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By Maduagwu Nzubechi

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Ngelenge .
photo credit : Manchester museum

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IGBO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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Ogbo ngelenge is an idiophone used by the igbo people of Nigeria. Mostly found among the Isuochi of modern day Anambra state and Mbaïse people in modern day Imo state. Ngelenge is cut out from a tree, called osisi ogirishi (ogirishi tree). The instrument is played by hand, made of tuned wooden bars that are struck with mallets to produce sound.



Xylophone with two players, three small drums and two basket shakers, Amuda Village, Isu Ochi. PHOTO CREDIT: G.I. JONES 1930.

To play the Ogbo ngelenge, one typically places it on a flat surface and begins striking or tapping the wooden bars with custom chiseled

sticks to produce a unique sound. Known for its sharp, bright, and playful sound. Ngelenge is usually played during feasts, celebrations, marriage ceremonies, wrestling matches and festivals like (iri ji). Ngelenge is an integral musical instrument in precolonial igbo orchestras.



Carved wood, roughly made paddle-shaped implement. Photo credit: British museum 1954

In some parts of igboland, especially places ana agba egwu owu done in oru-igbo, ngelenge is a pivotal instrument because owunis a festival of dances. During Iri-ji Mbaise, ndi egwu-Abigbo utilize the thrilling sound of ngelenge for their dance displays.

Unlike other musical instruments that find use in spirituality (oja, udu), as sounds of authority (opi) or communication (ogene), ngelenge is strictly a musical instrument for entertainment.

Ogbo ngelenge is an idiophone, which means that the sound is produced from the vibration of the instrument itself. Osisi ogirishi is used because of the nature of its wood which makes it produce such

tingling sound when put together.

In most igbo communities including Mbaise which is known for using it as a flagship musical instrument, ngelenge is nowhere to be found. Also wood carvers who made this very prized instrument have completely gone under water. Furthermore, ogirishi is going extinct in eastern Nigeria because those who should prize such an important asset of nature currently believe using it as firewood is a better option. So the base resource for making Ngelenge is going extinct because of the deforestation of ogirishi for firewood.



Ogirisi (*Newbouldia laevis*) tree Photo credit: Researchgate

Museums and non governmental organizations like center for memories (ncheta ndiigbo) have incorporated ngelenge as one of their display instruments, national museums based in the southeast, including the Nigerian National Archive in Enugu have all documented Ngelenge but there has been calls for more, utilization in mainstream music like highlife, afrobeats and even drill rap that has gained

mainstream traction of recent. Also the rise of traditional or contemporary orchestras whose synced voices tend to flow with the Ngelenge would go a long way.



National Archive Enugu

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Nzubechi is a history, political enthusiast who dabbles into social commentary once in a while



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