

# Contemporary Music and Dance in Nigeria: Morality Question

Prof. Williams Onogu<sup>1</sup> Damian Amana<sup>2</sup>

1 HOD department of Theatre Arts, Kogi State University, Nigeria.

2. Lecturer department of Mass Communication, Kogi State University, Nigeria

## ABSTRACT

Music and Dance are two inseparable duo that have co-existently been entangled in a web of symbiotic relationship over the years. Towing a comparative path, Music and Dance, in view of their inter-relationship are appraised to ascertain certain levels of conformity in their semiotic modes – both as medium of communication and psychological influence. However, the idea of utilitarianism suggests that the value of a thing depends on its use and not its beauty. It is in this vein that contemporary Nigerian music and dance have failed in their purpose of communication and influence especially as it affects the morality question. In recent times, the flock of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century contemporary Music and Dance have been characterized by such high vulgarity in language (lyrics) and dance patterns that has resulted to such permeability of moral decadence and sexualities among Nigerian youths and children; an impending menace which the core of this paper seeks to address by critically examining and analyzing some selected contemporary Nigerian Music and Dance in this respect, towards a good future for Nigerian audience.

**Key words:** Music, dance, morality, nudity, sex.

## INTRODUCTION

Music and Dance traditionally play an integral role in Nigerian culture, especially in representing the strong cultural heritage of the people. Music is therefore essentially pivotal in African Dance so much that both are inseparable. As it is popularly adduced among the southern Nigerians, the child is born in an ambience of music, rhythm and dance.

To the naïve and uncritical mind, the function of music and dance does not extend beyond the bounds of singing and dancing for pure entertainment purposes. To view music and dance in these vein only confines them to the simplistic realm of mere “play” which by implication falls within the domain of little children only. However, to the broad, prudent and enlightened mind, life is not complete without music and dance. It therefore spreads to affect virtually the physical, mental and emotional aspects of man. It is also important in child’s development and cognitive learning as well as social and language development towards the building of a total child (Gutierrez, 1).

Characteristically, Music and Dance, cut across broad areas of the societies and depicts the nexus that informs all human thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Through Music and Dance, both historical and cultural heritages have been passed from generation to generation. Music and dance are referred to as a phenomenon that has arisen out of man’s desire to create a histo-cultural response to the demand of his society (Onwueze, 32).

Music and Dance also have been used to communicate ideas, symbolize events, socialize people, and stimulate emotions as well as regulating functions (Blackings, 25).

Beyond the commerce of the contribution of current Nigerian hip-hop music to the entertainment industry Nigeria, beyond the individual and collective politics of economy that surrounds the contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music, some measure of the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary music and Dance in Nigeria portend a negative contribution to moral integrity and consequently to national progress.

The vulgar and immoral use of language in modern Nigerian hip-hop musical lyrics has evolved a corresponding dance pattern which foreshadows and threatens the morality and sense of rightful judgement of its audience who are majorly children and youths.

Against this backdrop, this paper shall analyze some selected Nigerian contemporary music as well as examines dance patterns which seems to be responsible for high moral decadence among children and youths of Nigeria today.

## MUSIC: CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

By conceptual clarification, Lomax, a music scholar, in his own terms refers to music as;

*“.....a musical organization of sound that symbolizes a fundamental and socio-psychological pattern common to a give people (Lamax, 50)”*

Aluede and Eregare, supporting this definition posit that music is:

*“not only an organization of sound only but also includes symbolic expression of a social and cultural organization, which reflects the values, past and present ways of life of human beings” (Aluede and Eregare, 87).*

The above definition is indicative of the centrality of music in African socio-cultural life.

In another vein, Jones A.M. defines music as:

*“a language which encodes emotions, aspirations and people’s goals in autonomous and self expressive arts forms” (Jones, 75). Onogu W.S. sees “music as an emotional intoxicant” (1.2)*

Extrapolating from the above definitions, one would posit that music provides an atmospheric background for healthy conversation and communication between human beings.

Lomax’s definition also shows that music is a psychological and social influence peculiar to a particular group of people. Suffice to say that with music, one can identify or differentiate an ethnic group or a people. It is therefore necessary to point out that different types of music reflect the kinds of society they come from.

## **DANCE: CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW**

Professor Bakare Ojo, a renowned dance scholar in Nigeria defines “Dance” as; “the rhythmic movement of the human body in space and time to make statements” (Bakare, 3). He further expatiates that whatever thought the writer can express through written words, the dancer can express through the rhythmic movement of the body. That is to say that Dance as a concept speaks a lot beyond the localization of meaning in pure verbal locus.

In the same vein, it is referred to as a physical response or behaviour to music or rhythmic accompaniment which are presented by bodily attitudes and postures (Merriam, 14).

Addo et.al add that, “*Dance is a body language that serves as a medium of communication, conveying messages, praising and affirming individuals (238).*

This assertion, further reiterates that dance can be actualized through selection of specific postures, eurhythmic motifs and facial expression (239). Furthermore, on functionality of dance Enem adds that Dance in community life recounts and teaches lots of morals that embrace history belief, custom and the well being of the society (70).

## **THE INSEPARABILITY OF MUSIC AND DANCE**

The outstanding relationship existing between Music and Dance is observed in the intensified rhythmic structure generated by music which stimulates the mind and body with the resultant effect of physical action known as dance.

With this inter-woven nature of music and dance one cannot exhaustively discuss dance without a corresponding emphasis on music. To this stance, Merriam describes Dance as; “*an integral part of music’ that generates physical response or behaviour which are represented by bodily attitudes and postures” (14).*

Nketia agrees with Merriam on the inter-relationship when he observes that;

*“Music is frequently integrated with dance which is bound to emphasize and develop those features that can be articulated in bodily movement or to relate it’s form and content to the structural and dramatic requirement of the dance” (Nketia, 207).*

In support of this assertion, John Nevin, a Music and Dance specialist in Chicago rightly argues that; “in a truly successful dance performance, there is little or nothing to separate the two arts because the movement and the music express together, the same artistic vision” (Nevin, iii).

Extrapolating from the above, when one uses the term “music” in reference to African Culture, it should necessarily include the idea of dance (Hassan, 1).

Despite the fusion of music and dance, Africans and Nigerians in particular have them as integral and ineluctable parts of culture, hence, constituting a very pertinent aspect of their living and W. Kariamu confirms this assertion thus; “*.....another outstanding characteristic of our outlook is our love for music, dance and rhythm. Our throats are deep with music, our legs full of dance while our bodies’ tremor with rhythm.... These three phenomenons is indeed, the spice of our life” ( 9).*

Music and Dance in Africa is therefore seen as inseparable and hence, one is incomplete without the other. Hardly can one dance without musical accompaniment and hardly can one play music without a corresponding movement of the body.

## **OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND DANCE**

Whereas, conventional dance is characterized by specificities in technique, structure and form, contemporary Music and Dance on the other hand lack specificity in technique or form, but rather with a particular philosophy (Rothman, 1).

In his bid to further reiterate the above assertion, Rothman rightly posits that; “*Contemporary dancers just attempt to explore the natural energy and emotions of their bodies and to produce dances which are often very personal (1).*

Further Ahmed Yerima notes that contemporary dance is a hybrid of various dance steps stung together into a pattern of fast pace and rhythm... "With gyrations from almost all cultural experiences in Nigeria" (30). The above paraphrased statement of Yerima is an indication of the fact that contemporary dance (music inclusive) borrows from different cultural patterns, (both African and non African).

Contemporary Music and Dance in Nigeria is characterized by extreme fluidity and very nebulosity of style which has given rise to new patterns which are seen as hybrid of Nigerian and Euro-American Hip-hop expression, defiling conventional pattern and drifting from classical patterns. To this end, Yaro argues that contemporary music in Nigeria; "*Fuses native rhythms with techniques imported from Congo for the development of several popular styles that were "unique" to Nigeria: (2).*

This extract reflects Yaro's view of contemporary Nigerian popular music which, to him, stems from the introduction of African Highlife which originally was the source of contemporary music in Nigeria. According him, the thirst for aesthetic and material success and a voracious appetite for life, love and experimentation characterizes this form of music (3).

In similar vein, Kansese also projects his assertion concerning contemporary Dance thus;

*"Nigerian Traditional dance is easily identified by its forms, structure, style; components making up the dance such as the dance concept, movement, music, costumes and props are closely knitted and help to interpret one another, thereby making the form easy to assess and comprehend. This is not the case with contemporary dance; it cannot be identified as a particular form... This makes it difficult for contemporary dance to be fathomed and appreciated like conventional dance" (92).*

The above extract is also synonymous with contemporary music especially as it is now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which rendered Music and Dance incomprehensible, breaking rules and standards which seems to be responsible for the immoral pattern it has taken in recent times.

## **CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND DANCE IN NIGERIA: A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK**

It is indubitable that before the emergence of contemporary music and dance in Nigeria, traditional folk music and dances had existed as defining modes for the socio-histo-cultural life and identities of the people. Although traditional music and dance continued in modern Nigeria, their central place in Nigerian life was threatened by the use and spread of radios, tape recorders, video cassette recorders (VCRs) and other mass-culture media, especially among youth.

Contemporary dance and music emerged in Nigeria as a result of Euro-cultural influence on the indigenous music, dances and culture which gave rise to new music and dance styles which are seen as hybrid of Nigerian and European expressions (Kansese, 93). This has given music and dance in contemporary Nigeria its fluid and nebulous style (Rothman, 1), cultural fusion (Akasue, 69) and other characteristics as discussed in the preceding topic.

Hubert Ogunde is particularly noted for his pioneering role in developing contemporary dance in Nigeria from the 1940s. He is popularly noted for his medley of different hybridized dance styles e.g. the introduction of tap dance into the African "Batakoto" and gyrations from other western experiences (Yerima, 30).

The turning point of contemporary music and dance in Nigeria is attributed to the French choreographer, Claude Brumachon when he was invited from France to Nigeria to train Nigerian dancers in contemporary dance techniques in the artist in-residence programme organized for dancers in 1994 (Kansese, 94).

Contemporary popular Music on the other hand, began in the late 1940s with the arrival of Highlife music from Ghana. Highlife music then blended western sounds ranging from big bands and guitars with African beats and instruments. Among leading early bands were those of Rex Jim Lawson and Victor Olaiya. Furthermore, during the 1960s and 1970s, King Sunny Ade and I.K. Dairo among others established a new style of music known as "Juju". Juju, a rhythmic dance music style blends western instruments with elements of traditional music. In the 1980s and 1990s, Fela Anikulapo Kuti commanded large followers and supporters both in Afro-beat inspired by funk, jazz and highlife which was accompanied by provocative lyrics in Yoruba and Pidgin English and that was also the turning point of contemporary popular music in Nigeria. After this, lots of artistes now invaded the music industry which has resulted in the musical and dance bastardization we now have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One critical issue that bothers the mind is the contrast in lyrical messaging via juxtaposition of the contemporary music of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as opposed to the melodious, moralistic and information packed lyrics of that of their counterparts during "the good old days" (i.e. 20<sup>th</sup> century).

In similar vein, the shift and drift in musical essence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century contemporary music has also led to a corresponding dance pattern that puts the future of youths of this generation at stake as far as "morality" issues are concerned. To this end, this paper takes a critical review and analysis of some selected 21<sup>st</sup> century

contemporary popular music and dance with particular emphasis on the contributions of this music and dance to the issue of morality in the society.

### **ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CONTEMPORARY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY MUSIC AND DANCE IN NIGERIA**

The influx of musical artistes in the music industry this day at such an alarming rate is a thing of high concern to every analytical mind. This influx has necessitated the emergence of different calibers of musical artistes on the musical stage – the crude and the refined, the trained and the untrained, the moral and the immoral, the social and the non-social, the educated and the un-educated and this raises a fundamental question of what is the role of censorship in Nigeria. The resultant effect of this influx is the production of music and dance that threatens and endangers the moral judgment of children and youths in our present society, needless to reiterate the fact that dance and music are very integral in youths and child's development because of its influence and role in cognitive learning as well as its capacity in promoting moral education among the youths in Nigeria.

The big question that therefore comes to mind is this: “with the crop of emergent and emerging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contemporary Popular Songs, what becomes of the moral standard and judgement of the youths and children of this generation?”

Inanga, as quoted in Frit rightly notes that... “*Music (song) texts are quiet important in understanding human behaviours*” (Frit, 159).

Corroborating the above assertion Foster and Ross assert that; “*It is pertinent to note that music does not only give pleasure and enjoyment through listening, it has the power to control the minds and bodies*” (Foster and Ross, 52).

Informed by the above assertions, it becomes necessary to juxtapose them with the messages of our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contemporary Popular Music. For instance, the song “Nack your Akpako” by Terri-G a Lagos based musician has become a house hold music permeating the Nigerian airwaves and possibly sneaking into the minds of both young and old including children. Lets consider its lyrics;

*“Make I knack your akpako tile tile tile make I knack your akpako  
Make I knack am, knack am, knack am.  
Everybody, knack am, knack am, knack am....”*

The above lyrics, by every sense of judgement is devoid of any moral standing or undertone, neither does it contain any relevant information that is worthwhile. The term “Akpako” is a stylized way of exposing what should not be exposed and revealing what should not yet be revealed. This is further buttressed in the succeeding verse:

*“Oya show me your back,  
I say make you show me your front,  
Oya make you show me your waist  
Make I knack am, knack am, knack am.*

This lyrics has necessitated a corresponding dance where youths dance running into each other either by joining waist facing each other or the female use their bumbum (i.e. buttocks) to rub the genital region of the male dancer, saddest of all, children are also emulating this practice and this immoral philosophy is drastically permeating into our society day after day. It is worth noting that a once time highly immoral street cartoon paper in Nigeria titled “Dauda the sexy guy” uses the word “knack” for having causal and forceful sex.

Also worthy of analysis and examination is the music “SEXY LADIES” by Timaya, the Niger-Delta based musician which belches out seemingly immoral messages capable of corrupting the minds of most youths in the society today. The introductory part of the song gives an insight into the mind of the singer and his supposed message.

*“Sexy ladies, I need sexy ladies.  
All my hommies need sexy ladies to hold their bodies”.*

This actually re-affirms the long-aged acclaimed assault on the identity and role of women as commodities meant just for the gratification of men's desire. Bringing out more of Vulgarity, he proceeds in his lyrical composition thus;

*“I want your something  
I wanna put my something  
Me go get time for long thing”*

“Morality” they say, is the height of responsibility what then becomes the responsibility standard of audience into whom such philosophy and decadence are inculcated and indoctrinated via Songs they hear everyday.

Following the first quarter of this year, was the release of another album by the same author (Timaya) and one of the track titled

*“Like Tom Tom” reads thus;*

*“Am young and I have it.  
You can have it if you want it  
My baby, turn around, let me see it,  
It’s a bow down low.....*

One would think after hearing this first verse that it’s normal and could be referring to any other thing until the following verse betrays his thoughts completely thus;

*“Your sister, she love any enter eee  
She want me to enter eee  
Melinda, Sunita, Suzy, Monika  
Everybody .... Want to enter  
They want to lick tom tom  
Your month de small, lick tom tom  
Baby girl, me I go use condom  
Use condom, use condom  
Your mouth dey smell, lick tom tom  
Go bath, use condom .*

The height of this menace is that these polluted lines and lyrics are directly proportional to the dance pattern that accompanies them, making “Dance” as a concept of no logical essence and as a means of portraying decadence via pantomimic display of diverse sexual practices voiced out by immoral lines in musical songs. Observations have shown that from the inception of dance and dance metamorphosis, distance between dancers has a lot to speak to the audience. Suffice to say that the allowances that exist between pair dancers of old that avails them the free space for display of aesthetic moves and steps have been gradually closed up by the recent trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary dance which has been orchestrated by such vulgarity and sexuality in our recent contemporary popular songs.

Now, owing to Lamax’s description of music as a fundamental and socio-psychological pattern common to a given people, do we now say that such music with such abnormalities are identifiable with the socio-psychological pattern common to Nigerians and Nigeria? It would be an exaggeration then to say that such songs have negative portrayals of our national image and identity; hence, it’s not just detrimental to the audience but also portrays the country’s image wrongfully as immoral. Such is also the case of the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary dance when weighted on the scale of Enem’s position about dance “teaches lots of morals that embraces history, belief, custom and well being of the society”. The question therefore becomes “such song as discussed above teaches about the history, customs, belief and well being of which society? The Nigerian Society?

It is also worthy of note that the conventional music of old, due to their pleasant times, philosophical, good and moral messages which are accompanied by coordinated dance movements up till date still maintains their relevance and spice even after decades whenever they are replayed. The case is entirely different with the recent “jagons” as every mouth seems to produce a new “jagon” and the level of vulgarity previous ones pales in comparison to newer ones. Same way the entrance of a new dance step ushers out the old and more often, the proxemics is continually assaulted. The diagram below shows the trend and transformation of contemporary dance from the 1940s till date.

## **CONTEMPORARY DANCE METAMORPHOSIS IN NIGERIA**

In order to verify the continual and continuous eclipse of defined proxemics in contemporary dance patterns, the authors of this work based on their knowledge of the past dancing steps sketched four different dancing postures of differing space between the dancers and presented them to youths and adults from the age of 18 and above. The dance sketches were without title or date. The research population consisting of a mixture of 30 lecturers and thirty students purposively chosen from the department of theatre arts, sociology and Mass Communication based on frequency to dancehalls at least five times in the past ten years were requested to order the pictures in order of chronology from 1950, 1970, 2000 and 2014.

**DIAGRAM**

*Picture one*



Table one

	Lecturers Frequency	Lecturers Percentage %	Students frequency	Students Percentage %
1950	Nil		Nil	
1970	Nil		Nil	
2000	9	30%	4	13.3%
2014	21	70%	26	86.7
Total	30	100	30	100

According to the arrangement pattern by the lecturers, 70% of the population of the survey placed sketch picture one as the prevailing style of dance around 2014. 30% of the population placed picture one as most prevalent around the year 2000. In almost a similar ratio, the student population purposively chosen one the criteria of having attended the dancehalls in the last 15 years, placed picture one as the prevailing dance around 2014 by a population of 86.7%. Another 13.3% of the students population placed the picture around the year 2000. In spite of the little difference between the staff and student's percentage, a greater majority of the locates the picture as representative of the dancehall proximity in the current year 2014.

*Picture two*



Table two

	Lecturers frequency	Lecturers percentage	Students frequency	Students percentage
1950	9	30	2	7
1970	19	63.4	23	77
2000	2	6.6	5	16
2013	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	30	100	30	100

Sketched picture number two is located as a prevailing dance stile around the 1950s by 30% of the staff and 7% of the student. 63.4% of the population of staff and 77% of student however located the picture as representative of the year 1970. While 6.6% locate the picture around the year 2000. The data garnered is indicative that for a majority of those researched picture sketch two is representative of the dancing posture and distance between dancers around the 1970s.

Picture three



Table three

	Lecturers frequency	Lecturers percentage	Students frequency	Students percentage
1950	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
1970	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
2000	20	66.6	23	76.7
2014	10	33.3	7	23.3
Total	30	100	30	100

Table three above reports the placement of the picture sketch three by the staff and students. For either the staff or the student population, none located picture three in the year 1950 or 1970. While 66.6% of the staff's and 76.7% of student's population placed the picture around the year 2000, 33.3% of the staff's population and 23.3% of the student's population located the picture in the year 2014. So that for a majority of the respondents, the dancing posture and distance between dancers represented in picture three is representative of the dancehall patterns of the year 2000

Picture four



	Lecturers frequency	Lecturers percentage	Students frequency	Students percentage
1950	19	64	23	77
1970	11	37	7	23
2000	Nil		Nil	
2013	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total	30	100	30	100

While 64% of staff and 77% of students placed picture four around the year 1950, 37% of staff and 23% of students placed it around 1970.

The placement of picture one and picture three as prevailing dancehall types either in the year 2000 or 2014 showcases the continued eclipse of dance space between partners in recent times in Nigerian dance pattern.

The twining concatenation of contemporary Nigerian Hip-hop music and ensuing dance patterns that is daily increasing in contents that verge towards immorality and licentiousness portends a negative future for morality and consequently upon national character. Amana and Onogu (2013) have demonstrated the level of impact of the immoral content in Nigerian music on the gullible youth and children. So that a continued increase in music and dance that excite towards carefree sex life indeed could have negative bite on the economic courtesy of health related problems e.g HIV-AIDs.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the foregoing, discourse on the question of morality as it affects contemporary music and dance in Nigeria in recent times, this paper is of the position that the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian Music industry has permitted the production of songs and dances that threatens the moral standard and judgement of the audience of such musical pieces who are mostly youths and children.

It is also discovered that there have been no proper and effective check on music production in Nigeria in recent time as anything” is producible and marketable.

Research has also shown that such music does not only threaten the moral judgement of the audience but also the integrity and moral image of the country. To this effect, this paper makes recommendations thus;

- That professionalism be imputed into the music industry in that “quacks” and people with little or no sense of “ethics” be entirely left out of the “show”.
- That the censorship Board should take drastic measure in scrutinizing music albums that are released per time by weighing them on moral and integrity scales so as to ban songs that will threaten the moral judgement of its audience.
- That the law enforcement agencies or a task force be set in place to check this menace by arresting people or artistes who go ahead to still market banned songs and musical videos.

Until a quick control measure is adopted, the fear is that such music and dance. Continues to avail themselves on the musical arena, they will end up endangering the future of the children and youths of this generation; producing reprobates instead of true leaders.

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