**Globalization and commercialization—threats to cultural self expression and diversification in Nigerian popular music**

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**Abstract**

Popular music in the 21st century has come to fully reflect the politico-socio-economic flavours of the third millennium. The once peculiar elements marking the differences between the African, the Asiatic, the European, the Australian, and the American popular practices have all blended into one global genre called *World Music.* The only consideration in creative rationalization regarding World Music is the global market value. The accepted morality in international politics is economics. Economics connotes politics; commercialization condones capitalism. In the end, the winning economy not only asserts her interests, but also imposes her values. In so doing, a global culture ceases to be a picture but a feature. Creative expression is then conditioned by economic assertions. Motivation for creative innovation now has money as its prime consideration. Money that must be counted in Pounds, Dollars, and Euro. This global hegemony not only dictates but also psychologically controls ingenuity. Through a social analysis, a survey of the popular music practices in Nigeria today shows that the current craze for collaborations between Nigerian pop musical artistes with their foreign contemporaries only gives a blurred picture of the extent of threats to regional cultural self expression and artistic diversification posed by globalization.

**Introduction**

Ever since the presence of man on the planet Earth, one thing has endured—man’s desire to prosper. For this reason, human society over the millennia has evolved from the rustic to the sophisticated; from timidity to complexity; and from kingdoms to sovereign states. In this millennium, everything has become global. Now, not only are military issues global, so are economic and even cultural ones. And increasingly the entire world has access to the same culture—same music, same movies, same markets, same sports, same lifestyle, and same ideas.

This all-inclusive universal culture is termed globalization. In the words of Idolor (2009),

Globalization is the interconnectivity of the activities of people irrespective of distance, race, culture, technology, trade in goods and services; facilitated by improved information and communication technology, transportation, political and socio-cultural co-operation, and applied technological developments; turning the world into a ‘global village’ (p. 152).

Globalization, therefore, is the socio-economic transactions of a worldwide integrated global economy facilitated by the modern technology-spawned super highway of electronic media of communication, achieved mainly via the Internet. Through the electronic media of radio, television, and the internet, it became possible for the world to have the same experiences instantaneously and simultaneously.

**Globalization and popular music**

A novel practice in the global pop musical creativity is a conscious fusion of the distinctive elements of African, Asiatic, European, Australian, and American popular (and even classical/art) music styles to arrive at one global genre called *World Music.* A basic characteristic of these “new” sounds is that they keep adopting musical elements, properties, and instruments from any part of the globe that the musicians consider worthy of enhancing their creativity. This flexibility has given birth to a global genre that is also known as *World Beat* or *Ethno-pop*. They have become a global pool of sounds, expressing, dramatizing, interpreting, and mediating meanings, identities, and values of the world social order. Reflecting on the impacts of globalization on the arts, Porterfield (1998) notes: “Literature, the theatre, classical music lost the authority to set the cultural agenda. Today the influence, the action, the buzz is all pop” (p. 35).

**Globalization and commercialization**

Politics is recognized to be the artful or skillful negotiations, by individuals or groups, geared towards appropriation and maximization of opportunities inherent in the distribution of jointly owned scarce/competitive amenities or interests (Onwuegbuna, 2009). In the politics of globalization, the competitive pursuit of scarce amenities by different nations of the world has led to intensification of uneven development and subjugation of the weaker nations by the more powerful ones. In this guise, the process of globalization assumes a contradictory and hierarchical nature, in the sense that the super-powers assert their interests and impose their values on the rest of the nations. The contradiction is that instead of encouraging even development and capital flow, globalization encourages uneven development and capital hegemony (Ho, 2003; Kiely & Marfleet, 2005; Stokes, 2004).

**Nigerian pop music: Pre-globalization era**

Nigeria, bounded on the north by Niger Republic, east by Chad and Cameroon, south by the gulf of Guinea, and west by Benin Republic, became a source of attraction to Portuguese slave merchants, who, in the 14th century invaded the north through the assistance of Muslim Arab raiders from the Sahara regions. This contact with Middle-Eastern and Western European cultures started a cultural miscegenation that was to be amplified by other attractions.

By the beginning of the 17th century, the discovery of natural resources in Nigeria, which Stock (2011), records as iron-ore, salt, coal, lead, zinc, gold, uranium, petroleum, and natural gas, attracted more Portuguese and British colonialists. Buah (1981) tells us that these same Portuguese were the ones that opened the doors of West Africa to the Spanish settlers in America; thereby exposing the blacks to a deeper foreign influence culture-wise.

The event of Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century, the abolition of slave trade in 1807, and America’s acceptance to back off the obnoxious business in 1864 all made black freedom in the white lands obvious. A bold campaign for repatriation had been on since the tail end of 18th century; hence so many freed black slaves were transported back to Africa—mostly to Freetown in Sierra Leone and Lagos, Nigeria. This gesture further compounded the case of cultural confluences along the west coast of Africa.

On the heels of this industrial revolution also came other revolutions. A notable one is the emergence of a world popular culture, which inaugurated a musical diversification in the late 19th century. The dramatic transformations—especially urbanization and industrialization—brought about changes that “disrupted traditional attitudes, lifestyles, and forms of artistic patronage, while creating new urban social classes with new musical tastes” (Keita, 2011).

The first and second world wars fought between 1914 and 1945, as well as the advent of hi-tech communication media also serve as a conduit for cultural transfer between Nigeria and the world at large.

Drawing heavily on these politico-socio-economic associations on ground, Nigeria started witnessing various foreign musical cultures in the European regimental March and Wind bands, the Sea-Shanties of seamen along the gulf of Guinea and the bights of Biafra, and the piano-accompanied hymns and cantata of the white Christianity.

Collins (1996) reports that the same process was tenable in Ghana, while Akpabot (1989) praises the Protestant Movements for their liberality that gave room to acculturation.

Before the end of the 1800s, Nigeria was already used to the European colonial ballroom dances. Akpabot (1989) lists the dances as waltz, foxtrot, quickstep, and tango. The freed slaves also returned with rhumba, conga, son Afro-Cubano, mambo, meringue, and cha-cha-cha dances of Latin America.

A fusion of divergent notions garnered from exposure to various foreign musical cultures soon gave birth to a unique musical experience. This experience became a synthesis of African and Western musical traditions, involving new scales and modes, new styles, new harmonic principles, and new instruments.

The new genre which was the first of the locally produced musical idioms soon became a national idiom under the name, Native Blues.

Native Blues then became a national musical experience expressed on the European box guitar, sometimes an accordion, two or more native instruments (like the traditional drum, thumb piano, shakers, rattles, etc.) and almost always a bottle tapped with a knife to produce high sounding notes; and all fused with indigenous dance rhythms.

Soon after the Native Blues stabilized, Combo bands evolved as an indigenous version of the then reigning Brass bands of the European colonialists.

Okoro (1993) reports that:

The necessity for the rising African elite to blend something of their tradition with the surging western popular music which swept the cafes, night clubs, ballrooms, and public entertainment from the ’30s on gave rise to a new brand of music, half indigenous (in its extemporization, meaningful vocal lines, and meaningful rhythms) and half Western (in strict tempo [*sic*], harmony, instrumentation, and melodic structure) (p. 9).

A typical Combo Band would consist of brass, woodwinds, drums and guitar in its choice of instrumentation; and the songs are done in indigenous languages, Pidgin English, and/or English language.

As the Combo Bands thrived amongst the elites, the low-class who also wanted a piece of the action, soon found an answer to their need for the entertainment of the new social order. The Native Blues that grew out of palm wine drinking shacks metamorphosed into small but more subdued guitar-and-percussion ensembles known as Guitar Bands. These bands played two electric guitars, one electric bass guitar, a set of trap drums, a set of conga drums, sometimes an electronic keyboard is added, as well as one trumpet and/or one saxophone.

The tail end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s saw the mingling of two genres of popular music: the already established Guitar bands and the ‘new’ big bands known as the Dance Band. Most of these bands actually grew out of the Combo bands and Dance orchestras that belonged to the highbrow society of civil servants and their likes in the private sector.

The Dance bands employed a full horns section of trombone, trumpet, cornet, saxophone, clarinet, and even flute; a rhythm section of rhythm guitar, lead guitar, double bass or electric bass guitar, and even violins at times; and percussions that included a set of conga drums, shakers, and claves. The electronic keyboard was also introduced. These bands equally enriched the vocal lines of the lead vocalists by introducing, at least, three professional back-up singers who sing in three harmonic parts (with other instrumentalists doubling as back-up singers) to produce a dense harmonic texture in the vocals.

These bands artistically packaged and performed rich indigenous melodies through the media of swing, jazz, and twist.

These popular musical styles became acculturated music that leaned towards playing of a brand of music that reflects the African cultural heritage even with European instruments.

 In the words of Akpabot (1989):

Two trends are easily discernible here. The first one being those musicians who played traditionally derived music on European instruments; and the other those who discarded European dance band instruments to form small groups of performers comprising a guitarist, who was usually also the solo singer supported by secondary traditional drums (p. 99).

The 1960s and ’70s saw a sporadic explosion of Africa’s independence from Western colonial rules.

This experience facilitated culture contact amongst African nations, which in turn made available the variant forms of popular music of neighbouring nations of Africa recorded on vinyl. From Cameroon came *Makossa* and *Bikutsi*, *Soukous/Liquour-Liquour* (called *Ikwọkịrịkwọ* in Nigeria) came from Congo/Zaire, while Benin Republic supplied *Zouk* and *Goghahoun*. Tanzania’s *Yetu*, Sierra Leone’s *Maringa*, and Cape Verde’s *Morna* were all imported into Nigeria. Other variants include *Benga/Taarab* of Kenya, *Chimurenga* of Zimbabwe, South Africa’s *Marabi/Mbaquanga*, and *Jiti* of Zimbabwe.

This condition made inevitable the development of different styles of not only Highlife, but also other forms of popular music in Nigeria. Commercialization of the genre created a steep competition in the music business, and also challenged the creative imaginations of the musicians.

The stratified social order in Nigeria, then, was easily revealed in the choices of musical listenership. Musical patronage and sponsorship was mostly kept in the hands of the ruling class by the privilege of their economic and political might.

The development of different styles in early Highlife music of Nigeria started with the minstrels who were the first to respond to the above needs of the society. Baba Tunde King is credited with the coining of the term *Juju* music to address the *Owambe* variant of Highlife music which captured the interest of the Yoruba minstrels. The development of this variant was further expanded by Ayinde Bakare, Tunde Nightingale, and J. Oyeshiku. However, it was I.K. Dairo who took the genre to limelight when he introduced new elements such as the electric guitar, accordion, and the *dundun* talking drum. His efforts earned him the prestigious MBE (Member of British Empire) in 1963.

Following the trails beaten by Dairo, Ebenezer Obey, in 1964 formed his big band Juju Highlife group, the International Brothers. Competition within the new genre became sharp with Sunny Ade leading a fast and furious development with the introduction of as many as four electric guitars, various keyboards, Hawaiian sitars, trap sets, and a wide range of traditional and modern percussions. He also featured numerous back-up vocalists.

Julius O. Araba initiated the journey towards the evolution of the outrageous Afrobeat variant. In the early 1940s, Araba started recording his dreamy Juju tunes; but a decade later, he saw a need to inject new waves into his style. By the infusion of Haruna Ishola’s *Apala* music with Juju that is expressed through electric guitar, locally made two-stringed double bass, and other traditional instruments of Juju music, Araba added more depth to his own brand of Juju music. This new creation he called Afro Skiffle. Even though Ebenezer Obey and Sunny Ade stayed with the Juju genre, Akpabot (1989) reports that they copied, on a grander scale, the innovations of Araba.

Starting from the middle of the 1960s, individual expressions of national styles became the vogue. Orlando Julius and Fela Anikulapo (then Ransome) Kuti introduced, yet, another variant of Highlife music called Afrobeat. Tinkering with Geraldo Pino’s Afro-soul style, Fela combined this soulful tunes with elements of Highlife, Jazz, Afro-Cubano, and traditional Yoruba music to define a distinctive rhythm called Afrobeat.

Moving further down to Mid-Western Nigeria, the Edo born Victor Uwaifo exploited the rich musical culture of Bini to create his own variant of Highlife music which, at various stages, he has called *Ekassa*, *Akwete*, *Mutaba*, *Shadow*, and *Sasakossa*. Since the formation of his Melody Maestros in 1965, Uwaifo has persistently tried to reflect in his music the intriguing beats and language of Edo culture, as well as the full spectrum of the colourful hues of Akwete hand-woven cloth material.

In the Igbo speaking Eastern Nigeria, it was the introduction of *Pachanga Meringue* variant by Stephen Osita Osadebe in 1966 that led to other variants like *Ikwọkịrịkwọ*, etc. Osadebe, Mike Ejeagha, St. Augustine, and their contemporaries introduced elements of the Meringue dance of the Dominican Republic to Highlife, and laced it with the declamations that are borrowed from the Igbo folk music. This style is still evolving more complex variants till date. Peacocks, Oriental Brothers, Oliver De Coque, Bright Chimezie, and Ken Nwofor have all benefited from this innovation.

The variants evolved include Afro-Highlife, Higherlife, High-pop, Gbedu, Africalypso, and others which tend to craft rock and jazz-oriented ambient sounds that appeal to Westerners while still retaining some indigenous flavour. I.K. Diaro introduced the accordion to his music, thereby producing a music that is traditional and at the same time new—a novelty and continuity to a people who value both. Inyang Henshaw played the slap-and-pull technique of bass guitar to funkify his Highlife music, while Celestine Ukwu introduced the vibraphone to his band to bring back the effect of the thumb piano. Joe Nez used the electronic organ to support his calypsonic rhythms, while the wah-wah/cry-baby electric guitar effects give a rocky feeling to Osita Osadebe’s music.

By the time the war ended in 1970, the Nigerian society was in a flux. This situation led to other up-coming musicians exploring other forms of popular music, so as to sound different and attract commercial investors. These new forms include Afro-Rock, Africalypso, Afro-Reggae, and Afro-Funk. The exponents were many; they include the Black Stones of Port Harcourt, Funkees of Aba, Apostles, Wings, and Sweet Breeze of Aba, One World and Hi-Grades of Enugu, Aktions of Ikot Ekpene, and the Strangers of Owerri. Others like Wrinkers Experience, Doves, Founders 15, and Semi-Colon also ruled the airwaves.

**Nigerian pop music and globalization**

As the twentieth century was exiting, and the twenty-first was bestriding the threshold, Nigerian popular music had truly gone international. Shirley Bassey performed the theme music in 007 James Bond’s *Diamonds are Forever*, Patti Boulaye modeled for *Lux Beauty Soap*,Seal, Sade Adu, and Dr. Alban (all Nigerians) won the prestigious Grammy Awards. The music of Femi Kuti and that of Lighthouse Family were used as commercial jingles for advertising the products of some international conglomerates. By these rare feats, Nigerian popular music and musicians become sought-after commodities in the global economy.

In this twenty-first century proper, when 2-Face Idibia became the first artiste to win the Best African Act Award at the 2005 MTV Base Music Awards in Lisbon, for his *African Queen,* he and his hip hop-oriented music became a model for his contemporaries. He then went ahead to collaborate with the Jamaican international *dancehall* star, Beenie Man, in the song *Nfuna Ibanga;* and yet another collaboration with Wyclef Jean (another Jamaican superstar) in the song *Proud 2 Be African.* D’Banj was the next to win an international award that opened the door for collaborations with the American rap megastar, Snoop Doggy Dog. Soon after, collaborations between Nigerian Afro-hip hop artistes and many international stars across the globe became the vogue.

The craze for collaborations between Nigerian and international artistes has resulted in commercializing creativity. For any of these globally accepted artistes to be hired to perform in any event in the country, they demand to be paid in foreign currency—preferably Pounds, Euro, or Dollars. This commercialization of musical creativity has resulted in a high consideration of economic profit, and a consequent debasement in creative quality.

**Conclusion**

As creativity is stifled, musical rhythm is stagnated, and every musician is striving to sound alike in order to benefit from the commercial success of the reigning global musical styles. At the end of the day, cultural self-expression and artistic diversification are sacrificed at the altar of commercialization. For the way forward, the producers, directors, and patrons of the Nigerian pop music business should borrow a leaf from the book of the Nollywood home-movies industry. The Nigerian Nollywood, ranked third in the world, after America's Hollywood and India’s Bollywood, has been able to achieve global acceptance and liberation from global imperialism by the insistence of the stakeholders to use the medium to export a near-real presentation of the culture and philosophy of the modern-day Nigeria. This consistency has been accepted globally as a truly Nigerian cultural and artistic expression and diversification. The Nigerian pop music industry has a lot to benefit from this approach to cultural self expression and artistic diversification.

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