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Article

Women's Participation in Traditional Music and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Women are unique individuals in Rivers State and are given the freedom to participate in music and various cultural traditions. These traditions not only define their role within the family and community but also ensure the sustainability and continuity of their heritage. In Ogoni communities, the Gbeabe custom plays a significant role in preserving cultural practices and family structures. This study aims to examine specific customs practiced in Ogoni communities, including Sira (First Daughter Type), Tube Kimasi (Family Continuity Type), Kpoli ne yoma (Grave/Ghost Type), Dom-Age (No Suitor Type), Disability or Physical Challenge, Kin Dom (Rejection of Early Suitor), Nen Sia Yor (Spirit Possessed Person), Man Nwin Gbeabe (Giving Birth Before Marriage), Zor Kpano (Natural Sickness), Poro Baroboo (Moral Decay), and Tea-Ki/Bete (Run-Away Type). Women are divinely created beings, and in Rivers State, they are known for their exceptional skills in dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments. These artistic talents enable them to participate in both favorable and challenging traditions. However, some customs, such as the family continuity tradition, which requires a woman to remain unmarried for the sake of preserving lineage, pose significant challenges for women in Ogoni communities.

Keywords: Women, Participation, Music, Traditions.

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Introduction

In various traditional African societies, women possessed the power to bind the society together, ensuring the survival of the family and the future of marriages. The African woman plays a pivotal role in educating and teaching children social, ethical, and moral values, which serve as the cultural standards for evaluating proper societal behavior. Traditionally, no form of stereotyping against women existed, as women held the power to organize the family and society at large. The responsibilities of both men and women were seen as complementary, fostering a co-dependent relationship rooted in mutual respect and shared responsibilities.

Afisi supports this assertion, that "There was no existence of gender inequality. Each role, regardless of who performed it, was considered equally important because it contributed to survival" (p.230) [1]. Clair, as cited in Afisi, emphasizes the significance of women in traditional African societies, stating that "In various traditional societies, the African woman possessed the power that binds the society together. In fact, the survival of the family and the future of marriage depends a great deal on the African woman" (p.27). Leith, as cited in Afisi (2010), further highlights the role of African women as cultural transmitters, affirms that

"Culturally, African women were the transmitters of the language, history, and oral culture, including music, dance, habits, and artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers responsible for the transmission of knowledge to the youths because they had a distinct understanding of the earth, environment, ceremonies, and traditions, including those exclusively performed by men" (p.34).

Women are known for their exceptional skills in singing and dancing, which are integral aspects of African cultural expression. From festivals and title-taking ceremonies to burials and other communal events, women actively participate in music and dance. Every traditional community has several women's dance groups, where their performances are believed to reach the gods and induce them to fulfill the community's wishes. Following the women's performances, diviners and seers interpret divine messages and foretell the future of the community. Hafkin and Hanson [2] reiterate that

"Women were treated with unparalleled respect because they were seen to be closer to the creator than men could ever be. This is because women themselves had the ability to create life through childbirth. As creators of life, they were charged with the sacred responsibility of caring for the needs of the next generation. Because of this, they can be regarded as the originators of what is now known as sustainable development" (p.59).

There is no doubt that women possess immense potential and can contribute meaningfully to the development of their society. Sustainable development is rooted in a strong family structure, and in every society, the family is the cornerstone of survival. Afisi [1] confirms this by stating that "Women are often the backbone of the family in traditional African society. The African family has always been characterized by strong women who usually held significant positions within the family" (p.231). The survival of any family is fundamentally dependent on women, who play crucial roles as caregivers and educators, instilling social and moral values in children. Okafor [3] affirms that

"Women are important in the religious music of the Igbo. Some serve as priestesses who worship before various deities through chants, songs, and dances. Others are diviners and seers, making this class of music not exclusive to men. Ministration by women is particularly prevalent where protection is sought from dark forces that prevent conception or the survival of children" (p.79).

Women have played indispensable roles in traditional African societies, yet despite their immense contributions, they continue to be relegated to the background. From pre-colonial Africa to modern times, men have retained the position of family head and societal leader, reinforcing a patriarchal structure where women play supportive roles. While these roles are complementary, women have historically been denied leadership and decision-making opportunities.

The human rights of women and the girl child are inalienable and indivisible components of universal human rights. However, in many societies and spheres of activity, women continue to face systemic inequalities—both legally and socially. These disparities are perpetuated by cultural, religious, and societal stereotypes that reinforce gender discrimination. Okafor [4] describes a specific instance of gender-based restrictions, that

"In most Igbo communities, when a man dies, his wife is confined to the home for a number of weeks or months. During the mourning period, she is not allowed to go to the market or farm. She expresses her grief through song, often raising her voice in public lamentation before dawn, chanting praises for her late husband, recounting his virtues, and explaining why his loss is not only personal but also affects the entire community" (p.77).

Traditional culture prioritizes the male child over the female child, and the birth of a male child is more celebrated than that of a female child. In many societies, a female child

is viewed as a liability rather than an asset. Ajewole [5] explains the gendered nature of culture, stating that

"Culture is seriously gender-based. Having been brought up under this type of culture, where men are seen as semi-gods, women find it difficult to rise to positions of authority where they can use their talents for the upliftment of Nigerian society. In some homes, a woman dares not hold a different political view or belong to a political party other than the one her husband belongs to" (p.62).

Despite colonial influence in perpetuating gender oppression, some powerful and enlightened African women resisted colonial domination. Historical examples include Queen Amina of Zaria, a prominent warrior, and the women of Eastern Nigeria, who led the Aba Women's Revolt of the 1920s against British colonial authorities in protest of inhumane taxation. In traditional African societies, a woman who is unable to bear children is often stigmatized. She is either labeled as a witch or blamed for blocking her husband's ability to establish himself as a full-fledged member of the community. This social stigma further marginalizes women, reinforcing the need for empowerment initiatives that challenge oppressive cultural practices. Women must be empowered to challenge and discard harmful cultural practices. When women are given equal opportunities, they can actively participate in political and economic matters, thereby contributing meaningfully to national development. Women are highly honored and valued in society, and their contributions to culture, politics, and economy must be fully recognized and utilized. Afisi [1] highlights the impact of Western influence on gender roles, affirming that

"Western influence shaped women's participation in Africa's social, economic, political, and cultural identity. Women thus had relatively little opportunity to become involved in whatever they desired because Africa's contact with European colonialism became the basis for gender inequality in Africa" (p.87).

Bosenip [5], as cited in Afisi [1], affirms that "Today, the complementary roles of women no longer exist in Africa, but African women's subordination to men and gender inequality in various fields persist" (p.87). Before British colonial administration and the struggle for independence, some Nigerian women refused to accept inferior social status. Today, it is widely acknowledged that for sustainable development, women—who make up a significant portion of the population—must not be excluded. Both men and women can equally contribute to the development and progress of society.

Nnamani [6] reinforces the importance of gender equality in education, positing that

"Equal access to education for both men and women can ensure improved status, self-realization, and economic empowerment. With this, our country can progress into the 21st century with minimal economic burdens and better capacity utilization of our natural endowment" (p.93).

Women are indispensable contributors to societal growth, serving as custodians of cultural heritage. Ajewole [7] adds that "When a women's dance group performs in a village, the entire community gathers. The proceeds from these performances are often used for community projects such as building maternity homes and sinking boreholes" (p.67). He also asserts that "the tasks 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". (p. 63). FGN [8] States that

a. Respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals

b. Faith in Man's ability to make national decisions

c. Moral and spiritual values in inter-personal

d. Shared responsibility for the common good of society, respect, for the dignity of labour and promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of the children (p.12) If women are given equally opportunities, they will go places, they are nation

builders, they are vital to the progress of the nation, their potentials are for the good of the society. Although today many countries of the world are making efforts to bridge the gap between men and women but in Nigeria the participation of women in traditions even though it has improved slightly it is still unsatisfactory.

Methodology

A qualitative descriptive and ethnographic research design was used to study women's roles in traditional music performance, the role of traditional music performance in preserving cultural heritage of Ogoni communities of Rivers State, Nigeria. This design is selected because it allows for a deeper understanding of the lived cultural experiences, beliefs and practices associated with women performing Gbeabe tradition in musical expression. Study Area The study area is selected Ogoni communities famous for their rich musical and cultural heritage. This comprises women who participate in the local performing arts ecosystem as performers, cultural custodians, community elders and opinion leaders. The sample will be selected using the purposive sampling technique knowledge for selection of participants who have relevant cultural information and experiential insight Data are gathered using a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation of cultural and musical events, and literature and oral traditions. Combining multiple methods removes the possibility of bias and strengthens findings through triangulation. Thematic analysis, including coding and categorizing recurring ideas about gender roles, music performance, and cultural continuity The research follows strict ethical guidelines — ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and respect for cultural sensitivity. The methodology also provides reliability by comparing responses from different individuals and sources against each other. Such a design allows the researcher to obtain both past and present perspectives on women as custodians of traditional music and cultural heritage, as well than the socio-cultural implications of the Gbeabe customs for the community within Ogoni cultural context and heritage preservation study focus.

Result and Discussion

Women Participation In Traditional Customs

Women are custodians of tradition, serving as the first point of contact for children, through whom they learn the norms and values of their people and uphold their cultural heritage. In Ogoni, Rivers State, there is a tradition known as Gbeabe tradition which dictates that certain daughters are not given out in marriage. Gberegbara [9] describes the Gbeabe tradition as an ancient tradition of the Ogoni people, which denies certain girls or women the right to be married legally for their entire lives. Loolo, as cited in Gberegbara [10], further explains this custom: "A system by which certain girls or women are not allowed to be married. Any man who fancies a girl or woman under this custom would approach the parents or relatives with his intention to cohabit with the girl or woman. If the family favors his proposal, he proceeds to provide customary items to the girl's or woman's family" (p.99).

In the Gbeabe tradition, girls do not marry in order to raise children for their family lineage. A man who wishes to take care of a woman under this custom must present a goat, a bottle of gin, one jar of palm wine, tubers of yam, salt, pepper, oil, a crate of soft drinks, and a crate of malt. Once these items are presented, the man is permitted by custom to cohabit with the woman and father her children, who remain within the woman's family lineage. Women in Ogoni communities view marriage as a sacred bond, essential for ensuring the continuity of generations. Factors such as barrenness, the absence of a male child, sudden death of a husband, or a man who has not raised a child—particularly a male child—are not seen as barriers to the continuation of a family lineage.

The Gbeabe tradition ensures that women who are not given out in marriage can still bear children within their own families, allowing the lineage to continue without disruption. Brinley [11] underscores the importance of nurturing children, stating that:

"Keep nurturing and loving your children, leading them in light and truth. They are the most precious thing you have in the entire world. Among all you possess, nothing is as precious as your children. You will grow old, even as I have grown old, and when you look around you, you will see that the greatest thing to have is the love, confidence, and respect of your children" (p.20).

Women consider their children as their greatest treasure, relying on them for support and care in old age. The love, confidence, and respect between a mother and her children reinforce the significance of family continuity. As a result, it is viewed as compulsory for every family to have children, particularly male children, who are expected to preserve the family name and uphold the legacy of their ancestors.

Types Of Gbaebe Traditions

According to Gberegbara [12], there are different types of Gbeabe traditions, all designed to ensure family continuity by producing children, particularly male offspring. In cases where families are desperate to have male children but only have daughters, a special arrangement is made for one of the daughters, especially the first daughter, to remain unmarried and bear a male child for the family. In Nigeria, the absence of a male child is often regarded as a source of discomfort and dissatisfaction within families. The birth of a male child is celebrated with immense joy, and the event is marked by elaborate festivities. The arrival of a male child is heralded within the community through songs, dance, and musical performances accompanied by traditional instruments, reinforcing the cultural significance of male heirs in preserving the family name and lineage. To some Nigerians the male child is all and all, the implication of this is that certain arrangements in Ogoni communities are made to ensure that a male child is produced thus Gbeabe tradition was introduced and this traditions are

1. Sira (First Daughter Type)
2. Tube Kimasi (Family Continuity Type)
3. Kpo Line Joma (Grave/Ghost Type)
4. Dom-Age (No Suitor Type)
5. Disability or physical challenge
6. Kin Dom (Rejection of Early Suitor)
7. Nen Sia Yor (Spirit Possessed Person)
8. Man Nwin Gbeabe (Giving Birth Before Marriage)
9. Zorr Kpano (Natural Sickness)
10. Poro Baroboo (Moral Decay)
11. Tea-Ki Be Te (Run-Away Type)

Out of the eleven Gbeabe traditions five will be discussed and they are

a. Sira (First Daughter Type)

b. Tube Kumasi (Family Continuity Type)

c. Kpoli Ne Yoma (Grave/Ghost Type)

d. Dom-Age (No Suitor Type)

e. Disability or Physical Challenged

Preservation Of Cultural Heritages

The focus of this study is to explore the origin and other traditions of the Ogoni people beyond the well-known Yaa puberty rite. Among the various traditions practiced in Ogoni society, one of the most significant is the Gbeabe custom, which involves specific cultural practices related to family continuity and lineage preservation. Before the different types of Gbeabe traditions are carried out, the oldest man within the family must perform

a libation ritual using palm wine or gin. This ritual is conducted at the family's ancestral altar, known as Tor Yoma, or at the entrance leading to the compound. The libation ceremony is a symbolic act of invoking ancestral spirits to bless and guide the continuation of the family lineage. Gberegbara [13] highlights the importance of the Gbeabe custom, stating that "the different types of Gbeabe customs that are in practice in Ogoni are borne out of the strong ties within the family set-up" (p.121). Similarly, Omeregbe [14] reinforces the significance of family unity in African culture, affirming that: "In African culture, the family unit is so strong that even death cannot break it up, since strong family ties continue beyond the grave" (p.66).

Gberegbara [15] identifies various forms of the Gbeabe custom that serve different cultural and social functions within the Ogoni family structure. These include Sira, which refers to the first daughter type; Tube Kimasi, also known as the family continuity type; Kpoli ne yoma, referred to as the grave or ghost type; Dom-Age, which is categorized as the no suitor type; and the disability or physical challenge type. Other forms include Kindom, which signifies the rejection of an early suitor; Nen Sia Yor, associated with a spirit-possessed person; Mannwin Gbeabe, which involves giving birth before marriage; Poro Baroboo, known as the moral decay type; and Tea-Ki Be Te, described as the runaway type. Each of these traditions has specific cultural significance, and their roles in preserving lineage, family honor, and social order will be explored in detail, one after the other, in the following sections.

Sira (First Daughter Type)

The Sira type was practiced exclusively in the Khana area of Ogoni, particularly in the past. This tradition was a deliberate act by parents to prevent their first daughters (Sira) from getting married, allowing them instead to bear children and own property within the family. The families in which the Sira type was practiced are what Nnom and Igbanibo (2006) refer to as:

"A social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction, where adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship. The resultant effect is that children, which include both males and females, are produced." (p.27)

The Sira (first daughter) holds a prominent position in the Khana area of Ogoni. Kponi (1990) states that: "The first daughters are naturally endowed to be given a place of honor within the family system among the Khana people of Ogoni, and this tendency has granted them the right to own wealth and exercise authority within the family. It is believed that their position is divinely arranged by the Supreme Being (Bari)." (p.15)

The implication is that the first daughter (Sira) is perceived as a female deity appearing in human form within the family. Hence, a Sira is not to be married but retained within the family as a representative of a mother-god (Kawa Bari). This position granted first daughters a privileged status, allowing them to connect easily with both the ancestors and the living members of the family. These first daughters (Sira) remained in the family to bear children who did not take the biological fathers' names but instead inherited their mothers' surnames.

In cases where the first daughter (Sira) was unable to bear children, she had the option to send another girl or woman who would, in turn, bear children to continue the family lineage. However, with the advent of Christianity and modernization in Ogoniland, the Sira tradition has significantly declined.

Tube Kimasi (Family Continuity Type)

In the traditional Ogoni family setting, it is paramount that the family must always exist, regardless of prevailing circumstances. This belief implies that each male child born into an

Ogoni family is expected to establish his own family unit. In cases where a man's wife gave birth to only daughters, one of the girls was required to remain in the family to raise children for lineage continuity.

Gberegbara (2012) confirms this practice, informing that: "There is an aspect of Ogoni culture that does not permit some young girls or women to marry. Their parents and family members sit down and decide that they should not be given in marriage. Today, we have several women under the institution of the Gbeabe custom who have no husbands and continue to bear children with little or no fatherly care. This has really brought untold hardships to the children who are products of such arrangements." (p.194)

The main goal of this custom was family continuity. Once the customary items required for cohabitation—such as a goat, gin, palm wine, yams, salt, and other customary gifts—were presented by the man intending to cohabit with the chosen girl, formal prayers and offerings were made to the ancestors, and the woman became permanently bound to this custom. Today, a significant number of women in Ogoniland still serve under the family continuity type of Gbeabe tradition.

Kpoli ne yoma (Grave / Ghost Type)

The Grave / Ghost Type pertains to girls or women who were not given out in marriage but were instead required to remain at home to maintain the family after the death of their parents. Under this custom, the women involved could have married if their parents were alive. In earlier times, it was common in Ogoniland for entire families to be wiped out due to illness, war, or mysterious circumstances. In such cases, when a girl or woman was the sole survivor, she was forbidden from marrying and was expected to stay behind to maintain the family home and ancestral graves. Due to the cluster-type settlement patterns of Ogoni communities, family homes were traditionally built in close proximity to one another. The idea of a family compound being permanently abandoned due to death was strongly detested. It was believed that the family compound must always be kept lively and maintained, especially the graves of the deceased ancestors. This sacred duty was entrusted to the unmarried daughter, who was obligated to remain at home and raise children for the family name.

In the event of excessive deaths within a family, extended relatives consulted diviners to determine the cause of the misfortune. Awolala and Dapamu (1979) note that: "Diviners are consulted to find out the cause of such deaths, especially the type that wiped out members of a family unit. As a remedy, sacrifices, as prescribed by the diviners, must be adhered to." A unique feature of this tradition is that the woman or girl observing the Grave/Ghost Type of Gbeabe would have been married if not for the deaths that claimed most of her family members. If she died without bearing children, extended family members came together to marry a new wife in her name. If no funds were available for such arrangements, the extended family contributed money to ensure that the family name did not disappear.

Dom-Age (No Suitor Type)

Some women naturally struggled to find a husband, and such women were acknowledged under the Gbeabe custom. They were permitted to bear children within their maternal families, ensuring that their offspring retained the mother's family name rather than the biological father's surname. Women categorized under the Dom-Age (No Suitor Type) were granted full rights within their maternal families, including inheritance of land and other family assets. Wiwa (1992) describes Ogoni as a land rich in natural resources, stating that: "Ogoni has always been a blessed land. Its plateau soil is extremely rich, with fresh water streams, farmlands, and the surrounding seas that brim with fish. The forest has an abundance of minerals and hardwood preserved by their forefathers from time immemorial." (p. 18). Because of this, family resources had to be preserved and inherited, and women who remained unmarried under the Dom-Age type played a role in keeping the family name and assets intact. Thus, those women that could not find husband

(dom-age) type are made to partake in the sharing of the family natural inheritance and this concession has helped this custom to survive till date.

Disability Or Physical Challenge

There are women in Ogoniland who are physically challenged due to birth defects, accidents, illnesses, or communal clashes. In some cases, incidents of natural disasters may also result in conditions such as blindness, lameness, or deafness, significantly impacting their lives. Unfortunately, societal perceptions toward physically challenged women do not favor them, as they are often unable to find suitors for marriage. As a result, many of these women cohabit with men of their choice under the Gbeabe custom and remain within their father's family. The children they bear do not inherit their biological father's surname, but instead, they take the mother's family name, ensuring that they remain part of the maternal lineage. These women also inherit and share property with the male children of their maternal family rather than the paternal family of their biological father. Dealing with the issue of physically challenged women in Ogoniland presents significant challenges. Many Ogoni daughters who serve under this custom struggle emotionally, as they are often overwhelmed by feelings of rejection and disappointment. Some of them are haunted by the thought that they could have been properly married if not for their disabilities. This sense of loss contributes to emotional distress, sometimes causing them to develop harsh attitudes that affect their relationships with family members and the community.

In some cases, these women feel marginalized and unimportant within their own families. Their children, who grow up without a recognized father, often struggle to assert their rights within the family structure. In some instances, these children face neglect due to the circumstances surrounding their birth. This results in psychological and social challenges, as they often feel excluded from both their maternal and paternal family networks. Another major challenge arises from the lack of involvement of the biological fathers. Many men who have cohabited with physically challenged women under the Gbeabe custom often fail to acknowledge their children, leaving the mothers to bear the burden of raising them alone. In some extreme cases, if someone mentions to a man that he once cohabited with a physically challenged woman, he may react aggressively or deny the association altogether. These factors contribute to significant hardship and deprivation for physically challenged women serving under the Gbeabe custom. As they navigate day-to-day life, they face economic struggles, emotional distress, and societal neglect, making survival exceedingly difficult.

Kin Dom (Rejection of Early Suitor)

These are women who rejected early suitors who sought their hand in marriage. Consequently, they were left without husbands. Changes in physical appearance due to aging, as well as social and cultural shifts, significantly impact their personalities and their chances of securing another suitor. Ekpenyong (1993) notes that in Nigeria, cultural values have undergone continual modification, stating that: "Many of the choices we make and the priorities we set today are radically different from what they were in the past." (p. 191) This observation is evident in Ogoniland, where some women selectively choose suitors and reject men who propose to them. The consequence of this decision is that many of these women remain unmarried and eventually turn to the Gbeabe custom, which permits them to cohabit with men of their choice as concubines. The children born from such relationships do not bear the names of their biological fathers but instead inherit their mothers' surnames. Within the Ogoniland custom and tradition, these children are given full recognition as members of their maternal families rather than their paternal lineage.

In some cases, if the rejected suitors later become wealthy and successful, the women who once refused their proposals experience regret and distress, especially when burdened with the responsibilities of raising children alone. Additionally, if their children do not listen to them or face challenges in life, the women may feel even more remorseful

for not marrying a man who could have provided stability. Some members of the woman's family may also blame her for rejecting a suitor who later attained success.

Nen Sia Yor (Spirit-Possessed Person)

There is no doubt that across generations and different African societies, certain individuals are believed to be possessed by spirits, and Ogoni is no exception. Marcus (2005) explains that: "Supernatural power spirits may become embodied in humans either permanently or temporarily. This phenomenon is found at all stages of human development and has a profound effect on the history of religious beliefs." (p. 177) In Ogoni culture, when a girl or woman displays erratic behavior or experiences periodic loss of control, she may be regarded as spirit-possessed and as a result, struggle to find a husband. From one community to another, certain girls or women are perceived as being under the influence of deities, affecting their ability to marry. Within the traditional Ogoni religious system, some of these women play significant roles in their communities, ensuring harmony between the spiritual and physical worlds.

Weneka (2001) observes that: "Human beings have accepted the existence of spirits as part of human life and seem to believe that without spirits and spiritual entities, the world of men will be incomplete. This idea is embedded in the mentality of the people, and the affected girls or women are seen as those under the influence of the gods." (p. 22)

This belief prevents these women from finding husbands, and they eventually become part of the Gbeabe custom. Families with spirit-possessed daughters, however, often gain high status in their communities as these women are revered as spiritual mediums. In ancient times, their opinions were highly regarded, particularly in situations of war, disease outbreaks (such as smallpox or measles), and community crises. The children of such women were also deeply respected within the society. With the advent of Christianity, the status and privileges of these women have declined. Some of them renounce their spiritual roles and convert to Christianity, but in many cases, they do so too late in life to find husbands.

Man Nwin Gbeabe (Giving Birth Before Marriage)

This tradition applies to young women who conceived before marriage. Many of them find it difficult to secure husbands later in life due to societal views on premarital pregnancies. The traditional Ogoni society often perceives such women as unfaithful or morally weak, which further diminishes their marriage prospects. Ekpenyong (1993) describes how premarital sexual activities influence social structures, stating that: "Premarital sexual activities are reflected in new patterns of relationships, creating a situation in Ogoniland where many girls or women are now being abandoned by the boys or men responsible for impregnating them." (p. 25)

The effect of this is that children born out of wedlock are left with their mothers, as Ogoniland customs do not allow a man to claim a child unless the marriage was formally recognized through traditional rites. Women under this custom often experience disappointment, rejection, and regret. In many cases, the men responsible for these pregnancies deny responsibility and refuse to acknowledge the children. As a result, the children grow up without a father figure and often face social rejection. These children are sometimes labeled as vagabonds, and many of them develop rebellious tendencies within their families.

Zor Kpano (Natural Sickness)

Some women face severe health challenges, which hinder their ability to get married. When a woman suffers from chronic illness as she approaches puberty, it significantly affects her marriage prospects. Men seeking wives often prioritize physical health and strength, as they need a capable partner who can handle the demands of marriage and family life. Women with severe health conditions are often unable to meet these expectations and, as a result, are absorbed into the Gbeabe custom. There are many women

across Ogoni who have remained unmarried due to illness and have no option but to raise children within their maternal lineage under this tradition.

Poro Baroboo (Moral Decay)

The moral decadence in society has significantly challenged the high moral values that Ogoni people inherited from their forefathers. Cases of youth restiveness, prostitution, and social misconduct have become prevalent in Ogoni and the Niger Delta region.

Bebebiafia (2008) highlights the rise of prostitution in the region, stating that: "Another dangerous vice threatening the region is prostitution. The type of prostitution that devalues womanhood, where very many simply clad women move around town spreading seduction in a manner reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah. A society that allows so many women to dress in such ridiculously erotic manners that reveal everything meant for a bedroom in public is certainly decaying and experiencing a moral crash." (p. 51)

As a result, many of these women fail to secure husbands. When their youth passes and they reach menopause or old age, they often return to their families and become candidates for the Gbeabe custom. Many of the children born to such women grow up without proper parental guidance and, in some cases, become leaders of criminal groups involved in kidnapping, armed robbery, and militancy. These issues contribute to the growing problems associated with the Gbeabe tradition in modern times.

Tea-Kil Be Te (Runaway Type)

The Runaway (Tea-Kil Be Te) Type of Gbeabe applies to women who were once legally married but later abandoned their matrimonial homes. These women either fled due to personal reasons, marital abuse, or disagreements and returned to their father's house. Once they decide not to return to their husbands or are unable to remarry, they become absorbed into the Gbeabe tradition. In many cases, their bride price is refunded to their former husbands, formally annulling their previous marriage. Some of these women desire to remarry, but due to age or societal stigma, they fail to secure another husband. As a result, they settle under the Gbeabe custom and raise children with concubines. The children do not belong to their biological fathers but are fully integrated into their maternal families.

Conclusion

Traditional music represents the indigenous musical expressions of a people, performed by members of the community who have inherited and preserved these traditions over generations. Women play a crucial role in traditional customs, particularly in the Gbeabe tradition, which is largely rooted in the desire for male children. When families are unable to produce male heirs, cultural norms dictate that one or more daughters, especially the first daughter, must remain unmarried to bear children within the family, ensuring lineage continuity. The decision of which daughter will remain unmarried is not solely left to the parents but is often made in consultation with extended family members. The Ogoni people strongly believe that a family must have surviving descendants to perform ancestral rites, which include pouring libations for both the living and the deceased members of the family.

Women, as the first educators of their children, play an important role in cultural preservation.

Through traditional songs, they communicate values, history, and moral teachings in their native dialects. Every significant activity in Ogoni society is accompanied by music, and certain songs are designated for social and ritual occasions. Due to their strong presence in the grassroots of society, women utilize music to educate the community, relieve stress while engaging in domestic tasks, and contribute to both musical and non-musical community activities. These contributions occur in both organized and spontaneous musical performances. The Gbeabe tradition in Ogoniland is sustained by

several cultural and social factors, including the need for family continuity, the desire for male children, unregulated affection for female children, the Sira issue where first daughters are designated to remain unmarried, the land tenure system in Ogoniland, and the conception of unmarried women, which affects their marital prospects.

Recommendations

1. Women should be encouraged to continue teaching children the indigenous music of the people, as it serves as a means of communication, a source of information, and a way to instill norms and values within the community.

2. Every community activity should incorporate traditional music, including songs, dances, and indigenous musical instruments, to serve as a moral and cultural booster while reinforcing the socio-cultural identity of the people.

3. All daughters of Ogoni should be given the freedom to marry whomever they choose, allowing them to enjoy personal agency and autonomy in their marital lives.

4. Women should be granted access to formal education, as education empowers females, enhances their ability to make informed decisions, and promotes their independence and self-determination.

5. The church should play a role in advocating for women and children, ensuring that they receive fair treatment and protection. The Gbeabe custom, which forces women into cohabitation, should be reconsidered, as it contradicts Christian teachings and the principles of a just and equitable society.

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