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Indigenous Music and Religion among Ilorin People of North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

The diachronic realities of indigenous African culture (especially that of music) in the consciousness of rising modern popular culture calls for urgent attention. Hence, it is imperative for scholars and researchers to pay attention to the dwindling knowledge of culture. Against this backdrop, this study documents the indigenous music arts among Ilorin people of Kwara State in North Central, Nigeria. This ethnographic research relies on descriptive method, field observations of indigenous musicians in Ilorin and book reviews. This study reveals the influence of the Islamic religion on the indigenous musical arts in Ilorin vis-à-vis urbanization and modern culture as acceptance and popularity of the indigenous practices is reliant on the permeation of religion. Findings reveal the multifaceted functionalities of these indigenous styles and the issue of gender relativity in their musicianship. This study posits that, the syncretic effects of western culture, civilization, religion, the issue of culture change against the culture of restraint contributed to the evolution and emergence of new indigenous styles, thereby, sending old styles into oblivion. This study therefore recommends the need for more efficiency of designated centres and repositories of culture discussed in this study, in the bid to preserve music of the Ilorin people.

Keywords: Indigenous music, Ethnography, Religion, Ilorin culture, Nigeria

Introduction

Music, culture and the society as separate concepts are intertwined and inextricably linked together. Music permeates and transcends culture and the society it evolved. Studies on the musical practices in primitive and folk cultures reveals that there was practically no aspect of life in which music did not play an essential and functional part. It was an integral part of important public acts, festivities, rituals, and ceremonies. From the cradle to grave, literally, music has been an omnipresent factor in most primitive and folk societies. It is closely associated with every step/ stages in human life with vital biological and social activities. This assertion is evident in the current sociocultural realities. Music is inherently social and cultural in its

manifestation and bears a direct relationship to the culture and society in which it is produced. For this reason, this study investigates music among Ilorin people in North Central Nigeria.

A Review of History & Culture of Ilorin People

Ilorin, the capital of Kwara state in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria is located between latitude 8˚ 30'N and longitude 4˚ 35'E. The city is usually described as the gateway between Northern and Southern Nigeria because it is a cultural melting point between Northern and Southern Nigeria. It conglomerates various ethnic groups between the two regions. Due to its relative position, Ilorin enjoys economically from both Northern and Southern Nigeria. The town borders Oyo state on South, Kogi state on the east and Niger state on the North. Ilorin Emirate is one of the oldest and most popular emirate in Northern Nigeria according to the population census (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008) cited in (Abdullahi, 2017, p. 228). Ilorin Emirate is made up of five local government areas (Asa, Ilorin East, Ilorin West, Ilorin South and Moro). Ilorin is in the wooded savannah grassland vegetation area with locust bean trees, shea butter trees and bamboo trees as the commonest trees in the area.

Ilorin was founded by Ojo, a hunter from Ilota near the present Oyo between the periods of 1670 – 1800. There are two major oral histories which account for the etymology of the name "Ilorin". The first oral tradition is that, the name "Ilorin" was derived from Ojo Isekuse's activities on a rock situated at Ile-Ilorin near Bamidele's compound in Ilorin. Olowoyeye (2013, p. 16) documents that "it was on this stone that Ojo Isekuse used to sharpen his hunting implements, hence the name ILORIN (The sharpening of iron)". Till date, there is a big stone still available at Bamidele's compound, Idi-Ape, which is acclaimed to be the stone in question.

The second oral tradition holds that, "Ilorin" was derived from "Ilu-Erin", meaning town of Elephants. This tradition according to Salihu and Jawondo (2006, p. 1) states that the founder of Ilorin was a certain Ayinla from Oyo-Ile (perhaps the same Ojo in the first account) and that he sojourned in Ilorin to hunt elephants. This tradition became popular when in 1824, an elephant was killed on the outskirts of Ilorin at a place called Oko-Erin. They claimed that these hunters were attracted to Ilorin because of the elephants that were there in large numbers. Though, Jimoh (1994) argues that "killing an elephant is not sufficient evidence to justify the claim that the word "Ilorin" was a derivation of "Ilu-Erin". However, a common factor about

both traditions is the fact that, the historical evolution of Ilorin can be traced to a hunter from Oyo and his hunting activities.

In 1450, Ilorin became a provincial military headquarters of the ancient Oyo empire, headed by Afonja. It later became a northern Nigerian protectorate when Shehu Alimi (descendant of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio dynasty) took control of the city through the spread of Islamic religion (Olalusi, 2013, p. 330). Afonja's importance grew in leaps and burnt after 1796 and he held a prominent place of pride in Ilorin. This is why till date; he is still being highly revered in words and in songs in Ilorin. For instance, a popular folk song says:

E sin wa de'lorin	Follow us to Ilorin
E sin wa de'lorin	Follow us to Ilorin
Ilorin Afonja e sin wa de'lorin	*Ilorin, Afonja's* town, follow us to Ilorin

In the opinion of Garvin (1976, p. 3) cited in Alabi (2017, p. 115), the city of Ilorin in the 19th century, depended largely but not totally on the proceeds from its war and plunder which came from its military enterprises. At this time, various ethnic groups lived in the cosmopolitan and autonomous village with a well-defined socio-economic and political system. Fulani hegemony was subsequently entrenched around 1807 after the death of Afonja and the termination of Oyo's suzerainty over the town. Oba AbdulSalami became the first emir in 1817 after the death of Shehu Alimi (1740-1842). The second Emir was Oba Shitta (1842- 1860) was noted for diplomatically curbing the initial Christian Missionary incursions into Ilorin. His strategy for checkmating the missionary designs became a legacy that his successor held on tenaciously to until the conquest of Ilorin by the British Colonial power in 1897.

Oyedepo (2015, p. 12) notes that about the year 1817, the condition that created the stool of the Emir of Ilorin and indeed the emirate system of Ilorin was established. Then, Ilorin stopped being a satellite town of the Oyo empire. Time therefore changed what used to be part of Oyo Empire to Ilorin Emirate. Ilorin is usually called "The home of Islam". Reason is not farfetched due to the historical antecedents linking the city to Islamic missionary activities. According to Olalusi (2013, p. 330), never has there been a time when Islamic religion was trivialised in Ilorin. Ilorin boasts of the most revered city in Nigeria with astute allegiance to the Islamic religion. The popular song below corroborates this fact:

Awon Alfa wa ni'lorin, ni'lorin ni'lorin	Our Islamic clerics in Ilorin
Ti won nko wa ni kewu, ni kewu ni kewu	Who teach us the quran regularly
Ore Olorun ni wo nse…	They are friends of Allah

However, the coming of Islamic religion and even Christianity did not eradicate the traditional / indigenous religious practices in the town. But, the coming of the religion, especially, Islam which is the dominant religion in the town influenced indigenous cultural practices largely. For this reason, religious attributes can be found in all aspects of their culture today.

As a result of the cultural and economic conglomeration between the Northern and Southern region of the country which was discussed earlier, the emirate had a buoyant economy and there was hardly any family compound in the city that was not identified with a craft or profession or one economic activity or the other. For instance, there were Ilorin families known as Ile Alagbede, Ile Onikere, Ile Asileke, Ile Olodo, Ile Olokonla, Ile Oniluru, Ile ElewuEtu and lots of others (Mohammed et al., 2017, p. 147). The households were identified, known and tagged with their crafts, profession and still bear the name up till date.

There are several rich multi-cultural heritages that have been in existence for years in Ilorin. These heritages are represented by socio-cultural and traditional practices which include theatrical and musical arts, ranging from Durbar (Horse race) to Waka (Poetic song), Ijo Olomo-Oba (Royal Dance) also called Ere Olomo-Oba, Were (traditional poetry), are osan (afternoon party), Ijo pamu-pamu (Local dance and music), Algeita Bembem (Local trumpet), Egun Majiro (Majiro masquerade). These socio-cultural activities project the different identities of families, clans, tribes and ethnic groups comprising the emirate. The Ilorin people are mostly farmers and this is helped by the savannah grassland that forms the vegetation of the area. They produce yam, cassava, guinea corn, groundnut, maize and cutton. Another important work of the Ilorin people is weaving. This is said to have been introduced to Ilorin from Iseyin in Oyo state. Other occupations like pottery, leather works, blacksmithing and dyeing also abound in Ilorin. Below is a list of Emirs who ruled Ilorin till date after the death of Shehu Alimi.

1st Emir Shehu Abdulsalam Salih Alimi	1831-1842 (First son of Alimi)
2nd Emir Shehu Shitta Alimi	1842- 1860
3rd Emir Shehu Zubair Abdulsalam	1860-1868
4th Emir Shehu Aliyu Shitta	1868-1891

5th Emir Oba Moma Zubair	1891-1896
6th Emir Shehu Sulyman Aliyu	1896-1915
7th Emir Shehu Shuaib Bawar Zubair	1915-1919
8th Emir Shehu Abdulkadir Shuaib Bawar	1919-1959
9th Emir Shehu Zuluqonain Gambari	1959-1992
10th Emir Shehu Aliyu Abdulkadir	1992-1995
11th Emir and Present Emir Alh. Ibrahim Sulu Gambari	1995 till date.

Below is the map of the Ilorin metropolis, detailing the major households found in Ilorin town.

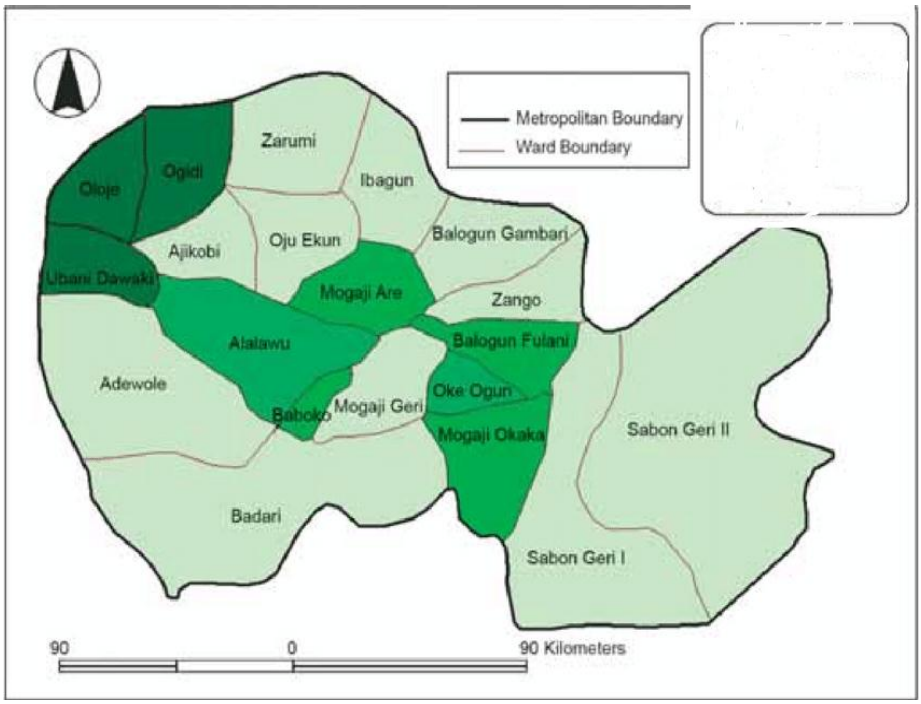


Fig 1: The map of Ilorin metropolis. Source: https://researchgate.net

As noted earlier, Ilorin is a confluence of different social and economic life, especially from the bordering northern and southern regions. Hence, it became a settlement to several non-indigenes of the town who has become inhabitants of the city. In 1975, the population of inhabitants is about 367,930. According to Olanrewaju (2009, p. 68), between 30 years (1975-2005), the population of inhabitants in Ilorin doubled to the figure of 780, 771. She documents that the growth rate range is approximately 2.5% - 2.9%. After the 2006 National Population Census, Ilorin was declared the 6th largest city by population in Nigeria. However, despite

urbanisation and westernisation, many of the indigenous socio-cultural arts are still very much in existence.

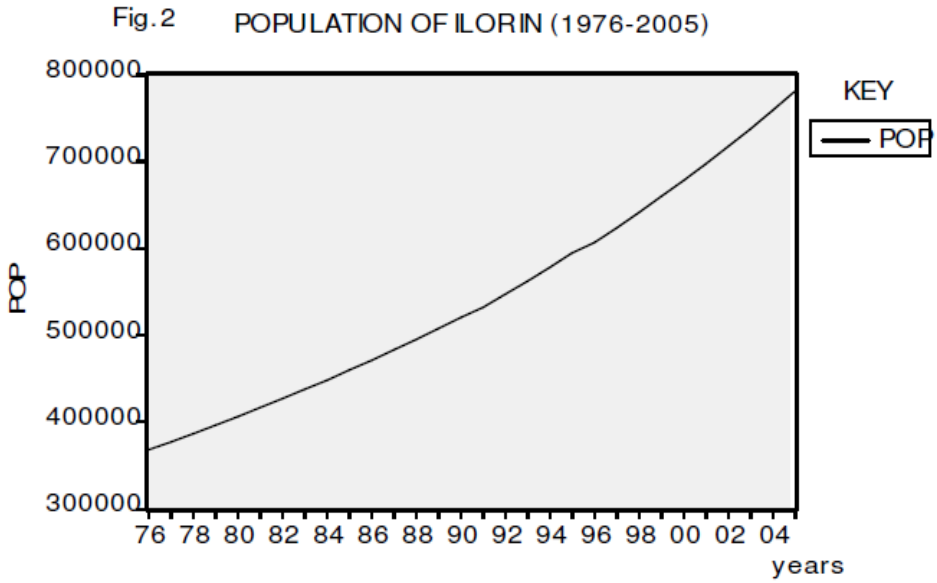


Fig 2: Population growth of Ilorin between 1976 – 2005. Olanrewaju (2009, p. 69).

Music in Ilorin Culture

Overtime, numerous styles and genres of music have evolved and developed in Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria. These various genres and styles of music have evolved into sociocultural heritage and traditions for the people of Ilorin. They are usually performed for various purposes at different occasions and ceremonies. These cultural practises have been in existence long before the introduction of Islamic religion among the Ilorin people. Ikibe & Ojakovo (2014, p, 247) note that "Ilorin, like any other Yoruba community practised African traditional religion before the emergence of Islam and Christianity". They document further that "sacrifices, and ritual performances to the supreme God, other gods, spirits, and ancestors were the basic religious practices in traditional Hausa/Fulani and Ilorin communities before Islam was introduced to these areas in the 15th and 18th centuries respectively". Adeola (2013, p. 250) corroborates that, "The people of Ilorin accepted Islam when an Islamic emirate was established by Shehu Alimi in 1823. Since then, Ilorin has continued to be a stronghold of Islamic religion".

As noted by Ikibe & Ojakovo (2014, p. 248), prior to the emergence and acceptance of Islam and Christianity:

> Music is sung by Ilorin people to extol their deities as a cultural expectation during worship and festivals. During festivals, deities are superstitiously acknowledged as a means of averting troubles, acquiring victories during war, enriching soil fertility for productive harvest and procreation.

However, a wide range of these styles and genres are now embedded with Islamic imports and affiliations. As rightly asserted by Na'Allah (1988, p. 12), "Ilorin town has been completely Islamised. There is no culture now in Ilorin than the Islamic culture – except again few oral and some aspects of the cultures of the ethnics who brought Islam to Ilorin i.e Hausa, Fulani, Gobir and Nupe". Corroborating the above assertion, Olowoyeye (2013, p. 39) states that "Ilorin custom is a mixture of Islamic and Yoruba cultures. Majority of Ilorin indigenes, if not all, are devoted muslims".

It is worthy to note that, musical resources in Ilorin is inclusive of Oral and instrumental musical arts. Indigenous oral musical arts include: Baluu, Kengbe, Waka, Were, Dadakuada, Senwele, Ijo-Olomooba, Agbe, Pamu-Pamu, Apala, Sekere, Molo, Bembe, Orin makondoro, Alagbe, Oriki etc. while indigenous musical instruments include: Bandiri, Bembe, Kengbe, Akuba, Kakaki, Algeita, Ilu Agere, Sekere, Keremu, Adamo etc. Surprisingly, some musical instruments and music genre have the same nomenclature. For instance, Kengbe is a musical instrument as well as a genre. The same is applicable to Sekere and Bembe music. This is because, genres like Kengbe, Sekere and Bembe derived their names from the musical instrument used as accompaniment to the music.

However, some of these oral musical arts have gone into extinction as a result of westernisation or evolution of other genres. For example, Agbe, Sekere and Molo oral musical arts are in this category. The coming of Dadakuada suppressed these poetries; and Agbe, Sekere and Molo audience now prefer Dadakuada. In other instances, the originality of some of these genres was abandoned by musicians who adopt another genre in vogue while other decline was caused by audience preference. In spite of the modern realities such as the European contact and the distortion cum deconstruction of originality in African culture without exception to Ilorin, some oral musical arts among Ilorin people have encumbered acculturation and westernisation. In spite of the threat of extinction and oblivion in the face of western civilization, Baluu and Kengbe musicians have ensured to protect the musical arts by encumbering acculturation and foreign influence except from Islamic influence which is inevitable as discussed earlier in this

study. In contrast, Alhaji Jaigbade Alao, a dadakuada musician in Ilorin is renowned to be the first musician to incorporate the use of western piano into dadakuada music. This syncretic experimentation gave a modern facelift to dadakuada music. Today, more popular indigenous music styles such as Fuji music and Senwele music evolved from the fusion of western instruments and nuances with indigenous forms.

Music in the royal context cannot be overemphasised in Ilorin. The royal household has musical traditions that are reserved for the royal families. These musical arts are usually performed on royal occasions such as weddings to add colour, glitz and glamour to the event. For example, Ijo Olomooba also called Ere Olomooba which literally means "dance for the sons and daughters of the royal family" is a traditional cultural performance of the Ilorin-Fulani Royal elite in Kwara State, Nigeria. Similarly, Kengbe music which has now been secularised outside royal restriction is associated with royal wedding ceremonies at its inception. Kakaki, a valveless indigenous trumpet is a royal trumpet used to herald the presence of the Emir. This royal instrument is also commonly found in other parts of the Northern Nigeria.

Some musical arts among the Ilorin people are gender based. They are specifically restricted to a particular gender. For instance, Baluu, Ere Olomooba and Kengbe music are female oral musical arts while Dadakuada is a male oral musical art. Because of this gender relativity, the musical arts are usually placed side by side in artistic relationship. Dadakuada music, a male oral musical art is usually regarded as a 'brother' to Baluu, a female oral musical art.

From the historiography of Ilorin which can be traced to Oyo as it was discussed earlier in this study, the origin of some of these arts is rooted in Oyo. Sowoolu-Coates (2018, p. 32) documents that Ijo Olomooba is an offshoot of the Yungba Royal Dance which takes place at the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo. Ibitoye (2019, p. 44) also asserts that the history of Kengbe music can be traced to a female court music called Igbá-tití (Calabash drumming) in the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo.

These indigenous musical genres have been propagated over the years by Ilorin indigenous professional musicians. Olowoyeye (2013, p. 39) documented that Ilorin has been producing musicians as early as 1900. Such were Late Ayinla Edu Onimolo, Jimoh Ayinla 1930 – 1955, Aminu Olaribigbe 1950- 1965. Out of them, Jimoh Ayinla and Aminu Olaribigbe were

natives of Ilorin, but resided in Lagos. Others are Late Ajadi Ilorin (Rara singer with Apala music) and Labaeka, a waka singer.

There are several other indigenous musicians in Ilorin such as Iyabo Awero Baluu, Omoekee, Amao, Jaigbade Alao, Alhaji Raheem Igijegede, Odolaye Aremu, Alhaji Aremu Ose, Saki Kolobo, Alhaji Oba Alabi and many more. The art of music is a business venture, hence, the aim of these oral artists are to please, to earn money and to gain prestige. Through the use of music, these indigenous musicians use the indigenous music genres of Ilorin to celebrate and promote culture, tradition, and prevent indigenous heritages and aspects of their culture from going into extinction. In his explanation of the Dadakuada music, Na'Allah (1988, p. 42) explains that "another most important function of the Dadakuada artists is the teaching of people their family lineage and ancestral linings and genealogy". In agreement, Adeola (2013, p. 251) explains that "it is a common thing for the Dadakuada artists while praising an individual to compare the person with some deities in an attempt to bring out the attributes of such individual". This is not far-fetched because a lot of contemporary youths have been cut off from their roots and origin. The praise songs are performed in a musical form in the Yoruba land, styled Oriki. Olowoyeye (2013, p. 13), documented Oriki Ilorin as below:

Ilorin Opa	Ilorin's Staff
Baba nile Olododo	Father of the honest land
Agere Baba Ilu	Agere, the father of all drums
Ilu toyii koleegun	A big city without a masquerade
Esin leegun won	The horse is their masquerade
Oko loro ibe	The spear is their cult
Tie ba wolu	When you enter Ilorin,
Eoje wara kasi	You'll eat enough of fresh cheese
Ilu ti won ti nse nunu	The city that produces fermented milk
Ti fura po lapoju	And millet doughs in abundance.

Ikibe and Bisiriyu (2014, p. 166) assert that "Oriki is used to praise personalities of high nobility – making mention of the good deeds they have done". Oriki also satirises some individuals of questionable character in the society. We can therefore conclude that, music is a medium of preserving the history and culture of the people of Ilorin.

Indigenous Music and Religious Influence

Music interrelationship with religious activities makes the influence of religion on music inevitable. Several scholars such as Adeola (2013), Olowoyeye (2013) and Olalusi (2013) discussed earlier in this study agreed that Islam takes a vantage position in the hearts of majority of the people in the city. In fact, this city is popularly referred to as "the home of Islam". Hence, the religion is pivotal to the growth, development and survival of any music form till this day. For this reason, Na'Allah classifies traditional performances in Ilorin culture into two categories; Pre-Islamic traditional performances such as Dadakuada, Pakenke, Baalu and Damudamu and Post-Islamic traditional performances such as Bandiri, Were and Waka.

The post-islamic traditional performances were formed absolutely on Islamic tenets. For instance, Were music developed as a musical way of arousing the Islamic faithful to pray and eat during the Ramadan period of fasting; while the pre-existing performance forms prior to the coming of Islam have been influenced already by the religion. Even though Baluu music has been in existence prior to the coming of Islam in Ilorin, Abiodun (1999, p. 58) cited in Ikibe (2011, p. 33) states that "Baluu music is one of the Islamic music genres popular among the Ilorin Muslim community." This is to affirm the influence of Islam on the music.

The influence of religion has affected the behavior patterns of the musicians and has heavily influenced the content of their music. This is because, majority of the people who are the target audience of these musicians have strong inclination towards Islamic tenets. Hence, a musician who wants to sell out must make his/her music acceptable with Islamic coloration. Quranic verses and Arabic words are usually embedded in the music texts to drive in their message. It is common to find most of these musicians who are muslims themselves starting their performance by paying homage to Allah.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has discussed different indigenous music forms and arts among the Ilorin people of North Central Nigeria, religious influence and the inevitability of change. Going forward however, it is pertinent and imperative to ensure the preservation of the indigenous culture of Ilorin people from extinction, cultural deconstruction and other impeding threats against cultural development, continuity and survival. This deconstruction is in the context of Hansen's deconstruction, denoting "the disruption of principal elements, encrypted meanings,

conventions and iconography imbued in a social construct" (Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Megrine, R., & Newbold, 1998, p. 177). However, since the society is not static and change is inevitable, deconstruction to an extent is inevitable. It is for this reason that documentation is essential for preservation and promotion. Hence, the need for essential bodies that serve as custodian of cultural records and archival centres. For instance, the Centre for Ilorin Studies (CILS), University of Ilorin, Unilorin Archives and Documentation Centre (UADC), University of Ilorin, and Centres for Documentation and Archiving, Oral Traditions in Africa (COTA), Ilorin Manuscripts and Culture of Kwara State University, Malete, are specialised bodies and centres for such purposes.

Also, several aspects of indigenous cultures and traditions in Africa are usually handed down and transferred orally or via a griot who is often a repository of oral tradition. Therefore, the need for proper documentation and preservation of history, culture and traditions is sacrosanct. These centres (as listed above) are therefore encouraged also to do more in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities.

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