# OLOLADE ASAKE'S MUSIC AS A NIGERIAN CULTURAL DIPLOMATIC TOOL

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**Abstract**

Cultural diplomacy fundamentally presupposes a soft power tool that promotes and enhances the exchange of art, music, ideas, information and culture, in a bid to engender mutual understanding and strengthen cooperation and friendship among communities and sovereign states. Nigerian musicians before now, such as Fela Anikulapo Kuti, King Sunny Ade, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister, King Wasiu Ayinde Marshal just to mention but a few, have helped burnished the image of Nigeria, through the instrumentality of their "trade"-which is music. In the same vein, Asake, has helped to propagate Nigerian cultural values to the international community, as a cultural ambassador. This paper beams its search light on the areas in which Asake's music has helped to propagate African and Nigerian cultural values to the international community. The promotion and propagation of this kind of music abroad increases the positive image of the Nigerian state in other states and also ensures its popularity as an aspect of cultural diplomacy. The methodology adopted for the study is descriptive, producing an in-depth description of Asake's music as a cultural diplomatic tool. This study, when completed will be of value to diplomats and academics who could use the findings as a foundation for future academic research.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Oloade Asake, Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power

## Introduction

This paper examines the deployment of music as a diplomatic tool among sovereign entities. Music resonates in all spheres of human endeavour including arts, culture, and science in the relations of people, as a cultural tool. Music occupies a prominent place among the arts, which have a significant impact on cultural exchange and the diplomatic climate Little wonder, in pop culture, it is said that," music, is what makes the world go "round". This saying has found apt expression in the activities of entertainers, when it is conspicuously displayed at clubs and other entertainment arena, just so to amplify the significance of music in the entire matrix of humanity.

The place of music as an art form, cannot be overemphasized in the affairs of humanity, particularly, in the relations of countries. This was corroborated by Ekpo and Ugwu (2021) when they submitted that from ancient times to modern-day, exchange of arts, music and other cultural aspects formed an integral means of establishing diplomatic ties and projecting national

interest abroad. However, despite the usefulness of music as a cohesive element in the relations of countries, , it has not been accorded its prime place in cultural relations. The kernel of this paper, therefore, is to forge a nexus between music and positive diplomatic relations between and among countries, using Asake's music as a reference point.

## Conceptual Clarification

In this section, three key concepts integral to this study will be examined. They include: (a) culture; (b) Cultural diplomacy; (c) Music; and (d) Soft power.

### Culture

Culture has been conceptualized differently by different scholars according to their disciplinary orientations. However, in the context of this study, culture is described as fundamentally denoting the ways of life of a people. The Center for Advanced Research and Language Acquisition defines culture as shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive construct and understanding that are learned by socialization. The import of this definition is that culture is not static, but it mutates over time due to the prevailing conditions-both internal and external factors. On a related analytical plane, Cristina De Ross, cited in Ekpo and Ugwu (2021: 143) an anthropologist, sees culture as a multi-dimensional concept that "encompasses music, arts, patterns of dressing, marriage, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things. In her view, culture presupposes a people's ways of life and the features that differentiate them from others.

### Music

Music is a universal language and as such, sufficient literature abounds on music generally as a form of communication. However, there is a dearth of literature on music and politics. Okoro (2020: 275) opined that, literature on music and politics is scanty. Deploying music as a diplomatic tool, represents" soft power". What typifies soft power is that it focuses on how "political issues are resolved by mutual support rather than force." (Zawisza, 2015). John Blacking defines music as a humanly organized sound, a formal or informal behavioural product of human groups, (Einbinder, 2013).Therefore, music is of human construction.

### Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy (Mark, 2009). The term "cultural diplomacy" was coined by Milton Cummings as "the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding (Cummings, 2009). Einbinder (2013) further contended that, cultural diplomacy entails any activity or process that leads to the exchange of values, ideas, traditions and identity for the purpose of enhancing cross-border cooperation, strengthen relationships and advance national interests for the long-term

benefits of a nation and its people (Einbinder, 2013). Cultural diplomacy is a form of non-political communication between countries (Cummings, 2013). Cultural diplomacy has not only become a buzz word or byword for diplomats and foreign policy practitioners, it is also a multi-dollar money spinning engagement or enterprise. In order to align their thoughts to this assertion, Ekpo and Ugwu (2021) , contended that, it is also a multi-dollar enterprise as nations are developing their cultural institutions to attract foreign tourists and investors; which has the capability of changing the paradigms of public diplomacy. Due to the end of the Cold War that tended to bifurcate and balkanized the world until the early 1990s , countries of the world are making serious efforts to propagate their beliefs and value systems (culture), in order to influence global opinions in the countries' favour. A veritable conveyor belt of cultural diplomacy is music. Using music to "sell" culture therefore, serves a dual purposes. First, it alerts the world about the cultures of such countries and secondly, there is a lot of financial benefits that will accrue to the artiste involved. Cultural diplomacy therefore is linked with musical diplomacy. Musical diplomacy refers to the use of music to promote mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between communities and nations (Demir, 2017).

However, cultural diplomacy as a form of soft power via international exportation of culture and arts through communication is inadequate in the international relations of countries, in the foreign policy of most African countries and in the field of international public relations as a whole (Enaifogie and Makhutla, 2020). Furthermore, Waller (2009:74) averred that, cultural diplomacy includes exchange of ideas, information, language, art, and sundry cultural aspects in different countries and their people in order to engender mutual understanding. Cultural diplomacy is therefore, reckoned with as a type of international public relations that is understood as a form of soft power in the global system today (Enaifogie, and Makhultla, 2020). Countries across the globe, are making spirited efforts to "market" themselves through cultural exchanges among others. Enaifogie and Makhutla (2020) noted that, China and India see culture in international relations as a veritable means of diplomacy.

In the opinion of Maack (2001:59), the motivation behind cultural diplomacy is to develop an understanding of a nation's ideal and institutions to build broad support for economic and political goals", for the people of foreign nations.

**Soft Power**

Soft power does not lend itself to easy definition, like other concepts in the social sciences. Power and soft power do not lend themselves to easy definition. This definitional quandary was envisaged by Nye Jr, when he posited that: a consistent portion of the debate around the concept of soft power is its definition. Such difficulty arises from the fact that te idea of power, being something abstract, is something difficult to define. As Nye Jr (2002: 9; 2004: 1) stated, power is like love, easy to feel but difficult to define and measure. Power conceptually means the ability to control the behavior of others through the use of coercion; while , Joseph Nye popularized the

phrase "soft power" in the 20th century to describe a nation's capacity to influence others through institutional, cultural, and ideological methods (Kumari, 2025).

The place of culture in the analysis of soft power cannot be overstated. In view of this, Nye averred that, the key to soft power is the appeal of one's own culture.

> The success of soft power depends heavily on the actor's reputation among the international community, as well as on the flows of information between them. Popular culture and the media are usually identified as sources of soft power (Nye, 2005: 93).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study will be anchored on the cosmopolitan constructivism theory which was propounded by César Villanueva Rivas (2010). The theory presupposes that cultural diplomacy is a celebration of societal exchanges, cultural differences, and personal encounters promoting mutual understanding, (Einbinder, 2013). The theory's assumption is that governments engage with cultures and people in intercultural dialogue through cultural diplomacy. The discourse celebrates cultural diversity, civil society and cultural exchange encounters in order to foster common understanding in diversity among people (Mutisya and Banda, 2019:215)). The cosmopolitan constructivism school of thought posit that through cultural exchanges, relations of countries can be thawed, if it had been strained before and can be enhanced via cultural engagements among sovereign entities. The basic premise of the constructivism theory is that international relations are a platform for interactions through which a state's identities are molded (Demir, 2017). It therefore, provides another route for inter-states diplomatic relations that is diametrically different from the hitherto, traditional diplomacy. And in this context, music plays a pivotal role as a soft power diplomatic tool for Nigeria to engage with the international community. Without mincing words, the cosmopolitan constructivist theory underscores the fact that music and cultural diplomacy can bolster intercultural communication and enhance cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, music as a soft power tends to build good relations between countries that engage in it.

Soft power theory will also be deployed as the epistemological framework of this study. Soft power as a theoretical framework, was coined by Joseph Nye Jr in his book Bound to Lead (1990a). Joseph Nye Jr defined soft power in his work Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye Jr 2004: p. x), or to be more concise, "soft power is attractive power" (Nye Jr 2004: p. 6). It must be stated emphatically and without ambiguity that, the concept of *soft power* had been in place before its coinage by Joseph Nye Jr . Little wonder, in the foreword to the book*, Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States* edited by Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, Nye claimed that despite that the concept of soft power is recent, "the behaviour it denotes is as old as human history" (Nye Jr 2008a: p. ix cited in )

In this study, Ashake's music is a form of soft power that helps to endear Nigeria to the global community as his music travels beyond the continent of Africa. For context, he has played to the admiration of fans in America and London. Therefore, the place of music as soft power cannot be overstated in the current international order and global dynamics. This phenomenon is one of the reasons, which explains the interest of decision-makers, both democratic and non-democratic countries, in developing their public diplomacy instruments and soft power dimensions to strengthening their position in the international arena (Martino, 2021).

**Music as a Soft Power Instrument in Diplomatic Relations**

In modern times especially sequel to the end of the Cold War, music has come to play a significant role in international relations as opposed to the old thought of traditional and stereotypical diplomatic means- hard power. . The Post-Cold War era has continued to witness growth in the use of culture to foster relations among nations to promote peaceful and secured ties in the face of growing tensions of "nuclear power" (Ekpo and Ugwu, 2021). Lending credence to this assertion, a musicologist, Anaïs Fléchet (a lecturer in contemporary history at the Université de Versailles-St-Quentin and co-editor of a book about music and globalization) cited in Zawisza (2015), observed that "until quite recently, they were more interested in analyzing musical scores than the actual context in which these were produced and how they were received." Music has come to serve more than soothing of souls' purpose. Rather, it has come to serve as a veritable tool in the hands of shrewd diplomats and artistes who know their onions. More so, in this age of globalization, music tends to help cultures spread across the world with ease and in a seamless manner. Reinforcing this submission, Alain Weber, artistic adviser at Philharmonie de Paris, cited in Zaziswa (2015) noted that musicians are keen to get produced in the West. It's a way for them to save their culture in the face of globalization.

The roles that music and culture play in forging good relations among peoples and countries of the world, was well fleshed out by Thomas Jefferson, in his letter to James Madison, in 1785 when he opined that "I am an enthusiast on the subject of arts. But it is an enthusiasm of which I am not ashamed, as its object is to improve the taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation and to reconcile to them the respect of the world and procure them its praise (Jefferson, 1785)." The deployment of soft power in relations of countries has been made more popular and gained wider currency through China, as against the hitherto hard power stance of the United States of America (Nye, 2004). In contrast to the US hard power policy, Ernest J. Wilson (2008: 99) affirmed that China, with its doctrine of "Peaceful Rise", consisting in avoiding the use of hard power instruments, is becoming more and more attractive to many countries in the world. The same principle has also been supported by Joshua Cooper Ramo (2004), who defined the Chinese rise of influence in the dynamics of the international relations as "Beijing consensus", and which is an antithesis to the unilateral, aggressive, and neoliberal policy of the United States defined as "Washington Consensus" (Mario, 2021).

Joseph Nye Jr (2004: 11) affirms that the soft power of a country is generated by three primary resources: culture, political values, and foreign policy . Music is a sub-set of a country's culture. Music was deployed by America to thaw her relations with the Soviets (Penny Von Eschen, 2004). According to N.J. Cull (1995), cultural diplomacy was part of an ambitious American effort to exploit the cultural diplomacy factor. The "Jazz Expansion" was only the first step in the campaign to export the American way of life to the citizens of the Soviet Union, which had as its logical finale the acculturation of the "discharge" period of international tensions between the United States of America and the Soviet Union (Valerii Panasiuk1, Ihor Borko2, Taisiia Khvostova1, Andrii Maslov-Lysychkin1,3 & Anastasiia Yermukanova, 2022).

**Examples of Past Cultural Diplomacy of Nigeria**

Several soft power tools have been deployed by Nigeria either directly or indirectly to project her image as a force to reckon with especially on the continent of Africa. Consequent upon Nigeria's independence in 1960, economic, political and oil forms of diplomacy were the traditional ways of prosecuting Nigeria's foreign policy; this was despite the cultural diversity of Nigeria. Ekpo and Ugwu (2021:143) submitted that:

> Nigeria established diplomatic relations with the United States of America in 1960 after its independence from the United Kingdom. Following the recognition of the statehood of Nigeria by the international community, Nigeria entered into diplomatic ties with several nations of the world mostly on political and economic grounds; seeking for the need to boost its economic and political relevance in the global affairs. The establishment of the embassy by the United States of America in Nigeria led to the improvement of diplomacy between the two countries. As a major oil-producing nation in Africa, oil diplomacy has remained one of the most effective means of manipulating and strengthening diplomatic negotiations between the two countries.

Attention was solely focused on economic, political and oil diplomacy to the exclusion of soft diplomacy-culture. In a bid to corroborate this position, Ekpo and Ugwu (2021) submitted that, a critical overview of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives both in the first and second republic clearly explains the unpreparedness of Nigeria to key into the cultural innovation to boost its diplomatic relations with other nations. Sequel to Nigeria's independence, efforts were made to broaden Nigeria's diplomatic terrain. For example, there were establishment of local institutions that underscore culture and express Nigeria's cultural policy and diplomacy are the Ministries of Culture and Tourism, Information and Communications, Foreign Affairs. Other bodies include the country's diplomatic mission, National Council for Arts and Culture, Nigerian Television Authority, National Troupe, the Film Institutes, various national universities, the national theatre, the national museum and Center for Blacks and African Arts and Civilizations, the Nigerian Nollywood (Ekpo and Ugwu, 2021).

**Ashake's Personality and Music**

Asake (real name, Ahmed Ololade) is a graduate of the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile Ife, Osun State. Asake studied Theatre and Dramatic Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria. He began releasing music in 2017, and his career took off in 2022 with the single "Mr. Money", followed by a remix with Zlatan and Peruzzi. In February 2022, fellow Nigerian artist Olamide signed Asake to his YBNL Records imprint. That same month, he released his debut extended play, *Ololade*, which featured his breakthrough song "Omo Ope", featuring Olamide, and the single "Sungba". In July 2022, Asake signed a distribution deal with Empire (Wikipedia).

**Ololade Ashake's Indirect Praise of Nigeria and Nigeria- (hustle, resilience, street life)**

**From "Worship" (2026):**

- *"It is work, no be luck"*
  This shows how industrious Nigerians are; it underscores Nigerians belief in hardwork, rather than luck.

- *"No matter your condition, stay close to God"*
  These are among other traits that characterize and define Nigerians- **faith and endurance**, common in Nigerian culture. Nigerians are resilient, dogged and stoical when it comes to achieving goals they set for themselves.

- *"God na my protection"*
  This lyric highlights Nigerians unwavering faith in God,emphasizes the **strong religious identity** of Nigerians.

**Street hustle & Nigerian survival mindset**

**From "I Believe":**

- *"I dey street, I dey hustle"*
  This reflects Nigerians capacity for struggle and the commitmet to succeed in any undertaken.

- *"Where dem dey when I no get"*
  This underscores how uneasy it is to succeed, and Nigerians are ready to go through tick and thin to succeed.

**Nigerian lifestyle & celebration vibe**

**From "Amapiano":**

*"Everyday ibi be like a new year"*

This reflects Nigerians celebratory mentality, even in the midst of agony and adversity. When some nationals would have taken to the street in protests and demonstrations, Nigerians would make fun and joke out of it.

**Ashake as Nigeria's Cultural Ambassador**

Before Ashake's emergence on the music scene, , older musicians had promoted African and Nigerian cultural values to the world. The likes of the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti, late Sikiru Ayinde Barrister, King Sunny Ade, Ebenezer Obey, King Wasiu Ayinde, the late Yusuf Olatunji, late Ayinla Omowura, Wasiu Alabi Pasuma just to mention but a few, have all deployed their different genres of music to make African values, especially Nigerian values to be known beyond the continent of Afca. Ololade Ashake, in the footsteps of the aforementioned late and living music legends has helped in popularizing Nigerian culture in places like: Cotonou-Benin Republic, the United States of America and London in the United Kingdom. Through his music, more non-Nigerians in these countries get to know more about Nigeria and her cultures. And it is natural that, the more of a country's culture you know, the less you will believe in the propaganda that will be bandied about such country. The last time he played in Benin republic, many of his fans from neighbouring countries such as Togo, Lome, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Niger Republic all trooped to Benin Republic to catch a glimpse of their music idol and the rave of the moment. This feat no doubt helped to further cement and concretize the supremacy and big brotherhood of Nigeria, especially in the West African sub-region. In sum, this has invariably added him to the pantheon of previous music ambassadors mentioned above, who have deployed the instrumentality of music to help burnish and bolster the image of Nigeria.

Below are a few of Ashake's music that potray Nigeria in good light in the global community:

**1. Mr. Money with the Vibe (2022*)***

In this album, Ashake project a good image of Nigeria, highlighting how vibrant and culturally rich the Nigerian culture is. It's a blend of Fuji, Afrobeas and Amanpiano which reflects Nigeria's musical diversity and creativity.

**Tracks like:** *"Omo Ope," "Peace Be Unto You (PBUY)," "Terminator"*

- These songs reflect hard work, joy, resilience, and gratitude, therefore countering negative stereotypes about Nigeria.
- For example, themes of success despite humble beginnings reflect a positive "hustle culture" identity associated with Nigerian youth.

The impact of this is that, international listeners now see and associate Nigerians with **energy, creativity, and optimism**, rather than instability or poverty.

**2. Work of Art (2023)**

This album showed Ashake's global reach and promoted and enhanced Nigeria's image in the global music community. Tracks such as: *"Yoga," "Amapiano," "Sunshine," "Lonely at the Top"* , and songs such as: *"Sunshine"* and *"Amapiano"* help to promote happiness, celebration, and African identity, while *"Yoga"* shows cultural fusion with global sounds. The album equally underscores spirituality and cultural pride, particularly in tracks that reference Yoruba beliefs and gratitude to God. The impact is that, the album has helped to shape the perception of Nigeria as being innovative, globally relevant and culturally influential.

**Conclusion**

This article has no doubt interrogated the instrumentality of Ololade Ashake's music as a cultural diplomatic tool with which to further help to "sell" Nigeria and her values to the world. This of course is in addition to the efforts of the traditional diplomats who work in Nigeria's foreign missions abroad. The study has highlighted how Ashake's music has helped to rebrand Nigeria and counter the negative image Nigeria has had in the global community. In conclusion therefore, Ololade Asakes is a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy because, it has helped to project a positive image of Nigeria to the global community. His combination of Afrobeats, Amapiano, and indigenous Yoruba expressions, he has not only succeeded in entertaining but has also promoted Nigerian language, people, fashions, lifestyles and our values across countries borders. His large fan base across the globe has helped to reshape perceptions about Nigeria as against the stereotypical lens through which we were being looked at before. Therefore, his music has played a fundamental role in enhancing Nigerias soft power and fostering cultural exchange in the modern global space.

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