

**Title of Paper: Riding the Riddim: Rethinking the Culture Industry
Thesis in the Economic and Aesthetic Production of
Zim Dancehall Music.**

Zvenyika Eckson Mugari

Department of Media and Society Studies
Midlands State University
Gweru, Zimbabwe

Abstract

This paper evaluates the relevance of the culture industry thesis in understanding the economic and aesthetic production processes of Zim Dancehall music in Zimbabwe. It assesses the contractual relations of production, producers and artistes enter into in the successful production of the music genre. The problematic in the division of labour in the production and reproduction of the work of art was first subjected to scholarly and theoretical analysis by Walter Benjamin (1936) in his essay: "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction". Its critical focus and that of critical cultural scholarly tradition of the late twentieth century concerned itself with the aesthetic implications of subjecting the production of creative work of the imagination to the capitalist mode of mass production for a mass consumer market. The focus of my discussion in this paper is on the tensions between notions of originality, authenticity and aura of music as a work of art on the one hand and considerations of music production as profitable business; the division of labour and contestations over ownership and the distribution of rewards in Zim Dancehall as a work of art in the age of digital and electronic reproduction. It is this paper's contention that Zim Dancehall offers many points of similarity as much as dissimilarity to the world about which the Frankfurt Scholars theorised in their seminal critique of the hegemonic function of the culture industries of early industrial European economies. The unequal and exploitative extraction and distribution of surplus value along the production chain so characteristic of modern capitalist mode of production and division of labour also typifies the production relations between producers and riders of the riddim in Zim Dancehall music industry.

Key Words: Riding the Riddim; Co-Creation; Collaborative Production; Zim Dancehall

Introduction

Zim Dancehall music is now firmly established as a distinct genre of popular music in Zimbabwe. It is most popular among youths but is also beginning to attract a significant following among the adult community. A cursory survey of the types of music played at social events of every kind bears testimony to the widespread popularity of Zim Dancehall music. Its message resonates with the day-to-day lived experiences of young people in the ghetto. The Zim Dancehall phenomenon

takes place at particular historical moment in Zimbabwe. The economic dynamics characterised with decline in the formal sectors of the economy and a significant rise in the informal small scale sectors of economic production. Artisanal activities have become pervasive and the main employer for young people. Examples include small scale mining, petty trading, vending. There has been a dualisation of every sector of the economy including the arts sector, specifically music. One mode of production is mainstream, the other informal. Mainstream music production is characterised with clear formal systems of production and channels of distribution with well-established organisational institutions and structures along the value chain of music production as an industry. There are well established music bands owned by individuals and groups which have dominated the music industry for decades in Zimbabwe. Such music bands as Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited, Oliver Mutukudzi and Band, Simon Chimbetu and the Dendera Kings are some of the household names associated with music in Zimbabwe. There are music recording and distribution and music promotion corporations like Gramma Records. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's radio stations also played a very significant role in popularising certain artistes' music and in establishing the music careers of many musicians in the country. In the music sector as in other sectors of the Zimbabwean economy, there also seems to be the phenomenon of informalisation of both production and circulation of music products, and the rise of Zim Dancehall music industry is largely representative of this phenomenon. A nexus of conditions of general economic decline in the country since 2000 and advances in digital technology seem to have favoured the exponential expansion of artisanal music production and alternative often clandestine channels of distribution. This paper critically examines the economic model behind the success of Zim Dancehall music with a view to draw lessons of general applicability beyond the music industry. It seeks to situate the Zim Dancehall phenomenon within the broader critical theoretical reflections about the significance of the production and circulation of culture in society. In doing so the present discussion hopes to assess the continuing relevance of the culture industry critique of popular culture in an age where more and more artificial synthetic culture is made very pervasive through electronic and digital means of production.

Theoretical and methodological considerations in the study of culture

The sphere of culture as a domain of scholarly and academic enquiry has a very long tradition in western thought from the age of metaphysics through the age of enlightenment to the present. First generation Marxist critical engagement with the idea of culture departs from the basic assumption that culture is a reflection of the contradictions and dialectical relations of the economic mode of production. People's religious beliefs, ideas, political convictions, forms of entertainment like music, art and literature all form part of a society's culture and are determined and shaped, in

the final analysis, by relations of economic production. Classical Marxist perspectives privileged a critical political economy analysis above a concern with the content of human consciousness such as cultural artefacts. It was not until a group of neo-Marxist thinkers associated with the school of critical thought that emerged at the University of Frankfurt in the pre-2nd world war years, that culture began to attract any meaningful analytic attention. Adorno and Horkheimer's seminal work, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1947 firmly carved a space for the study of culture on the academic firmament. The two authors coined the term "culture industries" in their critique of the debasing and debilitating effects of subjecting the production of cultural goods to the same logic of industrial mass production which had been so successful in the production of material necessities such as shoes and bread under industrial capitalism. This work and Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was an indictment on the commodification of what in an earlier age would have been inconceivable to produce by any other means but human creativity and ingenuity. Works of art had been considered as products of the human creative labour and as such were each supposed to be unique and to bear the aura and stamp of authenticity of the individual who created them. Mechanically reproducing any work of art for mass distribution to a mass consumer society was believed to result in the loss of originality in the cheap cultural counterfeit or imitations of the real.

Instead of taking a hard-nosed economic analysis of how cultural production became mechanised and mass produced, the critical scholarship of the Frankfurt tradition vied off into a moralistic debate about the value to humanity of the cultural counterfeit goods produced for mass consumption under industrial capitalism. The critical theorists raised posed questions about the quality and effects of what the commodification and mass production of culture might be having on those who consumed it. Instead of welcoming the culture industry as having the positive effect of democratising access to culture they criticised it as capitalism's way of cheating the working class into abandoning its historical struggle as a class for emancipation from exploitation by the bourgeoisie. Such culture was accused of producing one dimensional men (Marcuse 1964), and was generally understood as culture produced not by but for the working class and dumped down on them by the culture industries.

Adorno and Horkheimer adopted the term "culture industry," as opposed to concepts like "popular culture" or "mass culture," because they wanted to resist notions that products of the culture industry emanated from the masses or from the people.¹⁷ For they saw the culture industry as being administered culture, imposed from above, as instruments of indoctrination and social control. The term "culture industry" thus contains a dialectical irony typical of the style of critical theory: culture, as traditionally valorized, is supposed to be opposed

to industry and expressive of individual creativity while providing a repository of humanizing values (Kelner: 8).

Products of the culture industries, be they in the form of music, film, photography or literature were believed to act on the collective unconscious of the consumer society more like a narcotic drug which dulled the senses and stupefied the mind. They were cheap and imperfect esarts for the real authentic high or working class culture. Cultural content studies inspired by this theoretical tradition identified the mass produced cultural products as marked by homogeneity, standardisation, commodification and pseudo-individualisation. The culture industry thesis remains extremely relevant and useful in analysing the imitation, homogeneity and pseudo-individualisation in the digital production and reproduction of typical Zim Dancehall music. But this analysis falls short when it comes to trying to understand the nature of economic and organisational logic upon which Zim Dancehall industry appears to work. There are no obvious large enterprises accumulating super profits by exploiting smaller entities and a mass of cheap labour. Instead, the production as well as profit accumulation is thinly spread among thousands of small independent players. Riddim producers working in their backyard studios, the chanters who sing the lyrics to accompany the instrumental rhythm and music promoters who organise music show business each get only a small share of the final proceeds. Those involved in the music distribution channel also get returns for their efforts in popularising the Zim Dancehall music. The culture industries of Adorno and Hokheimer's late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe were largely driven by and rode on the back of powerful capitalist industrial complexes. It is important to underscore the fact that the Frankfurt critical analysis tradition focused on and treated the masses or ordinary people as consumers of culture produced for them by the culture industry, that culture was acting "both as a force of social conformity and opposition" (Kelner 200.: 2). The attitude slightly shifted from viewing the masses as victims of an ideologically manipulative culture to the more condescending view of the same hordes of masses actively capable of resisting or negotiating the ideological impositions of the cultural text through the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCC). Stuart Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding theory inspired and spawned a whole generation of scholars whose research studies ascribed some sort of agency to the reader in the reception/consumption encounter with a cultural artefact (Morley 1977; MacRobie 1994; Radway 1983; Fiske 1989; Hebdige 1979). Although it differed from the neo-Marxist critical tradition's conception of the masses as passive consumers of culture, the cultural studies approach continued to operate from the same basic premise that took the capitalist division of labour between the capitalist class as owners and producers of the cultural goods and the ordinary people or the working class as consumers of that culture. Apart from very few studies of subcultures, culturalism never gave serious attention to the prospect of

the dominated classes challenging the capitalist established order which it accepted as given to treat ordinary people as serious alternative producers of culture.

It is only very recently in the wake of the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution that cultural critics have begun to refocus their scholarly attention on the new phenomenon of the emerging prosumer society by which term scholars attempted to describe the blurring and collapsing of the producer/consumer role distinctions in the same ordinary people who earlier on in the hey days of industrial capitalism were arrogated the role of passive consumers. The so called user generated content (UGC) studies in media studies fall into this new trajectory of studies on culture. But very often such UGC activities by members of the public are often described in the literature as sporadic, largely uncoordinated and reactive to the dominant mainstream culture (Toffler 1980; Paltrinieri and Esposti 2013). This scholarly tradition usually draws on reader comments to online newspaper stories as typical examples of the prosumer society. Such tendencies are never theorised as representing any real threat to the established capitalist order.

It is in this regard that the present study on the Zim Dancehall phenomenon clearly represents an opportunity for the development of a uniquely different theoretical proposition as the Zim Dancehall music industry seems to represent a very significant democratisation of access to participation in the organised production of an alternative stream of cultural content. It is a study of ordinary people as producers of cultural content unaided as well as unencumbered by the capitalist cultural industrial establishment but in contradistinction to it in a truly post-capitalist economy.

The Zim Dancehall music industry rides on the back of the new digital ICT revolution. While the industrial revolution had the effect of centralising economic benefits in the hands of few capitalist magnets, the digital revolution seems to stand this capitalist logic on its head particularly with reference to how the Zim Dancehall music industry appears to work. Instead of capitalist consolidation economic benefits of the industry seem to flow into the lower segments of the dominated class, putting economic power into the hands of many formerly unrecognised ghetto youths. The digital revolution has generated and made possible the emergence of a new economic riddim with a limitless and in-exhaustive potential for numerous culture-preneures to ride on. The digital economic riddim represents a portent threat to the old capitalist economic order that in Zimbabwe teeters like a huge dinosaur on the brink of extinction.

In the present work I eschew the question of the moral value to society of Zim Dancehall music. Instead I concern myself with the object of sketching the

theoretical outlines of the economic relations that define the production practices that distinguish Zim Dancehall music industry and its genre of music. It seeks to understand the economic imperatives that drive these many different players into cooperating and competing with each other and the points of conflict. Material for analysis will be drawn from secondary sources such as published newspaper articles on Zim Dancehall as well as through interviews with established players at different stages of the value chain in the industry such as Zim Dancehall artistes, studio owners and producers of riddims, music promoters as well as music journalists and critics.

The Jamaican Connection

The rise of Zim Dancehall though a post-2000 phenomenon, is not altogether original. It represents both the increasing global; integration and interchange and flow of cultural influence between Zimbabwe and other countries on the globe. What is unfolding in Zim Dancehall may not be simplistically accounted for and explained away as another case of cultural imperialism. There is admittedly irrefutable evidence of cultural importations, particularly from the older tradition of Dancehall culture from Jamaica, but it is not just a case of wholesale cultural transplantation, there is a great deal of adaptation and indigenisation of the Jamaican template that is also going on in Zim Dancehall to give it a local flavour. Zim Dancehall traces its ancestry to the more well-established Jamaican Dancehall as its progenitor, the system of digitally based sound production of the riddim and the DJ voice overs and chanting and the dancing styles share many features with and suggest they might have been borrowed from Jamaican Dancehall and other genres such as the South African Kwaito. "An oft-noted landmark in the production of riddims occurred in 1985 with the release of Prince/King Jammy's and Wayne Smith's 'Under Mi Sleng Teng', whose riddim was generated entirely on digital keyboards" (Manuel and Marshal 2006: 453). The lyrical content and the innovative blending of indigenous languages with creolised English gives the Zim Dancehall its clearly local flavour and imbuing it with its distinctly Zimbabwean identity. Unlike the Jamaican Dancehall music industry which because of its much longer tradition has been widely researched on and documented (Manuel and Marshal 2006; Newel 2009; Niaah 2011; and Marquis 2011), very little if any sustained research attention has been given to the Zimbabwean version of the dancehall phenomena. Although it has attracted much media publicity, it still is yet to be systematically studied from a scholarly stand point. An online search for published research on Zim Dancehall, apart from studies conducted by Viriri and Viriri in (2011) and Mate (2012), often yields largely short analyses and commentaries published in culture and entertainment magazines and newspapers by music critics and commentators. The two studies cited above, by Viriri and Viriri and by Mate focused mainly on discursive aspects

of the lyrical content of selected songs by well-known Urban Grooves artistes – Urban Grooves music is widely acknowledged as the forerunner of the nascent Zim Dancehall music. A study that gives critical political economy analysis of the Zim Dancehall phenomenon as an industry remains to be undertaken. The present work only attempts to sketch out a broad outline of the economic structure of the emerging Zim Dancehall industry.

Mapping the value chain in the production of Zim Dancehall



Riddim Production and Recording – Chanting and performing – Music Video Production – Music Distribution – Radio Deejaying, and Music Journalism – Street Vending of Music CDs – Electronic downloading, CD burning and file sharing – Music Management, Promotion, Shows and live performance Organising

Music commentators and critics have pointed out that the value chain in the production and distribution of dancehall music in Zimbabwe apes the Jamaican dancehall music industry. It is spread out across many different activity and value adding nodes with actors who play distinctly different roles in the production process of a single Zim Dancehall music record/show. The traditional dividing lines between production and distribution, formal and informal are often blurred and indistinct. It is difficult to imagine Zim Dancehall as a wholly informal industry, nor would it be absolutely accurate to characterise it as entirely belonging to the formal sector. It contains tendencies and characteristics of both formality and informality. The concept developed by Lobato (2012) in the study of what he terms “shadow economies of film” may be very relevant in the analysis of the informal circuits and networks of Zim Dancehall music production and distribution in Zimbabwe. The nature of division of labour among the different players along the value chain of Zim Dancehall production and distribution challenges the traditional notions of centralised ownership and copyright in the music so produced (Manuel and Marshal 2006). Some critics argue that a dancehall song consists of two elements, the riddim and the voicing done by the deejay (Mushawevato, *The Sunday Mail* August 24, 2014), but when looked at from the economic perspective of value addition, this description is far from complete, because performance on stage as well as downstream digital dubbing reproduction, downloading and music file sharing, music CD burning and street vending are critical components of the value and popularity of any dancehall music product. Attendance at musical live shows is the main way Zim Dancehall producers and artistes realise economic rewards for their work.

The neat division of labour between production and distribution that characterised traditional music production practices made it easy to determine ownership of a musical record. It made it possible to unproblematically determine whose creative labour was solely responsible for a given musical output recorded on a newly released vinyl record. Copyright became the legal title by which ownership and interest in such a product could be secured ostensibly for the benefit of the “producer”. The production of Zim Dancehall music, on the other hand is so dispersed spatially and temporally among different agents often acting completely independently of each other make only a partial contribution in a production process characterised by its semiotic open-endedness with no possibility for closure to the process of re-textualisation and epistemic reconstruction “from material, social and symbolic infrastructures in various states of dysfunction”, ... as users, among whom ghetto youths constitute the most significant demographic group, “respond to situations of scarcity through attempts to multiply the uses that can be made of” (Lobato 2012: 45) a wide array of available resources in the form of old personal computers, digital sound mixing equipment in makeshift recording studios operated in rented suburban living quarters. Givanchy Records, Chillspot,

and Gunhil Recording studios all in the high density suburb of Mbare are typical examples. This aspect of the division of labour in Zim Dancehall music for example remains a source of serious contestations over how any economic or symbolic rewards realised from a Zim Dancehall song can be fairly distributed as between the riddim producers and the chanters, with the former often expressing a sense of being cheated out of much of the rewards which end up disproportionately favouring the latter.

The opacity of the distribution of rewards across industry players is also often aided and further complicated by the informality of the distribution channels as “the ability to monitor media consumption drops sharply as we approach the informal end of the distributive spectrum” (Lobato 2012: 44). The drive to draw crowds of fans to their shows defines the genre’s preference for clandestine channels and distribution practices. Unlike in the old economic contractual arrangements between recording companies and music artistes in terms of which the former dictated the pace while the latter literally signed off their rights in the product of their creative labour to the recording company and in return only received royalties calculated on actual sales of music records Zim Dancehall represents a departure and a new paradigm where the artistes have become more empowered than the producer or recording company taking advantage of the new technologies which have increased the potential for digital reproducibility of the work of art. The production process of Zim Dancehall thus negates the traditional notions of the separation of roles between author and reader, producer and consumer. It challenges the:

charismatic ideology of “creation” to be found in studies of art, literature and other cultural fields. This charismatic ideology ...directs the gaze towards the apparent producer – painter, composer, writer – and prevents us from asking who has created this “creator” and the magic power of transubstantiation with which the “creator” is endowed. This does not merely mean going beyond the individual creator to a wider network of agents involved in cultural production (Hesmondhalgh 2006: 212).

The meaning of a riddim cannot be fixed for all time at the point of its production. Its meaning remains tentative, always open for re-inscription with new meaning every time a new chanter rides on it. A riddim may be thought of as akin to meme in the sense in which Varis and Blommaert (2015: 36) use it to denote open endedness of texts when they define memes as:

often multimodal signs in which images and texts are combined, would typically enable intense resemiotization as well, in that original signs are altered in various ways, generically germane – a kind of ‘substrate’ recognizability would be maintained – but situationally adjusted and altered so as to produce very different communicative effects. Memes

tend to have an extraordinary level of semiotic *productivity* which involves very different kinds of semiotic activity.

Thus, Zim Dancehall production is characterised with production practices of distributed co-creation dispersed along various stages of value chain, in such a way that it poses challenges to the traditional view of intellectual property rights.

The few existing music recording outfits that have emerged mostly in the high density suburbs of Mbare, Highfields and Chitungwiza offer rehearsal platforms for upcoming and formally unidentified music talent and create/produce riddims in their production studios. Some examples of successful riddims produced include *Zimbo Flavour* produced in 2013 by Chillspot studio based in Mbare, which attracted as many as 150 chanters riding on it by the end of that year. The popularity of a riddim partly depends on who rides on it. For example already established artistes like Winky Dee, Tocky Vibes if they ride on a riddim they always bring with them an already established fan bases to the riddim. “One Clan” on which Winky Dee sang his popular song “Paita Party” and Sniper Storm sang “Mawayawaya” are some of the examples of riddims that became very popular through the tradition of riddim riding. But chanters and DJs are not the only riders who derive economic and symbolic and cultural capital from riding on a riddim. There is a very long value chain of other beneficiaries who also begin to harvest cultural capital for themselves riding on the Zim Dancehall riddims. Music critics such as Fred Zindi though sometimes unduly critical of the bourgeoining music genre are themselves riding on Zim Dancehall riddims to make themselves famous as music critics and connoisseurs. In fact Zindi acknowledges that Zim Dancehall “provided hundreds of ghetto youths with employment” (The Herald November 17, 2014). Zindi’s criticism of Zim dancehall, for producing morally decadent and sexually lurid lyrical content is rather misplaced. It is to be appreciated that the same ghetto youths are victims already trying to come to terms with their own dehumanising circumstances of hopelessness in a state of permanent unemployment. They live in a world which has long lost its own moral compass, where obscene wealth lives side by side with abject poverty. It is this lived world of the Zim Dancehall musician to which Zindi could perhaps most fruitfully direct his censure.

Music reporters writing for different newspaper titles such as *The Sunday Mail*, *The Herald*, *Daily News* and *Newsday* to mention but a few are another important institution in the development and growth of the the Zim Dancehall industry. Music DJs at almost all radio stations in Zimbabwe popularise themselves and their radio stations by establishing Zim Dancehall slots on their stations’ programming where they involve listeners in judging and voting for the best among competing newly released Zim Dancehall music songs. The amount of airplay

given to a musical video recording of a hitherto unknown song by an unestablished Chanter is not only critical in the process of popularising both the song and in the creation and establishment of the Chanter as a music star which then brings valuable symbolic capital for the music artist but also in creating demand along the entire distribution chain of the music industry. Music Promoters can attract more fans to their music shows, while music vendors can reproduce and make more sales of digitally reproducible copies of the music which they sale cheaply on the streets. Commuter omnibuses have also become important distribution channels for most Zim Dancehall music artistes seeking to make themselves known and their music more widely accessible. Digital technology and the internet have made it much easier for people to freely download and share music files on line, rendering the old logic of profiting through scarcity obsolete and hiding behind copyright protection of intellectual property almost unsustainable. The challenges to copyright protection posed by Zim Dancehall music simply call for a serious rethink of business models that profited through sale of content, like was the case with traditional companies like Grammar Records, Diamond Studios and Zimbabwe Music Corporation (ZMC). These music distributors had underserved the market and it was this market failure that gave rise to the proliferation of music piracy.

Other top Zim Dancehall riddims include: "Pure Niceness" produced by Chill Spot; Body Slam by Chillslam; Blackout by PTK Producers to mention but a few. Interested artistes then pay to ride on such riddims. The success of a riddim is measured by the number of artistes competing to ride on it. The more the artistes who come on board to ride on the riddim the greater the revenue the producers expect to make from the riddim. Riddim creators however, generally feel they do not get as much economic reward for their part in the whole bargain and they have registered their dissatisfaction mainly through the media on a number of occasions with such headline stories as: "Zim Dancehall producers cry foul" (The Sunday Mail August 24, 2014). In one such story published in The Herald (May 28, 2014) Rodger Kadzimwe popularly known by his stage name "Levels" is cited as saying: "There is something terribly wrong with this industry. You find it's the artistes who benefit more than the producers". Experts in the music industry however argue that even the artistes are not making as much money as most people think due to the depressed nature of the Zimbabwean economy. They cannot afford to charge that much for their stage performances as most of the fans, drawn from the same unemployed ghetto youths with little or no disposable income to spend on entertainment, would stay away if fees charged are too high. So their reward is mainly in the form of symbolic capital in the form of prestige and popularity with fans. But such symbolic capital often generates monetary benefits indirectly for other independent players in the industry including radio stations which, by playing such music often increase their audience ratings which

then might translate into advertising revenue for the stations and greater attendance at live shows where dancehall chanters and their music managers enjoy rich pickings in the form of increased gate takings. Zim Dancehall more than other music genres like Sungura, Chimurenga and others, is incomplete without the dance floor performance. It has to be performed to be realised as dancehall music (Stanely-Nlaah 2004: 104). It is principally the engagement with the nexus of the DJ's verbal and lyrical artistry' and the "wider context of dancehall's social, spatial, and cultural topography." Much more important economic returns begin to flow to the artistes the moment they break into stardom. When this threshold of popularity has been reached then real lifestyle changing economic spinoffs are realised by the artiste through endorsements by major economic entities who ride on the popularity of the chanter to advertise and brand their goods ranging from consumer goods such as different brands of cigarettes to social causes such as male circumcision as a prevention strategy in the fight against the spread of HIV. They are made into brand ambassadors for economically powerful corporations and institutions of hegemonic power. Popularity that comes through staging of live shows locally also often act as important springboards for emerging Zim Dancehall artistes to launch themselves onto the international music scene when they capture the attention of music promoters in the international circuits of show business. It is through these interstices that Zim Dancehall begins to connect with and latch onto international capital flows.

Unlike Hollywood and the culture industries theorised by the Frankfurt scholars one characteristic feature of the operations in Zim Dancehall music industry is the absence of the big capitalist. Any capital accumulated cascades and is very thinly spread across many small highly specialised enterprises. In this Ghetto industry everyone has a role to play in a synergistic and symbiotic relationship. Everyone rides on each and each on everyone else, in some Hobbesian organised anarchic style. In Gweru, for example at Bahadour Centre one often meets young people milling around as if idle and doing nothing in particular, but as soon as they suspect you to be a potential client, they whisper in hushed tones: "Would you like the most recent Zim Dancehall music? We can load it for you." If you ask; "for how much?" "For only a dollar we can load up to as many as hundred different songs", would come the answer. If you press further and say you have an eight gig flash drive and you would want it filled with music, then depending on your bargaining skills you may end up getting as many music files for as little as two or three dollars. Once a deal is struck you are then led into some often very busy little offices offering everything from photocopying laminating book binding, mobile phone repairs, typing and secretarial services, software loading services on laptops and cell phones, and in a short space of time you will leave that place with more music than you had bargained for so that you may come back again in the future. If you have a smart phone then as many music files can also be

transferred onto your phone via Bluetooth, so long as there is adequate memory. If you asked for Tocky Vibes or Winky D's latest song, you are told that that is not yet available on the market. You will soon learn that the music artistes send their latest music recordings exclusively to radio stations first before they can make it available on the streets. If you asked why the discrimination in favour of radio stations, you are soon made to understand that it makes good business sense for the artiste because radio stations have a wider and more instantaneous reach for popularising the artistes' music than through informal channels of street vendors and on the internet. The technologies for electronic reproduction of music files have one important advantage that the source of the original does not get exhausted or depleted by the number of times it is copied and reproduced and this capacity effectively undercuts the source of traditional recording companies' profit. The old reproduction technology profited by manipulating demand and scarcity, the new technology profits by increasing accessibility of cultural goods at little or no additional cost.

The low cost capital outlay required at each stage of the value adding chain in the production of Zim Dancehall makes entry into the industry much easier for often poorly resourced ghetto youths. The mushrooming of backyard recording studios in Mbare is a clear case in point. The danger though is often that this often quickly reaches a point of saturation, before the system implodes and the cycle starts all over again. This is true both for recording and riddim production business aspect as it is for chanting, every other unemployed youth dreams of one day striking it big to rival the current reigning Zim Dancehall king or queen. But the intense market competition generated produces self-correcting and regulating processes. One way this gets achieved is through a discriminating pricing system as producers and recorders at Givanchy Records explained:

After we have produced a riddim, we invite established artistes to ride on it for free, but the up-coming and those who have not yet made a name would have to pay a fee to ride on the same riddim. We protect it from being pirated by our competitors through a mechanism of over-writing it with lyrical content of our own which we alone are able to erase at the point of recording with a chanter who comes along to ride on our riddim. A development which is the most threatening to our business is when some artistes after making money riding on our riddims then go on to set up recording studios of their own so that they cut us out completely. Killer T and Jah Love are cases in point. They have set up their own recording studios; Hot Property and Conquering Records respectively (Givanchy in an interview in Harare 21/08/15).

The tendency of the industry to splinter is however not unique to Zimbabwe, as Manuel and Marshal (2006: 453) note with reference to Jamaican Dancehall music: "the digital era has also led to an exponential rise in the number of studios, large

and small", and this is a phenomenon that was already happening in Jamaica as far back as the 1980s.

Debates on the Aesthetic value of Zim Dancehall music

Given the techniques used in the creation of dancehall music discussed above a question often arises: is Zim Dancehall music art? That a computer was the chief instrument of production used and not traditional musical instruments like the mbira or the guitar is an invalid basis upon which to determine whether the product could be considered as art at least according to Tolstoy's conception of what art is. It is not even the subject matter dealt with in the song or its performance. The chief focus and object of labouring at the production of a work of art cannot be to make money. To the degree that the ulterior motive for self-enrichment is allowed to dominate then so also will art lose its value as a work of art.

The same old issues of the de-aestheticization of music as art which Adorno raises in his critique of the products of the culture industry become the more pertinent and relevant in Zim Dancehall music

Adorno defended the "de-aestheticization" of art, its throwing off false veils of harmony and beauty in favour of ugliness, dissonance, fragmentation, and negation which he believed provided a more truthful vision of contemporary society, and a more emancipatory stance for socially critical art. In Adorno's view, art had become increasingly problematical in a society ruled by culture industries and art markets, and to remain "authentic," art must therefore radically resist commodification and integration (Kelner p6).

The aesthetic value of the Zim Dancehall music as a genre of music remains highly contestable. Its production practices makes a perfect candidate the same aesthetic censure raised against products of the culture industry raised by critical theorists against products of the culture industries of the 1930s. By its very nature Zim Dancehall music would necessarily be far more repetitive and therefore homogeneous by dint of the way it is produced in the first place. A single riddim which itself does not differ in any significant way from the next riddim has a potential for carrying an infinite number of chanters who can ride on it with the effect that except for the difference in lyrical content the beat remains strikingly similar. Due to a shared socio cultural context or world the artistes inhabit there is a great coincidence of the lyrical idioms and memes the singers draw on being very closely related. For example in his song "Machira chete" King Shaddy is drawing on an already familiar biblical meme and narrative of Jesus miraculous resurrection about which the popular Gospel Music singer Pastor Charles Charamba had sung before, but he re-encodes it and infuses it with new meaning

and in a completely different context that of prostitution and theft. In the same song he also draws on and exploits another term “Bhakosi” (a term used with reference to Government free food humpers distributed to the needy as drought relief) which his audience are already familiar with in “Vakadzoka vane one one mababy avo eBAKOSI” . (two young men went and came back from the pub with one lady of the night each) to refer to prostitutes. Maggikal, another chanter in a different song sung on a different riddim drew on this familiar imagery of “Bhakosi” in “Amai mwana muri vebhakosi” to refer to his girlfriend whom he accuses of being of loose morals. The music artists here exploit an idiom which they know will appeal to their audience as it invokes and draws on their lived experiences as Zimbabweans who will have either benefited from or at least heard about a government policy of free food hand-outs in a scheme code-named “BACOS” at the height of Zimbabwe’s economic crisis which was further compounded by famine as a result of drought in 2008. The average life span of a Zim Dancehall song in currency often viewed as extremely shorter than what was the case with music produced in other genres such as Sungura, and this is often cited as a major weakness of Zim Dancehall. Other music commentators have even predicted that Zim Dancehall music bubble will bust sooner than later. The focus of the present analysis however is not specifically concerned with the textual dimensions of the music but rather with the lessons that can be drawn from how Zim Dancehall is structured to work as an industry for wider applicability in rethinking how other sectors of the Zimbabwean economy may be re-engineered and rearticulated to work in a more integrated way. Beyond providing relevant lessons for rethinking Zimbabwe’s economy, Zim Dancehall music presents serious opportunities for rebranding Harare’s oldest suburb Mbare and its environs as the Music City of Zimbabwe modelled along the lines of Kingston, Jamaica or Nashville Tennessee in the United States of America. Terril, Hogarth, Clement and Francis (2015: 10) define a Music City as: “a place with a vibrant music”. They go on to argue that “Music Cities can deliver significant economic, employment, cultural and social benefits”. The economic benefits and social transformation for that suburb and the spin-offs that would accrue to the Zimbabwean economy as a whole would stimulate much needed growth in other sectors of the national economy.

Zim Dancehall as alternative music

Indeed, Zim Dancehall music industry like its neighbouring culture industries like the film industry, advertising and the press apart from being closely interlinked and well-articulated with the rest of the capitalist economy is often paradoxically, “bound up with a subculture of protest as much as with the commodification of culture for profitability and harmless catharsis – absorbed and co-opted by the existing system” (Kelner 2006: 14). The circuits of production, distribution and consumption of Zim Dancehall still remain largely informal and as such tends to

offer space for counter-hegemonic engagement with the dominant systems. In this regard Zim Dancehall may be considered as alternative music

Riding the riddim in Zim Dancehall music production process is akin to practices already in use in the open source software approach in the development of computer software where programmers can freely access the source code of a prototype programme on the internet, modify and redistribute it, in an endless evolution of the product.



Zim Dancehall artiste Tocky Vibes performing on stage

Conclusion

The emergence and rise of Zim Dancehall music industry presents few interesting lessons on an economically well integrated system of different processes of value addition and beneficiation, division of labour and specialisation for the social re-engineering of the Zimbabwean economy. The economic logic behind the principle of riding the riddim provides interesting learning points for value adding and beneficiation as provided for in the fourth cluster of Zimbabwe's national economic blueprint. The riddim may be taken as the equivalent of raw mineral ore like uncut rough diamonds while the practice of riding the riddim done by many different chanters on the same riddim signifies a clear process of value adding to come up with usable music gems. Just as Zim Dancehall creatively turned the unfortunate

situation of joblessness among ghetto youths into an opportunity to create out of those constrains sources of income and entertainment for the same youths so also Zimbabwean economic minds could craft viable solutions to the economic challenges the country faces. And as Kadzimwe, a riddim producer urged, government could chip in and assist the once “infamous old suburb of Mbare that had earned a bad reputation for breeding top notch thieves to transform into a dancehall music epicentre”.

References

- Durham M. G. and Kelner D. M. (Eds) (2006) *Media and Cultural Studies*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.
- Hall S. (1973), *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, Bccs stencilled paper no. 7 (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies)
- Hebdige D. (1979), *Subculture The Meaning of Style*, London, Routledge
- Hesmondhalgh (2006), Bourdieu, the media and cultural production, *Media, Culture and Society* 28:211-231, London, Sage Publications
- Hesmondhalgh D. (2006), Bourdieu, the media and cultural production, *Media Culture & Society* 2006; 28/2; 211-231, Accessed 04/07/15 from: <http://mcs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/28/2/211>
- Horkheimer M. and Adorno T. W. (2001), “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”, in Durham M. G. and Kelner D. M. (Eds) *Media and Cultural Studies Key Works*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing
- Kellner D. (No Publication Date), *T.W. Adorno and the Dialectics of Mass Culture*’ <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/>
- Lobato R. (2012), *Shadow Economies of Cinema Mapping Informal Film Distribution*, London, Palgrave Macmillan
- Manuel P and Marshal W. (2006), The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice, and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall, *Popular Music*, Volume 25(3):447-470, Cambridge University Press
- Marcuse H. (1964), *One Dimensional Man Studies in the ideology of advanced Industrial Societies*, London, Routledge.

Mate R. (2012), Youth lyrics, street language and the politics of age: contextualising the youth question in the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38(1):107-127.

Newell M. (2009), Dancehall Culture and its World: Synthesising competing discourses and interpretations of Jamaica's controversial ghetto youth culture (*Masters of Arts in Development Studies Thesis*), Graduate School of Development Studies, International Institute of Social studies, The Hague.

Noerr G. S (Ed), Jephcot E. (Trans) (2002), *Dialectic of Enlightenment Philosophical Fragments Max Hokheimer and Theodor W. Adorno*, California, Stanford University Press.

Radway J. A. (1983), Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context *Feminist Studies*, 9(1):53-78.

Stanley-Niaah S. (2004), Kingston's Dancehall A Story of Space and Celebration, *Space & Culture* vol. 7 no. 1, 102-118 Accessed 21/07/15 from <http://www.sac.sagepub.com>.

Stanley-Niaah S. (2011), Dancehall From Slave Ship to Ghetto, *Research for Development Recognising Outstanding Reserachers*, Mona Jamaica, The University of The West Indies.

Terril A., Hogarth D., Clement A. and Francis R. (2015), *The Mastering of a Music City Key Elements, Effective Strategies and Why it's Worth Pursuing*, IFPI and Music Canada.

The University of The West Indies (2011), *Research for Development Recognising Outstanding Reserachers* (2011), Mona Jamaica.

Viriri A. and Viriri A. (2011), The influence of popular music, in particular urban grooves lyrics on the Zimbabwean youth: The case of the Troika, Maskiri, Winky D and Extra Large, *Muziki* 8(1):82-95.

Zim Dancehall: Ninja President Losing grip (August 3, 2014) By Prince Mushawevato Available at: <http://www.sundaymail.co.zw/?p=10874>.

Zjmdancehall debate rages on (February 16, 2015) By Fred Zindi. Available at: <http://www.herald.co.zw/zim-dancehall-debate-rages-on-2/>.