

Deconstructing Colonial and Religious Interventions in Indigenous Musical Expression in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper critically explores the interrelationship between colonialism, religion, cultural hegemony, and indigenous music within the Zimbabwean context. It examines how missionary-led colonial enterprises not only dismantled African religious systems but also disrupted indigenous musical and cultural traditions, promoting Western values as superior through religious indoctrination and education. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates that colonial and postcolonial institutions suppressed Zimbabwe's traditional music and performance practices, leading to a marginalisation of cultural identity. Drawing on postcolonial and decolonial theoretical frameworks, the paper advocates for a reimagined music education curriculum that integrates indigenous knowledge systems with Western methodologies. It argues that rather than rejecting modernity, this integrative approach would promote cultural inclusivity, preserve intangible heritage, and affirm epistemic plurality in Zimbabwe's educational and artistic spheres.

Keywords: Culture, Decoloniality, Indigenous Music and Dance, Religion, Subjugation

Introduction

The legacy of colonialism in Africa is deeply etched in the cultural, religious, and educational institutions inherited by postcolonial states. In Zimbabwe, the colonial project extended beyond territorial and economic domination; it was also an epistemological enterprise aimed at restructuring indigenous ways of knowing, worshipping, and expressing identity. Missionary activities, closely aligned with imperial agendas, played a central role in eroding traditional belief systems, reconfiguring cultural authority, and delegitimising indigenous practices. Among the most affected domains was music, a cornerstone of Zimbabwean social, religious, and communal life. Before colonisation, indigenous music in Zimbabwe functioned not only as entertainment but as a critical medium for spiritual expression, social cohesion, and political communication. With the arrival of European missionaries and the establishment of colonial governance, this music, along with associated dances, instruments, and oral traditions, was categorised as primitive, immoral, or idolatrous. Educational institutions institutionalised these