

TRADITIONAL MUSICIANS AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Historically, traditional musicians in Africa, including Nigeria, have played a significant role in societal development and social integration. They serve as custodians of culture, moral commentators, and the voice of their communities. Through their song lyrics and texts, they promote peace, unity, patriotism, and communal responsibility, thereby fostering social cohesion. This paper examines the contributions of selected traditional musicians in Nigeria to social integration through textual analysis of their song lyrics. The study employs the lyrics and texts of selected traditional musicians as its primary source of data, while relevant literature, audio recordings (MP3s), and internet-based materials constitute the secondary sources. The study aims to document the contributions of selected Nigerian traditional musicians to social integration and to demonstrate how their lyrical content promotes shared values and collective identity. Analysis of two Urhobo traditional songs reveals how traditional musicians employ lyrical narratives to cultivate collective consciousness, reinforce communal values, and counter social disintegration. The findings further indicate that the works of many Nigerian traditional musicians remain undocumented despite their significant contributions to nation-building and cultural preservation. The paper therefore recommends the systematic documentation and archiving of traditional musicians' lyrics and texts as part of Nigeria's and Africa's cultural heritage, while advocating for greater institutional support, including state-funded archival initiatives, to preserve these musical resources as instruments for promoting social cohesion.

Keywords: Social Integration, Traditional Musicians, Lyrics/Texts, Contributions, Community

Introduction

Music is known worldwide as a symbol of national identity. It is a major cultural and systematic symbol. Music is a source of cultural understanding and a site for cultural exchange. As a multimodal activity that invites cognitive, emotional, social and physical engagement, music provides an embodied and situated experience that is deeply intertwined with cultural traditional attitudes (Crooke *et al.*, 2023). Traditional musicians in Africa generally and in Nigeria particularly have contributed greatly to social integration of their various communities and the larger society through their music compositions and performances. Composed traditional music lyrics/texts deal with themes that checkmate individuals, groups and institutions in the society. Akporherhe (2023) iterates that every traditional society is endowed with ethno-musical poetry contextually and constantly deployed for promoting cultural heritage, peaceful co-existence, socio-economic and political development of such ethnic nationality. This implies that every society is endowed by traditional musicians who deal with the frank issues of life through ethno-musical poetry. One of these issues is social cohesion. Traditional musicians encourage social cohesion. Social cohesion is the ability to bring together various section of the community under one umbrella though varied in opinions yet being able to unite for the purpose of progress and development of the community. On a broader perspective/spectrum, social cohesion is the ability to bring the different section of the State together as one in order to build and develop the nation.

Statement of the Problem

Okinono (2024) avers that 'historically, human society has been embedded with one form of conflict or order. In addition, Okinono (2024) observes that despite signing a truce for peace, when state and personal interests clash, war and insecurity becomes inevitable. Furthermore, Okinono, (2024) notes that persistent conflict and insecurity are caused by competition for scarce resources. Cultural incompatibility is responsible for the majority of conflict around the world.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual-analytic design. The corpus comprises two purposively selected Urhobo traditional songs, *Ovuovo* by King Enakpodia & Mike Okri and *Egbobo Yen Ozighi* by Lucky Ogharisi, chosen for their explicit thematic focus on unity, peace, and collective identity. Selection criteria: (a) performed in Urhobo language, (b) widely circulated in Delta State via MP3/YouTube, (c) composed post-2010 to reflect contemporary cohesion concerns. Lyrics were transcribed from audio recordings and YouTube videos, then translated into English by the researcher, a native Urhobo speaker, with back-translation checks by a second Urhobo linguist to ensure semantic accuracy. Data were analysed using deductive thematic coding based on

Durkheim's indicators of collective consciousness, shared values, belonging, moral regulation, and Jenson's five dimensions of social cohesion. Each lyrical unit was coded for presence/absence of these indicators and interpreted within the socio-political context of Nigeria's multi-ethnic tensions.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts Emile Durkheim's theory of social integration which states that social bond and shared beliefs (collective consciousness) are essential for a stable and cohesive society (Durkheim, 1897). He argued that the degree to which individuals feel connected to their society and the strength of those connections, significantly impacts social order and individual well-being. Durkheim (1897) viewed social integration as the framework of social attachments that connect individuals to the society. He believed that strong social bonds and shared values are crucial for social order and preventing anomie (a state of normlessness).

Conceptual Framework

Social Integration

Social integration is one of a constellation of "social" terms that is being used widely in contemporary policy development to describe concepts whose aim is to foster societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant, and respect diversity, equality of opportunity and participation of all people. Other terms that often invoked in support of this goal are "social inclusion", "social cohesion" and "social capital" (Jeannotte, 2008). Social Integration is defined as the extent and intensity of the interlinkages among the constituent parts of a social unit, which can range from small groups like families, communities and societies (Wright, 2015).

Social Cohesion

Jeannotte (2008) asserts that the most well-known of the Canadian theorists Professor Jane Jenson of the University of Montreal, outlined five dimensions of social cohesion. In Jenson's framework, the degree of social cohesion in a society can be characterised by where it ranks on the continuum represented by each of the five dimensions (Jenson, 1998) as follows:

Jenson's Five Dimensions of Social Cohesion

Belonging	Isolation
Inclusion	Exclusion
Participation	Non-involvement
Recognition	Rejection
Legitimacy	Illegitimacy

Jeannotte (2008) further states that Paul Bernard, a colleague of Jenson's at the University of Montreal, later suggested that another dimension - equality versus inequality - be added to her framework to make it more complete (Bernard, 1999). Bernard also pointed out that the resulting six dimensions could then be paired, since they represent either conditions promoting social cohesion or substantive societal outcomes of these policies and programs.

Bernard's Formal and Substantive Dimensions of Social Cohesion

Formal	Substantive
Equality / Inequality	Inclusion / Exclusion
Recognition / Rejection	Belonging/Isolation
Legitimacy /Illegitimacy	Participation / Non-involvement

Traditional Musicians

Traditional musicians are musicians of various African or Nigerian origin who explore and communicate to their various communities of ethnicity by using music as the media of communiqué through their spoken dialects/languages understood by their nativity. They are called grassroot adjudicators, reformers, advocates etc. They are part of the people who engage the society through their musical skills. They touch on various communal subjects or topics. Traditional musicians use music to teach the value of social cohesion among the people. Okafor and Okunbor (2024) state that:

In Africa and Nigeria in particular, various traditional music exponents from different geo-political and social-cultural milieu abound. These traditional music writers in Africa and Nigeria respectively employ various music idioms and figures of speech in expressing their views on issues relating to various aspects of the society and happenings within and sometimes outside the communal environment. Some also express in their writing issues bordering on the generality of the society and even beyond geo-political and socio-cultural region using languages decoded by that society (73).

In Igbo society, musicians are identified through the genre they belong to hence there are traditional musicians, highlife musicians, pop musicians, art musicians, folklore minstrel among others (Nwobu, 2019). For

instance, '*Waka*' music is a type of traditional music. '*Waka*' music is a Yoruba genre popularised by Batile Alake from Ijebu and later by Salawa Abeni (Oladejo, 2022). Though primarily associated with the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria, '*Waka*' music also exists in the Hausa tradition of Northern Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria, '*Waka*' music often incorporates themes that promote social cohesion and positive values within the community. '*Waka*' music is explored by artistes like Ferfesan Waka (Sulaiman, A. Tijiani) who uses the genre to address social issues, promote good governance and advocate for positive change within the society. In a broader perspective, this implies that musicians irrespective of geopolitical zoning or geographic locations are identified according to music genre, style and typology including the themes of their message.

Traditional Music and Social Integration/Cohesion

Traditional musicians use their music texts as message to condemn injustice, inequality and promote common good. Okobia (2024) states that:

Common good is seen as that which is shared and beneficial for all members of a given community. The common good refers to all those values and concern which belong to the entire community and not just to a specific group of people or individual and contains values which benefit the generality of all. It contains three essential elements such as (i) respect for the person and his dignity (ii) Social wellbeing and development of communities, and (iii) Peace among men founded on truth, justice, charity and freedom. The idea of common good is opposed to selfish interest, but encourages happiness of all. The ultimate end of the common good is that all or majority enjoy justifiable equal treatment that will promote general wellbeing (136).

Chukwu (2024) affirms that the development of any society, depends largely on the level of peace, love and unity among its inhabitants. The scenario of a once peaceful community where community members cocoon together in the cool of the evening umbrella is destroyed by the terror of the sneering hissing noise of restlessness, driven out of habitats into the harsh weather of uncertainty. Firstly, where there is tribal hegemony in a social-strata, is devoid of social cohesion. It is the nucleus that makes the whole. Every nucleus within the society is an integral part of the bigger society hence if there is social disharmony, national development is invariably affected no matter how minute. Many traditional musicians understand the importance of social integration; of being integrated socially in the fibre of the society hence traditional musicians are in the fore-front of encouraging, teaching and preaching the importance of social harmony. Secondly, Idamoyibo (2021) states that ethnic communities, nations and institutions formulate and express their identities through music, naturally linked to social relationships, conventions and ideological connotations anchored on the values, dreams and aspirations. This implies that music helps to cement social relationships. A healthy social relationship would breed a healthy community, a healthy society and a healthy nation. Thirdly, text used by traditional musicians play a very vital role in achieving social integration. These traditional musicians often use texts that promote unity, love, kindness, humility, while also reproving erring members of their communities - because they know the value of social integration. Ugoji (2021) posits that 'music - an integral part of Nigerian culture, offers a dynamic medium for community expression, identity formation, and emotional communication'. Thus, traditional musicians play crucial role in social integration and social cohesion through song texts and themes. The idea of the common good is amplified in King Enakpodia and Mike Okri song title '*Ovuovo*' as shown in the textual example below:

Ovuovo by King Enakpodia and Mike Okri

We ju'rhubo na dio'vuovo
We ju'rhubo na dio'vuovo
O da dio'wian, jo dio'vuovo
O da dia'chohwu'ko, jo dio'vuovo
Aghari'gho, jo dio'vuovo
Say, let there be love and unity in our midst
Oye, ughe-e
Wo dia diohwo ra'frica
'Vwa vwa gwiobo kU'rhubo
Oye, ughe-e
U de dance oya gbe make you shake body
Oye, ughe-e
Urhobo, Africa, Nigeria (wa dio'vuovo, wa dio'vuovo)
No matter the situation (wa dio'vuovo, wa dio'vuovo)
Festival, na river o (wa dio'vuovo, wa dio'vuovo)
Urhobo, Ovuovo (wa dio'vuovo, wa dio'vuovo)
Ovuovo literally means 'we are one' in this context.

Embedded Video of Ovuovo by King Enakpodia and Mike Okri



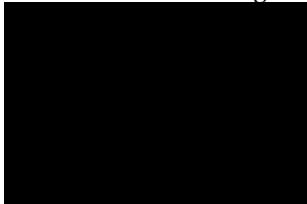
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mg9CoT_sGqI

The second song texts '*Egbobo Yen Ozighi*' by Lucky Ogharisi depicts the consequences of fighting, when individuals or group of individuals feels disconnect from the society, a state of anomie sets in. Lucky Ogharisi understood this concept hence he encouraged peaceful coexistence when he said that 'when an egg is broken with force from the outside, a life ends but when an egg breaks by itself, a life begins, all transformation being from inside. There is need for healing. See song texts below:

Egbobo Yen Ozighi by Lucky Ogharisi

Oyogho, izighi zighi yo'ma rhe-o
Oyogho e, iyagha yagha yo'ma rhe-o
Oyogho, ememera, e ruaye-o wado,
Oyogho, izighi zighi yo'ma o-o
Oyogho, efarhie farhie yo vwi ri rhe
Oyogho, ememera, eruaye, ado ine,
Oyogho, izighi zighi yo'ma rhe-e (o yo'ma-a)
Oyogho, efagha fagha yo'ma rhe-e (oke re'mu da ghwogho)
Oyogho, ememera, e ruaye (odie'mamo ro'de-e-e)
When an egg, is broken, with force, from the outside, a life end;
If an egg break by itself. a life begins;
All transformation, begin from inside
Urhobo me sia'gwarheo-o-o
Iya
Oko ri'Noah-a-a
O gbo'rumuemu-u
Okoka'rhua (Oka-rha)
Ame kporhe-e, udu bre'ri-i
Kidie Oghene-e
Omra'sae'je
Oghwe gbare Urhobo
E - gbo'bo yo'zighi-o ra whrere Urhobo
E - gbo'bo yo'zighi-o ra whrere akpo
Obo ra whrere wharie'mu-u
Ozighi whrere'mu-u
Oo ro'zighi gwhe yan
O vwe'rere re-o
Egbo'bo no'zighi-o ra whrere Urhobo
Egbo'bo no'zighi ra whrere ine
Egbo'bo no'zighi ra whrere akpo na
Obo ra whrere wharie'mu-u
Ozighi wharie'mu-u
Obo ra whrere wharie ga
Egbo'bo yo'zighi ra whrere akpo na

Embedded Video of Egbobo Yen Ozighi by Lucky Ogharisi



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IIGAolRynU>

Social Integration/Cohesion

Social integration will result in social inclusion and thus social cohesion. Therefore, the models by Shookner (2002) and Jeannotte (2008) below can be used as model by policy makers and stakeholders in Nigeria as prototype. The policy of social integration, inclusion and cohesion should start from communal communities, to the state and every geopolitical region in Nigeria.

Elements of a Model of Social Integration (with examples)

Dimension	Level of Need	Formal Investment	Substantive Outcome
Physical	Basic - food, personal security	Agricultural investments, military and justice systems	Adequate nourishment, freedom from fear, lower crime rate
	Enhanced - physical infrastructure	Water and sewer systems, transportation systems, electrical grids, hospitals, public health measures	Clean and functioning communities, healthier populations, easier trade and travel
Natural	Basic - clean air and water	Waste management systems, basic environmental standards	Healthier populations, lower pollution levels
	Enhanced - liveable cities, diverse habitats, beautiful scenery	Waste treatment systems, pollution control and conservation measures, parks, wildlife sanctuaries	Aesthetic enjoyment, robust ecosystems, improved quality of life
Democratic	Basic - human and civil rights	Functioning legislature, impartial judiciary, free press	Equity before the law, voter participation
	Enhanced - economic, social and cultural rights	Social safety net, collective bargaining, education in mother tongue	Social support for the disadvantaged, fair wages, sense of identity
Economic	Basic - employment, adequate income	Labour market standards, minimum wage laws, anti-discrimination laws, access to micro-credit	Lower poverty rates, increased employment
	Enhanced - meaningful work, pensions, savings and investments	Job retraining, employment insurance, accessible banking and investment systems	Labour mobility, high rates of home ownership, equitable income distribution
Human	Basic - primary education	Primary schools, incentives for female education	Increased literacy, higher female education rates
	Enhanced - secondary and postsecondary education	High schools, colleges and universities, advanced research institutes, scholarships for disadvantaged students	Increased number of high school and university graduates, increased innovation and productivity
Social	Basic - family connections	Family policies, adequate housing	Healthier children, fewer single mothers without support
	Enhanced - community connections, civic engagement, volunteering	Social capital investments (e.g. in clubs, professional organisations, sports teams, charities), community development initiatives	Higher volunteer rates, healthier civil society, more mobility across social groups
Cultural	Basic - recognition and respect for identity and culture, basic cultural infrastructure	Employment equity policies, anti-racism policies, language rights, libraries, community centres, broadcasting facilities	Diverse labour-force, linguistic diversity, access to information

	Enhanced - creativity, acceptance and celebration of cultural diversity	Multiculturalism and interculturalism policies, museums, galleries, theatres, recreation facilities, investment in artists and creative industries / districts	Diversity of cultural content supply, high level of intercultural exchange, high level of cultural participation (both active and passive), high number of “creatives” in population, vibrant community cultural life
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Source: Jeannotte, 2008

Jeannotte (2008) states that Social cohesion is based on the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together at all levels of society to achieve collective goals. Therefore, in addition to the models above, traditional musicians in Nigeria should continue in educating the masses and government on the need to pursue and ensue peaceful co-existence among one another.

Findings: Textual Analysis of Urhobo Songs

i. Analysis of Ovuovo by King Enakpodia and Mike Okri

Applying Durkheim’s collective consciousness and Jenson’s five dimensions to Ovuovo reveals how traditional musicians operationalise social integration at the micro-textual level.

a. Belonging vs Isolation: The repeated chorus “We ju’rhubo na dio’vuovo / Urhobo, Africa, Nigeria (wa dio’vuovo)” functions as a linguistic nesting of identities. Durkheim’s “shared beliefs” are enacted by placing ethnic identity Urhobo inside continental Africa and national Nigeria within the same breath. This codes belonging across three levels, countering isolationist ethnic narratives. The phrase “dio’vuovo,” “be united,” is not metaphorical but declarative, constituting what Durkheim calls a “moral fact” that binds listeners.

b. Inclusion vs Exclusion; Moral regulation: The imperative “Say, let there be love and unity in our midst” directly addresses inclusion. The code-switch to English widens the audience beyond Urhobo speakers, signaling that unity is not ethnically exclusive. Durkheim’s “moral regulation” appears in the reproachful subtext: by naming love and unity, the text implies their absence and prescribes them as norms, preventing anomie, the normlessness that Durkheim linked to social disintegration.

c. Participation vs Non-involvement: “U de dance oya gbe make you shake body” invites bodily participation. Music as multimodal engagement turns listeners into co-performers of cohesion. The dance call is not entertainment alone; it is Jenson’s participation dimension embodied, transforming passive reception into collective action.

d. Recognition vs Rejection: “Wo dia diohwo ra’frica / ‘Vwa vwa gwiobo kU’rhubo” translates as “If you are people of Africa / Let us celebrate/clap for Urhobo.” Africa is named before Urhobo, granting pan-African recognition to the ethnic group and demanding Urhobo recognise its place in a larger whole. This counters rejection/“tribal hegemony” which is a threat to cohesion.

e. Legitimacy vs Illegitimacy; Collective effervescence: The festival imagery “Festival, na river o” invokes traditional Urhobo river festivals as legitimate indigenous institutions. Durkheim argued that rituals produce “collective effervescence” that renews social bonds. By citing festival + river, the song legitimises pre-colonial sources of cohesion over divisive post-colonial politics.

In sum, Ovuovo compresses all five of Jenson’s dimensions. The song does not merely describe unity; it performs Durkheimian integration by creating shared symbols, prescribing norms, and ritualising participation. This textual evidence supports the claim that undocumented lyrics are empirical data on grassroots cohesion mechanisms.

ii. Analysis of Egbobo Yen Ozighi by Lucky Ogbarisi

While Ovuovo performs positive integration through collective affirmation, Egbobo Yen Ozighi operationalises Durkheim’s concept of anomie by diagnosing its causes and prescribing indigenous solutions. This encodes Jenson’s dimensions through negative exemplars and moral restoration.

a. Legitimacy vs Illegitimacy; Moral regulation: The central metaphor, “When an egg is broken with force from the outside, a life ends / if an egg break by itself, a life begins,” is a Durkheimian warning against external disruption of social norms. Forced breaking = illegitimacy: violence, ethnic hegemony, and state coercion that shatter community cohesion. Natural breaking = legitimacy: internal transformation grounded in Urhobo moral values. The line “All transformation begin from inside” directly invokes Durkheim’s moral regulation, positioning endogenous cultural ethics as the antidote to anomie.

b. Belonging vs Isolation; Recognition vs Rejection: The refrain “E-gbo’bo yo’zighi-o ra whwere Urhobo /ra whwere akpo” grants recognition to Urhobo culture as a site of universal human value, countering rejection by dominant national narratives. It codes social integration as restorative justice, not just unity.

c. Inclusion vs Exclusion: Unlike Ovuovo’s celebratory inclusion, Egbobo Yen Ozighi is remedial. It addresses a fractured society where exclusion has already caused damage.

d. Participation vs Non-involvement: The Biblical allusion “Okò ri’Noah-a-a,” “The time of Noah,” invokes flood as collective crisis requiring collective action. In Genesis, Noah’s ark demanded participation for survival. By mapping Urhobo society onto Noah’s community, Ogharisi reframes healing as active, communal labor, not passive hope.

e. Collective consciousness vs Anomie: Where Ovuovo declares achieved consciousness, Egbobo diagnoses its absence. Repetitive breaking = anomie, the normlessness Durkheim identified as fatal to societies. The song’s structure, problem metaphor → Biblical analogy → healing prescription, mirrors Durkheim’s remedy: re-establish shared values to rebuild collective consciousness.

Comparative summary

Ovuovo and Egbobo Yen Ozighi function as a dialectic. Ovuovo models successful integration; Egbobo warns against disintegration. Together they satisfy all five of Jenson’s dimensions and demonstrate Durkheim’s full arc from collective consciousness to anomie to moral restoration. This paired analysis justifies the paper’s policy claim: archiving must capture both celebratory and cautionary lyrics to document the full indigenous mechanism of cohesion.

Conclusion

Crooke *et al.* (2023) submit that “routes to encourage social cohesion are of great importance in a world that increasingly requires people of many different backgrounds to live together.” Similarly, Sabater (2021), as cited in Okobia (2024), argues that knowing how to live together harmoniously is an essential aspect of human existence, requiring both emotional commitment and rational understanding. Such harmony enables individuals to understand one another better, resolve conflicts more effectively, reach consensus with greater ease, and collectively pursue societal progress. Peaceful coexistence is therefore a fundamental pillar of human life. As inherently social beings, people depend on harmonious relationships for survival, well-being, and sustainable development. Achieving this requires commitment, mutual respect, political will, dialogue, and peace-building initiatives. Social cohesion is founded on the principles of equal rights, equal opportunities, inclusion, and mutual respect regardless of ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status.

Furthermore, Danga (2024) argues that creating an inclusive society by bringing people together under a common banner, despite their differences, and encouraging them to share common values, beliefs, customs, and traditions fosters social harmony and cohesion among diverse groups within a nation. While this perspective highlights the importance of shared values, this paper contends that social cohesion is more sustainably achieved through the recognition and respect of cultural diversity rather than through the imposition of a single communal identity. Empowering individuals and ensuring equal opportunities, while allowing diverse cultural identities to flourish, provide a stronger foundation for lasting social cohesion within Nigerian communities and the nation as a whole. In the same vein, Okinono (2024) emphatically asserts that “among all the requisite necessities for the realisation of sustainable development, peace is without doubt the most essential.”

Without meaningful social integration among Nigeria’s diverse population, social cohesion remains unattainable. Through a textual analysis of *Ovuovo* and *Egbobo Yen Ozighi*, this paper demonstrates that Urhobo traditional musicians encode Durkheim’s concept of collective consciousness alongside Jenson’s five dimensions of social cohesion within their lyrical compositions. These songs promote unity, collective responsibility, mutual respect, and communal identity, thereby serving as indigenous mechanisms for strengthening social bonds and countering social disintegration. Despite their relevance, many of these musical texts remain undocumented beyond digital platforms such as YouTube, limiting their visibility and application in scholarly research and public policy.

The paper therefore argues that systematic documentation, preservation, and state-supported archiving of traditional musicians’ lyrics should be prioritised as an important component of Nigeria’s cultural and social policy. Integrating these indigenous musical texts into national cohesion strategies would provide culturally grounded approaches to peace-building and social integration, thereby complementing existing top-down policy initiatives. Social cohesion is not merely an abstract theoretical construct but a lived social practice continually expressed through traditional musical performance. As captured in the Urhobo refrain *wa dio’vuovo* (“we are one”), these songs embody and reinforce the values of unity and collective identity. Documenting and preserving them is therefore not only an act of cultural conservation but also a strategic investment in the infrastructure of social cohesion.

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