

## ABSTRACT

Whenever Zimbabwean music is debated in the country or outside, the reflections tend to centre on established male singers such as Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi, Simon Chimbetu and others. Female singers are on the margin of theoretical works despite the fact that Susan Mapfumo, Dorothy Masuku and Stella Chiweshe have been singing from the 1950s, through the 1970s and certainly up to the present day (in the case of Stella Chiweshe). In Zimbabwe today, the performances and creativity of new female singers such as Mbuya Madhuvu, Chiwoniso Maraire and Fungisai Zvakavapano<sup>2</sup> steal the musical charts. And yet very little research has been done on their work in order to explore the phenomenon of a female singing culture and to explain how they contribute and give shape to the contours of Zimbabwe's national culture. The main aim of this article is to consider the musical contributions of Mbuya Madhuvu and Chiwoniso Maraire to the debates on democracy in Zimbabwe. These singers have been neglected even in those studies that have analysed the songs of women such as Stella Chiweshe, Dorothy Masuku and Susan Mapfumo (Kwaramba 1997, Vambe 2004, Makwenda 2005). In analysing the lyrics of Mbuya, Madhuvu and Chiwoniso we do not try to link the lives of the singers to their creativity.<sup>3</sup> We argue, instead, that what female singers intend their songs to mean, and how these very songs are received by the listening audience, constitute the arena of national culture formation.