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Celebrating the Past, Present, and Future: The Case of Odumu Music and Dance Among the Idoma People

ABSTRACT

Odumu music among the Idoma people in Nigeria has served historical, sociological and entertainment functions. Performed predominantly by male members of the society, female community members are allowed to participate in the dance as a mark of collective cultural identity and responsibility. Communality is a core community ethos among the Idoma which promotes individual expression within a wider communal space. This paper, therefore, examines Odumu musical performance from the angle of its socio-cultural significance as well as its reflection of anthropocentric impact in shaping the environment. In a specific sense, the paper aims to highlight the musical narrative of how the people have encountered and impacted their environment, and how such experience have shaped their cultural expressions using the instrumentality of traditional music and dance. The research adopted observations and interviews as field methods among the Idoma people as well as Odumu performers to obtain data for the research. Analysis of data obtained reveals that Odumu musical performance provides a space for socio-cultural identity, transmission of culture and re-enacting historical facts that promote communal bonding. Hence, it reinforces the larger social sense of belonging. This paper will be of benefit to environmental and cultural scholars by providing knowledge on the intersection of music, culture and the environment among less visible indigenous groups like the Idoma people.

KEYWORDS

Odumu

Idoma

Performance

Dance

Communality

Background of the study

Like most African cultures, Idoma traditional music tells the story of the people's social culture, historical antecedents, environment and religious convictions. It codifies the philosophy of their life systems and processes of communal living (Ajewole, 2011: 118). African traditional music is largely connected with religious and social situations although not exclusively so. Thus, much of African music has a performance context which shapes the material and sonic attributes of the music. In this regard, there exist music types among the Idoma that are designed to be performed only during given religious occasions, social occasions such as burial, or for royalty alone (Locke, 2005: 75). This implies that music is indispensable in Idoma (and African in general) social situations owing to its contribution to successful observances of occasions by "focusing attention, communicating information, encouraging social solidarity, and transforming consciousness." (Locke, 2005: 75).

Beside these, some musical performances also bring to the fore the relationship between culture and nature in a given environment, which is what ecomusicology is concerned with. Regardless of the supposition that ecomusicology is a relatively young "sub-discipline in musicology" (Isabel G. Thomas, n.d.: 2), nature has occupied a prime place that commands admiration, adoration, awe and sometimes supplication in the music of many cultures since time immemorial (Jonathan Gilmurray, 2018: 3). Gilmurray provided example of the primal place of nature in the music of even non-western cultures when he revealed that the throat singing by both the Tuva and Kisedje people reflect the strong relationship that exist between nature, animals and man (Seeger, 2017: 89). Aaron S. Allen similarly stated that Wolfang Amadeus Mozart's pastoral music was a reflection of his admiration for birds, some of Gustav Mahler's music represented his personal experience with and expression of nature, and Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, the "Pastoral", captured his love for nature (Allen, 2017, 371). This research, therefore, seeks to unveil the culture-nature underpinnings in *Odumu* music and dance in Idoma society and how it serves as constant reminder of the people's common history, ancestry and ecology through the interactive performance atmosphere of its theatre. This is essential because it provides a sonic dimension to understanding the historical heritage of the Idoma people, in a way that reflects their performative cultural expression, identity and environment. *Odumu* dance, costume and paraphernalia are indicative of how the Idoma

have interacted with their environment historically, thereby connecting them with one another and their past. Further still, the undeniable role of sustaining culture through transmitting cardinal practices from one generation to the other is achieved in *Odumu* musical performances. According to Cavalli-Sforza et al (2010: 19), the concept of cultural transmission encapsulates the process of actively transferring and acquiring practices, attitudes, ideologies, technologies and values (among others) through conditioning and imitation.

Statement of the problem

Documentation on Idoma people has been undertaken primarily by historians and other scholars who have presented their research from historical perspectives. These works have been very central in addressing the cultural identity of Idoma people. To a large extent, however, the sonic aspect of Idoma culture and its engagement with the environment have not been explored, thereby overlooking a vital aspect of cultural information. This shortcoming generally leads to the perception of the generalized "Other", using western concepts of identity and aesthetics. According to Taylor (2007: 12), "Aesthetics is a kind of commodification machine: It strips everything of history, culture, and the social to render it fit for commodification, or for appropriation." The need to re-present part of Idoma history using other aspects of their culture that ensures the proper appropriation of self-identification consistent with their aesthetic valuations makes this work imperative. Hence, *Odumu* music and dance performance is not just entertainment for commodification purposes among the people, but a cultural expression that tells the story of their past, heritage, struggles and triumphs.

Aim of the study

The aim of this research is to investigate traditional dance music performed by the Idoma people to highlight the impact of human activities on the environment even in the local setting. In a broader sense, the study intends to contribute to the global discussion on using music to provide insight on the state of the environment. Further still, the study provides much-needed information for a wider readership on how the Idoma people employ music to highlight historical, environmental and cultural issues in an interrelated manner. To achieve this, the article undertook a performance analysis of the *Odumu* music and its association with ecological considerations in Idoma land.

Significance

This research is significant for providing an intersection between music and the environment in understanding Idoma cultural expressions within the context of entertainment, social responsibility and cultural history. This is a deviation from the intellectual approach previously undertaken by some scholars for appreciating and engaging Idoma culture. For the Idoma and scholars interested in Idoma music and dance, research and documentation of *Odumu* performance provides greater knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of Idoma history and culture (Falk and Ingram, 2008). The research further "provides access to cultural and aesthetic representations and responses to the environment" reminiscent of cultural and sub-group understanding and representation of human-human and human-non human relationship in the environment (Groffman and Titus, 2022: 480). Ultimately, this supports the growing global scholarship on the environment, especially as it relate to non-western cultures. Whereas significant studies have been carried out on the impact of human activities on the environment in cities, this study provides an ethnographic report which encompasses traditional musical practice, cultural expression, entertainment as well as environmental history.

The Idoma[1] People

The main thrust of Idoma land is a contiguous belt of territory which stretches from the Southern banks of the river Benue to the Northern fringes of Igboland. This territory lies within longitude 7° and 13° N and latitudes 7° and 14° E and covers a total land area of approximately 5,955 square kilometres. According to Anyebe (2012: 220), "historical facts and theories of origin like the ones based on oral traditions and totemism traced the origin of the Idoma people to [the] Kwararafa Confederacy which existed in c.1535 – 1745." Kwararafa was composed of several nation groups who resisted Islamic expansion and domination from the old Bornu Empire. Inuaeche (2001: 17) observed that there existed a famous settlement to the east of Wukari called Apa, to which the Idoma constantly allude as their homeland. Folorunso (1993: 148), Ochefu (1996: 263) and Anyebe (2012: 3) all believe that historical facts and oral traditions support the submission that the homeland being referred to is located within and around Biepi, which

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[1] The Idoma people are predominantly found in Benue state, a mid-central state in Nigeria. They share boundaries with the Tiv, Igala, and Igbo ethnic groups in Nigeria. Traditionally, they worship a supreme being called *Owoicho*, but have very strong belief in the spirit of ancestors known as *Alekwu* to guide, protect and procure blessings for them.

at the time was the capital of a revived Kwararafa kingdom (Onaji, 2013: 19; Alachi & Tyokyaa, 2016: 3).

Leadership crises and power struggles triggered the exodus of most of the nation groups that made up the Kwararafa Confederacy. The Idoma group left in phases, giving rise to their dispersal to different locations. This explains the presence of some Idoma groups called Etulo in Shiga, Sondi, Riti, and Bantaje in Taraba State, as well as the Nkum, Nkim, and Iyala subgroups found in Ogoja, Cross River State (Neyt, 1985: 8). Erim (1981: 37) revealed that the Idoma groups that fled from Kwararafa had their unique totems, representing their kinship emblems.

As farmers and hunters, Idoma people believe animals play unique roles in their existence and survival, and therefore, are revered and used as totems. Some of these totems are *Owuna* – bird (Idoma-Ugboju), *Eka* – monkey (Idoma-Adoka), *Ikwu* – crocodile (Idoma-Edumoga), and *Obagwu* – baboon (Idoma-Otukpo). Beyond the initial Kwararafa crisis, the Tiv invasion created further dispersal and southward migration culminating in the creation of new habitats and farming areas from the wild. Thus, encounters with wild animals became unavoidable, and among such animals was the *Odumu* (hyena).

Other studies have enriched our understanding on the relationship between music and the physical environment. Clarke (2013:90) posits that music and the surrounding material and auditory world are inseparable owing to the fact that such music reflects and is inspired by the that environment. This suggests that the material and cultural environment from where a given music originates provides the sonic materials of such music. Both Feisst (2014:17) and Esan (2016:9) argue that human interactions with animals and other environmental elements have often been expressed through music. The growing interest and attention of scholars on human relationship and (or) interaction with his environment has resulted in the remarkable development in researches and studies in ecomusicology. This is a shift from the near-exclusive traditional human-human pre-occupation of ethnomusicology to man's relationship and interaction with animals, materials and the climate in his environment (Post, 2018:4). This shift has resulted in the enriched understanding of how music defines, refines and mediates" our knowledge concerning ourselves and our environment (Groffman and Titus, 2022:484). Beside non-human themes in the environment, man's continued

engagement with the earth in evolving built and non-built space as well as induced climatic re-configurations have been captured in music in one way or the other. Titon (2005:28) captured this view when he said, "Like all of culture, music is a peculiarly human adaptation to life on this Earth... Each music-culture is a particular adaptation to particular circumstances." This aligns with Ogundele and Lumowo (2009: 79) when they opined that human adaptation to environment and how such terrestrial space is conceptualised and used for purposes of "economy, security, peaceful co-existence, aesthetics and symbolism" in their collective experience is what human settlement connotes. They further stated that human settlement "is the end product of a set of conscious efforts by a group of people to transform a natural space to a cultural experience in order to survive and make progress rooted in the world-view and social history of its members." However not much is known about how groups such as the Idoma integrate cultural history, environmental issues and socio-cultural responsibilities into a musical performance. This study, therefore, attempts to provide insight on how the Idoma people have employed music and dance to make statements on their history and environment in an entertainment form.

Research method

The research adopted the ethnographic research approach, which involved observations and interviews to obtain data for this study. To this end, the research team visited Obotu community in Idoma land, who are recognized as some of the best *Odumu* dancers in the region. We started by discussing the purpose of the research with the group. This was necessary for them to give informed consent for data collection in form of audio and visual recordings, as well as permission for publication. This was graciously granted by the group before we commenced the interviews, discussions and observations. The researcher further interviewed members of the group as well as selected elders in the community who served as patrons and consultants to the groups. It is customary that such elders were themselves experienced *Odumu* music and dance members (performers) in their younger years.

Also, we observed the group in three main contexts: during rehearsals within the community when rules and formats were more relaxed, during burials in the community

where the group was invited to perform, and during the *Ej'Alekwu Afia*[2] annual festival of the Ugboju-Idoma when all musical groups in the Ugboju clan are expected to perform. The interviews and performances were recorded using audio and visual recorders for later analysis.

Theory of Sameness and Change

This work is based on the theory of sameness and change. Fraisse (1963) in Lalonde and Chandler (n.d.: 2) argued that there exists a paradox between the conceptualisation of sameness and change in the sense that it imposes on the individual the burden of understanding oneself to embody both permanence and change simultaneously. Thus, Lalonde and Chandler agreed that claims for personal sameness and personal change are true. In their view, persons are, "in some sense, sufficiently self-same to allow for their regular identification and re-identification as one and the same continuous person through time". Hence, an individual's failure to subscribe to the idea of personal sameness inevitably leads to "patent absurdity". On a broader application however, Shaun Gallagher (1998) submits that life is a constant whirl of change, thereby forcing self to constantly respond to such in public and private in order to live or be static and die. Negotiating a balance between sameness and change becomes very imperative in view of the fact that change is inevitable and sameness is unavoidable (Lalonde & Chandler). Re-echoing Cassirer (1923), Lalonde and Chandler (n.d.: 2) posited: "Failing to do so is simply not a live option, all for the reason that any putative self that did not somehow negotiate a way of achieving sameness within change would simply fail to qualify as a recognizable instance of what selves are standardly taken to be." Nonetheless, such sameness must not exist in isolation, seeing nothing of self can survive or sufficiently endure time, but must be founded in relation to linking past and later experiences into a coherent whole. This subscribes to the narrativist view of sameness and change as against the essentialist position. Leaning towards the narrativist's position, Lalonde and Chandler offered that the concept of selfhood must be built on "the stories we fashion in an effort to integrate our past, present, and anticipated future." Interestingly, every performance of *Odumu*

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[2] *Alekwu Afia* is the Idoma ancestral masquerade believed to be a spirit manifest of the ancestors. They are revered and invoked for blessings, favours and good omens.

music and dance is intended to integrate the past, present and anticipated future into the collective expression of the Idoma people.

Odumu music and dance is a cultural attempt to express communal sameness within the context of change. The culture and environment of the Idoma people have changed remarkably owing to factors that bother on colonialism, modernism, agriculture, cultural diffusion among other things. Hence *Odumu* musical performance provides an expressive space for communal 'identification and re-identification'. Changes are evident in the context, composition, costume and other features of the music, but the concept and philosophy remains the same. It is on this basis that this theory of sameness and change, although presented from an individual perspective, forms the foundation on which this research is based.

Findings: The *Odumu* in Idoma Fauna

Odumu is an Idoma word for hyena, one of the wild animals which formerly inhabited the geographical area now known as Idoma land. Ecologically, the entirety of the geographical area occupied by the Idoma people in Benue lies within the savannah vegetation of the middle belt area of Nigeria. This area was an ideal habitat for hyenas and other animals such as gorillas, baboons and snakes, which they (the Idoma) perceived as unfriendly co-habitants. For the animals that were not classified as extremely harmful based on the level of danger they could pose to humans by way of attacks, some of them are seen as constituting economic risks because of their destructive impact on farms. The hyena in particular was said to attack both humans and domestic animals, thereby making night time, solitary walks, and breeding of domestic animals dangerous. Contending with such animals in the open savannah became a new battlefront for a people seeking to escape the wars and upheavals in the Kwararafa kingdom. Creating an atmosphere for survival and establishing a built environment required that steps be taken to mitigate all factors that could negate these ambitions. This quest for safety and survival underlay the constant campaign against animals such as the hyena and others. Unfortunately, the impact of this survival campaign and hunting games is the extinction of some of these animals in the area, which is rather regrettable. However, the continuous performance of this music and dance is indicative of the people's quest to re-

enact their history by identifying with it as well as re-state their collective socio-cultural and environmental identity.

Odumu music and dance

Odumu is a fast-paced dance music which is portrayed and perceived as a musical group dominated by men. This is not unconnected with the visible display of ferocity and agility of the hyena, as well as the exercise of masculine energy in the dance. However, membership is open to women who may wish to identify with the group. Although in the past membership was exclusively for middle-aged men and women, teenagers and young adults form the strength of *Odumu* dance groups today while some elders serve as caretakers. This generational shift in membership is largely attributable to a growing interest among the younger generation to demonstrate their physical ability in performing the energetic and demanding dance. Furthermore, it is a collective effort by both older and younger members of the community to prevent the dance from becoming extinct. Therefore, the elders support the growing interest of teenagers in the dance, serving as mentors, guardians, and spiritual leaders. Obotu in Ugboju is known for *Odumu* music and dance where it is believed that every member of that community is a natural *Odumu* dancer.

Admission of new members into the group is devoid of any special ritual. Rather, all new members undergo the process known as *Ọyekwu oche*[3]. This is a pre-condition for becoming a member of the *Odumu* group. Aside from the registration process, new members must acquire cloth wrappers that form part of the dancer's costume for performance. The general (non-targeted) and natural training process that exists in communities where *Odumu* dance music is popular is learning by imitation. When *Odumu* groups rehearse, it is common to see children watch with keen interest and dance along as well. In their play groups, such children are often observed to imitate the adults by dancing together, simulating drum rhythms with their mouths. This has been instrumental in creating passion for the dance and the necessary early induction that prepares the children for future participation. However, guided training begins when a new member formally performs *Ọyekwu oche,* qualifying the new member for mentoring

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[3] *Ọyekwu oche* is the act of registering new members, which involve paying a requisite token fee of two hundred naira [NGN 200 ≈ USD $0.60, or about 15% of an average Nigerian daily income].

as a dancer or instrumentalist in the group. Guided training usually takes place during rehearsals, where a new member's dance skills are polished and prepared to become a qualified *Odumu* performer.

Costume, musical instruments and other performance paraphernalia are derived from cultural resources within the immediate environment. Whereas the dancers tie a piece of wrapper around their waist during the performance, the dance leader and a few others perform with a white ram's mane tied to their wrists in reference to domestic animals in the environment. Beside this, the dancer is costumed in a spotted dark brown material, with a tail representing the hyena. The instruments bear no special social-cultural significance in the performance, rather than that they are part of Idoma musical instrument resources.

Only membranophone and idiophone instruments are associated with *Odumu* music performance. These are three single-membrane drums (one *okwulaga* and two *uba*), a slit drum, and a metal gong. The *okwulaga* is an outstanding drum employed in *Odumu* dance music. It has a comparatively long wooden barrel of about 32 inches in length, but possesses a smaller membrane diameter of about 26 inches.

Figure 1. *Okwulaga* drum standing on its open end (Personal archive, 2008)

The wooden barrel of the drum is made from log of wood or tree trunk (Vidal, 2012: 48). It is a single membrane drum which serves as the master drum whenever it is played along with the *uba* drums.

Although o*kwulaga* is the most prominent instrument in an *Odumu* ensemble which produces a domineering sound above the other drums, it is low-pitched. It is played by a drummer who sits on the wooden frame and strikes the drum membrane with his two palms. As master instrument, it produces different rhythmic patterns to dialogue with and communicate instructions from the master instrumentalist to other instruments and dancers, thereby directing the performance. Therefore, the *Okwulaga* observes moments of rest at intervals usually to allow a dancer take his position on stage. Once the dancer is on stage, the master instrument begins its series of rhythmic patterns to guide the dancer. At moments of rest, the master instrument plays single notes that occur on the first beat of the bar. The following are examples of *Okwulaga* basic rhythmic themes which are varied and developed into different patterns.

Score 1: A brief *okwulaga* rhythmic excerpt played in consort of other instruments to accompany *odumu* dance.

The *uba* is structurally different from the *okwulaga,* although they both share similar playing techniques. The *uba* is a single membrane, cylindrical-framed drum played with bare hands too. Similar to the *okwulaga,* the drummer sits on the wooden frame during performance. The wooden frame of the smaller *uba* is about 9 inches long while the membrane is about 32 inches in diameter. Similarly, the wooden frame of the larger *uba* is about 12 inches long and 39 inches in diameter.

Figure 2. A set of five *uba* (single-headed membrane drums (Personal archive, 2008)

The high-pitched drums which are particularly used to direct dance steps in the absence of *okwulaga* are referred to as *ọb'uba* (male drum) while the low-pitched ones, are called *ẹn'uba* (mother drum). The mother drums are usually larger in size than the male drums. In instances where the master drummer performs on two *uba* drums simultaneously, he combines the mother drum with the male drum. The other drums play unvaried rhythmic patterns, which provide textural support and strength for the master drum.

Odumu dance also makes use of single or double, small clapper-less bells known as *oke*. The player strikes the bell either with a stick or metallic object. The bell provides a regulatory rhythm within which all other instruments find their reference and timing as to when and where to weave their parts in and out of the performance. Owing to the fast tempo of the music, the bell plays single notes on each beat of a simple compound time. The metallic sound from the bell is often sharp and clear for all the performers to hear.

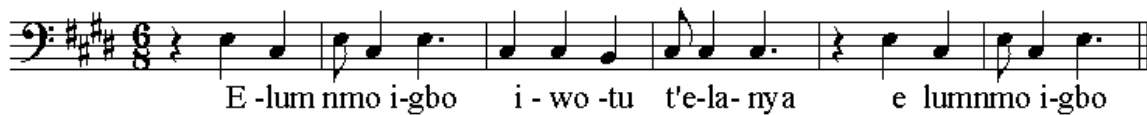**Figure 3.** *Oke* (Hand-held double bell) (Personal archive, 2008)

The other major idiophone instrument is the slit drum, known as *agidigbe* in Idoma. According to Vidal (2012: 47), it is made from a dried tree trunk, with its inner content dug out and designed to have two openings known as the lips which produce two distinct tones (Figure 4). Although musical groups like *Odumu* make use of *agidigbe* in their performances, it is the most prominent instrument of the *Ibo* dance group. Apart from musical use, it is also used for sending coded messages within and between communities.

Figure 4. An *Agidigbe* (slit drum) and an *okwulaga* lying beside. (Personal archive, 2008)

Odumu dance musicians and performers prioritize instrumental music over songs in their performances. Arguably, this is because the music is intended to accompany vigorous

dances by members of the group and any member of the audience who wishes to dance. Therefore, singing is intended to keep non-dancers engaged in a form of vocal response to the dance and an impetus for the dancer. Furthermore, the songs attest to the fact their preoccupation with dancing does not make them oblivious to social happenings in society, as the songs make very clear (though brief) social commentaries. Such songs are often short and buit of two phrases, characterised by a cantor's call which may or may not be repeated by the chorus as response. In Music Example 2 below, the cantor's part is devoid of textual variation as observed in other Idoma songs like *Ichicha* and *Aja*. Rather, the call and response between the cantor and the chorus repeats the same musical material presented below throughout the singing.

Score 2. This is a short song titled "Elum nmo" sang by Odumu dancers at the interment of a late member.

Odumu songs texts dwell more on themes of nature and love than death even during funeral occasions. The song most frequently sung by *Odumu* that dwells on death is *Iyọla l'ọy' odumu nmo* where the cantor's call differs from the chorus response. The song describes the death of a member of the group (*oy' odumu* – hyena's cub) as being overwhelmed with sleep, while the response rhetorically answers that 'sleep is sweet, death; sleep is sweet, death.' As stated above, every member of the Obotu community is believed to be an *odumu* dancer, hence, culturally, every adult member of the community is deemed qualified to have the music performed at their burial. This explains the expression *oy'odumu* (hyena's cub) in the burial song. However, owing to the encroachment of modernity and the choice of other non-traditional (particularly Christianity and Islam) belief systems, some members of the community choose to be recognized and accorded a non-member status in the scheme of things in the community.

Performance Context and Structure

As non-ritual dance music, *Odumu* is performed during annual *Ej'Alekwu* festivals as well as other social occasions. However, its performance during burial ceremonies is restricted to burials of members of the musical group and the king. Owing to the unique

manner in which the group handles performances during the funerals of deceased members, the discussion on performance context will focus on funeral contexts.

Whenever a member of an *Odumu* dance group dies and the group is invited to perform at the funeral, the family of the deceased is required to send a formal message to the group, informing them of the death of their member and the need for them to perform at the funeral. The same process is followed when an elder in the community known to have associated with *Odumu* during his lifetime died. If the masked dancer is to perform with the group, the bereaved family must present a live goat to the group, as it is believed that hyenas come to human settlements primarily to snatch animals. Instances of featuring the *Odumu* masquerade in a performance is highly esteemed, therefore requires providing the symbolic bait for *Odumu* (hyena) in form of a live goat. At such instance, all the group dancers must be adorned in a uniform costume. Where the family meets this demand for *Odumu* performance, the group promptly dispatches *Ukpokwu* (Figure 5) to the deceased's compound in the evening of the wake where he gives a shout, then places a broken tree branch on the roof of the house where the body is laid. This signifies the group's readiness to perform at the wake. The firing of any type of gun is prohibited from the moment *Odumu* musical instruments begin to play in preparation for performance. If this should happen, the *Odumu* performance is automatically terminated. This is predicated on the belief that whenever a hyena comes out, men shoot to kill it, and hyenas naturally flee from gunshots. But where the family of the deceased is able to present only food and drinks to the group without the live goat, the group would still perform but without the masquerade.

Figure 5. *Ukpoku* masked dancer (Personal archive, 2008)

Odumu performances are structured in three sections: *Inspection* or *pre-performance*, *performance*, and *closing stage.* The *inspection* or *pre-performance stage* begins when the instrumentalists start the music for the dance. This ushers in the *Ukpokwu* who runs into the open stage with a shout and a whip in his hand to enforce crowd control. He charges from one end of the stage to the other, forcing spectators to create enough space for the performance. This done, the *Ukpokwu* exits the stage while the lead dancer runs into the stage and performs a solo dance, to enable him inspect the performance arena/stage and the preparedness of the instrumentalists. He dances alone for some seconds, usually facing the instrumentalists, and then runs off the stage. This marks the end of the *inspection* or *pre-performance stage.* While the instrumentalists continue their music, a short interval is allowed before the second section begins.

The second stage of *Odumu* dance performance, the *performance stage,* begins with the *Ukpokwu* running into the dancing arena again, shouting and threatening spectators with his whip in order to enforce the boundaries earlier marked out for the dance. The dancers then enter the arena in a single file, led by the dance leader, followed by the masked dancer and finally the remaining dancers. Thereafter, they proceed to form a semi-circle

opposite the instrumentalists and begin dancing simultaneously, following which they change into a single line formation beside the instrumentalists, allowing individual dancers to enter the stage to perform one after

Figure 6. An *Odumu* dancer engaged in a solo dance while others watch (Personal archive, 2008)

the other. However, the masked dancer is the star attraction because he is always the best dancer. Apart from solo dance by the dancers, two dancers could also perform simultaneously, usually facing one another. The *Odumu* masked dancer represents the hyena while the lead dancer and a few other members tie a ram's mane on their wrists to symbolize domestic animals.

The last part of the performance is the *closing stage.* This involves all the dancers re-entering the stage and performing together in a semi-circular formation. The dance leader then leads the group off the stage while the instrumentalists continue their music until the *Ukpokwu* exits the stage also.

The high points of *Odumu* performance at burials are always during the all-night wake, and the morning following the wake when the group performs its final funeral rite for its late member. This final funeral rite usually begins as the group accompanies the body to its final resting place singing the following song:

Score 3. This song titled "Iyola" is one of the short songs commonly sang by *Odumu* dancers during interment of a late group member.

After the body is finally interred and the grave covered, a member of the group pours *oblukutu*[4] on the grave, upon which the leader stands with a single-headed drum which he tucks under his arm and beats with the other hand while group members dance round the grave. Pouring *oblukutu* on the grave indicates the last drink shared with the dead while standing on the grave and dancing round it represents *Odumu* burying its dead. This last rite is not accompanied by the energetic and fast-paced dance normally associated with the group.

Discussion of findings: Dance of culture-nature story

At the level of socio-cultural representation and significance, *Odumu* music and dance could be analysed from wider perspectives. The music with its associated dance tells the story of a people as well as representing a musical culture that embraces the whole spectrum of their expressive life. It captures the way in which the people have related to their environment in the past and how that is translated into their constant cultural expression. Hence, celebrating the conquest of hyenas does not just tell the story of subduing an animal species, but is a narrative about other animals that had co-inhabited the environment with them in the past. Every performance of the music reminds the Idoma that he/she descends from a lineage of ancestors who had interacted with diverse wild animals that may not be commonly seen in their environment at the moment. The philosophy underlying the music and dance is reflected in different forms in the performance. Prohibition of gun shots during *Odumu* performance points to the fact that hyenas were not spared in the environment. Consequently, the most potent weapon believed to deter the hyena is the gun. Therefore, every shooting of gun at such instance

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[4] *Oblukutu* is a local alcoholic drink, brewed from sorghum. It is a standard requirement at most Idoma traditional occasions. It is a common drink among other ethnic groups in Nigeria such as the Tiv, Gbagi, Birom, and Ngas, among others.

is an indicative of spotting a hyena which must be killed or deterred from attacking any human or domestic animal in the community. But, since the hyena is represented therein by a masked dancer, such gun shots are interpreted as symbolic threats to him and expression of rejection of the performance. This explains why gunshots are prohibited when *Odumu* performs be it at burials or any other occasion. In practice, underlying the dance is the cultural philosophy of non-accommodation of any factor that threatens the survival of the people. This could be the survival of their agricultural, social or spiritual practices, an individual, or the whole group. Hence, defence of the culture and community becomes a moral responsibility resting on every adult in the community.

The conquest of the hyena demonstrates the safety and security of the Idoma man, his family, and his domestic animals. A man's security determines his success and wealth in the society. Therefore, the security and safety of a man, his family and possessions have direct bearing on his social standing in the society. In the face of recent wave of attacks on some Idoma settlements by killer herdsmen and "unknown gunmen", the dance rally the people to rise in defence of the land and their family, reminding them that no foe is unconquerable.

The dance is vigorous and energetic, requiring strength and stamina. Although portrayed as a men's musical group, women are not prohibited from being members, neither are women who are non-members barred from joining in the dance if they wish. The vigorous and energetic display of stamina is a demonstration of the Idoma man's pride in his physical strength. Similarly, the subjugation and conquest of the wild is a demonstration of psychological, social, and physical strength. Idoma culture abhors laziness and sloth because of the resultant vices and unwholesome dependence such life breeds. As an agrarian people, their survival and social security depend on every member's hard work and productivity through physical strength. Further still, besides funeral occasions for adults adjudged worthy to be honoured with *Odumu* burial rite, the performance of *Odumu* at different social occasions epitomizes Idoma philosophy that conquest leads to celebration, which naturally gives birth to entertainment. Therefore, every performance is an occasion for entertainment.

The continual performance of *Odumu* music and dance is a re-enactment of culture and collective identity. The performance projects music and dance as entertainment with the

goal of educating and refreshing the memories of the audience on historical heritage and ecological realities. This is socially significant, considering the fact that it strengthens communal bond and common heritage among members of the community. Connecting human society and nature is obligatory for better environmental realities. However, contemporary arts must seek to situate itself within the broader benefits of society beyond just entertainment. This should warn on the consequences of human actions on both society and surrounding nature. While *odumu* (hyena) may be a familiar animal term among the Idoma people, most of the people have never seen one, because hyenas no longer exist within their physical environment. Also, society's need to constantly induct the younger generation into their cultures makes performances of this kind imperative.

Implications of *Odumu* performance on environmental sustainability in Idoma

Presently, climate change and diverse human activities have adversely affected the natural habitat that originally provided a home to animals such as the hyena around the environment inhabited by the Idoma people. According to Djomo et al (2021:1851), studies have shown that the average temperature in Nigeria has climbed to 31.83 Celsius in 2010 from 26.74 Celsius in the 18th century. Generally, this is attributed to global warming, whose impact is noticeable all around the globe. Rising temperatures naturally affect the biodiversity of a given environment. In Nigeria, the Guinea and Sahel savannah zones are experiencing environmental changes that include desert encroachment, deforestation, irregular rainfall patterns among others (Nwalem, 2015:7). Interestingly, Idoma land lies between the tropical rain forest zone of southern Nigeria and the savannah zone of northern Nigeria. This zone, therefore, provided a home for several animals such as hyena, monkey, baboon, gorilla, fox etc in the past. In fact, in Adoka district (an Idoma district that shares a common boundary with the Ugboju people), some villages are named after the natural habitat of some wild animals that once dwelt there in the past. Examples are *Og'odumu* (a literal translation is hyena's hole) and *Okp'aflo* (gorilla stream). These support the claim that there was a balanced existence of wild animals in this area in not too distant past. However, these animals are no longer found within this geographical area. Factors that are primarily responsible for this development are direct consequences of human activities, which include excessive killing of wild animals by local hunters as source of income, and destruction of the animals' natural

habitat owing to agricultural activities, expansion of human built spaces as well as commercial logging.

The destruction of the natural ecology of this geographical area is a disaster, having a negative impact on the entire life cycle of the environment. Therefore, deliberate efforts must be put into helping the environment recover. This requires providing the locals with some level of environmental advocacy or education aimed at enlisting them into working to save and conserve all that inhabit their environment. Such advocacy should enlighten them on alternative sources of income as well as protein sources which the animals formerly provided for them. Creating a safe haven for the animals is capable of helping the animals build back their population reasonably within a given period. Finally, effective legislations and government support for protecting the environment from indiscriminate human encroachment is urgently needed.

Conclusion

Idoma historians have frequently investigated and told Idoma history without exploring other aspects of the culture that mirror their existence. Idoma music and dance do not tell of a people's performative art only, but also their environment and its interface with their existence and identity. This include the bio-features of the environment, such as animals that are believed to have had an effect on their survival, animals and aquatic lives that have become extinct on account of human activities, plants that define their agricultural and medicinal life among others. Therefore, Idoma music and dance transport the people on a historical journey to their past as well as appreciate their environment. These are captured in musical texts, instruments, performances, and costumes, which provide strong evidences of their history. Beyond the undisputable cultural benefits of these performances to the Idoma people, their representation and identification must be pictured correctly especially as encapsulated in their music and dance. *Odumu* music and dance provide a sonic statement within the broader historical narrative of the Idoma people and their environment which, hitherto, have not been explored. This suggests, therefore, that understanding the ecological space of the mid-central area of Nigeria through the music of the indigenous inhabitants of the area would be essential to a better reconstruction of their history as well as ameliorating their ecological challenges.

Musical performance has remained a primary medium for expression among the Idoma in Nigeria. Beyond the surface, there lie deeper meanings and implications of music and dance performances among the Idoma and Africans in general. Every performance either tells a story of a distant or recent past, re-enacts an event, supplicates a deity, communicates with ancestor, or passes information. Although modernity has eroded many musical types among the people especially such music as have ritual and traditional religious bias, there are still other types that are of immense cultural significance. Their performances are critical to cultural preservation and sustenance, requiring that necessary interventions be made where required in order to strengthen them.

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