

## Waka Music as a Commentary on Yoruba Society in Post-Colonial Nigeria: A Review of Two Female Musicians

*Mutiati Titilope Oladejo*  
Department of History  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria  
[oladejomutiati@yahoo.com](mailto:oladejomutiati@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

In pre-colonial and colonial Yoruba societies, music was an integral part of everyday life. Scholarly works have differentiated music genres among the Yoruba with attempts made to analyse their historical background. Even though the Yoruba music industry is a male-dominated industry with concentration on Fuji, Highlife and Juju music, the few female musicians in the industry have created a distinct genre known as Waka music. This article argues that the Waka music of the female musicians presents a perspective for understanding the feminisation of music and the challenges of development in Southwestern Nigerian cities from the immediate postcolonial era. Moreover, against the stereotype that women lack insights into social issues, this work displays that Waka music by female singers, Batuli Alake and Salawa Abeni, illustrate how an agency of communication and relevance is created. The career history of both women serves as a basis for unravelling feminist struggles to eke out a livelihood in postcolonial Nigeria. The article adopted an historical approach in its analysis. It employed both primary and secondary sources such as online interview excerpts, newspapers, journals and books. The findings show that Waka music has strictly been a sphere of interest that women have sustained in the Yoruba music industry.

### Key words:

Waka music, Yoruba Society, Postcolonial Nigeria, Female musicians  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ummaj.v9i2.8>

### Introduction

In Africa and globally, music is a product of creativity of the mind which is expressed verbally. In Yorubaland, music genres occur in different forms, but this work focuses on Waka music by examining the life of the singer and the context of their music. Recently, Professor

Kunle Lawal of the Department of History, University of Ibadan presented a monograph at the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) that describes music as integral part of Nigerian society in reference to the life and times of Chief (Dr.) Sikiru Ayinde Agbaje Balogun (2013). The monograph highlights extensively the relationship between Fuji music and the Nigerian society. His writing also provides insights into the history of indigenous music industry.

This article further explores the integral part of music in Yoruba life by examining the perspectives of the few women operating in the male-dominated music industry but who have created a unique niche of Waka music. Specifically, it examines their lives as musicians in the context of the Waka music in Yoruba society. The article has adopted an historical approach to analysing both primary and secondary sources such as online interview excerpts, newspapers, journals and books. It has established that Waka music has been strictly a sphere of interest for women in the music industry.

The sources used in writing this article mostly come from musical albums and life histories of Batuli Alake and SalawaAbeni particularly their albums released between 1970 and 1990s. Other sources include newspapers of the era, and interviews published in online magazines. The practitioners of Waka music in Yorùbáland are mostly women. Some of them are an overlapping crop of female musicians in the Waka genre who came into prominence between the 1960s and 1980s. These include Olawunmi Adetoun, Decency Oladunni, Adebukola Ajao Oru, Foyeke 'Ajangila' Ayoka, Ayinke Elebolo, Aduke Ehinfunjowo, Hairat Isawu, SalawaAbeni, and Adijat Alaraagbo. Their presence and identity creation in the industry feminised the practice of Waka music (Documentary interview organised by Suwat music and Films for Kuburat Alagbo published on Facebook, October 5, 2020). The feminisation of this brand of music evolves from Yorùbá culture of merry-making.

Research in women's studies still owes much to biographies and/or life histories of women who contributed immensely to societal growth despite the constraints and challenges with which they contend. Several studies have been carried out on Yoruba women in various professions. A rather neglected aspect in scholarly literature is the role of women in Yoruba music, particularly Waka music in which they have exceptionally distinguished themselves. As such, this work aims to contextualise the

place of women in Yoruba music by examining the musical content in the work of Queen Batuli Alake and SalawaAbeni. Even though, their brand of Yoruba music is Waka it is broadly classified under the Fuji music genre. Their works serve as a source of shaping and understanding women's lives and the general contradictions in the Nigerian society. Moreover, this analysis attempt to look at the life of Batuli Alake and Queen Salawa Abeni beyond the popular polemics that degrade and dismiss female musicians in Yorubaland as a category of prostitutes who use music as a platform for their exploits. In essence, the work is an historical reconstruction of the perception of women in Yoruba society.

Saudat Hamzat traces the history of music among the Yorùbá and describes Waka as a new musical form that blends tradition and modernity influenced by acculturation, education, and faith (Hamzat 2017, pp. 164-165). The feminisation of Waka music is also a manifestation of how colonialism side-lined women. Nandy explains this colonial marginalisation as manly and husbandly treatment since colonialism offered opportunities for men to dominate all spheres (Nandy, 1983, p. 5). As a result, the masculine dominated the feminine. Such domination called for a re-creation of the feminine life, which the women musicians have been trying to do in an otherwise male-dominated industry. As such, this article projects Waka Fuji music as a feminine creation that counters the husbandly hegemony created by the colonial state.

The colonial effect that contributed to the marginalisation of women is further illuminated by Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997), who explained that the colonial and international capitalist system introduced economic organisations that twisted the African economy and tended to exclude women. Access to power was gender-based in Britain and this orientation influenced Nigeria under colonial rule. The tradition of male dominance had overarching effect during the colonial era. Rather than accept the norm of gendered power in balance, Yorùbá Muslim women recreated a new balance through the agency of Waka music.

This article affirms that the Waka music re-created by women was an agency responding to colonialism and its implication. Whereas Oyewumi (1997) disagreed that colonialism offered any favour to women, Mba (1978) proffered that the colonial structures such as the legal system

offered an opportunity for women to negotiate their status, especially through unsatisfactory unions. Additionally, Oladejo's (2019) book, *The Women Went Radical: Petition writing and the colonial state in South Western Nigeria 1900-1953* concurs with Mba's view that colonialism offered some advantages to women and thus in this article moves further to analyse the agency created through Waka music.

The recreation and feminisation of Waka music also resonates with how colonialism separated the spheres of women differently from men. For example, education for boys and girls were masculinised and feminised. Denzer (1992) and Oladejo (2017) analysed how women were mainstreamed and secluded in certain forms of education such as domestic science of sewing, embroidery, housekeeping and after much clamour for advanced plans for women they trained as stenographers, teachers and nurses. These forms of exclusion gave clear indications that women were not expected to qualify for other professions deemed to be domains for men. The markets became the sphere for women and means of earning their livelihoods, with Waka music serving merriment function of socialisation process that emerged from merry making among women from that category.

Even though market women mostly from Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta staged protests against the colonial state in the 1940s, music served as a means for rallying demonstrators. The content of the songs communicated messages of grievance to the government and during merry times; however, these songs are composed to fit into the relaxation and leisure mode. Oladejo (2015) articulates how Ibadan women used chants in demonstration. The agency formed around using songs in protest especially by market women also created a sense of belonging for women. Expressions of grievances through songs at demonstration sites meant a lot to women. They provided an opportunity for them to speak to power and promote viewpoints affecting their society.

Invariably, the adverse effect of colonial gendered segregation became very manifest as women and men rarely share the same space for expression. Waka music became a means of expression in addition to creating a feminine space for analysing the challenges and events in the society. That women used songs was not new in the colonial era, from the precolonial times were women were praise-singers, story tellers and

chanters in West Africa. The colonial era was only a phase aided by modernisation in terms of recording and instrument.

### **Conceptualising Waka Music**

There is generally a contentious argument pertaining to the supposed lack of harmony in African music. But Akpabot (1999) explained dismiss this contention as a colonial view of Africa where African music was compared in European perspective. This misunderstanding is connected with the issue of the use of indigenous African languages. Understanding these African language remains sacrosanct to discerning the message in music. Implicitly, European dismissive remarks about African music resulted from the language barrier. Hence, culture and language are important factors that determined the brand of African music. The cultural indicators of African music encompass various social, political and economic endeavours in everyday life. Invariably, music in many African contexts can fall into three groups: Basically for entertainment, appraised, and abuse music.

One of the major features of Waka music is its affinity to the Islamic faith. Waka is a term that describes music created by women and developed out of Yoruba folklore. It is a rhythmical music supported by Yoruba ethnic drums. In a study of Yoruba music, Euba (1989) has established a link between Islam and Yoruba culture. Waka music is an Islamic-influenced Yoruba traditional music style popularised by Batuli Alake in the 1950s (*Nigerian Tribune*, 12/04/1975). Moreover, the development of Waka music evolved from *Seli*, a brand of singing in traditional Ijebu society, where a band of women sing as a procession on ceremonial occasions (Alaroye 2013). In fact, Waka music emerged earlier than Juju and Fuji music.

The concept of *waka* among Yoruba Muslims emanated from women groups who formed *Egbe Alaslatu* within Islamic organisations (Gbadamosi 1978). These women compose songs at occasions, which gave comments to support Islamic injunctions on Muslim life. In this regard, Waka music has proven its worth to portray the role of music as a commentary on the society. The cultural perspectives of these songs are well-depicted in Waka music. Muslim lifestyle of the twentieth century

enhanced the relationship between *waka* music and Yoruba culture, for instance, the period of *Ramadhan* (the third pillar of Islam) entails musical concert to wake Muslims before dawn by performers known as *Ajisaari/Ajiwere* (Oral interview with Alhaji Yunusa Gbadamosi, 15/10/2012).

The way masculinity is fleshed out from the colonial era enhanced the creation of femininity in all spheres. Carrigan et al. (1985, p. 92) identified the ways of becoming a man as a culturally-exalted hegemonic model. In Yorùbá societies, this masculinity construct holds sway even in the colonial era as men's identities became fluid, situational and relational. In essence, the colonial era clearly separated spheres of masculine power from feminine power. Consequently, variations in emerging masculinity in Yorùbáland created the urgency for feminine agency as an alternative for survival. In fact, women took advantage of new livelihoods in the colonial state. Progressively, the nature of relationships between men and women changed. These changes signifies how women's agency evolved with all ramifications. Although the new agency was an advancement of precolonial forms of socialisation common among Yorùbá women. *Waka* music evolved from the Egbe (social/professional) groups formed among women in the markets and Yorùbá towns. The groups also evolved new ways of living and socialising and they cherished merry-making. These groups created a music system related to how Muslim clerics use Yorùbá language to sing at events. This type of music was picked up by a few women and it morphed into a feminine music genre known as *Waka* music.

In the making of music, Yorùbá men and women respond differently. These differences were attributable to the separate lives of men and women. Whereas the concept of *Waka* originated from Muslim preachers, Nigerian veterans who had partaken in the world wars influenced the growth of music industry, especially *juju* or *highlife* (Collins 2016, p.12). Some Yorùbá in Sierra Leone also contributed to the growth of mostly Muslim men adopting the *Juju* musical instruments from ex-service men and the permeation of *Waka* music into social and celebration fabric. This origination of *Juju* music from Muslim men assumed different dimensions until it metamorphosed into *Fuji* music. *Fuji* music created a different feeling among Yorùbá listeners. Whereas the Yorùbá elite preferred *Juju* music, the traders and artisans favoured *Fuji* music. The

feminized socialisation agency and the Waka music among Yorùbá women distinctly led to the construction of womanhood. And it depicted a picture of independence as women rarely relied on men. In Cornwall's (2003) description of the ideals of masculinity in Ado-Odo of Southwestern Nigeria, most of the challenges encountered by men were based on certain expectations they wanted women to conform to and accept. Yet, the changing nature of urbanisation affected the states of the way gender manifest, especially in cities.

The Yorùbá trade networks mainly domiciled in the informal sector, mattered in the success of Waka music. The role of Islam in Waka music is evident in one of Batuli Alake's music in which she recites verses in the Quran, mostly seeking the help of God in daily affairs (Aje Onire Music Album). This recitation of verses affirms the Islamic influence on Waka music.

Gbadmosi (1978, p. 199) in the analysis of the growth of Islam among the Yorùbá emphasised how Islam blended easily with Yorùbá culture and the roles of women in-between. The civilizing role of Islam accepted in Yorùbá society serves as a derivative for defining a new life. The making of the Yorùbá Muslim women was a redress and rebranding due to the Christian challenge and discrimination. Thus, creating a new life as Yorùbá Muslim women featured in work as traders in the markets of the twentieth century. In fact, scholars in African women's studies have emphasised on and enacted how African women should be understood in African reality.

### **Batuli Alake**

In a picture published in the *Alaroye* newspaper of September 2, 2013, Batuli Alake and her Waka music band performed to welcome the Queen of England in 1960 (*Alaroye*, September 2, 2013). She belonged to a generation of musician that witnessed the attainment of Nigeria's independence in 1960. She belonged to an older generation and was initially a part-time musician. She started singing aged twelve, childhood involvement in Waka music for young girls was a feature Yoruba society where music is an integral part of everyday life. Her music was also influenced by nationalist politics of the 1960s as she had an affinity to Chief Obafemi Awolowo's political party—Action Group (AG). Batuli

Alake's music reigned in the 1950s and 1960s. Being an Ijebu woman from Ijebu Igbo, partying and merry-making was synonymous to Ijebu. Considering that they were the most prominent textile traders in Lagos, who had made real entrepreneurial connections with textile manufacturers from Austria (Oladejo, 2022). Like fellow Ijebu women who prospered in textile trading, she commercialised Waka music by taking advantage of modern music companies in Lagos of the 1960s.

The inspiration to sing came from both her father and paternal aunt who were musicians, as well as a cordial relationship with a male musician, Alhaji Haruna Ishola (*Apala* musician) served as a guide for operating in the male-dominated music industry (Alaroye, September 2013). In essence, Waka music is saddled with commentaries on contemporary issues, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. Apparently, the ceremonial Yoruba culture associated with organising ceremonial events provided a viable platform for Waka musicians to thrive. Moreover, between 1950s and 1970 Austrian laces flooded the Nigerian market (Plankensteiner & Adediran 2011). By then, fashion and music were an integral part of social life of Yoruba women.

As among the Ijebu and Lagos women Waka music was widely accepted, Batuli Alake relaunched her brand of Waka music. With support and solidarity from the Ijebu-Igbo Basiri Club, which was formed by natives of her town, she became even more popular in the 1970s. She also received business support from Femi Okuyemi, the Chief Executive Officer of Femco Sounds (*Nigerian Tribune* 14/06/1975). Additionally, with further support from Femco Sounds, she relaunched her album at Salome Night Club Yaba, Lagos in 1975. Prior to the relaunch, the training and mentorship she had received from her Aunt Rafatu Aduke enabled her to produce about twelve records, which basically centred on socio-political and economic issues in Nigerian society. In fact, she released related records thusly:

- i. *Orin Awolowo* - comments on politics and the personality of Chief Obafemi Awolowo.
- ii. *Gbogbo wa pata ka roomo bi* - centres on how Yoruba culture cherishes the need to procreate and the inability to do so, such woman involved is stigmatised as barren.
- iii. *Danfo Onimoto* - a motor transport service business was revolutionised by Nigerian entrepreneurs and, as such, a lot of

transport employees emerged in the cities. The record comments on the need for the Onimoto (transporter) to exercise patience and avoid reckless driving for the security and safety of passengers (*Nigerian Tribune*, 14/06/1975).

The Yorùbá language and philosophy feature prominently in Waka music. The composition of Batuli Alake's lyrics refers to animals, the human body, plant leaves, trees, the moon, rainbow, to construct the purpose of life. She also uses Yorùbá sayings and proverbs in her music. In essence, central to the track are issues of money, prosperity, success and peace. In the context of emphasizing Yorùbá philosophy of life, Batuli Alake's track titled: *Ojumotimo* finished the track with the lyrics: *Eni ire ti tan, sika sika le niegberun* (good people are scarce, but wicked ones are readily available). This and other sayings in the track describe how complicated everyday life was in the society.

The richness of Yorùbá philosophy as it manifests in her music illustrates deeply engrained the music is in the Yorùbá language and culture. Indeed, the use of Yorùbá phrases to describe moments enrich the content of her music. Moreover, her emphasis on moments fits into the Yorùbá cosmology of success and prosperity. Furthermore, the role of merry-making and the Yorùbá trade networks manifest in the tract coupled with the praise singing of the Lagos Unity Social Club. The focus on the club and the names of members show that they were mostly men and traders.

With regard to content, charged issues in Nigerian society of the 1950s - 1970s period were prone to generate conflicts that prompted musicians to comment with a view to resolving them. Furthermore, the legacy of Waka music is profound since the titles of their albums centred on phenomenal context of this problem, which are composed to eulogise, sermonise, criticise, and even condemn based on the issue at stake.

Conflict resolution in the context of Batuli Akake's brand of Waka music manifested in her emphasis on the need for fostering a cordial relationship between Chief Bolarinwa Abioro and King Sunny Ade in a case that involved court proceedings. The conflict in which the Chief Executive Officers of recording companies were implicated in generated animosity between the producers and musicians. Hence, Batuli Alake

used this as an opportunity to advocate for peace within the music industry (*Nigerian Tribune*. 12/04/1975)

### **Salawa Abeni**

At a period when Nigeria as a nation attained independence, Salawa Abeni was born on 5 May 1961 at Ijebu Waterside. Thus she qualifies for classification as an Ijebu-Yoruba. Salawa Abeni Alidu was born into an Ijebu family just like Batuli Alake, but quite younger as she was born in the early 1960s. By the time of her birth, Batuli Alake had already established herself in the Waka music and popularised it among Ijebu and Lagos women.

Salawa Abeni enrolled late in primary school at a time when the girl-child education was valued largely among the elite. The wider society, on the other hand, frowned upon sending girls to school for Western education. Before age thirteen, she was bestowed to serve as a house-maid in Igbogun at Ibeju-Lekki. Eventually, she enrolled in primary three by the headmaster of a neighbouring school at Lekki. Probably, at sixteen, she was in primary six while learning musical skills, which at that age could be a natural talent. She started singing in 1975. A basic feature of her music was reflecting on societal issues and problems that show her level of versatility and a native intelligence of the indigenous knowledge of the Yoruba society. She began her professional career in Waka music and released her debut album with Leader Records. The album sold over a million copies. Her first album was released in 1976, named after the Late General Murtala Mohammed.

Teenage marriage affected the stability of Salawa Abeni's material life as she married her music producer Alhaji Lateef Muyiwa Adepoju after the release of her first album. The marriage rarely sustained in a long duree because she was a young woman, who could not have understood the dynamics of marriage. Being popular as female musician had a lot to do with her failed marriages as she opted out of marriage twice (*Nigerian Tribune*, 02/11/1991).

In a male dominated profession, she adopted an entrepreneurial approach to attain personal achievement. The concept helped to redefine her lifestyle in the 1990s as she became separated from her second husband Alhaji Kolawole Ayinla who was also a middle-aged Fuji musician in the 1980s. However, her marital life with Kolawole Ayinla was blissful as she

continually promoted the music career of her husband and projected an idea of marriage as a way of life by emphasising on women as the pillar of marriage who were expected to obey their husbands, display humility to in-laws and avoid bad influences. By extension, her musical album also known as Indian Waka, even though it just included an Indian language to improve her brand of music dedicated to the importance of marriage and good parenting. The patriarchal nature of the music industry at that time influenced her decision to marry a professional musician to enhance her singing career. Moreover, to sustain her achievements, she needed to defy public views against her personal challenges on continual basis and produce musical albums to sustain the Waka music.

However, the story of her marital life is often associated with separation having got married to two husbands and divorced twice, which exposes the patriarchal nature of Yoruba society, where women's success is usually hindered by spousal disinterest, among other familial limitations. Subsequently, she decided to solely nurture her children while working to realise her aspirations in the music industry. This experience represents the challenges women encounter in the pursuit of their career. It is a cultural phenomenon in Yoruba society that women's achievement should be limited and determined by the perceptions and wishes of the husband. A pertinent question is what differentiates male and female's career success, or what limits the female's career success in the context of Yoruba society? Salawa Abeni released 60 records (Online biography published by Joyful Noise Productions and funded by the Art Council of England, 'Queen SalawaAbeni' 2012), which immortalised her place as a successful woman musician in the male-dominated music industry. In this regard, she maintained:

Everybody has their own crowd; young people dance to hip-hop whereas the old, wise and intelligent people listen to our kind of music. I still have my fans. Three months hardly passes without me performing in England (Naijarules.com 2006).

In an attempt to modernise Waka music, she introduced management principles into the Waka music. She became the first female musician to acquire an office space in the Ikeja business area in 1991 (*Nigerian Tribune* 25/05/1991). This effort accorded her the chieftaincy status of a Yoruba professional in the music industry as she was crowned Queen of Waka

music in 1992 by Oba Lamidi Adeyemi—the Alaafin of Oyo. (Naijarules.com 2006). Quite different from other Waka musicians, Salawa Abeni modernised Waka music with some high frequency sassy voice and smart bodily dance performance. The content of her music was styled like that of Batuli Alake, deploying the Yorùbá language and philosophy. By the 1980s, the content of her music reflected the cosmopolitan nature of Lagos. In the music she released in 1992, she started with “*Gentle lady ni mi, mi o ki n se fighter* (I am a gentle lady not a fighter/nobody should engage me in trouble).

The content of this music is instructive particularly on the complicated features of Lagos and the attendant survival strategies that come with conflict, especially with men in the music industry. Her concept of modernisation and revolutionising of Waka music featured global affluence as she performed at the Royal festival hall in London (A clip from live performance in May 2003, she performed the music title *Beware* released in 1995). The music video titled “Congratulations” released in 1992 contains a performance that features modernisation in instrument, dance, composition, fashion, and reflects the celebrity and entertainment status of social life in Lagos. This reflects also in the music titles: “Cheer up: Waka traditional music,” “Waka music is my music,” “If I modernise, there is no harm in listen to my rhythm,” “Percussion,” “Yuppies,” “Yummies dance to my music,” “Old ones,” and “Young ones dance to my music.” With these lines, she regarded herself as Waka Funky moderniser. Her music relies much on modern musical instrument, as well as the new generation of fashion and affluence. There is also the praise singing feature in Salawa’s music since it reflects the Yorùbá tradition of singing praises, which a culture from the pre-colonial era. Moreover, it features the patron-client system in the informal sector among the Yorùba. Basically, it depicts appreciation of gifts in cash or in kind given to the music.

### **Perspectives on Lifestyle Approaches**

Work remains a constant part of everyday life of Yoruba women. McIntosh’s (2009) work of *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change* gave an elaborate explanation on the dynamics and dimensions of Yoruba women’s work life and contributions since the pre-colonial era. Queen Salawa Abeni’s music lends credence as a basis of lifestyle of a woman in a patriarchal society of the colonial and the postcolonial era, which was full

of turbulence. Hence, the content of her Waka music portrayed lifestyle approaches that could serve as coping strategies. In this regard, she says:

Ma ji ma we ma se oge  
Mo wo ewu tan  
Ibiwumiwewu tan  
Omookunrin ole lo.  
Ma ji ma we ma se oge

I will make up in the morning and care for myself  
I will dress up  
Ibiwumi will dress up  
A man will admire  
I will wake up in the morning and care for myself

Implicitly, a woman in spite of socio-economic problems she encounters should care for herself and be set for daily life without brooding on life challenges. For women, this indirectly, is a phenomenal antidote to poverty and eventually reduces the menace of mental illness.

Gossips, which are a general attribute mostly for derogating the lifestyle of each other in Yoruba society, was also a significant concept in Salawa Abeni's music. A popular saying among the Yoruba is the phenomenon of *O ri ara ile ire*, that is look at your neighbour. Usually, it is common among women to draw attention to derogate people in the community or neighbourhood. Usually, this situation created friction or, probably, occasioned conflicts that often-fomented enmity and hatred associated with acts of mischief and treachery. In this regard, Queen Salawa Abeni surmised: *Ore mi so ara fun won, ya so a ra fun won awonti won ba e je ati awon ti won ba e mu, ti o bayii ese pada, wa soro e lehin, ile aye le ri yen*. This composition resulted in her experiencing two failed marriages and, as such, she was accused of engaging in prostitution. By implication, the Yoruba society tends to treat an out-of-marriage woman as a prostitute, which also leads to divorce or separation. This issue from the perspective of women has yet to be thoroughly researched upon in Yoruba society.

Furthermore, she carefully explained that no matter one's level in the society, gossip is recurrent whether one is affluent or a pauper. Thus, she stressed that devilish temptation - *ki esu ma semi* - should be the

watchword for inspiration in life. With a clear differentiation between understanding the status of the devil and the divine, a philosophical twist to Queen Salawa Abeni's *ki esu ma se mi*, was her constant emphasis on the praise worships to the Almighty. Hence, patience, perseverance, praises and prayers are well-composed and integrated in all her musical albums. For example, during the threshold of her career, she proffers that *Orin ti wa nasia ni, Ojogbon ti mo*. *Nasia*, here is an Arabic word for sermon and, by implication, her conception of *Waka* was set out for divine praises.

### **Commentary on Politics and Government**

Emphasis on societal issues is more of an attribute of *Waka* music, with Queen Salawa Abeni exploits the phenomenon of General Muritala Ramat Mohammed's assassination on 13 February 1976 as the title for her first musical album. Based on the challenges of political stability that affected Nigeria's governance, Salawa's music content expressed critical views on the need to sustain democratic governance. Before the third republic, Nigerian nation hardly witnessed political unity based on ethnic cleavages. The release of her album titled 'Experience' referred to the need to ensure that the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) resolve the problem of nation-building. During the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida, the two-party system was adopted to avoid ethno-political and religious conflict. Hence, Salawa Abeni lend credence to the issue of national integration (Salawa Abeni, Experience, 1991).

During Nigeria's Second Republic, which lasted from 1979 to 1983, there were various food and agricultural policies that derived their framework from the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) introduced to cater for agricultural development to food access by the then General Olusegun Obasanjo. Meanwhile, the emergent the food problems prompted the Federal government to introduce the Price Control Boards to ensure that the prices of foodstuffs are regulated to maintain living standards and affordability. In essence, the Boards ensured that prices did not increase beyond the purchasing power of the masses. The Nigerian National Supply Company (NNSC) was also instituted to sell foodstuffs at designated centres for a cheap price. The NNSC plan, which was eventually politicised in 1983 became ineffective. As such, Queen Salawa Abeni appraised the farmers by treating them as the most important to the

economy. Her eulogy of farmers as *Agbeloba* was more informed by the rise in the price of *gari*, which was the most affordable to the masses.

### **Queen Salawa Abeni's Popular Slangs and Women's Lives**

Popular slangs are an attribute of the Nigerian music industry. Even though the use of these slangs stemmed from everyday life in cosmopolitan societies where there are different categories of people who communicate not in the normal official or indigenous language but, the slangs are drawn from or are a coinage of these languages. To save women from the problems of deceit associated with illegal sexual relationships, queen Salawa Abeni managed to paint a picture of either love and deceit that ravaged the Nigerian society of the 1980s thusly:

Iba awon olose kose  
Ti e bari won esa o  
Ki won ma fi osekoseyii e lekoile  
Nitoriwi pe Olosekose po ni Lagos  
Omodeyii to so pe ohunfemi  
Oyi mi ni Odu  
Egbo bi osewi  
Baba mi loni Airport  
Aunty mi loni Racecourse  
Se bi Alagbari lo ga mugu  
Mugu ko riowo mu  
N o fi owomugu je Aroso  
N o fi owomugu je Ofada  
Ma tun fi owomugu se Alubarika

Translation: Fear deceitful men  
Avoid them  
So that they will not deceive you  
Because they are so much in Lagos  
There is a man who wants to date me  
He wants to deceive me  
Hear Him  
My Father owns Airport  
My Aunt owns Racecourse  
A wise one will detect the deceiver  
A deceiver is foolish

I will use his money to eat Aroso (Imported rice)  
I will use his money to eat Ofada (Local rice)  
I will use his money for other things

The use of this analogy shows how men lure women into sexual relationships by deceit. In this track, the slang *Olose ki ose* refers to someone who is a fool or acts as a fool to mislead others in the society. In this context, the man tries to woo a woman using a make-belief style of projecting the image that he is from a wealthy family. Queen Salawa Abeni's music presents a perspective to condemn prostitution, as it passed the message that women should be wise and modest. She emphasised on one of her musical albums, that women should disregard ephemeral overtures and promises offered by men to degrade the value of women in request for sexual relationships.

### Conclusion

There are several other women in Waka music industry, but only a few women achieved fame and popularity. For example, Kuburat Alaragbo, an Egba woman is a female musician that reigned in the 1980s but could not wax much music record due to paucity of funds. There are several challenges that reduced the interest and lack of support affected the growth of her career in the 1980s ([Kuburat Alaragbo Waka Queen: Tíèmi àti Salawa Abeni bá pàdé lórí "stage' lóní, erù ò ba odò tẹ̀mí o - BBC News Yorùbá](#)). Given the patriarchal nature of the Yorùbá society, the Waka music from female musicians hardly appeal to men. To appeal to the popular interests of listeners, her first album in 1976 was titled *Kewu Adura*, which involves Arabic lyrics of prayer and worship. In addition, the rise to fame and popularity of Salawa Abeni in the 1980s was enhanced by her first and second marriages to record producer and a Fuji musician. In the accounts of her life histories, Salawa Abeni narrated how she worked with her husbands to promote Waka music.

As Waka music emerged as an agency to create a feminine expression in the entertainment industry, women in other genres of music faced similar challenges. In contemporary times, Female Music Association of Nigeria (FEMAN) was formed to serve as a platform for all women in the music industry (<https://femannaija.blogspot.com>). FEMAN recognised Batuli Alake's demise with a condolence message. This article affirms that Yorùbá women's creation of Waka music is a manifestation of African

feminism because it is a distinct lifestyle that served the purpose of happiness and fulfilment. This perspective resonates with the some Afonja's classification on the evaluation of African feminism (Afonja, 2007, pp. 35-36).

It is a common perception that popular musicians add more to the social vices inherent in the society, they are often regarded as 'worldly'. There are seemingly preferences for faith-based music, which is perceived as the best for a 'good' lifestyle. However, a contextual analysis of some popular music are vital in discerning not only in terms of describing women's lives, but also in understanding the perspective of societies in the past. Songs remain a form of historical reconstruction as they include a symbolic expression of socio-cultural issues that reflect the values of the present and the past. Thus, a careful analysis of music is significant in historical writing. As very few women are musicians, the focus on these two women in the popular music industry has provided insights into the socio-political and economic realities in postcolonial Yorubaland that Waka music engendered.

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