“In the Ghetto, Life No Easy For We”: The Construction and Negotiation of Identity in Ajegunle Raga

by

Ogunbowale Mopololade Oreoluwa

A Thesis presented to The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History and International Development

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Ogunbowale Mopololade Oreoluwa, June, 2012
ABSTRACT

“In the Ghetto, “Life No Easy For We”: The Construction and Negotiation of Identity in Ajegunle Raga

Ogunbowale Mopelolade
University of Guelph, 2012

Advisor:
Professor F.J Kolapo

This thesis is an investigation into the historical evolution of Ajegunle Raga, a reggae form developed within an urban ghetto in Lagos called Ajegunle and the construction and negotiation of identities therein. The research further argues that Ajegunle Raga is a home-grown oppositional music subculture that draws inspiration from diasporic musical subcultures like Reggae and Hip Hop but retains a genuine representation of Ajegunle in its tales of survival, poverty, marginalization and expressions of creativity within the ambience of the music.
Figure 1: Map of Lagos showing Ajegunle and its environs. Used with permission from Odunuga Shakirudeen of Department of Regional and Urban Planning, University of Lagos, Nigeria.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to appreciate all those that have contributed immensely to making this project a success. First of all, I thank God for the inspiration, strength and determination to complete this project. I sincerely want to appreciate my dad, Lanre Ogunbowale, my mum, Theresa Tokubo Koya and my sisters, Tobi and Busola Ogunbowale for always motivating and encouraging me. I cherish your love, support and friendship and whatever I do is to make you all happy. I appreciate my best friend, pillar and support, Adewale Fadugba for always being by my side and picking me up when I am down. I would forever appreciate how we brainstormed on my project late into the night and how he kept calm at the peak of my confusions. To Adewale, I say, I cherish your love and friendship, my dearest.

My gratitude also goes out to my advisor, Professor Femi Kolapo and my advisory committee members, Professor Cecil Foster and Professor Adam Sneyd for opening my mind to new ideas and giving me wings to fly. I never imagined I would delve into this area of study. I was practically scared of this leap into unknown waters but words like “Write the proposal”, “You can do it”, “This job has great potentials” motivated me to keep thinking, learning, listening, reading and writing. I would also like to appreciate my friend and teacher, Dr Bukola Oyeniyi for grooming me intellectually (since my days as an undergraduate) and making me take up academic challenges. I appreciate the support of Professor Peter Goddard, Professor Alan Gordon, Barb Mitterer and Edna Mumford and the Department of History, University of Guelph for their academic and financial support throughout the course of my masters program. You made the department my second home and when Pius Adesanmi, in his presentation at the University of Guelph says Canada can be our Africa, the Department of History and International Development made Canada my Africa.
At this juncture, I would like to appreciate the respondents for their hospitality and interest in this research. I would want to say a big thank you to Ajegunle Raga artistes like Daddy Showkey, Daddy Fresh, Mighty Mouse, Baba Fryo, Nicco Gravity, Vocal Slender, Kanmi Ranking, Kimi Ranking, Mad Melon, Prosper, Delta Ninja, Lyrical Builder, Okunla, Wisdom King, Intruder, Akinoye, Cashman Davis, J Black, Hip Hop Alhaji and many others for telling me their inspiring stories. I also appreciate the officials of the Ajeromi-Ifelodun Sectariat, the Baale of Ajegunle, Chief S. Salami and Prince Tajudeen Basua of the Ojora Ruling family for giving me an opportunity to know the origin and history of Ajegunle. My sincere gratitude goes out to Innocent Uba, Obi Nweke, and other music marketers of Alaba International for sharing their thoughts on the Ajegunle music industry with me. I also appreciate the contributions of Dr Albert Oyikelome of the Creative Arts Department of University of Lagos, Dr Seye Kehinde, Editor, City People Magazine, Florence Udu of the Uncommon Man Network and Joe Ejiroghene of Radio Nigeria to this research. I am sincerely grateful for giving me time out of your busy schedules to share your stories, concerns and prospects for Ajegunle Raga and the Nigerian music industry as a whole.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of wonderful friends like Adebola Odebumni (aka Mr Bee), Adebowale Adesuyan (aka Bowii di Reflector), ThankGod Ocheho (aka TG), Dare Sagoe (aka Baba Sagoe), Bunmi Coker, Kemi Ayegbusi, Bella Okogie, Gbolabo Olaniwun, Bukola Adesanwo, Olubunmi George, Rasheed Hassan, Dr Odunuga Shakirudeen, Joseph Bolarinwa, Ndidi Okpara, Adenike Adegbayi and Adewale Fadugba to the successful completion of my fieldwork. I sincerely appreciate the members of the interview crew Adebola, Bowii, TG and Adewale for being on the field with me throughout the course of the research. I am also very grateful to my Guelph family: the Kolapos, Mummy Okoh, Mummy Florence,
Daddy Okuribido Olabanji Akinola, Abiola Bankole, Blessing and Tobe Emerenini, Candace Stewart, Sabrina Thomas, Yonae, Paul Gordon, Joe McIntyre, Raschelle Litchmore, Steff Dwie, Bamidele Adekunle, Mr and Mrs Ntinya Johnson, Ajoke Bello (and many of my other friends in Guelph I forget to mention) for showing a great interest in my work and asking after my progress always.

Finally, I appreciate my heroes, heroines and musical idols whose words, thoughts and ideas inspire me daily: Lanre Ogunbowale (my dad), Rasaq Gbadamosi (my uncle), Oyewale Tomori, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Angelique Kidjo, Chimamanda Adichie, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Sade Adu, Asa, Bob Marley, Victor Olaiya, Obafemi Awolowo, and Wole Soyinka. I hope to make a great change to society like my heroes someday.
TABLE OF CONTENT

Cover page................................................................................................................................. i

Abstract....................................................................................................................................... ii

Map.......................................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgement..................................................................................................................... iv- vi

Table of Content....................................................................................................................... vii

List of tables............................................................................................................................... viii

List of Figures............................................................................................................................ ix

List of Nomenclature.................................................................................................................. x

Chapter One – Introduction........................................................................................................ 1-8

Chapter Two – Review of Literature........................................................................................ 9- 20

Chapter Three- Sources and Fieldwork.................................................................................. 21-24

Chapter Four- History of Ajegunle Raga and Popular Music in Nigeria.............................. 25-47

Chapter Five – Construction and Negotiation of Identity in Ajegunle Raga...................... 48-84

Conclusion and Recommendation............................................................................................ 85-87

Bibliography............................................................................................................................... 88-94

Oral Interviews and Discography.............................................................................................. 94- 98
LIST OF TABLES

Figure 7: Table (constructed by author) displaying the use of Yoruba language and vocabulary in the lyrics of Ajegunle Raga.
LISTS OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Lagos showing Ajegunle and environs

Figure 2: Street Soccer in Ajegunle (All photographs taken by Bowii di Reflector. Copyright belongs to the author).

Figure 3: A view of AJ city.

Figure 4: Daddy Fresh, a pioneer of Ajegunle Raga at the Embassy.

Figure 5: Daddy Showkey aka King of Ajegunle Raga.

Figure 6: Baba Fryo, the Denge Pose Crooner with ThankGod Ocheho at the Embassy.

Figure 8: Intruder, a prominent Konto producer at his studio at Ajegunle.

Figure 9: Vocal Slender, an artiste of the Konto Alanta.

Figure 10: The author, Lyrical Builder and Adebola Odebunmi.

Figure 11: Prosper, a studio engineer and music producer at his studio in Ajegunle.

Figure 12: Kanmi Ranking giving a ghetto solider pose at his barbing salon and video club.

Figure 13: The musicians and interview crew at the Embassy, Ajegunle.
LISTS OF NOMENCLATURE

Jungle City

Jolly City

Ajegunle Raga

Konto

Suo

Galala

Alanta

Charlieman

Ghetto Soldier
Chapter One - Introduction

It is called “Jungle City” because of its multi ethnic population of Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Hausa and Urhobo, Cletus Nwachukwu, in an article titled “Musical Revolution in the Jungle” notes that Ajegunle is home to violent crimes, ethnic conflicts, prostitution, drug abuse and juvenile delinquencies. Ajegunle, located in the Ajeromi Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos state, Nigeria is by all standards, a slum or an urban poor neighbourhood if David Satterwraite’s typology of the multiple deprivations associated with urban poverty conditions is adopted. These deprivations include:

- inadequate food intake, large health burdens from illness and injuries associated with poor quality homes, inadequate water sanitation, garbage collection, inadequacies in public transport, difficulties in getting health care and affording medicine; difficulties (and often high cost) of keeping children at school for long hours and often damage conditions (Satterthwaite 2003:74).

Ajegunle exudes these slum-like conditions in its erratic power supply, environmental, sanitary and infrastructural deficiencies. According to the Report on Community Infrastructure Upgrading Program for Metropolitan Lagos, Ajegunle constitutes 12.8% of the forty two socially blighted areas in Lagos and its population has increased astronomically between 1952 and 2006 from 12,951 to 500,000 respectively (although unofficial records suggest that Ajegunle houses close to two million Nigerians).

Despite all, Ajegunle is also described as “Jolly City” because of its vibrant entertainment culture that has churned out nationally and internationally acclaimed soccer stars, musicians, actors and actresses. As Nwachukwu notes:
Contrary to the seeming and widespread negative perception of Ajegunle inhabitants as lazy, never do well criminals, observers argued that the city is peopled with hard working, law abiding, ambitious, strong inhabitants who also love to enjoy regardless of their social economic limitations (Nwachukwu 2011: par. 6).

It is against this backdrop that this research seeks to examine the emergence of the Ajegunle Raga in the Nigerian music scene of the 1980’s, its representations of the memories of marginalization, poverty and ghetto life in Ajegunle (and by extension Postcolonial Nigeria) and, on a wider scale, its artistic connections and borrowings from musical genres of the African Diaspora, particularly, Hip Hop and reggae traditions with which it shares a similar history of marginalization.
Andy Bennett, in tracing the histories of reggae and rap music, emphasises the relevance of youth insubordination to the redefinition of popular music as a site for the negotiation of identities. Popular music serves as a global resource “continually explored and redefined through the inscription of particular urban narrative” (Bennett 2000: 63) into the aesthetic and cultural composition of the music. The concept of cultural re-territorialisation in popular music signifies the mobility and adaptation of popular music genres to new cultural conditions without entirely losing its initial essence. Rap music, with its street cultural and improvised origins, and reggae with its anti-oppression messages attain global relevance because of their malleability to unique urban narratives of various cultures. This is evident in the appropriation of reggae and hip hop in Australia and Japan respectively which are but few of the very many examples of the relocalisation of reggae and Hip Hop. While Australia encounters the same history of slavery and marginalisation as the Americas, reggae among the aborigines maintained the Rastafarian emblems while attempting a cultural revival “tied to land rights, to origins, to a cultural integrity beyond contemporary industrial arrangement” (Bennett 2000: 86). Also interesting is the use of hip hop culture and rap music to reinforce the generational protest of Japanese youths as opposed to the traditional use of hip hop to address issues of racial exclusion, ghettoization, black urban narratives and gangsterism.

In the Nigerian case study, Shonekan observes that rappers combined the essence of Afro beat with traditional music genres to produce a home grown Hip Hop with “humour, metaphor and rhymes” (Shonekan 2011: 16) that offered narratives on the Nigeria society in the second half of the 20th century. He however condemns the “uncritical” adoption of hip hop culture by Nigerian rappers, especially the stifling of local creativity to accommodate what Niyi Osundare calls “the hip hop hysteria” (Shonekan 2011: 16) that urges one “to take leave of one’s very self
and assume the borrowed clichéd mask of the other” (Shonekan 2011:16). Thus the globalization of hip hop and its entrapment in the culture industry creates a gradual homogenization of localised forms of rap music to fit the American standard.

Notwithstanding, the locality remains significant in Nigerian popular music with the use of pidgin English, incorporation of traditional Nigerian rhythmic elements and specific cultural narratives into the music. It is against this backdrop that this study of Ajegunle Raga seeks to highlight how Ajegunle is represented in the lyrics and performance of the music. Though many studies attest to the musical feedback cycle between Africa and the diaspora, there is little emphasis on the reworking of reggae and rap music in the Nigerian context. This research contributes to filling this gap.

It must be noted at this juncture that there is no specific musical form unique to Ajegunle. This is basically because Ajegunle has produced Fuji, R and B, reggae and even rap artistes. This research however focuses on Ajegunle’s variety of reggae which blends local languages, Pidgin English, Lagos and Ajegunle slangs with dialectical versions of Jamaican dread talk, the activism and cultural elements of Rastafarianism and Afro beat, the slackness and ghetto inflections of Hip Hop and Jamaican Dancehall traditions. This genre has also been selected because the bulk of Ajegunle artistes compose reggae tunes and the institutionalization of the musical culture in Ajegunle began in the early 1990’s with the establishment of the Raga Dub Chapel, a centre for the discovery and nurturing of hip hop and reggae talents by Johnny Nabena and Mighty Mouse.
This comparison does not imply that Ajegunle Raga is purely reggae or Hip Hop. On the contrary, Ajegunle Raga evokes an expression of Ajegunle in its performance style and lyrics. This research therefore highlights the “Ajegunle” in Ajegunle Raga with specific reference to how the lyrics and the performance style draw materials from the realities in this ghetto. It is these realities that make Ajegunle Raga authentically Ajegunle. Due to the limited literature on Ajegunle Raga music, an examination of the basic characteristics of the music of the marginalized in Africa and its diaspora shall be a good platform to understand the possible elements that have shaped Ajegunle Raga.

Figure 3: A street view of AJ city.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions constitute the basic concerns this research intends to address;

- How did Ajegunle Raga evolve within the context of Nigerian popular music in the late 1980’s and what is the influence of the Lagos environment and popular music genres like Juju, Fuji and Highlife on Ajegunle Raga?

- How is the Ajegunle self and, by extension, the multiculturalism of Lagos expressed in the performance of the music? This question will also take cognizance of how the social geography of Ajegunle and Lagos is reflected within the music.

- What is the influence of reggae and Hip Hop on the lyrics and performance of Ajegunle Raga?

BREAKDOWN OF CHAPTERS

This thesis shall attempt a review of literature on popular music in Africa and its diaspora with the aim of highlighting the importance of music in the storage of collective memory and the reinforcement of identity in geographical and cultural spaces. Also, the evolution of popular music in Nigeria with particular focus on the centrality of Lagos to the development and commercialization of popular music in Nigeria shall be discussed. In light of this, the intercultural elements in Nigeria popular music shall be traced to Islamic, European, West Africa, Afro American and Afro Caribbean musical influences and the emergence of Ajegunle Raga within the history of Nigerian popular music shall be examined. The fifth chapter shall be dedicated to examining the narrative identities of Ajegunle and Lagos represented in Ajegunle
Raga and the appropriation of reggae and Hip Hop traditions in the lyrics and celebrity representations of Ajegunle Raga

**METHODOLOGY**

The use of qualitative and participatory research approaches have been necessitated by the interdisciplinary nature of this research. This research shall utilize primary sources that include oral interviews with Ajegunle Raga artistes, residents, music marketers, media personalities and music scholars. Also music videos of Ajegunle Raga artistes would be used for lyrical and performance analysis.

While the availability of the necessary music videos is guaranteed (thanks to YouTube), this research experienced some limitation in oral information from media personalities due to the time constraints of the field research and the inability to get in touch with some media personalities relevant to the Ajegunle case study. This gap is bridged through the use of newspaper articles to evaluate the public perception of Ajegunle Raga. Secondary sources comprising of journal articles and books are used to provide a historical connection between Ajegunle Raga and popular music in Africa and its diaspora.

Stanley regards music and performance as a habitus for the display of history and identity; “an institution around which process, economy, identity and heritage are organised.” (Stanley 2010: 32). She further notes that identity in music inhabits narrative identities “linking the past and present in a spiral of interpretation and reinterpretation (Lawler 2008: 19).” This research therefore seeks to examine music as a narrative encapsulating the memories of the marginalized, creating an unending musical dialogue and solidarity between peoples sharing
similar histories of marginalization within various geographical orbits and also as a centre for the negotiation of identities.

Durkheim asserts that solidarity is often necessitated by some sort of religion and socialization that link “individuals to a broader collectivity” unified by factors beyond the economic (Crow 2002:20). Bourdieu notes that this solidarity is created by the dynamic interaction of the symbolic capital (made up of the economic, social and cultural capital) within the “habitus”:

The system of durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge and act in the world…. The habitus is unconscious and learned by us via exposure to particular social conditions (Butler and Watt 2007: 173).

SIGNIFICANCE

This research helps reinforce the idea that music is a tool for the expression of identity, negotiation of identity and also a store of collective memory. It shall also reflect the continued musical feedback between the Africa and its diaspora. However in the Ajegunle case study, this feedback cycle shall be considered an adaptation of Afro American and Afro Caribbean rhythms and grooves necessitated by a shared memory of impoverishment and marginalization, a solidarity triggered by a quest for redemption from oppression and an urgent need to reinforce the self that the social constructions of society often incapacitates.
Chapter Two - Review of Literature

Ajegunle Raga and its evolution within the Nigerian entertainment scene of the 1990’s has received little or no attention in scholarly writings. This may be due to the fact that this adaptation of reggae to suit the Ajegunle context is barely considered a unique genre of Nigerian popular music like Juju and Fuji (Oyikelome, 2011). Stephanie Shonekan in her study of the influences of Hip Hop culture in Nigeria notes that the development of various musical forms in Ajegunle (Ajegunle Raga inclusive) is one of the several responses of Nigerian musicians to the waves of reggae and Hip Hop music that flooded the Nigerian music industry in the 1980’s. Studies treating Ajegunle Raga as an innovative expression of the Ajegunle self and identity within the ambience of reggae and Hip Hop instrumentation and radicalism are nonexistent. A proper characterization of the Ajegunle Raga shall therefore benefit from an understanding of the roles of popular music in Africa and the African diaspora. In addition to this, the similarities between Ajegunle Raga and other genres of African and diasporic popular music shall be identified especially as reflected in the memories they represent, the cultural, religious and political expressions therein and the negotiation of identity within lyrics and performance of the music.

Mano Winston argues that popular music in Africa serves the purpose of journalism in the way it informs, mobilises and Enlightens people about the political and social conditions of the nation. Thus, when the press is gagged, popular music “is an alternative communication that helps galvanize forces at the margins to recognize and do something about their unfavourable conditions of life” (Winston 2002: 93). Also, popular music in Africa gains its wider audience by expressing “a majority will when all other avenues seem to be closed” (Winston 2003: 93). It is therefore journalism in the way “it sets the agenda on what to talk among people and in the
way music texts meet with and generate new forms of knowledge among members of the audience” (Winston 2002: 93). Though the assumption that popular music serves a journalistic purpose is valid, a pigeonholing of African popular music into this category neglects the idea that “harmony and hostility between politics and music is largely determined by what type of service the latter offers to the former” (Falola and Hassan 2008: 341).

Christopher Waterman encapsulates this interest-based relationship between popular music and politics by examining various celebrity representations in the Nigerian popular music scene and how they serve mild or radical political purposes. In his classification of the celebrity selves into the “Big man”, the “Black President” and the “Masked one”, archetypes of the voices of adulation, vehement resistance to authorities and the faceless masses respectively, Waterman views the celebrity as a voice representing a solidarity of the masses either in the subtle resistance of Lagbaja (“The Masked One”), the radical tunes and activities of the Fela Anikulapo Kuti, (“The Black President”) and the adulations of Fuji and Juju artistes (“The Big Men”). In all these categories, it is interesting to note that the celebrity stands in for the voiceless and evokes their representations through musical lyrics and performance.

Afro beat however strikes a slightly different cord as it progressed from being the music for the marginalized to one by the marginalized or better still victims of political persecution. An examination of the gradual transformation of Fela Ransome Kuti to Fela Anikulapo Kuti is crucial to evolution of Afro beat as a dissident tune in Africa popular music. The emergence of the revolutionary Afro beat music was largely influenced by Fela’s awakening to Black Power and Pan Africanist ideologies. Fela’s encounter with Sandra Isidore (during an unsuccessful American tour), a former member of the militant black nationalist organisation and his exposure to the revolutionary teachings of Malcolm X on “black political radicalism and cultural
nationalism that effected an epochal shift in the psychological constitution of African America” (Olaniyan 2004: 30) initiated a revelation, consciousness and enlightenment that recycled Pan Africanist and Black power ideas into the political commentaries of Nigerian Afro beat. This further extends into Afro beats’ production of an anti-establishment performance culture and lifestyle in the context of the political dynamics of post independent Nigeria.

Michael Olatunji in “Yabis: A Phenomenon in Contemporary Nigerian Music” draws a connection between Afro beat and Ajegunle Raga when he identifies both as Yabis music. Although the bulk of the work focuses on Afro beat and picks on an Ajegunle Raga artistes like Baba Fryo and African China (an artiste often considered an Ajegunle Raga artiste). The study notes that the “Yabis” in both genres is articulated in their criticism of the Nigerian politico-economic conditions, the use of Pidgin English and nonsensical onomatopoeia to relate with the ordinary Nigerian. Though this material does not provide an exhaustive analysis of Ajegunle Raga, it gives us an important insight into subtle resistance of Ajegunle Raga which the author perceives as slightly different from the radicalism of Afro beat which forms the basic template for understanding “Yabis” music. A contribution of my study is the identification of the unique elements of Ajegunle Raga which “Yabis” does not necessarily epitomize.

A prominent attribute of popular music is the role it plays in storing the collective memory and providing a voice for an oppressed and marginalized group. In this case, music serves a dual purpose of documenting the realities of a historical epoch while also acting as a weapon against oppression. This extends beyond the informative and political agenda that Afro

---

1 “Yabis” music coined from the “Yabis Night” of Fela Anikulapo’s every Friday nights at the African shrine in Lagos of the 1970s represents a session of Fela’s stage performances dedicated to social and political commentary. Yabis music is therefore any form of Nigerian music that embarks on social and political commentary using Pidgin English, nonsensical onomatopoeia and realities from base society.
beat represents. This use of music as a weapon against oppression and also a store of collective memory are better exemplified in the Black South African music during the apartheid years. According to Miriam Makeba, a popular South African musician:

In our struggle, songs are not simply entertainment for us. They are the ways we communicate. The press, radio and TV are all censored by government. We cannot believe what they tell us about events (Gray 2008: 64).

Gray Annie Marie notes that genres like “iMusic”, “iragtime”, “Toyi toyi” and traditional liberation chants provides copious historical details of the conditions and moods of Black South Africans. Similarly, compositions like “Umteto we Land Act” by Reuben Caluza (a pupil and later teacher of the Ohlange Institute) and “Nkosi Sikele iAfrica” (God bless Africa) by Enoch Sontonga consecutively served as the SANCC (South African National Native Congress) anthems and expressed the emotions of black South Africans in their fight against the political and psychological oppressions of apartheid. As the revolution became more violent, Black South Africans expressed musical solidarity with the African diaspora by drawing inspiration from the rhythmic elements of Afro American ragtime with its historically significant expression of Afro-American self-advancement in the face of centuries of slavery. In Maree Jeremy’s documentary, Rhythms of Resistance, he reflects the use of Black South Africa music as a therapy against the psychological depressions of apartheid. With the dominance of the South African music industry by the white South Africans, black music and radio programs were put through rigorous censorship. This gagging of the media led to the production of less politically overt Black music that only demonstrated the agitation and resistance of Black South Africa by its mood, tone, voice and instrumentation.
Despite all, musical concerts still sprung up in the black neighbourhoods, hostels of migrant workers and even in the churches. The documentary further highlights the performances of the “Mahotella” Queens and the “Abafana” who found an alternative mode to expressing the sufferings of the black South African through dramatic musical performances in black neighbourhoods. Jeremy also notes that musical revolutions were kick started within the hostels of migrant workers who regained their pride and victory over oppressive apartheid through the performance of the “Ngoma”, a Zulu war dance. In the apartheid South Africa, popular music was a weapon against oppression, a store of collective memory and a space for the negotiation of the heroic Black South African identity that apartheid denied. Popular musicians in Black South Africa used music not only for entertainment but for regaining a freedom that society denied.

Though, the South African rhythms of resistance helped redefine popular music as a “habitus” for the negotiation of history and identity, the utilization of popular music for the reassertion and negotiation of identity is evidently reflected in the reggae- Rastafarian duality where the social and political ideologies of Rastafarianism is expressed within the lyrics, rhythm and the celebrity identity of roots reggae. Stephen King describes this symbiotic relationship between reggae and Rastafarianism as a relationship between a protest song and social movement with the latter providing a religious, cultural and political memory conveyed in the lyrics and celebrity identity in reggae music. Equally evident within reggae celebrity representations are Rastafarian emblems like the Rasta colours (gold, red and green), wearing of dreadlock and the use of dread vocabulary as a confrontation of the oppressors and the reinforcement of the authority of the self. The constant use of the first person “I” even in referring to a third party is an example. Coupled with this is the constant reference to Jah, the deified Haille Sellasie (the Ethiopian King crowned in November 2, 1930) as the saviour of the
Rastafarians from the oppression of Babylon. ² King emphasises that not all reggae artistes are Rastafarian and that the earlier contacts of reggae pioneers like Bob Marley with the dispersed Rastafarians in the ghettos of Kingston transformed reggae into a music that serves an “important in-group function … including intensifying group solidarity and transforming member’s selfhood and identity” (Peddie 2006: 107) for the Rastafarian movement. Sarah Dynes considers the Rastafarianism-Reggae duality as an elective affinity between a cultural form and “a social, politically and religiously engaged music” (Dynes 2010: 22) representing a political and religious chain of memory. First, is the continued remembrance of slavery and the urgent need to reinvent Africa (often referred to as the lost paradise) in the lifestyle of the Rasta. Reggae further reflects the Rastafarian re-reading of the Bible and the comparison of their dispersal from Africa and the experience of slavery under the Western and Jamaican authorities (regarded as Babylon) with the exile of the twelve tribes of Israel and their persecution in Egypt. The hope of the Rasta is however brought to light in the eschatological narrative of reggae music where the eventual destruction of Babylon and liberty in Zion (Africa) is the Rasta’s only hope for redemption from oppressive Babylon. According to Dynes, is a culmination of this social memory and the hope for redemption from the tyranny of Babylon that defines reggae as Jamaican history as narrated from the perspective of the poor and as the music accompanying a social religion of the poor.

Ajegunle Raga artistes (though many claim to have no religious attachment to the Rastafarian doctrine) draw a lot of inspiration from the reggae perhaps because, like Kingston, Ajegunle shares the same ghetto realities of poverty, deprivation and marginalization. In addition to the solidarity developed out of a similar experience of marginalization, Ajegunle Raga draws

² Babylon encapsulates slavery, poverty and all other forms of oppression found in the Jamaican society. It is also a secular world that is not Rastafarian.
almost all its rhythmic elements and celebrity identities from reggae and Jamaican dancehall. It is worthy to note that in a You-tube recording of Bennie man’s, (the king of Jamaican Dancehall) musical tour in Nigeria in 2004, he was introduced to Daddy Showkey, a successful pioneer of Ajegunle Raga. It is interesting that both men wore dreadlocks and communicated in dread talk and Daddy Showkey particularly urged Beenie man to visit Ajegunle which he referred to as the “Kingston of Nigeria”, a poor neighbourhood where reggae artistes have been produced. The intriguing thing about this little interaction is that both artistes shared an affinity of brothers playing the same music and also having a similar experience of poverty and marginalization. This research therefore highlights the essential components of reggae demonstrated within Ajegunle Raga and how reggae has also provided a space for the expression of the Ajegunle self and musical creativity.

Simonde Akinde highlights the adaptation of reggae in African popular music through his examination of the use of “Nouchi” (Ivorian French) in Ivorian reggae to express the disillusionment of the unemployed youths with the political situations of the country. Consequently, re-localised Ivorian reggae played “a mobilizing role in the return to multiparty politics in 1990 under Houphouet Boigny and in the December 1999 coup that toppled Bedie and put an end to the rule of the PDCI (Parti Democratique de Cote d’Ivoire) and its wealthy elites” (Akindes 2002: 195). Akinde notes that musicians like Alpha Blondy and Fadal Day, banned for criticizing Bedie’s government are known for utilizing Rastafarian cultural representations. Alpha Blondy reflected youth insubordination by creating “his own mystique around symbols of Rastafarianism, dreadlocks, marijuana, red, green and gold, walking stick [and] the Bible (even

---

3 Beanie man interaction with Daddy Showkey in 2004 was uploaded in April 27th, 2009 under this link http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlhcV_oW7wo.
though he was Muslim” (Akinde 2002: 195). According to Akinde, most Ivorian reggae stars like
(Tiken Jah Fakoly) have maintained loyalty to roots reggae but introduced a local flavour
through the use of native languages and French. Juxtaposing this to the current case study, the
question remains what local elements and subcultures are inherent in Ajegunle Raga which roots
reggae and Jamaican dancehall traditions complement? This is a gap this research intends to help
fill. Ajegunle Raga as earlier noted draws a lot of its celebrity representations, advocacies and
lyrical terminologies from roots reggae but there seems to be no specific commitment to any
religious ideal of Rastafarianism. However, Rastafarian representations are depicted in the
wearing of dreadlocks (artistes like Daddy Showkey, Marvellous Bengy, Professor Linkin,
Raymond King and many other are on dreadlocks), using of Rasta vocabularies like Jah,
Babylon, “Irie” (almost all Ajegunle Raga use this terminologies except Daddy Fresh) and the
wearing of the Rasta appropriated gold, green and red colours (Marvellous Bengy, Daddy
Showkey and Baba Fryo put on caps or use scarves of this colour).

However, Ajegunle Raga’s contradictory blend of Rastafarianism with hard core
Christian expressions seems to indicate that the artistes are simply sympathetic to the Rasta cause
and are not Rastafarians at heart. This is observed in most of Daddy Showkey’s lyrics and videos
where he uses words like “Jah Jehovah”, “Hosanna” and “Hallelujah” which are not only Rasta
vocabulary. The oxymoronic blending of “Jah” and “Jehovah” is particularly interesting because
“Jah” refers to Haile Sellasie, the Rasta God and “Jehovah”, the Christian God. It can therefore
be assumed that most of the Rastafarian and reggae representations are relocalised into the
Ajegunle and Nigerian social and religious context.

Ajegunle Raga further takes on the political engagement of reggae through its criticism of
poverty, violence, ethnic conflicts and corruption in Ajegunle and the Nigerian society. Daddy
Showkey in his song *Fire! Fire!* declares that the Nigerian nation is under fire because of corruption and it is only a ghetto soldier who can clear the inferno:

```
Fire! Fire! In our country!
Give me plenty water
Make I quench the fire...
```

Consequently, Ajegunle Raga takes on deep political and social commentary on the Nigerian condition and how it affects the ghetto dwellers. Lewd lyrics and the expressions of masculinities in Jamaican dancehall are vividly displayed in Ajegunle Raga during the second era of the evolution of Ajegunle Raga. Tales of gangsterism, prostitution, drug abuse, sex, crime and survival in the ghetto all add to the street credibility in the music. According to Daddy Showkey, *(Ghetto Soldier)* it is only a soldier that survives in the ghetto because of the economic and social problems prevalent in the ghetto. Marvellous Bengy accentuates this message in the lyrics of the song *Life in Ajegunle*:

```
If you are living in Ajegunle, make you no, make you
shine your eye well well. Look you left and look you
right cos you may be the next victim.  
```

Marvellous Bengy also tells the tales of killings, the gun culture, prostitution, fraud and drug abuse in Ajegunle. Prof Linkin in his songs *Jogodo* and *Charlieman* gives a life display of his dreadlocked counterparts smoking marijuana and expressing its hallucinating effect in dance while telling stories on the marijuana business and its effects on youths in Ajegunle. Mad Melon and Mountain Black take a more positive approach by showing how the ghetto soldier is proud to make a living out of the informal economy by being a “Danfo Driver”. In fact, they constantly emphasize that their vocation as “Danfo Drivers” makes them influential beyond Ajegunle.

---

4 This simply means if you are living in Ajegunle you have to be vigilant so you do not become a victim of violence or criminal activities.
especially in other areas of Lagos like Mushin Olosha, Alagbado, Alaba and Ojuelegba. The idea of the “danfo” driver satisfied with his occupation and happy as a product of the ghetto is resonated in Daddy Showkey’s *Dyna* where he says “If you see my mama (Hossanna)/ tell am say oh (Hossana) / I dey for ghetto (Hossana)/ I no getti problem (Hossana)” implying the Ghetto is a safe haven for all. Rayan T expresses this by saying “Nothing dey par for the ghetto where we dey” meaning we have got no problem in the ghetto.

Rather humorously, Raymond King in his song *Ajegunle Holiday* says Ajegunle is a paradise and if you want to go on a summer holiday come to Ajegunle because of its friendly and hospitable abode. He makes a rather interesting argument in his song when he asserts that most Ajegunle dwellers are regarded as never do wells and criminals but they are still happy. This brings us to the question of the negotiations of identity done within Ajegunle music, a reassertion of the self that the economic, social and environmental constructions of society have denied. This research therefore turns now to examine Ajegunle Raga, its representation of Ajegunle and its adoption of reggae in telling the story of poverty, marginalization and a partial victory against such odds through an investment in musical creativity.

Hip Hop can never be divorced from the origins of Ajegunle raga. In fact, Stephanie Shonekan records that pioneering Ajegunle artistes like Daddy Showkey and Daddy Fresh (Fresh has a lot of R and B inclinations in his raga) began playing rap music in 1986 with their crew, the Pretty Busy Boys comprising of Sexy Pretty and Cashman Davis. It is therefore imperative to note that Ajegunle Raga and Hip Hop culture share a similar youthful zest and insubordination expressed in music and dance. Hip hop is a subculture that emerged from the block parties of the poor South Bronx neighbourhood in New York in the 1970s. As chronicled by Emmet G Price III, the replacement of an earlier middle class neighbourhood of Pre-World War II Bronx by a
population of poor blacks, Latinas and Latinos pioneered the Hip Hop revolution. On the one hand, the construction of the Cross Bronx Express Way which was to serve suburban commuters “devastated the once stable community, pummelling some 60,000 homes” (Price 2006: 6) forcing affected families to relocate. On the other hand, Robert Moses, the city construction coordinator who led the demolition, replaced single family apartment with high rise building which were given at subsidized rates to “fleeing working and middle class families who could not secure the highly competitive housing” (Price 2006: 17)

A culmination of these factors turned Bronx, a middle class community once populated by Jews, Italians and Irish, into a ghetto of despair where street gangs, crimes and drugs combined with filth, dirt, poverty, frustration and exploitation (from government and even the slum lord) that institutionalized a culture of violence:

By the 1960’s the South Bronx was regarded as a leading headquarters of street gang violence. Numerous brutal gang encounters, particularly around intra territorial rivalries and sexual assault of female victims by male gang members were common headlines in local newspaper (Keyes 2002: 46).

Hip Hop was born out of a need to redirect this gangsterism into a creative energy exhibited in Djing (disc jockeying), MCing (rap), dance routines by the B- Boy and B- girls (the “B” means break, a dance routine) and Graffiti, the art form that accompanied the music cum performance revolution. The documentary Rap: Looking for a Perfect Beat describes hip hop from the point of view of its pioneers as a subculture representing a creative response to the social decadence of South Bronx and in the words of Grand Master Flash, an expression with “no constrictions” (Shaw 2004).
As Price states, by the 1980’s, rap music began to take on a militancy that questioned social segregation and retold the stories of gangsterism, sex, drugs and crimes which its pioneers sought to avert. Influenced by radical political lyrics of Gil Scot Erin (a Jazz poet) in the 1970’s, “gangsta” rap drew material from “the worsening problems facing African American communities and especially young black men” (Quinn 2005: 19) to present a “socially valid testament of ghetto reality, slotting easily into preconceptions about black ghetto realness: authenticity with no uplift” (Quinn 2005: 21). Byron Hunt in *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* examines the reinforcement of black stereotypes within rap music. Featuring interviews with rap pioneers, musicians, scholars, enthusiasts and cultural critics, Hunt highlights how hip hop culture after the “golden ages” has constantly propagated gun culture, homophobia, gangsterism and an extreme objectification of women as sex subjects. Hunt however neglects the reality that Hip Hop culture after the 1980’s not only emphasizes its roots in the ghetto, but it further displays street credibility and its relevance to the lyrics and performance of the rap music and Hip Hop culture.

This reggae-rap duality is but one of the several music tendencies exhibited in the Ajegunle social context. Hip Hop strikes a commonality with Ajegunle Raga not simply in the fact that both music take root in the ghetto but because Ajegunle Raga musicians inject some elements of rap in their music as exemplified in Marvellous Bengy’s *New Dance Remix*. Ajegunle Raga artistes (basically all of them) further maintain their street credibility by bringing tales from the streets into their music. Equally interesting is the fact that Ajegunle Raga creates a complete musical theatre with its competing dance routines to accompany the activities of the musicians, DJ’s and music prod

---

5 The ‘golden age’ of Hip hop is the period between the 1980s and 1990s where mainstream hip hop experienced greater creativity, innovation and diversity.
Chapter Three - Sources and Fieldwork

This research utilized mainly primary data in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted among musicians, music marketers, media personalities and academicians located in Ajegunle, Alaba and other parts of Lagos. This research benefitted from personal interviews with propagators and eyewitnesses to the Ajegunle music revolution who were willing to tell their stories. Notwithstanding, logistical challenges occurred that slowed down the process of the research; preventing access to two media personalities very relevant to this research. In addition to this, power tussles between the subjects of the research played out in form of biases in the oral data collected.

David Henige observes that “the most outstanding characteristic of oral research is its unpredictability (Henige 1985: 39) evident in form of inconsistent chronology, biases and the power dynamics of interviewing. In the course of the fieldwork, several biases were identified in the oral data collected from different generations of Ajegunle Raga artistes and a few Yoruba residents of Ajegunle. The researcher observed divergent perspectives on causes of the decline of Ajegunle Raga from the 2000s. For members of the Galala era, later generations of Ajegunle artistes lack the creativity and perseverance required for the production of good music. On the flip side, the musicians of the Konto Suo and Konto Alanta era consider this decline a condition necessitated by media unfriendliness and the reduced financial and moral support from the “elders of Ajegunle Raga.” In the same vein, traditional Yoruba leaders interviewed ascribed the development of the vibrant music culture in Ajegunle to poverty, joblessness, crime and

---

6 The Galala era, the pioneering era in Ajegunle Raga began in the late 1990s and fizzled out in the late 1990s.
7 The Konto Suo era began in 2000 and ended towards 2006.
8 The Konto Alanta era started developing in 2003 but reached full maturation in 2006 and it is still evolving till date.
excessive love for jollification associated with the ordinary Ajegunle resident. Thus, the music revolution in Ajegunle is viewed as antithetical to mainstream Yoruba culture and only suitable to the musical tastes of the Niger Delta and Igbo residents of Ajegunle. This perception of Ajegunle Raga by some of the Yoruba residents of Ajegunle is reflective of the subtle ethnic tensions between the Yoruba and non-Yoruba groups in Ajegunle.

In some of the oral interviews conducted, the researcher asked leading questions in a “cleverly executed flank attack” (Henige 1985: 55) to gather perspectives (of the researched) on topics that would otherwise be considered sensitive. An example of this is the power tussle between Daddy Showkey and Daddy Fresh over the kingship of Ajegunle Raga. Many of the respondents maintained a sort of neutrality on the strained relationship between the two but emphasised their pioneering contributions to the development of Ajegunle Raga (particularly the influence of Daddy Showkey on the rise of Ajegunle Raga to national prominence). However, during personal interviews with both artistes, the researcher strategically introduced this topic into the conversations and observed that both artistes pursued their own agenda by claiming the kingship over Ajegunle Raga. In conditions as this, Henige recommends that the historian should be a “wise stranger”:

On an intellectual level, he should accept the fact but, because his conception of historical truth may differ from that of the community, he cannot undertake in good conscience to impose his views on theirs. At the same time, he will or should be aware that the evidence on which to arrive at a firm judgement is not adequate and perhaps never can be to the extent he thinks necessary (Henige 1985: 64).

While the researcher gave unconscious signals that should have provided cues on how some questions posed should be answered, the respondents still provided their genuine perspectives on questions that bordered on their perception of poverty and success. An example
is when the respondents were asked “how is life in Ajegunle” or “how is survival in Ajegunle”, very few emphasised the aspects of poverty. A large number of the respondents claimed to be from poor homes but maintained that living in Ajegunle is similar to living anywhere else in Lagos. The researcher could sense the respondents’ resentment to being referred to as poor or residents of a ghetto and as such any attempt to drive home the point was met with resistance. Thus, in finding out details on the experience of poverty and marginalisation from the respondents, the author simply asked questions like “What was growing up like?” and similar questions that indirectly sought for their personal reflections on life and survival in Ajegunle.

This research also utilized transcribed lyrical texts and music videos of Ajegunle Raga artistes to identify the expressions of Ajegunle self and influences from the African diasporic musical subcultures within the ambience of the music. The rationale behind this combination of music videos and the lyrical text is to highlight the cultural expressions of Ajegunle, Rastafarianism and Hip Hop in both text and performance. While it is important to note that music videos are not necessarily a reliable resource for studying a people’s identity (because a large part of the contents are scripted and dramatized for commercial purposes), Ajegunle Raga, just like its music videos, provides a space for the expression of the Ajegunle self that society misunderstands and the social constructions of society alienates. It is therefore observed that all the music videos of Ajegunle Raga artistes that were considered validated the ideas on Ajegunle already represented in the oral and secondary sources. On the one hand is a tale of hardship and survival in Ajegunle which has earned it the name “Jungle city”, “Ilu gbo gbo”\(^9\), “Ilu isobo”\(^10\)

\(^{9}\) Ilu gbogbogbo is a Yoruba word meaning a place where everything and anything can happen.
\(^{10}\) Ilu Isobo is a Yoruba word meaning land of the Urhobo.
and “AJ city” and on the other hand is a celebration of dance innovations, street credibility and the survivalist self of the Ajegunle bred in the character of “the ghetto solider”
Chapter Four- History of Ajegunle Raga and Popular Music in Nigeria

The expression of intercultural elements in African popular music is a phenomenon Impey Angela attributes to the cultural spill over’s from trade, colonisation, urbanisation and what Collins terms “the transatlantic musical feedback cycle.”(Collins 1989: 221) Whether from Arabic, European or transatlantic musical influences, African popular music is “a site for adaptation, assimilation, eclecticism, appropriation and experimentation.” (Impey 2000: 116). These intercultural exchanges particularly at the coast of Lagos have largely influenced the evolution and development of genres like Juju, Highlife, Fuji and later appropriations of West Indian popular music into the African context.

Akin Euba examines popular music genres (particularly those unique to the Yoruba) in Nigeria as neo traditional rhythms created from a blend of traditional Yoruba music with Christian and Western musical influences on the one hand and Islamic and Arabic musical influences on the other hand. Juju, Highlife, Fuji and its “cousins”- Apala, Waka and Sakara are contextualised into these broad frameworks. Fuji music which surfaced in the Nigerian music scene of the 1980’s shares strong stylistic affinities with Sakara, Waka (sung by females) and Apala music- Islamic ceremonial music deeply rooted in the “Ajisaari” music11. Fuji, the most “modernised, popularised and commercialized version” (Euba 1989: 12) of these Islamic cum Yoruba musical genres evolved as a modification of “Ajisaari” music. It however transversed its neo traditional roots by introducing “European musical instruments like jazz sets, synthesizers and electronic keyboards, microphones and heavy amplification systems” (Omojola 2006: 75) into the intricate dance rhythms and street credibility sustained in the music from 1980’s through

11 A wake up song for Muslims to break their fast and eat their ‘Saari’ in the morning
the 1990’s. Also interesting is the shift of the lyrics to accommodate obscene and vulgar (Omojola 2006: 77) themes that were deemed more commercially friendly.

Bode Omojola ascribes this accommodation of “extra- Ajisaari” elements to the urban context in which Fuji music developed. Earlier Fuji music performances were held in the Oje, Aperin, Yeye, Ituntaba and Alapo slum areas in the city of Ibadan. It is interesting to note that Fuji musicians like Wasiu Ayinde Marshal, Adewale Ayuba and Wasiu Alabi Pasuma were street entertainers either in Lagos or Ibadan who rose to the limelight through community patronage. The roots of Fuji music in urban settings allowed for a design of lyrical texts that were “tailored towards the social needs and aesthetic taste of the urban working class (Omojola 2006: 76).” Themes revolving around sex, poverty, crimes and communal identity were favourably reflected in Fuji music from the1980’s.

While Omojola studies Fuji music in the context of Ibadan, the centrality of Lagos and Ibadan to the development of Fuji music and other Nigerian popular music genres is pertinent to the understanding of the historical and social context in which Ajegunle raga evolved. Lagos doubled as an attraction to up and coming musicians who wanted to develop and commercialise their music and a multicultural centre where diverse linguistic and cultural forms intermixed to influence musical creativity. The history of Lagos is an account of the several waves of migration of the Yoruba, non Yoruba and non Nigerian groups to the coast of Lagos for political, social and economic reasons. Defining the Lagos identities requires a recognition of the cultural eclecticism of Lagos triggered by the pioneering economic and political activities of the Awori, the political overlordship of Benin in the 1600’s; the introduction of West Indian and European
modernisation by the Aguda,\textsuperscript{12} Saro\textsuperscript{13} and British respectively, and also other economic and cultural influences of other Yoruba and non-Nigerian groups at the coast. This is reflected in the development of Juju, Fuji and Highlife music. Oral traditions trace the beginnings of Sakara to the Yoruba migrants in Bida, a Nupe town or to Ilorin. Nonetheless, the first commercialized recording of Sakara was produced in Lagos by Wilts and Busch on 21\textsuperscript{st} August, 1931. With the metamorphosis of Sakara and Weere into Fuji music, pioneers like Kolawole Ayinla (aka Kollington) and Sikiru Ayinde Balogun (aka Barrister) developed their crafts in Lagos from the late 1960’s through the 1970’s. As Asobele iterates:

\begin{quote}
The little Kolawole was brought to Lagos when he was still a baby…. But before then, he has been long in the exploration of Weere and as early as 1962, he won the first prize in Dr Nnamdi Azikwe’s competition organised for Weere singers all over the federation (Asobele 2002: 76).
\end{quote}

Barrister who hails from Ibadan was also born and bred in the Ita faji area of Lagos Island in 1948 where the majority of Yoruba Muslim population reside. What then is this magnetism between popular music genres and the urban setting of Lagos? Is it purely a result of the status of Lagos as a commercial nerve centre of Nigeria, its position as a coastal city or its diverse peopling and culture?

Waterman provides an answer to this puzzle through his exploration of the nexus between cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in the development of musical genres in Lagos (especially in the evolution of Juju music). Music in the Lagos of the early 1930’s served as a means of expressing and reasserting the unique identities of the different peoples of Lagos especially in a context where a superiority complex was displayed by the Saro and Aguda against

\textsuperscript{12} Ex-slave returnees from Brazil and the West Indies.
\textsuperscript{13} “Recaptive” Yoruba ex-slaves from Sierra Leone.
the indigenous Lagosians called the Omo Eko. The Omo Eko reasserted their Yoruba identity through an addition of Bini and Dahomean cultural performances into Yoruba traditional music. The Aguda, introduced Brazilian architecture, cuisine and also guitar works which formed the roots of Juju music. Finally, the Saro, musically reinforced their Western-influenced identity in the Yoruba style classical music (also categorised into the genre called Nigerian art music) of Ekundayo Philips and R.A Coker. It is against these diverse cultural influences that Juju emerged as a blend of Asiko music, palm wine guitar works and African percussion.

Furthermore, the status of Lagos as a coastal city allowed for several cultural exchanges along the coast. Well-travelled Kru sailors (Liberians) who later became residents in the Lagos Island area behind Tinubu square introduced the palm wine guitar techniques from Freetown to Fernando Po and this marked the beginnings of Asiko and Juju music in Lagos. Early Juju music as evident in the works of Tunde King in 1932 added “syncretic Christian hymnody, Asiko drumming and Ijinlee Yoruba poetic” (Waterman 1990: 155) into the palm wine music framework. Juju musicians from the 1950’s have simply made instrumental, rhythmic and performance modifications to the foundational Juju format. I.K Dairo popularly known as Baba Aladura branded Juju for a wider Yoruba audience (beyond that of Lagos) through his utilization of folklores of Ilesha, Ekiti and Ondo in the lyrics of the music in the late 1950’s. Dairo, often regarded as the founder of modern Juju music is renowned for his introduction of the accordion into Juju music.

A major revolution to Juju music began in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s with the entry of Ebenezer Obey and Sunny Ade into the Juju music scene. Obey whose music is greatly influenced by I.K Dairo’s style improved his guitar works and added a tinge of country and soul music into the melodic vocal rendition of his highlife-flavoured Juju. Sunny Ade also applied
this multimedia approach to Juju music by forming a large band (about twenty members or more) that heavily invested in traditional percussion instruments, guitar works and choreographic dancing which he calls the “synchro system”. Shina Peters in the 1980’s displayed youthful zest (Shina mania) to his fast paced Afro-Juju which appealed to a youthful audience in its rhythm, lyrics and performance.

Just like Shina Peters (who blends Afro beat and Fuji elements into Afro Juju), later propagators of Juju music explored new terrains by either introducing a new instrument, injecting a new musical genre into the Juju framework or simply giving it a different name without making any remarkable changes. A notable example is Dayo Kujore who calls his sort of juju “soko” but plays an Afro juju garnished with slangs. In the same manner, Y.K Ajao in 1980 named his style of Juju “Makossa Superstar” because of his incorporation of Makossa rhythmic elements into of Juju music. The evolution of Juju to accommodate other music forms further testifies to its appeal to different social classes from its roots in the 1930’s. Drawing its inspiration from the palm wine music of the Liberian Kru sailors, Juju evolved from being the music of area boys of the Saro-Ologbowo quarters of Lagos in the 1920’s to a praise song for elites. Consequently, Waterman ascribes the ‘big man’ celebrity identity to Juju and Fuji musicians - a lyrical and performance technique in which “the singer becomes the subject of his own panegyrics” (Waterman 1990: 23) reproducing his own celebrity identity through praising others.

Highlife music, a West African music genre popularised in Lagos of the 1950s also catered to an elite audience. Waterman observes that “advertisements in Lagos newspapers suggest that the primary patrons of dance orchestras during the early 1930s were educated African elites” (Waterman 1990:44). Interestingly, the terminology, “highlife” developed in the
context of the Ghanaian music scene of the 1920’s where “asiko” and “gombey”\textsuperscript{14} music were appropriated by high class orchestras to serve an elite audience. The name “highlife” was the designation the poor gave this appropriation of their street music by sophisticated bands for an elite audience. The existence of European style brass bands in Lagos in the 1930’s paved the way for the development of the highlife as a music genre in the 1950’s. However the efforts of E.T Mensah and his Tempo band in introducing Afro Cuban percussion swing and calypso horns into highlife music established highlife as a West African music genre by the 1950’s. Taking a cue from Ghanaian highlife revolution, Nigerian highlife maestros like Bobby Benson, Victor Olaiya and Rex Lawson launched an urban sound played in hotels and nightclubs for an elite audience.

Collins refers to the re-occurrence of West Indian and Afro American musical influences in popular music in Africa as a trans-Atlantic musical feedback cycle where music genres like gombey, maringa, asiko, kokomba, Juju, Highlife and some other West African popular music genres are fusions of African rhythmic elements with Afro American and Afro Caribbean musical forms (that are also African inspired). Highlife music therefore draws musical elements from this feedback cycle. One of the influences came from the synthesis of musical forms between the Kru and foreign sailors who designed palm wine music in the “low class deck side palm wine bars where foreign and local sailors” drank palm wine (Collins 1989: 223). Palm wine music predominantly communicated in Creole and Pidgin English was a “coastal and urban phenomenon” (Collins 1989:223) that was later localised and called Native Blues in Nigeria and Ashanti blues in Ghana.

\textsuperscript{14} Gombey is a folk tradition that blends African and Caribbean dance and music forms
Another influence on Highlife music according to Collins came from brass and fife bands associated with European forts dotted along the West African Coast. In this context, the European march time was blended with African rhythmic elements to make it danceable for a West African audience. This danceable extract was called “adaha” and later “Kokomba”, an improvised version by the poor. Kokomba developed into a West African music genre from the 1920’s till its decline in the 1940’s. Interestingly, Kokomba highlife further “diffused eastwards out of the Akan speaking areas into the Western Nigeria of the 1930’s” (Collins 1989: 224) where it merged with palm wine music to create Juju music. The last inspiration came from dance band highlife which had earlier been discussed as the elitist version of highlife music that dominated the Lagos music scene of the 1950’s.

Collins notes that a new wave of Afro American and Afro Caribbean musical influences flowed into the Nigerian music scene between the 1970’s and 1980’s. This does not deny the influence of Jazz to the development of Afro beat, Afro rock and Afro Jazz genres in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Coker emphasises that a genre like Afro beat prides itself on a fusion of funk and Jazz with highlife and African percussion. Similarly, Asobele notes the impact of pop, soul and funk on the music of Charly Boy, Felix Liberty, Onyeka Onwenu, and several other Nigerian pop sensations in the late 1970’s through the 1980’s. Hip hop and reggae music, the core influences on Ajegunle music according to Shonekan surfaced in the Nigerian music scene of the late 1970’s and the 1980’s developed as an expression of solidarity with the youthful music resistance displayed in reggae and Hip Hop music and cultures.

It is noteworthy that the influence of reggae in the Africa context functioned not just as a musical adaptation but as a source of reinforcing the African identity. In the works of Frank Tenaile on reggae in Africa, he observes that Afro reggae, took on different degrees of reggae
radicalism in the Cote D’Ivoire and Nigerian contexts. Sonny Okosun, who recognises the predominance of African rhythmic elements in reggae music, adapted the liberation message of reggae and reggae instrumentation into traditional Bini music and Western rock. Alpha Blondy due to his marital and religious (Rastafarianism) connections to Jamaica demonstrates the cultural and redemptive messages of Rastafarianism in his celebrity identity and music. As Tenaile notes:

> Putting this philosophy onstage, he sometimes stands at the mike holding the Bible and the Koran in his hands. For the Rasta man, fond of symbol, there must be reconciliation. He does not hesitate to provoke, as when he went to sing in Marrakech wearing a Star of David and braving the accusation (printed in some papers) of having ‘sold out to international Zionism. (Tennaille 2000: 152-153)

In Nigeria, Afro reggae took on full swing in the 1980’s with reggae hits from The Mandators and Evi Edna Ogholi- Ogosi both releasing albums between 1987 and 1988. Other artistes like Terrakota, Majek Fashek, Ras Kimono and Daniel Wilson adapted reggae to the Nigerian context but retained a reggae influenced by wearing dreadlocks, engaging in commentary on politics (Majek Fashek: “So Long”), poverty (The Mandators. “Rat Race”), street credibility (Majek Fashek, “I come from the Ghetto”), dance routine (Ras Kimono, “Rhumba Stylee”) love, women and sex (Alex Zito, “Walakolombo”) and also the use of Rastafarian terminologies and colours.

While little literature exists on the reggae phenomenon in Ajegunle, oral sources, the bulk of which were collected from pioneers and propagators of Ajegunle Raga, describes the genre as an expression of the Ajegunle self, survival realities and dance innovations within the ambience of reggae music. Nicco Gravity succinctly describes Ajegunle Raga as a “fusion of Ajegunle
experiences, pidgin English and reggae” (Nicco Gravity, August 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2011). Other sources agree that the uniqueness of the Ajegunle appropriation of reggae lies in its incorporation of African percussion and rhythmic elements into the tales of survival, exuberance and creativity within the Ajegunle context. Simply put, the Ajegunle “local content” which comprise of Pidgin English and slangs of Ajegunle extraction and performance of the music is added to the instrumentation and activism of reggae. Ajegunle raga no doubt is cultural solidarity around music and dance and reflects the similar histories of poverty and marginalization shared between Kingston and Ajegunle. Thus, Ajegunle raga musicians found a voice within reggae music and identified with a music genre that shared their reality. According to John Oboh aka Mighty Mouse “Music is our way of expression, telling our story and bringing attention to our locality” (Mighty Mouse, August 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2011).

Hip Hop can however never be divorced from the beginnings of Ajegunle raga. In fact, pioneering Ajegunle artistes like Daddy Showkey and Daddy Fresh (Fresh has a lot of R and B inclinations in his raga) began playing rap music in 1986 in their group, the Pretty Busy Boys (Sexy Pretty and Cash man Davis were also members). Shonekan in his study of the evolution of rap music in the Nigeria of the 1980’s refers to Daddy Showkey and Baba Fryo, renowned reggae artistes as rappers:

Early Nigerian rap artists like Junior and Pretty, Daddy Showkey and Baba Fryo used humour, metaphor and rhyme to comment on the state of early 1990’s Nigerian society… Around the same time Nigerian reggae/rap artists, Daddy Showkey (2004) spoke about the reality of the ghetto for Nigerian urban youth in the song (Shonekan 2011: 13-14).

The reggae- rap duality is but one of the several music tendencies exhibited in the Ajegunle social context. Musicians like KC Presh, Saheed Osupa, Felix Liberty and Mike Okri
(as claimed by Daddy Showkey) either grew up or honed their skills in Ajegunle. The prominence of reggae in Ajegunle was also a response to the reggae Rastafarian current that flowed into Nigeria in the 1970s. King notes that Jamaican reggae stars toured Africa in the late 1970s and even featured African themes in their lyrics:

In the late 1970’s several reggae artistes including Bob Marley and the Wailers and Jimmy Cliff toured Africa. In 1979, the Wailer released ‘Survival’ an album that addressed the political turmoil in Africa. African militants chanted the album’s hit song ‘Zimbabwe’ during the civil war in Rhodesia…. The popularity of both reggae and Rastafari in Africa influence some Africans to wear dreadlocks, smoke ganja and do their best to imagine they are Jamaicans (Tennaille 2000: 152-153).
Despite the influence of the reggae – rap current of the 1970’s on the development of Ajegunle Raga in the late 1980’s, the unstable socio-political and economic climate of Nigeria in the 1990’s influenced not only the thematic content of the music but, in the views of Albert Oyikeilome\textsuperscript{15}, necessitated the choice of reggae as the weapon for the transmission of the emotions of the urban poor (in this context the Ajegunle residents) in these periods of economic and political disorders. Oyikeilome notes that the adaptation of reggae by Ajegunle artistes was necessitated by doctrines of freedom and cultural renaissance associated with reggae music. Thus, as Nigeria struggled through national disunity, political instability, corruption and several oscillations between civilian and military rule, Ajegunle Raga utilized reggae music for commentary on the Nigerian condition. This is also buttressed by the fact that the thematic and performance content of the Galala era focused more on sharing the survival realities of Ajegunle and redefining the negative stereotypes against Ajegunle. In addition to this is a commentary on Nigerian politics and the role of the ghetto soldier in “quenching the fire” (Daddy Showkey: Fire Fire!).

The period between 1983 and 2007 has been described by Toyin Falola and Matthew Heton as the years of civil society in Nigeria due to the effort by student, religious and civil rights organisation to counter military dictatorship and ensure a transition to democratic rule was eventually realised in 1999. Prior to 1983, Nigeria encountered national disunity accentuated by the Biafran war (1967-1970) and the escalation of economic mismanagement and corruption triggered by the oil boom of the 1970’s. As Falola and Heton note:

\begin{quote}
The oil boom rather than providing an impetus to grow the productive sector of the Nigerian economy instead encouraged a rise in imports...The oil boom also resulted in widespread corruption on the part of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Personal Interview with Albert Oyikelome, Senior Lecturer, University of Lagos, Nigeria, August 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2011.
government officials responsible for the collection and allocation of revenues. The oil boom led to the development of a rentier state’ in Nigeria (Falola and Heton 2008: 183).

As massive corruption ravaged the administration of Gowon, the succeeding Murtala-Obasanjo administration emphasised the need for national unity through the National Youth Service Corp scheme and the hosting of FESTAC\textsuperscript{16}, an international festival of black arts and culture in 1977. These efforts however did not erase the corrupt practices that had infiltrated government parastatals and officials. Neither could civilian rule of Shehu Shagari in 1979 nor the later military takeovers salvage the situation. It is interesting to note that despite the high handedness and the extreme dictatorial tendencies associated with military rule of the Buhari-Idiagbon administration (1984-1985), this period was bearable compared to the military rules of Ibrahim Badamasi Babaginda (IBB, often called the Evil Genius) and Sani Abacha. In addition to the human rights crimes that characterised these regimes, extreme corruption and poverty became the order of the day. The implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program in June 1983 required some economic belt tightening for the payment of national debts but this in turn affected the ordinary Nigerian:

\begin{quote}
...the SAP also caused serious hardships for Nigerian citizens and failed to achieve many of its anticipated results. Unemployment levels increased markedly under the SAP, for a variety of reasons. While the rising cost of imports encouraged local outsourcing by industry, it also caused much Nigerian industry to operate at below-capacity production levels (Falola and Heton 2008: 183).
\end{quote}

In addition to the unfavourable aftermaths of the SAP to the Nigerian citizens, the annulment by the Babaginda regime of the June 12, 1993 presidential election (won by M.K.O Abiola) disrupted the nascent democracy that was being nurtured in Nigeria and produced

\textsuperscript{16} FESTAC means Festival of Arts and Culture.
oppositions from civil society groups like the Nigerian Labour Union, National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and Campaign for Democracy. This period of military rule and dictatorship reached a climax with the leadership of Abacha where the corruption, extreme dictatorship and the imprisonment of anti-government opposition and activists became rampant. According to Falola and Heton, the sudden death of Abacha in 1998 paved the way for the eventual transition to democratic rule under Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. It is evident from the socio-political environment of Nigeria from the 1970 till 1999 that the fate of the urban poor was worsened by the economic crisis of the period and the widespread corruption therein. Though, there is no direct reference to these events forming the inspiration for Ajegunle Raga, the experience of poverty further worsened by economic crisis and mismanagement is most felt by the urban poor and Ajegunle residents form no exception.

It must be emphasised at this juncture that music was very essential in the political activism of Nigeria at this period. Falola and Heton note the role of Afro beat as a weapon against political oppression and economic mismanagement of post independent Nigeria. Particularly in the 1970’s and 1980’s, Afro beat criticised government corruption, police and arm force brutality, colonialism and the general state of politics in hits like “ITT”, “Coffin for Head of State”, “Teacher no teach me nonsense” and “Shuffering and Shimiling”. The Kalakuta republic, “a commune that Fela Anikulapo Kuti declared independence from the government of Nigeria” (Falola and Heton 196) was also instrumental to authenticating the sort of resistance Afro beat sought to convey. The influence of Afrobeat as a weapon no doubt inspired later
forms of anti-government popular music that sprung up in the 1990’s. No wonder Olatunji classifies the music of African China\textsuperscript{17} as “Yabis” music.

Integral to the Ajegunle adaptation of reggae is the attempt to replicate in Ajegunle, the activities of Buka, a dancehall in the Apapa area of Lagos where reggae artistes like Majek Fashek and Ras kimono performed live shows. Mighty Mouse, already a DJ in Ajegunle began experimenting with dub reggae; Johhy Nabena aka Johnny Nabs also a DJ provided the Raga Dub Chapel at Wilmer as the space for experimentation while DJ Devo provided the instruments. Mighty Mouse acknowledges the help of family members and friends in the earlier financing of activities at the Raga Dub Chapel. By 1991 after the split of the Pretty Busy Boys crew and the specialization of Daddy Fresh and Daddy Showkey in reggae music and Cashman Davis and Pretty in rap, the raga phenomenon kicked off in earnest.

The only element left was the incorporation of the Ajegunle local content within the framework of reggae music. The expression of the Ajegunle self in the music was necessitated by the desire to redefine Ajegunle residents as an abode of creativity as opposed to been a den of criminals. Coupled with this is the use of Pidgin English (as the official language of communicating the Ajegunle ideal) and Urhobo drumming into dub reggae. Music therefore became a “way of bringing attention to the locality” (Daddy Fresh, August 16\textsuperscript{th}, 2011) and Ajegunle Raga—“a fusion of Ajegunle experiences, pidgin English and reggae” (Nicco Gravity, August 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2011).

Equally integral to the understanding of Ajegunle Raga is the centrality of dance to the naming and classification of the music. Though, there is a consensus among all the respondents

\textsuperscript{17}Who is not an Ajegunle artiste but an Orile musician (still in the Ajeromi Ifelodun local government) but performs Ajegunle Raga and sites the realities of Ajegunle in his music.
that Ajegunle Raga is strongly influenced by reggae and Hip Hop traditions, Nicco Gravity emphasises that the genre has also adopted the names of dance routines created in Ajegunle to classify the music and its periodization as it evolved. Differently put, the dance routines and music provide a symbiotic service to one another with the rhythm of music determining its accompanying dance routine and the dance forming the nomenclature for historicizing the music. It is as a result of this concept that Ajegunle Raga has historicised into three broad periods- Galala, Konto Suo and Konto Alanta eras marked by distinct lyrical and performance contents.

Figure 5: Daddy Showkey aka King of Ajegunle Raga
As the Raga Dub chapel churned out musical talents like Daddy Fresh and Daddy Showkey, the major roadblock to the recognition of Ajegunle Raga in the Nigerian music scene was the perception of Ajegunle residents as criminals and no do wells. Subsequent to the early 1990’s, Ajegunle Raga artistes received no media attention neither did they get air play on radio stations. In an interview with Daddy Fresh, he reveals that it was better to be silent on the Ajegunle status and simply allow the music to pave the way because “Ajegunle was in the dark musically and nobody wanted to associate with us” (Daddy Fresh, August 16th, 2011). What radio stations denied became discovered through music shows that provided an opportunity for Ajegunle artistes to hone their skills. Important to this revolution are the contributions of renowned DJ’s who were produced in Ajegunle; the likes of Steve Kadiri, Grandmaster Lee, DJ Alex O, Ben Omoge and ace broadcasters like Dayo Adeneye alias D1 and Kehinde Ogungbe alais Keke, all who helped spread of Ajegunle raga beyond the ghetto. Artistes like Daddy Fresh began to gain media attention at the Nigerian Music Carnival in the 1990’s where he performed alongside other Nigerian artistes like Weird Mc, Majek Fashek, Blackky and Ras Kimono. As usual, he did not mention his roots in Ajegunle but allowed his talent to pave the way for him. His impressive rendition of his single Follow me go dancehall drew the attention of Keke and D1 who aired him on OGBC Fm. This launched the career of Daddy Fresh and also brought his Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN) awards as the Best Male Vocalist artistes and new album in 1992 and 1993 respectively.

Respondents like Mighty Mouse, Wisdom King and virtually all Ajegunle Raga artistes however claim that the rise of Ajegunle raga to national and eventually international recognition began with the coming of Daddy Showkey into Ajegunle music scene with his Move on Move on Daddy Showkey hit in 1994. Showkey’s rise to prominence began at the Lekki Sunsplash in 1994
but his formula of creating an Ajegunle-focused reggae was a true definition of Ajegunle Raga. Popularly called the king of Ajegunle Raga, Daddy Showkey who describes himself as the “key to any show” (because of his well-rounded career as a boxer, acrobat, actor and dancer) began his teenage life as a street urchin who ran away from home after the death of his father in 1979. In 1986, he joined the Pretty Busy Boys as a rap artiste and after the split of the group metamorphosed into a Raga artiste through the help of Mighty Mouse and Johhy Nabs. In addition to his hit songs, he created the Galala dance step, a mock dance of a boxer (created by him and his dancer, Iko Aleri), and also initiated the popular name “Ghetto Soldier” as the encapsulation of the Ajegunle self that the music sought to reinforce. Showkey further transplanted Ajegunle into his music by using the Ajegunle environment as his theatre for performance and Ajegunle residents as his performers in his music videos. The recognition of Daddy Showkey as the King of Ajegunle music is therefore hinged on his packaging of Ajegunle music for a national audience through his lyrics and performance.

It is against this background that the first historical period in the evolution of Ajegunle Raga is called Galala in honour of Showkey’s creation of an Ajegunle styled reggae. As earlier noted, each era in the evolution of Ajegunle raga is named after a dance routine, however the use of Galala (a brand of music which is often confused as a dance style) is due to the generalization by pioneers, propagators and even the Nigerian public that Galala and Konto are both dance routines. In a personal interview with Showkey, he clarifies this confusion by emphasising that Galala derives from two Yoruba words “Ga” meaning grow and “la” meaning progress. Galala is therefore a growing and progressing music fusing African American, Jamaican and local music while Konto is a dance routine derived from boxing. Another rationale behind sticking to the Galala nomenclature for the first period in Ajegunle Raga is because the bulk of respondents
referred to Konto music as a distinct period. In this study, Galala will be considered a distinct period in which the music names the music as opposed to the dance naming the music since popular views recognise the kingship of Showkey in the Galala era.

The Galala era which began in the early 1990’s and fizzled out by the late 1990’s featured raga artistes like Daddy Showkey, Daddy Fresh, Nicco Gravity and Baba Fryo. Even though there exists slight differences in the raga compositions of these artistes (for example Baba Fryo plays hard core Afro reggae and Daddy Fresh adds an R and B flavour to his raga ), there are thematic confluences that reflect the pioneering efforts of the artistes of this period. Besides popularising the Konto dance routine, the artistes in this era focused on political and moral themes that emphasised the survival instincts of the Ajegunle residents in the midst of poverty and marginalization. It was at this period that the coinage “Ghetto Soldier” was used to encapsulate the Ajegunle self as a victor against marginalization and poverty as opposed to their earlier categorization as criminals and drug abusers. As Showkey recounts in the song *Ghetto Soldier:*

```
In the ghetto
Life no easy for we
Life in the Ghetto isn’t easy
All the youths inna' ghetto are always busy
If you live inna the ghettto you can never be lazy....
```

In a personal interview, Nicco Gravity refers to this period as one that produced music with social relevance and good lyrical content. Several other respondents like Mighty Mouse recognise the intentions of the pioneers to correct existing stereotypes against Ajegunle and so they implemented this intent through a commentary on the politics of Nigeria (Daddy Showkey;

---

18 ‘Inna’ is the Jamaican patois for inside.
19 Ghetto Soldier by Daddy Showkey.
Fire Fire!, Baba Fryo, No kai), an appreciation for the hospitality and great family values in Ajegunle (Showkey; Dyna), a reinforcement of the confidence in the Ajegunle self (Showkey; Ghetto Soldier, Baba Fryo; Denge Pose) and a commentary on social vices (Daddy Fresh; Elerugberu and This World Na Wa, Nicco Gravity; Storyteller).

Between 2000 and 2006, a new set of Ajegunle artistes emerged with an entirely different thematic content and a slightly modified performance content. Named the Konto Suo, this period that featured artistes like Marvellous Bengy, Kinmi Ranking, Kanmi Ranking, the duo of Mad Melon and Mountain Black (popularly called Danfo Drivers), Prof Likin and Flekta Man. In this
period, a great emphasis is placed on the reinforcement of the Ajegunle self through a revelation of the street credibility in the ghetto. A bulk of the lyrical and performance content of the Konto Suo focused on crimes, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, dance routines, and sex in the ghetto. Though Marvellous Bengy had a stint with the pioneers as a resident sound engineer at the Jaoha studio and was trained by Mighty Mouse in the mid 1990’s and his first single *Life in Ajegunle* was produced at the Jaoha studio in December 2011, his categorization into this period is basically because he popularised the Suo dance step and his thematic focus is on crimes and dance in Ajegunle.

The Konto Suo period has been widely criticised by musicians of the Galala era and by a majority of Ajegunle residents interviewed for promoting poor lyrical content lacking social relevance, especially filled with lewd slangs that fit in with the Ajegunle lifestyle and restricts the brand to the ghetto audience. Innocent Uba laments that the sensual acrobatic displays, lewd lyrics and street slangs destroyed the earlier media friendliness Ajegunle Raga enjoyed and further made it unsuitable for promoting African family values. Nicco Gravity ascribes this decline to what he calls the “Nosamu street syndrome”. Nosamu, a notorious street in Ajegunle is notable for producing many of the artistes of the Konto- Suo period especially artistes promoted by music marketers like Globe Disc, Confidence Music and Rich Music who specialise in the promotion of ghetto music. As explained by Nicco Gravity, the Nosamu street syndrome orchestrated by the trio of Globe Disc, Rich and Confidence Music which took over the production of Ajegunle Raga in the beginning in 2000s sought to promote gullible artistes that produced music with no social relevance but with copious street slangs and credibility.

---

20 Jahoha studio owned by Mighty Mouse is “an informal academy for local musicians”.
21 Innocent Uba is a music marketer and the CEO of Uba Pacific records in Alaba, Lagos.
According to Nicco Gravity, it is the syndrome that drained the creativity of Ajegunle Raga artistes and made music a free-for-all affair in Ajegunle in the new millennium.

The “Nosamu syndrome” argument is however not a highly popularised perspective. Many respondents including Obi Nweke of Globe disc attribute the decline of Ajegunle Raga in the 2000’s to the diminishing creativity of the musicians and the poor media attention they gained. Although many of these artistes produced hit singles, the longevity of such compositions was not guaranteed and the probability that such singles would hit the airwaves was also slim. Another cause for decline was the gradual pigeonholing of the genre to suit just the ghetto audiences and the Niger- Deltans residents in Lagos. This does not disregard the national and international recognition of hits like Danfo Drivers by Mad Melon and Mountain Black and New Dance by Marvellous Bengy. For example, the tune Danfo Drivers was one of the sound tracks in the well acclaimed comedy film Phat Girlz (2006) by Nnegest Likke and Marvellous Bengy’s New Dance remixed by Kennis Music in 2005 was an African dancehall tune to be reckon with. The rhythm and performance of the Konto- Suo era packaged the streets rather moderately in the compositions of Marvellous Bengy but other artistes displayed groups of Ajegunle residents smoking ganja (Prof Likin’s, Charlieman and Jogodo) or engaged in extremely sensual acrobatics (as evident in Kinmi Rankin’s, Dapada). Even though, Kanmi Ranking and Flekta man emphasise moral themes in the songs selected for analysis in this research, element of sensual acrobatics still remains evident in their music, nonetheless.

The Konto Alanta era began in 2003 by artistes who played Konto music but fully matured into the Konto Alanta specialization by 2007 till date. In personal interviews with Vocal Slender, Nicco Gravity, Obi Nweke and several other respondents relevant to the Konto Alanta revolution, this period not only popularised the Alanta dance style but featured a new experiment.
with R and B and also rap music with the Ajegunle raga framework. New generation artistes who have identified the cause of the decline of Ajegunle Raga during the Konto-Suo era seek to push Ajegunle music out of its limitations to Ajegunle locality to fit into the current more commercially favourable Hip Hop and R and B craze that have dominated the Nigerian air waves in the 2000’s. Consequently, artistes like Vocal Slender, Orisha Femi, Raymond King and Rayan T perform varied functions within the Konto-Alanta era. On the one hand is the reconstruction of the Ajegunle identity as that of noble citizens, as evident in the song *Ajegunle Holiday* by Raymond King and on the other is the attempt to package Ajegunle raga for an audience beyond the ghetto as displayed in the R and B and Hip Hop flavoured music of Orisha Femi, Rayan T and Vocal Slender. According to Raymond King in *Ajegunle Holiday*:

```
I tell them in Ajegunle life is easy
And everybody dem they live freely
With the little we have we no dey worry
I tell you say Ajegunle people are friendly
Whether big, whether small, whether you no get money,
In A.J, I say we love everybody
In A.J, I say we appreciate everybody
In A.J, omo we love everybody
In A.J, we appreciated everybody
```

Though the reggae, rap and R and B experimentation has featured earlier in the Ajegunle music scene since the late 1980’s, the uniqueness of contemporary Ajegunle raga artistes lies in their effort to produce a brand that is relevant beyond Ajegunle but still attaches an umbilical cord to the Ajegunle reality. As Baba Fryo notes, the Ajegunle brand is good but lacks packaging due to poor education of the artistes, poverty and the excessive jollification associated with the average Ajegunle dweller. All these factors have limited the capacity of the Ajegunle raga artistes to compete with other Afro Hip Hop and R and B artistes who have dominated the music

22 Raymond King, *Ajegunle Holiday.*
scene in present times. Music marketers’ further attest to the need for packaging the Ajegunle brand of reggae for a more national audience beyond ghetto residents, commercial bus drivers and local bar owners who have formed the bulk of the clientele for the genre since the pioneers gradually stopped churning out music. It is in an attempt to revive Ajegunle Raga that artistes like Vocal Slender and Oritsefemi have engaged in collaborations with other musicians outside Ajegunle to tell the tale of street life (*Ghetto Red Hot* by Vocal Slender and Sound Sultan) or groan for the redemption of the masses from the oppressive Nigerian government in Oritsefemi’s *Mercies of the Lord* (in which he featured Rhymzo and Shiny).

In all, Ajegunle Raga evolves from a long chain of Nigerian popular music that has always featured an interaction of continental and intercontinental musical influences. While there have been Islamic and European and West Indian musical influences on earlier genres of Nigerian popular music, later influences came from rap and reggae in the 1970’s. This formed a newer generation of Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean musical influences that developed within urban context of Lagos. Ajegunle Raga is a product of such context and a musical dialogue with diasporic musical forms.
Chapter Five - Construction and Negotiation of Identity in Ajegunle Raga

This chapter shall highlight how Ajegunle Raga reflects the cultural diversity of Lagos and Ajegunle, transatlantic musical feedback cycle and by extension document the narratives of survival in Ajegunle. Central to this task is Charles Taylor’s conceptualisation of identity as “created in dialogue and sometimes in struggle against the identities our significant others want to recognize in us” (Taylor 1991: 33). However in the evolution of the socially constructed self and the self conscious individuality, the unending dialogue between the self and the society is inevitable and music can be a site for the expression of such conversations. Consequently, a conceptualisation of Ajegunle identity would highlight the several social narratives that have informed her description as “Ilu Isobo”23, “Ilu gbo gbo gbo”24, “Irrepressible AJ”, “Jolly city” and “Jungle city” by Lagos and Ajegunle residents and the reinforcement of the Ajegunle self noticed in the continued reference to Ajegunle residents as “Ghetto Soldiers” (a recurring terminology in the lyrics of the music) shall be considered as an integral element of the Ajegunle identity that the music helps to construct. In addition to this, the negotiation of identity within Ajegunle Raga shall be considered a subculture that utilizes music as a vehicle for the celebration of identity and also as a resistance to the misconception of Ajegunle and Ajegunle Raga by out-of the group members.

Kay Deaux taking a social constructionist perspective notes that identity is informed by social relations and activities (2006: 6). Invariably, the self is a socially constructed continuum that evolves and develops in dialogical interaction with society. It is against this assumption that Chris Kearney citing Baktin suggests that the development of consciousness takes three forms-

---

23 Ilu Isobo means land of the Urhobo.
24 Ilu gbogbogbo means a land where anything and everything can happen or a place where you can find anyone.
the others for self, the self for others and the self for self (Kearney 2003: 114). Even with the centrality of the society to the formation of the self, “we have a unique inner self which chooses what to do and how to do it” (Layder 2004: 8). Thus society informs our activities and as a result, our individuality cannot be created in isolation of society though the expression of social identities can be subcultural either in the celebration of the uniqueness of self in the context of larger society or an opposition to the construction of society

Taking a Marxist perspective, any subcultural reaction is borne out of what Edward Grabb refers to as the “elemental struggles of society” (Grabb 1997:15) informed by the economic disparities amongst classes. Consequently, a proletariat revolution is directed at correcting this inequality in society and rather ironically recreates the cycle. In the Ajegunle case study, the Marxist idea becomes relevant because Ajegunle represents a marginalized people and Ajegunle Raga (as would later be elaborated) a reaction to the inequalities in society. Beyond this, however, the Weberian idea of the causal pluralism and probability25 becomes useful in acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the inequalities in society and thus gives room for a proletarian revolution that takes the form of social solidarity bounded by factors beyond the economic. Music in the case of Ajegunle is a “habitus” for the expression of this sort of solidarity that combines economic with social and cultural capital. What then is the connection between music and the expression of identity and how does Ajegunle Raga exude this connection?

25 This idea by Max Weber states that the inequality in society is triggered by multiple factors beyond the economic.
The nexus between music and identity has preoccupied the discourse of ethnomusicology in the modern time. Timothy Rice reflecting on the relationship between music and identity emphasises the importance of music in the creation of spaces for the assertion of in-group and out-of-the group identities. In the case of the former, Rice notes the contribution of music to “self definition or self understanding” in “situations where people work in unrewarding hum-drum jobs but where musical competence provides them with a sense of pride and self worth” (Rice 2007: 21). While in the latter, music represents a collective self understanding and consequently provides a “sense of self belonging to pre-existing social groups” (Rice 2007: 23).

Theodore Gracyk notes the indispensable role of different socio-cultural contexts and vicissitudes of life on the identity produced within or through music. Gracyk further makes clear cut distinctions between identities produced in music and those developed and constructed through music. While the social and cultural influences of composers, pianists and other music producers on music ends up producing a musical identity, identities constructed through music stress the role of music in the creation of a non musical identity. She extends this argument by noting that musical preference and taste also play a key role in the construction and development of identity. Gracyk therefore in answering the question “Does everyone have a musical identity?” concludes that:

Through their association with music, memories of otherwise mundane events, times, and places seem unusually integrated and meaningful. So to the extent that a sense of self-identity literally begins with one’s memories, musics’ power to enhance and integrate selected extra musical memories contributes to the construction of self in unpredictable but powerful ways. Music serves as an unconscious principle of selection in the ongoing project of assembling an identity from the total sum of one’s past (Grayck 2004: 16)

---

26 This question is also the title of the article examined.
Simon Frith in an in-depth theoretical engagement with the concepts of music and identity describes them as mobile processes constructing an experience not necessarily reflecting a culture. Differently put, music in itself is a superstructure that evolves in the progression of the self-in-process. Subsequently an idea or experience can “take on an artistic or aesthetic form” (Frith 1996:109) not simply by being “reflective or representative of its conditions of production” (Frith 1996: 109). Juxtaposing this with music and identity, Frith notes that:

Music like identity is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; Identity like music is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics (Frith 1996: 109).

The idea that identity as constructed through music relives a social experience is represented in Andy Bennett’s focus on the significance of the locality in making popular music a space for the expression of ethnic and national identity. Though the globalisation of a local sound is often perceived as a cultural genocide, the space provided in popular music for the expression of the local within the global is what Lull calls cultural reterritorialization of popular music where local knowledge and sensibilities are incorporated into popular music and consequently different cultures claim ownership of global tunes (such as hip hop, reggae, soul and funk) because popular music is “a resource in the construction of local identities” (Bennett 2000: 63).

James Lull demonstrates this production of identities through music by acknowledging how youth subcultures “are often organised around music and its related socialising” (Lull 2005: 29). Lull notes that oppositional subcultures (Rastafarianism, punk, hip hop and deadhead) and aesthetic subcultures (jazz, flamenco, classical and salsa) are musical subcultures that have constructed either radical political or apolitical identities respectively. The centrality of music to
the development of expression of a subcultural identity has been exhaustively treated in literature. First is the fact that subcultures are always associated with the reaction of the marginalized or a frustrated group to the structure of mainstream society and such reactions take the form of music and object. Thus a subculture is defined as expressing:

... forbidden contents (consciousness of class, consciousness of difference) in forbidden forms (transgressions of sartorial and behavioural codes, law breaking, etc). They are profane articulation and they are often and significantly defined as unnatural (Hebdige 1987: 91-92).

Equally relevant to the understanding of musical subcultures is the evolution from a resistance expressed in music and materials attached to a mass produced culture that loses its initial ideological concepts to the media and wide range commercialization. In this transition from a subculture to commodification:

The transfunctionalized objects produced by the subculture become the raw material for cultural production by the mass culture industries. During this process, subcultural meanings are changed by mass producers (such as advertisers) into more marketable less radical meanings (Blair 1999: 28).

It is against this background that this chapter shall examine if Ajegunle Raga is a youth subculture and if the affiliations with reggae music and Hip Hop culture are grounded in similar ideological leanings or are simply commercially based. In the same vein, the role of music in the interaction of the social and the self and the rise beyond the socially constructed self to express the genuine self shall be examined in the lyrics, performance and narrative components of Ajegunle Raga.
Ajegunle described as “mini- Nigeria”\(^{27}\) by General Yakubu Gowon in the early 1970s is home to the Yoruba, Ijaw, Urhobo, Isoko, Igbo and Hausa peoples of Nigeria. Historical records confirm that the Ijaw who surfaced on the coast of Lagos in the 17\(^{th}\) century were amongst the first settlers in Ajegunle (this is apart from the Oyo- Yoruba who are regarded as the founders of Ajegunle) but by the 1920s, other Niger Delta ethnic groups like the Urhobo and Isoko came to the Apapa Wharf area of Lagos as house helps, peasants, domestic servants and annual workers. Kehinde Faluyi in his study of the migration patterns of different Nigerian peoples to the coast of Lagos notes that the nearness of Ajegunle to the Apapa wharf afforded these Niger Delta peoples an opportunity to build houses and become residents at Ajegunle by the 1930s. According to Margaret Peil, the Igbo who have been in Lagos before the 1920s began to migrate in large numbers to Ajegunle as a result of the heightened suspicion against the Yoruba. Though their population was reduced drastically by the late 1960s, during the outbreak of the Biafran war, Ajegunle remained a safe haven for poor and minority groups in Lagos who according to Chief S. Salami viewed Ajegunle as their home rather than the home of the Yoruba.

Studies into the ethnic attitudes of the Yoruba in Ajegunle reveal that:

> the Yoruba of Ajegunle were more prejudiced against strangers than any other ethnic groups in Ajegunle or Yoruba living elsewhere. An explanation can be given in terms of competition; Ajegunle is the only area in Lagos where the Yoruba are a numerical minority, though they remain the major house owners. The Yoruba see Lagos as their city (or their farm) and want to reap most of the benefits for themselves (Peil 1991: 44).

Notwithstanding the multi-ethnic peopling of Ajegunle, the author observes the dominance of a Yoruba cultural element of Lagos in Ajegunle especially because the Yoruba

\(^{27}\) This is General Gowon’s description of Ajegunle during his visit to the locality in the 1970’s (culled from the Official Website of the Ajeromi Ifelodun Local Government Website, http://www.ajeromi-ifelodun.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=3.
language and Pidgin English are lingua franca in Ajegunle and non-Yoruba groups resident in Ajegunle speak Yoruba fluently. This spills over into Ajegunle Raga as the bulk of Ajegunle Raga artistes who are either Urhobo, Isoko or Igbo\(^2\) use the Yoruba language in their lyrics. The table below shows the use of the Yoruba language in the lyrics of seven Ajegunle Raga artistes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTISTES</th>
<th>SONG</th>
<th>USE OF YORUBA LANGUAGE IN LYRICS</th>
<th>MEANING OF THE WORDS USED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daddy Fresh (from Abia state)</td>
<td><em>E le ru gberu e</em></td>
<td>Daddy Fresh: Ta lo le ru? Chorus: Waa gbe! Daddy Fresh: E le rug be ru e</td>
<td>This simply means the owner of this load (in the context an unwanted pregnancy) should take responsibility for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baba Fryo (from Delta state)</td>
<td><em>Notice me</em></td>
<td>Baba Fryo: Kin lo faa? Ki lo de? Kin lo sele? Te n pariwo.</td>
<td>This is just a series of questions asking what is happening and what the essence of pride is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oritshe Femi (from Delta state)</td>
<td><em>Mercies of the Lord</em></td>
<td>Anu Oluwa so ka le le awon omo re</td>
<td>This means mercies of the Lord come down on your children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mad Melon and Mountain Black (from Delta state)</td>
<td><em>Danfo Drivers</em></td>
<td>We wiwo la lagbado</td>
<td>The only English element here is ‘We’ but the entire sentence means we are recognised at Alagbado, a locality in Lagos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Slender (from Delta state)</td>
<td><em>Konto</em></td>
<td>Be re mo le, bar a je</td>
<td>This simply means dance and instructs the listeners to experiment with various dance patterns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\)Kanmi Ranki whose full name is Olasunkanmi is the only Yoruba Ajegunle Raga artiste interviewed.
Fig 6: Table (constructed by the author) displaying the use of Yoruba language and vocabulary in the lyrics of a selection of Ajegunle Raga.

The author observes from the study of the lyrics of the selected songs that some of the artistes who do not outrightly make sentences in Yoruba language adopt Lagos slangs (especially those used by commercial vehicle drivers) or they simply use Yoruba vocabulary in the framework of their lyrics. For example, vocabularies like “Agandangodo”\(^\text{29}\) and “Baba”\(^\text{30}\), “Ojoro”\(^\text{31}\), “Ashewo”\(^\text{32}\) and “Egunje”\(^\text{33}\) and slangs like “Gbo ri e”, “Jeun lo”, “Omo” and “Ja si” frequently reoccur in the lyrics of Ajegunle raga artistes. The use of “Omo” which literally means child in Yoruba language is redefined to mean ‘my friend’ or “my guy” as Lagos commercial bus drivers would use it.\(^\text{34}\) A phrase like “Jasi si” which means “enter it” is readapted to the context of urban Lagos to mean “keeping it real”. Also “gbori e” and “Jeun lo” which literally mean “Carry your head” and “keep on eating” is also reinterpreted to mean “take cover” (from street attacks) and “keep on moving.”

\(^{29}\) Agandangodo means padlock.
\(^{30}\) Baba means father.
\(^{31}\) Ojoro means to cheat.
\(^{32}\) Ashewo means prostitute.
\(^{33}\) Egunje means bribe.
\(^{34}\) Rather ironically Ajegunle Raga artistes Mad Melon, Mountain Black and Kanmi Ranking were once commercial bus drivers and conductors.
The prevalence of Yoruba vocabulary and slangs peculiar to Lagos does not remove the expression of ethnic nationalism in the music. In fact as the artistes’ pay homage to their roots in the ghetto, some are quick to emphasise on their ethnic origin in the lyrics, costumes and performance of their music. This expression of ethnic nationalism is displayed in the music videos of *Somebody call my name* and *Dyna* by Daddy Showkey. In both videos, Daddy Showkey is clad in complete Niger Delta regalia\(^{35}\) and even performs a naming ceremony of the Niger Delta people respectively. Though Showkey sings raga, wears dreadlocks and displays the Ajegunle diversity in the way the actors in his music videos either wear Yoruba and Igbo regalia or the usual shirts, trousers and skirts, Showkey emphasises his Niger Delta roots through his attire. Daddy Fresh further reinforces this ethnic nationalism in the music video of *This World Na Wa* by rendering the lyrics in four different languages (Pidgin English, Yoruba, Igbo and Urhobo) but retaining an Igbo cultural flavour from costume to performance. First, the video is opened with a scene dramatising the dialogue of a traditional Igbo witch doctor and his client who plans the death of an enemy and then, Daddy Fresh is ushered in clad in complete Igbo regalia\(^{36}\) (not disregarding his use of necklaces and earrings which is more Western than Igbo) doling out chants in Igbo language. Next, short clips of Igbo warrior and female choreographic dancing are introduced at intervals to complement the solo vocal rendition of Daddy Fresh.

---

\(^{35}\) Igbo traditional regalia like wrappers (unisex), red caps with feathers (for men), coral neck beads, ‘jigida’ (waist beads), leg beads and white chalk body designs.
In the same manner, Oritsefemi adopts this multi-lingual technique in the chorus of Mercies of the Lord where he sings in English tinged with deep groans of “Oluwa”\textsuperscript{37}, “Osanobua”\textsuperscript{38}, “Oghene”\textsuperscript{39} and “Chineke”\textsuperscript{40} amidst late DaGrin’s \textsuperscript{41} rendition of his Yoruba rap style and Rhymzo’s\textsuperscript{42} reggae rendition (tinged with mimicry of Jamaican patois and a constant

\textsuperscript{37} Oluwa is the Yoruba name for God.
\textsuperscript{38} Osanobua is the Benin name for God.
\textsuperscript{39} Oghene is the Urhobo name for God.
\textsuperscript{40} Chineke is the Igbo name for God.
\textsuperscript{41} DaGrin is a late Nigerian Yoruba rapper who is reputed for his use of Yoruba, English and pidgin English in telling the tales of life in urban poor areas in Lagos. He came into the Hip Hop scene in 2010.
\textsuperscript{42} Rhymzo is a Nigerian reggae artist and music producer who came into the music scene in 2005.
reference to Jah and Babylon). Just like Lagos, Ajegunle Raga exhibits a cultural hybridism that is further celebrated in the music. However, regardless of how strong the attempt to crouch into an ethnic space, a persistent reference to Ajegunle as home supersedes the celebration of ethnic nationalism. On the contrary ethnic diversity is more celebrated:

I want to tell you about AJ city
One of the ghettos in this country
Whether good, whether bad
We are ever ready
We have different tribes and different family
We have footballers in AJ city
We have musicians in AJ city
Doctors, Lawyers in AJ city
Just name anything
We get them plenty

Kimi Rankin in a comical way recognises this diversity when mentioning the names of different ladies he accuses of promiscuity. Though these names refer to no particular people, the choice of names across ethnic groups directly or indirectly celebrates this diversity. In the video of *Shakara*\(^{43}\) *don end*, a man mimicking the dialect of a Hausa introduces the theme of the song before Kimi Rankin sings:

Kimi Rankin: Charity don get belle\(^{44}\)
Chorus: Shakara don end oh\(^{45}\)
Kimi Rankin: Amarachi don get belle
Chorus: Shakara don end oh
Kimi Rankin: Ashewo don get belle
Kimi Rankin: Morai don get belle
Chorus: Shakara don end oh
Kimi Rankin: Shukura don get belle
Chorus: Shakara don end oh
Kimi Rankin: Rashida don get belle
Chorus: Shakara don end oh

\(^{43}\) Shakara means pride.
\(^{44}\) Belle is a corruption of belly and in this context means pregnancy.
\(^{45}\) Don end oh means it is over.
It is interesting to note that names like “Morai”, “Rashida” and “Shukura” are Muslim Yoruba names, Amarachi, an Igbo name and Charity an English name that most Christian families in Nigeria would give their children as baptismal names or just a name attached to no spiritual consecration. The stronger representation of Ajegunle as home as opposed to the ethnic localities, creates some a kind of puzzle as to whether such sneak peeks of ethnic nationalism is pointer to genuine patriotism or simply a gimmick for commercialising the music. A major criticism of Ajegunle Raga by music marketers in Alaba (as gathered from the oral interviews conducted at Alaba, Lagos) is its limitation to the Niger Delta audience and ghetto residents in Lagos. It is therefore commercially viable to maintain such clientele by inserting their cultural identity into the music. Beyond this aspect of commercialisation which became prevalent in the 2000s, the earlier cultural displays within the music seemed like an attempt to display the heterogeneity of Ajegunle through a celebration of the ethnicity of the artistes.

Ajegunle Raga further presents a testament of the socio-economic life and experiences in Ajegunle. As earlier noted, Ajegunle is a product of the widening social and economic gaps that engulfed Lagos on the eve of her modernisation. Elizabeth Cox and Erica Anderssssen in *Survive Lagos* note that as Lagos evolved from being a British Crown Colony in 1861 to the capital of Nigeria from 1914 to 1991, greater migration from other parts of Nigeria became inevitable and the rising gap between the colonialist, expatriates, Lagosians, Omo Eko and migrants from other parts of Nigeria became visible. Margaret Peil notes that these divisions along settlement patterns translated into the British occupation of the Marina area, the Omo Eko residency at Lagos Island, the Igbo and Niger Delta at Apapa and the Saro and Aguda at the Ologbowo and Campos Square areas of Lagos respectively. Areas along Marina and Broad Street served as commercial and administrative nerve centres and industries were situated around Apapa, Iganmu, Ijora,
Ikeja- Oregun, Gbagada- Matori, Ogba, Yaba and Iddo Island areas. This division according to commercial and economic functions also influenced Peil’s classification of Lagos locations in order of population density. Low density areas like Ikoyi, Victoria Island, Maryland, and some parts of Anthony village accommodated the wealthy. Middle density destinations like Ebute Metta, Igbobi, Surulere, Yaba and FESTAC town\textsuperscript{46} “have substantial housing on planned streets with frequent public transportation and reasonably short journey to the city centre” (Peil 1991: 27) that catered for middle income and high income families in Lagos. The high density locations characterised by haphazard planning and uncontrolled population congestion houses low income families and provides low cost housing to the poor. Locations like Ajegunle, Mushin, Agege. Maroko, Bariga, Oshodi, Isolo, Shogunle and Shomolu areas are usually prone to flooding and bad sanitary conditions despite their allowance for informal trading activities fall under this category.

Leke Oduwaye reiterates exactly the same urban conditions that Peil documented in her writings on Lagos in 1991. While some locations (particularly places that were administrative centres and residential areas of the elites) enjoyed good housing systems, others experienced “overcrowding, unhealthy housing and spread of diseases” (Oduwaye 2009: 161). Ajegunle and other areas like Mushin, Isale Eko, Makoko, Oshodi, Ojo and Orile are noted for conflict and crimes in addition to poverty and poor environmental conditions. Ross Kemp in an interview with Chief Odelola\textsuperscript{47} on pollution and piracy on the Ajegunle waters narrate his experiences with Ajegunle residents when he was offered “palm wine by two different men and sex by three

\textsuperscript{46} FESTAC town is a federal housing estate located along the Lagos-Badagry Expressway in its named after Second World African Festival of Arts and Culture which was held there in 1977.
\textsuperscript{47} A fisherman and resident of Ajegunle since 1940.
different girls.” very early in the morning. No wonder Ajegunle is described as a “Jolly city” and a “Jungle city” where the unsafe conditions of the jungle does not kill the vibrant spirit to entertain and to be entertained. Even in the lyrics of the music, Ajegunle Raga artistes dwell less on the environmental conditions but tell the tales of poverty, survival and juvenile delinquency, confirms Oduwaye’s analysis with eye witness accounts. Marvellous Bengy in his hit song Life in Ajegunle blends singing and rap to narrate the realities of the violence and crime in Ajegunle:

Marvellous Bengy: Make you shine your eye well well
Chorus: Make you no lee
Marvellous Bengy: When you are living in Ajegunle
Chorus: Make you no lee
Marvellous Bengy: Pick pocket dey everywhere
Chorus: Make you no lee
Marvellous Bengy: When you want to enter molue
Chorus: Make you no lee
Marvellous Bengy: 419 dey everywhere
Chorus: Make you no lee
Marvellous Bengy: Ashewo dey everywhere
Chorus: Make you no lee
Marvellous Bengy: Ashewo dey everywhere
Chorus: Make you no lee
Marvellous Bengy: Ashewo dey everywhere
Chorus: Make you no lee

Marvellous moves out of the usual raga style to render his rap cum R and B tune sampled against Dr Dre’s The next episode (2000) remixed with background noises of gunshots, police siren and people murmuring in disillusionment with the escalation of criminal activities that has turned “Ajegunle upside down”. Marvellous assumes the position of a stoty teller addressing the themes of violence and government neglect in Ajegunle that has fuelled the

48 Ross kemp in the documentary on piracy on the water of Ajegunle http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOOhQHou1cw.
49 Lee is an Ajegunle slang for sluggish.
50 Molue is the Lagos slang for Mercedes 911 commuter lorry which is usually rickety and overcrowded.
51 419 is a code for an article in the Nigerian Criminal Code that fights against advanced fee fraud. Thus a 419ner is a fraudster.
52 Lyrics from Marvellous Bengy’s ‘Life in Ajegunle’. 
vicious cycle of poverty. He gains greater credibility when “elders of Ajegunle Raga” featured in his video, support his argument either by vocalising or using dance to express their concern. Marvellous, however, does not deny his love for Ajegunle even with the violent culture that has engulfed the area; he blames the government for the condition and looks up to God for redemption:

```
The government na dem make the thing dey worse
Dem steal our money and put inna dem purse
Dem tell us story say dem wan help us
Na lie na, them one kill us
We pray so hard for God to help us
Every day and night we dey work inside wharf
One day we go build our house
Inside our garage we go buy Lexus
```

A commentary on the history of violence and juvenile delinquency in Ajegunle encounters different reactions in Ajegunle Raga. While artistes of the Galala era attempt a critique of these conditions and seek for social cleansing, the Konto Suo artistes perceive this situation as an expression of a reality which is not necessarily bad. Thus, the two perspectives address the question of juvenile delinquency and social vices from two extremes; the Galala era perceives it as symbol of social degradation and the Konto Suo era as street credibility. Artistes of the Konto Suo era like Kanmi Rankin and Marvellous Bengy however perform rather different function from their contemporaries. Marvellous in his Life in Ajegunle expresses a deep bitterness against these conditions while Kanmi Rankin in Shakara don end criticises promiscuity, abortion and unwanted pregnancy in a rather “sensual” way. Kanmi Ranking chastises young ladies who avoid the opportunities of getting education for a careless life in

53 This means the pioneers of Ajegunle Raga like Mighty Mouse, Daddy Showkey, Daddy Fresh, Baba Fryo, Nicco Gravity, etc.
54 Marvellous Bengy blames the Nigerian government for the poverty of the ghetto due to their greed. He goes further to seek the intervention of God so that their toil in the Wharfs of Apapa would eventually yield great riches and prosperity.
pursuit of sexual pleasure which in the end leads them to unwanted pregnancy and abortions. At this point, he says the ladies have lost their dignity and their “shakara don end”. It is however interesting to note that the visual presentation of this theme contradicts his advocacy when two female dancers clad in bra tops and skimpy skirts make sexual suggestions through dance and acrobatics. This is a situation where the artistes take a middle ground disposition by retaining the street credibility of the music even when moral issues are being addressed.

On the contrary, artistes like Prof Likin and the duo of Mad Melon and Mountain Black celebrate street credibility in the lyrics and performance of *Jogodo* and *Kponologo*. Although they mention the need to be careful so that their ghetto counterparts “no go wound”, they provide raw details on ganja smoking and different brands of locally brewed alcohol in Ajegunle respectively (very peculiar to motor parks and poor neighbourhoods in Lagos). Mad Melon and Mountain Black celebrate youthful zest in *Kponologo* where they describe the new forms of locally brewed liquor that have displaced the rums and schnapps of the earlier generation:

Because for their own time  
Dem dey use rum and schnapps  
In olden days, hin do teh oh  
Na rum and schnapps  
Because if them wan celebrate na rum and schnapps  
If them born pikan\(^{55}\), Ikomo\(^{56}\) oh  
Na rum and schnapps  
Oya\(^{57}\) for Ajegunle where we dey  
Nigeria and Danfo\(^{58}\)  
We dey call am Kponlogo\(^{59},^{60}\)

They simply warn against the dangers these drinks have on human health. Rayan T takes this a notch higher through his detailed discussion of the hallucinating effects of local brews

---

\(^{55}\) Pikin is Nigerian pidgin for child.  
\(^{56}\) Ikomo is a Yoruba word for naming ceremony.  
\(^{57}\) Oya is a Yoruba word meaning ‘Let’s go’.  
\(^{58}\) Danfo are the yellow and black commercial buses in Lagos.  
\(^{59}\) Kponlongo refers to locally brewed drinks.  
\(^{60}\) My interpretation of these lyrics is that Kponlogo is the new version of alcohol in Ajegunle that has come to take over the older alcohols like rums and schnapps.
which he calls “Aguanta.”\textsuperscript{61} In a personal testimony, he chastises himself for giving in to peer pressure despite his parents’ warnings against getting high on “Aguanta”. He refers to himself as a strong Rasta who in an attempt to please his peers decides to drink and even create a concoction of the different flavours of “Aguanta” only to end up with tummy pains, shaking legs, headaches:

Rayan T: I don high, i no dey see road oh  
Chorus: I don gree, i don dey on Aguanta oh  
Rayan T: See my head hin do dey heavy me oh!  
Chorus: I don gree, i don dey on Aguanta oh!  
Rayan T: Hin be like my eyes hin don close oh!  
Chorus: I don gree, i don dey on Aguanta oh\textsuperscript{62}

Prof Likin in his song \textit{Jogodo}\textsuperscript{63} talks on ganja trade and smoking and his pride in being a Charlieman\textsuperscript{64}. Likin claims that he fears no Babylon (in a typical imitation of dread talk) and that he will continually Jogodo as long as his mother is not aware of his new habit. He goes ahead to warn his fellow Charliemen of the need to be vigilant against police attacks when smoking marijuana or sensimilia\textsuperscript{65} otherwise they will be arrested and taken to Kirikiri maximum prisons\textsuperscript{66}. Prof Likin brings to bear the Nosamu syndrome of expressing street life in a no holds barred narrative and performance style where he constructs an Ajegunle self christened the Charlieman. The Charlieman tag does not necessarily encapsulate the Ajegunle self but represents the realities of juvenile delinquency that has shaped Ajegunle survival. Who then is the Charlieman and on what philosophy does the existence of this persona thrive? Prof Likin

\textsuperscript{61} Agunta is a compound name for locally brewed alcohols in Lagos. Drinks like Pepper soup, Lemon grass, Sepe, Ogogoro, Dongoyaro, Smallie, Soldier root and many others. Rayan T classifies brandies as all Agunta but have a different name.  
\textsuperscript{62} Rayan T provides a description of the hallucinating effects of Agunta through his personal experience with these alcoholic drinks that have made him so high that he can hardly find his way home.  
\textsuperscript{63} Jogodo refers to the ecstasy that comes with getting high on marijuana.  
\textsuperscript{64} Charliemen is a compound name for ganja dealers and smokers  
\textsuperscript{65} Sensimilia is another Jamaican terminology for marijuana.  
\textsuperscript{66} Kirikiri maximum prison is located in the Apapa area of Lagos.
defines the Charlieman through the music video of the song “Charlieman” where groups of young men (most of them wearing dread locks) holding wraps of lit marijuana against a cement wall with graffiti inscriptions like “Ruff”\textsuperscript{67}, “Kuti”\textsuperscript{68}, “Jah”, “Fire them”, “Bad Boy”, “Sound Town” defines the territory as a venue for “unlimited Jogodo”. He goes ahead to tell his own story of initiation into the cult of the Charliemen:

Before before i dey swear say for my life i no go smoke Igbo\textsuperscript{69}
Me and my padi\textsuperscript{70} we dey one corner
Hin de shark\textsuperscript{71}, i dey close my nose
Hin kon dey look me
Hin come dey laugh

\textsuperscript{67} Ruff as in rough.
\textsuperscript{68} Kuti as in Fela Anikulapo Kuti.
\textsuperscript{69} Igbo is a Yoruba word for marijuana
\textsuperscript{70} Padi means friend.
\textsuperscript{71} Shark is a slang for drinking alcohol.
Say make i help hin hold am make hin go kaka\textsuperscript{72}
As hin dey go I come dey perceive the odour
Inside my mind hin be like perfume
Like play play, i draw two bay...
You no go believe i don send for pass one
If you look my eye, you must to know say I be Charlieman.\textsuperscript{73}

He confesses to the influence of peer pressure in the making of the Charlieman and the
difficulty to withdraw if you are already involved. Jegbo, an Ajegunle artiste who features in this
song introduces the philosophy of the Charlieman which draws a lot of justification from the
Rasta’s idea of the sacramental smoking of ganja. Jegbo who appears with dread locks and wears
a costume of Rastafarian colours believes lighting up the ganja is the first step to the destruction
of Babylon. He further attests to the brutality of the police against the Charlies\textsuperscript{74} but maintains
that the smoking of ganja is the best way to challenge and stand up to the oppression in Babylon.

Any day spent without smoking ganja makes the Charliemen “para.”\textsuperscript{75} Rather comically another
artiste by the name Omo Jesu\textsuperscript{76} gives a religious justification for the smoking of ganja noting
that “Igbo is an herb” created by God” and logically anything created by God is good so the
Charliemen can keep smoking without having a sense of guilt.

It has already been established that reggae rhythmic elements constitute the instrumental
foundation for Ajegunle Raga (except for some mild sampling of hip hop tunes and Urhobo and
Isoko drumming). Rastafarian symbols are also strongly featured in the performance of Ajegunle
Raga. A question to ask whether a symbolic representation of Rastafarianism indicates a genuine
belief in the Rastafarian philosophy as a religious ideal since in the words of Winston Reedy “not
everyone who looks like a Rasta is really a Rasta” (Gordon 1988: 76). Since all Ajegunle Raga

\textsuperscript{72} Kaka is a slang for easing oneself.
\textsuperscript{73} My interpretation of these lyrics is that this is a narration of Prof Likin’s first experience with smoking marijuana. He talks of his initial hatred for doing marijuana and how his friends influenced him to becoming a Charlieman.
\textsuperscript{74} Charlies is a short form for Charliemen.
\textsuperscript{75} Go dey para means they will be getting angry. Para is an Ajegunle slang for angry.
\textsuperscript{76} Omo Jesu literally mean child of Jesus.
artistes interviewed refer to reggae legends like Bob Marley, U- Roy, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff and Lee Scratch Perry (amongst many others) as their musical icons, one may ask whether Rastafarian ideal and symbolism represented in Ajegunle Raga are genuine. Mike Alleyne inquiring into the cross cultural transformation of reggae notes that the commercialization of the reggae soundscape accounts for “the tendency to ignore the roots of its origin and its deeper meaning and function” (Alleyne 2000:16). Reggae music has however become a resource satisfying the musical and philosophical yearnings of many across the globe and providing a voice for the expression of a genuine identity. During the 1970’s, black Australia militants found the revolutionary tunes of Bob Marley and Peter Tosh and the communal nature of reggae music relevant to the expression of their resistance to oppression. In cases where the redemptive message of reggae did not have direct relevance, the rhythm seemed appealing. This is exemplified by Uyghur musicians who subsume reggae rhythmic elements into “classical American imaginings of the cowboys and the Wild West” (Harris 2005: 633). Afro Caribbean’s in Britain also found solace in the message and celebrity identity of reggae music as a means of expressing resistance and blackness in the face of the discrimination and intolerance faced by white majority in Britain of the 1970’s. Needless to say, the globalization of popular music encounters a relocalisation of the rhythm and lyrics to soothe the taste buds of the host community.

In the same vein, Ajegunle Raga shares solidarity with reggae music and Rastafarianism in its message, instrumental composition and celebrity identity. Evident within Ajegunle Raga is the display of Rastafarian colours, the wearing of dreadlocks, an imitation of Jamaican

---

77 In almost of the music videos of Ajegunle Raga artistes especially Marvellous Bengy and Rayan T you find the musicians and other people featured in the video wearing Rasta-coloured shirts.

78 Artistes like Daddy Showkey, Rayan T, Orishe Femi, Prof Likin, Marvellous Bengy and many more Ajegunle Raga artistes are on dreadlocks.
and the dread terminologies like ‘Irie’, Jah, Babylon and ganja. Nonetheless, an artiste like Daddy Showkey is quick to assert that he is not a Rasta but wears dreadlocks too fulfil covenant with God. On the flip side, Mighty Mouse believes in the Rastafarian doctrine and its influence on Ajegunle Raga regardless of how much the artistes dissociate themselves from Rastfarianism as a religion. At the entrance to his dancehall at Coconut area of Lagos he places a small signpost of Haile Selassie as a testimony of his belief in the Rastafarian doctrine. Rayan T who refers to himself as a Rasta reinforces his connection to the Jah when he uses the image of Haile Selassie as a background picture in some scenes of his Aguanta video. Since the political and cultural conditions that defined the development of Rastafarianism and reggae music in Jamaica is somewhat different from the context in which Ajegunle Raga embraced reggae music and more copiously, Rastafarian symbols, what then is the meaning of Jah, Babylon and ganja in Ajegunle Raga?

‘Jah’ as used in Ajegunle Raga is a reference to Haile Selassie and the Christian God in some context. Rasta conscious artistes like Rayan T create an ambience in their music performance that provides a signal that ‘Jah’ is Haile Selassie. In Mercies of the Lord, Rhymzo who seems to have rendered his lines in a mimicry of Jamaican patois says “Jah is faithful” and also says “Lord you are faithful”. This creates a puzzle where it becomes difficult to know if the Jah referred to is Haile Selassie since Orishefemi had earlier provided a long list of Nigerian names for the Christian God. This confusion is further complicated with Daddy Showkey’s oxymoronic use of ‘Jah Jehovah’ which seems to be a terminology used in most Aladura

---

79 Use of Jamaican patois like ‘inna’, ‘wata gwaan’, ‘yah man’ etc
80 In a personal interview with Showkey he tells the author that his oath with the Christian God is to keep his hair long and locked if he becomes successful.
spiritualist churches\textsuperscript{81} in Nigeria. Jah in Ajegunle Raga is therefore used interchangeably to mean Haille Selassie or God depending on how deep is the musicians’ affiliation with Rastafarian doctrines is.

All Ajegunle Raga artistes perceive Babylon as an opponent or opposition to the attainment of their desires. Babylon can be a symbol of oppression, corruption and capitalism that widens the economic gap between the wealthy and poor. Babylon is the superstructure of the Nigerian government that has left the ghetto man unemployed. Babylon encapsulates agents of

\textsuperscript{81} Aladura spiritualist Churches are a sect of the Aladura church movement in Nigeria in 1918. The idea of the Aladura church movement is a creation of an Yoruba mode of Christianity that seemed more appealing to the natives than the Protestantism and Catholicism. The Aladura spiritualist sect includes churches like the Celestial Church of Christ, Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim and the Church of the Lord.
political and economic imbalances in Nigeria. There is equally a contextual usage of Babylon in Ajegunle Raga which moves beyond the earlier economic or political definitions provided. For the Charliemen, smoking ganja is a way of setting Babylon ablaze and the police officers who arrest ganja smokers and dealers are agents of Babylon sent to create chaos in the community of the Charliemen. According to Jegbo, the Charlies must never fear Babylon despite their persecution but keep smoking ganja as a resistance to the oppression. This scene brings back memories of the persecution of the Rastas at the Pinnacle in the 1950’s for trade in ganja and other related Rastafarian activities. Thus, the police and all institutions of government are the Babylon that the ghetto man need not fear.

Mr Coleman provides another meaning for Babylon when he claims Babylon is falling because Marvellous Bengy has come out with a hit album. At the period of the release of this album, Marvellous Bengy just signed on to Kennis Music\(^{82}\) in 2005, a big feat that launched his successful music career on a higher pedestal. A realisation of this feat marked the destruction of the Babylon obstructing Marvellous Bengy’s music career. In Ajegunle Raga, Babylon can also be perceived as barriers to success or socio-economic and political frameworks of society that hinder the realisation of the dreams of every ghetto youth. Conquering Babylon resides in the realisation that Babylon is surmountable only if “ghetto soldier” in every Ajegunle youth rises in opposition to such societal constructs. It is in self realisation and discovery that redemption\(^{83}\) lie.

It is important to note that the reggae message of brotherhood and resistance runs through Ajegunle Raga but the Rastafarian elements are more symbolically represented in the

\(^{82}\) Kennis Music is a leading music label in Nigeria owned by Kehinde Ogungbe and Dayo Adeneye. They are renowned to have produced internationally recognised artistes like Innocent Idibia popularly called Tuface.

\(^{83}\) The idea of redemption in Ajegunle Raga will be elaborated upon when examining the concept of the ghetto soldier.
performance of the music. Ajegunle Raga artistes utilize Rastafarian symbols in their celebrity identities without necessarily being Rastas at heart.

Ajegunle Raga also features a varied representation of women within the lyrics and performance of the music. While no notable female musician has been produced within Ajegunle, women have become indispensable as dancers in the music videos of several Ajegunle raga artistes. Thematically, women are presented as mothers who deserve adulation and respect because of their role as procreators and home makers. On the other hand, there is the disrespect for promiscuous women who are viewed as a disgrace to the dignity of womanhood and African family values. Also, there is the reinforcement of masculine virility through a display of women as objects for sexual pleasure. This is evident in Kimi Rankin’s song *Dapada* where he combines explicitly sensual lyrics and performance to reveal his desire for women with big butts who can “whine” their waists well:

```
Erema⁸⁶ wey no whine well, dapada⁸⁷
Erema wey no sabi dapada
Hear me now, the girls dem love my piom⁸⁸
That’s why they fight for my piom
The girls dem love it
The girls dem like it
The girls love it that’s why they fight over it.⁸⁹
```

While it cannot be claimed Kimi Rankin is the only Ajegunle Raga who preoccupies his lyrical content and acrobatic displays with heavy sexual details (at least in almost all Ajegunle

---

⁸⁴ This is evident in ‘Dyna’ by Daddy Showkey: ‘If you see my mama, Hossana! Tell am say oh, Hossana! I dey for ghetto, Hossana, I no get problem, Hossana’.
⁸⁵ This is evident in ‘Elerugberu’ by Daddy Fresh: ‘You dey wake up paint your face like masquerade , You dey deceive yourself say you fine like mermaid, Fine boy come carry you go, go for him home (a fine boy took you to his home), Una start to dey blow (you both decided to make love), forget to use blom blom (forgetting to use condoms)...’
⁸⁶ Erema refers to a woman’s butts.
⁸⁷ Dapada is a Yoruba word meaning return it.
⁸⁸ Piom is a slang for masculine genitals.
⁸⁹ My interpretation of these lyrics is that Kimi Rankin appreciates women that have big butts and he also says that he is a ladies’ man and women enjoy having sexual intercourse with him.
Raga videos and other Nigerian popular music videos and performances you find women putting up sexually suggestive acrobatic routines, most Ajegunle Raga artistes after the Galala era have been criticised for focusing on “Erema! Erema!” themes. This reoccurrence of sexual themes is not a sugar coating of the reality; on the contrary, it is a mirror through which the social life and juvenile delinquencies in Ajegunle can be viewed.

In a personal interview with the author, Michael Adeniyi describes a typical day in Ajegunle as full of jollification that is accentuated by the presence of many beer parlours and guest houses that provides drinks, alcohol, food and sex. He describes Ajegunle residents as people who love to dance and party a lot and thus organise a lot of block parties to satisfy this urge for unlimited “faaji” (as Adeniyi describes it). The author also observes the presence of a beer parlour called “University of Shayology” where the sale of locally brewed alcohol, beer and pepper soup is a bustling business to the extent of being tagged a university. Marvellous Bengy in response to a question posed by renowned Nigerian broadcaster, Funmi Iyanda, describes the energetic social life of Ajegunle in a comical but factual tone:

Marvellous Bengy: Ajegunle is an entertainment oriented community. Ajegunle dey celebrate. Come burial for Ajegunle or come wake keeping
Funmi Iyanda: Wetin dey happen?
Marvellous Bengy: You go think say the man hit contract. You no go know say the man don die. Them no give the man money when he dey alive, the man don die now dem don buy cow.

It is as a result of this vibrant entertainment culture that Raymond King in a reggae remix of Mc Miker and Dj Sven’s Summer Holiday (1986) invites the audience to an Ajegunle

90 In a personal interview with Wisdom King, a producer in Ajegunle on August 16th, 2011 he referred to the lewd lyrics of Ajegunle Raga as ‘Butt-centred themes’, Erema is a slang for butt.
91 Micheal Adeniyi is a worker at the Ajeromi-Ifelodun local government secretariat.
92 Faaji is a Yoruba word for enjoyment or jollification.
93 Shayology can is coined from a joining of the ‘Shayo’ and ‘logy’. While Shayo is a slang for drinking and getting drunk, the “logy” is performing the function of a suffix in this sense.
94 Marvellous Bengy intimates Funmi Iyanda of how vibrant the entertainment culture of Ajegunle is that even when a burial is being conducted, one can assume the person being buried just hit a jackpot.
holiday that is full of hospitality, love and peace. Rayan T in a remix of *Nothing de par*⁹⁵ (clad in a camouflage jacket with a Rastafarian coloured headband) notes that the ghetto is always getting its groove on. Despite the economic challenges and violence, the ghetto is still home and vibrant. Respondents like Tajudeen Basua⁹⁶ refers to AJ city as “ilu gbo gbo” where anything and everything can happen because of the relative poverty and unemployment in the area and it is this condition that has allowed for the crimes, social vices and “unlimited faaji” therein. In a personal interview with Florence Udu, the President of Uncommon Man Network explains that the dream of every Ajegunle boy is to be footballer or musician and as a result the focus on the development of a flourishing music and sports culture is a step to the actualization of this dream and a profitable alternative to crime. Michael Adeniyi reiterates that Ajegunle youths are very enthusiastic about getting involved in what can be described as the complete theatre of Ajegunle Raga where music and dance produce symbiotic benefits to each other.

The role of music in the social and economic empowerment of the Ajegunle youths cannot be overemphasised. In addition to providing a means of livelihood to young men and women who would otherwise have turned to crime, music has helped boost a sort of confidence in the creative capacities of the Ajegunle self that economic poverty tends to downplay. Musicians like Daddy Showkey and Daddy Fresh have made huge financial benefits from music and even moved out of Ajegunle to better areas in Lagos like Berger and Festac respectively. Daddy Fresh emphasises in his interview with the author that music making is not a guaranteed exit from economic poverty but that it contributes immensely to the making of musicians’ fame and reputation inside and beyond the ghetto. Baba Fryo, the *Denge Pose* crooner claims that the only benefit he got from his hit song *Denge Pose* is his celebrity status. Aside from this,

---

⁹⁵ Nothing dey par means nothing is happening or we are keeping it real in the ghetto.
⁹⁶ Tajudeen Basua is a prince of the Ijora royal house - the owners of the lands from Ajegunle down to the Oshodi-Isolo expressway.
he describes himself as a victim of poverty accentuated by the fact that he was ripped off by music pirates, his music managers and by his promoters. Another example is Kanmi Ranking who despite his fame as a musician hustles between running a barber salon and a video club in a small shop (in Ajegunle) to make ends meet. Nonetheless, Kanmi Ranking, Kimi Ranking, Mad Melon and Mountain Black, who were once commercial vehicle drivers, rose to stardom through music. In the same spirit, Vocal Slender discovered by the BBC during the shooting of Welcome to Lagos documentary struck the crew as a scavenger (at a dumpsite) with some exceptional

97 In the fieldwork for this research, the author conducted a personal Interview with Kanmi Ranking at this shop on August 23th, 2011.
musical talent. Subsequently, he rose to the limelight through music and even began international recording in the UK (though he still does some recording in Ajegunle).

Respondents like J Black who is not an Ajegunle resident is inspired by Ajegunle Raga and his association with Daddy Fresh is an attempt to learn music from its masters. Daddy Fresh also claims that top Nigerian music stars like the “Plantashun Boiz”\(^98\) before their split were groomed and produced by Nelson Brown, a prominent Ajegunle music producer and DJ. Many if not all the respondents\(^99\) say that the current street and ghetto feel in the music of Nigerian Afro Hip Hop artises like Terry G, Timaya is Ajegunle inspired. Upcoming artistes like Lyrical Builder, Delta Ninja and Hip Hop Alhaji (all resident in Ajegunle) believe that nurturing their music gifts in Ajegunle is a pilgrimage that would eventually lead to their metamorphosis as great music stars. Thus, Lyrical Builder says he left home to hustle for a successful music career and Delta Ninja also left Delta state to start a music career in Ajegunle. A celebrity like Prof Likin says music elevated him from the position of a brick layer to the status of the nationally acclaimed Jogodo crooner. Mad Melon in his conversation with the author says his delinquent behaviour made his parents send him away from home and music eventually got him a fame that has made him a respectable citizen of Ajegunle. This explains why there are many studios and local musicians in Ajegunle.

Popular studio engineers and music producers like Prosper and Intruder are reputed to have worked with Vocal Slender and other Nigerian Afro Hip Hop sensations like Black Face and “Ruff, Rugged and Raw”. Music no doubt contributes to economic empowerment but beyond this is the hope it offers- the hope for a successful career as a musician, the realisation

---

\(^{98}\) Plantashun Boiz is a crew made a R n B and reggae crew created by the trio of Tuface Idibia, Faze and Blackface who stormed the Nigerian music industry in the 1990’s.

\(^{99}\) Respondents particularly like Intruder, Okunla, Daddy Fresh, Baba Fryo and Wisdom King in personal interviews conducted on August 16\(^{th}\), 2011, claim that Ajegunle is an informal academy for all rising music talents in Nigeria,
that crime is not the only alternative to survival in a ghetto and also a redefinition of the Ajegunle self as innovative and creative.

Ajegunle dance routines are very relevant in telling the stories of survival strategies in Ajegunle and in some contexts; the dances demonstrate the thematic content of the music. For example, in the video of *Jogodo*, all the dancers choreograph the act of smoking marijuana and the ecstasy that follows using Galala and Suo dances. From the beginning of the video to the very end, these dances and acrobatic movements are fused to demonstrate the “Jogodo” condition. The use of dance to speak to narratives of survival in Ajegunle is vividly displayed in Marvellous Bengy “New Dance”. Marvellous Bengy in this song presents a short history of dance routines and their significance in each generation in Ajegunle. He extends his argument by noting that Galala and Konto are synonymous with fighting and his new dance innovation (though it cannot be assumed he created the dance because he sings about it) is relaxed and makes “you feel alright” despite its technicalities. One of the rap acts featured in the *New Dance remix* tells the history of dance in Ajegunle and how dance routines are synonymous to survival strategies:

AJ recognises Galala in old time but in our time
Suo be the brand new dance
Listen make you smile like you are feeling high
Very easy like rolling a dice
Watch your back men you have to be wise
You better realise say no be time to fight
Thats the new dance Mr Bengy bring come
Style na style no matter where you come from
Pattern na pattern come lets rock to this people’s rock.

Phrases like “feeling high” refers to the ecstasy that comes with smoking marijuana and the warning to “watch your back” is a usual advice given to everyone in the ghetto since life is basically a survival of the fittest. Raymond King popularises the Alanta dance routine through

---

100 The Jogodo condition is a state of being high with marijuana.
his song *Alanta* where he embarks on a tutorial on dancing Alanta without particular reference to survival strategies in the ghetto. It is interesting that Daddy Showkey (by featuring in the music video) endorses the Alanta brand as the dance of the period and attests to its rising national recognition. Baba Fryo in his commentary on Alanta claims the dance was created by a man called Peter who according to him is not presentable because he is presently wrecked by a life of drinks, drugs and sex (factors crippling the longevity of good music and artistes in the Ajegunle music scene). It can therefore be concluded that dance in Ajegunle is not just a movement to rhythm but a historical device for differentiating each generation of Ajegunle Raga and a dramatic device encapsulating the tales of creativity and survival in Ajegunle.

Oritsefemi in the song *Flog Politician* draws attention to the influence of Afro beat on Ajegunle raga. As earlier emphasised, Afro beat, like other popular music honed in Lagos drew inspiration from highlife music, jazz, soul, funk and African percussion. But in the context of Ajegunle Raga, Afro beat inspires most of its political and social commentary. Orishefemi introduces his gospel in this song with the line- “Baba Fela tell them before, Orishefemi tell them again oh” in an attempt to liken his advocacy to Fela’s political advocacy through music. It is not disputable that reggae influences the celebrity identity, and musical, performance and narrative content of Ajegunle Raga but the commentary on the Nigerian political conditions is bolstered by Fela’s revolutionary use of music a weapon for the voiceless. Hence, Ajegunle Raga drawing inspiration from Afro beat but takes on a milder political activism through music.

Daddy Showkey also concludes that the Nigerian political condition is an inferno that needs to be quenched by the strength of the ghetto soldiers. Oritsefemi in *Flog Politician* narrates the ordeal of the helpless Nigerian masses in the hand of corrupt politicians and political parties who siphon the people’s resources. He appeals to the masses to stand up against these politicians
by flogging them with a whip. In the video of this song, all the performers wear grey camouflages, holding whips and demonstrating how the whipping of the politicians will be done through Galala and Suo movements. He comically distorts the names of the political parties by calling an Alliance for Democracy, Alliance for “Gibiti”\(^{101}\) and People’s Democratic Party, (the ruling party in Nigeria since 1999) “Yeye”\(^{102}\) People Party. This play on words is a technique characteristic of Afro beat where Fela plays on words like democracy to create “demo\(^{103}\)-crazy”, “crazy- demo” and “demonstration of craze”. Oritsefemi affirms that the masses have been freed from the “magicalities”\(^{104}\) of the politicians and are ready “to flog politician koboko.”\(^{105}\) Vocal Slender in “Ghetto Red Hot” metaphorically presents the condition of the Nigerian masses and poses a rhetorical question to the Nigerian government:

Na we be the weed
And the power na risler
Na so our government dey smoke us like ganja
I got a question to ask now
Who be mumu\(^{106}\)? Oya government answer.\(^{107}\)

A similar commentary on the state of the nation and the plight of the ghetto features in the music of African China. Though African China is an Orile\(^{108}\) musician, he tells the story of government corruption and clamours for a fair treatment of the masses before the entire nation is thrown into a well. Particularly important is the documentation of his own version of the ethnic crisis in Ajegunle on October 19, 1999 in the song *Crisis*. The Ijaw/ Odua People Congress

---

\(^{101}\) Gibiti means dubious.

\(^{102}\) Yeye can either mean clowning or shameful.

\(^{103}\) Fela's short form for demonstration and it has also be appropriated into the Nigerian pidgin English to mean posing or the act of being a 'wannabe'.

\(^{104}\) Oritsefemi coins the word ‘magicalities’ out of magic but in the sense means that the masses have been cured from the hypnosis of the politicians.

\(^{105}\) Koboko is a whip.

\(^{106}\) Mumu means fool.

\(^{107}\) My interpretation of these lyrics is that Vocal Slender likens the government oppression of the ghetto dweller to the smoking of ganja where government drains out the value of the citizens and smokes them like ganja.

\(^{108}\) Orile is a ghetto in the Apapa Wharf area of Lagos.
(OPC) clash was an extension of the Urhobo-Ijaw/Ilaje crisis triggered by the kidnap of an Ijaw man. Nevertheless, the fear of political domination of the Yoruba by minority groups in Lagos, particularly the need to prevent the annexation of the Lagos port by the Ijaw faction snow balled a conflict between Apapa dockworkers (Yoruba and Hausa) into a fracas that pitted the OPC against the Ijaw residents in Ajegunle. African China laments:

Another one happen inside Ajegunle
Burning and killing to be become Baale
Wey plenty woman wey carry belle
Omo dey make dem begin dey fear
If I say O, you say P, another one say C
Omo na you sabi
I say dem burn house
Dem kill man oh
For inside Ajegunle.

African China holds the OPC responsible for the killing during the crisis due to their insatiable desire for political domination of Ajegunle. Ajegunle Raga artistes embark on a general criticism of government corruption and political instability but situates the ghetto man in the context of these conditions as the most affected (by the conditions) and the most visionary (in understanding the state of the nation). The marginalization of Ajegunle environmentally and economically is often cited in all their works but they quickly emerge out of this narrative of deprivations to accentuate the strength of the ghetto youth amidst the prevailing hardship, violence and poverty. Unlike reggae where redemption lies in Africa or a re-enactment of Africa in Babylon, redemption in Ajegunle Raga is defined as the ability of the ghetto soldier to hustle and survive the odds of the ghetto legally or illegally.

---

109 Baale is a Yoruba title for a community leader.
110 The separation of the O from the P and the C is a satirical devices meaning that everyone collectively agrees that it is OPC that did the killings even if African China humorously makes it seem he only said O.
111 My interpretation of these lyrics is that African China narrates the ordeal of the non-Yoruba residents of Ajegunle in the hands of the OPC faction who burnt houses and maimed men and women.
It is from this survivalist tendency that the idea of the “Ghetto Soldier” represents the Ajegunle self that rises beyond the deprivations of the ghetto to create a self that takes pride in making a meaningful living in the ghetto and possibly attaining national and international recognition. Put differently, the idea of the ghetto soldier takes on the duality of an individual and a philosophy. As an individual, the ghetto soldier is an Ajegunle dweller driven by the philosophy to survive the hardship of the ghetto. Thus, he develops the skills to be hardworking and courageous in the battle against poverty and marginalisation. Showkey in the song *Ghetto soldier* describes himself as “the field marshal of the Ghetto army” and leads a military parade of ghetto soldiers who tell their story and define their “self-in-process” in the dynamics of Ajegunle condition:

```
Enough Respect to the ghetto soldiers....
In the ghetto, life isn’t easy for we....
Life in the ghetto isn’t easy
All the youth inna the ghetto they are always busy
If you live in the ghetto you can never be lazy
To the people
Abeg Oluyemi\textsuperscript{112} again....
In the ghetto where me live, in the ghetto where me born
Mama tell us to be humble
Papa teach us how to struggle
Every ghetto youth knows how to hustle
If you come to the ghetto, no fumble
If you fumble, you get double
And when you get it, you get it double
Hustling and struggling is along the ghetto.
```

While these lines espouse the qualities and moral prerogative of the ghetto soldier, Showkey’s definition of the ghetto soldier does not provide specific examples of how these skills acquired in the ghetto are put to use by the ghetto soldiers. In other words, the philosophy of the ghetto soldier is explained, the potentials of the soldier unmasked, but the ghetto soldier in a military occupation against poverty and deprivation is not adequately depicted. Raymond takes

\textsuperscript{112} Oluyemi is a praise name Daddy Showkey gives to himself.
up this task by indicating the fact that Ajegunle has produced footballers, musicians, doctors and lawyers (even poets and actress). Prof Likin notes that the ghetto soldier can take the form of a “Charlieman” who smokes or sells ganja in an attempt to burn Babylon down. In his *New Dance remix*, Mr Coleman\textsuperscript{113} refers to the choreographers in the video as ghetto soldiers implying that the creativity of Ajegunle youth in producing unique dance routines is an expression of the “ghetto soldier” in them. Vocal Slender in all his hit singles tells the story of how music transformed him from a dump site worker to an internationally recognised musician whose talent already nurtured at a local studio at Ajegunle was better honed by BBC who discovered his singing abilities at a dump site in April, 2010. Mad Melon and Mountain Black reinforce their pride in being “Danfo” drivers. They particularly emphasize the sentence “I am a danfo driver” repeatedly in their song to show the pride they take in the profession which has made them influential beyond Ajegunle to areas like “Alagbado”. The music goes on to intimate potential customers on the itinerary of the driver through “Alaba Suuru, Orege Mile two, Ojuelegba and Mushin Olosa”\textsuperscript{114} and invite them on a jolly ride with the “danfo” drivers. The “danfo” drivers interestingly provide their resume as products of the Ajegunle:

\begin{quote}
In the ghetto where we dey  
I was born in the ghetto  
My brother in the ghetto where we dey, I school in the ghetto  
I tell you in the ghetto where we dey  
We grow up in the ghetto  
But now I am a danfo driver  
I am a danfo driver, Suo!  
Sebi\textsuperscript{115} you be danfo driver, Suo!
\end{quote}

The ghetto soldier identity is further complemented with the wearing of camouflage\textsuperscript{116} especially in music videos of Ajegunle raga artistes engaging in political commentary in their

\textsuperscript{113} Mr Coleman is a rap artiste that featured in this song.
\textsuperscript{114} These are names of places in Lagos.
\textsuperscript{115} Sebi is a way of confirming an idea.
music. Thus, the idea of the ghetto soldier is a reflection of the survival instinct associated with being a resident of Ajegunle and by extension a reflection of the desire to conquer poverty, marginalization and the deprivations within Ajegunle by investing in the latent potentials of the self\textsuperscript{117} or creating alternatives to survival as the environment permits.\textsuperscript{118}

Apart from featuring rap acts and verses, Hip Hop is less prominent in the works of Ajegunle Raga artistes except for artistes like Cashman Davis who decided to specialise in rap music after breaking away from the Pretty Busy Boys crew. The high demand for and commercial success of Afro Hip Hop and R n B music in the Nigerian music scene of the new millennium has created a need to diversify Ajegunle Raga from the straight jacketed reggae and dub reggae feel for crossover that incorporates rap music and some elements of Hip Hop culture. As earlier emphasised, Ajegunle Raga and Hip Hop music share similar historical roots as youth expression created in urban ghettos and prominent Ajegunle Raga artistes started off as rappers. Still, the bulk of the musical elements are reggae inclined except for little sampling of rap tunes in the instrumental composition of the music. Ajegunle Raga however draws a lot of inspiration from what Steven Graves called “homemade creativity” of Hip Hop music where most of the innovations developed within the music are improvisational and inspired by individual creativity. In the case of Hip Hop, it was a creation of a complete theatre of performance where the “turntabilsm” provided the needed zest for rap, graffiti and break dances and in Ajegunle Raga it is the display of dance creativity, street credibility, lyrical dexterity and a documentation of Ajegunle realities within the music. The Konto Alanta era marked a heavy incorporation of rap music into Ajegunle Raga because of the need to build a clientele beyond the ghetto and other

\textsuperscript{116} Green, brown and grey camouflages have been worn in the music videos of Rayan T, Oritsefemi and Daddy Showkey respectively.
\textsuperscript{117} These include the gifts of music making, sports and acting.
\textsuperscript{118} These include fraud, pick pocketing, prostitution, ganja smoking and trading etc.
poor neighbourhoods of Lagos. Consequently, Orishefemi features Dagrin in the remix of *Mercies of the Lord* and Sound Sultan\(^\text{119}\) provides some rap lines in Vocal Slender’s Ghetto *red hot*. Vocal Slender attempts an expression of Hip Hop culture in the video of *Konto* where the dancers clad in “T” shirts, base ball caps, dark shades and blings incorporate little break dancing into Galala. While this cannot be said to be an outright attempt to transport the hip life into the video, it is a signal to the fact that elements of Americanization in the dancing and even costuming add a tinge of sophistication and commercial value to the music. Though musicians of the Konto -Alanta era still set their themes and music videos in the ghetto, the aesthetic and musical properties of the music are patterned towards a blend of reggae with rap with a lesser emphasis on Rastafarian elements for a showcase of a communality in dance and performance laced with copious elements of Americanization like baggy jeans, blings, base ball hats, durags, slim jeans, NY caps amongst others.

In all, this chapter has attempted an examination of the multiplicities of identities represented in Ajegunle Raga and the historical and artistic relevance of Lagos, Jamaica, New York and Ajegunle (in itself) to the construction of the musical and non-musical identities Ajegunle Raga exudes. From Lagos, Ajegunle Raga draws its cultural plurality, themes on social segregation (which extends to the socio-economic and political conditions of the Nigerian state) and an array of Yoruba vocabulary and slangs. In Jamaica, Ajegunle Raga finds a comrade in redemption, resistance and rhythm all ingrained in reggae music and symbolic elements of Rastafarianism. In Bronx lies the trendiness, tune and the lyrical tonic provided by rap music and Hip Hop culture that would provide Ajegunle Raga a territory beyond its ghetto audience. Finally in Ajegunle are the narratives of poverty and survival, dance creativity and a

\(^{119}\) Sound Sultan is a Nigerian R n B singer, song writer and music producer.
reinforcement of the ghetto soldier (as a reaction against their stereotyping by society as criminals and never do wells) that makes Ajegunle Raga a voice of the Ajegunle masses.

Figure 11: Kanmi Ranking giving a ghetto soldier pose at his barbing salon and video club

120 Voices in this sense refers to both celebration and lamentation. A Celebration of the ability to conquer the limitations of their environment and a lamentation on the experiences of poverty and marginalization.
Conclusion and Recommendations

Chimamanda Adichie\textsuperscript{121} in her 2009 presentation titled “The danger of a Single Story” proposes that rejecting a single story is regaining a paradise earlier lost to stereotyped narratives. In light of this, this research delves into the story of survival and musical creativity in Ajegunle as opposed to the single story of Ajegunle as an abode of poverty and a ghetto of despair. This research also accents the role of Ajegunle Raga as a site for the negotiation of identities- a reinforcement of stereotyped stories of Ajegunle and an unmasking of the latent creativity of the Ajegunle self.

Beyond its role as a “habitus” for the expression of the Ajegunle self, this research emphasised that Ajegunle Raga draws lots of inspiration from diasporic music like reggae and Hip Hop with which it shares a similar history as youth subcultures developed within ghettos. The author argues that contemporary Nigerian popular music is a product of the unending musical dialogue between Africa and its diaspora. Ajegunle Raga is a vivid example of this musical cycle and a pointer to the general embrace of diasporic music in Nigeria from the 1970s till date. Even with this intimate relationship, Ajegunle Raga genuinely reflects Ajegunle in its narrative on poverty and marginalization, adaptation of rhythmic influences from traditional Nigerian percussion, and the creation of unique dance routines that are all displayed in lyrics and performance of the music. Diasporic subcultures like reggae and Rastafarianism are accentuated in the rhythm, celebrity identities and the call for redemption in the music. Similarly, connections to rap music and Hip Hop culture is best featured in the works of Ajegunle Raga.

\textsuperscript{121}Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist of international repute awarded several literary awards including the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2005 and the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2007. This presentation was at the Ted Talk of October 2009.
artistes of the 2000s where rap music and Hip Hop culture serve as a vehicle for the commercialization of the music beyond its ghetto clientele.

Just like reggae and Hip Hop, Ajegunle Raga is a youth subculture that is perceived as oppositional to mainstream Yoruba culture and the rising Americanisation of the Nigerian music scene. While this research has focused on music, subsequent research that examines the nexus between music and sports in the development of Ajegunle would prove very useful. Beyond the possible economic benefits that comes from music making is the boosting of the social status of the Ajegunle resident who would otherwise be classified as a delinquent in society. In music is exposed the hope for a better future, an alternative to crime, a realisation of the latent potential of the self and a possible vehicle for the eventual transition out of urban poverty. It would be recommended that policy makers should examine an investment in music and sports as a strategy of transforming Ajegunle into a ghetto of hope rather than one of despair. Also a comparative study of creative responses of residents in urban ghettos to the challenges of poverty, marginalisation, violence and crime would be an exercise in creating what Chinua Achebe as quoted by Chimamanda Adichie calls “a balance of stories” where stories are made to humanize, empower and celebrate the similarities in differences.

---

122 Chinua Achebe is a Nigerian professor, poet, novelist and critic of international repute.
Figure 12: The musicians and the interview crew at the Embassy.
Bibliography


**Oral Interviews**

Personal Interview with Mighty Mouse, Music producer in Ajegunle, August 22nd, 2011.

Personal Interview with Daddy Showkey, Pioneer of Ajegunle Raga August 31st, 2011.

Personal Interview with Daddy Fresh Pioneer of Ajegunle Raga August 16th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Baba Fryo, Pioneer of Ajegunle Raga August 16th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Nicco Gravity, Pioneer of Ajegunle Raga August 22nd, 2011.

Personal Interview with Intruder, Konto Music producer in Ajegunle Raga August 16th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Cashman Davis, Pioneer of Ajegunle Raga August 31st, 2011.

Personal Interview with Mad Melon, Ajegunle Raga artiste, August 22nd, 2011.

Personal Interview with Kanmi Ranking, Ajegunle Raga artiste, August 23th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Kimi Ranking, Ajegunle Raga artiste, August 23th, 2011.
Personal Interview with Vocal Slender, Ajegunle Raga artiste, August 23rd, 2011

Personal Interview with Lyrical Builder, Upcoming Ajegunle Raga artiste, August 23rd, 2011.

Personal Interview with Hip Hop Alhaji, Upcoming Ajegunle Raga artiste, August 16th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Delta Ninja, Upcoming Ajegunle Raga artiste, August 27th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Michael Adeniyi, Local government worker, Ajeromi-Ifelodun Secretariat, Ajegunle, August 23rd, 2011.

Personal Interview with Tajudeen Basua, Prince, Ojora Ruling House of Ijora, Lagos, September 4th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Chief S. Salami, Balogun of Ajegunle, August 23rd, 2011.

Personal Interview with Godfrey Akinoye, Actor, Scriptwriter and Musician resident in Ajegunle, August 27th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Florence Udu, President of Uncommon Man Network and Resident of Ajegunle, August 27th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Seye Kehinde, Media Personality and Publisher of City People Celebrity Magazine, Gbagada, August 18th, 2011.

Personal Interview with the C.E.O of Rich Music, Nosamu Street, Ajegunle, August 24th, 2011.


Personal Interview with J. Black, Upcoming Afro Hip Hop artiste, August 16th, 2011.
Personal Interview with Okunla, Music Producer in Ajegunle, August 16th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Wisdom King, Music Producer in Ajegunle, August 16th, 2011.

Focus group interview with Abiodun Abiose (artiste and interior decorator) and Femi Shokeyo (music aficionado and a great witness to the evolution of Afrobeat and activities of the Kalakuta), Isolo, August, 21st, 2011.


Personal Interview with Chibike, Music Marketer, Alaba, August 19th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Dr Albert Oyikelome, Senior Lecturer, Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Ajegunle, August 29th, 2011.

Personal Interview with Leo David, Music Marketer, Alaba International, Lagos, August 24th, 2011.


Personal Interview with Okey Ejiroghene, Radio personality at Radio Nigeria Fm, Obalende, August 26th, 2011.

**Discography**

Daddy Showkey – *Dyna, Welcome Daddy Showkey, Somebody Call My Name, Ghetto Soldiers and Fire Fire!*. 

Daddy Fresh- *Elerugberu* and *This World Na Wa*. 

Baba Fryo- *Denge Pose* and *Kai Dey*. 

Vocal Slender- *Konto* and *Ghetto Red Hot*. 

Rayan T- *Nothing dey Par* and *Aguanta*. 

Kimi Ranking- *Dapada*. 

Kanmi Rankin- *Shakara don End*. 

Oritshe Femi- *Flog Politician* and *Mercies of the Lord*. 

Flekta Man- *No think am*. 

Mad Melon and Mountain Black- *Kponlogo* and *Danfo Driver*. 

Raymond King- *Alanta* and *Ajegunle Holiday*. 

Africa China- *Crisis*. 

Marvellous Bengy- *New dance, New dance Remix, Life in Ajegunle*. 

97
Prof Likin- *Jogodo* and *Charlieman*