

The Hustler Narrative: Protest and Identity in Contemporary Kenyan Youth Music

Abstract

The concept of hustler has become a main point of talk in Kenyan political space. The youth have styled themselves as hustlers and have appropriated this term to create a counter narrative which contests their position as a marginalized group. In effect, they have used the concept as a rallying point against the marginalization, by the political class from the economic and political feast table. This paper attempts to interrogate and explain how the youth use music to craft an identity distinct from the one assigned to them by the dominant political and social class. It explains how the youth through the structuring of the music and the use of language protest and dismantle the identity assigned to them. Consequently, music is shown to be a means through which the youth create and perform a unique identity which cuts across ethnic, political and economic divides. This is achieved by using their musical compositions as a means of highlighting the challenges they face every day which include unemployment, perceived police brutality aimed at them and their misuse by the political class. The songs are relatively revolutionary especially those from the disadvantaged neighbourhoods which betrays their desire to partake of the political and economic largesse which they lack access to. By styling themselves as hustlers, the youth present a critical awareness of the unfair state of affairs in the country where certain groups find themselves alienated. The paper concludes that by seeming to glorify alcoholism, promiscuity and primitive desire for material acquisition, the youth are in effect pointing to a society that is drunk, promiscuous and morally and politically rotten.

Primary author: Dr SANG, Kiprotich (Moi University)

Track Classification: Music and Music Business