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The Yorùbá *Dùndún* in Local and Transnational Perspective:

A Cosmopolitan Tradition in the Making

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Ethnomusicology

by

Jesse D. Ruskin

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Yorùbá *Dùndún* in Local and Transnational Perspective:

A Cosmopolitan Tradition in the Making

By

Jesse D. Ruskin

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, Chair

The *dùndún*, or “talking drum,” of southwestern Nigeria is a versatile speech surrogate used to reproduce the tones and inflections of the Yorùbá language. Through their daily recitations of history and oral literature, *dùndún* musicians have for centuries played an integral role in the social, religious, and political life of Yorùbá-speaking peoples. In an environment where oral

performance is a predominant feature of social interaction, talking drummers control a key mechanism of public discourse. While enmeshed in hierarchies of title and seniority, as well as in inherited ideas of personhood and community, Yorùbá drummers exercise considerable influence over the discursive construction of daily social life. As their economic support system weakens, however, talking drummers and those who advocate for them are today presenting and representing the *dùndún* tradition in ways that maximize opportunities for translocal patronage. In their bid to find new patrons in the Nigerian government and private sector, musicians and culture brokers are, with some success, transforming the *dùndún* from an art of local value to a cultural heritage of national and global value. This practice has been further extended by talking drummers who now live or regularly pursue professional opportunities outside of Nigeria. Through a study of individual musicians and their communities in Nigeria and the United States, my dissertation examines how Yorùbá *dùndún* drummers, on one hand, reproduce their tradition and its social dynamics, and on the other, reinvent their trade so as to create social and economic value for it in increasingly wider contexts.

The dissertation of Jesse D. Ruskin is approved.

Andrew Apter

Timothy Rice

Timothy Taylor

Christopher Waterman

Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

For my parents

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## VITA

### EDUCATION

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- 2006 M.A., UCLA, Ethnomusicology  
1996 B.A., Tufts University, Massachusetts, Sociology, minor in Music

### PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

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- 2000-2004 Program and Administrative Assistant, Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities  
2000-2001 Cross-Cultural Music Specialist, New England Conservatory Learning-Through-Music Program

### UNIVERSITY TEACHING

---

- 2012-2013 Teaching Fellow, UCLA  
2011-2012 Teaching Associate, UCLA  
2010 (Fall) Lecturer in Music, World Music, American Jewish University, Bel Air, CA  
2008-2009 Teaching Associate, UCLA  
2006-2007 Teaching Assistant, UCLA  
2006-2007 Ensemble Assistant, Afro-Cuban Music, UCLA  
2005-2006 Teaching Assistant

### ARCHIVING AND LIBRARIANSHIP

---

- 2013-present Center for Primary Research Training Scholar, UCLA Library Special Collections  
2012-2013 Principal Investigator and Researcher, Music of Africa Archiving Project, funded by Office of the Dean, UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture  
2012 Bibliographer, UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive (Winter)  
2008-2009 Assistant, Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings, UCLA Digital Library Program (Fall and Winter)  
2006 Graduate Student Researcher, UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive (Winter and Spring)

### PUBLICATIONS

---

- (Accepted) "Biographical Writing and Individual Creativity in African Musicology." In *A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Emeritus J. H. Kwabena Nketia*.

- 2012 Co-author with Timothy Rice, "The Individual in Musical Ethnography."  
*Ethnomusicology* 56(2).
- 2011 "Talking Drums in Los Angeles: Brokering Culture in an American Metropolis."  
*Black Music Research Journal* 31(1).
- 2010 Review of *Ancient Text Messages of the Yorùbá Bàtá Drum: Cracking the Code*, by  
Amanda Villepastour. *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 15.
- 2006 "Collecting and Connecting: Archiving Filipino American Music in Los  
Angeles." *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 11.
- 2006-2008 Editor-in-Chief, *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* (Vols.12 & 13).

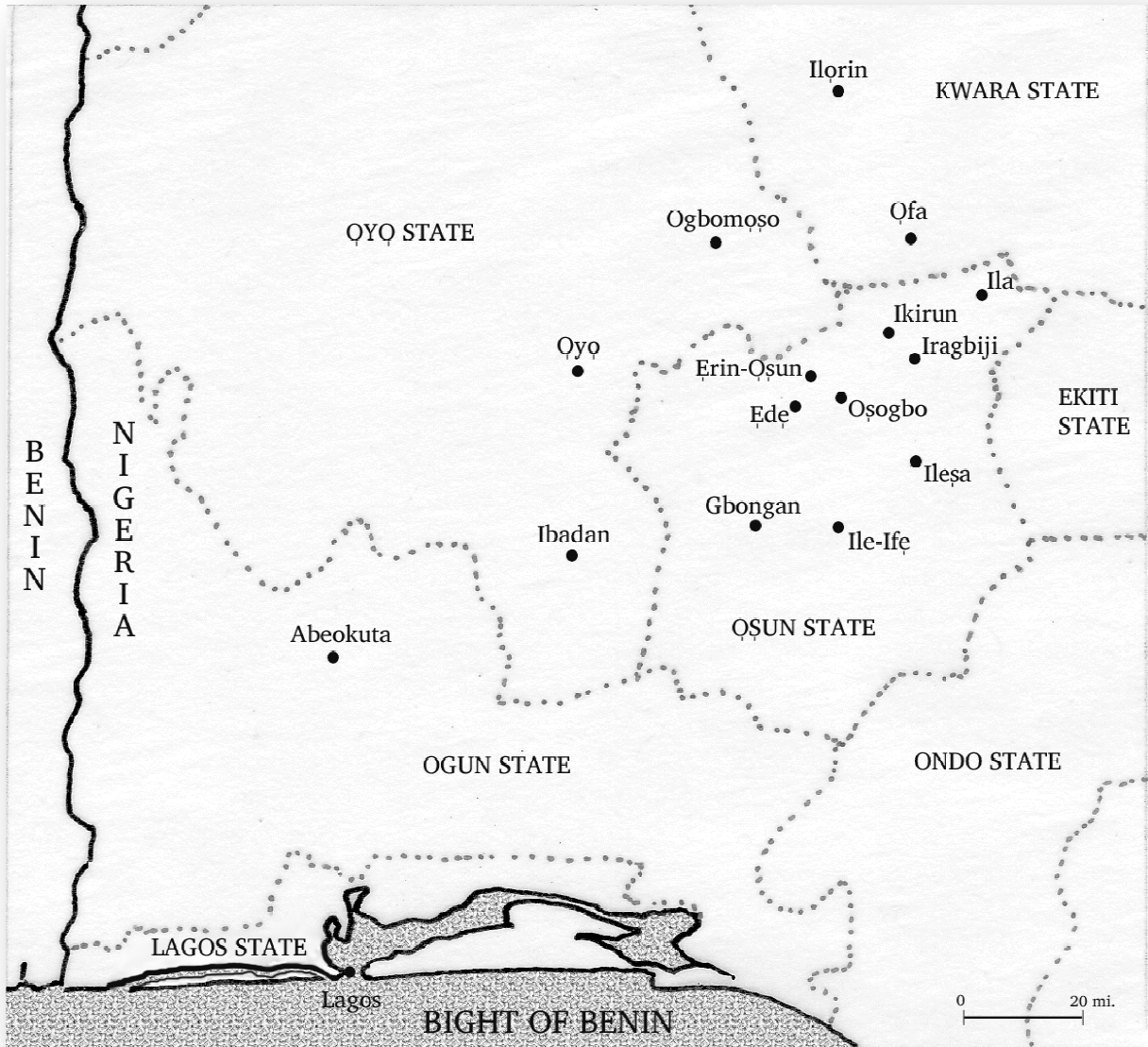
#### SELECTED PAPERS AND INVITED LECTURES

---

- 2013 "The Yorùbá *Dùndún* or Talking Drum." Lecture-demonstration presented in  
MUS 468 Multicultural Music in America: Eye on Los Angeles at  
Pepperdine University, January 17.
- 2011 "Biographical Writing and Individual Creativity in African Musicology." Two-  
Day International Conference in Honour of Emeritus Professor J. H.  
Kwabena Nketia, September 23, University of Ghana, Legon.
- 2008 "From Culture as Theory to Culture as Practice: Musical Biography and  
Individual Creativity in African Musicology." Annual Meeting of the  
Society for Ethnomusicology, October 27, Middletown, Connecticut.
- 2006 "The Individual Musician in Musical Ethnography: Further Investigations in  
the Ethnomusicology of the Individual." Annual Meeting of the Society  
for Ethnomusicology, November 17, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- 2006 "Teaching *Dùndún* in Los Angeles: Francis Awe and the Interpretation of  
Tradition." Southern California Chapter Meeting of the Society for  
Ethnomusicology, March 4, San Diego, California.
- 2005 "Archiving Filipino American Music in Los Angeles (AFAMILA): A Case Study  
of Collaborative Archiving." UCLA Ethnomusicology Graduate Students  
Organization Fourth Annual Spring Conference, April 10, Los Angeles,  
California.



## Map of Research Area



## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The *dùndún* (lit., “sweet sound”)<sup>1</sup> of southwestern Nigeria is a versatile hourglass-shaped pressure drum used to reproduce the tones and inflections of the Yorùbá language. English colonists referred to it as a “talking drum,” a term that has stuck even though it is a misnomer—all Yorùbá drums can, in fact, “talk.” Through their daily poetic recitations, *dùndún* drummers have for centuries played an integral role in the social, religious, and political life of Yorùbá-speaking peoples. In an environment where oral performance is a predominant feature of social interaction, talking drummers control a key mechanism of public discourse. While enmeshed in hierarchies of title and seniority, as well as in inherited ideas of personhood and community, Yorùbá drummers exercise considerable influence over the discursive construction of daily social life. Text, context, and music are, in other words, mutually generative in the *dùndún* tradition.

The flexible and intertextual qualities of *dùndún* repertoire are evidence of the tradition’s long history of creative invention. In its early history, the *dùndún* tradition offered

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<sup>1</sup> Following Euba (1990:19), I use the name *dùndún* in this paper (unless otherwise noted) as an umbrella term for all Yorùbá double-membrane hourglass tension drums, including the related *gángán* family. Some Yorùbá practitioners treat *gángán* as a subfamily of *dùndún* (Timi of Ede 1959), whereas others see it as a distinct but related group (Thieme 1969:57-93). While it is often noted that “all Yorùbá drums talk,” I follow the lead of a number of scholars and practitioners in using the English term “talking drum” interchangeably with *dùndún*.

music primarily for kings, chiefs, warriors, and *òrìṣà* (deity) devotees. But in the early-twentieth century it was reformulated as a secular dance music to accommodate a new class of patrons—farmers and traders growing wealthy in the modern agricultural economy (Olaniyan 1984:74-76). The dance forms innovated at this time remain popular today. Several decades later, the *dùndún* was assimilated into the popular music of highlife and *jùjú*, which simultaneously brought elements of “tradition” into the global realm and introduced new melodic approaches to traditional drumming. In Nigeria’s post-independence era, talking drums became an object of scholarly attention and many drummers were hired as consultants and demonstrators in the country’s universities. At the same time, the *dùndún* was incorporated as a symbol of tradition and as an integral narrative voice in modern Yorùbá-language literature, theater, and film.

As their economic support system weakens, however, talking drummers and those who advocate for them are today presenting and representing the *dùndún* tradition in ways that maximize opportunities for translocal patronage. In their bid to find new patrons in the Nigerian government and private sector, musicians and culture brokers are, with some success, transforming the *dùndún* from an art of local value to a cultural heritage of national and global value. This practice has been further extended by talking drummers who now live or regularly pursue professional opportunities outside of Nigeria. Through a study of individual musicians

and their communities in Nigeria and the United States, my dissertation examines how Yorùbá *dùndún* drummers, on one hand, reproduce their tradition and its social dynamics, and on the other, reinvent their trade so as to create social and economic value for it in increasingly wider contexts.<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation is in part a conventional idiographic study of a singular music-culture as it exists in a particular place and time, but is also a study of discontinuities within, and transformations of, a tradition that is now being reinvented as national heritage and transnational commodity. I walk the line between agency and structure, focusing instead on how individual musicians and musical communities are both shaped by, and active in reshaping, the worlds in which they live. It is, in this sense, a “practice-centered” approach, but one in which music is taken as a critical form of discourse. Musical sound and speech about music, I argue, do symbolic and social “work” that both reaffirms the status quo and opens up spaces for negotiation and change.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Patronage systems in which hereditary musicians are permanent clients of kings and chiefs are in decline, and have been for a long time, in many West African societies. The reimagining of tradition in new contexts and the reconstitution of patronage networks across wider domains is a common practice in the region (see, e.g., Duran 1987:233-236; Tang 2007:57-95).

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted here to the work of Andrew Apter (1992:7, 2007:30), who argues that Yorùbá ritual discourses, realized through interactive speech events, represent “indigenous critical traditions” that harbor the potential to re-evaluate and “revise” the very social and symbolic systems that they aid in reproducing.

This introductory chapter begins by offering a basic cultural and historical orientation to the *dùndún* tradition. A review of literature on drum language, as well as on theories of discourse, agency, and cosmopolitanism will then be introduced. My interventions in the existing literature, addressed in more detail below, are fivefold. First, I examine how practitioners and observers constitute the *dùndún* as an object of reflective conversation, with the assumption that interpretive tensions are a constitutive feature of most music-cultures. In contrast with existing literature on the subject, I bring the mythological discourses commonly used to provide cultural context into conversation with the socio-ethical discourses about drumming evident in modern Yorùbá-language mass media. Second, I examine the social organization of the *dùndún* tradition through the voices and stories of individual Ayàn (hereditary drummers). The social structure of a music-culture, from this individual-centered perspective, is approached not as a Platonic ideal form, but rather as an agreement between people that is consciously and reflectively reenacted. Third, apart from talk *about* drumming, I examine drum talk *itself* as a mode of discourse. By approaching drum language as both formal structure and socially-situated performance, I investigate the *dùndún* as a mechanism by which musicians interpret the world and situate themselves in it. Close observation of drum talk shows that discursive agencies and structures are mutually generated at the minutest levels of personal interaction. Fourth, I return to the framework of discourse, this time looking at how

musicians and culture brokers are today mobilizing both local and universalistic notions of “cultural heritage” to transform the image, and expand the patronage base, of the *dùndún* tradition. Whereas heritage production in Yorùbá fine arts has been widely discussed, studies of Yorùbá music have left it relatively unexplored. Finally, the migration of many *dùndún* musicians overseas is approached through the lens of musical cosmopolitanism, a concept that can account in nuanced ways for the agency of individuals and communities in the transnational expansion and recontextualization of a musical tradition.

### ***Cultural orientation and historical background***

The Yorùbá live in what is today southwestern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. “Yorùbá,” a term derived from the Hausa-Fulani, is an ethno-linguistic grouping subsuming pre-colonial political entities such as Ọ̀yọ́, Ègbá, Ìjẹ̀bu, Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà, Èkìtì, and Òndó (Eades 1980:2-4). As Chris Waterman (1990:12) suggests, Yorùbá typically identify themselves first by these kingdom-based identities and only secondarily, and relationally, as Yorùbá. A story or “myth” of origin, with many regionally and politically inflected variations, is invoked as a point of reference—tracing all Yorùbá to Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and the first King of Ifẹ̀, Odùduwà, a deity descended to earth (Bascom 1969:10-11). The use of “Yorùbá” as a unifying identity, however, emerged only in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, with the growth of mission schools, colonialism,

and the codification of the Yorùbá language. Popular music, such as *jùjú*, which blends traditional verbal arts and drumming with contemporary musical styles, would serve as a major catalyst for the construction of pan-Yorùbá identity in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (Waterman 1990). Following Waterman (ibid.), I approach Yorùbá culture in this dissertation from a constructivist perspective, understanding that it is neither “etched in stone, nor spun out of thin air.” For this reason, I focus not only on how talking drummers construct their social worlds in sounds and words, but also on the structures of knowledge and power that give their discourse its peculiar shape.

Drums feature prominently in the musical and social life of Yorùbá-speaking peoples. Among the oldest of instruments is the wood-carved, barrel-shaped drum, with a single membrane affixed by wood pegs. There are several different “families” of drum with this construction, each of which are believed to be the property of particular *òrìṣà* (deities) and are only played by devotees in their shrines. But there are drums of more recent origin that are considered neither products of, nor restricted to, particular deities. The prime example of this is the *dùndún*, an hourglass-shaped pressure drum, which is now one of the most widespread Yorùbá instruments.

It is difficult to speak of a singular unified *dùndún* tradition for at least two reasons. First, the instrument is used widely across a variety of musical genres, speech styles, and

performance contexts. *Dùndún* is more or less unrestricted, allowing for its use in both sacred and secular contexts, as well as its widespread use as a substitute for other instruments. Because it is particularly effective for reciting the *oríkì* (attributive poetry) associated with particular deities, the *dùndún* has been adopted by followers of other deities (Adegbite 1988:20). *Dùndún* may also be used in *egúngún* (ancestral spirit) masquerades and for individual private worship and communion with *òrìṣà* (Thieme 1969). The *dùndún* now, in most cases, replaces older drums that would in the past have been used, such as *ìgbìn* for *Ọbàtálá* and *ògídán* for *Ògún*. More recently in Nigeria, the *dùndún* has been incorporated in Christian worship, most prominently in African separatist churches, but also in mainline contexts as well. The instrument is used in quasi-religious life-cycle events, such as weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies. It is also employed in various forms of Yorùbá popular theater and music, as well as in neo-traditional art music (Euba 1990; Waterman 2000). A second challenge to thinking about the *dùndún* as a singular performance tradition is its relationship to linguistic and cultural diversity among Yorùbá-speakers. *Dùndún* performance practice may differ regionally, and by the dialect of Yorùbá that is spoken within a particular community. What those differences are, however, have yet to be thoroughly or systematically documented.

Despite these challenges to delineating *dùndún* as a singular performance tradition, there are several factors that allow us to speak of it as a coherent unit. First is its mythological



association with *Ayàn*, the *òrìṣà* of drumming. Second are Yorùbá musical classifications and organizational practices. Though widespread in use and varied in function, the *dùndún* is classified by Yorùbá as a distinct family of instruments, with distinct structural features, ensemble organization, playing techniques, and methods of orchestration. Contingent on the drummer's technical, musical, and literary skill, it is the Yorùbá instrument most able, in phonemic terms, to imitate Yorùbá speech. Equal in speech ability is the *bàtá*, but it relies on an encoding system, rather than an imitative one, to interpret Yorùbá language, which makes it more difficult to decipher (see Villepastour 2010 for full comparison). Third is a history that differentiates *dùndún* from all other Yorùbá drums. *Dùndún* is the only Yorùbá drum family (along with the related *gángán* family) that originated outside of Yorùbáland, most likely imported from the Northern kingdoms (Euba 1990:60). Its very status as being of foreign origin and the freedom of use historically accorded to it may be seen as elements that set it apart from other instrumental traditions, all others of which are typically restricted by site, context, or status of performer. This relative freedom, I would speculate, has allowed it to develop into a "tradition of innovation" and expansion, as effective in the Christian church as it is in the Yorùbá festival. A fourth distinguishing feature is the social organization of the tradition. As a hereditary tradition associated with kingship, *dùndún* drummers play a unique role in politics as the primary intermediaries and musical accompanists in the courts and ceremonial activities

of Yorùbá leaders (Euba 1988b:31-56). While fewer leaders today can afford to maintain retinues of drummers, the Aláàfin of Òyó and the Ọ̀ni of Ifẹ̀, the spiritual heads of Yorùbáland, do still keep their own ensembles, the Aláàfin's residing full-time at his palace, and the Ọ̀ni's being called in to accompany weekly meetings.

Of the many contexts in which *dùndún* are used, two institutional types more than any other appear to have conditioned the entrance of this drumming tradition into the international arena: national and university-based theatre troupes and touring popular music ensembles. A pioneer of Yorùbá popular theatre, playwright and director Duro Ladipo integrated drums into his productions in the model of Yorùbá folk theatre. Duro Ladipo's theatre troupe was the first to travel outside of Nigeria, presenting his award-winning play *Ọ̀ba Kò So* (The King Did Not Hang) at the Berlin Festival of the Arts in 1964 (see Ladipo 1964 for English adaptation and Ladipo 1965 for early sound recording). The troupe toured about twenty countries over the following decade, and launched the international careers of musicians such as Chief Muraina Oyelami (Beier 1988:85; Ladipo and Kolawole 1997:107). After Ladipo, other theatre productions featuring *dùndún* drums toured internationally, including Akin Euba's *Chaka* (1970; see Euba 1999 for recording and booklet), and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (first published 1975). Alongside such postwar developments in Yorùbá theatre, was the introduction of talking drum into Yorùbá popular music. According to Waterman

(1990:82), *jùjú* bandleader Akanbi Ege first hired a talking drummer for his ensemble in 1948, setting off a genre-transforming trend. Bandleader I.K. Dairo, who gained popularity in the 1950s and 60s through radio, television, and recordings, was among the first *jùjú* artists to receive international acclaim (ibid.:101). After Dairo, King Sunny Ade and Chief Ebenezer Obey's bands would bring talking drummers such as Rasaki Aladokun and Sikiru Adepoju into the international spotlight. Both would later collaborate with "world music" stars Babatunde Olatunji and Mickey Hart.

### ***Topical and Theoretical Literature***

#### **Drum talk: Structural, performance, and global perspectives**

The literature on drum language has a long history. Investigations of drum and whistle speech surrogation systems have occupied researchers from a variety of fields since the late nineteenth century (Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1976:xxi). One of the most widely cited works is Carrington's classic study, *Talking Drums of Africa* ([1949] 1969), which is based on drum texts collected among the Lokele people of the Congo basin.<sup>4</sup> Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok's two volume collection *Speech Surrogates: Drum and Whistle Systems* (1976) is the most extensive compendium of essays on the topic of speech surrogates to date. It includes pioneering

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<sup>4</sup> Carrington's work is used, for example, in Theodore Stern's (1957) theoretical study of language "abridgement" systems; and it serves as the primary source for Walter Ong's (1977) argument that talking drums shed light on the principles of oral knowledge systems.

contributions on drum language by ethnomusicologists George Herzog and J.H.K. Nketia, among others. A key part of this literature is the distinction between “encoding” systems that convey meaning independent of natural language and “substitutive” systems that carry meaning with reference to natural language (Stern 1957; Nketia 1971; Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok 1976:xiii-xiv). Herzog (1945), working among the Jabo of Liberia, explores the formal correlations of speech and drum language in one such substitutive system. Nketia (1963) carries the distinction further by examining the structural differences between signal, speech, and dance “modes” in Akan drumming. The early literature is for the most part concerned with the formal delineation of structural relationships between speech, sound, and meaning. The social contexts and cultural significance of drum language are treated in a normative fashion.

Paul Neeley’s (1999) work on the drum language of the Ewondo of Cameroon is the most extensive analysis so far on drum speech in Africa. He fills several gaps in the earlier literature, most evidently the role of individual creativity and variability in drum language performance. Nonetheless, his analysis is formal and his theoretical conclusions are more relevant to linguistics than ethnomusicology. The ethnographic dimension is lacking in two areas, which he himself draws attention to. First is the interactive context of drum language performance; the performances detailed in the book are abstracted out from their social

contexts. Second is the problem of reception, or how participants receive and respond to drum language.

Talking drums feature prominently among the Yorùbá. A small but valuable literature has emerged on this over the past fifty years. German scholar of Yorùbá culture Ulli Beier (1954) is among the first to publish on the Yorùbá talking drums, examining its tonal principles and textual basis. This is followed by Ọba Laoye I, *The Tìmì of Ẹdẹ* (1959), a Yorùbá paramount chief and musician who included the talking drum in an article describing the different myths of origin and usages of Yorùbá drums. Anthony King (1961) produced the first book-length study of the talking drum tradition. His work is notable for its attention to musical structure, ensemble organization, and stylistic differences. Darius Thieme's (1969) dissertation on Yorùbá musical instruments was the first study of the talking drums to integrate detailed history, ethnography, and organology. Obafemi Awolowo University professor C.O. Olaniyan, in his dissertation (1984), compiled the most comprehensive transcriptions of *dùndún* repertoire to date. Perhaps the most prolific scholar of the talking drum is Akin Euba, who conducted dissertation research on *dùndún* in the early 1970s, and subsequently published several essays and a monograph on the tradition. *Yorùbá Drumming: The Dùndún Tradition* (1990) brings together his scholarly work on the topic. This book is notable for the breadth of historical information; the detailed treatment the tradition's social organization; the

transcription of a wide sample of repertory material; and the advancement of talking drum scholarship beyond concerns with speech/sound correlations towards an understanding of the *poetic* and *musical* construction of drum texts. The poetics of drum talk is also the focus of Mobolanle Sotunsa's *Yorùbá Drum Poetry* (2009), which documents, translates, and explicates an impressive selection of drum texts. While both Euba's and Sotunsa's books contain ethnographic descriptions of particular musical events, the way in which drum talk contributes and responds to specific social encounters is left relatively unexplored.

Henry and Margaret Drewal (1983) and Andrew Apter (1981) are among the first to examine Yorùbá drum language *in* and *as* performance. Drawing on observations of Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ ritual and drum texts collected by the Drewals, Apter (1981) argues that talking drummers play a critical role as coordinators of Yorùbá ritual "drama." Drum talk serves the practical functions of ordering ritual and directing dancers, while at the same time giving moral advice and providing running commentary on the event at hand. Apter's and the Drewals' understanding of drum talk closely resembles the "language-as-drama" approach taken in the field of performative linguistics. From this perspective, the rules and functions of language can only be properly understood by looking at the ways people use words to do things in the world. Language is seen as a form of social action that people use in collaborative ways to give shape to, and transform, their personal, social, and culture realities (Robinson 2006:8).

This leads us to the imaginative ways in which people use music to construct interpretations of the world and locate themselves in it. Recent examples of Yorùbá verbal performance demonstrate it as a rich technology for just this type of imaginative “world-making” project (Barber and Waterman 1995; Klein 2007). Yorùbá verbal texts—whether sung or played on a talking drum— traverse spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries, weaving together the near and far, present and past, into compact narratives of selves in the world. In my dissertation I will use the idea of drum talk as social action to investigate how talking drummers discursively reproduce and transform their social world. This is particularly salient now that such musicians increasingly negotiate intercultural circumstances and relationships in the process of sustaining their musical tradition. How do drummers use drum language to reflect and affect the world they live in? How do individual interpretations, institutional affiliations, and perceptions of audience shape drum talk? How do musicians make drum talk aesthetically affective and socially effective in different circumstances? To illuminate how drum talk functions as social action, we must understand it as a discursively-constructed and discourse-generating phenomenon.

## Discourse

In its broadest philosophical sense, discourse is defined as a chain of statements or utterances that are perceived to be linked in a particular way. Discourses are traditionally

understood to take written or spoken form as “narratives” or “conversations” (Blackburn 1996:107). In sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, discourse is a “relational” activity of words and gestures through which people construct their social worlds—language structure and social context, in short, are seen as mutually constitutive (Monson 1996:186). Discourse analysis, in this sense, concerns the normal rules and conventions by which language use is governed in different contexts.

In poststructuralist social theory, and specifically in the work of Michel Foucault, discourse has taken on a meaning closer to that of hegemony—the unexamined, politically-determined ideas and practices that govern peoples’ lives. Foucault views discourse as a collection of signs (verbal “statements,” to be precise) whose unity, continuity, and originality are taken as given and accepted as normal or natural (Foucault [1972] 1982:22). Foucauldian discourse analysis, or “archaeology,” aims to “question the document,” that is, to investigate a text or “notion” not only for *what* it says, but also for the *historical conditions* that made it possible to say, or *not* say, those particular things at that specific time (ibid.:6). Language, then, is not a transparent reflection of ourselves or our societies; it has the power to shape how we think and act. In the Foucauldian world, authors or actors fulfill only a mediating role in the play of discourses, so over-determined are they by existing structures of knowledge that their



agency to originate an entirely new or autonomous conversation is curtailed (Oksala 2007:43-44).

In an ambivalent response to the “anti-humanism” of poststructuralism, Ingrid Monson (1996) has proposed an “interactive, relational theory of music.” Drawing on literature in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, she argues that musical structure and social context are mutually generative. Sound, she argues, is just as important a discursive mode as language in the construction of social life: musical “conversation” as a sonic phenomenon depends on a particular context of social interaction, yet it is sound itself that helps generate this “community of sentiment” and guide its practices. While she acknowledges that music can be seen, in the Foucauldian sense, as a “system of signification” that exhibits apparent coherencies and continuities over time, she prefers to emphasize the ways in which agency and structure reproduce each other in the micro-interactions of music making.

In my dissertation, I bring together the model of *discourse as structure of knowledge* with the model of *discourse as interactive, relational process* in order to explain the peculiar balance of social determination and agency in the work of talking drummers. When looked at through a wide lens, the individual talking drummer, analogously to Foucault’s “author,” occupies a de-centered place in his tradition. His utterances are already determined by notions of tradition, kinship, and power, among other key discourses that have a hold on Yorùbá subjectivity.

Through the public recitation of a king's *oriki* (attributive or "praise" poetry), for example, talking drummers reproduce notions about the *oba*'s "natural," divinely-sanctioned claim to authority. In addition to conveying poetic images of the king's greatness, the physical presence of drummers on the king's flanks and the dense, bombastic sonic impact of the drums also signify the king's unassailable stature. Talking drummers, furthermore, are not the originators of their own repertory; their musical expressions are shaped by the content and conventions of the literary *corpora* on which they draw (c.f., Barber 1984:503).

While talking drummers may not be authors of the discourses they peddle, they are highly-engaged social actors who control one of the primary discursive mechanisms by which social contexts are generated. Talking drummers' use of certain sounds and words may be shaped by established structures of knowledge—including aesthetic preferences, poetic genres, and performance practices, as well as a host of inherited notions about society and history—but, at the interpersonal level, it is they who control the discourse and its public performance. As anthropologist Paula Ebron (2002:118) puts it, with reference to the similar Mande *jaliya* (griot or "praise singing") tradition: "West African public spaces where important men compete for power, patronage, and authority are theatrical. But they are spaces in which the important men are themselves rendered inarticulate while their subordinates hold center stage...the 'public transcript' is rather out of their control." Likewise in Yorùbáland, the powerful men to

whom, and of whom, talking drummers speak are, quite literally, left speechless. The musician's knowledge of a king's life and lineage can be, on one hand, extremely valuable for image-building and, on the other, potentially dangerous should loyalties be called into question. As we will examine, it is in such politically-fraught theaters as the *ɔba*'s palace that the discursive construction of social life at the interpersonal level is observable in high relief.<sup>5</sup>

## Agency

My argument that talking drummers, while reproducing established structures of knowledge, have a degree of control over the unfolding of specific social situations depends on a particular understanding of agency. Far from representing “pure” freedom and autonomy, I treat agency here as a culturally-inflected, socially-grounded phenomenon. I also view agencies and structures as multiple and operating at different levels of social scale—from mundane face-to-face interactions to national policy-making. I owe these perspectives to the work of Sherry Ortner (1996), who by extending the ideas of Giddens and Sahlins, argues for a more ethnographically-grounded model of agency, one that accounts for the intentionality of actors, the inseparability of agents from the social worlds in which they are enmeshed, and the multiplicity and indeterminacy of actions and structures. In fact, through her conception of

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<sup>5</sup> For further comparison, see Irvine (1979) on how Wolof *gélwel* (griot) speech differs from that of their “noble” or “uncasted” patrons and how, as a discursive code, it is used in high-stakes arenas to call hierarchical relationships and their attendant obligations into play.

“serious games,” she proposes to move beyond the agency-structure binary altogether (1996:12-13). The concept of the “game,” first of all, recognizes that social life involves culturally and historically constructed fields of play, as well as “categories of actors, rules and goals.” Second, it portrays actors not as autonomous agents, but as always and inextricably enmeshed in “webs of relationship and interaction.” It does, however, recognize agency in the form of intentional and skillful navigation of the game—action that may even change the parameters of the game itself. And finally, she states that the qualifier “serious” is intended to “add into the equation the idea that power and inequality pervade the games of life in multiple ways” (12).

Talking drummers are, indeed, engaged and intentional actors in the social “games” of Yorùbá small-town life. Whether welcoming visitors at the gates of the *ọba*’s palace, accompanying ancestral masquerades on their annual outings, or entertaining patrons at a party, talking drummers “play” the game on multiple levels—on one hand, by discursively reinforcing the social hierarchies and cultural practices that define the game and, on the other, by navigating social space in a way that maximizes the potential for patronage. The latter form of opportunistic play is normal, but if it occurs during moments of political competition for a chieftaincy or kingship title, it can be extraordinarily dangerous and socially disruptive. But economic gain is only one motivator; a discourse perpetuated by *Ayàn* (hereditary drummers)

of the historically intimate relationship between drummers and kings is also a driving force. Sitting at the center of the palace, talking drummers monitor the movement of palace visitors and inhabitants alike, both offering gestures of hospitality and conveying, often in coded language, sensitive information to the king. And in political and ceremonial settings, the *oba's* drummers serve as guides, instructing him if and when it safe to move. An *oba* once said to me that, in their everyday work on his behalf, drummers exercise “influence,” but they do not have “power” (Aragbiji 2009). This resonates with the idea of serious games, in which agency, on one pole, operates as skillful navigation of the playing field.

If the model of “serious games” is useful for understanding agency and structure in its routine manifestations, the notion of an “agency of projects” (Ortner 2006)—with its connotation of reflexive, persuasive, and community-driven action—better explains the discursive work of the writers, dramatists, and culture brokers who speak and create representations *about* the *dùndún* tradition for an intended audience or public (see Barber 2000 for an extended discussion of audiences and “publics” in the Yorùbá context).

Ortner (2006) has recently refined her theory of agency by drawing an analytical distinction between the “agency of power”—agency that is “organized around the domination/resistance axis, and thus defined to a great extent by the terms of the dominant party”—and secondly, the “agency of projects”—agency “defined by local logics of the good

and the desirable and how to pursue them” (2006:145). In practice, of course, the two are often inseparable, but Ortner finds the distinction a useful tool for analyzing the overlap and intersection of different “modalities” of agency. The agency of projects, for example, is never in reality separate from relations of power: “The cultural desires or intentions [that shape local projects] emerge from structurally defined differences of social categories and differentials of power” (ibid.). Furthermore, these local projects, constituted by local relations of power, may become entangled in larger projects of domination and resistance. To summarize, Ortner describes agency as the “property of *social* subjects” (151, emphasis added), always “interactively negotiated” within a “web of [power] relations,” and finally as a “disposition toward the enactment of ‘projects’”—projects conceived not as the result of “free will,” but as socially organized efforts which establish in themselves the culturally acceptable parameters of intention and action (152). The key point for my purposes is that the agency of projects is not about routine action; it is about a person or community’s reflexive engagement with culture and their effort to point its resources towards a collaboratively defined goal.

While knowledge structures embedded in the “abstract” or “metaphysical” discourses of Yorùbá oral performance, history, and cosmology are significant intellectual inheritances, they are only part of the discursive world in which drummers and those who represent them participate. The literary and dramatic work of Adebayo Faleti, Akinwumi Isola, and Jimi

Solanke, among others treated in this dissertation, can be viewed as projects in Ortner's sense – reflexive efforts at discourses of culture that are both conditioned by, and directed towards, a Yorùbá-literate public. These authors' work is situated within a larger context of Yorùbá-language literacy, which developed first in nineteenth-century Protestant missions and was later instituted as part of public grammar school curricula. By the early twentieth century, this had generated a ready audience of Yorùbá-literate readers for whom writers produced a variety of genres, from newspapers and histories to folklore and fiction (Barber 2000:308-309). While the production of modern Yorùbá literature and theater reproduces, in a general sense, discourses of European modernity—such as the primacy of the written and performed “work”—closer scrutiny reveals that the “work” is produced and received in a culturally-localized way: “The existence of a large and thriving sphere of Yorùbá written literary production meant that in the formative years of the popular theater, the prestigious aura of literacy was not exclusively linked to a culture and language defined and possessed by an alien, dominating and socially impenetrable colonial center.” Rather, just as the shared cultural world of Yorùbá actors and dramatists took shape onstage, so too did the “shared verbal art of everyday life—proverbs, histories, praise epithets, divination poetry...enter the sphere of print” (Barber 2000:310).

Much of this popular literature and theater professes an equalizing morality, the illustration through story and allegory that all people, high and low, are bound by the same moral requirements (Barber 2000:304-305). It is this discourse of morality—in particular the way in which standards of good, right, and proper are applied to talking drummers—that I introduce to scholarly discussion of the tradition’s cultural context. By situating Yorùbá drumming largely within the “extraordinary” discourses of myth and metaphysics (e.g., Sowande 1972; Adegbite 1981, 1988, 1991; Euba 1988a), scholars have neglected the more concrete, socio-ethical aspects of the music’s cultural context (Hallen 2000; Fayemi 2009). In this dissertation I explore the particular moral discourses about drumming that take shape in modern Yorùbá-language literature, theater, and film. In addition to the representations of writers and dramatists, I also look at how *Ayàn* themselves maintain the social organization and ethical standards of their profession.

Beyond the world of literature and theater, there is a small but significant movement of culture brokers and musicians who have recently been attempting to transform *dùndún* from a local art into an internationally-marketable form of cultural heritage. The *Ayànàgalú Şòúngòbì* Foundation (ASF), which I focus on in my dissertation, is one such “heritage enterprise.” This project is embedded in social and discursive formations of both local and international scope. Indeed, the very language of Yorùbá culture as “world heritage” that is used by the foundation



and its supporters is rooted in the institution of UNESCO and its international representatives, some of whom have had a presence in Nigeria. The ASF is emerging at a particular historical moment when the state-centered production of “national culture” has yielded to a more localized, entrepreneurial approach in which non-traditional patrons, like telecom companies, independent investors, and foreign NGOs, play key roles in cultural production. Nonetheless, more traditional forms of patronage persist even in the work of heritage enterprises like the ASF. The Aláàfin of Òyó, one of Yorùbáland’s most influential *òbas*, has accepted with pride the role of grand patron of the ASF. This has ensured that local values, such as the respect accorded drummers as custodians of history and advisors to the king, are perpetuated in the foundation’s work. Heritage enterprises, then, are socially and culturally conditioned in multiple ways, and their impacts are equally multifaceted and unpredictable.

Outside the sphere of heritage production, many talking drummers are now developing their own cultural projects, searching out new patrons in the international arena, and engaging in distinct forms of musical cosmopolitanism at home and abroad.

### **Musical cosmopolitanism and cultural circulation**

At least five related developments can be identified in recent scholarship on cosmopolitanism. First is the move to conceptualize cosmopolitanism outside of the intellectual

history and political concerns of Europe and the United States. At the broadest level, this means “look[ing] at the world across time and space [to] see how people have thought and acted beyond the local” (Pollock and Bhabha, et al. 2000:586). More specifically, and this is the second point, cosmopolitanism is being re-conceived as a common form realized through myriad social arrangements, cultural contexts, and historical instances (Vertovec and Cohen 2002:16). In other words, scholars are arguing for a notion of cosmopolitanisms, plural, as opposed to a singular cosmopolitanism rooted in Western concepts and interests. This literature explores, in various terms, “situated universalism” (Pollock & Bhabha, et al. 2000:585), “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” (Clifford 1997:36), “emergent cosmopolitanisms” (Appadurai 1996:64) and “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 1997). A third development relates cosmopolitanism to problems of scale, or in Anna Tsing’s ([2002] 2008:86) words, to “the making of scale.” This opens up the concept of cosmopolitanism beyond macro concerns of inter- and supra-state relations, to the way in which cosmopolitanism is formulated within and acts upon a variety of scales—from the domestic sphere all the way to the global (Pollock and Bhabha 2000, et al.:584). From this perspective, cosmopolitans are involved in the imaginative and social work of defining “localities,” “nationalities,” and “globalities,” and situating themselves therein. A fourth area of concern in the literature is the subjective, reflexive, or “interpretive” dimension of cosmopolitanism, which concerns cosmopolitanism not only as a

“condition” in the world, but also as an “outlook or disposition” (Vertovec & Cohen 2002:13; Fine 2007:134). For Appiah (2006:xv) cosmopolitanism is an ethical stance that requires a person to hold simultaneously two sometimes conflicting positions: “universal concern and respect for legitimate difference.” For Appadurai (1996), cosmopolitanism involves the imagination of selves and “worlds” in relation to people and resources both near and far. The subjective dimension of cosmopolitanism, as Fine (2007:xiii) argues, is dialectically related to the objective formation of cosmopolitan practices and institutions. Fifth, then, is the idea of cosmopolitanism as a potentiality transformative practice, one which brings theoretical questions of agency (in its different forms) to the forefront.

In two recent articles, Martin Stokes (2004; 2007) suggests the idea of “musical cosmopolitanism” as a productive alternative to discussions of “musical globalization.” Drawing on work by Turino (2000), Tsing ([2002] 2008), and Monson (1999), Stokes (2004:51; 2007:6) argues for the value of musical cosmopolitanism as a concept that allows scholars to explore “practices of world-making in and through music.” While Stokes does not extend the intellectual genealogy of his concept much beyond these three scholars, I would suggest that his thinking is consistent with most of the broader developments I mention above. Musical cosmopolitanism, as Stokes conceives it, attends to the ways in which people use music to imagine “worlds” and how they situate themselves in the world through music. Stokes

suggests that while systems and institutions mitigate this intentionality and imagination, they do not do so in the monolithic and determinate way assumed in much globalization literature. He outlines many forms of musical cosmopolitanism—from elite to popular; mass mediated to the highly localized, and examines how these musical worlds sometimes articulate and sometimes collide. Finally, Stokes argues that a focus on musical cosmopolitanism impels us to examine the mechanisms by which people move music through the world. He suggests that we look at musical circulation not only in terms of overt social and cultural factors, but also in terms of the internalization or embodiment of attractive musical features. In either case, he indicates that explanations must be grounded in particular sites and processes of intercultural translation and transmission. Musical cosmopolitanism, in short, “restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as a process in the making of ‘worlds’, rather than a passive reaction to global systems” (Stokes 2007:6).<sup>6</sup>

Anthropologists Debra Klein (2007) and Paulla Ebron (2002) have written ethnographically rich and theoretically rigorous books that, in my view, lend support to Stokes’ model. While globalization may entail the imposition of external conditions on the production of African vernacular music, they suggest, it is also a process in which African musicians

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<sup>6</sup> See Taylor (1997) for examples of such musical cosmopolitanism among African musicians navigating the “world music” industry.

themselves are intimately involved. Klein argues that the globalization of African culture cannot be reduced to the operation of impersonal systems; while undoubtedly contingent on existing political and economic realities, international markets are built from the ground up, one personal connection at a time.

My dissertation complements this literature by showing how the *dùndún* tradition's expansion into international patronage networks and intercultural contexts of performance—that is, its “global” reach—is due largely to the projects of individual musicians. As expansive as their visions may be, however, these artists earn their livelihoods by re-localizing and creating value for their tradition in particular communities. Because Yorùbá drummers who live in the diaspora are often geographically isolated from each other, such artists have the latitude to interpret and market their music in diverse ways. There are constraints and contingencies, of course. The global mobility of *dùndún* drummers depends on the institutional sponsorship of universities and government ministries, as well as on the patronage of touring theater directors, popular bandleaders, and foreign academics. When they do go abroad, drummers must identify and cultivate markets for their craft within vastly different social and cultural contexts. Nigerian theater veteran Francis Awe, for example, creates demand for his music in the Los Angeles public schools by tailoring *dùndún* repertoire to fit state content standards for the arts. Hereditary drummer Akeem Ayanniyi, by contrast, builds a market for

his music by affiliating himself with Santa Fe's fine arts community and by leading musical tours to Nigeria. These cosmopolitan musicians, then, adapt their profession to new contexts by applying their cultural knowledge in diverse and creative ways

### ***Design, Methods, and Ethics***

#### **Multi-site research design**

The roots of ethnomusicology lie in a discipline concerned with broad comparisons of musical instruments and sonic structures, often supplemented by historical documentary evidence. Emphasis in early ethnomusicology was on “folk” or “traditional” music seen to be endangered by the advance of modernity, a preservationist stance in which musical dispersion, mixing, and change were viewed with some ambivalence (e.g., Hornbostel 1928).

Ethnomusicology by the 1970s had taken an ethnographic turn, producing what Tim Rice (2010:319) calls “community-based” or “idiographic” musical ethnographies, which focused on music as the property of self-contained communities in particular places. This is the intellectual context in which Slobin and Titon's (1984) model of the *music-culture* was developed. As “peoples' total involvement with music,” the music-culture model expanded on Alan Merriam's tripartite scheme to include *ideas about music* (its intangible, discursive dimensions), *activities involving music* (its social dimensions), *musical repertoires* (concerning sonic structure and its

generation and classification), and *material culture* (concerning the relationship of musical instruments to the natural and built environment). While initially formulated to deal with musics of particular locales or communities, the music-culture model can readily be adapted to a tradition like the *dùndún* that, while it exhibits certain unities and continuities, is also socially, culturally, and geographically differentiated.

Over the past few decades increasing scholarly attention to urbanization, globalization, media, and popular music has yielded more positive attitudes towards musical change and hybridity. What ethnomusicologists have learned from this is that so-called “traditional” music-cultures are also hybrid, multiply situated, and rich with histories of innovation, change, and adaptation. Traditional musics like the *dùndún* are, in other words, as “modern” as any other type of music. As a music with “local” origins, perhaps among the Hausa to the north or the Yorùbá kingdoms of Ilé-Ifè and Òyó, it has grown to encompass multiple locales, communities, and social classes throughout southwestern Nigeria, Benin, and beyond. And over the last twenty-five years, as many talking drummers travel and settle overseas, the tradition’s scope has grown even wider.

With this in mind, my dissertation research was designed as a multi-site study to generate a comparative understanding of the *dùndún* tradition’s constituent elements—its sounds, texts, contexts, and ideas—and how they proliferate or cohere across time and space.

These comparisons are necessarily multilayered. First, within Nigeria, I worked in several different towns and sought out multiple sites within each location to observe *dùndún* drummers in particular types of context. This included observing and participating in life-cycle events, *òrìṣà* and *egúngún* festivals, *ọbas'* palaces, and a university theater company. In order to better understand the continuities and discontinuities of social organization and discourse across the region, I spent dedicated time with people of different social position within the *dùndún* tradition. These included *ọbas*, who are, historically, the primary patrons of talking drummers; *baale* or *aare onilu*, the respected elders and leaders of Ayàn communities; members of Ayàn families who perform locally; drummers who work in universities and straddle local and cosmopolitan ideas about culture; culture brokers who aim to transform the *dùndún* from art into heritage; and the literati and academics who write about and produce representations of Yorùbá drummers.

Second, in the United States, my research was necessarily multi-sited because of the geographical dispersion of talking drummers there. In order to work with several Yorùbá musicians, I had to travel to several cities. Additionally, from my analytical perspective, the musicians I selected represented contrastive professional trajectories, which presented valuable data on the formative conditions of musical cosmopolitanism and offered rich examples of the ways in which individual creativity takes shape in dialogue with different “host” communities.



Furthermore, by seeking out the perspectives of a dispersed musical community, I was able to observe how cultural discourses and practices are in various ways maintained or transformed over time and space.

The third layer of my multi-sited approach concerned the aggregation of data *within*, and comparison of data *between*, these two world regions in order to develop a picture of the *dùndún* tradition as a transnational phenomenon. Following Marcus (1995), I approached the global not as “something monolithic or external” to the particular phenomenon I am studying, but rather as something that is integral to and emergent from it. From a methodological point of view, this means that global systems and logics cannot be assumed *a priori*; they must be *demonstrated* by comparing and connecting sites, subjects, and symbols that are geographically discontinuous (Marcus 1995:97). For my research, this meant first attending to individuals, and situating them in relation to the musical projects with which they are engaged. In turn, I compared these projects to each other in hopes of discovering larger patterns. As DjéDjé (2008:8-9) suggests, however, the cross-regional study of a performance tradition involves more than constructing a whole from its parts; it involves understanding the “extent, distribution, and function of differences,” from regional style to individual artistry. In shifting focus between the micro and macro in this way, my aim has been to shed light on the roots and

routes of the talking drum's movement through locales across the world, and its role in constituting these very "worlds" of sound and sociality.

To ensure the comparability of my data I organized my research around a modified version of Slobin and Titon's *music-culture* model. Mine included seven overlapping foci or elements, that together constitute my understanding of this translocal musical tradition: 1) *Individuals*—personal and professional histories; repertory knowledge; values, beliefs, and aspirations; social identifications and strategies (see methods below for further detail); 2) *Networks*—the social, economic, and symbolic linkages through which the talking drum tradition is maintained, negotiated, and transformed; 3) *Institutions*—established or emergent social structures that create certain "conditions of possibility" for individual and group action; 4) *Contexts*—pre-existing spaces in which drumming performance happens, and the social and cultural places it participates in or brings into being; 5) *Repertoire*—musical styles, structures, and content; 6) *Performance*—situated deployment of repertoire; communicative interactions surrounding drum language and music; teaching and learning is included here as a performative transaction; 7) *Discourses*—historical, evaluative, and interpretive speech and writing about drumming; visual and other symbolic representations of the talking drum; understood both as a structure of knowledge and as an interpersonal interaction.

## Preparation and field research

My dissertation fieldwork, beginning in 2007 with intensive Yorùbá language training in Nigeria, built on two years of previous engagement with the Yorùbá *dùndún* tradition in the U.S. In spring 2006 I completed an M.A. degree in ethnomusicology at UCLA, with a paper on the artistry and pedagogy of Francis Awe, a *dùndún* musician and educator with whom I had worked in Los Angeles (Ruskin 2006). This project sparked my interest in Yorùbá music of southwestern Nigeria and, more generally, in drum language and the use of musical instruments as speech surrogates. I became aware, at the same time, of the often idiosyncratic and strategic ways in which African diaspora musicians present their music in American contexts. To address these issues, I combined life history and ethnographic methods with musical analysis to craft an ethnomusicological biography of my teacher. Based on over twelve months of intensive participatory research with Mr. Awe, this project taught me the basic skills necessary to conduct urban fieldwork on a diasporic musical tradition, and how to approach it as a collaborative endeavor.

After the completion of my M.A. paper, I began practical and theoretical preparation for my dissertation. Mastery of Yorùbá language is an essential for building rapport in the field, and as a methodological tool for unraveling the textual strands and communicative strategies of the *dùndún* itself. Three academic years of Yorùbá language study and *dùndún* performance,

including a summer in Nigeria with the Fulbright-Hays Yorùbá Group Project Abroad in 2007, prepared me for this challenge. That trip also allowed me to initiate many contacts who would later be helpful in facilitating my dissertation field research.

After my first summer of language study in 2007, I returned to Nigeria for the summer of 2009. I began at Chief Muraina Oyelami's Ọ̀bàtálá Centre for Creative arts in Iragbiji, where I observed local activities and interviewed Oyelami regarding his approach to Yorùbá cultural promotion. Oyelami graciously arranged for me to study *dùndún* drum-making and performance under one of the town's senior drummers, Ayansola. Under Ayansola's tutelage, we shopped for materials in surrounding towns, built drums, and performed at numerous sacred and secular community events. In addition to participant-observation at such musical events, I conducted interviews with the traditional heads of drumming families in Iragbiji and the nearby towns of Eḍe, Ila-Ọ̀rangun, and Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun. Following my work in Iragbiji, I spent some time in the Ilé-Ifẹ̀ area, where I participated in and documented the work of a local drumming family in the town of Gbòngán. Through this work I observed the continuing dominance of *dùndún* drumming in Yorùbá community life, especially its intimate connection to traditional leadership. Also striking was the simultaneous overlap and gap between the needs and interests of locally-oriented drummers and those of the cosmopolitan culture brokers who seek to bring this tradition to a wider audience.

During summer 2010, I returned to Ilé-Ifè, where I lived on the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University and commuted daily to the town of Gbòngán, where I observed, interviewed, and performed with a family of *dùndún* drummers in the community and at the palace of the Olúfi (king's title). In Ilé-Ifè, I attended, documented, and performed in the annual festival of the Ayàngalú Şòúngòbì Foundation, a heritage production that was held in a conference hall on the campus of Obafemi Awolowo University. I also spent a considerable amount of time on campus, talking with local scholars, observing and playing in a theater production, and taking lessons with my *ògá* (master/teacher) Gbeminiyi Akintunde, a hereditary drummer-turned-university lecturer.

From Nigeria, I traced the *dùndún*'s dispersion to four sites in the United States. While my sites in Nigeria were geographically proximate, those musicians teaching and performing talking drum in the U.S. were dispersed and isolated from each other. I conducted biographical ethnographies of four men, situating each within the community in which he lives and works. I chose these particular individuals because their networks intersected with mine, and because each represented a different path to achieving global mobility and gaining the ear of American audiences. The first is Bisi Adeleke, a hereditary drummer from Ila-Orangun who first gained international exposure in the Duro Ladipo Company, the same company in which Muraina Oyelami was trained. He later came to the U.S. through his connection with ethnomusicologist

Chris Waterman. Adeleke works in Atlanta as an educator and performer. Francis Awe, the Los Angeles-based *dùndún* drummer on whom I wrote my M.A. thesis, forms another link. He was a colleague of Muraina Oyelami in the theatre program at the University of Ifè. By his own estimation, Francis represents another extension of the theatrical approach to *dùndún* into the U.S. Through one further degree of separation, the network expands widely in two directions. One leads to the San Francisco Bay area, where former members of several popular Nigerian bands are active as performers and teachers. I spent my time there with Rasaki Aladokun, who first made his name as a young talking drummer in King Sunny Ade's *jùjú* band, and who performs regularly with bands in the Bay Area. The other path leads to New Mexico, where hereditary drummer and textile artist Akeem Ayanniyi teaches and performs in schools, community centers, and fine arts venues. Akeem takes a cosmopolitan approach to cultural exchange, leading cultural tours from New Mexico to his home town of Èrìn-Òşun, where students can study at his family compound.

### Documentation methods

My methods of documentation included: 1) Participant-observation as an apprentice in formal and informal learning situations. During my M.A. research, I found that a fruitful way to build rapport as a researcher was to become a dedicated student. Learning to render Yorùbá

texts on the *dùndún* helped me to better understand the musical translation of spoken language and problems of transmission more generally; 2) Video and audio documentation of performances. Because of the density and rapidity of discourse at performance events, video documentation proved critical for analysis. Holding “feedback” sessions with the featured musicians allowed me to, with a great level of detail, analyze drum talk as a communicative event; 3) Formal and informal qualitative interviews with key collaborators and other individuals who represent the various social divisions, or “classes,” within the *dùndún* tradition. Interviews were rich sources not only of biographical information on but also of the multiple discourses that surround and define the tradition; 4) Collection of primary sources, such as newspaper articles, films, photographs, promotional literature, pedagogical materials, and drum texts. In combination with qualitative interviews, these “texts” were useful in uncovering the many representations of the talking drum that are in circulation.

### **Individual-centered methods**

My study of the *dùndún* tradition as a translocal and transnational phenomenon led me to foreground the individual voices and stories of *dùndún* musicians at home and abroad. I achieved this by examining both the larger contexts in which these musicians were located and the ways in which they situated themselves in the wider world. Using personal interviews and

immersion in the social worlds of these musicians, I gathered information on: a) formative conditions, including formal and informal education and musical training; b) institutional affiliations and social networks, such as those afforded by relationships with universities and non-governmental organizations; and c) musical contexts in which they perform or teach, including those both inside and outside of the tradition's customary purview. In order to understand how my consultants represented themselves, I observed their performances and pedagogies and asked them to share with me: a) their knowledge of the *dùndún* tradition's history; b) how they saw their own training, practice, and professional ambitions relative to the norms of the tradition; and c) where they saw themselves and the tradition heading in the future.

The method of ethnographic biography heightens one of the basic ethical problems of fieldwork, which is the proper relationship between ethnographers and their host communities. When ethnographers work in communities, they are, of course, working with specific individuals in particular locales, leaving abstractions of "culture" and "field" to dissolve in the vicissitudes of interpersonal relations (Shelemay 1997; Ruskin and Rice 2012). Interlocutors may become what we would call "friends," but they are often, as Klein (2007:xxvi-xxvii) has noted, relationships conditioned by social inequality, what she terms "strategic collaborations." In Yorùbá society unequal patron-client relationships are common, and the ethnographer-



consultant dynamic is considered an acceptable variation. While the two parties are not on equal footing, if they play their roles wisely then each achieves his or her limited goals—that is, to put it crassly, the researcher gets information and the informant gets paid.

If looked at from a global vantage point, I conducted research in Nigeria with a structurally-determined power advantage by nature of being an American citizen with the financial and administrative backing of an influential educational institution. Many of my interlocutors, by fact of being Nigerian citizens or because they lacked formal academic pedigrees, did not have such ready access to institutional sponsorship and the global mobility that it affords. Nonetheless, in the context of daily life in Yorùbáland, my interlocutors wielded far more influence over the outcomes than I did. Operating as I was within local hierarchies of seniority and title, my position as a foreign researcher— while affording me patron-like privileges because of my access to money—did not give me power or authority in any locally-viable way.

### **Abstraction and accountability**

The developments of poststructuralist theory, particularly those of Foucault and Derrida, fomented a critical reappraisal of the nature of texts and authors. In the social sciences, this led to reevaluations of the presumed objectivity and omniscient authority of

ethnographers, just as it called into question the presumed transparency of ethnographic representations. The “constraints” that shaped researchers and their encounters now took center stage (Gourlay 1978), and ethnographic texts were reevaluated as discursive formations that exist in problematic relationship with the worlds they purport to represent. Paul Rabinow (1977) has gone as far as to say that ethnographies, far from transparent representations of a culture, are essentially cross-cultural products. Increasing attention to individuals (including the ethnographer’s own self) and highlighting particular encounters and dialogues with individuals was one response to this so-called crisis of representation.

Focusing a narrative on individuals, in my view, only heightens the problem of drawing generalizations from particular instances. But it does have the salutary effect of increasing the ethnographer’s accountability by requiring greater specifications of evidence for the abstractions he or she does make. The researcher is accountable for the fair and accurate representation not just of “cultures,” but also of key interlocutors, which requires the ability to think critically without criticizing the person. The researcher is also accountable for the reliability and representativeness of information such individuals provide. This means being able to both situate the ideas and actions of subjects within a larger frame and determine their continuity or discontinuity with those of others. By necessity, the individual-centered approach requires a much clearer acknowledgement of information sources, their interpretive biases, and

the researcher's relationship to them. While Clifford Geertz spoke of ethnographies as "interpretations of interpretations," Crapanzano (1986:74-75) noted that the voices of actual native interpreters was missing in his work. Individual-centered narrative, by contrast, foregrounds the voices of interlocutors so as to convey some sense of the person, a strategy that both offers the reader greater interpretive freedom and destabilizes the authorial position of the researcher. And in Yorùbáland especially, where names are the very foundation of social being, it calls in to question the convention of anthropological anonymity. It is in this spirit that I am careful to cite all interlocutors by their real names, no matter how small or large their contributions.

***From here to there: an outline of chapters***

Chapter 2 investigates how Yorùbá-speaking people themselves represent the talking drum in scholarly literature, oral tradition, and modern mass media. Scholarship on Yorùbá drumming tends to focus on either metaphysical discourses or structural analyses of musical instruments and sounds, often giving short shrift to the social and ethical implications of drumming. In this chapter I bring the theoretical discourses about drums that emerge from Yorùbá mythologies of origin and Ifá oracular literature into conversation with the socio-ethical discourses about drums that are offered by modern Yorùbá literature, theater, and film.

While the former discourses suggest how drums function psychically, the latter deal with the social implications of drums and what their good, right, and proper uses are in society.

Chapter 3 addresses the social organization of *dùndún* drumming in contemporary Yorùbáland through the lenses of family and lineage, leadership and governance, and the economics of patronage. Bridging normative and particular description, I use the voices and histories of individual musicians to show how the social contexts of the *dùndún* tradition exist as lived experience. The chapter begins with the perspectives of men who grew up in Ayàn families. We then examine the hierarchy, leadership, and governance of professional drummers through interviews with elders and chiefs. Economic organization is accounted for through the different types of patrons, forms of patronage, and schemas of monetary redistribution with which *dùndún* musicians engage.

Chapter 4 turns to the detailed description and analysis of particular *dùndún* performances. Using a flexible definition of context drawn from linguistic anthropology, I explore how *dùndún* drummers frame and define particular social environments through the performance of language-based musical texts. For example, when a group of drummers recites royal praise poetry, they create sounds that signify power through amplitude and textural denseness, and at same time affirm the king's pedigree by reporting the names, attributes, and exploits of his ancestors. Inside and outside of the palace, drummers invoke social hierarchies

and define social boundaries through word and sound. This chapter also looks at how *dùndún* drummers contribute to the contexts of ritual and entertainment events in their roles as “stage directors” and facilitators.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine how the *dùndún* tradition has, over the past forty years, grown from a music of local purview to one with national and international reach. Chapter 5 explores the work and media strategy of the Ayà̀nàgalú Ş̀òúngòbì Foundation, a private organization dedicated to promoting the talking drum, as a lens on cultural heritage production in modern Nigeria. Chapter 6 follows the professional trajectories of three Yorùbá hereditary drummers—Bisi Adeleke, Akeem Ayanniyi, and Rasaki Aladokun—as they access international networks, build careers for themselves, and recontextualize their family heritage within American communities. These entrepreneurial musicians seek to build appreciation and support for Nigerian cultural heritage, while using this cultural resource to tap into a wider world of economic opportunity.

## CHAPTER 2 THE DÙNDÚN IN YORÙBÁ DISCOURSE

### *Abstract and pragmatic discourses*

African and European scholars alike tend to oscillate between one of two general emphases in writing about Yorùbá drums and drumming. The first emphasis is on the role of drums in Yorùbá cosmology as it is evidenced in myth and ritual (Sowande 1972; Adegbite 1981, 1988, 1991; Euba 1988a); the second, by contrast, minimizes discussions of the metaphysical dimensions of drumming in favor of more structural studies of genre, social organization, and musical sound (King 1961; Olaniyan 1984; Euba 1990). In drawing this distinction, I wish to acknowledge, as Barry Hallen (2000:8) has cautioned, that researchers of African intellectual cultures have tended to focus on “theoretical” or abstract discourse, with the result that the pragmatic and socio-ethical dimensions of culture are sometimes minimized or overlooked (Fayemi 2009:166-167). Akin Euba’s (1990) monumental work on *dùndún* tips the scales towards the practical elements of a Yorùbá music-culture. Euba focuses less on cosmological and ritual discourses than on verifiable history, observable social organization, and musical sounds. But with all the strengths of Euba’s approach there is something missing. There is a danger, when focusing primarily on the structural dimensions of a music-culture, that both the psychic forces it exerts and its socio-ethical significance may be lost. In this

chapter I bring the theoretical discourses about drums that emerge from Yorùbá mythologies of origin and Ifá oracular literature into conversation with the socio-ethical discourses about drums that are offered by modern Yorùbá literature, theater, and film. While the former discourses suggest how drums function psychically, the latter deal with the social implications of drums and what their good, right, and proper uses are in society. In both sets of discourses it is understood that Yorùbá drums carry a symbolic weight and emotional significance that goes well beyond the structures and sounds of music.

### ***Drumming at the intersection of human and divine***

Yorùbá cosmology should be understood not as a codified, unchanging worldview, but rather a wide range of interpretations and variations of certain shared ideas, beliefs, and practices. Broadly speaking, the Yorùbá cosmos is divided into two planes or categories of being: *òrun*, the sky or heavens; and *aiyé*, the earth or world (Eades 1980:121). *Òrun* contains Olódùmarè, sometimes referred to as Ọlórún (lit., owner of the sky or heavens), or known in Christianized terms as the “Supreme God.” Next are the deities known as *òrìṣà*, the ancestors, and the minor spirits. The Yorùbá pantheon consists of over 400 *òrìṣà*, some of whom are considered universal or “major” and others considered local or regional manifestations (Euba 1988:2-3). While some *òrìṣà*, such as Ọbàtálá (the creator), Ọrúnmilá (the first oracle, known

also as Ifá), and Èṣù (the gatekeeper or “trickster”) are understood as “primordial beings,” gods descended to earth prior to the creation of humans, others such as Ṣàngó, Ògún, and Odùduwà were humans deified after death (Adegbite 1981:18; see also Bascom 1969).

*Aiyé* (earth or world), on the other hand, consists of people, animals, and plants, as well as unseen agencies referred to in terms of witchcraft or sorcery. These two worlds must not be seen as analogous to the Western dichotomy of heaven and earth, but rather as always deeply interrelated, interconnected, and co-present. To illustrate this point, Beier (2001:282-283) discusses what he claims is a Yorùbá idea of “divine essence,” referring to the myth of how Òrìṣà, the original deity, was shattered to pieces by a trickster servant (later we find out it was the deity Èṣù). Beier describes how Òrìṣà “was crushed and hundreds of splinters were scattered throughout the world.” While Òrúnmilá, the first oracle of Ifè, collected many of the pieces, “many of the splinters are still in trees and rocks and rivers and animals and human beings. So there is some spark of the divine essence everywhere, even within ourselves. We have to discover it and try to be in harmony within it. So it is not like the Biblical concept: God on one side and the world on the other.” The Yorùbá concept of personality illustrates this with a concept of self that exists simultaneously on the physical and spiritual planes—consisting of *ara* (body), *ẹ̀mí*, (breath or spirit) and *orí*, which is understood variously as the “head,” intellect, destiny, or “ancestral guardian soul” (Eades 1980:121-22).



Yorùbá drumming reflects the interrelationship of these planes of existence and plays a role in maintaining the bridge between them (see, e.g., Sowande 1972; Adegbite 1988, 1991). Like the human being, the drum itself embodies the worlds of *òrun* and *aiyé*, the physical and metaphysical, human and divine. That the origins of many Yorùbá drums are attributed to the *òrìṣà*—understood variously as deified humans or gods descended to earth in human form—reveals the complexly layered meaning of drums, instruments that incorporate the forces and qualities of humans, gods, and the natural environment. Furthermore, to recall Beier’s idea of “divine essence,” a drum embodies the spirits of tree from which it was carved, the spirit of the animal whose skin is affixed to the wood, and when ritually consecrated, the spirit and lineage of Ayàṅàgalú (also known as Ayàn), the first Yorùbá drummer and *òrìṣà* of drumming. Adegbite summarizes this interplay of the divine, human, and natural in his description of drum making:

The world of gods and goddesses, the world of ancestors and heroes, the world of human beings and the world of nature form a unity. Each world is alive, inter-related, and dependent upon each in one vast circling stream of power in which visible and invisible forces interact. (Adegbite 1988:18-19)

Thus, according to Yorùbá cosmology, “each of [the] steps of drum-making requires certain rituals which must be performed so that the spirits in the materials from which the drum is made may be placated and that the drum may function well” (ibid.).

Drums are typically addressed in human terms, as evidenced by the “family” structure of Yorùbá drum ensembles, and the attribution of the power of speech to drums (Bankole 1975:53-54). The *dùndún* ensemble consists of five drums organized along what Olaniyan (2007) calls a “male/female polarity.” There is also a hierarchy of age and family role implicit as well. The *iyáàlù*, which translates literally as “mother drum,” functions as the master drum and leader of the ensemble. The *ọmọle isáájú* (lit., child that goes in front), also known as *ọmọle ako* (male child), is tuned to the highest pitch in the ensemble and is often responsible for carrying the main timeline pattern. The *ọmọle ikẹhìn* (lit., child that goes behind), also known as *ọmọle abo* (female child), must be tuned lower than the male *ọmọle*. The *kẹríkẹrì*, also known as *aguda*, is not given a male or female name, but by its position as the second largest drum in the ensemble and by producing the lowest tone in the ensemble it might suggest a female polarity. The *gúdúgúdú* is not gendered in name, but its maleness is suggested by its association with Ayàn, the patron deity of drumming who is usually (though not always) depicted as a man, and by the reverence it is given as the eldest drum in the *dùndún* ensemble.<sup>7</sup> Making the matter a bit more ambiguous, however, each of the two tones the *gúdúgúdú* produces is

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<sup>7</sup> According to Rabiú Ayandokun (2012c), the *gúdúgúdú* predates the advent of the *dùndún* and *bàtá*. As the drum over which sacrifices are made to the deity of drumming, the *gúdúgúdú* is the drum that “makes *dùndún* Ayan.” It is worth noting that the *gúdúgúdú* bears resemblance, in name and structure, to the Hausa *kuntuku*, a bowl-shaped drum of similar size used to accompany the *kàràngó* family of double-membrane pressure drums (See Ames and King 1971:29).

assigned a different gender: the high tone, achieved by striking the edge of the drum head, is considered a “male tone” while the low pitch, resulting from striking the center of the drum, is considered a “female sound” (Olaniyan 2007:70-71). One could speculate that the association of high tones with maleness and low tones with femaleness relates to cosmological notions of the sky or “godhead” as male and the earth or natural world as female. Since *gúdúgúdú* rhythms are often constructed to combine and mimic the high and low voices of the *ìsáájú* and *ìkẹhìn* drums respectively, one might plausibly view it as embodying a male/female synthesis. Los Angeles-based talking drummer Francis Awe simplifies the matter for his American students by representing the *dùndún* ensemble as a “family” in which each drum has a musical role that corresponds to its family role. The *ìyáàlù* (lit., mother drum) and *gúdúgúdú*, which he refers to as the “spiritual father,” are considered the parents and share the lead role, while the *ìsáájú*, or “lead supporter,” and *ìkẹhìn*, the “follower,” are viewed as children and therefore subordinate. The *ìyáàlù dùndún*, like the matriarch of a family, is responsible for directing the group and communicating with audiences (Awe 1995).

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of the human-drum relationship is the verbal basis of drumming. Drums are more than percussion instruments; they have “voices” and speak by emulating the tones and contours of the Yorùbá language. Bankole’s (1975:53) account of the process of drum making illustrates the extent to which speech and tone are central to the

conception (in both senses of the word) of drums. Drum carvers, he recounts, often select wood from trees by the side of well-traveled roads, “for such a tree will have heard much conversation and will therefore make a drum that is especially good at talking.” In addition, wood is often selected to match the tonal “range and quality” of the master drummer’s voice.<sup>8</sup>

### The role of drums in Yorùbá ritual

In ritual contexts, drumming is understood as a means of creating an ecstatic connection between devotees and their *òrìṣà*, or patron deities (Adegbite 1991:51; see also Euba 1988:16). Because the *òrìṣà* created drums and enjoyed music when they existed in their earthly forms, it is these very drums that are used to communicate with the *òrìṣà* on the metaphysical plane and to call them to earth to commune with their devotees. This is achieved directly through the drumming of *oríkì*, or praise poetry, dedicated to the particular deity, and indirectly through the contribution of drumming to the overall “drama” or “spectacle” of ritual. In other words, drums are used to activate the spiritual plane and facilitate “communication and communion” between people and their gods (Adegbite 1991:51).

Yorùbá ritual, says Ifá specialist Funmi Odusolu (2010), is the “meta-language of being” – a symbolic system that interprets and reveals the “works and workings of existence,” leading

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<sup>8</sup> Because it is taboo for *Ayàn* to cut or carve wood, they typically rely on professional woodcarvers to make propitiations, select and fell trees, and create the wood shells of their drums (Ayandokun 2012b).

to greater understanding of oneself and the world. The source of this ritual system is Ifá, the Yorùbá oracle, whose revelations can only be effected by sacrificial offerings from people to the deities. Oduolu suggests that the connection between material and spiritual worlds, embodied in the drum and personified as the deity Ayàn, is most effectively facilitated through ritual drumming:

[That] the complex role of Ayàn Òrìṣà...for the ritual acquaintance of man and God [is] inescapable is also cited in many Ifá verses. But why is Ayàn so fundamental to [serve the point] of the Yorùbá world? I said elsewhere that the Yorùbá world is arrangement in vibrations and Ayàn is the sole material-spiritual instrument of communication and rapprochement in existence.

Sowande (1972:67-68) similarly argues that music has two related functions in [Yorùbá] society: first it serves to “bridge the gap between the visible and the invisible worlds” allowing access to the “psychic forces” that are active in the community; second, it serves to “foster a corporate spirit” among music makers and their community in the reenactment of mythological origins.

The theoretical and practical significance of drumming as a form of mediation between human and divine, past and present, is further illuminated through detailed accounts of the origins and history of drumming.

## *Origin Stories*

Yorùbá drums, according to Adegbite (1988:19-20), may be divided into three ontological categories. First, there are drums created by the *òrìṣà* and restricted to the worship of particular *òrìṣà* by their devotees. *Òrìṣà*, the original creative beings (Beier and Soyinka 2001:161-162), are said to be the first appreciators and cultivators of music. While many *òrìṣà* drums exist in name only, and others are no longer played, there are a few that remain in use. Examples of such drums include *ìgbìn* drums created by Ọbàtálá, *ìpèsè* by Ọrúnmilá, *bàtá* by Èṣù, and *ògìdán* (also *àgèrẹ̀*) by Ọ̀gún. Two of these musical creation stories, one recounted by Ọba Laoye (Tìmì of Èdẹ 1959:6) and the other by Adegbite (1988:17), speak to the mythical origins of the “family” structure of Yorùbá drums. The *ìgbìn* drum set, Laoye recounts, was created by Ọbàtálá and named in honor of the four wives who used to sing for him. And the *ìpèsè* drums, Adegbite recounts, are believed to have human origins, once having been the four wives of Ọrúnmilá. *Òrìṣà* drums, large and ornately carved from solid wood, tend to be restricted to private shrine-based rituals by devotees of particular deities. Unlike *dùndún*, shrine-based *òrìṣà* drums are typically organized in stationary sets—the *bàtá* being one exception to this rule. The repertoire of these drums, and associated songs and dance, are understood to be those which each *òrìṣà* enjoyed during its original sojourn on earth. Speech and drumming style, in these cases, is a “primordial gesture,” intended to reproduce the style

avored by each deity. There is room for creativity, however, and the spirit of creativity that the *òrìṣà* represent is manifested in the musical practices of their followers (Adegbite 1991:49-51; Euba 1988a)

The second category of drums consists of *òrìṣà* drums adapted for use in devotion to other deities and ancestors. The *bàtá*, for example, while originally attributed to Èṣù, has been adopted by followers of Ṣàngó, an *òrìṣà* who is now seen as the keeper of the *bàtá*. The instrument is also used to recite the praises of the Egúngún, the ancestral spirits who manifest themselves in masquerade. Thus the *bàtá*, though restricted, may be used for a wider range of purposes than the drums in the previous category. Although it was previously forbidden, today *bàtá* can be combined with *dùndún* ensembles, and it is even used in church (Ayangbile 2009) and theatrical contexts (Awe 1998:85).

Third, there are drums of more recent origin that are neither products of, nor restricted to, particular *òrìṣà*—which is not to say that people see them as devoid of divine inspiration, but rather that they aren't fixed to a single deity. The prime example of this is the *dùndún*, an hourglass-shaped pressure drum, which is now one of the most widespread Yorùbá instruments (Euba 1990). The use of *dùndún* is more or less unrestricted; it may be used in a variety of sacred and secular contexts, from *òrìṣà* shrines to churches and every-day social events. Since it is a particularly effective tool for reciting the *oríkì* (praise poetry) of particular deities,

*dùndún* has been adopted by followers of *òrìṣà* such as Ọ̀bàtálá, Èṣù, Ọ̀ṣun, and Ọ̀gún (Adegbite 1988:20). Like the *bàtá*, the *dùndún* may be used in Egúngún masquerades and for individual private worship and communion with *òrìṣà* (see Thieme 1969). The instrument is also used for social occasions, such as weddings and funerals, and it is employed in various forms of popular and neo-traditional music (Euba 1990; Waterman 2000). Before examining the origin stories that scholars have gathered about the *dùndún*, it is necessary to contextualize them historically.

Euba's (1990:46-56) review of the historical material on Yorùbá drumming is valuable in assessing the meaning of myths about the *dùndún*'s origins. Euba claims that stories of this drum's origins are consistent with the two categories of Yorùbá myth delineated by P.C. Lloyd (in Euba 1990:46). The first are *creation stories*, which view the drum as descending from heaven with the original gods at Ilé-Ifẹ̀. Falling into the second category are *stories of conquest and migration*, which are divided along Ifẹ̀ and Ọ̀yọ́ lines (Euba 1990:50). The Ifẹ̀-centric stories situate the introduction of *dùndún* in the migration of Odùduwà, the first king of Ilé-Ifẹ̀, from the east. Others suggest Arab-Muslim origins, tracing the *dùndún* to "Mecca," from where it was brought first to Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and only later to Ọ̀yọ́ and the rest of Yorùbáland. Ọ̀yọ́-centric myths, however, focus on Ọ̀yọ́ generally, and the Aláàfin's (king's) palace in particular, as the origin of *dùndún* —the site of its discovery and creation, or, alternatively, as the place where Muslim



outsiders first introduced the drum to the Yorùbá.<sup>9</sup> Euba suggests that the historical record supports the claim that the *dùndún* was introduced only after the Yorùbá settlement of Òyó, probably via contact with the Islamic influences of the Hausa-Fulani to the north of Yorùbáland (ibid.:49, 51). The rise of the Òyó Empire is also associated with the advent of a professional class of musicians, a development that would have accelerated the use of multipurpose tension drums. But Euba also acknowledges evidence that the diffusion area of *dùndún*, the area where it is most strongly practiced, is consistent with migration patterns out of Ilé-Ifè, which suggests at minimum that *dùndún* was introduced only after Odùduwà settled Ifè (ibid.:50). Because of the limited and inconclusive evidence, Euba leaves the question of historical origin unanswered but does say that, whatever the *dùndún*'s origin, Òyó is unquestionably important in the drum's diffusion throughout Yorùbáland. And its popularity and high status among drums may be due to its use during the Yorùbá civil wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because of its effectiveness during these wars, drummers gained "heroic" status and "wide patronage" during subsequent peacetime years (ibid.:54). As we will see in Chapter 3, the theme of the drummer as war hero is one that appears in hereditary drummers' accounts of their ancestry.

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<sup>9</sup> Apter (1992:13-34) argues that the divergence of Yorùbá founding myths along Ifè - Òyó lines must be understood in terms of both the Òyó Empire's historical subjugation of Ilé-Ifè and Ifè's need to maintain an ideological bulwark against Òyó hegemony. Narratives about the *dùndún*'s origin reflect this mythic polarity to the extent that they center the drum either in Ifè with Odùduwà and Ọbàtálá or in Òyó with the Aláàfin and his wives.

## Ilé-Ifẹ̀-centered origin stories

There are a variety of origin myths associated with the *dùndún*, some of which locate it in the spiritual center of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and others that locate it in the former political capital of Òyó. The “revised standard version,” according to Darius Thieme (1970:360), attributes the *dùndún* to Ayàn, the drummer for the first king of Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Odùduwà. But there are many different stories in currency. By another account (Tìmì of Èdẹ̀ 1959:10), the *dùndún* was introduced to the Yorùbá by Ayàn of Sàwòró in Ibàrìbáland prior to their migration to Ifẹ̀. Ayàn, the story goes, was so beloved by the Yorùbá to whom he had taught drumming that he was deified after death. Other myths of origin have *dùndún* coming to Ifẹ̀ from “Mecca” (Laisi Ayansola in Euba 1990:38), presumably meaning the east.

In a mythically-infused story recounted by the Olóòwu (king’s title) of Òwu in his keynote address at the Ayànàgalú Şòúngòbì Foundation’s 2010 drum festival in Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ayàn is situated among the original deities who came to earth at Ilé-Ifẹ̀. According to the Olóòwu, Ayàn was a blacksmith in the workshop of the creation deity Ọ̀bàtálá, which means he would have been present at the beginnings of creation at Ilé-Ifẹ̀, making this story closer to the one claimed by one of Euba’s (1990:38) informants and echoed by some of my interviewees that the *dùndún* was brought down from heaven by the gods during the founding of Ilé-Ifẹ̀. In the

Olóòwu's story the talking drum is brought into being by the collaboration and creative experimentation of the deity Ọ̀bàtálá and his blacksmith Ayàn:

Of all the shrines in Ọ̀wu palace, the shrine of Ọ̀bàtálá is most sacred. Ọ̀bàtálá was father of [Asokobade], the first Olóòwu. Ọ̀bàtálá was the husband of [Inuade], the first-born of Odùduwà [the original king of Ilé-Ifẹ̀]. Ọ̀bàtálá was the foremost Ifá priest and thus a popular advisor and consultant to kings on matters of ritual material and the supernatural. He was also a versatile man and fashioned many tools—farming tools, weaving tools. And [he] was the one who fashioned the hollowed *ọ̀mọ̀n* tree [commonly used for making drums]. One of the able assistants in his [Ọ̀bàtálá's blacksmithing] workshop was nicknamed Ayàn because of his dexterity at making the most meaningful [beats] out of the metals he was working with. So for him, Ọ̀bàtálá fashioned the first talking drum and predicted to Ayàn that he will make a huge success of himself if he could make an attractive sound with the hollowed drum. Ayàn and Ọ̀bàtálá experimented in communicating with the talking drum. Ayàn created sounds that were very close to the thoughts he wanted to communicate to Ọ̀bàtálá. (Olóòwu 2010)

Because Ayàn and Ọ̀bàtálá are so closely related in the mythology, the Olóòwu says, many drummers also take Ọ̀bàtálá, alongside Ayàn, as their patron deity.

### Ọ̀yọ́-centered origin stories

Ọ̀yọ́-centric origin stories tend to credit several different Aláàfin (kings) of Ọ̀yọ́ with the introduction of the *dùndún*. In one case, *dùndún* is believed to have been adopted directly into Ọ̀yọ́ from elsewhere—perhaps from the Hausa-Fulani north—by one of the latter day kings, the Aláàfin Atiba (Salami Ladokun of Ọ̀yọ́ in Euba 1990:39). Alternatively, Anthony King's (1961:4) informant from the Èkìtì region credits the introduction of *dùndún* to Aláàfin

Ajiboyede, a leader who long preceded Atiba as king of Ọ̀yọ́ and who had the drum manufactured in celebration of his jubilee (Johnson [1921] 1969:162-163; Thieme 1969:15-16).

Moving further back in mythical time, another Ọ̀yọ́-centered origin story claims that the *dùndún* was among the drums descended from heaven to earth at the palace of the Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́. It is there that a sacrifice was made, ensuring that the *dùndún* would forever more speak better than all other drums. An Ifá poem from the oracular sub-corpus says of the *dùndún*'s sacrifice at Ọ̀yọ́:

When the drums left heaven for the earth, only *dùndún* [made] sacrifices [of raffia].  
When they [the drums] all arrived at the Aláàfin's Palace at Ọ̀yọ́, all the other drums were unable to speak. They had all been quenched by rain. Èṣù used the raffia sacrifice by *dùndún* to wrap up *dùndún*, so *dùndún* now sings. (Odusolu 2010)

Odusolu's account of the *dùndún*'s origins, similar to one recounted by the *aàrẹ onlù* of Ọ̀yọ́, suggests several themes that are apparent in many *dùndún* origin stories. First is that the power of the *dùndún* is linked to the power of the king, both as a political figure and as the recipient of divine authority. Second is that the effectiveness of drums depends on the benevolence of deities, a fact that necessitates ritual sacrifice. For example, it is only because of the *dùndún*'s offering of raffia that the deity Èṣù allows the drum to sound properly when it arrives at the

Aláàfin’s Palace. Third, there is the suggestion of competition—the *dùndún* is represented as the favored drum of kingship because it outperforms its rival drums.<sup>10</sup>

### Women in Òyó origin stories

While the Òyó origin stories reviewed so far associate the *dùndún* with male power, there are others that more closely link the drum with powerful or influential women. In the 1968 Nigerian Broadcasting Service radio special “Nigerian Folk Music,” Ayo Bankole tells a variation of Odusolu’s story that characterizes Ayàn, the first deified drummer, as a woman. The source of this story is purportedly a solo *ìyáàlù dùndún* recitation that dramatizes the archetypal relationship between drummer and king in Yorùbá society. In this case Ayàn is represented as a female musician who was invited to the palace of the Aláàfin to compete with all the other drummers for the favor of the king. Ayàn then goes to her spiritual advisors (presumably including an Ifá priest) and they instruct her on building a small drum from the skin of two sacrificed rams. Spared the damage of rain, Ayàn wins the contest with her drum solo and is invited to live in the palace with Aláàfin. This, the story goes, is how *dùndún* drummers came to live in king’s palaces, and were referred to as *ìyá* or wives of the king (Bankole 1975:56).

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<sup>10</sup> This is a story and interpretation with which professional *bàtá* drummers will likely take issue. Ayandokun (2012b) responded to my reading of it by saying, simply, “I don’t believe it.”

Morakinyo Daramola, founder of the Ayà̀nàgalú Ş̀òúngòbì Foundation, explains his organization's name by recounting a similar story as to how the *dùndún* was introduced to the Yorùbá at Ọ̀yọ́—but this time it is “discovered” by one of the Aláàfin's wives:

Ayà̀n is the name of a family. Agalú is also the name of a family. Ş̀òúngòbì is name of the first person who discovered the talking drum, centuries back. According to Ifá, through a *babaláwo*, the talking drum was discovered by the wife of the Aláàfin in those days. The talking drum is the only drum that talks out of all drums in the world. This was discovered by Ifá. Even the drum itself is *òrìşà* –it is an idol that speaks languages of earth and heaven. It is the one between us and [...] According to research by our forefathers...Abeńi [Aribe] Ş̀òúngòbì was the name of the wife who discovered the drum. Ş̀òúngòbì is the origin. (Daramola 2010)

A similar story relayed by Thieme (1969:17), which credits a wife of the Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́ with introducing the *dùndún* to the king, depicts the *dùndún* in an even more intimate relationship with kingship. Ayantọ̀la, the first drummer, was the son of Yemoja (the deity of rivers and oceans). Ayantọ̀la then gave birth to Ayanwunmi, the first female drummer, who lived in the palace as wife to the first four Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́, including Ş̀àngó. Her son Adélù (lit., the crown is a drum), who assumed the title of Aláàfin after the death of Ş̀àngó, was the first king to inherit the art of drumming.

Given such stories linking *dùndún* to the wives of kings, it is not surprising to hear one of Euba's informants Laisi Ayansola liken the drum to the *iyá ààfin* (lit., mother of the palace; also queen or queen mother), “for it gives the drummer the kind of freedom in an *ọ̀ba*'s palace

which only the royal wives enjoy” (Euba 1990: 94). From this perspective, one could view the name *ìyáàlù d̀̀nd̀̀n* (mother drum) as representing more than the leader of the ensemble; perhaps it is also symbolic of the drum as the king’s “wife” or close companion.<sup>11</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to gender the tradition of *d̀̀nd̀̀n* female or to claim that it is the profession of royalty. *D̀̀nd̀̀n* drumming is, with a few notable exceptions in the realm of popular music, a strictly male profession – inherited and passed on from fathers to sons. Of all the hereditary drummers I interviewed, I only encountered two who claimed matrilineal inheritance of their *Ayàn* names. Second, although there are *̀̀bas*, including the current *Aláàfin* of *̀̀ỳ̀*, who respect drummers and patronize them, drummers are viewed in no uncertain terms as being of a lower class than the king and his chiefs. While the previous *T̀̀m̀̀* (king’s title) of *̀̀d̀̀* was known to play drums non-professionally and promote knowledge about drumming, it is otherwise unheard of for *̀̀ba* to be drummers.

### **Ayàn or Ayànàgalú**

Despite evidencing an *Ilé-Ifè* – *̀̀ỳ̀* polarity and a disagreement over gender, origin stories consistently credit *Ayàn* or *Ayànàgalú* with being the first drummer and the founding head of all *d̀̀nd̀̀n* and *bàtá* drumming lineages. *Ayàn* was deified as such, becoming the

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<sup>11</sup> For comparison, see DjeDje (2008:202). Dagbamba *gondze* (one-string fiddle) musicians use the same language to describe the favored relationship of their *Yamba Naa*, or head fiddler, to the *Ya Naa* (king).

“patron god of drumming.” In addition to being an *òrìṣà*, Ayàn is also considered the spirit that resides in the wood of the drum, and the “voice” that speaks through the drum (Euba 1988a:7). All *bàtá* and *dùndún* drummers consider themselves, to some extent, members of the “House of Ayàn”—that is, descendants of Ayàn (Bankole 1975:49). Thus, members of *bàtá* and *dùndún* drumming families attach the prefix “Ayàn” to their names. According to Rabiú Ayandokun (2009), descendent of an old drumming family from Erin-Òsun, it is only families who play *bàtá* or *dùndún* who take the Ayàn name. The older stationary drums, Ayandokun says, are played only by their “*òrìṣà* people,” devotees of the deity to whom the drum belongs. These people will not necessarily take Ayàn names, but rather names associated with their patron deities.

The name Ayàn or Ayànàgalú, then, has three referents: 1) the deity-creator of drumming; 2) the founding ancestor of all *dùndún* and *bàtá* lineages; and 3) the spirit residing in an individual drum (Euba 1990:91). The *orúkò* Ayàn (Ayàn name), in other words, provides the drummer with a link to the creator Ayàn, to an extended family of ancestors and contemporaries, and to the spirit of the drum itself.



## *Drums in Traditional Yorùbá Arts and Literature*

### **Ifá as literary source and cultural foundation**

The philosophical underpinnings of drumming in Yorùbá society are evident not only in origin stories; they can also be explored by looking at how drums, broadly speaking, feature in traditional Yorùbá oral literature. I have chosen to look at how drums in general, as opposed to *dùndún* in particular, are treated in the literature for several reasons. *Dùndún* is, historically speaking, the youngest of Yorùbá drums and when it was introduced it became the most popular and widespread. It has come to substitute for many other drums, and has incorporated the repertoire of older drums, being employed in certain rituals and ceremonies where older drums are no longer used. Reference to *dùndún* itself is somewhat limited and cannot be properly understood outside a broader philosophical treatment of drumming. While there are differences in the functions and contexts of the various families of Yorùbá drums, by and large the ideas that apply to drumming in general apply also to *dùndún*.

I will focus especially on the oral literature of Ifá (also known as Ọ̀rúnmìlá), the great Yorùbá oracle whose innumerable stories, poems, and verses have been passed down by memory for generations, and whose combined corpus of knowledge constitute (and reproduce in performance) the philosophical foundations and religious tenets of Yorùbá culture. As the purveyor of foundational wisdom, Ọ̀rúnmìlá is viewed as the primary source or author of

Yorùbá culture. Literary scholar A. Opefeyitimi (2010) of Obafemi Awolowo University, for example, considers Ọ̀rúnmilá the “first literary expert.” The genres of “orature,” or forms of oral performance, through which Ọ̀rúnmilá expresses his wisdom are fourfold. First there is *òwe* (proverb), which is, as Opefeyitimi puts it, the “shortest way of proving a point.” Second is Ifá verse, which is divinatory in purpose and functions relative to the circumstances of an individual. It is used to assess what the individual’s particular issues are—that is, to divine for him or her. Third, *àyáǝ* verse is used as a ritual way of solving the problems identified during divination. Fourth, there is the *àrò*: a puzzle or riddle in long poetic form that is designed to exhibit Ọ̀rúnmilá’s wisdom. In reviewing this literature, my goal is not to interpret it literally but rather to investigate how drums are used in the texts as metaphors for philosophical positions that are still evident in the practice of *dìndún* drumming today.

### Ọ̀rúnmilá’s Àrò (poetic puzzle) on the origin of drums

During a 2010 conversation, Opefeyitimi introduced me to an *àrò* (riddle or puzzle of Ọ̀rúnmilá) that is translated in Wande Abimbola’s collection *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá* (1975). Abimbola (ibid.:390) argues that the purpose of this particular *àrò* is to prove that Ọ̀rúnmilá expresses his wisdom through statements that are not intelligible by literal reading—rather, they involve play on the meanings of words and references to broader cultural contexts or

philosophical ideas. Such an *àrò* might be told to a diviner's client who is uncertain or confused about the veracity of Ọ̀rúnmìlá's words. This *àrò* consists of four puzzles/riddles aimed at demonstrating Ọ̀rúnmìlá's roundabout ways of speaking. No matter how puzzling his expressions are, the *àrò* teaches, there is always a practical or actionable truth behind it:

This story is for this client [one who has come to a *babaláwo* for divination] so that he may not say that all the things Ifá predicts for him do not come to pass quickly, and therefore say they are all lies. (Abimbola 1975:408)

In the fourth and final puzzle/riddle of this *àrò*, told as a dialogue between Ọ̀rúnmìlá and his companions, Ọ̀rúnmìlá claims to his companions that on his way home to his ancestral land, he saw that “a dead goat, can certainly cry louder than a living one” (403-404). His friends are incredulous, dismissing it as another “trick,” but Ọ̀rúnmìlá teaches them by demonstration how this could be so. He instructs his companions first to beat a live goat and listen to its bleating. The sound does not carry very far. He then instructs them to kill the goat and remove its skin. The deity Èṣù then assists Ọ̀rúnmìlá in carving wood on which to affix the goat skin. They then nail wooden pegs around the skin to hold it to the carved wood. The men prepare a feast as the wet drum skin is drying. This is a common practice in Yorùbá drum-making—skin is first dried and cured and then re-moistened to apply it to the wooden drum shell. After the feast, as the men are resting, Èṣù approaches the drum and beats it with a drum stick. The sound is heard and people begin dancing to the sound of this “strange drum” in villages many miles away.

Ọ̀rúnmìlá now confronts his companions, “When I told you that a dead goat can cry louder than a living one, you said that it was a lie. Do you hear [the drum] now, or don’t you hear?”

The practical truth of Ọ̀rúnmìlá’s puzzling statement is that when skin is removed from the animal and prepared as a drum, the sound will travel farther than the sound of that animal’s own cries. Ọ̀rúnmìlá’s wisdom is revealed as the riddle unfolds: drumming will carry sound a greater distance in space than the bleating of a live goat that is beaten by human hands. It is possible that this is a version of an origin story for *ìpèse (àràn)*, the drum believed to belong to Ọ̀rúnmìlá and traditionally used by Ifá devotees. Although the drum created by Ọ̀rúnmìlá and Èṣù is not named, its wood-peg construction (noted by the narrator) and its association with these two deities would suggest that it is an Ifá drum. The *àràn* drum does appear by name in other poems, as do *dùndún* and *bàtá*, but these latter two drums do not match the structural description of the drum in this poem.

Chief Farounbi Aina Mosunmola Adewale-Somadhi, known as Chief FAMA for short, an Ifá priestess with whom I discussed this text, warned me against interpreting the content too literally. She said that the “core message” of the text, or its symbolic meaning, is more important than the specific content. The core message is that there is “rapport between

Òrúnmílá and Èṣù,” and the story of the goat is symbolic of how the wisdom of Ifá operates by “turning a situation around” and approaching problems from different angles (FAMA 2011).

While taking Chief FAMA’s caveat seriously, I would like to pause on the content of the text to tease out some ideas about drums that underlie this story. My argument for doing so is that the picture of the origin, function, and power of drums conveyed in the story is consistent with what I have found in my interviews with hereditary drummers and in writings by those knowledgeable about drumming. If read symbolically, the drum in this story embodies the wisdom of Òrúnmílá and the agency of Èṣù – it is through Ifá’s creative mind and Èṣù’s power to bring things about in world (*àṣẹ*) that the drum in this story comes to life. Abimbola says that Èṣù, as the sole custodian of the divine creative power of *àṣẹ*, is the one to whom Òrúnmílá (like all deities) must turn when he wants to perform supernatural feats. The suggestion is that Èṣù opens up the potential of the drum, imbuing it with supernatural power. Without the gift of *àṣẹ* from Èṣù, the story implies, a drum cannot have its powerful effects. In this case, Èṣù first fashions the wood shell—widely recognized as the most physically substantial and spiritually pregnant element of a drum (see Sowande 1972:65 and Bankole 1975:53). He then activates the drum’s power by being the first to beat it. This drum is so powerful, we are told, that people in another village become enraptured in dance. The story, as Chief FAMA suggested, is not “about” drums in a literal sense, but as metaphor it does reveal ideas about drums and

drumming that may have been in place at the time it was composed. The story does indeed echo ideas that I have heard from Ayàn drummers and scholars of Yorùbá drumming: drums are believed to be created by the deities and inhabited by natural spirits; drums cannot be effective without ritual preparation and, when consecrated, their effects can be magical; drums are effective mediums of long-distance communication; dancing is intimately entwined with drumming and the two together represent a joyous act of communal celebration. One might also speculate that the widely held view of drummers as both wise and mischievous is reflected in this Ifá story through the presence of Ọ̀rúnmilá, representing wisdom, and Èṣù, representing capriciousness.

### Other Ifá divination poetry featuring drums

Numerous verses of Ifá and proverbs make reference to the power of sound in natural and humanly produced forms (see, e.g., Adegbite 1991:46-47). Drums of specified and unspecified type are mentioned in several Ifá divination poems collected and translated by Abimbola. *Àràn* (or *ìpèsè*) drums, with their attendant *agogo* bells are the drums of Ifá. In the poems collected by Abimbola (1976, 1977), drums and gongs are used for celebration in the name of Ifá—to accompany the singing of Ifá poems and dances of their joyful clients. Such drums are restricted in their usage and maintenance—they may only be stored in Ifá shrines or the homes

of Ifá priests (Euba 1990:34). They are frequently mentioned in the seventh section of divination poems, where the client and the Ifá priests react in joy to a successful divination and the acceptance of a prescribed sacrificial offering (Abimbola 1976:53-54). It is a stereotyped passage, appearing in part or whole, and in subtle variations, but the context is always one rejoicing at a successful divination and the achievements of a client or his defeat of some form of evil (death, disease, witchcraft, etc). The long version of the passage, as transcribed and translated by Abimbola, goes:

Ijó ní nǹjó, Ayò ní nǹyò; Ó nǹyin àwọ̀n awoo rẹ̀, Àwọ̀n awoo rẹ̀ nǹyin ‘Fá. Ó ya ẹ̀nu kótó, Orin awo ló bọ̀ sí lẹ̀nu, Ẹ̀sẹ̀ tí ó nà, Ijó fà á. Agogo ní Ìpóró, Àràn ní Ìkijà, Ọ̀pá kugúkugù lójúde Ìṣẹ̀rimogbe.

He started to dance, He started to rejoice. He started to praise his Ifá priests, While his Ifá priests praised Ifá. As he opened his mouth, The song of Ifá priests was what he uttered forth. As he stretched his legs, Dance caught them. Gongs were beaten in Ìpóró. Àràn drum was beaten at Ìkijà, Drumsticks were used in making melody at Ìṣẹ̀rimogbe. (Abimbola 1976:53)

Chief FAMA (2011) again warns me of too literal an interpretation. The passage above, she says, is symbolic of the joy that a client feels after a successful divination and sacrifice. In reality, she says, musical celebration of this kind would never occur at a private Ifá divination or sacrifice. Only at public events like Ọ̀dún Ifá, an annual Ifá festival, would a full ensemble of àràn drums, agogo (gong), and ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀ (gourd rattle) be found. One might also find agogo alone where “light” Ifá music is appropriate. Nonetheless, it is significant that the beating of drums

and gongs, the singing of songs, and dancing are the chosen metaphors for the happiness one feels when his or her sacrifice is accepted. It is a multi-sensory, embodied representation of the feelings associated with a return wholeness and stability. Drumming and dancing seem to represent in the above text the integration or healing of an individual and his community after hardship is overcome or after the balance between forces of good and evil is restored. Since my focus here is on the reading of musical metaphors in traditional literature, I will temporarily sidestep the question of whether drumming and dance events, in practice, necessarily represent wholeness and balance or whether, as Andrew Apter (1992) and John Miller Chernoff (1997) have argued, they open up potentially subversive and dangerous spaces, where the status quo might be brought into question. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that drummers' unequalled knowledge of local histories and personalities, combined with their penchant for sometimes mischievous ambiguity, opens up the possibility of social destabilization anywhere they play.

### *Discourses about drums in modern literature, theater, and film*

#### **The work of Akinwumi Isola and Alagba Adebayo Faleti**

Having reviewed the philosophical underpinnings of Yorùbá drumming, I now turn to the practical uses of and ethical stances towards *dùndún* drumming in contemporary Yorùbá literature, theater, and film. This is based on conversations I had in 2010 with two of Yorùbá-



speaking Nigeria's most respected dramatists, Akinwumi Isola and Alagba Adebayo Faleti. Isola is a writer and dramatist who spearheaded a revival in the 1960s of Yorùbá-language literature written for Yorùbá speakers. He has written historical, political, and poetic novels and plays, several of which have been made into films by the successful director Tunde Kelani. Among Isola's best-known works is *Şaworoide*, a parable centered on the *dùndún* drum (I will return to this later). Faleti is a renowned writer, dramatist, actor, and producer who worked with Duro Ladipo and Herbert Ogunde, among other pioneers of modern Yorùbá theater who adapted the traditions of *alárìnjó* (Yorùbá traveling "folk" theater) to the modern contexts of the concert stage and, later, television and film. Faleti's stories and poems are so widely known that they have achieved a nearly folk or traditional status.

#### **Intra- and extra-dramatic roles of drums**

The talking drum, says Akinwumi Isola, ordinarily plays a valuable role in Yorùbá social life, as part of ritual, ceremony, and entertainment. And it retains this role in contemporary popular culture. In the years before the advent of mass media, the Yorùbá traveling folk theater known as *alárìnjó* used drummers in their traditional role as entertainers, communicators, and stage directors. They might be used to advertise the performance of a play and attract people to it with a boisterous opening "fanfare." They would be not only incorporated into the drama of

the play in scenes where their presence would be culturally appropriate, but they would also be responsible for directing actors on and off the stage with musical signals.

This way of incorporating the talking drum as part of the whole theatrical event surrounding the play was also common, Isola suggests, among playwrights like Ogunde, Ladipo, Adejobi, Ogunsola, and others who produced modern theater that was modeled on the older practices of *alárìnjó* theater: “When you are talking of traveling theater it has been there before, like in *alárìnjó* and Ogunde. In the olden days you could say the drum was a central part of the play. The drum would direct actors on and off the stage. We still use it, but not as much as before in the olden days before independence.” This is to say that drums had roles both internal and external to the drama.

Veteran actor and playwright Jimi Solanke (2010) recalls how Ogunde and Ladipo would advertise their performances: the actors would dress in character and they might walk through a marketplace led by drummers or drive around in a lorry with drummers playing and an emcee giving details of the performance. This was a common method of publicity in which drummers played a central role.

Adebayo Faleti (2010) confirms that drums played an important part in the theater of Ladipo and Ogunde, both of whom he worked with closely. Faleti says that one of the features of theater at that time was the use of “mixed drums,” including *dùndún*, in a musical prologue

or “opening glee.” In his most famous play, *Ọba Koso*, Ladipo initially used only *bàtá*, *șẹkẹrẹ*, and *aro* (circular iron bells), but *dùndún* was added in some performances. Ogunde and Ladipo also used large stationary drums as well, like the *ògídán* (Ògún’s drum) and the *àgbá*, a sacred drum played only on the occasion of a king’s death. But both did incorporate *dùndún* at various times, says Faleti (see also Ladipo 1964, 1965).

This is no longer the role of drums in modern theater. “Now [the talking drum] is not as favored as it used to be,” says Isola, comparing modern postcolonial theater to the earlier era in Yorùbá theater. “Modern writers, they incorporate drums when necessary, but today they do not use it to attract people. In the past, when you want to stage a play at a center, your men will go around the town in a lorry or bus, beating the talking drum, attracting people to watch your play. But with radio it is not necessary now. The use in society still remains, however; it is still relevant” (Isola 2010).

While the talking drum maintains its significance in Yorùbá social life, “how we use it in drama is so different from how musicians use it,” says Isola. “We use it only when we want to explain or point out some past cultural situations or occasions when drums will be used. If you are talking about chiefs or an *ọba* in the palace, [or] if you want to portray Yorùbá society as it was, you include drums in this situation to welcome and send messages to the *ọba*” (Isola 2010). Isola suggests that while talking drums are still used today to enhance the entertainment

value of a play, they are used primarily for purposes of historical realism or as symbols of cultural authenticity. The practical value talking drums had in the folk theater, Isola seems to be saying, is less important to modern dramatists than its role in making cultural representations more accurate and on occasion providing some narrative assistance. The role of drums nowadays is primarily internal to the drama; they rarely nowadays act externally as stage directors.

An example of the drums playing a role incidental to the drama is Isola's play *Efúnṣetán Aníwúrà* (1970), which is a historical work about the Ìyálódè (headwoman) of Ìbàdàn. Written in 1965, it was his first dramatic work written entirely in Yorùbá. Submitted to a competition in Ìbàdàn in the late 1960s, it won first prize and was published by Oxford University Press.

Isola describes the role of drums in the play:

The drums we used were *dùndún*. [They were] singing and chanting praises of the Olúbàdàn, the chiefs, and so forth. Drums were included as functioning on behalf of chiefs and within the Olúbàdàn's palace. And the Ìyálódè, she used [drums] for many things. But the play is not about music. It is, or was, the duty of the drummers to announce whoever was coming for a visit. And that drum would tell the chief inside the house the person coming to visit him. (Isola 2010)

In other words, Isola employs talking drummers as characters in this play only to the degree that they enhance its historical realism, as part of the dramatic representation of daily life among Yorùbá chiefs and kings.

Like Isola, Adebayo Faleti says that the use of drums in his theatrical productions echoes that of modern Yorùbá theater generally, where *dùndún* drums may provide entertaining musical interludes, accompany dances, and serve as markers of authenticity in dramatic representations of traditional life. The use of *dùndún* drums to enhance social realism occurs, for example, in Faleti's recent play *Fere Bi Ekun*,<sup>12</sup> where talking drummers appear at a wedding ceremony in order to eulogize the bride and groom and in a scene representing the installation of a king, where the drums accompany an old Ọ̀yọ́ song. "The one on the stage is an imitation of what happens in real life, in rituals, ceremonies, and in the shrine," says Faleti (2010). Otherwise, he asserts, drums are not really dominant in his plays. At this moment in the interview, my teacher Gbeminiyi Akintunde, who had played a musical role in one of Faleti's productions at Obafemi Awolowo University, gently takes issue with this, protesting that drums are used to say proverbs in some of his plays: "but the sound of the drum is part of the play, too, sir" (quoted in Faleti 2010).

Indeed, drums may still on occasion be used to play the role they did in folk theater, where they perform both inter-dramatic and extra-dramatic roles. I performed as a drummer for the 2010 staging of *The Imprisonment of Ọ̀bàtálá* by Obotunde Ijimere (Ulli Beier's pen name,

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<sup>12</sup> Faleti's play was produced as part of Nigeria's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, according to a press release by the Office of the Governor, Lagos State (2010).

1966) by the Obafemi Awolowo University theater department. Drumming is in fact used throughout the play in a way reminiscent of Isola's description of traveling theater. The drummers played an opening fanfare, ushered actors on and off the stage with music, and accompanied scenes of dance and festivity which were part of the drama. Perhaps it was Beier's intention to make this play resemble older forms of traveling theater. After all, he did encourage modern Yorùbá artists and playwrights to explore the cultural roots of their crafts.

Although Beier's play does use drums in a more extra-dramatic way, there are dramatists outside of the university theater setting employing drums in the tradition of *alárìnjó* folk theater, to advertise and draw audiences. Actor and dramatist Jimi Solanke (2010) has led close to two hundred training programs in advocacy-oriented community theater in villages throughout southwestern Nigeria. With a UNICEF Fund for Leadership Development grant, he performed and taught methods of community theater all over Yorùbá-speaking areas of Nigeria, focusing particularly on women's and children's health issues. Solanke recounts that he brought both *dùndún* and *bàtá* ensembles on his travels along with a strong acting team. In the manner of *alárìnjó* theater, drums would always be played in a public arena prior to the dramatic performance. As soon as they heard the drums, people would gather and want to know what was happening. In addition to advertising the play and drawing crowds, the talking drummers were the "main messengers," conveying educational information to the public. In

one skit that his troupe used regularly, Solanke recalls, a talking drummer would go into the market with an actress carrying a baby slung on her back. The woman would dance and the drummer would play in a musical-speech mode used for reciting proverbs:

E f̣oṃo l'oyon (2x)	Breast feed your child (2x)
[Text uncertain]	Don't deny this to your child
E f̣oṃo l'oyon	Breast feed your child

Eventually a crowd would be singing along with the talking drummer and people would follow him and the actress back to the point where the drama was going to be enacted. By using this method, Solanke attracted audiences and demonstrated how theater in the vein of *alárìnjó* could have immediate impact in the communities in which he worked.

### Talking drum as a symbol of Yorùbá culture

As Isola and Faleti have noted, the use of drums in modern theater is primarily aimed at enhancing the perceived social realism or cultural authenticity of plays, especially those with mythical and historical content. Situated in the contemporary world, on stage at a university campus, this kind of realism also achieves something symbolic – it represents an interpretation of Yorùbá culture by and for Yorùbá people. During the production of the *Imprisonment of Ọ̀bàtálá* at Obafemi Awolowo University, the audience would erupt in cheers during the

traditional song and dance numbers that were led by the drum orchestra. In this context, the dramatic representation of Yorùbá society and culture was brought to life through drumming, song, and dance.

Perhaps the best example of a dramatic work where the drum is featured as a symbol of Yorùbá culture—and of its ethical standards in particular—is Isola’s novel *Şaworoidę* (2008),<sup>13</sup> written many years ago but published only recently. The narrative is best known by the Tunde Kelani film of the same title (see Kelani and Isola 1999). In this story, the drum is used not for the purpose of social realism; its functions as an instrument of communication, its association with the affairs of kingship, and its believed supernatural powers are dramatically transformed so that the drum becomes a broader symbol of Yorùbá culture and its moral standards.

Isola says that he had always appreciated the unique contribution of the talking drum to Yorùbá culture and, indeed, world culture – a single instrument that can communicate an entire language—and he wanted to build a story around it. Unlike his earlier plays, he was not seeking to replicate the reality of how drums are used in everyday Yorùbá society, but rather to use it as a symbol of Yorùbá culture and, more specifically, as a representation of a moral pact between Yorùbá leaders and their people.

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<sup>13</sup> *Şaworo* are the brass bells affixed to the *iyáàlù dùndún* used by the king’s drummer.



“The drum is a symbol of the agreement between the people and their rulers,” says Isola. In the novel *Şaworoide*, “the king of the city had to swear with the drum that he would rule well and not steal their money. If he broke this oath something bad would happen to him—he would get a headache and die [when the drum was played]. At first he struggled not to swear the oath, and tried to avoid it. But things changed” (Isola 2010). The king in the novel eventually relents and participates in a medicinal ritual that binds him to the talking drum and makes him susceptible to its “magical” effects. In this story the drum “enforces compliance” and when the king eventually turns against his people, he is held to account by a talking drummer, who plays an incantation on the drum that causes the king to abruptly fall ill and die. Although drums are still believed to activate spiritual forces when played, Isola’s employment of this belief within a political context is a case of dramatic embellishment: “At times when the drum is beaten it can have a magical effect; it still can have it, but it is not recognized in modern times and it is not used as an agreement, compact, or constitution” (Isola 2010). The talking drum, rather, plays a metaphorical role in Isola’s story that it does not play in everyday Yorùbá social life. In reality the drum itself is an instrument, a tool for communication that can be used for good or for ill; it is not representative of a Yorùbá moral system. While drummers from hereditary Ayàn families certainly have standards of right and wrong behavior, says Isola, the talking drum itself is not an embodiment of Yorùbá moral

standards. Readers of the book and viewers of the film, says Isola, “know it does not portray what really happens one-to-one in society. [The talking drum] does not really represent an agreement between the people and the *ọba*. It is an instrument in the hands of chiefs and drummers and so on in ordinary society. We made use of the drum as a pact between the *ọba* and the people. So they can see how the drum has been used to tell a story” (Isola 2010).

And the story he is telling is one about the value of Yorùbá culture as a guide to morality in the modern world. Isola sees his “parable of the drum as the voice of the people” as representing the role culture plays in Yorùbá society. “When you grow up, your culture will teach you many things: standards of conduct, what you can and cannot do. And you learn such things through your own culture, through language, for language is the center of culture; it is the blood of culture” (Isola 2010). Isola uses the talking drum, in other words, as a dramatic representation of what Yorùbá call the “*ọmọluabi* standard” – that is, learned standards of right and wrong based in the inherited wisdom of Yorùbá-speaking cultures. Isola’s parable suggests that because so many of Nigeria’s political leaders and those supposedly interested in its “development” did not follow the *ọmọluabi* standard, the country is in the trouble that it is in now.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Interlocutors told me that Ayàn are subject to the *ọmọluabi* standard just like every other member of society, but they must also adhere to standards set by their elders and professional associations.

## Mischievousness of drummers

The mischievous nature of drummers is a recurring theme in Faleti's writing. His play *Nwọn Rò Pé Wèrè Ni* (They Think She's Mad, 1965) is a parable of how the elite's excessive need for praise, in tandem with drummers need to praise others for money, can bankrupt them.

Here Faleti summarizes the story:

This play is based on the influence of music on the elites of that time. It is different from popular music like Ebenezer Obey and Sunny Ade. It doesn't happen so much anymore [like it did in Ìlọrin, Kwara State] where they use drums to praise and eulogize you. And you spread money for them. *Gángán* is a type of talking drum [used to play] *àpàlà* [and] *pankeke*. The drummers are also singers, and they continue praising, praising you until you have exhausted all your money. The play tells the story of this kind of system, and a man comes to ruins as a result of trying to satisfy drummers. He has to enter a secret cult to look for money. He uses [captures] the daughter of a friend to buy his membership. But the girl escapes, and returns home naked, so her family thought she was mad. So this is the influence of the talking drums, talking drums used to praise people. (Faleti 2010)

In Faleti's *Ọmọ Olókùn Eşin* (Son of the King's Horseman, 1970), probably based on the same Ọyọ history as Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), which Faleti claims to have neither read nor seen, talking drummers are catalysts of social disturbance. In Faleti's novel, talking drums are employed by princes going to the provinces, where they are used to make veiled threats to the people:

Ká to túndé

Before we return

[Text uncertain]

Your children will have grown up  
and been taken as slaves

Ká to túndé

Before we return

In the novel, the people are upset and this causes a great row. Things like this happen in reality, too, Faleti says: “Drummers have caused a lot of problems [with] chieftaincy titles and politics. A lot of problems in politics are caused by drummers because they will say a lot of things that annoy the opponents. Many times it ends up in fracas, in violent fighting.

Drummers may cause trouble, and then they cover their drums with their clothing and run away” (Faleti 2010). Drummers may not hold political power, but they can exercise critical influence through their knowledge of history and local personalities (Aragbiji 2009). It is because of this potential influence, Faleti seems to be saying, that drummers ought to be held morally accountable for what they say with their instruments.

According to Yorùbá literature scholar Olusola Ajibade (2010), drummers distinguish between *ìlù òwe* (proverbial drumming) and *ìlù òtẹ̀* (literally meaning “drum of conspiracy,” or more mildly, competitive drumming). Another term I have heard referring to ill-intentioned drumming is *ìlù ìbàjẹ̀*, which literally means “spoiled or rotten drum,” but which Oyekan Owomoyela (2005:355) interprets as “drum of defamation” in the context of a proverb:

Òtá nì lùlù ibàjé, Olórùn ò jé kó dún      One's enemy is beating the drum of  
defamation, but God won't let it make a  
sound

Whether we refer to it as conspiratorial, defamatory, or simply competitive, this is drumming that disrupts or subverts the social order as opposed to that which affirms it. The public work of drummers is to praise patrons and to affirm the social hierarchy. While this normally involves directing admonitions towards those who might seek to harm the patron, the blatant tearing-down of an opponent's personality creates much more potential for social disruption. Such drumming often takes place in exceptional social circumstances such as chieftaincy or kingship disputes. Ajibade (2010) told me the story of a kingship crisis in Ekosin, Odò-Òtìn, Òṣun State and how, in his view, the ethically dubious behavior of talking drummers worsened the situation. This crisis was precipitated between 1992 and 1993, when a new king was installed against the will of the townspeople – the king's father was disliked by many and widespread opposition had developed among the populace. In apparent defiance, the king assembled a band of a dozen drummers around the time of his installation to sing his praises and insult his opponents. Considerable violence ensued and many people died, allegedly due to the use of traditional medicine. The drummers on the other hand, says Ajibade, quickly left the scene. While the drummers in this case might be pardoned as pawns in a politician's game,

Ajibade clearly sees them as culpable, in so far as their choice of derisive language catalyzed the break down in civility.

Adebayo Faleti's well-known poem *Oníbodè Lálúṣọ̀n* (The Gatekeeper of Lálúṣọ̀n, in Faleti and Olatunji 1982) addresses the ethically ambiguous stances of drummers and their culpability in fomenting dangerous social situations. The story involves a talking drummer from Ìbàdàn who is given hospitality in the nearby town of Lálúṣọ̀n by the gatekeeper, whom Faleti's narrator describes as "buréwà," a very ugly man. After taking food, the drummer plays for the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper's men interpret the drum tones as signifying an insult:

E wenu ìmòdò, e wenu isín	Look at the mouth of the wild boar, look at the mouth of the small fish
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È wenu oníbodè Lálúṣọ̀n	Look at the mouth of the gatekeeper of Lálúṣọ̀n
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They call for the drummer to be punished, but the drummer protests and reinterprets the same set of tones to show that he was actually praising, not insulting, the gatekeeper:

Mo jẹun Èjìgbò, mo jẹun Ìwó	I ate the food at Èjìgbò, I ate the food at Iwo
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Mò jẹun oníbodè Lálúṣọ̀n	I ate the food of the gatekeeper at Lálúṣọ̀n
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On one level the poem deals with the basic problem of interpretation and the ambiguity of talking drum texts relative to natural speech because the technology of communication is more limited than that of the human voice (see, for example, Ajayi 1990 and Sotunsa 2009 for such

analyses of Faleti's poem). The aspect of the poem that I wish to address, however, is the uncertainty with which the reader is left about the true intentions of the drummer. This makes it impossible to know whether it was a simple misunderstanding by the gatekeeper's men or a deliberate ploy by the drummer to obscure his mischievous intentions. When I asked him about this in an interview, Faleti leaned towards the latter interpretation: the poem, in his words, "chastises drummers for twisting meaning of tones to suit themselves, but that might harm others...even when they are abusing [insulting] you, they can say they are not abusing you" (Faleti 2010).<sup>15</sup>

### ***Conclusions***

This chapter began by looking at the cosmological dimensions of a Yorùbá music culture—the stories, theories, and archetypal personalities absorbed by those who grow up in the tradition. We have noted that while there are a bewildering array of origin stories, certain themes are recurrent: 1) the presence of Ayàn, the foundational drummer, and his or her close relationship to deities and kings; 2) the drum as an instrument of human communication and of communication with the world of spirits and ancestors; 3) the significance of ritual protocols and sacrifices as preconditions for the proper sound and effectiveness of drums, as well as for

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<sup>15</sup> Ayandokun (2012a) claims that, while it is taboo—and dangerous—to drum against one's king, it is acceptable for Ayan to use their drums to insult others, especially those who are considered "enemies" and who operate outside the traditional political system.

the well-being of drummers; and 4) the notion of a drummer's life being one of competition for the patronage of powerful men. The oracular literature of Ifá, in addition to reiterating some of these themes, adds further layers of symbolic meaning: drums represent the personalities (in all their wisdom and capriciousness) of the deities who created them, and in the contexts of ritual, the sounding of drums represents (among other things) the healing, or return to wholeness and balance, of individuals and their communities.

The discourses of origin and oracular knowledge that I have cited are comprised of what Hallen might call “abstract” or “metaphysical language”—accounts of the extraordinary that reduce history to symbols and offer theoretical or “immaterial” explanations of human life. While giving us snapshots of the ideological inheritance of Yorùbá drummers, they offer only a minimal understanding of how Yorùbá people view the social roles and moral responsibilities of drummers in their communities. It is here that the use and representation of drums and drummers in contemporary Yorùbá literature, theater, and film has offered us better insights. In the drama of Ladipo, Ogunde, Beier, and Solanke, we see drummers as entertainers, educators, and advertisers who do the work of mass media. In Isola's writing, the *dùndún* becomes a marker of authentic cultural representation, as well as a symbol of Yorùbá traditional ethics. And in Faleti's work, talking drummers are characterized as opportunists who use their knowledge of individual personalities to leverage the patronage of “big men” and



occasionally bring them to ruin. Drummers, in other words, occupy a socially and morally unsettled position in the contemporary imagination. How drummers represent themselves in the world and how they strategically navigate the moral landscape of their profession are the subjects of Chapters 3 and 4.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL IMAGINATION

Based on interviews with senior drummers in six mid-size Yorùbá towns, this chapter examines the social organization of hereditary *dùndún* drumming through three lenses. First is family and lineage. The root of social organization and self-identity in a hereditary profession such as drumming is the *ilé*, an extended family occupying a household, compound, or nearby residence. It is here that the child of *Ayàn* takes his family name and comes to know his place in society as a *dùndún* musician. Lineage histories (*ìtàn*), as they extend back beyond remembered events, blend with mythologies of origin, thereby linking living members to the personalities and deeds of heroic ancestors. Rendered as prosody or poetry, such histories offer a glimpse of the perceived uniqueness and transcendence of a person's lineage (see, e.g., Alabi 2005). What's more, knowledge of the lineages and personalities of other families is the key currency with which *dùndún* drummers work.

The second set of organizational principles concerns leadership and governance. The title of *báálẹ̀* or *aàrẹ̀ onílù* (head or chief drummer) of a town is given by a community of drummers to the eldest man of a particular lineage in recognition of his seniority and leadership qualities. This title is sometimes held within a single house or, alternatively, rotated through different houses according to seniority. The *báálẹ̀ onílù* occupies a central role in the

social life of hereditary professionals, commanding the deference and material tributes of all the drummers in a town or district. *Ọba* (kings or heads of town), *olóyè* (chiefs or title-holders), and other “big men” who are organizing events where drummers are needed deal first with the *báálè*, and it is he who brokers agreements and mediates disputes with these patrons. In addition to their recognition of the *báálè*, hereditary drummers govern themselves through inter-lineage associations that serve to advance the material wealth and social standards of the profession.

A third factor in the social organization of the *dùndún* tradition is patronage. I argue that the nature of the patronage relationship, which can vary in both type and form, shapes the contexts in which *dùndún* drummers work. Patronage, however, is not simply an economic arrangement; it is also a dynamic performance in which values of generosity and equitable redistribution are interspersed with affirmations of individual exceptionality and social hierarchy. While religion is also an important factor in social organization, this subject will be treated in Chapter 5 as part of the discourse surrounding cultural heritage production in modern Nigeria.

## *The Ayàn family*

### **Inheritance**

For a group of people to constitute an Ayàn family, as a hereditary drumming family is known in Yorùbáland, they must have a blood relationship, live in the same compound or nearby, and perform together (Euba 1990: 89). The eldest man in the compound (the *baálé*) is considered the ultimate authority on issues related to the family profession (Ayandokun 2009). Since, as scholars have long observed, Yorùbá kinship often exhibits as much of a sociological basis as it does a biological one (Schwab 1955:359), it is not surprising to learn that distant relatives may also be included in an Ayàn lineage. Although not commonly reported in my interviews, there did emerge a couple of cases of inter-lineage apprenticeship, where a member of one lineage lives and learns from members of another lineage for extended periods of time (Akintunde 2010c; Ayanboye 2010). While all males of an Ayàn family are trained to play, not all are actively practicing. The Ayàn elders I interviewed reported that this was the case with some of their siblings or children. Once they reach an age where they have finished their family apprenticeship and can make their own professional choices, a child of Ayàn may choose to leave drumming behind.

Drumming is traditionally an exclusively male profession. Children typically receive their training and their hereditary drumming name from their father. The honorific name,

always beginning with the prefix “Ayàn” in homage to the Yorùbá deity of drumming, is taken only by hereditary practitioners of *dùndún* or *bàtá*. Drums specific to an *òrìṣà* (deity) are typically played not by men with Ayàn names, but by devotees who carry their *òrìṣà*'s name. While inheritance of the drumming profession and the Ayàn name is typically through the father's patriline, at least two of the men I interviewed offered examples in their families of inheritance through a mother or grandmother's patriline – that is from a woman who passed on her father's, rather than her husband's, lineage identity to one or more of her sons.<sup>16</sup>

### Scope of hereditary practice

In order to understand the scope of hereditary practice in the region that I worked, I asked Ayàn family patriarchs from four towns (Èdẹ, Gbòngán, Iragbiji, and Èrìn-Òṣun) to estimate how many drumming families were actively practicing the profession in their area. The household or compound (*ilé*) was used as the unit of focus because it is the term most commonly used to distinguish between different Ayàn families. To maintain the specificity of my inquiry, I sought not numbers but rather the names of the *ilé* that have descendents active in the *dùndún* tradition. Keeping in mind Barber's (1991:158) caveat that definitions of what

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<sup>16</sup> This type of matrilineal inheritance is also found among other West African peoples. For a comparison with Wolof *gèwel* (griots), see Tang (2007:58, 80). For a comparison with Dagbamba fiddlers, see DjeDje (2008:231-232).

constitutes an *ilé* may shift and that small or marginal *ilé* may not be considered in formal conversation, my counts of reported lineages should be considered rough estimates only.

The smallest number of active families was reported in Èrìn-Òṣun, a town founded by northern Yorùbá migrants (Klein 2007). Ayangbile (2009), the *báálè onílù* and eldest son of the Iyaloja compound, counts only five families, including his own, who still practice *dùndún* in the town. There were more families in the past, he says, but they “do not exist as *dùndún* players anymore” – that is, their descendents no longer carry on the tradition (Ayangbile 2009). In Iragbiji, a town of comparable size that was reportedly also founded by migrants from the north, the *báálè onílù* Ayandosu counts seven *ilé* or houses in Iragbiji that play *dùndún*. He claims that all of them learned to play initially from his forefathers’ family, who he believes were among the first wave of settlers from Ofa (Ayandosu 2009).

In the areas of Èdẹ and Gbọ̀ngán, both of which were founded by direct descendents of the Aláàfin of Ọ̀yọ́, the numbers reported are significantly greater. The senior drummers of Èdẹ name a total of seventeen houses or compounds that “actively” play *dùndún* in their town (Ayanleke 2009; Ayanpade 2009). There are others that have histories of playing talking drums in Èdẹ, they noted, but these families no longer carry on the tradition. The greatest disparity between practicing and non-practicing families was reported by the Ègbẹ̀ Onílù (Drummers Association) of Gbọ̀ngán (2010), who named twenty-one patriarchs of drumming families in

the Gbòngán area, only six of whose descendents still play *dùndún*. Although I have not obtained enough information to verify it, these findings suggest that the number of hereditary craft families is historically greater in towns where lineages have closer historical connections to Old Òyó and therefore may have had a larger class of patrons on which to rely (c.f., Lloyd 1953:32).

### Lineage histories

In Yorùbá culture, knowledge of one's own family history is key to locating oneself in the social fabric of the community. The histories of Ayàn family lineages, as told by the Ayàn patriarchs I interviewed, tend to share several traits. Exact years are rarely known, so histories are more typically described in terms of generations of patriarchs. The stories tend to relate a history of migration following a kingship dispute or that caused by warfare. In only one case did an elder Ayàn report his family's indigenous status in a town dating back before memory (Ayansina 2009). Close relationships between lineage ancestors and sacred kings are often evoked with images of lineage patriarchs as warriors or guardians of their *oba*. Insistence that leadership titles held by the family were conferred before the present generation was also evident. Given that most of the Ayàn men I interviewed held chieftaincy or other leadership

titles in their communities, it was not surprising to find that many appealed to lineage depth, proximity to kingship, and invocation of heroic ancestors to support their present authority.

Alhaji Lasisi Ayanpade Ayantemi (Ayanpade hereafter), who holds the title *Aàrẹ Onílù* of *Èdẹ*, states that the title has been hereditary in his family for eleven generations. His ancestors, he claims, migrated “with their talking drum” alongside the first king of *Èdẹ*, the *Tìmì* of *Èdẹ*, when he moved from Old *Òyó* to *Èdẹ-ilé* on the outskirts of the *Òyó* Empire, and then later to present day *Èdẹ* town. When I asked Ayanpade the role his family played in relation to the king, he talked about the role of the talking drum more generally: “It tells the *oríkì* [attributive poetry] of the *ọba* and it serves as a guide for the *ọba*. It tells the *ọba* whatever is on the way if someone is coming or if there is war coming on the way, especially in the olden days” (Ayanpade 2009).

Chief Karimu Ayanleke of Sigidi’s Compound (Ayanleke hereafter) is Chairman of the Drummers Association of *Ọ̀sun* State (commonly known as *Ayànsowápò*, or, lit., gathering of hereditary drummers). Although this is apparently an elected position, Ayanleke claims that his father was also a chairman. His family has played drums for an “uncountable” number of generations. They migrated to present-day *Èdẹ* town from *Ogbomọ̀so* via *Èdẹ-ilé* (Ayanleke 2009).



Ayandosu, the eighth *báálè onílù* of Iragbiji, says that his family has been passing down the drumming tradition for ten generations or, he estimates, about 400 years. His king, the Aragbiji of Iragbiji (2009) confirms this, saying that while the town of Iragbiji is about 800 years old, the Ayàn families extant today in the town have been there for some 300 years. Ayandosu reports that his family migrated to Iragbiji from Ofa in what is today Kwara State, after a kingship dispute unsettled that city. He indicates that his drumming lineage is not strictly patrilineal. The profession was passed from the original patriarch [Ayanronbi], who was the “owner of the drum,” through his daughter to her son, and then on to a subsequent line of patriarchs stretching down to the present. Ayandosu says that the original patriarch and the grandson who started the second patriline were both great warriors: “He always led the war; he always beat the drum during slave raids. That is why we are the *ọba's* drummer” (Ayandosu 2009b). By invoking founding ancestors who are drummers and warriors in service of a king, Ayandosu legitimizes his lineage’s proximity to royalty and embodies his current authority as the town’s head drummer.

Ayangbile, the *Báálè Onílù* of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, offers a story with similar themes. “I think it's about seven generations,” he replied to my query about his family history, “we were originally in Èrìn-ilé in Kwara State before we moved down here to Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun in Ọ̀ṣun State. We left Èrìn-ilé because of the [Fulani religious] war. Our forefather is a warrior and used to protect the

king. [That is why] he, our forefather, had to go back [to Èrìn-ilé] to face the war. After the war he came back here [Èrìn-Òṣun]. He later went back but his son and brother stayed” (Ayangbile 2009). As with Ayandosú’s account of his family, we see in Ayangbile’s story a characterization of the founding patriarch of a drumming family as both a warrior and a drummer, and a close associate – or “protector” in this case—of the king.

These accounts of Ayàn families founded on warrior patriarchs closely allied with their king return to two themes common to both oral and literary accounts of the *dùndún* in Yorùbá history: 1) the association of *dùndún* with the institution of sacred kingship; and 2) the usefulness of *dùndún* in warfare (for a review of such source material, see Euba 1990:41-44, 51-54). Euba posits that the association of *dùndún* with royalty in myth, literature, and common practice has at least two possible historical origins. First is the probable adoption of *dùndún* by the Yorùbá from the Hausa, among whom the pressure drum was probably used as an “emblem” or “insignia” of power holders (Euba 1990:52). Second is that the growth of the Òyó kingdom (especially during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) played an important role in the diffusion of the *dùndún* throughout Òyó territory, the historical boundaries of which still outline the areas strongest in *dùndún* tradition. In short, Euba sees it as plausible that the Hausa introduced a *dùndún*-type drum to the Yorùbá, who then followed suit by making it part

of the royal retinue. And as the Yorùbá Ọ̀yọ́ Empire expanded so did the adoption of *dùndún* (Euba 1990:51-52).

As for the association of *dùndún* with warfare, Euba speculates that the *dùndún*'s effectiveness, particularly as an instrument of psychological warfare, led to its subsequent esteem and popularity in peacetime settings:

It is probable that it was during the period of the [Yorùbá] civil wars that *dùndún* really assumed dominance over other Yorùbá drums. The usefulness of *dùndún* as talking instruments and the relatively easy mobility of *dùndún* musicians must have made *dùndún* the most sought after among the different types of music that could be employed in psychological warfare. As a war hero continues to enjoy popularity in his community long after his wars are over, so *dùndún* must have thrived on its former heroic [sic.] role, subsequently attracting wide patronage in peaceful situations in which drumming was required. (Euba 1990:53-54)

Whether accurate or apocryphal, the stories I recorded of ancestors migrating, fighting wars, and associating with kings are common in many lineage histories, including those associated with hereditary crafts other than drumming (Lloyd 1953:34). Retracing the actions and character traits of lineage members has two historical functions. First, it articulates an “official history” of the lineage and, second, it reinforces a “charter” that legitimizes the living members’ rights and duties to a profession, a set of customs, chieftaincy titles, and property (Lloyd 1955:239). In a political system where, beginning in the nineteenth century, heroic warriors often came to enjoy an authority second only to that of the *ọ̀ba* (Barber 1991:205),

and where chief drummers rarely held a formal position in the political hierarchy, one could speculate that a *báálè* or *ààrẹ onílù*'s identification with lineages of warriors and kings became a means of enhancing his status in the community.

## Learning

While the *Ayàn* drummer's knowledge of his own lineage is a key to his self identity, knowledge of other people's lineages, especially those of kings, chiefs, and other big men is his stock-in-trade. This knowledge, as one member of the *Gbòngán* drummers association suggests, can only be acquired through experience:

It takes you a long time because you have to know the lineage of people so that when you see them you can create their *oríkì* [attributive poetry]. You memorize all this in your brain. All the praise poetry of people in your village – this is where all the work lies. The more you go out with older people the better you become. (Egbé Onílù *Gbòngán* 2010)

In other words the work of the *dùndún* drummer is that of absorbing and recombining fragments of history and biography in ways that are contextually and individually fitting. But this history is not written down; it is learned from one's elders and recreated in musical performance.

“Once we start drumming we remember all the history,” says Ayangbile of Èrìn-Òṣun, “it is just like you're talking.” The histories of the town and of its key personalities are not

recorded anywhere, he says, “the history has been put in their memory in the language of the drum” (Ayangbile 2009). For drummers in this Yorùbá town, historical knowledge does not exist independently; it is activated in performance. While drumming (like other forms of Yorùbá oral performance) may record and reflect the ongoing events of society as poeticized history; it also activates the past in the present. As Ayangbile of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun suggests, drumming is an activity that invokes social relationships both in the present and back through ancestral time. The *oríkì* (attributive poetry) for the present *ọ̀ba* of Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun consists of the recitation of the names and attributes of past kings: “We greet all the people that have been *ọ̀bas*—his [the *ọ̀ba*’s] forefathers, and all the kings that have existed. We greet them and call their *oríkì* every Friday morning when we go to the palace” (Ayangbile 2009). These invocations of the past serve to make public and audible the legitimacy of the king’s authority. From the Yorùbá viewpoint a historical lineage is not conceptually distinguished from a living lineage group (Schwab 1955:353). Lineage depth, in other words, registers not as distance from the present, but rather as an accrual of the past in the present (see, e.g., Barber 1991:14-15). Therefore, as Ayangbile suggests, the *ọ̀ba* not only represents himself; he also represents an entire genealogy of kings and their combined powers and personal attributes. This historically-compressed and concentrated sense of the king’s character is evident in the *oríkì*, or attributive poetry, that drummers must play for him. It is the *dùndún* musician’s responsibility to keep this history alive

in his own family's repertoire of drum poetry and active in the *oba's* mind through the regular recitation of the king's personal poetry. The Aragbiji (king) of Iragbiji even suggests that public knowledge of the *oba's* office depends on the hereditary system of drumming: "All those who drum in this town are from these [Ayàn] families. They all know the history of this [the Aragbiji's] office; it is passed from fathers to their children." Like other oral traditions in which cultural knowledge is passed between generations, he says, elder drummers want their children to know the royal history so that "this thing will not die with them" (Aragbiji 2009; c.f. Hale [1998]2007:19-24).

Drumming in a particular town requires extensive knowledge of local history and political personalities, as well as knowledge of the musical preferences of the ancestral and spiritual personalities that comprise the town's imaginary. As Ayangbile (2009) puts it, in reference to the drummers of Èrìn-Òṣun, "They know all the history of this town, all the gods [òrìṣà] that exists in the town, and the history and music they like to dance to. [They know] *egúngún* [manifestation of an ancestral spirit] too...and the kinds of drums he likes to dance to." This music is not just for the deities and spirits, however; it is used to publicly acknowledge and address devotees of a particular deity or the member of a family that carries an *egúngún* masquerade. By invoking a patron deity or ancestral spirit, the drummers stir the adherents to dance as they sing their praises.

Drummers, in other words, must know more than rhythm and tone. Their repertoire addresses a wide range of contexts, personalities, and histories. For Ayansina, learning the tradition involved more than just drumming. Perhaps influenced by his time in the professional theater, he characterizes the drummer as a sort of dramatist: “If you are a drummer, you must know about art, literature, danc[ing], sing[ing].” Concurring with Ayansina, my interpreter added, “A good drummer is a playwright [and] director. Drumming can be used to explain the history of the whole town” (Ayansina 2009).

As for the mechanics of drumming, there is no formal instruction. Children begin by listening to and memorizing what their elders are playing and this is how they eventually learn to play. They typically follow their father and other elders on outings and they learn by absorption, imitation, and trial-and-error. Boys as young as three to five may begin holding drums and following behind the older boys and men as they perform. Boys of this age are not allowed to play, but they do carry drums for their seniors. Depending on aptitude, boys begin playing at the age of six or so. They will start on a *gúdúgúdú* or a small hourglass-shaped called *kà̀nàngó*, then progress through the support (*atẹ̀lẹ̀* or *ìkẹ̀hìn*) and lead support (*isáájú*) drums before taking up *ìyáàlù*, the master instrument. With two to three years spent mastering each drum in the sequence, a child will spend between eight to ten years, depending on proficiency, learning the secondary drums before moving on to the lead drum, which itself requires an

additional four or more years to master (Ayangbile 2009). Chief Rabiú Ayandokun of Èrìn-Òṣun, for example, started on a small fixed-pitch drum of the *bàtá* family called *kúdi*, graduating within two years to playing the other supporting drums. By nine years old, says Ayandokun, “you must know how to play rhythm well.” Ayandokun claims that he had mastered all of the supporting drums (*omole*) by age thirteen and that by fifteen he could play *iyáàlù* well in both *dùndún* and *bàtá* ensembles. Some do not start *iyáàlù* until age seventeen, he says, but he was a “fast learner” (Ayandokun 2009; Ayangbile 2009).

Because it is such a long process of training, and because the quantity of historical and poetic material they must learn is vast, the Ayàn men with whom I spoke emphasized the importance of starting young, at a “tender age” as Ayansina of Ila-Orangun (2009) put it, and learning gradually. Ayanpade and Ayanleke of Èḍe say that they were able to learn the *oríkì* and lineages of all the important people in the town only because they have been accruing this knowledge gradually from the time they were children: “Since we were young, we’ve been doing this thing: once we hear a name we will not forget it. We learn it with time” (Ayanleke 2009; Ayanpade 2009).

Discipline can be harsh for children who make a lot of mistakes while learning. The most common technique involves striking the offender on the head with a drumstick. My *ògá* (master/teacher) Gbeminiyi Akintunde, also known as Ayanladun, son of the Báálè *onílù* of



Gbòngán, describes the practices of punishment and reward that attend young people's learning in a hereditary professional environment: "You now want to practice it. At a performance, when the drum is down [i.e., when your master is on break], you may pick it up and say [vocalizes drum tones]. But not as [well as] your father or ògá. And if you miss it, he can give you a [mimics using a drumstick to strike top of researcher's head]. That is the joy of it—you can see from their eyes that they are not happy, but when you perform very well they can take money from [their] pockets and dash you and put it on your head, even when you are playing accompanist" (Akintunde 2010b).

Elders do not typically have the time or inclination to sit down and teach their children or other apprentices formally (Ayandokun 2009), but Ayàn men do report, however, that if they did not understand what their elder was playing on a particular occasion, they could always ask him when they returned home from the outing. When asked if children are allowed to ask questions of elder drummers, Ayangbile replied, "If we start drumming and they don't understand, then we explain to them how to go about it." Ayansina of Ila-Orangun (2009) remembers going through this process many times as a child—trying to imitate, making mistakes, and asking questions—until he got things right.

Akintunde (2010c) describes the experience of training as a child in terms of two areas of learning. One was the learning of accompaniment, which he considers an essential first step

in becoming a good lead drummer: “The moment you are playing it [accompaniment], you are putting that tempo in your body, so when it is time to play the master drum [you have it in your body]”

The second area is the learning of drum speech – both its content and poetic formulas. Akintunde did so by following and observing his father’s ensemble during festivals: “When you are three, four, or five they do not allow you to play, but you can be listening. That’s how we learn about praise poetry.” He describes how he came to memorize lineage relations and personal attributes of townspeople by observing the ensemble’s performance of *orki* (attributive poetry) as they moved from house to house:

“Ojurongbe ó *şògo şògo*” [Ojurongbe, you will boast/be proud]—that is praise for some people. So [they say] each lineage. We get to another and they say, “Alaije, *omọ Siawo*” [Alaije, son of Siawo]—that is another house. This year they say it and next year they [will] say it. Every time we get to that house and start reciting their praise poetry...that is how we normally put it in mind. So now you decide you want to be a drummer. Your memory will be flashing to that: when we go to this house, this is what we normally say; when we go to this room, this is what we normally say. So that’s how we gradually learn the language of the drum. (Akintunde 2010c)

Ayansina, too, reports the festival as being an important context for learning drum language and the histories and personalities it records. He cites Ila-Orangun’s annual Orò Festival as being formative in acquiring his knowledge of local lineages. The festival used to be celebrated over thirteen days and it involved everyone in the town: “So [the drummers] go to each

compound and they praise each family by their names and their father's name. So they go from compound to compound, one house to another, so through that they learn different people's names and *oriki*" (Ayansina 2009).

While learning *dùndún* depends largely on observation and repetition, there are occasions where more expressly instructive techniques may be used to teach children drum language. Gbeminiyi Akintunde of Gbòngán (2010c) reports, for example, that elder drummers would test him when he was a child by speaking to him only through the drum: "At times, if they want to talk to us, they don't talk with their mouth. If they are holding their drum, they can say,"

Ayanladun, wá	Ayanladun, come.
Ayanladun, wá	Ayanladun, come.

Bá n gb'omi o	Bring me water.
Bá n gb'óúnjẹ mi	Bring me my food.

Or they will use drums to communicate something private, so that "other people there will not know what they are saying":

Níbo l'ó ní bá lọ?	Where are you going?
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Mo fẹ lọ tọ ni o.	I want to 'ease myself
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Bàbá, eélódó ni ka kójo f'in?	Father, how much money should I collect for you?
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“So that is how they teach us, gradually progressing, when they use the drum to talk to you” (Akintunde 2010c). The effects of Western education on teaching and learning *dùndún* will be discussed in Chapter 5.

### Ensemble formation

Ayandosu (2009a) says that once a drummer has graduated from his apprenticeship with a master, he is free to form his own ensembles, but he is still required meet with town drummers and the *báálè onílù* (chief drummer) prior to large events: “After they have learnt how to drum and are now free, each one has his own group and places they go, and we have our group and places we go. If we want to have a celebration, all of us will gather here. We make provision for food and we eat and drink and dance.”

Even when a drummer is old enough and skilled enough to start his own ensemble, principles of age stratification and the authority of seniority remain active in family contexts. In a compound of hereditary professionals like that of Rabiú Ayandokun in Èrìn-Òşun, everyone defers to the eldest male in the family for professional leadership. This patriarch coordinates the formation of family ensembles and decides who will play on a particular outing. He delegates responsibilities to junior family members, and chooses which events will and will not be attended. Once he makes a decision, says Ayandokun (2009), “you cannot

refuse.” This elder family member will negotiate payment for the group and will, because of his seniority, take a greater cut of the earnings even if he does not play as well as younger members. But in some cases, however, like in Ayandokun’s family, the eldest male may also be the *báálè onílù*, so he will receive the tributes due to a man of that title.

### ***Leadership and governance***

#### ***The báálè or ààrè onílù***

Each town or district has a *báálè* or *ààrè onílù*, who is usually the eldest man of one of the Ayàn lineages. *báálè onílù* and *ààrè onílù* are synonymous titles, the usage of which varies by location. *Báálè* is a contraction of *ọba-ilè* (king/owner of the land). This neither confers on the titleholder a royal pedigree, nor guarantees him a place on the king’s cabinet, but it is a recognized chieftaincy title that signals seniority and authority among professional drummers.

The title of *báálè* or *ààrè onílù* may remain within a single house and be passed down the patriline. This appears to be the case in Iragbiji, Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun, Ila-Ọ̀rangun, and Ede (Ayandosu 2009; Ayangbile 2009; Ayanpade 2009; Ayansina 2009). Ayandosu of Iragbiji was firm about this, stating that there are no other families in Iragbiji that have held this title and that all the families that know how to drum in this town learned from his own family. “There is no other household that can lay claim to the *báálè*,” he asserts. In his view, it is only the

family of the *báálẹ̀* that can “beat the drum for the *ọba*.” From what I observed this isn’t strictly true, as I witnessed a number of different groups of drummers play at the king’s palace, but what he may be saying is that only the *báálẹ̀* and his family can maintain a symbolic relationship with the king by nature of the title that they hold. Those who, by whatever means, attempt to usurp this title will be, he suggests, subject to retribution of a metaphysical sort (Ayandosu 2009b). While most *báálẹ̀ onílù* were not this outspoken in defending their position, most of them did claim that the title had been held by their family for at least four generations.

This title, however, is not always the exclusive property of a single compound or household. In the town of Gbòngán, for example, it was reported that the title alternates between two or more Ayàn compounds, within which the title is passed through the male line (Akintunde 2010c). If there are men from more than one house who are eligible for the title *báálẹ̀* or *aàrẹ̀ onílù*, the candidates must be nominated by committee and engage in a campaign for the position, which includes making an offering of food and money to the king (Ayandosu 2009a).

The *báálẹ̀ onílù* is the primary gatekeeper through which any professional drummer, whether local or outsider, seeking to play at town events must go. If one plays a professional event without permission of the *báálẹ̀*, that person can be fined and their instrument can be confiscated. In relation to town events, the *báálẹ̀* vets outside musicians, delegates

responsibilities to town drummers, and mediates conflicts among musicians. All drummers who play professional outings are expected to pay him a small tribute from their earnings. The *báálè* is expected to be a figurehead and does not often perform, except in some cases for the *òba*, so he depends on these tributes for his living.

As Ayangbile Ayanniyi (2009), *Báálè Onílù* of Èrìn-Òṣun, replied when I asked him the significance of his position, “I am the head of all drummers. They do whatever I tell them to do. They cannot do whatever I am not interested in. If a drummer comes from another town, like Ìlòrín or anywhere, he has to see me before he starts drumming in this town or else I could tell them to bring his drum [confiscate his drum]. He has to get permission from me.”

Furthermore, visitors and resident drummers alike must always seek the *báálè*'s approval when they wish to go on a particular outing and they must bring the *báálè onílù* a “token amount” each time they play such an occasion. The *báálè*, says Ayangbile (2009), does not dictate how each group divides its earnings, as long as the members set aside a tribute for him. The *báálè* may be called in to mediate, however, if there is a dispute over money among members of a group or between a group and a patron.

The *báálè onílù* is beholden to the king of his town. Ayangbile, for example, is required to play in the palace every Friday, when the *òba* holds his weekly meetings with the town chiefs. He will bring his drummers there in the morning to recite the *oríkì* of the king and the

chiefs as they arrive. While the other palace ensembles I witnessed used only *dùndún* drums, Ayangbile's palace ensemble mixes *bàtá* and *dùndún*. In addition to his palace responsibilities, Ayangbile may be called by the *ọba* to organize drummers for a social event or "spiritual occasion" at which the king's presence is required. Ayangbile says that he is also part of the king's cabinet, so "[we] do things together." He claims that the *báálẹ̀* is typically part of the king's cabinet throughout Yorùbáland, but this is not the case in Gbòngán, where the *báálẹ̀ onílù* holds no official position in the *ọba*'s governing apparatus. But the *báálẹ̀* is expected to be in close contact with the king about anything having to do with entertainment in the town or ceremonies involving the king.

The Báálẹ̀ Onílù of Iragbiji, Ayandosu (2009a), asserts that he has an exclusive relationship with the *ọba* of the town and that it is the *báálẹ̀* alone who acts as representative of drummers in the palace: "It is only the *báálẹ̀*'s family that is close to the *ọba*. When the *ọba* has an occasion, he calls upon the *báálẹ̀* who now invites other drummers to drum at the occasion." While this may be true in terms of normal protocol, it is not strictly true that the *báálẹ̀ onílù* is the only drummer with access to the king, since *ọbas* today may be approached by citizens of any status or title.

Ayansina of Ila-Orangun (2009) views the *báálẹ̀ onílù* as a mouthpiece of the *ọba*: "He is the one that carries information from Kábiyèsí [honorific address of king] to the people. The



*oba* communicates through him to the whole community.” When I asked him about the relationship between the *báálè* and the *oba*, Ayansina said: “Without the king there won't be drummers and without drummers [no] king.” Perhaps this is a bit hyperbolic, but it does indicate a belief, which I heard echoed by others, in the interdependence of these two professions—the king patronizes drummers and drummers create his public persona. Ayansina continues, “If *Kábiyèsí* wants to do anything there has to be drums. If one praises him through the drum he will be happy. If they praise his father too, he will be happy and feel elated for making him to remember his father.” In practical terms, the *báálè* is responsible for communicating between the king and the town’s musicians, and for organizing the king’s musical retinue anytime he appears in public.

The *báálè* or *aàrè onílù* shoulders leadership responsibilities in his immediate community and because of this, as in towns such as *Gbòngán* and *Iragbiji*, he is not expected to be an active performer. In *Èdè*, however, the *aàrè onílù* sits and plays with the palace drummers. *Ayanpade*, who holds this title, told me through an interpreter that “he has the responsibility of praising the *Tìmì* (king’s title in *Èdè*) every day. This gingers the *Tìmì* for the purposeful action of the day.” The *aàrè onílù*’s ability to rouse the king’s spirits with praise is a specialized skill that requires knowledge of the names and attributes of all the men who have historically held the title of *Tìmì*. *Ayanpade* typically leads the ensemble and his subordinates

learn as they provide musical accompaniment. “It is like a division of labor,” he says (Ayanpade 2009). As for his responsibility to the community of drummers, he makes himself available when others need advice, and they meet with him when they want to “enhance their welfare” as professional drummers.

### Drummers associations

“Traditional” drummers meet in associations separate from those of popular musicians. The traditional associations in Òṣun State have town branches that meet typically every two weeks at the houses of their members and a state branch that meets monthly. *Dùndún*, *bàtá*, and *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* (cowry-strung gourd rattle) players meet together in the State Association, and this is also true in the town association of Gbòngán. While *bàtá* drummers typically maintain separate professional spheres outside of association meetings, *dùndún* drummers and *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* (*ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* players) continue to work closely together, especially in Òyó Yorùbá communities like Gbòngán and Èdẹ, as they have since the early twentieth century (Olaniyan 1984: 73).

Drummers associations are supported by systems of dues paying. In Gbòngán, for example, members each pay ₦500 (\$3.00) monthly to support the town association. The town association in turn pays State Association dues, which was reported as ₦1,000 (\$7.00) every three months. Town associations may also collect dues from performing ensembles, and may

also set aside a portion of dues for the *bádlè onílù*, chiefs, and the king of their town. If a town wants to host a State Association meeting, delegates of the Association must approach and greet the king and bring him a gift (Ayandokun 2009).

The first agenda of the drummers association is to advocate for the profession.

Ayanpade of Ede (2009) discusses the drummers association as a place to talk about the “progress” of the town, as well as more concrete issues associated with the “day-to-day activities” of members. This includes resolving disputes among members, and exercising power in numbers if an outside party treats drummers unfairly: “If someone wants to cheat us, we rise up to the challenge and fight for our right[s].” An issue that Ayanpade is particularly invested in is that of state and federal government recognition for traditional drummers associations. He laments that the government recognizes associations of popular musicians, like those who play *jùjú* and *fújì*, but they do not recognize traditional drummers associations. When popular musicians are invited to government functions, they are given transportation and donations for their work. Traditional drummers, he says, do not receive such assistance or acknowledgement. Ayanpade is also advocating for official recognition of his position as *aàrẹ onílù*, head of all the drummers in the town. As *aàrẹ onílù*, he believes that he should be paid a salary and should receive transportation assistance, including an official vehicle with his name painted on it. Of

his effort to garner government support, he says, “we need them to help us promote our work” (Ayanpade 2009).

In a similar effort, Gbeminiyi Akintunde (2010a) and his colleagues in Gbòngán’s town association are lobbying the federal government to regulate the Òṣun State drummers association. By registering the association, Gbemi says, it fosters “unity” among traditional drummers, gives them much-needed official recognition, and offers them legal protection. If registered with the government, police will not trouble them, and members cannot be pressured into bribes. Because the association includes *dùndún*, *bàtá*, and *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* musicians, there has been some discussion about the name to propose for registration. One suggestion was to include the names of all the drums, but Akintunde feels that the generic *Ègbé Onílù* (Drummers Association) is preferable to naming all the individual drums.

Another intention of association meetings is to foster community feeling among professional drummers. According to Chief Rabiú Ayandokun of Èrìn-Òṣun (2009), who belongs to both a town and state association, sharing ideas and experiences about “progress for traditional drummers” is a key agenda of the Òṣun State Association. Drummers are encouraged to let the association know about their experiences of playing different places and with different types of patrons. The reasoning is that where problems are reported, the association can investigate and resolve them.

Part of community building is the maintenance of high standards of professional conduct. Drummers associations maintain best practices in several ways: first, by assessing fines or other sanctions on members of the drumming community who do not follow proper protocol – including proper dress, instrument care, and event invitations—and second, by negotiating with or sanctioning patrons who treat drummers poorly.

It is standard practice for hosts of social and religious events to issue invitations to drummers they wish to attend, and for drummers to seek the permission of the town's *bádílè* or *aàrẹ* prior to playing. The drummers with whom I worked take this protocol seriously because they see it as key to maintaining the dignity of their profession and countering the common notion among the general public that drummers are *alágbe*, or beggars, a notion that those who show up to events without invitation or permission tend to reinforce. Following protocol also saves a drummer the embarrassment of appearing before a town association for fining or having his drum confiscated during an event. I have witnessed such a hearing, and while all parties had a fair chance to make their cases, the discomfort of the alleged offender was palpable. This is not social control for its own sake, however; a difference in the quality of musicianship is clearly evident between events that are and those that are not held to professional standards.

The association serves as the primary negotiating body between drummers and their patrons. If a king, “òrìṣà people,” or other patrons want to do any event where they require a certain number of drummers, this must be discussed by the association, and the *báálẹ̀ onílù* will delegate responsibilities and decide which ensembles will be involved. If the *badlẹ̀* or *aàrẹ̀* has a misunderstanding with the king regarding an event where his drummers are to appear, the association will discuss it and find a solution. If a drummer has not been paid, or a patron has not paid the agreed upon amount, the association must discuss the grievance. The association will do its due diligence and may ask the drummers, “Did you do what you were supposed to do?” If there is a dispute with a patron of high standing, such as a king or chief, the association may send a delegation to discuss the complaint with him. On the other hand, if a major patron is unhappy with the conduct of a drummer, he can file a complaint with the association. A scenario in which this would happen is uncommon, but might be, for example, that one of the drummers neglected to use an *ìyáàlù* with brass bells. The king might take this as a sign of disrespect because the use of bells on the *dùndún* is a sign of respect for the royal family. Another case might be that a *báálẹ̀ onílù* appears at an event with the king wearing clothes unbecoming of his stature. In both cases the king would be warranted to lodge his concern with the town or state association (Ayandokun 2009). Disputes between *òrìṣà* people and the

drummers who work for them may also call for association intervention. If a host embarrasses a drummer, the whole association can boycott him until he pays them a fine (Ayandokun 2009).

Although associations typically only adjudicate professional disputes, they will on occasion handle personal disputes among members or their families. At one town association meeting I attended in 2010, an elder member was held to account by the association for allegedly neglecting one of his wives. The women of the house knew that by interrupting the group during a bi-weekly meeting, they would get the attention of the full association. It proved an effective tactic for the wife and her supporters to speak to the group, and the men of the association encouraged the elder man to better care for his wife. An association member summarized the group's decision: the men reasoned that, if the elder man's wife were to die from neglect, they would be required as drummers to be involved in the funeral ceremonies. They concurred that they did not want to be put in that position, so they instructed the man to attend to his wife.

### ***Economic organization of drumming***

#### **Drumming as material pursuit**

While the *dùndún* drummers whom I interviewed expressed pride in carrying on the tradition of their fathers, they equally celebrated the material gains—however modest—

afforded them by their profession. In an extended eulogy to the *òrìṣà* of drumming, *Ayàṅàgalú*, Euba's collaborator Laisi Ayansola expresses the various ways in which the deity supports the material well-being of the drummer, from the fundamentals of marrying, supporting children, and building houses to the purchase of luxury items and the potential for social mobility (Euba 1990:97-98). These sentiments were echoed by several of the elder men that I interviewed. The expansion of the family through marriage, children, and the acquisition of property is seen as a primary value of the profession.

The late Michael Abokedi Ogunleye, Ataga (chairman/representative) of drummers for the Aiyedaade Local Government Area, expresses gratitude for the profession that he inherited and pride in what he has achieved from it: "I was born a drummer. Drumming was what [my father] used to marry my mother. When I was crawling I was playing the drum. Until this present day I have drummed – for men's societies, for women's societies, for masquerade. It is the job my father did. Drumming and farming is my main work. I was blessed through this: I got married, trained children through college, and built houses" (Ogunleye 2010).

Ayansina (2009) of Ila-Orangun claims that the profession of drumming not only allowed him to establish a household of his own, but also afforded him and his children increased access to education, employment, and travel. In the 1960s, when he was coming up, there were a wider range of paths open to traditional drummers than ever before. In this



context, Ayansina's skill as a drummer led him to the world of professional theater and the global mobility it offered: "If not [for] drumming I wouldn't have stepped out of this country."

Ayansina also says it is due to his reputation as a drummer that, even though he is in his words an "illiterate," he was able to work in state and federal government for many years as a civil servant.

Despite being embedded in a hereditary system, Ayàn drummers take a variety of routes in their professional lives. Some drummers claim not to have any profession other than drumming. Ayandosu of Iragbiji (2009a), for example, states that his only profession is drumming. In addition to earning money playing in conventional contexts, Ayandosu expanded his horizons by assisting artist and culture broker Chief Muraina Oyelami with his drumming workshops at the University of Ifè. But now that Ayandosu is an elderly *báálè onílù* and cannot play anymore, he makes and repairs drums and is a practitioner of traditional medicine.

Although it is possible for *dùndún* drummers in contemporary Yorùbáland to make a modest living at drumming alone (Ayanleke 2009; Ayanpade 2009), this is uncommon among the elders I interviewed; most men held supplementary professions, if not currently then at least during certain periods in their lives. Among the professions reported to me were farming, tailoring, and trading, as well as those related to the manufacture and repair of drums. Some drummers also took advantage of the growing contexts of neo-traditional drumming and

international collaborations in postcolonial Nigeria. Chief Rabiú Ayandokun's (2009) professional trajectory illustrates this well. His father had three wives and nine children, every one of whom learned to play *dùndún* and *bàtá*. His father permitted them to take another profession only after they learned to drum first. When Ayandokun was in primary school, his father gave him a small drum to take to school because Ayandokun's father felt that his son must become a professional drummer. Ayandokun committed himself to drumming, playing traditional *bàtá* and *dùndún* with his father's group, while also performing in popular bands, theater troupes, and experimental collaborations. As a young man in his twenties, Ayandokun took a brief hiatus and moved to Lagos in the mid 1970s to try his hand at professional trading, but within a few years returned to drumming as his primary profession (Ayandokun 2009). Ayandokun continues to play traditionally and work in collaboration with international artists and scholars. Ayandokun's entrepreneurial spirit is not, of course, uniquely Yorùbá; it is but one expression of an adaptation that many West African hereditary musicians have made to survive in urbanized, modernized, and monetized economies (see, e.g., Duran 1987). The global turn that patronage has taken will be more fully examined in Chapter 6.

## Types of patrons and forms of patronage

Euba (1990:72-74) outlines six, sometimes overlapping, “sectors” of Yorùbá society that regularly patronize *dùndún* drummers: devotees of the *òrìṣà* (deities); families celebrating life-cycle events like a naming, wedding, or funeral; Yorùbá Muslims celebrating secular events; social or occupational groups, such as a town hunter’s association; families of *egúngún* masquerades; and *ọbas* and their subordinate chiefs. Euba’s observations in the 1970s are more or less borne out by my own research—all of these social groups remain active to some degree as patrons. One difference today, according to the Ayàn men with whom I spoke, is that as the numbers of *òrìṣà* practitioners have dwindled and periods of traditional celebrations have in some cases been shortened, so have opportunities for *dùndún* drummers to earn money in traditional contexts. Royal patronage remains an active, if inconsistent, institution, offering selected drummers unparalleled access to the *ọba*’s palace, and the patronage of the kings, chiefs, and big men who grace its grounds. But due to the growth of religious fundamentalism and the declining economic power of traditional leaders, fewer *ọbas* today are willing or able to support drummers. Earnings garnered from appreciative patrons at life-cycle ceremonies and occupational social events appear to be the bread-and-butter gigs of the *dùndún* drummers with whom I work. For drummers connected to Nigerian or Western scholars and culture brokers, university theater departments, such as those in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ìbàdàn, have since the late 1960s

become significant patrons of *dùndún* drummers. Outside of academia, bandleaders in popular music like *fújì* continue to offer opportunities attractive to young drummers.

Although there are many types of patrons, there are only three primary forms of patronage on which *dùndún* drummers depend. The first is what I would call established ties, or long-term patronage, such as that between an *oba* and his palace drummers. The second is event-specific patronage, such as retainers or prearranged payments made by hosts to ensembles in order to ensure their presence. The third is “incidental” or spontaneous patronage, arising from interactions between drummers and their addressees at social events. The Ayàn men I interviewed denied any efforts to pursue long-term patronage, and suggested that the rewards of day-to-day incidental earnings at social events were greater. Long-term patronage may be a welcome result of consistently masterful performances, but it is not the goal. The main goal, drummers say, is that they want to get paid – whether it is an advance payment for a performance or whether it is a felicitous interaction with a patron at a party.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> According to DjeDje (2008:136-137), Hausa *goge* (one-string fiddle) artists recognize a similar set of patronage forms, including “short-term contracts,” “long-term agreements,” and “gift-giving.” Dagbamba *gondze* fiddlers, however, prefer to see themselves as permanent clients of the Ya Naa (king/ruler), even if they do garner income from “common” patrons. Fiddlers are sometimes critical of *lunsi* (talking drummers) for their perceived preoccupation with short-term patronage (ibid.:200-202). See also DjeDje (1982) for a comparison of Dagbamba and Hausa patronage systems.

### Established ties: royal patronage

The Ayàn men I spoke with insisted that they never think of musical interactions as a means of developing long-term patronage; they play for whomever calls on them (Ayansola and Oyelami 2009). Both my own and Euba's research shows, however, that whether or not these established relationships are explicitly articulated, they do exist. An *egúngún* family, for example, will likely hire the same drummer repeatedly because this drummer knows the *oríkì* of the mask better than anyone. Similarly, as Ayandosú of Iragbiji (2009) suggests, those allowed to drum directly for the king will be a select group of drummers, some of whom come from families with generations-old patronage relationship with the king. Such drummers are retained on either a full or part-time basis. The initiative for long-term patronage, then, appears to lie with the individuals and groups in a position to hire drummers. Respected drummers will not seek out these patrons, nor will they explicitly acknowledge (at least not to an outsider like me) any interest in "cultivating" these patrons. Their goals, says Oyelami, are more immediate: they wish to recite people's *oríkì* well and to be remunerated for their work (Ayansola and Oyelami 2009).

There is one form of established patronage, however, that has been very important historically to the development of *dùndún* drumming – the retention of drummers at the *ọba*'s palace. In the past, drummers were a necessary part of palace staff, but these days fewer *ọbas*

have the means or willingness to retain drummers at their palaces on a daily basis. The kingdoms of Iragbiji, Èdẹ, Oşogbo, and Ọyọ are four prominent exceptions. Drummers are retained there daily during the working hours of the palace, and are kept available to follow the *ọba* to public events as is necessary.

According to the Aragbiji of Iragbiji (2009), the retention of drummers as full-time palace employees is not common today. There is no government support for such palace affairs and so the employment of drummers has to be a “private initiative” of the *ọba*. The Aragbiji says that he, along with the Tìmì of Èdẹ (who is also the grand patron of the Ọşun State drummers association), the Aláàfin of Ọyọ, and the Atáọja of Oşogbo (office of which was in dispute at the time of my research) are among the few *ọbas* in Yorùbáland who have elected to retain drummers on a daily basis. Even though his predecessor did not follow the practice, the current Aragbiji chose to reinstate drummers in the palace because he sees both their pragmatic and symbolic value in the affairs of kingship. In his view, they help him create an air of “hospitality” and cultural pride at the palace and provide him with valuable information about the people coming and going from the palace grounds. The drummers in the Aragbiji’s palace earn money by playing for visitors, who then “dash” or “spray” them with money in appreciation. Regardless of what they earn from visitors, however, the Aragbiji gives them a monthly stipend: “Even if they did not receive any [gifts from visitors], I give them enough to

feed their children.” They gave up their lives as farmers to work at the palace, he says, so he feels responsible for “sustaining” them.

In some kingdoms, like those of Gbòngán and Èrìn-Òṣun, the *obas* have elected, largely for pragmatic reasons, to invite drummers to the palace once a week. The Olúfi of Gbòngán, for example, retains one particular ensemble of drummers at his palace on Fridays to act as a welcoming committee for the weekly meeting of the council of chiefs. This is also true in Èrìn-Òṣun, where the king gives drummers a small token of food and ₦1,000 (\$7.00) each week that they appear at the palace.

The Olúfi says that in past times it was much easier for *obas* to support retinues of drummers on a full-time basis:

In the past, every king was supposed to have drummers to recite in the palace. In the past the institution was self-financing. It was compulsory [for the populace] to bring tributes to the *oba*. The *oba* would have lots of resources. There was none that could not maintain his own drummers. [He would] even build quarters [for them]... So in past it wasn't difficult for an *oba* to maintain a workforce, including drummers. In the past, wives of earlier kings would stay and be taken care of by the new king. Everyone was expected to live on the palace grounds. (Olúfi 2010, paraphrased)

What the Olúfi describes here could be thought of as “subsistence patronage,” that is, labor in exchange for a place to live and food to eat (Duran 1987:234). But colonial political arrangements, the Olúfi asserts, largely dismantled the *oba*'s ability to command and redistribute the material resources of his people: “When colonialists came, they removed a lot

of [the *ọba*'s] powers, to ensure that their own authority was not [disrupted].” To this day, traditional councils constituted by kings and their chiefs are given no powers by the national constitution, although some Local Government Areas have chosen to acknowledge them with limited financial allotments. In Gbòngán, which is under the aegis of the Aiyedaade Local Government Area, affairs of kingship depend to some degree on voluntary donations or tributes from the public. While Aiyedaade does set aside 5% of its budget for the operations of traditional councils, these funds must be split among the councils of six kingdoms within the Local Government Area. Therefore, the Olúfi's patronage of palace employees, including drummers, is severely limited by financial constraints.

### Event-specific payment

Hosts of events or programs may meet with the leader of a group of drummers and pay them an advance to secure their attendance. The head of an *òrìṣà* family, for example, may ensure the participation of a group of drummers he likes by speaking with the *ògá* (head/master) of a particular ensemble. The *ògá* would then have to clear this with the *báálè onílù*. This “cash advance,” according to Euba (1990:69), is known as *owó ipèlù* (lit., “money for calling the drum,” or, invitation fee). In addition to money, promise of food and transportation may be used as a partial form of payment. In most cases, it is something that drummers expect.



When inviting drummers to a festival or ceremony, for example, *òrìṣà* devotees who are celebrating will be expected to provide food, money, and sometimes transportation to the musicians (Ayandokun 2009). Indeed, at all of the outings I attended, food was always provided to the drummers free of charge.

According to all of the *báálẹ̀ onílù* with whom I spoke, when an *ọba* is planning a royal event, he will call directly on the *báálẹ̀ onílù*, and they will discuss the entertainment arrangements. The *báálẹ̀ onílù* will then delegate responsibilities to the other town drummers. Whether or not the *ọba* provides an advance payment, drummers will be free to pursue patrons in the course of their obligations to the king. In any case, the drummers who perform there (whether town drummers or outsiders) will have to pay tributes both to the king and the *báálẹ̀ onílù* of the town

Interpreting for Ayansola of Iragbiji, Chief Muraina Oyelami says that a professional *dùndún* drummer would never approach an event organizer and beg to be included. If a drummer is talented and a patron is impressed with him, he will be invited to events. In his capacity as *Eésà* (high chief) of Iragbiji, Oyelami does this when he hears a drummer he likes. But long-term strategy regarding patronage is not part of the drummer's thinking. Drummers have a professional "pride" that Oyelami claims prevents them from directly asking patrons for work (Ayansola and Oyelami 2009).

In Gbòngán, the town association determines how much can and should be collected as advance payment for particular events. The guidelines, as outlined for me by association member Gbeminiyi Akintunde, delineate what will be collected respectively from “òrìṣà people,” “*egúngún* people,” and other hosts. Whatever the amount, it is required that a certain portion of this pre-payment be given by the chosen ensemble to the town association as set-asides for chiefs and other VIPs. The family of an *egúngún* masquerade might, for example, pay a drum ensemble ₦5,000 (\$33.00) up front to ensure their participation. The *ògá* (master/head) of the ensemble could hypothetically divide it so that ₦1,500 (\$10.00) goes to the town association as set-asides for chiefs or other important elders. He could then give ₦1,500 (\$10.00) to a senior drummer or to other exceptional drummers, to “impress them” and keep them on board for the performance. The *ògá*, if he is the one who arranged the advance payment, is permitted to keep the remainder. When a group leader is hired and paid for a performance ahead of time, he is allowed to keep that money so long as he has paid the necessary tributes and association fees for the performance. Other than that required for tributes and fees, however, the leader is not required to disclose the pre-performance earnings to his group, because if he did they might “trouble him” about it. Pre-performance or up-front payments are expected, because spraying is contingent on the level of performance, and on the responsiveness of the audience (Akintunde 2010a)

## Incidental earnings

By far, the biggest source of income that drummers have is what they earn spontaneously in performance through face-to-face interactions with patrons. This is what (Euba 1990:69) calls an “incidental fee.” I have adopted Euba’s term, but with a couple of clarifications. First, the term “incidental” is not meant to imply that such earnings are unimportant; in fact, they are what drummers rely on more than any other form of patronage. The term is intended to analytically differentiate this form of economic transaction from established patronage or event-based payments. Drummers who play in palaces, for example, depend on incidental earnings regardless of whether the *ɔba* offers them a monthly retainer or other gifts. In one case recounted to me by the palace staff of a prominent kingdom, the *ɔba* recently offered the drummers a salary on the condition that they no longer accept money from palace visitors. The drummers declined this, knowing that they would earn far more than what the *ɔba* offered them if they could accept money from visitors. Second, incidental earnings are not accidental; they are based on drummers’ informed and skillful navigation of a variety of social contexts. The reward can be significant for a drummer’s quick recall and ability to artfully recite the lineage history and attributive poetry of the important members of his community.

This practice of seemingly spontaneous gratitude, in the form of “spraying” money on musicians as they perform, proceeds by more or less agreed-upon rules. Even when a drummer is friends with the person for whom he is playing, the success of such spontaneous transactions are always contingent. It is rare that a potential patron will actively spurn or criticize a drummer’s performance – that would be considered a serious insult—but the more attention a drummer can command from his patron with a masterful performance, the more money he will be given in appreciation. As Gbeminiyi Akintunde puts it, what you as a drummer earns depends on whether the potential patron is “sweetened” by your playing. Spraying is not considered mandatory, but depends on “audience enjoyment.” When a drummer effects this joy or sweetness of mind in his audience, there is an unspoken “agreement” that the addressee will “appreciate” him with money (Akintunde 2010a). It is expected that if a person is impressed with what the drummer plays for him, he will give according to his desire and ability. The money offered may be placed on the forehead or temple of the lead drummer. It also may be handed to the drummer, or tossed in his direction, at which point the musician’s juniors will pick it up.

## Redistribution of earnings

In the context of an ensemble outing, money earned in spontaneous interactions with patrons is collected according to a specific protocol and divided by the group according to an established formula. During group outings where there is an *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* (gourd rattle player) present, he is the one who collects the money and stuffs it into the body of the gourd. It is not insignificant that the *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, also referred to as *ajé* (epithet of the goddess of wealth), is the one instrument in the group that is covered in cowry shells, an old currency of exchange on the Atlantic coast. If the group does not have an *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, or if the *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* is busy when a patron is spraying money, one of the *omele* players (usually a junior member of the ensemble) will collect money. The ensemble that I performed with took ten to fifteen-minute breaks every couple of hours during an outing. During rest periods, the group would find a private place where the money earned could be counted. After all of it is accounted for, the money is then given to one ensemble member to hold. Typical ensemble earnings for an outing varies “by the grace of God” says ensemble leader Muritala Alani, but he cites ₦10,000 (\$67.00) as a reasonable estimate for a small event. Rabiú Ayandokun, on the other hand, cites figures of ₦40,000 to ₦500,000. But the daily earnings of an ensemble, he affirms, ultimately fluctuate according to the number and type of patrons who are present, as well as by the length of the event.

According to Gbeminiyi Akintunde (2010a), a person's age is the first determining factor in what portion of the earnings they will take home. One's performance role (lead drummer or accompanist), or in other words, their relative "prominence" in the performance, is the second factor. The money is first divided into separate allotments for *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* and *dùndún* players. Further internal divisions and distributions are then made. Among the *dùndún* players, the eldest man will always earn the largest portion, followed by the *ògá* or group leader. The remainder will be divided according to age and prominence in the performance; it is not always distributed equally. If, for example, there are two *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* and ten *dùndún* players (including a leader and an elder) and a total of ₦3,000 is earned for the gig, the money is divided in thirds: one third (₦ 1,000) would go to the two *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, who will divide the money according to seniority; one third (₦ 1,000) would be given to the senior *dùndún* drummers, divided among the leader and the eldest man in the group, with the elder receiving more than leader (e.g. ₦ 600 to elder; ₦ 400 to leader); finally, one third is shared among the remaining eight junior *dùndún* players, with the allotment scaled according to the member's age (e.g. ₦ 100, ₦ 80, ₦ 50, etc.).

The relatively large proportion of group earnings that is allotted to the *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* is indicative of their value to a *dùndún* ensemble. According to Akintunde (2010a), *dùndún* players see *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* as belonging to a specialized class of musicians, descending as they do

from non-Ayàn lineages and hailing from a “northern tradition” (north of present day Ọyọ).

*Dùndún* families, I was told, have historically had to teach *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* the poetry and praises of their houses and communities because the *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* came from lineages with different historical roots. Based on my interactions with the members of the Gbòngán Drummers Association, however, the *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* appear well integrated (at least professionally) into the community of drummers and they seem to know the repertoire as well as anyone. But their role as vocalists is coveted and there are fewer of them than there are *dùndún* practitioners. In short, *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* are more in-demand and therefore more valuable, so they are considered for a greater share per person than the supporting *dùndún* players.

In practice, the redistribution process is more complex than the formula suggests. There may be, for example, both fixed and contingent set-asides that need to be made before the earnings are divided. First of all, money must be reserved for tributes to the town’s *báálẹ̀* or *aàrẹ̀ onílù*. Regardless of where an ensemble performs, whether it is next door or on the other side of the Atlantic, the members are expected to pay tribute. While some interlocutors said that tributes are typically small and that their primary purpose is to show respect for the *báálẹ̀* or *aàrẹ̀*, others insisted that tributes must be substantial enough to offer him some security, since he is a figurehead who is not expected to perform regularly for money. The elder men of a compound, as well as those in the family that hold chieftaincy titles, will also be given set-

asides. A small amount of money is then reserved for fees paid to the town drummers association, sometimes prepared in the form of an *owó ìwé* – a receipt indicating that an ensemble has played a professional outing. This piece of paper must be presented to the town drummers association along with a nominal fee of perhaps ₦50 (\$0.30). This fee is deducted before earnings are distributed. Additionally, there may be contingencies related to instrument repairs. While drummers are expected to do their own repairs, if a drum “spoils” (ó bàjé) during a performance, then a certain amount, say ₦200 (\$1.30) might be deducted from group earnings prior to distribution to assist that drummer with purchasing new skin or other materials necessary for proper repair. While food is typically provided by a host, drinks are typically purchased out of the group’s earnings.

### ***Conclusions***

My goal in this chapter has been to add layers of ethnographic and biographical specificity to the typically broad surveys of social context found in scholarly works on *dùndún* (see, especially, Euba 1990; Olaniyan 1984). By focusing on voices and selected biographical details of my collaborators, as well as firsthand observation from field research, I examine how social organization is understood and lived by individual musicians. Structures of family and lineage, leadership and hierarchy, and the economics of patronage inform the everyday work of



hereditary *dùndún* drummers, and these are topics about which they have a lot to say.

Attending to these discourses illuminates how musicians negotiate between what is given and what is possible in their professional lives. The past is always present, but it is malleable—emphasized or revised to maximize one’s pedigree or justify the authority of a title. Hierarchies of age and title rule the profession, yet at the same time common drummers have empowered themselves through affiliation with guilds or associations. *Dùndún* drummers value material achievement as much as cultural pride, yet obligations of monetary redistribution in one’s house and community may slow entrepreneurial advancement. Nonetheless, many *dùndún* professionals have sought out new types of patrons and forms of patronage – remapping a familiar system across wider domains in order to improve their and their families’ economic situations. This dialectic of structure and agency, stasis and change in the *dùndún* tradition is the subject of Chapter 6. First, however, we look at how *dùndún* drummers use words and sounds to discursively reproduce, yet simultaneously influence, Yorùbá social life.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**DRUM TALK AND THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL LIFE**

*Performance roles and functions*

The preceding two chapters examined aspects of the metaphysical and moral imagination that surround *dùndún* drumming in small-town Yorùbá land, as well as drummers' own perceptions of their professional social organization, which cohere in discourses of family, governance, and patronage. The present chapter narrows the focus to *dùndún* drummers' participation in particular social contexts and how their musical discourses reproduce expected social structures and dynamics, while simultaneously influencing the outcomes in unpredictable ways. I argue that the apparently diverse roles and functions of *dùndún* drummers can be reduced to two social ends—first is the motivation, enhancement, or extension of individual personalities and second is the coordination of group social action around a particular person or towards a specific goal. Skillfully negotiating complex and often politically-charged social landscapes, drummers simultaneously give their patrons the recognition they expect, serve their duties to kings, and facilitate performances of social distinction and group cohesion.

The social “work” that *dùndún* drummers do is tied closely to Yorùbá language-culture more broadly. The richness of the Yorùbá lexicon and the flexibility with which it is used

allows for both fine empirical distinctions (Hallen 2000) and elaborate poetic constructions. In a culture where sound itself is deeply affective and language is socially effective, the insightful, prudent, and aesthetically-pleasing use of words is a respected skill and a sign of good character (Fayemi 2009:169). *Dùndún* drummers, as well as the oral poets with whom they commonly perform, are the finest verbal artists of this kind (although goodness of character does not always follow in proportion!) As a speech-surrogate instrument, the *dùndún* can convincingly reproduce the tones, timbres, and inflections of the Yorùbá language. *Dùndún* drummers, therefore, have at their disposal a massive corpus of oral literature that they recite over a selective repertoire of interlocking melorhythmic patterns – some of which also have their roots in language. By fluidly fusing music and language from a variety of sources, *dùndún* drummers affect the minds and sentiments of individuals and effect collective action.

Such ideals of verbal artistry are also linked to Yorùbá notions of human personality. By textually constituting an individual's persona as a web of historical occurrences, personal relationships, and symbolic associations, *dùndún* performers play a key role in the enactment of public identities and the mobilization of community feeling. One of the primary verbal genres through which drummers accomplish this is *oríkì*, “attributive” poetry that is directed towards a particular individual and which encapsulates and magnifies the unique personality of the addressee. In contrast to deterministic strains in Yorùbá philosophies of personality, *oríkì* texts

and performances (whether chanted or drummed) suggest that human personality is not simply an inheritance but rather, in the terminology of linguistic anthropology, a “social achievement.” As Barber and Waterman (1995:257) describe the discursive construction of personhood in *oríkì* performance, “The creation of social personality is the outcome of work: prolonged and vigorous attention from others is what constitutes a salient social personality. And the elements out of which the social persona is constituted speak with a multiplicity of voices. The ‘self’ appears highly concentrated – almost magnetic in its compact radiance - but at the same time internally highly diverse, assembled from networks of past and present personalities.” Yorùbá texts and their musical performance, then, focus energy and attention on an individual, while simultaneously drawing in the people around him or her through associations of kinship, town identity, religion, and the simple joys of participation. In a culture where authority is earned by the accumulation of “wealth in people” (Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Guyer 1993) and ritual success depends on community participation, drummers’ skill in mobilizing individuals and groups is always in demand for the affairs of sacred kingship, *òrìṣà* devotion, and ancestral masquerades.

This chapter is based on participant-observation with *dùndún* ensembles and, in some cases, individual *dùndún* drummers as they entertained at dances and life-cycle events, enacted ritual dramas, and facilitated political life in *ọba*’s palaces. I draw as well on personal

conversations and public comments by *obas* (kings) about the significance of drummers in Yorùbá society. I am personally indebted here to the Aragbiji of Iragbiji, the Olúfi of Gbòngán, the Olódwu of Òwu, and the current Tìmi of Èdẹ, as well as to the intellectual legacy of Oba Laoye, the late Tìmi of Èdẹ. *Obas* are particularly well-situated to comment on the roles and functions of drummers, as historically, drummers accompanied them in all their activities from waking to sleeping. *Obas'* work as spiritual and community leaders necessitates that they think about the big picture of their society and culture, and they understand well drummers' places in it. This is not to say, however, that drummers themselves lack a critical sensitivity to the place of their profession in society or how they are perceived in it. As we have seen in Chapter 3, these are, in fact, among the primary concerns of drummers associations. I expand on the *obas'* ideas and insights by providing additional examples both from palace drumming and performance events outside of the palace. Translations and interpretations of texts are my own unless otherwise indicated.

In the discussion that follows, I use the term *role* to indicate the position, identity, or stance a person assumes in a given situation. This is explicitly different from the meaning of *role* as a long-term or “invested” social identity. *Function*, on the other hand, connotes a person's relative contribution to a particular situation. A function, in other words, is what one achieves in, or by means of, a particular role. *Dùndún* musicians, who must quickly traverse

different social terrain and mediate face-to-face interactions, may shift roles and functions according to the nature and dynamics of particular social situations.

### The eyes and ears of the *oba*

In the royal palaces where they are retained, *dùndún* drummers typically sit either out front of, or just within, the palace gates and serve as the first intermediaries between the public and the king. By observing palace activities, welcoming visitors, and relaying information, the *dùndún* extends the king's faculties of perception and communication. Indeed, to the Olóðwu of Òwu, *dùndún* drummers are the “eyes, ears, and mouths of the palace.” Because they are located in the center of the palace, at its entrance, they observe everything, both obvious and hidden:

In fact, the drum not only dictates the pace of life in the palace, it exposes the inner goings-on of the inhabitants of the palace. It drives them, moves them, warns them, makes them happy, makes them sad, and limits them. The palace has its own population of powerful servants - wives of the old kings that have gone and district chiefs whose minds and pulses an ordinary observer can not read or even feel. The palace is the abode of the wives and women of the reigning monarch, [and] the visitors who come to spy on other occupants or sow seeds of discord among them. Call them [drummers] harbingers of good and bad news. Right at the entrance of the palace sits the private eye and mouth of the drum, which sees everything and can communicate with and to all as he deems fit. (Olóðwu 2010)

*Dùndún* drummers make it their business to know the movement of residents and visitors on the palace grounds:

The drum gives information about those that come into the palace, whether they be friends or [foes]. If the *oba* is within hearing distance, he can decide if he wants to see them or not and in turn has a way of informing the reception area/the drum area as to what he decides. The drum gives information about the movement of the chiefs, the children of the *oba*, and the *olori* [head wife]. You can get all kinds information from the drum. Where has the *olori* gone to? The drummers can inform you. (ibid.)

Even though people do not tell the drummers where they are going, the drummers “know their movement.” But this keen eye is not just watching others, it is also trained on the *oba* himself:

“The mind and movement of the major inhabitant, known as the king (*oba*), is under the insuppressible vigilance of the drum.” While enhancing the *oba*’s awareness of what is going on in his palace, in other words, drummers may subject the king’s own actions and intentions to the same scrutiny.

Drummers have a coded communication system with the *oba* that allows the two parties to work together as an organic entity. For the Aragbiji of Iragbiji (2009), talking drummers serve to announce visitors to the palace, but they also inform him in veiled language if there is anyone coming who may have troublesome motives. The drums can be heard clearly from the Aragbiji’s office, so he can conduct business while being informed of exactly who is coming and going and what their intentions are. There are coded phrases – typically obscure Yorùbá idioms that only the *oba* will understand - that a drummer can play to inform the *oba* that a person of questionable character is coming. The drummer can, for example, urge the *oba* to act with care

and maintain even temperament (Aragbiji 2009). Coded communication can also serve more mundane matters as well: “It can aid the *oba* in getting things done,” says the Olódwu of Òwu, “I was going to the gents [toilet] a little while ago, and he [the head drummer] was asking me where I was going [with his drum] and I gave him a signal so that he knows where I was going. They speak to me from time to time. The drum communicates with the *oba*, but the *oba* has a way of answering without anybody knowing. There is a ‘pally-pally’ thing going on between the drum and the *oba* in the palace” (Olódwu 2010). Examples of such coded communication will be discussed in the second half of this chapter.

In addition to extending the *oba*’s faculties of observation and communication, drummers are also expected to extend his attitude of hospitality. Drummers are in the palace to entertain visitors, even when the *oba* is not around. The purpose of having them is to show “hospitality,” make the palace a “convivial environment” (Aragbiji 2009), and contribute to “merrymaking” at festivals and ceremonies (Olúfi 2010). The physical manifestation of this hospitality is dance: “The spirit of the palace drum is very entertaining, accommodating, spirit of friendship, joy, and festivity. The language of the drum, especially its rhythm, is best captured by the body of the listener” (Olódwu 2010).

Although putatively an extension of the *oba*’s apparatus, drummers in today’s economic climate, where the *oba* no longer has the resources to be a musician’s sole patron, drummers



may shift loyalties among their various patrons for a price (as is also true of *jalolu*, or griots, in the Gambia today, see Ebron 2002). Drummers, in other words, are not always neutral parties – they may be on the side of the *ɔba* or they may be persuaded, often with money, to act against his interest. As the Olóðwu (2010) puts it, “The inhabitants of the palace all have purposes and things they want to have and achieve. People are there to seek their own self-interest (as it is in wider domain). The spirit of the drum can vary from time to time – it can agree with the *ɔba*, who is the head inhabitant of the palace, or it can disagree.” He continues, “The drum is the close confidant of the *ɔba*, but it can also be the confidant of the *olori* and the chiefs, and anybody else. Especially more so in this day and age, ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune.’ This may be why most [kings] don’t pay too much attention to the place of the drum in their palace.” In the tangled politics of local kingdoms, the convivial spirit of the drum can become twisted into something more dangerous:

The fact is that there is some of the same going on with other inhabitants, the quiet...chiefs who have things in their minds [i.e., they are hatching schemes]. Between the *olori* as well, if she does not like what the *ɔba* is doing, the spirit of the drum can commune with the *olori*. The spirit of the drum can communicate or commune with complete strangers. They know the stranger when he comes, if he is the type that relates well in the palace. It depends on what the drum wants. The spirit of the drum won’t always be loyal to the *ɔba* and the inhabitants who seek interest of kingdom. If it goes and aligns with people who don’t seek the interest of the kingdom, then the kingdom is endangered via the drum. That is a situation that one hopes does not happen. (Olóðwu 2010)

In short, drummers' intimate access to the king and his palace is what makes effective their work on his behalf. But it is this same intimacy that makes drummers' ability to convey criticism or denunciation in a pronouncedly public way a potential risk for kings.

### **Magnifier and motivator of kings**

The performance of oral literature by *dùndún* drummers is fundamental to the contexts of Yorùbá sacred kingship. Like the famed *jalolu* (griots) of the Gambia, *dùndún* drummers must be “personality specialists,” rendering words musically to construct a powerful public image and motivating personal narrative for the king every day. The Tìmì (king's title) of Èdẹ's drummer Ayanpade (2009) says that of his duties as Aàrẹ Onílù of Èdẹ, the most important is his recitation of the king's lineage: “All the *ọbas* that have been king, I must greet all of them one after the other.” Interpreting for him, the current Tìmì of Èdẹ's son, Prince Lawal, expands: “Baba [Ayanpade] has the responsibility of praising the Tìmì every day. This gingers the Tìmì for the purposeful action of the day.” The job of the *dùndún* palace drummer, in other words, evidences what Eric Charry (2000:58) calls “the symbiotic relationship between speech and action” common to the court music of many West African societies. The royal bard's ability to speak and the king's ability to act are interdependent—without the great deeds of kings, the

*dùndún* drummer has nothing of which to speak; but without the speech of the drum encouraging and directing him, the king may be unable achieve such things.

Knowledge of history, for this reason, is a key element of royal music. *Dùndún* artists are “historical record-keepers” in the sense of tracing lineages, knowing the customs and history of the *ọba*’s office, and in documenting current events: “The palace drum, the talking drum, is a well-known, well-tested historical record-keeper. The drum knows the history, cognomen of every important compound, citizen, and chief. And as soon as they appear, the drum goes up to recognize and praise such individuals” (Olódòwu 2010). History, for some *ọbas*, serves as a form of personal and professional guidance and motivation. The Aragbiji of Iragbiji (2009), for example, suggests that drummers’ advice is worth considering “because of the history they know, and their experience, they understand the nitty-gritty of the *ọba*’s office and duties, though they may not always be right.” In this sense, the Aragbiji asserts, drummers can have “influence” even though they do not have “power.” They influence the *ọba*’s self image within a historical context, the way he conducts himself in public affairs, and the way others perceive him. Historical knowledge, viewed this way, is not static; it is constantly in play to legitimize or change the social environment through its daily telling and re-telling. This active sense of the past-in-the-present underscores the dialectic of “word and deed” by which history extends into the future. As Jali Mamadou Kouyate, narrator of the great Mande kingship epic, puts it,

“in this way Balla Fasseke [the *jali*] reminded Sundiata [the king] of the history of Mali, so that, in the morning, he would show himself worthy of his ancestors” (Niane 1965:63). This captures well the motivational uses that *dùndún* artists make of kingship history.

The Olúfi of Gbòngán (2010) describes his *oríkì* and the active significance its historical evocations have for himself and his progeny:

In 1759 the first Olúfi came from Ọ̀yọ́-Ilé, capital of the old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire, which was probably the most prominent of pre-colonial empires. It stretched from Ọ̀yọ́ to Ogbomoso, to Gbòngán. [Slaves] were taken from Ọ̀yọ́-Ilé ...to Gbòngán-Ilé, the first settlement. All of these things are packed in to our cognomen, our *oríkì orile* [*oríkì* of origin]. When they recite the *oríkì* of the Olúfi, they recite not only his lineage, but also all the things that happened on his journey from Ọ̀yọ́-Ilé to this place [present-day Gbòngán town]. My predecessor, the late Olúfi, was a professor of African Studies who documented this entire *oríkì*, 293 stanzas long. This will tell our children and grandchildren how their ancestors settled here. It was a son of the Aláàfin [king of Ọ̀yọ́] who settled here. That is why he is praised as the owner of the land: “Babaà re ló nilè / ìwo máa rìn / máa yan ...” (your father is the owner of the land, walk as you like, stride majestically). That is the beauty of the talking drum. (Olúfi 2010, paraphrased)

A crucial purpose of drumming in kingship, according to the *obas* with whom I spoke, is to stoke the *oba's* pride and his desire for great achievements by extolling the actions and attributes of his ancestors. As the Aragbiji of Iragbiji (2009) puts it, “Drummers trace your history and encourage you to do things like your forefathers have done, they motivate you, to encourage you to strive to do something better.” This is done through the recitation of the king's *oríkì*, poetry which names the *oba's* ancestry and the personal attributes and

achievements of his forefathers. Proverbs and other genres of oral literature may be excerpted and interpolated into the *oríkì* as part of a composite representation of the *ọba*'s character. The Aragbiji summarizes the effect of hearing his *oríkì* in this way, "They [palace drummers and praise singers] will tell stories of my lineage – you want to do as your forbearers have done, and you want to even surpass them! It makes you feel proud that, yes, your pedigree is good. They use the drum, but sometimes they supplement it with the *aro* man [praise singer] talking" (ibid.).

The Olúfi of Gbòngán (Olúfi 2010) likewise describes the psychic impact of hearing his *oríkì*:

The praise poetry is the only thing, the major thing, that makes a man proud of his heritage. As they recite it, they tell you about the exploits of your great-grandfather: wars he fought against certain tribes, the laurels he won, how he expanded the kingdom, the size of his farm, the number of his wives and children. There is no question that you become proud and almost wooden-headed that [this] other person is your progenitor. It is an aspect that makes the *ọba* feel that he is one wanted by the people and the one chosen by God for them. The Yorùbá believe that the *ọba* is the second in command to God. It makes a king feel happy, elated, and ready to give out anything. There are stories of those who were praised and divided the whole of their kingdom into two – giving half away to the people. It [praising] is a very, very powerful tool to excite the king and make him feel important. When you say someone is next in rank to God, it means every other person is subject. It is, at the core, expressing the importance of the king to him. There is no king that will not feel very happy. People who know how to praise well [can be made rich]. When they praise the big men, there is almost nothing they [the big men] cannot give. (Olúfi 2010)

Casting the experience in near-mythological terms, the Olúfi shows just how deeply affecting it can be to hear the words of one's own *oríkì* (glossed here as “praise poetry”) and how important this is for the self-identity of the *ọba*. By reminding powerful people of their greatness, *oríkì* can evoke profound sentiments of magnanimity and motivate extraordinary acts of generosity. Such verbal artistry, as we will observe in *dùndún* performances, simultaneously draws hierarchical distinctions while catalyzing a redistributive ethic.

The recitation of *ìjùre* (greetings for waking)<sup>18</sup> remains an important duty of drummers in palaces where they are retained full time. *ìjùre* is almost always the first thing that palace drummers mention when I ask them about the work they do for the king. The former Tìmì of Èdẹ, the late Ọba Laoye (1972), emphasizes its significance: “One of the most important functions that the drum performs is to wake up the *ọba* in the morning. At the entrance of every palace, you must find the sight of drummers waiting there. The first duty they perform early in the morning is to play *gbèdu*, a royal march, to wake up the *ọba*. Before playing the march they would be playing certain things to alert the *ọba* that it is time for him to get ready to come out.” He jokes that when he was first installed as *ọba*, they would start playing at 5am,

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<sup>18</sup> *ìjùre* is a term used by Akin Euba to describe drum music that is used to wake the king. Although it is not a term that my interlocutors themselves used, I find it useful as shorthand.

but he begged them to come later, telling them to buy some chickens and feed them before coming to the palace (Tìmì of Èdẹ 1972).

The tradition of *ìjùre* still continues in the town of Èdẹ. These greetings proclaim that the *ọba* will rise with strength, that his enemies are no match for him, and that his health reflects on the health of the community. Typically the *ìjùre* begins with a “prelude,” in which these exhortations are recited by the *ìyáàlù* without accompaniment and in metaphorical poetic constructions. This is followed by the metric *gbẹdu* section, a “royal march,” performed by the full *dùndún* ensemble over which the *ìyáàlù* drummer will recite general idioms and proverbs that he feels are appropriate for the *ọba*. The *gbẹdu* march may go on as long as an hour, only after which will the drummers begin their full day of work at the palace gate announcing and greeting entering or departing guests (Tìmì of Èdẹ 1972).

The Tìmì of Èdẹ’s chief drummers, Ayanleke (2009) and Ayanpade (2009), said that they play *ìjùre* for the Tìmì every morning before 7am. Ayanpade typically leads the group, and his “subordinates” follow along. “It is like a division of labor,” the Tìmì’s son Prince Olusola Lawal (2009) concurs. While a full recitation of the Tìmì’s *ìjùre* is longer than this, these are the verses that the Ayanleke and Ayanpade chose to highlight for me. The two Ayàn played the texts on the drum and recited the poetry verbally, while Prince Lawal provided running

translation and helpful interpretations. The *ijire* begins with an idiomatic expression, indicating one's deference to the king:

Èru ọba ni mo bà                      It is the king that I fear

Ọba tó                                      Great king

Prince Lawal (2009) emphasizes its social meaning, as an utterance that by acknowledging the king's legitimate rule and one's own submission to it, places the speaker hierarchically lower than the king: "The king is to be feared in any community in Yorùbáland because he is an authority."

The next line is a common morning greeting, often used by drummers to address kings and chiefs. It is worth noting that the king is called here by his personal name, a privilege enjoyed by drummers and royal bards that is not extended to the general public:

Adesola, o jíire, o jíire              Adesola [king's given name] did you wake up well? You woke up well.

The waking of the king is metaphorically linked to the waking of the natural world. As the world awakes, so the king awakes – this is the natural state of affairs. A full *ijire* usually achieves this effect through a litany of different beings waking, usually including the elephant as a symbol of the king's fortitude, but here the drummers offer just two:

Èmọ jíire lójú òpóolé              The bush-rat/guinea pig awoke by the house-post



Àfè-ìmòjò jíire nísáà rẹ      The grass-cutter awoke in its hole

As Prince Lawal explains it, the drummers are saying to the king that even as the lowliest of animals have awoken, “so we expect you to wake up well.” Like all Yorùbá poetry, however, there are additional meanings. The *àfè-ìmòjò* has a symbolic relationship with Yorùbá kingship. This hole-dwelling animal’s tail was used by some *ọba* in Yorùbáland as a sign of royalty, an *ìrùkẹ̀rẹ̀* (royal switch), held in front of the mouth while speaking (*Dictionary* [1913] 2006:8; Abraham 1958:318).

The well-being of the king’s body is then metaphorically linked to the well-being of the body politic:

Adesola bó bá ti jíire àbùṣe bùṣe      Adesola, if you have woken well, our work is finished [i.e., all is well]

Panning out from this particular king to the title he holds, the man is linked to his office, and the office is linked to the body politic:

Tìmì, bó bá ti jíire àbùṣe bùṣe      Tìmì, if you have woken well, our work is finished [i.e., all is well]

As the “traditional ruler” wakes well, suggests Prince Lawal, so does his kingdom as a whole: “all is well” in the town and “everything is fine, we are okay.” A king’s healthy waking, then, signifies that his town is under control and presumably at peace (Euba 1988b:45). Such metaphoric conflation of the king and his town makes material as well as symbolic sense. In a

sacred kingship tradition where, in earlier times, a town's material and human resources were entirely under the king's control, the town's wealth was the king's wealth, and vice-versa in times of need (Falola and Adebayo 2000:99-100). The fitness of the king for rule, in this context, was more than a metaphoric indicator of a town's relative health; it had material consequences that could intimately affect the entire population under his jurisdiction.

Like much Yorùbá poetry, human affairs are described through metaphors of animals and the natural world. Trees and elephants, for example, are commonly employed as metaphors for kings and other great men. Within the context of royal poetry, the imagery of the natural world has the effect of naturalizing the king's authority as preordained and not subject to contest. In this case, the king's authority is as natural as one species of tree's domination over another:

Igi dáràjù nígbó, wọ̀n fi ìrókò j'ọ̀ba igi	The most superior tree in the forest, they have made ìrókò the king of trees.
--------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In addition to the naturalization of his political authority, metaphors are also employed to naturalize the king's strength and ability to dissuade opponents. The unshakable tree stump, for example, is a proverbial image sometimes found in *oríkì ọ̀ba* to indicate the king's ability to withstand opposition (see Euba 1988b for *oríkì* of Ọ̀ba Laoye, the late Tìmì of Èdẹ̀; Sotunsa 2009 for *oríkì* of the Olúfi of Gbòngán and that of the present Tìmì of Èdẹ̀). In this case the

leopard, an image commonly used in royal drum poetry as a metaphor of strength and cunning (Sotunsa 2009: 85), is used here to symbolize the *oba*'s natural superiority in taming opposition:

Èran kòtì dojúkọ ẹkùn.      The ordinary animal only reluctantly confronts the leopard

In addition to or in place of *ijüre*, there may be other forms of morning greetings that serve similar psychological-motivational and personality-enhancing functions. In the town of Gbòngán, since the Olúfi today resides in a compound separate from the palace, the drummers recite his *oríkì* at his residence on Fridays, the day he holds court. The poetry does not contain any references to waking and it appears to be different in poetic construction from that of the present Timì's *ijüre*. Nonetheless, its intention is the same: to remind the king of his good pedigree and encourage him to carry out the day's work with strength and confidence. As the Olúfi makes his way to work at the palace, the *dùndún* ensemble of Muritala Ayanboye salutes the king as he arrives, creating a motivational narrative through the accumulation of key phrases: "babaà re lónilẹ̀" (your father owns the land), the Olúfi is told repeatedly, therefore, "ìwo máa rìn" (you will walk freely), and "máa yan" (stride majestically). This poem simultaneously motivates the king to behave according to his status and projects to the listening public the king's inherited right to do so. Motivation and enhancement of personality

are in this way intertwined. The title of *oba* is rightfully his, but he must constantly strive to live up to it by acting accordingly.<sup>19</sup>

### Magnifier and motivator of the ancestors

Apart from the daily affairs of kingship, talking drummers' duties as magnifiers and motivators extend to ancestral masquerades (*egúngún*) and deities (*òrìṣà*). During annual festivals, drummers serve a key motivational and personality-enhancing function for *egúngún*, the ancestral spirits that are evoked or “manifested” in elaborate masks.

In 2009, I observed and participated in the annual *egúngún* festival in Iragbiji as a guest of Chief Muraina Oyelami. I chose to focus my attention on and follow one particular *egúngún* throughout the festival. In the “old days,” says Oyelami, every family had an *egúngún* to honor one of their ancestors. Over time, some masks and families have become more prominent, whereas others have died away since their families no longer practice the tradition.

Alápánsánpá is a prominent *egúngún* owned by the Ayibiodo Compound in Iragbiji. The name Alápánsánpá means, “You are the owner of your arms that you can swing back and forth,” which signifies, in Oyelami’s words, that “you are your own person, you can do as you like and act with freedom” (Oyelami 2012a). Drum poetry documented by one of Chief Oyelami’s

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hale ([1998] 2007:48) describes this same duality of purpose in the work that Mande *jalolu* (griots) do for their patrons: “Praise constitutes, then, an announcement not simply of qualities but also of duties and responsibilities.”

university pupils (Sulaiman 1984/85), for example, recasts Alápánsánpá's *oríkì* name as a symbol of personal agency and transgressive action:

Alápánsánpá, inú níbì baba wọ̀n	Alápánsánpá, their fathers are annoyed
Ó dà bíí kója sọ̀nù	It appears as if the arm is missing [one is swinging his arms]
Baba ẹ̀nikan ò jápá sọ̀nù, kíngbọ̀	No person's father has [ever] snapped off his arm, that I have heard

As his name and *oríkì* implies, Alápánsánpá is, in Oyelami's words (2012a), a "rascally" character who exhibits "toughness of personality." This does not mean, however, that he is permitted to act against the moral standards of his community. Since he is known as a mischievous *egúngún*, Alápánsánpá is given his own day to go about the town with his *atòkùn* (junior or assistant). The third day of the now seven-day festival (formerly three months) belongs to him alone. Alápánsánpá traverses the town paying homage to deities and ancestors at key locations and offering blessings to town chiefs, *olòdògùn* (medicine makers), *babaláwo* (Ifá priests), and members of the lineage from which the *egúngún* hails. The elder women of Alápánsánpá's family will accompany him singing his *oríkì* and announcing his presence, usually followed by a gaggle of raucous young men.

During the 2009 festival, I followed Alápánsánpá and his entourage as he made his way around the town of Iragbiji, blessing family and other important community members. The

“musical” segment of the entourage included *dùndún* drummers – ranging in age from children to elders – and a group of mostly older female *oríkì* chanters. A group of drummers, including my teacher Ayansola, initially attached itself to Alápánsánpá and followed him for the first part of the morning. But through the course of the day, drummers would splinter off and rejoin at various points. At one point, only Ayansola stayed with Alápánsánpá, playing motivational phrases for him or playing *oríkì* for relatives of the *egúngún* whom Alápánsánpá would stop and visit. From time to time the drummers from that morning would rejoin Ayansola and together they would play music for the *egúngún* to dance.

The day begins as drummers, family of the *egúngún*, and onlookers gather around the ancestral home of Alápánsánpá. The yard in front of the house slopes upward towards raised ground on all sides, creating the dramatic effect of an outdoor amphitheater. The drumming becomes heated as the crowd anticipates Alápánsánpá’s emergence from his home.

Alápánsánpá’s minimally-costumed youthful “guide,” or *atókùn*, is running around outside the house inciting the *egúngún*’s entourage of young men to run through the yard and whip each other with sticks (a common activity of young men during *egúngún* festivals). An up-tempo rhythm is played on the accompanying drums, a pattern commonly used to identify the addressee as an *egúngún* or a member of its family. While each *egúngún* normally exhibits particular musical preferences, this rhythm is considered generic enough to be played for any

mask. There is a brief argument among drummers about Alápánsánpá's delay in his house. I can hear *iyáàlù* players occasionally calling out the name "Alápánsánpá!" on their drums. As the anticipatory energy builds, a group of four *iyáàlù* drummers gathers in the center of the yard and in thunderous unison call out on their drums an exhortation to Alápánsánpá:

Alápánsánpá!

Alápánsánpá!

A bìdí ẹṣin "bátá kùn bátá kùn"

Who can put the backside of the horse down like "bátá kùn bátá kùn"?

Níbò ni ó kọ ìdíṣin ní lẹhún

Where will you put the backside of the horse, over there?

Addressed to Alápánsánpá, this passage is turned from riddle into rhetorical affirmation of the *egúngún*'s power. There is a complex semiosis here through which talking drummers use words and sounds to convey meaning and bring public personas into being.<sup>20</sup> The establishment of communicative context is the drummer's first responsibility. Through the act of naming and the use of identifiable rhythmic accompaniments, drummers define the parameters of any given interpersonal encounter, ratifying intended participants and audibly marking their social positions. By invoking his name over a rhythm generically associated with *egúngún*, the *iyáàlù* players have designated Alápánsánpá as the primary addressee and subject around whom their musical discourse is meant to cohere. The lexical parts of the text function symbolically, which

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<sup>20</sup> My thinking here is influenced by Thomas Turino's (1999) interpretation of Peircian semiotic theory.

is to say, they are linguistic signs that convey generalizable meaning *about* something else—in this case, conjuring up the image of a horse and rider. There is, of course, an indexical process taking place as well in which, through discursive repetition, the *egúngún* is associated with this powerful animal and its skilled handler. The *iyáàlù* players add yet another layer of significance through the use of onomatopoetic words. The nonlexical phrase “bátá kùn bátá kùn” enhances the text with an iconic reference to the impact a horse’s hooves might make as it is turned in a tight circle. Together, the words and sounds are integrated to index Alápánsánpá’s power – both associatively and experientially conveying the *egúngún*’s force of character [Figure 1].

**Figure 1: “A bìdí ẹ̀ṣin”**

♩ = 120

Iyaalu  
A lá pán sánpá A bì dí e sin bá tá kùn bá tá kùn

Isaaju

Ikehin

Iy.  
Ní bò ní ó ko ì dí sin ní lò hún

Is.

Ik.



The *iyáàlù* players repeat this musical passage several times before they are interrupted by the *egúngún*'s handlers, who inform the musicians that the masquerade is about to emerge from his house. As Alápánsánpá becomes visible, wading slowly through the crowd surrounding his house, the *iyáàlù* players together strike up a percussive, nonlexical rhythm [Figure 2].

**Figure 2: Alápánsánpá's rhythmic "theme"**

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system consists of three staves: Iyaalu, Isaaju, and Ikehin. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120. The Iyaalu staff features a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes, accented with >. The Isaaju staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes. The Ikehin staff has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system consists of three staves: Iy., Is., and Ik. The Iy. staff has a melodic line with eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests, including triplets and accents. The Is. staff continues the eighth-note accompaniment. The Ik. staff continues the steady eighth-note accompaniment. The score concludes with a double bar line.

Although this rhythm does not belong exclusively to Alápánsánpá, it functions as an identifying musical "theme," repeated throughout the festival whenever he wants to dance. Alápánsánpá moves slowly down the front stairs, where he is greeted by women who bow before him, give

him sacrificial offerings, and receive his blessings. He is a compact but imposing figure, enhanced by a colorful shawl that is inlaid with mirrors, and a carved wooden headpiece that extends backwards behind the head. He moves purposefully, not exactly lumbering, but measured and powerful. Alápánsánpá signals the beginning of his signature dance by throwing his horsetail whip into the circle of onlookers, to which the crowd responds with cheers.

The drummers continue to turn up the “heat” – beating the thematic rhythm with greater amplitude and intensity. Alápánsánpá repeats his dance two times through. Unlike his junior, who is incessantly running about and dancing athletically, Alápánsánpá does not run or move with any high velocity motion. His dance is neither quick nor nimble, but it is precise and powerful, projecting the strength and energy of a virile and vital elder.

When he is finished dancing and begins walking away from the house, the drummers and entourage quickly follow after him. After winding through the narrow dirt pathways between houses for some time, the drummers lose track of Alápánsánpá. Eventually we catch up with some of Alápánsánpá’s followers at one of the town’s Ògún shrines, which in this case is a large rock with a crevasse carved out of the middle. Searching around, Ayansola drums the name of the mask: “Alápánsánpá!” While waiting by the shrine for Alápánsánpá to return, the drummers strike up a rhythm different from the first – one that is a “generic” 12/8 *egúngún* rhythm that can be used as an accompaniment pattern for any mask – indeed, I have heard this

same rhythm used in *egúngún* festivals in Èdẹ and Èrìn-Ọ̀ṣun. Some of the young boys who are playing have trouble keeping up the complex rhythm, and their mistakes are sternly corrected by an elder drummer. Ayansola again uses his drum to call Alápánsánpá, inquiring as to his whereabouts:

Alápánsánpá, níbo ló wà

Alápánsánpá, where are you?

The *iyáàlù* drummers are playing idly in waiting, occasionally calling out Alápánsánpá's name on their drums. As Alápánsánpá appears from an alleyway between two houses, the accompaniment drummers strike up the first dance rhythm [see Figures 1 and 2] over which the *iyáàlù* players (three are present at this moment) address the mask in unison with a saying usually reserved for political contests where there is a dispute over electoral candidates. But its application here, says Chief Oyelami (2012b) is as a form of praise singing, as “ego-boosting, to make the *egúngún* feel superior [to] others.” Alternatively or additionally, it could be read as a reference to the rowdiness of Alápánsánpá's followers, and although I have not researched it, it is possible that the phrase indexes a political event in the *egúngún*'s lineage history.

Ìwọ la fiṣe

It is you [addressee] we have chosen

È bá ja ja ja

You [audience] may fight fight fight

Kí ẹ forí sólẹ

So that you knock your head to the ground

The *iyáàlù* players recite these lines several times and in different poetic permutations.

Alápánsánpá, I am told, “accepts the blessings of Ògún” at the shrine and is soon ready to move on. He and his followers move quickly along a narrow path between two houses. Eventually, the mask and his entourage of young men, drummers, and chanting women find their way out onto the town’s main road. The street is filled with people, and lines of cars in both directions are stopped with their horns blaring. Alápánsánpá moves slowly, while the *atókùn* and young men run ahead, stopping vehicles and passersby for monetary contributions. Alápánsánpá would occasionally approach a driver and sometimes lean in to talk to the driver. While many of the drummers splinter off to join the *atókùn* or others, Ayansola stays with Alápánsánpá.

Following Ayansola and Alápánsánpá throughout the day kept me in constant motion. There was a slow progression down the street with a lot of crossing and doubling back and forth. In most cases, whether on the street or at people’s homes, money would be collected by Alápánsánpá or his entourage. Ayansola would collect the money he earned for himself. At certain moments when Alápánsánpá was out in the street, drummers including Ayansola would surround him and begin playing his “thematic” rhythm. The townspeople would gather around and Alápánsánpá would dance to their cheers. A few bold individuals would join Alápánsánpá in his dance.

To summarize, Ayansola’s main work of the day, at least that which was customarily expected of him, was fourfold. First was to announce Alápánsánpá’s presence by name, which he would often vary in terms of rhythm and register while keeping the recognizable tonality of the name. Second, he played idiomatic phrases to encourage and spur the energy of the *egúngún*. One that he repeated frequently throughout the day, often following Alápánsánpá’s name:

Alápánsánpá, ògbòlùú kòlùú

Alápánsánpá, collide [hit him]

Bòd bá ògbòlùú un ó padà lẹ̀hìn rẹ̀

If you do not collide [hit him] he will leave you behind

Ògbòlùú kòlùú

Collide [hit him]

Although an idiom of common usage, it is applied here in reference to Alápánsánpá’s “hard” or “tough” personality, and energizes him by encouraging him to exercise his strength over others (Oyelami 2012a). Although Alápánsánpá himself wouldn’t actually attack anyone, his followers are known for their toughness and fight. Alápánsánpá is thus motivated to maintain a virile stance, lest he be left behind by his opponents.

Another phrase that Ayansola frequently attached to announcements of Alápánsánpá’s name was:

Alápánsánpá

Alápánsánpá

È sí agbada lórí Èṣù

Open the pot that covers Èṣù <sup>21</sup>

This provocative exhortation has a double meaning. It means to unleash blessings, but also to unleash mischief. One could say that this duality of meaning is embodied in the presence of Alápánsánpá, who prays for the town and offers his blessings, yet whose followers unleash quite a bit of mischief at the same time. The image is likely a reference to an Èṣù shrine, which, according to R.C. Abraham (1958:166), is “a pot with a hole in the middle sunk into the ground.” Èṣù, in other words, is used as a metaphor here for the blessings and mischief that this *egúngún* brings to the town – and Ayansola is encouraging him to fulfill that promise.

Ayansola’s announcements and exhortations would often overlap the chanting of women who would call out praises highlighting the singer’s relationship to the mask:

Alápánsánpá ọkọ

Alápánsánpá my husband [i.e., male lineage member]

And:

Alápánsánpá

Alápánsánpá

Bàbàà mi o

My father [i.e., male elder]

On occasion the female chanters would call out pieces of Alápánsánpá’s *oríkì*, praising his status in the community:

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<sup>21</sup> According to Yorùbá literature scholar Sola Ajibade (2010b), this phrase has a double meaning: it means to unleash blessings, but also to unleash mischief. Note that the elided form of *sí agbada*, *ṣágbada*, can also be used here.

Oò mò pé oníwà ní í òshù

One does not know a person of good character to trouble the town

Orí olówó bàbá à mi [ní]

My father has the head [i.e., destiny or divine predisposition] of a rich man

In addition to naming and encouraging the mask, Ayansola was responsible for playing the rhythms to which Alápánsánpá liked to dance. After the morning dance in front of his ancestral home, the mask did his “signature” dance several more times throughout the day in different locations around the town. By providing the musical space for Alápánsánpá to physically express himself, and engage with the townspeople in dance, *dùndún* drummers magnified his public persona.

Finally, it was Ayansola’s duty to play *oríkì* for the people that the *egúngún* visited, accompanying him into the houses of family and important community members. As the *egúngún* was offering prayers and blessings, I could hear Ayansola reciting *oríkì* for the addressees. Like his exhortations to Alápánsánpá, Ayansola’s poetry for those visited by the *egúngún* would be inter-cut with women’s praises for the same men. For example, as Alápánsánpá offered his blessings to a group of men on the front porch of their house, Ayansola played the senior man’s *oríkì*, while a woman in the *egúngún*’s entourage called out a line of praise to him:

Ajíbádé kinní yíì mà yèni

Ajíbádé this thing befits a person

Multiple discourses (naming, exhortation, praising), layers of independent musical voices and rhythms (drums and women’s chanting), the energetic commotion of the *atókùn* and his band of young men, and the participation of townspeople in Alápánsánpá’s dances all meshed to create a rich texture of sound and a visual aura surrounding the *egúngún*. The mask’s perceived power and status in the community became kinesthetically perceptible in the collective movement of bodies in space, especially in the context of crowds where his entourage adhered to him like the rippling trail of a wealthy man’s garment—he was, almost literally, as the Yorùbá idiom goes, “clothed in people.” Visually, he was magnified through his attractive dress, virile dancing, and the size of his entourage. At the same time, his presence was audibly registered in a rich tapestry of music and discourse that filled the space around him. But these are more than artistic or aesthetic gestures that “represent” the *egúngún* – as a character’s theme in film or musical theater might do; rather, the sights and sounds *constitute* the *egúngún*’s persona as a being of great stature and power.

### **Magnify and motivate the deceased**

In the days before modern mass media, drums played an important role as mediators of public information. They would announce and say prayers at felicitous events, such as the birth of a child, or their drumming about public events would warn the king of trouble in town or on



the palace grounds (Olúfi 2010). *Dùndún* drummers today will still be employed to announce the death of an important person. As Ọba Laoye, the late Tìmì of Èdẹ put it, “if a very old person...or nobleman dies in the community, drummers should be requisitioned to play the funeral dirge. And before doing it, to announce to the people, to the town, that somebody very important has passed away, the drummer will play a prelude [of]...solemn words” so that “people will know that someone important is gone” (Tìmì of Èdẹ 1972). But Laoye’s explanation is only partial. The drummers’ function here is not just to convey information; it is to engage in “conversation” with the dead -- to call incantations and *oriki*, as well as playful taunts, in an attempt to motivate the dead person to rise back to life. As *oriki* “swells the head” of the living, so it is believed to do for the dead.

In a 1972 talk at the University of Ifẹ, Ọba Laoye and his drummers demonstrate how such a recitation might go for the recently deceased. The poetry is rich with metaphor, highlighting the unnaturalness of one being called to rise up and not doing so. It revolves poetically around the repetition of the Yorùbá word “*dide*” (rise or get up), accruing affective power until it culminates in a direct incantation that beseeches the deceased to “wake up,” as if the very repetition of the word itself might stir him back to life. “*Dide*,” then, is treated in this poem as a word pregnant with *àṣẹ* (a force of potentiality or the power to affect or achieve

things in the world). The opening line shows the poem's characteristic construction as a kind of conversation between the living and the dead:

Mo ní kó dide ó lóò dide

I say get up, you say I cannot get up

The *iyáàlù dùndún* drummer continues to cajole the deceased into rising by using metaphors of mighty animals waking, by telling him not to pity himself, by spurring him with a playful insult, and by ending with a direct plea to rise:

If Olu is asked to get up, he will get up [dide]

If Awo is asked to get up [dide], Awo will also get up [dide]

No bride is permitted call her husband by name, but she, too, will get up [dide]

If a buffalo is awake it will get up [dide]

If the elephant is awake it will get up [dide]

The elephant is lying down like a big mountain

As the elephant has fallen and can no longer rise [ò dide]

You say you have no wealth

You [say you] have no children

Not even forty cowries with which to buy salt

You muffled [drowsy] head, get up [dide]!

(Tìmì of Èdẹ 1972, English translation; c.f. Beier, et al. 2002:80)

As the final incantation is called, the full *dùndún* ensemble breaks into a vigorous, or “hot,” 12/8 rhythm, and the *iyáàlù* player brings the music to its climax, calling out on his drum, “Dìde, didele!” (Rise up! rise up!).

The audience for this poem is not only the recently deceased; it is also the general public, who will then know that a ritual process is under way: “It is then that everybody in the community will know that somebody has died,” said Ọba Laoye. “Thereafter, because of the importance of the deceased, merriment continues because in Yorùbáland we believe that when we are able to bury our parents we are considered to be lucky. That is why [merriment] goes on for a few days after the burial. Traditional dances continue for two or three days before people go back to their work.” *Rárà* poems are chanted as the drumming continues. Together, the drums and the *rárà* singers are “telling the story of the ancestors of the deceased or of the past deeds of the deceased, to encourage those who are alive to live as he did in his lifetime, if he was a good man; otherwise, nobody will mourn him” (Tìmì of Èdẹ 1972).

There is a great complexity to the role of drumming in wakes and burial ceremonies that is only being glossed here (see Sotunsa 2009:93-102 for a fuller discussion). The key point of this example is that *dùndún* drummers don’t neutrally convey information; they *mediate* information through poetic and musical gestures that concentrate language’s affective powers, maximizing its psychic and spiritual impact. The poem above dramatizes a Yorùbá belief in the

closeness of the living and the dead, and in the power of the spoken (or in this case, drummed) word to achieve things in the material and spiritual worlds. As literary scholar Mobolanle Sotunsa (2009:96) puts it, with reference to a similarly-structured funerary poem, “the Yorùbá’s belief in life after death accounts for the structure of the poetry where the deceased (signified) is addressed directly as an invisible audience.” The drummer’s responsibility to magnify and motivate individual personalities, in other words, does not end when a person dies.

### Facilitators of ritual events

In ritual contexts, the *ìyáàlù dùndún* acts as a facilitator or “master of ceremonies,” as Oba Laoye puts it (Tìmì of Èdẹ 1972). *Ìyáàlù* drummers act as stage directors, using various musical and textual cues to move people through the physical space of an event at the appropriate times. They are also facilitators in the sense of providing the textual repertoire and musical accompaniment necessary for the success of ritual events. They also offer guidance in the sense of interpreting information for their peers and superiors. During a ritual event, drummers will help the *ọba* navigate the space and assist him with Timing by telling him when to come and when to go. They also help the *ọba* with the basic protocols of the ceremony or event; for instance, they will “remind you to do things like give salutations, greet somebody,

give recognition to somebody or [pay homage] to the ancestors” (Aragbiji 2009). In addition to providing procedural assistance, drummers can also play a mediating role, giving the *oba* “guidance” in the sense of interpreting information for him. For example, an *iyáàlù* player might alert the *oba* if there is trouble at an event and signal him in code if it is necessary for him to leave immediately or to stay put (Aragbiji 2009).

At the 2009 *egúngún* festival in Iragbiji, the palace drummers attend to the *oba* throughout the opening night. They begin (as we will discuss more below) by playing the *gbèdu* (royal march) as he is seated in the town square and accompany him as he moves to greet the *egúngún*. At the end of the evening, the drummers signal to the Aragbiji (*oba* of Iragbiji) that it is time for him to get up from his seat overlooking the grounds of the town square and lead the processional into the palace. This is a common saying to which the *oba*’s name is attached as a signal and directive:

Ayotúndé ọmọ Olábòmí	Ayotúndé son of Olábòmí
Kó dide	[You should] stand up
Ẹrú gàlè <sup>22</sup>	Slave and master
Kó dide	[You should] stand up

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<sup>22</sup> *Ẹrú* means slave; Oyelami claims that *gàlè* is an abbreviated form of *ìgàlè*, an archaic (“ancient,” he says) reference to royalty. I have not been able to verify this word or its etymology in any written sources, but the verb “ga” can be used to connote superiority or loftiness.

As the procession moves away from the town square and into the palace gates, the drummers begin playing a prayer of thanks to which the crowd gathering behind the *oba* sing along. “Adú pé” is a common utterance of thankfulness in worship settings and in everyday greetings, but in this case the Arabic-Hausa expression for thankfulness “alíámúdùlilàì” is also added to the recitation, perhaps because of the Aragbiji’s Muslim faith:

Alíámúdùlilàì	We are thankful [Arabic-Hausa]
Adú pé	We are thankful [Yorùbá]
Lówó Ọlórún Ọba	In the hand of the Lord God
Alíámúdùlilàì	We are thankful [Arabic-Hausa]
Adú pé	We are thankful [Yorùbá]

When I asked Ayansola, one of the drummers who helped facilitate events in the market square, to recite the thanksgiving prayer again, he did so with an alternative construction (Ayansola and Oyelami 2009). This demonstrates a typical way in which texts are subject to continuous subtle variations, while still maintaining their core character:

Adú pé	We are thankful [Yorùbá]
Lówó Ọlórún Ọba	In the hand of the Lord God
Adú pé	We are thankful [Yorùbá]
Şalùbàríkà [Şe àlùbàríkà]	“May you prosper” [Arabic-Hausa blessing]

Adúpé We are thankful [Yorùbá]

Lọwọ Olórún Ọba In the hand of the Lord God

Adúpé We are thankful [Yorùbá]

Lastly, in the closing processional, the drummers play a saying uttered at the end of felicitous events-and never at a sorrowful one (translated by myself, following Sotunsa 2009:54):

Àṣeṣe tún ṣe We will celebrate again and again

B'á bá [bí a bá] ṣè yí tán When we finish this one

À ó ṣè mí [míràn] si We will do another one

Àṣeṣe tún ṣe We will celebrate again and again

This processional exemplifies not only the technical and textual guidance that drummers provide a king and his audience, but also how the presence of drummers can add sonic and visual grandeur to the movement of big men. Through facilitating audience participation in gesture and song, drummers galvanize the community around the king and around the protocols of the festival or ceremony.

### Stage directors for dance

Drummers provide direction in social settings as well, particularly in the context of dance. This direction comes in several audible forms—verbal cues, verbal directives, and

nonlexical signals. The example from which I draw was a performance given in my honor by the Iragbiji Cultural Troupe to celebrate my departure from the town in late summer 2009. The performance was held in the center courtyard of Chief Muraina Oyelami's compound, where the ensemble typically holds its rehearsals. The accompanying drummers established a vigorous 12/8 pattern typical of young men's social dances, while the cues for dancers, verbal and nonverbal, were played by the ensemble leader, a young man nicknamed Akere, on a single-membrane, peg-constructed cylindrical drum. The longer segments of drum poetry were relayed between Akere and another young man who played *iyáàlù d̀̀nd̀̀ǹ̀*.

The piece begins with nonlexical signals to the dancers indicating a swirl of the arms and punctuations with the feet. This is followed by a rhythmic cadence signaling a transition to another part of the dance. This cadence is repeated, in part or in whole, at key moments in the composition. Although nonlexical, I've added interpretive diacritics according to the pitch level suggested by the lead drum:

A-da-bi-ri-dá-lá-pá

A-da-bi-ri-dá-lá-pá

Bá bá bá bá bá

Bá-da bù-rá

Bà



Following this, the dancers are instructed by a common idiom of uncertain meaning but which the dancers know indicates quick, decisive gestures according to the number stated. Here we have a verbal cue: incorporating lexical and nonlexical elements, it is intended to be “read” by dancers as an impulse to movement, not as a meaningful linguistic construction:

Abula méjì méjì, bá bá (2x)	Two flashes [i.e., two vigorous motions], Bá bá [punctuation]
-----------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------

Abula mēta mēta, bá bá bá (2x)	Three flashes [i.e., three vigorous motions], Bá bá bá [punctuation]
--------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------

This section is followed by the abridged first lines of a nonlexical rhythm indicating the shift to a rhythmic interlude:

A-da-b’ri-dá’pá

As an interlude, the third and fourth lines of the cadence are then repeated to indicate a repeated dance gesture:

Bá bá bá bá bá

Bá-da bù-rá (4x)

This is followed by a full statement of the cadence, leading the group into a new section of the dance in which drum poetry will be featured.

A-da-bi-ri-dá-lá-pá

A-da-bi-ri-dá-lá-pá

Bá bá bá bá bá

Bá-da bù-rá

Bà

A drum poem commonly associated with the brisk 12/8 *gbandikan* rhythm featured here is then recited. The first half of the poem is played by Akere on the single-headed drum. It is then relayed to an *iyáàlù* drummer who recites the poem in full:

Mo ʃá kéké

I cut the kéké [facial mark]

Mo mú regbó Ifá

I go to the bush [initiation place] of Ifá

Gbandikan

[rhythmic punctuation for dance gesture]

Mo bàbàjà

I cut the abaja [facial mark]

Mo mú rèdíòpe

I go to the place of the palm tree

Gbandikan

[rhythmic punctuation]

Ọpẹ̀ mì tìtì ẹ̀ b'ójò lórò

The palm shook, I thought it would rain

Gbandikan

[rhythmic punctuation]

Òjò pa'gi lápákan o dápákan sí

The rain struck one tree, but spared another

Gbandikan

[rhythmic punctuation]

Òjò pa mi o ma ẹ̀ pa ọ̀pẹ̀ mi

Rain struck me, but did not touch my friend

Gbandikan

[rhythmic punctuation]

This poetry is followed by verbal directives, which are meant to be interpreted literally and then translated into gestures by the dancers. It is a stylized display of the dancer's skill in conversing with the talking drum:

Bó bá ẹ̀ ẹ̀ bí ẹ̀mi nìwọ̀ nìwọ̀ ni	If I were you
Nbá f'apá jó, f'apá jó	I'd use my arms to dance
Bó bá ẹ̀ ẹ̀ bí ẹ̀mi nìwọ̀ nìwọ̀ ni	If I were you
Nbá f'ẹ̀sẹ̀ jó, f'ẹ̀sẹ̀ jó	I'd use my feet to dance
Bó bá ẹ̀ ẹ̀ bí ẹ̀mi nìwọ̀ nìwọ̀ ni	If I were you
Nbá fi gbogbo ara jó	I'd use my whole body to dance

The *iyáàlù* drummer then inserts a proverb, which one of the dancers, Lukman, interprets with non-literal dance gestures:

Orí ẹ̀yẹ̀ ni ò pẹ̀yẹ̀	It is the bird's head [destiny] that protects it
Orí ẹ̀yẹ̀ ni ò pẹ̀yẹ̀	It is the bird's head [destiny] that protects it
Ìwò tá níwo àparò	You look at the bird
bíi ká fi dálá	[as if] you are putting it in okra stew
Orí ẹ̀yẹ̀ ni ò pẹ̀yẹ̀	It is the bird's head [destiny] that protects it

In addition to providing repertory-related directives, drummers may comment to dancers about the execution of their performance. “That is why it is important for every dancer to interpret the language of the drum,” says Ọba Laoye. If one is not dancing well, the drum might correct him or her by saying, “Şe pèlẹ̀ pèlẹ̀” (Be careful/take it easy). If there is someone obstructing the dancer’s way, the drum will warn him. If he fails to heed the warning, the drum will instruct the dancer to kick the obstinate man: “Tan bàtà kó şubú, tan bàtà kó şubú” (Kick him in the shoe/foot so that he falls down) (Tìmì of Eḍe 1972).

### ***Dynamics of performance***

So far in this chapter we have examined *dùndún* musicians’ roles as motivators and magnifiers of individual personalities, and their complementary roles as facilitators or coordinators of group action. We turn now to the dynamics of performances in which such roles play out. First, by following one *dùndún* musician throughout the course of a day, we see the strategies by which an artist navigates the social landscape of a performance event. Second, we look at how the complex social interactions of palace life require drummers to constantly shift their focus of attention, performance roles, and even sometimes their loyalties. Third, we examine the ways in which drummers “sound,” or audibly reproduce, social structures. By performing the personal poetry of individuals over rhythms that mark social identity and

status, drummers reenact structures of social distinction and thus reaffirm hierarchies. Yet those same repertory distinctions allow audiences to reaffirm community sentiment based on lineage, town, or social identity group.

The fourth dynamic we investigate is how, in catalyzing audience participation, drummers facilitate public displays of redistributive wealth or generosity. In some cases this amplifies social difference and hierarchy – those capable of giving demonstrate their generosity publicly by “spraying” copious amounts of money on performers. Should a guest of honor enjoy the entertainment by dancing, he or she may also be the recipient of money. At other times spraying may be a show of appreciation and solidarity among peers. Further, ample cash may be distributed to performers not for any higher ethic of generosity or hospitality but rather for the purpose of detaining and enjoying the attentions of a particular musician. Nonetheless, the redistributive ethic is typically called forward whenever *dùndún* drummers play.

Whether drawing attention to the distinctiveness of a patron or encouraging collective participation in a dance, the work of *dùndún* drummers evidences an approach to public life in which status is always “in the making” and loyalties are constantly called into play. In an environment where social hierarchy and community are mutually reinforced through daily cultural practices, says Ebron (2002:116) of the analogous tradition of Mande *jaliya*, there emerges “the necessity for interpersonal performance to make and reaffirm status and

interconnection” (c.f., Irvine 1979 on a parallel process among Wolof griots and their patrons).

As such, *dùndún* performance “sounds” society through the combined use of language and music. Drummers use recognizable patterns and timbres to convey social identity and status, while simultaneously “composing” the poetry of selves and subjectivities through verbal arts such as *oríkì*.

### Custom and agency – performance strategies

In summer 2009, I attended a celebration to honor the Aragbiji of Iragbiji at the one year anniversary of his installation as *oba*. Throughout the course of the day I followed one of my teachers, Ayansola, as he traversed the palace grounds and played *iyáàlù* for a variety of patrons. Following this I sat down with him and Chief Oyelami, who both interpreted and spoke for him as one who has worked closely with local *dùndún* drummers for decades. Following each of my questions, Oyelami would either answer directly in English or consult with Ayansola in Yorùbá prior to answering. In both cases, Oyelami would then translate his answer to Ayansola for verification. Through this conversation, I gleaned some of the normal and expected behavior of drummers in attempting to earn money in an informal setting through incidental patronage transactions. (All quotes in this section reference Oyelami and Ayansola 2009.)

I began by asking how Ayansola decides whom to play for at such an event. If you see three people, says Oyelami, you begin by playing for the one you know the best -- people who are “even-tempered”; people you have played for before. “You play first for the big givers, Oyelami continues, “the people whose characteristics you know. After that you play for strangers – you can create *oríkì* for them.” If you do not know their names, you greet the strangers with generic phrases like, for example:

O kare, kábò

Well done, welcome

Or, alternatively:

Eni dádá l’òkùnrin

This man is a good person

You face the person for whom you are playing so he knows you are addressing him. Oyelami pauses to translate this for Ayàn. Whether or not you know someone, “o ní kí wón” (you must greet them) if you want to earn money. There is, thus, a critical assessment of likelihood and profitability of patronage based on social status or established personal ties, even though drummers do not explicitly describe it as such.

But at the Aragbiji’s anniversary, Ayansola’s audience is populated by the community to which he belongs, so he knows virtually everyone. Regardless of who he knows, however, “Ayàn has the freedom to approach anybody. They [drummers] are like people seeking alms; they will not quarrel with the potential giver even if the person decides not to give.”

Drummers may face the challenge of a potential patron who appears reluctant to pay.

At the anniversary event, I noticed Ayansola playing for a man who seemed to be chatting with him and negotiating rather than offering him money. The man is joking with Ayansola about me, “Oyìnbó ó sanwó” (the white man will pay). And he continues, “Óó sanwó...màá gbọ” (he will pay and I will listen). The man appears to be delaying Ayàn, engaging him in conversation to avoid paying for as long as possible, and while Ayàn laughs at the man’s joke he continues playing persistently. “Ayàn’s main objective is to be paid,” Oyelami responds, “it does not matter what they are talking about—it has nothing to do with drumming.” Finally the man gives Ayàn money and Ayàn leaves to find another patron. I ask Oyelami and Ayàn how common such transactions are. Although he can’t speak to this particular addressee’s intentions, Oyelami says that some people will use various techniques to delay paying a drummer, either because “they are miserly or they don’t want to spend money.”

I noted that during the event on a couple of occasions, potential patrons either pay no attention or get up and walk away. When a potential patron ultimately decides not to pay, Oyelami tells me, no offense is taken. “It is not mandatory that everyone who is played for must pay. In this case, perhaps he does not have money or does not want to pay.” As long as the man does not get up or walk away in anger, then no offense is meant [by the patron] nor is



offense taken by the drummer in this case. “If the man does not give today, he will give tomorrow,” says Oyelami, “so Ayàn takes no offense.”

I am curious to know if a successful transaction is defined only by the receipt of payment or whether there are other considerations as well. Oyelami replies, “A successful interaction is one in which the person who is supposed to pay the drummer understands very well what drummer is saying and is versatile in understanding or interpreting what the drummer is playing. There is already joy in this for the drummer, even without the money. It will ‘double his joy’ if the patron dips his hand in his pocket and gives the drummer money. An unsuccessful interaction is one in that, for a strange reason, the person listening is showing signs of annoyance (as if the drummer is just making noise), and/or walks out on the drummer. This would hurt the drummer’s feelings.”

By Oyelami and Ayansola’s assessment, *dùndún* drummers do not approach outings as a means of cultivating or securing long-term patronage. Apparently they operate with short-term objectives – to play and get paid by the next patron they encounter: “This is their profession,” says Oyelami, “their first concern is to get paid.” If a drummer is good, and a leader likes him, he will be invited to events. As Eésà (high chief) of Iragbiji, Oyelami says he does this when he hears a drummer he likes. But long-term strategy regarding patronage is just not part of the drummer’s thinking, says Oyelami. There is an element of pride of profession involved in this –

drummers do not want to be seen as begging leaders and big men for invitations to events.

Nonetheless, if they are good drummers, then they will receive regular invitations.

If we accept Oyelami's assertion that drummers have no articulated strategy for securing long-term patronage, we should not assume that there is no strategic sensibility in their work. It's just that the strategy is institutionalized in the profession for which they are trained. *Dùndún* drumming is an economy of personality, or "personalistic economy" as anthropologist Paula Ebron (2002: 128) puts it, in which the personal attributes, lineages, and histories of the patronage class are the stock-in-trade. Once a hereditary *dùndún* drummer reaches the level of a master in his late teens or early twenties, he has learned all he needs to know to secure regular patronage from kings, chiefs, lineage heads, and government officials. The nature of this repertoire – the texts of which hinge on particular personalities – and the drummer's ability to deploy this knowledge quickly and flexibly is key to his ability to make a living. Social events are, as Oyelami says, "fluid" and *Ayàn* will never know who he is going to meet next. But, as a member of the community for which he is playing, the drummer most certainly knows something about the event: "*Ayàn* knows, because it is an event for the *ọba*, that family and friends of the *ọba* and *ọba*'s chiefs will be around. What's more, he may know some others. He will meet those people's friends and relatives. And he will know many more

once he sees them, as well as some unknown—that is the pattern” (Oyelami and Ayansola 2009).

For a point of comparison, I asked drummer Chief Rabiú Ayandokun of Èrìn-Òṣun whether he approached playing social events with any sort of strategic plan. While, like Ayansola and Oyelami, he admits to no explicit strategy for gaining patrons, Ayandokun does indicate that there is a formula likely to earn you money and that if you do not follow it, you will likely fail. He says you must know how to greet visitors well and know their *oríkì*, especially that of wealthy people. If you address a potential patron by name only, it is likely that the person will just walk by without paying. A successful talking drummer must know how to address a person at minimum by his or her father’s name and by rank title, if applicable. But knowledge of the addressee’s family *oríkì*, at least to the lineage depth of the grandfather, is considered far more impressive and likely to increase earnings (Ayandokun 2009).

As one example of such a successful transaction, I filmed a brief exchange in which Ayàn notices and greets an important man passing quickly by. Ayàn’s recognition is instant, and he drums a phrase of the man’s *oríkì*, which begins with his rank title and the name of his father:

Baálẹ̀ ọkọlú ọmọ Omítádé

Husband of town/head of town [title], son of  
Omítádé [Father’s name]

The man immediately dips into his pocket and hands Ayàn some folded bills. It is often the case, I observed, that a drummer has to act instantly in this way to be successful. In this situation, the *baálè* walks quickly, with the attitude of, as Oyelami puts it, “Let me give you money and go,” an interaction “without joy.” This is why it is important for a drummer to know almost everyone’s *oríkì*, says Oyelami; this is how they make their money. If you only play, “*Kábò ẹ̀ dádá l’odé*” (a generic greeting meaning welcome, I hope you have arrived well), you will not earn much money; but if you play *oríkì*, that is how you earn your money. To emphasize this point, Ayàn recites the first two lines of Oyelami’s *oríkì* to him.

### Dynamics of attention and role shifting

In the context of palace life, a drummer’s job may require even more strategic thinking than in the social event just described. The wide range of visitors and residents in a palace ensures that it is an environment of high political stakes with an array of intentions and loyalties in play. Palace drummers are primarily, but by no means exclusively, patronized by the king. Although their loyalties are ostensibly with the *ọ̀ba*, *dùndún* drummers are responsible for hospitably welcoming all visitors – whether regulars or strangers, enemies or friends of the *ọ̀ba* – and this requires a constant vigilance and diplomacy on the musicians’ part, which on one hand can serve to protect the *ọ̀ba* in dangerous situations, and on the other hand leaves

drummers susceptible to offers by other big patrons with differing agendas. In short, rapid shifts of attention, fluid alternation between performance roles, and strategies of diplomacy constitute the key dynamics of palace drumming. A wide repertory of coded language, as previously noted, facilitates drummers' momentary transitions of attention, purpose, and alliance.

When a visitor arrives at a palace, a *dùndún* drummer must at minimum attend to that person with a generic greeting – by which the *ọba* will be informed indirectly that a person has entered the gates. If it is an important and known visitor, the drummer will notify the *ọba* directly of that person's arrival and then greet that visitor with his or her personal poetry. For example, the Olóòwu (king's title) of Òwu and his drummers demonstrate, in a presentation at Obafemi Awolowo University (2010), what would be played if the governor of Ògún State, Otunba Justus Olubenga Daniel, were arriving at the Òwu's palace.

*To the king (ìyáàlù):*

Dosumo, níbo ló wà?                      Dosumo, where are you?

Olugbenga                                      [Governor] Olugbenga

Ó mbò wà                                      He is coming

Ó mbò wà                                      He is coming

*To the governor (ìyáàlù and ẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀):*

Olugbenga

Olugbenga

Kábò ẹ̀e dádá lodé

Welcome, we hope you have arrived well

(Olóòwu 2010)

The full ensemble then strikes up a chiefly rhythm to escort Olugbenga into the palace.

Normally the Governor's full name, parentage, and his traditional Egba title of "Otunba" would precede his given name, but the Olóòwu's drummer has abbreviated it here for demonstration purposes. At this time, the Olóòwu says that he will typically respond to the drummers in code (which he does not disclose) notifying them if he is prepared to meet the visitor at present.

In addition to greeting visitors and notifying the *oba* of their presence, *dùndún* drummers can also track the identities and intentions of those who enter the palace grounds. The Olóòwu (2010) first demonstrates how the drummer informs him in code that a chief's intentions are neutral – that his agenda is in line with the *oba*'s as it has been in the past. As an example, the king asks his *dùndún* drummers how they would normally greet Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria, who happens to hold the title of Balógun (second in rank to the *oba*) in Òwu:

*To the king (ìyáàlù):*

Ó ti dé o

He has come

Ọbasanjo ti dé o

Ọbasanjo has come

K'ó si dé o

As he always comes

(Olódùwu 2010)

“As he always comes” is an oblique communication between the drummer and the *òba*; it is code for an important piece of unspoken information: that Obasanjo’s intentions or demeanor remain in line with what they have been in the past (Olódùwu 2010).

In another hypothetical situation that the Olódùwu draws, a visitor to the palace may come with an ambiguous or unspoken intention. In this case, the drummer can advise the *òba* to be vigilant of that person:

If people come in, even without their saying the purpose of coming to the palace, the drum knows. And you have the drum warning me about enemies. When you look at the mouth of the speaker, you might be able to guess the purpose of his speech. Because people come who talk about “A” and “B,” without talking about “C.” If you look at their mouths, you will see them almost saying “C”: “Kábiyèsí, we have come for A, B,…” Then at such moments the drum speaks, “T’ẹnu wá ni o wò, t’ẹnu wà ni ò gbó” (When you watch the mouth, you see what you do not hear). You cannot watch the lips without listening to the sound they have made. You have to listen to them and watch their lips so that you know precisely what is in their minds. Most of the time, the drum knows what they have come for. There is no hiding a secret if the drum decides to leak it. You cannot hide the secret of your mind. If the drum knows it...invariably they know it...they will tell you what it is. (Olódùwu 2010)

In yet another circumstance, the intentions of visitors may be plainly negative, and it is the job of the drummer to inform or advise the king about this:

We have twenty-two villages. I am not popular in some of these areas, because I have conferred *òba*-ship on a number of well-known but struggling *badílẹ̀* in these areas.

People in my area are mostly loyal, but trouble does happen in some of these areas...and they bring their strife and crises to Abeokuta to be settled in court. Even the magistrate courts still recognize the palace rulings. You [the *oba*] listen to them the first day, and they change it the next day—it has escalated. The drum tells me the intentions of the important individuals involved and warns me accordingly. (Olóòwu 2010)

The Olóòwu asks his drummer to demonstrate:

*To the king (ìyáàlù):*

Dosumo	Dosumo
Má bínu	Don't be annoyed
Ní sùúrù	Take it easy [have patience]
[È jí òrò rẹ]	Watch out [watch your words]

The Olóòwu says that if he hears such a warning, he knows that he is “no more on top” – that is, he should be watchful because he no longer has the upper hand on the people with whom he is dealing. Perhaps, he says, they have come with an agenda that is less conciliatory than before or they have changed their minds on important matters. If the *oba* should flare up or lose his temper, says the Olóòwu, we would have “katakata” (division, separation, or chaos). So the drummer advises the *oba* to be vigilant and careful with his words (Olóòwu 2010).

Such warnings, as I learned from the drummers at the palace of the Tìmì of Èdẹ, may also be conveyed through less direct speech (Ayanleke 2009; Ayanpade 2009). The warning here is addressed to the current Tìmì of Èdẹ:



Adesola, a fidíkalẹ̀ ni	Adesola, you will settle on the ground
Bí ẹ̀gún bágún ní ẹ̀sẹ̀	If a thorn pierces your foot
Tóbá gún ní ọ̀wọ̀	If it pierces your hand
A fidíkalẹ̀ ni	You will settle on the ground

Although I have translated it literally above, Prince Lawal (2009) interprets the saying more broadly as an advisement to act calmly in a difficult situation: “Adesola, if there is any misfortune, you will just settle down and gently remove whatever the thing is pricking you on the leg and on your hands.”

The Tìmi’s drummers then played another proverbial statement that is here made relevant to a king facing a difficult negotiation:

Adesola, inú ẹ̀ni ní gbé	Adesola, let it rest in your stomach
Ọ̀rọ̀ t’a sọ l’ónìí tí ó dìjà l’ọ̀là	The words that you say today will become a quarrel tomorrow
Inú ẹ̀ni ní gbé	Let it rest in your stomach

Drummers may also use humor to warn the king of a potentially troublesome visitor.

Akintunde (2010b) illustrated this to me with a well-known talking drum message of colonial vintage that is still used today as a signal that white people are around. Typically, it would be connected with a generic greeting to the white visitor. To illustrate it in context, Akintunde

(2010b) shows how the coded phrase might be used if a drummer was reciting the Olúfi's praise poetry and then noticed a white man approaching the palace.

Akintunde begins by demonstrating the *ijire*, or poetry of waking, for the Olúfi of Gbòngán:

Adétóyèse ọmọ Ojúbáńíré, o jíire...

Adétóyèse, son of Ojúbáńíré, you have woken well...

Then, illustrating what would happen if a white man or foreigner were approaching out of view of the *ọba*, he quickly shifts his attention to notifying the *ọba* of the visitor. He does so with a coded message:

Oníșòkòtò pé n pé	Owner of the short trousers
Tí șe ẹlẹwù ẹtù riye riye	Who makes the owner of the <i>ẹtù</i> cloth spread its wings
Ó n bọ	He is coming
Adétóyèse	Adétóyèse
Oníșòkòtò pé n pé	Owner of the short trousers
Tí șe ẹlẹwù ẹtù riye riye	Who makes the owner of the <i>ẹtù</i> cloth spread its wings
Ó n bọ	He is coming
Oníșòkòtò pé n pé	Owner of the short trousers

Then, turning to the white visitor, Akintunde greets him by drumming:

Oyìnbó a tire ti,

White person/foreigner we are expecting you

Kábò, ẹ̀ dádá l'ò dé

Welcome, have you arrived well?

If there were no other pressing concerns at this point, a drummer would then return to his job of reciting the king's *ijfire*.

This interaction demonstrated by Akintunde illustrates the constant shifts of attention, priority, and momentary alliances necessary to the work of palace drummers. In one short passage, we see a flexible transition between three different types of speech discourse, each of which has a different focus and function: motivational poetry for the *oba*, a coded warning to the *oba* about a white visitor, and a generic greeting addressed to the visitor (whose identity is unknown). This text also illustrates a brilliant application of Yorùbá poetic language for coded communication. The “short trousers” referred to in the poem represent the uniform of the British colonial officer. *Ẹ̀tù*, on the other hand, is a fine cloth favored by the Yorùbá rich and powerful. The cloth is typically patterned to look like the feathers of the guinea-fowl, and the image of the men who wear it “spreading their wings” (running about in “panic,” as Akintunde puts it) at the sight of a white man is meant to be humorous, but it glosses the serious truth that under policies of British indirect rule, traditional governance was disrupted and even the *oba* and high chiefs were at times fearful of the colonial authority.

*Dùndún* drummers are typically balancing some combination of roles as entertainers who must show hospitality to visitors, servants of big men to whom they sing praises and attributions, observers who register visitors' appearance and behavior, and informants who fulfill the king's need for accurate and timely information about events in the palace grounds. This, as we have seen in the examples above, requires them to engage in different levels of discourse simultaneously. A greeting, for example, will often be coupled with an announcement of arrival marked by, for example, "ó ti dé o" (he has arrived), thus reminding the king to be prepared for his meeting. Or, perhaps, an apparently discontinuous or ambiguous statement will be tagged onto a greeting as a coded message to the *oba* about the identity or behavior of the visitor, such as, "oníṣòkòtò pé n pé" (owner of the short trousers). Or perhaps the coded message will be incorporated seamlessly into the announcement itself, "k'ó si dé o" (as he always comes), at once informing the king of the identity and current demeanor of the visitor. The constant calls on a drummer's attention may also lead to a shift of his alliance to a party other than the king. Although it exists as a possibility that some *obas* fear (Olóòwu 2010), I neither witnessed nor heard any reports of this happening in the day-to-day business of the palaces I observed. In exceptional circumstances of chieftaincy and kingship disputes, however, when drummers are hired as propagandists for or against a candidate, their role as shapers of public persona can become a disruptive or destructive power (Aragbiji 2009).

## Audibility of social structure

Yorùbá *dùndún* music signifies power and authority in several ways. First, it does so through the *iyáàlù* drummer's recitation of *oríkì* texts, which include images of heroism, effectiveness, and virility; metaphors of strong animals and other powerful elements of the natural world; and assertions of ancestral legitimacy to the title. Second, *dùndún* drummers can identify the title, age-rank, vocation, or religious affiliation of an addressee by playing an interlocking rhythmic pattern that signifies the chosen attribute. Third, density of instrumentation and increased amplitude can also convey power. Oftentimes, the greater status a person achieves, the greater the number of talking drummers he or she will attract, creating a thunderous aural effect that signifies a person "heavy" with followers.

Drummers' skill in attracting audiences for the recitation of royal poetry and music is an essential way in which they influence public perception of the king's vitality and legitimacy. Performance of power and sonic enhancement of social stature depends on the participation of family, clients, and onlookers. Central to a Yorùbá man's rise to power is a "wealth in people"—these webs of relations are his primary currency. At public functions, the primary celebrants (whether politicians, traditional leaders, or other "big men") are surrounded by retinues of drummers, who in turn draw outsiders into the circle to dance, commune, and

shower praise on the primary celebrant. *Dùndún* drummers, in other words, make power audible and visible by amassing sonic and social “auras” around their patrons.

*Egúngún* festivals have a similar quality, where each ancestral mask is followed by a band of drummers and family members from the ancestor’s compound. The presence of this musical retinue, which will typically include both talking drummers and female praise singers from the *egúngún*’s compound, creates a certain aura around the ancestor that enhances his presence. This buzzing social and musical energy is built as the *egúngún* makes his visits during the day—people are brought into the mask’s circle as the drummed *oríkì*, praise chants, and dances are extended to them.

The same is true of the *òrìṣà*, who depend on followers for their vitality and potency (Barber 1981). *Dùndún* drummers are not typically devotees of the deities for whom they play; they are hired by devotees to perform a service. Nonetheless, they play a significant role in framing social interaction and shaping the psychic contours of the festivities. At the 2009 *Ọ̀dún Ọ̀gún* festival in Gbòngán, for example, talking drummers moved through the town playing *oríkì* and dances for the celebrants and their families, helping to build the devotees’ energy towards the day’s denouement – the sacrifice to *Ọ̀gún* in the town’s central shrine. At the shrine, while the ritual preparations were made, Muritala Ayanboye and ensemble played the *oríkì* of the *Ọ̀gún* chiefs, to which they danced gracefully over a stately rhythm typically

reserved for elders. As the sacrifice was completed, the drummers broke into the energetic duple-meter rhythm belonging to Ògún, while the lead *iyáàlù* recited poetry about the deity, all to indicate the community's celebration of a successful sacrifice.

### Hierarchy and community in *gbèdu oba*

The personal poetry of *obas*—incorporating praise names, proverbs, witticisms, metaphor, folk songs, and histories— is typically performed as part of a stately march known as *gbèdu*, which is sometimes glossed in English as “royal drumming” or “drumming for kingship.” Each *oba*'s drummer will play *gbèdu* slightly differently, using variations of a stylistically recognizable framework of rhythm and tempo. The melorhythmic gestalt of *gbèdu* is no less significant than the poetry it accompanies. Speaking of kingship music in the town of Gbòngán, Sotunsa (2009:69) writes: “Although the royal anthem is not ascribed a linguistic meaning, the set rhythm is a subtext which serves as the signification code for the subject of the performance, that is the king...the royal anthem is exclusive to the royalty. In other words, only the *oba* may rightfully constitute the signified of the royal anthem.”

*Gbèdu* drumming makes the king's power and authority audible. The presence of a great individual is exhorted through drum poetry, marked by distinctive rhythmic patterns, and characterized by dense instrumental timbres and forceful use of amplitude. The effect of public

recitation of the *oba's oriki* is not only a psychological boost for the king; it affects public perception of the *oba's* stature and charts his movement through the public sphere. But just as it magnifies the *oba's* singular personality, *gbèdu* is also designed to attract audiences (Sotunsa 2009:87). Facilitated by poetic alliteration, repetitions or refrains, and segments of well-known *orin owe* (proverbial songs), *gbèdu* offers multiple points of engagement for listeners. The increased tempo and high volume of the concluding section of *gbèdu* is intended both to build public excitement over the king's arrival and to bring participants into the circle of followers (ibid.). *Gbèdu oba*, in other words, creates a context in which individual exceptionalism is made perceptible through communal participation, and the reverse is also true—communities are reaffirmed through their identification with the king's desirable attributes.

The opening evening of the 2009 *egúngún* festival in Iragbiji illustrates the significance both textural and textual density in *gbèdu oba*. There were eight *iyáàlù dùndún* reciting the *oba's oriki* in unison as he took his seat, alongside the high chiefs, overlooking the town square. The *iyáàlù* were accompanied by five *omele* and two *gúdúgúdú* playing *gbèdu* support patterns, while one praise singer steadily beat his *aro* (iron bell). The *iyáàlù* played together in near unison, the Aragbiji's *oriki* thunderously awakening the town square:

Ayotúndé ọmọ Olábòmí

Ayotúndé son of Olábòmí

Igba abéré wọn ò tọkọ

Two hundred needles do not make a hoe



Igba iràwò wọn ò toṣù

Two hundred stars do not make a moon

Òkan ṣoṣo òsùpá ójugba fi tí là lo

One single moon is much more [brighter] than two hundred oil lamps

Ayotúndé ọmọ Olábòmí

Ayotúndé son of Olábòmí

(Oyelami 2009, text and translation)

This passage is repeated several times and is followed by other verses of *oríkì* for the king and high chiefs. Although addressed specifically to the Aragbiji, the passage above is comprised of stock idioms that may be incorporated into the attributive poetry of other rulers—we find similar text, for example, in the *oríkì* of the king of Ìkẹrẹ (Beier 2002:52). Such poetry uses the accumulation of metaphor to build a representation of the king’s power as layered and concentrated, vast worlds incorporated into his singular being. Such “chains of metaphor,” as Karin Barber puts it, are one way in which *oríkì* builds highly concentrated images of individual personalities. In this case, poetics and timbre are both significant – the textual “thickness” of royal poetry is enhanced by the textural density of the sixteen-member *dùndún* ensemble that performs it. The royal drumming continues this way for some time, notifying participants that the festival is about to commence and attracting members of the surrounding community until, within an hour, the square is teeming with people. The rhythms of *gbèdu ọba*, in other words,

alert people that it is time to gather, while the text’s expansive metaphors incorporate a multiplicity of beings into the king’s radiant personality.

The *gbèdu ọba* of the Olúfi of Gbòngán offers a clearer example of how this kind of music is designed to encourage community sentiment and group participation while singling out a great individual for veneration. According to Sotunsa, there are three “musical” techniques through which *gbèdu ọba* invites audience attention: the poetic interpretation of texts, the incorporation of recognizable melodies, and the use of danceable rhythms (2009:87, 92). First, the use of repetition and alliteration or assonance in drummed interpretations of *oríkì ọba* is pronounced. Second, the incorporation of well-known *orin* (songs), especially *orin òwe* (proverbial songs), into the *oríkì* of the king is an effective way to encourage audience participation. These two techniques can be illustrated by a song that is a key component of a much larger body of *oríkì* and salutation poetry for the Olúfi of Gbòngán (see Sotunsa 2009:86-87 for a full transcript):

Adétóyèse ọmọ Ojúbáńíré	Adétóyèse, son of Ojúbáńíré
Máa jayé ọba nìsọ	Continue to enjoy the royal life
Babaà re ló nilè	Your father owns the land
Ìwo máa rìn	You can walk freely
Ìwo máa rìn	You can walk freely

Máa yan

Stride majestically

Babaà re ló nilè

Your father owns the land

Prior to encountering it in Sotunsa’s scholarship, I was taught this song by Gbeminiyi Akintunde and eventually performed it on *iyáàlù dìndún* for the Olúfi himself (as a gift of praise for a man who showed me great hospitality). Initially, I tried learning it as non-melodic poetry and found the timing difficult. Although the presence of repetition, “ìwo máa rìn,” and assonance, “babaà re ló nilè,” helped me to memorize the text, it was not until I turned to the melody that my performance coalesced. Songs such as this stand out pronouncedly in a genre of poetry that is more often performed in a “recitative” speech-melody, and that is the point – they are intended to draw listeners in [Figure 3].

Figure 3: *Gbèdu* – selection of *oríkì* for Olúfì of Gbòngán

♩ = 118

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a drum line. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 118.

**System 1:**  
 Iyaalu: A dé tó yè se o mo O jú bá ni ré  
 Gudugudu: [Drum accompaniment]

**System 2:**  
 Iy.: Má a ja yé o ba ni só ba ba à re ló ni lè  
 Gd.: [Drum accompaniment]

**System 3:**  
 Iy.: Í wo má a rin Í wo má a rin Í wo má a rin má a  
 Gd.: [Drum accompaniment]

**System 4:**  
 Iy.: yan Ba ba à re ló ni lè  
 Gd.: [Drum accompaniment]

A third way in which *gbèdu* attracts audience attention is the use of a danceable rhythm in the concluding sections. Sotunsa stresses this point but does not illustrate it, so I have transcribed selected segments of a *gbèdu* performance for the Olúfì that I solicited from Muritala

Ayanboye's ensemble. There are typically three sections in *gbèdu oba*: a solo *iyáàlù* recitation, a

slow and stately march [Figure 4], and a fast concluding dance [Figure 5]. In other words, we see unfolding over twenty minutes a gradual progression from regality and poise to the excitement and physicality of faster and denser rhythms.

**Figure 4: *Gbèdu* – slow section**

♩ = 118

Gudugudu

Isaju

Ikehin

Sekere 1

Sekere 2

Figure 5: *Gbèdu* – fast section

The musical score for the fast section of *Gbèdu* is presented in a five-staff format. At the top, the tempo is indicated as  $\text{♩} = 194$ . The time signature is 6/8. The parts are labeled on the left: Gudugudu, Isaaju, Ikehin, Sekere 1, and Sekere 2. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 6/8 time signature. The Gudugudu part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Isaaju part consists of a sparse sequence of notes with rests. The Ikehin part shows a rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and rests. The Sekere 1 part is characterized by a series of sharp, upward-pointing strokes, representing a specific drumming technique. The Sekere 2 part consists of a series of downward-pointing strokes, representing another drumming technique. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line, with repeat signs at the beginning and end of each measure.

As the rhythmic gestalt progresses and is transformed in this way, we see also a transition by the lead drummers from a musical-speech mode of textual recitation to a “dance mode” in which nonlexical percussive gestures are featured.

I would add a fourth element to Sotunsa’s list of participatory techniques in *gbèdu*: the use of markers in the text that might appeal to different segments of the community. For example, in the *oríkì* of the Olúfì, the king is named as Olúgborí (Lord of Igbori), which long-time members of the Gbòngán community would likely understand as referring to the ancestral homeland of the Olúfì and, by extension, the people of Gbòngán (Sotunsa 2009:77). Sometimes the references are more cryptic. In that same *oríkì* transcribed by Sotunsa, for example, the

Olúfi is also named Ọmọ Oníkúlódó (Offspring of the great one who keeps death in the river), which is likely an historical allusion that only those with specialized knowledge would fully understand. The text itself, then, both invites people to identify with the king and limits their ability to do so – allowing for a performance in which communal affiliations are affirmed through transparent references to origin, while the king’s power is concentrated behind evocative yet often impenetrable allusions.

### The sounds of hierarchy

*Dùndún* drummers who are hired for public events are expected at minimum to recognize important celebrants by name, title, and ancestry. While social hierarchy is recognized in everyday language and practices of seniority, *dùndún* drumming brings it to life in a vibrant way. While using *oríkì* and other verbal genres to record an individual’s personal attributes and ancestry, drummers also use specific interlocking rhythmic patterns to identify the occupation and rank of the addressee. In other words, they combine linguistic and musical resources to aurally signify the personae and social status of their patrons.

Meetings of traditional councils at *ọba*’s palaces, where the king meets with his high chiefs for an audience of townspeople, are particularly good contexts to observe how drummers recreate the political hierarchy in sound. I will first discuss the verbal material from a 2009

chiefs' procession in Iragbiji where only an *ìyáàlù* and *aro* (iron bell) were used. I will then describe the opening of a traditional council meeting in Gbòngán that same year to look at how rhythmic accompaniment patterns, apart from the consideration of verbal texts, contribute to a sonic map of the town's political hierarchy.

On the day of the traditional council meeting in Iragbiji, I took a public bus to Eésà (title, second in rank to the king) Muraina Oyelami's meetinghouse to greet the chiefs before they process to the Aragbiji's palace. The house is tucked into a row of buildings along the main Iragbiji road, next to the town mosque and in front of the house that Oyelami's father built. Simple wood benches line the walls of the sparsely decorated hall, and there is a recessed room where the Eésà holds private meetings. I arrived there at about ten after nine in the morning, greeted Oyelami and the other chiefs, and took my seat on the bench along with everyone else. The Eésà sat on a chair at the head of the room and welcomed a few visitors who had come in to request money or settle some grievance.

The chiefs began their procession to the Aragbiji's palace at about half past nine, filing in order of rank, with the Eésà at the front. There are a total of ten high chiefs on the *òba's* council, not all of whom were present that day. Lower-level chiefs, who Oyelami referred to as "lesser chiefs" or "messenger chiefs," followed behind. I took up the rear, documenting the event on video. The chiefs walked down Iragbiji Road, around the central mosque, through the



market square, and under the archway of the Palace gates. As the Eésà crossed the threshold of the palace, an *iyáàlù* player recited his *oríkì* and offered him a blessing while an *aro* player struck up a steady pulse. After the Eésà's *oríkì*, the drummer recited those of the other chiefs who filed in according to rank. He did not recite for all the chiefs, only those who were present that day. Usually, says Oyelami, the drummers do not play for lesser chiefs who follow at the end of the procession, but it is at their discretion to do so. There was a basic structure to the *iyáàlù* player's recitation for each chief:

- a. Name and/or title and/or rank
- b. Lineage (*omọ*, "child of")
- c. Personal *oríkì* name
- d. *Oríkì* of one's place of origin (*oríkì oríle*)
- e. Greeting (in this case, *ojùre*, "you wake well")

In the text that follows, given by Oyelami after watching my video of the event, the Eésà's *oríkì* names are included, but the *oríkì* of the other chiefs is omitted. This is not because the other *oríkì* are secret; it is because they are highly personal. Even a high chief like Oyelami may not know the personalities and personal histories of his subordinates well enough to interpret their *oríkì* when it is played on *dùndún*. Beginning with Eésà Oyelami's *oríkì*, the *iyáàlù* musician played:

(1) Kò mu ‘mi ní koto àgbò méji	Two rams cannot drink water from the [same] calabash pot
(2) Oyèélámi ọmọ Tọwọbolá	Oyèélámi child of Tọwọbolá
(3) Àbẹfẹ Òdí Nigbákejì Ọba, ojíire	Àbẹfẹ Òdí, Second in Command to the King, you have woken well

This passage illustrates how powerfully concentrated *oríkì* can be, in this case condensing information about Oyelami’s lineage, place of origin, and the history of his title into three short lines. The first line, says Oyelami, is “a phrase peculiar to the title of Eésà.” Perhaps an oblique reference to an historical struggle for ownership of that chieftaincy title, it is a variation of an axiom well-known enough to be included in Abraham’s *Dictionary of Modern Yorùbá* (1958:29), “Àgbò méji kì í mun omi nínún koto” (Two rams cannot drink water from the calabash pot), which is interpreted figuratively as “We cannot all be masters.” Line two marks Oyelami’s lineage, the word “ọmọ” (child of) indicating that a parent or ancestor’s surname or *oríkì* name is to follow. Line three begins with one of Oyelami’s personal *oríkì* names, Àbẹfẹ, followed by his *oríkì oríle*, Òdí, an *oríkì* name that identifies his town of ancestral origin as Iṛesa, which was formerly a sizeable kingdom in the Ìlọrin area. This is followed by an affirmation that Oyelami’s title of Eésà makes him second only to the king. Adopting Karin Barber’s (1991) notion of *oríkì* as a form of “naming,” each of the three lines above could be seen as name

equivalents, with line three combining several names into one. In this way, *oríkì* compactly identifies and names different aspects of personality and ancestry as well as social status and rank.

Following Eésà Oyelami, the other high chiefs were greeted by the *iyáàlù* drummer in rank order. The absence of several chiefs explains the gaps in recitation, for example the skip from “Second in Command” to “Fourth in Command”:

Adérèmí Ọsólò Ọba...ojíire	Aderemi, Fourth in Command to the King,... [ <i>oríkì</i> unknown] you have woken well
Ìnúnrín Àgbàlágba Oyè...ojíire	[Title name] Senior Title Holder... [ <i>oríkì</i> unknown] you have woken well
Ajagùnnà ni Jagun...ojíire	[Title name and its variation]... [ <i>oríkì</i> unknown] you have woken well

The *iyáàlù* drummer continues this formula until all the high chiefs present are recognized in hierarchical order by name, lineage, and rank title.

Having looked at how *dùndún* drummers use verbal material to aurally highlight the hierarchy of chiefs, I now turn to the opening of a traditional council that same year in Gbòngán where the rhythmic accompaniment itself plays as significant a role as words in identifying the social position of the addressee. Muritala Ayanboye and his *dùndún* ensemble typically salute the *ọba* at his place of residence early in the morning and by 9am are present in

the palace, ready to greet him with his *oríkì* and the unmistakable music of *gbèdu*. The Balógun, a high chief who is second in position to the king is usually next to arrive. He, too, is greeted with his *oríkì*, but the musical accompaniment is different from *gbèdu*. When greeting this high chief, Ayanboye’s ensemble typically performs a social music know as *geèsé*, which in this case, although it is not unique to the Balógun, has been indexed to him through repetitive association. If asked for “*ìlù Balógun*” (drums for the Balógun), *geèsé* is what Ayanboye’s group will play [Figure 6].

**Figure 6: Balógun music (*geèsé*)**

The musical score for Balógun music (*geèsé*) is presented in 4/4 time with a tempo of 118. It features four instruments: Gudugudu, Tsaaju, Ikehin, and Sekere. The score is divided into three measures. Gudugudu plays a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. Tsaaju plays a melody of quarter and eighth notes. Ikehin plays a steady bass line of quarter notes. Sekere plays a rhythmic pattern of quarter and eighth notes.

This process is followed as each member of the *oba*’s council arrives. As the *Ìyálódè* (chief of women’s and market affairs), accompanied by the king’s wives, makes her way into the

courtyard of the palace, the supporting drummers strike up *ɛtike*, a stately dance typically, though not exclusively, reserved for elders of seniority or high-ranking title [Figure 7].

**Figure 7: ɛtike**

♩ = 100

The musical score for ɛtike is presented in a five-staff format, all in 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 100. The parts are:

- Gudugudu:** Features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a triplet in the first measure.
- Isaaju:** A simple melodic line of quarter notes.
- Ikehin:** A melodic line of quarter notes with rests.
- Kerikeri:** A rhythmic line of eighth notes, with 'S' markings placed below the notes in both measures.
- Sekere:** A complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

As the music continues, the *Ìyálódè* takes a few measured dance steps, jutting her hips back for emphasis. Her face exhibiting both poise and pleasure, she sprays some small naira bills on the performers in appreciation. Like the *geèsé* dance for the *Balógun*, the rhythm addressed to the *Ìyálódè* is not uniquely identified with her title, but it is a musical gesture—a sonic signifier—that indexes her respected status in the community.

### The sounds of society – aural contours of a social event

In addition to discursively reproducing a town's political hierarchy, drum patterns and poetry may be used to recognize people of different socio-occupational groups and to comment on the unfolding dynamics of a social event. Indeed, each rhythmic gestalt in the *dùndún* repertory is indexically linked to a particular category of person, as defined by religious affiliation, family occupation, age, title, or the like. As social indices, supporting rhythms define who the intended addressees are in a given musical interaction, which in turn makes possible interpretations of the *ìyáàlù* player's often opaque and context-dependent poetry.

This was in evidence when I performed with the ensemble of Ayanboye Muritala Alani (Ayanboye hereafter) in 2009 at a party following the burial of a local townsman from Gbòngán. It was held on the grounds of a church and guests were arranged at tables that wrapped around the yard in a rectangular pattern. Various town groups or family segments were identifiable by the particular patterns of dress they wore. The strategy of the ensemble, so it appeared to me, was to move from table to table, beginning with the elders and the important celebrants. The amount of time spent entertaining at each table depended largely on the engagement of the celebrants and on their being forthcoming with money. Those who rose

to dance after hearing their *oríkì*, for example, or those who generously paid the drummers, received the most attention and the most entertainment.

Drummers capture reflexively what is going on in the course of performance and comment on its social dynamics. In this case, Ayanboye's ensemble is addressing me, as I am on an outing with this group for the first time. While entertaining at a table of guests, using a common duple-meter social dance rhythm, the *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* begins calling out short segments of *oríkì*:

Ọmọ ẹkùn ààyè

Child of the living leopard

Followed by:

Babaà rẹ, òni ni ní ò kì óki

Today I shall praise you and chant your father's  
*oríkì*

The *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* has excerpted these phrases from a much larger body of *oríkì* for the lineage of Gbemi's father Akintunde. The first phrase is an excerpt of a passage normally addressed to Òbùró, the *oríkì orílẹ̀* of Akintunde's ancestors, for whom the *òbùró* (alligator pepper) is representative. Gbemi later told me that, in this instance, the poetry was addressed to me because I am now "blood." The *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*'s reference to Akintunde's *oríkì* was intended to rhetorically incorporate me into the family group (see Sotunsa 2009:45-46 for full texts).

The *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* continues by announcing my name and teasing the audience about my presence in the group. Here he uses my Yorùbá drumming name, Ayanwale:

Ayanwale l'ẹ̀ẹ̀rí ẹ̀                      You are watching Ayanwale

Ènìyàn tí ò mọ̀                      Anyone who does not know

Ayanwale l'ẹ̀ẹ̀rí ẹ̀                      You are watching Ayanwale

This abbreviated statement is followed by another passage in which a playful taunt is issued to the audience. Akintunde glosses it for me in English:

You are watching Ayanwale

Anyone who does not enjoy it

Should go and drink poison

You are watching Ayanwale

Just as the *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* announces my presence, the leader and *iyáàlù* player Ayanboye inserts an idiomatic expression that calls on God to save the addressee (in this case it is me) from the people who seek to do him harm:

Kó gbé mi lékè, Èdùmàrè                      That you should raise me above, God

Kó gbé mi lékè, a bínú ẹ̀ni                      That you should raise me above those who trouble us



The *alùṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* immediately follows by alerting my teacher Akintunde (referred to here as *ògá* or “master” in the Yorùbá idiom) to watch out for others who may be seeking to do us harm:

Ògá Ayanwale

Master [teacher] of Ayanwale

Ma kíí sílẹ̀

Watch the ground [i.e., be careful]

Akintunde explains that this refers to protecting oneself from a jealous man setting a trap for one more successful. After introducing the group in this way, the *iyáàlù* player proceeded to play proverbs and *oríkì* for the men at the table. The accompanying drummers continued the social dance arrangement they had started earlier. While this rhythm was the default for the day, there were occasions where other rhythms and other musical arrangements were introduced.

The choice of verbal material and musical arrangements has everything to do with the age, identity, and status of the celebrants addressed by the *iyáàlù* drummer. At one table of celebrants, as Ayanboye played *oríkì* and proverbs relevant to this group of elders, one of the old men was so moved by it that he rose to dance. Signaling his intention to address the man directly, Ayanboye immediately cued his ensemble to strike up *wórò-ẹ̀tike*, a combination of two regal dances that are typically played for those who hold high status by fact of seniority or title. The *wórò* dance begins with a moderately paced 12/8 groove, to which the old man

begins stepping, assuredly yet with experienced restraint. Ayanboye then uses the *iyáàlù* to insert a common proverb into the rhythm:

Èni ò fé, ká rẹ̀rù ká sọ	People do not want one to lift a burden and put it down
--------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------

Orí ẹ̀ni ni ní yọ̀'ni	One's head [destiny] will free/save one
-----------------------	-----------------------------------------

Èni ò fé, ká rẹ̀rù ká sọ	People do not want one to lift a burden and put it down
--------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------

Owomoyela (2005:355) interprets this somewhat ambiguous passage as, “people do not offer to help others out of difficulties; only providence does.” References to *orí* (translated literally as “head,” but understood variously as destiny, divine predisposition, or providence) as a personal guide are common in Yorùbá poetry. A person’s *orí* is sometimes referred to in English as his or her “guardian spirit.”

As the intensity of the man’s dancing heats up, Ayanboye transitions from verbal material to percussive punctuations used to inspire the dancer. He brings the tempo to its peak and then signals another break on the *iyáàlù*. This is where the *ẹ̀tike* dance proper begins [see Figure 7 above]. After a few percussive dance gestures, Ayanboye offers an excerpt of a well-known piece of drum poetry. As it is drum poetry often interpolated in *oríkì* for hunters (*ilù ọ̀dẹ̀*) or their deity Ògún, it is possible that the elder man was a hunter or belonged to a family with ties to Ògún devotion. On the other hand, it is a popular poem that may be used in a

variety of situations. In a dance context such as this, however, it is a passage that is addressed only to those who are known to be conversant in *iyáàlù* drum language:

Wòrú o	Wòrú
Wòrú oko	Wòrú of the farm
Wòrú o	Wòrú
Wòrú odò	Wòrú of the river
Wòrú pekà féiyẹ jẹ	Wòrú shelled corn for birds to eat
Mo délé mo rò fún baba	I returned home and reported to father
Babá na Wòrú jojo	Father beats Wòrú so much
Lábẹ̀ ògèdè	Under the plantain tree
Lábẹ̀ òrombó	Under the orange tree
O ti ẹ̀e dábẹ̀ ata	Why are you under the pepper plant
Idẹ̀ wẹ̀rẹ̀wẹ̀ ni t'Ọ̀sun	Tiny brass bells are that of Ọ̀sun
Ọ̀jẹ̀ gídìgbà ní t'Ọ̀sà	The lead bracelet is that of the deity (Ọ̀bàtálá)
Sẹ̀kẹ̀sẹ̀kẹ̀ ni t'Ọ̀gún...	Iron chains belong to Ọ̀gún...

The full poem continues on for another stanza, but Ayanboye omits it and returns to percussive motifs to which the addressee dances. The poem, though somewhat cryptic on the surface, creates the sense that a restless, trouble-making child carries the nature of Ọ̀gún, the hunter

and adventurer, in him: “All children have a little bit of Ògún’s spirit in them” (Abiodun in Beier 2002:160). Indeed the complete poem normally ends with the reassurance:

Gbogbo wa l’Ògún jobí

We are all offspring of Ògún

l’Ògún jobí l’Ògún jobí

Offspring of Ògún, offspring of Ògún

The way the poem builds in textual density mirrors the build in musical tension that the drummers create while performing it. One can observe the dancer’s energy rising, his movements becoming more defined, while the *iyáàlù* player Ayanboye, too, becomes more animated, fixed in an intense dialogue of drumming and movement. It is at this point that the dancer begins spraying money on Ayanboye, in this case dropping naira bills on the ground in front of him – an expression of joy and appreciation for a masterful performance, but also a playful taunt to spur the drummer on. As the dance comes to a natural conclusion with a rhythmic cadence, the man walks away and Ayanboye signals the drummers to return to their duple-meter social dance rhythm. The ensemble moves on.

When I later asked Akintunde (2009) about the dancer’s knowledge, he said that this man knew the drum language well. A dancer must “know the tones of the drum, and that is why he can take a step. If you don’t understand the drum...the drum’s language, you mustn’t be far from the drummers [so that] they can be teaching you gradually.” I then asked him about Ayanboye’s choice of drum poetry: “So why did he choose that proverb and poem to

play?” Akintunde (2009) answered that because it is what came to him creatively in the moment: “When you are playing, whatever is in your mind is what you express...the moment it comes to your brain you put it out.” Nonetheless, the social position and individual identity of the particular addressee are keys to what is chosen as repertoire, which in this case was *wórò-ẹ̀tike*, the appropriate choice for an elder man of high status. While there is significant room for improvisational creativity, the *iyáàlù* drummer’s musical choices are driven initially by considerations of the addressee’s age, occupation, title, and personality.

After playing for several more tables, we come upon a table of young men – all dressed in white – who are from a family of medicine makers (*onûşègùn*, or *olòdògùn*). Ayanboye begins with a solo recitation of the *oríkì* of the men at the table, to which they respond vociferously. They are a rowdy group, eager to be entertained, and they vocally demand some dancing music. We strike up a vigorous 12/8 dance rhythm called *gbandikan* (stand strong), a music of 1950s vintage which is known colloquially as “music for tough guys” (Olaniyan 1984) and which is typically selected for young male audiences. Akintunde also refers to this particular form of 12/8 dance music as *ẹ̀já* (fragment), identifying it by the staccato percussive technique that the *iyáàlù* player uses to communicate with the dancers. These rhythmic punctuations, which involve right-hand sticking alternating with left-hand slaps, are what give the music its particular character – “that is the color of the music,” says Akintunde.

Between each set of dance punctuations, Ayanboye inserts common proverbs, idioms, and stanzas of poetry. At this point in the performance, since he has already recited *oriki* directly to the young men, he is using more common material to energize the men's dancing and to engage their participation in singing, which they do by vocally interpreting the segments of drum speech that they recognize. One proverb that Ayanboye inserts periodically throughout the performance is:

Òní l'ó b'ọ̀la l'ojú	It is today that veils tomorrow
Èni tí ó rí sí l'òní	One who sees today
Yòò rí sí l'ọ̀la	Cannot see tomorrow
Òní l'ó b'ọ̀la l'ojú	It is today that veils tomorrow

To encourage one young man's dancing, he recites a portion of drum poetry discussed in this chapter's earlier section on dance drumming. This poem is typically associated with *gbandikan* music, which is a secular social music, but has added meaning in this context because it makes reference to Ifá, the oracle, whom these young men or their fathers must consult when making their medicines:

Mo ọ̀a kẹ́kẹ́	I cut the facial marks
Mo mú regbó Ifá	I go to the bush [initiation place] of Ifá
Kùgú, kùgú gbandikan	Kùgú, kùgú gbandikan [percussive gestures]

Ayanboye follows this with a brief segment of *èjá* punctuations, followed by another stanza of the poem. In addition to such proverbial and poetic material, Ayanboye occasionally draws attention to the raucousness of the group by playfully warning them:

Sigidi rora k'o má bá şubú                      Be careful that you do not fall down

After the dancing continues for about fifteen minutes or so, Ayanboye signals a shift to verbal mode (*ifilùsòrò*), wherein the accompaniment instruments drop out and he recites poetry to the young men in a responsorial fashion, with the *iyáàlù* “calling” and the chorus of celebrants responding. In this case, the drum poetry and praises are addressed not to specific individuals but to *onîşègùn* more generally, a profession to which the young men at the table belong. Such material contains a considerable amount of poetic material used in the *oríkì* of *Òrúnmìlá/Ifá*. Additionally, it includes idioms referencing the power and effectiveness of the addressee’s medicine, their association with *Ifá*, and their inheritance of their family’s estimable traits:

Ewéje	Ewéje [“Medicine-Was-Effective”]
Ifá ó palúwa rẹ je, ó palúwa rẹ je	Ifá will kill [discipline] that person (2x)
Òrúnmìlá ó palúwa rẹ je	Òrúnmìlá will kill [discipline] that person
Ewéje, Ewéje	Ewéje [“Medicine-Was-Effective”] (2x)
Ewéje, babaà're l'ó bío	Ewéje, you were born to a good father (2x)
Babaà're l'ó bío	You were born to a good father

B'omọ ò jọ sòkòtò

If a child does not resemble his father

Yóó jọ kijipa

He will resemble his mother

Babaà're l'ó bíó

You were born to a good father

Ewéjẹ, the primary name of address used here, is likely an *oríkì* name of a particular house of medicine-makers to which these young men are related. Translated as “Medicine-Was-Effective,” Ewéjẹ suggests a past ailment that was cured through the use of traditional medicine (FAMA 2011). The reference to Ifá is oblique in this context, but it refers to a well-known saying that is often incorporated into *oríkì* for Ọ̀rúnmílá, or for *onûsègùn* and *babaláwo*, whose professions tie them closely to Ọ̀rúnmílá (text and translation, Abimbola 1997:135-136):

Ifá ó palúwa rẹ̀ jẹ

Ifá will kill [discipline] that person

Eni ó bá fojú èkùọ̀ w'Ọ̀rúnmílá

Anyone who looks at Ọ̀rúnmílá as if he were ordinary palm nuts

Ifá ó palúwa rẹ̀ jẹ

Ifá will kill [discipline] that person

This is a saying intended to illustrate the level of respect and deference that Ọ̀rúnmílá (Ifá) deserves. Palm nuts are the most important tool of Ifá divination, and so in this context they should be treated with reverence, not as mere objects. Indeed, according to Ifá mythology, sacred palm nuts (*ikin Ifá*) are believed to contain the spirit or essence of Ifá (Abimbola 1976:ill. plate 1, n.1).



The phrase following this, “babaà’re l’ó bío” (you were born to a good father), is a common idiom of flattery. This is quickly followed by a common proverb, “b’òmọ ò jọ şòkòtò...,” which says that a child resembles or takes after one of his parents. “Babaà’re l’ó bío” is repeated afterwards to bookend or musically and poetically punctuate the proverb. The young *onîşègùn* are praised not only for the effectiveness of their own medicine, but also for their invulnerability to the harmful medicines of enemies (Adeyemi 2012):

Kùrù-kéré kùrù-kéré	Little footsteps [running around]
Ó dilé onîşègùn	You rush to the house of the medicine-maker
Kùrù-kéré kùrù-kéré	Little footsteps [running around]
Ó dilé babaláwo	You rush to the house of the <i>babaláwo</i> [Ifá priest]
Oògùn ò ràn mi o	Your medicine will not harm me
Ẹ má wúlé sárika	Don’t trouble yourself running around

The young *onîşègùn* to whom this poetry is addressed sing enthusiastically along with the *alùşèkèrè*, who is vocally interpreting the Ayanboye’s *iyáàlù* lines. The addressees appear to know these poetic formulas quite well and get visible pleasure from singing them together at the tops of their voices. In this and the *wórò-ẹtike* example, we see how *dùndún* music is used to aurally mark the exceptionality of an individual or group (by fact of age, occupation, or rank),

while at the same time affirming collective sentiments through audience participation in dance and song.

### Generosity and audience “performances”

Audience participation—specifically dancing and distributing money—plays a central role in *dùndún* performances; indeed, it is the only way a drummer can earn his living. Such performances of monetary redistribution have two primary dynamic forms, which are often taking shape simultaneously. One is enacted between people who are socially unequal, calling into play patron-client relations. The other is enacted among audience members who are social equals or peers in age, occupation, or social status.

In the patron-client dynamic there is reciprocation, but it is not equal. By giving conspicuously to drummers, a person will receive the praises due to their station and appear generous in the process. This is why people often spray in small denominations so the act of generosity can be extended and appear more substantial. This has been described to me in various terms as an act of hospitality, generosity, or redistributive giving. It also, however, reinforces each party’s place in the social hierarchy. For the Aragbiji of Iragbiji (2009), the expectation of generosity is a motivating force: “In Yorùbáland we are very generous. I see you, I want to give you something.” But spraying money or “dashing” performers is mostly a matter

of rewarding them for their work so that they can maintain their professions: “It is like appreciating an artwork; it is an encouragement to the artists and it will make them happy. Not everyone would want to do it voluntarily. It further encourages them to do more” (Aragbiji 2009).

Drummers facilitate this dynamic by approaching big men, who are “big” by virtue of wealth, political position, or family lineage and rank. White visitors often fall into this category regardless of their *actual* wealth or position. There is a sense of pride in what drummers are willing to accept from a particular patron. If a person perceived to be of means offers only “small money,” it may be taken as an insult. On my first visit to the palace in Iragbiji, I made the mistake of offering the lead drummer only ten naira (the equivalent of about 15 cents) and much to my surprise he handed it back to me shaking his head. I then offered 100 naira (a little less than a dollar) and this proved acceptable. The patron-client relationship, then, takes shape through a performance in which the musician and the addressee must play their respective roles adequately.

Audience performances are also enacted between and among peers, people of equal status or means, people who share a workplace or occupational association. This can be seen when peers are dancing and they begin to spray each other in addition to the musicians. It is in this way a peer-to-peer transaction that can be going on simultaneously to their patron-client

transaction with the drummers. It appears to be a way of both recognizing exceptional or talented members of the group while reinforcing group feeling.

A moment of dancing at the 2010 *egúngún* festival in Èrìn-Ọ̀sun illustrates the redistributive ethic that emerges through audience performances. Akintunde approached a group of *bàtá* drummers and indicated that he wished to dance, insisting that they switch from a popular *fújì* rhythm to *ìlù àgbà*, an older style of drumming (lit., “drum of the elders”). He wanted to dance to something more “traditional.” As he began dancing, members of the community came up and pressed naira bills to his forehead. He continued dancing and when the drummers fell more solidly into sync, an air of satisfaction crossed his face and he took one of the naira bills just given to him, which he had been holding in his hand, and pressed it to the temple of the *iyáàlù bàtá* drummer. So we can see how the cycle of generosity continues through the dancer to the drummer. While the accumulation of money matters to the drummer, for whom this activity is his living, for the non-professional dancer and his surrounding circle, the very act of giving and redistributing is what is important – this is what is of value, not the money itself. In this brief social interaction, we see how drummers and audience members collaborate in performance to enact the patron-client and peer-to-peer dynamics characteristic of Yorùbá societies.

## ***Conclusion***

This exploration into the roles and dynamics of *dùndún* performance offers insights into forms of agency, the links between music and context, and the nature of the social “work” that musicians do. Yorùbá musicians may exercise some forms of agency in social situations, but this potential for influence is only realized through dependence on more powerful patrons. The agency of Yorùbá drummers is also circumscribed by the customs of their profession, the structures of knowledge they have inherited, and the expectations of their audiences. As we have sought to demonstrate, however, this is not a rote adherence to hierarchy and tradition; it rather involves social calculations and economic strategies made constantly, and often instantaneously, in musical performance. Yorùbá musical repertoire, like its poetic genres, is famously porous and intertextual. This allows for musical performances that are extraordinarily sensitive to context – and not to a singular context, but rather to multiple layers of context: repertoire may be added, omitted, or blended according to cultural, interpersonal, and aesthetic factors. Finally, Yorùbá musical performances facilitate the reenactment of social distinctions and hierarchies while at the same time energizing collective action and community sentiment. This illustrates, as Steven Feld (1984) noted in his critique of Alan Lomax’s cantometrics, that it is far more productive to examine the ways in which musical structures

and relationships embody a society's peculiar balance of hierarchical and egalitarian tendencies than it is to delineate strictly "individualistic" and "communalistic" forms of music.

In the chapters that follow, we examine how the forms and limits of agency in Yorùbá society, the shifting social and cultural contexts of modern Nigeria, and the particular constellation of the *dùndún* tradition, both condition and reflect contemporary cultural entrepreneurship and expression among *dùndún* musicians in Nigeria and the U.S.

## CHAPTER 5 THE DÙNDÚN TRADITION AS HERITAGE ENTERPRISE

### *A heritage enterprise*

The Ayà̀nàgalú Ş̀òúngòbì Foundation (ASF hereafter), named after the eponymous patron deity of drumming, brings together scholars, practitioners, and local political figures to bolster support for the “talking drum” tradition, promote it as an emblem of Yorùbá identity, and develop it as an attraction for international tourism. “Talking drum,” by the foundation’s definition, is understood to refer to both *dùndún* and *bàtà*, although the former is the primary focus and that which appears on their logo. Conceived in 2006 by Ìbàdàn businessman Morakinyo Daramola, the ASF’s grand patron is Ọ̀ba Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi III, the Aláàfin (king) of Ọ̀yó. The Aláàfin casts his commitment to the project in terms of the historically close relationship of drumming and kingship, and the king’s duty to uphold Yorùbá tradition. Apart from being “authenticated” in this way by traditional leaders and literati, the foundation has also received praise as a cultural marketing strategy, with pledges of support offered by the governors of Ọ̀yó and Ọ̀şun states. The goals of the foundation include establishing a talking drum tour of western Nigeria, an annual showcase to celebrate the achievements of elder drummers and to cultivate new talent, a drum and dance school, a cultural museum and archive, and the publication of research materials (ASF Brochure 2007). The one event now in

place is the Talking Drum Festival, which was inaugurated in 2007 and includes performances, exhibits, and educational lectures. The ASF's work in reinventing the talking drum tradition as heritage involves symbolically positioning the organization as a catalyst both of artistic revival and of cultural entrepreneurship. While southwestern Nigeria's first major arts and culture movement followed a historical trajectory from artistic innovation to the codification of cultural heritage (see Probst 2011, Klein 2007), the ASF is attempting to make both happen simultaneously.

This chapter examines the Ayà̀nàgalú Şòúngòbì Foundation as a heritage enterprise, by which I mean an entrepreneurial effort to transform living culture into commodity forms such as exhibitions, staged performances, educational workshops, and published material. Yet, at the same time, the foundation seeks not to alienate the musicians whose labor is at the heart of the *dùndún* tradition, but rather to add value to drummers' work in ways that strengthen the profession. I look at how the ASF, using both their own publications and the attention of the news media, strategically frame their enterprise to articulate with a variety of public discourses. First, the ASF's mission is drafted in line with the Nigerian Federal Government's publicized initiatives to strengthen the culture and tourism sector through the production of cultural spectacles and arts institutions that appeal to an international audience. This, I argue,



is a legacy of the unfulfilled promise of FESTAC '77, Nigeria's attempt at a "black world's fair" (Apter 2005:3-9).

The rhetoric of cultural tourism reveals a second discursive strategy that is woven into the first, which is to link the ASF's work, and the talking drum, by extension, to global culture by re-conceptualizing it as a contribution to "world heritage." This way of thinking was promoted by UNESCO in the mid twentieth century and strengthened by their more recent recognition of living cultures as "intangible heritage" (see Kurin 2004). Following Probst (2011) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), I argue that the ASF, like many heritage enterprises, depends heavily on narratives of the loss, recovery, and preservation of culture. Unlike Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, however, I argue that heritage enterprise needn't be exclusively focused on the export of culture and the import of tourists (1995); it is also a means of re-imagining and re-shaping the ideological and material bases of a "traditional" practice in ways that encourage local identification with, and monetary investment in, the culture.

This leads to the third discursive strategy evident in ASF's work—the promotion of cultural pride and cultural ownership in the talking drum tradition among Nigerians, especially the artists themselves, as a complement to the foundation's focus on international audiences and interests. This discourse entails a number of thorny debates, including what the talking drum tradition actually comprises, what its proper contexts and functions are in a modern

nation, and what it signifies religiously and culturally in a dominantly Islamic and Christian society. Likewise, the goal of cultural ownership involves the cultivation of local stakeholders in and sponsors of the organization and its events, thus reshaping the talking drum's patronage system for the twenty-first century and, ideally, making it a more attractive and viable career for upcoming generations of hereditary musicians. It also leads to debates over who actually owns and benefits from the culture, whether it is the artists or the administrators who "promote" their art. The historical legacy and public discourses to which the ASF has harnessed its heritage enterprise are, in short, far from stable. As they circulate both inside and outside the world of heritage production, these issues are debated in ways that both complement and challenge the ASF's methods and assumptions.

### *A history of heritage production*

#### **Culture and national policy**

The Nigerian Federal Government's current agenda to build cultural tourism and international exchange appears to be a remnant of the euphoria surrounding FESTAC'77, the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, when culture became a "national" project in Nigeria and "heritage tourism" gained traction (Probst 2011:68-69). The ASF aligns itself with this agenda, intending not only to produce musical spectacles, "to popularize the

talking drum festival as a national and international event,” as they put it, but also to institutionalize the talking drum tradition by “set[ting] up museums and archival centers in strategic locations in the country to serve as culture banks and tourist attractions” (ASF 2010a). One of the partners in this endeavor is the Center for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), a parastatal organization set up to maintain the legacy of FESTAC’77, from which the ASF sought support for their 2012 Talking Drum Festival. In his pitch to the CBAAC, foundation member Chief Yemi Ogunyemi cast the foundation’s work as important to national development by arguing, as one reporter paraphrased him, that “Culture is the only thing that does not go through the factory that God has given this country. [The ASF] was set up to promote the significance of the drums to the development of the nation.” Treating “cultural heritage” as symbolically equivalent to a natural resource (c.f. Apter 2005), Ogunyemi stated that “culture is the only thing that we have to sell, apart from oil” (Okuyemi 2012). To understand why this type of discourse is a legacy of FESTAC ’77 and how it exhibits some of the same contradictions of that era, a brief history of Nigerian cultural policy is necessary.

J.H. Kwabena Nketia (1998:38) describes the 1960s in West Africa as a “period of institutional development,” where “the cultural revival that had characterized the previous decade became institutionalized in many African countries.” In short, it was a period in which many governments saw the promotion of African cultural heritage and resources as a means of

fostering national sentiment and advancing pan-African agendas. In Nigeria, political turmoil in the Western region and the devastating Biafran war of 1967-1969 made the development of coherent cultural policy difficult to realize until the late 1960s (Adejumo 2002:859).

Nonetheless, the Nigerian Arts Council (NAC), a volunteer organization of arts connoisseurs and entrepreneurs founded in 1959 and supported by a small government grant, advanced an ad-hoc cultural policy during the 1960s by building artist networks and drawing public attention to Nigeria's vibrant cultural resources. Universities also played an important role in cultural development. The early 1960s saw the establishment of Institutes of African Studies at the Universities of Ìbàdàn, Nsukka, and Ifè, and Centres for Nigerian Cultural Studies at universities in Zaria and Lagos (ibid.:299).

With regional re-structuring in 1967, the NAC merged with the Northern Region's Nigerian Cultural Society (NCS), becoming a joint parastatal body responsible for cultural policy. The inauguration of the All Nigeria Festival of the Arts (NAFEST, also known as the Festival of Unity) in 1970 marked a renewed effort by the Nigerian government to build national unity through cultural policy (Adedeji 1985:291-94). The National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), a conglomeration of earlier cultural organizations, was formed in 1975 as preparation for FESTAC'77. This festival demonstrated the state's shift in priority from showcasing local art to the production of spectacle on a grand scale (Apter 2005). Despite

presenting itself as a celebration of “national culture,” of “unity in diversity,” FESTAC produced culture by committee and marginalized those it purported to represent. The means and mechanisms of cultural production were controlled by what Jean-Claude Milner might have called the “salaried bourgeois” – a class of administrators, managers, and power brokers who receive a “surplus wage” based not necessarily on competence but on credentials (Zizek 2012:8-13, after Milner). It was, as Apter (2005:118) puts it, “the production of ‘the people’ over and above the people,” which left non-literate artists and culture-bearers to jockey for state recognition and support.

During the 1990s, NAFEST similarly came to misrecognize artistic spectacle as art itself, where the production of “symbols of traditional culture conversant with modernity” replaced true support for local artists and their lifestyles (Klein 2007:42-44, 56). Government and parastatal cultural organizations were administratively bloated, supplanting the interests of hereditary artists with those of the formally-educated cultural elite. Some twenty years later, the problem remains the same. Chief Muraina Oyelami, who has been active as an artist and culture broker since the 1960s, interprets it this way: “The pitiful thing is that we have a government that does not see what we [artists and musicians] are doing as important. We are looked at as someone who has nothing else to do, as *alágbé* (beggars). We are only just better than beggars. We have good people in government, [but] most of our people [in government]

are not interested in arts and culture; they only show interest when there is something to siphon, to take from it. For example, there is going to be a carnival in Abuja. Local governments are sending hand-picked ‘mediocres’; the artists get nothing and the administrators take everything [of the revenues]” (Oyelami 2009a).

Despite federal and local governments having proven themselves unable or unwilling to provide consistent and sustainable support for hereditary artists, those involved in the ASF’s heritage enterprise continue to seek support from government officials and affiliation with parastatal cultural organizations. While little material support has resulted, this engagement with the state has legitimized the ASF’s discourse about the talking drum’s national significance and its potential as a resource for economic development. Public perception of state backing is valuable as symbolic capital, and so the ASF continues to invite government officials to their events, offer them awards of recognition, and solicit their public views on cultural heritage. Founder Morakinyo Daramola acknowledges the difficulties that politicians face, stating that the strong regional and ethnic affiliations of local and national figures alike makes it difficult for many to publicly support a project like ASF, which focuses on the culture of a single ethnic group.

Creating heritage involves transforming the value of a local art or culture practice by molding its contextual frames—the “interfaces” through which it is consumed (Kirshenblatt-

Gimblett 1995)—to meet the needs and interests of a wider constituency. Representatives of the state are crucial to legitimizing such claims of a heritage’s significance beyond the local. Professor Tunde Babawale, CEO of the federal parastatal organization CBAAC, with which the ASF is affiliated, does so this way: “Drums are an essential symbol of our art and culture, not only in Yorùbáland but also in Nigeria and Africa in general. It is connected to entertainment, language, and culture, so CBAAC is prepared to support any project that propagates it” (Lasisi 2012). Despite this optimistic language, it remains to be seen how well *dùndún* artists themselves will benefit materially from such symbolic elevation of their profession.

### Heritage model of culture

The present-day entrepreneurial re-imagining of the talking drum tradition recalls an earlier artistic movement in the town of Oşogbo. Through the intervention of European artists and scholars, the agency of Nigerian literati like dramatist Duro Ladipo and his protégées, and the leadership of the Atáója (king) of Oşogbo, a modern Yorùbá arts movement emerged in the 1960s. As Peter Probst (2011) tells the story, the “Oşogbo School” of fine art, once derided by Nigerians (especially by artists of the Zaria School) as a mere charade of European primitivism, was in time accepted as an authentically Nigerian style that became a valuable part of the country’s heritage. With growing interest in heritage tourism spurred by FESTAC ’77, many

Oşogbo artists began leveraging the notoriety of Oşogbo art and their professional arts networks to travel, reach international audiences, and establish workshops and “schools” of their own. This transformation was marked by a move towards artistic standardization, that is, the codification and reproduction of a recognized and profitable style of artwork. They began focusing on the Oşogbo art “brand,” with “individuality and originality” taking a lesser role. Cultural heritage entrepreneurship, in other words, augmented the production and sale of Oşogbo art, which has seen a “waning” audience since the 1990s (Probst 2011:78-96).

Probst (2011) describes this process as the transition from artistic innovation to heritage development. Heritage making involves first the transformation of living culture into a commodity that a society can own and from which it can benefit. But heritage is not only an objective commodity; it is also a dynamic social process that necessarily involves specific stakeholders and the peculiar relations that emerge from a confluence of global and local politics of culture. While it may be, quite literally, a fabrication – a cultural construction—it is not necessarily a falsity, as some critics claim (see examples in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:368). It does not have to involve a complete break from the past, nor a complete break from the culture it purports to represent. In fact, as Probst illustrates, heritage can be developed through historically-conscious, culturally-grounded methods, and made to articulate with peoples’ long-held senses of who they are. In Oşogbo during the 1960s, the making of



heritage became part of the *oba*'s effort to control ritual imagery and its relationship to political power - a local, culturally-inflected politics of representation in which Oṣogbo kings had been involved for generations (Probst 2011:146-149). Far from a purely “invented tradition,” the making of heritage is seen as both a deeply reflexive and historically-conscious project.

Nonetheless, heritage is a distinctly modern phenomenon—it is, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995:370) puts it, “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past.” Heritage, although it may directly or indirectly represent the past, speaks in and to the cultural and social environment of the present.

Today's entrepreneurial efforts to turn the talking drum into cultural heritage evidence both direct historical connections and discursive resemblances to the Oṣogbo arts movement. Since many of the first-generation Oṣogbo artists were also members of Duro Ladipo's traveling theater troupe, in which music featured prominently, performing arts became wrapped into the fold of Yorùbá heritage production. The Oṣogbo artists provided ideas and institutional models from which the current generation draws. The heritage model entails a focus on, among other things, the institutionalization of culture: education of artists and the general public through schools and workshops, documentation of the art through research and publication, and memorialization of the art through museums and exhibitions. Muraina Oyelami, a pioneer of Oṣogbo Art and a veteran of the Duro Ladipo National Theater, continues such heritage work to

this day with his Ọ̀bàtálá Centre for Creative Arts, which includes education, documentation, and exhibition of Yorùbá music in its mission (Oyelami 2001). Similarly to the Oşogbo arts movement, enterprises like the ASF rely on state and traditional authorities for political legitimacy and on the generosity of ọ̀bas, chiefs, and other literati to sustain them materially.

The heritage model also focuses on audiences external to the tradition. It is geared especially towards international audiences, with the intention of attracting tourism. Morakinyo Daramola, founder and director of the Ayà̀nàgalú Ş̀òúngòbì Foundation, has repeatedly talked of the global aspirations of the organization, hosting an “international festival [that will] attract people from all over the world to Nigeria” (*Nigerian Tribune* 2009). But what would be the basis of this attraction –the spectacle of the festival or the talking drum itself? The ASF suggests that it is both, and this is where UNESCO’s popular language and ideology of “world heritage” is mobilized.

UNESCO’s past recognition of Yorùbá monuments like the Ọ̀şun Grove and “intangible” practices such as Ifá divination as well as their ongoing collaboration with local Nigerian cultural organizations is of great value to those involved in heritage enterprise. ASF grand patron the Aláàfin of Ọ̀yó suggests that such recognition gives local cultures the visibility and legitimacy necessary to attract a global audience. UNESCO’s public support for the ASF, he said, should encourage Nigerians to: “propogate [the talking drum], celebrate its uniqueness

and [the] positive impacts it could have on people; if we are able to bring it to the world, surely the world will know that Africans are intelligent and have evolved [i.e., developed] certain things that the rest of the world can learn from. That it is not only Western cultures and values that should be embraced” (Aláàfin 2007). The suggestion here is that the world has failed to embrace African “cultures and values” in part because effective “interfaces” like the ASF festival have not been in place to “propagate” them. Yet those who support the ASF also acknowledge that cultural heritage does more than promote particular values, it shapes a nation’s image and its profile in the world. In a 2008 public statement of support for the ASF festival, for example, then minister of culture and tourism Prince Kayode used the language of intangible heritage popularized by UNESCO to indicate that culture is both something ephemeral belonging to a community or “nation” and something of potential value to the wider world: “The ministry proudly endorses the proposed talking drum festival because of the significant role which the talking drum plays in enriching Nigeria’s intangible cultural heritage, which is the nation’s strongest point in terms of our contribution to global heritage” (Salawu 2008).

ASF’s efforts to symbolically transform the talking drum – a situated Yorùbá performance practice— into a national heritage and a contribution to world culture show a tendency to universalism that detaches the drum from the contexts that give it meaning. What

is in practice a musical tradition deeply rooted in the particulars of language, lineage, locality, and liturgy, is recast as something of universal scope and applicability:

The talking drum is a monumental and unique Yorùbá contribution to world musical heritage. Among world musical instruments, it is one of the most varied in its use and application. It is an instrument equally adaptable to war and peace, celebration and lament, thought and feeling; it is a custodian of the rhythm of the collective soul. It is sad to see, however, the clear and obvious neglect which the talking drum has suffered relative to, say, the piano or the string instruments of western civilization...The talking drum traveled the seas and is to be found on every continent of the world today in its real or virtual form. (ASF 2010b:11)

What is implicit here is a narrative of loss, in which the talking drum has been neglected and is in need of an intervention to raise it to the respectability it deserves as a world-class musical instrument.

### *Discourses of heritage production*

#### **Loss, recovery, and preservation**

The notions of setting up museums and archives of living cultures, and of creating cultural spectacles and attractions geared to international audiences, of “preserving and promoting” a culture that is actually alive and well, is rooted in Nigeria on a combination of Pan-African ideas about “recovering” and “reconstructing” pre-colonial cultures (see Fanon 1967 for a summary and critique of such tendencies) and European modernist ideas of cultural death and revival (Probst 2011). The discourse of “preservation” was advanced further by the

late twentieth-century involvement of UNESCO in Nigerian cultural affairs, a period in which foreign interest was seen to legitimize local cultures as valuable pieces of national and world heritage (ASF 2010a).

The discourse of preservation, of course, depends on there being something to preserve. For decaying antiquities this may be an easy case to make, but for living traditions like Ifá divination or the Yorùbá talking drum, whose practitioners have been preserving themselves quite well for generations (albeit not as successfully these days), it requires a larger conceptual leap. While claiming to reverse a process of colonial “de-culturation” by recovering a tradition in decline, culture producers like the ASF are, in fact, creating something qualitatively new – a local musical tradition packaged as heritage (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:370). And this begs the question of, when foreign elites and native literati intervene in the “recovery” and “preservation” of living cultures, who will ultimately benefit. Supporters of the ASF would probably say that everyone, from Yorùbá artists to the world community, would benefit. For them, preservation is not simply a means of attracting outside investment or vying for respect in the international arena, although that is a necessary part of it; preservation is also a means of returning to the Yorùbá people an emblem of their collective identity and rebuilding it as a means of material sustenance.

The ASF sees the talking drum being in decline and in need of, to use the words of supporters themselves, “preservation,” “promotion,” “promulgation,” “revival,” and “rejuvenation.” The program writer of the 2010 Talking Drum Festival Event Program, for example, asserts: “We have come to a nadir in our individual and collective ability to appreciate simple phrases of the talking drum. An average Yorùbá child today cannot tell when the family signature tune is played at its doorstep. It is nothing short of tragedy...It can be said, without fear of contradiction, that to take the phenomenon of the talking drums out of our collective experience as a people is to uproot and cast a whole nation adrift” (ASF 2010b:12).

The narrative of loss is accompanied by nostalgia for a time past when “foreign cultures” were not such a dominant force in the lives of Nigerians. The Akinrun (king) of Ikirun, in his pledge of support for the 2010 ASF festival spoke of the loss of a past where the talking drum played an integral role – something that the ASF festival would actively memorialize: “With the Talking Drum Festival, many people, especially Yorùbá people, especially Yorùbá people, will be taken back to the years gone by when we [could] use the drum to communicate in different ways. It is unfortunate that a lot of Yorùbá people are fast losing their culture while opting for a foreign one and this should not be so” (*Nigeriafilms.com* 2010). The ASF, in other words, is seen as an important corrective to the current fetish for things foreign. While falling short of advocating for *òrìṣà* devotion or *egúngún* veneration (many

ASF supporters proudly identify as Christian), the foundation presents itself as an advocate of “Yorùbá culture” more generically and non-religiously conceived.

The narrative of cultural loss, however, is not an invention of heritage producers alone; nostalgia for a past in which talking drums were more highly valued is also common among hereditary professionals not directly tied to heritage enterprises. The stories that Ayàn men tell share several themes: the intimate relationship of drumming and the affairs of kingship, the significance of drums as accompaniment to ritual sacrifice, the efficacy of drummers as warriors or defenders of king and community, and the role of drums as entertainment. Karimu Ayanleke of Èdẹ (2009), for example, noted some differences between today and days past – although the scope of time he is talking about is unclear. In “those times,” he said, the *dùndún* would be used for traditional sacrifices and would be used for everything that the king wanted to do. If “wild animals” entered the town, Ayanleke said, the king would call the drummers to play in order to drive off the animals. “Laiyé átijó” (in the old days), he continued, they would use *bàtá*, *kósó*, and *dùndún* drums together to “entertain the whole community”; but today *dùndún* and *bàtá* are not played together anymore.

For Ayandosu, Báálẹ̀ Onfù of Iragbiji, the talking drum played a crucial role in defense of the town: “In the olden days, our fathers used the drum to stop the activities of armed robbers and save people to go about their normal activities. That is why it will be a success for

him [researcher] if he is able to study the drum as it is a success for us here. The drum serves as a protector in times of warfare. Whenever there is an important occasion it is the drum that comes first. As God created the towns, he created the drum. To learn the drum requires patience. It is not what can be learnt in a hurry. This is an art that when we use our hand to communicate it comes out of the drum” (Ayandosú 2009a). The loss of historical knowledge and attributive poetry is also invoked when Ayàn elders talk about the contemporary generation of drummers. Commenting on young peoples’ increasing attraction to non-traditional forms of drumming, Ayansina of Ila-Orangun (2009) laments that many young drummers today can only play by following other musicians; they don’t know what the drum is saying or the meaning of what they are playing. For those young and old who “understand drumming,” however, they prefer the “olden-days drumming” (*ilù àgbà*, lit., drum of the elders). The use of *şaworo* (brass bells) on the *iyáàlù*, he says, is characteristic of older drumming styles. When you put them on your drum, it shows that you are the leader and “everyone [including the elders] must follow you” (Ayansina 2009).

One of the complaints I frequently heard among hereditary musicians was that young drummers of today, even if they have some technical ability, are much less adept at understanding and using drum language in their music. In a *Nigerian Tribune* interview, David Jegede, drummer for Nigerian gospel artist Yinka Ayefele, echoes this sentiment. He expresses



displeasure that *saje* (subgenre of *fíjì*) drummers of the current generation often use the drum to pass “lewd messages” or to say “gibberish” because “they did not really take time to learn how to beat it [the drum].” He also lays responsibility on audiences, who have “lost interest in what [the musicians] were saying with the drum.” There is a big difference, he claims, between the drummers of today and those of the previous generation who played with deeply-cultured bandleaders such as Yusuf Olatunji, Ayinla Omowura, and Ebenezer Obey, whose musicians were required to be skilled enough to play proverbs and interpret drum language (Akintayo 2007). Another interviewee in the same piece responds by arguing that the decline of the talking drum tradition is less about music than it is attributable to modern technology having made the talking drum irrelevant as a means of communication (ibid.).

Yet another position is evident in the Olóòwu of Òwu’s keynote address at the 2010 Talking Drum Festival, in which he argued that the tradition’s decline is rooted in material factors. He highlighted, for example, the economic realities that drive many Ayàn away from their traditional duties in the palace: “The *ọba* is the spiritual head of his people. His official residence is the palace. The location of the drummers is usually the porch at the entrance of the palace. It is a pity that this custom, this practice is almost [dead]. As the minister said, the Ayàn don’t get paid, yet they have to struggle in the same markets as us buying foodstuffs. They have to send their children to the same schools, the same universities. Who blames them

if they don't stand at the porch in front of the palace asking for alms? Nobody can blame them” (Olóòwu 2010). As I have noted in an earlier chapter, however, in those cases where palace drummers receive a regular stipend from king, palace drumming remains strong.

### Cultural pride and ownership

To reverse this perceived loss, the ASF aims to build cultural pride and ownership by encouraging both artists and the general public to see the talking drum tradition as culturally vital and economically viable. While concerned with musical change, technological obsolescence, and other issues that affect public perception of the talking drum, the ASF is first keen to address the material causes of the talking drum's apparent decline by re-imagining and re-building an economic structure that supports the tradition. While “diversifying Nigeria's monolithic economic structure by driving tourist traffic and revenue to southern Nigeria,” the ASF seeks to “build a network of volunteers, partners, and stakeholders for the purpose of fostering Yorùbá cultural renaissance.” This, in theory, does not exclude foreign participation, but in practice the key stakeholders have all been Nigerians. The board of trustees, for example, includes an *oba* (the Aláàfin of Òyó), two highly-respected Yorùbá writers and public intellectuals (Akinwumi Isola and Baba Adebayo Faleti, discussed in Chapter 2), and members of the local business community (ASF 2010a). Securing the participation of such local

stakeholders, many of whom are respected as “custodians” and “ambassadors” of Yorùbá culture, serves to authenticate or legitimate the ASF’s enterprise and make it attractive to investors from government and the business community.

The ASF’s marketing strategy recognizes that in order to attract private or public investment, a heritage enterprise must be perceived as culturally authentic and politically legitimate. As the foundation’s heritage product attracts a growing number of supporters among Yorùbá literati, politicians, and traditional leaders, it is authenticated as culture and legitimized as a project in line with the goals of the state. A 2007 brochure advertising the ASF, for example, includes an appeal for funds written by the Aláàfin of Òyó. It begins by symbolically linking the talking drum and the patron deity of drumming Ayànàgalú with the “royal father” (king) and his office. Making reference to Akinwumi Isola’s film *Şaworoide* (discussed in Chapter 2), the author writes, “The throne, the king and the crown are inseparable from the talking drum and the Ayàn Àgalú. No wonder the unrivaled passion with which the Kábiyèsí Iku Baba Yeye (honorific address of the king) has prosecuted this Talking Drum Campaign [caps in original].” This is followed by a pitch to potential investors: “The Kábiyèsí expressed His determination to collaborate with Ayànàgalú Şòúngòbì Foundation to make sure that honour and prestige is restored to the Talking Drummers (Ayàn) for the propagation of Yorùbá Culture. He therefore called on governments, corporate organisations

and individuals to support this worthy endeavour by partnering with Ayààgalú Şòúngòbì Foundation to sponsor the Talking Drum Festival and its other projects, in view of a Yorùbá cultural renaissance” (ASF 2007).

In addition to cultivating investment, the ASF is interested in the monetization of the talking drum in the international marketplace. As the CBAAC’s Tunde Babawale pleaded, “Some of our musical instruments have been adopted by other countries and they have formed them into modern musical instruments and we import them. Drums are used for communication, performing religious rights, entertainment, and so on. Drums also provide jobs for so many people. How many traditional drums do we have today? Can’t we produce drums and export them? We can use our drums to promote employment for [the] youth. Our partnership [with ASF] will continue. Together we will take this issue of drum[s] to other parts of the world” (Okuyemi 2012).

Apart from the economic dimension, the ASF’s goal is to stimulate cultural pride by drawing attention to the vitality, the centrality of the talking drum to Yorùbá culture and history, and the importance of owning one’s heritage. The difference is important here between the Oşogbo art movement, which had all the hallmarks of an “invented tradition,” and the art of *dùndún*, which has been passed down for centuries. Unlike Oşogbo art, the very repertoire of *dùndún* invokes claims and ties of kinship, lineage, and history, and the tradition has been

likened to the “blood” of the Yorùbá – an integrative and life-sustaining practice that holds the culture together: “The talking drum and its siblings are as blood to the Yorùbá...we cannot hope to recover the vigor and the essence of our forebears if we neglect so basic a thing as the talking drum in our odyssey towards a whole Yorùbá entity” (ASF 2010b:11).

The ASF also holds that the vitality of the talking drum depends not only on recognition of its cultural importance, but also on the degree to which the Yorùbá take ownership of it and have a stake in its future: “The occasional child prodigy has found it useful securing a rare visa abroad. The fortunate session musician has etched out a few checkered phrases on wax and compact discs but the talking drum is running out of guises under which it can survive, as creative as it is on its own. The drum is saying to those who would listen today that, the drum, like the land that gave it birth, must be nurtured and developed. Like land, it must be possessed or lost forever. Like land, it is [a] vital and lasting legacy, to be cherished from generation to generation” (ASF 2010b:11). And this ownership is seen as key to a people’s projection in the world. In a public address at the ASF’s 2008 Talking Drum Festival, University of Ìbàdàn historian Professor Bolanle Awe emphasized that “cultural heritage,” like the talking drum tradition, is crucial to a people’s sense of who they are and how they project this identity to the world. As paraphrased by a journalist, Awe stated that “Yorùbá culture must be celebrated at all times, because if it was not done, people would think the Yorùbá have no history.” She went

on to discuss the importance of UNESCO recognition of Nigeria's intangible heritage, such as the oral literature of Ifá and the Òṣun Grove (Abodunrin 2008). At the same event, then Òṣun state Governor Oyinlola, respected for his cultural work and partnerships with UNESCO and the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU), argued similarly that the promotion of culture such as the talking drum is important because it tells you about your past, present, and future as a people. As the journalist reports it, Oyinlola said that "A tribe that loses its culture will become slave to others" (ibid.) Or as CBAAC's Tunde Babawale put it, "A people without a past will never be respected by anybody" (Okuyemi 2012). For dramatist Akinwumi Isola, knowledge of history is about controlling the story. While accepting international interest in Yorùbá arts and culture, he is adamant that Yorùbá people must be able to sustain their own culture and take control of how it is represented in the wider world: "This is our culture; we have to preserve it because nobody will do it for us. We have to tell our own stories ourselves if we don't want it distorted" (*Nigerian Tribune* 2009).

The ASF's concern with international recognition is again tempered by their interest in the Yorùbá people's ownership of their heritage. The Aláàfin of Òyó, when interviewed about his role as the ASF's grand patron, emphasized that while he appreciated the interest of foreigners in the talking drum, he felt it essential for Yorùbá to remain in control of their cultural heritage: "Even non-Africans, Europeans, are coming here to learn the talking drum

and it will be a disaster if these people go away and in the future, because we neglected it, they have to teach our people [the Yorùbá] how to beat the talking drum” (Aláàfin 2007). The Aláàfin is speaking to the fear of losing both the knowledge to tell one’s own story and the very object around which that knowledge adheres. This resonates with the ASF’s definition of cultural heritage as being vital as “blood” and possessed like “land.” These are, in fact, quite useful metaphors for what the talking drum achieves psychologically and socially – its repertoire maintains people’s pride in the characteristics and deeds of their ancestors as well as their sense of investment in lineages, hometowns, and stories of mythical origin. Since this level of intimacy cannot be experienced by outsiders, the Aláàfin argues that it is properly the job of Yorùbá themselves to preserve this culture (*Nigerian Tribune* 2007).

The ASF aims to foster a sense of cultural ownership among hereditary professionals by giving them incentives to pass the tradition on to their children. This includes sponsoring Ayàn children to complete their formal education, and setting up arts finishing schools for “talking drum, arts and crafts,” that will offer “training to present and future generations so that knowledge can be passed on from generation to generation.” The ASF wants to re-create, albeit in a non-traditional form, the structures of learning and financial incentives that make intergenerational cultural continuity viable and desirable. Through the success of ASF at attracting sponsorship from telecommunications company MTN Nigeria Communications, Skye

Bank, Nigeria Distilleries, and UNESCO, as well as investment from other private sources, young people from Ayàn families can in theory recognize the material benefits of transforming the talking drum tradition into a multifaceted heritage enterprise.

The ASF's efforts towards sustainable heritage involve encouraging traditional leaders to maintain their patronage, and showing the younger generation that there are new ways to use the drum and make money from it. Of the foundation's work in these directions, Daramola claims, "We've gone to primary and secondary schools; we have visited area fathers (kings) and asked them to install drummers back in their palaces; we want drums to be part of primary school education, we want everyone to learn it...to make sure we have successful talking drummers everywhere. When we [the elder generation] are no more, they [the younger generation] will know that they have something. We don't want to throw away our culture and that is why we celebrate this festival every year" (Daramola 2010).

Daramola says that the goal of the ASF is to organize the drummers of today "to preserve what they have," and be able to pass it on from one generation to the next. "We have as a goal by 2030 to have sustainable development through the talking drum. We want to put it [in the hands of] the upcoming generation. For how long are we going to [listen to all this foreign music]?" This is why, he asserts, young people from hereditary families of drummers must be made aware of their inheritance. "Because if they don't pick it up, over the next 50



years there will be no such thing as talking drum in Africa. I want to preserve culture, to bring drummers together, to let them feel important, to know that there is a life in this [tradition] for them, and to let them know they have done a lot of good things for us in this land” (Daramola 2010).

The ASF, however, is not the first to promote cultural pride and ownership by broadening the contexts in which talking drum is performed and patronized. Painter, drummer, and culture broker Chief Muraina Oyelami has for decades been successfully realizing, at a smaller scale, the kinds of goals for which the ASF is reaching. And he has been doing so without government support or private sector investment. Oyelami sees building international interest in Yorùbá arts as beneficial to the self-identity and sense of possibility that local artists experience. But he believes it must be done on an interpersonal, not commercial, scale. In 1974, Oyelami began collaborating on a cultural tourism package with a travel agent he met in Cologne, Germany. The agent arranged flights to Nigeria, while Oyelami arranged arts and culture workshops for participants in his hometown of Iragbiji. They began with seven participants who had diverse interests in tourism, textiles, dance, and drumming, and it has continued in various forms since.

Locals were initially skeptical and concerned that by taking hereditary artists away from home or by bringing foreign students to Nigeria, Oyelami would somehow be “giving away”

the culture. But Oyelami was keen on demonstrating that this kind of exchange work not only enhanced artists' sense of pride and ownership of their culture, but also made the culture more economically viable. He faced similar skepticism when he introduced the idea of building a cultural museum in Iragbiji. For most of his career, Oyelami has been collecting Yorùbá artifacts with the intention of creating a museum. At the time of my research, the material resided in a designated building in his family compound. Townspeople were, at first, baffled; they didn't know what he was doing, said Oyelami, because the term museum was "not in their dictionary." They thought, perhaps, that he was a thief—stealing art to sell to *òyìnbó* (white people/foreigners). One community member initially thought that Oyelami was amassing "idols" or "fetishes" to enthrone himself in his own "palace." But as townspeople saw the collection increasing, rather than decreasing, and as the *ilé-ọ̀nà* (lit., house of art/craftwork) was opened to the public, their understanding shifted (Oyelami 2009a).

### Religion and culture debate

The talking drum tradition, because of its intimate connection to kingship, *òrìṣà* devotion, and *egúngún* veneration, stirs debate about its status as religion or culture. The religion or culture debate hinges on the interpretation of Yorùbá practices and performances that are perceived as "traditional" – which usually means having something to do with the

*òrìṣà*, *egúngún*, or *Ifá*. The debate hinges on whether a practice such as the public celebration of an *òrìṣà* or the “coming out” of an *egúngún* is something religious – that is, constitutive of spiritual sentiments and relationships—or whether it can be perceived as having a more civic or “secular” purpose, such as reinforcing the corporate feeling of a town or lineage (see Probst 2011, cites of Olupona on “civic religion”). In other words, while some view “traditional” festivals and ceremonies as cultural entertainment, for others it represents something potentially subversive of a community’s Islamic or Christian status quo.

The perceived tension between religion and culture leads those involved in ASF’s heritage enterprise to state their positions explicitly. Information scientist and ASF trustee Tunde Adegbola, for example, states that while some Christians call for the abolition of traditional practices such as drumming because they deem it “devilish,” he does not count himself among them. He sees Yorùbá tradition not as malevolent but as representative of a past “steeped in ignorance,” but nonetheless worthy of celebration and of value in the scientific, Christian world (*Nigerian Tribune* 2009).

During the 2011 Talking Drum Festival, ASF founder Morakinyo Daramola likewise brought a religious caveat into his public rationale for the annual festival. While hereditary musicians may choose to “worship” the talking drum—that is, make sacrifices to *òrìṣà* *Ayàn*—Daramola reassured the audience that this is not a necessary part of promoting the talking

drum as a heritage enterprise: “Some do not want to worship, yet it forms the basis of all our native, traditional, and cultural dances. I believe that the drum has done a lot in the lives of Yorùbá people and that is why I have chosen to revive and celebrate it every year.” Citing its functional importance in *òrìṣà* festivals and its usefulness in directing the *ọba* and warning him of danger, Daramola argued that “[for] this reason and more, we need to have this culture back for the good of our people.” Now that the talking drum is an integral part of most church bands, Daramola cited its value to Christian worship as another rationale for promoting the drum: “It is no longer seen as part of idol worship. Churches play the *bàtá* [and *dùndún*, more commonly] these days. The sounds penetrate the soul and aid worship tremendously” (Udeze 2011).

### ***Royal Patronage and Religion***

The *ọba* – perceived as an embodiment and exponent of Yorùbá tradition – is in a key position to influence, ideologically and materially, a community’s stance on the religion and culture debate. His historical role as a patron of the arts has changed in recent years alongside the adoption of more fundamentalist strains of Islam and Christianity. The Olúfi of Gbòngán cites changes in the “value of culture itself” as affecting royal patronage of traditional activities. In the past, he suggests, Yorùbá leaders and their people believed more or less the

same things and were more culturally aligned than they are today. In his view, there is now a greater variety of beliefs and individual preferences expressed and exercised by *ọbas*. The Olúfi suggests that as *ọbas* have widely come to exercise their “religious freedom” as Christians or Muslims, there has been a fundamental shift in thinking about Yorùbá traditional activities. They view *òrìṣà* devotion, ancestor rituals, and the music that accompanies them as part of a culture rather than a religion.

While some *ọbas* who subscribe to more fundamentalist strains of Christianity or Islam refuse to patronize what they perceive as an “idolatrous” indigenous culture, the Olúfi feels that it is his responsibility to “preserve” it: “The Ọba is supposed to be custodian of our culture and traditional values. Whatever my belief as a Christian, Muslim, or Free Thinker, I must not do anything that would discourage the preservation of our culture. When the new palace is built, there will be an archive of things we have inherited. I don’t pour oil on idols, but I will preserve them. There is nothing wrong with letting coming generations know what came past. The king’s job is to preserve culture and even to enhance it” (Olúfi 2010, paraphrased). He also applies this pragmatic approach to his patronage of traditional festivals: “I will not say, because I am a Christian: ‘I don’t want to see drumming again’ or, ‘Don’t carry [a masquerade].’ But I will encourage traditional worshippers not to spend all of their time on festivals, because you

need time for work, to generate money so that there won't be poverty in the land" (Olúfi 2010, paraphrased).

Despite a decline in royal patronage, musicians and businessmen involved in the promotion of talking drum still seek symbolic capital from *obas* and elders in the form of statements of support, membership on advisory or trustee boards, and appearances at events, so as to "re-authenticate" (Probst 2011) their innovative reimagination of the talking drum as a heritage enterprise.

### ***Religious attitudes***

Having addressed *obas'* perspectives on the religion and culture debate, I turn now to the musicians themselves, who must negotiate these issues as part of their everyday work. Yorùbá are well known for their religious duality, holding either Muslim or Christian beliefs alongside indigenous beliefs or practices. For drummers this is not a choice; it is "institutionalized" in their profession (Euba 1990:99). Drummers both Christian and Muslim tend to separate out their profession from their primary religious belief systems. This is evident both in Euba's and my own work.

Although identified strongly enough with Islam to have made a pilgrimage to Mecca, Ayandosù of Iragbiji (2009b) expresses belief in the supernatural origin and powers of the

drum. He describes the divine origins and social functions of the drum: “You see, about drums, it is the wind [*atégùn*, also breeze or breath] that we are beating. This implies that [*o tùmò si pé*] we work together with extraterrestrial beings [*ìdìde’lu àgbà*, lit., elders who have risen] when we drum. When we hang the drum around our neck, we use our hand to communicate [*sòrò*, to speak] just as in writing. What's in there that brings the sound? This is because as God establishes towns [*ìlú*] so has God created the drum [*ìlù*]. *Ìlú* [and] *ìlù*—that is how God created it. That's why whatever we do regarding the drum has significance.”

Ayandosu links drumming directly to supernatural power, and drumming to the functioning of human society. While playing the drum requires “only learning,” he suggests, its power is much greater and its reach wider than that of the individual: “It is only education -- the drum we beat requires intelligence. We teach some people and they don't understand. The drum is not ordinary; it is a deliberate creation from God.” He continues by articulating how the violation of taboos is something that could draw supernatural retribution via the drum. The drum is an instrument of divine origin, he says, and “that is why it is dangerous to offend a drummer. He can get his drum and use it to invoke curses on whoever offends him. Also, the drum must not drop from your neck and break.” This, Ayandosu says, could cause a drummer to fall ill. “It will require a lot of sacrifice to appease [the deity *Ayàn*] before the individual can be well again. We that are in the profession know the taboos” (Ayandosu 2009b).

Religion has become a factor in intergenerational change in the drumming professions, says Gbeminiyi Ayanladun Akintunde (2010). “My uncle [Michael Abokede Ogunleye] encouraged me to play all kinds of rhythm[s], not just social rhythm[s].” Gbemi laments that today young people don’t want to play rhythms for *òrìṣà* (deities) like *Ògún* or *Ifá*, “because they fear that people will think they are worshipping them.” But, Gbemi says, if you want to be a drummer, you have to play for all of these people, “because when you play for them their praise poetry will be coming out and you will be so versatile. This style [*ilù òrìṣà*, drumming for deities] is slowly disappearing. But today people just play social [music] like *fújì*; it is just punctuation [non-lexical rhythm]. The young people are not interested. You know the *Ọṣun* rhythm [drumming for the deity *Ọṣun*]—I could call some [young people] to play now, and they wouldn’t know how to play it.” When I ask Gbeminiyi why he thinks traditional drumming repertoire is disappearing in the coming generation, he asserts: “It is because of religion. I am a Christian, I play in church, but that doesn’t stop me from playing the repertoire that I’ve known. I am a Christian to the core” (Akintunde 2010).

“So, you keep these things separate?” I ask.

“Yes, I believe that when I am working, I am working; this is my work, this is my job. I see all of this drumming and the other things that they [traditional practitioners] do as a culture, not as a religion” (Akintunde 2010). Akintunde’s attitude, however, is neither unique



to him or his generation. Two of Euba's informants in the 1970s, both Muslim, say that they and their religious leaders consider drumming a trade or profession, and so they have the freedom to practice it as they wish (Euba 1990:99; see DjeDje 2008:142 for an analogous example among Hausa *goge* fiddlers). But, despite this professional adaptation, demand for drummers has decreased with the decline in *òrìṣà* devotion, the shortening of *egúngún* festivals from a period of months to one week, and the curtailing of lengthy life-cycle events.<sup>23</sup>

Ayangbile of Èrìn-Ọṣun describes some such changes he has noticed in the tradition, notably the decline in use of *dùndún* in traditional ceremonies associated with wakes and burials, contexts in which drummers used to play a significant role. Nowadays they only perform in contexts where people want to dance, he says, like weddings. The decline in *òrìṣà* devotion has also led to decreasing opportunities for drummers to play in ritual contexts: "It's like 10 years ago since [I] played last for any *òrìṣà*. Before, we used to have Ọbalúáyé, Ọgún, and other festivals, but now the only *òrìṣà* we have in this town is Ọbàlùfọ̀n—that is the *òrìṣà* for Èrìn-Ọṣun town. Then we also have *egúngún* festival, too, in three days time. So it's only these two we have now that exist, because people do not want to worship them and celebrate them anymore" (Ayangbile 2009). Ayansina of Ila-Orangun concurs, saying that while there are

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<sup>23</sup> Multiple factors, including changes in religious, economic, and educational conditions, may account for the recent shortening of sacred rituals and life-cycle events in West African societies. See, for example, Sidia Jatta's (1985:17) assertion that the advent of compulsory Western education in Senegambia has led to such a curtailment.

still *òrìṣà* and *egúngún* festivals for him to play, the number of people attending these festivals is fewer than in earlier times (Ayansina 2009).

The language Ayangbile used to describe the loss of the *òrìṣà* was strong: “these *òrìṣà* are no more,” conveying the sense that, as Karin Barber put it, “man makes God” and when people cease to worship the *òrìṣà*, and cease to celebrate them musically, they cease to exist as social facts. While contexts of *òrìṣà* devotion are shrinking, Ayangbile (2009) does say, however, that *dùndún* and *bàtá* are now both accepted, even welcomed, in churches. This is true in the Baptist church that I attended in Ifè, where the band, which specialized in rendering Christian hymns in popular *highlife* and *wórò* styles, was supplemented by *àkúbà*, conga, *àdàmò* (small pressure drum of *dùndún* family), *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, and *omele mẹta* (fixed-pitch drums of the *bàtá* family).

### New contexts and applications

The cultural entrepreneurs of the ASF and their academic backers have argued that in order to keep the talking drum vital and relevant in the modern world, there must be reapplications of the drum’s technology and social functions, and innovations in its aesthetics, leading to wider uses and wider audiences. As academic music scholar Tunji Vidal put it, “Today, rethinking and reinventing the drumming tradition is perhaps the greatest challenge

before this generation.” He goes on to suggest how the talking drum could be instituted in primary and secondary schools to mark the opening and close of the school day, and how it could be used to greet and entertain foreign dignitaries (Vidal in Abodunrin 2007). Information scientist and ASF trustee Tunde Adegbola, in an interview for the *Nigerian Tribune* (2009), argues that the talking drum is worth recognizing not only for the “sentimental” attitude it evokes towards one’s own people, but also for its scientific value as a technology of communication and “speech synthesis.” This is a project that Adegbola has pursued by collaborating with ethnomusicologist Amanda Villepastour and drummer Rabiú Ayandokun to analyze the speech techniques and model the communicative system of the Yorùbá *bàtá* drum (see Villepastour 2010).

### ***Educating Ayàn***

ASF publicists insist that “if the intellect available to the nation is combined with the skill of the few master drummers remaining and these further combined with a whole range of technological innovations in the world right now, a revival of the art of drumming can occur” (ASF 2010b:12). They suggest that formal education and its consequences – an increase in literacy and the social integration of hereditary musicians into a modernizing nation, among other things – are central avenues for realizing the scientific, social, and artistic value of talking

drum in the modern world. During his fieldwork in the 1970s, Euba notes that most of the hereditary drummers he interviewed had no formal education apart from any religious training they might have received (1990:96). Indeed, of the elder men I met from Ayàn families, fewer had formal education than their children and grandchildren.

Due to the advent of mandatory primary education, most of the younger Ayàn that I met did have at least a primary-school education. But lack of access to formal education, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels, remains a fact for some children of Ayàn families. ASF's Morakinyo Daramola (2010) views this as one of the key problems that his foundation is set up to address. Encouraging this combination of formal Western-style education with hereditary knowledge of the talking drum is one of the key goals of the ASF, says founder Morakinyo Daramola. He is careful, from the outset, not to minimize the importance of the knowledge that the Ayàn have: "Although they cannot read or write, it is through the drum [that] they have educated themselves...none of them has gone to school before [but] they pass [on] the message[s] of their forefathers." Describing how drummers are expected to know the history and personal poetry of all the important people in their town, Daramola says, "There is a library, you have a book, but these drummers do not write anything down; it is all in their minds [and] it has been there for hundreds of years" (Daramola 2010).

Nonetheless, Daramola is convinced that formal Western-style education is crucial to change their senses of possibility about where their musical tradition can lead them: “The foundation is looking for funds to send these young people from Ayàn families to school. So once you go to university, you can still return home and package your drum [that is, present your musical ability in a modern, professional way]. You won’t forget the source.” As well as producing hereditary musicians who are also skilled in heritage enterprise, Daramola also sees formal education as a means of integrating an often-marginalized population of musicians into the mainstream: “We want to get our Ayans together and make them feel like part of us. We don’t want to see them as riff-raff, and some people see them as riff-raff, as beggars—going to parties and saying, ‘come and spray us, spend money on us’—but now ASF is repackaging it [the talking drum] in such a way that they will feel among us, they [will] believe in themselves, [and] they can talk anywhere.” Daramola hopes that this approach of transforming Ayàn youth into formally-educated culture brokers will actually strengthen, rather than weaken ties between generations, and provide today’s young Ayàn with incentives to pass the tradition to their children: “You can’t do anything without education. Once you are educated, you can be a professional [drummer] and do it better than if you do not even go to primary school.” Knowing that this success was a result of their commitment to the talking drum, “they will be grateful to the foundation and pass this on to the next generation” (Daramola 2010).

The notion that formal education will add value to the tradition and create better opportunities for talking drummers is held not only by bourgeois cultural administrators, but also by *Ayàn* who are not heritage producers. Chief Karimu Ayanleke, senior drummer for the *Timì* of *Èdẹ* and Chairman of the *Ọ̀sun* State Drummers' Association, is proud of his children's formal education and hopes that they will apply the benefits of Western education to their knowledge of the talking drum. When asked about his aspirations for the future, Ayanleke (2009) responded: "Our aspiration is that it is going to be better through our children because of the Western education they have acquired. That the children will carry on and combine Western education with talking drum."<sup>24</sup>

### ***The story of an educated Ayàn***

Gbeminiyi Ayanladun Akintunde (Gbemi hereafter) was born in the small town of *Gbòngán* to the youngest wife of Amos Ayinla Ojurongbe Akintunde, the fifth *Báálẹ̀ Onílù* (chief drummer) of *Gbòngán*. Gbemi's father was a highly-respected *dùndún* drummer who maintained his own ensemble. Gbemi attended an Anglican primary school in the town and

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<sup>24</sup> Now that Western education is mandatory for young people in many West African communities, Ayanleke's aspirational attitude is not unique. Dagbamba fiddler Alhassan Sulemana, for example, argues that Western education has helped the *gondze* tradition, as well as sharpened his competitive edge, by encouraging him write down and document everything. Yet, like my *Yorùbá* interlocutors, Sulemana fears that while Western education has opened up more opportunities for young people, it has led them to see their musical tradition as no longer viable (DjeDje 2008:208-209).

followed in the Christian faith of his father. Gbemi began at age four or five carrying drums for the older men in his father's *dùndún* ensemble. He was allowed to play supporting drums from the age of six. When Gbemi was twelve, his grandmother removed him from the group and sent him to live with his uncle in Lagos. She did not like how the elder drummers would beat the boys when they made mistakes. She supported him becoming a drummer, Gbemi says, even though she disapproved of the way the men treated her grandson. When Gbemi reached the age for secondary school, he moved with his uncle back to Ilé-Ifè, close to his hometown of Gbòngán. Modáké High School had a performing arts troupe and Gbemi led the musicians on *iyáàlù dùndún*. While he played supporting drums for his father's ensemble nearly every weekend, Gbemi had not until then been an ensemble leader: "My father was happy when he heard me play master drum, because I am the only one of his sons who can play it well" (Akintunde 2010c). The school principal also recognized his achievement and encouraged him to apply for the certificate program in music at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in order to "upgrade his family." Gbemi auditioned for Professor Tunji Vidal in the music department and was accepted to the certificate program. After this, he went on to earn a second certificate in Dramatic Arts (dance), and combined the two to gain direct entrance to the university's B.A. program in dramatic arts, from which he graduated in 1999 with a thesis on the *dùndún-ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* tradition. At the university he learned from academics and non-academics alike, studying music

notation with Professor C.O. Olaniyan and playing alongside hereditary musicians who Muraina Oyelami brought into the theater department. After graduating, Gbemi married and took a job as a security officer. More recently, he was invited back to OAU as a lecturer in dramatic arts and as supervisor of the music department's small archive, both positions that he holds today.

Many children of Ayàn families do not have the advantages that Gbemi gained through his educational efforts. Gbemi's story supports the ASF's claim that "with education you can maintain your culture and do it more effectively." And because of this, those who don't avail themselves of educational opportunities may be left behind in a rapidly modernizing world, playing for alms like their fathers and reinforcing society's view of them as beggars. Or perhaps they will be forced out of financial distress to leave drumming behind altogether. This is what the ASF aims to prevent.

### ***Education or Mentorship***

Not all culture brokers agree that formal education is the best route for the sustenance of Yorùbá arts and culture. Chief Muraina Oyelami, for example, who has been working in the cultural sector for more than fifty years, sees formal Western education as a potential liability for hereditary cultural continuity and has focused instead on arts mentorship, the extension of



patronage networks, international exchange, and the publication of educational material. Chief Oyelami (2009), who has been an innovator in creating new contexts and applications for Yorùbá arts and music, described the changing scene this way:

Things have changed a bit but not too much. In 1960s, there were more hereditary traditional drummers. Mandatory primary education schemes – there is little support for the drummers professional path. Drummers today want to join the popular [*jùjú* and *fújì*] orchestras. You don't find young people taking over the profession as much today. Ninety percent of the old men you see doing drumming full-time are illiterate; if they are literate they will be working in an official or administrative capacity. But these men are contented; it is their family obligation, duty to the throne. They depend on the masses to give them something.

The fusions of *jùjú* and *fújì* are working well, says Oyelami, because they do incorporate some level of traditional drumming. So talking drum survives in this context. But, he says, patronage for drumming is in decline. Drummers have to go out to events, often uninvited, to make a living. Young people are required to combine school with their family profession. They may pick up their drum after school and go out, but, he asserts, they don't have time to learn drum language as well as their predecessors, which decreases their potential earnings from patrons. Partly because of declining patronage and because of his own positive experience as a young man training in a theater troupe, Oyelami established his own arts organization, the Ọ̀bàtálá Centre and the Iragbiji Cultural Troupe. Although he cannot afford to pay participants, he makes rehearsal space available in his compound, hires local artists to train participants, and

offers his students personal or professional mentorship where they need it: “I am interested in training young artists, he says, “I don’t have much, but I give what I have” (Oyelami 2009).

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has examined the *Ayàṅàgalú Ṣòúngòbì* Foundation as a window on modern heritage production in Nigeria and situated it within its historical and ideological contexts. The ASF shares with earlier Nigerian cultural enterprises a conventional model of heritage grounded in principals of performance exhibition (e.g., the production of a drumming “festival”) and knowledge exhibition (e.g., the production of educational forums and materials). The foundation’s ideological emphases on cultural recovery, ownership, secularization, and adaptation are also reminiscent of earlier enterprises. But such discourses have life beyond the strategic rhetoric of heritage producers; they are matters of deep concern to those for whom the stakes are the highest –the *Ayàn* whose livelihood lies in balance. This leads to what I see as an imperfect alignment between the admirable ideals of the ASF and the realities of those musicians whom they claim to represent.

First, the notion that the talking drum can be “packaged” in such a way that it attracts international tourist traffic of scale seems to me a discourse without a material referent. For one thing, as is often commented by those in the cultural sector, Nigeria has numerous security

issues and infrastructural instabilities that make it unfriendly to mass tourism, let alone to its own citizens. What's more, I can say anecdotally that the current interest of cultural tourists in southwestern Nigeria is both limited in number and highly specialized in focus – the religious devotees, academics, and artists who make up their bulk seem hardly sizeable enough to sustain an industry. The language of tourism, then, appears to be more a link to the political capital of the state than it does a strategy grounded in material conditions. Nonetheless, if the ASF's calculations are correct, the very promise of tourism might be enough incentive for some young Ayàn to continue the tradition of their fathers.

Second, the foundation's firmly "cultural" stance on the religion/culture debate may unintentionally devalue the traditional religious practices with which talking drummers have been connected for centuries. With a distinctly modernist spin, the foundation heralds the continued significance of the talking drum to Yorùbá society and identity, but treats the music's associations with *òrìṣà* devotion and *egúngún* veneration more as relics of a past way of life than as essential elements of the art itself. The drum, in other words, is cast as a culture not a religion. In 2010, however, the foundation commendably included a talk by an expert in Ifá, who linked the talking drum to the very roots of Yorùbá spiritual wisdom (see Chapter 2). And, despite the foundation's ambiguous stance towards traditional religion, ASF director Daramola

does respect the talking drum as an effective instrument of Christian worship – a spiritual vitality key to its continued survival as an art.

Finally, the foundation's laudable effort to find new contexts, applications, and audiences for the talking drum might affect incentive structures in ways that both positively and negatively impact the art. The emphasis on festival-style stage performance may lead musicians, on the one hand, towards creative innovation and, on the other, to a loss of creativity as they standardize or simplify their repertoire for increasingly diverse audiences. Nonetheless, the foundation's ideas of installing drummers in foreign embassies to greet international dignitaries or in public schools to signal the various activities of the day are useful examples of how the talking drum might be re-contextualized in ways that maintain the vitality of its social functions.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**MUSICAL COSMOPOLITANS:**  
**DÙNDÚN MUSICIANS IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS**

Heritage enterprise, as we explored in Chapter 5, involves the entrepreneurial reconfiguration of a local art and its patronage system to meet broader aesthetic standards and economic conditions. Based on fieldwork and interviews with Yorùbá talking drummers who live and work in the U.S., this chapter argues that the same sort of creative and entrepreneurial agency exhibited by heritage producers in Nigeria is also being exercised by self-styled “traditionalists” in foreign contexts. In fact, what might temptingly be called the “globalization of the Yorùbá talking drum” is actually a variety of largely independent cultural projects enacted by individual Nigerian musicians as they seek professional opportunities beyond the boundaries of hometown and nation-state. As an alternative to the abstractions of “musical globalization,” I use Martin Stokes’ (2004, 2007) concept of “musical cosmopolitanism,” which more clearly illustrates the role of agency and subjectivity in the transnational growth of musical traditions (see Chapter 1).

The notion of musical cosmopolitanism is consistent with recent Africanist scholarship that recognizes transnational musical processes as consisting *both* in the play of “impersonal forces” *and* in the agency of individuals and communities. In her 2007 book on a family of

Yorùbá musicians, for example, anthropologist Debra Klein shows how individual drummers expand their horizons internationally through what she calls “strategic collaborations” with European artists and scholars. The agency exercised through such projects of cultural entrepreneurship, however, is anything but unfettered. In order to operate in a global marketplace, the subjects of my dissertation, like the subjects of Klein’s book, must navigate both local custom at home and diverse cultural territory abroad, and the success of their efforts often depends on access to international networks of culture brokers and cultural institutions. Agency is understood here in Sherry Ortner’s (2006: 129-153) limited sense as a person or community’s effectiveness in mobilizing their culturally-conditioned goals within circumscribed social situations and relationships of power. This is what Ortner refers to as the “agency of projects,” which I find captures well talking drummers’ entrepreneurial efforts to create meaning and value for the *dùndún* tradition in foreign contexts. As agency often proves unpredictable and indeterminate in its results (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:17), projects with similar goals may have different outcomes. In bringing the *dùndún* to wider audiences, some musicians achieve greater stability and mobility in their lives, while others descend into poverty and dislocation; the exercise of agency, in other words, does not reliably lead to empowerment.

As I will illustrate with three musical biographies, the agency of talking drummers in transnational contexts is conditioned by cosmopolitan ideas and social formations. In accordance with recent literature on the issue, I treat cosmopolitanism in two senses – 1) as a material condition established through personal and institutionalized social networks that cross national boundaries; and 2) as a trans-local, trans-cultural intellectual orientation characterized by knowledge of, and navigational skill in, multiple social environments and cultural worlds. Contrary to the idea that cosmopolitans necessarily see themselves as transcendent of culture rather than part of it (Turino 2008), I demonstrate that for internationally-oriented talking drummers cultural locality is key, both as an attachment to the “home” from which they and their music originated and to the “host” communities in which they reside and make their livings. Cosmopolitanism, we might say, does not require a rejection of local attachment; rather, it requires the dialectic linking or “articulation” (Hall 1986:53-55) of many different localities.

This chapter begins by arguing that a “disposition” accommodating social change and cultural exchange has been cultivated for some time in Yorùbá music, specifically in the areas of travel, entrepreneurship, and musical creativity. Second, I examine the roots of musical cosmopolitanism as a social and ideational phenomenon in modern Nigeria, and trace its routes through the stories of particular musicians as they grow from being local professionals to

international culture brokers. Through the use of musical biography, I show how individual agency is both catalyzed and constricted by institutional power, and how cosmopolitanism – more than a solipsism in which a particular culture is misrecognized as “universal” – may also take shape in the actual and imaginative linking of formerly disconnected cultures and localities.

### *Disposition towards musical change in d̀̀nd̀̀n tradition*

#### **Travel and mobility**

*D̀̀nd̀̀n* musicians have always been on the move, traveling from town to town, event to event; wherever there is work, they will go. In the past, this travel was limited primarily to Yor̀̀báland and also nearby countries of Benin and Ghana. Ayangbile (2009) of Èr̀̀n-Òṣun reports that even before they began hosting international visitors, his family, like other Aỳ̀n (hereditary drummers) families, would “always” travel from town to town for social events, festivals, and other programs. Laisi Ayansola, one of Akin Euba’s key informants, likewise claims that his family traveled as far as the four corners of the state of Nigeria to perform, as well as traveling out of the country to Ghana (Euba 1990: 72). Traveling to work outside of one’s hometown is economically advantageous, and this is why drummers do it quite regularly. When they are invited to other towns, drummers who have good reputations are often paid



money up front to secure their services, and this is in addition to whatever they may earn from patrons whom they entertain at such events. Ayanpade (2009) and Ayanleke (2009) say that, even as elders, they perform at an “uncountable” number of occasions each year. Travel, then, is built in to the profession. In the past, this was often done at a hardship, especially in the days before affordable motor transportation, when many elder Ayàn men recall having to walk more than twenty miles to reach a performance.<sup>25</sup>

Ayandosu (2009a) of Iragbiji describes *dùndún* musicians’ work ethic this way: “We don’t stay in one spot. We go to different places we have been invited to drum. If it is Adà, Ìgbájo, Oṣogbo, or Èkó [Lagos], anywhere we are requested to [go], we go...if anyone has a celebration, marriage, or burial. For instance, when the Olódòwu, an *ọba* from another town [Òwu, in Abeokuta], is having a celebration he invites me to come and I go. If another *ọba* from Ejigbo invites me to come and drum I will go with my drum. It is [not] until after the celebration that I [will] come back home.” For Ayandosu, this work ethic extends to cultivating overseas patronage: “if you invite me to go to America now I will go,” he eagerly tells me.

Although his work has been limited mainly to the Yorùbá-dominated southwest, he has

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<sup>25</sup> Musical itinerancy and opportunistic travel are common features of many West African performance traditions. This is especially true now that most bards—singers and instrumentalists alike—no longer, if they ever did, attach themselves to a single patron. For examples, see Jatta (1985) and Duran (1987) on Mande *jalolu* (griots); DjeDje (2008) on Hausa, Dagbamba, and Fulbe fiddlers; and Tang (2007) on Wolof *gélwel* (griots).

traveled beyond the borders of Yorùbáland to perform, including the area around Calabar in southeastern Nigeria and the city of Jos in the north. He says that recognition and reputation matter; the better you are and the more you are known, the more often you will be invited to perform. If you've made a name for yourself, as Ayandosú has, patrons will come looking for you; you will not have to go looking for work.

This willingness to be mobile has led Ayandosú to opportunities beyond the traditional purview of his profession. When Chief Muraina Oyelami began teaching in Nigerian universities in the mid 1970s, for example, he extended this opportunity to well-reputed hereditary musicians in his area. This led him to Ayandosú, whom he brought to the University of Ifè to assist in teaching music students there. What Oyelami was supervising at Ifè was a pioneering course in Nigerian music performance that he developed between the mid 1970s and 80s. Oyelami also brought Ayandosú along as a demonstrator to the University of Jos, where the drummer has been invited to return on occasion (Ayandosú 2009a). Despite his professional inclination towards travel, Ayandosú's work with Oyelami opened his horizons beyond that to which he was accustomed. In addition to learning how to work in institutional environments, Ayandosú has taught European and American visitors at his home in Iragbiji and proudly displays a framed photograph of one of his European female students in the front sitting room of his house. Such opportunities, however, do not come regularly to rural

musicians, or at least they do not perceive it being so. Ayanpade (2009) and Ayanleke (2009) of Èdẹ, for example, report that the last time a group of oyinbo (white/foreign) students came to learn drums from them was in the 1970s during the reign of the previous *oba*, the late John Adetoyese Laoye, Tìmì of Èdẹ. When asked whether they knew of others in Èdẹ who had worked internationally or taught foreign students, they could only come up with one family whose son had pursued drumming as a profession overseas.

### Market orientation and entrepreneurship

The Yorùbá aphorism *aiyé l'ọjà* (the world is a market) suggests a view of the marketplace as a concentrated space in which all the activities of humankind collide in a “microcosm of life” (Waterman 2000:185). The market is also a cautionary metaphor for living, warning of a world shaped by competition and exchange, “fraught with danger and ripe with possibility” (ibid.), and always swayed by the capricious movement of unseen forces. At a more abstract level, *aiyé l'ọjà* could be taken to represent the convertibility of people and money. Using *oríkì* texts as evidence, Karin Barber (1995:213) argues that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Yorùbá came to see “money and people [as] inter-translatable and mutually generative”—that is to say, they were treated as symbolically equivalent and one could be exchanged or used to produce the other. *Owó àti ọmọ* (money and children) thus





Njọ a ti dáyé	Since we together [ancestral lineage] came into the world
Ilù làwáá lù	We have been drumming
N lafíí lóbìnrin	It [drumming] is what we use to have wives
N lafíí bímọ	It is what we use to have children
N lafíí kólé	It is what we use to build houses

(Text, Euba 1990:98; translation mine)

Through the mutual reproduction of people and money, then, *ilé Ayàn* (the house of Ayàn) grows and the vitality of Ayànàgalú as an *òrìṣà* is ensured.

The introduction and indigenization of money forms and systems of commodity exchange on the Atlantic coast has been viewed by some scholars as indicative of the pervasive effects of European entrepreneurship on African histories and cultures (Belasco 1980). But what is neglected in this approach is the way in which money has been refigured by Africans themselves as both a *catalyst* of action, and a *form of agency* itself—a substance that has, even in utterance, the power to transform worlds (Barber 1995:207). Among the Yorùbá, money-as-agency is dominantly (though not exclusively) represented as a positive and productive force, a marked contrast to European narratives that see commodification primarily as a cultural desiccant. Yorùbá *dùndún* musicians tend to view the intersection of music and money quite

positively – its productive tension ensuring the future of their profession. Market orientation, then, is a necessary condition for the growth and continuity of drumming lineages and, by extension, the Ayàn tradition as a whole. As is evident from the amount of travel required even of local professionals, Ayàn will search out markets for their work as far and wide as is necessary to earn a living. It is this orientation, I would argue, that conditions Ayàn’s entrance into the international marketplace.<sup>26</sup>

Following Ebron (2002), I understand the transnational patronage of *dùndún* as a “personalistic economy,” in the dual sense that the relationships are personal and the commodity in exchange is often a symbol of the client or patron’s personal reputation. An American academic, for example, by sponsoring a Yorùbá musician’s visit to his/her university would not only be exchanging money for a cultural service, but would also be exchanging symbolic capital with the artist—the academic gaining a reputation of authority among his/her peers and the musician increasing his stature at home as a man of the world. The globalization of African musics, then, cannot be causally reduced to the hegemony of world systems and industries. As Yorùbá drumming “goes global,” it does so through contingent, locally-grounded

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<sup>26</sup> Market orientation, by which I mean strategic participation in a money economy, is common to many West African music-cultures. In former times, royal bards like the Mande *jalolu* survived more on “subsistence patronage” (Duran 1987:234) than on monetary gifts. But as Hale ([1998] 2007:289-290) shows, gold and other currencies were part of griot-patron exchange systems dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

social formations: “global processes—in this case market and identity formation—are indeed created and negotiated at local levels” (Klein 2007:85). Just as the “global” is rooted in particular places, so too is it culturally-inflected. As Mande *jalolu*, for example, invoke their “personalistic” patron-client system to forge international networks, so too do Yorùbá drummers. While such musicians once depended on local patronage, and later Nigerian state patronage, they now rely on more entrepreneurial approaches to cultural production. Tapping international markets is largely a matter of cultivating personal relationships, and of remapping local models of patron-client relations onto transnational and cross-cultural networks.

What this means, in the Yorùbá case, is that money earned overseas, just as money earned in one’s own hometown, is funneled back into a lineage-based redistributive system. Rather than accumulating capital to invest in one’s business, money is reinvested in wives, children, family elders, and in tributes to the king and his council of chiefs (Belasco 1980:159). This does not mean, however (*pace* Belasco), that Ayàn cannot be truly “entrepreneurial” in the sense of risk-taking and innovation in re-shaping cultural production and consumption. If we are willing to accept that entrepreneurship is evident not only in the large-scale, international trade in goods and services, but also in the small-scale efforts by individuals to build value and demand for their cultural products in foreign contexts, then perhaps we can imagine Ayàn as entrepreneurs.



## Creative adaptation

Just as travel and market orientation are integral to the *dùndún* tradition, so too is the predilection for musical creativity. As the principles of musical change are inherent in the *dùndún* tradition itself, it is not surprising that the tradition has exhibited a long history of creative innovation. For the Ayàn drummers that I interviewed, tradition is defined relative to one's own family. More specifically, tradition is understood as that which you inherit from your forefathers. As Rabiú Ayandokun succinctly puts it, "If people want me to play traditional, I play what I learned from my father...tradition is what you learn from your father and elders." But there is room for creativity, for transformation within the reproduction of tradition (see, e.g., Omojola 2012:68-69). Ayandokun suggests three ways in which creativity comes into play, which I've approximated with the terms *improvisation*, *variation*, and *recontextualization*. A drummer, for example, can use the Òṣun dance phrase "ṣẹ̀ṣẹ̀ kú n̄ dú, ṣẹ̀ṣẹ̀ kú n̄ dú" as a basis for improvisation (see Villepastour 2010:160 for musical illustration). Or, Ayandokun demonstrates, you can create any number of variations of this basic Òṣun rhythm without compromising its basic character. And, finally, you can take traditional patterns and insert them into other musical contexts. For example, says Ayandokun, "You can take the Òṣun rhythm and 'sing it' to the pop rhythm as well. But you must be very good at traditional first. It is not taboo to introduce òrìṣà rhythm to pop music" (Ayandokun 2009). The category of

recontextualization, I would add, applies to social as well as musical contexts. As part of their daily work, talking drummers select texts from a massive corpus of oral literature and perform them in ways relevant to the social situations in which they find themselves. It is impressive to observe drummers apply this knowledge and present it musically within split-second social interactions. But Ayandokun suggests that there are limits to creativity: while certain things may vary, like the context in which a deity's poetry is recited, or the particular musical variations that a drummer might choose, "traditional must be same. All the notes must be there, otherwise your rhythm will not be complete" (Ayandokun 2009).

In addition to creativity in the setting of texts and rhythms, the *dùndún* tradition shows great flexibility in instrumentation, incorporation of new repertoire, and adaptation to popular musical styles. Olaniyan (1984:73-76), for example, argues that late nineteenth-century processes of modernization and secularization, and early twentieth-century successes in the agricultural sector, led to a flush of creativity as *dùndún* artists sought to meet the demands of a new class of patrons. This led to the creation of new types of ensemble like the *dùndún-ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, which came to specialize in lively social dance forms like *pámúrege* and *gbandikan* (also known as *mosákékẹ̀*). Although I have not been able to confirm it, it seems quite likely that the use of *àlùjọ́* (non-lexical drum patterns designed to inspire dance movements) first rose to prominence in this period when secular dance music was flourishing. *Àlùjọ́* has today become a common

feature in the sacred repertoire of the *òrìṣà*, serving to enhance and punctuate the classic texts with exciting new passages of dance drumming. Omojola (2012:46-69) suggests that, in the current context of decreasing audiences for traditional drumming, this music reflects an adaptive aesthetic in which audience engagement has become as important to drummers as the content of the texts.

Other creative adaptations may be attributed to a more recent history of Yorùbá popular music. Prior to the incorporation of *dùndún* into popular music like highlife, *jùjú*, and *fújì* [that is, pre-1940s], says Ayandokun (2012f), *dùndún* drummers who worked in *òbas'* palaces typically played only with praise singers, who accompanying themselves on *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* or *aro*, and trumpet players. *Dùndún* style in this context was less melodic than it is today, as drummers would often imitate the technique of the trumpet, which “spoke” Yorùbá using only two tones. The drummer would likewise reduce his coding of Yorùbá to two tonal levels, only occasionally using a third tone.<sup>27</sup> Today, however, in an era when most *dùndún* musicians have either performed in, or had exposure to, vocally-oriented popular music, the talking drum is used to imitate the human voice with more melodic and timbral precision. Not only do

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<sup>27</sup> A recording of this older *dùndún* style is available in the Darius L. Thieme Collection (item 2005.09\_021: “Tìmì’s Ipedi Festival,” July 27, 1965) at the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive.

drummers now “sing” songs with tonal accuracy, they also recreate vocal vibrato and rasp with manipulations of the tension strings and drum head.

### ***Musical cosmopolitanism as social position and intellectual orientation***

#### **The Nigerian context**

By the time Nigeria came into existence as a nation-state in the middle of the twentieth century, opportunities were opening to men of Ayàn families for mobility and network formation of a much greater extent than ever before. The intensification of urbanization and formation of migrant communities in the coastal cities proved fertile ground for creative innovation and economic network building. Mobile, cosmopolitan musicians played a crucial role in this expansion (Waterman 1990:54). The incorporation of talking drum into popular music in the 1940s and its increasing popularity in the decades to come in *jùjú* and *fújì* music would further open horizons of travel and mobility for musicians. The fervor of independence and the revitalization of cultural nationalism led to the development of centers for African studies in state-funded universities. These programs would become the training ground for artists and academics who wished to explore their own cultures and take their knowledge to audiences beyond the local. The Universities of Lagos, Ifè, and Ìbàdàn, among others, would develop particularly strong theater arts programs and become regular patrons of talking

drummers who lived in the surrounding areas – much as they do today. In addition to offering steady employment, work in the university might in turn lead to collaborations with international scholars and foreign students, thus greatly expanding a drummer's patronage network and opportunities for mobility.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Oṣogbo Arts movement of the 1960s also proved an important entrée for Ayàn men into cosmopolitan social worlds and their aesthetic predilections. The Duro Ladipo National Theatre, a modern traveling company founded in 1962 on the model of Yorùbá folk theater, was a gateway for many who would become internationally successful artists and musicians, including Twins Seven Seven, Jimoh Braimoh, and Muraina Oyelami. Another influential institution was the Nike Center for Arts and Culture. Founded as a training school in 1988 by internationally-acclaimed Oṣogbo artist Nike Davies Okundaye, the center attracted widespread attention and its graduates have been quite successful in bringing Yorùbá fine and performing arts to the world market.

The late twentieth century saw a shifting balance in Nigeria, as in many African nations, from a state-driven economy shaped by national agendas to a neoliberal or “free market” economy refigured by international and corporate agendas (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Despite its support for universities and its production of national and regional cultural spectacles like FESTAC and NAFEST, respectively, the Nigerian state was never a reliable

source of patronage for artists. With the further decline of state support for the arts in recent times, more individualized and entrepreneurial forms of cultural production have emerged – what I have termed “heritage enterprise.” In some cases, this involves the formation of privately-funded, publicly-supported institutions like the Ayà̀nàgalú Ş̀òúngòbì Foundation (see Chapter 5) or in others it may be an individual artist who does not wait for state recognition, preferring instead to build his or her own international patronage networks one connection at a time. Prince Adewale Laoye, son of the late Oba Laoye, Tìmì of Ede, is in the early stages of this process, building on his late father’s international reputation among scholars and diplomats as a proponent of the talking drum (c.f., Klein 2007).

If the agency of talking drummers in transnational markets is conditioned by cosmopolitan social formations, it is also shaped by a way of thinking that is learned in such environments. The outlook of a musical cosmopolitan is one in which a music-culture is viewed as accruing power not in its structures of secrecy and maintenance of esoteric knowledge, but rather in its use as a public resource for cultural development, social outreach, and economic growth. Ayàn men who have adopted cosmopolitan attitudes tell me that “tradition” is, quite simply, what you learn from your forefathers. While the basic repertory content of traditional music should not be changed, they say, you are free to use it according to your conscience and creativity. In other words, as long as the critical core of the musical repertoire is not altered

and its meaning to the artist is not disrupted, then the *dùndún* tradition may be acceptably disseminated as widely as the artist sees fit. Depending on their own backgrounds and the perceived interests of their audiences, of course, talking drummers present their music to foreigners with varying amounts of cultural context, and with varying types and degrees of musical and religious content. The orientation of a musical cosmopolitan, then, is one of a cultural mediator who extracts and ties together relatable strands of home and host cultures.

But cosmopolitan attitudes aren't only useful in international arenas; they may come to take root in one's home as well. Chief Muraina Oyelami's cultural heritage work illustrates some of the shifts of perspective that happen as a community becomes oriented in a cosmopolitan way towards their own culture and its use as a medium of exchange with foreigners. Oyelami is a child of Iragbiji and, like his forefathers, holds the town's highest chieftaincy title. A founding member of the Duro Ladipo National Theatre and the Mbari Mbayo arts collective, Oyelami would go on to achieve renown at home and abroad as an artist, musician, and culture broker. In the 1970s, Oyelami partnered with a German travel agent to organize cultural exchange programs that brought many people from overseas to study Yorùbá arts and music in Iragbiji.

Iragbiji locals were at first skeptical of Oyelami's efforts at international cultural exchange. They were afraid that by inviting outsiders to learn about Yorùbá arts, Oyelami

would be giving away the “secrets” of the culture to strangers. (Even during my studies in *dùndún*, some interlocutors expressed fear that I would use this knowledge to enrich myself inappropriately.) This is an understandable attitude for those whose professions, inclined as they are to hold power through secrecy, have historically been weakened by the European presence and its misrepresentations of Yorùbá culture. Yet Oyelami was skeptical of this response, arguing with locals that sharing culture doesn’t necessarily weaken its power and that culture is fundamentally a means of communication. Europeans, he told them, certainly didn’t weaken themselves by sharing their musical instruments with Africans: “What about the piano you use in your churches,” he asked them. “Who manufactured it, who taught you how play? It is a way of disseminating information about our music and our musical heritage” (Oyelami 2009b). Cultural exchange as Oyelami conceived it was a foreign concept in Iragbiji:

People are not exposed, their horizons are very narrow. It is quite healthy and important that things like this [cultural exchange] happen, not just for drumming but for world understanding. If you do not know about the other person’s culture, you may not respect him enough. But by knowing his culture, you appreciate him more. It is very important for these interactions to happen. Not on a large scale, it may be one to one, but over time it makes a difference...It’s very important that there is this communication, this interaction, using the vehicle of arts. It is my joy to know that someone is interested in Yorùbá music. (ibid.)

Oyelami has deployed the discourse of “world understanding” in ways appealing to foreign cosmopolitans and this has brought concrete gains to the artists in his community, building



what was a local patronage network into an international one. As locals have come to reap the benefits of Oyelami's approach—for example, the opportunities many of the town's drummers have now had to travel, teach in universities, and work with foreign students—attitudes have begun to shift as well. Musical cosmopolitanism, then, need not mean eschewing the local in favor of the universal; while making strategic use of universalistic discourse, it is closely tied to culture and locality.

### The American context

The work of Yorùbá *dùndún* drummers in the U.S. more closely resembles a cosmopolitan musical phenomenon than it does one of global, immigrant, or diasporic music (I use these terms following Turino 2008). First of all, the number of Yorùbá talking drummers who regularly travel and settle abroad is relatively small, especially compared to others like the Mande, who congregate in sizeable musical communities. Second, since the music is difficult and esoteric, their target audience is small; it is not truly “global” in the sense of being marketed worldwide. Third, the talking drummers with whom I work do not reside among substantial communities of Nigerian Yorùbá in the U.S., and even those who do regularly socialize or collaborate with people from their homeland tend to exhibit their music for audiences who are cultural “outsiders.” This is markedly different from immigrant music,

which tends to be geared towards one's "own" people. Finally, while talking drummers may hold tightly to a sense of Yorùbá culture that persists across time and space—a diasporic sentiment, perhaps—their music is largely adapted to the interests and abilities of host communities that may or may not identify as part of the "African diaspora."

For the reasons above, those who practice it in the U.S. are generally isolated from communities that would traditionally constitute their patronage networks at home (e.g. Yorùbá kings and chiefs, *òrìṣà* devotees, and Nigerian families celebrating life-cycle events). On one hand, this demands greater effort in accumulating patrons and more creativity in presenting music in non-traditional contexts. On the other hand, geographical dispersion gives talking drummers in the U.S. more freedom from peer accountability and obligation than they might have if they were part of a larger musical community. This allows them to develop economic strategies that suit their own circumstances and develop methods of teaching and performance that foreigners will readily accept as authoritative and authentic. I don't wish to imply that these musicians are completely isolated from other Nigerians, however, only that their work in the United States is less directly influenced on a day-to-day basis by the expectations and aesthetics of a Yorùbá ethnic community.

Work in educational institutions, especially primary and secondary schools that adhere to "multicultural" curriculum standards, is something that virtually all the U.S.-based

drummers with whom I work have pursued at one point in their careers. The period of time surrounding Martin Luther King Day and Black History Month are particularly busy for them as it is for many African musicians. American colleges and universities, in addition to sponsoring local and international cultural programming, have also proved important places for artists to teach, perform, and build their patronage networks. Outside of formal educational institutions, state arts councils and non-profit organizations have provided valuable support and sponsorship for talking drummers. Musical performances, which are held in a wide variety of venues, from church to city hall, are important sites of association between talking drummers and various segments of the host community.

Turino (2008) looks at Zimbabwe's black middle class as a basis for his model of cosmopolitanism—a cultural group that does not recognize itself as such, its members rather preferring to see themselves as individuals who transcend local boundaries. While Turino's definition is useful in isolating a particular form of trans-national musical activity, it is also limiting in two respects. First, as evidenced by many of the drummers with whom I have worked, one need not have achieved middle-class status in order to be cosmopolitan. One need rather navigate institutional and individual patronage systems in ways that maximize opportunities for geographical and class mobility. Second, one need not disavow attachment to the local and the particular in order to be cosmopolitan. As Anthony Appiah's (2006) notion of

“cosmopolitan ethics” would suggest, musical cosmopolitanism depends on valuing both cultural particulars and human universals, as well as articulating them in interesting ways. Talking drummers who traverse national boundaries maintain strong attachments to their culture and place of origin, while at the same time adapting their music to the expectations, interests, and aesthetics of the communities in which they settle. An ability to make music *appear* transcendent of culture and place, despite the significant role locality and individuality play in its production, is a hallmark skill of musical cosmopolitans.

### Cosmopolitan trajectories

The agency exercised by talking drummers on the international stage is rooted in their professional trajectories—that is, the specific interplay of personal choices and social structures that give their professional lives shape. The three musical biographies that follow are based on interviews and informal conversations with *dùndún* drummers who live and work primarily in the United States. Each story represents a variation on the theme of cosmopolitanism and how it is “achieved” in social and ideological terms. By outlining each man’s professional trajectory from small-town drummer to transnational artist, I aim to illustrate how the talking drummer’s engagement with foreign markets is shaped by a variety of social alliances—both personal and institutional—and by the shifting senses of self and possibility these entail. We focus here on

the *conditions* of these artists' creative agency, taking up their artistic processes and pedagogical strategies in the subsequent section.

### Bisi Adeleke

We begin with Bisi Adeleke, a hereditary talking drummer from the historic Yorùbá town of Ila-Orangun who currently lives and works in Atlanta. Coming from a long patriline of drummers, Adeleke learned talking drum the way his father had, by watching and imitating his elders. Quickly becoming an exceptionally talented drummer, Adeleke was recruited in his late teens by the well-known Nigerian dramatist Duro Ladipo, who was scouring the countryside in the early 1960s for talent to join his Yorùbá traveling theater company. Ladipo, like many art composers of his time, was a cosmopolitan, having pursued a missionary school education and European musical theater training alongside the study of Yorùbá history, language, and culture. With sponsorship from German ex-pat scholar Ulli Beier, and through sheer determination in the face of public skepticism, Ladipo proceeded to become a central figure in the 1960s revival of Yorùbá arts and culture (Raji-Oyelade, Olorunyomi, and Duro-Ladipo 2003). Talking drummer Bisi Adeleke was a direct beneficiary of this – becoming part of Ladipo's project widened his professional horizons significantly by bringing him close to powerful cultural and educational institutions and by expanding his notions of what he could achieve with his talents.

Adeleke, in describing his own upbringing, suggests that the horizons of hereditary drummers, even exceptionally talented ones, are usually quite small. He told me that he had no choice of profession; drumming was chosen for him at birth, by nature of his being a male son in an Ayàn family. When he was young, there was never discussion of, nor space to imagine, doing anything else. But when he was old enough to make the decision, he continued with drumming, “because it was my family’s tradition, and because I didn’t know anything better” (Adeleke 2010a). As Adeleke describes it, working in the Duro Ladipo National Theater was a transformative experience:

The theater takes you to another level. You being a drummer all by yourself...you are in a cage, [and it’s] not a wide cage; [it] limits you to yourself. Your being in the theater opens you wide to life, to peoples’ lives, to the day-to-day happenings of peoples’ lives. You have more experience, you know more than you knew [before], you can see more things, [and] you work with many kinds of people. (Adeleke 2010a)

With the theater company, global travel would soon become a significant part of Adeleke’s life. But travel was always part of his work as a drummer, even as a child, and he looks at global travel as an extension of this:

As a drummer, you travel. Any drummer will travel. And traveling is part of my life, it is part of me, part of what I grew up to do...even before I joined Duro Ladipo, I had been traveling...not traveling abroad, but traveling from one town to the other. (Adeleke 2010b)

As he says this, he recalls with a pained expression having to carry drums for his elders, walking by foot to events more than twenty miles away.

After his work with Ladipo's company, Adeleke's newfound reputation as a theater drummer landed him teaching jobs at colleges and universities around southwestern Nigeria. He eventually ended up in the Theatre Arts Department at the University of Ìbàdàn. It was there that he met a young ethnomusicologist, Chris Waterman, who was conducting dissertation research on popular *jùjú* music. While becoming "good friends," as Adeleke puts it, the two also reproduced an extended patron-client exchange that many ethnomusicologists are familiar with – Adeleke would assist Waterman with his dissertation research and provide him crucial insider information, in exchange for which Waterman, once he achieved a university teaching position, would sponsor Adeleke's travel to the U.S. as a visiting artist at his university. This is, admittedly, a vast oversimplification of their relationship, but the basic exchange pattern remains true. While on one hand he was accepting a reciprocal offer from a friend, Adeleke remained structurally in a client position – teaching at an American university through the patronage and discretion of a professor and his institution.

Nonetheless, Adeleke felt appreciated in the American academy in a way that he hadn't in Nigeria. The university classroom and the concert stage became spaces where he felt "inspired" and where he could realize his creative agency:

The way they look at drummers in our [Nigerian] culture, they don't really appreciate them. But here [in the U.S.], if you are drummer or musician from Africa, the little you do, they appreciate it. Coming to America inspired me more than when I was in Nigeria. (Adeleke 2010b)

The high praise he earned in his initial American university position has led to continued (if infrequent and inconsistent) work in higher education, including numerous university theater productions and, most recently, a gig performing at Princeton's prestigious symposium on the music of Africa. The way in which these international contexts have affirmed his professional choices and opened up his sense of possibility is evident as well when he speaks of his current work teaching in the Atlanta public schools: "When you see the enthusiasm [of students] when I go to schools...that makes me proud of myself being a drummer. Many drummers in Nigeria don't appreciate being a drummer" (2010b).

### Akeem Ayanniyi

Akeem Ayanniyi is a ninth-generation Ayàn, son of Ayangbile, the Aàrẹ Onílù of Èrìn-Òṣun. Like all Ayàn men, Ayanniyi learned as a young boy by watching his family members perform:

We have so many master drummers among the family, so we just learned from each other. As a kid you follow your elders wherever they go...so you follow them, you play along with them, you just go along with them to different places. Then you get to learn and study with different teachers, so that's the way it goes. And I studied with my dad too, as well as many other master drummers in the family. (Ayanniyi 2009b)



This was a deeply immersive experience, then, that both offered rich opportunities and commanded intensive obligations.

While meeting the demands of his family profession, Ayanniyi attended a Christian Apostolic elementary school and finished his secondary education at the Community Grammar School of Erin. He continued on to take classes at the University of Ifè, and the College of Education at Ilesa. He would often go to school and then join his family at performances afterward, as well as on weekends, but, he says, it never disrupted his studies. This ability to balance family obligations and formal education is not something all Ayàn are able to do: “For some people it is not the same story...you are going to hear different stories. Some people just focus on music, not academic work...they just want to do practical [i.e. play drums]. At the same time, I managed to keep them both – difficult, but, hey, you’ve got to do it” (Ayanniyi 2009c). Ayanniyi would continue his education after moving permanently to the U.S. in 1995, earning an Associates degree at Santa Fe Community College.

In the early 1990s, when Ayanniyi was in his early twenties, he began working as a drum instructor at the Nike Center for Arts and Culture, an institution founded by artist Nike Davies Okundaye dedicated to training and promoting young fine and performing artists in the Yorùbá tradition. Ayanniyi came to the Center at the behest of his uncle, Buraimoh Ayandare, who had been personally asked by Davies Okundaye to assemble drum and dance teachers for

her students (Ayandare 2010). In addition to teaching, Ayanniyi would pursue a course of study there in *adire* (tie and dye) and *batik* fabric processing. Although some elder members of his family had already traveled to Europe and the United States, Ayanniyi's first opportunities to build an overseas patronage network for himself came through his affiliation with the Center.

The Center had already garnered international attention by the time Ayanniyi arrived, and he immediately began teaching English and German students, as well as other international visitors. Akeem and his colleagues assembled a performance group, which included talking drummers, hand drummers, singers, dancers, and masqueraders, some of whom hailed from his own extended family. Although it began as a self-directed volunteer effort, the group became self-sustaining as it performed in schools and universities around Nigeria. The Nike Center's climbing reputation in the Oşogbo visual arts scene made it a hub for international networks of fine artists, some of whom would prove instrumental to the success of Ayanniyi's performance ensemble. The Oşogbo ensemble's first opportunity to go to the U.S. came in 1993 when a representative from a Michigan-based arts council came to study art at the Nike Center. She subsequently helped the Oşogbo group book educational performances in Detroit and Iowa City. A number of similar "city tours" followed, brokered initially by single individuals and then sponsored by local governments and businesses. Eventually the ensemble was invited to

Santa Fe, where Ayanniyi would return to live permanently just a few years later.

The fine arts networks that first enabled Ayanniyi and his group to travel abroad remain important channels for his enterprise in the U.S. Santa Fe is a city plush with artists, and host to an annual international folk arts festival that is among the largest of its kind. Ayanniyi has participated in the Santa Fe Folk Arts Market every year since he arrived, selling hand-made drums and fabrics, as well as giving performances. He has made numerous contacts among African and American artists at the market, connections that have brought him work at fine arts galleries, museums, and folk arts fairs throughout the southwestern states, Texas, and California. While scholars frequently speak about the interrelationship of the arts in Africa, Ayanniyi has turned it into an economic strategy, developing his skills in handicrafts as well as in performance and using each to build patronage for the other. This has served to increase his overall visibility in the community. At one performance, for example, Ayanniyi was approached by the head of music at Santa Fe Community College and was hired to teach there shortly afterward. This not only made Ayanniyi's continuing education possible, it increased his symbolic capital: "If people know that you've been working with many institutions and organizations," he says, "they have more confidence in hiring you." Indeed, because of his widespread institutional affiliations and continuous personal networking, Ayanniyi says that he no longer has to actively pursue work—his jobs come to him through word-of-mouth (Ayanniyi

2009b).

Ayanniyi's educational efforts have assisted him in making his music more accessible to international patrons. As a child, he did not learn to discuss his own music theoretically: "it's more like physical and practical learning," he says; the theoretical aspects of it were never taught. During secondary school and college classes in Nigeria, however, he began to learn about Western music. But it was not until he came to the U.S. that he studied European history and how to read and write standard musical notation. This, he says, has proved a valuable skill in teaching students trained in the Western system: "Because living here and teaching here, you kind of want to know where your student is coming from, so then you can meet them halfway. So studying Western music, it helps a lot, so then you can understand your students a lot...better. So you can speak in music language, and music terms, and know what you are talking about" (Ayanniyi2009b). Ayanniyi's facility in the methods and discourses of Western music, in other words, gives him tools and language to mediate cultural gaps in musical perspective: "I'm using it every day," he says, "in every way. You are teaching, you are playing with other musicians."

Ayanniyi's family is somewhat unusual among Ayàn families today in that they are specialists in both *dùndún* and *bàtá*. But Ayanniyi does not see this as unusual: "If you go to my family house you will see talking drum, you will see *bàtá* drum, and you will see hand drum.

So anything that has skin on top, you will find it...anything that has goat skin or cow skin” (Ayanniyi 2009b). This early experience in a family that played many instruments has influenced his later eclecticism. While working in Oşogbo, Ayanniyi studied under a drummer who introduced him to Ivorian and Ghanaian (Asante) music as well as a number of hand drum traditions. Ayanniyi’s musical eclecticism intensified after coming to the U.S.: “I met so many drummers here...we just work with each other [and] in the process we study with each other, too.” They would teach “their own style” and I would teach “my own style...we are just teaching each other.” As a drummer, he says, it doesn’t take much to learn a new instrument or style, “you just have to want to *do* it, to learn it, you want to open up” (Ayanniyi 2009b).

In the early 1990s, when Ayanniyi first moved to New Mexico, there were more African musicians in the area, including some Nigerians, with whom he would perform or share the bill at shows. He recalls that Babatunde Olatunji, who was by then a world-renowned drummer and educator, would come to the area and Ayanniyi would perform with him. This proved significant, as Ayanniyi has come to incorporate some of Olatunji’s repertoire and pedagogy into his own work.

### **Rasaki Aladokun**

Rasaki Aladokun was born into an Ayàn family in Ikirun, a mid-size town in northern Òşun State not far from where many of my interlocutors hail. Like most Ayàn boys, Aladokun

began around the age of six, progressing from the gudugudu and omele drums to the *iyáàlù* by the time he finished primary school. Aladokun recalls how, when he was young, he would follow his father Sule's *dìndún* group on outings. On occasions when the elders had been playing for a long time and were tired, they would call on Aladokun and his peers to perform: "Rasaki come play [drums] with the small boys." They would gather in front of his father's patrons and "people will be looking at us...then we try and play. That is how we learn it, gradually." Aladokun came to enjoy playing *gángán*, which at that time was often used in concert with gudugudu for *egúngún* masquerades. Again, Aladokun and his peers learned through imitation; they would watch how his father and elders did the masquerade and then he and his age-group would do their own: "we practiced it," he said (Aladokun 2010).

By the time he was in his early teens, Aladokun had gained a reputation in the region and he would be called to perform all over Òṣun and Kwara States. He led an ad-hoc ensemble of his peers, who would come together whenever called. They played mainly as entertainers at social events, including funerals, weddings, and naming ceremonies. Aladokun also gained experience in *òrìṣà* repertoire by performing with his uncle who played drums for Ifá, Ọbàtálá, and Òṣun devotees. He also had early experience in Muslim popular music, playing in *ajiwere* groups that would travel around the town in the early mornings during Ramadan to wake the

observant. The rhythms and instrumentation of ajiwere, Aladokun emphasizes, would later form the basis of *fújì* music.

Aladokun began performing with *jùjú* groups in the early 1970s when he was in his late teens. He started with the band Ara Special, followed by Sunny Olateru, both of whom were for a time based in the Ikirun area. The instrumentation reflected the “modern” period of *jùjú*, with the addition of bass guitar, acoustic guitar, and a larger percussion section including bongo, clave, maracas, *şèkèrè*, *àkúbà*, *gángán*, and *agogo*. In addition to performing their own material, Aladokun’s bands covered the songs of Sunny Ade and Ebenezer Obey, both of whom were already known throughout Nigeria, and emulated the sound of pioneers like I.K. Dairo.

Aladokun described his approach to *gángán* drumming in *jùjú*:

When the leader is singing you play rhythm and when he stop you play real hard – you play proverb. When the leader sings a song about something, you take talking drum and say something similar to that. You say something that [fits]. People [are] giving money to the *jùjú* singer [and] because they hear what you said on talking drum, they come and give you money too. You know, a lot of Yorùbá people know what talking drum says, so when you say something, they are happy. (Aladokun 2010)

This was the same time that Aladokun began asserting independence from his family’s wishes.

While they wanted him to stay in school and become a doctor or lawyer, Aladokun was intent on being a professional musician. He first left home with the intention of going to Kaduna to join a traveling theater troupe there, but was stopped and returned to his parents by one of his

relatives before he made it. After finishing high school, Aladokun saved money and again left home, this time traveling to Lagos. His plan was to go straight to Sunny Ade's house and ask him for a job in his band. At the age of nineteen, Aladokun arrived in Lagos late one night after a long bus trip. Never having experienced the city before, Aladokun depended on the kindness of strangers to find food and a place to sleep. The next morning, he went directly to Sunny Ade's house and knocked on the front door. When the security man answered the door, Aladokun first indicated a connection to Sunny Ade's family by stating that he was from the town of Ikirun, where one of Ade's sisters happened to live. He then indexed his own family's social status by using his father's name, Aladokun, "because my dad is very, very powerful, and [the] name is popular" (Aladokun 2010). The security man informed Ade's mother, who let Aladokun in immediately, thinking that perhaps he had come to report on her daughter. Aladokun reassured her that nothing was wrong, and that "I am a good drummer," he said, "and I just want Sunny Ade to put me in small, small band so that's why I come."

"You're good?" she asked.

"I'm sure I'm good."

So Ade's mother chose a record of his that featured some difficult drumming and played it for Aladokun.

"You, small boy? You know how to play like that? Is it true?"



“Yes,” he replied.

“Then you will see Sunny Ade.”

Aladokun waited until the evening until Ade came out, and then repeated his pitch. Ade said he would have to “test” Aladokun first before putting him in the band. Aladokun then followed Ade to several venues where he was working. During a set break at the Stadium Hotel, the band’s talking drummer Tiamiyu Olaitan (a.k.a. Hajji Timmy) approached Aladokun and told him to play. The band had just released the cut “È Kilo F’òmọ Ode” (1974), and he wanted Aladokun to play it. Not only did Aladokun execute the rhythms properly, he also recited the opening verse and chorus on the *gángán*. Tiamiyu expressed surprise, “Ah! You small boy can play this!” As Tiamiyu took his drum back from Aladokun, Sunny said to the young man from Ikirun, “you don’t go anywhere; you have to play with my band.”

Ade gave Aladokun money to go to Ikirun, inform his parents, and return to Lagos to join the band as a full-time member. Aladokun began following the band, playing supporting rhythms while Tiamiyu maintained the lead talking drum: “I just play background – behind the stage. I just play rhythm.” But Sunny, he said, was always listening. Then one day at a show in Illorin, without any discussion, Ade asked the stage technician to put out a microphone for Aladokun next to Tiamiyu. “So that is how we started two talking drums; [we are] the first to start two talking drums in a *jùjú* band.” Whether accurate or not, this was a key moment for

Aladokun when he began to share the stage on equal footing with Tiamiyu. In June 1975 Sunny Ade brought the band to London and the east coast of the U.S. for a three-month tour, Aladokun's first time outside of Nigeria. While he was a star in Nigeria, Ade had not yet broken into the American mainstream, so the band played primarily for the Nigerian diasporic communities who had arranged his tour of the U.S.

It was not until Island Records approached Ade and released *Jìjù Music* (1982) that he gained an international audience. This album, and the track "Sámbà" in particular, was a breakthrough for Aladokun, who for the first time recorded the lead talking drum parts. Following their first Island/Mango release, the band began touring internationally and came to the U.S. every year. Eventually, in 1985, after some reorganization of the band, Tiamiyu left and Aladokun became the lead talking drummer. This lasted until 1994, when he left Ade's band to settle in California. When asked how and why he ended up in Oakland, Aladokun replied, "When you are doing some jobs, you can be thinking, I cannot be like this for ever...especially in Nigeria. In Nigeria music, not like here...they think you are old, they want to hire small boy. Like when Tiamiyu left - one day it will be me. I think that I do not want to be in a band forever, that I should find something else to do" (Aladokun 2010).

Aladokun married and settled in Sacramento, later moving to Oakland with the assistance of his friend Sikiru Adepoju, then a talking drummer for highlife-afrobeat artist O.J.

Ekemode (and later for Mickey Hart), who also resided in the area. Aladokun, then, joined a sizeable network of Nigerian musicians, including Sunny Ade's former bassist Kenneth Okulolo (a.k.a. Baba Ken) and a former talking drummer for I.K. Dairo, who had been developing a vital African music scene in the San Francisco Bay Area since the 1980s. Adepoju had also been playing with Babatunde Olatunji, who for many Americans had become synonymous with African drumming. Adepoju soon introduced Aladokun to him, and from the early 1990s until his death, Olatunji called on these two talking drummers for his major concerts on the west coast. While holding a day job as a taxi driver, Aladokun continues to perform regularly with the many bands of Ken Okulolo, tours occasionally with jazz-fusion groups like Garaj Mahal, and works on his own songwriting and recording projects. "You remember that I told you, there is no music at all that I cannot play with," he says. But supporting his parents, children, and siblings in the U.S. and Nigeria is his priority now: "In Nigeria there is no social security; your children are your social security" (Aladokun 2010). As a child of Ikirun who has achieved moderate international success, this is indeed one of his responsibilities.

### Conditions of creativity

There are two phenomena common to these professional trajectories. First is the distinctly personal nature of "musical globalization," which when closely scrutinized comes to look more like a web of partially independent musical projects, each of which is anchored to a

set of individually-established patronage relationships. This includes “strategic collaborations” (Klein 2007) with cosmopolitan musicians, artists, administrators, and academics, as well as more conventional patron-client arrangements with figures like Sunny Ade, Duro Ladipo, and Nike Davies Okundaye, whose names alone are enough to open doors of opportunity.

But these “personalistic economies” (Ebron 2002) are not freely constructed—and this is the second point—they are lodged within larger cosmopolitan discourses and institutions. Adeleke’s participation in the Duro Ladipo National Theater, for example, offered him the symbolic capital of association with a highly-regarded name, but it also exposed him to the ideas and methods of modern theater, in which culture is detached from its material contexts and recreated in stylized forms on stages around the world. This approach would prove readily transferable to his work with schools, universities, and arts organizations in the United States. Additionally, work at the University of Ìbàdàn primed Adeleke for academic patronage, a type of relationship that would initially help him find work overseas. But the same public institutions in which Adeleke has found the most interested audiences for his work in the U.S. have left him vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the economy. With funding cuts to the arts affecting many schools and universities, support for musician-educators like Adeleke is drying up.

For Ayanniyi, his association with the Nike Center gave him not only an additional set of marketable skills in fabric design, but also access to an international network of fine artists who would prove instrumental in establishing him professionally in the United States.

Affiliation with Santa Fe Community College also proved valuable in giving him a new audience for his work and allowing him to finish his college education, which would give him institutionally-backed credibility and a new cultural vocabulary with which he could communicate with his American students. Ayanniyi is fortunate to maintain work through his fine arts network, because, as is the case with Adeleke, funding cuts to the arts have deeply reduced his job opportunities. For Aladokun, becoming part of Sunny Ade's band opened doors of international mobility that would not have been possible before. But over time, the lifestyle of touring as a sideman became too difficult and unsustainable as a way to make a living. So he decided to prioritize stability over a full-time music career and settled down in California, where he would take up a profession not related to music, while pursuing musical opportunities where he could find them. Aladokun's former association with Sunny Ade would lead him to a valuable network of friends, colleagues, and patrons, who continue to help him sustain his current musical projects.

These professional trajectories, with their shifting constellations of personal and institutional alliances, represent both historical sequences of social network building and

gradual redefinitions of the creative horizon. These biographies, in other words, are meant to illustrate the *conditions* of each man's creative agency on the international stage—that is to say, what is creatively *possible* and *desirable* for each of them given their particular histories and contexts.

### ***Cosmopolitan musical creativity***

#### **Pedagogy, performance, and reflexivity**

A key area in which to observe cosmopolitan musical creativity at work is in the pedagogy of musicians who teach cultural outsiders. In the case of my interlocutors in the U.S., musical pedagogy is performative and reflexive, requiring both creative and representational choices. First, they must overcome linguistic and musical boundaries by selecting, arranging, and orchestrating repertory of the *dùndún* tradition so that it is accessible and meaningful to audiences who know little about Yorùbá culture. This is what I call *repertory adaptation*.

Complementing this, my interlocutors must also decide how, or how much, to ground the music in the social and cultural contexts of its homeland. This *contextual awareness* (Ruskin 2011) can be developed in various ways such as the translation and explanation of drum texts, discussions of culture and history, or the illumination of certain social values and principles through participatory music-making. In both their creative and representational choices, these

talking drummers are reflexively engaged with their culture – treating it as a resource that can be strategically and meaningfully deployed to meet the needs of different audiences.

### Repertory adaptation

To illustrate the practice of repertory adaptation, I focus on the pedagogy of Bisi Adeleke and Akeem Ayanniyi and the creative choices they make in American educational contexts. Adeleke tends to avoid repertoire that requires drum language from educational presentations and performances for non-Yorùbá audiences, instead using duple-meter social dance rhythms spiced up with *alùjò* (non-lexical percussive patterns). Nonetheless, he has found a way to convey the *principle* of speech surrogacy without delving extensively into Yorùbá texts. He typically begins educational presentations by asking his students a question: “Can a drum talk?” After allowing students to call out answers, he asks another: “Can a drum sing?” He then demonstrates, translates, and has students repeat a simple exchange in Yorùbá: “Níbo l’oń lọ?” (Where are you going?), which is answered with “Mo ń lọ’lé” (I’m going to my house). Students are then challenged to engage in drum talk, asking and answering the question along with the *ìyáàlù dùndún*. While this may appear formal and didactic, Adeleke is referencing a traditional game of drum talk that elders in an Ayàn family will use to test and train their children (see Chapter 3).

Adeleke also likes to show students how the talking drum can “sing.” To do so, Adeleke will use the *ìyáàlù dùndún* to play melodies of familiar American songs, like “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” for younger audiences and “Amazing Grace” for those who are older. (For predominantly Nigerian-Yorùbá audiences, he would substitute the melodies of Yorùbá songs, but this is not a common circumstance.) Whichever songs he chooses, his goal is to bridge a cultural gap: to make an unfamiliar musical instrument meaningful to his audiences by connecting it symbolically with things they know. Adeleke says, “When they hear the song coming from this strange instrument, they will start to sing, they will start to admire it.” He emphasizes that he doesn’t have to tell them to sing, “just do what you want to do and people will see...if you do it right, they will act right...when you hear a song from a different place, you will sing.” Since the experience of *song* itself is a human universal, Adeleke sees it as a way of making the talking drum more relatable. But to Adeleke, the textual content matters, too, and must be handled according to the audience: “I don’t like to do something that won’t be meaningful to people. If I am singing a Yorùbá song on the drum, it’s like you are playing drums, [they will think] you are just playing what you like, but if you want them to react to what you do, you have to do what they understand, what they know.” If you play a Yorùbá song on the drum, “it won’t make sense to them....the rhythm might be good to them, but they don’t know what you are really doing. That’s why I prefer to sing in English [rather than]



Yorùbá song. But sometimes, when I play in front of Nigerian audience, Yorùbá audience, I sing a Yorùbá song. I know they will understand that and whatever I sing they will understand” (Adeleke 2010c).

In lieu of exploring drum texts with his audiences, Adeleke focuses on the full musical range of the instrument by playing melodic runs up and down an octave, executing passages of extreme dynamic contrast, and eliciting a variety of timbres from the drum by manipulating the strings and muffling the head with his finger nails. When teaching rhythms to students, he likewise tends to avoid textual material, instead drawing on *alùjó* (dance-drumming) passages or other accompaniment rhythms. Adapted for hand drums, the rhythms are repeated either in unison or in a responsorial organization. Adeleke will, for example, take a duple-meter social dance rhythm that is usually orchestrated on *gídúgídú* or *omele* drums, and transfer the parts to the high and low tones of a hand drum [Figure 8].

**Figure 8: Social dance rhythm for hand drum**





Ayanniyi’s Yorùbá material is drawn from several sources: didactic verbal formulas, social dance music, sacred rhythms and texts for the *òrìṣà* and ancestors, and popular music. For example, he will string together the tonally contrasting words *agbádá, búbá, ṣòkòtò* (robe, shirt, pants)—a common formula for teaching Yorùbá language—and set it to a generic 12/8 social dance rhythm. The three tones of the Yorùbá are transposed to the three tones of the *djembe*, which Ayanniyi refers to as “bass” (low/bass tone), “tone” (mid tone) and “slap” (high tone). They are abbreviated here with the letters B, T, and S [Figure 10].

**Figure 10: “Agbádá, búbá, ṣòkòtò” for *djembe***

♩ = 105

Djembe 1

T S S B S B B B

Ag bá dá Bù bá Sò kò tò

Djembe 2

B T T B T T B T T B T T

Theoretically, at least, an exercise like this will teach students not just a particular rhythm, but also the principle of, and method for, creating danceable music from both lexical and non-lexical sources.

While Ayanniyi rarely explains to students much about the sacred contexts in which Yorùbá drumming happens, he does make frequent use of sacred texts and rhythms in his teaching. He will, for example, select a fragment of *oríkì* for Òṣun:

Òṣun yèyé                      Òṣun, great mother

Òlómọ niyá                      mother of the children

As with the previous example, he will then transpose the three tones of the Yorùbá to the three tones of the *djembe* or *aṣíkò* hand drum. While one group of students repeats this phrase, he transposes one of the standard *gúdúgúdú/omele* patterns for Òṣun to the remaining hand drums, with the overall result as below [Figure 11].

**Figure 11: Òṣun yèyé for *djembe***

♩ = 120

Djembe 1

Djembe 2

B    T    B    S    B    T    T    B    S  
Ò    sun    yè    yé    Ò    lo    mo    ni    yá

T    T    S    S    T    T    S    S    T    T    S    S

While simplifying sacred repertoire for musicians who have little experience with Yorùbá music and culture, Ayanniye still effectively conveys the Yorùbá principle that words and sounds are a potent combination that can enhance and activate the personalities of deities and ancestors.

Ayanniye also draws on Nigerian popular and neo-traditional music in his teaching.

Most of this material appears to be derived directly from the repertoire of Babatunde Olatunji, with whom Ayanniye worked during the 1990s. Ayanniye uses a number of songs that Olatunji

made popular, including “Akiwowo (Chant to the Trainman),” based on a folk song about the first train line in Nigeria (Olatunji 2005:46); “Kiyakiya,” or “Sálo’lé” as Ayanniyi refers to it, which is based on the melody and lyrics of a highlife song from the 1930s or 40s known originally as “Òrẹ mi kíni ẹ?” (My friend, what are you doing?); and, third, “Funga/Fanga Àlàáfìà,” a prayerful Yorùbá lyric by Olatunji set to the rhythm of a Sierra Leonean or Liberian “welcome dance” originally made known in the U.S. by Trinidadian-American dancer Pearl Primus (Charry 2005:10).<sup>28</sup>

### Contextual awareness

The development of contextual awareness among students is something that my interlocutors in the U.S. do to various degrees and with differing methods. Francis Awe, a talking drummer with whom I work in Los Angeles, exhibits a strong pedagogical focus on the social and cultural context of Yorùbá music. This provides a useful point against which to compare the pedagogy of other drummers. The rhetoric of “family,” a discourse used by Yorùbá to strategically incorporate outsiders into a local world mutual obligation, forms the heart of Awe’s teaching. The concept of family is at once universally recognizable, culturally particular, and personally resonant. As such, it serves three purposes in Awe’s work. First, it is a means of making talking drum music accessible to a wider audience. It is through the metaphor of family that Awe

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<sup>28</sup> For recordings of the aforementioned songs, see Olatunji (1960); Waterman (1993); and Àgalú (2007).

teaches students about Yorùbá taxonomies of musical instruments (they are indeed grouped in “families” based on types of physical structure), as well as the hierarchy of roles through which ensemble music is organized. Second, it is a way of maintaining culturally appropriate parameters of musical performance and pedagogy. For Awe, teaching and learning is more than an economic transaction; it is a family-like relationship in which he expects students to treat him with the respect of a father figure. In the context of his Talking Drum Ensemble, he frequently reminds students to treat it as a family obligation in terms of both acknowledging the hierarchy of talent in the group and committing to playing one’s own role with pride. In this way, Awe has recreated in adapted form the apprenticeship and ensemble models one might encounter as a child in an Ayàn family. Third, Awe uses the metaphor of family to think across social categories and social scale, symbolically linking the intimate bonds of kith and kin to universalistic ideals through the language of global brotherhood and sisterhood, as he does, for example, when referring to his musical ensemble as a “global family.”

Adeleke, too, makes pedagogical use of the family metaphor. He does this by unveiling the classification structure of Yorùbá drums gradually throughout the course of an educational workshop, moving from the supporting drums (*omele*) to the lead drums (*ìyáàlù*). He begins with the *àdàmò*, or as he puts it to his audiences, the “baby drum.” After playing some *alùjò* (non-lexical dance drumming) on the *àdàmò*, Adeleke will typically ask students if they think

the baby drum has a mother. “All children have a mother!” he’ll exclaim, and pull the *ìyáàlù* *dùndún* from its case. Appropriately conveying its leadership role in the ensemble, Adeleke uses this drum to show how a *dùndún* is used for verbal communication by engaging students in a game of drum talk. Adeleke then introduces the “daddy drum” (in this case, a *bèmbé*) as the one most closely associated with music for kings. The *ìyáàlù bèmbé*, although it is neither a member of the *dùndún* family nor, strictly speaking, a male-gendered drum, serves Adeleke’s pedagogy adequately by showing how the musical roles of Yorùbá instruments—to some degree indicated by their size and shape—mirror the social structure of the family. He then introduces the *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* (gourd rattle) as an instrument appropriately gendered female: “they call it sister drum because it is women who play it most of the time...and it is beautiful – you know women are beautiful, so that is why they call this Sister” (Adeleke 2010c). There is an extraordinary amount of cultural information that is glossed over here—among other things, the association of *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* with Ajé, the goddess of wealth—but again, his explanation is adequate to convey the instrument’s female valence. When asked about his pedagogical approach, Adeleke talks about it not so much as a means of teaching cultural context, but rather as a strategy to add excitement to his presentations:

Many drummers when they want to entertain people solo, they just play—brah, brah, brah!—and when you play like that for ten minutes people will be tired. Don’t you think so? People will be tired of what you are doing. You don’t say anything; you don’t

say something that can move them. So that is why I have many drums: before you are tired of what I am playing on baby drum, I change it to daddy drum; before you are tired of daddy drum, I change to mother drum. You see what I am doing? So you won't be tired. (Adeleke 2010d)

Whatever his motives, Adeleke's pedagogy does effectively and accurately represent Yorùbá music-culture as embedded in, and reproductive of, a gendered, hierarchical division of labor.

By comparison with Awe and Adeleke, Ayanniyi's use of contextual reference is quite minimal. Normally, he introduces his workshops by asking students where Nigeria is located on the African continent, by naming the drums he brought with him, and by stating that his family has been playing drums "for a long, long time." Rather than explaining the instruments, songs, and rhythms ahead of time, he prefers to perform first and then allow students to ask questions about aspects of the culture that interest them. Although it plays only a small role in his pedagogy, Ayanniyi does evidence a particular stance towards the use of cultural context.

While addressing certain aspects of Yorùbá culture, Ayanniyi aims more for a broader representation of West Africa as a musical region. His instructional video, *Drum with Master Drummer Akeem Ayanniyi from Nigeria* (n.d.), which in addition to Yorùbá drumming features *djembe* rhythms and other repertoire from outside Nigeria, includes the tag line "Watch, listen, and learn West African drum rhythms." There is no mention of Yorùbá music other than in Ayanniyi's promotional biography on the back cover of the DVD. During workshops as well,



Ayanniyi does not privilege Yorùbá drums and song over other traditions, preferring instead to contextualize them all as part of a larger world of West African music. This, I would speculate, is born out of his eclectic musical training in which he not only mastered his family tradition of *dùndún* and *bàtá*, but also gained competency in hand drum traditions of *djembe*, conga, and *aṣkò*. Just as it affects the content and performance of his repertoire, so too does it color his representational choices.

### ***Conclusions***

Yorùbá drummers like those discussed in this chapter, as they expand the horizons of their tradition beyond its local bounds, are fundamentally in the business of cultural mediation. Like the cultural efforts of art composers and popular musicians during of the eras of colonialism and nation building, as well as those of present-day heritage producers in Nigeria, the global projects of talking drummers depend on a notion of culture-as-agency. Culture is not an abstract notion for these musicians; culture is their everyday work, and it is the source of their livelihoods. For those who live in the diaspora, their success depends both on the depth of their knowledge and their ability to make it meaningful and valuable to diverse audiences. Positioning themselves in an international market requires that they adopt a cosmopolitan disposition towards tradition. When it is no longer a secret to be protected, cultural heritage

becomes a pool of resources that global artists use creatively and strategically in dialogue with the people and places they encounter.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

### *Trajectories*

Trajectories are the paths carved by ideas, objects, and people as they move through space over time. A music-culture like the *dùndún* tradition is an entity in motion, its elements illustratable only in arcs of possibility. The mythological and philosophical narratives that surround it proliferate in diversity, while its symbolic meanings and moral valence remain in flux. The social organization of the tradition, apparently stable, is also in a slow process of transformation. Opportunities are changing in the free-market economy, religious fundamentalism is growing, and women and non-hereditary musicians are joining in, while many young *Ayàn* are no longer following in the profession of their fathers. Once an art of local purview, it is now being reimagined as a form of cultural heritage aimed at international markets. The *dùndún*'s repertoire, too, is always in motion. The poetic genres on which it draws are unstable and intertextually entwined, always reconfigured in endless variations to meet the needs of diverse audiences and situations. The social life in which talking drummers participate, as well, is always "in the making"; with the discursive tools of sounds and words, drummers both reflect and affect their social worlds. And, of course, drummers themselves do not stand still, traveling overseas as they build new patronage networks and creatively adapt

their tradition to new cultures and locales. The unearthing of trajectories, as Klein (2007:135) astutely observes, is a key aspect of Foucault's historical method. In anthropological terms, it is an excavation of the historical conditions and conceptual developments beneath what we normally accept as ethnographic "facts." In this spirit, I hope to have uncovered some of the paths by which the *dùndún* tradition has reached this historical moment, and by which it will be spun out into the future.

The dissertation begins by capturing how the *dùndún*, as a musical instrument and a social practice at the heart of Yorùbá public life, is constituted as an object of cultural discourse. I bring the inherited narratives of myth and sacred poetry into conversation with more recent discursive productions of Yorùbá-language literature, theater, and film. While the former casts images of music's psychic imprint, the latter queries its social and ethical dimensions. In consultation with personal and published sources, I first examine three different genres of "traditional" discourse—used here simply to mean narratives that are passed down orally from one generation to another—as they concern Yorùbá drums: origin stories or "myths" (*ìtàn*), Ifá divination poetry (*odù Ifá*), and Ifá puzzle-stories (*àrò*). I turn then to the representation of Yorùbá talking drums in mass media, specifically in the literary and dramatic work of Akinwumi Isola, Adebayo Faleti, and Jimi Solanke, among others. In their books, plays, and films, as well as in their personal reflections, these members of the Yorùbá literati

concern themselves with the social functions and ethical codes of drummers, grappling with the roles and responsibilities of these musicians in a modernizing society. My conclusion in this chapter is that discourses about the *dùndún* in Yorùbá culture are anything but fixed; interpretations vary by context, and its meanings are layered, often ambiguous, and profoundly unsettled. Cultural context, in literature about Yorùbá music, is too often conflated with metaphysical discourses about cosmology that take on a timeless quality. My argument here is not only that there is a pragmatic dimension to cultural context that needs to be considered, but also that discourses about a music-culture are not frozen in time, that they, like the cultures they participate in, are constantly in motion.

Chapter three examines how the *dùndún* tradition's elder men, the *báádlẹ̀* or *aàrẹ̀ onílù* view and experience the social organization of their profession. My discussions with them hinged on the themes of family and lineage, leadership and governance, and the economics of patronage, about all of which they had a lot to say. For these elders, the Ayàn family is constituted not only by the kinfolk among whom they presently live and work; it is also a form of historical consciousness in which the past is used to enhance one's pedigree or legitimize one's authority in the present. The inseparability of Ayàn ancestors and their kings, for example, is a common theme in Ayàn lineage histories. As the ratified leaders of each town's community of talking drummers, the *báádlẹ̀* or *aàrẹ̀ onílù* were keen to discuss the ethical and

economic standards of their profession. Proper conduct was typically enforced by each town's *ẹgbẹ onílù* (drummers' association). Their biggest concerns lay with musicians whose behavior—for example, showing up at an event without an invitation—reinforced negative stereotypes about the profession. Indeed, positive recognition, official or otherwise, was something they desperately sought in an environment of declining patronage. This chapter, then, is ultimately about the social structure of a music-culture as a lived and living phenomenon. Social structure—if it exists as an ideal form in the minds of participants—does so only because it is reproduced that way discursively and reenacted as social practice. As subjective experience, the social organization of the *dùndún* tradition is constituted by musicians' negotiations between what they see as given and what as malleable in their professional lives.

Chapter four transitions from conversations about the *dùndún* to discourses emanating from the drum itself. I bring together the model of discourse as a regime of knowledge with the conception of it as a relational mode of communication in order to demonstrate that drum talk is a form of social action that both reproduces and transforms its context. My proposition is that there are fundamentally two types of social “work” that *dùndún* musicians do. First is the enhancement or magnification of individuals, accomplished through the poetics of personality as well as through the rich timbres and dynamics of the instruments themselves. Second is the

coordination of group social action, achieved through directions or exhortations to dance, process, or sing along. Since age, status, and occupation groups each have their preferred types of music, a drummer's choice of repertoire or text is an act of social demarcation that can galvanize the participation of one class and exclude another. With lexical and non-lexical sounds at their disposal, as well as the sometimes imposing figure that their instrument cuts for them, talking drummers are able to frame social interaction and mark social boundaries in concrete ways. The *dùndún*, in other words, makes social structure audible. Balancing adherence to custom with personal motivation and creative agency, talking drummers discursively co-create not just the political, ceremonial, and ritual contexts in which they participate, but also the very personas of those with whom they interact.

Chapter five looks at the work of the Ayààgalú Şòúngòbì Foundation as a lens on the production of cultural heritage in modern Nigeria. Their efforts to build new markets for the *dùndún* in non-traditional sectors involve the discursive translation of its local cultural references into trans-ethnic and trans-national terms. The foundation, for example, imagines talking drummers, once the fixtures of *òbas'* palaces, now installed in foreign embassies to greet visiting dignitaries. There is also a symbolic conversion necessary for the transformation of art into heritage, whereby the musical tradition is rhetorically constructed as a national resource, that is, a saleable commodity equivalent to any other export. This project has engendered

contentious debates over the role of talking drums in a technologically modern, religiously Muslim and Christian nation. Despite laudable and often successful efforts to regenerate the economic bases of local traditions, there remain inescapable misalignments between heritage enterprises and the artists they claim to represent.

Chapter six centers on the professional trajectories of three Ayàn who, in the pursuit of opportunities beyond hometown and nation-state, now live and work in the United States. Understanding trajectory as a matter of both motion itself and the forces conditioning that movement, I examine how these musicians' adoption of cosmopolitan ideas and social positions shaped their chosen paths. Turning to the topic of pedagogy, I argue that teaching in intercultural situations involves both creative and representational choices. In their adoptive homes, these three men are ultimately cultural mediators—translating and transmitting the heritage of their fathers to communities without any prior connection to it. This requires the fundamentally cosmopolitan stance that culture accrues power not in secrecy and untranslatability, but rather in its accessibility and universal appeal (c.f., Helgesson 2010).

***Further studies: recontextualizing African musics***

The music of twentieth-century African immigrants is everywhere in American cultural life. Live performances, educational programs, and participatory opportunities abound in cities



throughout the United States. A survey of the Los Angeles scene alone indicates just how deeply these cultural threads are woven into the fabric of contemporary American life. At UCLA and Cal Arts, Kobla Ladzekpo provides rigorous performance training in the traditional Ewe repertoire of Ghana; in the L.A. public schools, Nigerian drummer Francis Awe offers innovative workshops that use Yorùbá song and dance to help students think critically and build self-esteem; Motherland Music offers drum classes to the community seven days a week, including a wide range of Mande styles from Guinea and Senegal; and on weekends in Venice Beach, appropriations and imaginings of “African music” emanate from the drum circles that assemble there.

Ethnomusicologists, however, have only recently begun to look at the integral role of twentieth-century African migrant music in the constitution of American social and cultural life. A prodigious body of historical scholarship exists on African music and culture in the Americas and its relationship to that of the continent (e.g., Holloway 1990). Paradigms have shifted significantly since anthropologist Melville Herskovits sought to identify African origins in African-American culture by treating the continent as a historical laboratory. Greater attention is now being paid to cultural innovation in Africa and the Americas as historically coeval and as part of ongoing dialogues within and beyond the black Atlantic (e.g., Clarke 2004; Matory 2005). African popular music, its transnational roots and routes, and its

intersections with jazz culture have been widely studied since the 1960s (Coplan 1985; Erlmann 1999).

Over the past ten years a significant literature has emerged on the music of the twentieth-century African diaspora and its transnational links (e.g., DeFrantz2002; Kelley 2012; Monson 2000). Among other issues, the American domestication of African music and dance is linked to the history of twentieth-century African-American political and cultural movements. The peculiar shape that African music has taken in the U.S. is also tied to its participation in the world music movement of the 1980s (Charry 2005). The re-contextualization of African music is never simply a question of transporting static traditions to pre-existing contexts. Such musics are reproduced and transformed within historically and socially situated interactions. They are also enacted within and against a variety of dominant and subaltern discourses, such as colonialist images of African difference, and African-American imaginings of African roots (Ebron 2002). While historical literature on this subject area has gained momentum, there are still few studies that explore in ethnographic detail the sites of pedagogy and performance in which African musics are recontextualized (Feay-Shaw 2002; Mundundu 2005).

Nigerian musicians have participated widely and formatively in recontextualizing African music in the United States. Among the most well known is Babatunde Olatunji, who came to the U.S. as a college student in the 1950s with the intention of becoming a diplomat.

Instead, he became a beacon for African Americans seeking to reclaim and reimagine their heritage. Later, he led a wider movement of Americans towards a universalistic notion of African music as a healing and integrating art. Along with Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart, Olatunji played a formative role in energizing nascent drum circle communities and catapulting African music into the world music industry. Prior to Olatunji, Nigerian migrant Moses Mianns made a name for himself in the New York area, performing with the pioneering African dance troupes of Asadata Dafora and Pearl Primus. Mianns is also credited with introducing Americans to the *aṣíkò* drum (Charry 2005:11). Another musician about which little is known is Efrom Odok, a Nigerian who arrived in New York in the 1920s and opened a center in Harlem with the intention of teaching black New Yorkers “the music and dances of their forefathers.” By the 1930s, the drummer was able to assemble Efrom Odok’s Calabar Dancers, a troupe consisting entirely of Calabaris (Kelley 2012:14). Biographical information on such musicians is hard to find and so the history remains slim.

It is within this intellectual context that I sought in my dissertation to highlight the professional routes and pedagogical approaches of three contemporary Yorùbá musicians living in the U.S. The part that their work plays in larger stories of African migrant musics in the U.S., as well as in relation to the specific contributions of Nigerian musicians, remains to be explored. An inquiry of this sort could profitably be anchored in what might be called “sites of

translation and transmission”—situated performances or educational transactions in which musicians rearticulate, renegotiate, and reproduce their music. Examining the performance of African musics in such concrete intercultural situations would illuminate more sharply the modes and mechanisms by which music moves through the world.

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