ASHESI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

POPULAR RELIGIOUS MUSIC AS A TOOL FOR RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature:………………………………………………………………

Candidate's Name:…………………………………………………………………………….

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by Ashesi University College.

Supervisor's signature:……………………………………………………………………..

Supervisor's name:……………………………………………………………………………………………

Date:…………………………………………………..

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of history, religion has proven its importance and pervasiveness in human interaction with their environment. This has led to people striving to understand this phenomenon by studying it. However, the study of religion has been dominated by one approach, which is the mentalistic approach. This approach stipulates that religion is a personal affair between an individual and the transcendental, which is devoid of all outer forms and material.

An emerging field has started to propagate the need for viewing religion from different lenses and perspectives. The new field consist of a new approach to the study of Religion tagged as the materialistic approach to the study of religion. Several scholars have done various researches on religion using this approach to show the importance of using outer forms or materials in the expression of faith or religiosity. However, little research has been done on music as a material tool for religious mediation.

This thesis seeks to feel that research gap by exploring the use of popular religious music as a tool for religious mediation. Through in-depth interviews with 8 participants, this research was able to establish popular religious music as sensational form; tangible or outward "things" that serves as a medium or means to connect to the transcendent, which is limited to the be the accepted belief of the religion.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Humans are in constant inevitable interaction with their surroundings and environment for the sustenance of life. This interaction makes our environment tangible in the sense that it can be felt, seen, and heard. Interaction between human beings and their environment has brought with it experiences which have been documented in different ways for the advancement of societies. The documentations have in turn, become beliefs, customs and traditions which are peculiar to the type of experiences gained during interaction. Religion is one of the many phenomena created as a product of these interactions and documentations. This phenomenon (Religion) sought to search for meanings behind the tangible "things" that were evident all around and explain the world beyond our physical senses. Mattijs Van de Port expressed religion brilliantly as the search for the "rest of what is" (Meyer, 2012a, p.23). This view led to people looking beyond their immediate surroundings, and "things" for answers to ontological questions. Unfortunately over the course of history, (most evidently, during the protestants missionary campaign to different parts of the world) religions have opted to belittle the significance of materiality and things in general.

> "Grounded in the rise of religion as a modern category, with Protestantism as its main exponent, this conceptualization entails the devaluation of religious material culture -and materiality at large-as lacking serious empirical, let alone theoretical interest" (Houtman; Meyer, 2012,p.17).

The research of religion has also been highly influenced by what Brigit Meyer termed as a "mentalistic" approach to the study of religion. The approach frowned or dismissed other religions and traditions that place significance on things as mediation to the transcendent being, as primitive or underdeveloped. Meyer (2012a) in her article, explained that in the hierarchies of religious development from fetishism and animism to monotheism, inward-centred religiosity was viewed as the highest level of religion. "It (inward-centred religiosity) is posited as intellectually and morally ahead of and superior to religions that still rely on outward forms of religious expression" (Meyer, 2012a, p.9).

However, scholars are beginning to spread the importance of a materialistic approach to the study of religion with works such as that of Donald S. Lopez (2012), who seeks to understand the preservation of Buddhist teachings through stone statues in Europe or C.M. Van Santen's (2012) attempt to understand the importance of prayer beads to the identity of Muslims in Northern Cameroon. Scholars are beginning to highlight the problems that comes with focusing on only one approach to the study of religion. This study seeks to do well to add to the already growing literature on the materialistic approach to the study of religion with focus on popular religious music.

Music- a very vibrant aspect of culture and religion- will be used as the focal point to which this study seeks to express further, the importance and significance of outward forms in the religious expression of worshippers. Andy Bennet (2001) claims that for many people, music is an omnipresent aspect of their day-to-day activities. This omnipresent nature would make music an aspect of culture with an affective space for our emotions, thoughts and feelings, so it raises questions as to

why the area of religion and music has been ignored up until recently. "...what has been lacking, particularly in the study of religion and popular music (an admittedly recent field of analysis), has been an appreciation of music as a dynamic medium in the construction of personal and social identities" (Partridge, 2012, p.182). Affective space is a focal terminology, in Christopher Partridge's paper "popular music, affective space and meaning", which is defined as an inner space or atmosphere where thoughts, moods and emotions are created.

This paper explores how influential music is, in the religious space and how individuals use music in furthering their religious experiences. In essence, my research seeks to fill the research gap of music as a powerful creator of affective space, and help to contribute to Meyer's dream of a "holistic view on the study of religion" (Meyer, 2012). I will be focusing on Ghanaian popular religious music such as hymns, gospel music, praise and worship songs and its effect on Ghanaian listeners. Gospel music has proven to be a very important aspect of the Ghanaian society. By the year 1990, it was estimated that local "gospel-Highlife" represented between 50% and 70% of the radio air-play and local cassette production of Ghana (Collins, 2004). Today, gospel music is still very dominant in the Ghanaian music industry, staking its importance to the Christian population of the society. Religious music is a trans-cultural urban phenomenon that caters for furthering spiritual and religious experiences of both its listeners and creators. This gives it a dominating presence in the Ghanaian society, thus making it a worthwhile understudy to better understanding the need for a material approach to the study of religion.

Definition of Terms

- "Mentalistic" approach- An approach to the study of religion which assumes religion as an inward and personal practice devoid of external and material factors.

- Materialistic Approach- An approach to the study of religion, which focuses on outward rituals and the use of tangible things around us to connect with the Supreme Being.

- Affective Space - An inner and personal atmosphere where emotions, thoughts, moods and feelings are created

- Religious mediation- Negotiation of the supernatural through culturally accepted religious practices.

- Popular Religious Music- In relation to this study, this refers to gospel music, praise and worship songs, and hymns.

- Sensational forms - Tangible "things" that serves as a medium or means to connect to the transcendent, which is limited to the accepted belief of the religion. For instance, the rosary used by the Catholics or the Quran used by the Muslims.

Research Purpose

- To understand how Christians use religious music to create an affective atmosphere of emotions, thoughts, and moods

- To explore how popular religious music mediates religious experience

Research Question

- How does popular religious music mediate listeners' religious experience with a Supreme Being (Higher power)?

Layout of Study

- Chapter 1 introduces the main argument of the paper which is the exploration into the use of popular religious music by worshippers as a mediation tool for religious experiences and also the need for a material approach to the study of religion. This section identifies the objectives and purpose of the research as well as a layout or an outline of the paper.

- Chapter 2 serves as the literature review. This section summarizes briefly the history behind mentalistic and the growing field of the materialistic approach to the study of religion. This entails critiquing works of involved scholars such as Houtman, Meyer, Moors and Asad. After which, I analysed the different researches which have been done to prove the importance of a material approach to the study of religion, while also touching on different researches, that have been done with popular religious music as a focus. This chapter shows how my research fills the gap in the literature already available on the material approach to the study of religion.

- Chapter 3 explains the qualitative research method of narrative inquiry employed in this research. This section also justifies the proposed methodology and how the method is operationalized.

- Chapter 4 discusses the results the study. The section analyses the data gathered in relation to the objectives and scope of the study. It compares and contrasts results with the analyses of the literature to further show the relevance of this research and to show validity or credibility of my findings.

- Chapter 5 summarizes the insights from this research with conclusions on the results found with respect to the aim and objectives of the research. Limitations of this study were also discussed in detail in this section.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The recent emergence of discussions and debates on the analysis of ways to approach the study of religion has brought with it, several and diverse works from different perspectives and background. The notion of inward religiosity which has long informed the modern study of religion, has recently began to be questioned, giving rise to a turn to matter and materiality in the humanities and social science (Houtman; Meyer, 2012). This chapter reviews and critically analyses the train of thought in some of these researches while pointing out the different researches, which have been done to justify the material approach to the study of Religion. These critiqued works will form the foundation for my own exploration into how popular religious music is used to further religious experiences of listeners. To allow for easy understanding, this chapter will be approached chronologically, beginning with a discussion of the two distinct approaches to the study of religion.

Mentalistic and Material Approach

To understand the different dynamics that accompany the discourse on the different approaches to view religion, it is important to first understand the need for even venturing into this exploration. With the accelerated increase of globalization, the further dilution of culture and religion has been witnessed. This (globalization) has brought forth social frictions on how to cope with the different and diverse aspects of other religions ("other religions" here referring to the foreign belief or religion). Asad is one of the scholars who seek to shed light on this conflict. "Since the closing decade of the millennium, social friction generated by the presence of substantial numbers of Muslim immigrants in Europe, as well as the threat of

Muslim terrorists, has given a new impetus to the fear of politicized religion" (Asad, 2012, p.36). Asad (2012), in his paper expressed the political dimension and importance of how the public view different aspects of religion. He also believed that central to the social conflicts and antagonism being felt in different countries currently (e.g. France, United Kingdom, Netherlands and Israel) is the concept of belief. As mentioned in the introduction, belief stems from interactions of people with their environment, meaning the existence of several different beliefs as each people interact with their nearest surroundings in their own unique way. It is therefore becoming increasingly important, especially on a politicized level to understand the different viewpoints of religions, so as to foster tolerance and quell social frictions. The occurrence of religiously stimulated political issues, sets the stage for scholars and experts on religion to implement and publicize further researches as their work is crucial for the co-habitation of different beliefs in a shrinking globalized world.

Over the century, the approach to the study of religion has been skewed due to the hegemonic control of the West (Europe to be specific) (Meyer, 2012). Since the spread of Protestantism from 19th century Europe, there has been a hegemonic hold on the way or how the study of religion should be approached. This hegemonic view has been propagated by several influential scholars such as American philosopher William James who defined religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James, 1902). This above definition is termed as the "mentalistic" approach to the study of religion. The "mentalistic" approach views religion as "spirit over matter, belief over

ritual, content over form, mind over body, and inward contemplation above 'mere' outward action" (Houtman; Meyer, 2012, p.1). This approach has pushed the view and study of religion (dominated by western frontiers) into a one sided dominating story, in essence failing to understand non-western religion on their own terms. Therefore, for us to get the wholesome view on religion, it is extremely important to delve into the realm of materiality, so as to understand people's attachment to "things" as a mediation tool to the transcendent. Scholars have already done different researches, which help to justify the importance of a material approach to the study of religion. I have chosen two researches to discuss in detail, in this chapter.

There is Spirit in That Image - Birgit Meyer

The paper titled "There is a Spirit in That image", originated from Meyer noticing the public and cultural presence of Christian imagery after the liberalization and commercialization of mass media. Meyer (2012b) in her paper discusses how Pentecostal-charismatic churches assert their public presence and power through television, radio, posters, and stickers with focus on the domineering presence of Jesus imagery in the mass media. Her paper helped to prove the existence of the affective power which is encompassed in the material Christian imagery despite the constant belittling of rituals and materials by hegemonic views on the approach to the study of religion. Houtman and Meyer (2012) expressed this point even further:

> "Despite the aggressive attitude regarding religious things (including pictures) and their dismissal as fetishes and idols in the nineteenth

century encounter between missionaries and local populations, these

things were not entirely stripped of their power "(p. 282)

The case of the Jesus imagery in southern Ghana is one of peculiarity due to the symbolic nature and reverential attitude towards the mass produced pictures by the public. This reverential attitude has caused a dilemma about how these pictures are being viewed, especially by the Pentecostals in Ghana. On the one hand, there is the view that these pictures were dangerous in the sense that it could most likely lead to idolatry behaviour from Christians due to the iconic nature of the pictures. While, on the other hand, the reverential attitude toward these mass-produced pictures is part of a broader Pentecostal crusade in Southern Ghana against a particular kind of material culture associated with shrines and artefacts of local religious traditions (Meyer, 2012b). This dilemma in itself breeds ambiguity over the views on Jesus pictures in southern Ghana, as it is subject to the personalized belief of the beholder. However Meyer (Meyer, 2012b) argues that pictures should not just be understood simply as depictions, subject to the beholder's gaze, but instead should be taken seriously as things that may evade human control. This argument shows that, the Jesus pictures in its seemingly dormant state has the ability to instil a sensuous impression on its beholder- whether idolatry or religiously. In other words, the Christian imagery creates affective space for the beholder, thereby becoming animated and attributing itself the power to affect thoughts, emotions and moods.

A further explanation of the power which the Christian imagery possessed in itself, is seen in the paper by the expressions made by some of the individuals

interviewed. An interviewee discussed: "One may have something bad in mind but seeing the picture reminds one that this is no good" (Meyer, 2012b, p.307). Here, it is clear that even though to some, they might be mere images, to others these images have the power to remind them about their moral pact with a higher power. Another interviewee expressed the power of the image differently-"Having pictures of Jesus in your room is a way to show one's Christianity" (Meyer, 2012b, p. 308). For this interviewee, the images serve as an identity and a sense of individual self. Thus, by highlighting the problematic values of pictures as either indices of divine presence or instances of idolatry admiration (Houtman & Meyer, 2012), Meyer has shown the unavoidable power of material forms which has added to the justification for further venturing into the material approach to the study of religion.

The Affective Power of the Face Veil-Annelies Moors

Annelies Moors (2012) is another scholar who justifies the importance of a material approach to religion with her paper titled "The affective power Of the Face Veil". Her paper puts the expression of the power of things in a politicized context. In 2005, the Netherlands became the first country where the parliamentary government voted in favour of ban on face veiling. The paper centres on the ban of face veiling in public places in the Netherlands. Moors (2012) analyses the influence of language confusion in the face veiling issue and how the public experiences the veil. Naming/framing, in different language settings, of material forms attribute some form of power to the thing being observed. This is the case with the face veil, which as an article of clothing is insignificant, but takes on a different meaning to Muslims who use it for religious purposes. In the same vein, the face veil takes on a

negative and dangerous significance to the public sphere of the Netherlands. This shows the unavoidable relational influence between the object and the subject. Although Moors (2012) acknowledges this relational influence and signification (with its dichotomies of subject and object), she sought to turn attention to the material experience and recognize the affective power of things and the need to examine how people experience this affective power:

> "Face Veiling does not have affective force only through the terms used to refer to this practice. A major way in which face veils evoke particular feelings and engage in the production and circulation of affect is through corporeal experience, which includes both the tactile and the visual. The act of wearing a face veil affects both those who are themselves involved in the practice (or want to do so) and the majority of society in very different ways"(Moors, 2012, p.286).

As for the women who practice face veiling, the act is one of the highest religious importance. They consider wearing a face veil to be an act of worship and a means of expressing their love for God (Moors, 2012). Others believe the veils have an effect in the spiritual sense, with responses from interviewees such as: "I felt wow, this is it, and I felt strong" (Moors, 2012, p. 307). In this sense, the veil is said to be a sensational form. Meyer (2012a) defined sensational forms as relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between religious practitioners in the context of particular religious organizations. For these practicing women, the veil was much more than just an article of identification but a material object, which caused a sensuous link between them and the Immaterial or Higher Power.

However just as the definition states, sensational forms are limited to an authorized and accepted view, thus the veils' significant essence to the practicing Muslim women does not serve the same purpose to the Netherlands public. The limited or rather esoteric nature of sensational forms based on beliefs, creates the foundation for the conflicts occurring around the world as is the case in Netherlands. Moors (2012) study showed that for many, the rejection and negative reaction to face veiling is "based on the assumption that face veiling is a strong sign, instrument, or symbol of women's gender oppression"(p.289). Others simply could not tolerate the sight of women covered in face veil. Discussions and interviews by Moors produced responses such as "I find a face veil a terrible sight" (Moors, 2012, p.290) or "personally I find it horrible to see a woman in a Burqa"(Moors, 2012, p.290). In essence Moors sought to answer the question of "why face veils work so well as things that disturb?" (Moors, 2012, p. 290). She proves that there is indeed a presence of affective power in the use of face veils, depending on beliefs of the beholder. This study done in Netherlands gives further political insights on the utmost need and importance to delve into the material approach to the study of religion.

Music as a Creator of Affective Space

There are other authoritative works of significance that shows the heuristics of the material approach to the study of religion. Works such as that of Donald S. Lopez (2012), who seeks to understand the preservation of Buddhist teachings through stone statues in Europe or C.M. Van Santen's (2012) attempt to understand the importance of prayer beads to the identity of Muslims in Northern Cameroon. Willie Jensen and Grietje Dresen (2012) sought to understand the symbolic significance of

blood in the American Baptists' expression of their faith. However, most of the researches have been skewed towards the visually stimulated materials and images, while little has been done on music. Christopher Partridge is one of the scholars who raised the issue of the belittling or neglect of the importance of music in the formation of a sense of self, individual and societal identity. Specifically, he points out that within the material approach to religion "what has been lacking, particularly in the study of religion and popular music (an admittedly recent field of analysis), has been an appreciation of music as a dynamic medium in the construction of personal and social identities"(Partridge, 2012, p.182).

Music and sound in general have always been a noticeable aspect of the interactions between people and their environment. Sara Cohen(1995) identifies the importance music plays in the interaction of people and the environment, by explaining that "music plays a role in producing place as a material setting comprising the physical and built environment; as a setting for everyday social relations, practices and interactions; and as a concept or symbol that is represented or interpreted" (p.434). In essence, music as form or material creates an affective space or platform for further individual and personal interpretation and representation. An article by Mark Storey (1976) touched on the renowned Professor Blacking's belief that the significance of music lies in the context with which it is being received. "Professor Blacking is eager to put music in its context-social, political, and so on and he is really arguing (sometimes asserting I feel) that it is only then, it can fully be understood"(Storey, 1976, p.10). Cespedes-Guevera (2005) goes further to explain that musical meanings are as varied as there are people who compose it, play it, listen or dance to it. This viewpoint explains that

music is a function of the context to which it is placed in. In other words, music is subjective, thereby varying from one individual or group to the next. The subjective nature of music makes it a good sensational form which can be used uniquely by different groups of people (religious people) to make meaning of their religious experience.

Religious music epitomizes the influence of music on the social consciousness. The analysis of religious music can be seen from two perspectives. Religious popular music could be seen from the perspective of the creator as a medium through which religious messages could be passed. On the other hand, and more important to this research is the perspective of the listener. How the listener receives the religious messages and how it is used to help connect with the transcendental. Robert Dean Lurie helps to explain this perspective sufficiently using his own personal attachment to a gospel album released by an Australian Psychedelic band:

> Ah, Starfish. That was a big one for me. It was my introduction to the church -and to my new life...It became my constant companion, the soundtrack to my daily existence and an escape capsule when life became too stressful (Partridge, 2012, p.183).

From this expression, it can be seen that the music gave him a lift from the ordinary of his everyday life and lifted him to a different state of mind. My research seeks to fill the research gap of religious music as a powerful creator of affective space, and to help contribute to the creation of a holistic view on the study of religion (Meyer, 2012a). I will be exploring what ways Ghanaian Christians use gospel music to further their religious experiences.

The Case of Gospel Music in Ghana

To understand the origin, presence and impact of gospel music in the Ghanaian society, I will be reviewing works done by Collins (2004) and Atiemo (2006).

Gospel music in Ghana can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when local music and dance were fused with imported European dance and music. The protestant missionaries played an important role in this as they established schools, and artisan training centres. "Through protestant hymns and school songs, local Africans were taught to play the harmonium, piano, and brass band instruments and were introduced to part harmony, the diatonic scale, western I-IV-V harmonic progressions, the sol-fa notation and four-bar phrasing"(Collins, 2004, p.407). However, over the course of history, the sound of the churches evolved to different forms such asasiko (or ashiko), osi-bisaaba, local brass band "adaha" music and "palmwine" guitar music (Collins, 2004). Sounds from this new musical forms received ambivalent reactions from the missionaries who deemed it as a "nuisance" and an instrument which made people forget their souls Atiemo (2006). The emergence of separatist churches in Ghana gave the evolved music forms an outlet for freedom and better expression in the 1920s. John Collins (2004) shared his findings:

> "Furthermore the "praises" and "choruses" of the independent churches were influenced by local popular music such as Highlife. So were their "singing bands" that began to record in the late 1930s.18 Moreover, as early as the 1950s some of the spiritual churches were using dance band instruments (such as bongos, double bass, and guitar), brassband instruments, and playing in "dance-club" style "(p.410).

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At this point, there was already an established cross connection created between local popular music and separatist churches in Southern Ghana. Collins (2004), mentioned three similarities between the groups of local popular music and separatist churches which helped tighten the cross connection. Firstly, both local popular music and the separatist churches were influenced by the arrival of the early missionaries. The second deals with the congregation of the separatist churches and the local popular music performers belong to "the 'intermediate' class that emerged between the Westernized African elites and subsistence peasant farmers"(Collins, 2004, p.413). Lastly, both groups provided cheap cleansing release for the intermediate class and the urban poor. In the churches the worshipers danced and became influenced, while charismatic pastors and prophets made dramatic prophecies, and miracles. Through popular music such as Highlife, purifying energy was released to the listeners (Collins, 2014).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Gospel music in Ghana got a huge boost as a commodity in the society. This could be attributed to the rapid increase in the rise of Pentecostal movement and the spread of charismatic and Pentecostal churches in the country. By 1993 it was estimated that local "gospel-Highlife" represented 75% of the local cassette production of Ghana (Atiemo, 2006, p.143). Today, gospel music is still very dominant in the Ghanaian music industry staking its importance to the Christian population of the society. Gospel music in Ghana is a trans-cultural urban phenomenon that caters for furthering spiritual and religious experiences of both its listeners and creators.

Conclusion

The issue of materiality in religion is one of great importance to the study of religion. Scholars have proven with different works, justifications for the need to venture into this discipline. This chapter has outlined some of the important justifications. Meyer's research in Ghana on the Jesus images in Southern Ghana, proved the unavoidable power attached to this images, whether they are idolatry or iconoclastic. Moors' research in Netherlands on the ban of face veils, showed the power which things have, as sensational forms and their presence in a politicized contest. Music has also proven itself as a sensational form capable of affecting people in different ways despite the little work which has been done on it. Simon Firth (1996) expressed similar views: "music, an aesthetic practice, articulates in itself an understanding of both group relations and individuality, on the basis of which ethical codes and social ideologies are understood" (P. 111). As discussed earlier religious music has a dominating presence in the Ghanaian society, thus making it important for this research to fill the informational gap on this aspect of the material approach to the study of religion.

Chapter Three: Methodology

I used narrative inquiry method to understand how Christians use gospel music in their religious experiences. A narrative inquiry was used due to the personalized nature of my research. "Through narrative inquiry you gain access to the personal experiences of the storyteller" (Kramp, 2004. p.2), the storyteller here being the participant in my research. Basically a narrative inquiry method is a type of qualitative research which employs the use of field extracts, such as stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artefacts), and life experience, as the items of analysis to study and understand the way people make meaning in their lives as narratives. My research focuses on observation, in depth interviews and conversations with selected participants as items of analysis to understand the meaning and impact of religious music on the worshipper's religious life. This method of research enabled me to put the vivid illustrations of the participant when listening to gospel music in a story format for better comprehension and cohesion. This method is also ideal in helping satisfy my curiosity on how religious music, serves as a mediation tool between the listener and the immaterial Supreme Being. Following in the footsteps of other narrative inquiries such as that of Leslie Maureen Cavendish (2011), on culturally responsive teaching, I have divided my research design into three different phases. The phases are contact phase, interview phase and lastly, the data analysis phase.

Research Design

Contact Phase: Key interview participants

I interviewed and interacted with eight participants. This number was picked to accommodate the time it would take me to interview and transcribe each interview within the within the deadline of this research. The number of participants was sufficient as I got a saturation point. A saturation point is described as a point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges, in other words, when information and responses begin to repeat themselves. Participants were drawn from the Berekuso and Ashesi community based on their religion and also willingness to participate. In order to get to participants from Berekuso, who were willing to partake in this research, I had to be introduced. I had a contact which aided me in this regard. My contact is familiar to the community with which I drew my participants. This eased the participants, as I have been introduced by fellow community member. Some of the participants from Ashesi were picked by observing those actively involved in one of the school choir. Other participants were picked on referral and/or recommendation by already interviewed participants. Due to financial and time constraints, I was able to visit two churches namely Presbyterian Church of Berekuso and Flames of Pentecost Church also in Berekuso.

Interview Phase

Timothy Rapley (2001) defined Interviews as inherently social encounters, dependent on the *local interactional contingencies* in which the speakers draw from and co-construct, broader social norms. Each audio recorded interview lasted fifteen

to twenty minutes. I conducted some of the interviews in the worshipping churches of the participants. These interviews took place after the mass or congregational meeting, so as to enable me observe the people and the mood of the atmosphere when gospel music is being played. Other interviews were performed in the comfort of the participant's room or home. As mentioned earlier, a minimum of eight in-depth interviews were performed. The interviews were structured into three categories. The first category was meant to deal with the religious background of the participant. The second dealt with the participant's mood, and feelings when listening or participating in music being played during the church service. The final category dealt with the participant's personal reflections, feelings and moods when listening to gospel music alone. Open ended questions were used to probe for information on the experiences of participants. Open question words such as "what" and "how" featured prominently in the interview. Most of my planned questions were prompts such as "tell me…" or "describe..." This was done so as to prevent my interruption of participants and to ensure the opportunities for narratives to emerge naturally from conversations. Although, I had planned questions, conscious efforts were made to make the interview flexible. The flexibility allowed for follow up questions to further clarify narrated experiences of participants. Being flexible also allowed the participants to be at ease, thereby ensuring a free flowing discussion between me and the participant.

Protecting Confidentiality

To ensure the protection of participant's in this interview, the following two procedures were put in place:

- First, issues of confidentiality are addressed at the time of data collection. At this point, I gave consent form statements such as, "All identifying characteristics, such as occupation, city, and ethnic background, will be changed". I presented confidentiality agreements at the beginning of the data collection process.

- The consent form contained explanations, stating that I am the principal investigator in this research and that every personal details, I receive from them would be treated with utmost confidentiality.
- Lastly, pseudonyms were used during the analysis and presentation of data findings so as to allow for protection of participants.

Data Analysis

This section seeks to take the reader through the analytic process of the data collected in this study. Interviews with the participants which were audio recorded, were transcribed. Firstly, I familiarized myself with the data by listening to the interview a couple of times. My impressions of some of the participants' interviews were also recorded during the re-listening and re-reading of the interview data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the interviews and my impressions of the church service environment or atmosphere. Thematic analysis deals with the searching for patterns and themes embedded in data. This

approach to my analysis will aid me in organizing and describing my data in rich detail (Braun & Clark, 2006). My study went beyond the mere description of thematic observations, and attempted to "theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implication" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.84). I used the bottom-up approach to my thematic analysis. This approach involves coding data without fitting it into an existing coding frame, or preconceived impressions and/or ideas. Analysis made, were therefore completely data driven. The bottom-up approach meant I had to read and re-read the data, looking for key words, trends, themes, or ideas in the data that will help outline the analysis before any analysis took place (Guest, Macqueen, & Namey, 2012). Below is a step by step guide of the phases followed in the analysis of the data.

Initial organization of Data: After collecting all my data from eight respondents and two visitations to a Sunday services at two different churches, I began my analysis by organizing my data. Each respondents was assigned a document which included transcripts and my personal reflection during the interview process. I used a clean transcription, which involves the omitting of intonations, utterances and false starts which are common in everyday speech. This use of a clean transcript is to enable me focus on the content of the interview while creating a comprehensible read for easy analysis. Braun V. and Clark V.(2006) suggests that "it is vital that you immerse yourself to an extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content" (p.16).Thus, after transcription I familiarized myself with the data by listening to the audio a couple of times and also reading and re-reading the transcription in detail.

Coding: The process of coding is part of analysis (miles & Huberman, 1994), as you are organizing your data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). After reading over the transcription, my initial ideas and codes were recorded. Codes are developed to represent the identified themes and applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis (Guest et al., 2012). Examples of initial codes are: connection, connecting with others, and manifestation of spiritual in physical. This codes were gotten from the meanings attached to the participant's narrated experiences to me. My reflections of the participant's narration also helped in the formulation of my codes. I was able to tease a total number of 36 concepts which served as my codes. These were further categorized into 4 distinct and broader themes, which I felt ran across the data collected.

Defining Themes: Themes include ideas gotten from the data collected which relates to the research question and/or objective. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006). To map out my themes, a mind map was used to visually aid the task and make it clearer (see fig 1). At this stage also, "candidate themes" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.20), which turned out not to be themes were eliminated. The four major themes teased out from this analysis are:

- Affective space
- Materiality
- Connection
- Positivity

Chapter Four: Findings & Discussion

Affective Space

As mentioned earlier in this paper, affective space is an inner and personal atmosphere in which emotions, thoughts, and moods are created. Affective space was dominant in the experiences recounted by the participants. The narrated experiences suggests that popular religious music served as a catalysts for thoughts, emotions and moods. Popular religious music as a powerful catalyst, "instills certain attitudes, it encourages certain emotional states" (Partridge, 2012, p.185).

Tolu is a singer who values music (both secular and religious) in her everyday life. Music has a constant presence in her day-to-day tasks and activities. She understands and acknowledges the affective power of music in her life, as suggested by this statement:" I listen to (gospel) music when I'm sad, it makes me happy…I listen to music when I'm studying late and feeling sleepy". Though, she appreciates the influences of secular music on her life, she believes popular religious music has a bigger influence on her mood and emotions. Tolu describes a personal experience of which popular religious music changes her mood, attitude and mindset. She recounted a time when she had been studying, one night and she was asked to listen to a gospel song by a friend. The song was very pleasing, as she listened to it over and over again till she lost the mood or will to study. She said "…and immediately I listened to it, I just felt like taking my things and go…so I couldn't even study, I left, took my stuff, packed and came to lie here". Her

account, shows that, her mindset and mood which were set on studying at that moment was altered by the very pleasing gospel song.

Kweku is a taxi driver, who listens to gospel music constantly while driving passengers around. He stated that when he doesn't listen to gospel music, he is left uncomfortable while working. Kweku's words were "When I did not listen to music or something like that, it affects me…then I can't do the work". This also shows an acknowledgement of the influence of gospel music on his daily life and activities. He described an instance in church, where people had been initially dull during a church service. However, as the music was played in the church, he explains how people become joyous and jubilant: "… when we started praising God with music, you can see, everybody is happy". For the affective power of gospel music on himself, he recounted an experience of him having a quarrel with a passenger over payment of the taxi fare. This encounter left him angry and displeased. However, his mood was lifted after listening to one of his favorite gospel songs: "when I'm listening to it in my car, I'm feeling happy…like the way I am driving is different. It affects my mood, it affects my everything".

Elliot believes the impact of gospel music on his moods and emotions can be classified between two peculiar genres of gospel music. He said that when he listens to Ghanaian gospel music (those sang in local dialect), he feels alive and active, while listening to foreign gospel music makes him calm and relaxed: "when I'm listening to Ghanaian gospel music, I feel alive and active, like I'm in the stadium where the music is being performed…listening to foreign gospel, calms me down". After probing further, Elliot explained that when listening to gospel music, he is able

to think and reflect on his actions. Nana gives an account that exemplifies the affective power of popular religious music: "So basically I was listening to a song for the first time, someone had told me to listen to it. I tried listening to the words very well. I was doing something, I can't remember, but I found myself randomly praying. I think that it is something spiritual because it's all the time you feel like this when you listen to gospel music. I just started praying, and I was crying. I don't know why I was crying. Probably because of basically the words of the song and how the person delivered it".

A prevalent subtheme in some of the interviews in relation to the broader theme of affective space, was the ability of popular religious music to motivate, encourage and inspire. Elliot gives an account of how gospel music pushed him to do better in his studies: "I was about to study some time ago, that was about two years ago, I was not doing well. I woke up and I listened to some gospel music. The song was talking about motivation and all that, it made me believe I can really do this…it's like motivational speeches that's been sang, because it gave me motivation to actually study hard and assure me that things will work out well for me". Tolu's account of how "people started giving testimonies about how they've been lifted up within themselves" by her singing in church also shows an instance of how popular religious music is used to encourage and inspire people.

Connection

This is another prevalent theme that ran across the data collected. Participant's described popular religious music as a tool which was used to mediate their experiences with God. Their religious experiences are possible and replicable by certain modes of inducing experience of the supernatural (Meyer, 2012). Popular religious music serves as religious mediation; any ritual or outer object which is used by believers to connect with their transcendental. Interestingly while in discussion with the participants, I came to realize a different aspect of connection which is provided by the listening of popular religious music. This aspect deals with the connection with other people also seeking to experience God. Interviews with participants suggests a sort of "communal connection" is created while listening to popular religious music especially during church services.

When asked what being Christian means to Tolu, her response was "that I have a relationship with God". For her, her religion and her faith means having a relationship with something higher. This relationship is mediated through different means, with popular religious music as one of the most pervasive means. "And the music always keeps me connected to who God is…It basically keeps me connected, and by knowing him, I can better relate to him". This statement made by Tolu, shows that her connection to God is tied to her relationship with Him; how well she knows and understands Him. Tolu also perceived the gospel songs, she listened to as a medium to connect her to other people. While listening to songs, especially the "new gospel music that is emerging, especially for the Ghanaian youth", Tolu feels close to singers, and believes she connects with them. She recounted an experience

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which exemplified the creation of connection with others by popular religious music. Over a period, she had been fearful of what the future held for her. She feared she wasn't doing enough to ensure a prosperous future. During a Sunday service, inspired by God, she led the singing in church. She said "so He (God), gave me songs as a gift to people…right after the worship, people started giving testimonies about how they've been lifted up within themselves". A's singing had created a link between her personal problems and the problems of other people

Sandra who accepted Jesus into her life three years ago, also believes that her faith means having a personal and close relationship with God. During the interview she said "…but then I did not really know Him for myself, so the past three years has been about me working with God, knowing him for myself through everything… Connecting realer, because then, I probably didn't have anything just the same way as going into a garage doesn't make you a car". For her to get this "realer connection", she listens to religious music. Religious music gives her reassurance of her relationship, the closeness and the presence of God: "…this morning I was going through a whole lot , and I just remembered the song I collected from someone…just singing and repeating those words to myself was like giving me an assurance that whatever I was going through, God will be faithful". During the interview, Sandra explained that all her actions and everyday activities are all a form of worship to God: "I worship God with everything I do". Religious music, for her is "just another beautiful way, another medium of expressing the kind of intimacy and connection we have with God".

Kweku brings a different dimension; he sees his connection through the bible stories narrated by the gospel songs he listens to. Through, the words of song, he is able to learn what God has done for characters in Bible and believe that the same would be done for him. He explains to me during the interview: "to me, it (religious music) helps and lifts my soul to God...God which has done something very good for other people in the bible, and through music I know this, and I know God will do it for me". Nana also lays emphasis on the connection, gospel songs creates between people. Nana, discusses that beyond the lyrics and the beats of the song, "the person also singing it as an impact". As a singer, herself, she claims she understands that it's about communicating your message to people through your words and your music. Though, she is not a big fan of hymns, she believes that it (hymns) help to put people in line with what the sermon of the service is all about.

For Peter, he describes singing and listening to music as a form of worship and prayer; which for him is the best means of connection to the "almighty above". He describes gospel music as a tool which "tells you who God is…it just gives you a clear understanding of who God is". Similar to Tolu, his connection is based on a personal relationship with God where he knows and understands who God is. Peter acknowledges a separation between the physical world and the "rest of what is". He said "We are spirit and God is also spirit. So to connect to God, your spirit has to be able to connect to God, because this thing we are in is just body". Further discussion with Peter, shows a desire to go beyond the physical into the "spiritual realm". Religious music gives him that means to go beyond and cross over, like he so desires as he says "So the real me is my spirit, so when I'm listening to

(religious) music, especially worship, God can drop a word in my spirit…it just takes me to another realm beyond this physical world".

Materiality

Discussion with participants suggests that religious music is a type of sensational form. A sensational form as defined by Birgit Meyer is anything tangible that serves as medium or means of connection to the transcendent. The key word here is "tangible"; tangible could range from rituals, practices to objects and things. Listening to popular religious music, participants described instances where they felt they could feel close, talk to and experience the transcendental. Birgit Meyer (2012) stated that, once made material, the invisible can be negotiated and bargained with, touched and kissed. During my visits to the churches, I noticed this involving experience of negotiation and bargaining, through prayer when music was played. I noticed that, during music procession (praise and worship), there always seemed to be more energy in the atmosphere, as the congregation danced, clapped and sang along. The music in the church services served as a transmitter through gaps and limits of the material word to the supernatural world beyond.

For Nana, gospel music was about "making the vague real". She believes that the concept and idea of God is not clear. Especially since "we haven't seen God before". Nana suggests that "it's not just the lyrics of the song, the beats and other things puts you in tune with God and makes me feel more connected with that vague idea of God…from the lyrics and beats we are able to get that connection and it gets real". From the discussion with her, I realized that the listening and singing of gospel music had become a practice and a ritual which is performed in worship.

However, it goes beyond just a mere ritual for some participants to being a requirement or necessity for worship. When asked what influence music had during worship, Nana said "music must be present before we worship". Victor echoes the notion that music is required for worship by claiming that he "could not imagine a church service without singing or music". When asked about activities they involved themselves in to worship, almost all participants responses suggests that listening to popular religious music is a ritual of worship as is going to church, reading the bible and/or listening to sermons.

For some of the participants, popular religious music served as a communication medium, which brought the Supreme Being ever closer to their physical grasp or understanding. Peter explains how music gives him a better understanding of the abstract concept of God: "If it's a Christian song or worship song, the words tell you who God is. So when you are singing it, or when you are playing it, it just gives you a clear understanding of who God is". He goes further to discuss a direct interaction with God: "when I'm listening to those kind of music, I get to a zone where, I feel, I'm closer, like I'm very close to God. I can talk to Him. You can pour out your heart to God". Kweku gives a more vivid account of how music blurs the line and/or distinction between the spiritual realm and the physical realm. He recounts "Anytime I'm listening to worship, I get more spiritual. At that time, all the angels are coming down in the church, and they are just sitting down and listening and hearing the way we are doing things…If you lift God up with music, then God will open your eye, then you will see everything. The angels too will be happy and clapping…then you will know that your soul is now going deeply in God".

Positive Experience

Participants linked the listening and singing of religious music to a positive experience or feeling. In essence, discussions with participants suggests that religious music had a positive affective power such as lifting their moods, creating positive emotions and ensuring that everything would be alright.

Tolu expressed the positive influence gospel music has in her life with various recounted experiences and statements. She recounted the time when she sang with the choir during a church service. After the singing session, people came forth to give testimonies about the trials they had been facing and how "they've been lifted up within themselves". She went further to explain the reason for this: "God started giving me songs, and the songs were songs about magnifying God above our problems, because when you fear, you begin to focus on the object of your fear. But when you lift God up through music, you make him bigger than the fear. The fear then begins to shrink in your eyes and you focus on him more". The discussion with Tolu showed that there was knowledge of the positive influence of religious music on her moods and emotions. This statement shows intent by her to improve her mood ad emotion: "I listen to music when I'm sad, it makes me happy...I listen to music when I'm studying late and feeling sleepy".

Respondents explained that religious music gave them confidence in the presence of God. The religious song gave them the guarantee that God was behind them in all their endeavors and trials. Sandra recounted a time when she woke up feeling down with negative thoughts of what she had been going through for a while now. She responded to this by playing a song and this gave her confidence in God's

ability to change her life for the better. In Sandra's own words:"...just singing and the repeating the words (of the gospel song) to myself was like giving me some assurance that whatever I was going through, God will be faithful". She echoes this theme further: "when I listen to the (gospel) song I feel wonderful. Because it gives an assurance and it reassures me. I think we all need to be reassured, you know day by day, hour by hour, because we are all going through one thing or another, we need reassurance, sometimes you won't get the reassurance by somebody talking to you, encouraging you, get it from listening on your own to worship music".

For all the participants, religious music served as a form of inspiration, motivation and encouragement. For Elliot, religious music gave him the extra push he needed to study and also to believe in his ability to improve his grade. Mary believes that the more gospel music she sings the more the songs gives her "power to pray more". Tolu was inspired through religious music to give testimonies and also sing of her trials and God's ability to lift her from her problems. Kweku's recounted experience epitomizes this inspirational influence of religious music on the listeners. Kweku had had a terrible week, with his sister falling ill and his car getting damaged in an accident. He was meant to lead the Wednesday evening prayer session but he had made his mind up not to go because he "could not think straight". However, as he listened to a gospel song, telling him about the "power and greatness of God", he was moved and encouraged to "forget his problems and go and preach His (God's) words to the people". In his own words:"...as I listen to the song, God is telling me, God is encouraging me to go, because I am the spiritual leader and I have to lead them in prayer".

Chapter 5: Interpretation and Conclusion

Popular Religious Music Aids in the Construction of Personal and Social Identities.

The findings from this research has proven the importance of religious music to the everyday lives of the listeners. For practically all the interviewees, being Christian was an identity for them as their faith covers every aspect of their everyday lives. The Christians interviewed, believed religious music is synonymous to worship and prayer as one of the interviewees explained: "you need gospel music for worship". This perspective shows the power and influence religious music has on the personal identities of the listeners. For them, listening to gospel music is another form of them expressing their faith or religiosity which is equally their identity. Also, going beyond their personal identities, as seen from the findings, religious music gives them a strong connection to people of similar faith. This shows that religious music goes further, to influence and contribute to the "phenomenological and existential features of social life"(Partridge, 2012, p.182). Therefore this research has added weight to Partridge's (2012) claim that "music is a dynamic medium in the construction of personal and social identities"(p.182). Apart from personal and social construction, Partridge (2012) also sort to explain the use of music in everyday life to manage feelings and thoughts. Findings in this research support the claim, with interviewees expressing how their moods and emotions were positively changed during or after listening to religious music.

Popular Religious Music is a Sensational Form

From discussions with interviewees, this study was able to acknowledge that popular religious music is in fact a sensational form. As mentioned already in this paper, sensational form is a termed formulated by Birgit Meyer (2012a), used to "refer to a configuration of religious media, acts, imaginations and bodily sensations in the context of a religious tradition or group"(p.26). Key to this definition is the word context. The context or traditional norm must be taking into account when considering religious music as a sensational form. Discussions from interviews explains that for a song to be classified as religious music, it has to be "inspired by the almighty"(Nana) or have a spiritual purpose. This gives support to Professor Blacking's (Storey, 1976, p.10) belief that the significance of music lies in the context with which is being received. The significance of popular religious music to the interviews was based on the fact that, it promoted their Christian beliefs and faith. Popular religious music is a tangible object, in that it can be heard and felt which enable it's listeners to negotiate, mediate and connect to a higher power or Being. Therefore proving that popular religious music is indeed a tool for religious mediation.

The Need for the Material Approach to the Study of Religion

In summation, this research has explored through in-depth interviews with eight Ghanaian Christians, the use of popular religious music as a tool for religious mediation. Results from the study showed the affective power of religious music on the moods, thoughts and emotions of listeners. The paper also proved religious music to be a sensational form, which had a positive influence on the listener in the

mediation and expression of their faith. This research further shows the need for a holistic view of the study of religion (Meyer, 2012), through the propagation of the material approach. Through its findings, this research shows the limitations of the established "mentalistic" approach which "entails the devaluation of religious material-and materiality at large-as lacking serious empirical, let alone theoretical interest"(Houtman; Meyer, 2012, p.1). The in-depth nature of this research shows that popular religious music-a material- is more than a mere outward form but rather an essential "material dimension of religion, which is indispensable to the making of religious beliefs, identities and communities"(Houtman; Meyer, 2012, p.17). My research fills the research gap missing on the use of popular religious music to express belief and faith, while also promoting the need for more researches to be done using the material approach. This would enable us have a better understanding of religion as a pervasive and important aspect of human culture.

Limitations

- Language Barrier: My inability to speak the local language left me at a disadvantage during the data collection phase. Some of the participants were unable to express their thoughts, and feelings in English which lessened the richness and quality of my data

- Inability to train interviewers: In hindsight, training interviewers who were fluent in the local language would have improved my data collection as participants would have expressed themselves better, thereby enriching my data.

- Financial and Time constraints: Due to financial and time constraints, I was limited to just two visitations to two different churches, which reduced the quality of my data. Also financial and time constraints, also prevented me from being able to train interviewers who were fluent in the local language

- Not enough probing questions: During my analysis phase, I realised that I could have asked more probing and follow-up questions to further tease out meaning from the participant's experience.

Appendix

Interview Guide

- What does being Christian mean to you?

    o What denomination are you?

- How do you worship God?

    o Activities in which you partake in during your worship time?

- What role does music play in your everyday life?

- Do you use music in your worship?

- What role does it play during or when you worship?

- What type of gospel music do you listen to?

    o Why?

- What role does music play during your church services?

- Describe the atmosphere during a musical procession in church?

    o How does the atmosphere influence your worship?

    o How would you describe a church service where music and/or singing is absent?

- How do you feel when listening to gospel music?

- Describe your experience of an instance (If you have had any) when you have been spiritually moved by gospel music.

- Kindly say a few words about the following statement "popular religious music is a manifestation of God in the physical world"

Statement of how confidentiality record is being maintained

I, <u>Moshood Folorunsho Aremu</u> as the principal investigator in this research certify the fact that whatever personal details I receive from my subjects will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The information will be handled properly and will only be viewed by myself.

_____

(Principal Investigator's Signature)


Statement that participation is voluntary

This consent form is to ensure that you the participant of this test is aware of the procedure that is about to be carried out. Please be reminded that this is not a test, there are no right or wrong answers, and simply do what you think should be done.

I, a participant of this usability test agree that I am voluntarily partaking in this procedure. I have not been forced or promised an incentive to take part in this.

_____   _____

(Participant's Signature)   (Interviewer's Signature)

Fig 1: Thematic Analysis Network
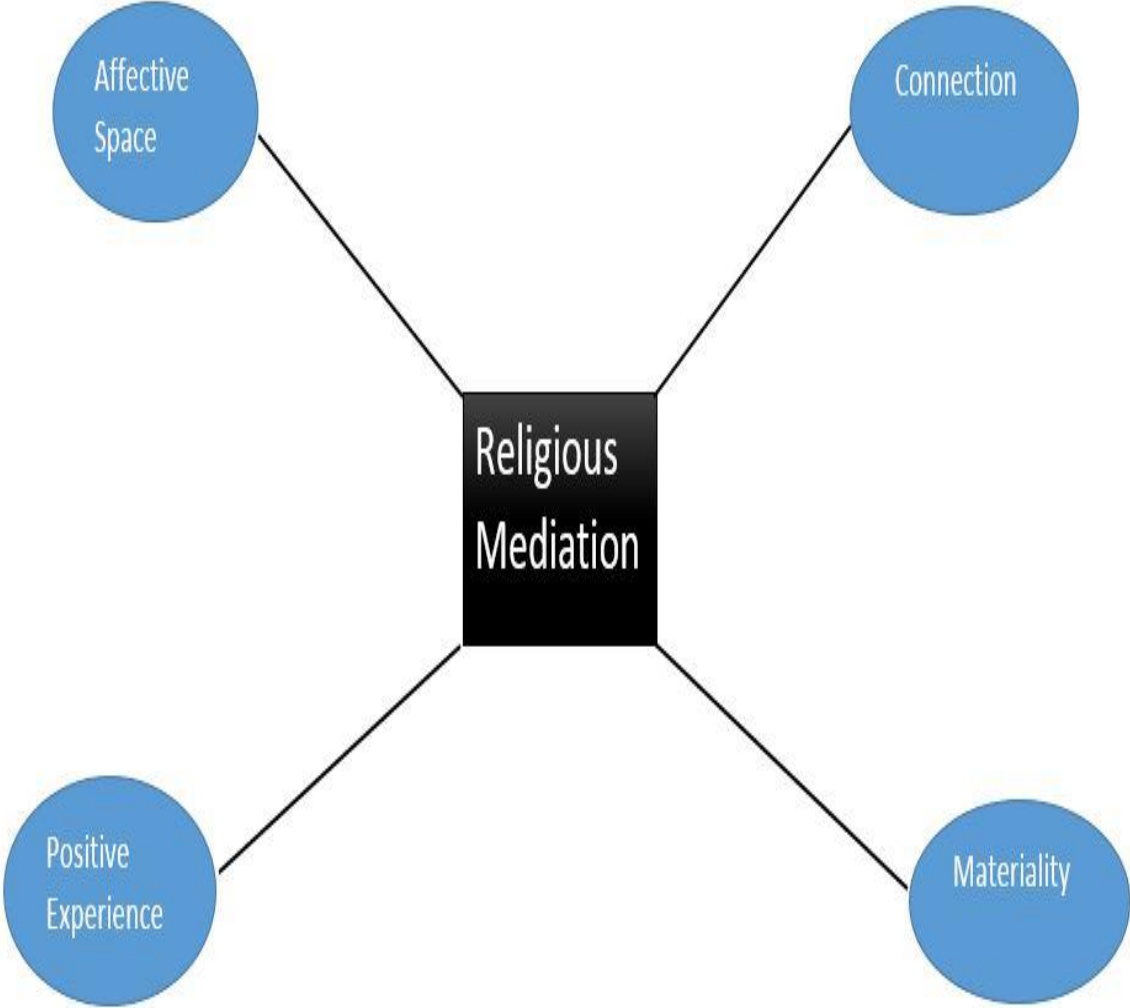
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