

THE PERFORMER AS AN EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM OF A PEOPLE

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of the performer as the expressive medium for a community. In doing so, it would investigate how the performer protects belonging to the country, provides social commentary, and produces fresh art. The paper adopts a multidisciplinary approach in which it depicts how the performers maintain traditions, reflect the collective memory, and build ties between individuals through rituals, storytelling, and indigenous cultural forms. In addition, the text also explores the contribution of the performers' social critique and activism. It also considers the functions of satire, music and theatre in political resistance. We cite various Nigerian performers such as MC Edo Piki, Mr Macaroni, I Go Dye, and Falz in this context. Here, the study shows that humour, digital media, and performance art are combined to break the silence and advocate for change in various socio-political situations. Insights are also drawn from the fact that globalisation and digital technology and new tools of expression presented in performances are inspiring the development of new forms of cultural expression and intercultural interaction. However, despite the many challenges facing performers, such as commercialisation, cultural appropriation, and the lack of institutional support for traditional arts in Nigeria, performers have yet to give up. They adapt their practices to preserve authenticity and participate in different types of audiences.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Performers, Social Commentary and Expressive Medium

Introduction

A performer, on a broad-based level, is an artist who uses movement, sound, and expression to tell a story. Whether it is singing, clapping, gesturing, or laughing, performers use their bodies, voices, and emotions to convey meaning. Performers communicate more than just information; they connect people to transcend language and culture. A performer can channel abstract emotions into visible expressions. They can inhabit stories, characters, rhythms, and emotions with thought-provoking, emotional, and inspiring action. Through this dynamic collaboration of physicality and emotion, they become a vehicle for societies to interpret and reinterpret themselves. Performance is a form of art and cultural/historical expression. Performance throughout civilisations has been related to identity, community, and spirituality. For example, the West African griot was responsible for documenting history through spoken word and music, and Indigenous storytellers used movement and voice for sacred knowledge of their heritage. Not only do performers entertain more than they entertain, but they encode the values, struggles, triumphs, and worldview of their people into their art. Performance is a cultural archive, ever-evolving but always profoundly tied to its heritage.

As societies evolve, so also does performance. Built upon tradition and tradition alone, performance has a remarkable capacity for adapting to and interwoven with contemporary reality. In the context of today's theatrical world, the traditional tones of performance speak to politics, technology, and social tensions. Modern performers might comment on current events with the help of traditional tones of performance or challenge customary norms. A stand-up comedian would use satire to critique political and political leadership, as in history, ancient court jesters were able to make subtle challenges to politicians' authority through comedy. A spoken word poet might add ancestral proverbs to works on systemic injustice. Performing is a cultural translator, blending the wisdom of past eras with the urgent urgency of the present.

Performance also functions as a mirror, reflecting the society from which it emerges. The performer responds to the political, social, and cultural context of his or her time, allowing audiences to understand complex realities. It often reveals the voiceless, revealing those experiences that are not always addressed and discussed by Western culture; typically, this includes people in institutions with limited freedom of expression. There is an understated but profoundly effective mode of resistance of performance: Performers speak truthfully to power, using metaphor, irony, and symbolic gestures to illustrate messages of truth in oppressive regimes, particularly in places where performers lack freedom of speech or expression. Performers are also healers and unifying. In times of crisis or in times when social injustice threatens society as a whole, the nature of performance can serve to quell rage, foster solidarity, and foster new hope. A well-crafted skit, a powerful monologue, or a moving song may describe the pain in one's community and help to heal difficult emotions. A performance might bring people together in laughter, grief, celebration, and protest; a performance can break the silence about taboo topics and allow viewers to think about those issues with fellow audience members. This ability to bring audience members together on a common emotional and intellectual level has been one of the most important and eternal powers of performance.

At the very heart of all of this is the performer as a living embodiment of culture, social commentary, and artistic evolution. Performers are not just spectators but producers. They move, move and move. They challenge boundaries. They open new forms of expression. They absorb societal pressures, rhythms, and contradictions. They reimagine them in forms that resonate and are understood. Whatever their intentionality, they document history as it unfolds and dream about futures to come. As performers, they must not just be entertainers; they are cultural agents—expressive means for people to express their deepest truths, dreams, and contradictions. From ancient storytellers to modern comedians, dancers, and spoken-word poets, performers carry the soul of a people on stage. They are historians, visionaries, critics, and healers, perceiving that art has a capacity, still today, to speak where words fail, bring together where division continues, and reveal a people's heart in all its complexity and beauty.

The Performer as a Vessel of Cultural Identity

It is an impressive fact that at the very core of every society lies a rich web of values, traditions and narratives that contribute to that society's cultural identity. These can be documented in texts or etched on stone, but, in their most symbolic and visible form, these can best be expressed through the art of performance. As a performer, the performer is not just a spectator but also a guardian of culture- using a body, voice, language and expression; they are purveyors of the collective memory and evolving identities of their community. In Nigeria, performers like Edo Pikin, Mr Macaroni, Falz, and I Go Dye represent that position, being living vessels of tradition, social critique and collective identity.

One of the most visible and longest-lasting roles of performers is that of preserving tradition. Performed in different cultural settings, performers serve as historians and preservationists of folk tales, myths, and traditional values; in the Egbo (West Africa) culture of griots, indefatigable oral historians document family origins and traditional morals through song and story (Hale 24). Actors in Nigeria rely heavily on humour, local languages, and family values to capture cultural wisdom in their acts. The comedian MC Edo Pikin draws much of his inspiration from the Esan culture of his region of Egbo, using expressions (songs) and indigenous language in the production – from which he contributes cultural knowledge to modernism and urbanisation. Macaroni uses Yoruba expressions and traditional wisdom to create satirical skits and euphemisms, which incorporate idioms and traditional proverbs. His costume is a flowing agbada, and his headdress includes a cap – reminiscent of that of Yoruba elders that display authority and tradition while mocking those in power, using language and clothes to convey meaning in an effective way that resonates with Nigerian audiences and still features all the recognisable cultural elements.

Performance is an important event in rituals and social groupings, especially in religious ceremonies, rites of passage, and other communal festivals. At their lowest levels, performances like the Balinese temple dances or African drumming ceremonies were not merely forms of entertainment but also of sacred communion and social cohesion (Schechner 16). In modern Nigeria, comedic performers have taken up this mantle in new ways. Comedy shows, online skits, and live performances have become communal spaces where people gather, physically or virtually, to laugh, reflect, and bond.

For instance, I Go Dye and Falz are particularly adept at using satire in their shows to entertain people while also bringing Nigerians closer together with stories of poverty and corruption, as well as fighting social inequality. He often make different jokes that reference these common experiences, such as NEPA breakage or when dealing with security agents that are too aggressive. With these performances, he is turning his shows into 'modern communal rites', which give refuge, release and bonding through laughter (Lilian 77). In addition, performers often perform the values and beliefs of a people. They actively engage in moral education and social critique. Theatre acts as both a reinforcement of human values as a critique of unethical behaviour and as a celebration of virtues. Theatre in classical Greek culture examined the ethical paradoxes of the polis, whilst Nigerian comedy performers explore the ethical ambiguities of everyday life.

Mr Macaroni and Falz master the art of making their jokes funny and exposing the ill-usury of Nigeria's elite. His character is often portrayed as lecherous and morally corrupt. He exposes the hypocrisy of Nigeria's upper class, particularly the politicians, civil servants, and religious leaders who waste their power. His skits make a lot of sense and prompt discussion about consent, corruption, and other forms of abuse of power. It is like watching comics play outside of their comfort zone but having the opportunity to ask questions about their own lives through laughter. Similarly, I Go Dye shows remarkable force in both his comedy and his political activism: I Go Dye is a satirist and a serious character who uses satire to interweave libel with critical scholarship. His humour and its enlightening critiques encourage audiences to engage themselves in the ways of democracy, to reject violence and responsibility for leaders, in other words, to have the courage to make your mark. MC Edo Pikin, on the other hand, often speaks out against some traditional cultural values such as respect for elders, dedication to the task at hand and community support. Although his delivery style is mostly comedic, the content that he imparts is always informed by cultural values that are rooted deeply in Nigerian culture. In his shows, he acts as a guide, guiding us through laughter and instilling pride in our local identities. This is especially true because of his emphasis on Benin culture and Esan culture, a characteristic of what makes Nigeria a multi-cultural nation.

The relationship between performer and audience is crucial in cultural transmission. Performance is not passive or one-way but a dialogic process where meanings are co-created. The audience brings cultural knowledge to performance interpretation, with reactions like laughter, applause, or criticism influencing the performance. This dynamic is evident in the digital age, where performers like Mr Macaroni and MC Edo Pikin interact with fans via social media, responding to feedback, adapting content, and fostering communal dialogue. Performance is an effective way to reinforce cultural identity, but it faces great challenges in the 21st century. The rising interconnectivity of global media and commercialisation and the rise of new social values pose severe threats to traditional forms and meanings. The Nigerian performers have shown extraordinary adaptability. Using traditional images to highlight new issues and digital platforms to reach new audiences, they preserve and harness cultural identity.

Performing artists from Nigeria like I Go Dye (MC Edo Pikin), Mr Macaroni, Falz, and other performers and entertainers demonstrate the role of the performer in our nation, strengthening our collective identity and maintaining our ancestral knowledge and heritage. These artists, using their sense of humor, satire and storytelling, educate, entertain, critique, unite, and inspire their audience. These artists live in a diverse, complex country where laughter is an important part of their culture.

The Performer as a Social Commentator

The arts have played a key role, not just in entertainment but also in refining, criticising and, increasingly, reorienting societies. In many parts of the world, performers are at the forefront of socio-political discourse, making use of their art to confront injustice, identify contradictions, and provoke change. Performing as a mirror for society, they reveal mismatches, uncover unspeakable fears and provide alternative visions of what might come next. This is mainly reflected through the artistry of prominent Nigerian social commentators, like MC Edo Pikin, Mr Macaroni, I Go Dye and Falz, who use humour, satire, music and stagecraft to document the repressed forces at work in our society and encourage public engagement and collective action. Modern times have seen a range of performances and performance-based practices that can engage a political critique of power and reveal social injustices. Political theatre, by contrast, has long been a staple in the intersection of performance and protest. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht developed a style of acting that challenged old narrative tropes and encouraged audiences to interact with and consider societal issues rather than sit back and take in entertainment. Augusto Boal devised Theatre of the Oppressed, an act focused on dialogue that enabled a more excluded community to express complaints and practice resistance (Boal 39). These cultural traditions underline how the function of performance is not only a diagnostic function but also a therapeutic function, from which solutions to these societal diseases may emerge.

Musicians like Bob Marley and Fela Kuti (Old Man of the Black Music) are both artists who created a form of art that was explicitly used as a tool for resistance. The music of Afrobeat (Fela Kuti, Afrobeat – the fusion of Yoruba rhythms, political commentary, and humor) openly attacked the military regimes and colonial legacy of Nigeria (Veal 19). This legacy continues today through contemporary Nigerian rapper and songwriter Folarin Falana (“Falz”), whose songs call attention to police brutality, corruption, and poor governance. In 2018, Falz released his song “This Is Nigeria”(modelled after Childish Gambino’s “This Is America”), which uses brutal lyrics and vivid imagery to raise questions about national dysfunction: fraudster pastors, corrupt politicians, or the normalisation of violence and poverty.

Besides the obvious artistic value of entertaining, Nigerian comedians have become increasingly keen to address these issues as part of their personas. They work from the heart of a social conversation rather than at the fringes, where they usually sit. Mr Macaroni uses his skits to criticise exploitative regimes and to call for young people to become agents of change and say what they want to be about the situation in society, not just its hegemony. He took part in #EndSARS protests in 2020, not just with performance but through real-life actions, such as participating in marches against police brutality and being arrested.

Falz's activism blurs the line between artist and advocate. Beyond his music, he speaks at forums, writes op-eds, and supports initiatives that amplify marginalised voices. His song 'Johnny,' mourning extrajudicial killings, is a tribute and protest, a performance of remembrance and resistance (Okoronkwo 15). Performers use public platforms to raise awareness, bridge socio-political gaps, and demand systemic change.

This activism aspect of performance is also seen in the work of entertainers such as I Go Dye (now a stand-up comedian whose shift to become a social activist is seen as a representation of the social impact of comedy). As a performer of the social justice genre, I Go Dye frequently addresses serious issues such as youth unemployment, leadership failure, and environmental degradation. In 2020, I Go Dye performed a one-man theatre for climate action and government accountability. This performance incorporated satire, storytelling, and ecological education to open audiences to a global issue in a culturally relevant way. This work is a reworking of performance as public education. I Go Dye's nonspecific role as an activist reveals how comedians can bring awareness and civic responsibility to the issue. MC Edo Pikin, among others, is an artist making waves with his critical commentary on the inefficiencies of Nigerian structures and various problems that Nigerians face every day. His comedy plays primarily on familiar stereotypes like excessive public spending, corrupt infrastructure, and working-class struggles. These skits are not only amusing, but they critique deep structural problems. Right now, MC Edo Pikin has spoken publicly about community empowerment and environmental consciousness, contributing to discussions on sustainability through various performances and outreach events (Lilian 78).

One of the most enduring tools in a performer's arsenal is satire and humor, historically a powerful method for resisting oppression and subverting authority. Satire lets artists critique without facing the full wrath of censorship or repression, using laughter to cloak truth. This tradition spans ancient court jesters who mocked kings with impunity to Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, which ridiculed Hitler during fascism's peak. African oral satire is rich, where storytellers and praise-singers embed social criticism in parables and proverbs (Barber 23). In Nigeria, this tradition thrives. Performers like Mr Macaroni use satire to mock hypocrisy, misogyny, and authoritarianism. His Don Jazzy character, flirtatious and morally dubious, parodies elites who hide self-interest behind piety or patriotism. His shows challenge audiences to question social norms and face uncomfortable truths with laughter's disarming power.

This approach to critique is both "subversive" and "resonant." In a society in which there may be limited avenues for communication of discontent, the humor offers both a refuge for truth-telling and a counterpoint. Comedic performers reach audiences, many of whom may not otherwise embrace politically charged rhetoric. They instigate discussions that span homes, markets, and e-mail conversations, with implications well beyond the stage or screen. The digital age has expanded the reach of these performers. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube let performers bypass traditional gatekeepers to connect directly with audiences. This accessibility democratises discourse, allowing performers like MC Edo Pikin and Mr Macaroni to engage millions on vital issues. Through comment sections, live sessions, and viral

sharing, audiences join a shared cultural critique, blurring performer-spectator lines and art-activism boundaries. The performer, as a social commentator, shapes public consciousness. Falz's biting lyrics, I Go Dye's activist humour, and Mr Macaroni and MC Edo Pikin's satirical skits show performance moving beyond entertainment to a change vehicle. They serve a crucial civic role by reflecting society's failures, amplifying marginalised voices, and envisioning just futures. Their work reminds us that performance speaks in silence and roars against repression.

The Evolution of Performance and Cultural Adaptation

As society evolves, so must the ways it tells its stories, values, and concerns. Performance, inherently a living art, is fluid, responsive, and adaptable. Historically rooted in cultural rituals, oral traditions, and local aesthetics, today's performance is shaped by globalisation, digital innovation, and hybrid identities. Performers balance cultural heritage with modern sensibilities. This evolution is more than a style or medium shift; it reflects cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and transnational influence. Nigerian artists like MC Edo Pikin, Mr Macaroni, and I Go Dye show artists staying rooted in tradition while embracing a rapidly changing world.

It's about combining traditional styles with new ways of acting, which is what many of these performers do in many different settings on a global level. For instance, hip-hop (derived from African-American resistance culture) has spread across different continents, taking its roots in new forms of music and creating things out of them, from French slam poetry to South African kwaito. And what about older plays, such as Greek tragedies, that can be read alongside modern costumes, settings, and social issues in order to reach contemporary audiences (Carlson 35) They are acts that preserve and renew culture by making the past into something new (see above), in this case through using the past to move into something new.

As in many cultures, old and new combine and play a major role in contemporary performance. MC Edo Pikin is one such performer, using his comedic routines to translate traditional storytelling into his indigenous language, Igbo. In his performances, Edo's voice conveys all the sounds and rhythms of traditional village folktales. From there, he draws out the various aspects of life in the contemporary world, like economic crisis, social hypocrisy and urbanisation. He bridges generations. He bridges culture.

Mr Macaroni's often lively skits draw heavily on traditional and modern cultural practices - using Yoruba wisdom, traditional clothing and epithets such as the corrupt elder or the ruthless 'sugar daddy' - all to draw links between modern culture and traditional narratives. He also plays them out in video form, in Instagram videos, and in YouTube shorts. His skits are accessible to young and modern audiences because they use traditional forms and illustrate the importance of ancestral wisdom in countering the problems of today.

As performance becomes more globalised, cross-cultural exchange and technological advancement reshape culture's creation and consumption. Globalisation allows performers to reach audiences beyond their geographical and cultural origins. K-pop's global rise, influenced

by Korean aesthetics, Confucian values, and Western pop, transcends borders through strategic branding, multilingual lyrics, and digital distribution (Jin 12). African music, once peripheral, is now central to Western pop, with artists like Burna Boy, Wizkid, and Tems collaborating with international superstars and topping global charts. Cultural osmosis is bidirectional. Western styles influence African performance, while African artists reshape global trends. Nigerian performers contribute to Afrobeat's internationalisation, Nollywood's African cinema revival, and digital comedy through short-form skits and stand-up. I Go Dye tours internationally, bringing Nigerian humor to diasporic communities in the US, Europe, and Asia. His performances, rich with local idioms and social commentary, introduce global audiences to Nigerian experiences while adapting to diverse viewers' sensibilities (James 13). These exchanges highlight the role of performance in cultural diplomacy and mutual understanding. Digital media has also further enriched the role of performance in society by offering new forms of expression, outreach, and preservation. With the proliferation of social media networks, streaming services, and mobile devices, performers no longer have to do their work on traditional stages or with production companies. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become virtual stages which empower people to create content without commercial pressure, creating massive audiences for the performers on the ground. Mr. Macaroni and MC Edo Pikin are two examples of artists who truly know how to use digital media to tell stories. They develop their skits for the social media medium: short, punchy, visually stimulating and often include audience interaction - comments, hashtags, remixes and all - allowing them to keep up with cutting-edge events and keep their performances sharp and current. Even more important, it allows them to make use of the web as a dialogue venue while being engaged in and responding to the content they are seeing.

In many ways, the internet has made cultural preservation a natural part of our lives. Archival film, oral histories, and traditional performances can now be put to digital use, communicated, and transmitted for future generations. Performers using social media to document cultural rituals, languages, and philosophies play the role of modern griots, holders of collective memory in the age of the internet. One example is the app TikTok, used by young Africans to reproduce traditional dances, produce ancestral cuisine, or share folk tales—often juxtaposing them with modern soundtracks or aesthetic expressions. Thus, cultural identity is preserved, celebrated, and reimaged for the global stage. I Go Dye has also collaborated with digital media to explore social and environmental causes such as climate change, education for the homeless and human trafficking. By posting and publishing theatrical sketch versions of his work, as well as political speeches and news clips, he effectively extends his outreach beyond the convention hall and into the digital public sphere.

However, this digital environment is also messy. The pressure to generate revenue for their work—to achieve huge numbers of followers online, to be the first in line at local or national festivals, and not to be missing—could easily be used as an excuse to dilute further (or to pursue sensationalism over any kind of cultural verve). However, Nigerian performers such as MC Edo Pikin and Mr Macaroni do not fall into one of these traps. Aside from taking a stance in Indigenous languages, addressing domestic and international issues, and maintaining a style that resonates with the local community, they also make their music and performances

sustainable in both digital spaces and in the real world. The perils of modern society can easily bring about art performative success, but artists such as MC Edo Pikin, Mr Macaroni, and I Go Dye demonstrate that performance can adapt through multiple stages and platform incarnations, adapt through the global exchange of ideas and cultures; and, if these arts are innovative and applied strategically to digital platforms, audiences can look forward to the next generation of performances.

Challenges Faced by Performers in Cultural Representation

Performers are crucial for cultural expression and social awareness, yet their work faces numerous challenges that complicate the authenticity and sustainability of their art. As expressive mediums for people, they must balance cultural heritage with evolving audience expectations, commercial pressures, and global trends. In Nigeria, artists like MC Edo Pikin, Mr Macaroni, Falz, and I Go Dye have emerged as influential voices of identity, critique, and humor. Their creative paths highlight cultural representation tensions, such as commercialisation vs. authenticity, the fine line between cultural appreciation and appropriation, and the struggle for recognition and institutional support in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

One of the most persistent problems for performers is that of commercialisation and authenticity. As the entertainment industry has become increasingly profitable, artists are forced into adapting traditional or culturally embedded performance practices to reflect the needs of the common market or of an international audience. Much of this adaptation results in the loss of complexity and depth, which is usually characteristic of indigenous performance practice. Performance artists are typically encouraged or granted incentives to adopt more conventional ('universal') or Westernised modes of presentation that are perceived as more economical (Barber 27).

MC Edo Pikin's comedy, richly rooted in Edo cultural traditions, language, and everyday struggles, exemplifies this dilemma. His use of Pidgin English and local narratives grounds his work in a specific cultural setting, yet expanding his audience beyond regional borders necessitates content modifications for broader accessibility. Balancing relatability with national or international appeal often forces artists like MC Edo Pikin to make strategic compromises. The need for monetisation, through views, endorsements, or live shows, heightens commercial pressure, prompting performers to consider how much cultural complexity a broader audience can digest.

Also related to this problem is cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation (which also becomes increasingly difficult in the age of global media and instant access to content). Speechmakers/artists who draw on aspects of their own culture in order to teach or entertain a global audience must do so with sensitivity and skill, but their works of art may at times be taken out of context or are simplified by others. This is particularly common in the field of music and dance; African rhythms and aesthetics are often copied and imitated by Western pop artists without sufficient respect or understanding (Young 7). In this way, different elements of the cultural product become both trivialised and marginalised.

Rapper and lawyer Falz has ably and openly discussed these issues in his songs and interviews. His song 'This Is Nigeria'—a local adaptation of Childish Gambino's 'This Is America', begs the question: What is it about the socioeconomic issues of Nigeria that seem especially hard to relate to but is also clearly reflected in Nigerian culture? And this makes me wonder. The most recent controversy over the video censorship by state broadcasting agencies in Nigeria shows how the same system that benefits from African culture – the government, in turn – is one which, at times, mutes its expressions because they point to things that are uncomfortable in the local context.

Another major challenge for culturally expressive performers in Nigeria is the widespread lack of institutional recognition and support of traditional and community-based arts. For example, in Nigeria, although formal arts institutions and state bodies are both focused on mainstream entertainment and urban popular culture, the media and public administration rarely offer funding, support infrastructure and professional training to any area of the arts, especially for artists outside Nollywood or Afrobeat. This negatively impacts the sustainability of many such artists' work, particularly when these works involve indigenous languages and critical satire that may not provide any commercial value.

I Go Dye has been using comedy as a platform for his political activism for some time, bringing in issues such as environmental sustainability, political responsibility, and youth empowerment. While his performances are widely admired, they have not received the same level of institutional support as they do with large-scale public productions, such as his online video skits for which Mr Macaroni, for whom the internet provides audience, has faced police harassment and social media censorship (Lilian 77). Although his film, which was seen by about 500 million people, portrays state corruption in Nigeria and human rights abuses, it has not gone unnoticed by Nigeria's public. The diminishing audience for traditional performances may serve as a long-term threat to cultural preservation. As new generations move toward global media trends, indigenous forms have been viewed as obsolete or inadequate. There is the impetus for global pop culture and the speed and volume of content digitisation that threaten the obsolescence of traditional performance. Traditional performers who wish to sustain their cultural authenticity have to make some tough choices in order to reach an audience swamped with fast, flashy, algorithm-driven news and cultural media. Most Nigerian performers have harnessed digital platforms to bridge tradition and innovation. For example, Mr Macaroni and MC Edo Pikin make use of short-form video content and social media interactive features to reach audiences that may not resonate with traditional performances. By placing cultural values and critiques in modern forms, they demonstrate that one can remain rooted yet adapt to change.

Performers such as MC Edo Pikin, Mr Macaroni, Falz, and I Go Dye are vital in embodying and transmitting the identities, values, and concerns of their communities. Yet, their efforts face challenges from commercialisation, appropriation, and neglect. Despite these hurdles, their resilience and adaptability highlight that cultural representation through performance is a powerful and necessary way to affirm the people's voice. Their work reminds us that

authenticity in art is about fidelity to the past and navigating the present with integrity, creativity, and courage.

Conclusion

The role of the performer as an expressive medium of a people is both profound and complex. Performers do not merely entertain; they embody the histories, values, tensions, and aspirations of the communities they represent. Whether through traditional dance, satirical comedy, protest music, or digital skits, performers act as living vessels of cultural identity, social commentary, and artistic evolution. This paper explores the ways in which performative arts shape societal discourse, sustain cultural heritage, and foster change, most especially in contexts like Nigeria (which embodies both its historical complexity and the contemporary challenges it faces). As a vessel for cultural identity, performers honor and transmit the memory of a people through ritual, storytelling, music, and movement, carrying the values, myths, and traditions of communities through the ages. Performing through rapper/comedian Edo Pikin (whose comedy is highly rooted in the Edo culture), Edo's work demonstrates how performance also presents a way of maintaining indigenous languages, customs and philosophies, even in an era that is rampantly changing. In religious and ceremonial spaces that preserve continuity, whether religious drumming circles or community theatre, this generational commitment to cultural practices offers the power to hold over generations.

In parallel, performers function as social commentators, drawing attention to power structures, injustices, and hypocrisies through creative expression. This role is particularly significant in societies where freedom of speech is limited or where conventional political participation is fraught with danger. Performers like Mr Macaroni and I Go Dye have boldly used their platforms to challenge corruption, advocate for youth empowerment, and demand accountability from leadership. Through humour, satire, and parody, they create spaces for critical engagement, transforming entertainment into a form of activism. Falz's music, especially his socially conscious songs like *This Is Nigeria*, illustrates how performance can amplify marginalised voices and serve as a rallying cry for reform.

Moreover, performers have shown remarkable agility in navigating cultural evolution and adaptation. Facing globalisation, technological change, and shifting audience preferences, many artists blend traditional forms with contemporary genres. This synthesis results in new hybrid expressions that resonate with modern sensibilities while honouring cultural roots. Digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok expand performance reach, turning mobile phones into theatres and social feeds into stages. Performers like MC Edo Pikin and Mr Macaroni use these tools to bridge tradition and modernity, making local narratives globally visible and relevant. However, these opportunities come with challenges. Performers balance authenticity with commercial viability, face cultural appropriation, and seek institutional support and recognition. The commodification of culture, prioritising profit over depth in entertainment, pressures artists to conform. Despite influence, many socially engaged performers lack formal support and may face censorship or threats when their work challenges political authorities. I Go Dye and Mr Macaroni's experiences highlight performers being celebrated and silenced, applauded by the public yet marginalised by systems they critique.

The performer is not just a passive spectator of the social mood but also a constructive constructor of cultural consciousness. It is through the linkage that plays out between history, identity, resistance, and innovation that performers offer a voice to the non-comedy, provide sight to the invisible and continuity to the past, and encourage their audiences to think, feel and act. In Nigeria, where history, politics and culture intertwine in a complex way, artists such as MC Edo Piki, Mr Macaroni, I Go Dye and Falz have become powerful characters and agents of expression, change and resiliency and their work shows that performance is not only art but a catalyst for transformation, a mirror to society and a source of common soul.

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