

IBIBIO MUSICAL PRACTICES AND CLIMATIC CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The influence of alien culture in the society has been on the increase and has greatly affected the growth of traditional musical practices. This influence is not only applicable to Ibibio an ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State, but is equally a universal phenomenon which has affected many traditional societies. Some of the factors responsible for this could be attributed to the development in information technology, cross-cultural fertilization and other factors. Other issues like, religious, political and educational changes have crept into the fabric of traditional musical practices, thus, resulting in weak and scanty cultural behaviour. The area for this work is the Ibibio - speaking communities which are loosely located in the mainland area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study examined various changes that are affecting the traditional musical genres of the people using descriptive method. Relevant works were reviewed on the roles of music and societal change in the cultural tradition of Ibibio and other ethnic groups. It sought the opinions of other authors concerning the place of music in the society and the influence of societal change on indigenous music. It is realized that no society is static and changes are inevitable in any given society, it is recommended that changes in musical ideas should not be a threat to indigenous musical practices but should develop alongside in the society to reflect the mood of the changing world.

Keywords: Ibibio, musical practices, climatic change

INTRODUCTION

Nations around the world are undergoing rapid changes that are altering the social nature of the society. Music, which is a product of man-made object, is objectively open to change especially when the mode of preservation is through oral transmission.

It is a well-known fact that the contemporary society is subject to changes due to certain factors which bring about so called development. Some of these changes are influenced by internal and external factors, which may be inimical to the social and moral values of the society. Often time, it may result in moral decadence while some yield a favorable effect leading to the advancement

in social development and knowledge. Changes have both negative and positive influence in the society, therefore; the issue of social and cultural changes cannot be ignored in a particular society Onuora-Oguno (2006), in his writing on “The Albatross of Fishing Songs in Igboland”, opines that “Many unique musical genres are fast disappearing from Igboland because the system of oral transmission has greatly been undermined by Western influences.” (p. 90). It is likely that the influence of Western values and globalization over the indigenous culture is quite enormous. Westernization has cut across every phase. According to web definition, it is the “assimilation of Western culture” and also “the adoption of Western ideas and lifestyles by other countries” (goggle). It involves the ethical values, social norms, traditional customs, specific artifacts, technologies, beliefs, political and economic systems of the Western world that are being imposed on the besieged culture. The rapid global revolution has great effect on the African societies - either positively or negatively. The effect has diffused into the cultural traits of many indigenous African traditional practices and has grossly affected some Ibibio traditional norms and values.

However, the effect of the alien traits is not only applicable to traditional musical practices alone but has penetrated into other components of cultural milieu which include; food, personal names, language, dressing, religion, education, economic and political system. For instance, on giving names to persons, Ukpog (2007) has confirmed that some Ibibio people have abandoned their indigenous names and adopted other fashionable foreign names because of Western impact. He states:

The Christian missions have had a good deal of influence on the Ibibio. After all, they were nearer to the colonized people than the commercial firms and the colonizers themselves. Because the missionaries taught the Ibibio that they were heathens or pagans, with no religion of their own and that the Ibibio culture was inferior to that of the white man, there was every attempt particularly among the educated and the Christians to imbibe white culture including language, dress religion (and even music) ... It was a great pride in those days to bear foreign names without any thought of the meanings of such names. After all, anything white was deemed good, rational and official (p. 275).

The influence of music can affect one’s soul, character and mind. Therefore, the occurrence of any musical innovation in the community stands the chance of affecting the whole state of mind. The change in musical traditions, affect the fundamental mores of the society. For instance, it is apt to note that, the missionaries during colonial era taught British folk songs, introduced piano and harmonium and thought it deemed for the expression of musical knowledge and values. This was a change that resulted in flippancy of practicing indigenous musical arts. Changes happened as a result of behavioral response of people to certain external and internal demand and needs.

Throughout history, music has been a vehicle used for enacting change in the world. A clear case is Martin Luther, who protested against the Roman Catholic liturgy by introducing German choral and hymns using other vernacular apart from Latin texts. Johnson (2014) in his comments on the effect of alien culture says, “More than ever before, African cultures of which Nigeria is part, have suffered not only fierce and incessant invasions by foreign cultures, they have also sadly, been pushed into a position of either a second or third reserve in priority, or totally forced into extinction” (p.53). In the course of this, indigenous cultural value embedded in religious, social and political institutions disintegrate, causing a change in societal behavioural pattern.

THE IBIBIO MUSIC AND SOCIETAL CHANGE

The dichotomy of traditional and modern Ibibio society caused by the increasing threats of urbanization, globalization, and technological advancement, educational, religious and political activities has challenged the social norms and values of the society. An alteration in the social order of the society has brought about changes in nature, social relationship, social institutions and social behaviours. This paradigmatic change has shifted the social structure of the traditional system to the present status-quo. Similarly, Okafor (2005) when describing Igbo society in transition sees them as being more receptive to culture change. He states that, in more recent times, the Igbo society has undergone more rapid changes than in former times, propelled by internal and external forces. According to him, these changes have struck at the heart of not only the relevance of the musician in the society but also of the people’s music (folk music) itself. However, factors contributing to the evolutionary change of our culture are considered as influencing agents that wade into the fabric of people’s ethos. Such factors are:

i. Westernization

Many African states have been affected and influenced by Western culture through colonization, trade, education, Christianity, technological revolution among other factors. Western education was introduced into Nigeria alongside with missionary work. This has several influences on the retention of the indigenous culture of the people. The traditional society like Ibibio has adopted the formal system and ignored traditional methods whereby the education of the citizenry, though informal, was geared toward the cultivation of good moral values and the maintenance of relatively crime free society. Traditional education was also seen as the process of preparing the individual to fit into the social structure and to play a particular social role as a member of that society.

Mostly, some of the right virtues and morals of the land were passed on to the next generation through music. Tradition education was a continuous and life-long process in Ibibio society, where every member of the society was concerned about the morality and virtue of individuals

within the society. Music was not only an aid but an integral agent to Ibibio traditional education. The Europeans, in their quest to evangelize, injected their culture, education and ideas into the lives of the people, hence, indigenous cultures were replaced by foreign cultures. People saw and admired this and absorbed into their lives the secrets and qualities of these foreigners' traits.

Through Colonization, the Western way of worship, which was fundamentally different from that of the African was introduced. The new mind set was developed and children were sent to schools to receive formal education in quest for literacy. Such ideas incidentally became an opposite to the African way of life, hence, the exposure of young brains to Western ideas and beliefs, brainwashed their thoughts, to regard anything African as barbaric and inferior. However, such influences rather helped Africans to accept anything Western as superior and better especially when compared to their culture.

The perception of the so-called backwardness of African tradition by foreigners, all factored into why things in Africa were replaced often with other cultures and customs. What came in then was perceived to be better and was often adopted, integrated or substituted. People with high influential power were persuasively absorbed into new cultures. For others in the society, often their own ways were flushed out, got imposed and had no ability to successfully make these new things their own.

ii. Effects of Christianity

The advent of Christianity into Nigeria in the early part of the 19th century carried both positive and negative influence on the people. For Christians, it was the period of emancipation of sins and causing people to relate with God through Christ. While for the traditionalists and culturists it caused a lot of breakdown in their beliefs and practices.

With the coming of the missionaries, the Ibibio people were overwhelmed with their culture and the new way of worshipping God. The kind of music brought in by the early Missionaries was strictly patterned after Western culture. It is of note that the mission schools were founded to pay great attention to European music with the purpose of enabling school masters, catechists to play simple chants and hymns from staff notation on the harmonium in order to replace the traditional musical instruments. Fafunwa (1991) who wrote on the history of education in Nigeria supported this fact that the early Christians were out to convert the Africans to Christianity via education. He states, "Knowledge of the Bible, the ability to sing hymns and recite Catechisms, as well as the ability to communicate both orally and in writing, were considered essential for a good Christian." (p. 81). These developments were encouraged and strengthened by the activities of the missionaries who preached against African cultural practices while promoting Western

cultural practices. The mission philosophy founded by the colonial educational system according to Vidal (2008) was implicated to music such that sacred and solemn music resulted in the conversion of souls, while all efforts were geared towards planting and institutionalizing the European music educational system in Nigeria. He reiterated that the objectives of the missionaries were two folds: to propagate the British Christian religious system and to spread the Anglo-version of the European musical culture. He states:

Locally, schools were founded and they served as the reservoir for recruiting young boys who will be trained as choir boys at divine services. The English alphabets and the European sol-fa system of notation and sight singing were taught to school children. Singing classes were organized for children of the mission houses. Western harmoniums were imported to establish European intonation in music and to accompany singing...At the Lagos female institution, Robert Arungbamolu Coker was giving music instruction in voice and piano forte to a large number of women singers who later dominated the musical scene of Victorian Lagos from 1880-1990 through their brilliant performances at public concerts. (pp. 3 - 4)

This supports the fact that the early music education brought in by the missionaries has really influenced the indigenous music practice because they were meant to serve and promote the Western culture rather than our own culture. Likewise, Nketia (1974) claimed that their perception and hostile attitude toward African music, especially to drumming, because it was associated with what seemed to Christian evangelists as pagan practice, led to frivolous opinion about African music. Moreover, the music did not appear to be suitable for the form of Christian worship that Westerners were used to.

The trend of superimposing Western musical practices has led to the establishment of schools and institutionalizing European music in the lives of many Nigerians. So, despite the imposition of the foreigner's policy on our culture, it has yielded a substantial result by producing some of the early crops of Nigerian pioneer music scholars such as Echezona, Harcourt Whyte, Ransome Kuti, T. K. E. Phillip, and A. T. Olude among others.

In the main stream of the school system, the traditional African music was viewed as paganistic and underdeveloped with no educational value, and as such it was excluded from the curriculum of the school system. Akpabot (1986) states:

During the colonial era, Nigerians were made to learn songs from European countries that bore no semblance to their environment and way of life ... The situation then, was that the European teachers who controlled the classrooms, instead of allowing the pupils in

their charge to develop within their own culture, were feeding them with undigested Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. (p. 88)

In line with Akpabot's view, Nketia (1974) adds:

Because indigenous African music could not be used, the substitution of Western music was vigorously pursued. Some churches translated Western hymns into African languages and thus made them more meaningful to their converts. The music curriculum of Western-style education introduced by those churches emphasized Western hymns, school music and art music. (p.15)

This has created an indelible impression and bad notion concerning the appreciation of one's own music. The abandonment of indigenous culture in favour of the Western products has altered the long existed musical culture, such that some Ibibio musical genres and plays are given little or no attention.

The influence of foreign cultures, like the one indirectly brought in by the missionaries, had adversely affected the Ibibio musical practices. They came in with multiple purposes of spreading the gospel and evangelizing the area, colonization and trade. This has brought a drastic cultural and remarkable change which according to Vidal (2012) created a situation whereby to be civilized and progressive means to imbibe European culture and to be uncivilized and backward means to continue with the African or Islamic traditions and values. The cultural influence of the Europeans was strengthened through importation of material culture which includes among other things the musical instruments. Vidal states, "As early as 1853, western harmoniums were imported to accompany singing." (p.87). In the words of Hinderer in Vidal (2012) states thus:

Mrs Hinderer, an English Missionary woman, played on one of such harmoniums to the excitement of many of her Yoruba audience. The action of sound from ivory and wood caused so much excitement and respect for the European culture that Ogunbona, the great Egba war chief made this remark: 'it is only white people who can do anything great, and only the *iya* who can make wood and ivory speak with her fingers. (p. 87)

Culture contact, had a strong effect on the cultural genre of Ibibio people. For instance, urbanization has affected some of the musical groups that existed in the traditional society. Cultural exchange occurs in a heterogeneous community where people with different cultural backgrounds meet and relate together. Nketia (1974) states:

In the pursuit of trade, members of some societies, such as ... travelled far and wide; other states maintained diplomatic relations with one another. Likewise, there was cultural interaction that resulted in the borrowing and adaptation of cultural items, including music (p. 6).

Ottenberg (1962) wrote on the topic, "Igbo Receptivity to Change" and observed that the Igbo are probably receptive to cultural change and most willing to accept Western ways of any large group in Nigeria. This is not peculiar to Igbo alone but also to Ibibio people, who also moved away from the rural areas to the urban centre in search for white collar jobs. Another factor is through the information network which exposes people to outside culture. This has caused people to become easily attracted to the outside social norms and behaviours.

iii. The Dearth of Indigenous Taste and Value.

African culture is impacted negatively from many sides, and this is a complex dilemma. The first agent that imposed the dominance of European culture came via slavery, colonialism and missionary work. Thus taking European names, language, dress, food and culture circumvented things of African origin and thus secured the notion of African inferiority.

Urbanization has a great effect on the drive for aesthetical values; indeed, it has an overwhelming negative effect on the traditional African culture and language. Some of the effects include the use of the English language as the mother-tongue, whereby, some children can speak English yet they cannot speak a word in their native language. They can sing popular songs and other foreign musical stuff without actually being able to sing any indigenous game song using their mother tongue.

The growth and development of cities, together with the current globalization processes have given rise to the multicultural environment, thereby, giving individual the freedom to share in beliefs and values of other ethnic groups. The wake of modern values such as urbanization, industrialization, science and technology has greatly affected the status of Ibibio traditional values. There are some cultural changes, as an individual migrates from the rural to the urban centres, traditional area to modern city, or from developing environment to advanced city. The complicated life's values and his mode of living are bound to change. During the transition it is likely that the indigenous/old values disappear, making the traditional values to suffer disruption, which sometimes may even lead to extinction. This reversal of man's traditional values with new values creates tension in the cultural system. The growth of cities and towns is not a total blessing to the traditional man because of the eradication of traditional values generated from the progenitors. It is rather the quest for money and better living conditions that has pushed many out into the city and gradually alienated man from his traditional values to embracing new

lifestyle. Though development has its advantages, yet, the subjects are exposed to all sorts of new problems, crimes and difficulties like the state of insecurity which is rampant nowadays.

iv. Political and Economic Change.

The peculiarity of African culture is shown in their ways of life. And most of the value systems as components of the culture are revealed in music, arts and craft, food, religious practices and political/judicial system. Consequent upon the contact with the Western culture, the upsurge of power by the alien eventually challenged the political system of the Ibibio society. The influence of this usurpation of power has really affected the musical practices which were incorporated in secret societies. Udo (1983) states that the political and judicial system of Ibibio before the colonial day was solely under the jurisdiction of secret societies in which all the heads of political leaders were initiates of the esoteric societies. He submits:

Throughout Ibibioland one of the indispensable qualifications for headship of any grade, whether of the village or of the clan, was membership of all the important traditional societies. It cannot, therefore, be said that the state of affairs in Ibibioland was altogether strangely and unreasonably dark, dull and drab in pre-colonial days. There was a well-organized system of government which maintains law and order throughout Ibibioland. (p.115)

The leadership role by esoteric societies and women sororities is still taking place in Ibibioland though in a lesser degree. And its ability to evoke people's emotional state of consciousness is considered as one of its great vital roles. For example; the influence of *ebre* sorority over the conduct of women's affairs in certain quarters is still felt.

The influence that the Europeans established through trade, Christianity and colonial rule was the force that shaped the cultural norms of the African as a whole. Ryan (1987) writing on the impact of Christian Missions in Cross River State made the comment that:

The effects of the missionaries' arrival on the patterns of Nigerian life cannot be denied. The emergence of an educated elite which eventually led to a reduction of the power and influence of the traditional rulers, the rapid assimilation of alien values and practices into a cultural system that had been self-contained and orderly for centuries, the acceptance of alternative methods of dressing, marrying, burying the dead, worshipping God – they all came in the wake of the ships carrying the missionaries. (p. 211).

He further explained that despite the positive effects of missionaries in this part of the region that there were limited benefits against the background of areas like cultural contamination and loss

of political power or changes in the traditional political system. Traditional pattern of political administration was structured under the legislative and judicial powers. Ekong (1987) confirmed this as he stated:

Among the Ibibio/Annang, *ekpo* served this crucial function while among the Efik/Ekoi groups, *ekpe*, *mgbe* served. Besides these, were other instruments of social control like...*ekpo ndok*, *ekpri akata*, age grades and sex groups, and all the minor deities and spirits recognized by each village or clan. Deviant behaviors or what constituted a violation of societal norms were widely known. There was a clear distinction between criminal and sacrilegious deviant behaviours, like stealing received severe public and instant punishment. (p .99).

The state of judicial system and political organization changed from secret societies to modern governmental system and powers became diluted and restricted to other organized political institutions. Unlike the African system which was communal in nature, the new legal system introduced by the white man encouraged and promoted individual right which sometimes may not guarantee peaceful resolution of conflict. Whereas, in traditional Ibibio set up, there was a quick and rapid solution to solve conflict through *mbiam (juju)* Udo (1983) affirms that to settle conflict amicably this approach was employed. He stated that *mbiam (juju)* on which people swear for certainty was one of the most important Ibibio judicial instruments. They believed in the justification of the potency of *mbiam* by then. Nowadays, traditional rulers do not have full control to exercise their powers because of the new trend in political system. The newly imposed power on the people weakened the traditional system of government. Following the words of Aston Smith in Udo (1983):

The impinging of the British legal code on the indigenous social structure was regarded by the Ibibio mainly as juggernaut....As it was, the machinery was disrupted by forbidding *Mbong* to act, and the popular consciousness startled by the introduction of a totally new order of things into the recognition of such alien ideas of impartiality and humanity. In effect, the time interval necessary for growth of the growth of such ideas was shortened. There seemed to be no justification for believing that the ideas of impartiality and humanity would have emerged in an inevitable, evolutionary way, any more than asserting that a Bach fugue lies inherent in the motional reiterations of a native (Africa) dance. The chance of their being implanted from within by an inspired and powerful law-giver, an Anang Mohammed was remote. The likeliest possibility was frank imposition (of the British rule) from without. (pp.116 - 117)

In traditional Ibibio society, the political system was based on the social organizations of six different administrative units augmented by clubs or secret groups. Udo (1983) has it that, the administrative divisions of clans into unit has, for instance, secret societies and clubs, festivals and *Iman* pacts which transcended the clans and united the Ibibio people. Also as earlier mentioned, secret societies such as *ekpo nnyoho*, *ekpri akata*, *ekoon*, *ebre/iban ison* (women society) were quasi political institutions that were highly organized to control the administration of the people. It was indispensable for any leader at any level or gender to become a member in either one or more of the secret societies.

Accordingly, the effect of Western ideology on Africans has lots of influences. It is also important to note that since culture is dynamic in nature, Ibibio culture and its values just like the culture of any other society cannot remain the same. However, the fact is that not all Western values propagated through globalization are good for Africans as a people. Westernization or globalization has its advantages, but not without its attendant woes. Wisdom demands that there is the need to sift the wheat from the chaff.

v. Technological Development.

There is an adage in Ibibio: *okube okpukho nkem ekene isong, isong ikpukhoke nkem ikenne okube* meaning: “The chameleon changes colour to match the earth, the earth doesn’t change color to match the chameleon.” This is a true saying. Society is not static; culture itself must reconstruct itself if the system in which it exists is reconstructed and rearranged to complement with the society. Ibibio culture is constantly changing and evolving because the musical context in the society changes and evolves to meet with time. Technology has become a huge part of today’s societal life.

The development of electronic media and other information technological devices have lessened physical human performances and allow musical ideas to flow globally. Every generation is moving out of relative obscurity to match with time and space, while the current state of humanity in this era is the technological application of skills, knowledge, techniques and resources. This is to produce desired products easily and solve problems and process data.

The pressure exerted on Ibibio traditional musical genres by this new innovation has increased the chances of making them to become outmoded. But, despite the vast trend and various technological influences imposed on the society, without culture the very meaning of Ibibio identity folds and crumbles. Ibibio is not just a geographical set of marks on map; it is the repository of traditions and wisdoms which build Ibibio people’s cultural heritage. The tradition of Ibibio culture has to operate in the interests of Ibibio people and also they are to advance as Ibibio people. The move to re-vitalize Ibibio culture led to the renaissance of Ibibio culture. The

consequent of the cultural imperialism which came with the onslaught of Ibibio indigenous value shaped its society with positive and negative effect causing many Africans to rise and salvage the situation.

CONCLUSION

The nature and the aims of traditional African musical practices are many. The end objectives in traditional society are so wide that it involves every social, political, religious and the general norms of the society. Apart from the fact that music plays an important role in every social activity, it harnesses the development of character, intellectual skills, sense of identity and participation in community affairs. Most importantly, it promotes the cultural heritage of the community. Okafor (2005) adds that “the folklore which embraced early knowledge of the traditional folk – the stories, clan mythologies, music, dance, cookery...were integral in the educational system.”(p. 223 – 224).

In an attempt to revive indigenous culture, the Ibibio and indeed other Africans have come to realize the implication of abandoning their indigenous art. This concerted effort by the people has brought revitalization in the cultural life of Ibibio people and Africa as a whole. For the Africans, the new form of music based entirely on Western model with solemn characteristic of the European music in church became so boring and disgusting. They opted out for a change. According to the words of Akpabot (1986), “protest is the keyword in all changes.” (p.87) With bold attempts made by protestant cliques to translate some English hymns into vernacular, songs were composed in the vernacular idioms and gradually light percussive instruments were introduced, like the gong and rattles as accompaniment in the church. This was to give way to the Western dogmatic forms of worship which did not give room to African musical characteristics of expressing improvisation.

The erroneous perception which settled in people’s mindset about our indigenous music lingered on, but equally needs to be corrected with time. The ideology towards the current trend in our musical activities is on the issue of change and continuity. The complex nature of indigenous musical scene has come to the limelight of acknowledging our musical practices. Nketia (1974) observes that the increased attention is now given to the expansion of the scope of traditional music mostly by African music scholars. In Nigeria, this has been the great effort of the founding fathers to promote the traditional music education. Such people like Meki Nzewi have worked greatly on the issue of promoting African indigenous musical arts and practice by studying and writing on contemporary African musical arts and culture. The fact remains that despite the external and internal influences, some basic elements and traits of Ibibio culture still survive and are firmly established and identified without being totally eradicated.

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