

# The Use of Foul Language in Pop Music Composition in Nigeria: A Historical Analysis

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## Abstract

The background and exposure of music artistes contribute a lot in shaping the quality of songs they compose and produce. Since the 21st century, there has been a great departure in what used to be the ideal choice of words for musical composition and productions in Nigeria, especially in the popular music spheres. Hitherto, musicians of all genres were careful in their choice of words; but regrettably, the decent use of language is fast disappearing especially in dance hall and emotional songs. This stems from the cultural shack on the part of the artistes especially in the influence of the environment. It is this inherent lacuna that this paper seeks to address but most importantly the paper recommends a cultural policy for the government and as well as the need to checkmate and regulate the brands of music by periodically engaging DJs, radio presenters and other principal stakeholders in the entertainment industries.

## Keywords

Cultural shack, History, Philosophy, Language, Environment

## Introduction

The Nigerian music has come a long way since independence in 1960. The age long period of doing music performances in Nigeria did not witness significant changes except for the various technological transformations that have taken place around the globe. The changes had to do with innovations in musical equipment's which also affected the production and sound of music. The sound and lyrical content of the various Nigerian music productions from 1960 to 1990 was relatively stable. The various brands of music such as Highlife, Pop, reggae, Hip-pop, Afro juju, Afro beat and gospel dominates the Nigerian performing and entertainment industries. Nigerian artistes such as I.k Diaro, Sunny, Fela kuti, Majek Fashek, Ras kimono, Tuface Idibia, Onyeka Onwenu and Osita Osadabey have gained international prominence from their creativity. I.k. Diaro for example was invited to the United Kingdom in 1963 and Queen Elizabeth II conferred him the award of Member of the British Empire for (MBE) his exploits in High life music (Adeniyi, accessed 2021).



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The artistes of the 1960s to the early 1990s such as Victor Olaiya, Victor Uwaifo, Sunny Ade, Osita Osadebe, Celestine Ukwu, Fatai Rolling Dollar, Bright Chimezie, Paulson Kalu, Onyeka Onwenu, Felix Liberty, and others had their fair share of emotional songs. However, they were decent in character, content and expression of their emotions in such a way to avoid the profane use of language. Between 1992-2021, the quality of music production in Nigeria especially popular music has not gone down and the standard dwindled. This paper is interested in investigating those factors responsible for the dwindling lyrical content of Nigeria music scene especially Hip-Hop. The writers looked at how musical theories built on philosophy of globalization, changing trends in linguistics-history and cosmopolitan philosophy has affected the thinking and actions of those in charge of the dance hall.

This paper will be examining the following:

- i. Post structuralism, external influences and the golden Era of doing music in Nigeria and;
- ii. Effects of globalization and digital revolution on the Nigeria musical scene.

### **The theory of Post structuralism and the Nigerian Musical Scene.**

Post structuralism cannot be properly understood except for a critical insight on structuralism. Morris traced the foundation of structuralism to the foundation laid by Swiss linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure. He studied languages from a more scientific basis by breaking the traditional, historically oriented or diachronic approaches of the kind that dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> century philology (Morris, accessed 2021)

The Structuralist scholars include Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Claude-Lévi-Strauss who is strongly believed to be the rallying point of anthropologist structuralism (Harcourt, 2007:3). The Structuralist dominated the intellectual circle of the 1960s with the fame of creating distorted important difference between the theoretical approaches of the intellectuals labeled as Structuralist. (Harcourt, 2007:3). Unfortunately, Structuralist by every standard failed to help social scientists and critical theories to deploy. The structures to anticipate or project future outcomes (Harcourt, 2007:3) it was this shortcoming that paved way for the coming of post structural theorist.

Structuralism had influence on music and history. As languages and historical developments are inseparable because changes in environment also affects the use of language. The constant change in environment and society do not only affect music production alone but as well as other esthetics costumes and their related characteristic that accompanies performances. Historically in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the structuralist school emerged it was sustained by the Neogrammarian school of Herman Paul, Karl Bruggs man and William Dwight of Yale university (Halle, 2015:3)

The composition of music under the structuralize era influenced the rise of ethnomusicology which is anchored on the blue print established by linguistics, anthropology and sociology especially the use of folktales. (Halley, 2015:4). The musical scholars as pointed out by Halley (2015) seems to belief that structuralism withered because Noam Chomsky postulation that external

artifacts of language would be possible only if they were relevant to the theories of mental representation of languages (Halley,2015;4)

Post structuralism by its outlook involves the social contribution of powers associated with the construction of knowledge (Harcourt,2007:21). According to Woodward attempt a concise coverage of the idea behind the post structural ideologies as follows:

Post structuralists critiqued structuralism reliance. Reliance on centers and binary opposition They questioned the soundness of ontology and demonstrated the emergence of truth regimes and they develop new ways of thinking about difference and identity. They are anti-essentialist rather than grounded or fix a prior (Woodward and JonesIII, 2009)

The Post-structuralist draw their ideas from Habermas and the Frankfurt school on language especially on a vehicle of transcending ideologies and engaging in a free and equal exchange of communicative reason (Mason and Clarke,2010). Music arts and performance revolves around effective communication and language. The Nigeria example presents two categories of generation of musicians. First, the golden era which is from 1960-1992 and secondly the staggering era, from 1993 to the present. This staggering era of music composition and performances is the main issue of discuss that is as a result of Post-structuralism in musical practices. Post-structuralism as recorded by Harcourt (2007;23) is that it represents a penultimate stage of modernity as Krim (2021) noted that Post-Structuralist ideologies reinforces the need to create a special status of music and art.

By the early period of 1960s, musical arts had regulations not only from the Nigerian broadcasting corporations but from record labels beginning from EMI records Polygram, Premier records Tanbansi records, Decca records and others. These agencies provided a kind of screening beginning from the submission of "Demo cassetts" by the artiste for the purpose of listening not only to commercial value of lyrics but as well as its significance of values.

The historical development that took place since the 1990s in terms of technological advancement and economic harsh realities created by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) could in no small way attribute to the failing standard of music compositions. Psychologists and sociologists could offer answers to why ideological driven music paved way for profanity considering the increasing dilemma associated with modern Nigeria such as hunger, unemployment, low standard of education, malnutrition and insecurity.

Post Structuralism itself is interested in studying the structure of meaning which is not universal, the ontological truth about human society and feeling. The gaps created by unnecessary ambiguities in the system (Harcourt,2007:17).The Performing artistes from Nigeria such as Sunny Okosun. Ras Kimono, Majek Fashek, Orits Williki and others contextualized the leadership situation of the Nigerian nation in their lyrics in a manner that did not appear abusive. The musical art of Fela Kuti was different from the artiste mentioned above. The choices of language as suggested in post-structural dictums are also relevant in conveying the message and in determining the relevance of music. The synthesis of analysis and ideological dispositions from Nigerian artiste of the 1960s -1992 depicts the environment of the composer.

By the historical period in emphasis, the cultural shack that paves way for artiste to express themselves negatively were not pronounced. This leads us to underscoring why artiste like Tina Onwudiwe, Nelly uchendu, Onyeka Onwenu, Alex Zitto, Felix Liberty and others did love songs in the 1980s yet did not provoke their audience in the lexicological sense of it.

### **Effects of Globalization and Digital Revolution on the Nigerian Musical Scene**

The study of neo-imperialism does not imply economic exploitation alone but it involves a certain degree of cultural and social enslavements. The Nigerian musical arts is a victim of circumstance especially events that began to unfold since the coming of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the late 1980's.

Beginning from the 1990's, musical arts in Nigeria has been tele-guided so much towards profanity. Example of such includes: Blacky's 'Bang Belly' Femi Kuti's "Bang Bang", Flavour's "Ashawo", Olamide's "Techno" Burna boy and Timaya's "Ukwu" are few among many vulgar songs in the Nigerian dance hall. Nwankpa, (2015/2016:119) reveals that Flavor's "Shake" commonly referred to as "Ukwu Nwanyi Owerre" reflects mundane lyrics, displaying of sex centered stage performances, nudity and disdainful, immoral and despicable utterances. He concludes that Flavour's Shake is perhaps one of the most despicable popular musical lyrics in "Highlife genre". In addition, Nwankpa, (2015/2016:112) noted as well that Harry Song 'Reggae Blues' demonstrates "an erotic undertone presenting women as sex symbols". Also Nnanyelugo, (2017:7) has it that;

The rate at which most of the popular music is projected by some of the popular musicians force people to believe that popular music is less morally educative as a musical genre and is not to be exposed to children because of the vulgar lyrics used in most of the compositions and also the dance steps which denote sex, waywardness, and immorality.

In most cases, the aforementioned artistes such as Falvour and Timaya have done lyrical morally inviting songs but a greater percentage of their songs are deeply rooted in profanity. In the ordinary sense of it, these categories of artistes have been encouraged by the kind of dance hall created in the western world such like the Notorious BIG, Snoop Doggy Dog, Tupac and others. In dealing with the ontological basis of searching for the truth, post structural philosophy is interested in unearthing the real situation of one's environment. A good number of artistes such as Falz, Idris Abdulkareem and to some extent Tu Face Idibia have lend their voices to the ills of the society and to draw attention to political leadership for their flaws.

In spite of these recorded achievement in sound musical composition and performance, the reward system of the contemporary arts from Nigeria such as Burna boy and Wizkid receiving Grammy award in 2021 does not portray merit in ideological sense of it. What will be given to the likes of Fela, Ebenezer Obey, Majek Fashek or Ras Kimono for their more meaningful lyrics? This issue poses the question of whether or not; cultural globalization promotes dance hall songs that have no meaningful lyrical content? The idea is that the artistes rewarded with Grammy are by the award considered the best from Nigeria thus creating the impression that meaningful lyrical composition could not come out from Africa except one's with barbaric language expression at most times.

### **The Music Production Regulatory Agencies: An Appraisal**

The various agencies that would ordinarily regulate musical arts are weakened by dynamic structures created by technological globalization. How can the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) regulate Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Youtube channels and online bloggers who are now major agents of music distribution? A critique of the 'Golden Era' of music in Nigeria by the likes of Celestine Ukwu, Ebenezer Obey, Sunny Ade, Onyeka Onwenu, Ras Kimono, Sony Nneji and so many others point to three significant factors.

First, these artistes came out from an ideological position of decolonization. The lyrical composition of these artistes was channeled towards the search for freedom, love, social justice and unity. Those artistes had basic education at the primary and secondary level and this was the era history was strong in the school curricular. On a comparative basis, how much history and philosophy does Davido, Wizkid, Phyno, Flavour, Techno, Tiwa Savage and others know? Even if they had full or partial tertiary education, what is content of the curriculum to enable their musical arts to be so influenced? The artistes of the 1960's to the 1980's may have acquired no 'High School' education but they had more moral upbringing compare to those composing and performing music in Nigeria now. The emphasis here is that the 21<sup>st</sup> century artistes are now products of Universities and Polytechnics which does not encourage multidisciplinary studies especially in the Humanities. With the rising unemployment rate, a quick grab of the microphone for anyone who thinks he or she can sing offers a job even if the lyrical exposure of the individual is baseless and harmful to the society.

Post-colonial studies is ongoing but the deconstruction of imperialism as did by Fela Kuti, Ras Kimono, Majek Fashek and Sunny Okosun is gradually dying. With the level of insecurity in Nigeria and the rising level of arms proliferation, the Nigerian musical arts are silent instead of waking up to fight. Historically, the powerful tool of musical arts could be seen in Estonia singing revolution which granted the country independence from the Soviet Union. This development was feasible because of the sufficient historical and ideological clarity possessed by the people of Estonia. One major factor that gives room to this unspeakable act of composition and performances is the ineffective drive and weaknesses on the part of the music production regulatory agencies. The various agencies in charge of regulating the musical arts presented for societal consumption are currently weakened by the dynamic structures created by the numerous technological advancements; this is indeed a very big problem that needs urgent attention in order to rescue the state of musical arts composition and performances in our country Nigeria.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In conclusion, in view of the issue under study, which is to ascertain the reasons and the cause of musical composition and performance ethics dwindling in the recent times. And how it could be restructured towards post-structuralism views and ideologies. In line with this, this paper suggests that, the Nigerian musical arts should be shaped based on few guidelines provided by post-structural ideologists. First that, the ontological basis of searching for the inner most truth which is grossly missing lately in the Nigerian musical arts, needs to be revised. Secondly, the level of lyrical hopelessness being exhibited by Nigerian artistes which is caused from the findings by the

absence of strong historical and philosophical knowledge has to be re-instated and lastly, the cultural shack orchestrated by globalization which is responsible in promoting the use of foul language should be checked as the rising of digital revolution recently has rendered the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) handicapped in regulating the quality of music showcased for societal consumption. However, this paper recommends finally that a periodic workshops of performing music artistes in Nigeria to focus on the language of communication, lexicology and aesthetics in music composition and entertainment rather than been silent on the issue.

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