

The Influence of the African Religious and Cultural Context and Its Impact on Lutheranism: The Case of Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality

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Abstract

In Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, traditional religion has played a significant role in transforming Christianity by confronting it with the decisive issue of indigenization. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to examine the inter-religious relations among Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), and to explore how African religious and cultural values have impacted on Christian – ATR relations within the municipality, and how the latter has, also, been affected by the former. The primary research question raised in this study is: what is the relevance of indigenous people's music in the existing (Lutheran) liturgy? The study employed an intercultural theological approach to Science and Religion, and the analysis is based on acculturation and the principle of elimination by substitution. The study also utilized a triangulated and contextual approach, and data was collected through observations, face-to-face interviews and video recordings of rehearsals and performances during church services and other related events. Secondary sources included published books and Journal articles. The investigation has revealed that the integration of spiritual folk songs (choruses), traditional musical instruments, handclapping, and dancing into liturgical church service of almost all Evangelical Lutheran churches found in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, has not compromised the essence of Lutheran tradition. It has rather encouraged maximum, active and unimpeded participation in liturgical church service and/or Congregational singing. Indications from the investigation have also shown that the dimensions of rhythm play an important role to contextualize and Africanize the existing (Lutheran) liturgy, in order to make the missionary qualities of worship an integral part of mission work. During the study, it was also observed that musical creativity and musicality in the visited churches embrace other elements such as the capacity for becoming absorbed emotionally in music and the ability to enter into an intimate relation with it, so that the whole organization of the soul is affected. It was concluded that it is indeed of great significance that indigenous people's music should be

regarded as a matter of relevance and ultimately becomes a vessel which carries the full meaning of the Gospel.

Keywords: African religious, Lutheranism, Greater Sekhukhune Municipality, cultural context, traditional religion.

Introduction

Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality is one of the municipalities found in Limpopo Province (**see Fig. 1**). In the Bapedi society, religion¹, culture, music, and spirituality² are broad and complex concepts which vary their understanding according to different cultural, religious, and musical backgrounds. Within Bapedi people's cultural context, spirituality is linked to the expression of religiosity, and religiosity can be described as the way an individual follows and experiences or practices a particular religion, whether intrinsically or extrinsically. Beliefs can be considered as the cognitive dimension of spirituality, an affirmation of something considered real, which varies according to the culture; and spirituality can be considered a source of coping to handle crisis and stressful moments, and related to positive meanings in the face of challenges, such as health problems. To Bapedi people, music seems to be intertwined in the everyday life, as something to enjoy, relax with, regulate stress, and so on. This characteristic seems to accord with much published research on everyday uses of music (Lo-Bamijoko 2015; Isabirye 2021; Monteiro & Wall 2011; Silverman 2018).

Bapedi people have faith in themselves. Their belief system is connected to God through their intermediaries (ancestors – the living – dead). They acknowledge that God exists, and He is the Supreme God. Their spiritual experiences have a strong impact on characteristics of physical and emotional well-being associated with health and wellness. Within Bapedi cultural context, music functions as a cultural immunogen and a psychospiritual container wherein the body and the spirit are connected and there is an integral relationship between music and spirituality. Among Bapedi people music has an important role to play in ritualistic and spiritual healing practices, and is capable of affecting and eliciting experiences in health care and creating a positive emotions and spiritual wellbeing.

¹ In the context of this study, Nweke (2020:43) defines Indigenous religion in Africa as the way Africans understand and worship their god. According to him, this religion is found in almost all the activities of the African man. In his view, African traditional religion cannot be discussed without mentioning that it is the way of life of the people of Africa, and so cannot be differentiated from the politics, education, and socialisation, etc. of the people which are all together (2020:43).

² According to Le Roux and Sauer (2016:162), the term 'spirituality' is derived from Latin '*spiritus*', meaning 'breath', and related to the Greek *pneuma* 'breath' which refers to the vital spirit or soul.

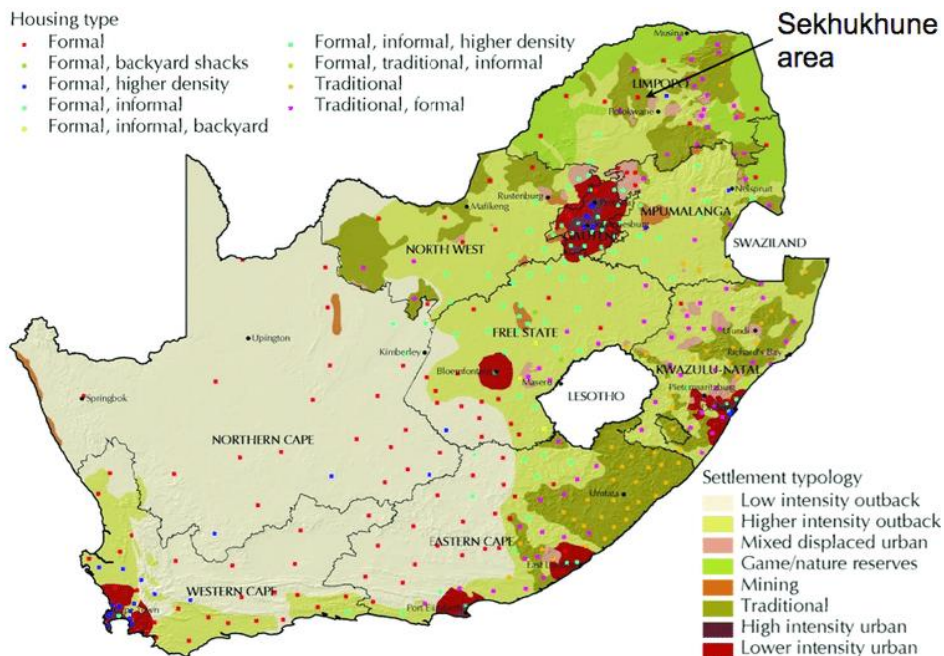


Figure 1

Figure 1: Geographical Location Map of South Africa showing Limpopo Province & Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality.

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-human-settlements-in-South-Africa-showing-Sekhukhune-area-in-Limpopo-province-with_fig1_228092563 [accessed 21 June 2022].

In Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality music creates an emotional and cognitive context that is conducive to a feeling of well-being or a state of alertness or relaxation in accordance with the needs of the situation. Bapedi people use music on a regular basis to re-focus one's attention or address and align oneself with troubling memories to spark an emotional catharsis. This gives evidence that music may also be used to change one's mood or forget about one's worries.

Corroborating the above observations, de Brito Sena et al. (2021:6) observe that spirituality is a complex and multidimensional part of the human experience, and has cognitive, experiential and behaviour aspects. According to de Brito Sena et al., the cognitive or philosophic aspects include the search for meaning, purpose and truth in life and the beliefs and values by which an individual lives (2021:6). These scholars postulate that the experiential and emotional aspects involve feelings of hope, love, connection, inner peace, comfort, and support (2021:6). In their view, these are reflected in the quality of an individual's inner resources, the ability to give and receive spiritual love and the types of relationships and connections that exist with

self, the community, the environment and nature, and the transcendence. In the same vein, Singh and Bhagwan (2020:409) write that drumming is a common practice in the African tradition which enhances the way in which individuals and communities call on their ancestors. Singh and Bhagwan contend that people are believed to experience a sense of calmness and guidance, as they feel the presence and closeness of the ancestors when they drum (2020:409). These scholars believe that drumming fosters a spirit of togetherness with community members and family (2020:409).

Sharing more insight of the concept 'spirituality' Le Roux and Sauer (2016:163) remark that spirituality alone is not necessarily considered to be a positive factor, as people may use it toward negative or positive ends. According to Le Roux and Sauer, through spirituality, individuals attempt to perceive their world, themselves, and their needs in terms of their connection to the self, others, nature and God, and music is capable of affecting spiritual aspects with emotional needs in health care and can contribute to the 'wholeness' perception of a person (2016:163). Based on the foregoing, Bapedi traditional religion has played a significant role in transforming Christianity¹ by confronting the missionaries' activities, Lutheranism inclusive, with the decisive issue of indigenization. Their bold response to acculturation yielded significant results. According to Lebaka (2020:1; 2017:165), culture change usually took place over an extended period, but in Sekhukhune district, acculturation took place at a tremendous speed. Lebaka writes that missionaries of all church denominations from different cardinal points across the globe were heartily welcomed into Bapedi society in Sekhukhune district, Limpopo province, to establish churches and schools as the main vehicles for the dissemination of European culture (2020:2). According to Lebaka, the missionaries were skilful and helpful in many ways, unfortunately they did not take into consideration the traditional beliefs, customs and practices of the Bapedi people. Instead of adding to the Bapedi cultural practices, they applied the principle of elimination by substitution (2020:7). A serious attack, for instance, was launched on Bapedi traditional and religious beliefs, customs and practices – polygamy, ancestor veneration, initiation or circumcision, traditional religious music, traditional healing systems, etc. (2020:5). This puritanical attitude frowned upon and condemned incorporation of any indigenous religious and cultural expression into Bapedi Christian life, and this undermined those positive values of indigenization and inter-religious relations among Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), as well as the cultural blend within Evangelical Lutheran Congregation singing context.

Theoretical Perspective

¹ Christianity in the context of this study is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (Nweke 2020:43). According to Nweke, it is a missionary religion holding that Christ's message, as intended for the whole world, is not just for a particular area of people, instead it is for everyone as we can see in Mark 16:15ff. Jesus gave the injunction "Go ye into the world and preach the gospel to all creation".

This study is underpinned by the theory of cultural risk often referred to as 'Cultural Theory', developed by Mary Douglas (1992). This theory focuses on collective, social, and shared conventions that influence individual perceptions (Douglas 1982:40). Cultural theory proposes that individuals choose what they fear in relation to their way of life – that is, in relation to the 'culture' they belong to (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982; Thompson et al., 1990; Douglas, 1997). The theory advocates that, structures of social organization endow individuals with perceptions that reinforce those structures in competition against alternative ones (Douglas, 1966). Two features of Douglas's creative work inform the basic structure of cultural theory. The first is a general account of the social function of individual perceptions of social dangers. Douglas argues that this tendency plays an indispensable role in promoting certain social structures, both by imbuing a society's members with aversions to subversive behaviour and by focusing resentment and blame on those who defy such institutions (1996:4). The second important feature of Douglas's work is a particular account of the forms that competing structures of social organization assume. Douglas and Wildavsky (1992) stress that individuals are embedded in a social structure and that the social context of individuals shapes their values, attitudes, and worldviews. Douglas maintains that cultural ways of life and affiliated outlooks can be characterized (within and across all societies at all times) along two dimensions, which she calls 'group' and 'grid' (1970). According to her, a 'high group' way of life exhibits a high degree of collective control, whereas a 'low group' one exhibits a much lower one and a resulting emphasis on individual self-sufficiency (1970). Attesting to Douglas' viewpoints, Rayner (1992) observes that a 'high grid' way of life is characterized by conspicuous and durable forms of stratification in roles and authority, whereas a 'low grid' one reflects a more egalitarian ordering.

This model is indeed in agreement with Moscovici's (1981) theory of social representation. Borrowing Moscovici's theory, Rodlach (2006) argues that within any culture, there are points of tension and fracture around which new representations emerge. According to Rodlach, social representation emerges when individuals engage in interaction with each other during everyday conversations. He describes the concept as everyday thought associated with colloquial language. In his view, the result is a set of explanations originating in daily life during inter-individual communications (Rodlach, 2006:9). Rodlach outlines two specific processes which are engaged when people integrate new ideas, and these are anchoring and objectification (2006:11). According to him, through anchoring, unfamiliar concepts are compared and interpreted in the light of the phenomena generally acknowledged as common sense, as well as widely shared values, norms, and beliefs (Moscovici, 2001). These two mechanisms make the unfamiliar familiar, first by transferring it to a sphere that allows people to compare and interpret it, and second, by reproducing it among tangible things. He is of the opinion that once social representations are created, they can be modified and reworked as they continue to evolve. Applying the

theory of social representation to the context of this study, depicts the manner in which the indigenization process of Lutheran tradition evolves over time.

The theory is applicable to this study because Christians/Lutherans in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality feared acculturation, infiltration of culture, Westernization, indoctrination, and distortion of culture by the missionaries. They confronted all these with bold response and with the decisive issue of indigenization. They are currently embedded in a social structure of indigenization. Their mission is to transform Christianity and/or Lutheran tradition, and shape their values, attitudes, and worldview. In the context of this study, all aspects namely, collective, social, and shared conventions as outlined by Douglas (1982) apply. The context of this study is ideal for this model because indications from the investigation in this study have revealed that the rapid growth of Lutheranism in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality and elsewhere, and the inter-religious relations among Christianity and indigenous people's music in the existing Lutheran liturgy made inter-religious dialogue an urgent necessity. The present research complies with this endeavour because during observations and interviews, it was established that the integration of spiritual folk songs (choruses), traditional musical instruments, handclapping, and dancing into liturgical church service of almost all Evangelical Lutheran churches found in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, has not compromised the essence of Lutheran tradition. It has rather encouraged maximum, active and unimpeded participation in liturgical church service and/or Congregational singing.

While I greatly respect the theological traditions of the Western and/or European church, yet I feel that the African Lutherans should be allowed to theologize without feeling they have to submit to the Western or European yardstick. There is an African metaphor/proverb saying, *'A bee does not start a new home with honey'*. So, just as a bee starts with the raw material and produces honey, so African Christians, Bapedi Lutherans in particular, must take Lutheran tradition and biblical message (gospel) as the raw material and using their own culture should make (manufacture, weave) a Christian theology capable of responding to Bapedi Lutherans' deepest concerns and questions. I applaud Christians/Lutherans within Bapedi religious and cultural context for their bold response, by confronting acculturation with their decisive issue of indigenization. It is not an overstatement to contend that there is a need for the Christians/Lutherans in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality to keep, uphold and promote their indigenized Lutheranism, for the preservation of Lutheran tradition in African context.

Previous Related Studies

Research over the last decades has been growing substantially in the field of Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), showing a significant influence of inter-religious relations among Christianity and African Traditional Religion; and exploring how African religious and cultural values have impacted on Christian – ATR relations within the society, and how the latter has, also, been affected by the former

(Adamo 2011; Chukwu 2018; Crews & Taylor 2022; Lebaka 2020; Luhrmann et al. 2021; Manganyi & Buitendag 2013; Mtemwa et al. 2021; Mpofu 2020; Nweke 2020; Ogbonna 2021; Sanneh & Carpenter 2005). Religion according to Nweke (2020:42) gives answers to a lot of things and problems people face in the world, has no founder and that is why it is called an indigenous religion. Nweke is concerned that African traditional religion has been seen by many from a negative point of view (2020:44). He cites some negative terms used for ATR, such as a) *archaic*, which implies old, old fashioned, antiquated, no longer in use; b) *Paganism*, which refers to pagan, derives from the Latin word for a rustic, village dweller, and its use in English connotes polytheism; c) *Animism*, which is described as a belief that spirits inhabit some or all classes of natural objects; d) *Heathen*, which implies an uncultured or an uncivilised person or religion. Based on these misconceptions, according to Nweke, ATR is seen as a religion that is not refined, but crooked and, e) *Idolatry*, which implies a religion that worship idols (2020:44). His statement of position is that African Traditional Religion (ATR) is not archaic because it is the life of the people which has to do with the day-to-day life of an African, is not a polytheistic religion, rather a monotheistic one, does not worship idols, it is the religion of the people that has to do with their way of life, does not worship idols, is not heathenism, and its adherents worship the Supreme Being just like every other religion (2020:44). Nweke (2020:46) further asserts that community life practices among religious groups in Christian societies must have had its teaching and foundation in African traditional religion. In his view, religion generally includes belief in the supernatural and a code of ethical behaviour (2020:47). His humble advice is that as each religion is important and has a lot of things others can learn from, no religion should be seen as superior to the other, and each should encourage the other, see something good in the other, appreciate the other, applaud the other and equally condemn the negative sides of the other. Hence, no one should single itself out as the best because they are all monotheistic by nature (2020:47). Nweke is convinced that by doing this, ATR, Christianity, and Islam can co-habit and have peace, love, unity and understanding between them (2020:47).

Sharing more insight on the encounter between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), Adamo (2011:1) postulates that the rapid growth of many religions in Africa and the revival of ATR in postcolonial Africa have made inter-religious dialogue an urgent necessity. In consonance with Nweke's viewpoints, Adamo suggests that unlike the colonial encounter with ATR, which was characterized by hostility and the condemnation of ATR, the postcolonial encounter should be characterized by mutual respect, understanding, tolerance, and some level of freedom, liberation and genuineness, and in this way, suspicion will be reduced, because despite the adherents' confession of Christianity, ATR is not about to be extinct (2011:1). Adamo defines ATR as the inborn and aboriginal religion of Africans, embraced by the forefathers of the present generations (2020:3). He further describes it as the religion that emerged from the sustaining faith of the forebears of the present generation of Africans passed from generation to generations and still

practiced today by the present generation of Africans (Lebaka 2020:3; Awolalu 1991:111). Adamo maintains that dialogue with adherence of African Indigenous Religion (AIR) is a way of expressing our love and concern to our neighbour, which is the greatest commandment in the Bible (2020:9). According to Adamo, this means that dialogue without genuine love and concern is not true dialogue (2020:9).

Manganyi and Buitendag (2013:1) testify to this fact when they state that the missionaries were not only perceived as turning Africans away from their culture but were also understood to be undermining African culture by being arrogant, in the sense that they compared African culture to their so-called *superior* culture. According to Manganyi and Buitendag, an African continues living life as part of a community, not in isolation as an individual. Life is lived in connection with those that are alive in the here and now, but also with an awareness of those who have died, yet who are also present in the here and now (Maimela & Buitendag 2013:13). Maimela and Buitendag maintain that the reality of life for an African is that there is never a separation of physical from spiritual. To the traditional African, there is no coincidence or accident. Nothing happens by chance (2013:11). Manganyi and Buitendag further point out that African Traditional Religion has a space to exist within the Christian faith, yet the approach to worship differs (2013:13). Relatively, few studies have focused upon the decisive issue of indigenization and the role of culture in liturgy (Amalorpavadass 1971; Lebaka 2015; Ndemanu et al. 2018; Triebel 1992). Lebaka (2015:5) writes that traditional African religious music in general has a great impact on Evangelical Lutheran liturgical church services. He proposes that Evangelical Lutheran congregations in Africa (that are losing church members because of poor attendance) could potentially consider introducing traditional African religious music as part of their church services (2015:5). On a similar note, Ndemanu (2018:83) notes that the level of inter-traditional religious tolerance in Africa is worth celebrating. Ndemanu elaborates by stating that the degree of tolerance has gone a long way to impact how Africans view interfaith relationships (2018:83). There is a vast literature on the use of music in everyday life (Dargie 1988, 1995; Davidson 1991; Hustard 1981; Isabirye 2021; Lebaka 2009; Lo-Bamijoko 2015; Monteiro & Wall 2011; Nelson 1999; Nketia 1949, 1954; Nketia & Djedje 1984; Scott 2000; Silverman 2018). What is noticeable in the use of music in the use of music in everyday life in African context, is the vital role played by musical instruments. Lo-Bamijoko (2015:20) explains that instruments described as rattles have one common feature. According to him, they are always strung together, and are then used as anklets or waist bands, or tied around a musical instrument to act as a buzzer, and their names vary according to the material with which they are made (2015:20). Lo-Bamijoko contends that the drum has been described by many scholars and musicians as a rhythm-melodic instrument; and as a rhythmic instrument, it is regarded among the Igbos as the generator of everything happening around it, and a pulsating force, like the heart, which gives life and meaning to music (2015:24). Lo-Bamijoko is of the

view that as melodic instrument, it is regarded among the Igbos as possessing life, but this is not life as we know it, of the mortal, ephemeral type (2015:24).

Attesting to the above observations, Silverman (2018:13), notes that in West African cultures, drums themselves are sacred, signifying power and influence. According to Silverman, 'drumming in this tradition, is spirit'. Monteiro and Wall (2011:234) add another important point. They observe that in the African worldview, dance is a conduit of individual and community healing. According to Monteiro and Wall, African conceptualization of illness and health integrate social, spiritual, physical and mental realms, all of which are impacted by trauma (2011:234). Monteiro and Wall further maintain that traditional African dance is connected to ritualistic and spiritual healing practices and addresses a range of ailments (2011:235). These scholars assert that the understanding belief is that in the community, mind and body must be incorporated into ritual systems to facilitate healing, as well as transform and empower the individual and the group (2011:235). Based on the foregoing, it is worthwhile to mention here observations by Isabirye (2021). Isabirye remarks that before colonization, Basoga people in Uganda, like other African societies, learned music through indigenous ways: through social interaction with everyone and anyone in the community who was more knowledgeable and skilled (2021:240). In his view, the transmission process was from elderly people to the children, and from siblings to siblings (2021:240).

Research strategy

Subjects for this study were identified because of their knowledgeable and informative qualities. Pastors (*baruti*), church elders (*badiši*), church choirs' conductors (*bahlahli ba dikhwaere*), and selected congregants/singers in different Evangelical Lutheran Church Congregations made it possible for me to attend their church services and church choirs' rehearsals with them. During my association with them they corroborated my data on the significant role played by traditional religious and cultural context in transforming Christianity for the purpose of indigenization. Sincere thanks are due to them for their patience, time, and kindness. The study employed an intercultural theological approach to Science and Religion, and the analysis is based on acculturation and the principle of elimination by substitution. The study also utilized a triangulated and contextual approach, and data was collected through observations, face-to-face interviews and video recordings of rehearsals and performances during church services and other related events. This approach consists of (i) ethnographic observational data, (ii) interview data, and (iii) literature searches. Firstly, *ethnographic observational data* was obtained from eleven (11) Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in eight (8) villages. I also endeavoured to attend church choirs' rehearsals of different Congregations and other relevant events (church rallies and conferences) that would further understanding of the Lutheran hymn singing within Bapedi cultural and religious context. Secondly, *interview data*, was obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven (27)

participants across the eight (8) villages, who were full members of Evangelical Lutheran church, pastors and church elders inclusive, with conversations focused on addressing the key research questions. Both oral interviews and observations were employed to gather data. Most of these interviews were informal and spontaneous. However, I also carried out other interviews that were longer, more formal, and in some instances taped. Virtually, all the interviewing, formal and informal, revolved around questions emerging from my observations. Thirdly, I reviewed existing literature around the topic from published books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, reports and theses, while analysis and discussion of results were in progress.

The above approach is supported by Reck, Slobin and Titon (1992:444) who argue that although we may travel to far-away places to meet, see, and relate with unfamiliar things and people, or search for marvellous treasures, 'the pot of gold is buried in one's own backyard'. They encourage researchers to seek out nearby musical cultures, which they can observe, understand, and document, to contribute to the body of knowledge on the influence of the African religious and cultural context and its impact on Lutheranism. The author found the above guide and the approach of purpose definition useful in this study. After every interview and discussion session with individuals and groups, I listened to the playback to determine issues that needed further clarification. Since the researcher was born and bred up in the Bapedi society, Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, Limpopo Province, the knowledge of Sepedi language and culture was very useful to the understanding of structural elements and characteristics (language), content and context of traditional spiritual folk songs (choruses) and the Lutheran hymnal. I found in the study that the congregants/singers have very good diction in their Congregational singing, and this made understanding of text a bit easy. The data was continuously analysed in a dynamic 'top down' manner based upon the key research questions. The purpose of this study was twofold: a) to examine the inter-religious relations among Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), and to b) explore how African religious and cultural values have impacted on Christian – ATR relations within the municipality, and how the latter has, also, been affected by the former. Two interrelated research questions therefore guided this study: a) what is the relevance of indigenous people's music in the existing (Lutheran) liturgy? and b) what is the attitude of the current missionaries, local pastors, church elders and congregants towards the transition process? Both questions are addressed in this study.

Results and Discussion

Integration of spiritual folk songs (choruses), traditional musical instruments, handclapping and dancing into Liturgical Church Service.

During observations and interviews, it was established that the integration of spiritual folk songs (choruses), such as '*Ntate roma nna*' (Father send me/*Vater schick mich*); '*Ngwanesu o sa diegelang*' (My brother/sister why are you undecided?/*Mein*

Bruder/Meine Schwester, warum bist du unentschlossen?); and *'Re tswa ka mo re ya ka mo'* (We are moving from one place to the other/ *Wir ziehen von einem Ort zum anderen*); traditional musical instruments (**see Photo 1**), handclapping and dancing into Liturgical church service of almost all Evangelical Lutheran Churches found in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality has not compromised¹ the essence of Lutheran tradition and/or Lutheranism. It has rather encouraged maximum, active and unimpeded participation in Liturgical church service and congregational singing by congregants.



Photo 1

Leg Rattles (*dithlwathlwadi*); (Lobethal Church Centre, 23.06.2019), Photographer: Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka.

It was also found that during this type of service congregants feel that they are themselves, recognized as part of the congregation, and are free to express their emotions, appreciation, satisfaction, and social excitement by either dancing, drumming, ululation, blowing whistles and handclapping, which is in line with the African religious and cultural context. Congregants are singing from memory (in four-part harmonic setting), dancing and praising the Supreme God, Lord God Almighty,

¹ Whelan (1990:202), for instance, has observed that “many local churches have begun to produce a body of liturgical music that is a worthy cultural expression of their Christian faith”. Furthermore, Chenoweth (1984:35) gives a few examples showing the “fruits of indigenous musical leadership in the church” which have resulted “in a wealth of worship styles all over the world”, such as those of Papua New Guinea, Nigeria or Cameroon.

the Father of Jesus Christ, the way they like and as they wish, without any barriers or obstacles, and there is active participation in the church (**see photo 2**). This viewpoint is supported by Lebaka (2015:1) who writes that from a cultural point of view, African people do not always feel comfortable in a controlled and/or solemn church environment where emotions are not expressed freely. Lebaka further notes that whilst traditional African religious music is carried out with the help of traditional musical instruments (e.g., *meropa* (drums), *dinaka* (whistles), *dithlwathlwadi* (leg rattles) and *mekgolokwane* (ululation), liturgy enables the congregants to encounter God within the context of a worship service (2015:5). Lebaka further argues that traditional African religious music is indispensable and has a positive impact on mission work, as it proclaims the gospel within the South African missionary context (2015:2).



Photo 2

The congregants feel that they are themselves, recognized as part of the congregation, and are free to express their emotions, appreciation, satisfaction, and social excitement by either dancing, drumming, ululation, and handclapping. They are singing from memory (in four-part harmonic setting), and worshipping the Supreme God, Lord God Almighty, the Father of Jesus Christ, the way they like, and as they wish. There is active participation in the church (Schoonoord; Evangelical Lutheran Church – Schoonoord Congregation, 09.08.2015), Photographer: Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka (Researcher).

Attesting to the above thoughts and observations, Liebernecht (1994:281, 283) rightly postulates that singing helps the congregation of God to recognize itself as church, so that it can establish its own identity through music and appears to be

attractive to outsiders. In the same vein, Nketia (1984:15) shares more insight and contends that apparently ‘the fact that drums and other percussion instruments were used in the Ethiopian church, which has been established in the fourth century A.D., did not affect the evangelistic prejudices.’ It is worthwhile to mention here that it is not only the Lutheran church denomination, that is transforming Christianity, but other church denominations, such as Anglican, Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed and others have incorporated similar Congregational singing strategy to indigenize their liturgical church services. This approach or strategy is supported by Dargie (1989:138) who views the incorporation of African hymns into worship as the best alternative option, a wise move and contributor to the renewal of the whole church.

Music making and music identity

When analysing the data material, it becomes evident that creative music making and music identity are two sides of the same coin, in that the former provides an arena in which the latter can be explored. It is also noticeable that in all the visited churches, creative music-making takes place during a process of interaction between the congregants’ musical experience and competence, their cultural practice, their traditional instruments, and the instructions. Altogether this forms the *affordances* in the creative situation. The following spiritual folk song (chorus) was communally composed by the congregants at Lobethal Lutheran Congregation because of their expertise, musical experience, inborn talent, competency, and creativity (**see table 1**).

Spiritual Folk Song ‘*Ntate Roma nna*’ (Father send me)

‘*Ntate roma nna*’ (Father send me) is an example of spiritual folk songs (choruses), a genre of communal singing whereby a group of congregants (both men and women) sing, clap their hands and dance to the beat of the clapping. According to Mamogudi Phaladi (personal communication, 18 August 2019), the lyrics tell how the singers/congregants are prepared and willing to be sent out there, to the people to spread the Word of God (good news). Table 1 below is the lyrics of ‘*Ntate roma nna*’ followed by the transcription (Transcription A).

Text and translation

Spiritual Folk Song (Chorus): ‘*Ntate Roma Nna*’

Table 1: Lyrics of ‘*Ntate, roma nna*’

Lyrics in Sepedi	German translation	English translation
Ntate roma nna	<i>Vater schick mich</i>	Father send me
Ntate roma nna	<i>Vater schick mich</i>	Father send me
Ntate roma nna	<i>Vater schick mich</i>	Father send me
Roma nna ditšhabeng	<i>Schick mich den Menschen</i>	Send me to the people.

Table 1: The song was recorded by the author on a field trip at liturgical church service held at Lobethal Evangelical Lutheran Church, Ga-Phaahla Mmakadikwe village, Sekhukhune area-Limpopo Province on the 23rd of June 2019.

Figure 3: Musical transcription of the spiritual folk song ‘Tate, roma nna’ - Father send me (my transcription)

Tate, roma nna



Figure 3: Musical transcription (own transcription) of the spiritual folk song ‘Tate, roma nna’ - Father send me (my transcription). (Transcription C; my transcription) shows the song ‘Tate, roma nna’ (Father send me) in instrumental version. This was performed by Lobethal Congregation, and accompanied by Kenny’s Brass Band, Ga-Phaahla Mmakadikwe, Limpopo Province – South Africa; Date: 23rd of June 2019.

Descriptive Assessment

The song ‘Ntate roma nna’ is a spiritual folk song (chorus) originating from Lobethal congregation, Arkona parish – Greater Sekhukhune Municipality; Botshabelo Circuit, Northern Diocese in South Africa. This song and others are often sung during the church offertory because of their power to excite and put congregants in a celebratory mood that makes them more generous in making their contributions. This celebratory mood associated with these songs stem from the functions for which the songs were designed and performed - a happy occasion. During church rallies, conferences and liturgical church service, the rendition of this song excites and makes congregants participate by singing, clapping hands and dancing due to the song’s tune and rhythm they are familiar with. The pulling power of this song was in its tune and rhythm that compelled most of the congregants to participate actively during the performance. Their active participation also heightened their religious experience. In fact, the lyrics used in this song are taken from the Bible and the dancing style is about innovation

and creativity. With its attractive melody and setting, this song supports numerous biblical texts such as Joshua 24:15; John 8:7; Isaiah 6:8; Isaiah 6:8-10; Exodus 3:4; I Samuel 3:4; Isaiah 6:5 and Exodus 3:10. Its danceable rhythm tends to move the congregants to dance. Moreover, the use of Sepedi language in spiritual folk songs (choruses) tends to emphasize the scriptural lyrics in the song.

When the song was sung during liturgical church service, the congregants actively participated and gave to the church as much as their souls were motivated to give. The happy feelings generated by this song facilitated the gift-giving in the form of money, which translated into making contributions towards renovating the church. This simple melodic and rhythmic song is popular among the Lutherans in South African context, because it is relatively easy to sing and can be sung as individual or as a group. During field research, it was interesting to observe that while singing spiritual folk songs (choruses), the congregants are using both inhalation and exhalation technique to produce musical sounds. This breathing technique differs from regular singing (of hymns) where sounds are produced only during exhalation technique. Consonant with the above observation, Niemi (2009:52) asserts that the vocal technique which is based on sounds produced through alternating inhalation and exhalation is quite common in the circumpolar cultural area.

The melodic structure of this song is based on two parts, the call and response. The instrumental rhythms, on the other hand, depend on the dancing style. During church rallies, conferences and liturgical church services, the song's structure such as melody, rhythm, pitch, and instruments are adapted to suit congregational singing and church service. There is no fixed tempo in this song. It gradually gets faster as the performance approaches the climax. The intensity of the music also grows with the tempo as more instruments join the performance. At the climax, a signal is given by a drummer, or a whistle is blown by the leader and all music and handclapping stops.

The relationship between music and culture

With regards to the relationship between music and culture, closer investigation has revealed that in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, music is part of culture and at the same time forms culture. It also has communicative qualities necessary for relating the Christian message in all cultures. There is a growing body of evidence to support this view. Nelson (1999:152-155) for example, provides convincing evidence of a relationship between music and culture. He examines the role of 'ethnomusicological' research in the mission context, herein stressing the importance of the bonds between music and culture and arguing that 'God can and will use whatever we have for His Kingdom and service'. Darby (1999:66) gives the example of the African initiated where allegedly 'African spirituality has been allowed to permeate fully the worship and liturgy', while all 'mainline denominations in Africa have incorporated into their traditions, whether they like it or not, music, rhythm, ceremonies and pilgrimage, which are intrinsically African'. How vital authentic hymns are for the relevance of a liturgy, has been evidenced in the Indian mission context, where,

according to Amalorpavadass (1971:11), a truly Indian liturgy has been shaped through the implementation of Indian instead of Western music. Hence, considering the cultural impact on liturgy, including its music, it becomes clear that 'the future of worship and its music will be written by both the church and society'. From what has been pointed out concerning the relationship between music and culture, the implication is that indigenous music in missionary work should be taken seriously, as it will play an indispensable role regarding indigenization. Endorsing the above observations and viewpoints, Triebel (1992:235) states that 'We cannot ignore culture in our missionary task'. On a similar note, Scott (2000:9) asserts that 'accepting that music is part of the experience of every human culture group, we can say that it is an inherent gift given by a wise Creator for the benefit and enjoyment for us all'. Scott proposes that the church, in its missionary endeavours, ought to recognize and accept 'the powerful effect of music in all aspects of Christian ministry (2000:9), and, therefore, employ it in its missionary work'. From the discussions above, it is arguably true that indigenous music has an important role to play in the missionary work.

Handclapping in Liturgy

At this point it is appropriate to bring the vital role played by handclapping into the discussion. An interesting observation on the vital, if not central role of handclapping in liturgy should be mentioned. The impression created during interviews and observations was that handclapping helps to maintain the tempo since the congregants have a tendency of gradually and habitually slowing down the tempo of hymns during Congregational singing. Regarding musical parameter (tempo) during Congregational singing, the enquiry revealed that when handclapping is enforced, the tempo is regularized, thereby producing a metronome effect. During my field research at Lobethal Congregation, it was further observed that with musical creativity and rhythmic direction, congregants build a repertoire which is characterized by interlocking rhythms, four-part harmonic setting, improvisation, polyrhythm, and cultural blend, which compel the congregants, the pastor inclusive to dance to the music, and hence increase attendance and participation.

Singing and Movement

Oral accounts and literary evidence have revealed that singing and movement, like dance, is another quality of music which supports a total understanding and acceptance of the message in the African mission context (Khuzwayo, 1999:17; Scott 2000:9; Triebel 1992:235). Khuzwayo explains that it forces the missionary to integrate certain movements, which underscore the song's content, together with music in worship, as part of an Africanization process (1999:17). It is an accepted position that the emphasis on contextual indigenous music would be in line with Luther's criterion of familiarity. Martin Luther emerged as a voice in Europe at a time when Church elders were out of touch with the religious needs and expectations of their community, who were poor and downtrodden. The data analysed thus far,

confirm that this is perhaps a reflection of what is happening within our communities again in the modern world.

Musical creativity and musicality

During the study, it was also observed that musical creativity and musicality in the visited churches embrace other elements such as the capacity for becoming absorbed emotionally in music and the ability to engage into an intimate relation with it, so that the whole organization of the soul is affected. When participants were asked about the creation of traditional spiritual folk songs (choruses), it was found that to the congregants/singers, music is an inborn talent. The talent for composition is based on originality, creativity, improvisation, imitation, and spontaneity, together with other aspects such as a listening skill and an ear for music. It was further observed that the art of composing, instrumental playing, ululating, handclapping, whistling, and dancing requires a reliable musical memory, concentration, determination, commitment, and passion.



Photo 3

The researcher who is also a Lutheran (Lobethal Congregation), and an insider (Bapedi society) & Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, occasionally participates during Congregational Singing (playing his drum). Ga-Phaahla Mmakadikwe; Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa, (09.08.2015), Photographer: Moletje Frank Paledi.

It is worthwhile to mention here that despite fundamental and multi-consequential changes Christianity brought about in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality,

African religious and cultural values have also impacted on Christian – ATR relations, and congregants are using their Lutheran – indigenous system of worship.

Concluding Thoughts

The primary objective of this chapter was to examine the inter-religious relations among Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR) to explore how African religious and cultural values have impacted on Christian – ATR relations within the municipality, and how the latter has, also, been affected by the former. The investigation has revealed that the integration of spiritual folk songs (choruses), traditional musical instruments, handclapping, and dancing into liturgical church service of almost all Evangelical Lutheran churches found in Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, has not compromised the essence of Lutheran tradition. It has rather encouraged maximum, active and unimpeded participation in liturgical church service and/or Congregational singing. During observations and interviews, it was also established that the dimensions of rhythm play an important role to contextualize and Africanize the existing (Lutheran) liturgy, in order to make the missionary qualities of worship an integral part of mission work. Indications from the investigation have shown that the dimensions of rhythm play an important role to contextualize and Africanize the existing (Lutheran) liturgy, in order to make the missionary qualities of worship an integral part of mission work. During the study it was also observed that musical creativity and musicality in the visited churches embrace other elements such as the capacity for becoming absorbed emotionally in music and the ability to enter an intimate relation with it, so that the whole organization of the soul is affected. It was concluded that it is indeed of great significance that indigenous people's music should be regarded as a matter of relevance and ultimately becomes a vessel which carries the full meaning of the Gospel.

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