THE SELECTION AND INSTALLATION OF SHANGWE CHIEFS IN GOKWE NORTH AND SOUTH DISTRICTS OF ZIMBABWE: AN APPLIED ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL DIMENSION TOWARDS VIOLATING AN INDIGENOUS MODEL

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ABSTRACT

The article is based on a research that investigated, from an applied ethnomusicological dimension, the manner in which Shangwe indigenes in Gokwe North and South districts of Zimbabwe violated the indigenous model of selecting and installing chiefs. The scramble and fighting for positions of leadership remains an unresolved challenge in this political world. There are well documented sociological studies about fighting for positions of power and possible solutions being proffered to attempt and reduce the social quandary. The ethnographic paradigm was utilised to collect qualitative data through unwritten interviews that were meant to obtain information about causes for fighting for chieftainship. Findings were as follows: There were undocumented succession plans of passing chieftainship from one household to another; fighting for chieftainship could continue even after the incumbency was endorsed by the State; and fighting for chieftaincy is a way of trying to restore the cultural legacy bestowed to households that do not belong to the genealogy of chiefs.

Keywords: Chieftaincy, cultural principles, fighting, heritage, household.

INTRODUCTION

The article is based on a research that investigated, from an applied ethnomusicological dimension, the manner in which the Shangwe in Gokwe North and South districts of Zimbabwe violated the indigenous model of selecting and installing chiefs. The article shifts from the usual sociological analysis of the scramble for positions of leadership to an applied ethnomusicological approach. Keil (1982: 89) defines applied ethnomusicology as a field of study whose parameters go beyond academic implementation of ideas and principles. Applied ethnomusicology is "guided by the principle of social responsibility" and goes beyond generating "knowledge and understanding toward solving concrete problems and towards working both inside and beyond typical academic contexts" (Harrison, Mackinlay and Pettan, 2010: 1). Applied research is fundamental to the field of applied ethnomusicology that advocates adoption of practical applications of scholarly studies (Titon, 2009). Applied scholarship should develop solutions that are relevant and specific to address particular and practical economic, social, and political problems pervasive in specific African musical arts such as installations of chiefs. Seizing and wielding power outside the cultural rubrics that regulate the passing on of chieftainship is a violation of the

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indigenous installation ethos model. The struggle for positions of leadership remains an unresolved challenge in the political world (Hassan, 2016; Bishara, 2018; Weinstein-Tull, 2018). There are well documented sociological studies about fighting for leadership and possible solutions being proffered in order to reduce the social dilemma (Munro, 2001; Nellen, 2014)**.** The Shangwe Chiefs of Zimbabwe fall in a similar predicament. A vacant position for chieftainship often occurs after the passing on of the incumbent hence selection and installation of another chief is inevitable. Physical and nonphysical fighting for chieftaincy characterise the selection and installation procedures although Shangwe norms and values do not embolden that practice. Physical fighting refers to "an occasion in which the rebellious indigenes make use of tangible weapons and objects such as axes, knives, knobkerries and spears" whereas nonphysical fighting is "an occasion in which the aggressive indigenes employ intangible means that are meant to harm or kill" the aspirant to the throne (Ngara, 2018a: 129).

Chieftaincy is a leadership position cherished by the Shangwe of Zimbabwe yet the selection and installation of Chiefs is influenced and controlled by the State in order to exploit them (Ngara, 2018a). The control and exploitation of traditional leadership in Southern Africa by the states is a shared modern phenomenon (Ferguson, 2013; Logan, 2009; Sylvain, 2014). Traditional leaders in Malawi strategically exploited the decentralisation policy such that they had become "a dominant force at the grassroots" of politics (Chinsinga, 2006: 251). Notably, it was established that these traditional leaders "play the role of midwife" in domesticating and customising the "reforms" of local conditions (*ibid*, 251). Consequently, politicians find it easy to influence these traditional leaders and achieve their political agendas. Renders (2007: 441) concurs with Chinsinga (2006) by also establishing that in Somalia "modern" and "traditional" institutions co-exist but political rivalry has become the order of the day in local communities. South African government statistics of 2002 indicated that there were 1 600 Chiefs and *izinduna,* village heads (RSA, 2002). One of the findings was that South African Chiefs co-ordinated "elections" (Williams, 2004: 115). The attainment of independence in African states witnessed the installation of more traditional leadership than before. For instance, the passing of the Decree 15 of 2000 of Mozambique after attainment of independence in 1975 witnessed the installation of over 4 000 "community authorities" (Kyed and Buur, 2006: 568). These authorities were symbols of the state authority through which it could exercise control over the communities, a "top-down" model of governance adopted from the colonial masters (*op. cit.,* 568). The motto in Mozambique was, "kill the tribe and build the nation" (Gould, 2001: 8). This could be one reason Chinsinga (2006: 256) stresses that the powers of traditional leaders in the larger "part of postcolonial Africa" had been "circumscribed". This research article did not limit its scope to the debates on whether chieftaincy reflects the true African democracy, a point that was once raised by Ayittey (1991: 31), but also contextualised and examined an applied ethnomusicological dimension of attempting to reduce squabbles related to ascendancy to chieftainship in Zimbabwe. This could be one way of establishing salient links between the installation ceremony and State politics.

Richards (1969: 26) observes that Bemba kinship comprises "installation cere-monies" and "numerous chiefdoms" that are "virtually autonomous". The Bemba Chiefs still had the freedom to apply their indigenous lore in governing their areas of jurisdiction. Conversely, Ranger (1982: 20), in Tradition and Travesty: Chiefs and the Administration in Makoni District, Zimbabwe, 1960-1980, posits that in "sixty years of destructive colonial rule the administrators had rediscov-ered the sovereign virtues of 'custom' and 'tradition". The incident was a farce that resulted "in death for most of the Chiefs and headmen". It is inferred that: The Chiefs died because they resisted the white minority rule; the Rhodesian government knew quite well that in order to effectively govern rural communities in the then Rhodesia, the administrators should find means of weakening tradi-tional institutions which had a direct control of community people; and the tradi-tional leaders' authority was undermined during white minority rule. The minority regime utterly "devastated" the "social fabrics" and introduced "a new culture of violence" meant to destroy democratic systems of governance in Makoni district of Zimbabwe (Ranger, 1982: 20). The ethnography is a departure from a socio-logical perspective of traditional wrangles to that of applied ethnomusicology. It contextualises fighting for leadership in the selection and installation of Shangwe chiefs.

METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION IN TWO SETTINGS

The study was informed by ethnography that comprised participant observation. As espoused by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Reeves, Kuper and Hodges (2008) ethnography is ideal in conducting research on cultural practices. An ethnographic paradigm was adopted in this qualitative account that investigated ways in which the Gokwe communities violated Shangwe cultural norms and values of selecting and installing chiefs. Qualitative data was gathered from twelve culture owners who were famed for their indigenous knowledge about the selection and installation of a chief. These culture owners provided meanings of four songs that were selected and song texts were presented in the indigenous language and translated into English verbatim. Ethnography was employed in order to understand the lived experience of the ethnographer, a point that was once emphasised by Berry (2011). Participant observation, in the installation of two chiefs, encompassed living among the Shangwe for a period of more than two decades. This stint enabled me to participate in the installation processes of the two chiefs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SYSTEMS OF COMMUNICATION IN RITUAL CONTEXTS

Ritual communication theory acknowledges that there are ways in which partici-pants communicate during a particular performance (Rothenbuhler, 2000). Any mode of conveying messages can be understood by ritual participants. Genres of communication that occur in performances are typical reflections of "symbolic reality" just as maps "construct" space (Carey, 1989: 29). Performers and partic-ipants work as a single entity to achieve the goal of any ritual. "[R]itual practices

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serve to bring about communion in a communicative fashion" (Habermas, 1987: 52). Similarly, the Shangwe converse with each other during *chinyamu-sasure/kayanda* dance performances but their communication is enshrined in cultural symbols. Meanings of these symbols can be deciphered by the indigenes in the installation contexts of chiefs. Ngara (2018b) discusses the hierarchical theory of communication prevalent in the Shangwe *mukwerera* rainmaking prayers that are directed to the Supreme Being, *Mwari*. The community people were informally educated of indigenous channels of communication and hence they follow them each time they pray for rain (*ibid*). Some of the rituals are characterised by ancestral spirits possessing their mediums intending to communicate with the living present at the performance (Chapin, 2008; Erlmann, 1982).

The Shangwe installation songs symbolise the manner in which indigenous education lore is passed on during the ritual performances. As guided by the aforementioned theories of communication and research findings, I developed the Shangwe indigenous installation ethos model (SIIEM). The model has undocumented but specific cultural procedures and principles that the indigenes follow in their selection processes of a chief to be accorded installation and delineates roles of the community people, the chiefs, and the spirit world. The model also describes the symbiotic relationship pervasive between the world of the living and that of the spirit realm. The local people's choice of a chief is communicated to and approved or disapproved of by the spirit realm. The chief incumbent undertakes indigenous phases meant to satisfy the spirit world who are the sole guarantors of such a post. In general, the model explains how the indigenes are culturally informed to accept the new leadership with the intention to maintain and sustain the ethos of peace and familyhood enshrined in the African philosophy of humanity. In a nutshell, the model treasures democratic systems of governance, selection and installation of indigenous leadership.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF SONG TEXTS

Song number 1. *Kana mapedza hondo*

Vana vangu wee	My children, I beg you
Kana mapedza hondo	If the war has come to an end
Vana vangu wee	My children, I beg you
Mundidzorere pfumo	Return the spear to me

The meaning of the song entitled 'The war has ended' was explained in comparison with the fighting that occurred between the black freedom fighters and the Rhodesian soldiers. A culture owner said:

> The black freedom fighters led by Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe waged a war against white minority rule. Mr. Mugabe said, 'My children, we have won the war and taken our country, return the spear'. The chief also fought for chieftainship and won the war and hence he is asking children to stop fighting and return the spear.

With respect to when fighting for chieftaincy among the indigenes started, one of the culture owners posited that:

> Fighting for chieftaincy dates back to the colonial era. The arrival of the whites and their participation in the installation of Chiefs posed challenges of installing people who do not belong to households of chieftaincy in Zimbabwe.

Another culture owner uttered these words:

> Although we fight for chieftaincy today, we know the household that is supposed to inherit this cultural legacy. Long back, we did not fight for chieftaincy because we used to follow our cultural ideologies and procedures of selecting and installing chiefs.

Some of the current Chiefs in Zimbabwe do not belong to chieftaincy households, but they are installed as Chiefs by the State. As a result, the people from the culturally deserving households are fighting to get back their legacy. Since the attainment of independence in 1980, the government adopted the colonial model of installing Chiefs hence fighting for chieftaincy continues in Zimbabwe. The terms 'war' and 'spear' are symbolic. War does not refer to a genre of war such as the Second Chimurenga of Zimbabwe. In the selection and installation of chiefs, 'war' is a social uprising of indigenes against antagonists who want to inherit the legacy of chieftaincy. The term 'spear', does not mean the literal spear. In precolonial Zimbabwe, a spear was used for hunting wild animals in order to obtain game meat and also against enemies during tribal wars (Spears, 2007; De Luna, 2015). In the installation rituals, the spear symbolises guns such as those that were used during the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe.

Nowadays, 'a spear' is a symbol of various weapons such as axes and knobkerries that can also be used for fighting. The expression 'give me the spear' implies that the goal to attain chieftainship has been achieved. The period of 'returning the spear' symbolises the historical phase when the black freedom fighters stopped fighting. Having defeated the Rhodesian forces in late 1979, freedom fighters surrendered all the guns. This period was described as the moment of restoration of peace in which the freedom fighters assembled in designated camps (Soames, 1980). Politically, the period was called Cease Fire, meaning the period to stop fighting since the black freedom fighters had won the war against white minority rule. In southern African states, liberation struggles were meant to attain independence and restore democratic systems of governance destroyed by the colonial masters (Soul, 2002). Similarly, the Shangwe indigenes are being reminded to discontinue fighting for a State endorsed position. The chief is now supposed to set up a judiciary system to assist him to run and govern the chiefdom. These interpretations were influenced by previous knowledge of the post-colonial era which abolished tradition. The post independent Zimbabwean government also embraced the Community-State model of installing Chiefs that is still used. This colonially inherited model violates indigenous installation ethos models that are culture specific and cherish the cultural rubrics of peaceful selecting and installing of chiefs.

Song number 2. *Ngoma yedembe*

Vamezvara vakanyetera, ndoita kudini?	The father-in-law is angry, what should I do?
Hoyi hiye hiye	*Hoyi hiye hiye*
Vabura hari ndaisa pasi	He has taken the pot I had put down
Hoyi hiye hiye	*Hoyi hiye hiye*

The song portrays a father-in-law who is angry at the son-in-law's immoral sexual behaviour. Literally, the son-in-law would have removed father-in-law's pot from the fireplace and consumed the food contents yet the 'pot' has sexual symbolism. A culture expert said:

> The father-in-law is angry with son-in-law who has removed his pot with a broken beam from the fire place. He feels belittled and insulted. This sexual symbolism cannot be explained at this public domain.

Female culture owners could not offer themselves to interpret the sexual symbolism since the interviewer was a male. Notably, women are not happy to answer questions of sexual symbolism if the interviewee is a male (Deutsch, 2007). Reserving such questions to be answered by male culture owners is the option to counteract the challenge. Eventually, males interpreted the symbolism. Father-in-law became angry with his son-in-law because he entered into a relationship with the former's girlfriend. In Shangwe, dating one's father-in-law's girlfriend is a taboo. Junod (1927: 573) defines a taboo as "any act, object or person that implies a danger for the individual or for the community, and that must consequently be avoided, this object, act or person being a kind of a ban". Some of the taboos espoused by the Tsonga of Mozambique are: using obscene language; and physiological taboos pertaining to persons defiled by sexual intercourse, menstruation, death and the birth of twins (*ibid*).

In the installation context, the chief would be angry with those who contest for chieftaincy yet someone from their household would have been installed. Thus the meaning of the phrase, *"*The pot with a broken opening". Chieftaincy has always rotated among community families in a particular order, and criteria. In support of this view a culture expert echoed that:

> There are intruders who would be also aspiring for chieftaincy, yet their households had had the opportunity to rule. We would identify the household that has never had rulership to inherit chieftaincy. We need to pass on and rotate this cultural legacy of rulership.

Fighting for chieftaincy can be described as a defilement of the succession principles that are culturally known by households that rotate the rulership. In addition, fighting is a clear desecration of the Shangwe indigenous installation ethos model advocating sanity, serenity and harmony. It is not a cultural norm that Shangwe should fight for the status.

Song number 3. *Ngoma yarira*

Imwi munogweniko?	What are you fighting for?
Ngoma yarira	The drum has been sounded
Shumba munogweniko?	What are you fighting for Shumba?
Ngoma yarira	The drum has been sounded

As indicated in the preceding two songs as well as song number three, fighting for chieftaincy is predominant in the Shangwe community. The expression "the drum has been sounded" does not refer to the literal drum. It is an instruction ordering community people to stop fighting since the incumbent has already been sworn into office. The term drum does not refer to a drum, meaning a musical instrument. In various African contexts, the term drum (*ngoma*) conveys different meanings. Friedson (1996: xiv) posits that:

> *Ng'oma* the Ndembu word for drum, means more than merely a particular kind of Membranophones ... For scholars such as John Janzen (1992: 64), this term is "proto Bantu cognate" that speaks of an ancient healing institution found throughout central and southern Africa.

Gearhart (2005: 22), in *Northern Kenya Coast,* admits that: "The interconnected-ness of music and dance is represented by a single word that the Swahili speakers use to define both simultaneously: "*ngoma*". The term *ngoma,* on the Kenya coast, is symbolic. It denotes "competitions between neighbourhood dance associations that took place regularly in towns and villages from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century" (*ibid*). The celebration of *ngoma* ensemble activities is "one way that residents of Kenya's northern coast (between Mombasa and Lamu Archipelago) explain how marginalized individuals became powerful, how celebrities won and lost their fame..." (*ibid*). In the views of Janzen (1992: 64) and Van Dijk, (2000), the term *ngoma* means a dance drum that is utilised in ritual rites of healing and renewal in eastern and southern Africa. In Congo, MacGaffey (2002: 13) explains how *ngoma* was used during dancing and "when ancestors or Chiefs were being addressed" yet the *ngoma* does not have a ceremony named after it in the same society. The term *ngoma* refers to a dance drum on the one hand, and on the other hand, *ngoma* is a term derived from a tree called *ngoma ngoma,* from which the drum, as a musical instrument, is carved (*ibid*).

The installation of Shangwe Chiefs is considered to be divine and must not be dishonoured by humans. A culture owner commented:

> Those who fight for chieftaincy after installation would be wasting time. We would have finished the installation process yet one would still challenge the whole process.

Chieftaincy is approved by the metaphysical world. Ethnically, fighting is not only a disturbance to the peace and stability of the Shangwe community, but also to the spirit kingdom. Fighting for leadership positions is a mutual feature in most

African societies (Blake, 2005; Lauer, 2007; Hoekema, 2014; Kaoma, 2016). Being a chief is a respected, loved, and admired status of society. Therefore, this maybe the major cause for conflicts.

The Shumba people (lion totem) are also implicated in the fighting for chieftaincy. Earlier research indicates that Chiefs Chireya and Nemangwe of the Shava totem, are the only Shangwe in Gokwe North and South districts and other ethnic groups constitute *madheruka* (Ngara, 2018a). *Madheruka* are described by the Shangwe as the Karanga who migrated from Masvingo and Midlands provinces in search of farming land (Nyambara, 2002). Shumba symbolises non Shangwe of other totems such as Hove, Hungwe, Maposa, Moyo, Shoko and Zhou. They could be fighting in support of households who hope to take over chieftaincy. In Chireya and Nemangwe chiefdoms, the status is a prerogative of the Shangwe (Ngara, 2018a). Envying cultural legacies of other indigenes is a breach of the Shangwe ethos model that clearly outlines the succession history.

Song number 4. *Ndokanda museve*

Ndokanda?	Do I have to throw?
Rega kunda museve	Do not throw the arrow
Ndokanda?	Do I have to throw?
Handina basa newe	I do not care about you

The song is a testimony of violating the principles of humanity espoused by the Shangwe ethos model. The model discourages fighting for the position of chieftainship since the installation is approved by the spirit empire. The installation process by both the indigenes and the State would have been accomplished. However, the chief realises that others would still be unsatisfied by the outcomes and harbour intentions of challenging the chief through seeking aid from nefarious indigenous medical practitioners in order to harm the chief. The chief's ancestral spirits would inform him through dreams that the fighting is not yet over and a culture owner said:

> The chief is a person who interacts with the spirit realm through dreams. The spirit world would say, "Hey, don't you realise that the war for chieftaincy is not over?

The chief would inform his closest family members about the person who intends to harm him. Thus, by the question, 'Do I have to throw?' the chief would be seeking approval from intimate friends before retaliation. By the answer, 'Do not throw the spear'*,* the chief's family members are discouraging him from fighting back since killing someone is against cultural morals of humanity. Sharma (2013) and Molefe (2015) posit that African life is guided by ethics of mortality which prohibit people to fight and kill each other for any reason.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participation of the state in the installation of Chiefs is a total violation of the indigenous model that cherishes the ethos of social cohesion, peace, stability,

unity of purpose and familyhood. Respect for cultural principles of appointing and installing leadership enshrined in particular indigenous models is an essential move that states should revert to. Resorting to, and implementing indigenous models of installing leaders can be a possible solution to the social dilemma of fighting for positions of power. Lack of documented succession plans creates a fertile ground for political parties to manipulate the indigenous systems of installing Chiefs for its political advantage. It is recommended that institutions of higher education should embark on programmes for documenting chieftainship succession plans and such records should be kept in libraries for future reference. Cultural groupings should always refer to those records to avoid quarrels that sometime erupt resulting in fighting for leadership positions. Establishing the root of the problem is the first step in finding solutions.

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