



MUSICAL MEDIATION, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF YEMI ALADE'S *STAND TOGETHER*

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Cite this article:

F., Ezeugwu, Agbo, B.,
Authority, O. A. U. (2026),
Musical Mediation, Social
Integration and Peace
Building in Nigeria: A Critical
Analysis of Yemi Alade's
Stand Together. African
Journal of Culture, History,
Religion and Traditions 9(1),
115-128. DOI:
10.52589/AJCHRT-
MFKOOMSA

Manuscript History

Received: 2 Feb 2026

Accepted: 3 Mar 2026

Published: 19 Mar 2026

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria's complex ethnic and religious landscape continues to generate tensions that demand culturally grounded approaches to peacebuilding. This study examines Yemi Alade's Stand Together, a pan-African collaborative song released during the COVID-19 pandemic, to explore how contemporary popular music can contribute to conflict transformation and social integration. Drawing on theories of musical mediation, conflict transformation, and African cultural humanism, the study employs qualitative musical analysis supported by interpretive insights from three experts in African popular music, ethnomusicology, and music-and-society research. Their perspectives illuminate how stylistic hybridity, participatory aesthetics, and affective experience shape the song's social meaning. The analysis shows that Stand Together weaves Afrobeat idioms, multilingual vocality, rhythmic interdependence, and transnational collaboration into a sonic narrative of solidarity, resilience, and collective responsibility. These musical strategies extend the song's impact beyond entertainment, positioning it as an informal peace education resource that models inclusive citizenship and pan-African cohesion. By demonstrating how musical structure and collaborative authorship can foster empathy and shared identity, the study contributes to scholarship in African popular music, peace studies, and music education. It highlights the strategic potential of contemporary musical practices to cultivate civic consciousness and support sustainable peace.*

KEYWORDS: Critical Analysis, Musical Mediation, Peace Building, Social Integration, Stand Together, Yemi Alade.



INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of sustainable peace in plural societies has become a central concern within contemporary peace and conflict scholarship. Across Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, the persistence of intergroup tensions underscores the need for approaches that extend beyond political negotiation and security-driven interventions. Scholars increasingly recognise that peacebuilding must engage the cultural, affective, and relational dimensions of social life, where identities are formed, narratives are negotiated, and collective meanings are produced (Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1997, 2005). Within this broader interdisciplinary landscape, music has emerged as a significant yet under-examined cultural resource capable of shaping social consciousness, mediating relationships, and fostering communal resilience.

African musical traditions have long functioned as vehicles for communication, moral instruction, and social regulation, embedding artistic expression within everyday life, ritual, and political discourse (Merriam, 1964; Nketia, 1974). In Nigeria, music has historically served as a platform for articulating dissent, mobilising political participation, and negotiating national identity (Omojola, 2006; Waterman, 1990). The rise of contemporary popular genres such as Afrobeat, Afropop, and hip-hop has further expanded music's reach, enabling artists to engage diverse audiences across ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic boundaries. These genres operate not only as entertainment but also as informal pedagogical spaces where values, aspirations, and imaginaries of community are shaped (Barber, 1997; Street, 2012).

Despite this rich cultural and scholarly foundation, the mediating capacities of popular music in peacebuilding remain insufficiently theorised. Existing literature tends to focus on music's role in political mobilisation, identity formation, or social critique, with limited attention to how contemporary musical practices actively contribute to conflict transformation, social integration, and peace education in Nigeria. Moreover, while pan-African musical collaborations have gained prominence in recent years, their potential to model transnational solidarity and collective responsibility has not been systematically examined. This gap is particularly evident in relation to musical responses to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which generated new forms of artistic engagement and cross-border collaboration.

The present study addresses this gap by interrogating how Yemi Alade's *Stand Together*, a pan-African collaborative song released during the pandemic, functions as a tool for conflict resolution and social integration. The research problem centres on the need to understand how contemporary African popular music, through its sonic structures, performance practices, and collaborative networks, can mediate social tensions and contribute to peacebuilding in a deeply plural society. This inquiry is timely given Nigeria's ongoing challenges with ethnic fragmentation, religious polarisation, and socio-political instability, all of which demand culturally grounded strategies for fostering unity and civic consciousness.

The study is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it advances scholarship on musical mediation by demonstrating how sound, text, and performance can operate as affective technologies of peace. Practically, it highlights the potential of popular music as an accessible and culturally resonant medium for peace education, particularly among Nigeria's youthful population. By analysing *Stand Together* through the lenses of musical mediation, conflict transformation, and African cultural humanism, the study contributes new insights into how contemporary musical practices can support social cohesion and promote sustainable peace.



The article proceeds by outlining the conceptual frameworks guiding the analysis, followed by a detailed examination of the song's musical and performative features, and concludes with implications for peacebuilding scholarship and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

African music scholarship consistently underscores the functional, communal, and pedagogical orientation of music. Foundational ethnomusicological studies by Merriam (1964) and Nketia (1974) demonstrate that African music is inseparable from the social contexts that produce it, a perspective further elaborated by Nzewi (2007), who conceptualises music as a system of knowledge that sustains social equilibrium and moral responsibility. Agawu (2003) critiques Western analytical paradigms that detach musical structure from social meaning, arguing instead for interpretive approaches that foreground African epistemologies. These works collectively establish the conceptual foundation for understanding music as a medium of social communication, identity formation, and cultural regulation. As Nketia (1974) observes, in African societies, music is not conceived as an isolated art form but as an integral component of social experience. It accompanies life-cycle events, reinforces communal values, and provides a framework for expressing collective emotions. Its meaning is inseparable from the social relationships, ritual practices, and moral expectations that shape its performance. To study African music, therefore, is to study the society itself, for the two are mutually constitutive and continuously intertwined.

This functionalist orientation provides the conceptual grounding for examining Nigerian popular music as a site of social commentary, identity negotiation, and civic pedagogy. Nigerian scholarship demonstrates that popular music genres such as juju, highlife, Afrobeat, and Afropop have historically mediated tensions between tradition and modernity, local identity and global influence, and individual expression and collective responsibility. Waterman's (1990) ethnography of juju music illustrates how musicians mobilise stylistic hybridity to negotiate cultural change, while Omoniyi (2009) and Authority (2025) highlight multilingualism and code-switching as strategies for fostering inclusivity in diverse audiences. Omojola (2012) further argues that Nigerian music functions as a repository of memory and a platform for articulating socio-political critique, thereby reinforcing its relevance to peacebuilding discourse.

Afrobeat scholarship has traditionally centred on Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's revolutionary politics, with studies by Collins (2009) and Olaniyan (2004) emphasising his critique of state oppression and advocacy for pan-African consciousness. However, recent scholarship recognises the evolution of Afrobeat and Afropop beyond Fela's ideological framework. Oikelome (2014) demonstrates that contemporary artists increasingly foreground themes of unity, resilience, and collective responsibility, reflecting shifting socio-political realities in Nigeria and across Africa. Digital technologies have further transformed the landscape of African popular music, enabling transnational collaborations that amplify the integrative potential of musical production (Dasent, 2023). These developments are particularly relevant to the present study, which examines a pan-African collaborative work produced during a global crisis.

Peace studies provide an additional conceptual lens for understanding music's mediating capacities. Galtung's (1996) distinction between negative and positive peace and Lederach's



(1997, 2005) emphasis on relational transformation highlight the need for peacebuilding approaches that address cultural, affective, and symbolic dimensions of conflict. Harris and Morrison (2013) argue that informal education through the arts can be more effective than formal curricula in shaping values and social attitudes. This perspective resonates strongly with music's pedagogical potential. Bergh and Sloboda (2010) note in their influential work on music and peacebuilding that music's capacity to evoke emotion, shape identity, and create shared experiences positions it as a uniquely powerful medium for peacebuilding. Unlike formal interventions, which often struggle to penetrate everyday life, musical practices operate within the intimate spaces of social interaction. They can challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, and cultivate a sense of belonging that transcends political and ethnic boundaries. Yet, despite this potential, music remains marginal in mainstream peacebuilding discourse, and its mechanisms of influence are insufficiently theorised.

This observation underscores a critical gap in the literature: while scholars acknowledge music's potential to support peacebuilding, few studies integrate detailed musical analysis with peace education theory, particularly in the context of contemporary Nigerian popular music. Existing works tend to focus either on socio-political messaging or on musical structure, but rarely on how sonic, textual, and performative elements collectively mediate social relationships and foster integration. Moreover, the peacebuilding implications of pan-African musical collaborations, especially those emerging during global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, remain underexplored.

The present study addresses these gaps by analysing Yemi Alade's *Stand Together* through the combined lenses of musical mediation, conflict transformation, and African cultural humanism. By synthesising insights from ethnomusicology, popular music studies, and peace education, the study constructs a conceptual framework that illuminates how contemporary African popular music can function as an informal curriculum for unity, resilience, and social integration. This literature review, therefore, establishes the scholarly foundation for examining the song's sonic structures, performance practices, and collaborative networks as tools for peacebuilding in Nigeria's plural society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines how Yemi Alade's *Stand Together* operates as a medium of musical mediation, conflict transformation, and peace education. It addresses the limited understanding of how musical practices, sonic structures, and collaborative performance processes shape social integration and peacebuilding in Nigeria's plural society. The framework links musical practice, affective and relational transformation, and peacebuilding outcomes such as unity, resilience, and social cohesion.

Three complementary perspectives guide the analysis: music as social practice, conflict transformation theory, and African cultural humanism. Together, they explain how music functions as cultural action, relational intervention, and moral communal expression, mechanisms central to peacebuilding.

Music as a social practice forms the first pillar. Merriam's (1964) model of music as sound, behaviour, and concept highlights the contextual basis of musical meaning. DeNora (2000) shows that music shapes emotion and social interaction, while Turino (2008) emphasises participatory bonds that reinforce collective identity. These ideas, supported by Frith (1996)



and Street (2012), position music as social action capable of influencing moral orientation and communal belonging.

Conflict transformation theory provides the second pillar. Galtung (1996) and Lederach (1997, 2005) argue that sustainable peace requires transforming relationships, narratives, and structures. Concepts such as relational change, moral imagination, and shared futures align with the study's focus on how music fosters empathy and collective responsibility. Bergh and Sloboda (2010) further show that music's affective and non-discursive qualities support relational transformation.

African cultural humanism forms the third pillar, grounding the study in values of communalism, interdependence, and moral responsibility (Mbiti, 1990). African musical practices embody these principles through participatory forms, call and response, and rhythmic interdependence (Nketia, 1974; Onyeji, 2004). Afrobeat's collaborative ethos and rhythmic layering exemplify these communal values, making it a suitable lens for analysing *Stand Together*.

These perspectives support the proposition that music mediates social tensions by operating at aesthetic, emotional, relational, and ideological levels. Music as a social practice explains how it shapes identity; conflict transformation theory explains why these shifts matter for peace; and African cultural humanism explains their cultural resonance. This integrated framework guides the study's analytical focus on sonic features, performance practices, collaboration, and affective response, ensuring conceptual coherence throughout the article.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design integrating musicological analysis with expert interpretive commentary to examine how Yemi Alade's *Stand Together* functions as a tool for musical mediation, conflict transformation, and peace education. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study investigates meaning-making processes, affective responses, and socio-cultural interpretations that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement.

The primary data source was the commercially released audio recording of *Stand Together*, supplemented by publicly available performance videos and paratextual materials such as artist statements and production notes. These materials provided insight into the song's sonic architecture, performance aesthetics, and collaborative context. The unit of analysis is the musical work itself, including its melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, textual, and stylistic features.

Musicological analysis followed established procedures in African popular music scholarship, focusing on melody, rhythm, harmony, texture, form, and stylistic construction. Attention was given to modal tendencies, rhythmic organisation, call-and-response structures, multilingual vocal delivery, and performance practice conventions characteristic of Afrobeat and contemporary Afropop. Analytical listening was conducted iteratively, enabling the identification of recurring motifs, structural patterns, and expressive devices relevant to peace-building themes.

To strengthen interpretive depth, the study incorporated expert commentary from three scholars specialising in African popular music, ethnomusicology, and music-and-society studies. These



experts were purposively selected because, taken together, their scholarship spans the full intellectual terrain required for a culturally grounded analysis of *Stand Together*. One brings authoritative expertise in contemporary African popular music industries and stylistic evolution; another contributes deep ethnomusicological insight into African performance practice, participatory music-making, and communal aesthetics; and the third offers a socio-cultural perspective on music's role in identity formation, collective emotion, and social transformation. Their combined disciplinary breadth ensures that the commentary is not only informed but also exhaustive, capturing musical, cultural, and socio-political dimensions that no single scholar could address comprehensively. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit insights on the song's cultural significance, stylistic features, and potential peace-building functions. These commentaries served as secondary qualitative data and were used to triangulate the musicological findings.

Data analysis employed thematic coding, combining deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework, such as communal participation, affective resonance, relational transformation, and pan-African identity, with inductive codes emerging from the musical analysis and expert interviews. Coding and interpretation were conducted manually to allow close engagement with the sonic and textual material. Themes were refined through constant comparison until conceptual saturation was achieved.

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of data sources (audio, video, expert commentary), methodological triangulation (musicological analysis and interpretive interviews), and peer debriefing with two independent scholars who reviewed the analytical categories for coherence and validity. Reflexive memo-writing was used throughout the process to document interpretive decisions and minimise researcher bias.

Ethical considerations were observed in line with qualitative research standards. Expert participants provided informed consent, and their contributions were anonymised unless explicit permission for attribution was granted. All musical materials analysed are publicly available and used strictly for scholarly purposes.

While the methodology provides rich interpretive insight, it is limited by its focus on a single musical work, which restricts generalisability. However, the depth of analysis offers a strong foundation for understanding how contemporary African popular music can function as a peacebuilding resource.

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF *STAND TOGETHER*

Stand Together is conceived as a deliberately pan-African musical project whose aesthetic design mirrors its ideological commitment to unity, solidarity, and collective resilience. The song brings together artists from Nigeria, Morocco, Tanzania, South Africa, Cameroon, Angola, and Ethiopia, each contributing distinct vocal timbres, linguistic resources, and stylistic inflections. This collaborative architecture is itself a symbolic enactment of social integration, aligning with Turino's (2008) conception of participatory music-making in which collective engagement and shared affect take precedence over individual virtuosity.

From a melodic standpoint, the song's modal behaviour aligns with what Agawu (2003) describes as modal intuition, an approach in which performers navigate tonal space through



culturally grounded sensibilities rather than through adherence to fixed theoretical systems. The chorus's descending contour, which oscillates between pitch centres associated with G and C, does not simply evoke a Dorian inflection in the Western theoretical sense; instead, its fluidity reflects an intuitive negotiation of tonal resources characteristic of Afrobeat and contemporary Afropop. This intuitive modal practice generates a sense of openness that mirrors the song's inclusive ethos, inviting listeners into a shared sonic environment shaped by culturally embedded ways of hearing and responding.

The organisation of the melody further draws on principles that Nzewi (2007) identifies as central to African pedagogical and social processes, particularly the use of repetition as a mechanism for communal learning. The song's narrow-range phrases and cyclical repetitions do more than enhance memorability: they cultivate an embodied mode of participation in which listeners internalise musical ideas through iterative engagement. In this framework, repetition becomes a social technology, enabling the transmission of collective values and shared emotional orientations. The melodic design therefore functions not merely as an aesthetic structure but as a culturally resonant medium for peace-oriented communication, aligning musical experience with practices of communal learning and ethical formation. See the musical excerpt in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Excerpt From 2-Face and Yemi Alade's 'Stand Together'

Stand Up

2Baba, Yemi Alade etc

Ev-ery-thing has changed now-a-days,

fun-ny how we cant pev-en play no more, it was on-ly yes-ter-day that we

part-y ev-ery-day, now its blood on the dance-floor all be-cause of the vi-rus

but it can kill the po-wer in-side us to stand to-get-her and de-feat co-ro-na



Rhythm constitutes one of the most salient expressive dimensions of *Stand Together*. The song is anchored in a syncopated Afrobeat groove characterised by strong downbeats, off-beat accents, and layered rhythmic patterns articulated through percussion, bass guitar, and vocal phrasing. The interlocking relationship between rhythmic layers generates a sense of forward motion and collective energy. Euba (1990) emphasises that African rhythmic systems prioritise interaction and balance, creating musical textures that model social cooperation. In *Stand Together*, rhythmic interlock functions metaphorically as social interdependence, sonically enacting the principle that unity emerges through coordinated difference rather than uniformity, as exemplified in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Excerpt from 2-Face and Yemi Alade's 'Stand Together'.

Stand Together

2Baba, Yemi Alade etc

One day_ my peo - ple, one day_ we'll be ce - le - bra - ting cause

this plague is o - ver, not - hing_ will be se - pa - ra - ting

us, no - bo - dy_ is safe un - til ev - ery - bo - dy is

safe o ev - ery - bo - dy is safe o

Harmonically, the song privileges horizontal sonority over complex vertical progression. A steady bass ostinato provides a foundational reference point around which melodic lines unfold



in counterpoint. This approach aligns with African harmonic practices in which harmonic meaning emerges through melodic interaction and rhythmic coordination rather than through functional chord progressions (Nketia, 1974). The harmonic simplicity ensures that no single musical element dominates, allowing diverse vocal contributions to coexist within a cohesive sonic framework.

Stylistically, *Stand together* blends Afrobeat with elements of hip-hop, reggae, and Afropop, reflecting the hybrid nature of contemporary African popular music. Multilingual vocal delivery, including English, French, and indigenous African languages, reinforces the song's pan-African orientation and enhances its communicative reach. Omoniyi (2009) argues that multilingualism in African popular music fosters inclusivity by allowing diverse audiences to locate themselves within the musical narrative. The recurring chorus serves as a unifying refrain that invites collective identification and reinforces the song's peace-orientated message through repetition and affective resonance.

FINDINGS

Emergent Themes of Musical Mediation

The experts describe *Stand Together* as creating an emotional atmosphere that draws listeners into a shared expressive space, softening social boundaries and encouraging empathetic identification across Nigeria's fragmented landscape. Its warmth and optimism function as an affective bridge, enabling audiences from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to recognise themselves within a common emotional frame. This affective accessibility is central to the song's mediating power, allowing it to operate as more than entertainment and instead as a subtle catalyst for relational openness. The song's modal fluidity further strengthens this mediating function. Because its tonal language aligns with familiar African modal sensibilities rather than rigid Western frameworks, listeners engage with it through culturally intuitive ways of hearing. This accessibility allows diverse audiences to participate without specialised musical knowledge, reinforcing the song's inclusive ethos and supporting its role as a culturally grounded tool for social connection.

Communal Participation and Collective Agency

Repetition emerges in the expert accounts as a key driver of collective participation, functioning less as a stylistic habit and more as a social technology that draws listeners into shared patterns of engagement. Through its cyclical phrases, the song encourages an embodied form of listening in which audiences rehearse, internalise, and enact the values of solidarity and mutual responsibility that underpin its message. This iterative participation mirrors wider African pedagogical traditions, where learning is communal and reinforced through repetition. Alongside this, the song's call-and-response exchanges are interpreted as modelling reciprocal social relations. Their dialogic structure symbolises mutual recognition and interdependence, inviting listeners to imagine themselves within a responsive musical conversation. In doing so, the song cultivates a sense of shared agency and collective voice, offering a sonic analogue for the relational ethics essential to peacebuilding.



Pan-African Identity and Transnational Solidarity

Experts interpret the song's multilingual delivery as a deliberate gesture of continental inclusivity, allowing listeners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to recognise themselves within the musical narrative. This plurality of languages becomes a subtle but effective means of modelling unity in diversity, suggesting that peacebuilding must embrace multiple identities rather than collapse them into a single frame. The pan-African ensemble of artists reinforces this message. Their collaborative authorship is read as a form of symbolic diplomacy in which diverse cultural voices coexist within a shared creative project. By bringing together musicians from across the continent, the song performs the very solidarity it advocates, offering a lived demonstration of transnational belonging and cooperative agency.

Peace-Oriented Messaging and Symbolic Transformation

The experts read the song's expressive character as carrying a clear narrative of resilience and hope. Its uplifting gestures and affirmative vocal delivery are understood to offer listeners an emotional script for imagining collective recovery, encouraging a sense of shared strength in the face of crisis. This optimism becomes a subtle form of peace messaging, inviting audiences to orient themselves towards possibility rather than despair. Because the song emerged during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the experts also note how it reframes crisis through sound. Instead of amplifying fear or fragmentation, the music redirects attention to mutual care, civic responsibility, and the ethical imperative of looking outward rather than inward. In doing so, it transforms a moment of vulnerability into an opportunity for renewed social commitment, using its sonic and symbolic choices to cultivate a more hopeful and solidaristic orientation to collective life.

Expert Triangulation of Peacebuilding Functions

Across the three expert domains there is clear agreement that *Stand Together* carries meaningful peacebuilding potential, particularly in its ability to foster empathy, encourage participation, and articulate shared identities. This convergence underscores the song's mediating power and affirms that its musical strategies resonate across disciplinary perspectives. At the same time, the experts bring different emphases that enrich the interpretation: scholars of African popular music highlight the song's stylistic hybridity and its position within broader industry dynamics; ethnomusicologists draw attention to its participatory aesthetics and the embodied forms of communal engagement it enables; and music-and-society researchers foreground the affective and identity-forming processes through which listeners connect with its message. These varied angles do not contradict one another but instead reveal the multidimensional nature of musical mediation, showing how the song's peacebuilding functions operate simultaneously at aesthetic, social, and emotional levels.

Integrative Model of Musical Peacebuilding

Collectively, the findings show that *Stand Together* operates as an informal curriculum of peace, modelling the attitudes and relational practices needed for coexistence through its affective warmth, participatory energy, and symbolic inclusivity. Rather than instructing listeners directly, the song cultivates dispositions of empathy, solidarity, and mutual responsibility through the emotional and communal experiences it generates. Its capacity to draw diverse audiences into a shared expressive space, to rehearse collective agency through



participation, and to symbolically enact unity across linguistic and national boundaries positions it as a subtle but effective vehicle for peace-oriented learning. In this way, the song demonstrates how contemporary African popular music can function as a culturally grounded medium for civic consciousness and social cohesion, articulating shared values in forms that are accessible, resonant, and widely circulating.

DISCUSSION

The core insight of this study is that *Stand Together* demonstrates how contemporary African popular music can function as a culturally grounded mechanism of conflict transformation by modelling relational ethics, shared identity, and collective responsibility through its sonic, affective, and collaborative design. This matters because it shows that peacebuilding, often dominated by institutional, policy, and security frameworks, can also be advanced through everyday cultural practices that shape how people feel, imagine, and relate to one another. By revealing how musical structure and performance cultivate social cohesion, the study directly addresses the research problem and expands the conceptual terrain of peacebuilding theory.

The findings indicate that the song's participatory and affective qualities enact the principles of positive peace articulated by Galtung (1996), particularly the cultivation of harmonious relationships rather than the mere absence of violence. The shared emotional experiences generated by the music align with Lederach's (2005) notion of moral imagination, enabling listeners to envision themselves within a web of interdependence and to imagine constructive futures without defensiveness. This interpretive resonance is consistent with recent scholarship emphasising the affective and relational dimensions of peacebuilding, which argues that emotional connection and shared symbolic experience are essential to transforming social imaginaries (Crooke et al., 2024). The study also extends African cultural humanism by demonstrating how the song's rhythmic interdependence, dialogic textures, and collaborative authorship embody Mbiti's (1990) relational conception of personhood, reinforcing the idea that African musical practices are not merely aesthetic but deeply ethical and communal.

The results align with emerging research on music's role in reconciliation and peace education, which highlights its ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers and foster inclusive participation (Bergh, 2010; Acker & Nyland, 2018). By showing how *Stand Together* mobilises these capacities within a contemporary Afropop idiom, the study advances this literature by demonstrating that peace-oriented musical practices are not confined to grassroots or traditional settings but are equally present in mainstream popular culture. This challenges assumptions that socially conscious African music must adopt confrontational or protest-based aesthetics. Instead, the song's conciliatory tone and collaborative ethos suggest a broader spectrum of political engagement in which empathy, inclusivity, and symbolic unity serve as powerful modes of social intervention. This finding complicates dominant narratives about Afrobeat's political identity and invites a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary artists articulate civic consciousness.

Methodologically, the study contributes to scholarship by demonstrating the value of integrating musicological analysis with expert interpretation. Much existing research privileges lyrical content, yet the findings here show that peace-oriented meaning is embedded equally in sonic, rhythmic, and performative dimensions. This approach strengthens interpretive validity



and offers a model for interdisciplinary inquiry that takes musical structure seriously as a site of social meaning. It also aligns with recent calls for more holistic approaches to studying music in peacebuilding, which emphasise the need to consider affective, embodied, and participatory dimensions alongside textual analysis (Bradley and Hess, 2021)

An unexpected but significant insight is the extent to which *Stand Together* advances peace advocacy through non-confrontational aesthetics. While Afrobeat's historical association with political critique often foregrounds resistance and denunciation, this study shows that contemporary iterations of the genre can mobilise unity, empathy, and collective care as equally potent forms of social intervention. This suggests that peace-oriented musical expression in Africa is diversifying, with implications for how scholars conceptualise the political agency of popular music.

The study's limitations define the boundaries of its claims. Focusing on a single song restricts the generalisability of the findings, and the reliance on expert interpretation, while methodologically justified, means that audience reception remains underexplored. The analysis also centres on a pan-African collaboration, which may not reflect the dynamics of more locally rooted musical practices. These limitations point to clear avenues for future research, including comparative analyses across genres and regions, audience-based studies that examine how listeners interpret peace-oriented music, and investigations into how digital circulation shapes the transnational reach of musical peacebuilding.

This paper demonstrates that contemporary African popular music offers a rich, culturally resonant resource for peace education and social cohesion. By showing how musical structure and collaborative performance can model relational ethics and shared identity, it advances theoretical debates in peace studies, enriches methodological approaches to music analysis, and provides practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking innovative tools for conflict transformation. A natural next step is to explore how these musical strategies might be integrated into community-based peace initiatives or youth-focused civic programmes, where their affective and participatory qualities could have significant impact.

CONCLUSION

The study set out to clarify how contemporary Nigerian popular music can function as a medium for conflict transformation and peace education, and it addressed this problem by analysing how *Stand Together* organises sound, collaboration, and affect to model constructive social relations. In doing so, the study demonstrated that the song offers a coherent example of how musical practice can support peace-oriented ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

The study's core accomplishment lies in showing that a mainstream Afropop collaboration can embody principles of relational ethics and collective responsibility through its musical design. Its contributions are threefold. Theoretically, it strengthens understandings of positive peace by illustrating how musical participation and shared affect can nurture relational imagination. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of integrating musicological analysis with expert interpretation to illuminate how meaning is produced through sonic and performative choices. Empirically, it provides a detailed account of how a pan-African musical project articulates unity and social cohesion in a contemporary popular-music context. Together, these



contributions show that *Stand Together* operates as an informal pedagogical resource, modelling dispositions that support peaceful coexistence.

The findings hold significance for wider debates on music and peacebuilding by demonstrating that peace-oriented musical practices are not limited to traditional or community-based forms but can be embedded in commercially circulated popular culture with broad reach. They also refine prevailing assumptions about African popular music's political agency by showing that conciliatory and collaborative aesthetics can advance social consciousness as effectively as oppositional critique. In this way, the study helps to fill a recognised gap in scholarship concerning how musical structure and performance, not only lyrics, can shape civic imagination.

Future inquiry should extend this work by examining a wider corpus of songs and genres to determine how consistently these peace-building mechanisms appear across contemporary African popular music. Audience-centred studies would also deepen understanding of how listeners interpret and internalise such musical cues, while research on digital circulation could clarify how transnational networks influence the reception and impact of peace-oriented music. These directions follow directly from the study's scope and limitations, offering concrete pathways for advancing knowledge in this field.

Collectively, the findings affirm that contemporary African popular music can serve as a culturally resonant resource for nurturing social cohesion and relational awareness. By showing how *Stand Together* animates solidarity, empathy, and shared responsibility through its musical and collaborative design, the study underscores that music, when grounded in collective experience, remains a powerful medium through which societies can imagine and rehearse more just and connected futures.

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