



The Sociological Implications of Awigiri Music on Agbere Community

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Abstract

Awigiri music is a genre prevailing within the social milieu among the Ijaw across the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Agbere community, one of the several communities that make up the Tarakiri clan of Sagbama Local Government Area in Bayelsa State has been a major group of people who give Awigiri large patronage. As such there is a need to examine the sociological implications of the music genre within this community where it features in various social occasions, showing its popularity and acceptance. In this discourse, the writer asserts Awigiri music – in spite of its incorporation of some western musical instruments such as guitars, electric piano, and bass drums, is an hybridized indigenous music, referred to as Izon highlife music and as such remains a traditional genre which reflects the musical idioms of the Ijaw especially in Agbere community. The method of information gathering is mainly participant observation and the use of related literature. Within the work, Awigiri music is defined along side traditional music, its form and structure is analyzed; and its sociological implications along side songs that reflect them discussed. In conclusion, the writer opines that Awigiri music possesses both positive and negative social effects; it is a potent tool that can either preserve or eradicate the traditional music forms of the people; and implores, community leaders and government organizations as well as Awigiri musicians to use the music as a viable tool in preserving and sustaining the musical heritage of the Ijaw.

Introduction:

“Music is the centripetal and centrifugal force in a society...” (Emeka; 2006). This is the reflection of music in a conventional traditional African society. Every society has certain genres of music distinctive to it that its members easily, readily and unquestionably identify with. This music has the power to sustain cultural and communal bonds, as Emeka (ibid) states further “music arouses, reinforces, stimulates and commemorates social commitment of a course...”(1).

This work centers on the Sociological Implications of Traditional Music in a given locality. The focal point of the study is Agbere Community in Sagbama Local

Government Area of Bayelsa State; one of the communities that make up the Tarakiri clan of the Ijaw nationality. It is a riverine community along the Nun river, with Odoni and Biseni communities being its nearest neighbours. Major occupation of the people is fishing and farming in subsistent quantities of crops such as plantain, cocoyam, pepper, cassava and native yam. The motto of the community which is a slogan among its indigenous people, and one readily used by neighbouring communities to refer to Agbere indigenes is '*Agbere bebe keni*' – which means Agbere, one mouth – implying 'a united people'.

There are various genres of music within the community. Some of these originated from the community such as '*egunanagune*'. Others are related to neighbouring communities within the clan and their origins cannot be laid claims to by any of the communities as they have become folk – handed down from one generation to another, dispersed as communities merge, emerge or disperse. Some of them include, *Ngusei*, *Agene sei*, *Pingi*, etc to mention a few. All of these genres are actually dances with music ensembles that have now created the various music forms associated to their dances. However, the music of choice for this study is Awigiri music. This is because although it is quite widespread and did not originate from Agbere community, it has become more outstanding and used regularly in almost every social function within the community.

Definition of terms

It would be pertinent to briefly explain and define the main terms, which occur frequently within the study:

Sociological implications of music: This refers to what traditional music suggests within the context of society. It refers to the effect of music on human expression. In her discourse on the sociological implications of music, Sadler (2004) made the following statement about the effect of music on any given society thus:

“In our modern world it is not just dancers, musicians and artists whose actions are influenced by music and sound. Music is universally understood to often be the sum of more than its parts, and causes emotional and physical reactions from simply being heard. It is used in many aspects of society to persuade, to advertise, to heighten emotional tension, to increase learning skills, to identify social groups and to influence speed and muscle tension, for a few examples. The effects of music can be conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The power of

music over any other art form to penetrate people's emotions is a widely recognized fact.

All of these simply describe the effect of music within a modern society. In a traditional society, the same effect of music is evident but it goes beyond the above. Music has a much stronger social implication in African traditional societies as Mbanugo (2006) puts it "music is an essential part of every facet of daily life in the African society" (188). These roles and their implications shall be looked at in detail in the course of this work.

Traditional music: Traditional music would best be described by looking at what tradition is. Hunter and Whitten (1976a) in Okafor and Emeka (2015) opines of tradition as "values, beliefs, rules, and behaviour patterns that are shared by a group and passed on from generation to generation as part of the socialization process (78). Okafor and Emeka (ibid) opine further, that traditions and culture share some constituent elements – custom, beliefs, opinions, superstition, etc.; and the same transmission route – passage from one generation to another (79). Thus traditional music can be said to be the music of a particular people or culture that expresses their values, beliefs, rules, and behaviour patterns.

It is also described as "songs and tunes, which have been performed by custom, over a long period" (*traditional music.org*). Okafor (2005) states: "traditional music is the most widely used medium of expression for all manners of occasions and at all times and periods of life" (87). Emeka (2006) describes traditional music as the music that is "rooted in the pristine culture, rites and rituals, ceremonies and social contacts that governed or marked the rhythm of life in the traditional society" (5). Ayakoroma (2003) defines traditional music within traditional Ijaw culture as "the cultural music associated with funerals, marriages, festivals, wars, wrestling; the native blues using local musical instruments and accompaniments..." This definition brings us closer to the geographical location of the study. Ayakoroma stated further:

"It... includes the Awigiri music of King Robert Ebizimor (late), I.K. Belemu (late), Pereama Freetown, Barrister Smooth, and S. S. Eberiyé; which though they draw on modern musical instruments, have lyrics in the local language and are patterned according to the rhythmic form of the musical orientation of the people" (17)

Drawing from the above definitions, one would go along with Ibekwe's (2013) assertion that "any traditional music that has not totally lost its indigenous flavor can be definitely considered adequate to portray the philosophical import of African music" (126). This work seeks to establish Awigiri music - a type of hybridized Ijaw music possessing highlife features as 'traditional music' with both positive and negative sociological implications on the Ijaw cultural music milieu as evident in Agbere community.

Awigiri Music:

Awigiri is mainly dance music and can refer to the dance styles associated with the music or the unique kind of music identified as Awigiri. It originated or evolved out of a fusion between Izon traditional music styles and the emerging highlife music of the colonial period in Nigeria. Its presence in the Ijaw sociocultural musical milieu is usually accredited to Late I. K. Belemu; the other is Late Robert Ebizimor who stands out as a legendary music icon of his time, with the acclamation as the 'Izon Music Maestro' even after his death in 2013 in an auto-crash. The name 'Awigiri' was first used by Late I. K. Belemu as the name of music he played. It was then a new highlife genre born into the Ijaw traditional environment, cutting across various genres, communities and clans. Following whether behind or beside his trail was King Robert Ebizimor. The latter was a member of the Rex Lawson Band and later on a member of the Seagulls dance band of Prince David Bull. (onlinenigeria.com).

As earlier cited from Ayakoroma's definition, Awigiri draws on modern musical instruments, its lyrics are in the local language and is patterned according to the rhythmic form of the musical orientation of the people (although in recent years there are indications of language borrowing from pidgin English, Igbo, Yoruba and even the pidgin French spoken by Cameroonian migrants of Ijaw extract). Among these, it still incorporates traditional musical instruments such as the wood block, maracas, and skin headed membranophone drum-ensemble in its performances. Western musical instruments incorporated into Awigiri music include electronic keyboard, bass, rhythm and lead guitars, bass drum as well as trumpet and saxophones in recent years.

Awigiri can also be described as minstrel music. Mbanugo (2006) citing Grout (1980) describes minstrelsy as: 'Professional musicians... men and women wandering singly or in small groups from village to village, from castle to castle, gaining a precarious livelihood by singing, playing, performing tricks' (65). Mbanugo further opines: "minstrel music was one of the earliest genres of vocal music known to the Igbo. The

minstrel was a solo performer who entertained his audience with songs, storytelling and even buffoonery of a higher witty and sophisticated kind... (Okafor, 2005). The same description would go for the Awigiri musicians and dancers in Ijaw land, as its lyrics satirizes, and draw from prevalent social issues and events; although in recent times they have become bands that go about with large vans carrying a collection of musical instruments, electronic sound systems and instrumentalists as well as back-up vocalists. They no longer show up uninvited in places and ceremonies but have become professional, commercial musicians paid well to perform their art.

In spite of this recent development, Awigiri music still remains a potent force in unifying, stabilizing and integrating the community, shaping opinions and creating ideologies emerging from current issues that bother on the society as well as threatening the survival of other indigenous dance and music groups within the Ijaw society. It is identified as traditional music of the Ijaw people not only in a single community but also among the Ijaw in the entire Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Before the advent of Awigiri music, the music of legendary gifted musicians as the Late Isundu, Baby Okey, Fred Ziboh, Madam Ball-ere, and Kuro-endi to mention a few; and the highlife music of S.K. Karibo, the White Eagles, B.K.O. Kaiser and Echo Toikumo, dominated the Ijaw music scene. These musicians moved from paid, live appearances to record production in short and long play (SP and LP) records and cassette tapes. Late King Robert Ebizimor and I. K. Belemu are both regarded as the proponents of Awigiri music in Ijaw land. Others who followed the trail and became prominent include Bestman Douperre, Pereama Freetown, Barrister Smooth, S. S. Eberiyee to mention a few; as well as 'Junior Robert', Karinto Fokite and a trail of many other recognized talents.

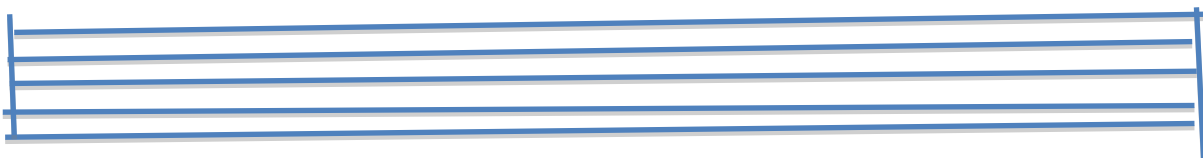
Form and Structure in Awigiri Music

The form of Awigiri music cannot be examined outside the musical idioms of the Ijaw people. It expresses the African traditional perspective in music. As mentioned earlier, Awigiri makes use of both western musical instruments and traditional musical instrument. The combination still sustains and retains the form and structure of traditional Izon Music. Akpabot (1998) opines that "...It is more rewarding examining cultural tradition and structure side by side to find out how a piece of music is put together and why it is so conceived (10). Agu (1999), holding a similar view posits, "The important features which give tradition its intrinsic character are the broad

principles of tonality, and the relationship of people’s music to other aspects of their culture and social life” (1). Form in Awigiri music is being looked at from the African traditional musical perspective.

In analyzing the scale patterns within the music, one will quickly recognize the same types of scales identified in most African cultures, containing between three to seven tones. “In many cases the tones are selected from the heptatonic modes (Agu, 1999:34). Most Ijaw folk songs are noted for starting and ending on minor notes (or scales) such as *l* and *t* e.g.

You yoma



Song example starting and ending with minor notes

Vocal and instrumental forms involve call and response, call and refrain, solo and chorused refrain and the employment of repetitive techniques as recognized in African singing. Below is an example of an Awigiri song by Late Robert Ebizimor which employs the solo and chorused refrain style:

Bo bara mu bara

Solo:	bobara mu bara eh!...	the way in is the way out
Refrain:	bobara mu bara	the way in is the way out
	Selekedou ne barasuoghakpo	if you seek money but do
	Tamunokememiegha eh,	not find it, it is not God’s fault
	Enibibobara	you chose your destiny

As with many African cultures, Awigiri makes use of several percussion instruments including those that sing such as the Piano and guitars, thereby creating a strong sense of melo-rhythm and polyrhythm. Awigiri music also employs harmony in singing and instrumentation. As it is the pattern with most African music, “instrumental music

...borrows much from vocal music” (Akpabot 1998; 41). Two-part harmony is generally employed in singing, moving mainly in consecutive thirds. Fourths and fifths are also observed in the harmony. There is also the employment of ostinatos played by both the bass guitar and the rhythm guitar.

Since the study is not in pursuit of African musical forms and structure, but on highlighting the sociological implications of Awigiri music, it would be more pertinent to progress in that direction.

Sociological Implications of Awigiri Music

The sociological implications of Awigiri music genre goes beyond its effect on the society where it is found, to also include the musician, his role in society as being significant beyond entertainment but also, in the words of Okafor (2005) “the economy and in the role of being the societal conscience and watchdog” (2). The place of the musician in the society as described by Onwuka (2012) citing Bowers (1964) “the musician is not merely an entertainer but a reminder of tunes, a supporter of the ruling, an interpreter of events and a transmitter of the past (1).

Music is a viable tool in awakening and sustaining social consciousness; Emeka (2006) states that “the consciousness of the individual of the meaning, implications and values of belonging to his/her society and the consciousness of the society for ensuring continuity and development of its own being through the development and promotion of social consciousness in the individual are the double barrel of social consciousness’ (2).

The following examples of some Awigiri songs highlight the message of the music and its sociological implications in Agbere community.

Ama Layefa (Home is Supreme) By Bestman Doupere

Ama layefa o	there’s no place like home
E ‘na ama layefa	your home town is supreme
Ama layefa o	there’s no place like home
E ‘na ama layefa	your home town is supreme
Bou firi ke emu weni tim’ aki	you may work in the bush
Sii surun kurai feni ke bai kpo	for twenty-five years
Eni ama me ororo	think of your home town

E 'na ama layefa o	your home town is supreme
Beke firi ke emu weni tim' aki	you may have a white-collar job
Sii Sonoma kurai feni ke bai kpo	for twenty-seven years
E 'na ama m' okiye	remember your home town
E 'na ma laye fa o	your home town is supreme

The lyrics awaken people to social consciousness, highlighting the right attitude towards one's homeland, encouraging collective effort in the development of the town.

Traditional music is known to teach morals or to satirize and correct people. It is a vital tool in upholding the way of life of the people. In the words of Olson (2016) in Andrew (2012) "music is an important tool in the way we learn". Basically, traditional music reflects and expresses the social and human experiences of a people (Ayakoroma, *ibid*). This is very apt in describing Awigiri music as it features songs that condemn socially unacceptable ways of living such as satirizing of drunkards, the lazy, women who live loose lives, etc. It is in this light that Saleh (1985), citing Nketia (1973) wrote "... for the African, music and life are inseparable, for there is music for many activities of everyday life as well as music whose verbal texts express the African attitude to life, his hopes and fears, his thoughts and beliefs.

Egberi Gbele Mi (You Will be Talked About) By Joseph Ekeremiye

E yei nana ne	if you are married
Yei ware otu e tarigha ba	and your in-laws do not like you
Egberi 'gbele 'mi o...	you will be talked about
E nagh ma... egberi 'gbele 'mi	hear me, you will be berated
E moto yorw ne	if you buy a car
Sa moto ke yorw da ba	and you buy it on credit
Egberi 'gbele 'mi o...	you will be talked about
E nagh ma... egberi 'gbele 'mi	hear me, you will be talked about
Egberi gbelegha wari fa	no one escapes being talked about
Eni ye ke fii da ba e...	If your husband dies
E you k aba	And your cry so much
Egberi 'gbelemi	you will be berated
E ba yougha kpo	If you do not cry

It is satiric of how the society behaves over other people's personal issues regardless of the individual's predicament.

Rose By S. A. Eseduwo

E rosi ye, Rosi ye hey Rose, Rose
Ama Rosi ye, Rosi ye lady rose, Rose
E tomu k' amu kpo you go to the river front
E ba mu ton ke bunu ma you go to meet a man
E san y'a mu kpo kpo you go to urinate
E ba mu ton ke bunu ma you go to meet a man
Ama Rosi ye, Rosi ye, lady Rose, Rose
Akpo eyerin nimi learn to live right

This song satirizes promiscuity among young girls and calls them to maintain societal moral values of purity before marriage.

Akpainfoko (Empty Shell)

Me kpo yei ya is this a husband
Y'e nde k' e-fei ma for how much did you buy me
En' alemo eki san kpo sangha you won't let me go to urinate
Y'e nde k' e-fei ma for how much did you buy me
En' alem 'aki buo kpo su-gha you won't let me stretch my legs
Eni selebo do ne y' eba ma is it because of the dowry you paid
E numugha o I don't know
Eku o, ba bei kpo yei ama such husband!
Y'o dii ya, look at him
akpanfoko yei ama empty-shell husband
bide feimu gba weri a you promised me wrappers
aru gbeinmu gba weri a you promised me dresses
masini feimu gba weri a you promised me sewing machine

This song was revolutionary for women as for the first time a male musician broke out of the conventional notion that women had no right to challenge their husbands' excesses or failures. Moralists hold the song in bad light, as it is overtly encouraging breakdown of the marriage institution and respect for husbands who are the head of the home.

The role of Awigiri music in expressing this aspect of traditional life is evident in the lyrics of Awigiri music (e.g. '*Duen-amabou*' by Robert Ebizimor); thus reinforcing and educating the people in life's experiences as it draws from myths, legends, folklore and history.

DuenamaBou (Land of the Dead) by Robert Ebizimor

Ign Robby ari 'ye bo bin mo	Robby has seen many things
Ign... weni mu paya duenama	I arrived my destination, land of the dead
Ma keme ke weni bo e' la ne	two men hired me to play to
Ya 'na tu duoya	I followed them but where we
deunama bou	arrived at the land of the dead

This song reinforces the belief in the spirit world where the dead go. It is common superstition among the Ijaw that a person can be privileged to appear in the land of the dead. One can either return alive or may never return, depending on their moral uprightness. It expresses the spiritual and philosophical disposition of the people.

In many African cultures there are no different names for music and dance – the same word denotes both. Beyond this, dance is said to be “the expression of the beliefs, attitudes, norms and values of a particular culture” (Onwuekwe, 2015). When Awigiri music is played, both the professional dancer and the audience are compelled to the dance floor. This is a major feature of African music. Awigiri makes use of all the basic ingredients in creating dance as outlined by Onwuka (2005) – the human body movement, organized rhythmic sounds, theme, time, and space (19). Still echoing the words of Ayakoroma (2003): “the culture conflict we experience in our society – that of the old versus the young” (21). This conflict finds a meeting point where both the old and the young, gender and class agree and are unified by the same cultural element – ‘dance’ to Awigiri music. It serves as a unifier in the community.

'Wabu' by Alfred Izon-ebi

Zi bai kpo keni oge	the day of birth is one of celebration
Fii erein kpo keni oge	the day one days is another celebration
Keni otu you mene	some are crying
Keni otu deri mene	some are laughing

Eyi amene oge oge	every occasion has its own celebration
Tebeaku kpo e gbolu gha me	I have no headache
Ma biri kpo e doungha me	I don't have stomach ache
Izonebi eee fari da e sei me	Izon-ebi, play music let me dance
Wabu	wabu (dance step)

Wabu is a dance step that draws from an existing cultural dance step made popular by the song "Wabu". It is the present delight in social gatherings as people take to the dance floor. Awigiri musicianship is a source of economic empowerment both to the instrumentalist and the vocalists in live performances and to recordings that are commercialized. Ekong (2015) posits:

"The greatest challenge to any society is its ability to provide conducive environment and opportunity for its citizenry to be self-reliant and render service to it for its development and self-sufficiency" (109).

To this end, Awigiri has satisfactorily paid its dues to society as its musicians are well paid to perform their art, at marriages, funerals, birthdays and several other social events. Music performance is a medium of work, which Umezina (2006) defines as "any activity of man which involves physical and mental energy for the production of goods and dispensation of services" (13). Umezina (ibid) asserts, "the only way to translate our creative energies into relevant social value for human development is through work" (23).

Ango Tua Layefa(Diligence is Supreme) By Robert Ebizimor

Yerin ama e... yerin ama o,	ways of living, ways of living,
yerin ama e, (2x)	ways of living (2x)
Zuo otu seledou timine	some people seek money
barasuogha ba	when they have not found it
Pou ke tin mene	they say it is witchcraft
Zuo otu seledou timine	some people seek wealth
barasuogha ba	when they don't find it
Oru kpo tin mene	they say it is juju
A weni mu Belemu di gha	go and study Belemu
A weni mu Roberti di gha	go and study Robert
Be ma keme tun emi duma mo	these two men sing diligently

Ango ke tuaweri ne	they make a lot of effort
Pere-weri bii dei o..	now they have gained wealth
Ani – aba, ngo tualayefa o	giving your best is the ultimate

The singer in this song (King Robert Ebizimor) condemns the tendency of people giving up on their endeavours so soon and laying blame on witchcraft and juju. It challenges people to be diligent in their endeavors and not give up at difficult times as that is how to guarantee success.

Tuo Wuru Ebi Dou Ogbo of Aleibiri by Robert Ebizimor

Tuo wuru ebi dou ogbo	dry gin association
pena emi bara ke	is your heart has pure as the dry gin
Biye kpo pena emi ya, Margareti o	oh Margaret
Edise-emi ogbo kpo emi,	Edise-emi is in the association
Buloufiniere ogbo kpo emi	Buloufiniere is in the association
Abalaere ogbo kpo emi	Abala-ere is in the association
Ebiere ogbo kpo emi	Ebiere is in the association
A gomu ebi firi ke wenimene	if you are doing a good job
keme se keme weripei kumo o,	don't mind criticism
Toru tua eni fere ke dii	focus on your job

This song by King Robert Ebizimor is in honour of a foremost trade association of Gin producers from Aleibiri town in Ekeremor Local Government area of Bayelsa state. It is customary for musicians to sing praises of prominent entities and successful people or groups. In this way the musician promotes and popularizes such groups.

Garri Moun (Garri Hunger) By Robert Ebizimor

Fiyai moun ke bo 'ba midei ye	hunger wants to kill us
Moun be o yin	o, the hunger
Garri moun ke bo 'ba midei ye	Garri hunger wants to kill us
Moun be o yin	o, the hunger
Teike mie timi moun ke	what sort of hunger is this
Piri ba mu bara	that seek our lives
Moun be duo bo yor kpo	the source of this hunger
Y'eri nimigho	I do not know

Awou kerri kpo keni ye	a capable father
Bina di kpo keni ye	a capable relative
Ebi kiri alagha o	good things don't last
Oloye o, kem' alemo y' ekiye owei	Oloye causes me depression

Awigiri musicians are in the business of eulogizing and immortalizing important personalities who die such as the song above where Chief Oloye Akpe – the writer's father is sung about after his death in 1983. The song is still played in traditional funeral gatherings.

CONCLUSION:

On one hand Awigiri music has contributed immensely to the development of Ijaw indigenous music by its use of the language and some of its musical instruments. On the other hand, it has hampered and stifled the sustenance of folk forms of music and dance in Ijaw land as the society has embraced it wholesale such that it is no longer common to see traditional music and dance group performances in social or ceremonial events; as Awigiri becomes the first choice of music. Much of what is retained as indigenous music (which is almost always accompanied by dance or created for dance) is found mainly in the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and Culture and pockets of a few communities such Egbelegbe dance in Amassoma in Southern Ijaw local government area. Such performances are accorded great appreciation. Nevertheless most community leaders who are regarded as custodians of their traditions still haven't felt the need to be committed to the sustenance and preservation of their indigenous music and dance genres. To this end Awigiri has contributed to the fast decline of the cultural music heritage of many communities in Ijaw land and Agbere is one such community.

It is the concern of students and professionals of musicology, governments and community heads to preserve the music of their cultures. Rather than allow Awigiri music serve as a threat to other forms of folk music, it would be rewarding to encourage musicians of the genre to use it as a tool to reinforce the musical idioms of the society. Its functions and forms should be such that reflect the contexts of the culture of the people. Since Awigiri has gone commercial, incorporating these aspects of the music of the society would preserve and sustain them for future generations to experience as it is a known fact that folk music today was popular at their time of creation.

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