



Mining the past or letting a treasure slip away: Examining a national emergency in a post-colonial state

Chinedu Ogoke

Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria

Abstract

The past is important. How we relate with our past may be harmful to national development. It is worth emphasising that the past contains a lot of ... can nourish the current generation. Unfortunately, past events and personalities in Nigeria are quickly forgotten as soon as their active days are over. Nigeria has had great sports men and women over the years. A lot of these people are hardly remembered. These individuals cannot return to remind us of their achievements and the color they gave to our national life. The story no different in music. The value old songs in Nigeria have remains being replayed as makeovers by contemporary musicians, who claim the glory of the ingenuity behind the creation of the songs. It is not unconnected to the attitude to history in Nigeria. The writer intends to open active discussion on this issue. There is a call on the various authorities in Nigeria to set aside resources for the establishment of music and sports museums. Media houses and writers have a big role to play in this regard. This undertaking was informed by discussions the writer has had in recent times with some Nigerian youths. The scarcity of materials on the trend is a testimony to the fact that little is being done to engage the past.

Keywords: History, Nigeria, preservation, sports and music, development

Introduction

The past constitutes events that happened before the present time. It can be a few minutes ago. According to Ma'am, it is "[] the 'past tense' form of a verb, as the term suggests, can be used to speak about or represent an event or action that already happened in the past." When we speak of the past, though, we refer to a long time in the past that cannot fully be recollected except with the aid of some instruments. The instruments may be literature, film, art work, implements used at a time and various fields of knowledge like philosophy, math and history. Since the past is the foundation of the present, the past remains a part of the present. This builds up to the future. Societies have different methods of remembering the past. Some do it through commemorations. This past may be pleasant or bitter. The nature of the past experience informs the nature of the celebration. If it was a joyful experience, the celebrants will be happy. In this write up, we pay attention especially to music in Nigeria and how the present generation reacts to it. The thesis is that current generation in Nigeria loves music like other generations. However, what is termed oldies or old music hardly interests this group of people. The same attitude is observed in other areas like sports and history. In other parts of the world, this is markedly different. The aim of this undertaking is to suggest ways through which this orientation will be corrected.

Nigerian People

Nigerian people comprise the ethnic people who constitute the ethnicity known as the country of Nigeria. Nigeria is a country in West Africa. It was occupied by the British people who colonized the area, bringing the diverse peoples of Yoruba, Hausa, Ijaw, Beriberi, Igbo origins together. The British left officially in 1960, after over 100 years of colonial rule. Nigerian people are different in too many ways. Nsereka opines that it is not quite certain how many ethnic groups Nigeria consists of but it is widely believed

that Nigeria consists of a minimum of 250 ethnic groups - with Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as the three dominant ones - and a maximum of 400 with over 400 different languages [...]. Each of the component groups has its own language and custom and accepts one or more of the main religions of Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. Nigeria is, therefore, described as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious country - an apt description. Interestingly, this fact of our multiplicity is obvious, palpable, and stares us in the face. However, many a Nigerian sees the multiplicity of the nation-state more from a negative perspective than from the positive one. Interestingly, Nigerians have a common disposition when it comes to remembering past events. Nigerians are usually at loggerheads when it comes to historical accounts. One of the reasons why is that the record keepers are few and partisan. Events that preceded the Nigerian independence from Britain are indistinct. Many people hardly know the main actors of the Nigerian independence struggle, even when they may encounter such people in written texts. Many Nigerians have vague ideas who their sports representatives on the international stage have been. Few people are interested in old songs (Obiegbo). Over a long time of co-existence, people who are associated with a particular nation can have a national culture. Culture, according to Obiegbo, refers to the way of life of a people. This includes their customs, traditions, ideas, art, values their language. Invariably, language can be described as the repository of culture, since a language cannot express or name an entity that is not part of that culture. In the history of any civilization (70), Speaking about culture and nations, Idang informs us that "[t]he cultures of a people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity (). He provides more information, stating that [c]ulture, as it is usually understood, entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or

societies. These peculiar traits go on to include the people's language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and so on. It also goes on to include a people's social norms, taboos and values. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life.

The question arises if there is a national culture. There is indeed a national culture, which Bamgboje-Ayodele and Leonie Ellis say "can be defined as the profile of a society with respect to norms, values, and institutions (4)." What is at play among the ethnic groups in Nigeria is cross cultural interaction. Nsereka explains this better when he distinguishes between cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication among Nigerians. He declares that all communication is both intercultural and cross-cultural. However, communication within the Yoruba nation is more intercultural than cross-cultural, while communication between the Yoruba nation and the Ibo nation is more cross-cultural than intercultural [...] cross-cultural communication involves more diverse groups than intercultural communication. For instance, the communication between the Ijebu people of Ogun State and the Oyo people of Oyo State is both intercultural and cross-cultural, with the degree of intercultural interaction between them being higher than that of cross-cultural interaction. However, communication between the Ijebu people of Ogun State and the Ngwa people of Abia State is more cross-cultural than intercultural. (16)

The position taken here will align with Eze's stance, which posits a global common attitude. To this Eze states thus, The current phase of globalization has further alienated the people from their roots as a result of the impact of information and communication technology. Through the globalized media, people all over the world are being made to look the same, profess the same faith, speak the same language, wear the same type of dress, enjoy the same type of music, and eat the same type of food (141-142).

The departure in this work is that there are common values which people indigenous to what is Nigeria share. They have these features in their attitudes to past events.

Nigeria's Sports People and Music Artistes In football, Nigeria has produced people like Mathias Obianika, Tunde Balogun, Babaotu Mohammed, Kenneth Abani, Haruna Ilerika, Okey Isima, etc. it was when Rangers international, Vasco Da Gama, WNDK/IICC Shooting Stars, Racca Rovers, Kano Pillars, Mighty Jets of Jos, Bendel Insurance, Aluysalam Rocks, etc. They were the nationally known football teams. The next generation of teams were Iwuanyanwu Nationale, Abiola Babes, Rangers International, JIB Rocks of Jos, Mighty Jets, Leventis United, Sharks of Port Harcourt, ACB, Stationary Stores, IICC Shooting Stars, Kano Pillars, Bendel Insurance, Enyimba of Aba The players of that generation were Henry Nwosu, Stephen Keshi, Kingsley Onye, Austin Okocha, Etim Esin, Friday Ekpo/Frida Elaho, Augustine Eguavon, Victor Ikpeba, Rashidi Yekini, Kanu Nwankwo, Richard Owubokiri, Samson Siasia, Finidi George, etc. these players are still remembered because Nigeria excelled most in their time at all levels of international football. The entire world recorded their careers. Ironically, the clubs they played for locally are almost forgotten, even though half of the clubs still exist. Players like Mikel Obi, who retired recently, are still fresh in our memories because they played mostly in Europe. Analysts in Europe have a tradition of keeping the

image of footballers alive. In track and field, Nigeria had Modupe Oshikoye, Mary Onyali, Ezinwa Brothers, Chidi Imoh, Brown Ebebele, Kasali Lasisi, Imonitie of tennis, etc. (Akindutire, Oshikoya).

Ramblers of Ghana in the 50s and 60s. they listened to Orlando Owo, Rex Lawson, Osita Osadebe, Sunny Ade, Haruna Uji, Ebenzar Obey. There were later Ikenga Super Stars, Sweet Breeze, Apostles, One World, Voice of the Cross and Jamaican acts like Jimmy Cliff, Peter Tosh, Bob Marley and many others. (Okosun). They are mostly forgotten. What this present generation know are a handful of like Fela and ... They are only familiar with singers of their generation, who are Mercy Chinwo, Tuface, Teckno, Kizz Daniel, Davido, Tiwa Savage, PSquare, etc.

What Is the Reason behind It?

It can be traced to modern music appreciation. A song is usually at the center of current excitement. There comes a time when the people have had a surfeit of it. At this time, they desire earnestly another hit song. When the desire is met, the song is replaced and is outdated. It has put a lot of pressure on supply. Miraculously, there has been always a new song in town. The trend may have peaked in the 1980s, with the US leading the way. In that time, chains of hits tumbled out. There has surely been a decline in the past decade as a result of burn out. With the discovery of local songs in Nigeria, which now compete with songs anywhere in the world, the appetite for the new is sustained. The Nigerian song writers though in a lot of instances engage in music overlay. They reactivate old songs, unknown to their fans. Since old songs and their artistes are quickly forgotten, songs had made the rounds before in Nigeria or in foreign lands.

Another reason why this is the case is that there is a disconnect between parents and their children. Before now, children in the homes listened to music from one source, with the father and older siblings being in charge and influencing what everybody may listen to. The father may be paying Jimmy Cliff's songs while the other sibling would mix it up with music of a younger generation and the contemporary songs. These days, most teenagers have their android phones and other devices with which they listen to songs they share with their mates. Parents no longer have a central system in the house. The father does not have to tune BBC or VOA, that everybody was compelled to listen to. The business with playing of songs has become individualized. The chain is broken, making the teenagers to be unaware of the music his parents listened to. Besides, mothers no longer move around the house or add another layer of wrapper while singing to female group songs (Endong 14-16).

Surprising as it is, the young people detest old songs. It is poison to their ears. They take offense when old songs are played around them. Their tastes change like the new iPhone trends in the market. Once a new iPhone is felt in the hand, the older version feels like a bore. They drop it. Hardly anybody talked about it. It is not fashionable to be seen clinging to old things. The world is changing fast. Music appreciation has to change as well. If Davido, Wizkid and Flavour are making waves, it will be distasteful to mention or to play old songs. It gives joy to partake in discussions about Davido and his baby 'Mamas or on Kizz Daniel's experience. Tanzania. Thus, a musician can fade from the scene forever (ABEREOJE).

The media would have helped a lot to correct this anomaly. They can mix songs of different generations. They can bring up discussions on the old singers. They can have special sessions on old songs. They can invite old musicians and music experts and throw up queries about a particular song. Ask viewers or listeners to call in to say who played a certain song. Some of the discussants can go ahead and narrate world or national events that took place when the song was released. More background information will then be given about the singer or band and some of the lyrics. For instance, a discussant can ask, "What is 'Funky Town' in the line "I want to take you, to Funky Town." Another will answer and say, "It is in Kansas City, Missouri." It will then be a learning opportunity for listeners. This is how it is done in some advanced countries. Too much damage is being done in Nigeria because of this laxity. This is a job creation opportunity. What is being lost is enormous (Normell).

In the *Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemmingway, the narrator repeats how the Old Man meditates about DiaMagio the baseball player. The narrator in the *Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald Scott speaks about golf and American football. Many Western stories and films feature football stars. Some refer to songs that are tied to the periods of publication. This is how these things and individuals are made to be ever present in our consciousness. The idea helps to heal society. It is beneficial in various ways. Schools can teach about these personalities and their positions. Students have to be familiar with these events, as they help to form who these students are. The students will be able to understand the world better. A student should not be found to say he or she does not have any business with a musician that plied his trade decades ago. As a matter of fact, an educated mind should be curious to hear great songs he must have missed. How could one of the greatest songs exist somewhere, yet one has never heard it? How can one hear a song adjudged one of the greatest ever and shut his ears? Bob Dylan received the Nobel Prize for literature for songs that were sung decades ago. It would help if a student had heard one of Dylan's songs before (Cwik).

The government should encourage the study of history in foundation schools. The Nigerian government banned the study of history as a single course. If students do not learn their history or other people's histories, the students will be handicapped. This is what is happening. Nigerian students have been deprived a lot as a result. Shockingly, Nigerian students have come to hate history. How can somebody have a healthy life when he neglects his past? This is one of the reasons why students in Nigeria may not want to be bothered by old songs or old football teams in Nigeria. The same young people are abreast with football events and past actors in European football leagues? In Europe, ex-footballers are football teams' administrators. They are relevant. After retirement from the game, they still can sustain themselves financially. Boris Becker and Goran Ivanisevic, etc in tennis. In football, there was Franz Beckenbauer, Zinedine Zidane, and so on. They are experts in their fields. Using them makes sports in those places to thrive. In Nigeria, the wrong people are sports administrators while those who were active nationally and internationally fade away. Occasionally, some are spotted living in penury. If they remain in the consciousness of the citizens, a lot of these issues would be avoided (Menzel).

Odion Iruoje is the only known music critic in Nigeria. He has been writing for over 30 years. He will not write for

ever. The country is happy to have one who volunteers to do a job like this. He chronicles lives of song writers and songs. Clearly, few people take interest in what he is doing. He should be invited to different for a to share his knowledge. He can teach in schools periodically as well. Music should not be restricted to learning the act of producing songs. Wolfgang Bender collected Nigerian songs for the University of Mainz in Germany. Nigerian schools and musical departments literary studies departments should endeavor to find out more what Bender and ... did. Literary studies departments should make provisions for the study of various singers and the art. It should be comprehensive. It should be replicated with sports. The football league, tennis, table tennis and, athletics should introduce courses that cover them exclusively. The same thing should be the case with music and music makers. It should progress in the same manner as pure literary students. The designation should be cultural studies. Literary studies departments have shied away from this responsibility for too long. Much times has been lost already. The society is hurting as a result of this negligence (Vanguage News).

Promoting Sports through Literature

How many literary journals in Nigeria have produced books on sports personalities in Nigeria? How many biographies do we have that were written by the sports people? The figures are surely insignificant. This should have been a very robust area in knowledge dissemination. We should have been reading books on the exploits of Dombraye and Onyeawunna or sports commentators Ernest Okonkwo or Sabastian Ofurum. Who was Nnamdi Olebara? Who was Harcourt White? Who was Victor Uwaifo? Who are Bongos Ikwue? These were and are actors' extraordinary talents, who were song writers and film actors and actresses. Essien Igbokwe for instance, was an excellent actress, who played the role of Akpeno in *New Masquerade*. She was also a very good musician. She spoke Efik, Yoruba, Igbo and English, singing in all these languages. She had songs like *Seun Rere* and *Kusimi*. Victor Uwaifo and Bongos Ikwue were and are musicians and sculptors. Nnamdi Olebara was a comedian and. He had moving songs with Harcourt White, who was once a lepper, from Okrika and mistaken to be Igbo. His situation was so tough that he never would have had the chance to excel in life. How beautiful it would be if the individuals cited here were studied in our literary departments. Many young people sing songs they attribute to their churches without knowing that the original singers are Patty Obassy or Voice of the Cross (Njoku and Sowoolu).

Conclusion

The past is quite important in our lives. Our present moment and the future are based on the past. Without the past therefore, there would be a void. In this work, the argument has been made that the contributions of personalities in our past and what they left behind must be savoured. It is unhelpful not to be entertained by works that appeared in the distant and near past. In this regard, we mention areas of endeavors like sports, music and history. It has been found in the course of this research that, universally, people are passionate about events like sports and music that enjoyed in their childhood. They hold fond memories of those things. It is clear also that while the youth detest oldies or old songs, the elderly is hardly amused by the songs the current

generation enjoy. This may not be representative of the global reality. Attempts are being made in some countries of the world to keep the sounds of the old times alive. This is one of the reasons why there are musical and sports museums around the world. It is also the reason why the United States of America has the Walk of Fame in various states and nationally. Such museums are absent in Nigeria. Their absence in Nigeria and the reluctance of radio and TV houses in Nigeria to air these monumental events.

Sports personalities in Nigeria fade away very quickly. It is the same story with musicians and their songs. The youth find old songs irritating. They cannot reach out to songs that were heard just two decades ago. It is argued that this is shocking. It is because a song that hits the airwaves today may turn out the greatest song ever. Would people recoil in the future when they hear the same song. A good sound should remain one in spite of age. This is hardly so in Nigeria, an attitude that is stated here may have originated in the USA. The Americans, more than the Nigerians, make past events and personalities to be relevant in their society as much as possible. Nigeria should learn from these societies. Nigerian novelists and playwrights and poets should re-echo events and names of individuals and concepts of yesterday. Ernest Hemingway is mentioned in his work as one who does this in his *The Old Man and the Sea*. Mark Twain also revives the name of King Arthur in his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

References

1. Abereoje T. The Kings of Baby Mamas. Vanguard, 2017. Available from: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/09/kings-baby-mamas/>
2. Akindutire IO. Sport as a Manifestation of Cultural Heritage in Nigeria. *Int Rev Sociol Sport*, 1992, 27(1).
3. Alison JO, Alison VU. Information and Communication Technology: The Veritable Tool to Reinstate History Teaching in Nigeria Secondary School. *South-East J Res Sustain Educ*, 2021, 4(1).
4. Basu R. The Importance of Forgetting. *Cambridge Core*, 2022, 19(4).
5. Bamgboje-Ayodele A, Ellis L. Knowledge Management and the Nigerian Culture - A Round Peg in a Square Hole? *Afr J Inf Manag Syst*, 2015, 7(1).
6. Balogun SK, Obosi AC. Role of Cultural Identity and Social Cohesion in National Development: Nigeria in Perspective. *Niger J Soc Psychol*, 2018, 1(1).
7. Costanzi M, Cianfanelli B, Santirochi A, Lasaponara S, Spataro P, Rossi-Arnaud C, *et al.* Forgetting Unwanted Memories: Active Forgetting and Implications for the Development of Psychological Disorders. *J Pers Med*, 2021, 11(4).
8. Cwik EF. Take Me Out to the Ballgame: The Function of Joe DiMaggio in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, 2013. Available from: https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=senior_theses
9. Das RJ. Marxism and Revisionism in the World Today. *Capital Class*.
10. de Saint-Laurent C. Uses of the Past: History as a Resource for the Present. *Integr Psychol Behav Sci*, 2019, 53(1).
11. Ditta AS, Benjamin C, Storm C. Thinking about the Future Can Cause Forgetting of the Past. *Q J Exp Psychol*, 2016, 69(2).
12. Dorsh H. African Music Archives (AMA). Available from: <https://www.musicinafrica.net/directory/african-music-archives-ama>
13. Endong FPC, Essoh NEG. Indigenous Media Programmes in Foreign Languages as Strategy to Enhance the Globalisation of the Nigerian Culture. *J Med Stud*, 2013;28(1):13–25.
14. Eze D. Nigeria and the Crisis of Cultural Identity in the Era of Globalization. *Afr Stud Dev*, 2014;6(8):140–7.
15. Ezekiel M, Alaku ME. Re-Echoing the Place of History in the Curriculum of Secondary Education. *J Afr Adv SUS Stud*, 2023;29(2):45–55.
16. Fargion JT, Bender W. *Sweet Mother: Modern African Music*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991.
17. Fawcett JM, Hulbert JC. The Many Faces of Forgetting: Toward a Constructive View of Forgetting in Everyday Life. *J Appl Res Mem Cogn*, 2020, 9(1).
18. Geall L. The Real Reason You Start to Hate New Music as You Grow Older. Available from: <https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/music-tastes-growing-older-hate-new-songs-psychology-scientific-study/306324>
19. Gioia T. Is Old Music Killing New Music? Available from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/old-music-killing-new-music/621339/>
20. Heath J. Why teens don't listen to classical music. Available from: <https://doublebassblog.org/2009/09/why-teens-dont-listen-to-classical-music.html>
21. Idang GE. African culture and values. *Phronimon*, 2015, 16(2).
22. Kahane G. The Significance of the Past. *J Am Philos Assoc*, 2021, 7(4).
23. Kustermans J, de Carvalho B, Beaumont P. Whose Revisionism, Which International Order? Social Structure and Its Discontents. *Glob Stud Q*, 2023, 3(1).
24. Ma'am A. Available from: <https://byjus.com/english/past-tense/>
25. McAndrew F. Why Old People Hate New Music. *Psychology Today*, 2019.
26. McCarroll CJ. Remembering the Personal Past: Beyond the Boundaries of Imagination. *Front*, 11.
27. Menzel JC. Rummenigge: 'Now Real Madrid is Bayern's Bogey Team.' 2024. Available from: <https://en.as.com/soccer/rummenigge-now-real-madrid-is-bayerns-bogey-team-n/>
28. Mukundarajan VN. Why Do Old People Dislike Modern Music, 2021. Available from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/old-music-killing-new-music/621339/>
29. Njoku B, Sowoolu L. Growing up Was Tough, Says Christy Essien. *Vanguard*, 2019. Available from: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/11/growing-up-was-tough-says-christy-essien/>
30. Normnell. If Funkytown Is a Real Place that You Have Visited, then Where Is Funkytown, and Why? Available from:

- https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/grcjxa/if_funkytown_is_a_real_place_that_you_have/
31. Nsereka BG. Multiculturalism in Nigeria as a Factor in Promoting National Integration through Cross-Cultural Communication. *Int J Innov Res Dev*, 2019, 8(1).
 32. Nwoke JO. Downward Trend in the Teaching of History in Nigerian School, 1950–2016. *J Linguist Lang Cult*, 2021, 8(1).
 33. Obiegbu I. Language and Culture: Nigerian Perspective. *Int Multidiscip J Ethiop*, 2014;10(4):69–82.
 34. Okosun K. The Nigerian Music Register (1920s–1960s). Available from: <https://www.musicmemories.life/blog/bz98msjf7w02zkrab8c7m5ls13ukh0>
 35. Oshikoya M. From Montreal to Lagos in 47 Years: The Story of Forgotten Heroes. Available from: <https://guardian.ng/from-montreal-to-lagos-in-47-years-the-story-of-forgotten-heroes/>
 36. Pollmann T. Forgetting the Historical Past. *Mem Cogn*, 1998;26(2):320–9.
 37. Stone C, Barnier AJ, Sutton J. Forgetting Our Personal Past: Socially Shared Retrieval-Induced Forgetting of Autobiographical Memories. *J Exp Psychol*, 2013;142(4):1084–99.
 38. Mhlambi T. An introduction to African music archives. *Music in Africa*, 2015. Available from: <https://www.musicinafrica.net/magazine/introduction-african-music-archives>
 39. Ukpabi UI. History Teaching in Nigerian Institutions: Challenges and the Way Forward. *Int J Humanit Thoereticus*, 2(1), 23–36.