Modernisation and Popculturisation of (Asalatu) Islamic Music in Nigeria: Trajectories of participation, instrumentalisation and strategies

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The penetrating effects of modernization in Africa are undeniable. Across social institutions of Africa, observable changes exist to the extent that definitive shifts occur. Religion, however, is one of the most stable social institutions across the world, and in Africa particularly. Changes in religion are often less immediate and less profound. Of all religions in Africa, Islam has, particularly, remained among the most stable religions. This is however not to suggest that Islam has remained immutable as modernization elements have been introduced into Islam, especially the Islamic music in manners that suggest popculturisation of the music especially among the youths. This popculturisation has created new musical and identity orders in the social system with attendant existentialities across generations and participation. To contribute to bourgeoning bodies of literature on modernization, social change, youth, popular culture, religion and development in Africa, this article investigated the interfaces of modernization and religion through music among the youths in Ibadan, Nigeria. Research questions this article answered are what is the nature of interest of youths in modernised Islamic music? What are the associated, behaviours, instrumentalisations and strategies in Asalatu Islamic music?

Keywords: Modernisation, popculturisation, Islamic music, instrumentalisation, youths, Ibadan, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is among the most ethnically and religiously diverse nations in the world (Akanle, 2013). Different religions exist in the country but the most predominant religions are Islam and Christianity. African Traditional Religions also exist but at the margins when compared with widespreadness of Christianity and Islam. The proportion of followership of Christianity and Islam is nearly 50-50 in southwestern (Akanle and Olorunlana, 2014). While Christianity has demonstrated much dynamism in accommodating modernization elements, Islam has remained relatively more reserved necessitating the need for more research into contours of modernity and Islam in Nigeria and Africa. One of the major elements of religion that have experienced profound change in Africa is music (Rukungu, 2012). Music is very important in religion because of its identity, recreational and spiritual forces among worshippers. Even in worship, music introduces human and trans-human elements that bring sacred fun and recreational appeals into service to God and humanity. This is particularly so and relevant as music has therapeutic and aesthetic forms needed by humans to remain at the normal, abnormal and natural at the same time at supernatural.

According to Idioh (2011), music has intermedial elements of society and it carries emotional and socio-psychological angles that provide not only information but also expression of identities and appeals. In religions, musics are forms of communication, expression, affiliation, identity and social relation. As music conveys information, it is also a language of worship and encoded form of bonding, unification, simplification, alliance and totemism among adherents. In Durkheinian sense, music is a form of religious entity in religious life as music has the capacity to determine survival or
otherwise of religion. In many instances, religious leaders pay attention to forms of music played. This is because, music have both attractive and repulsive forms and elements. Music can attract and/or repeal adherents. It can sustain and/or dissociate membership depending on forms. This is why religions pay close attention to musics associated with them.

Another important angle of religion is that it can affect perception of people about religion and it can affect attitudes and behaviours of adherents within and outside the fold. It can profane the sacred and it can sacredise the profane. Against this background, music is a very important element and language of religion which can determine the being of the group and the entity. Intergenerational elements are major determinants of forms and utilizations of religion. What appeals to a socio-demographic group may not appeal to the other yet different socio-demographics subsists within and across religions. Interestingly, all the socio-demographic are critical to religious survival. This is particularly so when the youths are involved.

The youths are the present and the future of society and religion. In Africa, there is the popular youth bulge as the population pyramid of Africa, and Nigeria, is middle heavy/bulging (Akanle, Adesina and Akarah, 2016, Amit, 2015). This demographic reality can however be a gain and liability depending on the appropriation capabilities and outcomes. This is particularly the case for religions whose survival and sustainability rest solely on the principle of catch them young. In Nigeria, every religion competes for the youths and music is a major strategy through which religions attract the youths. Unfortunately, youths are more creative, more energetic, more demanding, more ambitious and more innovative even in religion. By implication, religious, Islamic, music must factor these parameters and characters into their worships and music for the youths (Amit, 2015; African Studies Centre, 2012; Irele, 2010; Oloyede, 2008; Daramola, 2007; Daramola, 2007; Adegbite, 1989; Abdu-Raheem, 1992; Deremi, 1992; Sadik, 1985; Balogun, 1978; Vidal, 1977; Jenkins and Olsen, 1976; Elbourne, 1975; Fatunwa, 1974; Euba, 1971; Lomax, 1969). This is particularly so as competing

religions, build on these in attracting and retaining youths across religions (Esan, 2015; Akanle and Olorunlana, 2014). What then is the situation in Islamic music and the youths in the age of modernization globalization within increasing secularization, syncretism and westernism? What are participation issues in Islamic music (asalatu), modernisation, instrumentalisations and strategies within attitudes and behaviours?

Research Method
The data reported in this article is from a larger study conducted in Nigeria in 2016. The research design was explorative and descriptive approach was adopted. Sampling was purposive. In other words, all the people selected for interviews were selected on purpose based on one or combinations of criteria. Such inclusion criteria include knowledge, availability, degree of involvement in asalatu and willingness to be interviewed. Our study population included leaders of Alasalatu and Muslim youths. The choice of these populations of study was to capture the worldviews of key actors relative to asalatu Islamic music and youths’ interface. The study setting was Ibadan metropolis. The choice of Ibadan was for scientific reasons. First, there is appreciable representation of Muslims and youths in Ibadan. Second, Asalatu Islamic music is very common in Ibadan (Akanle and Olorunlana, 2014). This is specifically understandable against the historical background that Ibadan was among the traditional Yoruba societies with early successful encounter with Islam. Hence, unlike Lagos, Ibadan remains significantly tradition though stable modernising (Olutayo and Akanle, 2009).

In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIs) were the data
collection methods used. A total of 20 in-depth IDIs and 20 KIIs were conducted. 20 IDIs were conducted among religious leaders and 20 IDIs were conducted among adherents with appreciable lived experiences in asalatu relative to youths' worldviews. Data analysis was done through content analysis and presented as systematic narratives and ethnographic summaries. Ethical principles of research were observed throughout the study. The principles particularly observed include anonymity, non-maleficence, confidentiality, informed consent and right of withdrawal. Data

Analysis and Presentation of Findings
This section presents results/findings based on analysis of data gathered from the field. This section is presented under specific objectives and interpretations were kept at minimum to allow originality of research participants' worldviews.

Modernisation, Interest/Participation and Islamic Music
Findings suggest modernisation influences youths' worldviews of Islam generally and Islamic music particularly. The youths do not see Islamic music as only a means of praising God but also as a form of entertainment which they sing and dance to. This was captured by one of the key informants:

The Alasalatu music is now commercialized which is not supposed to be the case. During weddings or naming ceremonies, the music is seen as a form of entertainment which people dance to instead of using the music to serve the original purpose for which it was introduced which is to praise Allah. The involvement of the youths in the music is the reason for this. The youths see the Alasalatu music as a form of enjoyment to the extent that they even sing it like Fuji music. (KII/Male/32years/Odogbo barracks/Engineer)

It was further revealed that, as a result of modernization, youths no longer attend religious activities the way they should. Many of the youths prefer attending secular shows than going to Islamic events. This was expressed by one of the male informants:

Modernization has distracted the youths especially when it comes to religious activities. Some youths prefer attending a Wizkid show on Sunday instead attending of Alasalatu programmes or go to the mosque. Some do not even do the Islamic music on their phones, what you will find are secular songs. (KII/Male/40 years/Akobo/Artisan)

According to another interviewee:

The Alasalatu music we see around us today is the one for the elderly. It is the elderly that are steadfast and doing the music the way it should be done. Most youths do not attend Alasalatu programmes. In fact, most of the values have been lost. (IDI/Male/27 years/Sango/Student)

An alternative view was however expressed by some informants who maintain not all youths have abandoned asalatu music. According this category of respondents, many youths have shown interest in the Asalatu music and have contributed to elevating Islam and the music. According to another interviewee:

There is high participation of the youths in the Alasalatu music. They are actively involved in programmes organized by the Islamic societies. Most of the people that sing the Alasalatu music are now youths unlike in those days where it was sang by the older ones. So, the youths have elevated Islam to another level. They have made Alasalatu music modernized for enjoyment. (KII/Male/44years/Akobo/Music composer)

From our findings, it can be observed that there are three distinct categories of youths relative to Islamic music in in the context. This categorization of the youths relative to Islamic music can also be linked to Islamic music typologies as we found. Islamic music is
therefore not a monolithic category so are the youths not monolithic entities. By our analysis, there is traditional Islamic music. This is Islamic music sang and adhered to by older and more traditional youths. This brand of music remains largely original and traditional and the patterns are maintained by the religious elders and few conservative youths. There is also the hybridized Islamic music— the not so old and not so modern and not so traditional— the in-between version of the music and youths. This category attracts the old and the not very modern/western youths. The youths in this category are conservatively modern. They are not expressly and overtly modern/western in their attraction to music. The third and the last category is the elaborately and the outrightly modern/western. This is Islamic music and youths with very marginal appeal of originality but with outlandish modern contents. Youths who are attracted to this brand of Islamic music are very western in their orientation and appearances and are not attracted to earlier versions of Islamic music indicated above.

**Attitudes, Behaviours, Instrumentalisation and Strategies**

It was found that the Islamic community in the context has tried many strategies to propagate the teachings of Islam through the Asalatu music. This is to sustain Islam and its teachings in the communities especially intergenerationally. This is particularly so due to increasing secularization, modernization, westernization and multiplicities of Islamic music in the age of globalization. It therefore found that there is conscious strategies, even though implicit, to sustain asalatu music. According to one key informant:

I applaud the Islamic community in Ibadan because they have tried a lot in ensuring that the culture of Islam is maintained through the Asalatu music and dance. The consistency in the asalatu music is good which could not have been possible if not for the Islamic community in the city of Ibadan. (KII/Male/42years/Odogbo Barracks/Engineer)

According to another interviewee who maintained that Islamic communities organise gatherings to teach and educate the youths as a strategy for sustainability of the music and religions:

The Islamic communities in Ibadan are really trying in propagating Islam. They organize gatherings for the youths to teach and educate them on the tenets of Islam. There are provisions put in place by the Islamic community in Ibadan for us to serve Allah fully.

It was also revealed that the Islamic societies in Ibadan use the Asalatu music as a way of educating the youths so that they can attend the Asalatu programme. One of the interviewees, a 24 years old student at Orogun, explained:

The Islamic community enlightens the youths on the importance of Islam in their lives. The NASFAT society, for example, organizes Asalatu music for Muslims to attend. There is also interpersonal relationship between the Islamic community in Ibadan and the youths.

According to another interviewee, a female 27 years old trader in Sango:

There is a community here in Ibadan that supports Islamic societies which makes it easy to guide the interest of the youths so that they can participate fully in Islamic music.

A key informant interviewee, 44 years old male music composer in Akobo, gave a more critical and nuanced perspective of Islamic music trajectories especially relative to economics of change. According to him, even though the Islamic community uses the music as avenue to praise Allah, the Asalatu music is also used for profit-making:

The Islamic societies preach that music is good in Islam but I feel music should focus more on praising Allah instead being used as a profit-making business. There are things put in place by the Islamic community but it is now left for the people to accept those things.
According to another key informant, the Islamic community encourages their members to perform the Asalatu music so as to promote a sense of belonging and bonding among members:

There are many Islamic societies in Ibadan like NASFAT and many others. These organizations have their own asalatu music and dance group. Some musicians do recordings for their societies to promote a sense of belonging. The Islamic community encourages the Alasalatu music as much as they can.

The Islamic community organizes public lecture to educate people on Islam, and the Asalatu music is performed on such occasions. Asalatu music thus becomes instrumentalised tool and strategy of bonding and sustainability in such context. One informant, a 30 years old male in Odogbo barrack explained:

The Islamic communities hold lectures to educate people about Islam. They also promote Islamic music among the youths, and they sponsor those that are talented.

Sponsorship is another strategy commonly adopted by muslims in the context in order to jumpstart and sustain interests among the youths in Islam and Islamic music. According to a female interviewee, 27 years old in Orogun:

The Islamic competitions sponsor competitions so that the youths can be actively involved in the music.

A major theme found in data is the in-competition among the muslim societies in Ibadan. While competition is good for organizational development, excessive competition for relevance tends to be repulsive to many, especially the youths, who see the competitions as distraction to the main issues. There is also the issue of competition between the Islamic societies as a category and the other religions as another category in attracting especially the youths. The in-competition of Islamic groups actually leads to excessive divisions among the groups thereby reducing their attractive and sustaining impacts in areas of attracting new adherents and the youths: according to an interviewee, a 25 years old student in Sango, due to the many competitive Islamic societies in Ibadan with different Asalatu music group, it is quite difficult for the Islamic community to do anything (to propel the music and the religion). He observed:

Different organizations perform the Asalatu music so I believe it will be quite difficult to do anything about the music. Also, the music is now competitive as each organization strives to perform their own music to their very best.

Results from the study revealed various styles used in performing the Asalatu music. These styles include praises, Qur’an recitation and use of instruments. An interviewee put it thus:

The styles in the Asalatu music include chanting holy names, remembering God through praises, and beating of the bandiri. The way it is done is the same in all other Islamic societies. (IDI/Male/26years/Orogun/Student)

This view was further emphasised by another interviewee:

The aspect of Islamic music I like is the drama aspect. I don’t really like it because I have no interest in it. (IDI/Female/27years/Sango/Employed)

Another interviewee averred:

I like all the aspects of the Asalatu music. The Qur’an is recited in the music and it teaches us about Islamic tenets. The music praises God and makes listeners to be more aware of the religion. There are different types of Asalatu music. Some sing it only to make money while it is sang by others to praise God. (IDI/Male/28years/Bodija/Businessman)

An informant reported that even though he likes the Islamic chants in the Asalatu music, he dislikes the modernised Fuji beats introduced in
the music. This can be gleaned from his position below:

Aspect of the Asalatu music I like is the voice of those who sing as well as the Islamic chants. Another aspect of Islamic music I like are the ones that teach discipline. I also like the quotes from the Qur’an in the music. But, I dislike the Fuji beats used in singing the Asalatu music (KIIV/Male/35years/Odogbo barracks/Engineer).

Data gathered from the study revealed that people had various attitudes towards the Asalatu music and dance. This was seen in the frequency at which they attend religious activities, seeing religion as part of their life and decision of whether or not to marry outside their religion. It revealed that while some attend religious activities frequently others do not. One of the interviewee simply stated:

I attend religious activities if I am chanced to do so. I have a very busy schedule but if I am less busy then I do go the mosque to pray but not very often. (IDI/Male/26years/UI/Student)

A female interviewee observed:

I attend Islamic gatherings regularly. I don’t miss out of them. When its time for prayers I close my shop and leave immediately. I don’t miss the Tajud and Asalatu because I believe so much in prayers. It is part and parcel of me. (IDI/Female/28years/Sango/Caterer)

Similarly, another interviewee reported:

I attend NASFAT services every Sunday. I also go for Islamic vigils known as Tajud every third Fridays of the month (IDI/Female/41years/Akobo/Trader).

A male interviewee further stated:

I attend religious gatherings once in a while when I’m attending functions like wedding and birthdays. I don’t go to the mosque very often because I believe I can stay in the comfort of my home and render prayers to my God. (IDI/Male/24years/Orogun/Unemployed)

A female informant also revealed that she had to stop attending the Asalatu music because of the changes seen in the modern way the music is now performed. She put it thus:

I stopped attending Asalatu music, but I go to the mosque every Friday to pray. The reason I stopped going to Asalatu is because of the way in which the music is now being performed. Modernization has changed the whole thing. Imagine, people see the music as a form of entertainment which they dance to. The musicians do not even dress in a manner that is becoming of a good Muslim. So I just had to stop going for Asalatu on Sunday. (KII/Female/38years/Sango/Employed)

An informant also opined:

I attend religious activities every time because it affords me the opportunity to worship and praise Allah for the wonderful things He has done for me. On these occasions, I also sing to the Asalatu music being played or performed. (KII/Female/39years/Odogbo barracks/Self-employed)

Information gathered from the field further revealed that while most of the interviewees can marry outside of the Islamic religion only few could do so. An interviewee reported that he can marry outside his religion as long as his parents favour it. This is however not so easy among the females both at home and in the alasalatu. While the religion and the groups are ambivalent relative to male marriages, they are more definitive and prescriptive when females are involved. Exogeneity is therefore more relaxed for the men than women. Exogeneity is largely discouraged among women and these are sometimes included in asalatu songs especially on marriage. According to an interviewee:

I might marry outside my religion because I am not biased to any religion. The only problem with intermarriage is just the family. So, if
my family can accept whomever I want to marry then I will go ahead and marry that person. (IDI/Male/25years/Orgun/Student)

The interviewee below voiced the common reason why exogeneity is more welcomed for males as against females’ exogeneity even as sung in Islamic music:
I might marry outside my religion because I’m bringing the person into my religion (KII/Male/37years/Akobo/Businessman).

The interviewee below gave a good example that illustrates the issue of Islamic tenets often sung in asalatu music about gender, marriage, Islam and exogeneity:
I can marry outside my religion if the lady will convert to Islam. My father was a Muslim and he married my mother who was Christian, and she was converted to Islam. I can do the same thing my father did (IDI/Male/26years/Sango/Student).

The issue of gender, Islam, exogeneity and marriage was captured by women as already indicated above. According to an unemployed 25 years old female, a female cannot marry outside her religion. She put it thus:
I cannot marry outside my religion because I love Islam. My parents were Muslims and I see the way they love each other and their religion. They had the fear of God in them, and I want my family to be that way.

Discussion and Conclusion
From the findings in this study, it can be maintained that asalatu Islamic music is affects different aspects of Islamic community. These effects include marriage, participation, survival, participation, youthhood and economics. There are in-competition and external competition in the context relative to music and adherence. While there are continuities in the music, there are discontinuities and these have been moderated by modernity, westernization and globalization. While some youths are receptive of the modernized and popculturised elements of the music, some find the elements repulsive and they have affected their religiosity and participation. The interest of youths in asalatu music is ambivalent and the communities and the older generations are strategizing to moderate changes in the religion and music- the music being of the survival strategies of Islam among both the youths and older adherents. While the older adherents are stable, the youths are more sensitive and more dynamic yet they are the future and must be constructively managed for propagation and practice of the religion and music.

Youths are ambivalently involved in the asalatu music and dance. While some find it entertaining and interesting some do not see it as such. This however also depends on the typologies of asalatu music in question. From our analysis, it is possible to classify asalatu and we have done this. Asalatu music is also a strategy for bonding and belongingness among adherents and a way of attracting and retaining the youths and the elders. This is consistent with the findings of Idioh (2011) that some other forms of music like the Islamic music could be used to create a sense of unification or alliance for increased inter-group understanding. While modernization attracted some youths to asalatu, some reported minimal participation as a result of modernization. Asalatu music is no longer seen by many youths as a form of worship used to praise God. Also, the older generation participated more in the Alasalatu music than the youths.

The Islamic community in adopts various strategies to inculcate the tenets of Islam into the youths through asalatu. First, they organize public lectures to teach and educate people on the tenets of Islam as well as the importance of music in Islam. Second, they organize various problems that targets the youths. There are various Islamic societies in Ibadan, such as NASFAT, that focused on promoting the Asalatu music among youths. Talented youths who can sing are sponsored by such societies. While majority of the people did attend religious activities regularly, others did so irregularly. Reasons given for the low frequency in attending religious activities particularly the
religious activities are to draw them closer to God. Asalatu music involves chanting and to afford them the opportunity to praise God. Asalatu music is loved by the adherents are the ones that include chants from the Qur'an and praise to Allah while the aspect they disliked most are the Fuji sound of the asalatu music.

References


