Music and Sustainability of Peace: An Appraisal of Selected Yorùbá Traditional Songs

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Abstract

Yorùbá culture has music as a fundamental motivator in communal development projects, war, attendance to dispute, conventional gathering, exigent meeting, and peace maintenance and so on. Presently, attention is gradually shifting focus from the obtainable mediation and impartation of traditional music towards popular urban culture. This calls for a re-evaluation in order to preserve and make the best of the embedded impact of traditional musical contents. Hence, the study sets out to identify the possible potency of Yorùbá traditional songs as a means of peace advancement and to ascertain the status of its usage for peace social stability in contemporary dispensation. Anchored on functionalism and communicative theories, the research used Yorùbá traditional song repertory, and bibliographic modes of enquiry to achieve its set goals. The result shows that Yorùbá traditional music for peace advancement is in three dimensions, namely peace conservative songs, peace recovery songs and peace conceptual songs. There are also traditional songs for ritual peace advocacy. The paper concludes that traditional repertory is convincingly potent in the maintenance of peace culture in the Yorùbá context. It facilitates communication, though it is currently being underutilized.
KEYWORDS: Peace, Conflict, Traditional Music, Yorùbá songs, Yorùbá people

Introduction
For the purpose of this study, research activities were limited to Yorùbá traditional songs, these songs are very common to every sub-division within the Yorùbá nation. However, it is practically impossible to have any community totally void of conflict, there must, hence, be a channel to restore peace at any instance of conflict and to also provide balance for continual sustenance of peace culture. To the aforementioned, Nigeria is not excluded from such experience (Ekwueme et al 2013). It is, therefore, in the view of this assertion that the research into Yorùbá traditional music (peace songs) seems to be a natural antidote to conflicts among Africans. Furthermore, charity, they say begins at home and according to Yorùbá tradition, the use of traditional music for peace advancement is a means of employing indigenous methods in tackling our internal fracas before engaging other alien (foreign) approaches to mend any of those problems.

Significantly, indigenous music is efficiently capable of reducing violence in the Nigerian society in the sense that it contains elements that can enlighten the populace on the humanistic aesthetics of peaceful coexistence of the society. Among traditional African communities, music making is closely related to and recognized or seen as a social activity that fosters and reinforces communal unity. Indigenous music in Africa is still being transmitted orally from generation to generation. Evidence from various field works revealed that it plays powerful roles that go beyond words. It enables meanings to be shared with great appealing mode to the public. It is embedded with multidimensional coded meanings which make the music a typical means of identification for the Africans.

It is, in fact, no longer news that Africans have their culture mostly preserved in oral tradition, most of which were concealed in their arts such
as poetry, music, religion and arts. Hence, traditional music possesses great potentials in the protection and restoration of peace among the Africans. This includes settling of all sorts of conflicts, wars, disagreements, inter-boundary disputes, pro-ethnic clashes employing African media and wealth of oratory prowess. This goes along with the application of her arts one of which traditional music plays a major role. Such valuable quality of traditional music should never be swept under the carpet but to be given a proper attention and status in order to protect and preserve African heritage in the first place and secondly to realize the objective of African traditional music in finding lasting solution to disputes, disagreements, war and violent clashes.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Adedeji’s functional theory as expressed in Adedeji and Omosilade (2018) and Daramola’s communicative theory (2010). Adedeji (2018) functionalism theory postulated that

music possesses both anabolic (constructive or creative) and catabolic (destructive) roles of functions. The anabolic role of music aids in the creation of a positive mindset being entrenched in the listeners, hence making them better citizens. The catabolic function of music on the other hand, is believed to be responsible for the creation of various vices in the society”.

The above implies that music has both creative and destructive potentials. Barenboim (2006) equally affirms that music potency is so powerful, touching man from all sides.

Daramola’s communicative theory (2010) hypothesised that “musical instruments (music) is a medium through which information is communicated to the society among the traditional Yorùbá people”. This
means that, whichever work music is going to play in society, it must first and foremost communicate to its audience. This translates that there must be contact between man and music before it can impart.

Literature Review
There have been so much theoretical projections into peace and conflicts resolutions, though majority are from sociological perspectives, only a few were propelled from musicological ground. This was noted by Craig (2010) that

while many music departments were beginning to look at cultural theory and sociology and how they might incorporate these disciplines, they still remained secondary considerations. Music departments did not seem to be exploring the wider social meaning of music, which I began to feel, was crucial in order to understand how music might assist in conflict situations.

From the aforementioned, there is yet much less focus on music and conflict resolution. This in otherwords is to state that less is being done to ascertain and explore the sociological power of music. The above notwithstanding, there are a number of existing studies which have focused on sociological theoretical frame-works that lead to conflicts resolution or peace advancement. Ideas from such scholarly studies could be applied to music and peace resolutions. A very cogent example of such study is Bercovitch (1984). He projected three methods of conflict resolution. These, in his view, include use of violence and coercion, negotiation, or third party intervention. However, his projections left music out as a veritable tool in peace negotiation and conflict resolution. Music could have been a useful tool in peace-conflict negotiation. These studies that have really contributed to the relationship between music and conflict resolution or peace sustenance involve Barenboim (2006), Craig (2010), Born (2010), Ekwueme et

Affirmatively, Craig (2010) opined that ‘music did seem to have some traceable reflexive influence on group cultural identities that could theoretically be included in a conflict transformation scenario. Music could be used to remove enmity between two warring people. This is Barenboim’s position while discussing the formation of an orchestra that combined equal number of Arabs and Israeli. Performing together in the orchestra brought about interactions which could, if continued, provide the desired peace among the people. This music escapade should be replicated among Africans, especially, among the Yorùbá people. Peace culture or conflict resolution could be empowered through the instrumentality of Yorùbá songs. Odunuga (2013) delved into music education as it could be used to reposition the mind for a peaceful coexistence in the face of world conflict and especially the Nigerian situation. However, the discourse is based majorly on music education while the efficacy of Yorùbá traditional music was not addressed in the write-up which is the basis for this present research. Okpala (2015) presented traditional Igbo folk songs as part and parcel of Igbo culture. Furthermore, he opined that Igbo folk music is capable of moulding character, its lyrics can assuage loneliness or incite passion, and that Igbo music is a powerful agent of peace which is a pathway to both rural and national development. The discourse however was limited to Igbo music hence the need for this research on its Yorùbá counterpart as findings may be harnessed towards building a nationalistic platform for peace in Nigeria. Ndoma, Offiong, Davina, Juliet and Florence (2016) analysed the lyrics of selected popular music artistes in Nigeria with respect to peace building. These artistes are Sunny Okosun, Sir Victor Uwaifor and Onyeka Onwenu. Song lyrics input to peace building were highlighted through lyrical construct. Yet, the discourse did not include traditional Yorùbá songs with reference to peace building, hence the need for this paper. Oke (2019) discussed extensively on the Yorùbá and Roman
political institutions for conflict resolution strategies in pursuit of peaceful environment. He argued that these institutions can ameliorate conflicts without necessarily going to the modern day judicial courts. He also lamented the deterioration of these traditional institutions with regards to peace mediation in the contemporary era. Above all, the discourse did not, however, relay the influence and impact of music on peace fostering especially among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria.

The aforementioned set of studies have examined the capacity of music to bring about peace and to resolve conflict in a broader terrain yet not in the direction of ‘traditional music’ which is thus the subject matter in this paper. Craig’s (2010) remarks that music did seem to have some traceable reflexive influence on group cultural identities that could theoretically be included in a conflict transformation scenario’. A vivid understanding of the assertion above draws attention to the use of traditional music to uphold the aesthetic values of any society. This will resultantly bring about a peaceful co-existence as an offshoot of traditional music. Piekut (2014) observes ‘that music is a special, and exemplary, case for investigating matters of social theory’. The provision of these special features is predominant in Yorùbá traditional music.

**Peace versus Conflict Scenarios**

There cannot be the need for the pursuit of something that is readily available. The social status of the Nigerian communities is of a great concern especially now that there are a lot of societal upheavals. This is obvious when we look at the Nigerian society today with the level of crime and conflicts ravaging every nook and cranny of the country. In the very recent past (18th and early 19th centuries), the Yorùbá people could boast of a better community, in terms of peace and conflict resolution. The story, however, is now a different one compared with the situation today. Many factors may be responsible. In the period earlier mentioned, traditional music was of great help. This is owing to the fact that the people were
constantly in contact with the bulk of traditional repertoire available. The lyrics thus did the magic. This is an area where Daramola’s theory of communication comes to play. Contact with music leads to communication before it could either make (anabolic) or mar (catabolic) the recipients – a central argument of Adedeji’s functionality theory. When the communal life becomes unpalatable under whatever condition; it simply means the existing peace has been interrupted. Yorùbá people generally understand the concept of peace hence their popular parlance ‘ogunòdàbíiyán, ogunò dàbiàmàlà, ogunò dàbíkásùnn’aralóòdèeni’ which literally translates that ‘war/conflict is not like pounded yam, it is unlike steamed yam powder and it is never like sleeping peacefully in one’s home.’ This is a clear statement that underscores any form of precipitation that does not encourage peace. Traditionally among the Yorùbá, when the people are aggrieved or when they are experiencing cracks capable of disrupting the existing peace, they begin to sensitize the people who are meant to bring about the desired solution by singing around the streets, display of various kinds of leafs as a signal to prevent such looming conflict or disruption of existing peace.

This practice is done with the use of symbolic elements called àrokò (Dáramólá, 2010). Peace is therefore, relative within every society and it depends solely on basic set beliefs, ethics, religious practices and general values. Above these, activities of individuals are expected to conform in order to avoid a chaotic co-existence within the community. Peace and conflicts are antonyms of human relations and interactions. Furthermore, ‘Peace is a concept of societal friendship and harmony in the absence of hostility and violence. In a social sense, peace is commonly used to mean lack of conflicts (such as war) and freedom from fear of violence between individuals or heterogeneous (relatively foreign or distinct) groups’ (Peace 2019). Naturally, every human society cannot be totally void of conflict. Similarly, Yorùbá communities do find themselves in various conflicts. Dáramólá (2010) noticed the evidence of conflicts among the Yorùbá people of Africa he, therefore, affirmed that
When an àrokò contains an option, the receiver may opt for the positive or the negative and prepare for the consequence(s) of his choice. For example, if two groups of people are quarrelling, one of the groups may send an àrokòof èṣù-iboṣ (gun powder) in a container and iyò (salt) in another with both items wrapped together in a sack. The choice of gun-powder by the receiving group implies that the group has opted for war while the choice of salt implies that the group opts for peace. On the other hand, the sending of gun- powder only implies that the receiving group has no choice but to prepare for war.

Hence there is always a proffered solution to such difficult or unimpressive situations among which music is not lacking. Music among Yorùbá is grossly inseparable in their day to day activities (Oluniyi 2016). It forms an important aspect of living from birth to death; music is everything. Consequently, there is music to solicit and restore peace among the Yorùbá in general. Music in African context involves a great blend of songs, instrumental accompaniments and dance and it is oftentimes intended for a purpose. Music rarely exists for its sake among Africans generally and the Yorùbá are not an exception. Music thus plays one role or the other among which may include but not limited to communication, creativity, education, entertainment and corrective roles. In the corrective role capacity of African rendition, music as a veritable for settling conflicts and advocate for peace and tranquillity. To this discovery Nketia (1974) attested that

The treatment of the song as a form of speech utterance arises not only from stylistic consideration or from consciousness of the analogous features of speech and music; it is also inspired by the importance of the song as an avenue of verbal communication, a medium for creative verbal expression.
which can reflect both personal and social experiences. Accordingly, the themes of songs tend to centre around events and matters of common interest and concern to the members of a community or the social group within it.

Consequently, themes of Yorùbá musical repertoire will surely concentrate on peace whenever there is any form of conflict, be it intra-communal or inter-communal. Such musical context may be officially organized or staged by some interest groups depending on which side is agitating for peace. The potency of music in the pursuit of peace cannot be overestimated. It is a powerful tool that has developed in the core traditions of Africans in general and the Yorùbá people in particular.

**Traditional Sacred (Ritual) Music as Peace Advocate**

Looking at communal peace among Yorùbá people is as important as any other issue. When the community experienced a graceful season, it is interpreted as a peaceful era. When this changes, it is equally described as ‘not-peaceful’. To secure and maintain the former, traditional ritual music is often employed to appease the gods in a special request to grant them peace in the community. The granting of this request genders to a peaceful environment. This kind of request involves everything that can contribute to a peaceful living of the members of the society such as good farm yield in the year, safe deliveries of pregnant women, progress in infrastructural development and promote sales in the village/town market, the required amount of rainfall to promote good farm produce, moderate sunshine, prevention of untimely death, longevity for the king and chiefs and security against attacks from enemies to mention but a few.

Such music may be kept from the uninitiated while some are available for every interested member of the community. However, performance context meant for initiates only would not overrule its existence. To this practice, Smith in Vidal (2012) postulates on how traditional music is performed to
appease the gods for “a prosperous journey, fair weather, a good crop, or whatever else they want”. The collective spirit of purpose behind such musical performance can be convincingly described as crucial for peace, thus being traditional ritual music, they are meant to project peace from the metaphysical realm for the community as a whole.

**Traditional secular music as peace advocate**
This involves the total collection of local songs which are genuinely traditional and native to the Nigerian people, the Yorùbá most especially. Music evokes, it has power (Barenboim, 2006) and it is functional (Adedeji, 2018). It is capable of sending or communicating to various individuals (Daramola, 2010). Obviously, traditional music is performed by singing and it is guided by the context of the milieu. These songs were discovered to be in use in three ways. These are thus described as ‘conservative songs’, ‘recovery songs’ and ‘conceptual songs’.

**Peace Conservative Songs**
The conservative songs are intended to protect and preserve the existing peace among the people or between few individuals beginning from two or as many that may be connected to or with certain issues. The performance context may differ from place to place, and between groups. Yet the notion behind the rendition of such songs is to keep alive the existing peace among the affected fellows. Renditions may come in a persuasive manner, as an advice and sometimes as a strict warning hoping to avert a looming breakdown of peace among factions within the society. Below are few examples of traditional songs that portrayed the spirit of preserving the existing peace in the community.
Song 1

Oro yi a d’ariwot’è o ba jawo  
[This issue will result into chaos if you refuse to retreat]

The above song is simply warning a defaulting section or people to desist from their action as it is capable truncating the existing peace in the community. In a similar spirit is the verse that is always sung as follows

“Oro yi a d’ogunnit’è o ba ja’wo”  
[This issue will result into war if you refuse to retreat]

Other traditional song that portend, the destruction of the existing communal peace is

Highlighted below

Song 2

E máf’òtèba ‘huntódárajéò  
[Let not conspiracy destroy that which is good]

E máf’òtèba ‘huntódárajéò  
[Let not conspiracy destroy that which is good]

T’óbá lo bàjékònísunwòn  
[Destroying it is not palatable]

T’óbá lo bàjékònísunwòn  
[Destroying it is not palatable]

E máf’òtè o é éé  
[Let not conspiracy, I mean]

E máf’òtèba ‘huntódárajé  
[Let not conspiracy destroy that which is good]
The above song, according to its usage in the traditional Yorùbá setting, is simply sounding a serious warning to the people to desist from unethical actions. It portrays a preservative spirit in a warning style. This song is usually rendered before things get out of control thereby of preserving the existing peace within the community.

**Peace Recovery Songs**

These are series of songs rendered to halt ugly developments which are directly or indirectly anti-peace movements. Its context may be formal or informal though the latter is often applicable within Yorùbá settings. Such renditions are intended to bring to an end any kind of imbroglio(s) that is/are already in place hence its description as ‘recovery’. Recovery songs sought to reinstall peace that has eluded the community, attributes and features that are evidently available in the text of such songs. Below are few samples of traditional songs that exist in the capacity of recovery works.
Song 3
Call – Ore la o ma se [Friendship we shall embrace]
Res – Ore la o ma se [Friendship we shall embrace]
Call – Awa o jamo o [We shall fight no more]
All – Ore la o ma se [Friendship we shall embrace]

The above song is always the rendition to seek an end to chaotic situation in the community.

Peace Conceptual Songs
These are sets of traditional songs that have the capacity to nurture and instil values and character in children and adults in the African society. They portray the exalted values of Yorùbá indigenous way of life by means of the content of their lyrics. Ordinarily, a child will be indoctrinated by the aggregate of all he/she has been exposed to in life; therefore these songs are always a valuable tool to constructively nurture a Nigerian child for the expected character and inter personal relationship that is needed to sustain the peace of our community. These songs are therefore meant to
conceptualize virtues that could uphold peace existence within the community.

Below are few examples of conceptual songs

**Song 5**
Eyinomode e ma s’afojudi o, [O! ye children never be
………………] 
afojudi o on j’eniyanniya o [……. Causes unpredictable sufferings]

The above song is simply to warn or teach children to desist from any anti-civic behaviour as it leads to great punishment within the society. It is actually a very sound way to naturally create peace culture peaceful character in every child.

**Song 6**
Aare npe o Olondifa [The general calls you and you are 
consulting the oracle]
T’ifaba fore tare fobinko [what if the general speaks negative though the oracle says right]
This is simply suggesting a life without suspicions. When you are upright in all things you do not have to be troubled whenever you are sent for or needed at a public place. It is rather better to live a peaceful life rather than living a life full of suspicions.

**Song 7**

L’áyéOlúgbón’mogé ‘borùnméje[During the reigns of Olúgbón I bought seven shoulder muffler]

E ò ma sèwélórín [Write this as a song]

L’áyéArèsà‘modá ‘borùnméfà[During the reigns of Arèsà I bought six shoulder muffler]

E ò ma sèwélórín [Please write this as a song]

L’áyéÀfònjá’moraKókó‘mor’Arán\(^5\) [During the reigns of Àfònjá I bought Kókó, Aran]

Mora Sányán baba asoàf’òle[And I bought Sányán the king among fabrics except for the lazy ones]

Lolèpé ‘lèyiòdùnkókérùkógb’oko lo [that can say the era was not good and I guess they should pack and go to the village instead]
This is a song that teaches how to work hard in every season. The lyrics reveal that you can make something out of every dispensation come what may. It was presented in the song that during the Olúgbónera something was achieved, likewise in Arèsà period and even during Àfònjá period – a period characterised by war and clashes, the best was achieved except for the lazy – Af’ole. This is to clarify that with all sense of commitment, one can achieve much in any period.

**Song 8**

Iseagben’iseilewa       [Agriculture is our native occupation]
Enikosisayo ma ja’le    [He who does no work will sure steal]
Iwekiko, laisioko, atiada [Schooling without hoes and cutlasses]
Koi pe o, Koi pe o       [is incomplete and incomplete]
The above is a song that deals with children’s psyche to prepare themselves for a dutiful future. It explicate that despite the western education, one still requires the indigenous occupation which is farming. Most important emphasis in the song is the part that says ‘eni ko sisie yo ma j’ale’ i.e. he who would not work will resort to stealing. This a song for a lasting and true peace construct as its meaning is embedded. It encourages children and everyone to be gainfully engaged to avoid becoming a nuisance in the community.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

As it has been discovered in the course of this research work, traditional songs are of various usages precisely among the Yorùbá people. Yorùbá traditional peace songs are highly potent in the sense that it is capable of building the society for peaceful co-existence, it is capable of promoting the development and maintenance of peace culture among individuals or groups (social, religious or cultural groups), and that traditional music facilitates communication which goes beyond words and it enables meanings to be shared among people. Furthermore, traditional music is at
present underutilized both at the rural and urban settings. Youths among the Yorùbá race are not familiar with both the lyrics and tune of many traditional songs, hence its underutilisation in the present dispensation. The usage of traditional music for peace advancement is gradually tending towards extinction. This is partly because the songs are not constantly used in everyday activities as necessary and there are no official platforms to actually showcase its rich contents.

However, traditional music could only become a veritable tool for peace resolution only if given the required attention, recognition and usage. Let every traditional institution rise in profuse usage of traditional songs. This will bring unprecedented results by creating citizenship that is very close to and familiar with their own very traditions and moreso, culture, ethics and values would be instilled and preserved. To further enhance the dividends, the academia needs to solicit for use of traditional music both in writings and performances and finally, government should create an enabling environment, recognition and patronage for traditional music both in schools and within the general populace. These will surely usher in a new era, a better society void of fraud, immoral practices and nonchalant attitudes.

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