

Singing Foreign Songs in the Lord's House: An Examination of the Worship Music  
Sung in Songhai/Zarma Protestant Churches  
of the West African Sahel, with Special Reference to Niger

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**ABSTRACT**

Music is a key marker of a person's identity. It is commonly assumed that people identify most strongly with the music of their own culture and upbringing. The Songhai people of West Africa have a rich historical and musical heritage. Songhai Christians, however, rarely make use of their musical traditions, relying mostly on borrowed forms of worship music. This qualitative study uses insights and methods from ethnomusicology and liturgical study to examine why Songhai Christians ignore or neglect their musical traditions in worship. Using data elicited from eighty semi-structured interviews and lessons on the three-stringed lute, the thesis presents a comprehensive synopsis of Songhai traditional music, including ideas about music, genres/occasions for music, musical instruments, musicians, and dance. With this information as a basis for comparison, the thesis proceeds to examine Protestant Songhai music using information obtained during observations of twenty-three churches and case studies of three of those churches. The analysis of the data shows a significant confusion or loss of identity amongst Songhai Christians under the powerful impact of five cultural and historical forces: tradition, Islam, the Christian subculture, the West/globalization, and the political nation/state. Music plays a role in each of these subcultures and helps shape people's choices and identities. Additionally, each subculture is undergoing rapid change, causing further destabilization of believers' identities as individuals and as a church. Using grid/group cultural theory as a frame for analysis, the thesis proposes a new model for investigating the mix of cultural and historical causes which affect worship music in the Songhai church. It further presents a 'logophonic' principle of soundly ordered words and words soundly ordered which the church could use to build on current worship practices and construct a more robust Songhai Christian identity.