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From Fading Facades to Building Bridges: A Study of the Inculturative Texture of Christian Religious Songs in Edo State, Nigeria

Nijerya'nın Edo Eyaletindeki Hıristiyan Dini Müziklerinin Kültürel Dokusu Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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Abstract

This study examines the domestication of select Edo folk songs/musical traditions in contemporary Christian religious worship. Its objectives are to underscore the resilience/renaissance of indigenous musical traditions despite cultural imperialism; and reemphasize the relevance of inculturation in contemporary Christian evangelism. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews with church clergies, traditional chiefs, elders, and adults, alongside observations and an extensive review of related literature. Participants were selected based on their deep knowledge of Edo music and the Christian liturgy. The paper reveals, among other things, that musical tradition plays a great part in the social-religious life of a people. That, rather than capitulating under the weight of religio-cultural colonisation, Edo folk songs/musical tradition has creatively domesticated the Christian faith, having been absorbed into the Christian liturgical system. The paper reaffirms the verdict of Vatican II, with its language of *aggiornamento*, which brought a new concept of enhancing the solemnity of the Christian liturgy within the context of the people's worldview. Insights from this paper apply to the broader discourse on inculturation. It provides a framework for cultural preservation amid religious transformation. The findings also offer a basis for developing a contextual Christian theology that respects a people's indigenous culture and creates opportunities for expanded dialogue and collaboration.

Öz

Bu makale, Nijeryanın Edo Eyaletindeki halk şarkılarını/müzik geleneklerini incelemektedir. Amaç, kültürel emperyalizm karşısında yerli müzik geleneklerinin direncinin/yeniden doğuşunun altını çizmek ve kültürleşmenin çağdaş Hristiyan evanjelizmindeki önemini yeniden vurgulamaktır. Nitel bir etnografik yaklaşımın kullanıldığı çalışmada, kilise din adamları, geleneksel şefler, yaşlılar ve yetişkinlerle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerin yanı sıra gözlemler ve ilgili literatürün kapsamlı bir incelemesi yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar, Edo müziği ve Hristiyan ayini hakkındaki derin bilgilerine dayanarak seçilmiştir. Çalışma, diğer hususların yanı sıra, müzik geleneğinin bir halkın sosyal-dinsel yaşamında büyük bir rol oynadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Edo halk şarkıları/müzik geleneği, dinsel-kültürel sömürgeleştirmenin ağırlığı altında ezilmek yerine, Hıristiyan ayin sistemine dahil olarak Hıristiyan inancını yaratıcı bir şekilde evcilleştirmiştir. Bu makale, halkın dünya görüşü bağlamında Hıristiyan ayininin ciddiyetini arttırmaya yönelik yeni bir kavram getiren aggiornamento diliyle Vatikan II'nin kararını yeniden teyit etmektedir. Bu makaleden elde edilen görüşler, kültürleşme üzerine daha geniş bir söylem için geçerlidir. Dini dönüşümün ortasında kültürel koruma için bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Bulgular ayrıca, bir halkın yerli kültürüne saygı

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duyan ve genişletilmiş diyalog ve iş birliği için fırsatlar yaratan bağlamsal bir Hristiyan teolojisi geliştirmek için bir temel sunmaktadır.

Keywords Christian liturgy · Edo Christian songs · musical inculturation · adoption of traditional songs in Christianity

Anahtar Kelimeler Hristiyan liturjisi · Edo Hristiyan ilahileri · müzikal enkültürasyon · geleneksel ezgilerin Hristiyanlıkta benimsenmesi

Introduction

Music does not only pervade Christian worship; it is one of the strongest instruments of transcendence. The nature and application of music is quite paramount in Christian liturgy that it epitomises differing worship modes (Grace E. Ekong and Johnson J. Akpakpan 2013;939). Music has been shown to be a tool for cultural preservation (Esther Titilayo Ojò2023; 106). For Africans, music is far more than entertainment; it is a vital means of expression, storytelling, spirituality, and community bonding. It is based on this understanding that Blacking talks of music as engendering fellow feeling (Cited in Ojo 2023, 106). Music is a vehicle that transports African thoughts for people to hear in terms of joy or sadness. It serves as a therapeutic tool to heal and ease the mind of bereavement; it is a motivational tool that boosts and encourages the mind of Africans towards any physical engagements such as war or during stressful work, thus making it perhaps an audio-analgesic. Africans make music at home, at social functions and gatherings, at event centres, and in the marketplaces. Music accompanies and celebrates African festivals, social rituals, religious gatherings, and even political rallies to mobilise people for solidarity. This deep-rooted connection to indigenous music has also influenced how Africans adapt to new experiences, including religious practices. For example, in Christianity across Africa, traditional music has been creatively integrated into worship. By embracing indigenous music within new contexts, African communities maintain a cultural continuity, blending old and new in a way that reflects their unique identity.

No doubt, Edo is a highly Christianised community where the people have been culturally colonised (Thomas Ebhomienlen 2017, 691). Yet behind the façade of the religio-cultural superiority expressed in Christian evangelical sermons, the Edo indigenous spirito-cultural values still have a foothold on the purportedly modernised Edo people of today. A historiographic reflection of the early days of Christianity in the Edo communities reveals the existence of an ugly dislocation between the Christian culture and the Traditional religious practices of Africans. Commenting on such a rift between the New Christian Culture and Old African Indigenous practices, Benedict Agbo (2020;144) reiterates that: 'the stage is rife for 'cultural identity crisis' especially in the liturgical music domain. As a result, many early African Christians and churches abandoned traditional things; others do not know how to combine the old and the new. For example, early Christian missionaries believed that engaging in the singing and playing of indigenous songs and instruments might bring back the images of traditional gods and goddesses that African people had disowned for the true God of the Christian faith (Sadoh 2009, 3 cited in Fasipe Olusola, 2022).

The Christianity that reached Africa, especially the sub-Saharan region, had undergone several stages of inculturation[1] and re-organisation (George Olusola Ajibade). In Edoland, for instance, there have been tendencies by the different Christian denominations to have a juxtaposition of elements from Christian worship and its indigenous counterparts with music dominating these elements. This is not unconnected with the changing social, political, and cultural situation of the people, which is having a tremendous impact

[1] Enculturation and Inculturation are both related to how people learn and adapt to cultures, but they have different focuses and are used in different contexts. Enculturation is the process by which individuals learn and adopt the values, customs, and norms of their own culture, usually from a young age. Inculturation on the other hand, is the process by which one culture (often a religious group, especially Christianity) adapts to or integrates elements from another culture. Our context here is inculturation; How Christianity integrates elements of Edo folk songs in their contemporary worship.

on the Christian religion. Today, the indigenous philosophical language of the Edo people is being applied in expressing some of the mysteries of the Christian faith. This is particularly evident in the articulation of the theological language expressed through various Christian songs.

It is on the above note that this paper examines the domestication of Edo folk songs/musical tradition in contemporary Christian religious worship. Its major goal, as highlighted above, is not just to underscore the resilience/renaissance of the indigenous musical tradition despite cultural imperialism; but also to reemphasize the relevance of inculturation in contemporary Christian evangelism.

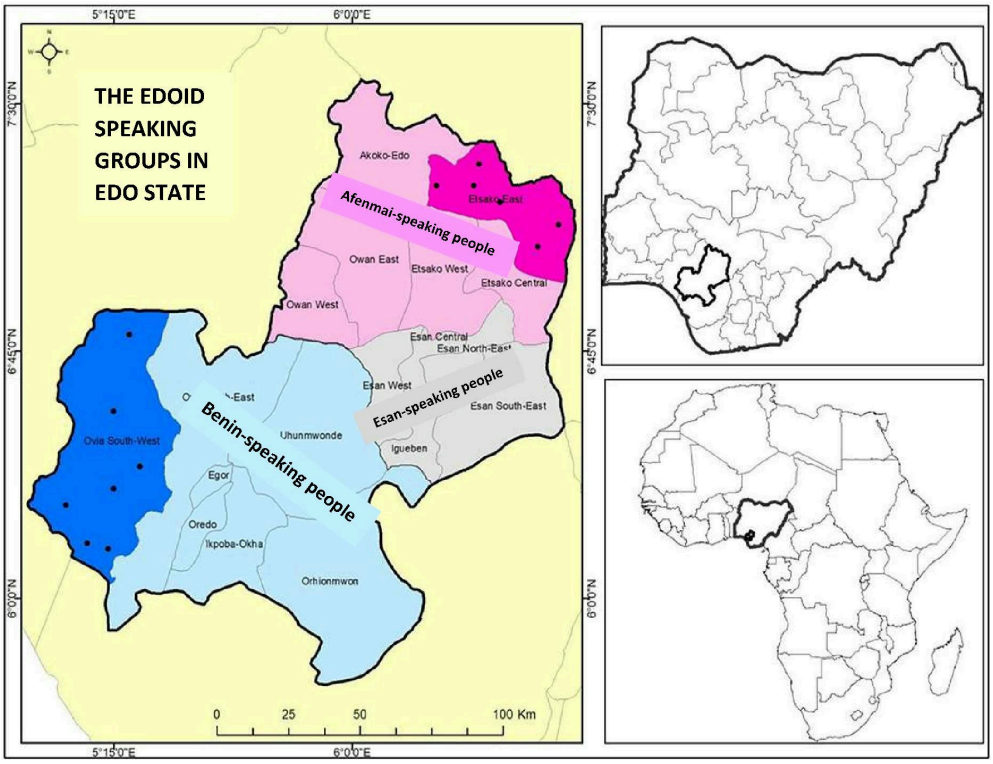
Methodology

The focus of this research is on musical inculturation as practically visible in contemporary Christian religious worship in Edo (figure 1). The term "Edo" is what can be described as the "generic name of the group of people who share a common ancestry, speak a common language; though with some different variants, depending on the distance, and resident in and around the present-day Benin City, in Edo State (Solomon Ikhidero, Peter Alli and Joy. Ikhidero, 2021; 146). The Edo people, usually identified as the “Ivbi’ẹdo” (the children of Edo) of Edo State comprises of; Afenmai, Esan and Benin speaking people of Edo State. The main ethnic groups in Edo State are the Edos, Afemais, Esans, Owans and Akoko-Edos. The Benin-speaking people occupy seven out of the 18 Local Government Areas of the state, constituting 57.54%, while others are Esan (17.14%), Afenmai comprising Etsako (12.19%), Owan (7.43%), and Akoko Edo (5.70%) (Edo MDAs 2024).

In essence, Edo consists of these several clans, which are bound together by language, traditions, and religious beliefs and practices. The existential experience of Edo reveals that traditional belief to them is a priori real and a minute-to-minute phenomenon in their consciousness (Ikhidero *et al*, 146).

Figure 1

Map Showing the Study Areas



Source: Culled from David Awolola et al (2022) Profiling User Needs for Weather and Climate

"Edo state has a tropical wet and dry or savanna climate with a yearly temperature of 28.78 °C (83.8 °F), which is 0.68% lower than Nigeria's averages. Edo typically receives about 183.49 millimetres (7.22 inches) of precipitation and has 265.91 rainy days (72.85% of the time) annually and at an elevation of 239.16 metres (784.65 feet) above sea level."

This study employed a qualitative research design, focusing on ethnographic methods to gather both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly from participants through interviews and observations, while secondary data were obtained from a review of existing literature related to the subject matter, including historical texts, academic journals, and cultural analyses.

Participants were carefully selected from towns in the three geopolitical zones within Edoland, ensuring a diverse representation of the community's socio-cultural landscape. In total, fifty (50) individuals participated in this study, including 30 clergy (aged 35 to 70 years) and 20 lay faithful (ages 35 to 85) drawn from the orthodox and Pentecostal Christian denominations. These participants were identified on the basis of their deep-rooted knowledge and involvement in the Christian practice and understanding of the customs and traditions of their communities, making them valuable informants for this research. Six indigenous songs, inculturated in the contemporary Christian liturgy; two each from the three Edoid speaking groups in Edo State were reviewed.

The research unfolded in several stages, starting with the identification and selection of participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather in-depth information about Edo musical inculturation in contemporary Christian worship. Observational techniques were also employed, allowing for a richer understanding of the ritual execution and its significance within the community. In addition, a comprehensive literature search was undertaken to supplement the data obtained from interviews and observations, ensuring a well-rounded exploration of the subject.

Data analysis followed a systematic approach, beginning with the processing of collected data to organising and preparing it for in-depth analysis. This involved the transcription of interviews, cataloguing of observational notes, and compilation of relevant literature. The analysis then proceeded through data reduction, where the vast amount of information was distilled into key themes and patterns relevant to the study's objectives. This thematic analysis enabled a focused examination of how Edo musical inculturation highlights the Edo cultural resilience despite cultural imperialism in contemporary African societies. Insights drawn from this analysis were then contextualised within the broader academic discourse on indigenous music in postcolonial African societies, contributing to a nuanced understanding of cultural resilience and identity negotiation in Edoland.

The Edo Religious Landscape

Christianity is the dominant religion in Edo State. It was first introduced to the region by Portuguese missionaries in the 15th century. The Etsako/Afenmai people of Edo state have the highest population of Muslims. The practice of Islam in the Edo land is a by-product of the Nupe Jihadists' invasion of its northern fringes in 1860. Hence, Islam has a large following only in those parts (Suleiman Yakubu 2021;10).

Apparently, in Edo communities, like all other African societies, either or both the world's most popular religions, Christianity and Islam, is practised. These two religions, however, are external influences introduced to the Edo (African) people by foreigners. Hence, despite these foreign religious incursions, the Edos still practised their indigenous religious tradition alongside Islam and Christianity (Yakubu 2021;7). Affirming this position, Idumwonyi and Ikhidero (2013; 125) put it succinctly that foreign religious incursion and colonial experience could not sever the Edo people from their traditional beliefs. They have still been able to impose respect on their traditional beliefs and values. In fact, traditional methods and practices

are often consulted as a last resort in times of distress and need for survival. In their explanation of this reality, Tobias Onah *et al* (2021;10) note that, "there exist sturdy correlation linking its (religion) and custom. This has presented culture as an obstinate fact of life that refuses to die out-rightly. Christianity is a religion introduced to Africans as an alien culture. Furthermore, before its emergence, Africans had the idea of their God in the context of their culture to which they clung tenaciously. Consequently, it became difficult for the new religion to send the old one into extinction. This explains why it is difficult to entirely separate African (Edo) Christians from the influence of their traditional culture and religion, and hence, enculturation becomes imperative practical Christianity in Edo (African) communities."

Arinaitwe K. Alex (2023; 48) adds that there is no such thing as a pure religion that has not been influenced by traditional cultures in its ritual components. From a historical context, Peter Alli and Solomon Ikhidero (2024; 257) point out that right from the day Christianity left the confines of Jerusalem, following the death/martyrdom of Stephen and the bitter persecution and subsequent migration of Christians; to non-Jewish territories, the story of Christianity has always been the story of inculturation. The Church had to learn, sometimes through controversy as was the cause and case of the council of Jerusalem, (Acts 15), and to adapt its message to the contexts of different peoples. The writer of the John Gospel provides us with a deep and rich prologue whose central message is the incarnation. "The word become flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). By so doing, Jesus, a Jew, is born into a specific time and place, religion, economy and political environment.

Inculturation Hermeneutics in Contemporary Christianity

In one of his comments on the dimension of African Christology, Professor Ikechukwu Kanu (2015, 328) asserted that Christian missionaries, in their scramble for African converts, succeeded only in baptising individual Africans into the Christian faith but had failed to baptise the African culture. This apparently resulted in a clash of worldviews and the reluctance of today's Christian evangelisers to come to terms with the traditional African cosmology in contemporary African communities. The efforts at filling the hermeneutical gulf between a people's beliefs and the Christian faith apparently invented the word 'inculturation' into the Christian theological lexicon.

In affirmation of the above position, Ikenga Metuh (1996, n.p) notes that inculturation is a term borrowed from cultural anthropology to denote a process by which a person is inserted into his own culture. Explaining this from the standpoint of communication, Waliggo (1996, 14) described inculturation as a process that requires a speaker to insert himself into the thought pattern of his audience for better understanding and effective communication. As a theological concept, inculturation is the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his gospel of salvation ever more understood by people of every culture, locality and time. In the words of Waliggo (1996, 14), it is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity 'truly feel at home' in the cultures of each people. According to Luzbetak (1988; 65), inculturation involves learning from other people's cultures. As a dynamic process, it involves translation, assimilation, and transformation in order to confront new norms and forms of life (John Pobee 1992; 34-44). Justin Ukpong (1999, 105) observed that African socio-cultural concerns were not reflected in missionary and Western academic forms of biblical interpretation. Inculturation hermeneutics thus arose as a response, "paying attention to the African sociocultural context and the questions that arise there from". He further elaborates that inculturation hermeneutics "designates an approach to Biblical interpretation which seeks to make the African context the subject of interpretation" (Ukpong 1999, 105); This basically means that the interpretive process should be informed by the African worldview.

In the Catholic Church, the second Vatican Council ushered in the era of Inculturation/Indigenisation of Liturgical Music - a new concept of enhancing the solemnity of the liturgy within the context of the people's

own worldview. Pope John Paul II (1985; 802–803), in this context, describes inculturation as the insertion of the Church into a given cultural milieu. In his words, inculturation entails the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church. It is through inculturation that the Word of God becomes companionable and agreeable with the human ecological realities of the people. Through inculturation, the Gospel is evangelised to the people in their cultural plurality, and God's message becomes edified, relevant and given a deeper interpretation and meaning with cultural relevance and sensitivity (Mwanyungwi Audrey, 2020; 3).

Music and Dance in Edo Indigenous Religo-Cultural Expression

Indigenous music and dance hold central places in the life of the Edo people. According to Charles Aluede and Abu Braimah (2005; 125), "in Edo and indeed in Nigeria today, music making is enshrined in every activity of the people's lives. Folk songs are the principal works used in the ceremonies that induce music making." Music enriches religious expression and gives a profound sense of community, cultural identity, and spiritual significance. Music and dance, traditionally called *ihuan* and *gbe* in the Benin language; *ilo* and *ikhien* in Esan; and *iro*/*ikhien* among the Ora-Iuleha (Afenmai) communities are vital to connecting with the spiritual world, particularly during festivals. Rhythmic drumming, chants, and movements are often seen as a means of invoking deities, ancestors, or spirits, creating a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms. While discussing the Esan landscape and soundscape, Charles Aluede (2024;52) adds that Music making resides in every Esan (Edo) irrespective of age, caste, sex, and religious belief. Boluwatife Afolaranmi and Adebayo Afolaranmi (2024, n.p) also note that, African indigenous music and dances are deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of various regions and ethnic groups. Each dance, as these scholars observe, embodies the specific essence of the community it symbolises; through its unique costumes, choreography, and musical accompaniments. It often reflects the daily activities, rituals, and celebrations of the community, providing valuable insights into their ways of life.

In today's era of globalisation, even though many traditional cultural heritages face the risk of being overshadowed or diluted by external influences, indigenous music and dance, on the contrary, provide a means of celebrating and revitalising cultural heritage in addition to preserving it. Communities across the globe have recognised the power of indigenous Music and dance as a catalyst for reclaiming their roots. For instance, among the Edo people, the most outstanding costume is white and in some cases red. This white costume worn by dancers and the coral bead (ivie) are symbols of peace and prestige. Whenever this costume is adorned in a music and dance display, it showcases the rich culture of the Edo people. This also applies to other communities in Nigeria (John Abuedefe, John Abolagba and Peter Aihevba 2012, 2).

Considering the above, indigenous music and dance can be viewed as sacred acts, with participants embodying spiritual forces or invoking blessings. The trance-like states induced by drumming and dancing allow individuals to feel a stronger connection with their faith and beliefs, bringing them closer to their ancestors and deities.

Edo Indigenous Musical Inculturation in Contemporary Christian Liturgy

Indeed, Indigenous music is known for its complex rhythms and the use of traditional instruments such as the talking drum, drums of different kinds, slit drum, bell, gourd rattles, and castanets. These instruments are increasingly being used in Church services to accompany hymns, chants, and songs. Many indigenous songs celebrate themes of life, family, and the community, often carrying messages of hope, thanksgiving, and resilience. These themes are closely aligned with the Christian messages of salvation, gratitude, and unity, allowing for a seamless integration of traditional songs into the Christian liturgy. Songs celebrating harvest or other life events, for instance, are often adapted from Christian texts that communicate similar

values within a religious context. The infusion of these indigenous rhythms has obviously enriched Christian worship by adding a familiar and lively beat to the music, creating a spiritual atmosphere that resonates with indigenous African worshippers. It has allowed Edo worshippers to connect deeply, as they can express their faith in familiar terms and sounds. The melodies themselves reflect cultural styles, creating a sense of unity between their cultural identity and their Christian religious beliefs.

In this segment, we will analyse six (6) apt songs, two each from the three Senatorial Districts (Edo South, Central and North Senatorial districts). In quest of the preservation of the songs being analysed, four out of six songs, which amounted to 60% of the songs used in this study, were scored and analysed while the text of two, which amounts to 40% of the songs, was simply written and also analysed. These songs existed before Christian missionary activities in the land. According to Aisen (2013), Christianity came into Benin in the 16th century and that it had long-lasting effects on the kingdom and on her history, even though the indigenous religion smothered it until its second coming in the 20th century after Benin became a colony of Britain. It is important to mention that Benin was the headquarters of the then midwestern region out of which two other states were created and today, it is the headquarters of Edo State. No doubt, Christianity first reached Benin before it dispersed to Esan (Edo Central) in 1900 and Auchi(Edo North) subsequently.

Egharevba (1968) and Aisien (2013) maintained that before Christian missionary activities came into the Benin kingdom, traditional worship was the people's major religion and way of life. It is this background that fanned the adoption and parodying of already existing traditional religious worship songs in the nascent or initial religion.

The journey of the emplacement of indigenous music and musical instruments in liturgy was not a smooth sail. For example, while discussing the southern African scenario, Louw (1958:44) observed that the Christian musician had the conviction that, just as other musicians sing out of their hearts, using real Nyanja poetry and real Nyanja tone patterns, when they dance or mourn or praise a chief or hero, the Christian should do the same when he wishes to praise God spontaneously, or to come to Him in time of distress, or express any other normal religious experience in song. When one true African Christian musician is brought to disregard any form of church music that he may have known in the past and breaks forth praising God in the musical medium that lies closest to his heart, half the battle will have been won.

Examining the Yoruba Nigeria sonic space, Beier (1956:28) remarked that "Yoruba vocal music is still developing and creating new forms. There are now several Yoruba composers writing Yoruba hymns for the church. There are also new Yoruba popular operas. Speaking further, Beier maintained that

> The most common form of song is the praise song. The praise song or oriki is not a continuous narrative but merely consists of a series of proverbial phrases that praise or characterise the respective persons. They are not always sung in the same order. They may be played on the drum as well as sung. The most interesting and important praise songs are those of the kings and of the gods (1958: 25).

Today, the Yoruba church music has grown beyond bounds, absorbing all its traditional traits and characteristics that have been infused into the music for the worship of God in contemporary times.

Whether to allow traditional music in the church was not just a Nigerian palaver but a continental one. Thus, while some missionaries tried opposing it, some tacitly and openly approved of it. It was against this background that Martin (1988) opined that one area in which Western influence has been deeply felt in African culture is the development of music in the Christian Church. Clearly, Christian missionaries to Africa during the colonial era used traditional African idioms in worship services. Speaking further, he maintained

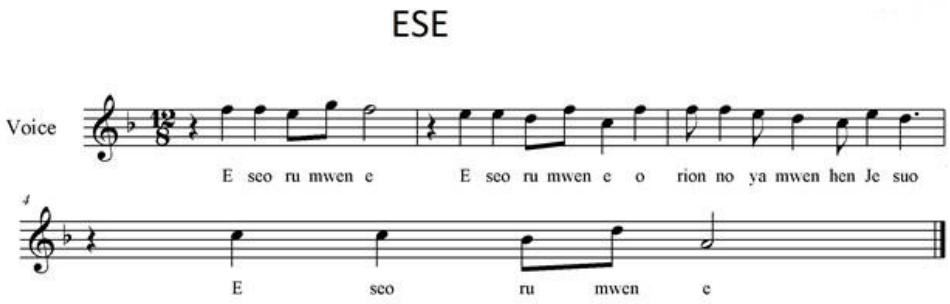
that at some point this issue was strongly debated. While in Zaire there was a strict ban on such use, among the Zulus, Ngonis and Tumbukas, it was allowed.

In the whole of Edo, the scenario is not in any way different from those of her neighbours. Beyond parodying (a vocal composition in which the original text is replaced by a new one, particularly a secular text by a sacred text, or vice versa), their indigenous songs were also adopted for sacred use. Put succinctly, Turkson (1992:66) defined 'Parody as a satirical imitation used in music either by replacing the original text with a comic one, or by changing the character of the composition in a comical manner. In earlier days, it was the practice to replace text with or without the implication of caricature. This process, often referred to as parody as in the songs....'

From the Benin territory, which forms the Edo South Senatorial District, we picked two apt songs as good examples for analysis in this study: Ese and Oya.

Song 1. ESE

Figure 2



Traditional Text in Benin and English

Ẹse ọroru mwẹn e	-	It is good that was done to me
Ẹse ọroru mwẹn e	-	It is good that was done to me
Oriọn nọ ya mwẹn	-	The spirit that made me
rẹn Olokun	-	knows Olokun
Ẹse ọroru mwẹn e	-	It is good that was done to me

Christian Text in Benin and English

Ẹse ọroru mwẹn e	-	It is good that was done to me
Ẹse ọroru mwẹn e	-	It is good that was done to me
Oriọn nọ ya mwẹn	-	The spirit that made me
rẹn ijesu o	-	knows Jesus
Ẹse ọroru mwẹn e	-	It is good that was done to me

Song 2. OYA

Traditional Text in Benin and English

Oya ha ru mwẹn	-	When I am pained
Ibu Olokun no ogie	-	I go to Olokun the king
Emwin nọ da mwẹn bho oriọn	-	Whatever pains me in my spirit
Tọ ha ruẹ e mẹn o	-	He will do it for me

Emwin nọ da mwẹn vbo oriọn - Whatever pains me in my spirit
Tọ gha ruẹ e mẹn o - He will do it for me
Emwin nọ da mwẹn vbo oriọn - Whatever pains me in my spirit
Tọ gha ruẹ e mẹn o - He will do it for me

Christian Text in Benin and English

Oya ha ru mwẹn - When I am pained
Ibu Ijesu no ogie - I go to Jesus the king
Emwin nọ da mwẹn vbo oriọn - Whatever pains me in my spirit
Tọ gha ruẹ e mẹn o - He will do it for me
Emwin nọ da mwẹn vbo oriọn - Whatever pains me in my spirit
Tọ gha ruẹ e mẹn o - He will do it for me
Emwin nọ da mwẹn vbo oriọn - Whatever pains me in my spirit
Tọ gha ruẹ e mẹn o - He will do it for me

In the Benin kingdom, Olokun is one of the mostly worshipped deities. It is a traditional worship whose origin is synonymous with the origin of the Benin, and it predates the introduction of Christianity in the land. In the view of Imasogie (1980:91), 'Olokun is tagged as the divinity of fortune, amongst the Bini, women are the main worshippers of Olokun, this is so because Olokun is the giver of children, most of the priest (except for the chief priest) of Olokun shrine in the Benin area are women, the gift of children that Olokun bestows, invariably attracts more women to Olokun worship'. While discussing music in Olokun worship, Yemi Andrew Akperi, *et al* (2022:176) note that:

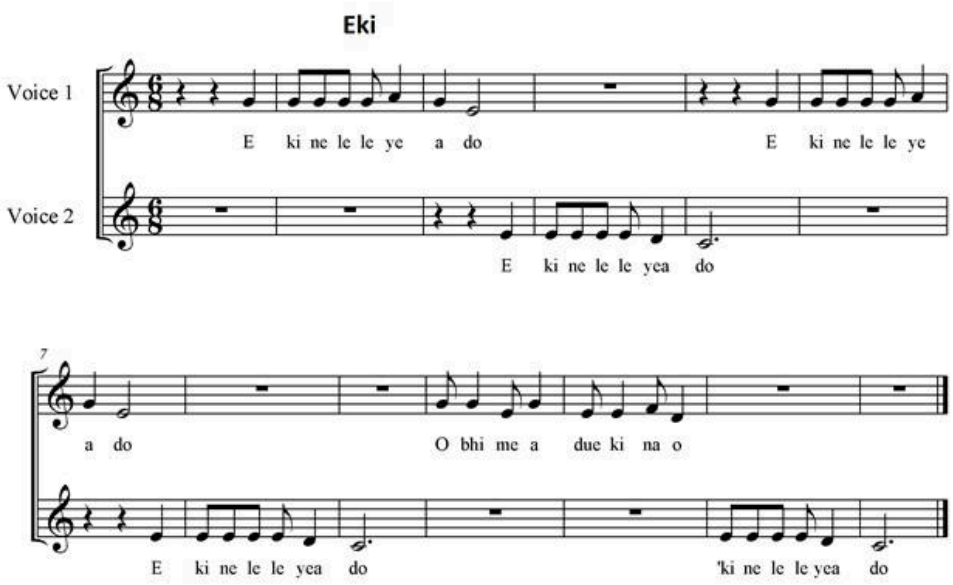
> Music is integral to the Olokun liturgy, as it is the conveyor of the various rites and ceremonies. During worship, Olokun adherents/worshippers, including onlookers, are usually captivated by the rich display of African musical arts (music, dance, ritual, costume and drama). It is common for worshippers to be emotionally transformed and sometimes transfigured by the eerie spirituality associated with Olokun veneration. Olokun worshippers interpret the ritual of worship through various physical and verbal expressions that include dancing, clapping, being in a trance, brisk movements and diverse body postures/motions; all these physical/verbal expressions are steeped in music presumably dictated by the deity.

Early in their worship, they had beautiful songs that extoll the deity and the two songs above address its unique attributes. For example, while the first song talks of so much good that has been done to the devotee for being introduced to Olokun worship, the second one expounds the subject by pointing out that in times of pain, suffering and inclement living conditions, Olokun the king is beseeched as a refuge for whatever pains and troubles are, and Olokun will address the devotee's challenges. Word for word, letter for letter (except for the replacement of Olokun with Jesus), these songs were parodied and adopted for use in the Christian churches.

In Esan (Edo Central Senatorial District), we also identified two very relevant songs that were scored and analysed below.

EKI

Figure 3



Traditional Text in Esan and English

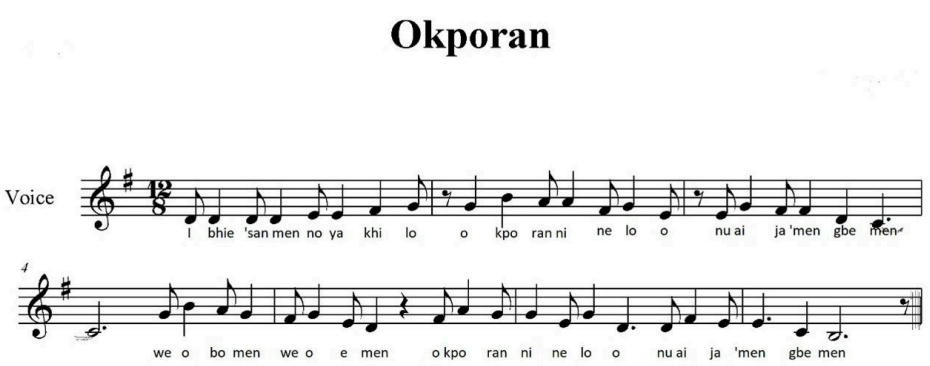
Eki ne lele ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does
Eki ne ‘lele ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does
Eki ne ‘lele ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does
Obhi men ia du’ eki nao	-	It is my child that I will trade for
Eki ne le le ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does

Christian Text in Esan and English

Eki ne ‘lele ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does
Eki ne ‘lele ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does
Eki ne ‘lele ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does
Ijesu ia du’ eki nao	-	It is Jesus that I will trade for
Eki ne le le ye a do	-	It is a profitable trade that one does

OKPORAN

Figure 4



Traditional Text in Esan and English

Ibhie ‘san mẹn noya khi lo	-	Esan people who will not be overwhelmed by suffering
Okpo ran ni nẹlo,	-	A big tree that I have taken refuge in
Nu ai ja amẹn gbe mẹn	-	do not let rain drench me
Wẹ ho obọ mẹn we ho ẹ mẹn	-	You are my hand and my leg
Okpo ran ni nẹlo,	-	A big tree that I have taken refuge in
Nu ai ja amẹn gbe mẹn	-	do not let rain drench me

Christian Text in Esan and English

Ijesu mẹn ni die gbe yan	-	My Jesus, who is my strength
Okpo ran ni nelo,	-	A big tree that I have taken refuge in
ai ha ja amẹn gbe mẹn	-	do not let rain drench me
Wẹ ho obọ mẹn we ho ẹ mẹn	-	You are my hand and my leg
Okpo ran ni nẹlo,	-	A big tree that I have taken refuge in
nu ai ja amẹn gbe mẹn	-	do not let rain drench me

Iyayi, which is the Esan variant of Igbe, has many practices in common (Ekewenu 2018). According to Aluede and Ekewenu (2023:228), ‘In Esan, the building where the Iyayi adherents worship is called Ogua–Ose (the temple of God). The building, like its Urhobo counterpart, is adorned with mirrors of different sizes. In Esan, it is the kings and chiefs who own the Ojukhuo in their houses. With the coming of Iyayi into Esan, Iyayi priests and priestesses have beautifully constructed Ojukhuo in their temples. It is in these temples that profuse music making is made while the devotees dance and vibrate ecstatically to the heart-throbbing rhythms of the musical instruments. Song number 3 addresses the importance of children in the Esan culture. Childbearing in Nigeria is a major reason for marriage. For example, while sharing the Yoruba-Nigeria experience, Ajibade (2005:103) opined that childbearing is one of the three principal things that the Yoruba people consider as the attributes of their vitality in life. Others are wealth and longevity. Therefore, they do not treat marriage with flippancy because of the importance that they attach to childbearing. The Iyayi song Eki epitomises an aspect of the Esan construct and worldview on the child in their world. Thus, its text says: ‘It is a profitable trade that one does. It is my child that I will trade for, it is a profitable trade that one does’. This song was also parodied *verbatim et literatim* for the church use with a replacement of the child with Jesus. As for song 4, it is a folk song that was made popular by Lady Christy Ogbah in one of her recorded musical albums whose text was later deployed into the service of God. In this song, the term Esan people was expunged and replaced with my Jesus. Here, we see the use of a widely accepted already recorded material for secular services being domesticated for sacred use. The unregulated employment of folksongs in Nigeria has a history that is almost making it difficult to address. In the opinions of Ogisi Arugha, Anifowoshe Peter and Aluede Charles (2019:22),

> ...folksongs in Nigeria are orally transmitted, communally owned, of indeterminate origin and of unknown composers. These features surrounding folk songs in Nigeria have made them vulnerable. Hence, they are used under any social climes with audacity. The idea that folk songs are no one’s property has blurred into the general perception of recorded works. Even when aspects of such songs have been rearranged and recorded, they are still seen as the people’s collective treasure, which can be borrowed from at will, devoid of restraints.

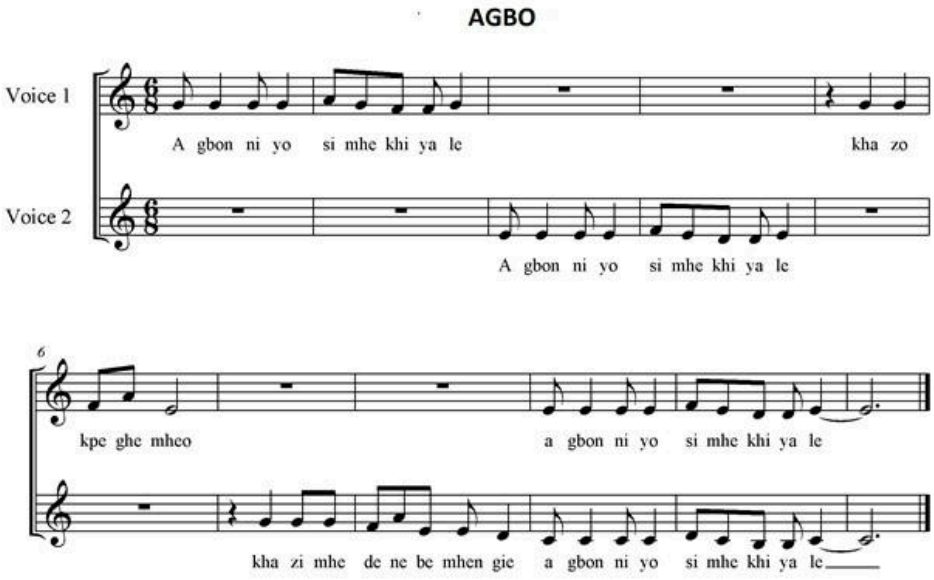
The last two songs were drawn from Edo North Senatorial District and they are Agbo and Ilele. From the available information, while the first song is originally an indigenous religious song of the Estako people, the second is a social recreational song of the Agbenigie[2] ensemble. In Agbo, we see a passionate appeal to God for mercy and support as it is normally when traditional religious worshippers prostrate before their religious effigies as they pour out their hearts in supplication to God for good health, longevity, prosperity and a smooth sail through life without being overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of life. Its text reads:

> This life that I told my God that I have come. This life that I told my God that I have come. Life should not be turbulent for me. Do not let me fall so that my enemies will not laugh at me. This life that I told my God that I have come.

A perusal of the song Agbo reveals no mention of Jesus but God. This is quite unlike most songs used in the liturgy by this people. Till date, this song has retained its original content, thereby giving a clear lead for any investigator in the song analysis in terms of its etymology. This is also the case with the song Ilele. In Ilele, Oghena, which is often called upon in traditional worship and sparingly in the church, enjoys a dominant mention in the song. Ordinarily, an original song composed for church use is more likely to have a mention of Jesus, as commonly found in many other songs in the area. These attributes clearly allude to the fact that these songs are parodied. Below are the texts of the songs in reference:

AGBO

Figure 5



Traditional Text in Etsako and English

Agbo ni yo si mhe khi yale	-	This life that I told my God that I have come
Agbo ni yo si mhen khi yale	-	This life that I told my God that I have come
Kha zo kpe ghe mheo	-	The life should not be turbulent for me
Kha zi mhe de be mhen gie	-	Do not let me fall so that I will not be laughed at

[2]Agbenigie simply means a dance for the kings. Although it was originally performed for the king as its name implies, in the contemporary Etsako, this ensemble performs for anyone who has the wherewithal to hire its services.

Agbo ni yo si mhen khi yale	-	This life that I told my God that I have know, oh I know
Emho Agbenigie	-	It is Agbenigie's matter
ore mha khia	-	that is taking me round
Ilele	-	I know
Agbenigie ni khie mhan	-	Agbenigie our dance
Ilele Ilele e	-	I know, Oh I know
Emho Agbenigie	-	It is Agbenigie's matter
ore mha khia that	-	is taking me round
Ilele	-	I know

Christian Text in Etsako and English

Ilele Ilele e	-	I know, Oh Iknow
Emho oghena	-	It is God's matter
ore mha khia	-	that is taking me round
Ilele	-	I know
Oghena ne ra mhan	-	God our father
Ilele Ilele e	-	I know, Oh I know
Emho oghena	-	It is God's matter
ore mha khia	-	that is taking me round
Ilele	-	I know

Results and Discussion

In the six songs drawn from the three Senatorial districts, we see different patterns of parodying. In the first set of two songs, we discovered that Olokun songs were in a very strict sense borrowed into the church with little or no modification, except for Jesus, who replaced Olokun. Here we find good examples of traditional religious songs that are deployed for use across Christian churches and their associated spectrums. In the second set of songs, we find that while one of the songs is originally from the Esan Iyayi traditional religious movement, the other is a folk song that was made popular by Lady Christ Ogbah in one of her recorded musical albums. Thus, evidence emerges of a social recreational song being parodied for Church to the second set of songs, where one is drawn from traditional worship and the other from a social recreational musical ensemble. In sum, there is a strong element of the adoption of musical features from the religion of the host indigenous communities for church use. This is in itself an interesting oeuvre in musical enculturation.

Conclusion

This article examines a set of six songs elicited from the three senatorial districts that make up the Edo State of Nigeria. This effort is the result of an investigation into the socio-religious significance of songs. In this investigative search, it was established that some songs used for worship in the areas under investigation were actually cloned from some already existing folksongs from their host communities. This obviously underscores the spirit of inculturation. The inculturation of African indigenous songs into Christian songs is a vital step in making Christian worship more culturally relevant, spiritually enriching, and community-driven. This study demonstrates that integrating African Indigenous songs into Christian worship praise/song fosters deeper engagement among believers, preserves cultural heritage, and enhances the liturgical experience. It also highlights the theological and pastoral significance of music as a bridge between faith and culture. However, the process of inculturation requires careful discernment to ensure that indigenous

elements align with Christian doctrine while maintaining their cultural authenticity. Collaboration between theologians, liturgists, and local musicians is essential to achieve a harmonious synthesis in this musical Inculturation process.

Moving forward, further research and dialogue are necessary to explore ways of training Church musicians and leaders in both African traditional music and Christian liturgical principles. Additionally, promoting a broader acceptance of indigenous musical inculturation can help create a more inclusive and spiritually enriching worship experience for African Christians. Ultimately, the successful inculturation of African indigenous songs into Christian liturgy affirms the universality of the Gospel while respecting and celebrating the diversity of African cultures in worship.

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