

Research Article

A Psycho-Realist Analysis of Gabriel Omolo's 'Lunch time' Music

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Abstract: The 'lunch time' music that was sung by a music guru Gabriel Omolo in the 1970's basically talks about behaviors of workers specifically at the industrial area in Nairobi, Kenya. These workers are casual laborers who earn low wages on a daily basis but accumulated by the employer and paid only at the end of the month. These paid wages are normally little that cannot sustain them up to the end month. Before end month, many of these workers appear so tired and therefore lie under trees while others go round the shops pretending to be window shopping. These behaviors explicated by Gabriel Omolo clearly augur well with the basic tenets of both psychological and realism theories. Thus the paper exposes the psychological and the realistic aspects manifested in this hit song 'lunch time'. The paper concludes that the 'lunch time' hit song augurs well with the basic tenets of both the psychological and realism theories whereby the industrial area workers generally change behaviors as soon as they receive their little pay. These behaviors are truly manifested in the real working environments especially industrial areas in the developing countries.

Keywords: music, benga, psychological, realist

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INTRODUCTION

This article is premised on a psycho-realist prism. A psycho-realist prism is combinatory in nature whereby both the psychological and realism aspects are put into focus. The psychological aspect is concerned with the behaviors of characters in the song and realism aspect focuses on the real happenings in the society as depicted in the song. Therefore, psychological aspects such as human behaviors are exposed in the song and the realism concerns are also put into focus. Thus, for clear development of this article, the following areas are enshrined in the introduction: the concept of music, life and songs of Gabriel Omolo, concept of *benga* music, the lyrics of 'lunch time' music and its aesthetic translation, and also the synopsis of the song.

Music can basically be viewed from two perspectives: platonistic and nominalistic (Kania, 2013). The platonistic perspective regards music as an abstract object that talks only about imaginations. These imaginations can be a mirage thus no member of the community could achieve or has witnessed in life. On the other hand, nominalistic view regards music not as an abstract entity but rather a reality in that it talks specifically about something that happened and indeed focuses on real issues in our environments. In this regard, music therefore tends to have a great value in our communities. According to Kaiser (*n.d.*), music is a greatly revered genre of oral literature in our communities because of the following functional

vitalities: encourages group participation, social skills development, expression of emotions, enhances self concept, refines listening skills, creates awareness of movement and body positions, and also enhances creativity and imaginations. In addition, music helps in learning new words and concepts, exploring cause and effects, developing large motor skills, improving balance, co-ordination and rhythm through dancing, and also improving on small motor skills especially learning how to play the musical instruments. Music also provides a commemoration or evocation of a place (Taylor & Hurley, 2015).

Though, Kaiser has a long list of significance of music, McConnell and Porter (2016) summaries the value of musical pieces into three sub themes namely: improving physical, psychological and emotional problems. In addition, any well composed music tends to require three distinct dimensions especially aesthetic, praxial/participatory and social (Camlin, 2016). Aesthetic dimension refers to the beauty and how appealing the music is. Praxial or participatory dimension means that music is human practice that generally has procedures or rather stages. The social dimension refers to benefits that we get from a musical hit like the psychological wellbeing, physical health, social cohesion and also social capital among others.

Despite the fact that music generally improves on physical, psychological and emotional problems, most musical songs fall within a given genre for

instance, secular, sacred and political among others. In this case, the hit song 'lunch time' falls within a secular genre that is basically called *benga*. This is normally performed with the singers, dancers and musical accompaniments. Because of these components, Doyle (2013) calls this kind of music as 'a musical theatre' because it integrates an elaborate structural design that includes a combination of music, song, dance and the spoken dialogue to tell a real story in the society. Thus in many instances, a well composed music tends to be a 'musico-dramatic' text that generally includes the plot, character, theme and action (Doyle, 2013). That is to say that music has the beginning, middle and the end that form the plot. There are always characters singing or being sung. There is also the theme that is talked about and the action taken by the characters. Presentation of the themes in music can be coated by use of literary styles so that they cannot be simply understood by the listeners. However, most songs are very simple and clear and therefore directly comprehended by the intended listeners (Anudo & Awuor, 2018).

According to Hu (*n.d.*: 1), 'some music may not describe a story, but all music must express, strongly or softly, a certain emotion or a mixture of emotions'. In addition, music normally tends to change peoples' moods however not all moods are aroused by listening to music. Sometimes there is a uniform mood effects amongst different people but not all moods have same level of agreements among the listeners, and there are also some clear correspondence between the judgement of listener on mood and the parameters of music (Hu, *n.d.*). In this regard music therefore creates a link with emotions, psychology and the environment in which it is played (Vainiomaki, 2012). Some people believe that music has nothing in it apart from sounds of musical instruments. This notion has been disputed by scholars like Dunn (1984) who opined that music results from the needs of interactions especially the observed phenomenon and also changes in both the observer and the observed. In this case music therefore entertains and raises social awareness especially on things and issues that emerge in the society. If these issues are weighty or rather poses political ramifications, then a musician has to look for a stylistic way of expressing them. That could be the reason why Anudo and Awuor (2018) stated that some musicians therefore tend to coat their songs using various idiomatic and or proverbial sentences.

Gabriel Omolo who was famously referred to as Gabby by his music lovers died aged 80 years (Makori, 2018). He was born in Nyabeda village, Uholo in Ugunja, Siaya County. According to Ngaira (2018), Gabriel Omolo was a great singer and a composer of various *benga* musical hits. However, his 'lunch time' hit song catapulted him to a real fame in the musical arena in 1970's thus earning him recognition as an

accomplished singer. In this regard, he was awarded a *Golden Disc Award*. About 150,000 copies of this hit song were sold. Omolo did not just sing in Kiswahili or English but also perfected the art of singing in a mixture of some African languages Dholuo being one of them. Dholuo language is widely spoken by the Luos who reside along the shores of Lake Victoria as their ancestral land especially in the counties of Migori, Homabay, Kisumu and Siaya. Omolo performed in the *Equator Sound Band* in the 1960's with the other famous musical gurus like Fadhili William, Nashil Pichen Kazembe from Zambia, Charles Ssongo and also Peter Tsotsi. According to Nation Media Group (2010) henceforth referred to as NMG, there were other notable deceased Luo *benga* musicians such as Daniel Owino Misiani, Ochieng' Nelly, Dr Collela Mazee, George Ramogi and Okach Biggy among others.

Gabriel Omolo was not just a simple musician but was indeed a realist who used to sing about real happenings in his songs. In his musical career, Omolo sang a plethora of hit songs such as: *Jaluo Asili, Lunchtime, Nairobi, Mr. Agoya, Tamaa, Mpende Mkeo No.1 & 2, Mchumba Rossy, Tom Mboya, Mr. Kupe, Argwings hero National, Fundi, Ogwela, Elizabeth Odongo, Aketho Kindena, Sir James Ang'awa, Onyango Tonny, Keep Change No. 2, Tutalula Vyajabu, Ubaguzi, Seamen 1 & 2, Oluoro Dek, Riat Nyar Jonam, Big Fish, Jadak Kenda, Adeya, and Wed Today Divorce Tomorrow* among others (Gabriel Omolo - Jojo Records, <http://mdundo.com/a/173>). However, the 'lunch time' hit song was very famous and widely sold to his clients who were basically *benga* enthusiasts. This was because of its thematic aspects therein.

Benga music refers to 'a fast paced rhythmic beat and bouncy finger picking guitar technique' (Ketebul Music, 2014). This kind of music manifests various characteristics whereby the lead guitar generally follows track of vocals, singing is sometimes separated from the climax, and also the instruments include basically three or four guitars and percussions. In addition, there is a tendency of the sharp lead guitar overriding the rhythm and the bass guitars. Many guitarists in *benga* music generally pluck and pick single notes very rapidly unlike the Congolese guitarists who tend to massage their guitars when playing. According to Ketebul Music (2014), various historians and musicologists opine that *benga* music originated in Nyanza (the Kenya's lake region) especially amongst the Luo Community. However, this kind of music has tremendously spread all over in Kenya and also influenced the famous *Lingala* music style predominantly performed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (NMG, 2010).

Though current *benga* music style manifests some kind of modernism in terms of instruments, stage management and singing, traditional *benga* music that

began in the early 1950's and 1960's basically graduated from the much loved eight-stringed instrument called *nyatiti* and sometimes one-stringed instrument known as *orutu* (Ketebul Music, 2014). In the 1960's, most entertainers were one-man guitarists who also included other accompaniments such as grooves of bottles especially of *fanta*. However, by the end of the 2nd World War, various soldiers who came back home carried with them the Spanish guitar that changed the style of music amongst the Luos while the accordion that was prominent after the 1st World War lost its fame in Luo Nyanza but gained fame in Central Kenya.

Gabriel Omolo's '*lunch time*' music lyric that was written in Kiswahili can be aesthetically translated. Aesthetic translation is a technique that involves the transfer of message from the original text to a target language text without changing the original style, theme, characters and structure (Newmark, 1982). The technique is applied in most cases to the translation of poems, novels and plays in order to uphold the taste of the original text in the translated text. Thus, I have aesthetically translated this hit song into English as here below:

Kiswahili Version

Sasa ni lunchtime
Tufunge makazi
Twende kwa chakula
Tuje tena saa nane
Wengine wanakwenda kulala uwanjani
Kumbe ni shida ndugu
Njaa inamuumiza
Wengine wanakunywa soda na keki
Huku roho yote kwa chapati na ng'ombe
Na wengine nao wazunguka maduka
Huku wakijidai wanafanya window shopping
(Lunchtime)

English version

*Now it is lunch time
We stop working
So that we go for food
Then come back again at two
Others will go to lie in the field
Because of problems, brother
Hunger is biting him
Others take a soda and cake
While the heart longs for pastry and beef
And others go round the shops
Pretending that they are window shopping
(Lunchtime)*

Kufika mwisho wa mwezi
Uwanja tire mundu
Ukiona anaye lala ni asiye na kazi
Wamekwenda wote kula hotelini
Wengine kwa biriani
Wengine kuku na wali
Watu wa Industrial Area watoroka maharagwe
Waenda hotelini
Kwa chapati na ng'ombe
Na wengine nao wale mishahara juu
Siku hiyo wote kwa hoteli za wazungu

*By the end of the month
The field has nobody
If you see one lying then he is jobless
All have gone to eat in the hotel
Others eat cooked rice with fried steak
Others chicken and rice
Industrial area people thus avoid beans
They go to the hotel
For pastry and beef
And others with higher salaries
Will on that day be in the white dominated hotels*

Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya
Mtu kulala chini ya miti
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya
Mtu kung'ang'ana na maharagwe
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya
Mtu kuonekana kama mtoto
Nimeelewa ee nimeelewa oh
Nimejua kumbe ni shida oh
Nimeelewa ee nimeelewa oh
Nimejua kumbe ni shida oh

*So it is just a problem that makes
Somebody to lie under trees
So it is just a problem that makes
Somebody to scavenge for beans
So it is just a problem that makes
Somebody to behave like a child
I've understood ee I've understood oh
I've now known that it's just a problem oh
I've understood ee I've understood oh
I've now known that it's just a problem oh*

Twanga ngoma

Beat drums

Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya
Mtu kulala chini ya miti
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya
Mtu kung'ang'ana na maharagwe
Kumbe shida ndiyo hufanya
Mtu kuonekana kama mtoto

*So it's just a problem that makes
Somebody to lie under trees
So it's just a problem that makes
Somebody to scavenge for beans
So it's just a problem that makes
Somebody to behave like a child*

Nimeelewa ee nimeelewa oh	<i>I've understood ee I've understood oh</i>
Nimejua kumbe ni shida oh	<i>I've now known that it's just a problem oh</i>
Nimeelewa ee nimeelewa oh	<i>I've understood ee I've understood oh</i>
Nimejua kumbe ni shida oh	<i>I've now known that it's just a problem oh</i>

(Source: *Lunch time* (n.d). <https://www.shazam.com/gb/track/62415552/lunch-time>)

This hit song basically talks about behaviors of workers at the industrial area specifically in Nairobi city in Kenya. These workers are generally casual laborers who are paid low wages at the end month. Indeed these wages are normally little that cannot take them up to the end month. That could probably be the reason why they behave in such a way that before end month many of them appear as if they are so tired and therefore lie under trees while others will be going round the shops pretending to be window shopping. But immediately this low pay comes by end month, their behaviors change drastically whereby some will go to eat what they have longed for while others will be enjoying themselves in the white dominated hotels where meals are expensive.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The paper is based on a descriptive design whereby various aspects in the results and discussion area are basically described. For the clear accomplishment of this article, the following one main objective was relied on: to analyse Gabriel Omolo's 'lunch time' hit song through a psycho-realist prism. In this case therefore, the work is premised on two theories: the psychological and realism that are generally applied to depict the behaviors of characters in the song and the true or real life situations that they normally experience. Though, Gabriel Omolo had many *benga* hit songs, the 'lunch time' song has been purposively selected because of its uniqueness as it augurs well with the basic tenets of these two theories. In addition, this is the song that earned him a *Golden Disc Award* with about 150,000 copies sold (Ngaira, 2018). Thematic analysis is employed in the analysis of various aspects in this song and the results presented in a continuous prose style.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 'lunch time' music can be analyzed by using various theories one of them being Marxism. As opined by Makori (2018), 'lunch time' hit song mirrors the tenets of Marxist theory in which deplorable state among the poor citizens was witnessed in Kenya immediately after independence while on the other hand the rich continued to enjoy the easily earned wealth. It is very clear that after independence and especially in 1970's, the ordinary citizenry tended to wallow in quagmire of depression, abject poverty and even unsure about whether the country genuinely attained independence or not. Therefore, the song focuses on the gap between the poor and the rich from a Marxist prism. This gap is still omnipresent in many parts of the

country despite the fact that the country has been independent for over fifty years. However, this section of the article deviates from the analysis of Makori (2018) and therefore focuses on the psychological and the realistic aspects manifested in the same hit song. Thus, this section exposes two distinct discussions namely: the psychological and realistic manifestations in the 'lunch time' music.

Discussions on the psychological manifestations in a song involve an analysis of the behavior of character(s). Generally, behavior refers to how people function, interact and eventually make choices in response to either internal or external stimuli (Wolfe, Malone, Heerwagen & Dion, 2014). The issue of behavior change occurs also in this hit song by Gabriel Omolo in which the industrial area workers tend to make various choices depending on the received stimuli. According to Communication for Governance and Accountability Program (hence forth be cited as CommGap) (n.d), behavior change relies on some key elements namely: threats, fears, response efficacy, self efficacy, barriers, benefits, subjective norms, attitudes, intentions, cues to action, and also reactance.

Though these elements exist, characters in the 'lunch time' music are basically changing their behaviors due to three key elements such as barriers, attitudes and cues to action. Barriers refer to something that prevents one from executing a certain response. In this song, the characters cannot go into the luxurious hotels and eat the delicious foods that they have been yearning for due to financial barrier. This is the reason why some of them decide to lie under trees while others pretend to be window shopping. The attitude as an element of change refers to an individual's evaluation to a response. It has a role of predicting and explaining the human action or what they do (Holdershaw & Gendall, 2008). In this case, after earning something by end month, the characters in the song evaluate themselves thus some go for cooked rice mixed with fried steak and pepper, chicken and rice, and also pastry and beef. They therefore avoid eating their usual meal of beans. This tendency resonates well with what Caponecchia (2012) stated in behavioral psychology that a stimulus will always lead to a response. In this case, workers in industrial area will always go to luxurious hotels after getting the meagre pay that is a stimulus. The element of cues to action refers to the external and internal factors that make an individual to make decisions about a response. In this case the characters behave after getting the pay which is an external factor thus they go to eat whatever they want in the hotels.

The behaviors of these characters also tend to augur well with the various theories of social change opined by various behaviorist proponents. According to behaviorists, there are various theories of behavior change such as: social cognitive, planned behavior/reasoned action, trans-theoretical, health belief, social practice, and the diffusion of innovation (CommGap *n.d*; Morris, Marzame, Dandy & O'brien, 2012). Social cognitive theory states that peoples' behaviors are determined by external forces that exhibit triadic interactions that involve behavior, personal factors and environmental factors. The theory of planned behavior/reasoned action states that behavior generally depends on ones intentions to perform that behavior. That change in behavior will rely on attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and intentions. Trans-theoretical theory means that change depends on various stages namely: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and termination of the behavior. The health belief theory asserts that behavior is determined by a number of beliefs about threats to ones well-being. Social practice theory states that human practices are arrangements of interconnected elements such as physical and mental activities, norms, meanings, technological use and knowledge among others. It therefore, emphasizes on material contexts within which practices occur. On the other hand, diffusion of innovation theory refers to changes that people adapt due to innovation as an agent of change.

With regards to 'lunch time' hit song, the characteristic traits of the characters tend to augur well with the social practice theory whereby characters' change behaviors are induced by the physical and mental activities, norms, meanings, technological use and also knowledge among others. The physical factor refers to the environment where they work that is basically an industrial area. There is a norm that they are paid low wages thus meaning that they must always eat beans on a daily basis. However, mentally they yearn for delicious meals in the white dominated hotels. They therefore change behavior immediately the pay comes and especially when it has not been budgeted for other things in the family.

On the other hand, realism theory focuses on the real happenings and lives of people (Mbatiah, 2001; Sibley, 2013) especially in a given environment (Barnaby, 2008). The application of this theory cuts across academic disciplines (Barrish, 2011) however the most common application is on the analysis of literary texts in which the happenings in a text tend to mirror the real situation in a given environment (Pedro 2009; Barrish, 2011; Taghizadeh 2014). In this regard, the people in any given environment are basically regarded as a true creation of that particular environment within which they reside (Pedro 2009) especially in terms of behaviours. Realism tends to

show the lives and behaviors of people in a given environment and their manifestations in the literary texts (Abrams, 1988). Realism is believed to have originated from Aristotle's work *Poetics* of 335 BC in which he used the term *mimesis* that basically refers to copying or showing reality of happenings in a given environment (Snircova 2015). Though the theory could be traced back to the works of Aristotle, its proper use was manifested in France in 1848 (Ruan, 1986; Thakar, 2012) and further theoretical usage in the 1870's and 1880's (Pizer, 1995). The theory was used also in Germany, Britain and America in which many literary works were based on it (McGowan 1980; Abrams 1988, 1999).

There has been an opinion amongst people that music is just arrangements of musical instruments without any real message. However, IFPI (2017) through its chairman states that music is a true connector between the artist and the audiences. This connection occurs directly and quickly. This is probably the reason why the 'lunchtime' music was appealing to many music lovers. Further, music tends to have a lot of linkages with the environment right from the ancient epoch (Taylor & Hurley, 2015). This linkage with the real environments mirrors the connectivity between music and real happenings in the society. This connection is not just a recent phenomenon but has been in existence in the man's historical life and tends to stir people in order to appeal for justice among other issues (Papathanasiou, 2016). Thus the analysis of this hit song augurs well within the prism of realism theory. Thus, the characteristic traits of the characters in this hit song tend to fulfill the tenets of realism theory.

In addition, Dunn (1984) states that music has been relegated to a vague category that is basically associated with human intuition. Therefore, most of its activities are rarely considered capable of giving a very high level of articulation in language other than that used to generate specific activity. However, most musicians artistically use stylistic language appealing to the audiences in order to expose a serious theme. The theme is in the environment and emanates from people's behaviors. Music is thus an object that has a movement of creation, stability, and is capable of affecting people (Roy & Dowd, 2010). Music is therefore, a social function shaped by social arrangements and the culture (Roy & Dowd, 2010). Though, many *benga* musical songs focused much on investigating memorable social events, political drama, love affairs, money, personal experiences of hardship and struggle, and praising people with dignity (Ketebul Music, 2014), this hit song focuses on the society and how it shows some kind of real classes and experiences whereby some workers are destined to work in the industrial areas with low wages and basically eat what they don't like but forced by circumstances. However, the same low class gets this meagre pay and tend to

rush to the luxurious hotels for delicacies to compete with the rich.

The song is generally exhibiting realistic tendencies of the industrial area workers not necessarily in Nairobi but also elsewhere in the developing countries. In these developing countries workers tend to yearn for needs and wants that may come or may not. Needs refer to something necessary and wants refer to a desire to have something necessary for ones well being. In the industrial areas, many workers need and want good food and better pay. However, this tends to be a mirage. That is why the singer is saying that he has now known that people have problems that make them behave the way they are behaving. However, when they get this little pay, the characters in the song tend to satisfy their needs and wants by eating what they have yearned for in luxurious hotels. According to the Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture (2009), people generally tend to satisfy their needs through commodities and things acquired in the market. In this regard, the characters tend to acquire beef, cooked rice and other delicacies after getting the low pay as a commodity.

CONCLUSION

From the thematic analysis that was applied in the song, we can categorically conclude that both the psychological and realism theories clearly depict the behaviors of characters in the song and also the real life situations that they normally experience. It is noted that as the casual laborers get their meagre pay they normally tend to forget their common behaviors like that of lying under trees and window shopping and instead visit expensive hotels dominated by the white men. Their menus also change from the usual beans to other delicacies like beef and pastry. This behavior among the industrial workers is real and thus manifests itself even in the modern societies especially in the developing countries. Further, even though the hit song can be analyzed through Marxist prism, the psychological and realism theories give more insightful scenarios in the song.

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