

A ‘Misplaced’ Genre: Role of Kenyan Popular Gospel Music Within the Secular Context Damaris Ngoru

This paper will discuss the misplacement of the gospel genre in Kenya in view of its continuous presence in secular space. Gospel music has arguably become a medium of entertainment aimed to give a ‘feel good’ effect and effectively trivialising the traditional role of gospel music to promote Christian values. For example, Esther Wahome’s popular hit song Kuna Dawa regularly played in local Kenyan bars, led to her partnership with the Guinness company. Also, Size 8 hit song tiga wana which literally addresses the devil to ‘stop being childish’, regularly aired on secular radio shows. Moreover, Gospel music artists have been contracted to promoting various products online, for example on January 2019, Mercy Masika partnered to campaign for the detergent brand Ariel and Size 8 a brand ambassador for baby products. Since the predominant religious population in Kenya comprises of Christians, the ‘misplaced’ role of gospel music has been a cause of concern, hence the following points are key to understanding the shift of roles;

- Gospel artist have trivialized the weighty and eternal matters
- The demand for entertainment has overshadowed the need to edify
- The ‘prosperity gospel’ influence
- Gospel artists write music more for business purposes than being Christian ambassadors

It would be crucial to point out that individuals decode music genres distinctively, hence the idea of the gospel genre being ‘misplaced’ may not necessarily be a fact. Therefore, to understand why this genre (gospel) has been used to promote secular ideologies, there are key aspects to consider;

- Demographics – targeting the youth
- Supply and demand in the gospel music industry
- Socio-cultural shift and transformation
- Acculturation of Western music ideologies
- Technological advancement towards commercializing gospel music

Keywords

- Popular culture • Genre • Demographics • Acculturation

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