

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE RELEVANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF MUSIC TO SOCIO-POLITICAL AWARENESS

Chima Albert Abiakwu

Abstract

The importance and relevance of music to the growth of the human person and above all the society are quite indispensable. This is because, down the ages, music has enhanced and continues to enhance the life of the society. Man as a social being lives and finds his being in association with other men and for this association to be cordial, the government was established, thus man is fundamentally a political animal. Both music and politics are social realities that combine to make humanity better. This paper looked at the extent of relevance which music has had in man's relationship with the politics of his society, how it is used to direct the affairs of politics and how it is used in politics to impact the desired ideologies on citizens. Thus, many authors think that music is the voice of the people. The method used is a simple analysis of observed socio-political trends, evaluation of scholarly articles and historical and contemporary events which have established a clear focus on the relevance of music in socio-political awareness. The study observed that music is overtly used in political campaigns, in shaping political discourses and in presenting the needs of the society to the government. This article concluded by suggesting a more rewarding relationship between music and politics in the areas of human development and empowerment as music in making citizens socio-politically aware, helps politics in human capital development.

Keywords: Music, Politics, Revolution, Political Music

Introduction

Music is universal in nature and scope across societies and civilizations; at the same time, it is highly diverse in structures, roles and cultural interpretations. Hence, music is often at the heart of relationships; between man and his fellow men, between man and his social environment. This work presents a sampling of coordinated and seemingly uncoordinated musical activity across cultures, highlighting key functions and contributions to the life of every human society where it thrives (and this is almost everywhere) especially its penchant for speaking awareness into the socio-political conscience of the people who live and make their living in this society.

The Role of Music in Life

Music accompanies virtually every stage and activity of human life; it accompanies work, leisure, our religious worship as it is used in uplifting our spirit. It also accompanies us when travelling, sporting, shopping, in academics and most especially in the quest for social organization and cohesion. One can say that music has an omnipresent nature; omnipresence in the sense that it permeates the marrows of our daily living. Hence, like water, music can be said to be the cardiac of social living. This omnipresence of music raises several questions:

how does music affect our lives? What is the relation between the society we live in and the role, function, and position of music within that society? How is music influenced by human actions and how does music influence social, political and economic well-being of man?

Music and the Struggle for Liberation

The struggle to liberate African nations from the yoke of the White monopoly was not one-faced and the gun alone was not enough weapon for the emancipation of Africa because it did not offer any form of morale or motivation. According to some liberal authors that gap was “filled by music for it offered relaxation away from the battlefield and made people realize the cause for taking up arms against White cartel” (*Seeger, 1985*). Thus, music brought more information to the general populace; liberation struggle was not going to be won through fighting only without the dedication of musicians who also put their lives on the line to communicate very important political messages to the general populace and the war combatants. Music became a vital force for the emancipation of Africa.

Historical Differences in Music

When this paper speaks of music and historical differences, it means the implications of the music of the people in History. The history of a given people is dynamic. The music of people tells the tale of how in time the people have evolved. It tells the story of the rise and fall of dynasties, the struggle of inclusion in the society, the failures, crises and successes recorded. With indigenous music, the story of a people is told and retold to an infinite regress. In a community, for example, music that preserves culture, language, customs, folklore, political, social and family interactions, would have great importance since in the words of *Lynskey (2011)* it “embodied the memory of the past and the totality of the life of the people.” It is on this basis that different societies have different musical materials and content since their music sings the glories and satirizes the pitfalls of their past and seeks to model their present and future along the lines of accepted social norms and targeted goals.

Music and Politics

The connection between **music and politics** is seen in many climes and societies. Music influences political movements and rituals as recent events have shown to what extent general audiences relate to music and apply its message to political situations and contexts. Songs have been used to portray specific political messages. The nuance of these messages varies according to contexts and the targeted goal. These range from mere observation of political phenomena and trajectories to active and partisan opinions and ideologies even to coordinated and specific proactive goals like advocacy and regime change. The numerous works of Fela Kuti, Sonny Okosun, Oriental Brothers etc are lucid examples which have remained relevant till date.

Music as a Revelation of Political views and stands of a People

“If there's any hope for America, it lies in a revolution. And if there's any hope for a revolution, it lies in Elvis Presley to become Che Guevara.” These words by Phil Ochs, an American protest singer, reflect the power of the political use of music (*Street, 1997*). Since

music is a strong vehicle for expressing inner thoughts and feelings, it reveals the political views and stands of people; thus serving as a political tool. Music has the power to drive people to/for/against particular causes. In war times, governments used music as propaganda to boost nationalism and promote fighting. Also, music is used in elections numerous times. From a different standpoint, many musicians benefited from music as their resistance. Rock and roll was the voice of anti-war protests in Europe and America in the '60s, while folk music was a symbolic muster point for civil rights. These examples also prove to us that music is closely related to social issues and that music and politics are inseparable; as a matter of fact, both of them are extensions of man. Music obviously goes beyond mere entertainment, it is the reflection and expression of a people as it gives voice to their concerns, innermost challenges and yearnings for better living. Since to a very large extent, music enjoys freedom, it becomes one of the safest means for voicing out disdain against policies and political ideologies which have become unpopular among the people. Music, therefore, becomes the 'truth bearer' of a people.

Music and Socio-Political Causes

If we look at the role of music in politics, we will see that it is used to aid two broad causes; it either serves or rebels against dominant institutions in society. Due to music's irresistibility and ability to change mould ideas, it has an integral part in the life of every society; hence it is used by various societies and political sides to promote their beliefs. National anthems are highly respected by their citizens and boost nationalism, for instance. American government frequently has songs to raise support for troops in war, as in "God Bless America", which was used in WW2 (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum, 2012). Also during WW2, Soviet government-funded bands and other forms of entertainment to maintain military morale, and infamous Nazis specified the use of songs in their Nazi Youth training, as John Street stated (Street, 2011).

Music was also used against governments. Redgum, (an Australian rock group) recorded a song which was titled "I Was Only 19" to show what young Australian soldiers had been through in Vietnam. The song had exploded in Australia and became the voice of people against the war. Mobilization of local and international shame for the Imperial or colonial Powers, preying on African and Asian nations in their lands and the apartheid regime in South Africa was achieved by lots of means of which music was chief. Many musicians drove their role as social critics to overdrive. Okafor and Okafor (2009) captured the situation perfectly when they wrote:

“Like the poet that he (musician) is, he looks critically at what happens in his society - at the conduct and foibles of men, at the persons behind the personalities and creates a song with the objective of social control...in many instances, he is the true voice of the people for he says what everybody is thinking about.” (P.38)

All these situations are great examples of how music is used successfully to promote a belief, a stand. It is, therefore, safe to subsume from the fore-going that, music plays a big role in determining and directing socio-political trajectories.

Music as a voice of Resistance

Music is a great way to create and sustain bonds between people and make them act as one. It is also the unofficial voice of resistance. An intriguing case study is provided by Peter Wicke, who argues that rock musicians in East Germany were the catalysts for collapse of the East German regime. He states that the government's repression of rock turned it into a resistance, which was more or less impossible to control (*Street, 2011*). A local example is the travails and legend of Fela Anikulapo Kuti the founding father of Afro-Beat genre. His life and death were punctuated by a series of revolutionary hit-tracks against a dictatorial regime which used every conceivable plan in the bid to silence him. He was jailed and maltreated, his family was not left out; 'but the more the authorities tried to oppress him, the. More he acquired the status of martyr.' (Okafor and Okafor 2009).

Music source of Information and Social Revolution

For many times, music was used to inform society about various issues. Soul music in the 1930s demonstrated the hardships of anguished Afro Americans. Folk singer Woodie Guthrie wrote many songs about the lives of black people, especially in rural areas, where black people were used as slaves. An example of this is the song "I Ain't Going to Be Treated Like This Way". His outspoken lyrics caused him to be labelled "un-American", but his work informed the US society and influenced many artists to follow his way (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum, 2012).

There are also much more peaceful attempts, just as the "USA for Africa". Many famous artists including Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen etc. founded this group and recorded "We Are TheWorld". It made the community aware and raised millions of dollars to stop the growing famine in Africa. Some artists wrote a song called "Sun City", criticizing the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Bob Geldof can be considered as the father of charity concerts, such as Live Aid, which was also started for the poor living standards in Africa. These concerts raised hundreds of millions and created a type of consciousness in society while giving immeasurable pleasure to its audience.

Some people used to say that music is irrelevant with politics and the political stance of a musician does not need to be shared by its listeners; considering the apolitical youth in the 2000s and so, this used to be true. However, this school of thought have forgotten an important factor; that people identify freely with music and that music is both an influencer of thoughts and a product of thought patterns. Audiences want to connect with the artist, and the artist is aware that if his views are not on the same page with its audience in politics, the songs may not meet his expected 'sale-rate'. John Parales said that "People wanted to hear something to comfort them. They wanted to hear something that captured the anger people felt." (Brand, 2003). Any song irrelevant with the political stand of the US society, which was supporting war then, would not be listened to. Also, rock music, particularly in the 1960s, integrated the black and white youths. Since they were all listening to the same songs, they supported the same political views. This was not viewed as a good thing by the government and the parents at that time. Still, it opened a way for the future, and it's a

wonderful example of the socio-political relevance of music.

Conclusion

In conclusion, music is seen and utilized in human socio-political space as it is used by governments to project and propound their policies and program, opposition parties and pressure groups utilize this same medium of music to drive home their anti-government stands and agitations, corporations and civil right groups also couch their messages in music. All these profuse uses of music as a vehicle to reach target audiences are coordinated in fashions that will sway popular opinion and appeal towards the various arms in search of them. This paper has shown to what degrees these pursuits have achieved their aim. Hence it is evidently clear that music creates, reflects and directs the yearnings and desire of a people, and as often as these desires tend towards politics, music has contributed to socio-political awareness.

Music brings support to various causes, it connects people and opens ways to a better future for all, better humanity and also raising consciousness in societies. People define themselves with music and are moved by its messages, especially when it appeals to popular idiosyncrasies and demands as the examples above have shown. Nations have never grown beyond the level of socio-political awareness of its citizenry as this awareness cuts across, commerce, education, agriculture, health etc. Policies and program of government which in and of themselves have not met the expected welfare of the people are resisted and one of the safest and cheapest means of doing this without recourse to violence is the medium of music. To this extent, music has strived and still strives to continually make us aware. The USA for Africa movement utilized the music track 'We Are the World' to gather financial and emotional aid to Africa and other nations who had fallen victim to outbreaks of famine, diseases, natural disasters as in Haiti and war. The Music of Sonny Okosun and other international artists paved the way for a post-apartheid South Africa; the works of Fela Kuti made more Nigerians increasingly aware of the excesses of political office holders and the prophetic messages of Oriental Brothers as in "Ochichi Nigeria, mekwanuya ka odimma" (Nigeria's governance, ensure it is beneficial to all) all contributed to the resurgence of increased political participation which is being recorded in recent times and which is key to the all-round development of nations.

References

- Brand, O. (2003). *The ballad mongers: The rise of modern folk song*, New York: Funk and Wagnalls
- Lynskey, D. (2011). *33 revolutions per minute: A history of protest songs*. London: Harper Collins.
- Okafor, R. C. & Okafor, C.U. (2009). *Music and national development in Nigeria*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Rachel, D. (2016). *Walls come tumbling down: The music and politics of rock against racism, 2 tone and red wedge*. London: Picador,
- Seeger, P. (1985). *Carry it on: A history in song and picture of the working men and women*

- of America. New York: Simon and Schuster.*
Street, J. (1986). Rebel rock: The politics of popular music. Oxford: Blackwell.
Street, J. (1997). Politics and popular culture. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Street, J. (2011). Music & politics. Cambridge: Polity Press.