

RESILIENCE MUSIC: ONYEKA ONWENU'S NIGERIA GO SURVIVE IN NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC RECESSION

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Abstract

Onyeka Onwenu's iconic music "Nigeria Go Survive" is a beacon of hope during Nigeria's economic recessions. The problem addressed is Nigeria's persistent challenges of economic instability and its impact on national morale. The aim is to analyze how Onwenu's popular music has historically provided psychological and emotional support during such periods. The study is anchored in Social Solidarity Theory which elucidates how collective cultural expressions, like music, reinforce societal bonds, and Social Learning Theory illustrates how individuals emulate positive behaviours and attitudes presented in influential music. Using a qualitative approach, this research employs a historical review of Onyeka Onwenu, "Nigeria Go Survive", socio-economic context, comparative and lyrical content analysis. Findings reveal that Onwenu's music reflected the socio-economic challenges of its time and instilled a sense of resilience and unity among Nigerians. The music served as a psychological anchor, promoting a collective belief in overcoming adversity. In conclusion, "Nigeria Go Survive" remains relevant as a motivational force, reinforcing the power of music in fostering social cohesion during economic downturns. The study recommends leveraging cultural artefacts like music in national policy frameworks to enhance social resilience and morale during economic crises. This approach could further bridge the gap between cultural heritage and socio-economic development strategies.

keywords: economic recession, Nigeria go survive, Onyeka Onwenu, resilience music.

Introduction

Onyeka Onwenu, often referred to as the "Elegant Stallion," is a seminal figure in the Nigerian music industry, celebrated for her powerful voice and socially conscious lyrics. One of her most impactful music, "Nigeria Go Survive," released in the early 1980s, continues to resonate with Nigerians, particularly during periods of economic recession. This anthem of resilience and hope has become a cultural touchstone, symbolizing the enduring spirit of the Nigerian people (Ogundipe, 2007). The significance of "Nigeria Go Survive" can be understood in the context of Nigeria's turbulent economic history. During the 1980s, Nigeria faced serious economic challenges, including declining oil prices and increasing debt. It was during this period of instability that Onwenu's music emerged, delivering a message of hope and perseverance. The lyrics, which emphasize survival and resilience, resonated deeply with many Nigerians grappling with economic hardship (Ojo, 2018).

In subsequent years, Nigeria experienced multiple economic downturns, including the global financial crisis of 2008 and the recession of 2016. Omojola (2006) notes that "Nigeria Go Survive" has been revisited by successive generations, reinforcing its relevance and timelessness. The enduring popularity of this song highlights how music can serve as a form of socio-cultural resistance, providing psychological relief and fostering a sense of unity among people facing economic adversity. Indeed, this music plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes and promoting resilience during crises. Okunoye (2010) discusses how African musicians, including Onyeka Onwenu, use their platforms to address socio-political issues and inspire hope.



Onwenu's "Nigeria Go Survive" exemplifies this trend, as it not only entertains but also motivates listeners to remain optimistic and resilient, despite economic challenges.

The music's impact extends beyond its immediate reception. It has been used in various campaigns and movements aimed at fostering national unity and resilience. During the recession of 2016, several media outlets and public figures referenced the music to rally the national spirit and encourage perseverance (Akinleye, 2017). This recurring invocation of the music during economic downturns attests to its lasting influence and the crucial role it plays in the socio-cultural fabric of Nigeria. Onyeka Onwenu's "Nigeria Go Survive" stands as a beacon of hope and resilience for Nigerians facing economic challenges. As Nigeria continues to navigate economic uncertainties, the relevance of music remains vital in promoting social cohesion and emotional resilience (Brown & Johnson, 2012).

The study is anchored on two theoretical frameworks: Social Solidarity Theory and Social Learning Theory. Social solidarity theory, a concept rooted in the works of Émile Durkheim, refers to the sense of cohesion and unity within a society. This sense of solidarity is achieved when individuals feel a strong bond with others based on shared values, beliefs, and common goals. In the face of economic hardship, such as a recession, solidarity becomes crucial for maintaining social order and communal resilience, In Onyeka Onwenu's "Nigeria Go Survive", the message is one of collective hope and unity, encouraging Nigerians to remain strong and resilient despite economic challenges. The song emphasizes the need for a unified national identity and cooperation among citizens to overcome adversity. The lyrics, which convey a message of hope and perseverance, reflect the essence of social solidarity, where survival is seen as a communal effort. Durkheim's theory suggests that during crises, such as an economic recession, social solidarity can prevent societal collapse by fostering a shared sense of purpose and mutual support (Durkheim, 1984). In this context, "Nigeria Go Survive" serves as a cultural artifact that strengthens social bonds by reinforcing a collective narrative of resilience.

Social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura, focuses on how individuals learn behaviours, values, and attitudes through observation, imitation, and modeling. During times of economic difficulty, songs like "Nigeria Go Survive" can serve as models of resilience and positive behavior, teaching listeners how to cope with hardship. The message of the song exemplifies vicarious learning, as Nigerians observe the optimism and determination expressed in the lyrics and adopt these attitudes in their personal lives. According to Bandura (1977), individuals are more likely to emulate behaviours that lead to positive outcomes. "Nigeria Go Survive" provides a model of resilience, encouraging listeners to believe that survival is possible if they remain united and persistent. Through social learning, the song not only offers emotional comfort but also impact coping strategies that can help individuals navigate economic recessions. By embedding messages of hope and survival, it fosters adaptive behaviours that contribute to the overall resilience of society.

Onyeka Onwenu's "Nigeria Go Survive" embodies the principles of both social solidarity and social learning theories. The song reinforces collective resilience through social solidarity, while simultaneously serving as a model for adaptive behaviors through social learning. During economic recessions, cultural artefacts like this music play a vital role in promoting unity and resilience.



Literature Review

Resilience music

Resilience music has been a vital theme, especially during times of economic hardship. In Nigeria, artists have played pivotal roles in promoting resilience through their music, using various platforms to address socio-political issues and inspire many through their activism. Scholars like Euba (2012), emphasize the power of music to strengthen community morale and support collective psychological resilience. One notable example is Onyeka Onwenu's song "Nigeria Go Survive," which exemplifies how music can serve as a critical tool for emotional and social stability during the economic crisis. Its message of hope and perseverance remains relevant, particularly during periods of recession. This music has become an anthem of survival, encouraging Nigerians to endure and overcome challenges (Akinsola, 2015; Punch Newspapers, 2024).

Economic recessions

Economic recessions have repeatedly tested the resilience of nations and their cultural expressions. During such times, music often serves as a medium for expressing collective hardship and hope. Throughout the global financial crisis of 2008, many artists worldwide, including those in Nigeria, utilized music to reflect the economic realities and inspire resilience among their audiences (Baker, 2009). The themes of resilience in music, exemplified by artists like Onyeka Onwenu and music like "*Nigeria Go Survive*," highlighted the enduring power of music to provide hope and strength during economic recessions (Johnson, 2020; Business Day Nigeria, 2024).

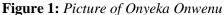
Nigeria Go Survive

"Nigeria Go Survive" is a music by Onyeka Onwenu which played a significant role in bolstering national pride and resilience during challenging times in Nigeria. Released against the backdrop of economic hardships in the early 1980s, this music became an anthem of hope and perseverance, resonating deeply with Nigerians facing economic instability and political unrest. Onyeka Onwenu, often referred to as the "Elegant Stallion," used her music to address social and political issues. "Nigeria Go Survive" exemplifies her commitment to uplifting the Nigerian spirit through her artistry. The powerful message conveyed in the lyrics encouraged Nigerians to remain steadfast and optimistic, reinforcing the belief that the nation would endure and overcome its difficulties. The significance of "Nigeria Go Survive" extends beyond its immediate impact; it has been celebrated for its timeless relevance and continues to remind the nation of its enduring strength and unity in the face of adversity (Guardian Nigeria, 2024; Punch Newspapers, 2024).

Onyeka Onwenu

Onyeka Onwenu is a multifaceted Nigerian icon renowned for her contributions to music, acting, journalism, human rights activism, and politics. Born on January 31, 1952, in Obosi and hailing from Arondizuogu (Ideato North), Imo State, Nigeria, she is the daughter of a politician who served in the Federal House of Representatives until his death in 1956. Onwenu began her career in journalism, gaining significant recognition with her 1984 documentary, "Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches," which highlighted corruption and environmental degradation in Nigeria's oil-rich regions. This work not only enhanced her reputation as a courageous journalist but also influenced public perception and policy on these critical issues (Guardian Nigeria, 2024).







Onyeka Onwenu was a profound pop musician who began her career in music in the early 1980s and quickly gained popularity due to her powerful voice and socially conscious lyrics. She uniquely blended pop, R&B, and traditional African music. Her songs were not just hits; they also carried messages of unity and resilience, often addressing social issues and advocating for peace, unity, and women's rights. Some of her notable hits include "African Woman" (1984), "Ekwe" (1984), "Iyogogo" (1984), "Greatest Love" (1984), "Nigeria Go Survive" (1984), "Bia nulu" (1986), Am the one" (1991), "Falling in love" (1991), "One love" (1991), "You and I will live as one" (1991), and "Endless life" (2023). These songs help cement her status as a leading voice in the Nigerian music scene. Her dedication to the music industry extended beyond performance; she actively fought for artists' rights, famously staging a hunger strike against a television station that refused to pay royalties for her music (DBN Stories Africa, 2024).

In addition to her music career, Onwenu made her mark in Nollywood, appearing in numerous films such as "Half of a Yellow Sun" and "Lionheart," where she was recognized for her strong and nuanced performances. Her acting career complemented her musical endeavours, showcasing her versatility and depth as an artist. In politics, Onwenu continued her father's legacy, serving as the Chairperson of the Imo State Council for Arts and Culture and later becoming the Executive Director and CEO of the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD). Her political career was marked by her advocacy for women's rights and cultural preservation. Onyeka Onwenu passed away on July 30, 2024, at the age of 72. Her legacy as a trailblazer in various fields remains influential, reflecting her unwavering commitment to making a difference in Nigerian society (Nigerian Entertainment Today, 2024; Premium Times Nigeria, 2024).



Methodology

This study utilized the socioeconomic content analysis, historical review, comparative and lyrics analysis methods to authenticate this research as discussed further:

Socioeconomic content analysis

Socioeconomic content analysis involves analyzing the themes and messages within a text or cultural artefact in relation to the economic and social circumstances surrounding its creation and reception. This method helps identify how "Nigeria Go Survive" reflects, responds to, and shapes public perceptions of economic challenges. Onyeka Onwenu's music was released during a time of economic uncertainty in Nigeria, marked by significant issues such as inflation, unemployment, and political instability (Punch Newspapers, 2024). The socioeconomic content analysis of "Nigeria Go Survive" focuses on how the lyrics, tone, and imagery of the music engage with these economic issues, portraying resilience and hope amidst hardship. The music emphasizes survival and national pride, serving as a response to widespread economic disillusionment. By examining the content of the music in relation to Nigeria's economic struggles at the time of its release, scholars can gain a better understanding of how music functions as a medium for addressing social issues, offering comfort, and promoting social unity (Berelson, 1952). This method highlights how "Nigeria Go Survive" provided socio-political commentary on Nigeria's economic resilience (Business Day Nigeria, 2024).

Historical review

The historical review of Onyeka Onwenu's "Nigeria Go Survive" through socioeconomic content, comparative and lyrics analysis offers a comprehensive understanding of the music's relevance in Nigeria's economic context. The socioeconomic content method reveals how the music addresses the economic realities of Nigeria, while comparative and lyrics analysis allows for a deeper exploration of the music's specific messages about other cultural works and artists. Together, these methods provide valuable insight into how music can serve as both a reflection of and a response to socioeconomic conditions (DBN Stories Africa, 2024).

Comparative and lyrics analysis

Comparative lyrics analysis involves examining the lyrical content of a song about other songs with similar themes or from the same period to understand broader cultural and historical trends. In the case of "Nigeria Go Survive," this method can be used to compare the song with other popular Nigerian music from the same era that also addresses themes of economic hardship, resilience, and national identity. By analyzing the lyrics of "Nigeria Go Survive" alongside music that deals with economic issues, we can highlight the unique or shared strategies employed by artists to inspire hope and perseverance in the face of adversity (Lee & Thompson, 2022). This comparative analysis reveals how Onyeka Onwenu's approach to promoting national resilience differs from that of other artists, such as Fela Kuti, who also addressed socioeconomic themes but employed more critical or revolutionary tones. Through a detailed examination of the lyrics, researchers can explore specific lines from "Nigeria Go Survive" to uncover deeper meanings related to resilience and economic survival. Lines like "Nigeria go survive, Africa go survive" serve as rallying cries, encouraging a collective national and continental effort to withstand economic challenges. This analysis illustrates how music not only reflects historical realities but also acts as a tool for shaping collective attitudes toward economic crises (Tate, 2012). The transcription of the music can be found in the appendix.



Comparative Analysis of *Nigeria Go Survive*, *Redemption song*" and *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*" When comparing "Nigeria Go Survive" to "Redemption Song" and "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," we can see further connections.

Bob Marley: "Redemption Song" (1980)

Figure 2: *Picture of Bob Marley*



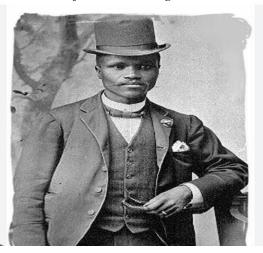
"Redemption Song," released in 1980, by Bob Marley is one of the most iconic pieces in reggae and global music history. Written during a challenging period when Marley was facing his cancer diagnosis, the music is a powerful anthem of freedom and resistance. Its lyrics are inspired by a speech by Marcus Garvey, a significant figure in the Pan-African movement. The music has had a profound impact on Jamaica and the world at large resonating with themes of liberation, self-empowerment, and resilience against oppression (Bob Marley and the Wailers, 1977; Salewicz, 2009).

In Jamaica, "Redemption Song" became a rallying cry for the disenfranchised symbolizing hope and resistance against political and social injustices. Bob Marley's message of overcoming mental and physical slavery resonated deeply with the Jamaican population, and it continues to inspire movements advocating for justice and equality. Globally, "Redemption Song" has been covered by numerous artists and remains relevant in various contexts where people struggle for freedom and human rights. Its universal message of hope and resistance transcends cultural and national boundaries, making it an enduring symbol of the fight for justice (Smith, 2011).



Enoch Sontonga: "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" (1897)

Figure 3: Picture of Enoch Sontonga



"Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" (God Bless Africa) is a hymn composed by Enoch Sontonga in 1897. Originally written as a hymn, it later became a crucial anthem in the Pan-African liberation movement and a symbol of African unity and resistance against colonial rule and apartheid. In South Africa, "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" became the anthem of the anti-apartheid movement sung at rallies, protests, and gatherings, symbolizing the struggle for freedom and equality. The song's powerful plea for divine intervention in Africa's suffering deeply resonated with millions of South Africans inspiring hope and solidarity among those fighting against racial oppression. Following the end of apartheid, "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" was adopted as part of South Africa's national anthem symbolizing the country's transition from a divided past to a unified, democratic future. It is also used as the anthem for several other African countries, including Zambia and Tanzania, highlighting its broader significance across the continent (Songonga, 1990; Ojo, 2018). These songs exemplify how music can serve as a powerful tool for social change, reflecting and influencing the political and cultural landscapes of their respective nations.

Findings

Onyeka Onwenu's music "Nigeria Go Survive" emerged as a significant cultural artefact during Nigeria's economic recession, reflecting resilience and hope in a period of widespread economic hardship. Released amidst a backdrop of economic downturn and societal challenges, the song resonates as an emblem of optimism and endurance. Here are key findings on the impact and significance of this music during the recession:

Cultural Significance and Context: "*Nigeria Go Survive*" was released during a time of severe economic crisis in Nigeria, characterized by high inflation rates, unemployment, and socio-economic instability. Onyeka Onwenu, a prominent figure in Nigerian music, used her platform to address the collective sentiment of resilience among Nigerians. The song's title, which translates to "Nigeria will survive," encapsulates a message of endurance and hope for a nation grappling with economic difficulties.

Lyrical Analysis: The lyrics of "*Nigeria Go Survive*" are imbued with themes of perseverance and faith. Onwenu's words convey a sense of unity and collective strength, encouraging Nigerians to maintain hope despite the economic adversities. The song emphasizes that resilience and solidarity can overcome even the



most challenging circumstances. This lyrical content serves as a motivational tool for listeners, providing reassurance and encouragement during tough times.

Social Impact: The song had a significant social impact by boosting morale and fostering a sense of national pride. During periods of economic distress, cultural expressions like music play a vital role in fostering a positive collective identity. "*Nigeria Go Survive*" contributed to this by reinforcing the belief that, despite the hardships, the nation's spirit remains unbroken. The song became an anthem for many, reflecting the collective optimism and resilience of the Nigerian people (Lee & Thompson, 2022).

Media and Public Reception: The reception of "Nigeria Go Survive" was largely positive, with media outlets and public figures praising Onwenu's efforts to uplift the spirits of Nigerians. The song received extensive airplay on radio and television, amplifying its reach and impact. It was widely discussed in both mainstream and social media, highlighting its role as a cultural touchstone during the recession.

Economic and Cultural Resonance: Economically, the song contributed to the broader cultural response to the recession. By addressing economic issues through a positive lens, "*Nigeria Go Survive*" contributed to a narrative that countered the prevalent despair. Culturally, it reinforced the role of music as a source of comfort and inspiration, demonstrating how artistic expression can influence public sentiment and contribute to societal resilience.

Legacy and Continuing Influence: The legacy of "Nigeria Go Survive" extends beyond its initial release. It remains a powerful symbol of hope and resilience in Nigerian popular culture. The song's enduring popularity and relevance highlight the power of music to inspire and mobilize people during challenging times. Its influence is a testament to Onyeka Onwenu's role as a cultural icon and the broader significance of music in fostering national unity and resilience. "Nigeria Go Survive" serves as a powerful example of how music can be a beacon of hope during economic hardships. Through its lyrical content and cultural impact, the song provided a much-needed source of optimism and solidarity, reflecting the resilience of the Nigerian people in the face of adversity.

Discussion

Psychological and Emotional Support of "Nigeria Go Survive" in the Current State of Nigeria

Onyeka Onwenu's song "Nigeria Go Survive" holds significant relevance given the current challenges facing Nigeria. The country is grappling with numerous issues, including economic instability, political unrest, and social difficulties. Despite these adversities, the song's message of resilience and hope serves as a powerful source of inspiration, stabilizing the psychological and emotional state of many Nigerians.

The economic situation in Nigeria is marked by inflation, high unemployment rates, and widespread poverty. In this context, the optimistic message of "Nigeria Go Survive" reminds the nation of its potential to overcome adversity. The song encourages Nigerians to remain steadfast and hopeful, reinforcing the idea that perseverance will eventually lead to better times (Lee & Thompson, 2022).

Additionally, Nigeria has faced significant political turmoil, with protests and calls for better governance becoming increasingly prominent. Movements such as #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernment have protested against police brutality, economic hardship, rising fuel prices, and government corruption. These movements have evolved into a broader call for systemic change and improved governance. "Nigeria Go Survive" resonates with the sentiments of resilience and determination evident in these protests, highlighting the collective strength of the Nigerian people.



Socially, Nigeria faces challenges such as ethnic tensions and inequality. The song's message of unity and collective survival is particularly significant, emphasizing the importance of coming together to tackle common issues. It encourages protesters to persist in their fight for a better future despite the obstacles they encounter. This message is especially relevant, reinforcing the idea that the nation possesses the inherent strength to overcome its challenges and emerge stronger (Brown & Johnson, 2012).

The enduring relevance of the song provides a sense of historical continuity and cultural pride, reminding Nigerians of past struggles and their capacity to overcome them. In times of economic hardship and political instability, "Nigeria Go Survive" acts as a unifying anthem, fostering a sense of collective resilience and hope among the populace (Punch Newspapers, 2024; Business Day Nigeria, 2024). The song offers both emotional and psychological support to Nigerians during protests, instilling a sense of hope, unity, and resilience that is crucial for maintaining the momentum of social and political movements.

Conclusion

Onyeka Onwenu's music "Nigeria Go Survive" serves as a poignant example of resilience music, offering a beacon of hope during Nigeria's economic recession. Released against a backdrop of significant economic challenges, the song encapsulates a spirit of endurance and optimism, highlighting the powerful role of music in societal coping mechanisms. The impact of this music is evident in its cultural and social significance. By emphasizing themes of unity and perseverance, "Nigeria Go Survive" resonated deeply with the people grappling with economic hardship. Onwenu's lyrics not only delivered a message of hope but also served as a rallying cry for collective strength, reinforcing the notion that, despite economic difficulties, the nation's spirit remains unshaken. This connection to the collective sentiment of resilience demonstrates the song's contribution to fostering a positive national identity.

Furthermore, the reception and media coverage of the song underscored its importance as a cultural artefact. The widespread attention and praise it received reflect its success in uplifting public morale and instilling a sense of national pride. As a form of cultural expression, "Nigeria Go Survive" exemplifies how music can transcend entertainment to become a tool for social cohesion and emotional support during times of crisis. The enduring relevance of the song emphasizes the lasting influence of resilience music. By addressing the economic recession through a lens of hope, "Nigeria Go Survive" not only provided immediate comfort but also contributed to a broader narrative of overcoming adversity. Onyeka Onwenu's work stands as a testament to the profound influence of music in shaping public sentiment and reinforcing societal resilience.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Governments and educational institutions should integrate resilience music into programs that focus on
 emotional and psychological support. By incorporating songs like "Nigeria Go Survive" into curricula
 and public initiatives, they can raise awareness about the impact of music on mental well-being and
 societal cohesion.
- Financial and institutional support for artists who create music centered on themes of resilience and hope should be strengthened. Grants, sponsorships, and funding opportunities can be established to enable musicians to continue producing impactful work. Collaborations with mental health organizations could enhance the reach and effectiveness of resilience music.
- Community organizations and local governments should organize events and programs that use resilience music to unite people. Workshops, concerts, and listening sessions featuring music like



- "Nigeria Go Survive" can create spaces for collective reflection and emotional support. These activities can help strengthen community bonds and foster a shared sense of hope.
- Digital platforms and media channels should be utilized to promote resilience music and enhance its
 accessibility. Social media campaigns, streaming services, and online radio can effectively spread
 music with uplifting messages to a global audience. Engaging with digital technology will help ensure
 that resilience music reaches individuals who could benefit from its hopeful messages during
 challenging times.
- Further research should be conducted to explore the effects of resilience music across different demographics and in various contexts. Studies can focus on understanding how such music influences mental health, community solidarity, and economic recovery. This research could provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals.

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Appendix

Title: Nigeria go Survive
Medium: Voice and Piano

Form: Strophic

Time Signature: Common Time (4/4)

Texture: Homophonic Length: 84 Bars

Mood: Lively/Hopeful

Scale: Diatonic Tempo: 100 BPM



Nigeria go survive









