

The Rhetoric of Self-Adulation in Contemporary Nigerian Popular Music: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

The tendency among many Nigerian popular music artists to engage in self-adulation has been identified in some studies, but has not received enough pointed and focused attention. This article therefore takes a close look at this phenomenon. Twelve songs by eight different artists deemed to be sufficiently representative of contemporary popular music in Nigeria were purposively selected for the study. They were analysed thematically on the basis of some constructs in social psychology. Based on the analyses, this article concludes that self-adulation in contemporary Nigerian popular music serves the artists as a defence mechanism in the face of palpable threats to their self-esteem, which are generated by specific social realities. The attendant lyrics which often involve the flaunting of wealth and women have the capacity to encourage crass materialism and the denigration of women among the young impressionable fans of the musical genre. The article recommends some reorientation that would encourage artists and their producers to take the overall social implications of their lyrics into cognisance and make necessary adjustments to avoid misleading youth into vain materialism and gender bias.

Keywords: rhetoric; self-esteem; self-adulation; popular music; social psychology

Introduction

The term popular music encompasses a wide range of musical genres consisting of different styles and themes. Onyeji (2004, 1) provides an apt description of what popular music involves. He observes that a

Simple definition of popular music distinguishes it as music type that is targeted by the composer and maker to the ordinary man or the general public for immediate appreciation and consumption. Popular music is, therefore, a genre of music



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encompassing several styles, which is readily comprehensible to a large number of the people without much knowledge of music theory or techniques.

One of the most prominent subjects of Nigerian popular music is the artist's perception of himself, his career and his music, and the public reception of his music. In addressing these subjects, the artist often veers into bouts of self-praise, frequently verging on megalomania. Self-praise is so prominent in Nigerian popular music that Forchu (2013) includes self-praise as one of the elements of choice in his assessment of the music preferences of youths in Enugu, Nigeria. Adedeji (2010, 141) also identifies what he calls "ego tripping/self praise" as one of the favourite themes of popular music in Nigeria. In a description of the attitudes of Afro-music performers, Onyeji (2004, 1) points out that often there is an "obstinacy on the part of the musicians, forcing the audience to appreciate the music the way it is or leave it, if not go to hell." These insights suggest that the phenomenon of self-adulation is a well-recognised feature of popular music lyrics in Nigeria, and has received some measure of attention, albeit as a passing subject in investigations of other phenomena.

One must therefore be quick to stress the fact that the phenomenon has not been adequately isolated for focused study. Yet, it is a well-established social phenomenon that no active or casual listener of Nigerian popular music can miss. In this regard, the phenomenon is deserving of academic scrutiny, particularly in view of the extent of influence wielded by popular music artists on the audience (especially the youth). It is imperative that close attention be paid to the ideas the artists project, why they project these ideas, and the overall social implications of such ideas. For example, the relationship between popular music and social malaise has been recognised and extensively documented in different contexts in Nigeria, as exemplified by Christopher (2013) in the case of violence and popular music and Ojukwu, Obielozie, and Esimone (2016) in the case of diminished values and popular music. Such research efforts provide society with scientific insight necessary to organise informed responses to social challenges associated with popular music. It must be expected that whatever dominates the lyrics of extremely influential popular music icons must one way or another have some bearing on the orientation of the teeming consumers of their music, possibly with some social implications. It is therefore surprising that self-adulation, being quite a dominant element of Nigerian popular music, has not received adequate attention in research thus far, especially considering the potential of self-adulation to breed unpleasant social attitudes among the youthful audience. This article seeks to fill this gap. It primarily provides an in-depth analysis of the inner drives that produce the tendency towards self-adulation among artists, via a focused, psychology-based interrogation of the phenomenon as a rhetorical feature of their lyrics. In this regard, this article uses relevant aspects of the concept of self-esteem (as often used in social psychology) as tools of analyses. In addition, the social implications of this phenomenon are identified, with recommendations made on how they can be mitigated.

Nigerian Popular Music

There is immense structural, functional, operational and historical diversity in sounds humans can consciously generate (Davies 2012). This makes the task of defining music very tricky. It will suffice here to view music as “sounds temporarily organized by a person for the purpose of enriching or intensifying experience through active engagement (e.g. listening, dancing, performance)” (Levinson 1990 cited in Davies 2012, 2). Apparently, there are different types of music, and the typology would depend on several values like structure and purpose. Popular music, as previously explained, is differentiated on the basis of its audience. In terms of structure, diverse styles and style combinations are involved. However, it is targeted at a general audience and is “readily comprehensible to a large number of the people without much knowledge of music theory or techniques” (Onyeji 2004, 1). In Nigeria, several music types fall into this category. They include several traditional types such as *apala* and *fui* and modern types such as highlife, *juju* (African jazz) and hip-hop.

Aigbokhaevbolo (2015) opines that the history of popular music in Nigeria can be categorised into three periods: the traditional period spanning up to the mid-19th century, the post-Western period from the mid-19th century to 1960, and the contemporary period from 1960 to date. During the traditional period, traditional music involving indigenous instruments held sway. These were performed at various ceremonies and were associated with dance. In the post-Western period, there was an infusion of Western musical instruments and styles principally via church music. In this regard, choral music and classical music became part of the culture of the educated elite, especially in some parts of the south western parts of Nigeria. These people were exposed to European musical traditions not only via the churches but also through the missionary operated schools. Someone like Josiah Ransome-Kuti (Fela Kuti’s grandfather) began to compose hymns in Yoruba and eventually went to Britain to record his songs. In addition to the classical hymns, military brass bands were also introduced by the colonialists. The military brass bands eventually began to experiment with local songs and tunes, thereby gaining popular appeal to the extent that civilian brass bands emerged and soon metamorphosed into highlife groups. This process was enhanced by the revolutionary step of recording the first indigenous record in 1925. This was accomplished by Ladipo Solanke and Domingo Justus. As exposure to the Western world increased via travel and trade, people began to experiment with several Western styles which inevitably were infused with local colour, creating several unique brands that became popular with the people.

The contemporary period witnessed an explosion in recordings and the continued emergence and entrenchment of new genres including *juju*, Afro beat, Afro funk and *fui*, in addition to highlife. Apart from these, there was an explosion in the import of foreign genres such as pop, reggae, funk, rock, blues, R&B, hip-hop and rap. These influenced the local scene immensely, as the youth adopted these styles wholesale or

blended them with local musical themes. In the new millennium, the Nigerian music world now has a new breed of commercially successful popular music artists such as D'Banj, Eedris Abdulkareem, Aşa, Sound Sultan, Korede Bello, P-Square, Davido, Flavour, Yemi Alade, Dr Sid, WizKid, Tiwa Savage, Omawumi and Olamide.

The subjects of the accompanying songs of Nigerian popular music are varied. They range from contemporary social, religious, economic and political concerns to personal matters, and of course subjects related to money, fame, success, love and sex. There are lyrics that explore these subjects from a morally conservative angle, while others are deviant, rebellious and blatantly obscene and vulgar, with the latter tending to dominate the hip-hop and rap culture which appears to have a wider appeal to the young people in contemporary times. The moral decadence associated with Nigerian popular music culture is well documented in works by Christopher (2013) and Ogunrinade (2015). Adegoke (2011), however, portrays a more balanced perspective which views this category of music as not just full of negative values but also full of social commentary and thus as engaged in the archiving of views and perspectives on social, political and developmental challenges.

Whichever perspectives one chooses to adopt in viewing popular music in Nigeria, one cannot deny the fact that the genre and the artists that produce it have come a long way in getting established as a formidable force in society. Many of the artists listed earlier have become household names, both within and outside the country. Many of them have received prestigious awards and recognition in exalted realms in and outside the country. The sheer volume of popular musical output, especially in terms of hip-hop, and the extent to which this output is appreciated outside the country has attracted attention to the significant potential of this industry to contribute to Nigeria's GDP and foreign exchange earnings are being seriously discussed, as indicated in Gumm (2010), Babalola (2014) and Sunday-Kanu (2016). These are clear indications of the significance of the popular music phenomenon in Nigeria, and the attendant need for continuing interrogations of all its dimensions.

Self-Adulation in Nigerian Popular Music

Self-adulation in the context of this article refers to a tendency in some individuals to have and declare an exaggerated positive appraisal of themselves. This tendency has been extensively studied by psychologists largely as a negative trait, particularly as it relates to persons whose actions tend towards narcissism on account of exhibiting beliefs about the self that “do not on average, reflect reality” or are “inflated relative to what objective measures indicate” in domains such as status, success, power, and dominance (Campbell and Foster 2007, 117–18).

It is very difficult to miss the preponderance of lyrics laden with such barefaced self-adulation or self-praise when listening to Nigerian popular music. Lyrics that fall under this category often involve haughty claims of different sorts, ranging from claims of

being the progenitor of a musical form or being the custodian of an authentic form to claims of having made it big on the musical stage or in financial attainment. Also common are direct or disguised references to other artists while laying claim to some form of superiority in skill or popularity.

As previously mentioned, self-adulation or self-praise in Nigerian popular music has not received adequate exclusive scholarly scrutiny, but has been recognised in passing. For example, Adedeji (2010, 144) states clearly

Ego tripping or the art of self praise is a common phenomenon in hip hop culture where battling among MCs is a permanent feature availing rappers the opportunity to engage in lyrical contests. This theme has constantly appeared on hip hop recordings where artists boost their reputation and maintain their street credibility and self worth by throwing punches at rivals.

This is an apt description of one of the most common ways in which self-adulation manifests in popular music in Nigeria.

It is perhaps relevant to say at this point that this tendency is not unique to the contemporary popular music artist. Traditional oral performers also engage in self-praise. They not only perform the primary task of praising others, but also significantly engage in self-praise. For example, Ojaide (2006) observes the following in a description of the *udje* song contest among the Urhobo people of the Niger Delta:

Many songs begin with self praise and boastfulness. Since *Udje* contest is a form of warfare, each side attempts to intimidate the other. Many of the openings are boastful and self praising. In some, the singers say they are kings and there is only one king in the community. In the famous “me vwudjelabo” Okitiakpe tells his rival group that he is invincible, and draws on a string of analogies to express his superiority over others. He may be poor but he is king of songs, no matter how poor a king is, he still wears the coral beads.

Performers in a form of poetry among the Yoruba known as *ewè* also tend to engage significantly in self-adulation, especially as a strategy of signing off from a performance. In this regard, Okùnòyè (2010, 55) points out that the artist “normally signs off by identifying himself/herself at the end of each performance. This formula ... has come to serve as an avenue for propagating their self-made identities and sense of mission.” The expressions are often extremely bombastic and haughty. This is also the case with the well-documented *ijala* poetry tradition among the Yorubas where, according to Batabyal (2013, 7),

every *ijala* performer tends to give priority in his chanting to his own lineage and salutes himself as a man of some note. This salute to himself and his own lineage is somewhat equivalent to a self-portrait ... Hunters employ the *ijala* to construct and praise themselves, their families, communities, and to contest their community's

representation by others. ... The ijala performer chants about his own characteristic behaviour, his interesting experiences, past achievements and what he considers to be his principles of conduct. In a typical ijala the performer speaks about himself.

To argue emphatically that there is a connection between self-praise in traditional oral arts and self-adulation in contemporary popular music may be tenuous without deeper insights. It is necessary therefore to reiterate the fact that self-adulation in one form or another is not a novel phenomenon in the entertainment business among Nigerian ethnic groups. In any case, the manifestation of this feature in traditional art does not match the consistency and belligerence of its manifestation in the lyrics of many popular music artists today. As Adedeji (2010, 144) points out, it now appears to reflect attempts to assert “street credibility” and to “throw punches” at rival artists. This tendency, one must add, also characterises some spheres of pop culture in Western societies, particularly among African American rap artists. The case of African American rap culture is well-documented, as exemplified by the work of Skeggs (1993) and Fraley (2017). There are, however, unique dimensions to this phenomenon in the Nigerian context which necessitate more pointed scholarly scrutiny. Specifically, it is important to examine this phenomenon as something that has become a consistent part of the rhetorical style of Nigerian popular music artists.

Self-Adulation in the Context of Rhetoric

Keith and Lundberg (2008) opine quite correctly that there are diverse ways in which people conceptualise the term rhetoric. Differences often depend on the context in which the term is used. For example, in the context of public speaking the term may refer to persuasion strategies, while in a context where broader issues of communication are discussed the term may be given a wider berth to include not just strategies of persuasion but every discourse feature introduced to enhance a verbal presentation. In the context of political campaigns, the term wears a different garb altogether: it can be taken to refer to empty talk that is meant to have momentary appeal and cannot be backed up with action. Thus, a politician’s promises could be condemned as “mere rhetoric.” In view of the divergence in the application of the term, it would be expedient to identify and discuss the dimension of its use in the context of this article.

Rhetoric in this article refers to general strategies in the presentation of ideas. More specifically, it refers to the methods used by popular music artists to drive home their messages. Keith and Lundberg (2008) observe that rhetoric can help us to gain insight into three broad areas of our contemporary life: identity and power, visual and material symbols, and the public and democracy. The aspect that is relevant to this work is identity and power. In discussing identity and power in rhetoric, Keith and Lundberg (2008, 9) emphasise the fact that rhetoric is about how discourses are persuasive and how they influence our perspectives; it is about how people “draw on their discourse of identity” to cope with reality and why “certain identity practices and labels facilitate

political power” (9). The interest here is not political power but social power which popular music artists seek to exert.

In this context, self-adulation is seen as a critical identity practice that many Nigerian popular music artists employ to sustain the current of their themes. To properly understand this, one must be aware of the dominant themes that surface in their art. As previously mentioned, these include social, religious, economic and political concerns as well as personal career goals and attainments. In addition, subjects related to money, fame, success, love and sex often surface in this category of music. In singing about subject matter relating to the artist’s career goals, his financial breakthroughs and fame, the artist often presents his story with bombastic declarations, especially where he deems it fit to score one or two points over his perceived musical rivals. Thematically, self-adulation appears well placed within the environment of this kind of discourse, but it is not an inevitable device for sustaining arguments inherent therein. The manifestation of this phenomenon requires deeper explanations. The preponderance of elements of self-projection in themes of popular music to the extent that it becomes a signature element of lyrics raises questions about the psychology of the artists. This perspective essentially explains the decision to interrogate the phenomenon in question from a psychological perspective, specifically from the perspective of the concept of self-esteem.

The Concept of Self-Esteem

In order to conceptualise self-adulation in Nigerian popular music from the perspective of the concept of self-esteem, a broad overview self-esteem is required. From this, relevant principles and elements that inform the analysis in this article are drawn.

The study of self-esteem emerged within the field of psychology in 1890 as a novel concept developed by William James and expanded by Charles Cooley in 1902 and Herbert Mead in 1934 (Flynn 2003). Today, self-esteem is a subject of interest in psychology and sociology, although psychology (particularly social psychology) appears to dominate the study of the concept.

In this article self-esteem is discussed and applied as a broad concept in social psychology and not necessarily in relation to a particular theory (although there are a number of modern theories of self-esteem such as self-determination theory, sociometer theory and the terror management theory). Although these theories address varied focal points within the broad spectrum of relevant issues, there are core sub-concepts that cut across all the theories. Some of these core concepts, which will be specified later, are of interest to this study, thereby necessitating the application of self-esteem as a concept without zeroing down on any of the theories.

Self-esteem, in the words of Keith and Lundberg (2008), refers to an individual’s overall positive evaluation of the self. These scholars further opine that self-esteem, as often

presented in the relevant literature, comprises two distinct dimensions: competence and worth. The competence dimension, which is the efficacy-based self-esteem, refers to the extent to which people consider themselves as capable and efficacious. The worth dimension refers to the degree to which individuals generally value themselves without necessarily basing the valuation on possession of specific capacities or potentials. Whether viewed as a phenomenon linked to competence or worth, self-esteem research often ends up being conceptualised as either outcome, self-motive, or buffer. Keith and Lundberg (2008) explain that an analysis of self-esteem as an outcome involves focusing on processes that produce or inhibit self-esteem, while self-motive involves focusing on the study of behaviour that accentuates or increases positive evaluations of the self. The conceptualisation of a buffer, on other hand, involves research that sees self-esteem as an internal device that provides the individual with inner defences against the effects of negative experiences.

Self-esteem is a critical aspect of a person's psychological composition. Branden (2001, 109) explains it as follows:

There is no value-judgment more important to man—no factor more decisive in his psychological development and motivation—than the estimate he passes on himself. This estimate is ordinarily experienced by him, not in the form of a conscious, verbalized judgment, but in the form of a feeling, a feeling that can be hard to isolate and identify because he experiences it constantly: it is part of every other feeling, it is involved in his every emotional response.

When there are deficiencies in self-esteem, there are usually marked attempts at self-esteem repairs, and the repair measures can define the personality of the individual concerned. Branden (2001, 110) further observes:

So intensely does a man feel the need of a positive view of himself that he may evade, repress, distort his judgment, disintegrate his mind—in order to avoid coming face to face with facts that would affect his self appraisal adversely. A man who has chosen or accepted irrational standards by which to judge himself can be driven all his life to pursue flagrantly self-destructive goals—in order to assure himself that he possesses a self esteem which in fact he does not have.

The repair mechanisms are extensively discussed by Nussbaum and Dweck (2008) who conducted an experimental study to find out the determinants of people's responses to threats to self-esteem. The two responses investigated were to resort to defence mechanisms or to embark on the process of remediation. The results of the experimental study suggest that persons whose perspectives on life hinge on a static view of the self, who see no clear means of adjusting personal abilities, and adopt what Nussbaum and Dweck (2008, 610) refer to as an "entity self-system" are more likely to resort to the use of defence mechanisms to fight threats to self-esteem. Persons who believe in an "incremental self-system" (Nussbaum and Dweck 2008, 610), which involves a

dynamic view of the self, are more likely to work on themselves with a view to achieving improvements that would bring them in line with their expectations.

From the foregoing three key elements are extracted which form a framework within which this article undertakes an engagement with self-adulation among some Nigerian popular music artists. First, everybody has an estimation of self (whether linked to competence or self-worth). Second, there are factors that accentuate or diminish self-worth (as often studied under the outcome dimension of the concept of self-esteem). Those that potentially diminish the self are referred to as threats to self-esteem. Lastly, where there are threats to self-esteem, people tend to engage in some repair strategies. One of these strategies involves a resort to the use of defence mechanisms or entity self-system (a dimension that is often studied under the approach that views self-esteem as a buffer). Repair can also involve engagement with self-improvement strategies or incremental self-esteem. These ideas inform the analysis of data presented in the sections that follow.

Description of Data

Several songs were considered, but only a limited number were purposively selected based on the extent to which they reflect self-adulation. The resulting data consists of a sample of 12 songs that are considered to be adequately representative of the tendency of self-adulation among Nigerian popular music artists. These songs include the following:

“Blame It on the Money” and “Mr Endowed” (D’Banj)

“Baddest Nigga Ever Liveth” and “Awon Goons Mi” (Olamide)

“Show You the Money” and “JaiyeJaiye” (WizKid)

“Bahd Baddo Baddest” (Falz, Olamide and Davido)

“Dami Duro” (Davido)

“Bad” and “Wanted” (Tiwa Savage)

“Warn Yourself” and “Bottom Belle” (Omawumi)

The songs are written and performed in multiple codes. In other words, they involve more than one language. English, Yoruba, Pidgin (precisely Nigerian Pidgin English) and Hausa are the languages used in varying degrees, as is often the case in Nigeria where multilingual singing is a norm.

Method of Data Analysis

The data was analysed using qualitative text analysis, which is most suitable because of the need to make general or holistic interpretations of overt or subtle meanings of all the textual and extra-textual cues available, taking each song as an organic meaning unit.

As previously stated, every human has some measure of self-esteem. It would therefore be redundant to supply data to prove that the artists whose works are sampled here have self-esteem. However, there is a need to provide data to demonstrate the palpable existence of systemic threats to self-esteem entrenched in societal perspectives on music artists, and that this registers strongly in the psyches of these artists. In addition, it is crucial to demonstrate the repair strategies that ultimately produce the rhetorical strategy of self-adulation.

In doing this, light is shed (where need be) on aspects of the lives of the artists, which represent very clear threats to self-esteem. Subsequently, an attempt is made to discuss how these elements manifest in their songs and how some aspects of the songs constitute personality repair strategies. Summaries of the contents of the songs are provided, with extracts and translations provided where necessary.

Data A: Threats to Self-Esteem

It was noted in the discussion on early life realities and the inherent threats to self-esteem that negative attitudes within families towards children with “irregular” orientations is a palpable threat to their self-esteem. This is evident in the music produced by the selected popular music artists. Olamide’s “Baddest Nigga Ever Liveth” and “Awon Goons Mi” as well as D’Banj’s “Mr Endowed” and Tiwa Savage’s “Bad” reflect this.

The denigrating questions that often arise among family and immediate community members regarding the prospect of these young popular music stars (while they were upstarts) are alluded to and mocked in Olamide’s “Baddest Nigga Ever Liveth.” This rap piece is a belligerent catalogue of the artist’s struggle from a humble beginning to the current point of fame and fortune. Quite clearly, the hostile rhetoric, rendered in a mixture of Yoruba, Pidgin, Hausa and English, reflects some measure of bitterness at some form of rejection and criticism that he had to contend with along the way. The following extract, which is accompanied by its translation, is quite revealing in this regard:

Yoruba Version

Bo wun mi ki n ma fa gbana titi
wọn o gbese ranmi
Nigbati mo bere,
wọn nipe mio ni career

English Translation

If I wish, I could smoke cannabis endlessly
I am not working for them
When I started out
they said I had no career

Tori pemo n   Yoruba rap,
 but language no be barrier
 Mo ranti nigbati orun mi gun,
 bi ti Agbani Darego
 So many JAMB question, mehn,
   na WAEC or na NECO
 Buh me never hold back...

Because I perform rap in Yoruba,
 but language proved not to be a barrier
 I remember when my neck was thin
 and long like Agbani Darego's
 So many JAMB questions, man;
 is it WAEC or NECO?
 But I did not give up ...

The last two lines are quite revealing. The acronyms JAMB, WAEC and NECO refer to examination agencies in Nigeria. Olamide indicates here quite clearly that his experiences with them were problematic and characterised by struggle, very unlike the situation of the typical good child that enjoys the approval of parents. Indeed, Olamide in an interview concedes that he was not really close to his parents while growing up, and that he was “a stupid boy, more of a black sheep,” who dropped out of school (NaijaGists 2014). This suggests that he suffered negative attitudes and rejection from his family which constituted a threat to his self-esteem.

In the following lines from “Awon Goons Mi,” which translates to “My Goons” in English, it is evident that Olamide is deeply and bitterly conscious of the possibility that his dreams of making it big in music were despised and perhaps overtly opposed by some members of his family or immediate community. The last line below is loaded with meaning. It conveys Olamide’s final response: he has fared well, even while involved in things some persons would consider abominable or unworthy.

Yoruba Version

English Translation

Emi chase dream mi
 Mi o ma care beni body nkun
 Eyin oponu apo odaoya
 e kun nkan tefe kun,
 Awodi jeun epe sanra

I chase my dreams
 I don't care if anyone is grumbling
 You daft persons
 grumble as much as you can
 The hawk is nourished by the accursed food it eats

The last line of this extract is crucial to gaining a better understanding of the sense of initial rejection many popular music artists have to endure in their struggling days. The idea of a hawk nourished by accursed food is an idiomatic expression in Yoruba often used to describe persons who profit from adversity. In Nigerian towns and villages, free range hens often forage freely around neighbourhoods, and often their chicks are picked up by hawks who are then cursed (to no avail) by the chicken owners. Here, the artist defiantly and sarcastically likens himself to the offending hawk who survives the curses of the chicken owners. In this regard, the artist boasts of his survival in spite of the likelihood of disapproval.

The feeling of being in a race to prove some persons wrong also manifests strongly in D'Banj's song “Mr Endowed,” as demonstrated in the extract below:

Yoruba Version**English Translation**

Eni gee shin o le ba mi
 Lai lailailai won le ba mi (eh)
 O ti pe ti mobo lowo won
 Won tun binu pe
 motikoja won lo (eh).

He who rides on a horse cannot catch up with me
 Never, never. They cannot catch up with me
 I have broken free from them
 They are vexed because
 I overtook them.

Within the overall context of the song, it is clear that the pronouns “they” in line 2, “them” in line 3 and “they” in line 4 refer to persons within the artist’s circle who were probably in contention with him one way or another. One cannot ascertain conclusively who they are. By conjecture and implicature though, one may reason that the lyrics refer to those who opposed the artist’s choice of career and lifestyle. These opponents were clearly threats to his self-esteem.

In this regard, the lines quoted below from Tiwa Savage’s “Bad” are also worth noting:

Pidgin Version**English Version**

Yes I fly like they no dey see me
 Only time dey see me na for TV
 Tell bad belle make them free me
 I just wana fly I wana be me
 Anything I do
 them say I do I do too much
 Started from the ghetto
 but them say am acting posh
 Hustle and I grind
 from the bottom to the top
 Even when they tell me plenty
 no I never stop oooh,

Yes I fly and they don’t see me often
 They see me only on TV
 Tell envious persons to leave me alone
 I just want to fly I want to be me
 Whatever I do
 they claim I do it in excess
 I started from the ghetto
 yet they say I am acting posh
 I struggled
 from the bottom to the top
 Even with rejections
 I never gave up

It is important to note that both Tiwa Savage and WizKid, with whom she collaborated in this recording, were never ghetto kids in the real sense (contrary to the claim in line 7). Tiwa, for example, grew up in Britain as a fairly privileged child who obtained a degree in business administration from the University of Kent. The ghetto motif is however employed to buttress the expression of a strong sense of rejection and opposition that had to be overcome in order for the artist to realise her dream, as reflected in the entire extract. Tiwa’s song suggests that threats to self-esteem do not come only from family or community members but may also arise from people in the music industry, putting the artist in constant “battle mode” to combat these threats through music.

All the other songs sampled for this article, as well as a substantial volume of songs and rap produced by Eedris Abdulkareem, Sound Sultan, P-Square, Flavour, Dr Sid and Goldie, contain similar ideas.

Data B: Repair Strategies

Nigerian popular music artists often use defence mechanisms as recourse in order to cope with the realities of oppositions to their chosen career paths. The strategy they regularly employ to defend their careers is to blatantly and aggressively flaunt their wealth and their successes with women. The bellicose tone in which this is often done cannot be missed. The following lines from D'Banj's piece "Blame It on the Money" aptly illustrates this:

I am not sorry I'm rich
I am sorry you broke
Yeah, don't blame me
Blame it on the money
Money, Money, Money, Money, Money, Money
Blame it on the money
Money, Money, Money, Money, Money, Money
Blame it on the money
Money, Money, Money, Money, Money, Money
Blame it on the Money
Money, Money, Money ...

The outright mockery of those who are broke (probably some other artists) is evidence that there are some seething contentions in the social context in which the lyrics are written. It is in this regard that D'Banj also finds it necessary to flaunt his escapades with women, as depicted in the lines below also from "Blame It on the Money":

Four-five-fine women, that's a copulation
Weed, Hennessy and me; what a combination
I had a bad day, tonight is a compensation
I don't trust that bitch, I got the condom tested
Ow, paper chasing till I die
Stacking papers to the sky

These lines suggest that he is successful both because he has money and can use his money to have as many women as he desires. The angry and quite belligerent rhetoric used to advance this rather coarse offensive is further illustrated in these lines from the same song:

D'Banj is the man with the Lion King
And money ain't shit, we will buy anything
Blame it on my riches

Blame it on my bitches

For D'Banj, therefore, repairing damages to his self-esteem involves a lavish display of his money and escapades with women. Self-esteem is thus conceptualised in Nigerian popular music as something that can be retrieved through engaging in excesses. This theme shows up quite clearly in "Bad" by Tiwa Savage. Obviously, her response to consciously or subconsciously perceived threats is to flaunt her material possessions in the faces of those who launch these threats. This is exemplified in the following lines:

Yeah am coming to cause trouble oh yeah
You don't like me unfollow oh yeah
You can't talk about my hustle no no
You make money I make double oh yeah
Turn me up turn me louder
From the street to the zanga

In "Mr Endowed," this theme also emerges to reflect the artist's desperation to cling to what appears to give him some edge over his peers. The following extract illustrates this:

I'm the kind of brother that your boyfriends wanna be
Cause I am so endowed (I am so endowed)
See the ladies looking at me, ...

Cause I am so endowed (I am so endowed)
I am D'Banj
I'm the kind of brother that your boyfriends wanna be
Cause I am so endowed ... I am so endowed
See the ladies looking at me, na me they want to see
Cause I am so endowed (I am so endowed)

These sentiments clearly amount to an attempt at self-esteem repair, coming from a man who (as a child) rebelled against the expectation that he should follow his father's illustrious military career, but only managed to complete secondary education in a south western Nigerian context where getting a good education is considered very honourable. Indeed, he abandoned university education for music (*Nigerian Biography* 2015).

In "Show You the Money," WizKid combines the crass flaunting of wealth with the sexist flaunting of access to women. He denigrates women as mere sexual objects that can be easily manipulated through financial inducements, all in an attempt to prove to himself that his stupendous wealth has put him ahead of his peers. The lines below are informative:

Are you gonna dance oh
If I show you my money
Are you gonna dance oh

If I show you the way
 Are you gonna dance oh
 If I show you my pocket
 Are you gonna dance oh
 If I show you my wallet
 I will show you the money oh
 Baby dance for me oh
 Baby move for me oh
 Don't go funny oh
 I will show you the money oh
 Baby dance for me oh
 Show me your body oh

The pomposity and arrogance underpinning these lines can be read as an outpouring of inner angst occasioned by a struggle, not just to succeed in the arduously competitive Nigerian music industry, but also to attain social status and community respect. Indeed, in the case of WizKid, the diversion away from his original church music (Udeze 2017) meant that he had to contend with significant community-based hostilities. Below are lines also from “Show You the Money” that depict such a struggle:

You cannot believe,
 what I have seen with my eyes,
 Say my people
 it is a beautiful story nanana,

See I fought through defeat,
 Now I am living a better life,
 And I'm thankful for the life
 That I am living nana.

It seems important for the young artist to argue that life outside church circles is a good life, and that he has made it in spite of dropping out ingloriously from university due to poor grades. Where an incomplete tertiary education is a threat to his self-esteem, the artist deploys his money and what it can buy for him to repair the damage.

Falz, Olamide and Davido, in a collaborative piece entitled “Bahd Baddo Baddest,” also find it necessary to boast of wealth as a means of combating threats to self-esteem:

Pidgin Version

I get like two million dollars
 no be asset? Eh eh
 Some people say
 dem bad like me
 but nobody badder than

English Version

I have two million dollars
 Is this not an asset?
 Some people claim
 to be as bad as I am
 but they are not

Some people wan buy car like me
but dem money no reach gan
I cover magazine,
I see am for my dream,
I see am for my dream

Some people want to buy a car like me
but haven't got the money
I am on magazine covers
I have seen it in my dreams,
I have seen it in my dreams.

In this extract, the trio position financial wealth as proof of success. This is particularly true for Davido, who struggled with his education. While he wanted to squarely face his music, his family wanted him to get a university education in the true tradition of an elite Yoruba family. After Davido dropped out of a US university due to poor grades, his rich family, still determined to avoid the reproach of having a poorly educated son, is believed to have induced a local private university into starting a music department in which he enrolled and graduated. In a situation like this, the young music icon, in spite of being very rich, has some points to prove. Wealth, of course, turns out to be the element with which to prove his success.

Such success is not complete without limitless access to women, an element which is obscenely flaunted in the song “Dami Duro,” a shortened form of the Yoruba expression *Ema da mi duro* which translates into “Do not stop me.” The following is an extract from the song:

And on the beat is Davido
And I am driving all the girls crazy yo
Na nananananananana
Na nananananananana
And on the beat is Davido
And I am driving all the girls crazy yo
Na nananananananana
Na nananananananana

Davido's reference to his ability to attract women with his money, as evident in the line “I am driving all the girls crazy,” projects the notion of musical success as inevitably bound up with the commoditisation of women. Self-adulation therefore not only involves competition between males but also the inferiorisation of females.

Ironically, the denigration and commoditisation of women inherent in the self-adulating lyrics of male artists is endorsed by the over-sexualisation of women by female artists who tend to flaunt their sexuality as a self-adulating strategy, in addition to their money and fame. Tiwa Savage's “Wanted,” for example, is themed on the idea of a woman flaunting her sexuality at a man, using it as a weapon to “kill,” and ultimately boasting of being “better” than most people on that basis. The lines below exemplify this point:

You got my number call me
Make I yarn you something

And if you ready for it
He fell real quick

It was like a gun on my hand
Killing him slow while I'm shake shaking it
I didn't wanna do it cause I know
Out in the street they call it murder

Hmmm, by the way nothing you fit do
Said by the way, nothing you fit do
Cause by the way, I'm better than you
That's why I'm wanted
That's why I'm wanted

Tiwa's song suggests that within the Nigerian popular music industry, even women adopt the masculine tradition of hyping the sexuality of women as a means of addressing threats to self-esteem. Another female singer, Omawumi, uses the flaunting of female sexuality as a form of self-adulation in her popular hit song "Warn Yourself," which projects a female character admired by a younger male. The female boasts:

Pidgin Version

But you dey waka pass the thing
Stand dey look my behind,

You fit craze oh
You fit craze oh (no dey look oh)
You wan climb tree wey old men

Dey point from afar
Take your time oh
Take your time oh
I'm baby liking the way you liking me
I'm digging the way you digging me
But you no go fit to contain me

English Version

As you walk past the thing
You stare at my butt

You could go crazy
You could go crazy (don't look)
You want to climb a tree old men

Gape at from afar
Be careful
Be careful
I like the way you like me
I admire the way you admire me
But you are below my class

The artist projects herself in this song as a woman of hyper sexuality who is desired by men, even those she deems beneath her status. In this song, then, self-adulation is manifest in the artist's inflated self-esteem as a sexually attractive woman.

In "Bottom Belle," also by Omawumi, the flaunting of female sexuality as an instrument of self-adulation is blended with the crass commoditisation of women. The song dramatises a female's response to a man's sexual overtures. Some of the lines of the woman are as follows:

Pidgin Version

English Version

| | |
|---|---|
| If I tell you say make you do me better | When I tell you to treat me well |
| Try understand | Try to understand |
| As a woman wey like plenty money | That as a woman who loves lots of money |
| Oya show me you fit shake your body | You need to show me you can spend a lot |
| You be chairman no be for mouth eh | You cannot simply claim to be rich |
| Chairman do something, pamurege. | Do something practical. |

In Nigerian parlance, this kind of expression simply translates to telling a man to spend money for sex. As a gesture of self-adulation, these lines seek to project the image of an “expensive” lady whose sexual favours can only be purchased with lots of money. Ironically, it keys into the distasteful rhetoric of male artists who boast of their successes with women on whom they can spend lots of money.

Findings and Discussion

This study demonstrates the place of social psychology in stylistic/rhetorical choices, with popular music artists in Nigeria as a reference point. There are a number of findings with individual and societal implications that emerge from this study.

The first is that Nigerian societies inherently pose threats to the self-esteem of artists in view of the subtle and overt reservations which often emerge in the attitudes of families and communities towards burgeoning performers. Successful performing artists are among the richest persons in Nigeria. Yet, the tendency for people to view progress in terms of the acquisition of sound educational qualifications is widespread and is problematic for some artists, many of whom struggled in the sphere of education, and consequently had problems with their families. Even where such family or community pressures do not exist, the arduous nature of the music industry in Nigeria provides enough pressures to produce threats to artists’ self-esteem.

Second, the outrightly bombastic, belligerent, aggressive and somewhat insensitive rhetoric of many popular music artists in Nigeria is a manifestation of the repair strategy with which they either consciously or subconsciously attempt the fight off the threats to their self-esteem. Specifically, such rhetoric amounts to defence mechanisms. This, in other words, implies that as a consequence of the discussed psycho-social realities, communication laced with self-adulation consciously or subconsciously becomes a preferred rhetorical option for the concerned artists, especially in a context where such a style already exists (albeit for different purposes) as an inherent element of some categories of traditional oral performances, such as *ijala* poetry among the Yoruba (Batabyal 2013), *ewi* poetry among the Yoruba (Okunoyè 2010) and the *udje* song contest among the Urhobo (Ojaide 2006).

Third, one of the outstanding dimensions of self-adulation which male artists resort to is the tendency to boast of their escapades with women, thereby trivialising and commoditising women as objects of pleasure. Significantly, several female artists also join in self-commoditisation by resorting to the use of their female sexuality as a basis for boasting.

Lastly, individual and group rhetorical and stylistic choices as well as the attitudes linked to them can be properly understood if the social and psychological circumstances of the concerned individuals are objectively scrutinised. In this regard, language use and other behavioural elements which may otherwise be misunderstood may be placed in proper perspective.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This article presents some explanations for the preponderance of self-adulating rhetoric in popular music songs in Nigeria, using some constructs in social psychology as a framework. The article identifies specific threats to self-esteem in the form of educational and social challenges which the artists experience in one form or another, and the attendant measures of subtle stigmatisation. The conscious or subconscious response to these realities manifests in the use of self-adulation as a defence mechanism.

Nevertheless, one cannot claim that these are the only explanations for the phenomenon of self-adulation in Nigerian popular music. There is obviously room for more research, using diverse theoretical perspectives, as well as a wider body of data. Whatever other factors are in play, the most important matter at this point is the possible social implications of the tendency.

Several studies on the impact of popular music on the consuming audience have been carried out in different parts of the world (Christopher 2013; Forchu 2013; Jing 2017; Mitchell 2005). The consistent consensus is that there is immense power in popular music to mould the perspectives of listeners, especially youths. Mitchell (2005), for example, demonstrates how popular music was a major player in some political movements in the USA, France and Britain, albeit merely serving as a propaganda tool and not as a catalyst. One may argue, therefore, that where the dual factors of wealth and women are aggressively flaunted before youths via popular music, the likely consequences are that such youths may imbibe a culture of crass materialism, and a get-rich-quick attitude. As shown in the analysis, one of the messages Nigerian contemporary popular music artists implicitly put across is the impression that they are able to become rich with relatively little education. This, obviously, cannot be a valuable message for the youths. Moreover, the drive in modern African society towards gender equality and the enhancement of the status of women is impeded by popular songs that present women as objects of male conquest and commodities that can be purchased for pleasure with plenty of cash.

In view of the above, there should be concerted effort on the part of media organisations, civil society groups and even relevant government agencies to sensitise popular music artists and their producers to the implications of their work and the need to make the appropriate thematic adjustments towards less disconcerting lyrics. This will go a long way to positively reshaping public perception of the artists. This in itself is critical, bearing in mind (as explained above) the fact that a negative perception of the artists represents a major self-esteem threat which is at the root of the problem of inappropriate lyrics.

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