

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF YORUBA CULTURE IN SELECTED INDIGENOUS WEDDING MUSIC AMONG EKITI PEOPLE OF SOUTH- WEST, NIGERIA

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Introduction

A wedding ceremony in a cultural context is one of the traditions in the form of rituals with various functions. There are meaning of connotations in the process of wedding ceremonies which are embedded in symbolic elements found during wedding ceremony. The symbols include the indigenous items, cultural performances such as dancing, drumming, singing, poetry and other musical aspects embedded in the ceremony. Wedding can be regarded as a ceremony, where two people are united in marriage. Wedding technically inaugurates marriage. This means that, wedding leads to marriage – family. Adegboye and Dare (2010) tend to allude to this position on the observation that there is much communal significance attached to ceremonies culminating in a marital union. Furthermore, the significance of the wedding rites is inherent in its capacity to bring about marriage and family. To this end, it is practiced and encouraged by most cultures, religions and states.

Traditional weddings and Indigenous weddings are often used interchangeably to refer to wedding ceremonies that follow the cultural customs and practices of a specific ethnic group or indigenous community. Indigenous weddings in Nigeria are significant cultural events that vary across different ethnic groups in the country. In Nigeria, wedding is conducted in different forms such as traditional, court, and religious (church or mosque) wedding respectively. It is important to note that wedding rites vary according to cultures, orientations and religions. Thus, it is

B. O. Omoniyi: *Symbolic Representation of Yoruba Culture in Selected Indigenous...* significant to examine wedding rites in relation to the particular background – cultural, religious and legal – on which it is conducted.

In Yoruba culture, indigenous wedding is known as 'Igbeyawo' – 'engagement ceremony'. It is viewed as an essential event; it is one of the rites of passage that is treated with great significance. Thus, it largely serves as a social event performed by matured and responsible adults. The performance of the rite of passage is a common phenomenon in the Yorùbá milieu. Yorùbá, one of the most culturally diverse ethnic groups in Africa, elaborately celebrates every segment of rites of passage. Mahmud in Akinsipe & Babarinde, (2018) states that the entire Yorùbá people's lives are shrouded in a series of rites, especially that of birth, marriage and death. Not only do these rites of passage describe milestones of life, but they are also marked with rituals and involve performance and material forms such as the music, dressing, food, and wedding items, among others. These elements of culture are exhibited during wedding ceremony. They are symbolic, for instance, the items required by the bride's family are symbols of proper request for betrothal and they are used in praying for the new couple, they are a form of communication embedded with meaning. By 'meaning', we mean forms of codes and symbols which have connotations beyond the literal and the context in which they are employed, to become an intelligible mode of communicating so much with so little. Such representations of culture also signify and represent the worldview of the users with respect to the context in which they are used. It is against this background that this study examines the semiotics of indigenous weddings as practiced in the Yorùbá culture.

Furthermore, people who share the same culture also share signs or symbols which have particular and distinctive meaning and value for them. Also, cultural signs are very effective in communicating significant information to both the indigenous people and outsiders through generations. It should be noted that signs can take the "form of words, images, sounds, odors, flavors, acts or objects." Besides the signs and symbols in the Yorùbá culture, is also associated with some communicative doctrine. Indeed, the act of communicating in various forms is very characteristic of the Yorùbá and well described by Ogunkunle (2007), that Yorùbá culture is rich and condensed with beautiful and vast communication skills. She explained that "The usual verbal communication among the Yorùbá people is

B. O. Omoniyi: *Symbolic Representation of Yoruba Culture in Selected Indigenous...* embellished with such figures of speech as irony, metaphor, and so on with many instances of proverbs and idioms”.

Many communicative events in the Yorùbá indigenous wedding are done through songs. Songs are important means of verbal communication, a verbal expression that reveals social and personal experience (Nketia, 1982). Euba (1970) categorises songs into five typologies and they are traditional, neo-traditional, western pop music, westernised pop music and conservatory music. The indigenous wedding songs which is the focus in this study falls into the traditional category. The songs used during indigenous wedding ceremonies are coded with deep meanings. They are entertaining and instructive and it is believed by the people within the culture that these songs are meant to prepare the couple, especially the woman for successful marriage.

The foregoing thus shows the importance of cultural symbols and their meanings in wedding ceremony among the Yorùbá people of southwestern Nigeria. Specifically, this study, particularly provides an ethnomusicological approach to examining the meaning, representations and implications of the Yorùbá cultural symbols in Ekiti indigenous marriage activities and practices. This is with a view of contributing to the theoretical bases and literature of traditional wedding within the context of the Yorùbá culture. Ekiti people more particularly, are creative with their music characterized by great harmonic practices. Their wedding songs are embedded with deep meanings which thus make the state a rich source of information for a study of meaning and symbolic representations as they relate to culture.

Objectives

The objectives of this research include:

- To investigate and identify the symbols, their representations and their meaning in the selected indigenous wedding music.
- To notate the selected indigenous wedding songs into staff notation for the purpose of musicological presentation, analysis and preservation. .

Methods of Data Collection and Sources

The data for this study is collected through participant observation (10 different wedding venues) 2 each from the selected villages and local government. Focus Group Discussion, structured and unstructured oral interview with housewives (Obirinile) both elderly, middle age and newly wedded brides (Obitun) methods. The focus group discussion was achieved with the help of masters of ceremonies (Alagalduro and Alagaijooko). Participant observation method is chosen because of its ability to give the researcher first-hand information about the subject matter. At the same time, it helps the researcher to source for useful information about some subjective experiences. The unstructured oral interview is chosen because of its ability to provide original and insightful responses from the interviewee, which are instructive to the study. Also, it allows the respondent to express reasons and basis for various responses. The focus group discussion method is employed because of its ability to assist in the analyses of issues generated. It helps the researcher to make some clarity on certain responses gathered. Secondary data were gathered from journals, articles, books, newspapers, clippings and reliable internet sources. Data analyses were done using content analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This research adopts two different theoretical frameworks that are based on the theory of semiotic. These theories serve as the theoretical bases for the data analyses. They are Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotics framework and Van Leeuwan's Social Semiotics.

Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotics: Charles Sanders Peirce (1920) was known as a co-founder of semiotics. He developed many valuable concepts and methods in order to study signs. As he put it, "we think only in signs". Everything could be a sign as long as it is interpreted by someone. Peirce's theories of semiotics are useful for analysing different kinds of symbolic systems, music included. Peirce's model of signs consists of three components: the representamen (sign), the object, and the interpretant. Peirce observed that "representamen" (or a sign) is something interpretable as saying something about something. It is not necessarily symbolic, linguistic, or artificial. An *object* (or *semiotic object*) is the subject matter of a sign and its interpretant. It can be anything discussable or thinkable: a thing, an event [my focus], a relationship, a quality, a law, an argument,

B. O. Omoniyi: *Symbolic Representation of Yoruba Culture in Selected Indigenous... et cetera*. The most accurate definition of the object is the universe of discourse to which the partial or special object belongs. An *interpretant* (or *interpretant sign*) is the sign's more or less clarified meaning or ramification, a kind of form or idea of the difference that the sign's being true or un-deceptive would make. In other words, an interpretant is the result of an interpretive process or a piece of content that culminates in an interpretive relationship, though this product or content could be an act, agitation, behavior, or anything else. This is summed up by saying that the sign represents the object to the interpretant.

Simply put, a sign is something (A) that brings something (B), its interpretant sign determined or created by it, into the same kind of correspondence with something (C), its object, as that in which it stands to C. (Peirce, 1902: pp 20–21).

In this study, “representamen” stands for the elements of music that are unique to the Ekiti people, such as the melodic contour, rhythmic flow, tonality, and others. These elements are expressed by the performers (house-wives, alagas) through an Ekiti way of vocalising and bodily gesture, which makes the audience, especially the groom and bride, react in a certain way. This expression, here, is termed the interpretant. It is the reaction of the audience to the *representamen* in the music and its performances. This is primarily the expression of how the audience feels, that is, their emotional response elicited through the representamen at a particular time in the wedding ceremony. The marriage ceremony and the musical performances are the subjects of this study. As Peirce opined, these are the subject matters of the *representamen* and the interpretant.

To put it differently, it is the reason for which signs are applied first and emotional responses are elicited afterwards. As a result, this study looked at how the Peirce triadic model is used to generate meaning through a symbolic representation of the Ekiti cultural elements in the wedding songs and their performances.

Social semiotics: Introduced by Van Leeuwen (2004) is a theory that provides a framework for understanding how humans use signs to make meaning of the world around them. This theory has enjoyed scholarly attention in social sciences and humanities; its preoccupation being the study of meaning making as a social

B. O. Omoniyi: *Symbolic Representation of Yoruba Culture in Selected Indigenous...* practice. It looks at the significations of specific human practices or activities in certain social and cultural circumstances that are capable of construing meaning. Hodge & Kress, (1988) state that the interest of social semiotics includes making meaning out of the study text, how people design and interpret, and how semiotics systems are shaped by social interest and ideologies. Thibault, (1991) notes that social semiotics is concerned with the development of analytical and theoretical frameworks, which can explain meaning making in a social context.

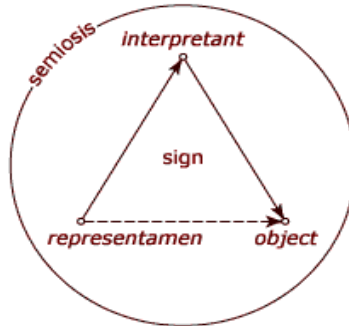


Fig. 1: Social Semiotic

This study engages social semiotics as its theoretical framework in the analysis of its data. Social semiotics is employed in this study to examine at the communicative text, meaning and interpret the Ekiti selected indigenous wedding music as they relate to the culture of the people.

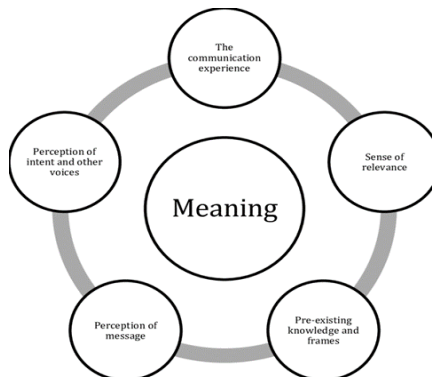


Fig. 2: Showing Social semiotic and its meaning in a social context

Field of Study

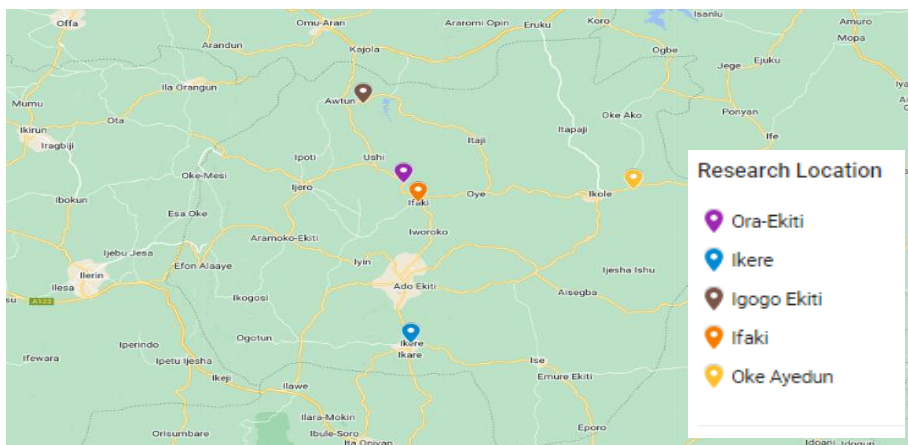


Plate 1. Showing Research Location

Objective 1: Investigate and Identify the Musical Symbols and their Meaning in the Selected Music

Below are few of the selected indigenous marriage songs, their symbols meaning and cultural representations.

Yoruba	English Translation
ADODO LOMO	A CHILD IS A FLOWER
Adodolomo	A child is a flower
Komo mi ma re danu	That my child should not wither away

The song is a substitutive description. It likens a child to a flower. As a flower adorns a plant so a child is the pride of his parents. However, a withered flower is no longer useful to the plant because its beauty has vanished. So the parents pray that their children should not wither (die off like a withered flower).

Yorúbá people employ euphemisms for real things hence they would say “Child is beauty”, “Child is cloth.”, “Child is crown”, “Child is wealth”, Child is honour” etc. The song signifies that the bride to be given out in marriage should be treated as a precious child.



Plate 2. Showing a bride and a house wife who doubles as Alagaljooko in Ayedun

O Ni Ba Ti A Mu Kara Komo

Yoruba	English Translation
O NI BA TI A MU KARA KOMO	HE WHO WANT TO GIVE BEANS CAKE TO CHILDREN
O nibati a mu karakomo o Kena o soke	He who wants to give beans cake to children Raise up his/her hand
Emi ran	I am inclusive
Emi ran la mu karakomo o	I will be one of those who will give beans cake to children
Mo na o soke e	I raise up my hand

The song is a prayer as well as rhetoric. It asks whoever would give “akara” (beans cake) to a child should signify by raising up his/her hands. Culturally this means, anyone who desires a good thing as given out a child in marriage should indicate by raising of the hand.



Plate 3. Showing drummers

Objective 2: Notate the Selected Indigenous Wedding Songs into Staff Notation for the Purpose of Musicological Presentation and Analysis.

In this section, the selected Ekiti indigenous wedding songs are notated and analyzed. The broad based characteristics of the music of Ekiti people shall firstly be examined and secondly, an analyses will be carried out on each song collected for musicological presentation.

Broad-Based Parameters of Ekiti Indigenous Wedding Songs

Expressive Medium: Ekiti indigenous songs are mainly performed with voice alone or voice and accompaniment (supplied with indigenous musical instruments).

Pentatonic Scale: Technically, Ekiti indigenous songs are derived within a set of five tones which musicologists call pentatonic scale. Most of the songs in this work are within pentatonic scale which gives the song its musical flavor or uniqueness.

See the figure (right), for pentatonic scale



Melodic Contour: The melodies of Ekiti wedding songs in terms of contour (rise and fall of notes) are generally wavy.

Harmony: Generally, Ekiti indigenous harmonies are in parallel seconds and thirds, which is the hallmark for a cadential phrase. Likewise, unison does exist as harmonic figure but at the cadential point, it diffuses into parallel harmonies.

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Melodic Structure: Ekiti melodies are structurally in repetitive form, call and response.

Metric Division: The songs are in compound time.

Rhythm Organisation: Instruments used during performance ranges from two to four. Rhythms played therefore are interlocking, Cross rhythm, ostinato.

Melodic Range: Ekiti wedding songs are mainly within the range of an octave.

Song 1

IYE MO YO RI O

call

Yio mo ri o le gbe mi mo yio mo ri o _____ E de lo rin mi,

4

yio mo ri o _____ E wu re jeun e ke we A gun tan jeun e so be

7

ihun ri ri ti ra ye mo jo ko si o i mo yio mo ri o _____

10

E ye i Bu sa yo i ke mi a be yi o yio mo ri o _____

13

I gbe ya wo a la yo i re mi de o i mo yio mo ri o _____

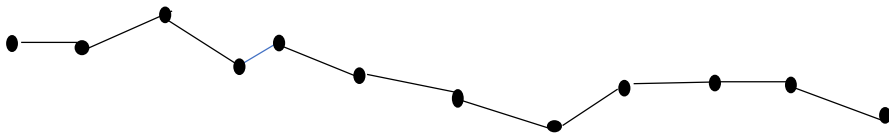
16

Ka ba si le _____ ka ba bi mo _____ ka bai gbe ya wo

19

ki a ni a pe wa o i ru e yi jo wo _____ la ma ba ra wa se.

Melodic Curve



The dots in the curve above describes (in part) pitches in the song up to the first line only. This reflects the “word-tone” relationship that characterizes most African traditional music of sub-Sahara Africa. The curve has phonological and semantic implications. Phonologically, the tones enhances the sound of the words so that its literal meaning is retained. This is what musicologists refer to tonal inflexion.

Melodic Structure: The structure of the song is in Call and response
Call and response is a pervasive form in music of Ekiti. It involves the *adari* – leader and *elegbe* – *chorus*. While Ekiti melodies are a sequence of tones, singing are mostly phrased between the lead and the chorus.

Harmony: The harmony of the song is in parallel 3rds and 2nd at the cadential phrases. It is evident at bars 9, 12 15 of the song “Yio mo ri ooo”

Range: The range of the notes is an 8ve, the lowest being middle C and the highest being Treble C.



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The musical score consists of four systems, each with three staves: Agogo (top), Sekere (middle), and Voice (bottom). The time signature is 12/8. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The lyrics are written below the voice staff.

System 1:
 Agogo: Rest for 4 measures, then eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5.
 Sekere: Rest for 4 measures, then eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5.
 Voice: Rest for 4 measures, then eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Lyrics: I gbe ya o ni bo_____ a yo mo a ye le i

System 2:
 Agogo: Triplet eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5.
 Sekere: Triplet eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5.
 Voice: Triplet eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Lyrics: gbo mi ni nu e ye u ba pe de_____ e ru wa lo ni ma_____

System 3:
 Agogo: Eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5.
 Sekere: Eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5.
 Voice: Eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5. Lyrics: sa ke re le nu mi_____ a fo ri so ya c a u so c le ni ni

System 4:
 Agogo: Eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5.
 Sekere: Eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5.
 Voice: Eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5. Lyrics: a soe ba mi mu po mo ni ma_____ mu_____

The Functions of Indigenous Music in Yoruba Culture.

Indigenous music which can also be called traditional music is that which is original to an ethnic group or nationality that inhabits any geographic region of the world. In this regards Ella (2012) records that Nigerian indigenous music is the indigenous music of Nigeria people. Music gives a sense of belonging to its citizens by making them understand the cultural norms and values of the society. Music has

B. O. Omoniyi: *Symbolic Representation of Yoruba Culture in Selected Indigenous...* been a vehicle of socio-political campaign, awareness and effective communication. Adesokan (1998) observes that “music promotes cooperation, human relationship and mutual co-existence through singing, dancing and other competitive events” Amoakwa (2010) succinctly makes the point that “traditional art forms, including music, are rooted in mythology, legends, and folklore, are associated with gods, ancestors and heroes. Musical activities are ritualized and intended to link the visible world with the invisible beings” The writer intimates that music is often an important part of the ritual and spiritual aspect of performance activities.

The various roles of music in Nigerian society is summed up by Idolor thus, *Emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, communication, symbolic representation, physical response, enforcing conformity to social norms, validation of social institutions and religious rituals, contributing to the community and stability of culture, and integrating the society. While some of these types feature incidentally in human activities others are strung to ceremonies such as child birth, incision/circumcision, age-grade initiation, marriage, installation, coronation, war, farming, funeral, festivals, and core music events (Idolor, 2002).*

All music types in Nigeria serve a variety of purposes to individuals, groups and the society. Nwankpa (2015) notes that vocal or instrumental music in traditional culture ‘constitutes significant ethnographic data for historical construction and reconstruction. This is because; music does not only invoke the perceptual reality and cosmological orientation of the people but celebrates the successes and recounts their failures, inspires solidarity and gallantry’.

Further, he thinks that music is a ‘medium of entertainment, relaxation and recreation. This shows that every form of music is meant to serve a specific or combination of purposes. The characteristic feature of African music has been variously described as functional in the life of Nigerians. Most social events involve music. This is clearly stated by UlliBeier that;

There is no occasion in Yoruba life that is not accompanied by songs. Birth, marriage and funeral are all occasions for lyrical songs of great deal-beauty. Everyday life is also accompanied by great deal of impromptu singing, a kind of musical singing in which the singer put everything to a tune which happens to pass through his head (UlliBeier: 23).

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In African societies, music is an integral part of socio-cultural life and is linked with the world view of the society in which it is produced. African music is generally organized as a social event. It has social, ritual, and ceremonial functions as well as some purely recreational purposes. Public performances, therefore take place on social occasions, for recreational activities, merriment, performances of rites, ceremonies and festivals. These activities are rooted in traditional African cultures. Indigenous African music is an artistic (re)presentation of the peoples' fears, hopes, aspirations and general world view as well as the expression of their socio-cultural values. This means that performance in African setting is the expression of their feelings and thoughts voiced out through music and dance.

Music is so central to African traditional societies and that, according to Aodohemba (2006) "any attempt to sideline it may affect the socio-political, socio-economic and social-cultural aspects of the people generally". This means that music preoccupies all activities of the traditional societies. In African society or community, music is highly subjected to functional need and serves both sacred and secular need of the individuals and the community at large.

Conclusion

This study has been able to examine the meaning and symbolic representation of culture in Yorùbá indigenous wedding music among Ekiti people. Indigenous weddings are significant traditional realities in context. The study has documented culturally relevant Ekiti indigenous songs for wedding for preservation and archival purposes that other researchers can find useful for further research in such field as ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology.

Recommendation

This study therefore recommends that the study of African music as indigenous wedding music of Ekiti people should be engaged from its cultural perspective, the symbolic representation of Yoruba culture should be focused for a well balanced view and understanding.

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