

**CREATIVE INGENUITY AND SOCIAL OBLIGATION: MUSIC MAKING AMONG
WOMEN COMPOSERS IN EKITI, SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Studies around women have established that they are good singers in their own respect. However, little or no studies in Nigeria have investigated the ability of women as composers. This study, informed by socio-musical studies into musical behaviour of women in Ekiti, examines the process of music making among the Ekiti women composers of the South-Western Nigeria. Analytical and participant observation methods were employed in generating the data analysed within the ethnomusicological framework. Many of their performances during the rehearsals and live performances in the last 18 months were recorded and transcribed. Analytical summaries of the two selected musical styles (Alakutu and Alamo) are presented while focusing on the creative processes of the music within the context of social obligation. In their musical roles, these women articulate the musical essence (entertainment and dance) and extra-musical essence (moral, ethical, obligatory and social-control) of music in Ekiti through compositional art. The paper concludes that women using the extemporization and improvisation techniques were found to be good composers and arrangers of Ekiti songs.

Key words: Music composition, Music making, Women, Creativity, Ekiti.

INTRODUCTION

Within its operational usage in this study, composition is creating a new piece of music. Its technique and structure are analysed in this study. Ekiti women generally, are naturally musical, and music in that culture is extremely invaluable. This is evident in their daily musical and social life as they sing to either entertain self or others with solo pieces or group singing performances. Context of performance among other musical activities determines the creative process; the

mode of performance, the length of songs, the text of the songs and in some cases, the tempo of the music.

The solo performances feature praise singing in chant mode. The chant is known as *Alamo*. It is a solo art that emphasizes praises of an individual within his genealogy. Chant in Yoruba community according to Vidal (1979) is a ‘musical medium for the performance of poetry; a verbal medium’. The group performance (*Alakutu*) features compositions that have a distinguished melodic line that can be termed as songs, (A singing mode different from chanting mode).

This paper examines the compositional and creative process of the musical art of the women in Ekiti focusing on solo and group performances. It also focuses on musical and non-musical factors that determine the structural patterns of the compositions. Data for this study were collected through participating in and observing the various performances of the different musical styles between February 2015 and August 2017 (38 performances of *Alamo* and *Alakutu* music were observed and recorded).

Socio-Musical Design of Alakutu Music and Alamo Chant

Ekiti is a sub-group of the Yoruba people living in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. Their dialect distinguishes them from other Yoruba people (Oyo, Egba, Ondo, Ijebu, Owo) living in the Southwestern region of Nigeria. Little scholarly attention has been given to the Ekiti musical traditions. By comparison, with the Yoruba Oyo and Lagos, investigations on Yoruba Ekiti music have been sparse.

Ekiti women as used here are the women who are married or who are of marriageable ages. They are between ages 18 and 55 especially in the organized groups. More elderly women of between ages 25 and 75 years are in the spontaneous group. The latter category allows everybody; young and old; to take part. There is no restriction to membership. The women are of two groups: the compound women (*Obinrin-ule*) these are the women who are married to men in a particular compound and the second group is the *agbo-ule* group. These are women living in a major street comprising many compounds. Apart from musical event, they group for socio-economic reasons like *upade obinrin ule* (house wife meetings) where they contribute money on weekly basis in form of local cooperative society (*ajo*) to organize social activities, discuss women affairs and recently associate with Government Women Affairs Ministry.

Two musical styles were analyzed in this study:

- (a) *Alakutu* musical group (pot drums art)
- (b) *Alamo* praise chant (a praise solo art)

Alakutu music is performed by a group of women who freely associate (spontaneous group) or have formed themselves into a permanent music band (organized group).

Organized Group (*Alakutu*)

The organized grouping is a small musical band of players and singers who come together to perform *alakutu* music. It is a distinguished group with a leader. In most cases; the leader owns the group. The group features only the women who are the singers and drummers. The women do the drumming themselves like the adult women in Akan society of Ghana where women do the singing and drumming. These women grouping in Ekiti include Afolabi Adepeji musical band in Ido-Ekiti and Eye-jari native band in Ilupeju Ekiti.

Members of this group are inveterate musicians who have long-standing and firmly established musical habits. A deviation from their musical habits is invidious. Such musical deviation is usually unacceptable, and is likely to arouse resentment or musical anger from members and even the community, which over the years are musically inclined to the music. These women composers are inviolable in that they are never to be infringed or dishonoured. They carry a status that is not determined by wealth but their musical art. Nketia (1974) noted that ‘musicians were expected to know their art and the duties required of them’. Status is therefore determined by how well a musician can perform these expected musical duties.

Spontaneous Grouping (*Alakutu*)

This grouping which is ad hoc in nature, is a temporary arrangement of a set of women who are not in musical band relationship but come together to perform music when need arises. They perform at different occasions and for that purpose only. Mostly the performances were not previously arranged. This impromptu ceremonial group performs in a gathering of specific occasions like naming, funeral and marriage ceremonies. At such performances, once an identifiable good singer who could lead others is identified, the performance starts with others forming the chorus.

Songs that are related to the occasion at hand are raised, sung and performed usually with one or two musical instruments; usually pot drums or some times, two gourd rattles (*Apiiri* drums). When pot drums are used; the performance is *Alakutu* music which differentiates the performance from *Apiiri* music using rattles.

The women are in the same *agbo-ule* organization with celebrant who they own a social obligation. Such social obligation is expressed through a musical performance. The *alakutu* spontaneous musical group is open ended. It is derived from contextual contingencies (the absence of certainty or necessity in events). It is composition by exigencies. With the spontaneous group; *alerin* (lead singer) is often reserved for women who have such musical ability. As soon as the *alerin* is around, she raises songs and women around respond by repeating entire songs (*omo mi o akurebete*) see example 1; or a part of the song (*Lakurubu tutu*) see example 2; or a different chorus (*eruniyo*) see example 3.

The membership of this group as noted by Onyeji (2004) ‘is not negotiated and neither is it open to personal discussions. It happens automatically as a result of marriage into any (Igbo) community’ As in Igbo culture, women in Ekiti are charged with the responsibility to receive, welcome and introduce the newly married women to the community singing group (the spontaneous group). This process includes the introduction to singing, drumming and dancing norms of the community musical event. Learning takes place through ascription and observation of older women.

The two groups create music before and during the performance. As David Locke (2011) noted ‘Composers fix multi-determinate components into their musical designs’ (performers who in the case of this study are the composers) bring this multi-faceted condition into being; (through the dancers and well-wishers) and listeners actively participate in hearing the multivalent potential of a familiar item of repertory.

Alamo Praise Chant

Alamo is a solo praise chant among the Ekiti people of Southwestern Nigeria. It is a musical mode in which Ekiti people recite their genealogical poems. The poetic lines are individual creation. It is not a spoken poetry but a chanted one performed in chant intonation which Vidal (1979) described as ‘voicing mid-way between speech and song’. Within the Ekiti musical lexicography *Koorin* (sing a song) and *sa Alamo* (chant a poem) differentiates a song-form from a chant mode. Vidal further noted that musically speaking, ‘chant can be differentiated from song on the basis of intonation, melodic range, melodic contours, tonal register, absence or presence of a fixed musical pattern including rhythmic and tonal patterns’.

A solo voice renders the chant to eulogize people and not the gods. It is different from *Ijala* chant used by the hunters to eulogize *Ogun*, the Yoruba god of iron and wars. It is equally different from *iwi or esa eegun* (masquerade chant) which is used to eulogize the departed ancestors whose incarnated spirits are symbolized by the appearance of masquerade. *Iyere-Ifa* is a chant used by the devotees of *Ifa* oracle to worship or celebrate *Ifa* (Yoruba god of divination). *Iyere-Ifa*, *Iwi* and *Ijala* are religious chants that are identified with one deity or the other. Unlike these three, *Alamo* is a chant for social and festive ceremonies (See Abiodun, 2005). It is not occupational based like the *Ijala*, which is chanted by hunters. *Alamo* is chanted by women and occasionally by men during festivals and funerals in Ekiti. It is therefore a ceremonial chant.

The chant uses the syllabic style of chanting that is, one music tone is sung to one syllable or vowel of text. A high falsetto and wailing voice quality characterize the tone colour of Alamo chant. It is devoid of nasalization.

Social Events and Musical Creativity

In its general terms, the Ekiti women composers (38 of them interviewed) identified compositional process to include songs that come to the “supplicant” in a flash, vision, dream, inspiration and through reflectionary activity. All women composers interviewed indicated that these compositional processes are real. Some informants recounted some cases of somebody singing for them in their sleep and some hearing melodies in a meditating mood. Some of them who are educated write down the lyrics with some self-developed symbols that help them to recollect the tune. One of the informants had recently recorded such melodies that coming to her on her cell phone (Abiodun, 2012).

In its specific terms, the musical art and the process of making music among the *Obinrinule* in Ekiti can be classified and analyzed according to events to be performed. Though the presentational form is open-ended, the composition can be distinguished according to the functions the musical events are made to realize. The assumption here is that the social event dictates the compositional technique. The discussion of the creative process in relation to social obligation and social events is based on this assumption.

***Orin Arobo* (Song of a New Baby)**

Music is created around the celebrations of a newborn baby in Ekiti Community. The music event starts with a procession from the hospital or maternity home in contemporary time to the home of the baby. In the recent past when women had their babies at home, the noise that announced the birth of the child was always followed by songs by women around the birth place. The spontaneous musical group led by a singing voice (*alerin*) raises a song and is chorused by the women around. As soon as a better lead voice comes on board (the venue of performance)

she takes over from the other women and the singing continues until they are satisfied. Being the first musical event of the naming ceremony, no musical instrument (accompaniment) is played at this stage.

The second stage is the naming ceremony, where the parents may invite an organized group with a token fee or make use of the *obinrinule* group (spontaneous group). On this special ceremony, several songs centering around prayers for the child, purpose of child bearing and rearing, thanks to God and some social issues in the society that are directly related to children are created and rendered.

These women spontaneous group is the *Alakutu* musical group, which uses between two and four pot drums. It is an all pot ensemble beaten by women themselves. These pot drums are kept in the house of the most elderly women from where they are retrieved when they are needed. The women who beat the drums acquire this knowledge through imitation and ascription, with skills developed over the years. Young women are encouraged to acquire the knowledge too through the master drummers. The knowledge acquisition is passed on from one generation to another. No ritual is allowed. All women of this category (*Obinrinule*) are entitled to this ceremonial event. It is a musical obligation that must be performed for and by women in a compound when a new baby is born.

This musical role within the context of naming ceremony, is assumed by women as wives in the compound. The musical ensemble (spontaneous or organized) is expected to provide entertainment for the visitors of the celebrant. The entertaining sound attracts visitors to a dancing spree with the celebrants.

The songs are accompanied with *Eye-lu* (mother drum) *Tingidi* (middle-sized drum) and *pipiri* (the smallest pot drum). These instruments are percussive and they only provide danceable rhythmic pattern. They are not melodic instruments. *Eye-lu*, which is the biggest is the pulse marker and dictates the tempo by regulating its pulsating beats. The *Tingidi* plays the regular rhythmic pattern while *pipiri* plays the supportive rhythm, which complements the rhythmic pattern of *Eye-lu*.

The music is majorly vocal employing the call and response form. The lead singer takes a phrase in question form ending on a dominant key and the chorus (the dancer, observers, women or even children) take the answerable phrase ending on the tone key (See example 4). The dancers perform a free dance steps making extensive use of the space, which in this case is usually in front of the celebrant's house. The songs which are usually short, feature a lot of repetition with less improvisation.

The music features a two-bar questioning phrase (lead) with a two-bar answering phrase (chorus) when there is overlapping as in example 2, (*Lakurubututu*) the call enters before the chorus ends its phrase. In the example given, the last 3 syllabic sounds of the chorus form harmony which has an interval of a major second. When the note is tonic the harmony note is supertonic. This in Abiodun (2010) was referred to as *Ekitophony* (harmony that is peculiar to the Ekiti people).

Orin Aro (Funeral Song)

Women in Ekiti perform in funeral ceremonies of an elderly man or woman. Apart from the *Alakutu* music (the all pot drums ensemble) used by women to celebrate the departed, *Alamo* Praise chant is also performed by solo performers eulogizing the attributes and praises of the celebrants and participants. The chanting is not done by every woman, but by those who are

essentially creative. Creativity is core to musical composition which Nettle (1954) in Mariam (1964) defined as a 'production of the mind of an individual or a group of individuals and not the expression of an entire people'. Creative is therefore individualistic and personal.

It was customarily obligatory for women to chant the praise of oneself or others in its literary poetic form (spoken chant) or in its musical form (singing chant) *Ai se re, eoni* (failure to do it, is abomination). Any woman who failed to join others in the musical event is sanctioned.

Musical creation started with sound of shouts and wailing announcing the death of a person, (small or great). While some are chanting with a wailing voice, others do the chanting in its plain voice. The creation is in musical chains emanating from repertoire, context, content and momentary exhibition of skills.

The beginning of the chanting modes features praises that are linked to *orikiorile* (genealogy). The content does not change and they are usually in spoken form. Two or more people may start the chanting. The number decreases as the chanters drop when each exhausts her repertoire. A versatile and experienced chanter (older in age) will however continue. The creation is widely explored randomly through generations of lineage. The content covers *orikiorile* of the maternal and paternal lineage of the deceased.

Some chanters would stop at the deceased *orikiorile* while others would go to the parents, grandparents and great grandparents. The creation here depends on how rich the repertoire is. It sometime goes beyond this family structure. Some versatile chanters traced the origin of the deceased outside the immediate family structure by chanting the *orikiorile* of the migrating fathers. For instance, the *Ilogbe* quarters in Ifaki-Ekiti migrated from Ido-Ekiti. The chanting of

the people in *Ilogbe* quarters will always include *Udo Ogangan, omo a me kuru resin* (Ido-Ekiti, who uses bean cake to buy a horse).

At the middle section, context of the musical event determines the creative style. Two distinctive styles were deciphered: A sorrowful mood and less-sorrowful mood. The age of the deceased distinguishes the different moods. When a young person dies, the elderly women chant the praise of the deceased because the atmosphere is tensed and sorrowful. The chanting is moody, grief and heavy. Only the elders do the chanting here. Such chanting uses the wailing voice pattern. It is a mixture of crying and wailing chanting and speeches that involved more crying. Content usually does not include any comforting poems but *orikiorile* that narrates the being essence of the deceased.

All the women chant in the less sorrowful mood when the deceased is elderly. The atmosphere is bright and light as women chant to praise and make merry. They chant for a gift of money. Such chanting makes the head to swell (*oriru*) and motivates the celebrant to dance and spend money for the chanters. While the latter is cheerful and fast, the former is moody and slow in tempo.

The end section features the climax of the funeral performance. Many of the women sing praises of self and others. The chanting voices are numerous and mostly the gathering features groups of two people facing each other and showering praises on each other not necessarily for money now but a performance exhibiting dexterity of the musical ability of women celebrating the departed, the celebrants and friends.

Social control songs

Women musical performances within the social control context feature songs that have text containing abuses, songs of insults and songs of warning. Such passages are intended to call attention to wrong done by a member of the society, secret habit, social offences, disobedience to societal norms, customs, statutory behaviour, legendry, myth and history that established the social control laws and regulations of the society. Apart from these instances, they are meant to regulate societal behaviours and to explain the circumstances of procedures that call for punishment. The text of the social control music feature offensive, invective and highly critical language which are meant to attack the suspected culprits. The context of performance may be reformative:

<i>In mojalemo,</i>	Do not steal again,
<i>Oni baj'ale,</i>	those who steal,
<i>Sango li e pa</i>	god of thunder will kill them

The songs may contain song of abuse to bring about change of attitude (See Example 4):

<i>Olojukangberan eye o,</i>	One eyed man stole mama's goat,
<i>Eranebo o.</i>	meat of sacrifice,
<i>In mokorin a bueraneboni o.</i>	sing to abuse him.

The song may be descriptive and insulting in order to expose a culprit who has done something abominable causing moral revulsion. They (the composers) inveigh with great hostility against any suspected person through their composition of offensive songs. Informants got facts from their male counterparts who under in vino veritas (truth in wine) tell the truth when they are under the influence of alcohol. The composers have musical freedom to sing what they dared not

say in public. They are therefore covered under the legal, though unwritten law of community singing.

The performances were usually in the streets of the community during the days of a festive period, *odunijesu* (yam festival) or *odunoba*, (King's festival). The group is spontaneous as few started the performance but the number increased as they moved along the streets. In some towns in Ekiti, it is usually a night before the festival in Ifaki-Ekiti, (*Ikosun* festival) Ido-Ekiti (*Owayunro*- women festival) and Ado- Ekiti (*Iwemo* festival), the night of the festival in Ise-Ekiti (*Amomo* festival), Igede –Ekiti (*Iromo* festival) and Igbara Odo-Ekiti (*Akomowaye* festival).

The melody is in song mode rather than the chanting mode. Melodies were created with items of news at hand spontaneously with existing melodic lines with a change of text (See example 5). The textual materials reflected context of performance.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues that composition has a process among the women in Ekiti. It started from learning and mastering the old tunes. The different techniques of composition by individual composers as discovered in this study confirmed that composition among the Ekiti women as a process applied rationalized creative principles. The paper asserts that the process which is spontaneous included techniques of creating melodies as occasion demanded (performance composition). In such instances, the technical skills allowed versatile composers to combine different melodic lines, substituting text and melodies, rearranging the existing melodies, reworking the known melodies and composing entirely new melodies.

Since it is mandatorily obligatory for women to organize a musical event among themselves, women who are regular singers during such musical events take it up themselves to compose new melodies outside the performance. The songs are preserved by continuously singing the songs to themselves, sharing the songs with somebody around and recently recording the songs on mobile phones.

These compositions are ingenious, original and inventive, and they are functionally determined. A deviation from these functional indexes invalidates the cultural context of the music as its practice is a fulfillment of the social obligation of the women to womanhood world in Ekiti, Southwestern Nigeria.

APPENDICES

Example 1

Me ra sin an a

Mera sin an a U-ya u-le o-ko o-pola po ju o-ri jemire-re i be me-ra

8
sin an a o wi be e si ra re
Me ra sin an a U-ya u-le

14
o-ko o-po la po ju o-ri jemire-re i be me-ra sinan a o

Example 2

Lakurubututu

Musical score for 'Lakurubututu' in 2/4 time, key of D major. The score consists of two systems. The first system has two staves: the upper staff contains the melody with lyrics 'La - ku - ru - bu - tu - tu' and the lower staff contains accompaniment with lyrics 'O mo ya jo o o - mo li ye ni'. The second system starts with a measure rest labeled '5' and continues with the melody 'Ya m'o - yan ko mo re' and accompaniment 'O mo ya jo o o - mo li ye ni'.

Example 3

Erun iyo

Musical score for 'Erun iyo' in 2/4 time, key of D major. The score is divided into 'LEAD' and 'CHORUS' sections. The 'LEAD' section has two staves with lyrics 'E - run yo e - run yo in mo' and features triplet markings over the first two notes of each phrase. The 'CHORUS' section starts with a measure rest labeled '5' and has two staves with lyrics 'me - run yo wi te mi o e - run yo', also featuring triplet markings.

Example 4

Eran Ebo

Lead Chorus

O - lo - ju kan gbe - ran e - ye o e - ran e - bo ni

3

Lead Chorus

o in mo ko - rin a bu - e - ran e bo ni o

The first note of bar 2 ends on a dominant note (lead) in question form while the chorus gives the answer ending on tonic.

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