

MUSIC AS A SPUR FOR MIGRATION AMONG THE AFRICAN YOUTHS: THE YORUBA EXAMPLE

By

**Kayode Olusola Ph.D
Department of Performing Arts,
Olabisi Onabanjo University,
Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria.**

Kayode.olusola@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

Abstract

Quest for migration by African youths especially to the Western and other part of Europe has been observed to be a common phenomenon in Africa, especially the poor and developing countries. This has been argued by different scholars to be mainly as a result of seeking for economic or financial opportunities and better living condition in these developed countries by the youths. This study focus on the role played by music as a spur for migration, among the African youths, the Yoruba people in particular. Oral, discography and bibliography methods are exploited for data collection for this study. Findings reveal that parents especially mothers, are the facilitators of migration interest in the youths right from childhood through the use of pet-songs and other play-songs. The texts of these songs are observed to contain lyrics that eulogizes white-skin individuals, love for travelling an aircraft, short stories about England; as well as other travelling fantasies. Result also revealed that

lyrics of some popular music also contributes to this quest. This paper concludes that music is one of the earliest method use by parents to educate and integrate children into the societal culture. This is the reason why it is easy for the children to quickly develop the interest for migration in order to experience the good adventures enthralled through the texts of the songs. This paper therefore, recommends that African youths should be informed and well educated by educational institutions, immigration experts and other relevant government agencies on processes and issues concerning migration and laws binding on the immigrants.

Keywords: *Migration, Oyinbo, Ilu-Oyinbo, Aeroplane, Spur.*

Introduction

Immigration inquisitiveness by African youths especially to the Western and other part of Europe has been observed to be a common phenomenon in Africa especially the poor and developing countries. Immigration to the Western and other part of European countries as being observed to be a common expedition of the African youths. This is more rampant among the youths of the poor and developing African countries seeking for financial opportunities, better living condition, or a life-time ambition. Kohnert (2007) observed that the conflict ridden and poverty stricken region of Western Africa became the cradle of migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, where most African

migrants with overseas destinations live. According to him:

‘They flee from their desolate economic situation, violent conflicts or political persecution. The drain of human capital from Africa is most pronounced in the employment sector for highly qualified personnel. Another remarkable trend is the ‘feminization’ of the brain drain in recent years, caused by the growing number of highly skilled African women looking for employment abroad.’ (Kohnert: 2007: P.1)

According to Flahaux and De Haas (2016), Africa is often seen as a continent of mass displacement and migration caused by poverty and violent conflict. Influenced by media images of massive refugee flows and ‘boat migration’, and alarmist rhetoric of politicians suggesting an impending immigrant invasion, the portrayal of Africa as a ‘continent on the move’ is linked to stereotypical ideas of Africa as a continent of poverty and conflict. They observed further that:

‘In recent years, irregular migration from Africa to Europe

has received extensive attention. Sensationalist media reportage and popular discourses give rise to an image of an ‘exodus’ of desperate Africans fleeing poverty at home in search of the European ‘El Dorado’. Millions of Africans are believed to be waiting to cross to Europe at the first opportunity’

(Flahaux and De Haas: 2016)

Since music among the Africans is an expression of their inner-most conscience, motions and feelings, music therefore becomes the commonest art phenomenon in day to day lives of the people of Africa. African Children start experiencing music right from their mothers’ womb from about two to three months of their conception. This is achievable through their mothers who frequently sings different songs as well as making some dance-steps while working at home or moving along the streets. As soon a child is born in Africa, the child is welcome and circumcised by the society with music. This child grows gradually with the musical culture of the society.

African mothers entertains or pet their children with different panegyric songs (*Oriki*), play-songs,

folklore songs and other pet-songs as they grow into juvenile in the society. These songs invariably create impressions, ideologies, fantasies as well as developing their inquisitiveness about things they do hear in those songs. This explains the reason why parents in Africa try as much as possible to make sure that the songs the children listen to at childhood conforms to the norms of the land as well as teaches good morals and ethical behavioral expectations.

Apart from panegyric songs (*oriki*) which are performed by parents especially mothers for a child, other children play-songs, folklore and pet-songs are performed within and outside the compounds by the children themselves. These songs serves as a sort of entertainment as well as passing a cultural or moral knowledge into the children. These musical experience and messages gotten from the songs are remembered and influences the personalities of these children as they grow into youths and adults in the society.

Apart from children's pet and play songs among the African people, there are popular songs like highlife, juju, fuji among others, that have their song themes narrating the opportunities and prospects in migration to England, America or other European countries. The lyrics of these popular songs thereby, spurs the quest for overseas migration among the youths, because it serves

as a corroboration of the impression they had since their juvenile age about migration.

Using oral and bibliographic method of data collection, this paper therefore, aims at examining, analyzing the text content of some selected play and pet songs among the children in order to discuss how they consciously or unconsciously induce immigration inquisitiveness among the African youths. This paper specifically focus on the music of Yoruba children of Southwestern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study shall rely on Merriam's Functionality theory which contends that the aesthetics of any music genre is predominantly rooted in the relevance and functionality of such music within the society and it had been advanced that no music is or should be without a purpose. 'The functions and uses of music are as important as those of another aspect of culture for understanding the workings of the society. Music is interrelated with the rest of the culture; it can and does shape, strengthen, and channel social, political, economic, linguistic, religious and other kinds of behaviour'. Merriam stated further thus:

‘Therefore on this note, music is clearly indispensable to the Proper promulgation of the activities that constitute a society;

it is a universal human behaviour— without it, it is questionable that man could truly be called man, with all that implies’

(Merriam. 1964).

Merriam explain further that “functions” involve aspects of music which bring society together, which create connection with the spiritual as well as each other, and which foster societal integration, shared experience, aesthetic uplifting (i.e., exposure to beauty), and societal conformity. Since migration is part of societal experience which has brought some acculturation or diverse cultural experiences, these experiences are obviously expressed through songs and these songs are passed from one generation to other.

In his landmark text, *The Anthropology of Music*, Alan P. Merriam (1967) in Hadsell (2016), discusses the uses and functions of music in the context of societies. According to him, music also facilitate communication. Human beings are wired neurologically for speech, language, and social interaction. Communication among individuals and groups is essential for the formation and maintenance of societal structures. To provide an outlet

for emotional expression, feelings and emotions can be expressed in ways other than through words.

Alper and Ryer-Parker (2013), opine that music could also be used to study critical issues of migration beyond statistical analysis and surveys. There are now more than 270 million migrants across the globe. Music has also been used to study critical issues of migration beyond statistical analysis and surveys. This is because it has provided an opportunity to look at their existing knowledge through a different lens, one that emphasized interpersonal communication and building community.

The Functionality or Role theory advanced by Adedeji (1999) recognizes the ‘anabolic’ and ‘catabolic’ role of music in religious discuss. Every of all sacred music is or should be with a purpose, or else it loses it sacredness. It is therefore worthy to note that since music form part of daily paraphernalia of the people of Africa, the Africans do not just perform music without the purpose it meant to serve. Festivals being an important and ubiquitous religious activities in every tribe in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, music is used for different purposes in different facets of all festivals. Therefore the value of music in festivals is espouse in term of the functions it performed during the festivals.

Yoruba Children Songs with Thematic Issues that Spurs Quest for Migration

Among the traditional Yoruba people of West Africa, there exists different songs with thematic issues

that could develop the children's interest in migrating to other country, especially to Western and other European countries. Some of these songs are spontaneously composed mostly by mothers and performed for the children since infant till the end of their elementary school year. The composition of songs and themes are influenced by different life experience, acculturation, modernization brought through British colonization among others. The songs with thematic issues that influences migration inquisitiveness are categorized and discussed subsequently.

Songs about Aircraft

Movement of aircrafts either airplane, jet or a helicopter in the air is not a common phenomenon especially around rural villages and communities. According Azeez (oral interview: 2022), each time the Children sighted or heard the sound of an aircraft flying over the sky, they get so excited with shout of joy and jubilation. Parent especially, sings about the aircraft, putting the names of their children as the subject in the song to celebrate with

the children. The song title ‘Kayode’ in Figure 1 (Song No. 1) below is an example of songs in this category.

Figure 1.

Kayode

Allegretto

Ka - yo - de Ka - yo - de sa - re wa wo ko o fu - ru - fu

5
wa wo bo tin fo lo - ke re re on fo lo si 'lu o yin - bo

Song No. 1

Yoruba Language

Kayode, Kayode

Sare wa w'oko ofurufu

Wa w obo t info lokerere

Onfo lo si 'lu oyinbo

Translation

Kayode, Kayode

Come quickly to see an
airplane

See as it is flying up high

It is travelling on air to
England

The song below ‘Here Comes an Airplane’ is another example of songs in this category which are sung by children living the in urban areas of Nigeria:

Here comes an airplane, an airplane, an airplane

Here come an airplane to take me to London

The two songs above, the children are informed about the destination of the airplane. Thereby, the children are excited and looking forward to a day when they too will have the opportunity to board the airplane and travel to England. It is worthy to note that the subject of importance in this music are the airplane and his usual destination.


Songs about White-skinned Person

Since the inception of British Colonization in Nigeria when people of Nigeria just had contact with the white-men, their appearance always excites the people, especially the children. Braimoh (an informant: 2022) explained that any time children in the rural communities see a white man or a white-skinned person on the street, they are in the habit of shouting with excitement and sing different songs to welcome and celebrate their appearance. An example of such songs is ‘Oyinbo Pepper’ which is sung in spoken-verse form in pidgin language as shown in Figure 2 (Song No. 2) below:

Figure 2

Oyinbo Pepper

Allegretto



O- yin bo pep - per if you eat pep-per you go yellow more more

Song No. 2

Pidgin English Translation:

<i>Oyibo pepper</i>	you white-man
<i>If you eat pepper</i>	if you continue to eat pepper
<i>You go yellow more, more</i>	you will become whiter and whiter

The song above portrayed White-men or white-skinned individuals as an important and interesting subject in the song. Therefore, the love and excitement in meeting more white-men by the children as portrayed in this song invariably serve as a spur for migration quest in the African children up to their youthful age.

Migration Farewell Songs

Adenrele (oral interview: 2022) observed that among the Yoruba parents especially mothers while going out or travelling, usually sing different migration farewell songs to create an impression that they are travelling to overseas when they are actually not. These farewell songs about migration to England are capable of making

the youths to develop interest in migration. An example of the songs in this category is the song titled ‘*Aduke Duro Sile Demi*’ illustrated by the Figure 3 (Song No. 3) below:

Figure 3

Aduke Duro Sile Demi

A -du -ke duro si - le de mi A - du -ke duro si - le de mi e-
 5 mi fe lo si-lu O-yn -bo e - mi ko ni pe de, du-ro si - le de mi

Song No. 3

Yoruba Language	Translation
<i>Aduke duro sile demi</i>	Aduke stay home and wait for me
<i>Aduke duro sile demi</i>	Aduke stay home and wait for me
<i>Emi fe lo silu Oyinbo</i>	I’m travelling to England
<i>Emi ko ni pe de</i>	I will soon be back
<i>Duro sile demi</i>	Stay home and wait for me.

The song above is a farewell song by an imaginary traveler to England and the text specifically state the traveler’s destination. The children and youths are fond of singing the song repeatedly during their leisure time and during play. This song thereby encourage and

developed the interest in migration to England and to Europe among the African children up to their youthful age.

Migration Marching-Songs

Generally, the performance of marching-songs by the African local soldiers and warriors as a culture, has been in existence in the African traditional society before the advent of the British or other foreign cultures and influence. Adeniyi (oral interview: 2022) affirmed that this practice is common among the children and youths either as a play-song or used at morning devotion in elementary schools. The most popular marching song which has its lyrics based on migration is the song titled ‘*Awa Soldier Kekere*’ illustrated in Figure 4 (Song No. 4) below:

Figure 4

Awa Soldier Kekere

The musical score is written on two staves in 4/4 time, marked 'Allegretto'. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics: 'A-wa sol-dier ke-ke-re A-wa nki-le a a ki-le dA-me-ri-ca'. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of lyrics: 'ti - ti lo de Lon - don.'. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Allegretto

A-wa sol-dier ke-ke-re A-wa nki-le a a ki-le dA-me-ri-ca

ti - ti lo de Lon - don.

Song No 4

Yoruba

Awa soldier kekere

Awa nkile

Aa kile d'America

Titi lo de London

Translation:

we the juvenile soldiers

we are marching

we will march straight to America

till we get to London

The text of the song above portrays London and America as an interesting places worthy of enduring to march to. Siting these two countries in the songs indicates that these two countries are very important and interesting countries to be visited. This song thereby, spurs the children and youths' interest in migrating to these countries.

Other Yoruba Popular Music with Thematic Issues of Migration

Another type of music that contain text that spurs interest in migration among the Africans is popular music. Euba (1989) described popular musics as those associated with nightclub or with private parties or other social contexts in which merriment (*àrìyá*), leisure and consumption of beverages are prime objectives. These descriptions seem adequate if one looks at popular music as a type that can easily be understood, experienced and enjoyed without

having any specialized training in music, which is usually true of popular music.

Omibiyi (1981) observed that ‘in Nigeria, jùjú, fùjì, highlife and afro-beat are among the well-known popular music categories recognized worldwide yet they are still misinterpreted at times when the term popular is applied to them because they develop from traditional music and through contact with foreign culture evolve into inter-ethnic idioms in contemporary times.

There are quite good numbers of popular music with some of their lyrics centered on thematic issues of migration. Many of the lyrics of the songs contain texts that encourages the African youths to migrate to England and other European countries. An example of these songs is a juju music titled ‘Mo Mure Bo wa’ by Ebenezer Obey which sang thus:

Song No. 5

Yoruba

Mo mure bo wa

Mo mure bow a o ire

Ilu oyinbo ti mo lo

Mo mure bow a o ire

Translation:

I came back with riches

I came back with abundant riches

from England that I travelled to

I came back with abundant riches

Another popular song in this category is a fuji music titled ‘*America Ti A Lo*’ by Akande Obesere which he sang thus:

Song No 6

Yoruba

<i>America ti a lo eyin eyan mi</i>	my people, when we traveled to America
<i>Nigbati a de Ame</i>	when we were in America
<i>Chicken laaro, gira losan</i>	we eat Chicken as breakfast, burger as lunch
<i>Kenturkey lale</i>	and Turkey as dinner
<i>Nibi tia de je chicken de</i>	due to high rate of our chicken in-take
<i>Awon adiyee nsa fun wa o</i>	fouls have started fleeing away from us

Another example is the popular highlife music by Victor Olaiya titled ‘*Omo Pupa*’ which many Nigerian mothers use in praise or pacify their fair in complexion children. The song is sung thus:

Song No. 7

Yoruba

Translation:

<i>Omo pupa o, Omo pupa l’emi nfe</i>	light-skinned lady, light-skinned lady is whom I desire
---------------------------------------	---

Ono pupa o, jowo mo feran re o light-skinned lady, please I love
you

Ti mba de London ma wa fowo oko ranse When I get to London, I
will send you transport fare

Omo pupa o, jowo ko b'oko de o Light-skinned lady please come
with the plane

The popular music in song No 5, 6 and 7 above have their themes based on financial prospects in migrating to England and they also portrays the abundance of food and other amusement facilities, as well as alluding to England as a wonderful and enjoyable place to be for couples or lovers. Listening to these recorded popular music on tapes, CDs, VCDs, television, video and on computer internet can spur the desire for migration, especially among the adventurous youths.

Discussion of Findings

Findings reveal that parents especially mothers, are first the facilitators of migration interest in the youths right from childhood through the use of pet-songs and other play-songs. Parents especially mothers, sing songs about boarding an airplane and migration to England as lullaby or to eulogize their children by incorporating their names in the songs where necessary. Some of the texts of these songs are also observed to contain lyrics

with themes that eulogizes white-skin individuals, popularly known as 'Oyinbo' in Southern part of Nigeria, while some other songs are in form of short stories about England; as well as other migration fantasies and financial prospects.

Result also revealed that popular musicians through the lyrics of some of their music, also contributes to this quest. Many African popular musicians have engaged in musical tours to England and other parts of Europe on several during which they did live video recordings of their performance for commercial purposes. Some of them have travelled abroad for shooting and production of their music-videos. The appearance of the background, recreational and tourist locations/sites used, and the foreign dancers in the video serves as confirmation of their long time wonderful impression about migration to England and other European countries.

Conclusion

Since music is one of the most common art and earliest methods through which knowledge and cultural and ethical information is transmitted into a child from infant to adolescence among the people of Africa, it is easy for the children to quickly develop the interest for migration

in order to experience the good adventures enthralled through the texts of the songs with migration themes. As African children are growing into adolescence, they becomes more aware of the poor socio-political and economic situation of their country.

This creates some level of curiosity for financial breakthrough, and this brought about their impression

and other information gathered through pet-song and other children play songs with thematic issues of migration and its prospect, both as a children and through popular music as youths. These therefore, spurs the interest for migration to developed countries among the Africans especially among the youths. This paper therefore, recommends that African youths intending to migrate to England and other European countries should not only rely on information gotten from music, but needs to consult and be well informed and educated by relevant immigration experts on the processes, procedure and other important guidelines on migration regulations. Other corporate bodies as well as other relevant government agencies should continue to guide the intended migrants on the laws binding on immigrants in different countries.

References

- Euba A. (1989) 'Essay on Music in Africa' African studies. Volume 2. Bayreuth: The Bayreuth University.
- Joseph Alper and Kerry Ryer-Parker (2020) 'Sounding Home: Music of Migration, Memory, and Exile' Council for European Studies for Bennington College. <https://www.europenowjournal.org>
- Kohnert Dirk (2007) 'African Migration to Europe: Obscured Responsibilities and Common Misconceptions' GIGA Research Programme: Transformation in the Process of Globalization. N° 49. www.giga-hamburg.de/workingpapers
- Nancy Hadsell, (2016) 'Merriam's Uses and Functions of Music' Published by Guset User. Pp. 1-10.
- Merriam P Allan (1964) 'Anthropology of African Music' Northwestern University Press, Evanston.
- Marie-Laurence Flahaux and Hein De Haas (2016) 'African migration: trends, patterns, drivers' Comparative Migration Studies volume 4, Article number: 1
<https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40878-015-0015-6>
- Omibiyi M. A (1981) 'Popular Music in Nigeria' .Jazzforschung. 13: 151-172.

Oral interviews

S/N	NAME	SEX	AGE BRACKET	ADDRESS	DATE INTERVIEWED
1	Mrs Bintu Azeez	(Female)	74 Years	Afijoi's Compound, Oke-Ede, Ila-orangun	26/03/2022
2	Mr Ganiyu Braimoh	(Male)	64 Years	Alapa's compound, oke oja, Iwo.	22/03/2022
3	Mrs Ojuolape Adenrele	Female	66 Years	Oloje's coumpound, Atiba, Oyo	27/03/2022
4	Mr Kareem Adeniyi	Male	70 Years	NW6/66 Akintola road Ekotedo Ibadan.	04/04/2022

Discography

Abass Obesere (2013) 'American Fuji Series 2' Lati Alagbada and Sons Company Limited

Ebenezer Obey (1969) 'Obey in London' Decca LP Album, WAPS 28.

Victor Olaiya (1963) 'Omo Pupa' West African Records, LP Album, PF 548