

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

REVIVING THE FOLKSONGS FOR MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN A MORDEN IGBO SOCIETY

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Abstract

The long aged folksong of the Igbo society which carries the very essence of the people's culture, beliefs and ethics have been severely devalued in these modern times. If nothing is done about it, the society will lose its way of life and identity in the near future. The Igbo folksongs have been used in many ways to sustain the tradition of people and it has been handed from one generation to another through oral transmission. The paper aimed at pointing out the need for reviving Igbo folksongs for moral development in modern Igbo society. The paper highlighted the relevance of Igbo culture, moral education associated with Igbo folksong, and the factors affecting Igbo folksongs in the modern society. The paper concluded by suggesting and re commending various steps to be taken towards reviving the presence of Igbo folksongs in a modern society.

Keywords: Folksongs, Igbo society, Cultural transmission and Moral development

Introduction

Every society has its peculiarities and uniqueness. A society is made up of people who most times speak the same language and share the same cultural heritage, customs and traditions. And every society seeks to preserve its culture. Due to the quest for continuity, the pioneers of these cultures tend to seek for preservation through the use of folksong to educate the members of the society and also to pass down the culture to the younger generation. The music of a group of people carries the moral values, belief and norms of the people because it's born out of the womb of the people. It does not have to conform to the music of other people, though it could share some common factors and elements (Onuora-guno, 2011).

The worst thing that can happen to any society is having people whose moral conscience is severely decayed. In modern society, most people no longer have value for long-aged behaviours, patterns, values and norms of the society. Skimpy dresses, cultism, erotic songs, sexual perverseness disrespect to elders seems to be the order of the day. The older people who supposed to be role models to younger ones no longer live as patterned by their forefathers. Thus; www.narialand.com in Ojukwu and Esimone (2014) laments:

Shame and shamelessness are rewarded with encomiums and emphasized recognition. Half nakedness is now synonymous with fame and acceptance; skimpy are tickets to classy events; songs that have intimate talks in them sell faster than meaningful ones; when one's trouser is around the waist, then one is perceived as a learner; big girls are now identified by the level of exposure of their private parts. Even the world religions and institutions have failed in eradicating this unpalatable way of life. Mediocrity has become the order of the day (P.1).

These trending lifestyles align with a popular adage in Igbo land which says “*ife ojo gba afo o buru omenana*” meaning that when a bad thing is left without correction; it invariably becomes a pattern of living. Every sector of this present society seems to be experiencing a high rate of decadence due to tremendous quest for materialism. The most corrupt person is seen in today's society as the smartest person and this has left others with no option than to join in the moving train of corruption to feel belonged.

Folk Song

Folksong is traditional music of a people which expresses the values, custom, beliefs of its people and usually handed down orally from one generation to another with an unknown composer. It is a music that is typical of a particular community or nation. Wikipedia.org defines folksong as "music that has been transmitted orally usually with an unknown composer or music performed by custom over a long period of time" (<https://www.wikipedia.org>). Nnamani (2014) defines folksong as “a spontaneously composed music of a race, tribe, and group etc of a humble nature, orally transmitted from one generation to another with an unknown composer” (p.304). According to Ojukwu, Onura-oguno, Esimone (2014) folksong refers to “the traditional or indigenous song of a particular community handed down orally from one generation to the next” (p.4). It can also be said that folksong is a communal song of a group of people which reflects the general lifestyle of the people. The melodies are usually simple and easy to memorize. Folksong portrays the true identity of the people and carries the spiritual quality of the people. Agu (1990) defines folksong as the spontaneous and traditional music of the people, race, region, or nation that is handed down orally from one generation to another” (p.3). Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English (2010) defines folksong as "a song in the traditional style of a country or community". Nwamara 2017 defines folk music as a “music that is transmitted orally from one generation to another and currently thrives in the rural areas, where the custodians of the various cultures of the people reside” (p.1). Scholes (1955) in Nwamara (2017) sees folk music as:

Folk music is the music that has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It is the product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstance of continuity. Variation and selection...it can also be applied to music which originated from an individual composer has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten, living tradition of a community...it is the fashioning and re-fashioning that gives it its folk character (p.2).

According to Udoh (2012),

Folk music is communal property with spiritual qualities that are shared and experienced by all. It is the product of the people and cannot be separated from them. It is spontaneous and usually associated with the traditional, religious and political system of the people (p.1).

From the definitions, it is established that folksongs are the song of the people, by the people and for the people which depicts the identity of the people. It is therefore good to note that folksongs are tonal since all African languages are tonal. It reflects the musical idioms of its

owners. Igbo Folksongs are not notated like the western music except for the ones gathered and notated by some modern-day music scholars so that the folksongs won't go into extinction in future. Folksong is durable, utility purpose-born and serves the society's folkways. It serves as a means for entertainment and most of the performers also earn a living from it.

The Relevance of Folksong in Igbo Culture

The Igbo nation is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria which is located in the South-Eastern part of the country. They are enriched by their cultural heritage, traditions, and practices which are expressed in their customs, beliefs, and social norms. The Igbo people are rurally craft men, farmers, and traders with the diverse socio-cultural background. They are very energetic, industrious, innovative, creative, adventuresome, courageous, spiritual and mystical people who have a strong belief in tradition and cultural values of the people (Ikemerike, 2015).

Folksongs are part of life in Igbo culture and society which affect the people's belief system and way of living. Onyeji (2008:123) sees culture to be "the social identity and way of people, developed over a period, which is manifested in the material and non-material aspect of their lives and which they handover to their coming generation. Culture is the social behaviour and norms found in human societies which involve social practices and expressions such as in arts, dance, music, rituals. Okafor (2012) refers to culture as the totality of the way of life evolved by people in the attempt to meet the challenge of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetics and religious norm and mode of organization that distinguish them from their neighbours. Culture is a cumulative experience of people in their years of systematic attempts to master their environment so that they can enjoy a higher quality of life.

In Igbo culture, improper dressing, stealing, prostitution, rape and other societal vices are seen as an abomination. Therefore, everyone tries to avoid and forbid such practices. Unfortunately, the Igbo modern societies seem to have thrown away the folksongs of their communities which expose their young ones to moral education and have borrowed the poems and songs of Western nations. One can rarely hear those rich and educative folk songs in the schools, homes, society of today. In the Igbo home in the past, children were taught folksongs and other children's songs by their parents. This is usually done during moonlight play where children and elders gather round with some burning firewoods to listen and learn some songs from their parents. Today, some parents even discourage their children from speaking Igbo language and singing Igbo folk songs. They perceive these activities to be local, and lack of exposure. Ekpo (2008) exclaims that "evidence abound where parents and guardians discourage, stop or ban their wards in extracurricular activities especially those that are traditional" (p.72). Those days when folk songs were used by teachers in schools to demonstrate and further explain in details the seriousness of what they are teaching them especially when the subject has to do with moral education. The teachers go steps further in teaching the children new songs that are related to the subject and accompany the songs with

some dance steps and demonstrations of which the children will joyfully participate in. Teachers and parents of the olden Igbo society understood the power of folk music and used it to give their children a solid moral foundation that is required of them in their society. That knowledge and the skills the child needed to learn are found in the song text. The folk songs the children learnt helped to develop a lasting interest in Igbo culture. In those days when folk songs were prevalent in the Igbo society, one would hardly hear of teenage pregnancy, fornication, stealing, kidnapping as it is now in society. Okpala (2015) agrees by saying:

In those days in the primary schools, one would hardly hear of children or youths being caught in fornication, stealing, cultism lesbianism, teenage pregnancy, kidnapping, ritual killings money doubling, vehicle snatching, bribery, corruption and other societal vices that are rampant in our society today (p.21).

Folk songs have a way of restricting the behaviour of the people from doing bad things and help them emulate good behaviours (Nwaodu, 2014). This culture of folk song is passed down from one generation to another using oral transmission. Folksongs are used for cultural preservation and most times not usually taught in the formal school curriculum. Rather, it is the duty of the elders of the community or the elders in the family to orally and traditionally pass down this culture to the people during moonlight gatherings or plays. Agu (2006) affirms that:

In the home, it is often believed that culture transmission begins immediately after birth. As a child grows, he learns to distinguish between acceptable behaviours. And music is also an aspect of the culture, which he grows up into. In this way, the culture of the people is transmitted from one generation to another (p.6).

Onuora-oguno & Nnamdi (2012) affirm this by saying that "in the traditional African society, there is often little formal learning, little of what one would ordinarily call school or classes or teachers; instead, the entire environment and all activities are viewed as school and classes, and adults act as a teacher". In this gathering, elders tell stories and sing songs which do not only entertain the participants but also have educational and moral benefits using animal kingdoms as illustration. This illustration creates pictures in the minds of the listeners and most times, they are assumed to be real-life occurrence or consequences of an action. Folksong experiences serve as a binding force that unites the people together. The role folk music plays is innumerable. It ploughs through the minds of the people that make up the society and make them law-abiding citizens. Through folksong, the conventional rules of behaviour are maintained. It encourages peace, oneness and good team spirit (Okpala 2015). Ikemerike (2015), also attests to this by saying that "every family, village and community strive to inform their young ones the value system for which they are known right from the dawn of history. The people are furthermore encouraged to holding on to the same as worthy ambassadors of their immediate family, village, community and tribe" (p.84).

Moral Education Using Folksong

In the ancient Igbo society, the indigenous educational system existed before the arrival of Islam and Christianity. Folksong was one of the prevalent weapons used for moral education

and eradication of decadences. The lyrics of folks are used for moral control through ridicule, sympathy, praise. Every parent or guardian knows the consequences that follow immoral life in the society like a young woman getting pregnant without marriage, stealing, eating the sacrifice that belongs to a deity, therefore, they do everything to educate their children of the consequences that follow the violation of the laid down values and custom. The lyrics of folksongs usually contain the dos and don'ts of the society's values and the consequences that follow suit if violated. Violators are usually taken to public places like the market square, village square, the king's palace, and some few cases banishment is implemented to cleanse the land from impurity and avoid the anger of the gods which will invade the land with calamities. These punishments are done to prevent others from committing the same offence. Agu (2011) states “that Igbo folksong is an instructional material for the moral education in Igbo land. The Igbo child learns about everything around him and his environment through folksong. Folksongs serve as a link for education and cultural transmission”.

Reviving Igbo Folksongs

To revive means to become or make conscious or healthy and strong again (Oxford advanced dictionary of current English 2010). To revive is to deliberately bring back to the original state. Nwamara (2017) submits that “to revive suggests bringing something back into existence, use or fashion” (P.5). Igbo folksongs are going down into extinction and need quick and deliberate revival. The activities that made it worthwhile need to be rekindled such as folktale, folksong, moon light-gathering, music festivals, village gatherings, and punishing a culprit using folksong. Nwamara affirms that “reviving Igbo folk music entails bringing it back to use and making it interesting and attractive to the present generation”(p.5). During these activities, the morals are taught which are embedded in lyrics while the music is enjoyed. This spurs interest and enthusiasm in people to relate with folksongs.

The relevance of folk music in the society has been established. The role folksongs played in ancient Igbo society has been critically numerated. Giving that modern society seems to be facing a serious moral challenge, there is a great need to restore the presence of folksongs. Not only was folksong used for moral education and punishment, but it also served as a means for entertainment and therapy. These made folksongs to be relevant in the olden days. Nwamara (2017) says that “folk music to an appreciable extent pays some role in education (moral and cultural), cultural preservation and entertainment” (p.2).

Need for Revival

Igbo folksong obviously is the musical heritage of the Igbo but it is gradually disappearing while western music is gaining ground in the society. Through songs, impactful messages and lasting information are communicated. Human beings cannot do without music. Education is most effective when it is conveyed through songs. Folksongs are one of the major tools used by our forefathers for cultural transmission and preservation. They were

used in instructing, guiding and correcting their children in society. They were used in inculcating the cultural values, norms and beliefs of the community that is expected of the child as he grows into adulthood. Agu 2011 submits that:

Moral education is mainly channelled through the medium of folk music because it enhances easy comprehension and assimilation. In Igbo setting, the child learns about everything around him, the culture and the history of the land, the general knowledge and moral instructions through songs. And folk music serves as a pivot on which the impact of education rotates, plays a vital role in the process of cultural transmission (p.3-4).

If nothing is done about the disappearance of folksongs, the messages and the impact of folksong will go into extinction.

Igbo folksong needs to be revived because:

- The culture and customs of the people are embedded in it.
- It is used for cubing moral decadences in society.
- It is a means of entertainment and recreation for its people.
- It encourages peaceful living among society

Factors Affecting Folksongs in Modern Society

The issue of modernism has so much affected folksong in that the rural environment that paved the way for communal living, sharing and gathering is no longer obtainable. Most people no longer live within their community due to the quest for materialism and as a result, have relocated to different parts of the world. Ojukwu and Esimone (2014) supported the above statement by saying that "in recent times, the music education of the Igbo child traditionally has been ignored...the young people no longer participate in Igbo folksong either because they were not taught or because they are more involved in pursuance of modernism"(p.2).

Okafor and Ng'andu (2003) laments:

Urbanization and the push for wealth have driven millions of African out of the rural areas-the habitat and bedrock of African cultures and civilization. In the cities, people of many cultures meet and mix in the struggle for survival amidst the major details and problems of poverty, disease, congested life of the slums dislodgement from the home environment and pressure from a different set of values. In this boiling pot, the moonlight games and songs have disappeared under pressure from the religious and Western concept of civilization and the new view of technology and ways of passing on information (p. 187).

It is well preferred to sing Western folksongs than singing Igbo folksong as the society tags a person who is engrossed with Igbo folksong as local. It will be right to say that modernism and materialism have posed a lot of challenges to sustenance Igbo folksong.

Steps to Reviving Igbo Folksongs

Seeing the tremendous importance of folksongs, these folksongs can be revived by:

1. Folksongs should be included in the music curricula, especially in primary and secondary schools. By doing this, folksongs can be learnt in schools. It is noticed that an average Igbo child in school most time of the year spend virtually the whole day in school. This leaves the child with little or no time to spend at home to learn folksongs from the parents.
2. Recreational events that will showcase the beauty of folksongs can be planned by schools, families or villages such as moonlight play, folksong festival. In these events, people should dress in their different cultural attire. The participants can be encouraged with reasonable rewards. With this kind of approach, a lot of people will be enthusiastic and spurred in learning folksong. Thus, this will bring about a great revival of folksongs in this modern society.
3. Parents should communicate the culture of their society and moral expectations to their children through folksongs.
4. Village council should call the decadents to order by singing folksongs depending on the gravity of the offence. They should reward a good person by singing folksongs to honour the person.
5. Musicologists and composers should document the folksongs both in written form, visual and audio form.
6. Academic seminars should be organized to educate people and to create awareness of the relevance of Igbo folksongs.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to prove the importance of folksong and the need for revival. Igbo people are gifted in songs. They have different varieties of cultures, laws and activities that guide peoples' behaviours in the society. The songs of the Igbo people carry a lot of moral education that help in teaching the good ethos of the community. Parents should teach their children folksongs and also encourage participation in folk events. Parents should also allow their children to interact with elderly people in rural areas. Educational institutions, parents, and the government should collectively join hands in helping to revive the use of folksongs in schools, at home and in the society at large.

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