

PARTICIPATION OF KALEO PAALONG WOMEN GROUP IN CHURCH MUSIC IN NADOWLI CATHOLIC PARISH, GHANA.

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ABSTRACT: The paper emphasized the factual evidence and situated the study in the cultural peculiarity of women in the performance of indigenous church music in the Nadowli catholic parish. Through interviews and participant observation, the authors explored the artistic and creative nature of the use of musical instruments by women. It also underscored the distinctive and disproportionate qualities of catholic women in converging to form a music group to cater to the social and emotional needs of members on occasions of need. It concludes that the women can be acknowledged for creating their own genre of music with the use of improvised musical instruments fused with original instruments found in the area which has to be upheld by the church and the community for the perpetuation of the cultural heritage of the people.

KEYWORDS: Acculturation, Catholic Parish, Church Music, Kaleo Paalong, Nadowli

I. INTRODUCTION

Roman Catholic Church is one of the conventional and most formidable churches in Ghana. With its branches across the length and breadth of the country, has so many groups in it such as Catholic women, Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, Catholic Organization for Social and Religious Advancement (COSRA) and others. Some of these groups are children, men, women and mixed groups. Apart from the groups that are general and known country-wide, there are other minority groups that also exist and are recognized at the Parish or Diocesan levels only. One such minor group is the *Kaleo Paalong* group in the Nadowli Catholic Parish. The group's main aim is to promote unity and good relationship among members which is hinged on the conviction of Ovbiebo (2013) that the Christian faith develops morality and influences the behaviours of members through the word of God, worship and social services. The major activity of this group is the performance of music.

Women form the majority of the group, a practice that is similar to the music groups of some churches. Buttressing the above is Kwarteng (2015) who posits that women's participation is more numerous than men's in some of the branches of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *Kaleo Paalong* women created their own genre and handle the musical instruments with dexterity. With the support from the two men, the group performs in different social contexts and contributes in diverse ways to the development of the Nadowli Parish and the Wa Diocese. Apart from the musical performance, the group also performs other activities including advocacy programmes for women in the group, the church and the community at large.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of women in Ghanaian society is crucial in every aspect of life that they feature especially those that relate to music performance traditionally at home and in the community. At home, they cuddle babies with lullabies when they cry and also use the same to shepherd them to sleep. They also perform incidental music to accompany household chores and other activities on the farm and in other workplaces (Flolu and Amuah, 2003) and among other things some of the music is performed with physical exercise accompaniment to sustain their interest in the work and also to break boredom and sedentary.

The participation of women in the communal ethos such as music hitherto was not encouraged in certain areas such as drumming and handling of other instruments in some Ghanaian communities (Nketia, 1968). This was

due to the beliefs and practices of the people. Similar to Nketia's findings are that of Ndah, Walden, Okyere – Twum and Sarpong (2021) who posited that women in the Logba traditional area could not take part in the performance of two war dances, Akpi and Adevu. This is due to their formation as sole-gender dances for males performed during the war and a ritual for hunters. Nowadays that inter-tribal wars are over and certain rituals frowned on, both ensembles are performed on other occasions but women still do not partake with the view that they are for the performance of only men. Aside from the exemption of women from participation in some of the dances, the main roles women play in the mixed-gender dances are singing, dancing and on rare occasions, few of them play the rattle and the castanet. This situation is akin to the musical practices of Afghanistan, a country in which only men play musical instruments in the course of performance (Sakata, 1987; Sarkissian, 1992; Ebeli, 2015) as a result of the feminine role predicted by the country's cultural inclination. *Kaleo Paalong* women have undergone the same experience as women elsewhere when their cultural orientation could not permit them to play certain musical instruments. This effect could be realized in their selection of instruments for inclusion in their ensemble as *Gyile* (xylophone), a prominent musical instrument identified with Dagaaba/Dagao people is missing.

In spite of the gender and cultural orientation of certain Ghanaian societies preventing women from partaking in some musical activities, women's participation in indigenous music and therefore female dominated musical genres were identified in the olden and present days in certain parts of Ghana. According to Ampomah (2014), Adzewa and Adzeba are the female-dominated traditional ensembles found in the Fanti and Guan communities in the central region of Ghana. Both ensembles are occasionally performed during funerals and festivals. The following authors gave accounts of women's participation in traditional music in other parts of Ghana. Haydon (1985) and Mark (1985) both cited in Amuah (2013) opined, in the Volta region, *Gbolo* ensemble is retained for northern Ewe women. The Ga people have a recreational dance called *Adaawe* reserved for only women while in Akuapem Mamfe and Dagbon typical female ensembles known as *Abao* and *Tora* are identified with the women respectively. In the Upper West region where the discourse is centered, two traditional music genres namely *Janga* and *Han-ye* are performed by Sissala women. Nadowli and Kaleo people are Dagaaba/Dagao and their women perform the *Anlee* dance which their neighbour the Waala people call *Lee*.

Through trade and the spread of the Gospel that Ghanaians came to contact with the white man. Even though this contact came with its ramifications, it brought about great social change and national development which affected music tremendously. This change saw the emergence of new types of music genres. These new genres combined the existing musical instruments with that of foreign ones from Western countries such as brass, woodwind, strings as well as percussion. The two notable genres identified during that era are the brass band and highlife music. Highlife music started in Ghana during the colonial era. Wright (1995) is of the view that the sources of Ghanaian highlife music are numerous and pointed out the following: dance orchestras, palm wine groups and colonial brass bands. In assertion to Wright's view, Collin (2005) cited in Bonsu and Adjepong (2019) posit that other Ghanaian recreational dances such as Nwomkro, Agbadza, Adaha, Kokoma and Kpanlogo contributed and formed the basis of the genre. The genre started in the coastal towns as a recreational genre with the fusion of Ghanaian musical instruments and that of the west where the whites first settled and spread to the other parts of the country with time. Throughout its formation and its current state, men dominated in the composition and the performance of highlife music but one notable woman who stands tall among the few women that composed and performed the genre is Rose Badu (Awurama Badu) who doubled as a police officer and guitarist.

The emergence of technology and acculturation engendered the display of the music of different cultures in different media and made it available to different societies. This predisposes the Ghanaian populace to this trending vogue, especially the youth who normally engage in and enjoy hip-life and dancehall music. The origin of hip-life could be traced to hip-hop music which started in the 1970s in the U.S.A and later metamorphous from highlife in Ghana with the addition of rap (Bonsu and Adjepong, 2019). Dancehall music however is Jamaican popular music that emerged from reggae music with a rap accompaniment. In Ghana, the difference between the two genres is negligible due to the rap as such some of the musicians such as Mzvee, Kaakie, Shatta Wale, Samini and others are composers of both genres. Women composers for both genres are numerous because of the changing roles in gender due to education and cultural assimilation whereas women elsewhere are popular music composers and songstresses.

The Ghanaian gospel music is reserved for Christian religious activities and other secular functions. Being one of the popular music, it is performed in Agbadza, Adowa, Asafo and other Ghanaian musical styles (Atiemo, 2006). It is dedicated to the worship and praises sessions, during prayer and other activities in the majority of the Christian denominations except for Jehovah's Witnesses and a few others for the purposes mentioned. The number of women who are into the composition and performance of this genre is almost the same or more than men as compared with other popular music due to the realities and misconceptions that Ghanaians have about the performance of secular popular music. The reality about reggae, hip-life and dancehall musicians is that their style of dressing does not

conform to Ghanaian distinctive appearance hence indecent, and the misconception, Ghanaians consider all popular musicians except for gospel and art musicians as people who engage in debauch acts.

The singing of hymns and canticles is associated with orthodox churches. Aside from the two, there are other types of art music which are anthems performed during church service and other Christian religious activities for the orthodox churches. Apart from the orthodox churches, all other Christian denominations have musical groups such as choristers for mixed-gender and sole-gender groups and children. In these church groups, women's participation is numerous and diverse as they also form part of the decision-making bodies of the groups.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers used structured interviews and participant observation to collect data. The interview was used to complement the participant observation in order to unravel the hidden aspect of what has been observed. This is in accordance with the presupposition of Qu and Dumay (2011) that the respondents are the best to disseminate factual information about a phenomena understudy. This is in order to aid the researchers to come out clear with the results that reflect the true nature and praxis of the *Kaleo Paalong* group. Hence the engagement of two women and one of the women in the group. The researchers usually scheduled an interview session with the respondents after every performance. In light of this, we constructed the interview guide according to the suggestion of (Roberts, 2020) to avoid flaws and deviation from the phenomena being researched and also to observe the norms that guide the conducting of interviews.

The main instrument for data collection for this research is participant observation. The authors had the opportunity to join the *Kaleo Paalong* group on several occasions to participate in their performance sessions. The usual every two weeks Sunday meetings after church (the first mass) are frequent interactions by participating in the performance where we played the improvised idiophone (milk tins) together with other participants. Due to the language barrier, two of us were just accompanying the parts of the songs we could sing with harmony well while the third author participated fully in the singing and sometimes danced to the music. We did these by observing the rule guiding participant observation put forward by Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005) so as not to disrupt the activities with our presence. As we took part in the musical performance, we also concentrated on the phenomena that we were observing. We were rather exempted from their discussion session since this was based on the administration of the affairs of the group and other vital issues.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Kaleo Paalong group started in the year 2009 with thirty-six (36) members with the purpose of fostering unity among members. Currently, it is made up of seventy-four members. Seventy-one of the members are females while only three are males. Out of the three men, only two are active members of the group. This reflected how the affairs of the group are steered as women form the core and the majority of them are part of the decision-making body which only a male member is part of and plays a role as secretary. The decision-making role of women in the group is hinged on the assertion that women currently have the potential of executing primary duties meant for men (Ebeli, 2015). This is also the case with Girls' schools in Ghana where their leaders are selected among them and they steer their own affairs diligently as their male counterparts in male-dominated communities.

To be a member of the group, a person is supposed to possess certain qualities before he or she might qualify. These are:

1. One should be a member of the Catholic Church.
2. Must hail from the Kaleo area.
3. Be a husband or wife to a member from the place or both must hail from the area.
4. Children cannot be part but those that are not of age usually follow their parents to meetings and other gatherings.

The laid down principles of the group not accepting people who do not have the above qualities is contrary to the conviction of Gregory (1997) cited in Gene and Chandhi (2022) that *music is a tool for uniting people and brings a sense of belonging* p.25. This pertains to a pluralistic community where the residents have religious and tribal affiliations. The Kaleo area is a cosmopolitan area consisting of dwellers belonging to different tribes and religions who coexist in a community with a common purpose. If people from these backgrounds are co-opted into the group it would have been a group that brings people together for ethnic and religious tolerance. However, the reason for not giving those who do not qualify the chance is that it is a group that is recognized by the Nadowli Catholic Parish hence it is reserved for only Catholic members and those from the area.

One of the distinctive aspects of the group is the musical instruments. Some of the musical instruments used by the group are adopted from the indigenous dances in the area such as *Bina*, *Bawa*, *Dugu* and *Anle* while others are

discarded materials adopted by the members of the group. According to Allansah, the group initially did not use any musical instrument to accompany singing apart from handclapping. Later, milk tins were introduced followed by empty rubber containers and eventually the *lato* (double bell) and the double-headed drums (*Brekete*). This reiterates the claim of Mukuma (2010) on the borrowing of musical instruments from different or similar geographical areas to another in an ensemble. The borrowed instrument either serves as an improvised instrument or plays a new role in the new ensemble. The milk tins, for instance, have replaced clapping which is why all other members who do not play any other instrument play them. Allansah further indicated that the *gyile* (xylophone) is not part of the instruments because it is only women that perform with the instruments.

The exclusion of the *gyile* due to the playing of the instruments by women highlights how some cultures perceive women's participation and inclusion in musical performance. The idea of the women in the *Kaleo Paalong* group not including xylophone in the musical instruments is similar to the Fantes of the Central region of Ghana not including the women in the performance of the *Asafo* as posited by Acquah (2013) cited in Arko-Mensah, Annan and Korley (2020) that "*the Fante tradition frowns on the handling and playing of Asafo by women because it is not only a male ensemble but also associated with wars*" p.11. Probably, the women not including the xylophone might be due to the fact that in the Kaleo area xylophone music is only performed during funerals. In the Volta Region of Ghana, women playing the talking drum is not common even though it is not taboo for them to do so. This is rather due to how the ensemble was formed at its initial stage and the role women played in the ensemble. More so the cultural orientation of the people at the time of its establishment would not permit women to play the drums as compared to the present day.

The handling of the instruments by the group constitutes an interesting and unique embodiment during a performance as everybody in the group plays an instrument. The milk tins are acquired in abundance and therefore available for any member to play during performance apart from those who play the other instruments. The milk tins in this context serve as an idiophone and together with the *lato* (double bell), these two types of instruments keep time and lead other instruments. The members either play the two types of idiophones in seating or standing positions during the performance. The two *brekete* drums and the rubber buckets are played by the women either seating or standing and bending down to reach the instruments while standing. While the drums are played by hand and stick technique, the rubber buckets are played by the two hands. It is also worthy of note that no particular instrument serves as the master instrument as the two *brekete* drums and the rubber buckets that serve as membranophones play variations and ostinato interchangeably and communicate with other instruments during a performance. The musical instruments and their playing techniques are shown in the picture below.



Handling of Musical Instruments by Kaleo Paalong Group

The lyrical content of the repertoire of songs used to accompany the musical instruments is based on both Biblical and secular texts in *Dagaare* (a language spoken by the *Dagaaba/Dagao* people of the Upper West Region of Ghana). Those that are based on Biblical texts are hinged on the issues such as commitment to God's work and

having a good relationship with one another. Even though the group does not perform during church worship, its activities are based strictly on the Catholic faith and its practices. The secular text however uses the proverbs and idioms in some of the songs for social control and to check deviant behaviour as suggested by Impey and Nussbaum (1996) that, *in Shona society: "You cannot plainly say what you want to say. You have to dress it up in art. You can say a proverb, or wait for an occasion to sing it in a song."* p.11. This invariably helps shape the behaviour of members of society and the group to maintain order.

One of the mandates of the group is to foster unity among members and this reflects in their performance contexts. One such occasion is the Easter get-together which is usually organized by the group every Easter day to interact with each other and to make merry. This context of the group's activity touches on the three propositions of social functions of music by Hargreaves and North (1999) as "*self-identity, interpersonal relationship and mood management*". These three functions of music are the foundations of which the group's activities evolve. Easter is one of the remarkable occasions for Christians to see many of the indigenes residing outside the Nadowli coming home to celebrate the festival and it is on this occasion that the group performs the dance after church service to entertain both members and the general public.

Music forms an integral part of the Dagaaba/Dagao funeral rituals. As one of the arenas of music performance, the Kaleo Paalong group normally converges at the funeral ground of a dead relative of a member to commiserate with family members through performance and to entertain the sympathizers of the deceased. Fundamental to Dagaaba/Dagao cultures, the *Kaleo Paalong* group's performances during funerals expose the rich cultural heritage of the land through their discourse embedded in the performance with the use of language as posited by Woma (2012) that *as public rhetoric, the textual themes of Dagara funeral music and dirge are deeply rooted in proverbial language that addresses issues of moral values, social conflicts, and local politics* p.1. These attributes of Dagaaba/Dagao cultures exhibited by the group form the educational viewpoints on which societal norms are based and are one of the pillars of the group. This practice is also observed in Gene and Chandi (2022) that sympathizers make sly innuendos about how family members looked after the deceased in his/her last days, especially those that made a mess of the deceased. It is interesting to note that the group does not perform during the funeral of a dead member before burial. This is the decision of the group to remain sorrowful and mourn the dead until he/she is buried.

The third context of the group's performance is the annual end-of-the-year meeting which takes place every second Sunday in January every year. On this day, members convene at an agreed venue where the programme is scheduled to take place. Members usually go with friends and family members to witness the performance. During the performance, the group is sandwiched by the onlookers and some of them join the performance by dancing and singing in congruent with Nketia's (1988) supposition that music is a communal activity that involves both performers and spectators at a performance field. This performance field could be a community centre or any spacious place in the community. The group's performance recommences at the venue till such a time that the group decides to go on recess and also to outline the programme for the year. Of all the performance contexts of the group, the formation is another exhilarating feature of the group in all performances. Per the space and the location, the group assumes a queue, file, horseshoe and most especially the circular formation which is the commonest to its performance. The dancers conform to how the group positions itself and dance in pairs, groups and individually.

V. CONCLUSION

The place of women in society is indispensable, especially their contribution to music performance and the perpetuation of culture. The paper noted that in the olden days, women were not permitted to partake in the playing of some instruments and performances of certain types of traditional music. Contemporarily, formal education and acculturation have brought new dimensions to women's participation in all genres of music. It was also revealed that the *Kaleo Paalong* group formed their own genre and perform skillfully with the instruments by providing musical needs to members, the Catholic parish and the people in the community on various occasions.

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