

Popular music: A satirical weapon for the fight against social ills.

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Abstract

Many people in society see popular music as entertainment music for the youths, where dancing takes the form of jumping and shaking, in exciting jamboree. Hardly do people pause and ponder on the relevance of the song texts or lyrics in the life of the society. The purpose of this study is to attempt to survey the contributions made by the Nigerian popular musician towards spotlighting the ills of society with a view to correcting them. This study also visits the role of music in human society with particular reference to the Nigerian experience. From the revelations of the survey, we stand to appreciate how music is a powerful weapon in the fight against social ills in Nigeria – an awareness that music is not only for entertainment. To get the facts surrounding this study, different relevant systematic approaches to research are adopted including frequent visits to the music shops and listening to relevant music albums, interviews with available popular musicians as well as using internet sources. Relevant findings are made in the filed including the following:-

- That the youths are more interested in dancing and enjoyment than appreciating the moral messages of popular music
- That popular music in Nigeria has contributed to a reasonable extent in the fight against social ills.
- That popular musicians have played self assigned roles in the theatre of politics.
- That music reaches where mere words cannot – to the soul and mind.

Introduction

Music plays vital roles in virtually every culture of the world. It is essentially a human activity denoting or expressing human emotions and the relationship of the emotions to the environment or to life. Not only is it a human activity, in its truest sense, it cannot exist without man. And so man recognizes or seems to hear music in nature only because the sound of nature appears to have close similarity with sounds that man consciously organizes to express a feeling or idea. That is how the expression 'humanly organized sound' (Blacking, 1976) gets its validity. This is typically the essence of popular music in Nigeria. Okafor (1989) describes popular music as:

Music that deals with familiar themes and issues of the moment. It is understood and accepted by a lot of people not as a final solution to the problems but as a topical reflection of their sentiments and current world view. Consequently popular music is more subject to change than any other genre of music... popular music is therefore music with broad, immediate, and implicitly transient appeal. It is also social entertainment and dance oriented and draws its core clientele from urban dwellers.

The modern pop music scene in Africa has been traced from the contact with external cultures that came to Africa and the consequent adulteration of many aspects of African culture-the legacy of Islam and of Europe on the African continent.

Africa is our motherland where good sound is produced and appreciated. Over the years, Africa has produced musicians, songs, dances and instruments of the highest caliber.

In each African song, the lyrics have a meaningful story to tell: stories about peace, love, war, progress, politics, justice, injustice, freedom, the past, the present and the future.

In Nigeria, political movements, and activities have provided many a singer of popular music with some of his richest themes. He has been able to say what the people are thinking, but, perhaps, would not say for fear of criticism or sanctions:

The popular musician plays a self assigned role-he is an observer, critic and chronicler. He says what he thinks should be or should not be in society and which he feels the masses should like, and that the leaders should hear. He is not only an entertainer but also a faithful witness whose music and words eventually survive the upheavals of society.

The socio-political commentaries in Nigerian popular music.

One of the phenomena that dominates the lyrics of Nigerian pop music is the socio-political commentaries. In it one can see the opposing factors in Nigerian politics, the internal struggles, the gap between the rich and the poor. We can also see the movements and strains in society, the relationship between leaders and followers. All these constitute the lyrics or commentaries of the pop musician some of which are performed in a satirical manner, projecting popular music as a vital utility consumed by the society.

This agreed with Idolor (2002:2) which contends that 'no phenomenon void of utility survives in a society, an indication that the presence of music in almost every African society has a formidable role to play'. This point of view suggests that human beings have always used music to meet certain societal need in different circumstances. Contemporary Nigerian popular musicians use their lyrics to reflect on happenings in society. According to Okafor (1989:9).

The Nigerian popular musician has always borne witness to the times he lives in. He praises, he admonishes, he records events and he involves himself, through his music, in the social and concrete problems of his land. In addition, he yearns for ideal human relationship between people of various lands. He is ahead of his time. His music is therefore a social document.

As contemporary Nigerian musicians use their lyrics to mirror the society, they become chroniclers of events, recreating the history and culture of their people, commenting on aspects of societal values that have diverged from historical reports, and suggesting ways by which society could be restored to the normal order. In so doing, the musical social critics cannot but resort to employing the tool of satire to deride the prevalence of social ills in a bid to correct them. This brings to the fore the didactic functions of music. Idolor (2002:6) explains:

The didactic function of music is affected through logical organization of lyrics and performance practice. Some lyrics are presented in direct or indirect satire through such speech figures as simile, metaphor, alliterations, allusion, and even short anecdote to convey an observation or/and opinion to a witness-audience. In other situations, other activities in performance teach both viewers and participants the coded lesson(s).

We can now look at some of the Nigeria popular musicians whose works are surveyed in the study. They include:-

1. Dan Maraya Jos in *Babban Mutum* (Popular minstrel)
2. The writer, in *Ebee ka anyi neje* (Story in Music)
3. Fela Anikulapo Kuti in *Zombie, Yellow fever and Vagabond in power* (Afro Beats)
4. Eedris Abdulkareem in *Nigeria Jagajaga* (pop)
5. Lagbaja in *Me and You Nobi Enemy* (pop)

The Nigerian popular musician satirizes, the relationship between the rich and the poor, and the corruptive tendency of status and public office attract the attention of Dan Maraya Jos in *Babban Mutum*.

Babban Mutum (Hausa)

Mai Arziki	Great man
Kana tuka Mota Mai-tsada	You ride on expensive car
Ga tad a na-u' ran sanyi	It is air-conditioned
Ga ta muma da Rediyo	It has radio
Kana gain Talaka shi ba	you despise the poor man
Kana tsammanin shi ba kowa bane	You think he is nothing
Amma ka tuna fa	But remember this
Idan-Motar naka, ta kafe	When your car is stuck in the mud
Shi dai wanna ta-lakan zaka	You will look for the poor
Nemo ya fitceta	Man to push it out
Mai Dukiyar	Great man
Kana zanne chikin BabbanGidan ka	You live in your big house
Ga Na-u' ran sanyi	It is air conditioned
Ga manyan kujeru	You have big beds
Ga Babban Madafi	You have a big kitchen
Ga kuma Babban Zaure	You have a big parlour
Kala gain talaka shibakowa bane	You despise the poor man
Baka Taimakon sad a komai	You will give him nothing
Amma ka tuna fa	Remember this
Shi di wannan Takakan	It is the poor man
Da ba shi da komi	The lowly man of no means
Shi ya dauki kasan	Who carries the sand
Da Ruwan	And carries the water
Da kuma sauran kayan	And carries the loads
Da aka gina Gidan kan da shi	For the building of your house

(Dan Maraya Jos 1989)

The writer, as a popular minstrel singer extensively uses moral songs based on topical and political issues in his weekly programme in the N.T.A. Enugu. In one of his minstrel songs titled *Ebee ka anyi Neje* (Igbo), he laments the deteriorating standard of life in Nigeria.

EBEE KA ANYI NE JE (N.T.A Enugu)

Voice 

E-be_ k'a - nyi n'e - je o - bo-do_ Ni - ge-ria lee ke- d'i - h'a - nyi g'e - me na

Voice 

7 chu- kwu k'a - nyi n'a - yio. E- b'a - nyi'n- cha_ no n'u- ju a-ku ma a- guu_ n'a - to si'a-

Voice 

12 nyi'a-kwa n'u- kwu, o bu m- gbe_ ke'a- ma - ghi a-kpu'i-si K'o- bu_ n'a - gu b'a - di-ghi'n- ko.

Ebe ka anyi n'eje?

Where are we going?

Obodo Nigeira lee

This country Nigeria

Kedu ihe anyi g'eme?

What shall we do?

Na Chukwu ka anyi n'ayo

We are praying to God

Ebe anyi ncha no n'uju aka

Where we are in the midst of plenty

Ma aguu na atosi anyi akwa n' ukwu

But hunger is stripping our cloth from our waist

Obu Mgbeke amaro akpu isi?

Is it that Mgbeke doesn't know how to shave?

K'obu na aguba adito nko

Or because the razor is not sharp.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the Afro-beat exponent was famous for his satires and criticism of authority in music. *Zombie* which satirizes the intelligence of the military and the police, and the *yellow fever*- a criticism of a sophisticated city girl who bleaches her face, legs and arms – are fine examples. But one of his most popular releases is *Vagabond in power* (V.I.P). Normally V.I.P means Very Important Personality but in Fela's song, he portrays these VIPs as the authors of Africa's economic woes and problems of poverty.

V.I.P (Vagabond In Power) – Afro beat

Na them be head of state
commissioner, permanent secretary
judges, bank managers and them
You cannot be a big man
copying colonial master
An African must be African

They are the head of state
commissioners, permanent secretaries
judges, bank managers and so on
You cannot be a personality and
behave like a colonial master
An African leader should behave like an
African

Man get power, him take am cheat person
Man get power him take am talk nonsense

A man who is voted into power uses it to cheat
A man who is voted into power uses it to talk
nonsense

Man get power him take am steal money

A man who is voted into power uses it to steal
money

Dem no know hungry people	They don't know that people are hungry
Dem no know jobless people	They don't know that people are jobless
Dem no know suffer people	They don't know that people are suffering
Dem go dey ride best car	They ride on the best cars
Dem go dey chop best food	They eat the best food
Dem go live in best house	They live in the best houses
Dem go dey waka for road	As they move on the road for them
You go dey comot for road for dem	They continue to steal money
Dem go dey steal money	He is the wrong man
He be wrong man	He is the vagabond in power
Na vagabond in power	I say he is the wrong man
I say he be wrong man	He is the vagabond in power
Na vagabond in power	(Felan Anikulapo Kuli 1979)

Abdulkareem is a contemporary pop musician who has devoted his music to commenting on Nigeria's problems. In his album *Mr. Lecturer* where he chronicles the degeneration of the nations socio-economic and political structures, he titles one track *Nigeria Jagajaga*, a term literally meaning a state of disorderliness and chaos.

He sings:

Nigeria jagajaga	Nigeria in total disarray
Every thing scatter scatter	every thing has scattered
Poor man de suffer suffer	The poor are suffering...
Gun shot in the air	Gun shot in the air...

Due to the biting satiric thrust of the lyrics, Eedris was reported to have incurred the wrath of Nigeria's former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who scolded him for portraying Nigeria in negative terms. On this issue Oyetayo (2006:52) reports:

The song was said to have touched a wrong chord with the president who reportedly thumped the artists' head when he visited Aso rock, the seat of power, with the performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN). In his response, the president reportedly told Abdulkareem: "It is your papa and mama who are jagajaga".

Thus in a subsequent album *-Letter to Mr. President*, Eedris attempts to shed light on the import of the signifier jagajaga, and the degeneration that has permeated Nigerian society, pointing out that his lyrics are a reflection of the realities that require

urgent attention. Specifically, he cites the endemic social vice of corruption which must be fought for the nation to develop.

Chinagorom Onuoha popularly known as *African China* is another contemporary pop musician who in his first album titled *crisis* complemented Eedris Abdulkareem in his lyrics. He labels the Nigerian government as bad for its perceived insensitivity to the plight of the ordinary people on the streets. Writing on the satirical thrust of African China's message, Oyetayo (2006:5) comments:

The track *our Government Bad*, is a satirical x-ray of the penurious state of citizens occasioned by perceived insensitivity of the government. He opines that there are no job opportunities for the ghetto man and if he eventually gets one, it would now be a battle for survival. Ingeniously blending raga tunes and social commentary into a stunning music tapestry, African China is unsparing in his caustic criticism of the government anti-people policies which have left Nigeria more impoverished than ever.

In his second album titled *Mr. President* the musician continues with his musical preoccupation, expressing his disenchantment with the lack of basic social amenities such as water and good roads, coupled with the appalling scarcity of food in Nigeria. The musical social critic thus calls on the president and his team to attend to the problems, and put Nigeria on the right track so that those at the grass root level can benefit from good governance. Other popular artists that represent this new breed of Nigerian musicians include Augustine *Black face* Ahmadu, Femi Anikulapo-Kuti, Tony Tetaula, and Lagbaja. They have in their own ways, used the medium of music to reflect on the socio-economic conditions of Nigeria. However, it should be pointed out that the current relevance of their music is tied to the history of popular music in Nigeria where Fela Anikulapo-Kut's Afro. Beat holds sway.

Another contemporary Nigeria popular musician lagbaja, has through his lyrics shown unwavering commitment to transforming his society with music that touches on diverse aspects of Nigerian culture and politics. These serious social issues include ethnic discrimination and religious crisis.

Ethno-religious conflict has been a recurrent theme in Nigeria's national discourse because it threatens the unity of the country. On this Suberu writes:

There has been a growing wave of mobilization and opposition by ethnic minority groups against their perceived marginalization, exploitation and subjugation in the Nigerian federation. This ethnic minority ferment has engendered ethnic conflicts, involving thousands of fatalities, in the oil producing areas of Delta region in southern Nigerian and middle-belt of Northern Nigeria. (1996:1)

The national anthem has also found expression in Lagbaja's lyrics in his track *Me and You Nobi Enemy* (you and I are not enemies). Lagbaja muses over ethnic discrimination and preaches tolerance among the heterogeneous groups in Nigeria in order to foster a culture of peace. This becomes imperative when we reflect on the ethno-religious conflicts, especially in Northern Nigerian cities such as Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, Katsina, and more recently the city of Jos in Plateau state of Nigeria. For the musician struck by the orgy of violence in society, he raises philosophical and existentialist question that emphasize the need for Nigeria to live together as brothers and sisters' though they may be of different cultures and nationalities'. Using the refrain, '*We Are The Same Everybody Na Family*' (every body belongs to the same family), and *All Of Us Na The Same*' (we are all the same) he appeals for tolerance among various ethnic groups (e.g. Efic, Iteskiri, Housa, Fulani and Nupe to name a few) emphasizing the fact that they are the same family created by the same creator'. In relaying this message, Lagbaja takes a temporal overview of the situation. The music casts the audience back to the glorious past, in contrast to the present day inter-group hostilities:

Sebi we dey live together before	But we did live together before
Sebi we dey share together before	But we did share things in common before
We dey suffer together before	We did suffer together before

So far, Nigeria pop musicians have continued to critically contribute their talent towards the fight against social ills with a view to creating a better image and maintaining the social integrity of Nigeria. This they have achieved through the use of satire.

Conclusion

Popular music in Nigeria is not merely for entertainment but a vehicle for social commentaries, education and for reflecting and influencing the political life of Nigeria. Popular music in Nigeria is also cross-ethnic and inter-cultural, making use of poetry which mixes languages together. Nigerian popular musicians use a mixture of English, Nigerian languages and Pidgin English to sing, for effective and grass-root communication to achieve the desired goals.

Based on the contributions of Nigerian pop musicians so far, we can conclude that the text of popular music in Nigeria is very instrumental in communicating right attitudes and in promoting ideologies which help in influencing the socio-political opinion. Popular musicians in Nigeria creatively combine the capability of music in emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment and entertainment in order to forge ahead

the continuity and stability of Nigerian culture. Popular music is the voice and mirror of the Nigerian society. But one would ask this heart breaking question. What impact has these contributions of pop musicians made in the socio-political life of Nigeria as a nation. The researcher views it as unfortunate that the leadership class in Nigeria are very insensitive to the voice of reason, insensitive to the plight of the common man because they are seriously engulfed by the endemic social vise of corruption which is the root of all evils in the country. As a result, all the moral and prophetic messages of the inspired pop musicians appear to fall on deaf ears.

But one cannot conclude that the leadership is entirely insensitive to the critical views of the Nigerian pop musician. The open air reaction of president Obasanjo against Eadris Abdulkareem when he visited Aso Rock with the PMAN demonstrates that the music *Nigeria Jaga* caused the Nigerian leader some sleepless nights, followed by the next release- *Letter to Mr, President*. Consequently, who knows, the administration of Obasanjo came up with a policy-*War Against Corruption* resulting to the creation of EFCC as a powerful weapon to fight corruption in the country.

Pop Musicians in Nigeria should not relent in their self assigned roles in society while the country continues to wait for the *Messiah* who will definitely come when the time comes. They should therefore continually aspire towards this social effectiveness so that they can progressively serve the public as partners towards social change. They have been playing self-assigned roles in the theatre of politics. But their music and words stand above the thrust and counter-thrust of party politics. The stimulating effect of music in all this respect is overwhelming, for music reaches where mere words cannot, to the soul and mind, to reawaken the people's consciences and recapture fading values.

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