years working for British American Tobacco, Muvavarirwa launched Shamiso near the end of 2000. Shamiso's goal has been to cultivate a new generation of artists, committed to Zimbabwean music, but more open to international trends than the music released by Gramma/ZMC. Despite impressive successes with early releases,

described in *Appendix: Music Styles of Zimbabwe* under Modern Trends, Muvavarirwa is now suspending operations until conditions in Zimbabwe improve. This development leaves Gramma/ZMC unchallenged for the foreseeable future.

### 3.3.2 Radio and the Foreign/Local Music Controversy

Shamiso Entertainment's efforts point to a cultural vacuum in Zimbabwean music. Radio 3 is frequently criticized for playing so much foreign music, mostly American and British pop and R&B, mainstream hip-hop, and South African *kwaito* music. DJs and journalists have long complained about the lack of viable local alternatives, music with the power to appeal to youth. Why it is that nobody produces local R&B, local hip-hop, remixes of classic Mapfumo tracks, indeed *any* music that acknowledges new developments in international music? The current Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, has introduced a new ploy to postpone the inevitable arrival of independent private broadcasting. He has declared that when and if new stations are allowed, they must play 75% local music. In the meantime, he has asked that the existing stations, including Radio 3, the international pop music station, raise their local content to at least 40%.

Radio 3 DJs offer a uniform response to Moyo's edict. Having long demonstrated a preference for foreign music, they complain that if 40% local content is achieved, or worse still, if the 75% rule is enforced, "*All the stations will sound the same.*" This phrase recurred like a mantra in my interviews with Radio 3 DJs. I sat in on one session at ZBC. Taped to the DJ's window, there was a large handwritten sign that read: "*All announcers. Please note!! Make sure that 40% of local music is evident in all your compilation!! HR3.*" The request from the head of Radio 3 was simply not achievable, the DJ informed me. From the DJ's point of view, this sort of government interference with their programming is far more bothersome than any acknowledged form of censorship.

### 3.3.3 Barriers to Importing Materials of the Music Profession

Finally, it should be noted that despite the obvious fact that Zimbabweans consider music a necessity of life, the government continues to treat all imports relating to music—from the strings and instruments played by musicians, to the microphones and recording gear in studios, to the blank tapes and CDs that ultimately deliver recordings to customers—as luxury items. They charge a blan-

ket 25% duty on all such materials, creating enormous and often insurmountable obstacles to all players in the music sector. Gramma/ZMC has lobbied the government for years to reduce these tariffs, without any success. This imposing financial barrier to the creation of competitive institutions in Zimbabwe reinforces the industry's stagnant status quo, and subsequently limits creative outlets for musicians.

A strong musicians' union could make a difference here. However, the Zimbabwe Union of Musicians has proven a singularly ineffective entity throughout its history. A number of split-off associations of musicians and music professionals have also failed to sway hearts and minds in a government that seems to think only of the short-term scenario, and never of the long-term benefits of building a more robust music industry. Some of my informants speculate that keeping a lid on creativity is an explicit government objective. Others simply see it as part of the ruling party's overriding need to control and profit from all economic activity in the country.

### **3.4 WOMEN IN ZIMBABWEAN MUSIC**

Even by comparison with other African countries, Zimbabwe has a poor record when it comes to the advancement of women. In Shona society, women are routinely expected to stay home and tend house while their husbands keep outside mistresses. This informal polygamy is one reason why HIV/AIDS has spread so readily in Zimbabwe. Education and employment possibilities are limited for women, and while there are beginning to be studies, associations and movements aimed at improving the status of Zimbabwean women, there's a long, hard road ahead by all accounts.

This gender inequality is plainly visible in the domain of music. The vast majority of popular and traditional musicians in Zimbabwe are and have always been men. Those women who have achieved even modest success in music are very much exceptions to the rule. Singer Dorothy Masuka, a contemporary of Miriam Makeba, had an illustrious career during the 1960s and 70s, but she made her name in South Africa's jazz scene, and enjoyed general popularity in her home country, Zimbabwe, only afterwards. Two *mbira* playing women, Stella Chiweshe and Beuler Djoko, have made reputations for themselves, but only after defying family and traditional authorities, and proceeding with dogged determination. In Chiweshe's case, as with Masuka before her, recognition abroad spurred her

reputation in Zimbabwe, but she still faces opposition from conservatives who do not think that women should play *mbira*.

An important young woman musician, Chiwoniso, is the daughter of Dumisani Maraire. Chiwoniso was raised in the state of Washington, playing *mbira* and learning Shona tradition in the context of American culture. When she returned to Zimbabwe as a teenager, she was shocked to find no other girls interested in traditional music. *"There's still a very serious stigma attached to women in the industry,"* Chiwoniso told me. *"This disturbs me. There's a lot of girls that come up to me and say, 'I really want to do this, but my parents will kick me out.' That's wrong."*

Chiwoniso and others see some signs of hope for women in Zimbabwean music. The young artists associated with Shamiso Entertainment include some promising women singers working in non-traditional styles aimed at a youth audience. If Zimbabwe is ever to produce a female superstar, it is likely to emerge from this milieu, rather than from one of the existing local genres.

## 4. Censorship and Intimidation in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has the means and methods at its disposal to censor or ban anything it likes. The guarantee of freedom of expression in the constitution leaves ample room for exceptions, and the Board of Censors is ready and waiting to do business. Over time, though, it seems that government, industry and media mechanisms have evolved to the point where direct proclamations of censorship and banning are simply not needed. This section examines the ways in which Zimbabwe controls and limits speech and artistic expression without resorting to official censorship. I make a distinction between actions taken against art for its sexual or moral content and those taken against political art. I then document cases where artists have been interrogated, and consider the question of whether artists—musicians in particular—are afraid to express themselves in Zimbabwe.

First, I cite a recent development. In my interviews, I often mentioned the impressive sales figures generated by the controversy surrounding Thomas Mapfumo's songs "Mamvemve" and "Disaster," and Oliver Mtukudzi's "Wasakara." In almost every conversation, I asked, *"Why don't young artists push the envelope of political speech in order to win publicity and generate sales?"* I received a variety of answers, many of which appear later in this section. A common reply, though, was that a small, unknown artist attempting such a strategy would, firstly, never be recorded or broadcast, and secondly, be seen as an opportunist and not taken seriously. Since I left Zimbabwe, such a case has arisen. Bekithemba Khumalo, a smalltime singer from Bulawayo, recorded an album called *Taking Him Away*, including the song, "The President is a Thief." Khumalo had a very hard time finding a producer willing to record his album. According to BBC News, *"One producer did relent and secretly recorded 'The President is a Thief,' but now shops in Khumalo's home town of Bulawayo are refusing to sell the cassette."* (BBC, 8/31/2001)

Khumalo has made brave statements to the press, such as, *"They can think of arresting me but then it's a way of expressing myself. It's my democratic right to say whatever I feel."* At the same time, he tried to hedge on the interpretation of his song. All my informants—even the artists—said that direct mention of the president in a

negative context is a clear violation of constitution and plainly out of bounds. This explains Khumalo's telling the BBC that he was not referring to President Robert Mugabe personally, but to his government. Khumalo's recording is not backed by Gramma/ZMC, but we do not know whether they ever formally rejected the music, or if they did reject it, why they did so. This is a young artist with no national following, and the quality of his music and the recording are not particularly good. Nevertheless, the willingness of any singer to write such a song, and the unwillingness of at least some producers to record it, and of shops to sell it, is indicative of the restrictive environment faced by Zimbabwean musicians.

In Zimbabwe, I tried to determine whether the government is now paying more attention to works of art they might find threatening than they did in the past. Many felt that this is the case. As reported later in this section, I discovered cases of singers being officially questioned about song lyrics as early as the mid-1990s. Since my return, one event has underlined high-level government awareness of and focus on the potential power of music to sway hearts and minds in the country. The Minister of Information himself, Johathan Moyo, released an album of songs to coincide with the Heroes' Day celebrations in mid August. The 18-track release, titled *Third Chimurenga (Third Revolution)*, includes reworked versions of liberation war-era songs, as well as original compositions by Moyo, such as "All Proud Zimbabweans." Government propaganda disguised as pop music is unlikely to impress the traumatized Zimbabwean public, any more than Southern Rhodesian patriotic songs succeeded in counteracting the old *chimurenga* anthems during the liberation struggle. But Moyo's gesture exemplifies this government's recognition that music is now a tool being used against it.

#### 4.1 CENSORSHIP OF "IMMORAL" ART

The restriction of art deemed to be obscene generates little controversy in Zimbabwe. Even Thomas Mapfumo frequently criticizes musicians who sing about "bedroom love." He is referring to popular *sungura* songs that recount sometimes humorous tales of men being caught in hotels with their mistresses and so on. Zimbabwean newspapers have long printed attacks on foreign art deemed to be vulgar. A 1993 column decrying "rude Zairean dance" in a rumba concert by Kanda Bongo Man is typical. "*It takes a lot of guts for a woman, especially a Zimbabwean woman in view of our culture, to dance so rudely in front of large crowds,*" wrote Tinaye Garande in the Sunday Mail. "*Who could have taught innocent souls such indecent things?*"

It's difficult to say whether Zimbabweans' general reluctance to discuss or display sexuality openly has roots in local African values—as President Mugabe has claimed in his crusade against gays and lesbians—or whether it reflects British prudery inherited as part of the oft-cited “colonial hangover.” But in all my conversations, I heard little complaint about the nation's long history of suppressing public expressions of sexuality.

A prominent author spoke to me about a large sculpture at the National Gallery in Bulawayo. It is called “Looking to the Future,” and depicts a naked man standing and peering ahead. At the behest of a minister, ostensibly offended by the nudity, the sculpture was moved to a back room where few can now see it. The author wondered whether the nudity was really the issue. For him, a fear of encouraging people to contemplate Zimbabwe's future seemed an equally likely explanation for this instance of government meddling in the arts. My impression was that the nudity objection seemed to my informant silly, but benign, whereas the political objection seemed sinister.

In terms of direct censorship, ZBC has always tightly controlled what goes on the airwaves, and this has roots in the practices of the Rhodesia Broadcasting System. Here are two statements from broadcasters, the first from one who actually worked in both organizations.

*RBC/ZBC BROADCASTER: They were always telling us not to play stuff. During the Rhodesian regime, they had a whole library of people, just sitting, restricting and banning records. These were English speaking [censors], so they were listening to white records. I must assume that in the vernacular radio station, they had people listening as well with a clear mandate of what to ban.*

*ZBC DJ-1: There would be a pinned up list on the board, which no one looked at. It would say, “As from now, don't play Marvin Gaye's ‘I want to Rub Your Body,’” or whatever. It normally had to do with sex or lust or rude things. Protecting the morals of the nation.*

The fact that so many Zimbabweans seem comfortable with having government and media institutions protect them from immorality might lead one to conclude that this is not a serious problem. However, this morally righteous climate does have victims. The predicament of the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, cited earlier, provides one obvious example. But still more disturbingly, Zimbabwe's

tragic delay in educating its population about HIV / AIDS and how it is spread, can also be seen as a byproduct of national prudery. Zimbabwe has one of the highest HIV infection rates in the world, and one has to wonder whether a more tolerant of open sexuality would have let things go so far before initiating a national dialogue about sexual behavior. Now, of necessity, such a dialogue has begun. But many have died and will continue to die because of the society's deeply rooted secretiveness regarding sexual intimacy.

## 4.2 CENSORSHIP OF POLITICAL ART

As stated earlier, in the area of political art, government mechanisms to censor specific works have rarely been used. I spoke with a playwright and scholar who worked at high levels of the Zimbabwean government for most of its history, including five years as a Minister. Minister X told me:

MINISTER X: *In the whole area of protest culture or theatre, the only time when we made a decision about an artistic piece was Workshop Negative [a play by Bulawayo playwright Cont Mhlanga], when the guys said they wanted government money to go and present the play in England. We said, "You will have the money to present the play in Zimbabwe. You can tour with it, but to go and perform it in Britain using our own money, presenting a criticism of ourselves to British audiences—we will not do that." That's the only time I know where our government said no.*

Minister X argued passionately that artistic criticism—if it is respectful—is part not only of Shona culture, but of African cultures in general. He claimed that the number of artists and playwrights who have been imprisoned for political reasons in all of modern African history can be counted on one hand. When I reported to him that many of my informants had made statements along the lines of, "In Africa, if you criticize leaders, you disappear," he rejected the notion out of hand:

MINISTER X: *That's totally untrue. It's completely the opposite. I can pick series of songs, series of plays, series of art, the cartoonists that are every day cartooning the president directly who are walking freely in the streets, and yet in my own culture, if you come and insult my uncle while I am there, and I kill you, I am innocent, because you have injured my uncle... People are walking freely, cartooning the uncles of other people who should actually take a spear and kill them because that is our heritage. There are so many people who are doing blatant, downright*

*insults in the papers, calling names and so forth. These are artists who are writing those things. They are not being killed. If you take Thomas's songs and you analyze a number of them, most of them are very, very critical of leadership, not just political leadership, and he has never stopped. He is a critic par excellence. Respected critics will never be arrested. In African context, they will never be tortured. Who will dare torture a critic who is genuine? Nobody.*

I reported Minister X's comments to a Radio 1 and Radio 3 DJ with many years of experience at ZBC. He said, *"I think he's a little naïve. I know X as well. He's a thoughtful guy. But I think he doesn't quite know some of his colleagues. Just read in the papers. Talk to people around."* In fairness to Minister X, he did acknowledge that the environment is now becoming more "dicey" and "complex." When I mentioned to the minister that I had heard from artists who had been interrogated about their song lyrics, and that there had been many incidents of political violence, he spoke of *"other middle level people, the security people, who will think that if they did something to you, then they will be patted on the back."*

This separation between appointed and elected officials and their more zealous underlings, who may at times cross the bounds of acceptable behavior is key to understanding the environment of intimidation that exists in Zimbabwe. The minister, even as he sights a tradition that values "criticism" but punishes "insult," even with death, has no problem divorcing the government from the actions of "middle level people" and "security people." Similarly, the president and his ministers have no trouble divorcing themselves from the actions of CIO, army, police and "war veterans," who terrorize opposition supporters nightly in today's Zimbabwe. To the man having his teeth broken for holding up an open hand, this distinction is less meaningful.

Minister X claimed that the Zimbabwean government has virtually never censored political art pieces. Television journalism is another matter. To take just one recent example, on June 4, 2001, a ZBC television talk program, "Talk to the Nation," was abruptly banned from the airwaves following a program in which phone-in callers praised MDC policies on national finances.

Going back to the previous regime, there are many examples of Southern Rhodesian bans on local music deemed too political. Around 1960, a top Salisbury concert group, the City Quads, recorded a song inspired by an American spiritual, "When Will the Day of Freedom Come." This sounded like politics to a lot of people, and it was banned. Near the end of the liberation war, all of Thomas

Mapfumo's music was banned from the airwaves, but it took a surprisingly long time. In part, this is because the country's political art is characteristically indirect. A veteran black DJ, who also worked at RBC, thinks that Mapfumo was shrewd to avoid the censors for so long.

VETERAN DJ: *Thomas knew exactly what to do, the way he used to structure his lyrics was so that even the black policemen wouldn't really know what the hell he was talking about. But a lot of people knew. It was like [the song] "Hokoyo." [It said,] 'Watch out! We're coming. Hey. Be careful, man. We're getting there.' That kind of thing.*

The practice of delivering indirect political messages in lyrics is often cited, but difficult to document. During my time with the Blacks Unlimited in 1997 and '98, I often heard people in the audience spinning elaborate interpretations of what Mapfumo was *really* saying in a song. Sometimes Mapfumo would confirm the interpretation, as in the case of "Asingade," ("He Who Refuses"), an indirect attack on ZANU-PF's intolerance of dissent. In other cases, he would chuckle and suggest that the fan had an overactive imagination. The art of interpretation becomes particularly difficult when the songwriter uses "deep Shona," old language full of metaphors and mysterious phrases. I have been told on numerous occasions that a song simply could not be translated into English because it is written in "deep Shona." Such songs have never been banned or generated public controversy, but that does not mean they convey no political messages.

Back in the 1970s, Southern Rhodesian authorities did ultimately ban Mapfumo's music, and of course, this only served to boost his public stature. Having witnessed that, officials at today's ZBC have a clear understanding of how censorship can backfire and strengthen the hand of the censored party. They have learned to favor indirect approaches of their own. I was told that after a series of incidents where written instructions not to play certain music or discuss certain topics found their way into the press, the practice of writing things down was consciously abandoned.

ZBC DJ-2: *I remember once I saw on the notice board in the newsroom a sign. I don't know if you remember the opposition politician called Margaret Dongo. There was just a sign on the notice board in the newsroom that said, "Margaret Dongo has received enough coverage in our bulletins." Full stop. And I never saw her again on television after that. And even if you did see her, you wouldn't hear what*

*she was saying. Somebody would tell you what she said. You'd see a picture of her talking, but somebody said, "Oh, she said this, and this, and this." They pick up some of the negative things. It happens all the time. And it's even more so now.*

In reference to the supposed restriction of Thomas Mapfumo's songs, "Mamvemve" and "Disaster," a highly placed ZBC official confirmed to me that, in his words, "Things are not written down." He suggested that there were other ways to get the point across. Two DJ's who worked under this person for years elaborate:

*ZBC DJ-1: Self-censoring is huge here, and huge on radio. It's very hard to describe that unless you've been involved in it. As you drive in ZBC, there are guys with guns at the gate. And you walk through and the receptionist just looks at you, and you go in and there's this sort of deathly silence, and you open the mic, there's this like fog that envelopes you and you just know what you can't say. No one has to tell you.*

*ZBC DJ-2: When I was at ZBC, it's not like anyone ever came and told you, "No, you cannot say this." But you just felt it. You just felt it. They were so paranoid. They are so afraid of different voices. It's incredible. I think now it's reached even greater proportions.*

A white, independent newspaper editor and an acute observer of the nation's political machinations agrees that there is no need for formal banning and censorship in such a tightly controlled media environment.

*NEWSPAPER EDITOR: You don't have to issue an edict banning something. You just pick up the phone. The Minister picks up the phone to the ZBC Director General, or to somebody at the head of one of the departments, and that's the end of that. That's how it's done.*

Minister X also spoke of "self-censorship." For him, it represented a kind of cowardice, a surrender to fear, a response to some imagined threat. He praised Mapfumo for being "not afraid." In the Minister's view, this made him a great asset to the nation. Again, I felt he was distancing himself from the reality experienced by many artists, writers and public figures in Zimbabwe. Given the violence, people have good reason to be afraid. When one DJ was very forthcoming with me, I thanked him, telling him that others had been suspicious and reluctant, clearly afraid. "It's understandable," the DJ said. "Because when ZANU hits back, they hit rough."

I spoke with a prominent writer and columnist in Zimbabwe, who said he is routinely trailed by CIO agents. He clearly felt that the effort to instill fear is not the work of rogue elements, but a systematic approach.

*AUTHOR: You must understand the art of intimidation in this country. They start by intimidating you. If you are stubborn, they intimidate your wife, reminding her every day that, "Your husband is going to die very soon," and all that. And if your wife is stubborn, they go to the soft spot. They even trail the children. They follow them to school as if they were about to kidnap them, giving the impression that anything [could happen.] They could kill them, or kidnap them, or throw them in the swimming pool to drown.*

This author also stated that the government avoids direct censorship of artists, but he clearly feels that government is paying closer attention to art in recent years.

*AUTHOR: What they do now is they harass the artists. Towards elections, it gets quite intense. But under normal circumstance, you just see them [CIO agents]. They are paid to come and have a drink. That's part of the intimidation. You just ignore them. But since that time, they began to monitor artists. That's when they began to follow artists, and writing all these files. Before it was not like that...I know them. There's one of them just went out. [We were sitting in the author's favorite bar.] But I never bother about them. If you show that you care about them, they will make you more miserable. You just ignore them. I don't panic. When I see them, I actually go to greet them, to acknowledge their presence. Every night, they are here.*

#### **4.3 INTERROGATION OF MUSICAL ARTISTS**

Here are three accounts by musicians who experienced official intervention in their art. In the case of Artists 1 and 2, these incidents happened when they were relatively unknown. In each case, the artist was actually approached and questioned about the lyrics to a song. By all accounts, this would not happen to artists with the stature of Thomas Mapfumo or Oliver Mtukudzi. They are too prominent, too popular, and too public to be treated in such a direct manner.

Artist 1 released a song on his mid-90s debut album that made allusions to unfair treatment of workers. This is a particularly sensitive area for the government considering the fact that MDC, ZANU-PF's opposition, emerged from the trade union movement.

ARTIST 1: *When that song was released, I tell you, that's when most companies started experiencing some strikes and all sort of things. But most people they even thought I'm going to be probed by the intelligence organizations here. But well, I was asked twice. Once in Southerton there, by the guys. "Who are you singing?" I said, "I don't sing a person. I sing music. I compose a song about the situation that I experienced. Like that song, I was singing about my experiences at work. I don't sing against the government. I don't do that."*

*You know, these guys, they are not in uniform, but they said, "You know, we can deal with you, and we can silence you."*

*And I said, "Well, of course. But what I am telling you is the truth. Listen to the song. It doesn't talk about anyone in particular. I'm just singing my experiences."*

Artist 1 told me that this first interrogation occurred at a police station.

ARTIST 1: *But after that event, some came to me and said, "Who has asked you about this song?"*

*I said, "Nobody." I used to refuse because I knew if it was the CIO, and you speak out about whether you were heard about this asking or not, you will be creating more problems for yourself. So whoever asks me, I tell them nothing has happened. But at times you ask, "Ah, but this is a simple song. How can someone try to fit it in a situation that I did not sing about?"*

Artist 1's real intent in this and other songs is not entirely clear. He made a point of explaining to me that he writes his songs deliberately to allow for different interpretations. This is part of his artistic style as a songwriter, and also part of Shona and other African artistic traditions. When Artist 1 told me this story, I was simply asking about his career. I had not posed any questions about political content or government interference. He clearly felt that harassment by suspicious parties was part of his professional biography. Later in his career, when he was better known, the harassment took on a different character. He found himself being attacked in government-run newspapers.

ARTIST 1: *You know, these guys, they will say, "We can build you and we can destroy you." One newspaper, especially the Sunday Mail and the Herald—you know, it's one company—they went against me for almost two years, hammering me every day. "His music is no longer market worthy. He tries to sing politics. He is not a politician. If you are a musician, sing just the general life. Don't sing*

*politics. If you want to get into politics, then get into it." It was week in, week out; you could see the paper hammering on me.*

*One time someone phoned me to say, "I want you for an interview at the Herald."*

*I said, "I am not prepared to talk to anyone from press."*

*And they said, "Do you know that the press can build you and the press can destroy you? If you try to go against the press, my friend, I tell you, your career is coming to an end."*

Interestingly, when I asked Artist 1 directly whether he felt he was free to sing about what he liked, he said yes, as long as he did not name any individual directly. Despite the harassment, he has continued to sing about "situations" and "hardships." He said that he feels free to do so. As with so many things in Zimbabwe, the message is mixed. Artist 1 tells a frank story of intimidation, but when I ask if he thinks artists in Zimbabwe feel intimidated, he says no. Based on many conversations with Zimbabwean musicians over the years, I give more weight to the complaint. The concluding claim that he is free and can sing what he likes seems designed to muddy the picture, to protect himself by stopping short of pointing out the obvious: that he has been a victim of unconstitutional intimidation.

Artist 2 also ran into problems with an early release, before he had established much of a reputation. He sang a song that complained about rising prices, an increasingly common theme in Zimbabwean pop songs in recent years. In this case, the artist was questioned about the song.

*ARTIST 2: They gave me a bit of a problem. A hassle. Two, three people approached me, who I don't know. "Can you give us the sequence? What was the idea that you were trying to tell people?"*

*Then I said, "Look, don't you see the price of the bread has gone up?"*

*"Oh that's true."*

*"Don't you see that the fare of the Emergency Taxis has gone up?"*

*"Ah, that is very true. Okay, [artist's first name], thank you very much."*

*The first person called me on the phone and said, "Look, I am also an ex-combatant. Why are you singing such type of music?"*

*I said, "Look, I am talking the straight point here. Are you arguing with the point that I'm saying?"*

*He said, "Ah no, [artist's first name]." Then he started laughing. That was on the phone. The second time they approached me, there were two, here in town. They said, "Ah, we are very much interested to hear. We are from ZBC." That's what*

*he was saying. "We are from ZBC, but we are in the investigation team. We want to know what you were trying to say." I explained, and they said, "Ah, okay. Fine. We just wanted to know." They just left me. I went.*

Artist 2 feels an affinity with Thomas Mapfumo, and he is unabashedly interested in voicing protest through his music. I asked him whether he now feels he has to be careful about not crossing the line to the point where he would have more serious problems. He said:

*ARTIST 2: Yeah. It's something that I've got to think about. At the same time, as I've said, this type of music, you have got to be possessed somewhere when you are writing the songs. It's not actually you writing the songs. It is something there that is forcing, teaching, saying, "Write this." It must come out. But then, as a human being, I've got to think again and say, "Right. Enough here is enough. I must stop there."*

I asked Artist 2 if he ever feels pushed by his audience to be more political. He told me that during some of his live shows, people wave the open hand when they feel a song is being critical of the ZANU-PF government.

*ARTIST 2: Sometimes, it's nervous, and I think I'm not going to get out of the door today and walk outside... Even now, people think maybe I am on the other side of the party, which is not the current party. But I'm not. I'm not picking a party. Not at all. Not at all.*

Artist 3's incident is somewhat different. This occurred quite recently, at a time when this artist was well established and popular. This case is interesting because it reinforces other statements that there is tremendous nervousness among broadcasters at ZBC. Artist 3's experience when he was invited to do ZBC to do a radio interview clearly indicates informal censorship at work.

*ARTIST 3: Yeah, the first day I went to the radio station to have my first interview with a Radio 3 DJ, you know, [X] was his name. We got there, and the first five minutes were cool. They were playing "[song title]" and starting to introduce the album to the nation and stuff. And the next thing, the DJ gets a call—I don't know from whom. So, I could just see this guy's face changing, and hear, "Ah, yes, chef. Okay, chef. Sorry, chef." And then he told me, "Look, I can't interview you anymore." And the next thing, there was police in the studio and we were escorted out into the rain. So that was the last time I was in the radio station.*

Artist 3 tended to laugh this event off. For him, it was a kind of war story, almost a badge of pride. In other comments, however, he showed a pained awareness of how serious the situation is becoming for artists like him. He spoke about making plans to be out of the country during the 2002 campaign and election. While his ejection from the state radio station provides plain evidence of government censorship of the arts, it seemed only a mild brush to this artist, in comparison to what might happen in the future.

#### 4.4 ARE MUSICIANS AND WRITERS AFRAID?

If Zimbabwean authorities are carrying out a campaign of intimidation against artists, however disorganized, one measure of its effectiveness is surely the extent to which artists and those who produce and promote their art actually feel afraid. Once again, the evidence is not consistent, and requires careful interpretation. In this section, I present a cross section of responses to this question. Often, I posed the question this way: If songs perceived as political have yielded such extraordinary sales for Thomas Mapfumo and Oliver Mtukudzi, why don't more artists sing them?

*RADIO 3 DJ-1: I think it is because of fear. We have a very repressive government here. They cannot handle criticism. They always seem to think any criticism is an act of treason. When you criticize, you are being treasonous. You are not being patriotic. They seem to think there is just one way to be patriotic and that's through ZANU.*

*YOUNG RAP MUSICIANS: "We are afraid. We are afraid."*

*"But we're not afraid to say it." "We are afraid, but there is nothing we can do."*

*GRAMMA/ZMC EXECUTIVE: You cannot state your views in Africa. You state your views, you disappear.*

*TRADITIONAL POP BANDLEADER: I'm a small band. I don't want to talk or sing about politics. You can disappear. They can dig into your past.*

*THOMAS MAPFUMO: Some [musicians] are very much afraid to involve themselves in politics. They think maybe they just might get killed or get arrested, but if you are a fighter you don't have to fear those things. You must fear for the*

*people, for the rest of the people, not for yourself. If you are a fighter, you've really got to stand up and say this is wrong and this is right.*

*MUSICIAN: As a musician, I believe you are like a church organization. You house everyone from any political party, from any organization. If you just link yourself with a political organization, then one, you are destroying your business, and two, you are putting your life at risk. We are not politicians. We must just sing about situations that people are experiencing, but not link ourselves to political parties. That's the best way for us.*

*VETERAN TRADITIONAL MUSICIAN: Ah no, you sing what you want. We are very free people here... I don't fear anybody. I am just very free... People like my song ["song title"]. The government, they like it too. They come and dance. Nobody has ever told me to shut up my mouth. So I'm very happy, although I'm poor.*

*OLIVER MTUKUDZI: I've never seen one who is afraid. No fellow artist has ever come to me to say that I want to say this, but I am afraid. Artists can criticize in actions. You don't have to say. There are a lot of ways of speaking out in our culture. If people are scared to criticize, I don't know. But I've been criticizing left and right... In my Shona culture, criticizing is not illegal, not at all. It's not that you don't criticize the leaders. Leaders can be criticized. That's how they learn in our culture. Criticizing in Shona culture—it's done, but we have channels. There is some degree of respect. You can criticize, but it has to be respectful.*

The traditional musician who is not afraid was a fervent supporter of the liberation struggle, and has been generally loyal to the government ever since. His lack of fear is quite easily explained by the fact that he does not feel artistically compelled to criticize political leaders. Mtukudzi's perspective is more complex, as we will see in the case study later in this report. The clearest cases of intimidation's effects involve musicians in the Harare townships who do want to sing about the failures of leaders and the suffering it causes to those around them, but who do not share Mtukudzi's confidence.

*VETERAN GUITARIST: It's not a secret. Everybody knows it. Let's say the government did something you didn't like here in Zimbabwe. If you mention that, you will be in trouble. They don't want you to say anything... You know long back, people used to sing anything, before this government. It was okay to sing anything under the white government. Maybe they didn't understand the language. I don't know. Now, you can't do that. You can go to Gramma Records and say, "Look here,*

*I want to record this song. It's about this, this, and this." And they will say, "No. We don't want to get into trouble."*

This statement comes from a person who talks to and knows many musicians in many bands. So I asked him if he thought that this perception holds people back from singing about subjects they would otherwise like to sing about.

VETERAN GUITARIST: *Of course. They would like to do that, but they can't do that because they are afraid of the government. If you say something direct to the government, something bad, you disappear. The only guy who doesn't disappear for saying something is Thomas. They are not afraid of Thomas, but Thomas is a public figure. If they do something wrong to Thomas, there will be a noise.*

Out of caution, I did not approach hard-line war veterans in Zimbabwe to get their thoughts on this situation. I acknowledge that such views would be an asset to this report, but I made a decision not to risk my own security and my research by asking pointed questions to such people. I did, however, get indirect views into the thinking of those who condone or carry out acts of intimidation. One Radio 3 DJ told me about a conversation he had with an ex-combatant and intelligence agent.

RADIO 3 DJ-1: *I said, "Why do you seem to think that my criticism necessarily means that I am a member of the opposition, or that I am trying to do treason—all kinds of things. I am in cahoots with Americans and British. There is a great big conspiracy. We're all winking at each other and I'm just a puppet. I don't think for myself?"*

*He said something very interesting. He said, "Because, you see, the whole Zimbabwe population is like sheep. They have to be herded. So if somebody comes and tries to wrestle from us the nose ring by which we are pulling, we will fight hard to get it back so we can pull this way." It is rather depressing.*

The highest ranking ZBC person I interviewed is also a war veteran, although an unusually well-educated one. He offered a more imaginative line of argument when I asked him why musicians are so timid about criticizing their government.

ZBC OFFICIAL: *That is something that we were also wondering about. Why? Why? Why? What sort of people are we that our singers do not stand up and say openly what they do not agree with? They are so quiet. Or they completely ignore*

*it altogether. I don't know. I don't have an answer to that. But perhaps. Perhaps. Just perhaps, it's just a possible explanation. I suppose it has to do with this overriding issue. I think it has to do with the land. Let me explain. No matter how much you maybe disagree with the government, with the way it is handling the issue, for instance. But then, somewhere in your mind, it is an issue that is so close to your heart actually, that you end up just saying, I don't know. I don't know. It's so close to everyone's heart that there is a real possibility of forgiving people for the manner in which they are handling it. You end up agreeing with them.*

This somewhat convoluted reasoning reflects general thinking within ZANU-PF regarding the land issue, which politicians consistently use as a way of diverting attention from government abuses. The end is so desirable that people will overlook the means. The fear of rocking the boat actually serves a higher purpose, reclaiming stolen land. If in fact, this sort of voluntary deference goes on in the minds of artists, other observers feel it has older roots.

VETERAN BROADCASTER: *There's been such control here for so long, going back to the Rhodesian regime. So there is this belief that you as an individual cannot make a difference. And maybe, there's a perception that it's the journalist's job to do that. Not mine.*

I found many examples of people afraid to have or express an opinion, even on matters that affect them directly. I asked a young traditional musician who admires Mapfumo whether he feels inspired to criticize the government as Mapfumo does.

YOUNG TRADITIONAL POP MUSICIAN: *I don't want to touch much on that area... Normally these are newspapers saying this and that, and you know what some of these journalists do. They don't ask you what to write about, but they simply write of whatever they think is okay, so I can't say Thomas is against the government or the government was against Thomas because this is secondary information. Maybe Thomas is very close to the government and maybe the government is very close to him.*

Puzzled by this “see no evil, hear no evil” attitude, I pointed out that Mapfumo had made very strong public statements against the government. This musician refused even to acknowledge that Mapfumo takes moral stands on political issues.

YOUNG TRADITIONAL POP MUSICIAN: *Some of these things are propaganda because they want to sell newspapers... I'm not saying they are talking lies, but I want to just say that Thomas is a musician and the government is a government, I don't see there's anywhere they can merge... So there is no one who is wrong or no one is right, but we are just in between. I am someone who takes life as it is. I don't want to complicate situations.*

This musician took an equally timid stance concerning music industry institutions. Whereas the great majority of musicians I met complained about the lack of record company promotion and radio airplay for local music, this one claimed to be quite content with both. *"I'm okay even if they play me once a year,"* he said. *"If something is good, you don't have to prove it through much airplay."* At best, this shows a limited awareness of the power of radio. More likely, it shows a complete unwillingness to say anything remotely critical of a government institution to a journalist such as myself.

*Sungura* musicians are, by most accounts, the least likely to engage in protest song. This is because their base of support, like the ZANU-PF government's, lies in rural Zimbabwe, where government intimidation is widespread, ruthless, and often invisible to local and international press observers. The veteran guitarist cited above says that *sungura* musicians in particular avoid politics for this reason. *"It's not good for them,"* he told me, *"because ZANU-PF is very powerful in the rural areas. Everybody—I think three-quarters of the people are ZANU supporters. So if you sing about that, maybe you will be beaten."*

I had this conversation with an extremely popular and well-traveled *sungura* artist.

SUNGURA COMPOSER: *When I am writing my songs, I do try to avoid [politics] myself. I don't want to put myself into the political situation. I don't want to be there. What I have to do is just write my songs about our life and our livings. How are we living, and how are we surviving? I do try to avoid [politics] myself because I have seen some of the musicians get in trouble because of that type of singing, that type of writing.*

BE: *What would happen if a sungura group sang songs with political themes?*

SC: *They will still hunt for you. They will still hunt for you because we really know how we survive here in Zimbabwe. That's why we always stay away from that.*

BE: *Some artists tell me that there is no censorship. Everyone is free to sing what they like.*

SC: *They can say so, but if I am here at home, and someone can come. [knock-knock-knock] You don't know who is he who starts saying, "Hey, you, what does your song mean? What were you singing about?" Starting from there, wherever you go and wherever you are, there are people who are taking a very, very strong listen to whatever you say.*

Not surprisingly, there are artists working mostly in the cities who see things differently.

POPULAR URBAN MUSICIAN: *The whole idea is to sing songs that make social changes, make the politicians think again, make all the people to be aware of what's actually going on, than just to read the papers. We continue to do that.*

YOUNG URBAN POET: *So, most of these musicians, they don't want to strike the nail on its head about what the government is doing. They just want to stick on social life. They are brave on writing things like social living, cultural things, economic life and whatever. But they don't want to point specifically on the political level. I think they fear the government...Mapfumo can sing about "Mamvemve." His singing is very real. And Tuku can sing about "Bvuma." Accept, tolerance. These people are brave. Some of these musicians are not... I think another thing which is causing musicians not to sing about the political scenario is that the media here is really controlled by the government. When you go to the DJ and the studio and talk about the political things, they will say, "You, young man, you want to spoil things. You can make our studio be bombed." So most of these studios they do not accept politically oriented music and politically oriented lyrics, because they also fear.*

This poet, whose work seemed quite brave to me, told a story of reading a poem on Radio 2 and being scolded off-air afterwards by the DJ, who took the poem to be in support of the MDC, although it was not. I spoke with a much more seasoned and successful author. He too was brave, but for reasons similar to that of Mapfumo and Mtukudzi.

ESTABLISHED AUTHOR: *They could kill me somehow, but they have to be very careful. Before I was known all over the world, they used to be very heavy on me. Try to bump me with a car and all that. But it didn't work and I survived. If they*

*kill me, they will have to do it in a very subtle way. I even told one of them, "Listen, the best thing you can do is to protect me. Because even if I collapse dead on my own, you'll be blamed. So you had better protect me."*

ORGANIZER OF HARARE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS (HIFA), 2001: *The Harare Commission wanted editorial control in return for supporting the festival. Eventually they relented on that, when the organizers refused. But they said, "We are watching you. If there are any attacks on the government, we will hold someone responsible." It felt like a threat.*

I often heard it said that recording companies would not record protest music, an assertion that seems to be born out by the experience of Bekithemba Khumalo and his song, "The President is a Thief." I asked Radio 3 DJ-1 if he thought braver, more political music could be produced in Zimbabwe. He did not believe it could.

RADIO 3 DJ-1: *My analysis of this is number one, the record companies won't touch it. Because they know that later on, the police will come and raid them, take their equipment. All kinds of trumped up charges. Number two. It will never get airplay. You might think, maybe underground, whatever. Even if it gets played in a nightclub, chances are police will come and raid that nightclub.*

Here are the contrasting positions of two, small record label heads.

SMALL LABEL HEAD-1: *I wouldn't discourage my artists. The definition of an artist is freedom of expression. So I want someone who stands with a voice and an idea that makes you different. And it's got to touch people's sentiments... A true artist, there will be nothing that they cannot say. It's a form of expression. That's your job. You're a voice for the people... The future will come. You will deal with it. I'm not scared.*

SMALL LABEL HEAD-2: *It's not very easy to record something controversial. The reflection comes back on you. We want to be educative, not controversial. We want to unite the country, not divide it. We tell our producers to be careful. They must record things that are straight down the line, that don't raise any eyebrows. It's company policy that we don't record anything controversial.*

Since my visit to Zimbabwe, LABEL HEAD-1 has written to tell me he is closing up shop and moving his family to South Africa.

Given that Gramma/ZMC is really the only significant recording operation in Zimbabwe, I asked a number of people there what their position was on recording controversial or protest music. The reactions were so varied as to make me wonder whether the company even has a policy on the subject.

BE: *It seems to me that being controversial can help to sell records. It's good business.*

GRAMMA/ZMC PRODUCER: *It is. It just depends on guts, I think. Some people have got guts. Like Thomas. He can say whatever he wants. Other people are scared. Sometimes a song is very, very popular on radio and with the people but the sales are not that good. But with people like Thomas, people want to know why they have done that, why it's not getting played on radio. So they are saying things to support him, like, "You are our voice."*

BE: *Are there any new artists trying to do this?*

PRODUCER: *No. Not really. Most of the guys are just singing general love songs, life in general. I haven't seen anyone who sings like Thomas. It's a general trend here. I don't know whether it's fear or it's respect, but people are very reserved here when they sing. You get just a few people like Thomas who can say whatever they want.*

BE: *What if it did happen? What if an artist came to you with good music and a tough message?*

PRODUCER: *I think it would be great because people are looking for a voice. That's why I say, there's no guts. No guts! This is the general trend of people in this country. They feel depressed about something, but they don't say it. They'd rather suffer and just mumble. But they won't say it out straight. That's unfortunate. People I think here generally have got respect for other people. Sometimes respect turns out to be fear... I can't go out there and encourage them to do it, but when you listen to what people are saying in the country, I think the musicians should speak for them. Not being aggressive, but just to speak the voice of the people.*

BE: *Have you ever turned a group down because you thought their message was too strong?*

PRODUCER: *About five years ago, I came across a group that was a bit, you know, actually inciting violence. It's not right to do that. They were really angry, but the way they were going about the lyrical side of it was too aggressive. I would have accepted something if it was mild and constructive, but not like this. They were doing reggae. They were not that hot, but we could have worked on them. I said, "Look if you can tone down, maybe do it in a more civilized way." We could*

*have worked something out, but after that, I never heard of them again. They just disappeared.*

Here are some other comments by people at Gramma/ZMC on the subject of recording controversial music. Remember that most commercial music in the country is recorded by this company, and all commercial music is distributed by it.

GRAMMA/ZMC EXECUTIVE-1: *They'd close our doors tomorrow. If we were to say, "Let's do controversial songs," they'd close us down in a day. You could go to court, but you'd never win the case. Even if you won. Look at Capital [Radio]. They won their case, but they're still frozen...And smaller musicians feel vulnerable. Thomas is untouchable at the moment. But a small upcoming group? [The authorities] wouldn't even blink."*

GRAMMA/ZMC A&R MAN-1: *It's risky, because of whatever goes with that. Some guys are lucky, but at times you can end up in jail. Thomas was lucky. Not everybody can be lucky like that... People don't want to be against the authorities. They don't want to sing about politics.*

BE: *Would Gramma/ZMC would record such music?*

GRAMMA/ZMC A&R MAN-1: *They would record you, provided it's not direct, like if you were talking about somebody's name. But if it's hidden, it's not direct, it's okay. But if you were pointing at somebody, I mean, we don't record that.*

GRAMMA/ZMC A&R MAN-2: *Why do we mix politics with music?... I know before the country was freed, before we got our freedom, people used to sing about politics—you know, hammering on the white people. And that thing is a thing of the past now. If we allow in our country our artists to sing politics, they will have a problem.*

GRAMMA/ZMC EXECUTIVE-2: *There's commercial viability in any controversial music. It doesn't have to be political. If it's controversial, and people start saying, "Oh, it's going to be banned on the radio," well people will go out and buy it. Now, I'm obviously not going to go out and canvas for that sort of thing, even if it is very commercially viable.*

In general, the more highly placed the Gramma/ZMC official, the less I found any willingness to encourage or embrace the idea of recording controversial music. The company has a very good thing going. They produce a product that sells even in hard times. The company's decision makers have no interest in rocking the boat, and here, as in the area of developing new artists and genres,

they act as a conservative force, dedicated to preserving the status quo, not to facilitating or championing change of any kind.

The most surprising response I received to the question of why musicians do not engage political messages came from a music journalist at The Daily News. He said:

*MUSIC JOURNALIST: They do it. Most of the musicians they do it. There are quite a number. Andy Brown. Ah, most of the musicians. Every release that is released in the country today, there are three or four political songs. But it depends now on the magnitude of their popularity. It's not that Thomas and Oliver are the only ones singing about what's happening in the country... There are artists, smaller artists, who are popular in the rural areas, whose political messages actually reach the people more than these guys... I believe that most musicians sing about politics. It's only the people on the street who don't identify the political connotations within songs.*

For this journalist, any song that points out economic hardship is automatically “political.” He feels that political messages missed by the mass media are in fact reaching rural audience in disguised form in song lyrics. This is an intriguing notion, argued forcefully by this individual. However, most observers I spoke with set the bar for “political messages” a good deal higher and share in a general perception that artists are reluctant to make waves or take on the government. Some people I spoke with were prepared to offer profound explanations for this.

*RADIO 3-DJ-2: In the Zimbabwe scenario, you have a population that is very docile, a population that has been intimidated into watching every step that you make, what you say, a population that was never been given an opportunity to recover from the traumas of colonialism. It was just from one extreme into another. The only difference now is that whereas before independence it was a white oppressors, it's the same now. They didn't even scrap the laws. They are using the same laws to oppress people. Law and Order Maintenance Act. They are using LOMA. Ian Smith put that in place. And they are using that. So what do you say? Nothing really changed. People still have this feeling of being watched.*

*INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER EDITOR: It's a problem of a culture of deference, a lack of a properly developed civil society, a lack of self confidence. I think if you are not brought up with a sense of entitlement, entitlement to protest,*

*entitlement to speak out, entitlement to differ—if that is not part of your raising, then you're going to have problems with it when it manifests itself in other ways. You're not going to be able to own up to it. You'd rather back away from it. We see this all the time with the clergy. The clergy is the best example. The conscience of the nation, the very people who should be speaking out. Business. The captains of industry. They say nothing. Representative institutions of all sorts, people who one would have thought would have had a view on the destruction of the economy. It's not part of their mindset to engage in protest that is too outspoken. There is a culture of respecting elders, respecting chiefs, of respecting hierarchy, of the man as head of the family—that social structure. And this government has done as much as it can assiduously to cultivate that notion of social hierarchy, that you should not question your elders and betters. You should not challenge those in authority, and therefore you should not challenge the president and his ministers. They have translated traditional notions of cultural deference into political attitudes, and we're constantly battling that.*

*We as a newspaper feel this sense of frustration, growing dissatisfaction and disaffection among urban youths. And don't forget, over 50% of our population is now under 30, born since independence, with no sense of obligation... They have no wish to relate to the dogmas of the liberation struggle. They see themselves as abandoned by the political aristocracy that won independence in 1980, and which now terrorizes them. That disaffection is not addressed in terms of the local music.*

Based on all my conversations, I must conclude that most people, including musicians, have at least some fear about expressing themselves openly. This fear has deep origins and it is being actively reinforced by today's violent regime. The resulting social environment—stagnant, squelched, and unhealthy—is all the more reason why the few writers, singers, journalists, and politicians who transcend fear and challenge public officials openly are a crucial asset to Zimbabwe, and why their continued ability to speak to the people is so important to preserve.

## 5. Case Studies

This final section of this report looks more closely at three case studies: the reported restriction of Thomas Mapfumo's songs, "Mamvemve" and "Disaster"; the controversy surrounding Oliver Mtukudzi's *Bvuma/Tolerance* album, and especially the song "Wasakara"; and the failed attempt to launch Zimbabwe's first independent radio station, Capital Radio.

### 5.1 THOMAS MAPFUMO: "MAMVEMVE" AND "DISASTER"

Thomas Mapfumo is a central figure in this report because he popularized a tradition of political song during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, and he continues that tradition today. In fact, Mapfumo appears to be the only singer who has ever had his songs even informally barred from radio play in Zimbabwe for political reasons. At the same time, he is one of the only singers who has recorded and distributed explicit songs of protest against Zimbabwe's current regime. Mapfumo established a prerogative for himself during the 1970s, and he has been granted considerable license ever since. His central message has always been that Zimbabweans must reclaim the cultural legacy stolen from them during the Southern Rhodesia years. But this general rhetoric includes a specific argument that today's leaders have become corrupt, self-serving, intolerant of dissent, and as such, have abandoned the best interests of ordinary Zimbabweans.

#### 5.1.1 Mapfumo's Biography

Thomas Mapfumo was born in 1945 in Marondera, a small town south of the Southern Rhodesian capital, Salisbury. He spent his first ten years living in the countryside with his grandparents, tending cattle herds, and waking up long before sunrise to do chores before school. One of his greatest pleasures was traditional music, especially the sacred music of the Shona *mbira*. When Mapfumo was ten, he moved to Mbare, the poorest and toughest black township

of Salisbury. Life was different in the urban home of his mother, stepfather, two brothers and two sisters. Mbare was a center of black protest against the Rhodesian regime, and a scene of random police actions designed to intimidate would-be rebels. Mapfumo's stepfather was active both in the Christian church and in Shona traditional religious circles. He taught his children a highly moral worldview that saw no contradiction between the guidance of an almighty Christian God, and that of Shona ancestor spirits.

Mapfumo began to sing, and in high school, he joined his first band, the Zutu Brothers. For the next ten years, while the liberation war roiled through the country, Mapfumo worked in a series of bands as the rock 'n' roll singer, the man charged with reproducing vocal performances by the likes of Elvis Presley, Bobby Darrin, Wilson Pickett, and Mick Jagger.

In 1972, Mapfumo moved to a mining town and started a band called the Hallelujah Chicken Run Band. It was here, working with guitarist Joshua Dube, that Mapfumo first adapted songs from the ancient *mbira* repertoire and worked them into the band's Afro-rock repertoire. To sing in Shona and use traditional music in a pop context may not have been unique, but it was unusual, and in the context of the escalating war, automatically political. As Mapfumo moved on to work first with the Acid Band, and ultimately with the Blacks Unlimited, everything came together. He developed his *mbira* pop sound with guitarists Jonah Sit-hole and Leonard "Pickett" Chiyangwa, bassist Charles Makokova, and other innovative young players. Much has been made of Mapfumo's lyrics, but Professor Musa Zimunya stresses that the music itself contained a powerful message.

MUSA ZIMUNYA: *The African melody was being recaptured with guitars, brass, and drums. It was also rhythm and dance. Now for any of these songs to make any sense and to appeal to the people, the message had to be complete in that respect. That's what made this music different from rock, and pop, and jazz and emerging reggae at the time. The message for the African listening to these songs was in the melody first and foremost and in the words secondarily. I would say that that is Mapfumo's achievement. He could have put these words in rumba and it wouldn't have mattered one bit.*

Of course, Mapfumo's *chimurenga* lyrics did contribute to the effect, dwelling on highly emotional themes—hardships in the rural areas, young men heading into the bush to fight, and a rising sense of indignation at white rulers who had systematically devalued Shona culture for four generations. Near the end of war,

the out-maneuvered Rhodesians arrested Mapfumo briefly. As a condition of his release, he had to play at a rally for Archbishop Abel Muzorewa, who at the time was leading an effort to settle with the Rhodesians for something short of full liberation. Mapfumo's association with Muzorewa's accommodationist effort hurt his reputation for a time following independence. But through his music, Mapfumo soon became popular again, first as a praise singer to the new leaders, but ultimately as a critic of the regime.

When ZANU-PF leaders showed overt signs of corruption, they unexpectedly found themselves in Mapfumo's sights. In 1988, following a scandal involving government ministers using public funds to buy luxury cars, Mapfumo shocked the nation with the song "Corruption," plainly condemning Zimbabwe's leaders for their dishonesty and graft. This was the beginning of a new era in Mapfumo's career. For the second time in his life, he became a leading critic of the state, virtually the only popular singer willing to take on such a role.

A Thomas Mapfumo concert in Zimbabwe during the 1990s was an extraordinary communal experience. It began at 8:00 in the evening, and could last until daylight. It included deep *mbira* anthems, rollicking township dance grooves, and refracted glimmers of reggae, R&B, and African jazz. The songs decried alcoholism, AIDS, domestic violence, and corruption. Through his recordings and concerts during these years, Mapfumo helped guide a large sector of the population to the point where they could imagine opposing ZANU-PF in the service of a greater patriotism.

Near the end of 1999, Mapfumo was awarded an Honorary Degree from the University of Zimbabwe. He received the honor from President Robert Mugabe in person, and the two even spoke a few words together. Two weeks later, Mapfumo released *Chimurenga Explosion*, the album with "Mamvemve" and "Disaster." The album instantly rose to the top of the charts, and these two songs were among the most popular of 2000, a year in which ZANU-PF suffered its two painful defeats at the polls. Reports began to circulate that ZBC radio DJs were being told not to play these two songs. In June, following the parliamentary elections, police came to Mapfumo's home and confiscated his three cars, claiming that they had been stolen and then purchased by Mapfumo from South Africa. In July, Mapfumo quietly moved his family to Eugene, Oregon. He returned home briefly the following December to play his traditional year-end shows. He has not been in Zimbabwe since February 2001, and although he

would very much like to go there and perform, as of this writing, he does not know when he will deem it safe to do so.

### 5.1.2 Mapfumo vs the ZANU-PF Regime

Thomas Mapfumo has always insisted that his 1970's *chimurenga* songs were not in support of any political party, or even of black people against white people. They were motivated by principles of social justice. Long before "Corruption" clarified Mapfumo's distaste for ZANU-PF, keen listeners were sensing his doubts about the leaders he had helped bring to power.

*ZIMBABWEAN AUTHOR: There was a ZANU congress, a big one, down at Borrowdale Park in 1984. And he sang that song "Congress." It's like a fairy tale about all the animals going to congress, even crocodiles and snakes. It's got a satirical edge to it, and they were dancing to it! If you listen to the lyrics, he's starting to tease them. "Even hare, even baboon. Let him come out. Even snake. Let him come out!" Insiders were too drunk with their own power to worry about that. That, I think marks a turning point.*

As mentioned earlier, the art of "hiding the meaning" is well established in Zimbabwean music. Zimbabwean author Chenjerai Hove cites war era songs, such as one by Zexie Manatsa that simply said, "There are guinea fowls in the forest. If you want to touch them, you must go to Mbuya Nehanda first." Mbuya Nehanda is a Shona ancestor spirit whom many believed was guiding the war effort.

*CHENJERAI HOVE: [Zexie] was singing about the guerillas. I was teaching in the southern countryside at the time, and we used to sing these songs at the *pungwes*, the whole night. And the Rhodesians didn't know what was happening, until towards the end of the war, when they realized what the meaning was. That's when they began to employ African, so-called, cultural advisors—the Army Psychological Unit. That's when the army band began to sing African songs also, to try to do the same as the other musicians were doing.*

"Corruption" had instant impact because it made no attempt to hide the meaning. The lyrics—Something for something/Nothing for nothing/...Everywhere, there is corruption/... Corruption in the society—left no room for interpretation. Lest anyone in ZANU miss the point, Mapfumo sang, "Eight years," the exact length of ZANU's rule at that time.

The song was a runaway hit, and as in the case of “Mamvemve” and “Disaster,” there were reports of it being restricted from radio play. But it was never officially banned, and it has remained a popular song, played often on radio ever since. For at least some in the government, it did represent what Minister X and Oliver Mtukudzi describe as “constructive criticism,” a service to rather than an attack upon the leaders.

*ZBC OFFICIAL: He sang this song “Corruption” in 1988...Those who purported to be the leaders of the revolution ended up being the biggest corrupt people. To me, because my mind was already traveling along that direction, I was with him. I said, “Ah, now he is starting to point it out now. In fact, I thought it was long overdue.”*

Since that time, Zimbabweans have listened keenly to Mapfumo’s lyrics, and have often found critical messages, sometimes more veiled than others. The 1996 song mentioned earlier, “Asingade,” says literally, “He who refuses, that means he refuses.” While this song did not trigger any restriction of radio play, it clearly conveyed criticism of ZANU-PF. During my 1997-98 stay in Zimbabwe, I recall one concert in Masvingo at a time when a prominent local politician was engaged in a bitter fight with party leaders. When the band struck up this song, the crowd responded with sustained roars of approval, implicit support for their protesting representative. In an interview at the time, Mapfumo acknowledged the intent of this song.

*THOMAS MAPFUMO (1998): Whenever someone goes against ZANU PF, he is said to be a sellout, and that is wrong. All these people are Zimbabweans. If they go against you, they have their reasons. And they have a right to do that. You must look for genuine support, rather than forcing people to support you. The people are the majority, and every sin that you have committed against the people will come back to haunt you.*

“Mamvemve” and “Disaster” were, like “Corruption,” unambiguous attacks on the failures of government. Here are the essential lyrics, as translated by Mapfumo himself.

#### MAMVEMVE

*The country you used to cry for is now in tatters  
Chipo, carry the baby on your back  
Let’s get out*

*Johnny, Johnny, carry the baby on your back  
Let's get out of here  
The country you used to cry for is now run by crooks (tsotsis)*

#### DISASTER

*Mother of my child, there is disaster here  
Disaster within our family  
Disaster within our house  
Man, there is disaster here  
Disaster in our country*

*Man, there is a lot of corruption in our country  
Our country is full of corruption  
The crooks are going to finish us  
Also AIDS is killing us  
You crooks, man, you're going to run*

The tone of threat and challenge in that final line recalled Mapfumo's defiant stance in the songs he sang against Southern Rhodesia's Ian Smith. "Watch out!" Public response to these songs was immediate, and unlike Oliver Mtukudzi with "Wasakara," Mapfumo made no attempt to soften the blow in his statements to the press. In March 2000, shortly after the government's effort at constitutional reform had gone down to electoral defeat, Mapfumo spoke to the Telegraph in London, saying, *"I'm very disappointed. After all our struggle, I never expected our own black government was going to destroy our country. People are saying enough is enough."*

These comments and others hinting at the possibility of civil war were reprinted in Zimbabwe in The Daily News (March 29, 2000). Some observers feel that such comments, made to a British newspaper, angered the government more than the songs themselves. In any case, over the next few months, during and directly after the June parliamentary elections that made MDC a legitimate political force in Zimbabwe, the "banning" reports began to surface.

*MUSICIAN MANAGER: I think the rumor started from the fact that there wasn't much airplay. It has to be said. There wasn't. Most of us in the industry make a point of listening. There was no official word on it. It's true. But the music did go off the air. There's no question in my mind.*

Thomas Mapfumo himself told some journalists, including myself, that these songs had been “banned.” Before I traveled back to Zimbabwe in March 2001, I called him at his home in Eugene, Oregon, and he clarified his position. *“They were just threatening the DJs not to play that music,”* he said. *“They actually didn’t ban the music as such. They didn’t have to.”* Mapfumo also warned me that DJs were not likely to talk to me about this, saying, *“It’s going to be really very difficult for someone to come out and talk to you.”*

Here is what the DJs I spoke with had to say about these Mapfumo songs:

RADIO 3 DJ 1: *I was there. We were never told to stop playing them. There was never a directive like that. But as I said to you, it’s never said to you. It’s never written down so that it could reappear in the Financial Gazette or somewhere. It’s just implied. To be honest, nobody ever came up to me and said, “You mustn’t play this.” It’s never explicitly said to you that you cannot do this, but you just get it.*

RADIO 3 DJ 2: *I used to play those songs last year... I had four music shows on ZBC. Nobody ever said anything to me, or to the people that I know who work at ZBC, to say, “No, you should not play this song.”...Whenever people argued and said, “They banned the songs,” I said, “They didn’t ban the songs. I’m going to play them on Saturday.”*

RADIO 3 DJ-3: *Personally I never played “Mamvemve” that much because I thought it wasn’t the most brilliant song on the album. I would play that ‘Disaster’ or some other songs. But, but, but, but, I do not remember in our meetings anyone talking about the lyrics. Personally, I don’t. It didn’t happen. Nobody took it off radio. Nobody ever had the intention of taking it off radio.*

RADIO 3 DJ-4: *You know, to be honest with you, like I am saying, nobody told anyone to stop playing them. But it was like, the Director of Programs really thought, “You know, I think we have played [these songs]. That’s enough.” So if you keep on pushing. Because you see, we are government as well. So, if you keep playing something like this, these guys will come and hammer on you.*

A question arises as to whether some stations were told not to play the songs, but not others. Mapfumo believes that the restriction was across the board.

TM (July, 2001): *I think it was at every radio station. When you look at the whole situation, when the record was released, every radio station was playing that music. And then all of a sudden, there was nothing on the radio.*

It is difficult to reconcile these statements. Clearly there were DJ's who made a point of playing the song in order to counteract the banning rumors, but their statements leave open the possibility that they had avoided playing the songs at some earlier point, and then reversed course due to negative publicity. Even the Radio 3 DJ who conceded that he got indirect word not to play these songs told me that, later on, he was *encouraged* to play the songs, in order to discredit the censorship reports. If nothing else, this reversal demonstrates the value of a vigilant independent press drawing attention to censorship.

RADIO 3 DJ-4 says that during the time when he believes Mapfumo's songs were being restricted, other songs were also mentioned as problematic. This DJ listed a group of songs including "Sadza ye Nyama," a song about food scarcity by Andy Brown, and "Ndaremerwa (One Week)," a Simon Chimbetu song about workers who spend their pay getting through the weekend, and then have to wait a whole week before they can feed their families again. DJ-4 told me that a minister spoke to him around the time of the 2000 elections, saying, "*You see, the songs they are playing, they are not good for the party.*" This was as close as any DJ came to telling me that he had received a verbal suggestion not to play these songs. When I reported this DJ's version of the ZBC director's comment to Radio 3 DJ-3, he said:

RADIO 3 DJ-3: *I think when the director said that, it was maybe his personal view and maybe out of a personal dislike of those particular songs. It wasn't policy. I don't think the director went to people who he could easily overrun. I played that song...nobody ever banned this song.*

I reached only one Radio 2 DJ who was willing to talk to me, and he was visibly nervous about it, insisting that we not discuss anything remotely political. This is understandable. Radio 2 broadcasts in vernacular languages and so has more penetration with the rural population, the group ZANU-PF is most keen to keep on its side. But when the subject of the two Mapfumo songs came up, this DJ was unequivocal.

RADIO 2 DJ: *No, they were not banned. It's not true. We played the music. I think it's just that people were trying to create something which is not there. Because we are the radio guys and we played them. It's not true. We heard the rumors as well, but we never heard any directive. Speaking on my behalf, I never had any directive from any superior that the music must not be played. No. If we didn't play the music, it was entirely up to us. But not from someone else.*

This statement pointedly leaves open the door to self-censorship. But the consistent claim by DJs that they received no instruction not to play the songs seems persuasive to me. I conclude that the effort to squelch Mapfumo's songs was disorganized and half-hearted. As soon as its result became perceivable to the listening public, there was an outcry and a retreat by the would-be censors. Such inconsistent behavior made it easy for observers to blame the entire controversy on an over-eager press, and street rumors.

MAPFUMO BUSINESS MANAGER: *From my point of view, it's just people who blow everything out of proportion. There wasn't any problem with those songs. Of course, the media can say whatever they want. They want stories.*

RADIO 3 DJ-2: *There is a thing about Zimbabwe whereby something starts off on the streets. It's like a rumor. And then the more it travels, the more it becomes a fact.*

Minister X suspects that self-censorship on the part of DJs—hardly surprising considering the atmosphere at ZBC—is the explanation.

MINISTER X: *I know there are one or two DJs who disagree with Thomas, and when they are on radio, they don't play him and you don't hear his music. You think somebody has done something.*

One DJ even saw the banning rumor as part of a larger conspiracy to tar the government's reputation.

RADIO 3 DJ-3: *I walked into a record shop myself and I was shown a circular that I think should have come from that director who said, "Take this CD off the shelves." I saw a circular myself. But I looked at it and I said, "No, this is not authentic. This is not genuine." I think someone was playing politics. They could have generated that circular and taken it round the record shops, and made it appear as*

*if it was coming from the authorities. But I can guarantee you that the authorities had nothing to do with that.*

The press in Zimbabwe is polarized, and there are excesses, omissions, and incidents of irresponsible reporting on both sides. It is also plausible that propaganda stunts such as the false circular DJ-3 cites did occur. They do all the time. But the fact remains that an environment of fear at ZBC made it very easy to manipulate DJs into not playing popular songs on the nation's limited airwaves. This environment curtails freedom of expression every day in Zimbabwe. In fact, someone has "done something." Consider the words of a highly placed ZBC official, a man well positioned to know how things really work:

*ZBC OFFICIAL: What happens at ZBC is this. Things are not written down. Things are just said. So that if anyone wants to make an issue of it, there is no case actually, because they will say, "But it's not written down anywhere." It's left to the discretion of the DJs to do what they want. But it's true that there was word that flew around: Don't play those songs. But it was not written down, and the official position then becomes, no one has stopped these songs from being played. You are told, "Please, don't play that song." Just that. And so, what I am saying actually is that if you were to say there was restriction of his songs on ZBC, they would say, "There was no restriction. Officially, there was no restriction."*

When I returned to the United States and explained to Thomas Mapfumo what the DJs had said to me, he was not surprised in the least. "They can say whatever they want to say," he told me, "but I am very sure that they were told not to play these songs by some certain individuals. This is exactly what happened."

Finally, there is the matter of the cars confiscated from Mapfumo's house shortly after the June 2000 elections. I met people who think the police action may have been legitimate, and also those who see it as transparent government harassment.

*RADIO 3 DJ-1: Of course. If he came back and got arrested, he'd probably say, "They don't like my songs. It's because I'm critical of the government."*

*GRAMMA/ZMC EXECUTIVE: Thomas has been forced out. [Minister of Information] Moyo made comments about him. That's why he fled to America. He felt they were getting too close. He had made enough enemies in high places.*

Mapfumo told journalists, including me, that he moved his family out of the country for their protection. "My own life was in danger," he told me in October, 2000. "I could just read the situation, and also, I had been hearing a lot of rumors from my friends." Regarding the cars, Mapfumo claims that the confiscation was indeed part of an organized effort to harass him.

THOMAS MAPFUMO (July 2001): *That was really organized. I have my own friends who tell me exactly what inspired that, and they just wanted to find a case with me. Some top policemen were telling, from my understanding, that because I was criticizing the system, I should be put behind bars for this car case. But well, I think they were just confused. They wanted to do something about it, but they were afraid to put me behind bars because they knew that if they would have done that, the whole world was going to know. It wasn't going to be a very good reputation for the president himself and some of his followers.*

As this report was going to press, I met Thomas Mapfumo at a show in Middletown, Connecticut, and he reported more bad news from home. One of the Radio 3 DJs interviewed for this report recently aired a song from *Dreams and Secrets*, an album Mapfumo made with American jazz musician Wadada Leo Smith, and that was not released in Zimbabwe. The song "Masimba," "Strength to Overcome," urges people to find the inner resources to overcome oppression. The DJ told Mapfumo's representative in Zimbabwe that he received a call directly from President Mugabe's office. "What are you and [Mapfumo] trying to do? Stop playing that music!" In this case, it seems, the proverbial "one phone call" completely bypassed the Ministry of Information and ZBC management. It came straight from the president's office to the DJ. Furthermore, a former Blacks Unlimited security guard with police contacts has warned Thomas that he should not come back to Zimbabwe, or he will be arrested.

Standing back from all the murky details, one fact looms large: Thomas Mapfumo is no longer in Zimbabwe rallying and nurturing voices of opposition and protest with his powerful public performances. For all those within the ZANU-PF regime keen to preserve the current mood of fear, Mapfumo's absence has to be a great relief.

## 5.2 OLIVER MTUKUDZI: BVUMA/TOLERANCE AND “WASAKARA”

Oliver Mtukudzi was one of the more popular singers among blacks during the liberation struggle years, and he has remained in the public eye ever since. Like Mapfumo, he sings thoughtful songs about social issues, often offering advice and council to people in difficult situations, and criticizing those who are doing wrong in his view. That said, Mtukudzi has never enjoyed Mapfumo's reputation as a “political” singer, until recently.

### 5.2.1 Oliver Mtukudzi Biography

The only major Zimbabwean musician other than Thomas Mapfumo to remain popular from the 1970s through to the present, Oliver Mtukudzi was born in 1952, and educated near Harare. Gifted with a strong, husky singing voice, Mtukudzi started early singing in church choirs. He wrote his first song at 16, and a few years later, he left school to become a professional musician. After three years of no work, and no luck, he took a job, but soon quit and used the money he had made to buy his first guitar. As the eldest of six children, he came in for harsh treatment from his parents, who believed that to pursue music was to court a life of poverty and crime.

Mtukudzi recorded his first song for Teal in 1976, with minimal accompaniment. The experience convinced him that he needed a band, so he joined a group called the Wagon Wheels, and recorded his first hit song. The Wagon Wheels toured briefly with Thomas Mapfumo, whom Mtukudzi often cited as an inspiration. Mtukudzi soon left the Wagon Wheels and put together his own band, now called Black Spirits. He recorded his first album under his own name in 1978, and produced nine more over the next seven years. Mtukudzi's melancholy songs of hard luck and suffering sounded a lot like South African music to some listeners, but he was always working in aspects of Shona and other traditional music into his sound, although less aggressively than did Mapfumo. His fans simply call the sound “Tuku music.”

Mtukudzi's popularity has ebbed and flowed over the years, but since 1998, when he began recording superior-sounding music in South Africa and started, at last, to achieve international success. In the past three years, he has toured internationally, been signed to a U.S. label (Putumayo World Music), appeared in the celebrated Africa Fête touring festival, and become one of the top-selling musi-

cians in Zimbabwe, and one of the top draws in Harare's highly competitive live music scene.

In November of 2000, Mtukudzi released a record called *Bvuma/Tolerance*. The lead track, "Wasakara," is a remake of a song he recorded on his first album, back in 1978. It speaks to an old man, telling him he must accept his advanced age. Tuku music fans resoundingly interpreted the song as a call for President Mugabe to accept his age and step down. Mtukduzi has consistently denied political intent in his song. "*I am not a politician,*" he protested to The Mirror and elsewhere.

### 5.2.2 Tuku's Sly Rebuke

The release of *Bvuma/Tolerance* in November, 2000 quickly made Mtukudzi the most popular musician in Harare, and perhaps the entire country. Mtukudzi says it was not his decision to make "Wasakara" the lead track on the album. The original version of the song was called "Bvuma," meaning, "Accept it" or "Admit it." The new version has the same lyrics, but Mtukudzi changed the title to "Wasakara," meaning, "You are worn out." The following is a synthesis of two translations I received of the song. They don't differ significantly, but I've omitted a number of repeating lines.

*Admit it (Accept it)*

*Admit it, yes you*

*Admit it, just that*

*Admit it, you are wrinkled*

*Admit it, you are worn out*

*Growing old. What is growing old?*

*You are over the peak*

*You cannot do what you used to do*

*You are old*

*You, Mother, you've become aged, you can no longer do it, (referring to work)*

*You've grown old. Don't refuse (to acknowledge this)*

*And you, Father, look and see*

*Even your daughter is a grown woman*

*You are advanced in age. Don't deny it*

*Getting old is a reflection of time  
Getting old is a sign of time past*

*Outwardly you are old  
Your face is wrinkled  
But your soul is young*

Regarding the line addressed to the father who is “advanced in age,” one of my translators observes, “This line is also a phrase commonly used to exempt elders from working in the fields. Thus Tuku discourages those who have grown old from doing the unspecified ‘work’ by using a traditionally held concept of elders allowing the younger generation to take over.” This supports the notion that the song lyrics could well apply to Zimbabwe’s 77-year-old president. But in Harare in March 2001, Mtukudzi explained the song to me this way.

OLIVER MTUKUDZI: *The song really started when I noticed how my daughters were growing up. I thought, if I can have such big daughters, then where am I? My idea of the song was to really produce the idea that if you are old, it doesn’t mean you are finished. No. It means you have experience. It’s a celebration of age. I even say in the song that you might look old, worn out, whatever, but in the eyes of God, you are still a boy. That’s the origination of the song, but people can use a song, can turn a song to suit what they want it to mean. And you can’t stop that. You can’t.*

Many of my informants described to the public’s willingness, even need, to put their own spin on works of art. For some, this is a pan-African characteristic of audiences.

AUTHOR 1: *They make it political. When you talk of theater in Africa, people don’t just go there to sit and listen to the actors and actresses. They go there and intervene. If it’s music, they can add their own lyrics, add a little bit here, there, to make it juicy. They participate fully. They add their own.*

GRAMMA/ZMC A&R MAN: *I will give you an example. We have got a group called Rugare St. Luc’s Choir. They sung a song and the song says when you go through difficult times, call upon Jesus. And people diverted that song into their own feeling. They changed it to when things are bad, when there is no peace in*

*Zimbabwe, call upon MDC. You cannot stop them. The song has not been done with that aim, but people change it.*

AUTHOR 2: *It's a farce actually. I follow the debates in the press. And then, of course, [Oliver] had to explain himself, to say, "If that is what you are reading in my music, then I did not intend." And then someone immediately said, "It's not your responsibility to interpret your own music. It's our responsibility."*

This idea that the public—not the artist—has given the song its political meaning reflects Mtukudzi's position in numerous press interviews in Zimbabwe. There are, however, many who resent his reticence to acknowledge what they see as the obvious political nature of the song.

RADIO 3 DJ-1: *Oliver should be fair about this. I mean, if you are singing, "Bvuma wasakara," [Accept it. You are worn out.] at a time when the nation is saying to our president, "You are too old, you must go," I would think it would be very naïve of you not to think that people would put two and two together. It's a political song. He can say what he likes. I mean, the title itself: why would the album be called 'Bvuma Tolerance?'... "Bvuma" means "agree" or "accept"... So where does the "tolerance" come in? It's a political message. I know he will deny it, but it is a political song. I feel it. Everybody feels it.*

AUTHOR 1: *Oliver just continues to say, "Just accept. Acknowledge when you are old." He leaves it to the audience to finish, because he knows that the audience will finish it in their own way... Oliver tries to be apolitical, although he is very cunning. He is extremely cunning. "This is just about old age. All of us get old. So what's the problem?" And yet at the same time, you can see, when you look at his eye, you can see that the guy knows what is happening.*

Meanwhile, RADIO 3 DJ-3 takes the minority view, supporting Mtukudzi's claim.

RADIO 3 DJ-3: *I agree with Oliver Mtukudzi. He says it is not political. I want to believe it is not political. I think it was just a coincidence that we have an ailing president and then this song comes out.*

Mtukudzi had been playing the song in live shows for some time before the album was released, so he had to have some idea of how people were reacting to it. When the release came, his fans were ready. The day the cassette hit the

shops and flea markets, it was an instant sensation. Right away, there was an incident in Mbare. A rumor began to circulate that the police were confiscating copies of the cassette. This appears to have been a false alarm.

*MTUKUDZI'S MANAGER: When I phoned the Chief Inspector and Head of Public Relations and Marketing, Mugariri, at central headquarters. He's right under...everyone that matters in the police force. And he was horrified that I'd even heard this rumor. He took it upon himself to make every inquiry, to follow up any rumors I heard about cassettes being impounded. He took it upon himself, and he did it too. He did the inquiries, and he phoned me back and he was extremely specific, gave me the names of the guys at Mbare station, who confirmed that there had been a couple of incidents in Mbare market of Bvuma being raided. But they were for very good reasons. The guys normally selling cabbages were selling Bvuma cassettes, and they didn't have a license. Because, you know we've trained a twenty strong police force, and whenever a new album comes out, particularly a popular one, they'll make a point of going into the markets. And they check on who's selling them and do they have licenses. We've made incredible inroads into piracy in this country.*

*Inspector Mugariri is a personal fan of Oliver's. Nice guy. Came round and couldn't see any reason why it should be banned. All these things he was prepared to say... "I want anyone who complains about this to phone me. Believe me, it starts with me. If there's any kind of official ban is made on anything, I am the person who is going to take the flak. So I'm the first to be advised, and there has been no official banning of the 'Bvuma' album."*

Everyone I spoke with now agrees that while police may have confiscated copies of the cassette that day because they wanted to keep them, there were legitimate reasons for the police actions in general, and they did not represent an act of official censorship or part of a larger pattern of actions directed against this musical release. Nor was the song "Wasakara" restricted from radio play. After what had gone on with Mapfumo's songs a few months earlier, ZBC had learned its lesson there. Nevertheless, all this talk focused public attention on the song in a fierce way, and added a whole new kind of energy to Mtukudzi's live shows. Mtukudzi's manager describes the atmosphere at that time when Mtukudzi played "Wasakara."

MTUKUDZI'S MANAGER: *Remember, everyone's fairly high. They're enjoying the set. And Oliver tends to play a song like that as a penultimate or the final song...What would happen is that from an already relatively high situation which you thought couldn't possibly get any better, the change in the audience was visible. It was electric, the sense of excitement... And they just went over the top. The hands went up in the wave... Chanting started during the song in quite a considered way. What would happen is even when the song had finished, the chanting would continue during the break. Often, Oliver wasn't going to sing another song, and to try to calm it down, he would sometimes sing another song, and do you know they continued the chanting and would try to raise the volume of the chanting to exceed the volume of the song. The chanting is quite hard to describe, in terms of what they were actually saying. They weren't saying MDC or anything like that. It's like an expression of excitement, almost like a war cry.*

With CIO agents packing into Mtukudzi's shows, and violence against perceived MDC supporters on the rise, this put Mtukudzi in a very sensitive position.

OLIVER MTUKUDZI: *The problem is, whether I like it or not, I can't stop playing this song. I can't. I have to... If I don't play the song, I'm in trouble. If I don't play it, then it becomes an issue. I have no problem with the song anyway, because it's a song that is teaching everybody. It's a song that's talking about reality. So there is no problem really, unless people want to make it an issue, then that's something else. It's just an ordinary song that tells the truth. I'm not a politician.*

The situation grew worse on December 29, 2000, when Mtukudzi performed with the popular South African singer Ringo at the massive Harare Convention Center. When the song "Wasakara" came up, the hand waving and flashing of red cards began, and then, apparently at the suggestion of someone standing near him, the lighting engineer, 35-year-old Stephen Schadendorf, shone his spotlight on the portrait of the president at the side of the stage and kept it there, even moving it around to draw the attention of the crowd. People went wild. After the show, Schadendorf was arrested and spent the next four days in a cell with fourteen arrested criminals and a bucket, by his own account, the worst four days of his life.

Schadendorf is a white man, born in Southern Rhodesia, and according to Mutukudzi's manager, who hired him, ignorant as to the meaning of Shona music, Oliver Mtukudzi's songs, or the significance of "Wasakara." The lighting

trick was not even his idea, but a suggestion from someone standing near him. Still, Schadendorf was charged with inciting violence under the Law and Order Maintenance Act. After some tense weeks involving extensive police questioning of all involved parties, the police dropped the charges in February. Whether the government felt they might lose the case, or simply that the bad publicity wasn't worth it is a matter of speculation. But the public attention focused on Mtukudzi and "Wasakara" only intensified.

On January 4, 2001, days after the lighting incident, a lengthy article on Mtukudzi appeared in The Daily News under the headline, "Tuku wants liberation war role acknowledged." Interestingly, the singer who had been telling the press for weeks that he was "not a politician" was now reflecting upon his 1970s hits with emphasis on their relevance to political events in the nation at that time. *"The police's frequent visits did not deter me from composing more protest songs,"* Mtukudzi was quoted as saying. *"I would tell them these were just traditional folk songs."* For the writer of this article, Maxwell Sibanda, this was all of a piece with the just released *Bvuma/Tolerance* album, which he characterized as *"about Zimbabwe today, the politics, the fights and people's sufferings."* Mtukudzi has been walking a fine line indeed through all of these events.

On February 9, 2001, Mtukudzi played a show in Mutoko, a small city northeast of Harare. By now, defenders of the government were determined to intimidate Tuku music fans.

MTUKUDZI'S MANAGER: *[War veterans] invaded the show, made everyone wear ZANU-PF t-shirts and peak caps. They even tried to get Oliver to wear a t-shirt and peak cap and he refused. He reckons they would have beat him up as soon as look at him and the only reason they didn't beat him is that he managed to argue the case on the basis that they were being filmed. They then told Oliver initially he was not to play ["Wasakara"]. He hadn't decided whether he would play it or not. They then came and said he should play it. By then, he had decided he bloody well would play it anyway, because after all, it was the first time he had played in Mutoko in a year or two, and this is his new album.*

*It was very intimidating. Oliver says it was the worst night he's ever spent performing live. Totally intimidating. They were totally unpleasant, and he was mainly fearful for his audience, not so much for himself. And the thing is when he played "Wasakara," everyone went to pains barely to move their arms, let alone raise their hands. And yet they still extricated people at the end of the show as they came out, randomly, and just beat them up, which is just a show of intimidation: "This is who's boss, guys. Just in case you were thinking of being an opposition supporter, this is what happens to you."*

I saw Oliver Mtukudzi's performance at The Sports Diner in Harare on March 16, 2001. When he played "Wasakara," there was an instantaneous, instinctive reaction from many in the crowd to raise an open hand. But a split second later, all the hands came down, and remained that way.

### 5.3 CAPITAL RADIO

Broadcasting law has been debated in Zimbabwe for its entire history, but it has not changed. The movement to allow private broadcasters to operate in the country has been a constant thorn in the ruling party's side. The government has delayed, setting up committees, studying proposed legislation and regulations, but taking no action to change the status quo. Meanwhile, the music industry has suffered. In a country of over 11,000,000 people, there are just four radio stations. Only one of these, Radio 2, plays a significant amount of local music, and given the amount of news and talk programmed, it can be difficult to find local music on the radio at all. Given Julian Howard's comments on the necessity of local music for Zimbabweans, there is no doubt that local artists would benefit dramatically from competition on the airwaves. And yet, even as one African country after another has legalized private radio, Zimbabwe has maintained tight state control over all broadcast media.

This is the story of a brief moment in 2000 when independent voices went on the air in Harare. Geraldine Jackson, who worked at RBC and ZBC, both on television and radio, led the project. She was assisted by two other ex-ZBC broadcasters, Georgina Godwin, and Ish Mafundikwa. Though others considered joining the effort, or said they would and then reconsidered, Mafundikwa is the only black journalist brave enough to join Capital Radio. Some observers have attempted to belittle Capital as an effort by and on behalf of whites. In part, this is typical of the popular instinct to dismiss all actions by whites as self-serving. In part, there is some truth to the fact that Godwin and Jackson could indeed escape Zimbabwe and go to the UK in a worst-case scenario, while their black counterparts would likely face greater risks. Still, there was nothing inherently racial about Capital Radio's objective. It was aimed at breaking a broadcasting logjam, with the idea that others would then follow. Capital Radio forced action by the government and advanced one of the most important causes in today's Zimbabwe: the freeing of the national airwaves.

For a little background, Jackson assesses the life of a broadcaster in Zimbabwe this way:

GERALDINE JACKSON: *There is no career here in broadcasting. You go and work for the ZBC and that's it. They stick you in the studio and they pay you I think \$100 an hour. When I was working there, it was \$3 an hour. And no one talks to you. No one gives you any encouragement...Most people on the radio are freelancers because you can't earn enough to live here on broadcasting. And the only time you'll get called in the office is if they want to have a go at you about something. Nobody ever praises you or helps you. You produce. You present. You put on the commercials. You get the news done. You do everything. There's no help.*

During her 13 years at ZBC, Jackson most enjoyed her three-hour, Saturday afternoon shift. She told me, *"I could do with it what I wanted as long as I didn't talk politics."* She played almost entirely foreign music, rock, jazz and reggae, but often chose songs that contained messages. She did not have good relations with her bosses, but they tolerated her, until December of 1997.

Jackson began her shift on a Monday that month, a day when the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) had called a general work stay away to protest dramatically rising food prices. Street protests led to heavy-handed police actions, and by the time Jackson went on air, the city was experiencing widespread rioting. She began putting phone calls on the air. A woman wanted to take her child to the doctor and wondered whether it was safe. By her own account, Jackson was immediately questioned. *"What are you doing?"* a ZBC authority asked her.

*"Look, there's a riot on,"* Jackson replied.

*"Everybody knows that,"* the authority responded. *"If she's stupid enough to go into town, then she deserves to be stoned."*

GERALDINE JACKSON: *That was the attitude. No one could sit on radio and be getting those kind of phone calls, and not broadcast information on the situation. You couldn't do it. And I thought they wouldn't like it, but I was very careful to do it correctly, not to stir it up. It was the first time anyone had ever opened the phone lines. Nobody went mad or was rude or crazy. The callers were rational, erudite, and 99% black. I thought, "No one could react to this."*

*They pulled me out of the studio eventually. I went to the office. "Your programming is not balanced. The police have not given their side of the story."*

*"Get me the police chief."*

*"Don't be silly. He's busy. There's a riot going on. This is just a warning. You be careful."*

The following week just before Jackson was to go on the air interviewing the Minister of Information and a representative of a human rights organization, she received a letter firing her for insubordination.

Later that year, a Supreme Court decision cleared the way for businessman Strive Masiyiwa to challenge the government owned cellular phone company Telecel with a private company called Econet. Jackson had been preparing to launch a private radio station, and her lawyers informed her that this decision gave them a precedent. It took until September 2000 to prepare the case and have it heard before the court. *"We walked into the Supreme Court,"* recalled Jackson, *"and within sort of ten minutes, they said, 'Yeah. Do it.'"* The Court held that as there were no broadcasting regulations on the books, the Freedom of Expression clause in the constitution meant that Jackson's project, Capital Radio, could go ahead.

*GERALDINE JACKSON: The government immediately said that they were going to bring in Broadcasting Regulations the following Friday. The lawyer said to me, "You better be broadcasting before then, because we will have a stronger case to argue when they try to shut you down if you are an actuality." That gave me four working days to set up the first private independent station in this country. I went crazy... The transmitter had to come from South Africa. Monday was a holiday there, so we couldn't order until Tuesday. We got CD players, mixer, a couple of mics. We found premises, got broadcasters together, and on the Thursday night, we had all the gear, very rough and ready. But it didn't matter what it was, as long as there's a signal going out, you've done it... At the last minute, my engineer said, "I'm not putting up that transmitter for you. I think what you are doing is highly illegal." So I had to find someone else. We got it up and we started broadcasting at about half past 11 that night. It was just me on the mic, playing some music, reading out the court case so it was clear to everybody. And then we stopped broadcasting at about 1:00 that night. We started putting out a music signal the following day.*

As mentioned earlier, Ish Mafundikwa was the only black, and the only male voice they had at that point. Another ZBC DJ had signed on, but he never showed. Although Jackson says he never gave her a real explanation for his change of heart, he told me that he was unwilling to leave his ZBC post to join an unlicensed station. Nevertheless, Jackson, Godwin, and Mafundikwa operated Capital Radio for the next six days.

GEORGINA JACKSON: *And then on Wednesday, I was at a production company and my neighbor phoned and said, "You know, there's guys with AK-47s in your garden." The studio was in the Monomotapa Hotel. So then the Monos phoned and said, "There's guys with AK-47s here..." They swooped on everybody. They confiscated the equipment, which we eventually got back because of another court order. But they wouldn't return the transmitter because under the new Broadcasting Regulations, which were signed that Wednesday afternoon at 4:00 by Mugabe—that was the time they swooped; as he signed it, they were there—it's a criminal offence to own a transmitter.*

That was the end of Capital Radio, and though the outfit has other cases in the courts now, few believe that it will ever receive a license from this government.

ISH MAFUNDIKWA: *I never had any illusions that Capital would happen just like that. It was always going to be a fight, but I think what we did was very important. Because for the first time in the history of broadcasting in this country, there was an alternative voice. Even before independence, there was just the one RBC. I think we paved the way for other stations to come on the scene. We might never get a license as Capital Radio, but I think we really set the cat among the pigeons in the sense that we got government moving. They were always going to talk about, "Oh yeah, we are going to liberalize the airwaves," which they never did. I was working on an article about broadcasting after Capital Radio was taken off the air, and I went to the archives. There were articles from the '80s in which they were saying, "We're going to be having regulations in a few months to liberalize the airwaves." They were paying lip service to this and they were never going to do it.*

Another experienced ZBC DJ I spoke with considered joining Capital Radio, but opted out due to concerns for the safety of his family. This DJ has followed developments since closely, and he is not optimistic that there will be independent radio any time soon. He reported a conversation with an acquaintance prominently involved in the process of determining how frequencies would be allotted.

RADIO 3 DJ-1: *I was talking to him. "I'm an interested party. What have you done?" He said, "Nothing." This was the authority that can allocate a frequency to you. And this guy's the chairman. Nothing. This was yesterday. He said, "We only got our letters of appointment two weeks ago." And they were announced as*

*a board three months ago. So all this time they've been sitting around doing nothing. I don't have to tell you this. It doesn't take a lot to set up a radio station, but these guys want to make it appear so complicated and so deep and involved. It is frustrating. I tried to tell them one time, "You cannot continue like this. This is repression. This is what they're talking about. You must allow." And then they come down hard. "All radio stations, they must all play 75% local content." I can understand the idea behind it, but that's a little extreme... And you ask [the Minister of Information], "How did you arrive at 75%? What factors did you take into consideration?" He can't even tell you. He just dreamed it up.*

Late in 2000, as they closed down Capital Radio, the government presented a set of broadcasting regulations. In March 2001, the three-member Parliamentary Legal Committee rejected the regulations as unconstitutional. One regulation would disallow anyone from both creating programs for broadcast and also transmitting them. Presumably, this would preserve an opportunity for the government to block unwanted programming. The discussion in parliament and the press has at times bordered on the ludicrous, with the government talking about airwave frequencies as a "finite resource," and warning of air traffic control problems and planes crashing if the airwaves are made free. Almost no one I spoke with expects to see independent broadcasting in Zimbabwe anytime soon, certainly not before the 2002 presidential elections.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Zimbabwe is a country of enormous creativity and artistic wealth, hamstrung by a regime that seems steadfastly determined to prevent these resources from flourishing. Mired in self-deception, terrified of independent thought, and reconciled to the use of violence and intimidation to preserve the status quo, the Zimbabwean government is willing to violate international human rights standards, and even its own laws, in order remain in power. The entire society suffers as a result.

A substantial number of artists and musicians in Zimbabwe are afraid to express themselves, particularly those who hold and wish to express views critical of the government. Some artists may be so accustomed to living in an environment of intimidation that they do not even recognize it. After all, the Southern Rhodesian regime was at least as oppressive of free thought as the current one. History has shown that it takes generations to recover from such experiences.

The existence of an effective recording company monopoly and total state control of broadcast media leaves very few alternatives open to artists. The overall stagnation of the music industry is not unique. Many other industries are similarly constrained and obstructed by a government determined to control as much commercial activity in the country as possible. But since music plays such an important role in the spiritual and social lives of Zimbabweans, the repression in this domain is especially damaging to the society.

A historic reluctance to openly discuss and express sexuality probably has roots both in local African cultures and British colonial education. While much attention has been paid to political music, music that is in any way seen as vulgar is discouraged or de facto banned (as in the case of foreign music not released in Zimbabwe). Few complain about this situation, as public squeamishness about openness regarding sexuality is so widespread. However, in an era of rampant HIV/AIDS, official squeamishness has slowed the nation's reaction to the most severe health challenge in its history. The human cost has been catastrophic.

Regarding political statements in music, there continue to be Zimbabwean musicians like Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi, Andy Brown, and others who show a degree of courage and willingness to speak their minds freely. However, they and their fans can pay high price for this freedom. Mapfumo has left the country. Mtukudzi is unwilling to acknowledge the political implications of his own songs. As Zimbabwe moves toward a historic presidential election in April 2002, violent acts of intimidation and further restriction of the press can be expected with greater vigor and frequency. The government shows all signs of clamping down still harder on legitimate opposition, and also of preventing the outside world from knowing what is happening within the country.

Ultimately, these are problems that only Zimbabweans can solve. However there are things that outsiders can do to help.

1. Continue studying the areas raised in this report, not only in Zimbabwe, but in other African countries. Many subjects have been broached here that cry out for more detailed exploration. A partial list of subjects would include: mechanisms of intimidation used by the government and especially those at ZBC; the role of "war veterans" in determining government policy in Zimbabwe; the ongoing fight to bring private broadcasting to Zimbabwe; the existence and nature of "hidden" messages in song lyrics; the changes that HIV/AIDS are bringing to public attitudes toward sex, gender, and sexuality.

2. Take steps to invite Zimbabwean musicians to perform outside the country. The international Shona music community has done a lot to sustain and encourage traditional musicians, and to establish the value of their singularly beautiful music. One good way to learn more about this community is to join the Dandemutande network, available on the Internet ([www.dandemutande.com](http://www.dandemutande.com)).

3. Help to lay the groundwork for new arts sector institutions in Zimbabwe. These could include independent recording companies, film and music studios, broadcasting operations, and so forth. While these entities may not be able to exist in the short run, their time will surely come.

4. Fund and support initiatives aimed at helping forces within Zimbabwe's music industry communicate, organize, and work together more effectively. There is a tremendous amount of finger pointing within this sector. The Zimbabwe Union of Musicians is anything but united. In February 2001, the Zimbabwe

Artists Organization became the latest splinter group to attempt the job of truly organizing musicians. We wish them well, but experience indicates that much more is needed. Between the National Arts Council, the various musicians' unions, individual artists, recording companies, promoters, performance venues, and broadcast interests, there is a tremendous shared opportunity, but little cooperation or unity.

5. Support the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) and other attempts to present large-scale music events within the country. For more information, visit HIFA's website ([www.hifa.co.zw](http://www.hifa.co.zw)). Better still, bring more festivals, especially those designed to uplift and recognize local musicians, to Zimbabwe.

6. Follow events in the country using the internet. Websites for The Daily News ([www.dailynews.co.zw](http://www.dailynews.co.zw)) and the Zimbabwe Independent ([www.mweb.co.zw/zimin](http://www.mweb.co.zw/zimin)) are particularly good sources for opposition viewpoints. For the government's view of the world, visit the Herald's website ([www.zimpapers.co.zw](http://www.zimpapers.co.zw)).

7. Continue reporting on events within Zimbabwe, whatever obstacles the government attempts to erect. In particular, avoid playing into the rhetoric of the government by dwelling on the travails of white Zimbabweans, and so de-emphasizing the far more numerous incidents of hardship and violence suffered by black Zimbabweans.

8. Help to address the enormous problem of AIDS in Zimbabwe. The country needs everything from care and comfort, to education, to medicines and other supplies, and above all, hope.

9. Don't give up on Zimbabwe. As far down as it has gone, its most important assets—its resourceful people and unique cultures—are still intact. Zimbabwe can move beyond this dark chapter in its history.

# **Appendix: Music Styles of Zimbabwe**

This appendix provides more detailed background on Zimbabwe's major musical styles.

## **A. TONGA MUSIC**

The Tonga people, roughly 1% of country's population, straddle the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe, once Northern and Southern Zimbabwe. Those on the Zimbabwean side were displaced from their riverside fishing settlements when the Zambezi River was flooded to create Lake Kariba in 1957. Ever since, the Tonga have lived where they were resettled, on dry, nearly useless land 12 km to the south of the lake. The Tonga do have fascinating traditional music, most of it unknown to Zimbabweans as it receives virtually no attention in the media. Of particular interest to musicologists is Tonga funeral music involving drumming, vocalizing, and horns made from cow antlers. There are no commercial recordings of Tonga music in Zimbabwe.

One organization, the Kunzwana Trust, has worked hard to develop and publicize the arts of the Tonga. In 1997, Kunzwana organized the Nyaminyami Festival, A Celebration of Valley Tonga Culture. The project brought visitors to the Tonga valley, and Tonga music and dance to Bulawayo and Harare.

For more on Kunzwana and the Tonga, and to hear Tonga music, visit the website: [www.servus.at/argezim/tongatour](http://www.servus.at/argezim/tongatour).

## **B. NDEBELE MUSIC**

The Ndebele are particularly noted for their vocal traditions. Powerful choral groups, whose music is related to the Zulu vocal music popularized internationally by Ladysmith Black Mambazo of South Africa, have long played an important role in Ndebele community life. The vocal and dance group Black Umfolosi played concert halls around Zimbabwe before touring internationally in the mid-90s. The Amakozi Dance Company—directed by playwright Cont Mhlanga, who also runs Bulawayo's Township Square Cultural Center—is a highly respected exponent of Ndebele traditional arts. There are others as well, although they receive distinctly less attention than Shona music groups, both within Zimbabwe and internationally.

There have been successful Ndebele pop musicians in Zimbabwe, although very few of them. In general, popular music tastes in Bulawayo have always been

driven more from South African than from Zimbabwe's Shona majority. In the 1950s and 60s, township jazz—a sound with roots in the U.S., but with a strong South African veneer—became the most successful music in the region. Groups like the Cool Fours, the De Black Evening Follies and the Golden City Crooners sang swing jazz in Ndebele and Shona. During this period, Bulawayo and Harare were much closer in their musical tastes. During the war years, and especially afterwards, township jazz faded into obscurity while mostly Shona pop music out of Harare soared in popularity.

The most significant Ndebele pop singer of Zimbabwe's early years was Love-more Majaivana. Fitting the pattern of Bulawayo music, Majaivana's sound was close to the South African soul and jive styles. During the 1980s, Majaivana withdrew from professional music, and no Ndebele singer has ever been as successful since. Majaivana was recently coaxed out of his self-imposed retirement, but his revived career shows no sign of reaching the old heights.

Though never hugely popular, poet and singer Albert Nyathi has continued to perform. And there are some new Ndebele names in the ranks of up-and-coming popular artists. Among them are Nduduzi Malakisi, Solomon Skuza, Obedia Matulani, and a promising young woman singing R&B and hip-hop, Busi Ncube.

To this day, there is a belief among white Zimbabweans that the Ndebele people are by nature more creative, resourceful, artistic, and motivated than the Shona. How much of this is based on a holdover from Southern Rhodesian divide-and-rule rhetoric, how much on resentment of today's Shona leaders, and how much on observation is a matter of speculation.

There is a case to be made that Zimbabwe's music production monopoly, Gramma/ZMC, has undersold Ndebele music. The reason that Gramma/ZMC spokesmen give is commercial. They say that experience has shown Ndebele music to have a limited market in the country. One Gramma A&R man told me, *"In Bulawayo, there are just a few groups, not even worth talking about. All the groups are here in Harare."* Another, who is in fact Ndebele and began his career in the label's Bulawayo office, told me that Ndebele artists appeal only in the Bulawayo market. *"Their music has never really become big. Unfortunately, most of the guys don't sell."* Other observers feel that in addition to the industry's failure to support and promote local music in general, there has been particular reluctance to boost Ndebele music. Albert Nyathi—winner of the Best Poet of the Year Award in 1994—has stated in the press that Zimbabwe's music industry has strangled the growth of Ndebele music making it *"almost extinct...an endangered species."* [The Eastern Star, 5/28/1999]

### C. SHONA MUSIC

It should be noted that the appellation “Shona” is actually an umbrella term for a related group of Bantu ethnic groups, the four major ones being Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore, and Manyika. Though these groups share much in common, there are also significant differences among their languages and customs. At times, tension and competition among Shona subgroups have played a role in national politics. To cite one historical example, between 1969 and 1975, the ZANU High Command was substantially taken over by the Karanga people, whose power base is Masvingo, near the Great Zimbabwe ruins. The late nationalist leader Ndabaninge Sithole complained forcefully that this invasion of regionalism, or tribalism, into the liberation movement was a negative force that led directly to the assassination of nationalist figure Herbert Chitepo in 1975. In part because of his willingness to make these charges, Sithole himself was sidelined by ZANU. Loyalty to Shona subgroups continues to provide a complex and often overlooked subtext to political and cultural developments in Zimbabwe.

The traditional music of the Shona people is clearly a national treasure. Shona music encompasses a wide range of vocal, percussion, and harmonic instrumental music, but its emblematic genre is the *mbira* tradition and repertoire. There are a number of varieties of *mbira* and *mbira* music, the most popular being the 22-iron-pronged Zezuru *mbira*, often called *mbira dza vadzimu*. Many *mbira* musicians in Zimbabwe object to this term, which means “*mbira* of the ancestor spirits,” because it implies that other, lesser-known types of *mbira*, such as *njari* and *matepe*, are not used in ancestor possession ceremonies, when in fact they are. The varieties of Shona *mbira* music and the reasons for the predominance of the Zezuru *mbira* are beyond the scope of this report. However, it is worth noting that, with the possible exception of certain West African drumming traditions, Shona *mbira* music is probably the most widely studied African musical tradition by non-African musicians. Many observers have pointed out that there will soon be more *mbira* players outside of Zimbabwe than within it, if this is not already the case.

As noted in the body of this report, government and industry in Zimbabwe do little to promote traditional music—or any other indigenous art forms—and in the case of *mbira*, a particularly great opportunity is being missed. While people in England and America raise substantial funds to promote concerts, tours, seminars, workshops, festivals, and music camps designed to help a growing

community of foreigners learn Shona music, almost no one in Zimbabwe—except powerless musicians—has made any real contribution to the effort, or even any effort to exploit and benefit from it.

Meanwhile, while Thomas Mapfumo has consistently sold records with his modern adaptations of *mbira* songs, few other singers have managed to succeed with the “*mbira* pop” formula. A spate of groups in the early ‘90s—Pio Macheka and Black Ites, Legal Lions, Sweet Melodies, Ephat Mujuru and Spirit of the People, Vadzimba, and Traditional Madness—attempted to expand the genre. None of these groups lasted. Groups that play a variety of styles, such as The Four Brothers, and the late Robson Banda with his group The Black Eagles, successfully incorporated the “*mbira* pop” sound into their guitar band repertoire, but not as the main event. Straight traditional *mbira* music does continue to be recorded and sell in Zimbabwe. At the moment, an excellent group called *Mbira* Dzenharira is leading the way in this genre, and selling well. In recent years, two new artists, Brian Taurai Mteki and Robbie Chagumuka, are again vying for success with the electric, “*mbira* pop” sound. It is too early to say how they will ultimately fare.

A tour through the Zimbabwean rural areas, or through the Rhodesian Broadcasting Company music archives for that matter, will reveal a great richness of other, non-*mbira* traditional music and dance performed by the Shona people. *Ngororombe*, from the Mozambique border region, combines graceful dance movements with mysterious, interlocking melodies played on bamboo panpipes. *Shangara* music from the Masvingo region features quick, nimble dancing set to generally slower music, often played on *mbiras*, but sometimes just hand percussion. These and other traditional dance and music forms, such as *muchcongoyo*, *mbukumba*, *dandanda* and *dhine*, were all part of the traditional music explosion that occurred, centered in Mbare, during the 1960s and 70s. Though still performed in traditional settings, these forms are not commercially recorded or supported by any state or commercial institutions.

*Jiti* or *jiti* is a relatively recent designation for recreational, topical songs, generally accompanied by drumming and popular in villages. The term *jiti* was later adapted by electric guitar pop groups—notably the Bhundu Boys—obscuring the word’s older meaning. *Jerusarema* is a very important “outside the house” dance tradition, once associated with weddings. Originally called *mbende*, the dance seems to have taken on a quasi-Christian name in order to appease missionaries

uncomfortable with African religious associations. This is a classic example of the Shona gift for hiding the true meaning of something behind carefully chosen words. *Jerusarema* became more or less the official “folkloric” dance of both Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. *Jerusarema* societies go back to the 1930s, and still exist in the country. *Jerusarema* music introduces the news broadcast on ZBC-TV every night.

#### D. POP SINGERS OF THE REVOLUTION

During the late 1960’s, urban dance bands who had been getting by performing covers of jazz, rock ‘n’ roll, and Congolese rumba began to incorporate elements of local tradition into their repertoires. This was a natural enough process, given the effervescence of traditional sounds in the urban townships at that time. In those same townships, an emerging youth audience was discovering rock ‘n’ roll, and in the countryside, itinerant guitarists were seeking to earn a living by playing anything that anyone wanted to hear. As the liberation war got underway, fighters in the bush held all-night rallies called *pungwes*, and sang so-called *chimurenga* songs. These were not the adaptations of Shona *mbira* music that would come to bear the *chimurenga* name when Thomas Mapfumo recorded them later on, but rather western-style songs, re-fitted with revolutionary lyrics. In a society building toward violent and fundamental transformation, all these elements naturally came together to transform local music as well.

Thomas Turino documents and analyzes the emergence of modern Zimbabwean music in great detail in his book, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. He makes the point that urban dance bands began singing in Shona and adapting traditional songs as early as 1967, when a group called the Harare Mambos recorded a track called “Manhanga Kutapira” at RBC studios in Mbare. While Thomas Mapfumo was still covering Elvis and Rolling Stones tunes with the Springfields, and experimenting with Afro-jazz with his own group, the Halleluiahs Chicken Run Band, successful bands like Limpopo Jazz, under the direction of Jackson Phiri, were finding that there was an audience for Shona pop music, as well as the Congolese rumba that was their stock in trade.

Turino makes much of the fact that Mapfumo’s role as a pioneer of Shona traditional pop music has been exaggerated. In a parallel development, some writers in today’s Zimbabwean music press are keen to point out that Mapfumo was also not the only liberation war era singer to compose militant songs. I found two

recent newspaper articles reminding people of protest music performed at that time by singers like Comrade Chinx (a veteran of the bush *pungwes*), Zexie Manatsa, Tineyi Chikupo, and Oliver Mtukudzi. While these points are well taken, it is also clear that Mapfumo was the singer and band leader who best recognized the enduring power of combining these two ideas—the reclamation of traditional music, and the use of it to purvey protest messages. Once he began recording his own *chimurenga* songs in the mid-70s, he quickly emerged as the most popular singer in the country. While he has not maintained that status ever since, he has outlasted virtually all of his peers from the war era—Mtukudzi being the only notable exception—and Mapfumo is still, without a doubt, the most fearless Zimbabwean pop musician, his current exile notwithstanding.

### E. SUNGURA

Zimbabwe's top selling pop music, *sungura* is fast, punchy, electric guitar and vocal music, generally disparaged by urban intellectuals, but consumed passionately by rural farmers and laborers. In Zimbabwe's early days, groups like Jonah Moyo and the Devera Ngwenja Jazz Band, John Chibadura and the Temba Brothers, and Simon Chimbetu and the Dendera Kings pioneered and popularized the sound. The Bhundu Boys, one of the most exciting and internationally successful groups Zimbabwe has ever produced, started out playing this style, although they merged in elements of South African township jive, *mbira* pop, and Congo music to create a brilliantly diversified repertoire that caught on abroad in the late 1980s. Unfortunately, the Bhundu Boys succumbed to internal disputes, one major defection, and then a series of deaths from AIDS, and no group from the *sungura* ranks has shown the same crossover instincts since.

*Sungura* remains the dominant music of rural Zimbabwe today. Veteran urban singers like Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi, and Simon Chimbetu (whose music is now closer to Congolese rumba), or the maverick crossover bandleader Andy Brown can play more or less as often as they like in the many beer halls, nightclubs, hotels and other venues that proliferate throughout the sprawl of Harare and its bedroom communities. On the occasions when these groups tour the country, they mostly play similar venues in smaller cities. Prior to his exile, Mapfumo performed two annual rural shows, one at Christmas and one at Easter. But even then, he played largely to urbanites who have gone to their rural homes (*kumusha*) for the holiday. Meanwhile, at smaller, more informal venues in the country's myriad growth-points, *sungura* bands find endless work in a separate, parallel circuit.

One remarkable *sungura* artist of the 1990s was singer bandleader Leonard Dembo. Dembo's 1990 release *Chitekete* was the first Zimbabwean album to sell over 100,000 copies in Zimbabwe, and he continued to top the charts until he died of AIDS in 1997. A singer known as System Tazvida quickly replaced Dembo as the darling of *sungura* fans. He also died young, and during my visit, the *sungura* singer of the hour was Alick Macheso, formerly the bass player with a popular *sungura* outfit called Khiama Boys.

I asked a veteran music journalist, Maxwell Sibanda of The Daily News, what makes *sungura* music so popular in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. He said:

MAXWELL SIBANDA: *The lyrics. People identify with them. When I talk of music identifying with the people, I'm talking about day-to-day events in the rural areas. These communities are viewed as being primitive, but sungura lyrics fight for them. They talk about schools, good roads. Here in town, there are plenty of schools. But the rural communities need toilets. You can't talk of needing toilets in town. So it's something they can identify with. Electricity. You can't sing about electricity and have an audience here in town. Sungura lyrics are rural identified. People in town will say, "Ah, this music is for growth points. It's fast. It's primitive." They want the music of Oliver, where it's slow. It's jazzy. But the rural communities, they don't identify. They don't like that. They like their own type of music, the fast one. Then they can dance.*

## F. GOSPEL

Heavily Christianized during the Southern Rhodesia years, Zimbabwe has always provided a healthy market for gospel singers. Veterans like Brian Sibalo and Mechanic Manyeruke began their careers in the independence era, and still sell well. During the 90s, with the horrifically mounting toll of AIDS deaths, and a general sense of crisis arising from the nation's economic woes, more and more people have turned to Christianity, and to gospel music. The productions tend to be simple, featuring electric keyboards and drum machines, avoiding altogether the mysterious tonalities of Shona traditional music and the giddy, freewheeling guitar work of *sungura*. Gospel music represents a refuge from all of that. In 2000, a relatively new name, Charles Charamba and his group Fishers of Men emerged as the top-selling gospel act in Zimbabwe.

## G. MODERN TRENDS

A Radio 3 DJ was running down the listener-determined top 40 for the week. Although he was staring at a sign telling him that he needed to include 40% local content in his broadcast, there was little local material among the 40 songs that day. But the DJ did take pride in pointing out that two local songs from Shamiso Entertainment—the label described above under *Zimbabwe's Music Industry*—were actually in the top 10. One was a hip-hop rendition of a Shona wedding song, “Tauyanaye” by a young singer named David Chifunyise. The other was a beautiful, somewhat sentimental vocal piece called “Amai,” which means “mother.” It plays like a Shona version of Boys 2 Men. Both songs came from Shamiso’s first release, a compilation of songs by their artists called *The Future*. The sound was still identifiably Zimbabwean, but definitely modern. “*Give me music of this quality, and I’ll be happy to play 75% local music,*” the DJ told me.

In the spring of 2001, David Chifunyise released a full-length CD on Shamiso and reportedly scored four number one hits. In April, at the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA)—a rare progressive force in the Zimbabwean musical landscape—Shamiso artists occupied one stage for the entire Saturday of the festival. Many sources have told me that Shamiso is filling an important niche in Zimbabwe, nurturing local youth music and helping reach international standards without losing its Zimbabwean identity.

Given that some of Shamiso’s artists had received the “That won’t sell” response at Gramma/ZMC, I asked Julian Howard, head of the record company monopoly, what he thought about Shamiso. He seemed only remotely familiar with the label, and expressed skepticism about the youth market. “*This market is changing,*” he conceded, “*But it’s changing very slowly. We still tend to be very much the more traditional, older sound, which is the commercial sound. It’s very different, when I look at South Africa and see what’s happening and what isn’t happening down there. The traditional market in South Africa is very weak, whereas it’s very strong here. And quite often we find some of our groups try and sort of regionalize their sound. Then their local popular base starts dropping away. So inevitably, you’ll get some of the modern trends coming through in black music, but it’ll take some time and a lot of effort and energy for it to really become commercial.*”

Many observers consider this a self-defeating attitude, further evidence of the lethargy that keeps the Zimbabwean music industry in stasis. A Radio 3 DJ summed the situation up very well in this statement:

*RADIO 3 DJ: In this country, you talk about 75%, and yet every move that you make seems to discourage the production of local music. Why do they allow Gramma and ZMC to be a monopoly? It's the same company. There is no competition whatsoever. How are you going to encourage upcoming talent? You go to Gramma with something that is not mainstream—according to them—something that is experimental, it's like, "No, we won't touch it. It won't sell."*

The success of Shamiso's artists and the clear demand on the part of the urban public for more contemporary forms of local music inevitably point to the emergence of new artists and genres in the future. Barring a dramatic improvement in the quality of Zimbabwe's leadership, this will almost certainly lead to further showdowns between musicians and the government in the future.

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