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Subverting Women's Subjugation in West African Society: The Roles of Popular Music

ABSTRACT. Women's subjugation is a common phenomenon especially in African society. This is due to numerous factors which including religion, culture among others. This has facilitated scholars to document literature relating to gender equality in African society. Within the framework of Feminist theory, this paper discusses the issue of women's subjugation in West African societies and the roles played by popular musicians and their music in subverting this phenomenon. The methodology includes oral interviews, the textual analysis of the selected discography and the review of relevant literature. Findings reveals that text of the selected songs campaign against misconception and intimidation of women by the society, gender equality to social life, regard for women, motivation for gender equality, financial empowerment and better life for women and gender equality for Political leadership role. This paper concludes that apart from the fact that music is an ubiquitous phenomenon which covers every aspect of lives of the African people, popular music, being an integral part of popular culture of a society, has been used as an impactful medium through which women's subjugation in different West African societies have been subverted to an extent. This is because of its high rate of patronage and ability to reach larger number of audience through the mass media. The paper therefore recommends that government through the Federal Ministry for Women's Affairs and other corporate organizations for women's liberation should partner with popular musicians in creating awareness and promoting the campaign against women's subjugation the West African society.

KEYWORDS: women, subjugation, African society, equality, music

Introduction

Women, especially in African society are found to be the major contributor to the growth and development of the society. The integration of the societal traditions, cultural values and norms are informally transmitted into a child by the mother and other women in the society. Apart from this, women play significant role in building, sustaining and management

of home in every family. Therefore, it is important to note that well-being or welfare of a woman will invariably promote peace and development of the family and the society at large.

However, since the primitive period, women subjugation either by the society or men, has been recorded to be a universal phenomenon. This has manifested in form of restriction of women from some part of social life, domestic violence against women by men, underemployment of women for jobs, which has deprived most women from being financially independent. Some religions like Christianity and Islam through the doctrine in their Holy Scriptures, subjugate women in favour of men, thereby serves as spiritual basis for gender inequality in the society. This explains why women are not allowed to occupy some spiritual positions in these two religious worship places.

In Africa, culture has being one of the major factor militating against women's liberation and empowerment. Most cultures in Africa have little regards or placement for women especially when it comes to decision/policy making in the society. Most tradition in West Africa does not give equal liberty to women as men. Due to this factor, most Africans perceives woman as less superior being to men. Until about five decades ago, Hausa and Fulani women in the Northern part of Nigeria, are neither given privilege to have access to school education nor allowed to work. Similarly, the culture of the Igbo people from, Eastern part of Nigeria prohibits women or a girl child from benefitting from family inheritance because it regards women as less significant to the family due to the fact that a girl child will get married to a man outside their own family; and form part of another family within the same or different society.

According to Moodley et al. (2019) Africa lags behind other regions on progress towards gender equality in society, which we define using three elements: essential services and enablers of economic opportunity; legal protection and political voice; and physical security and autonomy Africa has not done a good job of providing essential services such as healthcare and education. According to them:

The continent has the highest average rates of maternal mortality and unmet need for family planning in the world. One key to unlocking economic opportunities for women is ensuring that they have access to finance, but that access has actually declined over the past four years. Some African countries have made some progress on getting women into influential positions in politics, but even here gender inequality remains extremely high as it is around the world. (Moodley et al., 2019)

In concordant with the above assertion. It is realized that despite the western education which brought about modern civilization to many African countries, women are still marginalized especially by men in the society. Some men believe that they are the 'bread-winner' in the family and therefore men should be the ones going out to source for income for the family; while the women's business is to stay back at home taking care of the children. This situation makes women to be financially dependent on their husbands and this sometimes resulted into social restriction and maltreatment of the women by their husbands. This explains the major cause of all domestic violence between couples or spouses.

Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor, illiterate and unemployed. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely not to be in groups which will offer them the opportunity to be economically sound and politically active (State of World Population, 2005). The obsession of this paper therefore, is to examine and discuss the various issues of women's subjugation and its pretext in African societies as well as to identify and highlight the roles played by popular musicians through the text content of their music and their impact in subverting this phenomenon among the people of Africa.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the nature of this research work, Feminist theory shall be the premise for discourse in this study. The feminist theories speak against women oppression and inequality and projects women liberation and self-empowerment. Feminist theorists have argued and are still arguing that Western feminism derived much of its inspiration from Africa. Women in Africa have suffered severe conditions such as growing and harvesting crops on farmlands during pregnancy, as well as fetching water and logs of wood with children strapped to their backs during nursing with little or no help from their husbands or guardians.

Women, in general, have endured emphatic stigmatization and oppression in their homes and elsewhere. Education had been the male child's birth-right, with the enforcement of domestic duties on the girl child growing into womanhood with the conception of being the weaker sex not only in physical strength but also in the psyche. In many societies, especially in Africa, man's acknowledgement of the input and contributions of

women on the growth of the economy, family, and nation as a whole is still farfetched.

Brereton (2001) argued that feminism refers to the recognition of the misrepresentation of females, both in actual public life and within, media representations and uses their writings to articulate and respond to such ideological effects. According to her, this ideology refers to the public opinion perpetuated by the powerful in the society and sustained by a public structure that seems normal and cultural in essence. Essentially most deep-seated patriarchal societies strive on this kind of attitude where tradition and identity are constructed based on erroneously enthroned myths in private cultures. (Brereton, 2001). It is therefore it is worthy to note that what feminism does for popular music like any other performing arts is, to interrogate the quality of representation of women's right through the text or lyric content of the music produced.

Uwah et al. (2016) theorized that feminism is a liberating movement that upholds the fundamental rights of women as global citizens not merely left at the back and call of men folk. Uwah et al. stated further that 'since all persons are grouped male and female genders and most society have the tendency to treat women as second class citizens after men, this ideology advocates for equality and equity between men and women in the society. This calls for the reappraisal of some of the political, socio-religious and the traditional cultural concepts about women's position especially in the African society.

According to Gloria Fwangyil (2012) women are subjected to male oppression and suppression at various stages of life. Unfortunately, female oppression is deeply ingrained in the culture of the societies which ensures the continuation of patriarchal control. This situation makes it impossible for women to seek ways of liberating themselves because doing so will be tantamount to challenging the age long tradition and customs of the people.

In concordant with Fwangyil's assertion, Ezenwanebe (2005) Feminist consciousness is the awareness of the social and cultural oppression of women and their consequent struggle for liberation. Feminism is the political label for this consciousness. The history of feminism is the history of women resistance and opposition to patriarchy. It is an ideology in art and life that resists "patriarchy" and challenges "the female essence". Ezewanebe stated further that, Womanism is feminism in African context. It is a political ideology that sums up the African women's quest for emancipation within the framework of non-oppressive African culture. According to her:

It not only fight against all forms of crimes against womanhood but also seeks for ways to empower women to break through the socio-cultural walls erected to suppress and marginalize women. Womanism calls for a re-examination and a deconstruction of some African cultural histories, traditional practices and social values and norms in the light of the realities of modern time (Ezenwanebe, 2005).

The application and implication of feminist theory in musicological study implies that in the study of music, which is the most common form of art that covers day to day activities of people, it is imperative to be conscious of its effects on, and the activities of both genders in musical practices in the society. Therefore, musicians especially the popular musicians are part of, and the most patronized by the popular society. The popular musicians through their music, reflects the situation of the societal situation because they serves as the mirror of the society. Since music have been identify as one of the most powerful and effective means for communication and transformation, It is therefore necessary to investigate and highlight the activities and roles of their popular musicians in campaign against gender inequality and efforts in subverting women's subjugation in order to buoy up women emancipation in the African society.

Common Issues of Women's Subjugation in West Africa

Women's subjugation are perpetrated in many ways in West Africa. This is largely due to the influence of varied socio-religious, cultural beliefs and norms that governs each society. In regards to gender roles, Adinkrah (2015) observed among the Ghanaians that the traditional roles played by women are majorly domestic. These includes activities such as cooking, raising children, catering for family guests, laundering and performing other household chores. On the other hand, men's roles are predicated on their responsibilities as heads of the household, security providers, and primary economic sources of the family.

In sequel to the above observation, Boateng (2016) stressed that as children, girls are taught to regard men and boys as stronger, wiser, and more responsible, while boys are accordingly taught to lead, exert control, and be assertive in their social encounters. Similarly, boys are advised against fighting girls, because the average girl is considered to be physically weaker than the average boy; however, a boy who loses a fight to a girl is considered to be less of a man, or a "weak" boy. Any deviation from these

gender perceptions is met with varying degrees of confrontation from the community such as name-calling, stigmatization, and physical violence. According to him Boateng:

A boy whose lifestyle deviates from these expectations is given derogatory names such as “kojo-basia,” meaning ‘man-woman,’ and a “weak boy is often called “obaa-ba” meaning ‘a woman’s child’. Similarly, a woman who veers from the expected feminine roles into domains prescribed for men is branded “obaa-kokonin,” (a female cock), “obaa-barima” (tom boy) or “obaa gengen” (a wild woman) (Boateng, 2016, p. 25).

Other common forms of women’s subjugation among the Igbo people of Nigeria, according to Ibemere (an informant), is when a woman give birth to only female child without a male child, such woman and her daughters have nothing to inherit from the man’s property after the death of her husband. This situation have subjected many widow into serious hardship that had led some to their early death. Also, women who had lost her husband has no right to collect items brought, and the dowry paid on her female child (ren) by her in-laws. Everything belongs to the male family members of her husband.

According to Ofagbe (oral interview), culturally, among the Isoko people of Delta State Nigeria, while the grooms are exempted, brides are subjected to take an oath before the gods of the land as part of the marriage rites, never to engage in an extra-marital affair after marriage. It is believed that doing such will afflict spiritual calamity upon the woman. Also, Among the Hausa-speaking people Northern Ghana, while men move freely and interact with other women in the society, Musa (an informant) explain that man can divorce his wife just verbally and it is uphold in the society. He also stressed that women’s movement are restricted on the street. Their tradition doesn’t permit them to have free interaction with their husband’s male visitors unless they are invited by their husbands.

Mgbo (Oral interview) explained that among the Ogu people of Republic of Benin, Women are subjected to do harder work than men. Ogu women are more engaged in more tedious and risky jobs than men. They are subjected by their husbands to do businesses like smuggling, farming, sales of cooked foods and retail sales of petroleum. Ogu women are saddled with financial responsibilities of taking care of their husband and children. Only few men engaged in motor and motorcycle transportation, while many others lazy ones depends on their wives for survival.

Another is the religious doctrines and practices in West Africa. There are three major religions embraced by the people of West Africa. These includes, Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. Since the advent of Christianity and the establishment of the first Church by the Christian Missionary Mission (CMS) in Nigeria in 1842, no female Bishop have been ordained by any Church denomination in Nigeria. Also the position of Imam and Sheik in Islam are mainly for men only in all West African countries. Equally when Islamic religion permits men to marry up to four wives, women are not allowed to marry more than one husband. The traditional African religion also subjugate women in different African society in different ways. One of them, according to Aileru (an informant) is that apart from few ritual worship and dance, Yoruba women in Nigeria are allowed to wear *Egungun's* (masquerade) mask during *Egungun* festival or take part in *Oro* cultism because women are forbidden from witnessing *Oro*.

Other forms of women's subjugation in West Africa includes, girl-child's deprivation from having education, which is common among the Hausa people of different countries in West Africa. Also, the issue of rape and domestic violence against women by their husband is another form of violence against women, which women are usually at the disadvantage because they are culturally victimized by the society. While some men only allow their wives to do petty trading around their homes and communities, others do not allow their wives to engage in any employment or business, thereby making them to be financially dependent on their husbands. All these and so many other factors contributed to the reason for women's subjugation in African society.

Popular Songs for Subverting Women's Subjugation in West Africa

Popular music in West Africa could be described as music recorded on tapes, CDs or VCDs for commercial purposes. They include music performed for all social and entertainment purposes which is the performance and dance is open to everyone irrespective of social class, age, race and religion. Similarly, Ekwueme (2008) described popular music as music that is enjoyed and appreciated by many people. It is social dance music for people across age, sex, class, and ethnic barriers. Similarly, Okafor (2005) in a sharp contrary, describes popular music as socially entertaining and dance music oriented music with broad, immediate and implicitly transient appeal,

which draws its core clientele from urban dwellers, adding that ‘It is understood and accepted by a lot of people not as a final solution to their problems, but as a tropical of their sentiments and current worldview.

It is significantly necessary if one want to adequately assess and investigate the representations and subversion of women’s subjugation in popular music to pay close attention to the text content and theme of the songs by popular musicians. The popular musicians that are conscious of issues of gender inequality and the women’s subjugation plays social roles in subverting the phenomenon through their song lyrics of music which addresses and condemn the different areas and form of women’s subjugation in West African society which shall be discussed subsequently.

Misconception and Intimidation of Women by the Society

The misconception of female child as weak and less important gender by the people, especially in African society have resulted into women being intimidated with insults and condemnation by everybody in the society. When there is inability of a family to produce children or the family becomes poor due to many factors, the women are blamed by the family to be responsible. Even when the family produce a child with unruly behaviour or with low intellectual capacity, the family always conceive such child as true replica of his or her mother. At time, such child is regarded to be a bastard. This serves as insults and intimidation to women. Some popular music were produced to create awareness and correct this misconceptions and intimidation. Songs in this category include the song titled ‘Woman’ by Simi in the album titled TBA. The song goes thus:

Pidgin English	Translation
Woman don suffer oh	Women have suffered
L’owo everybody	in the hands of everybody
Suffer suffer for world (amen)	Subjected to suffering while alive
Enjoy for heaven	with the hopes to enjoy in heaven
Man no like woman	Men don’t respect women
Woman no like woman	Women too don’t respect women
She no be like water (water, e no get enemy)	She is not like water that has no enemy

<i>If woman never marry oh (then she no be woman)</i>	A single lady is not being respected
<i>If woman never carry omo (she no be woman)</i>	No regard for a woman yet to have a child
<i>If she no get man for side oh</i>	If she is not known with any spouse.
<i>Dem go dey push woman aside oh</i>	She will be disregarded by the people
<i>And eventually oh</i>	and eventually
<i>Dem go suffer suffer woman</i>	Women will be maltreated by people.

In the song above, Simi, the female Nigerian musician highlighted the different ways in which the Nigerian women are being subjugated in the society which calls for need for change and women liberation and empowerment in the society.

Gender Equality to Social Life

One of the most common forms of women's subjugation addressed by popular music in West Africa is the issue gender equality to social life. It is a common practice to condemn women found drinking and dancing in night-clubs, hotels, beer shops and other places of relaxation without their husband present with them. Any woman found in such places for relaxation are tagged as 'Asewo' (prostitutes) whereas, men patronizes dance clubs and beer shops without their wives present with them. Some men are also in the habit of attending those places with their girlfriends or mistresses. A Nigerian popular juju musician, Sunny Ade addressed this in his song title 'E Mase Bu Awon Sisi Omoge' in the album titled 'Ja Funmi' where he sang thus:

Yoruba Language

E mase bu awon sisi omoge

E mase bu awon sisi omoge

Sisi l'amuludun, Omoge lo l'ariya

Translation

Stop condemning the socialite ladies

Stop condemning the socialite ladies

Ladies are the spice of all social merriments

In the song above, the musician tries to subvert women's subjugation by advocating for equal gender right to social life. The music explains the essence of women in social life of men in the society. Therefore, the society

needs to be sensitized about the fact women that are socialites, found in relaxation centers during their leisure time are not necessarily a slot or a prostitute.

Regard for Women

Women disrespect by men is another way in which women have been subjugated in the West African society. Many cultures have little or no regard for women and they are regarded as second class citizens or weaker sex. Therefore, the view of women in societal issues and discussions are less required and regarded. The disrespect for women in West African society have thereby contributed to women's abuse sexually, physically or emotionally by men.

However, some popular musicians made effort in subverting this women's type of subjugation by releasing album with song lyrics to create the awareness on the situation and to encourage women to be courageous to repel disrespect from men and the society. A Republic of Benin born Afro-pop musician, Angelica Kidjo in collaboration with Yemi Alade in her song, titled 'Dignity' advocates for respect for women by singing thus:

Dignity, can save you or kill you
Dignity, I wanna hold on to you
Dignity, can hurt you or heal you
Dignity, I wanna hold on to you
Were you dey yesterday?

When the gunman shoot men down?
No retreat, no surrender
If them push you, no fall down
Many come, many go
We no dey sleep, we dey for road
We come in peace
Not in pieces

O yeah, yeah, Oga
Respect is reciprocal, is reciprocal
Respect is reciprocal
My Oga, oh-oh-oh
Respect is reciprocal, is reciprocal
Respect is reciprocal.

The song is used in conveying the message to men in the society that women deserves some level of respect from men because respect beget respect. Respect for women is expected to reciprocate some respect from women to men in return. Therefore, mutual respect between all genders in the society will lead to smooth and peaceful co-existence of people in the society.

Motivation for Gender Equality

Since the awareness and commencement of campaign against women's subjugation in the world society by government, different world organizations, corporate bodies and institutions, effort have been made to sensitize, remind and motivate women for quest for gender equality in any community they find themselves. The need for motivation is that many women in some part of the world especially in Africa are still being subjected and afraid of their traditions and religious conception about women which placed men as a superior gender ahead of women. One example of songs for motivation for gender equality is the song titled 'Strong Girl' by eight top female artists from across Africa, Victoria Kimani, from Kenya, Vanessa Mdee, from Tanzania, Arielle T, from Gabon, Gabriela, from Mozambique, Judith Sephuma, from South Africa, Waje, from Nigeria, Selmor Mtukudzi, from Zimbabwe, Yemi Alade, from Nigeria and 14-year-old South African rapper called Blessing. The following is a lyrics excerpt from the song:

English translation

African baby, American lady
It doesn't matter where you're from, you're a strong lady
Chai, Asian baby, Australian *Sisi* (ladies)
The time has come to take our place as strong ladies
Coz we are strong, ayo
If we come together we can rule the world, yeah yeah
If you hit a woman, ayo
You hit a rock
Together we are stronger

Chorus

Anywhere you are
Show the world that you're a strong girl
Say you're a strong girl
Strong girl

We face different situations and different problems
 But we are resilient, I refuse to give in
 It's now time to empower the woman,
 because when you empower a woman,
 you have empowered the nation.
 We are the future
 The hope of a blessed world
 Here and everywhere
 We are the bearers of life
 Let's say it out loud, it's time to express ourselves
 Let's uplift women around the world.

The lyrics of the music contains words that sensitized, remind and motivate and encourage the ladies and women around the world to be strong and confident in themselves in order to get themselves liberated from being subjugated by other gender.

Empowerment and Better Life for Women

Zahidi (2005) in his study on Women's empowerment in relations to measuring the global gender assert that in the light of heightened international awareness on gender issues, it is a disturbing reality that no country has yet managed to eliminate the increasing gender gap. Several countries that do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their societies are misallocating their human resources and undermining their competitive potential in their developmental quest.

In this regards, some musicians through their song lyrics sang to enlighten the society on the need to subvert women's subjugation by giving the women, especially widows the opportunity to gain access to employment or empowering them financially for economic independence in order to foster general development of the society. Popular songs that that lyrics that represent and support women's empowerment for better life of the women includes Ebenezer Obey's song titled 'Better life for Women' in the album titles 'Womanhood' where he sings thus:

Pidgin English

*If you see a woman,
 make you treat am betta o
 If you treat am betta,
 e go betta for you*

Translation

If you have women around,
 try to treat them well
 If you treat them well,
 it will be well with you

<i>I support better life</i>	I support women's empowerment
<i>for my mama na woman</i>	because my mother is a woman
<i>I support better life</i>	I support women's empowerment
<i>for my wife na woman</i>	because my wife is a woman
<i>Softly, softly make you treat am betta</i>	handle them with care and treat them well

The song above was recorded by Ebenezer Obey to advocate for support of the Better Life for Rural Women Programme initiated by the Nigerian government in 1987. The programme was set up to empower widows and other single parents in Nigeria for them to be economically and financially independent and self-reliant.

Gender Equality in Political Leadership Roles

Generally in Africa, men dominate politics and this is evident in number of political positions occupied by men in governance especially in West Africa. This is as result of the African's conception that female gender are weaker sex and should be dominated by men. This is because they believe the leadership roles in homes, communities, state and country is solely the responsibility of men. Also, it has been observed that most women in politics are single ladies who are believed to have limitless freedom and access to other men in politics.

There is a popular notion in West Africa that women in politics are financially desperate and liable to being lured into extra-marital sexual engagements with rich politicians due to financial gains, political relevance and other opportunities. This is corroborated by a popular statement among the Igbo people of Nigeria that says: '*Onye nachoghi olulu nwunye-wa ozo, Gwa nwunyeya banye ndoro ochichi*'. Meaning 'He who is not interested in marrying his wife again should allow her to join politics.'

Shina Peters, a popular juju musician in Nigeria released a song track 'Give Our Women Chance' in the Album titled 'Shinamania' to advocate for gender equality in political leadership roles. The lyrics of the song says thus:

English/Pidgin English

Na wah ooooo Na wah for Nigerian men (Nigerian men are too fond of dominating women)

Give our women chance to talk o

Give our women chance to rule

Go to India, na women dey rule

Go to England woman ruled them before
Great Britain, Philippine, Nicaragua na woman dey rule
Na wah ooooo, ooooo, ooooo
African women get knowledge
African women are sensible
They are beautiful, ooooo, ooooo (and so on)

The song above serves as an awareness and appeal to men in Africa not to subjugate but rather, to create rooms for women's participation in political affairs of their country and gender equality in political leadership roles. This is because political knowledge and intelligence as well as leadership responsibilities has no gender barrier.

Conclusion

Since the inception of campaign against gender equality and women subjugation, government, different world organizations and corporate bodies around the world have for several decades been making financial commitment towards rehabilitating, empowering and supporting women especially the widows, internally displaced women (IDW) due to war or domestic violence or social rejection. The effort towards subverting women's subjugation in Africa has achieve remarkable success especially in West African countries despite western education and civilization. This is as a result of religious and concepts of women in the society. However, the impact of postmodernism on both popular culture and popular music in West Africa has contributed tremendously to the women's liberation from gender inequality and women's subjugation.

This paper concludes that apart from the fact that music is an ubiquitous phenomenon which covers every aspect of lives of the African people, popular music, being a genre that is widely accepted and patronized by popular culture in the society, has been used as an impactful medium through which women's subjugation in different West African societies have been subverted to an extent. This is because of its high rate of patronage and ability to reach larger number of audience through the mass media. The paper therefore recommends that government through the Federal Ministry for Women's Affairs and other corporate organizations for women's liberation should form partnership with popular musicians, in creating awareness and promoting the campaign against gender inequal-

ity and the subversion of women's subrogation the African society. This is inevitable for national economic growth and human development among the West African countries.

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Sunny Ade (1982) 'Ema Se Bu Awon Sisi Omoge' in album "Ja Funmi". Island Records.

ORAL INTERVIEWS

S/N	Name	Age	Occupation/ Position	Address	Date of Interview
1	Chief (Dr) Gbeminiyi Aileru	55	Traditional Doctor/ Chief priest	Itun-Idesun's Compound, Egbe	January 6, 2022
2	Mallam Musa	65	Security officer	Bankale Estate, Ijebu Ode, Nigeria	January 6, 2022
3	Mrs Comfort Ofagbe	50	Trader	Flat 45, Jakande Estate Isolo, Lagos	February 14, 2022
4	Kortin Mgbo	52	Trader	Agboku marche, Republic of Benin	February 15, 2022
5	Miss Loveline Ibemere	46	Teacher	No. 76, Owbeh Street Awoyaya Lagos	March 5, 2022