

The Alago Songs of Oral Poets (Audu Ommame) as Instrument of Social Mobilisation

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Abstract

The reason for this study is the significance of traditional songs as it relates to social control in the context of human development, and the fact that, in Nigeria, different attempts at rural mobilisation, orientation as well as development, turned out to be fruitless or less archived, sometimes, with violent outcome. The lack of understanding of the cultural ways for regulating the peoples' social life, has been linked to rural development. Within traditional domains, Alago songs in particular have been found to be significant in satirising deviant behaviour in society. In this aspect therefore, our basic thought is that once there is a felt need for social control, it means that songs exist through which the people are mobilised to correct deviant behaviour. Thus, the concern of such satirical songs is to lead people to a state of mind in which they can regulate their social behaviour positively. The major aim of this paper therefore, is to discuss how Alago people of Agwatashi in particular, worldwide use Audu's performance to regulate the social behaviour of their members. The presupposition is that Audu satirical songs is built upon the principle of human social development and practices.

Introduction

Man is ontologically an expressive being, and both actions and reactions consequently allow our modes of life and living. Artistic diversity, is a common distinctive and distinguishing mark of Alago as well as most cultures, this provides indisputable evidence of our basic human need for expression. The song-mode is just one of the innumerable artistic ways through which our latent *response energies are released* (Lonax, A. in Avorgbedor, 208).

This study relates to the above assertion in the sense that our preoccupation is on the song-mode; and its social dialectic in controlling and regulating society within the traditional context. Our main concern here is to harness the social relevance of traditional songs within the main stream of National Social Development Process. The proviso bears on the fact that traditional song is an appendix of human structure, which is geared towards progressive development in society. Thus, "it seeks to authenticate the communalness of traditional existences" (Lakoju, T. 96). The traditional singer in an attempt to control and regulate society, plays the role of a protester, mobiliser or crusader ridiculing acts of injustice, oppression, exploitation, negligence and marginalization through the song-mode complaints, cries and wailing are voiced out. As a result the singer provides a moral lesson to members of the community, (Wiredey, Ahire and Ahura in Dzurgba, A. 152). Such moral lesson is rooted in the social control factor in the development of the human person, which is the disposition in the

person that help determine his behaviour. In this case, the process of the establishment of those stable response dispositions that envisage personality development geared towards the overall development of a nation becomes evident in the song (Ikenga-methu, 171).

Considering the ad vocation on social mobilisation, Agbo in his view posits that;

unity and harmony as social ideals are frequently advocated in songs by the oral poets as the singer boasts of his ability to use his songs against an opponent. In the interest not only of social harmony, but also of each persons inner harmony, songs are used as a means of using experiences which are painful, shameful or otherwise desirable into a subject of art which enhances one's inner pride and recognition by society (1).

Be that as it may, the ultimate reality is that Nigeria as a nation is bedeviled by a number of religious, social, cultural, political and economic vices that are posing threat against her social harmony and development. The sum total of these militating factors resets its answer in the question of the Nigerian personality. The Nigerian person as an individual is at crossroad between two worlds – a person of unintegrated western habits practiced in the labour market and public centres in urban areas; and the traditional habits practiced in his home and native village. How does this obvious contradiction in Nigerian personality foster national development? The answer is not far-fetched from our pre-occupation in this study. Thus, the need for looking inward to our indigenous songs as modes of social mobilisation and community control for development.

Alago Culture and Songs

The Alago people occupy a large part of the Southern part of Nasarawa State. Like other ethnic groups, they traced their origin to Jukun of modern Wukari division, North of the middle Benue plain, a considerable distance from their present homeland. Meek quoted Barth, who derives the history of Alago from the Jukun by referring to them as a “Birnin Kwararafa, the name of the ancient Jukun capital” (146).

The Alago are mainly agriculturist and hunters. The people believe in ancestral worship and their religious world present itself as one fluid coherent entity in which spirits, men, animals, plants and other elements are engaged in continuous interaction. The ethereal world of ancestral spirits ‘*Aleku*’ and the world ‘*Ese*’ shade into each other, as well as influence each other. There are “Owuso K’ Iso”, the creator, the “*Eka*” lesser gods or dieties which manifest themselves through important phenomena such as the sun, the sky, thunder, the earth etc.

Buttressing this Oyigbenu states;

The religious hierarchy is such that *Owuso* dwells high in the sky. This belief explains why when one swears he points his finger skyward to the abode of God. Directly below *Owuso* are the patheons or lesser gods and spirits who constantly interact and influence the daily life of members of the community. These spirits are usually the ancestors who oversee the lives and wellbeing of those they left

behind in this terrestrial world. Directly below these ancestors (spirits) are the ordinary mortals (157).

Culture in Alago society as a matter of fact has the ideational, behavioural, and the materialistic aspects; it is established with some basic features, which seems to emerge as common features of culture.

- i. It is socially determined: that is to say, it is something which has to do with human relationships which are distinguished from the kind of relationships that exist between objects or animals. It entails a physical condition whereby the members involved in the relationship have some intelligible sense of each other. These elements share set goals as values in life.
- ii. It is general: That is to say, it is an experience commonly shared by a number of persons at the same time. Although there could be variation in cultural systems within a “whole” group, sub-groups might exhibit unique behaviour or possess unique materials which are not common to other sub-groups. The majority of the people at the different social levels share such behaviour and materials.
- iii. It is obligatory: That is to say, every member of the society is obliged to accept it. A few people may, of course, reject it, but if they do, they will not be fully integrated into the mainstream of the society.
- iv. It is variable: which means that, it can change, it can evolve, there could be different levels of participation in it by the different members of the community, and its manifestation may vary from place to place.

Within this feature of culture, the song-mode one of the musical facets of culture in Nigeria and Alago land to be specific remains the classic exponent of the people’s ideational, behavioural and materialistic experiences in communal living through the ages. In ancient Alago, perhaps songs, dance, rhythm and beating, which in common sense may be taken to be the components of music, started with the first men the founders, probably, as they went through their mighty task of hunting of the animals, songs were unlisted from their lips, heads would have been shaking and chances were that as they waddled through the wilderness, their sonorous voices echoed mildly within the bush. They dared not create noise by that for noise only pursued their preys far from them.

These founding ancestors of Alago songs, who were predominantly agrarian people, sang, danced and provided internal rhythm and beats on their way to farm. Sule says; this is also so with the Agatus of the North Central Nigeria. He argues that; “With their hoes fixed on their shoulders and their cutlasses dangling from their hands (and perhaps their bows and arrows strung across their trunk) they swaggered to the farms, whistling some sweet juicy tune of music to themselves” (14).

At such point in time of creative inspiration, the composer in his spontaneous attempt at singing provides a chorus in which the children and women can join the singer in singing; thus they automatically serve as choral group. Suffice to point out here that women play lead roles in composing songs in Alago land. Thus Iyimoga in his words says; “Unlike members of the Sombi musical group who are all male, this group (Alago) is made up of members of both sexes who

function mainly as respondents who supply the needed chorus and accompaniments for Audu's renditions" (Iyimoga, 31).

In discussing the roles of women in composing songs in Nigeria and Kwararafa in particular Sule says the Agatu women like their Alago counterparts play a greater role in composing songs in his words;

The Agatu women were known to be classic repositories of songs more than men. Reason was that while the men might be saddled with the calculation and miscalculation of the numbers of yams they were going to harvest in the next season, the women had little to riddle them. Thus, the women had much time for pleasure, and relaxation, and for domesticity out of which music was minded. (Sule, 4)

Although it might be said that the Alago women are more free to compose songs than the men, but in the area of musically, the men are highly skilled in beating of *Agaga nyaku* (big drum) *Okaji* or *Agaga leke* (small or medium drum) *Ogye* (iron) *Asha* (beads) and other accompaniments.

In view of the specific song-mode in focus at this juncture, it is important to know how Audu and his songs came to being among the Alago people; of Agwatashi and its acceptance in the societal circle.

Alhaji Audu Omame Agwatashi

Alhaji Audu Omame popularly known as Audu Owigye or Audu Maiwaka, meaning Audu the singer, hail from Olosoho (Agwatashi) chiefdom of Obi Local Government council of Nasarawa state. He was born in Lafia the state capital, the date of his birth was not recorded but he was born in Lafia during the reign of Sarkin Lafia, Alhaji Audu Mamman Agwai around 1933. The Sarkin Audu Mamman reigned between 1933 -1949. In fact, Audu Owigye, as he was called, was named after the then reigning monarch. With this information, one can estimate that the poet was born in 1903. His father Omame Ojiri and his mother Ajima Ogashuwa both hailed from Agwatashi chiefdom of the present day Obi Local Government Area of Nasarawa state.

Growing up as a child, he stayed with his grandfather Ogashuwa as it was traditional in Alago culture for one of the grand children (first born) to be nurtured by the grand parents up to his marriage time. As all the children of his time, he did not enjoy western education because there were no formal schools in the vicinity. They worked in the farms, hunted for recreation and participated in any dance festival in the community. Audu being the only male child among his siblings had four others after him, all females. They include: Adokoji who has the same mother and father with him (Audu), the other three that is, Obwado, Itake and Omatawe though of the same mother had different fathers. The reason being that she (Audu's mother) was divorced by his father after she had given birth to the two of them.

Audu Omame started composing songs in 1966, that is, 9 years before his second son Dauda Abdullahi was born. This information was got from Idris Abdullahi during an interview. The year 1991 marked the silver jubilee of Audu as a singer. The poet (Audu) chose to perform

simply because he felt something went wrong with the Alago society and the society at large. To him, virtues were gradually being overtaken by the vices and the best way to preach against it was through his songs, so he delved into performance so as to correct these societal ills.

Audu as a poet started as a flutist before he later started composing songs and sang in public for his admirers. He did not pass through apprenticeship or discipleship under any master but his was through inspiration based on the occasion. Audu like most of his contemporaries, would not rehearse before composing and performing the songs. Each performance was spontaneous following the already existing patterns for each performance in the poet's memory. During performance, all the troupe needed to do was to follow the poet's lead or cue.

Audu had six wives and eleven children. Out of these wives only two bore him children. These were Halimat and Hausatu, others are Mariam, Asibi, patu and Berimini respectively. The most popular of all his wives was Halimat who hails from the Obaka's family in Agwatashi town. This is evident in his musical compositions; for she is eulogized in most of his songs. Even though she gave birth to eleven children, not all of them survived, those who survived include; Ali, Dauda, Umar, Ibrahim, Mohammed, Ahmadu, Mallam, Kande, Hajara, Amina and Zainab. Only two male children died. Having seen the importance of formal education, Audu ensured that most of his children acquired western education. Late Audu Omame lived happily with his wives, children and relations all together forming an extended family which lived in the tradition of ancient Alago compound. He had a pleasant disposition and warmly welcomed any person(s) that came his way for all reasons particularly regarding his performance. Unfortunately, he was not there to receive me during this research.

The rendition starts with Audu who sings through a stanza and is followed by the rest of the singers who repeat after him. Sometimes the chorus performs functions by the consistent repetition which includes all the members of the troupe. Because of both the thematic and artistic aesthetics of his performances, he had won the hearts of the people both young and old after a short period of performances. The troupe latter known as Ayikigye K'Audu founded in 1991 consisted of between 10-12 people with Audu as the lead singer. Four of these men handled the musical accompaniment. During performance the ino gwa gaga nyaku handled the big drum. Ogwo k' aji played the medium size drum. Awo ta mada serves as the flutists and Audu himself doubled as the lead singer and lead, dancer.

Audu as a songster achieved a lot as his songs affected his life and his society, he gains favour from men both young and old as it is evident in his patron sponsoring him on pilgrimage, naming ceremonies of his children among many things. He also achieved as his performance became an avenue to praise those deserving it, to expose offenders and even tell tales on Alago history. In summary, he helped in correcting the societal ills around him. The poet who had traveled all over within and around his home land died on 17th March, 2000 after a protracted illness and was buried in his home town, Agwatashi according to Islamic rites.

After the poet's demise many people took over from where he stopped, but did not go far due to death. Most of them who took over after the poet were either his children or members of his troupe. Some of them include; Baba Abdulahi, (the poet's son), Osabo Onuku, Abe Aseku and Osakani Agida. None of these people mentioned is alive today.

The music of Audu is a contemporary popular one as far as Agwatashi and Alago land is concerned.

Audu experience of song mode seem to show that spontaneity is a characteristic feature of music composition among the Alago people. Thus their source of inspiration is careful observation of nature. They take into consideration in their songs the aesthetic attributes (beauty and ugly) as well as (good and bad) of nature, which encompasses both living and non-living things to make societal statements. Sule buttresses this point when he points out about the Agatu that: “The early Agatu people (including the modern ones) had keen interest in studying nature. And when nature had been studied and knowledge gained, the easiest method of bequeating the knowledge to their posterity was through the songs”(5).

Audu’s song avails the metaphor of nature-human beings, animal and non-living things which are either intoned in hatred or love, sadness or happiness like in every other socio-cultural entity to convey instructive criticism on *Alago* people, thus consolidating in the society.

Performance

The performance is an exclusive preserve, which Audu is solely the custodian, except on his authorization for any troupe member to perform as a lead singer. Women and children are not restricted from during Audu’s performance. Their participation is reduced to listening to chorosters or spectators. Audu’s performance can take place in the daytime, night, on special or emergency occasion like; when death occur, naming, marriage or political occasions.

The troupe performers are said to be custodians of Alago folklore by virtue of their vibrant oral artistry, they use allegory and other literary devices to pass their message to their audience. Below are two examples of Audu’s songs as a social mobiliser;

| | Alago | English version |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | <p>Onyagye ko kwodo Onyagye ko kwodo gbagye epa. ogbagye epa le in yagye hin in gyelo ogaya pini kadami la 5 Chorus The lines are repeated after the poet.</p> | <p>Onyagye daughter of Okwodo has two lovers she has two lovers oo...! I was on my own I don’t know It was Ogaya who told me</p> |
| 2 | <p>Ojugba jugba Ojugba jugba ya gini ome olutu lutu ya gi ni me onyagbaza gbumeka eka ya mwu lo owa bakpa. Chorus The lines are repeated after the poet.</p> | <p>Ojugba jugba where are you going to? Olutu lutu where are you going to? A prostitute woman do me juju juju will not kill me because you are a Muslim.</p> |

Audu Social Mobilisation and Alago Development: A Synthesis

The magnanimity of satire in Audu's songs is intoned in hatred or love, sadness or happiness. Like in most other societies, it is the vehicle used to convey instructive criticism using the name of a person or an animal in consolidating the societies. The message of Audu in this sense, consists of those cultural factors and events that depend on symbols, which have transformed man from the lower domain of animal life to the higher community of human life. It is through symbol that man can think and communicate and, thus preserve and accumulate his achievements and ensure human progress. In other words, human progress is dependent upon symbolic thought and communication, (White, 45), it is the legitimacy in cultural symbolics such as music (song) that the Alago people through poets (Audu) specifically inform, educate and communicate to themselves the developmental achievements they have preserved and accumulated over the years. It is this realization of the importance of Audu in the life of the Alago people that Iyimoga emphasises within the context of music when he states that; "*This holistic approach also made it possible for most of the symbolic interpretations of the musical performances as vital, dynamic and indeed functional media of communication in these communities*" (11). For example, as in the instance of the first song here, the aberrant social behaviour displayed by able-bodied young women relating to their refusal not to be faithful to their men, was made known publicly through the megaphone of Audu.

In the songs "Onyagye K'Okwodo" Audu criticises unfaithfulness to one's partner which is tantamount to cheating and prostitution. The Onyage daughter of Okwodo... has two boyfriends. The gossips are not spared, he warns those engaged in such vices to desist from them and the gossips to mind their businesses.

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Onyagye k'okwodo | Onyagye daughter of okwodo |
| Ogba'gya epa | She has two boy friends |
| In yagye hin | I stay on my own |
| In gye lo | I don't know |
| Ogaya pini ka da mi la | Itis Ogaya who told me. |

Still on prostitution, the poet-persona queries the morals of the prostitute; whom he addresses as *Ojugba Jugba*, using the Onomatopoeia to indicate her size as seen in lines 1-2

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Ojugba jugba | you Jugba Jugba |
| Olutu lutu | you lutu lutu |

He acknowledges their use of magical and diabolical means to 'enslave' men but warns the "lutu lutu" and "Jugba Jugba" that her charms cannot get him because she is a believer and the deities of the magic will not accept her charms, as seen in lines 3- 4.

| | |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| Onyagbaza | Prostitute woman |
| Gbu me ka | Chant your magic |
| Lo ya mwu | The magic will not kill me |

Owa bakpa

Because you are a Muslim.

This, the poet achieves by using Onomatopoeia in the first and second lines: “Ojugba Jugba” and “Olutu Lutu” to show the size of the prostitute and the way she walks to lovers guest houses. He also employs rhetorical questions as seen in lines 1 and 2 without mentioning names.

In this instance, the identity of such boastful unfaithful village cowards was overtly or covertly revealed and they would have no doubt that it was their behaviour that was the subject of the song. The same thing will be done to cheats, rumour mongers, pilferers, or anybody who indulges in behaviour that is considered anti-social. The individual concerned would quickly mend their ways (Igoli, I. 206). The post-civil war era witnessed the proliferation of urban migration among young men and women in Alago land. There was intensified rural-urban migration of young unmarried men, women and widows. The post-war economic melt-down was telling on rural communities. Hence, picking menial jobs in the cities was seen as the easiest way or solution to the attendant economic predicament. At the mid 1970s, urban-migration became a lucrative business among women in Alago land. Successful migrants were building houses in their father’s compounds, and even catering for the domestic and educational needs of their immediate relations. Thus, urban migration became a thing of pride among Alago women. Traditional Alago singers were not left out of the migration picture. They composed and sang songs reflecting the generosity of Alago youths in their migration exploits, Audu among other poets were at the frontier of such “migration” satirical songs, pointing out the merits and demerits of such migration exploits some of the migrant women and men whose conscience were provoked by such satirical songs, and could not go about with that reputation in the community, would flee to another place so as to start a new life with the hope of making it more respectable in an atmosphere devoid of constant reminders of the torments of the past life. Therefore, as far as social control is concerned, it can be deduced from the above analogies that Audu was effective in its own way.

In this regard, the synthesis of Audu and national development resets on the need to look inward to our cultural heritage for meaningful and people oriented socio-political and economic development, which will usher the vast majority of Nigerian populace who are in the rural areas to be aware of the fact that development in Nigeria has been stagnated by the conventional top-down approach, which was instituted by colonialism, westernization and the inherent globalization process we are experiencing at all level in our socio-political and economic life. This clarion call to enhance national development through the means of our culture is not far from Yaro Gella’s lamentation on our back bench position in Edde, when he asserts;

---Culture has not been accorded a significant place in the national planning strategy of this country. That self-reliance, self-sufficiency and national identity as the core areas of our national development objectives hinge on the recognition of culture as the spring board of policies has hardly downed on our policy makers-- (12).

Be that as it may, the expression of a people’s culture as well as their level of development bears on the human factor, which relates to social control. Thus, the need to look inward to our indigenous cultural heritage should be focused on oral traditions or oral performances that have original capacity for fostering national orientation, which is targeted at

nation building. Just like the Audu's paradigm, oral folklores (particularly songs) that exist in rural areas across the nation. As stated by Ojoade, this

Can be and indeed has always effectively been used for development. It can be used for example for firing the imagination of the folk for development, as was the case in Soviet Union where folklore was utilized to whip up Enthusiasm for desired developments. As moulders of the minds of the folks, folk singers and narrators can be called upon to propagate the ideas of what a nation wants imbibed in the folks. (21-27)

The thing to do is to let the people's culture dictate their development, which on the long run will culminate to their participation in the national development process.

Conclusion

This paper at conclusion seeks to stress that in most Nigerian community at the grassroots, there are songs for different activities, be it farming, hunting, fishing, livestock rearing, weaving, peacemaking, funeral, marriage ceremony, naming ceremony, circumcision/initiation rites, etc. these songs can be revived and be made relevant to national developmental needs. *For in propagating new development ideas cannot do better than follow the traditional paths which the folks themselves have marked for themselves*, (Ojoade, 44). In this sense culture is outstandingly the catalyst for National development, a development that springs from the cultural renaissance of the Nigerian personality vis-a-vis the diversity that characterized our national life in terms of ethnicity, therefore, the residual national consciousness in which Audu finds expressions to satirise deviant behaviours in society, can be geared towards national building as exemplified in the songs illustrated in this study. In this regard, I suggested that all hands must be on deck to harness our diverse indigenous song-mode for a concerted effort toward national life. Our leaders should re-address their policy on Federal character on the basis of people's culture inclusion in National affairs. We should be wary of our dependency attitude to foreign culture, because it is doing more harm than good to our national development process. Such aberrant dependency behaviour is their dressing, their gait and mannerism are foreign in line with western cultural tenets. They should see the future development of Nigeria as belonging to them and therefore seek positive indigenous cultural attitude to life for a relevant Nigerian personality tomorrow. Corruption is a social virus that must be curbed in every aspect of our national life if we are to achieve our national goals in terms of development; the arsenal for fighting corruption in all fronts can be readily found in our indigenous oral performance, especially the song-mode in which Audu provides vivid illustration.

The paper therefore, is of the opinion that the cradle of national development rest on the moulding of Nigerian personality from within (internally initiated) through our cultural pathways that exist among our people nationwide. This synthesis is imperative to our socio-political and economic advancement given the attendant westernization and globalization tendencies that are gradually eroding our indigenous cultural heritage.

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