

ISSN 1895-0972

The Performer

ILORIN JOURNAL OF
THE PERFORMING ARTS



3

VOL. 5 (2003) and VOL. 6 2004

THE PERFORMER: VOLUME 5, 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

1. Life and Work of Ola Rotimi
- Sam Ukala 1 - 16
2. Rotimi in Aristotle: Perspective on the
Inviolability of the Gods
- Ernest Agoba 17 - 24
3. Feminist Theatre: A Study of Femi Osofisan's
Tegonni
- Adunni A. Joseph 25 - 36
4. Popular Culture and Carnivalesque Tradition
In Nigeria - A Case Study of Ada Masquerade
Performance
- Chiduo Cyprian Obadiogwu 37 - 47
5. The Performance Phenomenon in African Oral
Literature: A Case Study of *Emperor Shaka the Great*
- Jide Balogun 48 - 59
6. Aspects of Linguistic Theories in Musicology
- J. O. Friday-Otun 60 - 73
7. The Relevance and Prospects of the Induction
Ceremony to the Performing Arts Programme
- Emoruwa Felix Damilola 74 - 82
8. GATEE: A Northern Nupe Ritual Drum
- Ibrahim, Binta Fatima 83 - 95
9. The Power of the Unsaid a Pragmatic Analysis of
Silence in Zulu Sofola's Lost Dreams
- E. N. Ugwu 96 - 101
10. Music as an Integral Part of Christian Worship:
The Anglican Church Experience
- Abayomi O. Bello 102 - 115

GATEE: A NORTHERN NUPE RITUAL DRUM

BY

IBRAHIM, BINTA FATIMA Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Drum beats by *Nupe* performers is strictly manipulated for ritual purposes. During the annual *Nupe Kuti* masquerade performance, the effect of the rhythm of *gatee* drum on the general elaborate activities and public dance in *Nupeland* is enormous. *Gatee*, a thick leopard-skinned leathery roundish drum, is the biggest drum out of all the musical instruments used for *Kuti* ritual occasion. It is the *Nupe* talking drum. It is a drum that speaks the language that its users understand. *Gatee* artifact projects *Nupe* art and culture. It is the actual object behind the melody of *Nupe* music. The performers do not miss the accurate steps for the rhythm of the music and sounds produced by *gatee*. Each unit of episode carries a different tone produced by the *gatee* for the purpose of accentuating the theme depicted by each episode of dramatic procedure and display. *Gatee* drum beats change according to the mood and intensity of performance at each procedural point in time.

A ritual is a culturally organized, symbolic (procedural) action that function as reinforcement agent of cultural values. Rituals harbour many other aspects of *Nupe* people's social life. From rituals, a cohesive set of culturally defined propositions about man's position on earth can be deduced. In *Nupe* ritual practices, the importance of the people's ancestors are portrayed, recited and acted with the aim of invoking ancestral spirits. *Nupe* ritual, therefore, develops into a form of religious worship. It involves the performance of rites for the purpose of ensuring some control over the unseen forces that determine man's existence. Hence, Achebe opines that:

**Ibrahim, Binta Fatima lectures in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts,
University of Ilorin*

Rituals are created by man to explain the problems and mysteries of life and death-his attempt to made sense of the bewildering complexities of universe .¹ (cited in Killam, 1969:21)

In *Nupe* culture, like any other Nigerian culture, intrinsic system of ideas and world views are displayed as indicators of the modes of perception and sensibility of the people. And the ideas are expressed by music produced by the sound of drums of which the *gatee* drum takes a major part in *Nupe* oral cultural situation. The people's worldview is accentuated by the pronouncement of the *gatee* drums. Hence Soyinka (1976:42) using the Yoruba experience, observes ritual process as "a genuine feeling in dogged secularization of the profoundly mystical".² Rituals are the system of beliefs dependent on a purpose aimed at expected end result by the worshippers. It involves the moment of man's communion with the supernatural, the divine. Rituals as a result of this, have religious undertones. And Turner (1968:159) gives a more relevant definition of ritual in the following terms;

A ritual is a prescribed formal behaviour for occasions, having reference to beliefs in mystical or non-imperial beings or powers... a corpus of beliefs and practices performed by a specific cult association.³

This is perhaps why a ritual, involves the rite of passage phenomenon. And the drum used to accompanish the *gatee* is the biggest drum out of all *Nupe* musical gadgets. *Gatee* is the equivalent of the Yoruba *Bembe*. It is the nerve center of the *Nupe* people's ritual performance. It can be viewed as the native xylophone used to control the type of performance for which it is used. As the audience listens to the sound of the drum, they take the right dancing steps appropriate for the different rhythms. *Gatee* speaks the language that its people understand. It is aimed at keeping orderliness, promoting existence and practices, eliminating group gossips, checking the ruling class, and envisaging a self-reliant future community, its re-establishment and progress. This general background of the *gatee* drum, its features and aim pre-suppose the complex atmosphere and the relationships of persons and their musical artifacts during ritual performance in *Nupeland*.

THE GATEE DRUM: FORM, ORIGIN AND USE

The *Nupe* can be found generally in the present northern part of Nigeria, in Niger State, Kwara north, Kaduna and Kogi States. They also dwell among the *Yorubas* as a result of migration especially in the Lagos municipality around Badagry area. Hence, there are observed similarities between their ritual proceedings. However, the drumming analysis here is based on the *Nupe North*.

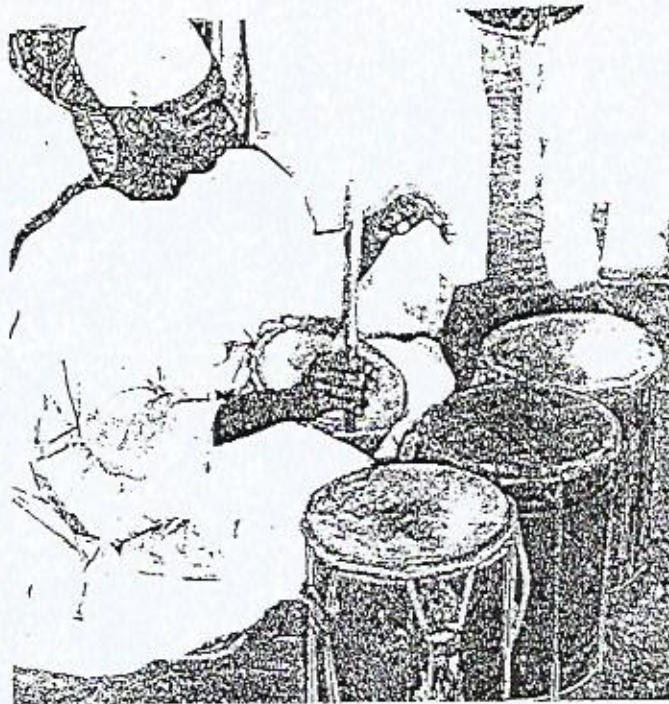
The origin of *gatee* is obscure as different reasons are given for its present use. But generally even in the past, *gatee* was observed as a cultural identifier and preservator. This indicates its aesthetic essence. However, the divergence is from what used to be referred to as a local and native artifact to a political gadget of the people. *Gatee* is however still popularly used all over Northern *Nupe* settings in Kwara, Niger, Kaduna and Kogi States. In these *Nupe* areas, there are striking similarities in the makes of *gatee* and also in its use during performance. Nevertheless, the stories that surround the origin of *gatee* in the different *Nupe* areas are different especially in the subsequent development of the drums. What can be deduced, is the general belief that *gatee* was originally carved for the *Kuti* masquerade performance by *Etsu Kolo Ta* of *Zambufu* in Kwara State. The drum was improvised for a ritual process, produced to cleanse the land of the king's mother's witchcraft devices. *Kolo Ta's* use to turn into a cat and be in attendance to spy at and listen to and attend chieftaincy meeting deliberations, chaired by her son, (*Kolo Ta*) the king. Subsequently, she was out to give counter advices to her son outside the decision of the masculine ruling group. Her aim was to cause a destruction for the land. Hence, the need for the rituals for which the *gatee* drum was required to invite the spirits of the land into matters that require collective agreement rather than disagreements, fights and disunity.

Gatee drumming among the *Nupe* began to vary in terms of rhythm, patterning and style, from one *Nupe* community to the other as each *Nupe* sub-region wanted to be independent of one another. Each *Nupe* community sought for local fame based on their aesthetic implantation of the ritual devices. Each area such as the *Binis*, *Kyadya*, *Batachidzi*, *Chekpan*, *Ebangi*, *Kusochi*, *Kintichi*, *Gbedegi*, *Ebe* and *Dibo* created the independent hand to carve its own style of the *gatee* musical instrument and used this for rituals based on the same common belief. It is worth noting that *Nupe* sub-groups are named according to their craftsmanship, geographical and economical features. The carving of drums in attractive styles, enhanced indigenous crafts among the *Nupe*. Music becomes inevitable in *Nupe* culture and religion, although the content and rhythm of the songs and chants changes and varies in line with time. *Gatee* is observed to have loud and aggressive rhythm since it is the authoritative voice of the ancestors. The vigorous

shaking of the scapular muscles by the male *Nupe* and the wriggling of the waist by the female suggests the perfection of the *gatee* practitioner. The drummer begins the drum in drum language involving the praise and epithets of the deities, since *Nupe* ritual is actually the performance of *Tsoede* rites. *Tsoede* is the *Nupe* ancestors: *Tsoede*, the *Nupe* ancestral figure established a central ruling clan and at the same times unified the *Nupe* sub-groups listed above. For this reason and as rightly observed by Abubakar (1994:36), *Tsoede* becomes very significant in *Nupe* traditional belief system and becomes "deified and worshipped nationally by the people; a situation that was effectively exploited by the emergent authorities to be able to maintain law and order within kin *Nupe* (*Nupeland*). *Nupe* tradition is *Tsoede* tradition in *Nupe* mythology. *Tsoede* is the Yoruba *Oduduwa* equivalent; the equivalent of *Seifawa* of *Kanem Borno* and also *Eweka* of *Benin* equivalent. *Gatee* drum becomes significant in the annual *Nupe Kuti* masquerade rituals performed in honour of this great ancestor (*Tsoede*). The drum is used to interact with the *Kuti* masquerade itself and also with the audience.

Out of all *Nupe* drums such as *Gbagurasasa*, *Kanangu*, *Tambari*, *Lambawure*, are *Kpandodo* the *gatee* drum is the most functional. It is the drum for communication, as it does not only sound in tongues but also uses proverbial rhythms for emphasis and perfection of communication.

About three to four same sized *gatee* drums are used in a single performance and drummed simultaneously by a single drummer. The drummer requires a seat before he can effectively beat the drum and he does this with the bare right palm and a stick known as *congo* used to hit the face of each of the *gatee* drums simultaneously, to achieve the required sound. The left fingers are permanently placed at the edge of *gatee* and moved at random round the cover of the drum. The drummer reverses the order or sequence of the beats when he wants to change the sound produced. He does this so clearly that the changes attract its audience's shouts and applauses.



Four gatee drums simultaneously beaten.

GATEE RHYTHM AND SOUND MELODY

The drum makes the initial one line sound to call the attention of the audience to the opening of the performance in the *ecnoe* language which they understand. The sound becomes deeper and quite explicit, heralding the arrival of the mystical, in the midst of the ordinary. The rhythms now combine, suggesting the mode of dance. *Gatee* is a musical tool commonly observed for carrying the required religious rites. And rhythmic changes are to accommodate the words that foreground the intended messages, some of which are put in proverbial and witty sayings by the drumming rhythm, generally echoed along and aloud by the audience. The *Nda lile* (chief priest of Kuti masquerade cult) is the director of the performance. He points at the direction where the *Kuti* masquerade should move. It orders the masquerade to stretch itself, shorten itself, spin, widen or shrink according to the varied *gatee* rhythms. Most *Nupe* performances have women singers who poeticize the praises of the most high, along with the drum beats. The masquerade is empowered and induced with the acrobatic display required from it by the rhythm of the *gatee*.

The drummer can be heard to be at the rhythmical peak of his drumming, when the *Nda lile* (chief priest) is seen uncontrollably and rigorously shaking his closed right palm (*gaako*). This moment is interpreted by a drummer¹ as a divine intervention moment during which the natural mystical person gets spiritually intoxicated. *Kuti* masquerade itself emerges by humming the welcoming melody of *gatee* before taking a few characteristic steps. The *gatee* drummers follow suit by drumming the masquerade's other favourite rhythms in quick successions. And as the drummer change the tempo of the music, the masquerade adjusts to the change every different dance patterns and style. *Gatee* rhythm is uniquely designed and implanted for the following ritual procedures.

- (a) preparation for the ritual occasion.
- (b) Appearance of the *Nda lile* (chief priest) with a *Nupe* artifact and *dunken* (pot) on head and other charms, arms and amulets.
- (c) Welcome drumming, feasting and flogging sequence for orderliness and for making significant the occasion.
- (d) Magical display by the incoming *Kuti* masquerades (*eyanman*).
- (e) Public dance time (*nko*) involving a slower rhythm beating of *gatee*.
- (f) Withdrawal of the masquerade and cult members to the shrine for communion with the ancestors.
- (g) Offering of sacrifices at the shrine: Sacrificial items include: 7 white and 7 red kolanuts, a black python, and bags of rice, maize, red palm wine known as *egedzuru*, as dog, guinea corn and dry fish.
- (h) Jubilation at the end of performance, to signify acceptance of sacrificial offerings.

We should note that each of the above procedural point in time is identified by different rhythms of the *gatee*, by the general public of the community.

Running into any *Nupe* town during *Kuti* masquerade festival performance, one would easily feel the excitement of the entire communal members. Children, women and men take to their heels, hide and seek for the appearance and sudden disappearance of the masquerade from one compound entrance to the other. The atmosphere is aided by the *gatee*. During this masquerade parade, the *Kuti* masquerade's rhythmic voice can

be heard, in thin quivering sounds, as it moves around the town and proclaim laws. The *Kuti* masquerade, at different angles of its movement is aided by the 'appropriate' *gatee* rhythm. At this ritual procedural necessity, the *Kuti* assumes not only the legislative role but also the judicial control of the community. The *Kuti* is a representation of the ancestors on earth. Its purpose is to communicate with its people, amplify and affirm traditional norms and values which must be collectively upheld for communal survival. Hence, in the words of *Ebong* (1968:55) observing a similar Nigerian situation, *Nupe Kuti* ritual involving the use of *gatee* drum is "multi-functional, multi-dimensional, multi-media and multi-expressional".⁶ *Gatee* would hum the following lines of *Kuti's* epithet.

<i>Gboyafaru</i>	The hidden one, what is it?
<i>Gboyameijini</i>	Owner of human blood
<i>Tapatioleyandodziye</i>	One who foresees from hill top
<i>Donbashi</i>	One with a numberless praises
<i>Gbaruru gbatundun</i>	A mighty house that refuses a fall

Gbarurugbatundun is onomatopoetic, synonymous with the masquerade's fierceful movement. *Donbashi* (numberless praises) is a pointer at the transitional essence of life. *Gatee* drummers are skilled. Hence, at times there is a surge of rhythmic impulse as if ordered by spiritual forces to stop the drum. As the drummers drum, they jerk their bodies on their seats. The music produced by *gatee* is completed by a grand finale of a non-vocalized drumming dance rhythm known as *tsankan* (meaning 'declarance'). Dancers dance the *tsankan* rhythm by pushing their knees in a cushioning fashion. They shuffle their feet and gracefully extend the palms of their hands, in fast succession, with the right leg slightly raised in quick movements. This is different from the shaking of the scapular shoulder muscles, earlier on observed as the dance for another *gatee* rhythm known as *Kuku*. The songs that are sung during the *Nupe* ritual are in categories depending on their purpose and message. Some are invocations before the arrival of the masquerade. Some are praises of God, ancestors and legendary figures, some are prayers, supplications, divinations, warnings, while some are philosophical of the character of the young folk, and some emphasis the need for unity. These songs are put in brevity, sarcasms, plea for mercy, and laments. For examples:

Eluguan kpara nda yi' Kuti
 Chorus: kpara da Kuti
 Let me rush to call in *Kuti*?
 Chorus: Rush and call ' *Kuti*

The chanter listening to the instruction of the *gatee* drum takes a characteristic step forward and re-seek for audience's permission to rush and invite the Kuti (masquerade) into their midst. Some of *gatee* rhythms therefore involve the use of rhetorics and hocket technique, for emphasis and foregrounding purposes. For an example, let's listen to the rhythms in the lines such as:

Suleiman Kolo, yan etsu Saba?
Suleiman Kolo, son of ruler Saba?

The rhythm of the rhetorics here makes the audience to reflect and recall history in the process of answering the question. Example of satiric rhythm can be seen in another rhythm known as marching which can be deduced from the following textual example as follows:

Afo yawo da
Yawo a mangi eba konba
Ye wole?
On announcement of marriage date
The bride gave birth to twins
Have you ever heard?

Rhythmic echoes such as these are lapoons on the entire foolishness of man. The Chanter turns to the audience which in turn joins to echoe the last line and accompanies it with clappings. Hence, historic resources and iconic materials are reinforced by the drum beats. The fame and dynamism of the *Nupe gatee* drum can therefore be linked to its functional effectiveness. It serves as the medium of communication, for *Nupe* audience.

CONCLUSION

The *Nupe gatee* ritual drum does not merely express emotion and feelings. It is a drum well connected with the rhythm and events of life, enumerated by the drum beats discussed above. Through its drumming, cultural artifact elements and history are put in shape, thereby protected from pollution from whatever source. The drum also serve as a social regulator, as it proclaims societal regulations and modifies deviances from them in suitable rhythms. *Gatee*, though a worship drum, creates a mental atmospheric condition for its audience, in the process of ritualization. *Gatee* is a symbolic cultural artifact with organized pleasant sound patterns, used for the attainment of a reunion with the supernatural. It also heralds the people's world view, aspiration and vision. It also gives its audience

messages and alert them about current issues, thereby creating awareness and perfecting communication and promoting unity.

NOTE

1. Madu Chekegi, a gatee drummer from Zambufu, Edu Local Government Area of Kwara State in an oral interview with the researcher. The interview was conducted on 16th February, 2003 at 4.00 p.m.

REFERENCES-

- Abubakar, S. 1974. "The Nineteenth Century Emirate Type of Government in Sokoto Caliphate", *Nigerian Magazine* 113: p. 36
- Ebond, I. 1968. "Some Northern Ebo Masquerade," *IRAL* Vol. I. Pp. 2-72
- Killam, G. D. 1969. *The Writings of Chinua Achebe Achebe*. London: The Free Press.
- ²Soyinka, Wole. 1976. *Myth, Literature and the African World*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, Victor. 1968. *The Drum of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes Among the Ndenbu of Zambia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.