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The Vanishing Resonance: Declining rituals and rites and their impact on the Sustainability of Indigenous Music among the Zezuru of Chikomba, Zimbabwe

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Perminus Matiure
University of Namibia & University of Venda, South Africa

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Abstract
The study examines how indigenous music performance practices and Zezuru spirituality have been affected by the decrease of Zezuru sacred rites in Chikomba, Zimbabwe. Prior to the dilution of their culture, the Zezuru's ontology and epistemology of life, known as Chizezuru, were consistently validated by performing sacred rituals (*zvirango*) intended to maintain a functional relationship with their ancestors (*vadzimu*) and the creator God (Mwari), to guarantee environmental harmony, and spiritual protection. Rituals were spaces to start a conversation concerning the Zezuru social cohesion, seeking guidance, and interacting with the spirit world. Music served as both a spiritual aid and a sonic cement throughout these rituals, by bringing community members together, signalling temporal shifts, changing states of consciousness, and bridging the gap between the divine and the material world. The connection of music to physical shrines and material objects is through acoustic resonance, symbolic association and ritual performance. Sacred spaces are activated by sound and truned into channels for the divine. However, the advent of Christianity and modernity has resulted in the decline of the frequence at which rituals are performed and leading to a subsequent loss of the valuable sacred music and spirituality. The gradual loss of the Zezuru sacred music and spirituality has not been extensively studied, hence this ethnographic study, in which the researcher was a participant observer was carried out in Chikomba, Zimbabwe, which focuses on the impact of the decline of ritual performances on Zezuru sacred music and spirituality. The study established that the sustainability of the Zezuru's indigenous music performance practices—which include songs, dances, musical instruments, and traditional shrines and objects—has been jeopardised by the decrease in ritual performances resulting in the erosion of Zezuru ritualism, spirituality and musical practices.

Introduction
During the pre-colonial period, most Africans had a strong relationship with ancestors and God. They believed that their forefathers had the power to look after them (Matiure, 2011) and that they acted as intermediaries who linked them with Mwari, Musikavanhu. The symbiotic relationship with their

ancestors and ritual performances defined their spirituality. Sources like Addaquay (2025); Lipe (2002); Barasa et al. (2023), Corbett and Moerman (2024), Bist et al. (2024), and Cobussen (2017) concur that music is used for altering the human states of consciousness, enabling spiritual healing and fostering deep connection between the living and the spiritual world. Rituals (*zvirango*) are historical practices that serve as a potent sociological and cultural framework, providing a profound understanding of how past deeds develop into enduring collective customs (Kelly & Kaplan, 1990). The Zezuru are a subethnic group of the Shona people (Matiure, 2011).

During the pre-colonial period, the Zezuru's ontology of life, known as Chizezuru, was regularly validated by sacred ritual performance *(zvirango),* which were meant to ensure spiritual protection, environmental harmony, and a functional relationship with their ancestors (*vadzimu*) and the creator God (*Mwari*). Rituals served as venues for engaging with the spirit realm, seeking direction, and bolstering Zezuru social cohesion (Matiure, 2011). Throughout these rites, music brought community members together, signalled temporal transitions, and altered states of consciousness.

However, Christianity and modernity have led to rituals being conducted less frequently, resulting in a loss of spirituality and a weakening of the efficacy of sacred music performed during these rituals. The Zezuru rituals, spirituality, and musical practices have been extensively documented; yet the slow deterioration of the Zezuru rituals and rites, and the ensuing influence on the music performed during the ceremonies, have received relatively little attention. Therefore, the study focused on how indigenous music performance practices and Zezuru spirituality have been affected by the decline in holy ceremonies among the Zezuru of Zimbabwe. The study alerts academics and cultural gatekeepers to the decline of essential cultural activities and the dangers it poses to the value, survival, and transmission of musical hegemonies.

Literature review

The majority of Zimbabwe is inhabited by the Zezuru, a subethnic group of the Shona people (Musasiwa & Dreyer, 2023). Their economy is mostly centred on agriculture, with crops like maize, finger millet, cotton, tobacco, and ground and round nuts being important (Matiure, 2025). The belief in ancestry, Chivanhu or Chizezuru, serves as the foundation for the Zezuru's ontology of life. The Zezuru worship God, Mwari, Chikara, or Musikavanhu (Zvingowanisei, 2024; Chikomo, 2025), through ancestors. The Zezuru firmly believe that Mwari is the highest ancestor (Mudzi mukuru) (Zivave, 2022), the owner of the entire universe (Nyadenga) (Mangena, 2012), and the first to exist (Mutangakugara) (Muzorewa, 2014).

During a ritual or rite that uses dancing and music to create a spiritual realm, communication with Mwari had to be channelled through the ancestors as intermediaries who had to follow a diet. To construct a soundscape that was favourable to spirit possession, several conditions had to be met. The traditional shrine, music, dance, costumes, traditional items, and traditional food and beverages. That is, traditional shrines were chosen from the natural world (Zvingowanisei, 2024). It was believed that the ancestors lived inside the natural environment. Chanza and Musakwa (2021) reiterated that forests are perceived as areas where ancestors dwell. For example, the Zezuru believe that certain trees, such as *muhacha,* are centres of spiritual connection. However, some rites take place indoors (Denskus, 2014).

Rituals are used to validate Zezuru spirituality. A ritual action is a set of organised, repeated acts that have symbolic, cultural, or religious meaning. Rutsate (2011), Chirikure (2008), Ngara (2012), and Matiure (2025) have all written extensively on some of the Zezuru rain-asking rituals (*mukwerera/mutoro,* according to the Karanga) performed under *muhacha* trees. Rutsate's research on

Mhande dancing in *mutoro* rites and *kurova guva*. According to Rutsate, *mutoro* is a fundamental indigenous ritual associated with the Karanga worldview (*chivanhu* or *chikaranga),* in which the natural and supernatural realms coexist. Chirikure critically examined how colonial archives misnamed *mukwerera* as "rainmaking" instead of a request to God made through ancestors. Ngara studied *mukwerera* in the Shangwe culture of Zimbabwe, concentrating on ritual music, the *jichi* dance, and environmental conservation systems. Matiure documented how traditional ritual music and performances during *mukwerera* promote community values and social cohesion among the Zezuru people. The other core ritual is *kurova guva* (The ceremony of guiding spirits home)

Kurova guva was covered by Matiure (2013), Rutsate (2011), Kyker (2009), Omoregie (2007), Gundani (1994), and Bourdillon (1990). Gundani claims that the ritual incorporates the deceased's spirit into the family as an ancestor and settles inheritance disputes. However, this ritual is slowly disappearing and is being replaced by *dombo* (unveiling of the tombstone) (Kgatle & Mashau, 2023). Notably, few people are conducting both *Kurova Guva* and *dombo* as a changeover.

The success of these rituals depends on music and other sacred paraphernalia. Certain songs were performed during each rite (Burges, 2024). Some of the songs, nevertheless, seemed to be adaptable. Music's core role is to shape the emotional flow, create group unity, and link people to the spiritual world. It guides participants through sacred spaces using rhythm, tempo shifts, and shared voice (Perry & Polito, 2021). The involvement of music in rituals and secular ceremonies helps sustain songs and materials associated with ritualism (Matiure, 2025). According to Shreen (2010), ritual objects such as *mbiya* (clay pots), *mikombe* (gourd cups), *Tsvimbo* (rod), *ngundu* (traditional headdress), *nhekwe* (snuffbox), and many more serve as essential physical conduits between the divine and human realms, facilitating community cohesiveness, mediation, and purification.

There is also excellent literature on Zezuru spirituality and its relationship to the environment by Ryff (2021), Taylor (2001), and Kamitsis & Francis (2013), who opine that the interdependence of Zezuru spirituality and their environment is a historical fact. Since the dawn of time, the Zezuru have demonstrated their dependency on the forests as a part of the ecosystem. Therefore, the relationship among ritualism, sacred music, and the ecosystem is better discussed by drawing on ecomusicology (Shevock & Bates, 2024; Allen, 2011). Spiritualism and ritualism are closely related, as ritualism reframes mundane actions as meaningful rituals that foster gratitude, reciprocity, and a sense of kinship with the wider environment. By providing the environment's symbolic significance and sacredness, rituals help people understand themselves as interconnected parts of the world rather than as separate creatures (Anderson & Foley, 2019). Generally, sacred rituals are performed less often than in the pre-colonial period because of rapid modernisation and urbanisation, the introduction of world religions such as Pentecostalism and Christianity, and the colonial demonisation of local customs (Torevell, 2004; Thomas, 2008).

The deterioration of Zezuru sacred ritual practices and how this has threatened the sustainability of the Zezuru sacred and spirituality have received relatively little attention, even though there is rich literature regarding Zezuru's spirituality, ritual practices, and music. This study aims to close this gap by documenting how the progressive loss of ritual power has contributed to the collapse of Zezuru spirituality and sacred music performance practices.

Theoretical Framework

The discourse in this article was envisioned through the lenses of Indigenous Agency Theory and Musicking Theory. Martin Nakata first presented the Indigenous Agency idea in 2007. It emphasises how Indigenous peoples may act, resist, and mould their own lives in spite of systemic and colonial

constraints (Page & Petray, 2016). It disapproves of perspectives that portray Indigenous people as helpless victims. Rather, it emphasises cultural resilience, active resistance, and self-determination. When examining the Zezuru concept of ritualism and how rituals are employed to defend against outside influences, this idea proved highly helpful. The ritualistic emotional energy that unites the participants during ritual acts will be replicated through music (Merker, 2009).

The term "musicking theory," first used in 1998 by musicologist Christopher Small, redefines music as an activity or process rather than a static "thing" or object. "To music" is defined by Small (1999) as participating in a musical performance in any way, including by performing, listening, practising, rehearsing, or producing material for performance. For the Shona, musicking is a communal activity that requires everyone's participation. Participants willingly assume positions based on their areas of expertise. Usually, the performance is done in accordance with the demands of the situation. This covers the dance routine and the chosen tunes. According to Samkange (1980), the practice of performing in a group is consistent with the *Hunhu* concept.

Methodology

The study used an ethnography to gather information about declining rituals and rites and their impact on the sustainability of indigenous music among the Zezuru in Zimbabwe's Chikomba District. The author chose this location because they were raised in this area and have personal experience with the Zezuru spirituality and musicality. As a result, the article's discussions were treated from an emic viewpoint. Another explanation is that many Zezuru people converted to Christianity due to the impact of Methodist, Anglican, and Pentecostal missionary activities in Chikomba. Kwenda Mission (Methodist) and Assis Mission (Anglican) are two mission centres with numerous churches spread across Chikomba. Additionally, several traditional musicians, including *mbira* players, moved from Chikomba to urban areas including Bulawayo, Gweru, Harare, Chivhu, and Marondera. Participant observation guides were used to collect data during three *kurova guva* ceremonies. Since the Zezuru are no longer conducting *mukwerera,* the author was unable to attend any during fieldwork.

Semi-structured interviews were administered to five Zezuru cultural bearers, a chief, and three headmen to collect information on Zezuru spirituality, ritualism, and musicality; the relationship between Zezuru spirituality and nature; and the loss of rituals and rites. Ten traditional artists were interviewed in focus groups about the effects of ritual decline on music and dance. However, due to geographic dispersion, five more interviews were conducted via digital communication platforms.

The researcher considered ethical issues before gathering the data, as he was working with humans. An ethical clearance No. SHS_7877 was obtained from the University of Namibia's School of Humanities, Society and Development Decentralised Ethics Committee (DEC). The goal of the study, the expected time commitment, potential hazards, advantages, confidentiality measures, and confirmation that participation is entirely voluntary were all included in the comprehensive consent forms that the author utilised. The researcher ensured that ethical considerations and participant well-being were taken into account.

The Zezuru perceptions of Spirituality (Chivanhu)

During the fieldwork, the author collected data regarding the Zezuru's perceptions of the Zezuru spirituality, known as Chizezuru or *chivanhu*. The term "*Chizezuru*" comes from the name Zezuru. One elder claims that the word "*zezuru*" means "from above." Because the Zezuru are located on the high plains of Zimbabwe Figure 1, most of them took on the name Zezuru. The term also refers to a group of dialects that are spoken within an 80-mile radius of Harare (Mangoya, 2007). The dialect provides the grammatical foundation for Chishona, the commonly spoken dialect in Zimbabwe today.

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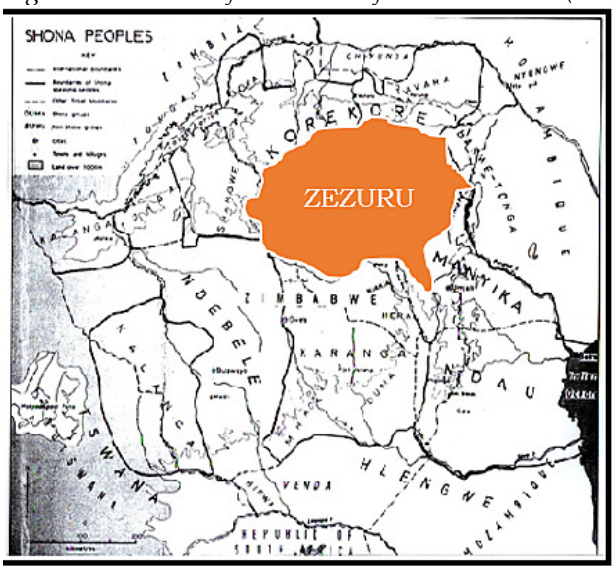
Figure 1: Location of the Zezuru from Bourdillon (2012)



The prefix "*chi*" is added to *zezuru* to generate the term "Chizezuru" from a linguistic standpoint. However, Chizezuru is another name for the spiritual traditions of the Zezuru people. This activity is also known as *chivanhu*. Like Chizezuru, *chivanhu* is made by adding the prefix "*chi*" to the word "*vanhu*," which means "people." The term "Chivanhu" refers to Zezuru/Shona customs, beliefs, and way of life. It is comparable to Ubuntu/Hunhu's ontological and epistemological frameworks (Mungwini, 2017).

Chivanhu is a comprehensive Zezuru framework, according to the data gathered. They utilise it to control their spiritual and socioeconomic lives. According to the Chikomba elders, *Chivanhu* is the centre of everything demanded of a virtuous son of the land. *Chivanhu*'s performance represents Zezuru culture. More significantly, the Zezuru community members' general conduct is controlled by *chivanhu*. The Zezuru spiritual cosmology is enacted through reverence for ancestors in the context of a shrine (nature), traditional materials and objects (paraphernalia), and holy music (musicality).

A person is a social animal that lives in a social context where he or she interacts with other beings and nature. *Chivanhu* is what propels Zezuru existence. It integrates dance, totems, dialectical devices, rituals, customs, spiritual practices, music, group work, and traditional paraphernalia.

Zezuru's connection to nature

Most African communities have some form of life regulated by both controlled and uncontrolled factors, including physical, political, and metaphysical ones. The most fundamental force is nature. Nature is defined as the physical universe and all its living things, forces, and ecosystems that exist independently of human creation (Seastedt et al., 2025). It encompasses everything from the natural environment and weather to the biological diversity of life and the geological processes of Earth. Nature controls the fundamental bounds of our survival. It provides our primary needs—clean air, fresh water, and food. Additionally, it limits our activities through raw physical power and shapes our emotional well-being. Humanity lives totally inside these nonnegotiable natural systems (Rafea et al., 2024).

Nature and the Zezuru ancestor spirits form part of the Zezuru cosmologies. The environment is typically considered a living, holy extension of lineage. Ancestors are thought to exist within, or

communicate through, elements such as mountains, rivers, and trees (Mapara, 2016). The natural environment serves as a spiritual conduit, with nature and ancestors cooperating to maintain cosmic and ecological equilibrium. Evidence collected from spiritualists suggested that their spirituality, Chizezuru, is historically linked to nature. One participant maintained that their forefathers are, in a way, part of nature as they are in spiritual form.

Furthermore, the Zezuru people of Chikomba, Zimbabwe, rely on nature for their socioeconomic and spiritual needs. According to one participant, their surroundings consist of what they believe their forefathers left behind when Mwari created them. Mountains (*makomo),* trees (*miti*), rivers (*nzizi*), dirt (*ivhu*), grass (*uswa*), caverns (*ninga*), and wild creatures (*mhuka*) were all recognised by him. Every action taken by the Zezuru has some connection to the natural world, according to another elder. They rely on nature for their mining, agriculture, and spirituality.

In his words, the Headman indicated that:

> **Chishiona:** *Mumakomo, mumatondo, mumiti, munzizi nemumapako ndimo mune raramo yedu. Ndimo munogara mweya yemidzimu yedu. Pane zviratidzo zvakati kuti zvaive mucherechedzo wekuti midzimu yedu ndiyo vene venzvimbo, uye kuti vanogara mumatondo. Izvi zvinosanganisa zvishamiso zvakaita sekuti munhu akaita zvinopesana nechivanhu mudondo rinoera, aiona mhondoro. Uye kwaiva ne zvisipiti zvaisapwa, madziva ne ninga dzinoera.*
>
> Translated to:
>
> Our survival depends on mountains, forests, trees, rivers, and caves. That is where the spirit of our ancestors dwells. Occasionally, there are indications that the ancestors are the owners of nature and live in it. These include miracles like seeing a spiritual lion (*mhondoro*) in the forest when one breaks the customary rules of sacred forests. Also, there were water springs that never dried up, sacred caves, and pools (Interviews compiled from Matiure Perminus 09/01/2025).

The chief said that in the past, the ancestor spirits oversaw the preservation of the holiness of religious sanctuaries and the protection of Chivanhu. He concurred with the participant above on the sacredness of traditional forests. Reza in Jordan River and Jemedza Mountain (Figure 2), Bakoravasikana (cave), Cheshumba (mountain), Gandachibvuva (hill), Mudzimundateura (pool) (Figure 2), Gwiranenzara Mountain, Dzidze River, and Mwerahari River were among the important religious locations, he reiterated.

Figure 2: Mudzimundateura, Jemedza (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUfUXkjI9Pg&t=40s)



The Chief also acknowledged that protecting these natural riches, which were thought to belong to the ancestors, is the responsibility of the chiefs and the territory spirit mediums, also known as *Mhondoro*. Taboos were one of the strategies they employed to preserve the environment. For example, some trees were prohibited from being chopped down or used as firewood. Additionally, it was forbidden for people to fish or wash in some of the pools. Wetlands in this region contained water sources (*zvisipiti,* singular *chisipiti*). These streams of water never dried up. They were thought to serve as drinking stations for the spiritual lions that *Mhondoro* had previously stated. It was forbidden for people to use burnt containers to get water.

Zezuru musicality and Ritual performance practices

Rituals and *ngoma* (music) govern the Zezuru's ontology of life. Zezuru *ngoma* uses vocables and yodelling methods in lead and response singing. Singing is accompanied by the traditional *makwa* (hand clapping), *hosho* (shakers), and drum (*ngoma*) rhythms. Dancers known as *Vatambi* frequently execute stylised jumps, kicks, and spins in perfect time with the drums' increasing tempo. They also do *mbira* dance in the forms of *kudeketera* (poetic singing) and *mahonyera nehuro* (male and female yodelling). In spirit mediums, music is utilised to evoke spirit possession (Mature, 2013). This is the culmination of rituals in which ancestral spirits speak to the living.

The Zezuru perform several rituals, including *mukwerera* (requesting rain), *kurova guva* (the rite of leading spirits home), and *doro renyota* (ancestor-pacification). The belief that rain is delivered by Mwari (God) through *mhondoro/makombwe* spirits is the source of the rainfall-seeking ceremony known as *mukwerera* (Matiure, 2011) or *mutoro* (Rutsate, 2011). The *muhacha* tree (Parinari curatellifolia) is the site of the ceremony. Regarding *muhacha*, the chief said the following:

> **Chishona:** *Kana iri nguva yenzara makore iwayo, kana nhasi mwari vanoita kuti mihacha ibereke michero yakawanda kuitira kuti mhuka nevanhu zviwane kudya. Mashizha tinobikisa svutu gadzike nekutyora hwahwa.*
>
> Translated to:

> During a long-ago drought, or even today, God made the *muhacha* tree produce a lot of fruit to feed animals and people. Its leaves are used as tea and in the preparation of a traditional brew (Interview extracted from Matiure, 16 December 2025).

The chief indicated that the Zezuru see this *muhacha* tree as a means of communication with their ancestors.

Kurova guva, is another ritual that is performed at least a year following burial. According to one participant, before reuniting with ancestors and kin, the spirit should be purified (Matiure, 2014; Kyker, 2009; Rutsate, 2011). *Mbira* music and songs such as *Nyuchi dzinoruma* (Bees sting) and *Yavanyama yekugocha* (Meat for roasting) are performed during an all-night vigil to commemorate the return of the deceased's spirit. The rituals mentioned above are not the only ones. However, ritual performances have declined due to Western imperialism, missionary demonisation, growing urbanisation, and global integration, which have forced many tribes to reject, alter, or condense ancient ancestral ceremonies. The following section will provide greater detail on the phenomenon.

The decline of rituals and their impact on the music performance practices of the Zezuru

The first mission schools in what is now Chikomba were Methodist Kwenda Mission and Anglican Daramombe Mission. These denominations and other Pentecostal churches now have many centres. However, a new duality evolved in which many Zezuru practised both Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Despite attending orthodox or indigenous churches, they continued to visit traditional healers (*n'anga)* and believe in the spiritual power of ancestors. Over time, several Zezuru families gave up Chizezuru and converted to Christianity. Some of the traditional musicians and spirit mediums had stopped practising Chizezuru. These Zezurus were often persuaded by the church that all forms of Chizezuru were wicked. Sacred rituals and performances were also prohibited. As a result, church-initiated ceremonies are increasingly replacing parts of the indigenous Zezuru traditions. These include the *Nyaradzo*, the memorial service, and the *dombo, the* tombstone unveiling, which seem to be replacing the ceremony of escorting spirits home.

The church's interference, which sought to eradicate ancestor worship and practices to advance colonial expansion and to establish political power, resulted in the destruction of some ancient sacred sites and rites (Etherington, 2017). Several key players in the administration of specific rituals withdrew from their duties to comply with church standards. *Doro renyota* (Ancestor-pacification), *kurova guva* (The ceremony of guiding spirits home), and *mukwerera* (Rain requesting) are ceremonies performed less frequently, as noted by one of the interviewed elders. The chief did point out that there is a modern decolonisation theology movement that encourages the Zezuru to express their Christian faith through traditional dance, music (like *mbira*), and cultural customs.

The colonial authority implemented procedures that affected Chizezuru as part of a new approach to managing agricultural matters. The chief provided instances of how cloud seeding was introduced to create rain, so destroying the character of *mukwerera*. Cloud seeding is a weather manipulation technique that disperses small particles (such as salt or silver iodide) into existing clouds to increase precipitation, providing water vapour with a surface to condense or freeze, thereby making cloud droplets heavy enough to fall as rain (Abshaev, 2022). However, the Zezuru's socioeconomic practices suffered because of the introduction of cloud seeding. It interfered with the traditional interactions between elders, ancestral spirits, ceremonies, and spirit mediums.

The power and function of *makombwe,* or rain spirits, were threatened by the altered pattern of rainfall. In addition to cloud seeding, one participant said that their Chizezuru was also impacted by the advent of Western agricultural practices, such as the use of fertilisers and contemporary crops. As a

result, the frequency and significance of several Zezuru spiritual practices, such as rituals, sacred music, and instruments, decreased. The songs that were ritualistic are those that addressed the ancestral spirits and those that were like prayers. Examples of these songs are; *Avo ndibaba* (There is father), *Kashiri kamambo musango* (The King's bird in the forest), *Nyama yekugocha* (Meat for roasting), *Mhondoro dzinomwa muna Save* (Lions drink in Save), *Dziva renjuzu* (The pool of maimed), *Mvura ngainaye (Rain must fall), Nhemamusasa (Make a shelter, Bangiza (Show us) and many more.* The instruments that are becoming less used for ritual purposes are *mbira dzavadzimu*, *hosho* (hand shakers), *magavhu* (leg rattles), *ngoma* (Traditional drums) and *hwamanda* (traditional horn).

Migration to farms, mines, and cities is yet another major element. Many Zezuru people moved to cities such as Chivhu and Harare in pursuit of employment due to urbanisation. According to one participant, these urban-dwelling Zezurus felt too sophisticated and contemporary to engage in *chizezuru*. They would journey back home to attend ceremonies in the early colonial era, but with time, some of them stopped returning for spiritual events. Some moved to mines that the white people had opened, and they hardly ever came back. To sell their labour, some moved to white commercial farms, and some of them hardly ever returned. The participants agreed that some of these Zezuru people were essential to understanding Chizezuru, while others were instrument makers, spirit mediums, or musicians, such as *mbira* players. In a sense, their departure affected both the extinction of ritual performance and the longevity of the music played during rituals. Some significant individuals are *mbira* players who performed *mbira* during the previously mentioned rites, among many others. The vulnerability of sacred rites like *mukwerera* has also been noticed because of human activities such as the cutting down of trees, including sacred ones, and the weakening of traditional regulations that protected the environment.

Muhacha trees are being cut down for firewood or to make bricks for building houses in growth points. One of the Forestry Commission officers at Chikomba Growth Point verified this. He said that visitors to the growth point do not adhere to the local customs. For firewood, they hack down any tree, including *muhacha*. He affirmed that if they are found in the act, his association will arrest them. But most of the time, they are unable to apprehend them. The ceremonies associated with the *muhacha* tree are disrupted by its decline. The chief went on to express the belief that the disrespect for this precious tree has angered ancestral spirits.

The Zezuru are forced to abandon faith in their forefathers because the rains no longer fall regularly. The collapse of rituals during the colonial and post-colonial periods, according to a traditional healer who participated in the study, is simply unfortunate for the survival of Zezuru spirituality and the music associated with the rites. The majority of Zezuru people no longer perform in some of the sacred ceremonies mentioned earlier, due to the current situation. This study's worry is the notion that the songs sung during these rites are likewise vanishing. In fact, as a Zezuru by birth, the author has also seen the growth of church-initiated ceremonies and the elimination of the aforementioned rituals and sacred songs. There are currently very few people practising traditional healing and spirit mediumship, although church prophets have used them. The prophets are members of prophet congregations that hold their services in forests rather than in actual churches. One elder expressed dissatisfaction that some of these prophets and their churches in the Chikomba area are using some of the hallowed locations as their Sowe, thereby undermining the shrines' purity.

Discussion

The Zezuru have always led a life connected to the spiritual world. They used sacred rituals as a pathway to connect with their ancestors. The Zezuru ritual performance practices showed a steady decline, with very few members still conducting them. Core rituals like *mukwerera* (rain requesting

ceremony), *kurova guva* (Escorting the spirit), and *doro renyota* (ritual of quenching the ancestors' thirst) are less common. The paradigm shift in religious beliefs, migration from rural areas to towns, farms and mines, has exacerbated the change in most of the Zezuru's perceptions about *chikaranga* (spirituality). The majority of the Zezuru opted to join Christianity rather than attend traditional rituals and ceremonies. This contrasts with the African belief in ancestry. Sacred music, such as *mbira,* is performed by *mbira* ensembles in hotels and restaurants. On weekends, several *mbira* groups perform in towns. This helps perpetuate *mbira* pieces, which are typically played in religious rites, even as a means of generating revenue. Vadzimba, Mbira Dzenharira, GuDoGuRu, Zvirimudeze, Maungira eNharira, Dzimbabwe, and several solo artists are among these groups. It was also established that traditional groups for competitions in schools and for entertainment in cities, are rapidly replacing rituals as venues for the promotion and preservation of songs and musical instruments. Sacred music performances at hotels or at school competitions, however, are legitimate, contemporary venues for cultural conflict. It develops advanced musical abilities, imparts significant historical knowledge, and communicates profound cultural and emotional values to a wide range of people (Netshivhambe, 2023). Additionally, it expands artists' musical knowledge and abilities.

In addition, it was determined that computer-generated tones have taken the role of what people once drew from nature. Ecotone has given way to "technotones." To put it another way, the Zezuru musicality has become unnatural. It has lost value because it has been artificialised. As a result, the Zezuru sacred music's ability to help them act, resist, and shape their own lives as proposed by the Indigenous Agency Theory is diminished. Additionally, it limits the runspaces where musicians can create music, which goes counter to Small's notion of musicking. By replacing organic, land-based soundscapes with "technotonic" musicking and severing oral traditions linked to ancestry disrupts human connections with the earth and previous generations by creating a missing link in the ecosystem.

This study also analysed the effect of the decline in ritual performance and spirituality and found that the move causes the songs, instruments and paraphernalia used for ritual and spiritual purposes to disappear. The data also indicated that disconnecting from ancestors harms a community by causing cultural erasure, a loss of shared wisdom, and deep psychological rootlessness. Losing sacred music leads to a decline in spiritual depth, a weakening of shared community identity, and the erosion of transcendent artistic expression in worship. Musical instruments and ritual materials are vital in connecting communities, their heritage, and the divine (Dirksen, 2019). The decline in ritual performance and spirituality may make the Zezuru feel cut off from tradition and virtually unable to perform the rite successfully.

After considering the changes, the author observed that the decline in ritual practices has not only affected the sustainability of Zezuru musicality but also weakened social cohesion and the relationship between Zezuru, their ancestor and nature. The author cannot rule out the possibility that limiting the study to Chikomba, while the Zezuru are spread across various rural and urban areas of Mashonaland East and Central, could be a confounding variable. In addition, the study did not consider the existing situation regarding the recontextualisation of music whose rituals had diminished. While the author believes these limitations have not impacted on the primary outcome of the study, future work could focus on the possibilities of evolution of spaces where the sacred music usually performed during rituals is now performed and how the music may have been hybridised with contemporary styles.

Conclusion

The study examined how the decline of sacred rites and rituals among Zimbabwe's Zezuru has impacted indigenous music performance practices and Zezuru spirituality. It aimed to determine the

reason for the decline in Zezuru spiritual activities and the elimination of holy melodies. The two main rites, *kurova guva*, *doro renyota,* and *mukwerera,* have become less common due to the expansion of churches, migration from rural to urban areas, and changes in religious views and lifestyles. It was determined that the gradual decline of Zezuru rituals has contributed to the fragility of indigenous music, as the survival of ritual music depends on the rituals' ongoing occurrence.

The Zezuru believe that their spirituality is the centre of their existence. They have faith in Mwari, Musikavanhu. It is thought that their ancestors acted as a bridge between them and Mwari. Zezuru's views of spirituality have evolved, and they now worship Mwari through a spiritual hierarchy that incorporates ancestor mediation, sacred music, and syncretic Christian traditions. Nowadays, most people practise Christianity, which is at odds with African traditional religion. They are prohibited from participating in religious rites or anything related to Chizezuru. Some of them held important roles, such as lead vocalists, instrumentalists, and seniors who were knowledgeable about Chizezuru. Their refusal to fully engage in religious activities put their spirituality and elements like music at risk.

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