

CHAPTER 53

ORIN IBEJI AS YORUBÁ FOLKLORE

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Abstract

In Yorubá land twins' births are usually regarded as special and, *orin ibeji* is the generic name given to the corpus of personality-themed songs that are variously composed and rendered for twins (*Ibeji*). This paper seeks to do an appraisal of *orin ibeji* of the Yorubá, probing and proving its status as an indigenous folkloric tradition. African folklore consists of artistic expressions that are essentially repositories of cultural history, philosophy and episteme. Using the Theory of Referentialism as its pivot, the paper argues that *orin ibeji*, as a musical tradition, typically references cultural semiotic elements outside the perimeters of the songs themselves. This, inadvertently, establishes the folkloric profile of *orin ibeji*. Oral interview, archival and observational methods are employed as the methodological approach in assembling the primary data for this paper. Using five key characteristics, including identity formation and communal performance, with corresponding examples of different *orin ibeji* songs, this paper explains how *orin ibeji* are indeed classical examples of Yorubá folklore. Finally, it recommends purpose-driven attempts at escalating the status of this tradition to an iconic status of a globally visible and attractive cultural heritage.

Keywords: Folklore, *Orin Ibeji*, Western Nigeria.

Introduction

There are different types of musical genres that are performed and practised in Nigeria. These musical genres have evolved with time and seasons. Different scholars have made attempts at taxonomical presentations of this array of musical genres. One of such is that of Omibiyi-Obidike, (1994) who presented four different categories:

- a. the indigenous or traditional music of the heterogeneous ethnic groups resident in

- Nigeria;
- b. religious music performed by Christians and Muslim communities;
 - c. popular music;
 - d. and music composed by western trained Nigerian musicians (art music).

The indigenous category of music belongs to specific people and cultures in Nigeria. The musics under categories b, c and d are oftentimes created as a result of syncretism; the conflation of different elements of existing musical practices to create a new genre. These syncretic musical genres can also be said to take place through the processes of acculturation and appropriation. This paper is focused on the first of Omibiyi-Obidike's categorisation, i.e. the indigenous music; also synonymously referred to as traditional music.

According to Okafor, (2005) traditional music can also be referred to as folk music or folklore. These two terms (folk and traditional music) are therefore used synonymously in this study. Encyclopaedia Britannica delineates folk music as “traditional music that originally was passed down through families and other small groups. Folk music like folk literature lives in oral tradition.” (Britannica, n.d.). This explanation brings to the fore the fact that, rather than modern means of documentation like writing/reading, folk music is passed down from one generation to the other through the hearing of oral accounts. However, this study chooses to adopt the definition of folk music as discussed by Karpeles in Okafor (2005). The same definition was adopted by the International Folk Music Council at its conference in Sao Paulo (Brazil) in 1954 and is apt for this study. It states thus:

Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are (i) continuity, which links the present with the past; (ii) variation, which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or group; and (iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives. The term can be applied to music that has been evolved from the rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular or art music and it can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community which gives it its folk character (Karpeles, 1973, p. 3).

These descriptions succinctly establish the identity and character of folk music. *Orin ibeji*, a type of traditional song composed specially for the twins clearly falls under this description of folk music. Various scholars have discussed the existence of *orin ibeji*, its drumming pattern, belief systems and the philosophies focused in and around the nature of the twins, but not so much has been done on the ethnomusicological connotations of *orin ibeji songs*, execution of its content analysis and deduction of the inherent qualities that classifies it as folklore. This study, therefore, seeks to conduct an appraisal of the textual contents of some selected *orin ibeji and situate them* within the framework of Yoruba folklore.

Theoretical framework

This study employs the theory of referentialism as its philosophical pilot. According to Reimer, (1970, p. 15) “the meaning and value of a work of art exist outside of the work itself. In order to find the artwork's meaning, you must go to the ideas, emotions, attitudes, events, which the work refers you to in the world outside the artwork.” The function of the artwork, in line with the referentialist's belief, is to remind the observer of something that is extra artistic or extra-musical which is outside the perimeters of the created work of art. This theory is apt for this study because *orin ibeji, an example of folk music, is an artwork that carries extra artistic and extra-musical information. Orin ibeji songs serve as reminders or clues to so many things about ibeji and, in the*

light of Yorubá cultural beliefs, other phenomena that are associated with it. For instance, a particular *orin ibeji* song may point one to the totem of the twins like kolanut, palm oil and beans that are used in rituals in the Yorubá culture. All these are extra-musical and they are symbolic of the *ibeji* tradition and belief systems in Yorubá culture. Also, different philosophies, beliefs and the norms of the society regarding the twins are being pointed at or referenced by this folk music, *orin ibeji*.

Orin ibeji as folklore

Orin ibeji is the generic name given to the corpus of personality-themed songs that are variously composed and rendered for the twins (*Ìbeji*) in Yorubaland. *Orin ibeji* is an agelong tradition with the theme of its various musical compositions centred around the twins' tradition, their god (*Òrìṣà Ìbeji*), related totems and symbols. *Orin ibeji* is grouped under Yorubá traditional songs and it possesses all the qualities and characteristics that make it rightly so. From the definition given by International Folk Music Council at its conference in Sao Paulo (Brazil) in 1954, so many characteristics can be inferred about this Yorubá folk music, *orin ibeji*. These are discussed thereafter with the appropriate examples of *orin ibeji* given:

(i) Orin ibeji as a reflector of Yorubá people's way of life

The way of life of the people of a referred culture is usually reflected in their folk music. This is also true of *orin ibeji*. *Orin ibeji as folk music* helps to unearth the cultural-historical information, re-echoing or resonating the norms, principles and philosophical foundations that govern the ways of life of the society. In support of this, Vidal, (2012, p. 16) asserts that “Yorubá musical styles are associated with the cultural practices that establish their expressive forms.” In this regard, *orin ibeji* reflects details of the Yorubá culture and society. Norms, history, values and philosophies that represent Yorubá societies are usually projected or seen in the songs. Some details that represent Yorubá people are easily traceable to this *orin ibeji*. In the same vein, Ibrahim Abdulai in Chernoff, (1979, p. 35) submitted that “music is something which does not conceal things about us and so it adds to us.”

The word “music” as referenced by Abdulai here may also be referring to other musical elements beyond the content of the music. For example, the musical instruments (*dùndún* ensemble) that are used in the performance or accompaniment of *orin ibeji* are also projecting the cultural values that are inherent in Yorubá culture. The materials the drums are made of, such as the shell that is made from '*òmo*' wood, the membrane, '*awo*' is made from goatskin or the skin of a goat foetus, '*aṣo oke*' or '*aran*' (ceremonial Yorubá traditional attire) and '*saworo*' are used in decorating '*dùndún*' drums are all symbolic in Yorubá tradition and culture. All of these items have extra-musical connotations depicting the Yorubá culture that is the origin of this drumming tradition. This discourse supports Triton, (2005, p. xiv) that argues that music is a cultural element that symbolises people's ways of life. Also, Daramola (2018) corroborated this assertion by submitting that music serves as a lens by which elements of any culture could be readily discerned. For instance, the Yorubá people believe that goats reside with human beings as domestic animals and because of that, they hear words or the language of the people they live with. This is part of the reasons for their choice of goatskin or goat foetus skin as membranes for the drums. Also, in Yorubá culture, drums are symbolically decorated with the rich Yorubá ceremonial attire, '*aṣo oke*' or '*aran*' because they believe that '*dùndún*' drums are synonymous with celebrations and ceremonies. One will usually find the drum being performed at joyous occasions (like house warming, wedding ceremony, burial rites for aged people and naming ceremony) are being marked. A musical illustration of an *orin ibeji* that reflects the Yorubá people's way of life is shown hereafter:

Táyélólú Gb'obi È

Tá-yé - ló-lú o, o yá l'ò-dò mi, Tá-yé - ló-lú gb'o - bi è,
 è - jì-ré gb'o - bi è t'è-wò bè-lè - jè kó-o gb'o bi è.

Song Text in Yorùbá:

Táyélólú o, Oyálódò mi,
 Táyélólú gbobi è
 Èjìrè gbobi è
 T'èwò bèlèjè, kóo gbobi è

Translation

Oh Tayelolu, please come to me
 Tayelolu, accept your kola nut offering
 Oh twins, accept your kola nut offerings
 Stretch forth your hands and accept your kola nut offerings

This *orin ibeji*, a piece of folk music, reflects the belief of the Yorùbá people about *ibeji* (twins) as a deity and to which sacrifices like kola nuts are offered from time to time. It also suggests the belief in the connection between the living and the spirit being and which they express with this *orin ibeji* during the rituals. This affirms Agawu's (2016, p. 49) comment that music is wedded to those things that traditional people do in the context of traditional life. Folk music connects the past with the present and that is why it is a cultural index that indicates a society's ways of life, and the beliefs, rules and norms which the society has adopted as its guiding principles.

(ii) *Orin ibeji* as an integral part of Yorùbá culture

Folk music, which *orin ibeji* also represents, is an integral part of the culture in that it is used as a tool for historical narration in Yorùbá culture and tradition. Omibiyi (1975 p. 484) commented that “music is an integral and functional part of daily activities.” (Vidal, 2012, p. 3) submits that “Yorùbá music is an inseparable element in Yorùbá culture.” Also, Merriam, (1975, p. 55) while commenting on African music (which, in essence, includes *orin ibeji*) affirms that “songs are the prime carriers of history among the non-literate folks in Africa.” Nettl (1963) opines that it is essential to accept music as part of the culture. Nettl's argument includes folk music, which *orin ibeji* represents. Elsewhere, Nettl (1983) regards music as culture and suggested that it should be approached as such. This paper agrees with these submissions because they argued in favour of why *orin ibeji* is an integral part of the culture. An example of *orin ibeji* is given and discussed thereafter to serve as an illustration of this.

Ìyá Ìbejì Şo Ti Şohun Tí Mo Wí

I - ya I - be - jì s'ò ti s'o-hun tí mo wí. B'í-le ba tí mo o, K'o ya s'e-wa fun 'be - jì.
 K'o s'e - wa fun 'be - jì, k'o s'e - po fun Ta - ye - lo - lu.
 K'o - ri Ke - hin - de ma pa - da l'e - hin mi, O - mo ni Ta - ye - lo - lu.

Song Text in Yorùbà	Translation
<i>Ìya Ìbejì S'ò Tí S'ohun tí mo wíṣ</i>	Mother of twins, have you done as I told you?
<i>Ìya Ìbejì s'ò tí s'ohun tí mo wíṣ</i>	Mother of twins, have you done as I told you?
<i>B'ìlè bá tí mọ̀o ko ya sèwà fún 'bejì.</i>	When the day breaks, ensure that you make a meal of beans for the twins
<i>Ko sèwà fún 'bejì, Ko sepo fún Táyélolú,</i>	Make the beans meal for the twins, and also palm oil for Táyélolú
<i>Kórí i Kéhìndé má Padà léhìn mi</i>	May the good fortunes of Kéhìndé follow me
<i>Ọmọ ni Táyélolú</i>	Táyélolú is a worthy child

Textual Analysis:

This example of *orin ibeji* presents a set of instructions directed at the mother of the twins; at the same time, philosophical bases are projected in the song. The instructions appear to have ensued from a superior unseen being, the compelling factor - *Orisà Ìbejì (the twins diety)*, who instructs the mother of the twins to execute the instructions projected in the song. The song proceeded to inform the mother of the twins of the benefits of obedience to the instruction which, according to the song, is the assurance of a harvest of good fortune from the twins. The interaction in this *orin ibeji* highlights some of the culture's symbolic representations; this comfortably situates the music within the framework of the culture. The fact that spiritual instruction was given, and which needs to be adhered to for the wellbeing of the twins and the society at large, expresses the dictates of the Yorùbà culture. Special delicacies of the twins such as beans and palm oil were mentioned in the song and the reason for them was given as well. These all point to why *orin ibeji is part of the Yorùbà culture*.

(iii) Orin ibeji as a cultural means of identity formation.

The indigenous songs of a particular society are carriers of the norms and customs guiding that society and these can typically be used to identify the society. The songs objectify, reify and bring to remembrance the peculiar features of the society as well. The general implication of this is that these songs can enact a sort of identity construction. This assertion supports Chernoff's (1979, p. 35) ideology that "music helps people to distinguish themselves from each other". Elsewhere, Chernoff submitted that "Africans use music and other arts to articulate and objectify their philosophical and moral systems" (1979, p. 37). These philosophical and moral systems are essential indices of a society's identity. When an *orin ibeji* song is raised in a society, it may promote one or more attributes of the society where it is autochthonous. Oludare (2019, p. 191) corroborates this view when he submitted that traditional music is a means for identity formation. For example, an *orin ibeji* titled '*Ìlása Ọwèrè'* that was performed in a town called Igbo-Ọrà is a representation of so many things that identifies and distinguishes the town from other places. This example is in line with Agawu's (2016, p. 27) submission that the presence of music is a defining feature of most human societies. In other words, a people's music typically manifests the nature and essence of the people. Oludare (2019, p. 191) was specific when he posits that "Yorùbà people employ their music as a medium of artistic expression and cultural identity."

Igbo-Ọrà, a town in Ibarapa Central Local Government of Oyo State is known and accepted as the home of twins. This is not unconnected with the high incidence of multiple births in the town especially that of twins (Ibageré, 2002). Also, '*ilasa'* soup (okra leaves and melon) is a special delicacy that is common with the people of Igbo-Ọrà. The indigenes mark most (if not all) of their special functions and celebrations with the (*ilasa*) soup. The people of this town even attribute the high incidence of multiple births to this special soup. However, the authenticity of this claim cannot be scientifically substantiated in this study. The musical example below objectifies the assertion.

Ìlása Ọ̀wẹ̀rẹ̀

The musical score consists of four staves of music in 12/8 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The lyrics are written below the notes.

Staff 1: ì - la - sa ọ̀ - wẹ̀ - rẹ̀ ni n ó ma sẹ̀,

Staff 2: ì - la - sa ọ̀ - wẹ̀ - rẹ̀ ni nó ma sẹ̀.

Staff 3: Tá - lá - sà - kẹ̀ bá ti bí - be - ji,

Staff 4: ì - la - sa ọ̀ - wẹ̀ - rẹ̀ ni nó ma sẹ̀

Textual Analysis:

This example of *orin ibeji* brings to fore the salient information about the society where the song emanated from. The song, which extols the values of the *ìlása* soup, presents what can be construed as the people of *Igbo-Qra*'s confident recommendations for the consumption of the soup.

(iv) *Orin ibeji* as communal and public performance

Traditional music is usually a joint venture or a communal phenomenon that is open to public performance; this can also be said to be true of *orin ibeji*. This is one of the characteristics that situates *orin ibeji* in the folkloric space. The communal lifestyle of Africans, which speaks of primordial cultural dictates, is being extended to the traditional musical practices in African societies. In most African societies, it is a norm to have communal participation in the performance of traditional music. Similarly, in *orin ibeji* musical performance, the music connects the performer, mostly 'iyá ibeji' (or whoever is performing) with the people around; the audience normally plays the role of co-performers during the performance. Nketia's (1979) assertion corroborates this by his submission that sees audience presence and their participation at musical performance in traditional music as an important thing that stimulates the performance. It does not matter if the people around were invited before the performance or have foreknowledge of the performance. Once an *orin ibeji* is raised, people around will normally participate even without being invited. Omibiyi (1975, p. 492) also asserts that "performance of music is basically communal, this affords everybody the opportunity to experience music through performance."

Furthermore, the role of the audience at a musical performance in an African traditional performance setting cannot be overemphasised. Their roles are highly significant in determining the overall outcome of the performance. Commenting on this, Chernoff (1979) opines that traditional music in African cultures will not be complete without the engagement of participants. Mostly, the participants are drawn from the people in the community that may have gathered at the sound of music and instruments. Corroborating this, Oehrle (1993) points out that music-making in traditional society is a group activity. Elsewhere, Oehrle (2003) opines that traditional music is

the most common and most widely used means of expression. These musical expressions in traditional musical practices in Africa have a place within the framework of its tradition (Chernoff, 1979).

The musical example thereafter is an explanation to this.

Èní Mára Bí'beji K'ó B'èwà Jẹ

A
 È - ní máa bí 'be - ji kó b'è - wà jẹ, kéùn - dè - re.
A'
 È - mí máa bí 'be - ji mó b'è - wà jẹ, kéùn - dè - re.

Textual analysis:

This *orin ìbeji* is an exposition on the Yorubá philosophy and belief that attaches great importance to the beans delicacy, as being essential for the twins who are believed to be one of the pantheons, and who they revered and honoured as a deity. It went further to advise those who desire to give birth to a set of twins to ensure that they eat beans.

(v) Orin ìbeji as an oral tradition-based performance

African traditional music, which *orin ìbeji* also represents, is usually performed orally. This is because different traditional music in African settings has been passed down orally from one generation to another generation from time immemorial. They are not written or documented, like Western music. Agawu's (2003) position on African traditional music affirms that African traditional music is a performative art in a predominantly oral tradition. This is in line with Nketia's (1979) assertion in his comment on traditional songs as depositories of information in African societies, where he argues that songs are oral documents that reside with the Africans. All these discourses affirm the character of *orin ìbeji* as folklore. In *orin ìbeji*, the initiator of the musical performance, 'iyá ìbejì' can present a series of *orin ìbeji* by heart without any assistance from written notes. All the musical examples of *orin ìbeji* that have been mentioned are all from the oral tradition that resides with the people in the society where it was created.

Conclusion

This paper has considered, in several ramifications, the meaning and manifestations of 'traditional music', explaining how it can be regarded as folklore, citing *orin ìbeji* as one of its examples. Various characteristics inherent in folklore were also discussed and multifaceted arguments on why *orin ìbeji* is folklore were thoroughly established and presented. We have therefore been able to show that *orin ìbeji*, a type of folklore in the Yorubá cultural universe means the following:

- a. a reflector of Yorubá people's way of life;
- b. an integral part of Yorubá culture;
- c. a means of identity formation of a culture;
- d. open invitation to communal performance, and
- e. performance that is predominantly oral tradition.

We were able to discuss all these characteristics illustrating them with different *orin ìbeji* examples. In conclusion, we recommend deliberate and purpose-driven advocacies that are

geared towards the propagation and encouragement of this tradition. As shown in this paper, its rôle as a repository of cultural values and history needs to be annexed. Further efforts should focus on how to transform *orin ibeji* musical performance tradition into a cultural icon and an object of global appeal.

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