

T̀̀NGB́́: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS GOSPEL MUSIC

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Abstract

T̀̀ngb́́ is a new style of gospel music which possesses some unique elements that makes it stand out of the existing gospel music styles. One of the uniqueness of the style is embedded on its ability to satisfy both religious and social musical needs of its numerous admirers. How can a gospel music be accepted by people of other faith? The paper, therefore, is an attempt to inquire into the intricacies of the elements that makes it accepted by its listeners irrespective of religious affiliations. Library and interview were the methods of data collection used to gather information for this study. The study shows that t̀̀ngb́́ gospel musicians use elements like rhythm, texts and eulogies to attract their fans to accept their music beyond Christianity. The paper concludes that musicians generally and those of gospel genre in particular should be creative enough to create atmosphere of peace amongst the populace, especially in the area of religion. When this is achieved, we would have a better interaction amongst different religious faith.

Keywords: T̀̀ngb́́, gospel, other faith, religious affiliation.

Introduction

The current reality of the gospel music genre in contemporary Nigeria is its development to full potential as a vibrant music brand practised by singers of diverse Christian denomination and significantly by notable performing and recording musicians. The level of professionalism of established band is characterised by unique performance identities thereby creating multiplicity of styles. It is worthy of mention that the attempt of many gospel artistes to incorporate established popular musical styles into gospel music resulted in the rebranding of gospel music such that the suffix could be adopted from popular music genres of Western or African origins. Some of those associated with Western styles include gospel-raggae, gospel-hip-hop and gospel-jazz to mention a few. Those associated with African styles include gospel-highlife, gospel-*fújì*, gospel-*wákà* and gospel-*jùjú* to mention a few. (Ògúnrèmí, 1991; Adékúnlé, 1993; Adédèjì, 2004). Factors responsible for the emergence of various styles of Nigerian gospel music include musical, historical

(evolutionistic), social, cultural, occupational, geographical, socio-anthropological, acculturative, economic and theological factors, as well as performing resources, conventions, talent, experience and skill (Nettle, 1964; Pascal, 1992, Adédèjì, 2005).

From the foregoing, recent observation showed that music in Christendom in Nigeria is seen to be evolving in a new direction. By these, emphasis is given to gospel music as an aspect of music in Christian worship. Precisely, the style of gospel music known as *tùngbá* was noticed in all social gatherings in the Southwest of Nigeria. *Tùngbá* is patronized by Christians and people of other religions, especially as it creates a good atmosphere for dancing and praising God. Omójoḷà (2014:93) observed that, “the changes and developments that a musical style undergoes thus often represent a joint project between a musician and members of his/her audience”, hence, the positive excitement with which the listeners respond to *tùngbá* gospel music attested to this.

A close observation of events in the Southwest of Nigeria revealed that *tùngbá* gospel musicians are usually employed at social and religious programmes. Some of the events include marriages, house warming ceremonies, birthdays and funerals. The acceptance of *tùngbá* seems to transcend religious affiliation as a renowned Muslim musician, Alhaji (Dr.) Bùkólá Aláyàndé, released a *tùngbá* album entitled *Èrè Àsàlátù*. In the aforementioned album, Alayande imitated Yínká Ayéfélé so much that it was rumoured that Yínká Ayéfélé had become a Muslim.

The birth of *tùngbá* brought to mind an earlier proposition advanced by Adédèjì (2004) that ‘new styles of gospel music are bound to emerge in the future as long as new forms of musical expressions continue to develop in other genres’ (Adédèjì: 2004:321). Adédèjì’s propositions and the emergence of *tùngbá* gospel music style triggered the student’s interest in this study. Despite the popularity and acceptance of *tùngbá* gospel music style, growing literature and scholarly focus on it is not adequate. Thus, there is need to unravel the musical and non-musical intricacies of *tùngbá*, the latest style of Nigerian gospel music.

Various submissions on when and how gospel music evolved in Nigeria showed that it started between 1960 and 1980 (Ajíríre and Àlàbí, 1992); Òjọ́, 1998; Awéléwà, 2000). The exact year of establishment of Nigeria gospel music cannot be established as a result of lack of documentation of vital historical issues in music in particular and, even other art-based disciplines like architecture, fashion, fine art and performing arts in general. However, according to Adédèjì (2004), all available records point to the validity of the 1960s as the period of origin. The 1960s became more accepted because there are various historical documents affirming the viability of the 1960. For example, the establishment of many gospel bands in Nigeria dated back to the early 1970s; Reverend Father Ilesanmi's group (Reverend Father T.M. Ilésanmí and his Ànjoórìn Spiritual Group) was established in the early 1970s. Bisi Adeoye-king also established his choral group known as "African Philosophers' singers in 1971. Out of all his songs, the most popular is "*Olórún Mímó*" (Holy God), which was released in 1971. Other gospel musicians who established their band included Lakin 'Ladeebo, Evangelist Sọlá Rótímí, who was noted for the use of accordion to accompany his music. From the foregoing, it is very evident that gospel activities must have been going on before the establishment of the aforementioned bands, which gave the 1960s as likely period of establishment of the genre (gospel music) in Nigeria.

At the inception of gospel music in Nigeria, the music was composed and rendered by men and women who refer to themselves as Christians and whose music is regarded as ministration of the Good News in songs (Roberts, 1973; Leon-Dufour, 1980; Adégbíté, 1994; Òjọ́, 1998). Therefore, the primary aim was to preach the 'good news' of Jesus Christ through songs. It was observed that all the aforementioned scholars saw gospel music to be purely spiritual and were not intended for economic benefits. The main purpose of gospel music was then produced solely for evangelism and tailored to the spiritual uplift of Christians (Adédèjì, 2004:2). The views of the earlier scholars on the definition of gospel music may have become obsolete as defining gospel music as a type

of church music may not ‘hold water’ in the present status of what gospel music is. It is very glaring that gospel music has left the confine of the church (change) and seen in public, where it is serving various religious (continuity) and social (change) purposes.

Ability to spur people into dancing is one of the major elements of Nigerian gospel music (Òjó, 1998). From the foregoing, it is very true that Nigerian worshippers, Christians in particular, prefer to smoothen out a more domestic character, familiar and recognizable in their approach to their Creator in worship. They are people who prefer to sing native airs to the borrowed melodies, people who want to be spontaneous rather than rigid and static and people who want to be emotional in celebrating God's presence in their midst with the melodious music of their alive songs (Amusan, 1996).

The Nigerian gospel music exhibited both Western and African musical elements especially in the area of instrumentation (Òjó, 1998). The combination of syncretic styles led to the establishment of new styles of gospel music like gospel – *wákà* and gospel - *fújì*. Omibiyi-Obidike (1994) submitted that gospel music originally was used in the church and was performed at special festivals such as harvest, thanksgiving and so forth. She explained that with the electronic technology and the need for the youths to have the kind of music they desired for their social interest, gospel music was taken out of the church. Etim (1998) traced the origin of gospel music to Black-American tradition. She also discussed the indigenous elements by Nigerian musicians. She observed that Nigerian music is broad, complex and like in most African countries, diversified. Adédèjì (2004) traced the development of gospel music in Nigeria to the music used by indigenous Pentecostal churches on evangelical parades between 1930s and 1960s. He stated that other sources of the origin of Nigeria gospel music included types of music used at Christian social functions such as naming, wedding and other church non – liturgical programmes, the Christian music performed by missionary school bands during the colonial era. Contrary to Adédèjì's view, Okafor (2002) averred that the development of

gospel music in Nigeria was as a result of Nigerian folksongs collected and arranged by some musicians for the choral stage and that some of the folksongs were even modified and used the tunes for worship. He concluded that it was the aforementioned trend that really developed into what we call the gospel music of Nigeria of today. Euba (1992), while commenting on Nigerian gospel music, noted that it has become increasingly popular among the Yorùbá and that it is as popular today as cotemporary popular idioms such as *jùjú* and highlife. Adédèjì (2004) complemented Euba's claim on gospel music when he commented that gospel music is already a widely accepted musical genre in contemporary Nigeria. He further explained that it had already become a household name played on radio and television stations, recorded on audio and view tapes, compact disks, phonograph records and MP storage facilities for personal use. He also observed that the origin of Nigerian gospel music was limited to the South-West especially, Lagos, Ìbàdàn and Ìgbàjà (via Ìlòrín) areas. He therefore, stated that the language of rendition then was purely Yorùbá and that this accounted for the dominance of the South-West region in Nigerian gospel music today. The literature showed that Nigerian gospel music takes its root from the church. It also shows that the musical activities and exposure of many choristers led to the decision by many of them to establish their individual bands. This is also true of *tùngbá* gospel musicians, although, many of them sing gospel music but they are not practising Christians. By this singular act by some of the Nigerian gospel musicians, we can, then, understand that there is a difference between church music and music in the church, or the difference between gospel music ministers and gospel music artistes. Gospel music ministers are the church musicians that sing in the Christian's worship. The main aim of Gospel music Ministers is to win souls for Christ through thier songs. He encourages believers to stand firm in their quest to qualify to rise with the Saviour. On the other hand, Gospel music artistes are Christian musicians who play their music within and outside the church to entertain and their primary aim is to make money out of their musical activities.

Tùngbágospel music often displays seemingly contradictory appearances as it is presented using all the earlier existing styles of Nigerian gospel music in a performance. Tùngbá gospel style could be likened to a ‘big pot’ in which all kinds of popular styles are conflated. For example, in a single tùngbá gospel music presentation, *jùjú*, *fújì*, hip-hop, highlife, makosa, soukous and apala styles may be presented. In such situations, the word ‘flavour’ is used to differentiate the styles. For example, when *jùjú* is on, tùngbágospel musician will refer to the period as that with *jùjú* flavour. If *fújì* is introduced as the performance proceeds, then the performance has changed to that with *fújì* flavour.

A brief discussion of performance activity in tùngbá gospel music is very necessary here. A typical tùngbágospel music performance will involve the performance of cross-over of different styles of gospel music styles. For example, tùngbá gospel musician may start with *jùjú* style on a particular tempo, change to highlife on the same tempo, change to apala on the same tempo and to hip-hop on the same tempo. One of the interesting attributes of tùngbá gospel music is the instrumental changes that are equally accompanying the music. This is evident in the fact that if, for instance, the band is singing *jùjú* style, all the instruments will be engaged and the guitars and the portative keyboard will be the main instruments of accompaniment. Immediately the music changes to apala, for instance, the guitars and the portative keyboard stop playing completely leaving the *dùndún* drum, omele (1 and 2), accord, agogo, sekere and drum set to accompany the music. if, for instance, the style changes to hip-hop, the *dùndún* drummers will be stopped allowing the guitars, the portative keyboard and the omele to take prominence.

Tùngbá: A Socio-Religious Style

Tùngbá gospel music is a ‘free’ kind of performance when all sort of themes, religious and non-religious, are rendered freely. Live performance is guided by ‘on- the- spot’ musical prowess of tùngbá gospel musicians. Praise-singing of guests at such events as marriage and (or) burial reception is the ultimate. Tùngbá gospel musicians focus mainly on their

economic gain than winning soul for Christ. In order to gain attention of their audience at various parties to which they are invited, *tùngbá* gospel musicians sing appropriate songs for different guest. In this context of performance, *tùngbá* gospel musicians may sing songs that are associated with other non-Christian faith. For example, if a guest is of Muslim background, *tùngbá* musicians will gain attention by singing songs associated with Islam. Sometimes, some of the songs rendered may even be against Christian belief. For example, *tùngbá* musician may sing:

Mùhámádù leni t' Ólórún rán
Aláàánú fún gbogbo àgbáyé
Gbogboìgbà tójúmọ bá ti ńmọ
A ó ma yìn Ó ni Múhammọ

Meaning:

Muhammed was the One sent by God
 Merciful to all human
 We will continue to praise You, Mohammed.
 As much as the day breaks

or

N ó ma fàsàlátù ráńsé (I will continue to worship)
N ó ma fàsàlátù ráńsé o (I will continue to worship)
Nígbà tẹ ò jẹ gbàgbée Medina (When we cannot forget Medina)
N ó ma fàsàlátù ráńsé (I will continue to worship).

or

Laila ilanlahu Muhammadu ro sulinlai

or

Alahu Akibar

A - lau A - ki - bar A - lau A - ki - bar A - sa - la - tu, A - sa - la - tu A -

5

This is not considered as a problem in tũngbá gospel music for the music is rendered as an entertaining music rather than religious music. This is one of the dynamics of tũngbá gospel music. Another significant attribute of tũngbá gospel music is the shift of styles or medley of styles of music. For example, most tũngbá performances are not limited to a particular style of music. Adédèjì (2004:6-7) had earlier described the status of Nigerian gospel music thus:

Nigerian gospel music appears in different ‘garments’, ‘colours’ and ‘textures’, resulting in various distinct easily identifiable as Christian music, others sound like styles. While some are characterized by indigenous elements, others use foreign idioms. While some are secular music genres to the extent that it has become so difficult to identify them as religious music. (Adédèjì, 2006:6-7).

At the time Adédèjì was making the statement, Nigerian gospel music had distinct styles. Some styles of Nigerian gospel music exhibited secular attributes like body jerks. Contrary to Adédèjì’s description of Nigerian gospel music at the time, tũngbá gospel music performances allow for mixture of various music genres within the same performance.



Figure 7: An Alhaji pasting money on Yínká Ayéfélé**(Source: Olaosebikan Rotimi)**

From the foregoing, *tùngbá*, as a term, describes a new form of dance music characterized, among other things, by verbalization of texts played by the *dùndún* (popularly referred to as *dùndún* drum) drum. The aforementioned exercise requires that *dùndún* (*dùndún* drum) riffs are verberlised in words simultaneously while the *dùndún* drum is played. The verbilization of *dùndún* drum riffs is also referred to as *tùngbá*. Therefore, it is very common to hear people saying that ‘the *dùndún* drummer played good *tùngbá*’, referring to drum riffs that are giving textual interpretations. *Tùngbá* is also characterized by interjecting vocal expressions, cross-over styles, ostinato rhythmic and harmonic flavours, polyrhythmic texture, short interjectory rhythmic motivates, vocal rendition of *dùndún* drum riffs and heavy rhythmic accompaniment, provided by different variants of Yorùbá membranophonic instruments like *dùndún*, *agogo*, *sekere*, *sakara* to mention a few.

Tùngbá started as an explorative musical phenomenon and continues to derive its themes from the socio-dynamics of the contemporary Nigerian society. For example, issues bordering on politics, religion as well as social, including celebration such as wedding, burial, house warming, chieftaincy and naming ceremonies to mention but a few, are

addressed in its performance. In these contexts, *tùngbá* musicians employ the use of panegyrics to arouse emotional sentiments of their listeners, who also respond in consonance with the heavy percussive rhythm of *tùngbá* gospel music by expressing dances characterized by body jerks, jumps, feet-tapping, rotational movements. This in addition adds colour to the entire *tùngbá* music experience.

Despite the appearance of *tùngbá* entertainment music, almost all its practitioners are Christians of different denominations. Some are members of orthodox churches like Catholic, Anglican, Methodist or Baptist. Others belong to the African Instituted Churches like Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim and the Celestial Church of Christ to mention a few. Their musical activities in their churches led to the establishment of their various bands. This accounted for the appearance of *tùngbá* gospel music in particular and Nigerian gospel music in general to still maintain its association to Christian faith. This was explained by *Ọláòsebìkan* (2005) when he gave examples of *Rẹ̀mí Ọ́lábánjì*, *Akin Adébáyò (Ìmọ̀le-Ayọ̀)* and *Sẹ̀yí Shọ́lágbadé* as some of the gospel musicians who were trained in the Celestial Church of Christ, in particular, and later established their individual bands. However, the zeal to expand their space and for economic reasons, *tùngbá* gospel musicians also included entertainment as part of the basis of the style, hence, their ability to satisfy both religion and social responsibilities.

One of the major reasons for the emergence of *tùngbá* gospel music was the fact that over the years, musical activities in terms of performance, instrumentation and styles of Nigerian gospel artistes are changing. This is not surprising, as music, like any other arts, is dynamic and subject to change. The agents of change, therefore, dictate the establishment of newer style in contrary to the existing ones. This has equally led to the establishment of earlier styles of Nigerian gospel music and the latest being *tùngbá*. A close observation of *tùngbá* gospel music revealed a style at the peak of hybrid because almost all aspects of *tùngbá* gospel music are embedded in multifaceted ideas. For example, the instrumentation of the styles is the mixture of both African and Western musical instruments. The performance of the style also shows the mixture of all the earlier

styles in one performance. All the aforementioned presence of hybridity added to the dynamics of tũngbá gospel music. Another height of hybrid in tũngbá is its ability to be associated with both Christian religion and social engagement. Tũngbá, sometimes, parades itself as religious music and at other times as an entertainment form of musical style. For example, tũngbá gospel music is used in religious setting, especially, during praise and worship or thanksgiving sessions of Christian services. This same style of music is heard in various social functions, wedding, house-warming and burial party, of Christian and people of other faith. At other times, it combines both aforementioned functions of religion and entertainment.

Examples of religious songs used by tũngbá gospel musicians are:

Eyin ni Baba

E-yin ni Ba-ba - to to Ba-ba E-yin ni Ba-ba to ju Ba-ba lo

and

Lat'Ojo ti mo tin rin

La - t'O - jo ti mo tin rin e o e o e - mi o

ri 'ru O - lo - run - yi ri e o e o

Exam

Su ku su-ku su-ku su-ku sa ba di bo - Su-ku su-ku su-ku su-ku sa ba di bo -

and

EMI LAYE MI

Treble E-mi, e-mi l'a__ ye__ mi, n o mo j'o-rin lo, se l'oun ba mi sun, t'oun ba mi

Tr. ji, n o mo j'o-rin lo, o un ba mi sun, o ba mi ji, n o -mo j'o rin lo.

Conclusion

In conclusion, t̀ngb́ais a style which has many styles brought together to become one unified style. It can, therefore, be described as a ‘big pot’ in which all existing style converged to create a unique style. T̀ngb́a experience is embraced, applauded and preferred by all in religious and social gatherings in the Southwest of Nigeria in particular and even in other parts of Nigeria and outside of the country.

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