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Nigerian pidgin proverbs and social-cultural reflections: a literary critique of Erigga's rap songs

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Abstract

Several extant studies have examined how Nigerian musical artistes engage their art in addressing social issues; however, very few have explored the use of proverbs in songs to reflect these societal challenges. This study, therefore, examines fifteen pidgin proverbs in Erigga's rap songs from the lens of Cultural Studies, which accounts for how social relations are formed, patterned, and sustained through culture, and disseminated in public spaces that are appropriate to its responsibilities of education, provocation, and political intervention. It focuses on how these proverbs are recreated by the artiste to reflect contemporary Nigerian socio-cultural realities. This study is further given impetus by the fact that Erigga's songs have not received much attention in literary criticism, despite their potential for in-depth analysis and interpretation. The study will contribute to a deep understanding of the socio-cultural significance and poetic value of pidgin proverbs in contemporary Nigerian rap songs, serving as a documentation of the Nigerian pidgin and its proverbs, creating a valuable resource for future researches, and positioning Nigerian rap music as a literary genre, worthy of academic critique, further expanding the scope of literary studies. The study, therefore, offers a unique window into Nigeria's literary and cultural scenery, demonstrating the significance of pidgin proverbs in Nigerian rap and promoting its visibility.

Keywords: Cultural studies, pidgin proverbs, Erigga, rap.

Introduction

This paper examines the creative employment of pidgin proverbs in Erigga's rap songs in reflecting social concerns as they affect the Nigerian society. This synchronises with the core principle of literature which presents literature as not merely a reflection of the society but, a medium for addressing pertinent contemporary issues. Nigerian song artistes have, since their emergence, situated their art as a vehicle for social commentary and advocacy for change.

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Most of the early Nigerian artistes had their unique styles and genres such as Sakara, Apala, Juju and Fuji, which were indigenously common to Nigeria. These artistes include Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Sunny Ade, Victor Uwaifo, Ras Kimono, Majek Fashek, Tee Mac Omashola, Rex Jim Lawson, Sir Warrior, Stephen Osita Osadebe, Sonny Okosun, Onyeka Onwenu, among a host of others. In the early 20th century, there was a deliberate shift in the music scene away from imitating European styles towards more indigenous sounds.[3] Fela Anikulapo Kuti's music is a prime example of this indigenous style, and the artiste himself, during his lifetime, became one of Africa's most celebrated musicians with his Afrobeat. Following in his footsteps, other artistes such as Eedris Abdulkareem, Daddy Showkey, TuBaba, African China, Black Face, Femi Anikulapo-Kuti, Seun Anikulapo-Kuti, Tony Tetuila, Lagbaja, Burna Boy, and Falz, among others, also used their music to address social issues.

It is important to recognise the role of language in this shift. Many of these artistes have embraced Nigerian Pidgin as a powerful medium for conveying their thoughts. They are fluent in Nigerian Pidgin, which is a widely understood lingua franca in Nigeria[4], especially among those who may not fully grasp the complexities of the English language. Pidgin is also evident in the proverbs used by these artistes, adding a unique quality to their lyrics. Proverbs are highly valued in African cultures for their figurative and poetic nature, and they are different from everyday speech as they stem from common sense and experience. Many orators and musicians have creatively reinterpreted proverbs based on their personal observations and experiences, using vivid imagery and expressions to convey powerful thoughts. As Achebe notes, "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten"[5]. Asika emphasises the significance of proverbs to African artistes, as they are used to justify characters' actions and criticise unethical behaviours, as well as to express their people's culture and experiences.[6] These cultural influences shape their language and imagery, allowing their songs to carry the weight of their lived experiences. Ojaide and Ojaruega also highlight how the socio-cultural background and historical events of a place like Warri influence the uniqueness of stand-up comedians and artistes, who draw from their experiences in that location for their artistic compositions and performances.[7] This study aligns with these ideas and aims to analyse Erigga's songs in this context.

Erigga, also known as Erhiga Agarivbie, was born and raised in Warri, Delta State, along with his family. He is a talented Nigerian singer, songwriter, and rapper, and his upbringing in his neighborhood is reflected in his use of pidgin

3 Olorunyomi, S. Afro Beat Song-Text Narrative and the Poetics of Hypertext Performance. (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ibadan, 2005).
4 Akande, A.T. & Salami, L.O. (2010). "Use and Attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin English among Nigerian University Students". Marginal Dialects: Scotland, Ireland and Beyond. Millar, R.M. (ed.). (Aberdeen: Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland and Ireland, 2010), 73.
5 Achebe, C. (1958). Things Fall Apart. (London: Heinemann Education Books, 1958), 14.
6 Asika I.E. "Telling the African Side of the Story: Proverb as a Crucial Element in Uchenna Nwosu's The Rejected Stone". Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities 13, no. 1. (2012): 14-33.
7 Ojaide, T. & Ojaruega, E.E. "Tradition and Subjectivities: Warri-related Comedians and their Art". TydskrifvirLetterkunde. 57, no.2 (2020): 82.

English in all his songs, where he shares stories of his childhood and early experiences. In an interview with a German broadcasting network, he explains, "the city brings out that toughness in you. You have to be strong to survive out here, it's really tough. There is no opportunity".[8] He speaks about his past life, selling drugs in his hometown, Warri, which has garnered popular opinion as a locality that harbours criminality, drug dealers, oil bunkering, and other social vices. His criminal activities led to his imprisonment, but after his release, he decided to turn his life around by pursuing a career in music, which he saw as a turning point. He chose to use his music to give a voice to his people, expressing, "What I rap about is basically the struggle that every Warri boy, every Niger Delta youth go through every day of their lives, but they can't say it".[9] Erigga's rap style is distinctive, as he combines hip-hop with Afrobeats. His music is captivating, filled with slang, linguistic and poetic elements, including rhymes, rhythm, metaphors, and proverbs. Despite the potential for critical analysis and interpretation, his songs have not been thoroughly examined in the field of literary criticism. Therefore, this paper evaluates Erigga's creativity and skillful use of Nigerian pidgin to reflect social issues in the Nigerian society.

An Appraisal of Cultural Studies

The study of culture is one that cannot be traced to a particular time in history, as it is inherent in quite a large number of human endeavours and academic fields like anthropology and sociology, as well as across geographic and academic spaces. Cultural Studies, therefore, is interdisciplinary as it investigates how culture creates and transforms social relations, individual experiences, etc. Agger argues that,

> Culture is found in every corner of late-capitalist society, undercutting the high-culture/popular-culture distinction. Thus, cultural studies resists a canonisation of cultural products on which it focuses its attention. There is no canon, only a heterogeneity of cultural gestures, from science to science fiction. This is one of its great strengths, helping to reverse the tendency for cultural studies to become a discipline cut off from all the others.[10]

Hall also advances this claim when he presents culture as the "actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society… (and) the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life".[11] He defines Cultural Studies as "a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic,

8 Erigga Paperboi, "Erigga's Exclusive Interview with Dwtv from Germany". (2019) https://youtu.be/LNI8OmyB2oY?si=AtMrAuJHqZ0bCFcO
9 ibid
10 Agger, B. Cultural Studies as Critical Theory. (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 2.
11 Hall, S. "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity". Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies. Morley, D., Chen, K.-H. and Hall, S. (eds). (London: Routledge, 1996), 439.

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social activity or institutional site in society".[12] Culture is focused on creating collective socio-cultural meanings through signs, particularly language, to comprehend the world better. It aims at analysing how power and social relations are established, structured, and maintained through culture, and communicating these analyses in public spaces for educational, provocative, and political purposes. Rodman describes cultural studies in two folds; as aiming to produce detailed, contextualized analyses of the creation of power and social relations, and to disseminate these analyses in appropriate public forums for pedagogy, provocation, and political intervention.[13] Cultural Studies contributes to the reappraisal of literature within specific cultural contexts, viewing texts as part of a culture rather than solely the creation of an author. It reconciles global issues with broader current concerns, focusing on aspects such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and the commodification of culture. This enables individuals to align their interests with broader topical issues, allowing for the study of cultural aspects such as Nigerian pidgin proverbs. While other fields may concentrate on a single aspect, Cultural Studies integrates various culturally significant aspects.

Sardar & Van Loon outline five key characteristics of Cultural Studies: firstly, it examines its subject from the perspective of cultural practices and their relations to power. The aim is to reveal power relations and investigate how these relations influence and shape cultural practices; secondly, Cultural Studies is not simply the study of culture as though it were an entity divorced from its social or political context. Its objective is to understand culture in all its complex forms and to analyse the social and political context in which it manifests itself; thirdly, culture in Cultural Studies always performs two functions - the object of study and a platform for political criticism and action; fourthly, it seeks to expose and reconcile knowledge divides, and overcome the divisions between forms of implied knowledge; and fifthly, it is committed to a moral evaluation of contemporary society and radical political action.[14] The tradition of Cultural Studies is not a value-free scholarship but one that is committed to social reconstruction through critical political engagement. The main institutions for cultural studies are universities, hence its classification as an academic discipline. Nevertheless, it attempts to forge connections outside the academy with social and political movements, as well as with officials and cultural administrations of cultural institutions. This area of study allows for a viewing and discussion of complex issues as well as issues and forms previously neglected by high culture/art. Abrams and Harpham observe that:

> A prominent endeavour in cultural studies is to subvert the distinctions in traditional criticism between "high literature" and "high art" and what were considered the lower forms that appeal to a much larger body of consumers. Typically, cultural studies pay less attention to works in the established literary canon than to popular fiction, best-

12 Hall, S. "Introduction". Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1997), 6.
13 Rodman, G.B. Why Cultural Studies? (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 39-40.
14 Sardar, Z. & Van Loon, B. Introducing Cultural Studies: A Graphic Guide. (London: Icon Books, 2015), 72.

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> selling romances (that is, love stories), journalism, and advertising, together with other arts that have mass appeals such as cartoon comics, film, television "soap operas", and rock and rap music. And within the areas of literature and the more traditional arts, a frequent undertaking is to move to the centre of cultural study those works that, it is claimed, have been marginalised or excluded by the aesthetic ideology of white European and American males, and particularly the works of women, minority ethnic groups, and colonial and postcolonial writers.[15]

A major aspect of Cultural Studies, on which this study is largely based, is popular culture. Oswell explains that:

> The discipline of cultural studies, in its relatively short history, has been concerned to a large extent with popular culture: namely, a form of culture that today carries the connotations of entertainment rather than high art, of ordinariness rather than eliteness, of standardisation rather than individuality, and commercialism rather than community.[16]

The term 'popular culture' encompasses various cultural expressions and ideas that have become widely accepted, especially in areas like popular music (e.g., rap), popular literature (e.g., novels by Hardly Chase), and festivals that leverage media to convey their message. Cultural Studies challenges the traditional preference for canonical texts over non-canonical ones and questions the conventional belief that scholars in cultural research should work in isolation from each other. This polemical approach to engaging with texts challenges the established academic norms of what is considered worthy of study and has opened up numerous research opportunities for scholars and students to explore cultural products such as music, art, and fashion.

The Song Artiste and Social Commitment

African literature serves humanity by aiming to improve society and has consistently addressed challenging experiences in Africa. This demonstrates the practical role of African literature as it passionately addresses social, political, economic, and cultural issues that hinder human life.[17] Literary figures, including musicians, have utilised their skills to criticise these societal problems. While Achebe and others are prominent writers demonstrating social commitment through their work, musicians like Fela Anikulapo-Kuti also contribute to this cause. Amuta supports the idea that African literature has a

15 Abrams, M.H., and Harpham, G.G. A Glossary of Literary Terms (11th Edition). Boston: Michael Rosenberg, 2012.
16 Oswell, D. "Popular Culture: From People to Multitude". Culture and Society: An Introduction to Cultural Studies. (UK: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2006), 74.
17 Onyema, C. "Jungle and Oil Green: Currents of Environmental Discourse in Four Upland Niger Delta Narratives". From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger Delta. (Ed.) Nwahunanya, Chinyere. Owerri: Springfield Publishers Ltd., 2011.

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social function when he avers that "as a refraction of social experience through the prism of the human imagination, the ontological essence of literature (song) is to be located in terms of the extent to which it recycles social experience and transforms it into an aesthetic proposition".[18] Obi suggests that literature "has become an important means of understanding and interpreting human beings and aspects of society such as politics, religion, economics, social conflicts, class struggle and human condition".[19] Ogundokun (2013) corroborates this thought further that literature has become:

> a medium of apprehending contemporary or conventional realities through the exposition of the socio-cultural and political experiences of a given society; since it is a product of a particular human society. It is far from being ambiguous that literature buys into the expressive function of a given language. And, the understanding of culture and the society, which are potential ingredients on which literature is premised, paves the way for an effective development.[20]

Okome also comments on the responsibility of the writer (song artiste) as, "one who identifies principally and maximally with the courses of his society with the ultimate objective of understanding them".[21] However, Ikiddeh extends the thought that African literature only reflects the social realities of Africa. Thus, he suggests that such portrayal of the problematic political and social experiences of the African society should also include laudable suggestions and reforms that would alleviate the precarious conditions that have engulfed Africa. He affirms, "literature (song) should show us not only where the rain began to beat us and how severely, but also how to prevent ourselves from perpetual exposure and our houses from flood".[22] The role of a song artist should not stop at highlighting societal problems but should also involve proposing solutions to these issues. Creative writers and oral composers have long been focused on reshaping society and guiding it towards a better path through their works. Fela Anikulapo Kuti and other artistes have consistently criticised the social conditions in Africa, attributing the country's challenges to its leadership. This has prompted many artistes to address these issues. Fela Anikulakpo Kuti, known for his unique Afrobeat, used his music to criticise the Nigerian government and shed light on the country's struggles. Similarly, Eedris Abdulkareem's song "Nigeria Jaga Jaga" continues to resonate with Nigerians, highlighting the disarray and suffering caused by the leadership. Erigga, a Nigerian singer and rap artiste, also focuses on the social predicaments faced by

18 Amuta, C. Towards a Sociology of African Literature. (Oguta: Zim Pan African Publishers, 1986), 38-39.
19 Obi, N. "Language: A Tool for Literature". The Study of Language and Linguistics in Nigeria: A Festchrift for Kay Williamsons. (Ed.) Ndimele, F. D. Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages and Grand Orbit Communication, 2006.
20 Ogundokun, S. "A Paradigm of Lamentation in Three African Poems". Journal of Arts & Humanities 1, no. 4 (2013): 76.
21 Okome, U. "Comic Dramaturgy and Societal Re-awakening in Yerima's The Lottery Ticket". Making Images, Re-making Lives: Art and Life in Ahmed Yerima. (Eds.) Uwemedimo, A. &Inegbe, S. Uyo: Modern Business Press. (2007): 161.
22 Ikiddeh, I. Historic Essays of African Literature, Language and Culture. (Uyo: Minder International, 2005), xiv.

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the masses in his songs, employing creative language and Nigerian Pidgin to decry oppression. Nigerian artistes have consistently used their art to expose and criticise the societal ills in Nigeria, viewing music as a powerful tool for driving social change. With the freedom associated with the current democracy, modern youths have embraced music as a means of criticising social issues and have even localised hip-hop in some urban areas of Southwestern Nigeria[23], garnering attention from both local and international audiences.

Proverbs and African Literature

The diversity of African languages and their extensive collection of proverbs set them apart, reflecting the continent's rich cultural tapestry due to its multitude of ethnic groups. Despite the divisions imposed by Western colonial powers, these ethnic groups share common cultural and folkloric traditions. Scholars such as Ukwuaba have emphasised the significance of these proverbs in African oral literature, as they encapsulate profound linguistic elements rooted in people's experiences and observations of everyday life and the spiritual realm.[24] These proverbs are repositories of cultural wisdom, with meanings that extend beyond their literal interpretations, as noted by previous studies like those of Finnegan[25] and Akporobaro[26]. African literature has oral traditions at its core, as evidenced by its rich folklore encompassing folktales, riddles, and proverbs. These oral traditions were passed down from older to younger generations, countering the misconception that Africa lacked literary traditions. The arrival of colonialists prompted the emergence of written African literature, aimed at presenting the African perspective and challenging Western perceptions. This literature incorporates folkloric elements, creating a hybrid form that ultimately benefits African literature.[27]

While proverbs have universal qualities, their cultural uniqueness stems from being crafted around specific cultural experiences. Achebe explains that in Igbo culture, proverbs serve to universalise specific incidents and soften the impact of harsh language.[28] By incorporating proverbs, writers in African literature not only preserve culture but also enrich character and meaning. Proverbs are frequently used to convey deeper meanings, cultural values, and social commentary. Authors integrate traditional sayings into their narratives to provide insight into characters, themes, and conflicts. For instance, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* extensively utilises Igbo proverbs to explore themes of tradition, change, and cultural collision. Similarly, in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's works such as *Petals of Blood* and *Wizard of the Crow*, the use of Gikuyu proverbs

23 Christopher, N. "Evaluation of Nigerian Rural and Urban Youth Music". Studies in African Music 2. London: Oxford University Press, 2015.
24 Ukwuaba, O.K. "A Linguistic Study of Proverbs and Language Identity in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God". M.A. Dissertation. Lagos: University of Lagos, 2015.
25 Finnegan, R. Oral Literature in Africa (2nd Ed.). World Oral Literature Series 1. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012.
26 Akporobaro, F.B.O. Introduction to Oral Literature. Lagos: Princeton Publishing, 2005.
27 Fortes, L.C.P. "Africa Viewed through its Proverbs and Literature". European Scientific Journal, (2014): 558.
28 Achebe, C. "Foreword". Selection of African Prose (Vol. 1). W.H Whiteley (ed.). (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964): viii.

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enhances the narrative's cultural authenticity and adds layers of meaning, shedding light on the complexities of post-colonial African societies. These proverbs serve as potent storytelling tools, enabling authors to convey universal truths while celebrating the richness and diversity of African cultures.

Proverbs are a genre of folklore that is passed down from one generation to the other. It also serves as a means of interpreting and understanding the life and events around us. In this respect, regardless of the rapid growth in technology, exposure to Western education and cultures, proverbs continue to play an important role in discussions, debates, speeches, and all forms of communication among people. Many African writers have employed proverbs as a means to show the daily experiences of the African continent. Asika avers;

> African writers have been able to use proverbs in telling the African side of the story and several Igbo writers, like Chinua Achebe, Cyprain Ekwensi, John Munonye, Onouha Nzekwu, Obi Egbuna, Flora Nwapa, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada, Rems Umuasiegbu among others incorporated Igbo proverbs in their works to reflect their "igboness" and to showcase the unique cultural values, traditions and norms of the people they write about.[29]

African literature stands out from other Western literature because it vividly delves into and presents the diverse African culture and traditions, including proverbs, folklore, and fables. Nigerian literature is notably rich in oral tradition, and writers like Amos Tutuola and Chinua Achebe have excelled in transforming oral art into literary works.[30]

From the preceding points, it is clear that proverbs are integral to the oral traditions and ethical norms of African societies, transmitted through songs, stories, folktales, myths, communal discussions, and other means from one generation to the next. Fortes supports this idea, stating that "proverbs, as a sample of African oral traditions, constitute a literary resource and a literary potential that carry values, beliefs, customs; in a nutshell, the world-view of African cultures".[31] Undoubtedly, proverbs play a crucial role in language development. Chinonye opines that "the compulsory use of Igbo proverbs, parables, and idioms in every traditional setting has elevated the language to the status of a living art of popular communication".[32] Proverbs are incorporated into everyday conversations, adding local flair, and many are believed to have been passed down through generations, offering insight into their creators' world. For Asika and Emeodi,

> this helped them in various ways to achieve harmony and balance in their lives and when we use these proverbs, we

29 Asika I.E. "Telling the African Side of the Story: Proverb as a Crucial Element in Uchenna Nwosu's The Rejected Stone". p. 18.
30 Lindfors, B. Folklore in Nigerian Literature. New York: Heinemann, 1973.
31 Fortes, L.C.P. "Africa Viewed through its Proverbs and Literature". p.558.
32 Chinonye, O.J. "Igbo Proverbs, Idioms and Parables", 2020. https://www.igboguide.org/guests/igbo-proverbs.htm p.1.

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> are reflecting and cultivating on their worldview and perception of life which aids our understanding and interpretation of certain cosmological and phenomenal occurrences around us and for a more codified human relationship; hence, the need to cite proverbs in our speeches.[33]

Drawing from the preceding discussion, it is "the real master of proverbs is one who is able to summon the entire cavalry at will and make them perform precisely those tricks he has in mind. Even the speeches of old men are usually spiced with them and it is certainly an index of traditional wisdom to apply them appropriately in one's speech" (p.1).[34] Additionally, it is increasingly vital to explore proverbs, their roles, and their functions in African literary works from various perspectives and dimensions in order to fully comprehend what is now collectively known as African literature. This is essential in portraying artistes not only as entertainers and educators but also as the moral compass, guardians, and agents of change within society. In this context, African literature becomes a valuable contribution from the African environment and the accomplishments of the past, which can only be provided by dedicated and authentic African writers who are responsible for reconstructing African history. It will continue to be highly esteemed and recognised as a remedy, conveyed through the written word, for the present and future prosperity of the African continent.

Reflections on Poverty and Socio-Economic Consciousness in Erigga's Pidgin Proverbs

The importance of Nigerian literature in addressing emerging social challenges in politics, commerce, religion, and ecology cannot be overstated. Nigerian literature has consistently responded to these challenges from pre-colonial times to the present day, reflecting the changing social landscape.[35] Musicians and song artists, including Erigga, have embraced the social function of literature in their art, using their work to highlight and satirise the crises in Nigeria and the world at large. While many modern Nigerian songs inadvertently romanticise poverty, inept leadership, and a careless lifestyle, Erigga stands out for his storytelling abilities and his focus on highlighting the socio-economic challenges in Nigeria through his music. His lyrics vividly depict the struggles faced by people living in impoverished communities, addressing issues such as unemployment, crime, corruption, and the harsh realities of life in Nigeria. Through his use of pidgin proverbs, Erigga adds depth to his exploration of poverty and socio-economic challenges, connecting with his audience on a cultural and emotional level. Erigga's song "Bad Person" presents a rich narrative that delves into the complexities of human nature, societal

33 Asika, I.E. & Emeodi, L.I. "The Palm-oil with which Good Stories are told: Proverb as Plot Generator in Flora Nwapa's Efuru and Idu". AFRREV LALIGENS, 1 no.2. (2012): 117.
34 Ihueze, A.O. & Umeasiegbu, R. "Proverb Usage in African Literature". International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention. 4, no.3. (2015): 1.
35 Megbowon, F.K. & Uwah, C. "African Literature: A Tool for Societal Regeneration". Imbizo 11, no. 1. (2020): 2. Doi:10.25159/2663-6565/6432

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pressures, and the struggle for survival in challenging environments. It paints vivid pictures of the harsh realities of life, particularly in the context of the streets and the struggles faced by individuals trying to make ends meet. While at this, he reminds as a way of warning about the transient nature of wealth and all that it attracts including those who have parasitic intentions. The singer encapsulates this through the lyrical proverb, "***you forget sey wen sugar finish, every ant dey lost***".[36] It suggests that when a source of sweetness or abundance, represented by the sugar, is depleted or gone, the ants, which were previously attracted to it, all abandon it as it has nothing else to offer them. This is reflective of the idea that people only want to associate with success because of what they stand to gain. The singer indicates this in the song when he avers "na who get money be their blood… (and) the day you no give dem money, you be bad person". The moment they stop getting what they want, they dissociate themselves from the very thing (wealth) that attracted them in the first place. Erigga uses this proverb to describe such persons based on his personal experience with people who cared less about him during his travails and prison experience yet want to associate with him now he is free and has made it. When he turns them down occasionally, he is seen as a bad person. In fact, he is resigned to the general opinion that no matter the good he does, while also being prudent in his spending, he will still be regarded as a bad person.

Indeed, Erigga doesn't shy away from depicting the stark realities of poverty in his songs. He uses vivid imagery and personal anecdotes to paint a picture of life in the streets, highlighting the struggles faced by individuals who lack basic necessities and opportunities for advancement. Often times, as a result of the lack of jobs, the impoverished and docile masses resort to any available, often evil, means to earn a living. Such immoral thoughts come to their minds mostly as a result of their idleness. The artiste portrays this in "Motivation" when he raps, "***idle mind dey opposite devil workshop***".[37] Even though the proverb emphasises the value of getting busy and staying focused as a way of avoiding the temptation of carrying out immoral behaviours, the economic situation of the country does not make it any better. Thus he tows the path of self-motivation as seen in the proverb, "***pikin wey dey find party rice no suppose fear dance***".[38] For him, a person who seeks success and a better life must make frantic efforts and be prepared for any challenges that may come with it. Considering the poor living conditions in the Niger Delta, the artiste adopts the image of 'party rice', which, for many of those living in Warri, is a free avenue to quench hunger. 'Party rice' then becomes a goal to be achieved. The artiste thus admonishes his audience to brace up to the hurdles (dance) in achieving that goal. The singer, himself, is not ready to give up on his dreams, hence, "as I come with my red eye, make dem give me chance". In "Kettle", the persona explores the harsh experiences surrounding his personal growth and that of his friend, Okiemute. He employs vivid imagery in conveying the challenges Okiemute faces and the lessons he learns in the process to become a better person. The song is a compelling narrative of struggle, perseverance, and redemption. Erigga's storytelling ability allows listeners to empathise with Okiemute's journey and gain insight into the realities of life in his environment. He captures

36 Erigga. Bad Persin. Greatness Musiq LLC, 2023.

37 Erigga & Victor AD. "Motivation". The Erigma II. No. 1 Sound Limited, 2018.
38 ibid.

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this in the proverb, "***who naked no dey chook hand for pocket***".[39] This proverb is birthed from Erigga's encounter with Okiemute where he beckoned on Okiemute who turned deaf ears to his call probably out of fear that Erigga would ask him for money. The proverb has two layers of meaning. First is that one must be honest about his true situation instead of pretending. The consequence of pretending is that one may not get help from anyone as he would have succeeded in creating the impression that he has in abundance. The artiste echoes this thus; "if you no get money no hide your face ooh/show your face make person help you". The second meaning that may be inferred is that one cannot give when he does not have. In this context, a naked man has no clothing in the first place, let alone a pocket to dip his hand into and gift someone. The significance of the pocket here is that of possession. As different as they are, both meanings are linked. The artiste encourages individuals to always be honest about their situations.

The lyrics of "The Erigma II" highlight the social condition of Nigerians and how it affects their struggles and hustle, showing people's different attitudes towards one another. While some are happy for the success, others are happy for the failure of their fellow man. This evil in the mind of people is what the persona laments as worthy of desperate response. He avers via the proverb, "***who wahala naked follow no dey use English pray***".[40] The proverb implies that tough conditions are not to be treated with levity. For him, desperate times call for desperate measures and when there is serious trouble, one does not need to pretend. The artiste also sees the English language as an inadequate medium for praying oneself out of the cruel social conditions that Nigerians face daily. Apart from prayer as a means of overcoming his challenges, the artiste is of the opinion that money also plays a crucial role. The lack of money is reflective of the poor economic situation of the country wherein not everyone is able to afford their needs. He posits, "***na pocket wey no get money hand dey stay inside tey***".[41] The empty pocket symbolises lack and one cannot take from what he does not have hence, he is constrained from taking certain actions to better his lot. In essence, the proverb implies that when one does not have the resources, he is less likely to spend or take action, often feeling limited or hampered by their lack of funds.

Erigga's songs often serve as a window into the harsh realities of poverty and socio-economic struggles faced by individuals in marginalised communities. Through his lyrics, he provides a voice for the voiceless and sheds light on the systemic issues that perpetuate inequality and hardship.

Reflections on Motivation and Morality in Erigga's Pidgin Proverbs

Nigerian pidgin proverbs, as with popular literature, reflect concerns on morality and motivation. This is manifested in Erigga's songs which are rendered in Nigerian pidgin and are reflective of the street realities in his hometown, Warri and Nigeria at large. He sheds light on issues corruption, inequality, and the struggles faced by ordinary people trying to make ends

39 Erigga & Graham D. Kettle. Emirates Records, 2018.
40 Erigga, Abaga & Sami. "The Erigma II". The Erigma II. No. 1 Sound Limited, 2019.
41 ibid.

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meet. In doing so, he gives a voice to the voiceless and highlights the systemic barriers that perpetuate injustice and hardship. His songs are often a reflection of street living, depicting the struggles, triumphs, and survival tactics of individuals navigating life in impoverished or disadvantaged neighborhoods. He draws from his own experiences and observations to paint a vivid picture of the challenges faced by those living on the margins of society. From tales of hustling to stories of betrayal and loyalty, Erigga's music captures the toughness of street life.

More so, in spite of his socio-cultural background and upbringing, Erigga's songs are incredibly moralistic and motivational. In some of his songs, he talks about his difficult journey into the music business and declares that he will not be giving up on music anytime soon since he is in it for a purpose far more important than mere relevance, which is to change people's lives through his words. Since making his debut in the music business, he has won multiple honours. Indeed, his songs are catchy and fascinating to listen to, but beyond their artistic merits, many of his songs include deeper teachings that many listeners overlook. Instead, they pay attention more to his wordplay, rhymes, and rhythms. As with the moralistic and motivational value of African literary expressions, which are deeply intertwined with the ethical values of the African culture, via oral traditions, folklore and proverbs, Erigga's songs often contain Nigerian pidgin proverbs that reflect morality and motivational messages which resonate deeply with his audience. Through his songs, he does not only motivate his audience, he also advocates for moral integrity and social justice.

"Area to the World" is both a moralistic and motivational record that talks about motivating one's self, pushing harder until one gets to that point where people begin to sing one's praise. The artiste narrates how he became successful in the music industry and how some persons, who used to ignore him, now pretend to be friends. He remembers how hard things were before he made it big and how he had to struggle to survive. Despite all these, he is staying positive and motivated hence, he raps, "***na only time e go take, stammerer go call him papa name***".[42] This is an apt pidgin proverb that suggests a difficult condition, which is likened to a stammerer who is faced with the challenge of pronouncing words properly. In spite of this condition, he is able to find a way through, only that it will take a little more time. This is a vivid depiction of Erigga's own struggles and triumphs, offering encouragement to those facing similar challenges. No doubt, the artiste's motivation is driven by a desire to rise above the challenges of street life and achieve success. The lyrics of his song convey a sense of ambition and determination, encouraging listeners to persevere and stay focused despite obstacles. The motivational aspect of the song is reinforced by the narrative of personal growth and transformation, illustrating how hardwork and resilience can lead to a better future. Whether rapping about overcoming adversity or staying true to one's self, Erigga inspires his audience to keep pushing forward and never give up on their dreams. This, he also portrays in the proverb, "***no matter how you watch film, the story inside no fit change***".[43] By implication, no one can change what already has been destined, regardless of the amount of efforts that is put in to alter it. For Erigga, no matter

42 Erigga & Victor AD. "Area to the World". The Erigma II. Area to the World INC, 2019.
43 ibid.

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what his friends and foes have done in the past to thwart his efforts, his success is permanent and cannot be changed or altered. Similarly, in "Motivation", the artiste emphasises the idea that what is meant to happen will happen, regardless of any attempts to interfere or prevent it. He avers, "***tomorrow get belle, winch no fit abort am***".[44] This proverb encourages and motivates individuals to stay optimistic and persistent, trusting that better days are ahead and that no negative forces can prevent the unfolding of what is destined to come. For him, the future is inevitable and cannot be altered, no matter how much one may wish to change or stop it.

Similarly, the moral dimension in some of his songs can be seen in the way the artiste addresses the choices people make in their pursuit of success. His songs highlight the blurred lines between right and wrong in a world where survival often necessitates bending or breaking rules. Erigga depicts morality when he highlights the betrayal and non-existence of trust in relationships and human endeavours. In "Motivation", he sings, "***if trust dey, then water no fit cook fish***".[45] The proverb highlights the non-existence of trust in human endeavours, judging from his personal experience with those who neglected him and wrote him off. He opines that if trust truly exists in a relationship, then there would be nothing to be scared of. In this case, water is the habitat of fishes and so should ordinarily not be able to harm them. It is only when the water has been compromised by virtue of its change in temperature that it can then harm the fish by cooking it. Thus, for the singer, trust does not exist anywhere and that is why the same water that serves as a habitat for fishes can also cook them. Also, the artiste in "Next Track" advises one to pay attention to the small details and to be diligent in all aspects of life. He reflects this in the proverb, "***na small shit dey stain yansh***".[46]

Beyond the call to treat minor issues with importance, the proverb has a moral undertone. It emphasises the importance of integrity. For the artiste, small lapses can tarnish one's reputation or character. Therefore, one must maintain high moral standards and be conscientious, even in seemingly minor matters. He reflects on the consequences of one's actions, the importance of integrity, and the challenges of navigating life's complexities. Through his lyrics, Erigga encourages listeners to reflect on their choices and strive to live with honour and dignity and avoid everything that is capable of distorting it. In "Loyalty", he says, "***no pick the ball if you know sey you no wan play***".[47] This implies that for one to decide to start something or take on a task, one should be prepared to follow through and see it to completion. By extension, it is a call for one's honesty about his intention upfront rather than accepting responsibility and then not living up to it. This applies to various aspects of life, from commitments in relationships to tasks in work or personal projects. Similarly, in "The Erigma II" the artiste motivates people to take immediate action and avoid procrastination. For him, delaying tasks or goals can hinder one's progress and potential. He avers, "***na I go do am later naim make fowl no fit fly like other***

44 Erigga & Victor AD. "Motivation".
45 ibid.
46 Erigga & Oga Network. "Next Track". The Erigma II. Emirates Records, 2019.
47 Erigga. "Loyalty". A Trip to the South. Emirates Records, 2017.

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birds".[48] This is a proverbial way of saying that procrastination can hinder the progress or success of a task. In other words, success and progress come from timely effort and commitment.

Street living is also portrayed in his song through the proverb, "***Club wey you shutdown for night dey open today***".[49] The proverb is quite laden with interpretations. On one hand, the proverb suggests that every ending marks a new beginning thereby preaching a message of hope and resilience. However, this does not fall within the context the singer uses it. In fact, in its didactic nature, it spells out the dangers of not being frugal with spending. The singer warns of the need to be a wise spender, knowing that there are many more responsibilities ahead that one would need as much finance as possible to pull through. This statement is apt as it exposes the lifestyle of many individuals who live in the ghetto and spend extravagantly without thinking about tomorrow. The artiste brings this proverb home by using the 'club' as a pointer to where these individuals often go for leisure. More so, in warning that one must be pennywise, the artiste narrates the story of Okiemute who rises from poverty to riches and back to poverty. He warns that everyone has his own struggles and path to success and may not get the help of another in achieving success. He portrays this in the song, "Kettle", where he sings, "***every mallam to e kettle***".[50] Here, the rapper represents man as 'mallam' and 'kettle' as a metaphor for man's problems and path. He is of the notion that every man is charged with the responsibility and task to search for the meaning of what complements his existence, and this responsibility is personal and non-communal.

No doubt, the use of Nigerian pidgin proverbs to express experiences of street living is an integral component of Erigga's music, shaping its content, tone, and impact. Through his ingenious use of proverbs, Erigga is able to provide a window into the complexities of the Nigerian society, showing his lived experience and that of some others, ultimately sparking conversations on morality and inspiring change.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, one can affirm that pidgin proverbs are a unique concept and import in both literary and linguistic endeavours. This study examined how Nigerian artistes, like Erigga, blend local linguistic forms with modern musical forms through their adept use of pidgin English. Erigga's pidgin proverbs carry deep cultural meanings and reflect the wisdom and values of the Nigerian society, particularly the South-South, which boasts a large number of pidgin rap artistes. He uses his songs and proverbs in commenting on contemporary social issues such as corruption, poverty, and social inequality, providing a voice for the marginalised and fostering social consciousness. By incorporating pidgin proverbs in his songs, he showcases the uniqueness and wealth of Nigerian culture. The paper, therefore, demonstrates the significance of pidgin proverbs

48 Erigga, Abaga & Sami. "The Erigma II".
49 Erigga. Bad Persin, 2023.
50 Erigga & Graham D. Kettle, 2018.

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in Nigerian rap, highlighting their roles in social commentary, expressing literary and linguistic creativity, and promoting visibility of Nigerian pidgin.

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