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Analysis of *Gangbe* Music of Badagry Ogu Community, Lagos, Nigeria

Loko, Olugbenga Olanrewaju, PhD

Abstract

This article focus on the structural analysis of Gangbe music among Ogu people in Badagry and its environs. The specific objectives are; to identify basic musical elements that characterises the repertoires of Ogu Gangbe ensembles; the texture of rhythmic patterns, and the structural foundation for its performance. Analyzing data drawn from the field work; eyewitness and practitioners' accounts collected through interviews, discussion, observation and participation. It revealed salient elements of scale, melody, instrumentation and that the texture consists of fixed patterns distributed among several instruments with contrasting parts to the Gangbe "ringed plates." In addition, it shows how the "ringed plates" assimilates and construct its own rhythmic patterns from the ensemble's overall rhythmic texture. Musical instruments include ringed plates, gongs, shakers, clappers in addition to few drums added when necessary.

Keywords: Gangbe music, Ogu, social music, ringed plates, Badagry

Introduction

GANGBE MUSIC PERFORMANCE IS ASSOCIATED WITH SEVERAL OGU communities in Lagos and Ogun states respectively. They can be found in various locations or areas of Badagry in Lagos, Ipokia, in Ogun state and other Ogu communities in south west Nigeria. However, there is greater concentration of *Gangbe* music performance more in the various rural areas such as Lagon Thogli, Tohon, Ajara Vedo and Iragbo ,among other places where *Gangbe* music and cultural practices still thrives rather than at the urban centres where very few neo-*Gangbe* groups and minstrels exists. Most of the rural Ogu communities still employ the *Gangbe* music extensively, especially during festivals, birth, weddings, and coronations among other social activities.

Many activities come alive in *Gangbe* music performance(Adeyemi, and

Williams, 2015). They include, music, dance, costumes, eating and merriment. Also, as an icon of Ogu women with a communal undertone, its performance equally awakens ethnic communal tendencies among all Ogu indigenes at the performance arena. According to Kunnuji (2019) Gangbe music is a vocally oriented music with instrumental accompaniment. The name 'Gangbe' comes from the predominant use of metallic instruments as the basic musical instruments, literally it means 'music from metals' (Kunnuji, 2019). The music according to Dosa (personal communication Octo. 4, 2019), is strictly performed by married women within a locality, while Thasi (personal communication Sept. 13, 2019), pointed out that *Gangbe* groups are often invited to perform at functions outside their own community especially among their kinsmen.

Among the basic elements that characterizes the repertoires of Ogu Gangbe ensemble in Badagry and its environs, Lagos state, Nigeria is the formation of a rhythmic texture, which acts permanently during a musical performance. The texture consists of fixed patterns distributed among several instruments whose parts contrast with the *Gangbe* "ringed plates" which at the same time provide a structural foundation for its performance. This study presents the instrumental parts that form the rhythmic texture in a *Gangbe* repertoire. In addition, it shows how the "ringed plates" assimilate structures from the rhythmic texture for the construction of his own part.

The Research Procedures

The recording of the *Gangbe* music used in this study were collected from three different locations, the first recording took place in Adamaye Lagon Thogli in 2019, specially organized performance by Thasi, Solomon for me, the second recording took place at Pota Lagon Thogli in 2020, during a stage performance and the last recording took place at Iragbo also at a performance in 2020. I was privileged to interview Thasi, Solomon, 'aka' Mi pa Mau, and Dosa, Isaac. Unstructured research questions were prepared for the interviews, as a guide in seeking and collecting information on the aspects of *Gangbe* music under investigation. All the *Gangbe* songs collected during fieldwork were transcribed with Finale software and presented in this study.

Structural Analysis

In this paper, structural analysis is carried out with particular reference to the form, the basic structural features, and styles and the performance/presentational form.

Performance/presentational form

Gangbe is an entertainment music used at social functions. The presentational form in *Gangbe* music performance often starts with an introductory section called *Avale* which normally starts slowly and gathers momentum involving active participation from all group members. The accompanying musical instruments

such as metal gong (*Ogan keke/Ogan fife*), shakers (*Hunsogo*) and twin-headed metal gong (*Gaviowena*) play metronomic patterns simultaneously at the beginning of the music. *Aze*, *Zehun* and *Alek* drums play improvisatory patterns, while *Gangbe* join the ensemble with its ostinato rhythm. The metronome, improvisatory and the ostinato instruments continue to play regular music from the beginning to the end of the music. Soloists and other 'chorus' members are mostly engaged in the singing and changing songs befitting the celebration.

Categories of songs

Broadly, *Gangbe* music employs a repertoire of chain songs with several songs looped together successively. Some of the songs in the series may be strophic (verse and chorus), while the rests are often in call and response form. The array of songs in *Gangbe* music is determined by the nature of the event at which it is being performed. Therefore, there are specific songs for child naming, wedding ceremony, coronation, burial and other festivities or ceremonies.

Language and song texts

In terms of language and song texts, *Gangbe* songs switch between Ogu and Yoruba language. Also, there is an apparent code mix of English, French and Yoruba texts in some songs. The song texts are usually folkloric that explicate wisdom, morals, societal and cultural values of Ogu people. In addition, there are also songs that contain satirical statements purely for amusements, fun and entertainment.

Form in *Gangbe* music

Gangbe music performance is characterized by a call and response. It is also found to be both strophic and solo-responsorial in nature. The improvisations of the lead vocalist are observed to follow a particular melodic pattern with variations in the lyrical content.

The Basic Structural Features

For the purpose of this paper, the song "Avale" (an introductory song) is analyzed.

The scale

The scale of the song is pentatonic because it consists of 5 tones. For analytic purpose the tones from C to G are indicated in the figure 1 and are employed. The composed melody is built on 5 tones in the minor mode (1 d r m s). It revolves around the first degree 'lah' note in the minor and ended on the 'Soh' note.



Fig. 1: Pentatonic scale

Melodic and harmonic analysis

Melody

Gangbe singers employ common melodic elements and concepts that features basically in most indigenous Ogu music as well as other music indigenous to Africa. Some of these features according to Agu (1999) are speech tone, imitation and the use of improvisation.

Ogu melodies usually follow the contours and melodic curves dictated by the spoken words, in other words the melodic movement employed incorporates Ogu language speech tones. In the same vein, they are found not exceeding the interval of an octave. This is partly because the melody is word-born and logogenic in nature. However, a few of *Gangbe* melodies are also found to be broad in range more than an octave.

Intervallic range

The intervallic range in the song '*Avale*' is a compound 4th (see figure 2). The melodic intervals that are evident in *Gangbe* songs as observed in all the communities visited are; unison, major seconds, major and minor thirds, perfect fourth, perfect fifth and minor sixth. No form of modulation was observed.

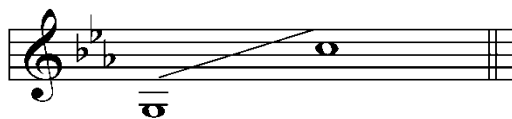


Fig. 2: Intervallic range

Intervallic relationship:

In the song below, there are both conjunct and disjunct movements as evidenced in the bars of the music. Some notes are static in the song, a cluster of notes are repeated by the solo singer and they appear predominantly. The repeated notes give the song its characteristic appearance.

There are intervals of 2nds as can be seen in bar 2, where the note F moves up by conjunct movement to G. It can be seen also in bar 3 where E flat moves up by step of a second to F. It can be seen in bar 4 where C moves down in conjunct motion to B flat. It appears in almost all the bars of the music. There are intervals of 3rds as can be seen in bar 1 where the note C leaps up to E flat, E flat to G and in bar 2 where B flat leaps down to G. Thirds appears in almost all the bars of the song. There are three intervals of 4ths and these appear in bar 1, 4, 8 and 18, where G leaps up to C and 11 where C leaps down to G; bars 3, 7 and 17 where E flat leaps down to B flat and from bar 9 and 10 where C leaps up to F. There are two intervals of 5ths and these appear in bars 2, 3, 6, 14 and 15 where C leaps up to G or G leaps down to C; bars 17 where B flat leaps up to F. There The leaps of 6th down can be seen in bars 4, 8 and 18 where E flat leaps down to G. There are no intervals of

7ths and octaves respectively. The predominant interval in the song is interval of a major second.



Fig. 3: Melody of *Avale* 'excerpt from Gangbe women at Lagon-Thogli

Harmony

The singers in Gangbe music all sing in unison, occasionally, some of the singers sing an octave above the others when they are excited or when the music performance becomes ecstatic.

Instruments and Instrumentation

The musical instruments employed in *Gangbe* music are based on various types of idiophones made from metals, woods and membranophones made with animal skins. The idiophones used in Gangbe music include *Ogan*, *Hunsogo*, *Gaviowena*, *Gangbe* (ringed plates), *Potin*, and *Kakatin* or *Asipetin* (*Pako*). The membranophones include *Aze*, *Zehun* and *Aleklewen* needed. The distribution of instruments in the Gangbe ensemble is strategically done to enable soft sounding instruments be heard as well as the voices.

The number of *Ogan* within an ensemble is between two to four, and its role is to dictate the pace of the music, while paying attention to the lead singer who may introduce new songs anytime. The *Gaviowena*, are usually not more than two within an ensemble. One plays a steady rhythm while the other improvises on the rhythmic idea. The ringed plate is the most numerous in the ensemble as most of the singers hold one and play while singing. One rhythmic pattern is heard from the ringed plate. In a bigger Gangbe ensemble where the wooden idiophones and

membranophones are added, one *Potin* because of its size while the *kakatin* or *asipetin* (*pako*) are between two or three present in the ensemble. *Alekle*, *aze*, and *zehun* drums are usually one each in *Gangbe* ensemble. *Aze*, gives the pulse while the *Alekle* and *Zehun* drums plays steady variation of the rhythm supplied by the *Ogan*. The description and function of each of these instruments in a *Gangbe* ensemble are outlined below.

Description and structural relationship among Gangbe instruments

Gangbe (pronounced *gan-gbe*)

This is an aluminum or stainless steel plate that is perforated with metallic rings attached round its circumferential edge. Each of the singers possesses one ringed plate while singing simultaneously. It is played by holding the plates in one hand and striking it against the palm of the other hand. Striking and sliding against the palm characterizes the playing of 'ringed plates' among the *Gangbe* ensemble. The above notation indicates where the instruments are stricken on the palm(P) and on the other hand 'sliding' it on the palm (S/P). The sliding is used on the palm alternatively

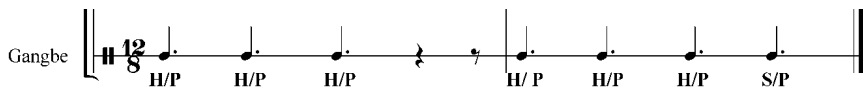


Fig. 4: Notated rhythmic pattern played by the Gangbe (ringed plates).

Hunsogo (pronounced *hun-so-go*)

The Hunsogo is a rattle constructed from a dried out gourd covered with netting to which little beads are attached. It is the same in shape and in size with that of the Yoruba rattle known as *sekere*. *Hunsogo* serves primarily as a rhythmic instrument. The *hunsogo* is usually played by shaking, striking and sliding on the palm of the player. Notably, the *hunsogo* players also sing along during performance as it is also a common practice among traditional music performers in Nigeria. It was observed that the same rhythmic pattern played by the *Gangbe* or ringed plates is same as the one played by those playing *hunsogo*. There were still some variations despite the fixed rhythm of the *hunsogo*.

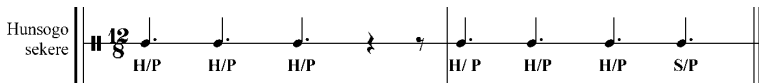


Fig. 5: Notated excerpt of rhythmic pattern played by the hunsogo.

The above notation indicates where the instruments are stricken on the palm (P) and on the other hand 'sliding' it on the palm (S/P). The sliding is used on the palm alternatively

Ogan (pronounced *O-gan*)

This is one of the principal instruments of Gangbe music. This is basically a piece of iron plate that is bent into a semi-cylindrical shape and beaten with a small metal baton. It does the main time lining and sets the rhythm and pace for the other instruments.



Fig. 6: Music excerpt of rhythmic pattern of the Ogan

Gaviowena (bell) (*Ga-vio-we-na*)

The *Gaviowena* is a metal bell instrument, known as *agogo* among the Yoruba, and *ogene* among the Igbo. It is one of the most common and widely distributed musical instruments in Nigeria. Akpabot (1986) notes that the conical-shaped bell comes in two varieties (single and double). Primarily, it is a rhythmic instrument which plays the standard bell rhythm throughout with some variations. It is played with sticks while they are held by the left hand either downward or sideways.

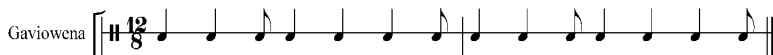


Fig. 7: Notated rhythmic pattern of the Gaviowena.

Kakatin /asipetin pako (wooden clappers) (pronounced *ka-ka-tin/a-si-pe-vin/pa-ko*)

The kakatin /asipetin /pako is a wooden clapper in pairs which are of the same size shaped like a boat. Pako is played stricken together. It is struck idiophone. In Gangbe music, the Kakatin or Asipetinis one of the common instrument used and played by some members of the group. It plays a rhythmic pattern as ostinato in the ensemble.



Fig. 8: Music excerpt of kakatin or asipetin/pako rhythmic pattern

Alekle (pronounced *a-le-kle* or *pli*)

This is a membranophone with a wooden body, it is beaten with wooden sticks. It provides a steady rhythmic variation of what is dictated by the *Ogan*.



Fig. 9: *Notated A-le-kle or Pli's rhythmic pattern*

Zehun (pronounced Ze-hun or A-pe-sin)

Zehun or *A-pe-sin* is a hand beaten membranophone. Its hollow body is made from clay and often shaped like a clay pot at the bottom. Dried animal skin is fastened with ropes to the the head area or surface. It emphasizes the pulse in the rhythm.



Fig. 10: *Musical illustration of Zehun rhythmic pattern*

Aze (pronounced A-ze)

Aze is a cylindrical drum of medium size with small protrudes at the bottom-end. Dried animal skin is fastened around the head area with several pegs which are used to increase or decrease the tension on the drum. It is beaten with both palm and sticks. It supplies steady but deep rhythm in their performance.



Fig. 11: *Notated excerpt of Aze basic rhythmic pattern.*

The Metric Patterns of Gangbe Music

Gangbe music commonly utilizes the compound quadruple time signature (12/8). This is well pointed out in the rhythms employed in the vocal part and instrumentation respectively. It is important to also point out that there are occurrences of other rhythmic patterns played by other accompanying instruments producing cross and interlocking rhythms.

In the example below in fig 12, the *hunsogo* and *Gangbe* instruments play the basic pulse of three and four strokes rhythmic patterns within a time measure set by the time-liners. The *Gaviowena* and *Ogan* (idiophones) maintain a steady bell rhythm of seven strokes premeasure while the membranophones as shown in Fig. 13 often change their patterns with every song and sometimes play some solo lines that consciously or unconsciously raise the tempo.

The musical score for Figure 12 is written in 12/8 time. It features four staves. The top staff is a common time signature line. The second staff, labeled 'Gaviowena', shows a steady eighth-note rhythm. The third staff, labeled 'Ogan', shows a steady eighth-note rhythm. The fourth staff, labeled 'Hunsogo sekere', shows a pattern of eighth notes with rests, labeled 'H/P' (half/pulse) and 'S/P' (solo/pulse). The fifth staff, labeled 'Gangbe', shows a pattern of eighth notes with rests, labeled 'H/P' (half/pulse) and 'S/P' (solo/pulse).

Fig. 12: Basic instrumental rhythmic patterns from Gangbe idiophone ensemble

In the example below in fig 13, the basic instrumental rhythmic patterns of *Gangbe* from Lagon-Thogli, in which *kakatin* /*asipetin* /*pako* plays the time-liner role, the *Aze* provides the ostinato pulse.

The musical score for Figure 13 is written in 12/8 time. It features four staves. The top staff, labeled 'Alekle Pevi', shows a steady eighth-note rhythm. The second staff, labeled 'Alekle Daho', shows a steady eighth-note rhythm. The third staff, labeled 'Apezin', shows a pattern of eighth notes with rests, labeled 'H/P' (half/pulse) and 'S/P' (solo/pulse). The fourth staff, labeled 'Aze', shows a pattern of eighth notes with rests, labeled 'H/P' (half/pulse) and 'S/P' (solo/pulse).

Fig. 13: Basic instrumental rhythmic pattern from Gangbe drum ensemble

The *Alekle-pevi* and *Alekle-Daho* jointly produce rhythmic patterns that functions as the time-liner. This role is also imitated by the *Pako*. The *Apesin* drum acts as the ostinato while the *Aze* drum provides the pulse.

Conclusion

Indigenous music among Ogu people in Badagry and its environs is monolithic, its manifestations cut across various Ogu communities. *Gangbe* music tradition has survived and maintained its integrity and relevance in Badagry and other Ogu communities. *Gangbe* music is not a modern or 'open ended' group but an age long institution strictly tied to the *Yaogbe si* (body of wives) with peculiar inner workings, which interrogates the social and creative potentials of Ogu women (Loko, 2021). Musical instruments include ringed plates, gongs, shakers and clappers, the adoption of few drums added when necessary is a very recent development. Its performance is rhythmically progressive in style with distinct ensemble instrumental accompaniment.

The structural analysis of *Gangbe* music, discussed in this paper, shows that the structural foundation for its performance consists of fixed patterns distributed among several instruments with contrasting parts to the *Gangbe* 'ringed plates'. In addition, *Gangbe* 'ringed plates' assimilates and constructs its own rhythmic patterns from the ensemble's overall rhythmic texture. Analyzed song[s] reveals the constant use of pentatonic scale, the absence of semitones and the recycled organization of the instrumental ensemble. Another important focus of the paper is the call and response formation of the songs.

A rich and dynamic deployment of oral literary aesthetics, underlines its reception and importance as an indigenous communal social music performed predominantly among various Ogu communities in Badagry and its environs.

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