

REPOSITIONING INDIGENOUS AFRICAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS FOR THE MUCH-NEEDED CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

The objective of this article is to take a critical look at one of musical heritage of Africa, the indigenous musical instruments with the purpose of repositioning them for cultural transformation of music education in Nigeria. The methodology relies on bibliography, discography and the Internet. Hinged on the transformative theory, the paper notes the invaluable resources Africa possesses in terms of musical instruments. Several works have been done on the subject while little has been done to properly integrate the instruments into Nigerian music education. Some of the assumed problems are looked into while the way forward is suggested. The paper concludes that it is only when Nigeria makes full use of its indigenous musical instruments alongside other indigenous musical elements that it can boast of an effective music education and consequently find its rightful place in global music scholarship.

The subject of musical instrumentation is a major aspect of African musicology, ethnomusicology and music education. I think the issue of integrating indigenous African musical instruments to Nigerian music education curricula is superfluous by now; but it is also true that ‘we are not there until we are there’. Therefore this article’s objective is to show to us where we are, what we need to do and chart the path forward as regards engaging indigenous African musical instruments as tools for cultural transformation of our music education. I have dwelt to a large extent, on the submissions of previous scholars whose works had already given some basic directions. In particular, I have found the works of Tunji Vidal and Meki Nzewi very useful in this regards. Although my end-goal is music education but my approach is musicological, leaning on bibliography, discography and the Internet within an historical qualitative milieu.

The transformative theory as applied to music education is an offshoot of transformative musicology and it serves as the theoretical framework on which this work is hinged. It postulates that music education be overhauled and tailored to change from information-based to transformation-based. It is to make music education positively functional and develop to the level of a tool for national development. Transformative music education has many dimensions. For indigenous African musical instruments to be repositioned for the development of the right music education, cultural transformation is imperative. (For details on transformative theory as applied to music education, read Adedeji, 2013).

Insights to Some of the Existing Literature

Several studies have been carried out on the indigenous African instruments by both Western and African scholars. Most of these works identified, categorized and described the physical properties, distribution and functions of the instruments. Euba (1960, 1965), Omibiyi (1977) and Vidal (1987, 2001, 2012a, 2012b & 2012c) identified, categorized and described varieties of traditional Nigerian musical instruments. Sad enough, some of those instruments have already become extinct, while the technology of some has changed over the years (Vidal 1987; 2012b: 59-60). Aluede (2006) reaffirmed the anthropomorphic qualities of African musical instruments as observed among the Esan of Nigeria. Blench (1984) focussed on the inter-regional transfer of musical instruments in Africa, (1987), described Idoma musical instruments and (2009) worked on the musical instruments of Cameroon.

In one of his works, Vidal (2012b) classified Nigerian musical instruments under five taxonomic groups - the membranophones, idiophones, aerophones, chordophones and keyboard instruments. Some of the works already done previously, according to Vidal, are Laoye I, (1959), Ames (1965) on Hausa drums and W.W. Echezona (1963, 1964) on Igbo musical instruments and therapeutic cures. Others are Armstrong (1966) on ‘Talking drums in the Benue – Cross River Region of Nigeria’, Thieme (1967) a descriptive Catalogue of Yoruba Instruments, King (1961) and Fagg (1956) on stone clappers and multiple rock gongs and (Echezona, 1963) on wooden slit gongs and ‘water-pot drums’.

Others are Akin Euba (1960, 1961) where he identified *Algahita*, a double-reed instrument and the *Goge*, a one-string bowed instrument as found in the northern area. Fela Sowande (1966) mentioned the ‘sucked’ flute called *Veccho* in the North, Echezona (1964) remarked the use of *Ogbo*, a three-hole flute among the Ibos. Laoye I (1966) explicated *Sibala Sibolo*, the *Duru* and *Molo* as ancient string instruments and *Ehin Erin* and the *Kakaki* as Yoruba aerophones, Samuel Johnson listed principal wind instruments among the Yoruba as the *Famifami*, *Okinkin*, *Igba*, *Tiyako Fife* and *Oge*. Akin Euba (1969) asserted that xylophones are found in the rivers, South- Eastern and East-Central States of Nigeria and that the Ibos of East Central State possess their own local pianos (or xylophones). Erokwu (1932), Okosa. (1962), Yeatman (1934) and the Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos, (1966) are noteworthy.

While it is pertinent to incorporate as many as possible to our music education, my opinion is that we have to start from our immediate cultural environment. This is because even in Nigeria, we are yet to discover all that we possess. Perhaps we can limit the Primary school curriculum to immediate cultural environment, say Yoruba, Igbo or Urhobo; Secondary school may be extended to Nigeria as a whole, while those in tertiary institutions would focus Africa. This would be in tandem with Vidal’s recommendation (2012c) that ‘our concept and orientation of African music should move away from the ethnic level, to the national, regional and Pan-African level’ (p. 188), if we are to develop a truly national, Pan-African style and identity in our musical creations in Africa.

According to Garritan (2011), ‘musicologically speaking, Africa can be categorized into five regions: North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa. Within each region there may be many different styles and variations in music and instrumentation’. In line with Garritan, my scope on indigenous African musical instruments in this paper covers Western, Eastern, Central, Southern and Northern including Anglo and Francophone traditions. However, I will dwell extensively on the Nigerian Anglophone West Africa. To my thinking, this is in order for many reasons. In the first instance, Nigeria is generally believed to be the most populated country in Africa, it is also considered the leader for other African countries. In addition, Nigeria has the largest number of ethnic groups, musical cultures and instruments.

Cultural Transformation

It is no secret that Nigerian music education is still undergoing development in terms of cultural transformation, howbeit very slow. Most curricula are still neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’. There is the crucial and urgent need for Cultural Revolution in our music education. Nigeria has already secured an identity but not self-assertion in World music circles. It is amazing to observe the rate at which indigenous African instruments has been incorporated into Western music education today. It is a shame for me that it is through Euro-American school curricula on the Internet that I would discover some indigenous African instruments as studied by Westerners. To say the least, African-oriented music programmes should be put in place in Nigerian music education and this would be 80% based on indigenous African musical instruments.

According to Vidal (2012c), the creative process in African music (vocal and instrumental) needs to be further researched as part of the endeavour to focus on African musicianship and bring it to the classroom. He wrote:

The creative process in the polyrhythms of West Africa, the xylophone orchestral music of the chopi, the sharawa flute ensemble of the Jarawa, the vocal polyphony of the Swazi Gogo, Birom, Yergam, and in the homephonic parallelism of the Ijaw, Igbo, Akan Konkombo, Edo, Memba and Muele needs systematic study and elucidation with the aim of arriving at the general theoretical principles underlying such musicianship practices found in these structural musical forms (p. 184).

In terms of curriculum, the existing content is still far from being the ideal. Although there have been several efforts and struggles in the past (see Vidal, 2012c for more details). In line with this, Vidal wrote ‘Today, music curriculum used in Nigerian Universities and Colleges are at the best bi-cultural and pro-Western, founded on both the American and British systems and garnished here and there with courses on African music’. At the contents level, Omibiyi-Obidike (1972, 2001, 2008), Okafor (1988, 1989, 1991, 2006) and Vidal (*ibid.*) had at various levels, examined the curriculum issue and proposed models for school music education in Africa and Nigeria. In Vidal (*ibid.*), the following courses are suggested: (i) African musicianship, (ii) African music theory, (iii) African music

history, (iv) African music aesthetics and (v) African music creative performance (p.188).

Musical performances that ought to serve as another vital resource for teaching and learning music in the classroom are also in crisis. The contemporary popular and pop genres are pro-Western and hence, counter-productive. On this, Vidal (2012c) wrote ‘The situation looks gloomy when one considers the fact that most of today’s urban youths have become emasculated culturally in their African culture. ‘Rap’ and ‘Rave’ music have become the ‘Craze’ with which urban youths are pre-occupied’ (p. 187). The above situations call for positive cultural reorientation.

Still in the spirit of cultural transformation, the approach to teaching African music may have to be reiterated. Vidal’s pragmatic approach which employs the listening –‘Speaking –Reading and Writing’ pattern as opposed to the existing Writing – Reading – Speaking, etc. should be employed. In addition, in achieving the desired cultural-oriented music education in Nigeria, Vidal’s proposal for a pan-African music education in terms of contents and approach as discussed above should be adopted for Nigeria first.

The Richness of Africa in Terms of Musical Instruments

It is not an overstatement to say that Africa is the richest in terms of musical instruments. For instance, Teffera (2006) wrote a comprehensive article on the role of traditional music among East African societies in which he described the abundant types of traditional music instruments, especially aerophones occurring in the musical cultures of East Africa. In addition, As listed in the *Wikipedia* (accessed on 10 May, 2015), other countries in West Africa and regions such as East, Central, North and South African regions in their various countries and ethnic groups, have an array of indigenous musical instruments; both in similarity and contrast to Nigeria’s.

Some of the notable online collections of musical instruments include. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (n,d), National Museum for African Art (n,d), Shake-Rattle Teacher’s Guide, African Music and Musical Instruments (n,d), Stanford University Libraries (n.d), the Garritan User’s Guide (2011) and the

wikipedia.org. Of all of them, the Garritan User’s Guide seems to be the most significant for some reasons. First, it is comprehensive and more importantly, it contains a digital representation of the sounds of notable musical instruments from continents and regions of the World. It is also accompanied with the ARIA™ Player. It included all regions of Africa in his categorization. Garritan described North African countries and their music and instrumentation, including Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Morocco, and Western Sahara as been strongly influenced by Middle Eastern culture. According to him, ‘the *Argdul* and *Mijwiz* are North African reed instruments that have similarities to their Middle Eastern counterparts’.

West Africa, as submitted by Garritan (2011), is ‘rich in its musical heritage. Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, and Guinea provide some of the most sophisticated and complex musical traditions in all of Africa’ (p. 29). He described the Ewe peoples of West Africa (Ghana, Togo, and Benin) as ‘renowned for their experience and excellence in drumming and have developed a deep tradition based on the Ewe drums’ (*ibid*). In addition, the delicate 21-string *Kora* harp is also popular in West African communities, and the otherworldly sounds of Udu drums can be heard among certain tribes in the region, particularly in Nigeria. The Central region of Africa displays a mixture of European and Cuban influences. Congolese rumba is quite popular. ‘In addition to numerous drums, the gentler, more delicate side of the Congo is reflected in the small *Donnu* harp’ (p. 29).

Garritan is of the opinion that East African countries are strongly influenced by Islamic traditions, but I think that is limited to some places while in some others, the influence was by Christianity. However, it is true that East Africa maintains its peculiar indigenous musical instruments especially drums and xylophones. ‘Ethiopia and the surrounding regions have musical traditions dating back well over a millennium—and Kenya enjoys its own special Benga music. The *begana*, which resembles a large lyre, is one of numerous instruments commonly heard in East Africa’ (p. 29).

Although South African music traditions have been greatly influenced by Western musical culture, there still exist indigenous music practices that feature the use of their peculiar musical instruments. Garritan commented that South

Africa ‘has largely led the recording, broadcasting, and media industries in Africa. The region has evolved a musical sound and style of its own by fusing homegrown jazz, jive, gumboot music, the Soweto beat, Zulu choir, and many other stylistic and formal elements’ (*ibid*). The above insights confirmed our earlier submission.

One wonders why the European World is so interested in World music and musical instruments on the one hand and on the other, African music and musical instruments. For me, advancement in research and scholarship may be a reason, but bid to conquer and control the World may also be an implicit reason, since each continent is engaged in struggles to be relevant at the global level. For Africa, civilization in most aspects of life (music included) started there. Some of the earliest lyres were taken away and rebranded as orchestral strings, and of course, African music has influenced the music of the World greatly.

Locating the Problems

Wondering, one may ask: ‘what have we done to all the researches on our musical instruments by innovative scholars?’ My judgement is that we have not done what we ought to. One is also curious to know what the problems are. I am therefore compelled to probe the following:

Our heterogeneity? One is tempted to think as usual of the problem the heterogeneous nature of Africa as constituting an impediment to an homogenous music education in Africa. Because of diverse languages, variants of cultural patterns and musical practices, indeed some challenges arise therefrom. For instance, there is the issue of so many indigenous musical instruments that are too numerous to be exhausted. However, if we also look deeper and critically, we observe that the elements of unity are stronger than diversity. Then looking at the way the West has been able to catalogue numerous musical instruments around the globe, what stops us? We may wish to look at this further later.

Our hypnotised condition? Again, as implied in Agawu (2013), imbibing the Western musical culture had robbed Africans of their richer indigenous musical qualities. For instance, many of us are Christians, some are Muslims while few are adherents of indigenous traditional religions. Christianity was imposed on Africans in Western ‘robes’, including their musical forms and instrumentation. The organ

and Piano have become the main instrumentation of Church music. We all agree with that up till now and not only enjoy them over ours but consider people who are versatile in them as better musicians. Are we not hypnotized? Are we not insincere with our pursuit of the ‘Africanization’ of Church music or music education? Can we have a rethink? Can we call a solemn gathering? Are we really ready for the transformative development of music education in Nigeria?

Complacency? Furthermore, one may still ask: Is our case that of complacency that leads to nonchalant attitudes, especially we of the contemporary era? We seem to be contented with cheap successes and glued to past achievements of our patriarchs in the field. We seem to be bothered with promotion and salary increment only. There is no way we can develop indigenous musical instruments in order to advance African musicology and cultural-oriented music education without indigenous language. Therefore, the Association of Nigerian Musicologists is making effort to gather sample indigenous musical terminologies from some major ethnic groups for publication soon. Some scholars are complacent on sending in information from their ethnic groups. The ball is still in our court, I suppose.

Indigenous Sponsorship? One of the main challenges some years back is lack of indigenous research sponsors that would replace foreign ones that always have strings attached to their aids. There is need for sponsors that would accommodate autonomy in research procedures. However, in recent times, the TETFUND, CBAAC and few others have provided some opportunities. The question is ‘Are the contemporary scholars doing justice to money received from these local bodies for promotion of research? Instead of serious and rigorous works, what we see are fleets of cars and mansions. Perhaps we need to change our mind-set.

Functionality

According to Vidal (2001), ‘if there is variety in the forms of musical instruments found in Nigeria, there is probably more variety in the ways the musical instruments are used to make music’. Functions of musical instruments in Africa are both musical and non-musical. Some of the functions are musical, socio-linguistic and symbolic (Vidal 2012: 74-75). Others are aesthetic, therapeutic and economic. Kazadi wa Mukuma (2010) in his well-researched work, has proved

that indigenous musical instruments have pertinent role to play in the globalization of music. Raleigh (2011) has also asserted that traditional instruments welded significant influence on the performance and sound of East African music. This is a vital aspect to study and apply to our music education.

Indigenous Musical Instruments’ Technology

While the metaphysical dimension of indigenous African music is already established, not many are aware that its technology also has physical and metaphysical dimensions. It is disgusting to note how many foreign marketers collect samples of our musical instruments and use technologies available to them to construct replicas. Apart from breaking intellectual/cultural property protection laws, little are they aware that their products are mere caricature of what is called indigenous African musical instruments. For instance, it is not only the size and shape that produce the ‘African’ sound, there are specific woods, specific animal skins; which are believed to possess some spiritual powers; and as a result perform some extra ordinary feats. Dr. Abel Adeleke, in an oral interview in 2010 confirmed these facts in their several researches at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, on the construction of musical instruments. An African child needs to be armed with these information and benefit from them as well.

The Role of Musicologists

In the pursuit of repositioning indigenous African instruments, the roles of musicologists are indispensable. Among what are expected of them is the systematization of theories of African music, which would define the principles of pitch, melody, harmony and rhythm; and would certainly also be needed to define the instruments. Another role is that of standardizing the technology of the musical instruments as well as their pitches. The ensemble of various orchestras needs to be standardized in terms of number and mix. We should not forget that the issue of indigenous system of notation is yet to be concluded, though there have been some valuable suggestions (Adedeji, 2006).

Repositioning and the Way Forward

Musical cultures such as India, China, Egypt, Malaysia, just to mention a few have created a niche for themselves in global music education because they developed their indigenous musical theories that encompassed their indigenous

musical instruments. Such instruments are used for classroom instructions and to compose their contemporary art music, unlike Nigeria.

In repositioning indigenous African musical instruments for cultural transformation of Nigerian music education, I shall explore the untapped methods already put forward by earlier scholars. Firstly, as observed by Vidal (2001, 2012a), the existing works on musical instruments covered only a few ethnic groups, namely: the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Tiv, Edo, Efik, Ibibio, Idoma and the Nupe. As a result, there is need, as he wrote, for similar works to be done on other ethnic groups such as ‘the Ijaw, Annang, Urhobo, Igala, Ebirra, Gwari, Ekoi, Mumuye, Alago, Ogoni, Isoko, Higg, Bura, Chamba, Kaje, Jari, Kambari, Egoon, Kolschi, Anags, Karakare, Birom, Kanuri and Yergam’ (p.170). We need to secure research grants and go to the ‘unreached’ to carry out original studies instead of recycling.

Secondly, there is the need for quantitative and empirical study of the indigenous musical instruments in Africa since most of the past and present research has involved the use of ‘qualitative’ data. The use of quantitative data would ‘show the number and distribution of musical instruments of every genre and nomenclature found in Nigeria’ (p. 171).

As recommended by Vidal (2012a), information collected should contain the following on each instrument.

- a. Ethnic name of instrument
- b. English equivalent
- c. Musicological classification
- d. Distribution and spread
- e. Origin and history
- f. Form and structure
- g. Pitch and tuning
- h. Playing techniques
- i. Musical role, function and usages
- j. Social usages and function
- k. Picture or Photograph
- l. Location of area or ethnic group.

Furthermore, we should evolve a standard classification system of our Instruments. This should be elastic and flexible enough, at the national level for the purpose of classifying musical instruments collected and grouping them into appropriate taxonomy. We may wish to examine the suggestions by Musical Instrument Museums Consortium on this.

Vidal (*ibid.*) also added that ‘Factories should be established in Nigeria for the building and sale of musical instruments, using indigenous manufacturing techniques; this is necessary for the development of indigenous music technology in the country’ (p. 52). Some of the above suggestions have been reiterated in Agu (2015) and Nwankpa (2015).

Nzewi (2007a) in his radical approach to the pedagogy of indigenous African instruments demonstrated the importance of learning to identify and be acquainted with the instruments; learning to play the instruments and learning to construct them. This approach would be very effective if adopted. At another level, Nzewi (2007b) taught both teachers and students the usages of musical instruments in an African setting and in the module 203, went ahead to explain the structure of an indigenous ensemble wherein he mentioned the *obligato* instruments as the most important. He wrote

An obligato instrument enriches the overall aesthetics of ensemble music. The sound of an ensemble piece would ordinarily be complete without it. An ensemble that features the obligato role would already have its full compliments of mother/solo instrument and other ensemble roles. The instruments that could play obligato roles include the flute, string instruments, xylophone and other melody instruments (p.87).

Furthermore, Nzewi, Meki and Nzewi, Odyke (2007c) in module 303, introduced learners to the traditional ensemble technique wherein he explained how musical instruments relate in an ensemble and practical ensemble experience as a learning process. These practical approaches to music education in Nigeria are a *sine qua non* for the development of music education in Nigeria in the spirit of true Cultural Revolution.

Digitalizing all the sounds of our principal indigenous musical instruments may culminate the above procedures. To my mind, Nigeria is already overtaken by the Western World who had already taken the advantages of the computer technology to have stored the sounds of some African instruments and packaged them as pedagogical materials for their purpose and for the use of others. I think we should use the knowledge we had acquired to advance our indigenous music education rather than depending on the West for what will not truly develop our education. Like I have said before now, we better get wiser otherwise, we would continue to sell our legacies to these ‘colonial masters’ who endlessly device more technologies and social networks that would continue to caress our unassuming senses while they use the same mediums to collect all our legacies from us. To my mind, some of the calculated tactics are the open access publication syndrome, LinkedIn and Facebook networks, all of which, sadly enough, we consider as opportunities.

Conclusion

The existing place of indigenous musical instruments in Nigerian music education is a misnomer and far from the ideal, despite the volume of research already conducted on the subject. Musical instruments occupy a key place in learning and understanding the music of any culture and therein lies our uniqueness and greatness as part of Africa. Truly, indigenous music education in Nigeria would continue to be a mirage without basing it on indigenous African musical instruments. Even then, necessary precursors and machinery should be put in place before it is too late.

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