

The Musician as Archivist: An Example of Nigeria's Lagbaja

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Abstract

This article revisits the role of music in human society with particular reference to the Nigerian experience. It examines Lagbaja's alternative perceptions of African values, as he reflects on socio-political events in Nigerian history. The article considers the ideas of cultural revival, social integration and national development that run through his lyrics. In so doing, it evaluates the socio-cultural relevance of his use of the talking drum as a speech surrogate, his injection of Yoruba traditional values into his lyrics, and his celebration of the Yoruba dance style as cultural ingredients for enhancing effective communication through his messages.

Key words: Lagbaja, Nigerian contemporary music, social commentary.

1. Introduction

The demise of the Nigerian Fela Anikulapo-Kuti¹ in 1997 has not stemmed the use of revolutionary and political music as a means to raise awareness within Nigerian society. This is because a younger generation of Nigerian musicians has emerged, who show great commitment in using the instrumentality of music to x-ray social ills in the country, and a view to correcting them. One artiste whose forte is worthy of note is Lagos born Bisade Ologunde, popularly called Lagbaja, or the masked musician. The word ‘Lagbaja’ means ‘somebody, everybody and nobody in particular’ in the Yoruba language (Oyebola, 2003: 1). Generally, the word is an expression of anonymity. The question then is: Why does an individual seek to be shrouded in such a mystery of nominal distancing from individual identity? This hints at the philosophy of the musician, for the name tends to draw the audience’s attention to the ideas behind the music, rather than to the musician’s personality. At another level, the title is the perfect name for the anonymity of the ‘common man’ for whom the musician has great empathy. Thus, he is an artiste submerged in meaningful mystery.

Closely related to the mystery of the musician’s name are his costumes worn during performances. Lagbaja always performs masked, and his elaborate masks and costume tie into the ancient tradition of the Yoruba masquerade, known as *egungun*. Although masks were originally made to disguise, and from ancient times people have associated mask

¹ The late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was the Nigerian musician, composer and political activist who pioneered Afrobeat music. Many of his songs were direct attacks on military dictatorships in Nigeria during the 1970’s and 1980’s. As a social commentator he also criticised his fellow Africans for betraying traditional African culture.

with deceit and vice, Hensley (2001) argues that Lagbaja should not be feared, for his mask is not intended to frighten, even if the political conditions that inform the music are nightmarish. Lagbaja himself says, ‘Our songs will be political . . . We will keep doing that because the whole concept of Lagbaja is that the mask is being used as a symbol that represents the working class, the common man . . .’ (Hensley, 2001: 2) At a social level, therefore, his nominal distancing from individual identity, and his physical disguise, are identity obscuring techniques that underline the relevance of his messages to the African people. This is his philosophy of ‘community-first’ development, for he believes society blooms when each of its members learns to place the group’s interests above their own individual focus.

Lagbaja plays a unique style of Afrobeat, incorporating a range of influences from highlife, juju, pop, funk, and hip-hop, among others. His music is usually rendered in Yoruba, English and/or Pidgin. This linguistic phenomenon, called code-mixing or code-changing makes his language very clear and accessible to the audience. On his musical form, Hixson (2001: 1) says:

The musical form in Lagbaja’s work bears the imprint of Afrobeat, the musical style created by Nigerian superstar Fela Anikulapo-Kuti decades ago, but it also contains traces of highlife, juju and more traditional music such as *bata* drumming. Lagbaja’s music also incorporates rhythms and melodies inspired by Western genres such as rock, funk and jazz

Lagbaja’s musical form and the social relevance of his message have endeared him to both the young and old. Berg (2001) reports that during a trip to Nigeria he asked locals to name the most exciting musician on the current music scene. Taxi drivers, diplomats

and porters alike replied: ‘that guy with the mask’ or ‘that masked man who plays at the Motherlan’ Club’. These confessions are evident of the popularity Lagbaja has won for himself in the Nigerian music scene. Commenting on Lagbaja’s mission, Adewumi (2002: 2) writes, ‘With the passage of Fela comes Lagbaja as a historian in a form of magical realism; creating a dialogue on African culture with the Abami Eda² himself, a feat made possible through the proficient use of modern technology’. Olorunyomi (2005: 204) describes Lagbaja as ‘the highly experimental Nigerian musician whose creative spiel is often channelled through infusion of the multimedia’. Against this backdrop, we consider it compelling in this paper to examine aspects of Lagbaja’s lyrics, paying particular attention to how his music reflects the concerns of his Nigerian people.

2. Socio-political Commentary in Contemporary Nigerian Popular Music

Idolor (2002: 2) contends that ‘no phenomenon void of utility survives in a society; an indication that the presence of music in almost every African society has a formidable role to play’. This viewpoint suggests that human beings have always used music to meet certain societal needs in different circumstances. Contemporary Nigerian musicians use their lyrics to reflect on happenings in society. As such, they become chroniclers of events, recreating the history and culture of their people, commenting on aspects of societal values that have diverged from historical reports, and suggesting ways by which society could be restored to the normal order. In so doing, the musical social critics cannot but resort to employing the tool of satire to deride the prevalence of social ills in a

² Abami Eda was one of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti’s nicknames. Literally, it means ‘strange one’ or ‘spirit being’.

bid to correct them. This brings to the fore the didactic function of music. Idolor (2002: 6) explains:

The didactic function of music is affected through logical organisation of lyrics and performance practice. Some lyrics are presented in direct or indirect satire through such speech figures as simile, metaphor, alliteration, allusions, and even short anecdote to convey an observation or/and opinion to a witness-audience. In other situations, other activities in performance teach both viewers and participants the coded lesson(s).

Artistes can also be seen as ‘town criers’ who satirise social foibles in order to make human society and living worthwhile. In fact, this is an important cultural element of developing countries that face extreme social and economic hardship. I will now set out other points of view from Nigerian musicians that will provide a background to Nigerian music as a social voice, and set the scene for the arrival of Lagbaja on the Nigerian music scene.

2.1. Eedris Abdulkareem

One contemporary musician who has devoted his music to commenting on Nigerian society is Eedris Abdulkareem. In his album *Mr Lecturer* where he chronicles the degeneration of the nation’s socio-economic and political structures, he titles one track *Nigeria Jagajaga*, a term literally meaning a state of disorderliness and chaos. He sings:

Nigeria *jagajaga*,
Everything scatter scatter,
Poor man dey suffer suffer...
Gunshots in the air...

Nigeria in total disarray,
Everything has scattered,
The poor are suffering . . .
Gunshots in the air . . .

Due to the biting satiric thrust of the lyrics, Eedris was reported to have incurred the wrath of Nigeria's former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who scolded him for portraying Nigeria in negative terms. Oyetayo (2006: 52) reports:

The song was said to have touched a wrong chord with the President who reportedly thumped the artiste's head when he visited Aso Rock, the seat of power, with the Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria, PMAN. In his response, the President reportedly told Abdulkareem: "It is your papa and mama that are jagajaga".

Thus, in a subsequent album titled *Letter to Mr President*, Eedris attempts to shed light on the import of the signifier *jagajaga*, and the degeneration that has permeated Nigerian society, pointing out that his lyrics are a reflection of the realities that require urgent solutions. Specifically, he cites the endemic social vice of corruption which must be fought for the nation to develop.

2.2. Chinagorom Onuoha

The concerns of Eedris are given expression in the lyrics of another new breed of musician, Chinagorom Onuoha, also known popularly as *African China*. In his first album titled *Crisis*, he labels the Nigerian government as 'bad' for their perceived insensitivity to the plight of the ordinary people on the streets. Writing on the satirical thrust of African China's message, Oyetayo (2006: 53) comments:

The track, *Our Government Bad*, is a satirical x-ray of the penurious state of citizens occasioned by perceived insensitivity of the government. He opines that there are no job opportunities for the ghetto man and if he eventually gets one, it would now be a battle for survival. Ingeniously

blending raga tunes and social commentary into a stunning music tapestry, African China is unsparing in his caustic criticism of the government's anti-people policies which have left Nigerians more impoverished than ever.

In his second album titled *Mr President*, the musician continues with his musical preoccupation, expressing his disenchantment with the lack of basic social amenities such as water and good roads, coupled with the appalling scarcity of food in Nigeria. The musical social critic thus calls on the President and his team to attend to the problems, and put Nigeria on the right track so those at the grassroots level can benefit from good governance. Other popular artistes represent this new breed of Nigerian musicians, including Augustine *Black Face* Ahmedu, Femi Anikulapo-Kuti (the son of Fela Kuti), Tony Tetuila, and Lagbaja. They have, in their own ways, used the medium of music to reflect on the socio-economic conditions of Nigeria. However, it should be pointed out that the current relevance of their music is tied to the history of popular music in Nigeria where Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's Afrobeat holds sway.

3. The Influence of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat on Popular Music in Nigeria

Afrobeat is the name by which Fela's music came to be known in the late 1960's. It is the combination of Yoruba music, jazz, highlife and funk rhythms, fused with percussion and vocal styles. Fela, the main creator of this brand of music, used it to revolutionise musical structure as well as political context in Nigeria. Through his music, Fela became critical of the successive military governments that ruled Nigeria between the early 1970's and the mid-1990's. Commenting on the political climate in Nigeria when the

military held the reins for two-thirds of the entire period of nationhood, Olorunyomi (2005: 82) writes:

The human rights situation regressed as the political public sphere shrank. Evidence of military pressure on the public sphere could be seen as wanton violation of rights through arbitrary arrest and detention, detention without trial, torture, indiscriminate killing, abduction, kidnapping and military attack. Fanning of ethnic and religious embers, and general brutality against public psyche became commonplace. The language of hegemonic discourse was further entrenched through the sole control of the electronic media by the state, and even when by the mid-nineties, licences were approved for private broadcast, allocation was largely to perceived client figures under a very strict regime of censorship.

It was precisely in this atmosphere that Fela emerged with his Afrobeat form, first as a reformer and later as an activist and artiste. In terms of lyrical content, Fela constantly questioned received notions through his strident political commentaries, rude jokes, parodies, and acerbic sense of humour and satire. Olorunyomi (2005: 78) comments on Fela's music and ideology stating, 'The predominant persona of his narrative is a troubadour in quest of justice and fair play, trenchant and uncompromising in exploring the nuances of everyday life and depicting the subject as victim of authoritarian constructions'.

It is not surprising that successive Nigerian governments expressed morbid fear of Afrobeat. In fact, the Nigerian state forbade the airing of this musical expression while encouraging other mass music forms like juju through generous allocation of air time and patronage. Explaining the rationale for this preference, Olorunyomi (2005: 37) says:

Unlike Afrobeat, juju does not challenge its ideological assumptions or the elite project to “reproduce its structure of dominance”. Herein lies the uniqueness of Fela’s Afrobeat form, which, even as a popular musical idiom, exhibits a rare capacity to locate society’s sense of place, time and event, while also challenging the patronage structure on all these fronts.

Many factors inform the classification of Fela’s musical practice as popular art. An important distinction is the relationship between the artiste and his/her audience.

Olorunyomi (2005: 36-37) posits:

Mass art, as it were, presumably panders to the whims of its clients and does not engage them in problematising their social situations in a manner that popular art does. By refusing to act the commercial art superstar, or what Micheal Veal (1997) refers to as “substituting the myth of art as a communal enterprise in place of the Western myth of the concert hall, or the artiste as separate, other-worldly sphere”, Fela was invariably re-enacting the subversive griot of ancient times, with the burden of delivering his art uncorrupted by material lure.

Olorunyomi (2005) concludes that Afrobeat, a subversive musical and cultural performance, had to shoulder the task of the brewing post-independence confrontation in Nigeria. The musical genre was not accepted because of ‘its breezy, generally covert political themes, obsessively hedonistic lyrics; of transcendental love, of women and wine; and a rather sedate rhythmic structure’ (2005: 73). It is interesting to note that the satirical thrust of the musical form of Afrobeat performers operates within the generic brand that Olatunji (2007: 30) calls *yabis* music. He comments:

Yabis music, as a phenomenon, does exist in the works of many contemporary Nigerian popular musicians, regardless of their techniques and styles of performance – reggae, soul, rock, rap, afrobeat, and so forth.

That is the reason why musicians such as Eedris Abdulkareem, African China, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Femi Kuti (Fela's son), Seyi Akinlolu (beautiful Nubia), and a host of others are all having some *yabis* songs to their credit.

Olatunji (2007: 27) defines *yabis* as 'a biting satirical song that is deliberately composed with the aim of correcting an atrocity, a misdemeanour or sacrilege committed by an individual or a corporate body within a particular society'. He notes that this brand of music was pioneered and propagated by the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti who, during his Friday night musical show known as *Yabis Night*, criticised the government for corrupt practices and insensitivity to the suffering of the people. Olatunji (2007) points out that satirical music is not new among many African societies. For example, among the Egbado people of the Yoruba in Nigeria, the phenomenon is known as *Efe*. Olatunji (2007: 27) explains:

Efe music, which integrates masks and dance, provides an ample opportunity for its performers to criticise, deride and ridicule any individual member or an organisation (of whatever status) in the community who had contravened the laws and ethics of that particular society. This is done under the auspices of conventional artistic immunity, which implies that artistes cannot be arrested, detained or punished for taking part in a live performance of satirical music or drama.

Despite being largely satirical in both its concept and content, *yabis* music still has some roles which it performs in the nation's music scene. Olatunji (2007) identifies the stimulating or motivating role whereby the music brand serves as a stimulant or motivator, moving the people into action against oppressive and repressive forces in society. There is also the propaganda role by which the exponents criticise governments,

systems and society, with the purpose of forcing them to change anti-societal programmes. Furthermore, *yabis* music portrays life in its base society. This is because artistes create their works from raw materials supplied by events in society. Finally, the music brand performs the great role of cultural revival; its practitioners use it to antagonise the dominance of western cultural values over those of Africa, at the same time try to extol the beauty of African cultural heritage. I now move to discuss Lagbaja's role on the nation's music scene.

4. Lagbaja's Lyrics

Lagbaja has shown unwavering commitment to transforming his society with music that touches on diverse aspects of Nigerian culture and politics. This emphasises the social relevance of art as opposed to the notion of 'art for art's sake'. These serious social issues include ethnic discrimination and religious crisis, the need to jealously guard Nigeria's hard-earned democracy, the beauty of communal life and fellow human feeling, Nigeria's rejection of 'second-hand' products popularly called *tokunbo* and the depletion of female-centred traditional values. The following discussion focuses on three inter-related themes that emerge from Lagbaja's lyrics: ethno-religious conflict, the loss of traditional African values and the role of the talking drum.

4.1. Ethno-religious Conflict

One recurrent subject in Nigeria's national discourse is that of ethno-religious conflicts which are seriously threatening the unity of the country. Suberu (1996: 1) writes:

There has been a growing wave of mobilisation and opposition by ethnic minority groups against their perceived marginalisation, exploitation and subjugation in the Nigerian federation. This ethnic minority ferment has engendered violent conflicts, involving thousands of fatalities, in the oil producing areas of the Delta region in southern Nigeria and middle-belt of northern Nigeria.

This national theme has also found expression in Lagbaja's lyrics in his track 'Me and you no be enemy' (*You and I are not enemies*). Lagbaja muses over ethnic discrimination and preaches tolerance among the heterogeneous ethnic groups in Nigeria in order to foster a culture of peace. This becomes imperative when we reflect on the violent ethno-religious crises, especially in northern Nigerian cities such as Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Bauchi, and more recently the city of Jos in the Plateau state of Nigeria. For a musician struck by the orgy of violence in society, he raises philosophical and existentialist questions that emphasise the need for Nigerians to live together as 'brothers and sisters' though they may be of 'different cultures and nationalities'. Using the refrains, 'we are the same, everybody na family' (*everybody belongs to the same family*), and 'all of us na the same' (*we are all the same*), he appeals for tolerance among various ethnic groups (e.g. Efik, Itsekiri, Hausa and Nupe to name a few), emphasising the fact that they are the same family 'created by the same Creator'. In relaying this message, Lagbaja takes a temporal overview of the situation. The music casts the audience back to the glorious past, in contrast to present day inter-group hostilities:

Se bi we dey live together before	But we did live together before
Se bi we dey share together before	But we did share things in common before
We dey suffer together before	We did suffer together before
We dey marry together before	We did inter-marry before

(Lagbaja from the song *Me and you no be enemy*)

Here, the repetition of the temporal deictic form ‘before’ emphasises the musician’s bid to recreate history for the enlightenment of the present and future generations. By chronicling events in society, Lagbaja cuts the picture of a *griot*³ in traditional African societies. Hinting at the factors that could be responsible for the unprecedented hostilities among the Nigerian people, he exhorts:

No matter your religion
No matter where you come from
We be family

No matter your religion
No matter where you come from
We belong to the same family

(Lagbaja from the song *Me and you no be enemy*)

Lagbaja preaches against the spate of indiscriminate killings arising from the spirit to revenge, avenge and retaliate. He calls this spirit *madness* and a vicious circle that will span generations if not removed. Although the sin of killing a man or woman is enormous, killing one’s own brother or sister is a sin with greater enormity. This impresses Lagbaja to ask this philosophical question: ‘Why brother go dey kill im own brother?’ (*Why would a brother kill his own kin?*).

From 1999 to the present day Nigeria has witnessed more ethnic, religious and minority conflicts than any other period in her political history. Badru (2000: 56) notes:

Ethnic conflicts and minority interests are twin concepts of concern to sociologists and other scholars. The tragedies of the Egbesu boys and the Odua People’s Congress (OPC) members in Nigeria invite attention to the challenges of ethnic plurality, diversity, conflict, and vested interests of ‘core’ and minority groups.

³ Griots in traditional African societies were social commentators who, as story-tellers and folklorists, captured and preserved the cultural sensibilities of the people.

This development is unhealthy for the sustenance of Nigeria's nascent democracy. In view of this, Lagbaja's track 'Three Gbosa' (*Salutations*) comments on Nigeria's democracy and its attendant problems:

We enter democracy
But instead of democracy to progress
Na fight we dey fight
If democracy go work
We must get patience

We have ushered in democracy
But instead of democracy to progress
We have resorted to hostilities
If democracy is to be practicable
We must be patient

In the above lyrics, Lagbaja emphasises the need to make democracy work in Nigeria rather than reawakening primordial sentiments that may take the country back into the doldrums of pre-democracy days. However, Lagbaja does not place blame on any group or political class for all the woes in the past. In his judgment:

If we search ourselves nobody innocent
Everybody guilty; nobody dey innocent

If we search ourselves, nobody is innocent
Everybody is guilty; nobody is innocent

(Lagbaja from the song *Three Gbosa*)

This position of compromise becomes necessary in order to heal the wounds of the past, and to allow Nigerian people to come together with one mission: to protect democracy known as 'ohun elege' (namely, *a fragile entity*).

Lagbaja, apart from his attack on the political class, feels obliged to intercede for his beloved motherland in prayers. This is a spiritual dimension to the musical critic's mission to rid his society of its crises. To some people, Nigeria's socio-political problems

are so myriad that there is much need for spiritual intervention. This view is shared by many Nigerians who have posited that unless we embrace and pray for spiritual revival and regeneration, we are not going to get anywhere as a nation. Hence, Lagbaja in his track ‘Omo Nigeria a ni lati gbadura’ (literally, *fellow Nigerians, we need to pray*) intercedes for his country:

Omo Nigeria gbogbo
A ni lati gbadura gidi
Elese niwa; Baba dariji wa

All Nigerians
We need to pray fervently
We are sinners; Father forgive us

In his wisdom, Lagbaja (as one musician who upholds the values of the Yoruba people with respect to the dignity accorded by the elders in any gathering) calls upon an elder statesman to pray for the youth. This prayer point is a very cogent one, as the youth in any society are the leaders and builders of tomorrow.

4.2. The Loss of Traditional African Values

It is a marked value of African people to demonstrate good neighbourliness. However, events and circumstances appear to have eroded such a primordial value. Lagbaja poses philosophical questions that reflect the themes of good neighborliness and sharing. His lyrics reflect the joy of giving that does not consist of giving only when one has abundance, but rather in sharing from the little one has. This is an African virtue that now sounds alien to many people, but has gracefully found expression in Lagbaja’s lyrics. In a related theme, the culture among Nigerians to crave for foreign goods, especially those

that are ‘fairly used’⁴ (popularly called *tokunbo*) is seen as unhealthy for national development. Realising the urgency to stem this unwholesome behaviour, Lagbaja laments in his song *Tokunbo*:

Won ti saye daye tokunbo	They have penetrated everywhere with <i>tokunbo</i>
Ko ma sohun kokan loja	There is nothing in the market
Ti o ni Tokunbo	That does not have <i>tokunbo</i>

(Lagbaja from the song *Tokunbo*)

This is a serious issue of national concern given that home-made goods are referred to as *aba-made* (made in Aba in the south-eastern part of Nigeria), while Nigerians run after goods whose original owners/users find every means to dump elsewhere. The word *tokunbo* has become a household name in Nigeria. The fact remains that if Nigerians had been patriotic enough to appreciate the industrial ingenuity of the Igbo in south-eastern Nigeria, such products disparagingly referred to as *aba-made* would have been improved upon over the years. This prompts Lagbaja to take a retrospective look at the situation, as he celebrates what Nigerians purchased in the past:

Before before, Naija !	In the past, Nigerians!
Na original we dey buy	It was original products we used to buy
Whether original Japan, original Aba	Either from Japan or Aba

(Lagbaja from the song *Tokunbo*)

⁴ Products that Nigerians refer to as ‘fairly used’ are imported goods, usually from Europe and America. As the term implies, the products have been used before being recycled in Nigeria. What is not determined is the degree of use. Therefore, the use of the adverb ‘fairly’ is relative.

One particular group that Lagbaja targets in his lyrics is the generation of ladies who have lost contact with female-centred cultural values. He recounts an experience in the track ‘Akebaje’ (*the spoiled child*). As a bachelor, he marries a lady, only to discover that she cannot uphold African cultural values. He labels the lady negatively, using the stereotypes ‘ajebutter’ (*the westernised*) and ‘akebaje’ (*the spoiled child*) that have become labels for the women who are swayed by the disruptive influences of western culture. He exposes the deficiencies of the lady thus:

Ko ma le gunyan, mo ra pounder	She cannot pound yam, I bought a yam pounder
Ko ma le lota, mo ra blender	She cannot grind pepper, I bought a blender
Ko ma le sebe, mo gba cook	She cannot prepare soup, I employed a cook

(Lagbaja from the song *akebaje – the spoiled child*)

These lyrics are particularly striking. First, the structure of the sentences brings into focus a culture clash. The lady cannot come to terms with the African way of doing the identified household chores that the husband cherishes and seeks to extol. Consequently, he is forced to support the western way of doing such chores that do not bring out the virtues an African man would naturally desire in his wife. Second, Lagbaja’s experience may sound hyperbolic, however many marriages in Nigeria have broken down on account of the brides’ inability to do household chores, seen as child’s play for a typical African lady. This development lends credence to Lagbaja’s biting satiric thrust in this track. I now move to discuss the role of the drum in Lagbaja’s lyrics.

4.3. The Talking Drum and Yoruba Dance Style

The talking drum operates as a speech surrogate in Lagbaja's music. Writing on the functions of the drum, Ajayi (1988: 3) comments:

The Yoruba talking drum performs different functions. Apart from producing music for dancing and enjoyment, it may also give signals or convey text (drum poetry). When the drum is used for conveying words, the drummer uses his drum to imitate the tones and rhythm of human speech.

It is in this light that we examine the prominence of the Yoruba talking drum or *bata* which has become a constant cultural semiotic in Lagbaja's music form. Euba (1975: 478) argues, 'a Yoruba drum orchestra in which none of the instruments talk is unusual'. Certainly, Lagbaja is not the only Yoruba popular musician who uses *bata* in his music. However, his style of sharing the floor with the master drummer, and acknowledging his presence and contributions to the effective relaying of his message, is his own unique style. In this respect, Lagbaja is fond of using any of the following interjections:

O se, Ayan, omode yii!	Thank you, the master drummer, my boy!
Oro lo so; o o puro!	Your contribution is germane; you have not lied!

(Lagbaja from the song *Agidigbo*)

Hence there is a proverb in Yoruba, 'Bi owe bi owe li aalu ilu agidigbo, eni ti o ba gbon ni i jo o, omoran ni i mo o' (literally, *the drum sounding a message in war is beaten in a cryptic manner; only wise men can dance to it, and only experienced men can understand it*).

Much of Lagbaja's reflections on Yoruba cultural heritage celebrate the Yoruba dance style. Let us consider his celebrated track *Konko Below*. Once again, Lagbaja's message is directed at the female audience, especially the young lady or 'ajebutter' (meaning *the westernised who has taken to the white man's style of dance*):

Se bi Naija ni e, sisi
O se wa n gbese bi oyinbo?

You are a Nigerian, lady
Why then are you dancing like the white?

(Lagbaja from the song, *Konko Below*)

Lagbaja hints at the destructive influence of western culture on African cultural values, and attempts to show his perceived inferiority of such values to those of Africa:

Owo gba Ilesa
Ese gba Pota
Ori wa n fi dugbedugbe bi agama

The hand goes in the direction of Ilesa
The leg, in the direction of Port Harcourt
The head is shaking like that of an agama lizard

(Lagbaja from the song, *Konko Below*)

Lagbaja sounds exaggerative in an attempt to paint the picture that there is lack of harmony in the western dance style. This is captured with the semiotic images of the hand going in the direction of Ilesa (a town in the southwestern part of Nigeria), the leg going in the direction of Port Harcourt (a city in the south-south), and the head shaking like that of an agama lizard. In contrast, Yoruba indigenous dance style prides on wriggling of the buttocks propelled in an amazing way to respond to the rhythms of the instruments, especially the drum:

Ibadi nijo wa
E gbejo

The beauty of dance lies in the waist
Twist it

(Lagbaja from the song *Konko Below*)

Further celebrating the Yoruba dance style in his track ‘Lagbaja di okoto’ (*Lagbaja has turned to okoto*⁵), Lagbaja strikingly uses the cultural images of ‘kuluso’ (*ant-lion*) and *okoto*. He celebrates the dancing and spinning attributes these cultural symbols are renowned for, as they feature prominently in Yoruba drum poetry text. He then encourages the audience to take after his dancing steps. The relevance of Lagbaja’s message here is validated by Arinze’s (1992: 27) view:

Dance is an important medium of education in traditional societies especially in Africa as it helps to disseminate cultural values within a generation. It also helps to ensure the transmission of such values and ensures that African societies perpetuate themselves. Such traditional music like Bata and Apala dance among the Yorubas serves as useful tools in cultural education.

Thus far, I have discussed Lagbaja’s use of the art of music to comment on serious social and political issues in his society, and to re-awaken the consciousness of his people to the beauty of African cultural values. I now present the concluding comments on this paper.

⁵ *Okoto* is a conical object, hence its spinning capability. It is used in a game played in traditional Yoruba society by two or more people (See Faduyile-Adegun, 2008).

5. Conclusion

The fact remains that the socio-political and cultural issues in Lagbaja's lyrics could have been raised in other discourses, be it in the proceedings of seminars, workshops, symposia and public lectures. However, Lagbaja's emphasis on such issues, via the art of music, is particularly reminiscent of the role of the oral bard in traditional African society who uses songs, drums and poetry to comment on social and political events. Lagbaja is the quintessential African music critic. He is an ambassador of the rich Yoruba cultural heritage, using a musical form to shape images of society in the face of drifting values. He creatively combines the capability of music in emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment and entertainment in order to forge the continuity and stability of Nigerian culture. The stimulating effect of music in this respect is overwhelming, for music reaches where mere words cannot, to the soul and mind, to reawaken the people's consciousness and recapture fading values.

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