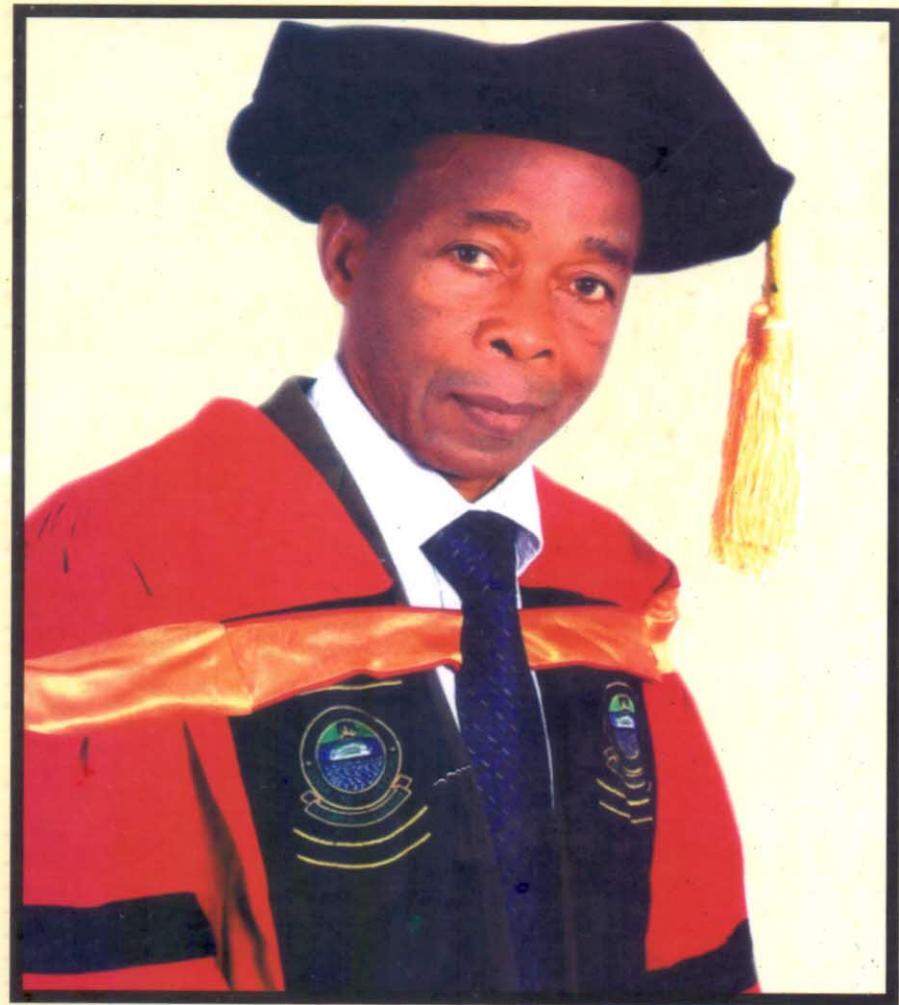


# **MUSIC, A PANACEA FOR A COUNTRY IN DISTRESS: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ANTHONY EKEMEZIE MERENI**



## **A FESTSCHRIFT FOR ANTHONY EKEMEZIE MERENI**

**Edited by Olusoji Stephen,  
Oluwaseyi Kehinde & Nweke Florence**

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# URBANIZATION OF DÙNDÙN DRUMMING: A STUDY OF ÀSO SÈKÈRÈ IN ÌGÀ ÌDÚNGÁNRÁN PALACE LAGOS STATE

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## Abstract

The forms and practices of dùndún drums and drumming in Yoruba land have flourished over the years. This ensemble, which is phenomenal in concept and delivery, has enjoyed an unrestricted patronage of scholars, performers and aficionados. However it is noticeable that in recent times, in some places, the ensemble is beginning to exhibit traces of disparity in content and context of performance. This paper intends to subject this hypothesis to test in determining the extent of these infusions (if any) and its consequences on the forms already associated with dùndún drumming. Taking the Aso Sèkèrè ensemble in the palace of Oba of Lagos as a study, the paper relies on archival and ethnographic sources for its methodology. Data for this study were collected using the Focus Group discussion method, Interview method and observation method. Performances of different typologies were observed at the palace and the lead dùndún drummer was interviewed. Focus group discussions was organised for the entire members of this ensemble. Emphasis was laid on the forms and contextual practices of dùndún drumming in the palace, the historical factors that may be associated with ensemble. Discussions in the paper were focused towards preserving art of dùndún drumming in its best form. The research is intended to instigate further discussions on the subject and make recommendations as deemed necessary.

## Introduction

Dùndún is both a Yoruba drumming style and set of hourglass drums that have been in existence for many years. It is, arguably, the most populous of the drums and drumming styles in the Yoruba land. More popular and widely accepted than the *Bata* (*Bata* is another drum of equal pedestal and acceptability in Yoruba land), which can be dated to the beginning of the Yoruba race. Vidal (2012), citing Johnson, puts its date of introduction of dùndún drums into Yoruba land at 1890 (p.46). Further Justification of the ubiquity of the dùndún drums in Yoruba land is done by Villapastour. (2010) According to him, “There is little doubt that the dùndùn is widely distributed and popular more than the *Bata*” (p.78). Euba also wrote in the same vein that “in Yoruba

land one does not need to go in search of *dùndún*, for one is apt to hear it many times in the course of one's daily activities. On the other hand many of the other drums ensembles are unlikely to be heard unless one knows where to look for them" (1990:28). According to Thieme (1969) as cited by Samuel (2012) "dùndún drum is widely distributed throughout Western Nigeria. This submission is predicated upon a survey on instruments which he undertook in 38 Yorùbá towns. He found that it was only a few small towns that had no resident *dùndún* instrumental ensemble of any kind" (p.100)

In a personal communication with *Jimoh Foworánú*, the head of *Aso Sèkèrè* group in the palace of Oba of Lagos, Ìgà Ìdúngánrán, he stated that the universality of *dùndún* drums in Yorùbá land can be proved with the presence of the drum in any gathering of Yorùbá people no matter how small the number could be. "Anywhere you can find two or three Yorùbá people, the first and in most cases, only musical instrument you find is *dùndún*. Which they use for all purposes from war to celebration and death" (*Foworánú*). This same view is shared by Vidal (2012), according to him "of the two types of drum families in this category, the *dùndún* set is the most popular for all occasions-religious, social, political, cultural, or entertainment" (p.46).

Varied views are given in respect of the origin of *dùndún* drums in Yoruba land. Some of these views are mythological, some are conflicting, while some are with elements of verifiable facts but laced with hyperbole. According to Euba (1990) citing Oba Láoyè 1

*Dùndún* was first used by Àyàn, a native of Saworo in Ìbàribá land. He taught some Yorùbá families the art of drumming and he was so loved by them that they deified him after his death" (p.38). However, Euba goes further to show the conflict in some of the stories. He gave the views of some Ilé Ifè drummers saying *dùndún* drums were brought to Ilé Ifè from heaven by the founder of Ilé Ifè (38).



Plate 1: Dùndún drummers. Source-Samuel Káyòdé

Some oral sources like, *Foworánú* who was interviewed in the course of this research work associated the emergence of dùndún drums in Yoruba land to the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria. This school of thought, which has been situated in some scholars, works, substantiated their position with the similar features and attributes of these instruments with those found in the Northern Nigeria, precisely, Hausa land. A typical example given in this instance are *Kanango*, a member family of the Ìyáàlù, also a double headed tension drum which share same physical attributes with *Kalangu* of the Hausa. Also in this category is *Kotsó* of the Hausa and *Kósó* of the Yorùbá. There is also, *Ganga*, of the Hausa and *Bèmbé* of the Yorùbá, though not of the dùndún family, the two instruments fall into the category of Hausa and Yorùbá drums, which share same physical outlook and names. The striking similitude of the aforementioned musical instruments informed the submission of *Foworánú* in concluding that dùndún might have been introduced to Yorùbá people via the northern axis of the country. This position was also corroborated by Johnson (2001) as he puts it, "the Ivory trumpet and the *Kákàaki* introduced from the Hausa and Nupe are used for the *Alááfin* alone (p.121). Although Johnson is not categorical about the source of Dùndún neither did he associate it with the Hausa, he was able to establish the inflow of some other instruments in the category of *Dùndún* into the Yorùbá land from the northern axis. A situation which reinforces the submissions of those who said *Dundun* actually is from the Northern states.

*Dùndún* could mean the name of the drums or the ensemble itself. It can also mean the name of the dance steps accompanying the particular ensemble. It is not uncommon to

hear people saying, *mo fē lo jó Dùndún* (I want to dance to Dundun), *Mo fē lo lu ilù Dundun* (I want to go and beat Dundun drums) or *mo ní ilù Dundun* (I have Dundun drum). *Dùndún* according to Villepastour “is a generic term for a family of drums” (2010, p.77). There are various dance forms accompanying Dundun drumming. These include *Àlójá*, *Wóró* and *Gbandikan*. “The creativity of a Dundun performance-composition called, *Gbandikan* otherwise known as, *ijó awọn ọmọ ako* is a dance music strictly connected with the harvest season of cocoa, a very notable cash crop in Yorùbá land” (Oláníyan, 2010 p.110).

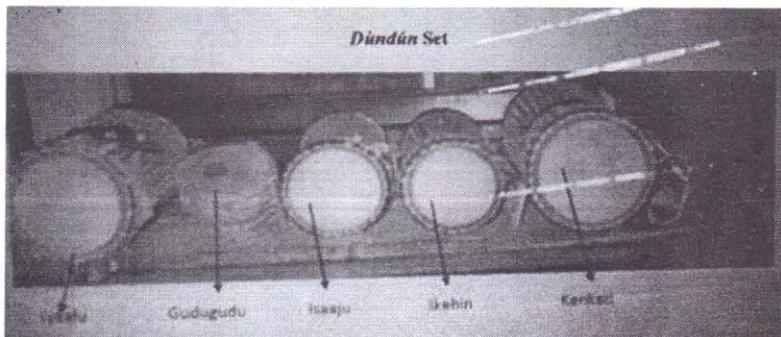


Plate 2: Dùndún Set. Source-Oláníyan Yemi

However, analysis of Dundun drumming and drums in Yorùbá land most likely will reveal that the culture of dùndún drumming is more pronounced in some localities than the other. While this tradition is entrenched in places like *Òyó*, *Òshogbo*, *Ìbàdàn*, known for strong Dùndún tradition, other places like *Abéòkúta*, *Èkítí*, *Ìjésà* are not as strong in Dùndún tradition. Euba (1990) wrote that;

the Dùndún tradition is at its strongest in the central and northern parts of the Yorùbá land, an area roughly coincident with that of the *Òyó Yorùbá*. From the *Ìjébú* area southwards, the tradition diminishes in strength until it becomes weakest at the coast. Similarly, the tradition becomes less as we approach the eastern and western borders of Yorùbá land (29).

Recent discoveries have shown there may be few exceptions to Euba’s submission. For instance, in the course of this research, it was discovered that dùndún drumming tradition is very strong in a few towns in *Èkítí* (*Èkítí*, in the South Western part of Nigeria, according to Euba’s conclusion is amongst the town with low patronage of Dùndún). One of such is *Òkèmèsi Èkítí* in *Èkítí* State. Personal communication with Bídùn Áyánlékè (2017) revealed that the Dùndún tradition in this town has been perpetuated by a settlement of *Òyó* people who migrated to the town after the fall of *Òyó* empire. These settlers, according to Áyánlékè

were led to the town by two brothers namely: *Ayélabówó* and *Ayélabólá* during the reign of *Oba Apónlésé*, who had been foretold of the coming of strangers who will generate source of happiness in the town. When these two people who were *Òyó -Íbádán* (as they were called) arrived *Òkémésí*, the *Oba* knew the prediction was about to come to fruition. Of the two, *Ayélabówó*, was the drummer who began to trade of *Dùndún* drumming in the town. He has since recreated so many *Dùndún* drummers in the town. Today, the tradition of *dùndún* drumming is firmly enriched and has survived many generations. (Personal communication with *Biódún Ayánlékè*, one of the lead drummers in *Okemesí*)

In the recent time, the usage of *Dùndún* has transcended the traditional music realm. *Dùndún* is now a common feature in the performance and rendition of other genre of music. Quoting Alaja-Browne, Ogisi wrote that during the 1930s and 40s Kruman Sunday Harbour Giant, alias *Àtári Àjánàkú*, introduced the samba (a framed drum), the melodica and the tambourine; *Àkánbí* Wright incorporated *gángan* 32). (*Gángan* belongs to *Dùndún* family).

The church, in the recent times have been having their own experience of *Dùndún* drums. For instance, in the 2015 year end concert of Day Star Christian Center, Lagos, a neo Christian movement otherwise known as Pentecostal church movement, full complements of *Dùndún* ensemble with all its attributes featured prominently in the concert. All these do not negate the fact that *Dùndún* drums are still dominant in the cults of gods like *Egúngún*, *Ògún*, *Òsun* and others. They are still played by Christians and Muslims without limitations or restrictions as it happens in other ensembles in Yorùbá land.

The growth of the economy and upsurge in population of the southwestern states and by, extension, Nigeria, has affected the spread of *Dùndún* drumming. It is not uncommon to see *Dùndún* drummer engaged by corporate communities. Starcomms a telecommunication outfit in the country have as it log a silhouette of *Dùndún* drumming. The *Dùndún* drums are now employed for advertisement and sales promotion. These development has affected the concept of *Dùndún* drumming in few ways.



Plate 4: Silhouette of *Dùndún* as logo of Starcomms

This paper is premised on the assumption that the widespread Dundun drumming in Yorubaland, in uncontrolled circumstances, has affected in different ways its forms and features. The paper is delimited to the palace of Lagos state in examining the practice of dündún drumming in the palace of Oba of Lagos otherwise named Ìgà Ìdúngánrá. The functional roles of dündún in the aforementioned place and the general practice of dündún drumming in the palace.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this paper is the theory of inter-culturalism as propounded by Akin Euba. The theory, according to Euba (1990) situates traditional music of Africa as a product of cultural interactions between African nations and nations beyond the borders of Africa. He stated that “there are various stages of interaction between two different cultures of music. There is, for example, a beginning (or experimental) stage, during which the elements that are combined from different sources, though successfully realized in a new context and accepted by the members of that society to which they are presented... Euba also identified another critical stage of this development whereby the elements have fused together and have become a unified idiom. (115)

### **Brief History Of Lagos**

Èkó is a Yoruba metropolitan city whose origin is traced to the 15th century and founded by Yorùbá fisher men. According to Kótún (1998) *Omo Èkó* (Èkó Indigenes) are descendants of *Odùduwà* (1) However the written history of this city could be traced to 16<sup>th</sup> century when it was recorded that the first traditional administrator, of the town, *Asípa* was enthroned. ‘According to Vidal citing oral tradition:

Lagos was settled by five waves of migrants; three major and two minor from Yorùbá Mainland. The first wave of migrant was led by *Ogúnfúnminírè* of the royal dynasty of *Ifé*. He and a group of *Àwóri* people first settled at *Íséri*, just at the bank of River *Ògùn*. An area now popularly referred to as Berger. From *Íséri*, segment of the first group spread to *Èbúté-meta* and from there they were moved to *Iddo* Island and finally to the Lagos (Èkó or *Onní*) Island. (Vidal 2012, p.3)

The second wave of Immigrants as explained by Vidal occurred between 1600AD and 1700 AD. *Asípa* (Esikpa in Benin), the emissary of the Oba of Benin led the second movement which consisted primarily of Benin people. This *Asípa* became the first Oba of Lagos and from that genealogy come the present Oba of Lagos. The third wave of people entered the coastal area of Badagry and started a separate cultural development. These were the *Pópó* people. (Otherwise known as *Ègùn*). (Vidal, 2012; 4). This Position is shared by Kótún (1997 p.4)

*Igà Idúngánrán* is the traditional home of Oba of Lagos. (Kòtun 10) It literally means the Palace at the pepper farm side. According to Kòtún, the palace was established since 1670 (9). There are over forty of such Igà spread around the old Lagos, which literally means every quarters has its own *Onigà* (custodian of Igà) otherwise known as high chief holding court in his palace. Some of these Igà have transformed into courts today. But the supreme of them all is Igà Idúnùngánrán where the Oba of Lagos holds court.

In an oral communication with Prince Oluwa, a prince of Lagos, he stated that the history of Igà Idúngánrán is similar to the story of Origin of the present Lagos. As he puts it, after what could be called unending feud and battle of supremacy between the Benin invaders and the original settlers, who were the subjects of *Olófin*, the Oba of Benin appointed Asípa to superintendent over his (Oba of Benin) war camp in Lagos. While Asípa stayed by the Lagoons, the *Olófin*'s children, stayed across the Lagoon at a place called Òtò. In other to enhance their communalities, *Arómiré*, one of the children of *Olófin* bequeathed his pepper farm land to Oba Àdó to build his palace. Therefore, Oba Àdó, who succeeded Asípa to become the first Oba of Lagos, and the first Oba to occupy and reign in Igà Idúnùngánrán (Oral Communication, 2017).



Plate 3: Aso Sèkèrè ensemble in Igà Idúnùngánrán

#### **Àso Sèkèrè Ensemble (Dùndún Ensemble)**

Àso Sèkèrè, as *dùndún* ensemble is called in *Iga Idúngánrán*, is the most visible ensembles in the palace of Oba of Lagos. This ensemble does not play any esoteric or spiritual roles in the palace but very prominent in discharging various entertainment and information roles. The performers are usually prolific in *oríkì*, chants, eulogies, cognomen and praises. At 5 am every day, they sound the beats of the drum to wake up the Oba. The

drummers return at 10 am to commence the day activities which includes welcoming visitors and entertaining them. According to Foworánú, the lead drummer of *Àso Sèkèrè* ensemble in the palace, the drummers will be there till 7.00 am to ensure that all is well with the king before they return to prepare for the day's expedition, Chief Foworánú explained. Giving the details for their procedural activities he said "At the sight of any prominent person, we rise up to perform by singing the praises of the new visitor to the palace. The talking drum will be drumming to the praises of their target. In return, and expectedly though, we earn compensation and acknowledgements in form of gifts which is usually money". *Aso Sèkèrè* is a prominent feature of any ceremony in the palace. According to the informants, 'it is mandatory for them to be on stage whenever the king is hosting any ceremony or people. The ensemble takes the stage at dawn and leave after the ceremony. They entertain the visitors and drum intermittently to the praise of the king' (Foworánú 2016)

The whole ensemble of *Aso sekere* is made up of drummers from inter-land of other Yoruba speaking states of Nigeria. None of the performer is a native of Lagos. The current *Olóri Onílù Oba* of Lagos, (*Àso sekere*, group) Chief Jímoh Foworánú is from Igbó orà, in Òsun State. A professional drummer who came to ply his trade in Lagos some 43years ago and had since secured a place for himself in the palace of Oba of Lagos. As at the time of conducting this research, he was indisposed and his brother, A. Bákàrè also from Igbó Orà, was holding forth for him. The numbers of drums in the ensemble of Aso ensemble as displayed for this researcher are: one *Ìyáàlù*, four *Àtèlè* and one *Gúdúgúdú*. See picture below



Plate 4: Aso Sèkèrè ensemble performance setting in Iga Ìdúngánrán

However, the drummers claim to have an expanded ensemble which comprises of more drums and related instruments. The instruments in this category are: Gúdúgúdú, 2 Sèkèrè, Omele Bata, 3 Àkúbà (upright drums)

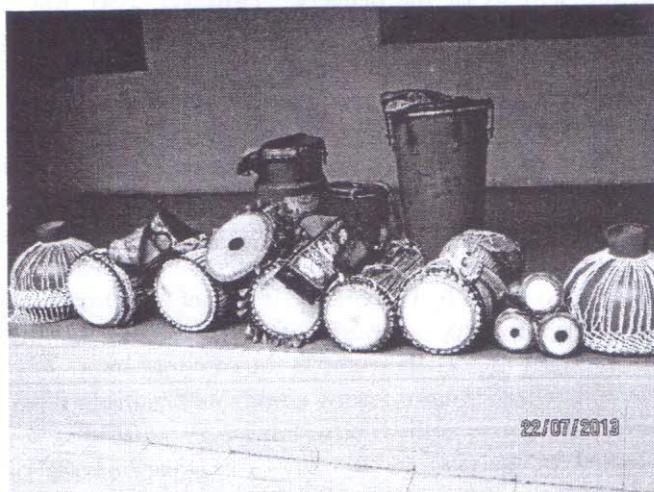


Plate 6: Expanded Aso Sèkèrè Ensemble in Iga Idúngánran

#### **Making of the Drums in *Aso Sèkèrè* Ensemble**

Series of spiritual purification and veneration are involved in the process of making *Dùndún* drum. Drums in *Dùndún* ensemble are made from *Òmò* tree. After identifying the tree, the maker must also ascertain if it is feminine or masculine. If it is feminine, it requires no purification. If the tree is masculine, the maker must pour libation, appease the spirit of the tree before cutting it off. There after the tree is taken to lay by the road side for days. The belief is that while at the road side, it will inculcate the habit of speaking by listening to pedestrians passing bye. This, to this researcher is to allow for curing which is needed for proper resonance and enhanced acoustic properties.

It is a sacrilege to allow *Dùndún* drum fall down or be thrown indiscriminately. In such a case, the spirit of *Àyángálú* must be appeased. Failure which the offender incurs the wrath of the dreaded god. If any part of *Dùndún* drum is broken, it is wrapped in white and handed over to the most experienced drummer in the group for special burial ceremony 'because the drum is more than an ordinary tree and leather. It is a spirit', said *Chief Foworánu*.

Before setting out for daily performance, *Dùndún* players are expected to propitiate *Àyángálú*. This is mandatory for them to have a fruitful and eventful outing.

### Mode Of Performance In Aso Sekere

There is no strict performance setting for players in *Aso Sèkèrè* ensemble. The type of beat or dance form and the circumstance of rendition, in great extent determine the orchestration and the settings of the delivery. However, *Aso Sèkèrè*'s performance mode can be streamlined into the following; the speech, the signal and the dance modes. *Aso Sèkèrè*, in speech mode, communicates with the king and all passive and active actors in the theatre of performance. In doing this, it announces the arrival and departure of visitors into the palace, sends messages, announces the arrival of important visitors at social ceremonies and recites their *oríkì* as deemed appropriate. The signal mode entails sending information to the king, it wakes the king up at dawn, informs the king of imminent danger as well as inherent implications in his actions and inactions. The dance mode involves the usage of rhythmic patterns to spur dance and other forms of physical displays. As explained by Foworánú “If a chief is approaching the palace, it is our duty to announce his arrival to the hearing of the king. The king knows before-hand, the name of the chief or any important visitor as the case may be;

### Song Texts

Two songs are sampled for analysis

Excerpts from Song 1

#### Title: Oba Àremú

Solo	Chorus	Translation
Lé ekò akókó	Yes	In the first Lagos
Asípa òun loba Àdó	Yes	Asípa is Oba Àdó
Àdó ó b'ímo méta	Yes	Oba Àdó has three children
Méji okùnrin, Ìkan obìnrin	Yes	Two male one female
Oba Àdó lóbí Gabaró	Yes	Oba Àdó gave Birth to Gabaró
Akínsemórìn okùnrin	Yes	Akínsemórìn is also male
Erelú Kútí òun l'obìnrin	Yes	Erelú Kútí is Female

## Analysis of Song Text

Form: Litany form/Call and response: The call is taken by a soloist while the other member take the chorus with a mono syllabic word (Yes) I have this response because the pitch is un determinable. The chorus comes intermittently with monosyllabic word (Yes). These serve as pedal notes for the basic rhythm sang by the soloist. The pitch for the chorus is also indeterminable.

ko A si pa o un lo bA do o | x O ba A do

Yes Yes

Meter: Common  
Scale: Pentatonic expressed in minor mode  
Melodic Structure: Short melodic phrases in regular metrical intervals. There are occasional leaps of minor sixth and minor 3<sup>rd</sup>

un l'o bA do o

le Lowest note a A A minor 6<sup>th</sup> apart

Melodic Range Highest note C { le Lowest note — A minor 6<sup>th</sup> apart

*Music, a Panacea for a Country in Distress...*

The melodic movement replicates the tonal inflection of the syllable of the words

Textual Analysis; The text chronicles the history of the Oba of Lagos from inception till date. the text exhibits an adequate knowledge of history of the palace and identifies heroic status of the incumbent Oba of Lagos.

#### Excerpts From Song 11

Láyé Olúgbón, Modá'borùn méje

E ò ,ma fi wé lórin

Láyé Arèsà, Modá'borùn méfa

E ò ,ma fi wé lórin

Láyé Àrèmú

Mo ra kókò, mo rà rán

Ma ra sányán baba aso

À fòle, ló e pé lè yí òdùn

À fòle,

#### Translation

During the reign of Olúgbón, I had seven wrappers

Let us sing to it

During the reign of Arèsà, I had six wrappers let us sing to it

During the reign of Àrèmú

I bought cocoa yam

I bought sányán, the king of cloth

Only the lazy people can complain of the good life

Only the lazy

#### Laye Olugbon

Thesis

8

Laye o lo gbon mo da bo run me je, E o ma fi we lórin Laye a re sa mo da bor un me fa E o ma fi  
we lo rin... Laye A re mu mo ra ko ko mo ra ran mo ra san yan ba ba so a fo le lo e pe le yi o dun a fo le

Title: Laye Olugbon

Form: Litany: Chorus

Scale: Pentatonic expressed in both major and minor mode

Melodic Structure: The melodic line of this extract consists of movement in sequences

characterized by 2nd 5th and occasional 6th



The cadential point was characterized by a minor 3rd le yi o dun a fo le

Textual Analysis: The song celebrates the meritorious reign of the Oba of Lagos.  
 Rhythm Analysis

Basic rhythm: It is a combination of duple and triple time interlocked in all the drums except Iya-Ilu, the mother drum, committed to improvisation. However, the Gúdúgúdú takes on the ostinato, which resulted in the cyclic pattern adaptable by each drums.



### Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident in this research work that in-spite of efforts by Aso Sèkèrè Ensemble to sustain the basic forms of dùndún drumming few distinguishable characteristic are yet noticeable. The ensemble, is populated by indigenes, of those towns which were identified by Euba as having strong dùndún drumming tradition expectedly confer appreciable degree of expertise on them. Notwithstanding, variations in practices, context and content were noticeable. Contrary to the submission of Euba, Oláníyan, Samuel, Ajéwolé, the ensemble dùndún ensemble otherwise known as Aso Sèkèrè in Iga Idúngánrán parades some musical instruments which are genetically alien to the ensemble. In this category are drums like Akuba (upright drum) and Omele Bata. Euba (1990) classified the instruments of the dùndún ensemble into, namely; the Nuclear, the standard and the enlarged (158). Of further significance is the prominent role songs play in Aso Sèkèrè. Singing has been fully incorporated into the performance of dùndún ensemble by the Aso Sèkèrè group. There are dedicated members of the group who's duty is to sing. This practice is uncommon in the performance of other Yoruba performance as identified by scholars whose work were sampled for this study.

Songs sampled for this work also revealed disparity when compared with rendition from other Yoruba states. For instance song two; the 2<sup>nd</sup> bad?



La ye o lo gbon mo da bo run me

shows a variation form what Ajéwolé (2007) transcribed from his study of the Social organization of Musical styles in the court of The Aláàfin of Oyo



La ye o lu gbon mo da bo run me je

### Conclusion

The import of these studies have implication for Music scholarship, particular African music scholarship. It is evident in this work that acculturation remains a challenges to the sustainability of indigenous cultural practices. It shows there is need to input more efforts into proper documentation of the musical practices of the people in order to retain it in its original form. In the same vein, while traditional rulers and other custodians of cultural values are encouraged to keep the sanctity of these practices, the government organizations in charge of culture and arts need to also encourage further research into this subject. .

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## Appendix



Dundun ensemble in Iga Idununganran



Dundun drummers welcoming a guest at Iga Idununganran