

## CULTURAL PRACTICES IN IGBO OF NIGERIA AND CHANGING TIME: THE MUSICAL DIMENSION

**IBEKWE, E.U.**

Department of Music  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
Email: eunyamaka@hayoo.com

### **Abstract**

Cultural practices extend to such areas as type of dressing, cuisine, languages, music making, norms and values, beliefs, worships and so on. Most of these aspects of culture have been impacted tremendously, judging from the recent trend of development that is raging or seems to have gained ground contrary to societal expectations. Obviously, traditional music performance is highly affected in this massive global change. In Igbo traditional society just as in every other African society, music is functionally and contextually ritualized. The fact that music is event oriented accounts for the reason why each performance identifies and gives meaning to the occasion under which it is performed. Unfortunately, the trend is no more exactly the same again, for instance, most traditional music performances in Igbo society have lost their natural taste. Most of them have moved from natural serene environment or arena to stage and electronic thereby shading the traditional flavour that gives them cultural identity. This paper examines different cultural practices and their musical involvements to determine which areas of these musical practices that have been affected by this raging change. Information for this work anchored on materials gathered from personal experiences, observation, oral interviews and review of literatures. It was discovered that technological development and quest for modernity have taken a great toll on Igbo traditional practices and their accompanying music performances. The paper suggests that healthy traditional practices and their music performances be encouraged, most especially as they are pointers to every culture's existence so as to avoid the menace of cultural abrasion and consequent identity devastation.

### **Introduction**

The fact that the Igbo societies share a unique cultural identification which stands them out from other ethnic groups does not imply that there are no recognizable similarities found among other ethnic groups within the Country. These related or varying attitudes are accommodated to foster a tolerable relationship, a situation which Emeka and Oehrle (2003) refer to as 'unity in diversity'. Take for instance; the three major ethnic groups that make up the Country delineate three distinct culture areas, among which exist differences and or similarities in some cultural etiquettes and expressions. These can be found in their manner of greetings such as bowing, prostrating and shaking of hands, respect to elders, music making and appreciation, and respect to constituted authorities. In this paper, the Igbo are exemplified to provide an in-depth account of issues of changes emerging in their cultural music terrain which either improve or endanger their traditional musical practices. In this discussion, one would not expect an elaborate account

of the Igbo as many writers have done much on that, just a brief summary to drive home or make an inroad into the discussion will suffice. In Akaolisa (2003) the Igbo inhabit the Eastern part of Nigeria and are surrounded by the Igala in the North, the Delta city states in the South, and the Efik in the South East. At present, they occupy the seven states of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi, Delta, Rivers and parts of Akwa-Ibom and Benue. Within these areas, where Igbo language is spoken, one may also notice a kind of disparity in dialects and cultures. Definitely, every culture has a spatial and definite geographical distribution of traits, complexes and patterns. (2)

Nevertheless, the Igbo are conurbation of communities with related cultural practices in function and usages such as title taking, marriage rites, puberty rites, birth and naming ceremony, burial and funeral rites, cult and ritual practices, festivals, recreational activities, initiation and other activities that constitute music making event. Generally, music making in Nigeria and Igbo in particular is ritualized in every mile stone of human activity from birth to death. Based on this, the discussion on emerging issues or changes in cultural practices in Igbo of Nigeria with music in focus becomes imperative.

### **Method of data collection**

Apart from literature sources cited in the work, information was also gathered through personal observation, experiences and interviews. The writer is of Igbo origin and having been attending ceremonies and festivals where musical activities are featured, such as, naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, burial and funeral ceremonies and chieftaincy activities and so on, has observed that a lot of changes have taken place in the way and manner of performances in most of these traditional activities in this recent time. Even in the choice of music and their styles of performances have all been affected. In one of the writer's encounter during a funeral occasion, a song was rendered which centred on the context of the death, but a good number of the participants refuted it reason being that the song has gone obsolete and unchristian too. This and other related attitudes have been a hard experience and a big challenge to the survival of traditional music. The rejection of traditional musical texts in favour of foreign texts has become the order of the day. Apart from personal observations, oral interviews were employed to elicit information in other activities that are gender exclusive. For instance, in matters concerning kingship, exercise of powers and type of music, questions were asked on the centrality of leadership and absolute powers of kings in Igbo society as well as what accounts for disparities in royalty music, or the types of music that accompany royal activities in different communities of the Igbo. Other information relating to the work was gathered and supported by related literatures

### **Cultural practices and changing time- the musical implications**

#### **Title taking: (such as *Ozo* title)**

*Ozo*- title is believed to be the highest honour to any traditional Igbo man. Anadu, (1989) asserts, '*ozo*- title is the status symbol of distinction which is usually conferred on qualified citizens in most parts of Ibo land. (It) bestows on the eligible possessor a form of honour or social prestige' (54). He further says that, '*ozo*-title had always been and still is one of the most significant titles that had stood the test of time' (55). The possessor of *ozo*-title in Igbo land is

automatically a member of *Nze na Ozo* initiates and every male has the right to become an initiate provided such person has the prescribed qualities such as good character, financial and material buoyancy, must not be a convict and above all a free-born. Because of the prestigious nature of the title, the type of music that follows it is highly exclusive for the initiates such as *Ufie* royal music. In Igbo culture, according to my informant, the issue of kingship was the aftermath of colonialism in a bid to actualize their political ambitions. That being the case, the accompanying music often becomes politicized and that gave birth to a number of title music thus the emergence of *Igba eze* royal music. To some communities *Igba-eze* music is exclusive, while in some it is open.

It is a very common practice in the Northern and some parts of the Western Nigeria, to see raconteurs, griots, praise singers in the courts of the Emirs and the Obas, whose jobs are to herald the dignitaries' in flowing robes, chanting their chronicles and genealogical traditions. But the story is different for the Igbo, although there are royal music that accompany the Kings during royal activities, there are issues of non uniformity. In some cases, the performance is not indispensable neither is it obligatory for the performers. The performance is based purely on the relationship between the king and his subjects. This action solidifies the maxim – *Igbo enwe eze*. According to Anedo, (2016, oral interview) 'The Igbo are more of a republican than monarchial in nature' therefore the issue of a central leadership and absolute power of a king is somehow not totally binding. In other words, there is no central organization among the whole of the Igbo, and the presence of these much fragmented kingdoms account for lack of central command.

Ordinarily, it is the nature of every average Igbo man to resist any attempt or trait to be subjected to central leadership, dictatorship or despotism and that might be the reason why the colonialists could not succeed in their mission to amalgamate and rule Igbo kingdom when they penetrated the country. In that dimension, Okodo, (2016, oral interview), asserts that 'Kingship is not universal, some communities of the Igbo do not have kings, even those that have, at times their authorities are being questioned and challenged as some of them are not duly recognized or installed'. In fact it has to be noted that kingship position has now assumed full political structure in Igbo society especially at this period the government has started acknowledging kings and community leaders. The tussle for kingship has soared so unreasonably that kings are now installed or even foisted on people without due process. It has become a lucrative business and a case of survival of the fittest. The number of communities prescribes the number of kings, no central power is recognized.

All these affect the quality and type of royal music performed among different communities of the Igbo as most of them lack traditional values and originality. Take for instance, in some parts of Igbo society, *Igba-eze* royal music is held sacred as music exclusive for *Igwe* and his cabinets, while in some other parts *Igba-eze* is just as open as any other music for entertainment purposes. As a result of these disparities, varied accounts and versions of royal music abound in Igbo society which may be right or wrong depending on the views of the writers or the communities involve in the study. The point being that what is exclusive in one area may be open in another. According to Nze Okwuegbunem Udogu (2006) in an oral interview, he informs that *nkwa* music is exclusive for *Igwe* in Isi Achina community and not *igba-eze*, reason being that the music was instituted by tradition and not borrowed or influenced by modernity, and that *igba-eze* has been watered down and adulterated in most communities.

## Marriage rites

Marriage is such an institution that involves very stringent traditional rites in Igbo society, where the two parties involved have important roles to play in the contract. It is not a clandestine affair rather; it is all inclusive to both *umunna*, that is the kindred of the suitor and that of the intending in-laws. Okafor, (2005) observes that,

In Igbo society, two persons do not marry; two families do. By their very nature, Igbo marriages are a community affair. Women provide virtually all the musical accompaniment to marriage ceremonies. On the appointed day for the young woman to go to her marital home, *umuada* or *umu-nwunye-di*, relations from her paternal and maternal lines and friends escort her with music and dance. They virtually sing her away to her husband's place, where her co-wives take over and install her in her new home. In course of time, they tell her about their dance organizations meetings, etc (76).

From the above submission, it is evident that the occasion calls for much merriments and music making. So during marriage celebrations, women feature prominently and colourful too, as they showcase different musical renditions as the event permits. Their music performance does two things- entertainment and culture propagation. This relates to Onyeji, and Onyeji's (2011) views, that 'African music is concerned with socio-spiritual issues while employing entertainment as a vehicle for the delivery of its specific concern' (29). In some communities it is the duty of the co-wives (*inyomdi*) and married co-sisters (*umuada*) to perform these important functions. In the process of entertaining the audience, wise instructions are given to the intending couple on how to embark on this journey of marital relationship. In some other communities, it is the maidens or the younger co-sisters who perform the ritual. For instance in Achina community of the Igbo, one of the maiden's songs contain such instructions as

*...ngwa jide nti gi aka k'inulu odu anyi na-adu gi*  
*Jide nti gi aka k'inulu ihe anyi na-agwa gi*  
*Esicha asaghi ite anyi na- aso ya inuna ?*  
*Ericha asaghi oku anyi na- aso ya inuna?*  
*Asiri puru ilo anyi na- aso ya inuna?*  
*Ti-nti lolo odu anyi na- aso ya inuna?...*

## Translation

...now hold your ears and listen to our advice  
hold your ears and listen to what we are telling you  
leaving the pot unwashed after cooking we abhor it, have you heard it ?  
leaving the plate unwashed after eating we abhor it, have you heard it ?  
public gossip we abhor it, have you heard it ?  
fighting your husband with pestle we abhor it, have you heard it ?

With this song the maidens are reminding their colleague who is getting married the societal detestable behaviours which she should avoid. All these instructions are meant to guide her in

her new home. The maidens are doing this to protect their own image as well because they believe that if their sister misbehaves or did not represent them well, it will give a bad impression about the rest of the girls who are yet to marry. There is a common saying that *ofu aka luta mmanu ozue aka nine*- 'if one finger is soiled with oil, it affects other fingers'. The parlance is very much active in Igbo tradition that is why child's upbringing in Igbo culture is a collective duty. Everybody's hand is always on deck to see that good character is enforced. Still in some other communities, none of the groups are in attendance, due to changes connected with modernization. This group according to Nzewi, (1997) 'has recklessly abandoned its human essence and cultural values while gobbling up the modern-publicity-hoisted glamorous allures of Western thoughts and life styles' (12). Unfortunately, they may be located within the confines of those he describes as 'modern Africa and the individual modern Africans (who) are suffering from unrelieved mental disequilibrium as well as identity submersion syndrome- a pathological case of modern self – mental- enslavement' (12).

Worse still, it is worrisome to note that presently the situation is that, even those communities where the practice previously existed are seriously facing threats of discontinuity and extinction. What is trendy now in those communities are electronically based entertainment with amplified gadgets -synthesizers and sound systems, even where live performances are involved; it is either gospel band or hip pop-highlife music. Obviously, traditional music with its ethical values is fading in most communities of the Igbo if not all the communities. A situation which in Nzewi's language 'is the tragedy of superficial modernism, of adopting borrowed mental idioms and material indices of mal-understood modernism' (12) at the expense of Igbo traditional value system.

### **Puberty rites**

During puberty rituals, the induction is entirely the responsibility of the adult women. They use the forum to initiate the young women into the next level of womanhood. The puberty rite is celebrated with songs and dances which are learnt during the period of confinement. Through this ritual the duties and expectations of motherhood are made bare to the initiates. Outside Igbo, many societies in Africa celebrate this rite in various ways. In Adangme of Ghana it is the duty of the older women to supervise the *dipo* puberty institution, its ceremonies and music. The girls, who are kept for several weeks of instructions in mother craft, learn special music and dance to celebrate the rite. On their graduation day, they move in musical processions to ritual places, make feast in their homes and perform publicly to mark the end of their training. Ibekwe, (2012 a) avers,

In Aguata of Igbo, puberty activities such as *Ahia ezi*, *Ahia mbibi*, *okuka nwoji* are organized for young maidens. During the period the eligible ladies are put on a fattening diet, the elder women are duty bound in educating them on the ethos of motherhood. In such confinement the ladies are to occupy themselves with the making of decorative accessories which they will use in beautifying themselves on the premier day. Such things included *uli*- (a type of liquid substance got from *uli* pod and is used for body designing), *ufie*- (red substance got from camwood for body designing), different types of beaded necklaces, etc. mothers see it as their social duties to transfer what they know to their daughters, so that they (daughter) will fit in properly in society (109).

However, it should be noted that almost every culture of the world ritualizes these important rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. For instance, Hispanic cultures have *quinceaneras* or fifteenth birthday for their daughters; Jews hold *Bar mitzvahs* and *Bat mitzvahs* for their children. And America celebrates Sweet Sixteen parties for their young girls. In South Africa, Blacking (1976) gave similar example of Venda girls who perform *domba*, the premarital initiation dance which is a very important rite in Venda culture. According to Okoye, (2008) similar dances are also performed by Swazi girls during the time the kingdom of Swaziland used to announce that their girls are ripe or ready for marriage. At this period during the month of August to September, every eligible maiden from the kingdom attend what is called the *Reed* dance, locally known as the *umhlanga*. Also in Okafor (2005) such ceremonies apply to the maidens of Efik, Ibibio and Ijaw of Nigeria, where a period of seclusion during which prior to marriage, a girl is taught body culture, house craft, music and the role of women in society. In some parts of Igbo land young boys perform what is known as *Iwa akwa* rites literally meaning tying of cloth. This is done to signify coming of age for young boys normally between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years depending on the readiness of the intending celebrant.

All these initiations with their associated music practices are fast disappearing. Young girls no more undergo confinement because at that age the female child is preoccupied in her academics and has no time for such rite and its music. Rather what are now taking place are exotic relationships –courtship, *asoebi* and honeymoon. All those societal ethics which every society should hold tenaciously, as they prepare the initiates adequately for the task of adulthood are lost. The fact that most of them are phasing out implies that their musical involvements are also phasing out especially where other means of entertainments are available.

### **Moonlight sessions**

This period in Igbo society provides a forum for interactions to both old and young. Nzewi (2003) avers that , ‘moonlight play is a seasonal, societal institution that enables intensive recreational socialization of young, non-married members of a community of either gender’ (23). Children tap or learn from adults as they use the medium to unravel the wits and wisdom of age. Folktales and folksongs are employed as the most valuable and effective means of recreation and relaxation that impact on children’s life. According to Basden in Okafor, (2005) ‘the Ibos (sic)... have a great fondness for fairy tales. The Igbo is a good storyteller with a faculty of putting reality into fables. He uses as illustrations animal and birds in such a way that they seem to be endowed with human powers’ (61). Onuora-Oguno, and Chuma-Ude, (2011) further stress that such ‘traditional education helps the child to understand as well as appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community’ (99). It is true that during folktale- folksong hour, figurative representation are made instead of direct remarks, yet those representations always convey the expected messages. Ibekwe, (2012 b) maintains that, ‘although in African tradition, animals such as tortoise, ant, grasshopper, lion and many others are usually personified as human beings during storytelling and folktale sessions the images they create do not in any way reduce or affect the messages they are meant to give, rather they intensify the streaks of reality the story intends to unfold’ (346). In that direction, Ogbalu in Ibekwe, (2012) gives the following illustrations to replicate the symbolic representations of various animals in folktales/ folksong performance. Thus

... tortoise is a symbol of injustice, greed and wickedness in most cases, tortoise is used to illustrate the Igbo man’s belief in retributive justice... lion has the image of

force, the spider symbolizes avarice, bees and ants portray hard work and industry, child is a symbol of innocence and credulity, rhino for monstrosity, elephant for unruffled strength, hugeness and the ultimate in any series, hawk is the indicative of agility and ruthlessness, eagle represents the beauty and excellence while ram is the stock figure for strength and extreme endurance and so on. (346).

Regrettably, all these message- driven instructions and musical accompaniments have given way to modernization. It is true that time are now allotted in the radio and television programs to cater for this important activity yet the result is so insignificant as the production lasts for a short period and the perception very far from reality or what should constitute a natural milieu for such traditional performances. New forms of relaxation and entertainment have edged out these aspects of traditional heritage in the name of globalization. In talking about this global impact, Nzewi in Ojakovo, (2013) decries that,

Globalization is divesting contemporary practice of musical arts in Africa of such spiritual, healing and humanizing roles. What gets re-fashioned and exhibited internationally as African musical arts are anemic abstractions of the substantial virtues and values of heritage- bastardization of traditional genius that intended to reflect the flippant European-American imaginations as well as proscription of African creative integrity. (251)

Obviously, this paper does not propose a total annihilation of the entire globalization process, but rather to suggest a form of syncretism where cultural practices are given equal packaging in the global terrain.

### **Burial and funeral activities**

Ordinarily death is a very awful and terrible event that would not require any celebration at all. It is always bitter no matter the age of departure of the deceased. But the fact that it is an inevitable situation made people always resolved or resigned to its occurrence. In Igbo tradition, age is a very differential factor that determines how a deceased person is accorded burial and funeral respect. Children are not celebrated or given elaborate burial and funeral recognition. In the past, any adult who is not married or died as a youth is said to have died a bad death, but old people are celebrated according to the person's wealth when they die. Nzewi, (2007) asserts that 'there are categories of death in most societies'. According to him,

The category of death prescribes the scope of mandatory cultural programmes and the extent of community's involvement it will generate... some deaths are treated as of agonizing nuisance value, and are quickly disposed of. Such is the death of rather young persons as well as adults who are not yet fulfilled, according to a society's conventions of reckoning achievement. Other deaths are of weighty communal concern, implicating critical political, religious and social businesses and affirmations thereby generating a wide range of socio-cultural observances and performances that could be of festival proportions. (120)

Musical performances accorded to the deceased are not left out in this submission. The performances are done to reflect indigenous rationalization and philosophical concept of people about death. Invariably, the deaths are honoured with musical renditions such as dirges and other songs that have some significance to the occasion. It is dialectically called *egwu onwu* (death music) which according to Nzewi, (1991) 'is any music which is played specifically in a death situation and the sound of which evokes death sentiments and therefore, evokes the transcendental emotions about death in the hearer' (48). In event of death one hears such songs as:

*Dibe nwanne m ebezina*

*Dibe nwanne m ebezina*

*Igwe nine jeko n'uzu*

*Madu nine jeko be Chukwu o*

*Dibe nwanne m ebezina*

### **Translation**

Endure my brother/sister, stop crying

Endure my brother/sister, stop crying

Every metal must pass through the furnace/fire –(everybody must die or is destined to die)

Every human is answerable to God or the Creator

Endure my brother/sister stop crying

This is a suiting song to the bereaved as well as a reminder to everybody present that death is inevitable. As we mourn the dead, we should also not lose sight of our own turn. This is a message-driven song for all mortals. Regrettably, most of these songs are said to be ungodly. The climax is the emergence or the activities of the so called UNDERTAKERS (eg the APAMS) who have given another dimension to the event of death. These are people who are contracted to carry the corpse from the mortuary to the burial ground. They dance with the corpse on their shoulders, throwing it up and down in different directions and doing all sorts of dramatic displays with the corpse. The sentiment and solemnity that usually go with such occasion and which are generated by the type of music accompanying the event are no more felt. Instead of mourning the dead, we now celebrate it no matter the age. Ordinarily, even death at old age is still painful and should be treated with respect rather than turning it into sport activities. All these exercises are alien to the traditional practices of the Igbo, including musical expressions that accompany them.

### **Child weaning practices**

Igbo people have a good number of cultural practices, which stretches from cradle to death. One of these practices is child weaning activities. This is a special period when mothers give ample opportunity to the weaning and nurturing of their children. Mothers use this period to introduce to their children the way and manner of speaking. Igbo people speak the Igbo language and that is the reason why they are called Igbo. The same thing applies to other ethnic groups such as Hausa, Yoruba, Ewe; Venda, Bemba, Swahili and so on. Each of these ethnic groups is identified by her language.

Invariably, this identity extension practice is made possible and enhanced through mother-child relationship at early stage. Young children learn this language early in life from their mothers who first introduces it through singing of lullabies. Before ever they know how to speak or pronounce words correctly, these lullabies have almost dominated their speech abilities. As the child grows, the mother's functions and training continues to widen. Mothers use storytelling and folk tale songs, which are rendered in local languages to train their children morally and intellectually. All these help in consolidating and inculcating native language from one generation to another.

But now the trend has drastically changed, the quest for greener pasture and the issue of white collar jobs have given a new dimension to mother-child relationships. Children now spend most of their time with care – takers and school aunties' right from as early as three months to as old as two years and onwards that is before they reach school age. This is the period they supposed to be under the care and tutelage of their mothers. Throughout these preliminary stages, the medium of communication with these paid surrogate mothers and aunties is the English language, by implication the child's first language or mother tongue precisely becomes the English language

Odinye and Odinye, (2010) observe that, 'Igbo people abandon the use of Igbo language from primary school to higher institution because the language of instruction is English language, by so doing, their love for Igbo language dies gradually' (88). Even the types of songs children are exposed to are void of cultural lessons. Songs like 'twinkle, twinkle little star', 'baa baa black sheep', 'London bridge is falling down', and so on and so forth are what kids are taught at this early age. Funny enough, these mothers who have failed in their primary duties as a result of circumstances beyond their control derogatorily regard the Igbo Language and cultural musical practices involved as inferior and take pride in their deficiency. Eme in Eme (2015) advocates that,

the Igbo should love, cherish and use their language in all spheres of their endeavour; they must also transmit it to their young ones to avert its going into extinction, since the death of a language signifies the death of everything about its native speakers- their worldview, technologies, belief system, norms and values, traditions, customs, legends, artefacts, history, games, literature, and in fact, all about them and their way of life. (34)

Children learn more through practical experiences and that is why introducing them to cultural practices early in life can never be overemphasized. Okafor, (2005) avers that,

'what the child sees or hears at this time forms the foundation of his /her education later in life. The child's first lessons in music are thus given by its mother before the father, siblings, peers and other people in the environment. Through the mother, the child also learns to develop its sense of pitch. The cradle songs (which) are the medium of instruction' (55) invariably, expose the child to its first language.

Unfortunately, the use of lullabies to introduce local language to our children at the early stage of their upbringing has become too obsolete to many of our young parents. This trend is so devastating that a good number of our young people cannot express themselves in their mother tongue due to poor foundation or total lack of it, hence Odinye, and Odinye, (2010) affirm, 'it is the speaker of Igbo language ...that can determine how important Igbo language becomes, if

they have a positive attitude toward Igbo language, Igbo will be important and vice versa' (87). Agreeably, there is need for orientation and re-orientation for young mothers and youths to really understand the danger of losing one's identity most especially when it is as result of negligence.

### **Child birth and naming ceremony**

This is another aspect of Igbo traditional practice that has been impacted by issues of change. In the past, according to Okafor, (2005)

birth announcement is sometimes encoded in the number of long hoots or calls made by the paternal grandmother or aunt. The sex of the baby is often not announced as a direct statement but encoded in reference to tools or trade depending on the prevalent occupation in the locality. For example, the palm-wine tapper's climbing –rope (*agbu - nkwu*) or machete (*mma-olu*) would refer to a male child while broom (*azuza ezu/aziza*) or trading basket (*alia –ashua/afia*) would refer to a female child (49-50).

This birth announcement calls for joy, merriment and songs of jubilation among women folk in appreciation that their fellow woman has successfully completed her nine agonizing months of pregnancy. Then naming ceremony which normally comes on the twenty- eight day of birth also ushers in jubilation, singing and dancing by women. All these activities are done to consolidate some important events in Igbo calendar. For instance, on the eight day of birth, circumcision takes place and on the twenty-eight day of birth, naming ceremony is observed. All these call for celebration especially on the part of women who, ostentatiously parade themselves in such a manner that portrays and establishes their exclusive role of motherhood. The event enjoys such renditions as

#### *i. omuru nwa neta nwa anya, nwa bu uwa oma ee*

<i>O muru nwa nete nwa anya</i>	whoever begets a child should take care of it
<i>Nwa bu uwa oma ee</i>	child is a good fortune
<i>Onye muru nwa nete nwa anya</i>	whoever that begets a child should take care of it
<i>nwa bu uwa oma</i>	child is a good fortune
<i>Nwa bu kariri ego igwe</i>	child is more valuable than money

#### *ii. kwenu oke nwa*

Call	response
<i>kwenu oke nwa</i>	<i>oke nwa akona anyi n'aka</i>
<i>Kwenu oke nwa</i>	<i>oke nwa akona anyi n'aka</i>
<i>Ebe m'ebe o jene</i>	<i>gbaghalu ya n'omuru nwa ohuru</i>
<i>Ihe m'ihe omene</i>	<i>gbahalu ya n'omuru nwa ohuru</i>
<i>Ojebe nku m'onuoghi ngwa</i>	<i>gbaghalu ya n'omuru nwa ohuru</i>
<i>chube iyi m'onuoghi ngwa</i>	<i>gbaghalu ya n'omuru nwa ohuru</i>

Translation

Sing child's share	let child's share never elude us
Sing child's share	let child's share never elude us
Wherever she goes	forgive her for she is just delivered of a baby
Whatever she does	forgive her for she is just delivered of a baby
If she goes to fetch firewood, And returns late	forgive her for she is just delivered of a baby
If she goes to fetch water And returns late	forgive her for she is just delivered of a baby

The second song here highlights some of the benefits women enjoy at childbirth. And that is why every mother's desire is to have her own child so as to enjoy those benefits. During the periods of nursing and weaning, a woman's offences are not strictly counted or dealt with; she is treated with utmost lenience no matter the gravity of her offence/s. If her offence is a grievous one that she could not be forgiven, she would be allowed some periods of grace, to enable her complete the ritual of childbirth, nursing and weaning before she is punished. The song is an open intercessory prayer to God to bless every woman with a child or children.

The issue now is that most of these valuable practices have experienced drastic shading and re-shaping as a result of Christianity. Okoye, (2008) observes that,

most of these child-centred musical activities ...are no more as they were before. Some changes have set in. Instead of the formal presentation of the child in the village arena for naming and outing ceremonies (in company of wife mates, who grace the occasion with music making), the child is now taken to the church for such ceremonies' (93).

In most cases when the child is taken to church for christening and outing ceremonies or churching as it is commonly called, the type of songs and dances that accompany the celebration are mostly religiously based. In such a situation, the content of the songs may be lyrically inspiring as a thanksgiving song to God for a gift of a new baby, but invariably lack cultural flavor or context, sentiment and appreciation. When a presentation does not portray, explain or capture the situation of performance, it is not culturally applauded. For instance, songs such as

*Kenelem Chi mo*  
*Nwannem kenelem Chi mo*  
*Na Chi m emeela*

**Translation**

Thank my God for me  
My sister/brother, thank my God for me  
For He has done marvelous thing

or

*Omekwana ya ozo*

*Ome ihe ukwu*

*Chi m emekwana ya ozo*

*O bu ome ihe ukwu*

### **Translation**

He has done it again

A doer of great things

My God has done it again

His is the doer of great things

Obviously, the above songs are examples of wonderful worship and thanksgiving songs which people render to God when they receive favours from Him. The songs are universally applied in every joyful situation and not restricted to any specific intention. Some Christian devout even sing such songs in event of sorrow to demonstrate their level of understanding of the gospel which says, 'in every situation give thanks to God'. Traditionally, any performance in Igbo and Africa in general must be self explicit in content, context and presentation. The song texts must intelligibly interpret or point to cultural phenomena as well as re-sounding the central theme of the event. Anything short of this is not African. In other words, birth song is expected to capture or carry information about child birth and activities surrounding it. Therefore singing of general praise songs in occasion like this does not picture the event.

### **Festivals**

Festivals are integral to the life of Igbo people. According to Okafor, (2005) 'any Igbo festival or ceremony is essentially a continuity of culture, usually hallowed by tradition and traceable for its origin down to the community's twilight of fable' (127). Festivals may be socially or religiously centred. When socially concerned, it ensures a kind of harmonious co-existence. According to Nzewi (2003), 'The process of creating and performing music together bonds participants...gives members an exclusive, shared social identity, binding them in musical action' (16). In such case, participation is always open, that is to say, the musical involvement is not restricted. But when religiously instituted, the performance is ritualized in reverence to some prescribed gods and deities. Musical performances here are selective to some groups. These festivals are arranged to follow a societal calendar of events. Myths have it that failure to observe some of these festivals may result to an unhealthy situation in such a community that violets its calendar. Some examples of festivals in Igbo culture include; *udala/udara* festival, (a fertility ritual performed by young girls around *udala* tree. A tree which is believed to be 'a tree of life' or a tree that can give children) *ogugochi* festival (a ritual in reverence to personal gods but more symbolically attuned to women folk) *ofala* festival (mostly in commemoration of kingship title) new yam festival (to usher in new yam for the year) *mmonwu* festival (spirit manifest celebration) *okuka nwoji* festival (organized for young ladies after their fattening room exercises or seclusion) fishing festival and so on and so forth. In all these festivals music is the pivot on which they rotate. In most cases it serves as a medium of social control where people's misconducts and social vices are brought to public ridicule through songs and dances. Okafor, (2005) stresses that, 'the Igbo have an elaborate social control system- to protect their institutions, punish unaccepted conduct, and prevent trespass' (129).

All these festivals with their valuable musical imports are no more in practice except in some few places where they thrive with so much moderations and reshaping. This is as a result of misconception which holds that those traditional practices are pagan orientated. These opinions in no small measure have jeopardized the place of indigenous activities, musical practices inclusive.

### **Conclusion**

Different cultures of the world have different traditional practices and their musical accompaniments. The Igbo have a good number of such practices both those that are human friendly and those that have some shades of inhuman act which are not discussed in this paper. In this discourse one thing is outstanding, and that is change. Culture is so dynamic that at every point in time one observes some features of cultural dynamism. As a society continues to experience and undergo such rapid changes in their social, economic, political, infrastructural and environmental set up, so are their traditional practices as well as their accompanying music. The problem with the Igbo and their disappearing culture is their inability to withstand the undue pressure and forces of modernization. No culture is a perfect or an entirely finished product. But the type of image the foreigners painted of Africans in general submerged them into inferiority complex syndrome, and that according to Asiegbu, (2009) ‘the values of the west become assumed as African values, while the core African values become rejected in preference to the west’ (6). The paper argues that the Igbo on their own part and Africa in general should rise up to the challenges, protect and defend their cultural values before they finally disappear from history. The paper also propagates that no culture should denigrate the other or claim superiority over the other in the name of modernization; rather people should imbibe cultural tolerance and co-existence so as to maintain cultural balance.

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