

## African Popular Culture and the Path of Consciousness: Hip Hop and the Culture of Resistance in Nigeria

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There is no doubt that hip hop is now one of the fastest growing musical genres in the world. As an expressive art and one of the fastest growing youth-driven popular cultures in the world, the hip hop genre has enjoyed a lot of both positive and negative media attention. Musically, hip hop is a combination of styles which thrives on hybridity; according to Perkins, the genre is “based on all previous musical forms . . . [fusing] the verbal and performance vernacular to an expanded rhythmic base” (vii). Its underlying characteristics rely on creating a groove which rests on a broad and diverse urban street-conscious culture. This culture extends from music to street arts (e.g. graffiti), fashion, and sports.

Summarising the origin of hip hop, while emphasizing its socio-political and economic antecedents, Tricia Rose writes:

Hip hop emerge[d] from the de-industrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect . . . [It] is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutality, truncated opportunity, and oppression within cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by post-industrial oppression and the binding ties of black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip hop. (21)

From having a sense of connectivity to its American counterpart, hip hop culture spread among youth throughout the world, dominating local music practices. Through this genre, young people now engage in local as well as global discourses to project their experiences, views and frustration regarding unpalatable socio-economic conditions in their everyday lives while using various devices such as indigenous language (or slang) and appropriation from local cultures to appeal to home-grown sensibilities. Hip hop has generated a global pop culture based on music, dance, and video and simultaneously marketed a modern lifestyle through brand names and symbols of consumer goods like shoes and clothes within the materiality of global youth-oriented culture (Osumare 1989).

It is perhaps pertinent to examine the context in which the term “consciousness” is used in relation to music in general and hip hop in particular. I use “conscious” hip hop not as a form or in a generic sense, but in the context of the lyrical content or message in a song. I therefore classify conscious hip hop as part of a broader hip hop culture that

criticises social and political conditions such as the corruption of political leaders, lack of basic amenities, unemployment and abuse of human rights (Perullo 79). These songs identify problems, stir up emotions in listeners, or call people to action. Sometimes they create awareness or educate the audience about issues, while in some cases they proffer solutions to distressing problems. In essence they are “emancipatory messages” that give the artist an opportunity to convey the truth about life while also sounding warnings about social existence. The medium has also been a powerful tool of protest against perpetrators of bad leadership and decadent political systems (Akpan 92-93).

### Hip Hop in Nigeria: An Overview

Hip hop has virtually taken over the popular music scene in Nigeria in a way that is almost subtle yet radical. This evolution can be traced back to the 1990s, when factors linked to the socio-political and economic situation facilitated its emergence, such as the serious economic crisis that rocked the country under subsequent military regimes and the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (S.A.P.) which was accompanied by strict austerity measures. The result of this was the collapse of most businesses and institutions which triggered mass migration of professionals, a phenomenon popularly referred to as the “brain drain” syndrome in Nigeria (Falola and Heaton 23). The adverse economy also affected the music industry, whereby major recording companies such as EMI, Sony, and Polygram closed their operations in Lagos, while most of Nigeria's established artists who found it difficult to survive also relocated abroad, thus leaving a gap in the entertainment industry.

The 1990s also witnessed the development of computer-aided music production and its incursion into Nigeria made it easy and cheap to make music. To fill the gap created by the mass exit of popular artists, youth with budding musical talents but no recording companies around to develop them, resorted to making music digitally and cutting promotional CDs for radio stations and DJs. The common social experience for young people during this period was a mounting frustration caused by the harsh socio-economic situation, which had produced social tension in both rural and urban settings. With a sense of affiliation to its North American counterparts, Nigerian hip hop became a voice and a weapon of criticism against the political class attacking state failure, the collapse of the economy and the absence of basic infrastructures (Ugor 2009: 66). These factors, coupled with the resilience of the youth, culminated in pushing the genre to the mainstream of Nigeria's popular culture. In the last decade, the genre has passed through different phases, the most notable being the use of indigenous languages in place of African-American “Ebonics” rapping. This has, in no small measure, stamped hip-hop on Nigeria's

music landscape, especially with its appropriation of well-known musical styles such as highlife and fuji, thereby “Nigerianizing” the genre.

## Hip Hop and the Question of Consciousness

Consciousness has been regarded as one of the strongest points of rap and hip hop culture from its inception. According to Alim, “From its inception [hip hop] has been an active vehicle for social protest in the U.S. and around the world . . . its targets have been racism, discrimination, police brutality, mis-education and other social ills” (25). In the same vein Chuck D, the spokesman for Public Enemy, hip hop's most conscious and politically radical group, once definitively described the genre as the “Blackman's CNN” (BBC 1-Xtra 2008), in that the music is supposed to inform, educate, and advocate for common people. Thus, the message comes first before factors such as entertainment and pleasure.

However, in recent times hip hop has faced much criticism in terms of its themes and messages, causing critics to wonder whether the genre has not actually lost its potential and potency for social change, especially its potential for influencing today's youth in a positive way. As Angela Ards observes, “Rap music has gone through various phases—the early eighties message raps, late eighties afrocentricity, early nineties gangsta raps [and] today's rank materialism” (313). This concern also instigated the BET roundtable talk programme “Hip Hop Versus America” prompting Todd Johnson (2010) to ask the cogent question in his recent article, “[w]ill hip hop return to its activist role?”

Similar concerns have been expressed in relation to the Nigerian hip hop scene. While there have not been cases of gangsterism, violence, and misogynist(ic) expressions in Nigeria's hip hop, the major concern has been whether the type of messages presently being conveyed is actually conscious enough or useful for addressing the state of affairs in the country. The most sensational statement has been that of Reuben Abati in his 2009 article, “A Nation's Identity Crises.” To Abati, “a country's character is indexed into its arts and culture, eternal purveyors of tones and modes. Nigerian youths now sing of broken heads, raw sex, uselessness and raw aspirational emotionalism. A sign of the times?” (2009). However, Abati's comment is highly debatable in that one cannot generalize hip hop as banal simply on the basis of a few artists trying to make some money by capitalizing on the global commercial exploitation of eroticism and materialism.

## Consciousness and Music: the Nigerian Experience

Before the advent and popularization of hip hop, politically conscious music has always been reflected in the works of Nigeria's music

practitioners; the culture of resistance through arts has an intriguing historical antecedence in the country. Nigeria was once described as the musical heartbeat of Africa (Servant 2003, 5) due to its array of popular music styles that have gained international recognition. Among the vibrant popular music styles that have come to define the country's musical identity are highlife music through the likes of Osita Osadebe and Victor Olaiya; juju music as internationalized through King Sunny Ade and Chief Ebenezer Obey; fuji music taken to the mainstream through Dr Sikiru Ayinde Barrister; gospel music as performed by Timi Osukoya and Broda Martins and reggae exemplified by Majek Fashek and Ras Kimono. Nigeria also has afro-beat originated by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, along with the contemporary Nigerian hip hop aptly dubbed "Afro hip hop." Post-independence Nigeria offered a site for the proliferation of conscious lyrics, especially from the late 1970s through the 1990s. This development was not unexpected, since turbulent political weather rocked the country through multiple coups and a military regime lasting from 1983 to 1999. In this vein, it is not unreasonable to observe that the unfavorable political landscape of the country, with its attendant socio-economic crisis over the years, has had an enormous influence on cultural output, especially music.

While popular music of Yoruba origin, such as juju and fuji, has entertainment and praise-singing as its major highlights, it is interesting to note that artists in these genres still produce records epitomizing consciousness in reaction to the tough social and economic conditions of their time. Dr Sikiru Ayinde, credited with the origin and popularization of fuji music, released the *Nigeria* album at the wake of the 1983 general elections that saw Alhaji Shehu Shagari returning as democratically elected president the second time, although the regime was later toppled by a military coup. The album served as a wake-up call for the electorate to vote thoughtfully and for politicians to serve their constituencies. Though subtly, Ayinde touches on some salient points that plagued the Nigerian polity. He sings:

*Oselu to ba wole, ti o ba mu leri se ota olorun oba ni  
 Agbara nbe lowo awon oselu wa,  
 Ogbon awa odibo o kere rara  
 Efo wo kowo osise, eni to ngba ogota naira koto dele  
 A sanwo moto pelu onje  
 Koto bo yawo pelu omo tobi koto dojo kefa owo atan  
 Austerity measure yi ga doba o  
 ka ma paro mekunnu n'jiya o  
 kaye sanwo ina lai mama rina  
 kaye sanwo omi lai mama ro mi o. . . .*

[Any politician making empty promises is an enemy of God  
 It is true our politicians are powerful  
 But we electorates are in no way stupid  
 Please increase the workers' wages  
 Imagine a worker earning sixty naira  
 How can he survive paying for transportation  
 Not to talk of feeding his wife and children

The money is gone in six days  
This austerity measure is too much  
The fact is that the masses are suffering  
We pay for light but we are in darkness  
We pay for water but have nothing to drink. . . .]

This expression of social consciousness was repeated in 1994—in a more intense and confrontational manner—during the notorious General Sanni Abacha’s military regime. In his *Truth* album, Ayinde decries the suffering of the masses and the corruption of the military, whose aim is to amass wealth and leave the people impoverished. Olukotun (2002) documented anti-military media (including music) in South-West Nigeria between 1988-1999, and oral poetry by Olanrewaju Adepoju and Kunle Ologundudu, for example, defied the prevailing censorship of that period and vented societal grievances against the military. According to Olukotun, Ayinde’s *Truth* album was perceived as a magnified expression of popular anger against a decadent military regime during that period (194-199).

Emancipation messages were also a major characteristic of the Nigerian reggae genre that was heralded by Tera Kota (Femi Gboyega) in 1984 with the release of his debut and Nigeria’s first reggae album *Lamentation for Sodom*. In this album, the artist compares the Nigerian situation in the 1980s to the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah where sin and corruption was rife, while resenting the appalling economic situation and oppression of the poor by the rich. As the album title suggests, “Sodom is Tera Kota’s reaction to what Jamaicans call Babylon . . . Sodom is oppression of blacks by blacks” (Comb and Razor, 2008). Subsequent reggae crooners capitalized on the success of Tera Kota by projecting socio-political messages in their music and eventually pushed the genre to the mainstream in the early 1990s. Among them is Ras Kimono whose 1989 *Under Pressure* album includes emancipatory classics such as “Shitstem” and “Gimme Likkle Sugar.” Other reggae classics with similarly conscious depth include Majek Fashek’s “Police Brutality” and Blackky’s “Cost of Living.”

One figure that outshines others in the area of consciousness and resistance through music is the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. He can be regarded as the epitome and unassailable icon of emancipatory music as defined by his genre of afrobeat, which he co-founded with Tony Allen in the 1970s. Fela churned out many afrobeat classics, the majority of which were direct critiques of subsequent governments, especially the military whose regimes were characterized by police brutality, corruption and abuse of human rights. Albums such as *I.T.T.-International Thief Thief* (1979), *Unknown Soldier* (1979), *Coffin for Head of State* (1980) and *Army Arrangement* (1985) brought him into direct conflict with the government, resulting in a series of detentions, the most daunting of which was the invasion of his “Kalakuta Republic” home in 1977 by the military. This invasion left residents badly injured and the property razed to the ground.

With the dawn of the millennium came the return of Nigeria to a democratic system of governance, and the simultaneous rise of youth-oriented hip hop as mainstream music. With democracy came a sigh of relief, especially about brutal military dictatorship, but it has not simply taken away all the problems that hitherto plagued the country. Considering the very vibrant background of politically-conscious music in Nigeria, some observers now believe that there is an assumed complacency and compromise as regards relevant social messages in popular music. If not, they wonder if the current mainstream Nigerian hip hop has nothing to talk about except parties, booty-shaking and popping of champagne. However, in the work of three artists in particular, the soul and consciousness of hip hop is still very much alive in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria.

### Eedris Abdulkareem and the “Jaga Jaga” Saga

The history and evolution of hip hop in Nigeria would not be complete without mentioning Eedris Abdulkareem, a rapper who is one of the trio that formed the pioneering hip hop group, “The Remedies.” This group helped in mainstreaming hip hop through their hit single “Sakomo” (1998), which facilitated the acceptance of Afro hip hop subculture on the Nigerian music landscape. The group churned out hits such as “Jealousy” and “Sade” among others, before it became defunct as each member charted a solo career.

Perhaps one of the most significant points in Eedris’ solo career was the 2004 release of *Jaga Jaga*, an album containing a hit single with the same title. It is pertinent to note that before 2004 Eedris had enjoyed astounding success as a solo artist with his debut album of 2002 that featured hit songs like “Player Meji,” “Oko Ashewo” and most especially “Mr Lecturer,” which decried the moral decadence permeating the higher education system in the country. By 2004, Eedris had undoubtedly become one of the highest-ranked rappers in the country.

### Hip Hop and Reality Check in Nigeria

It is perhaps not unexpected then that at the period when Eedris was on top of his game as the most popular rapper in Nigeria, he decided to use this status to call for a reality check on the prevalent socio-political and economic situation in the country. This occurred when Olusegun Obasanjo began his fifth year as civilian president (second term)—therefore, when the country had also clocked five years of civilian rule after over fifteen years of military dictatorship. Clearly, five years was a long enough time to start reaping the so-called “dividends of democracy” but unfortunately the reverse was the case, thereby prompting an urgent call for a reality

check—for ordinary people to stop living in a fool’s paradise and call the political class to order.

Starting from the intro in which the rapper asks for his microphone to be turned up as “it’s time to hear some reality,” to the pulsating and melodic chorus, the artist unleashes a “lethal critique” on the Obasanjo-led administration. In the opening chorus he declares:

*Nigeria jaga jaga  
Everything scatter scatter  
Poor man dey suffer suffer  
Gbosa, gbosa, gunshot inna di air*

[Nigeria is in ruins  
Everything is in dis-array  
The masses are suffering  
With gunshots everywhere,  
People get killed anytime]

The chorus depicts Nigeria after five years of democracy as a place of disarray and suffering. Capitalising on the use of repetition in the Yoruba language to emphasize words, whereby *jaga jaga* signifies the depth of dereliction, the chorus highlights the intensity of the problem by repeating the words “scatter” and “suffer” to highlight the high level of turbulence and poverty experienced by common people, while *gbosa gbosa* (for the gunshot sound) decries the lack of security in the country. This total collapse and lack of security is further emphasised in the verses where he factually decries the spate of extra-judicial and political killings that were so rampant in the country. The most spectacular of these was the assassination of the serving attorney general, Chief Bola Ige. As rightly observed by Umezina, “the spate of politically motivated killings in Nigeria under Obasanjo baffled the citizenry. The late attorney general, Bola Ige, Harry Marshall, Dikibo and a long list of others were murdered in that regime. No tangible arrests or government commitment was recorded” (136). This bafflement is re-echoed by Eedris:

*Armed robber came to your house  
E no thief money, e no rape your wife  
Went straight up to your bedside (Gbosa)  
Six feet, now you are down  
Which armed robber no wan money?  
Which armed robber no wan jolly?  
Na political armed robber be that  
Na wetin dey kill Nigeria o.*

[An armed robber came to your house,  
Without taking money or raping your wife,  
He goes straight to your bedside and shoots you,  
Have you seen an armed robber that doesn't steal money?  
Then you should know that that is a political armed robber,  
Political assassination is the order of the day in Nigeria now.]

Touching on the issue of corruption, he used the case of COJA (an acronym for *Comité d'Organisation des Jeux Africain*; responsible for holding the 8<sup>th</sup> All African Games in Abuja, Nigeria in 2003) to exemplify how corruption is rife in public institutions where perpetrators still hold their heads up undeterred in society. He echoes:

*Eedris, what about coja now?  
Won ti kowo waja  
NEPA, won ti di regular  
419 in Nigeria  
Agege to Ikeja na 100 naira*

[What about COJA now?  
They already embezzled the entire fund  
And NEPA is now a regular 419 in Nigeria  
[They defraud you]  
Agege to Ikeja is now 100 naira]

Under the directorship of Dr Amos Adamu, COJA was surrounded by accusations concerning embezzlement and mismanagement of funds during and after the games (Johnson 2003). Despite these criticisms and indictments, Adamu still held a management position in Nigerian sports administration and in a recent development was among the four FIFA members penalized by the ethics committee for demanding bribes for the World Cup hosting vote (BBC Sport, 2010).

NEPA (National Electric Power Authority) is saddled with providing electricity for the country, however, Eedris has actually equated the company to a “419” operator, a term used to depict advance fee fraud in the country, partly due to the fact that you pay energy bills now and then but you are never supplied with power. This has become so problematic, to the extent that most manufacturing companies, like Cadbury and Dunlop, have now shifted their plants to Ghana where electricity is stable in order to cut production costs incurred from running on generators.

Undoubtedly, “Jaga Jaga” became a hit and the hip hop anthem of 2004 in Nigeria, not only because it was publicly sanctioned by the Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, but also partly because the message was timely and incisive. The song also reiterates the fact that youth and the hip hop generation in Nigeria are actually aware of the political deception going on in the country and are bold enough to use this medium to voice their opinions against the state as a matter of national socio-political responsibility. According to Eedris in an interview:

Jagajaga is not an abusive word. . . . [it] just pin-pointed what is happening in our democracy, in our country, in our society and put it back to our people . . . [it points] to the ills in the society to see how we can improve it. (Interview in *Jaga jaga* VCD 2004)

While the music was felt on the street, it also touched the corridor of power where it was differently perceived. As widely reported, the president allegedly called the artist names, claiming that it was Eedris’

“mama and papa” that are “jaga jaga” and banning the song in the public media. However, the artist tried to justify his act in a follow-up album, with an open letter titled *Letter to Mr President* (2005).

### “E Be Like Say”: The 2Face Idibia Story

2Face Idibia remains the epitome of the new generation African hip hop culture, having garnered international recognition through his musical journey spanning over a decade, and having won awards such as the MOBO (Music of black Origin), MTV, MAMA (MTV African Music Awards) and BET. Born Innocent Ujah Idibia in Markurdi, Nigeria, he began his career as a member of the defunct Plantashun Boiz, making hit songs like “Knock me off” (2000) and “Don’t you Know” (2000) with the group. He went solo in 2004 and his track “African Queen” became an instant hit both locally and internationally. Along with the “spiritual,” his music is always punctuated by RnB with a notable reggae influence. In his sophomore 2006 album, *Grass to Grace*, 2face expressed his so-called “spiritual” consciousness to the fullest in “E be Like Say,” a ballad with heavy RnB influence, telling the story of two lovers with an underlying powerful message depicting the Nigerian political class as deceitful and corrupt. In the intro he asserts:

*Oh my God  
E be like say them want tell us wetin we never hear before*

[It’s like they are trying to tell us what we’ve not heard before]

This is a very common expression among the masses in response to political campaigns and manifestos, suggesting that the people are tired of hearing politicians’ speeches bearing mouth-watering but empty promises. Most of the time people ask: Is there really anything we've not heard before? Taking the role of the protagonist he sings:

Looking back through all the years  
That you and I have spent together  
It seems like you've been playing me all the while  
So many times, you asked to put the whole of my trust in you  
So many times, you betrayed and played me for a fool  
Why don't we work together so the future would be brighter  
*Cos, e be like you and I*  
[Because, it’s like you and I]  
*We dey need each other all the time*  
[We always need each other all the time]  
Another [election] year has come  
And now you want my trust [vote] once more.

The above lyrics explicitly refer to the lack of confidence the people have in the political system. Although now democratic, Nigeria lacks

accountability. With more intense vibes, Idibia actually nails it on the head, exposing the ruling class as having no concern for the downtrodden:

See, all I want to say is that  
They don't really care about us  
Because all they want to do is to get in touch with big bucks  
Because they think the money gives them the power  
But the power is nothing  
If your people cannot get quality education  
The power is nothing  
If your people keep on dying of disease and starvation  
The power is nothing  
If your people have no peace  
The power is nothing  
If your people cannot live in unity  
See, why do you keep deceiving the people, my brother, my sister  
See, why do you make all this people to dey fight one another  
Only God can judge you now. . . .

While many believed the return of the country to democracy would bring sanity back into the country's political system and improve the people's quality of life, it is appalling to note that the socio-economic problems currently plaguing the country have been a recurring issue from the 1970s. Sadly, the issue that was the source of major battles between Fela, his afrobeat music and the Nigerian government for over four decades is still the current bone of contention in today's polity, as described above in Idibia's song. The country is ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among oil-producing countries, generating 2.5 million barrels of crude oil per day while earning in excess of 42 billion Naira (US\$282 million) as daily oil revenue among others, with an annual budget (2011) in excess of 4.7 trillion Naira (US\$31.8 billion). In spite of this wealth, it is disheartening that basic amenities like good roads, health care system and power supply are lacking, while the government finds it difficult to regularize and pay a meagre 18, 000 Naira (approximately US\$113) per month national minimum wage to workers in the country.

Without mincing words, Idibia directs his anger at the politicians:

I dedicate this one to all of the shady politicians  
*Wey go promise and fail*  
[That makes empty promises]  
And make the people live in harsh conditions  
I dedicate this one to all of the shady politicians  
Why don't you change your ways  
Change your ways now  
Make the people live the way they are supposed to live  
*E no be small thing*  
*As you see me so I no send, I no send you oh*  
[I am not bothered about what you think]  
All of the shady politicians  
*As you see me so I no send, I no send you oh*  
[I am not bothered about what you think]

Idibia, the young hip hop artist, thus used this song as a way to deploy hip hop in direct confrontation with the political class in Nigeria, with entreaties to be more responsive to the needs of the people. But the onus of this discourse addresses credibility lacking within the political class, which can be inferred fully from the chorus:

*E be, like say you want tell me another story again oh*  
*E be like say you want to act another movie again oh*  
*E be like say you want to code another coding again oh*  
*E be like say you want to dance Galala ,new dance Again oh*  
*You want to sing another song again...*

[It seems you are trying to tell another story again  
It seems you are trying to act another movie again  
It seems you are trying to come up with a new code again  
It seems you are trying to dance galala the new dance again  
You want to sing another song again . . . ]

The song thrives on the well-known relationship between politicians and electorates in Nigeria, which is always enthusiastic during political campaigns involving the making of promises, but which typically ends unhappily in the long run. The people are still left to wallow in abject poverty until the next election when the promise-making begins all over again. Idibia equates their speeches to a “story” with no credibility. In the same vein he likens these politicians to actors and dancers just fooling themselves with *galala*, a new dance craze. The making and breaking of promises is not solely an issue in Nigeria but appears throughout the African continent. In Tanzania, for example, “politicians made extravagant promises during their campaigns, but these promises were never fulfilled, and only acted as a means to garnering political votes or political support” (Perullo 2005: 84). Thus, as the artist claims, politics in Africa has been turned to a game of lies and falsehood while political leaders are nothing but story tellers in the minds of their people. However, the hip hop generation is not taking any of that. For them, it is time to clamour for responsible and credible government. Idibia’s song thus constitutes a poignant critique of a failed and deceptive postcolonial state on behalf of a young generation angry and frustrated at the endless antics of a ruling elite class that has remained indifferent to the needs and concerns of ordinary people.

### Sound Sultan and the Tale of the “Bushmeat”

The music career of Sound Sultan (born Olanrewaju Fasasi) is that of an artist with a mission to use hip hop to mirror society. From the outset of his music career, Sultan’s main target has been the concern to deliver socially relevant music to his fans and to position hip hop at the top of social activism. Earlier songs such as “Mathematics” and “Craze World” reflect distinct issues in Nigeria’s socio-political and economic struggles.

Indeed, the name of his band/posse represents this artist's mission to the fullest: "Jagbajantis" is a Yoruba slang term meaning "nonsense," but to Sultan it is a mission statement, an acronym for "Justice Against Barawo, Jaguda" (Hausa/ Yoruba word for thief respectively) and "Thieves in our Society."

*E ba mi K'igbe Ole!*

In 2008 Sound Sultan released a single titled "Bushmeat," which further intensified his artistic purpose of criticizing the political elite's theft of public funds and corruption in the corridors of power. Using the analogy of bushmeat (game) and the hunter, Sultan made it clear to corrupt leaders that there is a limit to human endurance and that if their criminal acts persist, the hunter will become the hunted. To put it bluntly, revolution is the inevitable consequence of ongoing suffering.

"Bushmeat" is expository, with the artist addressing the issue of poverty and its root cause: the misappropriation of public funds by political office holders. From the intro and chorus it is obvious that Sultan is poised for confrontation. In a call and response pattern he sings:

*E ba mi k'igbe Ole! Ole! Ole!!!  
See one day bushmeat go catch the hunter. . . .*

[Please help shout on top of your voice, Thief! Thief!! Thief!!!  
One day the hunter will be the hunted. . . .]

The above clearly marked the end of any respect the hip hop generation, and by extension, the people in general, held for the political class. Delving more into the abject poverty brought about by stealing and embezzlement, he elaborates further:

*See them fly for them aeroplane  
On top of the pain my people maintain  
Pickin wey never chop self dey complain  
Water, light na yawa, everywhere just black no power  
The only power wey dem get na the one  
Wey dem take oppress my people for ghetto..  
What could be the answer?  
Could it be that we don't matter to them?  
Cos dem chop my money, your money  
Every other person money  
E ba mi kigbe ole! ole!! ole!!!*

[See them making wasteful overseas trips all the time  
While the people just look and can do nothing  
Hungry kids are complaining  
Water and power supply is non-existent  
But they have the power to oppress people in the ghetto  
What could be the answer?  
Could it be that we don't matter to them?

Because they stole my money, your money,  
They stole everybody's money  
Please shout on top of your voice, thief! thief!! thief!!!]

It is quite clear that what the country needs is responsible governance that will make the welfare of the populace the top priority. However, while awaiting this social transformation, artists continue to address the crimes of embezzlement by those in power. In an interview with Farinloye, Sultan declared that:

[Bushmeat] . . . is about the situation . . . [in] the country. It's about the fact that if someone steals a meagre amount in the market place, he is burnt but then, some people will steal billions and nothing is being done. Once the masses can be conscious of the law of stealing, then we can breathe down their necks. So even when they're chopping the money, they'll chop it with some consciousness. That's what I mean by *E ba mi kigbe Ole o*. (Cf Farinloye 2009)

### Light up Naija!

The energy supply has been one of the greatest problems confronting the Nigerian nation. Without stable energy the wheel of the economy will constantly be in slow motion and industrial development will be minimal, thereby making it practically impossible to realise the country's vision of being one of the world's leading economies by 2020 (*Guardian* editorial, 2008). People wonder why the country cannot achieve its targeted 10, 000 mega-watts energy supply promised in various "development plans."

While observers have identified a variety of reasons, ranging from wastefulness of resources like gas-flaring to lack of proper planning, it is clear that political corruption is the major cause of Nigeria's inability to meet the targets set out in these plans. Most of the plans require billions of Naira, much of which is unaccounted for and ultimately lost. Olusegun Obasanjo's eight year regime allegedly pumped in excess of US\$13 billion to achieve the 10,000 megawatts target, but surprisingly at the end of his regime "power generation had fallen to an abysmal 860 MW, a quantity not even sufficient for Lagos State" (*Guardian* Editorial, 12 May 2008). Decrying the obvious corruption in the power sector in Nigeria, Okonkwo (2010) observes that "[t]he amount of money that has been sunk into the power sector under the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo or the billions pumped into the Independent National Power Projects (INPP) is probably enough to solve the Nigerian power problem." Typical of political leadership in Nigeria, Obasanjo denied charges of corruption and his actions were never fully investigated or disclosed. He did not even appear in a publicly instituted probe set up to address the issue. Rather he sent a letter saying "his government had inherited 18 years of neglect in the power generation industry, and had done well to more than double power supply" (BBC News, 12 May 2008). Over US\$13.5 billion of Nigerian money went down the drain without anything happening!

Against this backdrop, the energy issue came to a breaking point, while youth and the associated hip hop generation gathered in an online-driven and social-network-motivated group called “Light Up Nigeria” in 2009. The message of this network was that Nigerians were tired of corruption truncating the progress of the country and especially putting people in blackout and investors out of business. In their mission statement, they declare:

Are you tired of the constant excuses being given for the incompetence of PHCN [Power Holding Corporation of Nigeria], we are forming this group as a voice for our generation. It is time for something to be done; the 7th oil producing nation is one of the world’s worst electricity providers. The time has come, Nigeria belongs to all of us and if we do not speak out now, it’s the same burden we will all have to bear. So join, tell your friends, family anybody you can, enough is enough. Our voice may be small now but as the group grows and the word is spread, the government will hear our words and something will be done. LIGHT UP NIGERIA so progress in all the other sectors can advance also. (Bellanaija 2009)

Hip hop once again became the voice of the masses in the debates that took shape around chronic power failure in Nigeria. Sound Sultan specifically addressed the issue of electricity and created awareness about the need for stability in the energy sector with the release of his 2010 anthem ‘Light up Naija-2010.’ Calling for light and an end to corruption and empty promises, Sultan declares:

*When we ask our Government o,  
When dem go give us light  
Dem say na 2010,  
We don dey wait 2010 since then  
But now the waiting must end  
Cos 2010 don show, oh-oh-oh*

*I want to be like Moses, eh  
Show my people dem to the promise land  
But then i notice something,  
people wey try am don dey underground  
I see dem i ja ,Look dem from far  
Me i fear this Government people  
Rise up Naija Raise ur Apa  
Tell them you are tired of the evil.*

[When we ask our government  
When we would have constant light  
They said its 2010  
We have been waiting since  
Now 2010 is here  
And the waiting must end

I want to be like Moses  
To try and show my people the promise land  
But I have noticed something  
People that tried it are now underground  
I see them and I run looking at them from afar

As I fear these government people  
Rise up Nigeria, raise your arms  
Tell them you are tired of the evil.]

It is quite clear that Sultan is expressing the disappointment of the people over empty promises and the incessant embezzlement of funds for power projects, resulting in the inability of government to meet the energy demands of the people. That corruption is the order of the day in Nigerian politics is self-evident, but for those diverting the country's funds for their private use, they must be made aware that people are tired of suffering as a result of their evil acts:

*Gbogbo owo lo n kolobi  
Won de TV won soro gidi  
Se wo ni, s'emi ni, a mo na gidi  
We dey follow follow dem like zombie  
Shey na today (na today),  
Wey we dey wait (we dey wait)  
Go buy candle, go buy candle  
Shey na today (na today), wey  
we dey wait (we dey wait)  
E lo r'abela, E lo r'abela o.*

[They have embezzled all the money  
While getting on the TV to talk nonsense  
Now we don't know the right way anymore  
The deceit has been on for a long time  
Waiting on their empty promises  
Its better we buy candles now in order to see.]

It is horrendous to note, as indicated by Sultan, that people now have to rely on generators for regular power supply while the cost of fuel on the other hand is so exorbitant. Those people who cannot afford generators now rely on kerosene lanterns or candles, hence the clarion call by the artist for people to have a full stock of candles as the government is not ready to stop the blackout. In this dispensation, what can people make of all the development plans and the huge funds sunk into achieving "Millennium development goals," when a single task of providing regular power supply is elusive? As aptly summed up by the rapper M.I on the 2010 track: "You said there's a plan for us, there's no light, how are you gonna show us?"

## Conclusion

Music, like any work of art, is "imbued with a particular ideology from the very beginning. [Because] art is message and that message is to influence behavior" (Okafor 2006: 92). No art exists only for its own sake but is often a medium to convey social messages and ideologies. The genre of hip hop goes beyond hedonism or the portrayal of affluence as widely

perceived. In contemporary Africa, it has become a powerful force for education, information, and resistance.

Nigerian hip hop artists not only display rare courage by assuming activist roles against the postcolonial state, but they also choose the path of consciousness by using hip hop to perform fundamental social functions. In doing so, they risk hardship and possible censorship, at least in the sense of commercial success. When artists become too critical of the state, their music may not get played often, especially in state media, and endorsements and other extra opportunities needed for career progression and ratings can fall short. As observed by Akpan:

[Conscious or rather] ‘recalcitrant’ artists risk career hardships as recording studios, live performance venues, television and radio networks, and other infrastructure for exhibiting creativity are often owned or controlled by the same corporates that dictate the marketing criteria for doing music. (94)

Not all hip hop artists in Nigeria or Africa are politically conscious in their music or projection.<sup>1</sup> However, Nigerian hip hop and the hip hop generation—particularly through the works of artists such as Eedris, 2face Idibia and Sound Sultan—offer a new and credible perspective in reassessing the genre. Popular music offers a new perspective on a disgruntled generation, as a conscious tool and a weapon of resistance.

## Notes

1. The artists discussed in this article provide a cross-section of hip hop that delivers emancipatory messages. However, it should be noted that the media has a way of downplaying these types of music in favor of less critical party raps. Songs like “I go Yarn” (2006) by El Dee, “Blaze” (2007) by Baba Dee, “Se Na like This” (2008) by Wande Coal, and “Pete Pete” (2010) by 9ice, are a few examples of conscious hip hop within the Nigerian mainstream music scene.

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