

**Ritual Ceremonial Life: Song Text and Spirit Manifestation among the  
Zezuru People of Hwedza, Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

Ethnomusicologists, and scholars from adjacent fields, have examined and viewed music and spirituality from various perspectives. Studies have been successful in examining the function of music in worship in many cultures. The Zezuru people are a Zimbabwean Shona subethnic group and they practise *bira rematendo*, (a ritual ceremony) in which songs are performed to pacify ancestral spirits. This thesis examines how song text fosters spirit manifestation in a Zezuru *bira rematendo* ceremonial performance. I further report on the origin of songs performed at *bira rematendo* ritual ceremonies for the purpose of creating a conducive environment for spirit manifestation. Three theoretical frameworks guide the research, these are historicism, multispecies ethnography, and communication models. Guided by the three theories, and employing ethnographic methods of participant observation, face-to-face interviews and video recordings, the following are interrogated: the Zezuru religious life, the significance and role of the song textual meanings in linking the living and the living-dead. The study demonstrates how song texts bring out song meanings which communicate with ancestors while enabling manifestation of ancestral and alien spirits in the context of Zezuru *bira* ritual performance. Furthermore, the study illustrates the resultant physical behavioural change of practitioners during song performance in the *bira rematendo* event.

## **Dedication**

*Vana vangu Kumbirai, Kundai naKudzai irwai kurwa kwakanaka.*

(To my children Kumbirai, Kundai and Kudzai; fight for a good cause.)

## **Acknowledgement**

It was through the assistance from certain individuals, and families, which made the execution of this study possible. I would like to particularly thank my supervisors Associate Professors Sylvia Bruinders and Helen MacDonald for their intellectual support, time, advice and encouragement.

My extended gratitude goes to the following families, and individuals, whose meaningful data assisted in the completion of this Master's thesis, and ethnographic film (Appendix B): Mavis Chikomo, Shepherd Chakuinga, Tashaya Chiringa, Chamunorwa Mupanga, Juliet Muswizwi, Zvamano Muhwati, Headman Tofa Munzverengi (passed on at the time of reporting; may his soul rest in eternal peace); Alexio Mukupwa, and Freddy Munzverengi.

Special thanks go to Jemwa Canaan Mukova who would inform me in advance about *mapira* (ritual ceremonies) held by Mukupwa and Munzverengi families in the villages of Hwedza. During my fieldwork, I attended sacred spirit manifestation ceremonies. Filming events in such

sacred ceremonies is not an easy task, as such, I would like to thank Munzverengi and Mukupwa families for their willingness to allow me to attend, film ceremonial events where spirit manifestation took place and to share with me their experiences about the relationship between song and spirit manifestation. This contact and experience in the field led me to produce an amazing document and informative ethnographic film.

Thanks also to my fellow colleagues, Dr Perminus Matiore, for his guidance and provision of related literature; Paul Dumisani Bajilla and Weston Chimbudzi for assisting me in transcribing traditional songs; Dr Richard Muranda and Dr Wonder Maguraushe, for their advice and encouragement through the research journey.

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<i>Bira</i> (singl.), <i>mapira</i> (pl.)	: a ritual practice performed to appease ancestral or alien spirits.
<i>Bira rekugadza mambo</i>	: a ritual ceremony held to install a chief on his throne.
<i>Bute</i>	: snuff which is usually made from uncured tobacco.
<i>Dare</i> (singl.), <i>matara</i> (pl.)	: a family or clan gathering meant to discuss issues of concern.
<i>Doro</i>	: traditional beer.
<i>Doro rehonye</i>	: traditional beer brewed to mark the decay of the body of the deceased.
<i>Gata</i>	: a ritual event done to consult a diviner to determine the cause of the death of a relative's death.
<i>Gokoro</i>	: a ritual event done to appease ancestral spirits.
<i>Gombwe</i> (singl.), <i>makombwe</i> (pl.)	: a person possessed by the highest level of spirits
<i>Hama</i>	: kinsmen
<i>Hukama</i>	: kinship or a relationship of people of the same lineage.
<i>Homwe</i>	: a person who is possessed by the family or clan or alien spirits, also referred to as a host or medium.
<i>Hosho</i>	: hand rattles
<i>Hukwe</i>	: a reed mat where the spirit medium sits when in full possession.
<i>Huro</i>	: a melodic style which includes high and low pitched vocal ranges.
<i>Kudzvova</i> or <i>kukonya</i>	: a roaring or hissing sound produced by the host or medium while being possessed by a spirit.

## **Glossary of Shona words and phrases**

*Bandangoma* (singl.), *mabandangoma* (pl.) : a person who skilfully plays a traditional drum.

<i>Kuisa chioko</i>	: a customary greeting gesture of clapping hands to show respect to elders.
<i>Kupira</i>	: an act of ancestral veneration
<i>Mambo</i>	: a chief
<i>Marovahosho</i>	: a person who skilfully plays hand rattles.
<i>Mashumba mashanu</i>	: a cloth inscribed with five lion head insignias.
<i>Mbira dzavadzimu</i>	: an indigenous instrument played for the purpose of creating a conducive environment for spirit manifestation.
<i>Mbudzi</i>	: a goat.
<i>Mhofu yemukono</i>	: a male antelope which symbolises a totem for the Hera clan who are part of the Shona-speaking people.
<i>Mhondoro</i>	: a male lion which denotes clan spirits.
<i>Mondizvo</i>	: a totem for the Mbire clan whose animal symbol is a baboon or monkey.
<i>Mudzimu</i> (singl.), <i>midzimu</i> (pl.)	: ancestral spirit(s).
<i>Mudzimu wemusha</i>	: ancestral spirit who takes custody of the family.
<i>Mukwerera</i>	: a ritual ceremony held to ask for rains through ancestral veneration.
<i>Mushauri</i> (singl.), <i>vashauri</i> (pl.)	: a person who vocally leads a song when singing lead and response format.
<i>Musikavanhu/Musiki/Mwari</i>	: God who is the creator of people and the universe.
<i>Mutupo</i> (singl.), <i>mitupo</i> (pl.)	: a totem usually symbolised by an animal to distinguish a clan from one another.
<i>Mwedzi wambudzi</i>	: the month of November.
<i>Mweya</i>	: wind or air which is viewed as the spirits which possess mediums or hosts.
<i>N'anga</i>	: a diviner who is consulted by a family or clan for divine intervention.

<i>Ngoma</i>	: a traditional drum.
<i>Njuzu</i>	: a mermaid in Shona spirituality.
<i>Samasimba</i>	: God who has power over the universe.
<i>Shavi/e</i> (singl.); <i>mashavi/e</i> (pl.)	: alien or foreign spirit which usually possesses a family or clan host or medium.
<i>Svikiro</i>	: a person who is possessed by a spirit of his/her ancestry.

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## **Chapter 1: The Spirits manifest: Sing the song!**

### 1.1 Introduction

*Jemwa Mukova<sup>1</sup> (gatekeeper) finally called me and informed me about the bira rematando<sup>2</sup> ceremony that was going to take place at Alexio Mukupwa's house on October 20th, 2021. I anticipated this call for weeks. Due to the sacred nature of the occasion, I was really ecstatic because I had no idea whether or not I would actually receive an invitation to attend.*

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<sup>1</sup> All participants and village names are not anonymous as consent was sought and permission granted to use them for authenticity of the dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> *Bira rematando* is a ritual ceremony held among the Shona people to thank God through ancestral spirit veneration for protection from ailments and evil spirits, providing wealth and good life in general.

*In order to be ready for the event, I prepared everything I would need for the excursion, which included recording equipment, stationery, and groceries for my respondents because we were going to dine together at the ceremony. In addition to that, I worked closely with my field assistant Kumbirai Chikomo for a period of three days to practise taking photographs and videos. Even though I had been given permission to attend and film the sacred ritual, I made sure to remind the assistant of the proper protocol for participating in the event.*

*On the day that the religious rite was going to be performed, my research assistant and I got up very early in the morning to travel to where the ceremony was going to take place. After travelling for almost an hour, we finally arrived at the Gotora village bus stop. Along the way, we had been able to take in some breathtaking views of the surrounding terrain. To get to Alexio's house, we took a meandering route that was covered with thatched grass. As this was my third time visiting the location, I was acquainted with the layout of the area. Each of us had a lengthy stick that we used to scrape the dew off the tangled grass that ran alongside the path.*

*When we arrived at about five in the morning, almost everyone was already awake. The members of the family were quite busy with the preparations for the occasion. Women could be seen carrying buckets of water and washing clay pots, and I also noticed that some women were using a different fireplace from the men to prepare food for the event. As a sign of respect for the family that was hosting us, we greeted them by clapping our hands and called their totem before entering the yard. Jemwa Mukova, Freddy Mukupwa and Alexio Munzverengi greeted us with open arms, and in turn, they showed their appreciation by clapping their hands. We were shown where to sit, which turned out to be around the fireplace (dare), where the older males in the family and some other people were congregating. We exchanged pleasantries as is our norm and I asked my gatekeeper to inform the elders of my visit. Since the elders were aware of my intention, we were fortunately granted permission so that we could take part in the gathering.*

*Following the briefing scheduled for the day, we were led by the hand to the sacred hut where the ceremony was going to take place. As a sign of respect, we took off our shoes and any jewellery that we were wearing before entering the hut. Once I entered the sacred hut, someone showed me where to sit and informed me that there would be no interference with the procedure. While my assistant adjusted the camera settings, I positioned myself as part of the participants ready to take part in the musical proceedings*

*The sacred hut was not like other dwellings; the floor had just been polished with fresh cow dung and the walls had been painted with colourful clay decorations. There were reed mats on the floor, clay pots filled with traditional brew, clothes and animal skins hung on the walls, and many other artefacts like snuff gourds (nhekwe), spears (mapfumo), clubs (tsvimbo) that appeared to be contextually relevant and appropriate to the practice of spirituality.*

*Alexio Mukupwa took the lead in singing the song "Mudzimu dzoka," which translates to "spirit come back,"<sup>3</sup> as soon as the people had settled in the sacred hut and taken their assigned positions. He sang in a high-pitched voice that was full of vitality. I realised why he was the lead singer among the performer-participants, as his vocal methods encouraged others to respond willingly. The song began softly, but as it gained speed, everyone in the hut began singing along with it. The song was accompanied by clapping, drumming, hand rattle shaking, and ululating in addition to dancing. I was able to pick up on the participants' level of seriousness as well as the level of intensity within the musical performance, all of which indicated that they are working diligently at what they were doing. The song was emotionally expressive and affected the performers profoundly. The arrival of other village elders as the sun began to rise signalled the*

<sup>3</sup> Lead: *Tovera m'dzimu dzoka,*

*Tovera the spirit come back*

Response: *Ha-a-a-woyiye kwaziwayi Tovera,*

*Ha-a-a-woyiye, we greet you Tovera*

*beginning of that day's bira rematendo event, and the song performance that they participated in was the opening act.*

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Every year from April to October, the Zezuru-speaking people (a Shona sub-ethnic group) in Hwedza hold ritual ceremonies referred to as *mapira* (*bira*-singular). The origin of a *bira* ritual can be traced back to a single individual who, for whatever reason, has the desire to communicate with the spirits of ancestors, or it can be a gathering of a family or clan. Depending on the family involved, the *bira* may be accompanied by song performances or music played on the *mbira* musical instrument. Not every song is sung in a *bira* to please ancestral spirits; most of the songs

must be linked to the sacredness of the event (refer to Chapter 5 for more information on this). An inquiry into the song complex, or components of it, as this study aims to do, is therefore a quest to discover the link that exists between song text and spirit manifestation<sup>3</sup> in Zezuru ritual ceremonial life.

The Shona-speaking people believe in *Mwari* (God) whom they also refer to as *Musikavanhu* or *Zame*, or *Musiki*, and they worship him through the practice of *kupira midzimu* (veneration of ancestral spirits) which honours the spirits of their ancestors. During a *bira* ceremony, veneration of ancestral spirits includes the performance of songs, and ancestral spirits make their presence known by manifesting through *homwe* (a host or medium). Therefore, in this research, my argument aims to establish what constitutes song performance that results in spirit manifestation in a *bira rematendo* ritual practice among the Zezuru people of Hwedza.

## 1.2 Background to the study

The findings of a review of ethnomusicological literature that discusses music and spirituality provided the impetus to undertake this study on the relationship that exists between song text and manifestation of ancestral and alien spirits. I attended Midlands State University in Zimbabwe in order to obtain an Honours Degree in Music and Musicology from that institution. The scholarly work to be alluded to below, together with my participation in *mapira* ceremonial activities ever since I was a child, is what initially sparked my interest in music, and more specifically song text and spirituality.

Globally, the major function that people believe song serves is as an entertainment medium, a means of relaxation and enjoyment, as well as for religious and any other reasons (Njoku, 2020). Kramer (2015) further states that the term song is more of an umbrella term that incorporates a number of behaviours that involve the use of the human voice. The significance of song as text is emphasised further in any kind of performance practice. On the other hand, much of the research on global music cultures, which I explore in the paragraphs that follow, discusses how music

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<sup>3</sup> In this discussion, the term possession entails the process of a spirit entering and owning its medium or host and manifestation signifies an action which clearly shows the existence of a spirit of the dead to the living world (Rashed, 2020).

breathes life into religious worship, rites, and ceremonies rather than exploring song text meanings in relationship to what members of the community perform specifically for spirit manifestation.

Brown (2014) remarked on the significant function that song and dance serve in the performance of funeral rituals in both Aboriginal communities and Gunbalanya, which is located in the western Arnhem region of Australia. Not only does music engage with the customary conduct of the bereaved, but it also influences the religious processes by which members of the community conduct their rites. Thus, the song influences and has a relationship with the spiritual world as the rites interlink the living and the dead through musical performance. Music is used to accompany ceremonial rites in certain civilizations, such as the Bulume secret societies of Liberia. The ensemble of drums, basket rattles, songs, and box-shaped lamellophones are used to create music that accompanies ritual ceremonies (Monts, 2000). In discussing how music is used in ceremonies, Djedje (2008) observes that the Safuno people of Cote d'Ivoire employ songs and ensembles of aerophones and membranophones to produce music during social and ritual events. Friedson (2010) investigated the function of music as ritual and ritual as music in the Brekete religion practised by the Ewe people of Ghana. The Brekete religion is rooted in West Africa. Drumming, dancing, reciting prayers aloud, and sacrificing animals are among practices that are utilised to facilitate the process of spirit possession in the Brekete religion. According to Kaemmer (1993), the Tsonga people, who historically occupied the coastal lowlands of Southern Mozambique, engage in rites designed to purify themselves. Those Tsonga people who become possessed by bad spirits are exorcised during ceremonial rituals. During these ceremonies, songs and a range of instruments are played in order to invoke the spirits of their ancestors, who are responsible for the exorcism processes. Emoff (2002) studied possession music of the Malagasy of Madagascar. In order to communicate with their ancestors who have crossed over to the supernatural world, the Malagasy use songs rich in their cultural heritage, as well as visual and historical textures which express their history and resilient spirit as a people.

As further stated by Mbiti (1982), the Bantu-speaking people of Southern Africa have religious systems in which music plays an important role. Both as social commentary and an accompaniment to ritual practices, songs serve a dual purpose. Maraire (1990) submits that there is a traditional belief among the Shona people that a manifestation of ancestral spirits takes place

whenever there is an attempt to please the spirits using *gokoro*<sup>4</sup> ritual events. The song performance is thought of as an accompaniment to the *gokoro* event. Matiure (2011) investigates the modalities of *mbira* music as important components to the manifestation of ancestral spirits. His argument is that when certain *mbira* modes<sup>5</sup> are played during a *bira* event, spirit possession takes place. Since these academic perspectives have not addressed the significance of song text as it pertains to spirit manifestation, this research is therefore pertinent in the context of the relationship between song text and spirit manifestation.

This thesis posits how specific people who claim Zezuru identities in Hwedza are performing *mapira* ritual ceremonies using traditional songs (with special attention to song texts/words/lyrics) for the purpose of communicating with their ancestral spirits. This debate will be based on the scholarly views on music and spirituality that have been presented above as well as the study of ceremonial rites performed at rural cultural communities. Within the framework of *mapira ematendo* (ritual ceremony held to thank God for general wellbeing), I am interested in the dramatic or musically performative presentations and the implications those presentations may have for the manifestation of spirits. Therefore, my contribution to the existing literature pertaining to song performance focuses on the meaning of the song text in relation to Shona spirit manifestation, which this thesis seeks to fulfil. The purpose of this study is to provide a detailed description of how song texts contribute to the creation of conditions necessary for the manifestation of spirits in the context of *bira rematendo* ritual ceremonies according to the local practitioners.

### 1.3 Statement of the problem

Music and spirituality have been studied in different Shona societies in contexts of belief in the existence of *nyikadzimu* (spiritual world). The focus of these studies is on the way individuals of different Shona ethnic backgrounds, including the Zezuru-speaking people, venerate their

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<sup>4</sup> *Gokoro* is the medium through which the ritual-myth of bringing forth the spirit of the dead is carried out.

<sup>5</sup> *Mbira* mode is a piece of *mbira* music or song (with specific lyrics) whose musical rhythmic progressions is believed to have been originally arranged from ancient or present generations and is passed from one generation to another in that form. Although song text can change to suit performers' context, the mode progression remains the same.

ancestors as a means of paying homage to the Supreme Being. The Zezuru people under study are a sub-ethnic group of the Shona people who are the descendants of the Bantu speaking people who migrated from the Great Lakes region of Africa and came to settle in Guruuswa, now Zimbabwe (Marangwanda, 2018). I focused on the Zezuru people who settled in Hwedza, particularly in Gotoru, Sengezi, Jenya and Dzvokora communities in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe. The socio-musicological and religious issues involving the Shona people of Zimbabwe, notably the Zezuru sub-ethnic group, have been discussed in ethnomusicological and anthropological publications. Among the Shona people, the devotion of ancestral spirits is kept alive through the performance of song and dance, the sniffing of *bute* (snuff), libation<sup>6</sup>, and the playing of specific musical instruments during a variety of religious ceremonies. While there has been some literature on music and spirituality (Matiure, 2011; Machingura, 2015 and Berliner, 2020) relating to ritual performance practices, I noted that little has been written on song text meaning in relation to spirit manifestation. Therefore, in this dissertation, my argument is to find out what is the resultant communicative intent encoded by song texts in songs sung in a *bira rematendo* ceremony between *vanhu vapenyu* (the living) and *midzimu* (ancestral spirits).

#### 1.4 Research Objectives

My goal in this thesis is to examine how messages are being communicated using songs between the living and the spiritual world during ritual practices to induce spirit possession. The song performances analysed are limited to *mapira ematendo* ceremonies. The chosen songs were all selected for their textual accomplishments in creating environments which lead to spirit manifestation. This thesis will thrive to:

- Describe the cosmic nature of a *bira* ritual practice that encompasses song performance.
- Examine the facets of song performance at a *bira* ritual practice.
- Analyse the intended meaning of song texts in relation to spirit manifestation.

To guide the research discussion and achieve the above-mentioned research objectives, I attempted to pose my argument based on the following questions:

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<sup>6</sup> Libation is an act within a traditional prayer (*kupira*) where the presiding elder of the family pours traditional brew on the ground, either outside or inside the sacred hut, chanting words of prayer. This act is done in the initial process of the *bira* event as an offering to the ancestral spirits.

- What is the procedure of *bira rematendo* ceremonial practice that involves song performance?

To answer the question, I argue through literature search and data analyses to define a sacred ceremony as perceived by practitioners of the ritual and how scholarship assesses the practice (as discussed in Chapter 4). This is done to clearly convey the picture of the sacred ceremony's significance as a hub that offers an appropriate setting for song performance in order to induce spirit manifestation among the Zezuru people.

- What are the facets of song performance at a *bira* ritual practice?

In this inquiry, I examine the data acquired and describe the characteristics of songs and song structure as they are perceived in indigenous communities who make the music. The question also insinuates my argument about what makes a song suitable to be performed at a *bira rematendo* event, according to practitioners and scholarship.

- What is the intended meaning of song texts in relation to spirit manifestation in *bira rematendo* ceremony?

This inquiry seeks to address the study's principal goal, which is to investigate the relationship between song text and spirit possession in the context of *bira* ritual. African traditional songs are distinguished, for example, by features that classify them as religious, love, narrative, epic, war, and gaming songs (Nketia 1974). This classification provides the songs with their meanings, (as discussed in Chapter 6).

### 1.5 Significance of the study

This study is important because the underlying methodology and philosophy contribute to the existing ethnomusicological dialogue through reviving, sustaining and archiving traditional songs in relation to spirituality. Although the Zezuru *bira* ceremonial rites and sacred events are taboo, I believe, as has also been approved by the participants, it is important to sustain them by archiving indigenous knowledge, particularly *bira rematendo* ritual ceremony, as a strategy for preserving processes that are threatened by cultural dynamism. Because indigenous knowledge is passed down orally from generation to generation, irregularities in oral communication pose a threat to the preservation of *bira* ritual practices. I often noticed as a participant observer, that

members of the family could ask each other whether a certain *bira* ritual procedure was done properly and some procedural stages were passed onto the next step with uncertainty. Therefore, through documenting the *bira* ritual procedures and traditional song performances, accepted and approved by the participants, not only will future generations benefit from the preservation of indigenous knowledge, but the current generation will have a reference as well.

Ethnomusicologists study the music of the culture that they are investigating. The focus of this dissertation is to examine various aspects of songs to include the purpose of songs in communities, the context in which songs are performed, and how song performance is defined in the context of culture. It is my hope that this dissertation will offer a new dimension on how song performance is viewed as a nexus between the world of the living and dead. Unlike other religions, for example, Christianity views the dead as only to resurrect with the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Zezuru people, like other African indigenous people, believe that the dead are not dead but the living dead who appear to their living descendants through the practice of ritual ceremonies (Hwata, 2021). Thus, this ethnomusicological study adds to current knowledge by reflecting on how song performance fosters spirit manifestation which entails cohesion and collaboration among the living in relation to the spiritual worldview.

This dissertation intends to expound on transcription and analysis of traditional songs performed during the *bira* ritual ceremonies. As alluded to in the previous paragraph, the passage of time may cause songs, which are orally passed from one generation to another to become extinct. Through transcription the traditional songs are transcribed and analysed for the purpose of archiving for future reference. Archiving also provides references which can establish that songs performed at *bira rematendo* by the Zezuru communities show that their traditional ceremonial life is valuable.

The study is also significant as it thrives to establish spiritual meaning through the analysis of non-musical events within *mapira* ritual performances highlighting the importance of kinship and the role of musical instruments and dance accompanying the song for the purpose of spirit manifestation.

Change in time offers multiple streams of influence among cultures, and creation of new ways of doing things that results from human and cultural interaction. This dissertation traces certain of those streams of influence and examines how the Zezuru-speaking people live and

survive changes in culture to sustain their own ritual performative culture. It shows how the Zezuru-speaking people have maintained their traditional sacred ceremonies despite interacting with other cultures.

It is my hope that this study will bring another dimension into ethnomusicological discourse—a dimension in which the connection between ancestral worldview and the living through song interaction is viewed not as drama but rather as life realities. Understanding the complex song text and spirit manifestation in the context of ritual ceremonial life among the Zezuru-speaking people is crucial to my study. Therefore, this dissertation is important as it adds to the existing body of knowledge about music and spirituality as it focuses on how song as text in a ritual performance induces spirit manifestation.

The dissertation intends to open further debate on how culture houses, policy makers and academic institutions discuss ethnomusicological issues surrounding song and spirituality.

## 1.6 Outline of chapters

In Chapter 1, I discussed the scope of the study. The argument is about the relationship between music and spirituality, which arose after reading scholarly contributions on the subject from the field of ethnomusicology and personal experiences as a Zezuru descendant. Music has been studied in Shona communities, as well as other African traditional cultures, as a source of entertainment, a form of relaxation and enjoyment, and an accompaniment to religious rituals (Nketia, 1978, Matiure, 2011, and Njoku, 2020). As a result of this literature search, I identified the need to explore how the Zezuru-speaking people worship *Mwari* (God) through ancestral spirit veneration, with a focus on the interaction between song text and spirit manifestation in *mapira* rituals. Amongst the Zezuru-speaking communities, the belief in worshipping Mwari through ancestral spirits in *mapira* rituals has been historically and customarily passed down from generation to generation.

Chapter 2 examines scholarly perspectives on music and spirituality, which serve as a foundation for my investigation into the relationship between song text and spirit manifestation. A literature analysis of other music cultures, such as the Safuno people of Cote d'Ivoire, the Ewe people of Ghana, and the Tsonga people of Southern Mozambique listed above, reveals that music plays an important role in the performance of ceremonial practices in those societies. This research has inspired me to investigate the connection between music and spirituality among Zezuru-

speaking people who worship God through the veneration of ancestral and alien spirits. Chapter 2 will also discuss the following theories: communication model, historicism, and multispecies ethnography. These three hypotheses are the focal points of my thesis argument.

Chapter 3 covers research design and methods. This chapter describes the research design strategies used, including population and sampling selection, methodology, data gathering procedures, and analysis. This chapter will also cover ethical considerations. The discussion on research ethics aims to emphasise the need for adhering to ethical issues that include participants and their cultural values and beliefs. When considering limits, it is important to highlight the research parameters.

Chapter 4 delves into *mapira* ceremonial practices of the Zezuru. In this section, the beliefs and values of the Zezuru people are addressed in order to shed light on the setting in which songs are performed. In this chapter, my argument is placed on the idea of *bira rematendo*, which is investigated in depth with a particular concentration on the various types of ancestral and alien spirits as well as the importance of kinship in order to provide an explanation for the role of song performance in relationship to spirit manifestation.

Within the context of a Zezuru *bira rematendo* ceremony, the fifth chapter places a significant amount of emphasis on the discussion regarding the song's actual content as well as its textual meaning. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the characteristics of a song as well as its capacity for communication. As a result, this chapter delves into the primary qualities that define a traditional song in order to outline its fundamental structure. The communicative tendencies of the song are defined by the traits mentioned, to which their connection to spirit manifestation may be established. Also, to be examined are issues concerning the significance of musical instruments and dance domains during a song performance in a *bira*.

The primary purpose of Chapter 6 is to conduct an analysis of the audio-visual recordings, interviews, field notes, and observations that were gathered during fieldwork. Because it contains transcribed songs, this chapter is the primary component of the investigation. These songs are analysed both textually and contextually in order to decipher their significance in relation to the manifestation of spirits. As a result, the text or word meanings in songs are analysed and described in order to demonstrate the communicative tendencies that are exhibited by the songs, with the communication model (discussed in Chapter 2) serving as a guide. Thematic indexing is used to

extract theme meanings from songs performed to give their assumed effects. I also discuss the resultant effect of song performance as shown by the psychophysiological reactions of the practitioners while they are participating in *bira rematendo* ceremonies. These reactions are discussed and analysed through observations, interviews (including feedback interviews), fieldnotes and video footage captured during live *bira rematendo* performances.

In the last Chapter 7, I present a research summary, including its results, conclusions, and recommendations.

## **Chapter 2: Context, song and spirituality.**

### 2.1 Introduction

In order to have a better understanding of the relationship between song performance and spirituality, I examine the prominent notions from publications that can be found in the literature surrounding traditional music performances in Africa and other world music cultures. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been an abundance of literature produced on the subject of music and spirituality in African societies, particularly Zimbabwe. Academic and scholarly works written by researchers such as Berliner (1993), Jones (1992), Pikirayi (1999), Turino (2000), Matiure (2011), and Perman (2020) look into topics relating the religious thought systems of various Shona ethnic groups with regard to music performance.

I will outline existing literature dealing with Shona identities from the perspective of rituals they perform in their communities. Historical literature on the origins of the Shona ethnic groups is significant in establishing trends. Literature on the Zezuru ritual performances seeks to study sacred songs with the intention to investigate if there is a marked functional relationship between song performance and spirituality. After presenting the relevant theories used to guide this dissertation, I will interrogate the scholarly literature on the origin of Zezuru-speaking people, their religious belief and value systems, the place of non-human components (song, dance, music instruments and ancestors) and practitioner behavioural patterns in *mapera* ceremonies to establish the need for this study.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that underpins this investigation is three dimensional. The theoretical framework is guided by notions that are ingrained in the fields of ethnomusicology and anthropology I am referring specifically to the following theories: historicism, multispecies ethnography, and communication. This is because these fields of study place preconceived conceptions of music in the cultures in which it is performed, putting the identities and behaviours of individuals in the communities at the centre of their focus.

The theory of historicism refers to cultural perceptions of the past (Stone, 2015). It calls attention to techniques such as rituals that people use to learn about the past, the principles that guide them and the performances and genres in which information about the past can be presented (Stewart, 2016). One of its chief characteristics is that it emphasises and explains people's identities through locating them in particular contexts (Bevir, 2012). The theory enlightens people's beliefs within the backdrop of their traditions that are defined pragmatically as particular components of the past to explain those beliefs (Stewart, 2016). The ideas that express the identity of a people in a social environment which includes culture, politics and economic life are ever evolving through time, hence historical. Thus, historicism is a mode of analysis in which all our thoughts about people, their culture, and their values are historically fundamentally oriented (Fullerton, 1987).

Mhiripiri (2008) argues in his dissertation that during the apartheid era, the Bushman and Zulu people of South Africa, among other marginalised ethnic groups, were treated as the "other" when exhibiting their own African arts, crafts, and cultural artefacts by those who controlled the

heritage and cultural tourism industry. He contends that the economic gains were realised not by these "others," but by those "whites" who monopolised the tourism business. However, as a result of interventions and changes in government economic policies, scholarly writings, politics, and global trends in cultural tourism, the Bushmen and Zulus, who were previously considered the "other," are now claimed to be the originators of the arts, cultural artefacts, and performances they create due to inscriptions on products that resemble their identity traced from precolonial era. Thus, historicising the Bushmen and Zulu cultural industry in South Africa for tourist attraction brought the notion that the indigenous marginalised ethnic groups are the owners of their cultural products and are directly involved in cultural tourism. As a result, historicising the Zulu cultural industry entails that they were tied to their cultural heritage, establishing ownership as cultural tourism beneficiaries (Mhiripiri, 2008; Ngema, 2013 and Mokoena, 2020).

I deployed historicism as a theoretical lens that informs the analysis of the history of the Shona, particularly the Zezuru-speaking people and interpretation of musical traditions and practices in their context. Through the ritual practices, song text is embedded in religious values, customs, attitudes and beliefs communicated between the living and *nyikadzimu* (spiritual world) (Reyes and Fernández-Llamazares, 2019 and Ekpo, et al, 2023). Thus, whenever analysing a song, its "texts put under study or enquiry should supplement and complement actual lived experience, that is to say there must be a relationship between the text and its social context, as well as how readers interpret the text" (Mhiripiri, 2008:71). Although I used historicism to trace the Zezuru-speaking people's origins and musical traditions, I discovered limitations in how it analyses non-human components (ancestors, song, dance, and musical instruments) and how humans interact with these components. Therefore, I deployed the theory of multispecies ethnography (Locke and Muenster, 2015 and McLauchlan, 2021).

The theory of multispecies ethnography decentred humans as the site of research and thus seeks to extend ethnography beyond the solely human realm (Locke and Muenster, 2015). The approach switches the attention from human to non-human components, recognizing their connection and inseparability from human life. According to multispecies theory (PaciniKetchabaw et al, 2016), I view participants as ancestors, song, musical instruments, dance, sacred huts, spiritual artefacts and humans who interact with these non-human components. These components interact with humans to determine how humans live in their geographical locations.

The ideas of multispecies ethnography guide this dissertation in that music and spirituality (as participants) are inseparable in the Zezuru people's cosmos. I perceive the ancestors as co-collaborators in my research to explain the relationship between song text and spirit manifestation, which leads me to believe that ethnomusicology needs more theoretical tools to do research, and multispecies ethnography may be the way forward. As a result, I contend that the non-human components are intertwined with the cultural life of the Zezuru people in that they determine the interaction that exists between the living and the living dead.

According to communication theory (Fornäs, 1997; Brown, 2008 and Serhaniuk et al, 2021) the contextual environment can be viewed as a process by which information is disseminated within a social grouping. I can investigate the phenomena of a singing culture within the context of *mapira* rituals with the assistance of this theory. In the context of cultural and religious commentary, I discuss how the lyrics of a song contribute to the overall meaning of the song. The process that involves the performance of a song and its reception by participants is explored critically in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the composite readings and meanings that can be drawn from any song text (Hall 1996; Grossberg 1997 and Ruby 2000).

The song text is the thing to be studied as a means of gaining some particular or general knowledge of the world. Brown (2008) elucidates that song texts are like a conduit transferring thoughts from the source to the receiver. In listening and participating during a song performance, practitioners extract the thoughts and feelings from the conveyed song words hence meaning is construed by the receiver. The function of song text is to enhance and reinforce behavioural conformity and stimulating compliance, to amplify and give salience to the messages being communicated. The above referred view implies that music is, psychobiologically speaking, an emotive reward and reinforcement, which acts to modulate arousal, affect and mood. In this study Brown's model emphasises the concept of manipulation and excitement.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the theory enables the researcher to analyse how song text as a musical product bridges the gap between the singer-performer (source) and the listener-performer (receiver) who ends with a psycho-physiological<sup>8</sup> effect as *homwe* (medium or host) in a *bira* performance.

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<sup>7</sup> Excitement in this context refers to manipulating behaviour.

<sup>8</sup> Psycho-physiological effect is viewed in this discussion as a noticeable reaction of a person participating in a ritual performance where songs are performed resulting in trance and/or manifestation.

I also use behaviourism concepts (Gelfand, 1987; Platvoet, 1999; Plancke, 2011) to assess the actions of practitioners who attend *mapira* ritual song performances. I focus on human behaviour during song performances among other things to evaluate participant behaviour using behaviourism concepts which are more relevant to this study. Behaviourism concepts view individuals' acts as unchangeable outcomes of their environment and everything in it that directly influences them (Cotton, 2019). When it comes to the environment, it is considered to be the setting where *mapira* events take place, that is, at a family homestead particularly the *Zezuru banya* (sacred hut) (fully described in Chapter 4). When songs are performed, individual participants show certain actions in response to the song performances. Thus, in using behaviourism concepts, I observe and analyse issues to do with physio-psychological effects, intensity<sup>9</sup> and duration of the spirit manifestation phenomenon.

Depending on the type of spirit and experience of the medium, behaviourism concepts assists me to analyse what happens to the body of the medium from the beginning of trance to full possession. Noticeable are physical changes in mediums such as twitches and body shakes, sometimes uttering sharp cries and moans. I observe these changes to assess the beginning of trance to full state of possession by the spirit medium. Also, the behaviourism concepts enables me to scrutinise the violent shivering, lack of body control and execution of movements unknown to the individual being possessed, which can continue for a long time during the *bira* event. I also used the concepts as a guide in directing the study to find the connectivity between song performance and the psycho-physiological behaviour of the hosts when they enter trance and full possession.

After introducing the theoretical aspects, it is necessary to examine the historical and religious past of the Shona people, paying particular attention to its sub-ethnic group of *Zezuruspeaking* people. This is a topic of utmost importance as it gives foundation to the study.

### 2.3 The historical and socio-religious background of the Shona people

Both history and anthropology provide evidence that the ancient African continent, like cultural distinctions and complexities of other civilisations (Europe and Asia) was home to human

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<sup>9</sup> Intensity refers to the seriousness of the song performance which leads the process of manifestation.

social, religious and cultural development, all the way from Egypt to Angola and from Timbuktu<sup>10</sup> to Guruuswa<sup>11</sup> (what is now present-day Zimbabwe). According to Tirivangana (2017), Africa's civilization consisted of a complex of civilizations that, in their organisation, displayed a remarkable formal and thematic homogeneity that can be detected in their (oral) literature and mythology. Idang (2015) further states that the indigenous peoples of Africa share a common religion, philosophy of life and culture. Aziza (2001: 31) asserts that:

Culture...refers to the totality of the pattern of behaviour of a particular group of people. It includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passages from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs.

Although culture is dynamic, this definition describes the state of the communities under study. Therefore, it entails that ethnic or group identity is brought about by different Zimbabwean regions, which differentiate a group of people from one another but are bound together by a common cultural template. As Africans, indigenous Zimbabweans have a shared history which is intertwined to give them identities which reflect common cultural behaviours.

From the points of view of Shona and Ndebele, the topic of Zimbabwe's current identity is not as simple as some people imagine. The Twa of Butwa State, who possessed San DNA, the Tonga, and eventually the Bantu people are regarded as Zimbabwe's founders (Mlambo and Parsons, 2018). Bantu people travelled from the Congo basin and the Great Lakes region to settle in the lower River Gwambe, now known as the Zambezi River, and the River Vambe, now known as the Limpopo River (Bostoen, 2018).

According to the findings of anthropologists, the Shona people, who include the Sena, Kalanga, and Remba or Lemba (who are referred to as black Jews), entered and settled in Zimbabwe by the late 1700s. Note that Shona is not a distinct language; it emerged only much later

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<sup>10</sup> Timbuktu is an ancient town in Mali where in mediaeval times, traders met to exchange salt from the Sahara Desert for gold, and ivory from the Sahel, which could be reached via the nearby Niger River (Tirivangana, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Guruuswa is an ancient name for areas now known to be covering most parts of Mashonaland East and West Provinces.

and gained prominence during the process of standardising the language used in (what was formerly known as) Southern Rhodesia (Doke and Litt, 2005). The Shona are a Bantu ethnic group that make up around 80% of the population in Zimbabwe. They may be found in the provinces of Mashonaland (East, Central, and West), Manicaland, Masvingo, and parts of the Midlands (Mungwini, 2019). These Shona people constitute the majority ethnicity in Zimbabwe and there is an estimated population of nine million people of this ethnic group globally (Chikomo and Maguraushwe, 2021). In addition to the Zezuru, the Budya, Karanga, Korekore, Manyika, and Ndau peoples are also included among the Shona peoples and their religious worldview relates to the subject of discussion in this investigation. Here is a [map](#) showing the geographical location of the Shona dialects to include the Zezuru-speaking people in Zimbabwe.

### 2.3.1 Who are the Zezuru-speaking people?

The participants pertinent to this dissertation are the Zezuru-speaking people (a subethnic group of the Shona people) who migrated from Guruuswa southwards and settled around Hwedza Mountains in the Mbire<sup>12</sup> area. The Zezuru clans who settled in Hwedza include the Hera popularly known by the totem *Mhofu yemukono* (male eland) who are believed to be the original owners of *mbira dzaVadzimu* (as the musical instrument is played to evoke ancestral spirits to manifest) and the Rozvi people known by the totem *Moyondizvo* (heart) who belong to the Ruzani and Soko families (Jones, 1992; Pikirayi, 1999). The above Zezuru lineages presently perform songs during their *bira* ritual ceremonies, and these songs narrate history, cultural norms and values, and spiritual nuances. Historicism stipulates that people are studied by locating them in their specific contexts which entails geographical locations and cultural complexities which determine how they practise their rituals. As suggested by Njoku (2020:160), “music in the African world served and continues to serve as a reservoir of historical knowledge passed down from one generation to another”. Thus, in order to understand the Zezuru traditions related to song performance and spirit manifestation in particular, historicism guides the researcher to link the Zezuru-speaking people’s belief and value system with their past to explain those traditions.

### 2.3.2 The Zezuru spiritual worldview

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<sup>12</sup> Mbire area dominates most parts of Hwedza to include Hwedza Mountains

"Africans are religious and have religious systems with a set of beliefs" that encompass musical performances (Mbiti, 1982:3). Indigenous Shona ethnic groups, particularly the Zezuruspeaking people, pay homage to *Mwari*, also known as the Supreme Being, through the spirits of their ancestors. According to multispecies ethnography, the Supreme Being (who is considered as existent) and ancestral spirits are considered as invisible but real family members of the Zezuru-speaking people who have a direct impact on their religious and cultural existence. They believe *Mwari* oversee the otherworldly realm, and this takes place within the framework of their various geographical locations.

Odozor (2019) concurs with Mbiti, that the concept of the divine was not introduced to Africa by missionaries or anybody else; that understanding of God in African religion was not dissimilar to the idea of God presented in Africa by Christian missionaries. As stated by Kaoma (2016), African traditional religion (ATR) promotes a set of spiritual beliefs and ideals in which spirit mediums play an essential role in the lives of African people. Odozor (2019) further states that rooted in the belief in God as the Creator, Africans believe in various dimensions of the created universe, such as visible and invisible (the spiritual realm), heavenly (skyward) and earthly (and in some ethnic groups there is a belief in the underworld).

As a Shona ethnic group, the Zezuru believe in the existence of a supernatural world. Gelfand (1987) investigates the thought patterns of the Shona people and how they relate to spiritualism. His discussion lays emphasis on the manner in which the social and spiritual link of the Shona people are formed to bring about morality and solidarity within the community through practising rituals where traditional songs are performed. The Zezuru believe that togetherness can be seen in their beliefs in ancestral spirits, pan-vitality, kinship, taboo, and totems (Bullock, 1950; Taringa, 2006 and Mabvurira et al, 2021), Therefore, it is thought that *Mwari* controls life, and in order to honour him, ancestral reverence is practised. Ancestral veneration of the Zezuru people is a religious custom that has historically been passed down from one generation to the next.

The Zezuru-speaking people, particularly those who follow African traditional religion, have a strong belief in a life after death, in which they are protected by ancestral or extraterrestrial spirits who hold power and influence to look after them. In this dissertation I argue that when sacred songs are played within the context of *mapira* ceremonies, Zezuru people believe that the spirits of the departed family members have mediums or hosts whom they can possess. This belief

as historicism entails, is based on both historical and religious evidence. When relevant songs are performed, a host or spirit medium demonstrates psychological behaviours, this often coincides with a transient alteration in the host's outward appearance.

Spirit manifestation can be deduced from the song performance which is part of rituals practised to appease ancestors. At the times that the ancestral spirits manifest themselves in *mapira* ceremonies, they hold *matare* (consultation gatherings) in order to connect with their living descendants. Kyker (2009:65) further states that, one of the ways in which the Zezuru attempt to bridge the gap between the living world and the world of their ancestors is through the use of song performance. Thus, the singing takes place within the context of ceremonies and serves a particular purpose (Kyker, 2009). It is thought in the Zezuru religious system that spirit mediums work as intermediaries between *Mwari* and the living, delivering messages, petitions, and praises from the living descendants to God. This is because it is believed that the spirit mediums are in contact with *Mwari*. Odozor (2019:99) sheds light on this assertion around the spirit mediums as intermediaries:

The belief in the invisible universe, consists of divinities, spirits, and the ancestors. These act as God's associates, assistants, and mediators, and they are directly involved in human affairs. Human beings maintain active and real relationships with the spiritual world, especially with the living dead, through offerings, sacrifices, and prayers. These act as a link between God and the human community.

In light of the aforementioned argument, everything done in Zezuru ways of life is tied to the protection of the Supreme Being through ancestral devotion. Thus, ancestral spirits serve as a conduit between the living and *Mwari*.

### 2.3.3 The Zezuru ancestral spirit hierarchy

Within the Zezuru cosmology there are various spirits of the departed. These spirits can be viewed in a hierarchical order. At the bottom level there is *mudzimu wemusha*, believed to be the family spirit, which can be traced to about two generations back (Perman, 2011). The *mudzimu wemusha* is the spirit guardian to the immediate family that survives. The spirit can be that of a relative of the nuclear family, that is, the dead father, mother, grandfather or grandmother (Shoko, 2011).

When the family members want to communicate with *Mwari* they organise a *bira* ceremony. During the *bira* where songs are performed, a spirit medium of the family is possessed

with the spirit of an ancestor (Zaretsky and Shambaugh, 2019). The possessed spirit medium will then talk directly with family members (Matiure, 2011). The spirit medium is chosen by the spirit from among members of the family. The person who is chosen is one who proves to be honest, respectful, forgiving, humble, polite, spiritually clean and not promiscuous<sup>13</sup>. The responsibility of the family spirit is to look after the immediate family members through promotion of correct behaviour and punishing those who misbehave (Larsen, 2014). Elders of the immediate family are generally advised by the spirit on matters of everyday life that affect them.

At the second level of the spiritual hierarchy comes clan spirits, which are referred to as *mhondoro* and *makombwe* (Rutsate, 2010). These are spirits that look after a region which is also known as *dunhu*. *Mhondoro* preside over regional issues such as rain requesting and war ceremonies whereas *makombwe* are curators for chieftainship and wellbeing. They are spirits of grandparents, and they date back to about four generations. *Mhondoro* and *makombwe* are owners of the land; they have distinct roles and responsibilities.

These clan spirits create and maintain balance among people of the same region or nation (Mapinga, 2018). They also create solidarity among people through the practice of certain clan rituals such as rain-requesting ceremonies (*mukwerera*). These spirits are believed to wield power and control over the germination, growth and good harvest of crops (Mavhura et al., 2013). Members of the clan provide a sample of their harvest to the *mhondoro* who acknowledges the readiness of the crop and then people are permitted to enjoy the yields after this process. These senior spirits are also diviners of social disasters, both national and personal; they interpret the wishes, whims, fancies and the displeasures of the people.

The *mhondoro*, *makombwe* and *midzimu* spirits are all offended by those who deviate from traditions, show greediness, lack of respect, and those who move away from their birthplace (village) resulting in lineage breakage (Madanhire, 2013). They are also offended by those who deny the ancestral calling to become *homwe*. Offending ancestral spirits is punishable by poverty, physical sickness, psychological disorders, and other forms of human suffering. *Mhondoro* and *makombwe* spirits are the last and highest level of great grandparents which cover the clans of the

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<sup>13</sup> The character and personality of a person considered spiritually clean is believed to be observed consistently by the spirit from childhood to adulthood for one to be a medium of that spirit (Matiure, 2011).

Shona people and are next to *Musikavanhu/Mwari*. These are believed to be the creators of the clans who can directly communicate with *Mwari* - the Supreme Being.

Apart from the ancestral spirits alluded to earlier, *shavi (e) (mashavi (e) - plural)* is accepted as an alien spirit which has alighted and selected its medium or host. It is important to note that ancestral spirits differ from alien spirits according to the Shona people. Machingura (2015,89) explains that alien spirits are spirits of animals such as *bveni* (baboon) or foreigners who died away from their home, having no living descendants they seek to express themselves by taking possession of unrelated persons. *Mashavi* spirits fall under the following classes: *changani*<sup>14</sup>, *dona*<sup>15</sup>, *madyozi*<sup>16</sup>, *majukwa*<sup>17</sup>, *njuzu*<sup>19</sup>, *zungu*<sup>18</sup> and *zvipunha*<sup>19</sup> (Maregedze, 2019). The *mashavi* generally make their first appearance known through a sickness engulfing its host (Shoko, 2009). A *n'anga*<sup>20</sup> is consulted by the elders of the sick person and the true source of the illness is recognized.

A *shavi* also known as *shave* is rejected on the basis of it being bad and if it is deemed good, it gets accepted through a *bira* ceremony. Some traditional songs are sung, and special clothes are procured and worn on such ritual occasions. The alien spirits that are rejected and considered bad or evil include “*shavi reuroyi* – the spirit of witchcraft, which is associated with evil propensities” (Machingura, 2015:5). Gelfand (1987:129) states that “usually the *mashavi* are accepted with the approval of the clan spirits.” The accepted *mashavi* are mostly concerned with improving the host’s talents on the art of doctoring (sacred practitioners), hunting, rain making in the event of a local drought, pottery, blacksmithing, singing and dancing and making of instruments (Zvinorwadza, 2002; Matiure, 2011).

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<sup>14</sup> Alien spirit from Shangani ethnic group.

<sup>15</sup> Alien spirit for cleanliness from the Ndau ethnic group.

<sup>16</sup> Ndebele alien spirit for healing.

<sup>17</sup> Rain-requesting alien spirits from Karanga-speaking people.

<sup>19</sup> Mermaid alien spirits from the ocean.

<sup>18</sup> White-man’s spirit

<sup>19</sup> Alien spirits from children who died at childhood.

<sup>20</sup> *N'anga* is a diviner who can foresee and has powers to heal ailments believed to be caused by the evil spirits.

It is also possible for one host to serve as an ancient spirit referred to as *gombwe* with several *mashavi* spirits. Another spirit known in Shona religion is *ngozi* (the avenging spirit) (Musanga, 2017). *Ngozi* is the spirit of the person “who was either murdered or indebted or of a mother who was not given the motherhood cow as dowry when her daughter got married” (Shoko, 2001:62). The belief in *midzimu*, *mhondoro*, and *mashavi* spirits hinge on their responsibilities in the welfare of the Zezuru-speaking people with *Mwari* as the overseer.

#### 2.3.4 *Mwari* – The Supreme Being

The Zezuru religious system is characterised by a monotheistic belief; there is *Mwari* (one God) who is also known as *Musiki/Musikavanhu* (the creator or first cause), or *Samasimba* (God Almighty or the Supreme Being) and he is regarded as the sustainer of the universe (Chavhunduka, 2002; Mpofu, 2003). At the top of the spiritual hierarchy, the Zezuru-speaking people consider God, “to be living, spirit, invisible, immutable, eternal, almighty, holy, omniscient, and good” (Jonas et al, 1991:291). God is further interpreted variously as the owner of the universe (*Nyadenga*); he who turns things upside down (*Chipindikure*); the one who provides for good or bad (*Chirazamaura*); the great pool (*Dzivaguru*); and the one who existed for the first time (*Mutangakugara*) (Gelfand, 1987; Sorsdahletal, 2010). The Zezuru-speaking people also believe in *Mwari-Matonjeni* who is believed to dwell in Matopo Hills, Matabeleland in Zimbabwe. He is believed to be the “God of rain (*Mwari wemvura*)” (Rutsate, 2010:30). It is also believed that “*Mwari* is the overseer of all life experiences of the Shona people” (Matiure, 2011:8).

The belief in God serves in the daily life of the Zezuru-speaking people, as one of the means to interpret certain occurrences, like catastrophe and other exceptional or negative events, and to understand the origin of humans and life in general (Ranger, 1985). The worship of God belongs to the Zezuru people’s secular or sacred ceremonies in which songs are used as a way of communication between the living, the departed and God depending on the context of the ceremony (Gunda, 2007). Thus, Zezuru-speaking people believe fervently that *Mwari* is the giver of life and is given the utmost respect through the practice of *mapira* ritual ceremonies where songs are performed to enhance communication between the living and the living dead.

#### 2.3.5 Mapira ceremonies

African traditional life has respect for rituals, social organisation, moments of relaxation, reflection, happiness or celebrations, exertion, loss or sadness expressed through music and dance as evidenced in *mapira ematendo* (Parrinder, 1983; Njoku, 2020). The Zezuru-speaking people venerate their ancestral spirits through performance of different types of *mapira* ritual ceremonies (Machinga, 2011; Machingura, 2015). The following summative classification of *mapira* is determined by the purpose of ritual, type and experience of spirit medium (Matiure, 2011, 32). *Mukwerera*, the rain-requesting ceremony, is a *bira* for rain spirits referred to as *mbonga* (female spirit) and *nyusa* (male spirit) who request rain from God (*Mwari wemvura*). The other *bira* ritual ceremony is *doro renyota* which is for *mudzimu wemusha* (the family spirit) and is performed to quench the ancestor's thirst. This traditional brew is consumed whilst holding their advisory and counselling duties. *Bira rekugadza mambo* is a ceremony for clan spirits meant to celebrate the success of a chief following the death of the predecessor. To welcome the spirit of the dead to the living descendants, a cleansing *bira* ceremony referred to as *kurova guva* is performed (Vambe, 2009, 132). Another important ceremony among the Zezuru is the *bira rediramhamba*. This is performed to sacrifice a bull to the chosen ancestors. In this dissertation my argument is centred on how song text enhances spirit manifestation in these *bira* ceremonies paying particular attention to *bira rematendo*. *Bira rematendo* as previously explained is meant to thank the family or rain spirits for good harvests, protection, wealth accumulation and general well-being.

It is important to note that according to Zezuru beliefs it is a taboo to perform these *mapira* ceremonies in the month of November which is also referred to as *mbudzi*<sup>21</sup> (Matiure, 2011). This is the month in which the ancestral spirits are believed to be resting after working for the whole year and it is the time when people will be farming in their fields. In addition to not being done in November, the *bira* could be performed during the day rather than at night as an all-night ceremony, depending on the reason for doing it. For one to attend any one of the abovementioned *bira* ceremonies depends on the context of the ceremony. Thus, there are *mapira* ceremonies which are attended by both men and women, and those which are attended by men or women only.

### 2.3.6 Spirit Veneration through song performance

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<sup>21</sup> November, referred to as *mbudzi*, meaning goats, is the month when goats multiply.

An attempt has been made by some researchers to provide written information about the Shona people's religious ceremonies focusing on traditional songs in relation to spirit manifestation. Although much has been said on the types of sacred ceremonies with particular emphasis on their purposes in Zezuru ritual ceremonial life, I argue that there is limited information on the role of song text in enhancing spirit manifestation. Machingura (2015) explains stages and processes of a *bira* ceremony where *midzimu* and *mashavi* manifest when songs are sung. This discussion focused on processes in ritual performances with a limitation on the meaning of song texts. Andrew Tracey (1970) and Matiure (2011) have also looked at Shona idioms that are expressed through *mbira* music in relation to spiritualism. They reiterate that it is the *mbira* sound that enhances the connection between the dead and the living.

In his monograph, "The Soul of Mbira", Berliner (1993) outlines how the Shona people pray to *Musikavanhu* through *mapira* ceremonies where *mbira* music is central to evoke spirit manifestation. Berliner (2006) notes that there is a great deal of freedom in the vocal parts referred to as *huro* (glottal), *mahon'era* (yodelling) and *kudeketera* (hocketing), and participants join in the performance of singing at will. Upon scrutinising the role of traditional voice, both high and low pitches, the researcher provides the need for further research on the influence of texts of traditional songs to evoke spirit manifestation. Bourdillon (2000) gives a holistic overview of Shona religion that encompasses the ritual practices where songs are performed for spirit manifestation. However, the overview sidelines the analysis of the role of song text in spirit manifestation.

Jules-Rosette (1975) discusses the use of songs in managing the ritual contexts of the indigenous John Marange Apostolic Church founded in former Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Singing during occasions of worshipping constitutes the core ritual practice and is used to create a conducive environment for the presence of the Holy Spirit. The songs sung combine traditional Bantu rhythmic patterns with a unique apostolic variety. Often drawn from biblical themes, the songs are composed by members as spiritually inspired pieces. The main thrust of song texts is to formulate aspects of doctrine and morality. The Christian perspective on the use of songs during Marange church services is for praising and worshiping God whereas in African tradition religion for the purpose of evoking alien and ancestral spirits. Thus, in this case the idea of communication stipulates that music brings behavioural conformity and compliance in the context of the congregation. Similarly, Hoelsing (2012) researched how song lyrics articulate mediumship and

spiritual patronage in *kusamira* ritual performance among the Baganda and Basoga people of Uganda. Analysed song texts in *kusamira* ritual performance revealed praise names and symbols of power among the mediums.

Nketia's 2013 monograph, "African and African-American Music Traditions," also extensively focused on the role of music in traditional African societies. He suggests that "traditional music is regarded as a cohesive and spiritually potent force" (Nketia, 2013:17). Similar to the above discussions, "the Nkoya people (along the Zambezi near the Zambian border with Angola), sing songs that emphasise death and dying during royal ritual practices" (Brown, 2008:44). Hence, because of its pervasive nature and integral role in everyday life, African traditional music exists in various art forms which fall within the following classificatory context: ritual, ceremonial, social, recreational and functional (Agawu, 2003). In this regard, I argue that singing of special songs is designed to give opportunities for expressions during ritual contexts. Therefore, it is my intention to find out the role of song texts sung during ancestral veneration and what causes psycho-physiological effects on the spirit medium during the trancepossession process hence that allows for manifestation in a *bira* ritual performance

### 2.3.7 *Kusvikirwa* – Trance and/or spirit possession

The relationship between music, trance and spirit possession has long fascinated those involved in ethnomusicological, religious, psychological, and anthropological research (Mbiti, 1982; Gelfand, 1987; Perman, 2011; Odozor 2019; de Oliveira and Maraldi, 2021). However, this relationship has resulted in extensive discussions which sought diversified methodological and theoretical approaches to scientifically rationalise and culturally contextualise the phenomenon. To contextualise the indigenous understanding of the relationship between song, trance and possession, I first explain trance and or possession based on views from the aforementioned disciplines and the communication model. The model reiterates that music is a communicative device that serves as an essential component of systems of persuasion and manipulation.

Depending on the metaphysical and cosmological lenses through which this phenomenon is observed, *kusvikirwa*, also known as trance or possession, can be understood in a variety of ways. The Pentacostal philosophy holds that holy spirits occupy those who are believed to be saints. In contrast, possession in African traditional religion is based on lineage; one is possessed by ancestor spirits, regarded in Christianity are wicked where the dead await resurrection through

the second coming of the Son of God, who is Christ (Chikomo and Maguraushe, 2021). As defined by Rashed (2020), spirit possession is a process in which a non-corporeal agent is involved with a human host. This process takes place in the human body. This results in the displacement of the host's agency as well as their identity. According to Cohen (2008), this is a concept that involves a shift or replacement of the host's identity. The host's physical appearance remains unchanged, but the invisible spirit takes over consciousness. Therefore, the idea of possession involves the substitution of the host's self-identification with another identity. The host assumes the identity of the spirit. Thus, when possessed the host is identified by the name of the ancestral spirit and not by their birth name. However, considering these perspectives from an African point of view, *kusvikirwa* is seen as ecstasy (Waliaula and Mangena, 2019:299), which implies a trembling entry of the spirit of the dead into a living being or host (*homwe*), so that the dead may interact with the living (Machingura, 2015).

When a person dies, he or she is buried, the body decomposes, losing speech vessels. The spirit leaves the body without the speech vessels. These speech vessels include the mouth, oral cavity, and breath, which are all necessary for speech coordination. In this manner, on possession the spirit enters inside the body of the living host in order to gain access to the organs that control speech. When they enter, it means entirely taking over someone else and forcibly inserting oneself into that other. This *kusvikirwa* (trance and/or possession) has been described as an experience of a different kind of self, a more emotional self (Becker, 2004). It is also described as a state of consciousness that is accompanied by observable psychological, physiological, and behavioural variables, such as hypnotic, mental absorption, brainwashing, and mystical experiences (Ward, 1984; Goodman, 1990). In relation to the *mudzimu*, which is an ancestral spirit, to demonstrate that there is a different person in the body, changes in speech and behaviour occur during the state of ecstasy. The experience of euphoria is accompanied by a set of sounds unique to each *mudzimu*. In most cases, the *kudzvova* (roaring) that occurs during ecstasy can be used to determine whether the spirit is male or female.

Typically, male spirits can be identified by their ability to whistle. If a male spirit was to possess a female, it would be possible to observe that, upon full possession, the female would whistle, sit with her legs open like a man, and ask for traditional beer, *bute* (snuff), and *tsvimbo* – (knobkerrie/club), all of which are spiritual implements. In addition, the female would ask for a

pair of trousers so that she sits freely like a man. Trance can be explained as a state of altered consciousness that is characterised by outward activity and much internal activity of the host or spirit medium (Schmidt and Huskinson, 2010). The signs of trance are psychological disorders experienced by a host or spirit medium during a period of manifestation are described in participants behaviour. While trance is interpreted in terms of psychological and physiological variables, possession, by contrast, is appraised by religious beliefs and traditions which ethnographers studying spirit practices must interpret (Ward, 1984; Platvoet, 1999 and Seligman, 2018).

Possession and trance appear to be interchangeable; possession always involves trance, and trance is always framed in terms of possession, therefore possession trance (Tsintjilonis, 2006). A spirit medium, on the other hand, may experience trance solely in the absence of spirit possession. It follows that spirit possession is often defined as the grip exercised on a human being by more powerful external forces or entities, which may be ancestral spirits or divine spirits of foreign origin, or beings that are both ontologically and ethnically alien (Boddy, 1994). At full possession, the spirit medium exhibits a wide range of behaviours, including involuntary motions that resemble epileptic convulsions (Gwimbi, 2009); mutism, incomprehensible language known as *kukonya* or *kudzvova*, and voice change. Thus, the relationship between music performance and spirit manifestation is dependent on the trancer being socialised into culturally conditioned specific modalities of forging that connection, in this case, a *bira* ceremony (Jankowsky, 2007). As noted in the previous paragraphs, this relationship between music and spirit manifestation has been studied ethnographically among African peoples such as the Shona of Zimbabwe (Berliner, 1978), the Venda of South Africa (Blacking, 1985), and the Malagasy of Madagascar (Emoff, 2003) to name a few.

This literature search assisted the researcher in identifying the gap that exists between song and the spiritual world. This prompted an interest in investigating many aspects of the Zezuru-speaking people's way of life regarding the belief in life after death. As a result, there is a need for this research to interrogate the influence in song text or words that invokes ancestral and alien spirits in Zezuru sacred events like *mapira*, where living descendants interact with the spirits of their departed family members.

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter discussion, I gave an overview of the literature as well as the study's theoretical framework. I reviewed subjects related to the Zezuru-speaking people's cultural and religious thought systems. The Zezuru-speaking people's historical background as well as several thought systems are discussed in order to track the past and present generations who continue to practise their musical traditions. According to the literature search, the Zezuru-speaking people believe in life after death. There is a profound bond between the living and the dead. God rules over the spiritual sphere; He is almighty and is thought to be the source of life and death. The *mhondoro* (clan spirits) believed to have the power to watch over members of the same clan and to connect them to God are believed to be second on the spiritual hierarchy. *Midzimu* are family spirits who rule over family safety and well-being. *Midzimu* and *mashavi* (alien spirits) are on the same level, and the alien spirits regarded as foreign spirits assist the family spirits in providing wealth and protection from evil spirits.

In addition, the chapter discusses the broad concept of a *bira* in the Zezuru religious thought system. Historically, it was widely assumed that Zezuru *mapira* ceremonies were held all night as ritual activities dominated by mbira music performances for the sake of spirit manifestation. According to a related literature search, the Zezuru *mapira* ritual ceremonial life is more intricate and subtle than this commonly held view. I argue that *mapira* ceremonies are not only held at night with mbira music performance, but they are also held during the day with song performance depending on the concerns of the family hosting the ritual practice. The major focus of *bira* proceedings includes song performances. Songs are performed with the use of musical instruments and dance. The state of trance and or possession occurs during song performance, and on full manifestation the living are able to communicate with their ancestral spirits. According to the reviewed literature, songs are played during the activities of a *bira* ritual, prompting the necessity for this investigation into how song performance contributes to spirit manifestation.

The theories that serve as a foundation for this research are the primary emphasis of this chapter. The discussion of this research was guided by historicism (Stone, 2015), multispecies ethnography (Locke, 2015), and communication (Brown, 2008) models respectively. When it comes to the study of a people's history, the historicist perspective maintains that the focus should be on humans as the pivot. As a result, one might gain some insight into the culture of a people by studying the traditions of their ancestors. As such, historicism directs the research towards an acute

and pervasive awareness of change across time to gain an understanding of the religious and cultural thought systems to which the Zezuru-speaking people adhere. One might garner a knowledge of the *mapira* ceremonies practised by the Zezuru-speaking people by first learning about their culture's past.

Although historicism implies a people's past, the notion of multispecies ethnography is used to enhance concepts in this dissertation. The multispecies theory calls for a multifaceted approach to understanding how non-human components such as ancestral spirits, song texts, singing, musical instruments, and dance influence human life. In this thesis discussion, the idea is used to demonstrate how such non-human components influence the Zezuru people's interaction with the living dead.

This study is also centred on communication theory. This theory examines the ways in which the lyrics of a song contribute to the overall meaning of the song. The process that includes the performance of a song and its reception by participants is investigated critically in order to acquire a full understanding of the complex interpretations and meanings that can be extracted from any song text (see Chapter 5). This understanding can then be applied to other musical contexts. The texts (lyrics or words) of the song are the primary subject matter being investigated as a means of acquiring either specific or general knowledge about any music culture. Brown (2008) explains that the lyrics of a song are like a conduit in that they carry thoughts from the originator to the recipient. During the process of listening to and engaging in a song performance, participants take the thoughts and feelings from the words of the song that are being delivered, which results in the receiver construing the meaning of the song. In this dissertation I argue that song text serves the purpose of enhancing and reinforcing behavioural conformance and motivating compliance, as well as amplifying and drawing attention to the messages that are being expressed.

Another approach that serves as a foundation for the investigation is observation of participant behaviour during song performances. The conduct of participants throughout the *mapira* ceremonies that are being described is the primary emphasis of this concept. Participants dance in the *bira* as the songs are performed, accompanied by musical instruments, and those who are hosts or mediums exhibit various behaviours as the song performance becomes more intense. The researcher is given the ability to analyse behaviour modification through participant observations. Some physiological shifts are said to occur in a person when they go into trance or

are possessed. These behavioural differences can be heard in the groaning and bodily twitching, as well as the voice which changes from usual when the host is not possessed. The possessed individual takes on the persona of a completely different person. Therefore, the researcher keeps observing and analysing (refer to Chapter 3) any changes in behaviour (shown by means of gestures) that occurred in relation to song performance.

The chapter concludes by examining trance and possession in order to describe certain behaviours displayed by practitioners who participate in *mapira* rites in which songs are performed in honour of ancestor spirits.

## **Chapter 3: Conducting research whilst spirits rest**

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on presenting the strategies used for the research design, population and sampling, methodology, data collection techniques and analysis. The research was conducted

according to a qualitative research design which included an ethnographic approach that had several different instruments used for data collection. The chapter also investigates possible strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of the design, as well as ethical considerations.

### 3.2 The design

A research design is the researcher's overall plan for obtaining answers to the research questions (Sileyew, 2019). It focuses on the type of study planned, methods involved detailing how the study is conducted, research instruments and techniques to be employed. According to Akhta and Islamia (2016) a research design is a master plan specifying the methods and procedure for collecting and analysing the needed information. Thus, a research design is in fact, a blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data.

The guiding principles that shaped this dissertation emanated from a qualitative ethnographic approach. It should be noted that the study does not purely qualify as 'anthropological' or 'ethnographic' because of one critical reason. The researcher did not fully meet the requirement of long-term participant observation. However, the uninterrupted time which I spent doing participant observation is arguably the cornerstone of ethnographic methodology (O'reilly, 2012). I chose this approach because it focuses on how participants experience and interact with a phenomenon at a given point in time and in a particular context (Levy, 2015). This approach gave leverage to the researcher to make observations, conduct interviews, record field notes as well as taking videos and still photographs rather than merely being confined to the library, archival and desk-top research.

### 3.3 Population and sampling procedures

Qualitative ethnographic studies tend to use small samples and focus on in-depth understanding and attain richness about people relations and information received, rather than on representativeness of the population (Shelemay, 1997; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Gobo, 2011 and Wilkinson, 2013). Crouch and McKenzie (2006:397) proposed that a small sample helps a researcher build and maintain close relationships with participants, resulting in improved open and frank exchanges of information. Moreover, small sample size studies generally involve more contact time with participants to be observed and interviewed (Mason, 2010:343). Some qualitative research methodologists have given general guidelines and ranges for sample sizes. Patton

(2002:1192) suggested that single digit numbers, if selected purposefully, can generate meaningful and insightful in-depth data. Morse (2000:539) suggested 6–10 participants and Creswell (2011:536) suggested 10 or fewer participants as adequate sample sizes.

Since my main focus is to articulate the relationship between song text and spirit manifestation, the method of sampling used follows that the researcher selects respondents directly linked to the context of *mapira* ceremonies. For this research study, the target population included music cultural bearers who sang traditional songs, played traditional instruments and danced, performed as spirit mediums (*homwe*) and the invisible participants (as explained in the multispecies theory, Chapter 2), the ancestral spirits who manifested through their *homwe*. These participants reside under the headship of Tofa Munzverengi (who died after researcher's data collection) under chief Kuvandikira in Hwedza District, Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe. Atkinson (2017) refers to this type of sampling as purposive. This sample design involves selection of participants that represent the population (Kothari, 2007).

Initially, I had planned to have a sample of more than five spirits and that was an oversight because on attending *mapira*, spirit manifestation varied depending on those who participated. In one of the *bira* ceremonies, for instance, only one participant was possessed. In another case, a *bira* was conducted and no manifestation took place. I also had anticipated focusing on five *vashauri* (song leaders) who were able to sing the traditional songs during *mapira* ceremonies. In these ritual ceremonies, there were only two *vashauri* (song leaders) who proved to be experts in singing traditional songs up to the climax of the ritual performances. Two *mabandangoma* (drummers) were selected as respondents as they showed virtuosity in playing the *ngoma* (drum) during the *mapira* ritual performances. One *marovahosho* (hand rattle player) who happened to be a spirit medium to a *njuzu* spirit were also my respondents. However, during the five *mapira ematendo* ceremonies I attended, only three ceremonies experienced spirit manifestation. According to one respondent, when there is no manifestation, elders of the concerned family or clan consult a *n'anga* (diviner) for guidance on whether there were procedural infringements in executing the ritual practice. I selected those respondents based on who were known to be good instrumental performers and singers among the attendees. During the performance, those selected respondents would take over from those who would have warmed up the stage and set the mood for manifestation.

It was a taboo to use ethnographic equipment in the presence of some spirits. Through familiarisation field trips, before attending the ritual ceremonies, I had the opportunity to explain to the elders of the families the intention of my research and sought permission to attend *mapira* ceremonies. As a result of creating a good rapport, I had the opportunity and privilege to be allowed to not only attend the live ritual performances but to video record and interview the invisible participants who happen to be two *makombwe* (clan spirits), one *mudzimu* (family spirit) and one *shavi* (alien spirit) who were evoked by song performance.

For the purpose of this study, I concentrated on this small area and managed to attend five *mapira* ritual performances. These *mapira* ritual ceremonies were held within the same area of Hwedza between the periods of September to October 2021. I observed that each ceremony could be attended by approximately fifty participants. However, during performances inside the *banya* (sacred hut), those who could fit in the *banya* would participate until one decides to leave. Oakely (2004) states that researchers usually seek a representative sample, as they often have only sufficient resources and time to study a small number of people. I selected this field because *mapira* ritual performances were still being held, where traditional songs play a pivotal role in evoking spirit manifestation.

### 3.4 Research methodology

Methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study (Patel and Patel, 2019). Methodology considers the logic behind the methods used in the research and explains the pros and cons of using a particular method or technique so that research results are capable of being evaluated by the researcher or others (Pandey and Pandey 2021). This research employed participant observation, informal conversational or unstructured interviews, audio-video recordings and still photographs. The individual instruments used in this research design are discussed in this section of the research beginning with participant observation.

#### 3.4.1 Participant observation

In capturing relevant data from the purposefully selected sample, I used participant observation which enables researchers to do more than simply observe the culture of groups and communities; they gain the opportunity to immerse themselves within the complex minutiae of a community (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016). As it is crucial for effective fieldwork, I used participant observation to collect empirical data in *mapira* ritual events. I took part in *mapira ematendo*

performances where I sang together with participants. During song performances, I would listen to how songs were sung and would join other participants by singing, clapping, dancing and in some instances whistling. Fetterman (2009) states that, the most important element of fieldwork is being there; to observe, ask insightful questions and write down what is seen and heard.

Through participation and observation, data about participants, experiences and reflections during the performances was recorded in field notes. In other words, in the field notebook I described those things that I observed and learned about both human and non-human participants and places where the ritual performances were taking place. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2014) state that, writing of these field notes force researchers to attend to everyday happenings which they may otherwise bypass among people living in a particular setting. I designed an observation guide which was structured to follow the demands of the research objectives. This guide is a written document with items which entail what to observe and it enables collection of data about participants' gestures, musical instruments played, attire and props within the natural behaviour of the group (Kothari, 2004). There are some probable demerits of participant observation, such as lack of observation control, the observer can become intimate with the participants hence compromising the results that will be realised and it is time consuming (Mouton, 2009). To solve this shortfall, I used informal conversational or unstructured interviews. These interviews compelled me to seek information from participants which augmented what would have been observed during participant observation.

#### 3.4.2 Informal conversational interview

Interviews were used to explore views and understanding of participants about *bira rematendo* ritual practice where songs are performed. "Interviews are appropriate in investigations where depth of meaning is important, and the research is primarily focusing on gaining insight and understanding" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2014:345). "Interviews are also appropriate in investigations where the significance of context is recognized" (Patton and Horton 2008:563). In this research, I used informal conversational or unstructured interviews as well as formal interviews.

Murthy (2008) asserts that an ethnographer relies on informal conversational interviewing as it provides the context for an exchange of views rather than a one-way flow of information. Through informal conversational interviews, I explored views about song and spiritualism. Informal conversational or unstructured interviews were also administered to gather data from the

practitioners as this technique is flexible and dynamic (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016). Unstructured interviews encourage reflexivity from both the interviewer and interviewees (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2014). Thus, the interviewer and the respondents explored their own beliefs about song and spirit manifestation.

Most face-to-face interviews were conducted between twelve noon and one o'clock – the time when the Zezuru-speaking people believe that the spirits rest and do not possess their hosts – and the time when the ceremony would end around four o'clock in the afternoon. I interviewed practitioners during this time as I did not want to interfere with *mapira* procedures of the concerned days. Some of the interviews for music instrument players and singers were conducted soon after the *bira* performances, between four and five o'clock in the afternoon. The reason for interviewing participants soon after the ritual performance is that I wanted to capture the data whilst the participants were still recalling what had happened in the events.

Interviews for the possessed hosts or mediums were held when I was given an opportunity to converse with the manifested spirits during the *bira* event. Thus, in full possession of the host I would wait to be given an opportunity by the intermediary of the spirit to conduct the interview in what could be viewed as an appropriate time for such an activity. The intermediary was the one who would first inform the manifested spirit through the spirit medium about my intention to conduct the interview. The spirit possessing the host would indicate the time when I could conduct an interview. Usually, the interviews were conducted after *matare* that is the time when the spirit medium engaged the family gathering in discussions about their welfare. Interview questions were designed so that they addressed the research questions, which guided the researcher when interviewing the respondents.

### 3.4.3 Audio-video recording and still photography

I used video and audio recordings as ethnographic tools to capture the experiences and reflections of participants. The footage of a Sony DCR-HC52E video camera recorder was used to produce a short ethnographic film to support the research findings. Supporting the integration of written text and film Baily (2010:16) says:

Filmmaking should be regarded as only part of the research, and the film as the only product used to communicate the kind of information that film does well and writing does not. Film

and written texts should be mutually illuminating; the written texts enhance our understanding of what to see, and the visual image makes what we read more comprehensible and meaningful.

Alongside the video camera recorder, an HTC F3188 still camera was used to take photographs of both musical and non-musical items. The still camera was useful in creating a photographic record of specific participants' behaviour. "The camera was also an eye-opener to provide rapid entry into the community" (Fetterman, 2019:11). Although I had secured permission from the three families to use electronic devices in the actual ritual performances which were held on different occasions, I was told to wait for the confirmation from the manifested ancestral spirit. These ancestral spirits which permitted me to proceed my interviews during ritual ceremonies included the spirit of *sekuru* (a male spirit of a great-great ancestor) Chidavanyika from the Munzverengi family, *sekuru* Mushayabasa from the Manjowe family and *sekuru* Nembire Muchinganji from the Mukupwa family.

At first, I never thought of getting permission from the spirit mediums, that is, during the time they would have fully possessed their hosts to conduct *matate* (consultation sessions). It was quite an experience to interact with ancestral spirits during my participation in the ritual ceremonies. Prior to the ceremonies I requested permission from the living family elders who presided over these rituals to attend the ceremonies. I was also to be cleared by the concerned spirits during the ceremonies after being granted permission by elders to participate. This clearance was made possible by a gatekeeper who would act as a liaison between the manifested spirits and myself. The spirits agreed to let me attend the ritual performances after we discussed the study's principal goal.

In some instances, I would give the video camera to an assistant as he participated and observed the performances. On interviewing respondents, the assistant also captured the dialogues between me and the manifested ancestral spirits. This gave the researcher an opportunity to interact with the participants whilst writing field notes. However, to avoid disruptions on the smooth running of the performances and attending to the camera, I made participants aware of the use of the device in advance. Before the performance I openly showed the participants the camera and took some sample shots of the families.

#### 3.4.4 Data analysis

A qualitative data analysis is a “process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Bazeley, 2007: 181). In this research, the process involved gathering and highlighting important segments of data that relate to participants’ experiences and perceptions about song and spirit manifestation in *bira* ritual practice. Textual analysis was used to scrutinise songs to reveal meanings embedded within the texts (Atkinson, 2017). Textual analysis entails examining and interpreting the meaning of words (Leff, 1992 and McKee, 2003) to unveil connotations as well as contextual, literal and figurative meanings. Meaning-making and interpretative tools (meaning of words are attached to clues from the world around the people) enriched the analysis of the messages (McKee, 2003) put across by songs performed for rituals at cultural contexts.

As stipulated in the communication model, “music’s uses must be analysed in sender’s intentions, receiver’s actions and the social functions underlying communication” (Brown, 2008), I adopted Norman Fairclough’s (2003) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and examined the meanings of words in the songs. Reliability and appropriateness of CDA as a method becomes effective as the researcher pays attention to the texts and the nuances that are expressed in them (Rogers et al, 2007). Krause (2008) encourages analysts to adopt a holistic approach to determine the importance of the text, and not concentrate on a few lines or segments in it. Considering this, I also heeded Onyebadi’s recommendation (2017:62) to understand song texts within the context of the time, as well as the setting in which the songs were composed and performed including their target audience.

For the transcription and analysis of songs and ethnographic film production, sequence shots and thematic coding was used. Baily (2010:10) suggests that “sequence shots are essential for filming musical performances, where we want to see, as far as possible, complete and uninterrupted sequences of performances.” Collier and Collier (1986) aver that camera pictures are also useful to enable the analysis of field observations. To elicit meaning from data about spirit manifestation the researcher used “intra-cultural field feedback” (Baily 2009:10). Thus, the ethnographic film was screened to the practitioners who sang the songs and the spirit mediums in Hwedza. They were given a chance to comment on their performances and actions. The researcher asked further questions on how sacred ceremonial songs related to spirit manifestation in *mapira*.

Transcribed songs were analysed using cultural analysis as advocated by Blacking (2000). The approach underscores description of traditional music using what he calls deepstructures.

In the above referred approach both musical and non-musical aspects were analysed. Barz (2008) proposes the use of different font texts to represent the researcher's experiences, reflections and interpretations. This method was used in analysing and interpreting the researcher's experiences and feedback interviews on the meaning of song text in relation to the receiver's actions. Following the completion of the data analysis, the researcher took advantage of the opportunity to conduct follow-up interviews with the participants. The information that was acquired by the researcher was then presented to the practitioners for additional commentary, which served to validate the findings. The researcher drew his conclusions on the findings of the research after going through these feedback interviews.

### 3.5 Ethical considerations

I anticipated any ethical issues that might arise during the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2011 and Creswell and Poth, 2016). Creswell emphasises the need to protect research participants through developing their trust, promoting the integrity of the research, guarding against misconduct and any improper association that might reflect on their institutions and cope with new arising challenges.

In this study, I employed the following ethical considerations:

1. Informed consent: permission was sought before researching from relevant authorities and participants "to gain a certain level of trust and openness, to be accepted as a nonjudgmental and nonthreatening person" (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2016: 96).
2. The authorities and participants were made fully aware of the researcher's intention to carry out research on them and how and where the findings were to be used (Wanyama, 2012).
3. Guaranteed safety, confidentiality and freedom of voluntary involvement to the participants. Those participants whose names were mentioned in this study expressed consent to be published. Tracy (2013: 263) asserts, "Participants must know that their participation is voluntary and understand how to opt out."
4. Advised participants to feel free to decline to answer any questions, at any time during interviews.

5. Abided by the research ethics as required by the Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town.
6. Informed the participants of the data collection methods and member checking processes.
7. Made the data interpretations available to the participants.

### 3.6 Limitations

The primary methodological disadvantage of my research is also its strength. The research is rooted in the anthropology and ethnography that support ethnomusicological studies, but it also focuses heavily on textual and content analysis. Textual and content analysis of song performance implies that I treat even brief acts that are not generally associated with those things we touch but are just audio-visual, such as song performances and dance. I did not appear to emphasise any conventionally recognized ethnographic research methodology thoroughly. Thus, I do not want to use psychology, anthropology and ethnography in their totality, but rather to focus on key components that allow me to investigate specific communicative tendencies between the world of the living and the supernatural world as postulated in ritual ceremonies. One such crucial feature is an ongoing series of loosely connected but necessary fieldwork activities that make ethnomusicological studies empirically plausible in places where researchers have not stayed long enough (Mhiripiri, 2008).

I am cognizant of the limits associated with the frequency and duration of interaction with community practitioners and respondents, as well as the difficulties associated with establishing trust and rapport. My thesis is written after encountering *mapira* ritual ceremonies in the communities under study as an “insider” for many years and I have maintained contact with my gatekeeper with whom I communicated through regular phone calls. This continuous communication made it possible for me to receive an assuring update of ritual ceremonies, which were taking place in communities under study.

Because of the potential difficulties (to include language barriers, taboos and custom differences) associated with remaining within the population being studied for an extended period, many ethnographers spend most of their academic careers living within and frequently travelling to the communities that they intend to research (Mhiripiri, 2008). Some researchers choose to work with the same community for more than a decade in order to demonstrate to both themselves and their scholarly counterparts that they are capable of performing the tasks of rigorous ethnography to

collect empirical data (Martos-Garcia, Jose Devis-Devis, and Sparkes, 2022). Others choose to work with several groups. When all details are laid down, the importance of research lies not in its number but in its quality. However, ethnographic methodologies and approaches appear to have rescued me in my field problems by incorporating supporting evidence gathered during fieldwork. Textualization of song performances remains the mainstay of my methodology and it locates me in ethnographic studies where evidence is drawn from fieldwork. Instead of limiting myself to the literature from ethnomusicological and anthropological studies documents like books, videos, and published articles, I systematically observed and recorded human behaviour as well as performative activities from fieldwork.

Another major limitation of this study was the use of electronic gadgets such as video and still cameras. Whilst I had sought consent from the community elders and family spirit mediums to use the gadgets, the main setback was on how to use them. My gatekeeper, Jemwa Mukova made certain that I reveal all the devices I planned to utilise prior to the *bira* event, as well as how the gadgets would be used so that the practitioners and ancestral spirits would be aware before and during the song performances and interviews. Justifying the usage of the electronic devices in these sacred rituals defined my "outsider" status, which was highlighted by the practitioners under study who conferred trust on me so that I could continue with my data collection. Although I was allowed to use my gadgets, there were several rules I had to obey, especially when the *bira* ceremony was being performed in the *banya*. Cameras could not use flashlights, but I was able to acquire still images and video clips inside the sacred hut, which were often dim. During the *mabira* functions, I complied with the set conditions. When I sought an explanation for these restrictions, my gatekeepers informed me that certainly the electronic devices did not exist during the time the ancestral spirits were once living beings, and hence their presence during *mapira* is forbidden. To avoid breaking the rule, at each *bira* ceremony I attended, Jemwa Mukova made sure I was seated in a position that did not jeopardise the smooth running of the *bira* proceedings. He provided or instructed me to have a cloth to cover my camera in such a way that I could use it. Despite their poor quality, the participants approved that I should take the still-photographs.

My interactions and experiences with Jemwa Mukova enlightened me about the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of the communities in which I conducted fieldwork. On one of my visits to attend a *bira* ceremony, I had the privilege of venturing into the early morning long walk

to the sacred shrine known as 'the visit to the sacred pools' (explained in detail in Chapter 4), and Jemwa Mukova instructed me not to bring my electronic gadgets with me because they were forbidden by the alien spirits who are believed to be the pools' custodians. The sacred pools were too sacred to be photographed or to verbally comment on the unusual things one could come across. I was only allowed to take field notes while observing the proceedings. On such occasions, I did not have images or video clips as part of my collected data, but I recognized this as part of confidentiality, and data collection was validated through interviews, observation, and field notes.

Another limitation to this study was the use of population sampling. Spirit manifestation is not a definite thing which can take place when called for anytime. I had intended to purposely select more than five ancestral spirits as mentioned earlier under the population and sampling procedures section. However, this was an oversight since *mapira* ceremonies are not held obviously but according to the concerned families' need to hold them. In the communities in which I intended to select the ancestral spirits, it emerged that there are few families located in different localities of Hwedza who are still practising this tradition of *mapira ematendo* ceremonies. Some of these families happen to be part of the same clan hence they share the same spirit mediums, hence, I came across the same spirit mediums (possessed by the same family or clan spirits) being hosted at different *mapira* ceremonies held in different communities. However, some *mapira* manifestations could not take place and according to my respondents, that happened especially if the family holding the ceremony failed to follow certain required and expected ritual procedures. As an example, family members first visit a n'anga (diviner) to see if there are any obstacles in carrying out the bira event or if a witchcraft deed occurs during the event's early stages, there may be no spirit manifestation.

Thus, in such a scenario where there was no spirit manifestation, the researcher would focus on interviews and observations concerning the *bira* event. Therefore, the researcher selected those spirits that manifested in *mapira* ceremonies attended as per the gatekeeper's invitation and respondents who happened to be present on those ritual ceremonies.

Despite the challenges I faced while conducting my research in the field, I was able to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the role that my gatekeeper, Jemwa Mukova, and the other respondents performed in attempting to make my research feasible. I truly empathise with

the respondents, respect the friendships, interrelationships, and interdependence that we built amongst each other in the communities where the research was carried out.

### 3.7 Conclusion

In Chapter 3, the emphasis is mostly placed on the technique and research design. The methodology of the study is qualitative, and it makes use of an ethnographic approach, in addition to a variety of tools for the collecting of data from a wide range of sources. The criteria of long-term participant observation were not entirely fulfilled, however, I argue that the unbroken period of time that I devoted to participant observation serves as the foundation of an ethnographic approach to this research. Four spirits manifested through different homwe (spirit mediums) during three out of the five *mapira* rituals attended. The spirits themselves, three music instrument players, the headman, and other community members who were present for the *mapira* ceremonies took part as participants in this research. I was able to create and maintain personal relationships with the participants attributable to the purposefully small sample size, which led to an increase in the amount of information that was shared in an open and honest manner. Thus, I used participant observation which is the primary method used in ethnography to collect first-hand information from the field to compile the data of song performance. I also used informal conversational interviews in this study since they provided the framework for an exchange of perspectives rather than just a flow of information in only one direction. I wrote field notes, particularly on the occasions when photography was not permitted. In order to offer first-hand knowledge that may be analysed, data was also gathered using photographic and audio-visual means.

I decided to employ a qualitative data analysis technique since it offered order, structure, and meaning to the data that was collected (Bazeley, 2007). I utilised the procedure in order to obtain crucial segments of data that pertain to the experiences and views of participants about song and spirit manifestation in *mapira* ceremonies. I employed a textual analysis approach to analyse songs within the context of the *bira* to explore and assess their implications, literal and metaphorical connotations, and other meanings related to them to investigate and unearth the hidden meanings disguised within song texts. As a result of this analysis, my argument is to find out meanings derived from the messages that are conveyed by songs that are performed with the intention of invoking spirit possession through continuous interaction with participants. The captured audio-visual clips were used to produce an ethnographic film (see Appendix A and B),

which summed-up and complemented my argument on what is the role played by song text in relation to spirit manifestation.

To validate my dissertation's argument, I focused on the participants' voices in conjunction with scholarly perspectives on the subject at hand, particularly in the context of *mapira ematendo* ceremonies.

Following this chapter is a presentation of my reflexive experiences of *bira rematendo* performative acts at selected Zezuru villages that I visited, specifically Dzvokora, Sengezi, Jenya, and Gotor. My primary objective is to investigate and appreciate the way *mapira ematendo* are performed with the purpose of establishing what is in song text that is amenable to spirit possession.

## **Chapter 4: *Bira rematendo*: The hive of spirituality!**

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I investigate the ceremonial practice of *bira rematendo* among the Zezuruspeaking people of Hwedza under the leadership of Chief Kuvandikira and Headman Tofa Munzverengi (now deceased). Dzvokora, Sengezi, Jenya, and Gotor are the names of some of the rural communities that are governed by these cultural bearers and fall under this research. The Zezuru-speaking people place a high emphasis on their traditional religion, much like the other Shona ethnic groups do. According to Dodo (2017:126), the Zezuru follower membership estimate for African Traditional Religion (ATR) is 18% (2,500,000) of the Zimbabwean population. As a result, the Zezuru-speaking people carry out rituals to worship *Mwari* through veneration of their ancestral spirits. In this chapter I argue that the sociocultural and religious activities that these Zezuru-speaking people engage in daily are the driving force behind the rituals that they practise

in their communities. The Zezuru cultural and religious rituals that require song performance to participate in include the *bira rematendo* ceremony as well as other ritual practices like *kurova guva* (cleansing of diseased spirit ceremony), *mukwerera* (rainrequesting ceremony) and *kugadza mambo* (chief's coronation) mentioned in the previous chapter. Within the confines of a *bira* gathering, this ceremonial practice pays homage to the spirits of both ancestors and aliens.

The Zezuru-speaking people have a strong belief that both the spirits of their ancestors and aliens have an important responsibility to look after their present descendants. Although invisible, according to multispecies ethnography, these spirits exist through their mediums as members of the living descendants. Hence, they have roles in life equally important to those of their living progeny. Alien spirits are welcomed as spirits that help the betterment of individuals within the family and clan worshipping of *Musikavanhu*, even though the ancestral spirits are viewed as the overall custodians of their current descendants. Therefore, belief in the existence of a supernatural realm is inherent to the culture of the Zezuru-speaking people, as evidenced by the *bira rematendo* ceremony. I will now discuss some of the beliefs and values of the Zezuruspeaking people that are ingrained in the *mapira* ceremonial rituals.

#### 4.2 Religious value system: The umbilical cord that binds the Zezuru-speaking people.

The Zezuru-speaking people, particularly those who believe in Shona traditional beliefs, have commendable religious values which bind them together as a social group. The religious values are considered in relation to particular cultural contexts and situations where a variety of traditional musical genres are performed assuming special meaning for participants at the ritual ceremonies (Mackie 1977, Kyker 2009). These religious values regulate, conduct and mould commendable characters referred to as *hunhu* as stated by [Jemwa Mukova](#). As one of my key practitioners Jemwa Mukova during an interview session stated:

*Ndinotenderana nechivanhu chedu zvikuru nokuti ndiwo muraramiro wangu unotarisirwa nevadzimu vekwedu kana tovanamata. Pakupira mudzimu yedu panodiwa munhu ane hunhu asina kusviba ndokuti ukwane mumatare. Midzimu inokurasa kana usina hunhu* (JM 12/10/21).

I believe in our traditions to a greater extent because that is how I live as expected by our ancestral spirits when we worship them. When venerating ancestral spirits, a person of good character is required, without bad morals to be allowed in praying sessions. The spirits will disown you if you lose your moral values.

Mukova explains that his clan strongly valued worshipping *Mwari* through veneration of ancestral spirits. This is their way of life that is expected by their ancestral spirits and is understood to be commendable. These spirits expect good behaviour and moral values for a family member to be considered morally upright. They bless and protect him or her from evil spirits. If, however, according to Berliner (1993:186), “a person forgets or dishonours departed ancestors, the spirits can either punish their progeny directly, or withdraw their support leaving him or her vulnerable to the forces of mischievous and belligerent spirits and witches.” It can then be acknowledged that there is social cohesion enhanced by religious values among the Zezuru-speaking people. Mageza (1997) states that Shona traditional religion delineates distinctive values, norms and principles for people to follow so that life might be abundant for all. This integration infuses community life with meaning and harmony.

#### 4.3 Religious Beliefs: The Zezuru code of life

Interacting directly with the divine is considered disrespectful, which is why the mediation of spirits is necessary in the Zezuru belief system. Beliefs are like a code of conduct which govern their way of making their daily life activities. Thus, I observed that mediation of spirits occurs through the performance of ritual practices like *bira rematendo*, *mukwerera*, and *kurova guva*.

#### 4.4 The Concept of *bira rematendo*

A close analysis of the Shona religion which encompasses the Zezuru tradition reveals that the world of the living is believed to have come from the most powerful spiritual being (*Mwari/Musiki/Nyadenga*). The supreme God is omnipotent and dwells everywhere within the Zezuru cosmos. Referring to the Shona conception of God, Gelfand (1987:90) wrote:

According to the Shona philosophy, God has no shape. He is not in the form of a human being. The Shona-speaking people say that the creator is as far as they know, a whiff “of

wind or air” who inhabits the Heavens above but who may be found also in places as deep as the earth, in mountains or forest.

The ancestral spirit of Nembire (Picture 3) manifested during the *bira rematendo* which was held on 20 of October 2021 in Gotora village of headman Tofa Munzverengi. Similarly to Gelfand’s view, the spirit through its medium or host precisely explained their mode of existence as spirits when he said:

*Ndakambobvunza mubvunzo kuvakomana ava, vakomana imbonditaurirai nerimwe rezuva zuro pandakabva pano ndaakuti vakomana imbai ini ndakuchikaira kuenda, makadini kundibvunza kuti maakuenda kupi? Chamajairira ndechekuti ari kutaura uyu haafambe netsoka asi anotaura. Paanoti ndauya anenge achibva kupi? Ndati muzukuru mhupo makumbwi hatizivi kwainobva nekwainoenda. Inotenderera nenyika, zvino yawafema nhasi iripi? Ini ndauya nhasi; ndinogara ndiripo pahomwe yangu, kana ndichibva ndichienda pamashizha, kana ndichibva ndichienda pamombe yangu ndinoziva pekunozororera (NM 12/10/21).*

I asked these boys a question: can you tell me when I said I am leaving you, sing for me I am going, why did you not ask me where I was going? You are used to saying that the one who is talking does not walk on feet, but he talks. When he says I came, where will he be from? I said nephew a spirit is multidirectional; we do not know where it is from and where it is going. It revolves around. Where is the air you breathed today? I came today; I am always present through my host. When I am leaving, I will reside in leaves, or when I leave, I will be on my bull, I know where to rest.

Thus, the spirit of Nembire confirmed that as *mweya* (wind), the spirit is always present within the proximity of the living descendants. As stipulated by multispecies ethnography, nonhuman things such as “wind” or “bull” are part of life in the existence of the Zezuru people. However, according to the spirit medium, the spirits are found everywhere like the wind. No one can tell the exact direction and whereabouts of the spirits; just like the wind, it is difficult to tell its direction as it changes at any moment.

Gelfand (ibid.) and the spirit of Nembire's views (NM 12/10/21) on the existence of spirits seem to agree that the spirits are "winds" which are closely related to God who is considered the highest spiritual being. These spirits are believed to take refuge on leaves and beasts when they are not possessing their mediums. The Zezuru-speaking people believe that the world of the living descendants exists through guidance from the spiritual world (Shoko, 2011). Hence, communication between the two worlds is enhanced through music performance during various traditional religious ceremonies, depending on the context of the ritual practice.

Machingura (2010:93) states that, "manifestation of spirit is witnessed through singing and dancing".

The Zezuru-speaking people believe that the death of a person comprises a sequence of ritual practices which may vary from family to family and from clan to clan but fulfil the same purpose (Huffman and Murimbika 2003:238). Turner (2008) regards such rituals as one of the many performance genres in which community people playfully but reflectively symbolise their beliefs, norms and conversational roles (daily communal activities based on what is expected) that govern their ordinary lives. Perman (2020:21) reiterates that such ritual ceremonies are important to those who practise them as they link the past, the present and the future, the dead and the living. This link is to help the living descendants in their social, cultural, economic and political well-being.

According to the Zezuru-speaking people's beliefs, approximately two weeks after the burial of an adult, traditional beer is brewed to mark the decay of the body of the deceased (Chikomo and Maguraushe, 2021). A ceremony known as *doro rehonye* (traditional brew prepared when the buried body of the deceased is considered decayed) is prepared and then during the ceremony people drink, sing and dance in acceptance of the death of their relative. Six months or a year after burial, another ritual event known as *gata* (consultation from the diviner) is held. Whatever the cause of death (known or unknown) the family of the deceased would want to ascertain the cause of death - *chakadya hama yedu* (Dodo, 2016). Causes of death, for example, car accidents or illnesses do not just occur according to Zezuru cultural beliefs, but are believed to be caused by bad spirits, hence they consult a *n'anga* (diviner). This stage entails a visit to the *n'anga* by family members who want to know the causes of death of their family member "in order to establish the desires of the spirit...and to find out whether the grave was desecrated" (Gundani,

1994:125). This is a private family ritual usually conducted at a *n'anga*'s home that is a distance away. It is believed that a diviner who stays closer to the concerned family location in search of help is conflicted as the diviner may know without magical or spiritual guidance how the concerned family lives, hence compromising the search for truth. The *n'anga* discovers, sometimes using divination bones referred to as *hakata*, whether there are hindrances in performing the next ritual. Although the elders may be acquainted with the procedures of the next ritual ceremony, the *n'anga* can also advise on how to perform the ritual *kurova guva* (cleansing ceremony) according to Zezuru custom. The ritual is a cleansing ceremony to bring the spirit of the dead back home (Vambe, 2009). It is believed by the Zezuruspeaking people that *kurova guva* is a crucial ceremony as it brings back a cleansed spirit (without evil) of the dead to look after the family. Such a spirit in the Zezuru family is the one which will manifest as an ancestral spirit after two or more generations. Thus, these rituals such as *gata*, and *kurova guva* pave the way to celebratory ceremonies like *bira rematendo*.

These spirits possess their usual hosts and are honoured at different *mapira* ritual practices. A medium is possessed with the same usual spirit at *bira* to install a chief or at a *bira rematendo*. As reiterated in the previous chapter, each *bira* is believed to serve a specific purpose in the Zezuru society. Geertz (2017) suggested that such a practice is a collective authored 'text' about the society, a story people tell themselves about themselves. Some of the ritual ceremonies include the rain-requesting ceremony referred to as *mukwerera*, which is specifically for *mhondoro* spirits which are at the highest level of all the spirits since they are available to the whole clan. *Mapira* held by a family usually focus on the welfare of the immediate family. Here *mapira* ceremonies are held for a specific family issue revealing the Zezuru religious belief and value system. During the processes (see preparatory stages on page 43) of the three *mapira ematendo* ritual practices, the researcher also noticed that kinship among the Zezuru value and belief system is of paramount importance.

#### 4.4.1 *Hukama* – Kinship and stratification

From the five *mapira* ritual practices attended, I observed that the people's behaviour and duties during the performances were controlled largely by *hukama* (kinship). *Ukama* is "a Shona concept that expresses the interconnectedness of humans, God, the spirit world, the ancestors, and the environment" (Horsthemke, 2017:120). Members of the same family can be distinguished from

members of other families using totems which are referred to as *mitupo* or by clan names. A totem is a material expression of something else or an honorific insignia that can represent an animal or object by which a family or clan is defined within a specific geographical place (Lang, A. et al, 1904, Rose, 2013, and Horsthemke, 2017). It is customary for family members to greet or address each other by means of a totem as a gesture of respect.

On arrival at Mukupwa homestead on 12 October 2021, during one of my field trips, accompanied by my aids, we all clapped systematically together and called out their family totem, “*Mondizvooo tisvikewo pano changamire?*”, (*Mondizvooo* can we enter your court your worship?). This we did as a gesture of respect, kindly seeking permission to be received. In reciprocation those seated outside the huts around the fireplace also replied to my totem, “*Svikai zvenyu Shunguwasha*” (you can come in *Shunguwasha*). Holleman (1949) elucidates that the clan’s name is often the name of some animal, the *nzou* (elephant) for example, or the *mhofu* (eland), or *tsoko/gudo* (monkey/baboon) and it is a taboo for members of the clan to consume cooked or roasted meat of the animal which is deemed their totem. These non-human components (*nzou*, *mhofu* and *gudo*), as stipulated in the multispecies ethnography, act reciprocally with humans to determine how these humans live in their communities. According to Jemwa Mukova (JM 12/10/21), the Mukupwa and Munzverengi families whose ritual practises I attended share the same totem *moyondizvo* or *mkanya* or *jena*<sup>22</sup>, whose symbolic animal is baboon or monkey. During their ritual procedural practices, I heard them addressing each other through those clan names, which indicates showing respect to one another as a way of communication. I also witnessed the use of totems during the prayers, “*Modizvo tisvitsirewo kuna Zame*” (*Mondizvo* convey the word to God), as the elders honoured their ancestral spirits at the beginning of each performance and on manifestation when greeting their spirit mediums “*Mondizvo tinoisa maoko changamire*” (*Mondizvo* we greet you our forefather). The above shows that “the extension of kinship in the Zezuru society goes beyond the elementary family, that is, beyond a man, his wife and their children, in relation to the supernatural world” (Bourdillon and Phil, 1998:26).

Those invited were of different totems and were called out in reciprocation during greetings or general conversations in *matate*. This Zezuru kinship system stresses the roles that are played by individuals during the ritual performances. Headman Tofa Munzverengi (TM 12/10/21)

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<sup>22</sup> Men are referred to as *jena* or *mondizvo* and women as *bvudzijena*, *vachikombo* or *mwenewazvo*.

emphasises that, women who brew the traditional beer are of great significance for the sacred ceremonies and they are referred to as *mapere*<sup>23</sup> or *varoorazukuru*. These are old women of lineages related by marriage to the immediate family hosting the sacred ceremony. Usually, the [bere \(hyena\)](#) is given the opportunity to take a pot of beer soon after praying at the beginning of the ritual performance. Feigning stealing, the *bere* takes the pot of beer and runs out of the hut, crying like a hyena. This gesture is done to honour and thank the women who brew the beer. The women drink their share of beer. If they do not drink alcohol, they hand over the clay pot to their husbands.

On another point, there is the family nephew, or the matrimonial grandchild referred to as *muzukuru mukuru* whose role is usually to mediate during some family rituals. The matrilineal grandchild takes charge to officiate and make important addresses to the spirit (Gelfand, 1981). Alexio Mukupwa explained that he is a grandchild of the lineage of Nembire the ancestral spirit. Together with his assistant, Jemwa Mukova, they presided over the ritual ceremonies that took place at Mukupwa and Munzverengi homesteads. [Alexio Mukupwa](#) emphasised that their main tasks were to explain to the gathering what the spirit (which would be speaking directly through the medium) said and assist in providing what was needed by the spirit medium during *matare*, for example clothing the medium in full possession.

Since it was a stratified ceremony, only adults were allowed to gather in the sacred hut. Other invited neighbours from surrounding villages, sons-in-laws referred to as *vakuwasha*, distinguished music instrument players and dancers constituted the other important strata of the Zezuru kinship system during these *mapira ematendo* ritual practices. Kinship determined structures of authority among them, hence the behaviour and roles assumed by everyone during the preparatory stages of the rituals.

#### 4.4.2 Preparatory stages of *bira rematendo*

*Mapira ematendo* ritual practices held at Mukupwa and Munzverengi families followed certain stages which were historically known to be the right way to perform ritual ceremonies. I

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<sup>23</sup> *Bere* (sing.), (*mapere* (pl.)) is a hyena which is known in the communities to feed on people's livestock especially the goats, hence this animal's act of stealing is likened to the women who would have brewed the beer as they are allowed at the beginning of each ritual ceremony to snatch a pot of beer which they would drink or give to their husbands. The act of being a hyena is a known customary act to the communities when performing such rituals.

participated and observed in order to find out how these ritual ceremonies are done. The attended *mapira* ritual ceremonies generally followed the similar stages of preparation as their main objective was to thank ancestral and alien spirits for their families' well-being.

The first *bira rematendo* ritual practice I attended was held on 12 October 2021. On this day I teamed up with my research assistant early in the morning to board the bus and travelled to Mukupwa's homestead in Sengezi Village in Hwedza. We arrived at the homestead at around 4:30 in the morning to find the elders of the family already preparing for the event. Jemwa Mukova welcomed us and we joined some of the elders who presided over the event around the fireplace, which was made outside the usual kitchen hut. Customarily, I sat around the fireplace to become part of the gathering, which included family members and other villagers. Observing the protocol, I asked the gatekeeper to lead me in the greeting procedure. He notified the youngest among the elders about my intention to greet them. The junior then passed the word to the next elder and the process proceeded in a hierarchical way until the message reached the eldest member of the family. The request to greet the *dare* (court) was accepted by passing the message similarly from eldest to youngest member. We greeted them by clapping hands calling out their totems referred to as *kuisa chioko*. After the greetings and introductions, I took the opportunity before the commencement of the *bira* ritual for interviews.

I interviewed Jemwa Mukova about the procedure of the *bira ritual*. The gatekeeper explained the preparatory stages as set out below.

#### Stage 1: Brewing of *hwahwa* – Traditional beer

This is a crucial stage during which the elders of the immediate family organise beer and food to be consumed at the ritual performance. People from the surrounding areas who include other spirit mediums are invited to the ceremony. Usually, the beer for *bira rematendo* is brewed by women who are no longer having their menstrual cycles as it is a belief among the Zezuruspeaking people that issues involving spirituality must be handled by those who are considered clean.<sup>24</sup> At that stage even those who are sexually active are not allowed to engage in

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<sup>24</sup> The term “clean” refers to young girls or women who are not or no longer active in sexual activities as sexual activities are considered to be profane acts during these *mapira* rituals. <sup>27</sup> Seven-days is a brand of Zezuru traditional beer which is produced after a process which takes seven days for it to mature

sexual intimacy for a period of about three weeks prior to the ritual practice. A woman who is a *bere* or *muroorazukuru*, with the help of her sisters-in-laws brewed traditional beer. Together they brew traditional beer commonly known as seven-days<sup>27</sup> within the Zezuru community.

Matiure (2011: 79) states that, “the beer brewing is in three phases.” The initial phase involves the boiling of the rapoko meal for almost five to six hours. This process is referred to as *kuvamba gambe*. The boiled porridge is left for two days, and then it is boiled again for almost ten hours in a second phase referred to as *kupisa*. During the traditional beer brewing the old women normally drop *muchakata*<sup>25</sup> (*mobola* plum) also scientifically known as *parinari curatellifolia* in the boiling porridge. The *muchakati* small branches are boiled together with the porridge until the brewers are satisfied that it is well cooked. The boiled porridge is allowed to cool down for one or two days and normally *rapoko* yeast, also known as *chimera* (malt flour), is added on the fifth day to allow fermentation for two more days. The resultant product of this process is known as *mhanga*. The third phase is for *kusanganisa* (mixing), which involves the preparation of *masese* (malt porridge) from the same mealie-meal which is then mixed with *mhanga* to form *hwahwa* or “seven-days.” This beer can make anyone who consumes it drunk. The beer usually matures with time and is normally given to people when it has cooled down within a time frame of four to five hours. It is usually drunk during the ritual’s song performances.

#### Stage 2: *Kumadziva* – The visit to the sacred pool

The visit to the sacred pool marks the initial stage of the *bira rematendo* ritual performance. All the immediate family members including men, women and children are taken by the mediator (*makumbi*) to the sacred pool in the nearby rivulet. The family members sang songs during the journey to and from the sacred pool. All family members were cleansed in the sacred pool, according to Jemwa Mukova. It is believed that the *njuzu*<sup>26</sup> spirits reside in the sacred pool. Kileff et al. (1997) explain that without *mashavi* (alien spirits) Shona religion would be incomplete, as they are responsible for assisting ancestral spirits in looking after the living descendants. As such,

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<sup>25</sup> Muchakata is a wild fruit tree common in some parts of Hwedza. It is the people’s belief that the boiling of *muchakata* leaves is a charm that prevents those who drink the beer from being violent when they get drunk during the ritual performance.

<sup>26</sup> *Njuzu* (mermaids) refers to alien spirits who in conjunction with ancestral spirits have a role to look after the well-being of the people.

they are also recognised in that manner of going to the sacred pool. On the other hand, this act of going to the pool is sometimes substituted by spraying the mouth with water mixed with snuff (*kufura mvura*) by the spirit mediums during consultation and counselling sessions. The pool cleansing process is only done once per year as a ritual act which marks the end of the year.

Those who were cleansed at the pool before the sun rose walked straight to the sacred hut. They were instructed by [Alexio Mukupwa](#), one of the mediators to Nembire the spirit medium, not to look back, referred to as *kucheuka* until they reached the sacred hut. When I later asked why the cleansed people were not supposed to look back, Alexio said:

*Chitendero chedu tinoti kana wasukwa mweya yakaipa, zvirwere neminyama zvinenge zvbviswa. Saka ukacheuka usati wasvika mumba yemidzimu yedu unotakurana nazvo izvo wambenge wambobviswa. Mweya yakaipa inotodawoka pokugara. Saka inotoitawo nharo kusada kusara (AM 23/10/21).*

Our belief is that when you are cleansed, evil spirits, diseases, and misfortunes are taken away. So, if you look back before you enter the ritual hut all the cleansed misfortunes will come back. Evil spirits also look for hosts to stay on, they resist being cleansed away.

This shows that it is a belief among the Zezuru-speaking people that in these ritual performances one must be very cautious in following the expected traditional instructions. Looking back after performing such rites invites the evil spirits back and as a result one will always face life problems.

### Stage 3: Banya – The sacred hut

After the cleansing stage, all members of the family gather in the [banya](#). This hut was located due east of the homestead and situated far away from the rest of the huts within the homestead. It is the venue where all the main ritual activities are performed. The floor of the sacred hut is polished with cow dung to give it the traditional look.

Before all the family members gathered in the sacred hut, the researcher was granted the opportunity to enter and set his video camera in a position with a clear view of the proceedings.

He had a chance to take some still photographs of the objects in the hut. From the way things appeared this was the hut where all the ritual belongings were kept. Some of the attire included black and white cloths which hung on the wooden beam set across to balance the roof of the hut. The cloths were used by the spirit medium of Nembire as wrappings during the possession event. According to Tofa Munzverengi, the headman and one of the eldest practitioners, the black cloth symbolised the spiritual world and the white cloth symbolised the world of the living descendants, both were used to wrap the *gombwe* (clan spirit). The other cloth was a combination of blue and white which was said to be for the family spirit. The researcher also noticed a white cloth with red and black triangle designs with five large lions' heads insignia (*mashumba mashanu*). This was referred to as *retso* and it was for the *mashavi* spirits. The red colour and the lion insignia on the cloth are associated with the *mashavi* spirits responsible for hunting and healing. The bodies of two intermediaries of the spirit medium of Nembire, who are Jemwa Mukova and Alexio Mukupwa were wrapped by *retso* cloths.

Apart from the cloths there were other [material artefacts](#) associated with Zezuru spirituality like specified animal leather and beads hung on the wall of the sacred hut. The arrangement of the material artefacts drew my interest as the hut had special sitting positions for the participants who sat according to the procedures of the day. At the front centre position were [four small clay pots](#) containing traditional beer.

The clay pots were arranged according to their uses in relation to the special spirits of the family. Animal skin was placed across the hukwe (reed mat), where the medium would sit near the clay pots of traditional beer. There were also a *ndiro yemuti* (wooden plate), a *bakatwa* (big knife) in its wooden pouch, a reed basket containing a *nhekwe* (snuff-horn), *chuma* (white beads), and *pfunha* (animal tail). *Tsvimbo* (Clubs) and a *gano* (hand-axe) lay beside the reed basket. These were for the spirit medium. During the *mapira ematendo* ritual performances, there were some foodstuffs placed at the centre of the ritual hut during the time of praying. These foodstuffs were prepared as tribute to the *njuzu* spirits. They included some beverages, loaves of bread, cooking oil, clear alcohol, wines, sweets, rice and white meat of a chicken, just to mention a few. According to Alexio Mukupwa, these were meant for the sacrifices to the alien spirits.

Stage 4: Creating the spiritual environment

All the *bira rematendo* ritual performances started around five o'clock in the morning and were accompanied by the singing of songs, dancing and the playing of instruments as shown in the next paragraphs. The singing started soon after the prayer meant for *Musikavanhu* through veneration of the ancestral spirits. The prayer was conducted by the elder of the family, Tofa Munzverengi. All family members and those who were invited from the neighbouring villages gathered and participated inside the ritual hut for the commencement of the ritual.

#### 4.5 Why *bira rematendo*?

The essence of *bira rematendo* among the Mukupwa and Munzverengi families and in particular those in Hwedza is based on the Zezuru belief that ancestral and alien spirits protect and give wealth. Therefore, as reiterated by Alexio Mukupwa, the living must thank and praise the ancestral spirits by holding a *bira* ceremony at least once per year especially during the harvest period. This is the time when most family members would have harvested their crops so it is worth thanking God for the good life experience through veneration of ancestral spirits.

##### 4.5.1 The Custodians of traditions: family and clan spirits

The family spirits, such as the spirit of Chidavanyika, referred to as *midzimu yemusha*, are usually believed to possess superior power to deal with life issues in the immediate descendants of the family as a small unit of the clan. It is usually the spirit of the deceased within the extended family lineage, for example, a father or a grandfather that brings the group together in ritual practices for the survival of the family. It is an obligation for the living descendants to come together from time to time and perform specific rituals in honour of their ancestors. In the context of *bira rematendo*, there are some ceremonies that are performed at family level and others performed at clan level. People of the same clan usually gather to honour clan spirits for specific purposes, for example, asking for good rains during a rain requesting ceremony, thanking *Mwari* for good harvest during *bira rematendo* and so forth, with song and dance taking centre stage.

##### 4.5.2 The place of the alien spirits

The *mashavi* spirit veneration is very common amongst the Mukupwa and Munzverengi families. During the *bira rematendo* ritual performances in Hwedza, the concept of dualism<sup>27</sup> in religious worshipping was evidenced when the *mashavi* spirits were also venerated together with the ancestral spirits. Although the spiritual hierarchy explained in the previous chapter clearly showed that the Zezuru as a sub-ethnic group of the Shona-speaking people express their relationship with God through their ancestral spirits, they also believe in the spirits of foreign people. These alien spirits are accepted in the Zezuru religious worship as spirits of complete strangers to the community who possess a medium in order to help him or her to perform tasks, such as healing, hunting, farming and so forth. It is, however, during these ritual performances, such as *bira rematendo*, that the *mashavi* spirits are considered to give support to the ancestral spirits in *matere*. Hence, during the *bira rematendo* events, precedence is given to the ancestral spirits to preside over the rituals and *mashavi* act as aids.

I interviewed Jemwa Mukova who explained that “*homwe imwe chete iyoyo inobudirwa nemidzimu yedzinza pamwe nemashavi akagamuchirwa*” (the same host can be possessed by both clan and accepted alien spirits). Thus, it is possible for a host to serve both ancestral and alien spirits. However, for the spirit medium to become possessed by either spirit depends on the task to be performed. Jemwa Mukova explains how both the ancestral and alien spirits are venerated within the same *bira* event:

*Mudzimu mukuruwe musha uno wakabuda mushure mekunge waona kuti homwe yakanga yasimba. Saka mhondoro iyi yakabudawo nemashavi ayo ane basa rekurapa. Zvakaitika ndezvekuti mhondoro yauya yakatora makore ichigara pahomwe mashavi ari mumashure kusvika yarera mhwere kusvika yaona kuti mhwere iyi inogona kushandika nayo. Tatambira mhondoro iyi takazonzwa kuti mashavi ekumvura anove njuzu ava kuda kutora homwe kuenda nayo kumvura sezvo ainge asati atambirwawo mumusha medu kuti abatowo basa pamwe nemidzimu yedu. Takamhanya tikagadzirisa zvinhu izvi. Tagadzirisa mudzimu uya wakabuda nemashavi aya pamwe chete. Saka doru riri pano nderematendo emudzimu wakabatanidzwa nemashavi aye kuti zvishande pamwe chete mukuchengeta mhuri. Tino*

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<sup>27</sup> Dualism refers to honouring both ancestral and alien spirits who manifest in the same *bira* ritual performance.

*zvipira mumutambo mumwe chete asi tichitanga kukumikidza mhondoro dzemusha tozopirawo kumashavi* (JM 12/10/21).

The spirit medium of this family manifested when it was satisfied that the host was strong. So, the spirit medium manifested together with the alien spirits, which had the task of healing. What happened is that the spirit medium took time to manifest until it was satisfied that the host was now mature to do the spiritual tasks. When we welcomed the spirit medium, we heard that the alien spirits wanted to take the host to the river since they were not yet accepted in our home to perform their tasks together with the family mediums. We ran around and sorted out the problem. When we solved the problem, the ancestral spirit came out together with the alien spirits. So, the beer which is here is meant to thank the spirit medium in conjunction with the alien spirits so that they work together in looking after the family. We worship them together, but we start to pray to the family spirits, then the alien spirits.

The above explanation shows that the *mashavi* spirits can express themselves by showing certain symptoms among their hosts, for example, illness, or threatening to take the host to the river so that he can be drowned. It is therefore the duty of the living to find out through inquiring from a *n'anga* the cause of such behaviour shown by the host. If they find out the cause, the alien spirits are accepted to help the family cared for by the ancestral spirits; they are then honoured together with the ancestral spirits during family music ritual performances. Thus, rituals as an efficacious socio-religious phenomenon (Turner, 1998:32) serve to transfer individuals or groups from the progeny to the sacred (Turner et al., 2017). Hence, communication is not only confined to words but expressed through codes such as gestures, music, dancing and so forth.

During the proceedings of *bira rematendo*, when praying (*kupira*), the elder of the family first saluted the family spirits by rhythmically clapping hands whilst kneeling in front of the gathering in the sacred hut. During that gesture of praying, the elder said the names of his ancestors in hierarchical order up to the Supreme Being. He then poured a libation whilst saying to the spirits how grateful the family is for the good harvest of that season and their general wellbeing. After addressing the ancestral spirits, the elder left the hut and immediately returned and knelt again for another prayer meant for the alien spirits. At this moment the elder addressed the *mashavi* spirits

who work in conjunction with the ancestral spirits. Alexio Munzverengi explains that prayers for ancestral spirits are done separately from those of alien spirits. Alien spirits are considered foreign hence their prayers follow those of ancestral spirits. When this was over, all the attendants clapped in honour of these spirits. The researcher's observation during *bira rematendo* was that the veneration of alien spirits, especially those that were accepted within the living families was of great importance as these spirits are taken as providers of wealth and health.

#### 4.5.3 Ancestral and alien spirits: The life caregivers

In this dissertation I argue that the essence of dual worshipping of *Mwari* through veneration of ancestral and alien spirits among the Mukupwa and Munzverengi families of Hwedza is principally motivated by the need to be protected from evil spirits. Performance of *bira rematendo* is primarily to show appreciation to both spirits for their protection of the families. More precisely, the family spirit mediums are there to directly protect the immediate and extended families of their living descendants from evil spirits that bring bad omen or death. They also preside over the installation of chiefs of their clan. On the other hand, *mashavi* spirits are accepted as those spirits which help ancestral spirits by providing expertise to individual family members in skills such as "hunting, healing, dancing and divination" (Machingura, 2010:335). Alien spirits are also accepted because they are considered wealth accumulators.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

The *bira rematendo* ritual is a ceremony that is held by the Zezuru people when they worship *Mwari* (God) through devotion of their ancestor spirits. This chapter provided a full explanation of the ceremony and its role as the ritual practice. In this chapter, I argued that although there are historically various types of *mapira* held for different reasons as reiterated in the previous chapters, spirits are evoked in different forms to include song, dance and instrument performance. However, during this research exploration, it emanated that the Zezuru *mapira ematendo* were dominated by song performances for ancestral spirit veneration.

When it comes to *mapira ematendo* ritual performance, the *banya*, also known as the sacred hut, is described as the setting where the ceremony takes place. The procedures of the *bira* are offered to reflect on both musical and non-musical behaviours that create an environment that is conducive to the manifestation of spirits. The non-musical parts of *bira rematendo* include the

stages for carrying the *bira*, the preparation of foods consumed during the event, *kupira* (traditional prayers), *hukama* (kinship), and the feasting that typically follows at the end of the ritual. All these non-musical aspects are included in *bira rematendo*. These nonmusical acts accentuate the setting for song performances, which in turn invoke the anticipation of spirit possession. The chapter concludes with an examination of the spirituality present in the *bira rematendo*, particularly the kinds of spirits that are acknowledged when they make their presence known.

## **Chapter 5: Zezuru traditional songs: A cultural code of communication**

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the characteristic of melodic movement (Scherzinger, 2010) enriched with texts is evidenced in Zezuru traditional songs used to accompany rituals in the community for the purpose of linking the living and the living dead. Nzewi (2008:202) explains that the most essential characteristics of traditional music are its melody, rhythm, content and textual status. I discuss how traditional songs extensively depict the context and effect impact within a particular song performance. The role of musical instruments and a rich variety of dances, which accompany song performance in Zezuru *bira rematendo* rituals, is the focus of my investigation. I further interrogate the content and textual features of songs in conjunction with instrument and dance domains to give their communicative intent within the context of a *bira rematendo* ritual performance. Thus, the main thrust of this chapter is to investigate the

characteristics, and the textual features of songs performed in the context of a ritual performance, which form the basis of communication between the living and the living dead.

## 5.2 Characteristics of traditional songs

Traditional songs are created in a variety of ways as part of African folk music. According to Jemwa Mukova (JM 12/10/22), “*Dzimbo dzatinoimba mumutare takawana dziriko ndedzemugamuchidzanwa, dzimwe ndidzo dzinongonyukawo mukuimba kwatinenge tichiita*”, (songs performed in *mapira* have been there since the days of our forefathers and are passed down orally from generation to generation, while others are composed spontaneously in the musical performance, as people come together to sing and dance). Based on a historicist perspective, Jemwa Mukova's argument connects the past and the present, implying that songs sung in *mapira* ceremony by their forebears are still performed by the current generation. Most traditional songs have been performed by custom, over a long period of time portraying themes related to commemoration of historical and personal events, love, daily work activities, children's games and any other aspect of communal life (Ntuli 2010). Many songs are patriotic in nature, express the values and beliefs of those who sing them, hence they provide a rich source of enjoyment and inspiration. Not only do they entertain and inspire, Zezuru traditional songs also express emotions, for example, love songs often tell stories of young love, heartbreak, and even betrayal. Some songs are specifically designed to be sung while working as they help to pass the time and make work enjoyable. Others are meant for dancing or just listened to depending on the subject matter.

## 5.3 Song and communication

People from different parts of the world have communicated through different languages that originated and existed within their environments (Kubik, 2010). In the early stages of human life, songs, among other things, were used for communication more than for pleasure (Brown 2008). Nzewi et al (2008:1) stress that, “the idea of indigenous music in cultures of Africa implicates organised human milieu, and thereby, societal systems.” Therefore, I argue that songs were one of the few ways in which people could connect with each other as a group and find common ground, hence they are typically passed down from one generation to another within the community. Ofuani (2012:71) states that, “folk song is composed, learnt, preserved and performed from one generation to another through oral tradition.” Thus, these songs are often based on

traditional tunes or melodies. They have a strong narrative element and can be used to tell a story about a people or convey messages. Therefore, songs by Zezuru-speaking people can be taken as observable cultural expressions which also served as cultural response to ritual processes.

A song that is sung at a ritual performance such as a *bira rematendo* provides context for manifestation of spirit mediums. Nzewi et al (Ibid) explain that “what is most universal about African music is its innate capacity to communicate within a cultural setting.” It is therefore very crucial to look at the text embedded in the musical form of a song to give its communicative nature in the context of a ritual performance.

### 5.3.1 Song form

Nzewi (1991:47) explains that the African music concept of time, space and eternity has informed the nature of musical form. In this regard, one of the basic forms of indigenous African music is reckoned by its time as moving forward endlessly in a cycle. According to Locke (2011:48);

In many kinds of African music, performers set up dynamic steady states. Timed to a steady beat, a cleverly arranged pattern of notes cycles repeatedly within a fixed span of time, providing an opportunity for a culturally attuned listener to hear a rich set of rhythmically exciting melodies.

This cyclical movement provides a changeable world space as such circularity becomes crucial in the realisation of form in African music. Circularity, as a basic musical form, signifies a block of sound or recurring length of the significant musical content that carries the song theme. Therefore, “the basic form is purely a musical rationalisation, a constant musical shape that takes the intention of the musical type” (Nzewi, 1991:43). This basic form is revealed during musical performances, which are full of creative possibilities from performers as exemplified in below Figures 11 and 12: The lead/call and response/chorus circular movement in a song. Nketia (2002: 147) concurs that, “details of form and structure grow out of the creative process.” It is within that creative process during a ritual practice that I argue that song texts function as a medium of communication between the progeny and the progenitor.

### 5.3.2 Stanzaic prose

Considering the above view, songs which I recorded during fieldwork presented by practitioners were in a cyclic form. The songs were characterised by responsorial singing in which there was the song-leader and those who responded. This could also be described as lead (call)-and-response (chorus) form. The researcher observed that most of the songs used a stanzaic prose which is basically a group of lyrics that make up a verse. The following example is a song entitled *Mudzimu dzoka* in Figure 10 which was usually sung during *mapira* to evoke ancestral spirits. I used Sibelius notation software to demonstrate melodic structure of songs that are sung in Zezuru rituals, but it should be noted that western rules of grouping notes were used to represent how the songs sound melodically because Zezuru traditional songs are full of improvisations depending on context where they are sung which make them lack specific material organisation. The song depicts the responsorial singing as shown in the example below.

### Mudzimu Dzoka

The figure displays musical notation for the song 'Mudzimu Dzoka' in two systems. Each system consists of two staves labeled 'Voice'. The first system shows a lead voice part and a responsive voice part. The lyrics for the lead part are: 'To - ve - ra - mu-dzi-mu dzo-ka ha - a - a - wo - yi - ye - e - kwa - zi - wa - yi To - ve - ra To - ve - ra mu-dzi-mu'. The lyrics for the responsive part are: 'Ha - wo - yi - ye - e - e - e kwa - zi - wa - yi To - ve - a - a'. The second system shows a similar structure with lyrics: 'dzo - ka ha - wo - yi - ye - e - kwa - zi - wa - yi To - ve - ra' for the lead and 'Ha - wo - yi - ye - ye - e - kwa - zi - wa - yi To - ve - ra' for the response.

**Figure 10:** The song *Mudzimu dzoka*

The song text for Mudzimu dzoka

**Lead (Phrase 1):** *Tovera m'dzimu dzoka,*

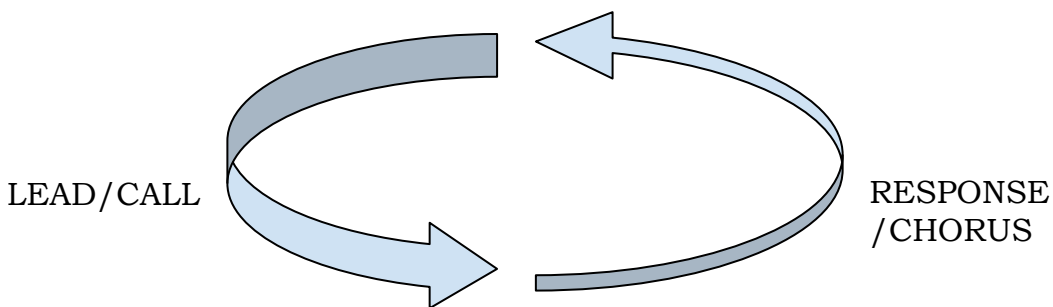
Tovera the spirit come back

**Response:** *Ha-a-a-woyiye kwaziwayi Tovera,*  
Ha-a-a-woyiye, we greet you Tovera

**Lead (Phrase 2):** *Nembire m'dzimu dzoka,*  
Nembire the spirit come back

**Response:** *Vana vanochema m'dzimu dzoka, kaziwayi changamire,*  
Children are crying, spirit come back; we greet you great one.

The structural movement of the above song can be understood as interlocking singing (Hayward, 2015). The lead-singer presents the solo lyrics referred to as *kushaura* whilst other performers sing the response lyrics or *kubvumira* in a chorus style. The lead (phrase 1) presents a theme “*Tovera mudzimu dzoka*” (Tovera the spirit come back), which is developed by the response section “*Vana vanochema mudzimu dzoka, kaziwayi changamire*” (Children are crying, spirit come back; we greet you great one), to give a complete idea of the statement, hence, its communicative intent of calling the spirits to manifest. The singers in a singing manner are speaking to their spirit mediums to manifest so that they can directly converse with them. This form of the lead and chorus can as well be noted as a direct adherence of the response which comes after the final note of the lead as illustrated in Figure 11:



[Figure 11](#): The direct adherence lead and chorus circular movement in a song.

The chorus may start before the lead singer has finished the lead part. The latter phenomenon is what can be referred to as ‘overlapping’ lead and response. The overlapping movement between the lead and response can be illustrated in Figure 12 thus:

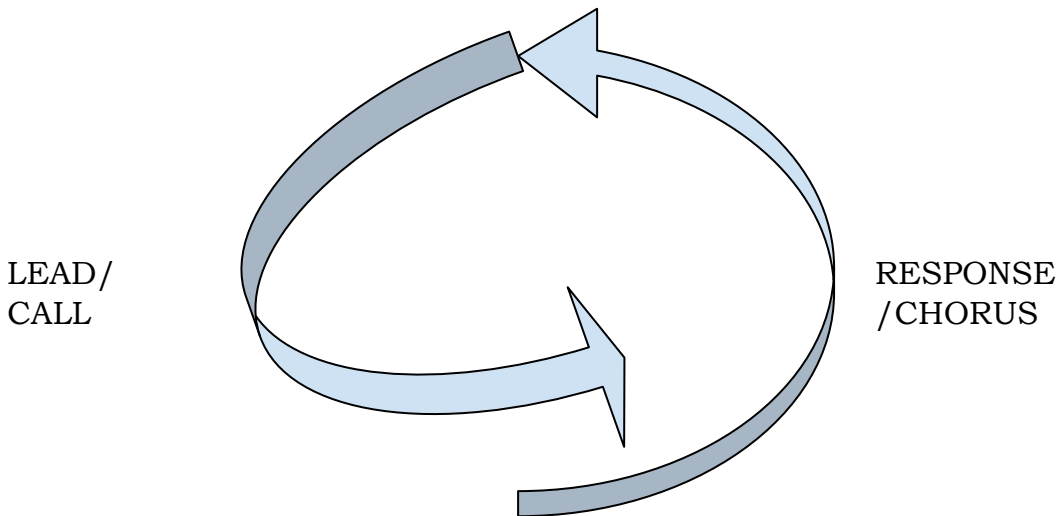


Figure 12: The overlapping lead and chorus circular movement in a song

The phrases of a soloist are repeatedly answered by those of a chorus. An exciting overlap often results when “the leader resumes singing before the chorus has finished responding or vice versa” (Kamien, 2018:391). There is improvisation in the solo part but none in the response.

From the above, I argue that the cyclic nature of songs reinforces the meaning of the message, which is consolidated by the structural and textual elements in a song depending on context where the song is performed. The meaning of the song content through song text is communicated or conveyed from *vaimbi* (singers) to *nyikadzimu* (spiritual world) during a song performance. As explained through participants’ behaviour, the resulting effect of this communication would be visible in the physio-psychological effects associated with participants who experience trance or possession. During a ceremonial practice such as *bira* rematendo, spirit mediums can experience full spirit manifestation.

### 5.3.3 Text in songs

Pongweni, (1982:35) suggests that Shona songs are folk poetry. As poetry, African songs, including those of the Zezuru people, are characterised by a text, which is a central feature that serves as a cultural code of communication (Okpokwasili, 2023). According to multispecies ethnography, humans link themselves with non-human things from their environment, hence song lyrics may incorporate names of physical areas, rivers, animals, and Zezuru language idioms. According to Colapetro (1992) the term text originated from the Latin word *texere* meaning to weave. Agawu (2003:97) further explains that “text is something woven by performer-composers

who conceive and produce the music-dance, by listener-viewers who consume it, and by critics who constitute it as text for the purposes of analysis and interpretation.” On the other hand, the term text refers to performances such as drumming, festivals and magical displays. However, in this discussion it is also used to mean words arranged in meaningful statements which build a song. These words require desired rhythms and other musical elements that are the primary source of African folk music which carries within itself sedimented social and historic content (Hooper, 2016).

The meanings of songs can be simple or complex depending on the text that is strongly connected and intertwined to specific actions and contexts. Ntshinga (2009:36) states that lyrics or words in a song have a limited meaning outside the context of oral performance. The singer combines these words musically with gestures, dance, dress and instruments to capture the other audience-performers. Those performing may react by clapping their hands, ululating, joining in the singing and dancing.

As a participant observer, I noticed that song performers at *bira rematendo* ceremony used the phrase *mashoko erwiyo* referring to text within a song that accompanied a ritual performance. It is the text which is turned into sound to give a song that affects the audienceperformer within a ritual performance. The meaning of this text in conjunction with the intensity created through the vigorous playing of instruments and dancing creates the atmosphere, supplies the continuity and accelerates or retards the mood of the *bira rematendo* ceremony. According to Okpokwasili (2023:232), “these songs usually carry the cultures and customs of the place they originate from and authorship is not tied to a particular individual most often, but rather belongs to the community.” I observed during *bira rematendo* ceremonies that song text defines the Zezuru culture, reveals their cultural traits and authenticates the spiritual mood in a manner subtler but more often telling than that of spoken dialogue as shall be explained in the subsequent chapter.

I interviewed Zvemano Muhwati (ZM 10/10/2021), an elderly informant (aged 90 years then) soon after a *bira rematendo* ceremony. Zvamano said that texts in songs are characterised by *madimikira* (idioms and metaphors), the meaning of which ordinary listeners do not always fully understand within a ritual performance. Here is an excerpt of my interview with him:

Elijah: *Jena munganyatsojekesawo here kuti padzimbo dzanga dzichiimbirwa mudzimu yekwenyu chii chaizvo chiri mudzimbo idzi chamungati ndicho chinoita kuti izosvikapakubuda?*

Jena, can you clarify what is in those songs which were sung for your ancestral spirits that makes them manifest?

Zvamano: *E-e-e, zvaunoona mudzimu kana idzo shamwari Dzedu dziye hadzingobuda asi pane zvakawanda zvinoitika kuti kusutswa kuzovepo. Panoimbwa chaizvo, ngoma ichidandaurwa zvekuti hana inoti dhidhidhi, ukuwo vane mashavi ekutamba anotobuda chete. Chinopa manyawi ekuti midzimu ibude mashoko ane tsumo nemadimikira emutauro wedu atakadzidziswa naivo vakuru vedu. Ya, dzimweni nguva zvinonetsa kunzwisisa mashoko acho chete kuti takangokura dzimbo dzacho dzichiimbwa zvekuti mamwe mashoko ndiwo ave kushanduka nekufamba kwenguva.*

E-e-e, you see the spirit mediums or our friend/alien spirits they do not manifest but there are a lot of things that happen for manifestation to take place. There is singing, drum playing that impacts the heartbeat and dancing. What brings the excitement that the spirit mediums manifest is the song text full of proverbs and metaphors that we learnt from our forefathers. Sometimes it is difficult to understand these texts/words only that we grew up singing the songs and some texts are changing due to time and space.

Zvamano Muhwati points out that *mashoko erwiyo* (text in songs) have traditional Shona oral literature which deals with particular contexts. In the case of the *bira rematendo* ceremony I therefore argue that song text as shown in the analysis of songs in the following chapter proved to be emotive and interpretive through the virtuosity of the song performers. The text which carries the Zezuru verbal expressions draws the performers into the reality of the ritual performance by identifying, determining and punctuating the ritual's structural units which indicate the beginning, climax (resulting in spirit manifestation) and conclusion of the *bira rematendo* event. Song texts are used as lamentation, expression of personal troubles, traditional proverbs, for social control and historical references (Kaufman 1970, Nyarko-Takyi, Arthur, and ResCue 2022). These expressions form the basis of themes of songs that accompany ritual performances. Variations in

vocalisation were also noted and experienced by the researcher in song performances at *mapira ematendo*.

#### 5.3.4 *Huro* - Yodeling and its variations

During the *mapira ematendo*, singers participated at will and exploited their vocal styles; some talented participants utilized their vocal skills to intensify the event. As a participant observer, the researcher witnessed that participants had a great deal of freedom in their vocal parts during song performances. Some participants concentrated on yodelling referred to as *huro*. For example, one singer could sing high-pitched and constricted non-vocables such as, “*huwe huwe huwe huwe*”. The singer used a vocal technique of moving quickly from a chest voice to a falsetto voice (Kamien 2002). The yodelling as executed by one of the expert singers, Alexio Mukupwa, is characterised by gliding effects in downward melodic leaps. In other words, the singer usually started with high-pitched sounds descending stepwise, one up, one down and bound to stay at the same two pitches until the end of the yodelling phrase.

The lead singer could interweave his part with those who could sing the low relaxed voices referred to as *mahon'era*. On 12 October 2021, I recorded the song *mbavarira* (Figure 12) in which *huro* and *mahon'era* followed each other. Another vocal style which is common in Zezuru traditional songs sung at a *bira rematendo* is that of “poetic chanting” referred to as *kudeketera* (Berliner, 2020:6). In describing the vocal techniques Berliner (1993) concurs with [Alexio Mukupwa](#) (AM 23/10/21) that *kudeketera* texts refer to the spirit world and serve as communications to the ancestors. I also drew an example from the song-leader of the song *mbavarira* who could comfortably “chant” phrases ranging from social commentary, proverbs and troubles within the song performance. An example of a *kudeketera* phrase is from the song *mbavarira*, that is, “*VaChatukuta vakafa vatambura!*” This means VaChatukuta died in poverty because of not honouring the ancestral spirits.

Another vocal style which characterised song performance is ululation referred to as *kupururudza* and is exclusively common amongst Zezuru women. This is done in the Zezuru ritual performance as a way of approving or encouraging the performers as it adds intensity to the performance hence the excitement which results in the manifestation of spirits. For men, whistling (*mheterwa*) is an alternative to ululation which is also a powerful driving force to the song

performance. These non-verbal styles in conjunction with *kudeketera*, provide the performer-listeners with deep emotions and thus sustain or enhance the mood of the performance (Berliner, 2020 and AM 23/10/21). The real creativity of a song occurs, “not in its initial basic design but in the sum of all variations and improvisations which are brought to bear upon it resulting in frenzied excitement” (Kaufman 1970: 146).

#### 5.4 Musical instruments and dance performance

It is one of the common characteristics of African music that song and dance are inseparable (Nketia 1974 and Okpokwasili, 2023). In the Zezuru community, like many parts of Africa, song and dance are generally activities of socio-cultural occasions, in which the members of a community or a social group meet for recreation or for the performance of a ceremony or a rite (Nketia, 1965). While performers are exploiting their vocal techniques during music performance, there is a hive of activities that take place simultaneously. This includes hand clapping (*kuuchira*), beating of clappers (*makwakwa*), [playing of instruments](#) such as drums (*ngoma*), shaking of rattles (*hosho*) and dancing (*kudzana/kutamba*). The musical instrument and dance domains, when synchronised in a song performance, produce interlocking rhythms which are characteristic of African music.

I observed during *mapira* ritual practices that the Zezuru people are not very familiar with *magavhu* (leg rattles) which are associated with Karanga (another Shona sub-ethnic group) but prefer *hosho* (hand rattles). The leg rattles augment the sound of dance patterns while dancing. On the other hand, the hand rattles keep the timeline of a song. However, I observed that there is a fusion of three common dance movements, which were popular within the *mapira* ritual performances; *mhande* (which use *magavhu*), *shangara* and *mbira* (explained below). These dances included dancing patterns which are both simple and complex in movements, following the drumming rhythms of the *ngoma*. Oikelome (2021:185) says, “Dance is performed in many cultures as a form of emotional expression, social interaction, or exercise, in a spiritual or performance setting, and is sometimes used to express ideas or tell a story.” Thus, during the *mapira* rituals observed, dance enhanced the song performance which expressed the interaction between the world of the living and the dead.

The leg movements of the *mhande* dancer, can be laid out following a basic cipher rhythmic pattern with left and right feet signalled below:

|1 – 2|1 – 2 – 3 – 4| 1 – 2 – 3|1 – 2|1 – 2 – 3 – 4|1 – 2 – 3 |  
 |L – R|L – R – L – R| L – R – L| L – R|L – R – L – R|L – R – L|

The above cipher notation depicts feet stamping alternately on the ground in the following sequence in the first bar; number 1 represents the left foot stamping on the ground followed by the number 2 right foot. The stamping continues up to bars 3 until the cycle repeats itself. However, the dancers are full of improvisations such that the cipher notation can be coloured by variations.

On the other hand, the *mbira* dance was characterised by basic steps in which the dancer hops and stamps the ground with both feet and in a minor variation of this stamp, one leg is lifted bending backward while the other leg carries the body weight. The dance style follows in a similar pattern continuously with some variations implemented by dancers’ virtuosity. Kubik (1994) has suggested dancing movements of that nature have asymmetrical timeline patterns of musical cultures of Africa.

Both the musical instrument and the dance domains enhance the song domain in its quest to transcend the barrier between the world of the living and the living dead. Baily (1985) and Kubik (1994) concur that African music is not sound alone, but it should be viewed as a system of movement patterns (that include musical instruments and dance). The researcher observed that singing in the context of a ritual performance among the Zezuru people of Hwedza should be approached from a holistic perspective for a meaningful song analysis.

### 5.5 The Implication of song text in a *bira* ceremony

Textual analysis of song in relation to spirit manifestation should not be done in isolation. I argue that song texts crucially give meaning to musical performances. It should be taken into cognizance that song texts enhance communication between the world of the living and the living dead besides other aforementioned forms (playing of *mbira*, libation and snuff sniffing) which are used by the Zezuru people to evoke spirit manifestation. The idioms that are carried in the discourse of ritual performance are embedded in the song texts. Thus, I argue that song texts in a musical performance relate to historical, sociocultural and religious narrations which reflect the bond between the living and the ancestral spirits.

The union between the two worlds of the living and the departed can be viewed by means of theoretical approaches which create appropriate principles to critically analyse the relationship brought about by song text as the mediator. Thus, the views of communication and multispecies theories are extended to postulate the mediation concept (to be fully explained in Chapter 6). In this mediation concept, I seek to establish that song texts convey messages from the performers to the spiritual world where the Zezuru people believe the ancestral and alien spirits reside. Upon receiving the song message, which is enhanced by dance and instrumental accompaniment, the spirits are excited and induced resulting in manifestation as can be evidenced from the physical reactions of the hosts during *bira rematendo* ceremony.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Zezuru ritual practices comprise complex musical events, which present expressive forms of culture where song interaction is instrumental. Thus, songs create the platform for communication. This communication is triggered by song text, enhanced by musical instruments and dance, in which the members of the social group celebrate their identity and relationship with the spirits in the context of cultural expression. In Chapter 6, song texts are expressed through textual or lyrical indexing<sup>28</sup> to define song themes, which are reflected in song performances with the aim to evoke spirit possession. Both the musical instrument and dance domains are analysed together with songs to contribute towards building a meaningful communicative system between the living and the spiritual world.

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<sup>28</sup> Index in this discussion refers to a coding system of counting repeated words or phrases in a song. This enables the researcher to carry a lyrical analysis of a song to give its intended meaning in evoking spirit possession.

## Chapter 6: The spirit of Nembire Muchinganji speaks!

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the participatory function of song text in relation to spirit manifestation in Zezuru ceremonial life. I argue that songs as non-human components to life, determine the link between the Zezuru ceremonial life to the spiritual world. Songs as part of non-human species, investigated through the perspective of multispecies ethnography (Locke, 2015), are integrally related to Zezuru ceremonial life. The Zezuru people believe in the existence of a supernatural world, which demonstrates their interconnectedness to other kinds of life. Aisher and Damodaran (2016: 294) state:

Multispecies scholarship has become a significant new wave of scholarship addressing human interactions with animals, plants and other life forms in what scholars once unproblematically called ‘nature’ or ‘the natural’ world.

Therefore nature, in the form of geographical settings, animals (totemism), and rivers, compel the Zezuru people to acknowledge the existence of non-human things as part of their lives. These non-human species are elements in Zezuru songs and *bira rematendo* ceremonial aspects highlighted in the previous chapter. Ofuani (2012:2) reiterates that, a folk song “reflects the sonic, lingual, norms, folklores, history, proverbs, and traditions of a people.” I noticed that the song lyrics make use of these non-human species to convey the interdependence of the Zezuru-speaking people, nature and the spiritual world.

Songs referred to in this discussion are transcribed using Sibelius notation software to give the reader a clue on how to sing the songs. Readers should note that Sebelius notation only captures the sonic features of the songs, such as pitch and rhythm. However, when these songs were performed in their original contexts, that is, *mapira* ceremonies, they did not adhere to the conventional time signatures such as 4/4, 6/8, et cetera. I observed that the pitch and rhythm were not consistent but changed as the songs progressed. Participants had a free style approach to the song performance. Thus, in analysing these songs the text takes the focus of this discussion rather than the notation. This is done in search of the meaning of song text vis-à-vis the reactions of participants during the *bira rematendo* ritual practice under discussion. Thus, a textual or lyrical

analysis of songs is done using word or phrase indexing by counting frequently repeated words which represent calling or possession of ancestral and alien spirits in particular songs sung during *bira rematendo*.

Different colours are applied to selected words in/or phrases of each song, representing calling or possession in each index.<sup>29</sup> I also discuss the role of the singer-performer in relation to the articulation of song text to express its communicative tendencies. Dukes et al. (2003:644) mention that songs are “content analysed to distil the meaning...as expressed by the singer.” I make comments and give descriptions of psycho-physiological reactions of performers which were observed during the song, dance and instrumental performance.

The data presentation and analysis are descriptive based on my own observations and interviews with informants. The ritual performances which I attended are appended in a video clip that I produced for this research which I linked to the interviews that I conducted.

## 6.2 Song Text and spirit manifestation

Song text is related to spirit manifestation among the Zezuru as observed from the repertoire of songs sung during *mapira ematendo* performances, in which the researcher participated in Hwedza.

On the morning of 15 July 2021 I approached [Headman Tofa Munzverengi](#) at his court to seek permission to attend ritual ceremonies where songs are performed for the purpose of worshipping God through ancestral veneration. This was my first trip to see the headman or to the community/village. This first visit was essential as it paved the way for me to create rapport with my respondents. I was welcomed by the headman, and we greeted each other with our totems. As reiterated in Chapter 3, it is a Shona custom that whenever people are addressing each other, a family totem is used more frequently than real names. The belief is that the use of a totem goes beyond the living to connect them with the ancestral world. This is done to show respect and identity of a people (Temples, 1959). Totems also avoid incestuous practices among group members of the same lineage.

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<sup>29</sup> The same colour in each given song lyrics indicates the frequency at which a word is repeated to emphasise its intended meaning.

I was permitted to carry out fieldwork in areas which fall under his headmanship; these are Gotor, Sengezi, and Jenya in the Northwest part of Hwedza. He was very interested in my project after I convinced him that my aim was to preserve our cultural heritage through scholarly writings emanating from this study. This second trip was facilitated when I received a phone call from Jemwa Mukova to attend a *bira rematendo* ceremony to be held on 12 October 2021. Although I have participated in different *bira rematendo* ritual practices as an insider since childhood, it was during this ceremony that I was interested in proving my argument that songs performed in the context of a ritual practice such as *bira rematendo* evoke spirit possession.

On arrival at the headman's homestead, my assistant and I were welcomed and ushered to the sacred hut. As we all gathered in the sacred hut those present participated in ancestral spirits' exaltation and song performance. After the prayer, the lead singer started to sing while others responded. As already explained, lead and response or cyclic form characterised most *bira rematendo* songs. This cyclic form gives a repetitive thematic structure which emphasises the communicative intent of the song. The repetition of verbal units or fragments consist of thematic segments<sup>30</sup> which carry the message in a song.

This is exemplified in the indexes below:

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<sup>30</sup> Thematic segments refer to phrases made up with fragments or units of thought that group into sentences or ideas of a song. It is from these song sentences or ideas that a listener deduces the meaning of a song.

**Figure 15:** Mbavarira with instrumental accompaniment

Song text for the song *Mbavarira*

**Lead (Phrase 1):** Mbavarira yakada vane dare,

Victory is for those who converse

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

**Lead (Phrase 2):** Ho-ha ho-ha ho-o,

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

**Lead (Phrase 3):** VaChatukuta vakafa vane nharo

VaChatukuta died a persistent man,

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

**Lead (Phrase 4):** Mbavarira chizungu chamakiwa,

Victory is for the spirit of Makiwa,

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

**Lead (Phrase 5):** Hi-ye hi-ye hi-ye he-ha

Hi-ye hi-ye hi-ye he-ha,

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

**Lead (Phrase 6):** Mbavarira yakada vane dare,

Victory is for those who converse

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

**Lead (Phrase 7):** Mbavarira yakada vane dare,

Victory is for those who converse

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

**Lead (Phrase 8):** Mbavarira chizungu chamakiwa,

Victory is for the spirit of Makiwa,

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

**Lead (Phrase 9):** VaChatukuta vakafa vane nharo

VaChatukuta died a persistent man,

**Response:** Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona,

Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see,

### 6.2.1 The song Mbavarira's calling words

I identified words which refer to the calling of spirits in the song *mbavarira*. The word *mbavarira* is a calling word which is frequently repeated in the lead phrases of the song,

“*Mbavarira yakada vane dare.*” The word means “victory” or “determination” and although very different when translated into English, their meaning will become clear (Azim, 2018). *Mbavarira* is an over 1,000-year-old Shona song played in ceremonies (Azim, 2018). In the *bira rematendo*, *mbavarira* was sung as a vocal piece accompanied by *ngoma*, *hosho* and *makwakwa*. The

accompanying instruments augment the song performance, that is, *ngoma* keeps the timeline, *hosho* and *makwakwa* color the performance. It is repeatedly sung in the leading lines to call for the attention of the spirits. It signifies victory which is achieved by spirits in protecting the living descendants from misfortunes. Therefore, the spirits are called on to manifest so that they hold a *dare* session with the living. In the song *dare* is also frequently repeated in leading lines to call the ancestral spirits and it entails a family gathering which is usually held when there is a ritual practice which evokes spirits. This *dare* can only be possible if the family comes together as a unit. The family's willingness to gather is enforced by the need to be victorious through the help of the spirits. The word *yakada* is also frequently repeated referring to 'acceptance' and is qualifying the willingness of the family to be victorious through holding of *dare*.

### 6.2.2 Possession words

I identified words which refer to the possession of spirits in '*Mbavarira*.' In this song the word *muchaiwona* was repeated frequently in the response phrases, '*Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona*'. *Muchaiwona* significantly means 'you shall see them' and it is referring to the manifestation of spirits. The words '*Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha*' are just hockets to colour the song. If the spirits manifest through their mediums, they converse with the living during *matare* sessions. Another word in the leading phrase which is frequently repeated to signify possession of spirits is *vakafa vane nharo*. This *vakafa*, '*VaChatukuta*' is a word which literally means 'they died.' Therefore, it is in the leading phrase referring to those who passed away long ago like *VaChatukuta* (Mr. Chatukuta) who is now manifesting in the form of a spirit to hold *matare*. The word *nharo* features in a leading line which begins with a proper noun, for example, *VaChatukuta*. This word *nharo* means persistence, hence it implies that *VaChatukuta* as an ancestral spirit persisted in its existence and is now manifesting to protect its living descendants.

### 6.2.3 Observation

*Mbavarira* means determination and aiming to achieve certain goals (Hannan, 1994). This is a victory song. The thematic segments of the song are carried and repeatedly sung in the solo or lead phrases. The response segments complete the theme. In music a conspicuous repeated figure is often used to build tension (Borroff and Irvin, 2009). Thus, in *Mbavarira*, the song text is

assigned to lively and sprightly rhythms and is in cyclic motion. Although there is a lot of improvisation by singers, the main theme is carried within the thematic phrase (lead: phrase 1) ‘*Mbavarira yakada vane dare*’ (victory is for those who converse) sung by the songleader and this is completed in the response phrase ‘*Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa muchaiwona*’ (Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa you shall see). These vocables “*Hiya yowerere hiye hiye heha haiwayiwa*” have no genuine meaning but are part of an improvisation done to flavor the song and finish the song phrases. The meaning of the text implies that *mbavarira*, which is victory, is achieved by those who discuss issues amicably at their family or clan courts.

This song, from my observation, was performed to evoke the ancestral and/or alien spirits. When the song was performed during the *bira rematendo* event the spirit of Nembire Muchinganji manifested through *homwe* (host or medium) and a consultation session was held. I argue that song text is intertwined with music, the sound, to portray contextual explanations which are advocated by virtuoso performers to raise communication (from the source who are the performers to the receiver being the spiritual world) within the *bira rematendo* ceremony. From the observations made, it is my argument that song text takes the dimensional space of action since it captures the true physical relationships between humans and nature within the entire ritual performance. Thus, from my observations the chief concern of song text, as shown by the calling and possession word indexes, is to create the atmosphere, send messages and set the mood to evoke possession.

I interviewed Nembire Muchinganji the spirit through its medium on the 12 October 2021 on the importance of *mashoko* (song text):

Elijah: *Ndinoda kubvunzawo musharukwa, kava kakawanda ndichinzwa muchiimbirwa nzimbo mumatare, e-e, Nembire wauya, e-e, mbavarira yakade vane dare, zvichidaro, nhai sekuru munombonya-nyotokonywa neiko ipapa kuti musvike?*

I want to ask you, my elder; there are many times I have heard people singing for you during performances, e-e, Nembire has come, e-e, victory needs those with a court, my elder what is it that triggers you to manifest?

Nembire: *Pandinoti ndauya, ndagara ndiripo pahomwe yangu sezvanda- kambotaura. Chazoita kuti Nembire Muchinganji azouya tichiimba chii? Ndazouya sei, unonzwa kureva kwangu? Kana iwe wave kuzoimba wonzwa ndoti gororo gororo kufarira mashoko amunoimba anotokonya*

*ndobuda pahomwe yangu. Wanzwa kureva kwangu.* When I say I have come, I have been around my medium as I once said. What made Nembire Muchinganji manifest whilst you are singing? Why do I manifest, do you hear what I say? If you are singing then you hear my roaring, it's acknowledging the words you sing which invokes me to come out through my medium.

The response by the spirit of Nembire reveals that *mashoko* (song text) acts as message carriers from the source – song performers to the receiver – spiritual world which results in *kutokonywa* (stimulation) of the ancestral spirits. The text helps the spirits through its medium to deduce the meaning of the song and with *manyawi* (excitement) upon receiving the message, it enters into trance which is characterised with *kudzvova* (roars), *kuzuzuma* (twitches) and *kutwasuka* (stretches) during the song performance. It is this *manyawi* (excitement) that leads to trance, specifically at the climax point during the song performance. The excitement of the spirit, according to multispecies ethnography perspective, comes from the spirit relating the song text which is composed of some non-human aspects of life which are familiar to the spiritual world. According to Nembire this is what induces spirits resulting in possession of the spirit medium, hence the spirit takes control of its medium as it manifests.

The following is an illustration of the song *mudzimu dzoka*

The image displays a musical score for the song 'mudzimu dzoka'. It consists of four vocal staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written in Shona and are aligned with the notes on the staves. The lyrics are as follows:

- Staff 1: lo - ve - ni - mu-dzi-mu dzo-lu ha - a - a - wo - yi - ye - e - kwa - zi - wa - yi To - ve - ra lo - ve - ra mu-dzi-mu
- Staff 2: Ha - wo - yi - ye - e - e e kwa - zi - wa - yi lo - ve - a - a
- Staff 3: dzo - lu ha - wo - yi - ye - e - kwa - zi - wa - yi lo - ve - ni
- Staff 4: Ha - wo - yi - ye - ye kwa - zi - wa - yi lo - ve - ni

**Picture 16:** An illustration of *Mudzimu dzoka*

Song text for the song *Mudzimu dzoka*

**Lead (Phrase 1):** *Tovera m'dzimu dzoka,*

Tovera the spirit come back

**Response:** *Vana vanochema mudzimu dzoka, kaziwai changamire,*

Children are crying, the spirit come back, we greet you great one.

**Lead (Phrase 2):** *Tovera m'dzimu dzoka,*

Tovera the spirit come back

**Response:** *Haya-a woyihe-e m'dzimu dzoka, kaziwai changamire,*

Haya-a woyihe-e the spirit come back; we greet you great one

**Lead (Phrase 3):** *Nembire m'dzimu dzoka,*

Nembire the spirit come back

**Response:** *Haya-a woyihe-e m'dzimu dzoka, kaziwai changamire,*

Haya-a woyihe-e the spirit come back; we greet you great one.

**Lead (Phrase 4):** *Tovera m'dzimu dzoka,*

Tovera the spirit come back

**Response:** *Vana vanochema mudzimu dzoka, kaziwai changamire,*

Children are crying, the spirit come back, we greet you great one.

#### 6.2.4 The song *Mudzimu dzoka*'s calling words

I identified those frequently repeated words which entails the calling of the spirits in the verses of the song '*Mudzimu dzoka*'. The word *dzoka* is found in both the lead and response phrases of the song, '*Tovera m'dzimu dzoka.*' The word *dzoka* literally means 'come back' from the spiritual world. In the extracted short phrase *mudzimu dzoka*, the word *dzoka* is qualifying the word *mudzimu*. Thus, in the short phrase the spirits which are referred to as *mudzimu* are being asked to 'come back'. Hence the theme of the song which is to call the spirits to manifest is conveyed. Another repeated word which relates to the calling of the spirits in the response phrases of the song is *vanochema*, '*Vana vanochema mudzimu dzoka, kaziwai changamire.*' The word *vanochema* means 'they are crying'. In the short phrase '*vana vanochema*', the word *vanochema* is qualifying the word '*vana*' which refers to 'children.' Therefore, '*vana vanochema*' literally means 'children are crying'. Thus, the theme of the phrase is that the spirits are called or evoked as they hear the 'cries' or pleas of their living descendants.

#### 6.2.5 Possession words

In the song *Mudzimu dzoka*, I also identified words which relate to the possession of ancestral spirits. The short phrase *kwaziwai changamire* is frequently repeated in the response lines of lyrics as participating performers sing and dance. The word *kwaziwai* literally means ‘greeting’ and *changamire* is a title of respect given to powerful and influential people like chiefs, headmen and in this case, it addresses the spirits. Therefore, in the short phrase *kwaziwai changamire* the spirits are being greeted implying that they are to possess their mediums. Those singing repeatedly *kwaziwai changamire* in the response lines of lyrics are welcoming the spirits which are being called to manifest as revealed in the calling words *mudzimu dzoka* (spirits come back).

#### 6.2.6 Observation

The thematic segments of the song ‘*Mudzimu dzoka*’ look simple in terms of musical phrases which flow in units to form melodic meaning. The song is characterised by lead and response singing. The lead singer uses persuasive and influential singing techniques such as yodelling, hocketing and overlapping to create intensity and climax. According to Alexio Mukupwa (AM 23/10/21), the text sung by the lead singer (phrase 1) carries the theme, ‘*Tovera mudzimu dzoka*’, which implies that ‘*Tovera*’, is the name which stands for the spirit which is being called to manifest as referred by the short phrase ‘*mudzimu dzoka*’. The development of the theme is in the response section, ‘*haya woyihe-e mudzimu dzoka, kwaziwai changamire.*’ This response section gives a complete sentence or idea of the song which is communicated from the source (participant performers) to the receiver (spirits which possess mediums). Thus, the living are requesting and welcoming their ancestral spirits to manifest in order to have direct conversations with them through a host or medium referred to as *homwe*.

There is much improvisation in the text by the lead singer, for example, the name ‘*Tovera*’ which stands for the commonly known clan spirit among the Shona people referred to as ‘*mhondoro*’ can be replaced by particular names such as ‘*Nembire*’, the spirit medium for the Munzverengi family. The song text functions as a directing force of the message which gives the effect of communication, hence some performers experience trance and the spirits are evoked resulting in manifestation of some mediums.

Contrary to the main aim of the *mapira ematendo* which are celebratory in nature, the lyrical lines ‘*Vana vanochema mudzimu dzoka, kaziwayi changamire*’, literally means that the living descendants are crying, referred to in the song as ‘*vanochema*’. This is because of various

problems the living descendants encounter in life hence they seek the intervention of their ancestral spirits. However, I observed that in the context of these celebratory ritual performances, songs of this nature are sung to evoke the ancestral spirits rather than what they literally mean. These songs survived the test of time by being passed from one generation to another. As a result, they are songs which are familiar to the past generations from which the ancestral spirits emanate. Thus, upon listening and dancing to these songs the ancestral spirits through their mediums respond to the songs and can react to the song performance, hence manifestation can be experienced.

## Nyangarike

**Figure 17:** An illustration of the song *Nyangarike*

Song text for the song *Nyangarike*

**Lead (phrase 1):** *Ndanga ndichadzoka nyangarike,*

I was coming back though I had disappeared

**Response:** *Haho heyeha-a, ndanga ndichadzoka*

Haho heyeha-a, I was coming back

**Lead (phrase 2):** *Mudzimu chidzoka nyangarike*

Spirit come back you disappeared

**Response:** *Haho heyeha-a, ndanga ndichadzoka*

Haho heyeha-a, I was coming back

**Lead (phrase 3):** *Manga marova nyangarike*

You had disappeared

**Response:** *Haho heyeha-a, ndanga ndichadzoka*  
Haho heyeha-a, I was coming back

**Lead (phrase 4):** *Ndanga ndichadzoka nyangarike,*  
I was coming back though I had disappeared

**Response:** *Haho heyeha-a, ndanga ndichadzoka*  
Haho heyeha-a, I was coming back

**Lead (phrase 5):** *Mudzimu chidzoka nyangarike*  
Spirit come back you disappeared

**Response:** *Haho heyeha-a, ndanga ndichadzoka*  
Haho heyeha-a, I was coming back

**Lead (phrase 6):** *Manga marova nyangarike*  
You had disappeared

**Response:** *Haho heyeha-a, ndanga ndichadzoka*  
Haho heyeha-a, I was coming back

**Lead (phrase 7):** *Ndanga ndichadzoka nyangarike,*  
I was coming back though I had disappeared

**Response:** *Haho heyeha-a, ndanga ndichadzoka*  
Haho heyeha-a, I was coming back...

### 6.2.7 The song *Nyangarike*'s calling words

I also analysed calling words in the song *Nyangarike* and identified those which were frequently repeated in the lyrics of lead and response lines. The calling word *chidzoka* is frequently repeated in the leading phrases and it literally means 'come back'. It is in the short phrase *mudzimu chidzoka* that the spirits or *mudzimu* are being enticed to 'come back' by their living descendants. Another identified a short phrase with calling words is *marova nyangarike*. The word *marova* means 'to be absent for a long time' and *nyangarike* means "to disappear". Therefore, when the living descendants say *marova nyangarike* they are calling their spirits to manifest as they have been absent for a long time from attending *matare*.

### 6.2.8 Possession words

An identified frequently repeated possession word is *ndichadzoka* (will come back) in the short phrase '*ndanga ndichadzoka*'. The word '*ndanga*' refers to the spirits who indicated that they are 'coming back' referred to as *ndichadzoka*.

### 6.2.9 Observation

This song *Nyangarike* is performed among other songs in *bira rematendo*. The ritual ceremony is at headman Munzverengi's homestead on this day of 20 October 2021. During the performance of this song, [Juliana Muswizi](#), aged seventy-nine by then, starts to behave in an awkward manner. She is dancing with others when she experiences trance and then manifestation. Juliana Muswizi is a medium to the spirit of Zisanhi a *gombwe* spirit for Mbire clan and is of the lineage to Munzverengi family discussed above. Central to the song are familiar calling and possession words for the spirit medium of Zisanhi. The song contains text or words such as in the call or lead lyrics: (phrase 1) '*Ndanga ndichadzoka, nyangarike*' which literally means "I was coming though I had disappeared", (Phrase 2) '*Mudzimu chidzoka nyangarike*' a plea from the living requesting the ancestral spirits to manifest, and (Phrase 3) '*Manga marova nyangarike*' which implies that the ancestral spirits have not been manifesting for a while to hold *matara*.

I interviewed the spirit medium of Zisanhi on why he<sup>31</sup> manifested when the song '*nyangarike*' was sung, and this is what he said:

Elijah: *Sekuru vamwe vanguri vauya, ko imi manga masarepi uye mazodanwa nani?*  
Forefather, some had already manifested, but where you were and who called you?

Zisanhi: *Hahahahaha (kuseka) wandifananidza. Kwete! WeMbire ndachikaira kubva kure dondipai donhodzo, guuuuu (kudzvova), ndanga ndichauya, zvino mandidana manga mati ndanyangarika, kwete, ayiii-ayiii (kudzvova).*

Hahahahaha (laughing) you liken me. No! A Mbire, I have travelled from afar I need to quench, guuuuu (belching) I was coming, but you called me you thought I had disappeared, no, ayiii-ayiii (belching).

Elijah: *Madanwa nei sukuru parwiyo urwu?*  
What made you come on this song forefather?

Zisanhi: *Mhwere dzokono dzoti ndarova, kwete ndiripo, ndauya, Mataura wani.*  
My children said I am nowhere; no I am here I have come you said it.

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<sup>31</sup> Juliana is a woman but the spirit of Zisanhi is a male spirit which possesses her as a medium hence she is addressed as male when possessed.

From the spirit’s interview response (through its host), it is the meaning of the repeated verbal fragment or the song text which enticed the spirit to be evoked and manifest. The spirit medium of Zisanhi’s response shows that it manifested when it received the meaning of *mashoko* (song text) when it said, “*ndauya, mataura wani*” (I came because you said so). From my observation, although in addition to the whole song performance there was a fusion of dancing, instrument playing and other non-musical activities that augmented the song text, the spirit of Zisanhi enjoyed the song’s lyrical meaning. This is the reason why during the *bira rematendo* ritual practice the spirit emphasised that it had to listen and dance to the song first before it manifested.

Below is an illustration for the song *Nyama yekugocha*.

The musical score for *Nyama yekugocha* is presented in three systems. Each system consists of four staves: a vocal line (Lead, L, or vocal line), two response lines (Response 1, Response 2, R1, R2), and a percussion line. The time signature is 12/8. The lyrics are as follows:

- System 1:
  - Lead: Ho o ya-ve nya-ma ye-ku-go-cha, ya-ve
  - Response 1: yo-we-e-re-re ho-ha-ho-o-o yo-we-re ba-ya wa-ba-ya.
  - Response 2: Hi-ye hi-ye.
  - Percussion: Hi-ye hi-ye.
- System 2:
  - L: nya-ma ye-ku-go-o-cha,
  - R1: yo-we-e-re-re ho-ha-ho-o-o yo-we-re
  - R2: Ha-ve ha-ve.
  - Perc: Ha-ve ha-ve.
- System 3:
  - Vocal line: ya-ve nya-ma ye-ku-go-o-cha,
  - Response line: ba-ya-wa-ba-ya.
  - Perc: Hi-ye hi-ye.

**Figure 19:** The song *Nyama yekugocha* with drum accompaniment.

The Song text for the song *Nyama yekugocha*.

- Lead (Phrase 1):** *Ho-o yave nyama yekugocha*  
 Ho-o it is now meat to roast
- Response:** *Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere baya wabaya*  
 Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere pierce
- Lead (Phrase 2)** *Tarirai mhuka inobva mugomo*  
 Look at the animal coming down  
 from the mountain
- Response:** *Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere baya wabaya*  
 Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere pierce
- Lead (Phrase 3):** *Ho-o yave nyama yekugocha*  
 Ho-o it is now meat to roast
- Response:** *Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere baya wabaya*  
 Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere pierce **Lead**
- (Phrase 4):** *Rave gudo rinoga mugomo*  
 It's a baboon coming from the mountain
- Response:** *Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere baya wabaya*  
 Yowe-e-rere hohaho-o yowere pierce...

#### 6.2.10 Calling words index

I identified some words which are related to the calling of the alien spirits. The verbal fragment *nyama yekugocha* is formed by two words, *nyama* which literally means ‘meat’ and *yekugocha* which is a qualifier that means ‘to roast.’ Therefore, the verbal fragment implies that ‘there is meat to roast’ hence the spirits are being thanked for what they would have provided to the hunters.

#### 6.2.11 Possession words index

The word *mhuka* implies ‘an animal’ and *inobva mugomo* means ‘from the hill’. Thus, the verbal fragment implies ‘an animal from the hill.’ This verbal fragment implies that the spirits are being evoked to manifest so that they could accompany the hunters in celebrating the hunt for animals on the hill. The hunting is seldom done throughout the year, and the alien spirits are acknowledged and praised for supporting the hunters during the *bira rematendo*.

Another verbal fragment with possession words is **gudo rinogara mugomo**. The word **gudo** refers to the ‘baboon’ and **rinogara mugomo** literally means ‘it stays in the hill’ hence the verbal fragment can literally mean ‘the baboon which stays in the hill’. This short phrase indicates that there are spirits that stay in the hills, so they are invited to manifest to lead in the hunting or to celebrate the hunted animals. Another verbal fragment which is more frequently repeated in the response section of the song is **baya wabaya** which means ‘to stab.’ The verbal fragment implies that the hunters who are guided by the spirits must stab the hunted animal.

#### 6.2.12 Observation

It is my observation that when the song *Nyama yekugocha* is performed [Shepherd Chakuinga](#) is possessed by a *njuzu* spirit during *bira rematendo* event. The lead verbal fragment (phrase 1) ‘*Yave nyama yekugocha*’ implies that the hunters have a catch referred to as ‘*nyama*.’ Lead (Phrase 2) ‘*Tarirai mhuka inobva mugomo*’ signifies that the hunters should hunt their prey in places like hills. Therefore, they are in a jovial mood as they sing ‘*baya wabaya*’ celebrating their success in killing the animals for meat. I also observed that as a possessed medium, Chakuinga's dancing movements are imitating those of a hunter. According to Chakuinga the song is usually sung during hunting ritual practices. However, I observed that the song is also performed during rituals such as *bira rematendo* to evoke the alien spirits. Shepherd Chakuinga (SC 20/10/2021) has this to say:

Elijah: *Kana muchiti shavi renyu rinodaidzwa nokuimba, zvikuru panoimbwa nyama yekugocha, rinosvitswa nei parwuyo urwu?* If you say your alien spirit is evoked through singing, especially when the song *Nyama yekugocha* is sung, what evokes it in that song?

Shepherd: *Ini sehomwe chandinoziva ndechekuti vari pandiri vanoimbirwa nzimbo dzechidzimba mubira, zvikuru urwo “yave nyama yekugocha” sezvoe-e-e rwuchinongedza kubayaka mhuka kumarimuka, mashoko sezvinoitwa nevavhimi vachienda kana kubva arwo anotokonya.*

Myself as a medium, what I know is the spirit that manifests when hunting songs are sung during a *bira*, especially *yave nyama yekugocha*. Since it points out that an animal is being killed like what hunters do when they are coming from or going to the jungle, the words stimulate.

Elijah: *Kana muchiti mashoko arwo anotokonya munorevei? Nyatsojekesai kuti mashoko aya ane ukama hupi nevari kumhepo.* If you say the words stimulate, what do you mean? Clarify how these words are related to spirits.

Shepherd: *Zvunoitika ndezvekuti vari kumhepo vanonzwawoka kana pachiimbwa, ngoma, mhururu nemuridzo nekudzana zvichirohwa...haaaa, makuwerere. Saka vanoteererawo izvozvi vachinzwa zvinorehwa nemashoko edzimbo dzedu.*

*Vanotobuda chete!*

What happens is that those spirits hear what we sing, the drum, ululation, whistling and dancing...it's hilarious. So, they listen to these and understand the meaning of the text of our songs. They will manifest!

The interviewee's response in conjunction with what I observed indicates that stimulation of the alien spirits is directly related to the meaning of the text or words of the song. I also observed that dancing, instrument playing, ululating, and whistling within a *bira rematendo* performance authenticates the message of the song which entices the spirits. Chakuinga explains that the descriptive nature of the song conveys the message to the world of spirits which is reciprocated by way of manifestation. It is conveyed in this song that the dead used to hunt. When they perceive what they used to do whilst they were alive through song performance, they are triggered and as a result they manifest. This is revealed in the above interview when Chakuinga says; "*vanoteererawo izvozvi vachinzwa zvinorehwa nemashoko edzimbo dzedu. Vanotobuda chete!*" (They listen to these and understand the meaning of the text of our songs. They will manifest!). Thus, the alien spirits listen carefully to the song and deduce the meaning of the text hence they respond by possessing their mediums.

The following is an illustration of the song *Varimugomba*:



**Figure 21:** An illustration of *Varimugomba* song

Song text for *Varimugomba* song

**Lead (Phrase 1):** *Varimugomba varamba kudaira vanawo tachema.*

Those in graves are refusing to answer children are crying

**Response:** *Hahoho varamba kudaira vadzimu woye,*

Hahoho they refuse to answer spirits oh

**Lead (Phrase 2):** *Vari kumhepo varamba kudaira vanawo tachema*

Those in winds are refusing to answer

**Response:** *Hahoho varamba kudaira vadzimu woye,*

Hahoho they refuse to answer spirits oh

**Lead (Phrase 3):** *Mhondoro dzose dzaramba kudaira dzenyika ino,*

All lions are refusing to answer

**Response:** *Hahoho varamba kudaira vadzimu woye,*

Hahoho they refuse to answer spirits oh

**Lead (Phrase 5):** *Midzimu yose varamba kudaira toitaseiko,*

All spirit mediums are refusing to answer, what do we do now?

**Response:** *Hahoho varamba kudaira vadzimu woye,*

Hahoho they refuse to answer spirits oh.

**Lead (Phrase 6):** *Varamba kudaira varamba kudaira toitaseiko,*

They are refusing to answer, they are refusing to answer what do we do now?

**Response:** Hahoho *varamba kudaira vadzimu* woye,  
Hahoho they refuse to answer spirits oh.

**Lead (Phrase 7):** *Vari mugomba varamba kudaira vanawo tachema.*

Those in graves are refusing to answer, children are crying

**Response:** Hahoho *varamba kudaira vadzimu* woye,  
Hahoho they refuse to answer spirits oh

**Lead (Phrase 8):** *Vari kumhepo varamba kudaira vanawo tachema.*

Those in winds are refusing to answer, children are crying

### 6.2.13 The song *Varimugomba*'s calling words

I singled out the words which indicate the calling of spirits in the song *Varimugomba*. The verbal fragments *varamba kudaira*, *yaramba kudaira* and *dzaramba kudaira* in both the lead and response lyrics have been repeated frequently in the song. These verbal fragments *varamba kudaira*, *yaramba kudaira* and *dzaramba kudaira* possess prefixes *va-*, *ya-* and *dza-* respectively which refer to the ancestral spirits. The word *-ramba* means 'refuse', whilst *kudaira* refers to responding (to the calls) and metaphorically it means 'to manifest.' The verbal fragments then imply that the ancestral spirits are 'refusing to manifest.' Hence the living descendants are calling the spirits to manifest through repeating the calling words in that song. Other frequently repeated calling words are *vanawo tachema*. The word *vanawo* implies 'children' and *tachema* literally means 'crying' hence the verbal fragment literally means 'children are crying.' The verbal fragment *vanawo tachema* portrays the singers' sentiments that they are 'crying' to their ancestral spirits hence they should manifest upon hearing their 'cries.' Another identified calling word is *toitaseiko?* meaning 'what can we do?' The word indicates that the living descendants are hopeless, and they need assistance from their ancestral spirits hence the spirits are being called upon to manifest.

### 6.2.14 Possession words

In the song *Varimugomba*, I also identified possession words in the lead and response lyrics. The verbal fragment *vari mugomba* is composed of two words. *Vari* means 'those and *mugomba* means 'in the pit.' Therefore, the short phrase literally means 'those in the pits.' However, figuratively this verbal fragment is referring to those people who died and were buried generations ago. The spirits of those buried who are believed to possess their mediums when the

song is sung are the ones who are expected to manifest. The other frequently repeated verbal fragment with similar possession effect is *vari kumhepo*. The word *kumhepo* means ‘in the air’ hence *vari kumhepo* refers to ‘those in the air.’ All those participating in the song performance through singing, as already discussed in the previous chapter, believe that the ancestral spirits take refuge in the air. Hence, they are called upon to manifest if the song is sung. The possession word *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits) is frequently repeated in the response lyrics as a means to call them.

By continuously repeating the word during a song performance, the process of communication takes place, the possession atmosphere is heightened thus inducing the spirits to possess their hosts. I also identified the verbal fragment *mhondoro dzose* to be possession words in the leading lines of lyrics. The word *mhondoro* refers to a ‘male lion’ and *dzose* means ‘all.’ It follows that *mhondoro dzose* means ‘all male lions.’ However, the verbal fragment has a figurative meaning; *mhondoro* is a word which is used to refer to clan spirits who are responsible for rainmaking. These clan spirits are believed to dwell in male lions during the time they are not possessing their hosts. In this song “*varimugomba*” such spirits are invited to manifest through their hosts.

#### 6.2.15 Observation

The verbal fragments analysed in the above lyrics together form thematic segments of call and response singing *Varimugomba*. These thematic segments complement each other to give that cyclic motion of the song. The meaning of the thematic segments of this song must be understood in relation to the context in which they are sung. With reference to the concept of communication, pragmatic rules treat the use or effect that any sign has to its user as well as the context or situation of the interaction. Thus, music is psychologically speaking, an emotive reward and reinforcer, one that acts to modulate arousal, affect and mood (Brown, 2008).

The above song’s thematic segments show the metaphorical implication of the song to the performers and those who are possessed during the *bira rematendo*. For example, the words ‘*vari mugomba*’ in the lead phrase literally means ‘those who are buried in the graves’ but the inner speech or the metaphorical meaning of the words ditto are ‘the ancestral spirits.’ I observed that those who are singing the song are lamenting that the ancestral spirits referred to as *vari mugomba* (those in the pit), *vari kumhepo* (those in the air), *mhondoro dzose* (all lions) and *midzimu yose* (all ancestral spirits) are sad. As a result of their sadness these ancestral spirits are no longer

manifesting (*varamba kudaira*) implying that they are not protecting the family from evil spirits. It is also my observation that during a lively performance of such songs like *Varimugomba* the spirit mediums hear the plea of their living descendants hence they manifest and hold consultation sessions with their progeny. It is the researcher's observation that many such songs which express problems faced by the living are sung during *bira rematendo*, which is intended to be for thanksgiving. Maybe this is due to the passage of time and space that even at a ceremony to thank the ancestral spirits songs for grieving are also sung. Below is an illustration of the song *Sekuru vauya*

**Figure 22:** An illustration of the song *Sekuru vauya*.

Song text for the song *sekuru vauya*.

**Lead (Phrase 1):** *Sekuru vauya*,

Grandfather has come,

**Response:** *Tovatevera mambo* ha-a he-re

We follow the king ha-a he-re

**Lead (Phrase 2):** *Mai hwe zvino todini?*

Mother, what can we do?

**Response:** *Tovatevera mambo* ha-a he-re

We follow the king ha-a he-re

**Lead (Phrase 3):** *Mai hwe sekuru vauya*

Mother Grandfather has come,

**Response:** *Tovatevera mambo* ha-a he-re

We follow the king ha-a he-re

**Lead (Phrase 4):** *Mai hwe Nembire vauya*

Mother Nembire has come,

**Response:** *Tovatevera mambo* ha-a he-re

We follow the king ha-a he-re

**Lead (Phrase 5):** *Mai hwe zvino tofara*

Mother now we are happy

**Response:** *Tovatevera mambo* ha-a he-re  
 We follow the king ha-a he-re

**Lead (Phrase 6):** *Mai hwee sekuru vauya*

Mother Grandfather has come,

**Response:** *Tovatevera mambo* ha-a he-re  
 We follow the king ha-a he-re

**Lead (Phrase 7):** *Mai hwee zvino tochema*,

Mother now we can cry,

**Response:** *Tovatevera mambo* ha-a he-re  
 We follow the king ha-a he-re...

#### 6.2.16 The song *Sekuru vauya*'s calling words

There are frequently repeated calling words from the lead and response lyrics of the song *Sekuru vauya*. The verbal fragment *tovatevera mambo* is composed of two words, *tovatevera* which means 'we follow' and *mambo* which refers to 'king.' Therefore, the verbal fragment literally means 'we follow the king.' In the short response phrase, the participant performers are authenticating their fellowship to the ancestral spirits. Hence, the performers are invoking the spirits to manifest. From the lead lyrics the researcher identified verbal fragments which show the emotions of the performers intended to be conveyed to the ancestral spirits. These verbal fragments are; *zvino todii?*, *zvino tochema* and *zvino tofara*. In these verbal fragments the common word is *zvino* which means 'now'. The verbal fragment *zvino todii?* in phrase 2 is a rhetorical question which means 'what do we do now?' It is referring to performers who are clueless about their lives hence they are seeking guidance from their ancestral spirits. *Zvino tochema* in phrase 7 literally means now 'we are crying'. Due to life problems performers portray their sadness through crying hence they are calling ancestral spirits to help them. The verbal fragment in phrase 5, *zvino tofara* means 'now we are happy.' It is the feeling of the performers that they are happy when their ancestral spirits manifest. Thus, the calling words of the identified fragment in this song are meant to evoke the spirits so that they possess their mediums.

#### 6.2.17 Possession words

In the song *Sekuru vauya* the researcher identified frequently recurring words which indicate possession. The verbal fragment *sekuru vauya* is regularly repeated in the leading lyrics

of the song. **Sekuru** means ‘grandfather’ and in this song it is referring to ‘an ancestral spirit.’ *Vauya* means ‘has come.’ Therefore, the phrase **sekuru vauya** figuratively means ‘the ancestral spirit has manifested.’ The word **sekuru** in the leading lyrics can be interchangeably used with a proper noun **Nembire** which refers to the actual name of the spirit medium. Thus, **sekuru vauya** can be sung as **Nembire auya** implying that *Nembire* the spirit has manifested through its medium.

#### 6.2.18 Observation

The call and response lyrics of the song *Sekuru vauya* together form thematic segments of the song. The repetition of thematic segments contributes towards the cyclic motion of the song. It is my argument that the meaning of song *Sekuru vauya* to the participant performers and the spiritual world must be understood in relation to the context in which it is performed. I observed that the intention of the song performers was to evoke the spirit of *Nembire* to manifest through its host as exemplified by continuously repeating the possession word index **Nembire auya**. The participant performer’s sentiments are shown in their misery, **zvino todii?** (What do we do?) and **zvino tochema**. The song was performed with vigour, intensified through dancing and instrument playing. With the repeated calling words **tovatera mambo** which shows the zeal and fellowship of the living to their ancestral spirits, a tense atmosphere is created hence, certain psychophysiological actions are noticed and manifestation takes place. It is also my observation that by performing the song *Sekuru vauya* within the *bira rematendo* event the spirit of *Nembire* heard the plea of the living descendants hence, it manifested and held consultation sessions with its progeny (Appendix C: title 2, chapter 2).

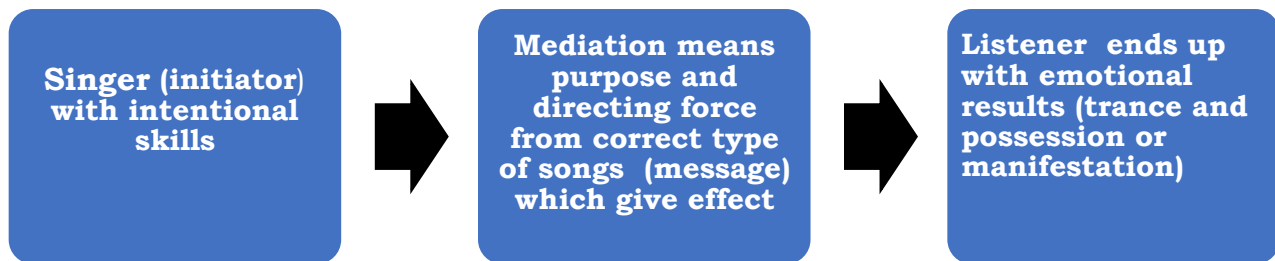
#### 6.3 The Concept of Mediation

The above analysed songs which were sung during *mapira ematendo* performances I attended and participated in underlined the significance of the context in which song text passes the message from the singer–performer to the receiver–listener as reiterated in the communication model. The process of conveying this message from the source to the receiver in each context with the intent to provoke specific psychophysiological reactions in performers is what is referred to as ‘mediation’ in this discussion. This concept is based on the argument that the emphasis is on interpreting music in relation to the social, cultural or historical contexts in which it is produced, reproduced or consumed (Hooper, 2016). Thus, it is the Zezuru-speaking people’s tradition which

has been orally passed on from generation to generation to hold celebratory rituals which are characterised by song performance. The songs that are performed in ritual ceremonies are reproduced from one generation to another and consumed as originating from the distant past.

The songs, as has been reiterated in the previous chapter, comprise texts or lyrics produced in *mapira*, which are regarded as the site of mediation processes (Hooper, 2016:75) and are consumed by participant-performers. The song texts mediate or are a path or conduit so powerful that they have a psychophysiological effect on performers which is evidenced during trance and spirit manifestation. Mediation can best be explained from the role of the singer– performer, analysis of song text and the resultant effect shown by receiver–listener within the *bira* ritual performances observed.

The mediation concept can simply be illustrated as depicted below:



**Figure 23:** Illustration of the mediation concept.

### 6.3.1 The singer as mediator

The singer–performer in a *bira rematendo* ceremony is observed as a skilful person who uses his or her virtuosity in singing. The ability to sing is noticed in using different vocal styles such as *kudeketera* (yodelling) and *huro* (hocketing) as already explained in Chapter 5. However, from the observations I made during ritual performances, the singer–performer possesses the musical skill referred to as *unjere* (expertise) in Zezuru. It is this musical skill which he/she uses to create contact through song text between the world of the living and the dead. In other words, in the mediation process, the singer is the initiator between himself as a musician and the listeners (who include the spirits). On the role of the singer–performer as the initiator in mediation, Alexio Mukupwa (AM 20/10/22) has this to say:

Elijah: *Zvakanaka, mungambotsanangurawo here kuti pamaonero enyu chii kunze kwemashoko amataura chinoita kuti rwuyo murwuti rwava kunakidza zvokusvitsa midzimu.*

Ok, can you explain from your observations, besides text, what else makes a song interesting to evoke spirits?

Alexio: *E-e-e, ndingati kunze kwemashoko, maridzirwo anoitwa ngoma. Ndinovimba manzwa maridzirwo anga achiitwa navakomana mumba umo. Chimwe ndinoona maimbiro atinoita, panodzvovewa, huro ichitamba zvekuti wega unotonzwa kuti pano zvinhu hazvisisina kumira zvakanaka, pane zvava kutoitika. Panoda unyanzvi kuimba zvinosvitsa mudzimu kana kufadza vanhu. Wanzwa mheterwa dzanga dzichirohwa here? Mupururu, unobva wanzwa zenze kuti tiri kuita zvinhu zvedu. Pamwe ndizvo zvinonzwawo vari kumhepo, hameno!*

E-e-e, besides the song text, it is the way drums are played. I understand you have heard how the men played the drum in that hut. The other thing is our singing style of yodelling, hocketing and the throat technique such that you feel that something is no longer normal. It needs special skills to sing for spirit manifestation or to interest people. Did you hear the whistling? Ululation? You can feel the excitement that we are doing our things. Maybe it is the same that our spirits feel, I do not know.

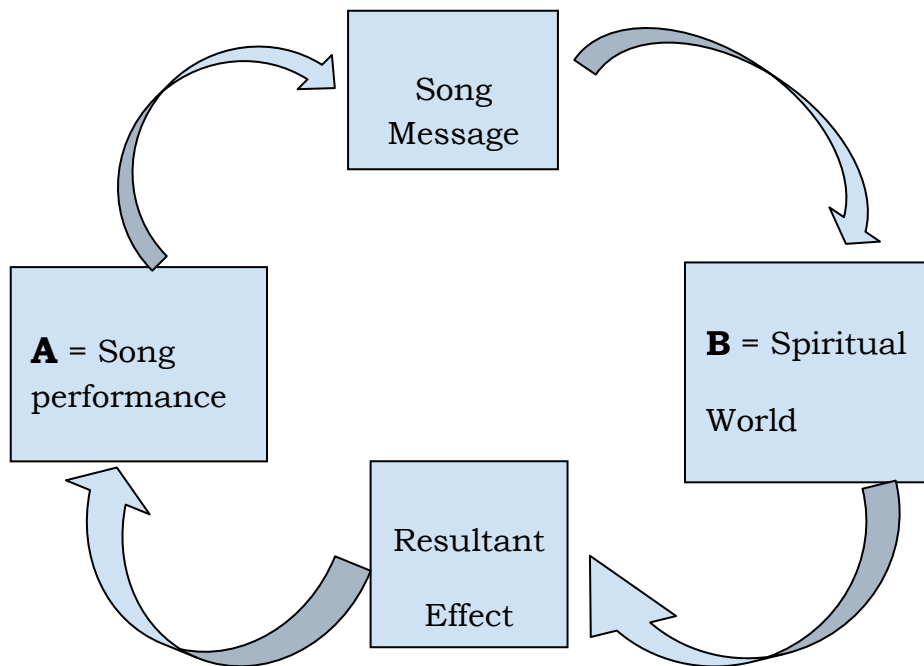
From the above interview, the interviewee's experience as an expert lead singer says that song text is one of few ways in which people can connect to the supernatural world and find common ground with their ancestral spirits. The lead singer also states that drumming, ululation, clapping of hands or clappers and dancing during the *bira* event augment the meaning of song text in carrying the message from the living world to the supernatural world. From my participation observation, it is also the lead singer's ability to produce the enticing resultant sound of text of a particular song that affects the listener-performers and or the spirit mediums physically and psychologically when they fully understand the meaning and the importance of the song within the context of a ritual performance. Thus, in a song performance, which encompasses music instruments and dance, the contextual meaning is deduced from the text that carries the message

from the source (participant performers) to the receiver (spirits through mediums) resulting in psycho-physiological effects during the mediation process, hence manifestation.

### 6.3.2 Song text as message

Songs performed during *mapira ematendo* can be viewed as a musical form which is composed of musical elements and text which enhances communication between the progeny and the progenitor. Blacking (2000) substantiates that music creates virtual time that leads to another world. With reference to Figure 23 above, the singer–performer as the initiator has a very crucial role of mediating, which is directing the message through skilful singing of a particular song that is performed and danced by participants within the context of a *bira rematendo* performance. Thus, song text (the message carrier) when turned into sound (as exemplified in the above indexed songs) possesses the potential richness of pitch, time, colour and sound intensity that direct sensual effect, hence constructing a communication system between the living and the ancestral or alien spiritual world.

This type of communication between the song performers and the world of the ancestral or alien spirits is like a reversible equation. The mediation concept states that a song performed in context has a purpose and a directing force of conveying a message from the source to the receiver resulting in an effect to the participants and particularly the host. In this case, as illustrated in Figure 24, the source of the message is (A) which represents those who are performing a song in the *bira rematendo* event and (B) which stands for the spiritual world which is experienced by the mediums.



**Figure 24:** Cycle of communication through song text.

The acknowledgement of song message by ancestral or alien spirit mediums is noticed through the resultant effect which is trance and/or manifestation during the *bira rematendo* event.

### 6.3.3 Reaction of spirit mediums

Spirit manifestation usually takes place in the early hours of the morning several hours after the *bira rematendo* commenced during the previous evening. In most of the ceremonies I attended and witnessed during my fieldwork, possession took place early in the morning or during the day after the performance of several contextual songs. I observed that the relationship between the meaning of song text and spirituality could be evidenced when certain contextual songs were performed to induce trance and possession in some performers within the context of *bira rematendo* ceremonies. Kartomi (1973:167) agrees that “to induce trance and possession music must be contextual and mesmeric in effect.” This response of performers to song performance in the context of *bira rematendo* event is shown by the testimonies given by subjects introduced earlier in this and previous chapters. (See Chapter 2 and Appendix B: Title 1)

In this section of the mediation concept discussion, the whole process of evoking ancestral and alien spirits through singing is explained below with the aid of a possession model. As

explained in the above section 6.3.2, a traditional song itself is free of direct meaning, but when performed in context the meaning can be made explicit. The juxtaposition of text and song lies in the virtuosity of the participant leading the song and the respondents to express the meaning of the ideas within a song performance. Thus, within the *bira rematendo* context, I observed that performers sing and dance to the song and after a continuous and intense performance their reactions can be noticed. The spirit of [Sekuru Mushayabasa](#) (SM 20/10/21) agrees that “*Pane nziyo dzandinonzwa kana dzoimbwa dzinonditurura kubva kumhepo ndipotera pahomwe yangu painenge irimowo munhandere ichidzana navamwe*” (When I hear certain songs, they entice me to come out from the spiritual world to possess my host when she is dancing together with others).

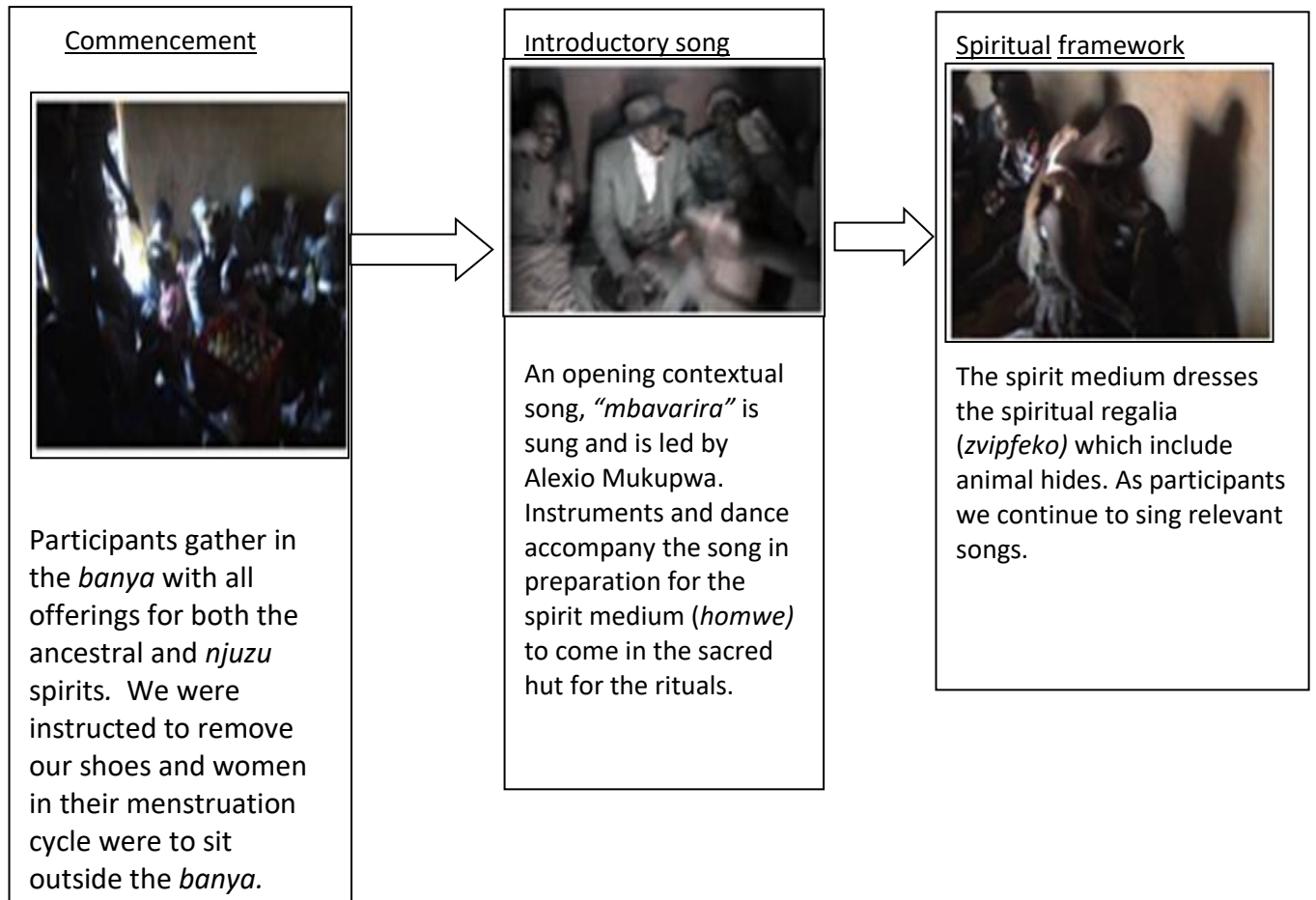
Certain song texts can have meaning which can arouse feelings and emotions of those who are listening and performing to the extent that at the climax of the performance the performers experience trance that can result in full manifestation. The following is a model, like that propounded by Matiure (2011), which shows the proceedings of manifestation or possession during a *bira rematendo*. The possession model is a product designed by the researcher from the manifestation acts of ancestral and alien spirits during *mapira ceremonies*. As an example, the researcher used the manifestation of *gombwe* spirit of Nembire Muchinganji during a *bira rematendo* ceremony. The *bira rematendo* ceremony was held on 20 October 2021 at Headman Tofa Munzverengi’s homestead in Gotora area of Hwedza. Figure 26 below is a summary of the proceedings of the spirit manifestation model (Matiure, 2011) referred to as *kusvikirwa* or *kusutswa* or *kubudirwa* in *bira rematendo* ritual performance.

The flow chart of spirit manifestation model

Stage 1

Stage 2

Stage 3



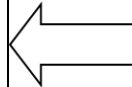
The flow chart of manifestation model continues;

Stage 6

More intensified atmosphere



The song performance becomes more serious and is intensified with syncopated rhythms of *hosho* and *ngoma* instruments. The host enters into trance. He starts with some slight jerk movements which become sharp as the host nods to the song. There is more of snuff taking.

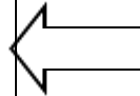


Stage 5

Creation of trance state (*nyawi*)

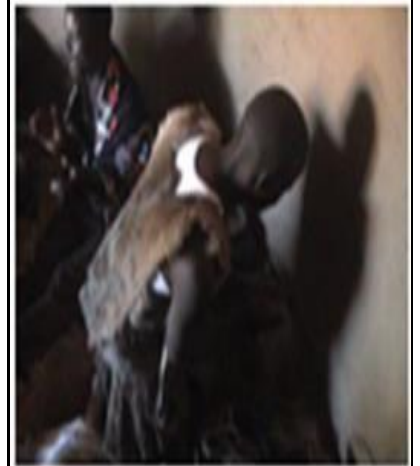


Song performance intensifies. The song "*mudzimu dzoka*" is sung whilst the medium concentrates on taking snuff. The atmosphere is getting tense.



Stage 4

Prayer (*Kupira*)



the spirit medium (*nyawi*)

kneels down and prays to the ancestors. He notifies the ancestors about the significance of the event and seeks their honor to bless the *bira* event. Alexio Mukupwa continuously leads on singing and others respond. Hand clapping, playing of *makwakwa*, *ngoma*, *hosho* and ululation continue after the prayer.

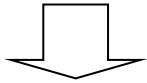
The flow chart of spirit manifestation model continues;

Total manifestation:

Breakthrough!



Intensified performance of “*mudzimu dzoka*” continues. The medium roars, shakes and changes facial outlooks. There are more of body movements. The medium’s movements eased and he now nods to the music. There is too much of yearning and belching. Alexio the intermediary adds on the dressing for the *gombwe* spirit of Nembire Muchinganji. The medium is now a total transformed person and the whole context becomes heavy and more spiritual. It is now the past which has been brought to the present. The spirit takes total control of the medium and we are into the spiritual



Stage 7

More intensified and serious song performance



Alexio Mukupwa exploits his vocal techniques as he leads the song “*mudzimu dzoka*” which is sung continuously with vigor and intensity. Tension in the atmosphere keeps on increasing as the performance approaches the climax. The host becomes more serious with jerks becoming more violent.

Stage 8

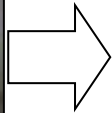
Trance state



The performers enter in some kind of trance as they all nod, clap and dance seriously to the music. The medium violently twitches, stretches with muscle contraction of arms and limbs. There are noticeable changes in the face; eyes are closed as if in seriously pain. What a new experience, I was anxious! With intensified singing the medium grunt with more of paroxysm.

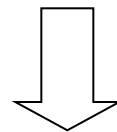
Stage 9

The flow chart of



world!

manifestation model continues;



The  
spiritual  
world



The song performance stopped, and the gathering greets the spirit by calling its totem "*Mondizvo*". With a completely changed hoarse voice, the spirit reciprocates by greeting us. This signifies that there is direct conversation between the progeny and the progenitor. The spirit at regular intervals takes snuff. Alexio Mukupwa the lead-singer now assumes the role of the intermediary, which was quite interesting. The spirit of Nembire Muchinganji on his greeting conversation went on to explain the spiritual world. I am really amazed! Alexio then explains the purpose of the *bira* ceremony to the spirit. It is a yearly event intended to thank both the spirit of Nembire and the *njuzu* spirits on their duties of protecting and blessing the living. The spirit of Nembire acknowledges this recognition by requesting the gathering to sing the song "*varimugomba*". Once again Alexio leads the song and the spirit nods. On the pick of the song, the spirit medium stands and lackadaisically dances whilst holding a club. The song performance comes to an end and Alexio introduced me to the *gombwe* spirit of Nembire and the purpose of my visit. I greet the spirit by *his* totem and the spirit greets me in return. I ask the spirit what makes it manifest when a song is performed. I want to compare what the spirit says in comparison to my concept of mediation which states that song text carries and conveys the message which stimulates the spirit in spirit mediums. Critically listening, the spirit takes more snuff at regular intervals as the discussion goes on. The discussion proceeded with more family issues and ended by song performance. The spirit medium yearns and the spirit of Nembire Muchinganji leaves and we are back to the world of the living again

**Figure 26:** The flow chart of spirit manifestation model as witnessed at the *bira rematendo* held on 20 October 2021

The flow chart resembles the manifestation of both the ancestral and *njuzu* spirits when songs are performed in a *bira rematendo* ceremony. Both the ancestral or alien spirits possessed their hosts, and this occurred at different times within the song performances. The model applies to all *mapira* ceremonies I attended. Although the model applies to any possession ceremony, what differed from each ceremony I participated in were the songs which were performed to evoke different spirits and the context of the ritual. The spirit of Nembire Muchinganji confirmed that there are songs which evoke *him* and those which evoke the *njuzu* spirits. These are songs of ancient times familiar to the spirits. However, some of these songs have slightly changed in text due to passing of time but they still have the power to evoke the spirits when performed in the context *bira* ceremony. When I interviewed the spirit of Nembire Muchinganji (NM 20/10/22) during a *bira* event (Appendix B: title 1, Chapter 1) he had this to say;

NM: *Iwe kana uchiimba uri kutopirikira mashoko...azouya ava kuti gororo gororo ndiye Muchinganji kana Chidavanyika kufarira zvaanwza kuti ndazopauya pamandidana.*

If you are singing you are conveying the words...when it comes to saying *gororo gororo* be it Muchinganji or Chidavanyika it is happiness which is brought by what has been listened to and that I have come where you have called me.

This implies that when the spirits hear the text message of the songs they used to listen to when they were still living beings they are evoked, and they enjoy the songs together with their living descendants. Spirit manifestation can take place under different conditions and for various reasons as discussed in previous chapters. However, the spirit of Nembire and those of the *njuzu* are evoked by singing, augmented by playing of instruments such as *ngoma*, *hosho*, *makwakwa*, hand clapping and the use of other traditional objects such as *magagada* (leg rattles). These musical activities are well coordinated and interspaced to facilitate the embodiment of the spirit medium. On experiencing trance and full manifestation, the spirit medium voice and facial outlook changed to assume the character of the spirit. The spirit's power of command over the living also changed to that of a totalitarian or having authority over those who gathered in the sacred hut for the *bira* event. In return the respect given by the living towards the spirit showed submission to the

possessed medium. The spirit was the source of consultations about life, hence the provider of knowledge and wisdom for the living descendants. During family discussions the spirit of Nembire explained and elaborated on various socio-cultural issues concerning music and spirituality (see Appendix B: title 1, Chapter 1). The discussion with Nembire helped me in answering some of the questions I intended to ask.

#### 6.4 Discussions from feedback interviews

In feedback interviews, discussions with participants were held to further collect data about the relationship between song text and spirit manifestation in the context of a *bira rematendo* ceremony. According to Bailey's (1989) intra-cultural feedback method, the field worker should revisit the field to give the participants the opportunity to view the film (see synopsis, Appendix A) and interact with their own data. This allows the field worker to ask further questions about the events that happened and make further comments from those who would have participated (Matiure, 2011). I used this approach as I went back to the field and showed my participants the film that I had produced to further discuss and pose some follow-up questions.

When the [medium of Nembire](#) (Freddy Mukupwa) watched the video he said, “*Zvandiri kuona zvoshamisa*” (what I am seeing is surprising). Freddy's astonished reaction was quite beneficial as further information was disclosed by the subject. I was permitted to use names of all interviewees in this part of feedback interviews for ethical considerations. For example, the following subjects made some important contributions when they viewed the film; Freddy Mukupwa the spirit medium of Nembire Muchinganji contributed more as he said “*tinovaimbira kuvadana vati kumhepo*” (we sing to call upon those in the air) on the role of song text and spirit manifestation during a *bira rematendo* ceremony.

Zvamano Chinyanga Muhwati further reiterated about the required materials which contributed to spirit manifestation. Alexio Mukupwa's participation as an expert singer during spirit manifestation ceremonies was quite interesting as he said, “*tinombira midzimu yedu kuti igobuda titaure nayo*” (we sing for our ancestral spirits so that they manifest, and we converse with them). Jemwa Mukova further interrogates the film as he said, “*chokwadi zvandona apa zvinofadza, tinotenda kumidzimu ne mashavi szvo varivo vanotiritira*” (truly what I am seeing here is wonderful, we believe in ancestral and alien spirits because they look after us). Jemwa Mukova commented especially on the appeasement and role of both the ancestral and alien spirits

in a spirit possession ceremony. Tashaya Chiringa and Chamunorwa Mupamhanga stated that *ngoma* playing and dance augment song performance in a *bira rematendo*. The following are presentations of additional data from the interview discussions with the participants which emanated from viewing the film. (See Appendix B, Title 1, Chapter 1).

When I revisited Freddy Munzvereng on 10 April 2022 at his Sengezi homestead in Hwedza, I found him working in his maize field. We greeted each other and I reminded him about the purpose of my visit as per my appointment and I was welcomed. Although it was my fourth visit, as a matter of ethical considerations, I discussed with Freddy whether he was comfortable to watch the film footage, which I had brought for my feedback interview discussion concerning song and spirit manifestation. He indicated that he was comfortable and very interested in watching the film. He told me that he would watch the film after he had notified his ancestral spirits about my purpose of visit. After we briefly discussed his crops, he led me to his first wife's hut, that is, we did not use the sacred hut as my intention was not to interact with the spirit.

We gathered in his wife's hut where he held a prayer to his ancestral spirits, after that he asked me to go ahead with my interview session. I took my laptop from the bag and cordially asked Freddy's wife to provide me with something which I could use as a table. A twenty-litre plastic container was provided. Before watching the film, I requested Freddy to critically watch and listen to the film scenes in preparation for the discussion which was to follow. I then switched on my laptop and we started to watch the footage. Whilst watching, I would stop the film at certain scenes which raised or called for immediate comments or discussions. After watching the film, he then furnished me with essential information which included his calling, how he was initiated, how other materials and songs contribute to spirit possession. The following is Freddy Munzverengi's testimony:

*“Kubva ndichiri mudiki ndakakura ndichitevedza tsika dzechivanhu dzataidzidziswa navabereki. Ndasamhuka ndava kuzvionera ndakazopinda chipositori ndakutoramba zvechivanhu. Ini pachezvangu ndakatombonamata chipositori ndikatoita muporofita mukuru muna1985 aizivikanwa nevanhu kuti anobatsira achidai achidai. Zvakazoitika ndezvekutindicho chinogona kunge chiricho chikonzero chiri kurasika. Vabereki vangu vakabva vati hande kumashopeshope kana kuti kun'anga kunobvunzira. Tasvika kumashopeshope takaudzwa kuti matambudziko ese andaiona anokonzwerwa nekuti ndaive*

*nemudzimu mukuru uri pandiri. Ndakanzi zvauro kuporofita nekubatsira vanhu uri muchechi ndiwo mudzimu wacho uri kubatsira vanhu uri muchechi imomo. “Asi nhasi uno wakambomirirwa kubva uchiri mudiki kuti hana yako isimbe. Nhasi uno mudzimu uya wave kuona kuti hana yako iwe yazosvika pakusimba, chiregera izvo uchipinda mugwara rako chairo rechivanhu. Kana pasina izvozvo matambudziko haasi kupera pauri.” Ini handina kugutsikana panguva idzodzo ndakaramba ndichisaidzana nemazwi evakuru semunhu aive musvondo. Ndakazoonamwe matambudziko etsaona yemotokari iyo yakabva parara nekurwara zvikuru. Vabereki vangu vakandiudza kuti inga izvi zvakange zvambotaurwa wani pazuva riya. Ndakazosvika pakuzovitambira, ndazvitambira takazoita chivanhu chacho. Pakabikwa doro, pakaimbwa, ngoma ikarira, vanhu tikatamba. Mudzimu uya wakanzi wakabuda vanhu vose vemusha varipo. Mudzimu uyu wabuda wakataura nhoroondo dzawo dzakadairwa nevakuru nanhasi uri kuita matare echivanhu” (FM 10/04/22).*

Since my childhood I grew up following our traditional customs, which we were taught by our parents. When I grew up I then joined the apostolic religion leaving the traditional customs. I then believed in the apostolic religion to the extent of becoming a prophet in 1985 and was known for helping people. What then happened is that I encountered serious problems and mishaps whilst in the church. This led me to go back to my parents to discuss these problems I was facing. My parents took me to the traditional doctor where we were told that my problems were being caused by an ancestral spirit which wanted to manifest through me. I was told that my prophetic powers and how I was helping people within the church was from this ancestral spirit. (He continued) “But today you were being waited for since your childhood, so that your heart would be strong. Today the spirit has seen that your heart is now strong, you should leave that and follow your tradition. Without that you will continue to suffer.” I did not accept this at once as a person who was in church. I then encountered a car accident in which my car was a right-off and I became seriously ill. My parents reminded me that this was already said in previous family consultations. I then accepted it and followed the customary way. Traditional beer was brewed, there was singing, drum playing and people danced. The spirit manifested during the presence of all

people and confirmed itself and elders acknowledged and up to date the spirit is holding consultation sessions.

In presenting his testimony, Freddy went on to engage the issue of manifestation during his initiation *bira* ceremony. He stated that he remembered very well the incident when he experienced a sudden blackout during the song performance of the *bira* which was meant to welcome the spirit for the first time. That indicated that he was possessed. He further elaborated that he could not remember what followed later as he was under the control of the spirit. However, after the *bira* he was told by his elders who were present that he was possessed by the spirit of Nembire Muchinganji. The spirit is from the Mbire people's lineage, which is believed to have migrated from the Great Lakes in Central Africa many generations ago. As discussed in Chapter One, some of these people settled in Guruuswa currently known as Dande and others in the northern part of Hwedza Mountains in Zimbabwe (refer to the map). Freddy said he was told by his elders that the spirit is a *gombwe*; hence it is of the highest order in its lineage. When the spirit was accepted and welcomed from that day of manifestation it started to hold consultation sessions referred to as *matare* and healed people in and outside Hwedza district.

Freddy Munzverengi and [Zvamano Muhwati](#) concur on the significance of cloths and animal skins, which are used to attract and signify the presence of ancestral spirits apart from song performance. As highlighted in Chapter 2, the cloths give another dimension relating to factors that contribute to spirit manifestation. They carry a semiotic function in that they signify different spirits. The red cloth with the lion insignia is for alien hunting spirits and it signifies their power or ability to hunt. The blue and white-coloured cloths are wrapped over the female spirits especially the rain-making spirits. The blue colour signifies the rain which is believed to be provided by *Mwari* through veneration of ancestral and alien spirits. The following is Zvamano's comment on the use of different cloths, animal skins and other materials after watching the film on 11 April 2022 at his homestead in Hwedza;

*Machira ayo haangori machiraba, asi kuti ane zvaanoreve uye zvaanoshanda. Panosvika mudzimu kana shavi panofanirwa kuve nemachira kana matehwe anofukidzwa. Izvi zviru maringe neshavi kana mudzimu wacho. Kazhinji matehwe anoenderana kuti ndemhuka ipi, matehwe emhuka dzakaita seshumba, mbada kana shato anopiwa midzimu yechirume*

*nekuti anoratidza masimbaka pangave pakuvhima kana pakutonga matare. Midzimu inopfekedzwa izvi ndeiya yemakombwe inomirira vakaenda karekare. Ukuwo machira matema ndeaya anonzi kana mudzimu wakonya watambirwa unotaura kuti unoda chii chokupfeka. Zvamazuva anoka matehwe onetsa saka machira matema ndiwo anomirira masimba okukoka svikiro irowo jena riri rechenuro yemusha. Ayo ane mavara masvuku, matema memachena ndiroka retso rimwe unogona kuriona riine mufananidzo wemhondoro. Irori rinomira paye panobuda mashavi. Rinogona kunge riri shavi rekuvhima ndizvo zvitsvuku ropa remhuka, zvitema mubatanidzwa nemidzimu wedzinza. Machira eruvara rwedenga ayo anobatana nemachena ndiwo aya anoratidza anasundamakore kana madzimbuya anonaisa mvura. Zvipfeko izvi ini ndakatengera mudzimu yekwangu pamwe netsvimbo, makano, nhekwe, ngundu, ndiro yemuti yatinopira nayo, pfunha, gonamombe nezvimwewo zvinenge zvarehwa nemudzimu wacho. Itori mhosva inoripirwa mombe chaiyo kana ukasatenga izvo unenge wanzi utenge nemidzimu kana shavi rekwako (ZM 11/04/22).*

These cloths are not just cloths, but they signify and are used for something. Where there is spirit manifestation the cloths or skins must be there depending on the type of ancestral or alien spirit. Mostly it depends on which type of animal skin, those skins like the lion, leopard or python are meant for male spirits because they show power, be it hunting or ruling. Spirits which do wear these are those who passed away many generations ago. On the other hand, black cloths are those given to confirm ancestral spirits who would have asked for cloths to wear. These days skins are scarce so black cloths are used to symbolise the spiritual world and the white one signifies the cleansing of the family. Those with red, black and white are known as *retso* and some have a lion head insignia. These are for alien spirits. This cloth is used when alien spirits manifest. It can be a hunting spirit which is represented by red colour or lion insignia which stands for animal blood. Blue and white-coloured cloths are for female spirits especially the rain-making spirits. I also bought these cloths together with clubs, moon-like hand axes, snuff containers made from pieces of animal horns, a wooden plate used during prayers, animal tail, snuff guard and others. It is a crime which attracts a penalty of a fine in the form of a cow if one does not provide what the spirits have demanded.

Zvamano's comment on the use and significance of cloths and other materials which form non-human species that are used for spirit possession can be related to most of the Zezuru people who believe and practice in worshipping God through ancestral veneration.

Zvamano's comments were more inclined towards how to create the spiritual framework during the *bira* event. However, Tashaya Chiringa and Chamunorwa Mupamhanga added another dimension how the playing of *ngoma* and other percussive instruments intensify the atmosphere during the song performance to create the spiritual framework. On 11 April 2022 at his Kasiperi home in Hwedza, Tashaya went on to say:

*Kana ndichiridza ndinoita zvandinoita sekuridza zvakanaka. Masitaera ekuridza ngoma anoenderana nekufamba kwemakumbo vanhu vachitamba. Kana ndichiridza seizvo ndinotarisa makumbo emunhu anonzi anobudirwa kuti ndouyo ndorova ngoma inotamba gumbo racho yakasimba inotirumutsa hana yake obva osvikirwa. Ndinoridza zvekuti inenge ichipesana sekutambwa kunoitwa shangara iyo zvinobva zvasangana nerwuyo zvosvitsa mudzimu (TC 11/04/22).*

When sitting to play the drum like this I can see that I am inviting our spirits. This is the reason for me to come to such events like this one. I learnt to play drums here in Hwedza when I was staying at Mount Gandamasungu before coming to stay at Kasiperi resettlements. The drum that I was playing at this event has a heavy beat which awakens the spirits. When I am playing, I do what I know, like playing well. Styles of playing the drum go together with the movements of the legs when people are dancing. When I am playing like this I look at the legs elegantly then I play the drumbeats which are in line with the dancing, and the beats are strong to affect the heartbeat such that the person will be possessed elegantly. I play such that it produces cross rhythms like one playing *shangara* dance that will be mixed up with the song to evoke the spirits.

In the above excerpt, Tashaya explained how the mega rhythmic patterns of the *ngoma* and dance aid in creating the spiritual atmosphere during song performance in the *bira* event. Tashaya claims he plays the drum to bring the song and dancers into focus. When playing the drum, the dancer's movement patterns lead him to vary the drum beats in accordance with the dancing style, whether *mhande* or *shangara*. This virtuosity allows the drumbeats to impart greater energy to the overall song performance, resulting in a climax as shown by spirits possessing their mediums.

Chamunorwa Mupamhanga watched the film on 12 April 2022 when I revisited him at his Sengezi rural home in Hwedza. He was very excited and motivated to answer my questions and commented on his role as a *ngoma* player during *mapira* ritual performances thus:

*Ngoma yandiri kuridza apa ingoma yandakatanga kudzidzira kubva ndichiri kuchikoro kupuraimari kumagiredhi 3 kana 4 paitambwa zvevitambo yechinyakare. Kuti ichibuda seizvi ndakazenge ndoridza ndati kureyi pamitambo yejiti, yekurova makuva kana yemapira. Ndaienda navakuru avo vaindipa mugomo ndonzi tsika apa kuti ndisvikire ngoma kana ndoridza. Saka ndazongokuriramo muchivanhu chedu ndichiibandangura ngoma. Ndakatanga ndicharidza imwe chete kusvika ndogona kuridzawo mbiri kana nhatu zvinoita VaChiringa kana VaJemwa nevamwewo vandinosiridza navo. Ndinonyanyofarira kuridza musambo wechivanhu wemapira kana wemashavizvekuti mudzimu unonetsa unotobuda chete. Ndinoridza ngoma inosvika pahana zvokuti kana mumwe anga achiridza unonzwa zvonzi ipai uyu kureva ini. Nguva inenge yakwana yekudana midzimu nemashavi kuti zvisvike. Ndinorova ngoma ine mutsindo wakanyanya iine mutsigo ichienderana nerwuyo rwuri kuimbwa zvekuti kana pane anga akagara anotosimuka wotamba. Ingoma inorohwa kwenguva refu. Vatambi vanonzwa manyukunyuku sezvandinongonzwawo kuitasendagarwa. Pandinoirova parwiyo rwunonzi “mbavarira” ndinonzwa kuti ndavakurova ngoma inosvitsa mudzimu yakaita savana Nembire, Sinyoro neimwewo yemunharaunda ino. Izvi zvokuridza zvinodawo wamborovawoka chikari kuti simba risiniri. Hwavamo mumusoro haiwa tinosvitsa-na kure (CM 12/04/23).*

This drumming style I am playing, I learnt it since I started my primary schooling, and it should be in grade 3 or 4 during lessons for traditional dances. To produce drumming patterns like this I used to play as a grown-up at traditional events such as *jiti*, *kurova guva* and *mapira*. I accompanied my elders, who could give me a stool to step on so that I could play the drum. I grew up following our traditional events playing the drums. I started playing a single drum until I was able to play a set of two or three drums alongside Chiringa, Jemwa and others. I usually want to play for ritual events such as *mapira* for ancestral and alien spirits, even the spirit which is difficult to evoke. I play the drum which the heart feels such that if someone else is playing, people will say ‘give that one’, referring to me. It will be time to call the ancestral and alien spirits to manifest. I play a drum with strong beats, with perfection in relation to the song being sung such that those seated will stand up and dance. It is a drum which is played for a long time. Dancers are aroused, I also feel like I am possessed. When I play the drum during the song

“*mbavarira*” I feel that I am now playing the drumbeats, which cause the spirits like that of Nembire, Sinyoro and others to manifest. This kind of playing needs a sip of traditional brew for one to get the power to play. If I am high, then I will play till late.

Chamunorwa and Tashaya’s collaborative views on the film showed that playing of *ngoma*, *hosho* and *makwakwa* accompanying a song for spirit possession needs proficiency for one to create the spiritual atmosphere. According to the two drum players, creation of the spiritual framework is a serious act within *bira rematendo* ritual practice. As the performance unfolds, participants are transformed. Percussive instrument playing and dance domains augment the song performance creating the spiritual framework. Hence performers can go into trance and possession as the performance reaches the interstices between the song text and context.

I had the opportunity to once again visit Alexio Mukupwa and held a discussion based on the ethnographic film focusing on his proficiency in singing traditional songs during *bira rematendo* ceremonies. I showed him the film that I produced from the *mapira* events to include those he participated in. in a *bira rematendo*. This *bira* was meant to thank the ancestral and alien spirits for taking care of their living descendants. While watching the film, Alexio was so excited by many events that took place during the *bira rematendo* which included the ancestral prayers, dancing, instrument playing, and other non-musical activities like drinking of traditional brew by participants. All these took place during that *bira rematendo* event. However, my questions directed him to discuss more on song text in relation to spirit manifestation. This helped me as I deduced that the meaning of a song is made in the actual and the virtual worlds.

Here is Alexio’s commentary:

*Inga zvinoshamisa! Kuimba kwakadai zvinhu zvandakazopinda mazviri nekukurira muvakuru vaiita tsika dzemadziteteguru edu. Ndinotedza zvechivanhu izvi zvekuti tinoimba kuti midzimu yekwedu ibude. Tikaimba nziyo dzedu, ngoma ichirohwa svikiro kana shavi rinobuda. Chinoitika ndechekuti mabudiro anoita midzimu akasiyana-siyana zvichienderana nezvatinosangana nazvo mukurarama kwedu. Seapa paive nemutambo wematendo saka tinoimba tichifara nokudanana tichitenda midzimu yude iyo yatinodana kuti titaure nayo. Tinogonawo kupira nhuna dzedu kana midzimu yasvika pamitambo yakadai. Tinoimba dzimbo dzakawanda kudana nokufara nemidzimu nemashavi ekwedu, asi urwo rwumbo rwandiri kuimba rwunonzi “Sekuru vauya” rwumbo rwandinoimba zvikuru kana tichidana mudzimu wedu mukuru sekuru Nembire. Rwumbo urwu*

*vanorwufarira chose zvokuti vanotorwuimbawo nokutamba chose. Kwangu kuimba kunoita kungouya zvokuti ndinonzwa sendagarwa. Zvinotoda ndiri pamutambo wacho izvozvi ndichiona apa ndinotoshamisika nezvizvandiri kuita apa pamufananidzo. Kuimba kwangu kwatove muropa uye ndave kuziva nziyo dzinosutsa midzimu nemashavi ekwedu. Pakuimba apa panotodiwa kushandwa pakutambisa huro, kutsetsenura mashoko acho sezvo dziri dzimbo dzatakangotorawo kubva kuvakuru vedu ivava vakare. Saka ini hunyanzvi hwekushaura chava chijairira uye panoda kuimba kune mashoko anoita kuti vari kumhepo vadairire kupfuurikidza nekusvika pahomwe dzavo. Hamuone kuti sekuru mudzimu wekwedu unototi imboimbai ndinzwe kuti magona here kundidaidza (AM 13/04/22).*

It is surprising! Singing like this came to me when I grew up with my elders who followed our forefathers' tradition. I do follow our tradition of singing to evoke our spirits. When we sing our songs accompanied by drums, ancestral or alien spirits will manifest. What happens is spirits manifest in different ways depending on what we encounter in our lives. At that moment at a ceremony when we happily respect each other thanking our spirits whom we invite so that we can converse with them. We also submit our problems to the spirits in such ceremonies like this. We sing a lot of songs to evoke our spirits, but that song I am singing called “*Tomutevera*” is a song I sing a lot when calling our spirits, especially the spirit of Nembire. This spirit likes this song and it can sing and dance to the song when it has manifested. My singing just comes in as if I am possessed. I like this when I am at the event. At this moment I am surprised with what I was doing in this film. My singing is in my blood, and I now know many songs sung for our spirits to manifest. When singing one needs to be good on the vocal registers and diction since these are songs which we inherited from our forefathers. So, my expertise in song leading is now through experience and exposure. It is a requirement to sing the text which evokes the spirits to manifest through their mediums. Can you not see that our spirit medium says we should sing so that the spirit confirms whether we are able to call the spirit?

From Alexio's comment it can be noted that there are certain songs which are sung for different spirits within a particular ritual performance context. This concept is backed by Scherzinger (1999), who states that not all Shona music and/or song can call the necessary spirit on every occasion. There are songs which evoke ancestral spirits and those that evoke alien spirits. This is exemplified by the song “*Sukuru vauya*” which he cited as one of the songs which evoke the *gombwe* spirit of Nembire. Alexio's conclusive response is, “*Saka ini hunyanzvi*

*hwekushaura chava chijairira uye panoda kuimba kune mashoko anoita kuti vari kumhepo vadairire kupfuurikidza nekusvika pahomwe dzavo*” (So my expertise in song leading is now through experience and exposure. It is a requirement to sing the text which evokes the spirits to manifest through their mediums). In this comment he further outlines that more important in a song is the meaning of its text within the context it is performed. Thus, song text indicates the themes in a song. These themes give meaning in a song which stimulates the listener–performer. The song themes are the indicators of the communication between the world of the living and the spiritual world as shown by the psycho-physical reactions of mediums in the context of a *bira rematendo* ceremony.

Alexio explains that he uses his *huro* – vocal techniques when singing a song during *bira rematendo* – to bring out its meaning and to create the atmosphere for spirit possession. This vocal technical singing will then promote responses in the form of trance and manifestation.

Ntshinga (2010:162) elaborates that, “the meaning of each song depends on the way its theme is handled.” Thus, the virtuosity of a lead singer in conjunction with instrumentalists and dance performers is of importance in spelling out the contextual meaning of songs which evoke trance and spirit manifestation in ritual performances.

## 6.5 Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be noted that when a song is sung in a particular context it serves a certain purpose. This has been reiterated by nine interviewees I interviewed who believe in worshipping God through veneration of ancestral spirits. The interviewees’ contributions towards this research highlighted that song text depicts themes (as shown in word indexing) within a song. These themes bear the message which is mediated from the singer to the spirits in the supernatural world. There are songs which are sung to evoke ancestral spirits and those sung to evoke alien spirits within the context of a *bira rematendo* ceremony. The difference in these songs is noted in the meaning of texts and the contexts in which they are performed. This is exemplified in the case of Freddy Munzverengi who is a medium to the spirit of Nembire Muchinganji which manifests through song performance. It is also possible to perform other traditional songs within the Zezuru ritual practices to evoke spirits besides those sung to the spirits mentioned in this chapter.



## Chapter 7: Summary, findings, conclusion and recommendations

### 7.1 Summary

In this dissertation, I investigated the relationship between song text and spirit manifestation during *bira rematendo* ritual ceremony among the Zezuru, a sub-ethnic group of the Shona people. Reviewed scholarly publications have provided a wealth of knowledge on African traditional religion, including that of the Zezuru-speaking people. Considering this literature review, I debated about topics concerning the Zezuru-speaking people's cultural ideas and values in order to better comprehend their perspective on song text and spirit manifestation. The Zezuru-speaking people follow certain protocols when executing *mapira* rituals to worship God through the veneration of ancestor spirits and value kinship because it fosters respect among family members and the wider community. As a result, the primary focus of my thesis topic was to show how song performances at *mapira* ceremonial rituals foster connection between the living and the dead. To set a foundation for the thesis, Chapter 1 focused on the investigation's scope: the background, problem statement, research objectives, and significance.

Chapter 2 is a survey of the available research that revealed that a great deal of material has been published on the topic of the connection between music and spirituality in world music cultures. In this section of the study, scholarly viewpoints on music and spirituality were explored in order to provide context for the investigation into the connection between song text and spirit manifestation. I conducted a review of the relevant literature to better understand the connection between song text and spirituality. During this process, I concluded that the religion practised by Zezuru-speaking people, revere *Mwari* as a God who is honoured by veneration of ancestral spirits. The Zezuru exhibit their faith in God through the performance of rituals known as *mapira*. These *mapira* ceremonies incorporate musical performances as an integral aspect of their worship of God. The performance of *mbira* music during *bira* celebrations and the use of snuff in ritual prayers are other examples of practices that scholars believe the Zezuru-speaking people use to evoke ancestral and alien spirits. Traditional songs have already been the subject of research and are recognized, amongst other roles, as a means of accompanying rituals; nonetheless, the purpose of this study is to expand on the factors that make songs capable of evoking ancestor spirits in the context of *bira rematendo* ritual ceremony.

The consideration of this thesis is informed by three theories: historicism, multispecies ethnography, and communication. I chose these theories because they guided the investigation into discovering what causes songs to induce spirit possession. The history of the Zezuruspeaking people includes their origin, social beliefs, and values as informed by historicism perspective. These beliefs and values have respect on human and non-human species such as invisible ancestral spirits, cultural artefacts, animal totemism, geographical locations and songs that bring the connection between the Zezuru-speaking people to their spiritual world. During song performance, trance and possession take place shown by psycho-physiological behaviour, hence spirit manifestation. The living are able to converse with their ancestral and alien spirits during *matare* sessions.

The research process is not complete without the application of the methodologies and approaches explained in Chapter 3. They are intimately linked to the findings and do affect the findings as well as the eventual crucial conclusions that were formed regarding the relationship between song performances, in particular song text, music instruments, dance and spirit manifestation in Zezuru ceremonial life. This academic write-up is being given form and structure intentionally through the methods that have been utilised for data presentation. In coming up with an authentic dissertation, consent from respondents was sought and granted, hence the use of the real names of participants in interview discussions.

Chapter 4 explored the spiritual realm, belief and value systems of the Zezuru-speaking people in Hwedza district as portrayed by informants during their *bira rematendo* ritual practices. As religious people, the Zezuru-speaking people have a deep belief in God through their ancestors, hence they worship *Mwari* through preparations of the *mapira* ritual practices. It is in these ritual practices that individuals or a group of people communicate with their spiritual world through a musical performance. During these rituals, kinship is valued as it entails roles and communication channels to be assumed by individuals for the success of a ritual ceremony. Communication from the living to the spiritual world happens in two ways, that is, in the same *bira* both ancestral and alien spirits are venerated but with the former given precedence over the event. Dualism in Zezuru religious worship is evidenced through the belief that the ancestral spirits protect family members, and it is the duty of alien spirits to provide life skills and knowledge through their mediums for the well-being of the family members.

The primary focus of this research is brought forth in Chapter 5. Here I provide an overview of the characteristics and the literary aspects of traditional songs that are sung within the context of a *bira* ritual performance in order to serve as the foundation for communication between the living world and the spiritual realm. The communicative qualities of African traditional songs are attributed, in part, to the cyclic and repeating qualities of the song structure. This chapter also defines the text or lyrics that are contained within songs in order to explain how songs function as carriers of messages from the source (performer) to the recipient (spirits), in the *bira* event. Analysis has been done into various singing techniques, such as *huro* (yodelling and hocketing). These are the traditional vocal techniques used by the Zezuruspeaking people, and they are what give a song its form and its capacity to instigate the possession of spirits. This chapter continues the subject begun in the previous chapters regarding the implications of the resulting force of a song performance and how the addition of musical instruments and dance add value to the performance of a song.

The data that was gathered in the field are dissected in detail in chapter 6. Sibelius notation software is used to transcribe the ritual songs to provide the reader with the idea of the melody. However, it is important to note that the improvisational nature of the live *bira* ceremonial performance of these songs, as well as the frequent shifts in tone throughout a single song, should be taken into consideration. Traditional melodies are performed in a manner that is distinct from the four-part harmony (SATB) structure that is characteristic of western chorales. I employed a textual analysis method in order to deduce word meanings in accordance with the thematic phrases or sentences contained within song stanzas. In order to indicate words or phrases which are often repeated to determine the meaning of a song's stanza, I used different colours. Words with the same colour in a song indicate the frequency of repetition of words or phrases that enforces conveyance of the message, hence its meaning. The calling and possession terms in the lyrics of the songs that were shaded have been indexed for convenience. I synthesised the replies of the participants and the observations that were made in the setting of the *bira* in order to analyse the lyrics. This allowed me to determine the meaning of the songs in relation to spirit manifestation. I analysed responses of the participants in the performance of the songs to identify observable shifts in behaviour that would be indicative of trance or possession. The idea of mediation is postulated by the act of deciphering the significance of lyrical content in connection to the process of manifestation. Within

the context of a *bira*, the notion of mediation summarises the communication process that explains how song text communicates messages from the source to the receiver, resulting in the participants' psycho-physical emotions. The feedback interview analysis serves as the chapter's final section.

## 7.2 Findings

My investigations are mostly concerned with the role played by song text in evoking spirit possession in the context of *bira rematendo* ceremonies among the Zezuru people of Hwedza. The findings of this thesis discussion emerged from analysed data collected from fieldwork to answer the research questions: (1) what are the facets of song performance at a *bira* ritual practice? (2) what are the communicative tendencies of song text in relation to ancestral or alien spirit possession and their living descendants who perform the songs during the *bira rematendo* ceremonies? and (3) what is the cosmic nature of a *bira* ritual practice that encompasses song performance? To answer the above research questions, the following summarises the findings of the study regarding song text in relationship to spirit manifestation.

Firstly, as reiterated by interviewees and the spirit of Nembire Muchinganji (NM, 20/10/21), “*mashoko anopa manyukunyuku ndopauya*” (song words lead to excitement then I come). When the song “*Varimugomba*” (Those in the tombs) is performed during the *bira*, the host of the spirit of Nembire Muchinanji enters trance and is possessed as the performance intensifies. From an immediate interview conversation held with the manifested spirit of Nembire Muchinganji, I found out that spirit manifestation can be made possible using song texts alluding to the summoning of spirits within the framework of the Zezuru *bira rematendo* ceremonial performances. Figurative language abounds in the song text of “*Varimugomba*”, sung in call and response style. Through repetitive performance of song text, dancing vigorously to the songs, which are accompanied by instruments, *homwe* enters trance and the spirit takes complete command of the body of the medium. The singers do this to constantly communicate with the spirits. Thus, connection can be created between the world of the living and that of the supernatural through repetition of thematic elements encompassed within a song to both reinforce and deliver messages.

I observed that the songs have cyclic structures. As an aural tradition, the Zezuru culture has adopted a cyclical conceptualisation of songs, where a constant grouping of words or lyrics repeat themselves. The music then weaves itself through this constant cycle. The cyclic nature is

characterised by the lead singer-performer presenting the thematic segments or lyrical phrases of the song emphasising the requests of the performers to the spirits in the spiritual world, and the response from the backing singer-performer repetitively echoing the message. This gives the song its distinctive quality. The researcher found from analysed data that the songs are arranged in such a way that the lead singer and those who responded to the lyrics carry themes that reflect the summoning of ancestral spirits. Therefore, the intent of the performers is communicated to the spiritual world through the messages relayed by *mashoko* (song text) repeated in a cyclical song form performed in *mapira ematendo*. These songs which are characterised by recurring themes are accompanied by dance and music performance. Based on the analysed data, the researcher found that the meaning of the song can be portrayed from the song text in relation to how it affects its recipients when it is sung in a particular situation such as in a *bira*.

Songs that are sung during *bira* rematendo ceremonies are said to be orally transmitted from one generation to the next. This information was gleaned from the responses I obtained from interview discussions with participants as well as from my participant observations. According to Jemwa Mukova (JM 12/10/21), these songs have traversed a period that ranges from the present, when they are being performed, back to the time when the ancestral spirits were still living descendants. Because of the passage of time and the changing dynamics of culture, the lyrics of the songs may have undergone some minor adaptations so that they are appropriate for the cultural contexts of today, but they still have a connection to earlier eras. Therefore, new words are added to the old ones in the verses or stanzas of songs in order to reflect current settings (such as how the descendants live in their communities), problems encountered (such as hunger, unemployment of the youth, illnesses, and barrenness), and wellbeing (such as bumper harvests and wealth) experienced by the living. When the songs are performed in the context of sacred huts where reverence of ancestors takes place, they are regarded as sacred and true by the spirits, hence they manifest. These songs change their contextual meaning if they are performed outside the *bira* context.

Secondly, through participant observation, interviews, and discussions with participants, I found that the meaning of song texts is enhanced by dance and instrument performance. The spirit of Sekuru Mushayabasa (SM, 20/10/21) states that, “*maimba, maridza ngoma mandidana, chimboimbai tidzane*” (you sung, played the drum, you called me, sing so that we dance). The spirit

confirmed that the interweaving of song text with drumming and dancing, which also includes clapping by wood clappers, gives value to song performance in such a way that the song is enriched to the point that the spirit manifests upon hearing such a nourished song performance. I observed that playing of *ngoma* (traditional drum) plays an important role in giving a timeline and intensifying the performance to create a conducive environment for spirit possession. For example, in the song "*Sukuru vauya*" (the spirit has come) the intense singing between lead singer and participants accompanied by instruments causes *manyawi* (stimuli) believed to evoke both the family ancestral and alien spirits.

Chamunorwa Chipanga (CC, 20/09/21) says, "*Ndoridza ngoma inopinda muhana...zvekuti mudzimu unonetsa kubuda unotosvika*" (I play the drum in such a way that its rhythms penetrate the heart, allowing even the spirits that are difficult to manifest to show their presence). Chamunorwa Chipanga plays the *ngoma* with such skill that the rhythm of the drum is felt deep in the chest controlling the beat of the heart. He plays the traditional drum such that everyone participates in the singing and dancing resulting in some spirit mediums to experience trance and possession. According to Tashaya Chiringa (TC, 20/09/21), another drum player, "*Ngoma inotsinhira kuimba zvoita kuti rwumbo rwunenge rwarukana uye rwoendeka*" (Drumming supports singing in such a manner that there is an interweaving, and the song becomes more exciting. The drumming that accompanies the performance is played in a style that is intended to deliver the beat and intensity which elevates the song to a greater level of stirring participants, which results in spirit possession.

According to my observations during the *bira* rituals, certain spirits whether they are family ancestral or alien spirits, prefer particular songs. As a result, a wide selection of songs is sung with drum and dance accompaniment until the spirits manifest. It is my finding that to successfully conjure the spirit, the singer must perform contextual songs while also being accompanied by *ngoma* and dancing. This demonstrates that the selection of songs to be sung at a *bira* is determined by the fact that the spirits in question are acquainted with the song lyrics that they may have sung when they were still alive. It is therefore the finding of this research that rigorous performance of song, instrument, and dance is used by the Zezuru-speaking people to evoke the family spirits as well as the alien spirits.

Thirdly, I found that *bira rematendo* as a sacred event that is paired with processes that put prayer to God and has dual veneration of ancestral and alien spirits who are evoked by song text which is the main way of relaying messages between the two worlds of the living and the living dead. According to the findings, a Zezuru *bira rematendo* ritual may honour both the Zezuru's ancestral spirits as well as spirits from other worlds. According to the *shavi*, an alien spirit that possesses Shepherd Chakuinga (SC, 20/10/21), “*tinovikaka mumatare kana tichinge takokwa nekuimbirwa seizvi pamutambo kuti tiite chirwirangwe kuumba mhuri*” (we manifest when we are excited by the song performance during the ceremony so that we assist in family guidance). Shepherd is a medium to a *shavi* (alien spirit) who confirms their presence as mediums in the ceremony. Thus, during song performances in the *bira rematendo* I observed that ancestral spirits usually manifested depending on performed songs. Usually the ancestral spirits would manifest first as the custodians of the ceremony and alien spirits would follow as the song performance continued.

However, I observed that in some instances an alien spirit would manifest first and only to hold *matare* in line with its expertise (for example, giving advice on curing ailments) when family spirits manifest. The manifestation of alien spirits within the same *bira* ceremonies where ancestral spirits are honoured depicted dual veneration in worshipping *Mwari* within the Zezuru traditional religion. Jemwa Mukova (JM, 20/10/21) asserts that “*Itsika yedu kunamata midzimu nemashavi akatenderwa padare rimwe chete, ndiko kunamata kwedu*” (It is our belief to venerate both ancestral and alien spirits in the same *bira* event, that is our way of worshipping). As can be seen by the roles that both ancestral and alien spirits play within the *bira rematendo* ceremonies, the Zezuru place a great level of respect on the bond that exists between ancestral and alien spirits. Therefore, ancestral spirits preside over their *matare*, which are gatherings for the purpose of discussing matters pertaining to the safety and well-being of families, and *mashavi* spirits are of assistance to these *matare*. According to what the study discovered, this relationship very literally indicates that you obtain support from other people and should accept that help to improve your social welfare. I found that this dual worshipping of ancestral and alien spirits draws members of the family together as well as the community at large; this practice is known as *hukama*, which translates to "kinship interaction."

Fourthly, I discovered that spirit manifestation during a *bira* ceremony is not an easy undertaking. The host's experience with trance and possession is sometimes accompanied by bodily anomalies. The stretches, twitches, wriggles, howls, roars, and other physical perceptible motions that the host exhibits during spirit manifestation indicate that it experiences painful periods when the spirit takes control of the body. I have noticed that sometimes after the spirit has passed away when the ceremony is over the *makumbi* (intermediary) will bathe the host in traditional medicines to relieve discomfort.

My fifth finding is that, after conducting interviews and participant observations, I discovered that the *hukama* (kinship) that exists among the participants in *bira rematendo* ceremonies is one of the most important factors in determining the effectiveness of these song performance ceremonies. Participants respect each other during a song performance because of their kinship, hence the determination of tasks carried. Kinship is expressed through several levels of relationship and tasks done throughout the event. From the early stages of preparation to the actual performance of the *bira* ritual, each participant strictly adhered to the tasks and obligations allocated to them. For example, there are the *varoora* (daughters-in-laws), who are responsible for catering; the *vazukuru* (nephews), whose duties include fetching firewood to be used for cooking, and on the *dare* (fireplace) during the ceremony; the *vasharukwa* (elderly), who preside over the ceremony; and the invited community members. This observation of relationships among members of the family and those invited brought unity, respect, and consciousness among the participants, which resulted in the realisation of the authenticity of the entire ritual performance.

Finally, the primary objective of the *bira rematendo* practice is to express gratitude to the Supreme Being by paying homage to ancestral and alien spirits. Consequently, songs of celebration would be an appropriate choice for such occasions, as individuals would be expressing gratitude and praise to the spirits that watch over them. However, I discovered that there are other song texts, such as the one in '*Tovera*,' which was also popular with the manifestation of the Nembire Muchinganji spirit. The song texts for '*Tovera*' (refer to transcribed song in Chapter 6) indicate that the living are weeping (*vana vanochema*) because of the challenges they face in life, as a result, they ask their spirits to help them. Through interviews with participants, I discovered why such songs are performed at such *mapira*. It would be the appropriate time to disclose their life difficulties during such occasions to seek assistance. Therefore, in terms of the significance of the

lyrics of a song, I found that a song can be comprehended in terms of the communicative tendencies it possesses provided it is performed within its appropriate context. If the song is performed within the setting of a sacred occasion like the *bira*, then the message of the song is considered sacred. If the same song is performed in non-spiritual settings like a soccer stadium, for example, then participants will consider it to be a secular song. Therefore, I found it of utmost importance to investigate songs that are performed for the aim of spirit manifestation within the appropriate cultural contexts of *mapira* in order to find meaning.

### 7.3 Conclusion and recommendations

Any researcher interested in trance possession would do well to investigate the relationship between song text and spirit manifestation. This subject field is both interesting and difficult. When it comes to song and spirituality, it might be difficult to tackle problems involving authenticity. When music is performed for the sake of spirituality, there are several concerns that can arise, which researchers in the field of ethnomusicology will argue for a significant amount of time. Several researchers, like Dumisani Maraire (1990), Perminus Matiure (2011), Paul Berliner (1978; 1993; 2006), and Micheal Gelfand (1981), to name a few, contributed to the study of the Zezuru by looking at them through the lens of people who play *mbira* music for the goal of spirituality. My experiences conducting fieldwork among the Zezuru people, as well as the *mapira* ritual performances that I both observed and took part in, lead me to believe that the scholars' perspectives are valuable. Those who are active in a particular cultural practice are the only ones who can try to comprehend the music performance associated with that practice. As a result, I focused my research on the performance of songs during *mapira* ceremonies to gain a better understanding of the communicative tendencies of songs in relation to the manifestation of spirits, from the point of view of Zezuru culture, considering the belief and value systems that are associated with it. During the *mapira* ritual performances in which I took part, this is exactly what took place: the meaning of song text regarding spirituality was supplied inside the context of a *bira* performance, during which spirit manifestation was experienced. During this investigation, I ran into some difficulties (of authenticating the existence of a physical link between the living and the living dead) when I attempted to demonstrate that spirit manifestation can occur as a result of song performance and that this phenomenon is based in truth rather than dramatisation (or staged performance). As a result of my study, I provide some suggestions for people who are conducting

research in the subject of ethnomusicology and related disciplines. My suggestions centre on music and spirituality, with a particular emphasis on the part that song texts play in generating spirit manifestation, drawing from the experience of performing *Zezezu bira* rituals as a point of reference. These recommendations are not speculations; rather, they are suggestions based on the findings of this thesis study.

From my time doing research, I learned that matters concerning *Zezezu* religious and cultural beliefs around spirit possession are extremely complicated, making them difficult to comprehend due to the sanctity and confidentiality surrounding these matters. Therefore, the norms, belief systems, and value structures of the *Zezezu* people should be considered in order to gain an understanding of how they perceive the supernatural world. Although there are a variety of perspectives about spiritualism, the findings of this research have led me to the conclusion that the religious and cultural beliefs of the *Zezezu* people regarding spirituality should not be interpreted in terms of western cultures and the effect of missionaries. Westerners, who were responsible for bringing Christian missionaries to Zimbabwe during the country's colonial period, have conceptions of Christianity that are distinct from African culture. As a result, I believe that it is possible to collect genuine data about the process of manifestation through song performance by conducting a literature search, observing participants, conducting interviews, and communing with spirits. Based on this information, findings and conclusions may then be drawn based on the context of the *bira* ritual practices.

Based on the findings of this research, I further advise that scholars in the field of ethnomusicology and related disciplines should examine dialectical distinctions when collecting and analysing songs performed for the purpose of spirit manifestation among the Shona subethnic groups. These songs are performed for the aim of evoking manifestation of spirits. Therefore, the text of the song needs to be explained in its cultural context, as discussed in Chapter 6. This refers to the context in which the song is performed. Songs can be recognized by specific phrases or words that are found to be widespread in each Shona sub-ethnic group, such as in the song "*Dzinonwa muna Save*" (They drink in the river *Save*) as an example. These are terms that are frequently used by the Shona people, as identified by the song. Although the same song can be sung for the purpose of spirit manifestation, there are certain textual differences that can be observed between the various Shona sub-ethnic groups. For example, in some communities they

add names of big rivers which are within their geographic locations, instead of singing “*Mhondoro dzinonwa muna Save*” (Spirits drink in *Save*), they say “*Mhondoro dzinonwa muna Chikambwe*” (Spirits drink in *Chikambwe*) or Zambezi and so on. However, the overall meaning of the song does not change as it is maintained by the phrase “*Mhondoro dzinonwa*” (spirits drink) which is the common indicator for the song.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that concerns regarding song text in connection with spirit manifestation are both fascinating and difficult to investigate, and I encourage researchers to attempt investigations if they have the opportunity. Because I was able to observe numerous *mapira* ritual performances in Hwedza, I can aver that the Zezuru people who continue to uphold their traditions show a great deal of reverence for their ancestors' spirits. Although the living and the living dead can communicate with one another through a variety of cultural activities, I discovered that song performance is one of the most popular methods that the Zezuru people use to mediate spirit manifestation. During my research, the time spent in the field exposed me to several perspectives on the Zezuru people's approach to music and spirituality. I was able to gain a lot of useful information from the participants I worked with. I have high hopes and strong beliefs that the research I did on their cultural practices added a great deal of value to the process of comprehending, maintaining and preserving their culture through literature.

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## **Personal Interviews**

1. Jemwa Mukova 12 September 2021
2. Nembire Muchingani 20 October 2021
3. Alexio Mukupwa 23 October 2021

4. Zvamano Muhwati 10 October 2021
5. Shephard Chakuinga 20 October 2021
6. Alexio Mukupwa 23 October 2022
7. Nembire Muchinganji 20 October 2022
8. Freddy Munzverengi 10 April 2022
9. Zvamano Muhwati 11 April 2022
10. Chamunorwa Mupamhanga 12 April 2022
11. Tashaya Chiringa 11 April 2022
12. Alexio Mukupwa 13 April 2022

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Synopsis of ethnographic film**

My ethnographic film is entitled “The Spirit of Nembire Muchinganji Manifests.” The film explains how song text, as thematic segments in speech form within a song, convey messages which create communication between the living and the dead resulting in spirit manifestation in the context of a Zezuru *bira rematendo* ceremony. The film is in two segments. The first segment which is title one presents interview responses from participants. The interview responses confirm that the Zezuru are religious people who practise rituals where songs are performed and believed to evoke ancestral or alien spirits. The second segment which is title two explores a possession ceremony where songs are performed to evoke the spirit of Nembire Muchinganji. The message behind this film production is that the relationship between Zezuruspeaking people and the supernatural world is made possible by performing songs in the context of a ritual performance.

Thus, communication between the living and the spiritual world is enhanced by song textual meanings embedded in a song performance during a possession ceremony.

**Appendix B:** Script of [Ethnographic Film](#)

**Film Title:** The spirit of Nembire Muchinganji Manifests.

**Duration:** 20 minutes 27 seconds)

<b>TITLE 1: Purpose of <i>bira rematendo</i> and functions of song text</b>	<b>DURATION</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	0:43-1:01
Purpose of ritual performances:	
a) Interview with Jemwa Mukova on purpose of rituals	3:45-6:35
b) Interview with Zvamano Muhwati on reasons of holding rituals	2:08-2:43
c) Interview with Alexio Mukupwa confirms purpose of rituals	2:43-3:36
<b>Chapter 2: Functions of song text</b>	<b>3:44-4:12</b>
a) Interview with Jemwa Mukova on the effect of song text in evoking manifestation	3:49-4:12

b) Interview with Alexio Mukupwa on the role of songs in evoking spirit possession	4:15-4:43
c) Interview with Freddy Munzverengi on why songs are sung in <i>bira</i>	4:19-4:43
d) Interview with Chamunorwa Chipanga on the impact of instruments in	4:44-5:23

accompanying song performance.	
e) The spirit of Nembire Muchinganji speaks on the importance of song text for it to manifest	5:25-6:36
<b>TITLE 2: Spirit Possession</b>	
<b>Chapter 1: Commencement</b>	<b>6:45-7:14</b>
a) Gathering of people into the sacred hut ( <i>banya</i> )	7:14-7:15
b) Offerings meant for the ancestral and alien spirits gathered in the <i>banya</i> in preparation for the ritual performance.	7:15-7:34
<b>Chapter 2: Song performance</b>	
a) Calling of spirits: performing songs; <i>mbavarira</i> , <i>mudzimu dzoka</i> and <i>varimugomba</i> to create spiritual framework for possession	7:38-12:08

b) Host ( <i>homwe</i> ) enters the sacred hut, dresses and gives an opening prayer ( <i>kupira</i> ) whilst singing continues to create the spiritual framework.	8:06-10:39
c) Host entering trance state and breakthrough - spirit manifestation	10:39-12:05
d) Total manifestation: In the spiritual world, clapping, ululation and the gathering greets the spirit of Nembire, who speaks and later requests and dances to the song <i>varimugomba</i> .	12:06-13:42
e) Prayers: First prayer by Headman Tofa Munzverengi to his ancestors in the form of a libation and the second prayer by Alexio Mukupwa	15:46-18:15
directed to the alien spirits ( <i>njuzu</i> )	
<b>Chapter 3: The End</b>	
a) Participants singing and the spirit medium of Nembire dancing to the song <i>varimugomba</i> .	18:23-20:07
b) Feasting in and outside the sacred hut	

