

***Egwu-edede* and its Socio-cultural Implications in Ovoko Community, Enugu State, Nigeria**

UGWU, Francisca Anuli

Music Department

Alex-Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria

Abstract

Egwu-edede is a traditional music of Ovoko community in Enugu State, Nigeria. It is usually performed during the *Ede* title-taking and other special ceremonies, and represents the common musical heritage of the Ovoko community with unique socio-cultural implications. This study sets out to discuss aspects of *Egwu-edede* (*Ede* music), and the socio-cultural implications to members of the Ovoko Autonomous Community, Igbo Eze South Local Government Area, Enugu state, Nigeria. Personal observation and interview methodologies were the means by which relevant information were gathered for the study. The study reveals that *Egwu-edede* is a symbol of dignity, prestige, nobility, and class, factors which informs the content of performance repertory. It also reveals that the socio cultural implications of *Egwu-edede* are socially understood and explainable in terms of the utilitarian functions of the music and musical paraphernalia. The paper concludes that *Ede* title-taking ceremony is hardly deemed complete without its (inalienable) musical traditions, which is due to the pervasive nature and importance of *Ede* music in carrying out the title-taking ceremony.

Keywords: *Egwu-edede*, socio-cultural implications, Ovoko Community

Introduction

According to all the respondents, Ovoko migrated from Nnrueto in Enugu Ezike as a matter of life and death. Akpurokwe and his sons left the Nnrueto village because of crises of a land dispute between them and their neighbouring town. The second son of Akpurokwe disappeared during their journey, and later completed the journey with his three sons including Umuelo, Umulolo, and Ejuona, which constitute Ovoko town.

Ovoko is blessed with many things that help them achieve their goals, especially in marketing and farming. The major activity that Ovoko people are proud of is earning their living from trading. That is why a proverb that says “*Ovoko achuguchumobugu Nashua*” exists. It means that Ovoko people do not eat their meals except in the market. Some of the natives later developed an interest in farming, and much later embraced white-collar jobs.

Ovoko experiences two well-defined climatic seasons. The wet season is from between mid-march or April to November, peaks in July and September. The dry season lasts from December to the end of March or early April. However, relative humidity is about 84% throughout the year.

The undulating topography of Ovoko is characterized by the hilly part in the north. Ugwuogbuebule, Ugwuohegi are the most prominent hills. The climate, geology, and topography

of Ovoko greatly influence the economic activities of the people in several ways. For example, quarry sites are commonly seen at the rocky parts of the town, while the loamy soil type at the plains supports the vast agricultural activities of the people. A prominent amount of the farm products are yam, cassava, cocoyam, beans okra, maize, and different kinds of vegetables. Economic trees include oil palm, mango, coconut, guava, cola nut, peers, and cashew trees. Palm wine from Ovoko which is highly savoured by many finds its way to most urban centers in and beyond Enugu state.

During serious farming activities, between February and July, no organised musical event is fixed. Every big festival in Ovoko is fixed during the harvest period when there is a plentiful supply of food. However, the *Ede* title is an exception. It is an exception because of the historical importance attached to the ceremony, in which music has consistently been functionally utilised from time immemorial. With the relative dearth of scholarly studies on *Egwe-edede* and its socio-cultural significance in the Ovoko community, this study became imperative as a means to contribute to knowledge and draw global attention to the musical practices and repertoires of *Egwe-edede*.

Traditional Title

In the social arrangements of African communities, there are several titles designated individuals. These titles define holders in terms of their social responsibilities and in terms of their status in the community.

Ezeanya (2008) notes that title-taking can be viewed as a human activity in a human society by which humans form themselves together to function for the benefit of the community. Even though title award might be considered as a form of reward for good moral behavior and contribution to the wellbeing of the community, title-taking is more importantly a clarion call to higher community service and higher level of moral responsibility from the awardee. Therefore, before an individual is awarded an Ozo title and inducted into the Ozo institution in Igbo communities for instance, the awardee and inductee must be thoroughly screened and found fit to maintain the high moral codes of the institution, which Ejiofor (2006) outlines to include truthfulness, equity, fairness, trustworthiness, justice, discipline, high public etiquettes, love, and peace.

As one who is tasked with higher social and moral responsibilities within the community, a change in social status of the awardee is only natural, as he is deemed to belong to a higher class of persons in the community.

Title-taking is generally a unique ceremony in African communities. Arazu (2005) notes that every title-taking in Igbo communities, is characterized by elaborate feasting and diverse forms of merrymaking. As the case is in all typical traditional events within African communities, music takes the center stage in line with the demands of the occasion (Zinkur, 2020), effectuated towards effective realisation of the essence of the event.

Geographical Location of Enugu State, Nigeria

Enugu State is among the South Eastern States in Nigeria. It is located at 6°30' North, of Equator and 7°30' East of Longitude. Also, Enugu State is also known as 'Coal City, sharing a border with Abia State and Imo State to the South, Ebonyi State to the East, Benue to the North East, Kogi State to the North West and Anambra State to the West.



Map of Enugu State Showing Local Government Areas - www.google.com/url?sa=i&url



Map of Nigeria showing the position of Enugu State - www.google.com/url?sa=i&url

Location of Ovoko

Ovoko is one of the towns in Igbo Eze south local government area, Enugu state. Geographically, the town is bounded by Iheaka in the north, Orba in the south, Obukpa in the west, and Iheakpu in the east. From the well-known University of Nigeria Nsukka, Ovoko is just a few kilometers away southwest. Approximately, Ovoko covers an area of 25 kilometers. It is densely populated, so much that it is statistically projected to be the largest town in Igbo- Eze South second only to Ibagwa Aka. Ovoko Akpurokwe is socially organised into three wards, namely; Umuelo, Umulolo, and Ejuona. Legend has it that these are direct descendants of the very children of Akpurokwe. They equally speak a local dialect known as Ovoko language.

Brief Profile of Respondents

Ede Odoja Ishiwu, Ede Ugwuokeja, Ede Obgodu and Ede Ossai are all septuagenarians from the Ovoko community. They are all *Ede* title holders of the community, who have resided within community for many decades. They are considered custodians of *Egwu-ede*, as they usually play

pivotal role in organising title-taking events. They are quite knowledgeable in the history and practices of Egwu-edede. Therefore, they were considered equipped enough to provide adequate and reliable information for the purpose of the research.

Egwu-edede Music and Ede Title Taking in Ovoko Community

Ovoko people have different categories of traditional music that vary in quality. These different categories of music are made to suit occasions such as funeral ceremonies, cultural festivals, traditional wedding ceremonies, masquerade, cults, and initiation into adulthood, and title-taking ceremony. The selection of membership and instruments varies from one music to another.

Among all these categories of traditional music, *Egwu-edede* features prominently in grand occasions such as the coronation of the king, new yam festival, burial ceremonies of the initiated men, and the initiation into *Ede* title-taking. *Egwu-edede* is a symbol of high social status in the community, and describes the status of performers.

The following music are associated with *egwu-edede* and *ede* title taking in Ovoko:

Umuayalagi

The entrants are boys between the ages of eleven and eighteen years. This title has its special significance because for the first time the adolescent is brought directly to the sense of manhood and political action. After the initiation, the initiated will now sing, dance, and crack jokes. Singing in this ceremony is accompanied by dancing. It is also supported by hand clapping. No other instrument is used, but sometimes improvised instruments like bells and bottles are used to support the hand-clapping that accompanies the songs which are often vulgarized and nonsensical. For example:

Example 1:

Manyijahoriteye

Let us go and carry her pot

Manyijahoriteyeno

Let us go and carry her pot

Manyijavriechichayano

Let us go and carry her food.

Manyi Jahoriteye Noo

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Manyi Jahoriteye Noo'. It consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the accompaniment. The lyrics 'Ma nyi je ho ri te ye no' are written under the vocal line. The melody is simple and repetitive, with a clear rhythmic pattern.

Example 2:

Obugini nada

What is happening?

Ihe nada

Something is happening

Obuginineme

What is going on?

Iheneme
Gwanyiiheneme
Iheneme

Something is going on
Tell us what is happening
Something is happening

Obugni Nada

O hu hn ni na da o bu gn ni na du
i he na da i he na da

Example 3:

Idiriikefuta
Idigiikenoruo
Megiafutaleo
Noruo, megiatulegwu
Noruo.

If you are strong come out
If you are not strong stay
Do not come out
Stay, do not be afraid
Stay.

Odogwu Music

Odogwu music is another step towards *ede* title-taking in Ovoko. It comes after Umuayalagi. Odogwu is performed every year and takes place during the second week of the second month of the year. Like ayalagi, it tells the initiate that he is a man in the making. The odogwu aspirant is bound to stay indoors. He is attended by a servant whose duty is to decorate and beautify the aspirant and the surrounding. Nzu and odo are mainly used for these decorations. The aspirant cooks and entertains his guest, while the initiated stay in the obi (palace) where unclean things are never kept. After twelve days of practice, he dances to the public glare in the village square. Two boys play the music for him.

Instruments, Music, and Costume

The instruments used in Odogwu music are Ikoro and Igba. The music is purely instrumental. The Odogwu aspirant is almost stacked naked except for the small pant that barely covers his private part. He puts on a necklace made of cowrie shells, a hat made of cowrie shells, beads on his legs and an oxtail, and a walking stick.

Odogwu Music

Other Minor Titles Associated with Ede

Other minor titles associated with Ede include:

Odo

This is the only minor title not accompanied by music. It is completely no musical. The ceremony comes after odogwu. The duration of odo is determined by the *ede* aspirant who presents five thousand Naira (₦5,000), a cock, three tubers of yam, and a kola nut for the ceremony.

Oshioko

Oshioko, literally meaning ‘leader’, symbolically tells the aspirants that it is time to lead and to face the realities of his marriage on one hand and the society on the other hand. For Oshioko, marriage is a prerequisite. Like the other minor titles, it is performed exclusively for the aspirant’s kin’s men (umunna). But unlike other titles, it introduces the initiates to some minor priestly functions and family obligations.

Socio-cultural Implications of Egwu-Ede in Ovoko Community

Egwu-ede is highly regarded in Ovoko community. It is a symbol of dignity, prestige, nobility, and class. *Egwu-ede* is ceremonial music meant strictly for the *ede* titled-men and the traditional ruler (igwe of Ovoko). It has some socio-cultural implications. Time and occasion determine who takes part in *egwu-ede*. It is esoteric but instrumental music used to praise the Igwe, oshioko, and *ede* men in Ovoko. *Ede* title taking in Ovoko is a prerequisite for one being made an oshioko, odo, or Igwe in Ovoko. These calibre of people understand and interpret the language of the drum.

Apart from the musical functions, instruments that constitute the *egwu-ede* also serve extra-musical functions. The wooden slit drums serve as a medium for information and communication. It informs the *ede* titled men of any initiation into the *ede* institution in Ovoko. During the investiture of an *ede* initiate, the Igba communicates with the *ede* aspirant and even the *ede* titled men. It makes calls and warning signals. In some of the examples, the Igba calls the *ede* titled men in Ovoko to come together. Again, it equally calls an *ede* man to order, especially when he starts making promises he could not fulfill by saying “ekwelenkwaigemetugi”.

The instruments could also be used for symbolic representations. The male and female Igba, for example, are used to give signals and for directing the *ede* man during the performance, while the oyo and the *oja* act as accompaniments to the Igba. The oyo is also used in attracting attention during ceremonies.

Egwu-ede drums are generally regarded sacred in the sense that before and after use, certain rites must be performed. For instance, before the Igba are brought out, a cock, a keg of palm wine, four Igbo kola nuts, and three tubers of yam are presented for *eja* (rituals) to appease the deities and the ancestors and to request for a successful performance. The blood of the cock is sprinkled at the head of the drums and some feathers stuck to them. After the performance, a chick (uyriomokuko) is also used for purification against any evil act during the performance.

Egwu-ede features in social occasions like the coronation of the Igwe of Ovoko and during the festival which is a bi-annual event. The music gladdens the occasions, gives information about the Igwe, and reminds him of his achievements and that of the town.

At burial ceremonies of *ede* titled-men, the music features for 28 days during which time it acts as a means of communication between the living and the dead. It is generally said that the drum beckons on a man twice-at his initiation into *ede* and at his death. It is believed that the lyrics direct the spirit of the dead peacefully to the spirit world. Two wooden sticks instead of the usual sticks from the midrib of palm fronds are used to beat the Igba at the burial because, after the burial, the sticks are being buried with the dead and it signifies mourning. The wooden sticks are cast away after the man's burial. Then the usual sticks from the mid rib of palm fronds are finally used to beat the drums to purify the household of the deceased.

Synopsis of Findings

The study reveals that *Egwu-ede* is a symbol of dignity, prestige, nobility, and class in the community, being originally meant for the *ede* titled-men and the traditional ruler (Igwe of Ovoko). To effectively depict this symbolic ideology, the entire performance repertoire including the songs, dance patterns, musical instruments, and instrumental patterns is selected and organised accordingly.

The study also reveals that the socio cultural implications of *Egwu-ede* are socially understood and explainable in terms of the utilitarian functions of the music in the Ovoko community. First, *Egwu-ede* is historically functional in carrying out *ede* title ceremony in the community. In other words, *ede* music serves as a fundamental requirement or resource for successful completion of *ede* title ceremony. Second, and as applicable to some dance/music forms of Igbo and most African cultural heritages which (Nzewi, 1991; Nwobu, 2013; Nnamani, 2014; Mbaegbu, 2015) have discussed, *Egwu-ede* is functional in the living processes of individual members, families and groups within the Ovoko community and the entire community as a whole. The utilitarian functions of *Egwu-ede* bestrides an expanded aspect of their spiritual lives and shared experiences, exploring the sonics and musical paraphernalia of *Egwu-ede* in the process.

Conclusion

Public musical performances in the African traditions are known to take place at social occasions. That is, on occasions where members of a group or a community come together for the enjoyment of leisure, recreational activities, performance of a rites, ceremony, festival, or collective group or community obligations. Nketia (1975:21) in Jayeola (2015) duly noted this, stating that "in traditional African societies, music-making is generally organised as a social event.

In African societies, music forms a vital component of social activities such that most activities of historical traditions are described in such terms. *Ede* title ceremony of the Ovoko community is one of such activities of historical tradition which is hardly complete or effectively describable without music – *Egwu-ede* (*Ede* music). Simply put, *Ede* title-taking ceremony is hardly deemed complete without its (inalienable) musical traditions, which is due to the pervasive nature and role of *Ede* music in the title-taking ceremonies.

Recommendations

The researcher hopes to draw global attentions to *Egwu-ede* and the Ovoko community. To that extent, the following recommendations are as made:

- i. Applied music and dance performers should explore *Egwu-ede* in their modern stage performances.

- ii. More research attention should be given to *Egwu-edede* by researchers, as they are still grey areas to explore especially in the esoteric dimensions of the music.
- iii. African art music composers should adopt *Egwu-edede* songs presented in this study (and others from the field), as motif for further composition using various mediums of composition. This will help in promoting *Egwu-edede* around the world.

References

- Arazu, R. C. (2005). *Our Religion - Past and Present*. Awka: Martin-king.
- Ejiofor, F. C. (2006). *Ozubulu Arts and Cultural Heritage*. Port Harcourt: Kinzprint.
- Ezeanya, E. A. (2008). *Ihembosi from the Early Centuries*. Awka: Martin-King.
- Mbaegbu, C. C. (2015). The Effective Power of Music in Africa. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 5, 176 - 183. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.53021>
- Nketia, J. K. (1975). In Jayeola, F. D. (2015). Indigenous music in Nigeria: Its role towards national development. *FUNAI Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1(2), 102 - 109.
- Nnamani S. N. (2014). *The Role of Folk Music in Traditional African Society: The Igbo Experience*. *Journal of Modern Education Review*, 4 (4) 304–310. Doi: 10.15341/jmer(2155-7993)/04.04.2014/008
- Nwobu, S. (2013). The functions and spiritual connotations of traditional music performance with particular reference to Ufie Music in Igboland. *AFRREV IJAH*, 2 (3), 210 – 227. <http://afrevjo.net/ijah>
- Nzewi, M. (1991). *Musical Practice and Creativity: An African Traditional Perspective*. Cambridge. University Press.
- Zinkur, T. G. (2020). African Music and the Other Art: A Critique of the Cultural and Creative Arts Curriculum in Nigeria. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341435114_African_music_and_the_other_Arts

Maps

Map of Nigeria Showing Enugu State. www.google.com/url?sa=i&url

Map of Enugu Showing the 17 Local Government Areas. www.google.com/url?sa=i&url

Oral Interviews

Ede Odoja Ishiwu (2011). Information on Ede title-taking and *Egwu-ede* in Ovoko and History.

Ede Ugwuokeja (2011). Information on *Egwu-ede*, Instrument Construction and Instrumentation.

Ede Obgodu (2011). Information on *Egwu-ede* – the Music and Implications of Music.

Ede Ossai (2011). Information on the History of *Ede* Title-taking and Event.

Appendix



Plate 1: Ede Ossai being interviewed by the researcher



Plate 2: Ede Obgodu being interviewed by the researcher



Plate 3: Odoja Ishiwu and Ugwuokeja being interviewed by the researcher