

Aesthetics and Performance Practice of the Music of Simisola Ogunleye

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian contemporary music industry is alive and well, displaying a wide range of musical styles and genres, including hip-hop, as a result of global cultural exchange. Hip-hop music was brought to Nigeria in the late 1980s and grew steadily throughout the first part of the 1990s. Numerous studies on various Nigerian hip-hop artists, such as Tu Face, D Banj, Burna Boy, Wizkid, and Davido, have been published in various research outlets. However, little research has been conducted on Simisola Ogunleye's aesthetics and performance practice as a Nigerian hip-hop music artist, resulting in a gap in the literature that this study attempts to fill.

The descriptive and interpretive research approaches are used in this study, which is based on African aesthetics theory. Data were collected from 10 Simisola musical tracks, as well as 4 music videos, as part of the primary data. Secondary data consists of various discussions about her music on social media.

According to the findings, Simisola, a gifted songwriter and singer, began singing at a young age in church choirs. She went on to produce a gospel album before transitioning into the secular hip-hop music industry in the country. Her songs are written on the street and reflect the social life of Lagos, where she grew up, providing her with compositional resource materials. However, the focus of this research is to conduct an ethnographic investigation into Nigerian hip-hop culture in Simisola's musical work as well as engage in scholarly discourse on how Simisola's work is influenced by exposure to various musical traditions and cultural phenomena. The significance of the study is to aid people working in the fields of popular art and media in understanding how music artists use everyday human experiences to compose their innovative musical works, how African artistry contributes to global contemporary culture beyond its geographical boundaries, and provide insight into the creative process. The creativity in her work expresses how she manipulates sounds to create unique melodies and arrangements that capture

cultural elements. It also highlights how her positive lyrics explore meaningful themes such as self-identity, ancestry, and resilience with an uplifting message.

I. NIGERIA HIP-HOP MUSIC

Hip-hop music was brought to Nigeria in the late 1980s, and grew steadily throughout the first part of the 1990s. Kris Okotie was among the earliest hip-hop musician in the country. The general rapid growth of hip-hop music in the country was supported by the entertainment industry. The mass and popular media like Videowheels, HipTv, Music Africa, Soundcity, MTN Project fame, Nigezie all played a major role in propagating the American hip-hop culture, thereby developing the hip-hop music in the country (Shonekan, 2013).

Hiphop music in Nigeria is a combination of the America hip hop genre and culture with the Nigerian popular culture. Stewart (1998) considers hip-hop as the newest cultural and artistic development in black America. Hip-hop is a cultural movement that exploded in the early 1970s in the Bronx, New York. It draws upon the dance, poetry, visual art, social and political legacy of African, African American, Caribbean and Latino immigrant communities in the United States. Hip-hop began as an independent, non-commercial musical and cultural form of expression.

Nigeria hip-hop industry popular known as Naija hip-hop is a replica of the American hip-hop industry and culture. The Nigeria rap music tends to copy the American counterpart in almost everything. The cultural expression of the American hip-hop industry is to some extent copied by the Nigerian counterpart.

We have American Idol in the States, and we have Nigeria or West African idol in Nigeria, project fame in the State and West African project fame in Nigeria. Also there is American got talent and Nigeria got talent. Almost every aspect of the hip-hop culture in the United States of America is being clichéd. Supporting this claimed, Shonekan (2013)

“It is rare to find an R&B star who has not collaborated in some way with a hip hop artist or at least imbibed a sound, beat, or swagger that is extracted from the art, actions, and demeanor of hip hop artists and their audiences. Young Nigerians aspire to acquire the essence of “cool,” which is tightly linked to the notion or perception of a contrived contemporary African American identity. American hip-hop has provided a blueprint for the rest of the world to appropriate and build new cultural formations that manifest in music and identity.” (Shonekan, 2013; 182)

The popular and mass media cannot be neglected in the propagation of America hip-hop music to the country. The television, radio, and virtual communities have helped a lot in transmitting the culture, music and lifestyle of the American community to the youth and musicians in the country. In the recent times, social media like YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram, and more open up Nigerian youth to the world diverse of culture to aid promotion of Afro Pop culture in the global scene.

Though, there was replication of the American rap style but with a blend of the Nigerian musical style too. Since popular music in Nigeria is a blend of three distinctive cultures; traditional Nigerian music, European tradition and Arabic tradition. Euba (1989) categorizes the various types of Nigerian popular music, which are; those that are entirely based on Western pop. For instance, various type of ballroom dance music, rock ‘n roll, jazz, hip-hop..., those in which foreign and African elements are fused together, for instance, highlife, afrobeat, afropop, gospel, gospop... and those that are localized among the ethnic group, for example juju, waka, ikwokirikwo and swange.

While the other genres of popular music were striving to make it in the mass media, R&B and hip-hop music by foreign artists especially the United States of America where regularly played and aired in the country by music and television station. They appeared as intervals for different program and also their albums are being played and showcased on the media. The introduction of this foreign hip-hop and R&B music gave birth to a new idiomatic expression for some Nigerian musicians to emulate.

Most Nigerian musicians embraced this culture not just in musical elements of rhythms, melody but also in the hip-hop culture of dressing, language, aesthetics, dancing and stage performance ethics. P-Square the male duo (Twins) were seen to employed and utilized the musical elements and motif of a musician in the West in

composing their own music. This act is popular among West African musicians.

The Music of Simisola and the Social Space

Since popular music is influenced by popular culture, particularly as it relates to a social environment. Most popular musicians (including Simisola) are inspired to compose by their surroundings. Taking a cue from the majority of Simisola's compositions, her inspirations can be seen in the theme surrounding her music's choice lyrics. This is to say that popular trends in the environment serve as an excellent compositional resource for the majority of popular music artists. Her compositions, for example, contain themes such as love, betrayal, gender, and cultural nostalgia.

Simisola's performances also capitalize on the social environment, as concerts and events are planned around special social events in the country, such as Easter Jamz, Christmas Holiday, Ileya (a Muslim festival), and national holidays such as Independence Day and Democracy Day.

These various holidays provide special moments and opportunities for concerts and live performances, where the majority of music artists perform live. The compositions and performances of Simisola are definitely influenced by the day-to-day activities in the country's social space.

The current state of the Nigerian music industry determines whether or not the songwriting profession will thrive. Simisola was also able to thrive and write songs for herself and other people in the music industry thanks to the industry. There are professional songwriters who write songs for musicians and receive the copyright to their works. According to Otuya (2017), songwriters advance in their careers by writing hits for bigger artists and thus earn a higher salary. Also, while the prospects for songwriting in the Nigerian music industry are promising, writers must safeguard themselves in terms of contracts. Despite this, the majority of the songwriters' lyrical content is taken from the streets. The street is used as a resource material in their creation.

Social media allows us to interact with one another despite the diverse and vast environments in which we all live. Thus, through various media such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, to name a few, trends and daily issues are raised and discussed, thereby songwriters and musicians who leverage on that to compose and write their music. Simisola Kosoko is not alone in utilizing daily trends on social media as resource materials for musical compositions, as other

popular musicians also leverage on the popular and mass media in their musical compositions.

Taking a cue from the song titled 'duduke', the lyrics are laced with the idea of pregnancy and the baby bump phenomenon popular on social media. This is a situation in which a pregnant woman goes online and takes a photo of herself with her pregnancy belly showing. However, in Simisola

Duduke's music video, the song was produced while she was pregnant, and she posed not only for still photographs but also for motion pictures, in which she was dancing while pregnant. Simi released the song; duduke during her pregnancy, as evidenced by the song's video. After shooting the video in the baby bump culture, the reaction was a replication of the acts in the video by various pregnant women and others social media users who are not pregnant – male and female alike.

After filming the video in the baby bump culture, the reaction was a replication of the act by various pregnant women. The Duduke challenge (hashtag #DudukeChallenge) was invented. A social media challenge launched by Simi herself resulted in a large number of people replicating Simi's actions in the video recording of the song. They recorded short videos of the act, with Simi's Duduke playing in the background and them miming along a section of the song. The videos were then shared on their Instagram pages and other social media platforms with the hashtag #Dudukechallenge. The challenge drew a large number of participants, both male and female, including celebrities, and was won by a young man named Diamond Jimma.

One could argue that the baby bump culture in society gave birth to the inspiration for the song Duke. However, the song's lyrical content made no mention of pregnancy or the delivery process. The theme was love, and not just love between two people, but love between two lovers. The choice of pregnancy, on the other hand, demonstrates that pregnancy is a seal of the two individuals (a high probability that they are husband and wife). An excerpt of the lyrics shown below describes this emotional sentiment in the composition.

Chorus

That's why my heart e Dey beat like
Duduke Duduke
Coz na you I choose o (Because I choose you)
Ayanfe mi ayanfe (Oh my love, my chosen one)
I sing for you and I be like
Duduke Duduke

Another social phenomenon that influences Simisola's compositional and performance style is the fight for women's rights. It has been seen propagated and spread on various social media platforms how gender inequality frequently affects females both at home and at work. Though Simisola is not the first popular musician in the country to embark on such a fight for women's rights, she chooses to join the campaign and raise her voice through the medium of music to inform the public about the importance of gender equality.

Woman don suffer o
Lowo everybody
Suffer suffer for world, Amen
Enjoy for heaven...

Translation

The suffering of the womenfolk
Is from everyone
They suffered in this world...

The song 'woman' by Simi is a song about elevating women any more than it is about trying to point out institutional barriers, glass and ceiling barriers, and male chauvinism placed on them. Simi highlights society's unequal treatment while advocating for a more equitable system. Both men and women are perpetrators of these inequitable systems. Simi observes that men regard women as less important than themselves and treat them unfairly, while women also treat their female counterparts unfairly. As a result of the social media outburst, our society today is littered with overburdened wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters.

The outcry was in support of the women, who said they were exhausted, stressed, and drained from having to fix themselves as well as an adult who should be fixing himself and fixing things around the house. Furthermore, all forms of abuse and violence are more commonly associated

with the female race. From sex abuse to emotional and domestic violence at home with husbands, women appear to face a lot of gender imbalance in society. That is why many social media commentators and influencers rise to the challenge of fighting and advocating for gender equality, equality, and equity (as applicable) in society. Below is another musical excerpt from the song that speaks to the intimidation faced by these women even at home from their husbands;

Na so so submission oh
Se we get assignment
Suffer suffer for world, Amen
Enjoy for heaven
But you no pay attention oh
To the intimidation she dey face

Translation

All they want from us is submission
Are we given an assignment?
They want us to suffer here on earth
And enjoy in heaven
But did you pay attention to details,
To the intimidation the woman face

Simisola's Languages of Performance

Another area to look out for in the social space that influences Simisola's musical composition is Language of Performance. Simisola's music is written in this lingua franca. Simisola's compositions reflect the people's attitude in that code-mixing and switching is extraordinary used among the populace; therefore, popular musicians also employ the use of such dialect in their musical compositions. Simisola's most commonly used languages in her music are English, Yoruba, and Nigerian Pidgin. This is because as her music influence the street, the street also influences her music and ingenuity in compositions.

Music and language are two centuries-old artistic disciplines that are both vital components of contemporary and local cultures. However, when writing lyrics or literature, the writer's surroundings can have an impact on the content of their work. The medium for understanding the connection between music and literature is the conceptualization of literature as an all encompassing art form. Most African literatures are utilitarian, and as a result, they are not devoid of the environment, as most songwriters write with the language of the environment, as Simisola grew into and context. Lagos, the country's entertainment capital, makes extensive use of these three languages: Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin.

The concept of mixing the three languages are used creatively by Simisola in her performances. A single musical track could contain the three languages used in a code-mixing style or 2 languages in a single song. Babalola and Taiwo (2009) agreed, stating that codeswitching is an intentional style used by artists who would have primed and reflected on the lyrics prior to the release of the songs. Artists are aware that their words may be heard by people beyond their immediate area of language use. Code-switching in

song lyrics is not a new phenomenon, spurred on by the development of mass media, which allows people all over the world unprecedented access to music from cultures other than their own.

An example of codeswitching with the three languages is shown below with the song titled Jamb Question;

Ma bi mi ni jamb question (no)
I no be dundi, I no be fool (I no be fool)
Ma bi mi ni jamb question (no)
You see your style, it's just not cool (not cool)

Translation

Don't ask me jamb question
I am not a fool
Don't ask me jamb question
I am not okay with your style

In the two excerpts above, the use of the three languages can be seen used by Simi in her compositions. 'Will you fight for me', as well as 'take a ride with me', are example of English Language, 'even if na Hulk Hogan' is an example of Nigerian Pidgin, while 'tori ko si anybody ti mo feran' is Yoruba language.

The website of Simisola; www.iamsimi.com substantiates and add as a primary source of information to this study. There, her music, music videos can be accessed and **Honour, Award and Recognition.**

Simi's transition from gospel to secular music was a huge step forward in the mainstream music industry. She rose to prominence in 2014 after releasing "Tiff," a song that was nominated for two Headies awards in 2015. As a result, the purpose of this research is to delve at her performance practice in order to glean information about her musical ingenuity and aesthetics. Since the environment provides the avenue and space for performances, the environment via various agencies also provides recognition for award and honour.

Simisola has been nominated for several awards in various award ceremonies. Since 2015, she has been celebrated and recognized from the best RnB video to the songwriter of the year. In 2015, the songs 'jamb question' and 'tiff' was nominated for the best soft rock/alternative video and music video of the year respectively by the Nigerian Music Video Awards. Also, in 2016, The Headies (a popular award platform in the Nigerian music industry) gave an award to Simisola for her music 'Soldier' (Feat. Falz) and 'love don't care' as

the best collaboration and best vocal performance (female) respectively.

All together Simisola Kosoko has received almost thirty (30) nominations where she won thirteen (13) from them. She has collaborated with other hip hop musicians (such as her husband; Adekunle Kosoko (Gold), Falz, Johnny Drill and Chike) in the country in producing lovely music that has been recognized also.

Aesthetics Values in Her Music

Simisola music using the theoretical framework adopted for this study; the African aesthetics as explained by Abiodun and Kofi Agawu can be classified according to the African themes they portrayed to the listeners. The concept of 'Iwa l'ewa' explained by Abiodun declares that beauty or aesthetics in African is examining the superficial physical appearance of things as to their deep essence in Yoruba culture and metaphysics. That is, the beauty of a musical piece will not just be in the melodious vocal renditions or the harmony from the instrumentation but also from the vital message passed across to the populace via the agency of music. Music, thus, becomes a veritable tool in exchanging cultural identity and value. These values will be discussed using the themes that are available in her selected music.

Love Theme

Simisola made a successful career singing songs about love, romance, affection, and relationships, among other things. Songs about love include 'love don't care,' 'joromi,' 'tiff,' and 'chemistry,' in which she featured Falz and the popular 'duduke.' Simisola wrote songs about the beginning of a marital relationship or the continuation of a relationship. In extending the discourse on inter-ethnic relations, Simi's "Love Don't Care" reveals the ugly discrimination that comes with falling in love with someone from outside one's immediate ethnic group. Furthermore, the song depicts the importance placed on material gains in romantic relationships. According to Onanuga (2019), conscious Hip-Hop artists intentionally move away from the sexist, misogynist, and patriarchal narratives that characterize mainstream Hip-Hop music. Because music is a reflection of events and occurrences, it becomes a platform for the formation of emotional and social bonds, which are necessary ingredients in the development of consciousness. Taking a look at the lyrics to 'love don't care';

Mama call me o
Just the other day
She said hello hello
I am talking to you baby
Somebody call me
He con dey tell me say
He see you with omo Igbo
Tell me, are you crazy?...

Translation

My mother called me
Said someone called her
Saying he saw me with an Igbo man (in a romantic way)
Are you crazy?...

Though infused with love themes, the song 'love don't care' also addresses segregation and ethnic marginalization. Simisola's narration in this song is about a young Yoruba lady who was seen in a romantic relationship with an Igbo man. In response to this occurrence, the young lady's mother advised her to marry a Yoruba man rather than an Igbo man. However, this young lady's response speaks to the intrinsic value of love, stating that when true love is present, it despises other factors that could potentially cause a rift or friction in a marital relationship, such as ethnic segregation, financial or social status, to name a few.

Another example of Simi's songs with a love theme is 'chemistry,' which she performed in collaboration with Falz. Many of her fans and listeners were already speculating about a romantic relationship between Falz and her at this point. Why? Perhaps the song was too good for a love song, or perhaps both performed the song excellently well and it was aesthetically accepted by the listeners, who alluded to the possibility that the duo were dating. However, in this performance, the narrative given was the scenarios of two lovers who share the same 'chemistry' (the titled of the song which depicts a strong feeling that mutually shared by two people) but are just coming to the reality of what they shared. Take a look at Simi's verse;

I know I said I wanted to be friends

The truth is that I was only pretending
Maybe we can start again
Forget what I said earlier
Can't you feel the chemistry now

In addition, the popular 'duduke' talked about an expression of love from one to another. The duduke looks like a play of vowel sound to described the

heartbeat beating with love and string affection for the partner.

Chorus

That's why my heart e Dey beat like
Duduke Du-du-ke
Coz na you I choose o
Ayanfe mi a-yan-fe...

Translation

That is why my heart beat like
Duduke duduke
Because you are the one I choose
My desire...

Ibitoye (2018) agrees with the claim that the social realities of love are a common theme used by contemporary musicians in Nigeria due to the universal crave and quest for love, particularly among the teeming youths and young adults who are the target audience of contemporary popular music. He went on to say that contemporary musicians use the quest for love in their thematic compositions. Their music captures the audience's attention by incorporating allusions and emotionally appealing moods.

Encouragement/Therapeutic Theme

Not just love, encouragement theme is also used in Simisola's compositions. Since her musical background is experience in Lagos, and the hustling and bustling of Lagos can be so cumbersome that it is possible for people to be discouraged, Simisola uses the agency of music in singing encouragement to her audience. According to Adedeji (2017), the popular music scene in Nigeria is vibrant and dynamic, displaying various music styles and genres, one of which is hip hop, a product of global cultural flow. Hip hop has gained acceptance and popularity among young people, and the genre's new wave artists are now capitalizing on the genre's popularity as well as the vibrancy of the music industry to advance their Nigerian identity agenda and fully express Africanism.

'Smile for me' is a song that encourages people to smile and be happy regardless of their situation. Simisola employs the instrumentality of music in admonishing and preaching her gospel of happiness and laughter in the midst of confusion and turmoil. This is visible in the music lyrics for 'smile for me' even though the theme of the music could be likened to a love theme laced with therapeutic and encouragement messages;

Smile for me, even if you sad o
Be good to me, even if you bad o
Stay with me, even if you've got some place to be
Pray with me, even if you no believe
Smile for me

Translation

Smile for me, even If you are sad
Be good to me, even if you are bad
Pray with me, even if you do not believe

Prayer Theme

Simisola employs the tool of Prayer or petitioning God to bless and do good after encouraging or giving an uplifting word to lift up the soul that is emotionally down. With the three popular religions available in the country, Nigeria and Nigerians are mostly religious minded and always have one god or deity they pray to. As a result, it is safe to say Simi's prayer adaptation speaks to the sacred culture of the people in praying to a supreme God to answer their prayers. The music titled 'Ayo' (joy) is a perfect example of such prayer themed song by Simisola.

My blessings come now
Favour fall down on me
Goodness and mercy follow me everyday
Everything wey I touch
For this life anything wey I want
Shey na mansion o shey na Porche o
Na me get am o amin
If friends dey doubt you no mind dem
If bad belle come make you bind dem

Translation

My blessing and favour, fall down on me
Goodness and mercy will follow me everyday
Everything I touch, anything I want
Even if it is a mansion or Porche (an exotic car)
I own it, Amen
Whether friends or enemy want, my time has come
Joy, blessing and every day, shower of blessings is mine

One could also see element of prayers in 'aimasiko' which is a parody composition originally composed by Chief Ebenezer Obey Fabiyi (a gospel juju music artiste in the country). 'Aimasiko lon damu eda o, Oro mi lowo Oluwa lo wa' translated as 'Nobody knows tomorrow, however, I will surrender to God who knows all'. The song speaks to the God the omniscient and all knowing Father who can controls the future because He knows yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Structural Analysis

The followings will be covered in the structural analysis: style, musical form, beat/rhythm, tonality, melody, harmony, singing/performance style, and instrumentation.

Musical Style

Simisola, a hip hop artist, claims to be able to sing hip hop, soul, afropop, soul, and alternative. Her musical style also includes a touch of African flavor in her musical productions. Machils and Forney (1991) defined style as the distinct manner of presentation in any art form and identified several applications for the term; first, they see style as referring to the element of flexibility that connects each type of art work to its function.

Musical Form

Vidal (2012) divides vocal music into four types: call and response antiphonal, through composed, strophic, and strophic responsorial. Simisola's songs are mostly in strophic form with a chorus. There are always verses that are tuned in nearly the same rhythmic phrases, as well as a chorus that is repeated after each verse. Example of such is 'by you' feat her husband, Adekunle Gold.

Example of Strophic
I'm scared of falling
But I will fall a thousand miles for you
I'm scared of flying
But in a heartbeat I will count the clouds for you

This verse was performed by Simi before entering the chorus section. After the chorus, another verse was sung with the same tune like the one above. She also made use of call and response form in her music. An example is ara ile as shown below.



Rhythmic Organization

Simisola music reveals rhythms of both divisive and addictive in linear movement. With most time coming in a slow, highlife movement. Some of her songs also even fast tempo and

mixture of both adagio and presto rhythmic movement. Most of her songs are in the ⁴/₄-time signature and a moderate pace.



The sample of her music in the above diagram in simple quadruple time signature with the exploration of rhythmic movement in both additive and divisive reflects her musical rhythmic dynamics.

Melody Structure

Melody is the aspect of musical composition that is concerned with arranging single notes into a pleasing sequence. The linear movement of a musical piece is represented by a series of single notes. Ammer (2004) defines melody as "a group of musical tones sounded one after the other, with a characteristic rhythm and musical shape." Melody can be both conjunctive and disjunctive. Simisola used both of these types in her performances.



A musical example of a conjunct melody

Musical Scale System

Almost all Simi song are tonal and follows the diatonic major and minor scale systems.



The A minor scale system

Compositional Techniques

Some of the songs used in Simisola music performances are parodies of existing tunes/melodies. As a result, repetition, improvisation, sequencing, and imitation are important techniques in her performance. Popular songs are also used in songwriting and song arrangement in order to make songs that are user

friendly and gain recognition in the social space. Her main compositional technique is repetition, which takes three forms: direct, modified, and sequential. Also, the social space provides an adequate compositional resource for her to delve into her compositions.

Harmony in Simi Song

Harmonies in Simi songs are irregular. In some songs, the harmony there is strictly homophonic, monophonic; while some of her music make reflects western harmony of a 3rd or 5th above.



An example of a monophonic harmony

An example of homophonic harmony employed in 3rd

Instrumentation

In terms of instrumentation, the majority of hip-hop music artists in the country rely on the instrumentation provided in the music studio, where music software such as Cubase, fruity loops and other relevant production software is used to provide the drumbeat, keys, guitar work, and other sound, including African percussive sounds installed on a computer system. Simisola, who is also a producer, creates almost all of her songs digitally. Most of the time, an electronic keyboard, also known as a synthesizer, is connected to the computer, and all other instruments are assigned to the keyboard in the rack of instruments.

II. CONCLUSION

This research provided context for Simisola Gold's work and theoretical framework as well as a review of related literature. An academic discuss was about her music in terms of aesthetic values, focusing on her musical background and how the environment has shaped her music. Her works' textual and structural analyses, as well as her contributions to the growth of popular music in the country, were also discussed. Simisola, a talented songwriter and singer, began singing at a young age and in church choirs. She went on to produce a gospel album before transitioning into the country's secular hip hop music industry. Her songs are written in the street and reflect the nature of the street by providing her with compositional resource materials. In addition, themes such as love, encouragement, and prayer are embedded in her music, lending it an African aesthetic aroma.

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