

## Nigerian music: Returning the favour of cultural imperialism?

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**Abstract** - This article explores the intricate dynamics of cultural imperialism as it pertains to the Nigerian music scene, which has become increasingly prominent on the global stage. Initially dominated by Western influences, Nigeria's musical landscape faces a transformative moment, characterized by the emergence of Afrobeat, Afropop, and other indigenous genres that blend traditional sounds with contemporary styles. Using a mixed qualitative research method that included case study, ethnography, content analysis and documents analysis we analyzed the ways in which Nigerian artists are harnessing global platforms to assert their cultural identity while simultaneously reclaiming narratives that may have been overshadowed by foreign dominance. Through examining case studies of prominent musicians and their international collaborations, we highlight Nigeria's role in reshaping global music trends and question whether this phenomenon represents a form of cultural return, a transactional exchange, or a new type of cultural imperialism in reverse. By engaging with theories of globalization, cultural exchange, and identity formation, this article seeks to contribute to the discourse on cultural power dynamics and the impact of Nigerian music on both local and global scales, ultimately posing the question: Is Nigeria returning the favor of cultural imperialism, or is it redefining the terms of engagement?

**Keywords:** Nigerian music, cultural imperialism, music industry, globalization, cultural exchange

### 1. Introduction

Cultural imperialism refers to the dominance of one culture over others, often facilitated through media, politics, and economics. According to Harvey (2020) Cultural imperialism is characterized by the dominance of one culture over others, resulting in the systematic erosion of local customs, traditions, and identities. Historically, Western cultures have imposed their values and aesthetics on the Global South through various forms of cultural products, including music. Authors like Edward Said (1978) in "Orientalism" (1978) argue that such constructs serve the purpose of justifying political and economic dominance under the guise of civilizing missions. According to Tobin (n.d.) "While the term cultural imperialism did not emerge in scholarly or popular

discourse until the 1960s, the phenomenon has a long record. Historically, practices of cultural imperialism have almost always been linked with military intervention and conquest”.

Tobin (n.d.) also noted that: cultural imperialism later became a major instrument of colonization. He explained that even though colonization was almost always initiated by some kind of military intervention, its full effects were achieved through practices of cultural imperialism. This he said was largely fueled by a belief in the perceived superiority of the way of life of the colonizers who then use law, education, and/or military force to impose various aspects of their own culture onto the target population. The colonizers often pontificate of their desire to purge local populations of allegedly barbaric, uncivilized customs and mores, colonizers also knew that the best way to mitigate resistance by the colonized was to eradicate as far as possible all traces of their former way of life.

In Nigeria, colonialism brought about profound disruptions to local culture, traditions and music, reshaping not only the societal structure but also artistic expression. Music genres like highlife and juju reflect a blend of indigenous sounds and Western influences. However, with the rise of Afrobeats and the global popularity of Nigerian artists, the notion of cultural imperialism has taken a new turn.

The landscape of global music has been irrevocably altered by the rise of Nigerian music, particularly the Afrobeats genre, which has surged in popularity over the last decade. This is because the Nigeria music scene has seen a remarkable transformation over the last few decades, rising from localized sounds to a global phenomenon that influences contemporary music across the world. According to Premium Times (2023), The Nigerian music industry is one of the most vibrant, exciting, and rapidly growing music scenes in the world. With a rich history spanning over a century, Nigeria’s music industry has evolved in many ways to become a symbol of Nigerian culture and a major contributor to the country’s economy. Artists like Burna Boy, Wizkid, and Tiwa Savage have not only topped international charts but have also contributed significantly to the narrative of African music on the global stage. This phenomenon is not merely a product of the internet or globalization; it is a significant cultural reaction to historical patterns of cultural imperialism. Nigeria’s vibrant music scene has become a vessel for asserting African identity while simultaneously challenging the longstanding dominance of Western music. However, this rise raises an important question: Is Nigeria music, in its pursuit of global acceptance, returning the favor of cultural imperialism that historically marginalized indigenous cultures, or are they establishing a new narrative?

This work is based on the applications of the following theories.

**(1) Cultural Studies and Hegemony:** Developed by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, the concept refers to the ways in which a dominant group's culture can influence and shape societal norms, values, and beliefs. Gramsci's theory posits that cultural hegemony goes beyond mere economic or political dominance; it involves the subtle manipulation of cultural narratives to establish a worldview that appears natural and common-sense to the broader population (Gramsci, 1971).

The work of Stuart Hall in cultural studies further provides a framework for understanding how cultural products are created and consumed. Hall’s encoding/decoding model suggests that media messages produced by artists can be interpreted differently by varying audiences. Nigerian artists encode their cultural narratives, rooted in local themes, experiences, and languages. These narratives challenge the hegemonic narratives propagated by Western media, allowing audiences both in Nigeria and abroad to decode their messages in a way that celebrates African identity and heritage.

**(2) Cultural Resistance:** The concept of cultural resistance posits that marginalized cultures can challenge and resist dominant cultural narratives. Nigerian music has become a vehicle for social commentary, addressing issues such as corruption, inequality, and identity politics. Artists like Fela Kuti, who used music as a form of protest against corruption and oppression, laid the groundwork for contemporary musicians to harness their art as a means of resistance against both internal and external cultural imperialism.

(3) **Network Society:** Manuel Castells' theory of the network society highlights how the internet and social media have transformed the way culture is produced and consumed. Nigerian artists have adeptly utilized platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Spotify to reach global audiences, circumventing traditional media gatekeepers. This direct access enables them to share their music, stories, and cultural heritage without being filtered through Western lenses, thus reclaiming agency over their narratives.

## 2. Method

This study employed a multi-faceted qualitative methodology combining the following approaches:

**Document Analysis:** examining of prior research, literature, and media related to the Nigerian music industry and cultural imperialism was examined. The sources included; academic journals, articles, books, and music industry reports. Special attention will be paid to works on cultural globalization, African music history, and trends in the music industry.

**Case Selection:** Specific genres, artists, and phenomena were selected and studied and they included; BurnaBoy, Davido, Wizkid, Tiwa Savage, CKay, Kiss Daniel and Rema. The selection was based on critical aspects such as international recognition, commercial success, and cultural impact.

**Ethnographic Observation:** This involved the watching of live music events, concerts, and festivals where Nigerian music is performed, both within Nigeria and in international locations. The objective was to observe audience interactions and cultural exchanges that occur in these settings, focusing on the implications for identity, cultural pride, and musical innovation.

**Media Analysis:** A Content analysis of music videos, social media campaigns, and promotional materials related to Nigeria music was done, this assisted in investigating how artists use media to shape their narratives, project cultural identity, and position themselves in a global context. An analysis of the responses from global listeners and industry figures was also done to gather data.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Understanding Cultural Imperialism

The term " Cultural imperialism can be defined as the practice whereby a dominant culture imposes its values, beliefs, and practices on a subordinate culture, often leading to the erosion of the latter's cultural identity. Historically, Western powers imposed their cultural narratives globally, often marginalizing local customs and traditions. The term gained prominence during the latter half of the 20th century, a period marked by significant geopolitical changes and the globalization of media. As former colonies gained independence, many retained tzers, leading to an intricate dynamic of power and identity (Tomlinson, 1991).

One of the foundational texts in understanding cultural imperialism is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Said argues that the West has historically framed Eastern cultures as "other," which has allowed Western powers to justify colonial dominance. This framing not only influences political and economic policies but also shapes cultural narratives that persist today. The portrayal of Eastern societies in Western media often perpetuates stereotypes and reduces complex cultures to simplistic notions (Said, 1978).

The economic aspects of cultural imperialism are also significant. Countries that rely heavily on Western media imports may face challenges to their local economies, particularly in the creative industries. Assenting to the economic impact of cultural imperialism John Tomlison in his book; *Cultural Imperialism*, argues that exported American culture is not necessarily imperialist because it does not push a cultural agenda; it seeks to make money from whatever cultural elements it can throughout the world. According to Nayar (2010), the influx of foreign media can lead to a decline in domestic production and employment within local film and television industries. An example is India's Bollywood, which, while continuously producing

content for both local and international audiences, faces fierce competition from Western media that influences popularity and funding.

There have been a huge push among people to reclaim their culture from imperialist according to Smith (1999) cultural imperialism does not only affects the cultures being dominated but also generates counter-narratives and resistance movements. He explained that in many regions, people are actively reclaiming their cultural identities in response to perceived threats from dominant cultures. This resurgence can manifest through the revival of indigenous languages, traditional practices, and local art forms, as seen in movements like the Māori Renaissance in New Zealand. Moreover, the internet has also provided a platform for marginalized voices to assert their identity and share their stories as grassroots movements across social media are challenging cultural stereotypes and advocating for representation, proving that cultural exchange is not unilateral and Nigeria has not been an exception.

Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with its unique languages, traditions, and worldviews. Major ethnic groups like the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo boast rich cultural heritages, represented in literature, music, art, and social practices (Akanbi, 2018). The country's diversity is one of its greatest strengths. However, the influence of foreign cultures, particularly Western culture, had increasingly threatened the preservation and celebration of its local traditions. This trend has been facilitated largely through the concept of globalization, which enables the flow of ideas, goods, and values across borders. While it provides opportunities for cultural exchange, it has largely been criticized for often leading to the dominance of Western culture. For instance, the proliferation of Western media—films, music, and fashion—has reshaped social norms and lifestyle choices among Nigerian youth (Feminist Africa, 2008). Decrying the situation Ogunleye (2021) noted that the rise of global platforms like Netflix and social media has accelerated the access to and consumption of Western popular culture, overshadowing indigenous narratives and local content.

This shift can be seen in the increasing prevalence of Western consumer products and lifestyles in urban areas, where brands often capitalize on the desire for modernity and status. As noted by Oluwatoyin (2020), the aspirational nature of globalization can lead to the marginalization of traditional practices as people adopt foreign customs in pursuit of a perceived elevated social standing. This practice has also affected gravely the economy of third world countries like Nigeria who have now developed a huge appetite for foreign goods neglecting their local alternatives thereby encouraging capital flight and increasing unemployment and poverty of the people.

The legacy of colonialism in Nigeria has also had a profound implication for cultural identity, particularly in the realm of music. During colonial rule, Western music was often privileged, and indigenous musical forms were marginalized (Oloruntoba, 2012). This created a hierarchical cultural structure wherein Western genres were seen as superior.

### **3.2 The Role of Media in Cultural Imperialism**

The relationship between media and cultural imperialism has been debated extensively, particularly since the late 20th century, when technological advances in communication significantly enhanced the reach of media products. The Media today is the main vehicle that drives the transmission of cultural values and norms across the globe and because the landscape of global media is increasingly dominated by a few conglomerates who exert significant influence over what content is created, disseminated, and ultimately consumed worldwide. This concentration of media ownership not only impacts the diversity of content available but also underscores the power dynamics inherent in cultural exchanges. As Appadurai (1996) suggests, the flows of cultural products such as films, television shows, and music often originate from Western nations, particularly the United States, and infiltrate societies worldwide. These products frequently depict Western lifestyles and ideologies, offering a narrow representation of what is deemed "normative" or "ideal." Such portrayals can shape audience perceptions and lead to the adoption of foreign values, often to the detriment of local traditions. [The Spring Theory Workbook \(2000\)](#) further explained that; western civilization produces the majority of the media (film, news, comics, etc.) because they have the money to do so. The rest of the world purchases

those productions because it is cheaper for them to do so rather than produce their own. Therefore, Third World countries are watching media filled with the Western world's way of living, believing, and thinking. The third world cultures then start to want and do the same things in their countries and destroy their own culture. According to Herman and McChesney (1997), such monopolization leads to what they term a "neo-liberal cultural imperialism," where local cultures are marginalized, diminishing their ability to represent themselves in media narratives.

In Nigeria today, local television and radio stations often air foreign content, while local productions frequently mimic Western narratives and aesthetics. This trend raises concerns about the authenticity of Nigerian arts and media. Scholars like Ndalianis (2017) argue that the dominance of Western influences hinders the development of a distinct Nigerian media identity and narrative.

Moreover, the portrayal of Nigeria in foreign media often perpetuates stereotypes and negative perceptions, which in turn affects the self-image of Nigerians. Such portrayals sometimes overlook the country's complexities, reducing a richly diverse culture to a monolithic narrative of poverty, corruption, and conflict (Chidozie, 2019). This fosters internalized cultural inferiority, particularly among the youth, who may begin to see their own cultural heritage as inferior or less desirable. So, even though, the internet and social media have transformed the media landscape, by creating new platforms for cultural exchanges, these platforms have often rather amplified existing inequalities. While digital technologies enable the rapid sharing of cultural expressions from around the world, they can also perpetuate the dominance of Western narratives. The algorithms governing social media platforms prioritize content that generates engagement, often sidelining localized content that lacks widespread appeal (Tufekci, 2017).

### **3.3 Responses to Cultural Imperialism**

Despite the obvious pervasive influence of cultural imperialism, local cultures have not passively succumbed to external influences. Many societies have and are still actively resisting and negotiating their cultural identities especially through media.

The early 20th century saw a blend of indigenous styles with Western influences, as Nigerian musicians began to infuse traditional elements into popular genres (Nwankwo, 2015). Now, local filmmakers, musicians, and artists increasingly use digital platforms to showcase their cultures on a global stage. For example, the rise of Nollywood in Nigeria illustrates how domestic film industries can challenge the dominant narratives perpetuated by Western media (Merritt, 2019). Moreover, localization strategies, such as dubbing or subtitling foreign content, allow audiences to engage with global media while retaining their cultural identities. Scholars argue that such practices can serve as a form of cultural diplomacy, blending global influences with local traditions (Zhang, 2010).

According to Nwankwo (2019) in response to the challenges posed by cultural imperialism, there is a growing movement towards cultural reclamation in Nigeria. Artists, musicians, and writers are increasingly incorporating their traditional elements into contemporary works, helping to create a fusion that celebrates local culture while remaining relevant on the global stage. For example, Nollywood, Nigeria's film industry, has made significant strides in promoting Nigerian stories and perspectives, achieving international recognition.

Also, cultural festivals, language initiatives, and local arts programs across the country have also seek to reinforce cultural pride and awareness, encouraging youths to engage with their traditions more actively. Organizations such as the Nigerian Language Federation are also working to promote the usage of indigenous languages, aiming to combat the dominance of English and other foreign languages (Emenyonu, 2020).

The emergence of Afrobeats, a genre incorporating various styles including traditional African music, hip-hop, and dancehall, has become emblematic of Nigeria's cultural glory. According to a report by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) in 2022, Afrobeats is one of the fastest-growing music genres globally, with many Nigerian artists gaining international recognition. According to the report African music streams increased by 26.4% from



2019 to 2020, highlighting a significant trend towards the globalization of African music (IFPI, 2021).

This newfound popularity has not only allowed Nigerian artists to thrive economically but also to reshape narratives around African music. As noted by journalist and music critic Okwui Enwezor, "Nigerian artists are both reclaiming their cultural identity and exporting it to the world" (Enwezor, 2020). The rise of social media and digital platforms has also played a significant role in amplifying Nigerian music on the global stage. Artists no longer rely solely on traditional media outlets to reach audiences; instead, platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok allow for direct engagement with fans worldwide.

As Afrobeats gains traction worldwide, it also serves as a vehicle for cultural representation. The genre conveys the richness of African stories, addressing issues like love, identity, and social justice. Nigerian artists are noted to have effectively turned the tables on cultural imperialism by reclaiming their narratives and helping to showcase the vibrancy of African cultures. For instance, Burna Boy's Grammy-winning album, "African Giant" (2019), features themes of identity, resilience, and pan-Africanism, challenging the stereotypes often associated with African music (Aleksyev, 2020). This shift represents a form of cultural imperialism in reverse, where African artists wield their cultural output as tools of empowerment and global influence.

The music videos that accompany Afrobeats tracks are also a cultural showcase, that often features vibrant visuals that highlights fashion, dance, and local traditions. This cultural representation helps to foster a sense of pride among Africans which helps promotes a deeper understanding of the continent's diversity among global audiences.

Afrobeats music is characterized not only by its sound but also by its infectious dance rhythms. The emergence of viral dance challenges on platforms like TikTok has propelled Afrobeats even further into the mainstream. Dancers and influencers worldwide have embraced these trends, creating dance routines to songs like "Love Nwantiti" by CK, "Feel it" by Davido, and "Soco" by Wizkid. Such online engagement has helped solidify Afrobeat's presence in popular culture and connect with younger demographics across the globe (Eno, 2021).

However, this raises concerns about whether the infiltration of Nigerian music into the global mainstream sustains or subverts the dynamics of cultural imperialism. Some scholars have argued that the global success of Nigerian music could inadvertently endorse a form of cultural commodity that aligns with imperialistic frameworks. As international record labels and platforms increasingly invest in Nigerian talent, there is a risk that the essence of Nigerian music could be diluted to fit global market standards. For example, while collaborations between Nigerian artists and international stars can lead to greater exposure, they may also impose Western stylistic preferences that overshadow indigenous sounds.

Hesmondhalgh (2013) posits that; the commercialization of Afrobeats and the involvement of Western media in its promotion could lead to a focus on marketability over authenticity. He insisted that similar patterns emerged in previous waves of global music, such as reggae and hip-hop, where cultural theft and appropriation occurred.

Despite these risks, many Nigerian artists have consciously choose to retain their cultural narratives and influence global music practices without compromising their identities. Tiwa Savage's music, for instance, often weaves traditional Yoruba themes and contemporary rhythms, effectively creating a dialogue between cultures. Furthermore, many artists actively critique issues of neocolonialism and cultural exploitation through their lyrics.

In her 2021 interview with the BBC, Tiwa Savage noted, "I want the world to hear our stories, not just the music. I want to paint a picture of who we are" (BBC, 2021). This intentionality can serve as a counter-narrative to cultural imperialism, advocating for a more equitable space in the global music industry.

The rise of platforms like TikTok, Spotify, and YouTube has also acted as a leveling ground, allowing Nigerian artists to directly reach international audiences without the mediation of traditional Western music industry gatekeepers. This autonomy in distributing their creative outputs means that Nigerian musicians are not just passive recipients of cultural trends but active

shapers of them. Instead of being overshadowed by Western musical influences, Nigerian music asserts itself, demanding recognition and respect.

Conversely, proponents of Nigeria's musical success view it as an act of cultural resistance and empowerment. Artists are reclaiming narratives and redefining their cultural identities through their music. Works that draw on indigenous languages, themes, and storytelling reassert Nigeria's cultural pride in a global arena. By challenging the traditional hierarchy of musical influence, Nigerian artists are not just contributing to global music; they are reshaping its very foundations, pushing back against historical cultural imperialism.

### **3.4 Case Studies of Nigerian Musicians Making Global Impact and Promoting Cultural Heritage**

#### **3.4.1. Burna Boy**

In recent years, Nigerian artist Burna Boy has emerged as a formidable force in the global music scene, transcending borders and captivating audiences with his unique blend of Afro-fusion—a genre that fuses Afrobeat, dancehall, reggae, and other global sounds. With an impressive array of successes and awards under his belt.

Burna Boy, born Damini Ogulu, has consistently topped charts worldwide with his distinct sound and powerful storytelling. His breakthrough album, "African Giant," released in 2019, was a significant turning point in his career. The album featured hits like "Anybody," "Gbona," and "On The Low," garnering critical acclaim and commercial success. It even earned him a Grammy nomination for Best World Music Album, solidifying his position on the global stage.

His subsequent album, "Twice as Tall," further etched his name in music history. Released in August 2020, the album debuted at number one on the Billboard World Album chart and eventually won the Grammy Award for Best Global Music Album in 2021. With tracks such as "Way Too Big," "Monsters You Made," and "Wonderful," Burna Boy continued to demonstrate his artistic diversity and commitment to authentic African narratives. Burna Boy's accolades reflect not just his artistic talent but also the global acceptance of African music. He has received numerous awards, including the MTV Europe Music Award for Best African Act, the World Music Awards, and several Nigeria Entertainment Awards. Furthermore, his international collaborations with artists like Beyoncé, Ed Sheeran, and Coldplay have amplified his visibility, showcasing the versatility and richness of African music on prestigious platforms.

His Grammy award have also had a ripple effect, inspiring countless upcoming artists from Nigeria and Africa at large. Burna Boy's collaboration with the global music elite has brought fresh attention to the African music industry, encouraging younger artists to see the viability of Nigerian brand in the international market.

One of Burna Boy's profound contributions is his role as a cultural ambassador. Through his music, he tells stories that resonate with Nigerian and African experiences, issues of identity, colonialism, and the diaspora's realities. Tracks like "Anybody" and "Ye" reflect the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, addressing corruption and societal struggles, while making them relatable to a global audience. Also, his visuals often incorporate elements of Nigerian culture, fashion, and history. In his music videos, he frequently showcases traditional attires, local dances, and picturesque landscapes of Nigeria, promoting cultural appreciation. By marrying modern sounds with traditional concepts, Burna Boy invites listeners to delve into Nigeria's rich heritage.

#### **3.4.2. Davido**

David Adedeji Adeleke, professionally known as Davido, has successfully blended traditional African music with global influences, creating a sound that appeals to diverse audiences. His hits such as "Fall" and "If" helped position him not only as a leading figure in Afrobeats but also as an ambassador for Nigerian culture. The success of his music videos, often showcasing vibrant Nigerian dances and attire, further promotes Nigerian heritage (Ogunshakin, 2021).

Davido has collaborated with international stars such as Chris Brown and Nicki Minaj, broadening his reach and bringing Nigerian music into the global mainstream. His social media presence and viral hits have attracted millions of followers, showcasing the dynamic nature of Nigerian culture to a younger audience (Adebayo, 2020).

Davido's contributions to music have not gone unnoticed. He has received numerous awards, including the MTV Europe Music Award for Best African Act, the African Muzik Magazine Award for Artist of the Year, and multiple Nigeria Entertainment Awards. His song "Fall" made history as one of the first Nigerian songs to chart on the Billboard Hot 100, and the massive success of his albums has earned him the title of one of Africa's leading musicians.

Through his music, Davido embodies the essence of Nigerian culture. He often infuses traditional Yoruba proverbs and dialects in his lyrics, resonating with audiences back home while intriguing international listeners. By promoting Nigerian themes in his songs, from love and celebration to cultural storytelling, Davido is a powerful vehicle for showcasing the depth and richness of Nigerian heritage.

Furthermore, Davido often expresses pride in his Nigerian roots, showcasing traditional attire in his music videos and incorporating cultural elements into his performances. His songs and dance are very popular on social media platforms like Youtube, Tittok, Instagram and Facebook with millions of people across the world singing and dancing to them, this has helped to spread the Nigerian culture across the world as people of different cultural background can now relate to Nigerian languages, food, drinks, clothes and general culture.

His recent projects often align with efforts to empower local artists, creating platforms for emerging talents and promoting Nigerian music on a global scale. Such initiatives not only highlight the vast talent in Nigeria but also provide a narrative counter to any misconceptions about African music being monolithic. Through his philanthropic efforts, including the establishment of the 30 Billion African Children initiative, Davido also promotes a positive image of Nigeria internationally, demonstrating that artists can be political and social advocates (Eze, 2021).

### **3.4.3. Tiwa Savage**

Tiwa Savage is often referred to as the "Queen of Afrobeats," thanks to her significant influence in the genre and broader African music industry. With her unique blend of Afro-pop and R&B, she has gained international acclaim, performing at prestigious events like the Coachella Music Festival in 2019 (Ibrahim, 2019).

Savage's songs often incorporate traditional Nigerian sounds and rhythms, which serve to celebrate and promote her heritage. Tracks like "Koroba" and "49-99" are imbued with cultural references and social commentary that resonate with many Nigerians and Afrobeat fans around the world (Olayemi, 2020). In 2017 Savage was recognised by the BBC as one of the 100 most influential and innovative women in the world. In 2023 she was among the few artists in the world invited to perform at the forthcoming enthroning ceremony of King Charles III, the British ruler, following the death of the Queen, Queen Elizabeth II.

Her collaborations with global artists, including her work with Beyoncé on the *Lion King: The Gift* album, further shine a spotlight on Nigerian culture while allowing her to engage with a global audience. Through her music and philanthropy, Tiwa promotes a positive image of Nigeria and showcases its rich cultural tapestry.

Born Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun in Lagos, Nigeria, Wizkid shot to fame with his 2010 debut album, "Superstar." Since then, his fusion of traditional African rhythms with contemporary sounds has mesmerized audiences both at home and abroad. Hits like "Ojuelegba," "Come Closer," and the global phenomenon "Essence" have not only gained chart-topping success but have also received critical acclaim, solidifying Wizkid's status as a pioneer of the afrobeat genre.

Wizkid's artistry has not gone unnoticed. He has amassed a plethora of awards, including the prestigious Grammy Award for Best Music Video for his collaboration on Beyoncé's "Brown Skin Girl." His wins at major award ceremonies such as the MTV Africa Music Awards and the All Africa Music Awards further underline his influence and the significance of his contributions to the music industry.

Wizkid's collaboration with international artists – such as Drake, Beyoncé, and Tems – further bridges the gap between cultures, highlighting the beauty of musical exchange. These partnerships amplify the reach of afrobeat while simultaneously providing a platform for African



artists to gain recognition in a predominantly Western music industry. Wizkid's music often draws upon traditional African sounds, rhythms, and instruments, making a statement that embraces African identity and cultural expression. His songs celebrate love, resilience, and community, resonating with diverse audiences and reminding listeners of the depth of African culture. Tracks like "Essence" became anthems for the summer of 2021 – topping charts and being acclaimed in publications while featuring lyrics that reflect day-to-day realities, moving away from the superficial themes often found in mainstream Western music.

With the digital landscape becoming increasingly interconnected, Wizkid's presence on platforms like Apple Music, Spotify, and social media has enabled direct engagement with fans across the globe. This accessibility fosters cultural exchange, giving audiences insights into African narratives without the tinted lens of Western media. Through his music people around the globe can relate with African food, slangs, dressing, dance and now proud to identify with them.

Chukwuka Ekwiani, known professionally as CKay, gained international fame with his hit single "Love Nwantiti." The song became a viral sensation on platforms like TikTok, reaching audiences far beyond Nigeria (Oluwakemi, 2021). CKay's smooth melodies are complemented by themes of love and longing, which resonate universally, allowing listeners to connect emotionally regardless of cultural background. The viral dance challenges associated with "Love Nwantiti" on TikTok was pivotal in advancing CKay's reach across the globe. Users worldwide engaged with the song through dance, fostering an interactive community that bridges cultural gaps. The virality of these dance trends has enhanced CKay's global presence, allowing people from different backgrounds to come together in a joyous celebration of music and movement.

Moreover, this dance craze illustrates the reciprocity in cultural exchange. As CKay's music captivates global audiences, audiences worldwide contributed to the dissemination of African culture through their interpretations – in essence, a mutual giving and receiving. This reciprocal cultural interaction helped in dismantling the prevailing dynamics of cultural imperialism, recognizing and valuing the contributions of diverse cultures in a shared global narrative.

According to Oluwakemi (2021) the song's success, which has earned multi-platinum certifications globally, demonstrates how Nigerian musicians are redefining contemporary music while promoting the essence of African romanticism

Divine Ikubor, popularly known as Rema, burst onto the scene with his self-titled EP in 2019. His single "Dumebi" became a massive hit, further solidified by an infectious sound that blends Afrobeats with trap and pop elements. Rema's distinct style has garnered him international recognition, with the Guardian dubbing him one of the most promising new talents in the world (Guardian, 2020). Rema's breakout single, "Calm Down," is more than just a hit; it is a cultural phenomenon that has resonated deeply across continents. The song's infectious melody and relatable lyrics bridge gaps between different cultures, while its rhythmic Afrobeats pulse invites listeners to dance. Since its release, "Calm Down" has topped charts in numerous countries, garnering billions of streams and solidifying Rema's position as a key player in the global music industry.

The song has been masterfully remixed, notably featuring American pop star Selena Gomez, which further catapulted its success beyond African markets. This collaboration not only symbolizes the merging of different musical traditions but also illustrates the growing acceptance and celebration of African sounds within mainstream music as the song has been transposed in more than five languages including, India, French and Spanish. Rema's ability to connect with artists from diverse backgrounds echoes a broader trend of musical fusion, where genres blend seamlessly, transcending geographical boundaries.

Rema's influence spilled into high-profile events, evidencing his rising status in the world of entertainment. His electrifying performance at the prestigious 2023 Ballon d'Or ceremony showcased not only his musical talents but also highlighted the intersection of sports and culture. Rema's presence at such a monumental event signifies a shift in the perception of African artists, marking them as integral contributors to the global entertainment narrative. Similarly, his

involvement in global spectacles like the FIFA World Cup further emphasizes Rema's impact. Sporting events of this magnitude, which gather millions of viewers worldwide, serve as a prime platform for artists to reach diverse audiences. Rema's performances at these events not only spotlight his music but also reinforce the notion of Afrobeats as a genre worthy of international recognition.

Rema's success story is a significant example of Nigeria musicians response to historical cultural imperialism, where Western music dominated the global scene, often overshadowing local sounds. As Rema climbs the charts and performs on global stages, he is playing a crucial role in reshaping the narrative – giving back agency to African artists and cultures. His ascent can be seen as a reclaiming of space in the music industry that was once monopolized by Western influences.

Kiss Daniel, now known as Kizz Daniel, has also made significant inroads into global music. His hit "Woju," and follow-up singles like "Yeba," showcase his knack for crafting love songs that blend Afro-pop with lyrical storytelling (Adeyemo, 2018). His music often incorporates Nigerian Pidgin and Yoruba, helping to promote linguistic diversity while appealing to listeners both at home and abroad. Kizz Daniel's ability to weave storytelling into catchy tunes reflects the depth of Nigerian culture, portraying themes of love, resilience, and celebration.

His monstrous hit "Buga" released in May 2022, took the world by storm, showcasing Kiss Daniel's musical prowess and the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria. The track, driven by its infectious beat and relatable lyrics, transcended language barriers, inviting people from diverse backgrounds to dance and sing along. With its uplifting message encouraging listeners to celebrate their achievements and aspirations, "Buga" struck a universal chord, resonating particularly with the youth.

The song's global acceptance can be observed in various arenas, from streaming platforms where it tops charts in multiple countries to spontaneous dance challenges on TikTok, where users showcase their moves to this Afrobeat anthem. The song's catchy chorus and rhythm inspired countless dance tutorials, contributing to its virality and reinforcing the idea that music is a language of its own – one that knows no cultural boundaries.

The widespread acceptance of "Buga" was a wonderful example of how cultural imperialism can be challenged and reversed.

As Nigerian music flourishes on international platforms, critics argue that localization can sometimes morph into a form of cultural imperialism in reverse. The question arises: Are Nigerian artists, while seeking to reclaim their cultural identity and showcase their heritage, simply creating a palatable version of their art for Western audiences?

In many instances, collaboration with established Western artists often leads to the dilution of the very essence that defines the music's cultural roots. There are concerns about a 'commercialization' paradigm where Nigerian musicians adapt their styles to fit global trends, potentially sacrificing authenticity for marketability. This modulation is not confined to music alone; it mirrors a broader trend in which diverse cultural expressions are reshaped to align with prevailing global narratives. Also allaying this concerns; Nwali and Mouton (2022) remarked that; Nigerian artists are increasingly faced with dilemmas when balancing the authenticity of their cultural expressions with commercial success. They explained that the desire to appeal to a wider audience can lead some musicians to conform to trends that may not resonate with their cultural identity. This they say can lead to a cyclical pattern where cultural elements are stripped of their original meanings, resulting in homogenized music that satisfies global market expectations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The rise of Afrobeats on the global stage is a testament to the genre's ability to resonate with diverse audiences and its cultural significance. With the help of streaming platforms, strategic collaborations, and social media, Afro beats is not just a passing trend; it represents a musical

revolution that is reshaping the soundscape of contemporary music. As more artists emerge and new collaborations are formed, it is clear that Afrobeats will continue to take the world by storm, leading a new wave of African musical influence on the global stage and returning the favor of cultural imperialism. The phrase "returning the favour" encapsulates the nuanced relationship between Nigeria and Western cultural hegemony. As Nigerian music gains prominence on the international stage, it serves as a critique of cultural imperialism while simultaneously re-establishing Nigerian cultural identity (Akinyemi, 2020). Artists are not merely consumers of cultural products; they are producers who engage with and reshape global cultural narratives.

This active participation in the global music market reflects a broader trend where formerly marginalized voices reclaim agency, thus reversing the traditional dynamics of cultural dominance. The success of Nigerian music is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its culture in the face of ongoing global influences.

So as the world tunes into Nigerian music, the country can be said to be returning the favour of cultural imperialism by not only amplifying its own voice but also reshaping the narratives associated with global culture.

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