

An Analysis of Drumbeats and Responses: A Study of Ajeran Masquerade of Ègàn Land

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Abstract

The close relationship between Egúngún festival and music is a feature that is inseparable in traditional festivals of the Yorùbá in general. In most traditional festivals, music depicts the way of life of the people over time. Among the Ègàn community in Alimosho Local Government area of Lagos state music forms part of their rich heritage. Egúngún festival is always celebrated annually by Ègàn community which has been observed to be violent during Ajeran performance. The study analyzed the drumbeats and responses of the masquerade during the festival and their relationship to violence. The study relies on primary data collected through oral interview with the Oje's family and drummers from the community. Information was also collected through participant observation method. The cultural studies theory was used to explain the violent nature of the masquerade during performance. Findings reveal that the drumbeats and responses of the masquerade to the beats overt and covert are responsible for the destructive activities of the masquerade. The study concludes with a clarion call for stake holders to nick this behavior in the bud.

Keywords: Ajeran, culture, festival, masquerade, traditional

Introduction

Traditional festival is a feature common to all societies as well as to the people of Awori land Ègàn community of Lagos state (Ajetunmobi & Ishola, 1998). These two scholars noted that Awori in general are embroiled with different traditional religious festivals which show cases them as a people that cherished their cultural heritage.

Juxtaposing the Aworis with other Yorùbás ethnic groups, one will find different types of festival that abound and the Egúngún festival is particularly found among the Awori people of Ègàn land. It shows how a people value their cultural heritage in the face of modernism.

Egúngún traditional festival is among the important festivals that are celebrated annually to deify the spirit of the ancestors of the people. Whenever the Egúngún festival is celebrated, the period is seen as sacred with participants and custodians of this traditional religion coming together annually or periodically, from far and near to celebrate, renew commitment, and pay respect to the spirit of the living death (Babayemi, 1980; Loko, 2014). The festival more impor-

tantly is organized collectively but varies among most communities. Most especially, it is celebrated for a period of either 7, 14, 17, 21 day in places like Ondo, Ibadan, Oshogbo, Ife, Owo, Oyo and Lagos just to mention a few. (Babayemi 1980; Romkalila, 1993; Loko, 2014).

It is important to note that the Egúngún festival like any other traditional religious festival is backed by the law of the land in southwest Nigeria but in recent time its celebration is now constituting a nuisance as it has come to be associated with violence (Agba 2018; Johnson, 2018; Adebayo, 2017; Ogunmola, 2016; Okwuofu, 2013; Bamgbola, 2013; Adediran, 2013; Ogunesan and Adelusi, 2012; Adeniyi, 2008; and Minchakpu, 2004).

Usman and Ewere (2020) advanced reasons which they identified as undue rivalry and supremacy battle between some Egúngún households, retaliation crime perpetration, religious intolerance and political manipulation of the festival in the struggle for political power. Olusegun (2013) looks at the role of drums as a means of passing message to the masquerade. According to this scholar, drums carry the spiritual potency of the gods or spirits. It serves as a spiritual symbol in some ritual practices of the people. The aftermath of the tendency to resort to violence has degenerated to the level that the once highly revered and deified Egúngún representatives have fallen into the ambit of the law, leading to their arrest and possible prosecution as a result of their alleged involvement in social mayhem and public disturbances. Against this background, this paper presents an analysis of drumbeats and Aḗeran masquerade responses in Ègàn Lagos State and its relation to violence during the performance.

Egúngún in Yorùbá Cosmology

Literally, the word 'Egúngún' is used to ascribe to all masked figures found among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria (Adedeji, 1969; Oke, 2007). It is seen as an ancestral cult depicting the belief of the Yorùbá in life after death (Aremu, Banjo and Olanipekun, 2012). According to Bolaji Idowu (1969) Egúngún is one of those means of showing in concrete terms, that the Yorùbá belief in life after death, and that a relationship still exists with their people who are still living. This shows why they are called Ara Orun meaning "the citizens of heaven" (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979; Campbell, 2015).

Babayemi (1980) and Campbell (2015) posit that Egúngún not only serve to bless, protect, lead their communities in war, it at times cautions and punish their earthly relatives. Quite apart from this, in general Egúngún protect their communities against evil spirits, witchcraft, poverty, sickness, bareness, famine, epidemic and evil doers (Babayemi, 1980; Aremu, Banjo and Olanipekun, 2012). The violence nature of this masquerade during festival present a multidi-

mensional reason, showing among other things the convergence of factors that makes the masquerade destructive during festivals.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the cultural studies theory as put forward by Raymond William and Richard Haggart in 1945. The theory is used to explain the response to a particular behavior which may be as a result of contact with an alien culture and to instill on the individual shared understanding of social values. The emphasis is on culture in the face of modernism. Culture, from the point of view of the culturalist is one of the avenues for propagating meaning and values in the individuals. Seen from this perspective this theory becomes relevant to the study when applied to the drumbeats played by the drummers during Ajeran masquerade performance where the drumbeats determines the elicited behaviour which sometimes proves destructive tendencies

Aim and Objective of study

The study presented an analysis of drumbeats and responses of Ajeran masquerade in Eḡàn land and it's relation to violence during the festival. The primary objectives are to: study the musical instrument used and their functions during the festival, the role of music during the festival and also give results of violence with musical responses of the masquerade.

Significance of the study

The study is significant in that it provides documentation on the drumbeats and responses of the Ajeran masquerade. In addition the study also provides the role of music during the festival, musical instrument used with their functions and the results of violence with responses of the masquerade to the drumbeats. It will serve as a reference point for scholars who belong to this field of study.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative approach. Gathering of data was through ethnographic and the use of in-depth interviews with the key informants, participant observation and focus group discussion with the Odufuwa and Olorunfemi families. Important information and performance practice which goes with the festival were collected and audio-visual recording of the drumbeats with the responses of Ajeran masquerade were undertaken. The masquerade custodians, drummers and singers were purposively interviewed to get information on the celebration of the festival. With the use of content analysis techniques, analysis of drumbeats with the responses of the masquerade to the beats, theme and

the compositional elements of the drumbeats which follow the festival at Ègàn is made available.

Ègàn Land in Historical Perspective

By geographical location, Ègàn community is a small village in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos state, situated north east of Akesan and north of Abaranje along iyana ipaja to iyana Iba road. In an oral interview with Mr Edun Saula from Odufuwa family and Mrs Rashidat Olorunfemi, Odufuwa was the first man to settle at Ègàn land some years ago, precisely at Oyisa area and later joined by Olorunfemi family. They both lived together to an extent that the family of Odufuwa allowed their daughter marry to the Olorunfemi family. Tradition has it that Ègàn has been in existence for over 190 years.

It was Odufuwa that named the place 'Ègàn' because the place was full of bush. In general, 'Ègàn' in Yorùbá land means Tick bush. The Awori are the earlier settler in Ègàn. Tradition has it that they migrated from Oyo and their first point of abode in Lagos was Isheri-Ile. Being a forest area as the time of settlement defined the people occupation which are farming, hunting as well as in the indulgence of the celebration of Egúngún festival and the worship of a deity referred to as Olofin (interview with Edun Saula of Odufuwa family and Mrs Rashidat Olorunfemi, 2022)

The Origin of Ajẹran Masquerade among the Aworis in Ègàn Igando

According to Rashidat Olorunfemi who is a member of the family that donned the regalia of the masquerade in Ègàn, the origin of Ajẹran masquerade can be traced to the turbulent period in Ègàn when Awori community was invaded by unknown spirit which caused a lot of unrest. To checkmate this community consulted an oracle which gave them the solution to the problems. The idea suggested by the oracle brought about two masquerades into existence. The first one is called Agan who is invisible to the people but his voice can be heard when he is out at mid-night and he performs till 4am in the morning. Rashidat also points out that if the Agan does not perform, Ajẹran cannot come out, and this is so because the presence of Agan is to hunt down the unknown spirit which will be cleared by Ajẹran in the morning. This explains the popular parlance among the people of Awori that "Agan bee Ajẹran Jade" (i.e. Agan performed and Ajẹran come out in the morning). It is of interest to note that when Ajẹran is performing, no other masquerade can perform until he is done.

In the words of another respondent on when does Ajẹran comes out, Mr. Ojerinde explained that: when the chiefs of OJE dies Agan will perform at mid-night and Ajẹran will come out in the morning so also during the Egúngún festival period.



These drumbeats are meant for the Oje's family. Iya-ilu bembe introduces the short phrase with omo eran da and Itele bembe responds with omo eran re. The drummers played these beats when the Oje family is marching to the masquerade's house. There is always a vocal response to the beats by mentioning individual's names of the family. Any stranger that joins them at this point is an intruder and will be dealt with by using cane on them. The purpose of this beats is to get the masquerade prepared for his performance and also to build his confidence that those names mentioned are his family and they came to pay homage by dropping leaves in front of his house after which the masquerade comes out for his performance.

Text English translation

Iya-lu bembe (lead) omo eran da.. Where is the offspring of animal

Itele bembe (response) omo eran re this is the offspring of animal

Iya-ilu bembe: Ojewale Ojewale

Itele bembe; omo eran ni is the offspring of animal

Iya-ilu bembe; omo eran da where is the offspring of animal

Itele bembe; omo eran re. This is the offspring of animal

The Role of Music in Aḗeran's performance During Egúngún Festival

According to Loko (2014) music plays an important role in traditional festivals. According to this scholar, when looking at the vocal and instrumentals during the festival using content analysis technique, music plays these roles: signal, publicity, evocative, satirical and motivational roles.

Respondents and most of the key informants maintained that the drumbeats played three key roles during the performance of Aḗeran masquerade: evocative, motivational and communicational roles. Though observers see Aḗeran masquerade as entertaining but those that know what he portrays understand that he is not for entertainment. (Ayankunle/Male, Aḗeran's Custodian/53 years/Olorunfemi/Egàn).

Communicative role

Pinmiloye (2009) shed more light on drums language as it used for communication which depend on the relationship that exist between the human language and the tones. He further extends his discussion to the functional role of the drums which are: the symbolic functional role, the musical role, signaling role and as a surrogate for human voice. The Iya-ilu bembe played a major role in communicating with the masquerade with the support of Itele bembe. Since Iya-ilu bembe is a melo-rhythmic instrument which has three tones, it is used as a surrogate for human voice to pass the message to the masquerade at any point in time when it is needed.

Motivational role

The drumbeats serve to stimulate the responses of the masquerade and it also determines the performance of the masquerade.

Invocative role

The drumbeat played a major role in invoking the spirit of the ancestors which is believed enters into the masquerade to influence the masquerade behaviour.

Musical Instrument Used and their Function during the Festival

The membranophones are bembe ensemble which consists of Iya-ilu bembe, Itele-bembe and omole bembe while the idiophones consists sekere (rattle) and agogo (gong).

Iya-ilu bembe: It played a melo-rhythmic role as it was used as a surrogate to human voice. Most of the beats produced from iya-ilu bembe always determine the behaviour of the masquerade.

Itele bembe: In order of hierarchy the itele bembe follow Iya-ilu bembe and it played a supportive role to iya-ilu bembe during the performance.

Omele bembe: Both iya-ilu bembe and itele bembe players relies on omole bembe because it played constant rhythmic pattern throughout the performance.

Sekere (rattle): This instrument



maintains a constant rhythmic pattern throughout the performance and also a regular tempo of the beat.

Agogo (gong): It is a rhythmic instrument which rhythmic pattern in different variation.



Form and Structure

The form of selected drumbeats at this festival is call and response. Call and response in African music exist between vocal and chorus, lead instrument with other instrument and instrument with vocals. Iya-ilu Bembe played the lead role by introducing the lyrics pronounced by the audience. Sometimes, Itele bembe responds to iya-ilu bembe while omole bembe and sekere keep a constant rhythm.

Time signature: The time signature is compound duple. 6/8 and 12/8.

Intervals: the intervals are 2nd 3rd and 5th

Rhythmic structure of instrument used

The arrangement of metrical organization is as follow: short to long (quaver to crotchet); long to long (dotted crotchet to dotted crotchet); short to short (quaver to quaver). The combination of the four musical instrument provide what we called hemiola pattern

Drumbeats and the Responses of the Masquerade

Eran o Eran o

These drumbeats are played often whenever the drummers need to pass message to the masquerade. The response of the masquerade to these drumbeats always require total attention because at any point when these beats is been played, there is always a message from the drummers to the masquerade.

Text English Translation

Iya-ilu Bembe: Eran o, Eran o Prey, prey

Itele Bembe: Eran o, Eran o

Ajeran Kawó Ìjà

These drumbeats are played to motivate the masquerade for his performance. Coming out from his house with Iya-ilu bembé passing message to him that he should raise the arm of conflict, the response of the masquerade leads to breaking of a bus windscreen and destroying some shops beside the road. The tempo of the rhythm is always fast at this point to bring out the real spirit of the masquerade. Iya-ilu bembé played the voice surrogate role while the Itele-bembé played a supportive role by responding to what the lead drummer was saying. Omele bembé and sekere played constant rhythmic pattern throughout the performance. As the masquerade continue with his performance he also pulled down a kiosk in front of one of the Oje's family to pay homage , that is why they always announce that people should not open their shops and all market should be shutdown till when the masquerade finishes his performance.

Text English Translation

Iya-Ilu Bembé (Lead): Ka wo ija. Raise the arm

Itele Bembé: (respond) Ajeran Ajeran

Iya-Ilu Bembé: Kawo ija soke Raise the arms of conflict

Ajeran Lògùn Jà

From the content of these drumbeats played by the drummers, they made it clear to the masquerade that his performance is not to entertain the audience but to clear what Agan has hunt down during the night. The drumbeats also gear up his spirit to perform more in cleansing of the unknown spirit that has invaded their land since many years. The response of the masquerade towards these drumbeats leads to the masquerade jumping on different things around him like chairs, tables and motionless cars.

Text English Translation

Iya-Ilú Bembe: Ajeran logun ija Ajeran is the antidote of conflict

Itele Bembe: Ajeran logun ija Ajeran is the antidote of conflict

Bó Kò'jú Sí È Tá

These drumbeats are always played at any point the drummers feel that the masquerade is going beyond his boundary. From the content of the sound played by Iya-ilu's player, it is obvious that it is a warning signal beat. At this point the response of the masquerade to this beats is always calm because he believed strongly in the message passed by the drummers.

Text

Iya-Ilú Bembe:(lead) Bo koju si e ta

Itele Bembe: (respond) Ajeran

Iya-Ilú Bembe: Bo keyin si e ta

Itele Bembe: Ajeran

Iya-Ilu Bembe: Bo ku wo nikan, te ro ara re pa

Itele Bembe: Bo ku wo nikan, te ro ara re pa.

Translation

If it faces you, confront it

If it backs you, confront it.

When you are left with nobody

Do a rethink about your case.

Gbon Wèriwèri Jo

Presto ♩ = 130

These drumbeats are meant for punishment. The drummers play these beats whenever they feel that the strangers are going beyond their boundary. The response of the masquerade to these beats is to use cane on those stranger.

Text

Iya-Ilu Bembe: Gbon weri weri jo (2 times)

Itele Bembe: Gbon were were jo

Iya-Ilu Bembe: Onile nsa, alejo nduro

Itele Bembe: Onile nsa, alejo nduro

Iya-Ilu Bembe: Gbon weri weri jo

Itele Bembe; Gbon weri weri jo.

Translation

Show your caning power (2 times)

When the indigenes are fleeing

And the visitors stay

Show your caning power.

Conclusion

The paper has analysed the drumbeats and responses of Ajeran masquerade performance among the Ègàn community of Lagos state. It examined the brief history of Ègàn land, the origin of Ajeran masquerade, the role that music played during the performance and the musical instrument used with their functions during the festival. The major reason for the violent behaviour was the drumming associated with vocal response of the audience and the rhythm elicited during performance.

From the above study, drumming plays significant role in Ajeran masquerade behaviour during performance at the Egúngún festival in Ègàn land. In view of this, the following steps are suggested as useful towards curtailing the violent nature of the masquerade during performance. Firstly, elders and the Oje family need to understand the sacredness of Egúngún festival as a way of ensuring that they come to terms with its religious and cultural significance while avoiding undue violence often encountered during the celebration. Since the masquerade performance is a fulfilment of a religious obligation, all rules and regulation guiding its performance need to be properly reviewed to ensure peace. These steps can go a long way in reducing the violent behaviour accompanying the performance.

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