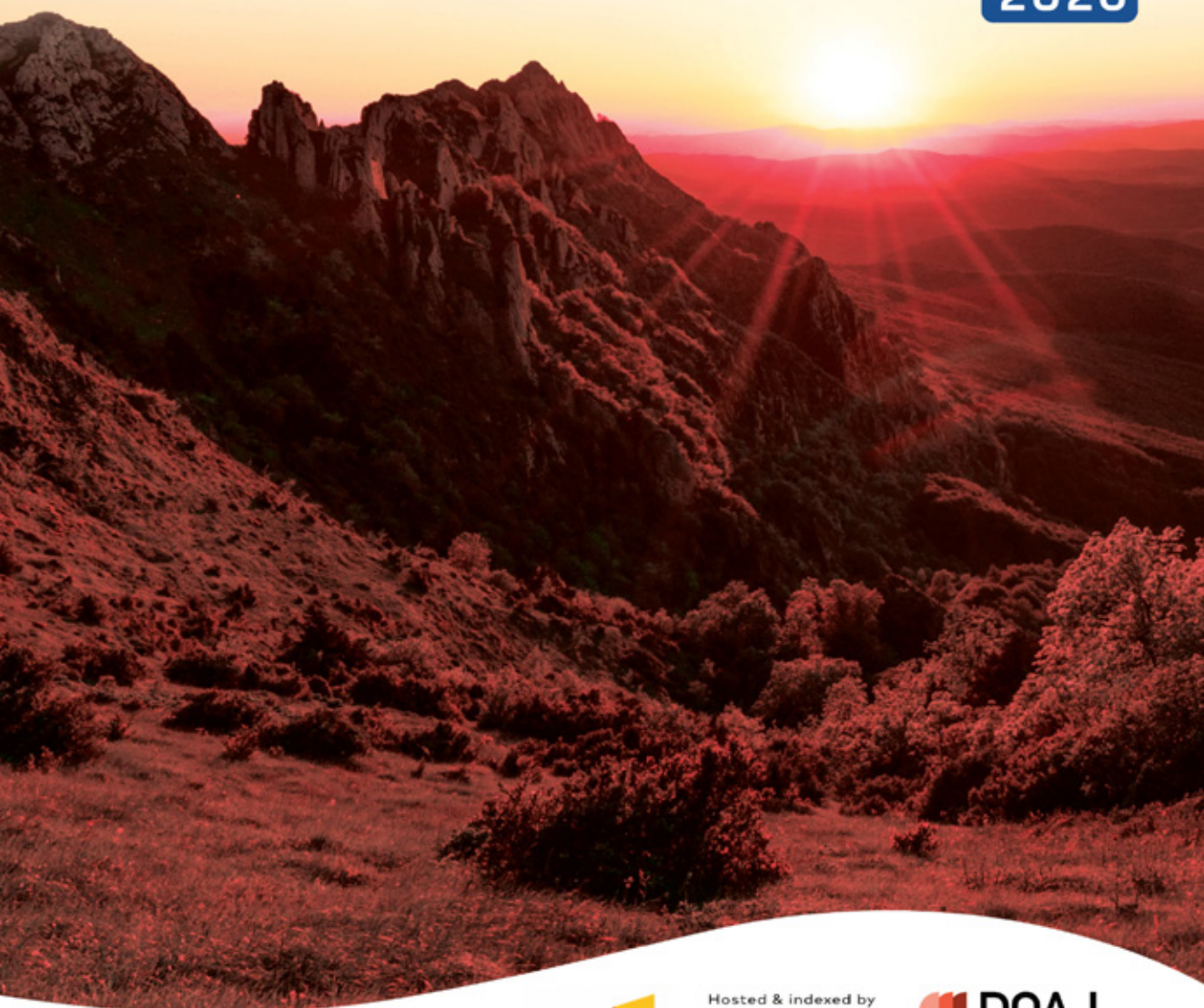


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Unpacking selected Zimbabwean popular songs as agenda-setting in unmasking the effects of occult wealth-seeking practice

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of popular music in shaping public discourse on *kuromba/hurombwa*, an occult wealth-seeking practice embedded within Zimbabwean socio-cultural realities. Situated within the context of prolonged economic instability, unemployment, and widening social inequalities, the study explores how musicians utilise lyrical narratives to expose, critique, and problematise the perceived dangers associated with occult wealth accumulation. In Shona cosmology, *hurombwa* is commonly associated with witchcraft, ritual sacrifices, and supernatural transactions believed to generate wealth, power, influence, and social prestige. Although often pursued as a means of attaining economic success and community recognition, the practice is simultaneously perceived as a source of social disintegration, mysterious deaths, failed marriages, psychological trauma, and intergenerational misfortune affecting both perpetrators and their families. Grounded in Agenda-Setting Theory, the study investigates how music functions as a cultural and ideological medium through which social anxieties, moral tensions, and communal fears surrounding occult practices are articulated and circulated within society. Employing a qualitative research paradigm and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the paper analyses purposively selected songs, namely "Baba NaAmaj" (Alick Macheso) and "Kujatajata" (DT Bio Mudimba). The analysis focuses on the ways in which lyrical constructions, metaphors, symbolism, and narrative strategies are deployed to communicate the socio-moral consequences of *hurombwa*. The findings demonstrate that music transcends entertainment by functioning as a socially embedded communicative platform that shapes public consciousness, reinforces cultural values, and critiques ethically contested practices. The selected songs portray occult wealth-seeking as a deceptive and destructive pursuit that undermines family cohesion, communal harmony, and moral order. Furthermore, the study reveals that musicians act as cultural commentators and moral agents who mediate public understanding of social realities through artistic expression. The paper contributes to scholarship on music, culture, and communication by illustrating how popular music in Zimbabwe operates as a discursive space for negotiating morality, spirituality, and socio-economic survival in times of crisis.

Keywords: agenda setting, *hurombwa*, music journalism, occult, witchcraft, wealth seeking

Introduction

This study interrogates the role of music as a form of social journalism in shaping public discourse on *kuromba/hurombwa*, an occult wealth-seeking practice prevalent within Zimbabwean society. Drawing on Mano's (2007; 2010) conceptualisation of music as journalism, the paper examines how musical expression functions as an agenda-setting mechanism through which artists illuminate socially contested practices and communicate moral anxieties embedded within communities. The study emerges from growing concerns surrounding the increasing visibility of occult wealth-seeking practices in contexts characterised by economic instability, unemployment, and widening socio-economic inequalities. Within such environments, some individuals reportedly resort to clandestine spiritual practices, charms, fetishes, and ritual acts in pursuit of wealth, influence, and social prestige (Partridge, 2015).

In Shona cultural contexts, *hurombwa* refers to the acquisition of supernatural powers or ritual assistance intended to facilitate material accumulation and social advancement. The practice is widely perceived as secretive and socially disruptive, often associated with witchcraft, ritual sacrifices, goblins, and mystical forms of wealth generation. Individuals who engage in *hurombwa* are believed to conceal their activities from family and community members, thereby reinforcing the covert and esoteric nature of the phenomenon. Although such practices are frequently motivated by aspirations for prosperity, business success, agricultural productivity, or elevated social standing, they are simultaneously associated with severe moral and social consequences, including family disintegration, mysterious deaths, failed marriages, psychological distress, and generational suffering affecting innocent relatives and communities (Mwansa, 2017).

Against this background, the paper explores how music serves as a communicative platform for exposing and critiquing occult wealth-seeking practices in Zimbabwean society. The study purposively selects two popular *sungura* songs, namely "Baba NaAmai" by Alick Macheso and "Kujatajata" by DT Bio Mudimba, to examine how musicians construct narratives around *hurombwa* and its perceived consequences. The choice of these songs is informed by their thematic engagement with issues of morality, spirituality, wealth accumulation, and social responsibility. Through lyrical narration, metaphor, symbolism, and cultural imagery, the musicians function not merely as entertainers but as social commentators and cultural mediators who articulate collective fears, ethical concerns, and existential realities confronting ordinary citizens.

The paper further situates the phenomenon of occult wealth-seeking within broader global, African, and Zimbabwean contexts to demonstrate the persistence of fetishism, ritual practices, and magical beliefs across societies. The discussion highlights how practices associated with supernatural wealth acquisition are neither uniquely Zimbabwean nor exclusively African but are part of wider historical and cultural attempts to negotiate insecurity, poverty, uncertainty, and aspirations for upward mobility. However, despite the prevalence of scholarship on witchcraft, occult economies, and ritual practices, limited attention has been devoted to examining how music operates as an agenda-setting medium through which such practices are publicly interrogated and socially contested. The study therefore addresses an important scholarly gap by foregrounding the communicative and ideological role of music in shaping public understanding of occult wealth-seeking practices.

The article is anchored in Agenda-Setting Theory, particularly the proposition that media platforms influence public perceptions of social issues by foregrounding themes and concerns (McCombs & Shaw, 2017). In this regard, music is conceptualised as a cultural medium capable of directing public attention towards socially sensitive issues that may otherwise remain obscured within private or communal spaces. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2000) to interrogate the linguistic, symbolic, and ideological dimensions embedded within the selected song lyrics. Emphasis is placed on textual and discursive meanings rather than on musical instrumentation or sound patterns. Through textual analysis (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013), the paper examines how language, metaphor, repetition, imagery, and narrative voice are deployed to construct *hurombwa* as morally dangerous, socially destructive, and spiritually corrosive.

The analysis begins with “Baba NaAmai,” followed by “Kujatajata,” with close attention paid to the overt and covert meanings embedded within the lyrics. The study interrogates how the songs portray the hidden operations of occult wealth-seeking practices, the social anxieties surrounding goblins and ritualism, and the devastating effects of such practices on families, communities, and social cohesion. Ultimately, the paper argues that music in Zimbabwe transcends entertainment by functioning as a culturally embedded communicative institution that educates, warns, critiques, and shapes public consciousness on critical social issues. The study concludes by offering insights into the intersection of music, morality, spirituality, and socio-economic

survival, while also recommending further scholarly engagement with the role of popular culture in mediating social and cultural discourses in contemporary African societies.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of occult wealth-seeking through charms, fetishes, ritual practices, *juju*, and witchcraft remains a deeply contested yet persistent feature of societies across the globe. Although discussions surrounding such practices are frequently obscured by secrecy, fear, and cultural sensitivities, recent scholarship demonstrates that beliefs in supernatural forms of wealth accumulation continue to permeate both traditional and modern societies. Contemporary studies increasingly argue that occult economies flourish within contexts marked by economic precarity, widening inequalities, unemployment, and social uncertainty (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2020; Geschiere, 2021). Within such environments, supernatural practices are often interpreted as alternative mechanisms through which individuals negotiate aspirations for wealth, social mobility, power, and existential security.

Globally, the literature demonstrates that magical and occult practices continue to exist despite modernisation, technological advancement, and scientific rationalism. Davies (2020) argues that belief in supernatural intervention remains embedded within contemporary social consciousness, even in highly industrialised societies. Similarly, Beresford (2022) observes that occult practices in Europe and North America have evolved into hybrid forms shaped by neoliberal anxieties, digital cultures, and alternative spiritualities. In Latin America and the Caribbean, ritual economies linked to voodoo, spiritualism, and folk religions continue to intersect with political influence, economic insecurity, and community survival strategies (Anderson, 2021). Comparable observations have been made within Asian societies, where ritual capitalism and magical consumption practices are increasingly associated with entrepreneurial aspirations and prosperity-seeking behaviours (Yamanaka, 2020). These studies collectively suggest that occult practices should not merely be viewed as vestiges of premodern belief systems; rather, they represent socially situated responses to structural insecurities and uncertainties within contemporary societies.

Within African scholarship, occult economies have attracted sustained academic attention owing to their enduring socio-cultural relevance. African cosmologies have historically maintained strong connections between spirituality and material existence, with spiritual forces often believed to shape

health, fertility, prosperity, social relations, and political power (Ashforth, 2021). Recent scholarship contends that neoliberal economic reforms, political instability, and declining social welfare structures have intensified recourse to supernatural explanations and ritual practices across the continent (Nyamnjoh, 2020; Moore & Sanders, 2021). Consequently, occult wealth-seeking practices are increasingly interpreted as manifestations of socio-economic desperation, contested modernities, and struggles for social recognition.

In West Africa, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana, ritual wealth-seeking practices commonly referred to as *juju*, money rituals, or occult economies have generated extensive scholarly and public debate. Endong (2022) argues that the commodification of wealth and celebrity culture has contributed to the normalisation of ritualistic wealth-seeking among sections of the youth population. Similarly, Olorunnisola (2021) demonstrates that social media cultures, cyber fraud, and conspicuous consumption have reinforced narratives linking success to supernatural intervention. Nwaka (2020) further contends that ritual killings associated with wealth acquisition have intensified moral panic and public anxieties concerning the erosion of ethical values in contemporary African societies. Arrey-Mbi (2020) adds that occult wealth practices in Africa are often intertwined with broader struggles for masculinity, authority, legitimacy, and socio-economic recognition. As such, ritual economies cannot be detached from broader structural inequalities and cultural contestations shaping contemporary African realities.

Southern African scholarship equally highlights the persistence of beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural wealth accumulation. Van der Watt and Kruger (2021) observe that occult practices in South Africa are frequently associated with social competition, economic rivalries, political tensions, and communal insecurities. Similar findings have emerged from studies conducted in Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia, where beliefs in ritual economies continue to shape perceptions of wealth, success, and misfortune (Mavhunga, 2020; Lembani, 2021). In many African communities, unexplained wealth accumulation is often interpreted through spiritual frameworks, thereby generating suspicions of goblins, ritual practices, and supernatural interventions. Such interpretations become particularly pronounced during periods of economic decline when conventional avenues for social mobility appear increasingly inaccessible.

The Zimbabwean context provides an important site for understanding the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding occult wealth-seeking practices.

Persistent economic crises, inflationary pressures, unemployment, and shrinking livelihood opportunities have generated widespread social anxieties and economic insecurities (Raftopoulos, 2021). Within these precarious conditions, *hurombwa* is often perceived as an alternative pathway to material success, social prestige, and economic survival. In Shona cosmology, *hurombwa* refers to the acquisition of supernatural powers or ritual assistance intended to facilitate wealth accumulation, agricultural productivity, business success, or political influence. However, the practice is simultaneously regarded as morally dangerous and socially destructive. Existing scholarship associates *hurombwa* with family disintegration, mysterious deaths, mental illness, infertility, failed marriages, and generational suffering affecting relatives of alleged perpetrators (Lembani, 2021; Mutsvairo, 2022).

The secrecy surrounding occult practices further complicates scholarly engagement with the phenomenon. According to Van der Watt and Kruger (2021), discussions concerning witchcraft and ritual economies are often silenced by fear, stigma, and concerns over spiritual retaliation. Individuals associated with occult practices rarely disclose their activities publicly, thereby reinforcing the clandestine nature of such practices. Nelson (2021) argues that spiritualists, traditional healers, and ritual specialists are frequently perceived as custodians of esoteric knowledge, although much of this knowledge remains inaccessible to ordinary community members. Consequently, public understandings of *hurombwa* are often mediated through rumours, oral traditions, religious narratives, and popular culture rather than through verifiable empirical evidence.

Recent scholarship has also foregrounded the transformative role of digital technologies and social media in shaping contemporary occult discourses. Botelho (2021) argues that the expansion of digital communication technologies has accelerated the circulation of narratives relating to witchcraft, ritual practices, and supernatural wealth accumulation. Similarly, Chiumbu and Mutsvairo (2023) observe that social media platforms have become important sites through which stories of goblins, ritual killings, magical wealth, and spiritual encounters are disseminated and contested. While some of these narratives remain unverifiable, digital platforms have significantly amplified public engagement with occult discourses and contributed to the visibility of ritual economies within contemporary African societies.

Another significant theme emerging from the literature concerns the ritual obligations and moral codes associated with occult wealth-seeking practices. Existing studies indicate that supernatural wealth acquisition is often governed by strict ritual regulations, taboos, and obligations commonly referred to as *mhiko* within Shona cultural contexts. Lembani (2021) explains that failure to adhere to these ritual conditions is believed to result in severe consequences, including sudden death, chronic illness, madness, infertility, deformities among children, misfortune, and the collapse of accumulated wealth. Such narratives reinforce communal perceptions that occult wealth carries destructive spiritual consequences extending beyond individual perpetrators to affect families, clans, and wider communities.

Within this broader socio-cultural landscape, music has increasingly emerged as an influential medium through which occult wealth-seeking practices are represented, interrogated, and contested. Mano (2020) argues that African popular music functions not merely as entertainment but also as a socially embedded communicative institution capable of articulating political, moral, and cultural anxieties. Through lyrical narratives, symbolism, metaphor, and storytelling, musicians frequently assume the role of cultural commentators who mediate collective fears, aspirations, and ethical tensions within society. In Zimbabwe, musicians such as Oliver Mtukudzi, Thomas Mapfumo, Jah Prayzah, Stella Chiweshe, Alick Macheso, Charles Charamba, DT Bio Mudimba, the late music artists Tongai Moyo, Marko Sibanda, and Nicholas Zachariah consistently engaged themes of spirituality, morality, greed, suffering, and supernatural practices within their musical productions.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on African popular music and occult economies, limited academic attention has been devoted to examining how music functions specifically as an agenda-setting mechanism in relation to occult wealth-seeking practices. Existing studies have largely focused on witchcraft as a sociological or anthropological phenomenon, while scholarship on music has predominantly concentrated on entertainment, nationalism, identity, or political resistance. Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to the ways in which musical discourse shapes public consciousness, moral debates, and social perceptions surrounding occult economies. The present study addresses this scholarly gap by examining how “Baba NaAmai” by Alick Macheso and “Kujatajata” by DT Bio Mudimba construct, communicate, and critique *hurombwa* within Zimbabwe’s contemporary socio-economic context.

Through the combined lenses of Agenda-Setting Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the study contributes to scholarship on music, culture, spirituality, and communication by demonstrating how popular music functions as a discursive space for negotiating morality, wealth, social survival, and existential anxieties in contemporary African societies.

Theoretical grounding

This study is anchored in Agenda-Setting Theory, a communication principle that explains the capacity of media platforms to shape public consciousness by influencing the issues that audiences perceive as socially significant. The theory posits that although the media may not necessarily determine what people think, it exerts substantial influence over what people think about through the prioritisation, repetition, and prominence accorded to issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Within the context of this study, Agenda-Setting Theory provides an appropriate conceptual lens for examining how music functions as a communicative medium through which public discourse surrounding *kuromba / hurombwa* is constructed, amplified, and contested in Zimbabwean society.

The intellectual foundations of Agenda-Setting Theory predate the seminal work of McCombs and Shaw (1972). According to Valenzuela (2019), the theory can be traced to Walter Lippmann's (1922) notion of "the world outside and the pictures in our heads," which argued that the media serve as the principal intermediary between social reality and public perception. Valenzuela added that Lippmann maintained that individuals rarely experience most social realities directly; instead, they rely on mediated representations to interpret the world around them. Eichorn and Stacks (2019) observe that Lippmann's formulation laid the groundwork for later agenda-setting scholarship by foregrounding the relationship between mediated communication and the construction of public consciousness.

The theoretical proposition was further refined by Cohen (1963), who argued that the media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (as cited in Nikata, 2016, p. 33). Cohen's argument underscored the power of media institutions to prioritise specific issues and frame public discussions around them. This proposition became central to the development of Agenda-Setting Theory, particularly in understanding how repetitive and prominent media coverage elevates certain social issues into matters of public concern.

The first major validation of the theory was conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972) during the United States presidential election campaign in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Their study demonstrated a strong correlation between issues emphasised in the media and issues perceived by audiences as politically important. According to Valenzuela (2019), the Chapel Hill study represented the first systematic attempt to empirically test the relationship between media emphasis and public perceptions of issue salience. Since then, Agenda-Setting Theory has evolved into one of the most influential frameworks within media and communication studies.

Contemporary scholarship has significantly expanded the scope of the theory beyond traditional news media. McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2018) argue that agenda-setting processes now extend across multiple communication platforms, including social media, entertainment media, political communication, advertising, and cultural production. In this regard, agenda-setting is no longer confined to journalistic news reporting alone; rather, it encompasses diverse communicative forms that shape social consciousness and influence public discourse. The expansion of the theory is particularly relevant to this study, which conceptualises music as a form of cultural communication capable of directing public attention towards socially contested issues.

The application of Agenda-Setting Theory draws from Mano's (2007; 2010) conceptualisation of music as journalism. Mano argues that popular music performs journalistic functions through narrating social realities, critiquing social injustices, articulating collective anxieties, and disseminating culturally relevant information. Through lyrical narratives, symbolism, metaphor, and storytelling, musicians communicate lived experiences in ways that resonate with audiences. Music wields the ability and success in telling readers what to think about as powerful and socially relevant themes, including topics that influence public opinion and debate (Cohen, 1963). Wu and Coleman (2010) and Chang et al. (2017) hold that agenda setting is when mass media hand-pick news items and publish them frequently and prominently, resulting in the audience perceiving them as more salient than others. This is applicable as songs by prominent artists are normally perceived as outstanding when compared to others; hence, they get repeated play on radio stations and in public spaces to influence people to think about the topics covered. This applies to the two songs, "*Baba NaAmai*" (Alick Macheso) and "*Kujatajata*" (DT Bio Mudimba) that were hit songs in Zimbabwe; they pushed the anti-fetishism

agenda. Consequently, music transcends entertainment to function as a socially embedded communicative institution that educates, informs, critiques, and shapes public opinion.

Within African societies, music has historically functioned as an important vehicle for social commentary, political resistance, moral instruction, and cultural preservation. Musicians frequently address themes such as poverty, corruption, spirituality, inequality, violence, and social disintegration. Through repetitive circulation and popular consumption, musical messages become embedded within public consciousness and contribute to broader societal debates. The repetitive circulation and popular consumption of music create salience of the messages it carries, setting an agenda as listeners are influenced to focus on issues around the topics. Um and Jung (2024) argue that music imposes significant communicative power due to emotional appeal, accessibility, and capacity transcending conventional literacy barriers. In this sense, songs become alternative sites of public pedagogy through which social values, fears, and moral anxieties are negotiated. Through that, music carries and pushes various agendas through the platform to negotiate social values, fears and moral anxieties.

The agenda-setting function of music exhibited in prominent messages carried in songs is significant in contexts where certain issues are culturally sensitive, spiritually concealed, or socially feared. In Zimbabwe, discussions on *hurombwa* and occult wealth-seeking practices are often mediated through rumours, oral narratives, religious discourse, and popular culture rather than through formal public institutions. Music therefore becomes an important discursive space through which musicians expose, critique, and symbolically reconstruct the phenomenon of occult wealth accumulation. Popular music sets the occult wealth accumulation agenda, thereby making way for the public to engage openly and discuss. Through foregrounding the social and moral consequences associated with *hurombwa*, musicians shape public understanding of the practice and contribute to the construction of collective moral consciousness.

The study further draws on Rogers and Dearing's (1988) tripartite model of agenda-setting, which distinguishes between the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda. The media agenda refers to issues prioritised within communicative platforms; the public agenda concerns issues perceived by audiences as socially important; while the policy agenda relates to issues that eventually attract institutional or political attention (Nikata, 2016). Within

the context of this study, songs such as “Baba NaAmai” (Alick Macheso) and “Kujatajata” (DT Bio Mudimba) function as components of the media agenda by foregrounding occult wealth-seeking practices as pressing social concerns. Through widespread circulation and audience engagement, these songs potentially shape public perceptions and moral attitudes towards *hurombwa*, thereby influencing broader social discourses surrounding spirituality, ethics, and wealth accumulation, into the public agenda. Once the agenda is set, it influences public officials’ legislative process (policy agenda). In this case, the music (media agenda) influences the perception of the public, affects the creation of various legislation and debates in the legislature (policy agenda). This is done through what Eichorn & Stacks (2019) term learning (by listeners) about concerns and other topics redundantly covered by the news media with minimal conscious effort.

The Agenda-Setting Theory is, therefore, particularly relevant to this study because it facilitates an understanding of how musical discourse influences public consciousness regarding occult practices in Zimbabwe. The theory also enables the researchers to interrogate how lyrical narratives, metaphors, repetition, and symbolic representations within the selected songs foreground *hurombwa* as a morally contested and socially destructive practice. Furthermore, the theory provides a useful framework for examining how musicians act as cultural intermediaries over public anxieties, shape moral discourse, and construct socially shared meanings concerning spirituality, wealth, and social survival.

Ultimately, the theory strengthens the analytical orientation of the study by demonstrating that music is not merely a form of artistic expression but also a powerful communicative institution capable of shaping public agendas and influencing societal interpretations of critical social issues. Within this framework, the selected songs are analysed not simply as entertainment artefacts, but as agenda-setting texts that participate in broader cultural debates concerning morality, spirituality, socio-economic hardship, and the consequences of occult wealth-seeking practices in contemporary Zimbabwean society.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to interrogate the role of music in setting the social agenda on the dangers of *kuromba* / *hurombwa* (occult wealth-seeking practices) in Zimbabwe. The qualitative paradigm was considered appropriate because the study is concerned with meanings, representations, cultural symbolism, and ideological constructions embedded within musical

discourse rather than with statistical measurement. Qualitative inquiry enables an in-depth exploration of how social realities are constructed, interpreted, and communicated within specific socio-cultural contexts. Flick (2018) argues that qualitative research privileges context, interpretation, and lived meaning, while Ugwu and Eze (2023) observe that it seeks to explain the “why” underlying social phenomena through interpretive engagement with human experiences. In the context of this study, the approach provides an appropriate framework for examining how music mediates public anxieties, moral consciousness, and cultural understandings surrounding occult wealth-seeking practices.

The study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which serves as both a methodological orientation and an analytical framework. CDA is concerned with how language and discourse reproduce, legitimise, contest, or challenge relations of power, ideology, and social meaning (Asghar, 2013). Fairclough’s (2000) three-dimensional model of CDA was adopted because it integrates textual analysis with broader socio-cultural interpretation. The model enables the study to move beyond surface meanings of song lyrics to interrogate the ideological and cultural assumptions embedded within musical narratives. As McGregor (2010) contends, CDA shifts the understanding of language from a neutral communicative tool to a socially situated and ideologically loaded practice. This perspective is particularly significant to the present study because songs addressing *hurombwa* do not merely entertain; they construct moral arguments, evoke communal fears, and shape public perceptions regarding spirituality, wealth, and social legitimacy.

Two *sungura* songs purposively selected for analysis are “Baba NaAmai” by Alick Macheso and “Kujatajata” by DT Bio Mudimba. Purposive sampling was employed because the selected songs explicitly engage themes of occult wealth-seeking, spirituality, greed, morality, and social suffering. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), purposive sampling enables researchers to select information-rich cases that illuminate the phenomenon under investigation. The songs were also selected because of their popularity and sustained circulation through Zimbabwean broadcast and digital media platforms, thereby positioning them as influential agenda-setting texts within the public sphere.

The analysis focused primarily on lyrical content rather than on musical instrumentation or performance aesthetics. Song lyrics were treated as discursive texts capable of communicating social realities, ideological positions, and cultural anxieties. Since portions of the songs are rendered in Shona and

Tonga, the lyrics were translated into English and cited verbatim to preserve contextual authenticity and semantic nuance. Attention was paid to metaphor, symbolism, imagery, repetition, tone, and narrative construction within the songs. Braun and Clarke (2021) argue that close textual engagement enables researchers to identify recurring meanings, thematic patterns, and discursive strategies embedded within communicative texts. In this study, close textual reading facilitated the identification of themes relating to greed, spiritual insecurity, moral decay, fear, family disintegration, and the destructive consequences associated with *hurombwa*.

The analytical process involved repeated listening to the songs, transcription of the lyrics, translation, coding, and thematic interpretation. Through iterative textual engagement, the study examined how the musicians depict, critique, and symbolically reconstruct occult wealth-seeking practices within Zimbabwean society. The analysis also explored how the songs function as communicative instruments that shape public consciousness and reinforce communal moral values. By foregrounding the social consequences of *hurombwa*, the selected songs position music as a culturally embedded form of social commentary and moral intervention.

The methodological approach adopted in this study, therefore, provides an interpretive framework for examining the intersection between music, discourse, morality, and spirituality in contemporary Zimbabwean society. From the CDA perspective, the study demonstrates how popular music functions not merely as entertainment but as a powerful communicative institution capable of shaping public discourse, mediating social anxieties, and contesting socially destructive practices.

Results

“Baba NaAmai”: Alick Macheso’s discursive construction of occult wealth and familial crisis

In “Baba NaAmai,” Alick Macheso deploys music as a form of social commentary to expose the destructive consequences associated with *hurombwa* and occult wealth-seeking practices within Zimbabwean society. The song constructs a deeply troubled domestic space characterised by fear, confusion, spiritual instability, and familial suffering. Through emotionally charged lyrical narratives, Macheso presents the family as a site under siege from invisible yet devastating spiritual forces. He opens the song with a lamentation:

“Baba naamai musha wedu washata, mamhepo awanda hatichaziva zvekuita” (Father and mother, our family home has been overwhelmed by darkness; evil spirits are tormenting us, and we no longer know what to do).

The lyrics immediately establish an atmosphere of spiritual crisis and social disorientation. The invocation of “father and mother” symbolically positions parents as custodians of family stability, morality, and protection. However, the children’s plea simultaneously exposes the apparent inability of parental authority to contain or resolve the destructive effects of occult practices. The family institution, which traditionally functions as a source of security and cohesion within African societies, is depicted as collapsing under the weight of supernatural affliction. Through this representation, Macheso foregrounds the communal and intergenerational consequences of *hurombwa*, transforming a private spiritual issue into a public moral concern, thereby setting an agenda. The amplification of private spiritual issues into the public domain aligns with McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (2014), who hold that agenda-setting occurs as perceptions of the public concerning important issues are influenced by high levels of redundancy in media messages that are churned out to the public. Repeated playing of the song sets the agenda on the consequences of *hurombwa*.

The song further constructs occult wealth-seeking as a hidden yet pervasive threat operating within intimate social spaces. The lyrics narrate experiences of mental illness, unexplained disappearances, and prolonged suffering among family members:

“Tarirai mukoma vave kurwara nepfungwa; sekuru Zanda kutsakatika nenyika” (Look, my brother is now mentally ill, Uncle Zanda has disappeared without a trace).

Through the impressions gleaned from the lyrics, a listener can visualise a brother and Uncle Zanda; Macheso associates *hurombwa* with psychological distress, social fragmentation, and existential insecurity. That aligns with Chang et al. (2017)’s view that the media wield prodigious power to generate and present pictures in the audiences’ heads. In this study, the lyrics create pictures that convey messages to the audiences that set the anti-fetishism agenda. As highlighted by the lyrics, mental illness and mysterious disappearance are symbolically employed to communicate the devastating and uncontrollable nature of occult practices. The song, therefore, constructs the family not merely as victims of misfortune, but as casualties of morally compromised wealth accumulation.

A significant discursive strategy within the song is the use of indirect accusation, commonly referred to in Shona cultural expression as *bembera*. Rather than explicitly identifying the perpetrator, the lyrics cautiously appeal to whoever introduced the goblin or spiritual force into the household:

"Kana paine akashinhwa akaromba chikwambo ngaabude pachena chidzorerwe kumwene wacho." (If there is anyone who acquired a goblin, let them come forward and return it to its owner).

The indirect reference popularly known as *kurova bembera* depicts someone raising issues indirectly without pointing at a particular person, to maintain secrecy, fear, and social sensitivity in discussions of occult practices within Zimbabwe. Reference to the word's *kana paine* (if there is anyone) brings out the reality of *hurombwa*; however, due to fear and secrecy around it, the singer does not point to or name the perpetrator even if he knows them. The song simultaneously condemns the practice while avoiding confrontation, thereby mirroring broader communal anxieties associated with exposing perpetrators of *hurombwa*. The lyrics unearth the fear connected to occult wealth seeking practice as it is associated with death, offering relatives as sacrifices and various misfortunes. This sets an agenda that everyone involved in fetishism should come clean and be helped in returning it and cleansed to free the family.

Macheso's discourse further frames occult wealth-seeking as inherently selfish and destructive. The lyrics suggest that individuals who engage in *hurombwa* prioritise material accumulation over the wellbeing of their relatives and communities. The song implies that perpetrators remain indifferent to the suffering experienced by family members as long as wealth and social status are maintained. In this regard, *hurombwa* is represented not only as a spiritual transgression but also as a moral failure characterised by greed, betrayal, and the erosion of communal ethics.

The repeated call "*chikwambo dzorerai*" (return the goblin) functions as both a warning and a moral appeal. It reveals an element of fear, where relatives want the goblin returned so that they become free. Discursively, the phrase operates as an agenda-setting refrain that reinforces the song's central message: occult wealth-seeking practices generate suffering and must be rejected. The repetition intensifies the urgency of the warning while positioning the musician as a cultural mediator seeking to restore social and spiritual order. Repeating the phrase "*chikwambo dzorerai*" is part of the agenda-setting process. McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (2014): The continuous repetition of the phrase brings with it

emphasis and, at the same time, makes it salient, thereby setting the agenda that the goblin has to be returned. It reveals that returning the goblin is an important effort against anti-fetishism to free the family and the society. The song therefore transcends entertainment by functioning as a form of public pedagogy aimed at educating audiences about the perceived dangers of fetishism and supernatural wealth accumulation.

Macheso further amplifies communal anxiety through rhetorical questioning: “*Angava aniko ave kutipedzesa?*” (Who could be trying to destroy us?) The uncertainty embedded within these questions reflects the paranoia and suspicion often associated with occult discourse in African societies. The enemy is imagined as internal rather than external, possibly residing within the family itself. Such representation destabilises trust within kinship structures and reveals how occult wealth-seeking practices are believed to fracture social cohesion and communal solidarity.

The concluding lamentation, “*Chondofira chiiko ini? Chotofira ka isu?*” (Why am I dying? Why are we dying?) encapsulates the emotional and existential anguish permeating the song. The repeated questioning symbolises helplessness, victimhood, and the search for justice within a spiritually compromised environment. Through this emotional closure, Macheso positions the victims of *hurombwa* as innocent sufferers trapped within systems of hidden spiritual violence.

Beyond the lyrical text itself, Macheso’s broader public discourse reinforces the anti-occult agenda embedded within the song. During live performances, the musician frequently condemns the use of *mishonga* (magic) and advocates hard work as the legitimate route to success. Such statements strengthen the ideological orientation of the song by positioning labour, perseverance, and ethical conduct in opposition to spiritually mediated wealth accumulation. Consequently, “*Baba NaAmai*” functions as an agenda-setting cultural text that critiques greed, exposes the social costs of occult practices, and reinforces communal moral values within contemporary Zimbabwean society. The song connects world events and the images in the minds of the public (Eichorn & Stacks 2019). Valenzuela (2019: 6) argues that “McCombs and colleagues saw the media as a conduit by which real-world problems can be addressed by policymakers and audiences.” This implies that *Baba NaAmai* delves into social issues on *hurombwa* to seek redress from society and policymakers. The song sets the anti-fetishism agenda by catapulting the social anomaly into salience by

evoking imaginations, debates and the search for answers in a society bedevilled by economic quagmire necessitating a search for fetishism.

“Kujatajata”: Mudimba’s musical critique of fetishism and occult wealth-seeking

In “Kujatajata,” Mudimba constructs a powerful anti-fetishism discourse that exposes the social, spiritual, and intergenerational consequences of occult wealth-seeking practices. With the study of meanings from both Shona and Tonga lyrics, the song positions *kujatajata*, a colloquial expression associated with *kuromba* and fetishism, as a destructive and morally corrosive practice that threatens family cohesion, social harmony, and communal wellbeing. From the outset, the song frames occult wealth-seeking as a secretive and socially condemned phenomenon often practised discreetly because of fear of public stigma and moral rejection.

Mudimba presents fetishism as a spiritually dangerous practice governed by strict ritual obligations and conditions commonly referred to as *mhiko*. With that, the singer informs an agenda that fetishism is a spiritually dangerous practice that pivots on *mhiko* where users strictly follow or succumb to reprisals. As Ndati (2022) articulates, agenda setting is the practice of the mass media to highlight certain concerns more than others, often enough for huge segments of the public to begin to believe that such issues are more important than others. Through highlighting the dangers of *hurombwa*, listeners see the importance and embrace it as an important element in their lives. The audience is influenced to hold that *hurombwa* is dangerous and that it is despicable. The song alludes to bizarre behavioural expectations imposed upon practitioners, including sleeping restrictions, ritual sacrifices, and social isolation. Through these references, the musician portrays occult wealth-seeking as dehumanising and psychologically imprisoning. The discourse constructed within the song suggests that although *hurombwa* may promise material success, it simultaneously erodes human dignity, morality, and social relationships.

A striking feature of the song is its use of familial dialogue to introduce the sensitive subject of occult practices. The narrator, depicted as a hesitant child, cautiously approaches the parents with a troubling concern:

“Baba na mai ndauyawo ndine nyaya” (Father and mother, I have come with an issue)

“Mundiregerere inosiririsa kwazvo” (Please forgive me because it is disturbing)

“Ndichaitaura chero ndiri mwana” (I will say it even if I am a child)

“Asi ndotyia kuti pamwe ndingazotanda botso” (But I am afraid I might be punished)

The careful and apologetic tone reflects the fear and cultural sensitivity surrounding accusations of fetishism within African families. The child further pleads, “*Mundiregerere inosiririsa kwazvo*” (Forgive me, it is a very painful matter), revealing the emotional weight and social danger associated with raising such issues.

The song’s discourse is embedded in Tonga; it resonates with Shona cultural values relating to parental respect and family hierarchy. Mudimba invokes the concept of *kutanda botso*, as he sings in Shona to refer to severe ritual punishment associated with offending or humiliating one’s mother. By referencing this cultural practice, the song demonstrates the extent to which discussions of occult practices are constrained by fear of social and spiritual repercussions. The narrator’s hesitation therefore symbolises broader communal anxieties surrounding the exposure of hidden spiritual wrongdoing within families. Unmasking evil doings defines the agenda-setting process, where issues that were once esoteric are brought into salience. This is what Valenzuela (2019) says: the agenda-setting hypothesis looks at how public opinion is shaped by the media and how this affects the public agenda. The members of society are more concerned with the public agenda. This song pushes and shapes public opinion on community concerns about covert spiritual misconduct in families as an anti-fetishism agenda.

Mudimba further presents spirituality as the primary avenue through which families seek solutions to occult-related suffering. The song reveals that family members consult apostolic churches and spiritual healers in search of answers regarding the mysterious misfortunes affecting them. The lyrics state:

“Vechurch dzemweya varikutiti bvunzai baba venyu” (Those from the spiritual churches are telling us to ask your father).

Spiritual authorities are positioned as mediators capable of uncovering hidden truths and identifying the source of suffering within the family. The song, therefore, reflects the enduring significance of spiritual institutions within Zimbabwean communities when dealing with supernatural anxieties.

The narrative intensifies when the song traces the family’s suffering to ancestral involvement in fetishism:

“Ambuya vanonzi vanga vakaromba makona” (Grandmother was said to have practised fetishism).

Through this revelation, Mudimba focuses on the intergenerational dimension of *hurombwa*. The song suggests that occult practices transcend individual perpetrators and continue haunting descendants long after the original practitioners have died. This representation reinforces communal beliefs that spiritually mediated wealth carries lasting consequences capable of affecting future generations.

The destructive social consequences associated with *hurombwa* are further emphasised through narratives of poverty, suffering, infertility, and failed marriages. The song laments that fetishism has brought “*kusawirirana pamba*” (disunity within the home), resulting in endless suffering and emotional distress. Mudimba uses examples such as unmarried women and childlessness to symbolise the social misfortunes believed to accompany occult practices. Through the Tonga lyrics concerning Salia and Jole, the song illustrates how innocent family members become victims of the spiritual consequences associated with greed-driven wealth accumulation.

A particularly powerful aspect of the song is its emphasis on intergenerational accountability. Mudimba repeatedly warns that the actions of parents inevitably affect future generations:

“*Kujatajata minsamu nkutuchita mataata twayinka swebo te twajonga bana*” (*The acquiring of fetishes by fathers affects children after the fathers are gone*).

The same warning is extended to mothers, reinforcing the argument that fetishism is not gender-specific. The discourse constructed here positions occult wealth-seeking as a selfish practice whose consequences outlive the immediate beneficiaries and become burdens inherited by descendants. The repetition of the above verse brings emphasis that propels the message into salience and the anti-fetishism agenda. This concurs with Valenzuela (2019)’s assertion that the agenda-setting effect denotes the capacity of journalists (in this case, musicians) to determine which challenges, aspects of these challenges, and people connected to these are regarded with critical importance. Reiterating the phrase that acquiring fetishes by fathers affects children after the fathers are gone sets the agenda on trans-generational dangers and effects of *hurombwa*. The text sets an agenda that fetishism has long-lasting effects on the family; hence, it should be avoided. This also instils fear in perpetrators to desist from practising it, especially since it destroys future generations.

The song also critiques the desperation associated with the pursuit of wealth:

“Skimbo wakakulya minsamu akuyanda” (Skimbo had to take concoctions for the love of money)

“Skimbo wakachiwule domba akuyanda cash” (Skimbo bought a goblin for the love of cash)

“Bafana bakamu robber loko akuyanda mali” (The young people robbed him due to his love for money)

“Ban’anza bakamu robber loko akuyanda mali” (Traditional healers robbed him due to his love for money)

“Ban’anza bamubingila bbondo akuyanda cash” (Traditional healers robbed him because of his love for cash)

Through the story of Skimbo, Mudimba exposes the extremes to which individuals may go in search of riches. Skimbo is depicted consuming traditional concoctions and nearly purchasing goblins because he is obsessed with money. The narrative constructs greed as a dangerous force capable of pushing individuals towards spiritual exploitation, deception, and self-destruction.

In addition, Mudimba critiques fraudulent traditional healers and opportunists who exploit vulnerable individuals seeking quick wealth. The song reveals how Skimbo is robbed by fake spiritual practitioners who manipulate his desperation for financial gain. Through this representation, the musician broadens his critique beyond fetishism itself to include the commercialisation of spiritual insecurity and the exploitation of economically desperate populations. The song, therefore, exposes how economic hardships create fertile ground for manipulation, deception, and spiritual abuse. Exposure to the issues above sets the agenda about how people get duped of their hard-earned cash through acquiring goblins to enhance wealth creation. The repeated lyrics in the song bring the cultivation effect in listeners, whereby, repeated listening to the same words becomes etched into their minds. Lyrics that continue ringing in listeners’ minds influence what they think about, a phenomenon that is agenda setting.

Discursively, “Kujatajata” functions as both a warning and a moral intervention. Sung in both Shona and Tonga, the song deliberately broadens its communicative reach and cultural resonance within Zimbabwe’s multilingual society. By combining storytelling, emotional appeal, cultural symbolism, and moral instruction, Mudimba transforms music into an agenda-setting platform that educates audiences about the dangers associated with occult wealth-seeking practices. The song ultimately argues that wealth acquired through spiritually

questionable means carries devastating social, emotional, and generational consequences that outweigh any temporary material benefits.

Viewpoints

The story from the two songs attests to the existence of unbelievable social realities that subsist in the spirit world. The two sungura songs set an agenda with underlying warnings to those who acquire “*zvikwambo*” (goblins), because “*zvinopedze dzinza*” (they can wipe out a people). The above implies that engaging fetishes for wealth and fortune seeking can incur misfortunes that kill innocent people among present and future generations. The songs reveal that when users of *hurombwa* die, someone in the family will inherit the fetishism and continue to cause calamities to others; hence the call, “*dzorerai*” (return to the supplier), according to Macheso. Mudimba suggests seeking spiritual help to avert the problem of goblins. Paradoxically, returning *hurombwa* to the supplier may attract misfortunes as much as keeping them.

The alluded reality means that danger remains looming in affected families and society. Mudimba reveals that *hurombwa* affects people who do not know anything about using fetishes. An old grandmother engages in a ritual to seek wealth, and her grandchildren suffer long after she dies. Mudimba’s agenda is to seek resolution through the spiritual churches to align with Macheso, who insists on returning evil powers. The fear of reprisals after returning *hurombwa* lingers in the minds of people, and in such cases, they elect to keep them furtive and die with them. Mudimba reveals that expeditions of seeking wealth through fetishes are real, but few people dare to challenge the users. In Zimbabwe, the Witchcraft Suppression Act bars the courts from prosecuting suspected users of *hurombwa*, and, as a result, society is open to witchcraft attacks. The affected resort to spiritual help even though the help may not be guaranteed. Some users of *hurombwa* encrypt their *modus operandi* from the rest of the people. People remain secretive about *hurombwa* matters to avoid getting victimised, and the problems are difficult to solve. In *Kujatajata* the progeny suffer because of the effect of fetishes that belonged to their dead progenitor whom they never knew. In *Baba NaAmai*, the children do not know who is threatening to wipe out the whole clan. Some families break up due to alleged goblin attacks; others relocate to places where they are not known to avoid being victimised. Due to evil attacks, some children disown their parents and vice versa, accusing each other of witchcraft in that way, families are destroyed. Macheso’s and Mudimba’s songs are listened to by many through the radio stations and social

media platforms; hence, they play a journalistic role in propagating the agenda against the acquisition and use of goblins. Both songs warn members of society who claim to wield powers that can enable people to acquire wealth. The majority population in Zimbabwe understands Shona; hence, its use cements the fact that music plays a critical role in agenda setting for both Macheso and Mudimba's songs. The paper reveals that *hurombwa* can trigger misfortunes for members of families and society; hence, people should eschew the use of evil powers to gain wealth. Macheso and Mudimba sing about such furtive and esoteric issues to inform on realities of life and empower them on dealing with such problems when they arise.

Conclusion

The study reveals that popular music wields some journalistic influence and function, Mano (2007; 2010), to set agendas on topical issues that affect society. The selected songs, "Baba naamai" and Mudimba "Kujatajata" enlighten society on the dangers of acquiring charms, *juju*, in occult wealth-seeking practices *kuromba*. The songs push an anti-fetishism agenda as they tackle the consequences and negative effects of *hurombwa* that families, society and the coming generations end up suffering from. In particular, the song "Kujatajata" highlights the dangers of falling into the traps of scammers who masquerade as spiritualists to magically empower people to amass wealth. In the end, they rob people of their hard-earned cash and other valuable property, such as cattle, in the get-rich schemes.

Macheso's song complements the same agenda with concerted emphasis to implore people to refrain from using *hurombwa*. He calls on perpetrators to return all the fetishes to the supplier to bring a stop to the incessant suffering caused by goblins' attacks. The agenda set in this paper is meant to fix the problems associated with goblins and free people from untold suffering. Combined, the songs advance an agenda that urges society to avoid consulting suppliers of fetishes and live freely. Instead of embarking on fetishism to get wealth, people are implored to detest shortcuts to get rich; instead, they should work hard. In their pursuit of prosperity, the Shona and Tonga people embrace hard work as a clean and expected *modus operandi*. Further studies that cut across genres may be necessary to come up with different thrusts of music journalism.

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