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Chapter · July 2017

DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-55281-1\_17

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# Vulgar Lyrics in Nigeria's Twenty-First-Century Popular Music: St. Janet and Olamide (Badoo)

*Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale, Dauda Adermi Busari,  
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## INTRODUCTION

Vulgar music is increasingly becoming a widespread popular culture in Nigeria. Though mostly censored, the songs are played at parties and by small-scale record sellers in public arenas. Vulgar music is thus becoming accepted as a dimension of popular music in Nigeria's rapidly globalizing popular culture. This chapter primarily examines the vulgar lyrics of the music of Janet Omotoyosi Ajilore (St. Janet) and Olamide Adedeji (Olamide Badoo) (see St. Janet (nd) and Olamide (nd) (a, b & c)). Since vulgar songs are censored in Nigeria, they were sourced from social media (in particular tubidy.mobi). Popular music in Nigeria precedes the advent of St. Janet and Olamide Badoo, and to some extent it can be traced to colonialism. Nigeria gradually came under British rule from August 1861, when the

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G. Padva, N. Buchweitz (eds.), *Intimate Relationships in Cinema,  
Literature and Visual Culture*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-55281-1\_17

island city-state of Lagos was proclaimed a Crown Colony; and between 1893 and 1906, the rest of the country was subjugated under British “Protection” (Samuel-Mbackwe 1986; Obiagwu and Odinkalu 2003).

British colonial rule marked a fundamental social change across Nigeria’s sociocultural fabric, and British culture became the ideal, despite its elitist nature. Between 1900 and the early 1940s, the newly educated indigenous elite, though still identified with some aspects of the local culture (especially local respect for values, titles, privileges, and polygyny), appreciated and celebrated their “Britishness” and, of course, distinguished themselves from the uneducated natives by adopting Western culture and etiquette, and this was particularly discernible in the sphere of Western music (Mann 1981; Omojola 2009). Hence, that new class of elites preferred sophisticated classical music such as that of Handel and Mozart, as well as Christian hymns (Omojola 2009). By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the educated elite were exposed to highlife music, a new trend of genre blended with aspects of Western instrumentation and local folklore. Originating in Ghana and popularized by Nigerian artistes and fans, highlife music was a dimension of popular music that captured the essence of the educated elite and returnee veteran nationalists for a glocal blend capturing both Western flair and African taste (Omojola 2009; Waterman 1990). Among the early highlife musicians were Bobby Benson, Eddy Okonta, Roy Chicago, Jim Rex Lawson, and Victor Olaiya (Jegede 1987; Omojola 2009).

Starting his music career in the early 1950s, Victor Olaiya in particular blended his music with aspects of the vulgar, which were rather strange to the dominant moralist culture of the 1950s and 1960s. One of Olaiya’s most popular songs, which has received popular acceptance across ages and generations, was a song in which the male singer asks his lady not to leave. He also asks his lady to put him on her chest and to fill his heart with love (Victor Olaiya nd (a)). Using the same rhythm, Victor Olaiya later released a more lewd song in which he asks his sweetheart not to leave because he is hungry and he needs to suck her breast (Victor Olaiya nd (b)). The song was an instant hit. By the 1970s, the popularity of highlife waned, replaced by the ascendancy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti’s Afrobeat, Juju music popularized by Sunday Adeniyi (King Sunny Ade) and Ebenezer Obey-Fabiyi (Commander Ebenezer Obey), and Fuji music popularized by

Kollington Ayinla and Sikiru Ayinde (Barrister) (Labinjoh 1982; Knight 1989; Jegede 1987; Campbell and Waterman 1995).

The elite class disdained Afrobeat, which won popular appeal among the lower and middle classes. Juju was mostly celebrated by lower-class and middle-class Yoruba, while Fuji was largely a proletarian popular music. Fela's music had more of a protest and revolutionary dimension; his songs took issue with colonialism, neo-colonialism, and corruption within the elites. Though his lyrics were not necessarily sexually lewd, he performed almost totally naked while his back-up singers (mostly his wives and mistresses) sometimes appeared bare-breasted (or wearing see-through brassieres and beads) in live performances and on album covers (see, for example, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti 1975). Fela largely expressed sexual vulgarity in appearance and pictures in order to present his popular protest music.

Like Fela, Sunny Ade's and Ebenezer Obey's music captured popular attention in the 1970s, especially among the lower and middle classes. Both musicians mostly sang about Yoruba folklore and social issues across Nigeria, though, of course, they did release some vulgar contents as well. In one of his hit songs, Sunny Ade states that a lady's full-fleshed breast is her beauty (King Sunny Ade nd (a and b)), while Ebenezer Obey sang the story of a lady who was invited to her lover's room. The lover locked the door, undressed her, then pushed her in the bed and did the male part, while the speaker performed the female part. The singer assures that if the intercourse results in pregnancy, Obey himself is responsible (Ebenezer Obey, 2011). In the 1990s the song was remixed by Shina Peters, another popular musician, and became very popular (Shina Peters 1993). The pop (*Fuji*) music of Kollington Ayinla and Sikiru Ayinde (Barrister) were largely limited to Yoruba folklore and social issues. By the 1980s, however, both Ayinla and Ayinde were producing video versions of their music with erotic female dancers.

By the 1990s, some popular *fuji* musicians such as Abass Akande Obesere were more daring in terms of the vulgar presentation of their music. One of Obesere's most popular songs was a song about a young lady who puts her *orange* (breast) in his mouth. He sings about her lover who has the sweetest *oranges* and describes his *thing* (penis) probing in between her legs to satisfy her. Another song of Obesere is "to sii be" (literarily meaning "urinate there," but in actual fact, the message was "release your sperm in her vagina"). These were the precedent foundations of contemporary vulgar pop music in Nigeria.

Vulgar music is increasingly becoming popular in Nigeria, and this chapter examines St. Janet's and Olamide's vulgar music as dimensions of popular culture with overwhelming fan support.

The child of devout Christians and dedicated teachers, St. Janet started her music career in the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (Church) in Nigeria. She entered the professional music world (Thisday 2012) at the age of 18, when she joined Los Konge's juju band as a back-up artiste. A diploma graduate of the Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Nigeria, St. Janet shot into the pop music limelight in 2010 after the release of her live presentation entitled *Faaji Plus* on CD. St. Janet usually starts her songs with a dimension of gospel presentation and gradually injects vulgarity, though still using popular gospel rhythm. The sexually explicit and lewd nature of her lyrics has attracted the attention of critics and fans alike (Sahara Reporters 2010; Thisday 2012).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that St. Janet's popularity continues to grow and her music sells despite official censorship. St. Janet also answers to other stage names, such as "General Overseer" of St. Bottles' Cathedral (Sinners' Chapel) and Mama *Yabis* (abusive madam) (Thisday 2012). Following the success of *Faaji Plus*, some other live performances by St. Janet were uploaded to social media. Though officially banned, these releases remain in circulation. Due to censorship, St Janet cannot be directly associated with the release of these albums. However, it is noteworthy that these albums promote her and her music, and also garner her enormous credit and financial rewards.

Born in 1989, Olamide Adedeji (Badoo) released his first album, entitled *Rapsodi*, in 2011, while he was still a part-time undergraduate at the Tai Solarin University of Education. The album was an instant hit and Olamide followed it up with other releases. Unlike St. Janet, Olamide's releases that are not sexually explicit are not censored, but the lewd ones are censored on radio and television stations, although they are played in open places. Olamide has received several national music awards, such as the Nigeria Entertainment Award, the Nigeria Music Video Award, and the Headies Award.

### THE NIGERIAN *VULGUS* AND THE CONTEXT OF VULGARITY

This chapter draws on the ethnographic meaning of *vulgus*, which describes a people's social context and symbolic interpretation of social phenomena (Newbold 1976; Dégh 1984; Barry 2008). It is important to note that Nigerian society generally presents a highly religious and moralistic

environment, where vulgarity is usually interpreted in the context of decadence. Vulgarity is negatively sanctioned within Nigeria's social space, and the socialization process also evokes codes of piety and morality. Notwithstanding this, as shown previously, the Nigerian *vulgus* is still receptive to vulgar music. It is grouped within the context of entertainment and relaxation, and, of course, the same "codifying normative authority" that specifies vulgarity within the context of the unacceptable becomes an active or passive audience of vulgar lyrics as entertainment.

The increasing prevalence of vulgar lyrics in Nigeria's popular music is thus a reflection of popular audience approval (both covert and overt) in spite of the explicit normative anti-vulgarity social structure. Vulgar music is thus a special communicative essence that attracts audience attention and approval. It is also to some extent a means of self-expression and sexual autonomy. Specifically, Nigeria's vulgar music describes male and female sexual organs and heterosexual sex in lewd terms, deconstructs the socially imposed normative restrictions, and projects the vulgar subculture into the epicenter and hearing of larger society, with the attendant conscious and unconscious reception by the listening audience. Everyday exposure to vulgar music eventually results in a gradual acceptance by a hitherto objecting public (or *vulgus*). This confirms Railton and Watson's (2005) submission that everyday exposure to vulgar music normalizes its content within an acceptable context, with the likelihood of practical expressions in the subculture.

Music plays a fundamental role in the interpretive construction of a society. It informs class, meanings, and actions with major implications for notions of belongingness, mobility, values, and social behavior. Music consequently occupies an important place in social gratification. In Nigeria, the increasing acceptability of vulgar music as a form of communicative blend reflects the current realities of social deconstruction of vulgarity within the Nigerian audience *vulgus*.

#### JANET OMOTOYOSI AJILORE (ST. JANET)

St. Janet's church socialization is strongly reflected in her songs. As previously stated, her performance begins with Christian songs and subsequently presents vulgar lyrics in popular Christian rhythm. She starts *Faaji Plus* with a popular Christian song that praises the Heavenly Lord,

promising him that his name is wonderful, excellent, and beautiful, and telling the Lord that we worship him because he is mighty, having the whole world in his hands. This introductory lyric presents a serene atmosphere of piety with a sense of spiritual recognition and submission. This is in no way unusual in Nigeria's highly religious social space, where supernatural constructions dominate social and private spaces. Almost every aspect of everyday interactions and social practices are denominated with the recognition of the Supreme Being, who is assumed to have power over life and death and also graciously forgives. Hence, St. Janet recognizes the religious convictions of her secularly sexualized audience, and often starts with some reference to God who has the whole world in His hands and expectedly will overlook and/or forgive all infractions (including those committed through her songs). She also recognizes the strategic socialization of the home and she sings that in a home where both parents are careless alcoholics, the children will become addicted drunks.

From there, St. Janet tells a story of sexual discourse between couples. St. Janet sings of a woman who appreciates the sexual dexterity of her husband in bed. She refers to her dear all-time husband and thanks him for the wonderful job he is doing. She appreciates his wonderful work in her vagina and she thanks him for the daytime muscle (penile penetration). She also thanks her partner for his always erect penis, which is her trust, and she promises him that he deserves all praise. Then the husband describes his hands caressing her breast, while his lips are kissing hers, and his penis is deep inside her, and he asks his partner to let her bum be still.

These lyrics describe sexual enjoyment between couples who are sexually explicit with each other. They present a sexually liberal wife, able to express her tastes and desires with her husband, freed from popular patriarchal constructions that tend to limit female sexual freedom and discourse. Moving on from conjugal sex, St. Janet appeals to the sexual constructions of those men who are aroused by the mere sight of exotic female accessories such as sexy bras and panties. She sings that if he sets his eyes on a lady's triple padded push-up bra, in particular, he will be aroused, and he will also be stimulated if he sets his eyes on G-string.

St. Janet also sings that an extremely erect and strong penis could cause abortion and also warns women that an unwanted pregnancy may result from casual sex. Her song thus promotes male sexuality as symbolizing power and masculinity, and advises women to welcome male advances. Furthermore, St. Janet directs attention to adolescents and young men

asking: “*So si nle?*” (Is your penis still strong and erect?) Her back-up singers answer in the affirmative, and she adds that local aphrodisiacs are available if a man experiences erectile dysfunction. She reveals that her crews have in fact taken a combination of several local aphrodisiacs and are ready for sex orgies. The lyrics end with a mention of her keyboardist, who fondles the breasts of his sex partners like he plays the keyboard.

St. Janet’s music reflects the prevalent oppressed sexuality culture, which is celebrated in the confines even by those who outwardly oppose it. Its vulgar presentations and constructions evoke exotic sexuality among the listening audience, and the spatial exclusiveness of its public presentations in restricted gatherings allows audiences’ expression of sexuality values within the constructed subculture, which would be impossible within the larger “moralizing” culture. Hence, though oppressed and censored, St. Janet’s music still finds its way into the social consciousness through the broad availability of recordings of her shows on social media and the subtle diffusion of receptive sexual culture into wider society.

#### OLAMIDE ADEDEJI (BADOO)

Olamide stands out as one of the most popular pop artists in Nigeria and Africa. Olamide’s sexualized lyrics make his music exceptionally socially lewd. When describing women, he uses several words that can be considered vulgar, raunchy, and sexually explicit. For him, the female body is a “performance site,” an object of entertainment, desire, and pleasure for men. He uses vulgar words to whet men’s appetite to secure women for sexual satisfaction. The dominant themes of his work are the construction of women as sex organs, the idolization of male sexual capability, and the debasement of womanhood. He usually plays out masculine feelings of deep intense admiration and fantasies. Women become objects of “worship,” as a bait to “take these women home.” His music centers on women, with particular reference to all the observable sexual features or attributes that make a woman—boobs, butt, waist, and vagina. This is very significant considering how men feel about the ostensible rhapsodizing and eulogizing that dominate much of Olamide’s lyrics.

Although the majority of his songs incline toward adoration, praise, and making women prominent, they in fact create a false pretense of empowerment, serving only to secure the woman for the man’s satisfaction and fulfillment. Here we report lyrics from three of Olamide’s hit

vulgar songs. “Falila K’etan” describes Olamide’s urge to have sexual intercourse with a consenting female, “Story for the Gods” expresses his antics aimed at convincing a lady to have sex, while “Kin nma la’di” disdains oral sex. In “Falila K’etan”, Olamide sings about a woman called Falila, who has huge hips and whose skirt is seductive. He sings about his wish to be on top of her and sample (caress and/or ‘finger’) her, yearning to have pleasure with her, all over her. He also sings explicitly about his wish to have penile penetration and ejaculate.

He further depicts sexual relations with a reluctant female in “Story for the Gods,” after he has taken the *dongoyaro* local aphrodisiac. He sings about his illicit desire to have sex. He explains to listeners that his partner says that she cannot wait because it is getting too late and she wants to faint. He considers that as a story for the gods. He sings about his partner, who says that she is in trouble because her lover has broken her hands and her back. Nevertheless, he sings about his yearning to marry her.

She gently declines his sexual advances, with the alibi that it is late and she must go home. He persists and dismisses her alibi as a story for the gods. As he penetrates her and she reaches orgasm, she screams in pleasure and pain; he ignores her pains as a story for the gods, but promises her marriage at the end. This scenario depicts the disadvantaged position of most African and Nigerian females in intimate relationships (both conjugal and non-conjugal), who lack power over their sexuality in their relations with sexual partners. Thus, “rape” is normatively absent in marriage and non-conjugal intimate relationship. Besides, just as Olamide mentioned, the promise of marriage is a soothing consolation for a female whose sexual rights have been infringed. Also, Olamide rejects oral sex in “Ki nma la’di,” singing that to lick, eat, and suck a vagina is dirty and disgusting. He notes that when he set his eyes on Kemi’s buttocks, he asked her to date him. The woman asked if he just wants sex and if he is sure that he can handle her. The woman asks if he wants to see her nakedness, raises her vagina, and he raises his penis. He sings that she thanked him for the pleasurable sex, saying that his penis is pleasantly huge. He adds that after eating his banana (sucking his penis), he wants anal sex, but she asks him to lick her pussy. Then he tells her no because it is disgusting. In this song, the predisposing normative environment grants the male partner overriding power in sexual relations, to the disadvantage of the female partner

Olamide sang “Ki nma la’di” with two other co-artists, Phyno and Lil Kesh.

## CONCLUSION

Janet Omotoyosi Ajilore's (St. Janet) and Olamide Adedeji's (Badoo) vulgar music are reflections of subtle liberal heterosexual preference of the Nigerian audience. Though normatively frowned at and censored, the popularity of vulgar songs among the Nigerian *vulgus* testifies to its covert and overt acceptability. The content and context of Nigeria's vulgar popular music celebrate male sexual mischievousness, escapades, and capabilities as symbols of erotic dexterity, authority, and dominance.

The female partner is seen as a symbol of sexual pleasure, possessing limited rights. The female's refusal of sex is seen as surmountable with a little persuasion, boosted by the promise of partner faithfulness and eventual conjugal commitment. The male gender is the lord whose pleasures must be satisfied, while that of the female is subject to her male partner's normative constructions.

These vulgar songs speak a reality that is overtly suppressed and confined to normative privacy and secrecy. St. Janet's and Badoo's songs are popular despite censorship because they depict the sexual reality of not just a subculture, but also of the dominant culture, whose discourse is normatively restricted.

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