

MUSIC AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PUNISHMENT IN TRADITIONAL IGBO SOCIETY: INSIGHT FROM LEJJA IRON SMELTING COMMUNITY, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA.

Christian Chukwuma Opata and Sam Kenneth Iheanyi Chukwu, PhD

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

Abstract:

Music is a specially intended sound that demands mental ingenuity as well as production skill specific to it as a specialized (specie-specific) human activity. The logic, didactics and intention of music must be of some predetermined value or benefit to man to warrant the carving out of special time, creative genius and ingenuity, as well as methods and objects of production. Every music as a human product has a life and logic. Among the Lejja people of South-eastern Nigeria, the logic of some of their music is to evoke fear, awe and other disturbing/provocative emotions in their cultural audience. Some of the music is used in their traditional setting to preserve their ancient iron smelting industry. In this study, ethnographic data based on many years of field studies and participant observation would be used in conjunction with materials from relevant literatures. Using two songs and the music of a masked spirit *omaba*, believed to be the societies' incarnate being, this study would examine how music is used in a traditional Igbo society to preserve and perpetuate the laws associated with iron smelting by serving as media through which verdicts of the community are communicated to those who violated laws relating to the industry and preventing people who may have the same intention with the culprit from performing the same abominable act. The study is anchored on the deterrent theory of punishment as in this community, any time these set of music are performed, it automatically means that an accused person has been excommunicated, banished or ostracized from the community after fair hearing.

KEY WORDS: Music, Punishment, Iron smelting, Traditional economy, Lejja, Igbo, Nigeria.

Introduction:

Music is the most widely practiced and accessible of all the arts. It is so easily available and associated with entertainment, relaxation, punishment, reorientation and appeal to emotion that some people hardly pause to ponder on its implications in/for the society. Apart from local language, traditional music appears to be the most widely used medium of expression. Lejja people use their traditional music to give voice and sound to their collective thoughts, actions and even spirituality. In the words of Okafor, R.C¹, even as people make use of music, music makes use of them; for it places on them that imprint on character, mien, thoughts and carriage, which are commonly summarized as identity. In Nigeria, (especially among the Igbo ethnic group) music provided a necessary introduction to laws and traditions of society. Lejja Igbo considered music necessary for the preservation of their community as music was and still is inextricably interwoven with their life. As Nketia observed, citizens' participation in music and dance was an important means of strengthening the social bonds that bind them and the values that inspire their corporate life. Nketia surmised that in the specific case of music, performances provided at once an opportunity for sharing in creative experience and for using music as an avenue for the expression of group sentiment². The sentiment expressed by Lejja people any time these set of music are performed, is such that betray their anger over the culprit who is assumed to have defiled the iron industry by violating rules associated with some monuments in the square that are linked with smelting of iron.

Punishment as a concept is loaded with meanings. Such meanings emanate from the purpose/rationale for imposing such punishments. Arising from the latter, there emerged four theories of punishment. These are the deterrent theory, the retributive theory, the preventive theory and the reformatory theory³. In traditional Lejja society, their concept of punishment is in line with the deterrent theory as they mete out punishment to offender with the notion that the chief end of punishment is to deny the culprit the mental satisfaction or feeling of enjoyment/accomplishment in the act he/she has committed. As a way of neutralizing the satisfaction, punishment is used to inflict equal quantum of suffering on the offender so that it is no longer attractive for him or her to carry out such committal of crimes. Equally, the deterrent theory of punishment posits that punishment makes evil-doers examples and also serves as a warning to all that are like-minded with the offender⁴.

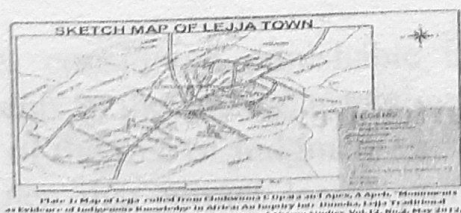


Plate 1: Map of Lejja, called *Enugu* (Igbo) or *Lejja* (Akan). "Mentoring as a technique of Anthropology in Africa: the Lejja case." *Journal of Anthropology of African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 11-12, 1972.

Music and Punishment: The Lejja Example.

Lejja community in Enugu State, Nigeria, is a very ancient community noted for iron smelting. Indeed, the history of iron smelting in this community has challenged the existing histories of iron smelting as the date of 2000 BC⁵ recovered through excavations in the area is contemporaneous with that of the Hittites who are assumed to be the ones who taught Africans how to smelt iron. However, the issue of iron smelting in Lejja community is not basically the concern of this paper. The venue where the punishment and the said songs/musics are performed is called *Otobo Ugwu Dunoka Lejja*. (village square of Ugwu Dunoka Lejja). This very square which is built with iron slag blocks is the parliamentary square of the entire town of Lejja. Lejja has three quarters and thirty-three villages as shown here under.

EJUONA QUARTER: villages under this quarter are:

1. EJERUM
2. AGUM
3. MBIAMONYE
4. AMAECHETA (formerly known as Amaju)
5. AMAEBO
6. AMAEZE
7. DUNOKA
8. AMAOVUKU
9. AMAOGBU
10. EZENOBE

UWANI QUARTER: villages under this quarter are:

1. UMUOROGBOGU
2. UGO
3. OKOCHIOWU
4. EJARIJA
5. OWERREANI
6. AMAOBINA
7. OBUKPA
8. EBARA
9. UPATA
10. UMUOGBUJI

AKAIBUTE QUARTER: villages under this quarter are:

1. AMUBE
2. AMELU
3. AMAEBO ATTAMA
4. EKPOROKE

5. UMUODA EZE
6. UMUODA DULUGWU
7. UMUAKPO UWELU
8. UMUAKPO UWANI
9. AMANKWO
10. UGA
11. UMUEFI
12. AMAESHIKEDIM
13. ISHAMELU

The square spans an area of about 500m² with a density of 3-4 slag blocks per m² in some of the densest area⁶.

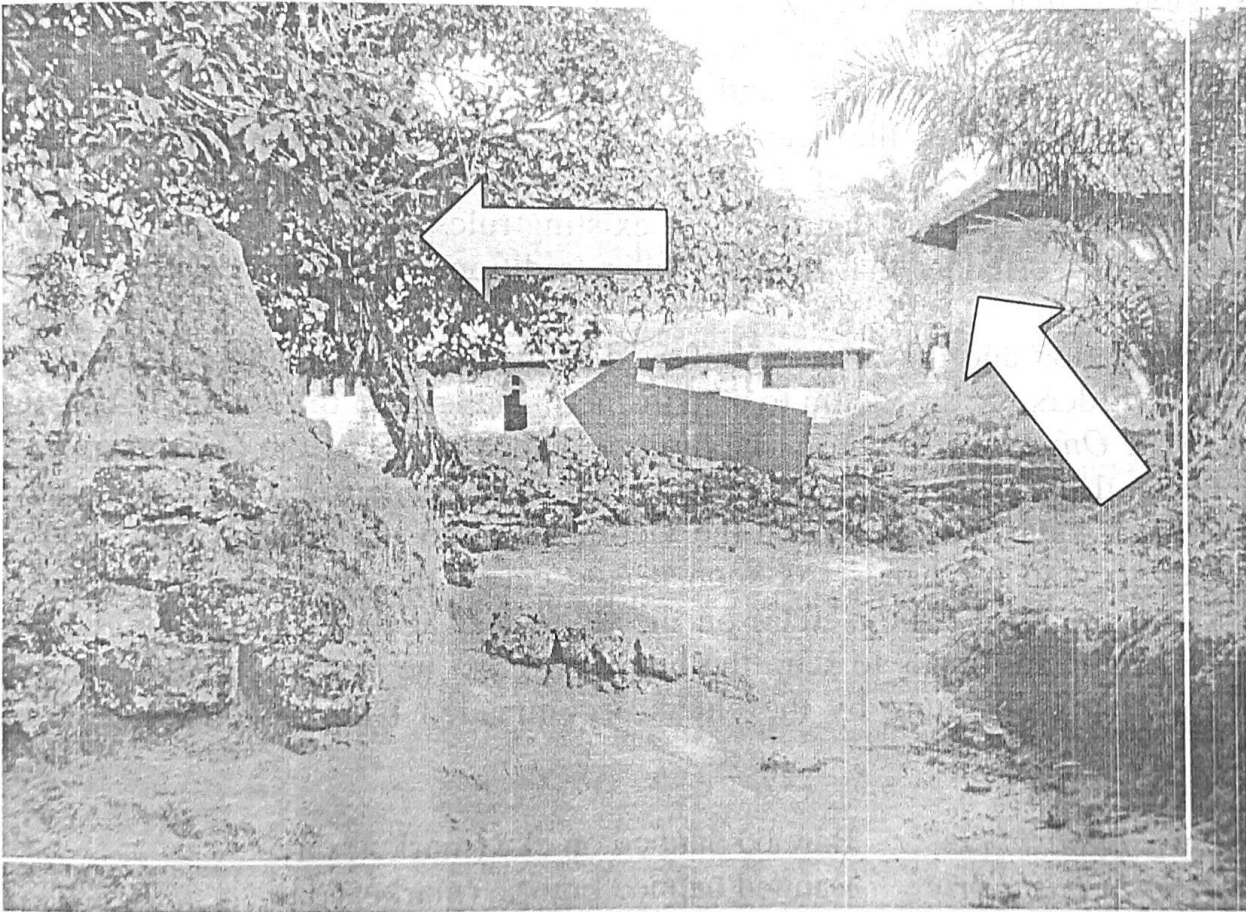


Plate 2: Photograph of Otopo Ugwu Dunoka Lejja. Red arrow indicates the concentration of slag blocks. Picture taken by the authors during field work in 2007.

Offences considered punishable in this square include pulling down any of the monuments in the square, urinating or defecating in or very close to the square, using the leaf of the tree of judgment (indicated by the Yellow arrow) to cook and a host of other rules that attract lesser punishments in the form of fines. In the event of someone caught defecating in the square, especially inside the *Okiti Akpuriagedede Oshimiri*- Omaba spirit house (indicated by White arrow) which is shaped like a furnace (the combustion chamber/ "kitchen" during smelting), the Council of Elders

would converge in the square following the sounding of the towns *Ogene* gong in all the villages by the town's central town crier called *Eri Oha*. These elders would walk into the *Okiti Akpuriagedede Oshimiri* - *Omaba* spirit house one after the other to ascertain the magnitude of the crime. After this, they would assemble at the square and all would sit on the slag blocks to take decision on what should be done to the offender. Whatever the decisions are, it remains binding and must be adhered to. The culprit would be made to come to the square naked, with very tender palm fronds (*omu nkwu*) tied round his/her waist. This practice still happens till date. However, this is done to those who had confessed to the crime committed, through his villages/community's representative in the council. Questions were directed to the culprit as to what must have led him/her into such ugly and reprehensible action. What is obvious is that, no answer given by the offender would make for a change in the punishment as there are local axioms to justify the councils' actions. In the local parlance as it concerns adjudication and punishment the view that *Nsua bu okwu ji ala* (precedents are used in the determination of cases), and that *echuchu alunna kpakwuru n'onu obu* (the cane of every lineage is fastened at the entrance to the house of that lineage) indicate that there are existing rules to be followed⁷. Hence, it is in punishing the offender that this particular traditional musical rendition comes into play.

After interrogation and the suspect confessed to the crime, two songs are sung by the Council of Elders for the victim to clap his/her hands round the square four times and run into the *Omaba* spirit house (the furnace shaped house of the *Omaba* spirits). Before entering the *Omaba* house, the offender would be made to produce an *Egbele*, a cock that must have crowed. Once the victim gets into the masked spirit house, he/she ceases to clap his hands. As soon he/she enters the spirit house, he/she is forced to clean the *Nshi* (shit/excreta) on the floor, and at that moment the culprit would use his/her bare hands to scup the human excreta he deposited in the house. The first song which is sung by the elders accompanied by hand clapping, is as follows:-

Wushi wushi bushi eke Banned banned on eke (market) day
Wushi wushi bushi orie Banned banned on orie (market) day

Wushi wushi bushi afor Banned banned on afor (market) day
Wushi wushi bushi nkwo Banned banned on nkwo (market) day
Putu ututu mma ekpala Every morning defecate like a fowl
 (without reservation) *Purere!* (Vocalized sound of scattering excreta everywhere)

Wushi Wushi

[Doh is F

Wu-shi wu-shi bu-shi Li-ke, wu-shi wu-shi bu-sh'O-rie, wu-shi wu-shi bu-shi A-for.

wu-shi wu-shi bu-shi N kwo, pu-'u - tu-tu me - e kpa-la pu- re - e re.

From this song it is obvious that a form of punishment as well as sentence is being passed over to the victim. First, he is banned all day and every week. The Igbo have four market days (Eke, Orie, Afor and Nkwo) which (they used as) their traditional week as opposed to the Gregorian calendar. Secondly, a curse is placed on the culprit (citizen) to “defecate like a fowl” and to “scatter his excreta everywhere”. This song, which is sung accapella, is a preamble to usher the culprit into the masked spirit house. It automatically informs the culprit that another phase of the punishment has begun.

While exiting the masked spirit house after clearing and cleaning the place, the second song is sung for the victim. The song runs thus:

Call: *Udele Udele*) x2 Vulture, Vulture) x2

Response: *Udele nyukwashi gi shi n'ishi* Vulture (should) defecate on your head

Call: *Udele Adada* Vulture of Adada deity (the goddess of the town)

Response: *Udele nyukwashi gi shi n'ishi* Vulture (should) defecate on your head

Call: *Udele Aboja* Vulture of Aboja (Aboja is the progenitor of Dunoka village where the square is situated)

Response: *Udele nyukwashi gi shi n'ishi* Vulture (should) defecate on your head, etc

Udele

1 | **Call** | : : s | s : - : l | - : m : - | m : - : m | **Response** | m : m : - s : m : - | s : m : - | m : m : - | m : - : s | s : - : l | - : m : - | m : - : m | **Call** | **Response**

U - de - le, u - de - le, u - de - le nyukwa shi gi shi n'í - shi. U - de - le, u - de - le, u -

4 | **Call** | m : m : - | s : m : - | s : m : - | m : m : - | m : - : s | s : - : l | - : s : - | m : - : m | **Response** | m : m : - s : m : - | s : m : - | m : m : - | m : m : - | **Call** | m : m : - | s : m : - | s : m : - | m : m : - | **Response**

de - le nyukwa shi gi shi n'í - shi. U - de - le, A - da - da, u - de - le nyukwa shi gi shi n'í -

7 | **Call** | m : - : s | s : - : l | : m : - | m : - : m | **Response** | m : m : - s : m : - | s : m : - | m : m : - | m : - : s | s : - : l | : m : - | m : - : m | **Call** | m : - : s | s : - : l | : m : - | m : - : m | **Response**

shi. U - de - le, A - bo - ja, u - de - le nyukwa shi gi shi n'í - shi.

Other gods and ancestors whose vultures are also mentioned in the course of the singing are Ugwoke Ugwuinyi (father of Lejja), Ugwelle (the supposed wife of Adada goddess), Idu Diara (the Premier Omaba spirit) and the ancestor of all the lineages that inhabit Ugwu Dunoka. As a rule the vultures of the progenitors of the offender are beckoned on, beginning with the immediate ancestors to that of his/her village. The essence of beckoning on the progenitor of the offender is to convey the message that even the offenders ancestors were part of the judgement and that nullifies any misgivings coming from the offenders as to whether the decision of the judges was right. This is because among the Igbo there is a saying that *Igbe adighi ama Onye nna ya nọ n'izu belu sọ m' Ọ dalu iwu* (One whose father is in a meeting is never found guilty except he flouted the law).

The above song is very provocative and thought provoking. Even though it is meant to ridicule, its logic is interesting. Among the Igbo, the vulture is regarded as an ugly bird even though seen as an agent of the gods as encapsulated in their proverb *achusia aja m'ahugu udele, ihe mere na be ndi nmuoo* (after any sacrifice (involving the killing of animal), and the vulture is not seen there (or around), something must have gone wrong in the land of the spirits). Therefore, the choice of vulture in this song is to point out to the culprit that those who gave the judgment are like vultures; they can neither to be eaten nor harmed by a lay person as they are representatives of the departed ancestors. Implicit in this logic is that those who serve as judges during such cases are above board and incorruptible. Before the final music that emanates from the masked spirit house is performed, the cock that was brought by the offender would be slaughtered inside the house. Its blood would be sprinkled round the house both within and outside. This stands for the ritual cleansing of the furnace⁸. With this, the incarnate beings can now go into the house.

The last performance which is the music proper is performed by renowned traditional musicians vast and knowledgeable in the art of performing the music of the incarnate beings that inhabit the furnace - shaped building. The wordings of the music are as follows:

<i>Ruru iwu ruri iwu</i>	Who violated the law, who violated the law
<i>Ndorima</i>	Should be torn apart
<i>Ruru iwu ruri iwu</i>	Who violated the law, who violated the law
<i>Ndorima</i>	Should be torn apart
<i>Nne ya kpoyi ya nwaite</i>	The mother should buy him a small pot
<i>Nnaya kpoyi ya nwaite</i>	The father should buy him a small pot
<i>Ndimma kuru mgbee so ya</i>	May the departed ancestor follow him complaining bitterly
<i>Akatakpa maru osha so ya</i>	May Akatakpa (a spirit manifest assumed to be an incarnate being) follow him with basket rattles (idiophone) <i>Ya na ya gworogodo be mma</i>
	May he and all those materials land in the land of the spirits.

Ruru Iwu

Dash is F

Slit wood

Call

Response

Ru ru iwu, ru ru iwu, N ne ya

N-do - ri - ma, n-do - ri - ma, N-ne ya

kpo - yi ya nwa ji - te, N - na ya kpo - yi ya nwa ji - te, N - di - mma ku - ru mgbee so ya, A - ka - ta - kpa

ma - ru - o - sha so ya, Ya na ya gwo - re - go - do be mma.

Judging from Curt Sachs and Eric Hornbostel's⁹ classification of musical instruments, the instruments used in this music are *abia* (membrane drums-

membranophones), *ufie* (wooden slit drums) and *mgbereke, ekwe mma* (long xylophones placed on the laps of the master artists) and, *Osha*- basket rattles (idiophones). But, going by Chukwu's taxonomical study of Igbo traditional musical instruments which are classified into five, the three used in this local ensemble mentioned above would be classified as thus; *abia* - (Materiaphone - Instruments identified by the materials from which they are made), *Ufie or "Ikoru"* (Abstractophone - Instruments identified or known by their abstract appellations), and *Mgbereke, ekwe mma* (Xylophone) and *Osha* (basket rattle) as Onomatophones; instruments identified according to their onomatopoeic derivations)¹⁰. Going by Curt Sachs and Eric Hornbostel's classification, only two categories were found while in Chukwu's taxonomy as an insider and an expert in Igbo traditional music and musical instruments, three classifications were identified in this culture according to their functions and materials of production. However, in this ensemble, the membrane drums are two in number (one very long but narrow and the other short and big in size), the slit drums are of two types; the very big and heavy type (which represents the actual combustion chamber in the smelting industry), the two small ones called *achaa* or *agbarada* (representing the small furnaces where slag flows into during smelting). As for the xylophones, they are nine in number but are categorized into three, based on sound and function. Those beaten or struck by the lead artist are three slabs (*eto*), even though they are five slabs (*ise*) involved (This is said to represent the chief smelter) while the remaining four slabs are grouped into two. The first two slabs, which are the coordinating slabs is called *unaa* while the second pair of slabs - the bass sounding slabs, is called *mgbeeh*. Implicit in the above analogy is the fact that the music and the instruments involved replicate sharing of function during smelting.

Be that as it may, one interesting feature of this music is that even though it is meant to punish, it is equally work music. One could notice the call and response pattern in African music resonating throughout the performance. Interestingly, the representation of the smelting industry is noticed in this music during what may appear to be deliberate, occasional breaks in the instrumental melody. During such breaks, the sound of *mgbeeh* (the bass xylophone) is made distinct. This is interpreted locally to mean the sighting of the bloom in the furnace¹¹ (bloom is the real iron while slag is the residue). This break in instrumental melody phenomenon is in consonance with black African work song. Southern Eileen observed that among the black slaves in the United States,

The call-and -response pattern of Africa singing was especially a prominent feature in black work songs. The work song as an accompaniment to the work had the effect of making the work easier. The singing helped the workers to coordinate their movements: "the work song usually included breaks in melody where the sound of the work movement could be heard, for example, the sound of an axe"¹².

As the music is sounding, the culprit was made to dance to the tune of the music four times amid jeers/hot banter and cajole from the public. At the end of the fourth break in the music, the culprit would be sprayed ash and led outside the community by one of the categories of the masked spirits assumed to be the incarnate beings of the society called *ugwaa*. This category of masked spirits represents the local police in the

spiritual realm but in the smelting industry they represent the apprentice smelters whose duty it was and still is, to guard the smelting workshops as represented by the masked spirit house, from where the last music was produced and the people that mobilized the raw materials for the smelting (wood and hematite).

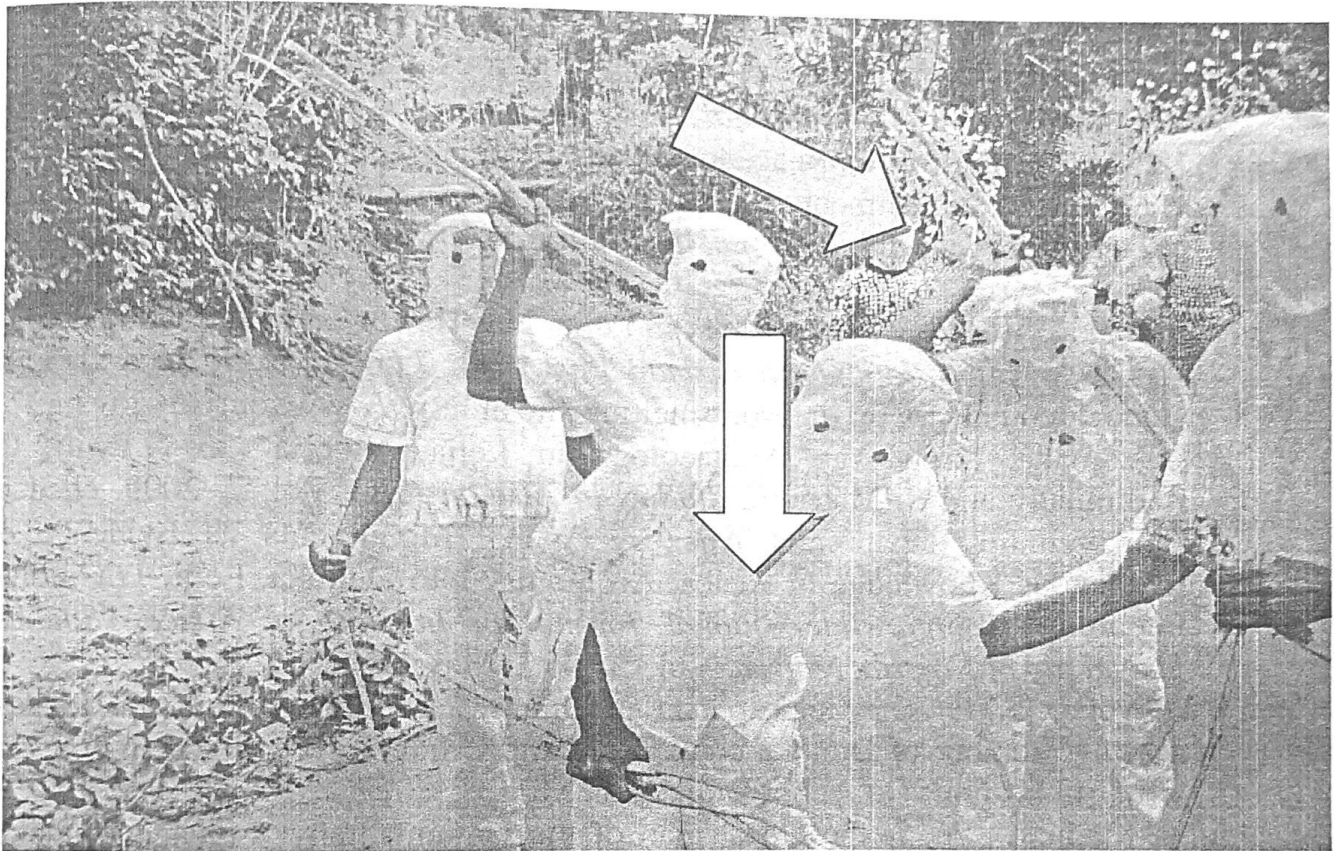


Plate 3: Ugwaa masked spirits seen with cane (white arrow indicate Ugwaa while orange is for Ujam)

As the offender is shown his/her way out, led by these incarnate beings, one of the masked spirits would use ash to cover the foot print of the evil-doer. This marked the final cleansing rite. They would finally lead the victim to a wilderness and left there to wander about to any place provided he/she is not found anywhere around the community. And the victim would remain banished. **Conclusion:** The idea of music is as old as rational humanity, and as deservedly formulated as per the salubrious spiritual and cultural needs of respective human groups¹³. For each cultural group, the value, function, meaning and essence attached to each musical form is unique. In Lejja, the song and musical *ensemble* discussed in this paper are meant to buttress and preserve the iron smelting culture and the traditional economy of Lejja people. The *omaba* songs so discussed are meant to punish and deter those who might be intent on committing the same crime. Thus, the set of musical rendition performed are instruments of social reengineering. Thus, music is not only for entertainment but also a good mechanism for correcting social non-conformists in a polity.

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