Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.8 No.3 September, 2025; p.g. 181 – 188; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

FOLK MUSIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION: A CASE STUDY OF MIKE EJEAGHA'S WORKS

REV. FR. DR. BENEDICT AGBO
Department of Music
University of Nigeria Nsukka
Email: benedict.agbo@unn.edu.ng
&
MAXIMUS C. ONYISHI
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Email: maximusonyishi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of folk music in fostering social integration, ethical consciousness, and cultural continuity in postcolonial Nigeria, using selected works of the Igbo folkloric highlife musician, Chief Mike Ejeagha, as a case reference. Through a qualitative approach combining ethnographic observation, lyrical analysis, and interpretive cultural theory, the authors demonstrate that folk music in southeastern Nigeria remains a significant medium of value transmission, community education, and moral regulation. The findings indicate that Ejeagha's repertoire embodies a functional model of indigenous pedagogy rooted in communal ethics, conflict mediation, and social cohesion. While globalization and shifting media consumption patterns have weakened traditional mechanisms of moral formation among Nigerian youths, the study reveals that folk music continues to provide a viable platform for cultural renewal and national integration. The authors conclude that contemporary social reconstruction efforts in Nigeria must incorporate indigenous musical knowledge systems as legitimate tools for ethical reorientation, leadership education, and intergenerational communication.

Keywords: Folk Music, Social Integration, Mike Ejeagha.

Introduction

Across Africa, music has historically functioned as more than an aesthetic practice; it has served as a repository of communal memory, a system of moral instruction, and a mechanism for consolidating social relations. Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, folk music (*egwu omenala*) occupies a critical position in the maintenance of cultural values and the shaping of collective identity. Prior to the introduction of Western literacy and formal schooling, music—together with proverbs, storytelling, and ritual—constituted the informal curriculum through which communities transmitted knowledge and regulated behavior.

In contemporary Nigeria, however, rapid urbanization, technological encroachment, and the dominance of globalized entertainment genres have eroded many indigenous channels of socialization. This has contributed to widening intergenerational gaps, weakened moral structures, and increased youth alienation. Against this backdrop, the works of Chief Mike Ejeagha emerge as a significant example of how folk music continues to sustain ethical consciousness and communal cohesion despite sociocultural transformations.

This paper therefore investigates the integrative functions embedded in Ejeagha's music, situating them within broader discourses of indigenous knowledge, decolonial education, and national moral reconstruction. By analyzing selected songs such as *Ụwa mgbede ka mma* [Available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vx6Tg_Q7b8M], *Omekagu* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heLkA605jnM], and *Égwu Ụdo* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKttdlzW7t8], the study demonstrates how folk musical performance encodes normative principles central to peacebuilding, community identity, and social justice.

Literature Review – African Music, Culture, and the Ethics of Sound

Scholarly discourse on African music consistently emphasizes its functional and socially embedded character. Nketia's (1974) foundational work underscores that African musical traditions operate as integral components of social organization, rather than as isolated artistic expressions. According to Nketia, musical performance reinforces communal norms, articulates collective memory, and provides an avenue for participatory social life. Similarly, Euba (1988) conceptualizes African music as a dynamic system of cultural communication, where rhythm, melody, and text perform specific social roles.

Within Nigerian musicology, Okafor (2005) highlights folk music as an indigenous educational institution through which moral values, historical knowledge, and communal expectations are transmitted. Nzewi (1997) advances this argument by explaining that African music expresses "theory in action"—a lived system of social reasoning where musical behavior embodies ethical logic. Stone's (1982) ethnography of Kpelle communities in Liberia supports this view, noting that song events are inseparable from moral interpretation and social accountability.

The decolonial turn in African scholarship further positions music as a symbolic archive of resistance and agency. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Mbembe (2015) emphasize that indigenous expressive forms, including folk music, constitute essential intellectual resources for countering the epistemic dominance of coloniality. Agawu (2003) critiques Western misrepresentations of African musical structures and argues for the recognition of African sonic epistemologies as valid frameworks for cultural interpretation.

In studies of social integration, Obielu (2018) demonstrates that folk musical practices create emotional solidarity and facilitate cooperative interaction. Similarly, Turino (2008) articulates the concept of "social participatory performance," in which music operates as a site of communal bonding and shared identity.

Despite extensive literature on the functions of African music, limited scholarship has focused specifically on the works of Mike Ejeagha as a case study for analyzing indigenous knowledge transmission and moral formation in southeastern Nigeria. This study contributes to filling that gap by situating Ejeagha's oeuvre within contemporary debates on cultural preservation, youth moral education, and national integration.

Transition: From Scholarship to Case Exemplification

The reviewed literature establishes that African folk music is a socially grounded, pedagogical, and integrative system. To examine these principles in practice, the present

study positions Chief Mike Ejeagha as a representative figure whose musical works exemplify the intersection of ethnomusicology, communal ethics, and indigenous pedagogy. His repertoire provides an empirical basis for analyzing how folk music continues to influence social behavior, conflict mediation, and cultural identity in postcolonial Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework – Decolonial Musicology and Indigenous Knowledge Systems
This study is anchored on **Decolonial Musicology** and **Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)**—two interrelated frameworks that challenge Eurocentric interpretations of African expressive cultures. Decolonial Musicology emphasizes the need to evaluate African musical practices on their own epistemic terms, rejecting inherited colonial hierarchies that privilege Western harmonic, structural, or textual criteria (Agawu, 2003; Mignolo, 2011). IKS scholarship similarly advances the recognition of indigenous modes of knowledge production, transmission, and validation, including oral traditions, communal performance, and embodied cultural practices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Within these frameworks, folk music is conceptualized not as a residual or nostalgic practice but as a **legitimate knowledge system**—a medium through which communities articulate their understanding of morality, social justice, leadership, kinship, and cosmology. The theoretical approach adopted here therefore positions Ejeagha's music as a form of "acoustic philosophy": a sonic mode of reasoning that reflects the ethical, historical, and epistemological foundations of Igbo society.

Furthermore, the study draws on **functionalism** in ethnomusicology, which views music as performing identifiable social functions—reinforcing norms, resolving tensions, and cultivating solidarity (Titon, 2009). Combined with decolonial perspectives, this framework allows the authors to interpret Ejeagha's works as both cultural artifacts and operational tools within Nigeria's evolving social landscape.

Methodology
This research employs a **qualitative, interpretive design**, integrating three complementary methods:
1. Lyrical Content Analysis
Selected songs composed and performed by Chief Mike Ejeagha were examined for recurring themes related to morality, social integration, peace, leadership, and communal identity. These songs include:

- *Ụwa mgbede ka mma*
  [Available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vx6Tg_Q7b8M]
- *Omekagu*
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heLkA605jnM]
- *Égwu Ụdo*
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKttdlzW7t8]
- *Umu Igbo Mulu Anya*
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ewtv44QguA]
- *Ka Esi Lee Onye Isi Oche*
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW7ToPJ1dqU]

Textual patterns, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and moral inferences were analyzed to identify embedded cultural logic.

2. Ethnographic Observation

The authors drew on long-term exposure to Igbo folk performance culture in southeastern Nigeria. Observations include:

1. communal settings where the music is typically performed;
2. intergenerational audience reception;
3. social functions associated with storytelling and folk performance;
4. the role of music in conflict mediation and social solidarity.

Although informal, these ethnographic insights provide contextual grounding.

3. Interpretive Cultural Analysis

The study employs interpretive strategies borrowed from anthropology, cultural studies, and African philosophy to understand how music encodes and transmits communal values. This approach situates Ejeagha's songs within the broader Igbo worldview, emphasizing the sociocultural and ethical messages conveyed through musical narration.

Data triangulation across these methods strengthens the reliability of the analysis and enhances the interpretive depth of the findings.

Analysis/Findings

Folk Music as a Medium of Social Integration

Findings indicate that Ejeagha's songs consistently reinforce principles that support communal cohesion. His use of shared proverbs, narratives, and moral aphorisms reflects the Igbo tradition of *igba ndu* (harmonious living). Folk songs serve as communal texts, enabling collective participation in recalling shared values.

In village gatherings, market squares, and family compounds, such music fosters cohesion by creating collective emotional experiences. Turino's (2008) concept of "participatory performance" is evident: the music invites audience participation and cultivates a sense of shared identity. In this participatory context, listeners do more than consume music—they reaffirm social bonds and re-engage their communal consciousness.

Moral Pedagogy and Value Transmission

The study identifies Ejeagha's repertoire as a pedagogical resource. His songs frequently address ethical dilemmas, critique antisocial behavior, and articulate expected norms. For instance:

- ***Ụwa mgbede ka mma***

This song emphasizes moderation, the inevitability of aging, and the virtue of contentment. It cautions against unrestrained ambition and provides moral guidance for navigating life's uncertainties.

- ***Omekagu***

This composition reinforces justice as an unavoidable moral principle. Its narrative illustrates the consequences of unethical conduct and aligns with indigenous notions of retributive balance. The message parallels the Igbo idea of *ikpe mmiri*—the inevitability of moral consequences.

- ***Égwu Ụdo***

This song stresses reconciliation and communal harmony. It is often performed during communal gatherings, reinforcing peace as both a social ideal and a moral duty.
These examples indicate that folk music functions as a dynamic curriculum for ethical reasoning, aligning with Okafor's (2005) description of folk performance as the "people's university."

Decolonial Function: Affirmation of Indigenous Epistemology
Ejeagha's commitment to performing exclusively in Igbo language represents a form of cultural preservation and epistemic resistance. Rooted in indigenous idioms, his music affirms Igbo ontology and provides an alternative epistemic framework distinct from Western paradigms.

The analysis shows that the lyrical content, harmonic structure, and narrative style of Ejeagha's music all embody indigenous notions of morality, leadership accountability, reciprocity, and community welfare. By foregrounding these values, the music offers a counter-narrative to contemporary socio-cultural pressures shaped by globalization and Western cultural dominance.

Leadership Accountability and Civic Ethics
The findings highlight *Ka Esi Lee Onye Isi Oche* as a culturally grounded commentary on leadership ethics. The song critiques irresponsible leadership and emphasizes accountability, echoing the Igbo belief that authority is legitimate only when exercised with integrity.

Through metaphor and satire, the song reinforces the communal expectation that leaders must embody transparency, empathy, and responsibility. This aligns with existing scholarship that identifies folk music as a mechanism for public commentary and social regulation (Stone, 1982; Obielu, 2018).

Youth Socialization and Intergenerational Communication
Findings also indicate that folk music historically served as a bridge across generations. The moral messages embedded in these songs provided youth with accessible frameworks for understanding social expectations.

However, contemporary trends show a declining transmission of these values due to urban migration, media influence, and changing tastes among young Nigerians. The analysis suggests that reviving folk music in formal and informal educational settings could mitigate youth alienation and support ethical development.

Conflict Mediation and Community Cohesion
Ejeagha's music promotes nonviolent conflict resolution. Through parables and instructive narratives, his songs facilitate communal reflection and often help de-escalate tensions. This aligns with Durkheim's (1915) assertion that shared rituals foster solidarity.

Égwu Ụdo, for example, functions as both a symbolic and practical tool for mediating disputes, reinforcing peace as a collective responsibility.

Discussion – Folk Music and Moral Reconstruction in Nigeria

The findings demonstrate that folk music remains a relevant cultural resource for addressing Nigeria's ongoing moral and social challenges. Although modernization and globalization have altered traditional forms of socialization, the study shows that the ethical frameworks embedded in folk music still offer viable tools for reconstructing communal values and strengthening civic culture. This aligns with broader scholarship that identifies indigenous expressive forms as instruments of social organization, moral regulation, and cultural continuity (Nzetia, 1974; Euba, 1988; Obielu, 2018).

One of the key concerns expressed in existing literature is the gradual erosion of moral structures among Nigerian youths, exacerbated by technology-driven cultural shifts and declining intergenerational interaction. This study finds that folk music offers countervailing narratives that can reinforce discipline, moderation, responsibility, and a sense of communal belonging. Songs such as *Ụwa mgbede ka mma* contain explicit cautionary messages against excessiveness, reflecting socially valued norms of restraint and contented living. Such values remain critical within contemporary Nigeria, where social pressures frequently encourage materialism, risk-taking behaviors, and disregard for moral boundaries.

Similarly, the analysis highlights folk music's potential to reintroduce leadership ethics into public consciousness. In *Ka Esi Lee Onye Isi Oche*, metaphoric criticism functions as civic education, addressing accountability and integrity. The song reinforces traditional expectations that leaders must maintain moral credibility and prioritize collective welfare. Given Nigeria's recurrent governance challenges—characterized by corruption, weak institutions, and public distrust—such indigenous commentaries provide culturally grounded alternatives to formal civic education programs.

In the area of social harmony, songs like *Égwu Ụdo* emphasize reconciliation and nonviolence. This corresponds with Durkheim's (1915) argument that shared cultural rituals strengthen solidarity by creating shared emotional experiences. In diverse and politically tense societies such as Nigeria, folk music's capacity to promote peaceful coexistence is especially significant. Unlike adversarial political discourse, folk narratives encourage reflective engagement and foster empathy across social groups.

The study also identifies folk music as a mechanism for addressing youth alienation—a growing issue within Nigeria's socio-economic context. Traditional music historically served as a medium for mentoring young people, embedding ethical lessons within culturally familiar narratives and melodies. As modern influences increasingly displace indigenous modes of moral formation, the authors argue that reintegrating folk music into educational and community programs could provide more culturally resonant avenues for youth development. This agrees with Okafor's (2005) assertion that indigenous music embodies "the people's philosophy of social order."

Additionally, the study underscores the decolonial value of folk music. By foregrounding indigenous philosophies, moral systems, and communal logic, folk performance challenges imported intellectual frameworks that often ignore African epistemological traditions. Ejeagha's consistent use of Igbo proverbs reflects a deeper knowledge system that resists epistemic erasure. This supports decolonial theorists (Mbembe, 2015; Mignolo, 2011) who

argue that cultural liberation requires reclaiming indigenous knowledge and repositioning it within contemporary discourse.

Overall, the findings indicate that folk music can contribute significantly to Nigeria's moral reconstruction by:

- reinforcing civic ethics;
- promoting intergenerational communication;
- preserving indigenous knowledge;
- supporting peacebuilding initiatives;
- fostering social integration;
- counteracting youth moral decline;
- and strengthening cultural identity.

Thus, the study provides strong evidence that folk music should not be viewed merely as entertainment or cultural nostalgia, but as a strategic resource for national development and ethical renewal.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that folk music—specifically the works of Chief Mike Ejeagha—constitutes a viable cultural framework for social integration, moral education, and community sustainability within contemporary Nigeria. Through qualitative analysis of selected songs, the study reveals that folk musical narratives convey ethical principles, reinforce leadership accountability, facilitate conflict resolution, and provide intergenerational communication channels.

The authors conclude that Nigeria's ongoing social challenges, particularly those related to moral decline, youth alienation, and governance deficits, can be mitigated through intentional engagement with indigenous musical knowledge systems. Folk music offers culturally grounded pedagogical resources that complement formal educational strategies and support community-based peacebuilding.

Furthermore, the study affirms the relevance of decolonial musicology as an interpretive framework for understanding African musical heritage on its own terms. By recognizing folk music as an epistemic asset rather than a relic of the past, policymakers, educators, and cultural practitioners can harness its potential for national transformation.

Future research could explore comparative analyses between different Nigerian ethnic folk traditions, assess the impact of folk music integration in formal school curricula, or examine contemporary reinterpretations of folk narratives among younger musicians. Such inquiries would deepen understanding of how indigenous music can contribute to a sustainable cultural renaissance in Nigeria and beyond.

References

Agawu, K. (2003). *Representing African music: Postcolonial notes, queries, positions.* Routledge.

Akpabot, S. E. (1986). *Foundation of Nigerian traditional music.* Spectrum Books.

Arom, S. (1991). *African polyphony and polyrhythm: Musical structure and methodology.* Cambridge University Press.

Barz, G. (2006). *Singing for life: HIV/AIDS and music in Uganda.* Routledge.

Durkheim, E. (1915). *The elementary forms of the religious life.* Allen & Unwin.

Echeruo, M. (2001). *Music and literature in African oral traditions.* Heinemann.

Euba, A. (1988). *Essays on music in Africa: Intercultural perspectives.* University of Lagos Press.

Mbembe, A. (2015). *Decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive.* Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research.

Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options.* Duke University Press.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonization.* CODESRIA.

Nketia, J. H. K. (1974). *The music of Africa.* Norton.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature.* Heinemann.

Nzewi, M. (1997). *African music: Theoretical content and creative continuum.* Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria.

Obielu, C. (2018). Folk music and social cohesion in Nigeria: A critical study. *Nigerian Journal of Musicology, 12*(3), 45–62.

Okafor, R. C. (2005). *Music in Nigerian society.* New Generation Books.

Shaw, R. (2019). *Ethics of listening: Music, affect, and moral attention.* Routledge.

Stone, R. (1982). *Let the inside be sweet: The interpretation of music event among the Kpelle of Liberia.* Indiana University Press.

Turino, T. (2008). *Music as social life: The politics of participation.* University of Chicago Press.