

Gangsters for Christ: Youth Identity in Gospel, Rap and Hip- Hop Music in Harare.

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Abstract

Gangsters have more often than not, been associated with the secular rather than the sacred, with the bad rather than the good. Due to the changes in societal and cultural trends, youths in Harare have adopted and adapted to the new ways of life. In the past, gospel music was often thought of to be quiet, cool and sombre music, where one was expected to listen to whilst contemplating. Today's youths are finding a place for themselves between gangster lifestyle, religion and gospel music. Instead of singing the "usual", and "norm", of gospel music, they have become Gangsters for Christ. Does society understand them as real Christians singing for God? Are they not continuously being seen as increasing mischief amongst their peers? Does this Gangster Gospel Music help to construct the youth, both in the urban and rural areas? This paper seeks to answer these and other questions by looking at youth and gospel music in its gangster varieties. The main thrust of this paper is to focus in the role of youths in Gospel music in society. Basically, Harare will be the center of research due to its urban setting. Being the capital city of Zimbabwe, most Gangster life is found in Harare. This is where the majority of the rural folk also migrate to for jobs and occupation, so there is a lot of cultural exchange. The Phenomenological approach will be mostly employed as it allows the researcher to get into the "believers shoes" and feel as if one was a Gangster for Christ, without any biases and prejudices. This approach works hand in hand with the participatory method where one becomes part of the musicians themselves in order to correctly interpret what they sing about and why they do so. In addition, interviews with both the musicians and the society at large will be carried out on how they interpret the Gangster youths for Christ as they attempt to get some identity in the society they live in.

Introduction.

Music has always been part of people's cultures. It always exists and plays a variety of significant roles to any given beings. It has social, political and spiritual roles

(Mapuranga 2000). Music is a medium to soothe, heal, entertain, warn, encourage and inform among other purposes. Music is integrated into every aspect of society. It is a style of human conduct that characterizes a sensibility with which humans relate to their surroundings. Thus, there is a song for every season. There are songs to celebrate the birth of a baby, there are songs for the attainment of adulthood, marriage, and death. In Africa, a song accompanies every joyous or sad event. The introduction of Christianity

did not lead to a transformation of this reality. The church had to accept the popularity of music in African communities. Indeed, the emergence of gospel music demonstrates the importance of music to the church and African communities.

Gospel music is one of the major types of music that have become the in-thing in Zimbabwe at the moment. Many gospel groups of the young proliferated into the limelight in Zimbabwe around 2000. They combine rap, hip-hop, reggae, and a variety of music genres. This has occurred at the same time that popular music has started to be modernized. Good examples include tracks that are presented in the Soul genre such as *Amai* by Guess, *So Ndiyani* by Slice and *Muroora* by D.Chifunyise. These appealed to the young audiences as they successfully mixed foreign musical styles with vernacular language lyrics (Chitando 2002:80).

This paper analyses the status of the youth in Gospel music in Zimbabwe today. This is achieved through an analysis of the songs that portray their identity in recorded music especially between the late 1990s and 2006. The first section discusses the context which gospel music started in Zimbabwe, and how it was performed then. The second section examines the lyrics and forms of gospel music performed by the youth today, and finally, an evaluation of the new wave of gospel music in Zimbabwe by the young.

Definition of terms

Gangster

A gangster is normally a group of youths who operate professionally in criminal activities. They use whatever means available to achieve their goals, albeit illegal ones. Their style of life has commonly been associated with a musical genre termed 'Gangsta'. Being a gangster can also be, 'willing to do whatever it takes to get something done'. (Wikipedia Online Dictionary, 2006). In the case of youth in Zimbabwe, the notion of a gangster has been extended to include young people who insist on using unconventional modes of identity formation. In this paper, gangsters for Christ will therefore be, the youth who use whatever musical genres available to sing and preach the gospel far and wide.

It is critical to emphasize that in this paper the term gangster is appropriated without accepting the criminal assumptions that underpin its popular usage. For most people, gangsters engage in socially undesirable activities. However, some young Christians have deliberately taken up the label in order to further their own evangelistic campaigns. They feel that by identifying themselves as gangsters for Christ, they appeal to "real" gangsters. Using the power of naming, they have taken up the designation in order to appeal to other young people who are on the margins of society.

Urban Grooves

This is a loose term popularly used to bunch together various music styles being performed and recorded by Zimbabwe's new breed of artists who are in what can be termed as the "the age of confusion". (Mandisoul, 2006). This is more or less like what emerged in South Africa as "Bubble gum" music where groups like Dalom Kids and Splash emerged. It involves a mixture of a variety of musical genres including Rap, Hip-

hop, jazz, soul and others. This type of music has caused a stir in the musical scene. In this paper, Urban Grooves in Gospel music is the center of discussion.

Youth

In this paper, the term youth shall be used as the category of those who are in their early period of maturity. It will be used to refer to that group of people who are neither adults nor children, but somewhere in between, scientifically referred to as adolescents. The youth will refer to a group of the young who fall into the category of around thirteen to about thirty years of age. It will also refer to those who are “young at heart.”

The study acknowledges the dynamics regarding the social construction of youth. It recognizes that youth is defined differently in various cultures. In some cases, youth is defined in terms of age. In other instances, youth is understood in terms of marital status, or whether or not one has undergone some rites of passage. I maintain that the category of youth is not cast in stone. In Zimbabwe, some “old” people enjoy rap and hip-hop. I refer to such individuals as those who are “young at heart.”

Gospel Music

Just as much as many terms have no unanimously accepted definitions, the phrase ‘Gospel music’ has raised many eyebrows amongst scholars. According to M.A Ojo, The term ‘Gospel Music’ is really too sweeping. However, it could be used to mean a distinct kind of music composed and rendered by men and women who call themselves Christians and who refer to their music as ministration of the Good News in songs. (Ojo 1998:211).

According to Chitando (2002:14), Gospel music is music that is laden with Christian themes and performed by individuals who regard themselves as Christians. Such

definitions will be used in this paper and encompass all the music that is laden with Christian themes, becoming the 'good news of Christ' which becomes a ministry serving human need.

Identity

Identity can be defined as 'relating to the question of difference between others and us: a difference in culture, sex, religion, age, nationality, living area, etc.' (Schipper, 1999:4).

Identity can be defined as the 'who and what' one is. In this paper, the question of what and who the youth in gospel music singing Hip-hop, rap and other music genres are, in terms of their Christian identity, is being sought.

The study contends that identity is not static or given once and for all. Identities are always in a state of flux. Identities are also malleable. I argue that in gospel music, rap and hip-hop, young people construct and express their identity. These identities are intricately related to matters of age, class, colour and gender. In the various music types, young people in cosmopolitan settings strive to find resources for constructing and expressing both who they are and what they would like to become.

The Rise of Gospel Music in Zimbabwe

In order to gain an appreciation of the role of young people in Zimbabwean gospel music, it is necessary to provide a historical overview of the rise of gospel music. Since the 1970s, musicians like the late Freedom Sengwayo, and the late Jordan Chataika started singing what is called gospel music in Zimbabwe today. These are among the names of those who gave an impetus to Gospel music. They composed their music especially from hymnbooks and church music. Their productions tended to be simple, featuring electric keyboards and drum machines, avoiding altogether the mysterious tonalities of Shona

traditional music and the giddy, free wheeling guitar work of sungura. Gospel music represents a refuge from all that. (Eyre, 2001:96) It was a simple type of music.

It was also musicians like Mechanic Manyeruke who took this type of music a step further in the 1980s. He started singing in the manner of his pathfinders, but gradually started to record music, which included more and more instruments. After him came other musicians like the late Brian Sibalo, Egea Gospel train, Charles Charamba , Ivy Kombo, Carol Chivengwa, Shingisai Suluma, Mahendere brothers and many others. Today, it has become the music most people sing; it has become the music of the times. With the horrifically mounting toll of HIV and AIDS, a general sense of crisis arising from the nation's economic woes, political instability, incessant droughts and general poverty and hunger, more people have turned to Divine intervention and are therefore turning to gospel music.

However, this paper adds a new observation to Eyre's approach to gospel music in Zimbabwe. Rather than singing that 'simple' form of music, gospel musicians, especially the youth, now use a variety of musical styles and instruments to communicate a wide range of themes. As Chitando observes, they now 'include the *mbira* beat from a traditional musical instrument, *sungura* or *museve* (like an arrow, it pierces the heart), Zimbabwean popular music, rap and hip hop from the African American influence, reggae from the Caribbean, country from the United States of America and Congolese Soukous and other types. (Chitando 2002:14). As these youths divert from the 'norm' of gospel music-that which is supposed to be cool and somber, are these youths identified

by the society they live in, as gospel musicians? Do they identify themselves as Christians singing for Christ? Would one label them as the youths for Christ, or rather, Gangsters for Christ?

For one to acknowledge the various genres of gospel music in Zimbabwe today, they have to look at the various issues that are being addressed by the youth. First and foremost, despite singing in a 'secular' style, the youth in gospel music claim they are Christians who are called by God to minister the good news to his people. They identify themselves as ambassadors for Christ. This stamps authority for them to communicate any religious truths, entertain, console, and mediate through music. Therefore, their music comes with different messages and tones that suit different human needs. These various tones therefore dictate the different identities that youth have.

(a) Youth as messengers for Christ

Many young gospel artists have had the task of justifying their presence in gospel music.

This is perhaps due to the heavy criticism they have suffered because they do not sing the 'original type' of gospel music that is dominated by quiet, prayerful and sedate tunes. The youth in gospel music have more often than not, had to identify themselves as messengers, soldiers or warriors of God. This is in pursuit of some plight for the general populace to see them as being sent by Christ. Among these, is Sharon Manyika, a young female musician on an album entitled '*Greater than the world*', on a song with the same title. She sings,

You ain't get hold of me
You cannot destroy me
Jesus is right inside me
He is greater than the world

I am a soldier
In the army of the Lord
I got to fight on
Till the battle is won
I'm gonna go for the crown---

Sharon sings a type of music with a mixture of hip-hop and rap which tends to appeal to the majority of other youths. In this song, Sharon identifies herself as a Christian, a soldier who is armed to fight in the battle of the Lord. This includes winning hearts of the lost to the saviour. However, the 'outsider', particularly the older generation would ask who then would accept her style of singing, especially if one looks at the video that accompanies the song .She dances in a 'gangster' manner and dresses more or less like a soldier when she presents her song under the background with an army helicopter. Her dance styles portray one whose fists are clenched and fighting. Is she really singing as a Christian?

The role of the English language as a significant factor in the identity construction of urban youth in Harare comes to the fore in the song by Sharon. As a member of the educated middle class urban youth, she utilizes the English language to communicate the message of Christianity. She does not regard her message as being relevant to the local context only. As a global citizen, she appropriates English to reach a wider audience. Although other 'secular' youth groups have used slang, many young gospel music groups use English to transmit Christian messages. English serves to connect them to the global Christian community, and to the wider world in general.

(b) Youth as children of God

Young men and women see themselves as children of God. They look up to him just as any Christian would do. For them, God is their provider and nothing lacks when He is present. Carol Wutawunashe is one other young lady who sings in a modern style, which has a fusion of the local *Mbira* tradition and modern instruments. From her song called *Mwari Baba*, on an album entitled *Hold on*, she says,

Mwari Baba Jesu-----God Father
Ndimi moga-----There is none like you
Ndimi moga Makatikwanira-----You are all sufficient
Ndimi moga Ishe -----You are the only one Lord
Hakuna umwe akarurama-----There is none as righteous as you
Denga nenyika zvinopfugama mberi kwenyu--The heavens and the earth bow down at you
Torumbidza zita renyu dzvene-----We Praise your Holy name.

In these lyrics, Carol shows that the Lord is her father and he is the all -sufficient to her. Whatever problems might befall her, her friends, family or nation, people should hold on to the lord. He provides the answers, whatever crisis befalls anyone. Therefore, the youth in gospel music identify themselves as children of God, helping to preach the good news.

(c) God as the Helper /comforter of the youth.

The youth identify God as their helper in times of need. Whatever problems they face, be they economic, falling sick or whatever social problem, for them, Christ is their sole answer. The youth, through their music, acknowledge the presence of the Lord in their lives. One gospel music group, Excel, is a gospel outfit that employs the Boys 2 Men soulful sound. They identify themselves as Christians, and relate to Jesus as their redeemer and comforter. In one of their songs ‘*Comforter*’, on the Compact Disc, ‘*Jesus you are my everything*’, they sing,

Though I was in a lot of pain
You came into my life
Now I know He is the One
He is my comforter
It is you only who can be my comforter.

In the same vein, Ngoni Kambarami, a young male urban grooves musician sings,

*Ndinotenda, Ndichitenda, -----*Lord I thank you, and I will thank you
*Imi Baba makandichengeta kusvika nhasi -----*Father you have cared for me up to this day
*Imi Mwari mandipa runyararo nguva dzose---*You give me piece all the time
*Ndinotenda Mwari-----*Lord I thank you
*Nyakupa matarenda-----*You give us the talents

(d) Youth and the socio-economic context of Zimbabwe

After identifying themselves as people with the authority to preach the gospel, the youth in gospel music feel they can sing and provide socio –economic and political commentaries on the *status quo* in Zimbabwe. The young in gospel music have sung about the better times to come, despite the social, economic and political difficulties that the country has found itself in since the early 1990s. Problems like HIV and AIDS, inflation, and political instability and hunger among other factors, have plunged the country into so many problems. Just as the prophets of God in the Bible, the young gospel artists feel ‘sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us’ (Romans 8:18). The present crisis needs the people to call for divine intervention, and by the Grace of God, the situation will improve. Kudzai Sevenzo is one young female gospel artist who sings the type of soul, cool, rhythm and blues

genre. In a song entitled *Uyai*, which is found on a Compact Disc called ‘*On a Day like this*’, Kudzai calls for the intervention of the Lord. She says,

Rwendo rwuno zvatiremera-----This time the burden is too heavy to bear
Simba renyu rinotikurudzira-----Your power encourages us
Kunze kwenyu Mambo hakuna Muwe----Besides you there is no other
Uyai Mambo Jesu -----Come lord
Uyai mutibvumbamire-----Come and shelter us
Uyai tapfugama -----Come we are pleading

Kudzai, in this song is performing the role of an intercessor. She is calling upon the Lord to intervene, since Zimbabweans have found the burden too heavy to bear. This refers to the general social, economic and political crisis that the nation is in at the moment, as the title of the album ‘*On a day like this*’, suggests.

Such a message of calling to God when the tides are low is echoed by another young musician, Tapuwa Puwai. In a style that is generally classified as the urban grooves in Zimbabwe which includes ragga, reggae, hip hop, rhythm and blues, soul country, rap etcetera, from his album entitled *Jesu ndiKristu*, he sings a song called *Zimbabwe*. He says,

Itya Mwari Zimbabwe-----Fear the Lord Zimbabwe
Ziso raMwari riri pauri-----The eye of the Lord is upon you
Ramangwana richakunakira----- Your future will be bright
Ndinomwaya ropa rajesu muZimbabwe-----I sprinkle the blood of the Lord in Zimbabwe
Ramangwana richakunakira-----Your future will be bright
Tichava vakundi, vapfumi-----We will be conquerors/rich

Ramagwana richakunakira----- Your future will be bright

In a *Rhumba* or *Kwasa Kwasa* genre, another youthful outfit known as House of David calls all people to look unto the Lord in times of difficulty and need. They employ a dance known as *Ndombolo*- in its mild form though. They use two languages (from Zimbabwe and The Democratic Republic of Congo) in their song in order to appeal to a larger audience, considering the fact that Zimbabwe now has a large population from the Democratic Republic of Congo. What is quite significant in this song is that, to appeal to a foreign audience, the group not only adopts their language, but musical genre as a whole, which includes their way of singing and their dance styles. From an album entitled *Simba Ramwari*, a song with the same title says,

Makomo anokoromorwa nesimba Ramwari-----the Lord removes Burdens
Vakamanikidzwa vanosunungurwa nesimba raMwari----if one is troubled, God redeems
Nherera dzinochengetwa nesimba raMwari-----Orphans are taken care of by God
Shirikadzi dzinochengetwa nesimba raMwari---Widows are taken care of by God

Namata uone, Kumbira uone-----Pray, make requests to God and see
Namata, Kumbira-----Pray, ask
Mwari anopindura-----God answers our prayers

From the style of this song, one could say that if the youth divert from the ‘usual’ gospel music, their identity as Christians remains: they are there to help spread the Good news of Christ in away that they feel can be understood by the people they want to communicate to. Therefore, the youth in Gospel music present themselves as patriots for their country, who become intercessors when the nation plunges into crisis. They communicate with a medium that their contemporaries understand, the music that their peers identify with—in as much as the older generation also identifies with the music of the more experienced and mature as well.

Another young musician known as Mr. Bell sings on behalf of the children of God in the difficult situations in the country. He sings in a rap and hip-hop style. In a song called, *Ishe komborera*, he suggests,

Vana venyu Tenzi Vanochema/Vanokumbira-----Your children Lord cry/plead
Vapeyi simba renyu -----Give them your power Lord
Varatidzeyi nzira dzenyu tsvene-----Show them your Holy ways
Dzakarurama, dzine Upenyu-----Which are righteous, which have life

Ishe komborera vana venyu -----God bless your children
Avo vanogara -----Thos who live
Munguva dzakaoma-----In difficult times
Ishe komborera vana venyu-----God bless your children
Avo vanofamba -----Those who walk
Munzira dzenyu Tenzi-----In your ways

Apart from the mentioned musicians, Pastor Stanley Gwanzura, affectionately known as Pastor G gives hope where there is despair .His musical style has been popularly known by its African- American genre. He includes rap in most of his songs. He employs a variety of languages in his musical career in order to appeal to a larger audience. What is most striking is that, he is an ordained Pastor who lives a lifestyle that many of the mainline church pastors would not have in Zimbabwe. He dresses in the Afro-American style and wears neck chains and jeans. As I carried out this research, I heard some people addressing him as the Gangster Pastor, probably because of his lifestyle .In that gangster style, in one of his songs, he argues that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Basing his

lyrics on the Bible (Lk21: 29), that is, ‘When you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near’. He warns the people,

Tariro nenyasha-----Hope and mercy

Zvinobvawo kuna Mwari -----Come from God

Ukaona makore owanda -----When you see clouds accumulating

Ziva kuti zvichanaka-----Know that things will be alright

Ukaona zuva ropota -----When you see the sun setting

Hazvireve kuti haridzoke-----It does not mean that dawn will not return

In this song ‘*Zvichanaka*’, off his album, ‘*Diary of a street preacher*’, Pastor Stanley Gwanzura has some influence of the African American youth culture that is apparent in his musical style.

As illustrated in these few examples, these young artists keep expressing the faith that with God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). They preach the message of hope that if the country calls upon the Lord, all things will work well for his people. The future will be bright. Therefore, the task of these young gospel musicians is to express hope where there is despair, to the listeners of their music.

(e) Youth and the general moral decay

The youth in Gospel music in Zimbabwe comment on the general decadence of morality.

There is corruption, fraud, homosexuality, murder, adultery and fornication, stealing, cheating and lying among many other social ills on the increase. The young sing about these, and call upon people to repent to the Lord and leave the wrongdoings. In a reggae and cultural mix, one young male musician known as Culture T (Unfortunately he passed away on the 1st of August 2006 as I was writing this article), in a song entitled ‘*Satani Wabvepi*’, from an album entitled *Chiedza*, sings,

Zvandakange ndichikura-----When I was growing up
Ini handaiziva-----I did not know
Kuti kune vamwe vadikani -----That there are some loved ones
Vane mazimoyo akadayi-----Who are heartless

Saka ndati----- That is why I sing
Satani wabvepi Satani wajaira-----Get away Satan
Chienda Satani-----Go away Satan
Ibva kumusoro/mber/kuseri kwangu----Get away from my midst

Jesu anodana -----Jesus is calling
Asi iwe woramba-----But you are refusing
Kuvhura musuwo wemoyo-----To open the door of your heart
Kana apinda anotanga-----When he gets in He starts
kutsvaira marara ose uye nehuruva----Sweeping all the dirt and dust

Culture T sings against the ill morals that have emerged in society. He is a Zimbabwean who lived in the United Kingdom. He was a devout Christian who teamed up with a Jamaican musician and used reggae to communicate various messages through music. He feels it is only through Jesus Christ that people can be saved from their immorality. Would it be unjustified as gospel music simply because he employs the reggae style which is often associated with Rastafarians who are popular for smoking herbs which are forbidden in the Bible?

Analysis and Conclusion.

The identity of the youth in gospel music has been a very controversial subject for many people in Zimbabwe. Some critics have lamented the ‘profanisation’ of gospel music by incorporating chants and worldly beats (Chitando 2002:79) and performing in ‘unholy places’ like bars. The emergence of gospel music in Zimbabwe had it identified as a

preserve for the churches, where pianos and keyboards were played to entertain members of various congregations. As this type of music was solemn and dignified, a listener would feel that spiritual and emotional touch. Gospel musical tunes and music chords were distinct from those of popular rock, soul, reggae, rap and hip hop among other varieties.

As observed in the previous section, this distinction is now blurred. Lively dance becomes a part of the whole repertoire. According to one journalist, a number of youthful groups have completely changed the meaning and feel of original gospel songs. (Guchu, 1999:9). The youth in gospel music have been accused of having lost and betrayed their African Christian identity. They are accused of lacking patriotism through the love of too many foreign musical styles. According to one Musavengana Nyasha, ‘Zimbabweans love their music-that which people can identify with: music based on the traditions and cultures of the country’ (Nyasha: 2006). He therefore labels these urban groovers as hopeless in their musical quest, and that their music will never appeal to the majority of the Zimbabwean folk.

This critique is informed by a rigid cultural nationalism. It imagines the existence of “pure Zimbabwean traditions.” Young gospel musicians challenge such readings of culture. By adopting and adapting foreign musical styles, they highlight the importance of hybridity. Young gospel musicians refuse to regard Christianity and its music as too serious. In their rhythm, dance routines and vocals, they force Christianity to become relevant to the needs of the young people of today.

Another criticism laid on these youths in gospel music is that they have completely lost the essence of Gospel music. Conservative Christians have complained that these youths cannot be identified as Christians, but as mere opportunists taking advantage of gospel music's popularity to make money through record sales. This is because 'Gospel music has become a financial bonanza in hard times'. (Guchu, 1999:18). As a result of the difficult times that the majority of Zimbabweans are facing, they have resorted to gospel music, which offers comfort and hope to the hopeless and needy.

However, on a different note, one Pastor feels that 'music expresses extension of human experiences and responses to God's love, and thus cannot be static. People should therefore sing in the ways that suit the contemporary period. Whether it is *Kwasa Kwasa*, Rap, Hip-hop, *Ndombolo*, 'Let the gospel go far and wide'. (Acts 1: 8-9). Tambu Nyanguru echoed the same sentiments when she said, 'Despite their dubious salvation credentials and music genres, let them bring people to Christ's kingdom'. The same has also been expressed by Oliver Mtukudzi, arguably Zimbabwe's best musician at the moment, 'To the people, anything that appeals to them is good to them---But, ah, the messages in the songs, they count'. (Turino 2000:308).

As the above interviews have testified, gospel musicians and consumers now put a lot more emphasis on the texts that the musical styles (Chitando 2002: 57). In as much as the music of the champions of gospel music like Charamba and Manyeruke, some of whom have won national awards, resembles *sungura*, why should people refute the authority that young gospel musicians have in their music? Who has the authority to disqualify the

Christian identity of the young in gospel music in Zimbabwe today due to their variance in music genres and lively dances that accompany their music?

People should note that music is a lifestyle that has a variety of cultural identities over space and time. Culture gradually changes over time and therefore identities adapt to the differences. Zimbabwe has been exposed to external influences through information technology and gone should be the days when people had to shut themselves from the rest of the world, which is fast becoming a global village. Gospel music should be given the space to change over time and adapt to what the modern youths can identify with and easily comprehend. Thus, one scholar suggests that identities are not given entities, 'they must be defined and redefined in a responsive dynamic' (Lundby, 1998:28). Du Toit C supports this when he says,

If identity is never static but always historically, geographically and sociologically conditioned, and therefore contingent, what is the sense of trying to find and identify with some roots from the past? Is it possible to regain this former identity: can it be verified, and if so, can it be forced upon a community? (Du Toit, 1999:9).

Therefore, the identity of a gospel musician whose Christian credentials are not doubted should not be determined by the standards set by the originators of what is called Gospel music in Zimbabwe today. What used to appeal to some listeners some time back should not be prescribed to have the same effect to another generation of an audience today. The

identity of any group of people is not any unitary fixed entity, but manifold, dynamic and in a process of change. (Du Toit, 1999:19)

Religion: Binding People Together

Religion in many societies binds people together. It gives them a sense of belonging. The moment people attach themselves to one religion; they see themselves as one family. This factor can be a very important aspect in giving an identity to the youth in gospel music.

The underlying common denominator between them and their pathfinders can be the religion to which they all belong. This can give them identity as one family; that of Christians who are preaching the Gospel. Different styles/genres of gospel music have different roles to play in the community. They appeal to the various generations across the societies that these musicians sing, with the same purpose at the end of the day.

According to Du Toit, what is handy for these differences in generations of gospel musicians is for them to accept one another. He says, 'There must, however, be an attitude of recognition and an acceptance of interdependence'. They are all working together for the deliverance and salvation of the people of the Lord. Therefore, the differences in the musical styles present a unity in diversity.

Overall, talking of what should be accepted as gospel music has raised many eyebrows among scholars, Christians and non-Christians. Therefore, the identity of the youth who present gospel music in Rap, Hip hop, *Ndombolo*, *Sungura*, Reggae and other musical styles has been a very controversial issue. However, from a phenomenological perspective, one would identify these youths as Christians, children of God, and Gangsters for Christ who are indeed playing a crucial role in ministration of God's word to the people. It remains a fact that 'while it was initially limited to the church context,

gospel music decisively spilt over into Zimbabwean popular culture in the mid 1990s(Mapuranga and Chitando, 2006:74).

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