

Prayers at Dawn, Fuji at Noon: Music, Spirituality and Everyday Wellbeing among Urban Informal Workers in Ibadan

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Abstract

This study examines how music and spirituality shape everyday wellbeing among urban informal workers in Ibadan, Nigeria. In a context where market traders and motor park drivers navigate long and unpredictable workdays, auditory practices play a crucial role in regulating mood, fostering resilience, and facilitating social interaction. Despite the centrality of music and spiritual engagement in daily life, little is known about how these practices are structured and experienced across time, creating a gap in scholarship on the intersection between musicology and African urban soundscapes. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with 20 participants and non-participant observation in selected markets and motor parks, the study traces a temporal shift in sonic environments. On one hand, mornings are dominated by gospel songs, communal prayers, and exhortations with repetitive melodic and rhythmic structures that provide moral grounding, optimism, and group cohesion. On the other hand, afternoons shift to secular genres such as fuji, highlife, and afrobeats, whose polyrhythms, call-and-response motifs, and cyclical grooves sustain energy, encourage social interaction, and support coping with the demands of urban labour. Findings reveal that workers deliberately curate sacred and secular sounds to navigate both economic and social pressures, promoting personal and collective wellbeing. By situating music at the intersection of spirituality, work, and resilience, the study highlights how auditory practices function as both social and affective resources. This research contributes to African urban ethnomusicology by demonstrating the structural and emotional dimensions of music in everyday life, and its quotidian role in shaping individual and communal resilience.

Keywords: Urban soundscapes, music and wellbeing, sacred and secular, Yoruba spirituality, Informal economy

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Introduction

Before the first customer arrives and before money begins to change hands, many urban workers begin the day by sounding their faith. In markets, motor parks, and roadside shops, prayer and music are woven into the opening moments of labour, marking the transition from rest to work and framing the day's uncertainties within spiritual expectation. Far from being eccentric, these practices reflect a widely held belief that work is sustained not only by physical effort but by inner balance and spiritual grounding. Spirituality is thus understood as a complementary resource that supports workers' capacity to pursue and maintain organisational and personal goals, grounded in holistic wellbeing that integrates the physical, mental, and spiritual (Khanifar et al., 2010). Scholars have shown that religiosity can shape job performance, often suggesting that spiritually inclined workers are more committed, resilient, and effective in their duties (Allameh et al., 2011; Othman & Harriri, 2012; Omolawal & Akinwumi, 2020). Yet, while these discussions have largely focused on formal workplaces, far less attention has been paid to the informal urban economy, where music and spirituality are embedded in everyday strategies of survival, sociability, and wellbeing.

This study focuses on Ibadan, one of Nigeria's oldest and most vibrant urban centres, where music and spirituality play indispensable roles in structuring daily life and wellbeing. For market traders and motor park drivers, mornings are typically marked by communal prayers, gospel songs, and exhortations that establish an atmosphere of spiritual orientation before the day's economic transactions unfold. As the hours advance, however, the soundscape gradually shifts: gospel tunes and sacred melodies give way to secular music, including highlife, fuji, and afrobeats, reflecting the dynamism of urban experience. This interplay between sacred and secular not only illustrates the fluidity of religiosity and spirituality but also reveals how sound is mobilised as a resource for resilience, optimism, and social cohesion.

In African societies, music and spirituality are closely intertwined, shaping how individuals and communities experience life's rhythms and challenges. Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) argue that gospel music in Nigeria functions not merely as religious expression but also as a means of everyday meaning-making. In this sense, music is both transcendental and practical: it invokes divine presence while also setting the emotional tone for labour and social interaction. Similarly, Ajose (2024) highlights how Yoruba Pentecostals engage in creative music-making on prayer mountains, blending artistry with spirituality to negotiate personal and communal wellbeing. These studies affirm that music and spirituality are not limited to formal religious institutions but extend into quotidian spaces such as markets, parks, and households.

Spirituality itself has been theorised in multiple ways. Psaila (2019) suggests that the concept stems from the recognition that human beings are essentially spiritual, and that spiritual wellbeing is an integral dimension of holistic health. In Nigerian urban contexts, however, spirituality is often inseparable from religiosity. Although there are distinctions in scholarly discourse, the two terms are used interchangeably in this study, recognising their overlapping influences on behavioural attitudes, work ethics, and interpersonal relationships. This fusion is evident in

Ibadan's markets and motor parks, where sacred and secular domains constantly interact (Oyelade, Jegede, Akintunde, & Omobowale, 2021).

The concept of the soundscape is useful for understanding how urban dwellers structure their day through sonic practices. From the invocation of sacred sounds at dawn to the pulsating rhythms of fuji at noon, Ibadan's soundscape reflects the dynamic shifts between spirituality and secular labour. Ajayi (2024) underscores that fuji music, in particular, is deeply embedded in the rhythms of everyday Yoruba urban life, blurring boundaries between entertainment, identity, and livelihood. Likewise, Adejube and Ajala (2024) illustrate how music in Islamic worship contexts can be ambivalent, simultaneously sacred and contested, revealing broader tensions in how sonic practices are embedded in social and spiritual life.

In Ibadan's marketplaces and motor parks, this sacred-secular continuum is not only audible but performative. Workers consciously structure their days around music and prayer, using sound both to prepare spiritually and to sustain energy in the face of economic pressures. This aligns with Igboin's (2024) observation of prayer cities in Nigeria, where constant prayer and sonic invigoration contribute to urban resilience and vitality. Such practices suggest that spirituality and wellbeing are not confined to personal devotion but are negotiated communally through sound. The concept of wellbeing in Nigerian urban studies has been explored from multiple perspectives. Rigon (2018) analyses wellbeing in urban Nigeria as multidimensional, encompassing material, relational, and subjective dimensions. Adegunloye and Afowowe (2025) further argue that environmental and behavioural conditions in the core areas of Ibadan significantly shape urban wellbeing, particularly in relation to health, social interaction, and economic activity. For informal workers such as traders and drivers, wellbeing is precarious, subject to fluctuating income, stressful labour, and unstable urban infrastructures. Yet through spiritual practices and music, these workers cultivate resilience, framing wellbeing not simply as absence of illness but as a state of balance, hope, and social cohesion.

The intersection of wellbeing and spirituality has also been recognised in studies of religious practices across Nigeria. Omolawal and Akinwumi (2020) contend that religiosity strongly influences work ethics and performance, while Oyelade *et al.*, (2021) demonstrate how the sacred and profane coexist in urban marketplaces, shaping interpersonal relations and economic exchanges. By situating these insights within Ibadan's sonic environment, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how wellbeing is enacted in everyday life.

Research Problem and Rationale

Despite the growing literature on music, spirituality, and wellbeing in Nigeria, there remains a gap in examining how these dimensions intersect in the informal urban economy, particularly within the soundscapes of markets and motor parks. Previous studies have emphasised either the role of spirituality in formal workplaces (Allameh *et al.*, 2011; Othman & Hariri, 2012; Khanifar *et al.*, 2014), or the broader religious and cultural significance of music (Ayorinde & Ajose, 2022; Ajayi, 2024). Few have explicitly analysed how sacred and secular sonic practices

are sequentially woven into daily routines, and how this structuring of sound contributes to wellbeing in the midst of economic precariousness.

This study therefore seeks to address three core questions:

1. How do market traders and motor park drivers in Ibadan incorporate spiritual music into their morning routines, and what meanings do they ascribe to these practices?
2. How does the transition from sacred to secular music across the day reflect the dynamics of urban life, work, and social interaction?
3. In what ways do these sonic practices contribute to everyday wellbeing, resilience, and social cohesion among informal workers?

Significance of the Study

By examining these questions, the study contributes to scholarship in three main ways. First, it expands understandings of urban soundscapes in Africa, highlighting how music functions as a resource for navigating the rhythms of survival. Second, it underscores the fluidity of spirituality and religiosity in everyday life, demonstrating how sacred and secular are not dichotomous but mutually constitutive. Finally, it illuminates the lived strategies of informal workers in Ibadan, offering insights into how wellbeing is actively negotiated through sonic practices amidst economic and social challenges.

In doing so, this research builds on and extends earlier works such as those of Oyelade *et al.* (2021) on the sacred-profane intersection in urban markets, Ajayi (2024) on fuji and everyday Yoruba life, and Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) on gospel music as everyday meaning-making. It also resonates with broader debates in African musicology and urban studies on the interrelation of sound, spirituality, and survival (Adejube & Ajala, 2024; Ajose, 2024). Ultimately, this study situates Ibadan's traders and drivers not only as economic actors but as cultural agents who "save the day" by mobilising prayer, music, and sonic creativity to foster optimism, cohesion, and resilience in the city's vibrant urban life.

Literature Review

Music, Spirituality, and Everyday Wellbeing

African music scholarship consistently demonstrates that sound is central to how everyday life, belief, and social relations are organised. Spirituality is often framed as a dimension of wellbeing that extends beyond formal doctrine to include practices through which individuals cultivate meaning, moral orientation, and emotional balance (Psaila, 2019). In Nigeria, spirituality and religiosity are closely intertwined, shaping attitudes to work, endurance, and social responsibility (Omolawal & Akinwumi, 2020). Music operates within this intersection, translating belief into everyday practice and making spirituality audible within ordinary spaces.

Studies of Yoruba urban culture show that music is inseparable from ethical and social negotiation. Popular musical forms often articulate tensions around morality, survival, pleasure,

and aspiration rather than offering simple entertainment (Samuel & Adejube, 2019). Adelakun's (2024) analysis of prayers and African popular pleasures further challenges rigid sacred secular boundaries, arguing that religious performance is animated by affect, embodiment, and enjoyment. Ajose (2025) similarly reflects on Nigerian gospel music discourse, showing how sacred commitments are continually shaped through engagement with mundane realities. Together, these studies foreground musical fluidity and situational meaning, offering a useful lens for understanding soundscapes where prayer, labour, and leisure coexist.

Beyond questions of belief, research highlights the role of spirituality and music in shaping work practices and resilience. Organisational studies suggest that spiritual orientation enhances discipline, motivation, and emotional regulation in workplace contexts (Allameh et al., 2011; Khanifar et al., 2014). While focused largely on formal employment, these insights resonate with informal urban economies where workers rely on cultural and spiritual resources to cope with uncertainty. Adejube (2025) situates music within Nigeria's creative economy, emphasising its role in sustaining livelihoods, fostering adaptability, and reinforcing cultural continuity. This perspective underscores how everyday musical practices among traders and drivers are linked to both economic survival and social cohesion.

Soundscape scholarship provides further insight into these dynamics by treating sound as socially produced rather than incidental. Adejube, Samuel, and Adeleke (2024) show that entertainment modes in Nigerian settlements function as tools for social organisation and survival rather than leisure alone. In urban markets and motor parks, sound structures time, regulates emotion, and reinforces collective presence. This understanding aligns with studies of religious and commercial spaces in Ibadan, where prayer, trade, and music intersect seamlessly (Oyelade et al., 2021). Adejube and Ajala (2024) similarly demonstrate how Islamic worship practices within NASFAT involve musical negotiation and ambivalence, reflecting broader tensions between devotion and urban modernity. These works point to sound as a medium through which urban subjects navigate competing moral and economic demands.

Empirical research on Nigerian music further illustrates how different genres respond to specific temporal and emotional needs. Gospel music has been shown to provide spiritual reassurance while supporting everyday meaning making in contexts of economic pressure (Ayorinde & Ajose, 2022). Fuji music, by contrast, has been situated as a central genre in Yoruba urban life, mediating humour, endurance, and social interaction (Ajayi, 2024). These genres are not oppositional but complementary, operating within the same social spaces and responding to different moments within the workday. Wellbeing in this context is relational and culturally embedded, shaped by shared practices rather than individual psychology alone (Rigon, 2018; Adegunloye & Afowowe, 2025). Igboin's (2024) work on prayer cities further reinforces the role of sound in generating collective energy and urban vitality.

Gaps and Contribution

Despite this growing body of scholarship, limited attention has been paid to how informal workers actively organise sound across the workday. Existing studies often examine gospel or popular music in isolation, focus on formal religious or organisational settings, or overlook the temporal sequencing of sacred and secular sound. There remains little empirical work on how traders and motor park drivers in Ibadan deliberately structure their sonic environments to navigate labour, spirituality, and wellbeing. By examining the movement from prayers at dawn to secular music later in the day, and by combining ethnographic and musicological analysis, this study contributes to debates on African urban soundscapes, sacred secular entanglements, and the role of music in sustaining everyday resilience.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine how music and spirituality shape everyday wellbeing among urban informal workers in Ibadan metropolis. A qualitative approach allows for close engagement with lived experience and routine practices, making it possible to understand how sound is actively used to manage labour, emotion, and social interaction. Rather than treating music as background noise, the study approaches sound as a meaningful social practice embedded in everyday work life.

Study Areas

Fieldwork was conducted across three major commercial centres in Ibadan: Bodija Market, Dugbe Market, and Gbagi Market, alongside adjoining motor parks within these areas. These locations were selected because they represent different economic zones and social rhythms within the city. Bodija Market operates as a major food distribution hub with intense early morning activity, Dugbe Market functions as a central commercial district with dense trading and transport activity, while Gbagi Market is known for textiles and artisanal goods. Together, these sites offered rich and contrasting sonic environments in which music, prayer, and labour intersect daily.

Participants and Sampling

A total of 20 participants were purposively selected for the study. The sample comprised market traders and motor park drivers who were actively engaged in daily informal economic activity. Participants included a mix of Yoruba women and men, alongside Igbo male traders who play a visible role in Ibadan's commercial life. They were involved in diverse occupations such as food trading, textile sales, spare parts trading, transport services, and loading work. This mix allowed the study to capture variations in gendered experience, occupational rhythm, and ethnic positioning, while also highlighting shared strategies of coping within informal urban labour.

Data Collection

Data were generated through in depth interviews and non-participant observation. Interviews were semi structured and conducted in English, Yoruba, and Nigerian Pidgin, depending on participants' preference. Most interviews took place within workspaces during less busy periods of the day. Conversations focused on daily routines, musical choices, spiritual practices, perceptions of wellbeing, and the emotional and social effects of music across the workday. Participants were encouraged to reflect on specific songs, genres, and moments when music felt particularly necessary or meaningful.

Non participant observation complemented interview data and allowed sustained attention to everyday sound practices. The researcher observed morning prayer sessions, background music during trading hours, radio use, spontaneous singing, and collective listening practices. Particular attention was paid to how sound shifted across the day, with mornings often marked by gospel music and prayer, and later hours dominated by fuji, highlife, and afrobeats. Observations were recorded as detailed field notes documenting both sonic activity and participants' bodily and social responses.

A notable observation occurred in Dugbe Market, where members of the Igbo trading community organised collective praise and prayer sessions on Thursday mornings. These gatherings brought together Igbo traders and neighbouring sellers before full trading activities began. Gospel songs, clapping, and short exhortations created a shared atmosphere of spiritual preparation and social bonding, highlighting how religious sound also functions as a form of community organisation within competitive trading spaces.

Data Analysis

The data collected were subjected to content analysis. Also, a musicological analysis of selected songs frequently played or referenced by participants. The analysis focused on lyrical themes, rhythmic repetition, call and response patterns, tempo, and performance context. Rather than formal notation, attention was given to how musical structure shaped affect, participation, and collective energy. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and sensitivity to participants' work routines. Care was taken to ensure that research engagement did not disrupt livelihoods or impose additional burden.

Findings and Discussion

Morning Soundscapes: Prayers, Gospel, and Collective Positivity

In the markets and motor parks of Ibadan, mornings are rarely quiet. From about 6:00 a.m., the urban soundscape comes alive with layered activity: traders arranging wares, buses revving engines, voices exchanging greetings, and, most prominently, prayers and gospel music that frame the start of the day. For many traders and drivers, work does not begin immediately with transactions but with a deliberate sonic orientation toward the sacred. Prayers, Yoruba gospel choruses, and brief exhortations fill the air, functioning as ritual preparation and moments

of social bonding. These practices are structured rather than incidental and reflect an understanding of wellbeing as a balance of spiritual, mental, and physical readiness, aligning with Khanifar et al.'s (2014) argument on the complementarity of spirituality and work performance. Such scenes were observed in Dugbe, where Igbo traders from different shops gathered every Thursday morning to sing praise songs and engage in churchlike activities before turning to the day's business, a practice that coincided with the government designated environmental sanitation period, which lasted until about 10 a.m.

Certain songs recur across these spaces and have become part of a shared morning repertoire. Among Igbo traders, songs such as "Good morning Jesus, good morning Lord" are commonly sung, while Yoruba traders sing or play Yoruba gospel songs on their audio devices as a way of beginning the day. Sola Allyson's '*ìjì mo jì lónìí*' (As I woke up this morning) is frequently played on small loudspeakers or hummed quietly by traders while arranging their goods. The song's emphasis on gratitude for life and anticipation of divine favour resonates with a widespread theology of thanksgiving and hope. Similarly, Beautiful Nubia's '*Òwúríl ló jílì 'ni máa rír'ì*' (Morning is the day of one's fortune) circulates as both recorded music and quoted lyric, expressing collective optimism that each new day carries the possibility of success. As Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) note, such gospel and inspirational songs function as tools for everyday meaning making, orienting labour toward divine favour while fostering calm, optimism, and social cohesion within shared workspaces.

Sola Allyson (jì jì mo jì l'oni) Lyrics and translation

Jìjì mo jì lónì o
(Waking up today)
Mo dupe eleda mi
(I give thanks to my creator).
Mo sun mo jì layo
(I slept and woke up joyfully)
Ese mi tele ire
(My feet stepped into greatness)
Bi mo tin jade lo
(As I step out today)
Kin se konge ore
(May I come across favour)
Imole oke ko tan sono mi
(May the light of heavens shine upon my path)
Anu ko wa mi ri
(May mercy locate me)

Beautiful Nubia's Owuro l'ojo eni ma r'ire

Ojumo ti mo, ara mi egbe ra ni le, ise ti ya

(The day has broken. Rise up, my kin. It is time for work)

Ojumo ti mo, ore mi e gbon 'ra jigi ka tun 'ra mu

(The day has broken. Get up and strategise)

Oni'se owo, alakowe, gbogbo eni to nwa'se, omo 'lewe o

(Craftsmen, learned folks, job seekers, students)

Chorus

Owuro l'ojo, eni ma r'ire o, eni ma r'ire o

Won a se 'ba owuro o

(The morning is the day.

He, who will be favoured has to pay homage to the morning.)

Theologically, these practices resonate with the Yoruba worldview that conceives each day as a divinely orchestrated gift. Ajose (2024), in his study of Pentecostal music-making on Yoruba prayer mountains, argues that music is central to how Yoruba Christians “activate” the spiritual potential of time and space. The invocation of songs like Allyson’s and Nubia’s in markets and motor parks represents a similar activation, in which dawn is sacralised through melody and rhythm, transforming ordinary spaces into transient sanctuaries. It is significant that many of these songs blend personal testimony with collective exhortation. *Jiji mo ji l’oni* testifies to individual gratitude, while *Owuro l’ojo eni ma r’ire* frames the day as universally pregnant with potential. This dual orientation makes them ideal for public performance: they allow participants to both affirm their personal relationship with the divine and align themselves with the fortunes of the collective. As Igboin (2024) notes in his study of Mountain of Fire and Miracles’ prayer culture, continuous prayer in urban spaces functions not only as spiritual discipline but also as urban invigoration, re-energising communities and individuals within the city’s relentless rhythms.

Sacred repertoires like this Sola Allyson’s and others are anchored in Yoruba expressive culture, where waking at dawn is ritually tied to thanksgiving. Allyson’s delivery relies heavily on the tonal inflections of Yoruba language, which are mirrored in her melodic contour. For example, the rising melodic phrases reflect upward tonal patterns, producing a musical embodiment of hope. Listeners interpret this not only as gratitude but also as a reaffirmation of ase (divine authority) that animates daily labour. Beautiful Nubia’s *owuro l’ojo* explicitly draws on proverbial Yoruba wisdom, foregrounding the belief that dawn signals opportunity. The song’s acoustic texture, guitar strumming accompanied by soft percussion mirrors the unhurried pace of early mornings. The musical texture, thus, situates listeners’ struggles within broader cosmological cycles, enhancing their evaluative sense of life satisfaction (Adejube, 2025). According to a trader at Bodija,

Every morning around 7 a.m., when Bodija Market is still quiet around this area, I play gospel songs like Tope Alabi or Bidemi Olaoba on my speaker. I light a little

incense and say prayers for the day. Even before selling a yard of ankara or lace, my mind is calm. Business comes second. This quiet blessing comes first, no matter if the day is busy or slow, whether I sell or not. **(Interview/August 2025/Ibadan/Female)**

A Micra driver also avers;

Every morning as I start my Micra and hit the roads of Ibadan, the first thing I do is play gospel music on the stereo. The atmosphere of the songs fills the car and makes me feel protected while driving up and down these busy streets with all the traffic and okadas. The music calms my spirit and reminds me to commit the day to God before picking up passengers. Later in the afternoon when the sun is high, I can switch to fuji from King Wasiu Ayinde or Pasuma to keep the energy going. But morning is strictly for God. That quiet worship time sets the tone and gives me peace no matter how crazy the road gets. **(Interview/August 2025/Ibadan/Male)**

Ethnographic observations indicate that morning music is frequently embedded within communal prayers that precede the day's business. At Bodija and Dugbe markets, groups of traders gather briefly for short prayers led by older men or women, invoking protection, prosperity, and peace. These sessions are often interspersed with familiar choruses and simple dances, expressing gratitude for previous sales and hope for the day ahead. Among non-Yoruba traders, particularly Igbo participants, weekly Thursday morning praise and prayer sessions were observed in Dugbe, coinciding with the environmental sanitation period before 10 a.m. During these gatherings, traders from different shops collectively sing and worship, temporarily transforming the marketplace from a commercial site into a musico-religious space marked by solidarity, spiritual reflection, and shared optimism (Igboin, 2024; Adelakun, 2024).

The choice of songs also reflects the permeability between religiosity and everyday survival strategies. Omolawal and Akinwumi (2020) argue that religiosity shapes workers' attitudes, and this is visible in how drivers frame their day. For instance, playing gospel songs such as Tope Alabi's 'Agbara Nla' (Great Power) or Yinka Ayefele's 'Olorun to tobi' (The Great God) before embarking on the day's journeys is seen as a way of invoking divine protection against accidents, theft, or police harassment. This underscores the functional differentiation of music across the workday, with sacred music setting a decent and spiritual foundation.

Such practices resonate with Feld's (1996) concept of acoustemology, where sound constitutes a mode of knowing and experiencing the world, and with DeNora's (2000) perspective on music's capacity to structure emotion and enhance wellbeing. In Ibadan's markets, music-making functions both as a spiritual invocation and a means of generating subjective wellbeing, offering participants communal identity, emotional anchorage, and moral grounding within the city's bustling urban rhythms. The morning soundscape, though informal, operates as a structured liturgy that reinforces belonging and collective resilience (Adejube,

2025). In motor parks, the morning commute similarly becomes a site of personal devotion. Drivers frequently transform their vehicles into mobile religious spaces by playing gospel or praise music through car stereos, singing along, praying, or quietly meditating. The vehicle thus functions as a portable sanctuary, regulating mood, fostering calm, and preparing the mind for the day's labour. Music in this context serves as both a resource for self-regulation and a structuring principle for subjective experience.

Beyond individual comfort, the collective performance of morning spirituality reinforces social cohesion. At Gbagi market, women traders highlighted that starting the day with prayer fosters a sense of unity, even amid intense competition. When one trader plays music on an audio device, others often join in singing, as most of the repertoire consists of familiar popular gospel songs. Oyelade *et al.* (2021) highlight the interplay between the sacred and the profane in Ibadan's urban markets, noting how prayer and music create temporary sacred spaces within otherwise commercial and contested environments. Morning gospel songs therefore do more than mark the start of the day; they create a temporary reprieve from economic pressures, fostering solidarity, shared optimism, and emotional steadiness. In Ibadan, these soundscapes function as informal yet structured rituals that anchor wellbeing, offering traders and drivers both spiritual grounding and social cohesion. By blending personal devotion with collective participation, the morning repertoire establishes a foundation for the day's labour, shaping the city's sonic and social rhythms. This underscores the study's central argument: music at the intersection of spirituality and work is a critical resource for negotiating the uncertainties of urban life and sustaining everyday resilience.

Shifting Sonic Practices: From Sacred to Secular

As the Ibadan morning matures into late morning and early afternoon, the spiritual tones that characterise dawn gradually give way to secular rhythms. By around 10 a.m. in markets such as Dugbe, Oje, and Bodija, gospel music recedes into the background, replaced by the pulsating beats of fuji, highlife, and increasingly, Afrobeats. This transition does not signal an abandonment of spirituality but rather reflects a pragmatic recalibration of the city's sonic order to match the intensifying demands of urban labour and economic survival. The soundscape becomes a tool through which productivity, resilience, and sociability are maintained, as secular music resonates with workers' lived experiences (Adejube, 2025).

Fuji dominates the mid-morning and afternoon hours, with the booming voices of Pasuma and Saheed Osupa filling the air from CD sellers' shops, small kiosks, and bus drivers' sound systems. Their music, driven by dynamic percussion and morally loaded lyrics, serves both as entertainment and social commentary, reflecting resilience, wit, and the improvisatory spirit of Yoruba urban life. Ajayi (2024) notes that fuji operates as a sonic diary of the Yoruba city experience, where money, rivalry, morality, and survival are central themes. In the markets, traders laugh, debate, or sing along to Osupa's lyrical jabs, while drivers quicken their tempo in response to the rhythm. Fuji sustains bodily energy and mirrors the competitive and

improvisatory ethos of informal urban economies. For many, fuji functions as the “voice of the street.” One Bodija Micra driver explained:

Fuji wakes us up in another way. After the morning prayers, gospel calms the heart, but fuji keeps the body and mind alert. When Osupa or Pasuma sings, I feel the street, the hustle, and the need to stay sharp. It is not just music; it tells you the city’s story while pushing you to work. **(Interview/August 2025/Ibadan/Male)**

The switch from sacred gospel to secular fuji thus reflects a sequential logic: gospel prepares the heart, while fuji energises the body and sharpens focus. Adejube and Ajala (2024) describe this as the “ambivalence” of musical practice, lived here as fluidity, with workers comfortably navigating between sacred and secular soundscapes to remain spiritually anchored yet physically and mentally mobilised for the day’s labour.

The layering of fuji and Afrobeats also reflects generational preferences and stylistic negotiation. Older traders and experienced drivers tend to favour the philosophically dense and morally infused messages of Osupa’s fuji, while younger apprentices or drivers gravitate toward Asake’s streetwise Afrobeats. Yet both genres serve similar functional purposes: sustaining energy, creating social ambience, and facilitating informal networks of sociability. A shop owner at Gbagi explained:

If I don’t play music, customers will not stay. They want that vibe. Sometimes I start with fuji, then later I play Afrobeats to keep everyone engaged. Music balances the mood and helps business flow. **(Interview/August 2025/Ibadan/Female)**

A young apprentice at Dugbe market explained:

By 11 a.m., I usually feel tired and sleepy, so I start playing music in my native language. But when Asake or Davido comes on, it energises me. I begin joking and dancing with prospective customers, waving at them, laughing and moving along to the music and it makes selling much easier. **(Interview/August 2025/Ibadan/Male)**

This sonic transition illustrates the adaptability of workers to the evolving demands of urban labour. Oyelade et al. (2021) describe Ibadan’s markets as contested spaces where sacred and profane coexist, and the afternoon soundscape exemplifies this dynamic. Morning gospel establishes moral and spiritual grounding, while fuji and Afrobeats provide rhythm, humour, and distraction from fatigue or stress. In this sense, secular music complements rather than contradicts earlier devotional practices, sustaining both bodily and emotional engagement. The use of music in this way aligns with broader conceptions of urban wellbeing. Rigon (2018) and Adegunloye and Afowowe (2025) emphasise that wellbeing in Nigerian cities is relational, cultural, and environmental, not merely biomedical. By sequencing sacred and secular

soundscapes, workers construct a rhythm of resilience, allowing them to endure heat, long hours, and the unpredictability of customers. Afrobeats and fuji thus operate as practical technologies of urban survival, energising bodies, regulating mood, and sustaining both individual and collective engagement within the dynamic social life of Ibadan's informal economy.

An older trader at the meat selling section at Bodija reflected:

Osupa or any other fuji music gives the market a rhythm we all understand. Even when Afrobeats plays later, we all follow along. It keeps the energy flowing and makes the day lighter. **(Interview/August 2025/Ibadan/Male)**

A bus driver on Bodija axis noted:

After morning prayers, I switch to fuji or Afrobeats. It helps me stay alert on the road and keeps passengers happy. Music here is part of how we survive the day. **(Interview/August 2025/Ibadan/Male)**

These excerpts reinforce the argument that secular music in the afternoon is not mere entertainment. It functions as a practical tool for sustaining energy, regulating mood, and facilitating sociability. Together with the morning gospel repertoire, these layers of sound create a continuous, adaptive rhythm that supports both the economic and psychosocial dimensions of urban work in Ibadan (Adejube, 2025; Oyelade et al., 2021).

Music, Spirituality, and Everyday Wellbeing

The alternation between sacred and secular soundscapes in Ibadan's markets and motor parks illustrates how workers cultivate subjective wellbeing through everyday musical practices. Drawing on Diener's (1984) tripartite model of wellbeing—life satisfaction, positive affect, and low negative affect—this study shows how spiritual and secular repertoires function as affective resources shaping both inner life and social relations. Morning sacred songs were strongly linked to life satisfaction, understood as participants' evaluative judgment about the quality and direction of their lives. These songs provided a narrative of purpose, affirming that divine guidance and blessings accompany daily labour. In this way, sacred music contributes to enduring meaning-making, a core component of life satisfaction (Lawes, 2019; Zoughbi, 2022; Ajose, 2025).

Positive affect, including joy, vitality, and enthusiasm, was more frequently associated with midday and afternoon secular soundscapes. Traders and drivers identified fuji tracks by Pasuma and Saheed Osupa as energising, creating lively atmospheres that sustained physical labour and encouraged social interaction. Similarly, Afrobeats hits from artists such as Asake, Davido, Wizkid, and Burna Boy animated the environment, making work more pleasurable and facilitating sociability. Both sacred and secular repertoires also mitigated negative affect, particularly stress and frustration arising from economic pressures, traffic, or customer disputes.

Morning prayers and gospel songs helped participants approach challenges with calmness, while fuji and Afrobeats later in the day restored collective cheer and vitality.

In Ibadan, the urban soundscape is a deliberate and dynamic resource for constructing subjective wellbeing. Music functions as a tool for sustaining optimism, reinforcing social bonds, and regulating emotional states, illustrating how spirituality and popular culture intersect to shape everyday life in the informal economy (Lawes, 2019; Zoughbi, 2022). This layered approach to sound demonstrates that musical practices are integral not only to ritual and entertainment but also to the psychosocial resilience of urban workers.

Table showing how sacred and secular music shape everyday life

Soundscape	Representative Musical Examples	Dimension of Subjective Wellbeing	Observed Effects
Sacred (Morning)	Sola Allyson – “ <i>Jiñ Mo Ji Loni</i> ” Beautiful Nubia – “ <i>Owuro Lojo</i> ” <i>Eni Ma Fire</i> ” Gospel choruses & communal prayers	Life Satisfaction (Meaning, purpose, gratitude)	Fosters gratitude for life; inspires hope for daily opportunities; affirms divine protection; strengthens resilience before work begins.
Secular (Midday–Afternoon)	Pasuma – Fuji tracks, Saheed Osupa – Fuji performances (e.g., <i>London Special</i>) Afrobeats Wizkid – “ <i>Oyelegba</i> ” Asake – “ <i>Omo ope</i> ”	Positive Affect (Joy, vitality, enthusiasm)	Stimulates energy and liveliness; sustains physical labour; creates pleasurable workspaces; encourages sociability and customer engagement.

Across both sacred and secular repertoires, Yoruba proverbs and tonal language provide a cultural foundation for wellbeing in Ibadan’s markets and motor parks. Gospel songs often encode proverbs of gratitude, patience, and endurance, situating traders’ and drivers’ daily struggles within broader narratives of divine assurance and hope (Ajose, 2024; Lawes, 2019). Fuji, by contrast, employs humour, satire, and proverbial wit as a form of therapeutic release, transforming hardship into laughter and fostering solidarity among participants (Ajayi, 2024; Adejube, 2025). Afrobeats extends these logics by translating local challenges into global aspirations, offering workers a cosmopolitan horizon of possibility beyond the immediate constraints of economic precarity. Central to all these genres is the tonal quality of the Yoruba language, where speech tones shape melodic contour and guide musical expression. Music, therefore, functions not merely as artistic display but as an extension of everyday communicative acts such as prayer, exhortation, and encouragement (Ayorinde & Ajose, 2022). In this sense, soundscapes operate as sonic proverbs, embodying moral, spiritual, and affective frameworks that sustain resilience, regulate emotion, and orient workers toward hope within the daily rhythms of urban life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interplay of sacred and secular music in Ibadan's markets and motor parks demonstrates that sound is not merely an aesthetic or background phenomenon but a central resource for everyday wellbeing. Gospel songs, fuji, and Afrobeats each perform distinct yet complementary functions: they orient workers morally and spiritually, sustain energy and sociability, and link local struggles to broader cosmopolitan imaginaries. Through Yoruba proverbs and tonal language, music extends beyond artistic expression to become a medium for communicating hope, fostering solidarity, and regulating emotional and social life. These layered soundscapes reveal that urban informal workers deliberately structure their auditory environments to navigate the challenges of economic precarity, social interaction, and personal aspiration. The central argument of this study is affirmed: in Ibadan, music at the intersection of spirituality and labour is a vital, lived technology of resilience, enabling informal workers to cultivate wellbeing, sustain optimism, and negotiate the complexities of everyday urban life.

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