

## WOMEN AND MUSIC IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The contributions that women make to the building of any Nation generally and in particular cannot be overemphasized. This paper, women in music in Nigeria, addresses cultural and religious beliefs about women as music-makers. The paper also discusses some women activities such as the transmitting of values; women's roles at home, women as mobilizers; women in education; women in the medical field; women in legal profession; women in politics; women in education; women in Agriculture; women in business and lastly women in music. The paper concludes that Nigeria had women of ability and integrity in the past and still has them today across all fields of life generally and music in particular. Nigerian women have proved to be in control through the use of their musical arts to move the nation forward. Various recommendations were given on effective way to tap the immense potential of Nigerian women in music.

### INTRODUCTION

Women can be described as indispensable group in the development of any nation. Writing on women's population, Masha (2001:1) said: "The 1991 population census put the number of Nigerian women at about 44million which is almost fifty percent of the total population 88,514,501million." Apart from their numerical strength, women have great potentials necessary for economic, social, political, educational and moral development, which will sustain nation building.

In his views on women's population, Oyetade (2003:1) notes that: "Women constitute more than half of the population of Nigeria, yet they are relegated to the background in the realm of things in the society." He went on to explain the fact that women were not expected to be individuals, in law they were not supposed to live by themselves. Unless they were widows, they were expected to spend their whole lives in legal and physical subjection to a man. The subjected women had many duties, but few rights. She was expected to breed and rear children, as many as possible. Ideally, a woman or girl should never be idle.

It is known from History that Nigeria was particularly blessed with women who could found and build societies. According to Emarievbe (2003:2) "We had the legendary Inkpi, Moremi and Daura, they were associated with the founding and building of Igala land, Yoruba land Hausa land respectively. There were also women who took charge of state affairs. These were like Queen Amina of Zauzau and Queen Kaumbasa of Bonny, who even commanded armies of their state. Furthermore, there were those who wielded great influences in the

society. According to Ogbah (2005:4) and Oruwari (1996:10), Iyalode Efusetan and Omu Otuwe are good examples of this.

In African culture generally and Nigerian in particular, the place of a woman is in the kitchen. According to Emarievbe (2003: 4) “her duty is to bear children, care for them and her husband. She should be seen and not heard, so it is seen as something abnormal and against the culture for a woman to see herself in position of authority which is the exclusive reserve for male. Women cannot participate in politics as this will be seen as an attempt to rub shoulders with the men. A woman is seen as a property of the husband just like any other inanimate object owned by the man. She does not own a farmland except that given to her by her husband to farm on and it is on a temporary basis. She could also have farm land from her paternal or maternal family depending on her relationship with the head of the family. According to Saito (1994:5) “Farming of these parcels of land was temporary.”

The culture gives priority and recognition to a boy child at the expense of a girl child. The female child is seen as a liability rather than an asset. The man is the head of his family and has authority to do what he wants with members of his family unit. Our culture is seriously gender-based. Having been brought up under this type of culture, where men are seen as semi gods, to aspire to positions of authority where they can use their talents for the upliftment of the Nigerian society becomes difficult. In some homes, the women dare not hold a different political view or belong to a political party other than the one the husband belongs. She could be severely disciplined if she does. Women should be empowered to do away with those aspects of our culture that are oppressive once this is done; they will participate actively in political and economic matters and contribute meaningfully to the development of their nation.

In the Nigerian society there are about 250 ethnic groups with different customs and traditions. It is important to note that there are bound to be differences between one society and the other, and the difference between sections of the same ethnic group may be striking. According to Okafor (1987:120) “In some societies like the Igbo, for example, there are certain aspects of the communal law both in maintenance and in breach in which the woman’s word is virtually the last.” And, there are other ethnic groups in Nigeria where the man’s word is certainly not the last especially as it concerns the welfare of the family.

There are customs among the Igbo, particularly in the funeral rite and moral laws, where the council of the classificatory sisters have an important and often decisive voice. In the history of Yoruba, we have had, at least, two cases of woman rising to the top and making their mark. One was a ruler of Ile-Ife, Moremi and the other was the well-known Madam Tinubu, the warrior. Among the Bini, Emotan made her mark and though a destitute, is now somebody, a figure, a name by which the Edo take their bearing. There was the princess Inikpi of Igala and, of course, the well-known Amina of the Hausa. And so, women have very important places in the history of Nigerian society and they are therefore not always the kitchen-bound, child-rearing, child-bearing ones.

## **Educated Nigerian Women**

If education is being regarded as a weapon of change, then every citizen, male and female must be ready to bring the desired change to move the nation forward. In Nigeria, there have been Women who have contributed scientifically to the socio-political and economic development of the country in their various fields. According to Ayanlola (1993) as quoted by Fadeyiye and Olaregan (2001)

Educated eminent Nigerian women had made their marks in the history of the nation. Prominent among them were madam Tinubu of Egbaland, Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan, Amina of Zaria, Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Professor (Mrs.) Bolanle Awe, Bola Kufariji –Olubi to mention but a few (p. 65).

Adepoju (2003:3) remarks that, “politically, there are women who have made impact and are still making impacts. Many women have been appointed ministers, deputy governors, senators, commissioners and so on.” In the literary field, there are women who have distinguished themselves. Also in the professional field, for example medicine, engineering, banking, law and so on, we have had women who have competed favourably with men. Even in sports, music such as Professor Omibiyi Obidike, (Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan), to mention but a few, several women have excelled. Generally the activities and contributions of these women have made serious marks in the development of the nation. This is to buttress the claim that educated women play a vital role in bringing about national development that is capable of moving the nation forward.

## **Women Activities in Nigeria**

Several records reveal overwhelming evidence of the women folk’s contributions in the Nigerian’s historical development. The following highlights women’s activities in Nigeria in the past and present:

### **1. Women as Transmitters of Values:**

The task of building a nation (Nigeria) requires a re-orientation of the citizens. It requires the inculcation of our cherished values as stated in the philosophy of Education F.G.N (1998: 12) which include:

- (a) Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual,
- (b) Faith in man’s ability to make rational decisions,
- (c) Moral and spiritual values in inter-personal and human relation;
- (d) Shared responsibility for the common good of society;
- (e) Respect for the dignity of labour and promotion of the emotional
- (f) Physical and psychological health of children.

Women are indispensable factors/instruments in the transmission of these cherished values to the younger generation. Women are rightly said to be the Custodians of the future. Ogbuigwe (1996:10) remarks that, not only because they bear and rear children but also because they are by nature endowed with much potential to nurture succeeding generations of the nation.

## **2. Women's Roles at Home:**

Women are responsible for early training of their Children. Our traditional education provides adequate rural training for women who in turn pass it down through instruction to their children. They care in so many ways as keeping and sustaining human life, ensuring that the child conforms to the accepted social norms. They ensure also that the child achieves success and develops into a responsible being. In fact, women are the doctors, teachers, cooks, accountants and lawyers of their various families.

## **3. Women as Mobilizers**

Moving Nigeria forward politically requires creating awareness through mobilization. Onifade (2003:9) notes that, "historical evidence shows that women are good mobilizers. Examples of these are Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti who played important roles in mobilizing people during the struggle for independence. The Aba Women's Riot of 1929 is another example of women mobilization against obnoxious colonial policies. It is well known fact that when people are mobilized for a common purpose, irrespective of differences in their backgrounds, they become more united, speak, with one voice and co-operate to achieve their purpose.

## **4. Women in Education:**

Educated women, particularly in Nigeria have been playing dynamic roles in the various fields of endeavour – from legal profession to Medical, Engineering, Surveying, Education, Aeronautics, and also in politics where many of them have sometimes proved the saying that "what a man can do, a woman can do even better". The outstanding contributions of women in education cannot be over-emphasized. Some of them have held high positions in our tertiary institutions. Prof Allele Williams, former Vice Chancellor, University of Benin, Prof. Jadesola Akande, Vice Chancellor, Lagos State University are two examples of such. There are other women professors and doctors in the different fields of education contributing to human development in Nigeria.

## **5. Women in the Medical Field**

In the medical field, women are not left behind in their contributions to nation building in Nigeria. Prof. Abiose of the Guinness Eye Center Kaduna is an example. Women doctors, surgeons, consultants, and specialists in pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, and other parts of medical field are helping to bring about the quality and longevity of live to millions of Nigerians through their sciences. Many of them including nurses help in the enlightenment campaign against HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases.

## **6. Women in the Legal Profession**

Women like late Hon. Justice Atinuke Ige, Justice Fati Abubakar, Justice Ansa Mbaneto and Justice Hansine Donli of ECOWAS Court of justice, to mention but a few, have proved that the legal profession is not the exclusive preserve of men.

## **7. Women in Politics**

In politics, Nigerian women have featured prominently not only in immobilizing others but also active participation in politics. According to Iwara (1998:138) Women have won local

Government elections as Chairmen in Imo, Kastina and Oyo States in 1991 while 209 women were represented in the executive of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic of the National, State and Local Government levels. Women have occupied the post of deputy Governors in some States of the Federation. Recent examples include Alhaja S. Badeu, Deputy Governor of Ogun State, Yeye Erelu, Deputy Governor Osun State, Dame Virgy Etiaba, Deputy Governor of Anambra State and later Governor of Anambra State for some months to mention but a few. In deed women like Sarah Jibril have dared the men in contesting the presidential position. Women Ministry like Kema Chinwe, formerly of Ministry of Aviation has proved that given the right education, there is nothing impossible for them. What is more? The recent integrity Award from Transparency International given to Dr. Dora Akunyili the Executive Director of NAFDAC according to Guardian (2003: 16) is another example of the unsurpassed achievement of educated women in their fields.

Among prominent women who played vital roles in the Country's political development were Mrs. Margaret Ekpo and Mrs. Elizabeth Adekogbe who were at the Constitutional Conference in London in the late 1950s. Even in Northern Nigeria, where fewer women dare to raise the voices, a prominent woman Hajia Bambo, played crucial role with men, socially and politically. The recent creation of the position of First Lady has placed a lot of responsibilities on our women and has given convincing evidences of what women can do if given the chance. There are also Women senators who are really rubbing shoulders with their men counterparts in the National Assembly contributing effectively to debates. With the current women empowerment, hope is bright that women can hold any position including the presidency.

#### **8. Women in Agriculture**

According to Adeyokunmi (1981: 10) "traditionally, roles in agriculture were sex- specific with the women complementing the men. Men did the clearing, ridge making and planting while the women mostly were responsible for weeding harvesting, marketing and storage." According to World Federation of Republic Health Association (1986: 45) These women are no longer only "Farmers' wives" but are 'farmers themselves'. In fact, Nigerian women play significant roles as farmers, traders and entrepreneurs.

#### **9. Women in Business**

Modern African women exhibited great ingenuity in business. On the business scene, many women are thorough in their managerial skills and intelligence and have made remarkable break throughs in their contributions to economy of the nation. For instance, the roles Kuforiji Olubi played in Nigerian economy are worth noting. She was the first Nigerian woman Chartered Accountant, first woman Chairman of the River Basin Development Authority, first woman Chairman of the third largest Commercial Bank in Nigeria, and first to be admitted as fellow of Nigeria Institution of Management. (NIM). The present effective management of immigration department is under women.

#### **10. Women as Music-Makers in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the education of the individual begins right at birth and doesn't stop until death. And, in education in Nigeria, music is a very strong force and vital factor. The education

begins with the life-rites-the birth rites, the child-rearing practices, the initiation ceremonies etc. here music is both a medium of instruction and a lesson itself. It is central to the educational process. Okafor (1989: 23) remarks that: The chants that are raised at the birth of a child or at the circumcision of a child may not be of great use to the child – the child may not really understand at all but it rallies the community it also means that the women raising the chants have fitted into the normal practices of the society.

In the ceremonies of title-taking, funerals, and others, we find that music is an integral part of the occasion. Women are majorly involved as music makers. Some of the chants, dances and songs used are in the prerogative of women. Not only that, women dominate in the performance because they are the main custodians. It is the women who must perform them. It is the women who will let the society move and by looking at the theme(s) of the songs used in the ceremonies, they are things that edify the society, excite and move the people and motivate them. Music, therefore, plays a cardinal role in moving the society throughout the life-rites and women are often the music makers.

In many cultures of the world and in many literatures of the world, the power of a woman to criticize, to decide, and to speak striking words are very easily recognized. In the Nigerian society the woman's tongue has been harnessed for the betterment of the society. There are some ceremonies in some parts of the country where once a year or at stated times, the whole society does a poetic and song review of what had happened – those who had misbehaved throughout the preceding year, those who are doing something bad in secret places and those who are stepping out line. Women lead the songs and they have been known to start gossips that were mainly corrective in nature. Some of the gossip started in the saloons or in the hair – weaving places, in the public streams, in the markets or even within high – walled compounds have motivated women to go on the march either to build or to destroy so as to draw attention of the elders to what have been irking them in the society or to forcefully tell errant wife or husband that enough was enough. It is known that it was through this medium and through the medium of their songs that they had, in some areas, been able to erect schools and maternity or hospitals, to get certain laws, customs, modified or abolished, to place taboos against certain markets or to guide some parents in their altitudes to their children. All these are facts that are known to the insider and perhaps less to the outsider. And that is why the outsider concentrates on the passive role or the supposedly passive role of the woman in the organization. Social control is a cardinal part of the corrective system of our society and women often, have their hands on the lever.

Okafor (1989) notes that:

There are many instances of the value or the nuisance value of women's dancing groups and musical-groups in many communities but we cannot deny that women are great organizers of these. They make the necessary law-binding laws, and they have the necessary organizational structure to move a whole community – husbands and relations, friends, kinsfolk and the general town's people (p. 24).

When a Women's dancing group for example, is performing in the village, virtually all the village is on the move and the proceeds of the show may be for desired purposes. Perhaps, in

these days, we should take account that many of these group have contributed to the building of bridges, maternity hospitals, post offices, sinking of boreholes, erection of primary health care facilities or even improvement of existing structures like tearing down the ceilings of schools and churches and putting on new ones. Other organizations have found these women's groups invaluable in the fact that it is not only what they can do but what they can attract others to do that end up in the final results.

The group organizations generally grow along the lines of classificatory sisters, wives of a village, greater relations like two related communities, and in modern times, pure simple social clubs or dancing clubs to which people from outside the community may even belong. But, the women have found these groups invaluable not only in keeping together but also in maintaining interest in other unrelated projects. Therefore, we can find out that a women's co-operative society selling rice or doing some farming or doing some trading will also find it necessary to have music and dance associated with their group. And therefore, they are both a dancing club and a co-operative society at the same time.

### **Nigerian Women Musicians**

A phenomenon of the Nigerian musical scene in modern times has been the upsurge of women's activities in musical performances. There are now several Nigerian women musicians, some of them trained in the classical idiom and some of them talented artists.

It is also well known that these people have turned their attention to the events in the society. They have therefore been able to compete with men and indeed come out better in performing music. In support of this assertion, Okafor (1989: 25) notes that, "women used music to rally round a given national cause or goal, to mobilize people towards a central attitude or action, and even to correct some of the common misconceptions in the society."

The mass mobilization programme has attracted comments and songs from Nigerian women such as Nelly Uchendu, Veno Marioghae, Bunmi Olajubu, Mandi Ojughana, Martha Ulaeto, Uche Ibeto, Christy Essien Igbokwe, Onyeka Onwenu, Joy Lo-Bamijoko, George Gold, Evil Edana Ogholi, Funmi, Adams etc. From merely singing about emotional events, women have suddenly burst out into patriotic favour that points the way to the future.

Patriotic music is another area in which women have been making great contributions in modern times. Popular among them are Veno Merioghae, Nelly Uchendu. Women have also shown political awareness when they express their sentiments over situations in either parts of Africa- Nelson Mandela, Apartheid and western Imperialism, for example Onyeka Onwenu and Joy Lo-Bamijoko's (nee Nwosu) compositions.

The Nigerian women singers such as Ulaeto, Funmi Adams, Christy Essien Igbokwe, Carmen Ezuma, Sharon (Shato), Comfort Omoge, Princess Mojisola Balogun, Evangelist (Dr) Sister Bola Are, Fasoyin, Funmi Aragbaye, Toun Soetan to mention but a few have used their various styles/types of music such as Calypso, Reggae, Pop, traditional folk songs, Gospel, Sekere, Juju, Fuji etc. for strengthening and pushing Nigerian music to the international scene, making Nigerians proud.

Many women in music have occupied the post of lecturership in many institutions of learning in some states of the federation. Women in music have proved that given the right musical education, there is nothing impossible for them in promoting Nigerian musical culture.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, women in music have extensively been highlighted and discussed. Nigeria had women of ability and integrity in the past and still has them today across all disciplines of human endeavour. If women are given full opportunity, they will excel, and they will be able to use talents for the improvement of the Nigerian society. A popular maxim has it that “if you educate a man you educate a single individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation.” Women are nation builders and this paper affirms that women are essential resources to nation building in social, political, family, religious, economic and educational fields. They are vital to the progress of the nation; their potentials are for the good of the society. Nigerian women have proved that they can be in control of the minds of men and as long as they use their arts especially music in the powerful way and in the right direction, they can move the nation forward.

### **Recommendations**

To effectively tap the immense potentials of Nigerian women, the following recommendations are suggested. Parents should ensure that girls get equal opportunities as boys in all levels of education from primary to tertiary. Government at all levels (Local, State, and Federal) should remove all barriers towards female musicians in their areas of jurisdiction. The educated professional women in music should intensify their efforts towards educating the uneducated ones about their musical roles in and outside the family cycle. Female music graduates should be employed in all sectors to encourage others to aspire to read music courses without fear of job discrimination in terms of employment. All concerned should organize more workshops, terminals and conferences to stimulate girls’ interests in music courses (theory and applied) using successful women in the field as resource persons. In this way females will be equipped to contribute their quota not only in the other arts subjects but also in musical culture. Parents should try as much as possible to develop more positive attitudes towards the education of their children most especially their female children. This will consequently close the educational gap between men and women.

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