

“Madhunamutuna akatiuraira nyika”. Shona Labels for Oppressive Leadership in Selected Popular Protest Music

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Abstract

In Zimbabwe, political protest music, particularly the musical open letter, has become a cultural means of expression where suffering citizens clash with political leaders after explicitly expressing their discontent with the oppressive Rhodesian Front (RF) and Zimbabwe African National Union-PF (ZANU-PF) regimes who have ruled the country since the colonial period. This article examines the madhunamutuna concept that emerges in popular song lyrics by Zexie Manatsa, Thomas Mapfumo, and Mbira DzeNharira from different epochs of Zimbabwe’s history. The study shows how the term madhunamutuna serves to lampoon Zimbabwean authoritarian leadership in ways that implicitly portray the political leaders as beastly and debauched. This qualitative study employs textual and content analysis of three purposively sampled political protest songs with lyrics composed to associate rulers with tyranny, suffering, and oppression. Analysis is informed by post-colonial theory, which lambasts how subjugated groups ought to right political wrongs and open up spaces for change dialogue by challenging their post-colonial elites who have taken on the role of the colonialist oppressors.