

# WORD INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN EBI FESTIVAL OF IJEBU-EGBE AND ITS SOCIO- RELIGIOUS VALUES

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## **Introduction**

Among the Africans, music has been observed to play numerous roles in all facets of life of the people from birth to death. Every African society no matter the size, has one or more festivals they celebrate annually or bi-annually. Each of these festivals are affiliated with ritual worship or celebrating a spiritual being or god or an important historical event among the people of the society in which the festival exists. Owusu-Frempong (2005) in one of his articles on African festivals noted that:

*'African festivals are "medium of cultural education and Inter-generational communication and play an important role in the preservation of our cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge and our experiences as a people to future generations' (p. 730).*

The Yorubas have a very rich culture with a strong spiritual background. These cultural wealth and spiritual beliefs are exhibited during their festive periods. Although there are festivals celebrated in all the Yoruba communities, some are peculiar to certain Yoruba communities and these festivals are numerous and multifarious. For this reason, some are of the view that the Yorubas are deeply spiritual. In addition to the generally celebrated festivals among the Yorubas, each Yoruba tribe has its own festivals.

Vidal (2012:205) considers festivals from the Yoruba definitive point of view as an annual event in remembrance or in commemoration of a god, spirit, ancestor, king, historical event or thing. Vidal further observed that observed that in several of Yoruba-speaking societies today, festival still constitute important events by which people living in the same geographic area are brought together. According to him:

K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and...*  
*'The total festival activities generated throughout the Yoruba-speaking area can best be imagine when one consider that from about six to a dozen may be held every year in each of a total of about one thousand Yoruba towns'*

Iyeh and Aluede (2005:86) observed two major structures of traditional festivals as follows: The religious component and recreational while Adedeji (1999) opined that in Africa, music in festivals is used to invoke, worship, appease and entertain the supernatural and hence the super-naturals are concerned about which types of music are played, their composition and performance practices.

The major aim of this paper is to enquire into the *Woro* instrumental music of Ebi Festival in Ijebu-Egbe, in order to identify and explicate its socio-religious values for the purpose of documentation and preservation. This study rely on participatory observation, oral interview and bibliographic methods were employed for the purpose of this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study shall rely on Merriam's Functionality theory which contend that the aesthetics of any music genre is predominantly rooted in the relevance and functionality of such music within the society and it had been advanced that no music is or should be without a purpose. 'The functions and uses of music are as important as those of another aspect of culture for understanding the workings of the society. Music is interrelated with the rest of the culture; it can and does shape, strengthen, and channel social, political, economic, linguistic, religious and other kinds of behaviour'. Mariam stated further thus:

*'Therefore on this note, music is clearly indispensable to the proper promulgation of the activities that constitute a society; it is a universal human behaviour— without it, it is questionable that man could truly be called man, with all that implies' (Merriam. 1964).*

Functionalism or Role theory advanced by Adedeji (1999) recognizes the 'anabolic' and 'catabolic' role of music in religious discuss. Every of all sacred music is or should be with a purpose, or else it loses it sacredness. It is therefore worthy to note that since music form part of daily paraphernalia of the people of Africa, the Africans do not just perform music without the purpose it meant to serve. Festivals

K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and...* being an important and ubiquitous religious activities in every tribe in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, music is used for different purposes in different facets of all festivals. Therefore the value of music in festivals is espoused in terms of the functions it performed during the festival

### **The Ijebu People**

The Ijebu people are located in the south-central part of Southwestern Nigeria, regarded as Yoruba land. Sote (2003) recorded that Ijebuland is bordered in the north by Ibadan, in the east by Ondo and Okitipupa, and the west by Egbaland. The southern border is close to the sea with the coastlines of Epe, Ibeju-Lekki, and Ikorodu. Although the people have always regarded themselves as one, modern Nigeria political division has placed three Ijebu-speaking local government council areas (Epe, Ibeju-Lekki, and Ikorodu) in Lagos State, whereas the larger part of Ijebu-land is in Ogun State (Abimbola, 2011; Oladiti, 2009).

There are legends that link the Ijebus to biblical Jebusites and Noah (Ijebu Kingdom, 2012). For this reason, the Ijebus call themselves “*Omoluwabi*”—*omoti Noah bi*—“the children of Noah,” but this is a claim quite difficult to prove. The term *Omoluwabi* is also said to have come from *omo-oluiwa-bi* (“the child or children born of *Olu-Iwa*”). The reference to *Olu-Iwa* can be found in the document given to the local British official in 1937 by Ijebu Ode community leaders. The document states that the king of Ile-Ife gave his daughter *Gborowo* as wife to *Olu-Iwa*. The marriage resulted in the birth of *Ogborogan*, which was the nickname (a disused term for addressing the king) of *Obanta* (the progenitor of Ijebu Kingdom; Oduwoji, 2006).

A British officer in 1906 quoted local sources who mentioned that the word Ijebu was coined from the name of two of three brothers *Ajebu* and *Olode* (the third was *Osi* who became the first king of Ijebu, but he later abdicated for *Obanta*—eldest son of the king of Ife—on his arrival). The three brothers were reported to have come from Ile-Ife (National Archives, 1906).

### **Woro Instrumental Rhythm in Ebi Festival**

Ebi festival is a festival celebrated annually in Ijebu-Egbe, a community located at about two and half kilometers to Ijebu-Ode from Ikorodu axis in Ogun State.

K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and...*  
 According to Gbeminiyi Aileru (an informant) Ebi festival is a ritual festival in commemoration of *Oshi* the ancestral god of the land as instructed by Ifa (Oracle) since over three hundred years ago. It is done as a means of cleansing of evil, sickness and misfortunes away from Ijebu-Egbe land. The festival also serves as a means of inviting good-luck, wellness, prosperity and peace into the land.

Ebi Festival is celebrated annually in the month of March for three days. As witnessed by this researchers, the announcement of the festival is marked with street dance from about mid-day after which some rituals have been made by the initiate chiefs of the festival. This is followed by all-night street music and dance by men only. The following is the only song performed during the night:

### Ope O Lari Ra

Chorus  
Tenor

O pe o la ri ra -- O pe o

la ri ra -- o - ju kan ra wa lo - ni oooo

#### Yoruba Language

Ope o lari ra

Ope o lari ra

Oju kan rawa loni o

#### English Translation

It was long ago since we met

It was long ago since we met

Here we meet again today

The song above symbolizes the commencement of the Ebi Festival in Ijebu-Egbe and women are forbidden to take part in this dance as laid down by the tradition of the land. The second day celebration is divide into three phases. The first phase is marked with the appearance of *Okooro* masquerade.



Pic. 1. Okooro Masquerade (photo shot)

Okooro masquerade will dance round the community with woro instrumental rhythm accompanied with the following song in spoken-verse:

**Kun Rebete**

CHORUS

Kun re- be - te e - je!! Kun re-be - te e - je!! (Repeatedly)

Ijebu Dialect  
*Kun rebete*  
*Eje*

English Translation  
 Here it come in full regalia  
 The deity

After dancing round the community, *Okooro* masquerade will move to the Ebi Shrine located in around the town market where some rituals will be performed by the devotees. At this shrine *Okooro* masquerade will be given two firewood burning with flames after which he walk towards the river-shrine for the final ritual. This is usually done without music but with spoken verses in Ijebu language dialect thus:

*Ijebu dialect:*  
*Oso yoo, Aje yoo*  
*Eni ba ni kin ma se temi*  
*A ba'gi ina wo'do*

*Translation:*  
*Witches and wizard be beware*  
*Whoever plot against my success*  
*He shall perish with the firewood in the river*

K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and...*

While this is going on, people on the street will continue in spoken words to rebuke evil and send curses against their known and unknown enemies as well as praying for cleansing of evil and other unwanted situations in their lives as well as well-being of Egbe-Ijebu community as a whole. The following is another example of such individual responses by the people:

Yoruba Language

*Eni to pami lomo  
O maa ba igi wo'do*

English Translation

*He that was responsible for my child's death  
He shall perish with the firewood in the river*

The second phase of day 2 celebration is the most important aspect of the festival. This contain the ritual performance at the river shrine strictly by the Chief-priest and the few selected initiates in order to obtain *Woro* leaves which must be taken back to the people in Ijebu-Egbe community as the object of cleansing of evils, healings, good fortunes and the symbol the presence of the deity in the society. According to Rashidi Ogunnaike (an informant), the musical performance at the shrine are highly spiritual and they consists of both unaccompanied vocal music and *Woro* instrumental rhythm that will facilitate in instant and mystical germination of *Woro* leaves at the river shrine. The growth of *Woro* leaves at the shrine symbolizes the auspiciousness of the rituals and the festival as a whole. The following is the example of the unaccompanied spiritual songs performed at the shrine:

### Tiworan-tiworan Lale

Lead  
Tenor



Ti-wo-ran to-wo-ran la-le o----- ko-wa gbo-ru-ko

Chorus



Ti-wo-ran ti-wo-ran la-le o ko-wa gbo-ru-ko

The song above is a spiritual call on the magical powers the Ebi deity, asking it to appear in form of instant and magical germination of *Woro* leaves at the river-shrine. The appearance of *Woro* leaves symbolized the mystical representation of the spiritual weapon of Ebi deity among the people of Ijebu-Egbe. Without woro

K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and...* leaves, all the sacrifices made are not auspicious. Taking these leaves back to people in the community marked the end of the ritual aspect of the phase two Ebi Festival.

The phase three of day 2 activities involves the taking the 'Woro' leaves by the 'Okoro' masquerade back to the people of the community to symbolize the success of the most important part of the festival. While coming from the shrine, people sing spoken verses with the accompaniment of Woro instrumental rhythm and dance. This is accompanied by the following song in spoken-verse form:

Yoruba Language

Solo: *Woro de o*

Chorus: *Gbangba ate*

Solo: *Woro de o*

Chorus: *Gbangba ate*

English Translation

*Woro leave has arrived*

*All evils had vanished*

*Woro leave has arrived*

*All evils had vanished*

While dancing round the community, the 'Okoro' masquerade and the followers distribute 'Woro' leaves to people for them to hang it in corners or entrance of their houses to expel evils as well as usage for spiritual healing and prevention of evils. According to Lateef Adesanya (an informant), 'it is the belief of the people of Ijebu-Egbe community that the sound of the *Woro* music play at this time has the spiritual power of instant healing of the sick and people afflicted with ailments caused by diabolic means. Also, they also believe that anyone who refuse to collect 'Woro' leave from Okoro masquerade during this festival is evil and should not be allowed in the Egbe community'.

The Day 3 of the Ebi festival which is the last day of the festival also witnessed 'Okoro' masquerade dancing round the street with two canes and Woro leaves to meet another three masquerades called 'Agbo' at the market square.



Pic. 2. The three Agbo masquerades

As soon as 'Okoro' masquerade get to the market square where the three Agbo masquerades have been waiting for him, 'Okoro' masquerade will give each of them a Woro leave and flog each of the Agbo masquerades with cane. As soon as 'Okoro' finished with the flogging of the three other 'Agbo' masquerades, he runs back to his 'Igbale' (shelter) immediately and does not appear again until the following year for another festival. This marks the end of the festival for that year.

### **Socio-Religious Values of Woro Instrumental Rhythm in Ebi Festival**

Music and ritual worship have been observed by various African scholars as an intrinsic part of any Festival in Africa. Amongst these several scholars, Ogunwale (1971), Ogunlusi (1971), Ogunba (1978), Agawu (1992), Vidal (2012) among others opined that African gods are lovers of music and each deity or god has its favourite musical instrument which associated with the worship of each deity or god. It was also observed that some certain type of sounds, pitches and timbre were associated with some gods in Africa.

Merriam (1964) is of the opinion that when the supplicant uses music to approach his god, is employing a particular mechanism in conjunction with other mechanisms such as dance, prayer, organized ritual, and ceremonial acts. The function of music, on the other hand, is inseparable here from the function of religion which may perhaps be interpreted as the establishment of a sense of security vis-



K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and... a-vis the universe*. Mbiti (1990) observed that ‘Africans were generally not inclined to separate rhythm, spiritual dimensions, and the order of the universe into compartments. According to him:

*‘Traditional African societies acknowledged that the drum had a spirit and character that was clearly observable. The gift of the voices of the Great Ancestors had been hidden inside the wood of trees so they could be accessed whenever men and women needed them’.*

Woro instrumental rhythm as the only music played during in Ebi Festival in Ijebu-Egbe, has been observed to have significant value as a result of the role it plays in both religious and social aspect of the festival.

### Symbolic Value

The music is played by Woro Instrumental ensemble, which consists of two upright-drums; the ‘Okele’ (medium in size) and ‘Kumbe’ (the bigger size). These appearance of these two drums also has symbolic value because they are strictly meant for playing Woro rhythm which is associated with spiritual healing and cleanse during Ebi festival among the people of Ijebu-Egbe.



Pic. 3. Okele drum(Small)



Pic. 4. Kumbe drum (Big)

K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and...*

The *Okele* drum plays the basic *Woro* rhythm which has the same time line as 'Konkolo' rhythm as the only and strict *woro* rhythm (in fast tempo) for Ebi Festival, while the *Kumbe* drum plays improvisational beats as well as occasional Yoruba vocalized drum verses. *Kumbe* is able to achieve the three Yoruba speech-tones by playing the edge of the drum for high tone, using the muted middle of the face of the drum to produce mid-tone and playing the open middle of the drum for low-tone.

#### Basic Woro rhythm by Okele drum



#### Basic rhythm alternated with improvisations by Kumbe



### Metaphysical/Spiritual Value

The *Woro* instrumental rhythm played by this ensemble has metaphysical and spiritual power and value in conjuring the mystical and instant germination of *Woro* leaves at the river-shrine in which without this spiritual exercise, the spirit of Ebi deity which the people believe comes in the image of *Woro* leaves, cannot visit Ijebu-Egbe community. It is worthy to note that the religious value of *Woro* Instrumental rhythm, lies in its metaphysical and spiritual connection with *Woro* leave and its ability to make all the ritual activities in the festival to be auspicious.

### Social and Entertainment Value

*Woro* instrumental rhythm is also valued in Ebi festival as a result of the role it plays in the social and entertainment aspect of the festival. Since it is generally believed that African gods and deities are lovers of music and each has its favourite musical instrument. *Woro* music and dance are performed to entertain both the spirit of the Ebi deity and the whole people of the community, irrespective of age and sex. Although the performance of *Woro* music is organized to a large extent, but the

K. Olusola & F. Oyesiku: *Woro Instrumental Music in Ebi Festival O Ijebu-Egbe and...* participation in singing and dance during this festival are open to all members of the community.

### **Therapeutic Value**

Aluede (2008) has reported that music is used as therapy in Iyayi society of Esan, Edo State of Nigeria despite the perceived poverty of information of the therapeutic potency of rhythm in African music. One of the five key ways where music can aid convalescence by Watson in Aluede and Bello (2014) include TIMP -Therapeutic music playing which posits that the simple act of hitting a drum supported by preferred rhythmic music, has shown to increase endurance and strength in motor control exercises.

*Woro* instrumental rhythm in Ebi festival in Ijebu-Egbe is also valued in terms of the people's belief in the therapeutic functions it plays on people in the community. After the last ritual performance at river-shrine, *Woro* leaves are brought into the community by *Okooro* masquerade with the *Woro* instrumental music and dance accompanied by *Woro* drums ensemble. It is a generally belief among the people of Ijebu-Egbe that the sound of *Woro* music at this stage, has the therapeutic power of healing the sick and people afflicted with ailments caused by diabolical means.

### **Research Findings**

During the course of this research, it was revealed that Agbo, Ebi and Oro festivals are the only festivals celebrated in Ijebu-Egbe. It was equally revealed that *Woro* instrumental music accompanied with voice is the only music strictly used in Ebi Festival in Ijebu-Egbe. The socio-religious value of the music was observed in term of the Symbolic, Ritual/Spiritual, Entertainment and Therapeutic roles it plays in the Festival.

In Ebi festival music, there are very little number of vocals and majority of them are in spoken verse form. Also, the *Woro* instrumental ensemble comprise of only two drums, that is the *Okele* and *Kumbe* drums. It is not common in most Yoruba festival music which involves masquerade to have an instrumental ensemble comprising of only two drums without any other supporting drums or percussion instruments to compliment the rhythms played by these two drums.

## Conclusion

Apart from Ojude-Oba, Agbo, Eluku and Alagemo festivals that are very popular among the Ijebu people, the people of various Ijebu towns and villages have other numerous festivals they celebrated which are not known or not have received adequate attention of the Nigerian musicologists. This according to Rasheed Ogunnaike (an informant), 'most musicologists that comes for research in many Ijebu towns are restricted from having full access to some information or observing some objects strictly meant for the few initiates only'.

Ebi festival has been celebrated as instructed by Ifa oracle since over a hundred years ago in Ijebu-Egbe as a festival celebrated to invite the spirit of 'Ebi' deity which comes in the image of *Woro* leaves to the community for cleansing of all forms of evil and to bring good fortunes and peace. This is achieved by carrying out of all the necessary sacrifices with the spiritual assistance by *Woro* instrumental rhythm played by the ensemble at the river-shrine. However, it is worthy to note that the *Woro* instrumental rhythm played in Ebi Festival in Ijebu-Egbe is different from *Woro* rhythms played mostly by Dundun ensemble in other Yoruba communities both in term of repertoire and the instrument.

This research conclude that, *Woro* instrumental music is an indispensable part of Ebi Festival because there is a strong spiritual connection between *Woro* leaf and *Woro* instrumental music. This study therefore, explicate the salient ethnomusicological imports and values in the *Woro* instrumental music for documentation and preservation.

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### Oral Interviews

S/N	Name	Age	Position	Address	Date of Interview
1.	Chief (Dr) Gbeminiyi Aileru	55	Bashorun of Egbe land	Itun-Idesun's Compound, Egbe.	April 6, 2019
2.	Chief Rasheed Ogunnaike	65	Ekerin of Egbe land	Oluwo's compound Egbe	May 10, 2019
3.	Chief Lateef Adesanya	60	Olorin osere of Egbe land	Eleku's compound Egbe	May 14, 2019
4.	Chief Waheed Fasasi alias Ileke-Idi	62	Olulila of Egbe land (Chief-Priest)	Oluwo's compound Egbe	May 10, 2019
5.	Chief Mogidi Aileru	58	Oloritun Idesun of Egbe land	Itun-Idesun's compound Egbe	April 6, 2019