

The Mask and the Message: Musical Figuring of Lagbaja's Artful Diplomacy

Kayode M. Samuel, Ph.D*

Abstract

The conceptual adoption of a hidden personality by Lagbaja, Nigeria's famous masked popular music artiste, to depict the facelessness of the common man represents artful diplomacy within African cultural milieu. Lagbaja relies on various resource materials including Yoruba folklore, *oriki* (descriptive poetry), *owe* (proverbs), *afujuinuwo* (imagination) and *ohun to nlo* (current affairs) in his satirical compositions. Through these elements, the artiste succeeds in making graphical representations of figures to facilitate transformative visualisation of the various political and socio-economic occurrences in Nigeria without attracting any negative consequences on his person. This paper adopts Louise Meintjes' concept of music figure to analyse how Lagbaja deploys definitive narratives in negotiating his crusade for an egalitarian society. Specific attention is drawn to the nuance with which the artiste critiques the double burden state of Nigeria's polity as represented by her leaders' repressive actions on one hand, and corollary inactions of and consequences on the led on the other. The paper posits that the figuring of the dynamics of events that shape the day-to-day ordinary life of Nigerians facilitates its proper contextualisation in the reading and interpretation of Lagbaja's songs and drum texts.

Introduction

Lagbaja, Nigeria's masked popular music artiste, remains an iconic figure within Africa's entertainment industry. Ajayi (2013) describes the musician's arts, especially his music, as symbols of performative existence with a temperament encased in a vision of the advancement of cultural performance from an African perspective. Lagbaja freely uses different musical genres and styles including

jazz, afrobeat, highlife, *juju*, funk, and sometimes, indigenous Yoruba music in his art. In terms of instrumentation, he has been able to maintain a perfect blend of Western horns (saxophones, trumpets, trombone and tuba), lead, tenor, rhythm and bass guitars and keyboards with Yoruba traditional drums such as the *dundun*, *bata* and *ogido* (Omojola, 2006 and 2012). This probably explains why his music is basically typified by layers of

*Senior Research Fellow, Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.*

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culturally divergent expressive modes when a distinctive musical style which speaks across national boundaries is configured. On another level, Lagbaja reflects local and ethnic identities, and sometimes makes a florid display of pure instrumental music. The uniqueness of Lagbaja's mask and philosophical messages, as contained in his music, are no doubt vital elements of the artiste's creativity and diplomacy combined together.

In this paper, I adopt Louise Meintjes' concept of music figure to examine some elements of artful diplomacy embedded in the mask, message and music of Lagbaja. The paper specifically examines how he enlists the opportunity of anonymity presented by his mask to use various figures in constructing and passing across his messages to both the leaders and the led in Africa. In other words, I set out to analyse the nuance with which Lagbaja engages local and regional socio-political issues, especially in Nigeria, in such a way that he avoids attracting any negative consequences on his person. My interest, therefore, extends to how the artiste, being mindful of the precarious environment he operates in, carefully negotiates and diplomatically deploys definitive narratives in his advocacy for an egalitarian society.

In terms of methodology, purposive sampling technique was used to select excerpts from four of Lagbaja's works to illustrate how he critiques the twin burden of Nigeria's political state, namely, bad and/or irresponsible leadership, and poor or docile followership. Three tracks: *Prayer for the Youth*, *Suru Lere* and *A o m'erin j'oba* from an album entitled "*WE*", and *Bad Leadership* from the album: "*C' est Un African Thing*",

all of which address the issue of leadership and followership, were selected for the purpose of analysis.

The article is informed by the author's interpretation of his music (song and drum texts), performance practice and interviews conducted with the artiste. I make reference to some of the views of the artiste himself as a means of understanding the relevant conceptual origins of his compositions.

Musical Figuring

By way of conceptual clarification, musical figuring refers to the ways various musical elements including lyrics are used to represent certain materials in a musical or an work. Figured worlds, as a concept, was first introduced by Holland, *etal* (1998) in *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* - a seminal book. According to them, 'figured worlds' is not an isolated concept, but a larger theory of self and identity. Meintjes (2003) was the first scholar to introduce the concept of figure to the field of music. According to her, figuring is a process of realising abstract tropes into particular voices and as specific experiences. She construes a figure as a motive that is subjected to ornamentation, variation, repetition and various musical elements including how lyrics are used to represent and realise particular concepts. Sanga (2012) also adopts the concept of music figuring in his preliminary writings on figure cultures in literary and visual arts and methodological issues in Tanzania. He observed that "imaginary music cultures are often encountered in the works of art and are part of everyday human experiences" (Sanga, 2012: 159).

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Borrowing Meintjes' concept of musical figuring, I advance two contrapuntal lines of argument in this paper. First is that Lagbaja's conceptual adoption of an identity of anonymity through the instrumentality of the mask to depict the facelessness of the common man in presenting his satires represents a form of artful diplomacy within the African cultural milieu. Second, his reliance on various Yoruba traditional artistic compositional resource materials such as folklore, *oriki* (descriptive poetry), *owe* (proverbs), *afojuinuwo* (imagination or seeing things through inner eye) and *ohun to nlo* (current affairs) to graphically present his figures, facilitates a transformative visualisation of the various political and socio-economic occurrences in Nigeria. Thus, his artistic works, as expressed by the mask and music compositions, combine to transport his listeners away from their ordinary world into imaginary worlds created by his messages. Each sonic experience, articulated by his song and drum texts, brings about a movement necessary for meaningful interpretations of his messages.

Agency of Music as a Tool for Confronting Tyranny

Although music is often conceived as an aesthetic entity, its utilitarian nature as an effective tool for reinforcing societal values is equally not in doubt. Besides being used for entertainment, evidence abounds globally, especially in Africa, where music has been deployed to resist repressive leaders, signal major political revolts and, in some cases, checkmate approaching aggressors. The boundless latitude with which African traditional musicians organise their arts to

deride anti-social behaviour is evident in various events. A notable example is the *epe* night performance during annual *gelede* festival in some Yoruba towns. Vidal (2012: 284) cites a specific example when the paramount ruler of Ondo (Osemowe) was satirised by musicians during *opepe* night of the *oranfe* festival because of what was considered his ignoble involvement in the rigging of the 1979 national elections in Nigeria. According to Vidal, no one is spared the pangs of bitter satire and derision.

Often, when musicians deployed their musical art as a tool to satirise anti-social behaviour of dictators, religious extremists and repressive political leaders, the tyrants have been known to bemoan and resist their critics. In extreme cases, they have abused their offices by deploying state security apparatus to either censor such music and performances or resort to brute force to crush all forms of criticism. From the global north, it is on record that there were attempts under the French King Charles IX (1550-1574) to ban certain types of music. On the homefront, records of celebrated cases of music censorship abound in Nigeria; cutting through the colonial period and post-colonial era to include the first republic and various military regimes up to the current democratic experience (5th republic). Censorship took the form of outright banning of performance as in the case of Hubert Ogunde's operatic works, *Bread and Bullet* (1950) and *Yoruba Ronu* (1964), or giving directives to broadcasting radio and TV stations to put an end to the airing of 'offensive' music as seen in Fela Kuti's *Zombie* (1977) and Idrees Abdul-karem's *Nigeria Jaga-jaga* (2001).

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An outstanding Nigerian music maestro who aggressively deployed music as an agent of political activism during his lifetime was the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Through his regular performances at his shrine as well as recorded albums, Fela did not only project and propagate his pan-African philosophy, but also sharply criticised the Nigerian Government of his days, whom he often accused of corruption and nepotism. According to Omojola (2006: 82), Fela's frequent confrontations with various governments (military and civilian alike), incessant direct criticism of what he considered unruly actions of various political and religious leaders placed his name in their black book. For these, he suffered persecution many times. Besides censoring most of his music/albums, Fela was constantly harassed and arrested on various charges ranging from openly smoking marijuana to such a frivolous one as removing the berets of traffic wardens. In spite of constant molestations from various military regimes, he remained undeterred as he composed and released new songs such as '*Coffin for Head of State*' and '*Unknown Soldiers*', especially in direct response to each attack he suffered from his repressive detractors. Although Olorunyomi. (2004) submits that it is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, for any other musician to suitably 'step into the shoes left behind by Fela', one famous musician whose artistic profile compares to Fela in terms of consistently being the conscience of the nation is Lagbaja.

Emergence of Lagbaja on the Music Scene

It was towards the end of 1993 and in the wake of the annulment of the country's presidential

election by the Babangida junta, which plunged the country into its worst political and economic crisis since Independence that Lagbaja formed his masked alter-ego, and released his first album, entitled "Lagbaja". According to Waterman (2011), although the work made some waves, it was his album entitled "*Coolu Temper*", released in 1995, that could be regarded as his first hit. Much later, he released a trilogy (*Abami, WE and ME*), which featured some thought provoking tracks such as "*Mammoney*", "*Prayer for the Youth*" "*Suuru Lere*" and "*A o m'erin j'oba*". Powered and deeply influenced by Yoruba philosophical concept of *Omoluabi*, Lagbaja tempered his brand of social crusade and presented them in a diplomatic fashion. The breadth of his vision and the depth of his insights on vital issue of public importance, especially within the Nigerian political space, are often presented with such dexterity as evident in the manner he combines his message(s) and polyphonic sounds enhanced by heavy instrumental section. Lagbaja continues to engage local socio-political issues and to play the role of the conscience of the society, especially to various leaders in Nigeria through his performative acts. His mode of engagement can, therefore, best be described as artful diplomacy. Omojola (2006: 86), while comparing Lagbaja to Fela, observes that although the former's music which focuses on themes of socio-political interest is great, -it lacks the overt and aggressive political tone of Fela, and thus portrays his presentation as moderate politics. Nonetheless, he duly acknowledges Lagbaja's ability to configure a socio-musical style that is satirical, witty, eloquent and profound, a feat which he

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adjudges as putting him well above many contemporary popular musicians in Africa.

Lagbaja carefully articulates the subject of social unification and mobilisation through a unique brand of musical arts, thereby engendering a culture of social solidarity and political action. I argue that it was not out of cowardice that Lagbaja maintains the same longstanding discourses and dialogues that bear strong definitive narratives on nepotism as well as the hegemony of Nigeria's political elites which Fela brazenly presented in his music. It was, however, because he subscribed to diplomacy as a more viable alternative strategy.

Lagbaja's Form of Diplomacy

Artful diplomacy is expressed first in Lagbaja's choice of anonymous Yoruba names such as Lagbaja, Tamedo, Lakasegbe, Laalu, Lamohin and so forth when making reference to a subject in his discourse. According to the artiste, Lagbaja or any of the foregoing names was conceived to mean anybody, somebody, everybody and nobody. Oduyoye (2014: 58) affirms that each person who gives a child a name in Yorubaland is trying to express an idea and without the meaning of such a name, it has no significance. In an interview this writer conducted with Lagbaja, he was expressive on the essence of the name, which was "to capture the notion that the so called 'common man' is both voiceless and faceless . . . this has invariably resulted in a loss of identity".

On one strand, one can argue that the name - Lagbaja - is a performative strategy, but on the other hand, considering the import of the stage name in full: *Lagbaja, omo baba muko-muko* (Lagbaja, son of the one who loves

maize pap), it can equally be argued that he inadvertently draws attention to a distinct African identity. First, the listeners are by themselves left to decode and draw inferences as to the real identity or character of the anonymous being depicted in his music at every point in time. Second, an affirmation of his true African identity can be seen in the *oriki: omo baba muko-muko*, which is a descriptive poetry. I, therefore, argue that the deployment of this figure serves a double function: to claim his Yoruba (African) identity and to announce how different he is from any other entity, especially European or English. Lagbaja is not merely alluding to the fact that he is of Yoruba descent when he states that his father's staple diet is maize pap, he does so with a clear understanding and in sharp contrast to yet-to-be-decolonised minds typified by persons who had developed taste for Western European continental dishes.

Secondly, Lagbaja's mask was designed to conceal his identity. Omibiyi-Obidike (2007) describes him as an innovative and creative but elusive artiste. According to the artiste, "my mask was therefore perfect to articulate my message... [and] the music also played certain roles in passing across the message to all parts of society" He considers it important to direct his message to the leaders, who control, in order to constructively engage them about the problems of society, and then to the citizens, who are being led themselves. In other words, "the overall goal was for us all to imbibe essentially, the social and political messages". Some scholars such as Waterman (2011) and Omojola (2012) suggest that 'Bisade Ologunde who is the artiste's producer is the real name of the individual behind the mask. Although

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the artiste has consistently maintained that there is a marked distinction between himself and 'Bisade, this is doubtful. I submit that such a distinction, if it exists at all, is purely conceptual considering the fact that 'Bisade is also credited as the co-author of all Lagbaja's compositions.

One other notable fact is that the distinctive anonymous identity is emblematic of the paradox that ruptures conventional performance act or practice. The norm is for performing artistes to be recognised or identified by their faces. This explains why many corporate bodies and multinationals sign on famous artistes (musicians, movie actors, comedians and so forth) as product ambassadors and they become respective faces for different products they promote, with a view to increasing sales. Lagbaja's position in this regard is however paradoxical since his encased personality remains shrouded in secrecy. An undisputable advantage for him, however, is that it enables the real person behind the mask unhindered access to freely interact with his social environment without attracting undue distractions from members of the public. When not in his costumes, the artiste is somehow shielded from any form of molestations from miscreants popularly known as *area*, *boys* notorious for extorting money from popular artistes when found in public, especially in urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt.

The third way by which Lagbaja uses Diplomacy is found in the way he deploys various Yoruba resource materials including *owe* (proverbs) and *oriki* as figurative locutions. Closely tied to this point is the fact that many of his compositions contain music materials

such as rhythmic and melodic elements, rhymes and scat singing style, carefully woven and creatively interspersed with coded and imitative drum texts culled from Yoruba traditional repertory. Besides the lyrics of his songs, a careful selection, blend and systematic deployment of a combination of African traditional and popular musical elements enables him to make full expression and enactment of strong cultural diplomacy peculiar to Africa. It is a combination of these that confers on him a status which transcends that of a mere performer to include a social critic, commentator, historian and chronicler of issues and events within his immediate locale and beyond as typical of traditional Yoruba master musicians (Samuel, 2014). This is in consonance with the peculiar utilitarian nature of African arts (music inclusive) often described as "art for life" compared to its Western counterpart, which is contemplative in nature, existing for its own sake and basically for the pleasure and entertainment of its listeners (Pogson, 1999:19).

Finally, by refraining from mentioning the name(s) of any leader, or by substituting real names with imaginary ones, Lagbaja carefully tiptoes Nigeria's hazardous political minefields by avoiding any action which can cause trouble for him especially from intolerant politicians. This strategy somehow insulates him from possible direct attacks, pestering or persecutions from any government official as a result of 'unpalatable' messages in his music. As earlier noted, his tactic differs from Fela's who was a victim of incessant harassments from overzealous government security operatives during his lifetime. The foregoing put together represents

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some form of performative act with the privilege of immunity from possible attacks against the man behind the mask, whose satirical compositions might be considered offensive to any aggrieved person or agency especially the government of the day. In other words, they somehow combine to shield him from being labeled as an 'enemy of the state'.

Utilising Yoruba Proverbs

There is no gainsaying the fact that Lagbaja freely uses *owe* (proverbs) in his music. By way of simple definition, *owe* are short, memorable, condensed and wise sayings often embedded with imagery based on sages' experience. They are like sign posts meant to guide and regulate the actions of the listeners. As a result, *owe* is commonly engaged in the day-to-day discourse and conversation of the Yoruba. Indeed, a well-versed individual in *owe* is believed to express sound wisdom. Depending on the situation, Lagbaja uses *owe* as a tool for *imoran* (advice), *alaye* (explanation), *ibawi* (reproach or rebuke) or *ikilo* (warning). This unique resource material is deployed as agency for social control to correct, rebuke and deride anti social behaviour of any person irrespective of status. Criticisms and uncomplimentary statements are often made by allusion, without mentioning the concerned person's name or revealing the individual's identity.

An example of *owe imoran* is found in an excerpt taken from the track: *Suuru lere* (Patience is profitable) in the album entitled *We:*

Song text (in
Yoruba language)

*Bi e ba sun e ma se
fa'jude o
Ka ma so won t'owo
t'ese o
Oju l'alakanfi
nso'rio*

*Awon arije ndi ibaje
nbe ntosi o,
Efure o
Pansa ofura, pansa
ja'na o,*

Aja ofura. ajajin o

*B'onile ofura ole a
kolo
Ifura l'ogun agba o*

Translation

While sleeping, ensure
you're half-awake
Vigilance must remain our
watchword

The crab closely watches
over its head against
predators

These pathological looters
are close by

Let us be watchful
It was the slackness of a
ceiling that made it to
droop

Such was also the case of
the leaking rooftops

A non-chalant house owner
is bound to suffer robbery

The elderly are always
firmly secure because of
vigilance

Lagbaja attempted a chequered history of the political journey of Nigeria and identified some factors responsible for perennial failure of each democratic experiment in the country. There is no gainsay that sustaining democracy in Nigeria as well as in other developing countries especially in Africa had posed more challenges than its attainment. Uwazurike (1999: 55) rightly notes that the main problem with democracy in the third world countries has to do with its potentiality for breakdown.

The song was released in 1999 shortly after the fifth republic was inaugurated and when the political temperature in the country became heightened. Judging by the actions of the political gladiators, especially the squabbles among the acclaimed leaders of the period, significantly along both the legislative and executive divide, there was much trepidation

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within the political space. As evident in social discourse, the situation, if not checked, could soon truncate the new democratic experiment, leaving the citizenry (common man on the street) to suffer and become the greatest loser. Lagbaja, therefore, composed *Suuru lere* in order to articulate the duty of both the leaders and the led in nurturing and protecting Nigeria's nascent democracy.

The foregoing text shows that Lagbaja evoked at least three *owe* in quick succession to drive home his point. Each *owe* correspondingly reinforces each other and represents a piece of advice on the need for vigilance: "*Oju I'alkan fi nso'ri o*", "*Awon arije ndi ibaje nbe ntosi o*," and "*Pansa o fura pansa ja'na o, Aja o fura aja jin o, B'onile o fura ole a ko /o*". According to him, it is extremely dangerous for the masses to continue to display lackadaisical attitude to ignoble acts of the political elite. By reiterating the message: *Efura o*, meaning "Be vigilant"; Lagbaja did not only accuse the Nigerian electorate of docility, he equally reminded them of their civic obligation including the need for vigilance. He stressed that his listeners must never forget the price the masses paid, which sometimes included the supreme sacrifice, towards restoration of democratic governance in the country following several years of military dictatorship.

In a sense, Lagbaja assumes the position of a prophet in terms of foresight, probing and ability to investigate, evaluate and also foretell future events, with a view to prompting Nigerian leaders and the electorates alike to make wise decisions. By way of amplifying his message, Lagbaja's role as a prophet is further reinforced by the costume and props

he put on in the video presentation of the song. He is dressed in Nigeria's national colour: white and green flowing *agbada* designed in a fashion similar to that of a typical prophet with a bell in his right hand as he moves round various places including market stalls and streets, vigorously proclaiming his message and warning the people of the danger which lies ahead should they squander another opportunity due to their carelessness.

Also, in a transcribed text from *iyaaalu bata*¹ drum, the following emerges:

Bata drum text	Translation
	<i>Omuti gbagbe ise</i>
	<i>O da'keregbe bo'ri</i>
	<i>O da'kere</i>
	<i>O d'akeregbe</i>
	<i>O da'keregbe bo'ri</i>
	k
	ard forgets his misery
	And clads himself (his head) with
	keg of palm wine
	He clads himself
	He clads himself (his head)
	He clads himself with keg of palm
	wine

It is instructive to call attention to two vital musical elements, namely, ornamentation and repetition contained in the foregoing excerpt. Lagbaja utilised both techniques as figures, especially repetition: *O da'keregbe bo'ri*, *O da'kere*, *O d'akeregbe*, and *O da'keregbe bo'ri* to represent the incessant failure of Nigeria's democratic experiments. Each "*da'kere*", therefore refers to past efforts at actualising democracy in the country, while stating it four times can also be interpreted as Nigeria's fourth but threatened attempt.

In order to understand the complexities of Lagbaja's adoption of *owe* in his drumming

mode, an understanding of its language and gesture is essential. This is because the true

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meaning of a message or drum text emerges only after a consideration of its linguistic basis. A Yoruba adage says: *'hi owe bi owe la nlu'lu ogidigbo, Ologbon lo mi ijo, Omoran mi moo'*. When translated, it means 'the *ogidigbo* drum is cryptically played like a proverb; It is only the wise that can dance to it and only the informed can discern it (Olatunji, 1984:170). In other words, *ogidigbo* music is played philosophically, and only those who could decipher it (the wise) can dance to its rhythm. Lagbaja restated this proverb in one of his songs (*I'owe, I'owe la, n lu'lu agidigbo*), although he wrongly referred to *ogidigbo* as *agidigbo* probably because both words are similar in sound.

The song or drum texts, as the case may be, are often coded messages filled with innuendos and guided missiles which might be directed at even the dancer. It would, therefore, be foolish for someone without a sound or correct understanding of the message from the musician to continue to dance to the music. Our attempt to read between the meanings in the drum texts of Lagbaja in its content analysis was to gain an insight into his thought process. It is evident from the foregoing that Lagbaja's endeavour and musical voyage could be interpreted as an attempt to invoke Nigeria's political history (past) as early warning mechanism against any possible future, catastrophic occurrence. However, whether these efforts have a tendency to lead to an "aspiration without possibility" (Bissell 2005:226) is still debatable in many respects.

In the track: *Prayer for the Youth*, the music begins with a common *owe* on a combination of Yoruba drums with the following texts:

Drum text (in Yoruba language)	Translation
<i>Ko s'oun t'Oluwa o lese</i>	There's nothing impossible for the Lord
<i>To ba s'ojo a s'oda</i>	He makes both the rainy and dry seasons alike
<i>A se 'kan bi otutu</i>	Sometimes it's chilly and cold
<i>A se 'kan a mu bi oye</i>	At other times, it's the season of harmattan
<i>Ko s'oun t'Oluwa o lese</i>	There's nothing impossible for the Lord

Thereafter, Lagbaja sets out with his solo tenor vibrato voice to make the following pronouncements:

Song text (in Yoruba language)	Translation
<i>Omo Nigeria gbogbo</i>	All citizens of Nigeria We
<i>A ni lati gbadura gidi</i>	must pray earnestly
<i>A ni lati gbadura gidi.. aaa</i>	We must pray earnestly
<i>Elese ni wa, Baba, e dariji wa o</i>	We are sinners, Father, forgive our sins
<i>E ma wo t'ese mo wa Para</i>	Do not repay us according to our sins
Chorus: <i>Baba, baba,</i>	Father, Father, Father I
	humbly kneel in prayer
<i>Mo wole, mo wole, mo wolefadura</i>	

There is a general notion that Nigerians are a religious people. Against this backdrop, Lagbaja explores the sentiment of religiosity and resort to prayer, while enjoining Nigerian citizens to earnestly do so. According to him, the people must seek God's forgiveness for their sins, which he claims was the likely cause of the country's misfortune. He echoes the

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popular mantra that the youths are the future leaders of this country whom he challenges to live up to expectation. His counsel to the youth of the nation to creatively evolve strategies whereby they could wrestle power from the older generation, who had perpetuated themselves in power, is particularly noteworthy.

Similarly, in the track *Bad Leadership*, Lagbaja made a catalogue of some of the problems confronting Africa, which he labeled as 'deadly but curable' diseases. According to him, these diseases include poverty, slavery, corruption, hyper-inflation and so forth. There are, however, some other more serious diseases, including the HIV/AIDS which are incurable at present, yet not as deadly as 'bad leadership'. In Lagbaja's view, Africa's greatest challenge remains her bad leaders and resultant effect can be likened to 'opportunistic infection' which always gives rise to more terrible diseases with many negative consequences. In addition, he identified bad leadership as endemic; a problem which seems to defy any natural solution. Consequently, he enjoined those who 'love Africa' to join him in seeking a spiritual solution through the following prayer rendered in imitative cantor/chorus format:

Let us pray for Africa, If you love Africa . . .
let's go; Uhm, uhm,
Oh God of all heaven and earth and all
creatures within; please
grant us succor, empower us, as you did
David; deliver us from the hands of the
oppressors; so that some day, wherever we
may be in Africa or the diaspora, Africans
will be free and Africa will be healthy oh
God almighty, please give us great leaders,
leaders with vision, give them to us oh lord

and deliver us from the hands of bad leaders, bad leaders like, bad leaders like, Ahhhh . . . You know them oh God, we don't have to mention their names.

Lagbaja's two main requests from God, from the foregoing, are to grant Africa benevolent leaders with clear vision, and to deliver the masses from bad leaders. Again, we want to draw attention to his use of repetition as figure in the two examples cited above. The melodic sequence in '*Baba, Baba, Baba*', and a direct melodic repetition of '*Mo wole*' (in prayer for the youth) as well as a section . . . and deliver us from bad leaders like . . ., bad leaders like . . ., bad leaders like . . .; you know them o Lord, I don't have to mention their name (in *Bad Leadership*). His soft diplomatic approach is implicated in strategic silence and refraining from mentioning the names of such 'bad' leaders.

Conclusion

This paper examines how Nigeria's famous masked popular musician, social activist cum entertainer - Lagbaja - adopts 'soft power' to negotiate his crusade for an egalitarian society. It draws attention to the way the artiste, through his mask and music, critiques Nigeria's socio-political double burden, namely, poor leadership traits on one hand and the corollary docility of the followers on the other. Through the lenses of musical figuring, the paper presents different ways by which the artiste utilises some resource materials to create his art. It argues that the mask and message of the music of Lagbaja are somehow typified by longings that allow "the narratives of the past to be woven into a more nuanced sense of the place in the present" (Rommen, 2008: 327). The paper also suggests

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that listeners' pre-understanding of the dynamics of socio-political events in the country is essential in reading and interpreting his message.

It is Lagbaja's firm belief that Nigeria's socio-political redemption cannot be clasped in the hands of its leaders alone. To this end, he stresses that it is equally dependent on the active participation of the average 'common man'. As a watchdog, he directs a greater part of his message at the citizens to remain alert at all times and constantly demand responsible governance from those to whom they have entrusted authority to lead.

Finally, Lagbaja's works allude to the fact that unchallenged repressive acts of Nigeria's leaders and corollary docility of the led are largely responsible for impunity in the country as well as negatively shaping the state of the ordinary Nigerian. A symbiotic relationship and joint responsibility are, therefore, required to ensure the progress and development of the nation.

Endnote

1. *Bata* is a conically shaped type of double-headed membrane drum. It is markedly different from the *dundun*, which is a cylindrical hourglass shape tension membrane drum in that both sides of the *bata* drum are not equal in size.

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