

INSTRUMENTAL RESOURCES: YAA PUBERTY RITES' MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND FUNCTIONS IN OGO NI COMMUNITIES OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Musical activity is an integral and functional part of Ogoni community. Music is very essential in all human activities and practices which express their emotions and feelings. All through the life of the Ogoni, they are surrounded with several rites of passage. Music making is generally organized as social events. Akpabot (1986) opines that "one of the chief characteristics of African traditional music is associated with social and ritual ceremonies." (p. 1) *Yaa* is the transition from boyhood to manhood in Ogoni community. *Yaa* is held in high esteem as a cherished age-long tradition which decides the fate of a young man in terms of his participation in the cultural practices of the land. Vidal (2012) posits that "there are traditions with traditional epochs and era." (p. 43) According to elder Nsiga in an oral interview (2016) disclose that "the *Yaa* traditional rite is very important in Ogoni because there are certain positions in the community one cannot handle if the person has not performed the *Yaa* puberty rite." *The* puberty rite is celebrated once in two years and the duration is for eight months. These eight months long celebration is celebrated with music accompanied by musical instruments.

Agordoh (1985) confirms that "Africans attach great importance to instruments in accompanying their music. Various types of instruments exist in Africa and one of the characteristics of African music is its enormous variety of musical instruments." (p. 17) In *Yaa* puberty rite celebration, different types of musical instruments are involved because the instruments involved are for both mobile and stationary movements. During their first outing, instruments that are light are

A. C. Ezebube: *Instrumental Resources: Yaa Puberty Rites Musical Instruments and...* selected because they move from one location to the other to create awareness and on the last day of the celebration which is celebrated at the market square, heavy instruments are stationed because they don't move from place to place. All the instruments used in this celebration have age long history are as old as their forefathers and they are constructed in the community with materials found in the community. Onwuekwe (2011) affirms that:

It is important to point out that in any vegetation are found trees and other plants. These plants are endowments from nature. People from various climate/vegetation zones make use of these gifts of nature to produce their musical instruments. Having been equipped with these trees and plants, they are also equipped with skills for production of the musical instruments from their various localities (p. 135).

Instruments and materials employed in the construction of these instruments are based on the kind of trees found around the community and those skilled constructs the instruments in the community. Ofuani (2011) agrees that “diverse societies, ethnics and cultures in Nigeria construct their musical instruments depending on materials (wood, animal skins, metals and earthenware resources) available to them coupled with their ability of technology of extraction and construction.” (p. 182) In Ogoni communities, trees planted in one's compound, bush or along the pathway are mostly used for the construction of musical instruments because the trees are believed to hear sound as people are moving along the road, they talk and discuss with each other. Odunuga (2009) posits that “in Africa, musical instruments at the disposal of performers are limited to those ones found in their respective communities.” (p. 79).

Classification of *Yaa puberty rite* musical instruments

Chukwu (2007) discuss different classification of African musical instruments by different authors as outlined below, he affirms that instruments in African communities are classified into divisions. Since 1914 different scholars have classified African musical instruments into three, four and five divisions. In 1880, Victor Mahillion developed a system of instrument classification. He classified them into five divisions and they are idiophones, membranophones, chordophones, aerophones and electrophones. In 1933, Curt Sachs and Eric von Hornbostel expanded the classifications with symbols and the instruments were classified into

A. C. Ezebube: *Instrumental Resources: Yaa Puberty Rites Musical Instruments and...*

four main divisions namely, idiophones, membranophones, chordophones and aerophones and this classification has gained popularity among other classifications. They are widely used during classification of African musical instruments although some authors have classified instruments in their own locality. Nketia (1974) adopted Curt Sachs and Eric von Hornbostel's classification but he sub-divided the four divisions and called it "inventory of African musical instruments". Nketia states that musical instruments are also studied as material objects in terms of their technology with respect to their designs and craftsmanship's, materials, constructions and musical functions.

Echezona, (1977) after observing the musical instruments grouped them into five groups and they are:

- a. Instruments of inherently resonate materials
- b. Membranophones
- c. Prongaphones
- d. Aerophones
- e. Stringed instruments

Echezona's classification system also falls in line with the four categories of Curt Sach and Eric von Hornbostel. Mosunmola- Omibiyi (1977) also grouped the musical instruments into four main categories in common usage, idiophone, membrano phone, chordophone and aerophone but Omibiyi stressed that the gourd as a material is used variously in different Nigerian cultures to construct musical instruments and she came up with this classification:

- (a) gourd idiophone
- (b) gourd membrane phones
- (c) gourd aerophones
- (d) gourd chordophones.

Akpabot (1986) classified African musical instruments into three groups and these three groups agree with the four groups classified by Curt Sachs and Eric von Hornbostel. Akpabot suggests that all the strings and blowing instruments have definite pitches and the percussive instruments are constructed with high, low or medium tones. He classified instrument into three groups (a) string instruments (b) blowing instruments (c) percussion instruments.

Okafor's (1994 and 2005) system of classification are grouped into idiophones, membranophones, aerophones and chordophones but with more elaborations to

A. C. Ezebube: *Instrumental Resources: Yaa Puberty Rites Musical Instruments and...* include context and manner of playing the instruments it gives it local classification and brought it closer to the people.

Nzewi's (1991) system of classifications recognized the folk system, classifying musical instruments and according to the sound material or the technique of production. He classified Igbo musical instruments into four categories and they are (a) melo-rhythm (b) blown instruments(c) shaken and pot instruments (d) the plucked (soft-toned) instruments. Agu (2000) adopted Eric von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs 1933 classification (a) idiophones (b) membranophones (c) aerophones and (d) chordophones. He affirms that their method of classification was mainly based on the cause of sound generated by the instruments. All the four categories are found in abundance in Nigerian cultures among Nigerian tribes and ethnic societies. Chukwu, (2007) based his system of classification on the folk taxonomy of Igbo people and established five categories of classifications of African musical instruments, they are:

1. instruments named after the materials used in the manufacturing
2. musical instruments known by utilitarian names for objects used daily
3. instruments known by abstract names with no readily discernible deeper meaning
4. musical instruments names connoting manner of player
5. names for musical instruments denoting characteristics sounds.

Oduhaga,(2011) in her classification notes that the overall instrumental resource used throughout Africa is large and extensive and classified instruments into five main divisions, which are:

(a) idiophones (b) membranophones (c) chordophones (d) aerophones and (e) anapophones.

Vidal,(2012) classified African musical instruments into five groups (a) idiophones

(b) aerophones (c) membranophones (d) chordophones (e) lamellaphones. All these classifications of African musical instruments by different authors are centered on Curt Sach and Eric von Hornbostel four main musical instruments classification in 1933 which are idiophones, chordophones, aerophones and membranophones. In the classification, the following scholars Mahillon, Echezona,, Vidal,, Chukwu,

A. C. Ezebube: *Instrumental Resources: Yaa Puberty Rites Musical Instruments and...* and, Odunuga grouped their musical instruments into five divisions and Akpabot grouped his own musical instruments into three divisions while Okafor, , Omibiyi - Nketia, Nzewi, and Agu, adopted Curt Sach and Eric Hornbostel classification of African musical instruments. All other classifications are based on the four main divisions with different terminologies. The various authors agreed that African musical instruments are classified into (a) blown (b) plucked (c) played (d) struck divisions which are idiophones, chordophones, aerophones and membranophones. Yaa musical instruments are classified under idiophone and membranophone families.

In Yaa puberty rites, different traditional musical instruments are used during their performances. The instruments played during the Yaa puberty rite performances are:

No.	Ogoni folk instrument	English
1	<i>Kere</i>	Drum
2	<i>Gira</i>	Big metal gong
3	<i>Gira</i>	Small metal gong
4	<i>Gira</i>	Double metal gong
5	<i>Geregere</i>	Xylophone
6	<i>Kana</i>	Musical pot
7	<i>Akiri</i>	Slit wooden drum



Photo 1: Yaa instruments and plantain leaves placed in front of the instruments

The above musical instruments have age long history (as old as their founding fathers) and have not been replaced, only the animal skins of the drum are constantly changed.

Xylophone (*Geregere*)

The xylophone (*geregere*) is the melodic instrument of the group. It has twenty-four slabs and the slabs are numbered and arranged according to their numbering. As a long aged wooden stands, long sticks are also attached to hold the slabs together. Three players perform the xylophone (*geregere*) at the same time during performance, one plays the leading role and the other two players perform supportive roles to the lead player. The instruments are kept on a raffia palm as a resonator before placing the slabs on the wood in order to produce good sound because better sounds are produced when instruments are placed on raffia palm as a resonator.



Photo 2: The Geregere (xylophone) instrument



Photo 3: The Geregere(Xylophone) Slabs Set on Top of the Rafia Palm



Photo 4: The *Geregere* (Xylophone), (*Kere*) Drums, (*Gira*) Metal Gong

Instruments and the Instrumentalists

The drums, metal gongs, musical pots slit wooden drums, xylophone musical instruments perform together to come out good for a good performance and xylophone due to its weight and the size are stationed at the village square where the *Yaa* celebrants appear for their final outing and performance. Okunade (2010) posits that “instrumentalists are either standing within a particular area or moving with other people involved in the musical activities, there are few cases where the drummers are seated throughout.” (p. 4) Implicitly *Yaa* instrumentalists move from house to house with light musical instruments like the metal gong, drum (small), slit wooden drum to create awareness and pass informations to the community on the commencement of *Yaa* puberty rite celebration. Heavy instruments like the xylophone are stationed at a place and other instrumentalists arrive at the venue along with other musical instruments to continue with the performance.

Functions of *Yaa* Musical Instruments in *Yaa* Puberty Rite Celebration

Musical instruments used in *yaa* puberty rite has lots of musical functions and contribute significantly to the ensemble’s music. Their functions include providing rhythmic patterns, time line, melodic and melo-rhythm functions respectively.

A. C. Ezebube: *Instrumental Resources: Yaa Puberty Rites Musical Instruments and...*

Rhythmic instruments: The metal gongs (*gira*), slit wooden drum (*akiri*) play rhythmic role. They are used to enrich the texture and increase density of the music. They play accompanying role to the xylophone (*geregere*) and they are used to pass information to members of the community. During the celebration, the celebrants dance to the rhythm performed by the instrumentalist with *Yaa* musical instruments.

Timing instruments: Some musical instruments play double roles like musical pots (*kana*), metal gongs (*gira*), and slit wooden drums (*akira*), the above instruments play dual purpose such time liner and supportive roles.

Melodic instruments: The xylophone (*geregere*) instrument is a melodious instrument and perform melodious music during the celebration, sometimes it performs solo function during the performance. The melodies played by this musical instrument spurs the *yaa* participants and audience into action, they dance and express their emotions, love and unity.

Melo-rhythmic instruments: Onwuekwe (2011) explains that “melo-rhythmic instruments are the musical instruments that play both melodic and rhythmic roles in a traditional ensemble.” (p. 140) Drums, slit wooden drums serves as lead instruments. Drums in *Yaa* puberty rites serve as principal instruments, like the xylophone due to their roles of directing and co-ordinating other instruments during *yaa* performance. Vidal (2012) supports that “it is in drumming that all elements: melodic, harmonic and rhythmic are exhibited.” (p. 152) Drums in *Yaa* puberty rite lead and accompany other instruments to stimulate the *yaa* celebrants to display dexterity on their dance and the drum is always hung in the *yaa* shrine for their preservation.



Photo 5: Melodic and Rhythmic Yaa Instruments

Findings and Summary

This study investigated the musical instruments in Yaa puberty rite of Ogoni communities, Rivers State. Yaa puberty rite is an Ogoni traditional rite performed by men to become full-fledged men in Ogoniland especially title taking and chieftaincy coronation. The yaa puberty rites' duration last for eight months and it is celebrated with music accompanied by Ogoniland indigenous musical instruments. Musical instruments has been classified by many authors Victor Mahillion, Curt Sach and Eric von Hornbostel, Nketia, Echezona W.W., Mosunmola Omibiyi, Akpabot, Richard Okafor, Nzewi Meki, Nwachukwu T.C., Odunuga A.F., Agu D.C.C and Vidal A.O among other scholars. All the classifications centered on Curt Sach and Eric Hornbostel in 1914 classification of African musical instruments namely; idiophones, membranophones, aerophones and chordophones. In this paper, Yaa musical instruments are classified under idiophone and membranophones families. The xylophone (*geregere*), metal gong both small, double and big sizes (*gira*), slit wooden drums big and small sizes (*akira*) and musical pots (*kana*) are classified under struck idiophones and the drums are classified as membranophones.

Musical instruments perform different functions in various performances. In the Yaa puberty rite, musical instruments serves as time liners, rhythmic, melodic and melo-rhythmic instruments. The xylophone and drum play prominent roles in Yaa puberty rite, performance. The xylophone is stationed at a particular place during

A. C. Ezebube: *Instrumental Resources: Yaa Puberty Rites Musical Instruments and...*
the performance while the other instruments are played from one house of the participant to the other to create awareness in the community.

Conclusion

Musical instruments in *yaa* puberty rites are potent and consistent in transmitting core natural values. Musical instruments in *yaa* rites gives identity to Ogoni people vis-a-vis expression of their value system, norms, beliefs and customs. Playing of musical instruments cannot be overstated it stimulates and spur celebrants into action, create awareness for entertainment, energize celebrants and also to appease the gods of the land. During the performance, drinks like palm wine and hot drinks are kept on the ground on top of a plantain leaf for the consumption of the instrumentalists for a good performance. Therefore, musical instruments play vital roles in the *yaa* puberty rite celebrations which their founding fathers handed over to them for continuity and sustainability..

Recommendations

- The Ogoni's local government chairmen should assist the *yaa* puberty rite instrumentalists to improve on their instruments
- The Rivers State Government should also publicize the *Yaa* puberty rite thereby expanding the celebrations both local and international for wider publicity. Also, encourage the technologists who construct these instruments for their daily living Ogoni
- Communities should also encourage the instrumentalist by providing remuneration for them.

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A. C. Ezebube: *Instrumental Resources: Yaa Puberty Rites Musical Instruments and...*

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Vidal, A.O. (2012). *Selected topics on Nigerian music*. Ile-Ife: Awolowo University Press.

Interviews

Name	Age	Occupation	Place	Date
Nsiga Dada Ikirika JP	65	Chief / Farmer	Kaani	6/02/2016
Tiginah Barisika Ndeekor	38	Business Man	Kaani	17/12/2016