



## The Place of Music in Olókogbè Festival in Pónyàn Community Kogi State, Nigeria

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### Abstract:

*Every society in Africa is identified with a kind of traditional festival which exists in oral tradition. Olókogbè is a religious festival practiced among Pónyàn community in Yagba-West Local Government Area of Kogi State. Music is a central figure during the festival. The place of music during the festival informs this paper. It was revealed that Olókogbè music entertains, rebukes, satire enlivens the spirit and is used as a force for the community unity. This paper is anchored on Structural-functionalism theory as propounded by Kingsley Davis. The paper employed the interview of 5 key informants in its methodology; it also employed content and context analysis of the songs. It was discovered that the music discourages the degeneration of personal or corporate morals, promotes social equity and fights injustice and enforces rule of law. The researcher recommends that the governments, corporate bodies, Non-Government organizations should help salvage Olókogbè festival. Also musicologists and researchers should commit time to document the various segment of the festival for posterity.*

**Key words:** *Olókogbè* Festival, Music Performance, Pónyàn Community, Musical Functions

### Introduction

Traditional festival refers to practices that are largely indigenous. Music performance is central in African festival, especially traditional religious festival like Olókogbè in Ponyan community. The place of music was further buttressed by

Omibiyi-Obidike (1987), that traditional music centers on folklore, which crystallizes the history, philosophy, arts and literature of the people. Nzewi (1980) explains that traditional music is a social organizer. It supervises the operation of established government, assists in the maintenance of the land, safeguards and perpetuates tradition. Furthermore, traditional music discourages the degeneration of personal or corporate morals, it promotes social equity and fights injustice, crowns rulers, welcomes birth, buries the dead, enforces rule of law and enlivens different purposes of communal get together.

This paper focuses on the place of music in Olókogbè festival. Studies that examine the place of music in festivals litters around Vidal, (1971), Omibiyi- Obidike (1976) Babalola (1966) but none of the works reviewed the place of music in Olókogbè festival of Ponyan people. This paper, therefore, is intended to fill the gap in documentation and analysis of Olokogbè music.

The primary objective of this paper is to investigate and document music used during Olókogbè festival. This paper shall attempt to answer the following questions: what is traditional religion and festival, what is the origin of Olókogbè festival, what are the roles of music in Olókogbè festival. Both primary and secondary methods of data collation were used to gather information from the practitioners and members of Ponyan community on the place of music in the festival. Ponyan is one of the communities in the present Yagba-East Local Government Areas in Kogi state, commonly described as middle belt of Nigeria. Politically in the northern part of the country but culturally are Yoruba who migrated from Ile-Ife and are grandsons of the Yagba, who was the founder of Yagba land which today consists of three local governments. They are predominantly farmers and grow yam both for subsistence and for commerce too.

## **Structural Functionalism Theory**

Structural functionalism theory as propounded by Davis (1945) concentrates on the positive and negative functions of social structures. Structural functionalism aims to explain the role of social structures and institutions in society, the

relationship between these structures, and the manner in which these structures constrain the actions of individuals. According to Davies (1945) individuals have little to control over the ways in which particular structures operate. Indeed, it understands individuals in terms of social positions, and discusses social stratification that they do not refer to individuals, but to the positions these individuals occupy. It is not individuals who are ranked, but positions that are ranked according to the degree to which they contribute to the survival of society. High-ranking positions offer high rewards that make them worth an individual's time and effort to occupy.

The structural functionalist account of stratification has been criticized on the grounds that there must be other ways to motivate individuals to occupy particular positions and perform certain tasks without such a disparate system of rewards. Structural-Functionalism addresses seven principles: firstly order and interdependence property of system, secondly, that systems are self-maintaining—tendency to equilibrium, thirdly stasis or ordered change (system is in one state or the other), inter-connectedness (one part affects all), also, and that systems have boundaries, allocation and integration necessary for equilibrium, finally self-maintenance—boundary control and adjusting part-whole relationships, controlling environment, and internal control of change. The foregoing theory is quite relevant to and has been adopted for this paper in its application to the formational, function and performance structure of Olókogbè music.

## **African Traditional religion**

Before the advent of Christianity, Islam and Western influence, Africans practiced traditional belief system. To them, traditional worship can rightly be said to be as old as the people. To this day, some of them still worship traditional deities, though the number of adherents has reduced considerably. Iyekòlò (2000) asserts that Africans believe in Supreme Being, the Creator of all things, although it may appear as if individuals cannot see or contact God directly without intermediary deities through their oracles. Africans believe they are capable of contacting the Supreme Being

through prayers, songs, pity and witty sayings. Iyekòlò (2000) listed some of Yoruba religions, to include the following:

Some of the deities of the Yagba are : *Orisa* (god of agriculture rain and fertility), *Egúngún* (god of iron, war and justice), *Sango* (god of thunder and lightning), *Esu* (a deity of sanction), *Ifá* (divine source of vision), *Imole*, *Alase* (creator god), *Oloke* (god of the hills), *Iroko*, *Ore*, *Epa*, *Arufe*, *Osanyin* (god of sickness, and health), *Igunnu* (god of motherhood), *Banumo*, *Awiyi* and *Bata tako*, *Paraka*, *Koto*, *Origba*, *Owe onìyángan*, *Elengede* (Iyekolo 2000:34).

Ilètógùn (1998) reports that the hunter's festival among Yoruba is the coming together of hunters and warriors; it is a rallying point for the young and old, rich and poor. Hunters' association is an organized group. Its members may hunt alone and also with younger hunters in training who are members of the association. Their costumes for performance include cloths beautifully designed with cowry, shells, beads and feathers. The ritual of hunters' festival takes place annually, every third week of March. Materials for rituals include dog, pounded yam, vegetable soup, local wine and so forth. Ilètógùn (1998) reports that the ritual and celebration are significant in many ways; the celebration brings the hunters together thereby creating more unity among the members, the celebration appeases the gods of iron since their instruments are made of iron, it is also done to see how the organization can move forward. Barber (1990) notes that:

Yoruba religion has two faces. On one side, it can be seen as a teeming array of colourful, strongly distinctive spiritual personalities. They fall into recognisable categories: *orisa* ('gods'), *iwin* ('spirits'), *alaseku* or *oku-orun* ('ancestors' or 'the dead', of which *egungun* masquerades are one manifestation), *aje*. ('witches'), *ile* ('earth') and personified forces such as *Iku* ('death'), *Arun* ('disease') and *Ofo* ('loss') (Barber, 1990:231).

Ilètógùn (1998) reports that Yoruba people are worshipers of ògún (god of iron) *Olukosi*, *Oguntosin*, *Agbana*, *Owa Aji Gbewu* and *Owa Asipa*. *Owa Asipa* is the present head of *ogun* worshipers in Yagba–West which is the cradle of Yagba land. The worship of the god of iron (*ogun*) involves both men and women, unlike hunting which is purely a male affair. The festival of *ogun* in Yagba land is held for twenty-one days and it

is an annual celebration. The celebrants are all in white head ties and rappers, the women plait their hair in *suku* style. The musical instruments of *ogun* festival include two *eku* drums (pot drums), two *emele*, two *bembe*, and two *dùndún* drums. One of the *ogun* festival songs is written below.

Festivals are days or seasons set aside for public celebrations, for rejoicing or to mark or to commemorate an event or to correct social vice in the society. Festivals are of great importance to the people and in fact could be seen as part of their tradition. *Agan* is another of the festival observed by males in Yoruba land especially Yoruba people in Kogi state. It is a festival to commemorate blessings for men. Iyekolo (2000) explains that four days before the festival a cow is sacrificed at Akata (the cradle of Yagba people). This is done to appease the gods of the land. During *Agan* festival people do not go to the farm so that they can participate fully in the celebration. *Oloke* festival is another cultural festival observed in Yagba land. It is performed once in three years. Oyekanmi (2006) reports that the festival is celebrated annually to worship the deity of mountains in Yagba land. It lasts for five days and is performed by both sexes, young and old inclusive. Yagba people believe that the gods on the mountains helped in their deliverance from the Nupe, Hausa and Ibadan peoples' imperialism during the raids. Ilètógùn asserts that on the day of the celebration, all *oloke* worshipers gather and dance uphill with wine, salt, kola-nut, and pounded yam. All these are sacrificed to *Oloke* to appease him. During the festival *Aworo* comes out to give the message of peace, fruitfulness and prosperity to the people.

*Egúngún* festival is also celebrated in Yagba land. It is an annual festival. Masquerade festivals involve only the men both old and young in Yagba land, the celebration is led by a priest called *Alaga* (Iyekòló 2000). On the festival day *Alaga* and members carry yam, goat, and drinks to *Igbale* (masquerades shrine) for rituals to appease the gods of the masquerades. Musical instruments used include ten big and small rattles, big and small *agogo* (gong). Barber reiterates the praise of gods in Yoruba land, especially during festivals that:

The orisa are certainly differentiated in oriki. Soponnon, the god of smallpox, and Sango, the god of lightning, are evoked as gigantic and terrifying figures commanding cosmic forces of sun and fire, ruthless and implacable; while Osun and Otin

are evoked as predominantly mild, cool figures, associated with the child-giving and curative powers of water. What is less well known is that in oriki Sopotnon and Sango are also praised for their curative powers and their ability to give children, while Osun, Otin and Esile are also represented as tough, ferocious and dangerous. Each orisa is credited with both sets of qualities, though in different proportions (Barber 1990:320).

## **Origin and History of Olókogbè Festival**

Oyekanmi (2006) explains that the Olókogbè festival origin could be traced as far back as the time the people settled in Ponyan community. They settled in a place called *Odò àwòrò*<sup>1</sup> between 1837 and 1893. One could not precisely say how the festival started, but it is an established fact that it has been since the cradle of Ponyan people. The festival is celebrated by the *odo-aworo* clan, one of the earlier settlers in Ponyan community. An informant (Adebayo) explains that Olókogbè simply means gods of productivity and Agricultural fruitfulness, and that until Olókogbè is celebrated people of Ponyan will not eat yam since they are mostly Yam farmers even till now.

Oral accounts identify *Epa*<sup>2</sup> *Imolè*<sup>3</sup> and *Olókogbè* as the major religious festivals observed by ponyan people. Olókogbè was recognized as one of the well observed festivals in ponyan. The form and text of this typology is not influenced by any other neighboring culture. Its performance is hereditary by right of primogeniture and as such only two related families have been known for its. It has become the second typology to evolve among their present settlement in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This period seems long, but only little information is available since the history is oral. This period witnesses a peaceful, loving and quiet environment for Ponyan people who go about doing their farm work and coming together to observe their festivals.

Oyekanmi (2006) explains that olókogbè as a religious activity involves both male and female. Although the festival was at the initial stage restricted to a particular clan that organizes it over the years, it has been extended to the whole village and today all members of the village take part, but then, the *odó àwòrò* clans are the main organizers and they

provide music during this festivals which is celebrated annually. This festival originated as a base from which other cultural activity spread to other part of the land and it is used as a communion to the gods and the living.

### **Performance of Olókogbè Festival**

Performances are central to artistic expression and experience in African tradition. Ogunba (2000) refers to the festival as the prime artistic institution of traditional Africa, arguing that it is the only institution which has the framework which can coordinate virtually all the art forms of a community. Ogunba (2000) notes that,

it is clear that what happens in most oral performances is not pure instantaneity, pure evanescence, pure emergence and disappearance into the vanishing moment. The exact contrary is usually the case. There is a performance, but it is a performance of something identifiable, understood to have pre-existed the moment of utterance. Or, alternatively, something is understood to be constituted in utterance which can be abstracted or detached from the immediate context and re-embodied in a future performance (Ogunba, 2000:23)

An informant Omowumi notes that Olókogbè festival is structured in time of festival, time of pronouncement from the chief priest and when music will be played in her own words:

The Olókogbè festival usually undergoes some stages before the climax which is real festival day. The preparation of Olókogbè festival therefore entails the timing. The festival usually comes up in June and July which is observed once in three years. The festival is for seven days and gets to the climax on the seventh day. The specific date for the festival is decided by *Odo-Aworo* clan which conducts this festival after which the event will be declared open for celebration. The stage that follows this is the bringing or contributing of food, materials of all sort by the farmers as a preparation for the festival.

Adebayo an informant notes that on the real day, of the festival, the people gather together in an appointed place. The occasion of Olókogbè festival starts with the pronouncement from the chief and presently the Chief is Ifagbemi Ifadare. Chief priest

delivers god's message to the people and also conveys the people's messages to the gods with rituals and sacrifices.

### **Functions of Music in Olókogbè Festival**

African music has indeed played a lot of roles in objectifying and unifying the philosophy and religious tenets of the African communities. Nketia (1974) asserts that African music presents a wealth of knowledge and stimulates learning experiences among its audience. It is often well worded in proverbs, and idioms so that audience is always given food for thought. The composer also makes use of parables to stimulate audience imagination in acquiring deductive meaning from the performance communication.

Olókogbè music serves different functions in Ponyan community, ranging from social, moral, religious to political. It has functioned so much in entertainment as most members of the society were normally intrigued to watch the performances. Olókogbè songs, though they have historical facts connected to time, place, events, vice and effects, are not just narratives of detached facts that are functionally ephemeral. They are songs whose poetry focuses on, and employs nature and metaphysical imagery, and well as wise sayings and inveterates philosophical wisdom of common experiences to the Ponyan people in particular and other cultures that are capable of fixing congruous ideas into the minds of listeners. Laura (1998) comments on the functions of music in the society, arguing that performance as entertainment can make people happy. According to him, songs can make people forget about death and fighting and words of some songs remind people of past times and of other occasions for praise signing, because, praise singing occurs during parties, celebrations, or other events that call for entertainment.

Olókogbè music does not aim at providing just temporary happiness in entertainment. It does not give momentary joy that makes people forget about realities of life. It rather presents issues of the moment and provides a stimulus to re-thinking about behaviours that are contrary to the norms of the society and such vice that could even be dangerous to those who indulge in them. It prompts members of



the society to examine and address facts about reality. Olókogbè music deals with frank issues of life, and there is no hiding in its practice. When the composer-performer means to criticize, he/she does so directly and when it becomes necessary to praise he/she does so frankly. The function of olókogbè songs are further itemized:

### 1. Praise, Entertainment and Commendation

African music is entertainment, praise and recommendation based. The tradition of praise singing is an important one in many African countries. Mr. Adebayo, an informant, reports that Olókogbè singer sings the praise of the gods and then turns around to praise the members and the other members of the society. The song below is an example:

*Olókogbè, A I wa o*  
*Olókogbè ,Ajubare*  
*Olókogbè, O mo seun*

Translation

Olókogbè, We are greeting you  
Olókogbè, We worship and adore you  
Olókogbè , We really thank and praise you

### OLOKOGBE



The song above is just thanking and singing the praise of Olókogbè for the good they have received from him.

### 2. Corrections of Evils doing in the Society

Oyekanmi (2006) also notes that Olókogbè festival is used as a medium of correcting social ills in the society such as stealing, fornication, corruption, taboos and abominable offences. Through the songs the festival is able to teach since most of the songs are satirical. The function of music in warning and counseling members of the society is paramount in Africa. Olókogbè singers warned and counseled their audiences against some wanton attitude and practices that could result in painful experiences. Some of the warnings and counsels are sometimes

directed to individuals, such as the mockery songs during the first six preparatory days of the festivals. The song below is an example.

*Oya glao muju di oko ate*  
*Oya guo muju di oko*  
*Ajeya, tor, oko kolor, oya*

Translation

The wife who holds the husband in contempt  
Shall suffer

Because the husband  
Is the heat of the wife.

The song is correcting and informing wives who do not respect their husbands. Gods recognize husband as the head of the home and any woman that refuses to respect the husband accordingly will be punished by the gods. Another song is given below:

*'oba sobo omo je a be ni ran dan wo*

*'oba sobo omo je a be ni ran dan wo*

*solo: ima run o eja gbigbe emo jeka arun*

*chorus: eja gbigbe emo jeka arun*

*solo: eja gbigbe emo jeka arun*

*chorus: eja gbigbe emo jeka arun*

if it is a lie let go and try it ,

I say if I am lying let us go and try it

dry fish cannot be bend it will scatter

dry fish cannot be bend it will scatter

The song is a caution to modern day family especially women that do not have time to train their children. The song says there is no way one can bend a dry fish implying that when parent refused to train their wards early in life they will surely develop bad character later in life and they will not be able to control them or correct those bad actions. Therefore parents should give time to the training of their children on good moral, social and inter personal relationships.

### 3. Cultural Awareness and Retention

Nzewi (1991) opines that the knowledge of the African cultural value systems provides the understanding to interpret African songs and deduce full meaning from the communication experience. One of the Olókogbè sings for cultural promotion and Olókogbè gives yam for farmers is written below:

*Olókogbè amusu ghun ta Olókogbè*

*Olókogbè ajagbe ghun jeun, olókogbè*

will help us to produce big yams

will make framers to eat well

## ISU LELA



## Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper looked at the role of the *Olókogbè* music, it examined the origin of *Olókogbè*, it discussed the performance structure of *Olókogbè* festival and the texts of the songs. It has been discovered that *Olokogbe* songs are the pivotal and the rallying point of the people's unity and oneness. Preservation of a cultural heritage as this will not only help in preserving the inheritance and rich culture of the people but will help preserve peaceful coexistence that is fast eroding different communities in different part of the country. The three tiers of government will therefore do well by recognizing and promoting *Olokogbe* festival as one of the national cultural festival in Nigeria. Also, NGOs and corporate bodies will do well by collaborating by promoting this culture. The community too will do well by providing enabling environment to make this festival a tourist attraction.

## Endnotes

1. Odo- Aworo: it is the clan that organizes the festival in Ponyan community
2. Epa : is a religious festival in ponyan community
3. Imole : this is another form of traditional worship in Ponyan community

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## People interviewed

Blessing Ayodele: an indigene of Ponyan community interviewed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of Sept., 2011

Elisha James Adebayo: an indigene of Ponyan and from the royal home, interviewed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Sept.2011

Wumi Olubense: member of Odo-Aworo clan from Ponyan interviewed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Sept. 2011