



SUPPLICATORY DISCOURSE IN YORUBA ART MUSIC: A CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF CHRISTOPHER AYODELE'S 'OLUWA L'OLUSO AGUNTAN'

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ABSTRACT: *One of the age-long practices in religious worship is the use of music for supplication. The practice of using music for supplication within the African religious space predates the arrival of colonial masters and missionaries. The coming of missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century also witnessed the inclusion of a significant number of supplicative songs as part of the liturgy of the newly established faith. The wave of decolonization that began to emerge in the later part of the nineteenth century within the Nigerian Church also provided African alternatives for liturgical expressions. Yoruba Art Music emerged from the negotiation between Western choral training and exposure, and indigenous Yoruba musical and linguistic practices. A good number of African Church musicians with bi-musical exposure contextualized their compositions for various purposes, one of which was the supplicative function. Christopher Ayodele, a post-independence composer, employed his bi-musical exposure in composing Yoruba choral art supplicative music. In contextualizing the composition, he utilized the Yoruba translation of Psalm 23, which serves as an affirmative prayer. The paper is anchored on "Supplicative Musicology," a theory I proposed in my paper, "Study of Some Nigerian Art Music: Towards a Theory of Supplicative Musicology" (2022). The primary sources of information for this study are interviews, the score of the song, and various YouTube performances of the music. Secondary sources, including journal articles and internet-based materials, were also consulted to achieve the objectives of the research. The paper recommends further engagement with ethno-compositional materials in African art music compositions and the expansion of African compositional musicology scholarship through a supplicative contextualization approach.*

KEYWORDS: Christopher Ayodele, Supplicative Musicology, Yoruba Choral art music.



INTRODUCTION

The foundation of a bi-musical environment was laid towards the end of the first half of the nineteenth century in Nigeria. The two cultures (Euro-American and Nigeria) existed in a multicultural form from this point. The foundation of interculturalism in the culture began towards the close of the century. This new indigenous creativity synthesized elements from the two cultures in the creative output of local composers. The three forms that came out of this interaction are, Nigerian hymnody, Nigeria Art Music and Christian-influenced-popular music.

The New Harvard Dictionary of Music (2001, p. 182) defined composition as “The activity of creating a musical work” a term that is used in opposition to improvisation. Onwuekwue (2016) described composition as the “art of creating original music for one or more media; it is the combination of well-organized sounds that are pleasing to the ear”. The composers of African Choral Music are mostly musicians with bi-musical exposure. At the turn of the twentieth century, African-trained musicians are faced with the challenge of cultural relevance in their creative output. Okafor (2020, p. 49) explained the above and how the challenge triggered new compositional materials. In the bid of African composers for musico-cultural and nationalistic relevance, there was a need for an ‘epistemic reconciliation’ a term used by Authority & Nwaoha (2026, 119), in an article titled ‘Epistemic Reconciliation in Nigeria Air Force Identity’. This is a move to reconcile the Euro-American exposure and African music exposure. African composers had to rely on ethno-compositional materials derived from the local space in their Art music compositions. This trend marked the emergence of African modernity in the area of artistic creativity. Agu (2018) described the composers in this group as those exposed to African musical knowledge systems and the performative skills of Western music, its history, and theory. Adegbite (2001, p. 77) defined African Art Music as ‘cross fertilization of African and Western musical elements that has resulted in a cultural synthesis’. Idolor (2001:136) also defined it as ‘a musical creation that exhibits features that are characteristic of African traditional music composed through literary approach’.

In explaining pre-compositional considerations, Okafor (2020, p. 50), described them as, ‘considerations, help and guidance the composer uses in making informed decisions from the embryonic stages of a composition to its completion’. One of the key pre-compositional considerations of compositions is contextualizing the music to meet the thematic focus of the music. This is in addition to the usage of ethnomusicological materials, which is a *sine qua non* in making the music ethnostatic and nationalistic. Some examples of songs for supplicative purposes in the European hymn books are ‘Spirit Divine attend our prayers’, ‘Pass me not o gentle Saviour’ and ‘loving Saviour hear my cry’ (*Olugbala gbohun mi*). Supplication has been a key part of the life of Africans. In the traditional religion, the need for supplication is key. A number of composers contextualize their compositions for supplicative focus. In the popular music space, Obey contextualized the following tracks for supplicative purposes: “*Ori mi ma jen te*” (My head will not put me to shame), *Mo foro mi le e lowo*, (I commit myself into your hands) *Igba owuro la wa* (This is the early part of our lives) and *Aimasiko lon damu Eda* (Not knowing God’s time is the problem of humans). Sunny Ade’s track titled, *Ori mi ye o ja fun mi* (My head fight for me), *Odun titun to mbo l’ona* (New year that is coming) and *Eni binu wa* (whoever persecute us). Adeolu Akinsanya also composed *adura owuro* (Morning prayer). Some of the examples from African hymnody are, Dayo Dedeke’s *K’Olorun so wa ka tun pade* (God be with you till we meet again), Taiye Adeola’s, *Ma f’owo leran lori oro mi* (Do not be silent on my issue), Bidemi Oyesanya’s *Eni igbani oba mimo* (Ancient of days,



the holy King): and Daniel Olukoya's, *S'idi Oke Nla* (Be removed thou mountain) as arranged by Seun Owoaje.

The ethnographic focus of this discourse is a Yoruba Choral Art Music composition. One of the most widely distributed ethnic groups in West Africa is the Yoruba people. They are majorly in Nigeria, Togo and the Benin Republic. According to Ayandele (2004), there are over 40 million Yoruba-speaking people in Nigeria (Agai, 2021). Below are some of Choral Art Music compositions that can be categorized as supplicative music. T. K. E. Philips composed *Emi yio gbe Oju mi so ke wonni* (I will lift my eyes to the hills). While Laolu Lawal composed "Gunugun I ku le'we" (Vulture doesn't meet its end prematurely), Debo Akinwumi composed a wedding Anthem titled, '*Jesu wa fara re han*' (Come and manifest yourself, Jesus) and Ayo Bankole composed "*Adura fun Alafia*" (Prayer for peace), for supranos and piano. The focus will be on Christopher Ayodele's (1958-2018) Oluwa l'oluso aguntan mi, (The Lord is my Shepherd) an African Choral Art Music, that he contextualized with supplicative lyrics. A liturgical choral art composition for choir and the Organ.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of scholars have commented on the intersection of music and prayer. In his paper titled, 'Vociferation of the Oppressed: Emphatic Underpinnings of Contemporary Indigenous Christian Prayer songs in Nigeria', Adedeji's (2017, pp.107-127), paper highlights the correlation between Nigeria's economic challenges and the rise of radical prayers in religious settings. These activities led to night vigils, prayer mountains, and prayer conventions as venues for the manifestation of these radical prayers. This is a paper on music empathy, and how it relates to unstructured music of the contemporary African indigenous Church. The main audience for these prayer activities is usually the less privileged and the oppressed. The research looked into how the emphatic feelings of the congregants triggered the composition of the prayer protest songs. How the members are psychologically relieved after the singing of the protest prayer music. Furthermore, the protest prayer songs reveal the criticalness of the situation of the oppressed.

In another related research by Ajose (2018, pp. 221-237), titled, 'Social, Discourse in the songs used at Ede Prayer Mountain, Osun State, Nigeria', he wrote about the social implications of songs used in Christian liturgy, with a focus on prayer mountains, a non-conventional church space. He conducted the study at a prayer mountain known as Ori-Oke Baba Abiye in Ede. A study into the social discourse in the context of the songs used at the Prayer Mountain. He ended his argument on the importance of music in worship by saying a liturgical service cannot be meaningful without music. He spoke about the essentiality of prayer in the Christian liturgy. Karen (cited in Ajose, 2018, p. 222) defined prayer as the "conscious act or attempt of opening oneself or activating a relationship to a higher being". Prayer as a means of communicating with a supreme being can be through music. The project analyzes the representation of mental health and environmental concerns in the context of prayer mountain songs. He highlighted music's capacity to embody prayer, making it a valuable resource for personal and communal expression.

In another prayer mountaineering work, conducted by Samuel & Ajose (2018), with an ethnographic focus on songs used at Ikoyi Prayer Mountain, also in Osun State. The prayer mountain was established by Joseph Ayo Babalola and some elders of the Christ Apostolic



Church (CAC) in 1936. The work acknowledged the setting up of such non-conventional prayer space common within African Indigenous Churches (AICs). The work highlighted the importance of music in African traditional religion. It is believed that music enables a smooth connection with the divine. The work explained how ‘music, vocal or instrumental may be offered as a prayer and prayer offered in the form of music. The work explained the adherent’s belief in the potency of such places, such as groves, thick forests and mountains as spaces for quick positive responses to prayers. Mountains are considered to be sacred by adherents of African Indigenous Churches, which accounts for the high patronage of the *Ori Oke* (Prayer Mountains). To corroborate the above, the work cited the work of Falaye (2015), who explained that members of the prayer mountain belief, whose prayers are in such venues have a strong potential of speedy answers. The work is focused on the ethnomusicological and the socio-cultural ideological factors that influenced the shape and the usage of the *ori oke* (prayer mountain) music.

In the study conducted by Adedeji (2017), Ajose (2018), and Samuel/Ajose (2018), we can see the usage of music as a tool for communing with God. The ethnographic focus of the researchers is Prayer Mountains in Southwest Nigeria. The work also reveals that most of the prayer mountains are established by African Indigenous Churches (AIC), particularly the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). The usage of music as a tool for communing with God is not limited to the African Indigenous Churches. The focus of this discourse is structured music, classified as Yoruba Choral Art Music. The creative work was contextualized as a prayer of affirmation. Choral music of this nature will be common in Yoruba elitist Churches and tertiary institutions. Using Adedeji’s (2017: 109) classification, this style of music will be common in the Orthodox, the Indigenous non-Pentecostal churches, and Gospel Churches. The performance of the style is also a feature in some elitist Indigenous African Pentecostal Churches.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on my earlier theory, ‘The Theory of Supplicative Musicology.’ This was discussed in my paper titled, ‘Study, of some Nigerian Art Music Compositions: Towards a Theory of Supplicative Musicology’ (2022). The theory explained supplicative musicology as a fundamental idea that revolves around the use of music to make sincere appeals for help, whether they are addressed to people or spiritual beings. The Yoruba belief system, in which music plays a crucial role in worship and veneration as a means of communicating with Olodumare and other deities, was used to examine the theory. The theory clarified how music can serve as a potent medium for spiritual or private appeals, transcending the use of music as a form of entertainment or aesthetics. Supplication can either be vertical or horizontal. Vertical supplication can be categorized as supplication directed to supreme divine beings, while the horizontal supplication will be directed from to humans.

CHRISTOPHER AYODELE BIOGRAPHY (1958-2018)

‘Behavior setting theory’, is a psychological framework propounded by Barker (1968: 18). In the theory he explained how behaviors are learned through interaction with the environment. In compositional musicological analytical works, it’s important to examine the environmental factors that shaped the creativity of composers and performers in question. This has necessitated this short biographical section.



Christopher Ayodeji Ayodele, Organist/Choirmaster, Music Educator and composer, was born on 5th August 1958 in Oye Ekiti, into the family of an Anglican Priest, Canon James Arowolo Ayodele, and Mrs. Racheal Ayodele, a teacher. Ayodele is a native of Isarun, in Ondo State. He attended Saint Luke Grammar School, Igbara-Oke; he was later trained as a teacher at Divisional Teacher Training College, Oye Ekiti. He furthered his education by completing his National Diploma and Higher National Diploma (ND/HND) at the Ibadan Polytechnic in 1982. He also sat and passed a good number of professional examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music in Piano Performance, Organ Performance, General Musicianship and Music Theory. Some of the lecturers that had a great influence on the music pedagogical development of Ayodele are Mr. Kayode Oni, a foremost Nigerian Organist of his era, and Professor Bode Omojola. In 1995 Ayodele completed a Master's Degree in Communications Arts at the University of Ibadan.

He was appointed as a Technical Instructor at the Ibadan Polytechnics in 1983. He rose through the cadre to become a Chief Instructor, a position he held until his demise. He was also an Associate Lecturer at Babcock University, Ilishan. He served as Organist in a good number of Churches, this includes, The First Baptist Church Idikan, Ibadan: Ibadan, St. Peters Anglican Church Aremo, and All Saints Church Jericho Ibadan. He was an highly sought-after organist. He was the guest organist at the funeral of the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, in 1987. He was a Chief Examiner in Music for the West African Examination Council (WAEC) until his demise. Ayodele was a former President of the Fellowship of Baptist Musicians. Ayodele composed the lyrics and the music of the Ibadan Polytechnic school anthem. He also composed the 40th anniversary anthem of the Ibadan Polytechnic.

Ayodele is married to Mrs. Funmilayo Ayodele (Nee Okunade).

ANALYSIS OF '*OLUWA L'OLUSO AGUNTAN MI*'

Oluwa l'oluso aguntan mi

Art. by: C. A. Ayodele

The musical score is for a piece titled "Oluwa l'oluso aguntan mi" by C. A. Ayodele. It is written in 4/4 time and marked "Andante". The score includes four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and an Organ part. The Soprano part begins with a piano (p) dynamic and the lyrics "O - lu - wa Fo lu". The Organ part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines in both hands.



MUSICOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Medium: The song is composed for soprano, alto, tenor, bass and organ accompaniment. There are frequencies of soprano in unison, and the usage of male and female semi-choirs.

Tonality: The music is tonal, with note F as the tonal center. The other side of tonality is the inflexional correspondence of the imposed melody and the Yoruba meaning of the context of the song. The lyrics of the melody showed a perfect affinity of the melody with the Yoruba meaning. The composer, in his bid to achieve the right harmonic progression had to bend the rule of perfect affinity in the parts. However, he was able to achieve it in some parts with one-part parallel harmony.

Meter/Time Signature: The timing of the song is 4 Crotchets beat in a bar.

Rhythm: The rhythm of the music is a simple quadruple. The recommended tempo could be interpreted as 'walking pace' or 'moderately slow,' which is known as *Andante*.

Scale: The melody of the music showed a 5-note pentatonic scale of d, r, m, s & l. The only F in the melody, which would have made the scale hexatonic, is on bar 35. In the harmonic part of the song, the heptatonic scale was used, with an infrequent usage of chromatic alteration.

Harmony: The harmonic style used by the composer showed a good knowledge of tonal counterpoint. The harmony showed multiple independent melodic lines that maintained their own rhythm and contour to create a rich and complex texture.

Accompaniment: The composer composed an interesting organ accompaniment for the choral piece in the J. S. Bach style. He also colored the accompaniment with some chromatic alterations. The music can also be played on the piano.

Melody: There are 18 melodic phrases in the composition. Most of the phrases are combinations of antecedent and consequent. All the phrases are in two bars, apart from bars 38, 39 and 40, which are one bar to a phrase. The intervallic structure of the music is a combination of 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th. The interval with the greatest frequency is the 2nd (24), followed by the 3rd (20) and the 5th (12), and the least frequent is the 4th (7). The first two phrases (bars 3-4 and 5-6) are repeated in bars 7-8 and 9-10. The melody started within a narrow range of a minor 7th (D4 to C5). The melody moved slightly upwards from bars 11 to 14, within a melodic range of a major sixth (F4 to D5). There was a forward-moving sequence from bars 15 to 18. The ascending melodic sequence started from bar 15, before moving to higher register on bar 16 and the highest on 17, before cadencing imperfectly on bar 18.

The range of the melody from bars 15 to 18 is D4 to F5, which is a wide interval of minor 10th. The music now cadenced perfectly between bars 19 and 20. The range of the melody is a perfect fifth. Bars 21 and 22 are an Organ interlude to usher in the phrase in bars 23 and 24, which is an antecedental melody to the consequent in bars 25 and 26. This is within a vocal range of a perfect octave (C4-C5). A phrase that cadenced perfectly. The organ interlude from bars 28 and 29, was followed by another antecedent (bars 30-31) and consequent (32-33) melodic construction: the melody was sung by the tenor singers. The melody is within an interval of minor 7th (D4 and C5). The melody from bars 30 to 33, was repeated by the altos from bars 34 to 37. Bars 38, 39 and 40 are a phrase to a bar. It has an ascending melodic sequence that has



resting notes that ascended from the subdominant B flat⁴, to dominant C⁵ and ascended to F⁵. The melody is within a range of a minor 7th (G⁴-F⁵).

Form and Structure: The music started with a two-bar melody creatively harmonized. The melody is the introductory theme of the opening vocal section. This was followed by a four-bar call from the soprano (bars 3-6), which was repeated in harmony by the full choir (7-10), following the African call and call repeat pattern. There was another soprano unison call from bars 11 and 12, which was followed by a non-exact response from bars 13 to 14. The composer colored the music with unaccented passing notes in the alto, tenor, and bass in bar 13. The lyrical content from bars 14 to 18 was emphasized with the choir in unison passage: this was concluded with a phrase leading to a perfect cadence in bar 20. The melody from bars 23 to 27 was partly introduced on the organ from bars 21 to 22. The melodic call was made by the sopranos from bars 23 to 24, which was followed with the choir in harmony from bars 25 to 27. The organ part on bars 28 and 29 was a prelude to the tenor and bass unison from bars 30 to 33. The tenor and bass parts were repeated by alto and harmonized by soprano from bars 34 to 37. The bars 38, 39 and 40 are melodic sequence, using the same ascending melodic contour. The music now went to the beginning before concluding on bar 20.

Vocal Range: The vocal range for the soprano is from C⁴ to F⁵, which is an interval of a perfect 11th. The highest note of F⁵ is on bars 17, 18, 34, 35 and 40, while the lowest note, C⁴, are on bars 23 and 25. The alto part is within the range of a perfect octave (C⁴ to C⁵). The lowest notes (C⁴) can be found on bars 7, 9, 10, 20, 25, 26 and 27. The high notes (C⁵) are on bars 34, 35 and 40. I did not analyze the alto part in the unison section (15-18), because some of the notes are above the vocal range of the altos. Magadizing will likely be common within the basses and the altos in this section. The range for tenor is an interval of a minor tenth. From D³ (bars 15 and 32) and F⁴ (bar 17). The range for bass is F² (bar 10) to C⁴ (bars 30 and 31), which is an interval of a perfect 12th.

Tempo and Metronome Mark: The recommended metronome mark for the song is between 65 and 70.

Length and Performance Duration: The performance duration of the song is four minutes ten seconds.

Textual Analysis

Original Lyrics

Oluwa l'oluso aguntan mi

Emi ki yio se alaini o

O mu mi dubule ninu papa

Papa oko tutu nini

Ire ati anu Oluwa

Yio wa pelu wa

Bi mo tile rin ninu ojiji iku



Jesu so mi

O te tabili ni waju mi

O te tabili sile niwaju ota mi

Ago mi kun

English Meaning

The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside the still waters

Goodness and mercy

Will be with us,

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

My cup runneth over.

Jesus kept me.

Thou preparest a table before me

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Lyrical Analysis: The text of the song is from Psalm 23, which has an age-long inclusion in the prayer part of liturgical gatherings and family alters. In conventional churches, where they sing chants, the passage is one of the Psalms they love to chant because of the prayer context. A number of composers set the context of the Psalm to Hymns, Francis Rous authored, 'The Lord's my Shepherd,' and Henry Baker authored 'The King of love my Shepherd is,' where he did a paraphrasing of Psalm 23. There is also a version of the song known as "Brother James Air (Marosa)," by James Leith Macbeth Bain. The Psalm is used as a prayer of affirmation in both corporate and personal prayer.

The act of validating or confirming something, often on a positive note, can be described as affirmation. Believers can express their confidence and trust in God's character, promises, and works through the biblical prayer known as the Prayer of Affirmation. In contrast, a prayer of confession or a prayer of petition focuses on asking or repenting. The main goal of affirmation prayer is to declare the veracity of God's character and word. It is basically an act of faith confession that brings the believer's heart into harmony with the reality of God (Brueggemann, 1984).

Prayers of affirmations are found all over the Bible. Devotees reaffirmed God's nature and promises with words that demonstrated their unwavering faith. When Moses and his people crossed the Red Sea, he sang a song affirming God's holiness and power (Exodus 15:11).



Scripture provides examples that demonstrate affirmation as a theological act based on faith rather than just positive speech. This is a confessional and doxological act. There is a wealth of affirmation in the book of Psalms. Such verses include Psalms 27:1, 46: 1-2, 103: 1-2 and 23. Affirmative prayer has many benefits, such as enhancing faith: it transforms perspective, bears witness to others and embodies worship (Gunkel 1967, Bruegemann 1984, Fee, 2007, Westermann, 1981)

The passage, Psalm 23, is expressing trust and confidence in God, using the shepherd and host imagery in affirming the covenant faithfulness, guidance, and the providential care of God. The psalm is an expression of deep reliance on the care and protection of God in the midst of the danger of uncertainty. This psalm is not a lament or a praise for God's faithfulness but an expression of personal confidence in God.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The work explained the important communicative role of music in communing with supreme-beings and how it has been used for supplicative purposes in liturgical spaces globally. This is with a particular focus on the structured music within the Yoruba elitist Churches. The ethnographic focus of the research is *Oluwa l'Oluso aguntan mi* (The Lord is my Shepherd), a Yoruba choral art music piece composed by Christopher Ayodele.

There was a strong interplay of intercultural elements in this cross-cultural composition. In the construction of the melody, Ayodele used the pentatonic scale. This is in conformity with the pioneering research efforts of Philips (1953:15) and Sowande (1968:47), who both assert that the scale of the Yoruba people is pentatonic. Bateye (2005, p. 61) also corroborates the above pioneers in his work titled, 'Defining, African Traditional Musical Traits.' The inflectional correspondence of the melody with the Yoruba meaning of the text is perfect, which is another feature of authentic African music. In harmonizing the semichoir sections of the melody, he used parallel harmony in a style that exhibited a good knowledge of tonal counterpoint. Mirroring the contour of the melody in other parts is a common harmonic practice in African music. The stylistic pattern of the organ accompaniment is in the Bach pattern, which brought to bear Ayodele virtuosity on the instrument. The organ accompaniment also showed the strength of the composer in chromatic harmony. The discourse explained the contextualization of the song as affirmative prayer music. The work explained how communicating affirmative prayer and other forms of prayer through songs has been an age-long practice in the Church.

The work recommends further contributions to compositional musicology that are contextualized for supplicative purposes. This will also further contributions to the field of supplicative musicology.



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