

Africanity and New Wave Popular Music Style in Nigeria: “Afro” Hip Hop Revisited¹

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Abstract: The concept of Africanity traverses many decades, being a socio-political ethos or cogitation perceived as manifest reaction against slavery and colonization. As a resistance mode, imbue ment of the Africanity philosophy has shaped people of African descent in the Diaspora and many post-slavery generations all over the world in maintaining their African roots identity. This paper examines the concept of Africanity in the 21st Century Africa, using the Nigerian popular music scene as a paradigm. Against the backdrop of the present mainstream Hip hop music style referred to as ‘Afro hip hop’, the study will use music and video analytical procedures with the objective of identifying the various media through which hip hop artistes project their Africanity. It is quite evident that music artistes still strive to maintain their African identity despite subscribing to a Western originated music style. This is made manifest through language use, nomenclature, message, visual projection, and sonic arrangement among other parameters.

Keywords: Africanity, Popular music, Hip hop, Music and identity, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The general notion of taking pride in the African roots heritage and being proud of black culture has been of paramount importance to African people in the continent and even more important to people of African descent in the diaspora. This concept traverses many decades, being a socio-political ethos or cogitation perceived as manifest reaction against slavery and colonization as the case may be, have always mutated under different appellations like “Pan-Africanism”, “Black Power Movement”, “Afrocentrism” and in this case “Africanity” all sharing the same principle of extolling and exhibiting the African identity in all ramifications.

The importance of culture in realizing the “Africanity” creed cannot be over-emphasized as culture is an important aspect of human existence, an embodiment of people’s belief system and guiding principles that bind them in terms of social, political and economic subjects. According to the Pan –African cultural manifesto of 1969 “Culture is the essential cement of every social group, its primary means of intercommunication and of coming to grip with the outside world, it is its soul, its materialization, and its capacity for change” (O.A.U.) This in essence is indicative of the fact that culture is the nucleus around which identity is built and to erase a man’s culture is to erase his identity. Therefore no African identity can be formulated neither can Africanity be projected by

Africans and people of African descent without the portrayal of the African culture.

Music being an expressive art and an incontestable conduit for cultural dispersal therefore makes it a fertile ground for identity formulation and in this instance an indispensable tool for the propagation of “Africanity”. In Nigeria the popular music scene is vibrant and dynamic parading various music styles and genre among which is hip hop- a product of global cultural flow. Hip hop enjoys greater acceptability and popularity among youths and the genre’s new wave artistes are now using its popularity and the vibrancy of the music industry to push their Nigerian identity agenda and express their Africanity to the fullest.

Background to Popular Music Scene in Nigeria

Popular music has generally been regarded as the type of music form or practice that is targeted towards audience satisfaction; it comes with crowd appeal and encompasses several styles. It is readily comprehensible to a large proportion of the population and its appreciation requires little or no knowledge of musical theory [1]. Popular music under different nomenclature has emerged in Nigeria over the years based on the above premise and process.

Scholars on Nigerian popular music studies have proposed two major lines of influences on the development of modern popular music in Nigeria thus: the Islamic influence and the Christian influence [2-6].

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The influence of Christianity aided the formulation of musical idiom like jùjú which borrowed greatly from the church choral music among other forms of syncretism. Likewise the influence of the Islamic religion gave birth to fújì music which evolved out of the Muslim *wéré* or *ajísààrì* Ramadan (fasting) music.

While these two lines of influences left indelible marks on the Nigerian music scene and resulted in the formation of most of its major popular music genres, it is also pertinent to take cognizance of a new factor that has changed the way Nigerians perceive and perform music: this is 'globalization', a precursor to the production or formation of different hybrids of music culture and sub-cultures among which is the booming Nigerian hip hop brand named "Afro hip hop".

In fact of various intercultural influences on the Nigerian music scene, one thing that is however discernable is that the country's popular music output still remains deeply rooted in the indigenous Nigerian tradition through appropriation by artists to project their cultural identity. The popular afrobeat music created by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti is a true exemplar of this notion while the popularity of hip hop music in Nigeria also gives credence to the capacity of artists in combining the local musical culture with foreign influence while still retaining a strong indigenous identity [7].

This experimentation and assimilation is noticeable in genre like jùjú which has combined the use of Yorùbá talking drum with Western instrumentations like guitar and keyboard to produce a perfect mix of entertainment music rich in Yorùbá oral text. The strong retention of Nigeria's cultural identity and tradition is also vivid in the mainstream hip hop, where the Yorùbá language, culture and music practice has been of tremendous influence. Franknel also opines that "while contemporary Nigerian rap is obviously aimed at an international audience, it is also clearly rooted in Nigerian culture [with] song titles and vernacular that regularly delve into pidgin English and local languages" (2006: 299).

Origin of Hip hop

The global influence of hip hop music and its accompanying urban cultural manifestation from America is undisputed, and this music form has found itself in the forefront in many countries. In Nigeria, youths find hip hop culturally attractive and its insurgence timely making them to embraced the genre as a major form of musical expression. Hip hop's origin is linked to the genesis of Rap which has been traced to The Bronx, an ethnic community in West New York where DJs developed the art of talking over sampled beats in a particular manner. The DJ or 'turntablist' [4] will provide the soundtracks with the latest rhythm while those that do the talking or rhyming on it are called the MC or Master of Ceremonies.

The greatest influence and pioneer of this art form is DJ Cool Herc a Jamaican migrant from Kingston who settled in the Bronx, New York and brought with him the Jamaican style of Dee-jaying, improvisation and chanting on the most current music, using popular sound instruments of the period with dexterity while combining two turntables [8]. Rap music thus, is the foundation on which hip hop is built while hip hop is a youth movement and culture which is multifaceted. It is therefore not unlikely that at times rap and hip hop are used interchangeably.

Rap music (albeit hip hop) is always domiciled on the street where itinerant DJs take sway with lyrics portraying everyday struggle of the average black American from a storytelling cum narrative procedure. Hip hop therefore come to represent the voice of African Americans and how they negotiate marginalization and socio-economic struggles .As summed up by Rose

[Hip hop] is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutality, truncated opportunity, and oppression within cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by post-industrial oppression and the binding ties of black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip hop. [9]

In terms of composition, hip hop is an amalgamation of musical styles from rap (its foundation) to rhythm and blues, to Jamaican dancehall, while the underpinning theme is the creation of a peculiar urban street culture which is broad extending from music to street arts of graffiti, fashion and sports.

Nigeria's "Afro" Hip hop

It is an undisputable fact that one of the major cultural exports from Nigeria today apart from Nollywood is music and the genre is Hip hop. This is indexed through the arrays of artistes that can be termed as the country's hip hop ambassadors representing Nigeria's cultural identity on the national, continental and international scene. There have been a lot of mentions, awards and recognition in Africa and on the international scene for these players indicating the influence Nigeria's hip hop is having on the global popular music scene.

The emergence and evolution of hip hop on the Nigerian music scene from the late 1980's has attracted a lot of scholarly documentations [10-15] to mention a few. These scholarly writings supported that Nigerian youths embraced the genre back then in order to find

their own voice, tell their own stories and hopefully effect a change in the country's socio-political climate. Globalization played an important role in exposing youths to the music while the harsh economic condition and unfavorable political climate from the late 1990s upwards fueled the determination of youths to find in hip hop an avenue for self-expression and a voice with which to depict the realities of their time. This is well captured in the track 'Questions and Answers' by Sound Sultan one of the pioneer Hip hop artistes in Nigeria.

Here the artist assumed the voice of the voiceless: the youths and posed serious question to the sitting president thus:

Na only one question we wan ask Mr Oga oh
(*I have on question to ask the boss*)
When E go better for all the youths wey de
Naija Oh
(*When will the situation change for better in
Nigeria?*)
No time for face to face we no happy oh
(*We are not happy about not engaging youths
in dialogue*)
Dem no send us and no want us for society
oh...
(*it looks like we are not wanted in the society*)
Why? Why?
He queried Further:
Tell me when we go dey get light constantly
oh
(*When are we going to have un-interrupted
power supply?*)
And police go turn to my best friend oh
(*When can I truly call the police my friend?*)
When will our economy grow
Is there a future for the poor? This we need to
know
Why be say our country no stable?
(*Why is our country not stable?*)
Why we go dey work and no food for our
table...
(*Why are people working and cannot afford to
feed themselves?*)
Why...Why...

Nigeria's hip hop during the earliest period was seen as mere imitation of its American version in terms of sonic arrangement and linguistic affiliation. This factor militated against its acceptance at the onset as most people seem not to understand the music due to its over Americanization. Players that later came on board transformed the genre, re-branded and re-defined it in the African parlance and re-territorialized the music to reflect the Nigerian identity through language, performance and visual projection. This signaled the birth of the sub-culture aptly named "Afro hip hop"

This 'new' hip hop portrays a lot of peculiarities and the earliest exposure of the Nigerian audience to this was through "Sakomo" (1998), a song in Yorùbá with a blend of English on a sampled beat of MC Lyte's 'Keep on keeping on' by a group called Remedies consisting of the trio of Tony Tetuila, Eedris Abdulkareem and Eddy Brown. The success of this song as a radio release with the later release of a full album by Kennis Music paved the way for what was to be a redefining factor of Nigeria's music industry and the consolidation of the unique style of afro-hip hop that is fully Nigerianised which is now being taken to higher level by the crop of the new wave players in the field like Olamide, Wizkid, Phyno, Reminisce to mention a few.

It is interesting to note that the whole concept of Afro hip hop thrives on the Africanity ideology in its entire ramification as with African ideology culturally projected through indigenous language use and syncretism of existing traditional music style to produce a hybrid sound, among other factors to be discussed in the next section. Hip hop as a global cultural form presents a lot of possibilities for music hybridization, which the Nigerian artists have been able to explore to the fullest. Through their dynamism they have been able to tap into the country's cultural heritage to mould out and negotiate for their Africanity by amalgamating hip hop with other musical forms like fuji, juju and highlife to create a cross-over form which now drives the present Afro-hip hop subculture [16].

Nigerian artists in the diaspora also identify with this trend as portrayed in the lyrics of UK based JJC and the 419 Crew in songs like 'Gba O' (2002) and 'Ki-lonsele' (2003) and also until recently, US Based El Dee in 'Bo si Gbangba' (2008). Perhaps this notion and the entire Afro hip hop concept has been well summed up by one of its formidable players Sound Sultan: To him 'Afro hip hop plays more on the "Afro" part... [and as] Nigerians you have to represent where you come from and "Afro" defines Africa' [17].

Afro-Hip-hop and the Manifestations of Africanity

In order to isolate the concept of Africanity in the new wave hip hop, several manifestations have been observed as afro hip hop's unique peculiarities. These are as follows:

Nomenclature

The system of naming is an important aspect of the African culture, while national identities have been successfully portrayed in history through name choice or nomenclature. When the late Afrobeat legend Fela Anikulapo-Kuti became immersed in the Pan-Africanist ideology and wanted to steer his erstwhile highlife dependent music style towards total emancipation of Africa from Neo-Colonization he started with a name change. He re-christened himself

'Fela Anikulapo-Kuti" jettisoning his earliest family name of 'Ransome-Kuti". He extended this further by re-branding his music with the name "Afrobeat" which till date has been one of the most formidable messages driven Afrocentric music genres to have originated from Africa.

In this same vein the Nigerian hip hop players are now asserting their cultural independence by adding the prefix "Afro" to hip hop which in a nut shell now defines the hip hop sound emanating from Africa. This of course is followed by other African oriented peculiarities infused into the genre as discussed further in this paper.

Music Syncretism and Hybridization

Popular music has always been a fertile ground for experimentation and syncretism. The effect of globalization has been indelible in most third world nations where Euro-American culture is somehow dominating the local cultures in a hegemonic fashion. In most situations hybridization has been handy as a negotiating tool employed by stakeholders in the popular culture industries to ensure their home front relevance and also assert a global presence. "Afro Hip hop" is a product of hybridization, a cross-over between the American rap genre and the Nigerian traditional music style heavily laden with indigenous linguistic orature.

Afro Hip hop has successfully synchronized existing neo-traditional popular music cultures like juju, fuji, and highlife making the product flexible, fashionable and most importantly "Africanised". This is evidenced in the releases of new wave Nigerian hip hop where the rhythmic contour and sonic reverberation always progress seamlessly between fuji, highlife or juju pattern in a synchronized fashion as typified in songs like "Woju"- Kiss Daniel (2015), "Connect" – Phyno (2014), "Ojuelegba"– Wizkid (2015), "Daddy" Reminisce (2015), "Ovation" –Tiwa Savage (2016), "Abulesowo" –Olamide (2016) among others.

Language use

Language which is basically a means of communication is also an important vehicle for cultural assimilation which undisputedly makes language very cogent whenever identity is to be fostered or formulated. In the past language or linguistics have been deployed as a tool of colonization where Africans have been made to act and speak as either British or French through the imperial imposition of either English or French language on the continent, the effect of which still exists today.

In the same vein language, in this instance the Nigerian mother tongue(s) is now being re-invented as a weapon for assertion of Africanity, thus creating a unique identity which is wholesomely African through a

blend of Nigerian languages: (Yoruba, Igbo,) Nigerian pidgin and standard English in what language scholars termed code-switching [12]. A typical example of code-switching is in the hit song "Woju" where the artist successfully combined Nigerian Pidgin (in italics), Yoruba (in bold), Igbo (underlined) and some standard English as follows:

*No be you I carry come,
Na you I dey carry go,
Sisi Agbarigo Ahh low waist
No be you I dey Check on
But na you I wanna Know
Sisi Ferrari Oh Low Waist*

Baby Good, Baby Nice
Baby do me do me
Odikwa tight (Odikwa tight)
Sho' mo pe o sexy
Ma lo robo ya iro ni
Otun mo pe o de wa pa
O wa fe ma buga si emi
Oya Woju O Woju O.....

It should also be noted that while code-switching is a striking feature of Afro Hip hop giving it more acceptability and popularity some artistes have actually taken it further by performing hip hop fully in their mother tongues and undiluted. They include rappers like 9ice, Lord of Ajasa (in Yoruba), Nigga Raw and Phyno (in Igbo) among others.

The Message

Music as an expressive art and important conduit of communication has a tremendous impact in influencing public opinions or beliefs. The central idea of a song in which the audience takes in is the message, which is coded in themes and transmitted via recordings or performances. In hip hop this is passed across in narratives created in a sequential and constructive manner often describing or unfolding an event.

The Nigerian Afro hip hop sub-culture is constantly reinforcing its subscription to the African ideology through direct messages from its players from time to time. In 2007 Ruggedman decided to make a statement about the need for rappers to 'Keep it Real' and he took a stance about the importance of mother tongue as a vital weapon for rappers to use in asserting their African heritage. In "Ruggedy Baba" he declared:

Wetin go let them know
(What would make people know)
Where your music comes from in the long run
Is the fusion of grammar
Your slang and your mother tongue
His acolyte 9ice supported by saying:
...Spit more in your mother tongue
Till the people say
They want more
He emphasized further:

I go only ask what is “keeping it real”?
Is it singing or rapping like ‘oyinbo’
[i.e,westerners]
Or doing what you or your own people can
feel?
[that is rapping in your mother tongue]
(Ruggedy Baba , 2007)

Popular music in the 21st century is fast becoming a digital multimedia fanfare where the importance of visual projection cannot be over-emphasized, This have put artists under a lot of pressure regarding how they project their image and music visually through music videos. Apart from its basic functionality of interpreting the song visually music video is fast becoming an avenue to project identity, initiate a movement or advance a philosophy.

Visualization



Fig-1: Ruggedy Baba in the Yoruba Kabiyesi attire in “Ruggedy Baba” music video



Fig-2: Olamide in “Abulesowo” Video (Left in Dashiki and Right in Agbada with dancers in Iro and Buba,)

Afro hip hop artistes in Nigeria are using this new media to represent Africa and project their Afrocentric ideology to the fullest. This is fully projected through costume or rather fashion statement, whereby most of these artists now put the Nigerian

traditional attires in their videos as opposed to western apparels. Typical example is the “Ruggedy Baba” music video of 2007 where the artiste used the Yoruba traditional setting and costume to fully corroborate the message of the song. [16].



Fig-3: Dr Sid and Don Jazzy in “Surulere” Video fully clad in Agbada attire

This trend that is becoming a norm is further visible in other music videos like Dr Sid “Surulere” (2014), Reminisce “Daddy” [25] and Olamide “Abulesowo” [24] among others. This has also been extended to stage performances where rappers whose

appearances are always typified with baseball hats, jeans and Timberland boots can now be seen appearing on stage in three piece Yoruba traditional agbada dress in recent times.



Fig-4: Reminisce (holding the mic) in “Daddy” music video clad in Aso Ofi and the rest also in various native attires

Summary

Colonization has drastically changed the African psychological landscape, politically and socio-economically. Many years of slavery and colonization with its daunting effects is not easy to erase on the African psyche. Post-colonial Africa has to contend with situations that require negotiating a balance between inherited cultures as a result of colonization and the authentic homegrown culture, which now makes Africa a fertile ground for hybridization as

visibly manifested in the language use, religion, belief system, dressing and music among others.

In the midst of these cultural complications, coupled with the latest globalization concept, the paper has demonstrated how the post-colonial Nigerian hip hop artistes now use the sub-culture of “afro hip hop” to negotiate for the advancement of the African culture and the need to maintain the African roots identity especially with the seemingly Euro-American cultural

hegemony. These are the ventures and belief of Sound Sultan, Olamide, Ruggedman and Reminisce among others in their hip hop music.

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Music video stills.