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## Trend of 'Avihɛwo' Performance among Women Dirge Singers in Tafi Traditional Area, Ghana

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### Abstract



Avihɛwo (dirges) play pivotal roles in the performance of funerals among the people of Tafi traditional area in Ghana. However there has been grave concern about the decline in the performance of avihɛwo in recent times in the Tafi Traditional area. This study explored the factors that brought about decline in the performance of avihɛwo in contemporary times in the area. An ethnographic study was adopted in a purely qualitative paradigm. Forty (40) women dirge singers were sampled through purposive sampling technique for the study. Interview, focus group discussion and observation were used to collect data for the study. Qualitative data gathered from the respondents were analysed using thematic analysis and responses were categorized into themes. The study revealed a decline in the live performance of dirges in Tafi traditional area. Almost three decades ago, the live performance of avihɛwo was a prominent feature of all funeral celebrations in Tafi, however the situation is changing. The dirge singers expressed their emotions, grief and condolences through their songs for the deceased person and the bereaved family. This phenomenon has been linked to the ban on wakes by some religious leaders in the area due to Christian beliefs, transformation in burial and funeral rites due to acculturation, modernity and technological

advancement, and youth disinterest in dirge singing. Historically, dirges are exclusively performed to epitomize pain due to death, but a myriad of factors threaten its live performance in recent times in Tafi traditional area. There is the need for traditional authorities to encourage live performance of dirges during funerals and also sensitize the people to remove biases and misconceptions against dirges in the area. Finally, lead singers and cantors in the Tafi traditional area to gesture, choreograph and interpret dirges to the audience during funerals in order to rejuvenate its live performance.

**Keywords:** Dirge, avihεwo, funeral, Tafi, acculturation.

## 1. Introduction

*Avihε* (a dirge) is a musical genre involving the performance of music and dance to express emotions, thoughts, sad feelings and moods at funeral celebration for the dead. The concept “dirge” or “elegy” is a poem, sombre song or lament that expresses mourning, or sorrow that is relevant for performance at a funeral. (Atoh, 2017; Boadi, 2013). Finnegan (2012) as cited in Atoh (2017) treats the dirge as a form of elegiac poetry performed at a funeral of a deceased or at a memorial rite. The dirge is an organised activity in which poet-cantors lead the mourners in chanting and singing.

Mourners act as chorus while the cantors act as lead singers or they act as both lead singers and part of the chorus in which way there is uniformity in the singing of dirges. Culturally, in the past, dirges were civil and tribal war poetry which emanate from the wailing of women whose husbands died in tribal wars (Orhero, 2017) to thematise pain, the horrors of war, grief, anguish, hunger, famine, and death. In other instances, the singing of dirge outside its formal context may emanate from the situation where a woman who has lost several relatives is overcome with grief (Gbolo-Sanka, 2010). A woman might have been reminded of her lost relatives through a particular incident or event that may set her singing dirges alone. In this instance, Gbolo-Sanka (2010) averred that the motivation behind the performance is not the desire to practice the singing of the genre. It originates on the spur of the moment from grief and pain.

In the tradition of the *Bagbor* (the people of Tafi), for instance, the performance of dirges (avihεwo) is considered as a major requirement for every funeral during which women sing dirges throughout the funerals of both royal and common persons (Adipa-Abutiate, 1999, Agawu, 1995, Brese, 1991). The performance of

dirges by *avihɛdzilawo* (dirge singers) of Tafi during funerals resonates their philosophy, values and traditions as a people. The non-performance of dirges during funeral in the area could mean the highest order of punishment to any deceased person. This portrays the relevance of *avihɛwo* in the socio-cultural life of the people and why it is held in high esteem in the area. This is an indication that the performance of *avihɛwo* is of great importance in the lives of the people of Tafi just as every ethnic group in Ghana (Adipa-Abutiati, 1999; Agawu, 1995; Brese, 1991; Nketia, 1965). Nketia (1998) cited in Amuah (2000) highlighted the integral role played by music in African societies.

History has it that the women of Tafi performed dirges while they kept vigil for a deceased member of the community to ward off wild animals such as hyenas which normally came in the night to eat the corpse while the people were asleep. In the past, the indigenous people of Tafi did not have the opportunity to keep their corpses at the mortuary while they plan for the funeral as it happens today. This was due to lack of electricity and mortuary facilities. However, the people of Tafi were able to preserve the body of the deceased till the following day for burial. The short period of preservation of the body and laying it in state, was to enable them send information about the death across the entire Tafi communities to all kinsmen to attend the funeral and pay their last respect. While they kept wake, the women dirge singers performed *avihɛwo* to express their condolences, pain and love for their departed community member near a bonfire. The essence of the fire was to lit up the vigil ground as there was no electricity and to also provide warmth to the women and other mourners.

The following morning, the *avihɛwodzilawo* (women dirge singers) went through the principal streets of the community to perform *avihɛwo* to mourn the deceased recounting their good works in the songs. The women after singing through the principal streets gathered in the house of the deceased where they were laid in state to bid them farewell as they women moved round the body while singing and wailing. The ensuing Monday morning after the burial, the women again marched through the principal streets of the community to perform *avihɛwo* this time thanking all sympathizers and funeral bearers for their supports. The women dirge performers would finally converge at the community durbar ground for the final ritual known as “dzokpekpe” (fire-setting) for the deceased. In the tradition of the *Bagbor*, (the people of Tafi), *dzokpekpe* is an important portion of the items paid to the bereaved by their in-laws, usually an amount of money that was latter given to the women dirge singers for the firewood they used in setting the fire for the vigil. In contemporary times where

mass funerals have become a common phenomenon due transformation in burials and final funeral rites, *dzokpekpe* may be performed for more than one deceased person at the durbar ground depending on the number of persons whose funerals were performed.

The performance of dirges is key to the transmission of social and culturally valued behaviours, norms and traditions of the people. Accordingly, this cultural heritage should be preserved. In contemporary times, however, most Tafi young women and many adults feel reluctant to perform dirges or go into dirge performance because of the stigma placed on them as being idolatry by their church leaders. Consequently, dirges are being replaced with record dance performances during wakes and funeral celebration. This current practice is not perpetuating the rendition of the old oral tradition of dirge performance as a cultural heritage of the people of Tafi due to Christian beliefs, technological advancement, foreign culture new ideologies and many others. This in effect is rapidly eroding the social cohesion, solidarity, the sense of belongingness and emotions expressed among the women during live performance of dirges which normally set the tone for the funeral.

Culture as an integral part of society has always suffered some threats of modernization and preservation as the two phenomena have continued to oppose each other. The live performance of dirges by women in Tafi traditional area, for instance, is being worked against by the aforementioned factors in recent times which hitherto had been highly patronized by women in Tafi during funerals. It is also sad to note today that the good recorded repertoire of *avihɛwo* (dirges) by women of Tafi that used to roll on the airwaves of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (G.B.C) radio one, and the Volta Star radio in Ho on Friday afternoons have become a thing of the past. This has been attributed to the fact that most of the lead singers and cantors recently face some level of stigmatization in their various churches and are therefore reluctant in taking active role in live performance of dirges. The study also revealed the lack of bold initiatives by music scholars in the area to do current recorded repertoire of *avihɛwo* for the local radio stations. These developments coupled with religion as a social tool has influenced the belief systems of the people of Tafi. The question is why some musical genre such as dirges have been relegated to the background or silenced in the area? It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the factors militating against the live performance of *avihɛwo* in Tafi traditional area in order to put measures in place for the continuity of the old oral tradition.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

In Ghana as elsewhere in Africa, there emerged three schools of thought on the subject of cultural direction. (Amenowode, 2003), and cited in (Ebeli, 2015), identifies three categories of viewpoints as the “traditional fundamentalist”, the “modernist” and those at the “middle of the road”. Out of these standpoints, the first group believes that the culture of Africa is very unique and must be maintained at all cost. The second group feels that African cultures are outdated and should therefore give way to changes dictated by technological age. The third group however thinks that the way forward is adapting the indigenous cultures to suit modern needs. These schools of thought (Ebeli, 2015) said provide a good reason to look at the contemporary perspective of indigenous musical practice in Ghana.

The divergent standpoints about musical culture and cultural practices in indigenous societies have clouded the prevalence of traditional musical culture in local communities. As a result, many communities in Ghana are confronted with the dilemma of either a total acceptance or rejection of their traditions, or acceptance with modification (Ebeli, 2015). Indeed, the challenges confronting the live performance of *avihɛwo* (dirges) among the people of Tafi in the Volta region of Ghana can be linked to the aforementioned divergent standpoints. Again, (Ebeli, 2015) stressed that most people are seen enjoying much of popular music at the expense of their indigenous music. This might be due to the fact that opportunities for performing traditional music are reducing while opportunities for popular music practice keep on expanding. There is no doubt that taste for modernity and popular music has over-ridden the love for traditional music among most people especially the youth and the literates.

Notwithstanding its relevance as a social tool for the advancement of the course of women and related benefits to the bereaved and performers, several factors hinder the preservation and sustainability of *avihɛwo* in Ghana and elsewhere. The live performance of *avihɛwo* is not a mere cultural heritage but a symbol of peace and unity among women of Tafi in the Volta region of Ghana. These factors include but not limited to Christian and Islamic religion and/or religious beliefs, modernity, modern institutions and technology (Ampomah, 2000; Potočnik, 2017), acculturation influences from neighbouring cultures and environment, and European presence. These factors are responsible for the abandoning and transformation of funeral rites, including the performance of dirges. Christian and Islamic religions are partly responsible for the transformation in the performance of funeral rites, particularly the performance of dirges (Potočnik,

2017).

In general, Christianity has had a profound influence on the culture, tradition, customs and ceremonies such as funeral rites (Potočnik, 2017). It may be found in hymns, women fellowships, praying over the dead body and other Christian rites. This is not only a new belief but also a lifestyle of a new generation. These views buttress the claim of Ampomah (2000) who maintained that those living in urban areas and of Christian beliefs have lost their traditional ways of life. Regarding technology, many families use computers and sound systems to play recorded funerals songs, including dirges (Potočnik, 2017). In terms of European presence and influence in the contemporary context, those living in urban areas have lost this informal type of education because of schooling as opined by Ampomah (2000). On the one hand, industrial urban civilization brought increased secularization of society, and the decline of ceremonialism. Some funeral practices such as the performance of dirges are separated from religious sphere and taken over by professional services such as spinners who use sound systems (Potočnik, 2017).

It is appropriate to state at this juncture that the love for modernity, technology and religious beliefs must go side by side with old oral traditions such as *avihewo* which is the cruz of this paper. From the foregoing discourse, it is important to consider a syncretism approach as applied to religious studies involving the merging or assimilation of several aspects of indigenous musical performances that are embraced in the modern world.

Dwelling on the theory of syncretism as in anthropology, (Laibelman, 2004; Stewart, 1999) argued that syncretism is used to describe a process of change, a mixing of values and forms that happen- to different extents- where there is contact between different value systems. The authors posit further that syncretism is used to define a state of reconciliation, integration or coexistence of conflicting values and meanings that happen as a consequence of the mixing process.

In religious studies, the theory of syncretism is mainly concerned with the moral and doctrinarian consequences of syncretism- that is, the normative debate identifying “pejorative” and “non-pejorative” syncretism. In other words, syncretism is considered as a normative ideal that explains how a community/ group/society deals with clashes between value systems through reconciliation and alignment of values leading to a state of syncretism. It emphasizes the non-pejorative aspects of syncretism and seeks to achieve creative integration

and synthesis of conflicting values through identification of commonalities in societies (Stewart, 1999). In the preceding discussion, it could be argued that the harmonious combination of religious, secular and indigenous systems would not only foster peaceful coexistence among African societies but also create avenues by which indigenous musical forms such as *avihewo* would thrive. The implication of this is that, Ghana and many African countries have had to come to terms with their traditional values and at the same time cope with changes in the modern world.

### **3. Methodology**

This is a qualitative research which adopted an ethnographic research method. The study aims at understanding behaviour from the perspective of the participants and to capture social reality through field work in natural setting (Osuala, 2003). In an ethnographic study, the researcher spends some time with the group, becomes a member of the group and gathers observational data from the people in their natural setting over an extended period of time. In the study, the ethnographer observes the subjects and interprets the data gathered (Kusi, 2012) and cited in (Kuranchie, 2016). This method was used as it tends to study in-depth human society and culture. It describes and interprets cultural patterns and meanings within social group. Ethnography studies the life and practices of a group with respect to custom, norms, beliefs, rituals and behaviour (Kuranchie, 2016). As a native of Tafi, I used this method in order to give a detailed description of the issues drawing from observations, narrations, and personal experiences and focused group discussion (FGD) of the respondents to bring out the factors militating against live performance of *avihewo* in Tafi in the Volta region of Ghana. The focus group discussion confirmed the information gathered from the one-on-one interviews conducted with the participants coupled with my personal observation on the subject matter. The target population was estimated to be three hundred and five (305) adult women who are *avihedzilawo* (dirge singers) across the four Tafi communities where the study was conducted. The communities are Tafi Atome, Tafi Abuife, Tafi Mador and Tafi Agome.

The purposive sampling technique was used to sample forty (40) women dirge singers comprising ten (10) each from the four (4) communities. Interview, observation and focus group discussion were used to collect data for the study. I used purposive sampling due to my background as a native of the area and based on my conviction that the participants possess relevant knowledge on the research topic. (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007) describe purposive

sampling technique as a feature of qualitative research where researchers deliberately choose subjects to be included in a study on the basis of their judgment of the typicality or possession of a particular characteristics needed. The qualitative data were transcribed, organized, coded and analysed manually using Creswell's (2007) thematic analysis method-responses from respondents were categorized into themes. The themes were developed after assigning codes, and these were discussed.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed both immediate and remote factors that brought about change in the live performance of *avihɛwo* in Tafi Traditional area. The immediate causes are: ban on wakes by some religious leaders; transformations in the burial and final funeral rites; replacement of live performance of dirges during wakes with recorded music by spinners/sound system operators; and lack of interest in the youth for apprenticeship in professional dirge singing. These immediate influences were linked to remote factors such as Christian and Islamic religious beliefs, acculturation — influences from neighbouring cultures and European presence, modernity or modernization due to modern institutions, and technological advancement.

### **4.1. Ban on Wakes by Some Religious Leaders**

It could be deduced from the results of this study that the ban on wake-keeping by religious bodies in Tafi traditional area contributed to the current trend of low performance of dirges (*avihɛwo*) to a large extent. In fact, Christianity is a stumbling block to the progress and continuity of dirges (*avihɛwo*) in the Tafi traditional area. This phenomenon has given way to the playing of sound systems to take over wake-keeping sessions in the area. Here are excerpts from interview and FGD participants who are lead and oldest professional dirge singers in the four sampled communities on the subject of ban on wakes by some religious leaders:

The ban on wake-keeping by some Christian groups due to Christian religious beliefs in the area accounts for the low patronage in the live performance of *avihɛwo* in the area. The posture of Christian religious groups in the area and their beliefs frown upon the performance of (*avihɛwo*) in the Tafi traditional area. Christians in the community consider those of us who participate in the live performance of *avihɛwo* as being idolatry. This is killing the good



oral tradition our mothers handed over to us. This phenomenon of stigmatizing women who perform avihεwo is commonly associated with the Pastors of the so-called new churches as she puts it. These pastors tell their members that the performance of avihεwo is a satanic activity. This in effect discourages the women who even though know the songs and can join us to sing feel reluctant to do so nowadays (Interview, Participant # 1).

The assertion above can be linked to what (Aborampah, 1999) postulates that the contemporary celebration of death has been secularized and/or christened in most African societies. Another participant attributed the changes to the introduction of Christianity the participant indicated that;

Before Christianity came to Ewe land, wakes (vigils) provided platforms on which avihεwo were performed live during funerals. The people in the community gathered in the compound of the deceased, in the evening on the day on which the death occurred where avihεwo and other local dances were performed till day-break. This tradition continued even with the advent of Christianity. During wake-keeping, the two main religious groups the Roman Catholic Church and the E.P church, Ghana recognized the role of the performance of avihεwo. Since wakes are controlled by the various religious groups and most have placed ban on wakes especially the E.P. church, the live performance of avihεwo in the Tafi traditional area is becoming a thing of the past as these religious bodies do no longer hold wakes. In most cases, gospels and Christian hymns have completely replaced the live performance of traditional funeral dirges. Even though the two major religious bodies, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, are the only two religious bodies that work side by side with some level of traditional songs and incorporate them in their worship, more room is given to the performance of Christian hymns and gospels during their funeral celebrations than dirges (Interview, Participant # 2).

The ban on wakes by some religious bodies in the area started with the E.P Church more than two decades. Currently, the ban by the Church is as a result of health related and moral issues. Apart from health problems, it is observed that wakes are fertile grounds for

most youth for promiscuous lives with its repercussions on the youth. Other religious denominations also follow suit. Most of the young women in the community due to their Christian beliefs consider the performance of *avihewo* a satanic event and do not want to associate with it. This is affecting the continuity of the oral musical tradition in the traditional area. Most of the women who take part in the singing of dirges are scolded by their Pastors as being idolatry. This stigma most at times discourages the women from associating themselves with the group. (FGD, Participant # 1).

Due to the ban, wakes are left in the hands of the family of the deceased who normally prefer the services of the sound system or recorded music group or operators to inviting the dirge singers. Depending on the religious beliefs of the deceased, the families sometimes do not allow the performance of dirges during wakes, burial and final funeral rites. These normally are periods that ensure the rendering of the old musical tradition by women of Tafi. Sadly, there is stigma attached to those of us who participate in the live performance of *avihewo* during funerals in the community whenever we go to church. This situation sometimes makes me reluctant to continue to be part of the performance. Most parents also do not allow their young women to participate in the live performance of *avihewo*. Women from strict Christian homes seriously frown upon the singing of *avihewo* and therefore disallow their young women from participating in the performance as they consider it as idolatry (FGD, Participant # 2).

#### **4.2. Transformations in Burial and Final Funeral Rites**

The findings of this study brought to light that funeral celebrations in Tafi Traditional area have gone through some transformations due to acculturation, modernization and technology. This has given rise to the current situation of low patronage of live performance of *avihewo* in Tafi traditional area. Here are quotes from some respondents:

Nowadays, funerals are performed only once due to the trend of keeping corpses at the mortuary for the bereaved families to plan and prepare towards the burial and final funeral rites of the deceased. (Interview, Participant # 1).

In the past, due to lack of preservation facilities such as mortuaries, the local people kept their corpses at most for two days after which they were buried. Their final funeral rites were performed at a later date that was decided upon by the traditional authorities and the bereaved family. (Interview, Participant # 2).

Today funerals in the traditional area, follow immediately after the burial service and the short duration available from Friday to Monday when the funeral ends do not promote the live rendering of *avihεwo* for the young ladies who are willing to participate have the opportunity to do so. (FGD, Participant # 1).

The modern trend in funeral celebration in the country has made it an accepted norm to see every bereaved family going for the spinners or the recorded music for their multipurpose nature of providing music of all nature as well as public address services. This development has continued to impede the performance of local dirges during funerals in recent times. (FGD, Participant # 2).

The responses given above in relation to transformation in the burial and final funeral rites by the interviewees can be supported by what (Burns, 2009) states and cited in (Ebeli, 2015) that Ewe people of Ghana are currently in the midst of racial epistemological transformation from an older, dynamic set of local beliefs and practices.

#### **4.3. Replacement of Live Performance of *Avihεwo* during Wakes with Recorded Music**

It unfolds from the findings of this study that the phenomenon of replacing live performance of dirges with recorded music by spinners/sound system operators during wakes has been an important factor which is strongly militating against the continuity and survival of live performance of *avihεwo* in the Tafi traditional area. Here are corresponding quotes:

On Friday, before the corpse is brought from the mortuary, it is common to see and hear recorded music booming in the compound of the deceased. The recorded music otherwise known as "Spinning" has become a social fashion during funerals across Tafi traditional area. The presence of the recorded music at the funeral ground with the nature in which they play their music makes it

difficult for the dirge singers to perform. This has most at times prevented us (the old ladies) from performing *avihewo*. In the opinion of the interviewee, it is one of the most significant factors that is killing the sustenance of the old oral tradition (*avihewo*). (Interview, Participant # 1).

We *avihewodzilawo* (dirge singers) only have the opportunity to sing *avihewo* in the morning when the deceased is laid in state before the corpse is carried to the church for the burial service. Apart from this, the ensuing Monday morning is the only time we sing dirge singers after we marched from the deceased's house through the principal streets to finally converge at the durbar ground for the final rituals. Still on the issue of the recorded music, since the celebration of funerals has been modernized, most people prefer to invite them to their funeral grounds. The 'spinning groups' as they are also called, provide a kind of music that seeks to satisfy the taste of all mourners during the wake-keeping and the entire funeral celebrations as they deliver from a repertoire of songs cutting across local music, secular and Christian art music (sacred music) that console, comfort, advise and provide entertainment to mourners. (Interview, Participant # 2).

This finding can be buttressed by the assertion made by (Ebeli, 2015) when she stated that, although every community in Ghana continues to enjoy some patronage in the existing indigenous music due to some contexts assigned to them, the proliferation of popular music which predominantly infuses traditional music elements has lowered the prominence of indigenous music giving a new musical hybrid in Ghanaian society.

During a funeral celebration in a typical *vedome* community, one is definitely to listen to recorded *bɔbɔɔbɔ* music coming from Fo Senyo's collections, Nanevi Mawoeta's albums and choral works and hymn tunes from singing groups and the E.P church choirs. In addition, recorded works on *avihewo* from different Ewe communities are normally played and this practice which is linked to technology has seriously affected the survival of live dirge performance in the traditional area. (FGD, Participant # 1).

#### **4.4. Lack of Interest in the Youth for Apprenticeship in Professional Dirge Singing**

The findings from the data also brought to light that the young women of Tafi feel that dirges (*avihεwo*) are associated with elderly women and therefore not their business. Here are the excerpts:

Looking at the age distribution of the membership of the group; we are sometimes tempted to think that some of us do not belong to the age bracket of the group as most of the women fall within menopausal class and are of age. This normally discourages us about the group even though we enjoy the performance of the tradition (Participant # 3).

In fact, professional dirge singing goes beyond the simple task of able to sing dirges. The elderly professional singers went through life-long material and spiritual preparations and advancement with their departed ancestors and continue to keep a relationship with them. This the young ladies find difficult to go into due to their personal values. The execution of dirges is a complete art and one needs a lot of dedication and diligence to graduate as a professional dirge performer. The performance of the dirge is also a medium of spiritual communication between the dead, the living and the poet-cantor (Participant # 3).

This explains the inclusion of the spiritual aspect in the training of professional dirge performers Gbolo-Sanka (2010). The author reiterates that the dirge performer occupies a unique position in the cultural set up of the people. This is not solely as a result of the texture of her voice on funeral grounds but it is mainly as a result of her training which moulds her into a social critic, a chronicler, a spiritual leader and an artist. The professional dirge singer is indeed a reflection of all these skills and capabilities.

Unfortunately, the youth and most women of Tafi today shun such training due to Christian beliefs, modern lifestyles, high appetite for foreign culture and through the exposure to the internet and the mass media. Consequently, the live performance of *avihεwo* in the Tafi traditional area is left in the hands of older women, a situation that is not fertile for the survival of the old oral tradition in the traditional area. Perhaps (Ebeli, 2015) is right by arguing that in spite of the attempts to retain traditional culture, the proliferation of education,

information technology and social media in contemporary times have opened the door for borrowed cultures.

A number of factors such as the ban on wake-keeping due to Christianity or Christian beliefs by religious bodies; the transformations in funeral celebrations due to acculturation, modernization and technology; the replacement of live performance of *avihɛwo* with recorded music by spinners through technology; and the lack of interest in the youth for apprenticeship in professional dirge singing. These factors account for the decline in live performance of dirges, and as stumbling blocks to its sustainability in the area. These revelations affirm the findings by several researchers (Ampomah, 2000; Gbolo-Sanka, 2010; Potočnik, 2017) who lamented that Christian and Islamic religion and/or religious beliefs, modernity or modern institutions and technology, acculturation hinder the advancement, preservation and sustainability of oral traditions like dirges in Ghana and elsewhere in contemporary times. In their view, these factors are responsible for the abandoning and transformation of funeral rites, including the live performance of *avihɛwo*. In buttressing this assertion, Ampomah (2000) lamented that in the contemporary context children especially, those living in urban areas and of Christian homes have lost their traditional ways of life. By implication of these findings, the people of Tafi traditional area in Ghana have had to come to terms with their traditional values and at the same time cope with changes in the modern world due to Christian beliefs, modernity, acculturation and technology in contemporary times.

## 5. Conclusions

The outcome of this study confirms findings in the literature that historically, the live performance of *avihɛwo* was prominent feature of the funeral tradition of the people of Tafi and looking at its relevance in the cultural life of the people, it must be upheld to live side by side with religion, modernity, technology and personal life style.

A myriad of factors such as Christianity and/or Christian beliefs, technology, modern lifestyles, and acculturation have been revealed by the findings as militating against the survival of dirges. These factors are a threat to the live performance of *avihɛwo* during funerals in Tafi traditional area. They are also responsible for the low patronage in the live performance of *avihɛwo* and the lack of interest in the youth for apprenticeship in professional dirge singing.

To mitigate these challenges, it is recommended that religious bodies in

the locality would respect the traditions of the people and learn to work in harmony with the indigenous people and not stigmatize the live performance of traditional musical types such as dirges by members of their congregations. To do this, the people would be addressed at durbars and other related forums that seek to educate the people on the need to accommodate one another's value systems and identification of commonalities and fostering peaceful coexistence. Also, traditional authorities and religious groups in the area would provide awareness and education to the people of their congregations in the traditional area to remove some misconceptions and biases they perceive about the musical genres such as dirges. Additionally, lead singers and cantors should gesture, choreograph and interpret *avihewo* to the audience during funerals in order to bring out their relevance to the people.

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