

YORUBA INDIGENOUS DRUMS: AN AESTHETIC SYMBOL IN ECOLOGICAL RITUAL OF THE YORUBA PEOPLE

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Abstract

Religion is a way of life for the African people. The structure of their religion identifies this in its fivefold classification which is belief in God, in divinities, in spirit, in the ancestors and in the practice of magic and medicine. Within these classifications is the element of anthropomorphism which expresses the ideas or concept about preternatural world of realities. The concept is keenly attached to the principle of animism which means beliefs in spirits that are separate and separable entities. The spirit world of African religion is initiated by the belief that certain spiritual entities reside in natural phenomena or landmarks such as rivers, mountains, or trees that serve as focus of communal ritual. The communal rituals in this regard show the attention or the preference given to the supernatural potency of a particular tree in the area of their spiritual understanding. Yoruba views about this gives the impression that all useful trees were thought to harbour gods or spirits which are venerated or worshiped in some occasions. Some of these trees are therefore considered as best material for drum making. Drums made from most of these trees are hence associated with ritual functions because they believe that the drum carries the spiritual potency of the gods or spirits of the tree which they are made from. Thus, the Yoruba drum therefore serves as spiritual symbol in some ritual practices of the people. The attempt of this paper is to observe and explore the connection between indigenous drum, the divinities, and the religion of the Yoruba people and its spiritual function in the environment where they exist.

Keywords: Yoruba people, Indigenous drum, Ecological rituals

Introduction

P.O. Ogunjuyigbe defined ecology as the study of a living plant and animal including man in environment that are suitable for life¹. It is within this system that ecosystem is derived. Ecosystem identifies an interaction between “a unit of living and non-living organisms through exchange materials and energy”². The feature of environment according to M.A.O. Aluko is the physical space and the surroundings in which man lives or resides³. According to him, these features could be identified through biological, social, economic, physical, political and technological levels. These levels serve as medium of interaction between living and non-living entities. The physical and social dimensions of Yoruba environment in this dimension serve as template for their spiritual interactions. This interaction could be between living or non-living organism. The interaction is purely guided by the cultural heritage of the people which serves as design for this relationship. It is therefore noted that the norms and values shared by the people bring to reality the prevalence of ecological ritual which is otherwise referred to as communal ritual.

Reference point in this discussion is the worldview that relates with physical and social environment. The social environment is described as the context of norms, values, customs, belief, family systems, attitudes, philosophy and collective experiences of man in a particular setting. This shows that social environment encompasses the culture of the whole society that determines the psyche and behaviour of people. The physical environment is also considered to be the natural environment. This comprises the things that nature has put in place like hills, mountains, rivers, lakes, rocks and soil.

The religious platform of the Yoruba people according to Bolaji Idowu is established upon a diffused model⁴. This model gives cognisance to the recognition of their spiritual forces in an ascending order. This order shows that links to the Supreme Being who is the ultimate can be followed from the level of man- ancestors- spirits- and divinities. It is within these levels that the widespread spirit world in their belief is recognised. This recognition is seen in the features of natural landmarks such as rivers, mountains, or trees as they are recognised as the abode of spirits. Indigenous

¹ P.O. Ogunjuyigbe, “Ecology and Population” in O.A Ogunbameru (ed.), *Sociology: A Contemporary Science of Human Interaction in Society*, Ibadan: Penthouse Publications, 2009, p. 231

² Ogunjuyigbe, “Ecology and Population, p.230.

³ M.A.O.Aluko, “The Environment, Ecosystem and Social Life” in O.A. Ogunbameru (ed.), *Sociology: A Contemporary Science of Human Interaction in Society*, Ibadan: Penthouse Publications, 2009, p. 238.

⁴ E.B. Idowu, *Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman, 1996, p. 221

drums among Africans are products carved from trees as one of the natural landmarks that as symbols through which they communicate spiritual forces. It is the belief of the Yoruba people that drums therefore carry spiritual traits inherent in the tree they are made from and this makes their use important within the religious practices in which they feature within the Yoruba community. The natural landmarks which drums are made from are therefore identified as a form of symbolic ritual aesthetics in any ritual practices among the people within their environment.

Àyàn as an Environmental Deity of the Drum

African indigenous religion has its foundation in the culture and tradition of the society. It is this platform that created the belief which people adhere to. The religious belief, therefore, identifies the level of spiritual relationship between the human and the primordial, deified and personified divinities recognised within the religion.⁵ The major objective of this relationship is to show that there is a major link between man and higher power, which is God, local deity, a nature deity or a deceased ancestor.⁶ These divinities are accorded serious respect in the affairs of social organizations.

The religious conviction among the members of indigenous *dùndún* music groups indicates that *Àyàn* is as an *òrìṣà* (deity).⁷ It thus shows that *Àyàn* falls within the local deity as exemplified above. *Àyàn* was an *òrìṣà* worshipped by the ancestors of the Yoruba people and thereby considered as the Yoruba god of drum and music. Drums like *bata* and *gáangan*, are drums commonly referred to as membranophonic-unipercussive drums. These drums are used in Yoruba religious worship and some are strictly attached to ritual and ceremonial events. In any case, it is traditionally compulsory to appease *Àyàn* whom Yoruba believe invented and endowed the drum with visible and invisible forces. The Yoruba drummers, therefore, demonstrate that *Àyàn* is the originator of the *òrìṣà* drums. They do this by special invocation known as *oriki* (praise poetry). This invocation is as follows:

<i>Àyàn àgalú</i>	<i>Àyàn agalu</i>
<i>Ò jíre bí ?</i>	Hope you woke up well?
<i>A mú ni jẹun ahun</i>	He who makes us to eat the food of miser
<i>A múni tẹ ọ̀nà</i>	He who makes one to walk through
<i>Tá ọ̀ dé rí</i>	The road never known before
<i>Asọ̀rọ̀ igi</i>	He who talks through the wood

⁵ J.O. Awolalu & P.A. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Macmillan, 2005, pp. 73-75

⁶ Awolalu & Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, pp. 73-75.

⁷ Y. Olaniyan, “Yoruba Dùndún Musical Practice” in *Nigerian Music Review*, Department of Music, Obafemi Awolowo University, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 72

*Òkú ewùré tí ñ fohùn bí
èyàn*

The dead goat that talks like human being

The features of *ayan* as shown in this invocation identify its personality with environmental elements like tree and animal. These identities give the impression that *ayan* as deity could be personified as one of the environmental forces through which Yoruba people establish their spiritual relationship with. The symbols of wood and goat in this invocation underline the materials like tree and different animal skins that are used in the production of the drum. It is then understood that *ayan* with these traits therefore imbues such drum with spiritual power.

Personification and Ritual Empowerment of Drums

Ritual is defined as a series of actions that are carried out in the same way, especially as part of a religious ceremony⁸. This ritual ceremony involves some practices that are done almost the same way at different interval of times and periods. The Yoruba explanation for this is “*ìlànà ìsìn*” or “*ònà ìsìn tí ó hàn lóde*”⁹ (an outward form of religious practices). Ritual as a form of liturgy is explained by Awolalu and Dopamu as a prescribed practice for public worship¹⁰. This practice entails communication and communion with a deity within the context of worship. It is noted in this sense that most of the worship and festival go with a particular type of drum that is made sacred for a peculiar ritual.

Ritual, according to John Mbiti, is known to be a method of carrying out religious actions or ceremony.¹¹ It is also a means of communicating something which is of religious significance, through word, symbol and action. Mbiti’s explanation indicates that Africans celebrate life and by doing this they celebrate their religion by dancing, singing and acting. A visible demonstration of these activities occurs in ritual and festivals. E.G. Parrinder¹² and J.S. Mbiti in some regards agreed with each other in the aspects of ritual. It is highlighted by both of them that ritual could take communal or personal form. Personal ritual is considered as the rites that surround the principal events in the lives of individuals while the communal ritual shows the relationship of religion to the structure of the society.

In all, their submission shows that ritual can generate a sense of certainty and familiarity and it can also provide continuity and unity among those who perform or attend it. In turn, people find a degree of identity

⁸ E.J. Sowande, and S. Crowther, *Yoruba/English Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁹ Sowande and Crowther, *Yoruba/English Dictionary*.

¹⁰ Awolalu and Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 128.

¹¹ J.S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Norfolk: Heinemann, 1991, pp. 131-143

¹² E.G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, London: Sheldon, 1975, pp. 79-90

through this common observance and experience. Through the ritual action and word, people are able to exercise a certain amount of control over the invisible world and forces of nature. In this way, humans consider themselves not just as passive creatures in the universe, but creative agents. For the purpose of ritual, human beings use almost everything at their disposal to communicate their actions and words. They use oral formulas including the drum in terms of invocation and prayers to connect to both the vertical and horizontal networks of mystical powers necessary for ritual purposes in different forms and occasions. The contents of ritual as described above will help to analyze how the drum is ritualized among the Africans and Yoruba people.

The explanation on how indigenous Yoruba drums which include, the *bàtá*, *dùndún* and other *òrìṣà* drums form a nature of unity that could only be described from the activities that establish the image and action given to the drum. The image and action start from the construction of the drum to the status attributed to it via ritual processes. This dimension as explained by Wande Abimbola is stated as follows:

Àyàn is an *òrìṣà* in its own right. At every stage of the contributions of a *bàtá* drum (or any drum), rituals are made, from the cutting of the tree to the finished drum.¹³

The adherent of *Àyàn* in the world of drums establishes the facts that the drum is an image which represents the invisible *Àyàn* deity. Apart from this, it is identified that drums are made from trees that behave in human ways. The trees are acknowledged to have harboured kindered spirits which Yoruba people acknowledge with *ìpèsè* or *ẹbọ* (sacrifice). *Àyàn* is also considered as a spirit which must also be acknowledged. This indicates that the drum is an image that represents and possesses *Àyàn* spirits. This belief, therefore, allows the drum to be dignified and addressed in human terms, with the use of “mother”, “father” and “children”. This is expressed by Ayo Bankole thus:

Drums are addressed in human terms, with the use of “mother”, “father” and “children” designations. One reason may be that even the trees from which the drums are made, especially the *Ìrókò*, are thought to behave in human ways and so embody spirits, including that of *Àyàn*.¹⁴

It is important to note here that Iroko tree is not really peculiar to the making of drums among the Yoruba people. Trees like *igi omo* and *apa* due to their good tone value are most reckoned with when it comes to drum

¹³ W. Abimbola, “*Ifa will Mend our Broken World: Thoughts on Yoruba Religion and Culture in Africa and the Diaspora*”, Massachusetts: Aim Books, 1997, p. 140.

¹⁴ A. Bankole et al, “The Yoruba Master Drummer” in *African Arts*, UCLA, James S. Coleman Studies Centre, Vol. 8, No 2, 1975, p. 53

making. However, the spirits in trees are considered as itinerant forces that have their freedom and must not be cut down without a special sacrifice or libations. Bankole noted that the truce of anthropomorphic understanding in the belief associated with the drums posed some effects on their care and treatment¹⁵. According to him, in a traditional way, drums are considered to be hung, placed in a reserved place when not in use or set in the sun. This provides a relative dry and undisturbed storing place. He also noted that the drum must not be dropped, thrown, stepped over, sat on, or used to curse someone. If these are accidentally or deliberately done, they became a matter of a serious or a grave sin that must be atoned. The sin is considered as a serious taboo to Àyàn the god of the drum. In that case, if a drum is broken, it is wrapped in white cloth and buried like a human being in a special ceremony. It is indicated that the gravity of the event will not be eased, nor will the person who broke the drum feel he can rest, until proper sacrificial restitution is made.¹⁶ This fact may seem to have been followed holistically in ancient times and its relevance still being acknowledged up till the mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The mythological importance attached to the value of the traditional drums as at then was given a religious connotation. Be that as it may, when civilization and modernization crept into most of these values, the significance then begins to dwindle. It is then noted that most drums like the *dùndún* ensemble that are considered a bit sacred are now found in secular places handled by non-revered people outside the *àyàn* lineage. It is even possible to see broken pieces of drum being collected and burnt without proper reverence to the taboos attached to its ritual. This is possible for drums like *dùndún* and *gángan* but not for major *òrìṣà* drums that are connected to ritual practices.

Environmental–cum-Divine/Spiritual Dimension of Drums and Divinities

The attempt here is to observe and explore the connection between the divinities, the culture of the Yoruba people and the environment where they exist. This is with a view to knowing how their connection affects the discussion on indigenous drum. Afolabi Ojo, in his book, identifies the abstract aspect of the Yoruba culture as a religion, philosophy and art. He notes that these aspects of culture are culture complexes in the sense that they do not belong to the core of geography¹⁷. He identifies these culture complexes as the way through which man also subdues or conquers his surroundings and this makes the culture complexes to wield a decisive

¹⁵ A. Bankole (etal), “The Yoruba Master Drummer”. p.53

¹⁶ A. Bankole(etal), “The Yoruba Master Drummer”. p.53

¹⁷ G.J.A. Ojo, *Yoruba Culture*, Ibadan : Caxton Press , 1971, p. 158.

influence on his mode of life. He identifies this influence in African life as the type being permeated by religion. He thus emphasizes that religion is not just one complex of African culture but the catalyst of the other complexes. From this instance, he notes that, for some aspects of Yoruba life to be fully and satisfactorily explained and understood, they must be interpreted in terms of their religion.¹⁸

The Yoruba people are noted for their great culture and traditions. Their socio-religious life is defined by language, traditions, beliefs and practices. In this way, Idowu describes them as a race that has great, long and noble traditions. He notes that the keynote of their life is neither in their noble ancestry nor in the past deeds of their heroes but in their religion, for in all things they are religious.¹⁹

Emile Durkheim explained religion “as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community to all those who adhere to them”²⁰. This inference shows that the religious intention of a people is more practical and that the socio-religious system in Africa is found mostly in an individual responsibility for the good of the collective as explained by Roland Hallgren. Hallgren notes that the context of worldliness among the Yoruba people rather consists of an acknowledgment that the problems to be solved are of this world, this life and the problems still continue.²¹ This is more importantly why Yoruba people attached their fate to the all knowing wisdom of *Ifa* whom they believe carries the responsibilities of revelation through the acts of divination. This could allow the understanding of the fact that the religion of the Yoruba permeates their lives as it expresses certain social and religious phenomena. These phenomena engendered certain festivals, rituals, symbols and a host of other concepts which are preserved and explained by their philosophy, myths, liturgies, songs and sayings which formed their pertinent traditions that allow environmental survival.

As already explained, the culture and tradition of the African society serve as the platform that created the belief to which people adhere. The religious belief, therefore, identifies the level of spiritual relationship between man and primordial, deified and personified divinities recognized within the religion. The major objective of this relationship is to show that there is a major link between the higher power which is the Supreme Being

¹⁸ Ojo, *Yoruba Culture*, p. 158.

¹⁹ E.B. Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*, Lagos: Longman, 1996, p. 5

²⁰ E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1915, p. 47.

²¹ R. Hallgren, *The Good Things in Life: A Study of the Traditional Religious Culture of the Yoruba People*, Loberod: Plus Ultra, 1988, p. 9

(God), the local deity, a nature deity or a deceased ancestor.²² Each structure of these lower powers is accorded serious respect in the affairs of social organization. The notion of a Supreme Being serves as a nexus of religious interaction. This concept is essential to the Yoruba.

The Yoruba believe that God manifests in all elements, especially the supernatural energies of nature. In the view of Dayo Ologundudu:

Yoruba worship those energies because they feel the power of the creator in them and believe Olódùmarè (God) manifests in those elements. Even though there are symbols or human attributes that describe these energies, during worship; the focus is on the energies and not on symbols.²³

This view admits a possible connection between nature and religion. The nature is seen as the abode of some peculiar power or spirit that serves as an intermediary between man and God. These powers are considered superior to man and they reside in natural objects such as highlands or hills, trees, rivers, lagoons, sea, earth and moon. These are generally regarded as the abodes of gods and the places where the gods are worshiped. Ologundudu argued that these natural objects are taken as symbols that describe the energy in them and during worship the focus is on those energies and not on the symbol. It must be noted here that without the symbol a connection with the energy cannot be made. This makes the symbol itself more important to the people.

The connection of the drum to the environment could be viewed through its symbolic representation attached to the tree. The tree is a natural object that harbours spirits in Yoruba understanding and it also serves as materials for making the drum. In Ojo's analysis, he shows that "any full explication of religion involves complete exploration of social and political organisation, material culture, law and custom as well as physical environment".²⁴ This assertion attaches the understanding of religion and beliefs of the people to the fuller exploration of other elements within the environment which are abstract in the way they are connected with the physical environment.

The dimension of the drum as part of the material culture can be seen from here. The drum is seen among Africans as a precious element of communication most preferred in the dialogue with gods, the spirits and the

²² Awolalu & Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, pp. 73-75

²³ D. Ologundudu, *The Cradle of Yoruba Culture*, U.S.A.: Centre for Spoken Words/Institute of Yoruba Culture, 2008, p. 30.

²⁴ Ojo, *Yoruba Culture*, p.158

ancestors²⁵. This indication according to George shows drum as a product of a cultural environment which is identified by its socialization, taboo, postulation and principle. Its identification shows that some texts and languages indicate its sacredness and uses. The texts and language are always in form of music which is used to describe elements of symbols and signs attached to taboos and principles of the Africans. These are noted in religious and socio-ecological situation with God, local deities, cosmic deities (sun, earth, moon, venus), ancestors and spirits during important events. The texts thus postulate the drum as an animated being, a memory which archives information and also as an unchangeable product which universally allows information to be tailored and accepted.

With the identification of dialogue in this context, it is clear that the element of worship cannot be overemphasized. In Ojo's view, the influence of the environment can best be appreciated by considering the 'what and why' of the worship.²⁶ With Frazer's definition of religion that portrays religion as 'a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life, Ojo also shows the impression why worship enables man to cope with the intransigencies of the natural environment and its effects on human activities. The 'what' of worship is attached to the powers that are superior to man.

It is thus clear that worship is a way of responding to the call of nature and also the intersecting relationship between the exoteric and esoteric form of nature through worship. The Yoruba responded to the call of their environment by worshiping the gods believed to reside therein²⁷. One of the responses is the attention or the preference given to the supernatural potency of a particular tree in the area of their spiritual understanding. In Yoruba worldview, any place where we have huge trees with massive trunks and buttresses towering above the others were almost always supposed to be the habitations of gods. Trees like ìròkò (*chlorophora excelsa*), the baobab (*andasonia digitata*), silk cotton trees (*eriodendron orientale*) are considered as abodes for those companion spirits suspiciously regarded to be a born to die infant²⁸ (known in Yoruba as *abiku*).

At the same time, all useful trees were thought to harbour gods or spirits. Some of the trees in this category according to Ojo include *àyán-án* (African satinwood), *òmò* (*cordial millemi*), and *asorin*. The spirit inhabiting

²⁵ G. Niangoran-Bouah, "The Talking Drum: A A Traditional African Instrument of Liturgy and of Mediation with the Sacred" in Olupona J.K. (ed.), *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, Minnesota, Paragon House, 1990, p. 87

²⁶ Ojo, *Yoruba Culture*, p. 158

²⁷ Ojo, *Yoruba Culture*, p. 166

²⁸ Ojo, *Yoruba Culture*, p. 166

the *àyán-án* was the one considered to be the Yoruba god of drums. Ojo, therefore, emphatically notes that devotees of tree deities are found chiefly among drummers, wood workers and herbalists because they attribute supernatural powers to the trees. The support to this fact is found in the remarks of Bankole in the acknowledgement to the type of trees needed for drum making when he claims that:

A drum-maker often chooses a tree from the side of a well – travelled road from which to carve a drum, for such a tree will have heard much conversation and will therefore make a drum that is especially good at talking.²⁹

Bankole also notes that everybody took part in the worship of supernatural powers since humans beings, dwarfed by these trees, were too weak and pliant in this environment not to bow to the spirits believed to inhabit some of them. The emphasis above, therefore, shows that trees play an important role in Yoruba religious life. This importance is linked to its symbolic representation, a divine natural habitat and a spiritual material. This identification is explained by Babatunde thus:

The symbolism is an age old preoccupation because of their indispensability to man. Indeed, the material importance of the tree makes possible its spiritual eminence-thereby giving way to different symbolic expressions of free-man interactions...³⁰

This analysis, according to Williams, identifies the Yoruba religious thought that is attached to natural objects like the tree as a way of explaining most religious rituals within natural phenomena. His explanation, in this case, is the medium through which they interact and make supplications with environmental deities whom they believe serve as intermediary between them and the supreme supernatural being (Olódùmarè). This medium is seen in the way trees are clothed for ritual and prayer supplications. The figure below shows a palm tree clothed in white cloth. The white cloth is the symbol of purity attached to Òrúnmilà, the deity of *ifa* (see plate 1). The worshippers also must adhere to this symbol to fulfil the ritual ethics attached to the deity (see plate 2). The tree thus becomes a symbolic expression for most myths and legends of the people. Most of the stories attached to these myths and legends are often attached to natural phenomena in which recognition are given to some divinities that are deified through them and acknowledged with sacrifice.

²⁹ A. Bankole (et al), “The Yoruba Master Drummer”. p.53

³⁰ B. W Adepegba, “Clothed Ritual Trees: An Insight into Yoruba Religious Thought” in Renne E.P., B. W. Adepegba (eds), *Yoruba Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Adepegba*, Ibadan: Book Builders, 2005 p. 157.



Plate 1: Anthropomorphic representation of ÒPE (palm tree) as a recognition of Òrúnmílà deity. Source: the researcher, 31/05/2012.



Plate 2: The devotees of Ifa in white raiment during ritual prayers besides òpe tree at Ile-Ife. Source: the researcher, 31/05/2012.

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The Symbolic aspects of Yoruba Indigenous Drum in their Ecological Ritual

A festival in Yorubaland is the climax of public worship as it unfolds acts of worships in both oral expressions and actions. A festival is the centre of activities where devotees commit themselves to the care of the divinities. The devotees also use the period to show their gratitude both in word and dance to the *òrìṣà*. During ceremonies and festival worship, from invocation

to the dismissal³¹, it is noted that communication is significant to the interaction that occurs between devotees, the society and the *òrìṣà*. This interaction allows music and drumming as a mode of enacting a divine worship. The process of enactment allows particular drums to be played at such festival occasions. The effect of the drum is to stimulate the ritual activities and also sensitize the stages of trance and frenzy³² mood attached to the festival activities. Some Yoruba festivals tend to have features of natural and environmental properties and in this way the kind of ritual practices involved portray more of ecological importance within their culture. Such festivals also establish the usage of a particular indigenous drum in that dimension.

Ìgbìn drum is an indigenous drum attached to the worship of Ògìyán deity. Ògìyán is the name given to Ọbàtálá in Ejigbo. Ògìyán is a festival celebrated in commemoration of Ọbàtálá and the new yam. The adherents must usher in the new yam with the worship of Ògìyán and must not eat yam until after the celebration. During the celebration, kolanut and snail are used for the worship. Within the shrine are stationed four different sizes of Ìgbìn which must be beaten by the devotees (see plate 3). The drum produces rhythm for the festival.

It is thus clear that Ìgbìn drum is a sacred drum attached to the worship of the Òrìṣà. It is made with the skin of Ìgalà (deer skin) and its link with snail (*ìgbín*) could not be overemphasized. Ìgbìn as a drum identifies itself with many *òrìṣàs* that are worshiped with *ìgbín* (snail) which is a large edible crawling organism belonging to moluscal species. The orthography of the two names looks the same but their pronunciations are very different. Igbìn drum is thus symbolic in the ritual worship of the Obatala deity and its symbolic reference and connection to the celebration of the new yam festival showcases the ecological identity which it portrays. Due to its attachment to the new yam festival, it is then significant for its use in counting calendar for every other festival as it is the first drum to be beaten to usher other festival in. The drum must be beaten before new yam is eaten among the people of Ejigbo. It is also used to open activities during the new yam festival.

³¹ A. O. Vidal, *Essays on Yoruba Musicology: History, Theory and Practice*, Ilé-Ifè: IMEF African Music Publisher, 2012, p. 201

³² A. O. Vidal, *Essays on Yoruba Musicology: History, Theory and Practice*, p. 200



Plate 3: Igbin drum ensemble stationed beside Òriṣà Ògiyán in Ibadan.

Òṣun festival, as accounted for by Òṣun priestess, is an annual event which commemorates the impact Òṣun deity had on the ancestral forefathers of the Òṣogbo people.³³ The celebration is an annual celebration usually held in August of every year. The events of the festival are filled with ritual performance from the first day of the commencement. Most significant in the festival are the period of *ÌWÓPÓPÓ* and the *ARUGBÁ* day. *Ìwópópó* is a match through a road called *PÓPÓ*. This event starts the first day of the twelve day festival. *Ìwópópó* is significant in the sense that the acts of singing and walking are highly embedded. The tradition of *Ìwópópó* has always been linked with spiritual cleansing of the city through prayers. In these acts, the use of drum is very important because the drum influences so many ritual actions in words, singing and dancing. Different stages of dancing are noted during the day and people are overwhelmed by the performance exhibited through the influence of drum. The drums displayed during this performance are *bàtá*, *dùndún*, *bẹ̀mbẹ̀* and lots of other traditional drums brought by dancing troupes from different places. The most recognised among the drum for osun festival is *bembe* due to its sacredness.

The few ritual songs got during *Ìwópópó* are as follow:

- (a) *Omi ò ní gbé wa lẹ o e* Water will not erode us

³³ Oral Interview granted by O. Adesiyán,, Iya Òṣun of Òṣogbo at Ataoja palace Òṣogbo on 20/06/2013. She is 65 years old.

<i>Omi ò ní gbé wa lọ o a</i>	Water will not erode us
<i>Omo Ọ̀ṣun mà ni wá</i>	Ọ̀ṣun the great mother of children
<i>Omi ò ní gbé wa lọ</i>	Water will not erode us

(b) *Odò ayé kò ní gbé wa mì o* The earthly water will not swallow us
Odò ayé kò ní gbé wa lọ The earthly water will not erode us

In the two songs, one can identify water as an ecological property. Water here depicts the environmental feature which signifies the deity, Osun. Through the river Osun, the deity is given ritual recognition yearly. This recognition allows the adherents to be protected from both physical and spiritual obstacles that may affect their success. These two songs were analyzed as a blissful prayer which encourages peace and longevity of the society and the people. The songs are led by the vocal of the *bembe* drum and thus influence the psychic and supernatural manifestation delivered by the people in words and actions.

The Osun festival lasts for nine days according to Ogunwale³⁴. The first day has to do with “*wíwá Ọ̀ṣun*” meaning (to search for goddess Ọ̀ṣun). In another Yoruba semantic parlance, it is called “*wíwọ Ọ̀ṣun*”.³⁵ This time, the priest in charge of the Ọ̀ṣun cult will embark on visits to the house of all the key chiefs of Ọ̀ṣogbo with songs and drumming. The songs to be sung will emphasise the acknowledgment of other mystical forces that will be present at the festival.

It is at this beginning that the use of *bẹ̀mbẹ* comes up. According to Abiodun Aselebe, this drum is referred to as “*Olúkòrídí*”³⁶. In the analysis of Ajibade,³⁷ the *Olúkòrídí* is the name given to *bẹ̀mbẹ* drum among the Ijesa people but referred to as *bẹ̀mbẹ* among the Ọ̀ṣun and Oyo people. It then shows convincingly that the ancestors of the Ọ̀ṣogbo people who migrated from Ijesa land might have brought the drum which later became sacred to Ọ̀ṣun (See plate 4). In the analysis of Olupona, it shows that the drum has sacred identity:

During this ceremony, senior priests and priestesses of Ọ̀ṣun, dancing to the *bẹ̀mbẹ*, Ọ̀ṣun sacred music, visit the home of key Ọ̀ṣun functionaries, other civil chiefs, and the private homes of the Oba who reigned in Ọ̀ṣogbo.³⁸

³⁴ T.A. Ogunwale, ‘Oshun Festival’ in *African Arts*, Vol. 4(4), 1971, p. 61

³⁵ A. Aselebe, *Itan Awon Ilu Mewa*, Ọ̀ṣogbo: Maseyele Golden Communication, 2005, p. 4

³⁶ A. Aselebe, *Itan Awon Ilu Mewa*, p. 4

³⁷ Oral Interview granted by G.O.Ajibade at Ilé-Ifẹ on 27/12/2012. He is 52yrs old.

³⁸ J.K.Olupona, “Ọ̀riṣàỌ̀ṣun Yoruba Sacred Kingship and Civil Religion in Ọ̀ṣogbo, Nigeria” in J.M. Murphy and M. Sanford (eds), *Ọ̀ṣun Across the Waters*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 54



Plate 4: The priestesses of Ọṣun and Oya during interview with the bẹ̀mbẹ̀ drum on their side.

In another dimension, there is also an explanation for the solar divinity in the Yoruba worldview. The belief in the existence of a solar divinity is attached to the concept of judgment among the Yoruba. Yoruba tradition and culture indicate that all forms of wickedness could be avenged by Olódùmarè through his “wrath”. This wrath is accomplished through some distinct divinities. These divinities are referred to as *Jakuta* and *Oranfe*. These divinities are believed not to have any images on earth and their acts of worships are directed to heaven. During the manifestation of the wrath, lighting, thunder, storm and heavy rain occur.

Oranfe is a divinity that is peculiar to Ifè people. When there is heavy rain that involves lightning and storm, people believe that the god is expressing his wrath. At this time, the *Àyàn* drummers are recognized because they help to communicate with the god through their drum. The praise name of the god is sung through the drum to pacify and calm him.

The praise names of *Oranfe* which are communicated through the dundun drum are stated as follows:

<i>Onílé iná</i>	The lord of the house of fire
<i>A da'niji</i>	One who causes sudden fright
<i>Iná ọ̀sán</i>	Noonday fire
<i>Iná gun orí ilé fẹ́ jú</i>	Fire that mounts the roof and becomes glaring flame

*Èbìtì ré firi se gbi*³⁹ The murderous weight that strikes the ground with a resounding force.

This expression shows how the drum is used in the act of communication with nature deities. It shows that the drum as a natural element can create an atmosphere of interaction between the environmental deities and man.

Conclusion

The presentation of praise names or invocation through the drum lyrics identified an aesthetic reference of verbal art in the display of the Orisa connected with the indigenous drums among the Yoruba people. The hyperbolic use of language through the drum therefore aided the manifestation of spiritual forces. There is no drum among the Yoruba people that its formation is not carved from the solid wood and most of the woods that are used for such carving are believed to have connection with one spirit or the other. Also, most animal skin that is used for the covering of the wood is considered to be special to the orisa. The uses of the ecological elements like tree and animal in the making of the indigenous drums therefore enhance spiritual episode of the Yoruba people in which their ritual feelings towards the environment they belong are emphasised. The use of drum for activities of festivals among the Yoruba people gives the indication that the drum possesses symbolic qualities like authority, blessing and spiritual power which are the basis for ritual practices. These qualities constitute the aesthetic feature which Yoruba indigenous drums possess. This then attests to the fact that different uses of indigenous drums have their different origins from one Orisa or the other due to these qualities.

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³⁹ E.B. Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 93

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