Wakasikirei Satani? Christian subversion in sungura discourse‡

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Abstract: The paper explores a unique type of theological discourse, discursively constructed through Zimbabwe's sungura music that cannot be properly accounted for by existing theoretically definitions of gospel music. It is argued that this brand of religious discourse is a protest one which owes its character to the influence of Traditional African Religions (ATRs) that are practised in the country. The result of this dialogue between aspects of Christian theology and ATR is a brand of music that is perceived to be subverting the conventional understanding of gospel music. The paper argues that elements of subversion in Sungura discourse evolve around questions of divine benevolence, earthly rewards, justice and individuality as they manifest in Christianity. There is an eagerness, among critics, to focus on conventional gospel music while paying less heed to musical discourses which speak to Christianity in dialogic ways characterised by seeming contradictions. This paper addresses this hiatus. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to explore the link between language and the practice of power through language. Analysis of songs is made within the naturalisation-neutralisation distinction framework in which discourse is employed with a view of either accepting or refuting/protesting against the existing relations of power. Thus, CDA is employed to explore how the subject positions themselves in relation to God.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Hugh Mangeya, PhD, is a lecturer in the English and Communication Department, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. His major research interest lies on how African culture lends itself in contemporary Zimbabwean discursive practices. Most of the research on this subject has been predominantly on the analysis of how the social practice of Zimbabwean urban graffiti, mainly that produced by students of various levels, has been shaped by sociocultural factors. The main research premise is that these discursive practices, such as urban graffiti in particular, are not random acts of language. They are in fact systematic—based on specific cultural parameters which can then be used to unpack them. It is from this perspective that the present study was conceived; music is socioculturally situated. The research explores the discursive negotiation of that occurs when ATR and Christianity come into contact. That is, just as in graffiti, there is need to understand African Christian theology from a cultural perspective.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The paper is based on the premise that there is no single way of understanding gospel music. Gospel music has been hitherto approached from a one-dimensional way. It calls an inclusive approach that also considers music genres that have been otherwise regarded as secular and are therefore incapable of grappling with such issues. The paper explores how elements from African Traditional Religions (ATR) find themselves in the discursive negotiation of Christian issues in sungura music. The result is a hybrid African Christian model expressed in African thought forms. Sungura Christian discourses however provide a framework for appreciating contemporary Christians who have not totally abandoned their African culture. Thus, sungura gospel cannot really be exhausted within the conventional understanding of gospel music. This therefore calls for a theoretical review of the term "Gospel" as existing ones cannot be effectively used in appreciating all discursive gospel music.

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The paper explores how *Sungura,* contributes towards a holistic understanding of the Christian theological experience in Zimbabwe's sociocultural terrain. Sungura is a genre of music that is mainly conceptualised as inherently or exclusively secular in Zimbabwe. Most maximalist, and even some minimalist theoretical conceptualisation of gospel do not recognise what is otherwise regarded as unconventional gospel discourses. The paper argues that in any given sociocultural context, the Christian theology that ends up being practised is a product of the compromise that takes place between the new religion and existing local/indigenous ones. The Zimbabwean context is one such situation whereby the new Christian religion underwent some form of hybridisation with the local African Traditional Religions resulting in a form of theology that is neither "pure" Christianity nor ATR.

Sungura music offers a discourse in which this theological negotiation can be better appreciated.

1. Introduction

Discourses, for du Gay (1996), enable the discussion of particular topics in specific conventional ways. *Sungura* music provides linguistic ways through which artists engage with theological problems in society. However, like any genre, *Sungura* music does not provide a conventional and unified arena for engagement with theological issues. There are many types and, therefore, interpretations of what a theological Sungura discourse entails. Broadly, there are three strands of theological Sungura songs: the Christian-informed *Sungura,* the African Traditional Religion (ATR)-informed Sungura and a Sungura informed by both Christianity and ATR. This paper focuses on a specific form of discourse constructed by Zimbabwean *sungura* musicians that has resulted from the fusion of dominant Christian religious discourses with elements from ATR. This fusion has occasioned the subversion of Christianity one is most likely to encounter in a number of *Sungura* songs.

Eyre's (2001), Chitando's (2002c) and Malembe's (2005) accommodate Sungura discourse within the genre of Gospel music, arguing for two broad traditions of gospel music. These are the dominant, mainstream, music produced largely by self-styled Christian musicians and the less conventional tradition that is mainly a product of popular music artists, Sungura artists included, who record Gospel music on a part-time basis. The former, which has been predominantly defined in relation to the artist involved, can be perceived as the more hegemonic type of discourse whilst the latter can be taken as a more subversive and counter discourse. The paper argues that the latter category has evolved from a quintessential Christian genre to a hybrid form that fuses Christian principles with discursive components from ATR. This produces an alternative Christian religious discourse which carries with it subversive elements whose roots or origins can be traced in ATR. It is the objective of this paper to identify these elements as they occur in the language used in selected songs. The songs whose lyrics will be considered are mainly from popular music artists such as Biggie Tembo, System Tazvida, Leonard Zhakata, Leonard Dembo and Cephas Mashakada. Elements of subversion in what is in this paper referred to as *sungura* gospel music come out mainly through questions evolving around benevolence, earthly reward, prayer, justice and individualism in Christianity. A critical discourse analysis approach, which considers discourse a social practice, will be used to explore these issues. The paper argues that influences of ATR govern the subversion of Christianity in Sungura discourse. The research, therefore, enables a much more holistic appreciation of the "shifts and borrowings in the terrain of religion [as well as religious discourses]" (Chitando, 2002b, p. 7).

Sungura music is not inherently subversive. What is taken to be "pure" or "legitimate" (hegemonic) gospel music has a significantly different orientation to the engagement with theological issues compared to that taken by artists who grapple with the same issues from the perceived part-time basis of *sungura* music. Artists who sing from the perceived "legitimate" hegemonic perspective are

highly constrained by conventional expectations of the genre. This is not necessarily the case for the artists within sungura, who may not even regard themselves as gospel musicians in the strict sense of the word. Indeed, their audiences may also be reluctant to perceive them as such. However, it is their engagement with theological issues that necessitates an analysis of how they treat such issues, especially in comparison to the treatment of the same issues by mainstream gospel musicians. The major argument is that it is rather narrow to continue to be one-dimensional in our definition and treatment of the term "gospel".

The introduction of Christianity in most African countries brought along an alternate religious discourse which sought to dominate existing discourses informed and underlain by African Traditional Religions. Christian converts were expected to totally renounce their previous heathen religion and wholly embrace the new religious dispensation. Such religious transformation manifested in a variety of ways. Discourse is only but one such instance. Dominant Christian religious discourses did not therefore reflect the incorporation of elements from traditional African cultures as is done Zimbabwean sungura musicians who engage with Christian issues. This negotiated approach to Christian theology can be attributed to what the musicians may regard as a problem of presence, to borrow from Engelke (2007). Following du Gay's (1996) argument that discourse provides ways of speaking about a particular topic, the discourse employed by Zimbabwean sungura as they grapple with theological issues can be read as a manifestation of one of the many ways in which the acceptance of Christianity by a significant portion of Africans was not without its struggles, which can then be taken as a clash of cultures (Zvobgo, 1986). The resulting negotiated theology is a strategy employed to enable the individual to discard their perceived weak standing and ensure complete religious "freedom, power and authority" (Perez-Romero, 1994, p. 116). It is from this negotiated perspective that Zimbabwean sungura theological music can be regarded as a subversion of the expectations of hegemonic Christian religious discourses.

Chitando (2002b) rightly acknowledges the incorporation of aspects of traditional culture such as language and traditional instruments by gospel artists into their music. He does not, however, go on to investigate how language itself can encode aspects from ATRs and how these aspects can find their way in music that can be regarded as belonging to the genre of gospel. The term "gospel music" is generally difficult to define from a minimalist perspective. A number of researchers, including Chitando (2002a), have cited the fluid nature of this genre, thereby leading to the general difficulty in defining it. In spite of this problematic nature of defining the term gospel music, the research adopts Chitando's (2002b) perspective which takes a textual rather than a music type approach. That is, gospel music is taken to refer to music that grapples with Christian or biblical issues. In Zimbabwe, gospel music has appeared as a genre in its own right, but more often under the rubric of other, broader, musical genres which include *sungura*, urban grooves, reggae and rhythm and blues. This paper focuses on a marginalised type of gospel music; precisely, gospel music from predominantly *sungura* (a type of Zimbabwean music genre) artists who are not really taken as "serious" gospel artists by the general public in Zimbabwe. The paper argues that through the use of discursive elements from ATR, this type of gospel music is able to invoke an empowering edge that provides the listener with agency within Christianity. Discursive practices in this kind of theological discourse tend to move away from the conventional *Mwari ndiye anoziva* (God [is the only one who] knows), to the militant. The link between the more assertive or agentive gospel music and traditional culture can be established by drawing parallels between Zimbabwean gospel lyrics and traditional religious poetry.

2. Defining gospel music

As observed by Chitando (2002b, 2002c) and Eyre (2001), defining gospel music is not only a very problematic process. It is also a controversial exercise. A number of definitions have been proffered thereby resulting in both narrow (minimalist) and broad (maximalist) appreciation of gospel music. Eyre (2001, p. 96), on the one hand, narrowly defines Zimbabwean gospel music as the simple productions "featuring electric keyboards and drum machines, avoiding altogether the tonalities of Shona music and the giddy, free-wheeling guitar work of *sungura*. Gospel music represents a refuge

from all that". Basing narrowly on form alone, Malembe (2005) actually goes on to distinguish between "Christian" and "gospel" music based on ethnic/racial factors. The former is employed in reference to Christian music produced by white musicians whilst the latter is produced by black musicians. The two are distinguished mainly by the rhythm of the music. There is however little effort to unravel the influence of the black musicians' former religion in the rhythmic differences. According to Eyre's (2001) and Malembe's (2005) definitions, gospel music is characterised mainly by its beat or rhythm. Approaching gospel music in this way ignores the fusion of elements from traditional culture and the influence of other music genres in the production of gospel music. Such a characterisation of gospel music tends to discount some established Zimbabwean gospel artists such as Elias Musakwa, Charles Charamba and Olivia Charamba whose beat is relatively fast.

Chitando (2002c, p. 89), on the other hand, adopts a much broader perspective by defining gospel music "… that utilizes Christian theological ideas". It is generally agreed that gospel music should engage with themes premised on the account of Christ's life and teachings as in the Bible, and on the doctrines of the Christian religion (Malembe, 2005). For Johnson (2009), it is from this perspective that gospel music is saliently marked by an overt expression of emotion in the engagement of individual and/or communal religious experiences within a collective predicament. It is this definition which is adopted in this paper since it is more inclusive and more or less captures the Zimbabwean gospel music terrain. Unlike in the definitions by Eyre (2001) and Malembe (2005), this definition does not exclude some songs on aesthetic grounds. Rather, it rightfully concentrates on the textual factor and categorises gospel music on thematic grounds. Chitando (2002b, p. 56) makes the observation that "the success enjoyed by the more gospel music in the 1990s saw a number of groups either diverting from *sungura* to gospel music, or recording some gospel albums alongside their traditional type". This paper focuses mainly on the latter group that has recorded songs that make reference to Christianity. Of major interest is how this group of musicians has constructed a religious discourse with traces of traditional culture.

3. Theoretical issues on religion

It is worth noting that most gospel music in Zimbabwe is mainly characterised by a complete break with traditional African culture (Chitando, 2002b). According to this perspective, gospel music in Zimbabwe has its roots wholly in the Christian religion whereby it is generally considered a medium through which only Christian principles are mediated, making it inseparable from the Christian ethos. As a result, analysis of the gospel music genre has been predominantly done without regard to any possible linkages with elements from ATR. Researchers have mainly understood "'conversion' in terms of radical discontinuity between the 'old' and 'new' worldviews" (Chitando, 2002b, p. 64). However, Mbiti argues that before the advent of Christianity African people had already founded religions. These religions, commonly referred to by the term African Traditional Religion (ATR), came into existence from what people think of the universe and how they solve the mysteries of nature (Mufungizi, 2012). As Mbiti (1975) observes, religious piety was and is still very evident in sub-Saharan Africa. The introduction of Christianity was therefore done to a people who already had very strong and vibrant religious systems of their own. There is need to appreciate the fact that the Christianity that reached sub-Saharan Africa had itself undergone several stages of in-culturation having adopted some Graeco-Roman, as well as pagan European elements, leading it to become distinctly European. Consequently, Hood (1998) is not off the mark in making the observation that to most Christians in the African context God is Greek. This captures the way most African Christians think about God intellectually and the way they talk about Him theologically. It follows that God can therefore be given an ethnic character by the culture in which Christianity is practised. The Christian religion was, therefore, inflected with a distinct Western character. This is coupled with the fact that the Christian Church approached the traditional religion with a theology of discontinuity whereby it sought to destroy the old religion completely. This heightened the conflict that arose as a result of the meeting between the two cultures. Converts to Christianity were expected to abandon their old religions and take up the new religion. As a result, the adoption of a new religious dispensation demanded that converts make a paradigm shift from the African traditional religious worldview to another. This also meant entering a new community of discourse with its fixed and rigid boundaries.

In spite of the many years of negative propaganda against ATR by the Church, most people in Zimbabwe did not totally abandon its values, method of practice and discourse in favour of the new religion. Indeed most converts of Christianity kept some elements of their old religion. This has given rise to a situation whereby most people do not see the two religions as mutually exclusive. The outcome is a kind of hybridisation whereby two conflicting cultures exist side by side in continual dialogue. This paper interrogates the nature of discursive practices that arise in this situation whereby a convert to Christianity is also a simultaneous practitioner of ATR. Chitando (2002b) argues that through gospel music individuals whose discursive identity is sorely shaped by a Christian worldview generally can be differentiated from those whose discourse is controlled by a different worldview or ideology, namely African Traditional Religions. Being faced with two totally different religious worldviews, the African had to make at least three fundamental choices. That is, either to totally ignore the new Christian religious order and practise ATR exclusively, to totally abandon ATR and practise exclusive Christianity or to take elements from both religions and end up with various hybrid forms of the two religions. It is apparent that that the latter presents potentially limitless manifestations in actual practice—depending on which religion is made dominant.

Whilst it is possible to focus on the lived religious experiences of the latter case, the present research concentrates on the discursive realisation of this phenomenon by *sungura* music artists. It is submitted that the artists infuse theological and philosophical elements of ATR in their engagement with Christian theological issues and topics. The manifestation of ATR in this alternative Christian worldview represents a discursive negotiation where theological elements from both worldview have to coexist, in different levels, thereby creating a unique religious ideology that is neither purely Christian nor purely ATR. Thus, it is not supposed to be difficult to locate the discourse of the Christian convert. There are "ideal" or "pure" Christian converts who speak in the "conventional Christian way". There also exists the "more pragmatic" Christian who has not totally embraced the new religion, whether consciously or subconsciously. This type of Christian manifests traces of ATR in their religious practices. Such a Christian has been referred to in the literature as the African Christian (Sarpong, undated). To this African Christian, faith goes through an assimilative process whereby the individual picks up parts of the Christian faith and, at the same time, dropped parts of their own religion that were no longer able to fulfil their purpose resulting in a form of Christianity that is African.

Ezeugo (1998) states that, "Given the oral tradition that forms the background of these African Christians and the literary tradition that the Bible represent, the question of the relationship between the Bible and culture in African Christianity becomes an intriguing one". Of particular interest is how discourse is shaped in a tradition that is informed and shaped by two competing traditions. Ezeugo (1998) goes on to give two main models on which the two traditions can relate with each other; that is, the dialectic and dialogic models. In the former model, Christianity and traditional culture (ATR) are antagonistic and their perpetual conflict produces a relationship of polarity. In the dialogic model the two traditions integrate and end up being compatible, a situation whereby "culture and gospel blend harmoniously. They could dialogue, and such a dialogue would result in their mutual enrichment and efficiency". It is in such a situation, that both systems of thinking can be observed parallel to each other. Given the fluidity of discourse, the research is interested in how, in dialogic situations, discourse is shaped to reflect the coexistence of the two traditions. That is, how discursive practices are indicative of ATR merging with Christianity to come up with a type of Christianity that can be regarded to be most suited for the African Christian. In this African Christian model, theology is expressed and understood in African thought forms. Given that the entry point into Christianity is ATR, the paper argues that it therefore follows those aspects of ATR manifested in the discursive practices of African Christianity in Zimbabwe.

When aspects from ATR find their way into conventional gospel music, subversion is inevitable. Such subversion can take place in a number of different, but related, ways. What characterises most of the texts resulting from the merger is a demand that Christianity should be of immediate utility to the practitioners, thereby providing the texts with subversive overtones.

Chitando ([2002a, 2002b](#)) points to the link between gospel music and the socio-political environment in Zimbabwe. In the former text, Chitando reveals how religious discourse, especially the songs, has been subverted by politicians to legitimise the authority of the leaders of the two main political parties in Zimbabwe, that is Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai of ZANU (PF) and MDC-T, respectively. The article reveals the creative interaction that obtains between the political and religious discourses as epitomised by slogans, songs and pronouncements. Parsitau ([2008](#), p. 55) also "focuses on the role of gospel music and dance as a mobilising factor for socio-political change and reform" in Kenya. Gospel music cannot therefore be regarded as "innocent"—it is intrinsically linked to the socio-political and cultural milieu in which it is practised. Chitando ([2002b](#)) explores the link between Zimbabwean gospel music and other music genres, local and international, and traditional culture in general. With regard to the former, he reveals how gospel music borrows its beat and style from diverse music genres such as the traditional mbira (Ephat Mujuru), sungura music (Charles Charamba), country music (Jordan Chataika) and soukous (Pastor Bandimba). With regards to the latter, Chitando observes how gospel musicians have shown their loyalty to traditional culture through the employment of indigenous languages and a wide array of traditional music instruments. He goes on to rightfully conclude that it is therefore erroneous to conclude that gospel music is a complete betrayal of African identity as it has carried forth some aspects from the past. Although Chitando ([2002b](#)) and Parsitau ([2008](#)) highlight the permeability of gospel music to external influences, they do not explore the link between discursive aspects of ATR and gospel music. The existence of both African Initiated churches and African Independent churches in Africa necessitate an investigation of the relationship between Christianity and ATR. Investigating how aspects of ATR have been incorporated in mainstream Zimbabwean gospel music reveals the extent to which "the Christian faith clothes itself in different cultural garments" (Walls, [2010](#), p. 148).

4. Subversive elements in *sungura* Christian religious discourses

Mhiripiri ([2011](#)) and Muranda and Maguraushe ([2014](#)) clearly distinguish between gospel and *sungura* music. They all locate the latter within Zimbabwe's traditional culture where it is influenced by such traditional music genres as *mbende, mhande, jiti, shangara* and *tsavatsava*, among others (Muranda and Maguraushe, [2014](#)). The link between these traditional music genres and traditional religious practices cannot be overemphasised. Resultantly, when *sungura* musicians, who are by nature regarded as secular musicians in Zimbabwe, venture into gospel-oriented songs, discursive elements from ATR are bound to manifest in them. A salient characteristic of the sungura-based gospel music is the distinct African traditional outline in the interpretation of the theological issues. That is, traditional theological conceptions about the nature of God and His relationships with both the living and dead.

Subversion *sungura*-based gospel music by elements from ATR takes place in a number of different, but related, ways. In Biggie Tembo's song *Wakasikirei Satani?* (Why did you create Satan?) the benevolence of God is called into question. Benevolence is an attribute of goodness that compels God to act in the best interest of the people. The lyrics, in example (1) read:

1. *Iwe Mwari tinokutenda muzvose tichikushora mukusika Satani*

   Wakasika rufu, sei rwusingaurai Satan mutadzi mukuru wepano pasi?

   (God we praise you for everything while blaming you for creating Satan

   You created death why does it [death] not kill Satan the greatest sinner of this world?)

It is apparent that the text is, on one hand, recognising that God is very powerful (omnipotent) as evidenced by His creation of the great phenomenon that is death. On the other hand, the persona is baffled by the fact that Satan seems immune to death itself. Implied in the text is the fact that nothing, except God, is immune to death. It is therefore within God's power to unleash death on Satan, who is perceived as the greatest sinner. This may come from the characterisation of Satan as the greatest sinner by most Christians. It is, therefore, in the best interest of everyone for Satan to be eliminated as it removes them from the "yoke of sin". Though it is granted that one may raise the

argument that it is up to the convert to refrain from sin, the text questions the overall goodness of God in doing what is clearly best for the people. The lyrics go on to question the wisdom of God's creation by noting;

2. *Wakatipa waini saka ndiwe unodhakwa.*

   (You gave us wine so you are the drunkard).

Of particular interest from example (2) is the song's reference to God as a drunkard. In Zimbabwe, and indeed in almost every society, drunkenness is a mark of irresponsibility and a lack of restraint. Clearly, the song lessens the moral obligation of the individual towards the social problem of drunkenness and all its related ills and makes it the sole responsibility of God. Ultimately, the song questions God's wisdom in creating social ills or elements that may cause man to sin. By so doing it the song relieves humans from the responsibility of trying to be upright in a world with difficult situations where they are apparently destined to fail. Thus, Christianity and the expectations of God are impossible to meet since man is operating in a field inherently designed for his demise. The song seems to suggest that man is destined to fail; and will, therefore, live in perpetual sin. Resultantly, man can only be as holy to the extent which is only permitted by his condition. This depiction subverts the Christian perception of God who, in His wisdom, knows all and always does what is best for man.

It is important to note that parallels can be found in religious poetry whereby practitioners of ATR can question why the creator is oblivious of the people's plight. Such is the relationship obtaining in the ATR perception of God and His relationship with the people that it is normal for someone to say:

3. *Ko iwe baba wedu kwauriko wakapfukirwa neiko?*

   Chokutadzisa kuzotitarisa.(Hodza, 1977, p. 15)

   (What avenging spirit are you fighting

   That is stopping you to come and attend to us)

The text above implies that the creator can only fail to protect the people only in cases whereby they are protecting themselves. It is this acknowledgement which then gives practitioners of ATR the right to petition God, through the ancestors, to be protected and attended to by the creator and that he/she is in a position to legitimately question the wisdom of God's choices.

The notion of Christianity as an impractical religion, one in which the individual is destined for hell, is echoed by Cephas Mashakada in the song "Kunamata ndaida" (I wanted to pray/to be a christian), in example 4 when he confesses that:

4. *Kunamata ndaida ini rwendo rwacho rwurefu*

   Zvinotoda kushinga kuti uve mutendi

   (I wanted to pray [to be a Christian] the journey is [too] long

   It needs perseverance for one to be a Christian)

The lyrics depict Christianity as difficult religion to practise. Implicit is the fact that maybe ATR is a religion that is easy enough to practise. The song is questioning the practicality of living a Christian life in perpetual perseverance. The persona does not however seem to be discouraging believers from practising their religion. Rather, he is just pointing out what he regards as the obvious and maybe steeling the believer so that they know what to expect from the religion.

Characterising Christian practice as a long journey also implies a process that, in spite of its odiousness, is almost fruitless. In Christianity one can only expect to enjoy the fruits or rewards of a journey well-travelled only at the end. The ultimate reward is in another life. Indeed the Christian scriptures advise believers to choose the narrow path if they are to enjoy paradise at the end. Example 5 below, from Leonard Zhakata's *Mugove* (Reward) is an example of how this expectation is subverted through song,

5. *Kana paine chamakandichengetera baba*

   Ndokumbirawo mugove wangu ndichiri kurarama

   Tenzi tarirai ndosakanzwa sechipfeko

   Nevane mari ndisina changuwo

   (If there is anything you kept for me

   Can I have my reward/share when I am still alive

   Lord, look I am being worn out like a piece of clothing

   By the moneyed when I don't have anything of my own)

The sentiments that are being expressed in the lyrics are that one should enjoy the journey of life instead of enduring it. According to Chidi Isozoh (undated), there is no borderline between this life and the afterlife. Life itself is cyclic, going from birth to death to re-birth. The emphasis on people's enduring happiness is not concentrated on the afterlife but rather on the totality of their well-being in this life and in the afterlife. In this light, Christianity should deliver people from abject poverty and enable them to enjoy prosperous lives without necessarily waiting for the afterlife. Life on earth should be lived in relative comfort. This is clearly expressed in the poem *Detembedzo ramwari* (God's poem), in example 6 where the text says:

6. *Nhamo dzedu dzose mutoro wako …*

   Cheuka macheche pasi patandavarwe, (Hodza, 1977, 17–18)

   (Our problems are your burden …

   Remember your children/people so that people may stretch their legs)

The poem calls upon God to care about the people and this care can only be shown by prosperity that can enable the people to metaphorically stretch their legs as a sign of complete relaxation and contentment. It is important to note that stretching one's legs is a metaphor for prosperity whereby the individual is relieving pressure on a full stomach. In the song *Mutadzi ngaaregererwe* (The sinner must be forgiven) Leonard Dembo expresses the same need for the people to be delivered from their problems so that they live peaceful lives. In example 7 the lyrics lament:

7. *Vachauuya here Baba, riinhiko?*

   Vachauya here Baba, kuzotinunura?

   Muchauya here Baba, riinhiko?

   Muchauya here Baba?

   Mukati mehondo.

   (Will God come, when exactly?

   Will god come, to rescue us?

   Are you going to come God, when exactly?

   Are going to come God, in the midst of war

The song is crying out for an immediate from intervention from God. This runs contrary to popular sayings such as *mhinduro yaMwari inonoka* (God's answer/intervention is slow in coming) by the

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Christians. What is called for are live conditions that people can enjoy in this lifetime. Example 8 from Fanwell Tazvida (populary known as System Tazvida), in the song *Ndiridze Mhere* (If I cry out) picks up on the same issue of lamenting the slowness of God's response when he sings;

8. *Uchandinzwawo here Mwari ? …*

 Mhinduro yenyu Mwari yazononoka

 (Will you ever hear me God? …

 Your response God is overdue)

The two songs *Mutadzi ngaaregererwe* and *Ndiridze Mhere* lament what they perceive as an undue delay in God's response in the solving of problems. The personas expect God's response to be instantaneous.

African Traditional Religions have a high sense of morality. Kazembe (2009) observes that the traditional worldviews provide the foundation of a system of morality that serves to distinguish between right and wrong as well as good and appropriate from bad and inappropriate behaviour. Within this system is an institution of justice that serves to reward or punish behaviour according to whether it is good or bad respectively. Indeed this is one of the most recurring motifs in which characters are either rewarded or punishment on the basis of their morality. Some Africans carry this notion of the justice system into Christianity in order to make sense of the new religion. The artists seem to be perplexed by Christianity's implied justice system that at times seems to punish the morally and religious upright Christian. Implied in this idea is the fact that it is the immoral and evil who seem to be enjoying good fortune on earth. Cephas Mashakada in *Nhai Mwari wangu* (Oh my Lord), in example 9, laments:

9. *Chandakatadza chiiko, kundirwadzisa kudai? …*

 Chandakatadza chiiko, kundipa hurwere?

 (What sin did I commit, to hurt me like this?

 What sin did I commit, to give me sickness?)

The song is uses the traditional justice paradigm to try and make sense of whatever has gone wrong in a person's life. In this case the person has fallen seriously ill and is trying to make sense of the situation. There are parallels in orature where in "Mukwerera", the persona says:

10. *Vana vako vapera nenzara,*

 Takatadzei kwamuri Musikavanhu (Hodza, 1977, p. 15).

 (Your children dying from starving

 What wrong did we make against you creator of people).

The need to understand one's religious standing does not necessarily make the believer a bad one. Traditionally, it served to invoke the gods into having mercy on believers. Indeed Mapanje and White (1983), in the anthology *Oral Poetry from Africa* state that traditional religious "prayers" were in most cases composed of "brief petitions to God". The *sungura* artist is carrying over this power into Christianity to ground his religion firmly in times of crisis.

Alick Macheso, in his song "Kumhanya kuripo" (Rushness is there), Alick Macheso advises Christians that:

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11. *Chinamato hachina kuuya nekuparadzanisa hukama vedzinza*

Christianity did not come with the intention of destroying kinship

In this song Macheso is insisting that Christianity as a religion should be grounded in traditional culture, specifically the notion of communality. p'Bitek (1998) argues that by his very nature people's life is organised into institutions from which they cannot successfully alienate themselves from. Thus, Christianity can only work in the African context/milieu if it is made to fit into the communal nature that is characteristic of most African institutions, especially its religion.

Being influenced by a culture mainly based on individualism, Christianity tended to preach a theology of individual salvation. That is, the convert entered into the new religion as an individual and not with all his kith and kin. It is not, therefore, abnormal to see a very fragmented religious family where, in one family, individuals may belong to different denominations or where some of the members either do not go to church or are overt practitioners of ATR. Kazembe (2009, p. 55) notes that the "missionaries were fascinated by the community culture of Africa, they themselves having come from individualistic cultures". This fascination captures the dichotomy between the African and Western conceptions of the individual. For Mbiti (1969), the personhood in African cultures is encapsulated by the now-idiomatic "I am because we are, because we are I am" dictum. That is, "as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life …" Menkiti (1984, p. 171). It is based on this philosophy that Macheso bemoans the apparent destabilisation of the family as a result of the Christian religion.

5. Conclusion

Music, in general, provides discursive spaces for public theological negotiation. This negotiation is not only limited to what has hitherto been referred to as conventional gospel music. From the foregoing discussion, it has been established that there is a marginalised category of *sungura* gospel music in Zimbabwe that manifests elements of ATR as a result of a dialogic relationship between traditional culture and the Christian religion. The effect of these elements is a subversion of dominant conventional Christian religious discourse in which the artists express the need for more individual agency and a much more intimate relationship with God in which individuals and communities can petition God on matters concerning their everyday lives. Of significance is the fact that this type of gospel music seems to try to make the religious experience part of the people's lived experience (Chitando, 2002b). Most importantly, the expected discontinuity that is supposed to be manifested by converted Christians whereby they totally do away with aspects from traditional culture is lacking in the type of gospel music explored in this paper. As observed by Walls (2010), African Christianity works best in cases of fluid and continuing worldviews which allow for much more frequent crossing of the frontier between the transcendent and natural worlds. This is an aspect that clearly comes out in the *sungura* type of gospel music by artists who are within the more traditional type of music in Zimbabwe. It was also revealed that this type of gospel music incorporates philosophical and religious elements of ATR into their lyrics which gives their music a subversive quality in which they apparently question God' benevolence, the delay in the answering of prayers, an inappropriate justice system, and an individualistic religion. In so doing the paper has aligned itself with Chitando's definition of gospel music as that which simply utilises Christian theological ideas.

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[‡] *Wakasikirei satani*? Translates to the question "[God] why did you create Satan?"

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List of songs used
Material arranged in terms of name of artist and group, title of song, title of album and year of release.
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Macheso, Alick and The Orchestra Mberikwazvo "Kumhanya kuriko", *Zvakanaka Zvakadaro*, 2001.
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