

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY OF MUSIC IN AYAN FESTIVAL OF OKE-ERO COMMUNITY, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA.**

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### **Abstract**

*Festivals are event characterised by communal participation, performed annually, seasonal or at regular interval. The Ayan festival is a cultural event celebrated in the Oke-Ero community fascinated by music and identity with deep socio-cultural roots that reflects the unique heritage and traditions of the community. Despite the centrality of music in the Ayan festival, there is limited research on how musical performances during this festival serves as a medium of preserving and transmitting socio-cultural identity among the Oke-Ero people. This gap therefore raises the questions on music reflect and reinforce the community's heritage through the musical elements, performance practices and symbolic meanings of Ayan festival. This article aims at exploring the socio-cultural identity of music in Ayan festival. Through the analysis of historical event of the festival, traditions and cultural significance, the study expresses the major role music plays, not only as entertainment but also as a medium of shaping and preserving the socio-cultural identity of the community. Through the study of various traditional instruments, performance styles, types of music employed during the festival, the research show case the rich cultural identity of Oke-Ero community. This paper therefore explores and give deeper understanding on how music has been used to promote, celebrate, preserve and honour the socio-cultural tradition of this community. Qualitative research methods were used in carrying out this work, historical analysis and Archival research methods were also deployed. Data was gathered through descriptive, internet and library sources. The study thus reveals the integral role of music in shaping and maintaining the socio-cultural identity of Oke-Ero community and its importance in preserving cultural heritage, passing it down from one generation to another.*

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, Symbolism, Traditions, Drumming, Spiritualism.

### **Introduction**

Music plays a major role in shaping and expressing socio-cultural identity of communities especially in cultural life of Africans, serving an artistic role, conveying communal history and values. In Nigeria, different festivals are celebrated to reflects and reinforces the socio-cultural identity of various

communities through the performance and practice of music. The cultural significance of music serves as a symbol to examine the forms, themes, lyrical content, compositional techniques and performance practice of such festival. Among these festivals is *Ayan* festival of Oke-Ero Community Kwara State, Nigeria. Oke-Ero Community is deeply rooted in the traditions of the Yoruba-speaking people, reflecting a connection with historical, social and spiritual phenomenon. Music in this context functions as a symbolic expression of communication, ritual, celebration, entertainment and collective tool of bringing community together in oneness. Drumming, serve as an integral element of music during *Ayan* festival which involves chanting, singing, and dancing of various styles.

This paper study the socio-cultural identity of music in *Ayan* festival of Oke-Ero Community, Kwara State, examining how musical performances reflect the values, beliefs, traditions and historical consciousness of the Oke-Ero community, expressing its functions and discourses of heritage for cultural sustainability. The *Ayan* (drummer) Festival in Kwara State, Nigeria, is a vibrant cultural celebration that showcases the rich musical heritage of the Yoruba people. The festival is an annual celebration held in Kwara State, specifically in Oke-Ero local government areas. The festival is a celebration of unity, peace, and prosperity, bringing together people from different communities to promote social harmony and cultural heritage, the festival is a celebration of strength, courage, and masculinity, the festival has been held for centuries, with roots in the traditional wrestling culture of the Yoruba people. It features traditional wrestling matches, music, dance, and drumming, participants usually include young men from the community that which are often fiercely competitive.

Adopting a descriptive and ethnomusicology approach, this study aims to contribute to scholarly discussions on music in reference to cultural deliberations and resilience in contemporary African societies. Festivals in Yorubaland are seen as an event staged by a community. They are of great importance to the people and in fact could be seen as part of their traditions. Festivals often serve to meet specific purpose, especially in regards to commemoration and thanksgiving. They are mostly associated with celebration and may also provide entertainment which was particularly important to communities. The celebrations provide a sense of belonging for religious, social or geographical groups. Festival reflects history of an events or occasions, religious beliefs and social adaptations of a community thereby focusing on communal unity, rituals and preservation of both materials and immaterial culture. In festival practices, music is seen as one of the major cultural tools that brings community together which can be in genres for different deities such as *Oro*, *Sango*, *Egungun*, *Ogun* etc. while evolving round different dance styles<sup>1</sup>.

The performance entails the use of indigenous musical instruments to shape the identity of the community and preserve its heritage. Culturally, in Yoruba land, people approach different deities for their needs, such as curative measure, rituals, worship, and so on especially during festivals. It is rooted in community beliefs, religion and tradition through some elements such as rhythms, melodies, forms and lyrics providing a channel of transmitting oral tradition and history from one generation to another<sup>2</sup>.

### **Historical Background of Ayan Traditional Festival in Oke-Ero Community, Kwara State, Nigeria.**

The *Ayan* Festival in Oke-Ero Kwara State, Nigeria, is a vibrant cultural celebration that showcases the rich musical heritage of the Yoruba people. Music plays a vital role in the festival, with various traditional genres and instruments featured throughout the celebration. Music is an integral part of Yoruba culture and is used to communicate, express emotions, and tell stories<sup>3</sup>. Traditional Yoruba music features a variety of instruments, including drums, xylophones, and stringed instruments. The Yoruba people have a strong musical tradition, with music playing a crucial role in various aspects of their lives, including festivals, ceremonies, activities etc. Drumming patterns during Egungun festival are not subjective but pass cultural message to the community<sup>4</sup>

The *Ayan* Festival is an annual celebration held in Kwara State, specifically in Oke-Ero local government areas. The festival is rooted in the Yoruba culture, specifically celebrating the rich culture tradition of drumming and its significance in the community of Oke-Ero. The festival is believed to be a celebration of the deity '*Ayangalu*' one of the major figures in Yoruba mythology. It is deeply associated with the deity of drummers and drumming itself, which hold a central place in Yoruba religious and social activities. It is an art of communication with the gods and ancestors, playing social roles such as funerals wedding and religious events. The festival honors their ancestral connection to the drums and their ability to invoke communicate the spirituals<sup>5</sup>. Festival is a celebration of unity, peace, and prosperity, bringing people together from different communities to promote social harmony, cultural heritage Symbolizing unity, tradition, respect and reverence for the power of drumming<sup>6</sup>. Music is a vital component of the festival, with various traditional genres and instruments featured throughout the celebration. The festival showcased the diverse cultural traditions of Kwara State, from music and dance to art and cuisine. The performances were engaging and entertaining, with talented artists showcasing their skills with energetic performance. The local cuisine was flavorful and diverse, with plenty of options to try local meals. The people of Kwara State were friendly and welcoming, making visitors feel at home, the festival was very crowded, making it difficult to move around at times. The festival as of recent serve as cultural preservation tool that brings people both within and

diaspora together. The festivals include various performances like dance, drama, prayer and community feasting.

### **The Socio-Cultural Identity of Music in Ayan Festival of Oke-Ero Community, Kwara State, Nigeria.**

*Ayan* festival contributes significantly to the social and cultural development of the community. The festival reflects and reinforces social norms, ceremonial practices, cultural expression, values and identity, facilitates community participation and engagement during the festival, thus contributes to an exciting and fastest medium form of leisure and business opportunities both at local and international level. The music genre used majorly in this festival is rooted in traditional Yoruba indigenous music. It helps the community to develop and share their culture, which create a sense of values and beliefs in order to provide opportunity for the members of community to exchange experiences and information. The music aids the strength and unity of the community.

Among the traditional indigenous genres used include chanting (*Oriki*) often accompany with drumming and dancing. They are used to invoke the spirit of ancestral lineage, performed by solo or lead vocalist with small ensemble of instrumentation majorly central to Yoruba identity expression. The Music serves as a call to the spirits, ancestors and deities to join the community in the celebration thus serve as link between the divine and the human world. Bata music is also engaged in the festival accompanied with Bata drums often used during ritual performance in the festival. Folksongs is another indigenous traditional genre performed during *Ayan* festival, they are oral poetic forms performed to convey history of the past and relate it to the present, portraying folktales, folklores performed by elders during the festival. They are used to aid story telling which features traditional songs, drums and history of Yoruba people. This helps to keep oral traditions and history which are passed down from one generation to another. Praise songs are also performed during festival to reinforce the values and traditions of the community music is used in unifying community through a shared cultural experience<sup>7</sup>. This fosters unity during the participation through singing, dancing and listening to drumming as an integral medium to an elaborate religious belief system which is characterized by a Musico-ritual interaction between the ancestral, the divine and mortals<sup>8</sup> therefore, occupies a pivotal role either as a solemn, sacred ritual rendition, performed at the shrine of a specific god, often in closely guided ceremonies, or as a flamboyant celebratory performance: open, loud and generally accessible to all and sundry.

Music promotes cultural identity through the unique traditions of *Ayan*, it helps to transmit the history, values and heritage of Yoruba people through the performance of *Ayan* festival, thus reinforces communal bonds within the community. Also, during *Ayan* festival, music, gives commentaries on actions on stage, song and their

costumes represent the degree of their social status, both as a group and as individuals, thus indicate the position of culture in Yorubaland. Enhancement of emotions and physical participation in the act of worship is also identified through *Ayan* festival and this often leads to ecstatic experiences.<sup>9</sup> Music plays a central role in the spiritual and communal aspects of Yoruba festivals. Music serves as a medium of communication between peoples and the ancestors. Employment of songs and dance practices enhances the means of communication. Oral genre is significantly directed towards aesthetic delight which is achieved through artistic performances. It is a ritual affirmation that connects participants with the divine through rhythm.

The festival committee employs the historical and cultural themes to develop the annual events to attract visitors and create cultural images within the community settings. Through the performance practices of the music engaged in this festival, revitalization of culture and traditions were made possible. As a result of this, tourism and economic development enhance social and cultural benefits. The festival is a celebration which helps to develop local pride and identity of the Awe people. The state government has also seen to the promotion of this event as part of their strategies for economic development and cultural tourism.

### **Forms of Musical Performance and Practices Context Engaged in *Ayan* traditional festival.**

The form of the singing style used in *Ayan* festival of Oke-Ero, Kwara State is in Antiphonal style, adopting call and response form. The medium is both vocal and instrumental and sometimes performed by either instrument alone or by unaccompanied voices. The form of the music in most cases is binary. The melodies were found to be basically logogenic and were based on the pentatonic (five tone scale) and hexatonic (six tone scale) scales. The song also reflects the Yoruba language which makes the songs understandable to the audience. The rhythmic patterns of the music reflect both regular and irregular rhythm.<sup>10</sup> The tempo is determined by the function of music at the various point at which it is used, ranges from moderately slow to very fast. The performance is undertaken by both men and women. Most of the songs performed are single line sentences which are full of repetition but at times with slight variations occurring either in the texts or in the melodies. These facilitate story-telling and participation in music. Singers often use ornamentation such as melisma (rapid flow of multiple notes on a single syllable) and vocal tones to add complexity to their performance.

Themes at this festival may be classified under three broad categories; these are; ritual, ceremonial and social. The ritual aspect of it falls in pre-festival activities. The Pre-Festival Activities of the *Ayan* festival in Oke Ero are highly important for setting the spiritual and communal tone of the main events. These preparations involve rituals, offerings and engagement of the community in order to ensure that

the main festival is successful. Cleansing rituals is one of the major pre-festival events, the cleansing ceremonies are held to purify the community and individuals, such involves offerings, prayers and the invocation of spiritual forces to drive away negative spirit and happenings and to ensure that the whole community are spiritually prepared. Consultation and divination are another major pre-festival event. These play an essential role in Yoruba spirituality.

Before the festival the community elders and diviners often perform some divination rites to determine the right process for the festival, the timing and seek guidance from the god (*Ayan*) on how the festival should be carried out. Also, offerings to *Ayan* are part of the pre-festival event. Offerings are made to god of *Ayan* before the festival proper with sacrifices of drinks, food and killing of animals at sacred shrines dedicated to *Ayan*, these are made to offer blessings for the drummers, the community and to ensure success of the festival.

Drummers' rehearsals are also observed at this stage, the drummers that will perform during the festival often begin rehearsals during this time, these are done in form of worship and entertainment. The drums used include; *Iyaalu Bata*, *Omele Bata*, *Iyaalu*, *Dundun*, *Omele -ako*, *Omele abo*, *Omele meta*, *Gudugudu*, and *Sakara*, these drums are played in an accompaniment with *Agogo* (Bell) which gives a timeline for the ensemble as well as *Sekere* (Rattle). It is important that the performances are perfect and reflect the deep spiritual connection with the deity (*Ayan*). Community involvement also contribute to the pre-festival ceremonies. The collective participation of the community reinforces social bonds, smooth running of the event and fulfilling cultural obligations.

Town meetings are held where different groups are assigned roles such as welcoming visitors, public cleaning, organizing rituals and food preparations like; pounded yam, (*Iyan*), yam four meal (*Amala*), ofada rice, bush meat and grilled meats, steamed bean cake(*moin-moin*), fried bean cakes with pap (*Akara*), wine of various sorts like palm wine, zobo, kunu, herbal drinks (*Agbo*) etc. Various community group contribute their resources and labour to ensure everything is in place. Both dignitaries and other guests are invited to partakes in the festival fostering cultural and communal ties. Community processions and announcements are engaged in pre-festival ceremonies. These are observed by town criers or traditional leaders in the days leading up to the festival. These processions serve as reminder for the upcoming event, gather attention and bring the community together. These include the displays of drumming, dancing and singing

The festival proper is highly celebrated and spiritually stimulated, centering around drumming, dance, worship and community bonding. The festival is in the honour of *Ayan Agalu*, the Yoruba deity of drumming, involving celebration of power and sacredness of music in communication with the divine and the ancestors. The

festival begins with an opening procession led by drummers, chiefs, priests and key community figures. The procession often starts from a significant place like shrine dedicated to *Ayan* or central community space and proceed through the town to gather participants. However, just before any performance on the day of festival, music, dance and general festivities awaken the village. The event can hardly take place without the functional role of music; hence music performs an accompaniment role during dancing. The elements of parade or procession are common and it is an integral aspect of the festival. Drummers carried their sacred instruments such as *gangan* (talking drum), *bata agbamole*, *bata*, *omele*, *dundun*, etc and other traditional drums creating rhythmic beats that resonate through the streets calling attention of the community to join the celebration. Traditional priests and community leaders might carry symbolic items like palm fronds, sacred objects or images of *Ayan* to bless the festival grounds. Drumming ceremonies is the highlight of the festival, the performances are both a form of entertainment and spiritual practices. Drummers from the lineage display the mastery of rhythms, communicating through the talking drum with the ancestors. Each rhythm played during the festival is highly symbolic. Praise drumming is observed to honour the gods, ancestors and community leaders, invocation of rhythms is experienced for spiritual presence of the spirit of *Ayan Agalu*. War and victory drums are also performed to celebrate and honor historical achievements and bravery. It was during the public presentation that the entire community was involved as participants, observant and well-wishers. Drummers take turn displaying their talents and during these, the drum beats are believed to evoke powerful responses from spiritual realm. Sacrifices and rituals are central to the *Ayan* festival, in which the offerings are made at the shrines or designated sacred spaces to *Ayan Agalu* seeking blessings, fertility, peace, prosperity and protection of the community. These often involves kola nuts, palm oil and yam as major offerings. Animals like goats or rams are offered to appease the spirits to ensure the success of the festival.

Dance is an essential element of festival accompanied by drumming and are performed during festival<sup>11</sup>. This is also inclusive in *Ayan* festival of the Oke Ero community, they are not just meant for entertainment but also serve as a form of worship and spiritual invocation. masquerade dance also features which symbolizing the presence of ancestors who came to bless them. Community members and visitors also participate in the dance performances. Drummers from *Ayan* lineage are praised and recognized for their skills and importance receiving gift from community. The festival also features cultural performances like story - telling, theatrical performance, choral singing which entails composition that honour *Ayan* deity. After the rituals and performances, the festival moves to the stage of communal feasting, which is an essential aspect of Yoruba festivals where drinks and foods are shared in one mind among the community. This is symbolic of abundant blessings that the festival brings to the community.

The festivals conclude with closing rituals where the drums are ritually silenced as sign that the festival has come to an end. This is done by covering the drums or pouring of libations to thank the spirits for their presence. At the end, the drummers and participants parade the town to symbolize the conclusion of festival in a farewell procession. This serves as a final opportunity for the community to express their gratitude and joy filled with singing and dancing. Immediately after the performance of the festival and the community has wine and dine (the feast-aspect of it), the community departs to their various homes with joy and gladness. This is a time for reflection and thanksgiving of the festival (The Post festival). It helps to solidify the spiritual benefits during the festival. Sacred objects used during the festival are also returned such as drum, masquerade costumes etc. they are blessed and cleaned before being stored and returned until the following year.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined the socio-cultural identity of music in *Ayan* festival of Oke-Ero community, Kwara State, Nigeria, discussing music as a major identity of *Ayan* festival within Oke-Ero community, highlighting different genres of music within the context of *Ayan* festival as a Yoruba traditional event. Music in this festival is major medium for transmitting indigenous knowledge, reinforcing communal bonds and expressing collective memory. The performance practices were done in three stages; Pre-festival, festival and post-festival activities. The festival conveys the activities of music, dancers, drummers as well as the spectators. It was also discovered that the texts of the songs focused on themes of thanksgiving, praises, requests, forgiveness and so on with the believe that whenever the festival is observed annually all their request is been fulfilled by *Ayan* (the deity). Furthermore, musical instruments used during this festival fall into two of four categories of Sachs/Hornbostel musical classification which are; membranophone and idiophone instruments. Membranophone instruments that are employed by different sections of performers include; *Bata* and *Dundun* drum ensemble. Idiophone instruments used include *agogo*, *sekere*, clappers, and so on. These musical instruments provide a kind of Ostinato rhythm which is repeated often and often on which the vocal parts improvised. The instruments reflect the Yoruba language which makes the songs understandable to the audience, serve as embodiment of cultural memory, custody of identity, spiritual intermediary. *Ayan* festival thus remains crucial in preserving and sustaining Yoruba cultural heritage, values and moral, hitherto, music is an expression of this cultural resilience and belonging.

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