



Endangered Funeral Rites and the Changing Traditions of *Iworoko* Music among the Nembe People of Nigeria

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Abstract

In today's reality and most cultural systems, efforts are made to preserve endangered traditions or local cultural differences within a continuously changing society. Traditional music in the Nigerian context, or in most ethnic cultures, is one that belongs to the past but can be preserved while still alive. This paper examines the changing tradition of funeral rites, which has endangered *Iworoko* Music among the Nembe people of Nigeria. It employs ethnographic methods and provides a cursory examination of the role of music in the funeral rites of the Nembe people, exploring the contemporary relevance of the past in relation to modernity. This study engages with Tansley's theory of the music ecosystem that promotes the life cycle of music as a holistic process toward sustainability. Findings and conclusions show that the original cultural identity is lost as traditional music cultures are abandoned under cultural evolution and transformation within the ecosystem.

Keywords: Endangered Music, Funeral Rites, Nembe, Change, and Sustainability

Introduction

In today's world, everywhere and in most cultural systems, efforts are made to preserve endangered traditions and local cultural differences. Particularly in the Nigerian society, where certain cultures are identified as majority, minority, and minority of the minority, cultural preservation has become a new trend. However, leading ethnomusicologists have warned that preserving cultural forms was not an option but inevitable as society changed (e.g., Blacking 1977; 1987, p. 12; Nettl 1985, pp. 124-127). What this means, in essence, is that the discourse against freezing culture in preservation has shifted to accepting, through revival, "a past that is alive" (Bharucha 1993, p. 15). Traditional music in the Nigerian

context, as in most ethnic cultures, is one of those cultures of the past that can be preserved while they are still alive.

Existing studies have unanimously shown that folk or traditional music is a “significant part of the social, cultural, and religious life of Africa, being effectively employed as an agency for moral, social, religious and general culture education as well as for the negotiation of societal wellbeing” (Onyeji 2006, p. 22). Forchu (2015) buttresses that “The *Igbo* musical aesthetic concept, as is typical in African musical aesthetic practice, [has]...the capability of musical sounds to appeal to and, more importantly, to fulfill expected aesthetic functions in the culture [but] has not been adequately approached, recognized, and utilized” (p. 2). This shows that although traditional music is of the past, they are living agent of the society. But the problem, as Forchu further notes, is that “Since insufficient attention is paid to indigenous African music and its practices in contemporary society, many of its various forms have disappeared” (Ibid.). In this paper, the notion of endangered music is centred on the disappearing music occasioned by the activities of contemporary society, and the Nembe community in context.

Apart from the consensus within indigenous communities that traditional music is a ‘microcosm of the community’, a corporate communal experience whose significance cannot be overemphasised, negative attitudes have recently been associated with its practices and meaning, especially from Christianity. In this article, we examine the traditional burial rites of the Nembe people, whose practices are fast fading away. It is worthy of note that the advent of Christianity, civilisation and acculturation, and other external factors have imposed their practices on the culture and traditions of the people. As Idube (2013, p. 140) has explained, “the African concept of burial has, however, been altered through widespread secularization, urbanization, Christianization and Islamization.” In recent times, the activities of the militants in the Niger Delta area have further altered the concept and sanctity of death and burial rites within the culture especially the music used for its celebrations.

On the contrary, Nzewi (1980) has argued that traditional music has been sustained and has continued to expand and enrich its resources as it crumbles ethnic barriers, incorporating broader geographical communities as it extends its ethnic identity. The problematic turn of this so-called ‘modernity’ to contemporary ways of life is that it has affected past native traditions by privileging dominating and chauvinistic foreign cultures. For example, traditional music is facing gradual extinction, as its endangered dynamics are the result of colonialism (its invasion into Africa) and the advent of Christianity, which placed a ban on expressive and functional cultural traditions (including music) and their usage in the community, identifying them as paganism. With this ban, the traditions of the people suffered a major setback, which has led to the continuous disappearance of musical practices, as Christianity and technological innovation are gaining ascendancy. As Philip Bohlman has contended, “Rather than expressing concern over the disappearance of folk music, it [internal cultural system] preferred to see change as normative and creative’ (1998: xiv), a model of cultural revolution, thus contributing to endangering traditional practices in the guise of modernity. What is the solution? What kind of intervention will suffice?

We are taking a cursory look at the role of music in the funeral rites of the Nembe people of Nigeria, examining the new (present) from the old (past) and their contemporary relevance vis-a-vis modernity. Being an ethnographic study, we relied on information from aged men who willingly shared their knowledge and experiences with the first author about

the practices of *Iworoko* Funeral Rites. This was done in the wake of institutional changes that have continued to grow across Africa, especially from within, endangering music and other oral traditions whose relevance has not only been jettisoned but questioned or even blackmailed within modern society. The argument here is that the song texts of these funeral rites have the societal ethos, guiding beliefs and philosophy of the people embedded in them. Unlike other rites of passage (naming, initiation, marriage, etc.), the focus on funeral rites is grounded in its practices as a living heritage of the people and possessing the capacity to command a wide range of cultural participation within and outside the specificity of the community. This, Nzewi has described “a communion between the living and their dead, [that] manifest in the preference for the cryptic potencies of inherited ancient instruments, costumery, symbols and formulae” (Nzewi 1980, p. 6), This implies that funeral or burial rites represent a symbiosis – a communion in assembling both the living and dead members of the community. In this context, we can identify the music of funeral rites as ‘communion music.’ This assemblage can also be set in context with the music ecosystem.

Theoretical Framework — Ecosystems of Music

According to Tansley (1935), the theory of the music ecosystem is defined as

the whole system, including not only a specific music genre, but also the complex of factors defining the genesis, development and sustainability of the surrounding music culture in the widest sense, including (but not limited to) the role of individuals, communities, values and attitudes, learning processes, contexts for making music, infrastructure and organisations, rights and regulations, diaspora and travel, media and the music industry (cited in Schippers 2015, 137).

Notably, the composite nature of the system shows ‘Individual musicians, instrument makers, communities, educators, the music industry, opinion leaders, and public authorities are among the direct actors, while not only the physical environment and climate, but also war, discrimination, and disease are among the indirect forces in such ecosystems’ (Schippers 2015, p. 136). In this context, we adopt the music ecosystem to imply overtly or covertly to the holism and plethora of practices identified within the complex arena of traditional music among the Nembe communities and their chain interrelationships to our modern society. Thus, the concept of music ecosystem is adopted as a theoretical position of sustainability for Nembe funeral rites facing imminent extinction. In addition, the music ecosystem can be understood and compared to the music value chain, and how each component is essential to the sustainability of the life cycle, on the one hand. On the other hand, Huib Schippers believes the theoretical position is “a fertile, practical philosophical and metaphorical framework to explore sustainability” (2015, p. 136).

However, sustainability seems ironic in modernity, where the changes are rapid and consistently growing. Schippers explains, “In music, as in many other disciplines, *ecosystem* does associate with *sustainability* in the context of other widely used terms such as *preservation*, *safeguarding*, *salvaging*, and *maintaining* (p. 137, italic in the original). This is buttressed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and its policy of Intangible Cultural Heritage, showing “Urgent Safeguarding List.” This list aims to acknowledge intangible heritage that is “facing grave threats” and is in “extremely urgent need of safeguarding”, which includes traditional music (see Norton 2014). Importantly, these terminologies (*preservation*, *safeguarding*, *salvaging*, and

maintaining) have their places in academic discourse and may represent a similarity of position, but for this paper, sustainability is the preferred terminology. We pitch our support for sustainability as found in the global stance of the United Nations on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Now the question that begs for answers is whether (any or all) music needs to be sustained and how this is possible, considering that “most music cultures adapt successfully to changing environments and often benefit from them” (Schippers 2015, p. 137). In this context, the communities deserve the exclusive right to sustain whatever music genre(s) they deem fit or music that could/would promote their cultural ideals and identity.

Sustainability of Endangered Music

Historically, an activist agenda, aimed at stemming disappearance of music by changing those conditions disadvantageous to folk music’s survival have been adopted by major musicological bodies: International Folk Music Council (IFMC) now International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), whose new name, International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD) has recently been widely voted. Although there were some dynamics in the change of names – to signal that they are about to redefine their fields of study with greater precision (see Bohlman 1988), its recent expansion to include Dance has been accused of reading music from the Western perspective. This is so because some ethnomusicological scholars have argued that there has always been dance in traditional music. Other international bodies like Society of Ethnomusicology (SEM), International Music Council (IMC); Continental and regional bodies: Pan-African Society of Musical Arts Education (PASMAE), West African Sub-Region; including national bodies: Association of Nigeria Musicologists (ANIM), Society of Music Educator of Nigeria (SOMEN) and many others have contributed to the activism towards sustainability of music. Sustainability efforts have also been propagated in pioneering books and treatises in the field of ethnomusicology and African musicology (Merriam 1964, Nketia 1974, Chernoff 1979, Akpabot 1986) and many others. Thus, we seek to contribute to the plethora of discourses, but localised to the culture of the Nembe people of Nigeria.

This is necessary because less has been written about how notions of modernity may continue to influence negative attitudes about indigenous musical heritage, and how an association with a contemporary musicking tradition comes to be identified (as modern) within a specific context instead of another (as old-fashioned). This paper is particularly important considering that certain music types, contextually foreign to a culture, are privileged at the expense of indigenous ones. In the case of the Nembe funeral rites, certain rites and songs are imposed over and against indigenous ones, as will be demonstrated. Thus, our discourse will be focused on songs and song texts. Contextually, Christian Onyeji maintains that “At the moment, pop, gospel and non-folk music constitute a large part of the musical materials competing for space in the minds and retentive memories of people in Nigeria” (Onyeji 2006, p. 24). Explaining further, he notes:

The colossal hands of modern technology have not spared folk music in Nigeria. More and more people have turned their attention to the benefits of modern technology to the detriment of folk music in Nigeria. A glaring example is the disappearance of moonlight games, folk tales and story-telling time in the families, as well as gatherings at squares for social relations. These have been replaced by television, video, and

satellite television viewing, and video and computer games. While they exist great benefits in modern entertainment, they have also contributed immensely to the destruction of the once-cherished social cohesion in the communities (Ibid.).

Comparing this assertion with the funeral rites of the Nembe people, it can be confirmed that these traditions or conventions have changed in favour of Christian rites supported by popular or disco music, which have dominated the gamut of activities performed at funeral ceremonies. The impact of these changes has dire consequences, such as loss of identity and cultural mores/ethos within the community, neglect of cultural authorities, and other negative effects that are already ravaging society in contemporary times.

As mentioned earlier, the ban, replacement and refinement by modern systems have ostensibly orchestrated the extinction of indigenous musical heritage among the Nembe people, whose natural component is situated in oral traditions. This is so because modernity, and its preference for written and audio-visual cultures, have resulted in cultural erosion and alterations occasioned by these technological, social and religious developments and changes that have continued to endanger traditional music. The notion of 'tradition' in this paper which implies 'culture' encompasses everything having to do with people's lives as members of human communities: "their religions and political systems; their languages and technologies; their rituals and dances; their modes of work and play; the things that make them laugh and cry; what they wear and what they eat; and, of course, the music they make and listen to" (Bakan 2012, p. 10). Inversely, throughout human history, cultures have always been changing, merging, overlapping, malleable, in continuous flux; and that is likely truer today than in any previous era. The implication is that changes are constant modes of cultural transmission globally, except in the context of this paper, we will argue that some of these changes, specifically in traditional music, are detrimental to cultural survival, identity and sustainable development.

The Ethnography: The Nembe People of Nigeria

Nembe is a mother community to different towns and villages, and as Alagoa (1964, p. 5) has identified: "...[Nembe] is divided into two sections, Ogbolomab'iri and B'assamb'iri, around these sections are three small suburban settlements---Oromabiri, Okipiri and Tub'opiri. These settlements are harboured in the present Bayelsa State of Nigeria and occupy the geographical location called Nembe Local Government Area. According to Okorobia (2009, p. 459) "the Nembes fall under the Ijo of the Central Niger Delta sub-region." Geographically, Nembe is surrounded by rivers, mangroves and has a number of creeks in the heart of the Delta. Their basic occupation is making salt, fishing, swamp farming and oil merchant, trading their produce in exchange for what they do not have. The scope of this study covers all towns and villages that share the same language, culture and traditions with the people of Nembe in Bayelsa State. They include: Odioma, Okpoma, Twon, Imbikiri, Kemmer's town, and Spiff town, Beletiema, Diema, Egwema, Okoroba, Idema, Agrisaba, Liama, Akasa, Akipelia, Amakalakala and Opomatubu.

Funeral Rituals among the Nembe People

Among the Nembe people, funeral rites enact a traditional setting, a corporate communal experience for family members, loved ones, contemporaries, friends and the community at large gathering to pay their last respect and farewell to the deceased, in a communion of

rituals between the living and the dead. The Nembe people believe that death is not the end of a man, that there is life after death. Implying that death is simply a transition from mortality to immortality. Significantly, there is a belief in reincarnation, the return of a dead family member to the family or to another family. Mostly in the case of children, it is believed that dead children return to the family or to another family within the community.

In the case of an elder, chief, chief priest or king who dies at old age, it is believed that the person has done or completed his/her God given assignment on earth and as such, is celebrated and a befitting burial rite is performed to usher the deceased to the great beyond. The Nembe people also had the firm belief that the spirit of the deceased goes to the other world with all its pompous and glory, where the body was honoured at its funeral (Ockiya, 2008, p. 262). This was also confirmed by most interlocutors, as they tried to justify that this is one of the major reasons why the people of Nembe spend money lavishly to perform burial rites for their deceased. Their explanations showed that these festivities, which include dancing, music, drinking, firing of cannons, display of war canoe boats by war canoe houses, adorning the dead body with expensive cloths, decorating where the body is to be laid in state, etc., are the necessary rituals that must be carried out to complete the life-cycle of these deceased members of the community.

Notably, the rituals have both non-musical and musical aspects of the traditional burial rite of the Nembe people. Our focus was on the musical aspect, to document the songs, performance techniques, structure, types or categories of funeral rite music in Nembe kingdom of the Niger Delta, and specifically, with the Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

When one hears the expressions:

Kala Ekulema! Kala Ekulema!!

And the response that follow:

All: Ama doko doko biokpo!!!

The community or gathering is set for communal discourse and representation, be it is oratory or musical anecdote. The rendering of the *Kala Ekulema* is symbolic of salutation or merely a rendering of the traditional praise name of the Nembe people. In the past, Alagoa notes that 'the praise name was normally beaten out on the talking drum as the war canoe of Nembe approached a neighbouring town or returned home from an adventure' (Alagoa 1964, p. 3). Today, *Kala Ekulema* is merely salutatory and a mark of identity to the Nembe people.

Classification of Death among the Nembe Communities

One striking trajectory that has been noticed among the people of Nembe is the fact that death seems not to be accepted as a natural occurrence. In other words, the people believe that death has its source(s) and must be investigated. Thus, amid the sorrow, grief, crying, and sadness that come with the departure of a loved one, the people of Nembe still look out for the circumstances surrounding the death of the person. The investigation may include where the person died (home, farm, river, etc.), possible cause of death (poison, genocide, at childbirth, etc.), the age of the person, and the spiritual status of the deceased (a witch or possessed evil powers), and many other causes. The importance of these investigations was significant as

some of the factors were determinant to what kind of burial is given to the deceased: whether the deceased will be given a befitting burial or not.

There are two main classifications of death in the land of Nembe: *Fi* lit. death or Clean-bellied death, and *Seifi*, i.e., unclean-bellied death. For example, *Ibo Duêi* is attributed to a dead person in a circumstance where the mother of the deceased person has never lost a child in life. This death becomes *Seifi* and must be treated with caution. One of our interlocutors noted that one of the ways for a deceased to be classified as ‘*Seifi*’ unclean-bellied death is determined after some investigation and ritual rites must have been carried out by the family members of the deceased to confirm if the deceased was in possession of any evil power or was a witch while he/she was alive. On confirmation, the dead body is pronounced either *Fi* or *Seifi*. This scenario implies that the deceased (if *Seifi*) may have contributed to the evil occurrences in the land and must necessarily be punished at death. Another group in this class would be those who died mysteriously, either by drowning in the river, being eaten up by wild animals, or other premature deaths, etc. In addition, the *Iwofî* (accidental death by natural causes) are exempted from the ‘*Seifi*’ classification. Thus, once the circumstances surrounding the death are not natural or unpleasant to the people, the death is classified as ‘*Seifi*’, unclean-bellied death. What this implies is that when a person dies at old age, without having any involvement with evil powers or witchcraft, and there were no abnormal circumstances surrounding the demise of the person, the deceased is classified under the *Fi*, clean-bellied death. People under this class are given a befitting burial ceremony with elaborate festivities for days with diverse performances, musical anecdotes, and are interred within the community, while those under the unclean class are thrown into the *seipiri*, evil forest, or buried outside the community. This said, the study was focused on the burial rites of the clean-bellied death. By the classification of burial rites in Nembe communities, we noticed that within the category between clean-bellied and unclean-bellied death, there were undertones that delineated the commoner (the poor) and that of the royalty or rich members of the community (a King, chief, or chief priest). In this case, the death of the latter most often would fall into the clean-bellied death.

Music Performance in the Context of Nembe Funeral Rites

Iworoko (music) is a musical accompaniment to the funeral rites of the Nembe people. It “is a ritual in that it is both a practice through which participants relate to the sacred ... and it is a form of religious behavior associated with(the) social transitions” of humans (in Hampton 1982, p.75). The performance of *Iworoko* (music performed most at night or during wake-keeps) includes *segi* (dance). As Hampton explains, such a performance becomes “transformative, contingent ritual, being occasioned by death; it belongs to a particular class of ritual, or it is a rite of passage. Like other funerary rites, those of the Nembe are characterised by what Turner has couched as ‘preliminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases’ (Hampton 1982). As highlighted in the previous section, the ritual attaches importance to kings and ordinary people, where different classifications determine what kind of burial the deceased is given. The music and dance do not merely articulate the defining features of the ritual, but shape it; for, as they constitute ritual actions that are expressive in the relationships among humans and the spirit, ‘a communion’ as Nzewi has succinctly described. Hampton (1982) notes that this communion is an encoded moral system performed to achieve certain effects in these relationships.

Iworoko is performed at the wake keep, the night before the burial. Interestingly, most Christian denominations have banned vigils and have given preference to burial ceremonies. In most cases, the ban has been justified as a measure to cut costs, as the Nembe funeral rituals are known for exorbitant spending. While it is difficult to ascertain that the cost-cutting measure has been reduced, as most families have adopted other measures, such as friends' nights, service of songs, etc., to continue their family burial rituals, which in their estimation cannot be considered a spending spree. In some families, the spending for funeral rituals runs for a whole week. The implication is that, in most cases, the Nembe cultural systems have taken over their vigils to awaken social cohesion and unity identified with these practices. However, their activities do not pay attention to specific *Iworoko* rituals and practices, which they consider paganistic and unacceptable by the new Christian standards. There are many examples in Africa to show that most funeral rituals were done at night. Adowa, among the Ga of Ghana, is performed at the wake the night before the burial and on the day of the burial immediately before and during the processional to the site of interment (see Hampton 1982). In other words, the banning of vigils by most Christian denominations has endangered most musical and cultural activities that were done the night before the funeral. In this context, we argue that the night vigils would contextualise a balance between the traditional rites (at vigils) and the Christian ceremonies that happen on the day of the burial.

The primary analytical value and modern relevance of *Iworoko* lies in the fact that it is about the only corpus of music events where songs and dances are performed for a single rite of passage by all Nembe people. Let us turn to the song texts as we pursue an understanding of the context, meaning, and what they contribute to the sustainability of the genre and culture of the Nembe society. Five songs have been selected for analysis as illustrated below.

Song Texts, Context and Literal Interpretations

Song 1

*A dumo,
Igbogi ye fa ka ori Idua*

I know no other person,
even if he has no money, my father is my father

Song 2

*Obi na fi na keme togu
Mbe gba, eria fina bere mie te*

Had it been sickness and death were like humans,
I would have made a case with death

Song 3

*Mi enegho eribo bi
Baigho erigha fi ye seimo*

The one you see today will be no more tomorrow
because of death, death has spoiled things.

Song 4

*I dau fi ene I sa fiyun ene
Agoro na ma sa
Figha bo di bi gha*

Even if you owe no debt in life
the day your father dies, you must owe a debt,
because in the Agoro community
Whoever does not owe is not buried.

Song 5

*Di ene ka olali
Fi ene ka oladi*

A day of birth and death
is a celebration.

Textual Interpretation and Analysis

Song 1 shows that every child has a filial relationship with their paternal kindred through a father. As the song demonstrates, the father-son relationship is not dependent on wealth or status but is a source of ancestral identity. For instance, any child without paternal kin is a bastard. This also means that children are products of fathers, and fathers are fathers because they have children. It is worth noting that the patrilineal affiliation insinuated here does not exclude the sexes of children, because the interpretation shows that children (male and female) constitute the category, and illustrates that children are products of mothers, even when the song is silent on gendered categorisation, as it is audible or voices fatherhood. Song 2 says it is impossible to sue death, the same way defaulting human beings can be retributed. Although Song 3 see death as a destructive agent, it also demonstrates that no matter your status, death is inevitable. This, in a way, shows that tomorrow belongs to the supernatural and cannot be predicted. Hence, humans should do their best today, while it is today. Song 4 promotes the concept of interdependency of wealth. This means that no matter your wealth, when your father dies, you will need the services of others. These services are debts that must be owed and paid in future. Song 5 shows that death and birth are celebrations. Thus, the birth of a child must be celebrated, and as death is a transition, it should be celebrated as well. The song seems to justify the extravagant spending for burial ceremonies in Nembe communities.

***Iworoko* Funeral Rites, Its Relevance to Modernity and Cultural Evolution**

It has usually been asked why Africa relies on its past rather than face the reality of modernisation. Such debates have continued to repudiate African scholars' views on decolonisation and the promotion of truly African ideals/identity. As some of these debates show, the world is facing radical changes due to the spread of new phenomena, trends, and sophisticated technological innovations. From the musicological perspective, music is found in all known human societies, yet it varies greatly within and between societies (Brown, 1991; Nettl, 2015). However, one crucial factor that needs to be addressed is the mistaken reliance of early comparative musicologists on colonialist/racist models of unilinear evolution from "primitive" hunter-gatherer societies with simple folk music to Western societies with complex art music (Nettl & Bohlman, 1991; Nettl, 2006; Savage, 2019). The evolutionary trend has shown that while indigenous music played an important role in sustaining and shaping the ideals of precolonial society, colonisation constituted a major hindrance to the sustainability of cultural mores, especially the dominance of Christianity and the banning of traditional music as paganism (see Akpabot 1986).

The motive of foreign music is to represent traditional music models as inferior, which have lost relevance in modernity, and must necessarily depend on foreign musical cultures for their survival. Globalisation has become a major force in Nigeria today, the implication being that every culture has something to offer the world, and the more conscious minority becomes, the more they stand a chance to survive. For example, our promotion of revival using *Iworoko* Funeral Rites means, the entire gamut of the music event, constituting a music ecosystem, should be promoted. This music entertained individuals in the community and has aided in the relaxation and reduction of stress-related challenges, thereby promoting longevity and the general well-being of individuals and society. Comparatively, traditional music events such as the *Iworoko* Funeral Rites, enhancing community festivals and ceremonies, encouraged audience participation, and generated collective identity and deep personal feelings of cultural solidarity among the members of the Nembe society (see Forchu 2015), unlike Christian burial ceremonies that privilege certain individuals above others within its traditions.

Thus, we argue that cultural evolution, which refers to the process by which human cultural traits, like beliefs, knowledge, and customs, change and develop over time, should be recontextualised to models of identity and authenticity. In so doing, cultural evolution should also see the sustainability of beliefs and customs as a way to stem cultural erosion and loss of identity. The preponderance towards music and music-related sustainability indicates that ‘music is a microcosm’ of the Nembe society, incorporating their language, ethos or cultural texts and signs, which may be hidden to others who are unfamiliar with the culture. Ultimately, the reduction of musical endangerment leads to multiculturalism, where all cultures of the world co-exist and promote their interdependence in a global milieu. Thus, no culture is superior to another, nor is any culture more sophisticated than another. As the younger generations are learning about popular and art music, they deserve to know about the music of their origin, and how the balance in this trajectory would promote the concept of cultural evolution.

Conclusion

In the paper, the general argument has been that the people of Nembe, like every other African society, have their own culture and traditions, which are expressed in traditional songs and rendered at funeral rituals and other practices. The communal musicking, which was once an integral part of the Nembe people, demonstrating that from the joy of a child’s birth to the grief and sadness of death, there is music for almost every activity, has been endangered. New traditions now form a major part of the day-to-day activities of the people. In the past, as Nketia (1974, p. 21) contextualise in the present, “music in traditional African society is organized around social, religious and political events during which individuals, as well as members of a group within the community, come together for activities like recreation, performing of rites, festivals and collective activities.” Funeral rites (mostly, night rituals before burials) in an African traditional setting were moments where family members, loved ones, colleagues, friends and the community at large gathered to share (sometimes imagined) ideals, as they paid their last respect and farewell to the deceased, and the Nembe community held these rituals in high esteem. While these have changed, the people of Nembe society are optimistic about a resurgence in the music-dance events, such as the *Iworoko* Funeral Rites, as the principal occasions on which the Nembe cosmology, the overarching framework of organisation of Nembe social life, would find expression in modernity. Thus, creating a system to endanger such a communal communion “amounts to musical violence of a very high order, a violence whose psychic and psychological impacts remain to be properly explored” (Agawu 2016, p. 337).

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