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## BUNUZDOGBE MUSICAL TRADITION AMONG THE AGANYIN OF LAGOS, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The Aganyin of Lagos are immigrants from then Gold Coast now Ghana into Nigeria and they have largely settled around the coastal areas of Badagry Local Government in Lagos State since around the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Given the dearth of studies on the socio-cultural practices of the Aganyin, particularly their music, this paper examines the musical tradition among the Aganyin of Lagos. Participant observation and In-depth Interview were used to collect data for the study. This study reveals that bunudzogbe music, a social music, is characterized by three musical movements during performance. Afahun with moderately fast tempo is the opening movement, and it takes the form of songs of praise and prayer. Gbaja is the second movement. It is very fast and involves full participation. Its lyrics are satirical, and they contain warnings and social sentiments. The last movement, Ageshe, has a moderate tempo. This paper concludes that bunudzogbe musical tradition fosters social bonding among the Aganyin and enhances interculturality with their host community.

### Introduction

Nigeria shares boundaries with some neighboring West African countries thus making migrations cushy. These countries include: Ghana, Benin Republic, Togo, Gambia and Sierra lone to mention a few. In the present day Nigeria, Badagry area of Lagos State is one of those areas where notable interactions and transactions with other Western countries took place along the coastal area. These interactions and

transactions include but not limited to trade and missionary activities (Boahen, 1966; Mabogunje, 1971; Ryder, 1969; Vidal, 1986).

Geographically, Badagry is located in the extreme southwestern part of Nigeria border with the Benin Republic. It is located precisely between latitude 6.5 north of the Equator and longitude 3.25 east of the Greenwich meridian. The Aganyin are largely domiciled along the coastal area of the Badagry with various settlements such as Jegeme, Pako, Abuja, Jhevenu, and Agbojejo. The social and political hub of the Aganyin communities across the coast of Lagos is on a beach in Ajido area with its geographical coordinates as 6° 25' 0" North, 3° 1' 0" East of Badagry.

Historically, the Aganyin are reported to have been migrants from Ghana. Corroborating this stance, Lawal (1994) noted "...these villages were established by itinerant fishermen who came to the Gberefu area from Modern Ghana, passing through the Seme area..."(p.17) A set of oral tradition claimed that the Aganyin origin could be traced to the ancient Oduduwa kingdom. They were said to have migrated Ile-Ife around the mid-twelfth century and journeyed through the present day Republic of Benin, Togo and finally to Ghana thus making them a sub-set of the larger Yoruba nation. The Aganyin (Ogu or Ewe pronounced Eveh people) have their kith and kins in the republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey), Ghana (formerly Gold Coast) and Republic of Togo and Egbado south area of Ogun state in Nigeria.

On the contrary, Chief Aganyingan, the community and traditional head of the Aganyin in Badagry, claimed that their forefathers were migrants from Gold Coast (Ghana) who settled in Badagry along the coastal area. It was from this area that they (their forefathers) came on fishing expedition through the high sea and settled in the area known as Jegeme, a beach opposite Ajido town. He further explained that his own parents settled in Ajido where they lived and worked as farmers. It should be noted that the chief did not trace their homestead to Ile-Ife during the conversation with the

researcher but other respondents remarked that they (Aganyin) are descendants of Oduduwa (personal interview in 2012). Available evidence shows that the Aganyin share cultural traits with the Yoruba, Ghana, Togo and Republic as a result of migration movements and this is evident in names such Akapo (Yoruba) and Kobena (Ghana).

The ancient city of Badagry has received several scholarly studies, however, the socio-cultural life of the Aganyin, one of the sub-ethnic groups in Badagry has not been given adequate attention particularly their music. Hence, the paper examines the musical tradition of the Aganyin.

#### ***Bunudzogbe* musical tradition among the Aganyin**

*Bunudzogbe* is the only musical tradition celebrated by the Aganyin in Badagry. The tradition which has been observed since 1953 among the Aganyin in Badagry still subsists till date even in Ghana. *Bunudzogbe* literally means 'think about your tomorrow'. This tradition reminds members of the community of life hereafter and encourages them to extend the hand of love and benevolence to each other. *Bunudzogbe* tradition is observed through a musical performance. It holds usually every last Saturday of the month or sometimes, rarely though, first Saturday the month for contingency reasons. The performance venue for *bunudzogbe* musical performance is usually in the centre area of the village under a hut with bamboo wood as pillars and palm leaves as the roof while the palm trees around the hut make performance venue very cool and conducive for the performers.





Figure 1: Performance venue for *bunuzdogbe* music

### Bunuzdogbe Musical Performance

The *bunuzdogbe* musical performance starts with an instrumental prelude by the drummers. The instrumental prelude which is moderate in speed and last for 20-30 minutes signals the commencement of the performance to every members of the community. Shortly after this instrumental prelude, an opening prayer and libation (water and any bottled drink) are offered by the chief celebrant, usually the head of the host family requesting for a smooth and hitch-free celebration and performance from their ancestors.



Figure 2: Chief celebrant and some members of the community offering prayers

After the prayers, a short song usually unaccompanied in free rhythm is sung by the lead singer in form of a call and response by the audience. The opening song is repeated about two to three times in free rhythm before resuming in a strict time along with instrumental accompaniments. Almost all the women in the performance use a pair of wooden clappers or their bare hands as accompaniment during performance. Like most African communities, singing in *bunudzogbe* is done by a lead singer, male or female while every member of the audience joins in chorus in a call and response style.

Generally, music in Africa engages song, drum and dance. Dancing in *bunudzogbe* is a vital component in the musical performance which portrays oneness and togetherness in the society. The dance is done in groups of two, three or four when a dancer gets up to extend an invitation to another dancer of his or her choice and both of them will dance from one end of the performance arena to the other. Vigorous swinging of hands, shaking of the elbows and arms characterize the dance movements in *bunudzogbe* music. Although there is no particular family, lineage or clan who is the sole custodian of *bunudzogbe* music; musicians, especially instrumentalists require proficient musical skills.

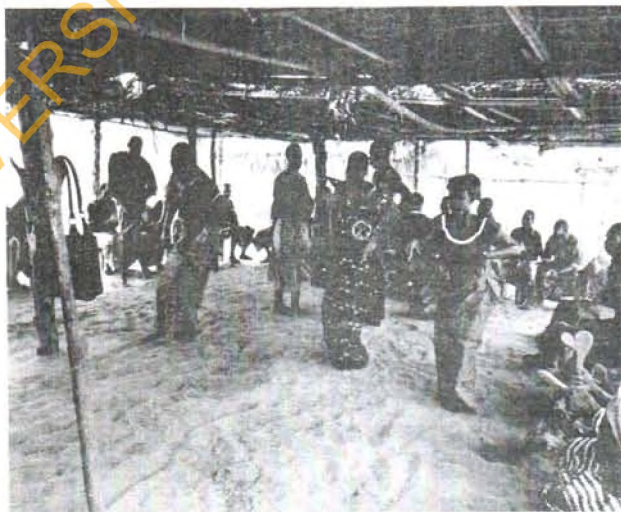


Figure 3: Female dancers to *bunudzogbe* music

### Musical movements in bunudzogbe music

In western classical music, many instrumental works are divided into large, independent sections called movements. These are stand-alone pieces that have been grouped together by the composer to constitute a larger work. Usually, the movements in a multi-movement work have a contrasting character in terms of tempo and other musical qualities (Hoffer, 2010, p. 29). Similarly, there are three distinct musical movements in *bunudzogbe* musical performance namely: *afahun*, *gbaja* and *ageshe*. Each movement varies in theme, instrumental and vocal character.

#### Afahun movement

This is the first movement in *bunudzogbe* musical performance and it is both instrumental and vocal forms of music. *Afahun* movement present songs of prayers and petitions by members of the *bunudzogbe* group to their ancestors requesting for a hitch-free celebration during their musical performance. The act of making supplications in order to solicit the assistance of the extra-terrestrial world is an age long tradition among Africans. The first song is presented first as a recitative by the lead singer before it is repeated in a more strict rhythm with instrumental accompaniment and chorused by all.

#### Musical example 1

### Ba sere

The musical notation is written on a single staff in bass clef with a 12/8 time signature. It is divided into two sections: 'Call' and 'response'. The 'Call' section consists of a series of eighth notes and quarter notes. The 'response' section consists of a series of quarter notes and eighth notes. Below the staff, the lyrics are written: 'E ba se re're'a wuna e yi ba u na e yi ba ba se re're'a wuna e yi ba'.

### Translation

Elders of the land, both living and the dead  
We acknowledge your presence and support  
As we commence this celebration and performance

The above song text reinforces the belief of the Aganyin in life after death as well as the needful support of their ancestors which they consider germane for a successful performance. Not only that deference is given to the dead, the elders who are still living in the community are also recognized and honoured. Another song that expresses the request of the performers in a call and response form is:

**Call:** *A matro ro gbe ma fia daje woni vonami*

**Response:** *A matro ro gbe ma fia da je oni go*

**Call:** *A matro ro gbe ma fia daje woni vonami*

**Response:** *A matro ro gbe ma fia da je oni go*

**Call:** *A matro ro gbe*

**Response:** *Ma fia da je*

### Translation:

God has answered all our prayers offered to Him  
And we have faith that He will still answer the remaining request  
From the text of the song above, the Aganyin expresses their faith in the Supreme Being who in time past had answered their requests, who they also trust will continue to answer all future requests.

*Afahun* movement is usually in a moderate tempo, intensity and volume. The word *aloya* (pronounced hallooya), meaning 'it is enough my people' is used to signal the end of a particular song or section of the performance. Once the lead singer exclaims '*aloya*' there is usually a prompt response from the audience: *agbo ato* (we hear you) and the

drummers are expected to stop playing. The expression *aloya* is only used in *afahun* movement.

### Gbaja Movement

This movement is purely a social and entertaining part of *bunuzdogbe* musical performance. In *gbaja* movement, the music becomes a little rigorous and faster in tempo. Dance steps and gestures become very energetic with more people participating. According to Mr Stephen, a member of another performing group within the Aganyin community explained that *gbaja* movement is the core section of *bunuzdogbe* performance. Songs in *gbaja* movement talk about love life and moral instructions. In a song titled "lo lo voda", the value the people holds for love among one another is expressed below:

### Musical example 2:

#### Lo lo vodola

The image shows two staves of musical notation in a 2/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats. The melody is written on a treble clef. The lyrics are written below the notes. A large diagonal watermark 'UNIVERSITY OF BADAGRY' is overlaid on the page.

Lo lo vo do\_ la shi mo vo na mo ra\_ ko ra ni ni she ra ja ja shi mo vo na mo ra\_ ko ra ni ni

5  
she ra ja ja shi mo vo na mo ra\_ lo lo vo do\_ la shi mo vo na mo ra\_

Love, love

The river of love never runs dry

Love, love is all we need

The expression of love and unity is seen among the performers of *bunuzdogbe* music in the way and manner they dance with each other in twos, threes and above.

### *Ageshe* movement

This is the last and the fastest movement of the performance. The theme of the songs in *ageshe* expresses the need to live in unity and cooperate with one another as members of the community and group. Participation by all, singers, dancers and drummers is very notable and overwhelming in this movement. The movement usually ends with a Ghanaian highlife tune. An example is given below:

### Musical example 3:

#### Highlife tune

Ya go to li ga ta o ka to\_ li viao ka ta\_ lu ve je gbo o\_ e si mo je mo

6  
o tro me gbe no yi mo\_ o la o le di la si\_ be la me la

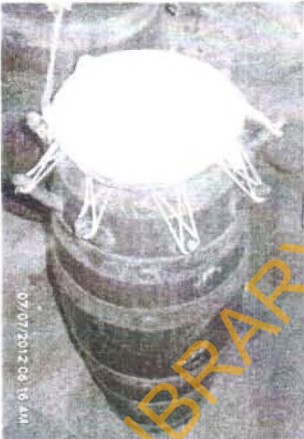
11  
bla\_ wo yi ka vu o\_ be la me la bla wo yi ka vu o

### Musical Instruments in *bunudzogbe* performance

In *bunudzogbe* musical performances membranophones (*sogo*, *asivi*, *kankaganu*, *pake*, *ezewu*) and idiophones (*aste* -rattles, *gankogwi-gong/bells* and *ape*- wooden clappers) are instruments which are prominent. However, the researcher witnessed the use of a Western musical brass instrument known as the bugle during a performance by a different performing group among the Aganyin. This cannot be disconnected from possible contact with the West.



Sogo drum



Asiyi drum



Kanganu drums



Ezewu drum



Pake drum



Sets of agogo



Figure 12: Cross section of women playing the *ape* in *bunudzogbe* music



## Conclusion

Bunuzdogbe music among the Aganyin performs dual functions. Firstly, it fosters unity, love and cooperation among members of the community. Secondly, it provides the Aganyin people the opportunity to re-enact their age long musical tradition thus allowing for cultural continuity as immigrants in Diaspora and inter-culturality in performance practice with that of their "host" community.

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