

DANCE IN YORUBA RITUALS

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Abstract

This paper does a critical survey of dance performances within the process of worshipping the pantheons of gods in Yorubaland. Using the Ifa ritual as a model, this article, through an anthropological approach, uses dances performed during worship by Ifa adherents in Ile-Ife, a Yoruba sub-genealogy in Osun State. Consequently, the paper founds the spiritual connections of these dances to the process of pacifying and adoring Ifa. This finding is eminent because the authors employed the method of movement descriptive analysis of some selected dance vocabularies performed by the worshipers of Ifa within Ife. The movement descriptions were, anthropologically based on the culture and personality and cultural configuration approach (Any Peterson Royce, 1977, 19) where groups of performances by the Ifa worshipers within the Ife cultural milieu were closely studied. The paper holds that there are symbiotic relationships between dance and the spiritual realm in general, and Ifa in particular. Hence, the power of dance in religious practice lies in its multisensory, emotional, and symbolic capacity to create moods and a sense of a situation in attention-riveting patterns by framing, prolonging, or discontinuing communication (Judith Lynne Hanna, 2004). On this submission therefore, the paper concludes that the efficacy of dance regarding spiritualism and faith is central to the worship of some deities in Yorubaland, and any attempt to remove it from such observances will render the ritual order impotent.

Keywords: Ritual dance, Ifa, Yoruba, worship, efficacy

Introduction

Dance as one of the ways of worship is obvious in several religious bodies, ranging from Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and indigenous religions, except Islam which abhors dance. In religious observances, dances are external expressions of the spiritual built-up of adherents, sometimes performed to redefine their spiritual positions, faith, and belief. Such dances may be performed as a part of praise and worship in the case of Christianity, as rituals, and as festivals in some world religions, and other indigenous religions. Consequently, upon this, many communities and nations within the African continent have a fair share of these dance traditions. In Nigeria for example, some traditional dance performances have spiritual significance for the dancers. The dancers "feel it" and for that moment when performing, are in tune with the dance. They breathe the breath of the spirits in ways that no one else can understand (Dennis Da-alaMirilla. 2019). To some extent, the devotees of some of the gods are possessed by the powers they believe to be worshipping, and in the process of performing such dances fall into a transition from normal ritual dance to trance taking them beyond the normal realm of the worship.

In Nigeria, examples of such religious dances could be found in Sango, a Yoruba warlike god, heavily built, signifying the Yoruba perspective of masculinity in its totality. The dance is vibrato and sometimes staccato of which at times, dancers fall into a trance while performing the Sango dance. The Igbe ritual cleansing of the Tiv people is structured around a dance performance where the performers, the priest and the initiates dance into a trance. OsitaOkagbue writing on indigenous African theatre compliments the position of this paper that

Mmonwu is an Igbo Masquerade, and masking theatre which is religious and theatrical, ritual and entertainment, it is difficult, almost impossible to separate the two.... The Hausa Bori dance involves the spirit possession of cult members, collectively known as bori (2012, 18).

In addition to the above, the Oloja Masquerade performance of the Igala people also exemplifies ritual dance and the theatre of transition concerning their gods. Others include Udiroko, Udede, Olosunta, orole, and Esise, all from Ado-Ekiti. Nzanzo of the Mbula tribe and Ofala festival from Onitsha are also examples of deities that dance is used in worship. Thus,

Throughout world history sacred sounds have served as a medium for human cultures to raise queries, advance beliefs, give praise and inspire others to join in an exploration of the mysteries of earthly existence and the greater universe. These sacred sound traditions encompass a broad range of expressive forms: melodic and repetitive vocalizations called chants; sharp, passionate, emotions-filled hums, groans, shouts; percussive, rhythmic hand claps and foot stomps; and extended song, sermon, and instrumental arrangements. Instrumental music, sung prayers, and mystical chants have been used to communicate with the divine, unite religious communities, and express moral, political, social, and economic aspirations. Sacred sounds in many traditions are the central means for invocation of spirits (Madukasi Francis Chuks, 2020,24)

This also establishes the fact that ritual dance is a fundamental element of worship in many religious organizations. Consequently, haven established the fact concerning the viability of dance within several traditional religious worships, the next segment of this paper will discuss the concept of dance in Yoruba land.

The Concept of Dance in Yoruba

In Yorubaland, various dances abound ranging from religious or ritual to age-grade dances, ceremonial and social dances as well as political and commemorative dance performances. This follows that in Yoruba, dance Functions within spiritual and religious engagements, social and ceremonial celebrations, and recreational purposes. In addition, there are specific dances for royal personages that are of two-folds: those performed by palace organizations for the relaxation and enjoyment of the King of the one done by the king for his subjects e.g. The Ooni of Ife, during Olojo Festival in Ile-Ife, or Ataoja of Osogbo during Osun Festival in Osogbo. There are also politically organized dances that can be used to enthrone or dethrone a king e.g. in Abeokuta, women danced naked in protest during the reign of Oba Ademola, Alake of Egbaland, led by Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. It is also a medium through which an individual can comment or advise a King on some aspects of his rule, whether negatively or positively without incurring his wrath.

Thus, in Yorubaland, as an accompaniment of dance, the drummer is not only expected to possess great creative skill and a sense of rhythm but equally a good memory for poetry and the history of the people. For instance, the drummers play a vital role in every palace in Yorubaland, they have to announce each visitor as he enters the place, to alert the king of his visitors' entrance and departure, which accorded dancing and singing of praises. Again, one of the major dance expressions that are very common and revered in Yorubaland is Dundun dance. Dundun, is a traditional pressure drum of the Yoruba people with a double-

membrane, hourglass-shaped. It is capable of imitating the tones and glides of the spoken language and is employed by a skilled musician to render ritual praise poetry and dance to a deity or king. The term pressure drum derives from the shape of the instrument's body, which is waisted, or smaller in diameter in the middle than it is at each end. The drum is suspended from the player's left shoulder; the left hand manipulates the leather tensioning things that connect the two membranes, while the drum is beaten in a dance movement, with a curved stick held in the right hand. By tightening or loosening the strings rhythmically, the player can control (i.e to raise or lower) the pitch of the drum.

On the other hand, the Bata drum gender names are: the largest is called *Iyailu Bata* (Bata mother drum). The next in line is *Omele Abo*, (Bata female *Omele*) followed by a little smaller than the first two, known as *OmeleAko* (Bata male *Omele*) while the last which is the smallest of the four is called *Kudi* (the smallest drum). These drums with their various sizes have different pitches and contributions as well as musical roles in music and dance. *Dundun* and *Bata* dance, apart from being used severally on social occasions, is widely acclaimed for spiritual or festival events, especially in the worship of notable deities in Yorubaland. These include *Osun*, *Ogun*, *Obatala*, *Egungun*, among others. Furthermore, the *Dundun* and *Bata* drum is used extensively at political gatherings to praise-sing a favoured candidate or party, and to hurl abusive and derogatory remarks at the opposition. *Dundun* dance is as old as the Yoruba tradition itself and without any gainsaying, *dundun* dance is a major component of Yoruba theatre because the *alarinjo* travelling theatre which marked the beginning of Yoruba theatre in Nigeria has the *dundun* and *bata* drum as its major instrument. At a later time in Yoruba theatre history, specifically during *Hubert Ogunde* theatrical exploits, *dundun* dance featured prominently during opening glee and closing glee. Interestingly, *I-Show Pepper*, *Kola Ogunde*, *DuroLadipo*, *TundeOmilani*, *OyinAdejobi* among others, also made extensive use of *dundun* dance in their various productions. Apart from the *dundun* and *bata* dances, there exist other dance forms in Yorubaland: *Shekere* (rattle) dance, *Agogo* dance is done with different sets of gongs, especially by the *Ifa* faith adherents while *Agere Ogun* dance is done by worshippers of the *Ogun* deity. Others include dances done in respect of *Obatala*, *Egungun*, *Osun*, *Edi*, among others. These dances cited above are mostly spiritual dances but several other dance forms ranging from social to commemorative are obtainable in Yorubaland. *Dundun* and *Bata* dances especially are synonymous with Yoruba theatre. The *Alarinjo* travelling theatre, which kick-started Yoruba theatre made extensive use of *dundun* and *bata* dance forms. The *Alarinjo* theatre comprises masked dancers (masquerades) and their major type of drum and percussion is the *dundun* drum. Although *Bata* dance is equally as prominent and highly favoured as *dundun* dance, however, due to the energetic and energy-sapping nature of *Bata* dance and the fact that mastering *Bata* dance somehow proves to be more difficult, a larger percentage of people have a preference for *Dundun* dance.

In *Dundun*, and *Bata* dances, dance steps speak following the rhythm of the drumming which dictates steps taken in dance. *Dundun* and *bata* dance are very communicative. An example goes thus:

Bo ba se pe mi, niiwonini wo mi

N'bafa'pajo, fa'pajo, fa' pa jo,

Bo' bba se pe mi, niwoni, niwoni

N'bafe'sejo, fe'sejo, fe'sejo,

Bo'ba se pe mi niwoni, niwoni,

N'ba mi gbogboaratititi...

Translation:

If I were to be you,

I would dance with my arms

If I were to be you,

I would dance with my legs

If I were to be you

I would shake my whole body effectively

This, therefore, means that dance in Yorubaland represents the totality of existence, joy, and sorrow; dance is life, and to live is to dance. This is why there is a dance in every life engagement in Yorubaland. There is a dance for the rite of passage, ritual, festivals, and many other avenues that call for dance.

Ritual Dance in Yorubaland

Rituals are "all forms of mechanical human behaviour ranging from the simple custom of shaking hands and daily etiquette of greeting to such a complex and solemn act of ritual sacrifices" (Leach, 1996, 523). Rituals are also defined by Victor Turner as "prescribed formal behaviour for the association not given to technical routine, having reference to beliefs and mystical (or non-empirical) beings or powers" (1968, 15). In this light, we see rituals and rites of passage as patterned (or repeatable) actions, enacted from time to time in the life of an individual, community, natural phenomena or the ecological-system, to celebrate the passage of human or cosmic life from one phase to the other (Umar HabilaDademDanfulani, "<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&v>"). Indeed, there are several conceptual clarifications of ritual by many scholars, therefore, for us to go into the same process of conceptual clarification will amount to rehashing some already established works. Moreover, this paper is not primarily on conceptualizing ritual process, but specifically on Yoruba ritual dance, therefore it will be of scholarly use for us to extrapolate more on ritual dances as regards to Yoruba worldview. Consequently, within the sacred point of view in Yoruba cosmology, spiritual or religious dances like in most societies on the African continent is very popular. This is because of the abundance of traditional African religious practices which had been in existence long before the advent of colonial masters to Africa. Despite the overbearing presence of Christianity and Islam still, there are adherents of these two 'imported' religions who practice elements of traditional African religion alongside their professed beliefs.

Thus, the general belief of adherents of traditional African religion is that the Supreme Being reigns as the God in heaven. However, it is believed in most traditions He is not involved in the day-to-day affairs of human beings. He is believed to delegate to the less important gods of African belief who occupy the spirit world. The spirit world is made up of superhuman beings, beings that occupy the spiritual universe between gods and humanity, the space between heaven and Earth. They invisibly tread the Earth so that they are continually present. It is to these lesser gods that people turn in times of joy and sorrow. It is to them that they make requests concerning their needs and desires, and to them that they take offerings and sacrifices for health and happiness, successful crops, the birth of healthy children, and protection from evil. In Yorubaland, adherents of the traditional religions believe that the deities or "lesser gods" they worship and pay obeisance to, are intermediaries who intercede on their behalf to the Supreme Being "Olodumare". The Yorubas believe in Orisha, and their theogony enjoys a pantheon of Orisas, these include Orisanla, Orunmila, Esu, Ogun, Sango, Osun, Oya, Aganju, Obaluaye, Erinle, Yemoja and among others of which dance is always involved

in the worship. The Yorubas also generate their ancestral spirits through Egungun, masquerades, Oro, Irunmole, Gelede, and Ibeji the orisa of twins, using dance as means. In Yoruba Pantheon known as the Orisa, Olodumare is at the top of the religious ranking as the Supreme Being. Next to him are his associates known as divinities or deities, ranked according to the importance and function they oversee. Next in line are the spirits of the ancestors and those of the ordinary dead. According to oral traditions (though not verifiable in all ramifications) Yorubaland has as many as 1,700 divinities but only a very few remain very popular and worshipped to date.

Ritual Dances in Ile-Ife

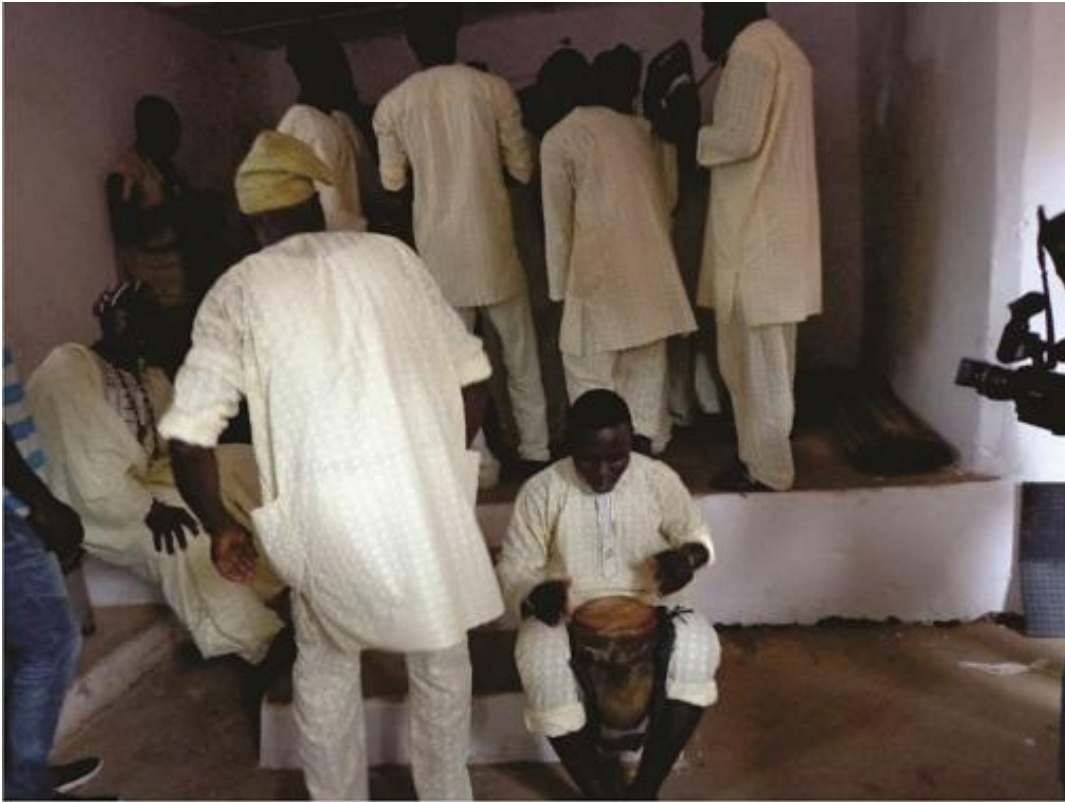
Yoruba myth traces the phenomenon of dance to the celestial descent of Ayan and his drum. According to the myth as Falola and Akinyemi discuss:

Ayan was commissioned by Olodumare (Almighty God) to teach and disseminate the art of music and dance. It follows that the phenomenon of dance among the Yoruba cannot be understood without recourse to the strongest beliefs and value system of the people (www.iupress.indiana.edu. 96).

The above lends credence to the earlier assertion that the role of dance in African culture is central to the understanding, and appreciation of Africa and its people. According to KariamuWelsh, "Dances in African cultures are multifunctional and they serve as a window into how many societies conduct and live their lives." (39) The above assertion by Welsh is in support of the view shared by Falola and Akinyemi that to understand the phenomenon of Dance of the African people, there is the need to understand their way of life including culture, customs and traditions. It is important to note the close relationship and affinity between traditional and religious or spiritual dances. This is because it is believed that during the ritual and public worship, both the gods and the worshippers participate. Africans believe dance connects people to their ancestors and nature. As part of a spiritual ritual, dance may be a symbolic form of communication with natural powers, or a trance-inducing movement enabling the dancer to communicate directly with the spirits. In some masked dances, the dancer assumes the temporary identity of a god or a powerful ancestral spirit (Albert Oikelome 2019, 195).

Thus, in Yorubaland, religious and spiritual dances are designated as dances that are specifically performed to pay homage to a deity. There are several traditional dances synonymous only with Ile-Ife. This peculiarity may be in terms of existence or mode of presentation, and may even be both. Examples of such dances within Ife cultural personifications are going to be discussed below.

Osirigi dance: This dance is common to Ile-Ife only and is presented during Olojo festival. This festival is to celebrate the Ogun deity. Osirigi is the drum of the first Olofin, the first king of the Ile-Ife kingdom. Before Olojo could take place, the drum must be unveiled with sacrifice. The drum must be worshipped. Players range from 5 to 30 and the whole presentation is always intriguing. The present Ooni of Ife has these Osirigi performers in his retinue of court entertainers and has been promoting them beyond the shores of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.



Osirigi dancers preparing for a performance

Agbon dance: This particular dance also is synonymous with Ile-Ife only. Agbon dance takes place during Agbon festival in Ile-Ife and is woven around the personality of Osara, a heroine of Ile-Ife and wife of Oduduwa. It is usually celebrated in May every year. The dancers wear rattles on their legs which serve as the dance accompaniment. They hold various sizes and types of raffia-made hand fans which they slap on their palms in rhythm with the rattles on the legs. This is done with calculated timing and practised steps to create unique and impressive dance performances.



Agbon Dancers

Ewo dance: The number of dancers who perform this dance mostly are between 20 to 30 persons; though the number is not a prerequisite to engage in the dance. However, to create beautiful dance steps and music, large numbers matter greatly. The dance is mostly done by men and the musical instrument used is like a traditional axe-head and beaten with slim iron rods. (Image not available)

Ikoko dance: Ikoko in Yoruba means pot made with mud. Traditionally, the drum is made with mud but recently, they are made with calabashes of various sizes which transmit different tones and sounds. Predominantly, the performance is done by women and it is very common as a pastime of a group of wives married into a particular family called Olobinrin-ile. (Image not available)

Adamo-Ife dance: This dance is synonymous only with Ile-Ife and Ijeshaland only. Though this study cannot tell who among the two traditional towns invented the dance it is quite arguable that Ile-Ife may have likely introduced the dance for the simple fact the ancient town is the source of all Yoruba races. The only two visible differences between the two is that the Ijesha version is called Adamo-Ijesha as opposed to Ile-Ife's Adamo-Ife. Also, Adamo-Ife is rendered in the Yoruba-language Ife dialect, and the Ijesha version is sung in the IjeshaYoruba-language Ijesha dialect.

Aside from these traditional dances peculiar to Ile-Ife with exception of Adamo-Ijesha, other traditional dances in Ile-Ife include Dundun and bata dances. However, these two are not as popular compared to the ones discussed above. Though, in recent times, dancers and drummers move around to market their "wares" at social events such as engagements and weddings, burial ceremonies, and Thanksgiving among others.

Therefore, it may be possible to find dundun and bata dance performers in such gatherings' reminiscence of the Alarinjo era in traditional theatre practice in Nigeria.

According to oral traditions, all the orisa are said to have been either divinity that descended from the invisible world (orun) and lived in this planetary world (aye) as human beings or famous individuals deified as gods or goddesses after their death in recognition of their supernatural deeds, outstanding wisdom and perseverance. The orisa is said to be closely associated with the living and frequently involved in human affairs. There is a commonly accepted tradition that there are 401 deities in Yorubaland, although the figure should be viewed as a sacred metaphor and not a scientific fact. However, notable divinities or deities universally worshipped everywhere in Yorubaland starting from Ile-Ife on annual basis include Ifa (Orunmila) Esu, Obatala, Ogun, Orisa-Okoto, Osun, Sango, Sapponna and Yemoja. However, there are some deities whose worship is limited to Ile-Ife alone. Among these are Moremi; whose Edi festival is reportedly celebrated in Ile-Ife alone. Oranmiyan; is a grandson of Oduduwa and a former king of the Ile-Ife and Oyo kingdom. After his demise, he was deified and has since been celebrated and worshipped in Ile-Ife till date. In Ile-Ife, Sango is named Oramfe or Onile-Ina and Ogun is named Olojo. As earlier mentioned in this study, Yorubaland has as many as 1,700 divinities but the number of the popular ones remains few still it is important to take cognizance of the fact that traditional religions are sacred activities and adherents take the ritualistic elements involved as serious business. Therefore, religious or ritual dances are very instrumental to the very essence of the lives of Africans. In Ile-Ife, the worship of the deities mentioned above remains incomplete without paying attention to their dances.

Ifa Ritual Dance in Ile-Ife

Ifa is a system of divination based on sixteen basic and 256 derivative figures (odu) obtained either by the manipulation of sixteen palm nuts (ikin) or by the toss of a chain (opẹlẹ) of eight half-seed shells. The worship of Ifa as the God of Divination entails ceremonies, sacrifices, taboos, paraphernalia, drums, songs, praises, initiation, and other ritual elements comparable to those of other Yoruba cults. Three versions of the origin of Ifa in Ile-Ife were reported by Clarke but a version that is generally supported by oral tradition shall suffice for this study. According to J.D. Clarke: My informant A. told me that "Ifa originally lived at OkeEketi, which is midway between heaven and earth, but later came down and lived at Ile Ife ". I am told that one of the names by which Ifa is greeted is Oba Sakete, a place in Dahomey near the Nigerian boundary (2016, 239).

However, to OluwoLokeeganAbereifaIfa, a notable Ifa priest in Ile-Ife who spoke the Yoruba language in the Ile-Ife dialect but translated to English for a better understanding: Orunmila came into this world (Ile-Ife) via a rope and that is why he is called seer of the world and the heavens...he divines for all other 401 deities and that is why Ifa is always consulted on every occasion by all other priests and adherents. He is the eyes of all other Orisas (oral interview).

The above position by OluwoLokeegan that Orunmila came into the world via a rope is a common belief among some sections of Ifa worshippers and priests but is not supported by the record. However, the primary objective of this study is to explain the dance aspect of Ifa which arguably has not been given much concentration before now. To understand the Ifa religion further, Bascom explains further:

The Ifa diviners are most commonly called babalawo or "father has secrets" (baba-li-awo) or simply awo, secrets or mysteries. They may also be distinguished from the others who worship Ifa as "fathers of those who have Ifa" (baba onifa). The term onifa or "those who have Ifa" (o-ni-Ifa) refers to all Ifa worshipers, including the

babalawo, as does its synonym, Olorunmila, or "those who have Orunmila" (O-li-Orunmila). The worshipers of Ifa include men who inherit or are initiated into the worship of Ifa without becoming diviners and women who are told to care for the palm nuts of their fathers (81).

According to Oba BoluFatunmise, a notable Ifa priest of international fame and traditional ruler of Iyanfoworogi, a small town in Ife Kingdom:

ArabaAgbaye is the spiritual head of all Ifa priests (Babalawos) in the universe. This is so because as the cradle of Yoruba people and the source of human civilization, it is the birthright of Ile-Ife to hold the headship of all traditional institutions. The Ifa hierarchy in Ile-Ife has the ArabaAgbaye as the head; though in the beginning, it used to be the AgbongbonAwo the order was reversed and AgbongbonAwo became the second-in-command. He is followed by the AkodaAwo and the Aseda Awo comes forth. They are followed by other lesser title holders but these four are the headship of the Ifa religion in Ile-Ife (oral interview).



The ArabaAgbaye (Middle) dances to Ifa Music

The Ifa community in Ile-Ife is divided into five zones and one can only move up within a particular zone. To illustrate this further, the implication is that if an Ifa priest does not fall within a particular zone that bears the title of AgbongbonAwo, such Ifa priest can never hold the title. Additionally, training in Ifa to become an initiate or priest is allowed but title-holding is purely hereditary. This means no matter how prolific you are as Ifa priest, if your house is not among the selected houses for title-holding there is a limit to what you may become in terms of holding exalted positions. Also, the headquarters of all Ifa adherents and priests is located at Oke-Itase in Ile-Ife where the yearly World Ifa festival holds. Another interesting fact that distinguishes Ile-Ife from the rest of the Ifa worship style is that in Ile-Ife, Iyere; the popular chant synonymous with Ifa is referred to as Eesoko in Ile-Ife. While every other part of the Ifa community engages in Iyere, the Ifa priests in Ile-Ife do the Eesoko. To be more elaborate, we shall be treating the values of Ifa in the next segment of this paper.

Religious values of Ifa dance

In Welsh's opinion:

All African dances can be used for transcendence and transformation purposes. Transcendence is the term usually associated with possession and trance. Dance is the conduit for transcendent activities. Dance enables an initiate or practitioner to progress or travel through several altered states, thereby achieving communication with an ancestor or deity and receiving valuable information that he can relay back to the community Dancing in Africa developed as an essential, functional part of life. Every important event—birth, death, harvest, and marriage—is commemorated by dance. Dancing is a major part of festivals to thank the deities for a bountiful harvest. Other African dances celebrate the passage from childhood to adulthood (2004, 18-19).

The above citation is to convince anyone as to the importance of dance in our society and to drive home the salient fact that in Yorubaland, the functionality of dance cannot be under-emphasized. Welsh's opinion vividly captures the importance of traditional dance in Nigerian societies and the case of Ile-Ife the source of the Yoruba people sacrosanct. Ifa dance in Ile-Ife is purely associated with the worship of the Ifa deity and is carried out by adherents of the Ifa faith. Avenues for Ifa dance performances in Ile-ife include: ItadogunAwoOlodumerindinlogun, IfaOoni festival, IfaAgbaye festival, IfaOlodumerindinlogun festival, OseIfa, Orisa gathering, Itefa (Initiation ceremony), Oro Awo (Isosun) Funeral ceremony, Isese festival, social activities

ItadogunAwoOlodumerindinlogun: This is not a spiritual or ritualistic gathering. It is more like a ceremonial gathering. It is the convergence of Ifa priests called AwoOlodu in Ile-Ife, comprising all the initiate priests who gather every seventeen days. It is a form of meeting injected with little spirituality. Priests or priests are selected on each Itadogun as host following the exhaustion of titled holders who are given priority due to their position in the cult. The host priest prepares food and drinks (Iponti) for everyone. After the meeting, a series of songs eesoko (praise songs) is rendered, merriment seasoned with music and lots of dance follows. According to Baba Awo Oba BoluIfatunmise (oral interview), an example of songs rendered during ItadogunAwoOlodu include:

*Ki la o san Ogun,
Ki irokoko san ogbon
Ki yayao san aadota
Ki lo san o juu
Yaya lo san o ju, yaya*

Translation

If okra pays twenty
And iroko pays thirty
Yet yaya brand pays fifty
Which one pays more
Yaya pays more

IfaOoni Festival: This is the Kings' Ifa ceremony which signifies the flag-off of the celebration of all Ifa festivals in Ile-Ife. Naturally, it takes place before Ifa festival is celebrated in any part of the Yoruba nation in reverence to Ile-Ife as the spiritual headquarters of all traditional festivals in the world. It is taboo for any Ifa festival to come before the celebration of IfaOoni and such never happens. The IfaOoni is held at the palace of the king for five days during which all the initiated Ifa priests (Awoolodu) gather at the palace for the ceremonies which include sacred religious and complex ritualistic elements.

Ooni, the king of Ile-Ife is not only regarded as such but taken as the father of all. Though this study shall not delve into re-writing the history of the Yorubas still the is highly revered, and even in present-day Osun State, his position as Permanent Chairman of the State's traditional Council of Obas. In essence, the IfaOOoni festival signifies the commencement of all forms of festivals for the entire Yoruba race; either at home or in the diaspora.



IfaOoni Festival

IfaAgbaye Festival: This is the world Ifa festival and it is celebrated by Ifa priests, adherents of the Ifa faith as well as other initiates from all over the world. This annual event takes place in June after the marking of IfaOlodumerindinlogun and it is after this ceremony that Ifa festivals are celebrated in other parts of the world. The implication of this is to show that as the source of civilization and spiritual headquarters, Ile-Ife holds the priority of flagging off all annual traditional events (Chief Priest LokeeganAbereifa, Oral interview). Ifa is an oracle of divinity and one of the principal deities of the Yoruba people. The first day of the festival involves various rituals, including the plucking of leaves for Oni Oracle (IjaweIfaOoni) and vigil at the palace that involves cooking (ArisunIdanaAfin), while the second day is Oracle sacrifice for Ooni's (IfaOoni). The third and fourth days were dedicated to the performance of rituals, AwoOloduMerindinlogun. On the fifth day, a public lecture and roundtable discussion on women in Ifa took place at Ooni's palace and was preceded by a ritual performance led by the Chief Priest, ArabaAgbaye. Every worshipper of the Ifa deity prostrated and prayed in front of the shrine for the development of the ancient city.



Ifa Agbaye Festival

Ifa Olodumerindinlogun Festival: Immediately after the world Ifa festival, all titled Ifa priests in Ile-Ife (Olodunmerindinlogun) collectively engage in the worship of Ifa for another five days and this takes place at the headquarters of the Ifa faith adherents at Okeltase in Ile-Ife. On the final day of the 5th day which signifies the close of the Ifa Olodumerindinlogun, all the Ifa priests then dance to their respective houses starting from the title holders' residences. This event holds in May of every year. It is after this that they individually celebrate their respective Ifa festivals.

Ose-Ifa: This is the weekly gathering of Ifa priests and other initiates to engage in spiritual activities which include homage-paying to Orunmila. It is purely a worship activity that can be likened to the Christians' Sunday Service or Muslims' Jumat Service held every Friday. During this ceremony, music and dance are rendered to glorify Olodumare (Supreme Being) and other religious activities are carried out.

Orisa gathering: This is the ceremony of Ifa outing to other orisas. It is a ceremonial event designed to relate with other traditional faith initiates to encourage synergy among orisas.

Itefa (Initiation ceremony): The initiation ceremony into Ifa religion is known as Itefa. It is strictly a spiritual occasion and only initiates are allowed to take part in or witness the ceremony. The initiation is done in Igboodu (the spiritual abode for Ifa initiation). The ritual is punctuated with intricate Ifa corpus, music, songs and dance.

Oro Awo/Isosun (Funeral ceremony): This is done to celebrate any Ifa priest or initiate who has gone to the great beyond. It is a ritual engagement and strictly for the initiates.

Isese festival: This is an annual gathering of all Orisa devotees who come together to celebrate Traditionalists Day. Rauf Aregbesola, one-time governor of Osun State promoted the festival in recognition of the rich cultural heritage of Africa and the necessity to encourage its further development. A public holiday is declared to this effect and the festival is held at the State Technical College, Osogbo. This singular feat of the government has elevated and further promoted the rich cultural heritage of the Yorubas.



Dance at Isese Festival

Apart from the religious functions, Ifa dance is also presented during social engagements and ceremonies to celebrate temporal events following the way of life obtainable in particular societies. During housewarming events, child naming ceremonies, and chieftaincy ceremonies among others, Ifa music and dance are presented purely in their social form devoid of any religious or spiritual characteristics.

Conclusion

Just like most dances, musical accompaniment dictates the movements of dancers in a given performance, the same can be said of Ifa dance in Ile-Ife. However, the lead drum in this case, Firigba or Ipeti or both dictates the movement of the dancers because they are the ones with beats that dictate every move. Movement in Ifa dance includes the simple one-step sideways move; where the dancers move their legs to the right side once and then to the left side once. Mostly, this dance movement is done to slow-paced drum beats. Also, the two-

step movement is done the same way but with two steps instead of one. The multistep movement is a bit complicated compared to the first two movements. The movement is woven intricately and requires dexterity and mastery. This is done to fast beats as dictated accordingly by either Firigba and Ipeti or both. In traditional Ifa dance, characteristics, elements as well as other tenets of choreography are not religiously followed still this assertion does not imply that they are completely absent.

This study affirms that in Africa, traditional dance is more than a form of exercise and neither is it a way of passing time or art for art's sake, it is better tagged 'an art for life's sake' because of its functionality. Ritual or religious dances have a purpose and as earlier mentioned, traditional Yoruba life revolves around the worship of a pantheon of deities hence the importance of Ifa dance should not be underemphasized or relegated. It is purely a way of getting across to the Supreme Being through Orunmila, the father of Ifa. The Yoruba people believe so much in divination as a means of discovering and hoping to influence the changes in their relationships with the gods and ancestors and other spirits in their complex cosmos, and so to gain their aid in their pursuit of health and good fortune. Therefore, the significance of Ifa dance to religious or ritualistic activities can be likened to a Christian belief in praise and worship as a means of glorifying God. For example, the Itadogun is a religious service held at a seventeen-day interval to have spiritual communication with Olodumare through Orunmila, and the service is not complete until songs, music and dance – though not very elaborate, are rendered in praise of Ifa and other affiliated deities.

Considering the above therefore, it is quite visible that despite the current popularity of Ifa faith, as evidenced in the yearly turnout of Ifa priests and adherents at the annual IfaAgbaye, the dance aspect of the religion has been given little or no attention. This assertion may not be an overstatement because much literature was found on Ifa as a religion while virtually little or no publication was located in the dance aspect. It, therefore, becomes worrisome to discover that even the adherents and priests who are supposed to be custodians of the Yoruba culture are not even paying due attention to Ifa practice. With the above in mind, reasons for the dwindling fortunes of the traditions, customs and culture of the African people may not be far-fetched. Nowadays, many youths are not conversant with many of the traditional values of their communities instead they are committed perpetually to understanding Western culture through their music and dance, dressing, books, and films among others. The dearth of enough materials on traditional values like Ifa dance has continued to gradually send our rich culture into extinction. It is therefore the position of this paper to encourage scholarship concerning ritual dances in general, and Ifa dance in particular.

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