

## DÉDEKÉ'S 'MÁ GBÀGBÉ ILÉ': A CREATIVE APPROACH TO DECOLONIZING CHURCH HYMNODY



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### **Abstract**

The latter part of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the process of decolonizing the Europeanized hymnody of the Yorùbá Church. Towards the close of the century, lack of African cultural identity in the liturgy of the Yorùbá Church became an issue. The agitation for this de-Europeanization and Africanization was championed by a group known as the Nationalists group. Nigerian composers with initial bi-musical exposure to African and Euro-American music rose to the challenge by composing African alternatives and supplementary hymns for usage during liturgical services. Some of the champions of this indigenous creativity are, Josiah Ransome-Kútí, T. K. E. Philips, Felá Sówándé, G. B. Oríerè, Olá Olúdé and Dayò Dédeké, who is the focus of this research paper. Dedeke, compiled his works in a book titled, '*má gbàgbé ilé*' (don't forget your heritage). The theoretical framework for this research is the William Cross's racial identity development theory. The paper analyzed the book thematically, furthered, with a musicological analysis of three of the songs. The primary source of eliciting information for this research are the musical notations and the contextualization of the songs in the book, '*ma gbagbe ile*', while the secondary sources are journals, magazines, text books and lecture notes. The research shows that the lyrical content contextualizes scriptures, uses Yorùbá metaphors, and strongly considers events in the liturgical calendar. The melody matches the tonality of the Yorùbá text reasonably. Furthermore, the work recommends an anthological records of past and current contributions of Yorùbá hymnologists and encourages more creativity in Yorùbá hymnody.

**Keywords:** Dedeke, Decolonization, Colonialism, Yorùbá Hymnody, Self-Identity Development Theory.

### **Background Infromation**

The foundation for the Yoruba Church was laid before the conclusion of the first half of the nineteenth century. The new Church witnessed the introduction of an alien culture, that was characterized with changing of names from African names to European and Hebrew names, singing of hymns in English and Latin languages (Omojola 1995, Adegbite 2001, Morohunfola 2016). Collins (2005, p. 119), in his paper, 'Decolonization of Ghanaian Popular Entertainment', described a similar suddenness, which took place in Ghana as 'cultural shock', that came about as a result of cultural imperialism. In his reason for the shock, he said there was no gradual straight line adaptation from African cultural performance to imported models. The first step to Africanize the Yoruba Church hymnody was to translate the English words to Yoruba, using the European hymn tune to sing it, a step that led to a lot inflectional correspondence problem between the imposed melody and the Yoruba meaning of the text. Towards the end of the century, the need for the incorporation of Yoruba cultural identity practices into the Europeanized liturgy became an issue. This issue laid the foundation for the decolonization of the Yoruba Church liturgy (Omojola 1995, Adegbite 2001, Morohunfola 2016).

Colonialism, coloniality and imperialism are related words to 'decolonization'. What is known as European colonization (also called modern colonization), started between the late 1400s to the early 1500s. The process of decolonization continued through all the world wars till the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dominguez & Seglem, 2023, p. 3). In his intellectual journey to defining colonialism, Horvath (1972, pp. 46-47), started with the universally accepted definition of colonialism, which he described as "a form of domination----the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals of groups", it could also be seen as economic exploitation, it will not exclude cultural change. He further identified intergroup domination and intragroup domination as the two types of group domination. Homogeneity and heterogeneity are the two criterions he used in differentiating between the two. The domination process in a heterogeneous society is known as intergroup domination, while the

domination process in a homogenous community is known as intragroup domination.

In the old Yoruba kingdom, the domination of the Oyo kingdom in the seventeenth and eighteenth century (Omojola, 2012, p.2), over other parts of the Yoruba land such as the Ekiti, Ijebu, Egba and many other part of Yoruba land can be regarded as intergroup domination. In societies, we also have stratified class arrangements in which power, status and wealth determines the relational structure, a type of domination known as intragroup domination. However, colonialism has to do with the intergroup domination. He defined Colonialism as “that form of intergroup domination in which settlers in significant numbers migrate permanently to the colony from the colonizing power”. Furthermore, he defined imperialism as “a form of intergroup domination where in few, if any, permanent settlers from the imperial homeland migrate to the colony”. Dominguez and Seglem (2023, p. 5) explained how the political, economic and socio-cultural dominion is over, but, how ‘the de-facto systems and structure of that era remained in place’, a trend that Maldinaddo-Tores (2007, p.243) described as colonialism given way to ‘coloniality’.

The term ‘decolonization’ connotes the undoing of colonization. The word decolonization was also described as “cultural, psychological, and economic freedom for indigenous people with the goal of achieving indigenous sovereignty... the right and ability of indigenous people to practice self-determination over their land, cultures, and political and economic systems” (cbglcollab.org).

The decolonization of the Yoruba church liturgical music which began in the later part of the nineteenth century as a result of a self-identity development promotion, was championed by the founding fathers of Nationalism in Nigeria. Some of who are, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Bishop James Johnson, Mojola Agbebi, John Payne and Tejumade Osholake Johnson (Ubaku, Emeh & Anyikwa 2014, p. 57). A good number of composers with bi-musical exposure from southwest Nigeria arose to the challenge by providing practical alternatives for the Church, which they did by composing hybrid indigenous music for liturgical usage in the Yoruba Church. Revd Canon Josiah J. Ransome-Kuti is the earliest known composer of Yoruba hymnody

(Olaniyan, 2001: 59). His contributions to Yoruba hymnody are included as appendix in the Yoruba hymnbook of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Revd. Ola Olude's contribution to Yoruba hymnody are compiled in a book titled '*Mayokun*'. 'Orin iyin' is a compilation of Bola Fadeyi's work, while Lafadeju's compositions are compiled in '*Imole Okan*'. '*Oniruru orin fun igba ati akoko*' are G. B. Oriere's compositions. Yemi Olaniyan compiled his own in a book titled '*Orin Ijosin*'. Some other notable Yoruba hymnologist are Olaolu Omideyi and Ajayi Kolawole Ajisafe (Olaniyan, 2021: 59-60). This research is focused on Dayo Dedeke's works that he compiled in a book titled '*Ma Gbagbe Ile*'.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this research is the racial identity development theory. In explaining the theory, I depended on a model developed by William Cross in 1971, titled *Nigrescence* a word with a Latin provenance. It can be referred to as, becoming black or developing racial identity. This is a word that impacts those that experience slavery or white supremacy. There are contemporary psychological identity instigations for people of African American descent. Enslavement has been described as "deliberate forceful repression of traditional languages and mental development to stifle the desire for freedom and to make freedom feel unattainable and unrealistic (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigrescence>)". The preferred strategy of the slave owners is to cause broken spirit for the Negroes, rather than causing physical restraints. In trying to explain the transformational process of a Negro to a black man, William Cross developed this racial identity development theory (1971).

The theory of racial identity development was included in the 1991 landmark publication of Cross titled 'Shades of Black Diversity in African American identity'. From his writing, the theory believed, African Americans are 'socialized into the predominant culture, which resulted in diminished racial identification' (Thompson, 2001: 155-165). The theory of racial identity development model postulates that, instance of racism or racial discrimination can precipitate a consciousness for racial identity, which lead to a deep understanding of what a united race can play in lives of African Americas. The Negro race has moved through distinct psychological stages that has transformed them from the stage of self-degradation to the stage of

self-pride. The process of developing black identity was described as 'to become black' by Frantz Fanon one of Nigrescence theorists.

William Cross, created a five stage racial identity development model, namely, Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion, Emersion and Internalization. The white dominant culture is idealized during the pre-encounter stage, while the black world view is denigrated. This involved a formation of anti-black behaviors and the romantization of the white culture and whiteness (Cross, 1971, pp. 15-16 & Endale, 2018, p. 514). At the encounter stage, the personality identity will be separated from the group identity. The new conscious awareness of the non-viability of the white world and the need for a new identity is apparent. This new awareness is usually triggered by a non-pleasant occurrence within the society that touches the inner thinking of a black person. An event that spurred a re-evaluation of the relationship between blacks and whites, which has evoked a need for own self-identity (Cross, 1971, pp. 17-18 & Endale, 2018, p. 514).

Psychological and physical withdrawal into the black world and blackness becomes some features of the immersion stage. The individual self-identity will be dominated by black racial identity. The idea of what it means to be a black may not be too clear at this stage. At this point the individual thinking will be dichotomous about blacks and whites. At the Emersion stage, the individual will accept ways to be a black and adopt measures to enact blackness. It will also witness rebuilding of deconstructed relationships with those considered to be under-serving blackness during the stage of immersion (Cross, 1971, pp. 18-20 & Endale, 2018, p. 515). The internalization stage will witness a resolution of dissonance caused in the transition from old self to a new emerging self. The cultural style of individuals at this point will be rooted in informed African history and heritage. The individual will be connected to his African heritage spiritually and psychologically (Cross, 1971, pp. 22-23 & Endale, 2018, p. 515).

Looking at the model just discussed, we can see how it can be related to the development that took place in the area of Hymnody, art music and popular music from the mid-nineteenth century to the introduction and the blossoming of Yoruba hymnody. At the inception of the Yoruba Church, the relationship of the Yoruba converts with the Euro-American missionaries was very cordial. Converts were doing so many things to idealize the

tradition of the colonialist, while denigrating their own culture. Many of them are picking European names and denouncing their native names. Converts were adopting new ways of dressing to the detriment of their own native ways of dressing. In this new found religion singing of songs was without dancing or the playing of African musical instruments. African members also agreed with the authority of the new Church that African musical instruments are fetish and should not be part of the Christian worship. Becoming like whites was considered the ideal thing by most members of the Church. Towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century, historical events fit the description of the 'Encounter' stage. At this point the experience of the Yoruba church members pointed to the non-viability of clinging to the ways of the European missionaries and the colonial masters, there were unpleasant experiences that laid the foundation for an emergence of a new African identity. One of the key factors that added to the inevitability of taking steps to Africanize the Church was the highhandedness of the European missionaries. Aiyegboyin and Ishola (1999) stated a typical case of highhandedness that occurred in 1888, that was meted on Revd. Moses Oladejo Stone (Nigerian) by Revd. W. J. David (American) both from the Baptist denomination. According to them, the anti-white ill feelings started around 1870. Revd. David refused to raise the salary of Oladejo Stone. Oladejo responded to the above refusal by resigning his position as Pastor in the Church, Revd. David later accepted the resignation without the consent of the Church council. This occurrence led to the ceding of a great percentage of the members of the First Baptist Church Lagos to form the first Nigeria indigenous Church, named the Native Baptist Church. Omojola (1995), also explained the tensions caused with the non-appointment and non-promotion of African clergies. He further explained the doctrine of the church that abolished so many African cultural practices, preventing African cultural identity which also became a big issue. Concerning the civil service, native workers were not allowed in the leadership cadre in the civil service, there was also the unrepresentativeness of the Natives (Saras) working with the Lagos government in the taking of political decisions, they were also not to be allowed to get to senior positions in the civil service (Ubaku, Emeh & Anyikwa 2014, p. 57).

The next stage from the self-identity development theory is the 'Immersion' stage, at this point, the self-identity was dominated with black race identity.

From the historical records available I posit that the Nigeria Nationalist movement was at the forefront of the campaign for the promotion of the Black race identity, a promotion that began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Traditionally, Nigeria Nationalism began in the nineteenth century, with key exponents such as Mojola Agbebi, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Bishop James Johnson. The nationalist renewed their pride by turning angrily to the culture of their forebears for reasons such as denials from attaining of respectable positions because of their racial inclination. They were great examples and they were able to create a strong awareness in the promotion of African identity. Most leaders of the movement rejected a wholesale westernization by rejecting European dresses and names. David Vincent became Mojola Agbebi, George William Johnson changed his name to Osholake Tejumade Johnson and Rev. S. H. Samuel changed his to Adegboyega Edun (Olusanya, 1980).

The post-immersion stage is known as the 'emersion stage'. The acceptance of the multitude of ways to enact blackness and promote the development of the racial identity is known as the emersion stage. The resultant effect of the immersion stage on the music of the Yoruba Church led to indigenous creativity from Yoruba church musicians. These led to the emergence of Yoruba Art music, Yoruba hymnody and the Christian influenced popular music. The last stage of the racial identity development theory is the 'Internalization stage'. At this stage there was a resolution of the dissonance between the old self and the new self. In the last over a century development of Yoruba liturgical music, the music has witnessed what I will call 'progressive traditionalism' borrowing the coinage of Austin Emielu (2018, pp 206-229). The style has witnessed a lot of syncretism of African and western musical values, without losing Yoruba racial identity. The above argument is to prove the relationship and relevance of the research with the theory of self-identity development theory.

### **About Dayo Dedeke (1921-1993)**

In writing this brief biography, I relied on the earlier works of Morohunfola (2020, p. 70) and Owoaje (2019/2020, pp.111-116).

Godwin Adedayo Dedeke, Music Educator, Organist/Choirmaster, Composer, Musicologist and Administrator, was born in Abeokuta on 2<sup>nd</sup> of

December 1921. He later attended Abeokuta Grammar School, when Revd. Isreal Oladotun Kuti was the Principal. Dedeké worked for some years in a number of private and public organizations before proceeding to the Trinity College, University of London to study music. He later attended the Melbourne University, Australia for further studies.

His journey into music began when he joined his family Church, this was further strengthened by his father, Deji Dedeké, who was also a Choirmaster. As a high school student, his Principal, Revd. Kuti built on the musical foundation laid by his father. While he was under the tutelage of Kuti, he was encouraged to further his musical knowledge by learning how to play the African drums. Dedeké became an accomplished musician with good bi-musical exposure, by the time he was leaving the high school.

On the completion of his course in the United Kingdom, Dedeké returned to Nigeria to contribute to music education and Church music in 1963, the same year he published his musical compositions in a book titled '*ma gbagbe ile*'. He composed many other songs that are still popular till date, one of which is the Ogun state anthem. He retired from the civil service in 1979 as the chief protocol officer in the Government office. He won so many awards in his lifetime, one of which is the Member of the Order of the Federal Republic (MFR). He was the Diocesan Organist of the Egba Egbado Diocese until his demise in 1993.

### **Analysis of *Ma Gbagbe Ile***

**General Description:** The song book is a compilation of fifty Yoruba songs that has thirty-six sacred songs and fourteen secular songs. These songs are used as Yoruba alternatives during liturgical services, by choirs and in schools.

**Publisher:** London Oxford University Press

**Year of Publication:** 1963

**Pages:** 113

**Language:** Yoruba

**Metric Analysis**

**6/8:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 47, 48, 49 & 50. (38 songs)



2/4: 5, 14, 16, 28, 31 & 46. (6 songs)

4/4: 6, 18, 30, & 43. (4 songs)

2/2: 25 & 45. (2 songs)

**Topical Analysis:** I considered the contextualization of the songs in order to group the songs under the following liturgical events:

Christmas: 1, 10, 13, 17 and 33.

Evening Songs: 2 and 4.

Opening of a Service: 3 and 11.

Closing of service: 5, 12, 18 and 32.

Supplicative songs: 6, 7, 8, 14, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30 and 35.

God's attribute: 9, 13, 19, 26 and 31.

Reformative songs: 16 and 34.

Children songs: 28 and 29.

### Analysis of Wa ba mi gbe (Song 32)

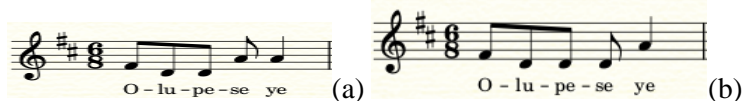
#### WA BA MI GBE

Smoothly and quietly

1. Wa ba mi  
2. Wa ba mi  
3. Wa ba mi  
4. Wa ba mi

gbe, a - le fe - re - le  
gbe, a - iye t'a wa ni  
gbe, o - ju mo ma fe,  
gbe, a - le fe - re - le

**General Discription:** The fourteen bar song is arranged for unison singing with piano accompaniment. The song is in strophic form with 4 verses. The song is a re-composition of an earlier hymn by Henry Lyte, popular for eventide, titled, 'abide with me'. Which is also a practical response to the need to decolonize the Yoruba liturgy. The song is in the key of D major with 6/8 timing. The song began with a two bar introduction, in an ostinato form, in which the first bar was repeated in the second bar, the only difference between the two bars, was the bass part of the second bar, which was repeated exactly an octave below. Bars 3 to 8 of the accompaniment is also in ostinato form, using mostly broken chords. The movement from bar 9 to the end is mostly chord wise movement, apart from bar 10 and the broken chord on the left hand of the last bar. The rhythm suggests an African drum cyclic pattern of playing rhythms together. The range of the melody is perfect octave (D4-D5). The vocal part has an evenly distributed six phrases (3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 11-12 & 13-14). The vocal part is in monophonic form, the harmony for the melodic line was provided on the piano. The vocal part began on bar 3. The first two phrases of the song (bars 3-4 & 5-6) is within a narrow range of a perfect fifth (E4-B4). The melody moved to an upper register in the next two phrases (7-8 & 9-10) within a wider range of a perfect octave (D4-D5). The compass of the melody reduced to a range of perfect fifth (D4-A4) on the last two phrases (11-12 & 13-14). The scale of the melody is the five note pentatonic scale of d, r, m, s and l. The tonal inflection of the melody is in perfect consonance with the Yoruba meaning in the first and the last verse. The second and the third verse has a slight tonal challenge, a little alteration on one or two notes will lead to a perfect consonance. Example is on bar 12 (example a), changing the second to the last note to D (example b), will give the word *Olupese* a perfect meaning.



Likewise bar 13 (example c), there was a problem of 'internal period' that affected the Yoruba meaning of '*mo sa di o*'. Changing of the note D to E (example d) will lead to a perfect meaning.



**Textual Analysis**

Wa ba mi gbe, Ale fere le tan,	Oh be with me, for shadows conquer the light,
Okunkun su mo si jinna si 'le o,	Far from my homeland in darkness I dwell now,
Bi oluranlowo miran ba ye,	Lonely and helpless I am in the night,
Oluranlowo alaini o,	Helper of helpless, Father above,
Wa ba mi gbe ooo	Come be with me now.
W aba mi gbe, a-iye ta wa ni pa,	Come be with me, for hard and lonely is life,
Opo lo ri oluranlowo o,	Though in this world there are many who give help,
Lati gbe 'ja l'aiye nwon ti ku o,	Those who could help me have gone in the strife,
Olugbeja ye mo un be o,	Helper of the helpless, I beg thee Lord,
Wa ba mi gbe ooo.	Come be with me now.
Wa ba mi gbe, o ju mo ma fe mo,	Oh stay with me, the darkness nearly is done,
Ibanuje d'ayo esu salo,	Sorrow and evil are changing to joy now,
Da kun pe-se ye wa fun mi layo,	God the provider, never leave me alone,
Olupese ye mo sa di o	Helper of helpless, I look to Thee,
Wa ba mi gbe ooo	Oh stay with me now.

The contextualization of this supplicative song is built on Henry Lyte's 'abide with me', but the song is not in perfect consonance with the Yoruba translation, however, it is a creative Africanized alternative for it. The first verse is almost the same with the colonial translation of the song. The verse two and three are composed by the composer. His usage of words is a further authentication of Yoruba identity. With Dedeke's melody and the lyrical content, the challenges of the direct translation of Lyte's English version is no more, making the song to be more meaningful and culturally relevant. The inspiration for the text is from Luke 24: 29, wherein two co-travelers with Jesus going to Emmaus encouraged Jesus to stay with them, for it is nearly evening'. Most worshippers consider this hymn as an evening hymn, but the usage of 'fast falls the eventide' is metaphoric, the hymnologist is

encouraging believers in Christ to lean on God when helpless. It is a supplicative music for God's abiding presence, when all around fails.

### **Analysis of *Wa Eyin Olooto* (Song 33)**

This is a ten bar song, in strophic form, arranged for a three-part choir and piano. The song is normally accompanied with Yoruba percussions in addition to the keyboards. The key of the song is D and the timing is 6/8, the song is arranged for Christmas celebration, borrowing the title of the renowned hymn titled, 'oh come all ye faithful', a hymn composition ascribe to John Francis Wade.

The song began with a two bars introduction, in a responsorial pattern similar to Bach's two part inventions. The composer used the melody of the song in composing the introduction. The initial melody of the song was responded too, by the two remaining voices which created an overlapping harmony in the last three beats of bar 3. This was followed by the three voices singing in similar motion harmony on bar 4. There was another melodic call from bars 5 to 6 by voice one, and a response by voice 2 from bars 7 to 8 within the same vocal range. The voices united in harmony in singing bars 9 to 10. The melodic range is perfect octave from D4 to D5. The melodic materials used in constructing the melody is the pentatonic scale of d, r, m, s & l. The melody started high on voice 1 (D5), which is the highest note before meandering to end the melody on the tonic on the second voice (D4).

## WA EYIN OLOTO

Solemnly and majestically

1.Wa e - nyin  
2.Wa e - nyin  
3.Ma gba - gbe,

1.Wa e - nyin  
2.Wa e - nyin  
3.Ma gba - gbe,

Solemnly and majestically

### Textual Analysis

Wa enyin olooto,  
Eyo sese abi Jesu Oba,  
Abi I sinu ese ati ya,  
Ope ni f' Olorun

Come then ye faithful flock  
Come and rejoice, for our saviour is born,  
Born into suffering, born into sin,  
Glory be to God on high.

Wa enyin Onigbagbo,  
E f' irele ope wole gidi

Come then ye who believe,  
Humbly kneel down and give thanks to the  
Lord,

Emura giri ke p'egan esu,  
T'ori Oluwa Oba.

Be on your guard against evil and sin,  
The only King is God

Ma gbagbe Olorun fe,  
Okan irele s'ise ayo fun,  
Ojo Oluwa o jinna tete,  
Wo 'le ko wa sinmi,

Come then, ye who fear God,  
When we obey Him, God give us His love,  
Now that the day of Lord is not far,  
Come to His house in peace.

Wa enyin alayan fe,

Come then, beloved ones,

Olugbala Oba wa p'ese run,	Our King and Saviour will stand by us all,
Egbe ina esu danu jina,	Help us reject all temptations and sins,
Olorun dariji ni,	O God forgive us all.

**Textual Analysis:** This is another Yoruba hymnody contextualized as a viable alternative to celebrate the Christmas season. This is attested to by its borrowing of some words from the popular 'o come all ye faithful. The marriage of the newly composed melody and the lyrical content also solved the tonality challenges inherent in the Yoruba translation of the European 'O come all ye faithful' usually sung to the hymn tune 'Adeste Fideles'. Sowande (1967, p.260) noticed a tonality problem in the European translation the song above. The sentence 'O come all ye faithful' was translated as '*wa eyin olooto*', the hymn tune used for the song usually change the meaning to 'dig palm kernel, thou inconsistent person. The decolonized version which is not verbatim with the previous Yoruba translation is a viable creative alternative for decolonizing the Yoruba liturgy. The scripture reference for this hymn is from Luke 2, 4-7, 13-14 and John 1: 14. The song encourages the Christian faithful to adore Jesus Christ.