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# Musical Narratives of Conversance between Mother and Child in Sonny Okosun's Music

ABSTRACT. In African traditional settings, the role of women in the development and growth of the family is more than giving birth to a child. In addition to being a vehicle for procreation, they contribute immensely to the child's training, thus playing significant role in the growth and development of family and the nation. Therefore, this paper investigates the connection between mother and child using the music of Sonny Okosun's, "Mother and Child" as a case study. The paper adopts a narrative method to explain salient issues raised in the song on the conversance between mother and child also, a musical score of the song is done for a documentary purpose. Secondary sources include a review of articles in journal, books, and internet sources. Findings reflect that mothers have served as the foundational source of indigenous knowledge acquisition and informal education for a child. The study concludes that a mother is not just a channel for a child to the world but also a veritable agent of education, socialization, and civilisation.

KEYWORDS: narratives, conversance, mother and child

#### Introduction

Music-making in African societies happen every day, this addresses diverse situations such as marriage, admission into puberty stage, burial and other community festivals. Apart from this, music is used to create riddles, solve riddles, narrate past and present situations or incidences, for educational functions, expression of emotions, or to influence emotions. Though, mother's role in the training and molding counselling of a child has been documented in literature cutting across diverse subjects and fields, few studies have delineated the mother and child relationship from a musicological point of view. In African melodic culture, the drums, gongs, woodwinds, and different instruments are used as channels of communication. Agawu (2007, p 1) asserted that:

Ritual, narrative, dance, singing and the beating of drums and other instruments are typically motivated by an awareness of a primal togetherness, the (imagined) presence of others and a sense that the meaningfulness of an activity depends ultimately on the constraints imposed by its participatory framework.

Music serves a dual purpose of entertainment and communication of vital messages; we listen to music purposefully and accidentally considering the way that music is normal all the time around us and our listening openings are different. Through music, between basic relations are strengthened, as systems associate and offer regards with neighbouring systems. There are motivating factors that are also responsible for music making as pointed out by Hallam (2002, p. 212) stating that:

The extent to which an individual is motivated to pursue musical activity will depend on the interactions between their characteristics, self-concept and goals and the characteristics of the immediate environment, including cultural and historical factors, the educational environment, and the support they receive from family and peers.

Historically, Rentfrow et al. (2011, p. 1140), stated that music has also been used for social bonding, comfort, motivating or coordinating physical labor, the preservation and transmission of oral knowledge, ritual and religion, and the expression of physical or cognitive fitness.

From these diverse functions of music in Africa, this paper is greatly concerned with the role of mothers in the shaping and guiding of an African child as expressed in the music of Sonny Okosun's *Mother and Child*.

### Contextual Narration of the paper

Music provides a powerful example of a situational narration without words, both in terms of musical form and content. According to Imberty (1979; 1981):

it is not only inherently sequential, it begins, progresses and ends and its modulations of tension and energy are its very fabric, but it can also be related to things outside itself because it is situated in and itself contains historic, remembered and imagined time. A musical narrative could either be in the form of vocal with instrumental accompaniment or just instrumental music. Malloch (2000, p. 5) explains that communicative musicality consists of the elements pulse, quality, and narrative as those attributes of human communication, which are particularly exploited in music, it gives rise to coordinated companionship. A narrative is a story that you write or tell to someone, usually in great detail. A narrative can be a work of poetry or prose, or even song, theatre, or dance (*vocabulary.com*). The narrative is the very embodiment of human friendship and correspondence. Malloch (2000, p. 18) further explains that

Narratives of individual experience and of companionship are built from the units of pulse and quality found in the jointly created gestures of vocalizations and bodily movement. Narratives are the very essence of human companionship and communication. Narratives allow two persons to share a sense of passing time. and to create and share the emotional envelopes that evolve through this shared time. They express innate motives for sharing emotion and experience with other persons and for creating meaning in joint activity with others.

Schroeder (2014) describes musical narration as "an event that has been in play from the beginning of human existence". This was further buttressed to have started from "antiquated root fantasies to films and TV, Greek catastrophes to Broadway, and papyrus looks to softcover books" The practice of narration could be closely observed in and around every African society as being appreciated in books, films, and theatrical creations.

In another instance, Nattiez (1990, p. 253) was quoted by Kramer (1991, p. 143) in a compelling argument that "in itself, music is not a narrative and that any description of its formal structures in terms of narration is nothing but superfluous metaphor". At best, Nattiez suggests, music "has the semi logical capacity of imitating the allure of a narrative, a narrative style or mode" that historical hermeneutics may connect to "[the] reservoir of philosophical, ideological and cultural traits characteristic of a particular epoch" (pp. 250–253) Kramer (ibid). Contrary to this opinion Nicholls (2007, p. 300) however, opines that:

music can become part of narrative discourse, either in those instances where it is ascribed extra-musical meaning through association with an object or a concept that is, where it acquires a leitmotiv function or where it interacts with one or more other media. In line with Nicholls' view, Jeffress (2013, p. 8) states that the concept of narrative is, for our purposes, inextricably interwoven with that of meaning. The investigation of narrative discourse in music is a means to the determination of possible meaning to the listener in that music.

#### **About Sunny Okosun**

Born in Enugu, Nigeria, on January 1, 1947, Okosun was the child of artists, even though his central developmental impacts were rockers like Elvis Presley and the Beatles. As a high school student, he learned the guitar, and in 1964 established the Postmen, a British Invasion covers band. In the wake of the mid-1966 government overthrow that prompted the Biafra strife, he and his family settled in Lagos, where he fashioned a profession as a TV on-screen character. Okosun came back to music in 1969 as an individual from Victor Uwaifo's Melody Maestros, a gathering noted for its contemporary popular way to deal with customary Nigerian music. In the wake of visiting Japan and Europe with Uwaifo's band, he framed his hallucinogenic stone unit, Paperback Limited, which he helmed until 1974. After dissolving the gathering, Okosun again rehashed his methodology, this time diverting impacts like soul, funk, and reggae-the subsequent gathering, named Ozziddi, solidified the dynamic melodic and expressive way he followed all through the rest of his vocation. Ozziddi scored its first significant African hit with 1976's "Help", and after a year reggae mammoth Eddy Grant blended their LP Papa's Land. Follow-up Fire in Soweto was recorded in London and scored through the title track, which fought politically-sanctioned racial segregation maltreatment in South Africa. Okosun by and by evaded the activist legislative issues of peers like Afro-funk symbol Fela Kuti, advancing African solidarity and dark pride over radical broadsides. In the wake of the 1978's Holy Wars, Okosun visited Nigeria with reggae greats Jimmy Cliff and Toots and the Maytals. In 1985 he arrived at the summit of his universal distinction as the solitary African craftsman to add to the top pick against politically sanctioned racial segregation collection "Sun City", and after a year his Highlife which was highlighted in the Jonathan Demme-coordinated element film "Something Wild". By the late '80s Okosun's seemed to be dwindling, yet in 1994 he re-emerged with the rebound vehicle Songs of Praise. In all, he recorded over three dozen LPs through the span of his vocation, with meetings cut in regions

extending from the U.S. to France and kept up prominent appearances at performances over the globe. Sunny Okosun passed on in Washington, D.C., on May 24, 2008 after battling colon disease for many years (Jason Ankeny [Accessed: 20 April 2020]).

# **Popular music**

With the emergence of different musical genres emanating from folk music through individuals and collective creativity, a brand of music evolved. These creativities could either be instrumental or vocal or both. These have become generally accepted in society beyond the local/traditional settings. This generally acceptable brand of music is popular music, which is a mix of verities of classifications from various social, societal orders. A portion of these incorporates Juju, reggae, Apala, gospel, hip-hop, and highlife among the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. Quite a several researchers such as Ojukwu, Obielozie, and Esimone (2016, p. 117), Adedeji (2017, p. 75) have given a descriptive definition of popular music differently. Though, the contents are somehow similar. Popular music has been used by various artiste for self-expression of feelings, either towards a situation that may be personal or general in the society.

Adegoke (2011, p. 154) opines that popular music could be defined based on particular terms such as appropriation, syncretism, hybridization, and creolization. They simply mean borrowing or combining from other sources to form new cultural forms and spaces. Nigerian popular musicians cut across the geo-political zone in the country with recognition and acceptance within and beyond. In this connection, Adedeji (2017, p. 75) states that:

popular music has generally been regarded as the type of music form or practice that is targeted towards audience satisfaction; it comes with crowd appeal and encompasses several styles.

In a further argument, Adedeji (ibid) opines that "popular music is readily comprehensible to a large proportion of the population and its appreciation requires little or no knowledge of musical theory". Despite the various intercultural influences on the Nigerian music scene, one discernable thing is that popular music output remains deeply rooted in the indigenous Nigerian tradition through an appropriation by artists to project their cultural identity. Jegede (1987, p. 61) uphold that during the slave era when many Africans were carried off to the New World, music was one of the ways through which aspects of their culture found boisterous expression. Shuker (2006, xii) opine that the term 'popular music' defies precise, straightforward definition. Culturally, all popular music consists of a hybrid of musical traditions, styles, and influences. At the same time, it is an economic product invested with ideological significance by many of its consumers. Barton (2018, p. 25) mention Radocy and Boyle (1979, p. 27) who stated that "culture clearly affects musical behaviour [and that] music may influence the culture [in which it is produced]". Barton (Ibid) pointed out that:

Views such as those expressed by Feld (1984), Lomax (1976) and Merriam (1964) highlighted the impact that culture can have on music and in some cases music on cultural expression with each author concluding that music is, in fact, culture and cannot be separated from life experience (p. 27).

Popular music, under different nomenclature has emerged and flourished in Nigeria over the years. Omojola (2006, p. 23) as cited by Abiodun (2018, p. 3) points out three factors that are responsible for the growth of popular music; the emergence of western and African elites, the eventual frustration of the western African elite who had hoped to gain more political and economic power and a spirit of cultural awakening. These three factors founded, and sharpened popular music and its history can be traced through these factors. Abiodun (Ibid) argues further to describe the present form of the Nigerian popular music as a result of different inputs of early Nigerian popular musicians who were influenced by one culture or the other and by one musical form or style or by one musician or the other. Popular music is indeed found everywhere all over the world. As a compliment, Abiodun (2018, p. 62) writes that:

from a preliminary survey, early popular musicians in Nigeria such as Bobby Benson, Victor Olaiya, Rex Lawson, Victor Uwaifo and so on. In the early juju we have Ayinde Bakare, Tunde King, I.K. Dairo, Daniel Ojoge, Sunny Ade and Ebenezer Obey while the old Fuji music featured Barrister Ayinde and Kollington Ayinla. The Apala scene was dominated by Alh. Dauda Epo Akara and HarunaIshola and Waka (female popular music) was dominated by Salawa Abeni, Fela Anikulapo Kuti dominated Afro beat with the inclusion of the pre-war palm-wine and highlife groups: These were the first set of Musicians who created the musical styles. Several musicians in Nigeria draws from the various musical genres that make up what is known as popular music today have at one time or the other sang about the relationship between mother and child. Eulogising mothers through popular music has been a practice by different generations of musicians in Nigeria. Themes from these albums depict or show appreciation to and praying for mothers in general. Table below is the survey of selected popular musicians with musical theme on mothers.

S/N	Name of Musician	Genre	Title	Interpretation
1	King Sunny Ade (Sunday Adeniyi) Juju	Juju	Iya mi Edumare Oba ma pa Iya mi lekun Iya rere	My mother God do not make my mother cry Good mother
2	I.K Dairo (Isiah Kehinde Dairo)	Juju	Iya mi Iya	My mother my confidant
3	Jesse King Highlife	Highlife	Mummy o, w ape laye	Mother, you will live long
4	Funmi Adams	Gospel	Omo laso	
5	Alhaji (Dr.) Sikiru Ayinde Barister. Fuji	Fuji	Orisa bi Iya kosi	
6	Jambo Express	African Calypso	Mother Africa	Mother Africa
7	Prince Nico Mbarga High life	Highlife	Sweet mother	My mother
8	Tunde Ara	Juju	Iya mi	Sweet mother
9	(Tosin Olakanye (Ayanbinrin	Juju	Iya rere	My mother
10	Sonny Okosun	Highlife	Mother and child	Good mother
11	Majek Fashek - Mother	Reggae	Mother never cry	
12	Sharon Ifedi		Sweet mama	Mother never cry
13	Ali Jita		Mama Na	Sweet mama
14	Prince Gozie Okeke	Highlife	Mama	My mother

Table. Survey of selected popular musicians with musical theme on mothers

Among Nigerian music giants who also sang about mother and child is Sonny who doles out his mark of contribution through the combination of reggae, highlife, Afro-funk, and customary tunes and rhythms.

#### **Theoretical framework**

This paper applies the "attachment theory" as postulated by Ainsworth (1973) and Bowlby (1969) which states that attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time. Bowlby (1969) points out that children are born with a psycho-biological system, the so-called attachment behavioral system that motivates them to seek or maintain proximity to an attachment.

### "Mother and Child": The Lyrics, the Content and the Context

Mama, you are my soul (you are my soul) Mother teach me how to smile Because am still a child Mother, you are my light Mother, you are my sight (you are my sight) Mother teach me how to see Because am still a child

Mama show me the way (show me the way) Am afraid to walk in the dark Because am still a child

Mother, you are my angel (you are my angel) I love you more than anything Oh yes I am a child

Mother and child (4ce) La la la la la la (7ce)

### **Musical value**

Music is used as a communication medium in mother and child through which the message of motherhood is passed to show the bond relationship between mother and child. This is another way to communicate in African musical culture. This form of communication could be through chants which are usually done by a Marable, or through instrument playing which also can be traced to various African instruments like the Oja from the eastern part of Nigeria, talking drum and kalangu from the western and northern part of Nigeria respectively. The vocal and instrumental sessions of the song *mother and child* have a defined rhythmic pattern from the instrumental introduction all through to the end of the song. Schroeder (2014) states that all interactive musical communication has a regular implicit rhythm, called the pulse of the interaction. It presents also a sequential organization whose units are most often shapes or melodic contours. Finally, it transmits something like content that can be described as narrative. The song mother and child has five (5) verses having the same melody but different text.



Figure 1. Mother you are my soul

#### **Cultural Value**

The first lines of the five verses in the musical narration of the song mother and child is evidence of the inseparable relationship as expressed through music that exists between mother and child.

First-line in verse one (fig. 1) Okosun points out that the mother is his soul. In the light of this statement (fig. 1) Emotional bonding theory or attachment theory as jointly propounded by Ainsworth (1973) and Bowlby (1969) which states that attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space is an indicator that the mother is the soul of a child. Bowlby considered the importance of children's relationship with their mothers in terms of their social, emotional, and cognitive development. The theory explains why parental relationships have such a powerful impact on the personality of children. This is an affirmation that the soul is the engine of life which is a reason or justification for existence; it also symbolizes the source of human existence, its significance, and tenacity. The soul is the first and most important aspect of any Human-being and gives room for all other activities to take place.



Figure 2. Mother teaches me how to smile

The second line which states that "Mother teaches me how to smile because I am still a child" is a pointer that explains the immediate position of mother to child and child to mother. It presents mother as the teacher while the child is the student pleading to be taught. The learning process starts from here which is a step into learning socio-cultural engagement or interaction with the child's immediate environment. To smile is a nonverbal behavior that communicates or expresses intimacy. Andersen, Guerrero, and Jones (2006, p. 3) point out that nonverbal expressions of intimacy include a wide range of behaviors that reflect both positive affect and involvement, such as gaze, smiling, forward lean, and affirming head nods. A smile can be an expression of approval, love, or acceptance. In the case of a mother and child, it expresses love and gives confidence of approval of behavior. Teaching a child how to smile is teaching the child how to love. This will help in his or her relationship with others and it will help to build his confidence as he learns about the world.



Mo - ther you are my life Figure 3. Mother you are my life

The second verse presents the mother as the life of the child and the child needs to learn how to live. This is dealing with moral engagement in life. Socially and culturally, a good moral life distinguishes personality from one another. Culturally it is the responsibility of the mother to teach a child the societal moral values to be a good representative of the soul which gave the child human existence, its significance, and tenacity. In addition to learning moral lessons, a child develops emotional intelligence as well as literacy. One of the several ways of teaching a child is through folk tales. Tshiwala-Amadi (1980: 92) as cited by Amali (2014, p. 91) who claims that:

Folktales serve many functions in African society. In addition to providing entertainment, they have certain didactic qualities. They are used to educate the young; they help to establish social norms.

Amali (Ibid) cited Achufusi (1986: 1–2) as she holds that these folk-tales:

serve as a means of enforcing conformity with social norms; of validating social institutions and religious beliefs and they help to provide psychological freedom from some society imposed restrictions.

This is also a biblical injunction from a religious ground that states that train your child where he will do so that when he grows he will not depart from it (Proverb 22:6). This is also linked with Yoruba proverbial statement that *Omo ti a o ba ko, lo ma ko ile ti a ko ta* meaning that the child that we did not build will end up destroying those things we built in life.





am still a child

Figure 4. Mother teach me how to see

Figure 4 above points out the importance of sight far beyond just seeing. The child in this context is asking to be taught how to see the world from the wealth of experience of the mother. This is also compared with the African proverbial saying that that "what an elderly person sees while sitting, a child cannot see even if a child climbs the tallest tree". Another African proverbial saying from the Yoruba ethnic group states that "*bi omode ba ni aso bi agba ko le ni akisa to agba*" meaning the child may have enough good cloths like the adult but surely cannot have enough rags as the adult. The wealth of knowledge in an adult about life is much more than that of a child. Okosun in this song opines that the child is asking for direction, guidance, skills, etc. on how to face the uncertainties of the world. This continues to the next verse in which the child is asking the mother to show him the way (fig. 5).



Figure 5. Mother you are my Angel

It is a general belief that an Angel is seen as a protector or a guiding terrestrial being. McLeod, (2017, 1) cites Bowlby (1958) who proposes that attachment can be understood within an evolutionary context because, the care-giver provides safety and security for the infant. The mother is a child's angel who provides the child with the necessary platform for survival. The attachment preserves up passionate strength, creating inspirational perspectives toward self as well as other people, and shaping adult, commonly fulfilling cozy connections. Cassidy, Jones, and Shaver (2013, p. 15) in line with Bowlby attachment theory pointed out that Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration, with all these lacking, such

relationship and development is disrupted, and the consequences can be severe and long-lasting". Cassidy, Jones, and Shaver (Ibid) better express in the lyrics below:

Lyrics

Mother, you are my angel I love you more than anything Oh yes I am a child

#### Interpretation (Yoruba)

Iya ni Angeli mi Mo n'ife e re ju ohun gbogbo lo Looto, Omode ni mo je

## Conclusion

His early intimacy can have a successful influence on the child's development during his/her lifetime, like the Hindus will say, "the mother's lap is the child's first classroom." The lesson learned in this classroom will not only affect the life of a child but the societal life at large. The narratives in the song "mother and child" point out the necessary training and care that a mother should give a child for life challenges. It is the very first aspect of education for a child that leads to some better achievements in formal education; this relationship empowers a child to comprehend the past and add to the molding of the present and future. This paper concludes that mother and child relationship is a necessary tool for the sharpening of a child's future is usually found in the intimacy that exists between mother and child. Beyond breastfeeding, the power of intimacy between mother and child will either help to structure the society towards positive growth or otherwise, if such intimacy is lacking.

#### Discography

Year	Album	Records Label
1981	3 <sup>rd</sup> world	Ivory music/Shanachie
1983	Which way Nigeria	Jive Afrika
1984	Liberation	Shanachie
1991	African Soldiers	Profile
1996	over the years' collection	Celebrity
2000	Ultimate Collection	Ivory
2000	Celebrate and worship in Caribbean	Rhythm Orchard

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