

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

### **PROGRESSIVE TRADITIONALISM: *ORIN IBÌEJI* ÌTRADITION OF THE SOUTH-WEST NIGERIAN THE CONTEMPORARY TIMES**

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#### **Abstract**

*Orin ìbejì* performance, an age long musical tradition among the Yorùbà people of South Western Nigeria has undergone an evolutionary trajectory; over time, a change in the practice of the tradition has been observed. This paper investigates and presents the progression of its evolution from its traditional form to the present. The theory of Progressive Traditionalism propounded and first used by Emielu (2018) is employed as the theoretical backbone of this paper. Oral interview, archival and observational methods are employed as the methodological approach in gathering pieces of information for the study. The study observes that several elements have changed in the *orin ìbejì* practice. These changes include the context of performance, the class of performers, and the contemporized usage of the music. This paper attributes these changes to acculturation due to immigration, globalisation, modernisation and advancement in technology, which it opined has helped in the propagation of this musical tradition. The paper further observes that these aforementioned factors should be harnessed to advance, rather than impede, the progressive course of indigenous values such as *orin ìbejì*. For example, technological means could be employed in the preservation and archival of *orin ìbejì* to project this tradition for global relevance.

Keywords: contemporary, folklore, *orin ìbejì*, progressive traditionalism

#### **Preamble**

I first encountered Prof. Young-Sook Onyiuk at the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State in the year 2014 as one of her post-graduate students during my Master of Arts in Music Education programme. I can still clearly recollect my experiences in her classes on 'Educational Planning' and 'Philosophy of Music Education. I consider the fundamental principles of Music Education that she taught us as of great value, and they form the core and foundations of my music education career and practice until now. One of the valuable lessons I took from her numerous counsels is to believe in myself and strive for the best in scholarship. I am a witness to the fact that she demonstrated her generosity to us in so many ways. I am grateful for the opportunity to have passed through her tutelage. As she is being celebrated and honoured, I wish her long life and more fruitful scholarly engagements. Best wishes to her in all her future endeavours.

(Omolabake A. Dada)

I met Prof. Young-Sook Onyiuke at the symposium organised in honour of the late Prof. Akin Euba sometime in early 2019 at the University of Lagos and became attracted to her due to her engagement in scholarly discussions. As she is being celebrated, I wish her a long life in good health and peace of mind.

(Timothy K. Ajiboye)

## Introduction

Music, as a prehistoric human practice, has evolved over the years as a universal phenomenon. It is a performance art that is common to virtually all known human cultures, hence its reputation as a universal phenomenon. This axiom alludes to the fact that music is not static but a dynamic art. Over the years, the art of music has revolutionised, undergoing phasal and seasonal transformations. The concept of 'change' itself is generally regarded as a constant and inevitable phenomenon of life; this can also be said to be true about the musical arts. This may not be unconnected with the fact that human beings, over time and seasons, tend to evolve in their musical tastes and preferences. Music, as a creative art, is therefore subject to whims and caprices of evolving human tastes and preferences.

Orin ìbèjì is an age-long musical tradition of the Yoruba people of south-west Nigeria. This tradition is based on personality-themed songs that are performed for twins (ìbèjì) in Yoruba land. *orin ìbèjì*, as a form of traditional music, has also undergone a series of changes over time. This change can be attributed to several factors and circumstances surrounding the *orin ìbèjì* musical practice. There is every likelihood that particular musical genres/styles undergo some metamorphosis after a period of 'reign' and acceptance.

African traditional music, like other creative works, tends to mutate over time. This happens to meet up with the patroniser's ever-changing desire for something new and different. This is why signification in African music per time is closely tied to the context of its performance. This is also why the meaning of African traditional music such as *orin ìbèjì* can be best understood by tracing its evolutionary trajectory. These assertions corroborate Agawu's opinion that "African music is best understood not as a finite repertoire but as a potentiality. In terms of what now exists and what has existed in the past" (Agawu, 2003, p. xiv). In this context, understanding *orin ìbèjì* will be easy if careful attention is paid to how it has evolved over the years of its existence.

This paper seeks to trace the evolution of *orin ìbèjì* bringing out the nuances in its transitions that have been observed overtime. The study, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What was the nature of this music at its inception and what has it become in contemporary times?
- ii. Under what circumstances, and for what purposes was this music performed at its inception and what has it been used for in the present times?
- iii. What was the profile of the performers in historic times and what class of people perform the music now?
- iv. What musical instruments constituted the initial performance ensembles in the traditional setting and which instruments are used in the contemporary times.

## Theoretical framework

This study is hinged on the theory of Progressive Traditionalism that was propounded and first used by Emielu in 2018. Progressive Traditionalism, according to Emielu, "is a process of how age-old indigenous music traditions are being revitalized and sustained through a continuous process of self-renewal" (2018, p.207). He explained that the basis of the theory is that "cultural interactions with the outside forces are deployed to enrich, not to destroy, inside resources in a progressive manner." Emielu went further to expatiate on the meaning of 'outside forces' by including internal borrowing and cultural exchanges from within and not limiting it to exogenous cultural forces. In Emielu's view, innovations and new developments contribute to the sustenance and the contemporary relevance of old music traditions. This theory is apt for this discussion because *orin ìbèjì* has undergone a metamorphosis; a series of transformations have occurred, from what it was in its inception, to what went through at different stages of its developmental

stages, into what it has become in the present times. The various components of the *orinìbejì* songs have been transformed to accommodate changing tastes, preferences and external influences. The context of the performance of *orinìbeji* has been extended considerably, accommodating different contexts of performance that were not considered possible or not explored in their early beginnings. Also, the various musical instruments incorporated in the performance of *orinìbeji* have extended to accommodate new and modern musical instruments with a high sense of adaptability and fluidity.

### Orin ìbeji and the attendant Changes

Different scholarly works have engaged the meaning of *orinìbeji* as “different songs that are variously rendered or performed for twins and which has ìbejì as the central theme or its basis” (Dada, 2020, p. 375; Dada, Akere & Omoniyi, 2021, p. 210). This definition is apt and it is what will be adopted for the study. *Orin ìbeji* is a musical tradition of South Western Nigeria and is categorised as a type of traditional music that has its root in the culture of the Yorùbá people. *Orin ìbeji* covers a wide range of areas in the Yorùbá belief systems that are associated with the raising and bringing up of twins children in the South West Nigeria traditional setting. This musical tradition has revolutionised over the years, transforming from what it used to be to what it is now.

The different changes have occurred in *orinìbeji* over time, from its primeval roots to contemporary practice. The changes observed in the *orinìbeji* musical tradition are highlighted as follows:

- i. changes in the content of the music that is performed;
- ii. changes in the initiators of *orinìbeji* performances;
- iii. changes in the context of *orinìbeji* performances;
- iv. changes in the use of the song;
- v. changes in the accompanying musical instruments.

Despite the highlighted area of change above, there still exists the performance practice of *orinìbeji* in its raw primordial form, as initially performed in the indigenous communities. However, this mode of musical practice has largely given way to the more modern forms. The reasons for these changes will be explained after the discussion on the areas of change highlighted above.

### Changes in the content of the music

The lyrical content of *orinìbeji* is based on the norms and customs that govern the belief systems in the Yorùbá traditional settings from historic times. That is why some of the *orinìbeji* songs are not just mere songs but purveyors of deep philosophical thoughts in and around the cultural bases *ìbejì*. An Example of this is an *orinìbeji* titled '*wòdìns'òl'roiròid'omi*' that discusses the mythical powers that the twins are believed to have and which, according to myth, were given to them by Olodumare, the Supreme Being. The musical and textual illustration of this *orinìbeji* song is given hereafter.

#### Musical Example 1 (*Wòdìns'òl'roiròid'omi*)

Song text in Yorùbá:	Translation:
<i>Wòdìns'òl'roiròid'omi</i>	They've turned oil to water
<i>Wòdìns'òl'roiròid'omi</i>	They've turned oil to water
<i>TàiyèìloluìEjìjùrè,</i>	The beloved twins,
<i>Oòmòdìs'òl'roiròid'omi</i>	have turned oil to water

## Transcription

### Wón S'òróró D'omi



Wón s'ò - ró - ró d'ò - mi, wón s'ò - ró - ró d'ò - mi.  
 Tá - yé - lo - lú è - jì - rẹ, ọ - mọ s'ò - ró - ró d'ò - mi.

## Textual analysis

This *orinìbejì* expresses the spirituality behind the disobedience to instructions regarding the care of the twins by a particular *iyaìbejì* (mother of twins). Her children, the twins (*ìbejì*), informed her through the divination (*Ifà*) to indulge in the practice of carrying them (the twins) for musical performances in public places; and that she should stop frying beans cake as her trade. The woman refused because of the embarrassment and shame of the public performances. As she was about to commence her beans cake business one day, the groundnut oil was turned to water by an unknown force. She was made to believe that this was due to her disobedience to the instruction of the gods about her twin children. The experience compelled her to change her mind and do as the divination initially instructed.

In modern times, there is an observable shift in the historical and philosophical patterns of lyrical contents in *orinìbejì*. The song lyrics have been adapted and expanded to accommodate a wider range of modern themes. This is in tune with the preferences of modern-day performers and listeners (majorly the youths) who find it easier to relate to urban-themed lyrics rather than the highly figurative, philosophical and spiritual texts of the traditional practices. An example of an *orinìbejì* with lyrical themes that are a departure from the older practice is titled 'Ijoil'ò'wo'.

### Musical Example 2 (Ijoil'ò'wo)

Songtext in Yorùbàì: Translation:

Tàiyèìloluìjòil'ò'wo ÌTayelolu dancing is your  
 trade Èjììrẹìjòil'ò'wo ÌEjire dancing is your trade

## Transcription

### Ijó L'ò-wò ẹ



Tá - yé - lo - lú i - jó l'ò - wò, i - jó, È - jì - rẹ i -  
 jó l'ò - wò, i - jó; Tá - yé - lo - lú i - jó l'ò - wò, i - jó l'ò - wò ẹ.

This *orinìbejì* is based on the belief that the art of public dancing is the stock-in-trade of the twins. The song affirms this belief but in a subtle way. The lyrics of the song do not portray any form of seriousness, rather, it seems to lack philosophical and spiritual depths that are typical of the early *orinìbejì* songs. The song seems to make a mockery of the traditional belief behind the idea of the song.

## Changes in the initiator of *orinìbejì* and the context of performance

*Orin ìbejì*, as a traditional musical performance, was usually initiated or performed mostly by a

set of people. These include iyaiibeji (twin'smum), grandmothers of the twins, neighbours and relatives of the twins or whoever may be representing the iyaiibeji performances as a traditional rite. This musical performance is a rite that is usually carried out in the market and public places by these sets of people. It is believed to be based on the divine instruction given by a recognised spiritual authority or a compelling force (such as the ifa oracle) that has been accepted by society and revered as capable of giving such instructions. The types and motives for the performances of orinibeji are discussed below:

- i. The one that is performed commonly at home like a lullaby, to soothe and pacify the twins when they're agitated;
- ii. The one that is being performed during the sacrifices to Orisaiibeji, the god of the twins, is sacred and is for the worship of this deity;
- iii. And the one that is been performed in public and market places is a traditional rite usually carried out for the healthy living and to preserve the lives of the twins that are been asked to be taken about for such. It is important to note that during Iya Iibeji's performance of this rite (public musical performance of orinibeji), monetary rewards that are usually received from the people are usually used for the upkeep of the children.

In the context of contemporary practice, the pool of performers of this musical tradition has increased greatly. Different people, aside for the mothers of twins and the class of people mentioned earlier are now known to perform orinibeji. This set of people may be public musicians, elders and orators in the community that do not necessarily have anything to do with the twins. Also, professional and amateur choirs may engage some compositions of orinibeji without necessarily having any connection with the twins. The motive for the performance by these sets of people is not usually based on any spiritual or divine instruction as is the case in the traditional and primordial settings. This class of performers often perform orinibeji as panegyrics for the sole aim of financial rewards, or purely recreational means. Also, such performances can be staged at public functions and concert halls.

### Changes in the attendant musical instruments

In traditional African culture, drums are an essential part of the day to day activities. Africans use an array of different types of drums as are necessary and applicable to different situations. Jones (1959) established that drums are the most important section of African Music (what he referred to as 'Orchestra'). Just like music, drums are regarded as part of the culture and are referred to as material culture to be specific. These drums are oftentimes associated with sacred roles. In South-Western Nigeria, nearly all traditional drums are associated with one deity or the other. This is corroborated by Olusegun (2015) who affirms that some festivals also establish the usage of a particular indigenous drum in Yorubaland. For example, *ipeise* drums are used in the festivals, worship and rituals that are associated with Ifa (the god of divination); *Baṭa* drums are employed in the worship and praise of *Sòṅgò* (the god of thunder and lightning); *Beḍimbedi* is the drum that is most recognised in the festivals and rituals that are associated with *Oḍṣun* (the river goddess); *Iyayiḷḷuduḷḷi* is used in to sing praises of *Oḷḡun* (the god of iron) (Adegbite, 1988; Vidal, 2012; Dada, 2015; Olusegun, 2015). Adeleke (2008) reported that *seḍieḍiḷḷi* and *andaḷkuibaḷa* are the musical instruments that are used in the performance of *orinibeji*. Vidal (2012) observed that *kananguis* engaged in the praises of special children such as *Daḷda* and *ibeji*, in Yorubaland.

*Duḷḷuḷḷi* ensemble which comprises *iyayiḷḷuduḷḷi* (mother drum), *Keḍiḷḷeḍiḷḷi* or *Aḷḡuḷḷaḷ* (father), *Iḷḷiḷḷi* or *Omeleakoḍ* (male), *aḷḷeḷḷe* or *Omele abo* (female) and *Guḷḷiḷḷi* (twin drum) are usually engaged in the festivals, rituals and praises of *ibeji*. In any case, this pattern of drum use is not

sacrosanct; any member of the *duḽḽḽ* family, except *gùḽḽḽ*, can be employed in the absence of other members of the family. It is very rare to see the complete ensemble in performance. *Gùḽḽḽ* is rarely seen in performances for praises of the twins. In the traditional settings among the Yoruba, it is a common practice to see *iyàḽḽ* in performance, going about with her *ìḽḽ* (binding one to her back with a piece of cloth and carrying the other one with her hands), in the company of a talking drummer carrying *gàngà* drum. *Duḽḽ* ensemble can be used to perform *orinḽḽ* repertoire without engaging human voices.

In contemporary times, the accompanying musical instruments have changed considerably. Different types of drums, aside from the dedicated drums mentioned earlier (members of the *duḽḽ* ensemble or the ensemble itself) for the performance of *orinḽḽ*, are now being employed for the musical performance of *orinḽḽ*. It is now common to see people performing *orinḽḽ* with different types of musical instruments. Some traditional musical drums that are not *duḽḽ* drums or *duḽḽ* family are now being employed for this musical performance.

At the concert halls, where art music is being performed, different exotic (non-indigenous) musical instruments are now introduced to this musical performance. An upright piano was engaged in the performance of *orinḽḽ* titled “*Epo n be Ewa n be o*” (attached as an appendix) an art music composition by Chinedu Osinigwe for choir and piano accompaniment. It was performed by New Wine Ensemble at the World Choir Games held in South Africa in the year 2018. The context of the performance and the accompanying instruments for this *orinḽḽ* musical performance represents a total shift from the foundational practice.

The above may not be unconnected with modernisation and current trends in musical practices and this does not exclude the performance of *orinḽḽ*. The average tempo (pace) of performance has also been observed to have changed as well. Most modern *orinḽḽ* songs are presented in rather fast, more rhythmic and danceable tunes.

Identified reasons for the attending changes

Presently, there has been a greater level of consciousness or awareness of artistic creativity by many modern performers of *orinḽḽ*. This is due to the technologically driven creative processes and the dynamics such devices are introducing to the creative processes. All the changes previously identified (changes in the content of the music that is being performed; changes in the initiator of *orinḽḽ*; changes in the context of performance; changes in the use of the song; and the changes in the attending musical instruments) for *orinḽḽ* traditional musical performance are driven by technology, advancement in knowledge, exposure to other cultures of the world and the advent of foreign religions such as Christianity and Islam.

All of the identified changes have inadvertently affected *orinḽḽ* tradition both negatively and positively. The negative side of it is that it has considerably reduced the instances of the original mode of musical performance rites and traditions. This has led to what can be construed as a change in the identity of the musical performance, thereby diluting its originality as profound spiritual and philosophical art rather than mere musical performances. This development can also be traced to the advent of exotic religious practices (especially the Abrahamic ones) which largely relegated the African religions, traditions and culture to the status of primitive and barbarous statuses.

Nevertheless, the modernisation of this musical practice also comes with some advantages which, in the opinion of this study, far outweigh its disadvantages. These advantages are what the

paper refers to as 'progressive' for the orinìbeji musical tradition and they are discussed hereafter one after the other.

These changes have given the musical tradition more visibility and global recognition due to the present-day online file-sharing systems. Also, the different format or types of arrangements has helped to propagate the musical tradition beyond the shore of the areas where it has been practised. Of note is the one composed by Chinedu Osinigwe that was performed in South Africa as mentioned earlier. The fact that the modern versions of orinìbejì are presented in more comprehensible formats allows more people to relate to it. This is another advantage of the contemporary orinìbeji types over the older ones. Due to these changes, different types of orinìbeji have been composed while some are being arranged for both the traditional and the contemporary ones, thereby leading to more patronage by all and sundry – this is good for the preservation of the tradition. Lastly, the documentation of orinìbeji musical performance by art musicians is a way of preserving the tradition for posterity to prevent it from going into extinction.

### Conclusion

This paper has explained the primordial state of orinìbeji at inception, what it has evolved to be in modern times and what it has developed into in the hands of its different performers. The different changes are highlighted and discussed. The paper has also been able to identify some of the reasons for the changes, bringing out their advantages and disadvantages for orinìbeji musical tradition. The paper believes the advantages outweigh the attending disadvantages of the different changes experienced by the musical tradition. The paper concludes that the changes are progressive for the global recognition and high visibility that the orinìbeji tradition deserves.

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