

## **AN EXPLORATION OF DANCE AND TECHNICAL AESTHETICS IN OBATALA FESTIVAL OF ILE-IFE, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Festivals from African perspective can be said to be religious events in remembrance or in commemoration of a gods, spirits, ancestors, kings, historical event and so on by African communities. Interestingly, role playing, rituals, songs, chants, dances and other art forms such as costume, makeup, properties are significant elements in display during these festivals because they are perceived as instruments of spirituality, socialization, participation and unity. To this end, this study examines Obatala festival of Ile Ife as showcased by adherents of the deity. Using both primary and secondary sources, the study takes a descriptive and analytical look at various procedural stages of the festival particularly the dances and technical aesthetics that are embedded in it. Our findings revealed that the dances performed during Obatala festival have significant styles which are believed to have spiritual, cultural, entertainment and aesthetic functions to adherents and the Ile-Ife society at large. It also discovered that the symbolic costumes, make-up, properties and songs of adherents play important roles in the success of the festival. It therefore, recommends that for originality, continuity and documentation purposes, researchers should embark on more researches on the festival in other to preserve and project this rich traditional African religion and culture to the world.

Keywords: Obatala, dance, technical, aesthetics, culture

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ile- Ife is known to be an ancient Yoruba city in South-Western Nigeria ( present Osun state). Commonly referred to as *Orisun* (the source) and spiritual seat of Yoruba. Biobaku (1955, p.21) states that “the town was founded between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD”. Jeffrey (1958, pp.21-23) corroborates this that “it had become a flourishing civilization by the 11th Century”. Also, Olupona (2011,p.36) assert that “ Ile-Ife is situated at the geographical center of the Yoruba city state.To the West lies Ibadan, the largest city in Sub-sahara Africa and to the East lies Ondo, gateway to to the Eastern Yoruba city state”. Ile-Ife is known for different forms of art such as; music, dance, poetry, tie and dye, bead-making, weaving, carving, sculpture, hunting, leather works which are still in existence till date. Also, it is known as a town with over four hundred and one deities. These deities are remembered through different festival celebrations. For instance, *Odun Ifa* festival, *Obameri* festival, *Edi* festival, *Ogun* festival, *Sango* festival, *Obatala* festival among others are typical examples of festival celebrated at Ile- Ife. Elements such as: Dance, music, invocation, ritual display, singing, chanting, and pantomimic dramatization are incorporated to reflect their culture and particularly the essence of such festival.

## Obatala Festival

Obatala festival, also known as *OdunSeseEfun*, is celebrated yearly in Ile-Ife, *Osun* state between Januarys to March in honour of Obatala, a great messenger of Olodumare. This festival is also celebrated in various countries such as Cuba, United State of America, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil and a host of others. Obatala festival is in different stages such as : Ìwọlé Ọdún (the commencement ceremony), Ìṣúlé (The plucking of the sacred medicinal leaves), Ìpiwọ (The sacrificial rituals), Ìtápá ( The festival day) and Àṣẹ Ọbalẹṣun (grand feast or celebration). it is believed that *Obatala* worship is an African traditional religion. African traditional religion comprises the religious beliefs and practices of the African which had been in existence from time immemorial and are still adhered to today by many Africans. Awolalu in Akinfewa (2005, p. 96) sees “worship as a means of honouring spiritual beings or an act of veneration paid by man to such spiritual beings”. Furthermore, Oloyede in Ojuade (2010, p. 648) describes “religion as man’s interaction or communication with God or a supernatural being”. This festival has two types of procession namely: The public traditional religious procession and the public social ceremonial procession. In order to accommodate non–adherents from within and outside, six days are set aside to capture some of the events while other days are meant for adherent to continue with the celebration of the festival. Thus, there are special sacrificial items used during Obatala festival. These items include: *Obi Abata* (special kola nut), *Igbin* (snail), and *Ori* (Shea butter) among others. Each adherent is believed to have specific role and duty. For instance; the *Isoros* (chief priests), *Isogan* (drummers and props managers), *Arugba* (calabash carrier) among others play prominent roles in the realization of the festival.

## Stages in Ọbàtálá Festival

Ọbàtálá festival consists of five main dramatic stages: Ìwọlé Ọdún (the commencement ceremony), Ìṣúlé (The plucking of the sacred medicinal leaves), Ìpiwọ (The sacrificial rituals), Ìtápá (The festival day) and Àṣẹ Ọbalẹṣun (grand feast of the celebration). Hence, Yèyélọrìṣà (2015 in an Interview) describes some of the doctrines of Ọbàtálá. She gave an example of the morning devotional prayer. It is very important and compulsory for adherents to recite the Morning Prayer before the statues of Ọbàtálá and Yemòó in the temple. This action is preceded by Ọbalẹṣun (Officiating priest) who breaks open the kola nut and perform a simple divination that determines the mood of Ọbàtálá and Yemòó and consequently, the good or bad that may be in store for the adherents.

Prayer recitation:	Erúwá dájì	I greet you, oh great deity
	Mo wá ọkọ	I seek the husband (Ọbàtálá)
	Mo wá aya	I seek the wife (Yemoo)
	Mo wá, Yemòó, Ìbànìba	I seek Yemoo, the one we worship.
	Ọwọ párá ,esẹ párá	with my hands and with my legs, I salute you.
	Àṣìngbó, Àṣìntó	I will worship you until I am old
	Àyúnwáìsìn, àsùnpaìsìn	I will propitiate you until I die in old age
	Kí n máa yún, kí n máa wá	May I come and go home in peace

Késè mi másè e	May my legs never cease from coming to worship you
Kín s'òdúnií, kí n sèmíi	We celebrate this year, and we shall celebrate the next
K'áyérójú, k'ódeilútòrò	May the world have peace , and may our town see prosperity
Kí Sijúadé pé lóba!	May Sijuade(Ooni) reign long
K'óségunÒtá, kórèhìnodì	May he defeat his enemies and overcome all opposition
Kiàgàntòwọ àlāboşùn fi lāra	May infertile women conceive and give birth to children

### **Ìwọlẹ̀ Qdún (Commencement Ceremony)**

It is transitional rite of passage that begins with feasting in the Ọbàtálá temple. The Ọbàtálá festival is announced at the end of Idio festival which is in honour of Odùduwà . After the announcement of the forthcoming ceremony, Iyilepada (turning the house around) takes place. It involves the ritual cleansing and the refurbishing of the temple and other sacred paraphernalia for a new beginning.

### **Ìşúlẹ̀ (Pilgrimage to the Sacred Forest)**

This stage involves the pilgrimage to the sacred forest of Ọbàtálá. This pilgrimage also entails the plucking of sacred leaves which will be used for healing medicines for the coming year. The medicine made from the sacred leaves is called prophylactic medicinal concoction (*Èrọ̀*) and his given as first -aid treatment for any kind of ailment. This stage in the festival comes up early morning on the seventh day of the festival with each adherent holding a long sticks (*Ọşán*) in a procession performing the ritual dance to the sacred forest. Once the priests enter the forest, they pluck different kinds of medicinal leaves. After plucking the leaves they return in a slow ritual dance to celebrate the pilgrimage completion.

### **Ìpiwọ̀ (The Sacrificial Rituals)**

This event takes place at Ìdita Oko(the forest shrine).It begins with preparing ritual condiments. Myth has it that, when Odùduwà and his allies drove Ọbàtálá out of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and into exile, Ọbàtálá hide in Ìdita Oko and lived there for decades before he returned home. The ritual, therefore reenacts the sojourn of Ọbàtálá and Yemòó in the forest through a sacrifice at the place considered to be the most important seat of the Ọrìşà's power. The rite of Ìpiwọ̀ sacrifice reminds the adherents of the special space that provided a secure sanctuary for their ancestors..This event involves the cult servants to fetch the statue of Ọbàtálá and Yemoo from Ìdita Ilé. The cult servants wrapped the statues in a large white cloth. They join the procession with the statues placed on the left shoulders. This procession is observed strictly by the adherents of Ọbàtálá. The Ọbàtálá acolytes start a night vigil in Ìdita Oko. They un-wrapped the statue of Ọbàtálá and Yemòó and paint the statues with white dots. This is done in remembrance of Şànpònná (god of small pox) for his friendly reception of Ọbàtálá after which the rituals of the long night vigil begin with singing, dancing and offering of sacrifices

## Ìtápá

Ìtápá is the climax of Ọbátálá festival and it is usually regarded as Ọbátálá's day. In preparation for this ceremony, a grand communal meal of Èkuru (Bean cake) is cooked and served to all adherents and Ìdita families. The next phase is making a procession from the temple to Ìta Yemòó (Yemòó junction), where the courtyard of Yemòó is located. The procession is led by a row of boys marching in front of each other carrying wrapped bottles on their heads which containing Èrò. They are followed at a distance by a girl carrying the throne stool of Yemòó on her head, closely behind her is Yèyélòrìṣà; the highest priestess of obatala walking in a dignified manner. The procession is usually directed towards the palace with the young men of the Ìṣògán (age-group playing the drums).

At a range close to the palace, the procession stops three times. First, Jàrán one of the Ọ̀nì's emissaries leaves his group and comes close to Yèyélòrìṣà to beg for forgiveness in a low tone on behalf of Ifè people. And when the palace is already in view, Àràbà, the high priest of the Ifè oracle also appears with fifteen priests and expresses the same request for forgiveness. At this stage the procession stops in front of the palace while the Ifá priest enters in order to consult with the royal Ifá oracle. Now the procession of the Ọbátálá people continues confidently to the temple, indicating that Ọbátálá has returned and Ìdita-Ilé will once again be his home. Finally, Yèyélòrìṣà will walk through the temple three times to deliver Ọ̀nì's Èrò which will keep the Ọ̀nì healthy and strong throughout the entire year. The Èrò also symbolizes Ọbátálá's own gift of life, offered free to the Ilé-Ifè people. Finally, the Ọbátálá festival ends with grand feast (Àṣẹ Ọbalẹsun) provided by the Ọbalẹsun. Participants and Audience: Obatala festival is celebrated by all. However, some aspects of the festival are witnessed by adherents while other parts are jointly and openly celebrated. The type of audience of this festival is determined by the activity of the day. Similarly, six days are set aside for the ceremonial aspect of the festival and audience from within and outside troop in to witness and participate in it.

## Dance Typologies in Ọbátálá Festival

There are different types of dances performed during the worship of Ọbátálá in Ilé-Ifè. These dances occur during the ritual segment and ceremonial segments. Each of these dances is enriched with different songs, audience participation, drumming, display of individual skills, and usage of different venues among others. Through these dances also, the mood and essence of worship are reflected as they are tailored to achieve different purposes. Some of the dance types includes: ritual dance, cult dance, sacred dance, coronation dance, royalty dance and entertainment dance. All these dances were observed by the researchers during the festival celebration.

### The Ritual dance

This aspect consists of ritual activities which are accompanied with dance. The dance in this section is performed strictly by Ọbátálá adherents. It is coordinated by the officiating priest, Ìṣorò Ọbalẹsun. The ritual dance starts with a procession and all adherents participate by dancing en-mass from Ìdita- Igbó Ilé (Ọbátálá's temple) to Ìrànjé-Ìdita where Ọbátálá resided during his life time.



Figure 1: Adherents during the Ritual Procession Dance. Source: Researchers. Date: 20th January, 2015. Picture taken at Idita -Igbó Ìtápá.

The Officiating priest leads the procession with a simple dance step which accentuates the upper and the lower limb in a subtle manner to the rhythm of the musical instrument *Èwó* (metal gong). This dance movement is observed and imitated by fellow adherents. The ritual dance ends when the procession reaches *Ọbàtálá*'s ancient palace (Iranje- Idita Oko). At this point, the eight *Ìsorò*'s (high chiefs of *Ọbàtálá*) break into a circle formation to start the cult dance.

### **The Cult Dance**

This dance is performed strictly by the eight religious cult chiefs. This dance is performed during the Ipiwo stage of the festival. The venue is at *Ọbàtálá*'s ancient palace. As soon as the ritual dance ends the chiefs break into a circle to perform the cult dance. The dance starts with the dramatic bending of *Ìsorò Ọbalésun* (Chief priest) to sacrifice the blood of an animal to *Ọbàtálá*. This action is then turned into a dance movement and is imitated and performed eight times by all the eight religious chiefs. As they are performing the cult dance, it is believed and compulsory for all other adherents present to sing, chant, and praise and also to be in the mood of prayers while *Ìṣògán* are to play the Igbìn drum ensemble.



**Figure 2: Ìsoròs performing the cult dance. Source: Researchers. Date: 21<sup>st</sup>January, 2015. Picture taken at Iranje Igbó-Oko**

According to Enem (1974, pp.115-116), “religious ritual dances are essential part of the worship procedure where it becomes a crucial communication link between god and man”.

### **The Sacred Solo Dance**

This dance is performed during the Ipiwo stage of the festival. The dance in this aspect is basically in three folds i.e. the rhythm body movement, unrhythm body movement. The climax of this dance is at the point where the chief priest performs the sacred solo dance. It is believed that at this point, the chief priest is communicating directly with Ọbàtálá through his dance movements. Also, the musical instruments sounds are heightened and the song increases in tempo and the chanting, and other elements employed are at extra-ordinary pace. The priest is supported by other chiefs as they sing and dance in circle.



Figure 3: The Officiating Priest Performing the Solo Sacred Dance. Source: Researchers. Date: 20th January, 2015, Picture taken at Igbó-Oko.

At this point, the circle is opened for the officiating priest to dance into Ọbàtálá's palace. According to Ọbálẹ̀sun (2014, in an interview), it is believed that at the point that circle is opened it means Ọbàtálá as a deity is ready to communicate with the officiating priest. The dance movement at that point is a very slow hand and leg movement which requires counting with full body concentration. After a while, the officiating priest dances out from the palace with a medium pace movement with attractive facial expression and hand gestures to sanctify adherents. This action is followed with a loud shout from adherents as it means their sacrifices and prayers among others have been accepted.

### **The Royalty Dance**

As the name implies, this dance is performed by the royal personages particularly the eight chiefs during the festival. These eight religious chiefs are believed to be the representatives of Ọbàtálá on earth, particularly at Ilé-Ifè. In order to celebrate them, they are charged with the task of performing the royalty dance. Despite being a non-ritual dance which comes up during the Itapa stage of the festival. Devotees believe that it is Ọbàtálá that is directing their individual dancing skill as they creatively display different dance styles with the horse whisk. However; the royalty dance is basically ceremonial in nature. It requires the chiefs to perform royalty dance as a solo dance one after the other in order of their titles. These royal chiefs dance to special *Igbìn* songs called *Arò*. These songs are composed using their different titles and nuances to praise them as they perform the dance.



Figure 4: Officiating Priest Performing Royalty Dance. Source: Researchers. Date: 20th January, 2015. Picture took at Ìdita-Ilé. (Ọbàtálá's temple)

For instance, the royal song for the first dancer who is the officiating chief priest goes thus:

Call: Kàrí 'baléşun o bàmi We greet you our priest  
Response: E e é e é kàrí 'baléşun Dance forward our priest

He dances forward with his two horse whisks in a subtle manner which portrays him as royal priest. He punctuates every beat with the improvised calculative dance movements of the *Igbìn* drums ensembles. As he performs the royalty dance, audiences are allowed to appreciate him by spraying him money. Also, other chiefs are invited to perform some royalty dance to different *Arò* songs:



Call: Ọba wẹré wẹrẹ wẹré            There are different classes of chiefs  
Response: Ọba pọ ní 'dita            There many chiefs in Idita lineage  
Call: E e é e é kàrí 'ba Ọwá oo    Come along Chief Owa  
Response: Ọba pọ ní 'dita            There are many chiefs in Idita lineage



Figure 5: One of the Chief Priest Performing Royalty Dance:  
Source: Researchers, Date: 20th January, 2015. Picture took at Ịdita-Ilé. (Ọbàtálá's temple)

### **The Coronation Dance**

Coronation dance is performed by both adherents and non- adherents of Ọbàtálá during the festival celebration. It is a dance performed to rejoice with those that are crowned with new titles during Ọbàtálá festival. Also, it is important for those adherents who are crowned to show appreciation to Ọbàtálá by performing the coronation dance amidst the audience. This aspect is usually very elaborate because different people are invited to grace the occasion. They employ contemporary musicians and drummers to perform. The coronation dance is in two folds, the solo coronation dance and the group coronation dance. The solo coronation dance is performed strictly by the adherents conferred with new titles after the officiating priest pronounces the titles.



Figure 6: Solo Coronation Dance Performed by an Adherent  
Source: Researchers, Date: 21th January, 2015. Picture taken at Igbó-Ilé (Ọ̀bàtálá's temple)

The performance of the solo coronation dance is within Ọ̀bàtálá's temple. The adherent is required to creatively perform this dance following the rhythm and transition of the drummers and songs rendered by fellow adherents. Adherents are allowed to appreciate them by pasting money on their foreheads as much as they want, especially if they dance well. The group coronation dance is very elaborate. The venue for this group coronation dance is usually an open space far from Ọ̀bàtálá's temple. Some adherents who are crowned pick *Aṣọ- Èbí* (uniform costume) for families and friends to grace the occasion. Ooni of Ife's representative is called upon to present the certificates of the titles to the beneficiary.

This action is followed by adherents, families and friends performing coronation dance to the music of the contemporary musician who sings their praises, and that of Ọ̀bàtálá.

### **Entertainment Dance**

Cultures of people are identified most times through display of some of their art forms. Dance as one of the major art forms has played significant roles in identifying and preserving Ọ̀bàtálá's traditions. These dances are different in styles, form, use and application of theatrical elements such as make up, props, costumes, music, songs, and musical instruments. These indigenous theatrical elements have helped to project the beauty and essence of the dances. This entertainment dance is usually witnessed and performed by adherents and non- adherents during Ọ̀bàtálá festival. People dance and rejoice from street to street to celebrate Ọ̀bàtálá during the festival celebration. Through this entertainment dances, people make a lot of money as they attract other people who appreciate their improvised dancing skills.



Figure 7: Arugbá, Adherents and non- Adherents Performing the Entertainment Dance. Source: Researcher. Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 2015. Picture taken at Mókùró Street, Ilé-Ifè



Figure 8: Adherents Performing the Entertainment Dance in Group. Source: Researchers. Date: 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2015. Picture taken at Igbó-Ilé (Obatalá temple)

However, it is important to note that the use of improvisation in all these dances is a deliberate device employed by Obatalá adherents due to the following reasons: through improvisation, individual's skills and dexterity are showcased, new dances are created, and dancers are appreciated with rewards.

### **Dance Styles in Obatala Festival**

The styles employed in these dances are numerous. Each of the dance structures has unique styles which aids the dances as they are performed. Coplan in Emielu (2012, p.220) defined styles in Performing Art as “a distinctive system of meaningful forms or methods of creating characteristic element organized around the expressive purposes and outlook of its practitioners”. In a nutshell, styles in these dances are mainly to create an image which represents the purpose

of Obatala festival. Some of the styles as viewed during the festival includes: Different dance postures, improvisational techniques, progression of dances, choice of songs, costume colours and styles, usage of properties, and body design among others.

**Dance Posture:** There are different dance posture adherents and non-adherents assume when performing the dances. For instance, the posture assumes during the religious ritual dance postures for the traditional religious dances and also the social ceremonial dances. The reason for this, is because the traditional religious dances are aspect which uniformity is aim at as it means adherent are communicating with one voice to Obatala, why the social ceremonial aspect requires different dance posture because the event is purely celebratory and adherents and non-adherents freely expresses themselves through dance. Harper in Ugolo (2005, p.47) observes that "...in majority of the dances the basic posture an attention of the dancers is directly towards the earth". This means the basic posture of Obatala traditional dances are earth bound which is a form of respect accord to Obatala. Some other postures includes: curve body posture, open and close posture, standing postures, sitting postures and others.

**Progression:** This progression reflects in the dance movement, rhythm of music, drums pace and mood of adherent. For instance, during Arugba dance the rhythm of the musical ensembles start on a slow note then suddenly heighten and this affects her dance style as well as the songs. The progression of event in Obatala festival has a beginning, middle and an end as it is showcased in their dances.

**Floor Pattern:** The visible floor patterns of these dances are circle and straight line. Tume (2012, p.179) expresses that "floor patterns of dance movements are usually of significance to the ceremony involved". These patterns give room for all adherents to participate with a sense of belonging during the activities.

**Improvisation:** Individual dancing skills is highly regarded as they perform different dances to the rhythm of the music. For instance, during the social ceremonial entertainment segment each of the chiefs is allowed to show off their dancing skills.

## **TECHNICAL AESTHETICS IN OBATALA FESTIVAL**

Technical aesthetics are the artistic and visual elements used in the Obatala festival to add meaning, value, and colour to the event. Such elements include costume, make-up, properties, music, drums etc. It is significant to note that the harmonious use of these elements not only please the eyes and ears of the audience but also make the festival enjoyable to them. However, beyond that, they communicate pertinent information about the festival to the audience. This is because they engage the viewer's attention by creating inner sense of order and balance in both their visual and auditory experiences. This establishes the fact that, aesthetic and technical communication are interwoven. To this extent, technical communication cannot be effective without some appreciable level of aesthetic appeal on the part of its elements. In view of this, this paper explores how the aforementioned theatrical accompaniments are used to give meaning to the festival and also highlight and reflect the cultural nuances and beauty of the festival to the audience in the following way;

## Costume Design

History has it that each deity in African culture has their special colour. For instance, Sango is associated with red colour, Ogun is associated with blue likewise Osun and Obatala are known with white which symbolizes purity. According to Egbefunke (2014,interview), explained that “in order to constantly remember Obatala, and identify themselves, adherent wear *AsoAla* (white cloth) everyday with white accessories called *Sesefun*”. The number each adherent wear on the hand and neck is determined by his or her post in Obatala’s religion..The essence of this white cloth is to constantly remember Obatala and also to identify and characterize themselves as a devotee of Obatala. Explanation by another devotee, Oranfumlayo (2014, interview) shows that the style of white worn by the Isoros is determined by the event of the festival which can be religious ritual activity or the social entertainment aspect. For instance, during the social entertainment procession all the Isoros are expected to be on *Agbada,Oro* (crown) and *Irukere* (horse whisks) while during the ritual public procession they are expected to tie *AsoAla* (white wrapper) around their body with the make-up design of *Efe* (white locals chalk).



Figure 9: Adherents in costume. Source: Researcher. Date: 23th January, 2014. Igbo Itapa

Similarly, other devotees pay much attention to the style of the costume because the festival requires more of procession and they sew style that would not hinder their movements. The uniformity in the costume usually showcases their affinity and relationship to the deity. This is usually seen when all adherent are cladded in white for the procession as well as when they engage in other activities.

**Make-Up:** Make-up is an essential art in African culture applied by men and women to define symbolic socio-cultural and political roles. Ani & Ayaoha in Shuaib (2014,p.4) describes make-

up “as non-verbal means of communicating, constructing, revising, generating and maintaining symbolic and connotative messages that are vital for their self-identity”. The name of the make – up applied on the body is *Efe* (white chalk) which is the most important make-up applied for *Isoros* during Obatala festival. However, one of the most important roles of this body design is to characterize the wearer and differentiate the status of adherents apart from beautification purpose. In view of this, Hewitts in Shuaib (2014, p.28) view body designing “as arts that indicate social status and social structure which explains the continuity and way of life of a particular group or class, nearly always follows aesthetics as well as social canons”.



Figure 10: Isoro’s body painted for the ritual dance. Source: Researcher. Date: 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2014. Iranje Idita

According to *Isoro O. Dada* (2014, interview), the body design is more of spiritual essence meant for *Isoros* of Obatala alone and series of sacrifice are performed before it is applied on the body by some traditional make-up artist among the adherents. Also it’s a memorable way of celebrating Sanponna (god of small pox).

**Properties:** The religious chiefs are the only set of people who are allowed to hold two horse whisks beaded at the bottom with *sees efun*(white bead) while the ordinary chiefs hold *Esan*(design cane). The significance of these properties is to compliment their dances, to identity each adherents post and status, beautify their appearance. During the social ceremonial aspect, *Isoros* wears white beads and tags showing their various titles. Also, they make extensive use of the horse whisk in the dances. During the traditional religious dances, all adherents are expected to hold *Esan* (design cane) as they proceed for the procession

**Songs:** The worship of Obatala entails series of songs and the type of songs rendered depends on the dance form and styles. The structural forms of these songs are mainly call and response, presented in short simple phrases. It is composed with a dialect. Ofosu in Ikibe (2010, p.209) adds that “African gods (divinities) manifest themselves when music appeals to them is played. This is why African priests make extensive use of music during worship rituals and festivals”. A

male devotee starts with a song that praises Obatala and it is accompanied by the musical instruments.

Call:	T'olúwaà mi l'àṣe	Àṣe belongs to my god
Response:	Tò ọ̀riṣà l'àṣe	Àṣe belongs to the Orisa
Call:	Túnwa ṣe o ọ̀riṣà	Renew us Orisa
Response:	Ọ̀riṣà tún wa ṣe o	Orisa renew us
Call:	Èní ṣ'ojú ṣ'emú	He who makes eyes and nose
Response:	Ọ̀riṣà ni maa ṣin	it is Orisa I will serve
Call:	A dání b'ótirí	He who makes one as he chooses
Response:	Ọ̀riṣà ni maa ṣin	It is Orisa I will serve
Call:	Èni rán ni w'áyé	He who sent me here on earth
Response:	Ọ̀riṣà ni maa ṣin	It is Orisa I will serve

**Musical Instruments:** The traditional drum comprise of Igbin drum ensemble and *Ewo* (metal gong). The Igbin ensembles are single-headed cylindrical drums and are ritually exclusive to the worship of Obatala. They are played with two straight sticks by *Isogans* (drummers) during the *Ose Osa* (weekly worship) and annual worship celebration of the festival. . The Agogo (metal gong) are played by the male devotees during the festival. The Igbin drum ensemble consists of: *Iya-Ilu Igbin, Omele- Ako Igbin and Omele-Abo Igbin.*



Figure 11: Igbin drum ensemble. Source: Researcher. Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2014. Igbo Itapa

Igbin drum ensemble and Ewo (metal gong) are classified under the membranophones family while the metal gong belongs to the idiophones family. Kofoworola & lateef (1987, P. 216) describes “membranophonic drums as the generic names for instruments consisting of skin stretched over a frame or vessel and struck with hands or a stick”. Also, Asante in Emoruwa (2005, p.21) sees African drums and dance as:

Two distinct expressions of the same entity i.e. both dancing and drumming require accompaniment one, dancing demands physical involvement and the other drumming demands human participation. In other words, the requisite tool of both dancing and drumming is the human body. The requirement is demonstrative of the ontological order and structure of the African world view... at the core of African culture is a humanistic philosophy that serves the people while serving the deities.

As expressed, drumming and dancing is believed to have symbiotic relationship. As arts displayed during every festival, they require human body and dexterity to communicate. Omojola (2006, p. 64) Opine that:

Appropriate drums must be used for each Orisa (deity) otherwise the devotees might incur the wrath of their tutelary deity. for instance, the drums 'Ipese' and bells 'Agogo' are played for Ifa, Bata drums for Sango, 'Gbedu' drums for announcing the passage of a king into the ancestral world, 'Agbailedi' a set of drums used by members of Ogboni cult in the same vein, 'Agere' drums are played to accompany hunters funeral ceremony 'Isipa Ode', 'Apase' is played during the annual Oro festival and Igbin drums for the worship of Obatala.

It can be said that, deities are accorded respect. Each is believed to have a unique musical instruments exclusive to its worship. The forms and styles of these instruments are determined by the purpose of worship.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ọ̀bàtálá festival is a religious and social platform where Ọ̀bàtálá one of the eldest deity in Yorùbá cosmology is celebrated, honoured and remembered using dance and technical aesthetics to depict the norms, values, customs, culture and traditions of Ọ̀bàtálá and Ilé-Ifẹ̀ as a whole, we have been able to identify some of the inherent technical aesthetics exhibited by adherents and non-adherents that added value and meaning to the festival. We therefore, recommend that researchers should explore more of these technical aesthetics in the festival which are yet to receive academic attention. This will solve the problem of scanty of materials on them and it will help in the aspect of documentation, preservation, and continuity of this significant tradition. Also, resource persons should be appointed to attend to researchers that are interested in Ọ̀bàtálá festival. Proper use of the mentioned theatrical elements should further be encouraged within the context of the celebration in order to avoid misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and the eradication of pertinent aspects of the festival.

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