

Nigerian Music Resources in Cultural Expressions and Identity Construction

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Abstract

This paper explores the profound Nigerian music resources in cultural expressions and identity construction. By analyzing the Nigerian music resources in cultural expressions, prominent Nigerian hip hop artists, the study highlights how artists like Davido, gice, and Tuface utilize Nigerian Pidgin and local dialects such as Yoruba to forge a distinct cultural and national identity. These artists not only celebrate their linguistic heritage but also leverage it as a form of resistance against linguistic and cultural imperialism, promoting a nationalist ideology that resonates deeply with their local audience. The paper argues that the incorporation of vernacular language in Nigerian hip-hop goes beyond mere artistic choice; it serves as a critical tool for social and political commentary. This linguistic strategy enables artists to address and critique socio-economic inequalities and political issues, making hip-hop a voice for the marginalized. Moreover, the study sheds light on how the use of local dialects and pidgin enhances the accessibility and reliability of the music, thereby strengthening the bond between artists and their audiences in cultural expression. This exploration into the intersection of language, identity, and ideology in Nigerian hip-hop not only enriches our understanding of the genre's cultural significance but also underscores the dynamic role of language in shaping artistic and social landscapes. The paper contributes to broader discourses on language policy, cultural expression, and identity politics within the global context of hip-hop.

I. Introduction

Music-making is necessarily a cultural performance because conventions about the structure of music, its instrumentation, context of performance, and meaning are all learned. Music-making is a system of communication transmitted through ongoing transgenerational interaction. Nigerian music stands as a significant aspect of the country's cultural heritage. It reflects the diversity of its people. Each region and ethnic group contributes uniquely to Nigeria's rich musical tapestry. The vibrant beats and rhythms tell stories of history, identity, and tradition.

Nigeria's music is a rich blend of indigenous and modern influences. Traditional instruments like the talking drum, shekere, and udu create unique sounds. These

instruments have been used for centuries, passed down through generations. They provide a connection to the past and a sense of identity. Modern Nigerian music incorporates elements from various global genres, creating a dynamic and evolving soundscape.

Music has the power to bring people together and bridge cultural divides in a way that few other things can. It has the ability to transcend language barriers and connect people from different backgrounds and cultures through the universal language of sound. Music plays an extensive role in shaping and sustaining culture. Additionally, music provides a good avenue and resources for the disbursement of cultural restraints and distributions of symbolism – a very important factor in the development of cultures. With the increased level of diffusion of culture now being experienced globally, cultural identification comes in handy in achieving the nexus between cultural development and global sophistication. Any coinage of the phrase 'global culture' is only apt through the various pools of cultural signs and themes, of which music contributes significantly.

Consequently, the expressive role of music in identity construction becomes crucial in any contemporary inquiry. Nigeria's kaleidoscopic culture accounts for cultural diversity in the country. Signposted by over 250 ethnic communities, Nigeria's need for national unity, collective consciousness, cultural settings, and identity is pressing. Its Yerwa cultural ethos, encompassing the multi-ethnic Borno community, is the trouble-shooter among other cultural expressions and practices. Many have argued about the cumulative effect of music in forging nations in terms of shared musical traits and practices. On the contrary, the distinction music engenders among groups and communities in identity formation are unassailable in the scholarly discourse of music as a vehicle for identity. This paper argues from an interpretative perspective and through the medium of horology.

Historical Overview of Nigerian Music

In the 1920s, highlife and palm-wine music - the first forms of Nigerian popular music commonly known as Naija music - spread throughout Nigeria and the neighboring nations of Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Nigeria is where juju music originated. Nigerian music has a rich history that dates back centuries and is closely linked to the country's cultural and social practices. Here are some highlights of Nigerian music history:

Traditional Music

Traditional Nigerian music was often used for functional purposes, such as marking rituals like weddings or funerals, or to motivate workers in the fields.

Highlife

Highlife originated in Ghana in the late 19th century and spread to western Nigeria in the 1950s. It was transformed in Nigeria with asymmetrical drum rhythms and syncopated guitar melodies.

Juju

Juju music emerged as a popular Yoruba genre in the early 1920s. Some of Nigeria's first musical stars included Tunde King and Irewolede Denge.

Fuji

Fuji music was pioneered by Alhaji Sikiru Ayinde Barrister in the late 1960s. He made the genre mainstream appealing with songs like "Bisimilahi" (1977) and "Ile Aiye Dun Pupo/Love in Tokyo (India Sound)" in 1976.

Fela Kuti

Fela Kuti was instrumental in the adoption of Jazz and Afrobeat. He used his platform to address political issues, as seen in songs like "Monsters You Made" and "Collateral Damage".

Afrobeats

Afrobeats is a contemporary style that takes cues from past styles. Artists like Burna Boy, Wizkid, Tiwa Savage, and Davido have collaborated with major international stars like Drake, Beyoncé, and Ed Sheeran.

Identity Construction in Nigerian Music

The process of forming and altering one's identity through music is known as identity building. In addition to helping people build their sense of identity, music can help them express their ideas, feelings, and social interactions. Nigerian music plays a profoundly significant role in cultural expression and identity construction. Here is a breakdown of how it functions:

Key Roles of Nigerian Music

Cultural Preservation

Traditional Nigerian music forms, with their diverse rhythms, instruments, and lyrical content, serve as repositories of cultural heritage. They transmit historical narratives, social values, and spiritual beliefs across generations.

Folksongs, for example, often contain moral lessons, historical accounts, and social commentary, thus educating and shaping cultural understanding.

Identity Formation

Music acts as a powerful marker of ethnic and regional identity. Different ethnic groups in Nigeria possess distinct musical styles, which reinforce their sense of belonging and cultural uniqueness.

Contemporary Nigerian music, especially genres like Afrobeats and hip-hop, often incorporates indigenous languages and cultural references, allowing artists and listeners to express their Nigerian identity in a modern context.

Social and Political Commentary

Nigerian musicians frequently use their art to address social and political issues, such as inequality, corruption, and injustice. Music becomes a vehicle for expressing dissent, raising awareness, and advocating for change.

This role has been evident throughout Nigeria's history, with musicians playing crucial roles in social movements and political discourse.

Linguistic Expression

The use of Nigerian languages, including Pidgin English and various indigenous dialects, in music is a vital aspect of cultural expression. This linguistic diversity not only enriches the musical landscape but also serves as a form of cultural resistance against linguistic imperialism.

National Unity

Despite its diversity, Nigerian music also contributes to a sense of national unity. Popular music genres, such as Afrobeats, have gained widespread popularity across ethnic and regional boundaries, fostering a shared cultural experience.

Factors that contribute to this:

Vernacular Language

The use of local languages in music strengthens cultural identity, e.g. Duncan Mighty that uses both Pidgin English language and Ikwerre dialect to perform Ahamefuna.

Musical Styles

The wide variety of musical styles from traditional to modern, allows for many different forms of cultural expression.

Social Commentary

Nigerian music has a long history of being used to comment on social and political issues. In essence, Nigerian music is a dynamic and multifaceted force that reflects and shapes the nation's cultural landscape.

Music and National Identity in Nigeria

Music served as a tool for communication, education, and the preservation of cultural identity. Traditional instruments such as the talking drum, udu (a clay pot drum), goje (a type of stringed instrument), and shekere (gourd shaker) played essential roles in the spiritual and communal lives of many Nigerian societies. It is an important part of Nigerian life and culture, and plays a significant role in shaping national identity:

Cultural Identity

Music is a powerful tool for preserving and communicating cultural identity in Nigeria. It's woven into many aspects of life, from birth to death, and is used to accompany important events like marriage, childbirth, and funerals. Music can also be used to teach cultural values to other cultures.

Political Identity

Music is a tool for political communication and cultural expression in Nigeria. Campaign songs can bring people together, amplify their voices, and make the political process more inclusive.

National Unity

Music can be used to promote national unity in Nigeria. Contemporary Nigerian musicians could explore incorporating diverse ethnic languages and musical instruments into their work to help bring their messages to different ethnic groups.

Musical Nationalism

Musical nationalism is the use of musical ideas, rhythms, harmonies, and folk tunes to identify with a specific country, region, or ethnicity. Some examples of Nigerian music styles include:

Naija Music: The earliest styles of Nigerian popular music, including palm-wine music and highlife.

Juju music: A style created in Nigeria

Apala: A style derived from traditional Yoruba music

Waka music: A new style that emerged in the last few decades of the 20th century.

Yo-pop: A new style that emerged in the last few decades of the 20th century.

Afrobeat: A new style that emerged in the last few decades of the 20th century.

Music as a Tool for Cultural Expressions

Music surely gives us relevant information about a particular culture through its instruments, instrument makers and the lyrics. Music is the expression of culture, a culture that values money and materialism will express this through music by the glorification of these items etc.

Erhiegueke (2020) opines that music has been a part of man's existence from the beginning. As a result it is often said that music is as old as man. Music coexists with man in numerous forms and its functionality is multi-faceted. Man has found a way to include music in almost every human activity as every culture has peculiar ways of making music to suit their occupation, environment and experiences. A culture's inspiration for music making is therefore drawn from its environment, its people's experience and ideas. p. 260.

Nigerian music is one of the cultural indices that make Nigerians Nigeria. It is a cultural identity that has to do with singing, playing of instruments, dancing and use of various artifacts. Music, over the ages, "has proved to be one of the indispensable arts cultivated by man for growth, nurture and transfer of his institution and value to future generations" (Vidal 2002:2). According to Bikeway (2009), the growth and development of any nation depend to a large extent on the ability of its citizens to harness its naturally imbued resources as well as putting into good use other man-made features, skills, and talents.

A cultural policy is a body of operational principles and administrative and budgetary practices which form the basis of cultural action or non-action by the state. Thus a cultural policy would facilitate or impede the management rational selection and determination of cultural programmes with emphasis on specific areas of government participation (Okafor, 2004: 29). A National cultural policy is generally regarded as an instrument of promotion of national identity and Nigerian unity as well as of communication and cooperation among different Nigerian or African cultures, while the federal states' cultural polices stand for the affirmation and development of a particular ethnic cultures.

Music and National Identity in Nigeria

Music has always served as one very potent media and symbol, through which cultures are identified. Music cannot be defined and appreciated outside the context from which it is created, costumed, taught and performed. This therefore means that music is associated with a given culture, and can therefore not exist in isolation, but bearing the identity of a given culture. This musical identity can further be tied to different social events within a given culture. Its functionality is multifaceted, and can perform various roles in culture (Erhiegueke, 2023).

Music can also be said to be intertwined with culture, as every culture employs available materials in its music making. These materials can include both tangible and intangible materials which intertwine with each other to create music. One of the intangible materials of culture which is an ever present component of music is language.

Language and music are interwoven, and are constantly allowing alterations of themselves, to accommodate the other (Erhiegueke, 2023).

Language is a vital device employed by people in the social portrayal of everyday life (Rahim, 2008 cited in Aboh, 2013). Therefore, language is a social process. From time to time, language users articulate and reproduce their identities and ideological leanings. Every language, regardless of its status: first language, second language, vernacular language, goes a long way in describing who we are. When people speak, the listeners can make conjectures about age, place of origin, level of education, etc. Aside from the language revealing details about an individual, language can symbolize national and ethnic identity. In the construction of identity, language plays a critical role.

Identity is a set of distinctiveness that defines an individual or a group and language is a formidable channel for this distinctiveness (Ogungbemi, 2023). For instance, if Nigerians meet one another outside the shores of the country, they may in addition to using their mother tongue, if they share the same mother tongue, use the Nigerian English or Nigerian Pidgin. When this happens, we have an instance of collective identity. Auer (2007: 1) describes collective identity as the “discourse of languages as the natural reflexes of national identities.” The notion that collective identities and languages are intertwined is a highly rated concept of modernity which is profoundly in language ideologies. Proponents of this idea firmly believe that every collectivity forms its identity using its language. Hence, the extensive vernacularization and indigenization of Nigerian hip hop music point radically to the legitimization of a Nigerian identity. A big implication of this is that the existence of collectivities, such as nations and ethnic or social groups is believed to be social and ideological constructs which rely on language as opposed to genetics, ancestry or birth (Aboh, 2013). Further, there is social identity. Here, individuals rely on the instrumentalities of language to identify with people considered as members of their group. People feel free to associate with others with whom they speak the same language.

Over the years, Nigerian hip-hop has functioned as a site for expressing and contesting identities. It is a platform for self-expression and discovery. Like other platforms of knowledge as Gates (1994: 11), music is “one of the sites for contest and negotiation, self-fashioning and refashioning.” Songs can serve as a conduit to sexual, social and national identities. Through the language of delivery, which is often a combination of Nigerian pidgin and an artist’s mother tongue, the hip-hop movement in Nigeria can be said to have a truly Nigerian trademark.

II. Theoretical Framework

The Traditional Igbo Society was not a literate one but we had our culture, traditions and music before the coming of the Europeans. In the olden days Igbo people did not derive entertainment from books; rather they developed and derived joy from imaginations through oral narratives including traditional/folk music. Specifically according to Emenyonu (1978) he said; Igbo oral tradition or folklore (oral performance) is the foundation of the Traditional Igbo music. Igbo oral performance include such as folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, prayer including incantations, histories, legends, myths, drama, oratory (forensic and others) and festivals from these grow the roots of Igbo life, its culture and its worldview...Traditional Igbo music reflects the inner characteristics of our culture, beliefs, philosophies and world view. The young

generation of the Igbo society learns to appreciate the basic ideas of life, their people's fundamental values, and their system of personal relationship and their sense of humour through folksongs. Through folksongs, emotion and feelings are expressed or elevated after the days hard work in the evenings. Thus, it is a veritable instrument for education which invariably influences the younger generation for positive change in life and fit into the society. Hence Okafor (1989) observes that women are the first music teachers because they teach children by singing lullaby and folksongs to pacify and they learn by intuition. To Egonu (2009), music represents anything that is sung, chanted, danced or chorused to project the aesthetics of the human mind. It demands one's cognitive ability, elevates the spirit into a state of ecstatic/nostalgic consciousness leading to a feeling of joy, anger, pity and kindness. Music brings healing to the soul, makes one sober to reflect on the issues of life. This is one of the art forms through which young indigenes are initiated into the society, prepared for adulthood, social responsibility, job orientation, political participation in leadership roles as well as for moral values.

III. Conclusion

The study has paid attention to how vernacular language including Nigerian pidgin, mother tongue, creates and maintains identities, and how the choice of the Nigerian culture is used in communication through music. Vernacular language is a weapon for inclusion, that is, it affords the hip-hop artists the opportunity to include their teeming fans who are mainly youth. The discussion of Nigerian music resources in cultural expression and identity construction shows how effective the language has become in creating a bond that is beyond ethnic and cultural strictures and a tool to effectively transform the society. The discussion of slang expressions reveals that slang words are not deviant expressions, but they are weapons for legitimising identities. Discussing language ideology, we submit that the processes of language choice in Nigerian hip-hop reveals unequivocal and concealed language ideologies which comprise people's beliefs and interests about the use of language in social life. It is through traditional music that the young ones learn to appreciate the basic ideas of life their people's fundamental values, their system of personal relationships and their sense of humour.

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