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Intertwining Ecolinguistics with Ecomusicology: Musicking Yorùbá Indigenous Plants for Environmental Sustainability

Intertwining Ecolinguistics with Ecomusicology: Musicking Yorùbá Indigenous Plants for Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract
This study examines ecolinguistic philosophies and ecomusicological ideologies to analyze Yorùbá praise chants and folksongs in relation to their embodiment of indigenous knowledge of plants, ecosystem conservation, and the prevention of environmental degradation. Despite scholarly efforts in exploring vital ecological issues in Nigeria, like environmental degradation, water and air pollution, and land erosion, only a few have explored indigenous knowledge systems. This study obtained data through ethnographic inquiry, using oral in-depth interviews and textual analysis of purposively selected Yoruba folksongs and praise chants. The study uses a content analysis technique to engage interview data in line with the theoretical lens of the discourse. Findings reveal that the adoption of '*trado*-indigenous' regulation of the Yorùbá ecosystems offers a potent strategy applicable to global contexts, especially in addressing issues of ecological sustainability using home-made indigenous solutions. I conclude that there is a need to amplify and sustain these indigenous knowledge systems, as they have proven potent and are visibly efficient in ecological conservation. Policies should be put in place by policymakers around the world to employ the use of indigenous knowledge and strategies in tackling the ecological crisis.

Introduction

In southwestern Nigeria, environmental degradation and climate crisis have led to floods, droughts, diseases, hunger, dust storms, water degradation, inadequate housing, chaos, conflicts, death, and ecological havoc. The Nigerian Punch Newspaper (2023, February 11) reported that the analysis of the 2022 floods in Nigeria showed that no fewer than 655 people lost their lives, and 676,945 farmlands, along with 356,086 houses, were destroyed. On the same token, the 2023 flood reports in the Nigerian Punch Newspaper (2023, February 11) stated that 4,476,876 people were affected, while 3,181 sustained injuries from the flood disaster, with 2,437,411 people displaced from the various affected settlements. This alarming data on ecological crisis and environmental degradation challenges was compounded by the neglect of traditional coping methods, such as indigenous mechanisms and knowledge of ecosystem adjustments, which had become severely constrained by contemporary deviations from cultural norms. Therefore, this alarming ecological crisis requires indigenous knowledge, local strategies, and cultural disciplines that are directly embedded in the Yorùbá musical genres in combating environmental degradation. Therefore, this study examines the Yorùbá indigenous methods of tackling the ecological crisis, embedded in traditional chants and popular

music, for adaptation to ensure the future of healthy ecology and environmental sustainability before the forces of forgetfulness and change render them obsolete.

The significance of this study lies in indigenous knowledge, which encompasses cultural understandings, philosophies, skills, strategies, and coping mechanisms developed by traditional societies with long histories of interaction with their natural environments. Therefore, the adoption of indigenous knowledge of plants will aid in quick propagation and cooperation with nature, enabling people to easily identify with their traditions in providing solutions to climate disasters in southwestern Nigeria. The entrenched local strategies, plants, indigenous knowledge, and cultural disciplines that can potentially counter environmental crisis are sourced locally and, therefore, are cost-free and easily accessible. Besides, it is hypothesised that natural problems require natural solutions without any adverse effects on humans and properties. Most importantly, indigenous societies will be more confident in adopting indigenous remedies, which are more affordable, convenient, and free of technological side effects. It is a truism that the Yorùbá people of southwestern Nigeria have been in existence and survived in their natural habitats for several decades before the arrival of Western technology to the zone. Indigenous people are moving toward revitalising their communities, addressing climate change, restoring native landscapes, reestablishing sustainable natural practices, and strengthening traditional ecological knowledge for environmental sustainability. Therefore, this study unearthed the unique traditional survival methods and strategies for combating ecological crises and securing environmental futures through ecolinguistics and ecomusicological concepts.

Ecolinguistics and Ecomusicology as Research Concepts

Music is a form of sound language that expresses socio-environmental issues at the intersection of ecolinguistics and ecomusicology concepts. The interconnection between ecolinguistics and ecomusicology is seen in a musical language of ecology, which is termed 'ecolinguistic musicology' (ELM). 'ELM' is concerned with the use of language to discuss environmental issues through the adoption of the sound language of music. Besides, Ecomusicology emphasises the triangular structure of culture, environment, and human beings (Allen et al., 2014; Allen & Dawe, 2016), while ecolinguistics, which is often held as the intersection of language and ecology, explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interaction between humans (Chen, 2016). The International Ecolinguistics Association defines 'ecolinguistics' as a field that explores the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species, and the physical environment. However, Chem (2016) opined that a precise definition is still emerging. Ecolinguistics aims are in two categories: theoretical and practical. This study focuses on the latter, which expresses how linguistics is used to discuss crucial ecological matters, ranging from biodiversity loss to climate change, environmental degradation, heat, chaos, water pollution, noise, and ozone layer depletion. In furtherance of ecolinguistics, the practical aim is an exploration of the craft of ecomusicology that sets the language of discourse to sounds.

The peculiarities of musical-sound language in ecology (ELM) are the intersectionality of environment, language, and melody that deeply interject ecological discussion into the mainstream of human consciousness. Language and music are interconnected, and both serve as essential expositions of ecological features. While spoken language is critical to fostering understanding of ecological discourse, as acknowledged by Mühlhäusler (2003), this study offers a unique perspective on humanity's musical-sound-language ecological issues. Stibbe (2015) expands upon Mühlhäusler's paradigm, highlighting that the dynamics of intention of ecolinguistics, then, is to show how linguistic analysis can help reveal 'the stories we live by' – and open them up to question, and help to contribute

analysis to our search for new narratives as we 'resist stories which oppose the ecosophy. Musical arts generally have long served as a potent medium for reflecting and critiquing societal intricacies, as acknowledged by DeMarrais and Rob (2013), Molyneux (2014), and Negash (2004). Recently, the prominence of musical art as social commentary within the humanities, especially among the Yoruba, has surged, with scholars such as Aluede et al. (2024), Olaleye (2022), Owoaje and Sofola (2021), Olaleye and Adeyeye (2020), and Owoaje (2020) exploring various aspects of the use of Yoruba music to address relevant societal issues.

The concept of 'Ecolinguistic musicology' in this study portrays the use of language in a musical form. Music and language are interrelated with a ubiquitous representation of complex cognitive systems. In evolutionary theories, the notion of extensive resemblances and a common evolutionary origin of music and language has a long-standing tradition. Many core physiognomies of language, denoted as "design features," are shared with music. Language has long served as a potent medium for expression and reflection, as acknowledged by recent studies that music and speech functions have many aspects in common and that several neural modules are similarly involved in both (Tallal & Gaab, 2006). This offers a unique perspective on contemporary ecological issues in Amouddou's eco-documentary series viewed from different perspectives (Mliless, 2020; Mliless and Azzouzi, 2020; Saidi, 2018). Recently, the prominence of sound linguistics as ecological commentary within the humanities has surged, with scholars such as Allen & Dawe (2016), Bendrups et al. (2013), and Taylor and Hurley (2014) aligning with a few of the previous studies on music and environmental studies, such as Pedelty (2013), that emphasise its role. This study aims to unravel the complex relationship between linguistics, music, and ecological issues, shedding light on how linguistic elements contribute to ongoing ecological discourse.

In an all-encompassing assessment of the literature, Besson et al. (2011) discuss the transmission effects from music to speech by explicitly focusing on the musical expertise in musicians. Shahin (2011) reviews neurophysiological proof supporting the influence of music on speech perception at the sensory level. Koelsch (2011) discusses discoveries from neurophysiology and brain imaging on music and language processing and integrates these findings into a broader "neurocognitive model of music perception." Schon and Francois (2011) focus on a series of electrophysiological studies and validate that musical expertise facilitates the learning of both linguistic and musical structures. Engaged together, this study provides an inclusive overview of current knowledge on the complex relationship between music, language, and ecology. There has been considerable argument about ecological biopics and how scholars use language to describe environmental issues. The principles of ecolinguistics underpin the scholarship on linguistic features through the lens of macro-linguistics, encompassing pragmatics and cognitive implications, highlighting the role of ecolinguistics in the environment.

Ecomusicology encompasses artistic, scientific, and indigenous considerations of any form of music that expands to culture, environment, and humans. Being a universal and novel discipline, it is one of the most exciting fields of academic musical investigation, encompassing the salient issues of ecology, environment, sound, and all the intricacies of human existence. Therefore, the various nuances in ecomusicology enable the interconnectivity of music, plants, and natural ecology, setting the stage for environmental sustainability. This current ecomusicological approach adopts a holistic and in-depth analysis of the dimension of ecomusicology in Yorùbá indigenous plants. The fertilisation and engagement of the ecosystem, predominantly plants, popular music, chants, and songs, in the analysis of environmental phenomena in contemporary Nigeria is very unique. Music is a creative expression and an intrinsic as well as essential characteristic of the human species. Music, as a cultural object or

product, can take many forms: as a creative object, it is transitorily experienced in popular music, chants, praise, and performance. Such a product, in this study, is a unique and specific embodiment of determinant ideological elements, reflecting cultural knowledge on plants and the traditional philosophy of the Yorùbá people in combating the ecological crisis. Pedelty (2013) opined that environmental issues have clear relevance to the world of popular music. This aligns with and connects with the Yorùbá popular musical genres of southwestern Nigeria. Tailor and Hurley (2014) enumerate global ecological challenges and itemise the role of music in the discourse of environmental problems, not just as a narrative, but as a tool in shaping mindsets towards actionable measures in environmental protection. This study, following the same line of action, enlarges the discourse with a focus on plants and environmental sustainability in Nigeria.

Recent scholarships have drawn attention to the role of indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs in the conservation of plants and biodiversity (Titus, 2018). Indigenous people and traditionalists in numerous parts of the world imbue local perceptions of headlands, springs, trees, and forests with religious meanings and observances (Lawrence, 2003). For instance, the interrelationship between traditional culture, plants, and biodiversity conservation has been well-documented over the last decade (Aaron & Allen, 2012). Therefore, this study extends the discourse from the perspective of distinct, diversified Yorùbá indigenous plants that are entwined in traditional poetry, songs, and Nigerian popular music, which have the potential to chronicle issues of ecological crisis and provide solutions to environmental sustainability in southwestern Nigeria. While there is no single pathway to solving ecological issues, countries must find unique ways that are peculiar to their society, political, and economic realities to offer solutions to ecological crises and environmental turmoil.

Study Design

This cross-disciplinary study is grounded in the ecolinguistic and ecomusicology theoretical frameworks. As earlier explained, language ecology or ecolinguistics is the interaction between the environment and language, founded by Einar Haugen as contained in Kramsch and Steffensen (2008). Ecolinguistics/Language ecology is a new branch of linguistics that investigates the role of language in the development and possible solution of ecology and environmental problems (Fill 1998, in Al-Gayoni, 2012, p. 28). This study is in tandem with Derni (2008), which holds that the study of language is relevant to many other fields of inquiry. Therefore, music, being a branch of linguistics and a form of sound language, is used in correspondence with ecological study. Additionally, ecomusicology emphasises the triangular relationship between culture, environment, and human beings, with music being a vital component of culture (Allen & Dawe, 2016). Within the scope of this study, ecolinguistics and ecomusicology explain the soundscape of nature, ecology, and environmental trajectories through the lens of Yorùbá traditional songs, popular music, praise poetry, and Yorùbá philosophy on ecological sustainability. Ecomusicology's exceptionality lies in its acknowledgement of the values of cultural disciplines, indigenous knowledge, local strategies, and environmental trajectories, in an attempt to establish a theoretical foundation for ecology and ecological sustainability in musicological contexts. As the theoretical compass guiding this study, ecolinguistics and ecomusicology are employed as the lens through which the selected songs are analysed, exploring their potential role in addressing ecological issues within their local context.

Study Population

The Yorùbá people's ancestral homeland cuts across southwest Nigeria and parts of the Republic of Benin. The average population of the Yoruba people in western Nigeria is estimated at 42,844,000, which is 21% of the Nigerian population. The bulk of the Yorùbá currently live in the southwest states of Èkìtì, Ògùn, Òyó, Òsun, Òndó, Lagos State, and spread to parts of Kwara and Kogi states in north-

central Nigeria. The climate in southwest Nigeria is characterised by both wet and dry seasons and relatively high humidity. The vegetation of Yorùbá land can be rightly classified under the derived savanna type. However, thick forests exist alongside the rivers, and the Yorùbá southwest region is unarguably endowed with vast arable land that can be cultivated to produce sufficient food. The climatic variation offers an opportunity for the cultivation of a variety of crops, as well as the abundant presence of wildlife. Despite its enormous agricultural potential and lush greenery, human activities in the ecosystem pose a threat to the environment and, consequently, to humanity. It is therefore essential to employ localised strategies such as the amplification of indigenous knowledge in this area, as engaged in this study.

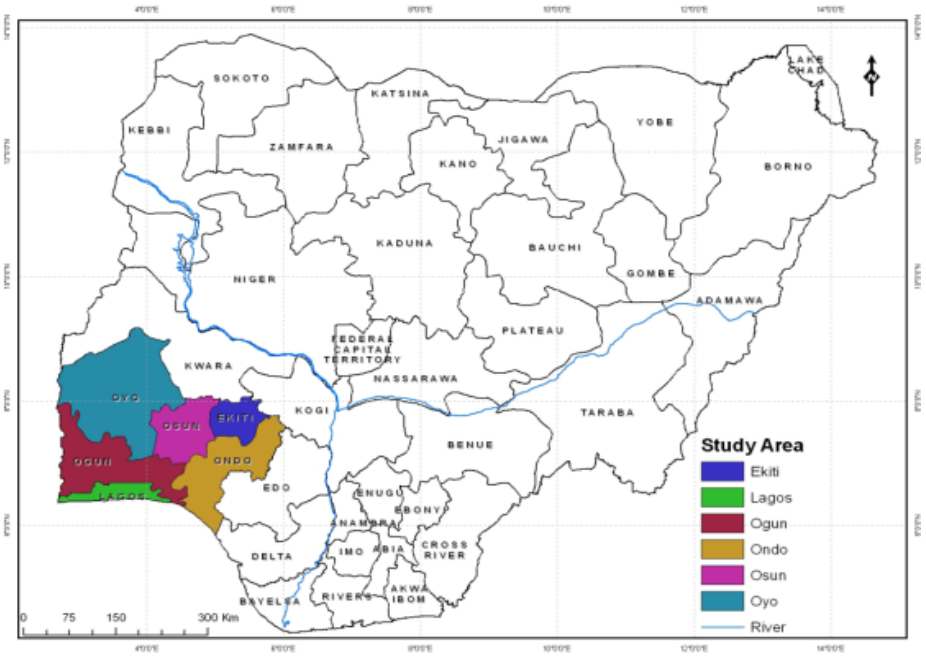

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the Southwestern states
Source: Survey and Geoinformatics Department, FPI, ILARO

It is worth noting that the indigenous Yorùbá are naturally religious people and express animism, which is the belief that spirits exist in most objects, including stones, trees, metals, animals, water, weather, the sea, rivers, humans, and natural entities within the ecosystem. These objects are conceived as totems and symbolic figures of spirituality or divinity. Therefore, ecological crisis and environmental degradation are believed to have ultra-spiritual undertones and divine underground phenomena. It is also important to note that the current religious gymnastics and contemporary exposures have impacts and deviations from the indigenous doctrines, hence the surge in ecological crisis and environmental degradation.

Data Collection

The study adopts a qualitative design that includes ethnographic inquiry through oral in-depth interviews and textual analysis of purposively selected Yoruba folksongs and praise chants. It interviews four purposively selected Ọ̀gbóni initiates to generate primary data regarding the connection between indigenous sacred spaces and the ecosystem. Furthermore, primary data were also generated through an exploration of Yoruba praise chants and folksongs that are affiliated with

the preservation of the ecosystem and the importance of plants, animals, and water resources for ecological sustainability. It analyses their texts within the context of ecolinguistics and ecomusicology. For data generated through oral in-depth interviews of Otunba Jayesinmi Onanuga (3rd February, 2024), Chief Leke Onabolu (3rd February, 2024), Ogboni initiates Semiu Adeogun *Ilédì* (23rd February, 2024), and Personal communication with Chief Solunde (23rd February, 2024). The study employed the content analysis method to engage the findings in line with the theoretical lens of the discourse. The following songs were selected for analysis: *Seleru Agbo*, *Ewuro L'agba igi*, and *Ibeji* chants based on their relevance to the ecomusicological framework. For selected songs, it presents an interpretation of the lyrical content in the English language, translated to preserve the original Yorùba contextual and cultural meanings. It also presents the songs in staff notation, enabling readers to get a sense of their melodies.

Data Analysis

This section undertakes an analysis of Yorùbá indigenous knowledge and explores local strategies adopted to mitigate the climate crisis. The Yorùbá people consciously acknowledge and are aware of the existence of Olódùmarè, the Almighty God, and his divine lordship over the universe. This reality and consciousness make them constantly careful about how the earth and especially their immediate environment is treated. The Yoruba religion and mythology have a significant influence on their socio-communal interactions with the environment, with built-in traditional activities that promote the preservation and sustainability of their environment, encompassing the sea, land, air, and beyond. One of the Yorùbá traditional philosophical thoughts is the development of demarcation theories, which include landed boundaries marked by trees and vegetables, village boundaries defined by rivers (*odò*), city boundaries delineated by hills (*òkè*), and family compounds featuring natural historic objects. Additionally, cities are decorated with valuable trees and plants.

Planting and respectful recognition of trees are directly embedded in the Yorùbá culture. In traditional settings, land demarcation is done with *pèrègún* tree (Dracaena draco: known as dragon tree, used for treating diabetes and abdominal pain) instead of modern blocks. Big *ìrókò* trees (Chlorophora Excelsa, often referred to as Nigerian teak or timber is also used for furniture making) are usually grown in Yorùbá settlements and villages, squared with other smaller trees, and are regarded and used as relaxation centers in the hot afternoons for their shades, and for evening relaxation, where they enjoy the cool breeze from the tree branches, especially during hot weathers. Usually, an ancestral big *àràbà* tree (Pentandra: silk cotton tree) is preserved around Yorùbá villages and accorded respect for preservation, often making it the point of worship for deities such as *òòsà alálè* (an ancestral god). Therefore, the Yorùbá recognition of the importance of trees and their indirect preservation of them is an age-long preservative strategy that prevents environmental disasters. Very closely related to the efficacy of trees and plants is the special recognition given to palm trees among the Yorùbá of western Nigeria.

In Yorùbá myth and legends, palm trees are usually given the first appearance in the creation story and are of special importance to Yorùbá deities. They are regarded as the bridge that links heaven and earth. The multipurpose use of palm trees for producing red oil, palm wine, soap, and palm fronds (*mariwo*) as deities' clothing and for shrine decorations makes it a special tree among the Yoruba people of western Nigeria. More so, the *ikin* (16 palm nuts) - the Yorùbá divination material in Ifa practice, is usually sourced from the palm oil tree (Elaeis guineensis). This alludes to the deep knowledge of the Yorùbá about ecology, and the value inherent in the various trees and plants within and outside their environment. Like several other human societies, especially in Africa, the Yorùbá have survived through the pre-industrial era by regulating society through various strategies, such as

ogbón inú (inner wisdom or traditional knowledge) and the observance of cultural and religious doctrines. Such a doctrine includes the preservation of demarcated parts of a forest as a sacred space where no one is allowed to hunt, cultivate, or cut down any tree for whatever reason. While engaging in any of these activities is considered a desecration of sacred space, this doctrine serves a dual role, as it entrenches the culture of ecological conservation. While the word "*Igbó*" is generally used to describe "forest", it is also used in the context of sacredness and conservation, where it is used to describe a conserved sacred forest like *Igbó Òjílá* (a conserved sacred forest associated with the worship of Ifá), *Igbó Orò* (conserved sacred forest related to the worship of Orò), and *Igbó Ìgbàlè* (conserved sacred forest associated with the worship of Egungun, also referred to as "masquerade" or "spirit manifest").

In the same way, the Yorùbá have a strong tradition of conserving water resources. Streams and other larger water bodies are associated with "*Yemoja*" and "*Òsun*", depending on established doctrine in each settlement. These water bodies are often the point of worship of these deities, and are therefore cherished in the expression of their belief in animism. While these water bodies serve as a worship point to these deities, they also serve as a source of drinking water, irrigation, and water for domestic purposes. For these reasons, the conservative culture, which is tied to animism, helps to conserve water resources and aquatic life, discouraging practices considered to negate these values. Some rivers and streams even have myths that forbid anyone from fishing in them. Such myths claim that such fish will never be suitable for eating when cooked. Since such claims have remained controversial, it has contributed immensely to the conservation of aquatic life. The Yoruba people believe that there is a need to appease *Òsun* whenever a river dries up or overflows its bank. It is believed that the goddess has the power to prevent such ecological disasters and also possesses the power to bring fertility to the barren. However, refusing to appease her and keep her grove clean and preserved is believed to possibly cause her anger, leading to an overflow that can drown people, cause boats to capsise, and destroy farmlands. They therefore respect and worship her, especially by keeping her grove sacred and performing sacrificial rites there at appointed times. This belief system has continued to play a crucial role in the preservation of rivers and other water bodies, thereby contributing significantly to a sustainable ecosystem. A popular traditional Yorùbá song discusses the importance of leaves for healing before the arrival of Western medicine to Yorùbá nations.

Sélèrú Àgbo

Sélèrú àgbooo, àgbàrá àgbooo,	Concoction from roots and flowing waters
Losun fi n wemo re,	*Osun* used those to fortify her children
Kí dókítà ó tó dé	Before the arrival of modern medicine.

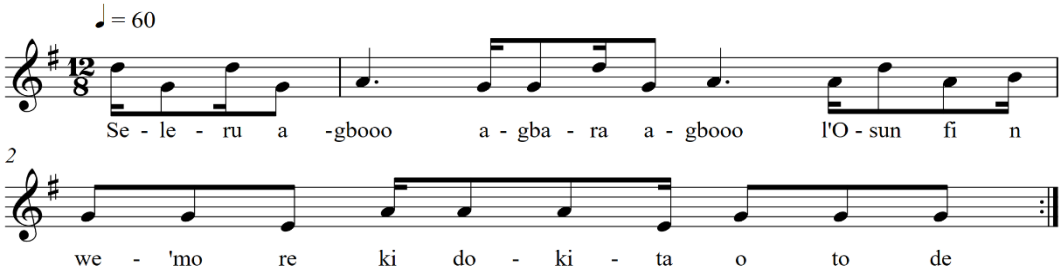

Figure 2: Musical score of Sélèrú àgbo
Source: Researcher (2025)

The song is part of the traditional tools used in sacralising *Osun* and indirectly, the several groves preserved for her worship. It emphasises the efficacy of water as a major sustainer of life, as well as the efficacy of roots and leaves in healing. It therefore makes a significant contribution to the preservation of the environment.

In an oral interview, a respondent, Chief Leke Onabolu, noted that although the Yorùbá usually have shrines around their house, shrines meant for the worship of the principal deities are traditionally located in the groves or forests. These shrines have trees planted in them, while others are located near lakes, streams, and rivers in serene natural environments. In the traditional Yorùbá pearls of wisdom, most of these trees are sacred and are preserved for the worship of deities, such as the *akòko* tree (Newbouldia laevis, also has various medicinal uses), which is sacred to *ògún*, *orò,* and is found in groves with *pèrègún* as an adornment and boundary marker tree. While the shrine of *ògún* is usually located at a distance from the main building with several trees, that of *èsù* is found at a crossroads. Most of these decorations, boundary markers, and medicinal trees and plants support healthy ecological preservation and good environmental sustainability.

In an oral interview with Otunba Jayesinmi Onanuga in 2024, he opined that a significant part of the Yoruba indigenous environmental sustainability strategies is the establishment of *Ilédì,* the place (building) of meeting/worship of the *Òsùgbó* and *Ògbóni* fraternity - the body of initiates, mostly males with a few females, full of wisdom, experience, character, and meritorious services within the community. They are the traditional establishment in charge of rules, regulations, and maintenance of general order. *Ilédì* is accorded similar reverence as *Igbó Orò* and *Igbó Ìgbàlè*. They may sometimes be built within the town, but are primarily established away from residential areas. These buildings are erected with the architectural design of a typical Yorùbá court and often conserve specially selected species of plants meant for use both in the sanctuary and by locals for medicinal purposes. According to Ogboni initiate Semiu Adeogun, in 2024, *Ilédì* serves as a secret meeting venue to address serious issues concerning the welfare of the masses, while also functioning as a place of worship. The uniqueness of *Ilédì* on environmental sustainability is that several trees are planted on the acres of land within the vicinity as natural habitats for their meetings, and are usually surrounded by traditionally made brick walls. In a personal communication with Chief Solude in February 2024, he confirmed that the Fraternity in 1984, when it marked its 70th anniversary, showed there were 10,000 members in 300 *ilédìs* across the country (Personal communication: Chief Solunde, 2024). The researcher noticed the planting of twenty (20) trees in an average *ilédì* in Abeokuta Township, and if twenty trees were planted in all the *Ilédì* across Yorùbá land, which would amount to a humongous and massive number of trees planted courtesy of *Ilédì* of the *Ògbóni / Òsùgbó*. Therefore, the indigenous practices of *ilédìs* that encourage the planting of trees should be encouraged for environmental sustainability.

Closely related to *Ilédì's* practice is the *ìpébí* kingship tradition among the Yoruba people, which encourages the planting of trees. Traditional rulers are custodians of African culture and traditions. The traditional rulers are expected to undergo a period of seclusion in *ìpébí*, a designated shrine where the king is taken through necessary rites and rituals before ascending the throne. In Yoruba kingship, the royal seclusion, otherwise known as *ìpébí,* is where the king-elect undergoes traditional training in customs and traditions of the land, learning about the historical antecedents of the town and praying to his ancestors for a successful tenure. While in seclusion, he is not allowed to see any member of his family and might be required to sleep on the bare floor. The *Ìpébí* is a secluded location that features several planted traditional trees, including those used for traditional kingship training materials such as *ògbóni* drums. This traditional practice also encourages the planting of trees, which helps promote healthy environmental sustainability.

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Besides the indirect preservation of groves and forests, the Yoruba also preserve the ecology through their beliefs in herbs, leaves, seeds, and greens concussions (*àgbo*) as medicine. Some of the leaves and their efficacy in healing are: *ìràwò ilè* (Mitracarpus scaber) for toothaches and arthritis; *etí erin* (aloe vera) for skin allergies and wounds; *ewe ile* (moringa) for common infections and asthma; *efirin* (African basil) for digestive aid, oral infections; *gbúre* (water leaves) for the prevention of heart disease and improvement of cognition. The Yoruba believe that the *òsányìn* deity is in charge of all roots, leaves, vegetables, forests, and trees and has absolute control, monitoring, and the use of plant materials for medicine and to cure illness. The greatness of *òsányìn* is seen in the following praise verse;

Agbenigi, òròmo die abìdí sonso,	One who is versed in the use of root,
Koogo egboro,	One who is as powerful as an iron rod,
àképè nígbà òràn kò sunwòn	One to whom people appeal when things are bad,
Ewé gbogbo kìkì oògùn	One who turns all leaves into medicine.

The above praise poetry presents Yorùbá confirmation of *òsányìn* as a powerful healer of all sicknesses. It possesses the power to appeal to witches or force them to release a victim who has fallen into their power. In their understanding of plants and their medicinal values, the Yorùbá recognise *Ewúro* (bitter leaf) as an outstanding plant given its dual role as food and medicine. Apart from being cooked as a vegetable, they employ its leaves, stems, and roots for various medicinal endeavours. More interestingly, the plant is always available despite the season, as it does not become dry like other plants during the dry season. Additionally, its stem is used as a chewing stick, serving a medicinal purpose in oral hygiene. This puts the plant in a special position of utility and, recognising its value, a Yoruba folksong describes it as the most valuable plant to which all other trees and plants should pay homage.

Ewúro Làgbà Igi

Ewúro làgbà igi ooo,	Bitter leaf plant is the head of all trees
Ewúro làgbà igi,	Bitter leaf plant is the head of all trees
Igi gbogbo e bòwò fewúro,	Every tree must bow for the bitter leaf plant
Ewúro làgbà igi	Bitter leaf plant is the head of all trees

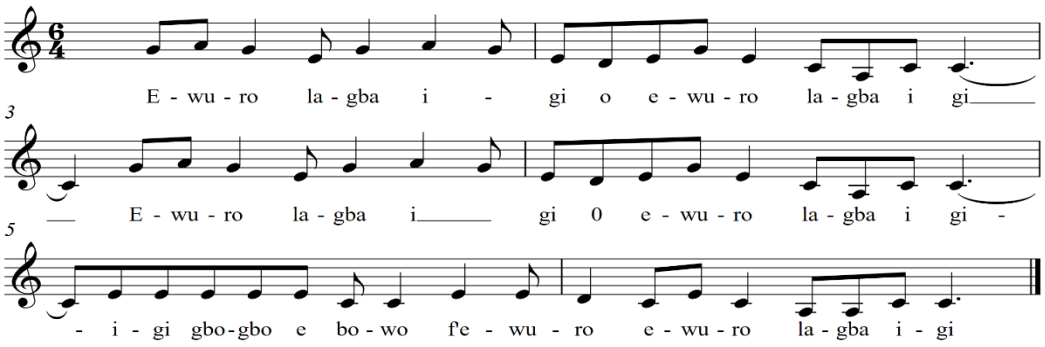

Figure 3: Musical score of Ewúro làgbà igi
Source: Researcher (2025)

Bitter leaves (Vernonia Amygdalina: *ewúro*) in Yorùbá contexts represent superiority because of their medicinal values to perform multifarious functions as antibacterial, anti-malarial, and anti-parasitic agents. Bitter leaf juice serves multipurpose roles. It is believed to enhance fertility, promote

abdominal healing, lower high blood pressure, reduce the risk of cancer and diabetes, alleviate fever, headache, and joint pain, and contribute to overall well-being. Generally, it contains complex active components that are pharmacologically useful. The song is a reflection of Yorùbá recognition of leaves and trees for healing, and therefore, they must be accorded respect and must be preserved.

Furthermore, the Yorùbá have several deities that they believe serve as intermediaries between them and the supreme God, which must be venerated with a preserved place of worship in the forests. Through the activities connected to the places of worship of these deities, such as *the òrò* forest, *ìgunukó* groves, and their sacred groves, as a symbol of identity for devotees of these deities, the Yoruba preserve their ecology. However, the arrival of foreign religions, such as Christianity and Islam, and other modern religious practices, has led to a reduction in adherents and, indirectly, the decline of indigenous religions that have put measures in place for the conservation of nature. The traditional preservation of land, which contributes to the ecology, has experienced a significant reduction through the conversion of sacred groves into infrastructural facilities, worship venues, and religious prayer camps. This advancement in ecological destruction warrants concern, especially since the preservation of ecology and biodiversity conservation are crucial for sustainability. There is also a need to resuscitate the Yorùbá traditional belief systems that encourage the conservation of sacred groves.

Apart from the preservation of trees and plants, the Yorùbá also preserve wildlife through their traditional belief system. For instance, twins (*ìbejì*) are considered to be sacred children with supernatural nature whose births are accompanied by some spirits. Hence, they are regarded *òrìsà* themselves. Their existence is linked to *òrìsà ìbejì*, which must be regarded, worshipped, and venerated in respect of each set of twins. The *ìbejì* being an *òrìsà* is comparable to a beautiful animal – the white-thighed colobus monkey with the botanical name *Colobus vellerosus* (Olateju, 2005). This is reflected in the following *oriki ibeji* (twins praise chant):

ìbejì, orò, afemari ìbejì,	Twins, spirits, people look for in vain,
Winni winni lójú orogú	The frail one in the eyes of the rival,
Wòrò wòrò lójú ìyá e	The robust in their mothers' eyes,
Edun lóní kí n jó	Twins compel me to dance,
Èyílà, bíbé ledun nbé	Twins jumped about on the tree tops,
Edun péléngé orí igi	the white-thighed colobus monkey that lives on trees

The Yorùbá indigenous beliefs in *Òrìsà ìbejì* help in the preservation of the white-thighed colobus monkey in the Yorùbá ecosystem. Individuals who are in any way related to twins are forbidden from killing this animal. This is based on the belief that killing them might spell doom for the twins to whom they are related. The white-thighed colobus monkey is linked to twins for several reasons. One, they are usually found in groups, connected to the belief that twins share the same spirit. The second is their habitation of groves reserved for the worship of various deities. The above praise chant reflects and compares Yoruba twins to the animal. This invariably keeps most Yorùbá hunters from killing monkeys and other monkey-related species, indirectly contributing to animal preservation in the ecosystem. The conservation of these species as related to twins becomes more potent as there is hardly anyone who is not associated with a set of twins, given the extensive family ties among the Yoruba. In addition to this is the prohibition of hunters from killing a pregnant animal. This traditional conservative regulation is tied to the possibilities of the killing of such animals, spelling doom for the hunter's pregnant wife or relative. This, in particular, is a regulation put in place to ensure continuity of life in the wild.

Conclusions

Music is inextricably linked with the contexts and socio-environmental conditions in which it is produced, performed, and consumed. Social and cultural customs influence music practices in both macro and micro capacities, and they are an authentic means of preserving culture, documenting the present, and predicting the future of ecological wellness, environmental sustainability, and general earth maintenance. The adoption of technological solutions to combat the ecological crisis and improve environmental health is a positive development. However, the application of indigenous knowledge systems and local adaptation strategies to combat ecological crisis will be of great advantage in the ongoing search for a viable strategy in this regard. The adoption of '*trado*-indigenous' regulation of the Yorùbá ecosystem and ecological crisis offers a potent strategy applicable to global contexts, especially in addressing issues of ecological sustainability using home-made indigenous solutions. This is due to the closeness of indigenous people to natural habitats, and their potential to tackle the ecological problems from the grassroots, offering a "Global" channel that stems from the local to global space. There is a need to amplify and sustain these indigenous knowledge systems, as they have proven to be potent and visibly effective in ecological conservation. Policymakers around the world should implement policies that utilise indigenous knowledge and strategies in addressing the ecological crisis.

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Oral interview

Otunba Jayesinmi Onanuga (3rd February, 2024)
Chief Leke Onabolu (3rd February, 2024)
Ogboni initiates Semiu Adeogun *Ilédì* (23rd February, 2024)
Personal communication with Chief Solunde, (23rd February, 2024)

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