

# Gender, Religion, and the Media: An Analysis of Selected Media Representations of Fungisai's Images and Music

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## <sup>1</sup>SHORT BIO

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## ABSTRACT

The study looks at the associations between gender, religion, and the media through an analysis of some media representations of selected images and music of the Zimbabwean gospel "diva," Fungisai Zvakavapano Mashavave (hereon Fungisai). With close to two decades on the Zimbabwean gospel music scene, Fungisai is not only a celebrated musician, but her career also demonstrates the complex ways in which power operates on subjectivities that are governed by gender and religion. The study aims to unpack the ways in which this power is determined and endorsed and also how the female gospel musician's image and music choices work to subvert this power. Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of hybridity as the "third space," third culture, and a mixture of two cultures and identities, provides the theoretical guideline for this study's arguments. As a female gospel musician, Fungisai's image and music choices have come under scrutiny and have been subjected to socio-cultural and religious prescriptions which dictate often constricting perceptions of what it means to be an "ideal" woman. The study is particularly interested in the ways in which Fungisai navigates her way through various competing as well as colluding systems of power in order to forge emancipatory religious identities.

## KEYWORDS

gender; religion; media; gospel music; the "third space"

## Introduction

Zimbabwean women generally occupy a position where the vast and largely problematic complexities of gender and religion are revealed and contested. The major theme that has been revealed, based on various scholarly perspectives, is that they occupy a subordinate position to men – a position that has not changed as yet. Thus, when it comes to the issue of the interconnection of gender, religion, and the media, the theme of women's subordination persists. This study discusses the complex intersections of gender, religion, and the media in the analysis of selected media images and music of Fungisai. The analysis aims to show the ways in which religion and gender affect these media images and music and how Fungisai formats her identities within these intersections. The core argument is that Fungisai's images and musical aesthetics are ambivalent and this ambivalence is conceptualised in terms of

Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity in the so-called "third space." The study shows how the third space signifies an important and creative space that values multiple and alternative identities for women like Fungisai, whose lives are governed by the dictates of religion and patriarchy. Before these issues are discussed, I will provide a broad spectrum background view of the issues that have generally shaped female Zimbabwean musicians.

## **Women and Music in Zimbabwe: A Background View**

Research on Zimbabwean women in the music industry generally exposes exclusionary practices that are informed by societal assumptions about the subordinate position of women. For example, Kerstin Bolzt (2007) provides a historically linear analysis of the role and place of female Zimbabwean artists and contends that they have been marginalised and excluded as national citizens.<sup>1</sup> Bolzt confirms how the tension between the religio-cultural space and the domestic space shapes the lives of many female artists. Consequently, the women who try to move freely as artists into the public sphere beyond the accepted domestic domain, are constantly challenged by men and the governing concepts of gender.<sup>2</sup> The dominant concepts of gender dictate that women should occupy the domestic sphere which is located and symbolised by the home. Bolzt's study is pertinent because it critically interrogates how female artists negotiate the contradictions between the private and public spaces.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Joyce Jenje-Makwenda (2013) confirms that in Zimbabwe, only a few women take music as a career and if they do so, they are either employed as backing vocalists for male musicians or as dancers.<sup>4</sup> This systematic marginalisation of female musicians is best explained by Bolzt as a direct result of colonial machinations that have for a long time pushed African women into the abyss of invisibility. For instance, colonial urban settlements were created for the comfort and residence of white colonial masters with black men supplying cheap labour. However, the growth of urban settlements added to the demands for entertainment, and because African women were not meant to exist

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<sup>1</sup> Kerstin Bolzt, *Women as Artists in Contemporary Zimbabwe* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African studies, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Ezra Chitando and Pauline Mateveke, "Challenging Patriarchy and Exercising Women's Agency in Zimbabwean Music: Analysing the Careers of Chiwoniso Maraire and Olivia Charamba," *MUZIKI* 9, no.2 (2012): 43.

<sup>3</sup> Bolzt, *Women as Artists*.

<sup>4</sup> Joyce Jenje-Makwenda, *Women Musicians of Zimbabwe: A Celebration of Women's Struggles for Voice and Artistic Expression* (Harare: Joyce Jenje-Makwenda, 2013).

within these settlements, it also meant that they were excluded from the music making processes. The women that seized the opportunity to achieve fame and fortune, became inextricably linked to the urban culture, although they were not easily accepted by either the white or the black patriarchs.

Research also shows that these exclusionary practices have endured within the postcolonial context. Mwenda Ntarangwi (1999) has the opinion that music making as a social and cultural enterprise reflects on gender realities and so, within music production and consumption, women and men face very different cultural, social, institutional, moral, political, and economic constraints. These constraints limit the potential of female musicians to own their “voice.”<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, women who initially made it into the Zimbabwean music industry did it with their husbands or family members because singing with family or husbands afforded them the necessary social status, making them some kind of role models.<sup>6</sup> The need to control and manage women in the music industry was driven by the view that music, especially popular music, was a site of deviance characterised by individuals of loose morals. Consequently, women in the music industry tend to receive harsher criticism than men because gender codes assume that a woman must uphold the national culture and values. Ntarangwi also argues that music has not exactly been sanctioned as “real” work even though the artists themselves regard it as work. It has always been associated with leisure and entertainment and so women’s participation or involvement in it is usually an unwelcome undertaking.<sup>7</sup> Despite these restrictions and social constraints, female Zimbabwean musicians have managed to move outside the socially sanctioned domestic spaces even though this movement comes with a price. Ntarangwi further shows that the public perception of female musicians is negative. If a woman exists outside the restricted social area of the home and enters a public space such as the popular music environment, she is labelled a “whore” or “loose,” and regarded as sexually available to all men, as opposed to the marked categories of “mother,” “wife,” or “sister” whose existence in society is

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<sup>5</sup> Mwenda Ntarangwi, “Musical Practice as a Gender Experience: Examples from Kenya and Zimbabwe,” in *Reflections on Gender Issues in Africa*, ed. Patricia McFadden (Harare: Sapes Trust, 1999): 34.

<sup>6</sup> Jenje-Makwenda, *Women Musicians of Zimbabwe*.

<sup>7</sup> Ntarangwi, “Musical Practice,” 34.

bound by a kinship relationship that brings with it social and cultural expectations and values.

Fred Zindi (2010) confirms Ntarangwi's position when he alludes to the strong misconceptions about Zimbabwean women in the music industry and how they have found the business to be socially and emotionally draining because they constantly have to defend their position as morally upright. According to Zindi, the negative associations with women in the music industry means that there are not many female musicians in Zimbabwe.<sup>8</sup> This also means that the gospel music genre has become more popular with women who would like to venture into the music industry. Zindi explains that gospel music is considered a safe platform from which a woman can find herself on the music scene: "Because people fear God, it is difficult for male chauvinists to stop their daughters from singing about God, just like they find it difficult to stop their wives from going to church."<sup>9</sup> Yet, Fungisai's journey and experiences within the gospel music industry deconstructs Zindi's concept of the "safety" of gospel music. Fungisai's narrative which will be analysed in the ensuing sections, highlights that the perceived "safety" within gospel music is not that safe. However, the debates by Zimbabwean music scholars attest to the discursive power of being gendered and demonstrate that the struggle to control and manage women's music making is a result of strongly gendered stereotypes about what it means to be a man or a woman. Gender is entangled with issues of power and identity and this is reflected in the struggles faced by female musicians in Zimbabwe. Society's anxiety about women's participation in the music industry emanates from the impulse to control. Therefore, being gendered as a woman becomes a constraint to a successful music career. This background to Zimbabwean women in music sets the pace for this article because I would like to proffer the argument that Fungisai's voice, as it emanates from the lyrics of her gospel music, the media images she projects through her fashion choices, and what she says in the media, are intricately linked to societal, cultural, and religious settings and these in turn, shape the trajectories of her identity formation.

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<sup>8</sup> Fred Zindi, *Music Guide for Zimbabwe* (Harare: Zindisc Publications, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Zindi, *Music Guide for Zimbabwe*, 69.

## A Theoretical Overview of Homi Bhabha's Concepts of Hybridity and the "Third Space"

The notion of hybridity was introduced into the broad field of postcolonial studies during the 1980s by the renowned Indian postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha. Bhabha (1990) conceptualises hybridity as the "third space," referring to a third culture – a mixture of two or more competing cultures and identities. This "third space" enables other cultures and identities to emerge and its function is to displace the histories that constitute it by setting up new structures of authority and new political initiatives.<sup>10</sup> Bhabha's ideas about hybridity stress the impossibility of purity as a cultural phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Katheryne Mitchell (1997) also asserts that hybridity's inherent resistance to fixed binaries attracts the interest of postcolonial theorists.<sup>12</sup> Hybridity is therefore celebrated within the postcolonial theorising because of how it resists rigid narratives. This resistance is appreciated because it provides a way out of a dualistic philosophy and allows room for the inscription of the intervention of the subaltern. Bhabha insists that hybridity points to the idea that cultures are diverse, and that cultural diversity must not be viewed as a short-coming, as it must be taken as good and positive. I agree with Bhabha's position on cultural diversity because it is my opinion that, as a post-colonial subject, the formation of Fungisai's identities is stimulated by various religio-cultural signifiers, and these result in multiple ways of being Fungisai. To explain his position on cultural diversity Bhabha states that

there is no culture which is full in itself because there are other cultures to contradict its authority and also because its own symbol forming activity always underscores the claim to originary, holistic, organic, identity...By denying the essentialism of a prior given original culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Homi Bhabha and Jonathan Rutherford, "Interview with Homi Bhabha: The Third Space," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

<sup>11</sup> Anjali Prabhu and Ato Quayson, "Postcolonising through Relation," in *Postcolonial Studies in a Francophone Frame: Intersections and Revisions*, ed. Anne Donadey and Adali Murdoch (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2004), 224-34.

<sup>12</sup> Katheryne Mitchell, "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 1997, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1068/d150533>.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabha and Rutherford, "Interview with Homi Bhabha," 210-1.

Both Bhabha's application of culture as a continuation in a process of hybridity and his idea of hybridity as a space between the rules of engagement, have inspired this article's philosophical underpinnings. Bhabha's conceptualisation of the "third space" is therefore applied as a way of extending knowledge about Fungisai's ambivalent identities. The "third space" theory is also used as a way of challenging the dualistic philosophies emanating from religious and gendered discourses not only about Fungisai, but also about the position of women in society.

## Methodology

Robert Burgess (1992)<sup>14</sup> insists that there is no best method of conducting research and that researchers need to be guided by the kind of research questions that they wish to pose. Going by Burgess' argument and because of the very nature of feminine religious "identities" which provide a wider philosophical choice to this study, a qualitative research methodology has been chosen as the appropriate approach from which to conduct this research. Qualitative research refers to the kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.<sup>15</sup> It is, as Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin argue, research about people's lives, stories, behaviour, organisational functioning, social movements, and interactional relationships. Strauss and Corbin express the idea that qualitative research is focused on studying human behaviour and the social world that is inhabited by humans. Likewise, Beverley Hancock (1998) provides five general questions which she purports to be the central questions that qualitative research seeks to answer and which are related to why people behave in the way they do and how opinions and attitudes are formed.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore a fact that qualitative research reflects and capitalises on the special character of people as objects of inquiry which dictates this study's choice of methodology (cf. Bryman 1988).<sup>17</sup>

This study places some media images of Fungisai in conversation with the gospel message in her music so as to understand how they

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<sup>14</sup> Robert G. Burgess, *Issues in Sociology: Research Methods* (Edinburg: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Beverley Hancock, *Trent Focus for Research and Development in Primary Healthcare: An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Nottingham: Trent Focus Group, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

represent her identities. Identity is an unstable concept: its meanings and usages are influenced by various forces. Although qualitative research has been condemned on the basis of being abstract, it is this abstract nature of qualitative research that aptly suits the multiplicity and instability within the phenomenon of identities. The general image that qualitative research conveys about the social order is one of interconnection and change,<sup>18</sup> and this study endeavours to unpack whether or not the said “interconnection and change” reflect in Fungisai’s identity formation processes. There is an implicit element built into much qualitative research, which is both a symptom and a cause of an undertaking to view social life in processional rather than static terms. This becomes ideal to the undertaking of my study because, as I argue in the following section, Fungisai’s construction of identity seems to be an ongoing process.

Having selected the qualitative research methodology, it was necessary to select qualitative research tools (methods) with which to collect the data accordingly. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis to interpret the selected data. Qualitative textual analysis is a research tool that is used to examine data as it appears through a variety of mediums.<sup>19</sup> The data, in this case selected media images and music of Fungisai, serve as “texts” under study and will be used to assess the range of meanings, values, and messages sent through it so as to understand the interconnections of gender, religion, and media, and its impact on Fungisai’s identity construction. The “texts” are purposively selected in order to aptly reflect the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is a method in which a sample is deliberately chosen due to the qualities that it possesses.<sup>20</sup> Purposive sampling enables the researcher to select only the material that brings out the study’s core arguments.

## **Positing Hybridities in the Media Images of Fungisai**

What has drawn my interest in Fungisai is her 2016 “scandalous” pronouncement that she “is not a ‘gospel’ musician and did not have any desire to be labelled as such.”<sup>21</sup> After almost a decade in the gospel

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<sup>18</sup> Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*.

<sup>19</sup> Jason A. Smith, “Textual Analysis,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research*, ed. Jörg Matthes (Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley and Sons, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Maria D.C. Tongco, “Purposive Sampling as a Tool for Information Selection,” *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* 5 (2007), 147.

<sup>21</sup> Fred Zindi, “Is Fungisai a Saint or a Villain?” *The Herald*, 28 March 2016, <http://www.herald.co.zw/is-fungisai-a-saint-or-villain/>.

music industry and dominating the Zimbabwean gospel music charts, this declaration came as a surprise. To illuminate her declaration, Fungisai exposed that the label “gospel musician” was a sort of maze that she tried to extricate herself from. According to Fungisai, she was battling the norms of society ever since she was labelled a gospel musician. On this revelation, Zindi (2016) expounds that gospel artists are associated with righteous things of the church as well as Christian values, and once that perception has been established by the society at large, it becomes difficult for the artists to remove themselves from that perception. Hence, Fungisai rightly feels that the label “gospel musician” has become the stumbling block to her development as a musician. She explains: “Problem yangu inenge yemakaradhi. Unogona kukwana kumablacks. Wokwana futi kumavheti asi kwese usinganyatsotambirwa” (*My problem is more like the coloured<sup>22</sup> people’s problem. They can fit in the black race, they can also fit in the white race but in both worlds they are not made to feel as if they belong*).<sup>23</sup>

Fungisai comes to this conclusion based on her experiences in the realm of the Zimbabwean Pentecostal Church – a realm that most scholars have concluded to be heavily patriarchal. Nomatter Sande (2016) confirms this situation when analysing the link between faith and gender equality within the Zimbabwean Pentecostal Church.<sup>24</sup> He is of the view that Christianity, particularly its brand of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, has normalised unequal gender expectations by institutionalising and perpetuating patriarchy. As a popular gospel musician, Fungisai also had to deal with the gendered pressures of the secular world. She argues that the church community only appreciates her for her music which attracts the presence of huge crowds to the church. However, the church does not consider her to be spiritually developed enough to evangelise. On the other hand, while the secular musicians appreciate her, the appreciation comes with certain barriers and boundaries because they are wary of her gospel orientation.

Fungisai’s dilemma illustrates the alienating effects of discourses that attempt to place individuals within a fixed realm. Her predicament perhaps also echoes the quandary generally faced by Zimbabwean

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<sup>22</sup> The term “coloured person” is used as an ethnic descriptor denoting a mixed race person (usually a mixture of a white European and black African).

<sup>23</sup> Zindi, “Is Fungisai a Saint or a Villain?”

<sup>24</sup> Nomatter Sande, “Faith and Equality: Rethinking Women in Leadership Positions in Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 22, no.2 (2016): 50-62.



women who still bear religious and culturally stimulated patriarchal prescriptions of ideal womanhood. Pascah Mungwini (2010) agrees that Zimbabwean women have to live according to the patriarchal prescriptions of ideal womanhood which include, but are not limited to, motherhood, loyalty, stoicism, simplicity, faithfulness, forgiveness, and being industrious and hospitable.<sup>25</sup> Although these are good values that human beings must aspire to have, prescribing them to women's identities has the potential of placing women in a rigid box and it becomes easy for society to condemn them if they fail to live up to these values. This is fittingly illustrated when Fungisai, a revered and respected gospel artist, suddenly lost the reverence and respect of most of her fans when she reinvented the sound of her music as well as her fashion choices. This reinvention confused and appalled her fans who felt that she was at a crossroads in her career and was veering from the path of righteousness. Hence, at the onset of her attempts to extricate herself from the "maze" of essentialising labels upon her identity, there was a huge backlash and controversy that rendered her a victim of bullying and hate speech from social networking sites such as Facebook and Whatsapp. However, she continued to reinvent her public image by wearing clothes that are not typical of a "respected" and "respectful" gospel musician. For example, *Celebrity News* (2016) posted an image on its website of Fungisai wearing an all leather jumpsuit.<sup>26</sup> The image invited controversy which stemmed from the fact that the leather clad Fungisai was a drastic departure from the "respectful" formally dressed Fungisai. The leather fashion was deemed by many of her fans as unsuitable for a proper gospel musician. Leather fashion is subversive and is associated with the rebellious and deviant values of the secular world. As a gospel musician, she has faced social restrictions on dressing and was expected to conform to prescribed standards about how a gospel musician should dress and behave. Dressing becomes part of the gender socialisation process and one of the dictates of this socialisation is that gospel musicians should look "respectful." A similar controversy was also generated when *Zimetro* (2016) posted an image of Fungisai

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<sup>25</sup> Pascah Mungwini, "Rape, Sexual Politics and the Construction of Manhood among the Shona of Zimbabwe: Some Philosophical Reflections," *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* (2010): 1-19.

<sup>26</sup> *Celebrity News*, Is Fungisai Mashavave The New Zim Dance-Hall Queen? *Youth Village: Zim's Youth Portal*, n.d., <https://youthvillage.co.zw/2016/02/is-fungisai-mashavave-the-new-zim-dance-hall-queen/>.

dressed in a torn denim with pink army boots.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps one of Fungisai's most confounding and controversy-ridden images was posted in *The Sunday Mail* (2016).<sup>28</sup> The image is of Fungisai lying on the grass by the riverside. In her hands she is holding the mbira<sup>29</sup> musical instrument and she has waist-long dreadlocks that prominently flow around her body.

The image is confounding because of the various cultural identifications and practices which it elicits. The cultural identifications and practices invited controversy because of its radical departure from what is regarded as an ideal gospel look. To begin with, one cannot help noticing the long almost waist-length dreadlock hairstyle. On the issue of dreadlocks and female identity formation, Ezra Chitando and Anna Chitando (2004) highlight that the cultivation of dreadlocks has worked synonymously with the challenges of forming postcolonial identities. They observe a Christian religious inspired opposition to the cultivation of dreadlocks, based on the fact that dreadlocks are originally associated with oppositional religions such as the Rastafarians and indigenous Zimbabwean religious practices of spirit mediums and the ancestral cult.<sup>30</sup> Fungisai's cultivation of dreadlocks, therefore, opposes the Christian religious values and ideals which her gospel music is supposed to communicate. I, however, argue that the dreadlocks seem to tally with Fungisai's need to extricate herself from the burdensome label of being a gospel musician and its consequential social constraints. The hair becomes a symbol of her refusal to be subjected to the weight of social regulations. Chitando and Chitando also opine that the length of dreadlocks is usually indicative of a woman's degree of non-conformity, that is, the longer the dreadlocks the more the rebellion. Based on their findings, the length of Fungisai's dreadlocks as illustrated in *The Sunday Mail* image, demonstrates an exceptionally rebellious stance. Her adoption of an unconventional image, an image that is deemed as

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<sup>27</sup> Kells. Fungisai's New Album will be Dancehall, *SA Breaking News*, 11 May 2016, <https://zimetro.com/fungisais-dancehall/>.

<sup>28</sup> Leisure, I'm not a Church Person: Fungisai, *The Sunday Mail*, 17 January 2016, <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/im-not-a-church-person-fungisai>.

<sup>29</sup> The mbira (thumb piano) is an indigenous musical instrument that is common to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. It is played by using one's thumb to pluck the metal spikes that are attached to a wooden board.

<sup>30</sup> Ezra Chitando and Anna Chitando, "Black Female Identities in Harare: The Case of Young Women with Dreadlocks," *Zambezia* (2004), 1-21.

oppositional to what is expected of a gospel artist, reflects postcolonial understandings of the mobility of identities.

Mitchell (1997) informs us that these postcolonial conceptualisations of identity as mobile, marginal, contradictory, and ambiguous can really be soothing.<sup>31</sup> Fungisai's alternative image is meant to show the society that her personal, religious, and musical identities are not static, but are constantly evolving. She has strategically transported her identities from the centre of gospel music and its religious implications and has positioned herself at its margins. The effect of this departure from the source is that it has equipped her with the necessary space to explore her musical options beyond what is expected by the society and the church. It is this movement beyond the societal and church expectations that appropriately reflects Bhabha's concept of the "third space." For Bhabha, the "third space" represents some kind of disturbance of direction. It is, as explained by Fetson Kalua (2009), a phase in the life of an individual which denies any attempts at settled assumptions about its identity because of the inherent contradictions and instabilities that often come to haunt the subject. The "third space" is therefore not always a comfortable place to be.<sup>32</sup> Based on Fungisai's struggles, the "third space" is riddled by numerous contestations. These contestations emanate from the ambivalence of the identity signals that spring from the constant evolution of Fungisai's images. Thus, one gets the impression that Fungisai is currently a combination of multiple hybrid components.

### **Singing Ambivalence in Fungisai's "*Vanondibatirana*" (2016) (*They hold me still*)**

Fungisai's hybrid outlook also culminates in the aesthetics of her music. Lately, she has taken to metaphorically "dining with the devil" by collaborating with musicians from the Zimbabwean dancehall music genre. Zindi argues that the hysteria and controversy around Fungisai's decision to collaborate with the Zimbabwean dancehall musician, Killer-T, lies in the fact that Zimbabwean dancehall music is regarded as the devil's music. It is associated with misogyny, sex, and drug abuse and it is therefore perceived as "unchristian." As a result, by collaborating with Killer-T, Fungisai has failed to live up to the expectations of the church and

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<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity."

<sup>32</sup> Fetson Kalua, "Homi Bhabha's Third Space and African Identity," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 21, no.1 (2009): 23-32.

societal standards and this compromises her Christian principles.<sup>33</sup> Zindi's assessment is too rigid because what Fungisai is doing is to diversify her fandom by bringing her gospel message to a different audience, a younger audience. Despite the criticism from the public, she is not apologetic about the mixed signals that her image and her music seem to project. In the song that she collaborates with Killer-T, entitled "Vanondibatirana" (*They hold me still*), Fungisai seems to be aware of this pressure from society. Although the song signifies the subduing of someone who is possessed by evil demons, and church elders are being called upon to come and help to exorcise the demons, I would like to argue that the song converses multiple messages. In the song she sings:

<i>Kuchurch vanondibatirana</i>	In the church they hold me still
<i>Izvi zvine chirevo</i>	This must mean something
<i>Ndidzivirei changamire</i>	Protect me sovereign
<i>Kurasika baba ndekwevanhu</i>	Father, getting lost is common to people
<i>Handimboziva zvinondibata sei</i>	I don't know what has possessed me
<i>Zvinoti kana zvandibata</i>	When they possess me
<i>Zvinondiwisira pasi</i>	They pull me down
<i>Toda munhu waMwari</i>	We need a man of God
<i>Rwendo rwarwadza</i>	The journey is now painful

Superficially, the song could be referring to a person calling for the exorcism of demons that have made their life difficult. However, reading between the lines, the persona in the song enacts the ways in which Fungisai the musician feels lost and isolated as a result of her decision to go against the gospel music grain. She could be acknowledging that she has indeed lost her way and she needs the church to bring her back in line. The dreadlocks and the seemingly outrageous outfits may signify this purported "madness." The persona also captures how Christian values are deployed to hold women down and how female gospel musicians are generally forced to sing in a certain way. Accordingly, the song becomes a critique of the church and its uncompromising structures that stifle women into rigid boxes. These multiple meanings and mixed signals embody one of the major concerns of postcolonialism, namely hybridity.

Hybridity is further projected by Fungisai's infusion of the dancehall sound. It is important to remember that hybridity has been theorised as

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<sup>33</sup> Zindi, "Is Fungisai a Saint or a Villain?"

crucial to the tactical war against dominant hegemonies.<sup>34</sup> Fungisai utilises dancehall music to challenge the dominant perceptions about the purity of gospel music and the impurity of dancehall music. It is worth mentioning that she has also taken to using the “mbira” music instrument as captured in the aforementioned image which was published in *The Sunday Mail*. The “mbira” (thumb piano) is emblematic of the Zimbabwean traditional culture and religious practices because it is closely associated with spirit possession.<sup>35</sup> Fungisai’s use of the “mbira” may reflect the multiple cultural influences and it confounds any simplistic essentialist understanding of the artist and her music.

By hybridising her music, it becomes difficult to place fixed labels on the artist and her music because, even though she uses the “mbira” and sometimes infuses her music with the dancehall sound, her message is still gospel. Such a scenario attests to the advantages of postcolonial pluralism, ambivalence, and non-fixity which, according to Robert Young (2001), not only mark a contemporary social fluidity and dispossession, but also a new stability and self-assurance.<sup>36</sup> I am amenable to such a trajectory because the Zimbabwean postcolonial context is complex and it would be defunct to stick to artistic purity when the context itself is not informed by a singular art form. The fluidity of the postcolonial context should therefore not be regarded as threatening to identities. It should instead be taken as an anchor from which postcolonial subjects derive their identities.

## Fungisai Within the “Third Space:” Resistance or Acquiescence?

It is important to problematise Bhabha’s “third space” and the resultant notions of hybrid identities. This is because the “third space” is characterised by ambivalence, and according to Anne Donadey (2001), notions of hybridity and ambivalence always lie at the crossroads of resistance and complicity.<sup>37</sup> Anjali Prabhu (2007) stresses the importance of distinguishing between hybridity as a theoretical concept and hybridity as

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<sup>34</sup> Mitchell, “Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity.”

<sup>35</sup> Claire Jones, “Shona Women Mbira Players: Gender Tradition and Nation in Zimbabwe,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 17, no.1 (2008): 125-49.

<sup>36</sup> Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001).

social change with historical specificity. Prabhu argues that notions of hybridity are tied to the concept of agency and that agency has to be radical in the sense that it must be tied to social change in which some inequality or injustice is addressed.<sup>38</sup> In view of the fact that religion, specifically Christianity, has been accused of perpetuating and institutionalising gender inequality which affects many women in Zimbabwe, the evolution of Fungisai becomes revolutionary because, while she utilises it to address the injustices that are meted on her personal subjectivities, it is also connected to the injustices meted out to Zimbabwean women in general. Because of her position as a celebrity, there are possibilities for broadly influencing and inspiring Zimbabwean women's collective struggles for gender parity. Prabhu is of the view that the most productive theories of hybridity are those that effectively balance the task of inscribing a functional instrumental version of the relationship between culture and society with that of enabling a more utopian or collective image of society.<sup>39</sup> Through the analysis of Fungisai's struggles and the strategies she employs to overcome these struggles, one gets a feeling of this collective struggle of women against society and religion. Fungisai's unapologetic assertions of her hybrid religious and musical identities work for her own personal and professional goals, but it can also be implemented to address the challenges of ordinary Zimbabwean women who experience the same systems of oppression.

Victor Aguilan (2017) explains that the "third space" offers an effective mode of articulation, a productive and reflective space that produces new possibilities.<sup>40</sup> It must therefore be appreciated for the ways in which it affords Fungisai the opportunity to broaden her musical style beyond the limiting confines of what the society thinks gospel music should sound like and what a gospel musician should look like. The hybrid within this "third space" becomes a counter narrative to the artificiality of the boundaries between gospel music and dancehall music, between the religious and the secular, and between what is deemed respectable and unrespectable. Evangelism does not always come neatly packaged. It can also be packaged within "disruptive" domains, and disruption is not

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<sup>38</sup> Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects*.

<sup>40</sup> Victor Aguilan, "Theology of Struggle: A Postcolonial Critique of Philippine Christianity and Society," Working Paper, 2017, DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.25762.02246.

always such a bad thing because there are moments when disruption brings about emancipatory raptures.

## **Conclusion**

The study analysed the intersections of gender, religion, and the media, and revealed how Fungisai successfully uses both her music and her personal image to articulate the complex obscurities and multifaceted oppositions of her identity, which reflects the conflicting elements of endurance and delight that are often experienced by postcolonial subjects. The sense of mixture that is evoked by Fungisai, does not act as a barrier to her assertions of identity. Instead, these different cultural signs that she emanates, decentre the notion of a unified gendered and religious subject and instead showcase the constructive mixture of cultures which is a tradition of the “third space.” Fungisai’s struggle to assert her own sense of identity outside the society’s prescriptive norms, reveals a performative hybrid identity. It is performative because it does not have a rational standing except from the artist’s various actions which point to its existence. As a result, it is not conceivable to refer to an accurate or real self when it comes to Fungisai. Instead, she signifies multiple selves which come into being at the point of delivery. This is what Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo mean when they assert that such performative articulations of hybrid identities position the postcolonial female body as a particularly charged site of cultural contestation in the process of constructing a hybrid subjectivity.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, Fungisai’s hybrid identity seems to offer her an effective way of resisting the pressures and discourses of religio-cultural purity which underpin the society’s expectations about her. Maria La Barbera (2015) raises the idea that the main goals of hybrid identities are frequently related to upward mobility.<sup>42</sup> This can also be equated to Fungisai’s own need for upward mobility within her career, her development as a musician, her attempt to broaden her musical horizon, and to transcend the restrictions placed upon her person and her music. She refuses to be rendered knowable because she probably appreciates that being knowable would make it easy for society to control her. She has adopted a hybrid self in order to mock and destabilise the systems that attempt to control her.

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<sup>41</sup> Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, “Performing Hybridity in Post-colonial Monodrama,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 31, no.1 (1997): 5.

<sup>42</sup> Maria C. La Barbera (ed.), *Identity and Migration in Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Springer Nature, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015).

Her hybridity renders her elusive to the clutches of the religious and cultural machinations of control.

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