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Musician as an ideologue: Example of Bob Marley and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti

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Abstract

Music has been used to project social and spiritual interactions irrespective of cultural and socio-political worldview of the people. Its entertainment value seems to have taken precedence over socio-political and spiritual utilities. Musicians are regarded as agents of social awareness and reformation that expose and correct the incidences in the society. Without strong ideological leaning it will be pretty difficult for any musician to impact his society positively apart from the entertainment values. This study is undertaken to take a look at two prominent musicians that influenced their societies as a result of their strong ideological persuasion. Their music has remained very relevant today even long after they exited the stage and the world. They were not only ideologically grounded, they were equally visionary and their music serves multiple purposes in our contemporary world. The study selected Bob Marley and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti whose music did not only provide entertainment values but supplied us with a standard with which we assess our social-cultural and spiritual interactions. The study submits that without strong ideological foundations the two musicians would have possibly died with their music. Today their music has remained evergreen and indelible because of the strong ideology that heralded and influenced their songs. The study therefore concludes that music should not be for music sake or mainly for entertainment purposes but for socio-cultural, political and spiritual interactions which cannot be achieved without deep ideological foundation.

Keywords: English language, literary studies, music, spiritual utilities, spiritual interactions

Introduction

The replacement of African traditional values with those of the West since the colonial era, as well as the effect of such on post-colonial African art, continue to affect the output of African artistes. This colonial contact situation has made most African (black) musicians in particular and artistes in general to be neither here nor there according to Adepegba (1999:15). The result is a crisis of ideology and its attendant perspective to cultural tangle and conflict. In pre-colonial time music and musical performances were community based and satisfied the aesthetic, philosophical, religious and social need of the people. It became a medium of articulating society's philosophical belief system and maintaining group ideology.

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With the advent of colonialism, the African man was made to believe that his art was 'primitive' and 'heathenistic'. The West sought to replace African art with their model and their culture generally. In the French colonies for instance, the colonialists sought to completely assimilate the black man into French culture. Consequently the colonized minds jettisoned the 'old' for the 'new' with the growth and development of cash economy and urbanization, rural dwellers moved en-mass to the cities where white-collar jobs and European culture flourished. The social niche created and the growing need for entertainment, attracted rural musicians to the cities, who in no time learnt to play Western influenced music. The framework for syncretism anti urban popular music was therefore laid and the crisis of ideology began. This made some musicians who we shall analyze shortly to create a certain ideological niche for themselves in line with black consciousness.

Overview of Music in Nigeria

In recent times Nigeria for example, has become a dumping ground for all genres of music from rock 'n' roll to R&B, Soul, Jazz, Reggae, Hip-pop, Rapp, Dancehall and Makossa. All these have had a concomitant negative impact on the indigenous music, which is culturally and ideologically based. It is against the backdrop of the ideological and identical quagmire that most musicians have found themselves that the paper attempts to discuss the essence of ideology in music which should, as a matter of fact, identify with black culture. This is so considering the fact that music of black Africa is basically protest in nature and musicians need strong ideological background to propagate their message. This becomes necessary in the sense that the message outlives the messenger and for this to happen, the ideology that staged the production of such works or music must be of timeless values, as we shall see in the musicians we are going to discuss in this paper.

Two important concepts are involved here, culture and ideology (identity). Culture according to E.B. Tylor is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (E.B. Tylor cited in Nettle 1983:27). Culture is largely acquired through a learning process. Albert (1990:90) opines that the environment in which one grows up determines to a large extent his cultural attributes. Culture is therefore, the totality of a people's way of life. Drawing inference therefore, the African culture can simply be said to refer to the peculiar ways in which Africans live their lives. This is replicated in their behaviour and then passed on to their young ones.

Such ideas and behaviours include music because it is perceived as part of human socio-cultural worldview. African music therefore replicates African culture and ideology. Musicians are therefore the carriers of this ideology of their culture. They are ideologists in the sense that through them the ideology of a particular community or culture is propagated and exported to the outside world.

Identity by definition is that which makes an individual what s/he is and which distinguishes him/her from others. It could be seen as an embodiment of peculiarities of a being as an existing whole different from others. One of the greatest problems that African slaves encountered in Diaspora was that of identity, a situation which W.E.B. Dubois summed up this way. “The Negro has two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings, two warring devils in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being turned asunder” he continues further, “the history of the American Negro is the history of longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and true self” (WEB Dubois cited in Holt 1980:6).

Mveng (1985:65) submits that “cultural identity is in the first place the cultural heritage of a people, a nation in all its riches, poverty, variety, originality in what makes it different from the cultural heritage of “other people”. Stressing this further, he opines. “. . . to speak of cultural identity is to speak of creativity and the fertility of a peoples imagination as well as of its productivity”.

Ideologue on the other hand is a person whose actions are influenced by belief in a set of principles, very uncompromising and strict most times dogmatic. With this understanding and clarification it is pertinent to evaluate the performance of musician against the backdrop of cultural and ideological identity. The legacy of Europe which came through trade, colonialism, and Christianity brought European musical styles alongside European fashion. With European musical styles like hymns, Waltz, Foxrot, quick step and so on, new sounds were created which gave rise to distinctive Nigerian typologies like highlife, afro-rock, juju, afro-beat and many more. Islam on the other hand introduced Islamic instruments, monodic and melismatic singing styles. The contact of Nigerian music with Islamic culture brought in its wake variety of musical styles which have now metamorphosed into Nigerian Islamic musical typologies like waka, apala, dadawada, senwele and Fuji (Otto Karolyn, 1998).

With the introduction of a cash economy from the West, large cities and urban settlements have become an irresistible lure for rural dwellers who want to jettison “local life” for city life which

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is grossly cosmopolitan. These city dwellers are voracious consumers of various forms of entertainments both local and foreign. The proliferation of different musical styles occasioned by improved global mass communication has greatly influenced the musical tastes of Nigerians, especially the youths and urban dwellers, who have shifted their interest from ethnic orientated traditional music to a more cosmopolitan one (Obidike 2001:29).

Since Western values and education is fast replacing African ones, urban dwellers including musicians and music educators are gradually losing touch with their traditional musical background. Obidike again submits that since the modern school system has not been able to provide alternative ways of imparting traditional musical knowledge, the learner musician has neither the competence nor the capacity to understand, appreciate and criticize with discrimination all the varied musical forms with which he is confronted in contemporary times. Consequently urban musicians are in great dilemma of ideological and cultural identity. While the music of Tupac, Heavy D, Puff Daddy, Shaggy and the rest are hot sellers and favourites of clubs and radio DJs in Nigeria, our own Remedies, Tony Tetula, Davido, Tuface, Alex O. and a host of other new breed musicians have little or no place in Western entertainment markets. The reasons are not farfetched. Most times they go abroad to entertain Nigerians there. Ours is a poor imitation of their authentic western styles, lacking in artistry and level of mastery.

In an interview, Joe Idulu, a 'rock' n 'roll' musician, submits that there is no way we can play purely and entirely Nigerian music because most urban musicians make use of Western Musical instrument. Since his argument is that since most urban musicians use western musical instruments, there is an irresistible gravitation towards western musical styles thereby depriving them of distinct ideological and cultural identity. While there may be some truth in this claim, the study opines that the mere utilization of western musical instruments does not in any way debar us from forging a musical identity that is Nigerian and by extension African. In recent times *Fuji* musicians like Wasiu Ayinde Marshal (KWAM 1) have introduced Keyboard phrases and other western instruments to complement the drum ensemble characteristic of *Fuji* music. By so doing they have given it a distinctive Nigerian identity. Today he is the rave of many nations abroad. And we have few similar examples.

A country like Jamaica has become synonymous with reggae music as made popular by various exponents like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Black Uhuru, Yellow Man and a host of others. The

study shall focus on Bob Marley later. Reggae has come to be known as music of resistance; resisting poverty, oppression and racial inequality which have been the lot of freed slaves on the Caribbean Islands. Reggae has distinctive African rhythms and song texts that reflect the African situation and cultural worldview both at home and in Diaspora. This is an ideological and cultural identity in its simplest form. Within the history of urban popular music in Nigeria, highlife as a genre occupies a pivotal historical and musical position. The musicians have their brand of music to convey messages to the people through the instrumentality of indigenous cultural and ideological identity. by integrating the rhythmic vitality of African music with European tonal harmonies. By combining traditional Nigerian instruments with Europeans ones, highlife music stand out as a unique style in discussing Nigeria urban life (Omojola 1995:22). This is also an ideological leaning.

It is in this regard that one must not fail to acknowledge the contributions of old breed musicians like Sunny Ade's Juju with his own unique band of Yoruba music which is original and consistent; Afro-beat King, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, , whose Afro-beat stormed the world and today he remains an impressive musical phenomenon worldwide. Others include I.K. Dairo one of the foremost exponents of Juju music, Chief Osita Osadebe, the doyen of Igbo highlife music, Celestine Ukwu who was highly philosophical in his songs, Cardinal Rex Lawson, the highlife Maestro, Dan Maraya Jos, Ebenezer Obey, Oliver de Coque, Nico Mbagha of "Sweet mother" fame, Mike Ejeagha, the famous folkloric story-teller and a host of others that created unique ideological and cultural styles and brought Nigerian music to world attention.

Having established the ideological and cultural essence of music and why musicians should imbibe this in order to escape the crisis of distinct ideology, it is important that some suggestions are advanced that will lead the way out of this search for identity. It is my opinion in this paper that the way forward is to go back to our "roots" to dig into the foundations of our ethnic or traditional music, seek to understand the inherent musical potentials and seek to develop them into a fine art with sound ideological framework. It has been mentioned earlier in this paper that a wide variety of ethnic or traditional music abound in our country. Rather than promote ethnic or artistic parochialism, our ethnic and cultural diversity should be an endless well of artistic creativity; a well of great wealth of musical expression from which the urban musicians and music educators can draw creative ideas.

Colonialism and European contact has brought in its wake a dichotomy of systems, the local versus the foreign, the rural versus the urban, and today, there is growing tendency to replace

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traditional African values and art with that of the west if one is to be branded 'civilized' or 'enlightened'. There must, therefore, be a conscious effort on the part of the musician, the government and the mass media to rediscover the roots of our traditional music, highlight their inherent qualities and possibly redefine them in contemporary modes of expression.

Bob Marley(Robert Nesta Marley) as an Ideologue

For the purpose of analysis as hinted earlier, we shall attempt to look at some of the musicians who have left indelible marks on the sands of time through the ideological ethos espoused in their music. It is pertinent to note that these musicians tapped greatly from their traditional and cultural roots, and blended them with modern instruments in promoting their ideological persuasions through music. One of these musicians is Bob Marley who died close to four decades ago precisely in 1981 yet his music is evergreen in the minds of people all over the world. Today no discourse on music is complete without Bob Marley. This is because of the sound ideology that he brought into his brand of music and which has continued to trail him. He used his music to protest man's inhumanity to man and fight for a just and ideal society.

Without doubt, Bob Marley can now be recognized as the most important figure in 20th century music. It is not just the opinion of this paper, that also, judging by all the mainstream accolades hurled Bob's way lately, the feeling of a great many others too. But in the close to four decades since Bob Marley has gone, it is clear that he is without question one of the most transcendental figures of the past hundred years. The ripples of his unparalleled achievements radiate outward through the river of his music into an ocean of politics, ethics, fashion, philosophy and religion. His story is a timeless myth made manifest in his music. He says; "There will come a day when music and its philosophy will become the religion of humanity. If there remains any magic it is music"(Otto,1998)

Bob Marley was a moral and religious figure. His own particular symbolism is derived from his beliefs as a Rastafarian, a sect that revered Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia (a.k.a. Ras Tafari) as a living god who would lead oppressed blacks back to an African homeland, and his firsthand knowledge of the deprivations of the Jamaican ghettos. His lyrics mixed religious mysticism with calls for political uprising, and Marley delivered them in a passionate, declamatory voice. Marley asserts:

That music alone can be called real which comes from the harmony of the soul, its true source, and when it comes from there it must appeal to all souls ... music alone can be the means by which the souls of races, nations and families, which are today so apart, may one day be united... The more the musician is conscious of his mission in life, the greater service he can render to humanity (Soni Varun,2010; 23).

Most of the pop stars thrown up over the past hundred years had entertainment as their first and foremost goal. Not so for Marley, who was conscious of his role as the bringer of the message of Rastafarians to the consciousness of the outside world. He cared nothing for earthly trappings, and loved nothing better than lying on Jah's cool earth at night watching the heavens revolve above him, rock stone as his pillow. He was here to call people to God. There is no way we can compare Marley to other well known musical figures. As for politics, he eschewed them; although his actions caused him to be perceived and sometimes feared as a profoundly radical political leader too. But his were the anti-politics of salvation through love and love alone, an unshakeable knowledge of oneness of all mankind. He opines that:

Music is behind the working of the whole universe. Music is not only life's greatest object, but music is life itself... Music being the most exalted of the arts, the work of composer is no less than the work of a saint (Soni, 24).

As for innovation, Marley was a multi-talented synthesizer of new ideas and rhythms, beginning with his precocious "Judge Not" solo debut at the dawn of the ska era, right up through his ongoing experiments with gospel, R&B, rock, folk, jazz, Latin, punk, scat, disco, and even (in unpublished form)

Actually the real secret is that Marley's music is about something. It has value. Marley's art is life transforming, answering our highest needs. It answers in a positive way, the question that Carlos Santana says we must always ask before we begin any activity in life: how is this going to make the world a better place? Although Marley became a commercial artist, he was not making commercial art. His art transcended pop fluffery. Many are there who swear that his music literally saved their lives.

The use of music for spiritual attainment and healing of the soul, which was prevalent in ancient times, is not found to the same extent now. Music has been made a pastime, the means of forgetting God instead of realizing God. It is the use one makes of things which constitutes their fault or their virtue (Otto, 43).

It is in the vast amount of adherents that Bob's work continues to lure, that we begin to sense his obvious immortality, even from this early point of focus. Elvis Presley may have been the

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biggest single rock icon of all time, but are his songs (none, incidentally, penned by him) really saying anything beyond mere pop cliché? Bob Dylan may be the most respected poet of his generation, but his often deliberately obfuscatory lyrics stand in the way of clear translation, and limit his appeal to the non-English speaking audience. Marley, on the other hand, refined his lyric art to a steely perfection, using the language of the streets to attain the stars. His words were so perfectly scripted that they achieved eloquence. Today, his elemental stories can be related to and understood by people anywhere who suffer and long for salvation, In other words, just about every one of us.

Marley's ready embrace of marijuana, and the flaunting of his startling dread locks that grew more ferocious as the '70s wound down, contributed to his image as a rebel for all seasons, treated like a deity among defiant youths and seasoned revolutionaries alike, who recognized him as one of their own, embracing him in Harare during Zimbabwe's independence, and sending him messages of solidarity from Peruvian jungles to Himalayan hideaways.

So it appears, at least to us, that Bob Marley has the clearest shot at being recognized as the Artist of the 20th Century, at least as far as ideologically grounded music is concerned, and probably a lot more. It becomes very easy to predict with literary certainty and confidence that hundreds of years into the future, Marley's melodies will be as prevalent as those of any songwriter who has ever lived. "No Woman, No Cry" will still wipe away the tears from a widow's face; "Exodus" will still arouse the warrior; "Redemption Song" will still be a rallying cry for emancipation from all tyrannies, physical and spiritual; "Waiting in Vain" will still seduce; and "One love" will be the international anthem of a coffee-colored humanity living in unity, in a world beyond borders, beyond beliefs, where everyone has learned at last to get together and feel all right because according to him man loves music more than anything else. Music is his nature. We are all come from vibrations, and he himself is vibration...There is nothing in this world that can help one spiritually more than music.

In his true heart of hearts, Bob Marley seemed to have heard the harmony of the heavens, and shared that celestial sound with the god-seeker in each of us. Thus it is not surprising that the *New York Times*, seeking one video to epitomize the past century, preserved in a time capsule to be opened a thousand years hence, chose "Bob Marley Live at the Rainbow, London, 1977." The same "newspaper of record" selected Marley as "the most influential artist of the second half of the 20th century."

He was particularly moved throughout his career by the gulf between haves and have-nots, a culture of oppression that was particularly in his poverty and crime ridden Jamaican homeland. “We should all come together and create music and love, but there is too much poverty” Marley told writer Timothy White in 1976. He states further that the most intelligent people are the poorest people... but people don’t get time to feel and spend their intelligence..., the intelligent and innocent are poor, are crumbled and get brutalized daily.

Though he died prematurely at age 36, the heartbeat reggae rhythms of the enormous body of music that Bob Marley left behind have endured. Moreover, Jamaica itself has been transformed by his charismatic personality and musical output. In a crowning irony, given the reviled status that Rastafarians and their music had once suffered at the hands of the Jamaican government, Marley’s pacifist reggae anthem, “One Love”, was adapted as a theme song by the Jamaican Tourist Board. Meanwhile, Marley’s music continues to find an audience. With sales of more than 10 million copies in the US alone, Legend best of spanning the Island Record Year (1972-1981) remains the best selling album by a Jamaican artist and the best-selling reggae album in history. We are all ennobled by our proximity to Marley and his art, his eternal songs of freedom

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti (Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome-Kuti) as an Ideologue

Another musician in the same league with Bob Marley is Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the king of Afro-beat music. Fela was born in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria to a middle-class family. His mother, Funrnlayo Ransome-Kuti, was an active feminist in the anti-colonial movement and his father, Reverend Israel Oludotun Ransome-Kuti a Protestant minister and school Principal, was the first president of Nigeria Union of Teachers. His elder brothers, Beko Ransome-Kuti and Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, were both well-known in Nigeria.

Fela and his band, renamed ‘Afrika 70’ returned to Nigeria from overseas. He then formed the Kalakuta Republic, a commune, a recording studio and a home for many connected to the band, which he later declared independent from the Nigerian state. Fela set up a nightclub in the Empire Hotel, named the Afro-Spot and then the Shrine, where he performed regularly. Fela also changed his middle name to ‘Anikulapo’ (meaning ‘he who carries death in his pouch’).

In 1977 Fela and the Afrika 70 released the hit album ‘Zombie’, a scathing attack on Nigerian soldiers using the ‘Zombie’ metaphor to describe the methods of the Nigerian military. The

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album was a smash hit with the people and infuriated the government, setting off a vicious attack against the Kalakuta Republic, during which one thousand soldiers attacked the commune. Fela was severely beaten, and his elderly mother was thrown from a window, causing fatal injuries. The Kalakuta Republic was burned, and Fela's studio, instruments, and master tapes were destroyed. Fela claimed that he would have been killed if it were not for the intervention of a commanding officer as he was being beaten. Fela's response to the attack was to deliver his mother's coffin to an army barrack and write two songs, 'Coffin for Head of State' and 'Unknown Soldier' referencing the official inquiry reports which claimed the Kalakuta Republic was destroyed by unknown soldiers..

Fela and his band then took residence in Crossroads Hotel as the Shrine had been destroyed along with his commune. In 1978 Fela married twenty seven women in one day, many of whom were his dancers and singers to mark the anniversary of the attack on the Kalakuta Republic. The year was also marked by two notorious concerts, the first in Accra in which riots broke out during the Song 'Zombie' which led to Fela being banned from entering Ghana. The second was at the Berlin Jazz Festival after which most of Fela's musicians deserted him, due to rumors that Fela was planning to use the entirety of the proceeds to fund his presidential campaign.

Despite the massive setbacks, Fela was determined to come back. He formed his own political party, which he called 'Movement of the People'. In 1979 he put himself forward for President in Nigeria's first elections for more than a decade but his candidature was refused. At this time, Fela created a new band called 'Egypt 80' and continued to record albums and tours the country. He further infuriated the political establishment by dropping the names of ITT Vice-President Moshood Abiola and General Olusegun Obasanjo at the end of a hot-selling 25-minute political, screed entitled 'International Thief Thief'.

In 1983 he again ran for President but was again attacked by police, who threw him in prison on a dubious charge of currency smuggling. Several human-rights groups took up his case, and after twenty months, General Ibrahim Babangida released him from prison. On his release he divorced his twelve remaining wives. Once again Fela continued to release albums with Egypt 80, made a number of successful tours of the United States and Europe and also continued to be politically active. In 1986, Fela performed in Giants Stadium in New Jersey as part of the Amnesty International 'Conspiracy of Hope' concert, sharing the bill with Bono. Carlos Santana. and The Neville Brothers.

The musical style performed by Fela Kuti is called Afro-beat, which is essentially a fusion of jazz, funk and Traditional African Chants. It is characterized by having African style percussion, vocals, and musical structure, along with jazz, funky horn sections. The ‘endless groove’ is also used, in which a base rhythm of drums, muted guitar, and bass guitar are repeated throughout the song. This is a common technique in African and African-influenced musical styles, and can be seen in funk and hip-hop. Some elements often present in Fela’s music are the call-and-response with the chorus and figurative but simple lyrics. Fela’s songs are almost always over ten minutes in length, some reaching the twenty or even thirty minute marks. This was one of many reasons that his music never reached a substantial degree of popularity outside of Africa. His songs were mostly sung in Nigerian pidgin, although he also performed a few songs in the Yoruba language. Fela’s main instruments were the saxophone and the keyboards but also played the trumpet, horn, and guitar and made the occasional drum solo. Fela refused to perform songs again after he had already recorded them, which also hindered his popularity outside Africa. Fela was known for his showmanship, and his concerts were often quite outlandish and wild and highly satiric with acerbic tongue.

The American Black Power movement influenced Fela’s political views. He was also a supporter of Pan-Africanism and socialism (although in a 1982 documentary he can clearly be seen rejecting both capitalism and socialism in favour of a third way that he described as Africanism), and called for a united, democratic African republic, he was a fierce supporter of human rights, and many of his songs are direct attacks against dictatorships, specifically the military governments of Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s. He was also a social commentator, and criticized his fellow Africans (especially the upper class) for betraying traditional African culture. The African culture he believed in also included having many wives (polygamy) and the Kalakuta Republic was formed in part as a polygamist colony. Though not part of African culture, it should be noted though that Fela was very open when it came to sex, as he portrayed in some of his songs, like ‘Open and Close’.

Conclusion

From the foregoing it is now established that without serious ideological grounding it is pretty difficult to be a credible musician. Every artist should try therefore to follow the footsteps of the musicians discussed above if they want their music and the message they are conveying to be timeless. Musicians should try and be themselves in order to create a unique identity for their music. Both Marley and Fela had running battles with the establishments of their various

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countries because of their ideological persuasions which heavily influenced their music. Their music did not make them millionaires as we have today but they have remained evergreen in our consciousness. Music should be used to reflect and refract society while serving its entertainment purpose. It is not about what is trending as we have it today where most songs lack meaningful messages. The examples of the artistes studied should be a guide to up and coming musicians that ideology is necessary for a flourishing career that will outlive them. Singing for the money is ephemeral and cannot stand the test of time.

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