

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL ENSEMBLES IN KALABARI KINGDOM - A CASE STUDY OF THE UNITED VOICE OF KALABARI

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Abstract

Economic Constraints on the development of traditional ensembles in Kalabari Kingdom - A Case Study of the United Voice of Kalabari, seeks to highlight the impeding effect of the paucity of funds on the development of traditional ensemble groups in the Niger Delta. This study, which is anchored on Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory on motivation in relation to human needs, with the most basic needs influencing one's action; is vital to the knowledge of the growth of traditional institutions in a changing world as it reveals how the group is able to sustain membership and advancement in the face of social, economic and religious changes within its society. Data for the study was derived from interviews, participant-observation and analysis of the environment under study. The study examines the communal role played by the United Voice of Kalabari; how economic realities affect the development of traditional ensembles. The study reveals that the collaborative support of the group to each member is what motivates their socialization and subsequent continuity as a group. It further charts a course for the sustenance and growth of traditional orchestral groups in African communities at large using the monetary contribution method.

Introduction

Musical ensembles in African traditional communities are creative musical entities that foster communal cohesion, transmission of culture and promotion of social consciousness, as well as sustenance of filial bonds among members of the community. The United Voice of Kalabari, which originated and is located in Buguma town, Akuku-Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State in Nigeria is one such group. The functionality of their art in communal activities such as burials, marriages, coronations and rites, is vital to the fullness of these events. Ibekwe (2013) highlights "the social function of African music validates its communal nature and purpose... group performances often evoke societal appeal more than individual expression due to the close association or interaction existing between the performers and the audience" (p. 129). Idolor in Igbi (2018) observes that "music is regarded as an effective means of expressing satisfaction or redress, love or hatred, praise or rebuke, to entertain, educate and keep the community lively" (p264). Employing the musical styles peculiar to the Kalabari, the group serves the purposes of transmitting history, preserving the culture of the people through the oral instrument of songs (Ibekwe, 2013). They also serve as a medium of traditional entertainment. As

such, their activities as a communal force are worth documenting to divulge their all-important role in Kalabari society. However, the changes in the society, especially those brought about by the present economic realities incise an impeding effect on the survival and development of such groups. Studies and theories of Motivation have shown that reward is an important factor in driving stable continuity to any task, and economic reward is a key determiner. Thus, this study seeks to reveal the activities of United voices, how it has succeeded in maintaining and sustaining membership in the face of declining traditional ensemble groups within the society; their aspiration to advance beyond their present standing, thereby using their approach to proffer solutions to the decline of this valuable cultural property within traditional African societies.

The significance of the study is a double barrel solution to the decline of musical practices within Kalabari society. The present spate of unrest in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria - where the Kalabari are located, of which they have also had their quota, is owing to several factors; chief of which are militancy and political clashes. Ibude (2013) highlights factors that have brought about change within Kalabari burial culture, which have affected the musical culture in return. He noted that religion (i.e. Christianity), economic factors and militancy have transformed the face of music creativity, presentation forms and performance practices among the Kalabari in a retrogressive manner. Beyond these factors, Ibude posits further in his discourse on 'music in Kalabari traditional funeral rites that 'the Kalabari of the Niger Delta are a group of people whose musical culture has not received much attention in terms of research' (p. 141). The study therefore promotes the knowledge of the people's musical culture.

Kalabari Kingdom

Kalabari kingdom is located in Rivers State within the Eastern Niger Delta of Nigeria. It is also called Elem Kalabari and is the independent traditional state of the Kalabari people, an Ijaw ethnic group. Its political structure constitutes kings and chiefs as the ruling class from pre-colonial times. A King along with his council of chiefs, most of who are royal princes make up the traditional Kalabari ruling house.

Several authors (Horton, 1969; Alagoa, 2005; Derefaka & Orugbani, 2009; Ejituwu, Jaja, & Enemugwem, 2009; Ndimele, Kari & Ayuwo, 2009) have written extensively on the history, language, politics and other aspects of the Kalabari people. Kalabari as a group is sometimes referred to as New Calabar (but this name is no longer fashionable). The Kalabari language is spoken mainly in Asari-Toru, Akuku-Toru and parts of Degema Local Governemnt Areas of Rivers State. Jenewari in Ndimele et al (2009) claims that "Kalabari was, as far as is known, the first Nigerian Language recorded by the Europeans" (p.79).

Horton in Ibude (2013) established that there are twenty villages that are broadly Kalabari in language and culture.

Three other villages are partially or minimally acculturated into kalabari and three large towns derived from the nineteenth century Kalabari metropolis. In addition, there are dozens of fishing camps and two plantation settlements that are seen as work-places

rather than home bases.... they are classified under the great bloc of Ijo-speaking subgroup exemplified by their dialect and culture (p. 141).

Various scholars have written extensively on the origin and history of the Kalabari people and postulated different scenarios by which the Kalabari would have settled in the Eastern Niger Delta. Oral traditions and research findings reveal that villages were made up of a number of descent-groups, whose founding ancestors are considered to be distinct from others around them and believed to have migrated into the area from parts of the Delta to settle at their present location. The basis of identity of the Kalabari before the pre-Atlantic Trade is a culture common to all its members which is distinct in every way from that of their neighbours.

Due to their involvement in the trade with the British, they were considered wealthy; all houses had royalty vested on them as this was achievable when a member of a house acquires wealth and influence. As such this disposition of affluence is reflected in the dressing, carriage and all aspect of their lives.

The Concept of Traditional Ensemble

Basically, an ensemble is a group of musicians, actors or dancers who perform together. The use of the term 'traditional', in this discourse refers to the appearance of the phenomenon within a distinct cultural milieu.

Ibude (ibid) noted different types of music which exist and are used in funeral rites in Kalabari Kingdom, one of which is *Ogbo be nume*, which refers to choral music or ensemble. The music art of the United Voice of Kalabari would place their performance among the *Ogbo be nume* (group singing or orchestra). He defines it as "songs performed by male and female singers either in single (all male or all female) or mixed (male and female) ensembles (p. 142).

These Songs, especially texts, which communicate diverse themes occupy a major part of both traditional and Christian funeral rites among the Kalabari. They are accompanied by dance performances and instruments such as drums, clappers and bells. However, the focus of such performances is the song rendered during funeral as the dance movements are unregulated. These songs require a limited number of instruments like a drum and a bell or a pair of wood block which provide the super structure as the songs are performed. Thus, traditional ensembles are those made up of singers who make use of instrumental accompaniment within any traditional milieu.

Theoretical Framework

Various psychologists have studied human behaviour and have formulated various motivation theories based on their findings which have provided thoughtful insight into human behaviour in relation to work or other activity as it relates to their sense of reward. Gartenstein (2019) opines that "money is a powerful motivator but it is hardly the only incentive that will inspire your staff to do good work". This concept highlights the relationship between financial reward and motivation. It draws its hypothesis from Abraham Maslow's psychological theory of Motivation. In his hierarchy of needs which

he proposed in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation (1943), Abraham Maslow postulates that a person will be motivated when his needs are fulfilled. He identified five levels in the hierarchy of needs vis, physical needs, safety needs, social needs, self-esteem and self-actualization needs. The needs starts from the lowest level, which is basic needs and keeps moving up as a lower level need is fulfilled. This theory implies that once people have certain basic needs, they would not be fired up to take on certain activities which they feel would not satisfy their need.

According to the Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology, "motivation is the force that initiates, manages and maintains our goal-oriented behaviours. Motivation is what compels us to take some sort of action, which can be as simple as reaching for a snack to satisfy a craving or as significant as moving across the country". The theory identifies that humans have a motive that propels them to particular actions, they are either intrinsically moved towards that action or decision, or extrinsically propelled by an incentive towards some end-goal.

A related view asserts that "motivation is a state of the mind, filled with energy and enthusiasm, which drives persons to work in a certain way to achieve desired goals" (knowledgehut.com). Motivation is a force which pushes a person to work with high level of commitment and focus even if things are against him. Motivation translates into a certain kind of human behaviour.

From Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, Physiological needs, which concern physical survival necessities such as food, water and shelter are the lowest and most necessary needs of an individual. The present economic situation within the nation, which also reflects in Kalabari kingdom would certainly trigger behaviour that show people to be inclined to work or services that would easily satisfy these needs.

When these physical needs are met, Safety is the next need that motivates human behaviour in relation to action. Every right-thinking person has the need for protection from threats, deprivation and other dangers. The spate of insecurity both to life and source of livelihood within the environment poses a threat to safety. As such the need for safety can affect the disposition of gifted individuals, such that engaging in social activities such as ensemble groups would not be a ready pursuit.

The relevance of this theory to this work is that it supports the writer's position that the present economic realities within the nation have a strong impeding effect on the growth and development of traditional ensemble groups. However, the United Voice of Kalabari appears to have defied these odds, or is it that its members are persons who have moved up the motivation ladder beyond the physical and safety needs? Oral interview with the group's secretary suggests otherwise. Rather, these group of mostly female singers (with a male lead vocalist) have chosen to respond to a higher need within Maslow's pyramid, which is the need for association, affiliation and conviviality amidst the present economic and social realities. As such they stand out as a beacon of hope

that traditional institutions which foster the growth and development of African culture can still survive and go on to develop and transform positively despite societal changes.

United Voice of Kalabari

The United Voice of Kalabari is a distinct traditional ensemble group with the rallying call - "we set the pace, others follow". This group was founded in 2016 by Madam Otelemagba George. It is an offshoot of the traditional compound or *Egede* rallying to sing for a deceased member. However, over time, the founder was able to create an ensemble, which can be hired for not just compound affairs but for any occasion. Other interested members of the community and kingdom, who indicate interest in joining the group, were accepted if they meet the conditions for membership. The responsibility of the group's welfare is a collective one; the members groom themselves collectively in preparation for performances to which they are invited. Their engagement usually comes from within Buguma, Abonema and other Kalabari communities; nonetheless they are open to invitations from the diaspora. The method of engagement is quite simple. An interested person who wishes to engage them can contact them through any of their members. A stipulated sum is paid depending on the eminence or status of the person for whom they are to perform. The lead vocalist who is a male (John Tamunobere) employs the use of information or biography about the celebrant or deceased person to create song texts. Such information as the person's date and place of birth or period of birth, their career, lineage, hobbies and so on are very essential materials the group relies upon for their craft.

The members of the group at present are within their middle ages (between 35 years and 50 years of age). Membership of younger members (mainly women) is encouraged, to ensure continuity, so that there would be a younger generation to hand the baton of the group's art to when the present generation retire.

All their songs are rendered in the Kalabari dialect. As such understanding and ability to speak the dialect forms the first criterion for membership. As long as a person can speak the Kalabari dialect, regardless of their tribe, they can join the group, following their qualification in other selection criteria.

The music is patterned to the Kalabari style of singing, employing melodic minor notes, with tonal inflections and maintenance of the harmonic principles akin to the people. In this manner, the group transmits and transfer their ancestral musical culture and idioms. This however does not hamper creativity. They employ the use of folksongs and tunes in their singing, of which Ibekwe (2019) underpins that "cultural values of a society can be transmitted, sustained and consolidated through folksongs" (p. 3). Okafor (2017) states that "a folk song is one which people have found as an integral part of their culture" (p.17), as such singing of the known folksongs of the community helps to sustain their survival and is a practical tool in transmitting their history and traditions orally.

The music of the United Voice of Kalabari is non ritualistic. It can be classified as *Ogbobe nume* (Ibude 144). At a burial event in honour of Mrs. Sele Amachree (nee

Kingson) on the 26th of June 2021, they performed on the eve of the burial; during the lying-in-state of the deceased, and after the interment. They also incorporated *Akwa* (instrumental/drum ensemble) this they achieved by hiring a drum orchestral group in the community, who respond in drum language to their singing.

Most members of the group are literate, can express themselves in good English and come from various works of life. In essence the financial benefit gained from their art is only an additional source of income. During individual interviews conducted with about five different women in the group, they expressed their joy in socializing through the ensemble more than the financial benefits gained from it. Literally, it does not appear that financial benefit is a motivating factor in joining the group; rather association is a stronger driving force. However, the importance of financial benefit of some sort cannot be ruled out.

Economic Constraints on the United Voice of Kalabari

This group has gone ahead to develop a system where they support each other by making routine monetary contributions for members. It is disbursed in turns. Every member contributes monthly and it is given to a single person for a month. He/she is free to use the money as they please. This technique has become a motivating factor for members of the group. New members are expected to have stayed long enough and contributed for a full cycle to the welfare of existing members before they can benefit from the system. This way, the United Voices have proffered a solution to the dearth of membership to their group. At the time of the interview, the leader of the group Madam Otelemagba George was reported to be bedridden. The secretary, Madam Love Johnbull, has been the acting-leader while maintaining her role as secretary.

The group also identified with a patron, whose identity was not disclosed for reasons best known to the leaders who spoke with me. Interview with the secretary of the group reveal their desire to produce recordings of their ensemble, as well as music videos to promote the group and retain a legacy for the future. They believe that their Patron who is a lover of traditional music and the Kalabari culture will offer them sponsorship.

Similarly, an interview with the lead singer of the group, Mr. John Tamunobere, who happens to be the only male member of the United Voice of Kalabari, also reveal that the group grew out of the traditional Kalabari *Egede* ensemble pattern, where people rally to sing and dance especially for the purpose of burial. In the course of such rallying, some quarters in the community do succeed at creating the emergence of a singing ensemble. Presently, there are about four traditional ensembles still existing in the community. However, there is a decline in the practice of traditional ensemble groups in the area. Aside economic factors that impede the survival of these groups, Christianity that condemns the eulogizing of the dead and other social singing as fetish is also a salient declining factor. Since Christianity now dominates the religious space within the Kalabari society, to which most persons are adherents (including members of The United Voice), the *nume* (song/singing) culture has been modified to suit what is considered appropriate by the church. Adegbite (2006) emphasizes Christianity's influence in bringing about

modifications and change on the musical culture and social commitment of the Yoruba. The same paradox is witnessed in the traditional musical culture of most Nigerian communities especially in the Southern parts of the country. Another factor is old age of the earlier practitioners. In the past, charges were not placed for the ensemble service as talented singers gladly indulged in such singing as a means of contribution to the occasion, whether they are called upon or not. Tamunobere John (2021) opines that lack of financial incentive discouraged people from participating in ensemble singing, this is what led to the formation of the ensemble groups or clubs. As a club, people who wish to invite the group to grace their events will have to pay charges stipulated by the group. This way, club members who have to leave their jobs or means of livelihood to participate in the performance find a sense of reward.

Performance Norms

The group engages in rehearsals when it is approached for a performance as well as during specified days of the month as directed by the leader. They meet every last Sunday of the month and the first Wednesdays of every month to pray for the welfare of the group, their members and the community. John Tamunobere does the song compositions together with other gifted singers. The lead singer is assisted by a second lead singer, while the others chorus and clap with two bars of flattened sticks which is express people’s musical technological nuance. Their formal wear is white or other coloured lace blouses tied with *injiri* (Jorge wrapper) on the waist and head. All group members must appear uniformly dressed.

Song Examples from the Burial of Mrs. Sele Amachree

Song example one

Vernacular	English Translation
<p><i>Alabo Kingye oh</i> <i>ikorite oh,</i> (thrice) <i>mina belema oyibo</i> <i>ori ibiminabo osete adiwari oh.</i></p>	<p>Chief kingye oh, you have done very well, A lover of kin He stands firm to bury his sister....</p> <p>(thrice)</p>

Song example Two

Vernacular	English Translation
<p><i>Tekenari Amachree oh,</i> <i>Elem njiri kei kpukpu kpote</i> thrice <i>Kuroma yingima diwi</i> <i>Okpara jinejinei okpara lamp oh</i></p>	<p>Tekena Amachree oh, Tie your loins strong with an <i>Injiri</i> Guard yourself with strength to bury your mother You are a capable/worthy first son.</p>

Song Example Three:

Vernacular	English Translation
<p><i>Kariboye Abbi warime buanie apakaye oh,</i> <i>Apaka barame ake abomaba (3x)</i> <i>Abbiye Ogujofa ari adapu iyimo oh.</i></p>	<p>She is a descendant of King Abbi karibo Amachree,</p>

<p><i>Ada kingsonbe a-ngima simemo oh,</i> <i>Egede warime bio (3x)</i> <i>Ori ka dibiyaye Fynn be Gladdys iyimo oh</i></p>	<p>I will praise her according to her history (3x) Prince Ogujofo Abbi gave birth to her grandfather. Her father Kingson married her mother Gladys From Egede West compound (3x) Elder Fynn West gave birth to Gladys.</p>
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Textual Analysis of Song Examples

According to Ibekwe (2013), musicians capture every eventful period and make full use of relevant texts - both spoken and written information in their composition (p. 128). This is evident in the text of the song examples in this study. Song example one hails the benevolence of Chief Kinye, brother of the deceased, who stood firmly to give his sister a befitting burial. According to tradition, burial ceremony in Kalabari kingdom have heavy financial implications, therefore a relative who ensures that the family member gets a befitting burial is worthy of praise. This is more so when the relative is capable of engaging the services of an ensemble to enact the *nume* for their late relative. The second song example is a song of encouragement to the first son of the deceased to gird himself courageously to bury his mother. The pride of being a first son (*Okpara*) is proven during the burial of one's parents, hence the encouragement to be girded with strength in burying his mother. Song example three gives an account of the genealogy of the deceased. An average speaker of the dialect is able to recognize the historical record keeping essence embedded in the singing, "engendering oral tradition" (Ibekwe, 2013). As such the songs become a source of historical documents as the lineage of the deceased is narrated in the songs. It is evident from the texts that the songs were specifically written for the burial of Mrs. Sele Amachree.

Structural Analysis of Song Examples

The songs are sung in the Kalabari dialect, employing the main forms in African music (Agu, 1999) - solo (in sample 1 and two), call and response (section of sample 1), as seen in song sample 1. The melodic phrases of the songs are short, employing repetition liberally to extend the songs and extemporize continuously as seen in song samples 1 and 2. Song texts are inflective of the spoken language. As such "pitchless tones" (Ibekwe, 2019, p.16) occur but are assigned a tone (see sample 1, bars 3, 9, 13). The songs fall into the diatonic scale, however, the key signature in the transcriptions are conceived for the purpose of transcribing the songs. The melodic intervals show tonal leaps in thirds and fourths as observed in sample 1, bars 1, 3, 5 and 6 (*f* to *d*), while those in sample two are short, gliding between *m*, *d*, *r*, *f*, and *s*. Rhythmically, both song samples are in duple time. This represents the main rhythmic style preferred by the group. The phrases are short and slurred in many cases (see sample 1, bars 4 and 5; 10 and 11, 14, 15 and 16). Tonal shifts are replete in both song samples as the main section of the song is repeated with variations in tone (see first section of both songs - bars 1 - 16).

Summary/Conclusion

The economic constraints on the development of traditional ensembles as found in the United Voice of Kalabari reveal that financial reward can intrinsically motivate ones' involvement in traditional ensemble singing. Furthermore, it reveals that in these days of economic downturn, ones' inherent gifts (music making in this case) can be a means of additional income to cushion the effects of the recurring global economic recession. While the members of the United Voice of Kalabari do not consider the rotational financial contributions that accrue to its members as a stimulant to continuing in the group, in-depth investigation shows that the absence of incentive leads to a decline in participation and existence of ensemble-singing among members of Buguma community as evidenced by the decline in the number of such groups, that do not practice the monetary contribution and reward system adopted by the United Voice of Kalabari. It is therefore a commendable and recommended solution to the dearth of traditional ensembles in Kalabari land and other traditional societies. The model can be planted in other circles of human interaction for effective continuity.

Song sample 1:

ALABO KINGYE

Allegro

Soprano Solo  A la bo kin gye__ oh i - ko-ri - te oh mi-na be-le ma'o - yi-bo chief ki-ng

7  S. Solo ye oh i - ko-ri te oh mi-na be-le ma'o - yi-bo A la bo kin gye__ oh i - ko-ri

13  S. Solo te oh mi - na be-le ma'o - yi-bo o - ri - ibim-na-bo'o - se-te'a - di-wia-rioh

19  S. Solo A la bo kin gye__ oh chief ki-ng

S.  i - ko-ri - te oh mi-na be-le ma'o - yi-bo

25  S. Solo ye oh A la bo kin gye__ oh i - ko-ri

S.  i - ko-ri - te oh mi-na be-le ma'o - yi-bo A la bo kin gye__ oh i - ko-ri

31  S. Solo te oh mi - na be-le- ma'o - yi-bo o - ri - ibim-na-bo'o - se-te'a - di-wia-rioh

S.  te oh mi - na be-le- ma'o - yi-bo o - ri - ibim-na-bo'o - se-te'a - di-wia-rioh

Song sample 2:

TEKENARI AMACHREE

Allegro ♩ = 120

9 Te-ke na-ri'a-ma ch-ree oh e-lem n-ji-ri kei-kpu-kpu kpo-te kuro - ma n-gi-ma di-wi

18 Te-ke na-ri-a - ma ch-ree oh e-lem n-ji-ri kei-kpu-kpu kpo-te kuro

- ma n-gi - ma di-wi te-ke na-ri - a - ma ch-ree oh e-lem n-ji-ri

27 kei-kpu-kpu kpo-te kuro - ma n-gi-ma di-wi O-kpa-ra ji-ne-ji-nei o-kpa-ra - la- mo

35 O-kpa-ra ji-ne-ji-nei o-kpa-ra - la- mo

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