

**NEGOTIATING SOCIETAL CRISES THROUGH ESCHATOLOGICAL NARRATIVES
IN YORUBA GOSPEL MUSIC: NOTES FROM EVANGELIST J. A. ADELAKUN'S
“AMONA TETE MAA BO”**

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have discussed how gospel music offers a framework for responding to the religious, social, and economic experiences of people in the society. Beyond performing religious and evangelistic purposes, how gospel music illuminates societal crises—politics and ecology—is yet to be known. This study examines the role of gospel music as a tool to facilitate religious experience while articulating social concerns. Specifically, it discusses the approaches employed by Yoruba gospel musicians in evoking spirituality in their discourse on societal problems. Reference is made to the musical performance of a popular Yoruba gospel music album titled “Amona Tete Maa bo” by Evangelist J.A. Adelokun which was accessed on YouTube. Further information is gathered from other internet sites including blogs, social media as well as periodicals which provided the secondary sources of data for the study. Through textual and musical analyses of the first and longest track in the album, and relying on critical discourses from musicology, religion and cultural studies, this paper demonstrates how gospel musicians deploy musical and theological approaches to reference and negotiate their social, political and environmental ‘salvation’ through eschatological narrative. The article explains the extent to which these approaches in gospel music and by extension Yoruba gospel musicians are evocative of the general spiritual dimension to almost every social, political and ecological crisis in Africa.

Keywords: Musicology, Nigerian gospel music, Evangelist J.A. Adelokun, ecology, Yoruba music, cultural studies, religion

INTRODUCTION

One of the problematic aspects of the study of gospel music is its definition. Within the African American space, “gospel music (also known as “black gospel music” or “African American gospel music”) is a sacred music genre that emerged in the 1920s out of the confluence of sacred hymns, spirituals, shouts, jubilee quartet songs, and black devotional songs with noticeable blues and jazz rhythmic and harmonic influences (Johnson, 2017). In Africa, according to Ojo (1988), the term “gospel music” is ambiguous in its usage. He defines it according to what the

practitioners and media agents of gospel music call it - “a distinct kind of music composed and rendered by men and women who call themselves Christians, and who refer to their music as “ministration of the Good News in songs” (p. 211). Similarly, Adedeji (2004) defines gospel music as a brand of Nigerian popular music that preaches the good news of Christ by a way of evangelizing. Gillen (2017) makes a distinction between gospel music and sacred music. He submits that gospel music is “music that is created by Christians for use within worship service and outside of the services” (p. 16). In an extended view, Palmberg (cited in Togarasei 2007, p. 54) defines gospel music as “the message of Christ having left the space of the church and entered the arena of popular culture”. As Gillen suggests, gospel music does not only privilege the spiritual domains but also shapes and is shaped by social processes. In other words, gospel music functions both internally (spiritually) and externally (socially). While these studies have attempted to define gospel music, how gospel music contributes to the social constructs beyond its religious borders remains unclear. This study extends the conversation on gospel music by bringing to the fore its functionality in the social, political and religious soundscape of Nigeria.

Scholars (Adedeji 2004, 2007, 2015; Atiemo, 2006; Brennan 2012; Chitando, 2000; Emielu & Donkor, 2019; Ojo 1988 and Sanga, 2006) have explored the historical, cultural, religious, social, and musical dimensions of gospel music in Africa. Ojo (1988) describes, though briefly, the origin of Nigerian gospel music and highlights its importance in social construction. The study demonstrates how gospel music constitutes the sites where religious and social discourses intersect and the role of gospel musicians as social commentators in Nigerian society. Adedeji (2004) discussed cultural, religious, technological and social factor that shaped the development of gospel music and its style in Nigeria. The study claims that gospel music in Nigeria originated without any foreign influence and that it emerged as a form of music for evangelization. Despite the existence of in-depth studies on notable gospel musicians in Nigeria, the contributions of Evangelist J.A. Adedokun, one of the prominent gospel musicians whose music has been vibrant since Nigeria’s independence era, have not been extensively studied hence a gap that this paper seeks to fill.

The advent of recording and broadcast technology has been noted as one of the factors responsible for the movement of gospel music from religious settings to public space in Nigeria

and Africa. The mid-20th century witnessed a large turnout of individuals and groups who took the opportunity of performing on radio and TV stations during special church seasons, such as Easter and Christmas. By this time, recording studios had been established in various parts of the country and gospel musicians took advantage of this to get their music recorded and distributed in different playable formats such as LPs, cassettes, CDs, and DVDs. As remarked by Ojo,

Christian music entered the public domain by a very slow process. In the 1960s and 1970s, Christian hymns were played on radio, and by the mid-1970s, choirs from churches were occasionally invited to sing on the radio and television - usually in a slot of about thirty minutes. Radio Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2013) 214 Ojo ELWA (that went off the air in about 1992 when the radio station was occupied by the warring factions in the Liberian Civil War), the only Christian station in West Africa broadcasting from Monrovia, Liberia, had a large audience in Nigeria, and most of the songs and hymns broadcast came from the choirs of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), the sponsoring denomination of the station: Some of the ECWA choirs were so successful that some songs they had rendered on the radio were soon released on records and cassettes by Challenge Productions in Jos. Choirs of other denominations also emulated this new adaptation, such that by the mid-1970s Christian music had become available to the public. After that, some musical groups that had been church-based also tried to transcend their locality by waxing records and appearing on the television. This early stage of Gospel music was promoted as an extension of the Christian music from the church, and had no commercial orientation (1988, p. 213-214).

Similarly, Togaresie (2007) explains how gospel music moved out of the church into the public space in Zimbabwe. He notes, “the history of gospel music in Zimbabwe can therefore be traced back to the time when musicians like Jordan Chataika and Mechanic Manyeruke began recording their songs in the early 1980s, taking church music out of the church into the arena of popular culture” (p. 54). The mediated mode of recording by gospel musicians to produce and circulate their music to a larger audience offered gospel music the agency to do the work of evangelism and in so doing gained entry into the commercial music space. For a long time, the commercialization of gospel music has raised tension in different quarters. Some of the debates center on the merger of arts, religion, and commerce (Gillen, 2017; Hurst, 2006). While some believed that the songs were divinely given and there is no justification for commercializing them, others argue that gospel musicians should make money while spreading the gospel (Togaresie, 2007). This study therefore aims to create an understanding of how gospel music sets ground in contemporary Nigeria, socially, spiritually, economically and environmentally.

There is an inextricable connection between gospel music and the social space wherein it is created (Adedeji, 2007; Ojo, 1988; Togaresie, 2007). Ojo (1988) explores how gospel music is used as a tool to respond to and negotiate the social, political, and economic terrain in African society. The study examines the role of gospel music and musicians not only in enhancing spirituality by evoking spiritual themes but also in articulating matters of public social concern. Ojo observes, “the themes of their songs included the success and peace which Christians have in Jesus Christ, the dominion of Jesus' power over that of Satan, overcoming the adversities of life, and health and peace in the country” (p. 215). In the same vein, Adedeji (2007, p. 90) explains that “some of the themes of contemporary Christian music are praise/worship, invitation, faith, exhortation, Holy Spirit baptism, spiritual warfare, eschatology, prayer and prophecy”. Adedeji argues that while these themes are neither social nor political, gospel music “sometimes do address socio-political and economic issues, but when it does, it is made to condemn bad and criminal behaviors thus serving as an instrument of discipline and social control” (2007, p. 90-91).

This paper hence adds to the growing body of knowledge on the significance of Christian music in society by explaining how Yoruba gospel music is used both as a religious and artistic tool in addressing social and environmental crises. In particular, attention is given to the space created by gospel music to understand and negotiate societal problems in Nigeria. More so, the study engages religious–eschatological narratives in gospel music in representation of socio-political and ecological concerns in Nigeria. I ask: why do gospel musicians evoke some sort of ‘divine inducements’ as a response to social and economic upheaval at local levels? To respond to this inquiry, I examine the music of one of the understudied gospel musicians in post-independent Nigeria, Evangelist Joseph Adebayo Adedokun (hereafter referred to as J.A. Adedokun).

Methodology

Data for the study was largely based on content analysis of a popular music album of Evangelist J.A. Adedokun titled “Amona Tete Maa bo” sourced from YouTube—an online music platform. The album was initially recorded in 1984 and later remixed in 1990. The music track was selected because it was the maiden and hit song that brought Adedokun and his music to the public space as far as gospel music is concerned. Gospel musicians have substantially

contributed to social discourses in their music. However, the selected music is different, as it constitutes a related series of discourse that intersects the themes of ecology, politics, social, cultural, and religious–eschatology all at once. Besides that, the album was recorded and released at a time of economic surplus occasioned by the oil boom in the country. To date, the selected track is still resonant in the Nigerian sound space as it still finds circulation and usage in non-religious context including celebrity TV shows such as Tejubaby TV reality programme, as later discussed. Secondary data were collected through internet blogs/sites and periodicals. Data were textually analyzed through expatiation of the various themes mentioned earlier and how they articulate the social and religious concerns of people from the time of recording the music to date. In addition, the music was transcribed using the western music notation with the aid of Sibelius 8v, a music writing software while the vocal–melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and instrumental organizations of the music were analyzed for an in-depth understanding of the structural/musicological components of the music.

Profiling Evangelist J.A. Adelokun

Birth and Education

Joseph Adebayo Adelokun (formerly known as Amusa) was born on June 12, 1949, to the family of Alhaji Salami and Mrs. Rafatu Adelokun, in a town known as Saki, Oke Ogun area of Oyo State in southwestern Nigeria. Raised in a polygamous-Muslim family, as the second child, and the first and only son of his mother – being the fourth wife to his father, J.A. Adelokun had always been interested in the Christian faith. Adelokun had a primary education and wanted to proceed to secondary school but the demise of his father in 1965 made it difficult. He proceeded to acquire vocational training in electrical engineering with the support of his older brother, Magistrate Bayo Adelokun, who later introduced him to Kareem Electrical Engineering Company in Ogunpa area of Ibadan, where he served as an apprentice between 1966 and 1968. (Adelokun, Daily Independent Newspaper, February 15, 2013).

In 1968, Adelokun joined the Nigerian Army where he was posted to the Nigeria Army Barracks Engineering Construction Regiment based in Ede, Osun State (then Oyo State). During his days in the Nigerian Army, he participated in different sporting and music activities with remarkable feats. For example, he won a gold medal in the 800m race during Army Sports Week in the year

1975. Beyond patriotism, Adedokun joined the Nigerian Army for an apocalyptic reason: simply to die! He remarks, “I joined the Nigerian Army purposely to die. I had written off myself. I had lost every hope; that was why I sold myself and forgot about my life in the Army” (Adedokun, Tribune Online, June 25, 2017). These comments were not unconnected with the socio-economic realities which Adedokun was confronted with as a young person – the death of his father and the inability to access good education. As later shown, the socio-economic milieu of individuals shapes their reactions and responses to life including their artistic expressions. In 1974, Joseph Adedokun was transferred to Kaduna, northern Nigeria, where his musical career began and later, he voluntarily retired from the service of the Nigerian Army to continue his gospel music performance (Adedokun, Daily Independent Newspaper, February 15, 2013).

Music Career and Ministry

At Kaduna, Adedokun joined the membership of the choir of Christ Apostolic Church – one of the foremost indigenous Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, in the year 1975 and it was in that same choir that his musical (singing) skills flourished. He reminisces,

...we sang a song at the CAC Kaawo, which went thus: ‘Akuku yewa oo Akuku yewa oo, baye gbogun be esu di te Jesu onigba, akuku yewa oo...’ which was widely accepted by people and became a slogan around January and February 1976. Gradually, the group took off and some elders, who loved what God was doing through us advised us to be careful to prevent sanctions. We were placed under watch and the elders eventually discovered that the ministry was real and they decided to pray for us, when five people joined me, and that was how we started the Ayewa group professionally (Nigerian Tribune Online, June 25, 2017).

Adedokun composed and led the singing in the newly established group. This practice aligns with the observation of Adedeji (2009), “Nigerian gospel music was church-based. Practitioners were also the choirmasters and music directors in their churches. They later formed their personal independent gospel singing groups during those years” (p.230). Speaking on how the group was named Adedokun recalls:

The group later met to choose a name for the band to avoid calling the group Brother Amusa and co. The leader, Brother Amusa, ask members to suggest names and the following names were suggested: Akukuyewa singers, Golden voices, Angelic voices, Yio ye wa singers and Ayewa Gospel singers. Immediately somebody heard the last name, he quickly added international and called it Ayewa Gospel Singers International. They all supported the name but they concluded to rearrange the words. That is why we

now have the name of the group as Ayewa International Gospel Singers till date (Nigerian Tribune Online, June 25, 2017).

Adelakun and his Ayewa group (later known as Ayewa Gospel Music Ministry) recorded and released their debut music album titled “*Emi yio kokiki Re*” in 1978. With over 40 years of appearance in the Nigerian music scene, the gospel band has released well over 30 albums.

Not much is known about Adelakun’s (in)formal musical training. His interest in music started early from his primary school days when he spent most of his time playing drums at Baptist Church, Oke Ogun in Saki, Oyo State. He attributed his musical abilities to the divine endowment. He recalls, “I knew nothing about music from the onset. It would interest you to know that I didn’t go to any music school. You can imagine the experience of a Muslim-turned-Christian, who knew nothing about rhythm; God gave me the gift of music to the extent that I teach music professionals now” (Adelakun, Nigerian Tribune Online, June 25, 2017).

Adelakun’s call to the music ministry precedes that of his pastoral calling. He started as an Evangelist – an appellation and a ministerial portfolio that confers the duty of evangelism onto an individual. In Africa and Nigeria in particular, gospel musicians consider their music performances as acts of preaching and evangelizing, therefore, making them fit for the title and office of an Evangelist. Scholars have examined how Gospel music helps to frame and sustain the identity of its practitioners in different regions (Adedeji, 2009; Emielu and Danko, 2019; Ojo 1988; Togarasei, 2007). These scholars consider the dual identity of gospel musicians by explaining how gospel musicians construct their identity through self-identification as an evangelist. Ojo recalls how a gospel musician describes her identity: “I’m an evangelist, but the area of my music ministration is music. I’m not good at entertainment, but in preaching. I am a singing preacher” (1988, p. 218). In their work on music and social identity in gospel music, Emielu and Dankor (2019) posit that the labeling of some musicians as gospel musicians (even bearing titles of music ministers or evangelists) and others are secular issues of social identity. Much more than the social and artistic label: ‘musician’, gospel musicians acknowledge their evangelistic role in performing their spiritual labor of evangelizing the world through music. According to Ojo (1988), this identification provides gospel musicians with some form of patronage and platform for evangelistic outreach programs. Like other gospel musicians in Africa, Evangelist J.A. Adelakun sees himself as one who fulfills the great commission of world

missions through his music. As a preacher–musician, Evangelist J.A. Adelokun, regularly performs at various church programs and other non-religious activities within and outside Nigeria, and he is still very much active in the Nigerian gospel music scene to date and remains a referential point in the Yoruba gospel music milieu. I recall my recent encounter with him at a Nation-wide Music Workshop organized by his church–CAC, where he sang one of his popular songs “*Wa Bami Gberu Mi Baba*” – Father, help me bear this burden, to the listening pleasure of over 3,000 youths gathered at the event.

Scholars of Gospel music in Africa have stressed that for a better understanding of the genre, attention must be paid to various factors that shape the genre (Sanga, 2006; Adedeji, 2004; Kidula, 2010). Consequently, this paper presents the socio-economic and political contexts in which the famous hit song – *Amona Tete Maa Bo* by Evangelist Adelokun was created, produced, and distributed. Second, I will explain how gospel music is representative of eschatological narratives alongside the political and ecological concerns in Nigeria not only at the time of the release of the album but also up to the present.

The metaphor of ‘*Amona*’ in Adelokun’s music

The album “*Amona Tete Maa Bo*”, which was first recorded in 1980 and later remixed in 1984, has four tracks with a performance duration of thirty-six minutes and fifty-four seconds. The track – *Amona Tete Maa Bo* – under review is the first and longest in the album. The word *amona* meaning ‘guide’, ‘compass’, or ‘direction’ is used metaphorically to express the concerns of Adelokun and by extension the listener on the dire need for ‘direction’ in the social, economic, and political space in Nigeria. The use of metaphor is prevalent among gospel musicians in Africa. In Tanzania, Sanga (2006) shows how gospel musicians utilize metaphor and imagery as well as the discourse of everyday life to communicate their message. He observes that these musicians employ this approach to talk about the past, present and future. Similarly, the picture of a highway on the cover design of the album under review figuratively suggests Nigeria as a traveler on a road who requires a compass, *amona*, to help navigate the road. My reading of the song “*Amona tete ma bo*” – Come quickly O Guide divine offers some metaphoric insights into the mind of the singer who describes the situation of the world, especially Nigeria, that has missed its social, economic, political, and spiritual track, as critical, and requires an urgent and

divine response. The opening chorus of the song pleads to the supernatural to come to rescue the world that is near apocalypse. He sings:

<i>Amona tete wa o, amona tete bo</i>	Come quickly O Guide divine
<i>Amona tete wa o, amona tete bo</i>	Come quickly O Guide divine
<i>Aye n baje o, amona tete bo</i>	The world is collapsing, Come quickly O Guide divine
<i>Aye n daru o, amona tete bo</i>	The world is destroying, Come quickly O Guide divine

[Excerpt A]

For an in-depth understanding of the context in which the song was produced, it is imperative to discuss the social, economic, and political state of affairs in Africa and Nigeria in particular at the period when the album was released. The years 1979 to 1983 marked the beginning of the Second Republic in Nigerian political history. The country witnessed instability between military and civilian rule and economic recession occasioned by the end of the oil boom as well as corruption. For example, in a space of nine years, between 1975 and 1984, Nigeria had about five different leaders including four military heads of state and a civilian president as well as a military coup. Economically, this period was gloomy in many African countries. In Nigeria, the unprecedented decline in a major foreign exchange commodity (oil) engendered a national economic downturn. With factors including financial corruption, the decline in foreign trade, and environmental crises, African leaders considered obtaining foreign loans as a temporary bailout from their financial quagmire from international agencies such as the International Money Fund (IMF) which supports transnational trade and financial systems. The IMF offered assistance to economically collapsed African States under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). As expounded by Riddell (1992):

The I.M.F. is concerned that heavily-indebted nations make the adjustments that are needed in order to become viable members of the international economy, and hence insists upon certain ‘conditionalities’ which must be met by the borrowing regimes, not least in the hope and/or expectation that they will be able to meet their debt obligations if they return to a ‘proper’ economic path (p. 55).

The effects, positive and negative, of SAPs on the social, economic, and political development of Africa have been discussed (Jaycox, 1989; Riddell, 1992). Jaycox (1989, p. 37) recounts that “structural adjustment is extremely difficult. It can involve profound economic, social, and political changes. Many vested interests are challenged; government expenditures are tightened

up, agricultural producer prices increased, trade liberalized, exchange rates realigned, state-owned enterprises streamlined and incentives built into the productive sectors”. As shall be noted in the music of Adedokun, political instability, economic recession, and corruption in the country implied a state of being ‘lost’ on a journey to peaceful governance, social development and economic progress hence the need for a ‘compass’ (*amona*) to help redirect.

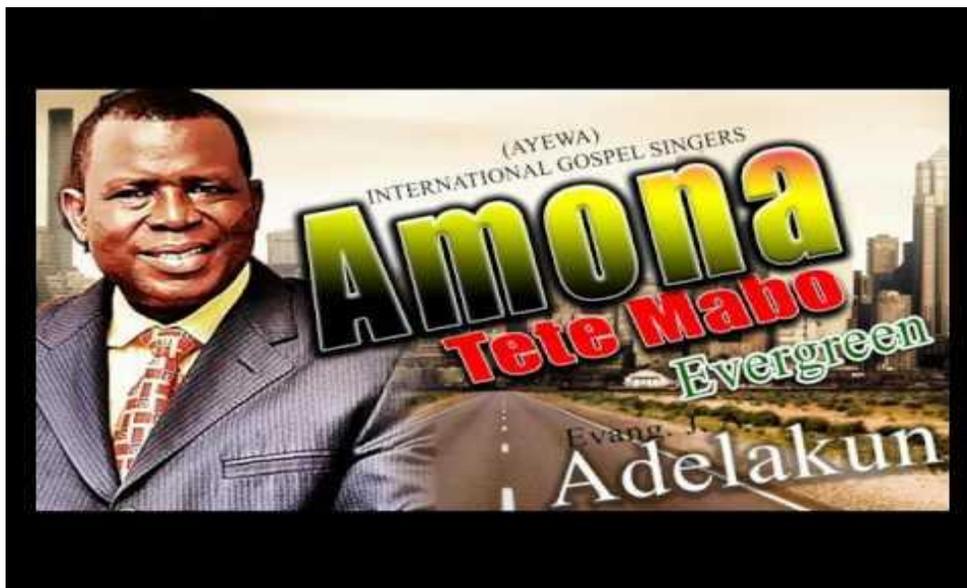


Plate 1: Front cover of Amona tete mabo CD produced in 2016

It has been observed that spirituality increases during difficult times and that religion constitute alternative modes to negotiate the spiritual, social, and economic ills of society. Adedokun prayerfully sought divine intervention on the state of the nation. Let us listen to him:

Jesu Kristi l'amona

Oun lo le tun ile aye wa se

A n reti re o Baba, A fe r'uju re

Nigbati Jesu bade, laye yi to le toro

Nigbati Jesu bade, laye yi to le dara

Decree lojumo ni se lofin n gori ofin

Sibe, sibe, ara mi gbogbo, aye o fi bee toro

Jesus Christ is the direction

Jesus only can fix the world's problems

We are expectant, we want to see Jesus

When Jesus comes this world will be settled

When Jesus comes this world will be a better place

Decrees upon decrees, laws keep increasing

Yet, the whole world is not at peace

[Excerpt B]

A critical examination of the song text in excerpt 'B' opens up the notion of utopia and dystopia—of an ideal and non-ideal place or society. With its etymology from the Greek word—"ou-topos"

meaning “no place” or “nowhere”, Sir Thomas More coined the term in 1516 and described it as a perfect place:

where no man needed to worry about poverty and hunger, where education was universal, and where politics had a democratic structure. Different religions worshipped in the same churches, which were run by the same priests, all of whom had the highest moral and religious level in utopian society. Economically speaking, personal interest was replaced by the benefits of the social welfare (More 2011 cited in Huang, 2017, pp. 7-8).

Utopia as a state of belief can be engaged in religious, social, and political spheres of humanity. In the Christian context, utopia is akin to the Biblical paradise of a new heaven and new earth which is contingent upon eschatology— of the return of Jesus Christ. Utopian society suggests a perfect, non-chaotic, stress-free environment and as Huang (2017) captures it, “the core of this utopian world is an idea of a highly developed and rational humanity that can lead to happiness. While More’s description of utopia is silent on the role of the transcendental in actualizing the perfect state of humanity, Christian teachings affirm that utopia can only be achieved through the Divine and this was articulated by Adedokun:

<i>Ologun mbe lode aye n rojo kiri</i>	During military rule there were complaints by people
<i>Oselu tun wo be o, igbe laraye nke</i>	We are now in democracy, complaints persist
<i>Oselu to kojalo ejo laye nro</i>	During the last regime, people cried
<i>Ologun lo tun de be o, igbe laraye nke</i>	Now it’s military regime, everyone cries
<i>Otito o nile mo, iro laraye n fe</i>	Truth is scarce, lying is what everyone wants
<i>Ododo o ribi gba o, ese ti bori aye</i>	Righteousness is no more, sin prevails in the land
<i>A fi ti Jesu bade, laye yi to le toro</i>	Except Jesus comes there can’t be a peaceful world
<i>A fi ti Jesu bade, laye yi to le dara</i>	Except Jesus comes, no better society

[Excerpt C]

The song text above not only calls our attention to what is utopian but also dystopian. The interrelatedness of utopia and dystopia has been considered and each precedes the other. Simply put: utopia leads to dystopia in the same way dystopia leads to utopia. Therefore, the utopia-dystopia and dystopia-utopia circle played out before, during and after the Biblical account of creation. As recorded in Genesis Chapter 1 verses 1-3, the initial formless and voided nature of the earth portrays a dystopian state which then became a utopia after the creation of man and later dystopian with the fall of man- Genesis 3. The Christian theology of utopian is animated

through the entire Bible from the Old to New Testament. For example, the Children of Israel begged Moses to lead them to the promised land—Canaan, which characterizes utopia as against their dystopian ordeal in Egypt.

The call on the supernatural—God to respond to the social, economic, and political uncertainties of humans as seen in the music of Adedokun reveals the nexus between eschatology, apocalypse, and social issues. The doctrine of eschatology is widely accepted in many Christian traditions. Eschatology, at least in a Christian sense, is about the final and ultimate transformation of creation and the redemption of history (Venter, 2015, p.114). Scholars have urged us to examine eschatology from the bi-polar view of continuity and discontinuity (Venter, 2015) and this was clearly expressed by Adedokun while narrating how the coming of Jesus Christ signals, on one hand, a new experience— of continuity and on the other hand, the ending—discontinuity—of an old order in human society. While eschatology signals hope and aspiration, does it mean that such a divine project can be humanly induced or ‘fast tracked’? Should we not consider Adedokun’s request for the speedy return of Jesus Christ as the solution to societal crises as a form of ‘divine inducement’ or ‘spiritual imposition’ especially when Venter cautions, “the starting-point for eschatology is not time, but God, and the end is not a human ethical project, but is ultimately in the hands of the triune God” (2015, p. 107). The biblical narrative on eschatological happenings as an apocalypse in Revelation 3 (King James Version Bible, 2005) such as war, famine, nations rising against nations resound in Adedokun’s music. He narrates:

<i>Ohun ti ‘we mimo wi gbogbo re loti mi se</i>	Every prophecy of the Bible are being fulfilled
<i>Oro ti Jesu wa so, gbogbo lo fara han</i>	Every word by Jesus are coming to pass
<i>T’aba wonu aye a ri p’aye do gbo lo</i>	We notice the world is aging
<i>Orile-edede ndide si ra won ogun at’ote n sele</i>	Nations rising against nations in war
<i>Mologun nile, ogun nile, ogun loko</i>	War at home, war abroad
<i>Wahala aye yi ma poju</i>	So much troubles in this world,
<i>Alagbawi tete ma bo</i>	Mediator Divine, come quickly

[Excerpt D]

Adedokun song further references environmental predicaments as one of the signs that humanity has lost its track. Both Ojo (1988) and Adedokun (2012) have examined themes in Nigerian gospel music. For Adedokun (2012), Nigerian gospel music themes “encompass the theological

(evangelism, which is dominant), the socio-cultural, political, and economic, as well as miscellaneous subjects” (p. 413). A critical examination of themes in contemporary gospel music in Nigeria and elsewhere shows that evangelistic contents are scant. However, gospel music produced between 1960s and 1980s in Nigeria, wherein the music in focus was recorded, evangelistic and eschatological themes were prevalent. Within this period, Christian messages were largely based on holiness and rapture as evident in Adedede’s song. In Kenya, Nyairo (2005) and Ntarangwi (2016) have examined non-religious themes in Kenyan gospel songs. For example, Nyairo noted that the song theme crisscrosses threat of HIV/AIDS, national economic recession and the political crises witnessed in the country. He asserts that gospel songs “has been transposed so that it provides an opening for the exposition of quotidian personal and national drama (2005, p. 79). Despite the substantial commentaries on environmental crises by gospel musicians, scholars are yet to consider how this genre constitutes a site of discourse on issues of environmental degradation as well as its negative impact on the survival of humans and non-humans. Perhaps, themes of ecology, insecurity, gender, social action among others are the “miscellaneous subjects” in the gospel music which Adedede referred to. In this track, Adedede also gave some insights into the ecological challenges experienced in society. He chronicles in the following excerpts:

<i>Moni laye atijo ohun gbogbo nlo dede</i>	In time past everything was alright
<i>Ojo n ro lasiko re, orun yo lasiko re</i>	Rain fell and sunset at their seasons
<i>Osupa yio lasiko re, oye nmu lasiko re</i>	Different weather at the appropriate time
<i>Isu njade lasiko re, agbado njade lasiko re</i>	Yam and maize grow in their season
<i>Moni lao f’oro gun ohun gbogbo nlo dede</i>	Without mincing words the situation was pleasant

[Excerpt E]

The report of a healthy environment as a thing of the past suggests that the situation was and is no longer the same. Recently, there have been growing concerns about the impact of climate change on humans and non-humans all over the world. Human activities continue to affect, on a negative trend, the health and productivity of the environment. Climate change is considered a situation that can disrupt food quality and availability. Because of changes in precipitation patterns, extreme weather events and reductions in water availability, agricultural productivity whether crop or livestock may be drastically reduced especially in growing economies like Africa. Recently there was an outcry about the extremely hot weather witnessed in Europe and some other parts of the world. It has also been projected that rainfall patterns are expected to

shift more than we have observed. Experts have noted the climatologically diverse nature of Africa and that climate change will affect some regions of Africa to varying degrees. (Mendelsohn, 2009; McKinsey Global Institute, 2020). As (dis)heartening as these projections may be, the fact is that climate change remains a source of concern for developing societies. Adelokun seems not to consider human attitudes to the environment as apocalyptic rather he elects to call on the transcendental for environmental salvation. Such attitude of human neglect of the environment as the responsibility of the divine is still rampant among very religious societies like Nigeria. A similar example is that of Chief Ebenezer Obey, a popular Yoruba Juju turned gospel musician, who chronicled environmental problems in Ibadan, southwestern Nigeria. In his music “Oro Ogunpa” he reported the heavy flood that destroyed lives and properties in Ibadan in the 80s and admonished his audience to seek the face of God for environmental protection. I argue that music is one of the approaches used by Yoruba gospel musicians in evoking a spiritual dimension to almost every social, political and ecological crisis in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

As a social construct, Emielu and Donkor (2019) argue that gospel music serves as an instrument for social control in African societies. Magosvongwe (2015) shows how gospel music is used to correct social, political, cultural and spiritual practices in the same way traditional oral art forms function in Zimbabwe. He observes, “gospel music attacks, rebukes, and persuades to create a peaceable and stable life” (p.72). Similarly, the lyrics of Adelokun bear this out. He warns on the danger of modernization, corrupt leadership and sin as factors responsible for societal ills and admonishes his listener to seek divine intervention before it is too late.

*Olaju, olaju, olaju lode lo baye je
Awon ton s’olori wa, okanjuwa lo poju
Dugbe dugbe kan n fi loke o, aye e je a fura
Eje ka gbadura s’Oluwa ki wahala ma sele
Eyin ojogbon aye, eyin ayanfe Oluwa gbogbo
Eje ka parapo, ka gbadura s’Oluwa
Oluwa o feku elese ironupiwada lontoro
Ka bere fun daraji ese alaanu lo lu wa*

Modernization destroys the world
Many of our leaders are greedy
Trouble is looming, let’s be watchful
Let us pray to God to avert chaos
All the nobles of this world and God’s elect
Let us come together and pray to God
God is not interested in the death of a sinner
Let us ask God for mercy because He is merciful

[Excerpt G]

The entertainment, informative and didactic functions of music particularly gospel music have been established. In Africa, musicians employ storytelling in communicating their messages. Storytelling is one of the time-honored means of communication in human history. It helps to preserve and share the history of people and societies from one generation to another. Through storytelling, different societies organize behavioral patterns and formulate meaning-making in their lives (Adichie, 2013). In Africa, stories offer a reflective space for people. As Mbiti (1966) observed:

Stories are to a certain extent the mirror of life; they reflect what the people do, what they think, how they live and have lived, their values, their joys and their sorrows. The stories are also a means of articulating man's response to his environment (p. 31).

Stories are didactic and are utilized as instructional modes in different societies. The applicability of stories in learning both for children and adults has been considered especially due to the strong emotions they evoke (Rossiter, 2002). Adelakun used storytelling as a kind of distinct mode for socio-religious instruction in educating listeners— Christians— believers or not in the concluding part of his song. The use of stories in adult education is not strictly a secular practice but also religious. As Edosomwan and Peterson (n.d) noted, “adult educators like Plato and Jesus of Nazareth have used stories to connect, demonstrate, illustrate and communicate with learners”. The Bible is replete with how Jesus engages stories in communicating and interacting with his listeners. In a lengthy conversation, Adelakun recalls the story of Noah, the ark, and the flood in Genesis 6-9 and what they imply in contemporary Nigeria.

Ara e je a ranti igba aye Noah
E ma je a gbagbe o gbogbo wa ibu omi tokoja
Olowo aye n wi, won ni iro ni Noah n pa
Talaka n so tire won ni nibo lojo ti n bowa
Lalai jiyani rara nise ni Noah tesiwaju
Lalai bikita o, omo Olorun o wehin wo
Pelu iranlowo Oluwa oko Noah pari
Eranko wole, era wonu oko
Awon eye oju orun gbogbo,
Gbogbo won lo sare wo le
B'Elede se yobun to, sibe oraye wo le
Ibe la r'omo eniyan ton jo ti won mu
B' Ewure ti je alaigboran to, sibe oraye wo le
Ibe la r'omo eniyan to nsope 'ro ni

Let us all remember the story of Noah
Let us remember the flood
The rich mocked Noah's warning
The poor despised his warning
Notwithstanding, Noah, a child of God
proceed to build the ark
With God's help Noah finished the ark
Animals including ants entered the ark
Even the birds of the air
All rushed to enter the ark
Pigs entered the ark despite their filthiness
Yet some people drank and merry
As stubborn as a goat, it entered the ark
Yet some people ignored Noah's prophecy

Won komo jade, won se gbeyawo kiri

They were naming children and getting married

Won o beru ofin Oluwa Oba wa,

They heeded not the laws of God

Gbogbo won lo n jaye

Everyone continued to wine and dine

B'otiri nigbaye Noah o mbe nisiyi o

As it was in the days of Noah so it is now

B'otiri nigbaye Noah o mbe nisiyi o

As it was in the days of Noah so it is now

Opo lo ti mi so, wipe Jesu o ni de mo

Many say "Jesus will not return"

After a long instrumental interlude, Adalokun continued the story by recounting how the flood started following many days of rainfall and how those who refused to enter the ark suffered destruction. He believes that those people in the days of Noah represent those who still doubt the second coming of Jesus Christ. He concluded the story by articulating the central theme of eschatology in Christianity. From the foregoing, gospel musicians see themselves as performing spiritual and social roles. As moral leaders, they believe they are saddled with empowering the people with guidance for living and these obligations they fulfill are largely shaped by their Christian experiences. Hence, music provides the avenue for gospel musicians to discharge their social and religious responsibilities hence providing everyday guide—*amona*—to their listeners. Gospel musicians draw from their biblical repertoire to communicate and shape their listeners' everyday perception of their worlds and to influence their dispositions towards past and present social realities, I submit.

In addition to drawing from his traditional Yoruba culture and that of the Christian practice of storytelling, I argue that Adalokun utilizes, artistically, Christian Biblical stories as a framework for describing an ideal path – of social, economic, political and environmental– even though his concluding remarks leaves an 'open-ended' interpretation to his listeners. This is a communicative style with gospel musicians in Africa. As Magosvongwe (2015) demonstrates how Mhere, a known Zimbabwean gospel musician, "drawing from Biblical images and symbols and parallels from African lived philosophy of life, makes room and allowances for people arriving at individual and or group interpretations, showing the respect and regard he has for his audiences" (p.78). These imageries are also crafted by the use of proverbs. In a Yoruba saying, *owe l'esin oro, oro l'esin owe* meaning proverb provides quick meaning to words and vice versa. It implies that proverb gives deeper meaning and clarity to any conversation. His reference to

dugbe dugbe kan n fi loke o, aye e je a fura, in excerpt G, is an extract from a Yoruba proverb meaning take head! a crisis is forthcoming

A careful analysis of “Amona Tete Maa Bo” offers some stylistic insights into Nigeria Christian music in general and Yoruba gospel music in particular. As used by Adedeji (2002) style refers to the “aggregate result of peculiar manner of composition, form, melody, harmony, vocal style and instrumentation inherent in a particular musical expression”. The music in the study fits into the stylistic classification of Adedeji (2002) on indigenous-spiritual styles. As a style of Nigerian gospel music, the ‘spiritual’ style avoids elaborate instrumentation, dancing, and entertainment and in which the texts concentrate mainly on heavenly matters, holiness and condemnation of sin and corruption. The music is however repetitive in its rhythmic and melodic structures” (p. 236). Below is a structural overview of the entire song:

Section	Bars	Vocal	Instrumentation	Chord Structure
Intro	1-8	-	Solo guitar calls with other instruments—keyboard, bass, drums respond in a slow tempo	V–I–IV–V–I
	8-16	-	Solo guitar: plays melodic segment of the chorus Keyboard: chord in homophony Guitar: chord in rhythmic form Bass: the root of the chord in a percussive manner imitating the <i>akuba</i> drum	/I – – – – // I – – – ii – – ii – – I – V – I
Chorus	17-20	Lead vocal with backups in 3-part harmony	All instruments playing	I – I – I – I ii – – ii – – I – V – I
Interlude	21-28	-	Solo guitar improvisation; melody in sequence with guitar effect,	Same as chorus
Verse 1	29-60	Lead vocal + a singer in harmony often a 3 rd above	All instruments playing	I – IV – V – I Or

		the lead vocal		I-ii-V-1
Chorus	61-68	Lead vocal with backups in 3-part harmony	All instruments playing	I – I – I – I ii – – ii – – I – V – I
Interlude	69-76	-	Solo guitar improvisation	Same as chorus
Verse 2	77-126	Lead vocal + a singer in harmony often a 3 rd above the lead vocal	All instruments playing	I – IV – V – I Or I-ii-V-1
Chorus	127-134	Lead vocal with backups in 3-part harmony	All instruments playing	I – I – I – I ii – – ii – – I – V – I
Interlude	135-142	-	Solo guitar improvisation imitating the chorus/chord progression	Same as chorus
Verse 3	143-164	Lead vocal + a singer in harmony 3 rd above	All instruments playing	I – IV – V – I I-ii-V-1
Chorus	165-172	Lead vocal with backups in 3-part harmony	All instruments playing	I – I – I – I ii – – ii – – I – V – I
Interlude	173-180	Lead vocal short speech interjection	Solo guitar improvisation imitating the chorus/chord progression	Same as chorus
Verse 4	181-226	Lead vocal + a singer in harmony 3 rd above	All instruments playing	I – IV – V – I Or I-ii-V-1
Chorus	227-234	Lead vocal with backups in 3-part harmony	All instruments playing	I – I – I – I ii – – ii – – I – V – I
Interlude	235-250	Lead vocal + a singer in harmony 3 rd above	Extended solo guitar improvisation borrowing themes from chorus; sequence, scalic, wide melodic range	Same as chorus
Verse 5	251-302		All instruments playing	I – IV – V – I

				Or I-ii-V-1
Final Chorus	303-318	Call and response	All instruments playing; loud and lively	

Amona Tete Maa Bo

1

Sekere

Bell/Agogo

Electric Guitar

Bass Guitar

Lead Vocal

Backup vocals

Keyboard

A - mo-na te - te wa o, A - mo-na te - te bo A - mo-na te - te wa o A - mo-na te - te

Detailed description: This system contains the first four measures of the piece. It features a Sekere part with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, a Bell/Agogo part with a similar rhythmic pattern, an Electric Guitar part with a sustained chord, a Bass Guitar part with a walking bass line, a Lead Vocal part with the lyrics 'A - mo-na te - te wa o, A - mo-na te - te bo A - mo-na te - te wa o A - mo-na te - te', Backup vocals with a harmonic accompaniment, and a Keyboard part with a sustained chord.

5

Sekere.

Bell/Agogo.

E. Gtr.

Bass

LV

Backups

Kbd.

bo A - ye'n - da - ru o A - mo-na te - te bo A - ye'n - da - ru

Detailed description: This system contains measures 5 through 8. It features a Sekere part with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, a Bell/Agogo part with a similar rhythmic pattern, an Electric Guitar part with a sustained chord, a Bass part with a walking bass line, a Lead Vocal part with the lyrics 'bo A - ye'n - da - ru o A - mo-na te - te bo A - ye'n - da - ru', Backup vocals with a harmonic accompaniment, and a Keyboard part with a sustained chord.

2

8

Sekere.

Bell/Agogo.

E. Gtr.

Bass

LV

o A - mo - na te - te bo

Backups

Kbd.

Figure 1: Chorus section of Amona Tete Maa Bo (transcription: author)

Adelakun employs short, simple and varying melodic structures with repetition. The variation in melodic patterns allows the singer to accommodate a broad range of notes to fit the extended song texts. Melodic patterns of the song adhere strictly to the Yoruba speech-tone pattern which gives intelligibility to the song text within the Yoruba linguistic framework. The chorus section of the song features the 8-bar phrase format based on the pentatonic scale with hexatonic and heptatonic scales sparingly used. The use of extended melodies—up to 40 bars before the repeat of the chorus was observed in the music. For melodic intervals, 5 distinct types were noticed in the song: unison, second, third, fourth and fifths. Cycling around these intervals is a result of the tonal allegiance the musician paid to the text of the song and as Loko (2017/2018, p.52) observes, “has stabilizing effect on the song resulting in a higher level of song’s familiarity and acceptance”.

Two- to three-part harmony was used in the song with parts overlapping each other. A noticeable trend in many gospel songs is that the melody is usually ‘sandwiched’ by other inner parts.

Three-part harmony was heard in the chorus section and 2-part harmony sometimes in the verse section. The harmonizing parts often followed the melodic contours of the lead part in a parallel 2nd, 3rd, 6th and octave and deviate at some points (See Figure 2). The use of parallel harmony is a common practice in many African music including popular Christian music.

The figure displays a musical score for a vocal excerpt in 12/8 time. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system features a 'Lead Vocal' staff with a melodic line and lyrics: 'A - mo-na te - te wa o, A - mo-na te - te bo A - mo-na te - te wa o A - mo-na te - te'. Below it is a 'Backup vocals' staff with a parallel harmonic line. The second system features a 'LV' (Lead Vocal) staff with lyrics: 'bo A - ye'n - da - ru o A - mo-na te - te bo A - ye'n - da - ru'. Below it is a 'Backups' staff with a parallel harmonic line. The music is written in a key with one flat and a 12/8 time signature.

Figure 2: vocal excerpt of the chorus showing parallel harmony

The thorough-composed form appeared to be prominent in the song with lots of interludes by the solo guitar before each of the verses. However, the solo-call and chorus-response forms were noticed towards the end of the song where the singer stresses the inevitability of the return of Christ, the ultimate guide – *amona*. (See figure 3).

Figure 3: Call and response section of the song (transcription: author)

Textually, the music employed imagery, metaphor, simile and Yoruba proverbs as the rhetoric of logos and pathos to appeal to the emotion of the audience to consider what ideal and non-ideal societies should be. The textual structure of the song is largely long-verse or additive form except for the chorus which is quaternary– 4 lexical units with variants, a predominant textual pattern in Yoruba music (Adedeji 2004; Vidal 2004).

Amona tete wa o, amona tete bo - A

Amona tete wa o, amona tete bo - A

Aye n baje o, amona tete bo - B

Aye n daru o, amona tete bo - C

In terms of instrumentation, the music employed a moderately large instrumental ensemble combining both western and African musical instruments. Unlike modern digital recordings of gospel music, almost all the instruments heard in the recording of Adelokun were played ‘live’.

The rhythmic section had a few traditional Yoruba instruments such as *agogo* (bell), *sekere* (gourd rattles), and *akuba* (double-membrane drum). Other instruments like electric guitars (solo,

rhythm, and bass), and the keyboard provided light accompaniment besides the electric solo guitar that was copiously heard throughout the song, especially during interludes. It is noteworthy here that the solo guitar was not used in the initial recording of the song in 1980. Paul Tao (now Evangelist), a renowned guitar player in the Nigerian popular music scene since the 60s till date, was invited to play in the remix of the song in 1984. Rhythmically, the song used the popular African 12/8 pattern also known as the bell or *konkolo* rhythm. Like Yoruba traditional music, gospel musicians especially Yoruba musicians often create their songs to fit into the *konkolo* rhythmic organization.

I read the overall complex structure of the music as being suggestive of the chaotic world that Adedokun describes in the song. The rhythmic section which featured different Yoruba percussions calls our attention to the past and present social and political realities both at local and global levels. Adedokun not only invokes a visual sense of ‘order’ in the chaotic space through the imagery of *amona* – compass, but he also represented this sonically. The extensive use of the solo guitar in the introduction section and repeatedly throughout the music is representational. The solo guitar could be described as a ‘compass’ that repeatedly provided the necessary ‘direction’ for the entire music ensemble through musical interlude/improvisation between each verse of the song. In addition, the tempo of the music, which is moderately fast, can be interpreted as indicating the urgent need for divine intervention in the myriads for social, economic, political and environmental crises in the world. It is worth noting that much of the social and political challenges that Adedokun reported in his songs are still being witnessed in present-day Nigeria

Evangelist J.A. Adedokun is still active within the Nigerian musical space both at social and religious functions. In November 2018, his band was hosted by Teju Oyelakin popularly known as Teju Babyface, a successful Nigerian standup comedian, on his popular TV programme “The Teju Babyface Show”. Teju Babyface told his audience he has longed to sing with Adedokun since childhood. He narrates:

Welcome to the Teju Babyface show... it is a special episode. I have one of my fathers in the house; from when I was a little boy, I'd always wanted to sing with him live and you know that God answers my prayers... [instructs the audience to

clap] God has done it again! (Teju Babyface,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuf2KxgG76s>, November 30, 2018)



Plate 1: Evangelist J.A. Adelokun and his band on Teju Babyface TV show
(Source: YouTube, November 13, 2018)

Conclusion

This article addresses the contributions of gospel music and by extension gospel musicians to the everyday life of the people of Nigeria by focusing on how gospel music explores Anthropocene and ecological interventions through eschatological appeal. Though the second coming of Christ is not within the remit of humans, this study argues that gospel musicians, like the case of Adelokun, deploy some elusive approaches of; spirituality to societal problems including environmental and economic. Beyond their evangelistic approach, gospel musicians also deploy artistic tools of storytelling and musicking to negotiate everyday social, political and environmental crises in Africa. Whilst religion provides a safe ‘space’ for people during crises, it is instructive that people begin to take responsibility rather than abandon their societal and environmental ‘salvation’ to the Divine.

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Discography

Adelakun, J.A. (Evangelist) “Amona tete ma bo” (1984; Ogo Oluwa Records)