



The Modernity of Songs: A Semiotic Adventure among the Ibibio of Nigeria

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Abstract

The assumption within traditional music domains has been the tenacity of songs despite widespread changes in both the context and ritual process and performance. This article examines how songs within the Ibibio of Nigeria have been construed, reconstructed, and practised in modern society. The focus is on the musical and cultural value of specific songs, their context, and how meaningful interpretations are generated and communicated. While the study highlights cross-cultural interconnectedness and relationships through songs across different cultural milieus, it argues that songs have continued to undergo varying degrees of transformation in most traditional African societies. The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork among Ibibio communities and develops through analyses of selected songs to highlight their relevance as cultural heritage in modern society.

Keywords: Songs, Modernity, Ibibio, Semiotics, Identity



Introduction

When William Bascom and Melville Herskovits edited the book *Continuity and Change in African Culture* (1959), they explicitly stated that their work was written from an anthropological standpoint. This standpoint became construed, reconstructed, and later developed into the field we now call ethnomusicology. Alan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), in its profound reconstruction, indicated that "ethnomusicology is approachable from two directions, the anthropological and the musicological" (1964, vii). Within the musicological, which subsists as an ethno-musicological reconstruction, two approaches are considered important in this article. The first is "found in the frequently expressed fear that the music of the 'folk' is fast disappearing and that it must be recorded and studied before it is gone" (p. 6). While the fears for the disappearance (extinction) of the music of the 'folk' seem germane, there is implied a failure to consider the inevitability of change. In contrast, there is a general assumption that music (or songs) is the most tenacious aspect of modern society, which raises concerns similar to those of Bascom & Herskovits in *Continuity and Change in African Culture* (1959). The second approach considers 'music as a means of communication which can be used to further world understanding'. In this way, Merriam (1964, p. 15) indicates that "Music is interrelated with the rest of culture; it can and does shape, strengthen, and channel social, political, economic, linguistic, religious, and other kinds of behaviour. Song texts reveal many things about a society." Song, in this context, is construed as music¹ or *ikwø*(song) is simply music.

Merriam's assertion foreshadows music as a neglected means of communication within a culture and song texts as a cultural indicator. While music and song are used interchangeably, the general assumption is that songs communicate within a given music community. It is somewhat contradictory because the song's communication is established through the investiture of music with figurative meanings tacitly agreed upon by community members. In other words, songs assume semiotic gestures within specific cultures, meaning some meanings are hidden or coded. In this article, the two approaches to ethnomusicology have been considered. The former is geared toward preserving songs, and the latter is how they communicate.

The general assumption within traditional music domains has been the tenacity of songs despite widespread changes in both the context or ritual process and performance. This article thus examines how songs in the Ibibio culture of Nigeria have been construed, reconstructed, and practised in modern society. The focus is on the musical and cultural value of specific songs, their context, and how meaningful interpretations are generated and communicated. While the study highlights cross-cultural interconnectedness and relationships through songs across different cultural milieus, it argues that songs have continued to undergo varying degrees of transformation in most traditional African societies. In this

¹The notion that music is song and song is music, is discussed in Suzanne K. Langer, 'The Principle of Assimilation', in *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner, 1953), p. 152.



ethnomusicological research, both primary and secondary sources of information have been used. Primary data were gathered through unstructured interviews with *Uta* music groups among the Ibibio people of Nigeria, during which songs were recorded. After being subjected to laboratory techniques, including transcription and analysis, the recorded songs have been integrated into this work. Moreover, other literary materials that engage with Ibibio songs, including contextual and extramusical perspectives, have contributed to the article's semiotic adventure.

Several studies on the music of the Ibibio people have been conducted; the most notable is the pioneering work of Professor Samuel Ekpe Akpabot. His book, *Form, Function and Style in African Music* (1998), examined the broader issues of formal structure, which can be seen to have a common denominator across African music. Although Akpabot, in one of the chapters: "Structure and Social Function" (1998, p.10), concentrated on general issues in African music rather than the specifics as exemplified in the Ibibio music, he pointed out that it is more rewarding to examine cultural tradition and structure side by side to find out *how* a piece of music is put together and *why* it is so conceived. Meanwhile, the book has contributed a comparative perspective on African music, highlighting the unique attributes of Ibibio music, particularly by discussing various anthropological perspectives on traditional music groups and other musical practices within the Ibibio culture of Nigeria. Although no part of this very useful material discusses songs and their semiotic gestures within Ibibio culture, its chapter on the 'Tune and Text' is unparalleled in its description of songs, song categories, and functions, which have been useful to this study with specific updates reflecting cultural changes.

Of importance to this article are Robert Kwami's *Songs from the Akwalbom and Cross River States of Nigeria* (1992) and Emaeyak Sylvanus' *Performing ethnicity in Nollywood filmmusic: the power of texted music* (2018). While Kwami's study categorised Ibibio song practices into songs for babies, children, adolescents, and adults, he indicated that the content and subject matter of the selected songs showed, relatively (directly or indirectly), the general African storytelling tradition (Kwami, 1992). Inadvertently, Robert Kwami's focus did not include the semiotic implications of the songs he highlighted. In this way, the current study highlights its stance that songs have semiotic implications that should be decoded and interpreted.

Remarkably, Emaeyak Sylvanus highlighted the power of text music in Nollywood films, noting that 'the use of texted music is Nollywood's conscious effort to orchestrate ethnicity through the adoption of local Nigerian languages (Igbo, Ibibio) and Pidgin English. Interestingly, as summarised in the study: "Nollywood texted film music presents its audience with an opportunity to rediscover and connect with Nigerian (ethnic) cultures of embedded musical arts practices (song, instrumentation and dance) and languages" (Sylvanus, 2018, p. 107). Sylvanus' study decodes songs in the modern society through the film, *Ekaette Goes to School* (2014), which enacts a reconstruction to revitalise cultural memory, including showcasing the musicality of the past in the present, ethnic relationship between the Igbo and Ibibio, and



the semiotic relationships – “the construction and performance of ethnicity through the interconnected and narrativized relationship of texted music and the moving image” (Ibid.).

Sylvanus’s study provides a decoding modality for this article by illustrating its priming gesture within the semiotic purview of what he calls *prefiguring* (Sylvanus, 2019). Thus, modernity in songs may not constitute new interpretations but rather a re-reading of songs as signs, and an examination of how their communicative values become modern in semiotic discourse. The need to assess songs in this way vis-à-vis reengagement with traditional music models in modern society is borne out of the emergent trajectory of safeguarding African cultural heritage. As Samuel Akpabot suggested, there is a need in African Music to foster closer relationships with African traditional musicians and, through structural analysis based on evidence from primary sources, to reassess some of the theories and conclusions commonly associated with African music (Akpabot, 1986, p. 79). This means new and modernist approaches to African musicological studies have emerged to challenge earlier Eurocentric ethno-musicological perspectives, for example, where ‘music as art’² is now being contrasted with ‘music for life,’ mostly couched in terms of decolonisation.

The Nature Songs in the Ibibio Culture of Nigeria

Among the Ibibio of Nigeria, songs play an auspicious role in individuals’ lives, constituting part of the life cycle in various rites of passage in society. As Akpabot (1998) has described, the Ibibio melodies are either ritual or non-ritual in conception and are produced by singers and instrumentation. According to him,

African instrumental melody in many instances derives from, and makes use of folk tunes; to fully understand the nature of an indigenous instrument melody, we must take another look at the principle of speech and speech rhythm. Many African folk tunes grow out of the melody formed by the speech inflection of the words of a song. This inflection, which corresponds to the high, low, and sometimes medium tones of African languages, and the stress placed on certain words in a sentence, controls the interval of the notes of a melody and dictates its rhythm (Akpabot, 1986, pp. 79–80).

This shows that songs emerge from both vocal and instrumental activities, drawing on logogenic and pathogenic sources. The logogenic (word-born) nature of Ibibio songs is the direct result of speech known as speech melodies, whereas the pathogenic (emotion-born) songs emerge spontaneously depending on the event or activity. Ibibio songs in a traditional context provide models for scales and harmonisation.

² Music as art is a deliberate, aesthetic pursuit focused on technique, expression, and performance. Music as art emphasises the aesthetic creation, an abstraction, composition, and technical mastery. Music as life treats sound as a functional expression of lived experiences, an ever-present organic element of existence, serving healing, cultural bonding, and communication. Music as life emphasises the organic, emotional, and social function of sound.



For example, in the excerpt of the Ibibio lullaby, there are four tones derived from the pitch inventory between the call and the response parts (Music Example 1).

Call: E-yen o, e-yen o, e-yen o! E-yen dop u-yo uka a-ka i-nwang

Response: O o o, nsi-nam even? O o o, nsi-nam

Music Example 1: *Eyen DopUyo* (Baby, stop crying)

Another example presents a similar narrative, in which the scale is derived from the melody.

Call: Se 'bod I - fia - yong ko. Se 'bod I - fia - yong ko.

Response: E - wad_ e - sin. E - wad_ e - sin.

Music Example 2: *Ewad Esin* (Row the boat ashore)

In Music Example 2, three scale tones are derived from the pitch inventories of the two parts. The two examples showcase the call-and-response pattern, along with several other common forms of vocal music in a traditional context, including solo and chorus alternations, solo and chorused refrains, and solo and chorus alternations with estimation accompaniment. Most danceable songs are short and repetitive, while others are long, story-oriented, and are categorised as musical storytelling.

Agu (2024) prescribes that the call-and-response vocal techniques are based on antiphonal exchange between the soloist (leader) and the chorus (congregation or members of the performing group). It is essential to attest that, in the traditional Ibibio context, music is participatory, with everyone taking part in the musical activity. In this society, musical activity is an integral and functioning part of society, a feature that music shares with other aesthetic aspects of the culture in gaining a semiotic orientation. It is worth reiterating that Ibibio songs are a mixture of responsorial forms essentially. The general form for the chain of songs is bi-cyclic (i.e., a song must be sung twice to complete its full cycle). The songs' mood is reflective and poetic, and they are meant to be interpreted in the context of performance. In a chain song, transitional devices such as vocal or instrumental cues are used to move from one movement or section to another.

As in all sub-Saharan traditions, singing is emphasised because songs are used as an avenue of communication. Because many African languages are 'tone languages,' in which pitch level determines meaning, the melodies and rhythms of songs generally follow the intonation contour and rhythms of the song texts. Melodies are usually organised into scales of four, five, six, or seven tones. In group singing,



some groups habitually sing in unison or in parallel octaves, with occasional fourths or fifths; others sing in two or three parts, using parallel thirds or fourths.

The Modernity of Songs – In and Between Change and Continuity

The notion that songs are modern, or that modernity is embedded in songs in the traditional context, raises probing questions. What is a song? What exactly is modern about songs in the Ibibio culture, particularly in oral traditions, and how is their modernity expressed in parlance such as sustainability, safeguard, or revival through various transitions and transformations? To attempt to answer these questions, there is a caveat: songs in modern Ibibio society are pluralistic, having been caught up in modern semiotic adventure, and cannot be limited to a single context. Songs, according to Ugoo-Okonkwo & Erhiegeke (2025), are 'artistic expressions and a form of storytelling, social connectors and emotional outlets: they have the capacity to evoke emotions, communicate messages and bring people together'(p.82). A song can be defined as "a genre in which words and music coexist, sometimes vying for prominence, mutually transforming each other, complementing each other, and often leaving a conceptually or phenomenally dissonant residue" (Agawu, 2009, p. 17). This definition provides a symbolic perspective or an eclectic orientation to view the notion of song in modernistic terms. For instance, the phenomenology of music examines the human experience of sound and explores *how* we perceive, feel, and make sense of music (De Souza, Steege, & Wiskus, eds., 2024).

To view songs from different genres and media, including film music in Nigeria, means to characterise how the Ibibio modern society engages directly and indirectly with semiotic gestures. At the semiotic level, songs are signs. The traditional definition of a sign is "something that stands for something else" (Chandler, 2022, p. 13). For this reason, songs are, on the one hand, signs of a culture's symbolism. On the other hand, language is a (predominantly) symbolic sign system, and it is widely seen as the pre-eminent symbolic form. It means Ibibio songs must necessarily be approached at the level of musical language domesticated in various 'genres' and 'music types' and their interpretations enacted within a reasonable level of critical language. A song is an amalgam of words-and-music or language-and-music, which leads to a fusion of text-and-music, using 'text' to register an interpretative move from a bounded or closed 'work' (a poem) to an open, process-oriented and irreducibly plural 'text' (see Agawu 1992). As a plural text, songs build resilience in transformations that ordinarily would have been impossible.

The symbolic attributes of signs are usually understood to be *intended* to communicate something. This means that the intended meanings of songs are not intuitively obvious: understanding symbolic signs depends wholly on our familiarity with the relevant conventions (without which they may fail to signify or be misinterpreted). For example, while conducting fieldwork with Uta musicians, I was curious about how new songs emerge in the modern sense. My interlocutor said the lead singers are expected to compose *ufaikwo* (new songs), while other members are free to compose songs and bring them for acceptance, thereby constantly building their musical repertory. The implication shows that both the lead singers and



other members of the groups are familiar with the relevant conventions. Invariably, the procedure for musical creativity was not chance-driven, as the music routinely follows three sequences: *usiakikwo* (musical cogitation), *udomoikwo* (evaluation of the tune), and *ufaikwo* (acceptability and contextualisation of the performance situation). Nzewi accepts this 'not-by-chance' ideology, saying that

No traditional African music composition or performance, which is reckoned with as of cultural integrity, happened by chance. There is a definitive, creative intention, creative design and structural idiomatic content to validate a music product as an acceptable cultural achievement (Nzewi, 1997, p. 3).

Onyeji (2002, p. 31) provides a similar tripartite creative process in *Abigbo* performance among the Igbo, like that of *Uta* music, but the third process involves choosing the most appropriate tune. In *Uta* music, the selection process is determined by the song's text and its suitability to the performance situation. The main function of songs is to express shared feelings and to construct the joint activities of members of the community; therefore, it is expected that the content of the song should be social rather than individual, normative rather than. As Lomax (1968, p. 7) confirms, "a song style is the recurrent juxtaposition of a set of such qualitative formulas, which define the precise limits for what the culture accepts as its musical representation." The underlying thesis is that songs operate in the semiotic realm as text, a plural text, and are open to eclectic interpretation, having been constructed by cultural symbols.

My first modernistic example of song is illustrated in what Sylvanus (2019) calls *prefiguring*, an indigenous creativity and narrative tool in Nigerian cinema. Sylvanus describes how the soundtrack of the film *Ekaette Goes to School* (2014) employs songs that blend the characteristics of two musical genres: Nigerian folk and highlife. While the film employs different songs, Song A, as Sylvanus explains, "uses a four-note melodic motif that is essentially a text-tune correlation of the name Ekaette. ... this motif consists of a repeated tone that leaps a perfect fourth and falls a major second" (2019, p. 171). The name Ekaette (mother of the father) conjures a plurality of interpretations among the Ibibio people when juxtaposed with the notion that the song has three pitches, "all three pitches and resulting intervals seem [are arguably a] part of the broader musical scale of the local *oja* (wooden transverse flute)" (Sylvanus, 2018, p. 97). The Ibibio-Igbo binary is symbolic in the anthropological-musicological drive of the semiotic signification.

Modernity in this song is not a repetition of the past using existing folksong, but an instantiated adventure, itself, an imagined derivative of the rise and fall of tones within the 'plural text', Ekaette, that correlated with a semiotic strategy, where song A "simulates a traditional (ethnic) groove that is evocative of Igbo and Ibibio folk music." (Ibid. p. 98). However, the nascent modernity in the song becomes symbolic, explicitly employed through a digitised local instrument that mimics the *oja* (in constructing a dyadic two-



way sign-object relation framework between the *signifier* and *signified*³ and wooden hand clappers to accompany the singing voice. Emaeyak Sylvanus argues that “this approach is aesthetically instructive, not least because it attempts to aurally orchestrate and, therefore, situate the geographical setting of the plot from the outset” (p. 172). This means the song, its melodic and rhythmic aspects, the musical instrument, and its digitised mode are signs (signifiers) that signify the plot (the culture).

Another modern example is Samuel Akpabot’s *Three Nigerian Dances for String Orchestra and Percussion*, published by Oxford University Press in 1977. The musical excerpt below illustrates Akpabot’s Ibibio musical source in its context and function, as exemplified in the third movement of *Three Nigerian Dances for String Orchestra and Percussion*. This kind of modernity is couched in terms of appropriation, in which songs undergo a transformation from oral to written form. The emergence of African art music has continued to grow in symbolic importance, exerting a global presence. Agawu (2016) observes that “Art music nowadays receives more performances outside Africa than within Africa. Perhaps this was inevitable given that the very tradition of written works for a contemplating, nonparticipating audience was a European practice in the first place. African art music began as unabashed mimicry of this practice” (p. 311).



Music Example 3: *Etiene mi* (Follow me)

The concern here is with the communication between the source ‘text’ and its global connectivity, which orchestrates a contemplating, non-participating audience. By using melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic elements inspired by traditional Nigerian and Highlife idioms and formal schemes akin to African and Western procedures, Akpabot was courting popularity (Omojola, 1995). The semiotic implication of the modern is highlighted at varying distances from the source (in Music Example 3), not least because it serves a symbolic end in bimusicality; it draws listeners to explore traditional and modern idioms as a contorted expression of Africanness.

³The signifier-signified binary is the foundational concept of semiotics. It explains that every ‘sign’ (understood as a unit of meaning) is made of two inseparable parts: signifier and signified. A signifier represents the physical, observable form of the sign (e.g., a written word, a sound, a photograph, or a color), where as the signified refers to the mental concept, idea, or meaning that the signifier brings to mind. In other words, a signified is the concept that a signifier refers to. Together, the signifier and signified make up the sign: the smallest unit of meaning. For example, the ‘green’ and red lights at a traffic point are signifiers; they signify ‘go’ and ‘stop’ respectively. In traditional societies, music is the signifier while culture is the signified. This is generally indicated in the notion that ‘music is a microcosm of society’.



Analysis of Selected Ibibio Song Texts –A Semiotic Adventure

In this section, four songs have been selected from *Uta* music⁴ as a representation of the repertoire of Ibibio traditional music, with the intention of highlighting various signs (as signifier and signified) and how to interpret them. A semiotic adventure with these songs is predicated on familiarity with the categorisation of songs: historical, social control, insult, obscene, praise, children's, funeral, work, war, humorous, communication, ritual, philosophical, and women's, etc.

Ayara Ndukpo

Uta (Ibibio) Folksong Transcribed by Ukeme Udoh

Music Example 4: *AyaraNdukpo*(Masculine Hawk)

AyaraNdukpo

Ns'inuenika ado?

AyaraNdukpo

Edem ate nkang.

Masculine Hawk

What kind of bird passes there?

Male Hawk

His back is as black as charcoal.

Music Example 4 is a philosophical song of social control. The song explores a satirical implication, using an animal (a bird or a hawk) as a signifier to describe human behaviour and activities as the signified. There are already several African folktales about the Hawk and its habit of wrecking the innocent homes of the mother hen in the Ibibio culture. This is just one such implied usage, symbolic in its meaning, in

⁴Uta music was a symbolic dance music used during the funeral rites of an old woman or the music of *Usen MkpAkanawan* (Udoh, 2006; Udoh, 2012). The use of *Uta* music today has been dominated by maleness, although the songs have not changed remarkably (see Udoh, 2017).



which masculinity is signified. The identity of the signified is veiled, not least because the defaulter seems to enjoy a reasonable level of immunity within the community. However, the notion that 'his back is as black as charcoal' contributes an iconic feature to the personification. The song texts reveal a kind of social relations of power (between maleness and femaleness in precolonial society), especially social inequalities that have been generated or legitimised in postcolonial Ibibio society, both explicitly and implicitly.

Udo Akpan Udo

Uta (Ibibio) Folksong Transcribe by Ukeme Udoh

U - do Akpan U-do Obong i - no, iya-ke ndu-kpo aso-ro K'u- ten, U - do Akpan U-do Obong i- no,

iya-ke ndu-kpo 'so - ro k'u-ten.

U - do Akpan U- do Obong i - no, iya-ke ndu-kpo

aso-ro K'u- ten, U - do Akpan U- do Obong i - no, iya-ke ndu-kpo 'so - ro k'u-ten.

Music Example 5: *UdoAkpanUdo*

UdoAkpanUdo

*Udo Akpan Udo, Obongino;
Iyake Ndu kpoasoro k'uten.*

Udo Akpan Udo

Udo Akpan Udo, chief among thieves;
Does not allow the hawk to perch on a young palm tree.

The literary interpretation of this song provides a more aggressive approach to antisocial behaviour than the "Ayara Ndukpo" above. Udo Akpan Udo signifies specificity, hence the person's full name. Symbolic in its portrayal of how the Ibibio people responded to thieves, the song embodies and contextualises the social oddity of thieves, where nobody enjoys the luxury of rest in the community, including the hawk. As a protest song in the Ibibio tradition, the Uta music group serves as an agent of



mass communication. The text “*Iyake Ndu kpoasoro k’uten*”, as Maeder & Rey Brouck (2015) explain, shows that “Many other meanings are possible in function of different situations and pragmatic contexts” (p. 10).

Udo Abasi

Uta (Ibibio) Folksong Transcribed by Ukeme Udoh

O - wo s'i-kwo-ho udo a-ba- sio, Nya-kwo ndo-mo nse, O - wo s'i-kwo-ho udo a-ba - sio, Nya-kwo
 ndo - mo nse,
 O - wo s'i - kwo - ho udo a - ba - sio, Nya - kwo
 ndo - mo nse, O - wo s'i - kwo - ho udo a - ba - sio, Nya - kwo ndo - mo nse,

Music Example 6: *UdoAbasi (Second son of God)*

Udo Abasi

Owois'ikwoho Udo Abasi

Nyakwondomonse.

UdoAbasi

No one sings (criticises) UdoAbasi

I will sing about him and see what happens.

Etuk (2002) avers that the name Udo Abasi (Second-son of God) is given to the Priest of Eka Abasi, a dreaded Ibibio deity that is responsible for possessing infants at birth, causing havoc to their parents from birth. Such children, if not taken for proper sacrifice and appeasement to Eka Abasi, will die and continue coming back until the deity is appeased. Priests to deities in the Ibibio culture are people of sound moral rectitude. However, when they exhibit their ‘human frailties’, Uta does not spare them. Of course, singing about their unacceptable behaviour could be dangerous, since everyone would require their services if one’s child is attacked by Eka Abasi.⁵ In modern characterisation, Akpan Abasi (First-son

⁵ Eka-Abasi, a most dreaded spirit which allegedly sends sickness to torment babies and snatch them away at noon time when their mothers are not attending. Also, if child proved to be a thorn in the flesh of the mother, he or she might be described as an *eyen eka-abasi* (literally, the child of the mother-goddess), suggesting thereby that the child was not a normal child but one sent to torment its parent.



of God) is signified (in Jesus Christ), particularly in gospel songs, while Udo Abasi has metamorphosed into Udo Obot (Literally, second-son of the Creator) interpreted as the Police.

Owo Isimaha Uta

Uta (Ibibio) Folksong Transcribed by Ukeme Udoh

O - wo'i-s'i-ma-ha Uta O,___ U-ta anie kwo 'wo, O - wo is'i-ma-ha Uta O,___ U-ta anie

8

Kwo Owo.

O - wo'i - s'i - ma - ha Uta O,___ U - ta anie kwo 'wo, O -

13

wo is'i - ma - ha Uta O,___ U - ta anie Kwo Owo.

Music Example 7: *OwolsimahaUta*(No one Loves Uta)

People do not love *Uta* because *Uta* sings (criticises) people. This song constructs *Uta*'s role in the community, especially in criticism. The idea that people hate criticism, especially in a public arena, is construed metaphorically and taken to mean that people hate songs. When songs assume cultural principles of checks and balances, their symbol of truth is often detested. But the reality is that such interpretation and communication draw society toward shared meanings, shared beliefs, and a sense of familiarity, and toward the need to preserve cultural models despite modern changes.

Conclusion

The general concept of this paper was to draw attention to how modern engagements have created diverse relationships between songs and their interpretations. The modernity of song texts in Ibibio music reflects intrinsic elements, especially socio-cultural expressions, and how meaningful interpretations are generated and communicated through a semiotic adventure. Nketia (1974, p. 76) argues that songs provide an avenue for verbal communication and serve as a medium for creative expression, reflecting both personal and social experience. Such experiences have been identified through familiarity with semiotic realities – codes and signs, what they signify and their signifiers. The main takeaway of this article is that understanding semiotics as the theory of signs and communication prompts us to develop analytical



strategies that can cope with the complexity of language and music, as well as with plural texts, as discussed in this paper.

The expression of modernity is an essential characteristic of songs, in the personal construct of art–music compositions (expressing a particular group’s philosophy) and in social experience (expressing the communal or collective philosophy of a culture). As illustrated, the texts of Uta songs possess essential dual elements, including masculinity and femininity, communicated through various codes and signs. While songs of social control are usually topical and appropriate to the Ibibio community, as shown in the analysis, they serve either to praise or to abuse, designed to regulate the social order of the community's members. Thus, communication, as a complex, multimedia phenomenon, does not rely solely on language as a closed system, be it musical or linguistic, but encompasses several other dimensions, and exploring such semiotic systems can provide greater insight into how songs are modern and how they can be interpreted.

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