

CHAPTER 29

POPULAR MUSIC, A TOOL FOR POLITICAL INCLUSION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Popular music has strongly gained acceptance across the varied ethnicity of Nigeria as more people clamour for it irrespective of their cultural background. Music and politics are one of the most common activities generally shared among the population in Nigeria. Popular music in Nigeria is intricately interwoven with development issues and if properly channelled can be a dynamic and highly charged force that influences the politics in Nigeria. Popular music can easily be used to create political inclusion as the fan base of popular music artists cuts across various ethnic and political divides. As can be seen with a 25-year-old popular music artiste, Naira Marley who started the "Marlian" brand in 2019 which has now grown beyond just a brand but now a lifestyle among the Nigerian youth populace. The followers of this popular music artiste now identify themselves as "Marlians" and distinguish themselves from other Nigerians therefore, creating a unique identity for themselves across Nigeria. This could be the beginning of a political movement if the artiste gives his support to any political party, as his followers are bound to do the same. It also provides the basis that popular music can be used for political inclusion in Nigeria. Thus, the author seeks to determine how popular music can help create an avenue for political inclusion in Nigeria.

Keywords: Popular Music, Political Inclusion, Development, Music Artiste.

Introduction

Music is a communicative culture and its power of communication cannot be over-emphasized. Dorothy et al note that music as a communicative art provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings. (Dorothy et al. 2012) Since instrumental structures are

closely related to the music-phonological structures of the song, both instrumental and local music perform communicative functions. Music in this sense is conceived as an integral part of the oral mode of communication. Some distinctive factors affect the choice or the type of music listened to. This includes too much parental control or lack of it and this often has been identified as one of the causes of unacceptable behaviour patterns. Obayan (1991) reiterates that "perceived maternal acceptance/ rejection is significantly related to positive or negative emotional stability". The popular music scene in Nigeria seems to be enjoying so much publicity and patronage. The reason is quite obvious; popular music has been seen both as a form of entertainment and a means of propagating and integrating the right values in the community. Popular music is a music genre that encompasses several styles of music that is readily comprehensible to a large proportion of the population. Its appreciation requires little or no knowledge of musical theory or techniques (Glenon, 1980).

We listen to music consciously and unconsciously because music is prevalent all the time around us and our listening opportunities are numerous. Social activities (funerals, marriage, naming ceremonies, festivals and court music (music played to entertain the king in his palace) also provide opportunities to listen to music. An individual who enjoys the music he hears is at least passing through the process of soaking it up or imbibing it in time. He/she may translate the experience and react in some overt way (Abiodun, 2017). This becomes a social challenge. While in some, strong rhythmic content may arouse emphatic gestures and in others, the reaction may be passive or active. Definite measurement in terms other than those of factual information is a difficult task and there are no accurate means of measuring the inner response of individual listeners other than the information elicited from respondents. Information relating to culture, identity, and moral and emotional (psychological) issues can also be derived from the song texts (Abiodun, 2017).

Music and Self Identity

Music of all times apart from the emotional gratification it gives has some concern for the development of our moral life. It is an agent of social change with the ability to see through the social circumstance of the time in question. Idowu (1986) describes the behaviour problem of the adolescent student as norm violation and deviation from age-appropriate behaviour which interferes with the student's growth and development. He equally identifies its causal agents as heightened anxiety, nervous disorder, psychosis and socio-economic status which in this case may be as a result of music listened to. Attitudes shown after listening to some form of music may be a result of emotional responses which may be physical, intellectual or imaginative. Attitudes are relatively synonymous with emotions.

Music and Emotional Inclusion

Music elicits some level of emotion in every human being once it is listened to. These emotions are expressed via feelings of affection or acceptance and create some form of fondness between

the listener and the music artist. This act is referred to as emotional responsiveness. Rohmer (1980) defines emotional responsiveness as an ability to express emotions like feelings of warmth, affection and other positive emotions freely and openly. This emotional responsiveness creates a virtual relationship between the listener and the music artist which in turn leads to followership. Nonetheless, the ability to be creative is innate and listening to music may set off a chain reaction of creativity in the mind and emotions of the listener. Seashore (1988) observes that: 'The bearing of music is a response to a stimulus. The idea and feelings which constitute the response are the creation of the listener in his own image' (Seashore, 1988). Here, the response of the listener to the effect of the music he listened to creates an imaginary relationship between the listener, the music and the music artist. More so, it creates an avenue where the listener adores everything done by the music artist as his kind of music relates very well to him.

Andrews (1953) listed four main classifications of the listeners' responses. In this study, these four types are adopted and used for measuring responses from music listened to (a) emotional response often brought about through the establishment of a mood (state of mind and feelings); (b) physical response through the listener's reaction in term of bodily movement (dance); (c) intellectual response through the ability to analyze the parts of the music and develop technical knowledge (structural appraisal); (d) imaginative response through the ability to project into music in terms of creative ability (music making).

Music and Politics

Music is an art form that uses harmonious sound or acoustic signals to communicate its messages. Throughout history, people have used music to send messages that may be difficult to convey by word of mouth or through other means. Chandra (2010) acknowledges that music is a form of entertainment for people's relaxation and amusement. According to Ligeti (1978) "it is equally true that music in itself does not oppress; neither is it democratic nor anti-democratic. To be sure, certain definite injustices are subject to political criticism in their relation to musical society." In other words, music on its own is neutral until people apply it to achieve democratic or non-democratic purposes.

Music and politics are often associated. Street, Hague and Savigny (2008) support this view with their observation that music and politics have long been connected. Onyebadi (2017) affirms that music is a platform for political communication. Political music can be commentaries on political subjects, music appealing to factional sentiments or even those advocating for particular political actions. Some may explicitly address specific political subjects. In their study, Weglarz and Pedelty (2013) found that political activists write lyrics, speak up in public and support political movements, for political activism using what they termed political rock as opposed to mindless party rock music.

Music may evoke contentment, satisfaction and pride in the minds of the listener. It may be an assumption that music has the power to sway listeners to do either good or bad. Nevertheless, it offers a channel for political communication. The desire to share political beliefs through music is not new.

Naira Marley and the Marlian Ideology

“Naira Marley” is a twenty-five-year-old Nigerian musician. His musical genre is described as “Afrobeat”, although it would appear more appropriate to label it “African Rap”. Naira Marley's real name is Azeez Fashola. He was born in Agege, a suburb of Lagos that has grown into a densely populated, essentially proletarian city in its own right. He moved to Peckham, a troubled heavily black neighbourhood of London, at the age of eleven, and spent several years there before returning to Nigeria (Business Day, 2020).

Naira Marley has a huge fan base. They call themselves “Marlins”. They are a rambunctious presence anywhere he performs. They revel in being “outsiders”, and as a trademark, they are disrespectful of rules and agents of law enforcement. But the controversial musician's escapades are nothing compared to the alarm occasioned by the cult-like following he seems to be acquiring among the young, not just in the heavily populated poor neighbourhoods where his motor park, the street language with its many slangs is the accepted medium of communication, but the event in the well-heeled circles of Ikoyi and Victoria Island (Business Day, 2020).

The craze of proudly pronouncing themselves “Marlians” and damning the consequence is spreading through schools and neighbourhoods among teenagers and young adults, and it has left many parents scratching their heads. The defining attributes of Marlians are roughly said to include the following: “NO MANAZ” – any effort to behave like “decent” youth is frowned upon; No Belt: Marlians would not be caught dead wearing a belt on their trousers; Smoke Weed, and perhaps use other drugs of abuse, such as “Coke” and Tramadol; Respect nobody; Eager to go clubbing every weekend; Crazy hairstyle – dreadlocks or scruffy; Don't fear anything, even death (MAFO); Must love Naira Marley's music and be ready to stand up for him; Not to pay excessive attention to studies (most “Marlians” are students); Strong focus on sex, including masturbation (Business Day, 2020).

How Popular Music can be used to create political Inclusion: The Marlian Case Study

Music in all its ramifications at all levels apart from the entertainment it offers performs a function and is concerned with the development of a complete being. Practitioners and consumers of music are culturally bound to exhibit certain reasonable socio-cultural behaviour accepted within the social constraint of Nigerian society.

a. Music Artist

With the wide acceptance of popular music among the youthful population across Nigeria, singers of popular music can become a reliable channel for creating a platform for political inclusion among the vibrant youthful population in Nigeria. Especially, a popular music artist who is a strong advocate for political fairness and inclusion can easily create this platform that will encourage political inclusion. For example, a popular music artist by the name of Banky W who contested for state house of assembly elections in Lagos State had the greatest number of votes from his followers who believed that if he is elected, he will speak for them in the house of

assembly. This created a form of political inclusion as his followers believed that having him in the house of assembly was a way they could speak their minds to the government of the State. More so, the image of a music artist goes beyond what he/she sings. It also encompasses what he/she believes and stands for. The belief of these music artists is what their followers tend to imbibe. This is possible because the music artist is using both his music as well as his brand to project a message to the public. This message is received by those it is appealing to. Once this happens, these people begin to relate to the message from the artist and tend to make it their reality. They start identifying themselves where ever they find themselves. This is observed among the fan base of Naira Marley. For an artiste to use his platform to create some form of political inclusion, he/she must project his/her political ideals then, those to which these ideals appeal to will identify with the artist thereby creating a fan base based on these ideals.

B. Song content (Lyrics)

One of the challenges affecting the political scene in Nigeria is the issue of identity. Every citizen is looking for a platform that allows them to be identified and the easiest platform for that has been popular music. The musical lyrics of some popular music artist project how they feel about Nigeria. It serves as a platform where their voices can be heard through the musical lyrics of a such artist who sings the song. These people devote their time and attention to these music artists because the lyrical contents of their music relate easily to their daily lives. This relationship creates a cult-like followership for such music artists.

In the case of Naira Marley, his followers believe that Nigeria is a lawless society as such, they can afford to behave lawlessly. The lyrics of the songs sung by the Naira Marley promote lawlessness, promiscuity, sex, drugs, etc. among his fan base which resulted in the name "marlian" meaning they have no manners nor conform to obey the laws of the land.

For instance, the song by African China titled, "*Mr President*" gained wide acceptance among popular music fans in Nigeria because the artist was actually singing about the prevailing conditions in Nigeria and he goes further to ask the government to do better for the people. It was observed that the content (lyrics) of the song was widely accepted across the popular music fan base because everyone was able to relate to the message being passed across to the government by the artist. This was an empirical example that popular music can create a platform for political inclusion when there is a shared purpose, ideals, situations, etc.

Another artist by the name, Falz, sang a song titled, "*This is Nigeria*". The lyrics of the song narrated the daily trauma faced by Nigerians and the government's irresponsibility in addressing these issues. However, the government felt that the song had a too much-uncensored statements in it and they banned the song. Among the Nigerian populace, the song narrated the daily ordeals Nigerians were going through and the people easily related to the content of the song. While these lyrics were not promoting political inclusion, they, however, showed that Nigerians will clamour for any opportunity they get to voice out their concerns even if it will be through the lyrics of a song sung by an artist.

There is clear evidence from the foregoing that, if the lyrical contents of popular music by music artists can focus on how to promote the younger generation's participation in politics and what they stand to offer in the politics of Nigeria, it will generate a cult-like followership that can be transformed to a political identity. Thus, fostering political inclusion.

Conclusion

Music has always been a tool to foster integration anywhere. In this paper, the author has empirically shown that music can be used to foster political inclusion in Nigeria with an emphasis on popular music. This is possible because of the wide acceptance of popular music across the country. This wide acceptance has created a cult-like followership among music artists by their fans. If these music artists can use both their image as well as their musical lyrics to project their ideals on what they stand for politically, they are going to attract people who share similar ideals towards politics thus, the birth of a platform where they can share their ideas which will result in political inclusion.

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