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1. Introduction

The very first time I played the *mbira dza vadzimu* was in July 2014, when I attended a one week summer school promoted by the School of Oriental and African Studies of London. Enthusiastic and excited about the idea of deepening my knowledge of this instrument, I soon engaged in a bibliographical research that confronted me with an interesting fact: the *mbira dza vadzimu* has been traditionally played in ritual contexts mainly and almost exclusively by men, for women, even though not clearly forbidden, were at least discouraged to do the same. However, it didn't take me so long to discover that *mbira* female players not only exist and perform both in the rural and urban context, but also that many of them in the last decades gained appreciation and recognition as artistic personalities in Zimbabwe and around the world. As all the women engaging in music and performances in Zimbabwe however, *mbira* players had (and still have) to perpetually face prejudices, to overcome obstacles imposed by a men dominated society and to fight for their right to play instruments. The involvement of the music industry, especially of the world music circuit, and the numerous academical works concerning the instrument itself and its gender related issues, contributed to make it visible and renown on an international level.

I personally chose to focus my attention on this topic for different reasons: first of all, I am encouraged by a mere sense of fascination for the sound of the *mbira* and for its musical culture. Deepening my understanding of the traditional (but not only) repertory, gives me the possibility to refine the listening skills as a scholar of ethnomusicology and consequently to improve my practical skills on the instrument itself. Secondly, I consider the choice of investigating the artistic value of women and the way they articulate their selves within the society as a political act. If we consider the ethnomusicologist as a scholar of a cross-cultural discipline whose aim is to respect, protect and preserve musics and musicians, who believes in the equal value of every kind of music, combating ethnocentrism and promoting intercultural exchanges, a clear and founded conviction toward the research's object is not only very plausible but also needed (MARTINEZ&MENDIVIL 2015; NETTL 2005). As stated by several studies of the last years, music is a privileged field for the expression and articulation of the identities, among others of gender: if women musician all over the world still fight for

recognition and try to break with their art the walls of domesticity in which they're often confined, the choice of giving value to and support their music through academic investigation represents a contribution in the process of dismantling the well rooted patriarchal system that obstacles them. Writing and researching about them represent a little step in gaining visibility and developing instruments for the understanding of how they challenge and even transgress „local model of gender identity“ (MAGRINI 2003: 11). Aware of the fact that much attention has been dedicated by the contemporary ethnomusicological research to the topic of female *mbira* musicians but that it requires further and deeper investigations, I decided to try myself on the field and bring my modest contribution.

Searching on the internet some information about Zimbabwean female musicians I ended up on an article about Tendai Mavengeni, a young *mbira* player who in 2014 launched her very first album in a well known cultural center of Harare, the so called „Book Café“. Moved by a sense of pure curiosity and wondering who this young girl was, which was her story and how sounded her music, I contacted her on Facebook and we got to virtually know each other. After she sent me some of her music and we exchanged comments and opinions, the idea of including her in my research became more and more tempting. The quality of her music, the fact that she is a *mbira* player who composes and already produced music, who has been noticed and interviewed by local media and who is actively working on her musical career, were crucial factors in my choice of focusing the research on her despite her young age. Furthermore, the awareness of the lack of experience as an independent ethnomusicologist I had before starting the whole project, made me realize that a small, clear and circumscribed topic of investigation would have been more easily suitable for my purposes and that my goals could have been successfully reached in the three weeks fieldwork that I planned in Harare, which I have been able to accomplish thanks to a scholarship from the University of Vienna.

The first chapter of this work aims to be a brief presentation of the *mbira* on a systematic and historical perspective: after the description of the instrument follows an overview of the contexts in which *mbira* is played.

The second chapter focuses on women performers in Zimbabwe: it encompasses an excursus on women's participation in music since the rise of the townships

entertainment until the contemporary musical scenario and an analysis of the Zimbabwean music industry's modes of operation. Particular attention is dedicated to female *mbira* performers, reporting examples on how they managed in the recent years to create their own space in the traditional context of spiritual ceremonies and in the recording industry.

The third chapter, based on the field research's material, focuses extensively on the young *mbira* musician Tendai Mavengeni: the detailed account of the familiar and social context in which she lives highlights the favourable conditions that allowed her to undertake the path in music. Furthermore the focus will be put on her experiences as musician, since the time she began to learn the *mbira* until the recent recording and performing experiences.

1.1 The individual and ethnomusicology

In the recent years several disciplines of the human sciences have developed research questions and methods with the purpose of making the individual a central topic of investigation. Considering that „the `individuality` of individuals and the diversity of human meanings have been either neglected or relegated to a secondary concern“ (ROBERTS 2002:4), the recent interest in the biographical investigation on which ethnomusicology among others disciplines focus its attention can be seen as a meaningful „turn“ in the understanding of cultures and societies. This focus on the individual is grounded in the basic premise the analysis of the modes in which individuals create meaning and formulate their experience is an essential tool in the investigation of bigger phenomena, cultural and social formations, instances and issues. Even though the concept of „culture“ related to music has been put under scrutiny since the early 1960s, the ethnomusicological earlier intent of investigating the authentic, the typical and representative traits of a musical culture with the aim of engage in cross-cultural comparisons (STOCK 2001: 8), went on considering culture as a unitary and homogeneous entity, instead of examining the researched cultures as a mosaic of identities and multiplicities. According to more recent perspectives, however, “culture“ can be located only in relation to the lives of concrete individuals as articulated through

action at specific moments. It involves “the *resources* (ideas, dispositions, practices, material objects, and modes of expression and behavior) that individuals select, create, or absorb through socialization to fashion their lives“ (TURINO 1993: 8): individuals create different identities and perception of the selves, that cannot be totally assimilated into a more generic one.

Gaining an understanding of individuals’s life experiences in their distinctiveness, however, obviously presumes a deep insight in the contexts in which they live, because no individual create its identity beyond the environment: in other words, „ the personal, the idiosyncratic and the exceptional turn out to be the building blocks of the collective, the typical and the ordinary“ (STOCK 2001: 15). If, quoting Turino, „culture“ is not to be considered as a system but a more fluid and complex totality of resources and processes of human lives and the task of the fieldworker is to deepen the knowledge about the actors creating it through the means of the narration, an important question of representation arises: how should the subjects be depicted through the literary fictiveness? Scholars of ethnographical and ethnomusicological tradition, generally opted for an omniscient and authoritative voice, which, in the attempt to reach a basically ideal objectivity, aimed to transmit the discoveries of a privileged viewpoint, the one of the researcher. Following the methodological changes and issues of the cultural studies concerning the representation of the individual, ethnomusicology also had to respond to a new literary need.

This critical re-evaluation of the way the subjects are represented, (that however doesn’t imply necessarily a new way of collecting data in the field) however goes simultaneously with another important intention: making evidence of the researcher’s presence. Taken for granted that the participatory experience of the researcher in the field influences the context itself and that he/she as individual engages with other (researched) individuals, there is no longer justification for a firm disappearance of his/her voice in the work. According to the viewpoint that the researcher and the researched engage in a dialogical relationship, the field itself can be considered as an „encounter“ between individuals, in which they have possibility of exchanging knowledge, experiences and perspectives. This way of representation also tries to go beyond a polarized conception of the „Self“ and the „Other“, allowing that closure and intimacy which are necessary to create a relationship based on collaboration.

Moreover, the belief that the participation of the fieldworker is unique and exceptional in its influence on the environment can make him/her realize that „there may be individuals among the researched community who also deserve sustained reference, and who may also have altered a previously established cultural flow“ (STOCK 2001: 14). These „sustained references“ Stock talks about represent another important factor that stimulated the interest on the biographical research in ethnomusicology: giving individuals a means of expression, letting them speak and allowing them „to articulate their own agency, creativity and difference“ (MACISZEWSKI 2001: 139) happens to be an important motivation for the investigation in this direction.

As we see, many issues are involved in the research of individuals's lives and that involves not only new critical perspectives about the representation of the researched and the role of the fieldworker, but also the fictive means through which every research is articulated: the narrative. Biographical research is an expanding, interdisciplinary qualitative methodology that tries to respond to some key questions concerning the individuals, the way they affects the surrounding world, the relationships to the communities around them and their distinctive roles as „outstanding performers“ with their own repertoires, styles and creativity. ¹„Stimulated by these reflections, ethnographers have stressed the contingency of knowledge, a tendency that encourages the documentation of individual perspectives and thus (auto)biographical writing. At their best, such works are deeply memorable, making a virtue of their literary fictiveness“ (STOCK 2001: 13).

1.2 Biographical research

Even though the interest for the individuals' experience, advocacy and musical creativity as stated above seems to have interwoven the ethnomusicological field of research only in the last decades, the biography as a literary genre and method of investigation has been a well explored terrain of the historic musicology since the 19th century and it undoubtedly shaped „our present-day perceptions of the lives of prominent musical figures of the past“ (PEKACZ 2004: 42). Musical biography has

¹ These questions have been discussed in the 31st European Seminar in Ethnomusicology „Making a Difference: Music, Dance and the Individual“, Limerik 2015.

been intended for a long time as a monolithic work in which the „omniscient narration [provides] a linear, chronological presentation of „events“ (Ivi.) that gives the readers the illusion of a cohesive, unitary subject. In the „positivistic“ attempt of presenting biography as much scientific as possible, the author positioned himself as a transmitter of the truth, giving his objective external perspective on the story without being present in it. That’s also why biography has been perceived just as an authentic „accumulation of primary sources“ (Ibid: 48). The challenges of history in the areas of both methodology and narration, however, had to be faced from the biography in general and musical biography in particular, through a strict critic and re-consideration of its traditional premises: „ the conception of biography as a reconstruction of the subject (the realistic fallacy); biography as an accumulative, rather than interpretative, enterprise (the positivistic fallacy); and the conception of the unified self of the subject“ (PEKACZ 2004:46). Deconstructing these assumptions could be seen as a starting point in defining the assumption on which the biographical research is based. Due to its cross-disciplinary multi influenced nature, in fact, an univocal definition of „biographical research“ would neither be appropriate nor beneficial (ROBERTS 2002: 2). This fast developing method of investigation is part of the wide range of qualitative research influenced from different ramifications of the social sciences and is concerned with the stories, the lives of the individuals. The assumptions through which this method analyses and focuses on the lives of individuals and on their own meanings are:

- the conception of the subject as composed by multiple „selves“;
- the necessary visibility /presence of the researcher;
- the use of oral history memory and narrative as important tools for the re-elaboration of the data gathered on the fieldwork and narration as a work of selection and interpretation.

The multiplicity of the „Self“ and its performativity

As stated above, biographical works traditionally tended towards a description of the subjects in a totalizing way, reducing them to unitary, monolithic beings whose life is supposed to follow linear ongoing and in which schemes and pattern repeat. Musical biographies among others have often presented their subjects in an idyllic way, like outstanding figure in a positive sense, purged of contradictory or negative

characteristics. The main critic to this approach is based on the well assumed belief of the last decades that the „Self“ is never unify and uniform: more appropriate is to talk about a heterogeneity of the Self, or „Selves“, which are mobile, multi-faced and controversial. The Self constructs its own identity within a bigger context „inseparably from the philosophical traditions, social classes, gender ideologies, language system, and national cultures“ in which it functions (PEKACZ 2004: 68). The individuals create meanings that are the basis of their everyday lives: „individuals act according to meanings through which they make sense of social existence“ (ROBERTS 2002: 6). Even though the Self is never univocal and monolithic, it engages in a representation, in a performance of itself, with the intent of being perceived as coherent and unitary: the “performative self” in fact communicates with the external world and aim to create an impression of coherence that puts it in relations with the surrounding contexts. (PEKACZ 2004: 69).

The autobiographical presence of the researcher

According to the recent turns in the use of the biography as a method of investigation, the role of the researcher has been revalued and reconsidered, with the attempt of taking distance from the traditional idea of the scientist as a voiceless transmitter of knowledge. Issues on the degree of collaboration, the extent and the nature of the researcher’s voice and on the biographical experience in structuring research, such as the effects of his/her presence in the field and in the narrative have been questioned and discussed.

Assuming that task of the researcher is, among others, to make/turn the field in a cooperative and collaborative environment in which everyone can interact, a deep reflection and grade of awareness about how his/her presence influences the others is a pivotal point in the biographical exchange occurring between them (ROBERTS 2002: 87). The research engages in interactive relationship. Moreover „discussion of the research’s role raises not simply the degree to which the researcher should place her/his voice within a socio- political context but methodological and ethical questions concerning the researcher’s role.“ (ROBERTS 2002: 14). That has to do with the representational task the researcher has once he has collected the data: question concerning how much he should be involved or reveal of the life stories, his decision

about believing the story as it has been told or not „The biographer is forced by the result of factual research either to accept or to reject the subject's self definition. If the biographer sees that self-definition is inaccurate, then he or she must find ways of building a different story from the same facts the subject had at hand.“ (WAGNER MARTIN 1994: 8). But in the case the biographer sees the self- definition of the subject as true, his or her task is to put the story in a wider context, to connect it with other histories and to make elaborate all of these in a portrait, carrying out an interpretative and representational work with the available material.

The narrative as an analysis

In the attempt of explanation of what is the biographical research and what are the characteristics of this method, it is at this point necessary to talk about the means through which individuals express themselves and construct a system that allows them to communicate and to create meaning of life: the narrative.

Although to the term narrative have been given different definitions, for the purposes of the biographical research it is possible to define the narrative as a *story*: „narrative as a story is of special interest to qualitative researchers as they try to understand the fullness of human existence by including in their inquiries the unique characteristics that differentiate the human experience from other kinds of existence“ (POLINKGHORNE 1995: 7). Human beings in fact have the capacity of perceiving their goal-oriented actions as something happening in a precise space and in a uni-linear conception of time and to communicate these through an articulated, emplotted story which is based on rhetorical devices, conventions and structures. The narrative as a tool for the construction of the self and for the connection between its inner world and the external reality, is a well formulated concept in those methods based on the interpretation of the narrative: „the narrative had never been merely a „neutral“ vehicle of ordering biographical data chronologically, but an active vehicle transmitting these unspoken assumptions and hierarchies, and a powerful tool for constructing the subject according to current political, cultural, moral and personal agendas“ (PEKACZ 2004: 51).

Questions about how human beings build themselves through stories and how they identify with their stories, how the Self is reaffirmed and reconstructed through the story and which elements unconsciously influence the narrative formation emerge

conspicuously in the biographical field of investigation.

Narrative has been used in the last decades in various ways in the qualitative research as a method of inquiry: the raise of interest in the individual's personal experiences goes parallel with a methodology which is based on the assumption that there is not a „absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text. The narrative approach advocates pluralism, relativism and subjectivity“ (LIEBLICH 1998: 2). Narrative analysis is therefore an interdisciplinary approach. The idea is to give value to multiple perspectives and to recognize that the individuals construct themselves inside constructed social realities. Individuals moreover construct themselves through the means of the narration, in order to being perceived and understood. According to some psychological studies of the recent years, it has been supposed that „personal narratives, in both facets of content and form, *are* people's identities“ (LIEBLICH 1998: 7).

The construction and reconstruction of the individual's personality and reality happens through narration. The domain of the self-narrative and of the personal identity are strongly linked together. The „narrative truth“ is something anyway subjective and it does not necessarily match with the „historical truth“. Task of the researcher, in this case, is indeed to choose in this investigative method, where to stand, what to interpret, what to take or not. He needs self-awareness in the decision process of drawing conclusions from the material. For this reason, but not solely, we have to be aware that the researcher influences the research. The narrative approach in the qualitative research has the advantage of putting in contact the researcher with the subject researched in the process of him interpreting himself. Each biography is a representation of a life and the researcher has to work decoding what is spoken and what is not, recognizing, re-contextualize or abstract someone's life in order to gain a new interpretation of the data gathered, such as to say of the life that has been investigated (ROBERTS 2002: 119). Task of the researcher, however, is to make clear the processes and the method used to produce the results.

Narrative research and more generally the biographical research is a fluid field of research in the process of changing and developing itself and it is based, as the qualitative research in general on the research itself (on the field) and on the phase of

reading, analysis and interpretation of the narrative. Even if its not here the purpose of drawing all the possible techniques and the methods used in the research, we can say that different theoretical and methodological approaches may be used in study, yet nothing is fixed and prearranged. The researcher works between induction and deduction, between factual reality, subjectivity and the reality produced by the individual. Oral history, feminism, auto/biography, ethnography are used to face the issues, to discover different area of interest and are used for specific purposes. In the process of reading and interpretation, however, it is important to define two macro fields that compose the structure of the narrative: the content and the form. Choosing of focusing on the one or the other is a choice made by the research that concerns the things he or she wants to underline and the results that have to be achieved through the research. The possibilities and the approaches are different but the material of the narrative can be used „ to learn about variations in structure. The working assumption in this cell of the model is that the formal aspects of structure, as much as context, express identity, perceptions and values of the storyteller. Analyzing the structure of a story will therefore reveal the individual's personal construction of his or her evolving life experience“ (LIEBLICH 1998: 88).

As stated before, the purpose of the study of lives is to gain an understanding of individuals' life experiences within their socio-historical context. Lives are meaningful not only in the expression of their unique individuality but also as reflection of wider cultural meanings of the society. „The appeal of biographical research is that it is exploring, in diverse methodological and interpretative ways, how individual accounts of life experience can be understood within the contemporary cultural and structural settings and is thereby helping to chart the major societal changes that are underway, but not merely at some broad social level. Biographical research has the important merit of aiding the task of understanding major social shifts, by including how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups and institution“ (ROBERTS 2002: 5). Changes, mutations, innovations and everything that happens in a specific society are the reflection of human actions made by individuals. Analyzing the individuality means studying the collective and, in a broader sense, the history of the humanity as well.

1.3 The ethnographic context

The setting of the research that I conducted from the 27th of September to the 20th of October 2016 is the urban area of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. In the southern district called Hatfield was located my accommodation, while in Sunningdale, the adjacent one, I conducted most of my interviews with Tendai Mavengeni. For the entire duration of the fieldwork I have been hosted by the dancer and *mbira* player Irene Chigamba and her numerous family. The members of the Chigamba family are known since several years by many amateurs and researchers from all over the world for being generous hosts and professional artists: the five little houses that compose their residence are the stage of numerous traditional dances and instruments workshops. Irene herself teaches *mbira*, *marimba*, *hosho*, *ngoma* and traditional dance. During my staying I was given a little one-room round house where I slept and worked, while I shared all the other spaces with the other members of the family, among whom were Irene's sisters and nephews, her father Tute Chigamba with his wife and their new born child, and other relatives. Living there for three weeks was an extremely important and fruitful experience, both on a personal and professional point of view: thanks to my staying there I had the possibility of being part of rehearsals and dance sessions and to assist every day to the construction of new *mbiras*. Sharing every meal and spending a lot of time with this family of artists represented for me the possibility of getting in touch for the first time with *mbira* players.

My first day in the field indeed started with some rehearsals and I could assist (and dance together) to a small group of participants, including Wiriranai Chingonga (called Sekuru Wiri), who played the *mbira*, Irene Chigamba, her sister and dancer Nyarai Chigamba and Rita. Moreover during the three weeks of research I learned for the first time to play the *mbira mavembe*, (*nyamaropa*) which is tuned differently and has more keys compared to the *mbira nhare*. My teachers were Seguru Wiri, Irene Chigamba and her youngest son Clarence Mzite. All of them gave me some of their time to teach me something new on the *mbira* and to make me try for the first time to play it together with other musicians, which I had never done before. Moreover I could enjoy Irene and Seguru Wiri, who know each other since several years, playing together in some random moments or during the party we organized for my last night in Zimbabwe.

Staying at Chigamba's actually facilitated my contacts with Tendai Mavengeni and her family as well, since Tendai and Irene know each other very well: Irene has been Tendai's teacher and they actually still meet, especially during wome mbira camps that are organized outside the city. By chance they live very close to each other, in a distance of more or less 15 minutes by car. Therefore the very first encounter with the young musician and her father took place at Chigamba's place on the 1st of October.

Besides the microcosm composed by Irene's house and Tendai's family house in which I spent most of my time, I could also visit the city center of Harare and some suburban districts like Mbare, which is known as the first township and renowned for its dynamic musical life, Hewporth, Dzivaresekwa and Highlands, where I had the chance to visit The mbira Center and carry out further interviews with its director, Albert Chimedza.

1.4 Research's question

Since I firmly believe that Tendai Mavengeni's musical biography is under different perspective *per se* exceptional and moreover that it represents a significant case in the wider panorama of women musicians in Harare, the main aim of this research is to investigate the modes of production and performance of her music and analyze those different factors that allowed her until now to become an active musician in the context of the urban space. Tendai Mavengeni is in fact a poly-instrumentalist and singer, even though she plays and composes music mainly on the *mbira dza vadzimu*. According to many biographies of female *mbira* performers, prejudices regarding women playing it in both ritual and not ritual contexts, have for long time hindered them from learning and performing. Generally speaking, being a woman musician in Zimbabwe presents numerous challenges on a social and professional point of view. How does Tendai, as a young female musician, cope with this situation? To which degree this affects her engagement with music? How does her biography differ from the others regarding learning the instrument and the concrete possibilities to perform and produce music? Considering that Tendai is sixteen years old and dependent upon her family, which role do the actors of the familiar and social context in which she lives play in her music's production's process? Who supports her and how? Which canals and public spaces in

the urban fabric are open to host her performances now that her musical career is rapidly developing?

The focus of the research is however pointed not only on the external factors that make her music more or less possible, but also on the music itself and on the performance: through the analysis of interviews, songs, footage and field's recordings I will try to delineate personal experiences, motivations, aspirations and important themes in the narratives of her texts.

1.5 Collection and interpretation of data

The planning's phase of my research has been dedicated both to organizational activities and to a preliminary collection of material available about Tendai Mavengeni, such as interviews, pictures, and newspaper articles. Before leaving for Harare I exchanged Emails with her and her father Boniface Mavengeni, in which I clearly explained my intents and asked for their permission to visit them. They immediately communicated me their willingness to collaborate and invited me to contact them as soon as I would arrive in Harare. Moreover, Tendai sent me some tracks of her first album for me to listen.

Being the goal of my research to reach an understanding of Tendai's life and music as wide as possible, her everyday life, reports of personal experiences and opinions, as much as the musical ones have been the main topics of investigation during the time we spent together. Other than being that, these moments of interaction, questioning and even playing *mbira* together contributed to create a relationship based on trust and reciprocal interest that became stronger even in the relatively short time I spent with her. Since our very first encounter, we managed to create a relaxed and positive atmosphere for getting to know each others: during the lunch that the whole family shared with me, we introduced ourselves and I declared how I intended to conduct my research, assuring that all the material collected and the resultant thesis would have been later sent to them. We took some time to talk about our reciprocal expectations and they clearly wished that this work could be in some ways beneficial for Tendai's musical future career. The Mavengeni family has been in each situation extremely

accommodating and helpful and there have been actually no obstacles from their side for the pursuing of the information I needed.

Mostly all of the interview took place in the yard of their house, where we usually seated under a big tree, surrounded by the noises of the neighborhoods' daily occupations. Each session of interviews resulted in a several hours lasting conversation interrupted just by a sneak's break or by short interactions with her younger brother, who usually played next to us, running around with a friend. Tendai's father often joined us during the interviews or simply seated close to us, while her mother Chengetai Cambang came to us just one time, recording our conversation with her smartphone. Every interview has been filmed- and audio-recorded, while most intimate and informal moments have been recorded just through pictures or short videos. Tendai as well often took pictures of us together with her mother's smartphone and afterwards she sent them to me: she seemed always extremely comfortable with being filmed and she likes a lot to see herself on the camera, performing or simply speaking.

During the entire fieldwork duration, I had the possibility to carry out four sessions of interviews, whose contexts, pace, contents and participants considerably differed.

First session

The very first session took place on Saturday 1st of October at Mavengeni house's yard, where Tendai and me spent together several hours talking and playing *mbira*. Starting the interview was easy and pleasant, since she seemed extremely exited at the idea of narrating as much as she could about herself and very comfortable in doing that. Not only she tirelessly talked for hours, but she also spontaneously decided to perform on the *mbira dza vadzimu* a couple of pieces of the traditional repertory and a song composed by her that is included in her first released album. The performances have been an important part in the interviewing process: first of all because her music is one of the main topic of my investigation, and secondly because it somehow integrated the oral narration, giving us several inputs for deepening some themes or to explain in an exemplary way some topics of discussion. Moreover, it was obvious how she felt enthusiastic about playing and singing in front of an audience while being recorded. In the afternoon, her father Boniface Mavengeni joined our conversation as well and

started to talk about Tendai's first experiences with the *mbira*, while she was seated next to him and listened. Even though the first session's expectations and goal was to get to know each other, to get familiar with the recording devices and to spontaneously talk about different topics without well structured questions, I received quite useful, precise and detailed answers and inputs that I later used for more topic oriented interview's session.

Second session.

The second session took place on the 2nd of October at Tsoro Art Center, which is actually Jacob Mafuleni and Martha Thom's house, both musicians and good friends of Mavengeni's family (see 2.1.3). Tendai invited me to join them in this visit which was planned with the intent of letting Jacob listen to her new produced second album, and giving them feedback and opinions before the release. Because I had not previously planned this meeting, everything was quite improvised but it ended up being extremely useful. Not only Boniface and Tendai gave me more information about the production of the album and other anecdotes concerning her music, but the conversation with Jacob and Martha allowed me to have an insight in the music industry and to talk more intensively about women in the music industry. The context and the dynamics of the conversations differed greatly from the frontal one to one interview we had the day before: being seated all together in the living room the conversation developed in a collective and cooperative interview during which the subjects constantly exchanged opinions and anecdotes, completing their sentences and narrating things to each others. Joining this visit not only gave me the possibility to gain facts and information about music industry from people who actually work in it, but also to experience Tendai as musician in another context playing *marimba* and dancing.

Third session

The third session took place again at Mavengeni's home, on the 8th of October. Having reflected and worked on the material that I have collected during the first two interviews, for this session I prepared some topic oriented questions, well aware of what I wanted to focus the attention on. I concentrated the questions on precise life's events

and episodes stimulating past memories as well as time perspectives: assuming that the biographical narrative is not merely chronological but it is more a „complex interlinking of perceptions of the past and future within the experience of the present and its shifting contexts“ (ROBERTS 2002: 84), understanding how individual move between past, present and future is an important tool of investigation. The interviewed person is asked to project him/herself in another temporal system and to adapt a different perspective on his or her life. Considering that time has an important role not only as a factor in which we structure our life but also as we tell our stories, I chose to conduct one interview in which time perspectives had the central role, trying to understand which modes of narration, reminiscence and imagination Tendai would apply to her biography. Exploring that has given me a better insight on Tendai's personality and on her self-representation as persona and as musician, which appear to be inseparable in her depiction. During the second part session of the interview I focused the attention on the composition and production of her music, asking her to actively help me in writing down and translating some texts of her albums. Moreover I asked her to explain the contents, her ideas concerning the music and her relationship with the *mbira*.

Fourth session

The fourth session took place firstly at Tendai's school and later again at her place. On the 15th of October at Mabelreign Girls' High School has been celebrated a ceremony in occasion of the Prize giving day, during which the best students of all forms have been rewarded for their outstanding performances in different subjects. On that occasion Tendai had a solo performance on the *mbira* and she played in the *marimba* ensemble as well. I had the chance to visit the school, I was introduced to Tendai's music professor and I spent time with the entire family. During the afternoon once we were back home, she taught me to play the *mbira njunga njunga* that she borrowed from school and she performed other songs. I could be present to some intimate moments, for example when the grandmother came to visit them and when Tendai put on for the first time the freshly sewed dress that she planned to wear at the forthcoming fotoshooting for her second album's cover and at the launch's concert. The whole family gathered together with me for the last time, talking about future plans and the will of keeping contact after my fieldwork.

Once back in Vienna, in front of the considerable audio- and video- material collected during my research in Harare and rethinking about the experience on the field, I had to make some necessary choices concerning the form and the contents of the narration I was approaching. The goal was to select, re-elaborate and transform the oral stories and conversations in a meaningful text, an aesthetically valuable document based on coherence, factual contents and critical considerations.

During the fieldwork I played a substantial role in directing Tendai's attempt of self-representation and my personality, behavior and attitude as person and researcher undoubtedly conditioned her narration. People talking about their lives generally engage in a self-representation's activity, yet they formulate a perception of themselves which may or may not correspond to the perception that the others have of them. Moreover, oral histories are just portion of lives and the documents produced on them remain just pure representations (GRELE 1985: 245). Being aware of these assumptions, I considered appropriate to produce a text with a highly degree of subjectivity, in which my voice as narrator and commentator and the voices of the interviewed subjects would have been equally present. The modes of expressions, the linguistic and rhetorical choices, the style of the narration and the morphology of personal life stories in fact seem to "manifest deeper layers of the narrator's identity" (LIEBLICH 1998: 13) and to shed a brighter light on the individual itself.

For the purpose of this work I structured the representation of Tendai's life in macro-topics in order to allow in-depth descriptions and to gain an exhaustive portrait : the narration starts with some biographical data, moves to a depiction of the different contexts that constitute her life and concludes with detailed analysis of her music modes of production and performance. What the form of the narration is concerned, numerous excerpts of the interviews and conversations are directly included in the narrative flow of the text, in the attempt of enriching it with voices that did not need to be filtered or re-elaborated by mine. Reporting my perspectives on what I experienced and on the subjects of my research however has been done keeping in mind that critical distance and avoidance of sentimentalization towards facts and personal stories are a basic requirement of the biographical research.

2. The *mbira dza vadzimu*

This chapter focuses on the *mbira* and on its music culture: not pretending to be an exhaustive description of the instrument, the next paragraphs' aim is to explain the characteristic of this type of lamellophone on a systematic perspective and to trace an excursus of the music for *mbira* that has been produced since the beginning of the recording music industry, both on a local and on an international level. Such an overview serves as a necessary contextualization of the panorama in which women *mbira* players perform.

Mbira is a term that encompasses a great variety of type of lamellophones having common elements: a set of metal keys, a soundboard usually made of wood, an amplification method and some devices to produce the buzzing sound (BERLINER 1978: 10, KUBIK 1998: 47). Lamellophones are widespread in most parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa and they are known with different names, they present a great diversity of shapes, layouts of keys and tuning, of the keys' material and shape, tone colour and ornamentation. Due to the history of slavery and deportation, lamellophones travelled around the world and were introduced for example in some parts of the Caribbean, Brazil and the United States (KUBIK 1998: 69).

In this work, however, I will focus just on the type of *mbira* played by the Shona people, a 9 million population of Bantu-speakers living in Zimbabwe and partly in southern Mozambique. The *mbira dza vadzimu* is considered the oldest type of lamellophone of the Shona people (KUBIK 1998 :48) and the archeological findings in the north-east of the country as well in the south could date several examples of this instrument between 1500 and 1800 A.D. In the ruins of the Great Zimbabwe at the beginning of the 20th century have been found pieces that can be dated back to the 14th century (BERLINER 1978: 28).

Archeological evidences, although extremely important, do not give sufficient and exhaustive information in the attempt of tracing the origins and the development of the *mbira*: the remaining materials of which these lamellophones were made, are either hard to preserve on a long time scale or difficult to assign to the original instrument.

The numerous written sources and drawings produced by explorers, priests or missionaries in the last centuries have been therefore fundamental tools to gain a better

understanding of the instrument. The Portuguese Dominican priest João dos Santos was the first to report the word *mbira*; Fillipo Bonanni drew the first known illustration of a lamellophones' musician in 1723 and David Livingstones in 1858 travelling in the Zambezi valley, gave account of a lamellophone in a resonator, explaining and illustrating it. In the second half of the 19th century Carl Mauchs, a German geologist, reporting in his diaries about the ruins of Zimbabwe in the Fort Victoria (nowadays Masvingo, in South-Eastern Zimbabwe) made a precise description of the *mbira*, drew it, wrote about rhythm and intonation and even transcribed three songs (KUBIK 1998: 87).

Besides these essential sources, however, an important role has been played by the ethnomusicological research of the last decades in order to understand and study the *mbira* and its music. According to Paul Berliner, one of the major experts of this instrument, five general types of *mbira* belong to the Shona culture: the *matepe*, the *karimba*, the *mbira dza vadzimu*, the *njari*, and the *mbira dzavaNdau*. During my research on the field, however, I realized that another type of *mbira* is being played in the last years, especially in schools and for teaching young kids: the *mbira nyunga nyunga*, which has fifteen keys and it is played also with the index finger of the right hand.

The geographic distribution, the shapes of the instruments, the repertories and the occasions in which they are played differ greatly: some of the *mbira*, like the *dzavaNdau* and the *karimba* are mostly played for entertainment, while the *dza vadzimu* and the *matepe* are the only ones associated with religious worship (BERLINER 1978: 33). The *mbira dza vadzimu* is the only one originally from Zimbabwe and it is associated most closely with the Zezuru people of central Zimbabwe, even though it is nowadays found in several other parts of the country (BERLINER 1978). The Zezuru is an ethno-linguistic population that is nowadays part of the Shona group living in the central region surrounding and south of Harare (TURINO 200:68).

In the next paragraphs the focus will be pointed exclusively on the *mbira dza vadzimu*, being the most used type in the urban music and favourite by the subject of my research Tendai Mavengeni.

2.1 Morphology

The *mbira dza vadzimu* is a rectangular square-shaped tray with raised edges on which lamellae are attached to the upper edge. These are however free to be plucked on the opposite extremity. The keys, made of iron, are usually 22 or 23 and are mounted on three manuals, two on the left side and one on the right side. On the lower right corner of the soundboard there is a hole in which the little finger of the right hand has to be insert in order to hold and support the *mbira*. The keys differ in length and the longer one are in the centre of the instrument: that means that the lower pitches of each manual come from there. In order to play *mbira* only three fingers are used: the two thumbs, which pluck the keys downward from above, and the index finger of the right hand, which plucks upward from below the six highest-tuned lamellae at the outside right.

The sound produced by the *mbira* is not loud, that's way another important part of it is the resonator (*deze*), made of a calabash in which the *mbira* is attached with a stick. On the resonator (or on the soundboard itself) are usually attached some bottle caps which produce a buzzing sound. Nowadays these resonators can be made of alternative materials like fiber-glass or plywood. Resonators are always used in public ceremonies and in performances in front of an audience because "the tone of the mbira comes alive, full-bodied, mellow and rich" (BERLINER 1978: 36).

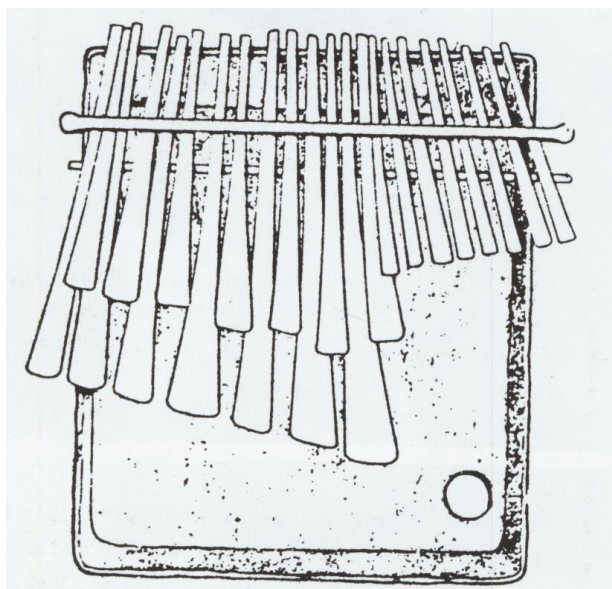


Fig 1. Drawing of a *mbira dza vadzimu* (KUBIK 1998: 50)

2.2 Performance context and repertory

The *mbira dzavadzimu* is traditionally used by the Shona people in order to establish a contact with the ancestors during religious and burial ceremonies called *bira* (KAEMMER 1998: 753). Since the pre-European Shona society, music in general is an integral part of many rituals, in which people gather together, play, sing, dance and drink beer. *Mbira* can be performed as a solo instrument, but it is more often played together with drums, called *ngoma*, and *hosho* (rattles played in pair made of little pumpkins cleaned out and filled with seeds) (BERLINER 1978: 112). “In ceremonies and other occasions the *mbira* and *hosho* provide the basis for collective singing and dancing” (TURINO 2000:73). The singing part is performed with the yodeling technique in a responsorial form, in which “the group-response parts are usually fixed, but the lead part has considerable leeway in improvising both text and tune” (KAEMMER 1998: 750). In many traditional songs the fragments of the text are interchangeable and the practice of inserting completely new lyrics is quite common.

The repertory of traditional pieces which, is transmitted orally from generation to generation, is extremely vast and the great variety of different titles that musicians give to the same pieces and to the amount of variations existing, it seems barely impossible to determine their precise number. New versions of the old songs or just completely new songs exist as well, even though the traditional repertory is taken in greater consideration than the new one, which generically comes from dreams, causal discoveries during performances, or simply are deliberate compositions for special occasions. The musicians learn continuously new variations on traditional pieces . Because *mbira* music is part of a both vocal and instrumental improvisational tradition based on variations of harmonic and rhythmic cycles, (Ibid.: 747) the repertory is always fresh and interesting, never repetitive and the possibilities of creating always new performances are infinite. Moreover “within the general repertory of *mbira* players, musicians distinguish individual pieces by their independent parts, history and function, formal features and relative difficulty” (BERLINER 1978:73). Even If, as stated before, the traditional repertory is connected to the religious ritual, it can be performed in non religious circumstances as well, while on the other hand, the pieces composed for entertainment (like adaptations of other instruments, newly composed pieces and so on)

are not played in religious ceremonies.

The repertory encompasses pieces with different degrees of complexity, which is measured according to the rhythmical regularity, the rapidity with which pitches have to be plucked alternatively by the fingers' movements, the strength and the agility necessary to perform.

The formal aspects on which mbirists distinguish pieces in the repertory compass the harmonic structure, rhythmic or melodic patterns, tonal centre, the length of the phrases, the amount of variations which each part plays. *Mbira* music is highly complex and requires a proper degree of virtuosity.

2.3 Playing technique

On a harmonic and rhythmic point of view, the *mbira* pieces present two parts "in contrasting and complementary rhythms" (KAEMMER 1998: 749) played by different musicians. The leading part is called *kushaura* and is responsible for the melodic lines, normally played on the higher notes. During the performance it is the first to start, keeping the version quite standard in order for the other musicians and listeners to recognize the piece and join in. The tempo at the beginning is normally slowed down and so that the other player enter with the second interlocking part, named *kutsinhira*, of which exist usually two basic types. The parts are relatively fixed but musicians perform their own improvisations on these versions. The tempo increases progressively during the performances especially when the *hosho* player joins the group. Each of the musicians plays numerous variations.

The very essence of *mbira* music is in the result of these interlocking parts and in their different melodic and rhythmic configurations (BERLINER 1978: 85). Due to this effect, a lot of changes are audible during the performance, such as new melodic lines which begin and end at different points, the appearance of melodies which were originally not played, changing of rhythmical patterns. Mbirists can choose to play some notes louder than others in order to change the harmonic and rhythmic relationships, so the emphasizing of different rhythmic figures is due to the free decision of the player.

The duration of the piece is arbitrary, it does not depend on fix rules and there is not a fixed number of times in which the cycles have to be repeated for the song to be finished: due to the circumstances and on the decisions of the musicians, the performances can last equally few minutes, half an hour or even more. Even during my fieldwork I was told that that it is the duty of the musicians to perform a certain piece as long as the dancers and the audience want it to be performed.

“Mbira music can be regarded as contrapuntal in the sense that the parts of its compositions are characterized by the presence of a restricted set of two or sometimes three pitches played either simultaneously or consecutively, as melodic fragments. (BERLINER 1978: 75)

2.4 Principles of harmony and tuning

The complexity of the *mbira* music on an harmonic point of view arose the interest of ethnomusicology scholars: different studies have been produced which analyze the system of the harmonic progressions and the cyclic sequences on which the music is based, which will not be treated here exhaustively (see GRUPE 2004; KLAUS-PETER BRENNER 1997). For the purpose of this brief description of the instrument it is enough to point out that the music is based on kinetic and rhythmic patterns comprehending harmonic cycles. The majority of *mbira* pieces are based on progressions between mostly four Bi-chords in a form of $4 \times 12 = 48$, (or less often $4 \times 9 = 36$) units of elementary pulse, where 4 is the number of the phrases. These elementary patterns, divided into four major phrases, are cyclically repeated throughout the performance of the piece (KUBIK 1998: 48; BERLINER 1978: 75). The intervals most commonly used are octaves, fifths and thirds and their inversions but lot of the harmonic colour of a section of a piece depends on the tuning of the instrument on which it is played.

The tuning plans for *mbira* of the same type are usually identical: the right manual consists of an ascending scale, while in the left manuals (both the upper and the lower) the keys in adjacent position produce intervals of thirds and a fifths. Moreover, some keys of the upper and lower register are placed close to another in order to facilitate the

production of a octave.

The aspects that distinguish the general sound of an *mbira* from the others, are among others the pitch level and the actual size between the intervals. Often the musicians choose personally and adopt a certain kind of sound of their instrument for aesthetic sound reasons according to their personal taste, for facilitating the singing, or even for reasons connected to the material and the quality of the instrument itself (BERLINER 1978:62).

Normally musician are used to a certain kind of tuning and they can have some difficulties in changing its; some other they can hear another kind and be fascinated and decide then to switch to it (TRACEY 1970).

2.5 The *mbira* in urban-popular music

As a matter of fact, the European invasion and consequent process of acculturation in the late 19th century changed not only the entire society but also the perception and the status of Shona *mbira* music and musicians. The missionary movements have, at least in the first decades, strictly condemned and forbidden the indigenous music, which was tagged as “devil music”. *Mbira* suffered a decline in popularity: musicians, especially in some parts of the country where the influence of the Christian church on the lives of the Shona people was more oppressive, were undervalued, punished and even imprisoned. The general conversion to the Christian church of the population and the fact that the Europeans took control of the scholar system greatly affected the Shona music (KAEMMER 1998: 755).

In the period just before the Independence however things started to change. According to Berliner (1978), two basic factors contributed to make *mbira* popular again in Zimbabwe: the liberalization by the Christian church of the African arts and the rise of nationalist movements who developed in the country before and during the independence war. “Within the changing political and social climate of Zimbabwe, the *mbira* has emerged as a potent political and religious symbol for young musicians. In addition, renewed interest in the traditional religious ritual among the African public has created a greater demand for professional *mbira* players” (Ibid. 243). The young generation, together with the old one, has been responsible for the rebirth of the *mbira*

as part of Shona expressive culture, refusing to subjugate to the colonial power and therefore to lose their cultural heritage.

During the uprising of the late 1970s, called *chimurenga*, the indigenous music became an essential symbol of the Shona identity. *Bira* ceremonies, along with their religious meaning, became an active space for politicizing people in the rural areas, bringing them to dialogue and for finding cohesion for the organization of the struggle. The term *chimurenga*, started to refer also to a genre of popular music based on traditional *mbira* music and played with electric instruments whose texts were highly political connoted.

According to an interesting theory of Turino (1998), however, the new popularity and broader diffusion of the *mbira dzavadzimu* started already in the 1960s and it is the result of different factors and not solely of the African nationalism, which is rather an indirect cause: the colonial, state-controlled radio of the 1960s, the interests of musicians in bringing some Shona genres (among them *mbira*) in the electric guitar bands, the rise of the worldbeat in the 1980s and the prolific researches of some ethnomusicologists are the reasons why the *mbira* gained much attention both locally and on the international scene.

Its increasing popularity taking place from the late 1950s through the 1990s in various waves can be considered as a “shift in fashion, or a new taste for *mbira* alongside other local lamellaphones, in regions where it had not been common previously” (TURINO 2000: 76).

One of the main reasons is to be seen in the geographical proximity of the Zezuru people to the city of Harare, where mass media were extremely active and contributed to dictate the development of the urban-style music in general. A special role has been played of course by the radio: at the end of the 1950s “African programmers and field staff of the Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) began recording a great deal of indigenous Shona music for airplay on African Service Radio” (Ibid. 77), lamellophone music and especially *mbira* has been recorded. In the following decades special programs had been planned in the African Service (now Radio 2) concerning lamellophone music. Zezuru musicians who were close to the Harare used to go to studios to perform and record and their music was aired over radio. Moreover, *mbira* music due to its “intricate melodic quality” and the fact that it could be easily detached from its original ritual context, was more suitable for being aired in radio in comparison

to other indigenous music and dances. However, numerous musicians were available in Mbare township, the oldest of the city that still nowadays hosts an interesting and active musical live scene. And again, its popularity grew when it started to be incorporated in the music of numerous guitar bands.

2.6 Mbira-Guitar band and the Guitar-band mbira music

The exposure of the *mbira* music in the mass media awoke the interest of the cosmopolitan youth culture's generation of Harare of musicians whose professional aspirations and interests in creating a new kind of style as a mixture between indigenous and Western music, produced the so called "Mbira-guitar bands". During the 1970s they started to explore the sound of the electric guitars reproducing *mbira* music, incorporating bass, traps, electric organ and percussion. Only after the 1986 that they started to incorporate indigenous instruments like *mbira*, *ngoma* and *hosho*, which later in the 1990s became a common practice (TURINO 2000: 224).

Guitar-band *mbira* music is based on the metric structure of the *mbira* music, it features chord progressions (usually oscillating between major and minor) and four-phrase harmonic-melodic ostinatos. In the attempt of transposing *mbira* music structures and form on other instruments, the resulting divisions of parts can be described as follows: the leading guitar plays the descending lines similar to those played on the high register of the *mbira*, the bass plays the parts which are usually played on the bass manual/keys, and the keyboards are used to play the *kutsinhira* part, which interlocks with the first part played by guitar and bass (Ibid: 226).

The singing style is like the one used in the performance of the traditional repertory and comprehends yodeling. The texts of the songs can be taken from traditional pieces and they have mostly a loose structure, may be completely new or a combination of preexisting lines.

The indigenous-based guitar-band music is a category that encompasses different genres which can not be treated here extensively (for an exhaustive overview see TURINO 2000) but a pivotal role in the use of the *mbira* in the urban music has been played by Thomas Mapfumo, the pioneer of the *mbira*-guitar band. Still one of the most famous

and acclaimed musician and singer in contemporary Zimbabwe who “has attracted tremendous attention and has received critical acclaim nationally, regionally and internationally by both academics and non-academics” (NAIDOO 2010:) especially for his music known as *Chimurenga* played in the 1970s with his band The Black Unlimited, Mapfumo gave the mbira music a new sound and a new audience and has been taken as example by many others bands. The need to combine indigenous music like local Shona songs, “*jit* song (a term associated with village recreational dance-drumming)” (TURINO 2000: 93), *mbira* indigenous-styled vocals including yodelling and call and response with electric instruments resulted in different and numerous experiments, although very few young musicians succeed in making career in the music industry.

2.7 Mbira in the Worldbeat

As stated before the cosmopolitan taste and aesthetic of the urban context, the radio of the decades 1970s and the 1980s contributed to the rising of success of *mbira* music but especially starting from the 1980s the interest for the instrument and its music crossed over the national borders. According to Turino, the most pivotal role has been played by the worldbeat market which not only exposed the sound of the *mbira* to music lovers around the world, but that also participated in transforming this instrument in a national emblem in and for Zimbabwe, dictating somehow the production of this kind of music for the international audience. “For a variety of reasons, *mbira* music became Zimbabwe’s internationally most famous, recognizable, and popular music tradition” (TURINO 2000: 340). First of all, the sound of the *mbira* itself resulted appealing for the cosmopolitan taste and sensibility: its characteristics and repertory are both locally distinctive and on the same time attractive and familiar. Its being perceived as a mixture between something “exotic” and harmonically close to the Western musical culture made its entrance in the world music circles quite successful. The timbre of the instrument and some changes that has been done on the quality of sound (such as removing the bottle caps from the board in order to silencing the buzzing sound, as the producer Chris Bolton of Thomas Mapfumo did, for example) made the instrument

beloved and awoke the interest of students around the world who also wanted to learn to play it. Thomas Mapfumo himself made some arrangements of its music such as the resulting parts are clearer: he kind of standardized and shaped indigenous Shona music for cosmopolitan consumption both at home and abroad (Ibid: 346), seeking to reach the transnational market.

Moreover, the recognition of the mbira as a spiritual instrument connected with ritual ceremonies functioned as a “sociological” basis for its popularity, as much as its use in the mbira-guitar band, especially by Mapfumo, during the war of Liberation gave it a political connotation (TURINO 2000:139). The international success that in the late 1980s artists like Stella Chiweshe, the Bhundu Boys, Black-ites, Vadzimba, The Legal Lions, Zimbabwe Clear Sounds, Ephat Mujuru and the Spirit of the People achieved in the world music market made other young artists try to enter the musical career specializing in the indigenous-based electric style and, as a consequence, boosted the production of *mbira*-based music in the country during the 1980s and later on.

2.8 Conclusions

The *mbira dzavadzimu* is an ancient instrument of the Shona musical culture which has been and still is used in ritual ceremonies in order to establish a deep contact with the ancestral spirits especially in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. The ceremonies in which the traditional repertory is played are still alive and important for the Shona, which is also a reason why the traditional repertory, transmitted orally, survived through the centuries and is still performed nowadays. The survival of these practices and of this music has been seriously threatened during the colonial time but in the last decades of the 21st century, parallel to the grow of townships and the development of new genre of urban-based music, *mbira* has been a central part of the changing musical culture not only of the main town Harare but of the country itself. From being an indigenous instrument of a small-scale tradition, the *mbira* gained success on the international scene of the world music market and spread around the world, and grew its visibility thanks to musicians, local radio and the ethnomusicological research. “Rather than seeing the rise in prominence of the Zezuru *mbira* as the product of a grassroots cultural movement, it is

better understood as the result of this instrument's fortuitous fit with cosmopolitan media, aesthetics, and musical as well as social trends. The mbira story is a clear illustration of the profound interplay between local cultural traditions and transnational processes and market forces in the post-colonial world" (TURINO 1998: 101).

3. Women performers in Zimbabwe

This chapter's goal is to analyse the historical and current situation of women musicians in Zimbabwe, focusing on the modes of musical production and the social-cultural boundaries women have to overcome. Starting from general considerations on gender and music, follows an historical overview on Zimbabwean women's condition and an excursus on the way women have been represented in the media from the beginning of the commercial music in the urban context. At the end of the chapter special attention is dedicated to *mbira* performers. It is important to point out that one of the main sources of information is Angela Impey's dissertation "They want us with salt and onion: women in the Zimbabwean music industry": published in 1992, this work represents an essential contribution in the research on women's presence and musical activity in Zimbabwe, especially in the urban context of the main towns Harare and Bulawayo. I'm aware of the fact that a work written twenty five years ago is not representative of the contemporary situation, for spaces and opportunities for women in the society and in particular in the music industry system have changed in the last two decades. I will however cite this source when facts and dynamics described in the book are, compared to the selected more recent literature, still pertinent to the contemporary condition of women musicians.

3.1. Women and music: general considerations

Music is a cultural domain in which identities are constantly formulated, articulated and expressed. It is also a dynamic, fertile terrain in which social, economical and political instances are reflected. A necessary premise in the investigation of every musical culture is that music cannot be considered separately from the context in which it develops and it is used. All over the world, across the most disparate societies and cultures, men and women engage in musical activities, ascribing them certain meanings and contextualizing their performance and production in determined contexts. From the 1970s the musicological discipline has engaged in the investigation of the degree, modalities and characteristics of participation of women in musical activities.

Influenced by anthropology, social and cultural history, ethnomusicological studies arose during the 1970s and the 1980s which would consider “gender” as “a socially constructed system regulating all forms of human behaviour [and music as] an interpretative site for enacting and performing gender relations” (KOSKOFF 2014: 27). Simultaneously, the American New Musicology played an important role in applying feminist methodologies and queer-theories in the study of classical music (see Ruth A. Solie, Susan McClary).

Some of the main questions of the increasing interest in the topic concern the “implications of gender upon music performances” (KOSKOFF 2014:32), in particular the ways in which the gender ideology of a certain society influences its musical practices, and what is the function of music in inter-gendered relationships.

Even though drawing a cross-cultural theory on gender related participation in music occurs to be impossible, for each society greatly differs from the others, it is possible to trace a common element: the degree of participation in music is strictly related to social power and control. “Power dynamics between social classes, ethnic and racial groups, and especially men and women have profoundly affected not only the composition and performance of music in virtually all societies, but also all other social activities” (Ibid.: 81). Gender ideologies differ a lot among the various societies but there is a correlation between specific gender stratification and the economical systems (Ibid.:79). Societies based on a capitalistic system, in which there is a clear differentiation between public and domestic sphere, “tend to be patrilineal, patriarchal, and characterized by materialism, a dependency on Western technology” (Ivi). These societies, as the ones we find in Europe, United States and Asia, construct a binary system, creating a opposition between categories like nature and supernatural, public and private, between sexes and the rigid rules prescribed for both. The control is the key for the maintenance of this kind of system and the power exercised by one part of the population, in this case men, is maintained and recreated: everything considered out-of-control and inappropriate is a forbidden domain, it has to be hidden or brought in the sphere of the control. Men have access to the public sphere of social life while women are supposed to be restricted in the domestic domain.

In this social definition of what a woman should do and how she should live the age plays an important role: as long as women are seen as sexually active and fertile they

are under restrictions, but young girls, unmarried or postmenopausal women are not considered a threat to the social and sexual order and are usually given more freedoms. The sexual activity and fertility of women is seen in connection with the supernatural, emotional and spiritual worlds, and it could threaten the social order, bringing chaos, that's why they have to be strictly controlled.

This ideology regards music performances as well: even though music is a cultural domain of every known society in which both women and men take part, not a single society exists in which they participate equally in it (NETTL 2005; KOSKOFF 2014). One of the reason why women appear not to have access to music and musical instruments as much as men is the fact that these are means of power and “are generally linked to gender ideologies [...which] underlie and prescribe who can and cannot play and under what circumstances performances occur” (KOSKOFF 2014: 129). Accordingly to that, in societies where the gender stratification is high, the access for women to musical instrument is limited and contexts for their performance are linked to their potential as sexual partners (Ibid: 130).

In the next paragraphs the focus will point on the situation of female performers in Zimbabwe, that can be seen as an exemplary case of what has been discussed above.

3.2 Historical overview of women in Zimbabwe

Since the settlement of the colonial regime marked in 1890 by Cecil Rhodes and the British South African Company, until the Independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has experienced important social and political changes which undoubtedly affected not only the presence of women in the society but also their participation in the cultural domains of the country, for example in music.

The colonial system developed in a pre-existing patriarchal indigenous society. The two dominant groups living in Zimbabwe, the Shona and the Ndebele, despite their different origins, ways of organization of the society, relations to property and land, economic organization, production consumption and reproduction, shared a “patrilineage-based mode of production” (IMPEY 1992: 30). Women were considered minors and qualitative inferior, and able to acquire status, identity and a certain authority solely

through the marriage, considered an essential institution in assuring contracts between the patrilineages. The most respectful position was acquired by a woman as she turned old and had grandchildren: not being associated with fertility and sexuality any longer, the woman gained a status as respectable as the one of a man. However, she would remain under the control of the husband or male relatives.

Analysing the condition of women in the urban context of Zimbabwe, Impey points out that colonial white patriarchal system, whose “sex-gender and power structures [...] were not entirely different from pre-capitalist gender prescriptions” (Ibid.: 46) affected even more negatively women’ status, perception and representation in the society, basically denying them a place in the social and productive realms of the city. The rigid control imposed on the Zimbabwean population, the ideological influences of missionary activities together with the Christian and Victorian morality, not only shaped the economical, political structure, class differentiation, and the growth of the urban spaces and dynamics, but also stressed a sharper division between sexes and forced women into a situation of total dependency on men (Ivi). In the creation of the urban spaces inside the colonial system, African men were given the possibility to work, access to the urban experience and also to Western education while women, at least for the first decades, have been relegated to the rural and domestic space. In the first half of the 20th century however, women occupied the urban space, either for joining the husbands in the city or, in the case of single women, in order to escape from the poverty of the rural life. In the completely male occupied urban environment, women had almost no possibility to work or to survive: they could live upon their dependence to men contracting some kinds of fake marriage (*mapoto*), doing small activities or prostitution. Viewed as not respectable because not married, single women were labelled as prostitutes. However, their small activities and prostitution represented a way to reach some sort of independence on the colonial structure.

In the late 1950s, gaining slowly access to education, women started to organize in groups and calling for emancipation and recognition, addressing the newspapers and demanding equal opportunities in the employment sector and in the education. In the 1960s, groups of women motivated by the overwhelming nationalist sentiment, joined since the first steps the second liberation war, bringing together the struggle for the women’s emancipation and the one against imperialism. The post- Independence in

Zimbabwe represents a contradictory period: the percentage of women occupying position in political and commercial sectors remains marginal, even if the Ministry of Community Development and Woman's Affairs has been created and several legal Acts for the women's rights were approved (for example Legal Age of Majority Act in 1982 and the Maintenance Act in 1985).

The Global Political Agreement on Women's Empowerment in the Political and Economic Arena was signed on 11 September 2008. It is a power sharing agreement between the country's leading political parties (ZANU-PF, MDC-T and MDC-M) and contains a clear commitment to gender equality. It supports women's participation in all efforts to build a participatory democracy that ensures respect for the laws and protects the human rights of all citizens (<http://theelders.org/article/women-zimbabwe-making-history>).

Women's representation in parliament increased from just 10 percent in 2005 to 15 percent in 2008, although this is still far short of the South African Development Community's goal of 50 percent women in political decision-making by 2015. Legislation such as the National Gender Policy Law, the Domestic Violence Act and the Sexual offences Act has also been adopted and moreover "the country is signatory to a raft of international conventions, protocols and treatise such as the Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the SADC Treaty on Gender Development" (CHARI 2008: 93).

Even in the Zimbabwean new Constitution signed on the 22nd of March 2013 there are important articles about women's rights:

"The State must promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society, and in particular:

- a. the State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men;
- b. the State must take all measures, including legislative measures, needed to ensure that;
- i. both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level; and Civil service recruitment
- ii. women constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any Act of Parliament"

(https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Zimbabwe_2013.pdf).

The status of the woman has still not undergone crucial changes: "in spite of these policies, attitudes that view women as less equal than man are still entrenched in various

structures and institutions in society such as everyday language, the family, the school and the media. In the media, women are still being represented as second class citizens dependent on men and as sexual objects at the disposal of men” (CHARI 2008: 94).

3.3 Representation of female performers in the media of Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean women has always been engaged in music: besides singing in the most different situations of the every day life such as working in the fields, celebrations such as marriages and funerals and more intimate familiar circumstances where they sang lullabies and practised story-telling, women even used to lead traditional ceremonies playing instruments like *mbira*, *marimba* and *drums*. (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 9). Since the first decades of the 20th century and the development of the urban life and later of the music industry, however, the participation of women in the performance of music underwent substantial changes. Despite the obstacles and difficulties imposed by the society towards them, women musicians from the 1930s tried to create their own space in the public domain realm of the urban culture entertainment scene. The representation of women performers however affected the degree of their participation in music, mostly negatively.

According to Impey the “popular media representation is considered an important barometer of the changing status and images of women in commercial music [...] and presents a vibrant commentary on the general social atmosphere of the day” (1992: 73). Her research based on newspaper articles, magazines and personal interviews demonstrates an interesting thesis: while women musicians have been admired at the beginning of the commercial music production and very represented in the media until the 1970s , after the Independence, despite an ideological re-evaluation of the women’s presence in the public space, the image of the woman in commercial music has been extremely discredited, and their presence obscured and obstructed, leading to an under-representation and social marginalization (Ibid: 69). Gender divisions, power relations and value systems of the Zimbabwean society are well represented in the progressive exclusion of women in commercial music. Even if women face a multiplicity of challenges contending with patriarchy and its construction of space (CHITANDO 2012:

41), a small but significant number of women resisted to social constraints and gender categorization, becoming active participant of the most visible and male controlled areas of public life, such as commercial music. (IMPEY 1992: 69).

3.3.1 The early urban culture entertainment scene of the 1930s

As stated above, women have participated in formal music-making in Zimbabwe since the onset of commercial music production in the 1930s. The modes of their participation in music depended not only on the general changes of styles and tastes but also on the venues and material spaces (the recreational facilities) of the entertainment: “most significant, however, has been the changing socio-economic and political context which has shaped the nature of performance and consumption of commercial music, and which has provided an ideological basis for the production, marketing and consumption of mass music” (IMPEY 1992: 77). Since the townships in the Southern Rhodesia of the first half of the century were characterized by racial segregation, the halls, the nightclubs and the beer-halls at the beginning were reserved for a mainly white public. In those same years, the African urban population found an alternative to the ban of attending this spaces, creating the so called *shabeens*, illegal private beer parties where people could meet, perform different kind of musics and dances, drink home made beer and where prostitution was practised. The role women played in this context was extremely important: not only they contributed to create a vibrant space for informal entertainment but they also managed to gain access to economic power, since the fruitful business of beer selling gave them economic independence and the possibility to support their family (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 33).

Simultaneously to the opening of municipal halls, where audience and performers were for the first time separated, women started to enjoy some choirs and bands, mainly influenced South African jazz band. (IMPEY 1992: 80). In these years two women musician appeared on the scene, opening the road for the following generations: Lina Mattaka and Evelyn Juba. Considered the pioneers of township jazz music, both of them performed in groups which comprised their husbands, performing spirituals, church songs and slow jazz. However, their acceptance on the stage was mainly depending on

their marital status: since they were performing with their husbands and they didn't dance or move their bodies extensively, they were totally accepted from the society and even seen as role models of a decent way of life (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 38).

3.3.2 Township jazz musicians and popular music

During the 1950s the popular music in Zimbabwe and particularly in Salisbury (now Harare) was at its peak and the demand of new form of entertainment was fulfilled with the creation of municipality and community halls, where bands staged regularly and offered new type of leisure activities. Women, who slowly gained access to formal education and paid jobs, took their place in the music scene (IMPEY 1992: 84). Many female musician, even though not professionally involved in music, managed to play in bands or perform as single artist, fully accepted and even encouraged by the newly born mass media culture, which represented them as icons and outstanding performers (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 39). Artists like Dorothy Masuka, Victoria Chingate, Vic Chingattie, Sylvia Sondo, Mabel Bingwa, "Short-Gun Boogie" Dauti, Flora Dick and the members of the all female band Gay Gaieties became very popular in those years, on the traces of South African female musicians who could join a more vibrant and liberated music industry.

The 1960s years saw the emergence of an alternative, popular form of entertainment, the *mahobo*, home parties for working class township where food, drinks and music were offered. This form of entertainment raised different issues debated in the mass media: the behaviour of women performing in this mainly male-dominated space were put under severe scrutiny. Women participating in these activities were considered "loose" and prostitute.

Moreover, "the influences from neighbouring countries brought new forms of music that would dominate the airwaves as well as music venues" (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013:64): among others, South African musical scene played in the 1960s an important role for the further development of Southern Rhodesian music. In addition to genres like rumba, rock, pop and soul coming from abroad, a new kind of entertainment coming from South Africa called *simanje-manje* (COPLAN 1985: 270) and now known as

mbaqanga grew in popularity. This term describes a life style of the working class as well as a genre of music produced by a male lead singer and a four women chorus: among the several groups that toured the country, the “California Queens” reached a huge fame and the saxophonist “Sisi” Masabata Konyana “was the first woman ever to be seen playing an instrument on local stages” (IMPEY 1992: 109).

Differently from the previous decade, when female performers would lead jazz group, the 1960s represented for women artist a period of displacement and restriction: women performing *rhumba* and *simanje-manje* were mostly backing vocals and at the mercy of their male band leaders (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 65).

The nature of the music and dance styles, characterized by fast rhythms and movements, exposed women to the moral scrutiny of the mass media, which started to represent the performers in “term of their sexuality and in relation to ostensibly male audiences, to whom they became subtly advertised as “available” and, therefore, as prostitutes” (IMPEY 1992:112).

3.3.3 The Liberation war and the Independence

The exceptional period of the 1970s, with its political movements and the war of Liberation, however, represented a discontinuity in the depiction of women in the society: “Zimbabwe’s liberation war was a form of authority structure that was able to partially override petty patriarchal rules and opened doors for women musicians” (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 43). The social and political transformations of this period opened up more possibilities for women in the public and cultural space. In these years for example the first female *mbira* musicians began to perform in public and to record music.

After the Independence of the 1980, women from the middle class started to work in the music business and found jobs in radio stations, broad castings and television. In this positions they “began to challenge the role of popular music and to explore music as a medium of social commentary and independent professional commitment. This has posed a challenge to the power imperatives of male entertainers and hereby challenged the reflected rights of men as public controllers of knowledge, identity and economic

resources in the broader context” (IMPEY 1992: 123). Despite a post-war debate on gender equality in the society, the small improvements for the conditions of women didn’t change radically the male hegemony that ruled over society and music production as well.

3.4 The music industry in the urban context of Harare

Women *mbira* musicians started to explore the music scene outside the religious ceremonies some decades ago, especially in the urban context. As much as other artists producing different genres of commercial music, nowadays they have to deal with the difficulties of a complicated and often discriminatory music business.

Even though as everywhere in the world, the cultural industry in Zimbabwe could have an enormous potential in contributing to the economic growth of the country generating wealth and employment (MHIRIPIRI 2012: 341), as a matter of fact the music industry lies in miserable conditions. The Zimbabwean music business (comprehending the record business, radios, management and production) is extremely problematic: besides inappropriate cultural policies which certainly discourage musicians from taking up a career in music, the lack of the most basic rules and regulation, of a basic organizational infrastructure, of managerial and marketing’s knowledge and of financial support from the government, make the professional paths of both women and men musicians particularly strenuous (Ibid. 352).

It has to be noted that the country became independent in 1980 and that certain post-colonial cultural policies have affected negatively the development of a newly independent country and its own music industry. In fact, even though the independence was badly wanted, assuming an important meaning in the sense of identity, freedom from oppression and control, the government did actually almost nothing to transform its previous policy of the cultural field and of music: “record production, marketing and broadcasting continued to operate as before, without fundamental transformation” (CHIKOWERO 2007: 112). Consequently, the monopoly state radio remained intact and persevered the broadcasting of mainly Western music, which was detrimental to the Zimbabwean musicians, who although being extremely active in creating new

genres of music (for example *chimurenga* and *sungura*), were not enough represented on the radio. Moreover, Western instruments soon supplanted the indigenous ones and became at the same time luxury products because imported and extremely expensive.

The government has been indifferent and went on with this politic, not investing but even charging from musicians and their live shows. Even though the music career is considered “economically unrewarding and socially despicable” (CHIKOWERO 2007: 217), still nowadays the interest of youngest generation for it is increasing. But how do artists actually manage to survive and how do they cope with this situation?

Due to some big problems in the music industry of Zimbabwe such as piracy and lack of corporate support, live performance has become the most important source of income for several artists, even for the big and renowned ones (like Oliver Mtukudzi, Jah Prayzah, Alick Macheso and Winky D). Since it is not thinkable to rely on recording sales, live performances business has become in Harare particularly vibrant and dynamic (SCANNELL 2001: 16; ZINDI 2016). The capital is the main spot for festivals, concerts, particular events and it hosts the newest trends and innovations in the music business. Many artists are based there and the venues where they perform are numerous and well distributed throughout the city and every genre of commercial music, from *sungura*, to disco to dancehall is performed. Accordingly to the type of the performance and the fame of the artists, live performances take place in different venues. In the high density suburbs, for example, night clubs, bars, beer halls and taverns are preferred for two basic reasons: they require a low budget and the possibility of success in terms of audience is higher. In the music live scene the names of the well known places to attend concerts include Jazz 105, Pakare Paye, the Zimbabwe-German Society, City Sports Centre, Stodart Hall, Mbare and Chitungwiza Aquatic Complex, Club Hideout 99 and the Book Café, which is not in activity any more (CHARWADZA 2014; MHIRIPIRI 2012: 75).

Local musicians count on the small venues, on weddings or parties to gain an income out of music while well known musicians can afford to perform in bigger venues such as stadiums, theatres, community halls but also churches, were especially gospel singers are requested. There are as well annual festivals that call for international artists around the country and probably the most famous and beloved one is the Harare International Festival of the Arts: this is a “ 6-day annual festival that showcases the very best of

local, regional and international arts and culture in a comprehensive festival program of theatre, dance, music, circus, street performance, fashion, spoken word and visual arts. HIFA has come to be seen as an important symbol of something positive about Zimbabwe, unifying socially and culturally disparate groups of Zimbabweans at a time of ideological conflict and political uncertainty bringing huge audiences together to celebrate something positive – the healing and constructive capacity of the arts” (<http://www.hifa.co.zw/about/hifa>). A critic has been moved towards this attempt to bring local and international artists together, because too much attention has been given to the international ones (CHARWADZA 2014).

If the live performances represent a real possibility to earn money out of music and to try to have success in this career, the other aspects of the music business are a source of problems for musicians. Besides the rampant piracy present in the country, a difficult situation is represented by the exploitation by record companies, by general unethical, exploitative and abusive practices carried out by intermediaries like managers and producers and the misrepresentation of “local” music on the radio.

1) Exploitation by record companies

According to Scannel, in 2001 there were just few oligopolistic record companies in Zimbabwe, mainly of South African origin: Zimbabwe Music Corporation, Record and Tape Promotion and Gramma Records (2001:15). They have been active especially in the 1980s and 1990s, when engineers and producers needed were recruited among musicians. Musicians at that time were paid with very bad royalties: many cases are reported of musicians who were not enough paid for their work and of record companies maintaining a percentage of the revenue (CHIKOWERO 2007: 118). In fact, “In music business parlance, recording artists are defined as licensors. They concede exclusive mechanical and other rights to the record companies- the licensees- to produce and market their works, earning an agreed percentage of the proceeds as royalties” (Ibid: 117). Taking advantage of the illiteracy among musicians, who on their side did not manage to organize themselves in unions, companies used to propose contracts which were not clear and understandable. They also know that the government does not intervene in this issues. Moreover, the companies act with no transparency against the legislation.

With the merging of new technologies in the last years some new recording studios came on the scene “as a result of this new technological development included Corner Studios, Diamond Studios, Gospel Train Studios, Monolio Studios, Mac Dee’s Studio and several others” like, Mangwenya, established by the mbira songstress Diana Samkange (<http://musicinafrica.net/new-recording-studios-opened-zimbabwe>). The new digital technology made recordings for independent musicians somehow easier but one of the main problem affecting the records distributions, such as piracy, never seemed to be solved. In an attempt of margining it, the Zimbabwe Association of Recording Industries (ZARI) deliberated that CDs and DVDs of high quality could have been sold at the same price as the copied ones, distributing them to all the music retailers and market traders, in an attempt to replace the pirates (Ivi) of course such a situation is not detached from the general economical situation of the country, which with its widespread unemployment and lack of control, make it attractive to large numbers of people to enter the piracy business (MHIRIPRIa 2012: 348).

2) Managers and Producers

As stated above, another factor considered critical and problematic in the functioning of the music industry in Zimbabwe, is represented by difficult and deceptive relationships between musicians and their intermediaries, such as music managers and promoters. Assuming that “a good working relationship between musicians and the intermediaries who intermediate between the production of music and its consumption is essential for the live music industry to be profitable and develop” (MHIRIPRI b 2012:66) and that these figures are essential for the visibility and success of musicians themselves, it is easy to assume that if this relationships which is intimate and personal is corrupt, that undoubtedly leads to depredations of the artists (MHIRIPRI b 2012: 76). Concerning the issues of the contractual obligations of the parties, which have to be respect from both sides, fight, conflicts and non payment of promised money are continuously reported, damaging the success of good music production and promotion.

3) Radio

An important role in the circulation of music is played by radio. Zimbabwe never had a system of private radio (CHIKOWERO 2007: 121) and in the course of the last century

the state radio assumed explicit political functions, especially during the anti-colonialist campaign before and after the Independence. “Zimbabwean radio and television not only influenced, nurtured and moulded musical tastes, identities and ideological orientations but also significantly determined the popularity and commercial visibility of music” (Ibid.: 120). The Zimbabwean Broadcasting Corporation, which delivers radio and television services, was remodelled and redesigned after the Independence on the system of the Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation, with the division in four main channels and it continued to broadcast predominantly Western music, bringing on the cultural interests of the British. According to a decree signed in 2002, the ZBC is committed to increase the local content, meaning cultural products which are locally produced.

However, Government-sponsored music exists : “the government uses music in two ways for its purposes: firstly, by directly buying songs and performances, and secondly, by favouring those groups that desist from criticism, and inviting them to festivals, having their records played on the radio, and helping them make video clips for the TV” (PALMBGERG 2002: 33)

3.5 Women as musicians

Being a woman musician in the urban panorama of contemporary Zimbabwe represents a challenge under different points of view. Even though some women successfully manage to conduct their musical career in the country and on the international scene, the “preponderance of men over women in local music is a well reported fact” (MUSHAVA 2014). Genres that are produced and well known such as “*sungura*” (ARTICOLO) and “urban grooves”, for example, are mostly exclusively male dominated and most often women are employed as backing vocalists for male artists or dancers, fact that was also confirmed in some interviews that I carried out during my field research. In the challenging condition of the Zimbabwean music industry that I discussed in the previous paragraphs, both men and women have to deal with financial problems related to the expenses of instruments, to the strict marketing rules of the music industry and to the high production and recording costs; however, solely women

face ideological constraints (MAKORE 2002: 49). In a society where being wife and mother is considered essential, to venture in the music career challenges the social expectations, first of all because the job as musician is generally not taken seriously, and secondly because it is something that a “decent” woman should not do: “the average African woman is inhibited by social pressures to expose herself in a job such as playing in a band. Attitudes from society for male musicians are usually very negative as very few people regard being employed as a musician as work. They are worse when the musician happens to be a woman. Singing in a band is regarded as a job for male vagrants and certainly not for decent women regardless of how talented they are in that area” (ZINDI 2017).

Nowadays men occupy the top positions in recording companies, events companies, media houses and they are employed as record engineers and producers, while women get few jobs as secretaries (KWAITOSTAR 2014; ZINDI 2017). The inequality of occupation in the music sector is tangible but women, far from accepting the system as it is, are trying to gain space and recognition. Some strides have been made in the last years: “women artists understand their situation better and [...] many of them contribute to the debate with confidence and stipulating what it is they want for themselves as players in the industry” (CHIGAMA 2016). The Zimbabwean Musicians’ Union existing since three years, whose president ad interim Edith weUtonga is a famous bassist, is taking concretely initiatives to empower women in music and to seek recognition in the male-dominated music industry for example compiling a database of Zimbabwean female musicians and organising events like “Women in Music” where special space is dedicated to showcase women’s talents (WINSTONE 2017). New structures around the country have been set up also in collaboration with the National Art Country of Zimbabwe and the Union is currently working for starting cultural international exchange programs which would give female artistes the possibility to interact with foreign musicians. The creation of synergies, platforms and collaborations to promote themselves in all sectors and to groom young women artists who need guidance and support is fundamental in the attempt of changing the system of the music industry (CHIGAMA 2016). In fact, if stereotypical views of women, exclusion and under representation affect mainstream artistes and musicians, even more they affect the underground and upcoming ones who often lack visible role models (KWAITOSTAR

2014). Talented artistes like Ammara Brown, Sandra Ndebele, Busisiwe Ncube, Tariro neGitare, Diana Samkange, Hope Masike, Fungisayi Zvakavapano Mashavave, Dudu Manhenga and Prudence Katomeni Mbofana are not only working for the recognition of themselves as women, for the space they deserve and their art, but also to allow the new generation of female artistes to confidently and successfully step into the musical path.

3.5.1 Female *mbira* performers

The case of female *mbira* performers, who are present both in the context of the spiritual ceremonies and in the recording industry, is a significant one in the wider panorama of women musicians in Zimbabwe.

First of all, historical information on women playing *mbira* in spiritual ceremonies are really scarce and contradictory, which make suppositions about the numbers and distribution of these musicians hardly demonstrable (JONES 2008: 136). Defining to which degree women participated as *mbira* performers in the religious contexts is nowadays still an open question: even though it is plausible to suppose that during the centuries women have played *mbira* because “there is no gender distinction in possession” (DUTIRO&KEITH 2007: 21) and that “there are no restrictions as to who may make or touch them [*mbiras*], or who may perform the instruments in ceremonial contexts” (JONES 2008:133), many testimonies of women musicians report that women in previous generations were prohibited from playing “in order to avoid breaking the spiritual laws (*mitemo*) governing the instrument” (KYKER 2014: 124). Proving the scarce presence of women as *mbira* performers in spiritual ceremonies, the Berliner’s declaration contained in his research’s work conducted in the 1970s is quite significant: “I chose to use the masculine pronoun throughout this work because in my research on Shona *mbira* music I have found that players, with few exceptions, are men” (BERLINER 1978: 17). Among these “exceptions”, he cites the name of Beauler Dyoko, who in those same years was the first ever female *mbira* musicians recording and performing in different ensembles; in the last chapter of his work however, where he reports “biographical sketches of *mbira* players” (Ibid: 207), not even one female performer’s portrait appears.

Women participation to the *bira* ceremonies through dancing, hand-clapping and singing is anyway not doubted and women as spirit mediums were taken in great consideration as much as men (JONES 2008: 134): during the ceremony, “through the critical interaction with the *mbira* players, the medium demonstrates the presence of his or her spirit to the participants” (BERLINER 1975: 137).

When it comes to play the *mbira* the situation is different. *Mbira* is often learned during childhood and it is a specialization that customarily ran in families (JONES 2008: 133). Both women and men performing *mbira dza vadzimu* in ceremonies report that the factors that originally motivate them to play are the will to participate to the *bira* and therefore practically be able to touch the instrument (which normally would be out of reach for children) and the desire to enter the world of adults, with the *mbira* as a vehicle to gain an important role in the ceremony (BERLINER 1978: 234). Even if both young girls and boys live common experiences, only the girls don’t face unequivocal support to their musical aspirations (KYKER 2014: 126).

According to the biographies of the four women who Kyker interviewed for her article, for example, they all reported some kind of prohibition coming from the family or relatives concerning their playing, especially from the male members. The belief that playing *mbira* is something not appropriate for girls and that learning to play would prevent women from being able to cook has been often reported (Ibid. 120). All of them recount that they started to play secretly to escape public scrutiny, feeling ashamed. However, both boys and girls who finally manage to perform and to enter in the realm of the ceremonies, are respected for their closeness to the spirits, for the player’s gender does not affect the special role they have (JONES 2008: 137). What women concern, once they have this spiritual power, it is respected and taken in higher consideration and even “appears to remain with them when they decide to use their musical skills in a popular performance context, as long as the appropriate respect is paid to the ancestors through the music” (IMPEY 1992: 130).

To affirm that women in the past and present days have been completely denied the access to the instrument in the religious context would be untruth: the research done on women *mbira* musicians until now, based mainly on collection of individual stories and experiences, confirms however the fact that women faced common societal obstacles and prejudiced based on the gender, that made mostly more difficult for them to

perform and develop as musician.

In spite of that and of the fact that “performance of any instrument requiring more than a moderate level of expertise is generally the province of male specialists” in Zimbabwe, there “may actually be more adult women performers of the *mbira* than of any other Zimbabwean instrument, old or new” (JONES 2008 :130). In the last decades, *mbira* is becoming increasingly dissociated from traditional Shona religion and spirit mediumship” (Ibid.:143) and is very present in the commercial music, as stated in the previous paragraphs. From the 1970s, some women managed not only to gain visibility and recognition as *mbira* performers inside the country but also in the international music scene: the trend of *mbira* “revival” in Zimbabwe in those years and the growing interest that the world music circuit addressed towards this music were fundamental factors for this success. Talented musician like Beauler Dyoko and Stella Chiweshe, both coming from the rural background and having the experiences of the spiritual ceremonies, have gained their space as outstanding artists.

As Jones asserts, however, “each of the women *mbira* players has had to carve out her public identity and space within (or against) the confines of national and cultural stereotypes (2008: 143) in order to be successful and accepted. Dyoko and Chiweshe since the beginning of their career, emphasized rather than hid their spirituality and their belonging to Shona traditional culture, which eventually facilitated their acceptance as professional women musician inside the country (Ibid.: 132). The world music circuit moreover, marketing them as African “Mother” and “Queen”, satisfied the average audience’s expectation of listening to something “exotic”. Younger musicians like Chiwoniso Maraire, however, challenging this prearranged “traditional” label, forged for herself a kind of new cosmopolitan identity which would blend together the fact of playing a traditional instrument with contemporary modes of musical expression and narratives.

Nowadays a growing number of young women are approaching the instrument, even though “they remain in the minority in a performance arena long dominated by male specialists” (JONES 2008: 137). The fact that *mbira* has been institutionalized after the Independence of Zimbabwe surely plays a role in it, since girls and boys are learning to play in school’s programs and other venues (see the experience of Tendai Mavengeni in chapter 4). The general perception on women playing *mbira* (and instruments in

general) is slowly changing and opportunities for them are better than before, even though despite their success still “female *mbira* musicians receive mixed reactions from the society. Some male musicians are angry that women are taking their place, while traditionalists continue to assert that women musicians offend the spirits” (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 75). Thanks to talented women who faced and challenged this system with their engagement, with music and their narrative, however, improvements have been done and more possibilities are available for girls who want to play the *mbira*.

In the next paragraphs, some portraits of the most popular and known female *mbira* players considered a role model for many, also for Tendai Mavengeni will be traced.

Beauler Dyoko

Beauler Dyoko, born in 1945, is the first woman *mbira* player having recorded her music with Rhodesian Broadcast Company in the 1960s. She recounts her approach to music as a possession of the spirits: as a child, feeling sick for a long time, she was brought to a *bira* ceremony by the mother, where they realized that the spirit wanted to talk through her. After some dreams about *mbira*, the mother bought her an instrument and she started to play, imitating the melodies she has heard in her dreams. Since that time she regularly played and received much support and encouragement from the community and her male counterparts. Dyoko obtained royalties from her music, which improved her economic status: in the 1980s, she performed internationally but continuously played in the home country, firmly believing in the necessity of maintaining a balance between the local and the international audiences (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013: 147). During her long career, she always encouraged other women to play *mbira* and music in general founding different groups and organizing show for show casing their talent.

Stella Rambisai Chiweshe

Stella Rambisai Chiwese, whom has been attributed the name of “Queen of the Mbira” is one of the most acclaimed *mbira* player on the international stage. The exceptionality of her career, of her activities as musician and teacher and because her story strictly interweaves the one of Zimbabwe as well, journalists and musicologists documented quite precisely (HOLLENSTEIN 2012; BUTAUMOCHO 2011; BOGNER 2008). Born in 1946 in Mhondoro (Mashonaland West), Chiwese started to play in the late 1960s encountering many obstacles from her family and having to face the prejudices of other women telling her that it was a crazy idea for a woman to do that. When she went to her grandfather asking for the reason why it was like this, he told her that it had to do with the fact that a woman is supposed to bear children, stay at home, cook and work in the field. Not disheartened from that, she went to an uncle living in another region who was the first to teach her to play the *mbira*. During the 1970s and the second *Chimurenga* she used to perform secretly in the *biras*, that were forbidden from the colonial rules. At the same time she recorded several of her compositions with the Teal Record Company, of whom just few were released. In those year she founded her own band, called The Earthquake. In the 1980s she was a member of the National Dance Company of Zimbabwe with whom she toured all over the world and she could play *mbira* as a soloist. In the 1987 started her cooperation with the Label Piranha (http://www.piranha.de/piranha/stella_chiweshe), with which she is still recording. At the beginning of 90s she started to conduct workshop for people interested in learning to play *mbira*, the first in is the UK. She toured all over the world, taking part to some of the most important festivals for World Music like “Womad” Festival in 1994 in North America and 1995 in Australia, Magdalena Aoteroa Festival in New Zealand in 1999. Though living in Germany since many years, she came back to Zimbabwe performing at the HIFA Festival in Zimbabwe with the Earthquake Band in 2000. In 2005 she won the Zimbabwe Silver Jubilee Awards (ZIMA Awards) for being the Most Outstanding Contribution in the Music Industry and for being “The Best Female Mbira Player”. She gained praises for being defined as an “Ambassador” of the Zimbabwean culture abroad. In 2013 she performed with her band in Harare at the Book Café. She is still playing and touring Europe with different ensembles, collaborating with different musicians and teaching: she even became a *mbira* teacher at the Global Music Academy

in Berlin.

She defines herself author of every song of each album (HOLLENSTEIN 2012: 45) and something very particular about her music that makes one recognize it is the arrangement with the marimbas. Since her career in the world music started she organized a lot of projects with other women and she founded in 1991 the movement “Mother Earth Thrust” together with her daughter and musician Viriginia Mukweshu and the musicologist Joyce Jenje Makwenda, a platform in order to create more awareness about artists’ rights and point for meeting and sharing difficulties challenges and successes. “It was a membership group for women musicians and acted as an advisory service to musicians, Djs, music promoters, music researchers and technicians. The philosophy behind the association was one of self-help and empowerment of women in the music industry” (JENJE MAKWENDA 2013:125).

Stella Chiweshe represents a role model for all the young women playing *mbira* and an example for every musician, since she leads her own band and gained prestige in the musical world of *mbira* music dominated by men.

Chiwoniso Maraire

Chiwoniso Maraire was born in Washington State in 1976. She grew up in a family where music was really important, both professionally and personally, since her parents were both artists and musicians. That is for sure an important point in her career as musician. The father, Dumisani Maraire, was a respected scholar and musician who studied Ethnomusicology in Seattle and a *mbira* player, while the mother was a singer. She had supportive parents and started to play *mbira* at the age of four with them.

According to Chitando & Matekve (2012: 46), another important point that advantaged her career in music was the cosmopolitan background in which she grew up. Being born in the United States and the possibility to travel allowed her to strengthen her own personality and that resulted very much in her music, being it a mixture between indigenous and Western instruments. She gained so much success in the international career also due to her political engagement: the stand for women’s rights has been always clearly expressed in her music “Chiwoniso calls upon women to assert

themselves” (Ibid.). Her connection with her African origins and the choices concerning her look also plays a role in making her recognizable. We can admit that in her personal life and the narrative of her music she has been revolutionary, speaking about relevant social and political messages: “I’m like a mirror, I basically sing about what I see happening in the world. If someone comes up to me in the street to ask for money I’ll sing about that. If people are jumping borders because their economic situation is too difficult, I’ll sing about that. If the police are beating people up and intimidating them, I’ll sing about that” (REBEL WOMAN: album).

Chiwoniso’s musical style embraces different kinds of music but the *mbira* plays a fundamental role. In the 1990 she was a lead vocalist in the group A Peace of Ebony, and in the 1997 she released her first solo album called Ancient Voices. At the same time she toured and recorded with the band of her husband Andy Brown called Andy Brown and The Storm. In 2008 she recorded her second album released in 2008, “Rebel Woman”.

“Chiwoniso has managed to defy social pressure and stigma and has continued to perform. Her resilience and willingness to transcend cultural structures surrounding women in the arts is remarkable” (CHITANDO & MATEKEVE 2012: 49).

Hope Masike

Hope Masike defines herself as an afro-fusion, *mbira* player (although she also plays percussion and dances). She started her musical career in 2008, she already recorded two albums (“Hope” in 2009 and “Mbira, love and chocolate” in 2012) and she is currently working on the third one. She is not just well known in Zimbabwe but she is gaining more and more recognition also in Europe, United States and Africa where she has more than once performed. She has a high education, having taken degree in Fine Arts and Music. In parallel to her musical career, she is very active in working within schools, education and cultural platforms, discussing about music in Zimbabwe and music business (<http://hopemasike.co.zw/>). She received in 2012 the price of NAMA (National Arts Merits Award) award for Outstanding Female Musician and competed for the 2016 edition of KORA, in the category Best Traditional Female Artist of Africa

“Huyai Tinamate”. . she played with a lot of Zimbabwean important artist, such as Mbuya Stella Chiweshe and Chiwoniso Maraire, Oliver Mtukudzi, Stewart Sukuma, Mafikizolo, Zahara and Zimbabwean UK-based Shingi Shoniwa and the Noisettes. She has also collaborated with different bands such as Zimbabwean Hip Hop band, The Monkey Nuts and French DJ, DJ Oil; German band FAVO; French Folk band, Coriandre; Dutch Dub DJ Chad Lee; Austrian-Zimbabwean collaborative, Kunzwana #1; pianist Bokani Dyer and saxophonist Muzila Malembe. Of note is the collaboration with the Norwegian World Music outfit, Monoswezi on the album ‘The Village’, which has received numerous warm review and was nominated for some international awards including the Songlines World Music Awards (<http://www.koraawards.com/en/music/biography-hope-masike/>).

Locations and venues in Harare played an important role in the launch of her career, starting from The Book Café, where from the 2008 she took over the Tuesday Night. Other places: The Delta Gallery, National Arts Gallery of Zimbabwe and the German Society, Alliance Francaise. She was invited to the Zimfest in Oslo as an artist in residence in 2015 and she performed in Harare at HIFA in 2015.

Hope Masike repeatedly pointed out how the situation for women as musicians is still nowadays challenging and frustrating and how they have to deconstruct the stereotype that labelled them “loose”, for the contemporary society has to change and dismiss these believes. She declared of having been harassed during some concerts and insulted, but also that she finds generally comprehension and respect for her music (<http://nehandaradio.com/2016/01/21/my-success-scares-away-men-hope-masike/>). She puts an accent on the necessity that women musicians lead their bands and persist on their attempt, bringing her example. For her it is very important, also as a teacher, to underline that female musicians in Zimbabwe and girls should not be afraid of trying and address all their energies in music, not being stopped by differences with the male colleges.

3.6 Conclusions

Musical performance is an arena for the definition of relationships between gender. On

one side it is a reflection of the existing dynamics between men and women within a society, but on the other it is a domain in which inter-gender relations are negotiated, where power and control can be challenged, undermined and subverted. Approaching music as a “gendered culture” (MAGRINI 2003: 2) in which identities articulate, is an important premise in order to deeper investigate the modes and strategies of women’s musical life, understanding how they react to male domination and how the challenge it through music (NETTL 2005: 405). Women musicians in Zimbabwe live within a patriarchal system which systematically obstacles them from freely and successfully perform. Both indigenous believes and colonial rules during the centuries impeded them in many ways the access to the public sphere and to step out of the domesticity in which they, because women, were relegated. During the 20th century women artistes started to enter the world of the urban entertainment participating in different forms and degree to the musical life of the country. Among them, *mbira* performers managed to concretely question societal prejudices on women musician gaining recognition in the realm of the spiritual ceremonies and in both local and international commercial music.

Nowadays, the scarcity of women performers in the Zimbabwean music industry is a matter of fact: the existing female artists are however cooperating and concretely working on different levels in order to create spaces and opportunities for the contemporary and future generation of women musicians.

4. Tendai Mavengeni

This chapter focuses extensively on Tendai Mavengeni, the young woman musician who has been the subject of the three weeks fieldwork I carried out in Harare. Born in the Zimbabwean capital on the 13th December 2000, Tendai started to play the *mbira dza vadzimu* at the age of nine. Supported from the very beginning by her family, that gave her the possibility to learn the instrument from numerous teachers, she soon began to practice the traditional repertory and to perform in different contexts, especially in the school. Her talent, creative attitude and the desire of finding a personal way of expression, however, have been fundamental factors that brought her to engage in the creation of her own musical compositions. Determined to achieve another important step in her musical career and thanks to the financial support of her family, Tendai launched her first six tracks- album called „Destiny“ in 2014, for whom she gained attention on television and radio. She is currently performing in different occasions, participating both to scholarly exchanges or programs (like the „Mbira School Program“) and to extra curricular context in Harare. In 2016 she launched her second album called „Tendai“ whose successful song „Munzira yakachena“ has been broadcast in the National FM Zimbabwe top 20, which represents another important achievement in her young career.

The next paragraphs analyse Tendai Mavengeni's life under different perspectives. The detailed account of the familiar and social context in which she lives, highlights the conditions that allowed the young musician to undertake the path in music. Furthermore the focus will be put on her experiences as musician, since she began to learn the *mbira* to the recording and performing experiences of the last three years.

4.1. Tendai Mavengeni and her family

The two pillars of the Mavengeni's family are Chengetai Cambang and Boniface Mavengeni, respectively Tendai's mother and father. Of their four children, Tendai is the second born and two of them, Ugene Mavengeni (23 years old) and Anesu Mavengeni (14 years old) are attending boarding schools outside Harare and they only

come back home during school's holidays. The youngest child, Tatenda Mavengeni, who during the field research turned five, is living together with Chengetai, Boniface, Tendai in Sunningdale, a residential district of Harare. The family owns a small house composed of two rooms placed in a yard just along the street that crossed the district. Boniface works as a mechanic in a small shop close to their home, while Chengetai is unemployed. The maternal family is numerous and all her brothers are living together in the grandparents' house in Dzivaresekwa 3. Boniface's family is living in the rural areas (he did not specify where) and they don't meet often.

Boniface and Chengetai are fundamental presences in Tendai's life: both of them are extremely caring and supportive in giving her what they consider the best. The father plays an important role in Tendai's musical activities, since he carries out managerial duties, builds contacts with producers, musicians and teachers and take decisions on many issues. Music is a strong factor that pull them together: while I was interviewing them, Boniface always showed a lot of respect for Tendai's talent, dedication and commitment to music, talking honestly and openly about that in her presence. They also were able to share some memories together or to complete one other's missing informations, when needed. Besides this important role, however, he's also very present in the girl's everyday life, he drives her at school and picks her up, they sometimes go to concerts together and they share intimate moments with the whole family, which from the outside seems serene and affectionate. Chengetai does not seem to be much involved in the planning of the musical activities of the girl but they spend time together daily: I also saw them often carrying out the households one next to the other. She represents an important emotional support for Tendai, who even wrote her a song in order to thank her for everything she does.

So this is a song I wrote about my mother. How much I love her. You know, my mother is a very special person in my life. The song talks about how I know that she loves me. There is some children who are killed, some children who are aborted, some children who are sent to children's home because their parents cannot look after them but she still manages to look after me. She still manages to call me „my child“ [...]. When she seems me when I'm sad, when I'm down, you know, her heart beats and she wants to know what's the problem, even if she sees me cry. She feels hurt. You know, I

appreciate all of that she does for me. I see it. I might not act like I see it, but I see it. Just one day without her, just does not get along so well, because nobody can take her place. That's how I wrote that song“ .

Chengetai is always present to every performance or concert and supports her taking videos and picture, advising and caring about Tendai's outfit and hairstyle.

The support she had from the beginning of her approach with music and that she constantly receives from her parents represents a huge motivation in improving, growing and investing time and energies in her musical projects. According to literature about mbira female musicians, the familiar support is often not something taken for granted. Loads of the women who Impey interviewed, for example, reported that their families were often against their decision of playing *mbira* or in some cases even not aware of their musical activities. “Encouragement from the family is considered a powerful motivating force for women in music careers. Most women, however, are strongly dissuaded by immediate and extended families from entering a profession in commercial music, and many who sing professionally attempt to do so without the knowledge of their family“ (IMPEY 1992: 175). Women musician in Zimbabwe have the most desperate familiar backgrounds and experiences: some of them had supportive families (for example Chiwoniso Maraire or Joyce Jenje Makwenda, the musicologist and musician whose father played a pivotal role in her exposition to music and musical life in general). Some others, instead, decided to learn to play *mbira* secretly, moved by their passion and their willing. It is logical to affirm that the familiar support is for the personal and artistic growth of an individual something important and that the dynamics that develop inside a familiar nucleus affect in different ways the person.

During an interview, me and Tendai were talking about her friends and she spontaneously illustrated a situation that she is experiencing in her social context. Talking about the difficulties of getting girls to participate to musical exchanges and *mbira* competitions, she mentioned the role of the families in some of her closest friend's lives:

The other thing is that most of the parents, even involving lot of the parents of the friends of my school, most of them don't even know that their children play mbira.

Because they would have been told that you don't have to play this instrument, it is not going to be of any benefit for you. But because they [the girls] love it thought, they learn it a school and they leave it there and come back the next day, you know. Even when we're going out for exchange they don't want because they're saying „whoever will tell my mum that I'm going“. And she would say „I told you of these things“! So you see, we get fewer people because parents are turning students away from this instrument. But it is for choir, you get sixty one people end up! Because it was singing hymns and... trusting the Lord, trust and obey! Because of the Lord you get sixty one students! When we talk about mbira, less than ten students. When we talk about piano, twenty one students just for one piano! All of them want to play the piano! But you see, we're trying to put this mbira on the map so all the people'll know that it is just an instrument, just like the guitar that a child can play just like anybody else. So that's what we're trying to bring out, you see [...]. I don't want to be the only one playing this instrument. At least we would be many.

As stated above, Tendai does not live this kind of conflicts or problems inside her family. She has been lucky enough to grow up in an environment in which she can completely express herself and can share her dreams and aspirations with parents who understand and support her all the time.

4.2 The social context

As Impey states regarding the personal experiences of the women she interviewed and met, „the social environment also provide a stimulus for women to enter a profession in music,, (1992:176). I could define the social context in which Tendai lives as a safe and comfortable environment. Her life flows mostly between home, school, relatives's house and few other places she visits. When I asked her to talk about her friends and school mates, she complained about not having the possibility to meet her best friends outside the school context, for all of them live quite far from each other and to move around the city presents many difficulties. Among her peer best friend, who are really involved in music as well, she cites Panashe, who plays guitar, *mbira* and piano, Hope,

who plays *mbira* and sings and Liacha, who plays piano as well. When I asked her if she would like to start a project, for example a band with them she told me:

I think it would be nice, because it would be a female band and that could be an approval point that women can also do it. But because we are away... I don't know what would happen! Just visualize it: like, this is my house, Hope stays next door, Liacha stays there, Panashe stays next door, Able stays there... what do you think we would produce?! We would produce real music. Yeah. [laughing]. But just because it is not like that, we are just bounce to produce average music because we don't see each other so often [...].

However, she seemed to have many ideas and a lot of motivation regarding planning some dates during the summer holidays in which they can meet and perform. She would like also to have the possibility of an exchange program during school holidays, and even perform in their schools. In that ways it could be also easier for the parents to allow the kids out, if they know it is a safe environment like the school. So if different schools were hypothetically participating, they could have a *mbira* festival, an exchange program. She feels the need for something like that and points out that exchanges programs for *marimba* and pianos are way more numerous than the *mbira* ones.

So you see, if we could organize something, like a get together, it would be something, something big.

Tendai's life is surrounded by friends of the family who are involved in music and who play an important role in her growing musical knowledge and tastes: besides the different *mbira* teachers she met during the last seven years she has been playing (see next paragraph), there is a close friend of Boniface who advises her on her music, Jacob Mafuleni. This *mbira* musician and constructor lives in the suburb of Harare called Dzivaresekwa with her wife Martha Thom and their children, one of whom, Able, is a good friend of Tendai and a musician as well.

During my time in Harare, Boniface contacted Jacob in order to receive some feedback, comments, critics and opinions about Tendai's second album music. The whole family

decided to visit their friends the 2nd of October and they kindly invited me to join them.

As soon as we arrived there, we were warmly welcomed at Jacob's and Martha home, that is not actually just a house but has become in the last two years a well known and attended cultural centre named Tsoro Art Centre. The two spouses, both experienced musicians who tour internationally, grew this centre in order to teach *marimba*, *mbira* and traditional dance for free especially to children and youngsters of the Dzivaresekwa 2 community of Harare: they also help providing access to education for their students raising funds everywhere in the world. The centre is really active in performing with the students at local festivals and events, where they have the possibility to showcase their skills and talent (<https://www.facebook.com/TsoroArts/?fref=ts>). Music is for them not only a big passion but a means to create culture, awareness and education: it is a means to keep the neighbourhood together and involve the young generations in learning traditional repertoires.

I had the fortunate chance to spend there the entire day and it was for me a big surprise. First of all I discovered amazing people who are engaged, wonderful musicians and artisans: Jacob is in fact building all the instrument, *mbira* and *marimba*, and teaching as well the students how to make them. He is sending instruments to America and providing mbira for a lot of schools of Zimbabwe. When they have rehearsal in the small yard of the house, they are playing on the instruments that they made themselves. We spent a couple of hours talking in the living room, during which we had a long conversations about women in the music industry of Zimbabwe, about the *mbira* player Chiwoniso Maraire, who was a close friend of them, and other topics. After that we moved to the small studio situated in a room of their house and Jacob and Martha started to listen to Tendai's new songs. He seemed quite enthusiastic about it and told her, while she was dancing around and I was filming her, that the product was more mature and professional than the previous one. Boniface and Tendai seemed quite relief and they said that now they could really have the launch of the cd. In the afternoon, slowly lot of kids that I avaradged from 6 to 13 years old started to gather in the yard and to approach the six *marimba* standing there. Tendai immediately took some stiks and started to play on one of them with Abel, the oldest son of the spouses. She considers him a good musician, they play often together and sometimes there is a strong

friendly rivalry between them. During one interview we had one week later, talking about the exchanges and competition they have in her school, she told me:

T (Tendai): When you see schools like Prince Edward! [male school that Abel is attending] That's why as women we end up being discriminated! Because when we're going for competitions and you take Abel and you put him here, and you take another girl from a school and you put her here, obviously Able would beat her.

A (Ambra): why?

T: because his family background is made up of mbira and at his school, at Prince Edward, they take arts very seriously and when you go to Mabelreign is a girl school. They take arts seriously, yes, but they don't have enough time to practice. The school sometimes is saying „we don't have funds, more funds for buying you guys new mbira sets“. And then you put these two here, this one would win [referring to the boy] and then the people would end up saying „you can not play better than the man“, you see. But when you take Abel here and you take Tendai, it's either there is gonna be a tie or Tendai is gonna win.

She told me about one episode of some years ago when she played against him during a school competition. Before the performance they were arguing about who would be the winner, but in the end the result was a tie. She expected that however specifying that if at her place there would have been another girl, she would have lost for sure. As reported just above, she pointed out that actually the resources and time that male schools spend in the artistic formation of their students are more than the ones invested in female education. It is interesting to notice, however, that she does not even remotely doubt of being at the same level as capacities and talent of some of her male friends. Self confidence and determination seem to be well rooted in her personality and in the ways she interacts with other people.

4.3 The context of the school

Tendai Mavengeni is currently attending the form 3 at the Mabelreign Girls' High

School located in Mabelreign, a north-western suburb of Harare. Most of the time of her week is spent there, since she attends lectures eight hours a day from Monday to Thursday and five hours at Friday. Every time we had conversations about school she told me how important it is for her to be a good student, to take her education seriously and to successfully finish her studies, in order to be able to enrol at the university (if there is the financial possibility). The school is a context in which she seems to feel comfortable and in which she can express herself musically: she is well known for her musical activities. She became the head of the *mbira* ensemble, she is a member of the *marimba* group and sings in the choir as well. She performed in several different occasions: on the 15th of October I had the chance to assist to the Prize Giving Day, which takes place every year in the big yard of the school. At the opening of the ceremony Tendai performed with *mbira* and voice a traditional song called *Mukondombera Ihondo* surrounded by hundreds of parents and relatives who gathered there to celebrate the scholarly success of their children. Later on she also performed in the *marimba* group, sang as a member of the choir and performed another traditional song called *Chikende* with the *mbira*. She received the prize as Musical Artist of the Year for her „sterling Solo performances at school, district, provincial functions and national functions“. At the end of the ceremony I was introduced to her actual music teacher with whom she and her parents have a good relationship and who is really supportive in pushing Tendai to play and improve.

During one interview we had at her place she was complaining about how few students want to learn *mbira* and join the group at school. As I stated in the paragraph 2.1, one of the reasons she personally thinks young girls don't play *mbira* is because they don't get support from their families. Strictly linked to this reason is a quite founded prejudice concerning the instrument itself:

Some people are just influenced, you know, from what the whites left, like the mbira is dirty, the mbira is evil. That's what they think of. Then they also think of school work: someone would say that if you start to play mbira you start failing in school but it's not like that. You have to create your own timetable on your own balance of work. That's not music's fault. [...] So we want as many children as we can get [learning mbira].

Grounding this thought she reported some experiences she had:

T: another reason why people like marimba more than mbira is that it is not termed as a dirty instrument.

A: is it more accepted?

T: Yeah, it is more accepted... because who can tell that you're playing marimba when you're walking in the street? Nobody, because you don't have the instrument with you. But when you're walking with the mbira they will all say „ah! She is a mbira player! Excused me? Do you get possessed?“ ...And you know, sometimes when somebody asks me a question like that, I just ignore them, I pass by, I just imagine I did not hear them. Because once someone says something silly for your heart, it will be so hard for you. That can actually break somebody's heart. Just words. Words are awful.

A: Do you think that if someone tells you something like this is an attempt of discrimination?

T: Yeah discrimination, is a way of intimidating me. So you see, that is the problem.

As she assumes, prejudices, lack of knowledge and support play an big role in pushing students away from the instrument. But on the other hand the possibilities that the school's system offer to them are, according to her own experience, not enough.

Most of the exchanges that we have nowadays in schools are marimba exchange programs. Because most of the children play marimba. They like marimba so much! [...] People who play mbira are the one who play marimba but there are more marimba exchange programs and I'm trying to change that, especially in my school. [...] We want also everybody to be able to play mbira.

She suggests that in order to teach successfully to new students, the cooperation between older students and younger is fruitful. She remembers about an exchange she had when she was in form 2. She was also teaching marimba younger kids who could then improve in marimba. She means that sometimes people do not necessarily learn from teachers but also from friends and school mates.

Before this conversation with her, however, I had an interview with Albert Chimedza,

founder of the Mbira Center (see paragraph 3.4) who told me that to the last „Mbira Month“ competitions several young girls participated and one of them won the competition.

A: Albert told me that in the last competition there were a lot of young girls, even the band who won.

T: San Martins [Elementary school]?

A: Yes. Are there a lot of primary schools in which they teach mbira?

T: Yeah, the problem is in schools they teach students to play mbira in the form that Jacob was telling you about. This one is going to play the upper keys, this one the lower keys... so that person can not perform on their own, because all that they know is the upper keys. They don't know the basics. They just know the upper keys or the bass. So they can perform as a band but singularly they cannot perform.

The school is definitively an important environment for Tendai's artistic growth. Not only gives her the possibility to improve and learn different instruments that she could otherwise not practice (like *marimba* and the *mbira njunga njunga*), but it also stimulates and promotes her performances in several occasions. Tendai's parents are as well convinced of the importance of education and culture in order to face whichever kind of career, especially in the music industry.

4.4 The *mbira* school program and the Mbira Centre

On the 5th of October I had the possibility to visit the Mbira Center, an institution based in Highland district of Harare headed by Albert Chimedza which employs fifteen people in the production of traditional *mbiras* and resonators. In the big garden surrounding Albert's private house there's a pavilion, under which concerts, presentation and official meetings take place, a small gallery with exposing several types of mbira found around the country, and a workshop full of wires, machineries, metal objects and pieces of wood, in which the instruments are produced. The centre was founded with the primary aim of making traditional instruments but Albert is not only a *mbira* musician and

maker, his activities are moved by a wider motivation concerning the role of music into the society, the empowerment and promotion of cultural local traditions. The actual goal of this institution, according to him is

[...] to commercialize indigenous intellectual capital, and mbira is a very good prototype. Because is distinctly Zimbabwean and you don't have to have gone to university or a Western school to learn to make mbira. So how do we take that and make it benefit the society? Make the mbira makers earn some money? Keep the culture going? Because that's the common problem in third world countries: the culture is always marginal.

The *mbira* music and the production of instruments according to him can be of a great utility in the society, not only on a cultural level but also economical and commercial: the production system of *mbiras*, based actually on few people who produce them basically for the exportation around the world, should change and develop within the global context in which *mbira* is growing. Production should be specialized and made professional, create job opportunities and awareness in the Zimbabwean society. In all this, the Centre tries since many years to interweave the *mbira* music and musicians with the young generations, and since the 2014 they started a program with different schools called „Mbira in Schools“ with the aim of giving access to *mbira* music instruments to as many learners in educational institutions as possible.

We started the project as a pilot, to see how we can put mbira in schools. The project actually started in 2000. The first thing we did was to go and volunteer teach for a year in different kind of schools to see how it works, if the kids like mbira. [...] in the end we gave 5 mbiras per schools to 20 schools. And we started to follow those around. [...] The way it was structured was that we gave the mbira to universities, to colleges that teach mbira, to secondary schools and primary schools and then we organized the festival, where all of them came. That brought attention, and the kids performed. We realized that it had to continue to be like that [...]. It's almost like the only platform where primary schools, secondary schools and university can meet together as equals.

Part of the project in fact is the participation to the Zimbabwe Mbira Festival, directed by Albert himself, during the Mbira month which is celebrated each September since five years. In the festival the groups of the different schools or institutions perform and compete in different categories. Since it worked quite well, next the aim is also that of making it more competitive.

Maybe we will close the number of the school that can participate to the festival. We will say, the festival only accommodates 15 schools, finished. And then it becomes more competitive so the kids really want to get in and they have to go to school! [laughs].

At the beginning of the whole project the centre had to look for schools interested in *mbira* and they started to work with twenty of them. Part of the concept was that external musician would go to the school and teach not only the students but the teachers as well. They organized special training for them. According to Albert in fact it is more important that people who are trained to teach join the project rather than just *mbira* players. The aim is to bring into the *mbira* classes so many kids as possible and to form later a group who can participate to the festival.

The partnership started with Prince Edward School, which has a really good music department, as Tendai also told me in a interview. In the last three years the project gained more and more resonance and importance since the Ministry of Primary and Secondary education included in 2016 *mbira* as a teaching aid in the new curriculum of primary and secondary schools.

The schools that participate are asked to pick ten students among their *mbira* players who can perform as a group at the festival. In the last edition, in September 2016, a group composed by solely girls from the St. Martins Convent Primary School won the trophy and the competition.

But of course the whole project requires a sufficient instrumentations for all the participant and financial support. That concerns the production of mbiras.

The next project now is to train the mbira makers who can make enough mbira to supply the schools. There's not enough mbira makers in this country. So it means you have to change the all production system and start making mbira in a different way.

When you go to the schools you have to decide what scales, what styles, and they have to be the same. And this requires a level of precision which is not very common at the moment.

According to him, *mbira* makers nowadays are mainly focused on the exportation of instruments around the world, since more and more countries are demanding these instruments. That of course goes to the detriment of the production for the local necessities.

[...]Most of the best mbira makers their major market is either the USA, Germany, or Austria, Japan. And now Latin America. I think they don't realize that it is very important to invest here first.

In the perspective of the centre, *mbira* represents not only an important part of the Zimbabwean cultural heritage that has to be preserved and passed on, but also a concrete possibility for strategical economical growth and development of the country itself. Investing in young generations means assure the future and the improvement of the society. Everyone can be involved in the project, regardless of sex and age. The families of the kids involved in the schools seem to accept generally well the intent and the musical activities. However, Albert reports that some prejudices addressing the *mbira* are still perpetrated in the churches, which are still strongly influenced by the colonial perception of *mbira* music. To overcome this obstacle the festival's program also started to include other categories of music like gospel played with the *mbira*.

Tenadai and Albert know each other personally: she performed more than once at the *mbira* centre in the last years. He confirmed that she has talent and that she will grow more musically, adding that the role of the father is particularly important in her musical path.

4.5 The musician's biography

T: Tendai and the mbira! They will never separate us!

Tendai Mavengeni never hesitated in defining herself as a musician. Music is something in which she identifies and the *mbira dzavadzimu* is the instrument she masters; however, I have seen her comfortable playing *mbira njunga njunga*, *marimba*, *hosho*, *chipendani* (musical bow that resonated in the mouth which she really much likes) and singing. Her daily life is fulfilled with music and more than once she pointed out that she could not imagine her life without it.

The very first contact that Tendai had with the *mbira* happened when she was five months old: a good friend of her father Boniface, Albert Kapondoro (who formerly played bass in Oliver Mutukutzi's band, now deceased), brought him from the village Murewa an old *mbira*. At that time he and her wife had no idea about what this instrument was and how to play it, but they just kept it in the house.

Since the early childhood Tendai showed an emerging musical talent: according to Boniface, her pre-school teachers often reported how the little girl used to react to music and dance during drum lessons. He remembers that during that time, the school organized a concert where the kids were playing. Tendai's mother joined the audience but Boniface didn't, thinking that the performance would be solely for the "kindergarten" kids of the school. The very same day, while he was walking around, he was stopped by parents of other children of the school who congratulated with him about how good her young daughter played percussions, saying that they wished she was their daughter. They told him that he should have gone to the concert and seen her. Feeling proud and curious about her daughter's musical potentiality, Boniface started seriously to think about which instrument she could play since in pre-school kids were playing medals, cups, and she was also dancing and drumming. He himself with the passing of time noticed that Tendai was musically gifted and that she showed a lot of interest for the music he used to listen to. He asked some friends for advice and one of them suggested to make her play the *mbira* and proposed that a member of his own band, who soon became her first teacher, could teach her how to play it.

According to the literature about *mbira* players, most of them develop „an interest in *mbira* at an early age in the ritual context of the *bira*“ (BERLINER 1978: 234). The sphere of the ritual ceremonies often take the curiosity of young kids, who sometimes start to play *mbira dzavadzimu* hiding themselves from elders of the community or from

their own family. Learning in secret, initiatory dreaming and participation at *biras* seem to be common phases in the biographies of both men and women *mbira* players (KYKER 2014).

Tendai experienced a completely different approach to the instrument since she personally had no contact with ritual ceremonies and her father from the very beginning encouraged her to play the *mbira*. He actually guided her first approach to the instrument: he was the one who started to search for *mbira* teachers and who accompanied her to the lessons, sometimes even far away from home. Boniface was able to recognise the musical talent of Tendai and gave the financial and moral support to bring it on the surface, making it grow more and more. On the other side, from the very beginning she showed a real interest and predisposition in learning this instrument and she soon developed important skills thanks as well to the many teachers who accompanied her in her musical journey.

Moreover Tendai accounts that as a child she was extremely fascinated by some of her father's CDs of traditional music and to Stella Chiwese, Chiwoniso Maraire and Beauler Dyoko, who have always been inspirational musicians for her and that because of that she developed a special interest in *mbira*.

4.5.1 Learning the *mbira dza vadzimu*

Tendai have had several teachers during the last seven years of musical activity. Her father has been responsible for her music education and he, following friends' advices, personally chose her first teacher, Trymore Jumbo. She remembers vividly the first time she played *mbira*.

I started playing mbira when I was 9. My father would take me to Trymore Jumbo, he was my first mbira teacher. He used to stay in Marbelreign. So he would drive me there and than he would come back and pick me up again. So the first day my fingers got blisters... I could not eat because I got blisters all over my hands [...]. Seeing how he was playing was more like where I wanted to be, what I wanted to do. I wanted to be like him, I wanted to play just in the way that he played.

She also remembers how fascinated and how determined to learn she was:

I loved the mbira so much! Sometimes I couldn't sleep because I wanted to do what he was doing. Something I would have a lesson, I could grab some of the concepts, some other concepts I wouldn't grasp them. So that would be my homework when I came back here [at home]. I would want to get that right and then for the next lesson I would do something again.

The first song he taught her (called *Dinta*) was actually an easier version of the traditional “*Temtembure*”. She recounts about how she just got the basics and how confused she was at the very beginning. Trymore Jumbo has been her teacher for almost one year but eventually he moved to the United States and Boniface had to find another one, because Tendai was determined and willing to learn more.

B (Boniface): my idea was to try to find a female teacher for her. Because you know, as a young girl growing up, you would want to trust it with other women, rather than men. You know, there are cases of abuses of girl child and everything. So I was trying to run away from that and find a female teacher. But then I had also problems with most female teachers, because most of them... their conduct wasn't what I liked. Maybe they would go beer drinking, misbehave... that's exactly what I i didn't want her to go into.

He found then a musician named Brezhnev Guvheya. Both Boniface and Tendai told me that he represents a turning point in her musical learning: the most important thing he contributed to, was that she taught her how to sing with the *mbira*.

B: Brezhnev idea was that of trying of saying... he wants to be in front of whatever she's going to do. So I think the coming of Brethnev was really a turning point, he taught her how to play and sing. And I think it was really great for her. We are really grateful, because if we hadn't realize that maybe she would not be where she is now.

After a period with him, a man who was working in the Mbira Centre, Amego

Mukucha, saw her on Facebook and contacted Boniface in order to give her lessons for free, impressed by her talent. He affirmed that he wanted to teach her some more skills. He gave her lessons at home and nowadays they actually still play together when he has time.

Besides individual lessons, Tendai attended the Mbira Camp Nharetare in January 2016 at Kufunda Village in Harare hosted by the *mbira* teacher Patience Chaitezvi Munjeri ². There she met Irene Chigamba, Ambuya Nyathi and Ambuya Tembo, all women *mbira* players. Thanks to Irene Chigamba she was introduced to *mbira Mavembe*, a 27 keys kind of mbira. Irene Chigamba knows the family really well and she also helped me to get in touch with Mavengeni during my staying in Harare; moreover her father Sekuru Chigamba, *mbira* player and constructor, taught her how to play the *chipendani* 2015. While she was learning this instrument Irene was in the States, but once she was back, they started communicating and their relationship strengthened during the camp. After that she went to her place to learn the *mavembe mbira*.

Another important teacher for Tendai is the music professor of Mabelreign High School that she is currently attending. I met him on the Prize Giving Day, I was introduced to him and he told me that he would like to have a copy of my thesis to put it in the library of the school.

4.5.2 Between musician and *mbira*

T: I can not go for a day without this instrument!

„In the performance of *mbira* music, there is an intimate bond between the *mbira* player and his instrument. This intimacy is to some degree inherent in the physical relationship of the *mbira* player to his *mbira*“, suggests Berliner. (BERLINER 1978: 127).

Tendai shows an extremely intense dedication and love for the *mbira*. She is surprisingly motivated, positive and confident in her capabilities as musician: even if she is aware of the things she still has to learn, she's satisfied with what she has been doing until now. Her undeniable engagement is reflected not only in her personal

² <https://2016campnharetare.wordpress.com/2015/10/03/the-details/>

attitude but in her music and performances as well: she loves being on stage, making the audience dance and express herself through music. She affirmed to feel good and beautiful during her performances.

Even when specifically asked, she never reported doubts, worries or difficulties concerning playing the instrument.

She pointed out more than once that her dream is being a professional musician and that she's doing everything she can to reach her goal: living with her music, becoming a full-time *mbira* player and touring internationally.

Music means a lot to her: she identifies herself with the music she plays and with the instrument. She has a lot of expectations on herself and she is confident about the fact that she will manage to do everything, but always saying „God willing“. Her expectations are surely feed also by the ones of the parents.

Boniface: I want her to play professionally, on a good and bigger scale. I don't want her to be one of the drunker... you know. I want her to be a professional musician if she wants to take up that. She must also take her school very seriously because without education there is quite a problem again. At one time you would not be able to read a contract [...]. It is something that we keep telling her: if you want your music to be received by lot of people, you have to conduct yourself professionally, you have to have got your own education so you are recognised and taken seriously by other people. So yes, that's the feeling we have. Me and her mum. We think if she got the talent, why say no to that. Let her just go ahead. Although each time we have to watch her really carefully to see how is she doing, how is she conducting, and even the people around her, the teachers around her.

The *mbira* accompanies her on a daily basis, at school and at home.

It has been pointed out in the chapter about women musician that women often don't trust themselves, they don't have enough experience or courage or support for getting into the musical career or just try to express themselves in this field. The positively surprising thing about Tendai Mavengeni is her courage and her determination. In some informal conversations we had, she never showed some doubt that she can achieve her dream of becoming a full-time musician.

I asked myself if, due to her young age and enthusiasm she is not aware of the difficulties that musicians in general and women in particular have to face, she is sort of naive or if she just believes so much in her possibilities and she can count on the support of family and friends that she doesn't fear anything. My thesis is that she just lived in a protected environment until now and she could always count on the managerial tasks that the father took. She never seemed to fear any kind of prejudices.

4.6 Music, recording experiences and performances

Tendai Mavengeni has been described as the youngest *mbira* recording artiste of Zimbabwe (CHESE-MSOWA 2016). The exceptionalism of her young career, her flourishing musical production and her improvement as live-performer can be seen as signals for a successful engagement in the music industry. She always seemed extremely excited at the idea of becoming an important artiste performing in her country and internationally.

Tendai composes music on the *mbira nhare* and writes the texts herself, in the attempt of being recognized and appreciated for her uniqueness and originality. As she started to learn the *mbira*, however, she had to master the traditional repertory. Improvisation on the vocals is a common practice among the *mbira* players and she also improvises vocals and lyrics on traditional songs. During the third interview's session we had, she performed the traditional song „Bangisa“

A lot of people just say that the song does not have lyrics so I had to write them on my own, because you know is boring to play a song without lyrics on and on and on. I had to fill in the gap with lyrics. it's a very good traditional song [...]. People just sing what they feel on that. So you can find this played by another person but singing differently. It's a traditional song, it belongs to everyone.

The text that she composed is a kind of prayer to God and to Ancestors.

With us as Africans as blacks bleeding with the ancestors to help us with what is

happening right now, you know, there is drought in Zimbabwe, the strikes, demonstrations... we need the Lord together with the Ancestors to intervene in matters like these because we can no longer handle them. But they can help us with them and we know they can do it. That's what the lyrics are all about in that song.

Since she underlined more than once that she considers herself a social commentator, I asked her to talk about her modes of composition, focusing on how she turns words, phrases and musical ideas into a song.

Sometimes [the lyrics] just come. Sometimes I have an idea about what I want to talk. Sometimes even when I'm in class... I have a notepad that stays on my blazer. I just write what I'm thinking about. Then when I get home I read all the notes and I come up with something. Then I find the tune on the mbira and sing the song. If it twists together, that is the song. Sometimes it comes just when I'm playing mbira, sometimes I can't even remember what I was singing about. Because sometimes I'm just singing, and then some days after my father says „you were singing about this and this and this“ but I can't no longer remember because there are a lot of things that come into my head [...]. Most of my songs are in my language, in Shona, but I try to mix them with English, so that people like you get to understand what I'm talking about.

Tendai's narrative encompasses different topics: in many of her songs spirituality, the contact with the Ancestors, with God and gender related matters are important element of her texts. Her music aims to be reflective, serious and politically engaged, whether she is writing about early child marriages, abused girls and the difficulties that they encounter during their lives, their right to education and to be untied from a conservative and prejudiced way of perceiving women. Some autobiographical elements are also present in her music concerning her family (although they don't appear in the recorded albums) but it does not concern sentimental love or love experiences, to which she never made any references.

She claims that she loves to write and writes generally a lot, she showed me some of her notebooks with the texts that she writes.

Poetry has always been a part of Tendai. Before I could sing perfectly, before I could sing and play at the same time I would do poetry. Because poetry does not have to do with the tune of the song... just be talking... even on my album I have a poetry track, in the first album. So I write and then I compile all these poems to make one meaningful.

Commenting on her personal songs she always seemed really proud of them, conscious that „you can never find someone playing this song except they heard me playing and they copied it“. Moreover, she underlines the infinite possibilities that the instrument give to the composer and how, according to her, the familiarity with the instruments and how it works is necessary in order to produce own compositions.

There is a lot to explore in this instrument. You can play „Bangisa“, you can play „Nhemamusasa“, you can even improvise, you can play a lot of songs, you can create your own songs. You see these upper keys? They even give you the idea of how the song is supposed to be sang. Once you're playing the mbira and you're playing these upper keys you are right. Because you can sing, you can do anything... [...] Mbira music is really controversial... you know African music comprises of call and response's system. When you're singing, there has to be someone who is responding to what you're singing about [...]. When the mbira is being played, all the sides communicate. The fingers give each other chances. When I'm playing these upper keys it means these ones [indicating the lower keys] are not so loud. But when I'm playing them as a one powerful thing and play all of them, one part is calling and the other is responding... that's how you get to sing when you play this mbira. Mbira is not an hard instrument, it just needs concentration on it. Once you grasp the mbira concept you are home drive.

The complexity of *mbira* music is well known: mastering it requires a lot of exercise and daily practice. When I asked her to describe her daily practice with the instrument she told me:

When I wake up in the morning, before I even do anything, before I go to school I first play a song that I feel like playing that day. Then I go to school. When I come back before I remove my uniform, I play another song that I'm thinking of that day. Then I do

my homework. Then when my mother and my father are talking in the house, I just play my mbira. Then I put it back and I sleep. So I play every day. I can not go one day without this instrument. Sometimes when I feel like playing the 15 keys [mbira njunga njunga] instrument, I play it. Sometimes I even go to the music room when I have free lessons, when I don't have a teacher coming, I just go to the music room, I play and then come back here. But I'm sure by the time he [the father] has money to buy me that little one, he will buy one for me. Because I need to be playing this instrument everywhere. I have a lot of instruments that I claim that Tendai play this instrument. that's how I live. that's how my life rotates.

4.6.1 The Book Café

Besides the context of the school in which Tendai always performed, another really important environment contributed to her developing musical and performing knowledge: the Book Café. Located in the city centre, this renowned cultural centre has staged the first public performances of the thirteen years old Tendai.

Founded in 1993 in cooperation with the NGO Palmeri Trust, The Book Café other than being an important stage for almost all Zimbabwean artists, offered a platform for exchanges, ideas and development of new projects during the whole time of its activity. Especially important in the biography of Tendai was the project called FLAME (Female Literary Arts & Music Enterprise), launched in October 2006 and founded with the aim of focusing on the support of female artists in the music industry, giving women some tools to successfully work on their musical career. The project established in 2007 the „Sistaz Open Mic“, a platform where women artists of each field could perform and express themselves through arts, music, poetry, etc. The project also organized a series of workshops in which professional female artists would discuss issues about the music industry and in general the role of the performer (<http://www.pamberitrust.co.zw/index.php/en/>).

The project has been successful and has nurtured many young artist, who are now active in the music industry. Tendai started to participate regularly to these afternoon's workshops which represented for her a concrete possibility to build contacts, get to

know other women artist and start to understand the modes of the performance.

[The Book Café] helped a lot because you know, that was where I learned to do performances. I would perform in front of the people. It would boost my confidence, I would get use to it, performing in front of people, until now. If it hadn't been for the Book Café I don't know what I would have been. [There] people would just being discussing the issues, people came to watch, people would be relaxing... so you see that all of the people are looking at me. That's where we learnt to do performance and then sometimes we had workshops, they would bring artist like Tariro [Tariro Ruzvidzu, a guitarist] and some from outside. They would bring a lot of women artists to have workshops with us and tell us how to perform, how to act and interact. It played a pivotal role in my career.

Commenting the closure of the cultural centre she added:

When the Book Café closed I was still in the process of building my career. I had launched an album but I was still coming up, you know. So when it closed it was a sad experience for me, because we had to find other places for me to perform and we still haven't found them up to now. You know, it disturbs me [...]. It was in the city, where everybody could come, it was a very mobile place. But now it is so hard! Because when you want to have a show you have to look at the German Society, at the Neutron Park, and when people think „I wanna go and see Tendai, how do I go there? I'm gonna need to have money to see Tendai“ [...]. So it kind of disturbed my career.

In the Book Café Tendai managed to launch her first album „Destiny“ in May 2014. Besides her appearances in this venue, Tendai has performed at different occasions like the Protest Arts Festival, UZ World Theatre Day, Women Arts Festival, Zimpapers (Kwayedza) Poetry Awards, Zimbabwe International Book Fair (<http://tendaimavengeni.blogspot.co.at/>). The school context however is still the one where she is more known and that gives her lot of possibilities to perform:

I'm widely known in the schools. I performed in a lot of events of the schools. They

contact my head mistress, they 're saying we're asking for your product. We need Tendai to perform at this and this event. Then my Head talk to my dad and my dad it's fine, take her there. And then sometimes maybe we're doing some exchange's programs with other schools and then i just get to perform there.

And sometimes is also the other way round, when I'm looking for performances. And I 'm like „where do I really need to perform“?. Then I can put up a show on my own with all the advertise... [...] It was last year in December [2015 at the German Society], we had to put up a show, you know we invited a lot of people, marketed the show.

She performed for this occasion with Edith Katiji, also known as weUtonga, a famous bassist.

They say she is the only female bassist in the country but she is not necessarily the only one. There are a lot out there but it is just a matter of where she is [meaning capacity]. I think she is on top of her game because she really plays it so good! That not even the men can stand up to her. Because she is on the top of her game, they say she is the only female bassist in the country.

They played together the songs of Tendai's first album with Edith and Claire, wife of her first album's producer James Buzuzi. Thanks to this collaboration she got to know Adrian Mapurutza, the guitarist and producer of her second album. Boniface recalls:

Adrian called me after the show and told me that he had seen quite a lot of potential in Tendai. And that in the short period they worked together he felt Tendai has a lot more to offer. He thought, if he was given a chance to work with Tendai, maybe they could do something great. He thought he had the potential of bringing the best out of Tendai.

It took me quite a while... I didn't know much of him besides the show they had done although I seen him as a quite a good person. I had to find out a lot more about him before proceed. It was after a stream of meetings with him, researching from other people how he is, how he takes his music... that's how I found out that he is quite a nice guy and that he had spent four years at the Cape Town University of music and I thought that he had the expertise he was talking about. [...] He recommended some

musicians that he thought were actually good to work with Tendai.

For the second album Adrian Muparutza and Tendai worked together but without the all member of the band for some time.

*During the meeting I had with Adrian I was trying to tell him the direction of music that Tendai wants and how **we** actually want the music to be. We have to keep the traditional flavour in it. So he also had the same feeling that we must do that way although we also agreed that we also must do it in a modern scale so that they create something that can be listened internationally as well. A sound that can appeal to anyone else [...].*

When the band came in they made them listen to what they've done and the band tried to come in and complete it. [...] so we don't want to loose, as Adrian said, the backbone of this music is the mbira, so we don't want to loose the direction of the mbira.

Even though the second album, released in November 2016, represented the first experience as a producer for Adrian Muparutza, both Tendai and Boniface were really satisfied of the final product, admitting that it was exactly the music was looking for. Boniface thinks they will collaborate with him again, for some future projects. However, it seems that lot of producers in the music industry are contacting Boniface to ask for collaboration with her daughter.

We have quite a lot. But she is a little girl, I think we have to find what is actually best for her. We need to find someone who we think believes in her work and in her talent. As much as we have a lot of producers around and people who want to work with her, is those qualities that we look for. If we can't find any of those then it is very difficult for us. But with the last two producers I think there was some common ground.

The general feeling on that music is that they are more and more growing and going forward.

She has to keep her standard of going up, you see. So next time she wants to do some work with any other producer, they're starting from this good work and going forward. So whoever is going to pick up with her in future, when we're still there or not there, even when she is doing it on her own, maybe she is a grown up and doing music on her own she will actually look back and say this is the first one, the second one, this is the third one, and you can actually see her going up the ladder.

Commenting some future ideas, Boniface told me:

B: On the next three songs she is going to do which is going to have no western instrument, it is going to be just mbira, the drums the hosho and vocals. The traditional beat.

A: Why?

B: I think is also good so, that she actually does not forget how the traditional beat sounds like. I think she has to keep that... no matter she's fusing with other instruments and with other artist. I think she also has to keep something in line with her culture. So when the mbira is played she can simply pick up the mbira with any any other guys. If she wants to play again with western instrument she can do the same.

4.6.2 The first album: „Destiny“

The concert for the launch of Tendai Mavengeni's first album took place at the Book Café on the 30th May 2014. The album called "Destiny" is composed of six tracks which were entirely written by Tendai herself: "*Tininurei*", "Spirit of my destiny", "*Wakaronga, Pfuma*", "Africa", and an instrumental version of "*Tininurei*".

That afternoon her performance was introduced by different people: Edith weUtonga (see paragraph above), Joyce Jenje Makwende, musicologist and musician, Tendai's head mistress Mrs Mutanda, the producer James Buzuzi and Boniface Mavengeni. Besides presenting and applauding Tendai for her musical results, her courage and talent, however, the speakers (especially Edith weUtonga and Jenje Makwende) clearly stated the importance of familiar and social support for young women who engage in

musical career and the meaning it has for Zimbabwean future society, bringing Tendai as a concrete example.

The stage opened with Tendai standing on the centre of it and the band (two guitars, bass, drums and *hosho* plus backing vocals) performing the song „Africa“, while four dancers performed in front of audience. Visibly nervous and concentrated, slightly moving and looking ahead, Tendai started to play and sing:

Ndiwe here Africa iwe [it is you Africa]

Ndiwe here Africa iwe

une vana vakadai [who has these type of children]

une vana vakadai

Africa my home

Africa my soul

Africa my destiny

Africa, is it you? Is it you Africa?

Is it you whose children are still under mental slavery?

Is it you Africa? Is it you?

I ask again

Is it you whose children denied what is theirs and search for what is not theirs?

Rise up Africa, rise up my land

Is it you whose children leave their traditions behind and seek for what is not theirs?

Rise up Africa, rise up my land

God bless my land, God bless Africa

After the first song she presented the second track on the set, talking in Shona and English and explaining the text of the song.

“*Tininurei*” is a trial to God, a prayer directed to God in order to ask his intervention in every day’s life matters like diseases or social injustices. When she explained me the meaning of the text during an interview, she pointed out that she is actually a social commentator and that she writes about

Things that we see every day. Things that can be heard in the newspapers, that we hear

on the radio , that we see on the internet. I'm just a social commentator, I sing of those things and people get to her them and they understand my message. Most of my songs are made up of everyday issues.

Even though the narrative of the album is mainly based on social issues, “Destiny” has some autobiographical elements. During an interview she recalls the time she was writing the songs and talking about „Spirit of my destiny“ she said:

I wrote that song when I was still learning mbira. So Brezhnev [her second teacher] told me that you're gonna be singing, I'm gonna teach you. So I would find something to sing. I wrote this lyrics down and I found a beat on the mbira and I started to sing the song. Back then, I was still struggling with mbira and with my voice either and I had to balance the two. But I knew that I had a vision! I was learning this instrument and the singing for a purpose. I wanted that kind of destiny. „Spirit of my destiny“ is a song that I sing looking at where I came from. Like the first lesson, learning to plug mbira, until I got to a stage where I'm. But even when I'm at this stage it doesn't mean I'm going to stop. I'm going to keep on going. that's why I say spirit of my destiny, I'm just gonna have this spirit and keep on going in the music. So that's I can say the song is all about.

I personally understand the lyric of the text as a declaration. Because Tendai seems really determined and to have clear ideas about what she wants: she strictly believes in her capacities, determined to go on in the musical career and that nothing is going to stop her.

Spirit of my destiny

Spirit of my destiny

Mueya munyuradzi, mueya nduchengete [protect me, I want to get there]

I know I'm a winner right in your face

Mueya munyuradzi, mueya nduchengete

I know I have got talent running in my blood

Mueya munyuradzi, mueya nduchengete
I know I have got the vision in my mind
Mueya munyuradzi, mueya nduchengete
Haiye yerere here ihere iherere

During the developing of the performance, Tendai seemed to gain more and more confidence with the stage and the audience. At the end of the concert, playing “Wakaronga”, she went off the stage, facing the audience alone with her *mbira*, and many people also started to dance in front of her. She seemed to enjoy it very much. At some point Edith weUtonga also joined the stage and started to sing together.

This concert represented for Tendai a very important moment in her musical career. Not only it was her concert, a great possibility to perform in the same place where she learned how to be on the stage, but it was the presentation of her first album, the realization of several months of work in studio together with other musicians on her songs. When I asked her about the rehearsal’s process she had with the band the very first time and how did they arrange together her songs, she told me:

The first rehearsal I would say it didn’t go quite well. Because when I was playing my mbira together with the vocals, I needed the bass, the drum and the vocals to cooperate together with my mbira. To go hand in hand with what I wanted. I explained them the kind of music that I wanted. Because you know, „Spirit of my destiny“ was the first song that I wrote. So that was something that I already had with me. I had a lot of songs but I wanted us to work on that song first. So I was trying to work on the feel of the music, what I thought that I wanted. But we could’nt understand each other on that. Because they were more relating to modern music, some simple beats maybe coming from an old song. But I did not want that. I wanted something that you would be listen to and say oh, this is nice, not something that you say oh, I heard that on a Chiwoniso CD. I wanted something on my own. I actually could tell them the beats that were ringing up in my head.

Before the rehearsal actually started, Tendai, Boniface and the members of the band

they had some meetings. The musicians have been found by the producer, James Buzuzi, who was asked to work with Tendai. During the all process of recording, mixing and mastering they some difficulties, due to the bad quality of the studio and some mistake they did. The first attempt was for her not satisfying enough:

the first attempt to record the stuff wasn't so good. I just told my dad, no, that just can not be. I can't put my name on that. Once you record an album, and there is my name on it, I can not remove it from my future for ever. So it has to be something that motivates... not like that when I look at the album I think „I wish I haven't done it“. I don't want an album that make people run away from my music.

The idea of recording an album came actually from Tendai herself, since her ambition was her music to be heard on the radio. On the launch concert the album sold a lot of copies on and lately Tendai has been invited to different television and radio programs. On „Weekend morning“, a program on Zimbabwean Broadcast Corporation, she was interviewed by a woman journalist and presented as the youngest *mbira* recording artist in Zimbabwe. Being asked about the motivation that pushed her to learning a traditional instrument, comparing with the young generations which is more into other commercial genres of music, Tendai pointed out that *mbira* music is really Zimbabwean and it expresses their identity. When asked about her first album, she commented her texts, underlying that she is a social commentator and that she has been inspired by great women musicians like Stella Chiweshe and Chowniso Maraire. Being perceived as an engaged artist seems to be quite important for her.

I: What do you want to say to young people who perhaps want to follow your steps?

T: I would say, do your own things in your way. Have faith but listen to your parents what they have to say. Just do it with passion, with love.

I: and then after school do you want to be a full time musician?

T: you know, I want to be like Patience Chaitezvi. That woman is a degree woman, she is a teacher. She has a degree but she plays mbira at the same time. So I want to balance this for the rest of my life. Doing school and doing music.

The interview was broadcast on Z Tv. She recalled this experience quite enthusiastically.

It felt great! Just the feeling of knowing that you're talking to the all country and most of the TVs are switched on and everybody is watching what you're saying, is watching you... everybody is seeing that girls can play mbira. Yeah, it felt good.

[...] God willing I want to see my music being listened to worldwide, firstly in the country I want to perform more, and then outside.

4.6.3 The Second album: „Tendai“

After the launch of her first album, the local newspaper Herald started to report Tendai's activities, describing her as a „mbira sensation“ „gifted composer“ and enthusiastically reporting her musical performances and projects (LOVEMORE 2016). The concert for the launch of the double singles 18th november 2016 was depicted with passionate tones.

The producer of this project, Adrian Muparutza, who found each single member of the band that played with her, declared: "Being part of this creative process has been a good experience as I worked with a very young artiste who has so much depth. Her writing is profound and subjects you to a lot of introspection. As the producer all I had to do was magnify her thoughts to bring out the musical product" (<http://tendaimavengeni.blogspot.co.at/>). The collaboration with a new producer and the improvements as musicians that Tendai have done during the last two years made possible a different, more mature and complex product.

We moved from the last album. If you listen to the two products, I feel there is a big difference. Maybe is because I have been grown up again, the kind of band that I have which understand what kind of feeling I'm looking for... and also because I have a bit of some knowledge again on the mbira. I have more knowledge on the mbira than the first album [...]. The more I improve on the mbira, the more I improve on the vocals. They always go together in my practice. Maybe it's because I have been a bit more serious

with my voice, trying, you know, to have the two to communicate until I got to the second album [...]. In the first album somebody helped me doing the backing vocals, but in this one I did them on my own.

The second album, called „Tendai“ contains two tracks: „Motoroodza” and „Munzira Yakachena”. When we were discussing about it, a couple of months before the launch, she told me that because of the expenses for the production she just could choose two songs to produce, even though she has many more. The choice was to work on the ones she had most confidence in. The first time I heard the two songs was at Jacob and Martha’s home (see 3.2), where Boniface played on the computer for them to be listened by Jacob. Tendai thinks as well that his opinion is really important

He just said the music was 100% fine. [...] people like him who do music on a large scale, internationally, they can be able to tell me where I’m doing wrong or right and they can be able to tell me if it’s completely correct.

The concert for the launch of the album took place at the Alliance Française and it was reported as a „powerful performance that left lasting impressions“ (LOVEMORE 2016). Her performance was preceded Tendai’s schoolmates the „Mabelreign Girls High Band“ with her friends Panashe Nyembo, Liacha Goreraza, Meritma Shonganyika. The Alliance Française hosted a big stage where she and the band performed: the atmosphere seemed to be more relaxed and Tendai, wearing the same dress of the cover of the album which I have seen at her place just two months before, incredibly danced and moved on the stage, with and without the *mbira*. Even though I was not present and I just could see some short video materials of the performance, it is clearly visible how she felt way more comfortable and sure on the stage. Her attitude towards the audience, her presence, the space she filled with her dances and the security on singing marked the quality of the concert. The audience was extremely active and danced. She performed barefoot and had a little carpet on the floor on which she would stand and go to her knee.

5. Conclusions

Women's engagement in music is a growing field of research of the contemporary ethnomusicology. The analysis of women musicians's biographical histories and focusing on their individuality allows a wider and important deepening in musical cultures and in the gender related dynamics of all societies.

In Zimbabwe women's musical participation has been and still is restricted in different environments from a male-dominated music system and society. Women artist adopt different strategies to fight for recognition and rights, despite their efforts, the examples of successful careers are few and limited to specific musical roles or genres.

A representative case are women *mbira* performers, which grew in numbers in the last decades, overcoming the numerous prejudices and believes that through the centuries excluded them from playing this instrument. They managed to gain space and acceptance not only in the context of the spiritual ceremonies, but also in the realm of urban music. Some of them took part with their music to the important social and political changes taking place in the country between the 1970s and the 1980s, they had success on the international stage, marketed by the world music's industry and contributed to bring Zimbabwe musical culture to a high degree of exposure and recognition.

The sixteen years old Tendai Mavengeni living in Harare plays *mbira dza vadzimu* and is the youngest recording artist in Zimbabwe nowadays. She composes her own music and since 2014 recorded two albums, performing with two different bands. Tendai started to practice the instrument when she was nine years old, completely supported by her family, that played and still plays in her musical education a fundamental role. The parents, and in particular the father, Boniface Mavengeni, encouraged her from the beginning to play, noticing the talent and the strong interest she had in music. Tendai's fascination and passion for *mbira* music has been nourished by her father's interest for traditional music and it grew also thanks to many women *mbira* musicians she listened to. The school also stimulates her musical activities: since the government put the traditional instrument in the schools curricula, Tendai joined *mbira* classes, participate to special programs and won several competitions. Attending cultural events, like the workshops at the Book Café, helped her in creating contacts, learning performance

practices and getting to know women artists involved in the foundation of a platform for female young musicians. This space was particularly important for her, since this unique welcoming environment enhanced her development as musician and led to the possibility to launch her first album.

Tendai Mavengeni can be seen as an exceptional successful musician: she is already known as *mbira* performer among different contexts, she collaborated with many other professional musicians and she gained the attention of local newspaper and television channels, that often described her as a promising *mbira* player. The reasons of this success can be found in five different crucial factors:

1. She has an indisputable musical talent and great composing creativity, which she showcases with determination and self-confidence on the stage;
2. These abilities have been developed with the financial support of the family, which manages to invest both in her scholar education and in the musical career;
3. The managerial aspect of her career as musician is completely overtaken by the father, who is responsible for the organization of concerts, the connections with producers and other musicians;
4. Being still a young girl, she is not affected by stereotypical representations that depict women musicians;
5. The examples and personal experiences of other women *mbira* performers who in the last decades undertook successfully professional careers in music, besides representing inspirational models for the new generations of musicians, which Tendai is part of, also contributed to change positively the public opinion's general acceptance and recognition of women playing *mbira*.

Some of these factors, that allowed Tendai to grow and develop musically in a protected and safe environment, are however connected to her young age and therefore can't be considered permanent elements in her life. Coming of age, Tendai Mavengeni will have to be more independent and to face the new challenges that the path of her musical career will request. She will have the chance to engage in the improvement of the conditions affecting women musicians in Zimbabwe, contributing not only to her personal success but also to the one of future generations of female performers.

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7. Appendix



Fig. 2 Tendai Mavengeni playing *mbira* portrayed by the author. Harare, October 2016.

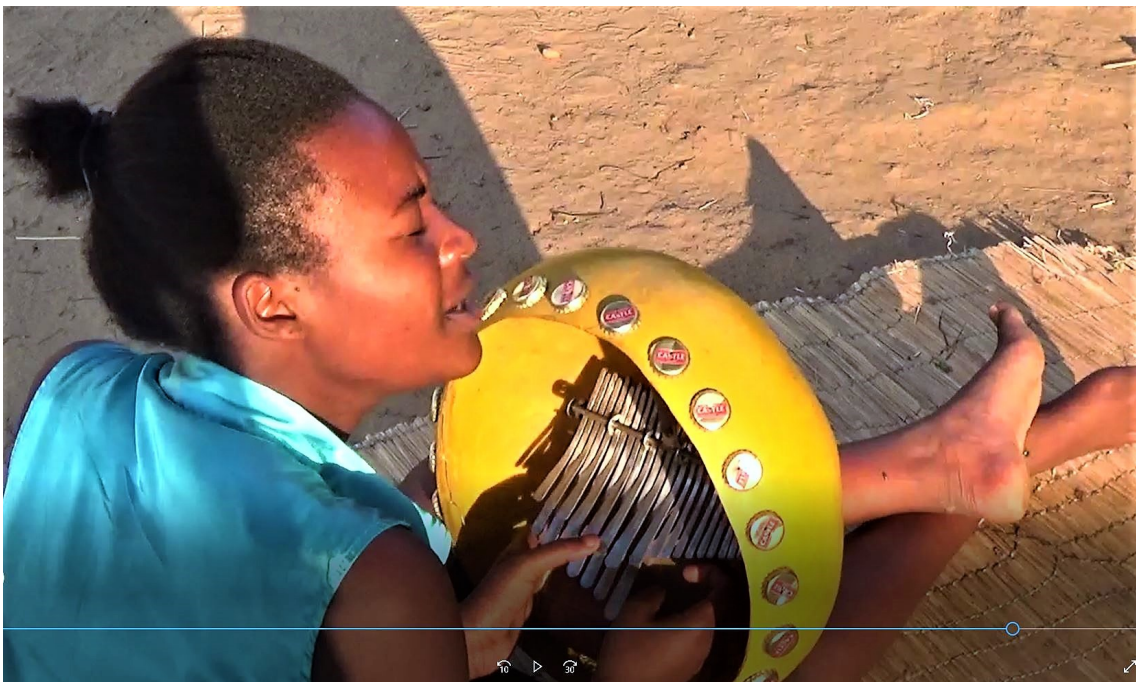


Fig.3 Tendai Mavengeni playing *mbira* portrayed by the author. Harare, October 2016.

Abstract

In the last decades, a growing number of women in Zimbabwe engaged in playing the *mbira dza vadzimu*, a lamellophone belonging to the Shona ethnic group that originally was played mainly by men in the context of spiritual ceremonies. Despite being hindered and discouraged from playing it, women managed to create their own space in the performing context and the recording industry acquiring a certain degree of recognition and acceptance both on the local and the international stage.

Following the recent trend of studies on individuals in ethnomusicology and applying the methods of biographical research, the present paper focuses on one single *mbira* musician, Tendai Mavengeni, her modes of musical production and performance, as well as her musical creativity and success while contextualising her musical biography in the familial and social context in which she lives.

Zusammenfassung

In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten spielen immer mehr Frauen in Simbabwe das *Mbira dza vadzimu*, ein Lamellophon der Shona, das ursprünglich hauptsächlich von Männern im Rahmen spiritueller Zeremonien gespielt wurde. Obwohl man sie davon abhält, gelang es den Frauen, sich sowohl in der Darbietung als auch in der Tonträgerindustrie eigene Räume zu schaffen und sich dabei ein gewisses Maß an Anerkennung sowie Akzeptanz auf lokaler und internationaler Bühne zu erarbeiten.

In Anknüpfung an den aktuellen musikethnologischen Trend hin zu Studien einzelner Personen sowie unter Anwendung biografischer Forschung legt die vorliegende Arbeit den Schwerpunkt auf eine bestimmte *Mbira*-Musikerin, nämlich Tendai Mavengeni, sowie ihre Art und Weise der Musikproduktion und Darbietung, die Kreativität ihres Schaffens und ihren Erfolg, wobei ihre musikalische Biografie in den familiären und sozialen Kontext ihres Lebens eingebettet wird.