

## **Ras Kimono: A Prototype of Old Testament Prophets in Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Ras Kimono, one of Nigeria's finest reggae musicians, is regarded as an evergreen musical voice and Prophet. His music has been earmarked by social commentators and fans alike as a weapon of social change, because it speaks truth to power and institutions at all times and at levels on socio-political ills that affect the masses in the society. This study, therefore, alludes that Ras Kimono is a mirror of Old Testament Prophets, who were active and spontaneous at critical times of national perils; who doubled as reformers and national advisors, alongside being seers. The purpose of this study is to highlight and attempt to re-awaken the nationalist consciousness among other themes of his arts which is lacking in post-colonial African States like Nigeria. The concern and significance of this research work bothers on the question of whether the Nigerian government and citizenry had and has ever taken his message into serious consideration in the light everyday realities which reflect some of the fears expressed by Ras Kimono in his music. Study engages in a critical assessment of the songs of Ras Kimono towards identifying in them national policies on politics, governance, religious pluralism and national cohesion as embedded in his works. The study adopts the performance and the Wallesteinian theories of nationalism as theoretical frameworks.*

**KEY WORDS:** nationalist consciousness, prophets, old testament, rastafarians

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Prophets and prophecy hold a paramount place in Christianity alongside Judaism, the latter often considered the Old Testament religion, as well as the history and culture of the Israelites. There abound in the Old Testament text, Prophets designated both as true and false, who wielded great influence in the politics, religion, economy and social life of their time. Seemingly, through their variant messages for God's people, Prophets in the Old Testament had assumed the role of divine assessors of the nation's life, conduct and relationships, on which they complemented the

priestly orders in their spontaneous critique of the social order.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it could be said that the responsibilities of Prophets in the Old Testament went beyond their being God's mouth piece or seers and extended to their wading into issues of social concern. Therefore, they could be said to double as agents of social change and rights activists. In this duality of roles aforementioned that these prophets played, the context on which it blossomed is the fact that the society which they found themselves was in disorder, as cases of injustice, tyranny and oppression abounded in the land of Israel at that time, as it does in the Nigerian socio-political climate.

In speaking fearlessly to those in positions of authority and individuals concerned, Prophets Amos, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah amongst others all spoke condemning the prevailing social evils of their times. Allusion is made to this by Familusi who writes as follows:

According to Amos, injustice was an offence against God (2: 6-7). He accused his hearers of turning justice into bitterness and of casting righteousness to the ground... admonishing that justice was an indispensable virtue (Amos 5: 24). In the same vein, Isaiah presented injustice as a grievous offence against God, who would judge the leaders for plundering the poor (Isaiah 3: 14-15). Micah condemned luxuries, which were rampant among unjust and oppressive people as well as bribery through which penalties were evaded (Micah 9:11). Jeremiah accused the Jews of the evils that plague the society during his time (Jeremiah 5: 26; 28, 9:1-9).<sup>2</sup>

Drawing from the above assertion, the role of Prophets in a nation-state cannot be undermined. Study has made it known that "they are called to proclaim God's requirement for nations and their rulers. They are called to predict what may befall people's disobedience, as well forth tell and foretell".<sup>3</sup> More so, Prophets are God's spokesmen, persons chosen by God to speak to people on his behalf, conveying his message of hope and judgment. They are often addressed with designations like man of God, watchman, servants of Jehovah, and messengers of Jehovah etc. Thus, Prophets in the Old Testament scripture in fulfilling these roles were quite confrontational in their approach towards issues in their societies. This kind of approach made them to proclaim God's truth in a way that at times irritated the political order, as they revealed through God what would happen in the future, communicated timely urgent messages from God, messages that were meant to edify, exhort or comfort. The messages came as warnings and judgments, bringing to the fore the assertion that Prophets directed their messages of judgments against their own

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<sup>1</sup> Quayesi-Amakye, "When The Prophet Speaks," 7-12.

<sup>2</sup> Familusi, "Prophets as Social and Political Activists: The Nigerian Example," 23.

<sup>3</sup> Adekoya, "Comparative Concepts and Hermeneutics in Christian and Muslim Scriptures." 15.

rulers, and leaders of other nations because of social oppression, while others spoke messages of condemnation against colonizers who brought their country into subjection.<sup>4</sup>

Although Prophetism is a pillar of faith in the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as these Prophets emanated with their special marks of prophet-hood (Moses had his staff which turned to a serpent to devour the serpents of Pharaoh's magicians, Elijah had fire from heaven that consumed the gods and prophets of Baal, Muhammad was given the Quran as a sign, while Jesus, the most outstanding prophet of the New Testament scripture was endowed with the power to raise the dead and heal the sick),<sup>5</sup> Rastafarianism now classified as an Abrahamic religion or movement in many quarters holds great prominence to the concept of Prophets and prophecy.

For one, Haile Selassie is regarded in the movement as a Prophet and an incarnation of "Jah" (Yahweh) on earth. Also, legends like Marcus Garvey are considered to be a Prophet similar to John the Baptist, as he prophesied the crowning of King Haile Selassie the alleged messiah of the movement. Ras Kimono, Majek-Fashek, Bob Marley and legendary Lucky Dube to mention but a few are also in their degrees ranked amongst great Prophets of the Rastafarian movement of the past decades. They, in their various works of art and music, communicated the mind of God, God's message of hope and retributive justice to the people of their society and leaders just as the Old Testament Prophets had done. Insights are required to understand the background that made these men rise to occupy the position of Prophets.

At first, the Rastafarian movement colours of red, gold, black and green typify an active participation in the struggle for emancipation from mental slavery that usurped Africa. The reggae music genre thus represents the struggles and experiences of the black man in numerous corners of the globe, which prompted various acts mentioned above to embrace pseudonyms such as "prisoner of conscience, slave, soul rebels etc."<sup>6</sup>

This work, therefore, aims to draw a similitude between Ras Kimono who lived post-independence Nigeria and Old Testament Prophets. This comparative analysis of his message and art in this light: as one which depicts the sensitivity of a conscious nationalist who employed music to highlight the ills and social issues of his nation and continent at large.

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<sup>4</sup> Adeogun, "Prophetic Conflict and Struggle for Political Space in the Light of 1Kings 22:26-29,34-35:The Nigerian Example." 43

<sup>5</sup> Adekoya, "The Relevance and Challenges of Prophecy and the Prophet-hood of Jesus in the Bible and the Quran for Religious Dialogue." 98

<sup>6</sup> Ojigbede, "Where are the Prophets?" 2

### **THE ENIGMA: RAS KIMONO (9<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1958-10<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2018)**

Christened Ekeleke Elumelu, but popularly known as Ras Kimono, he remains one of Nigeria's finest reggae artists to ever grace the Nigerian music industry and one whose contributions will remain evergreen in the minds of Reggae and conscious music lovers. He hails from Onicha Oluma in Anochia local government area of Delta state. He had part of his secondary school education at Gbenoba secondary school, Agbor Delta state, where he eventually dropped out of school to kick start his musical career. In the early part of his career, he started off as a Disc Jockey (DJ) for Rockers FM in Lagos State, playing for a couple of night clubs as well. Kimono also doubled as a radio-reggae presenter in some other stations. Afterwards, he associated with Justix Reggae Ital Band which had the likes of Majek Fashek, Amos Mckoy and Rice Osagie.

As a core Reggae artist, the Rastafarian code, beliefs and lifestyle made a great deal of impact on his music and personal lifestyle as evident in his musical language, lyrics, themes, dressing and dreadlocks. Having grown up in a deprived environment where being poor was a living reality, Ras Kimono in his art made several calls atypical of a nationalist and Prophet of the Old Testament. He expressed the generality of hard times in Nigeria, reacted to the negligence of social issues by governments of the day, and still never missed the mark on the aesthetic and entertainment aspect of his music.<sup>7</sup>

According to him, his music was his way of bringing governments and authorities concerned attention to the sufferings of the common man and the ills of the society. In an interview conducted by Sahara Reporters, a New York based online media house on October 2017, Ras Kimono is quoted as saying:

“I live where the people live, so I can see the tribulations they are going through, the suffering and the humiliation, so we can put it into our music and expose it”. His musical career was brought into limelight at the release and success of his “Under Pressure Album” which exposed him to global audience. However, five of his songs made waves in this regard. They include: *Natty Get Jail*; *Under Pressure*; *What's Gwan*; *We no Wan*; and *Rhumba Style*. Kimono traveled far and wide, touring different countries both in Africa and Europe and winning numerous awards.

As one of the very first Nigerian Reggae artists that could properly infuse the Jamaican root patois in his delivery, Ras Kimono stood out from other reggae artists of his time. Regarded as the voice of the people, his songs also focused on continental issues like Apartheid in solidarity

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<sup>7</sup>Ayodele, “Reggae Veteran Slams Artistes Who sing about boots and boobs.”

with South Africa and colonialism; sealing him as a voice to reckon with in Africa and beyond. A core vegetarian for 27 years, he never smoked, and was known for his traditional dreadlocks of 30 years. Ras Kimono died on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at the age of 60 in a private hospital in Lagos state. His death though is still a shock to family and fans. Notwithstanding, his music lives on, as it continually speaks out for the masses and the prevailing injustices in the society.<sup>8</sup>

### **THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED RAS KIMONO'S SONGS IN CORRELATION WITH OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS AND PROPHECY**

We begin this sub-section by stating the fact that Old Testament Prophets played important roles in shaping the course and context of Israelite history and religion, as they were actively involved in the social, political, religious and economic life of the nation, and so was Ras Kimono. Ras Kimono in his art made several calls atypical of a Prophet of the Old Testament times expressed the generality of hard times in Nigeria, reacted to the negligence of social issues by governments of the day, and still never missed the mark on the aesthetic and entertainment aspect of his music. This sub-section therefore is a thematic analysis of Ras Kimono's prophetic messages in selected songs in order to make a correlation of it with Old Testament prophets.

### **RAS KIMONO AS ACTIVIST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: A CORRELATION WITH PROPHETS AMOS AND MICAH**

The lack of social justice in the land of Israel was of great burden to Prophets Amos and Micah in the Old Testament. This led them to rise against any form of religiosity that had no impact on the practical or social life of the nation. Prophecies of Amos, for example, as captured in Amos 5:21-24 can be said to be that of condemnation and assurance of future restoration. Notably, the book of Amos abounds with issues of oppression and the situation of the poor in Israel. This notion serves as the basis on which the book has been regarded the epicenter of discussions on matters of social justice. The book of Amos serves as a reminder to humanity of the importance God attaches to justice and righteousness.<sup>9</sup> Micah, just as Amos, condemned the sins of the people, especially the oppression of the poor and needy by their leaders. These prophecies were directed in the light of making demands and creating awareness in the right direction in helping and defending the poor and needy in the society. (Micah 6:8).

In correlation, two of Ras Kimono's songs capture the same apprehensions of Prophets Amos and Micah. In the track *Gimme Likkle Sugar*, Ras Kimono narrates the deceit and lies of the political class, the brutality of the police on the innocent masses and the looting of the economy

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<sup>8</sup> Ayobami, "Reggae Music in Nigeria: Past and Present," 14

<sup>9</sup> Finley, "Social Justice in Amos." 32.

by the corrupt politicians. Further, he brings to the fore the menace of mass unemployment in the nation, which has forced young graduates to roam the street and the heavy taxes on the people, just as it was in the colonial rule.

The second song that reiterates social justice and nationalistic consciousness is one of the popular tracks *Under Pressure*. In this track, Kimono addressed the state of the nation under the then military government of General Ibrahim Babangida, and by extension, he talks about the social and political pressure contemporary Nigeria finds itself even in democratic dispensation. In the song, Kimono acknowledges the fact that Nigerians are suffering both in the rural and urban area. He cries out that the masses have no food to eat, no shelter to cover their heads, coupled with the killings on going in the nation. A verse of the song goes thus:

Under pressure, we wail under pressure,  
under pressure, black people under pressure,  
under pressure, Nigerians under pressure,  
under pressure, Africans under pressure...

This portrays Kimono's love for the masses, the nation and even Africa, as he sings about the sufferings of the people, bringing them to the conscience of the government and authorities.

### **RAS KIMONO AS JUDGE: A CORRELATION WITH PROPHET EZEKIEL**

The theme of Prophet Ezekiel's prophecy centres on the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity, which were necessary measures employed by God out of his grace to correct the disobedience of his people. Further, Prophet Ezekiel's ministry was fashioned out in such a way to keep before the exiles the sins that had brought God's judgment on them, and to assure them of God's future blessings in keeping his covenant. Evidently, Chapters 1-24 which were written before the fall of Jerusalem serve as a reminder that God's judgment on the city and temple was surely coming. Chapters 33-48, on the other hand, contain prophecies of a futuristic restoration of Israel in the millennial kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

In the track, *Kill Apartheid*, Ras Kimono brings to limelight the racial discrimination that was prevalent in South Africa. To him, the end of racial abuse and discrimination would bring about the liberation of the black nation. The song infers, just as Prophet Ezekiel inferred, that the reason for the misfortunes, captivity and discrimination experienced in Africa is as a result of the negligence of God and the truth.

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<sup>10</sup> Norman, "A Popular Survey of the Old Testament." 14.

## **RAS KIMONO AS POLITICAL ADVISOR: A CORRELATION WITH PROPHET NATHAN**

Nathan was a long serving Prophet during King David's reign. He knew about the rise, reign and end of King David's rule. Prophet Nathan also knew about the beginning of Solomon's rule. He stood out as a sound minded nonpartisan prophet, acting for the benefit and comfort of all in the society. It was also a veritable fact that his regular visits to the court was not for self- popularity, connection or quest for fame, but for the well-being of the masses, and for the benefits of those whom he foresaw that their lives were in danger (1 Kings 1:11-14; 22:26; 2 Samuel 12 1-14).

Seemingly, Ras Kimono depicted Prophet Nathan in one of his songs "Natty Get Jail". The song is said to have been written for the release of Fela Kuti. Kimono had placed himself as an advocate and political advisor, speaking truth to those in position of power for the bail and freedom of Fela, who had been locked up for criticizing the government of the day and its policies. Although Fela was later released on bail before the release of the song, which led to the change of the title from "Fela Getta Jail to Natty get jail", he is quoted in an interview as stating; "When Fela was locked up, right, I wrote the song strictly for Fela...but before I would release the tune, and ask the company, he was bailed, so I reversed it to Natty get jail". The song is a radical call for justice as Fela at that time was popular for hurling criticisms towards government and political class.<sup>11</sup>

## **RAS KIMONO AS AGENT AGAINST SIN AND ITS REPERCUSSION: A CORRELATION WITH PROPHET JEREMIAH**

The prominent theme in the book of Jeremiah is that of God's judgment against sin, alongside the message of hope and restoration, if the nation genuinely repented. Prophet Jeremiah had spoken out against the sins of his countrymen (Jeremiah 44:23), spoke against idolatry (Jeremiah 16:10-13; 22:9, 32:9; 44:2-3) and the sacrificing of children to foreign gods (Jeremiah 17).<sup>12</sup>

In his hit track and one of the most popular tunes he ever did, entitled *What's Gwan*, Ras Kimono highlights apprehensions similar Jeremiah's. He warned of God's impending judgment on the diverse sins and atrocities committed in the nation. He laments about the poor economic situation in the country, about the masses suffering starvation, about unemployment, and about the unabating killings in the country.

As a prophet, Kimono reminded the nation of its glorious and harmonious past, in comparison to the present misfortunes happening in the country, ranging from nepotism, corruption, tribalism,

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<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> ibid

disunity, poverty, and hunger. Atypical of a prophet, Kimono infuses into the lyrical content of the song a plea to God to have mercy in his forthcoming judgment on the nation.

### **RAS KIMONO AS EVANGELIST OF SALVATION: A CORRELATION WITH PROPHET ISAIAH**

The basic theme of the book of Isaiah is that of salvation being bestowed only by grace and by the power of God, the redeemer, rather than by the strength of man or the good works of the flesh. Therefore, God did not permit un-holiness among his covenant people, and thus dealt with them in such a way as to chastise and purge them of iniquities. Isaiah's work has also deep Christological insights not found elsewhere in the Old Testament as he focused on Yahweh as the Mighty one of Israel, the Holy one of Israel and as the Lord God of host.<sup>13</sup>

In his famous track *Rastafarian Chant*, there is a correlation with the message and theme of salvation in the book of Isaiah. For one thing, he begins by chanting the name of Haile Selassie who is regarded as the Messiah of the Rastafarian movement. He also mentions Yahweh (Jah) as the conquering lion of the tribe of Judah, referring to the Most High. He made a great deal of thanksgiving to Jah for all the beauty of creation in the song. On the second chant verse, Ras Kimono reiterates to his listeners whom he calls "brethren and sisthren" the message from God, which is to spread universally, enjoining them to pay attention to the message. While speaking of salvation, he notes that the devil is a crook, who would want to deceive the people; and that they that have ears should hear and they that have eyes should see and know that God is not a partial God. For God's enemies will shatter and shatter, and will melt away like wax at the coming of the messiah. With this, he called the people to repentance, as well as to commune with God.

### **NATIONALISM AS THE CORE OF RAS KIMONO'S ART**

So far, this study has consistently asserted that the role of Prophets in the biblical Old Testament went beyond being spokesperson's for God; it included their speaking out on issues of social concern. In other words, Prophets in the Old Testament had a nationalist outlook.<sup>14</sup>

From that perspective, Orgu.C.C avers that Prophets in the Old Testament were firmly rooted in the political, economic and social events of their times, even though their prophecies and messages are timeless. As such Prophets in the Old Testament were raised by God at a time in the history of Israel when the rulers became morally bankrupt, self-servicing and socially oppressive. They envisaged the realization of a just human society where the poor and the needy

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<sup>13</sup> ibid

<sup>14</sup> ibid



are well treated, as well as their fundamental rights and dignity respected. They were, as Kimono was, strugglers for social justice and good governance <sup>15</sup>

This implies that there is a correlation between music and nationalism. To a great extent, it could be said of the genre of music Ras Kimono falls in line with the immediate foregoing: the reggae conscious music. It is also apt to trace the fact that nationalism as a musical movement evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of political independence movement. This said movement is said to have been categorized by a prominence of national musical elements such as folk songs and dances or rhythms, or the adoption of nationalist themes for musical forms such as reggae, symphonies, poems or other forms of music. The concept is best explained with the genre of reggae, which refers to the employment of musical ideas associated with and appreciated by a particular group of people, to educate them on national and social issues.<sup>16</sup>

Ras Kimono was thus more than just an artist or musician. He was a Prophet, a nationalist who was greatly influenced by the hardship and injustice he witnessed in the nation and continent at large, making himself a voice of the people. His works cuts across national issues related to politics, economic struggles and international issues as apartheid and colonialism in Africa. To him, music is a weapon of social change through national consciousness. Thus, in confirming his prophetic claims, Kimono had responded in an interview as follows: ‘‘A musician is supposed to be a Prophet who speaks the truth as it affects everybody in the society’’. And when this was not far reaching in contemporary music, Kimono vented his apprehensions thus:

Can you tell me what young artistes are preaching about? They do nothing but sing about butt, boobs and other mundane things that do not add value to anybody. It is not a bad thing to sing party or dancehall music, but there is a problem when 95 percent of the music out there sound the same and don’t have any meaning... look at the musicians of yesteryears, their songs are still relevant today, decades they were originally released... people still play Fela’s music today because it still has something to offer... reggae music, which I do, dwells on topical issues bothering the society.<sup>17</sup>

The basis of this work in highlighting the Prophetic role that Ras Kimono played in the nation through his music and art bothers on the question why the Nigerian government appears unresponsive to the prophecies, messages and serious issues raised. With the political class being exploitative, immoral, greedy, and corrupt, setting aside God’s righteousness, does the country

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<sup>15</sup> Orgu, ‘‘Prophecy and Social in Ancient Israel’’ 43.

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, ‘‘Nationalism in Music.’’ 17

<sup>17</sup> ibid

aspire to be overthrown and sent into a second captivity of colonialism, just like the children of Israel were because of their attitude and disobedience? This study therefore sees it as necessity for Nigeria and African states to re-visit, if they had not done so before, the music of Ras Kimono which carries the full weight of the cries and yearnings of the masses, so they can fashion out a template on national policies in politics, economy, religious pluralism and national cohesion.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that:

Contemporary musicians should use music as a platform to articulate burning social issues in the nation.

Ras Kimono's songs should be regarded as a Prophetic message, similar to that of the Old Testament.

The Nigerian government through agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA), should employ Kimono's works as jingles to right the wrongs in the nation.

## CONCLUSION

This work focused on Ras Kimono, one of Nigeria's foremost Reggae Musicians who is regarded as a Prophet and voice of the people. His prophetic role was likened to that of the Biblical Old Testament Prophets such as Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah who had dual roles as prophets and social activists. The study highlighted each the identified prophets of the Old Testament prophetic books, and made a correlation between their themes and those explored by Ras Kimono in the selected songs.

The study further proposes that national consciousness was the drive of the art and brand of Ras Kimono. It therefore concludes that political leaders and others alike should examine his works and art as a means to chart a pathway for solving various national and international issues, especially as more and more nations embrace democratic governance.

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