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Instrumental organization in Bunuzdogbe music of the Aganyin people of Badagry, Lagos

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Introduction

The cosmopolitan nature of Lagos has attracted the interest of various scholars and this is evident in the increasing literature on the city. Lagos plays host to people from various social, cultural, and ethnic orientations. One of such people are the Aganyin—one of the ethnic groups in Badagry of Lagos. Many scholars have examined the historical context of the origin and settlement of the Aganyin people in Lagos (Akinjogbin, 1994; Lawal, 1994; Younge, 2011). The Aganyin people of Lagos are part of the southeastern Ewe (pronounced Eve) of Ghana who were dispersed across West Africa—Ghana, Togo, Benin and Niger due to colonization (Younge, 2011). Other scholars have noted that the Aganyin moved into Lagos from Ghana through the coastal routes while on their fishing expedition. Like other Ewe people, the Aganyin are located in Lagos, Badagri, and their suburbs in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Younge, 2011:16). According to oral history, the ancestry of the Aganyin can be traced to the ancient Oduduwa kingdom through migration from Ile-Ife to the present day Republic of Benin, Togo and then Ghana. Cultural evidence such as kinship and names largely suggest that the Aganyin share common traits with the Yoruba. As observed by Younge (2011:17), “the southeastern Ewe, together with the Yoruba, initially settled in Oyo, Nigeria, but later migrated to Ketu in present-day Benin. The Ewe culture and civilization as we know it today has since been significantly influenced by the Yoruba, Ibo and other ethnic groups from Benin and Nigeria”.

Beyond the economic activities that ensued around the coastal area of West Africa including Badagry area of Lagos in colonial Nigeria, some social and cultural exchanges also took place. As people move from one place to another, they also carried with them their social and cultural orientations. As the Aganyin people moved into Badagry from Ghana, they came with their musical traditions known as

Bunudzogbe. Though a visible minority in the social and cultural space of Badagry, the Aganyin continues to contribute to the soundscape of Lagos in general. Therefore, this paper explores bunuzdogbe musical tradition of the Aganyin people in Badagry by focusing on the instrumental organization of the music. Specifically, it discusses instrumental typologies and analyzes the instrumental structure of the music. In what follows, music within the cultural context of the Ewe people for a broader understanding of the music of the Aganyin people of Lagos is discussed.

Music-making among the Ewe people

Like other African communities, certain thoughts influence the social and cultural orientations of the Ewe people. For instance, music-making in Africa is a complex activity of performance and play which makes it difficult to find a word to describe music. Among the Ewe people, music combines various art forms such as music, drama, dance, storytelling, acrobatics and miming, and these art forms, according to their worldview, are regarded as physical and spiritual expressions. Scholars of African music including Vidal, 1997; Nketia, 1979; Apkabot, 1982; Omojola, 2006 and Younge, 2011, have considered the different media of music-making in Africa.

In African societies, music is experienced as a tripartite art of singing, dancing and drumming with the latter implying a range of performance on instruments other than the drums. And among the Ewe, vocal and instrumental music, as well as dance, are inseparable in any musical performance even when one of the forms appears prominent than the others. The art of singing is known as *hadzidzi* and it is the most celebrated musical form among the Ewe and instrumental music is considered an extension of vocal music (Younge, 2011:18). This musical perception in Africa has been established in the literature. Omojola (2006) noted that instruments may constitute the main focus of performances, while in others they may be conceived as accompaniment. Despite the centrality of vocal music, as we shall later discuss, instrumental music accompanied with dancing is vibrant in Ewe musical performances.

Younge (2011) observed that musical performances among the “southeastern Ewe are organized in two ways: free musical performances with no specific ritual or ceremony and controlled musical performances that are contextually-bound” (p.19). The first category is music performed within a social context to provide pleasure and entertainment during leisure time or after a stressful activity. The second musical organization is within a particular context of traditional ceremony

or rituals as they are performed at specific points during the ceremony. According to Younge (2011:19), “most of these musical types are linked with political activities, religious activities, occupational activities and life-cycle events”. Among the Ewe, these musical arrangements are socially organized, mainly as groups, in villages, wards, or towns in Ewe communities with participation opened to everybody. This type of performance offers members of the Ewe community opportunity for communal music-making. Nketia (1979:2) stresses the multiple functions 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. In the same vein, Kabonye-Ani and Nwankpa (2021) remark that African music is culture and environment sensitive as they reflect cultural philosophy and communicate human sentiments

Music is functional in Ewe community as it accompanies various aspects of their everydayness such as life cycle events—funerals, marriages, childbirth, work—farming, weaving, carpentry, carving and pottery, politics—installation of a king, religion—ritual worship and education—games, storytelling and musical apprenticeship. In the Ewe sound ecology, Younge (2011:20) observed that musical sound sources are derived from four areas:

- (i) the voice—as the most important source of sound;
- (ii) instruments of Ewe origin: idiophones such as *gakogui* (double bell), *adodo* (multiclapper bell), *axatse* (rattle), *akpe* (hand-clapping), membranophones or drums such as *atsimevu*, *sogo*, *kidi*, *kagan*, *kroboto*, *gboba*, etc.
- (iii) instruments borrowed from other Ghanaian/West Africa cultures: *dondo* (hourglass-shaped drum) and *blekete*, “gungon of Dagbamba origin” (cylindrical drum) etc
- (iv) instruments acquired as a result of contact with Western European agents: *sanku* (harmonica) and *biglo* (bugle), etc.

Given these sources of musical sound in Ewe cultural setting, we can then argue that instrumental material occupies a larger part of the sound culture in Ewe musical tradition even though vocal music is considered central.

Considering the social and cultural complexities that shape the music space of Lagos, there is the need to investigate the contributions of the Aganyin people of Badagry to the overall soundscape of post-colonial Lagos. This study explores

Bunudzogbe an age-long musical tradition among the Aganyin people of Badagry. It asks, what are the categories of musical instruments employed in Bunudzogbe music and how are they organized structurally and stylistically? Based on an ethnography conducted among the Aganyin people in the coastal area of Badagry specifically in Ajido community, qualitative methods of participatory observation and in-depth interview were used to gather data for this study. Performances in two (2) Aganyin communities in Ajido, Badagry were observed and interviews were conducted with the musicians—master drummer and players of supporting instruments. Audio-visual recording and facilities were used to capture performances during the fieldwork. Interviews were content analyzed while music recordings were transcribed using music writing software—Sibelius 8v and were analyzed structurally and stylistically.

The performance

The only musical tradition largely celebrated by the Aganyin in Badagry is the Bunudzogbe festival. This festival is a socio-musical performance for everyone within the Aganyin communities in Badagry. Bunudzogbe means “think about your future”. In other words, members are reminded to think of the future which holds both good and bad times, thus the need for care and concern for other people in the group. The musical tradition promotes unity, love and support among members of the community in times of joy and pain. The performance provides the social context for the Aganyin as an extension of the broader Ewe community to constantly reconnect with their ancestry through their musical tradition. In addition, it offers the framework for group musicking which characterizes musical organizations among the Ewe people.

Typically, Bunudzogbe performance commences with a long instrumental opening followed by a short ritual—of libation pouring—an act of acknowledging the spirit world and seeking their support for a trouble-free performance. The performance features three distinct yet connected movements. As I have argued elsewhere that bunudzogbe musical performance offers the site where Ewe cultural tradition is visibly negotiated and sustained by the Aganyin in Badagry, Lagos. (Ajose, 2016, 2018). Music helps people to maintain ties with their countries of origin and at the same time strengthen their communities in their host country/community. For the Aganyin people in Lagos, bunudzogbe musical performance helps them to maintain their cultural tie with Ghana as their homeland on one hand and foster strong communal interaction with their host community in Badagry. During the opening

rites the *Aganyinga*— community head of the Aganyin recalls the name of their ancestors requesting for their endorsement for an enabling performance environment. For Africans, and like the Aganyin case we present here, music-making is both a social and spiritual exercise.

Typologies of musical instruments in bunudzogbe music

Using the Sach/Hornbostel system of classification of musical instruments, African musical instruments can be classified into four groups. These are membranophones, idiophones, chordophones and aerophones (Nettl, 1964:212). In bunudzogbe musical performances, only the membranophone and idiophones were prominently used except during a performance that we noticed the use of an aerophone instrument—Bugle (*biglo* in Ewe). This confirms the observation by Younge (2011:21), “membranophones or drums, and idiophones, bells and rattles, remain the main sound sources used by the Ewe in their music-making—apart from the voice”.

Membranophone

Many African societies make extensive use of membranophones because of the emphasis on percussive instruments (Nketia, 1979). Membranophones are musical instruments that depend on the vibration of stretched animal skin as their source of sound production. Hornbostel and Curt Sachs (1961) described membranophones as instruments which sound is excited by tightly-stretched membranes. In bunudzogbe music, membranophones were used to supply steady rhythmic patterns during the performance. There are four membranophones (drums) used in bunudzogbe music: *sogo*, *asivi*, *kankaganu*, *pake*, and *ezewu*.

a. Sogo

The *Sogo* drum is one of the significant drums in bunudzogbe drum ensemble. It is a cylindrical single-headed membrane drum with several pegs around the head area to suspend the rope to the drum and to vary the tension on the drum. A light metal plate is used to reinforce the frame of the drum. According to the master drummer “*sogo* drum is the ‘bass’ of the bunudzogbe drum ensemble”. In the percussion ensemble of Ewe of Ghana, *Sogo* drum symbolizes the father while *kidi* and *kagan* represent mother and child. In western classical musical tradition, the bass section of the choir is largely made up of male voices and this could suggest why the master drummer refers to the drum as ‘bass’ of the drum ensemble. *Sogo* plays an improvisatory role in the ensemble as a melo-rhythmic instrument. *Sogo* drum is

often painted in three different colors namely red, blue and green. The *sogo* drum is played with hands and sticks or combining hands with stick), and pitch variation is achieved by striking different parts of the membrane. In addition to providing speech surrogacy, *sogo* drum provides the lead or support in bunudzogbe music ensemble.



Figure 1: Cross-section of bunudzogbe drummers with the *sogo* players

The range of *sogo* is:

Musical example 1



Figure 2: *Sogo* drum

Asivi

Asivi is another membranophone instrument used in bunudzogbe music of the Aganyin. It is a medium-sized drum which is not as big as the *sogo* drum. It is a cylindrical single-headed membrane drum with several pegs around the head area which are used to suspend the rope to the drum. The *asivi* plays a steady rhythmic pattern in the ensemble thus functioning as rhythmic instrument. Because of its medium size it is a mid-pitch instrument. *Asivi* is usually played with sticks in different sizes which can affect the quality of sound produced by the drum.

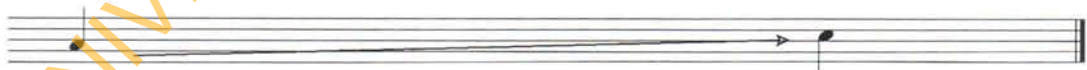
The painting of the *asivi* drums and other Aganyin drums with red, blue and green colors is symbolic as they call attention to Ghana national colors: green, red and yellow. The Aganyin found their drums as a portable and visible representation of their national identity.



Figure 3: *Asivi* drum

Musical example 2

The range of *asivi*:



The rhythmic pattern played by *asivi* is shown below:

Musical example 3



c. Ezewu (pronounced ezevu)

This is the only drum in bunudzogbe music that is different in shape, size and material design. *Ezewu* is a pot drum whose body is made of cement and covered with stretched membrane with wooden pegs around the drum. It has a metal brace roundabout with twined net fixed from the top of the drum to the base. The metal brace serves dual purposes. Firstly, it provides support for the net twined which holds the membrane to the drum. Because the drum is made of cement, the wooden tuning pegs cannot be used for the drum, thus the need for the twined net. Secondly, it provides support for the drum while giving the drum balances if and whenever it falls.



Figure 5: Ezewu drum

Like other drums in bunudzogbe music, *ezevu* is also played with pair of sticks. It produces low pitch like *sogo*. Apart from the *ezevu* drum all other drums used in bunudzogbe music are reported to have been imported from Ghana. However, the *ezevu* drum is believed to have been constructed in Nigeria and this further confirms the category of instruments that Younge earlier identified as instruments borrowed from other West African cultures. Below is the rhythmic pattern played by *ezevu* drum:

Musical example 5



d. Pake

As noted by Nketia (1979:86) that drums appear in a wide variety of shapes and different sizes. Some in cylindrical or semi-cylindrical drums measure about five or six feet high and twenty-four inches across, and large drums maybe four feet tall with a diameter of thirty inches. *Pake* drum is a cylindrical drum that is about six feet tall. According to Younge (2011:23), *Atsimevu* (named as *Pake* by my respondents) “is one of the largest and tallest drums in any Ewe percussion ensemble and it is associated with Ewe religious ceremonies and other ancient dance-drumming types”. The drum is played with hands and sticks with the drum bent during the performance. While the right hand holds the stick to strike the membrane, the left hand is used to vary the pitch of the drum. The drum shares many features with the *Sato* drum of the Badagry of Lagos. While the *Pake* drum serves as the master drum in the *bunudzogbe* musical performance of the Aganyin, the *Sogo* drum also doubles as the master drum in the absence of *pake* drum. It should be mentioned that both drums can serve as master drum but not at the same time in any given performance so as to avoid duplication of roles—of improvisation by the drummers. The practice, therefore, is that the master drummer cues other musicians especially about change in a rhythmic pattern and other forms of changes by the ensemble as the case may be. The *sogo* drum could be played by anybody in the band, but *pake* drum is exclusively reserved for the band leader. The master drummer remarked that the drum is not associated with any deity or gods.



Figure 6: *Pake* drum in standing position

In order to allow for convenience in playing position, the *pake* drum is usually laid on the bench by the drummer as seen in plate below:



Figure 7: Master drummer playing the *pake* drum (Source: Author)

Idiophones

Idiophones are primarily described as self-sounding instruments. Idiophone is any instrument upon which a sound may be produced without the addition of a stretched membrane or a vibrating string or reed (Nketia, 1979:69). Idiophones are commonly found in most societies in Africa. Nketia further classified idiophones as rhythmic–shaken (concussion), struck, scraped (friction) and stamped instruments and melodic. In bunudzogbe music, some of the idiophones used are *aste* (rattles), *gakogui* (gong/bells) and *akpe* (wooden clappers)

a. *Axatse* (pronounced ashe)

The *axatse* is a rattle constructed from a dried gourd covered with netting to which little beads have been attached. It is the same in shape and size as that of the Yoruba rattle known as *sekere*. *Axatse* is classified as a shaken, non-melodic idiophone hence serves primarily as a rhythmic instrument. The *axatse* is usually played by shaking and striking against the thigh and the palm of the player. Like in Yoruba percussion ensemble where *sekere* players sing during performance, *astse* players were also observed to sing along during the performance.



Figure 8: Cross section of *axastse* players during *bunudzogbe* musical performance

The rhythmic patterns played by the *axastse* players are notated below:

Musical example 6

Astse 1 $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{Musical notation for Astse 1} \\ \text{L H L H L H L H L H L H L H L H L H L H} \end{array} \right]$

Astse 2 $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{Musical notation for Astse 2} \\ \text{H L H L L H L L H L L H L H L L H L L} \end{array} \right]$

As mentioned earlier, the use of the hand and lap characterizes the playing of *Astse* among the Aganyin. Therefore, the above notation indicates where the instruments are stricken on the lap (thigh) or the hand (H). The shaking is used to bond the lap and the hand alternatively.

b. *Gakogui* (bell)

The *gakogui* is a metal bell instrument. Euba (1977:3) remarked that the iron bell is one of the most common and widely distributed musical instruments in Nigeria. He explained that the bell comes in two varieties (single and double). Akpabot (1986) noted that one of the bells is the large conical-shaped one producing just one tone and the twin-gong producing two tones which is smaller in size. The bell instrument is known as *agogo* among the Yoruba, *kuge* among the Hausas and *ogene* among the Igbos. The *gakogui* of the Aganyin is similar to the *agogo* of the Yoruba. It is played with sticks while they are held by the left hand either downward or sideways. The right hand beats bring out the sound. There is another shape of

Like every other aerophone in Africa, the bugle is also used to convey signals and verbal messages. It is also used as a speech surrogate among the Aganyin. The bugle used by the Aganyin is exactly like the western bugle but was painted blue to give a uniformity of colour in dress and musical instrument. It is primarily a melodic instrument performed. The bugle is one of the brass instruments with no valves or other pitch-altering devices. Consequently, the bugle is limited to notes within the harmonic series as notated below.

Western Bugle harmonic series:

Musical example 9



An extract from a performance witnessed by the researcher where the bugle was played as notated below:

Musical example 10



The melody was played in free rhythm by the player.

Instrumental organization in bunudzogbe music

Instrumental music consists of two main types, namely music for solo instruments and music for instrumental combinations (Euba 1977:4). The latter is very pronounced in bunudzogbe music. The *pake* or *sogo* drum acts as the master drum playing a variety of patterns, while other instruments such as *asivi*, *kanganu*, *ezewu*, *astse*, *gangogwi* and *ape* play rhythmic patterns with varying degrees of repetitiveness. While the rhythmic patterns are repeatedly, variations or modifications exists.

Akpabot (1986:103) aptly noted that seven rhythmic patterns that are easily discernible in Nigerian music are speech rhythm, melodic rhythm, percussive rhythm, polyrhythm, bell rhythm, standard rhythm and free rhythm. In bunudzogbe instrumental music, the polyrhythm, bell rhythm and standard rhythm were extensively used. Every instrument within the ensemble has its rhythmic pattern which is played regularly in combination with other instruments to produce complex rhythmic structure. No two instruments play the same rhythmic pattern. Even when parts are rhythmically similar, there is usually a difference. Polyrhythm

characterizes the complex rhythmic figuration in bunudzogbe music. The notation below represents the rhythmic structure as internalized in *bunudzogbe* instrumental musical performances.

Score by Author

Conclusion

This article contributes to the literature on Lagos by exploring the musical tradition of a visible minority—the Aganyin people of Badagry. Much of what is known about them is their contributions to the food culture in Lagos—*ewa Aganyin* (meshed beans). By focusing on instrumental music-making in bunudzogbe musical tradition among the *Aganyin*, this study calls attention to how the Aganyin has negotiated their everydayness while sustaining their socio-cultural identity in a ‘strange’ land. The article illuminates the place of drums in the sonic preservation of the Aganyin musical practices in Lagos specifically in Badagry.

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