



Kpankan Music: A Feared and Revered Music Group in Bo-Ue Community- Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Bo-ue community is in Ogoni land of Rivers State, South-south part of Nigeria. Ogoni land is within the South East Local Government Area, located in the East of Rivers State. The *Kpankan* music group had, through its musical activities brought relative peace in Bo-ue community, enforcing the laws and traditions of the society, guiding the people along moral ethics and behaviours, even after the post-colonial era. Being a male cult group, with membership of adult males, the *Kpankan* music was feared and revered in Bo-ue community where they operated as law enforcement agency. This study therefore attempts a comprehensive studying of this music group, laying emphasis on its membership, performance techniques, instruments and instrumentation, its messages and impact on the community. the research also reveals that this music originated from Ghana during the slave trade. In recommendation therefore, *kpankan* music should be sustained for peaceful co-existence in the community.

Keywords: Music, Fear, Musical instrument, Revered, Membership.

Introduction

Traditional music in Bo-ue community is generally accepted as a medium of communal activities such as burial ceremonies, festivals, chieftaincy coronations, worship, sacrifices, puberty rites festivals and initiations. The community takes music as part of their life and cannot be handled with levity. According to Agu (2000) affirms that:

Nigerians are great lovers of music who create and perform music to enrich every activity, ranging from birth to death. All musical creations serve specific purposes and all performances are carefully chosen to suit specified functions and activities appropriately. For example, ceremonies and activities like birth rites, marriage, title taking, initiation into cults and societies or organizations, religious worship, funeral rites, have specially designed and well-chosen songs, music and dance to enrich and glorify them (p. 80).

Kpankan music enriches every activity of Bo-ue community. It a cultural music instituted by their forefather's to protect the community from external or internal disputes. The *Kpankan* music group members are carefully selected from the members of the community to avoid recruiting members who are not upright in the community. Okafor (2005) posits that "traditional music is the most widely used medium of expression for all manners of occasions and at all times and period of life." (p. 87) *Kpankan* music of Bo-ue community is the most traditional music of the community performed to protect, usher in peace, love, joy in the community. The music originated with the people and also became part of their tradition, it is specifically performed to resolve conflicts, bring in peace, feared and revered in the community.

Historical Background of Uegwere Bo-ue Community

Ogoni land is made up of four Local Government Areas namely, Eleme, Tai, Khana and Gokana Local Government Areas of Rivers State. Uegwere Bo-ue community is situated in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. According to Bakor, Uegwere Bo-ue was founded by three brothers namely Gbene-kiri, Gbene-ka-bien and Bie, the three great forefathers of the community settled first in a community named Knog and later moved to a place called Luawii. The migration of these three brothers influenced by search for economic trees (hardwood) to produce masks, household utensils, doors etc and the quest to discover fertile land for planting (since they were predominantly farmers), also instigated the migration. Gbene-ka-bien, in one of his explorations, discovered a land rich in hardwood, he cleared part of the land and settled on it, thereafter, he went back to Luawii to inform his brothers of his great discovery. The three brothers moved to the newly found land, currently named Uegwere, the name was derived from "gwere"; meaning a solid hardwood, thus, Uegwere means the land of hardwood. The three brothers settled in Uegwere and they lived in peace and harmony with their families, there was no trace of internal crisis or war, these three families are represented in any important event in the community today, to make such occasion legitimate. The pride of every young man in Uegwere community lies in his strength and agricultural skills, they produce yams, cassava, fish, palm wine, fruits and assorted vegetables in large quantities.

Economic Activities of Bo-ue Community

Kpone-Tonwe (2003) in Gberegbara discloses that Ogoni land is a fertile plateau, rising to about 100 ft above sea level, from very early beginning, agriculture has been their main occupation, with yam as the principal crop. Other occupations such as palm wine tapping, palm fruit cutting, long-distance trade and fishing, were special occupations for which selected individuals were trained. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yam cultivation had become a competitive occupation attracting classified chieftaincy titles for the best and most successful farmers. Traditionally, the Ogonis are known for agriculture, livestock herding, fishing, salt and palm oil cultivation and trade. Gberegbara (2012) observes that:

The geographical location of the people of Ogoni has made them to inhabit a blessed land "flowing with milk and honey." They are predominantly farmers and fishermen. They plant several kinds of food crops such as yam, cassava, fluted pumpkin, maize, melon, okro etc. The production of garri and palm oil provides income for the farmers in the area (p. 67).

Parents usually advise, or sometimes compel their daughters to marry hardworking farmers like the Ogonis, because they believe that diligent men will take good care of them. Before the introduction of money as means of exchange, the people were fully engaged in trade by barter, they exchange their local produce for other scarce products with their neighboring communities.

Religious Life of Bo-ue Community

Bakor narrates that before the advent of colonialism and Christianity, the people of Uwegwere were Pagans. They had some dreaded oracles like "Amanikpo", which served as their deity and chief judge. Anyone accused of major offences were taken to the oracle for judgment, historians noted that in most ancient African tribes including Ogoni, there were traces of killing of twins, human and animal sacrifices, secret cults and cannibalism. Currently, Christianity is the most dominant religion. Although there still exist traditional worshippers but their population is insignificant compared with the number of Christians. Uwegwere accommodates almost all the church denominations in Nigeria. The churches include Orthodox, Pentecostal and Islam. Olupona (1992) affirms that "Christianity, Ogoni indigenous religion and Islam, are the three religions that are practiced today in Ogoniland. These three religions exist side by side without much conflict." (p. 5) Uwegwere is one of the oldest communities in Ogoni-land. That has a democratic government setting, void of discrimination and tribalism. Christianity is the dominant religion of the community and the rich cultural heritage of Uwegwere is second to none.

Social Activities

Culturally, the people of Uwegwere Boue are rich and loaded with cultural festivals which include masquerading and dance. The "tee-bee" masquerade display and *kpankpan* music are scenes to behold, while the prestigious "Jimpie" masquerade display which comes up once in four years is a first class tourist attraction. Oriloye (2011) affirms that "the *Rankiri*, like most African dance is a collaborative event as it involves almost all the community members. Thus the performance becomes an instrument for cultural perpetuation and consolidation of their corporate unity." (p. 19) The community also boasts of *kpankpan* music for conflict resolution and unity of the community for peaceful co-existence.

The Emergence of *Kpankpan* Music before the Colonial Era

Prior to the colonial era, Bakor informs that the *kpankpan* music group was a war like group that migrated with the Ogoni ancestors from ancient Ghana during a civil war in parts of that ancient empire, under the leadership of their empress named Kwaanwaa. The *kpankpan* music group form part of the people that escaped with her during this period. The group travelled with the ancestors along the coast with canoes and tools as well as weapon which helped them to scale through the harsh wild environment. *Kpankpan* music group served as a formidable army which through the support of spirit-medium, priest and medicine men, sustained their stability along the coast. The group was known for weapons and tools which helped them to strife for peace and to carry out other cultural activities like farming, fishing, hunting etc. They acquired their weapon in the period of silent trade through the exchange of Gold and other natural resources around them which made them a formidable army that fought for the peaceful co-existence of the then Ogoni-land. The *kpankpan* music group as a warlike group, was notable among the people of Eastern Niger Delta (present Rivers State). In line with this view; Pereira (1937) described a weapon carried by a people he had seen in the Eastern Niger Delta (present Rivers State), pointing that the people were warlike" and that he had not seen their type of weapon elsewhere except like those of the white Moors of Berbery. It is worthy to note that the *kpankpan* music group existed in Rivers State, Ogoni precisely; from about 15 B.C. Oral tradition shows that *kpankpan* cultural group was one of the oldest groups in *Bo-ue* community thus, making it as old as the people.

Kpankpan Music Group Clash with the Colonial Masters

Bakor further states that the *kpankpan* group was a warlike group found among the *Ogoni* ancestors which migrated from ancient Ghana under the leadership of a strong woman called Kwaanwaa, during the ancient empire. The group existed as a warlike group throughout the period, not until the colonial era, when there was a clash between the colonial army and the warlike *kpankpan* group. The period was evidenced with a "gorilla war" against the colonial army. The gorilla-war was such that they struck and disappeared and were not overcome by the colonial army due to their mystical powers and weapons. The group experienced a great fall as they were later subdued by the colonial masters who arrested and brought all the chiefs to the then

police station at “Igwenga” (present IkotAbasi), with a condition of having the *kpankpan* warlike group to surrender to the colonial army. This period marked the conversion of the “warlike” group to a musical group.

Kpone-Tonwe also confirms that the colonial masters discovered the music because it unified the able segment of the society, in their intelligence report, they found out that the (picture) *kpanpan* sacred society was evident with able warriors which they could not destroy, they observed that the *kpankpan* secret society could mobilize a large army of able bodied young men within a short notice, so they tried to fight the *kpankpan* secret society of *Bo-ue* area but could not succeed because, the *kpankpan* army employed a gorilla warfare tactics. The next step they took was to arrest the chiefs and elders (who by tradition were not supposed to vacate their domain in time of crisis), and deported them to Egwanga now called Ikot Abasi.

The action taken by the colonial masters made the *kpankpan* secret society to surrender. This led to the capture of some members of the group for slave trade. Those who were not captured did not stop, but continued with the music of *kpankpan* as a notable music of the community.

The Adoption of *Kpankpan* Music Group into Traditional Government

After the colonial era, the group was adopted by the traditional rulers of *Bo-ue* community, as a watch-dog over the community. The members were charged with the role of maintaining peace and order in the community. The then *kpankpan* group served as a military to the traditional council. They were entrusted with the power to carry out punishment on any one who caused any problem on any family or the community at large. The music was rooted in the *Bo-ue* territory, making it a trans-generational music of the people. The origin of this music in *Bo-ue* community is derived from oral tradition, by Zene Iwerebe who states that the *kpankpan* music group was a trans-generational group controlled by prominent men of old who were referred as the custodians of the group. One of them was Mr. Lelookpo who was a father to Mr. Igbaale who took over the group as a leader, with his friend called Naabeenyie Saah, who was also a member of the group. After their own generation, the group was later headed by Mr. Losi Adamnwini, whose compound, the *kpankpan* shrine was built. Mr. Iwere registered as a member when the group was headed by Mr. Losi Adamnwini, and others like Mr. Gbima Barabe, Mr. Forgorbu Naanyi and Mr. Naadah-Gorm Naakorobee, all of blessed memories. Members of the group were notable men of the community who were talented in music and dance.

Mr. Doosia Anani, who is also a member of *kpankpan* music group, narrates in an oral interview, that the group was known for mystical dance, which is also referred to as the dance of the brave, it involved the test of power. The group was known for witchcraft. Their powers were not meant to hurt genuine members of the community but to detect crime committed by any member of the community. Doosia informs that some of the notable members then were Mr. Sunute Poronee, Mr. Goddey Inaata, Mr. Mene-waa, Ikordume Jeroam. He further states that the powers acquired by members of the *kpankpan* music group, may be considered to have led to the disbandment of the group because those powers acquired by members of the group were later used to inflict pains and other forms of wickedness on others throughout the silent period of the group.

Kpankpan music group existed as a strong force that fought to unite the stronghold of the *Bo-ue* community, it was the first traditional and secret group that existed in the community with the ancestors. The group existed before the emergence of *Amanikpo*, which now serves as the most terrifying and scary group of the community. It was such that when the *Kpankpan* music group was performing, every other group suspended their outing as sign of respect to the group, and as a result of the value associated with them in the then *Bo-ue* community. After the colonial era, the group began to operate as law enforcement agencies to the community in playing executive roles in the community such as creation and maintenance of farm roads, spearheading community contributions, retrieving of old debt, securing important events of the community as well as punishing anyone who violate the norms and values of the community. The major importance of this *Kpankpan* music group was that they existed as a panacea for conflict resolutions, it is worthy to note that the legacy of the group formed the basis for operation to the present *Amanikpo* group in *Uwegwere* community. Dumsira Nuania Bari, in an oral interview, also disclosed that the *Uwegwere* *Bo-ue* community is one of the most peaceful communities in the entire *Ogoni* communities, this is as a result of the legacy made by the *Kpankpan* music group in times past and present.

Membership/Mode of Initiation

Membership of *Kpankpan* music group is based on choice, however, the standard for recruitment is based on lifestyle. Anyone with a questionable character, is not allowed to register as a member. Eeteh Dumlumene in an interview states that the *kpankpan* music is a traditional play of which registered members are seen to be *Baari nee* (Elder) The group does not recruit people who practice witchcraft as members because *kpankpan* music group already involves the test of power among members. Whenever any member is found wanting in any way, he is fined and suspended or banished from the community, no matter how highly placed the person is.

He also narrates that the group is older than him, nevertheless, he became a member as a result of his delight for cultural activities, which perhaps, involves music and dance. This implies that membership was based on interest and credibility, above all, a potential member must be found worthy in character, other mode of initiation includes the trans-generational method whereby a father decides to initiate his son on the ground of paying all the necessary bills while alive, on the other hand, a worthwhile son is persuaded to join at the death of his father. The membership or initiation does not require any form of sacrifice or rituals, aside the usual traditional libation, the requirements for initiation include the preparation of traditional sauce called “Goh” which is prepared with *Okazi* leaf (*gnetum Africanum*), oil, pepper, and salt and spiced with grinded limestone including a

A jar of palm wine

One schnapps of dry gin (*kaikai*)

Payment of the sum of N30.00 as initiation fee then.

Rules and Regulations of the Group

The *kpankpan* music group is a traditional music group whose norms are set to spiritual standards. Members are not allowed to involve in activities that will disrupt the peaceful co-existence of the community, keeping company with a mother of twins is an abomination, and members are not allowed to expose any member carrying out significant roles such as the lead singer, the drummer, the composer, the one in charge of rituals or the spirit-men among them, the group is notable for credibility, any member who violates any of the above mentioned rules. The group operates under the directives of the traditional council, having the paramount ruler as the traditional commander. The *kpankpan* music group was not known for bribery and corruption, rather members are known for carrying out every task with right judgment, calling to order, any one guilty of any crime in the community. The *kpankpan* music is usually performed in unique occasions such as the death of members, death of paramount rulers. Other occasions include conflict resolution between communities (both internal and external) as well as the preparation for a festival or for any significant celebration involving the entire community. The music is not performed in occasions such as marriages, birth day, naming ceremonies, and circumcision as well as the burial of non-members.

Rites of Death

The group usually stage a display during the death of members, on the other hand, one of the credible sons of the deceased is usually persuaded to join the group nevertheless, it has always been a matter of choice and not under pressure. In agreement with this view, Mr. Dum Adamwini notes that his membership was not based on age, rather it was at the occasion of his grandfather's burial (Mr. Losi Adamwini), the chief custodian of the group. According to him, the group came for display after his grandfather's death, and during the process, he was carried into the instrumental booth where the drummers and singers performed. It was from that day he became the chief custodian of the group in the position of his grandfather. It therefore, implies that death of members also serves as means of recruitment. The death of a member does not require much task among members, rather the members are entertained after performance and at a very low cost. Hence, members who are on suspension are not allowed to partake in such a performance and entertainment rites.

Mode of Performance

Deenwii further explains that the group at times performs at night when others are asleep, it is a sacred group which its performances should not be watched by non-members, they therefore perform in the night, non-members usually remain in-doors until the end of their performance. The night performance is usually based on special assignment such as contribution towards community projects and other issues which must be based on the interest of the entire community. Other assignments include the excommunication or banishment of evil doers from the community, or to carry out warning to people involved in conflicts whether internal or external. The day light performances were usually for significant occasions such as death of members, paramount ruler or the security of on-going events such as taking of oath by defaulters. During the day-time performance, the instrumentalist, singers and other key leaders usually confine themselves in a booth, in order to avoid the exposure of members with significant roles, except the dancers.



Kpankpan Music Group Dancers in action during performance close to the instrumentalist's booth

The Musical Instruments of *Kpankpan* Music Group

There are nine (9) musical instruments used by the *Kpankpan* music group during performances. These instruments are classified under Idiophones, Aerophones, and Membranophones families.

IDIOPHONE INSTRUMENTS

S/N	LOCAL NAME	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
1.	<i>ErebakaIsangini Gee</i>	Seven (7) Indian Bells
2.	<i>Akere</i>	Wooden Block
3.	<i>AkpaAkoro</i>	Clamp Shell
4.	<i>Aba Igaraba</i>	Wooden Clapper made with Bamboo stick
5.	<i>Igira</i>	Metal gong

AEROPHONE INSTRUMENTS

S/N	LOCAL NAME	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
5.	<i>GbaraMii</i>	Calabash
6.	<i>Koo Nama</i>	Animal Horn

MEMBRANOPHONE INSTRUMENTS

S/N	LOCAL NAME	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
7	<i>GbenekaKeres</i>	Stationery Drum
8	<i>TaaBuhnKere</i>	Triplet Konga Drum



GbenekaKere (Stationary Drum) and has been in use since 1985



TaaBuhnKere (Triplet Konga Drum) that plays supportive roles to the Gbeneka Kere



Koo Nama (Animal Horn) part of kpankpan musical instruments



Fig. 11: ErebakaIsanginiGee ne gira (7 Indian Bells and a Metal gong)



Akere (Small wooden drum)



AkpaAkoro (Clamp Shell)

Findings

Kpankpan music of Bo-ue community is as old as the community. Members of the group are recruited from the community they are feared and revered both within and outside the community. The *kpankpan* music protects the community from any external aggression. In an oral interviews, it was discovered that before the colonial era, *kpankpan* music group was war-like, which migrated with the Ogoni forefathers from ancient Ghana, under the Empress Kwanwaa. The group serve as a formidable army which, through the support of spirit-medium, chief priests and medicine men, sustained their stability along the coast.

Kpankpan music group clashed with the colonial masters, the period experienced “gorilla warfare technique” against the colonial army. The war was such that the *kpankpan* group, through their music, struck the colonial army and disappeared due to their mystical powers and weapons. To capture the *kpankpan* music group, all the chiefs in the community were arrested and handed over to the police at Igwenga and this period marked the beginning and end of the music group.

Members of the group were notable men of the contemporary community, who are talented in music and dance. The group operates as law enforcement agency to the community in carrying out executive roles in the community such as creation and maintenance of farm roads, retrieving debts, punishing anyone who violates the norms and values of the community. Registration is open to upright members of the community. The group also does not register

witchcraft members, it is noted for credibility, members are not allowed to get involved in activities that would disrupt the peace of the community. The musical instruments are confined in a booth during performance.

Conclusion

The advent of *kpankpan* music group brought relative peace in the community, and protection from both internal and external aggression, the community has enjoyed good farm roads, good performances and entertainment, they have, through their music banished evil doers from the community and with the support of the chiefs and members of the community, conflicts are resolved amicably and the parties involved in the conflict accept their verdict without arguments.

The *kpankpan* music group possesses magical powers that even non-members of the group and non-indigenes living in the community respect and adhere to their instructions in the community. Their musical instruments are well preserved and protected, the music group is old as the community and will continue to exist for the people of Bo-ue community and serve as the military arm to the people, in as much as Christianity has infiltrated into the group and it has affected the *kpankpan* music.

Recommendations

- 1.All males in the community should be allowed to register as a member of the group for continuity and the evil ones among them will be forced to change from their evil ways.
- 2.Christianity and tradition should be allowed to function side by side in the community for mutual understanding and peaceful relationships.
- 3.Other communities in Ogoni should adopt the *kpankpan* music group for conflict resolutions and well respected
- 4.Due to the magical powers the *kpankpan* music members possess, their musical instruments and instrumentalists are confined in a booth for their performance and the group should be allowed to perform in an open space where members of the community will watch and enjoy their performance.

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