EXAMINING 2BABA'S CELEBRITY IDENTITY EVOLUTION THROUGH INNOCENT IDIBIA AND FACEKUERADE THEORY IN AFRICAN POP CULTURE

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Abstract

Celebrity identity in contemporary Nigerian popular culture is shaped by the interaction between personal identity, artistic representation, media visibility, and public expectations. This paper examines the relationship between Innocent Ujah Idibia, popularly known as 2Baba, and the construction of celebrity identity through the template of Facekuerade popular culture. Drawing on Sunday Enessi Ododo's Facekuerade theory, the paper investigates how the relationship between the individual and the publicly performed persona can illuminate the complexities of celebrity representation. It adopts a qualitative approach based on textual and performance analysis of selected musical works, public statements, interviews, and media reports relating to 2Baba. The paper argues that 2Baba's public identity can be understood as a continuing negotiation between the private individual, the performing musician, and the celebrity figure produced through media representation. It also maintains that ethical celebrity performance requires a critical examination of the relationship between public image, personal responsibility, audience expectations, and the consequences of public statements. The paper concludes that Facekuerade offers a productive African-centred analytical perspective for examining the multiple identities associated with contemporary Nigerian celebrities, provided that its original cultural and ritual context is acknowledged.

Keywords: Facekuerade, celebrity identity, 2Baba, Innocent Idibia, popular culture, performance, representation, ethical performance.

Introduction

The growth of the African creative industry has transformed the meaning and function of celebrity within contemporary society. African musicians, actors, and other cultural producers are no longer evaluated only through their creative achievements. Their personal narratives, social commitments, public behaviour, and cultural affiliations have become central elements through which audiences interpret their identities.

This development has created a unique challenge for African performers. Global entertainment culture often encourages individuality, personal branding, commercial visibility, and the construction of distinctive public images. Conversely, many African societies continue to place strong emphasis on communal values, humility, family responsibility, cultural representation, and accountability to society. The African celebrity therefore exists within a continuous negotiation between international expectations and local moral frameworks.

Historically, African performance traditions have provided models for understanding such negotiations. Traditional masquerade practices demonstrate that transformation and identity performance do not necessarily represent deception. The performer who assumes a masked identity remains connected to the community and performs within a cultural framework governed

by social meaning and responsibility. The mask does not erase identity; rather, it reveals another dimension of identity appropriate to a particular context.

This understanding provides an important foundation for examining contemporary African celebrity culture. Although modern performers may no longer rely on physical masks, they continue to engage in forms of identity transformation through clothing, language, music, visual presentation, media appearances, and digital platforms. The public image of the artist has become a contemporary site where different aspects of identity are negotiated.

Celebrity culture has become an important feature of contemporary Nigerian popular culture. Musicians, actors, comedians, and other public figures are recognised not only for their creative works but also for their public personalities, media appearances, relationships, opinions, and social conduct. Their identities are continually shaped through interactions among personal experience, artistic performance, media representation, and audience interpretation. Consequently, the identity of a celebrity cannot always be understood as a straightforward reflection of the private individual. It is also a public construction that develops through repeated performances and representations.

This study approaches the issue through Facekuerade, a performance concept developed by Sunday Enessi Ododo. Ododo's original discussion examines the performative and transformational qualities of unmasked masquerade characters in the Ebira-Ekuechi festival. His analysis challenges the assumption that masquerade identity depends exclusively on a physical mask. Instead, it considers the cultural and performative processes through which an individual may be recognised as embodying a socially meaningful masquerade identity (Ododo 284-308). Although Facekuerade emerged from a specific Ebira cultural context, its emphasis on identity, transformation, and the relationship between the performer and the recognised performance character provides a possible framework for examining celebrity identity. In the context of popular culture, the celebrity's face, name, music, public conduct, and media image may become recognisable signs through which audiences interpret the person behind the public persona.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to examine the reimagining of celebrity identity and ethical performance between Innocent Idibia and 2Baba through the analytical lens of Facekuerade popular culture.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the construction and transformation of Innocent Idibia's public identity as 2Baba.
2. Analyse the relevance of Facekuerade theory to understanding celebrity identity and performance in contemporary Nigerian popular culture.
3. Investigate the relationship between celebrity representation, public perception, and ethical responsibility.

4. Assess how selected musical works, public statements, and media representations contribute to the negotiation of 2Baba' s celebrity identity.

Research Questions

1. How is the public identity of Innocent Idibia constructed and transformed through his identity as 2Baba?
2. In what ways can Facekuerade theory illuminate the performance of celebrity identity in Nigerian popular culture?
3. What ethical responsibilities arise from the relationship between celebrity representation, public perception, and public conduct?
4. How do selected musical works, public statements, and media representations contribute to the continuing negotiation of 2Baba' s public identity?

Conceptualising Celebrity Identity and Ethical Performance

Celebrity identity refers to the publicly recognised image associated with an individual whose professional activities and personal visibility attract substantial public attention. It includes the names, symbols, performances, narratives, and representations through which audiences identify and interpret a public figure. Graeme Turner's work on celebrity provides an important foundation for understanding celebrity as a cultural and media process rather than merely the consequence of individual talent. He explains that celebrity is produced through cultural and economic processes, including publicity, promotion, and media representation (Turner 4). From this perspective, 2Baba's public identity is not formed solely by his musical ability. It is also shaped by the ways his music, interviews, public appearances, and personal narratives circulate through Nigerian and international media.

Richard Dyer examines the star image as a constructed representation shaped by different forms of media, including performance, publicity, promotion, and critical commentary. His position helps explain how a celebrity' s public image can extend beyond the individual' s personal identity and become a representation interpreted by audiences (Dyer 60-63)

P. David Marshall examines celebrity in relation to public representation and cultural power. He argues that celebrities function as public figures through whom collective meanings and social identities are expressed, giving celebrity status significance beyond individual fame (Marshall 51-76). Ethical performance, in this context, refers to the relationship between a celebrity's public conduct and the responsibilities associated with being a visible cultural figure. It involves questions of honesty, accountability, respect, consistency, and the consequences of public communication. Ethical performance does not mean that celebrities must be perfect or that their private lives must be entirely available for public inspection. Rather, it requires a distinction between legitimate public scrutiny and the unreasonable expectation that celebrity status removes an individual's right to privacy. Nick Couldry's study of media rituals is useful for understanding how media practices contribute to the construction of public significance and social authority. He

examines how the media's privileged position is established and made to appear natural within society (Couldry 1-20, 37-54). The study of celebrity identity must therefore consider not only the individual who performs but also the cultural and media systems that make the performance meaningful.

Facekuerade Theory as an Analytical Framework

Facekuerade theory was developed by Sunday Enessi Ododo through his examination of the Ebira-Ekuechi festival and its unmasked masquerade characters. In "Facekuerade": The Transformational Duality in Ebira-Ekuechi Festival Performance, Ododo explores how certain performers may be understood as masquerade figures even when they do not wear conventional masks. His argument draws attention to the relationship between bodily appearance, performance, cultural recognition, and the meanings assigned to a character within a particular ritual setting (Ododo 284-308).

The significance of the concept lies in its challenge to a narrow understanding of masquerade identity. A masquerade is not necessarily recognised only because a physical mask conceals the performer's face. Identity may also emerge through the performer's actions, cultural position, ritual function, and the audience's understanding of the performance.

Ododo's position provides the primary theoretical foundation for this study. When applied cautiously to popular culture, Facekuerade offers a way of examining the relationship between an identifiable person and a socially recognised public persona. A celebrity may appear without a literal mask while still performing an identity that is shaped by professional expectations, media conventions, publicity, and audience interpretation.

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach provides a complementary perspective. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman examines social interaction through the metaphor of performance. He explains how individuals manage the impressions they create and how their conduct may be organised around the expectations of particular social situations (Goffman 22-30, 208-12). Richard Schechner's performance theory also supports the analysis. Schechner examines performance as an activity that can extend beyond conventional theatre into everyday social and cultural practices. Judith Butler's concept of performativity offers another useful distinction. Butler investigates how identity is constituted and sustained through repeated acts and conventions, particularly in relation to gender (Butler 179-80). Although her original argument concerns gender and subject formation, the broader idea of repetition can assist in analysing how public identities become recognisable through recurring names, styles, statements, and behaviours. The combination of these perspectives makes it possible to examine celebrity identity as a process involving performance, repetition, recognition, and cultural interpretation. Nevertheless, Facekuerade remains the central framework because it foregrounds an African theoretical contribution to the study of performance and identity.

Innocent Idibia and the Construction of the 2Baba Persona

Innocent Ujah Idibia's public identity as 2Baba provides an opportunity to investigate the relationship between personal identity and celebrity representation. The name 2Baba functions as more than an alternative name: it has become a recognisable professional identity associated with his musical career. It appears in music releases, publicity, interviews, and other representations of the artist. The distinction between Innocent Idibia and 2Baba should not be interpreted as proof that two separate personalities exist. Rather, it provides a means of examining how one individual may occupy different positions within public culture. Innocent Idibia refers to the person, while 2Baba identifies the established musical and celebrity persona through which many members of the public encounter him.

Dyer's work helps explain this distinction because a star's public image is constructed through different forms of media representation, including performance, publicity, promotion, and critical commentary. These representations may circulate beyond the performer's direct control, contributing to a public identity that is not identical to the individual's private self (Dyer 63). The 2Baba identity is consequently sustained through both his own performances and the interpretations supplied by audiences, journalists, critics, and other cultural participants. Turner's approach further suggests that celebrity identity is not simply an individual possession but is produced and circulated through media processes, including publicity, promotion, and representation (Turner 8-9). A musical release may establish one aspect of an artist's image, while an interview or public controversy may introduce additional interpretations. These representations can reinforce, complicate, or challenge the image associated with the celebrity.

The Facekuerade framework is useful here because it draws attention to the difference between the visible individual and the socially recognised performance identity. In Ododo's original setting, the relationship between a performer and a masquerade character is understood through the cultural conventions of the festival. In the popular-culture context, the relationship between Innocent Idibia and 2Baba is mediated by musical performance, publicity, and audience recognition. The comparison is not absolute. A musical persona is not equivalent to a ritual masquerade, and celebrity performance does not automatically possess the religious or communal significance of Ekuechi. The analytical value lies in examining how a recognised identity may be constructed through performance even when the individual's physical face remains visible.

Musical Performance and the Negotiation of Celebrity Identity: "African Queen" and the Construction of an Artistic Image

"African Queen," released on *Face 2 Face* in 2004, became one of the best-known songs associated with 2Baba's career. Its romantic subject matter and celebration of feminine beauty contribute to an artistic image centred on affection, admiration, and emotional expression.

The song can be examined as a performance of romantic identity. Through the lyrics, vocal delivery, musical arrangement, and associated visual representations, the artist presents a particular understanding of love and admiration. This performance contributes to the wider public

image associated with 2Baba. Stuart Hall's theory of representation is relevant to this discussion. Hall explains that representation is not merely a transparent reflection of an already established reality; it participates in the production of meaning (Hall 13-74). From this perspective, the song does not simply reveal the singer's private feelings. It constructs and circulates an artistic representation of romance that audiences may interpret in different ways.

The song's public reception can therefore contribute to the construction of 2Baba's persona as a musician capable of expressing romantic themes in a manner that resonates with listeners. This does not establish that the artistic representation completely reflects his private character. Instead, it shows how musical performance supplies material through which audiences make sense of the celebrity. Through Facekuerade, "African Queen" can be interpreted as one performance through which the 2Baba identity becomes culturally recognisable. The persona is sustained not by a physical mask but by the song, the artist's voice, the visual presentation, and the meanings attached to the performance.

Musical Performance and the Negotiation of Celebrity Identity: " If Love Is a Crime" and the Performance of Emotional Identity

"If Love Is a Crime," associated with the album *Grass 2 Grace* in 2006, offers another opportunity to examine the performance of romantic identity. The song's framing of love through the language of crime presents romantic feeling as an experience that may be misunderstood, challenged, or judged. The song is in relation to the emotional identity established through 2Baba's musical work. Its narrative and delivery contribute to the presentation of a performer who uses music to communicate experiences of love and emotional commitment. The musical performance is not simply a private emotion translated into sound; it is an organised artistic act delivered to an audience through a recognisable popular-music persona. From the perspective of Facekuerade, the song forms part of the continuing public performance of 2Baba's identity. It contributes to a body of work through which the artist is recognised, interpreted, and evaluated. However, the song should not be treated as evidence of the performer's actual conduct in his private relationships. The study distinguishes between the representation of romantic feeling in an artistic work and claims about the artist's personal life. This distinction is important for ethical analysis. A celebrity's artistic representation may shape audience expectations, but audiences should not automatically assume that every lyric or performance is an autobiographical statement.

Reimagining Celebrity Identity through Facekuerade Popular Culture

The application of Facekuerade to celebrity culture provides an opportunity to rethink the relationship between identity, appearance, and performance. In conventional discussions, celebrity image may be treated as a publicity strategy or as a representation created by media organisations. Facekuerade adds an African-centred performance perspective by asking how a publicly recognised identity emerges through transformation, embodiment, and audience understanding. Ododo's original theory examines unmasked masquerade figures whose identities

are established through cultural and performative conventions rather than physical masking alone (Ododo 284-308).

In 2Baba's case, the persona is sustained through the professional name, musical catalogue, public appearances, interviews, and the accumulated meanings attached to his career. These elements contribute to a recognisable celebrity identity. Nevertheless, the identity is not entirely controlled by the artist. Media representations and audience interpretations can introduce meanings that the celebrity may not have intended. Auslander's work on liveness and mediatized performance offers a useful way of understanding how contemporary performance is shaped by the relationship between live presence and media technologies. He explains that live performance operates within a cultural environment increasingly influenced by media technologies and reproduced forms of performance (Auslander 5-11). A musician's public identity is experienced through concerts and physical appearances, but also through recordings, music videos, interviews, and mediated circulation. The celebrity's public identity is consequently produced through multiple performance spaces. A live concert may emphasise vocal ability and audience connection; a music video may construct a visual identity; an interview may foreground personal opinions; and a news report may place the individual within a particular public narrative.

Facekuerade therefore provides a framework for examining celebrity identity as an ongoing relationship between performer, persona, and audience. The concept is particularly valuable when used as an African theoretical contribution rather than treated merely as a synonym for disguise or hypocrisy. The application also requires cultural sensitivity. Ododo's concept emerges from Ebira performance traditions and the ritual meanings of Ekuechi. Its use in celebrity studies should acknowledge those origins and avoid erasing the cultural specificity that gives the theory its significance. The value of the extension lies in demonstrating how an African performance theory can generate new questions about popular culture while remaining attentive to its original context.

The 2Baba Face: The Creative and Global Identity

The 2Baba identity represents the artistic and professional dimension of Innocent Idibia's public existence. It is the face associated with musical performance, creativity, innovation, and global recognition. Within the entertainment industry, artists require distinctive identities that communicate their artistic vision. The 2Baba persona provides this function by creating a recognizable image within Nigerian and international popular culture.

Through this identity, Idibia has been able to participate in the global music economy while maintaining African cultural expression. His musical career demonstrates how African artists can engage international audiences without completely abandoning local creative foundations. The success of songs such as African Queen illustrates the ability of the 2Baba identity to transform personal artistry into cultural representation. The persona operates within the demands of the entertainment industry, where confidence, performance ability, and public visibility are essential.

From the perspective of Facekuerade, this identity is not a false version of Innocent. Rather, it represents a different mode of expression appropriate to the performance environment. The stage requires energy, creativity, and spectacle. The audience expects the performer to embody a heightened version of artistic expression. The 2Baba face therefore functions as a professional instrument through which the artist communicates creativity and excellence.

However, the sustainability of this identity depends on its connection with the ethical foundation represented by the Innocent face. Without cultural grounding, celebrity identity risks becoming detached from the community that provides meaning and legitimacy. The relationship between Innocent and 2Baba therefore demonstrates the central argument of Facekuerade: different faces can coexist when they remain connected to a shared ethical centre.

Two Faces, One Performer: Identity Multiplicity and African Authenticity

The relationship between Innocent and 2Baba provides the central argument of this study: that multiple identities do not necessarily represent contradiction or inauthenticity. Through the framework of Facekuerade, identity multiplicity can be understood as a culturally meaningful process through which individuals navigate different social realities. A common assumption within some approaches to celebrity culture is that authenticity requires a single, consistent public identity. From this perspective, changes in behaviour, appearance, or communication style may be interpreted as evidence of artificiality. However, this assumption does not fully capture African understandings of identity, where individuals are often defined through multiple relationships and responsibilities.

African social philosophy recognizes that a person exists within different networks of meaning. One may simultaneously be a family member, professional, community participant, and cultural representative. These identities do not cancel one another; rather, they reveal the complexity of human existence. Traditional African masquerade practices provide a useful parallel. The masquerader does not cease to be an individual simply because another identity is assumed during performance. Instead, the mask allows another dimension of meaning to emerge. The performer remains connected to the cultural values and community expectations that give the performance legitimacy.

Similarly, the Innocent and 2Baba identities represent different contextual expressions of one individual. The Innocent identity emphasizes social connection and responsibility, while the 2Baba identity emphasizes creativity, entertainment, and global artistic participation.

The significance of this interpretation is that it challenges the idea that celebrity performance is automatically a form of deception. Performance can also be a cultural skill: the ability to understand context, communicate effectively, and assume appropriate roles within different environments. The authenticity of the African creative therefore does not depend on presenting only one face. Rather, it depends on ensuring that every face remains connected to integrity, cultural awareness, and responsibility.

Facekuerade and Perception Management in Contemporary Creative Practice

The modern creative industry is shaped by visibility. Artists exist within a media environment where public perception influences career sustainability, commercial opportunities, and cultural relevance. As a result, managing identity has become an essential aspect of creative practice.

Through Facekuerade, perception management can be understood beyond simple branding. It becomes a cultural process through which artists negotiate relationships with different audiences.

The 2Baba identity enables engagement with the global entertainment marketplace. It communicates professionalism, artistic confidence, and creative distinction. The Innocent identity maintains connection with audiences who value humility, family responsibility, and social contribution.

The effectiveness of this identity management lies in balance. If the commercial face completely replaces the communal face, the artist may lose cultural legitimacy. Conversely, if the artist refuses to adapt to professional demands, global opportunities may become limited. Idibia' s career demonstrates the importance of negotiating these two expectations. His longevity within African popular music may be interpreted as evidence of an ability to maintain relevance across changing cultural and technological environments. Facekuerade therefore presents identity management not as a manipulation of audiences but as a process of responsible communication. The artist learns how to express different dimensions of self while maintaining continuity of values.

Ethical Implications of Celebrity Performance

The relationship between celebrity identity and ethical performance raises questions about the responsibilities associated with public influence. A celebrity's identity may be shaped by artistic work, publicity, and audience interpretation, but public visibility can also increase the consequences of a person's statements and actions. Ethical celebrity performance requires responsible communication. Public figures should distinguish personal opinions from verified information, avoid making unsupported allegations, and consider the potential consequences of their statements. Ethical performance requires accountability without unreasonable intrusion into private life. A celebrity may legitimately be questioned about professional conduct, public claims, or actions that affect others. However, celebrity status does not remove the individual's right to privacy, nor does public interest automatically justify speculation about personal matters. Ethical analysis must recognise the responsibility of media organisations and audiences. News reports, online discussions, and social media commentary can shape a celebrity's public identity. Where information is incomplete or disputed, responsible interpretation requires distinguishing facts from allegations and opinion. Furthermore, Artistic performance should not be confused automatically with personal behaviour. A song's lyrics, a music video's imagery, or a stage persona may represent fictional, symbolic, exaggerated, or imaginative experiences. Ethical

criticism should examine the actual work and its context rather than assuming that every artistic representation directly reveals the performer's private character. Finally, Facekuerade offers a way of asking how the public persona relates to the individual without assuming that the persona is necessarily false. A performed identity can be a genuine part of professional life while remaining distinct from the totality of the person. The ethical question is therefore not simply whether a celebrity is performing, but how the performance is constructed, interpreted, and connected to public responsibility.

Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between Innocent Idibia and his public identity as 2Baba through the analytical template of Facekuerade popular culture. It has argued that celebrity identity is not adequately understood as a direct reflection of private personality. Rather, it develops through musical performance, public appearances, media representation, and audience interpretation.Ododo' s Facekuerade theory provides the central framework for considering how a publicly recognised identity can emerge through performance and cultural interpretation even without a literal mask. Although the concept originated in the Ebira-Ekuechi festival, its application to celebrity culture offers a productive way of investigating the relationship between an individual and a socially recognised persona, provided that the differences between ritual performance and contemporary popular culture remain clear. Ultimately, the relationship between Innocent Idibia and 2Baba can be understood as a continuing negotiation between individual identity and public performance. Facekuerade provides an African-centred perspective for investigating this relationship, while the ethical dimension of the study emphasises accountability, responsible communication, respect for privacy, and careful interpretation of public information. The study therefore contributes to the discussion of Nigerian popular culture by demonstrating how an African performance theory can be extended to celebrity studies without disregarding its cultural origins.

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