Rhythmic Variation in Nigerian Popular Music: Lagbaja's "who man".

By

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Abstract

Rhythm is the pattern of regular or irregular pulses caused in music by the occurrence of strong and weak melodic and harmonic beats. African rhythmic pattern is characterized by improvisation and many other rhythmic techniques. The focus of this paper is to analyze the rhythmic pattern of "**who man**" and to identify and decode cultural values in Nigerian popular Music by examining this Lagbaja's music. To achieve this, the paper adopt both primary and secondary sources of data, with a close listening to the music of Lagbaja "**Who man"**, within the ethno musicological frame work .The paper reveal that in this music, lagbaja used more than one gong which brought about an interlocking rhythmic pattern, the paper further revealed that this popular music brought the younger ones closer to the tradition of using African musical musical instrument which is fast fading away due to the influence of the west and he gave himself a clear identity as an African musician the paper raised the issue of gender inequalities as mention in the music admonishing the men gender to live and treat the female gender appropriately. The paper therefore concludes that with good knowledge of the basic rhythmic pattern or bell pattern in African music, African popular musicians can be more creative and innovative with a clear sense of identity.

Introduction

Rhythm in Music generally is all aspects of music concerned with motion through time and, thus, with its time structure. In addition to this overall meaning, the term rhythm is occasionally used to refer to specific time events, such as the patterns of lengths in a certain group of notes. Rhythm can also be defined as organization of music in respect to time, this can be expanded by adding that rhythm is the regular or irregular reoccurrence of groups and motion in relation to each other, this entails the pulse, metre, stress, duration, accent, pitch , contour and design

functioning within the architectural structure of the artistic whole. Rhythm can be free, flexible, measured or metrical. Many scholars had extensively discussed the Issue of rhythm in contest to African music yet rhythm cannot be over emphasized. Omojola (2014) cited the works of various scholars, where he mentioned the Concept of Time lines/Bell Pattern and Rhythmic Archetypes as discussed by Jones (1954), Nketia (1974), King (1960) and Burns (2010). The concept of Cycles, Multidimensionality, and the Ensemble Thematic Cycle (ETC) by Locke (2011) and Nzewi (2001). Vidal (2012) discussed the Mode method of analyzing African rhythms and mentioned that among the Yoruba people more than two dozen rhythmic patterns have been discovered.

In West Africa, drum ensembles consisting of three to five musicians who play interlocking patterns are common. In the ensemble, each drummer uses a special method of striking the drumhead to produce varying pitches and timbres distinctive sounds also known as tone colors to distinguish the drum from all the others. Such ensembles often include rattles and an iron bell, which is struck with a stick to produce a repeated pattern called a timeline. This pattern penetrates the dense texture of the ensemble and helps the drummers to play their patterns at the correct time. African rhythm is deliberately created. Quite often, it captures and bears certain images, abstractions and codes (musical and non-musical) that appeal to the cultural and emotional sentiments of African societies.

Ofuani (2014) mentioned that rhythms often prevail according to its role in any African traditional music ensemble. Some of which are rhythmic pattern(s) that projects/initiates timeline, gravity, balance, dance, onomatopoeic imitation, indigenous musical structures/forms, societal sonic-rhythmic codes, theatrical and communal sentiments and signal orientations. There are also those that are derived from speech-rhythm attribute of various African languages/words. However the ability of a trained or untrained Musician to adapt and balance all the above, gives room for achieving new rhythmic crafts with clear undertone that replicates or suggests its prototype. From the following it will be noted that rhythm is cogent and important to discuss of African music even as it has passed through thorough scrutiny in the various arguments of ethnomusicology.

In this paper, the rhythmic variation in Lagbaja's popular music in Nigeria will be examined within the ethno musicological framework, anchoring on the Timeline/Bell Pattern and Archetype philosophy. A close listening will be done applying a discography method of Analysis within the afore mentioned frame work.

The Concept of Bell Pattern (*Agogo*)

Generally in Yoruba music, the *Agogo* plays background rhythm which forms a basic rhythmic pattern for traditional music, similarly in Nigerian popular music there is always a surrogate for the Bell or *Agogo* when it is not used regardless of the genre, for example the Juju, Fuji, Gospel and Hip hop Music in songs like; King Sunny Ade's Appreciation, Tope Alabi's Mori Iyanu, and Harrysong's Reggae Blues, there is always an instrument which imitates the bell pattern in such a way that it regulates the tempo of the music throughout the whole song. Lagbaja adopted a unique choice of musical instrument by employing *Agogo* to take the lead role and play interlocked rhythmic pattern in the music Who Man. The question is why the *Agogo*?(a traditional musical instrument) what message was he passing across ? And what is the traditional believe towards the *Agogo* from the cultural background of the musician?

In the Yoruba tradition which is Lagbaja's background, it is believed that;

Enikan ki pa ohun mo *agogo* lenu : No one can stop the voice of the gong

There is the believe that the voice of the gong travels far and leave a lasting impression on whoever perceive the sound. These are the guiding phenomenon for the choice of the musical instrument (*Agogo*) used in this music. Furthermore, in the traditional communities, the *Agogo* is still used to pass information in towns and villages. The Music Who man adopts this medium to transmit the message of the music which will be examined later under the textual analysis. It can be observed that a bell ensemble which is close to the cult music of the Ooni of Ife Oshirigi music was also used in the music under study.

Who is Lagbaja

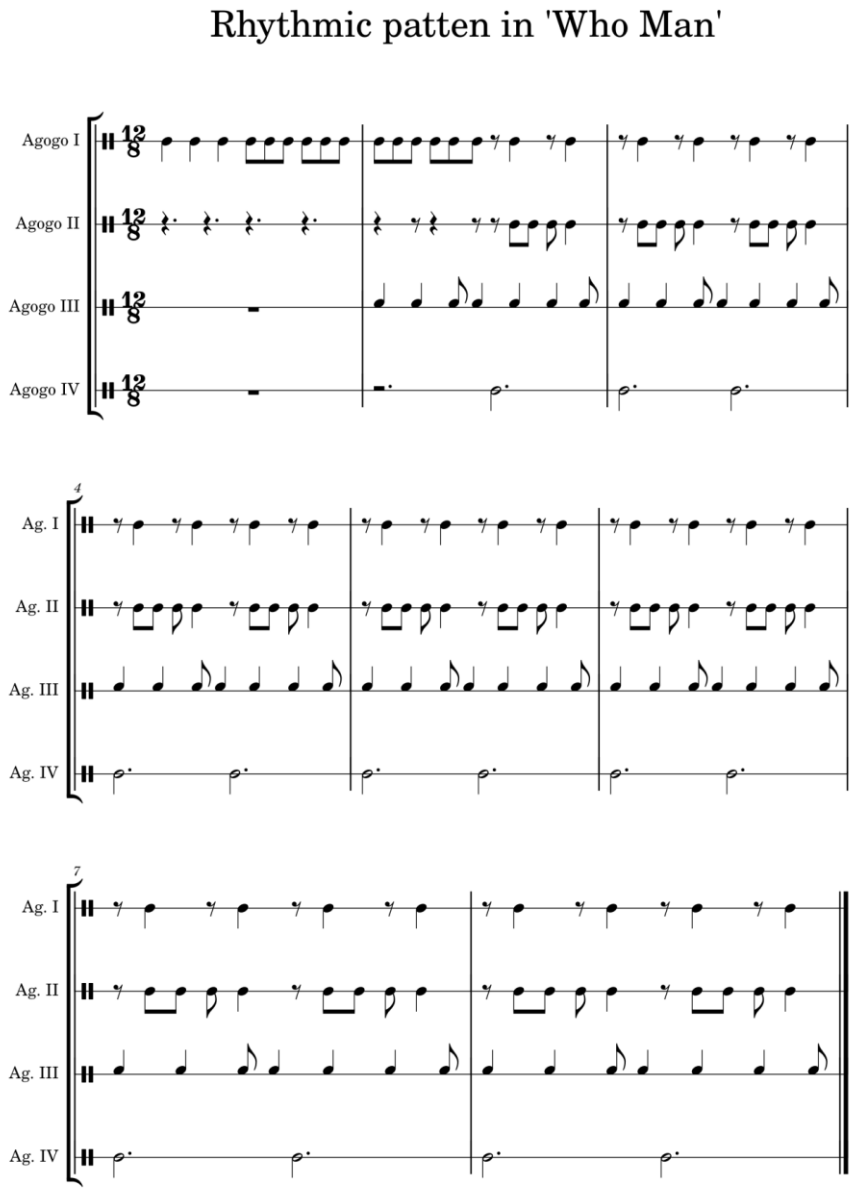
The first question that comes to mind each time the name Lagbaja is mentioned in the Yoruba settings is a hidden identity of a personality. Lagbaja could be anyone anywhere do things anonymously in a unique or special way. Lagbaja can

represent a female or a male gender to express the mind of the people in such category. Waterman (2002) described him as the masked one. According to him, Lagbaja whose original name is Bisade Ologunde bagan his music career in 1990's when he played the bass guitar with the Jazz quartet itan and he also played Tenor and alto saxophone with colours Band. In 1993, Lagbaja established his mask concept and released his first album entitled Lagbaja. Lagbaja first hit track was "coolu Temper" which was released in 1995. In 1996 he was one of the six African artists who participated in an International Red Cross-sponsored concert tour of the continent's war zone.

The mask of Lagbaja is a costume he carefully choose which perfectly depicts the anonymity of the so call "common man". The mask and the name symbolize the faceless, the voiceless in the society particularly in Africa Lagbaja reminds one of his own facelessness. This symbolism is so powerful that Lagbaja's mask is popularized the use of mask concept by other artistes both in Nigeria and beyond.

Another important point about Lagbaja and his music is the inclusion of heavy traditional percussive instrument in his music which includes the Dundun Ensemble, the Bata Ensemble, the Ogido and agbamole (Bass drum beating to the ground) the *Agogo* with other basic western musical instruments like the keyboard the lead guitar bass guitar and the trap set.

Analysis of *Agogo* rhythmic pattern



The illustration above is an excerpt of various *agogo* rhythmic pattern in who man by Lagbaja. The score shows that from bar one, *Agogo* I called the rest in with an

intro, while the *agogo* II and *agogo* III responded immediately in bar two and in bar three the *Agogo* IV came in with another rhythmic pattern .
Agogo I : played the leading role, making the call to bring others in.
Bar 1; it took the 2+2+2+1+1+1+1+1+1 to prepare the rest of the *Agogo* in form of a call and response nature of African Music.
Bar 2; *Agogo* I, II and III sounded together giving the effect of poly rhythms with the *Agogo* III maintaining the Time line which King (1961) referred to the Yoruba Standard pattern (the konkolo) with 2+1+2+2+2+1+2 which was maintained throughout the music, *Agogo* II took a regular rhythm of 6+6 all through in the music
Bar 3; *Agogo* I started various rhythmic pattern give a kind of ostinato on the established rhythm of *Agogo* II and III, while *Agogo* IV came in with an irregular rhythm with a syncopation technique which added more heaviness to the rhythmic variation in the Music Who man.
Bar 4; In this bar *Agogo* II, III, and IV maintained their rhythmic pattern while *Agogo* I continued with a more fascinating extemporization and improvisation varied rhythmic pattern till bar 8.

The Drum rhythmic Pattern in Lagbaja's who man.
The drum rhythmic pattern in Lagbaja's who man is a simple rhythm played on the ogido which included a three headed drum in various sizes played by one person. The three pitch tone drum represents the three major speech tones among the Yorubas.
3(rest)+1+2+1+2+1+2 continuously. See Apenndix II

Cultural Implications from Lagbaja's who man
The busy flow and groove of the but African and western musical instrument used in lagbaja's music , the implications and influence of the music is worthy of note. As a popular musicians who does different genres at different times , Lagbaja favoured African musical ensemble of various kind the dundun and bata ensemble this made him a custodian of culture. He brings the young ones closer to their tradition which is fast fading away with the influence of the western who giving himself a clear identity as an African musician. The mask even among the Yoruba people is generally ascribed to the *Egun* (masquerade) family, this brought about biased mind towards him among the yorubas who have embraced other

religion. But with lagbaja's explanation of his concept of the mask cleared a lot of doubt in the mind of many people. According to Lagbaja in an interview conducted in June 4 2001 by waterman he said:

> I wanted to depict that facelessness,
> That sense of not having an identity anymore,
> Of the faceless masses…

He sustained this motive with the track Who man in Africano record in 1997 after the establishment of the Motherlan in Ikeja, Lagos. This track represent the million faceless and helpless women been oppressed abused and despised by men all over the world . The Choice of *agogo* has the background instrument is to send a strong signal to the world, due to his cultural believe that no one can stop the voice of a gong and that wherever the sound of the *Agogo* is heard, it calls serious attention, the solemnity of the drum in the music show the fragileness of the female gender. Two strong points can be deduced from the Music *who man* with a view from the musical instrument and the rhythmic pattern ;

1. The message is a strong one and
2. The message is for the helpless, hopeless and faceless women all over the world.

Finally from the textual view point, the language choice of the music was English Language to reach out to a more larger audience. Who man from the language mean who is man,

The chorus ;

Call:Who is man without woman,
Response: Nothing _ nothing at all
Call:Who is man without woman,
Response: Nothing _ nothing at all

Verse 1:

We cannot do without her, yet we disrespect her
The day she gets her due, mankind would discover
Justice long elusive, no injustice is greater than man to woman
Than man to woman, man oppresses woman so

Bridge:

How would life be, a world without woman,
Empty as a ghost town Lily as a graveyard.

The lyric has a clear message giving reasons why women must be treated right.

Conclusion

This study looked into various works on rhythm and identified that the basic rhythmic pattern of the Yoruba is the background upon which various rhythmic patterns are built which bring about poly rhythm Ostinatos, interlocking rhythms and other rhythmic techniques among the Yoruba, which also form the basis of Lagbaja a Nigerian popular musician with international and global reputation in his music Who man, sending a strong message to the entire world. It could be concluded that with good knowledge the basic rhythmic pattern or bell pattern in African music popular musicians can be more creative and innovative with a clear sense of identity.

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