

Nigerian Hip Hop and the Yoruba Influence: “Ruggedy Baba” and the Negotiation of National Identity

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Abstract: Identity is an integral part of human existence and as a cognitive phenomenon it is regarded as a basis for self-realisation and actualisation. Popular culture is an important conduit through which identity can be formulated and expressed. Music on the other hand as an expressive art is a major appendage of popular culture and a fertile ground for identity negotiation and formulation, in this instance through language use. This paper investigates the music- Hip hop, the language- Yoruba and examines how the artiste- Ruggedman employs the use of the mother-tongue while exploiting the general acceptability of the Yoruba language to popularise hip hop music in Nigeria. The research argues that, through the artiste’s Yoruba linguistic affiliation he is able to formulate a national identity with a language not his own in a country where there is an overt subscription to ethnic loyalty rather than national.

Keywords: Hip hop, popular music and identity, Nigeria, Yoruba language, Code-switching, Ruggedman

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has a dynamic popular music scene which has in many ways projected her cultural richness. Through her musical output the country has earned international recognition in the popular music arena, and with the strength of the country’s population of over 150 million, most artists tend to look inward as the local market seems large enough to ensure their commercial success. In this vein emphasis is often laid towards the satisfaction of domestic needs through the use of regional languages while creating musical hybrids through appropriating elements from hitherto existing traditional and folk musical styles. Popular music genres that are visibly represented in Nigeria include: jùjú, afrobeat, fùjì, gospel, reggae and hip hop among others,

Hip hop which is now the mainstream music style in Nigeria took its roots from the Bronx in New York where its emergence as a cultural form attempted to ‘negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutality, truncated opportunity, and oppression within cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity and community’ [1]. As an expressive art its influence has been intense and global becoming a rallying point and a medium of expression among youths across the globe. The trend and the popularity of hip hop in Nigeria can be traced back to the 1990s while its emergence can be linked to various factors among which are political and economic.

The political and economic factors that contributed to the emergence of this genre are almost

inseparable as one predisposes the other. Both can be traced back to the 1990’s when the harsh economic condition during the military regime created a lot of tension while the populace bore the brunt of austerity measures. Nigerian youths at that time were able to affiliate with their American counterparts through the embrace of hip hop as a weapon to diffuse their tension and express their anger towards the failure of the ruling class. The incursion of digital technology into the country also aided hip hop as music production and duplication became easier, faster and less cumbersome. In the last decade, the genre has gone through various transformations, most notable is the use of indigenous languages in place of African-American “Ebonics” rapping.. which has contributed greatly in stamping hip-hop on Nigeria’s music landscape, especially with the juxtaposition of well-known musical styles such as highlife and fuji, thereby “Nigerianizing” the genre [2] while creating the sub-culture now called ‘Afro Hip hop’

The Yorùbá Language and Culture

The Yorùbá language has been classified among the Kwa language sub-group of the Niger-Congo family. The Kwa sub-group is distributed within the West African sub-region and within Nigeria it includes languages like Yorùbá, Itshekiri, Igala, Edo, Urhobo, Igbo and Igbira among others [3]. Yorùbá is a tonal language and ‘in Yorùbá, and indeed in all African tone languages [the tone] is semantically significant i. e. serves to distinguish between words having different meanings but which are otherwise phonetically identical’ [4]. The language consists of

three tones, the high tone (H) marked in writing by an acute accent (´), the middle tone that has no marking in writing and the low (L) tone that is marked by a grave accent (`) in writing. An example is the Yorùbá word *osan* that can be pronounced differently to have different meanings as dictated by the tone which includes *osàn* (orange), *òsán* (afternoon) and *osán* (leather strap for talking drum).

Among the Yorùbá speakers in Nigeria and the West African sub-region, there is a standard way of speaking the language that is understandable and intelligible to all speakers. According to Mosadomi [5] ‘the Yorùbá language has been classified into three major dialect groups: the central Yorùbá, i.e. Ile-Ife, Ilesha and Ekiti areas; the North West Yorùbá, i.e. Egba, Ibadan, Oshun, and Oyo areas and the south east Yorùbá i. e. Okiti-pupa, Ondo, Owo, and some parts of Ijebu. Standard Yorùbá i.e. North Western Yorùbá (also called Oyo dialect) has been chosen to be the norm because of its uniformity and wide use in schools, textbooks, and the media’.

There are as many speakers of the language as the Yorùbá population in Nigeria and around the globe: ‘users of the language have been estimated at up to ten million. This include the Yorùbá people of the south-western part of Nigeria and their remnants found in many parts of the world such as Cuba, Brazil and in other parts of south America’ [4]. According to the Yorùbá page on ‘Languages of the world’ Yorùbá literacy began very early in the African context becoming one of the first African languages to have a written grammar and a dictionary that were published in the mid-1800s and a writing system for Yorùbá based on the Roman alphabet which was developed by the church missionary society in Lagos in the mid-1800s (ntvc. gov 2008).

The adaptation of the Yorùbá people to written tradition and their acceptance of European education via the missionary has in no small measure contributed to the preservation and projection of Yorùbá art, culture and tradition around the world because ‘as the Yorùbá received both [literacy and Christianity] they began to translate traditions into writing, established newspapers, and produced creative writings [in the Yorùbá language]’ [6], while through published texts and literature they were able to stimulate the interest of Africans and non-Africans alike in learning the language and experiencing the culture more.

Popular Music and Identity

Identity as a point of convergence in this discourse is a connecting factor between Hip hop music and Ruggedman on one hand, and the Yorùbá language and culture on the other. It has been observed that ‘identity markers are important in understanding human behaviour’ [7], which can be manifested in various

ways ranging from gender, linguistic and ethnic to rural-urban identities. Identity in simplest terms means the distinction or state of being oneself and not another: identity is what differentiates A from B and answers the question, Who am I? Apart from this at times identity can be a case of Who do I want to be?, in which case it is by choice, a choice to identify with a purpose, a group or belief due to certain reasons. Identity according to David Newman is ‘our most essential and personal characteristic. It consists of our membership in social groups (race, ethnicity, religion, gender and so on), the traits we show and the traits others ascribe to us. Our identity locates us in the social world, thoroughly affecting everything we do, feel, say and think in our lives’ (quoted in Christian 2000: 2).

Disciplines like literature (oral and written), music, and culture are fertile grounds where identity is negotiated or formulated. Here language plays a very important role as a determinant in the way it is being used as culture and in music. As observed by Ngugi ‘the choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment [and] indeed in relation to the entire universe’ [8]. The position of music in the society as a way of life situates it within the centrality of culture which is ‘constitutive of a person’s identity... [in] that it is the source of a person’s value and commitment’ [9]. This placed popular music in a strategic position as ‘it enters the equation to provide an aesthetic sphere among others through which identity/ies can be expressed, experienced and socialised’ [10].

The discourse over the issue of identity and the recent interest in it among scholars of music and performing arts have also changed the way music is viewed, analysed or conceptualised. For example in the field of ethnomusicology ‘the question of identity has focused on discussion whether music should be viewed as having embodied meaning (as essentialistic) or referential’ [11]. That is, does popular music possess another meaning other than being an art? On this point Stokes suggests that ‘music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places and boundaries which separate them’ [12].

Popular music has gone beyond being viewed or interpreted only as an art, as it represents more than that. In it are encoded strands of messages that presents the way the artist wants to be perceived, who he is representing or what he stands for. In essence ‘music [now] not only reflects what is happening beyond the immediately visual or aural, but rather is the particular space of negotiation over identities, ethnicities and human relationships’ [11]. The relationship between music, identity and the appropriation of Yorùbá culture within the Nigerian popular music in the general

context can be varied as it can be ethnic, national or Pan-African depending on the way the portrayal of identities are interpreted in various musical genres. In this instance, hip hop music presents a new possibility for examining the relationship between music and identity in Nigeria, while Ruggedman, an established hip hop artist, offers a good exemplar through language appropriation.

Ruggedman: Artiste Profile

Ruggedman, born Michael Ugochukwu Stephens, hails from Ohafia in Abia State which makes him an Ibo from the eastern part of Nigeria. He completed all levels of schooling in Lagos and graduated with B.Sc. honours in Political Science from the Lagos State University. Thus he grew up in Lagos having migrated to the city at a very young age with his mother and attended primary school there. He speaks Igbo and Yorùbá languages fluently.

He adopted the stage name ‘Ruggedman’ when in high school and has been a performing artist in the rap genre since 1989 with break through around 1999 after putting two tracks out for air play. His influences include NWA, KRS-one, Dr Dre, and Eminem and his style in his own words ‘is hard ’cos of my coarse voice texture and I used to rap in all English like I heard it from cats [rappers] that inspired me, but now I’ve had to fuse our local lingua so as to have local appeal and make peeps [people] know where I’m reppin [representing]’ [13].

His recognition and popularity in the music industry began in 2002 with the single ‘Ehen Part 1’ when he criticised the then mainstream rappers in Nigeria, specifically Eedris Abdulkareem (formerly of ‘The Remedies’), Rasqi, Maintain and Black Reverendz, asking them on the track ‘Why you dey rap like *mumu*?’ which translates literally as ‘Why are you rapping like you are stupid?’. This song projects a kind of communicative line of attack which is identified as ‘verbal indirection’ [14], as emanated from American rap culture where ‘... [this] communicative practice [is] referred to as “dissin”... [and] the message is meant to deride and disrespect a particular person or groups of people’ (ibid: 1096). As observed by an entertainment journalist ‘his singular effort of voicing what we all know opened a new chapter in Nigerian music and rap in general as artists who fell below standard stepped up their game while some opted out of music completely. He named names regardless of whose ox ...[are] gored’ [15]. In short for him to mention names of other rappers that were well established then in a ‘dissin’ song was seen as an act of boldness and confidence, in that if the track was not well received at a time when he was struggling to be known, it might just signal the end of his hip hop career, but it turned out to be a career boost for him.

This aggressive way of getting noticed and entering the mainstream hip hop scene actually earned him the appellation ‘diss master’ making him one of the most controversial rapper in Nigeria . He has several singles to his credit as well as four albums, *Thy Album Come* (2005) , *Ruggeddy Baba* (2007), *Untouchable* (2010) and *MMM* (2012) .Perhaps the turning point in his career was when he released the single ‘Baraje’ (2005) which made him a household name and earned him the alias ‘Baraje Master’. He has since built on this popularity with the song ‘Ruggeddy Baba’ that featured the then upcoming Afrocentric hip hop artist 9ice who was just getting known for his skillful use of Yorùbá language crafted with proverbs and metaphors. ‘Ruggeddy Baba’ became the most successful track in Ruggedman’s sophomore album of the same title and earned him the ‘Best Rap Album of the Year’ award at the Hip Hop World Awards (HHWA), 2008. For his exemplary performance on the track 9ice also got the ‘Best Vocal Performance’ award for 2008 at HHWA.

‘Ruggeddy Baba’–The Song

Below are the lyrics of the song ‘Ruggeddy Baba’. For clarity the lyrics has been divided numerically with lines numbered 1 to 129. The Yorùbá verses are in bold, Standard English is underlined while the Nigerian pidgin verses are in italics. An English translation is provided in parentheses after each line where it is not in Standard English.

Intro

RUGGEDMAN (RM): Rugged records...

9ICE (Chorus 1):

- 1- **Àtèwó mó balá** (I found lines on my palms)
- Á o meni tóò Koó,** (But never knew who put it there)
- 2- *We spit in pidgin,* (We sing in Pidgin English)
- Àwòn Kan ún wúkó,** (Some people are complaining)
- 3- **E jé Kán ma pòfóló** (Let them choke)
- 4- You better show them where you belong
- 5- *Ruggeddy baba* (All hail Ruggedman)
- Òpómúléro mo jalekàn** (The pillar that holds Nigeria’s hip hop)
- 6- **Sá ma wò wón níran** (Just keep looking at them)

RUGGEDMAN: (verse 1):

- 7- Once again it’s me the individual
- 8- Running the game physical
- 9- I’m here to open my mouth
- 10- *Again to yearn spiritual* (And speak in a spiritual way)
- 11- To speak from my heart to let you know
- 12- *Where he dey pain me* (Where it’s painng me)

13-As people dey backbite (As people are backbiting)
14-And talk about me in the industry
16-Where dem dey (Where are they)
17-When I dey yearn (When I was singing)
18-About mechanics and shoemakers
19-Dem dey talk about the subjects (They were avoiding the subjects)
20-Like our lawmakers.
21-Before I dropped 'Ehen'
22-The industry was messed up
23-Fakers dey rule (Fake rappers were ruling)
24-Where real rappers dem dey stressed up, (And real rappers were stressed up)
25-Nobody did a damn thing
26-Until I came through,
27-I clear the whole area (I paved the way)
28-Now real rappers have a say too.
29-Now people dey listen to em (Now people are listening to our rap)
30-Come for our show and clap for em (Come our shows and clap for us)
31-Some dey take am to the next level (Some has taken it further)
32-With hip hop forum.
33-From Nigeria the world only know
34-Jùjú, fùjì and afrobeat
35-But we all know hip hop is running The Street,
36-Wetin go let them know (What would make people know)
37-Where your music comes from in the long run
38-Is the fusion of grammar
39-Your slang and your mother tongue.

9ICE (Chrs):

40-Àtèwó mó balá á o meni tóò Koó,
41-We spit in pidgin, àwòn Kan ún wúkó,
42-E jé Kán ma pòfóló,
43-You better show them where you belong
44-Ruggedy baba òpómúléró mo jalekàn
45-Sá ma wò wón níran
46-Spit more in your mother tongue
47-Till the people say
48-They want more

RUGGEDMAN (verse 2):

49-I'm telling people that gossips
50-I don switch from smile to frown (I have switched from smiling to frowning)
51-I'm tired of so called hip hop heads
52-Whispering that I'm not holding it down
53-Say I don change (Saying I have changed)
54-From the way I've been before
55-Say now I dey speak for pidgin (That now I singing in Pidgin English)

56-Say dem prefer me when I bin hardcore (That they prefer me when I was hardcore)
57-Like when I dropped 'what if'
58-It splits the airwaves
59-But financially it made me grounded
60-Like Nigerian airways,
61-What if I tell you say (What if I tell you that)
62-I only did one or two shows
63-What if dem no pay me well enough (I wasn't remunerated well enough)
64-To buy one good shoe or some good clothes
65-And say Paul Play had a hand
66-To let me know what it would take me
67-To rearrange and eventually blow
68-While you sit around and talk shit.
69-Our elders mock our shit
70-Cos of our too much metaphorical
71-Out of space type of shit
72-Wen some rap (When some people rap)
73-Dem no know where we dey come from (They do not know where we are coming from)
74-Back then two rappers on stage
75-Was like seven throwing a tantrum.
76-We need to change that
77-Put a face to our music
78-Let the world know where we come from.

9ICE (Chorus):

79-Àtèwó mó balá á o meni tóò Koó,
80-We spit in pidgin, àwòn Kan ún wúkó,
81-E jé Kán ma pòfóló,
82-You better show them where you belong
83-Ruggedy baba òpómúléró mo jalekàn
84-Sá ma wò wón níran
85-Spit more in your mother tongue
86-Till the people say
89-They want more

RUGGEDMAN (VERSE 3):

90-Now let me address this issue of 'keeping it real'
91-Na one subject wey dey make me vex still (Its one subject that makes me angry)
92-Cos of how some MCs feels
93-About these three words
94-When they open their mouth
95-My guy I no fit shout (My friend I can't shout)
96-I go only ask what is 'keeping it real'.
97-Is it singing or rapping like 'oyinbo' [White people]
98-Or doing what you or your own people can feel?

99-Say I sell out when I do dance track
(That I'm a sell out to do a dance track)
100-They call me 'Baraje' master
101-Forgetting it got me fame and money
faster,
102-Forget the latter I move to the next chapter
fast
103-And speaking my mind
104-Playing my controversial character
105-The way I've been known to you
106-When I spin to you,
107-You better recognize
108-A real brother reaching out to you,
109-Speaking pidgin and dance track
110-No mean say I no keep am real (Does not
mean I'm not keeping it real)
111-That's just me and how else I want to be
real?
112-My rules are speak whatever language
113- But make sense.
114-I did that and have been hot ever since.

9ICE (CHRS):

115-Àtèwó mó balá á o meni tóò Koó,
116-We spit in pidgin, àwòn Kan ún wúkó,
117- E jé Kán ma pòfóló,
118-You better show them where you belong
119-Ruggedy baba òpómúléró mo jalekàn
120-Sá ma wò wón níran
121-Spit more in your mother tongue
122-Till the people say
123-They want more

RUGGEDMAN (OUTRO):

123-Ruggedman Nigeria representer
(Ruggedman representing Nigeria)
124-Putting a face to Nigeria rap music and
language,
125-That don't mean I'm not keeping it real
126-That doesn't mean I'm 'whack', [Not real]
127-That doesn't mean I'm a sell out
128-Show me where you come from
129-Let the world know

**Using Yorùbá Language as Identity Marker in
'Ruggedy Baba'**

'Ruggedy Baba' (2007) was the first single from the album with the same title released by Ruggedman in 2007. It was the major track in the album that best summarises the theme of the whole album project, which is to create a Nigerian cum African identity with hip hop music, and it goes a long way to support the overall argument of the influence of Yorùbá language and culture in Nigeria's hip hop and popular music in general. 'Ruggedy Baba' is telling a story of his career and Nigeria's hip hop industry, boldly stating his stance as an Afrocentric artist from the chorus to the end of the song. The song is delivered

in the usual code-switching manner of Nigeria's Afro hip hop made, up of three languages: Yorùbá, Standard English and Nigerian pidgin.

Ruggedman actually had a concept in mind about creating a hip hop song that would fully exemplify his idea of Afro hip hop and have a deep African flavour with wider acceptability. As far as popular music is concerned Lagos is the hub with Yorùbá as the language. Thereby making it the only medium he can use to achieve this acceptability. Hence the presence of 9ice on the track as a featured artist.

This was further corroborated by 9ice:

I would say I translated what he [Ruggedman] had in mind, He was working on his album in the studio and I think he must have been talking with Cabasa [the producer], so he [Cabasa] asked me if I can do a hook on his song... He played the instrumental and I listened... We rubbed mind, He [Ruggedman] talked to me about the message of the song, what he had in mind and what he want the chorus to be like, so right there I did my thing [19].

The song was introduced with the Yoruba chorus, and the body contained many bold statements. In verse 1 Ruggedman takes us back through Nigeria's hip hop history, recounting his contributions toward making the genre a popular one. However, of particular interest are lines 36-39 where he stated: 'Wetin go let them know [What would make people know] where your music comes from in the long run is the fusion of grammar your slang and your mother tongue.' This promotes the over-all concept of the album: creating the African identity and giving a face to Afro hip hop through the use of a mother tongue which obviously is the Yorùbá language.

The issue of mother tongue here might pose some complexity as Ruggedman is Ibo but now adopts Yorùbá as his mother tongue to project hip hop as opposed to Igbo. The reason behind this can be attributed to the hip hop scene and its marketing strategy in Lagos. The Ibo hold sway at Alaba market where music is distributed, yet the Igbo language does not seem to be a commercial one for hip hop at that period in time based on Ruggedman's experience, as it was 'Baraje' where he used Yorùbá hookline that actually made him a commercial artist. In the same vein the use of Hausa language is not an option despite the fact that the Hausas have the highest population in Nigeria. The north is not hip hop friendly and there has been much censorship due to the regional adoption of Islamic Sharia in northern Nigeria. Making an album in the language would be suicidal as it would not be played in the north, and the south where the music

market is in Lagos is a Yorùbá speaking region. This left him with no other choice than the Yorùbá language.

In verse 2, Ruggedman replies to critics who objected to his using pidgin and local language and said that he would be better off using Standard English as he used to as a hard core rapper (line 55-56). To him those years of delivering his messages through the medium of Standard English is gone. Though songs he did in that era such as 'What If' were well received they brought him no financial gain and he could not even afford a good pair of shoes or clothes (line 57-65). The next verse (3) explains how he got out of this financial crisis which indicated how the Yorùbá language was appropriated through rearrangement of his agenda, which is the recording of 'Baraje' (2005) with the Yorùbá hook line that now gave him 'money and fame faster' (line 101). This statement highlights the impact of the Yorùbá language in the commercial success of most Nigerian hip hop artists.

In conclusion, this song supports Ruggedman's bid to give a face to Nigeria's Afro hip hop and carve a truly African identity out of this genre. Despite being an Ibo from the eastern part of Nigeria the only way he believed he could make this impact and fully represent Nigeria was by delivering his message in Yorùbá (line 123-124). The use of Yorùbá in this song contributed to its commercial success and acceptability both nationally and globally and established Ruggedman's street credibility as an Afro hip hop artist. To him, to 'keep it real' you need to do songs the way your people can 'feel it' which is not 'singing or rapping like *oyinbo*' (line 97), hence the use of the street credible medium which is the Yorùbá language.

Here the reference to *oyinbo* stems out of the Nigerian orientation which equates anybody trying to phonetise words or projects any kind of westernized fake accents to impress people as trying to imitate *oyinbo*. It might look complex as African-Americans created hip hop and they are not whites, but their kind of accent is being equated to an *oyinbo* accent here. Finally 'Ruggedy Baba' typically supports the fact that when most artists in Nigeria want to express their Afrocentricity they find it appropriate to use the Yorùbá language because of its wider acceptability and global/diasporic presence.

'Ruggedy Baba' and the Negotiation of Nigerian Identity

Extracting the commonality of music as identity projection, Waterman [17] commented: 'Why does she sing like that? She sings like that to express her identity. Why does she express her identity through music? Because music is intimately bound up with memory, the emotions and other foundations of identity' (p.19). Language is an important appendage of music: in it lie the coded sounds and texts of

communication making it an important angle through which popular music is studied. Stone (2008: 51) also asserts that 'linguistic orientations to the study of music as human communication have been of considerable interest to ethnomusicology as well as other music disciplines [because] the relationship between music and language has long been recognized'. In essence the appropriation of Yorùbá language through the vocal performance of 9ice on 'Ruggedy Baba' is a definitive statement towards expression of identity in the rap lyrics.

Whose identity?

Having established that the whole idea of 'Ruggedy Baba' is about carving out an identity and give a face to Nigerian hip hop by employing the mother tongue, it is imperative to ask whose identity or culture he is projecting considering the fact that he did not speak a word in any of the Nigerian mother tongues on the track, but rather employed 9ice to drive home his message in Yorùbá. This is rather a complex question to answer without going into the country's struggle with the issue of a lingua franca. Having a common lingua franca that is totally Nigerian, aside from the official language which is English as inherited from the British colonial government, has been a difficult task in Nigeria where over three hundred languages are in existence. The acclaimed Nigerian reggae artiste, Evi Edna-Ogholi even sang about it in the late 1980s asking:

Which one of them you go speak?
You travel go Benin they speak Edo,
You travel go Akure they speak
Yorùbá,
You travel go Warri they speak
Urhobo,
You travel go Kano they speak
Hausa...
All I'm saying lingua-franca.
(Ogholi, 'Lingua-franca', 1988).

The closest the country gets to having a common 'Nigerianized' code of communication is the use of the Nigerian pidgin (though un-official), made popular through afrobeat music of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti who employed it for over three decades as the language of his music. This is still not totally a Nigerian language but rather a convenient or 'broken' way of speaking English by defying all the set rules of the language with infusion of some local dialects and lingos mostly derived from the southern part of Nigeria into it.

To Ruggedman, the fusion of 'grammar' (English) and mother tongue is very important in creating hip hop that is fully Nigerian (see line 36-39 of the 'Ruggedy Baba' lyrics) which means that using the Nigerian pidgin to rap (as he did) will not fully substantiate his proposition, hence the use of Yorùbá language which is the official language of Lagos where

he lives and not his own mother tongue of Igbo. This gives further credence to the fact that experience and orientation forms an important foundation towards identity formulation.

Why Yorùbá language? Whose Cultural identity?

Experience and orientation plays an important part towards identity creation as it goes a long way in shaping an individual's personality (which is the basic unit of identity), while geographical location or spatial locale also plays a crucial role in determining what our experience and orientation will be. Against this backdrop one can decipher what determined Ruggedman's choice of Yorùbá in 'Ruggedy Baba'. Even though he is of Ibo descent, he has lived in Lagos from his early years and his musical career and development started in Lagos. Thus the city and Yorùbá language and culture moulded his experience and helped shape his orientation. Capturing this in his own words he said 'my parents split when I was six years old. That is why I am not too fluent in Igbo because I was brought up in Lagos. When I speak Yorùbá, you [will] mistake me for a Yorùbá guy, because I grew up with my mum and other siblings in Lagos' [15].

Migration, mobility and multi-culturalization have always played a core role towards shaping popular music. Lagos is Nigeria's commercial centre and the country's first capital city, the city always attracts a lot of talents in every field seeking economic upliftment and career progression. The pattern of urban migration to Lagos for the purpose of commerce and otherwise is a constant feature in the popular music scene and in case of Ruggedman has come to play an important role in shaping the course of Nigerian hip hop. Efe Omorogbe, who shares in this pattern of migration, tried to define what cultural identity is for a Lagosian like himself:

What is cultural identity?... Whose culture? Yorùbá culture or Edo [his tribe] culture?... My mum is Isoko/Urhobo, my dad is Edo [mid-western Nigeria], I was born in Warri [Niger delta area], I came to Lagos in 1991. I've been here for almost eighteen years, since I came I've not spent one month outside Lagos. So what's my culture?... I've been married for eight years, my mother-in-law, I see her I prostrate [a Yorùbá way of showing respect when greeting an elder], If I go to Benin [Edo land] and see my uncle instinctively I will prostrate, I won't kneel [the proper way an Edo man greets an elderly person]. I've been here in Lagos, a Yorùbá land for eighteen years, men here don't kneel they prostrate. So what's my culture? How do I switch instinctively to Edo or Benin culture? [16].

This is a rhetorical question that validates the phrase 'It's not where you are from but where you are at' commonly used in the hip hop community, supporting the fact that the experiences you have are a product of the community you belong to, your affiliation and contacts. In this vein, Ruggedman can only give or share what he has which is the Yorùbá culture he grew up on. Following the success of the 'Ruggedy Baba' album he now answers to the *oríkì* 'Ópómùléro moja lekàn' (the pillar of 'Nigerian hip hop') signifying his embrace of Yorùbá to the fullest as its only Yorùbá people that bears an *oríkì* which has a deep meaning rooted in lineage which is progenitorial.

Further to this issue of migration and cultural identity as exemplified by both Ruggedman and Omorogbe is the credence it gives to the seeming trend of 'cultural and linguistic homogenization' occurring in Nigerian popular music, facilitated by Lagos where Yorùbá is now gradually becoming the language of choice by artistes for commercial reasons.

'Ruggedy Baba' and Nigerian National Identity

The release of 'Ruggedy Baba' signalled the beginning of an era aimed at creating a truly Nigerian hip hop, Ruggedman was able to carve his own identity with the infusion of the Yorùbá language used to negotiate a common ground towards fostering a national unity in hip hop. This makes him an activist of a sort.

The idea of code-switching is prevalent in Nigerian hip hop as 'a way of exhibiting the Nigerian identity where these artists flag up their membership of a new generation of Nigerians by rapping in multiple indigenous languages including those that are not necessarily their mother tongues, so that language crossing... facilitates the construction of a national/regional rather than ethno-linguistical identity' [18]. But Ruggedman is the only artist that actually set out to make a declaration and statement about this and why Nigerian hip hop should be given its own identity through indigenous language.

Apart from the lyrics of the song that boldly stated this, he also declared this boldly visually in the video of the song with the opening montage showing the text: 'From Ohafia, Abia state comes a rapper with a mission, to give Nigerian rap a face with our local languages like South Africa did with kwaito and Ghana with hip life: *I am proudly Nigerian*' (emphasis mine). This opening montage clearly presents Ruggedman's intention, he introduced himself boldly as an Ibo man using his hometown Ohafia as a launching pad while the last line concomitantly points to the nationalized concept of his mission to create an identity for hip hop that is 'proudly Nigerian': not a Yorùbá identity, not an Ibo identity but a national identity through the embrace of Yorùbá language.

Summary

In this paper I have been able to use the music of Ruggedman to exemplify and argue for the influence of Yorùbá language and culture on the success of mainstream Nigerian hip hop. The research also established that Ruggedman is on a mission which can best be understood through the text of the song as portrayed through textual analysis of 'Ruggedy Baba'.

On 'Hip hop 101 part 2', the closing track of the *Ruggedy Baba* album Ruggedman declared:

If the culture is not Nigerian, it's not Nigerian, so the American culture, the British culture is different from the Nigerian culture... [As] Nigerian[s] our hip hop culture must contain elements of Nigerian customs, beliefs, arts and way of life. To cultivate our own hip hop culture our... hip hop has to contain Nigerian dance steps, the Nigerian language, instruments... and the Nigerian way of dressing... that's the way we can tell the world straight up where we are from. (Ruggedman 2007)

Though 'Ruggedy Baba' is music on a path of hip hop revolution, it is discernible that the use of an indigenous language is an agency of authenticity making the hip hop of a particular location relevant to the artist's situation while negotiating a boundary for him within the global hip hop community. Here the issue of ethnic and regional affiliations also arises as Nigeria has a history of conflicts in that respect. However by his use of Yorùbá language in this song and the portrayal of the culture to the fullest in the video, Ruggedman has been able to use the popular cultural space as an arena where loyalty to ethnicity can be neutralized for a unified positive goal, and a pragmatic step towards national integration.

Omoniyi [18], while discussing the language choice in hip hop, observed that 'multilingualism is widespread and growing as a result of global cultural flows, [while] it seems that in some environments hip hop artists deploy linguistic convergence in performing in the dominant official language of the cosmopolis' (p. 124). Lagos city being the musical hub of Nigeria (the cosmopolis), and Yorùbá being the official language of Lagos, the fate of the 'Ruggedy Baba' project is already tied to the Yorùbá language and culture as a linguistic vehicle in delivering his mission statement. It is not unexpected to see the level of success the album achieved commercially and otherwise both in Nigeria and abroad as evidenced in the recognition accorded the artist through awards and shows following its release.

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Source of Music

Discography

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2. 2Ruggedman. 'Hip hop 101-Part 2' (2007), Ruggedy Baba Rugged Records, Lagos. 2007.

Videography

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