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REVISING THE NIGERIAN ANTHEM: ADVOCACY FOR A MERGED NATIONAL ANTHEM

Abstract

The Nigerian national anthem at independence was “Nigeria we hail thee” written by expatriates (Lillian Jean Williams-lyrics and Frances Berda-music) who lived in Nigeria at the time. This anthem held sway until 1978 when it was changed to the present “Arise! O Compatriots” composed by Ben Odiase (Nigerian). The debate however exists and has failed to disappear on whether or not the change of the old anthem was necessary in the first place, looking critically at the lyrics of the anthem. Many people now think there is nothing wrong with the words of the old anthem. From interviews conducted, the conservative elderly citizens appear to prefer the old anthem while the revolutionaries preferred the new anthem because most importantly among other reasons, the old anthem was not written or composed by Nigerians. On the third wing are those who like the researcher want a blend of the two- An anthem that resonates with every Nigerian. Using the Hybridization method, the researcher therefore studies the Reunification model of the national anthem of South African after the Apartheid era which had a blend of a few different preexisting songs. Without changing the texts and melodies, the researcher’s arrangement of both the old and the new anthems linking the two with connecting chords and a modulation is presented in this paper. It is hoped that this work is acceptable nationally, and achieves the purpose for which it was done, bringing about an anthem that does not exclude any school of thought but respects and reflects the country’s history, pledge, prayers, hopes and ideals as we envision a much more united nation in the vision 2030.

Key words: Anthem, Hybridization, Debate and Expatriates

Introduction

National anthems are symbols of nations. They are not mere songs or chants but iconic compositions which embody, encapsulate the struggles, history, beliefs, hopes and aspirations of the citizens of the country. Anthems unite the nation as expressed by a veteran bassoonist of the US Navy Byers (2017). "A national anthem is a patriotic musical composition evokes and eulogizes the history, traditions, and struggles of its people, recognized by the government as the official national song or by convention through use by the people." He went further by saying "it reminds people of their shared values."

Brewer (2017) also emphasizes on the use of national anthems in sports events,

it is a sign of respect and unity. If there is a national anthem before a game, we have that brief time to remember the big picture. Yes, this is a competitive event, and we are passionate about our team, but we are all countrymen at the end of the day.

Brooke,(2017), in line with Brewer (2017) also says in agreement, “The purpose of singing the national anthem is to show pride in your country”. Simply put, rendering the national anthem of a nation, is a show of respect for the country and its traditions, it is beyond just the music but the aspects of the lives of the people that are captured in the song. It is sung in schools to instill national values and patriotism in the students and pupils. Thus, making it an integral part of a nation's existence.

Abril (2007) quoted President George W. Bush as stating; “I think the national anthem ought to be sung in English and I think people who want to be citizens of a country ought to learn to sing the national anthem in English”. It is, therefore, evident that national anthems are usually rendered in the official language of a country or the most widely spoken language of a country. The author disagreed with the former US president completely. He firmly believes that language is merely a means of communication. Nigerians for example speak and understand the pidgin English more than any other language, and given that unity is one of the social values engendered in anthems, then it is arguably pointless to believe that the pidgin English cannot be used to underscore the values enshrined in its national anthem.

It is argued that blatant disregard of anthem’s rendition should attract punitive punishments however it is imperative to add that the anthem does not in itself segregate or leave out a section of the populace in its content. In a report on the New York Times, Buckley and Bradsher (2017) say in China, "offenders could face imprisonment for deliberately distorting the lyrics or music of the national anthem of the people's republic of China...or insulting the national anthem in other ways.”

Writing on lyrics, Illsley,(2018) wrote that:

Although the vast majority of nations around the globe have national anthems with lyrics, The Marcha Real of Spain is an exception due to the fact that it contains no words. Various countries that currently also have anthems without lyrics include Bosnia and Herzegovina, San Marino and Kosovo.

The History of National Anthems

The idea of having a national song or anthem is one of the offshoots of the freedom found by composers early in the Romantic period, although some national songs predated the romantic period. For many, national anthems are the songs that inspire oneness and national unity as well as remind them of the lofty heights the country can achieve through the commitments and sacrifices of the citizens.

In a survey conducted by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Wambugu’s (2010) comments on the question “does your national anthem inspire you?” revealed that 72% of the respondents responded in the affirmative. The other 28% had no issues with the songs but with

the government who have failed to inspire patriotism in the citizenry. So, the government of nations being citizens themselves thought it wise to have a national song that challenges everyone to contribute their quotas to building a better nation.

Orji (1998: 13) in the book *The New Social Studies* opines:

The national anthem is a song that makes citizens of a country have the feeling of patriotism. It makes people of a country work for the progress, unity and growth of the country. Usually, it contains the ideas and traits which the country intends to impart to its citizens. The national anthem makes citizens try and live up to expectations in their duties to their country. The anthem is sung every morning in schools and whenever there is an important occasion in our country.

According to Wikipedia:

National Anthems rose to prominence in Europe during the 19th century, but some originated much earlier. The presumed oldest national anthem belongs to the Netherlands, and it is called the 'Wilhelmus'. It was written between 1568 and 1572 during the Dutch Revolt, and its current melody variant was composed shortly before 1626. It was a popular organist march during the 17th century but it did not become the official Dutch national anthem until 1932.

The Japanese national anthem, "*Kimigayo*", has the oldest lyrics, which were taken from a Heian period (794-1185) poem, yet it was not set to music until 1880.

The Philippine national anthem "*Lupang Hinirang*" was composed in 1898 as wordless incidental music for the ceremony declaring independence from the Spanish empire. The Spanish poem "Filipinas" was written the following year to serve as the anthem's lyrics; the current Tagalog version dates to 1962.

"God Save The Queen", the national anthem of the United Kingdom and the royal anthem reserved for use in the presence of the monarch in some Commonwealth realms, was first performed in 1619 under the title "God Save The King". It is not officially the national anthem of the UK, though it became such through custom and usage.

Spain's national anthem, the "*Marcha Real*" (The Royal March), written in 1761, was among the first to be adopted as such, in 1770. Denmark adopted the older of its two national anthems, "*La Marseillaise*", the French national anthem, was written in 1792 and adopted in 1795. Serbia became the first Eastern European nation to have a national anthem – "Rise up, Serbia!" – in 1804.

"*Ee Mungu Nguvu Yetu*", the national anthem of Kenya, is one of the first national anthems to be specifically commissioned. It was written by the Kenyan Anthem Commission in 1963 to serve as the anthem after independence from the United Kingdom.

The Welsh national anthem "*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*" was the first such to be sung at an international sporting event when it was sung in a Rugby game against New Zealand in Llanelli. The anthem was taken to counter the famous New Zealand Haka.

National anthems have come a long way and have become an integral part of national life and orientation. Overtly, even the youngest nations such as Croatia, Slovakia, East Timor, Kosovo and South Sudan all have national anthems.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts David Duff's (2000) theory of Hybridization of Modern Genre, he defines generic hybridization as "The process by which two or more genres combine to form a new genre or subgenre; or by which elements of two or more genres are combined in a single work." Hybridity, a social theory that has its origins in biology, and has developed significantly in the fields of culture studies, arts and post-colonialism. When aspects from different musical cultures are combined effectively, it is often claimed that a 'hybrid' style or system has been formed. Merging two anthems into one certainly falls into this theory.

Methodology

The study's methodology is simply a careful merger of two songs that are similar in style, content and rhythm. This approach has been used in sciences and in sundry fields of human endeavour including culinary studies. It involves skillfully weaving together or joining two different artistic materials or products in a manner that something whole and different emerges. The two anthems are on the same time signature, have the same nationalistic lyrical content and are hymn-like in texture making it a very simple thing to do. This simplicity is exactly what the Nigerian populace needs with regards to their national anthem.

Nigeria We Hail Thee: The Issues

As Nigeria edged towards independence, there was the need for an anthem which will replace the English anthem "God Save The Queen". The need was met by lyricist Lillian Jean Williams and composer Frances Berda. "The anthem was adopted as Nigeria's first national anthem on October 1, 1960" (Wikipedia). It further stated that the anthem was heavily criticized in some quarters, by some sections of the Nigerian populace. 'When 'Nigeria we hail thee' was announced, the new national anthem faced criticism for some reasons. The Daily Service, a newspaper run by a Yoruba organization *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* started a rebellious campaign against the national anthem, which led to a committee being established to collect signatures as a petition'. The lyrics of the embattled anthem go thus:

Nigeria we hail thee,
Our own dear native land,
Though tribe and tongue may differ,
in brotherhood we stand,
Nigerians all are proud to serve
Our sovereign motherland.

Our flag shall be a symbol
that truth and justice reign,
in peace or battle honoured,
and this we count as gain,
to hand unto our children
a banner without stain.

O God of all creation,
grant this our one request,
help us to build a nation
where no one is oppressed,
and so with peace and plenty
Nigeria may be blest.

The issue with this anthem for some Nigerians is the fact that it was seen as a “colonial document” as the composer and lyricist were both expatriates. Orji (1998: 43) in the book *The New Social Studies* opines,

Many things were wrong with the old national anthem. It was composed by a European; and it tended to emphasize our different cultures and traits rather than the common experiences. The spirit of patriotism, of faith and loyalty was not sufficiently recognized by that anthem. For these reasons, there was a national competition for a new one.

Chief Ekukinam (personal interview, 2018) is a legion of the Nigerian army who served in the Nigerian army in the 60s says:

The entire schools and armed forces were thrown into confusion. We already accepted the anthem, and I think the words were appropriately composed. It had such a beautiful melody. We rehearsed with the anthem, and we adjusted to it. Frankly, I still cannot understand the complaint that led to the abrogation of that lovely piece.

Balogun ((personal interview, 2018) was also in primary school when this anthem held sway also did not appreciate the idea of a change. He said that “there is no difference between the old anthem and the so-called new. Some influential people in government just wanted the change to score some cheap political points”. Suberu, (personal interview), the researcher’s father before he passed on in 1996 was when he taught him the old national anthem. He narrated how they stood at attention and sang with pride. In his words “those that wanted the old anthem to be changed, may have good reasons but am not sure I agree with any of them. ‘Nigeria We Hail Thee’ remains in my sub-consciousness as the national song.”

A critical study of both anthems revealed striking similarities and little differences. The lyrical content of the new appears richer in conveying the national thinking of unity and peace. On the whole, the researcher's position is that none of the two should be jettisoned; rather a merger of the two anthems in a way that Nigerians would appreciate as advocated in this study. What has been introduced is 'smooth' modulation from A flat major or G to F major relative keys.

Arise O Compatriots

This anthem was birthed on October 1st, 1978 by the then military administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo. It was received with joy and fulfillment because this was indigenous and the fact the lyrics and melody were from Nigerian writers, there was a widespread acceptance of the anthem. According to [wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arise_O_Compatriots), there was a national contest for entries: "the lyrics are a combination of words and phrases taken from five of the best entries in a national contest. The words were put to music by the Nigerian police band under the directorship of Benedict E. Odiase." Below are the words:

Arise, O compatriots
Nigeria's call obey
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain,
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom,
Peace and unity

O God of creation
Direct our noble cause
Guide our leader's right
Help our youths the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace
And justice shall reign

This anthem currently enjoys the love and regular rendition of Nigerians, but still, there are those who think the anthem should have been extended a little longer while others opined that the

repeated melody at the beginning was a little amateurish. In a chat the researcher had in May 2007 with MacDonald (2007), (then Band Director and lecturer at the Department of Music, University of Nigeria, he said,

In my opinion, Ben Odiase or whoever composed the national anthem should change something in the opening melodiesTo have repeated the same melody twice did not show compositional ingenuity.... Moreover, I quite agree that looking at the song, the melody that goes with "to serve our fatherland" should have been slightly different.

However, we cannot deny the fact that this anthem is a good work of art especially when you look at the dynamics of applying *mezzo piano* at the middle where we sing "the labour of our heroes past..." Moreover, the climax at "freedom" we can applaud the fact that this came from policemen who may not have been so well trained in classical music.

The Debate

Orji (1998) in the book *The New Social Studies* opines:

Many things were wrong with the old national anthem. It was composed by a European; and it tended to emphasize our different cultures and traits rather than the common experiences. That anthem did not sufficiently recognize the spirit of patriotism, faith and loyalty. For these reasons, there was a national competition for a new one.

In a survey of opinion among ten (10) senior citizens who sang the old anthem in their primary and secondary school days reveals that 80% of them do not see the reason why the old anthem was abrogated in the first place. Many of them said the decision to change the anthem was not only upsetting but annoying as they have already accepted "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" as the national song, so making that change was not really easy to accept. They, however, had to accept the new anthem because it was written and composed by Nigerians. The other two respondents felt the new anthem was way better. Of special mention is the line "the labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain" in the middle of the song is a line they cherish very much. So, it appears that though the new anthem (Arise O compatriots) was accepted, quite a number of Nigerians were still attached to the old.

Nigeria is a big country with diverse culture, there is hardly any issue that everyone agrees on. The country is polarised along ethnic, religious and regional divides. Economic inequalities and other perceived issues of marginalisation have further brought about animosity and bickering among the people. According to economic report by the United States Embassy in Nigeria, 'The country has over 250 ethnic groups'. A country this diverse certainly needs more creative ways to unite the people than one, and this revised work certainly treads that line.

It is envisaged, that this revised work will be appreciated for its merit. The country needs oneness and unity as portrayed in this advocated arrangement, hopefully it will reach out to wider interest groups among the Nigerian populace.

The Merged Work

The newly arranged or merged composition is a careful combination or hybridization of the two already existing works. The title also implies a proposition, a suggestion for consideration and to

create a sense of direction for unity, from the researcher's perspective, is what should be done to have all Nigerians sing together with renewed vigour and sense of patriotism.

Like most anthems "Nigeria We Hail Thee" is on the same time signature as the current "Arise O Compatriots" the researcher used a bar of common chords to link the first anthem which he presumed would be on A flat or G to the current anthem which is on F major. However, before this, the researcher had decided to harmonize and arrange his way using some passing notes and linking melodies.

After harmonizing and working on the link passages and passing notes, The Merged work evolved as described below.

The Merger: A South African Example

The structure and approach to this new work is inspired by the National Anthem model of South Africa. The South African National Anthem is often referred to as "Nkosi Sikelel; Afrika", however, this has never been its official title. Their current national anthem was adopted in 1997. It is a hybrid song combining new English lyrics with extracts of the 19th-century hymn, "Nkosi Sikel Afrika" (God bless Africa) by Enoch Sotonga and the African song "Die stem van suid Afrika" (The voice of South Africa) by C.J. Langen hoven/Marthinus Louren de Viller. "Nkosi Sikel Afrika" was formerly used as the South Africa national anthem from the late 1930s to the mid-1990s.

When apartheid came to an end in the early '1990s, the 'African song' was called to question but was retained while the hymn by Enoch Sotonga used mostly by anti-apartheid movement added as the second anthem of equal standing. However, "the practice of having two national anthems proved cumbersome" according to Wikipedia, as both would take about 5 minutes. This challenge was rectified by M. Khumalo and Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph who were commissioned to merge in abridged forms so as not to last beyond two minutes while interests of 5 major languages (Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Africans and English) were captured. Some slightly offensive lines in the old songs were expunged. The then President Nelson Mandela ratified the reworked piece in a reconciliatory measure for post-apartheid for the future of South Africa.

Given the foregoing, the study coined the methodology used in this compositional arrangement as the 'Reunification Model' since the underlying thought behind this abridged version is similar to that of the South Africans.

Score Outline/Analysis of The Merger

Duration: 1 minute, 20seconds

Key: A flat modulates at bar 12 to F major.

Time signatures: Common time

Bars: 50

Tempo: Moderate, *Maestoso* at the end of the first and the last pieces

Form: AB form

Texture: Homophonic

Rhythm: Anacrusis, simple quadruple time

Range: E flat (first space below bass stave) to E flat(4th space, treble stave). 3 Octaves.

Harmony: Most chords are major and minors

Instrumentation: piano accompaniment

Dynamics: forte, mezzo forte, maestoso, fortissimo.

Language: English

In a mostly homophonic composition, written on common time, the research composer, being unable to lay hands on the original scores of these pieces at press time, used his discretion to notate the music of “Nigeria, we hail thee” for A flat major, harmonized all sections using major and minor chords on a moderate tempo accelerated a little at the last song. At bar 12, he placed two connecting chords between A Flat Major chord which ends ‘Nigeria, we hail thee’ and the anacrusis C 7chord, which kick-starts the current anthem “Arise O Compatriots!” in a logical transition of tonality from A Flat to F Major. Because of the sober mood evoked by the words “the labour of our heroes past...”, the arranger/composer employed only two voice parts (soprano and alto) to reflect the meditational mood of that section.

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THE MERGER

(Revised Nigerian National Anthem)

Arr. JOSEPH SUBERU

Andante

SOPRANO

Ni ge ri a we hail thee our own dear na tive land though tribes and tongue may

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

Andante

Piano

This musical score is for the first system of 'The Merger'. It features four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a Piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The key signature has four flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: 'Ni ge ri a we hail thee our own dear na tive land though tribes and tongue may'.

6

di - ffer in bro ther hood we stand Ni ge ria all are proud to serve our sov - reign moth er

This musical score is for the second system of 'The Merger'. It continues the vocal and piano parts from the first system. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: 'di - ffer in bro ther hood we stand Ni ge ria all are proud to serve our sov - reign moth er'.

4

12 **Maestoso** **Andante**

land A ire O com pa triots Ni ge ria's call o bey to serve our fa ther land with

Maestoso **Andante**

19

love and strenght and faith the la bour of our he roes past shall ne ver be in vain to

25 **Maestoso**

serve with heart and might one na_tion bound in free - dom peace and un i

Maestoso

30

ty