
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 14:6 June 2014
ISSN 1930-2940

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Negotiating Globalization through Hybridization: Hip Hop, Language Use and the Creation of Cross-Over Culture in Nigerian Popular Music

Wale Adedeji, Ph.D.

Abstract

The process of globalization has been of a tremendous impact on African societies while the status-quo of expressive cultures have obviously not remained the same due to this factor with popular music gradually becoming homogenized to fit into the western stereotypes. The Nigerian popular music has been greatly influenced by the dictates and progression in the international scene due to global communication and cultural flows as exemplified by the popularity and proliferation of hip hop culture among the youths from the 1990s.

It is quite evident that English is more or less the official language of popular music while the glorification and promotion of foreign music styles especially hip hop and its cultural

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expressions is almost making the local music practices less fashionable. This paper explores the Nigerian popular music practice through the current mainstream hip hop and identifies how its practitioners have successfully formulated a sub-genre dubbed ‘Afro hip hop’ through hybridization whereby African identity is portrayed and maintained by asserting linguistic independence with the use of Nigerian languages as medium of delivery through code-switching. This is also followed by appropriating indigenous popular music style especially *fùjì* and *highlife* to create a fusion that appeals to home-grown sensibilities while still subscribing to the global hip hop community. This paper reveals the effectiveness of ‘Afro hip hop’ as hybrid music and how it is being used as a strategy of resistance towards seemingly popular music homogenization brought about by globalization.

Keywords: *Popular music and identity, Hip hop, Code-switching, Globalization, Nigeria, Hybridism.*

Introduction

Globalization, in its simplest meaning, ‘refers to a world in which societies, cultures, politics and economies have in some sense come together’ (Kiely 1998: 3). This implies that the world has been brought together as an entity through varieties of ways where it is now possible to look at the same thing at the same time in a synchronised manner irrespective of location. This can further be seen as interconnectivity of people and activities at the highest level notwithstanding the distance or regional boundaries, brought about by technological development through the internet, transportation, or exchange of information via satellite broadcast. However taking a critical look at this phenomenon from another perspective one can sense an undertone of dominance and hegemony: did the whole world actually want to be homogenized? Or are there some powerful forces determining trends and events elsewhere?

Nigerian Popular Music

The Nigerian popular music over the years has been greatly influenced by conditions in the international scene as evidenced by the popularity of hip hop a global phenomenon that has gradually become a dominant culture and subculture across the world. However, in discussing globalization and popular music one cannot but look at the angle of ‘cultural

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imperialism' and 'popular music homogenization' which has been closely linked to this interconnectivity. According to Turino (2000:6) 'the contemporary language of globalism rhetorically and ideologically links a particular cultural aggregate (modernist capitalism) to the totalised space of the globe, leaving people with alternative life ways no place to be and nowhere to go'. This is an indication that the proliferation, dissemination and dominance of a particular (stronger) culture over the weaker ones, if left unrestricted and uncurbed, can be inimical to the growth and development of the local cultures and in this perspective musical practices.

Hip Hop Music Outside America

The proliferation of hip hop music outside America and especially in the third world is a clear indication of international cultural flow and potency of globalization which is almost making the local music practices less fashionable. There has been an incubation period for rap music in Africa in the 1980s being projected by gross imitation of its American source while in the 1990s African rappers became comfortable in their skin and thereafter reached a level of maturity and urgency as portrayed among others by an influx of documentary films across the continent from Kenya to Ghana, South Africa to Tanzania and Senegal to Burkina Faso, each 'making compelling cases for how the genre has become one of the most relevant cultural forms of expression for African youth[s]' (Charry, 2012:1).

Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture in Nigeria

This surge and thirst for Rap music and hip hop culture facilitated the establishment of MTV Base Africa in 2005 and also the incorporation of MTV Africa Music Awards (MAMA) which is now a yearly event. In Nigeria, the extent of the global influence on local music practice cannot be over-emphasised as it remains a powerful force that has pushed the hip hop genre to the mainstream while also shaping the existing styles. Here music practitioners are persistently pushing the boundary while constantly negotiating the terrain through compromise. The Nigerian musician is now caught in a dilemma over how to remain relevant in the local context despite the continuous longing and subscription of his audience for foreign culture and lifestyle.

Background to Nigeria's Hip hop

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Hip hop and all its associated culture is now a phenomenon which is standing in the forefront of Nigeria's popular music with a unique style emanating from Lagos which is also gaining global recognition. The presence and dynamism of artists as well as music industry apparatus involved in promoting the culture have also been receiving commentaries. Reuben Abati (2009) in *The Guardian* attested to the popularity and strength of hip hop in Nigeria, noting that 'they [hip hop artists] are so successful... [while] Nollywood [Nigeria's movie industry] has projected Nigeria; the next big revelations are hip hop... Nigeria's hip hop is bringing the country so much international recognition'.

In the same vein, Tony Okoroji a former president of PMAN (Performing Musician Association of Nigeria), also attested to the resilience and strength of the hip hop artists, saying 'they are professionals creating a positive identity for the Nigerian nation at this point under terrible conditions and without any contributions from our national treasury, these young Nigerians have done what had appeared impossible a few years ago... They restored our dignity by ensuring that when you come to Nigeria the music you hear on the airwaves... [is] predominantly created by Nigerians' (Okoroji 2009).

The trend and the popularity of Nigerian hip hop can be traced back to the 1990s with the release of 'Sakomo' (1998), a song blended in Yorùbá and English on a sampled beat of MC Lyte's 'Keep on keeping on' by a group called The Remedies, consisting of the trio of Tony Tetuila, Eedris Abdulkareem and Eddy Brown. The success of this song as a radio release with the later release of a full album by Kennis Music paved the way for what was to be a redefinition of Nigeria's music industry and the birth of a unique style of hip hop that is fully Nigerianised which would later be known as 'Afro hip hop', a musical sub-culture that was a product of the socio-political and economic situation in Nigeria at that period.

Military Rule and Music Business

The second phase of military rule began in Nigeria in 1983 with the seizure of power from Alh. Sheu Shagari the then elected executive president by the duo of General Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon. The country has been under military rule (first phase) from 1966 to 1979 while the military take-over of 1983 was to eventually end in 1999 and it was within this

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period (which witnessed different successive military governments due to incessant coups) that many changes took place in the country's economy which vitally affected the business sector among which is the entertainment industry. The country was wallowing in external debt and in 1986 introduced the Structural Adjusted Programme (SAP) with strict economic measures accompanied by devaluation of the currency. Capturing this period of Nigerian history Falola and Heaton wrote:

Devaluation of the currency brought with it rapid inflation and a decrease in the purchasing power of the average Nigerian. The Naira which stood at ₦1 = \$1 in 1985 fell to ₦4.21 to the dollar in 1988, ₦7.48 in 1989, ₦22 by 1994. The inflation rate stood at between 40 and 70 per cent from about 1988 to 1995 and per capita income declined from estimated \$778 in 1985 to just \$105 in 1989 making it difficult for people to afford basic necessities such as food, clothing electricity, health care, education and anything else that cost money. (2008: 219)

This serious economic crisis led to the collapse of most businesses while the music industry was not spared, and there began an exodus of major international labels like Polygram, EMI, and Sony Music while the indigenous independent labels that were hitherto vibrant became moribund. Most artists were finding it very difficult to survive due to low patronage and as the economy put pressure on people the country started witnessing mass migration. This exodus of professionals also affected Nigerian established artists who found it difficult to survive due to the economy and exit of major labels. There began a migration of Nigerian artists into the diaspora in search of greener pastures along with other experienced professionals, where big players in the music industry like Mandators, Majek Fashek, Mike Okri and Ras Kimono left Lagos in quick succession creating a huge vacuum in the industry.

Entry and Growth of Hip Hop

Hip hop came on board at this period in Nigeria's music and cultural history, filling the interregnum and satisfying people's desire to listen to something new, global but with the local ingredient. The success of hip hop is also connected to the development of computer-aided

music technology which made its inroad into Lagos around this time, making it easy and cheap to make music. As there were fewer labels around ready to bankroll or sign an artist, an average aspiring Nigerian artist during this lull resorted to the art of DIY, making music with sampled beats and producing promotional radio releases on CDs whose subsequent air-play on radio encouraged a proliferation of hip hop songs on the charts.

The growth of hip hop around this time can then be seen as a bridge and a form of expression by the youth taking advantage of the digital technology and finding a way of reacting to the prevalent socio-economic impoverishment by having a sense of connectivity with their counterparts in North America, where hip hop has been used as a weapon by the marginalized social class and a mouthpiece of expressive and militant advocacy. According to Ugor ‘through their music young artists now criticize the political class for the failure of the state, the collapse of the economy, and the absence of basic infrastructure such as electricity, good roads, decent housing and an efficient health care system’ (2009: 66).

Nigeria’s Afro Hip hop as a Sub-genre

Nigeria’s Afro hip hop can be classified as a variant of America’s hip hop which is already a global phenomenon, while Afro hip hop’s indigenization and uniqueness in style has earned it a place on the world stage. The uniqueness of Afro hip hop lies in its language of delivery giving it a distinctive characteristic as ‘the real ingenuity is revealed in the use of pidgin English blended nicely with Yorùbá, Igbo, Hausa or any other language to produce melodies just as nice as any of the foreign ones we have craved all these years’ (Ebele 2006).

Music – Tool to Create Identity

Scholars have observed that music is a tool towards the creation of an identity (Euba 1989), and this is true of Nigeria’s Afro hip hop, in its creation of a unique sound that is truly African in style and language of delivery. According to Eedris Abdulkareem, a foremost rapper ‘you don’t have to rap in English, nobody’s gonna feel you, I wanna rap in broken [Nigerian Pidgin English], Yorùbá and Ibo’ (BBC 1-Xtra 2008). Hip hop is being re-defined by Nigerian artists and taken back to Africa which has been credited as its origin.

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Looking at the progression of hip hop in Nigeria, it has been rightly observed that in the past:

Many [artists] have tried, unsuccessfully, to mimic the lyrics, beats and sounds of American hip hop. Some would rap in English, not necessarily the language they were most at ease with. Others would adopt fake American accents and use slangs that originated from America's inner cities but bore little resemblance to the reality of modern Nigerian life... It is not surprising that [these] Nigerian urban artists soon found themselves ridiculed as poor imitators of American hip hop. (Adesioye 2009)

Foreign and Incomprehensible?

Perhaps in reaction to this rejection and lack of patronage in the formative years when Nigeria's hip hop was still looking for acceptance while the culture was beclouded with rejection as being too foreign and incomprehensible. This propelled young Nigerian hip hop artists to make a change of agenda by going back to their roots in order to engage with their audience directly in the language they understand, the Nigerian mother tongues, while also appropriating elements from the existing popular music genres like jùjú, fújì or highlife. The result is that Nigerian hip hop has become the mainstream music in the country while its presence is being felt internationally. Nigeria's Afro hip hop can now be distinguished by its use of a blend of native languages termed in the linguistic parlance as 'conventional code switching' and also the absence of heavy sexualisation, misogyny and gangsterism that has been a major criticism of North America's hip hop culture. Here the use of multilingualism and code switching is a major peculiarity that gave Afro hip hop its unique Nigerian identity and originality.

Code-switching as Expression of Identity

Hip hop as an expressive art is heavily dependent on narratives which originate from experiences. Here language plays a significant role and one of the ways in which the Nigerian scene adapted the genre to suit the home context is by employing the art of code-switching which has gradually become the identity marker of Afro hip hop. Here an artist performs music using more than one language or code. Socio-linguistic studies have found that this phenomenon is

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commonly exhibited in a multicultural society in which languages influence each other through contact.

According to Bokamba (1989) ‘code-switching is a mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech events’ (quoted in Ayeomoni 2006: 91). To Babalola and Taiwo (2009) code-switching is ‘a means of communication which involves the speaker alternating between one language and another in communicating events. In other words, it describes someone who code-switches using two languages (interlingua) or dialects (intralingua) interchangeably in a single communication’ (p.2). While the phenomenon has often been studied in relation to conversation it has also been observed in other communicative spheres like music or poetry where it can contribute to the aesthetics of rhetoric in a carefully constructed manner (Davies and Benthalia 2008: 2).

Hip Hop – A Fertile Ground for Code Switching

Hip hop performance outside America has been observed as a fertile ground for code-switching where the use of the indigenous language is seen as a way of ‘domesticating’ the genre to give it a local tenor. Some perspectives outside Nigeria present interesting discoveries. Oduro-Frimpong (2009) presents contemporary hip hop in Ghana as hip life, ‘a blend of the U.S. music variety *hip hop* and *highlife*, a Ghanaian popular music genre that blends distinct African rhythm with that of Euro-American and African diaspora’ (p. 1086), while its unique attribute is the blend of two or more languages, primarily Akan, Ga, English and pidgin.

On the Montreal hip hop scene Sakar et al. (2005) observed that using French as a base language ‘several languages and varieties are commonly used and mixed by Montreal rap artists’ (p. 2057). Here commonly used languages include Standard Quebec French, Non Standard Quebec French, Caribbean Creole, African-American English among others, where ‘hip hop groups are a mirror of the ethno-linguistic diversity that is so salient a feature of the downtown Montreal scene’ (ibid: 2060). In Kenya, hip hop has developed its own language

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Sheng, ‘a mix of broken Swahili, English and tribal languages... [which] has inspired many others and given Nairobi hip hop its own distinctive classless flavour’ (Howden 2009).

Code Switching in Afro Hip Hop

In the Nigerian sub-genre of Afro hip hop, code-switching has been constantly employed combining two or more languages which include Standard English, Nigerian pidgin, Yorùbá, Igbo and other languages. Sound Sultan is a prominent Nigerian hip hop act and below is an excerpts from his acclaimed song ‘Motherland’ to show a typical code-switching pattern in Afro hip hop. The song lyrics shows that the chorus line of the song is rendered in Yorùbá (in bold) and Nigerian pidgin (italics) while the intro and body of the song is rendered in Yorùbá, international English (underlined), and Nigerian pidgin.

‘Motherland’ by Sound Sultan (2006)

Song Lyrics

Yeah, Sound Sultan,
Naija ninja Kennis Music
You know how we dey do am
This one na for all ma brothers
Who don go outside Naija
*Who don **ja** commot for Naija*
Always try to dey look back
Because there’s no place like home
You know what I mean?
Yorùbá man tell me say...

Ajo o dabi ile

Na true Check this out, Oh, yeah

Ajo o dabi ile

No matter where you go

Make u no forget area oh Area oh Na naija

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Ti ode ba tile

Pada wale o, wale o.

Translation

Yeah Sound Sultan ,
Naija Ninja Kennis Music,
you know how we do it
This is for all my brothers
That has left Nigeria for good
Always try to look back
Because there's no place like home
You know what I mean
Yorùbá man says that ...

There is no place like home
It's true Check this out ,Oh yeah
There's no place like home
No matter where you go
Don't forget where you come from
Which is Nigeria
If it gets tough out there,
Come back home.

Language of Delivery

Language is an important means of communication and where popular music is involved the language of delivery is a coded embodiment of the speaker's culture. It is also a common saying that 'music is a universal language' meaning music should be enjoyed and felt the same way anywhere irrespective of the language of delivery and location. However writing about indigenous hip hop cultures and in particular the South African variant Kwaito, Kelefa Sanneh in the *New York Times* (2005) asks 'Why is kwaito so much obscure in America? Part of the problem is language: kwaito lyrics are usually delivered in a mashed up slang that draws

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heavily on Zulu, and Xhosa and Afrikaans'. I tend to believe that kwaito's non-popularity in America based on language is rather parochial pointing to the fact that globalization is just a one-way affair and the third world can only be a consumer. Otherwise, if Jay-Z or Lil Wayne can be played on African radio and enjoyed irrespective of the language/accent there should be no reason Spikiri (a South African kwaito veteran), 2Face Idibia or Ruggedman cannot be accorded the same privilege in America or elsewhere.

Globalization and Popular Music

Looking at globalization, popular music and language critically it is obvious that 'English is the language of popular music, arguably a form of linguistic globalization...' (Shuker 2005: 127), the Nigerian hip hop has been able to use hybridization as a strategy of resistance to popular music homogenization by exhibiting linguistic independence from English and adopting multilingualism where the Nigerian pidgin and Yorùbá language become prominent. Giving credence to the assertion of linguistic non-conformity in Nigeria's hip hop as a resistance strategy Omoniyi (2009: 124) also believes that 'Nigerian hip hop artists as social critics and activists explore language choice as a multilingual skill and in the process establish for themselves a creative patch and a non-subordinate local identity within the global hip hop constituency'. With this Nigerian hip hop is able to retain and assert its African identity while still subscribing to the global hip hop world in a process of cultural re-territorialisation.

Hip Hop and Fújì Synergy: A Reactionary Hybridism

Hybridity or the process of hybridization is originally a biological term denoting cross-breeding to produce an offspring which is referred to as a 'hybrid'. Now the term and procedure has surfaced in nearly all aspects of human endeavour, so that among others we now have cars that are called 'hybrids' in that they were designed to be powered by both fuel and electricity. According to Kerri Iyall Smith (2006: 9) 'hybridity results when two or more cultures are incorporated to create a new cultural identity, the identities are not assimilated or altered independently [but] bits of identities become elements of a new identity'. This follows older

themes of syncretism or creolisation and can exhibit a wider range of multiple identity or crossover, border-crossing and multi-culturalism among other themes (Pieterse 2001: 221).

Hybridity is an amalgamation and coalescing of different cultural or musical forms to foster or create a new identity thriving on the idea of border-crossing, Nigerian hip hop has been able to do this by creating a sub-genre in 'Afro hip hop' and fostering an African identity in it by infusing traditional musical forms, especially fúji. In this context globalization has created a dynamic energy which triggers a reactionary process resulting in creating new cultural forms. Corroborating this concept Shonekan (2012: 147) stated 'the people of Nigeria have embraced and imbibed African-American popular music for decades and in the process have created new cultural and artistic products' which in this vein is 'Afro hip hop'. Let us now see how Afro hip hop as hybrid music is becoming a strategy of resistance towards musical homogenization brought about by globalization.

Fuji within Hip hop

The term *fúji* can be used to identify a type of popular music mostly patronized by muslims (Barber and Waterman 1995) having various dance styles performed at parties. Fúji emerged from the Muslim wake-up music that is widely performed during the Ramadan (fasting) festival by '*ajísààrì*' (i.e. singers that wake us up to eat '*sààrì*' or break our fast). 'Fúji' itself derives from the Yorùbá word *fàájì* meaning enjoyment (Euba 1989: 12). The musical composition of fùjí consists of assemblages of Yorùbá drums which are combined in various textures where the *sakara* plays an important role. Fújí is a percussive music that thrives on Yorùbá rhythmic accompaniment while its thematic content is always laden with quranic citations. Often the introduction of most fújí song is performed in a Muslim chant-like vocal delivery style similar to that used in the mosque to call the faithful to prayer.

Although fújí developed out of the Yorùbá Islamic music tradition it is now secularised, modernized and enjoyed by all and sundry, and while most of its lyrics still possess extraction of quranic texts and citations, as an art form it is totally panegyric in nature in terms of its dependence on the patronage of the rich and powerful patrons who compensates the artist with

financial favours when he sings their praises at parties or on recordings. Fújì has been in existence from the 1970s long before the emergence of hip hop and is still the music of choice for parties and social functions popularly called *ariya* in Nigeria. However, the proliferation of hip hop have also pushed the genre to the periphery as according to Adewale Ayuba a successful fuji star ‘hip hop rules in today’s Nigeria’ (Pius 2009). In recent time there has been appropriation of this genre in a strategic way by hip hop artists blending fújì sounds and vocal delivery with high tech hip hop flows in a unique way and where fújì and hip hop meet the result is the creation of a fusion or crossover sound the process that can be termed hybridization.

Hip Hop Experiment with *Fuji*

One of the earliest experiments with fújì by a hip hop artist in Nigeria can be traced back to 2001 when Baba Dee then an aspiring hip hop artist recorded a song ‘So di’ with a renowned fújì artist Abass Akande Obesere .He appropriated the fújì genre successfully to create a hybrid song which defined his career and pushed him to the mainstream of Nigeria’s hip hop. ‘So di’ in 2001 can be seen as a way in which Baba Dee used fújì within hip hop to appeal to the local sensibilities while Obesere exhibited a unique fújì vocal prowess in Yoruba on a rap flow by Baba Dee to create a perfect blend. Here the audience were given the best of the two worlds in what was to be the beginning of hip hop domestication and authenticity, a trend that has since been followed by others till date. Other successful collaborations includes, ‘So ligali’ (2002) - Eedris Abdulkareem (hip hop) featuring Pasuma Wonder (fújì artist) , ‘Raise da roof’ (2002) - Jazzman Olofin (hip hop) featuring Adewale Ayuba (fújì artist), ‘Iwolomo’ (2007) - Pasto Goody Goody (hip hop) featuring Pasuma Wonder (fújì artist), and ‘Jobobalejo’ (2008) -Sound Sultan (hip hop) featuring Pasuma Wonder (fújì artist).

Fuji in Reaction to Hip hop

While hip hop has successfully appropriated fújì in a crossover move to establish its popularity, fújì as a Yoruba popular music is feeling the encroachment of hip hop as a dominant popular culture in the Nigerian music scene. This is not unexpected as one of the features of globalization that brought hip hop is the exhibition of its cultural hegemony. Taking a critical look at the effects of globalization on the local setting Shuker asks, ‘Do policies and activities of

multinationals inhibit the development of indigenous music in local markets? The response is complex and varies from country to country' (2005: 127). Here indigenous music practice like fújì is feels the dominance of hip hop and as admitted by Adewale Ayuba 'if you go to any party [or shows] today R&B and hip hop are in vogue. You hardly hear them play fújì or any indigenous music' (Pius 2009). This has triggered a reaction and resistance in him as one of his musical project did create an hybrid and cross-over music in order to resist the dominance of hip hop and ensure the continuous patronage of his own genre.

Cross-Overs

In 2009 Ayuba made a cross-over album titled *Camellion* with the main purpose of creating a hybrid sound that will blend hip hop with fújì in various collaborations where he featured seasoned hip hop artists like Sound Sultan, Luralph and Banky W. Here Ayuba hoped to bring fújì back to the mainstream while riding on the back of hip hop. To correct the under-representation of fújì on the mainstream his answer was to create a mix of hip hop and fújì rhythm—a fusion resulting in the crossover album *Camellion* of which 'Mo fe' (2009) was the first promotional single. This track ('Mo Fe') featured Luralph and Sound Sultan as hip hop artists while Ayuba was able to negotiate his way for acceptance within the Nigerian hip hop audience and at the same time took fújì to a more exotic clientele.

Conclusion

In the popular music sector globalization has vitally affected the way music is perceived, made or disseminated whereby the North American originated culture like hip hop has become a dominant feature in local music cultures across the world. In Nigeria, the mainstreaming of hip hop has triggered different negotiating strategies among music practitioners who wanted to remain global and yet domestic. It is evident that 'the spread of hip hop has generated exciting tentacles of hybridity that have encroached on but not always subverted existing traditions, art forms and cultural mores' (Shonekan, 2012:147). And in this context local cultures and practices are being sub-merged due to popularity and overt visibility of African-American oriented expressive culture brought about by inter-connectivity where hybrid culture is now being formulated as a negotiating tool.

Hybridization is an indication of change which comes as a result of contact and multiculturalism and also can be a negotiating strategy in maintaining and preserving the local cultures and practices from homogenization. This has been exemplified by Nigeria's hip hop where the sub-genre of Afro hip hop has been strategically crafted using the local languages and appropriating indigenous style to portray authenticity. This has been a vital tool in this situation where 'the transcultural character of current hybridity territorialises international music and prevents the homogenization of popular music from the world' (Martinez 2007). Creating hybrid forms of music from hip hop and fùjì supplants the homogeneity of popular music promoted by globalization while ensuring the relevance and development of home-grown music and expressive cultures.

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(This is a revised version of paper presented at 4th European Conference on African Studies (ECAS 4) in
Uppsala, Sweden, June 2011).

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **14:6 June 2014**

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