

Safeguarding the Nigerian Folk Music as a Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Iheakpu-Awka Moral Folksongs for Sustainable Education and Development

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Abstract

The indigenous music of the Nigerian society has been propagated through oral tradition from generation to generation. Parents and older siblings usually serve as teachers but due to modernity, it had been seen as an old fashion, rarely transmitted orally, written down, documented in audio or video format. Very limited numbers of folk song materials are published. For this reason, there are needs that moral folk songs of Iheakpu-Awka in Enugu state, Nigeria, which have cultural values, be safeguarded as cultural and natural heritage of the people by recording the music as audio/video and streaming it online, thereby reviving music which had gone into extinction. It will serve as resource material for teaching and learning in schools and colleges for sustainable development in a pandemic era. It will also inculcate in children and youths values, respect for elders, honesty, transparency and morality. So, it is best transferred to school which have systematic educational opportunities and to the world at large. Therefore, this article engaged in contextual and lyrical analysis of selected moral folk songs from Iheakpu-Awka culture. Employing descriptive survey design and content analyses method, the researcher used interview and participant observation as instruments for data collection.

Keywords: Safeguarding, Moral folk music, cultural heritage, sustainable education & development.

Introduction

Music is a living art in Nigerian communities and its performance is not only participatory but based on everyday life and activities as commonly found in many other African states (Nzewi, 2003). It is also pertinent to note that teachers and students enter the classroom with a rich experience of Nigerian music in their immediate environment as well as the larger community context. Their educational background, which includes the music syllabus, however operates within the Western institutional context (Bresler, 1998; Nketia, 1970; Okafor, 1991). These, no doubt, have led to an increase in the call by Nigerian musicologists to systematically document and analyze traditional ethnic music (Omibiyi-Obidike, 2001 and Samuel, 2013). Traditional ethnic music, notably folk songs, as a culture indicator provides an avenue for clear expression to the level of cultural complexity, and a set of norms differentiating and sharply characterizing cultures when analysis of their song texts are systematically embarked upon. Kennedy (1980) defined folksongs as songs of unknown authorship passed orally from one generation to another, sung without accompaniment and often found in variants (of words and tunes) in different parts of a country. Folk songs used to be predominantly found among peasants or country dwellers, but have since spread to towns and urban cities where they chronicle the people's lives in terms of design, melody and rhythm; hence they have become traditional among them. The indigenous music of the Nigerian society has been propagated through oral tradition from generation to generation. Parents and older siblings usually serve as teachers but due to modernity, it had been seen as an old fashion, rarely transmitted orally, written down, documented in audio or video format. Very limited numbers of folk song materials are published. For this reason, there are needs that moral folk songs of Iheakpu-Awka in Enugu state, Nigeria, which have cultural values, be safeguarded as

cultural and natural heritage of the people by recording the music as audio/video and streaming it online, thereby reviving music which had gone into extinction.

Safeguarding Cultural Heritage

Folk songs are intangible cultural heritage that needs to be safeguarded. In a public report on cultural diversity, UNESCO, as cited in Grant (2010), refines two core approaches to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. The first consists of collecting, recording and archiving it, and the second involves conserving it in living form and ensuring its transmission to future generations. In the report where this distinction is made, UNESCO makes no value judgments about each of these approaches, nor do they suggest an appropriate balance between the two. Yet the UNESCO cultural diversity report reminds the reader that: 'Tradition' and 'heritage' suggests dependability, immutability and inflexibility. In fact, local knowledge is subject to a continuous process of reassessment, renewal and expansion. Each generation forges the cognitive tools and understandings required to live in a rapidly evolving world by tempering the knowledge of its forefathers with personal experience and opportunities. Blending new ways with old enables indigenous communities to uphold their unique ways of life, identities, values and world views. This brings into relief a tension relating to the perceived best approach for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, including languages and music cultures. Collecting, recording, and archiving language or music can arguably be an end in itself: namely, the preservation of that heritage. Admittedly, these documentary activities can incidentally work in favor of renewal, for example by stimulating performance practice, raising prestige, or renewing community interest (Grant, 2010).

Transmission-Based Model

According to Cambodian Living Arts, 2015 as cited in (Grant, 2016), one successful model of a learning-based approach to music sustainability is the Cambodian Living Arts program of activities, which support master musicians, students and assistant teachers to develop income-generating skills, while also helping to revitalize and celebrate their cultural heritage”. This non-government organization provides master-musicians with a wage, instruments, teaching space, and basic healthcare. For students, it provides musical instruments, public school stipends, and a limited number of university-level scholarships; a few years ago it opened its first teaching and learning centre in Phnom Penh. This transmission-based model holds parallels with certain music apprenticeship schemes in the United States, funded by arts agencies as a form of “intervention” in cultural sustainability, in which younger members of an arts community learn from respected elders (Titon, 2009a, p. 13). In some ways in Nigeria, programs like these can help replicate time-honoured apprenticeship systems of music transmission between older and younger generations.

Methodology

Data were collected through in-depth interview sessions with old and middle-aged men and women in Iheakpu-Awka. These are individuals identified as the custodians of the people’s tradition. In addition, the participant observation method was used to collect and record live musical performances of the songs with the aid of video camera. Transcribed samples of the songs were collated,

organized, codified and presented by way of content analysis.





Fig. 1. Researcher on interview

Musical Ethnology

Several features of Igbo culture can be identified in the musical repertoires of Iheakpu- Awka folksongs. They can be categorized into what is known as musical ethnology. Examples include: moral songs, cradle songs, funeral songs, marriage songs, satirical/entertainment songs, festival songs, work songs and so forth. Other categories include songs which support cultural ideologies, ethos, values and philosophies. For example, there are morality songs meant to reaffirm certain established societal institutions especially those widely accepted as good and beneficial to the members of the community. There are also others that

condemn vices and correct bad habits and behavior of erring members of the community. Some of the categories are examined in this paper.

Moral Songs: Warning Against Immorality / Adultery

a. Eze jek'igbo

Igbo Translation Call/ Response	English Translation Call/Response
Eze jek'igbo, Ngwereje (x2) Ngwereje (x2)	A king was in a tour,
Par'igama ji dọọ, Ngwereje	Kept a heap of yam, Ngwereje
Par'igamaokpadọọ, Ngwereje Ngwereje	Kept a bag of Bambara nut,
O sionyeemeleọja pee Ngwereje	He said that nobody should commit adultery,
Obunokwuemeọja pe, Ngwereje Ngwereje	His dear wife Committed adultery,
Gwejegweje maa, Ngwereje (2x)	Chants of the spirits (2x)

The above song is a folktale song on how a king, who was to travel, ordered his family members and the wives never to commit adultery because it was against the custom and tradition of his town. He bought all kinds of food items like yam, Bambara nut, rice, beans etc., and kept for them so that they would not have reason for moving out or asking for help elsewhere until he comes back from his journey to a far country. One of his wives called Obunokwu (dearest wife) now committed adultery against the king's instruction. The gods of the land caused her to run mad. The promiscuous behavior of his dearest wife, made the

king to be very annoyed when he came back. But due to the culture of the land he has nothing to do about it than to put his dearest wife away while the villagers sang this song to remind her and other women around about the culture of their land. This is applicable to the culture of Iheakpu-Awka people.

The above song inculcates in a child the sense of being morally sound, especially when one gets married. It teaches a female child to be sexually dependent only to her husband especially the young girls. Parents tell this kind of story to their children to teach them the implication of leaving your own husband to meet with another man. From the above story, it causes divorce as it brings shame to both families. The person involved becomes a caricature in the village. The person involved especially women, becomes mentally disordered, etc.

Cradle / Lullaby songs

b. Onurū Ekwa Nwa (He who hears the cry of a baby)

Solo and Chorus Alternation Igbo Translation

English Translation

Onurūekwa e! a a e!

Who heard the cry of a baby?

Onurū ekwa nwa,

Who heard the cry of a baby?

mee ngwa ngwa

Should do fast to come

n' obughiofuonyemurunwa

because, a child is not owned by one person

In the Igbo community, a child is not owned by one person alone. Iheakpu – Awka inclusive. Though a child is born to his biological parents but belongs to the whole community when it comes to the child's upbringing. The song above implies that whenever a child is faced with one challenge or the other that it is the duty of the people, community or relations to come to the child's help or rescue.

This song was sung to teach people the importance of caring for one another or even for other people's children not minding their biological parentage. It inculcates in a child the spirit of neighborhood. No man is an Ireland unto himself.

c. **Nwa di mkpa(A child is important)**

Solo and Chorus Alternation

Igbo Translation

English Translation

Nwae!,Nwa di mkpa, Nwaasoka (x3)
important,

Child o!, child is
child is so sweet (x3)

Imana onweghiihenasonn'obikariaimutanwa
sweetens my

Do you know that, nothing
heart than to bear a child?

Nwaburunwoken'obukwanunwa e!
child o!

If it is a boy child, it is a

Nwaburunwanyi n' obukwanunwa e!
child

If it is a girl child, it is a

Imana onweghiihenasonm obi kariimutanwa
sweetens my
child?

Do you know that, nothing
heart than to bear a

In an Igbo society like Iheakpu – Awka, gender is considered important in child bearing. Sometimes if a woman consistently bears a particular gender, she fills badly about it especially when it is female gender. It is expected that a woman should have at least a male child who becomes the heir when his father dies. But when a woman bears only female gender, the husband feels offended and sometimes such leads to divorce, because the man loses hope that no one is to replace him or even possess his inheritance if he dies. Because of the challenges

women face in childbearing they had to compose this song to encourage whoever that is passing through such a challenge to know that no gender is more preferable than the other. Only that the culture demands that there must be a male child in a family who will take over his father's inheritance once he is no longer alive. The song implies that both genders are important and one need not to be biased about which gender one bears most, since children are gift from God which people need to be appreciated from the depth of their hearts.

Funeral song

D. Ọnụrụekwaọnwụ (He who hears the sound of mourning)

Igbo Translation	English Translation
Solo and Chorus Alternation	
Ọnụrụekwaọnwụ mourning	He who hears the sound of mourning
Buru nkata, jebeonitchamgbere	and left for business at Onitcha
Ọzụtaribee! should eat alone	Whatever profit he gets, he
Ọtọgbọrebuonyeọnwụ anybody any time.	Death is inevitable, it visits

This implies that when one refuses to sympathize with others that death will eventually visit him/her one day. It teaches that we should sympathize with one another knowing that death is inevitable.

Marriage song

d. Ola be di ya (gone to her husband's house)

Call	Refrain
Ọlaa!, Ọla be ya	She has gone gone to her husband's house
Ọlae!, ọla be ya	She has gone

She has gone	gone to her husband's house
Ngozi alaa, ọla be ya	Ngozi has gone Gone to her husband's house
Ọlae!, ọla be ya Gone to her husband's house	She has gone
Ịnọrọ be nnegi, mee k' imele house	when you are in your mother's house
	Behave as you like
inọrọ be di gi, changieomume character	when in your husband's house change your character
change, changieomume	change, Change your character
changeio!,changieomume	<i>change, Change your character</i>

The above folksong is sung when they might have paid the woman's dowry and she been handed over to her husband. The maidens will begin to sing the above song which implies that a lady can do whatever thing she likes in her father's house and not to her husband's house. The maidens through the above song, advises the newly married girl to change all her bad and unwanted characters as she goes into her new husband's house. Or it could lead to divorce when such bad characters were not stopped.

Educational Implications

The indigenous contexts of the songs could serve as a rich source of reference for musical arts education in formal music settings. Teachers could develop repertoires from these songs into a variety of materials in the teaching and learning of indigenous culture and music in the classroom. Another way is to use

the music elements (video/audio) of each applicable song to suit learning objectives of the day's lessons.

Recommendations

In order to actualize the implications itemized above, the following recommendations become

Imperative for immediate implementation amongst others:

- a) Parents and elders should endeavor to expose their children to the traditional music of their community from early stage even after they have been exposed to Western education.
- b) They should be given opportunity to participate in the musical activities of their town in order to get them exposed to the rich cultural heritage of Africa; and
- c) Music educators at various levels and musicologists must double their efforts by carrying out well designed studies to collect and document folksongs from different ethnic groups in the country. Such collections would form useful resource databank and reference materials for schools.
- d) There is the need to re-visit the current music curriculum in order to increase its local content and give it the much desired indigenous flavor. The study of different traditional ethnic music and their application to learning in Nigerian schools should no longer remain a pastime affair.

Conclusion

Iheakpu-Awka folksongs are rich sources of cultural significance. When adapted by music teachers, these folksongs would go a long way to enhance classroom teaching and learning. Students would appreciate their music lessons more when they could draw examples from their immediate environment with its attendant rich content and context adaptable to formal learning. Some scholars may argue by referring to teachers as preservers and transmitters of their own cultural heritages especially when it has to do with mere collections of folksongs, but the

perspective provided in this paper affirms that there is great merit in the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge to students, as demonstrated in the documentation and analyses of African folksongs.

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