

Developmental Trends in Igbe Music of the Urhobo in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Igbe has been a religious practice among the Urhobo since the late 19th century with its origin in Kokori, Agbon clan in Delta State. The music comprises a combination of chants, dances, speech, songs and musical instruments performed during ritualistic and social ceremonies. Since the emergence of *Igbe* music, much interaction with social development and information technology (ICT) has resulted in visible changes. However, the degree of the impact of these changes on *Igbe* music has not received desired academic attention. This paper therefore examine sthe various innovations in *Igbe* music to make its application relevant in the 21st century. From oral interviews and participant observation, it was established that in-corporation of Western bass drum (*Ibani*), various amplification gadgets, establishment of *Igbe* popular dance band and the waxing of *Igbe* songs/records in recording studios geared towards rebranding Igbe music and making it relevant in modern era. It is therefore recommended that, within a tolerable religious change, music should receive high administrative support to achieve the purpose for which it is part of the system.

Introduction

Igbe is one of the indigenous monotheistic religious practice that is popular among the Urhobo and its neighbours. Akama (1985), Okolugbo (1990), Nabofa (2003, 2005) and Bresibe (2015) acknowledge *Uku Ubiesha Etarakpobuno* of Kokori in Agbon clan, Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State; as its founder. The religious practice came into existence around 1958 through divine revelation by God to Ubiesha. Music (songs and dance) is a core element of *Igbe*. As expressed in Nabofa (1996) *Igbe* connotes Dance (vibrate, shake, rock and roll, quiver). Akpughe (2014) notes that *Igbe* is not just mere dance but an

avenue of expressing the spirituality – as a medium through which *Igbe* worshippers commune with the gods for edification.

Okolugbo (1990), Nabofa (2003 and 2005), Orhero (2015) recognize the two most popular sects of *Igbe* as *Igbe Ubiesha* and *Igbe Ame*. While *Igbe* -Ubiesha votaries recognize the spiritual power of the *Orben* (kaolin) while chalk as of divine revelation and authority, those of *Igbe* -*Ame* recognize the sea lord *Olokun* (the great water god) and other allied water beings as spiritual messengers to *Olokun*.

Igbe, which began as a pure Urhobo Kokori traditional sect, has spread to other parts of Urhoboland, Nigeria and Diaspora (United Kingdom) Orhero (2015). *Igbe* music consists of songs, dances and musical instruments used by devotees or associated with members during worship and other social ceremonies. As observed in Akponwei (2009) in time past, the founder of *Igbe Uku* Ubiesha, in his worship hall (*Ogwa*) in Kokori in his pristine white outfit with a horsetail and a hard white leather fan as his instrumental accompaniment, dance to *Igbe* songs during worship.

However in contemporary times, there have been some innovations in *Igbe* music. The incorporation of musical instruments such as the *agogo* (metal gong) *akise* (maracas) *Ibani* (Western bass drum), *Ishaka* (basket rattle), jazz drum, guitars, keyboard and various sound recording and amplification gadgets are incorporated into *Igbe* instrumental ensemble, as against the *Adjudju* (leather fan) which was the only instrument used in the ensemble, can be viewed as innovation adopted by devotees to make *Igbe* music more relevant to the modern era.

The Origin of *Igbe* music

An oral interview on the origin of *Igbe* music conducted on Hon. Justice James Omo-Agege, Idudu Oghenevwairhe, *Uku* Obaga Ibodje, Beauty Broka, Ebinum Eko, Inspector Sunday Eboh, Veronica Eboh, Diana Inayah among others attested to the opinion that *Igbe* songs originated from the activities of Ubiesha of Kokori who is acclaimed to be the founder of the religious movement which originated around 1893 in Kokori. According to these respondents, around 1893, *Oweya* (Almighty God) revealed the *orben* (kaolin) to Ubiesha on his way to his farm and instructed him to carry it home and use it for the benefit of mankind, that is, for prophesy to people happenings of the past, present and

future, to heal persons with ailments believed to be afflicted by the evil spirits and to be used in giving judgment on matters of witchcraft (Okolugbo, 1990). However his refusal to accept this divine assignment made him suffer from what was believed to be personality disorder. Under this condition, he roamed the streets of Kokori singing with chants and with kaolin (*orben*) bath all over his body. In this condition, his family, wife and relatives discounted him Akponwei (2009), Nabofa (2005), Obie (2005).

While in this state which lasted for about 27 years Lady Erukainure assisted Ubiesha with food and shelter and with the instruction from *Oweya*, they both became husband and wife. They both started the *Igbe* in a small hut in Kokori with some devotees who came for healing with *orben* (chalk), and for prophetic messages from Ubiesha etc. It was with this few group of devotees and Lady Erukainure started the *Igbe* with songs (music and dance). Throwing more light on this claim, Akponwei (2009:28) making reference to how Ubiesha does the *Igbe* dance in the worship hall notes “He stamped rhythmically to his feet on the ground with coordinating body gyration interspread while beating his legs with the leather fan. A variation of beating this fan on the leg, is beating of the fan held in right hand on the palm of the left hand to keep the rhythm of the song (2009:28)

This view expressed above was the practice when votaries were seated in *Igbe* hall of worship. The song used in accompanying the dance as established by Ubiesha and the use of leather fan (*adjudju*) which serves as the only instrumental accompaniment is what we refer to as *Igbe* music.

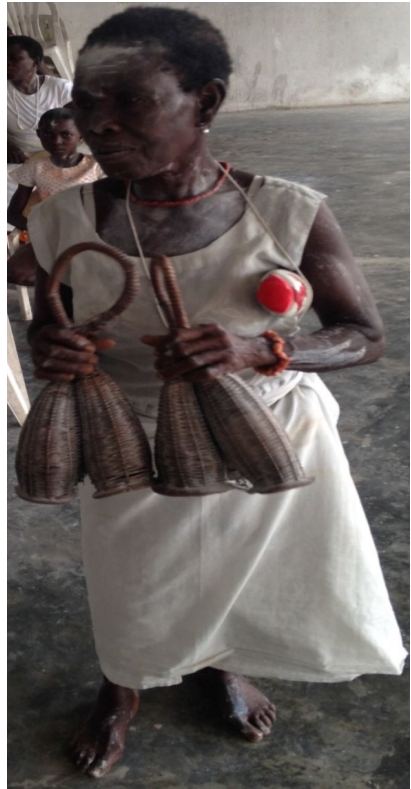
Societal and Cultural Influence on *Igbe* Music

The cultural interaction between practitioners of *Igbe*, the society and her neighbours has greatly influenced *Igbe* musical performance. The interactions have led to the incorporation of some musical instruments such as *agogo*, (metal gong), *akise* (maracas) and the *Ishaka* (basket rattle) into the *Igbe* musical ensemble. As noted by the respondents earlier mentioned, in the early years of *Igbe* practice, the *adjudju* (leather fan) was the only musical instrument used in accompanying *Igbe* songs. However, in the later years *agogo* (metal gong), *akise* (maracas) and *Ishaka* (basket rattle) which were instruments used by the Urhobos and their

neighbours to accompany their indigenous music were incorporated by the *Igbe* devotees into the *Igbe* musical ensemble.

Accordingly, from the rendition pattern of *Igbe* songs, it can be established that the singing pattern of the Urhobo is reflected in *Igbe* whose members are Urhobo. The indigenous singing style of the Urhobo where group sings antiphonally (call and response) has been adopted into *Igbe* music rendition style. However it is important to note that the choice of these musical instruments apart from the leather fan (*adjudju*) in various *Igbe* units, are optional. The inclusion of these instruments in *Igbe*, might be an influence of the Urhobo culture where the use of these instruments are very prominent.

Ishaka (basket rattle) played by an aged *Akpẹ-ine* Source: *Ikpẹ-ine* festival Orhomuru-Orogon



An *Igbe* devotee playing the maracas

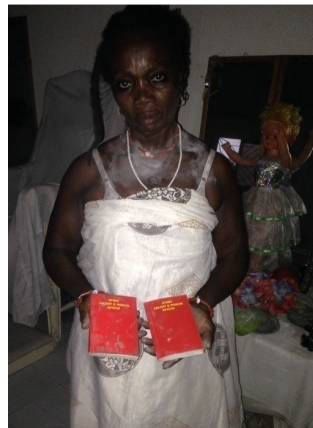
Influence of Foreign Religion/Western Music on *Igbe* Music

The contact which the *Igbe* devotees had with the colonial masters, missionaries, and the Western music idioms resulted in the inclusion of some western musical instruments, most especially the *Ibani* (bass drum) into *Igbe* musical ensemble. The bass drum, a western instrument by origin, was introduced by the missionaries during the colonial era (before 1960) into the established mission schools to accompany match past during morning assemblies and also used by the colonial masters in the regimental bands for parade and military ceremonies.

From oral interview with Abel Kodu, Geraldus Odalume and Lawrence Idahosa (*Igbe* members) suggests that the *Igbe* religious sect may have decided to incorporate the bass drum (*ibani*) instead of the traditional drums (*Igede*) into the *Igbe* musical ensemble, in other to pacify the colonial masters who were then clamming down and abolishing the traditional cult groups in Urhobo, and derogatorily branding them as fetish. According to Nabofa (2005), this act of the colonial masters is a bid for them to create a vacuum in order to accommodate their religious activities among the Urhobo. The *Igbe* sect, sort for a blend of both their traditional and European musical tastes into their musical activities. To further enhance this blend in some *Igbe Ogwia*, apart from the bass drum, one finds Christian hymn books and even a copy of the Holy Bible which were never used as part of *Igbe* items.



The Western bass drum (*ibani*) used in *Igbe* performances
 Source: *Igbe* Iderhivme Idjaro (a.k.a. *Akpe-ine* “India”) sanctuary in Kokori



Copies of Ancient and Modern hymnal in *kpe-ine* Iderhivme Idjaro sanctuary in Kokori

According to the respondents, as named earlier and from observation, in the last decade, remarkable developments have occurred in *Igbe* musical practices. Series of *Igbe* stage band have evolved. These stage bands which are commercial bands are usually hired to perform in *Igbe* social ceremonies such as festivals, burial ceremonies and marriage engagements.

These stage bands which made use of modern amplification gadgets and instruments such as full jazz drum set, guitars (bass and rhythm), and keyboard among others strictly perform *Igbe* tunes/songs. Example of such musical groups is the Holy Salvation Centre band resident at holy Salvation road Amekpa-Ughelli. This band is led by Rev. Prophet Oyiborame Emojeru (JP). According to Festus Ikoba and *Uku* Bishop Okwugbe, Rev. Prophet Emojeru's working experience overseas which exposed him more to musical taste of the west, influence of Christianity and modernity culminated to the innovation which he brought into *Igbe* musical practice. As observed, most *Igbe* sanctuaries have now been transformed in terms of its structure and musical instruments. As noted in the worship hall of *Igbe Omote-Uku* Amajatoya in Ughelli, they have a composite of modern musical gadgets, such as full set of jazz drum, gigantic speakers, microphones and equalizers to refine and balance the sound quality of the musical performance to aesthetic taste. The fusion of *Igbe* music culture, with Western music culture, can be viewed as acculturation.



A jazz drum set used in *Igbe Omote-Uku* Amajatoya worship hall in Ughelli



Igbe popular dance band performing during *Igbe* festival
 Source: The Holy Salvation Center dance band Amekpa-Ughelli

Influence of Technology on *Igbe* Music

The advancement in science and technology and globalization which entails the inter connectivity of various musical activities of the world into a single geographical entity for social interaction and global exchange Igbi (2016), has aided in projecting *Igbe* music within and outside Urhobo land and in Diaspora, and also enriching the musical taste.

As noted in recent times *Igbe* musical performances are no longer restricted to *Igbe* ceremonies alone or in the worship halls (sanctuaries), but its scope has moved into the Nigerian music industry and to the global world. Presently, there are series of *Igbe* professional musicians who make their living from sales of *Igbe* compact disc. They are specialists (*Ikepe-ine*) lead singers, and other musical enthusiasts who now engage various recording studios to record and commercialize *Igbe* tunes/songs, to meet the aesthetic taste of not only *Igbe* devotees, but the general public. The digital equipments in these recording studios have transformed the sound quality to make it more appreciable for aesthetic consumption.

As observed from interviewees stated above, and personal observation, with the use of memory cards, they now download *Igbe*

songs/hits waxed into compact disc into their cell phones and now use part of the motive or theme as their caller or ringing tones. With this technology, it translates that *Igbe* songs could now be heard in any part of the globe. A list of some *Igbe* artistes projecting *Igbe* music through their recordings, include Mrs. Lucky Olome alias Ogburine I of Ubiesha, title album *Eguono* (love), *Igbe* special group of Urhobo Vol. 001, Edjekevwe (an *Igbe* selection) by Lady Indian, Eloho and Eunice, Ajere (*Igbe* special Vo. 4) by Ogbo Maria among others all these albums are produced by star-records (Chief Diamond Ichege) of No. 34, Olori road, Ughelli.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the paper concludes that change is inevitable as interactions with other cultures influence patterns. Contacts *Igbe* devotees had with Western musical idioms, foreign religions and neighbouring cultures, aided the trends in *Igbe* music.

Ishaka (basket rattles), *agogo* (metal gong), *akise* (maracas) can be viewed as influence of the Urhobo culture and other neighbouring cultures, the *Ibani* (bass drum) electric guitars, jazz drum set, keyboard, establishment of popular dance band and waxing of records among others, are influence from western cultures on *Igbe* music.

The various innovations as established in *Igbe* music might be intentional by the devotees, in other to make its worship pattern relevant in the 21st century era, sustain its patronage, and globalize this musical genre.

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Primary Sources (Respondents) (Oral Interview)

S/No	Names	Age	Sex	Place/Date Interviewed
1.	Hon. Justice James Omo Agege (OFR) (CJ) Rtd. Delta State	85	M	Orhomuru-Orogun 23/3/2015- 2018
2.	Idudu Oghenevwairhe	95	M	Orhomuru-Orogun 20/6/2015- 2018
3.	<i>Uku</i> Supreme Obaga Ibodje	78	M	Kokori 29/12/2015 - 2018
4.	Chief Festus Ikoba. O.	57	M	Abraka 02/03/2015- 2018
5.	Beauty Ayeoba Broka	53	F	Oghior (Udu clan) - 2018
6.	Inspector Sunday Eboh	76	M	Abraka 15/02/2015- 2018
7.	Veronica Eboh	47	F	Abraka 25/06/2015- 2018
8.	Inayah Diana	32	F	Igun 02/09/2015- 2018
9.	Abel Olori Kodu	48	M	Otor-Udu 26/07/2015- 2018
10.	Lawrence Idahosa	57	M	Abraka 23/03/2015- 2018
11.	<i>Uku</i> Bishop Okwugbe	56	M	Aladja 26/07/2015- 2018
12.	Geraldus Odalume	76	M	Aragba-Orogun 01/03/2016- 2018