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PERFORMANCE PRACTICES IN THE MUSIC OF THE AGANYIN PEOPLE OF BADAGRY, LAGOS

Toyin Samuel Ajose

Abstract

One of the factors responsible for cultural dynamism is acculturation which is engendered by cultural interactions over a period of time. Music, a cultural product in African society is functional as it performs social, historic, linguistic and religious roles to mention a few. This paper examines the ethnography of the Aganyin people in Badagry with a view to highlight the various performance practices in the music of the Aganyin. Using qualitative method as tool of enquiry, this study reveals the various modes of recruiting and training of musicians in Aganyin community. Structural analysis of some selected Aganyin songs were done based on their scale system, tonality, harmony, texture and form. Data for this study were gathered through interview, observation, archival materials, library and internet materials.

Keywords: culture, performance practices, Aganyin music, Badagry.

Introduction

Culture permeates every aspect of any society. It is regarded as the bed rock of any society and a factor which distinguishes a society from another. Adedokun (1994:287) sees culture as a very important aspect of social structure as it distinguishes man from non-man and one social organization from another. The development of culture depends upon the humans' capacity to learn and to transmit knowledge to succeeding generation. Andah in Mbagoku (2004) notes that "...it has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic and technological expression and process of a people, usually ethnically, or supra-nationally related, and usually living in a geographically contiguous areas; what they pass on their successors and how these are passed..."(p.4). Andah's position therefore articulates the fact that culture can be learned. Not only can culture be learned, it is also shared

among members of a particular society. Culture can thus shape the personality of the members of a society. It can also control the behaviours and relationships of members of a society within the group since culture is a way of thinking, feeling and believing in any given society resulting in a behavior which gives that society resulting in a behavioral identity (Akpabot, 1986). It therefore means that culture serves as a yardstick for measuring and assessing various human behaviours within any given society.

It is no gainsaying that culture is dynamic hence the continuity and change in any given cultural practices because of so many factors. One of the factors responsible for cultural dynamism is acculturation which is engendered by cultural interactions over a period of time. The pride of any society is in its cultural components. No wonder Dabaghian (1970: 103) stressed that “the pride of any society lies in its culture since no society in the world could be considered great without reference to its tradition and culture”. Therefore, for a detailed understanding of a group of people, there is the need for apt observation of various aspects of their culture. Every human society is characterised by its culture hence cultural diversities among various societies of the world. In Africa, like other societies in the world, these diversities in cultural practices are evident in language, music, religion, politics and economy of each society.

Music in African society is functional as it performs social, historic, linguistic and religious roles to mention a few. Communal activities are accompanied by singing, dancing and drumming. Hickok (1989) aptly noted that these three activities are rarely separated, they are interdependent. He further remarked that music as a whole is characterized by sophisticated and complex rhythmic structure, a wide range of indigenous instruments, a strong oral tradition of songs, and a vast store of dances to accompany and celebrate all aspects of life. In similar vein, Akpabot (1986:40) remarked that “the word ‘music’ in Africa means vocal participation, the physical manipulation of instrument and the rhythmic or dance movements associated with music”. Similarly, Nketia (1979:2) stresses the multiple function of music performance in the context of communal behavior and the opportunity it provides for sharing in the creative experience, for participating in music as a form of communication experience, and for

using music as an avenue for the expression of group sentiments. He further explains that there is a great deal of emphasis in community life on music making as a terminal activity, for it is through such participation that a large number of people identify themselves with the aims and purposes of a social event and interact with one another.

However, it should be noted that there are exceptions to some social events such as rituals, customs or festivals where only the initiates are allowed to participate and perform as the case may be. For example, the *oro* festival (a cult exclusively for men among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria) is vehemently prohibited for women both in sight and in rites of participation. Performance of music in African societies as asserted by Nketia (1979:21) is generally organized as a social event. He further explains that on such occasions, members of a group or a community come together for the enjoyment of leisure, for recreational activities, or for the performance of a rite, ceremony, festival, or any kind of collective activity. It is pertinent to note that music performances in traditional society have been a public exhibition and are communal in nature. This view was further substantiated thus:

Since the traditional approach of music making makes it a part of the institutional life of a community, the physical setting for performances can be any spot suitable for collective activity. It may be a public place, or a private area to which only those intimately concerned with the event are admitted; a regular place of worship, such as shrine, a sacred spot, a grove, a museum, a mausoleum; the courtyard of the house where a ceremony is taking place, or the area behind it; the scene of the communal labor, the corner of a street habitually used by social groups for music making and dancing, a market place, or a dance plaza (Nketia, 1979:31).

Musical performance among the Aganyin people in Badagry provides a social platform for members of the community for enjoyment of leisure, recreational activities or performance of a rite; it also provides a social continuum even in the face of cultural change and interaction.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts as its focal lens the theory of continuity and change. This theory also referred to as cultural dynamism is identified with

Herskovis and Bascom and has been used by various scholars (Alaja-Browne, 1989; Okunade, 2005; Samuel, 2009). This theory posits that the transmission process or continuity of culture is subject to change in the process of time. In similar manner, Bowman (1998) remarked that culture is constantly being created, recreated, modified, contested and negotiated. It therefore suggests that culture is ever changing and dynamic. Okunade (2005:66) succinctly asserts: 'the main thrust of the theory is continuity of tradition in the face of changes as accepted by the community'.

Considering the fact that music is a product of a people's culture, it also suggests that the music practices and performances of such cultures are inevitably subject to change. Samuel (2009) explained that musical change as a sub-set of cultural dynamism is concerned with movements of the boundaries of musical tradition. He further noted that this usually involves significant innovations in musical systems, a new idea about music, or even a new social formation which often results in profound consequences on musical structures.

In Aganyin musical performance several changes have attended their musical tradition as practiced in Badagry. Notable among this cultural change is the use of an aerophone instrument – Bugle, a western brass instrument in the music of the Aganyin. Also, the commercialization of public performance of Aganyin music for social events outside their local communities is another notable change that has taken place among the Aganyin people of Badagry. Although the researcher did not witness any of such public performance, however, key informants reported that the Aganyin community performing groups are often invited to perform at public functions for a fee.

Ethnography of the Aganyin People in Badagry, Lagos

The Aganyin are largely settled along the coastal area of the Badagry. Badagry is fifty one kilometers West of Lagos. It is bounded in the north by the Egbado Plateau, in the south by the Atlantic Ocean and in the west by the Nigerian-Benin border. Among the coastal settlements of the Aganyin in Badagry are Jegeme, Pako, Abuja, Jhevenu, and Agbojejo. Specifically, the Aganyin settlement is on a beach in Ajido area with its geographical coordinates as 6° 25' 0" North, 3° 1' 0" East

of Badagry. The Aganyin is one of the ethnic groups which constitute part of Badagry.

Various historical accounts abound on the origin of the Aganyin people of Lagos particularly in Badagry (Akinjogbin, 1994; Lawal, 1994). As an enterprising and industrious people, they settled along the coastline of Lagos State stretching from Kweme sea beach (Seme border) going through the previously well-known as Menukunme that is now contracted to "Mekumen" at the Victoria Island, Lagos to Epe beaches. Their affinity to the coast may not be unconnected to their newly acquired trade of fishing and coconut during their sojourn in Benin, Togo and Ghana. According to Aganyingan (the traditional head of the Aganyin communities along the coastal area of Badagry), he reported that the Ajido people are the original owners of the land and that they (Aganyin) were sojourners long before Nigeria's independence.

Language

The language of the people of Badagry is Gu, Gugbe or Egun. It is a dialect of the Aja. According to Greenberg (1948), the Aja is a part of the Ewe language group, which covers between lower Volta in southeastern Ghana and the extreme southwestern Nigeria by the Nigerian-Benin border. The Ewe is a unit of the larger Kwa language family of West Africa. The common language spoken by the Aganyin is known as Ewe or Evuegbe. They also speak and understand *Egun* language. Some of the Aganyin could understand and speak little of English language as well as Yoruba language. Akinjogbin (1994) cited an oral tradition which claims that there had been strong contact between the Yoruba, the Aja and the Ewe people. He noted that this cultural contact was so strong that by the 19th century Yoruba language was the lingua franca of both the Ajah and the Ewe people. He further observed that names such as Fagbeji, Amosu, Akapo, Agboade, Famuyiwa e.t.c remain Ewe and Ajah names till date as a symbol of historical cultural contact with the Yoruba ethnicity.

Political Organization

An oral source claims that the earliest monarchy for the Badagry stool had its root from Accra in the old Gold Coast through the Ga/Ewe speaking group who historically reputed to have migrated from the ancient Ketu kingdom (part of Oduduwa major kingdom) which left Ile-

Ife around the mid twelfth century and established the Badagry kingdom around 1560. Despite the fact that the Aganyin are long time settlers if not co-founders of Badagry (Lawal 1994:17) they are not prominent in the political class in that region. However, the owners of the land- Ajido accommodated the Aganyingan in their political affairs since they are part of their subjects. The position held by the Aganyingan in the political structure of Ajido is known as Baale of Ajido beach in the cabinet of the Oba of Ajido. The person who assists the traditional head of the Aganyin community is known as Izangan who is an elderly man. He is responsible for resolving issues at grass root level and when it becomes imperative for an higher authority such issues are taken to the supreme head- Aganyingan. Izangan is also responsible for checkmating the activities of the traditional head as well as mediator between the people of the community and Aganyingan. He is usually appointed by the Oba of Ajido who the Aganyin refers to as their host.



Fig 1: Chief Aganyigan, traditional head of Aganyin community in Ajido, Badagry

Economic Activities

The *Aganyin* are known majorly for fishing. This is due to the nature of the geographical environment. The rivers, creeks, lagoon and the marshes are reservoirs for fishes, crayfish and crabs that are caught by traps, hooks and nets. Canoes and boats provide the means for fishing

and for movement. Apart from fishing, they are also involved in farming, red oil production and production of ethanol wine (*ogogoro*) because of the massive palm tree plantations available in the area. The Aganyin are believed to have been the oldest coconut trees planters in Nigeria. They are also involved in making of fishing nets and weaving of palm fons for roofing their huts and making of fence round their homes. Kunle (1994:18) noted that 'for the women, fishing smoking and mat weaving and trading were their major occupations'. Apart from these, the women were also involved in pottery.



Fig 2: Aganyin men on fishing expedition

Religious Belief

Like the Yoruba, the Aganyin practice traditional religion. According to their traditional head - Aganyingan, the Aganyin are traditional worshippers from time immemorial. He further claimed that they do not worship same deity or divinity collectively but that every clan and settlement in Ajido beach has their own various deities and divinities they venerate if and when the need arises. In his words he 'anyone and everyone will venerate its own deity whenever there is a demand from their god but that we do not celebrate or venerate one god together collectively as community' (Personal communication, 2012). The deities venerated by the Aganyin include but not limited to: *Ogun, Sango and Ifa*. Despite the fact that every members of the Aganyin community are adherents of various traditional religions, majority of them still practice some other religion such as Christianity and Islam.

Performance Practices in the Music of the Aganyin of Badagry

As a community, social celebration calls for diverse musical performances among the Aganyin. Ajose (2016:50) identified a major musical tradition among the Aganyin known as *bunuzdogbe* music. He noted that *bunuzdogbe* musical performance is the only musical tradition celebrated by the Aganyin in Badagry since 1953. A critical observation of this musical performance reveals some cultural interactions between the Aganyin and their host community. Some of the interactions are noticed in the mixture of language of performance, musical instruments and musicians. See Ajose (2016) for detailed analysis of the *bunuzdogbe* musical performance. However, a detailed inquiry into the recruitment and training of musicians, vocal and instrumental forms, structural as well as textual analysis of some songs of the Aganyin will be explored in the following sections.

Recruitment and Training of Musicians

Nketia (1979) observed that the success of a musical event depends to a large extent on good musical leadership. In a same vein, Idamoyibo (2013:185) opines that 'a skillful ensemble leader takes his time out to introduce the ensemble practices to his apprentice, knowing fully well that his method of introduction will go a long way to affect the members positively or negatively'. However, it is a common knowledge that there is no leadership without followership, it therefore implies that the success of a musical event is also dependent on good musical followership or team given that music cannot be performed in isolation. Hence, the recruitment and training of musicians is very germane to the continuity and patronage of any musical group.

Like various traditional African societies, recruitment of musicians among the Aganyin people of Badagry is not strictly formal or structured in the real sense. Among the Aganyin, musicians, especially instrument players are admitted into the ensemble based on innate skills and abilities. Anyone who wishes to join the band will be auditioned by the master drummer; upon satisfactory performance which is usually based on discretionary judgment of the master drummer, such an applicant is admitted into the band. Intending members of the band must be at least twenty-five years of age before being admitted. Apart from this, prospective member is expected to display satisfactory performance skill and dexterity. There are no rites accompanying the recruitment

process of new musicians. The new member is also expected to pay a token amount of money and this depends on his financial capacity as no fixed amount is made compulsory. In addition, some edible items are usually required of any new member of the band before he can be fully accepted. Such items include few bottles of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drink, sweets, chewing gums and biscuits. These items are shared among members of the band as part of the recruitment process.

The training process of musicians among Aganyin is very pragmatic and progressive. The training is non-formal in scope as 'there is no literary training by use of books; the entire art is transmitted practically by verbal instructions and guidance.' (Layade, 2018:316) through an apprenticeship method. Idamoyibo sheds more light on this form of music apprenticeship:

In the apprenticeship system of musical training, knowledge is transmitted through the experience of a master artiste to the learners under him. He does this by gradual instruction, utilizing or exploring his experience through moderate and consistent process of instruction while the learners observe the critical manipulations of his instruments (2013:185).

In traditional African communities, apprenticeship is encouraged, enforced, highly recognized, and accorded an enviable position in the people's culture and ways of life (Olusoji, 2013:56). Training under a revered master musician is considered a prestigious feat in any traditional musical arts education. The master musician determines to a very large extent the pace, scope and duration of the training as the case may be. As Olusoji (2013:56) rightly noted that 'would be musician are taken through an intensive training whose scope, duration, syllabus, philosophy, content and curriculum are determined by the masters. In the case of instrumental music, apprentice are taught to carry the instruments, how to tap rhythm, how to accompany songs and probably improvisation and repairs etc.'

Among the Aganyin, the master musician, a drummer, coordinates the training sessions which is sometimes done during live performances or few hours before the performance. He assigns who plays what at any given time and his instructions are final. During the training sessions whether at a live performance or rehearsal session, trainee musicians

rally round him for proximity and easy response to verbal or musical commands.



Master musician

Fig. 2: Cross section of Aganyin musicians in Ajido beach, Badagry.

Training session takes place simultaneously at rehearsals on every Monday preceding the performance day. In addition, training also takes place on the day of the event at least one hour before the performance proper.

It is pertinent to note that training of musicians in this community is not only focused on musical proficiency only, serious premium is given to non-musical matters such as promptness at training sessions as well as performance place. Any act of indiscipline is serious frowned at and in many cases attracts a penalty. Mr. Richard, popularly called *Kokoro* (a Yoruba word for insect), the master drummer explains the various sanctions accorded erring member of the music ensemble particularly the drummers:

Training session is compulsory for every member of the band. Absence from rehearsal will be queried and if genuine and satisfactory reasons are not provided, the defaulter will be fined. Fines could be either drink or money. Until fine is paid, such a musician may not be allowed to perform with the whole band (Personal communication, January 2012).

Whilst the recruitment and training of musicians among the Aganyin people of Badagry is non-formal in comparison with western music education, it is apt to note that the recruitment and training of musicians are still subject to some cultural pre-requisite such as innate musical ability, specific age bracket and willingness to comply with the code of ethics of the musical ensemble.

Vocal Forms of Aganyin Music

Musical performance among the Aganyin people of Badagry employed both vocal and instrumental media. The vocal music is performed by both song leader and the audience in an alternative or call and response form. At some point as observed by the researcher, there is no permanent song leader throughout the whole performance. Because of the lengthy nature of the performance, there is a periodic change of lead singer during the performance so as to allow the singers to rest at intervals. Sometimes, there are assisting vocalists between 4 and 5 who surround the lead vocalist to support him/her as well as amplifying the song to other members seated round the performance venue. Merriam (1964:115) aptly pointed out certain criteria for a vocalist in traditional music such as numbers of songs known, memory for words and music, tempo, voice quality, accuracy of rendition, and the necessity for group or solo singing.

It should be stressed that in the musical performances of the Aganyin, vocal leadership is not gender biased although men were prominently observed to be song leaders in many of the performances witnessed. Scholars have examined the significance of the men as singers in many traditional music performances. For instance, Wisler in Merriam (1964) reported that men are considered to be better singers than women partly because they learn more songs, though the women could do as well, if they had the chance, for women are not supposed to try to learn all the different songs like me. Whilst Wisler's position may seem to be correct, it is however not applicable to all African societies. Among the Aganyin, a vibrating or wavering tone is a major qualities of a song leader. Densmore in same view reports that among the Chippewa '...a vibrating or wavering tone is especially pleasing to the singers. This is difficult for them to acquire and is considered a sign of musical proficiency.' (1910:4).



Fig. 3: Researcher (left) and assisting vocalist supporting the lead vocalist during a performance

Structural Analysis

The section will examine the scale, texture and harmonic structure of some selected Aganyin songs.

Scale System

The pentatonic scale is most dominantly used in the music of the Aganyin. The pentatonic scale which is a five tone scale is well explored in the music of the Aganyin.

Koko yan o misi

Musical notation for the song "Koko yan o misi". The notation is in G major (one sharp) and 12/8 time. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Ba ko_ la ghao ma lo a ko ko vi yan we gba ko_ la gba o ma ya

mi se_____ mi se_____ ko ko bia o mi se_____

Musical example 1.

The hexatonic (six-tone) scale is also frequently used. See an example of hexatonic scale in *Zan ogbe*.

Zan ogbe

The musical notation for 'Zan ogbe' is presented in three staves of bass clef, 12/8 time signature. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words underlined to indicate syllables. The lyrics are: 'A dra ko ja pa zan_ gbe a dra ko ja pa yan e zan gbe dra ko ja pa', 'zan_ gbe a dra ko ja pa yan zan_ gbe ji son ke na mi_ zan_ gbe o gou ke_ na mi', and 'zan_ gbe dra ko ja pae_ zan_ gbe a dra ko ja pa yan e zan_ gbe_'. There are small numbers 4 and 7 above the first and second staves respectively, possibly indicating measure numbers or bar lines.

Musical example 2.

The hexatonic scale appears in various forms. Diatonically, it is either the scale uses a fourth or the scale is of a missing third and flattened seventh as the case may be.

Texture

The texture of Aganyin music is predominantly homophonic. This is due to the fact that other voice parts take their reference from the main melody and move in the same basic rhythm. Thus, there are no independent melodies observed during singing. Structurally, harmony produced is a deliberate phenomenon by performers. An example is given:

Dure ba ho dure

Solo
du re e__ ba ho du re o ho du re__ ba ye du re__ du re__ ba ho

Chorus
du re__ ba ye du re__

4

Solo
du re o ho du re__ ba ya du re__ so n to re lia u sau to o__ ta re lia u sau to o su kpo nu ma po

Chorus
du re__ so n to re lia u sau to o to re lia u sau to o su kpo nu ma po

8

Solo
zdi ja o ko me o ta kra me shi gbe to__ ki__ ja ro gbe o o__ ba on ja ro__ gbe o

Chorus
zdi ja o ko me o ta kra me shi gbe to__ ki__ ja ro gbe o o__ ba on ja ro__ gbe o

Musical example 2.

Harmony

The harmonic structures that predominantly characterize Aganyin music are parallel seconds, fourths and sixths. It should be noted that these harmonies often occur at cadential points. The sixth is an example of the third inverted so it is not entirely a new interval. The use of octaves is frequently used by female singers due to vocal convenience which matches that of the lead singer (male).

Lo lo vodola

Lo lo vo do__ la shi mo vo na mo ra__ ko ra ri ri she ra ja ja shi mo vo na mo ra__ ko ra ri ri

5

she ra ja ja shi mo vo na mo e__ lo lo vo do__ la shi mo vo na mo ra__

Musical example 3.

Call and Response

Almost all the song used in *bunudzogbe* music employed this vocal form. The leader (cantor) sings the song from the beginning to the end and it's repeated exactly by the chorus. Sometimes, the cantor sings a part of the song and the chorus completes the remaining part of the song and for some songs the leader calls part of the song and they both end together.

Ga jao

Musical score for 'Ga jao'. The score is in 6/8 time and B-flat major. It features two parts: Chorus and Solo. The Chorus part is on a treble clef staff, and the Solo part is on a bass clef staff. The lyrics are: Ga jao ga jao ga jao e ga jao ga jao ga jao e.

Musical example 4.

Another example

Mo welo mo we

Musical score for 'Mo welo mo we'. The score is in 6/8 time and D major. It features three parts: Solo, Chorus, and Solo. The Chorus part is on a treble clef staff, and the Solo parts are on treble clef staves. The lyrics are: Mo we lo mo we e o ma go wao si ma go wao ba ba ra ga ju a ga ra sa o e.

Musical example 5.**Song Text in Aganyin Music**

Song text is one of the indispensable sources of understanding the culture and history of a people. It reveals the personal and collective as well as social experiences of people in any given society. Akpabot (1986:42) remarked that song texts can act as historical commentaries or culture indicators. The song text in Aganyin music reveals points to issues of everyday life, traditions, belief and customs of the Aganyin people of Badagry. Nketia (1979) classified songs into three broad categories as cradle, reflective and general. He further states that reflective songs may be philosophical, sentimental or satirical, humorous or comic. Songs such as these may be intended to entertain, inform, praise, insult, exhort, warn, or inspire audience. To a large extent many of the Aganyin songs fall within the reflective songs.

A song that admonishes and encourages members of the Aganyin community to live and work in unity to ensure a blissful communal experience is seen below:

Du re e baho dure o ho, son to re lia u sau to
O sukpo nu ma po zdi ja o ko me
O ta kra me shi gbe to ki jar o gbe o
O ba on jar o gbe ooo

Nobody succeeds alone
No society succeeds alone
We are working together to
Make our society better

From the song text above, the need for cooperation, love and unity among community members is stressed. The Aganyin see themselves as strangers in their host community and there it is imperative for them to remain united so as to make their Aganyin society better.

Satire or comic songs are also found in Aganyin songs. These songs are usually used to enthuse audience especially during a long tiring performance session. An example thus:

Mama pa chia yan ga
Mama pa chia yan ga
Baba pa chia yan ga

If you lie or sleep
With a woman with big buttocks
Your bed may collapse

As observed in the text above, the song is used a satire and may not be used to deride woman with big buttocks in the society. In the author's opinion it may just be a way of spurring cheering interactions between members of the group both male and female. At the point when they say the word *pachia yanga*, the women will turn to their buttocks to the men cheerfully.

Religious beliefs and philosophy are also expressed in the songs of the Aganyin as follows:

Adra ko ja pa, zan gbe
Adra ko ja pa yan e
Zan gbe ji sun ken a mi
Zan gbe o gau ken a mi

All those that are chasing us for evil
O God, please help us to overcome them
So that their evil intentions for us
Will not be fulfilled

Like many African societies, the Aganyin belief in the 'other' world. That is beyond the physical dimension of human lives there are divine powers that can be responsible for the actions and inactions of human beings. Hence, there is the need for a supernatural intervention to help combat these malevolent agents whether seen or unseen.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the Aganyin as immigrants in Badagry, Lagos have consistently over the years maintained their cultural practices. Since music is one of the indicators of culture, the Aganyin people of Badagry through various performance practices have sustained their cultural heritage thus allowing for cultural acculturation. As seen in this paper, the musical structure of Aganyin music is predominantly pentatonic with occasional use of hexatonic scales; homophonic in texture with the frequent use of call and response and harmony used at cadential points. Also, Song texts reveal themes on unity, satire and cultural/religious ideology. We can infer from this study that the Aganyin community in Badagry has been able to sustain their socio-cultural identity through musical performances even as a immigrants thus ensuring that their musical tradition does not go into extinction. However, further studies can examine the contemporary performance practice in the music of the Aganyin in Badagry.

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