

## African Folksongs as Veritable Resource Materials for Revitalizing Music Education in Nigerian Schools

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### Abstract

Some Yorùbá cultural values and expressions embedded in Egbeda-Egga women's folksongs are the focus of this paper. With the use of in-depth interview and participant-observer methods, a collection, description and interpretation of some of the songs recorded during a field trip were undertaken. Analyses of the women's repertoire reveal that immediate local environment are overlaid with folksongs which can serve as veritable resource materials useful for effective music teaching as well as tapping and honing learners' artistic potentials to enhance and transform music performance in the classroom setting and beyond. The paper, therefore, submits that it is high time Nigeria embarked on school reforms and policies to make school music reflect the culture of the local communities.

**Keywords:** Women folksongs, Nigerian schools, Yoruba culture, Ethnomusicological studies

### Introduction

Nigerian music scholars and educators have over time expressed great concern over the state of musical arts education in Nigerian schools and the dwindling fortunes of music education in Nigeria in general (Omojola, 1994; Okafor, 2005 and Samuel, 2013). A gaze into the system from the basic education level (primary and junior secondary) through the senior secondary up to the tertiary level comprising colleges of education, polytechnics and universities reveals a continual domination of the Western music concepts, aesthetics and methodology in the curriculum (Olorunsogo, 2012). This is an irony especially when viewed against the backdrop that music is a living art in Nigerian communities and its performance is not only participatory, but based on everyday life and activities as commonly found in many other African states (Nzewi, 2003).

It is also pertinent to note that teachers and students enter the classroom with a rich experience of Nigerian music in their immediate environment as well as the larger community context. Their educational background, which includes the music syllabus, however operates within the Western institutional context (Bresler, 1998; Nketia, 1970; Okafor, 1991). These, no doubt, have led to an increase in the call by Nigerian musicologists to systematically document and analyze traditional ethnic music (Omibiyi-Obidike, 2001 and Samuel, 2012). Traditional ethnic music, notably folksongs, as a culture indicator provides an avenue for clear expression to the level of cultural complexity, and a set of norms differentiating and sharply characterizing cultures when analyses of their song texts are systematically embarked upon.

Kennedy (1980) defined folksongs as songs of unknown authorship passed orally from one generation to another, sung without accompaniment and often found in variants (of words and tunes) in different parts of a country. Folksongs used to be predominantly found among peasants or country dwellers, but have since spread to towns and urban cities where they chronicle the people's lives in terms of design, melody and rhythm; hence they have become traditional among them.

### Conceptual framework

Nettl (1983) stressed the need for music education students to take more courses in ethnomusicology in order to bring about the much-desired exposure in community music of different types, and ways of making music in the communities to intersect their music education courses. Current global trend also favors music educators' use of ethnomusicological insights and approaches in understanding the character of a music culture as well as its subcultures especially when related to community music (Nettl, 1983 and Welsh-Asante, 1993). The field of ethnomusicology focuses on music, not only in terms of itself, but also in relation to the culture where it evolved; in other words, the way music is used within the indigenous wider context (Dzansi, 2002). All these have positively reinforced music scholars' awareness that music is basically a diverse human practice and not only concerned with Western aesthetic concepts (ISME, 1994 and Oehrle, 1992). The main objective of this study is predicated upon Nzewi's (2011) challenge to an academic meeting of Pan African Society for Musical Arts Educators at Botswana in their quest for an African-sensed approach to solving the multifarious challenges confronting music education in the continent. The paper is therefore anchored to the African theory of humanism which Euro-Americans borrowed and labeled as the theory of structural functionalism. Among other submissions, Nzewi asserts:

Our task in scholarship and classroom education in Africa

then is to discern, unpack and deploy the humanity grammar and scientific logic of indigenous artistic conformations as foundation knowledge as well as practice in contemporary education philosophy, theory and practice (Nzewi, 2011:4-5)

There is no gainsaying that women constitute part of a larger culture. Indeed, by the figure derived from the latest population census exercise conducted in Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2006), women represent about half of the entire population. Their active participation in singing is a manifestation of happenings in the macro community as far as belief systems, values, identity and meaning are concerned. In addition, the lyrics of their folksongs are predominantly based on everyday living and experiences as noted by Nzewi (1999). Based on the foregoing concepts, an ethnographic study of Egbeda-Egga women's folksongs was undertaken with a view to identifying some repertoires of the respondents and participants as well as analyze the music not only for their educational, but also insightful interpretations. The findings of this research represent a modest contribution through a collection, transcription and analyzes of purposively selected African folksongs and its presentation as functional and veritable educational resource materials if well utilized in Nigerian schools.

### **Who are the Egbeda-Egga?**

An oral tradition has it that Oduduwa<sup>1</sup> was the progenitor of the people of Egbeda-Egga since the people are of Yorùbá descents. Their lineage could be traced back to three out of four great grand children of Oduduwa who left Ile-Ife on a hunting expedition. The eldest was killed by his siblings after they accused him of maltreating and cheating them especially on the issue of their inheritance. They, thereafter, travelled northeastward until they arrived at an area considered rich enough for their expedition. Afterwards, they parted each to re-settle and build individual communities, which later turned out to become Ijumuland in the present day Kogi State in Nigeria. The first of the three settled and formed a town called Iyara, which is at present the central town where the paramount traditional ruler - Olujumu governs the people. The second brother established Ogidi, while the youngest formed Egga.

The entire Ijumu is part of what is linguistically known as Okunland<sup>2</sup>. Ijumu is divided into three suburb areas classified as Ijumu-Oke (upper Ijumu), Ijumu-Arin (middle Ijumu) and Ijumu-Isale (lower Ijumu). Ijumu-Oke consists of towns and villages such as Ogidi, Egga, Aiyede, Ogale and Aduge, Ijumu-Arin is made up of Iyara, Iffe, Ekinrin-Adde and Iyamoye, while Ijumu-Isale has Ayetoro-Gbedde, Iyah-Gbedde, Ayegunle-Gbedde and other Gbedde towns and villages.

Egbeda (society's decision) was coined and prefixed to Egga as a result of a decision reached at a meeting of more than 80 years ago by the people of Egga when they opted to resettle from Ijumu-Oke to Ijumu-Arin. The meeting was spearheaded by the elites of the village who came together to address the issue of perceived unending marginalization on the part of the government as evident in the continuous neglect of the village especially with regards to provision of basic social amenities. These are in form of good roads, rural electrification projects, pipe borne water, which were already privileges of other towns and villages in the same geographical location. A decision was therefore reached by the entire Egga community to re-locate from the former site (between Ogidi and Ayere) to the present site (between Iffe and Ekinrin-Adde).

### **Methodology**

Data were collected through in-depth interview sessions with old and middle-aged women in Egbeda-Egga. These are individuals identified as the custodians of the people's tradition. In addition, the participant-observation method was used to collect and record live musical performances of the songs with the aid of an audio tape recorder. Transcribed samples of the songs were collated, organized, codified and presented by way of content analysis.

### **Musical Ethnology**

Several features of Yorùbá culture can be identified in Egbeda-Egga women's musical repertoires. They can be categorized into what is known as musical ethnology. Examples include: marriage songs, satirical/entertainment songs, funeral songs, festival songs, work songs and so forth. Other categories include songs which reinforce cultural ideologies, ethos, values and philosophies. For example, there are morality songs meant to reaffirm certain established societal institutions especially those widely accepted as good and beneficial members for the community. There are also others that condemn vices and correct bad habits and behavior of erring members of the community. Some of the categories are examined in this paper.

#### **a) Funeral songs**

The news of the demise of a community member spreads fast. On the day of the interment, the people gather together either to mourn or to sing in praise of the departed, depending on the deceased's age. While young adults are mourned, the death of an elderly person is cause to rejoice about in Egbeda-Egga. Women are theatrical in either reaction, for they sing excitedly during an old person's burial ceremony, but wail and mourn almost uncontrollably if it is the death of a youth - in which case, dirges are sung. What is however considered as 'proper' funeral songs by the people are sung during the burial rites of an old person and these are often

accompanied with much dancing. The ego of the surviving children of the deceased is boosted if they had acted well in taking care of their parents while alive. However, they may be booed for their neglect if the reverse was the case. The song - *Ihun woo se 'un 'ye* exemplifies funeral song as practiced by Egbeda-Egga women.

Example 1:

Cantor: Ihun woo se'un'ye	Chorus: Omo a se 'un wo
Cantor: Owo woo na 'un'ye	Chorus: Omo a na 'un wo
Cantor: Omi woo pon 'un'ye	Chorus: Omo a pon 'un wo
Cantor: Gbogbo 'un woo ba ti se'un'ye	Chorus: Omo a se 'un wo
Cantor: Ihun woo se'un'ye	Chorus: Omo a se 'un wo

Translation

Cantor: Whatever you've done to mother	Chorus: Your children will do to you
Cantor: The money you spent for mother	Chorus: Your children will spend for you
Cantor: The water you fetched for mother (on errand)	Chorus: Your children will fetch for you
Cantor: Whatever you've done to mother	Chorus: Your children will likewise do to you

The severity of the responsibility placed on each child is well articulated in the foregoing song. It is of tremendous educational value to both in-school and out-of-school children, for the song teaches the law of karma (sowing and reaping). Samuel (2009) observed that music can be used to promote the values of virtuous living as well as condemn ignoble acts which are not in accordance with societal norms and behaviours.

In another funeral song entitled *iye oge* (queen of fashion) in musical example 2, the virtue of a departed mother is extolled. The song expresses the worldview of the people of Egbeda-Egga in the existence of a mystical world of witches and wizards and the operation of their diabolical activities. In the song below, the departed mother is commended for not being a member of such malevolent cults who are believed to have the power to transform into nocturnal birds to perpetrate dastardly acts under the cover of darkness.

Example 2 (*Iye oge*):



Cantor: Iye oge i re 'le,	Chorus: Iye oge
Cantor: Iye oge i re 'le,	Chorus: Iye oge
Cantor: E o mo se 'ye a jade loru,	Chorus: Iye oge
Cantor: Iye oge o o,	Chorus: Iye oge
Cantor: E mo se 'ye a gbon'wu, gbe'do,	Chorus: Iye oge
Cantor: Queen of fashion has passed on,	Chorus: Queen of fashion
Cantor: Queen of fashion has passed on,	Chorus: Queen of fashion
Cantor: She was not a mother who flew by night	Chorus: Queen of fashion
Cantor: Queen of fashion has passed on,	Chorus: Queen of fashion
Cantor: She never partook in evil acts,	Chorus: Queen of fashion

As found in both examples 1 and 2, the folksongs display one of the main characteristic features of African folksongs in that they are predominantly in responsorial form.

#### b) Wedding songs

As commonly found in Yorubaland, marriage is an important and legal institution among the people of Egbeda-Egga. Both monogamy and polygyny are practiced in the society. During the 'giving away' and 'receiving' of the bride, women from both the families of the bride and groom as well as bride's friends and age group members participate in wedding songs known as *orin igbeyawo* (bridal songs). In some other parts of Yorubaland, the songs or chants are referred to as *ekun iyawo* (bride's cry). Women from the groom's family often sing to express their joy, happiness and appreciation to their in-laws for their good gesture in the giving out of their daughter's hands in marriage. In addition, they equally use the opportunity to state that their in-laws are

equally lucky to have chosen to marry their son. They articulate possible advantages and privileges which the new bride would derive from the union. The next two songs are examples of such:

Example 3 (*Omo kan un wa*):

Cantor:	Omo kan un wa,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	A robo, robo omu,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	A kuwo, kuwo awo,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	Ilolo tinu omo,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	A s'egbon, s'aburoo,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	A b'okunrin un 'wa,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	A b'obinrin un 'wa,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	E mo seun oni,	Chorus:	E seun
Cantor:	It's a wife they've given us,	Chorus:	We give thanks
Cantor:	She's got firm but succulent breasts,	Chorus:	We give thanks
Cantor:	Her skin is beautiful,	Chorus:	We give thanks
Cantor:	Her smiles, charming	Chorus:	We give thanks
Cantor:	Smiles that dazzle both young and old,	Chorus:	We give thanks
Cantor:	She'll give us male offspring,	Chorus:	We give thanks
Cantor:	She'll bring forth female offspring,	Chorus:	We give thanks
Cantor:	We thank you (in-laws) today,	Chorus:	We give thanks 3x

Example 4 (*Adumaradan i re'le oko re*):



A - du - ma - ra - dan, i re - le o - ko re, o - ju i - ro o - ri lo mu lo, o - ri lo mu lo, e mo m' e - wa lo, a -  
 11  
 du - ma - ra - dan o c

Adumaradan<sup>3</sup>, i re'le oko re, oju i ro;  
 Ori lo mu lo, ori lo mu lo, E mo m'ewa lo,  
 Adumaradan o e.

**Translation**

The dark complexioned one is heading to her matrimonial home with nostalgic feelings;  
 She is well-mannered and not just a beautiful damsel,  
 The dark complexioned one.

(Stanza 2) Eyinfunjowo, i re'le oko re, oju i ro;

Igba waa d'olomo o, o yin a se ni

**Translation**

The one with dazzling teeth, whiter than cowry shells, is heading to her matrimonial home feeling nostalgic;  
 When she eventually becomes a mother, everyone would envy her good fortunes.

The foregoing song demonstrates a prominent characteristic feature of Nigerian folksongs, which is the use of parody and substitution of texts. This primarily is rooted in the spontaneous nature with which traditional ethnic songs are composed. Each instance would dictate the mode of performance, as the texts to be adopted is dependent on the stature or complexion of the bride who is being honored.

**c) Cradle songs**

Mothers often sing cradle songs to express their love for their babies as well as lull babies to sleep, especially when the baby is crying. Some reasons adduced by Akpabot (1986) which inform singing of such songs, include making the baby happy, and calming and soothing her to sleep. The most important of all, according to him, is however an inward feeling of joy and that of gratitude towards God for giving her a child of her own. This is important given the high premium which many African societies place on child bearing.

Example 5: *Omo mo n'ise*

Cantor:	Omo moo n'ise, Omo moo n'ise o	Chorus:	Omo n'ise kuku
Cantor:	Mo ti s'owo pata lu'mo bee	Chorus:	Omo n'ise kuku
Cantor:	Omo moo n'ise, Omo moo n'ise o	Chorus:	Omo n'ise kuku

Cantor: Mo ti s'aju woroko w'omo bee

Chorus: Omo n'ise kuku

**Translation:**

Cantor: A child is important, so important

Chorus: A child is important

Cantor: Stop issuing corporeal punishment to him

Chorus: A child is important

Cantor: A child is important, so important

Chorus: A child is important

Cantor: Stop maltreating your child

Chorus: A child is important

Another song entitled: *E lu o e* is rendered by a mother as she rocks the baby on her back to sleep:

Example 6:

E lu o e, E lu o a, E lu o e, E lu o a;

Iku ba ti mo mo p'omo mi n'ile oko,

Mo ti a pitan ijo mo je, mo ti a pitan ijo mo mu,

Mo ti a j'oko s'inuu kaa omo mi o e

**Translation:**

E lu o e (nonsensical words)

As long as my child survives in her matrimonial home,

I would joyfully historicize my days of enjoyment in form of wining and dining,

I would gladly reminiscence the days of the chauffeur driven in my child's car.

**d) Festival music (Celebration of *Emidin* festival)**

Among the various festivals celebrated by folks with dancing, singing and pageantry in Egbeda-Egga community is the annual new yam festival, known as the *Emidin* festival. In some other Yorùbá towns and villages, it is known as *odun ijesu titun*. *Emidin* festival is usually celebrated in the month of September. Several reasons are adduced by the people for its celebration. Foremost of these is to give thanks to the gods for a bountiful harvest. Also, it is to ask for abundant rains for the next planting season, to bring out the symbolism of a crop, and prayer to the ancestors for continual guidance over community members as well as to bring indigenes who are sojourners in urban cities safely back home. The period also serves as a time for family reunion, socializing and to raise funds for community projects for the village.

The common practice in Okunland is that no farmer should bring new sets of tubers of yams to the village until the paramount ruler (or the village head) accompanied by the chiefs and elders have performed a ritual ushering in the new yams. It is unacceptable for any member of the community to expose any yam let alone partake in the eating of the new yam until the day the *Emidin* festival is celebrated. According to a key informant however, defaulters sometimes quietly smuggle yams to their homes to cook, although this might attract some form of punishment such as payment of prescribed fines if they were discovered. The simple fact is that no one speaks of it outside. As Abidatu Ibinaiye<sup>4</sup> noted:

On the eve of the festival celebration marking the lifting of the ban when everyone would be free to bring yams to the village, children follow their parents to the farm for the harvest in order to display their tubers for everyone to see. The yam species that are planted in Egbeda-Egga are big, long tubers that if the rich and fertile soil is blessed with abundant showers of rain, and a farmer devotes his time to his crops, one yam tuber could feed a whole family of eight to ten children. Every child from the age of six who is capable of carrying a load has a number of yams tied with robes to be brought to the village. This is considered great fun especially because as soon as you reach the village square, people shout an appellation of the yam *isu n o ta, isu n o ta*.... I remember when we were children; we loved it, especially when our parents' tubers were so big and long during the season.

On the morning of the festival, almost every household prepares *iyán* (pounded yam) and the rhythm of pounding is heard throughout the village. *Iyan* is the most popular delicacy in the whole of Okunland. The yams are boiled and pounded in a mortar with two people each holding a pestle. The actual festivity however begins at about 11.00 am with different activities and in the presence of several drumming groups climaxing with singing, dancing and the recently introduced fundraising activities for community projects. Hospitality is at its peak in Egbeda-Egga during *Emidin* festival, as all the visitors from the cities would have to be fed by their relatives during the whole day of celebrations. The song titled *Oni ka i je midin* is performed during the celebration.

Example 7 (*Oni ka i je midin*)

Cantor: Onipaki gbe danu

Chorus: Oni ka i je midin

Cantor: Elelubo gbe danu

Chorus: Oni ka i je midin

Cantor: Oni ka i je midin Chorus: Oni ka i je midin

**Translation**

Cantor: Cassava flour makers; throw it away Chorus: Today is the new yam feasting  
Cantor: Yam flour makers; throw it away Chorus: Today is the new yam feasting  
Cantor: Today is the new yam feasting Chorus: Today is the new yam feasting

The cultural significance of foods is made manifest in the foregoing song. In the context of food, the distinction between yam and cassava is quite important and significant in Egbeda-Egga. It is imperative as far as farming and festivals are concerned. This is understandably so because the community is an agrarian one. The significance in valuing yams over cassavas in the community can be attributed to the hard work that accompanies the cultivation of the crop. Most importantly, the pomp and pageantry surrounding the celebration of yam festival brings out the symbolism in the song 'cassava flour makers/owners; throw it away'. The song teaches members of the community to be vigilant and identify valuable items in their communities. It is considered an unpardonable offence to mistake cassava for yams.

**e) Entertainment and Satirical Songs**

Certain songs amongst the womenfolk are sung for pleasure and relaxation. As sung, they seek to relieve tension because of their humorous nature. Such entertainment songs may sometimes engage satire, wherein infamous acts and antisocial behavior by erring members of the community are derided. All my informants agreed that women have been the most emotional and vocal in commenting on such acts in the village. To ridicule any antisocial behavior such as adultery or fornication, laziness, theft and so forth, appropriate songs are composed and performed by the women. For instance, even though polygamy is widely accepted and practiced among the people, a man or woman who engages in illicit affairs outside the wedlock is greatly scorned. A song entitled: *E sunsun re* illustrates the point:

**Example 8 (E sunsun re)**

Cantor: E sunsun re Chorus: Le leee  
Cantor: E sunsun re Chorus: Le leee  
Cantor: Omode kerekere d'ale, e sunsun Chorus: Le leee  
Cantor: Agba gorogoro d'ale, e sunsun Chorus: Le leee  
Cantor: E sunsun re Chorus: Le leee  
Cantor: E sunsun re Chorus: Le leee

**Translation**

Cantor: This is totally shameful Chorus: Utterly shameful  
Cantor: This is totally shameful Chorus: Utterly shameful  
Cantor: Young ones are now promiscuous Chorus: Utterly shameful  
Cantor: Likewise, the older ones are immoral Chorus: Utterly shameful  
Cantor: This is totally shameful Chorus: Utterly shameful  
Cantor: This is totally shameful Chorus: Utterly shameful

**Educational and Policy Implications**

The indigenous contexts of the songs could serve as a rich source of reference for musical arts education in formal music settings. Teachers could develop repertoires from these songs into a variety of materials in the teaching and learning of indigenous culture and music in the classroom. Another way is to use the music elements of each applicable song to suit learning objectives of the day's lessons. For example, describing the melodies as simple repetitious, sequential, strophic and so forth wherever appropriate.

Students/pupils on their own part could diagram the contour of the melodies and come up with their own symbols to write down the songs (Dzansi, 2002). They could choreograph new dances to accompany entertainment songs or compare the melodic patterns of different folksongs. Students could also be assisted to develop good sense of rhythm as the teacher engages them in intelligent listening of the regular pulsation coming from the mortar and pestle when the people engage in pounding of yam (music appreciation). Students could also compose responses to calls and vice versa in songs (responsorial form) apart from displaying some of the strongest characteristic features typical of Nigerian folksongs, for they are short, fragmentary and repetitive.

The Yorùbá indigenous music pedagogy favors the holistic approach where the song texts, the activities and the music are equally important. Students could therefore be asked to enact music dramas depicting the events surrounding the song texts, for example the celebration of the new yam festival, wedding and funeral ceremonies. To this end, there is the need for policy makers in Nigeria to address their mind to the issue of re-assessment of the current trend in the educational sector and embark on school reforms which would make school music reflect the culture of the local communities. This should be backed with adequate funding of the various educational and research institutes to carry out studies on Nigerian cultural and indigenous knowledge practices and system so as to facilitate the processes of collection, documentation, and analyses with a view to modifying the present curriculum. This would be a step in the right direction. Furthermore, the indigenous

content and contexts of the folksongs could serve as a rich source of reference for 'multiculturalism' - a popular term now in international music education setting.

In order to actualize the implications itemized above, the following recommendations become imperative for immediate implementation amongst others:

- a) Music educators at various levels and musicologists must double their efforts by carrying out well-designed studies to collect and document folksongs from different ethnic groups in the country. Such collections would form useful resource databank and reference materials for schools.
- b) Due to the capital-intensive nature of research projects of this kind, government, educational institutions and funding agencies should be seen to be playing a vital role through provision of grants to aid such worthy endeavors.
- c) Interested individuals, entrepreneurs, associational bodies and non-governmental organizations should assist in publishing research findings and educational materials from such noble ventures particularly in the field of music education.
- d) There is the need to re-visit the current music curriculum in order to increase its local content and give it the much desired indigenous flavor. The study of different traditional ethnic music and their application to learning in Nigerian schools should no longer remain a pastime affair.

### Summary and Conclusion

This paper attempted to present some cultural contexts in which Egbeda-Egga women's folksongs are situated. When interpreted and analyzed, the customs and practices that underlie these songs are rich sources of cultural significance. When adapted by music teachers, these folksongs would go a long way to enhance classroom teaching and learning. Students would appreciate their music lessons more when they could draw examples from their immediate environment with its attendant rich content and context adaptable to formal learning. Some scholars may argue by referring to teachers as preservers and transmitters of their own cultural heritages especially when it has to do with mere collections of folksongs, but the perspective provided in this paper affirms that there is great merit in the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge to students, as demonstrated in the documentation and analyses of African folksongs.

### Endnotes

1. Oduduwa is historically believed to be the progenitor of the Yorùbá.
2. Okunland was carved out along with some other ethnic groups in Kwara and Benue states to form Kogi State in 2001 at the creation of the 36 states of the federation.
3. *Adumaradan* could be substituted with *apon-b'epo-re*, which means 'a beautiful fair-complexioned damsel; whose complexion is reddish as palm kernel.
4. A key informant with whom I conducted personal communication on September 19, 2009

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