

Bàtá surrogate speech in the *egúngún* ritual amalgam

Ọládíípò Ajíbóyè, University of Lagos

Victor Manfredi, Boston University

Today we illustrate surrogate speech by Yorùbá *bàtá* drums with the example of *Àlájì Àyàn Làmídi Àyánkúnlé* of Èrín-Ọ̀ṣun, Nigeria. His supreme musical art is known to us both from primary observation and from extensive anthropological research by Dr. Debra Klein (e.g. 2007, hbb.gavilan.edu/dklein/DebbieKleinPublications.htm).

Bàtá-playing is not universal in the Yorùbá zone. Its prime context is rituals evoking the presence of an *egúngún* 'masked ancestral representation', an *òrìṣà* 'divinity' or a living person e.g. a chief. The boundaries of these subtypes are necessarily fluid in a conceptual system that, despite generations of 'conversion', lacks the *this-world/other-world* dualism of monotheistic cultures (Verger 1966; Bámgbóṣé 1972; Barber 1981; Wenger 1983; Nwáòga 1985).

Sacred *egúngún* 'ancestral masks' are crucial to indigenous social organization (Bascom 1944; Babáyemí 1980; Láyíwólá 1995) but pose logistic and ethical issues for scientific study; more userfriendly is the secular *egúngún alàrínjò* 'traveling theater' (Adédéjì 1972; Drewal 1992), generically related to the masks of Atlantic *carnaval* and also appearing in proscenium theater (Ládíípò 1972). A climactic trait of *egúngún* performance is the utterance of *òwè* 'proverbs', *iwì* 'chants' and *oríkì*—an untranslatable term denoting stereotypical apostrophes built on the great facility of the Yorùbá language to coin names (Awé 1974; Ọlájubù 1974; Awóyalé 1982; Barber 1991; Ajíbóyè & al. 2003). As drummed and as vocalized, *oríkì* and related phrases have unique rhythmic and acoustic features (Ìṣòlá 1975).

In the rest of this presentation we sample *Ṣàngó*'s ritual amalgam from a video of Lámídi leading an *alàrínjò* troupe as recorded at the Department of Performing Arts, University of Ilorin in October 1997. Issues arising include:

- (i) how speech sounds are encoded in *bàtá* by both hands on the *iyá ilù* 'mother drum' (Oyèélámi 1991).
- (ii) alternate speech codings on other drums by pitch alone: *emele méta, dùn-dún...* (Beier 1969; Oyèélámi 1991).
- (iii) recoverability of the message: productivity versus corpus-probability (Adégbólá 2004).
- (iv) how dance gestures integrate with surrogate speech versus non-linguistic music in shamanic possession.

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