

## Youth and Postcolonial Subjectivity in Contemporary Nigerian Pop Music

Idom Tom Inyabri  
University of Calabar, Nigeria

In many ways, it is perhaps true that “a society lives in its youth” (Daiute 10), for it is the youth that carry on the legacy of the past and chart the future of any given society. Contemporary Nigerian popular music and its complex socio-aesthetic aspects offer a meaningful heuristic phenomenon for mapping this assertion. In spite of the varied challenges that confront the Nigerian youth in everyday life, they present one of the most profound examples of the creativity and resilience of the Nigerian/African society in the face of insufferable and uncertain conditions. It is this resilience, particularly in relation to young people and the production of popular culture, which I explore in this paper. The efflorescence of popular hip-hop music by Nigerian youth is a classic example of the multiple ways in which, as Deborah Durham describes it, young people now stand at the very heart of “Africa’s social imagination,” constructing alternative cultural texts that open up new social geographies and opportunities in the context of long-term reduction in social and economic opportunities.

Today’s Nigerian youth are very much a product of harsh socio-economic and political conditions ironically traceable to Nigeria’s oil boom economy of the 1970s. That era in the nation’s history was marked by a pervasive culture of extravagance in government expenditure and even everyday life. As Ken Saro-Wiwa, foremost Nigerian writer, social critic and environmental activist described it, the era was characterized by “conspicuous consumption” (243) during which the Nigerian state dissipated enormous petro dollars on fleeting development projects without investing in the future of its citizens. However, like every other un-reasoned circumstance of “third world” survival, the bubble of collective extravagance soon burst, particularly following the global economic recession of the early 1980s and the consequent Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which followed in the mid-1980s. Outside the boardrooms of Nigeria’s post-colonial economic think-tanks at the time, the SAP quickly engendered a desperate economy and a culture of anxiety and dispossession.

The sordid socio-economic conditions described above were deepened by the undemocratic governments of desperate and adventurous military dictatorships throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Masked as corrective anti-graft regimes, or what came to be known in Nigeria as

“child[ren] of circumstance,”<sup>1</sup> Nigeria’s military rulers and their aides soon became buried in corruption, misappropriation, extortion and the public display of crude militarism. In the nation’s cultural imagination, the Nigerian soldier became a super-hero, both in his crude and senseless accumulation of wealth and shameless display of materialism. This culture of accumulation, combined with a barrack mentality, soon became a standard of aspiration for impressionable Nigerian youth for years.<sup>2</sup> As the culture of corruption thrived among the military conquistadors, an atmosphere of impunity, lawlessness and the near total collapse of social responsibility were built among the ordinary citizenry. In the midst of a disintegrated and failed education system and other social structures that could have shaped the minds of the nation’s youth, Nigerian society itself relapsed into palpable social crises, marked by occult economies, drug-peddling, embezzlement, internet scams (popularly referred to as 419 in Nigeria), and many other social vices that have made the nation an uncertain socio-economic geography for both youth and adults alike.

In recent years, however, the mass of teeming youth in Nigeria have begun to reinvent these straightened circumstances, showing their stunning creativity and agency in spite of the sordid socio-economic conditions created by the adult generation. Focusing squarely on the creative outburst of popular hip-hop music in Nigeria, this essay demonstrates how contemporary Nigerian pop music is thoroughly located in and shaped by the tough social and economic conditions of the post-SAP era, especially from the year 2000 to the present. Drawing on key figures in the contemporary Nigerian pop music scene, the essay reveals how young people in the country have now evolved their own social potentials “as complex intersubjective beings, as individuals who embody the socio-political dynamics of their communities and nations, yet whose activities can transform ... their societies” (Dauite 11). Although the Nigerian youth, like their contemporaries all over the developing world, are overwhelmed by inexorable social, political, economic, cultural and moral strictures in everyday life, they have continued to find new and alternative measures for achieving balance in their lives. It is these cultural maneuvers and balancing acts by young and talented pop music artistes and the political implications of their creativity and enterprise that I explore in this essay.

## Defining and Locating Pop Music

I use the term contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music to index the current genre of popular dance music in Nigeria that has its roots in the West African Highlife of the 1950s and the politically-inclined and counter-hegemonic Afro-beat jazz of Fela Anikolapo Kuti that emerged in Nigeria in the 1970s, which confronted both colonial and neo-colonial dictatorial excesses within and beyond Africa. The new genre of dance hip-hop

music by young artistes dexterously draws on the acoustic resources of indigenous Nigerian musical genres such as Apala, Fuji, and other Afro-diasporic musical forms such as Hip-hop, Calypso and Reggae Dance Hall. As I have indicated in earlier studies, this genre of popular music emerged in the early 1990s and was pioneered by artistes like Dady Showkey, Baba Fryo, Zaki Azeez, and other young artistes, especially in the mega city of Lagos<sup>3</sup> where this brand of popular music was born (Inyabri 166). It is perhaps important to note, however, that while it is the doggedness and makeshift creative energies of the young artistes themselves that gave birth to this thriving creative industry and has kept it alive for decades, it was the enterprising efforts of young urban entrepreneurs such as Ken Ogungbe, proprietor of Kennis Music Studio, that brought sophistication to the genre by introducing emerging digital technologies to the young but flourishing hip-hop music industry in Nigeria. By introducing digital technologies into what was essentially a modest and crude artistic effort by ambitious youth, Young entrepreneurs like Ogungbe and his cohorts opened the path for experimentation, improvement and commercial success for the young hip-hop composers, song writers, musicians, and producers in the Nigerian pop music industry, many of whom drew on experiences gained from exposure to the American music industry.

Now a flourishing musical genre beloved by both the young and old across Africa, the Caribbean, and even beyond, popular hip-hop music first begun by young artistes in Nigeria has grown from a stuttering and somewhat coarse postcolonial form into a sophisticated and complex socio-cultural artistic practice with a particular kind of youth politics at its core. This complex musical genre pioneered by urban youth is truly an informal postcolonial creative form that has exploited both the liberties and tensions of postmodernity to its advantage. As the product of a disempowered group, contemporary Nigerian pop music, created and popularised by teeming but creative youth, weaves into its textual practice a particular kind of identity politics that resists the conventional silence that has accompanied the subtle and sometimes brutal subjugation of the creative industries by domineering postcolonial forces, whether political or economic. The new cultural activism by young Nigerian hip-hop musicians is reminiscent of Homi Bhabha's theorization of postcolonial cultural production as "a strategy of survival" which "give[s] the aspect of the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood...[and] a promise of pleasure" (Bhabha 247). The union between "selfhood" and "pleasure" which Homi Bhabha identifies in postcolonial cultural production derives from a sharp use of fragmented digital, oral and socio-cultural signs. The fusion of these signs has often produced a collage of hybrid texts dexterously woven together by individual artistes seeking to give voice to their collective social experience. It is within this conceptual purview that I seek to make sense of the blossoming hip-hop dance music by young Nigerian artistes.

Grounded in both autochthonous histories and experiences, on the one hand, and international cultural trends, on the other, the new genre of

hip-hop music by the young Nigerian artistes is a classic representation of the ways in which postcolonial cultural forms can be both transnational (Appadurai 48) and translational (Bhabha 303) at the same time: transnational and translational in the sense that these cultural producers draw on repertoires, cultural codes and signs that are both local and international, reinterpreting those resources into new contexts that yield meanings that are salient to both the local contexts of production and other cultural spaces within and beyond the African Postcolony. As such, it can be argued that the youth who are involved in the production of popular dance music in Nigeria are “deterritorialized” cultural subjects who have in many ways “... annexed the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai 4). Thus, given its curious combination of spatial specificity, or what one might call its ‘locality,’ and powerful borderlessness, i.e. its ‘internationality,’ contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music bears strong witness to the hybrid nature of postcolonial art forms in a postmodern world. The power now associated with the new postmodern electronic resources lends force to the creative imagination of young people that allows them not only to be vocal, but to inscribe their voices and presence in hegemonic spaces that have now made young people disposable subjects (Giroux 2012). Thus, popular dance music by Nigerian youth itself not only provides newfound ‘pleasure’ in the midst of unrelenting pain, but also functions as a space of contestation, a dialogic art form that is produced by what Bakhtin calls “a historically existent poet” (285). Contemporary Nigerian pop music by urban youth has inaugurated and installed a new form of cultural power to the voices of young people that offers them an alternate musical grammar that not only etches a new sense of selfhood, but also a particular brand of what one might call a postmodern postcolonial politics.

### Youth, Lyrics, and Subjectivity

In an earlier study of this genre, I established Nigeria’s hip-hop clear links with African orality, especially in its pidginization, call-and-response pattern, and the closeness of content and performance to societal issues (Inyabri 168). A dense motif of post-independence disillusionment, a theme very much palpable in the work of postcolonial literature, is discernable in the work of such young artistes as Conscious Boys, Stereo-Man, Junglist, Nigger RAW (Right and Wrong), African China, Black Face and Tu Face Idibia among others.<sup>4</sup> Often these young voices in contemporary Nigerian hip-hop Music revolve around certain topicalities: corruption and deceit, love and morality, urban desires and social striving, family travails and ultimate triumph, and the encounters with forces of hate and envy, both spiritual and temporal. It is these themes that I explore in the segment that follows.

## Themes of Politics and Social Struggle

In Junlist's very popular track, "Eyes Don Clear," for example, listeners are confronted with the reality of political deceit by the ruling elite and the selfish connivance amongst the same old brigade on the Nigerian political scene as they seek to permanently exploit and dominate the people. The track itself acknowledges the endless cycle of corruption in Nigeria's politics, and its title—"Eyes Don Clear" (literally translated as "eyes can see better," but which metaphorically means "we can't be deceived any more")—foregrounds the new clarity and understanding amongst the populace, i.e., that the populace is now awake to the machinations of the political class to exploit them. The lyrics below are unambiguous about embezzlement in government and the scam at the heart of Nigeria's political culture:

Song (in pidgin English)	Translation
If you wake up for morning try to look through your window	If you wake up in the morning try to look through your window
Weitin wey u go dey hear na syrine wey go dey blow	What you'll hear is the sound of siren blaring
And you go wonder na where de plane dey go	And you'll be wondering where the plane is going
Na one bank dem dey carry our money go-	They're taking our money to one of the banks
See election never start you go dey see different poster	Look, elections haven't started, but you're now seeing different posters
If you look inside de posters you go dey see all	If you look inside the posters you'll see all
The politicians wey don fool us before dem don go reinforce	The politicians that fooled us have now gone to reinforce (reorganize)
Dis time their plans e no go work.	This time their plans won't work.

What the track captures, then, is not just a deep sense of betrayal felt by the people, but the emergence of collective epiphany, a new awareness amongst the people that their leaders are not to be trusted with their collective mandate and resources. Indeed, the track itself functions as a new resource for political education for the exploited class. Here, we see the reinvention of hip-hop music from the status of "senseless music" by "rascals" to a political weapon wielded by young people on behalf of a disenchanted citizenry. Here, pop hip-hop music by youth not only functions as a conveyor-belt that mirrors public opinion, but also provides public education.

It is also within the context of popular disappointment with failed postcolonial governance that ‘Black Face,’ another young but very popular hip-hop musician, sings about the absence of good life in Nigeria in his song, “Na good life wey we no live for Niger” (“it’s a hard life that we are living in Nigeria”). One of the tracks in the same album depicts Nigeria’s perennial search for a suitable leader by asking in dismay, “Na who Go Lead Us (Who Will Lead Us)?” Such a rhetorical question not only highlights the desperate search by a despondent generation for good and responsive leadership, but also the collective desire of the Nigerian people for proactive postcolonial leadership that is sensitive to the struggles, hopes and dreams of ordinary people. In many ways, therefore, what we are seeing here is young people’s re-invocation of the old rallying cry by such great African writers as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong’O, great literary icons and thinkers who have spent enormous intellectual energies campaigning for the urgent need for open and human leadership in Africa. The outcome of bad leadership, as these literary idols have severally demonstrated in their works, is a life of destitution and uncertainty all across Africa. And it is this precarious life led by Nigerians that another young Nigerian rapper, Niger Raw, captures in his hit track, “Obodo” (“Country”). In his typically unpretentious and politically-charged rap, Niger Raw narrativizes the modern-day life of a deprived Nigerian in an impoverished economy. That life of destitution, marked not only by endless privation, but also by egregious contradictions in everyday life where the petty criminal is prosecuted in the courts while the thieving politicians walk around free, is what African China also lyricizes below:

Foodi no dey	There is no food
Baba-e water no de	There is no water
Our country no good-oo!	Our country is bad
If poor man thief	If a poor man steals
Dem go show am for Crime-Fighter	He’ll be shown on Crime-Fighter

Beyond the chronic lack and dispossession which African China lays bare in the song, he unravels the double-standard in the Nigerian polity where graft and pilfering in high government positions thrive with impunity while harsh punishment is meted out to members of the populace who commit petty crimes, often out of sheer desperation to survive. It is this contradiction in Nigeria’s everyday life that the young musician captures in the last two lines; “If poor man t’ief / dem go show am for Crime-Fighter”<sup>5</sup> (If a poor man steals / He’ll be shown on Crime-Fighter). While the thieving elite who prosper by dipping their hands on the public treasury strut around unmolested, in some cases, even protected by the state, innocent citizens who pilfer crumbs on account of straightened

conditions are made scapegoats in the public sphere for a national audience desperate to witness the open humiliation of those responsible for their plight. The call-and-response that follows in this song, then, is an advice to the generality of Nigerians, an admonishment in the manner which one of Nigeria's past President, Olusegun Obasanjo, likes to render:

If you be governor	If you are a governor
Governor us well	Govern us well
If you be senator	If you're a Senator
Senate am well	Be a good senator
If you be police man	If you're a police man
Police am well no dey take bribe!	Police well, don't receive bribe!

Tu Face Idibia, who, perhaps is Nigeria's most popular and successful artiste in this genre, places himself in the position of his country's corrupt leader and reverses roles by opting for the right choices in governance. In a string of conjectures in one of his songs, he plays with the /s/ consonant to create a melodious end rhyme to foreground parallel political options for his countrymen:

For instance	For instance
emi ni bale of Nigerians	If I'm the leader of Nigerians
They i go dey respect your own stance	I think I'll respect your own stance
They i go create the scenery for better to plenty	I think I'll create the scenery for the abundance of better things
To dey make, to dey give chance	To make and create spaces of opportunities
Instead to dey pack de money dey go France	Instead of taking the money to France

In many ways, Tu Face, like several other contemporary Nigerian Pop artistes, has remained faithful to the dialogic and intertextual profundity of this genre. In this song, he articulates the corrupt causes of capital flight, impoverishment, social neglect, and migration in Nigeria. His music, like that of his peers, taps into the collective search for a just and prosperous society. Clearly speaking on behalf of a disappointed and forsaken generation, his music decries the activities of gerontocratic elites that have not only lost the social contract with the masses, but have also contracted social spaces where young people have few opportunities to thrive and contribute their own quota to the growth of Nigerian society.

## Reconfiguring the Self

Another intriguing theme that continues to preoccupy young artistes within the contemporary Nigerian music industry is the desire to reconfigure the stereotypical image of the young artiste as a prime example of social failure. Given the somewhat conservative nature of the Nigerian society, a career in music, especially at the early stages, does not hold any attraction for most families, particularly as compared to other professions such as medicine, law or engineering. Given the extended family system in Nigeria, careers in established professions such as medicine, law, engineering, and other such lucrative fields are seen not only as markers of social class and distinction, but also as an enduring economic lifeline for the family. But young musicians, often poor, dependent on other family members, and bohemian in their lifestyles, are often derided as social misfits, economic liabilities to their families and bringers of shame. But young hip-hop musicians are beginning to address this pervasive problematizing rhetoric, countering the popular notion of the young musician “as a failure.” This theme of the young artist lingers on in contemporary hip-hop music as a recurrent motif. In Tu Face Idibia’s “Nf’ n Ibag a” (“No Problem”) for instance, the young artiste thinks he is being disregarded because of his modest education:

Everybody know that me too lazy to quit	Everybody knows that I’m too lazy to quit
Everybody know that me physically fit	Everybody knows that I’m physically fit
Just because of say i no finish school	Just because I didn’t complete my education
Some people dem dey take me for a fool	Some people’re taking me for a fool
Nf’ n ibag o	But there’s no problem
I never give another man yawa-o	I’ve never caused problems for another man
I got my conscience by my side...	I’ve got conscience by my side

Also, D’Banj, the international hit star, in his very popular track, “All the way,” tells the story of his parents’ choices for him and his preference to follow his own chosen career in music. But by insisting on his personal choice in life, he becomes a renegade child as he runs away to follow his dream to be a famous musician. But such desperate measures by young artistes seeking a career in the arts and culture should not be read as sheer intransigence by an unruly generation unwilling to hearken to the wise counsel of an adult generation. Rather, it indexes the struggles of young people desperate to retain their creative sides in a neo-liberal era in which material gains in life have taken precedence over philosophical issues. It is



the reaction of a new generation, call it “Generation C” (where ‘C’ stands for creativity), resisting the philistinism now associated with a late-capitalist order that is hell-bent on doing away with art and culture, and instead investing in careers that generate stupendous wealth.

For Mad Mellon and Mountain Black, two very popular artistes on the Nigerian hip-hop scene, their longing for higher education and upward social mobility is not hidden as they confess their quest for better educational training in their hit song, “Danfo Driver.” While the two artistes are self-confessed “Danfo bus”<sup>9</sup> drivers in the mega city of Lagos, they aspire “to go to UniLag<sup>6</sup> for more education.” Being a Danfo driver (the occupation of the duo) in Lagos is a precarious existence and/or business left for layabouts, and unambitious and unintelligent youth. Therefore the desire for better education by the artistes in the song becomes even more important as it indicates their desire to gain society’s regard. As a particular cultural text cobbled together by marginalized youth struggling to make sense of life in what is really a precarious postcolonial urban space, the song, in many ways, addresses the indignities, shame and the consequent search for belonging by an excluded and derided generation that strongly desires social acceptance and respect from society. The song reveals and speaks against the rude dismissal of the uneducated class who have often been disregarded and waved aside by indifferent postcolonial elites who lack respect for those that do not belong in their privileged ranks.

### Ambition, Superstition and Social Short-Circuits

It is interesting how the desire to gain society’s regard becomes a fundamental aspect of identity formation among the young artistes involved in the production of popular hip-hop music in Nigeria. To investigate this important postcolonial strategy of subjectivity, it is also important to trace the impulse from which it derives. The prolonged years of military mis-governance eroded what used to be a thriving middle class in Nigeria. And the onset of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), its austerity measures, and the pervasive culture of corruption that derived from it stratified Nigerian society sharply into the very rich and the poor, where outrageous wealth lives side by side with flagrant poverty. With the suppression of the middle class and its conservative values, the unbridled craving for the values of the wealthy and a general culture of extravagance became the ruling social ethos, even in the midst of abject poverty. By the turn of the twenty-first century, this brutal pattern of social stratification had taken root and the aspiration of every youth was (and still is) to become a *big man*. The term *big man* is used generally in Africa in referring to those with economic power or cultural capital, that is, those who wield social influence and respect.

But since the sources of wealth of the so-called big men are often unknown and unexplainable, especially in the absence of any culture of accountability, the route to the attainment of wealth is also often obscure, left only to the personal pursuits of the individual, whether legal or extra-legal. In this lawless environment of jungle survival, the informal sector, which may include a range of illegitimate activities such as drug-peddling, internet fraud/scams (popularly known as “Yahoo-Yahoo” in Nigeria), and a pervasive investment in fetishism, what the Comaroffs call the “occult economy,” become shortcuts to success in a new social and economic order where hard work and education do not lead to wealth and social progress. Young people’s fascination with what Iheanyi Enwerem has aptly referred to as “money magic” (189) can then be read as a new culture of wealth accumulation that is devoid of hard work and production of any kind, a phenomenon which young people see most commonly amongst its unproductive but wealthy political class. The obsession among people to “hammer,” Nigerian speak for “making it big in the city,” becomes a fixation for people, especially the youth in urban spaces.<sup>7</sup> Part of the “making it big” phenomenon is to identify and fight against perceived enemies, physical and spiritual, who may stand in the way of one’s “arrival” or success. These struggles for survival and wealth amidst scarce resources have become a recurrent motif in contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music.

Among the many artistes who weave significant texts thematizing the desperate quest for riches in metropolitan spaces are famous pop stars such as Timaya, Duncan Mighty, Wacomzy, Don Tom, Olu Maintain and Wande Cool. Of the young artistes mentioned above, Timaya seems to be the most creative in the articulation of personal family predicament and the desperate strivings/hustling on the road to success. In his very popular hit songs “My Life,” “Plantain Boy,” and “I Don Blow,” Timaya gives us different remix versions of his dramatic rise to wealth and fame. Indeed, in “Plantain Boy,” Timaya recounts how he was a poor boy selling his mother’s plantain and singing in the local church choir of Mountain of Fire,<sup>8</sup> a militant neo-Pentecostal sect very popular amongst the working class in Nigeria. In the song, Timaya recounts his personal struggles and ultimate redemption:

I dey there dey hala	I was there shouting
And God come answer my mama p-r-a-y-e-r	And God answered my mother’s p-r-a-y-e-r
But now I don Hammer....	But now I have made it

Having found fame and wealth, the young artiste now encourages the new generation, his aspiring youth audience, not to give up on life. According to Timaya, “if you climb Okada / e no mean say you no fit drive Hummer (If you ride around on a commercial cyclist today/ it doesn’t mean you can’t drive a Hummer jeep in the future)!” The song does not seek to

deride the poor who ride on motor bikes and those who occupy other marginal social spaces, but serves as an encouragement to anyone living in poverty to strive for greater heights. This discourse of social striving is indeed important because what it seeks to do is trigger the innate creative potentials of a submerged generation whose ambitions have been stifled by postcolonial regimes hell-bent on exploiting their own people.

Timaya's story of hardship and temptations (he had resisted being co-opted into the 419 business), and his ultimate explosion as a pop star on the Nigerian/African music scene is a testimony to what young people can achieve in spite of the mounting odds against them. In fact, from his lyrics, it seems the young Timaya is perhaps one of Nigeria's most maligned and stigmatized musicians. In spite of all these predicaments, the happy turn in his story as a young artiste who has moved from an austere and insecure life to one of prosperity and popularity, is heart-warming. Thus, Timaya's admonition to his young audience to work hard, detest crime and hope for good luck in life almost clashes directly with an emergent culture where wealth now springs literally from nothing. Timaya's story, where a supposedly criminal youth rises from the ashes of despair to international stardom, challenges the stereotypical image of Africa's youth as a failed and lost generation.

The discourse of social struggles and ultimate triumph in Timaya's songs is replicated in Wacomzy's "I Celebrate" in which the young artiste tells us of his experience as a child born into wealth, but who tragically loses that privileged existence on account of the death of his father. Raised by a single mother, his life is beset by endless privation and trauma. But here again we encounter another interesting turn in the story of the hustling young artiste as he sings:

I give God the glory-e	I give God the glory
As i dey sing i dey tell them my story-e	As I'm singing I'm telling them my story
I give God all the glory-e	I give God the glory
As i dey sing everybody dey say dem know me-ea	As I'm singing people say they know me
E be like say i get money pass	It looks like I have more money than
Abiola, Babangida, Yar Adu...	Abiola, Babangida, Yar Adu...

In a postcolonial setting where young people have little or no social opportunities; where young people are left to eke out a living amidst very scarce resources; and where the little narratives of young people that occupy marginal spaces are suppressed, the young and creative artistes involved in cultural production become their own praise-singers, engaging in a global postmodern self-reflexive living in which the promotion of the self has become central to the politics of everyday life.

For Don Tom and Olu Maintain (the latter popularly known as the chart buster), they seem to be a subtle glorification of notoriety in the pursuit of wealth. In their songs internet scams seem to be legitimized sources of wealth and attraction. Exploiting a popular Igbo proverb, Don Tom tells his audience that he is basking in abundance—”nwanne anosim n’ofe.” He has moved “from nothing to something,” he claims; he is now making money, and in dollars, and driving a Hummer jeep. Perhaps invoking the Nigerian version of the American dream, he asks rhetorically, “If Obama make am, all the way from Kenya... (If Obama made it, all the way from Kenya),” why would he not make it here in Nigeria? The difference, however, is that his success comes not from working hard, but from being at his “(computer) system...tidying sequence.” In Nigerian slang, “tidying sequence” connotes financial scam, either by hacking into people’s accounts or corning unsuspecting persons on the internet to part with their money. Olu Maintain seems to glory in the same illegitimate strategy of attaining affluence as the title and content of his hit track “Yahooze” suggests. The video of “Yahooze” itself shows exotic scenes of hedonistic living with young men and women popping Champagne under confetti of dollar bills with a long convoy of costly cars that include the popular Hummer jeep.

In fact, in these popular songs, the Hummer jeep is not just an artistic motif. It seems to be a loaded social semiotic. It appears in Mad Mellon and Mountain Black’s story of “arrival” as replicated in their song “Danfo Travel.” Here, the title of the track and the sub-title of the album (“Success Story”) itself are very significant. They speak volumes of the experiences of the artistes and the ambitions of a dispossessed and abandoned generation in a late-capitalist economy. On the album sleeve we see the two well-suited artistes standing astride a Danfo bus and a Hummer. In my earlier study cited here, I had interpreted this imagery as a pictorial representation of both extremes of the social landscape in Nigeria: the Danfo bus represents “poverty and hard life” while the Hummer is symbolic of “affluence and upward social mobility” (172). Mad Mellon’s and Mountain Black’s images of themselves not only speak of their idea of postcolonial modernity, it betrays much of their enchanted psychology. On the album sleeve can be read a palimpsest of postmodern desires, consumerism and instant compensation which they, like many of their musical peers, (un)consciously engage in. By reconfiguring themselves in the studio, through songs and the iconic representation of the camera, these young artistes reinvent themselves and achieve a new social image in an uncertain and risky postcolonial society that has robbed them of all but their creative faculties.

Also, the tendency for these artistes to encounter enemies—both real and imagined—is a recurrent theme in their music. From Timaya to Duncan Mighty, Mad Mellon and Mountain Black to Stereo Man, and a cluster of other artistes that occupy marginal spaces within the booming hip-hop scene in Nigeria, we find this fear and derision of perceived enemies of progress inflected in different modes. In some sense, one could

conclude that the powerful social impulse for success, and the looming fear of external threat to it, might be traceable to a thriving neo-Pentecostal culture in Nigeria in which religious leaders constantly preach the gospel of prosperity. It is not uncommon for one to hear of crusades against unseen forces of all kinds and the distribution of religious tracts prophesying laughter, supernatural speed to wealth, and financial progress. In an environment of acute postcolonial uncertainty where no one, however influential and wealthy, is insulated from the dangers and threats of everyday life, it makes sense that people worry relentlessly about unseen enemies, whether real or imagined.

This atmosphere of fear is not only inflected in contemporary Nigerian pop music; it is also a preponderant motif in Nigeria's Nollywood, Africa's biggest and most exciting film industry. In fact, Nollywood is unparalleled in its recreation of superstition, installation of exotic wealth, and near preternatural mobility to a life of affluence. Of course the same precarious social and economic conditions that gave birth to the Nollywood video industry also informed the emergence of contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music. Given this shared history, and the mutual exchanges—in terms of actors, directors and technologies—which both popular creative industries engage in, one could argue that contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music and its Nollywood counterpart are part of the same postcolonial response to a long history of unremitting poverty, privation and collective pain. To this extent, contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music, as a particular brand of youth culture, thrives symbiotically within a wider cultural complex in the Nigerian society, especially where uncertainty, swift uncanny changes and really tough socio-economic conditions are the order of the day.

Given the myriad of local dynamics driving the cultural work of the young artists discussed in this essay, a certain kind of masculinity stands out. This masculinity is also formed by complex West African colonial antecedents, combined with contemporary socio-cultural and political realities that have left deep cultural marks on this musical genre. Although the young men involved in the Nigerian hip-hop scene show a break from traditional modes of masculinity, which is defined by hard manual labour, their sense of social success is, ironically, fed by the *big man* mentality which emerged from postcolonial elites, who themselves, are also constantly negotiating extreme communal expectations on the one hand, and the personal desire for the perceived wealth, glamour and good life associated with western life, on the other. Additionally, one can also decipher an obsession with the hedonistic, consumerist life style of young North American hip hop artistes whose works, as noted above, also influenced the birth of Nigeria's hip-hop music. But whether it is in relation to popular disappointment within the Nigerian nation, the search for wealth, masculinity, or the fear of external enemies of progress, what we are witnessing in the Nigeria hip-hop scene is a complex of influences, both local and international, that have converged together to form a new

sense of the self amongst a struggling youth generation in Nigeria trying hard to cope with the new regimes and signs of its time.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music is an intertextual art form that is not only informed by, but also enters into dialogue with the society within which it thrives. Although the popular music by urban youth is truly an indigenous genre, the young Nigerians involved in its production exploit both the resources of global electronic media and their own local experiences to recreate a new image of themselves in what Appadurai has referred to as “a post-electronic world” (5). Apart from the expression of a particular sense of modernity which this art form inscribes, its representations embody the entire psychology, anxieties, fears and hopes of the Nigerian postcolony. That postcoloniality, especially in its unbridled pursuit of materialism, should be comprehended not only within a postcolonial history marked by what Frantz Fanon simply identifies as the culture of “display” by the elites (125), but also as part of a global postmodern cultural order where, as David Lyon notes, “everything is a show, a spectacle, and the public image is all” (4).

Although Fanon used the theory of display to interrogate the tastes of the bourgeoisie in the newly-independent African nation-states, his deconstruction of that psychology helps us appreciate the emerging tastes, desires and politics of the Nigerian youth in the pop genre under study. Fanon sees the national elites, or what he refers to as “national bourgeoisie” (120) as “new (internal) colonists” (124) who inherited the reins of power from white imperialists. Inheriting political and economic power also meant that the national elites inherited the privileges associated with such power strictures. But the national elites thus found themselves unprepared in the midst of abundance, which in turn developed a culture of indolence and mindless spending “on cars, country houses, and on all those things that have been justly described by economists as characterising an underdeveloped bourgeoisie” (125). This exuberant spree is what Fanon indexes as spending on “display” (125).

Hence “display” becomes a visual manifestation of the unconscious. The psychology of display is characterised by obsessive desire, unreflective mimicry and hedonism. In terms of craving and aspiration, contemporary Nigerian pop music practice textualizes the most palpable mentality of display in Nigeria’s postcolonial cultural space. Indeed, this musical activity has its own hedonistic standard in relation to the glamorous visual codes of North American hip-pop artistes. But I argue that the pervasive inflection of “the money-in-the-stockings mentality” (Fanon 124) in the lyric and filmic narrative of contemporary Nigerian pop music in many ways is an attempt by a marginalized generation to use

popular culture as a means of imaginatively experiencing “the fantasy of a glamorous lifestyle far removed from their everyday experiences” (Garritano 10-11). In this regard, although I had observed above that this youth-based music is counter-hegemonic in its tendency to engage the socio-political and economic barriers that frustrate young people’s self-realization, its obsessive expression of postmodern desires and fears which I link to neo-Pentecostalism and post-independence bourgeois taste, goes a long way to underscore the genre as a “contradiction-ridden” site (Bakhtin 272). The materialistic motivations and influences which I locate in postmodern religion and politics—larger cultural spheres that should be directly opposing, but, which in this context have coalesced and become one cultural complex—go further to demonstrate how these contemporary Nigerian youth are caught, as it were, in the vortex of the postmodern time and space.

## Notes

1. These are the same words with which General Sani Abacha described his own regime in announcing a coup in 1993. His dictatorship lasted five years (1993-98).

2. The late Ezenwa Ohaeto (Nigerian poet, biographer and critic) satirically represents this admiration in his pidgin poem “If to say I be soja” (“If I were a soldier”) (36-40).

3. Contemporary Nigerian pop artistes, like their Nollywood counterparts, have become influential in society. They now function as cultural icons for Nigeria’s teeming youth. During the recent crisis over the removal of fuel subsidy by the Nigerian federal government, some of these artistes (such as Dady Showkey) joined forces with organized Labour and civil society to antagonize the Nigerian government.

4. Note also that naming here is topical and ideologically loaded.

5. “Crime-Fighter” is a Nigerian programme that focuses on the apprehension of criminals in Nigeria’s cities. Often its well-structured cathartic narratives seldom reveal the criminality in government.

6. University of Lagos, Nigeria.

7. This obsession is not just limited to youth or youth culture alone. It pervades the whole strata of Nigerian society: religion, government, schools, etc. In fact, Iheanyi Enwerem has it that “the prevalent money-magic phenomenon is a product of a heightened materialistic culture and ethic where the worth of a person is determined by his or her possessions and power” (201).

8. Fiery and high-spirited Nigerian Pentecostal denomination.

9. Danfo buses are the mini yellow commercial buses which first appeared in the sprawling city of Lagos in the 1970s. They are the cheapest mode of local transportation within Lagos, but the buses are also infamous for being death-traps on account of the recklessness of their young and illiterate drivers.

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