

Societal Realities in Contemporary Nigerian Popular Music

By

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Abstract

Societal realities have continued to be evident in thematic structures of music composition, performance and production. Hence, this study critically examines the societal realities in contemporary Nigerian popular music. The Structural functionalism theory foregrounds this study. This study adopts the content analysis and deductive methods of research, audio and video tape materials in the contemporary Nigerian popular music space were used for deductions and analyses based on their thematic content and structure. This study argues that contemporary Nigerian popular music portray the realities in our contemporary society to a large extent as the society inspired its production and this music subsequently goes on to influence the people (society) with its content, especially the youths. This study encourages the use of the contemporary popular music as a tool for fostering national development, mass education and cohesion rather than embracing promotion of social immoralities and disintegration.

Keywords: Society, Realities, Contemporary, Popular music, Theatre.

Introduction

One of the evident realities in the society is the musical art. This is because, music is a social product and an itinerant part of the Nigerian society. The society is a dynamic entity, so its music. For this reason, music rapport with the social dynamics cuts across multiple perspectives such as education, political evolution, value systems and behavioral patterns, historical development and religious phenomena. Omojola (2000, p. 3) The multifunctional prowess of music and its multifaceted relationship with the society makes it an art which generally enjoys the favour of being acceptable to the people among which it is made.

Notably, any music form which enjoys the acceptability is branded Popular Music. The commercial objective of the popular music brand enables it to expand largely within or beyond a geographical space. Hence, it reaches wide range of people in the society

especially since the inception of electronic and social media. For this reason, thematic influence from the society is inevitable. This is because, popular musicians are conscious of ‘serving’ the society what it can relate with since the popular music genre is primarily for the purpose of entertainment.

Therefore, the focus of this study is to look into the social realities in the composition, production and performance of contemporary Nigerian popular music with emphasis on issues such as social immoralities, harsh economic realities, love, money, religion and political violence themes in 21st century Nigerian popular music.

Theoretical Framework

Emile Durkheim’s Structural Functionalism theory was adopted for this study. Structural functionalism is a broad perspective in sociology and anthropology which sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts. This theory addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. It sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.

Durkheim was concerned with the question of how certain societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. He proposed that such societies tend to be segmented, with equivalent parts held together by shared values, common symbols. Durkheim argues that, all social institutions (music inclusive) contribute to the harmony and stability of society. Having common rituals, he notes, drew people together by forcing them to engage in the same activities at the same time. (Adeola, 2011, p. 22).

Structural functionalism identifies the structures of a system, defines the part played by such structures, provides a wide-ranging explanation for many social phenomena, examines the consequences of social phenomena for the systems of which they are a part, and examines how new structures emerge. Its models allow stability and social change.

Popular Music

Popular music is a brand of music which generally occupies a large space in the contemporary African music scope. This is because it is significantly different from classical, folk, jazz music and other genres. It encompasses various styles of music.

As opined by Adeola (2000, p. 80), popular music is that brand of music that generally enjoys the favor of being acceptable to the people among which it is made. For this reason, different styles and brands of popular music is inevitable as it is closely linked, related and associated to people’s social environment. The people among whom it

is made must be able to relate and flow easily with the content of the music for it to be acceptable. Therefore, the Nigerian Popular Music encompasses sub-forms such as Nigerian hip-hop, Nigerian highlife, Nigerian Rap Music, Afro-beat, Yoruba Popular Music (Juju, Fuji, Apala etc), Hausa Popular Music, Igbo Highlife and many others which could be sometimes restricted within a local or regional space and can expand to the national or international space.

One of the oldest forms of popular music in Nigeria is the Highlife Music. Emielu (2013, p.13) asserts that, Highlife exists within the corpus of African popular music. He affirms that, the disyllabic division of the word into 'High' and 'Life' suggests that Highlife music is a product of high or elite culture in a socially stratified society. Emielu noted that, Highlife developed first as an urban popular music in Lagos, Nigeria's foremost cosmopolitan city, before acquiring ethnic and regional styles in the inland regions. These ethnic and regional styles developed into other styles such as Juju, Apala, Waka, Fuji and others in the Yoruba popular music.

Contemporary Nigerian Popular Music and Popular Culture

The commercial essence and entertainment purpose drives the content of popular music. Popular music mirrors the society as its texts documents the happenings in the society. It criticises the ills in society, educates and enlightens. Adegaju (2009, p. 4) in his commentary on contemporary Nigerian popular music, asserts that, Contemporary popular musicians use their lyrics to reflect on happenings in society. As such, they become chroniclers of events, recreating the history and culture of their people, commenting on aspects of societal values that have diverged from historical reports, and suggesting ways by which society could be restored to the normal order.

Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afro-beat, ridicules the social ills, particularly, the ruling class. Lagbaja whose works bears the imprint of Fela passes serious messages in humorous ways and use his music as a catalyst for a better society. Popular music texts as rightly asserted by Onyeji (2002, p. 32) continues to mine the popular sentiments of nostalgia, faced love, lost youth, the simple pleasures of pastoral life, morality, satires, praise and worship of God, political and social protests, national solidarity, economic recession etc.

The exploration of these common social themes for entertainment and commercial purposes in popular music is a factor for its wide acceptance in society, especially the mainstream youths. As a matter of fact, the core audience of the popular music market is the youths. Most importantly, the hip-hop genre is the widely accepted contemporary popular music form. Grixti (2006, p. 106) notes that, hip hop globally has transformed

into a worldwide cultural product that manifests the globalisation trends of (post-) industrial society. The globalised world make its dissemination to the target audience (youths) easier and faster. Grixti argues that, young people in diverse parts of the world are consuming the same types of materials due to globalisation and these patterns of consumption are amounting to a borderless youth culture. It is therefore not surprising that adults and older generations disapproves most songs in the contemporary popular music space. The effects and realities are not farfetched. Akanle and Fagbenle (2017, p. 99) agree that, today, there is scarcely a country in the world where the influence of hip hop music has not been felt by youths while the older adults either remain ambivalent or outrightly disapproving.

Realities in Contemporary Nigerian Popular Music

As society changes, music of the society changes. Societal factors are major resources of music produced and the music influences the society return. Hence, music is a factor in the changing society as well as a receiving end of the growth or decline of a society. Realities of the contemporary society are therefore evident in music compositions, performances and productions. Evident realities of the society in contemporary Nigerian popular music include: Social immoralities, sex themes and nudity, harsh economic realities, love, money, politics, violence and religion.

Social Immoralities: Immoralities in the contemporary Nigerian society varies from different social environment to another. Prevailing immoral acts include: Fraud (e-fraud popularly called yahoo), sexual immoralities such as abuse, nudity, sexploitation, sex commercialization, indecent dressing etc

While some musicians criticise and ridicule these acts, some promote and encourage such acts. For example, Adekunle Kosoko popular known as Adekunle Gold, in one of his songs, ‘Temptation’, addressed the menace of adultery and extramarital affairs and the social perspective that, ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ no matter the dimension or perspective it is coming from. He sings thus:

Iyawo ore mi bade,	So, the wife of my friend came around
O ni k’a ma sewo’le wo’de,	She asked us to be befriending each other
Wipe k’a ma collabo papo	And have extramarital affairs
I tell am say e no dey proper,	I told her its not proper
she tell me say e no matter	She said it does not matter
kos’ohun tuntun L’abeorun o	There is nothing new under the heaven
{Chorus}	
Mo ni rara, moni mi o se o	I said No, I cannot do it

Ma koba mi o, no implicate me jo o.	Do not put me in trouble nor implicate me
Mo ni rara, moni mi o se o	I said No, I cannot do it
Ma koba mi o mi o ni d'ale ore	Do not put me in trouble, I will not betray my friend

As noted earlier, it is alarming however that, sexual immoralities are receiving more promotion in contemporary popular music than correction. There is a perception and belief in the media that sex sells. Hence, sex is usually used as medium to attract more audience for popularity and financial gains. Contemporary musicians portray these realities in their songs and videos. It is common to see lots of contemporary music videos parading ladies as sex tools and sex appeals, it is also not uncommon to find keywords such as 'breasts', 'big buttocks', 'genitals', 'sexy girl' and series of vulgar words pointing towards sex and sexploitation (sexual exploitation in the media). In his song, 'Logo Benz', Olamide a popular musician promotes and encourages ritual killings and internet fraud.

Sa your pata at owner's risk
 Dry your pata at owner's risk
 Sa your pata at owner's risk
 Won nka pata oo! Won nka pata oo!
 I dey pray to Jesu (jesu)
 K'owo wo'le oo, eh (k'owo wo'le oo)
 If money no enter, I go do blood money oo, eh
 I dey pray to Allah, ah (allah)
 K'owo wo'le oo, eh (k'owo wo'le oo)
 If money no enter, I go do blood money oo
 Ko pata le fun won jor .. Bo pata le fun won jor
 Ko pata le fun won jor .. Bo pata le fun won jor

In his song, 'Pablo Alakori', Adekunle Gold seeks to redress the widespread E-fraud (Yahoo Yahoo) menace.

Wuruwuru to the answer
 Magomago no be the way
 Wayo no be the answer
 Stop wasting your time
 No play with your future
 All man for hinsef o
 No shortcut o abeg
 Abeg

You siddon for house
Dey beg beg for money
Pablo alakori padi jawo fine bara
No dey rush
Somethings dey take time
To be a man my brother ko easy

It is common to hear stories of young men involved in internet fraudulent acts in the quest to make money, live large and impress. It is believed that some go as far as involving in ritualistic processes to boom the wealth garnered via internet fraud. For instance, stories of young girls running mad, dead bodies of young girls found on the road are usually alluded to been killed and used for Yahoo rituals. For instance, an online report retrieved from informationng.com reported that, “Female student instantly runs mad after being dropped by alexus SUV. Many online users alleged that she was used for money rituals by internet fraudsters, popularly known as Yahoo boys in the Ijebu Ode area of Ogun state.”

Love: Love is generally familiar word to all humans across the globe. This is because, it is a feeling humans crave for. Different quarters has interpreted and perceived love differently. However, contemporary musicians leverage on the quest for love in their thematic compositions. Creating allusions and emotionally appealing moods, their music receives audience' embrace. For instance, Timi Dakolo, in his song, 'Medicine', sings thus:

I get sick when i'm far away from you for so long.
I lose sleep when i can't get you on the phone
And its killing me baby, oh i am missing you baby
Please dont stay away, I need you everyday
What we share, it is so rare, it can't be bought
Come home please, baby let us kiss and talk all night
Cos i'm missing you baby, and its kill me baby
Please dont stay away, I need you everyday
Baby o baby, you're like medicine to me
You give me everything I need.

Simisola Bolatito Ogunleye, popularly referred to as Simi, in her song, 'Love don't care', using the first person narrative techniques narrated dramatically, the sincere feelings of love which surpass boundaries. She sings thus:

Mama call me oh just the other day
She said hello hello I'm talking to you baby

Somebody call me he come dey tell me say
He see you with omo Igbo tell me are you crazy?
Girl are you foolish shey yoruba don finish oh
Watin you dey do with Okoro?
Girl am your mother,
You know that I know better oh
But my mom don't know,
That Love don't care,
Who you be where you dey from,
Love don't care,
Who you know, Watin you get oh,
Love don't care at all

The social realities of love is a common theme used by contemporary musicians in Nigeria because of the universal crave and quest for love especially among the teeming youths and young adults who are the target audience of contemporary popular music.

Harsh Economic Realities: The state of the economy in a society is a source of inspiration for music composers and producers. The quest and struggle for survival, Man's attempt to succeed and make ends meet is often found in music productions. It is a reality to see young graduates going extra miles and doing the unimaginable in the quest for survival due to the high rate of unemployment or the state of being underemployed. They troop in their hundreds to cities like Lagos where they believe the economy is more friendly with the hope that, some day, with consistency and diligence, success will come their way. However, the survival of the fittest is the obvious reality. For example, in a dramatic first person narrative technique, Dare Art Alade sings thus:

Woke up one sunday morning
told my daddy I'm leaving home
I'm going off to the city tomorrow
even though I don't know where to go
daddy said son, don't be a fool
cos life in the city is unbelievable
you could get broken oh
you're just a little boy
and you may never find your way.
and I said
I know I could get lost
I know I I I

I know I could get broken I know I II
 forgive me father but I got to take a chance
 and I'm already gone so just
 Pray for me, Gbadura fun mi
 pray I find my way, k'ori bamise
 oh forgive me father but I got to take a chance
 oh I'm already gone so just

The search for greener pastures, better opportunities, better standard of living and a way to secure the future is a reality in the contemporary society. This reality is therefore evident in contemporary popular music. Adekunle Gold sings thus in 'Ire':

The grass is greener on the other side
 That's what i thought, before I took the ride
 I burned my bridges, so I'd never look back
 But, if I had known
 The life I was searching for, was looking me right in the eye oh
 If I had known, the life I was searching for, was already my own

Money: Money is a major means of exchange and a medium for getting basic human needs. Especially, the physiological needs such as food, water, clothing and shelter as classified by Abraham Maslow (1954). Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met. To achieve these needs, money is required. For this reason, humans capitalise on the quest to make money in a bid to acquire the human physiological needs. It is therefore not surprising, to see contemporary musicians drawing their thematic ideas from money. Chief Ebenezer Obey, a popular juju musician, sings thus:

Olowolayemo, oluwa temi dowo re

The world recognise only the rich, Lord,
 my life is in your hands

Gbogbo lala eda, nitori owoni

All the strugglings of people, is all
 because of money.

Je kaye mi dun

Let my life be filled with joy

Shemi kinle jeniyan

Let me be recognised among people

Tete fona han mi ma je kinlolofo

Show me the way quickly, do not let me
 go empty-handed

It is worthy to note that, some musicians consciously or unconsciously use their music to encourage and promote greed and the thirst for quick money.

Conclusion

This paper has identified the predominant societal realities in contemporary Nigerian popular music as social immoralities, harsh economic realities, money and love. However, there are other realities in the society such as security, politics, mass mobilisation, violence, religion etc. But, this study has focused on the dominant ones. We have established that, music is a functional art in the society, hence popular musicians should use their music as tool for promoting social values, discouraging moral degradation and fostering national development.

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