

## **Constructing National Identity through Music: Examples from Selected Nigerian Musical Compositions**

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### **Abstract**

Since time immemorial identity has been closely related with culture. Culture being, beliefs, traditions, values of a certain group of people, and one of the tools used to propagate the culture/identity of a people was folklore which includes folksongs. As folksongs were one of the tools used to teach a generation the rights and wrongs of a given culture in the past, so is popular music in contemporary society. One of the driving mediums for passing down cultural identity of a particular society is popular music. Studies have purportedly shown that music has a lasting impression than other genres. It's a veritable medium for conveying a people's culture because culture is imbedded in music. Using selected songs of Flavour, Phyno and Olamide, this paper examines the effect of contemporary Nigerian musical compositions illuminating how these artists have used music to portray their Nigerian identity. This is carried out through the qualitative research method where primary data is gotten from selected songs of the three prominent Nigeria artists and the secondary data from the internet, books, journals and other relevant materials. The paper reveals that there is a national identity in music through the use of language to express one's self and to distinguish oneself from others.

**Keywords:** Music, National identity, Artist, Language, Nigerian musical compositions.

## **Introduction**

Music is an essential channel of communication. It provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings even though their spoken languages may be commonly incomprehensible. It can also provide a vital lifeline for human interaction for those whose special needs make other means of communication challenging. Music can exert powerful physical effects, can produce deep and profound emotions within us, and can be used to produce infinitely delicate variations of expressiveness by skilled composers and performers. At the same time, music plays a greater part in the everyday lives of people and community than any other socialising instruments. This is partly the result of the extraordinarily rapid technological developments that have occurred in the last two decades or so, akin to the increasing commercialization and economic power of the music industry. In the developed countries of the world at least, the widespread availability and relative inexpensiveness of the Internet, the video recorder and more means that a vast variety of musical styles and genres is available to us as listeners. The ways in which people experience music as 'consumers', fans, listeners, composers, arrangers, performers or critics are far more diverse than at any time in the past, as are the range of contexts in which this takes place.

One result is that music can be used increasingly as a means by which we formulate and express our individual identities. We use it not only to regulate our own everyday moods and behaviours, but also to present ourselves to others in the way we prefer. Our musical tastes and preferences can form an important statement of our values and attitudes, and composers and performers use their music to express their own distinctive views of the world. Music is a human universal, but its meaning is not. It occurs in many settings and includes many different kinds of action and ways of organising sound into meanings. Researchers have stressed that the fundamental meaning of music lies not in objects (e.g., a musical work) but in actions, what people do. To study music is to study the multitude of meaning makings of musical practices. To make music is "to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (Small, 9). Small coins the term "musicking" to capture this

conceptual meaning: all the meaning making practices that contribute to a musical performance. This activity is not unidirectional, from musician to listener. Instead, it is a dynamic process involving context and culture, thereby creating, maintaining, and changing meanings.

The Italian composer, Ferruccio Busoni, was up to something when he said that music is a sonorous air, because it is extraordinary to think that a simple vibration unseen by the human eye can facilitate a deeply rich emotional experience, alter perceptions and consciousness, and induce ecstatic states of being. Music is a universal language capable of awakening emotions and unique sensations. Sometimes, even though we hear someone singing in unknown language, we are still able to feel what they are trying to convey, even if we don't know what the lyrics mean. What we do know is that they are expressing something cheerful, sad or dramatic. The effect of music on our soul is so far ranging. The theme of the relationship between music and identity is growing in importance in music studies. Music is a constitutive part of culture and hence is important for individual and social identity formation. The broad argument that one wants to make here, in short, is that in talking about identity we are talking about a particular kind of experience or a way of dealing with a particular kind of experience. Identity is not a thing but a process - an experiential process which is most vividly grasped as music. Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective. Meaning social groups only get to know themselves as a collection of likeminded individuals, through cultural activity and in this scenario that would be music. As Mark Slobin puts it,

Music seems to have an odd quality that even passionate activities like gardening or dog-raising lack: the simultaneous projecting and dissolving of the self in performance. Individual, family, gender, age, super cultural givens, and other factors hover around the musical space but can penetrate only very partially the moment of enactment of musical fellowship. Visible to the observer, these constraints remain unseen by the musicians, who are instead working out a shared vision that involves both the assertion of pride, even Ambition, and the simultaneous disappearance of the ego (10).

The experience of identity describes both a social process, a form

of interaction, and an aesthetic process; as Slobin argues, it is the “aesthetic rather than organizational/contextual aspects of performance” that “betray a continuity between the social, the group, and the individual (11).” It is in deciding – playing and hearing what sounds right (we would extend this account of music from performing to listening, to listening as a way of performing) that we both express ourselves, our own sense of rightness, and suborn ourselves, lose ourselves, in an act of participation. Ever since different cultures started to form, there has always been a place for rhythmic sounds that can communicate our feelings. In every age and civilization this particular form of expression has existed, and in so many varied styles. To sum up, music provides an opportunity for the expression of identity, and it can facilitate the reproduction and transformation of established social identities. This study is intended to function as a means of depicting national identity in music. The specific objective includes showing the relationship between music and national identity and that there is a national identity in music. This study uses the qualitative research methods. Songs of three prominent artists were selected because of their availability and their relevance to the discourse.

### **Theoretical Fortification**

The beginnings of the social constructionist theory can perhaps be traced to Mead’s (1934) emphasis on the interplay between self and society: that we cannot develop an understanding of one without the other, and that this is achieved through interaction with others. Its main tenet is that people have many identities, each of which is created in interaction with other people, rather than having a single, core identity and these identities can be contradictory even as language is seen as vital to this process (Morris, 560-561). In applying social constructionist theory, musicians use their language to express themselves, the language give them that unique tool to showcase their culture. Social constructionist theorists believe that social experience consists of the exchange of symbols. The particular human use of language and other symbols to convey meaning is, therefore, emphasized (Mead, 124). And this work made use of them.

### **The Artists and their Music: Constructing Identities**

The music will be presented firstly in their original rendition then

English transliteration. Subsequent analysis will be carried out referring to them according to their number of presentation. The first music artist to be examined in this research is Flavour, and two of his songs will be presented here. Flavour, who is well known for his ability to sing fluently in the Igbo language, was born in Enugu State, Nigeria. Chinedu Okoli (born 23 November 1983), better known by his stage name Flavour N'abania, or simply Flavour, is a prolific Nigerian recording artist, dancer, songwriter, and performer. He began his musical career as a drummer for a local church in his hometown in Enugu State. Flavour is popularly known across Africa and the world. He is currently signed to 2nite Entertainment Music Label. In 2005, he released his self-titled debut album "N'abania." In 2010, Flavour released his second studio album "Uplifted." It was supported by the singles "Nwa Baby", "Adamma", and "Oyi Remix". The album's success made Flavour one of Africa's most sought out artists.

### **First Music**

#### **Ada Ada**

<i>Putakenenaogbo</i>	Come to the gathering
<i>Ife di m mmaamaka</i>	What is good is good
<i>Adanwangwagopekempekemya</i>	dance step
<i>Ada ada (hey adanwa)</i>	Praises
<i>Ada adaiyo...ooo</i>	Praises
<i>Adanwangwa(go) pekempekemya</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Ada ada (hey adanwa)</i>	praises
<i>Ada adaiyo..ooo</i>	Praises
<i>Ada ada (adanwa)</i>	praises
<i>Ada ada (cheiasanwa)</i>	praises – for a beautiful lady
<i>Ada ada (hey ada)</i>	
<i>Ada n'idioranma</i>	Ada that is pleasant to All-Praises
<i>Pekempekempekemiya</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Pekempekempekempekemkemyaije</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Pekempekempekempekemkemyaije</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Pekemyaije</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Pekemkemyaije</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Pekempekemiyapekemkem</i>	dance step- form of a dance

<i>Adanwangwaweluyangwaweluyangwacho bi ya</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Adanwangwaweluyangwaweluyangwacho bi ya</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Adanwangwaweluyangwaweluyangwacho bi ya</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Adanwangwaweluyangwaweluyangwacho bi ya</i>	dance step- form of a dance
<i>Pekempekempekemiyaijawaije o kaomee</i>	dance step- form of a dance

It has been said earlier that the essence of a people's culture is reflected in their music. This is true for Flavour's "Ada Ada." Starting with the name of the song 'Ada Ada' which is the title given to a first girl in Igbo society and the marriage celebration is big because its seen as auspicious, in the sense that her husband is expected to take care of some of the needs of the family. It's a very momentous accomplishment for the first daughter to get married. This is what Flavour tried to portray in his song. We are informed about the attribute of Ada Ada. The music is set in a way that it is reflective of the traditional marriage; it brings to mind the traditional marriage of the Igbo's first daughter. The artist uses certain literary devices to paint this picture. One of these devices is onomatopoeia, wherein he attempted to use his mouth to create the sounds that are noticeable in dances of traditional Igbo people (*Pekempekempekemiya*). If the artist had used English to express himself it would not have been able to bring out the beauty of the music, but using the Igbo language facilitated the artist to convey his message freely which gave way to identity.

## Second Music

### IJELE

my guzbataObodo, obodoedelu	My guys step into the town,
and the town becomes wellenwelu	I have boys who spend money
m boys naeri ego nauko ego, boys	while there's a money
na eke ego nauko ego, anyibiazookpana	boys who share money while
	there is a scarcity, when we
alaagbaamkponaala, ejiko sire m ofe	our footsteps sound like
	fireworks, I have money
onugbu, soro m kelechina o mu	please cook onugbu soup for

buziiheana acho, ichoasa ma esiofeachiifunaezi	me, thank God with me because I'm in demand now, if you
nwanyi di uko, oburunaidiakpoafa ego nwa bikopowa mu naubo, and munwaaburo okpukpuikemanaomubuiheanaako,	see my woman's achi soup you'd realise that good women are scarce, if you're not talking money, please leave me alone, I'm not a jock
Lekwa m Lekwa nu nwatahooiiiiii sinaonyechorubuwagahooiiiiii oputararachakoro pepper soup Ndinna fumukamagahooiiiiii	itch but I'm being talked about Look at me, Look at this child he came out and licked okro & pepper soup that the elders saw me as a fool
naogaesi m gaaiyanuipaja, ogaeso m gaa  iyanuipaja, omubuagubu nwa Nkitanaamaja	that he would follow to that thing and come out, it's me the lion that a dog's child is startling
Ngwatereefutawa du nnetemonyegaakpo  giafa IJELE, abia m nfutakamfuonyega  akpoanyi IJELE,  Abiaramabianaenuwaabughikwaebe anyi bi onyenwuruamaghiihenaadanauwabu	now dance and come out bring to me whoever will call you the name IJELE, I came out to see who will call us IJELE I came to this world it's not where I'll end up the dead don't know what's happening because death collects all
onafutaonawade nnambontonnoiseisiasaa anyiejekeamatandiakwasiriike n, Ukwu	1,2,3,4,5,6,7 We've come to know the strong men

This next song by Flavour conveys the unique African style and this can be seen through the language he uses to express himself. He sings his songs mostly in Igbo language because he feels that English cannot really grasp the splendour of what he wants to say. "Ijele" as the title of this song is the biggest masquerade in Igbo culture and it only appears on rare occasions to infuse more life into

festivals. Flavour uses this cultural reference to add charm to the song. His music established a unique cultural identity, using the sounds of unique instruments and rhythms. Instruments like the Igbo flute, rattle and gong help to transport you immediately to the Igbo society when you listen to the music. This feature makes Flavour's songs special and unique.

The next music is by the artist Olamide. A brief background will also be presented on him. Olamide Adedeji (born 15 March 1989), known by his stage name Olamide but popularly called Olamide Baddo or Baddo Sneh, is a Nigerian hip-hop recording artist. He records mostly in Yoruba, his native tongue. On 17 July 2013, Olamide became the first Nigerian to sign an endorsement deal with Cîroc.

### **First Music**

#### *Science Student*

Heavy-Carrier, it's you that don't understand  
Isale Eko<sup>1</sup>, it is not in Malaysia  
Brother that's snuffing, is it rizzla that you came to mould?  
The Pap Secret, it has been divulged in the presence of its wrap<sup>2</sup>  
No herbs, no medicine, no herbs, no medicine  
No herbs, no medicine, no herbs, no medicine  
They've mixed gutter, the eyes are now dirty  
They've mixed chemical, the folks dubbed Science Students  
the Ozone Layer has burst, the secret is in the open  
the smoke is too much, the secret has been revealed  
The wind blows, we've seen the whole truth of Mother Nature  
Trouble has started, the secret is in the open  
Khadija is it you I'm seeing in the front?  
You that mummy sent to Harvard  
Khadija is it you I'm seeing in the front?  
You that daddy sent to Harvard  
My friend, are you okay? Are you alright?  
Ogendegbe, ire nikomoye, ahh Isale Eko, e no dey for Malay  
Brother Onitafi, s'ewen'iwowa we? Asiri Eko, otituloju ewe, ahhehnn  
Kosewe, kosegbo, kosewe, kosegbo  
Kosewe, kosegbo, kosewe, kosegbo  
Won tip'omi gutter po, ojuti dirty  
Won tipo chemical po, awonomo  
Science Students Ozone Layer ti be, asiritu Erukutipoju, asiritu Afefefe, atirifuro  
Mother Nature Gobetisele, asiritu Khadija se iwo n mo n wol'okanyi?  
Iwo omoti mummy ran lo si Harvard  
Khadija se iwo n mo n wol'okanyi?  
Iwo omoti daddy ran lo si Harvard, eh Ore mi, you dey okay? You dey alright?



### ***Second Music***

Eleda mi o....mi o, mi o	My Creator
Oriiya mi o....mi o, mi o	My Mother's Head
Won fekobo la mi o....mi o, mi o	They want to implicate my wealth
Ma ma je kanja mi o....mi o, mi o	Don't let them bring me down
Ma ko le, ma ra le	I will build a house and buy land
Ma lo wo se, ma ni motor...yeey	I will be rich and I will have cars
Ma se gun oso, ma se gun ota ye	I will conquer witches and enemies
Wasagolo de port-har	They will pick up things until they get
Port Harcourt	to Port Harcourt

The second musical artist is Olamide. He sings and raps in Yoruba, a very complex language that is difficult to literally translate directly to English, but that is his own identity. Singing in Yoruba is his own way of trying to reach out to everyone and it also adds spices to his music. Music provides an entertaining form of repetition that is so conducive to memory and it's a key part of growing our cultural identity which the artist made use of (Kosewe, kosegbo, kosewe, kosegbo). When listening to this song thin line will get stuck in the head and the listener would want to find out the meaning thereby grasping the listeners attention, this will make you want to find out the origin of the music.

The next music is by the artist Phyno. A brief background will also be presented on him. Chibuzor Nelson Azubuike (born 9 October 1986), better known by his stage name Phyno, is a Nigerian rapper, singer, songwriter, record producer and actor. He started his musical career as a producer in 2003. He is renowned for rapping in the Igbo language. His debut studio album, "No Guts No Glory", was released in 2014. It produced the singles "Ghost Mode", "Man of the Year", "Parcel" and "O Set". As a producer, he has worked with artists such as Timaya, Flavour, Ruggedman, Bracket, J. Martins and Mr Raw.

*First Music*

God has made a poor man king I just want to say o thank you Jehovah oh I'll keep on seriously praising you father father eh If you come to a war front, take it easy If we tell you what we saw, brother you must agree I had nothing, I turned to a beast, my people you already know The person who gave me life, I will worship him (Everlasting King!) The person who gave me money, I will praise (Everlasting King) The people who kicked me, I will be careful with them (Evil people) The fine girl that kicked me, I will leave her (Pretty evil girl)	Chinekenne m ego kwa now gbenyezege Bu re keneriwootutoFadaFadaeeeh A di kwam Loyal oFadaFadaeeeh  I ma putiruogunwannebeluebelu Anyikolugiifeanyifulunwanne you must kwere Ezi m ife I turn to beast, you already know  I manaonyeahunyelu m ndungaefeyaefe (Ezebige bi) Onyegahunyelu m ego ngaetoya oh (Ezebige bi) I manandiakpokpalu m bungaese ha ese (Ndiokpolo) Asaahukpalu m buntigaako ha o (Asaokpolo)
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*Second Music*

My daddy doesn't have money but I have God my mummy doesn't have money but I have God my Father doesn't have money but I have God	Daddy mi olowoshugbonmolooloun  Mummy mi olowoshugbonmolooloun Baba mi olowoshugbonmolooloun
I will be rich because I have God Keep pursuing them, pursue them Catch them, catch them	Emi alowo tori mooloun Nwachuba ha, chuba ha Wudo ha, wudo ha Weluya, weluya Chubagide ha

Take them, take them	Nwamuluanya, muluanya
Keep chasing them	Wudo ha, wudo ha
Keep your eyes open	Weluya, weluya
Catch them, catch them	Nwa Chubagide ha
Take them, take them	
Keep chasing them	

The last artist is Phyno. This is a rapper and singer who also uses the Igbo language in his music because he feels adapting indigenous language is important in the music industry. He raps in Igbo language because it is what he can do best, not because he cannot rap in English. He feels that whenever he raps in Igbo that is the real him. Africans cannot continue to emulate international rappers for long, so he decided to do his own part and give himself an identity by rapping in Igbo as we can see in the first and second song of his above. What the artists have in common is their ability to sing and rap in their given languages and still produce a good beat for their music. One beautiful thing about music is that beside language (which is never a barrier), we can still appreciate a piece of music whenever we hear it. People listen to songs they don't understand and still enjoy it and know that the artist is good.

It is not when you talk or give a speech that people know you are from a particular culture or country, it is not when you carry international passport or driving license that they will tell you it's your identity, even music can be a source of your identity. If a white man is listening to Flavour, Olamide and Phyno's song and he's enjoying the music, all he has to do is go to the internet to get the translation of the song he's enjoying to see the beauty of the music, and by so doing he will find the country that produced such music, and that is a form of identity. With this we can see that there is an identity in music and it need not be pointed out by anything other than music itself.

### **Conclusion**

According to Rebecca Stigall, music has always been present as a socializing factor. Whether that socialization takes place as part of a group membership or as a way to express individuality, there is no way to ignore the fact that the influence and expression of music

expands as the world community shares more of its musical styles. Different people find that music speaks to them in a certain way, moves them in a certain way or that they can identify with its message. People may also find that they can use music to express themselves as individuals as well as to conform to a group. Music and its connection to individual and national identity will take on new forms as people continue to be exposed to varying forms of music and culture.

The concept of identity is important because it enables us to understand individuals' musical development 'from the inside' whilst clearly locating identity as an emergent feature of our fundamentally social worlds. It provides us with a way of conceptualizing the interaction between biological and social influences. Studying the ways in which people perceive themselves in relation to music has the potential to explain some phenomena of musical behaviour and experience that might otherwise be inaccessible. This is an important undertaking, particularly at a time when the nature of musical experience itself is changing so rapidly in the globalized world.

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