

**IN THE NAME OF WORSHIP: YOUTH
FACTOR IN SUBCULTURAL IDENTITIES
AND REPRESENTATIONS IN THE PRAISE
AND WORSHIP MUSICS AND DANCES
IN KENYAN CHURCHES**

*Maurice Amateshe
Kenyatta University
amateshem@yahoo.com*

The dialogue on the nature, reformation and purpose of music in church worship in Kenyan churches has continued to generate confounding intellectual, theological, moral and cultural debates among Christians and non-Christians with equal proportion since the 1990s. This dialogue, anchored on what music should represent in the context of worship in church and the nature of those representations has continued to happen against the backdrop regarding the politics surrounding church worship music, its requisite role and nature, contextualization and source in the 21st Century.

At the center of this debate are two diametrically opposed perceptions; on one hand, is a theological school of thought existing in a dilemma framing the appropriateness or otherwise, of certain musics in church worship, which, in the considered consensus of its members, should be purged for lack of adherence to tenets of Christian worship. On the other, is a progressivist cultural one, which perceives some morally 'proscribed' genres of popular music as integral and inevitable cultural elements competing for space in both the secular and religious jurisdictions. In the thinking of this school, these genres must be allowed to flourish regardless of a real or perceived negative historical baggage. The practical thought of worship music in this school is anchored on what Jahansson (1984) termed as always making attempts to find new ways to reach unchurched people in their culture, mostly by use of secular styles, and in a language which the average person in the market place can understand.

I will not attempt to discuss fundamentals of theology in relation to the music in church since I am not theologically grounded to speak on the various forms of theology and liturgy and their intersection with music of whichever nature. I will however make reference to basics that accommodate semblance of theological justifications on the issue of church music as recorded from accounts of my respondents whose mainstay is church ministry.

In this paper therefore, I address a 'tired' subject of music in church worship, but which still has numerous unanswered questions. Tired, because literature on evolving church perceptions, attitudes and practices with regard to church music is not in short supply. Little (1925), Trotter Boyer (1978), Jahansson (1984), Trotter (1987), Kidula (1997), Chitando (2002), Benzmilller (2003), Larson (2005) and Parsitau D (2006) are among many others who wrote on the subject of church music. I hold the view that we might not be able to say anything new as far as the politics of contemporary music in worship procedures is concerned.

I have approached this subject, building on past studies and opening up new frontiers, entirely as (1), a conflict issue in doctrine, theology and culture as it has always been, (2), as an issue that reinforces rather than arbitrates in the diametrical existence of a prevailing fluid culture of a particular time against a conservative religious mould based on certain specific teachings that do not change with time, (3) a study in explaining specific observable responses in the entire church movement today in the wake of a 21st Century reformation, (4), an opportunity, through a

theoretical framework, to expand the debate from merely being a cultural one, to identifying and understanding the principal players that have directly and indirectly affected the reformation in church on a cultural pedestal and finally (5), transcending the traditional understanding of 'Neo-Protestantism' and locating its new power, strategy and execution that sets it apart from its 16th Century contemporary.

The incomplete debate on sacred-secular music

The understanding of church music representation as a medium of religious worship and representation in church music in terms of both the musical and extra-musical elements that define it would have been best captured if an adequate definition existed to the nature and distinction between sacred and secular music. There still appears to exist an overwhelming confusion, irony and misrepresentation on the diametrical relationship of sacred and secular music, which needs to be resolved before judgement is passed on suitability of music genres in music. What makes music sacred? What makes it secular? What are the core determinants of profanity or holiness in music for church worship? In attempting to answer these questions, does one refer their judgment to rhythm, melody, form, harmony, text or instrumentation? Is it practically possible to speak of a religious melody, drum-beat, and form e.t.c, without risking sounding overtly fanatical about certain personalized beliefs? In this paper, I offer no position on the distinction between sacred and secular music (sometimes the distinction termed as being between music for church and music for the market) beyond the contexts in which the musics are performed. It is for that salient reason that I agree with Lang (2010) that strictly speaking, the term 'sacred music' should be avoided because it makes a false distinction which has done a great deal of artistic harm. But it is conveniently inclusive as a substitute for 'music composed on sacred subjects, or texts, or for devotional purposes.' This is the departure point from which I examine the representations in music for worship in churches in Kenya as stated in the title of this paper.

The controversial representations in the Kenyan worship music

The evangelistic church movement in Kenya that leans towards Pentecostal/Charismatic character (not all evangelistic churches are Pentecostal/charismatic), has reinforced its Protestantism through worship procedures, theological interpretations and representations in music. It is within this movement that speaking in tongues, miracle healing, prophesy and casting of demons has gained a whole new and practical meaning. In addition, it is in this movement that the 'Ministry' is subdivided further to accommodate specific needs of the market. For instance, one will find 'single lady ministries', the 'jobless prayer meetings', fathers' crusade and so on. Most of their theology is based on avoidance of poverty because 'God did not intend anyone to be poor.' What has endeared the movement to masses is its connection to their socio-economic problems. There will be promises of 'instant jobs', 'instant spiritually-chosen marriage partners to those who are single', assured 'pregnancies' for those to whom conception has been a challenge for a long time, promise of 'instant solutions to a myriad of sicknesses, which conventional medicine has been unable to cure' and so on. Suffice it to mean that the movement extols all known aspects of extremism and liberalism in scriptural and spiritual propagation while aspiring,

as much as possible, to institutionalize a 'market-driven' gospel.

Musically speaking, the evangelical movement emphasizes spirited, emotional and enthusiastic singing, dancing and clapping of hands and the use of popular music (Gifford 1998). The movement has effectively institutionalized what was hitherto considered secular music genres of the popular music category into their worship structures with resounding success. It is not uncommon to go into a church and find youth ministering through Rap music, dancing to Congolese music rhythms and melodies, which in Kenya, since the early 50s, have been the mainstay of the secular clubbing scene. The Jubilee Church for example, with a presence in East and South Africa has significant segments during praise that draw from traditional African music tunes and movement, philosophically a great departure from missionary inherited positions and/or expectations.

The controversy has been stocked by the fact that it is not just the music that has penetrated the hallowed space, but also elements of the parent popular cultures of Hip Hop and Zairian urban that has found music and worship space. This is manifested through language, fashion and lifestyles. The youth have resisted the idea of the robe or prescribed manner of dressing, which insists on dresses for ladies and suits or ties for men. Though there are those who still prefer this manner of dressing, the atmosphere of liberal dressing as long as one is present in church to worship rules. While the mainstream churches still struggle to have a blend of the traditional Christian worship music and a select few from the contemporary Kenyan popular (of course with an obvious bias towards the former), the evangelicals have radically shifted to the popular proper in their worship services. The engendering subculture to the protest has extended to a protest against the Christian/Baptismal names. Suddenly, names such as John, Eric, Philip that the youth may have used for over a decade, become a burden that must be shed off to create space for X-To, Crazy B, Mesh J, Rufftone, Ringtone and Q-C among other such names. It does not stop there, their particularized language of communicating the gospel, the same engendering culture has seen the emergence of a trend to simply sing about JC (Jesus Christ), JM (Jesus Messiah), words only understood on the first mention by immediate members of the subculture. To reinforce this argument, I have provided below, current existing study cases of names and song titles from Kenya.

Jambazi by Mashifta, *Yesu* by BoyBand, *X-PO* by Alter Ego, *Songa* by Astar, *Biceps* by Juliani, *Siwezi Elewa* by Redivivus, *Gospel Celebrity* by Mr. Googz, *Stronger (The Gospel Cypher)* by Astar, *Ngashville*, *Linda* and *Holy Dave*, *save me savior* by Mission Driven, *Mtaa Mentality* by Juliani, *Songa Kandoby* FatMod, *J Blessing* by Rise and *God's Replika* by Dj Rabaky are some of the most popular award winning Rap gospel songs currently playing on Kenyan media and in churches. *System ya Kapungala* by Daddy Owen, *Tusamehe Makosa* by Mkenya, *Generation song* by George Okudi, *Huratiti* by Jimmy Gait, *Mwaka Mpya* by Medley, *Lipuka* by Bushebi Jnr, *Ametenda* by Maximum Melodies, *Silk* by Danko and Rufftone, *Shukrani* by Krystal and *Nyasaye* by Sally are among the top-ten gospel songs on Kenyan music charts 2010, which have borrowed heavily from the Zairian Congolese instrumentation, form and melodies as well as dance styles associated with clubs such as *Ndombolo*, *Soukouss* and *Kwasa Kwasa*.

These songs, despite their themes on salvation and religion in general, strictly adhere to the *Lingala* style from the Congo or the traditional style of rap music including avoidance of

conventional language of communication preferring instead coinages that communicates to a designated audience, the 2-4 bar motif that is looped to form a desired length of song based on repetition, a non-varying background rhythmic material contained in a drum beat and bass guitar alongside a varying foreground material of the vocal rhymes, Hip Hop dress code of sagging jeans, baseball caps multi-directionally worn, over-emphasis on jewelry adorned on the ears, tongue, bellies, fingers, eye-lids e.t.c-regardless of sex.

Then there is the issue of the worship team, whose primary function is to lead the congregation in all forms of dance steps drawn from a cross-section of Kenyan traditional cultures and the latest dance movements currently at play on national media. This is reinforced by music of the popular culture family played on electric guitars, acoustic drums and the keyboard all amplified through loudspeakers however small the church might be. For close to one hour, the congregation engages in fervent song and dance drawn from the popular music idiom, never witnessed in the understanding of Christian worship before. Most of the time, the absence of official choreography but the presence of arousing music opens up possibilities for everyone to execute movement best known to them regardless of source and context without fear of reprimand, whether human or supernatural.

The mainstream justification of resistance

When I sought the views of the mainstream church on the subject of the emerging trends in worship music both in church and in the media, what I received was the expected 'it is sinful', 'it is against the teaching of Christ', 'it is the work of the devil' – statements. When they made attempts to invoke Biblical thought on the subject, I realized it takes us back to the incomplete debate on the definition of what is sacred or secular song. Here are some of what I was referred to Romans 12: 1, 2- we are warned against conformity to the pattern of the world, Levi 10: 10- distinguish between the holy and the unholy, the clean and the unclean; Col 3: 16- Paul names three forms of Christian music; Psalms scripture put to music, hymns song of praise and worship and spiritual songs, 1 Samuel 16: 23-Godly music should bring serenity to the soul. The underlying theology in these and numerous other citations is to outlaw the contemporary worship music styles. I hold the view that the debate should be taken a little bit deeper than scriptural insulation.

The youth factor in the neo-worship music controversial representations

In both the mainstream and charismatic churches in Kenya, youth seem eager to create an environment of worship suitable to their contemporary cultural environment. Even in the so-called secular world, the youth have rebelled against certain music genres they term as old fashioned and boring and have instead embraced what to them is modern, trendy and exciting exemplified in such genres as rap, rock and reggae. It is therefore not strange to find the same mentality stretching into worship where they need a worship medium that respects and conforms to what the contemporary culture, in which they live, has shaped in them.

Consequently, both the mainstream churches are reforming their music and procedures of worship not because time has come to do so, but because they are responding to a need by one substantial demographic of their congregation the youth. From 2009 for example, according

to mainstream media reports, the Catholic Church in Kenya led by the Holy Family Basilica (the headquarters of the Catholic Church in Kenya), openly discussed the dilemma the church finds itself in as far as catering for the extreme overhaul of worship elements demanded by the youth is concerned. In a landmark response, the Catholic Church has had to lessen certain restrictions in music especially, thereby opening room for youth-oriented services, separately conducted by the youth themselves where the popular music genres in worship, contemporary dress code and language have found full expression. By allowing them to retain their musical preferences but with a Christian foundation, it is hoped that the urge to indulge in the same music but with a non-Christian formulation is limited. Suffice this to mean that as much as one would want to examine the neo-worship musics in Christian worship in terms of general reformation in church worship procedures, in Kenya the youth factor appears to be a major attribute to these music and the indulgence of churches a response that ensures that they retain the numbers that the youth hold.

A reinforced neo-protestantism in worship music

The 16th Century Protestant Reformation provides a useful beginning towards a lucid understanding of the 21st Century 'revolt' against certain tenets that historically defined the Church of Christ (Gonzales 1985; Roland 1952). Although this Protestant configuration was underpinned by four questions or doctrines of namely; (i) how is a person saved? (ii) Where does religious authority lie? (iii) What is the church? And (iv), what is the essence of Christian living (McCarthy 2002), this paper found the spirit and intent of the reformation is aptly applicable in the current debate. The current scenes in contemporary Christian worship music appear to be products of a neo-Protestantism. This neo-protestation is embodied in perceptions of music in worship as progressive phenomena, which must be emancipated from the tangles of the hymnal and the mass recitations. While the 16th Century protest delivered to us the hymnal, the neo-protest wants us to transcend the enslaving nature of a selection of songs found in hymnals that bind us to an eternal worship formula. It calls upon the flock to exercise a liberal approach in the determination and practice of worship music that captures the spirit of the times while still perceivably, serving the initial worship agenda. New music representations are not emerging because there is an over-flow of songs in the world outside of church. They seem to emerge because the churches both charismatic and mainstream agree to a varying degree of tolerance, that cultural dynamics within nations is changing and so are the congregants and so is the need for a change in worship procedures.

The position of the neo-protestantism

Grout (1996) moved closer to discussing the effect the world outside of church had on the evolution of the church when he wrote about 'Cycles and Trends of Church Witness.' He particularly detailed the church as a three-phase cycle; a period of outside persecution, which causes the church family to seek the safety of the church and join together, a period of peace on the outside, which permits an encounter between the Christian and the non-Christian outside the church, and from which evangelism begins and a phase of revolution outside the church, which may not initially affect the church, but in many cases expressions growing out of this revolutions

are eventually used by the church in communication. Let me explain the revolution outside the church aspect, while appropriating one of these cycles to the Kenyan scenario.

All observable signs show that the Kenyan youth have engineered a reformation in church as far as music is concerned. They have revolted against an old order and instead caused a new order to be instituted, which caters for their needs and therefore they have won the war on considerable inclusion in the body of the church worship operations, which is Protestantism from within the churches in which the youth belong. There is then the world outside church, in which the youth socialize. The school environment, peer-peer social interactions outside homes, church or school and a mediated interaction with a liberalized media bear the tenets of this world. The cultural dynamics of this world are such that it has more pressure and porosity as far as infiltration of new cultural material leading to processes of cultural theories such as assimilation and enculturation among the youth is concerned.

However, the cultural materials that are disseminated to the youth are designed to reinforce the non-religious jurisdiction. They center their themes, form, contexts, fashion and all other attendant identities on to the reinforcement of the non-religious world, and self-gratification, yet not all the youth find a liberal institutional environment to freely practice these cultural elements in such contexts. The upshot is that the youth have protested about this and demanded that the same genres traditionally designed for non-religious contexts, and with which they identify as a result of a culturally and socially defined peer community, be re-designed and re-contextualized to suit contexts that find accommodation and acceptance by society in general. The challenge is that this protest outside of any religious environment had to find an application environment. Like any other protest, it had to find voice. It could not exist in a vacuum or begin a world of its own. Only two worlds – the religious and the secular – were available for the protest. The revolt outside of the church jurisdiction became a factor in shaping the very fact that the very church would henceforth reconcile with harsh realities of music reformation – if indeed it needed peace. Therefore these two protests, one against age-long traditions in church and the other against generalized contexts of popular music genres led to the reformation movement within the church and a direct impact on the nature of the music that could accommodate the youth who believed that the kind of music labeled 'bad and deviant' could find expression within church's evangelistic mission.

The youth, the subcultural theory and the postmodern attitude in the representations in worship music

It appears that the revolt that sought not only independence, but also freedom of choice and inclusion in church doctrine by the youth is best viewed within the context of Subcultural ideology and understanding. Not that it is the only cultural theory available, but it best suits my thread of argument. The views of Downes (1966), Cohen (1972) and Claude (1995) seem to reinforce the views of Marshall (1998) posted in Dictionary of Sociology, that widely and broadly used; the core idea of Subcultural theory is of the formation of subcultures as a collective solution to, or resolution of, problems arising from the blocked aspirations of members, or their ambiguous position in the wider society. The fact that movements, songs and lifestyles have emerged within the church to revolt, exaggerate and even distort what had hitherto been held

as canon as far as church music is concerned, points to a Subcultural ideology and motivation in the worship music in Kenya. However, it will be premature to conclude the representations as products of Subcultural thoughts at this stage. Some more frontiers to this connection are might be necessary.

Jock Young (1974) offered that in Subcultural theory, deviant subcultures are viewed not as pathological groupings of maladjusted individuals who lack culture, but rather as meaningful attempts to solve problems faced by the individuals concerned. Chris Livesey (1955) stated that a 'reactive sub-culture' is one in which the members of a particular sub-cultural group develop norms and values that are both a response to an opposition against the prevailing norms and values that exist in a wider (predominantly middleclass or 'conventional') culture. Where then, do the representations in worship music, and in turn the resultant music representations in Kenyan churches connect to these thoughts on subculture theory? While we are at liberty to criticize, demonize, reduce, castigate and even curse the perpetrators of the neo-worship musics in our contemporary church settings, it will be prudent to reflect on the oppositional relationships that occur so naturally in a generational gap scenario such as the one between the elder church members and the youth in their churches. Through the prism of Subcultural theory, the representations I have already stated as prevalent in the Kenyan church find validity. They appear to be a product of 'opposition' to a dominant almost hegemonic culture. They emerge as a result of a desire by the youth to create a world of their own devoid of any form of religious provincialism existing in the church hierarchy. They want freedom, not just of speaking, but also of expressing and doing so in the best and relevant, generation-oriented medium regardless of context. They want to rap, break-dance, swing hips and adorn the latest of fashions whether they are talking religion or disco club. Of course no conclusive research has shown that the subcultures in themselves are homogenous enough to sustain unity without divisive conflicts that can compromise objectives. However, the theory provides some useful ground towards understanding the youth revolt in the nature of worship music.

As far as postmodernism is concerned, Frosch (2007) argued that postmodernism rejects the notions of uniqueness, self-invention and interiority. Postmodernism does not rely on the 'self' and the expression that goes with it. It instead relies on the reflection of a collective environment and a response to certain stimulus present in the individual's surroundings. As we reflect on or examine the representations in worship musics, we should stretch that reflection or examination to consider the effects of the immediate environment of those practicing certain kinds of music. Is it such an influential environment or are we the ones in a position to influence it? Who is superior, the youth or the environment? What is the determinant of the superiority? How then can environment assist in explaining emerging representations in music within the church?

The representations concluded

New musics traditionally associated with the secular world have forcefully entered the church. It would appear that the only prudent thing to do is to re-examine and re-locate the new meanings that have come through rap music and other popular music genres in church worship including the traditional/ethnic folk inspired ones. It is only fair that we courageously

dissociate the unpleasant historical baggage of some of the genres and accept them as the new forms of communication within a significant segment of society. The truth is that such genres as rap might not be relevant to a certain generation due to its historical association to drugs, violence, alcoholism, crime, prostitution and all manner of deviance. It is no secret that there are those who have excluded it from the classification and inclusive discussion of anything musical. However, this does not make it extinct. In fact, it reinforces its existence through the postmodernist and Subcultural window.

In any case, refusing the entrance of these popular musics with all the negative representations they bear on our attitude - driven evaluations is to deny a large and significant history of the church and reformation. The church, as early as the 16th Century, was unable to withstand pressure to retain the character of music in worship as prescribed in Greek ceremonies, Syrian Monasteries, Jewish Psalmody and even the Catholic Canticle. Through the Council of the Trent, the 19th Century Cecilian Movement and the Oxford movement (Lockwood 1957), the reality of change dawned on the church as far as music in worship was concerned. The church responded by changing. It is therefore ironic that in the 21st Century, with the church facing yet another revolution, but engendered by a resilient yet significant youth demographic, should resist change. The Charismatics, even though their approach to theology is still a subject of controversy, have demonstrated the way by admitting popular music genres in the church.

It could be practical to imagine that these representations in music for worship did not just emerge out of a baseless motive. They emerged in church, not to serve the church as a body, but He, in whose name it exists. An objective departure point would be to establish at what point of history of doctrine in church did absolutism in the perception, approach and internalization of the Supreme God disintegrate into probabilities. Representations in music from my findings are emerging as a direct response to shifted and diversified perceptions of the individually perceived and practiced music requirements of God. While some visualize God who prefers serenity, sobriety, calm and all the adjectives that attend to moderation, there are a significant those who (and have scriptures to support their stand), visualize God in need of animated enthusiastic, creativity, freedom, liberty and all that breaks the rules of moderation.

Finally, there appears in all the debates surrounding music in church worship and the representations in Kenya, to be a well-founded theological basis for each argument. Each group of the divide (the Charismatics and mainstream), had definite verses from the Bible to argue a full-proof case. The only contention was that these theological foundations exist in a state of conflict. I believe that even within the stated conflict, and based on the fact that most, if not all, of the church foundation (apart from the Independent African traditional church, most of whose doctrine is still derived solely from the Old order), use both Testaments as a foundation for belief in God and the practice of Christianity. It is therefore incumbent upon each of the churches to interpret the theological foundations they independently defend objectively and progressively, taking into account cultural dynamism of the times, to give space to emerging challenges embodied in music for worship that the church must meet and adhere to the urgent call for a 21st Century reformation however unpopular with the conservative mindset of Centuries that were.

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