

## **THE SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF ENTERTAINMENT MUSIC IN AWORI COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY OF AGASA MUSIC IN AWORILAND.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The emergence and proliferation of entertainment musical genres in Nigeria have generated scholarly discourse over the years in historical, stylistics and analytical terms. The past decades have witnessed increasingly emerging musical genres, with the older forms struggling to remain relevant in the popular music scene. However, one unique popular entertainment music genre that has remained relevant over the years among the local populace is Agasa Music. Due to its relatively small output in comparison with other popular music genres in the region, Agasa entertainment music (like other traditional entertainment music genres) is hugely under-represented in historical and analytical studies of African popular music as a whole. This paper therefore examines the Agasa traditional entertainment music in Awori settlements in Lagos State of Nigeria as a musical genre in the grassroots. Through an interpretive lens, the paper will also identify specific themes, messages, and linguistic features pertaining to the lyrics. Ultimately, the paper will trace how the exponents of these genres in the Awori area have contributed immensely to the development and sustainability over the years in spite of obvious threats to its extinction as a result of urban influences.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Agasa music is a widespread musical genre in Aworiland. It can be regarded as a popular traditional music developed among the indigenous people of Aworiland. Nigerian people are noted for their wealth of transition and culture, which has been borne out of their mythology, legends, folk-tales, and songs. To get to the true involvement of traditional music in the Nigerian society, it is necessary to study the performance culture of traditional music in Africa. We live in a performance-oriented culture; therefore, there is the need to know more about the way in which traditional music (like the Agasa music) has fared considerably within the Awori clan. In Nigeria, traditional musical practices have not faded away; neither has the musical practices that accompany them. Euba (1976) believes that the traditional music of Nigeria is the oldest in the country. It is also the music with which the majority of Nigerians are most familiar with and which, even today, remains the most popular.

The Awori people are known for their deep involvement in festivals and entertainment involving music. According to Ajetunmobi (1998) such entertainment are carried out with fanfare and they inevitably demonstrate the people's belief in social interaction. Agasa music is typically practised in association with social events, and it is at the same time a utilitarian

as well as an aesthetic art. Events such as marriage, child naming, burial, house warming, chieftaincy installations and festivals are often celebrated with Agasa music.

It is believed that music practices flourish within a socio-cultural context (*Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001, p .205). Like other genres in Africa, Agasa music plays a functional role as it is used to express the social contexts of the community it is based. It can only be understood and appreciated within the context of the people. It is also coupled with some other arts such as dance, poetry, and in some respect ritual purposes. Ultimately, the music constitutes all forms of expression of the Awori people. The purpose of this paper therefore is an inquisition into Agasa music and the forces that have shaped its practices. It will examine its origin practices over the years. Furthermore, the paper will examine the performance context on which the music is built and its relevance in an age where these practices are fast fading away as a result of urban migration.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the Social and cultural theories. This, according to Knudtson (2002) strives to explain how people relate to each other and/or the surrounding environment. According to Bently et al (2008) this was developed in the 19th century, and it was an outgrowth of Darwinian evolution. They stated further that over time, cultural change such as the rise of social inequalities or emergence of agriculture occurs as a result of humans adapting to some non-cultural stimulus, such as climate change or population growth. The concept is relevant to the study in the sense that Agasa entertainment genre, though enshrined in the old age tradition of the Awori people, is still culturally relevant in the present time. The research was carried out in Oto-Awori, an Awori settlement in modern day Ojo local government area of Lagos State in Nigeria. The relevant information concerning the origin and development of the music was provided through the administration of a questionnaire conducted orally. There was the use of participant observation techniques to study the proceedings of the musicians from their venues to the performance of the music on stage. Effort was made to record the songs on audiocassette for analysis. Through an in-depth analysis of the music, it was discovered that Agasa music has the distinct qualities common to African traditional music.

### **Origin of Awori Settlements**

The origin of the Awori people is embedded in oral traditions. According to Onikoyi (1975), the presence of the Awori group and settlements in the region of Lagos and Ogun States have two major groups of traditions. The two traditions however, agree on the primacy of Isheri and Ogunnifunminire as the hero of all the Awori clan.

The first tradition posits that the founder of Isheri, Ogunnifunminire, was one of the princes of Ife and a brave hunter (Ajetunmobi, 1998). As an adventurous hunter, part of the present Awori-land constituted his hunting territory. While on a prolonged hunting expedition, his father died and his properties were shared among other children leaving behind a ritual pot. The tradition continues that he arrived to be displeased by the state of affairs and consulted with Ifa Oracle, which counseled migration with the admonition to float the ritual pot on water and to follow it until it disappears. (The sinking of the ritual pot or its disappearance

signified settlements). The river pot floated on the Ogun River and moved southwards until it sank at a place now known as Isheri. Ogunnifunminire and his followers settled at Isheri as forewarned by the oracle. Over time, other migrants joined him until Bini warriors started to threaten the stability of the community.

The second tradition relates that Ogunnifunminire and Onikoyi were brothers that left Ile-Ife on hunting expedition-being brave hunters. Their hunting expedition took them away far too long and consequently missed the funeral of their father. Thinking them dead, their relatives put their younger brother on the throne and this annoyed the two powerful princes when they returned. Not wanting a fight, Ogunnifunminire took the calabash that was willed to him and journeyed southwards following the movement of the ritual dish on river Ogun. The calabash eventually disappeared at Isheri. They eventually decided to settle.

Oral records available agree that the migrations of the Awori group did not occur until after the death of Oduduwa. According to Aderibigbe (1975), Ogunnifunminire founded the first of the series of settlements at Isheri. He further asserts that Ogunnifunminire appears to have played the pioneering role, which hunters like he generally played in the establishment of Yoruba towns. From Isheri, which became the dispersal center of the Yoruba Awori, other settlements were founded.

### **Agasa Music: Its Meaning and Origin**

Agasa music originated purely as an entertainment musical genre. Like many other traditional music of Nigeria as recorded by Euba (1977), Agasa music is realized within the context of social ceremonies. Even though such music is performed for the group's enjoyment, the most prominent use to which the music is put in traditional culture is in the celebration, whether as an embellishment or as an integral part of social ceremonies. The name "Agasa" is shrouded in mystery as non among the Oto-Awori that Agasa music originated from the word "Akasa", one of the instruments used in the music. This is in concert with Nketia's (1974) assertion that the principal instrument used in a given musical type may also provide the name for the music. The instrument plays a very important role in Akasa Music. Before any performance, sacrifices and prayers are offered to the Akasa instrument. However, Agasa music remains an entertainment oriented musical genre. The matured elders established it as a form of entertainment in ceremonies, festivals, coronation etc. That is why in the olden days, it was generally regarded as traditional music for the elders (Ere Agbalagba). With the passage of time and audience patronage, Agasa music has come to be accepted and appreciated by young men and women. The membership of the band comprises of old men and women with young children. Children are recruited into the organisation and given specific roles to play in the group.

The Agasa musical genre is as old as the Awori tradition. However, other musical genres have been recognized before it. At the early period of Awori settlement, much time was devoted to religious rituals and music was used mainly as a functional element for these rituals. Later, new ideas started coming in with the introduction of new traditional forms such as the *gbedu* and *hunwe* by outsiders coming from other lands. With their arrival, a new level of cultural development evolved in religious, political institutions, trade, and social organisations. The expansion in the religious, political and social system led to the

introduction and invention of new musical repertoire to provide avenues for the constantly expanding medium of verbal and non-verbal expression. One of such musical repertoire is the Agasa musical genre

There are various versions of the origin of Agasa music among the Awori people. While Akindele (1998) sees Agasa music as emanating from Ikale Ilaje and having its pre-eminence in Oto from where it was adopted by neighboring Egun and Egbado people, Aiz-Imokhuede (1975) sees the musical genre as a product of Awori origin that is sung with a roll. It is generally accepted that Agasa music originated from Awori. The Oto-Awori inhabitants believe that Agasa music originated from the forefathers of Oto land many years ago. From there, it transcended into other parts of Awori (Ijanikin, Ibereko, Imeke etc.) Agasa music was regarded by Brown (1964) as one of the musical genres reported in Lagos in 1800. The origin of Agasa as belonging to the Awori people is reflected in their songs. An example is the one below:

*E toju Awori fun wa*  
*E toju Awori fun wa*  
*Gbogbo Ijoye oba*  
*Alagasa, a ko ere wa de*  
*Awa lo ni Agasa*  
*A gbe're wa de.*

**Translation:**

**Take care of Awori**  
Take care of Awori  
You kings and rulers  
Agasa singers are here  
We are the owners of Agasa  
We are here with our songs.

The song above reveals the personal identity the Awori people place on Agasa musical genre. From the foregoing, it is clear that Agasa music found its way from Ile[Ife to the present day Awori settlements. During the interview with the band members, most of them in their fifties and sixties agree that “they met the music like that”- an expression which indicates that they grew up with the music tradition. Hence, their claim that the music is their *ajogunba*, which literally means an inheritance, cannot be faulted.

**The Social Relevance of the Music**

As an entertainment genre, the music serves the purpose of the Awori community in all occasions. Like traditional music in Africa, traditional music is directly associated with traditional religious and political systems and preserved by culture (Onwuekwe, 2012). She stressed further that it generates social experiences which go deep and serves as link which binds each ethnic society; giving each individual that sense of belonging. This is seen in the high patronage from members of the Awori community during weddings, house warming, coronation, funeral and community festivals. The members of the band start each music presentation with a procession in a location different from the actual event in order to elicit corporate involvement from members of the community before moving to the venue for the

events. This is seen in the song below where proclamative songs are rendered to portray their success and achievements

***Gbogbo re lawa mise***

*Gbogbo re lawa mise (2ce)*

*Benikeni bimo ko pe wa*

*A o lo gba yeye*

*Bo ba se 'yawo le gbe*

*E wa pe waa'aba*

*Oloko-iyawo se ayeye.*

**Translation**

**We take part in all festivities**

We take part in all festivities

We shall rejoice with you

During marriage ceremonies

We shall celebrate with you

Both husband and wife.

The first song is purely a song of publicity. This song publicizes the group and their functions. Through the songs, the lovers of Agasa music know the type of functions Agasa musicians can honour. This is reflected in their songs portraying them as worthy ambassadors. The song reveals the accomplishments of the Agasa musicians as they honour invitation to neighboring towns with their music.

Most of the songs are selected and performed without serious rehearsals on stage because it is assumed that a typical Awori indigene is already used to them. However, when new songs are introduced to the audience, they are short and witty so that members can easily comprehend the melodic nuances of the songs. This sometimes comes up with patriotic intonations like the song below that eulogizes the Awori people as the owners of Lagos State:

***Eni o mo awori lo mi pe Awori l'oko***

*Eni o mo awori lo mi pe Awori l'oko*

*Awori lo l'eko de obalende*

**Translation**

**It is a novice that calls the Awori people strangers**

It is a novice that calls the Awori people strangers

The Awori people are the original owners of Lagos

Stretching to Obalende

The procession also serves as a means of educating the masses through the music. Some of the songs in their repertoire encapsulate societal issues that are germane to the development of the Awori clan. One of such is the need for their children to get access to qualitative education. It is also important in ensuring that the various communities would have their indigenes nominated or elected to political posts in the future. Hence, in order to avoid backwardness of these communities, it is considered to educate the children who are leaders of tomorrow.

***O d'osupa o mororo***

*O d'osupa o mororo*

*Ile iwed'osupa o*

*O mororo e mo*

*E lo ko'mo yin l'eko o ee*

*Tori ehinola o*

**Translation**

**The school is like the moon**

The school is like the moon

It radiates a brightened light

Educate your child as the moon

Because of tomorrow

A major aspect of the performance is the visit to the elders of the community on their way to the venue of the performance. If they are performing outside their jurisdiction, they go by public transport to the community head of the place. When they are about getting to the venue of the performance, they disembark from the bus and sing in procession. This is a means of announcing their arrival to the community. The traditional African style in paying homage to the gods of the land and the rulers of the people is highly reflected in Agasa music. At such visits, songs of homage are rendered to the elders of the land in order to gain their acceptance and blessings. It is therefore common practice to sing songs of homage to the king, elders and people of the land as seen in the excerpts below:

***Oba Awori mo se iba***

*Oba Awori mo se iba*

*He, he, he, mo se iba o*

*Oro mo se iba o*

*He, he, he mo se iba o*

*Gbogbo omo Awori mo se iba*

*He, he, he, mo se iba o.*

**Translation:**

**Greetings to the king of Awori**

Greetings to the king of Awori

He, he, he, greetings

Greetings to the indigene of Awori

He, he, he, greetings

Greetings to all Awori indigenes

He, he, he, greetings.

One major feature of the Agasa entertainment bands is the strong affinity to the deities of the land. They affirm the importance of pouring oblation to the gods of the land for a successful outing.

***K'are oni ko ye wa***

*K'are oni ko ye wa*

*A ti seba lowo iroko (2ce)*

*Ogun ilu ye fori jiwa*

*Kare oni ko ye wa*

## **Translation**

### **May today's performance be successful**

May today's performance be successful

We have prayed to Iroko (2ce)

May today's performance to successful (2ce)

The above song is a ritual song used to propitiate and pay tribute to the gods of the Land. The singers believe that the payment of tribute to the gods of Iroko and Ogun (the god of wood and iron respectively) will bring them blessings and success. During such walk, people in the community would come out to watch the musicians, following them to the performance venue. One unique feature of their followers and admirers is that they are mostly children and youths. These admirers always stay in front of the musicians dancing and tagging along as the procession ensues. This becomes a strong means of creating awareness and entrenching the values of the genre among the young generation. The song below reflects the open handedness of Agasa musicians to the youths and children in the community:

### ***Ere Agasa wun mi mo dupe***

*Ere Agasa wun mi mo dupe*

*Ere ibile lo wun wa ka maa see*

*Alagasa fe sere o*

*Ere la mise Eyin Ara*

*Eje kajo se*

*Kemuye la ma lo (2ce)*

*Awa Elegbe Alagasa o*

*Kemuye la malo*

*Won pe wa n 'Ijanikin*

*A dupe e se*

*Egbe Olomowewe*

*A dupe e se.*

## **Translation:**

### **Agasa singers are performing**

Agasa singers are performing

We are singing

Friends join us

As we sing together.

I love Agasa song

I appreciate it too

We love traditional songs

Let us sing together.

We will honour the invitation

We the Agasa musicians

We will honour the invitation

You called us in Ijanikin

The students of Ijanikin

We thank you.

The song simply expresses the singer's love for the Agasa Music. They also try to appreciate the youths (students of Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education) who called them for a performance.

A major element in the Agasa music repertoire is the concept of praise singing. According to Murwaphinda (1973) praises are chanted to show what has been done at ceremonies including weddings, graduation, funerals etc. It is common practice among Agasa musical group to sing the praises of their invitees and important guests in the function. This is in view of the fact that the guests will be pleased and afterwards be made to “spray” them with money. Praise chants are prepared before hand and the names of important dignitaries are collected by the singers upon which the chants are sung. An example of such is this:

*Aregbesola iba re bi omode juba  
Ape l'aye*

**Translation:**

Aregbesola we praise you  
If a child bows before the elders,  
He lives long.

The song reveals the importance of greetings and praise in the music of the Agasa musicians. There is the belief that such practices before the commencement of the real entertainment commends the goodness of the elders and invariably ensures their success in the performance.

There are times the musicians sing dirges in memory of a departed soul. Such dirges are composed with the name of the dead man or woman mentioned.

***Alani Baba Kola Alani***

*Alani Baba Kola Alani  
Ki won bo ba de orun Gbogbo yin E ku ilede re  
Mo kii yin gbogbo omo Olooku Ire, Kola ma gbo  
Bolaji Baba mi lo ni yen Otun sin'pada bo  
Omi lo niyen Ipade di orun  
Baba Laide, baba Kola Bayi, bayi  
Baba, odi gba Odi gbere Ire o.*

**Translation:**

**Alani Kola's father, Alani**

Alani Kola's father, Alani  
Greet them when you get to heaven Greetings to you mourners  
Greetings to you, children of the deceased Kola pay attention to me  
Bolaji has gone. He is not coming back  
He has gone, and we shall meet in heaven.  
Laide's father, Kola's father  
Like this we say  
Bye-bye.  
Farewell...

This dirge was rendered at the funeral ceremony of one Alani. The text reveals the sorrow that accompanied the painful loss. The names of the children of the deceased were mentioned. This is a common practice when the Agasa singers render dirges.



## Conclusion

Agasa music so far treated is immersed in a distinctively Nigerian musical tradition. This is because it has all the characteristics of what we might call a typical Nigerian traditional music genre. As an entertainment group, Agasa music is accepted and loved by all the indigenes of Aworiland. As a social group, it is believed that Agasa music will continue as an entertainment musical genre meant for social events. Hence, Agasa musicians will continue to operate within public performances where a group or communities gather together for the enjoyment of leisure and for recreation.

Till date, the musical group is open to any member of the community that has a desire to make music. Hence, participation will continue to be voluntary within the society.

Agasa musical group has come thus far because of the maturity of the leaders of the group. The leadership structure is so spelt out that all the members know what to do. Discipline is the core of membership. This will further aid in the development of the group. However, training is still through the informal method. This is because they have the notion that what is essentially needed is the person's ability to develop his own natural endowment.

One major achievement of Agasa music is the ability to retain its unadulterated form of music in spite of the agents of changes around. The instruments are still membranophone and idiophones in nature. The movement of the music is still in 12-pulse meter while the songs are still majorly anti-phonical with a call and response format.

Agasa music in the 21<sup>st</sup> century stands the risk of extinction because of the migration of the young ones from the town to the city. In spite of this, the leaders of Agasa musical group believe that Agasa music will be passed on from generation to generation. This is also strengthened by the fact that the federal government is doing all it can to promote indigenous music. We are also living in an age when Nigerians, tired of foreign music want a taste of their own music. This has made the Radio Stations increase the level of traditional music aired on their stations. Example of such is Radio Nigeria 2, which airs Agasa music at 9.00am, on the programme Oto Omolafin. Radio Nigeria 1, Lagos devotes a time to Awori programme at 10.am on Fridays. The opportunity is given to air the Agasa.

It is believed that Agasa music will be carried on from generation to generation. This is because the music genre is a deep-rooted form of entertainment in Aworiland. Whenever there is a function of Awori people; you will definitely hear them enjoying the never-dying, favourite music-AGASA MUSIC.

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