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# *Harare muJoni*: musicking, placemaking and everyday citizenship of Zimbabwean immigrants in Johannesburg, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

The mass and social media coverage of Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa highlights the urgent need to address the xenophobic crisis. There appears to be a deliberate muting of ordinary Zimbabwean immigrants' voices in the narrativisation of Johannesburg. This paper foregrounds Zimbabwean migration experiences not solely defined by abjection. Drawing on in-depth interviews and participant observation at music shows and social gatherings, it examines how Zimbabweans employ music-mediated practices to claim belonging and inclusion in the city. Findings reveal that immigrants use music to mediate sociality, build communities, and resist cultural erasure. Their musicking and placemaking practices, often enacted publicly, assert identity amid xenophobic threats while challenging dominant narratives of invisibility and crisis. These practices generate bonding and bridging social capital, strengthening resilience, visibility, and urban participation. The paper concludes that Zimbabwean immigrants' experiences reveal richer dimensions of sociality and community-making than currently acknowledged in media discourse or academic literature.

## KEYWORDS

Musicking; Zimbabwean immigrants; creative placemaking; music; everyday citizenship

## Introduction

Immigrants from Zimbabwe move to Johannesburg in search of relative economic stability and perceived opportunities for a better life (Vanyoro 2023). These migration patterns have resulted in what South Africans frequently perceive as unhealthy competition for limited resources, especially among low-income earners (Mlambo 2019; Noyoo, Matsea, and Dlamini 2021). Xenophobic violence remains a persistent and serious threat faced by Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa, shaping both everyday experiences and broader perceptions. However, while acknowledging this harsh reality, this paper seeks to highlight an often-overlooked dimension: how musicking practices provide a means for Zimbabwean immigrants to resist exclusion, foster community and assert presence. Without undermining the gravity of xenophobia, this perspective challenges reductive narratives that portray immigrants solely as passive victims, offering a more

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nuanced understanding of migrant life in Johannesburg. This paper also attends to an often overlooked paradox: while xenophobia dominates the public narrative, there are spaces like kwaChikwanha where migrants assert their presence and identity without fear, rendering these acts of public visibility both courageous and politically significant.

The supposed boundaries between Zimbabweans and South Africans are historically recent and culturally porous. For instance, the *toyi-toyi*, a rhythmic, high-stepping “dance,” now emblematic of South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle, originated in Zimbabwean liberation movements (Alexander and McGregor 2020; Kellerer 2017). Similarly, Ndebele-speaking Zimbabweans often navigate “otherness” through using linguistic similarities with Zulu South Africans (Siziba 2015). Zimbabweans also consume South African music as a cultural strategy to blend into their new environment (G. Dube 2017). These connections contrast sharply with post-1994 narratives of difference, which, as Shannon Morreira (2010) argues, emerged when Zimbabweans, anticipating solidarity based on their country’s role as a haven for South African exiles, encountered hostility instead. Tamuka Chekero and Morreira (2020) further contribute to debates on cultural parallels and variances by looking at the social similarities between Zimbabweans and Tsonga South Africans in Limpopo. These connections contrast sharply with the dominant narratives of difference that are often exploited by opportunistic political actors such as Operation Dudula and ActionSA, who use social media to promote and bestow social legitimacy to a crude anti-immigrant populist discourse (Mckinley 2022; Myeni 2022).

The dominant framing of Zimbabwean immigrants’ lives in Johannesburg and South Africa as a whole presents a single story that potentially reduces them to passive victims of circumstances. In some cases, grave problems and violence surfaced due to the widespread perception that migrants outcompete the locals (Crush, Ramachandran, and Pendleton 2013; G. Dube 2017; Piper and Charman 2016). Popular discourse often portrays immigrants as socially isolated and dependent, a view that, as Halleh Ghorashi (2010) argues, obscures the meaningful relationships they form in their adopted homes. Research often focuses on Zimbabwean immigrants’ livelihood, challenges and precarity (Idemudia, Williams, and Wyatt 2013). While it is important to acknowledge these difficulties, it is equally crucial to recognise their diversity and agency. Zimbabwean immigrants possess agency, skills, and aspirations that go beyond this narrow narrative (Bloch 2005; Ghorashi 2018).

In a country where immigrants are openly marginalised and othered, proactive strategies such as urban relational initiatives and narratives can open up possibilities for new connections and establish immigrants’ presence (Ghorashi 2018). Immigrants, like all human beings, are not passive imbibers of cultural knowledge but actively partake in the production and reproduction of culture. Immigrant artists and their art play crucial roles in contemporary cities, either by reinforcing and idealising mainstream agents and institutions or by actively protesting and promoting socio-territorial innovation that can boost and enhance new urbanities (André, Ana, and Leandro 2017).

One way to uncover how immigrants contribute to placemaking in Johannesburg is through studying their practices of musicking. Loosely, musicking refers to the act of making music and the social practices that surround it, including listening, dancing, and singing. Cristopher Small (1995) defines musicking as taking part, in any capacity, in a music performance; for instance, by listening, rehearsing, composing, facilitating

a performance or accompanying social life. Musicking does away with the prescriptions of classical music that centres on the musical score and emphasises power relations, such as between the conductor and musicians. The lack of proscriptions and prescriptions allows a broad cultural exploration of the ways in which Zimbabwean immigrants engage with the city of Johannesburg through music.

Understanding the role of musicking in placemaking can provide insights into the complex ways in which cultural practices shape experiences of migration and belonging. Musicking spotlights paramusical activities and musical participation beyond those traditionally considered in formal music education (Rinde and Schei 2017). For Zimbabwean society, where music parallels life from birth to burial, understanding musicking illuminates the use and function of music and its impact on individuals and the community (Brown 2006). Musicking is a relational approach where artists and audiences jointly participate in the creation of a music-based experience (Valberg 2011). Such musical participation and experience hold a range of possible meanings and purposes for individuals and groups, depending on their specific situations and life contexts, as well as the context in which the musical participation happens.

Music, time and place have a symbiotic relationship and affect how individuals and small groups experience music in contemporary life (Rice 2003). The place where musicking happens is a significant factor in enjoying the process and consumption of music. Koji Matsunobu (2018) posits that place shapes how people make sense of their experiences; therefore, music-making practices are placemaking experiences. Zimbabweans are active in many sectors of the South African economy, including tourism and entertainment. However, most of them are based in under-resourced urban neighbourhoods where they have integrated with locals (Muzondidya 2008). This integration of Zimbabwean immigrants in South African communities poses an opportunity to understand a new form of musicking as it unfolds with resilience, innovation and group collectiveness.

Musicking encompasses the externalities of music-making, distribution and consumption that activate and heighten all human emotions. This view is echoed by Rolf Lidskog (2016, 25) who avers that “musicking can lead to the formation of emotional, social and cognitive bonds that allow enactment of social identities and social memory.” As an integral part of culture, music plays a crucial role in the development of both personal and societal identities. It can work as a setting and activity that unites group members, enabling them to perceive themselves as belonging to one another and perhaps even having a shared agenda. Music not only reflects culture or identity but also contributes to identity formation. According to Ayhan Erol (2012, 840), “Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives.”

Ethnomusicological studies have historically focused on the nature of a possible causal relationship between music and the society that produced it (Rice 2013). Zimbabwe and South Africa share a long history of musical exchanges. Zimbabwean music was influenced by music from South Africa through migrant labour, mass media and touring (C. Dube 1996). South African “township jive” was a powerful influence on Zimbabwean music in the post-independence era (Pfukwa 2007). At present, Zimbabweans of all ages enjoy the South African

music genre *Amapiano* (Mauwa 2022, 28). These musical exchanges are barely celebrated or valorised to create the necessary traction that can contribute to social cohesion.

There is a paucity of research on the contribution of immigrant music to shaping South African cities. This paper explores how music-informed placemaking of individual Zimbabwean immigrants and communities contributes to shaping their environments and experiences in Boksburg, Johannesburg. Zimbabwean migrants in this part of the city no longer see South Africa as a place of temporary economic opportunity for survival but rather as a place to stay and build a future for themselves and their families (Crush, Ramachandran, and Pendleton 2013). Expectedly, they contribute to placemaking and influence the culture there. Clyde Mitchell (2013, 37) observes that immigrants bring their cultural practices and beliefs to South African cities through cultural diffusion or borrowing, which is bound to happen as people, products and messages move from one to the other.

### Setting the scene: *Harare muJoni*<sup>1</sup>

The primary field site for the research was a shopping precinct in Boksburg called *kwaChikwanha* by Zimbabweans living in the area. In line with Richard Grant and Thompson's (2015) call for sensitivity to Johannesburg's diverse urban micro-geographies, this paper offers insight into Zimbabwean placemaking in Boksburg, contributing to a broader understanding of the city's cultural landscape. The *kwaChikwanha* precinct was purposively selected as an unique case (Flyvbjerg 2006) of Zimbabwean placemaking, recommended by Poet Itai Sekeremo, a Johannesburg-based Zimbabwean ethnomusicologist, due to its reputation as a cultural hub. Its organic renaming as *kwaChikwanha* by migrants signalled entrenched diasporic identity practices worthy of ethnographic attention. Though Zimbabweans dominate the space, it is not ethnically exclusive. South Africans, Malawians, Mozambicans and other working-class residents also frequent the area, albeit in smaller numbers. Demographically, the crowd leans towards Shona-speaking Zimbabweans aged 25–50, many of whom arrived during the post-2000 economic crisis. Younger immigrants (18–30) often blend Shona with English, while older patrons favour Zimbabwean vernaculars. Women are visible as vendors and attendees, but are underrepresented in the car-centric, street-side musicking scenes dominated by men. Notably, Ndebele-speaking Zimbabweans, while present, are less audible here, reflecting broader linguistic hierarchies in Johannesburg's diaspora (G. Dube 2017).

*KwaChikwanha* is a typical case of how immigrants' musicking and placemaking practices produce narratives and cultures that are different from the politicised xenophobic hatred. In a context where foreignness often invites erasure or violence, the overt expression of Zimbabwean identity, as is the case at *kwaChikwanha*, is both a social and political act of visibility. At the time of conducting this study, some South African townships were experiencing cases of unrest and xenophobia-related attacks on Black foreign nationals led by members of the Operation Dudula movement. Members of this movement argue that they want to rid South Africa of foreign nationals who are allegedly the ringleaders of crime syndicates and lawlessness in their communities (Khou 2022, 6). This is not the case with *kwaChikwanha*.

KwaChikwanha has a defined space in Boksburg's live music ecology, playing out perfectly as a good hang-out space for Zimbabweans who want to assert both independence and presence in South Africa. KwaChikwanha is also an "arrival zone" in the sense used by David Robinson (2010) to describe neighbourhoods that house new arrivals in the initial stages of their residence. Even at the height of Operation Dudula, kwaChikwanha showed no signs of resenting Zimbabwean immigrants. Musicking at kwaChikwanha facilitates the negotiation of new urbanities by providing what Loren Landau (2014) refers to as usufruct rights. These usufruct rights enable immigrants to access and utilise available resources and opportunities without ownership. These everyday processes of cultural entanglement where boundaries are transgressed lead to the flourishing of new urbanities (Nuttall 2004), as is the case with kwaChikwanha. The sustained Zimbabwean musicking activities from as far back as 2015 do not necessarily connote ownership of the physical space. Rather, they are indicative of tacit urban contracts or informal agreements where authorities tolerate migrant spatial practices so long as they do not disrupt the broader urban order observed by AbdouMaliq Simone (2004). For instance, police interventions at kwaChikwanha were largely negotiations rather than arrests, mirroring Ghorashi's (2018) observation of unusual friendships and their potential to unsettle normalised practices of othering. This performative policing reveals how migrant soundscapes can achieve de facto legitimacy despite formal precariousness.

The name kwaChikwanha is derived from a similar place in Zimbabwe, a popular bar and braai<sup>2</sup> spot in Chitungwiza, a dormitory town of Harare. Zimbabwean immigrants have a propensity to rename places in their destination countries, often as a reflection of their growing population. This renaming of a physical space signifies a symbolic act of claiming ownership and establishing a sense of belonging for Zimbabwean immigrants within the larger urban landscape of Johannesburg. Winston Mano and Willems (2008, 105) posit that "London informally became known as 'Harare North' in the Zimbabwean popular imagination, the UK<sup>3</sup> and Slough in South-West London as 'kwaChirau'<sup>4</sup> denoting the high concentration of Zimbabweans in the area." Zimbabweans based in Durban have many small businesses on Grey Street, which they either call "kwaMandebvu" or "kumaZimba."<sup>5</sup>

This research followed a focused ethnography design to study the interactions between musicians and music consumers in their natural context. My nationality as a Zimbabwean, next to my specialised education in music, gave me insider and background knowledge of the cultural group, thus aiding me in conducting the focused ethnography (Fetterman 2019). In addition, my position as a Zimbabwean immigrant with a music background created a common ground for me to interact with participants in ways that reduced participant reactivity. I was particularly interested in participating in and observing musicking activities as artists interacted with each other during rehearsals, recordings and performances. The study participants included practising immigrant musicians and music consumers of Zimbabwean origin living in Johannesburg. The participants were purposefully selected for their roles in making, consuming and distributing music. It was also necessary for the participants to have in-depth knowledge of Zimbabwean culture and music traditions.

Data collection involved a combination of immersive participant observations, community scoping and one-on-one interviews. My fieldwork relied heavily on informal

conversations during my numerous interactions with community members and musicians, sharing their working and socialising environment. I collected most of the observational data during community scoping and attended two live performances. This data included the frequency and settings of musicking events, the interactions among the community members and the ambience that music gives to the sense of place in the city. These observations were either captured using a digital camera or diarised. The community scoping process involved observing both the physical and social infrastructure of the community for the purpose of becoming familiar with the environment and the people. I had the privilege to be accompanied by the Zimbabwean poet, Poet Itai Sekeremo, a childhood friend and resident of Johannesburg. He is a popular figure among revellers and people doing business at kwaChikwanha. His social capital made it easy for me to negotiate entry into the community.

There are two things that immediately impressed me when Poet Itai took me to kwaChikwanha. First, I noticed that the streets were teeming with vendors who had neatly arranged their wares on street pavements to allow easy pedestrian movement and entrance into shops. This seemed rather unusual as street stalls often make movement difficult. The lack of space also often creates opportunities for thieves, especially pick-pockets. Simone (2004, 416) writes about the precarity of foreign lives in Johannesburg, saying that “[m]any foreign Africans cite the need for maintaining hyperawareness of their surroundings.” I realised that the sense of neatness I observed was also largely shaped by the negative stereotypes circulating on social media about foreigners contributing to urban disorder. This is not to say that there is no petty crime in the area. Certainly there is, but the visibility and neatness on the pavement can work as a deterrent, at least compared to densely populated areas. Secondly, I also observed that the community affably greeted each other in Shona, suggesting they were a closely knit community.

### **Musicking into everyday citizenship?**

Zimbabwean immigrants use everyday social practices to contest exclusion and assert membership and everyday citizenship in South Africa (Miriyyoga 2017). In particular, Zimbabwean immigrants use music to negotiate the social and cultural circumstances of migrating to South Africa. Immigrants are pursuing an agenda of unification, aligned with the economic cooperation and political brotherhood of the governments of Zimbabwe and South Africa. Public musicking, therefore, helps non-elite Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa to define who they are and, perhaps most importantly, who they are not. In this case, musicking presents Zimbabweans as highly sociable neighbours, not deserving of rebuke and hate.

It appears that Zimbabwean immigrants at kwaChikwanha employ musicking “to assert dignity and claim national membership” (DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015, 1236). Much like Oliver Mtukudzi’s music provided “resources for identity-making” in post-colonial Zimbabwe (Chitando et al. 2022), Zimbabwean immigrants in Johannesburg employ musicking to negotiate belonging in diasporic space. Where Mtukudzi reconstructed Shona identity through mbira-infused melodies confronting colonial erasure, our participants remake identity through sungura and dancehall in response to xenophobic exclusion, extending this sonic resistance across borders.

Essentially, these immigrants perform the right to belong through the ways in which they interact with the South African authorities and other citizens at kwaChikwanha. Therefore, musicking can be viewed as an accessible platform and conduit through which Zimbabwean immigrants find a sense of community belonging, even when not granted any official acceptance or citizenship.

The conceptualisation of citizenship has been broadened in recent years to address previously untheorised issues concerning group identities and how their recognition affects people's abilities to participate in the public sphere (Hopkins and Blackwood 2011). Researchers have begun to refer to this perspective on participation as everyday citizenship (Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2007; Wood 2010). Here, I follow Aoileann Ní Mhurchú (2016, 156) conceptualisation of citizenship as “an act that is linked to the process of claiming and performing rights to belong.” As such, this form of citizenship “enables us to rethink ‘who’ can be a citizen beyond the already-existing rights-bearing liberal subject” (156). So, citizenship can be understood outside the traditional canons of rules and legalities.

For Engin Isin (2008, 6), “citizenship is the art of being with others, negotiating different situations and identities and articulating ourselves as distinct yet similar to others in our everyday lives, and asking questions of justice.” Equally, Clifford Stevenson et al. (2015, 196) observe that “citizenship is now understood as located: within the interpersonal conversations and in public performances of everyday life; in the streets as well as the schools; and in the politics of the playground as well as the politics of the state.” Essentially, citizenship speaks to everyday interactional lives, negotiating different situations and identities and articulating oneself as both distinct and similar to others while also raising questions of justice. The pursuit of autonomy, “freedom,” and socialisation in diasporic communities leads to the creation of spaces, such as kwaChikwanha, that play a role in facilitating everyday citizenship and attachment to place. Music plays a dual role in creating a meeting place and allowing patrons to establish more enduring connections. Music is played at social events because of its known utilitarian functions and uses. It is not just for enjoyment. A prevailing theme in the results is how music invited Zimbabweans to meet and socialise at kwaChikwanha where they would find a host of other Zimbabweans.

While some see music as a boundary object, others claim that its purpose is not fixed; it can thus serve two extremes. For instance, music has been described elsewhere by other immigrant communities as a means to create identity boundaries (Erol 2012). In some polities, music, particularly pop music, is a space where differences between insiders and outsiders blur (Kasinitz and Martiniello 2019). Music provides resources for a group to make, remake, negotiate and renegotiate identity. But it can also be used to cut ties and to peripherise other people. By assertively emplacing themselves in these leisure spaces through the consumption of and identification with both Zimbabwean and South African music, Zimbabwean immigrants frequenting kwaChikwanha have responded to the threatening ways in which some groups of scholars have characterised them. They are therefore able to attempt to collapse cultural boundaries between them and their host nations/cities. The currency of song and dance to melt cultural and conflict boundaries is further elaborated by Tania Kaiser (2006), who discusses how music and dance are used to break cultural and conflict boundaries in the Kiryandongo refugee settlement in Uganda.

While most of the actions, conversations and associations happening at kwaChikwanha are personal, they are simultaneously political and serve to address cultural misunderstanding, a major contributor to ethnic and xenophobic hate. It appears there is a disjuncture between political and cultural borders as Kenneth Madsen and Van Naerssen (2003) suggest. The political borders between Zimbabwe and South Africa have failed to stop immigration, both of people and the exchange of cultures. In this context, Erol (2012, 840) notes that “In many situations, music is used to address the wider community, as a way of establishing a group’s identity in the eyes (and ears) of others.”

Most importantly through public musicking, immigrants are calling for recognition regardless of their status, whether documented or undocumented. Perhaps Zimbabwean immigrants share the same viewpoint as Tariq Modood (2005, 134) who suggests that an apologetic show of public ethnicity is a negotiation for recognition. The view that music and dance are used for endearment is widely held in Zimbabwe. Jairo Gonye (2012, 14), for example, posits that “dance has always permeated Zimbabwe’s everyday life, employed to express happiness and sorrow and to make friends and lovers.” Public musicking takes the everyday individual, from the periphery of negotiating regional politics, to the centre where immigrants in their individual capacities or as groups without official authority negotiate and assert citizenship. Music not only functions to express and maintain pre-existing identities, it also provides resources for contesting and negotiating identities and constructing new ones. Music and musicking serve to denounce the stigmatising label of *makwerekwere*, the unwanted foreigner, and replace it with a self-coined pan-Africanist identity that declares Harare can find expression in Johannesburg, *Harare muJoni*.

### **The role of music in creating an immigrant meeting place at kwaChikwanha**

Immigrants have the agency to shape their social environments and forge a sense of belonging through music and social interaction. I was introduced to Gono by Poet Itai on February 12 2022. Gono is a Zimbabwean truck driver living in the Boksburg area who convinced me that kwaChikwanha was “home.” My estimate when first meeting Gono was that he is aged 50 and above. His words still linger with me, and it is from him that I found inspiration for the title of this article. An excerpt of my conversation with Gono went as follows:

Handiti maBhurantaya momaziva? Babuminini ini ndiri muBhurantaya wemuno Ndiri wemuno chero vakandinemera. Tiri kutovaka Harare muJoni! (Is it not that you know of maBhurantaya? Young brother, I am a muBhurantaya here. I belong here, regardless of all insults. We are actually building Harare in Johannesburg!) (Gono, Johannesburg 2023)

Initially, Gono’s age gave me the impression that I would meet Zimbabweans of a different generation who would be able to historicise the creation of Zimbabwean spaces in Johannesburg. Gono embodies the experience of long-term Zimbabwean immigrants who have established a strong sense of belonging in Johannesburg.

*MaBhurantaya* is a derogatory term that was used in discourses of exclusion of people of Malawian origin in the early 90s living in Zimbabwe (Lwanda 2014). The term is derived from Blantyre, Malawi’s second-largest city and its centre of finance and

commerce. In Gono's narrative, the term "*muBhurantaya*," takes on a different meaning. He reclaims this label, asserting his place in Johannesburg despite any stigmatisation, and declares, "I am a *muBhurantaya* here. I belong here, regardless of all insults." While the use of terms such as *makwerekwere* or *maBhurantaya* is certainly not endearing in either Zimbabwe or South Africa, it is not always a reflection of the social attitudes of people from other countries. Mavhungu Mafukata (2021) points out that "*kwerekwere*" is not always used out of hatred but as an identity marker for so-called foreign nationals. At times, immigrants reinterpret and subvert existing labels to assert their presence and challenge exclusionary practices, as was the case with Gono.

The pursuit of autonomy, "freedom" and socialisation in immigrant communities leads to the creation of spaces such as *kwaChikwanha* that might play a role in facilitating placemaking (Pemberton and Phillimore 2018) and belonging (Antonsich 2010). The community's renaming of the area as *kwaChikwanha* carries undertones of belonging and some form of permanency. Commenting on the origins of the name *kwaChikwanha*, Gono had the following to say:

I do not know when the moniker *kwaChikwanha* was first used and by who. But I can tell you that the place has been called *kwaChikwanha* for some time now. I started staying here in 2012, while Itai only came around 2015. All that we would still meet at the shops during weekends. We would hang out while drinking alcohol. And where there is alcohol, you will always find music and meat. (Gono, Johannesburg 2023)

Gono's reflections suggest that music easily becomes an intangible territorial marker. Silas, a Zimbabwean musician, puts this point across:

*Chikwanha* is our home ground. We play music from home without restraint. If we want to hear *Amapiano* we go to other venue; otherwise, when you are here, all cars will be playing Zimbabwean music from one end of the road to the other. Mostly, they play *sungura* golden oldies that make one perform the *Borrowdale* dance. (Silas, Johannesburg 2023)

As Silas's remarks highlight, Zimbabwean music is strongly associated with dance. Some dance styles, such as *Borrowdale*, are very distinct and known to almost every Zimbabwean (Gonye 2012). According to Richard Muranda and Maguraushe (2014, 54), *Borrowdale* is a contemporary dance where dancers imitate the galloping horses at the *Borrowdale* race course in Harare. It is synonymous with *sungura* music in Zimbabwe. In contrast to the high energy and galloping that are key to dance in Zimbabwe, the dancing I observed at *kwaChikwanha* was much more subdued. The reduced vigour might be related to class, especially when read in light of the popular expression, "*mbinga hadzitambi zvinobuditsa ziya*" (loosely translated as "rich people do not sweat profusely when dancing") used in Zimbabwe street parlance when people dance "lazily."

Pee described how music lures people to *kwaChikwanha* through aesthetic appeal and how it has contributed to making the place a Zimbabwean space:

Music is the biggest thing on 1<sup>st</sup> Street. It works as an advertisement. How it happened for us is that we were passing through the street and we heard Zimbabwean music blasting from cars and from the bar. We heard Baba Harare's music playing. People were dancing to *jiti* music in Johannesburg. In that way, music served as an invitation; an invitation for people to come in, an invitation for people to eat, an invitation to speak about experiences from home. (Pee, Johannesburg 2023)

In the same vein, Farie, another participant, said:

That bar was set up for us. The beer and music are both from home. Even the ladies are from Zimbabwe. So, why should I go back to Zimbabwe? Zimbabwe should come here. Is it not that you saw posters advertising Zim Dancehall posters [...]. They [musicians] survived from performing for us, especially during the COVID lockdown. (Farie, Johannesburg 2023)

Participants buy and consume products made in Zimbabwe, including music, as Farie's reference to posters advertising Zim Dancehall shows suggests. The place itself is not as aesthetically pleasing as other shopping precincts such as Maboneng or Konka within that vicinity, but it has its patrons. The environment created by music at kwaChikwanha is a space for many possibilities. Participants shared that they are connected to kwaChikwanha through Zimbabwean music and that they gained experience with other "positive externalities" of music.

Musicking at kwaChikwanha allows immigrants to momentarily forget about their perennial preoccupation with seeking economic opportunities. It creates opportunities for relating and leading lives like everyday people whose existence is not solely dependent on commercial transactions. My fellow ethnomusicologist and research assistant, poet Itai Sekeremo, reflects on what kwaChikwanha means to Zimbabweans as follows:

KwaChikwanha is home. You will find everything that you want. It is our place. You should look at the music played on the music box. It is all from Zimbabwe. Even the sex workers [...] there are from home. (Poet Itai, Johannesburg 2023)

Itai describes kwaChikwanha as a Zimbabwean creation where a variety of social and business transactions – reminiscent of home – are carried out. I noticed, for example, that the jukebox playlist had Zimbabwean music. Many Zimbabweans, mostly women, had vending stalls in the precinct selling different Zimbabwean products such *mathings*, *muriwo wecovo*, *maheu epfuko* and *mbiya dzemapositori*.<sup>6</sup> I observed many people engaging in everyday practices, such as eating Zimbabwean foods and cuisine, including *sadza*<sup>7</sup> and mopani worms, with most of them exhibiting a sense of belonging through their demeanour of joyful interactions. Here, I use Lennon Chidi Mhishi's (2017) lens to understand belonging as being a full member of and showing love to a particular community. Zimbabwean music has played a role in attracting a particular population and the making of place at kwaChikwanha.

### **Gendered soundscapes: masculinity and the limits of belonging**

While musicking at kwaChikwanha constructs Zimbabwean identity, this process is profoundly gendered. The precinct's sonic dominance by men, through car stereos and bar culture, reflects broader diasporic masculinities where public space is male territory (McGregor 2008). Even the invocation of Zimbabwean women ("even the sex workers are from home") serves primarily to authenticate male migrants' sense of belonging, rendering women passive markers of cultural continuity rather than active participants in placemaking.

Furthermore, women's presence as vendors of *mathings* and *muriwo wecovo* constitutes an alternative, less visible form of placemaking. Their economic labour sustains the material conditions for musicking, yet their exclusion from performative soundscapes

suggests Zimbabwean identity here is contingent on male sonic dominance. This bifurcation mirrors homeland gender roles where women's cultural work is domesticated (Zigomo 2022).

### Displaying group identity through public musicking

As an integral component of culture, music plays a crucial role in the development of both personal and societal identities. It can work as a setting and activity that unites group members, enabling them to perceive themselves as belonging to one another and perhaps even having a shared agenda. Music not only reflects culture or identity but also contributes to identity formation. Rather than merely reflecting identity, music actively contributes to its formation by offering embodied and social experiences that situate individuals within broader cultural narratives (Erol 2012). Erol's conception of music also extends to musicking as the direct experiences Enrol speaks of are, in themselves, ways of "doing music" (Joseph 2007). These non-sonic activities happen alongside or after engaging with the pleasures of music from production to consumption.

During my numerous visits to kwaChikwanha, I observed small groups of mostly men milling around, chatting and drinking beer outside the bars, often playing music from their cars. This form of playing Zimbabwean music publicly, however loud or soft, is what I refer to as public musicking. While the intention might not necessarily be to assert citizenship as in Gono's case, these forms of musicking allow Zimbabwean immigrants to emplace themselves in the precinct. Acts of citizenship, Isin (2008, 38) argues, can be unintentional or affective, but they nonetheless remain acts of citizenship. In kwaChikwanha, however, participants are aware of the effect of their actions, and at times, they consciously listen to Zimbabwean music publicly to send a message. One of the conversations between Mhazi and myself (TM) in Johannesburg, 2023, revealed the following about music and group identity

**Mhazi:** We know that we have overstayed our welcome here. But we cannot just go back to Zimbabwe without a concrete plan. In a way, if you see us standing by our cars, drinking alcohol and listening to music, we are sending a message that we are not afraid and we are many.

**TM:** So you do not just listen to music for the purposes of entertainment?

**Mhazi:** I am not saying we are not entertained or that we purposefully leave home to make people afraid of us. I am saying it is possible that if potential xenophobes see our numbers, they rethink about being violent. Music helps us not to hide who we are, and it also connects us. I do not have to talk to everyone to know that they are from home. You can see it from how they dance and the music they listen to.

Mhazi suggests here that the Zimbabwean immigrants' musicking activities also serve to magnify their presence and, by extension, to send a message of defiance against community-led xenophobic attacks. There is a low likelihood that ordinary community members who are not criminals will have the appetite to instigate xenophobic violence when they see that the "foreigners" are many and united in groups. Standing in groups while listening to "foreign music" makes them visible and easily a target for attack, but, in

this case, this visibility is used as a deterrent and a boundary marker. As such, kwaChikwanha embodies what we term protective openness, a spatial strategy where Zimbabwean identity is loudly performed to counter xenophobic erasure, while the precinct remains technically accessible to all.

The practice of gathering publicly in groups is not unique to Zimbabweans. In a seminal study on inner city Johannesburg, Simone (2004, 412) shows that “Ibo Nigerians gather on the street, usually between 2 and 7 p.m. They are here not so much to deal narcotics, for which they are renowned, but to display impunity and solidarity while buying daily meals from the curb side street vendors.” In fact, Khalifah Alfadhli and Drury (2018) have also observed that immigrants frequently share social identity as a basis for mutual support in the face of stressful environments, at both practical and psychological levels. It is within the same realm that immigrants’ public musicking should be validated for its importance in displaying solidarity and group identity in an environment usually touted as unfriendly and xenophobic.

I observed that music is used at kwaChikwanha to draw boundaries between Zimbabweans and others, while working to shape identities and to strengthen social capital within the group of Zimbabweans meeting at kwaChikwanha. They often listen to music in groups, speaking over the music in Zimbabwean languages, much to the exclusion of non-Zimbabweans. The creation and observation of boundaries are very important in forming identities (Lidskog 2016, 25). Loosely and without a descriptive label attached to this group, Zimbabweans are seen for who they are by both their fellow countrymen and “others,” including South Africans. Besides listening to music at her lodgings, Chipo, a young woman in her early twenties, said she often spends her weekends with friends and other Zimbabweans at kwaChikwanha, hanging out and listening to music because being in a group has a different effect. She said:

I feel at home. I also feel that no one is looking at me suspiciously. We will just be one big group of happy people. We enjoy the moment, even if it is short. Do you know how good that feels, especially here, far from home? (Chipo, Johannesburg 2023)

The implication here, therefore, is that immigrants’ musicking activities create bonding social capital. Bonding social capital is the trust and unity experienced within socially homogenous groups (Putnam 2000, 22). In this case, the social cohesion exists only among Zimbabweans. Robert Putnam emphasises that bond social capital is a key component of social cohesion and offers a range of advantages to individuals and the society they belong to. When immigrants engage in communal music experiences with their compatriots, it fosters the development of shared identities, tight-knit communities and essential social support networks.

### **The venue as an avenue for building and strengthening social capital**

Langton Miriyoga (2017, 216) highlights the currency of musicking as social capital, noting that the effect of social practices done through social networks and ties is not only to “prove a point” that they are Zimbabwean enough, but simultaneously results in the realisation of meaningful and material outcomes. Generally, Zimbabwean music-making and performances are communal. While there is a distinction between the professional performer and the audience, the performances are often

participatory, involving everyone in singing and dancing. The venue capacity of kwaChikwanha facilitates interaction and connection. Interactions among patrons at kwaChikwanha might seem inconsequential, everyday transactions, but they have profound implications for different aspects of people's lives and, in this case, for place. Paul Chatterton and Hollands (2003) observe that small popular music venues create a fluid boundary between musicians and consumers, building relationships of trust, business and reciprocity. Besides facilitating agentic relationships, small venues are also considered a predictor of increased enjoyment at a musical show (Dowdy 2007).

Music performances, the availability of braaing facilities and beer have made kwaChikwanha a popular venue. In the process, different social dynamics occur as people engage in a range of social and economic transactions that build or strengthen attendees' social capital. Small music venues, in particular, can facilitate trade in social capital (Richardson 2014), and kwaChikwanha is no exception. Helen Gould (2001, 90) posits that social capital "is the wealth of the community measured not in economic but in human terms."

The currency of social capital lies in relationships, networks and local partnerships. Each transaction is an investment that, over time, yields trust, reciprocity and sustainable improvements to quality of life. Silas, one of the musician-participants in this study, uses his own example of how playing, listening, and dancing together with fans facilitates deeper connections that last beyond the encounter on the dance floor.

We meet different people during our performances. We also share the stage with other musicians, listen and dance to each other's music. I have built relationships with accomplished musicians here. I believe that some of my achievements would not have been possible if I was in Zimbabwe. I have a song with the legendary Dino Mudondo and I am now good friends with Gonyeti [Pamela Zulu]. I think this was all possible because of the space we have here. There are also audience members who now hire me for services as an electrician. Music gives me other jobs. (Silas, Johannesburg 2023)

Chipo describes how she has met and connected with fellow country people, with music as a constant feature in their social interactions:

I used to have a mentality that said: "Zimbabwean music and culture are annoying." Not anymore! It is the backbone of kwaChikwanha. We come here to meet other Zimbabweans and for many other social activities, and almost always, Zimbabwean music will be present. It's almost as if music provides a soundtrack to life here . . . In no time, you will be friends, especially when the person is a man. You know men! (Chipo, Johannesburg 2023)

Interestingly, Chipo loathed local music when she was in Zimbabwe. Considering her youth, her dislike of local music is understandable. This is a part of a deeper crisis, as Moses Chikwero (2008, 146) argues that the dislike of local music in Zimbabwe is indicative of "obstinate neo-colonial cultural disposition deeply etched at the heart of the national ethos." Writing a few years earlier, Tawana Kupe (2003, 191) observed that Zimbabweans opt for cultural infiltration and influence from other races as compared to indigenous music. However, for Chipo, Zimbabwean music became the magnet that drew her to a venue where she has built relationships and pride in her culture. This corroborates Jennifer Kyker's findings (2013) that when in the diaspora, Zimbabweans are drawn to musicians from home.

## Creating communities of belonging through musicking

Musicking provides a framework for immigrants to engage in everyday social activities that allow them to contest exclusion and assert membership both in South Africa, the host, and in Zimbabwe, their country of origin. Sociality and related everyday practices provide an avenue for undocumented immigrants to assert their citizenship. Participants indicated that the music bar is a safe zone where they do not have to worry about their immigration status. For instance, one of the participants highlighted that:

I feel very comfortable, there [are] no unfamiliar rules and we speak Shona freely. I am free to do whatever I like, just like we are at home [Zimbabwe]. This is one place where I proudly identify as a Zimbabwean, and I am not afraid of being arrested. *Ndepedu pano* [this is our place]. No one will ask for a passport. (Mhazi, Johannesburg 2023)

KwaChikwanha represents a key space where patrons can discover themselves as proud Zimbabweans. This implies that this specific community of Zimbabweans has created their own space in the diaspora where they freely socialise with kin without worrying about their status as immigrants.

Pamela, a seasoned session musician who has lived in Johannesburg for five years, offers a vivid illustration of the affective dimensions of music in place-making, describing feelings she perceives when she is either on stage or enjoying music with other Zimbabweans:

Yes, I like to come here whenever I am off duty. This helps me. I feel well when I arrive there, with all the people enjoying music, food and drink. And I see all these happy faces, cleaned up, ready to have fun. The feeling is even intense when I am performing. I feel loved. You know the stage has always been my go-to place. (Pamela, Johannesburg 2023)

Pamela's story refers to a range of feelings associated with her musical experiences at kwaChikwanha. Much of these sentiments are caught up in the homeliness of the host community and its associated joys. Paradoxically, the musical performances, musicians and most products sold at kwaChikwanha refine and maintain distinctively Zimbabwean lifestyles.

The open embrace of Zimbabwean identity through music consumption differs from the observations made by Gugulethu Siziba (2016), who argues that Shona-speaking immigrants in South Africa engage in social masking. He also claims that Shona people tactically maintain silence in public spaces. Khangelani Moyo (2017, 212) also notes that Zimbabwean immigrants conceal their identity in some places. Siziba's conclusions are understandable considering the time his research was conducted. But that was largely not what I observed during my conversations and visits to kwaChikwanha. KwaChikwanha presents the complete opposite of the threatening streets studied by Siziba (2016), where Zimbabweans of Shona origin hid their nationality. The street where the music bar is situated epitomised Zimbabwe, teeming with Zimbabwean wares, traders and musicians. It is almost impossible not to hear snatches of conversations in Shona or a distinctively Zimbabwean accent on the streets.

Zimbabweans have used music to explore new ways of being and connecting in the diaspora. Their musicking activities contribute to placemaking, giving South African spaces a hitherto unknown character. In the process, the immigrants feel a sense of

connection and belonging to the place. Music provides a soundtrack for social-relational processes happening at the venue.

## Conclusion

Zimbabweans have managed to use music to find new ways of being and connecting in the diaspora. Music at kwaChikwanha produces a heightened sense of belonging, and it contributes towards giving the place an identity and character. The musical reception frequently becomes a site where social relations and citizenship are negotiated and worked through. As a caution, while the fight against xenophobia is legitimate, it is crucial to acknowledge existing spaces that are inclusive. Zimbabwean immigrants in Johannesburg navigate and assert their presence within a new urban environment through everyday practices, particularly through music. Musicking constitutes an important form of bonding and bridging social capital; it extends immigrants' presence in Johannesburg beyond legal definitions of citizenship, encompassing acts of belonging, cultural expression and social participation that shape both individual experiences and the broader cultural landscape of the city.

## Notes

1. *Harare muJoni* loosely translated means “Harare in Johannesburg.”
2. A South African term that refers to grilling meat over an open flame.
3. UK is short for “Unit K” which refers to a section of Chitungwiza, a satellite town close to Harare.
4. KwaChirau is an area in Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe, whose name rhymes with the pronunciation of Slough.
5. KwaMandebvu can be loosely interpreted as “the place of the bearded man” While, KumaZimba directly translates to “the place of Zimbabweans.”
6. Mathings (dried snacks), muriwo wecovo (leafy greens), maheu epfuko (fermented maize drink), and mbiya dzemapositori (religious enamel cups).
7. Sadza is thick maize or millet porridge and a staple food in Zimbabwe.

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## Notes on contributor

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