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A Critique of Western Influences on Local Identities: The Case of Ekobe Music of Ibusa

Timothy Paul Udoka Nwokolo
Department of Music, University of Delta Agbor

Margaret A. Efurhievwe, PhD
Department of Music, Delta State University, Abraka

Abstract

In the evolving landscape of Nigerian music, the encounter between local traditions and global influences has produced both opportunities and tensions. The spread of Western musical styles, instruments, and production techniques has created a vibrant cultural exchange, but at the same time, it has raised concerns about the homogenisation of indigenous genres. This study examines *Ekobe music* of Ibusa, a traditional ensemble with deep ritual and social functions, as a case through which to explore these dynamics. Ekobe, once performed almost exclusively during funerals and other community rites, has gradually incorporated Western elements such as drum sets, guitars, and electronic keyboards. These changes have expanded its visibility beyond Ibusa, allowing it to feature at weddings, festivals, and other secular events. Yet, they have also provoked debate within the community, particularly between older custodians who emphasise authenticity and younger musicians who embrace innovation. The research employed a qualitative methodology combining historical reconstruction, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and review of secondary sources. Findings reveal that Ekobe now exists in a hybrid form that embodies both resilience and fragility. While adaptation has allowed the genre to survive in the competitive cultural marketplace, it risks losing the distinctive features that once grounded it in Ibusa's identity. The study argues that the future of Ekobe—and by extension, other indigenous Nigerian forms—depends on striking a careful balance between preservation and innovation. It recommends greater emphasis on education, policy support, and community-driven archiving to ensure that traditional music remains a living heritage rather than a commodified relic. Ultimately, the study highlights the importance of conscious negotiation in sustaining cultural identity within an interconnected world.

Keywords: Globalisation and Music, Cultural Identity, Nigerian Traditional Music, Ekobe Music, Hybridity

Introduction

The Nigerian music scene has long been a meeting ground of old and new, of deeply rooted traditions and restless innovation. Over the past few decades, the expansion of technology, the rise of new media, and the lure of international markets have accelerated this transformation, pushing musicians towards sounds that travel well across borders (Idolor, 2005; Oikelome, 2012). This shift has not been without consequence. Where music once carried the unmistakable signature of local instruments, rhythms, and stories, it now often appears wrapped in the gloss of global pop (Brennan, 2020). Nigerian artistes, compelled by commercial pressures, increasingly lean on formulaic beats, synthesised harmonies, and lyrical conventions borrowed from elsewhere (Akombo, 2019). In many respects, this trend reflects the larger realities of globalisation—a force that both connects and erodes, offering opportunities for recognition while threatening the subtle textures of cultural identity (Tomlinson, 1999).

Within this broader landscape lies the case of Ekobe music, a genre native to the Ibusa people in Delta State. Ekobe began as a community-rooted practice, performed at funerals and other significant social occasions, embodying the values, stories, and sonic imagination of its people. For generations, its repertoire was shaped almost exclusively by indigenous instruments such as the *okpokolo* (slit wood drum), *udu* (pot drum), and *agogo* (gong) (Okafor, 2005). Its role was as much social as artistic, reinforcing identity and belonging. Yet, like many traditional forms, Ekobe has not remained untouched by outside currents. From the late twentieth century onwards, Western instruments—the drum set, the guitar, later the electronic keyboard—found their way into performances, sometimes displacing or overshadowing the original textures (Collins, 2002). Today, Ekobe oscillates between fidelity to its roots and the seductions of modern soundscapes, raising urgent questions about continuity and change.

The tension between preservation and adaptation is not new to Nigerian music. Highlife, Juju, and Afrobeat each carry histories of hybridisation, of borrowing and blending to create something that feels both local and cosmopolitan (Waterman, 1990; Veal, 2000). However, the concern voiced by many scholars and cultural custodians is that contemporary shifts lean less towards creative fusion and more towards homogenisation. The rise of Afrobeats as a global brand, for example, though celebrated as a national triumph, often comes at the cost of local particularities (Omojola, 2016; Collins, 2018). As musicians chase the global ear, subtle idioms risk being lost. This paper therefore positions Ekobe music as a lens through which to ask a broader question: how might indigenous traditions navigate globalising pressures without erasing themselves in the process?

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it seeks to trace the historical evolution of Ekobe, highlighting the contexts that shaped its performance and reception. Second, it examines the entry of Western influences into the genre—through instruments, performance practices, and audience expectations. Finally, it reflects on the implications of these transformations for cultural identity, both within Ibusa and in the larger Nigerian musical ecosystem. By doing so, the paper hopes to contribute to

ongoing debates about hybridity, cultural authenticity, and the politics of representation in African music (Bohlman, 2013).

The argument advanced here is not that Westernisation is inherently corrosive, nor that Nigerian music should remain sealed against outside influence. Music, like culture itself, is dynamic, porous, and inventive (Stokes, 2017). Instead, the concern is that when economic pressures and cultural hegemony align too forcefully, local forms may lose their distinctiveness, reduced to faint echoes within a global chorus. By looking closely at Ekobe's story—its resilience, its compromises, its reimaginings—this paper offers both a warning and a possibility: that preservation and innovation can coexist, but only through conscious effort.

Literature Review

Globalisation and Music

Globalisation has become one of the most powerful forces shaping cultural production across the world, and music is no exception. Scholars such as Tomlinson (1999) and Appadurai (1996) argue that the circulation of cultural products across borders is never neutral but entwined with power relations, economic demands, and questions of identity. Music exemplifies this tension because it both travels easily—through recordings, streaming platforms, and live performances—and at the same time retains markers of local specificity. The ease of transnational flow has led to new forms of hybridisation, with genres borrowing from each other in increasingly rapid cycles (Stokes, 2017). Yet, alongside such creative fusions, researchers point to a contrary tendency: homogenisation. As Idowu (2018) notes in a study of Afro-pop, the pressure to conform to Western production standards and commercial templates often results in artists suppressing distinctive local elements in favour of a sound that appeals to international markets. This dynamic produces an ambivalence that frames much of the debate about globalisation: enrichment on the one hand, erosion on the other.

In the African context, globalisation has historically been linked to colonial encounters and their aftermath. Colonialism introduced Western instruments, notation systems, and pedagogies, which became embedded in formal education and performance traditions (Agawu, 2003). Later, postcolonial modernisation projects reinforced the prestige of Western musical forms, often at the expense of indigenous practices. Scholars such as Nketia (1974) were among the first to document how African musical systems adapted under these pressures, pointing to both continuity and disruption. More recent work by Collins (2018) suggests that globalisation, mediated by technology and the market, has created conditions where genres like Highlife and Afrobeat can thrive internationally, but only by packaging themselves in ways that sometimes obscure their original social functions. In this sense, globalisation is less a uniform process than a field of negotiation, where musicians balance demands of authenticity, innovation, and survival.

Nigerian Musical Transformations

The Nigerian music industry provides a compelling case study of how global and local forces interact. Historically, Nigerian music was deeply tied to communal practices, with genres such as Highlife, Juju, and Fuji serving social, political, and ritual roles (Waterman, 1990). Highlife, emerging in the colonial period, already embodied hybridity, drawing on indigenous rhythms while incorporating Western brass instruments and harmonic patterns. Juju, in turn, blended Yoruba praise singing with guitar idioms introduced by missionaries and traders (Omojola, 1995). These

genres reveal that Nigerian music has long been adaptive, but they also show that adaptation was not simply a matter of choice—it was shaped by larger historical currents.

In the late twentieth century, Afrobeat, pioneered by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, offered a striking example of how Nigerian musicians could appropriate Western elements—jazz, funk, soul—yet rework them into a resolutely local and politically charged idiom (Veal, 2000). Fela's music demonstrated that hybridity did not necessarily entail loss, but could instead be a vehicle for critique and cultural assertion. However, as Oikelome (2012) observes, the commercialisation of Afrobeat into "Afrobeats" in the twenty-first century has altered its function. Whereas Fela's Afrobeat was oppositional and rooted in Yoruba cosmology, the Afrobeats phenomenon often privileges entertainment and marketability, reflecting the pressures of global music economies. Burna Boy and Wizkid, though globally celebrated, perform within this logic, raising the question of whether Nigerian music is now defined less by its cultural embeddedness and more by its ability to compete on Spotify charts.

The fear of homogenisation arises precisely from this trajectory. Scholars such as Akombo (2019) note that young Nigerian musicians frequently bypass traditional training and oral apprenticeship systems, opting instead for digital production techniques borrowed from Western pop. While this allows for technical sophistication and broader reach, it simultaneously reduces the presence of indigenous idioms such as call-and-response, polyrhythms, or the tonal inflections of Nigerian languages. Thus, while Nigerian music today enjoys unprecedented global attention, it risks marginalising the very elements that once defined its uniqueness.

Indigenous Musical Practices and Identity

Against this backdrop, scholars emphasise the importance of studying indigenous musical practices as sites of resilience and cultural memory. Nketia (1974) long argued that African musical forms embody cosmologies, social hierarchies, and moral codes, serving as repositories of collective identity. Okafor (2005), focusing on Nigeria, insists that music is never merely sound but a reflection of community ethos and continuity. Traditional ensembles such as the Yoruba *bàtá* drummers or the Igbo *ogene* practitioners are not only artistic expressions but also vehicles of spiritual communication and social regulation.

The study of localised genres like Ekobe becomes crucial precisely because they illustrate how smaller communities negotiate the encroachment of global culture. Ekobe, rooted in the Ibusa people's burial rites and social celebrations, represents a case of music serving as social glue, marking transitions, and embodying communal aesthetics (Okafor, 2004). Yet, as Euba (1990) points out, such traditions are vulnerable in the modern age, where young performers often prefer genres that promise quick commercial returns. The gradual incorporation of Western instruments into Ekobe ensembles is symptomatic of this shift. While some musicians view it as innovation, others perceive it as dilution. What is at stake is not merely musical style but cultural identity: whether Ibusa people can continue to hear themselves in Ekobe when the texture begins to resemble global pop idioms.

The debate mirrors wider concerns in African ethnomusicology about cultural appropriation and the politics of ownership. Ziff and Rao (1997) argue that when dominant cultures adopt or repackage marginalised musical forms, questions of power, consent, and benefit-sharing become urgent. In the case of Nigerian music, the

appropriation often occurs indirectly: by adopting Western techniques, local musicians themselves participate in reconfiguring their traditions in ways that sometimes alienate the community of origin. Yet, as Stokes (2017) reminds us, music is not static. The challenge, then, lies in balancing continuity with transformation, ensuring that innovation does not come at the expense of identity.

Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical scaffolding for understanding these dynamics has been significantly shaped by Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argued that dominant groups maintain control not only through coercion but also by shaping cultural norms and values in ways that appear natural. Applied to music, this suggests that Western styles become hegemonic not simply because they are musically superior but because global institutions—media, record labels, educational systems—present them as the standard. Nigerian musicians adopting Western instruments or production values may thus be seen as operating within a hegemonic frame, often unconsciously internalising its logic (Akindes, 2002).

Complementing this is the perspective of Structural Functionalism, which emphasises how cultural practices serve to maintain social order and cohesion. From this standpoint, Ekobe music can be read as a functional system that integrates the Ibusa community, marking rites of passage and reinforcing kinship ties (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). When Western instruments are incorporated, the question becomes whether they enhance this function or undermine it. Some argue that adaptation allows the music to survive in new contexts, thereby continuing to serve its social role (Idolor, 2005). Others caution that once too many changes occur, the practice risks losing its original meaning and becoming mere entertainment.

Recent debates on hybridity further nuance the discussion. Bhabha's (1994) theory of the "third space" suggests that cultural encounters inevitably produce hybrid forms that cannot be reduced to either side of the binary. Applied to Nigerian music, this would mean that Ekobe's incorporation of Western elements is not simply loss but also an opportunity for creative new identities to emerge. Yet, hybridity is not always equal; it may still privilege dominant forms at the expense of local ones (Pieterse, 2009). Therefore, the theoretical challenge lies in recognising hybridity's potential while remaining critical of the power asymmetries embedded within it.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach, combining historical and descriptive research with ethnomusicological methods. The historical component was necessary because Ekobe music cannot be understood outside the longue durée of Ibusa's cultural evolution, colonial interventions, and postcolonial transformations. Historical methods allowed for the reconstruction of performance practices, repertoire, and the gradual introduction of Western instruments, drawing on archival sources, oral histories, and secondary literature (Collins, 2002; Euba, 1990). The descriptive dimension, on the other hand, enabled systematic documentation of current practices, emphasising not only what is performed but also how performances are framed, contextualised, and received by different audiences (Nettl, 2015).

Ethnomusicology, as both a discipline and a set of techniques, provided the central framework for this research. Following Nketia's (1974) insistence that African music

must be studied within its cultural context, this project placed emphasis on observation, participation, and dialogue with practitioners. By embedding the researcher within the Ibusa musical community, the study sought to capture not only the sonic features of Ekobe but also its meanings, functions, and transformations. Ethnomusicological approaches also allowed for sensitivity to local categories of understanding—what musicians themselves consider "authentic," "innovative," or "diluted."

Data Collection

Three principal strategies were employed in gathering data: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual/archival review.

Participant Observation

Over a six-month period between January and June 2023, the first author attended twelve Ekobe performances in Ibusa, ranging from funerals to community festivals. In line with Spradley's (1980) ethnographic method, observation was not limited to passive watching but included informal participation, such as assisting with logistical arrangements and, on one occasion, joining the ensemble's chorus line. Detailed field notes were taken after each performance, focusing on instrumentation, repertoire, audience responses, and the interplay between traditional and modern elements. Participant observation was crucial in identifying shifts in practice—for instance, how amplification technologies altered the balance between vocals and percussion, or how audiences responded differently to performances using traditional drums versus those incorporating keyboards.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eighteen key informants, including six lead musicians, four community elders, three cultural custodians, and five younger performers. The choice of semi-structured format allowed for consistency in core questions—such as perceptions of Western influence, changes in instrumentation, and challenges of sustaining the tradition—while leaving space for participants to tell their own stories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interviews typically lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted in a mix of English and Enuani dialect, depending on the preference of the respondent. Where necessary, interpreters were employed, and all interviews were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Consent was sought for audio recordings, although some elders preferred notes only.

Textual and Archival Review

In addition to fieldwork, secondary materials were examined. These included academic works on Nigerian and Ibusa music (Okafor, 2005; Omojola, 2016), entertainment news articles, and video recordings of Ekobe performances uploaded to social media platforms. Archival research was limited, as few formal repositories exist for Ekobe; however, oral histories provided by elders effectively served as community archives. These accounts were cross-checked against published histories of Nigerian traditional music (Collins, 2018; Euba, 1990) to establish consistency and credibility.

Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded through an iterative, inductive process consistent with qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). Data from observations, interviews, and texts were coded thematically, with categories emerging around themes such as "acculturation," "instrumental innovation," "authenticity," and "commercialisation." NVivo software

was used for initial coding, though final interpretation relied on manual cross-comparison of themes. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis, the process involved six stages: familiarisation with data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final account.

Triangulation was central to ensuring validity. For example, claims by younger musicians about the necessity of incorporating Western instruments were checked against elders' narratives and field observations. Where discrepancies appeared, they were treated as analytically valuable rather than as weaknesses, revealing generational differences in perception. Such differences underscore the importance of recognising multiple voices within a single musical tradition.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibility was foregrounded throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, whether written or verbal, depending on literacy levels and local custom. Anonymity was offered, though most musicians requested to be identified by name, considering participation a mark of recognition. Nevertheless, pseudonyms were used for sensitive opinions, particularly where criticism of other musicians or institutions was expressed. The principle of reciprocity, central to ethnomusicology (Barz & Cooley, 2008), was also observed: researchers contributed by assisting with performance logistics, sharing recordings with participants, and delivering a community seminar on findings at the end of fieldwork.

In terms of positionality, the lead researcher acknowledged his dual role as both academic observer and cultural insider, being himself Nigerian but not from Ibusa. Reflexive journals were kept to monitor potential biases, especially the tendency to over-identify with musicians' concerns about cultural erosion. By foregrounding reflexivity, the research sought to balance empathy with critical distance.

Limitations

While the study's methodology was rigorous, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The relatively short duration of fieldwork may have limited the ability to capture seasonal or less frequent forms of Ekobe performance. Similarly, while eighteen interviews provided rich material, the sample cannot be assumed to represent all perspectives within Ibusa, especially among women, who are less publicly involved in Ekobe performance. Future research would benefit from longitudinal study and broader demographic inclusion.

Findings and Analysis

Historical Roots of Ekobe

Ekobe music, as remembered by Ibusa elders, was once inseparable from the rhythms of everyday life. Oral testimonies suggest that it emerged as part of funeral rites for non-titled men and later broadened into festivals and communal gatherings. Chief Agility Okonji, one of the senior custodians interviewed, explained: *"In those days, Ekobe was not entertainment. It was respect. When a man passed, his people brought Ekobe to sing him home."* Such accounts reinforce Okafor's (2005) claim that traditional Nigerian music served functional purposes before it was considered art for art's sake. The structure of Ekobe ensembles—drums, gongs, horns—embodied a sonic philosophy

rooted in repetition, call-and-response, and communal participation, rather than virtuosity or spectacle.

Archival comparisons reveal that Ekobe's early form remained relatively stable until the mid-twentieth century. Unlike genres such as Highlife, which rapidly adopted Western brass, Ekobe retained its indigenous instruments well into the 1970s (Collins, 2002). The resilience of the genre can be linked to its ritual function; as Radcliffe-Brown (1952) might argue, its social utility reinforced its continuity. To remove Ekobe from its original context of funerary rites was, for earlier generations, unthinkable. Thus, the historical roots of Ekobe highlight both its conservative grounding and its central role in sustaining Ibusa identity.

Acculturation and Western Influences

The introduction of Western instruments into Ekobe ensembles marks a turning point in its history. Oral accounts attribute the first use of an English drum set to Chief Ogbogu Okonji in the 1990s, a decision that sparked both admiration and controversy. One elder commented during interview: *"Ogbogu wanted Ekobe to shine like Juju or Highlife. Some of us felt he was spoiling the sound, but others enjoyed the new energy."* This ambivalence aligns with theories of cultural hegemony, which suggest that local actors may adopt dominant forms not under duress but out of perceived necessity or aspiration (Gramsci, 1971).

Observations of performances today confirm that Westernisation has become the norm rather than the exception. In one festival ensemble, the drum set, electric keyboard, and rhythm guitar accompanied traditional instruments, with amplification ensuring their prominence. The younger audience appeared more responsive to these modernised versions, dancing enthusiastically when bass lines kicked in, while elders nodded approvingly only when traditional drums reasserted themselves. This generational divide echoes Akombo's (2019) finding that young Nigerian musicians often favour globalised soundscapes, while older audiences value continuity.

The process of acculturation is not limited to instruments; it also extends to performance style. Traditional Ekobe songs were call-and-response chants with lyrics in Enuani dialect, often improvised to fit social contexts. Contemporary performances, however, show increasing reliance on fixed, rehearsed arrangements, with elements of pop-stage presentation. Costumes, lighting, and microphone use mirror commercial concert settings, signalling a shift from communal ritual to staged entertainment. This shift raises the question of whether Ekobe is being redefined as a genre within the Nigerian music industry, rather than as a cultural practice specific to Ibusa.

Acceptability and Diffusion

The expansion of Ekobe beyond Ibusa has been facilitated precisely by these modifications. Communities such as Issele-Uku and Ogwashi-Uku reportedly invited Ibusa musicians to teach Ekobe during the late twentieth century, a process that spread both traditional and modified forms. One younger musician explained: *"We want Ekobe to be like Afrobeat – something everyone can play, not just Ibusa."* This ambition reflects what Bhabha (1994) might describe as the creation of a "third space," where local traditions gain new life through transcultural circulation.

Yet diffusion also comes at a cost. While Ekobe is now performed at weddings, festivals, and even political rallies, its association with funerary rites has weakened.

Several elders expressed concern that its sacred character is being eroded. As one elder put it: *"When Ekobe plays at a rally, it is no longer Ekobe. It is just noise."* Such perspectives echo Euba's (1990) argument that the decontextualisation of African music often strips it of symbolic meaning, leaving only aesthetic form. The acceptability of Ekobe across broader audiences thus illustrates both success and loss: success in terms of reach, but loss in terms of rootedness.

Generational Perceptions

Generational differences emerged strongly in the interviews. Younger musicians largely framed Western influence as innovation. One performer in his twenties remarked: *"Without the keyboard and drum set, nobody will stream our music. People want the modern vibe."* This pragmatic orientation highlights how global digital platforms shape expectations, pushing artists to prioritise accessibility over tradition (Brennan, 2020). For younger practitioners, survival in the competitive Nigerian music scene necessitates compromise.

In contrast, elders consistently linked authenticity to the use of indigenous instruments and the preservation of ritual functions. For them, Ekobe's value lies not in its entertainment capacity but in its identity work. As one community elder insisted: *"Ekobe tells us who we are. If you remove the okpokolo, it is not Ibusa anymore."* Such statements resonate with Okafor's (2005) thesis that traditional music in Nigeria embodies collective ethos and cannot be reduced to sonic structure alone. The divergence between generations thus illustrates what Pieterse (2009) calls the unevenness of hybridity: not all stakeholders perceive fusion as enrichment.

Field observations confirmed that these tensions manifest even within performances. In one instance, the ensemble alternated between purely traditional sets and hybrid sets with Western instruments. The audience visibly divided—elders applauding traditional numbers, youths cheering modernised ones. This polarity symbolises the broader debate in Nigerian music: whether to safeguard indigenous practices as cultural heritage or adapt them for global relevance.

Cultural Identity and Sustainability

Across these themes, one finding stands out: the negotiation between Western influence and local identity is not a binary struggle but a continual balancing act. Ekobe's evolution demonstrates both resilience and fragility. Its resilience lies in its ability to adapt, remaining audible in a competitive cultural marketplace. Its fragility lies in the risk of losing the very elements that make it distinctively Ibusa.

From a structural functionalist perspective, Ekobe continues to bind the community together, even if its contexts of performance have shifted (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Funerals, festivals, and social gatherings still employ Ekobe as a marker of identity. Yet from a critical perspective, its hybridisation risks transforming it into a commodified genre detached from its roots, paralleling the commercial rebranding of Afrobeat into Afrobeats (Veal, 2000; Omojola, 2016). This tension underscores the need for conscious strategies—through education, community initiatives, and cultural policy—to ensure that adaptation does not devolve into erasure.

Discussion and Conclusion

Negotiating Globalisation and Cultural Continuity

The findings from this study underscore a familiar but still urgent dilemma in African cultural studies: how to navigate the double-edged nature of globalisation. On the one hand, the incorporation of Western instruments and performance practices into Ekobe music has undeniably expanded its reach and acceptability. Performances that once remained confined to Ibusa funerals are now staged at festivals, weddings, and even political rallies. Such diffusion would not have been possible without adjustments that made Ekobe more palatable to diverse audiences, many of whom have grown up surrounded by Westernised pop idioms. This echoes the argument of Waterman (1990), who described Nigerian musical traditions as inherently adaptive, constantly renegotiating their forms in response to shifting social contexts.

Yet this adaptability carries a price. The elders' testimonies reveal deep anxiety about loss of authenticity, particularly as sacred contexts give way to commercial or political appropriations. Here the concerns align with Euba's (1990) critique that the decontextualisation of African music often strips it of symbolic depth, reducing it to sound divorced from meaning. What for younger musicians is "innovation" may, for older custodians, appear as betrayal. This generational disjuncture reflects what Pieterse (2009) calls the asymmetry of hybridity: while hybridity generates creative possibilities, it rarely distributes gains evenly. Younger artists may accrue visibility and revenue, but communities may lose intangible heritage in the process.

Cultural Hegemony and the Logic of Adoption

Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony offers a useful lens through which to interpret these findings. The adoption of Western instruments by Ibusa musicians was not the product of coercion but rather of consent—an internalisation of global hierarchies of taste. As several younger performers remarked, without keyboards and drum sets, their music would not be "marketable." Such reasoning demonstrates how hegemony operates: Western styles appear as the natural standard for what constitutes "modern" or "successful" music. Similar dynamics have been observed across African contexts, from Highlife in Ghana to Benga in Kenya (Collins, 2018; Perullo, 2011). Musicians are not coerced into adopting Western idioms; they do so because global structures of valuation—record labels, streaming platforms, audience expectations—make such adoption appear necessary.

Yet cultural hegemony is never absolute. The persistence of indigenous instruments in Ekobe ensembles demonstrates what Gramsci might call "counter-hegemonic practices." Even as drum sets and guitars dominate the soundscape, the *okpokolo* slit drum and *udu* pot drum remain indispensable. Their continued presence asserts Ibusa identity within a hybridised form. The struggle, therefore, is not between pure tradition and wholesale assimilation but between competing logics of survival: one anchored in heritage, the other in commerce.

Structural Functionalism and Shifting Social Roles

From a structural functionalist perspective, Ekobe's transformation can be read not as decline but as adaptation. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) argued that cultural practices endure by adjusting to the functional needs of society. In Ibusa, where funerary practices are less frequent focal points of public life, music must find new outlets to remain relevant. By appearing at weddings or festivals, Ekobe continues to serve its integrative role, reaffirming community identity even if the contexts differ. This

functionalist reading suggests that change is not necessarily loss but continuity under altered conditions.

Nevertheless, functionalism has its limits. It risks celebrating adaptation without interrogating power dynamics. As scholars such as Agawu (2003) caution, framing African music as merely functional can obscure its aesthetic, symbolic, and political dimensions. The Ibusa elders' unease demonstrates that not all adaptations are experienced as benign adjustments; some are felt as erosions of meaning. Thus, while functionalism explains survival, critical theories such as hegemony and hybridity better capture the contested politics of change.

Hybridity, Ambivalence, and the Third Space

Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity as a "third space" is particularly relevant to Ekobe. The hybridisation of instruments and styles does not simply replace tradition with modernity but creates a new form that is neither wholly indigenous nor wholly Western. Audiences who cheer hybrid performances are not rejecting Ibusa identity outright but embracing a reimagined version of it. This aligns with Stokes' (2017) observation that music often creates spaces of belonging that are fluid, negotiated, and porous.

However, as the findings suggest, hybridity remains ambivalent. For younger musicians, the "third space" is a zone of opportunity: it allows them to engage with global markets and digital platforms. For elders, it feels like a space of loss, where sacred boundaries are blurred. The ambivalence of hybridity thus reveals the tensions of cultural negotiation: while it promises innovation, it risks privileging dominant forms. The challenge for Ekobe lies in harnessing hybridity without allowing it to dissolve the distinctive idioms of Ibusa music.

Implications for Nigerian Music More Broadly

The case of Ekobe mirrors wider debates in Nigerian music. Afrobeat, pioneered by Fela Kuti, was once fiercely political, embedding Yoruba cosmology and anti-colonial critique within hybrid soundscapes (Veal, 2000). Its commercial rebranding as "Afrobeats" for global consumption illustrates how cultural products can shift from oppositional to commodified under global pressures (Omojola, 2016). Ekobe's trajectory suggests a similar risk: what begins as cultural heritage could become another entry in Nigeria's export catalogue, stripped of local specificity.

Yet the story also demonstrates resilience. Despite Western instruments, Ekobe still retains indigenous rhythms and structures, ensuring that Ibusa audiences can recognise themselves in the sound. The fact that debates continue between generations indicates that identity is still actively negotiated, not surrendered. As Brennan (2020) notes, cultural forms that provoke argument are often those still alive with meaning.

Several practical implications emerge from this study.

i. Traditional training systems—apprenticeship, oral teaching, communal rehearsals—must be revitalised. Incorporating Ekobe into school curricula in Delta State could provide younger generations with a grounding in indigenous forms before they encounter global pop templates. Scholars such as Okafor (2005) argue that music education in Nigeria has historically privileged Western notation; rebalancing this bias is essential for cultural continuity.

ii. Cultural policy should support indigenous genres not only as heritage but as living traditions. Government agencies and cultural institutions could sponsor festivals that privilege authentic performance, provide grants for traditional instrument makers, and support documentation projects. As Collins (2018) shows in Ghana, institutional support can make the difference between survival and extinction of folk genres.
iii. Given the scarcity of formal archives, community-led documentation should be prioritised. Recording performances, cataloguing repertoires, and preserving oral histories would safeguard Ekobe for future generations. Digital platforms, often seen as vectors of homogenisation, could also serve as repositories of authenticity if managed locally.
iv. Musicians themselves must be encouraged to reflect critically on the balance between innovation and preservation. Workshops and forums bringing together elders and younger performers could facilitate dialogue. Such spaces would allow musicians to experiment with hybridity while remaining accountable to community expectations.

The story of Ekobe music illustrates the broader dynamics of Nigerian cultural life in the age of globalisation. It is a story of resilience and fragility, of creativity and compromise. Ekobe has travelled beyond its original ritual setting, embraced new instruments, and reached new audiences. In doing so, it has survived. Yet its survival is precarious, shadowed by the possibility of erasure. The elders' lament—*"without the okpokolo, it is not Ibusa anymore"*—remains a stark reminder that adaptation can slip into assimilation.

Theoretically, Ekobe demonstrates the interplay of cultural hegemony, functional adaptation, and hybridity. It reveals how global hierarchies shape local choices, how traditions adjust to remain relevant, and how hybrid forms both enrich and unsettle identity. For Nigerian music as a whole, the lesson is clear: global success must not come at the cost of local essence.

This paper, therefore, issues a call to action: for musicians to innovate responsibly, for educators to rebalance curricula, for policymakers to invest in cultural heritage, and for communities to sustain their custodial roles. Only through such multi-layered effort can Nigeria's musical traditions avoid being swallowed by homogenisation and instead continue to thrive as vibrant, dynamic expressions of identity. Ekobe's journey from ritual to stage is not yet complete, and its future remains open. Whether it becomes another casualty of global standardisation or a resilient hybrid of local pride will depend on the choices made today.

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