

ROYAL WIVES AND THE NURTURING OF COMMUNAL CONNECTION THROUGH THE FOLK MUSIC TRADITION IN ILE-IFE, ÒYÓ STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

Gender roles in African performances are quite distinctive and not speculative, women are central to the performance of certain genres in African music. This is because they are experienced exponent of cultural practices, which describes their existence, challenges and relationships with their husbands, children and in-laws. This cultural practice obviously displays the nature and quality of their involvement in family affairs that are feminine. This research is an ethno-musicological research that is purely ethnographic and the literature review focuses on the dynamics of gender inspired genre in Yorùbá land. The findings reveal that women living in the same compound form a performing group to entertain their children. They use music as accompaniments to folk tales as a collective responsibility of married women. These folktales serve the purpose of education in a culturally fundamental ways to teach morals, hard work, commend good behavior and condemn badly behaved women. The study concludes that the role of women in supporting cultural transmission from credo cannot be undermined as it aids the promotion of indigenous music through communal practices among women.

Keywords: Nurturing, communal-interconnection Indigenous-music, teamwork, women, children.

Introduction

In Yoruba communities, there are definite gender roles that are approved and accepted within the backgrounds of customary practice to be performed by men or women. One of such gender role is the indigenous musical

performance among women. This performance has become an institution that is restricted to women participation and is sustained by elderly women within the family setting who integrates the newly married women into their husband compound. Here, women who are already married into the family, support the newly wedded one by welcoming and showing them unpretentious love, in settling down amicably and by introducing them into the family compound performing group in communally creative ways. This system create enabling environment for the new wives and also encourage their membership by participation in future performances. This institution of performing groups among women in the traditional settings needs redefinition to promote communal relationship, and social standard from the perception of the stakeholders. In royal family settings, women often form a musical performing group to entertain their children, as a collective responsibility of married women. They use music as accompaniments to folk tales; these folktales serve the purpose of education in a culturally fundamental ways to teach morals, hard work, commend good behavior and condemn badly behaved women. Bars (2004) corroborate this practice when he states that:

Rather than addressing social issues directly, music is used to effect change indirectly. Music is a polite, socially acceptable mode for handling social problem in the village. (Bars, 2004:62).

Music is also used in this setting as a means of encouragement to married women who are married newly to the family or are barren, thereby, making them to realize that no one living is hopeless and also creating avenue for them to be joyful and happy. This has gone a long way in making such women cheerful and enthusiastic about their membership to the group. Teamwork among village women covers lots of disadvantageous influences of a village lifestyle. There are many evidences of poverty in many villages but the threats of poverty are suppressed by the interrelationship of women among women.

Music is found everywhere in most African communities but the dimension of music discussed in this study is about an organized music performance performed by married women in a royal family compound setting in Yoruba land, Ile-Ife to be specific. Once a woman marries into a compound she

automatically joins the compound women performing team. Many of these village teams often mutually decide to permit an individual or two by giving the right of leadership to the woman/women with the best voice quality, regardless of their age or position in the family. Apart from having good voice qualities, some of the women are selected for their organisational abilities or drumming skills. This research focuses on the royal women's musical-cultural roles among children in Ile-Ife.

Definition of Concepts

Nurturing in the context of this study refers to the environmental influence that contributes to the development of an individual. It is an enriching system whereby the elderly women induct the newly wedded wife into the family musical performance group. Communal on the other hand means the women's belief in collective actions or fitting in suitably into a village setting as found in most villages in Africa. Interconnection as used in the study means interdependence or interrelationship as against independence and nucleus relationships common in the urban locations. Connectivity is African notion of strength; a realistic and lasting relationship among village women that is molded not by pretentious attachment or acceptance but of sincere commitment to the celebration and predicament of one another. Cultural practices in form of local palm oil milling, village farming teamwork, trading and musical performance among others help to create avenue for integration among women.

Statement of Problem

Despite the fact that music institutions in Yoruba land have been transformed naturally in the past years; substantiating, appreciating, and demonstrating support for Yoruba indigenous cultures has become an increasing concern in respect of the protection of its heritage. Historical reconstructions of Yoruba musical cultures are significant to the understanding of what music is, who performs what, why and how? Differences in class are a usual incidence in the village, yet, regardless of the status of a newly wedded wife, she is expected to align with the practices of her husband's family tradition. Even though, singing, dancing and music making generally might not have been essential parts of the newly married woman's lifestyle yet, rejecting the idea of joining the family performing group may lead to isolation and other related actions against her. At the same time, accepting to join the group may

mean relating with women of much lower standard than her previous pedigree. So, women in most African communities do not have a choice but to be part of the existing tradition because isolation is a taboo in any village setting, so also is an egocentric behavior. Ability to speak Yoruba is also an advantage that enables unhindered understanding and transmission of the practice. This research work seeks to investigate the indigenous musical performance practice among women in Oshikola Royal family, in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to investigate the nurturing communal interconnection and indigenous musical performance among women in Oshikola Royal family compound, in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- (i) study what exactly institutes the nurturing of young married women in Oshikola Royal family compound;
- (ii) examine why diachronic element of women performance among children in the royal compound is necessary?
- (iii) examine the effects of the women performing group and how it impact on the children?
- (iv) document the songs to justify the educative, moral and other possible attributes of the women performance repertoires.

Research Questions

1. What exactly institutes the tradition of nurturing of newly married women in Oshikola Royal family compound in Ile-Ife?
2. Why is the diachronic element of women performance among children in the royal compound necessary?
3. Why is it imperative to examine the effects of the women performing group and how does it impact on the children?
4. What documentary style should be adopted to reflect the educative, moral and other possible attributes of the women performance repertoires?

Research Methods

This study is premised on the cultural principle by Akin Euba (2013) as it relates to the indigenous musical performance among women in Oshikola

royal family, in Ile-Ife. Hence, it draws on both primary and secondary data bases that include interview, and non-participatory methods to provide a relationship ideal from the perspective of indigenous women performing tradition and the salvaging strategies for the household education of female children.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for the study is the Postcolonial theory by Kofi Agawu (2013) who argues that:

African music is best understood not as a finite repertoire but as a potentiality. In terms of what now exists and has existed in the past, African music designates those numerous repertoires of songs and instrumental music that originate in specific African communities, and performed regularly as part of play, ritual, and worship, and circulate mostly orally/aurally, within and across languages, ethnic, and cultural boundaries (Agawu, 2003: xiv).

Agawu is right in his assertion of African music because traditional music transmission is still very much dependent on oral tradition, though not extensively. It is now diversified into notated works in print and electronic forms and also recorded through diverse means of production. This new music is greatly influenced by the musical cultures of Arts scholars, and is now by extension a more reliable means of documenting music.

The Institution that Nurtures Newly Married Women in the Music Performance Group at Oshinkola Royal Family Compound in Ile-Ife

Women have gained popularity over the years through the construction and reconstruction of cultural ideas relating to them. They have become professional in the presentation of women and children's genres. They are accorded the recognition in the traditional settings as it relates to the incorporation of married women into the compound fold of royal wives. This is to justify the roles the key women and leading wife plays in the absorption and the strategies they adopt. It is the duty of the eldest wife in the royal family to be responsible for the nurturing of the newly married women in the family compound. They are guided by several basic ways that outline the expected behavior of married women in relation to the other wives in the

compound. This is a reflection of ancient recollections, despite that it helps in showcasing old ways of incorporating newly married women into an indigenous music performing family group or identity in the contemporary. Despite modernity, there are quarters where indigenous music practices are still held in high esteem, one of such quarters is the royal family compounds in Ile-Ife. The performance of the women in this group showcases a cultural trend or communal insight that defines the acknowledgement of indigenous role of women as musicians at home and royal events within cultural standards.

Previously, the king's wives used to gather every evening for the family music performance to mentor, entertain and teach their children cultural values like selflessness, uprightness, integrity and diligence through tale telling and folk tune singing. This culture has changed drastically, it now holds once a week. This is because most of the king's wives are now business women who have stores where they spend some time to augment their financial status. The women now dedicate a weekend to the performance instead of the daily evening meetings that was the practice. Once the meeting starts, the newly wedded wife is strategically placed at the centre of circle formed by women, the children sit on stools within the circle, while the women sit on plastic chairs around the children. The wife that is highest in status introduces the newest wife to the circle of performers; both the women and the children greet her pleasantly. The eldest wife introduces the woman that has been selected to lead the performance for the week; the specified woman comes up and greets the other wives in their order of seniority while the new wife observes the performance procedures. The leader normally starts the performance by singing core traditional songs meant for teaching children morals among others. Traditional music is characteristically passed along this system to children, by imitation and repetition.

Catching children's attention in respect of indigenous musical performance can be problematic, especially if their parents are city class types, who are not enthusiastic about local genres and have not also paid much attention to the teaching of indigenous languages to their children, to preserve Yoruba heritage. This is because African music is text oriented and the knowledge of the local language of the community aids understanding and memorization. Nevertheless, in this context, through singing, the children

are made to settle down in anticipation to sing, dance, clap and respond to music through different gestural styles. The leader with inborn musical qualities sings sonorously to the amusements of the children who are always inspired to be enthusiastic about singing. She inculcates into her performance, issues that reflect the collective understandings of children. The leader sings, while the other women respond by singing the chorus (this include sections wherein intervals of thirds is heard). It does not require any training to sing in parallel intervals, it is a traditionally acquired singing pattern. The women clap rhythmically to express their joy and satisfaction with the performance to the amusements of children who listen attentively to the performance. The songs the wives perform are usually in call and response style and it is usually short and repetitive. The performance, which often includes the creative display of the women's resourceful ability is an avenue within which royal family values are demonstrated, evoked and strengthened. The performance has several improvisatory versions based on the tradition experiences of womanhood, marital challenges, childbirth, marriage into the family, and children's tales. The women have conventionally emphasized subjects that music embraces and that bear relevance with their existence as wives and mothers. This is a very strong indigenous, royal family cultural institution that offers different form of celebration rites among women that are married into the royal family.

The Diachronic Element of Women Performance among Children in the Compound

Music is a unifying force that repositions and resituates indigenous knowledge to suit contemporary needs for diversified usages (Idamoyibo, 2016). The performance inside the royal compound is gradually accommodating changes, based on the modern factors realities that royal wives are no longer full time wives as they used to be. Change in this genre presentation is the sign of the contemporary times, an outcome or a counter repelling dynamism of modernization, which has provided infinite chances for an extensive variety of consideration on the transformation approach between what was and the present performance style and setting. This may prove sociologically strategic to indigenous music transmission of Yoruba children music. The new performance style is a radiance demonstration of children music in preparation for Yoruba folk music transmission among children through the emergence of the intervention of the Oshinkola royal

wives. The consideration of how the music is absorbed by the children is prominent in this discussion, which is also changing. Children now use recording devices to electronically document the songs for future learning and enjoyment; this makes them to be less attentive. Children used to be active in committing facts, lessons, songs to memory promptly before; unlike today that many other interesting things are competing for their attention. The fundamental modification in the local performance is the transition from moonlight scene to an evening scene for security purpose, parents are no longer willing to permit their children to participate in any moonlight event to prevent evil occurrence. Children no longer sit on plastered ground to listen to folk music and the tales; they now sit on stools or children's plastic chair. Unlike in the past when most wives in the compound are illiterates, some wives are now educated and sophisticated high fliers in the society. Yet, they respect the tradition of cultural transmission that enables children to participate in this event.

Impacts and Effects of the Royal Women Performing Group on Children

The performance of royal women within the specified setting varies as it unfolds, it does not have a rigid structure, and this is because rigidity or strict construction of music is not the only musical component that impacts neither how performers perform the folk tunes nor how the children perceive music. The royal women are fairly set in their opinion to impact children with indigenous practice that is socially and culturally beneficial to them, this is done by not only teaching the songs but also taking substantive time to demonstrate the music as they are performed. The preference of the group for children has to do with the dwindling cultural practices in schools and even the society at large. Focusing on the continuity and advancement of the folk tune tradition, the women are familiar with various types of folk tunes which they perform with or without instrumental accompaniment. Interestingly, the children who listen to the performance also show their keenness for the folk tunes through their enthusiastic participations. During the performance, there are cases where the children dictate the continuity of the presentation by their singing and clapping and they also terminates the performance by their reluctance to participate actively in the singing. All these deepen the awareness of the performers through their exposure to different performing situation among children.

The royal wives operate in a capacity that is befitting of royalty. This makes their performance discriminatory as it absorbs children from royal family only. The performance specifically connects the old and the young in dynamic ways, the royal wives who are much older than the children sit in a circle to perform before royal children, therefore, connecting the past to the present by passing moral, historical and instructional intelligence through the folk tales and songs performance. The royal wives have legitimized the performance of folk tunes as a public-domain music procedure for children from 4 years to 12 years. This entertainment ritual initially excluded men but they are now permitted to be part of the non-participatory audience. Echoes on the representation of women in this genre have gained media attention and the performance is now viewed on the Osun Broadcasting television station once in a week (on Saturdays).

The performance to some extent has influenced greatly the character of royal children within their immediate community. This means that the children do not only participate in the genre but also actively imbibe the lessons in the folk tunes and also consent to the traditional methods of corrections, commendations and chastisements as the situation dictates

Reflection of the Educative, Moral and other Possible Attributes of the Women Performance Repertoires

Idamoyibo (2016) affirms that Yoruba songs are text-applied, limited in range, tonal, most often in pentatonic scale and aesthetically repetitive. They are usually short and commemorative of great events, connected to tales for entertainments, moral lessons, instructional or for sacred purposes. This quotation summarises the Yoruba music features as it relates to the performance of the royal wives. The royal wives understand the alternating presentation style of folk tunes singing that endears the performance to the heart of the children. The folk tune performance is multi- faceted and it is performed from different perspectives. It may be performed in light mood if the lessons to be taught by the songs are trivial, it may also be performed from a very grave or solemn angle if the lessons to be taught are intense or very deep. It could also be taught from the enlightening or instructive viewpoint where children are taught specific lessons. Whichever way they are taught, the songs are performed to reflect and transform the children's mentality towards cultural values or ideologies. The approaches of one song

leader may differ from the other, but the tenets of the performance are always persistent. One remarkable thing about the performance is the deliberate partnership between the women and the children during performance. The attention of the children is caught first and foremost before performance, after which the texts of the songs are read to them and the lessons drawn before the actual song performance. The children are made to pay attention not only to the songs but also to the lessons derived from them. Such songs include: “*Bata mi a dun ko ko ka*”, “*Oluronbi*”, and “*Eni bi Eni*”.

SONG 1 BATA MI A DUN KO KO KA

Song text

Bata mi a dun ko ko ka

Bata mi a dun ko ko ka

Ti n'ba ka'we mi

Bata mi a dun ko ko ka

Bata mi a wo serere ni le

Bata mi a wo serere ni le

Ti n'ba ka'we mi

Bata mi a wo serere ni le

Bata mi a dun ko ko ka

Bata mi a dun ko ko ka

Ti m'ba ka'we mi

Bata mi a dun ko ko ka.

Translation

You will wear a high heeled shoe

You will wear a high heeled shoe

If you study hard

You will wear a high heeled shoe

You will end up in servitude

You will end up in servitude

If you refuse to study hard

You will end up in servitude

You will wear a high heeled shoe

You will wear a high heeled shoe

If you study hard

You will wear a high heeled shoe

SONG 2

OLURONBI

Song text

Oníkálukú jèjé ewúré

Ewúré, ewúré

Oníkálukú jèjé àgùtàn

Agùtàn bòlòjò

Olúróńbí jèjé omo re

Omo re a pón bí epo

Olúróńbí ò Jain jain

Iroko Jain jain

Translation

Some offered a goat,

Goat, goat.

Some offered a sheep,

A healthy sheep.

Oluronbi offered her child

Her beautiful fair child,

Olúróńbí ò Jain jain

Iroko tree, *Jain jain*

SONG 3**Song text**

Eni bi eni

Eji bi eji

Eta n tagbá

Erin worokò

Àrún là á kawó

Èfà ni tẹ̀lé

Eje bi eje, Olúgbón sorò ó kije

Ejo bi ojo, Jijo là á jo eni tó bini

Esán bi esán

ENI BI ENI**Translation**

One by one

Two by two

Three sounds like a tap on the calabash

Four is crooked

Counting is done in units of five

Six is one extra

Festivals last seven day

Eight evolves resemblance

Nine is like ninth

SONG 4**IYA NI WURA IYEBIYE TI A KO LE F'OWO RA****Song text**

Iya ni wura iyebiye ti a ko le f'owo ra

Oloyun mi fun osu mesan

O pon mi fun odun meta

Iya ni wura iyebiye ti a ko le f'owo ra

Translation

Mother is a precious gold that money cannot buy

She carried my pregnancy for nine months

And she backed me for three years

Mother is a precious gold that money cannot buy

The other side of the performance temporarily addresses how non-musical matters interconnect with music. Clapping patterns for example are sometimes incorporated into the performance; foot stamping is also an integral part of the performance. Words such as “*O daa bee*” (Very Good), are used as encouraging words to appreciate the whole-hearted performance of the children, making them to realize that passion and performance go hand in hand. Clapping of hands and stamping of feet by the children at the royal performance setting are traditional aesthetic performance complement that aids the children to appreciate that while tradition replicates and profiles singing, singing also reveals and promotes tradition. Verbal drumming is also a mimic aspect of the performance of the royal wives; this according to Layade (2021) is a patterned and specialized art of verbalized drumming used in performance to instruct young drummers and audience on new occurrences in the society, and to institute new and dynamic drumming skills for future performances in Yoruba land.

The songs are always the summary of the subdivisions of a cultural practice. They normally contain appropriate versions that are carefully chosen to communicate the essence of an idea to the audience. Kebede argues that:

The performer communicates ideas to his listeners through music. Purely instrumental music, because of its illusive and intangible nature, may be harder to comprehend than vocal music. Meaning in vocal music is often direct, as long as the text sung is constructed to convey ideas and it is directly integrated with the melody. Sometimes melodies are primarily used to convey the message of the text; in this case, the text is considered more important than the melodies. This applies to the vocal music of oriental Africa. (Kebede, 2002: 6)

Sequel to the views of Ashenafi-Kebede, folk tunes as performed by royal wives are direct, and it conveys specific ideas that the children understand and that are applicable to their life style. The songs are simple; it builds a solid musical experience throughout the children's lives. This argument was once established by Fiagbedzi (1985:41-45) who sees music as an 'unconsummated' representation that is short of denotative function, but makes use of symbols to communicate basic ideas that aid the formation of speech in language. According to him, the human brain has a way of converting information into symbols, in order to aid memorization.

Conclusion

The findings of this research reveal that women in the royal compound form a performing group to entertain their children, by using music as accompaniments to folk tales, a collective responsibility of married women. These stories serve the purpose of education in a culturally fundamental ways to teach morals, hard work, commend good behavior and condemn badly behaved women. The study concludes that the role of women in supporting cultural transmission from credo to death cannot be undermined as it aids the promotion of indigenous music through communal practices in Yoruba society.

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