TRANSFORMING NIGERIAN HIP-HOP MUSIC AND DANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL, MORAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL RELEVANCE

Prisca O. Ajaero, Emmanuel C. Umezinwa Ph.D. &
Alvan-Ikoku O. Nwamara Ph.D.

Abstract

Hip-hop music and dance came into existence in the 1970's and believed to have sprung from the South Bronx of New York city, although, with a root traceable back to Africa. This genre of music and dance became popular in Nigeria especially among the youths around the late eighties and early nineties but was associated with so much profanity and vulgarity, thus creating for a disinterest and irrelevance as an area of academic pursuit and a possible avenue for curbing societal and moral decadence as well as boost the economy of the country. Through library research, interviews and observations, this work seeks to expose ways in which hip-hop music and dance can be re-organized, restructured and transformed to fit more into the moral, academic standards and socio-cultural interests of the Nigerian society.

Introduction

Hip-hop has evolved from being just a type of music and dance, into being a lifestyle especially among the youths. The word 'hip' is believed to be used in referring to someone believed to be in 'the know or current' while the latter 'hop' is just used as the word implies, a hopping movement which was coined from a rapper with Grandmaster flash named Keith Cowboy, and the Furious Five who teased a friend who had just joined the U.S Army, by scat singing the words 'hip/hop/hip/hop' in a way that mimicked the rhythmic cadence of marching soldiers as stated by Nwamara (2011). Hip-hop music and

dance can be said to have sprung up in the 1970's in the South Bronx of New York City, United States of America, although, with a traceable root back to Africa. By means of globalization and acculturation, Hip-hop has found its way into many countries and has been incorporated into the lifestyle of the people without significantly losing its qualities and essence.

This lifestyle crept into Nigeria around the late eighties and early nineties and was "Nigerianized" and nicknamed Naija hip-hop with its essential hip-hop qualities still intact, bringing about so much negative criticism as regards the constant and unapologetic usage and showcase of obscenity and vulgarity that accompanies this genre of music and dance, causing for a high rate of disapproval and disregard for it from the older ones in society and also a disinterest in its academic teaching and learning process. Nevertheless, irrespective of all these criticisms, hip-hop music and dance has kept on igniting interest among the youths and has proven to be employment generating for them by indulging their minds in some unique level of creativity and sense of self-reliability. So, there is a need for the recontextualization and restructuralization of our hip-hop music and dance for more acceptability and societal relevance as suggested by Adedeji (2010) in his transformative musicology theory which states that:

> *…in order to meet contemporary social challenges there is the need to redefine the direction of art music in terms of functionality. This would imply recontextualizing it to address socio-political problems and serve as a vehicle for transformation while still retaining its artistic qualities. This is totally realistic since in its original aesthetic focus, art music carries textual or philosophical themes and contents which portray cultural norms, values, religious messages, nature, love. (p. 3-4).*

Igwe (2014) also examined contemporary popular music and dance as tools for social transformation, presenting the dance as important as the music.

Concept of Nigerian Hip-Hop Music and Dance

Hip-hop music is believed to have come into Nigeria between the late 80's and early 90's but there seems to have been no precise or definite documentation about the advent of this genre of music. Buchi Steve (2009) in Real Hip-hop Naija blog spot (realhiphopngblogspot.com) gave a brief history of the evolution of hip-hop in Nigeria to have taken place around the 1990s. Amos (2012) in his work entitled '*History of Nigerian Hip-hop: A Tale of Three Decades*,' he opined that in the last thirty years, hip-hop music has come to thrive and informed most of the developments in the Nigerian music. Hip-hop music first gained so much popularity and precedence in Lagos as Afro hip-hop among the youths as a safe haven for them away from the crisis, corruption and continuous outburst of problems and difficulties emanating in the country by ways of unemployment, currency depreciation, corruption and so on.

This genre of music started being used by the youths to call out and express their disdain and disapproval to the high rate of corruption displayed by the leaders. So many groups and solo artistes like Junior &Pretty, Daniel 'Danny' Wilson, Plantashun Boiz, Remedies with members Eedris Abdulkareem, Eddy Remedy & Tony Tetula started taking recognitions during that period. Then the late 90s and the early years of the new millennial era saw an outpour from artists and groups, many returning home from the Western Diaspora, like Eldee da Don of Trybesmen, Madarocka and the S.O.U.R.C.E. Clik, Naeto C of W.F.A, and from Europe, JJC and the 419 squad; and P-Square (the duo of Peter & Paul Okoye) and most recently, the likes of Flavour, Davido, Phino, Olamide, Tiwa Savage, Wizkid, Teni, Burna boy etc, all becoming a part of the mainstream of Nigerian music after the collapse of pop trends like Yo-pop. These Nigerian artistes started to localize hip hop and make songs in English and any other Nigerian language as a way of expressing themselves more, making Nigerian hip-hop multilingual.

Hip-hop music as a genre cannot be talked about completely without the addition of rap music. According to Akwaowo (2010), rap is one of the most prominent features, a major part and an inseparable element of hip-hop. The type of hip-hop is determined by the kind of rap style. There are 3 major types of rap style which are: the *Conscious rap type* which deals with the creation of awareness and imparting knowledge. It discourages the act of violence, discrimination, and other societal ailments and contains positive uplifting messages, the *Battle rap type* which stems from the quest to be competitive within the culture. Although, it is sometimes directed to an anonymous rival or used as a forum to sharpen one's lyrical swords, boastful lines and self-glorifying rhymes about one's proficiency or level of success, accompanied by verbal insults (beef lyrics) hulled at the other party directly or indirectly is mostly the underlying factor here and lastly, the *Gangster rap type* which reflects the violent lifestyles of inner-city youths and revolves around aggressive lyrics and trunk heavy beats. These are the three rap styles found in hip-hop music.

Hip-hop dance and its music are quite inseparable as they share a common history that dates back to the 1960's and 1970's. Dance being a great complement to music, is used to express the feeling of the singer/ artiste as it transcends beyond just bodily movements, but could be used to pass across information, tell a story and convey emotions as opined by Onwuekwe (2009), who stated that:

> *Dance goes beyond the merely function movement of work or sport to become an experience that is pleasurable, exciting or aesthetically valuable. In doing so, it can also express emotions, moods, ideas, tell a story or portray political and social needs. (p.178)*

Dance can also be said to be a reflection of the society that owns it as people tend to explore their cultures using even artistic and socio-historical materials in its creation and performance which gave rise to the statement made by Ojo (2003) that:

> *Dance is the language that expresses religious beliefs, political and historical experiences, social practices and economic peculiarities as well as the geographical location and biological temperament of the people that gives its birth. (p.1)*

The notion of dance being more than just a movement of the body but also a means of expression and more may have also prompted Ogene (2007) to state that:

> *Dance is about the only art form that punctuates the cultural continuum of human diversity. It is the hyphen of experience, the comma of victory, the colon of defeat, the parenthesis of the family and the full stop of pain... Yet it is an art form most ephemeral of all. (p. 195)*

In the bid to express themselves more, artistes started creating accompanying dances, sometimes derived from their culture and relatable to society to further interprete the messages conveyed in their music and also entertain their listeners.

Hip-hop dance is acknowledgeably, a quite stressful type of dance style and requires the utmost level of commitment, practice and undeniably, a great deal of strength for a proper execution and performance. It became popular in the 1970's in the USA after it was performed by the first professional street-based dance crews. Hip-hop dance styles includes the popping and locking, the break dance (whose dancers were known as B-boys and B-girls and which spread was made possible by Rock Steady Crew, New York City Breakers, The Lockers, and The Electric Boogaloos respectively as they were the most influential hip-hop groups at that point in time), reject and jerking, hammer dance, hip-hop ballet, twerking, cripwalk and so on. While in Nigeria, in addition to the existence of the known and adapted hip-hop dance styles, some other "Nigerianized" dance styles/steps were formulated, creating for a fuller and more culturally balanced and interesting repertoire of dance styles. These indigenous dance styles include the makossa, alanta, etighi, dab dance,

alingo, suo dance, skelewu, sekem, shakiti bobo and more recently, the zanku (leg-work) dance style. Hip-hop dance in Nigeria just as its music, has also engaged people in creativity and as a money-generating venture. It has received a great height of recognition in this era and as so, requires scholarly and academic attention.

Hip-hop Music/Dance and Moral Didactics

Morality could be said to be a code or set of conducting principles set by a group, society, an organization or even an individual that concerns itself with the separation between what is right and wrong or what is good and bad. It can also be said to be the day to day practice of a group or an individual's view of what is perceived to be 'good'. The philosophy of what is 'good' is quite different among people and the society at large due to religious, gender, cultural and even generational influences which most times, functions as a reality filter.

Microsoft Encarta Dictionary (2007ed.) defined the word didactic as a means of teaching or having a moral message which tends to give advice or instructions, even as at when and when not needed. The word is derived from the Greek word *"didaktus,"* which means to 'teach'.

A morally didactic song is one which messages tend to pass across information that teaches its listeners the distinction between good and bad and encourages them to always be upright and desist from the bad and evil things. This type of music is contained in our African repertoire of folk and didactic songs which are used in informing, instructing and educating an African child. This notion is supported by Agu (2011) who observed that the Igbo child "learns everything around him, the culture, history of the land, general knowledge, and moral instructions through songs. He also stated that, "one of the basic functions of Igbo folk music is that of moral education which concentrates on the moral obligations of the child to society". The norms, ethics and values of a society are basically transmitted to members of the society through the texts of the songs used by them (Okunade 2011). Nwamara (2015) also stated that, folk music is

"indigenous and on its own part performs to an appreciable extent some educative (moral and cultural) roles, culture preservation roles as well as entertainment roles" (p.266).

Unfortunately, hip-hop music in Nigeria has been predominantly profane and immoral in its lyrics, its dress sense and to the nature of most of its dance style as against the moral inclination of the society and its original purpose of creation which was basically to educate, inform and advocate for the common man against the ills of the society and corruption of our leaders through its themes and messages as seen in the songs of Eedris Abdulkareem and Tony Tettula. This notion was supported and emphasized by Nwamara (2011) who stated that, "one of the most important features of Hip-hop which distinguishes the musical genre and puts it in a class of its own as different from other genres is the song text." He further stated that:

> *Hip-hop singers are characteristically "praise singers of themselves". They sing about their love, sex, affluence, beauty, class, outstanding performance, God's intervention and "upliftment", hope for a promising future, good recording deal, popularity, attractiveness, etc. Others in wanting to be heard by other artistes (especially those considered as outstanding), sing songs to criticize them, known in the Nigerian Hip-hop parlance as "biff song". Some sing to criticize the government, and the rich class who segregate while others sing to praise outstanding artistes in the field and their DJs. (p. 147-148)*

Although, some hip-hop musicians in Nigeria have tried and succeeded in keeping their music free from profane words and sexual inclinations, so many others today, thrive in making themselves and their music a brand for the advocacy of gangsterism, violence, indecency and sexual immorality. The hip-hop dances are now created to be erotic in nature, with the female vixens/dancers dressed in so

little and very revealing attires because it is believed to be more marketable and in trend. Ekwueme (2001) is of the opinion that Nigerian composers should produce works to meet the Nigerian audience; to which I add that the songs need to be those that would be educative as well as morally sensitive and acceptable.

Hence, there is the need for the adaptation of Adedeji"s (2010) transformative musicology theory in the creation and composition of hip-hop music. Hip-hop musicians need to start creating songs that are more educative and morally balanced in nature by recontextualizing their themes and making them free from profane languages and sexual attributes. This can also be achieved by employing the use of our indigenous didactic songs which are basically used for educating, correcting, teaching and informing the people.

Educational and Socio-Cultural Relevance

Culture could be said to be the values, customs and beliefs, arts and social organization that makes up the way of a life of a particular society, group or country. The sum up of these ways of life of a people, are most times passed from one generation to another as cultural heritage. It is believed that people are often times as indigenous as their culture, meaning that a person when brought up from childhood in the ways and dictates of his/her culture; finds it quite difficult to deviate from it. Music has always been an important aspect of our Nigerian culture which most times play an integral role in the inculcation of moral values in the early life and developmental stages of a child. The indigenous music of a people tends to bring them together in oneness and create a sort of inter-personal relationship amongst them. In a socio-cultural setting, music, especially when lacking some form of cultural inclinations and unwanted religious influences, creates the opportunity for Nigerians to communicate and interact freely within themselves at a particular point in time.

Hip-hop music and dance in its regard, has metamorphosed into being a culture of its own and has mostly affected the Nigerian youths in their craze and yearning for modernity and globalization. The effect of this could be seen in the DRESS SENSE (with sagging, wearing of torn trousers and rugged jeans, and the ladies putting on very little and revealing dresses all in the name of trend and fashion), CULTURAL PREFERENCES (this could be seen in the cultural choices of the Nigerian youth, who consider their own indigenous cultural practices as archaic but would rather go for the western cultural practices alternatively as could be seen mostly in their dress sense) DANCE STYLE (especially in our cultural dances, as they have been greatly adulterated in such a way that the influence of hip-hop could be seen in the dance style, steps and even mannerism when being performed by a youth) and LANGUAGE of those that are hip-hop compliant (with slangs, rap words and pidgin being the order of the day, thus, robbing some the ability of proper English speaking and even language mastery).

Nevertheless, culturally speaking, hip-hop culture has proven not to be rigid or static as it tends to encourage cultural hybridity; where the foreign culture and even our indigenous culture assimilate each other thereby creating an existence for a modern culture that goes with the contemporary trends and also creating inter-social relationships between the different societies and states in the country.

Educationally, hip-hop music and dance is not recognized as a necessary area of research or learning in higher institutions and as so, does not receive much academic attention or relevance, and this could possibly be due to its attribution to immoral and obscene characteristics today after drastically deviating from its main purpose of creation being to inform, educate and advocate for the masses. Music is perceived as educational, when it possesses the ability to give positively formative effect on the character, mind and physical ability of the listener. Nketia (1966) informed that music was a basis for educating the members of community and it serves as a

means of teaching the norms and values of society. The need for educational grounding in the art of hip-hop music and dance in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized as education is the gateway to logical reasoning and sustainable provision to social and economic needs. Akumah (2004:202) also defined education "the process of discipline through training and study in the acquisition of skills and knowledge". Education is also "the sum total of processes by means of which a social group or community, small or large transmits its acquired power and aims with a view to securing its continuous existence or growth" (Eya 2000:143), all of these qualities, our Nigerian hip-hop music today has proven to be devoid of and causing an abnormality in the system.

However, with the inclusion and incorporation of hip-hop music and dance as an area of specialty and relevant research area in music studies, the output production of this genre of music would be manageable, curbing most of its obscene, vulgar and immoral tendencies or at least reducing it to its minimal, creating for a more educative and societally acceptable hip-hop works due to its high rate consumption, thus, giving this genre of music, the value it deserves.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Hip-hop music which was believed to have been originally created to educate, inform and advocate for the common man, has drastically deviated from that intention and has since then faced so much negative criticisms as to the immoral way of life it now champions and encourages today. The exhibition of violence, nudity, drug addiction and vulgar language has become the order of the day among its compliants (comprising mostly of youths), with the hip-hop dancers, especially the females, regarded as prostitutes due to their high level of nudity display and erotic dance styles. This genre of music and dance in its present state is believed to be of no good moral impact on Nigerian youths and society at large, causing it to receive little or no educational interest/relevance whatsoever.

However, despite its attribution to immoral values, hip-hop music and dance has been the most recognized and lucrative genre of music in Nigeria today, commanding a high rate of consumption and influence on Nigerian youths. So, it is imperative for this genre of music and dance to be given indepth educational study and relevance by music scholars, promoting the restructuring of the dance styles as well as recontextualizing its theme and message as suggested in Adedeji's (2010) transformative musicology agenda that champions the need for the recontextualization of musical compositions for societal transformation in Nigeria; and also Nwamara's (2011) support for the inclusion of more educative texts in hip-hop music in Nigeria. With music scholars delving more into the production of this genre of music, this would help in regulating the composition and production of hip-hop music, hence, curbing/ reducing to its very minimal the use of vulgarity and exhibition of immoral and profane lifestyle. This would create for a more meaningful, morally inclined, educative and societally acceptable hip-hop music production.

It is also recommended that the censors' boards in Nigeria should do more in their duties of checkmating the hip-hop music works before disseminating to the public. Works with vulgar languages and nudity should be banned from being displayed or listened to, thus, bringing it to its barest minimum. The government should also sponsor, encourage and promote cultural revival and export through hip-hop music and dance. Lastly, the Nigerian parents should give serious and adequate attention to the sort of training their children are given at home because the home is the most delicate formation ground and determining foundation for the future of a child.

References

Adedeji, 'F. (2010). Transformative musicology: Recontextualizing art music composition for societal transformation in Nigeria', in *Revista Electronica de Musicologia,* Vol. XIV, http://www.rem.ufpr.br/_REM/REMv14/09/transformative_musicology.html

Agu, D. C. C. (2011). Use of Igbo folk music as an instructional material for moral and musical arts education in Igbo culture, Nigeria, *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts (AJRMA)* 8, p.8-18.

Akwaowo, N. (2010). Hip-hop music in Nigeria: The music and its musicians. A composition seminar laboratory paper presented at the Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Akumah, E. (2004). Concept of functional education. In R. C. Okafor and L. N. Emeka (Eds.) Nigerian Peoples and culture. Enugu: New Generation Ventures. (p. 200-216)

Alex Amos (2012). *360 nobs.*<www.360nobs.com> Accessed16/05/2019

Buchi, Steve (2009). *Real hip-hop Naija blog spot.*<realhiphopngblogspot.com> Accessed 18/05/2017

Ekwueme, L. (2001). Composing contemporary African choral music: Problems and prospects. In M. A. Omibiyi-Obidike (ed.). *African music in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden. (p. 16-29)

Eya, L. O. (2000). Achieving national unity and development through the national educational philosophy. In *SOSTAN*: 3(1) (p.142-146)

Igwe, C. A. (2014). *Contemporary popular music and dance as tools for societal transformation in Nigeria.*B. A. Project submitted to the Department of Music, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka.

Nketia, J. H. K. (1966). Music education in African school: A review of position in Ghana. *British Journal of Education.*Vol I. 10-25

Nwamara, A. O. (2011). Naija hip-hop song texts and their implications to sustainable development in Nigeria in A. B. C. Chiegboka, T. C. Utoh-Ezeajugh and M. S. Ogene (Eds.) *The humanities and sustainable development.* P 147-152. Nimo: Rex Charles & Patrick Ltd.

Nwamara, A. O. (2015). Igbo folk songs: Towards reviving and preserving the Igbo musical culture. In A. O. Nwauwa and C. J. Korieh (Eds.) *Perspectives on the Igbo: Multidisciplinary approach.* Pp. 263 – 275. Glassboro – New Jersey: Goldline and Jacobs Publishing.

Ogene, J. (2007). Nigerian dance as visual data resource. In C. Ugolo (ed.) *Perspectives in Nigerian dance studies*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications Nigeria Ltd.

Ojo, B. (2003). 'Singing old tunes: Critical comments on Welsh Ashante's African dance.' *The theatre Experience: Journal of Contemporary Theatre Practice*. 3 (2). (p. 70-72)

Onwuekwe, A. I. (2009). The socio-cultural implication of African music and dance. *The Creative Artiste: A Journal of the Theatre and Media* Studies. Asigbo, A., Uto-Ezeajughi, T., and Abone, C. (eds.) 171-185.