



Female Musicians and the Preservation of Cultural Practices Through Vernacular Songs in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Historically, the role played by female musicians in popular music in general, and in cultural development and preservation in particular, remains underrepresented despite their significant contributions. This paper focuses on the contributions that are being made by female musicians in the preservation and promotion of cultural practices. These practices include norms, values, language and artefacts. Considering the fact that music is a subset of culture, this paper examines the preservation and promotion of African indigenous culture, focusing on three Zimbabwean female musicians and drawing examples from five of their purposively sampled songs. IsiNdebele and Shona songs are analysed to examine their influence in the transmission, preservation and promotion of cultural elements. Using De Korne's (2021) categorisation of language activism strategies, we analyse how songs by three selected female musicians work towards the development and preservation of cultural practices. Primary data is gathered through lyrical content analysis of five of their purposively selected songs to deduce meaning and extract the messages conveyed in the songs. Secondary data collection employs desktop research by consulting academic publications on the preservation and promotion of cultural practices. The paper concludes that vernacular songs play a significant role in influencing the preservation and promotion of norms, beliefs, values, language and material culture.

Introduction

The 21st century has been characterised by a decline in cultural practices. indigenous African culture is being disseminated through formal and informal instruction and needs to be safeguarded amid Western influences (Onwuatuegwu & Paul-Mgbeafulike, 2023). As culture is based on the totality of human social life, it is a people's culture that distinguishes them from others. Globally, people of different cultures come from every part of the world, and they draw on their environments to shape their cultures, as each group has its own way of life. Mironenko & Sorokin (2018, p. 13) define culture as "a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses processes, products and results of human activity, material and spiritual, transmitted from generation to generation in a non-biological way." This means that every group of people has its way of living, which defines who they are.

Problematically, indigenous African cultural practices have been influenced by alien cultures, which include both African and Western cultures. This has been attributed to colonisation, modernisation and Christianity (Matikiti et al., 2020; Maguraushe, 2025). Sibani (2018) states that we are currently experiencing cultural and social changes on a global scale. As a result, there has been a decline in cultural practices in African indigenous societies. Amiot et al. (2012) explain that culture is dynamic



because it changes in response to events such as the influx of migrants and cultural diffusion. This indicates that cultural loss cannot be avoided in indigenous communities. Indigenous African societies are composed of various ethnic groups with homogeneous cultural elements. These cultural elements are considered crucial as they bear meaning and understanding within African cultural contexts and project a people's identity.

Safeguarding Indigenous language has theoretical, epistemological, and practical models comparable to safeguarding Indigenous music and dance traditions (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023). Some female musicians in Zimbabwe are singing vernacular music and engaging in various activities to preserve and sustain cultural elements such as language, norms and values, as well as material culture, yet no study has focused on them. While male musicians are also doing the same, the problem is that the works and endeavours of male musicians in this aspect have enjoyed scholarly attention, while those of female musicians have not. Singing vernacular songs can be considered a unique way to preserve elements of culture. Preservation and promotion of culture is a continuous exercise which can be done through singing in the vernacular. Zimbabwean female musicians engage in various activities to preserve culture. The research question we pose in this study is: What ways are Zimbabwean female musicians using to preserve culture? The current study is significant to the preservation of indigenous culture in the face of forces of acculturation, syncretism and digitalisation (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023).

The choice of the three female musicians (Chioniso, Nkwali, and Nobuntu) was motivated by the fact that they are primary agents of socialisation as significant others, as the themes in their selected songs include elements of culture. Knowledge about cultural norms, language and values needs to be safeguarded in the face of globalisation, where young adults are exposed to numerous cultures through the internet, tourism, education and digital technology. We chose these three because, as female musicians, they are considered by both fans and music critics to be among the most influential singers of indigenous languages in Zimbabwe.

These artists held highly successful performances on the international stage and are highly recognised for their cultural impact in preserving and promoting indigenous culture. They blend traditional music with contemporary sounds and have won some accolades. Chiwoniso Maraire received the "Decouverte Afrique" (Discovery of Africa) honour from Radio France for her debut album, *Ancient Voices* (1998). She was also nominated for the Kora All-Africa Music Best Female Vocals of Africa Award in 1999. The title of her debut album reflects a deeply entrenched value for her Zimbabwean roots. Nkwali won the Zimbabwe Music Awards Best A Cappella Album for *Sithokozile* in 2016, as well as the PPCZIMA Award for Best Ezodumo/Imbube in 2016. Nobuntu were nominated for the Zimbabwean International Women Awards Best Musician of the Year in 2015 and won the Bulawayo Arts Awards Best Imbube Group in 2017 and 2019. The name Nobuntu reflects the African idea of being a person among others.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative design was used because it allows for an in-depth understanding of life experiences in relation to socio-cultural phenomena (Muzari et al., 2022). Primary data were collected through lyrical content analysis. This method can be described as one way of reviewing text to determine meaning. This is done to deduce the social meaning embedded in the lyrics. Lyrics of songs, regardless of their notes, were transcribed, translated, presented and analysed as textual analysis points to the importance of context, genre and modality (Kuckartz, 2019). We analysed texts of five songs by three female musicians who were purposively selected because they are sung in the vernacular. The selected songs are *Vanorapa* by Chioniso Maraire, *Nyawo lwami* by Nkwali, and *Inganekwane, Narinhi* and *Ingxoxo* all by Nobuntu. These five songs were purposively selected



because they addressed the phenomena under study. Thematic and narrative analysis were used to analyse the data. After transcribing the song lyrics, the analysis identified patterns that emerged from the dataset. We followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis, beginning with familiarising ourselves with the lyrics. We then generated initial codes and identified themes. We clustered the codes into potential themes, which we then reviewed, refined, and renamed each theme until it was clear. We identified three main themes: (1) Preservation, promotion and teaching of language using music; (2) Transmission of norms and moral values through music; and (3) Inclusion of cultural material objects in music performance. These themes fit in the conceptual framework of indigenous language and culture activism. Secondary data were also analysed through document analysis in this paper because this method is better suited to individual academics and draws on information from previous studies (Sharp & Munly, 2022). This is a process that involves reviewing academic publications relevant to the subject under discussion. This availed pre-existing data from previous related studies.

Literature review

Research on indigenous languages has been published extensively. In indigenous African societies, some indigenous languages are on the verge of extinction as a result of the use of foreign languages. It is predicted that over the next 70 years, half of the 6,912 languages spoken worldwide will become extinct, as one language dies every 40 days (Simons, 2019). Atifnigar et al. (2021) also note that an increasing number of languages are dying each year. The continuous use of English as the official language in Zimbabwe diminishes the appreciation and use of native languages. As a result, a lack of interest in the use of indigenous languages among people becomes inevitable.

Certain traditional songs have lyrics that promote good social actions among members of a society. Such songs can contain messages about good human relations, such as good behaviour, love, peace, and unity, among others. Beliefs, norms, and values are cultural elements that female musicians can transmit through vernacular songs to promote acceptable social behaviour. According to Edgar and Sedgwick (2007, p. 4) "norms do not merely codify the rules pursued...but rather serve to direct action". This means that if these are adopted by individuals, it will result in the integration of good moral values in the social system as a whole. Norms, beliefs and values are an integral part of any culture (Sibani, 2018) and are shared and transmitted from generation to generation. This means that norms, beliefs, and values can be considered indigenous knowledge, learnt through experience and observation. Battiste et al. (2021) explain that when people disregard their own knowledge and wisdom, it can slowly be lost and misappropriated. This explains why it is important for native people to preserve their indigenous knowledge. Failure to do so may risk deterioration of indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous songs have different values and meanings in societies. This means that lyrics can spell out how people can behave in their communities. Female musicians can instil positive moral values through vernacular songs and performances. People from indigenous societies can learn how to behave and relate to one another through the influence of vernacular songs by female musicians. Singing lyrics that encourage good behaviour gives female musicians an opportunity to inspire and instil good behaviour in their fans. Such songs also give meaning to a people's beliefs and values. Sibani (2018) is of the idea that members of a society may die but the cultural patterns subsist in time from generation to generation. These cultural patterns can be preserved through song by female musicians. Cultural patterns also create identity among indigenous societies. Music plays an integral role in shaping identity among members of society (Robertson, 2019).

Culture is learned by growing up with it. If people are exposed to music families that play traditional instruments, they can observe and learn how these instruments are played, thereby



preserving and promoting these instruments (Gornaya & Sirenko, 2020). Playing live musical instruments gives people an experience of engaging with both sight and hearing, thereby experiencing music with all the senses. The use of traditional instruments is important because it demonstrates what a community believes in and values. Material culture also includes costumes worn by female musicians during performances. These help musicians in expressing the significance of belonging.

From a cultural continuity perspective, there are different ways cultural practices can be preserved for the purposes of preservation, promotion and continuity. Auger (2016) argues that cultural continuity describes the integration of people into their culture and the methods by which traditional knowledge is maintained and transmitted. Realising that, at present, in nearly every country in Africa, women are visible practitioners and cultural producers (Beti, 2018), it implies that traditional female musicians are also involved in the preservation of cultural elements for the promotion and continuity of culture. Jones (2008) examines musical works by female traditional musicians in Zimbabwe and also discusses the preservation of traditional music through different means. Cultural continuity can therefore be considered as the maintenance of traditions and social structures that bring stability to a society. However, in preserving cultural elements, modifications and adjustments can be made to ensure continuity. In the continuity process, instruments, attires and song rhythms can be changed to suit the current times. The foregoing review reveals a lack of literature on the role of female musicians in the preservation and promotion of language through song lyrics in Africa, in general, and in Zimbabwe, in particular.

Preservation of cultural heritage is a continuous exercise that began long ago, as different societies employed different ways to preserve their cultures. (Cloonan, 2023) asserts that care for cultural heritage has a long history, one that primarily aims to repair and preserve objects for continued use and aesthetic enjoyment. Until the early 20th century, artists were typically called upon to repair damaged artworks (Jones, 2008). Accordingly, preservation activities encompassed conservation and examination of cultural heritage. This study is concerned with the preservation of cultural practices by female musicians. It is noted that female musicians use music to preserve elements of culture, such as language, dance, morals, and values. Singing music in the vernacular is a way of preserving language. Dressing in traditional wear is another way to preserve culture, as the traditional way of dressing is learnt and passed on to the next generation. It also allows people from different cultures to learn about the dress of a particular culture through music. Preservation also comes through the dance styles that female musicians engage in. This paves the way to the preservation and promotion of cultural practices for the benefit of future generations. The use of music to preserve culture also adds aesthetic enjoyment, as music is considered interesting.

Preservation is defined by Cloonan (2023) as the care of all heritage, movable, immovable, natural, man-made, and socially constructed. The author goes further to explain that preservation usually refers to the overall management and care of collections, while conservation is the treatment of individual items or collections of items. Preservation of culture by female musicians promotes culture. The process of recording audio and video by female musicians involved in culture ensures that cultural elements are preserved and promoted. This also ensures that cultural practises are available to anyone willing to learn. A collection of music by female musicians can help preserve cultural heritage. Cultural preservation and protection are major concerns for indigenous people.

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) states that it is essential for the items that make up the traditional and popular culture to be widely disseminated so that the value of folklore and the need to preserve it can be recognised. It is one of the African indigenous communities' cultural assets, thereby being an effective means to promote



culture. Because cultural heritage is the legacy of a society's intangible attributes, it must be preserved for the benefit of future generations (UNESCO, 2003). This paper adopts the view that preserving intangible cultural heritage is an integral part of human life. Preservation of cultural practices is a social action in which the female musicians are involved.

Theoretical Framework

To analyse the three musicians' use of vernacular language to preserve indigenous culture, we adopt De Korne's (2021) categorisation of language activism strategies. De Korne sees language activism as a social project that advocates linguistic equality within its specific language ecology. Her language activism strategies are organised in their actions, goals, and characteristics. Action strategies include representing, connecting, and/or creating and are targeted toward the goals of resources, events, spaces/structures, people/identities, and communication practices. The characteristics of the strategies are used to describe language activism that varies in terms of its location, timeframe, visibility/mobility, socio-historical orientation, diversity orientation, and participation. One key strategy is music shows, which are created events. The female musicians represent the Shona and Ndebele's people/identity through their artistic song compositions. They also represent communication practices by promoting norms of vernacular language communications. Their language activism activities in popular culture are characterised by a range of locations, as they perform(ed) in both global and local venues, and by socio-historical orientations. These popular musicians are highly visible, and audience participation is open in both live shows and those streamed online.

Results and discussion

A biographical background of the three female musicians

Nobuntu is a group of female musicians that seeks to promote local culture through music. The all-female group is composed of four musicians. The name Nobuntu is an IsiNdebele word that describes a woman's humility and love. The group promotes vernacular music and the playing of indigenous musical instruments. The group's collection is a fusion of traditional Zimbabwean-rooted music and afro-jazz. They infuse their pure voices with percussion and traditional instruments such as drums, *hosho*, and *mbira*. They also accompany their music with some dance movements. Their music promotes the preservation of culture and heritage. The group believes that music is a tool for preserving and promoting culture across all indigenous societies. They are located in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. They have performed at international festivals and concerts in countries such as Italy, Austria, Germany, Belgium, the Czech Republic, and throughout Africa. To date, they have released three albums: *Thina* in 2013, *Ekhaya* in 2015, and *Obabes Bembube* in 2018.

The late Chiwoniso Maraire was well known for her *mbira* music. She was a songwriter and singer. She played the Nyunganyunga *mbira* instrument. She contributed to the modernisation of the *mbira*, as her music blended *mbira* and contemporary music. She formed a music group, 'Chiwoniso & Vibe Culture'. She helped promote female musicians through her music. Among her achievements, she won herself a Decouverte Afrique Award. She released 5 albums over her entire career, from 1992 to her death in 2013. Chiwoniso contributed to the promotion of female musicians by being a member of a multinational all-women band called 'Women's Voice'. She was also part of the 'A Piece of Ebony' trio. She worked with 'The Storm' band as well.

Nkwali is another female musician and dancer who sings indigenous songs. She has an album '*Sithokozile*' recorded in 2015. She is a co-pioneer of the Inkululeko Yabatsha School of Arts. She also worked with musicians like Albert Nyathi, performing in festivals. She performs locally and internationally. In her career as a female musician, she earned herself a Zimbabwe award for best



Acapella album in 2016. The three music groups' actions through shows and song compositions are strategic actions of *creating* and *representing* (De Korne, 2021) their Indigenous languages and cultural values. This aligns with UNESCO's (2003) stance that the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is crucial; different methods can be used, such as vernacular music by these three female musicians.

Preservation, promotion and teaching of language using music

Through listening to the female musicians' vernacular songs, which include Nobuntu's "Inganekwane", "Narini" and "Nyawo lwami" by Nkwali, and "Vanorapa" from Chiwoniso Maraire, people can learn language and other aspects of culture. These songs are sung in a repetitive manner, which makes it easy to grasp and memorise the words and phrases, and by so doing, people can learn words and sentences. This means that vernacular-sung phrases can teach indigenous languages.

Singing and recording songs in the vernacular is one way to preserve endangered indigenous languages, ensuring they are passed on to the next generation. Since music is considered a universal language (Higgins, 2019), singing in a vernacular is a way to preserve language in songs so people can learn it through music. Indigenous languages are usually learnt and taught through reading and writing, but they can also be learnt in a short time and, interestingly, through a song. Singing in vernacular ensures that indigenous languages are preserved and passed on to others and future generations, especially in this era when music and performances are recorded for future use. Since culture and communication cannot be separated, this implies that vernacular songs by female musicians provide a platform for the preservation of native languages as languages are practised through song.

Music can be considered captivating due to its language expressions. As female musicians sing in vernacular, it renews interest in old songs. What one cannot say might be learnt through singing. This ensures that language is passed down to future generations. Though language can be a barrier to communication, musicians can use music to cross the language barrier (Maeda, 2020) through vernacular songs, which can help keep native languages alive. Below are examples of traditional songs that teach language elements.

Ingxoxo:

<i>Like layizwa ingxoxo</i>	Have you heard a conversation?
<i>Exoxwa ngamaxoxo</i>	Between the frogs
<i>Egxumeke'mthonjeni</i>	Jumping into a pool of water
<i>Axoxa ngexhegu elixapha iqhaga</i>	Talking to an old man drinking
<i>Lomhiqo liqede ngentshebe zalo</i>	Finishing beer with his beard
<i>Xoxo we xoxo we xoxo</i>	Frog! Frog!
<i>Lxhegu liquma liqansa amaqqa</i>	The old man climbing hills
<i>Liqond'ezizweni</i>	Going to other countries
<i>Lithembe ukuquma liqansa amaqqa</i>	Hoping to climb hills
<i>Liqond'ezizweni</i>	Going to other countries
<i>Laquma ixoxo liqans'amaqqa</i>	Climbs the frog, climbing hills
<i>Lithemb'ukuquma liqansa amaqqa</i>	Hoping to climb hills
<i>Liqonde ezizweni</i>	Going to other countries

This is a folk tale song with cultural layers to it. It adds humour and exaggeration to make the story stick. It reflects on indigenous attitudes of leisure and excess. It could also tell a tale about ageing and responsibility. This song by Nobuntu contains clicking sounds of the IsiNdebele language. It



incorporates a folktale in IsiNdebele while also teaching indigenous language structures. The 'xo', 'qo', and 'ngxo' sounds can be learnt in this song. The song is sung in a repetitive manner, which facilitates language learning. The clicking sounds can be made easier through song than through reading and writing, and by so doing, vernacular language is preserved.

Another example is the song "*Nyawo lwami*" by Nkwali, which is sung in IsiNdebele.

<i>Unyawo lwami lolu luganyana</i>	This my leg
<i>Mina ngekeleni ngihambe</i>	Let me go
<i>Tsholobela nhliziyo yami idabukile</i>	I am heartbroken
<i>Idabudikile inhliziyo yami idabukile</i>	My heart is broken

Musically, the song uses simple, repetitive structures to make it memorable and easy to pass down. It is easy to sing along and remember. It is in call-and-response form, which is a characteristic of Indigenous African music. The song is affiliated with a traditional dance called '*isitshikitsha*'. The dance pattern and attire worn during the song's performance help preserve material culture. The song teaches IsiNdebele words and phrases. Since the song is sung in a repetitive manner, it can help you learn a language by listening to it. The song can be likened to a living archive, keeping the language aspect fresh and spoken. The performance of such a spread of sound worldwide makes the language pop beyond its homeland.

Transmission of norms and moral values through music

The following are lyrics of the song '*Narini*' from the all-female group Nobuntu.

<i>Rune moyo munyoro harune godo</i>	Love is meek without any jealousy
<i>Harune manyawi haruzvikudzi</i>	It doesn't boast, it's not boastful
<i>Runogara nariini</i>	It lasts forever
<i>Haruiti zvoisingafaniri harizvoitsvagiri</i>	It doesn't do unnecessary things
<i>Harutsamwi haruna zvoisharu,</i>	It doesn't hold onto the past
<i>Runotenda zvese</i>	It is grateful
<i>Rune tariro pazvese runogara nariini</i>	It's hopeful and stays forever

The song uses lyrical symbolism to convey emotional and cultural values around love for one another. The lyrics present love as a humble, patient and enduring force, emphasising virtues such as meekness, gratitude and hope. It is a moral guide wrapped in melody, teaching and imparting ideal love. It highlights love as a communal value, not just an individual feeling. The song talks about love, which is commonly shared among members of the same society. As love is an important aspect in traditional societies, it brings togetherness. It appeals to people's beliefs because it guides their behaviour. If people listen to, watch, and observe songs like "*Narini*" by Nobuntu, they are bound to learn how valuable love is within the community. Through the song, cultural norms of humility, forgiveness and lasting commitment are transmitted. It is an ethical lesson that reinforces community values, using a vernacular style to make abstract virtues relatable and memorable. The repetition of these traits serves as a mantra, embedding values deeply in listeners' minds. The call-and-response form also helps reinforce cultural values, collectively promoting stable social bonds.

Another song is *Vanorapa* by Chiwoniso Maraire. The song talks about the belief system of African people. The lyrics are as follows:

<i>Vakuru vanorapa</i>	The elders heal,
<i>Honai vakuru vanorapa</i>	See the elders heal
<i>Ishe vanorapa honai</i>	The lord heals, see
<i>Vanorapa nevakafa</i>	Lord heals even the dead



<i>Honai vanorapa</i>	The ancestors heal,
<i>Shuwa vanorapa kani</i>	For sure they heal
<i>Mudzimu wako unorapa</i>	See the ancestors heal
<i>Shuwa vanorapa kani</i>	For sure they heal
<i>Mudzimu wacho</i>	Ancestors do heal
<i>Hona unorapa</i>	Look they heal

The song discusses the ancestral belief system of indigenous peoples in African societies. It explains how ancestors can heal the sick even on their deathbeds, underscoring the deep cultural belief in spiritual intervention. It explains how the ancestors take care of the living. The song conveys cultural norms of respect for ancestors, faith in divine power, and reverence for ancestors as key to health and well-being. The lyrics, such as '*vadzimu*', '*vakuru*' and '*ishe*', emphasise trust and reliance on these entities, acknowledging human expectations of higher powers. The song uses traditional rhythms and instruments like the mbira, inviting community participation and reinforcing collective belief in the healing process. Such songs can affect how people who listen to them behave and interact as an indigenous society. The song "*Vanorapa*" by Chiwoniso Maraire can help fans reflect on their judgments about how they relate to and believe in their ancestors as African descendants. By blending spiritual and traditional elements, the song transmits core cultural values about health, respect and community, keeping these beliefs alive through music.

English has been the official language of instruction in Zimbabwe until 2013, when all the vernacular languages were also made official (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). As a result, vernacular languages in Zimbabwe bore the consequences of this sidelining. The three Zimbabwean female musicians' activities wield potential to revitalise the Indigenous Shona and Ndebele languages. Their songs give Shona- and Ndebele-speaking people in urban communities opportunities to use their Indigenous languages as they sing along. This motivates indigenous people to speak their languages, and those children who now only speak English to learn their roots. This contributes towards the representation of the Indigenous *people's identity* (De Korne, 2021), which empowers them. This is similar to what has been observed in the literature (Augur, 2016; Gornaya & Sirenko, 2020): cultural practices, such as language and norms, ought to be preserved to prevent them from becoming extinct.

Inclusion of cultural material objects in music performance

In music, material culture includes traditional instruments, props, and attire. Material culture is the aspect of culture that relates to tangible products of art and craftsmanship. Female musicians in Zimbabwe are making a conscious effort to incorporate material culture through the inclusion of traditional musical instruments in their music. The female musicians focused on in this study use traditional instruments like the mbira, hosho and traditional drums in their music performances, as shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 below:

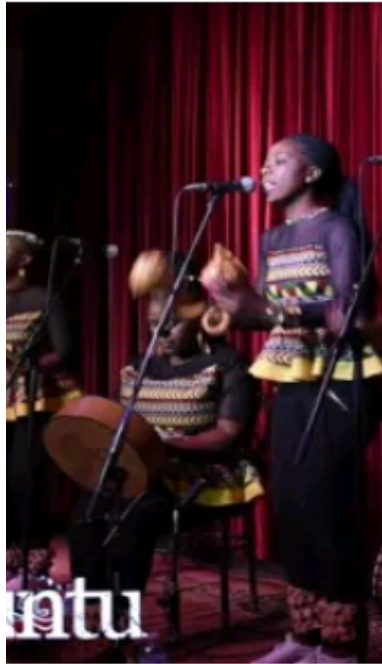


Figure 1: Nobuntu female musicians playing mbira and hosho, indigenous musical instruments
Source: Nobuntu Facebook page



Figure 2: Nobuntu female group in traditional attires
Source: Nobuntu Facebook page

Material culture involved in indigenous music performances defines culture in a way. This demonstrates how music can help people understand messages instead of just sounds. The use of indigenous material culture in vernacular songs can therefore be considered a tool for preserving



both tangible and intangible cultural values. Intangible cultural elements, such as folktales, can be preserved through music. An example is the song '*Inganekwane*' by Nobuntu, which tells a folktale from long ago through song. The lyrics are as follows:

<i>Kholobetsha</i>	Once upon a time
<i>Kudala zisakhuluma</i>	Long ago when they were talking
<i>Izinaanakazana zonke zomhlaba</i>	All the creatures of the world
<i>Kuthwa kwakukhona izidalwa zonke</i>	With all creatures present
<i>Zonke labantu</i>	Together with people
<i>Umdala wabeka umncintiswano</i>	Lord declared a competition
<i>Wokuthi ngubani oletha ubuhle emhlabeni</i>	To find beauty on earth
<i>Zazi'inyoni zathi zona zizaqala</i>	First came the birds
<i>Ake sizweni ukuthi zona zithini</i>	Let's hear what they said
<i>Zathi thina sinjalo sizinkonjane</i>	They said we are beautiful
<i>Inyoni zezulu ubuhle yithi</i>	We are the birds of the sky
<i>Bonke bubuzwa kithi</i>	All beauty is beheld on us.

The song tells a folktale about a grand competition among all creatures to find true beauty on earth. It is a story packed with lessons about perception, humility and appreciation of nature. Folktales like these are common in oral traditions, using competition narratives to teach moral lessons. Such songs reinforce community values and respect for nature's balance. It teaches that beauty isn't about showiness but essence. The melody shifts with characters, highlighting diversity. The folktale song uses competition as a clever device to teach deep cultural values about beauty, humility and respect for nature, keeping these lessons alive through music and story.

Zimbabwe is a country made up of diverse ethnic groups with distinct cultural practices. It is a country mainly populated by the Shona, who constitute almost 70% of the Zimbabwean population, the IsiNdebele, who constitute 20%, and other groups, which constitute 10% of the population (Muchemwa, 2016). The cultural practices in both the Shona and IsiNdebele societies have more in common than differences. Communal events such as rain-making, spirit appeasement, and wedding ceremonies are practised in both the Shona and IsiNdebele cultures, thereby giving the Zimbabwean people a collective identity. However, in this study, a decline in cultural practices due to different reasons is noticed in Zimbabwe. This may result from differences in the living arrangements of the present day and those of the past. In the past, people mainly lived in rural villages. Presently, most people live in towns and cities where individualism is more evident than in the past, when people promoted togetherness through social gatherings. People's recreational activities are now practised differently. As a result, this may contribute to moral decadence in indigenous societies. In the past, uncles and aunts played a vital role in promoting good moral behaviour in indigenous societies. The elders would make time for social gatherings with young people and advise them on the proper moral behaviour and the cultural practices. This was done through folktales and songs, amongst others. Young people would learn about their way of life through the apprenticeship model from the elderly. That practice has changed as forms of entertainment have changed. This has resulted in a change in the activities that indigenous people engage in.

However, cultural practices are being preserved (Cloonan, 2023) and developed in various ways, and music is one way of doing so. Female musicians are using music as a tool to promote the preservation and celebration of cultural practices. The songs they sing impact people in various ways by instilling cultural values. These include cultural elements such as language, norms, and values. Vernacular songs by female musicians help combat cultural loss and preserve culture. Culture is valuable to people; hence, the need to preserve it for future generations (UNESCO, 2003).



Some of these musicians include Zimbabwean female musicians Nobuntu, the late Chiwoniso Maraire and Nkwali. These are musicians who perform Zimbabwean music, mainly singing in vernacular languages. Singing in vernacular at live performances and on recordings are some of the ways in which these women are preserving indigenous culture by promoting the Shona and IsiNdebele languages.

Conclusion

The use of vernacular music can be considered an effective means to preserve and promote indigenous cultural practices. Based on the works produced by Chioniso, Nkwali, and Nobuntu in Zimbabwe, it can be concluded that vernacular music by female musicians is one way to preserve cultural practices. Cultural elements such as beliefs, norms, values, language, and material culture can be preserved through vernacular songs by female musicians. These can be preserved through lyrics, performances, dances and attire used by female musicians. Their performances and songs affect people's behaviour and beliefs. Through vernacular music, preservation and promotion of culture can be necessitated for the purposes of continuity. African culture was believed to be passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition, but vernacular music can also be an effective means of preserving culture. Culture is crucial in indigenous societies; therefore, it needs to be preserved through any means, including vernacular music by female musicians.

We recommend that Zimbabwe's macro culture planning policy makers consider further actions, such as including vernacular songs from the country's sixteen ethnic groups in the strategy to revitalise the Indigenous languages, material culture, and values among the citizenry. Popular musicians are also urged to value their cultural identity and continue to portray it through their songs, since they are society's role models.

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