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Music and dance as culprit and catalyst for change in democratic Nigerian society

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Abstract

The dominance of dance and music as part of the people's culture and the attraction and attachment of the society to them at various levels is strong enough to arouse a sociological curiosity because these duos are social products that influences and are being influenced by the society. This interaction between music, dance and the society is reflected in the political, economic, and educational and value systems generating patterns of behaviour. This paper relying on contextual hermeneutical approach discusses the positive and negative use of music and dance emphasizing how both can be a means to positive and not the offender working against change in democratic Nigerian society. It is discovered that on the one hand music and dance as catalyst are employed positively as tools to orchestrate the needed change in the society and on the other hand as culprit guilty of being employed negatively to amplify vices especially in democratic Nigerian society. The paper concludes by advocating a fresh look at music, dance and other art forms and their effects on the society thereby taking advantage of the capacities they possess for change and use them to drive the spirit of change that is in the air in the Nigerian Society.

Keywords: Music, Dance, Performance, Change, Catalyst, Culprit

The focus of this paper is essentially to discourse the positive use of music and dance as art forms to generate the desired societal change in the democratic Nigerian society and how music and musicians as well as their colleagues in the field of dance and their arts and acts have been deployed to upset the change. The dominance of music and dance as part of the people's culture and the attraction and attachment of the society to it at various level is strong enough to arouse a sociological curiosity. The power of influence of the musical and dance arts in the Nigerian democratic society is also clearly expressed in the deployment of these arts either positively or negatively thereby making the arts either a catalyst for the desired change in the society or the culprit

accused and found to be guilty of being used negatively to distort, disturb, or upset the process of the changes envisaged in the society.

Omojola (2000, p.3) asserts that the “interaction between music and social dynamics defines itself in multiple perspectives which include rapport between musical traditions and such other cultural elements as education, political evolution, value systems and behavioural patterns, historical development and religious phenomena”.

This assertion by Omojola about music and social dynamics is equally applicable to the interaction between dance and music and both relating to other dimensions of the people’s culture. The symbiotic relationship between music and dance evident in the interdependence of the duos on each other at different levels of performance can also not be downplayed. Omojola (2014, p.24) observes that the close relationship between music and dance is a feature that “even the newest observer of African performances will not miss”. Citing Ugolo (1997, p.181) Omojola states further that “the social conditions that motivate music and dance are principally the same: the forms overlap, and the compositional and choreographic techniques use basically the same principles, thus giving a keen observer the impression that the two are inseparable”. Although the debate about whether or not there can be dance without music has been on, as a musician our position is that if dance according to Dosumu (2005, p.35) is “the rhythmic movement of the body in time and space to communicate into a message”, it goes that dance is a response to rhythm or a generation of it whether internal or external and rhythm is an essential dimension of music then dance depend on music. A natural response to music is dance and it is observed that dance has become a deliberate way of interpreting music in recent times. Suru (2015, p.78) alluding to the inseparability of music from dance with specific reference to Africa states as follows:

Music plays a central role in African dances. In most cases, dances are named after the music. For example, in Nigeria there are: *Bata* music/dance, *Agogo* music/dance, and *Agidigbo* music/dance of the Yoruba, *Swange* music/dance of the Tiv, *Mtungolo* music/dance of Zimbabwe. Through music life is exposed. Musical rhythm frequently forms a dialogue between dancers, musicians and audience... The current trend whereby dance is divorced from music in Euro-American, post-modern dance is averse to African perception of music and arts.

It goes therefore that music and dance influence each other and both are partners in the business of influencing the society because of the power of appeal that they possess.

A Brief Historical Background of the Nigeria's Social, Political and Economic Realities

An historical overview of the socio-economic and political situation in the country since the 1970s indicate a progressive decline from economic surplus to economic depression both at the national and individual levels due to corruption, mismanagement, and bad leadership. From the oil boom of the 1970s which gave Nigeria as a nation enormous wealth and its citizens basic comforts of life and social amenities, Nigeria through the 1980s to the present time have moved to a state of economic hardship with each decade presenting peculiar features that contributed to the problems.

Fakiyesi (2004, p.389) observes that the recent experience in Nigeria have posed questions about the understanding of our leaders and hence their ability to come to grip with the dynamics of the political economy of the country as envisioned in the countries’ various development platforms. In his

view, no meaningful achievement has been realized despite the massive inflow of funds from the sale of oil for over a period nearing three decades. Fakiyesi (2004) summarized the social, political and economic context during this period as follows:

Nigeria's public policy has been in disarray, devoid of any consistent ideology; policy consistency was anathema, corruption, bad governance, social insecurity, unstable political economy and hence a free and laissez faire environment for rent seekers and rent seeking behavior were the norm (p.389)

By the 1970s, with the oil boom, Nigeria shifted attention from agriculture to oil production. Kirk-Greene and Rimmer (1981, p.70) observes that "farming no longer dominates Nigerian economic life as it did before the civil war of 1967 – 70. It has ceased to be the major source of export products and public revenue". The gains of the oil exploration were however not consolidated as a result of corruption and mismanagement that characterized the Nigerian political scene since the days of military dictatorship of about fourteen years. This corruption syndrome was carried on to the civilian rule of the second republic headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979 and further heightened by the military who took over in the 1980s. Onimode (1983, pp.213-217) identified six extravagant projects into which the oil money of the 1970s went which negatively affected the economy of the nation as "military expenditure; highly inflated contracts; frivolous and extravagant festivals such as FESTAC '77; the Udoji salary restructuring; outright theft and embezzlement; grandiose and white-elephant projects and conspicuous consumption".

The Military rule starting with Buhari who took over from Alhaji Shehu Shagari on December, 31st 1983 to Babangida obviously legalized corruption and this was built upon by General Sanni Abacha when he seized power in 1993. The wide spread corruption, mismanagement and insensitivity to the yearnings of the masses greatly has its negative impact on the economy of the nation and the lifestyle of the people especially the common citizens who find it difficult to make ends meet. Martey and Nwagwu (1998, p.18) defines poverty as "being poor, living in lack and inferiority, the lack of opportunity to develop our abilities to control our lives because of economic deprivation, political injustice and disorientation of our lives due to protracted wars and other natural disasters". This definition of poverty aptly describes the Nigerian social, economic and political contexts. These contexts have greatly influenced the content of the art forms as reflected in song texts of musicians and the themes of dance and drama performances clamoring for change. The Nigerian situation is described by Eteng (2004, pp. 37-81) as "depicting an apparently stalemated crisis condition, in which prevailing socio-economic, political and cultural conditions inherent in the nation's multi-ethnic pluralism generate endemic and seemingly irresolvable conflicts".

In the last thirty years, ethnic and religious violence, political instability and social unrest have become a prominent feature of the Nigerian sociopolitical terrain. As Adepoju (2004, pp. 291-326) observes, "they have also assumed a frightening dimension as exemplified in the violent upheavals and the attendant destruction of lives and properties across the country". The most recent and frightening menace of the Boko Haram that has led to great loss of lives and properties in Nigeria especially in the northeastern part of the country gives expression to the progressive decline that has characterized the Nigerian Social, political and economic life.

Trends in the socio-economic landscape in Nigeria reveal deterioration and in some cases, absolute collapse of structures, facilities and institutions that are suppose to make life comfortable for the citizens. For example, the impact of recession in the economy of the nation has had their negative impacts on the health sector, educational institutions and social amenities.

The present democratic dispensation headed by President Mohammadu Buhari who took over from Goodluck Ebele Jonathan on the 29th of May 2015 came up with a slogan of change while campaigning to be voted into power. Unfortunately even with the current democratic dispensation the economic recession is biting harder and making survival of the citizens more difficult, for example many states in the country are owing workers salaries ranging from three to eight month. Change is actually the desire of all citizens including the artists who have found themselves affected by the realities of the situation just like others in the society.

The Desired Change in Nigerian Democratic Society

The question of what change is required in the Nigerian democratic society is not farfetched. A brief historical overview of the economic, political and social realities in Nigeria discussed above indicates a need for a better society with better conditions of living. A society void of social vices, political tyranny, a society that will be free from religious and ethnic violence, corruption and manipulation of the instruments of government and governance for self aggrandizement and enrichment. Nigeria looks forward to a democratic society that is truly free from bondage and enslavement of the masses and self colonization.

The change that is desired in the society is one that will drive the nation towards maximizing the potentials of the human and natural resources to the benefit of all and not just a few who have the opportunity of being in power; a change towards an assurance instilled in every citizen that they have a future that is secured in their own country without a desire to run away to other nations. This change can be and should be driven by arts in its various forms and artist in their various capacities as actors, dancers, composers, playwrights, artistic directors, painters, sculptors and so on by moving the art forms from mere entertainments to really communicating ideas, philosophies and principles that will effectively drive the nation towards the desired change.

Music and Dance as Culprit for Change in Democratic Nigeria

The symbiotic relationship between music and dance makes it more or less inevitable not to refer to dance while talking about musical performances or point to the place of music in dance performances. References will therefore be made to dance as music is being discussed here because it is a general trend in the Nigerian music scene to have dance accompanying music performances. Music being a product of the society reflecting patterns of human behaviors is often employed in the conveyance of motives and intentions and used as a means to convict and convince the society by appealing to their conscience and emotions. It is the same with dance; according to Dosumu (2005, p. 36) "dance is a reflection of the communal mode of living, historical experience, ritual worship, political and occupational activities in African societies". Citing Primus she states further that "African dance is a part of the whole complex of living that cannot be separated from African life or other art". At various levels of human existence the culture as expressed through the arts gives and lives a strong impression upon the recipients and with particular reference to Africa the performing arts have always been integrated and employed as powerful tools of communication to effect social control and address social ills.

Ugolo (2001, p. 142) affirms that "all art forms are a reflection of the prevailing conditions in the environment". Be it political, economic or social environmental factors, these have influenced the styles and forms of art works especially the themes of music and dance. The contents and themes of the various art forms as well as the personalities of the vehicles namely the musicians, dancers, painters, sculptors and dramatists clearly reflects what goes on around them and many times what the environment has made the artists to become.

In democratic dispensations in Nigeria, artist including musicians and dancers have demonstrated negative tendencies. Musicians have presented themselves as sycophants, opportunists, mere beggars and lose and lousy people. These dimensions are however reflected in different musicians at different times and ironically at times by same musicians at different times depending on the social, political, and economic realities being experienced. Some music and dance practitioners are mere praise singers and tools in the hands of the money bags, politicians and the ruling class who pay to be propagated and sold to the society in spite of their bad activities. Writing specifically about music as a reflection of the society Hess (1972, pp.31-32) state as follows:

The music of a well ordered age is calm and cheerful, and so is its government. The music of a restive age is excited and fierce, and its government is perverted. The music of a decaying state is sentimental and sad, and its government is imperiled.

Writing about dance Suru (2015, p.79) asserts that "dance in Nigeria is used as a means of transporting expressions of life and aspirations; it is used in conveying ideas for spiritual process". Akunna and Iyeh (2015, p. 123) in their discourse of Dance, Female Body and Power in African Society identifies the contribution of dance to the society especially with women as follows:

The dance art has helped in determining their unique make-up and personality, but also their creative accomplishments in combating issues of class struggle and social relationship, reproductive health, political crisis and governance in private and public domains of existence. They have also used dance as important medium of education, socialization, leisure and recreation, artistic development and mastery of skills.

We can therefore conclude that music and dance can be reflections of the society in which they exist and are therefore capable of influencing the same society either positively or negatively.

Music and dance as culprit for change in democratic Nigeria manifest in Sensual and Sexual appeal which tends to dominate performances and this sends a negative signal about music and dance performance in Nigeria in recent times. The artists seem to have reduced the power of appeal at performances to sensual and sexual rather than the content of the performance in terms of the text, melody, harmony, mood and other elements that can make performance meaningful driven by philosophies and ideologies to communicate effectively with the audience. Exposure of some parts of the body and display of same especially by the female at performances is now the order of the day and this gives a picture and sells the impression that dancers and musicians are loose, lousy and sex instruments. The desire for a sane society in which decency in dressing and sound morals will prevail is opposed by the artists' indecency at performances. Music and dance in its execution is therefore guilty of promoting sensual and sexual appeal which tends to dominate the Nigerian society today.

Music and dance as art forms and the artists have also lent themselves at some points to politicians to be used as instruments to generate violence, rebellion and instigate people against one another at political rallies and campaigns. The Late Sanni Abacha employed the services of musicians for his one million man march towards transforming himself from a military dictator to a civilian president. To date artists are engaged to promote some politicians deceptive tendencies to the Nigerian society which they engage in at political rallies and campaigns. Recently, the Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN) openly declared their support for the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan and they produced jingles and organized performances to that effect indicating the extent to which some artists can release themselves to be manipulated by the people in power against reality and popular opinion.

The Culture of Vulgarism is a negative one employed by artists especially musicians in their recordings. Song texts and video clips of sexual nature seem to be on the increase in the popular music scene and this tends to encourage moral decadence in the Nigerian society.

Musicians today sing so much about money. Getting rich or making money is a recurrent theme in their songs. The get rich quick syndrome therefore is sold as a concept and pursued by many Nigerian youths who want to make money by all means including being fraudulent. The affluence that is being displayed by artists also attracts the youths and influences them in their pursuit in life. For example excerpts from the lyrics of a song by Adekunle Gold in his album titled "Pick Up" are given below:

[Chorus] Baba God oh Emi na fe wa range oh
Dangote olorimeji Na beg I dey beg oh
Olorun orun (pick up pick up)
Emi na fe wa bently (mo fe wa bently)
Otedola olorimeji (pick up pick up)
Na beg I dey beg oh

[Verse 1] Oya now I don go wedding taya
Many Saturdays, e don pass And I never marry
Oluwa provide a boo oh
Awon egbe mi'n kole Won bimolemo
oh Emi na fe yayo Oluwa dami loun oh

[Hook] Mama jeki anybody bere wipe
Ni bo lo'Olorun mi wa oh
No put me to shame oh
Ejowo baba answer my call oh
Mama jeki anybody ritemi wi
Koma ritemi so oh I look up to you oh
Answer my call oh (aswer my call oh)

[Chorus] Baba God oh Emi na fe wa range oh
Dangote olorimeji Na beg I dey beg oh
Olorun orun (pick up pick up)
Emi na fe wa bently (mo fe wa bently)
Otedola olorimeji (pick up pick up)
Na beg I dey beg oh

Verse 2. They call me workaholic oh

My hustle pure, no be small
I dey pray to make am
Oluwa answer on time oh
Na you get all the money
Emo pe olowo laye mo oh
Baba don't leave me hanging
Oluwa answer my call r oh
Baba se temi na oh
Tori mo fe di'olowo (mo fe d'olowo)
Mo fe di'olola (mo fe d'olola)
Emi na fe se'orire (mo fe so rire)
Answer my call e oh (pick up pick up)
Mo fe di'olowo (mo fe d'olowo)
Mo fe di'olola (mo fe d'olola)
Emi na fe se'orire (mo fe so rire)
I want your blessings (pick up pick up)
Oya now na na na (pick up pick up)
Oya now na na na na (pick up pick up)
Emi na aa ra Porsche oh (pick up pick up)
Answer my call oh (answer my call oh)
Oya now na na na (pick up pick up)
Jowo now na na na (pick up pick up)
If you see my number (pick up pick up)
Baba pick up pick up

In the above song the refrain expresses the desire by the musician to get rich like Dangote and Otedola in order to be able to ride porch cars like Range rover and Bentley.

Music and Dance as Catalyst for Change in Democratic Nigeria

Music and dance can however be the catalyst for the desired change in the present democratic dispensation if focus is shifted from these art forms as being mere entertainment to being vehicles to communicate and propagate the message of change. Beyond entertainment music and dance are veritable tools for mass mobilization and sensitization to integrate democracy. The duos of music and dance can be engaged in campaigns against vices in the society, criticize bad and corrupt leadership as well as praise the good things that run in the society. The themes of the performances should generate philosophies of good neighbourliness, patriotism, hard work and so on thereby sensitizing the citizenry towards changing for good in the interest of the nation. The fight against corruption being embarked upon by the present administration led by President Mohamadu Buhari can be realized through music and dance performances generated for that purpose. Onyeji (2002, p.32) writing on the pop music message submitted as follows:

Pop music texts carry enlightenment/educative messages as well as informative messages. They sometimes serve as means of instilling morals in citizenry. Culture, social and political education are contained in the text of

some pop music. Messages of discipline are also contained in some pop song texts.

Music and dance through the messages they portray can therefore be catalyst for change in the democratic Nigeria.

The artists either as dancer, dance librettist, choreographer, composer, or musicians in any form should be the conscience of the society, mouth piece of the people and critics of the government. They present themselves as the heart beat of the nation pointing out and commenting on the evil discovered with the politicians. As we have observed earlier (Adeola, 2001, p.84) the role of the popular musicians in democracy has always been to mobilize people, educate, criticize, give historical facts, and even to perpetuate certain people or government in power. An examination of the song texts by musicians and themes of dance performances in democratic dispensations reveals this reality.

The art industry is a big one and has generated employment for many youths in Nigeria. This can be a catalyst for change in the area of job generation. Unemployment being a major problem confronting the teeming youths of Nigeria can be reduced through their engagement in the arts of music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture and so on. Music and dance have particularly engaged the Nigerian youths positively and with the right attitudes can be used to drive the present democratic dispensation's message of change. The different aspects of music and dance performance and production can be a means of empowerment to different people.

Music and dance generates creativity and ingenuity for self employment and self expression that will cut down on vices in the society which unemployment can generate. As we have it today in the Nigerian music scene, Nigerian music and musicians are gaining international recognition which is a positive development that is boosting the economy and image of the nation in its own way.

The power of the arts to regulate the lives of the citizenry in terms of social control can also be explored to drive the change in this democratic dispensation. The art forms should be deployed to condemn the social ills and educate the people on the principles and philosophies driving the government's policies targeted at bringing about change. According to Magee (1988, p.23) a really creative artist is one who, in freely expressing his own fantasies, needs, aspirations and conflicts, articulates those of a whole society. That according to him is made possible by the fact that, through his earliest relationships, mother tongue, upbringing, and all his first experience of life, the cultural heritage on which he has entered at birth is woven into the whole fabric of his personality. Artists are able to express the ideas and aspirations of the society being a part of the society as such creative artists should resist being used by a minority who are in power or a few rich people in the society against the good of the whole society.

Conclusion

The concern of this paper has been to discuss how music and dance as art forms can be instrumental to driving the perceived or desired change in the democratic dispensation as well as how these duos have been guilty of working against the same change that they are capable of facilitating. It is our conclusion in this paper that music and dance are two inseparable arts that complement one another and capable of being used either positively or negatively. The change which the president Mohamadu Buhari administration has adopted as a slogan is quite relevant. The Nigerian social, political and economic situation which tends to be on continuous decline since the 1980s certainly needs a change in the positive direction.

If music and dance practitioners allow themselves to be used by politicians or other people in power without being a true reflection of the society as they should; and if they reduce performance to mere entertainment and sensualities they will be culprit for change in the democratic Nigerian society. However, if music and dance as art forms and the practitioners will see their arts as tools that can be employed beyond mere entertainment and really use these arts as vehicles to communicate philosophies of change and educate the Nigerian society then they will be catalysts for the desired change in the democratic Nigerian society.

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