

“Radi-aid”

“Radi-aid” is a song released in 2012 that was created by members of the Norwegian Students and Academics’ International Assistance Fund (SAIH) who were studying in South Africa at the time. The organization strives to promote global educational opportunities, and it emphasizes that it does so through collaboration rather than charity work. According to them, most of the singers featured in the video are South African student volunteers. The music was composed by Wathiq Hoosain, who is a South African living in Norway, though the lyrics were written by a Norwegian band, Bretton Woods. The song has gained mass popularity, as its YouTube video has over 3 million views.

Importantly, “Radi-aid” serves as a parody song for Western “charity songs” such as “We Are the World” and “Do They Know It’s Christmas”. The similarities between “Radi-aid” and the American produced songs are evident in musical style, lyrics, and also in the video. “Radi-aid” begins in a more somber tone as the piano is very audible with the first soloist. However, the song soon becomes more upbeat and there are multiple people singing in unison, at which point the instruments become less audible and the singers’ different voices are what can be most easily heard. Both “We Are the World” and “Do They Know It’s Christmas” progressively change in a similar way throughout the song. The ends of both songs also include a chorus of people singing in unison, and they are even clapping, swaying, and smiling in the videos, showing this more upbeat attitude.

The two Western songs were meant to raise awareness and funding for African nations. “Do They Know It’s Christmas” was targeted towards helping the famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s while “We Are the World” was generally aimed to alleviate poverty on the continent. The creators of “Radi-aid” say they are poking fun at these songs not because they think international aid should stop. Rather, they are making a statement about the culture of Western influence and of African portrayals across the world. The American and British songs include lines such as “Where nothing ever grows, or rain or rivers flow” and “there are people dying.” These songs also never mention specific African countries or regions, so they seem to be making dramatic statements about an entire continent. Likewise, the “Radi-aid” spoof says “kids are freezing” and its video has images of white people in the cold and harsh wind. While the statement about the coldness is true, it does not at all depict what there is to know about Norway in its entirety. “Radi-aid” also makes interesting commentary by actually mentioning some of Africa’s own issues “with poverty, corruption, with HIV and crime” and saying that Norway “taught us what to do.” This remark seems to be criticizing the interventionist culture of the West where the US and Europe try to step in as though they know what is best for African nations.

Ultimately, this song has an interesting role in our course. It was created by a Norwegian group but included an African composer and singers, so is a somewhat “African” song. Unlike many others discussed in class, “Radi-aid” is not about a single political issue or even a single African country or area. This song is a parody, but still addresses the serious issue of how Africa is typically portrayed and discussed as suffering and needing help. There is some controversy over a Norwegian group making a song about how Africa should be better portrayed. Regardless, the song fits well into the idea of “Rhythm for Change” because it tries to turn the tables on other popular humanitarian songs.

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