

## CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE PERFORMANCE PRACTICE OF KEKU DANCE MUSIC OF THE JUKUN

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### Abstract

Change is a constant phenomenon in our world, while knowledge is acknowledged as the power that rules the world. The combination of these two words about indigenous music seems to pose a sense of conflict, especially with the ongoing crusade for preserving African indigenous music heritage. Change is inevitable as consistently displayed in recent occurrences of the world; such as climate change, economic change, political change, fashion trends etc. The performance of keku dance of the Jukun has experienced some level of changes over the years, some of which will be discussed in this study. The coherence of the knowing and the change experienced in the performance of this music will also be examined. Through an ethnographic study of the music and the musician in the context of its performance and cultural implications, this study looks at the changes the music has experienced so far and their effects on the cultural posterity of the music. Therefore, this paper concludes that while maintaining the truism of change as an inevitable phenomenon, the knowing (i.e. the knowledge of the principal idioms) of the music are yet to be compromised, this consequently has preserved the music till date.

**Keywords:** knowing, change, performance, Jukun, keku dance

## **Introduction**

Consistently, every aspect of human existence changes. Times and seasons unfold with innovations or development on existing inventions. Music of the world has a rich history of various periods and their peculiarities which best describe them. African indigenous music has experienced some distinctive changes as a result of various cultural interferences. The 'Keku dance' is one of the prominent cultural music of the Jukun which has experienced three major changes in its performance in recent decades. However, the prominent musical elements and idioms of the music are still held tenaciously by the musical group. In other words, the major characteristics of the music in terms of instrumentation, rhythmic patterns and melodic patterns are still maintained till date.

The knowing of the Keku dance can be hung on its functionality and participation. At the earlier stage of the music, it was said to be restricted in its functionality, but flexible in its participation. This has switched position over time; in that, it is now flexible in functionality and restricted in participation. The advent of globalization and political occurrences has brought the music to limelight and called for some modifications in its presentation. It is of huge importance also to note that the existing knowledge of the music, informs the changes it has undergone. A discuss on change simply connotes an extinct way of doing such a thing; which may be an outright displacement or modification of a phenomenon. In the cause of this study, both the 'knowing' and the 'change' will be reconciled about the performance of keku dance among the Jukun.

## **The "Knowing" or "Know-how"**

In the discus of "knowing", learning comes to play and change cannot be ignored. The term knowledge is described as the codification of experience in some form of cognitive structure or behavioural pattern,

and of learning as the process through which such structures and patterns change (Kim, 1993; Fiol and Lyles, 1985). The concept of knowing and learning extensively forms an expedient impartation of ideas that facilitates human development and cognitive capabilities. The word "Knowing" is conceived as an inherent virtue that resides in human minds, which is often used in explaining and displaying individual potentials. This concept, views knowing/knowledge as a mere mental substance that is expressed in written texts, representations, and consistent behavioural pattern (Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow 2018). Although considered by some other schools of thought to be an unacceptable level of simplification and superficiality, void of intellectual sophistication. It remains the edge an individual or group has over another.

From the perspective of "Know-how", knowledge can be viewed as the indispensable acquired skill on a craft or trade; which embraces the Nicolini concept of knowledge as a process which is subjected to time. Here the "know-how" or Knowing depends solely on the conscious and structured mode of learning and training. Thus, by constant practice or work routine, the skill on the job is attained. In an oral interview with Ashu (2018), the art of Keku dance overtime is taught by observation and participation, which requires an intense commitment on the part of the trainee, by being always available at every instance of the music performance. Moreover, in addition to the aforementioned concepts of knowing about Keku dance, one can also view the term knowing as the basic rules and concepts that informs the creation of the music. In the same vein, the knowledge of the music can be realized by the distinctive elements and idioms that forms its functionality and identity respectively, irrespective of changes experienced; this is similar to distinctive features of a man or woman even when either of them chose to dress or behave differently from the general norm,

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there will always be an indispensable feature that will betray the disguise.

Generations come and generations go leaving behind a landmark for succeeding generation to adopt or improve on. Culture is not static; it is perpetually vulnerable to change as time goes by. Likewise, music being a powerful cultural force is well disposed to change, of which to a large extent has enhanced its growth through ages and across the globe. Our world holistically has experienced a change in all sphere of human existence; ranging from the ecological realm to social interaction, to economical experiences, to political occurrences and religious practices to mention but a few. Therefore, aligning this study with the recent drastic change in the nation's economy, indigenous musical practices that are fundamentally functional are becoming mere entertainment performances to raise funds to make ends meet and satisfy politicians ego at the detriment of musical cultural heritage.

### **Theory of Continuity and Change**

This study employed the theory of continuity and change which is identified with Herskovits and Bascom (1975). Many scholars have adopted the theory of continuity and change, also known as cultural dynamism, to explain various musical genres in Nigeria. Such scholars include Euba (1990)- *Dùndún* music; Alaja-Browne (1989) - *Jùjú* music; and Samuel (2009) - *Dùndún* music. Cultural practices, especially in the music domain, are subjected to the danger of outright extinction as a result of civilization and globalization respectively. The amalgamation of ethnic groups into geopolitical zones and economic activities have submerged minor indigenous societies and their cultural heritage into obscurity. James Mahoney's (2000) treatment of path dependence in historical sociology maintains that the positive feedback mechanisms sustaining a self-reinforcing sequence often lead to institutional persistence. The sustenance and reinforcement of indigenous heritage

like music require positive feedback on the part of the indigenes and the researcher, such that the interpretation of the details of the music adequately connotes the actual intent of the performers. One of the major problem faced in sustaining the elements and idioms of traditional music has always been an issue of misrepresentation of data.

However, the sustenance or continuity of any cultural heritage is not without some iota of change resulting from certain revolutionary events, policies and dynamics of creativity. Migrations of indigenous people as a result of war, trade, natural disasters, marriage and so on tends to bring about changes in existing cultural practices. In terms of music, the introduction of new musical instruments, costume, dance steps, rhythmic and melodic motive as the case may be, constitute a remarkable change in the composition and performance of such genre; which may be a modification or complete departure from the original music. This study discusses the significant changes experienced in the composition and overall performance of keku dance over the decades using the theory of continuity and change against the background of some factors responsible for the sustenance and creative dynamics in musical performances. The agreement is that *Keku dance* music of the Jukun has gone through two major changes in its performance and functionality but still maintains its creative elements and idioms.

### **Jukun Traditional Music**

The Jukun like every other African indigenous society views music as a functional art which is integral with life and rhythms of life (Akpabot, 1986; Nzewi, 1991; Agawu, 2003 Okafor, 2004, 2005). In other words, musical activities among the Jukun exhibits some remarkable elements that portray it as an entity rather than mere aesthetics and creativity. To them, music is an embodiment of total spirituality which may be

expressed mentally, psychologically, socially, emotionally or otherwise. It is text woven and it addresses specific socio-cultural events such as coronation, birth rites, marriage rites, funeral rites, socio-cultural and political sensitisation, moral values, rituals and initiations etc.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that the Jukun as submitted by historians like C.K Meek, H.R Palmer, S. Abubakar and T.M Tamuno in Dauda (2017) migrated to Nigeria. The Jukun originally came from Yemen, from where they crossed Kordofan, the Fitri region, the Mandara, the Gongola region and finally reached and settled at the Benue Basin. This record is further buttressed by the present king (Aku-Uka) of Wukari in an oral interview. As a result of their internal and external activities, the Jukun were compelled to migrate further south and founded a new capital at Puje and subsequently at Wukari in the middle Benue, from where they spread their influence over non - Jukun groups and rebuilt their institutions till date. The Jukun are categorised into two major groups; the Wanu (waterside, predominantly fishermen located at Ibi) and the Wapa (the Wukari Jukun who are predominantly farmers).

The Jukun possesses a large array of musical instruments which are used either individually (as an accompaniment to singing) or in large and small ensembles. Some of their music allows audience participation, a kind of communal sharing and interaction. Music among the Jukun is learned as part of cultural and practical education for posterity. Most often young children listen and observe the adults while performing, but as they get older they begin to actively participate in the musical functions of the community.

Invariably, Jukun music is characteristically complex; it is often heterophonic, polyrhythmic and polyphonic in nature. Although, players of simple solo instruments (such as the musical bow- Goje/Keku)

manipulate the instrument skillfully to produce simultaneous sounds by producing overtones with the bow. Also, percussive quality of sound is often derived from their idiophones and membranophones; with their melodies consisting of two balanced phrases, often in a call and response performance. The polyphonic performances are generally structured such that two parts or two groups of vocalists or instrumentalists perform in antiphony.

The binary musical form among the Jukun is expressed with variations or improvisations on short melodic motifs, which is repeated and sustained throughout a piece (litany type) or on strophic forms (i.e. the stanza type). Most of the Jukun music is associated with dance, which complements its multidimensional effect of presentation characterised by density and motion. Among the Jukun, the hocket technique is an important instrumental and vocal device and is frequently paired with multi-ostinato. Some of the music found among the Jukun include - *Ajo-Niku* - farming dance (work song), *Adiyamando* (war song), *Akische* dance (marriage music), *Garaza*, *Ajo-Bwi*, *Ajo-Kovo*, *Agyogo* and *keku* (*Goje*) dance.

### **The Keku Dance**

The *keku* dance is one of the prominent musical genres of the Jukun. It is named after the lead instrument called '*Keku*' in Jukun language but popularly known as *Goje* (African fiddle). The '*Keku*' dance according to oral tradition is peculiar to the Jukun and plays a significant role in conveying the new king from the coronation site to the palace. Although in recent times due to civilization, its performance is now extended to other major celebration of the people. '*Keku*' dance is open to any interested member of the society and still maintains its original musical instruments and modes of performance with slight modifications in their costume. The music like many African heritages is maintained and transferred to the younger generation by

observation, training and participation. Initially, the performance of keku dance involves the women too, but this gradually faced out because of the vigour required in its dance.

'Keku' dance employs three major instruments namely- the akwe (calabash), akacha (leg bracelet) and keku (African violin). The akwe and the akacha play the percussive role and maintaining the rhythmic dynamics of the dance while producing pleasurable percussive sounds that inspires the dancers. The 'Keku' on the other hand plays the lead role, and is often accompanied with a brief vocal response during the procession to the stage; with the melodies mostly consisting of two balanced phrases. There is often a leader/chorus relationship in the performance of 'Keku' dance, creating room for variations or improvisations on short melodic motifs. The presentation of Keku dance is meant for celebration with no mystical implication. Its performance connotes dance skill competition to show who can dance best and outwit the other.

Density and motion broadly characterize the performance of keku dance, coupled with high degree amplitude due it being mostly an outdoor performance. There also exists an overlapping instrumental antiphony and responsorial interaction between the three instruments. Also, some canonic imitation may occur in responsorial or antiphonal sections during its performance as a result of the repetition of the first phrase or the introduction of the new melodic material in the form of a refrain.

### **Analysis of Keku Dance music**

Ensemble: The music is of a mixed ensemble of vocal, dance and instrumental ensemble, with dominance given to the dance and instrumental ensemble.

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Structural form: this piece of music is in strophic form, although it has three major sections, there is mainly a chordophone solo and vocal and instrumental backup.

Instrumentation: there are only two categories of three instruments; the chordophone 'Goge' which is the main and solo instrument, and the idiophones, comprising of leg shakers and calabash, which play solo and time referent respectively.

Rhythm: The rhythmic pattern employed is additive and asymmetric rhythmic patterns.

Time signature: The musical piece is in a simple time 4/4 quadruple meter.

Scale: The scale of this music is pentatonic. Although, with little alterations.

Tempo: The music begins with a moderately fast tempo and gradually increase speed until getting to a very fast tempo and thus end.

Melody: there is a melodic arm-bit of A3-G5, (using piano pitch measurement method)

Key: C major

### **The Changes in the performance of 'Keku' Dance Music**

According to Ajiduku (2017), the 'Keku' dance at inception was performed by both men and women and strictly as the music that ushers in the new king from the coronation site to the palace. As discussed earlier on the basic musical instruments employed were the akwe (calabash), akacha (leg braclet/rattles) and 'Keku' (fiddle). The

music is a combination of vocal, instrumental and dance music. The dressing of the performers was not necessarily uniform, probably because the people at the early ages had limited wears at their disposal, so the performers simply dress presentably to fit into the celebration and royal aura of the coronation. The 'Keku' dance along other African indigenous music underwent some level of changes which is evident majorly in the participation, functionality and aesthetic presentation of the music over the decades. The initial flexibility in the participation of keku dance has over time metamorphosed into strictly masculine musical dance showmanship. According to Ajiduku (2017), this resulted from the often need for performance and the rigorous dance gestures involved in the performance of the dance.

Secondly, the restriction in the functionality of the music as the conveyor of the new king from the coronation site to the palace, which allows very minimal public performance of the music. The aesthetic representation of the music now employs the use of uniformed costume and dance formation, where the dancers sing and dance in structured patterns that reveal the masculine strength of the legs and the shoulders of a Jukun man. Unlike the original consciousness of the functionality of the performance which governs the presentation of the music and dance, the people are more concerned about audience acceptance and economic implication of the music.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper is able to reconcile the concept of "Knowing and "Change" in the performance of Jukun Keku dance by establishing the obvious inevitability of "Change" as a phenomenon of life; and that the performance of 'Keku' dance of the Jukun has experienced majorly functionality, participatory and aesthetic performance of the music dance. The coherence of the "Knowing" and the "Change" experienced in the performance of this music has been presented as being

Ekpo, O. E., Soretire, E. A. & Arum, J. C.: *Change and Continuity in the Performance...* dependent of each other. These changes experienced so far in the performance of the dance music and their effects on the cultural posterity of the music are discussed. Therefore, this paper concludes that while maintaining the truism of change as an inevitable phenomenon, the knowing (i.e the knowledge of the principal idioms) of the music are still maintained, this consequently has preserved the music till date.

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