

MUSIC: A RELEVANT TOOL IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE; A STUDY OF THE NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

The nature of music is such that it touches all the nukes and crannies of man and his universe. Its relevant melody made it so appealing that every body, irrespective of position, colour or race listens to it; and its lyric is so irresistible that the listeners are most of the time, left with the option to either obey or fight the singer. Such is the fate of music. Music indeed is very powerful. In Nigeria for example, musicians like Sunny Okosun, Veno Marioghae, Nelly Uchendu and so on had used music to decry the state of governance in the country; and today, music still serve as a deterrent, an advice, warning and guidance to those in the corridors of power, irrespective of their names and nations. This paper therefore seeks to reveal the power that music can weigh on the powers that be; in bringing orderliness and good governance in any nation, for the common good of the governed. It also reveals the concerns of musicians about democracy and good leadership.

Keywords: Nigerian Government, democracy, good governance, Issues in democracy and music as a tool in good governance.

Introduction

Music is a notable gift from God that helps man express himself emotionally, psychologically and socially. It is the best means of freedom of expression. In fact, its lyrics are so irresistible that it penetrates the innermost seat of man (soul) to achieve its aim. And any one, who understands what real listening to music is all about, knows music is very powerful and influential. The act of governance is another intrinsic aspect of human leadership that is so complex and complicated, that if the governor does not understand the governed, he or she will make a lasting mistake that history in all generation, will not forget for all its existence. Power is intoxicating and therefore requires checks and balances. Often times the words of the advisers and co-law makers look foolish and a waste of time, but when music comes, at the serene of the soul, in the quietest moment of the governor, it gives a blow to those issues that parliament and whole lot of advisers found it very difficult to resolve. Music is too powerful to comprehend. This paper adopts library and history method.

Nigerian Government

Nigeria is an African country, popularly known and called the giant of Africa. It is situated in the Western part of Africa and shares border with some of the African countries like Cameroun, Niger and so on. Nigeria is a multi – cultural, multi – ethnic and multi – language nation that is made up of thirty-six states and many local government areas. The Nigerian government runs a presidential system of Government, where the federal government is the central government and the state governments are at the state level and are answerable to the central government. The Nigerian government is divided into three arms of government which are Executive, Parliament and the Judiciary. The executive arm of government is made up of the President who is democratically elected by the entire states in Nigeria. He, the Presidents then appoints his ministers to work with him and for the entire nation. These ministers make up the Federal Executive Council, popularly known as FEC. Though they are appointed by the President, but they are approved by the Parliament and are answerable to the president. The President according to the Nigerian constitution is empowered to appoint ministers to take care of the different sections of departments that are necessary for the good of the country, but, they must be approved by the Parliament to function. The President and the members of FEC make up the Executive arm of the Government.

The Parliament on the other hand are the law makers of the Nation. They formulate the laws that govern the country which is written down in a document called constitution. These laws however, must be approved by two-third (2/3) of the members of the Parliament and must be signed into law by the President to become law. The law makers or the members of the Parliament are divided into two sections; which are the house of Senate and the House of Representatives. Both members of the house are elected by their state populace to represent them.

The third arm of the government is the Judiciary. These are popularly called the last hope of the common man. The judiciary is made of the Chief Justice, Judges and Lawyers. Also under the judiciary are the force men (police) who are to enforce the laws made by the Parliament and approved (signed into law) by the Executive (President). There also three sections of court which are the customary court, the high court and the supreme court of appeal. The supreme court of appeal is the highest court that has the final say in any matter in the country. The Judge in the Supreme Court of appeal is appointed by the President and certified by the Parliament. Though he is appointed by the President, he is independent of the first two arms of government.

As explained above, so it is in all the thirty-six states in Nigeria. Each of the states has a Governor who is elected by all the people in the state. Within the states also is the Parliament arm of government which are called the house of assembly and the Judiciary. Just like in the Federal government, the State Governor appoints members of his cabinet which are called commissioners. The members of the house of assembly (Parliament) are elected by the people of the different local governments of the state to represent them; while the Judiciary are appointed by the State Government to oversee the affairs of the state. All these arms of government run democratically. And this system of government no doubt is operational in many nations of the world.

Democracy

Democracy is the most widely celebrated form of government all over the world in this present age. Military rule is no longer popular and it is quite unacceptable in the world today. The word Democracy has enjoyed so many definitions.

Agbese (2012) defined it as “the most intriguing form of government by the very nature of its peculiar challenges to its self-sustenance” (p. 3). Esimone (2012) says: “democracy connotes the preservation of human rights, supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law, accountability and distributive justice” (p. 6). Agbese (2012) however, believed so much that Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States of America gave the best definition of Democracy when he said: “Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. To Agbese, President Lincoln’s definition offered the most classical definition for modern-states; because the definition underlines the two fundamental high points of democracy, namely; that the people are the repository of political power, and government must exercise the power freely given to it by the people in the interest of the people. In order words, democracy is an act of government that is solely dependent on the people. This is why Agbese (2012) noted:

The democratic government is brought into being by the people through the instrumentality of the ballot box. The right to choose is hinged on the pluralism of views, voices and ideologies of the masses. To this therefore, democracy accrues its rights and responsibilities as expected by the elected, to the will of the electorate that saw its emergence to power (p. 3).

All the above are facts and no doubt points to the fact that the elected at the corridors of power, have the responsibility to represent the electorate and to protect their interest for the common good of both the elected and the electorate. Also, In Agbese’s language “the cultivation of democratic temperament, the niceties of the rule of law that underpins democracy, and the contention with the slow but essential ingredients of democracy; known as due process, which are no easy task, must be available for there to be real democracy” (p. 3). This is how it ought to be in all the nations of the world where democracy is practiced even in Nigeria.

Good Governance

Good governance is one word that goes with everything and everywhere there is leadership. It deals more with democracy because it is particularly in democracy that good governance can be obtained. This is so because it is virtually in democracy that dialogue is possible; every other form of government is best described as autocratic. Good governance like democracy has many definitions. To Agbese (2012):

Good governance is the bedrock of democracy. It has eight fundamental and acceptable characteristics. The government must be participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and adherence to the rule of law (p.4).

The above statement is of great importance if some of those characters are explained. In explaining the participatory aspect of good governance, Agbese (2012) said:

A democratic government hinges its legitimacy on the consent of the governed. That consent is obtained through free, fair and credible elections. These conditions must be fulfilled for a government that emerges after an election to claim legitimacy. And for that to happen, there must be a full and unhindered participation of the governed in the entire electoral process (p.4).

This means that the principle of give and take must be operational. This implies that whereas the masses must fully participate in the election system through which their leaders are elected; the elected leaders on the other hand must see to it that all the rights and privileges of the electorate, as well as all promises made during campaign are delivered full and at when due. It is only when such is done that it could be said that there is good governance.

Consensus-oriented seeks for a dialogue between the elected and the electorate. This goes to say that the government should often seek the opinions of the masses over his leadership towards their wellbeing and their common good; as well as find out about their opinion over issues that are yet to get the attention of the government. This the government should do through poll of the masses. When such actions take place now and then, then it could be said that there is good governance.

A good governance is also one in which the government is accountable to the masses, because accountability no doubt is one of the strong pillars of good governance (Agbese 2012:4). Accountability and transparency in all things is one factor that good governance cannot relegate to the background. A democratic government must be one which distributes democratic dividends to the masses transparently, accounting to the masses how their revenues and taxes are being received and spent.

Good governance indeed is very important if a system of government could be said to be democratic. It remains an international standard for measuring the legitimacy and the performance of governments throughout the world.

Issues in Government

Every democratic government in the world is faced with one challenge or the other. This challenge could be summarised under two headings: Infringement of human rights and corruption and indiscipline. For better understanding, these two challenges will be handled one after the other.

Infringement of human rights: Human rights could be said to have been infringed when individuals are denied access to what rightly belonged to them as stated in the constitution of the country. So to what extent does the Nigerian government guarantee human rights? Esimone (2012) in answering this question noted:

Nigeria is known to be a signatory to a multiplicity of charters and accords which several international and regional communities have drafted to safeguard the rights of the world's citizens. Merely appending a signature to any such accord does not qualify a nation as a democratic nation. For this to be so, the rights of the citizens must be deemed as sacred, such that they are freely accorded, and it must be feasible to address any infringement, regardless of economic or social status. Nigeria must not just affirm a belief in the universal declaration of rights, but must be seen to protect rights, and accord rights. This is a positive action (p. 6)

Esimone, (2012) further noted:

Nigeria can be addressed as a fully fledged democracy when and only when its citizens, government officials and particularly security agencies learn to respect all constitutionally guaranteed rights, and not just select few of them, and at all times and locations, and not just sometimes or on select locations. Of particular note are the rights to free speech and assembly, as well as the right to freedom of worship. Even though Nigeria in the past has had security challenges occasioned by a plurality of religious beliefs, the emergence of extremist religious organisations which seek to dictate a rigid belief system, constitutes a credible threat to the right to freedom of worship, and it's an invitation to nihilism, since it denies the secularity of the constitution and seek to enthrone and protect sectarian religious interests above the peace and stability of the polity (p. 6).

From the above, the Nigerian government seem negligent over this issue since till date the culprits are yet to be both brought to book and punished. We, the citizens in Nigeria knew that the terrorism, that has become a strong security threat to life and properties of many Nigerians, is politically motivated, and due to some reasons best

known to the Nigerian government, these evil men and their sponsors are yet to be brought to book in expense of so many innocent lives. Almost on daily bases, many lives and properties are being wasted in Nigeria, most of them, in the name of religion. This is just one right and the most infringed right that the Nigerian government is toying with.

Corruption and Indiscipline: This is one cancerous disease that appears incurable yet curable, if the Nigerian government will so decide. A situation where those in the corridors of power choose to enlarge their bank account to the expense of the masses could be seen as one aspect of corruption. Indiscipline on the other hand could be seen as where ethics are replaced with misconducts and is termed and seen as normal, and people tend to laugh at it.

Corruption and Indiscipline before now is never in the culture of Nigeria and its history. Nigeria was fine and booming in sound moral lifestyle and economic growth until the military in disguise to salvage a never crumbling economy showed its ugly face from 1983 to 1998. Rather than salvage the ghost economy according to them, became the mother and nurturer of corruption in Nigeria. It was at this time that bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds and introduction of drugs like cocaine gained popularity; a time when the truth is bottled and lies to cover the truth is propagated, a time when if any one dares speak the truth, a letter bomb might be sent across to shut the mouth. Public funds were being transferred to foreign banks while the country is impoverished; the list is unending. Unfortunately, these issues of corruption were well nurtured for some good time that the slogan became “if you cannot beat them, please join them”, and since then, the battle against corruption seem futile; since the present day leaders, seem to still toe the steps of their military predecessors. The unfortunate fact is that the youths, who are expected to better the nation, have also been caught in the web of corruption, as they have been taught by words and actions that corruption is a normal fashionable practice for survival. They see nothing wrong with it. They watch the force men (uniformed) take bribes in broad day light and everyone keeps a blind eye to it; even when you tend to talk, you realise your life is in danger for speaking out. Corruption is seen in every facet in the nation, and in everything; from the government offices to Universities and so on. The fact remains that it will take a decisive leader, who is willing to turn a blind eye to sacred cows and do the right thing, in this present time to actually wipe away corruption in Nigeria. This is quiet unfortunate.

Music as a tool in good governance

Throughout the ages, musicians everywhere especially in Nigeria, have used their music as a tool in good governance. As Esimone & Umezina (2012) noted:

Throughout history, musicians have used their music to show their concern and quest for the good of the nation and mankind as the case might be. They are most of the time God's voice where the Pastor or the Priest on the pulpit could not influence, or declare to mankind their evil ways; or more so, where the pen of the mass media could not get to. And in good governance, the musician had not kept quiet (p. 4).

What is music, one will want to ask and why is it a good tool in democracy? Music is a universal language of the soul, because it is admired, accepted and imbibed by all and sundry irrespective of age, colour or race. Everybody listens to music. And it has a great power to influence lives as Esimone (2009) noted:

Many things tend to influence life and reveal clear changes in character; and music is so effective and very prominent at such. It goes beyond organised sound that please the ear to penetrating the innermost being of man, to cause a conspicuous change in the attitudes of man (p. 1).

Music is so powerful that it penetrates into the innermost part of man to reveal clear changes in his actions, attitudes and characters. This is why Abeles, Hoffer and Klotmann (1984) asserts:

Music directly emanates (shows) the passion or states of the soul – gentleness, anger, courage, temperance and their opposites and other qualities; hence when one listens to music that imitates a certain passion, he becomes imbued with the same passion, and if over a long time, he habitually listens to the kind of music that arouses ignoble passions, his whole character will be shaped to an ignoble form (p. 4).

Music according to Blacking (1973:57), is an organised sound. Okafor (2009), describing the organised sound asserts:

Though there are many sounds in creation – some natural, others made by living things – only sounds which have been deliberately organised by man to specific ends – expression of emotion, communication of ideas, toughing the senses and the emotions, calming the nerves or tuning the minds to certain planes of communication and worship – qualify to be called music. It is an organisation that makes the difference (p. 1)

Esimone & Umezina (2013), in supporting Okafor's assertion observed:

The instrumental organisation and the lyrics from a voice that is termed 'song', which unavoidably forces itself into the conscience of man through its ear, to get him do what is right has made the subject (music) very special and distinct from other fields of life. Music is one subject that is operational in all society and used for everything from cradle to grave (p. 5).

Music indeed is very powerful in influencing man and his doings. As okafor (2009) rightly says "music in a society is by nature dynamic – expressing the changed, changing and still changeable environment. The physical or natural and other environments in Nigeria, are literally sufficed with music; which is functional.. (p. 2).

A music lyric obviously influences the conduct and attitudes of everyone, and everybody listens to music whether it is appealing or not. Music is a social critic. Its power has been attested to right from the time of Plato and Aristotle, and its natural effect to the emotions of man can never be faulted. To this effect, it is obvious that this inherent power of music can still serve as a watch dog over the lives and conducts of those in the corridors of power. It is this watch dogging that has been the central idea of musicians who always give some head boots to the political elites. This is why Okafor (2009) noted:

The musician's role as a social critic has always been self-assigned. Like the poet that he 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. This role has subsisted notwithstanding, the transformations and radical changes in the society. In many instances, he is the true voice of the people for he says what everybody is thinking about. Some regimes are not comfortable with him; and they launch oppressive counter measures using the machinery and apparatus of state. In many instances, the more the authorities try to oppress the musician, the more he acquires the elevated status of martyr for truth (p. 38).

In Nigeria and in the past, so many musicians have used the medium of music to call to order the powers that be in the corridors of power and are still doing so right now. Sunny Okosun (of blessed memory) was one of such musicians who used his music vehemently to speak out against the evil in society both in Nigeria and other African countries. He made remarkable impact on the national and international stages. In Nigeria particularly, he was very forthright in demanding for change for the masses. His song titled "Which way Nigeria" still rings in the hearts and minds of Nigeria and their leaders today because the music is still in the air. The lyrics are thus:

Which Way Nigeria?

Refrain: Which way Nigeria? (2x)
Which way to go?
I love my fatherland
I want to know
Which way Nigeria is heading to?

Stanza 1.

Many years after Independence,
we still find it hard to stand
How long shall we be patient,
before we reach the promised land?
Tell me, let's save Nigeria, so Nigeria won't die

Stanza 2

Inefficiency and Indiscipline
 Is running the country down
 Corruption here, there and everywhere
 Inflation is soaring high why?
 Let's save Nigeria, so Nigeria won't die.

Stanza 3

Our ambition to be millionaires
 Is running the country down
 We all want to be millionaires
 And to build castles on the moon, why?
 Let's save Nigeria, so Nigeria won't die
 (Okosun 1984a in Okafor (2009:43).

Veno Marioghae was another musician who performed dual function through her music. She gave Nigerians hope, both those who had the way withal to leave the country as a result of what was happening; and those who have no choice than to stay, and at the same time made the powers that be know, they will be disappointed because their intentions to make sure Nigeria dies will not succeed.

Veno used what Nigerian's call pigeon English to embellish the song. It is in call and response form and it is performed thus:

Nigeria go survive

Call: If dem thief our oil ooo
 Even if dem burn the oil ooo

Response: Nigeria go survive

Call: I say, if dem drink the oil ooo
 No matter how dem try ooo

Response: Nigeria go survive

Refrain: Nigeria go survive
 Africa go survive
 My people go survive oo
 Nigeria go survive.

Stanza 2

Call: Andrew no check out ooo
 Andrew blood is thicker than water

Response: Nigeria go survive

Call: Our roots dem strong for ground ooo
 Ancestors no go gree ooo
 United chained Nigeria

Response: Nigeria go survive

Nelly Uchendu (of the blessed memory) was another voice that instilled wisdom and strength in Nigerians when the going became very tough. Hers was an encouragement to overlook the powers that be and with one unity, try to build our country again. Nelly came from Igbo tribe, one of the three largest tribes and ethnic groups in Nigeria, and she performed the song in Igbo language or dialect. The song is sung thus:

Nigeria amaka, ezigbo obodo oma (Nigeria is a beautiful country)

Nigeria amaka, ezigbo obodo oma,
Nigeria amaka anyi enweghi obodo ozo (2x)

Refrain: Nigeria amaka
Nigeria amaka eeeeh
Omaka, anyi enweghi obodo ozo (2x)

Biakenenu nwanem ooo k'anyi dozie obodo anyi ee
Nigeria amaka, anyi enweghi obodo ozo
Gbaputano n'igwe, k'anyi dozie obodo anyi eee
Nigeria amaka, anyi enweghi obodo ozo

All the above songs are among the many songs that musicians in Nigeria use as tool in a democratic governance. Musicians everywhere most often perform music based on the happenings around them whether they are pleasant or unpleasant; and till date the norm is still the same.

Conclusion

It is very important to note here that good governance according to Esimone & Umezina (2012) begins with being responsible, while focusing and contributing selflessly to society and taking the necessary steps to realising all the goals set during campaign and the things expected by the electorate; this makes a good leader. And according to Bamigboye (2006):

A good leader seeks to give rather than be given. He thinks more about the people and how he can make positive impacts in their lives, how he can put a smile on their faces rather than cause them pain, bearing in mind that he will be remembered for whatever good legacy he leaves behind (p. 2).

These are the facts that make musicians forthright in their demand for good governance and tend to make them relevant in any society where they are. Thus, the musician serves a noble role as a voice that both sings and stings. They are therefore the conscience of the nation (Esimone & Umezina 2012).

And It is obvious that in every nation, whether African or Western, the government of such a nation faces one or more of the challenges addressed in this paper; and there are musicians in all the nations as well, whose voice could as well sing or sting. Whatever the challenge, musicians in all the nations are called upon through this paper to rise up to their responsibility if they have been quiet, and through their voice, should help and save their nation from the powers that be.

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