

ESOTERIC INFLUENCE OF DRUMS COMPOSITIONS ON THE ADHERENTS OF EGÚNGÚN FESTIVAL IN ÌNÍȘÀ TOWN

¹Abiola Femi Michael

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Abstract

Traditional drumming is a vital emblem of African arts, culture, and heritage. As an ancient medium of communication, it continues to play a key role in festivals that foster identity, community, and ancestral connection. The Egúngún festival is a significant Yorùbá ritual centered on ancestral veneration and cultural preservation. It integrates the proverbial and rhythmic sounds of Bātá and Dùndún drums with masquerade dances, creating a layered esoteric performance.

This study investigates the esoteric influence of drum compositions during the Egúngún festival in Ìnìșà, Òșun State, Nigeria. While Yorùbá drums are widely studied, limited attention has been paid to their compositional motifs and spiritual impact. Guided by the theory of functionality and sociological insight, the research examines how drumming fulfills ritual and communicative roles, reinforcing spiritual bonds.

Through ethnographic and qualitative methods, interviews with drummers and masquerade carriers, and participant observation. The study reveals that drumming transcends entertainment. It induces spiritual possession, sharpens awareness, and connects generations. Drum sequences, rich in proverbs, guide dance movements and invoke ancestral spirits, bridging the physical and spiritual realms.

This research highlights the deep spiritual power of drumming in Egúngún festivals, affirming its role in preserving Yorùbá heritage and sustaining indigenous practices amid modernization.

¹Ministry of Arts, Culture and Creative Economy, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

E-mail: femikeabiola@gmail.com

Phone Number: +2348035195061

1. INTRODUCTION

ESOTERISM

Esoterism is central to understanding the Egúngún festival in Yorùbá culture, which informs the event's spiritual, symbolic, and performative aspects. The festival is not merely a communal celebration but a profound spiritual ritual that channels ancestral presence and power. In the context of the Egúngún festival, esoterism—the hidden knowledge and spiritual practices reserved for the initiated—guides the festival's structure, rituals, and meanings. This section examines the role of esoterism in the Egúngún festival, exploring how it shapes the relationship between the masqueraders, the community, and the ancestral spirits they honor.

The Concept of Esoterism in Yorùbá Culture

In Yorùbá cosmology, esoterism encompasses the secretive and spiritual aspects of life that are often inaccessible to the uninitiated. Knowledge in the Yorùbá tradition is divided between the “seen” and the “unseen,” with the latter considered sacred and accessible only to those who undergo specific initiation rites. According to Adéyanjú (2021), “Esoterism in Yorùbá culture represents the spiritual mysteries that connect the physical and metaphysical worlds, emphasizing the power of the unseen.” Esoteric knowledge includes rituals, symbols, and spiritual practices that enable humans to communicate with the divine and ancestral spirits.

Akapo (2020) posits that, “spirit possession and trance are very dominant features of Altered State of Consciousness (ASC), especially within religious spheres. However, dance and movement, with the accompaniment of music/sound, create such an enabling environment, for individuals who are so predisposed, to easily and quickly transpose from the normal states of awareness to altered states of mystical interactions”.

Esoterism in Yorùbá culture is linked to the concept of “àse,” or spiritual power, which is believed to be embedded in various elements of life, including words, actions, and objects. Individuals can harness this power through esoteric practices, strengthening their connection to the spiritual world. During the Egúngún festival, the use of specific symbols, costumes, and rituals imbued with àse allows the community to honor their ancestors and seek their blessings (Ogúnléye, 2020). Esoterism in this context goes beyond hidden knowledge; it is a dynamic force that guides the spiritual aspects of the festival and allows participants to interact with the unseen world.

Esoteric Practices in the Egúngún Festival

The Egúngún festival is rich in esoteric practices that distinguish it from other cultural celebrations. These practices are controlled by initiated community members, such as priests, elders, and experienced masqueraders, who hold the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the rituals correctly. As Oládípò (2020) observes, “The esoteric practices of the Egúngún festival elevate it from a performance to a sacred ritual, where every act is imbued with spiritual intent.

i. Preparation of the Masqueraders

One of the most notable esoteric practices is the preparation of the masqueraders, who are vessels for the ancestral spirits. Before the festival begins, the masqueraders undergo purification rites, including prayers, chants, and the application of sacred substances believed to imbue them with spiritual power. This process transforms the masqueraders into the embodiments of the ancestors, making their presence both symbolic and real.

ii. Costumes and Masks

The costumes and masks worn by the masqueraders hold significant esoteric value. Each mask is crafted with symbols and designs reflecting the ancestor's attributes or family lineage. The colors, shapes and patterns used are not chosen randomly but carry symbolic meanings understood only by those familiar with the spiritual language of the festival (Ajíbádé, 2019). The masks serve as sacred objects that facilitate the connection between the masquerades and ancestral spirits, embodying the esoteric knowledge sustaining the Egúngún tradition.

2. TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS

Festivals are Indigenous public celebrations of towns and villages to commemorate some unique aspects of the peaceful co-existence of people. They serve as a medium for expressing beliefs, values, art, and culture. Festivals are a significant part of cultural heritage and are an aspect of life. Festivals are the most important activities for social and religious purposes in traditional society. In a sense, festivals are days, times, occasions, feasts, and celebrations involving a series of performances, entertainment, merrymaking, rites, and ceremonies. Festivals are held once a year, two years, five years, seven years, nine years, weekly, or fortnightly. It takes place at a special time set aside by the host communities to commemorate historical, cultural, or religious events, integrate the members of the communities, and encourage unity of purpose. The festival is the people's way of life and has a social impact on the people and the community at large. (Quest journal 2022:42-44).

Ògúnḃà (1978:4), as cited in the Quest journal (2022:42), describes traditional festivals as an Indigenous cultural institution, a form of art nurtured on African soil over the centuries, which has developed distinctive features and whose techniques are sometimes different from the borrowed forms of performances now practiced by many. Because festivals belong to the sacred sphere, they are also connected with representations of the invisible, the other world, and otherness in general. The founding father of French sociology, Émile Durkheim, when writing his magnum opus on the elementary forms of religious life, defined festivals as a combination of celebration and entertainment, an original medium through which the sacred can come into contact with the profane.

According to Nwanaju (2024:1), African festivals are richly embellished with masquerading, feasting, dancing, and singing, notably Africa's most common communal activities. Duruaku (1997:24), as cited in Nwanaju (2024:1), points out that festivals in Africa can be categorized as festivals of the rites of passage, festivals of the feast of the farming cycle, occasional festivals, festivals of deity worship and ancestor veneration. The views of Akporobaro (2006, 366) and Odogbor (2004, 1-2), as cited in Nwanaju (2024:2), states that festivals provide education of the young toward an understanding of the cultural life and traditions of the people, while the latter posits that festivals remain a major communal event that expresses the people's general philosophy, attitudes, culture, norms, and the likes, which receive general acceptability and participation by the members of that community and non-members, which include spectators who stop over or travel to watch the celebration. Festivals are seen in almost all corners of the earth where human beings are found.

3. OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN DRUMS

Drums are central to African cultural expressions, particularly in traditional ceremonies and festivals. In many African societies, drums are the "heartbeat" of the community, serving functions far beyond musical accompaniment. As Nketia (1974) notes, "Drums are not merely instruments of rhythm; they are vehicles of communication, identity, and spiritual resonance." In ceremonies such as the Egúngún festival, drums communicate with the living and the spiritual realms, directing and enhancing the performance (Olúpònà, 2011). African drums are crafted to produce sound, express cultural values, preserve histories, and connect the physical and spiritual worlds. The significance of drums is particularly pronounced in Yorùbá culture, where drumming is indispensable in rituals, festivals, and daily life (Adégbìtè, 1991; Drewal, 1992).

African drums come in various forms, each with unique shapes, sizes, and sound characteristics. Generally, drums create rhythm, dictate the pace of ceremonies, and invoke specific emotions or spiritual states (Peel, 2000). In many African traditions, specific drums are reserved for specific purposes. For instance, the "talking drum" (Dùndún) is often used to mimic the tonal inflections of speech, allowing it to convey messages across long distances (Euba, 1990). Similarly, drums like the Bàtá, with their complex rhythms, are used primarily in sacred and ceremonial contexts, particularly in the Yorùbá ritual. As Lawal (2007) explains, "The Bàtá drum is not only a musical instrument but a sacred object, embodying the spiritual energy of the Yorùbá cosmos."

In Yorùbá culture, drums such as the Bàtá and Dùndún are used prominently during the Egúngún festival, each serving a distinct purpose and symbolizing various aspects of Yorùbá heritage. The Bàtá drums are intricately tied to religious and spiritual practices, often accompanying masqueraders to enhance the sacred atmosphere of the festival (Thompson, 1974). The Dùndún, on the other hand, functions as a communicative tool, its variable pitch used to "speak" praises, warnings, or invocations during the performance (Adégbìtè, 1991). According to Drewal and Drewal (1983), "The synergy between drumming and dance during the Egúngún festival transforms the event into a multisensory experience, where rhythm becomes a medium of divine expression."

The craftsmanship of the drums in Yorùbá culture also reflects their cultural significance. Each drum is carefully constructed from materials believed to hold spiritual significance, such as specific types of wood and animal hides. As Euba (1990) notes, "The drum's physical construction is imbued with cosmological symbolism, aligning it with the spiritual forces it is meant to invoke." This craftsmanship ensures that the drums not only produce the desired acoustic qualities but also resonate with the cultural and spiritual values of the Yorùbá people.

Yorùbá Drums

Yorùbá drums are among the most complex and symbolically rich in African culture. They are deeply interwoven into Yorùbá society's religious, social, and cultural fabric. The Yorùbá believe that drums are imbued with spiritual power, or "àṣẹ," which enables them to communicate with deities and ancestral spirits (Ìdòwú, 1962; Lawal, 2007). Thus, drumming is both a physical performance and a spiritual invocation. As Drewal (1992) explains, "The drum in Yorùbá culture is more than an instrument; it is a sacred medium that facilitates interaction between the human and divine." Yorùbá drums are known for their distinctive sound quality and versatility, each designed to produce a range of tones and rhythms to fulfill specific ritual and ceremonial purposes.

One of the most notable features of the Yorùbá drums is their ability to mimic speech. Specific drums, especially the "talking drums" like the Dùndún, are constructed and played in a way that allows them to reproduce the tonal patterns of the Yorùbá language. As Euba (1990) elaborates, "The talking drum functions as a linguistic bridge, capable of articulating proverbs, praises, and even complex messages through tonal variation." This speech-mimicking capability makes the Dùndún drum particularly valuable in Yorùbá society, as it can convey messages, tell stories, and express complex emotions through rhythm. Additionally, Yorùbá drums often feature intricate designs, with carvings and decorations that hold symbolic meaning, further enhancing their cultural significance (Thompson, 1974). These designs reflect the spiritual and historical importance of the drum, embedding cultural narratives in the instrument itself.

The drummers who play these instruments are highly respected figures, usually regarded as intermediaries between the earthly and spiritual realms. Their role goes beyond musical performance; they are considered custodians of Yorùbá's oral traditions and spiritual practices (Olúpònà, 2011). According to Peel (2000), "The Yorùbá drummer's skill is not merely technical but deeply rooted in the cultural ethos, making them essential to the transmission of heritage and ritual practices."

In Yorùbá festivals, notably the Egúngún festival, drumming is essential for setting the tone, guiding the dancers, and invoking ancestral spirits. The rhythmic patterns played on the drums were carefully chosen to align with the energy and purpose of the festival (Adégbìtè, 1991). Drummers may alter the tempo or rhythm to evoke specific emotions, heighten spiritual awareness, or signal different phases of the festival. For instance, faster tempos may signify heightened energy and excitement, while slower rhythms invoke a more reflective or solemn atmosphere. As Drewal and Drewal (1983) emphasize, "The interaction between rhythm and movement during Yorùbá festivals is a dynamic process, creating a sacred performance space where the physical and spiritual converge."

In this way, the Yorùbá drums provide a rhythmic foundation for the festival and serve as tools for spiritual engagement and communal connection. They facilitate not only the ceremonial aspects of the Egúngún festival

but also reinforce the shared cultural identity and spiritual values among the Yorùbá people. As Thompson (1974) succinctly states, "The drum is the heartbeat of Yorùbá culture, its rhythms echoing the pulse of its people."

Types of Yorùbá Drums

The Yorùbá drum ensemble is diverse, with each type of drum serving a unique function within the musical and ceremonial framework of the culture. Among the various kinds of Yorùbá drums, the most prominent in the Egúngún festival are the Bàtá and Dùndún ensembles, each composed of multiple drums with different tonal qualities and functions. The following sections discuss the characteristics, roles, and significance of these two main types of Yorùbá drums, highlighting their impact on the Egúngún festival and their broader cultural importance.

i. Bàtá Drums

The Bàtá drum ensemble is among the oldest and most revered in Yorùbá culture, particularly associated with worshiping the deity Sàngó, the god of thunder and lightning. The Bàtá ensemble comprises drums, each with a distinct size and pitch, allowing for a complex interweaving of rhythms. In the context of the Egúngún festival, the Bàtá drums serve as both musical instruments and spiritual conduits, believed to possess the power to invoke ancestral spirits and communicate with the divine. According to Olúdare (2016), "The Bàtá drum ensemble's intricate rhythms are not merely musical expressions but are coded messages that transcend the physical realm, engaging the spiritual forces of Yorùbá cosmology." The Bàtá drum ensemble is traditionally composed of three prominent drums: the "Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá" (Mother drum), the "Omele Abo" (Supporting drum), and the "Omele Méta" (Omele Ako) - (Sequencer).

a) Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá: The Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá is the lead drum in the Bàtá ensemble and is distinguished by its large size and deep sound. This drum is typically played by the most skilled drummer, who uses it to direct the rhythm and tone of the performance. As Adétòkunbò (2018) explains, "The Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá's tonal flexibility allows the drummer to mimic speech, transforming rhythmic patterns into intelligible messages." The Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá is known for its ability to produce tonal variations through its upper section, known as "Sásá" (the high-pitched tone), and the lower section, called "Ojú Òdò" (the deeper tone). This feature makes the Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá particularly powerful in the Egúngún festival, enabling the drummer to convey messages from the spirits to the audience. Furthermore, the Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá controls the pace of the dancers, guiding their movements and coordinating the overall rhythm of the festival (Adébáyò, 2020).

b) Omele Abo: The Omele Abo, next to the Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá in size and tonal arrangement, serves as a supporting drum in the Bàtá ensemble. While it does not mimic speech like the Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá, it complements the Ìyá-Ìlù through intricate call-and-response sequences. According to Ajíbádé (2017), "The Omele Abo engages in a rhythmic dialogue with the Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá, creating a layered musical narrative that enhances the performance's depth and dynamism." This interaction forms the foundation of the ensemble's communicative structure, allowing the drums to convey nuanced meanings and evoke emotional responses from the audience.

c) Omele Méta (Omele Ako): The Omele Méta consists of smaller supporting drums within the Bàtá ensemble. These drums provide a steady rhythmic foundation, enabling the Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá to lead with expressive and improvisational patterns. As Oláwálé (2019) observes, "The Omele Méta is essential for maintaining the rhythmic backbone of the Bàtá ensemble, ensuring continuity and cohesion throughout the performance." Their rhythmic consistency is crucial for creating an immersive musical experience. The steady tempo provided by the Omele drums sustains the dancers' energy and engagement during the Egúngún festival, reinforcing the overall flow of the ceremony.

The Bàtá drums, with their layered rhythms and tonal complexity, embody the Yoruba concept of "total theater," where music, dance, and spirituality are interwoven into a unified performance. As Àlàdé (2021) highlights, "The

Bàtá ensemble is not merely a collection of instruments but a cultural repository, transmitting the values, histories, and spiritual beliefs of the Yorùbá people.” Drummers are meticulously trained in specific rhythms and sequences corresponding to various phases of the Egúngún festival, ensuring the ensemble’s integral role in the festival’s spiritual and cultural expression.

ii. Dùndún Drums

The Dùndún drum, often called the "talking drum," is another prominent instrument in Yorùbá culture. It is valued for its ability to replicate the tonal language of Yorùbá in proverbs and praise poetry. As Akínyelé (2019) observes, “The Dùndún drum serves as a bridge between verbal and non-verbal communication, transforming sound into a language of its own.” The Dùndún ensemble is more versatile than the Bàtá and is frequently used in various contexts beyond religious ceremonies, including social gatherings, political events, and public celebrations. However, in the Egúngún festival, the Dùndún drums play a vital role in supporting the masqueraders, enhancing the spiritual and social ambiance of the event.

The Dùndún ensemble typically includes several types of drums, with the "Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún" serving as the lead drum. The Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún can produce various pitches, allowing it to "speak" and convey specific messages. In the Egúngún festival, the Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún calls upon the ancestors, summons the spirits, and guides the masqueraders’ movements (Adéyemí, 2020). This ability of the Dùndún to mimic human speech adds an esoteric dimension to the festival, as the drum serves as a medium through which the spirits can communicate with the living. According to Balógun (2017), “The Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún is not merely a musical instrument but a spiritual voice, echoing the presence of ancestors through its tonal versatility.” This aspect of the Dùndún enhances the festival’s ritualistic nature, as the rhythms played are believed to carry spiritual significance.

Supporting the Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún are other drums in the Dùndún ensemble, such as the Omele Dùndún, Gúdúgúdú and the other drums in the Dùndún family. These drums provide a rhythmic base, allowing the Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún to lead with expressive patterns and speech-like rhythms. The Dùndún ensemble is renowned for its proverbial sequences, syncopated rhythms, and dynamic tonal shifts, which add a dramatic and compelling quality to the Egúngún festival (Adébisi, 2018). Furthermore, the Dùndún drums are known for their responsiveness to the dancers, as the drummers adjust their rhythms to the movements and energy of the masqueraders. This interactive quality creates a fluid and engaging performance that reinforces the connection between the drummers, dancers, and audience. As Oláníyan (2021) notes, “The Dùndún drum ensemble demonstrates the Yorùbá ideal of collaboration, where rhythm, movement, and spirituality converge in harmonious unity.”

The Dùndún and Bàtá drums create a layered soundscape essential to the Egúngún festival. While the Bàtá drums offer a more structured and ceremonial tone, the Dùndún drums bring a dynamic, interactive element that enhances the festival’s energy and spiritual resonance. Together, these drum types encapsulate the richness of the Yorùbá musical heritage, underscoring the cultural, spiritual, and artistic dimensions of the Egúngún festival (Oyèbòdé, 2019). The interplay between these ensembles reflect the Yorùbá philosophy of balance, where structured tradition and creative improvisation co-exist seamlessly.

The Yorùbá drum ensemble is vast, with each drum type designed to serve a unique purpose within musical, ceremonial, and cultural contexts. Within the Egúngún festival, these drums contribute to a multi-layered sound that guides the masquerade dance, evokes ancestral spirits, and fosters communal cohesion. The Bàtá and Dùndún drums, with their rich histories and symbolic meanings, form the foundation of the musical experience at the festival. However, other supporting drums within the Yorùbá ensemble, such as the Gáangan and Sèkèrè, add complexity and variation, enhancing the auditory and musical dimensions of the performance (Adédayò, 2020).

4. THE PLACE AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE TALKING DRUM IN INDIGENOUS AFRICAN ORAL POETRY

The talking drum is, among other things, a musical instrument. Various studies that have been carried out on it have emphasized its musical function. However, some scholars recognize the literary functions of the talking drum. The obvious problem, nonetheless, is the fact that scholars have presented its literary functions as secondary to its musical function. In most cases, drummers are usually regarded as accompanists and not the main artists in oral performances. This view on the roles of the talking drum is hardly correct.

For example, Ebenezer Olúkojù (1978:83), as cited in the Yorùbá Drum Poetry 2009, recognizes the drum verse as an aspect of the speech mode in Yorùbá oral poetry. According to him. “Under the speech or recitation mode of vocalization comes the poetry of the drum. He further states:

“Hardly is there any musical ensemble be it membrano-phones or idiophones in which one of the component instruments does not ‘talk’... These poetic interpretations are stock expressions drawn from praise poetry. Proverbs, prayers and other traditional texts attached to each ensemble and are already familiar to listeners. Sometimes the dùndún drum, known as the hourglass or talking drum, is capable of imitating not only the registered tones of the Yorùbá language but also the glides/and at times. It plays the role of the contour in responsorial singing and verbal expression is usually given to this.” (2009:11)

The second mode of drumming is the dance mode. Drums are organized in singles, in pairs or in larger ensembles for playing music for the dance. The rhythms may be conceived in abstraction as pure music, or they may have a verbal basis.

The third mode of drumming is the speech mode. Here, the emphasis is on the use of drums solely for linguistic communication rather than for playing music for dance. The drum rhythms are based on the rhythms of specific words, phrases, and sentences. The text drummed may range from single utterances to complex forms intended to be heard as poetry. They include simple short directions to a dancer in a dancing ring to poems drummed as odes to the unseen. “Drums provide an avenue for creative verbal expression, an avenue for recitals of traditional poetry on various subjects”. (Nketa, 1968:27-28) as cited in Yorùbá Drum Poetry, 2009: 14). This is very prominent in the Egúngún Festival, and it creates an atmosphere of festival and celebration.

Similarly. Akin Euba (1990:192), as cited in the Yorùbá Drum Poetry (2009:14-16) recognizes the literary functions of the talking drum. He distinguished drum music from drum poetry. The Ìyá-Ìlù, according to the critic,” fulfills a dual role in the dùndún ensemble for it not only functions as a musical instrument but also as a speech instrument.” Euba also identifies three forms of Ìyá-Ìlù drumming. These include the direct speech form (heightened speech in free rhythm), the musical speech form (heightened speech in strict rhythm), and the song form.

The talking drum is as much a literary instrument as it is a musical instrument. It plays a dual role. Besides functioning as musical instruments, the drums sing and speak. Stories are told and poetry is recited in recognizable modes with drums.

Oba Adétóyèsè and Láoyè 1 Timì of Èdè (1959) view Yorùbá drumming as a complex and challenging art form, which requires many years of practice. The drummer must possess great manual skills and a good sense of rhythm. He must also have a good memory for poetry and a great knowledge of the history of the town.

Oba Adétóyèsè also identified four functions of the lead drummer. These include announcing the arrival of important visitor(s) to the palace or his departure from it: sending messages to announce the arrival of important visitors at social ceremonies, and recitation of oríkì. Oba Adétóyèsè is of the view that the last function is the most important of the functions.

Oba Adétóyèsè (1966:35), as cited in Yorùbá drum Poetry (2009), describes all the drums used in Western Nigeria as being “in sets consisting of two or more drums of various sizes and shapes and one of them is usually called the Ìyá (mother) of the set.” It is usually the Ìyá (mother) who is assigned the role of talking in any ensemble.

Oba Adétóyèṣe (1966:37-38) further gives the historical background of each drum set and describes their tuning methods. According to him, the Dùndún set consists of the Ìyá-Ìlù, gúdúgúdú, isáájú, kẹ́ríkẹ́rí and Kàṇàgó. The Bàtá set is made up of the Ìyá-Ìlù (the mother drum), the mele abo (female accompaniment), the mele akọ (male accompaniment) and the kúdi (the dull accompaniment).

Describing the making and tuning method of the dùndún drum, Láoyè (1966:36) explains, as cited in Yorùbá Drum Poetry (2009).

“The Ìyá-Ìlù is made out of a piece of apá wood carved in the shape of an hourglass with two open ends to which two membranes of kid skin are attached using strings made of goat skin. The drum is beaten or played with a curved stick. The leather strings with which the two membranes and bells (Saworo) around the two edges are connected are gripped by the drummer's left hand, and by tightening them, he can raise the pitch of the drum to produce the required tones.” (Pg 24).

Similarly, Oba Adétóyèṣe (1966:38) describes the tuning method of the bàtá drum. He writes.

“The bàtá drums are conical in shape. They are carved out of apá wood as the dùndún. The Ìyá-Ìlù bàtá, though suited for talking, does so with some difficulty, being a stammerer. The two membranes are played simultaneously to produce a tone. The right membrane is played with the palm of the right hand, and a stiff leather strap is used with the left hand to play the left membrane. Like the dùndún mother drum, the Ìyá-Ìlù bàtá can be made to talk. It is even reputed for its talkativeness, which is characteristic of stammerers. Even in playing dance music, it talks in proverbs, pronouncing oríkìs of people with the emele-abo repeating what the Ìyá-Ìlù is saying.” (Pg 25).

Oba Adétóyèṣe's explanation of the Yorùbá talking drums provides sociological information about the talking drum. Similarly, Adémólá Adégbìtẹ (1994:52), as cited in the Yorùbá Drum Poetry, reveals that there are two ways to manipulate the talking drum to produce tones. According to him, the armpit control technique can be used for smaller drums such as the Kàlàgún, Kàṇàgó, gáṅgan and àdàmò. Here, the drum is held under the armpit and manipulated using the underarm to press and release the drum to obtain the required tones. The drummer uses the other hand to stick with which he beats the drum. The other technique is the thigh/hip control technique, where the drum is held over the drummer's shoulder with a leather strap. The drummer uses the underarm to press the drum against the thigh/hip. A bigger drum like the Ìyá-Ìlù dùndún is played using this technique.

Francis Bebey (1975:92), as cited in Yorùbá Drum Poetry, adopts an anthropological approach to the study of African music. He opines that African music is a communal art with utilitarian functions. According to the critic, African music is an impure art form that is almost always coupled with other forms, such as poetry and dance. “The drum is, without question and the instrument that best expresses the inner feelings of black Africa.”

Drum composition is not based on historical background and understanding proverbs only; the composition is enhanced by the styles of composition in the Yorùbá music mode. Olúyẹmí Oláníyan (1984:60-63) as cited in Yorùbá Drum Poetry, attempts to study the composition and performance techniques of Dùndún-Sẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀ music of South-western Nigeria. He unfolds the processes involved in the art of composition as well as the mental and physical manipulation of the instruments. The researcher equally identifies the compositional devices used by the dùndún master drummer. These include Ìyípadà (variation), Àtúnwí (repetition), Àgékúrú (truncation), Ìfàgùn (elongation), ẹ̀gbésílẹ̀ ohùn/irẹ̀ sílẹ̀ ohùn (tonal shift), Àròṣọ ojù ẹ̀ṣẹ (Improvisation).

5. ROLE OF ADDITIONAL DRUMS IN THE EGÚNGÚN FESTIVAL

Beyond the primary Bàtá and Dùndún drums, the Yorùbá ensemble includes other drum types that, though perhaps less prominent, play essential roles in Yorùbá rituals and festivals. These drums add texture, rhythm, and energy to the ensemble, allowing for a nuanced musical experience that resonates with both performers and spectators. Drums such as the Sákàrà and Gúdúgúdú have unique sounds and functions, enriching the overall musical landscape of the Egúngún festival.

Sákàrà: The Sákàrà drum is a round, shallow drum made from clay and covered with goat skin, producing a distinct, mellow sound. Unlike the more prominent Bàtá and Dùndún drums, the Sákàrà is played with a thin stick rather than the hand. According to Ògúndélé (2018), “The Sákàrà’s understated tone enhances reflective moments within Yorùbá ceremonies, lending a subtle yet impactful layer to the sonic experience.” In the Egúngún festival, the Sákàrà often function as a background rhythm, supporting the main drumming patterns and adding subtle layers to the ensemble. The Sákàrà is especially valued for its delicate tone, which can emphasize reflective or spiritual moments within the festival. Though less potent than the Bàtá or Dùndún, the Sákàrà contributes a unique tonal quality, reinforcing the versatility and depth of Yorùbá drumming.

a) Gúdúgúdú: The Gúdúgúdú, another type of drum used in Yorùbá music, is a small, spherical drum often part of the Dùndún ensemble, known for its high-pitched tone. The Gúdúgúdú adds an element of sharpness and clarity to the ensemble. During the Egúngún festival, the Gúdúgúdú plays a supportive role, accentuating specific beats and phrases in the rhythmic structure. As Akínyemí (2019) notes, “The Gúdúgúdú’s punctuated tones bring balance to the ensemble, adding emphasis to critical moments in the performance.” This drum is typically played with sticks and punctuates the rhythm, offering moments of emphasis within the performance. Its clear tone contrasts with the deeper sounds of Dùndún, creating a balanced and dynamic sonic environment.

These additional drums within the Yorùbá ensemble showcase the intricacy and richness of the Yorùbá musical composition. Each drum’s unique sound and rhythm allow for expressive variation, enabling the ensemble to shift between different emotional tones, tempos, and intensities. This diversity is particularly relevant in the Egúngún festival, where the interplay between the drums mirrors the complex relationship between the community and its ancestors. By blending the tones of multiple drum types, the Yorùbá drum ensemble achieves a harmonious yet dynamic sound that reflects the community’s reverence, joy, and connection with the spiritual realm.

Symbolism and Spiritual Significance of Yorùbá Drums

In Yorùbá culture, drums are not simply musical instruments but vessels of spiritual significance and symbols of cultural identity. The craftsmanship involved in making Yorùbá drums is a deeply respected art, with specific rituals and practices that imbue the drums with spiritual power, or “àṣẹ.” As Adéyanjú (2020) emphasizes, “The materials chosen for crafting Yorùbá drums, such as sacred wood and animal hide, symbolize the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the divine.” For instance, the Bàtá drum’s construction, involving animal skins and sacred wood, reflects the Yorùbá belief in the interconnectedness of nature, the community, and the spirit world. Through these materials, drummers and festival participants reinforce the idea that the drum is a living entity with a unique identity and purpose.

Moreover, the symbolic language of the Yorùbá drumming adds a layer of esotericism to its use in the Egúngún festival. The ability of the Dùndún drum to “talk” by mimicking the Yorùbá language exemplifies how drumming functions as a medium of spiritual and communal communication. According to Ọlátúnjí (2018), “Drumming in Yorùbá culture is not only heard but also understood, carrying messages that connect the present to the ancestral past.” The Dùndún’s capacity to articulate tonal language allow drummers to convey messages from ancestors, gods, and spirits, enhancing the ritual’s depth. Specific rhythmic patterns played on the Dùndún might represent greetings to ancestral spirits, invitations to join the festival, or calls for blessings on the community.

In addition, the Bàtá drums are often associated with the deity Šàngó, reflecting the connection between drumming, spiritual power, and divine influence. When the Bàtá drums are played during the Egúngún festival, they provide a rhythmic foundation and serve as an invocation to the sacred. The vibrations produced by the Bàtá drums are believed to resonate with spiritual energies, creating an atmosphere charged with ancestral presence (Ogúnléye, 2021). Thus, the drum ensemble in the Egúngún festival becomes a powerful vehicle for invoking and honoring the spirits, merging music with ritual in a seamless display of cultural heritage.

6. DRUMMING TECHNIQUES AND RHYTHMIC PATTERNS IN THE EGÚNGÚN FESTIVAL

The drumming techniques employed in the Egúngún festival are carefully curated to align with the festival's spiritual and aesthetic goals. Drummers are highly skilled artisans, often trained for years to master the specific rhythms and techniques required for ceremonial drumming. Techniques such as slapping, tapping, and pressing on the drum's surface produce a range of tones and effects that contribute to the overall performance. These techniques vary based on the type of drum and the desired effect, allowing for a wide array of sonic possibilities that reflect the complexity of Yorùbá cultural expression (Awóyemí, 2020).

The rhythms played during the Egúngún festival are diverse and multifaceted, often shifting to mirror the energy and movements of the masqueraders. For example, a slow, steady rhythm might be used during a solemn part of the festival to invoke reverence and reflection. In contrast, a fast, upbeat rhythm could signal a celebratory moment, encouraging energetic dance and communal joy. As Balógun (2021) notes, "Yorùbá drumming is an adaptive art form, where rhythmic patterns align with the spiritual and emotional atmosphere of the ritual." The interplay between the drummers and dancers is another crucial aspect of the drumming techniques used in the festival. The drummers closely observed the movements of the masqueraders, adjusting their rhythms in real time to complement the dancers' energy and style. This synchronization enhances the ritualistic quality of the festival, as the drums and dance together embody the spirit of the ancestors.

7. THE BÀTÁ AND DÙNDÚN ENSEMBLES: ICONS OF YORÙBÁ CULTURE IN THE EGÚNGÚN FESTIVAL

The Bâtá and Dùndún ensembles are iconic elements of Yorùbá culture, deeply intertwined with the Egúngún festival. Each ensemble contributes distinct sounds, rhythms, and symbolic meanings, enriching the festival's spiritual and communal dimensions. While the Bâtá ensemble is celebrated for its intricate polyrhythms and association with Sàngó, the deity of thunder, the Dùndún ensemble is renowned for its ability to emulate human speech, often delivering messages through its tonal versatility. Together, these drum ensembles create an engaging auditory experience that synchronizes with the masqueraders' movements and elevates the festival's spiritual significance. This section examines their roles, structures, and cultural importance within the Egúngún tradition.

i. The Bâtá Ensemble: Structure and Cultural Significance

The Bâtá ensemble produces a distinctive polyrhythmic sound that carries spiritual significance in Yorùbá culture, particularly in festivals and rituals that invoke ancestral spirits. Closely linked to Sàngó, the Bâtá drums embody a sacred function, particularly within the Egúngún festival, where their rhythms are crafted to honor and summon the spirits (Ogúnyemí, 2019).

The ensemble comprises three primary drums: the Ìyá-Ìlù Bâtá (lead drum), the Omele Abo, and the Omele Akọ. There is Kúdi bātá, which makes up the family too. These instruments collaborate to produce a rich, multi-layered sound that defines the Bâtá's unique character.

a) Ìyá-Ìlù Bâtá: As the lead drum, the Ìyá-Ìlù Bâtá sets the tempo and dictates the performance's energy. It is conical in shape with two sides of membranes, the smaller part called 'Sásá', and the larger side called 'Ojú Òdò'. The Ojú Òdò contains a black wax called 'Ìda', which is used for tonal adjustment. It is renowned for its ability to "speak" through tonal modulations, conveying messages from the spiritual realm to the audience. According to Oládípò (2020), "The Ìyá-Ìlù Bâtá transcends its role as a drum; it is a voice of the ancestors, translating spiritual energy into rhythmic language." This drum's role is pivotal during the Egúngún festival, guiding the masqueraders and amplifying the event's spiritual energy.

b) Omele Abo: This is the female specification of the Ìyá-Ìlù. It is also the next in size and serves as a backup drum for the Ìyá-Ìlù Bâtá. The tone is in the middle range.

c) **Omele Akọ:** These supporting drums provide a steady rhythmic foundation, ensuring cohesion within the ensemble. While they lack the speech-like quality of the Ìyá-Ìlù Bàtá, their role is indispensable for maintaining rhythm and complementing the lead drum's dynamic patterns. Together, they symbolize the interdependence of community roles, reflecting Yorùbá social values (Afọláyan, 2021).

d) **Kúdi Bàtá:** The kúdi drum is often combined with Omele méta. It has a black wax called 'Ìda', which serves as a tuner and blends the tone to suit its combination with Omele Akọ. The combination of Omele Akọ and Kúdi forms Omele Ìsáájú or Omele Àtélé in the bàtá drum family.

The Bàtá ensemble's structure allows for a harmonious interplay of sounds, symbolizing the unity and interconnectedness of the community and its ancestors. The rhythms, imbued with spiritual power, serve as a medium to bridge the physical and ancestral realms, elevating the Egúngún festival beyond mere performance to a sacred ritual.

ii. The Dùndún Ensemble: Structure and Cultural Significance

The Dùndún ensemble, often referred to as the "talking drum" ensemble, is celebrated for its tonal versatility, which is capable of mimicking the inflections of Yorùbá speech. This unique feature enables the Dùndún to communicate messages and emotions, adding a verbal layer to its musical function. In the Egúngún festival, the Dùndún drums play a central role in directing the masqueraders, setting the pace, and fostering a profound connection between the performers and the audience (Adélakùn, 2018).

The Dùndún family is made up of a minimum of five and a maximum of six drums, which includes the Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún (Mother drum), Èwó (low-pitch drum), kẹríkẹrì/Aguda (high-pitch drum), Àtélé Aguda (high-pitch drum), Ìsáájú/Aro (medium-pitch drum), and Gúdúgúdú/Opón (tone drum), along with additional percussive instruments for enhanced texture.

a) **Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún:** This is the mother drum in the Dùndún Family. Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún excels in tonal manipulation, enabling it to "speak" proverbs and messages. This feature enhances the Egúngún festival's spiritual and communal dynamics, as the drum bridges the physical and metaphysical worlds. As Bákàrè (2020) explains, "The Ìyá-Ìlù Dùndún is an instrument of dialogue, speaking both to the living and the spirits through its intricate rhythms. The Ìyá-Ìlù is a unique drum with jingling bells (Şaworo) hung around it to add melody to the sound.

b) **Èwó/Àtélé:** This is the next drum to Ìyá-Ìlù dùndún, but it doesn't have a jingling bell (Şaworo). It functions as the backup drum with a low-end sound. It serves as a rhythm drum.

c) **Aguda/Kẹríkẹrì:** It has the same shape as Ìyá-Ìlù but smaller and slimmer in size. A drum with a high pitch that functions as an Omele, a rhythmic drum that holds the groove.

d) **Ìsáájú:** This is a determinant drum. It determines the tempo of the music in the dùndún ensemble and works hand-in-hand with Aguda in exchange for rhythmic patterns to sustain the groove.

e) **Gúdúgúdú/Opón:** This drum is unique and different in size and function from the rest. It is round and has a black wax 'Ìda' for tonal inflection. It is hung on the neck, unlike others that are hung on the shoulder, and it is played with bílálà (Animal skin) instead of a stick.

The drums in the Dùndún ensemble can be in pairs to achieve a louder and larger sound in an outing or a festival. Şèkèrè, a big gourd with cowries and Aro, a metallic object with jingling bells, are accessories for the dùndún ensemble.

iii. The Synergy between Bàtá and Dùndún Ensembles in the Egúngún Festival

While the Bàtá and Dùndún ensembles each bring their unique qualities to the Egúngún festival, their combination creates a powerful synergy that enhances the festival's spiritual and aesthetic impact. The Bàtá drums provide a polyrhythmic foundation, with deep, resonant sounds that ground the performance in solemnity and reverence.

Meanwhile, the Dùndún drums add an element of interaction and communication, with their speech-like patterns engaging the audience and responding to the movements of the masqueraders.

This interaction between the two ensembles mirrors the festival's dual purpose: to honor and connect with the ancestors while providing an engaging, dynamic experience for the community. The Bàtá drums invoke the spiritual presence of the ancestors, while the Dùndún drums facilitate communication and adaptability within the performance. Together, these ensembles create a rich, layered soundscape that encapsulates the essence of the Egúngún festival, reinforcing the communal bonds and spiritual reverence that define Yorùbá culture (Ogúnléye, 2020).

8. EGÚNGÚN FESTIVAL IN ÌNÍŞÀ

The Egúngún Festival in Ìnìşà, a town in Òşun State, Nigeria, represents more than just a cultural celebration—it is a profound spiritual event that connects the living with their ancestors and the divine. Rooted deeply in the traditions of the Yorùbá people, the festival is a vibrant manifestation of Yorùbá spirituality, art, and community life. Central to the festival are the Egúngún masquerades, which embody the spirits of the ancestors and act as intermediaries between the spiritual and physical realms. Through the Bàtá drums' mesmerizing rhythms, the dancers' graceful movements, and the powerful spiritual rituals performed, the festival serves as both a cultural celebration and a sacred act of worship.

The Ìnìşà's Egúngún Festival is a time of prayer, ritual, intercession of the ancestors and ancestral worship. The festival that reminds the people of Ìnìşà of their background and cultural heritage. Moreover, it is a spiritual experience of the utmost importance, bringing the living and ancestors together. The festival is rooted deeply in Yorùbá spirituality; it expresses the community's respect for its ancestors, asking for their blessings and invoking their protection, fortune, and guidance for the living. In addition to physical manifestation, ancestral spirits are represented by Egúngún masquerades, the central festival figures. These masquerades are believed to carry with them the spirits of the departed, bring them back into the community, and ask them to make a divine intercession.

i. Adherents of the Egúngún Festival In Ìnìşà

The success and spiritual potency of the Egúngún Festival in Ìnìşà is deeply tied to its adherents—the people who serve as custodians of its practices, ensuring that its rituals, dances, and music continue to thrive across generations. These adherents include the spiritual leaders and Egúngún masquerade carriers and the drummers, dancers, and community members who participate in the festival's preparations and celebrations. Each plays a crucial role in maintaining the festival's integrity and preserving its cultural and spiritual significance.

ii. Musical Composition in the Egúngún Festival In Ìnìşà

The Egúngún Festival in Ìnìşà is a vibrant display of Yorùbá artistry, with dance and music at its core. For the people of Ìnìşà, the Bàtá drums, Dùndún, and the dances performed by the Egúngún masquerades are not merely entertainment; they are the conduits through which the living connect with the spiritual world. Professional traditional drummers are born into a family called Ìdílé Àyàn (Àyàn's Family). Àyàn Àgalú is the deity of drums. Àyàn is the bloodline of traditional drummers. The drummers born in this family are naturally knowledgeable about drums and play drums effortlessly. Their knowledge and skills aided the creation of drum routines (Composition) and served as a source of creative and proverbial drumming. Drummers from Àyàn's family are accustomed to the background of masquerade clans, which enables them to compose and eulogize masquerades during performances. These compositions serve as inspirations for the masquerades. The drumming styles are traditional and use proverbs as a medium of communication with the masquerades and the performing groups at the festival. The meaning of the proverb is a driving force for the masquerades to perform, and it also influences the reactions of the spectators.

The Egúngún Festival in Ìnìṣà is an intricate spiritual and cultural celebration where proverbial wisdom and rhythmic drumming influence ritual practices and dance composition. The festival's unique blend of music and movement is more than just a performance—an invocation, a sacred dialogue between the living and the spiritual world. In the heart of this dialogue lies the essential role of the Bàtá drums, the Dùndún, and the proverbs that guide and inform the rhythms played during the festival. These elements are deeply interwoven, and together, they create a spiritual atmosphere that influences the movements of the Egúngún dancers, ensuring that every dance step is spiritually aligned and meaningful.

9. CONCLUSION

In the Yorùbá Egúngún festival, the Bàtá and Dùndún drums stand out as musical instruments and cultural artifacts reflecting deep spiritual and social significance. These drums are vital to the festival's rhythm, aesthetic, and ceremonial elements, as they guide the masqueraders' movements and serve as instruments of spiritual invocation and communication. The Bàtá and Dùndún drums are more than mere accompaniment; they are central to the festival's atmosphere, bridging the physical world with the ancestral realm.

In Yorùbá cosmology, drums such as the Bàtá and Dùndún are vessels of "àṣe," the spiritual force that enables communication with the divine and ancestral spirits. The Bàtá drum, which is associated with the deity Sàngó (god of thunder and lightning), carries a sacred status and is believed to invoke power. When played during the Egúngún festival, the Bàtá drum serves as a medium for connecting with the ancestors, aligning with the Yorùbá belief that sound has the power to transcend physical boundaries and reach the spiritual plane (Fásuyì, 2021).

The Dùndún drum, known for its "talking" capability, adds another layer to this symbolic function by directly mimicking human speech. It is uniquely suited to express messages from the ancestors to the living. As Adétúnjí (2019) notes, "The Dùndún's speech-like rhythms allow it to embody the voice of the community, connecting the present with the past."

Both drums reinforce Yorùbá culture's "total theater" concept, where music, dance, and visual symbolism converge to create a holistic experience. The symbolic use of these drums during the festival goes beyond entertainment, as they serve as conduits through which the community honors its past and reaffirms its beliefs.

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