

PROMOTING CULTURAL ARTIFACTS THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE IN A DIGITIZED NIGERIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY: THE IGBO EXPERIENCE

Chinedum N. Osinigwe, Ph.D.
Department of Performing Arts & Music
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo State

Abstract

Culture - which characterizes people's way of life and idiosyncrasies - is usually showcased in various humanistic endeavours and interactions through media such as music, fashion, arts, literature, and so on, by individuals who themselves are stakeholders in such cultural identity in terms of their nativity, nurture and behavioural influence. More so, in this digital age and economy, music, especially the popular genre, had seen massive innovative and creative contributions from musicians of different vocations and socio-cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, in trying to promote cultural relevance and uniqueness, musicians of this age have continuously used different artefacts (musical and non-musical) attributable to ethnic entities in Nigeria to achieve this feat. Based on the foregoing, this study discusses different artefacts identifiable with Igbo culture, which are of significant value and importance that were showcased in selected music videos of notable Igbo popular musicians in Nigeria. The primary data is generated through ethnographic inquiry and descriptively presented within the sociological context. The study also adopts content analysis in presenting and analyzing musical videos that were randomly selected, including the artists. These artefacts were analyzed and discussed based on their religious, prestigious, and ceremonial representations and significance to the cultural practices of the Igbo in Nigeria. The effect and implication of digitization in this age of promoting these cultural artefacts using various social media platforms were equally put into perspective. This sociologically inclined study shows its relevance to the body of knowledge through a systematic discourse on cultural values and symbols, especially that of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria.

Keywords: Cultural artefacts, Digitized, Popular music scene, Ethnic entity, music videos

Introduction

Societies or races of people all over the world have certain cultural practices that dictate their social lives and interactions, and by these practices, they are profiled and identified. Culture, according to Ellwood (1918) “is the distinguishing mark of human social groups, possess by them in differing degrees and qualities” (780). In another instance, culture characterizes people's way of life and behavioural patterns, both internally and externally. The above is corroborated by the Centre for Advance and Research on Language Acquisition, **asserting** culture is a shared pattern of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding learned by socialization (as quoted in Zimmermann 2015). The more a country or society grows in size (increased population), the more diverse the culture is due to interactions by people with different backgrounds and affiliations.

In Nigeria, various ethnic entities are domiciled within the geographical space, and each has been identified with one or more cultural practices which define them as a race or social group. The Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo have remained the major ethnic groups in Nigeria whose cultural practices and idiosyncrasies have been profiled over time at different academic and non-academic fora. The concepts of food, costumes, ancestry, poetry, medicine, music and dance, language and poetry, and

of course, artefacts, have remained agelong parameters for academic discourses (Ayeomoni, 2006; Igboanusi, 2001; Ohadike, 1996; Oludare, 2018). It is a known fact that no culture is static, but evolves due to pressing external influences and the existential need to remain relevant among other competing and domineering cultures, especially foreign counterparts.

Statement of Problem

Igbo cultural artifacts such as music, language expressions, symbols, attire, performance practices, folklore motifs, and ritual aesthetics have historically functioned as important carriers of identity, memory, and social values within Igbo society. However, rapid globalization, urbanization, westernization, and the dominance of mediated entertainment cultures have significantly reduced the visibility and everyday use of many of these indigenous cultural resources, particularly among younger generations in Nigeria. Despite the growing influence of Nigerian popular culture as a vehicle for cultural expression, there remains insufficient scholarly attention to how it can intentionally function as a structured medium for promoting and preserving Igbo cultural artifacts. More specifically, there is limited research examining the mechanisms through which popular culture can serve as a strategic tool for cultural transmission rather than merely a site of aesthetic borrowing or symbolic reference.

Research Objective

This study therefore seeks to investigate how popular culture in Nigeria can be effectively utilized as a platform for promoting Igbo cultural artifacts, with particular attention to the processes, agents, media spaces, and creative strategies involved in sustaining indigenous cultural identity within contemporary expressive environments. It highlights different musical outputs that showcase and promotes Igbo artefacts in musical video clips/ tracks of selected Igbo popular musicians and discussing their cultural significance and importance.

Methodology

By way of description, an artefact can be any object artistically crafted or produced to act as a symbol or mark of identity or representation. While a cultural artefact “is an object that provides information about the activities or identity of any group - ethnic or social - that owns or uses it (Encyclopaedia of Business, 2023). The above definition will suffice as a context for discussing the primary data (cultural artefact) in a more descriptive approach using the content analysis method. The selected musical samples analysed using three (3) significant parameters: religious/ritual, prestigious, and ceremonial artefacts as entrenched in the deep cultural practices of the Igbo in Nigeria. The selected musical samples include:

1. **Egedege** (Theresa Onuorah) - remixed by Larry Gaaga featuring Flavour and Phyno
2. **Umu-Igbo** – by Flavour featuring Biggie Igba

These musical samples/ videos were selected randomly using an ethnographic method of enquiry. This was achieved by ascertaining that each video meets the criterion for the selection of primary data, which is, being richly embedded with different Igbo cultural artefacts in terms of the language, costumes, dance/drama, instruments, other symbolic objects, sceneries and overall aesthetics.

Cultural identity however plays a pivotal role in this study from a theoretical perspective: in terms of aggregating the activities of individual musicians of Igbo extraction concerning their loyalty and allegiance to Igbo culture. As Lustig (2013) succinctly asserts, “cultural identities are central, dynamic, and multifaceted components of one's self-concept and they exist within a changing social context”. The display of traditions, heritage, language, religion, ancestry, aesthetics, thinking patterns, and social structures of the Igbo culture in the respective music outputs of the selected

musicians above, indicates strongly the processes of cultural identity. This foregoing, however, becomes reassuring and worthy of note in that the allegiance to these cultural tenets and the need to promote them is facilitated and initiated by young, talented and creative popular musicians of Igbo extractions. Additionally, the use of the Igbo language - though, most times code mixed - in these musical videos goes a long way to promote connections and roots to ancestors and cultural histories.

Nigerian Popular Music in the Digital Age

The contemporary popular music *scene* in Nigeria over the years has witnessed monumental changes in terms of music production, dissemination, marketing, and collaborations. Nigeria, which harbours so many ethnic groups and entities have seen its music industry overrun by musical outputs churned out periodically by a retinue of musicians, both old and young, with deep enthusiasm in representing their various ethnic divides. Various scholarly works have equally kept a tab on the ever-changing and dynamic nature of the music industry in Nigeria, especially as participated by various ethnic representations.

Osinigwe (2021) in one of his treatises discussed the evolutionary process witnessed by popular music culture from the post-independence era to the 21st century. He opined that the post-independence era (1960 – 80) witnessed top-notch mastery and dexterity in vocal deliveries and the handling of musical instruments, especially of western origin. The analogue approach to music production contributed greatly to the creative outputs recorded within the era. However, the 21st century period witnessed a massive influx of technological innovations that changed the face of music production, performance, distribution and marketing. Young musicians took the advantage of these innovations in the industry to sharpen their musical skills and abilities, but more on the vocal deliveries as the analogue system was overtaken by a digital approach (14). Different creative attributes emanate from this present era in the areas of music production and performance. Most musicians looked inward into their cultural background to adopt folksy themes for their musical outputs for want of uniqueness and creativity. The use of codemixing with the mother tongue has remained a prevalent trend among artists of different ethnic affiliations and age brackets (Osinigwe, 2016).

Digitization, a new wave across the globe, swept across various sectors in Nigeria and changed the old and archaic ways of doing things. Affected by this wave were the Industrial, Agricultural, Educational, Business, Information technology, Mass media, Music and Creative sectors respectively. The popular music scene in Nigeria, which is the focus of this study, had had its full share of this evolutionary trend called digitization. From a more negative perspective, Stafford asserts that the rapid emergence of new technologies has caused huge alterations in what was once a straightforward business model for success in the music industry, causing many industry leaders to take a second look at how to tackle their art forms. He further opines that the trend has equally scooped up artists and their music and has moved them to an entirely different level of sharing, purchasing, marketing and distributing (2010, p.113).

Social media and its attendant platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and the rest) have remained the culprits for either negative or positive appraisal of digitization, especially in the popular music scene. In his opinion, Patti believes these platforms opened people's participation in the public arena of cultural, political and social debates through virtual means of expressing themselves using texts, images, and audio-visual materials (n.d). Again, Safford appraises this scenario from the standpoint of online activities through social media impacting negatively on the musicians and their creative outputs. His concerns dwell more on the illegal sharing of musical files using online platforms and this act creates a decline in the cost of music for

consumers as well as an increase in their knowledge of artists (2010, p113). Most musicians in this age enjoy great popularity for themselves and their musical products through the use of the aforementioned social media platforms. Some online platforms are created to help in the distribution and marketing of musical products for these musicians for a small token. This is achieved when consumers download this music using an internet connection which is usually subscribed to on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Some of these online platforms include *Boomplay, Amazon, iTunes Store, HDtracks, Bandcamp*, and so on (MUO, 2023). The positive take from the digital age (especially in the music industry) is the opportunity it creates for i. consumers to have access to millions of music both local and foreign - of any genre - online with just the click of a button; and ii. musicians to enjoy massive exposure to their musical products and brand both locally and internationally.

Igbo Popular Music, Past and Present

The Igbo have remained dominant participants in musical activities within the Nigerian music industry with their unique evolutionary trends since the post-independence era. Osigwe (2016) was able to capture different evolutionary trends of Igbo popular music in Nigeria - from pre-independence to the 21st century - in his thesis and tagged the music genre (popular music) and the epochs using Igbo terminologies:

E-gwu n-nu-ta [MMHLH] - it means borrowed music and it represents the popular music genre which comprises all manner of vocal and instrumental music, including dance forms.

E-gwu i-kwo-ki-li-kwo [MMLHLLH] – this represents 'Igbo native blues' and it comprises all musical typologies or hybrids derived under 'Highlife music' as advanced by Igbo popular musicians right from pre to the post-independence era (1940-1960). Prominent Igbo musicians of this period include Osita Osadebe, Christogonus Ezebuio Obinna (alias the *Ultimate Dr Sir Warrior*), Oliver Sunday Akanite (alias *Olive De-Coque*), and a host of others.

E-gwu o-gba-ra-o-fuu [MMLLLMML] – this means music of the new age, and it comprises all foreign musical typologies advanced during the post-independence era. This period foreshadows the absence of Igbo highlife music due to the Nigerian civil war (1967-70). Most Igbo highlife musicians were grafted to the war zones during this period thereby allowing their counterparts from other ethnic divides to take centre stage in the music scene. The younger generation of musicians of Igbo extraction ventured into other forms of popular music, and these include Jazz, Pop, Disco, Reggae, Soukous (Congo music) and the rest. This period dovetailed into the twenty-first century and saw the emergence of these notable musicians: Nelly Uzonna Uchendu, Bright Chimezie (alias *Okoro Junior*), Christy Uduak Essien-Igbokwe, Onyeka Onwenu, and others.

E-gwu a-gwa-ra-o-gwa [MMHMMHM] – this denotes the syncretic form of popular music where styles such as Rap, Rhythm and Blues, Hip-hop, Rock, Reggae were fused with local derivatives such as Highlife, Afro, Nkwa and Ekpili music; coming out with hybridised musical forms or typologies such as naija hip-hop, hip-life, gospel *nkwa*, Igbo rap, and so on. In the twenty-first-century Nigerian music industry, code switch or mix and rap remain the prevalent trends in the vocal sections of the majority of the hybridized musical typologies. Notable musicians of this era include Okechukwu Edward Ukeje (alias *Mr Raw*), Chinedu Izuchukwu Okoli (alias *Flavour*), the duo of Obumneme Ali (alias *Smash*) and Nwachukwu Ozioko (alias *Vast*) – *Bracket*, Chibuzor Nelson Azubuike (alias *Phyno*), Owoh Chimaobi Chrismathner (alias *Zoro*), and a host of other young-talented musicians.

Igbo Cultural Artefacts

The Igbo is one of the three largest ethnic groups in the country. Like most Nigerian societies little is known for certain of the evolution of Igbo society, and there have been claims of Jewish origin for them, the term Igbo being said to be a corruption of Hebrew. Linguistic evidence indicates, however, that the Igbo language together with such genetically related languages as the Yoruba, Idoma, and Igala, evolved in the Niger-Benue confluence area 6000 years ago" (Afigbo, 1981). In the present day, the Igbos are located on both sides of the River Niger in villages and larger farming communities as expressed by their political organization; they occupy most of southeastern Nigeria - Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Imo, Rivers (Ahoada area) and Delta (Asaba, Ika, and Agbo areas) States respectively (Osigwe, 2016). There have been two conflicting myths about the existence and settlement of Igbo people in the geographical areas where they are located. One of the myths asserts that they migrated from the north of the Niger-Benue confluence and settled along the fringe of the rainforest of southeast Nigeria (Abayomi, 1980 as quoted in Ogbu, 2013). While the other myth attests that the majority of Igbo were indigenous to the area they occupy presently as they were created and planted there by God'Chineke'(Ogbu, 2013, pp.395)

The Igbo live in a patrilineage setting where groups of families or clans (*Umunna*) form a village, and groups of villages form a town (*Obodo*). Mixed, dispersed and compact settlements are also found in the Igbo nation (Ogbu, 2013). Igbo customs and traditions are homogenous despite the geographical displacement and dialectical differences inherent in their historical background. The Igbo hold tenaciously to their culture and traditions anywhere they found themselves. The cutting of kola nut, pouring of libation, the use and adoption of *Ofo* (staff of truth and justice), and the distinctive features of their title taking are the strong traditional foundations of a true Igbo man. Furthermore, their religious concepts of God the creator (*Chukwu okike*) and other smaller gods and spirits such as *alusi*, *mmuo*, *ahajioku*; and the ideology of abomination (*nso ala*) - which cut across the entire Igbo land - are made manifest in their artistic, social, religious as well as political traditions and pattern of leadership (Onwuejeowu 1981 as cited in Ogbu, 2013).

In terms of profession, the Igbo have remained great farmers as they are surrounded by farmlands in villages and towns. Oral tradition (*Nri* corpus of myth) had it that the first Igbo family created by God were Eze Nri, his wife, sons and daughters. They were fed with pieces of yam and were encouraged by God to cultivate the land and grow their yams on it. Because of their farming profession, the Igbo have over the centuries melted and forged irons (hoes, spearheads, arrowheads, and knives) for their farming activities. Apart from yams being the principal staple food, cocoyam, bananas and plantains are also attributable to the arable activities of the Igbo (Ohadike, 1996).

As discussed above, Igbo cultural artefacts or arts are greatly influenced by their cosmological dispositions and traditions. The notion that "art is for art's sake" does not apply to traditional African art. Igbo arts or artefacts according to Cole and Aniakor are notable for their quantity, quality and diversity; it also functions simultaneously to improve and reflect the quality of life, to honour divinities and to entertain (1984, as cited in Ogbu, 2013). From the description above, it is deduced, however, that any art or artefact is judged based on the following parameters: the religious/ ritual, prestigious/ adornment, and ceremonial functions respectively.

Igbo Religious/ Ritual Artefacts

These include all visual symbolic objects created, sculptured or carved for religious or ritual purposes:

1. ***Ofo*** (carved wood) – a cultural object used among the Igbo that symbolizes authority which descends from the ancestors, and upholds truth. It is handed on to the first son (*Okpala*) for

several generations (Otubah, n.d). “It is believed to have been set aside by God as a symbol of truth and binds all oaths sworn in any Igbo community” (Horton, n.d. as quoted in Otubah, n.d.).

2. **Oji** (kolanut) – though not an art object but is the most cherished fruit in Igbo culture and it symbolizes appreciation and acceptance. It is usually offered to visitors first before any other things. Likewise, in performing oblation to the ancestral spirit, kolanut is the first to be offered before any other offering or request is made (Ogbalu, 1970, as quoted in Otubah, n.d.).
3. **Ikenga** (carved image) –this symbolizes the strength of a man's arm which indicates his good future, and it is usually split at the person's funeral (Arinze, 1970). *Ikenga* is a carved image with two horns, sitting on as tool, with a drawn sword in his left hand and a human skull in the other.
4. **Mmonwu** (masquerades) – different masquerades emanate from different localities in the Igbo community. Some masquerades are termed to be more powerful than others in terms of performing magical powers and are believed to be connected with dreaded spirit beings or deities. The masks and costumes used by these masquerades are good examples of cultural artefacts as they usually come in different colours, shapes and sizes. The *Ijele* masquerade is considered the biggest among all other masquerades in the Southeast zone of Nigeria, and it originated from Umuatuolu Umueri in Anambra state.

Igbo Prestigious Artefacts

These are artefacts carved, sculptured, and melted for royalty, *Ozo* titled men (Chieftaincy), wealthy men of valour and honour. These artefacts include the following:

1. Royal throne – carved in wood or iron materials (bronze) and decorative furniture
2. Royal apparel/ cloak and symbolic Objects (wooden sword, crown, staff, bracelets and necklaces)
3. Apparel for *Ozo* title holders with different adornments
4. Ceremonial wooden stools/chairs for titled men (*Ozo*) and women
5. Carved Iron or wooden gates for royal courts, mansions owned by titled men

Igbo Ceremonial/ Adorning Artefacts

These are objects or motifs carved, sculptured, weaved, and constructed in diverse materials for ceremonial functions (festivals, coronations, burials, weddings, etc), and bodily adornments and beautifications. Such artefacts include the following:

1. All bodily adornments and enhancements – wooden necklaces, bracelets (iron), finger rings, hairdos (weaved or braided), waistbands, wrist and ankle bands, horsetails, animal skin fans, etc.
2. Clothing materials – *Efe isi agu* (thick fabric material for men and women), loin clothes for chest and waist covering, ceremonial wrappers for middle-aged women, red feathered caps for titled men, royal caps, etc.
3. Symbolic fruits, drinks and foodstuffs – *oji* (kola nut), *ose oji* (alligator pepper or spicey groundnut paste), *afufa or afufara* (garden egg), *ji* (yam), *ede* (cocoyam); and drinks include local palm-wine (*nkwu-enu*), local gin (*akpuruachia*), and Life beer.
4. Traditional musical instruments – *udu* (wooden/ clay/ iron pot), *alo/ogene*(big/ small conical iron gong), *ekpili/ ekwe* (big/small sized slit wooden drum), *Igba* (animal skin drums of different shapes and sizes), *Oja* (wooden flute), *opi* (elephant tusk), *ishaka* (beaded gourd), *oyo* (cowries), etc.

Images of Igbo Sacred Artefacts



Plate 1 the *Ofo*



Plate 2 the *Ikenga*



Plate3 *Ijele* masquerade in action

Images of Igbo Prestigious Artefacts



Plate 4 *Obi of Onitsha's* Throne



Plate 5 the entrance of
an *Igwe's* palace



Plate 6 an *Ozo* title
holder

Images Of Igbo Ceremonial Artefacts



Plate 7a beautiful Igbo maiden



Plate 8 Igbo cultural dancers
in their costumes



Plate 9, middle-aged Igbo women dance group



Plate 10, Igbo traditional musical instruments



Plate 11, an Igbo Kola nut
Analysis of Selected Musical Samples/ Videos

As earlier discussed, the music videos of selected Igbo popular musicians will be subjected to content analysis to identify inherent cultural artefacts of the Igbo highlighted and projected in the musical performances. Furthermore, each video will be discussed using the following parameters which are attributable to content analysis within the ethnographic context:

1. Title of song
2. Name of artists/ collaborators and the album release year.
3. Genre/ typology of music and duration
4. Social media source of video with the website address
5. Language and theme of the song
6. Tagging of video segments that display Igbo cultural artefacts.
7. Necessary comments and explanations

These music videos selected will be segmented and presented in jpeg (picture) format to bring out the key areas where the primary data (Igbo cultural artefacts) were highlighted or featured. This will help foster a better understanding of the whole concept of this study.

Egedege (New Song)

Name of Album	A single-track music
Year of Release	October 2021
Artist	Theresa Onuorah
Collaborators	Flavour and Phyno-fino
Producer	Larry Gaaga
Record Label Name	Gaaga Muzik
Genre/ Typology	Highlife/ Naija Hip-hop with Igbo rap
Duration	3min 52sec
Social Media Platforms	Mp3 – Boom-play Video –YouTube
Language	Igbo
Theme	<i>Egedege</i> is an existing song performed by Theresa Onuorah decades ago. It is a dance form in which the originator/ artist invites everyone to join in the dance

Segments of the Musical Video



Segment 1



Segment 2



Segment 3



Segment 4



Segment 5



Segment 6



Segment 7



Segment 8

The segments from the music video above displayed core cultural artefacts of the Igbo and created an aesthetics of beauty, elegance and colour. Those that showcased sacred artefacts of the Igbo culture were in *segments 2 and 6*; the prestigious artefacts were displayed in *segments 1 and 4*. While the ceremonial artefacts were displayed in *segments 3, 5, 7 and 8* respectively.

Note, *segment 1* shows the face of one of the Igbo veteran actors and elder state man, Pete Edochie, a celebrated actor of the character, *Ebubedike* in 'Things Fall Apart', an adaptation of a book written by Chinua Achebe. He is a highly respected and revered Igbo actor in the Nigerian movie industry – Nollywood. *Segment 4* also displays another re-known female highlife musician of Igbo extraction, Queen Theresa Onuorah (popularly known for her *Egede* dance group formed in the 80s). She poses with the producer of the music video *Egede* (New Song), Larry Gaaga - another creative and talented music producer of Igbo extraction - in the same segment.

UMU-IGBO

Name of Album	Flavour of Africa
Year of Release	2020
Artist	Flavour (Chinedu Izuchukwu Okoli)
Collaborator(s)	Biggie Igba
Producer	Angrv Bird
Record Label Name	2Nite Music Group
Genre/ Typology	Highlife/ Naija Hip-hop
Duration	3min 54sec
Social Media Platforms	Mp3 – Boom-play Video – YouTube
Language	Code mix (Igbo and Pidgin English)
Theme	<i>Umuigbo</i> is a song that eulogizes the Igbo culture and traditions, also the sons and daughters of the Igbo nation who have achieved great feats in their various endeavours, both home and abroad



Segment 9



Segment 10



Segment 11



Segment 12



Segment 13



Segment 14



Segment 15



Segment 16

Like the first video, the above equally highlights different segments where Igbo cultural artefacts were projected in the music video '*Umuigbo*'. *Segments 1 and 2* project the sacred artefacts associated with the Igbo tribe. The prestigious cultural artefacts were showcased in *segments 11 and 12*, while the ceremonial artefacts were displayed in *segments 13, 14, 15 and 16* respectively.

One of the positives from this particular music video is the acknowledgement of General Odumegwu Ojukwu (1933-2011) as one of the greatest soldiers in Nigeria's history. He instigated the Republic of Biafran civil war that took place between 1967 and 1970 (see *segment 12* above). Igbo personnel who were wounded and maimed during the Biafran civil war were also acknowledged in this video. The kind recognition of these patriotic citizens of Igbo extraction by the artist is believed to have brought immeasurable joy, happiness and feelings of fulfilment to them (see *segment 17* below).



Segment 17

Lastly, major geographical locations and capital cities in Southeast Nigeria were highlighted in this music video with different manufacturing products attributed to some of these states. For instance, the '*Aba*' shoes are usually made in Aba, the state capital of Abia state (see *segments 18-21*).



Segment 18



Segment 19



Segment 20



Segment 21

Conclusion

The homogeneity of Igbo tradition has created the consciousness and drive among indigenes of Igbo extractions in different strata of endeavours to constantly look for avenues and platforms to promote cultural tenets inherited from ancestors and generations. Popular culture has remained a veritable platform for these noble ventures. The popular music scene in Nigeria, especially in the twenty-first century, has always been bedevilled with activities of various talented musicians of different ethnic entities whose main interest - apart from making money – is to represent and promote their ethnic affiliations, and the Igbo are not left out in this regard.

The study, through its ethnographic inquiry, has been able to systematically present and discuss various cultural artefacts inherent in Igbo culture which were promoted by young and talented popular musicians using available social media platforms within the digitized music scene in Nigeria. These efforts are commendable and that is the reason for this academic intervention. The presentation and analysis of different music videos adopted in this study can serve as a reference point for other studies of this nature. It is hoped that the content of this study will be replicated by other ethnic groups in Nigeria to explore and promote their cultural idiosyncrasies on social media platforms available to them. Lastly, this study will go further in advocating that cultural objects or artefacts generally should not be treated with ignominy, superstition or prejudice, but rather be treated with deep respect and value as they represent our roots and origin as Africans.

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