

## **Choreomundus**

### **International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and Heritage**

*When Language Makes You Dance: the relationship between dance, tonal language, and drum languages among the Yoruba of South West Nigeria*

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## Abstract

Among the Yoruba people of southwest Nigeria, dancers have the ability to relate not only to music and rhythm, but also to the Yoruba tonal language. This is due to the fact that instruments being played during a dance event, once they are manipulated by the drummer, can follow the Yoruba language's tonality. Therefore, the so-called *talking drums* are able to articulate proverbs, poems, stories. The dancers' appropriations and interpretations of what the drums are *saying* create different artistic and cognitive layers during their dancing. Through Victor Turner's observations on the ritual symbol, this dissertation analyses the polarisation of meaning identified in two different drum languages. The first one derives from the Yoruba spoken language and is used by the talking drummer to share knowledge on Yoruba culture with the dancers. The second drum language consists of onomatopoeic rhythms, which are used by individuals to verbally direct the dance in educational and performance situations. Both of the drum languages are actualised in the Yoruba context within multiple dancing layers. Although, Yoruba dance is seen a creative and innovative manifestation of the individual, the reoccurrence of proverbs and repetition of rhythms establishes a platform for intergenerational community-making. However, how does the younger generation contribute to this identity, since it is claimed that the Yoruba language is becoming endangered? Going beyond choreomusical relationships, this dissertation aims to introduce the phenomenon of layering in Yoruba dance, which derives from exploring the personal dance experiences of a community of practice in Yorubaland.

Key words: Yoruba dance, talking drums, tonal language, drum language, polarisation of meaning

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## Introduction

‘...knowledge involved in dancing is not just somatic, but mental and emotional as well, encompassing cultural history, beliefs, values, and feelings’ (Sklar, 1991:6)

Dance among the Yoruba of southwest Nigeria can be characterised by many forms and styles and may be identified in relation to the context in which it is found. *Yoruba dance* seems too general a term to embrace all the bodily manifestations that can occur in the Yoruba context. Festival dances, masquerades, war dances, elderly and youth dances, dances of pride and leisure, dances dedicated to spiritual deities, all of them may be considered under the umbrella of *Yoruba dance*. In an attempt to decontextualise the dance form and to offer substantial information about the bodily practice itself, I refer to Ajayi (1990:35), a scholar who focused on Yoruba dances and who has identified a ‘standard posture’ in Yoruba dances through ‘a commonwealth of cultural body semantics’. An important characteristic of a Yoruba dancing body, the author maintains, is the forward stance of the upper part of the body and bent knees. However, the body movements in each dance cannot be defined by a ‘rigid uniformity’ (Ajayi, 1990:35), since individual dancing style is mandatory. Nevertheless, music accompaniment is compulsory in any form of Yoruba dance (Ajayi, 1990:34). My research suggests that music in the Yoruba context does not operate solely as an accompaniment, but also as a dialectic and collaborative medium with the dancer, specifically due to the frequent presence of musical instruments referred to as *talking drums*.

Talking drums are percussive instruments with a special ability to interpret different tones and tonal ranges. In the Western music notation system, ethnologists mention that talking drums can have a tonal range up to one octave (Beier, 1954), a term which represents eight different tonal heights named musical notes. The tonal construction of these musical instruments is based on the tonal structure of the spoken language and gives the impression that these drums can ‘replace the human voice’ (Vidal, 1969). As stated by Bankole et al.:

The intimate relationship between spoken Yoruba, which is a tonal language, and music is the essence of Yoruba music. Because of this relationship, whereby single drums and combinations of drums can be made to imitate Yoruba intonation, virtually anything spoken can be drummed. All Yoruba music communicates meaning to the listeners. Every melody, even if not consciously verbalized by the listener, was originally conceived as spoken Yoruba (1975:52).

The fact that Yoruba is a ‘tonal language’, as Bankole et al. mention, adds an important dimension to the talkative ability of the talking drums. The Yoruba language is part of the large Niger-Congo language family and it constitutes indispensable means of verbal and non-verbal communication and cultural expression. Along with Igala, another Nigerian language, it belongs to the Yoruboid subgroup of Eastern Central Niger-Congo (CNC) language group (Bennett and Sterk, 1977). Yoruba, like many other African and Asian languages, is characterized by multiple tones. That means, a specific word has a different meaning depending on how it is intonated as it is presented in the following example:

igbá	calabash	
igbà	time	
igba	200	
igbà	a type of rope	
ìgbá	a type of vegetable	(Folarin Schleicher, 2008:14)

The first three notes of the western music system, do-re-mi, are found in Yoruba syllables in an appropriated form. Yoruba language has three tones, low, middle and high, and it they are currently being taught in Nigeria through the three western musical notes, do-re-mi. Consequently, instruments with this tonal range, such as the talking drums, can represent the tones, accents and glides of the Yoruba language. The final artistic result has been identified in academia as *drum language*, a term with significant presence in this dissertation.

My research interest was developed in a twofold direction. Having trained in a variety of dance genres, such as ballet, modern dance, tap and body percussion, I have always been fascinated by the diverse implementations of rhythm in different dance forms and cultures. For over four years, I have had the opportunity to collaborate on various occasions with a diasporic Nigerian Yoruba community in Athens, Greece. It was through this population that my interest on Yoruba culture grew and led me to start learning the language. Yoruba performers whom I have had the chance to meet in Greece and other European countries, would often tell me that ‘the talking drum can really speak, and whoever understands Yoruba well can dance to what it is saying’. Indeed, a Yoruba proverb says: ‘The war<sup>1</sup> drum is cryptically beaten like a proverb, it is the wise that can dance to it, it is the well-informed that recognize it’ (Agbaje, 2002:238).

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<sup>1</sup>The talking percussion ensembles included in this research have been considered historically as war drums (Villepastour, 2010; Euba 1990).

Researching dance in relation to talkative rhythmical instruments, while engaging in a deeper knowledge of Yoruba language and culture, prompt me in proceeding with the research topic that governs this dissertation. In works, which will be mentioned further, a researcher can find information on relations between percussive instruments and language, or rather between talking percussive instruments and tonal language, through the notions of *drum language*, *langage tambouriné*, and *speech surrogacy*. However, only a limited amount of information is provided on Yoruba dance and dancers, let alone the latter's relation to other participants of an event. Such information led me to my research interest on the relationships and dynamics of Yoruba dancing. The topic of this dissertation, therefore, lies in the relationships among specific participants of a dance event, or an event that includes dance, among the Nigerian Yoruba and the dynamics of dance in relation to the talking drums.

Within this framework, I conducted anthropological fieldwork for approximately eight weeks in a town of Nigerian Yorubaland. My original plan was to meet and interact with members of Obafemi Awolowo Univerisity (OAU), in the town of Ile-Ife of Osun state, southwest Nigeria. I aimed at working on the relationships between Yoruba dancing and the spoken language, as it is expressed traditional percussive instruments called talking drums. The main drum ensemble I worked on is known as *dùndún*, a talking drum family consisting of one kettledrum and five pressure drums with hour-glass-shaped bodies (Kayode, 2012). More specifically, I focused on two main talking drums, the *gangan* and the leading drum of the ensemble, named *iyáàlù*. The research field was presented to me by a variety of groups of people related to dance. I attended numerous events where dance was vivid through social dancers, young children and practitioners of the Yoruba belief system. I collaborated with teachers and university students of dance, who taught me and shared with moments of their performances. Of great importance was the notion of barter (Watson, 2002) as a fieldwork technique, since I had the opportunity to teach the dances genres I was trained in to my collaborators and, therefore, to be part of mutual dance experiences, which derived from a reciprocal atmosphere and a shared interest in cultural and dance exchange.

Information on previous research conducted around the topics of drum language, percussive traditions, choreomusical relationships in African contexts, and on Yoruba dance, as well as a detailed description of the bibliography used for the theoretical and methodological background

of this dissertation, is presented in the first chapter. It is worth mentioning that the bibliographic material, which analyses theoretically the corporal, musical and linguistic elements of Yoruba culture are mainly from the twentieth century, with a few exceptions on linguistic and musical literature from the past decade. These facts become an important point of departure for this dissertation, as they illustrate the process of thought prior to fieldwork and the multisource contributions of previous literature to the current topic. A detailed description of the field and the general methodology I approached it with, is explained in chapter two. The experiences, surprises, downfalls and unexpected circumstances, which were created during my stay, play the most important role in this chapter, along with the presentation of the various dance situations I was involved in during participant observation, filming, and interviewing. Chapter three aims to discuss the relationship of Yoruba dance with two different drum languages that were identified in the field. I consider Yoruba dance as a multilayered dance form which depends on different cognitive meanings that are being conveyed through the drum languages. This leads to a more detailed discussion in the next chapter influenced by Victor Turner's *polarisation of meaning*, and allows a further analysis of the dialectical relationship between the dancer and the talking drums in the Yoruba context. The last chapter of this dissertation bring back to the fore the widely discussed topic among Yoruba scholars on the loss and endangerment of Yoruba language, to which the way the dance operates can contribute and reflect on. This study, therefore, aims to develop directions of thought towards Yoruba dance by describing the ethnographic field as it was lived, and by focusing on the analysis of experiential and audiovisual material collected during the research.



## Chapter 1: Influenced by the past

This chapter explains in an analytical way the various primary bibliographic references, which have aided me in organising the different theoretical and methodological concepts already available. Meanwhile, it aims to show how the study of this dissertation found its significance within previous ethnographic literature on Yoruba dances, music and performance events. More specifically, I refer to books and articles, which focus on the notions of drum language, choreomusical relationships in African contexts, Yoruba dances, Yoruba talking drums and Yoruba language, which formulated an initial platform, where my research topic could find a voice of its own and contribute to the scholarship of Yoruba dance.

The notion of drum language finds its significance in the beginning and the middle of the twentieth century. Ethnographic material and anthropological writings discuss situations where a ‘drum serves as the sound-making apparatus’ (Jewett, 1977:25). In this sense, specific percussive instruments are manipulated by drummers in a way, through which they represent or imitate the tonality of the spoken language. Readings on drum and whistle languages draw examples, which derive, mainly, from African countries, such as Congo, Nigeria, and Ghana (Ames et. al., 1971; Carrington, 1944; Clarke, 1934; Locke and Agbeli, 1980 and 1981; Ratray, 1923; Sebeok and Umiek-Sebeok, 1976; Stern, 1957). In French terminology, *langage tambouriné* and *langage sifflé* are most commonly used to express similar meaning of a spoken language, which is verbalized by percussive instruments, and they have been academically investigated during the same period of time (Bariaux and Demolin, 1995; Dugast, 1955; Labouret, 1923; Mvula Ngembe, 1980; Rouget, 1964; Titinga, 1988; Verbeken 1953; Zemp, 1997). Another term widely used from the previous century has been the, so-called, *talking drums*, the category of percussive instruments, which have the ability to imitate respectively their community’s spoken language (Armstrong 1954; Beier 1954; Euba, 1990; Ong 1977; Price, 1973). When trying to approach drum language from a dance viewpoint, two major issues arise in relation to bibliographical sources and academic readings. Firstly, although the existence of a rich amount of sources is extremely desirable for an academic interested in African drum language and talking drums, the chronological period of their production has almost transformed them into ethnographic texts, in which the weight has been shifted towards their historical significance, rather than their anthropological relativity to present situations. In the eyes of a young researcher, who is seeking theoretical frameworks prior or during anthropological fieldwork, the exploration of

bibliographical sources, which have been majorly created even decades before her birth, often supplement moments of befuddlement. Simultaneously, they create further motivation for an elaboration and continuation of research. A second issue related to the aforementioned sources is connected to their content. An important amount of the above ethnographic material is examined from an ethnomusicological approach, or a combination of a linguistic and musical point of view. The short references or descriptions regarding the dancing in relation to “the integral function of drum language” (Locke and Agbeli, 1981:25) or talking drums, give the impression that they may occur from the, often observed, inseparable relationship between music and dance in an African context. Therefore, an emphasis on elaborated examination of drum language from the dance researcher’s perspective becomes almost a necessity.

The term *drum language* can be found in academic writings from the 1930s. A respectful list of ethnographic work has been achieved throughout these decades on drum languages of different populations, most commonly from African countries. Since the beginning of research with such focus, a main definition has been kept on the term *drum language*: the ability of people to construct and manipulate specific percussive instruments and make them imitate the spoken tonal language of their community. By extending the knowledge of this observation and associating it with other disciplines, I have developed the interest of using this notion in relation to dance.

A useful reading in a Ghanaian context, which demonstrates a specific drum language in relation to the tonality of the spoken language and the singing, and makes a short reference to the dancing is Locke and Agbeli’s “Drum Language in Adzogbo” (1981). The authors discuss “the integral function of drum language in the structure of the music and dance” (1981:25) and develop a system of analysis where the tones of the Ghanaian Ewe language and the representative tones of the drums are presented in parallel, together with the onomatopoeic sounds, called vocables (1981:30). Although, the reader can find the relation between the drum language and the musical structure through the written analysis, the musical notation and the tonal transcriptions of the spoken language, the contribution of the bodily movements are hardly mentioned, let alone analysed. The Ewe and the Yoruba share the same amount of tones in their spoken language and the article in discussion offers many ideas on how to approach a drum language of Nigeria, as well as on how to elaborate the analysis further by integrating aspects of this phenomenon into the dancing. A piece of work from a different discipline discusses this percussive way of

speaking by referring to what linguists call *speech surrogates*. Theodore Stern, in his article ‘Drum and Whistle “Languages”’: An Analysis of Speech Surrogates’ (1957) classifies different points of reference in order to present the different kinds of relationships that the spoken language and the drums can create, such as morphemic or phonemic. This article has been useful in being introduced to academic material related to the relationships of two expressive elements, spoken language and drumming. From the above text it seems like, in the Yoruba context, the talking drums and the tonal language might have an *abridged* relationship, meaning that “each transmitted sign exhibits significant resemblance to a corresponding sound of the base message” (Stern, 1957:487).

In French bibliographic sources, the notion of *langage tambouriné* finds its main expression in Gilbert Rouget and his ethnomusicological article “Tons de la langue, en gun (Dahomey), et tons du tambour” (1964). Rouget compares the spoken language to the drum language in terms of frequency, intensity and duration. Some of these criteria, such as intensity and duration can also be found in bodily movements. It seemed interesting to investigate if these elements are present both in the dancing and the drum playing of the Yoruba.

Apart from the relationships of a tonal language and percussive instruments, J. H. Kwabena Nketia has made an important scholarly contribution to African music and dance with respect to the relationships of “talking” percussion and dancing. In his article “The Interrelations of African Music and Dance” (1965), the author argues that dancing in most African contexts is connected to talking drums and that rhythms “govern the choice of movement sequences” (1965:92).

Generally, however, it is rhythm that is articulated in the basic movements employed in the dance- the rhythm of a song where this is clearly defined for the purpose of the dance, or rhythm played by melodic and non-melodic instruments. (Nketia, 1965:92)

The author’s statement becomes helpful when trying to consider different kind of choreomusical relationships in the Yoruba field. Although, scholars claim that African dance is strongly connected to the percussive instruments, questions arise when the focus is on talking drums, which can be considered melodic in terms of tone and are said to be able to “speak”. Is it always rhythm that governs African dancing? Are there different dynamics during a dance in the Yoruba context which change this drummer-dancer relationship?

An important reading that had urged me to ask such questions is a piece of ethnographic work, where dance is studied in relation to other elements during its transmission. The article's author, Placida Staro, argues that "the use of syllabic techniques as a mnemonic aid is extremely widespread in all musical and dance cultures" (1991:253). This perspective has been extremely useful for the researcher to investigate situations among the Yoruba where dance is used for purposes of remembering the language.

Yoruba dance has been mentioned in a variety of ethnographic descriptions, which usually include other elements of performance, such as music, song, costume and audience participation. However, an extremely important bibliographic source where Yoruba dance is the primary focus and incorporates a broad analysis of the dances, is entitled 'Yoruba Dance: the semiotics of movement and Yoruba body attitude in a Nigerian culture' by Omofolabo Soyinka Ajayi. The Yoruba author researches and analyses different contexts where dance occurs, such as sacred and secular events and dance contests, where she focuses on 'the aesthetics, the significance and the production of meaning in Yoruba dance forms' (1998:8). Ajayi uses theories of symbolism, semiotics and body-coded signals to approach the communicative ability of Yoruba bodily movements and body language and often engages in an interpretive analysis in order to explain what each body movement represents or symbolises. Through this analysis the reader becomes well-informed on how diverse Yoruba dances are. (S)he also becomes aware of the methodology that is used by the researcher while conducting her fieldwork. From a reflexive viewpoint, this aforementioned book assisted me into shaping my personal focus during fieldwork. My ambition became to collect personal stories on lived experiences and to let speak the active voice of the participants in the field, in order to have access to the social actors' production of meaning. Indeed, as Sklar contends, 'dance ethnographers put their movement observation and analysis skills to work towards understanding people' (Sklar, 1991:6). Another text by Ajayi is 'Aesthetics of Yoruba Recreational Dances as Exemplified in the Oge Dance' (1989). This article offers important information on very specific categories of dances and music, one of them being *alujo*. Ajayi explains that *alujo* in Yoruba means:

"(...) beat out the rhythm and dance to it. Hence, the name *alujo* is a clear indication of the close relationship between the dance and the music to which it is done, and the dependence of the dance on the music."(1989:3).

While searching for more publications on Yoruba dances, I discovered an older series of ethnographic works conducted by multiple dance ethnographers in different parts of Yorubaland in 1978. The written material consists of ethnographic descriptions of the Yoruba Egungun masquerade festival in different Yoruba towns, such as Egbado, Ekiti, Iganna, Igbomina, Oyo and Remo (Drewal and Drewal, 1978; Rea, 2007; Schiltz, 1978; Pemberton III, 1978; Houlberg, 1978a, 1978b). Although, the authors present a holistic description of the festive events., little is mentioned though on the dancing itself. However, it is interesting to notice how the same entitled masquerade differs depending on the geographical location. Egungun's diversity was an excellent methodological reminder that the dancing phenomena I encountered in Ile-Ife, might share common points with other places, but it remains a unique situation within the experiences I gained from my collaborations and it does not aim to generalise on Yoruba dances. As Peggy Harper claims, 'the study of a single Yoruba village, reveals a great diversity of dance styles with distinctive functions' (1969:286).

It is worth mentioning the recent contribution of Debra L. Klein in reference to a Yoruba bata ensemble in Osun state. In her book, "Yoruba Bata Goes Global: artists, culture brokers, and fans" (2007), the author describes how this drumming, dancing and singing tradition has gone through dramatic changes and reinventions in Yorubaland. Although this book does not focus on the dance aspect of the Bata tradition, a significant contribution can be found regarding the linguistic abilities of this talking drum ensemble. More specifically, the author notices that 'not only did bata drummers "talk" with each other during an alarinjo performance, they conversed with lead and supporting singers and dancers.' (2007:18). This recent research coming from Osun state gives light to the conversational relationships of the dancer, the drummer and the singer.

It cannot be ignored that many scholars have been interested in researching the Nigerian Yoruba talking drums and drummers. The previous works on these subjects explore little on the role of Yoruba dance in the respective contexts. However, until present, I have personally not found any form of text, which analyses the talking drummer-dancer relationship. As can be deduced from the previous discussion, work has been done on the musical relationship between West African percussionists and dancers and also on the link between talking drummers and their spoken language. An interesting research topic addresses the relationships between the talking drummer

and his creator, the man who has constructed the drum and who is most commonly a master drummer himself. In their article “The Yoruba Master Drummer” (1975), Ayo Bankole et al. argue that in order for a master drummer to create a talking drum with excellent sound and ability to speak, as well as in order for the talking drum to perform well, that is, to speak well, the “master drummer is also a master linguist”(1975:52). This opinion provides the reader with important information on the convention that a musician is required to have the ability to speak Yoruba in order to talk with his drum. Consequently, possible questions that can be raised from this reading are whether a dancer as well is needed to be equipped with good knowledge of the language in order to dance. Furthermore, does the Yoruba dancer need to be a good listener in order to embody some aspects of the Yoruba language which are represented by the talking drums (s)he is dancing to/with?

An older in date article explains the tonal differences that can occur by referring to the transcription of a Yoruba word. The example derives from the Yoruba word “oko”. The different modes of intonation can change the meaning several times. Depending on where the author puts the signs of the low, the middle and the high tone, “oko” can mean husband, hoe, spear or canoe. Ulli Beier in his article “The Talking Drums of the Yoruba” relates this tonal diversity to the playing of the drums and argues that “the nature of the language then explains why the drum can talk” (1954:30). Relating this observation to Yoruba dance would be a playing section referred to, in Yoruba, as *eka*. Two important Yoruba scholars have translated the lyrics of the song of an *eka*, which are performed on the talking drum, as follows:

I can use my arms to dance, my arms to dance

I can use my legs to dance, my legs to dance

I can use my whole body to dance simultaneously

(Drewal&Drewal, 1990:115)

While the talking drummer is playing these phrases on his instrument, the dancer moves first his arms, then his legs and lastly the centre of his body and his waist in response to the lyrics played. What initially drives the dancer to his/her actions, whether his/her movements-responses derive from memory, from instant listening or any other function, were questioned which arouse through this resource.

Ethnographer Ulli Beier mentions that ‘the important function of the drum is to play *oriki*, which is the poetry of the Yoruba containing ‘ancient metaphorical descriptions of kings and gods’ (1954:30). In a similar sense, Drewal and Drewal argue that “eka are not always so explicit. They often refer to dance movements metaphorically (...)” (1990:116).

Although one can claim that the talking drums can actually talk and can represent every kind of tonal combination that can occur in the Yoruba language, the content of the texts chosen do not always consist of everyday language with an explicit, immediately understandable meaning. On the contrary, the lyrics of songs or phrases that the talking drums perform are often proverbial and have a metaphorical meaning. That means that phrases such as the *oriki* mentioned above “are a rich source of imagery and succinct utterance or expression. The expression of abstract ideas and allusive wording are clearly encapsulated in proverbs, usually in metaphorical form” (Agbaje, 2002:237). More useful information on the *oriki* has been Tunji Vidal’s “Oriki in Traditional Yoruba Music” (1969) who defines *oriki* as:

a descriptive song. It describes the ancestors of a person, their virtues, qualities and special attributes, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. (...) At festivals and vigils, when Oriki forms an important part of the ceremony, the song signifies the commencement of dancing. As the musician who is chanting the Oriki enters the song portion, he is joined by drum accompaniment, echoes, and dancing from the audience. (Vidal, 1969:56-57)

The idea of researching the talking drummer-dancer relationships in reference to proverbial lyrics is especially interesting for the researcher of this dissertation. When the dancer is reacting, responding or collaborating with the talking drummer who is playing phrases with “deeper”, more implicit meanings, then all the above hypothetical questions join together. The situation becomes a complex field of research where, while the drummer is well known to be “talking”, the relationship that is built between the musician/linguist and the dancer is unknown. The conceptual levels of reaction or memorisation or any other hypothetical idea that can come to the researcher’s mind before entering the field can possibly exist. In fact, the bibliographic sources read and analysed before beginning fieldwork have become a reference point where the researcher can splay and at the same time delimit her research questions.

The above bibliographic references on the notions of drum language, choreomusical relationships and, Yoruba dance and music have been crucial in formulating new conceptual frameworks about the relation between Yoruba dancers and the talking drums. Nevertheless, this

chapter aims to present initial thoughts, which aided me in organising and conducting fieldwork with specific focus. The unpredictable circumstances and the unexpected surprises that occurred during fieldwork were the actual components, which shaped the kind of knowledge I gained on Yoruba dance. My collaborations with dance practitioners created pathways to other aspects of knowledge on Yoruba dance ‘from the actor’s point of view, as both performance and experience’ (Cowan, 1990:24).



## Chapter 2: Methodological framework

In this approach we do not first observe, and then go on to describe, a world that has already been made—that has already settled in final forms of which we can give a full and objective account. Rather, we join with things in the very processes of their formation and dissolution. (Ingold, 2011:2)

When trying to form a methodological framework for dance research among the Yoruba, a variety of bibliographical, as well as empirical methodological tools, have been used in order to formulate my personal methodology. Historical sources and public documents were used prior to fieldwork in order to gain deeper knowledge of the country and the particular nation-state in question. The material and tools which will be exemplified in this dissertation refer to a micro-level research and more particularly to the population of the city of Ile-Ife who practice Yoruba dance and music. Therefore, the anthropological method of participant observation is particularly suited for such a microscopic approach.

For the particular research, I combined an active participation in the everyday life of the people, with an in depth engagement in Yoruba dancing. I do not mean to say that dancing cannot be part of everyday life. I want to stress the importance of participating in the dances in order to hold the position of a participatory student. At this point, it must be mentioned that, before entering the field, I did not have any practical experience in Yoruba dances. Inevitably, such inexperience gave me the position of a novice when entering the dance-field. However, I did have previous knowledge of the Yoruba language. This communicative skill did not only aid me in situations of participation, but was especially useful for the observational part of this method, as I was able to understand less explicit moments of communication among the dancers or between the dancers and the talking drummers during a preparation for or an actual dance performance. Participant observation constituted a basic methodological tool, which was especially useful in order to ‘gain some understanding of the unwritten “rules” that govern human interactions among a specific group of people’. (Fife, 2005:72)

A large part of the fieldwork in Ile-Ife focused on bodily movement and corporal activity. Audiovisual recordings were an extremely useful tool for further comprehension, memory and analysis of the dances and the dance events I took part in. However, some types of recordings were more appropriate than others depending on the environment and context. Filming was very helpful in teaching situations, both during observing teaching contexts, or participating as a student or a teacher. More importantly, since I attempted to take classes of Yoruba dances with

master dancers and musicians, having audiovisual material of my personal learning procedure provided me with more information on implicit and explicit modes of transmission and helped me with reflexive feedback of the lived experience.

Interviewing became one of the main tools of my ethnographic fieldwork. In this case, different forms of interviews were used with the Nigerian participants depending on the levels of familiarity or intimacy among the researcher and the interlocutor. For example, informal or semi-structured interviews became useful while discussing with dance teachers and choreographers, students of dance and social dancers. The personal opinions of the participants on what constitutes a good dance or a good dancer, as well as general critical opinions provided the researcher with information on the relationships in a dance event, even when they were implicit, and integrated her in the insider's perspective, or what Clifford Geertz calls "the native's point of view" (1974). A addition form of more formal interviews was applied on situations where teachers or professional performers were involved. Questions referring to their discipline or specialization and their personal or professional background and education provided supplementary material in relation to Yoruba dances. In any case, regardless of the level of formality of an interview, it seemed methodologically correct to maintain an open-ended character of the interviews and to focus on empirical questions so that 'the person being interviewed has the "right" to interpret the question and take it any place he or she pleases' (Fife, 2005:93).

Furthermore, an additional type of interviewing was used together with the audiovisual material mentioned above. This combination seems advantageous when working on corporal practices and the opinion of the practitioner is needed. By using pre-filmed video recordings of a Yoruba dance event when interviewing the participants, the researcher was able to use the technique of self-confrontation, where performance on a screen is commented by the actors. This method, also known as *stimulated recall*, "reveals much about the dancer's experience and thought process" (Gore, 2007:2) and partially gives verbal explanations on how to start thinking about dynamics of Yoruba dancing. While proceeding with formal interviews, it seemed like I was developing a methodology of my own, which derived from a dialectical and reciprocal process with the interviewees. In particularly, I would firstly ask my interlocutor what s/he remembered from the particular dance event. After trying to explore their memory on a bodily experience, we would

seek further information from the recorded audiovisual material. After the interviewees would explain their movements in relation to what they were listening to, I could later generate more systematic thoughts on what happens to the dancers, while listening to talking drums and how each individual's background facilitates this ability. We would finally conclude by talking about their artistic life and their dance history up to when they joined the academic institution. It is crucial to note that many of my collaborators had never confronted themselves dancing through a technical device. This fact had an impact on many levels. After surpassing initial shyness and sarcastic moments, they managed to focus on their movement and their relations to the drumming. However, it seemed like a hard task for them to identify the proverbs played from a recording of a past dance event. Moreover, it is often the case that during a dance event a musical piece is danced simultaneously by many participants, therefore, the proverbs are played and identified in a group-formulated situation, where each dancer's reaction to the drums facilitates the comprehension and the bodily expression of the rest of the participants. Since the aim of this fieldwork was to research the dynamics of Yoruba dance and the relationships of individual dancers with the talking drummers from the dancer's perspective, it was important to focus on the lived experience of the dancer during a performance, in order to understand how and if they experience or realise such relations. While the interviewees were listening to the music, drumming and other sounds of a previous, but recent performance of theirs, they were able to re-live the event and explain in the process what gave them the initiative to react to, or interact with the drumming at different moments.

The aforementioned methodologies were performed in English and in the interlocutor's native language. From the interviewer's side, it was necessary to be well informed on the terminology used in Yoruba, as well as in English, on body parts and body groupings. This is a matter of conceptualizing the body, which, through fieldwork, can lead to information on "conceptualization of the dance" (Cowan, 1990). In some cases, however, the assistance of a native speaker was needed for translation purposes.

## Chapter 3: Conducting fieldwork in South West Nigeria

### 3.1. Exploring the field

In geographical terms, the field, in which I conducted research on Yoruba dance, is located in Ile-Ife, a small town in Osun State of Southwest Nigeria. I specifically chose this field for two reasons. Firstly, previous collaborators from Athens were urging me to explore ‘the ancient Ife’, as it is the town, which is said to be the origin of all Yoruba people. One of the most well-known divinations of the traditional belief system among the Yoruba is the Ifa system, which is said to come from Ile-Ife (Hallgren, 1998). The oral histories of Ifa describe Ile-Ife as being the “cradle” not only of Yoruba people and tradition, but also human creation as a whole. These facts have made Ile-Ife quite a popular town for someone who wishes to be exposed to traditional local events, artefacts and the Yoruba language. Secondly, one of the main institutions in Ile-Ife, which has also become a landmark for Osun State as a whole, is Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), formerly named University of Ile-Ife. I thought that Obafemi Awolowo University would be a good institution to be connected to. There, I could be accepted as a student of Yoruba language and dance at the Departments of Linguistics and Dramatic Arts respectively, which could also provide me with rich archival material. In short, I chose Ile-Ife as my field site because I felt that the exposure to the traditionality of the town in combination with the facilities and members of the University would form an appropriate balance for a student conducting her first short-term fieldwork.

During my stay, I was exposed to the rural life of citizens of different generations and integrated myself in their everyday life. Meanwhile, I managed to position myself as a student in an institution where I could learn, in a faster rhythm, more of the local language and dances, as well as have access to archives and interactions with professionals. The fact that I was hosted by a Yoruba family of academics in the headquarters of OAU, gave me the opportunity to be exposed to the local knowledge system, as well as to practice the language as often as possible. Furthermore, I had the chance to build close relationships with the host family and even expand my relations with the extended family members. I also had the opportunity to have the position of a dance teacher in OAU as well as that of a student and collaborator with language, dance and music professionals.

Upon my arrival at Obafemi Awolowo University, I had to face a technical difficulty. The institution, where I had planned to do fieldwork was not as active as I had expected. All the academic staff from all Nigerian state universities were on strike and its ending date was unknown. The academic professors I had planned to interact with primarily were no longer as present on campus, so they introduced me to the non-academic staff, which was at the time more available. This led to a shift and change of my prearranged ethnographic “gatekeepers” (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007; Schensul and LeCompte, 2013; Walsh, 2012). In retrospect, something that seemed as an unfortunate circumstance, at start, turned out to be a great opportunity.

The remaining non-academic staff and students were not absent from campus. To the contrary, they grasped the chance of having empty classrooms and halls to their own benefit. During my stay, I came across many student rehearsals and dance-exchange classes as well as musical practices. Moreover, the dance teachers were less occupied and offered a lot of their free time to assist me and make me feel welcomed. I, indeed, made many acquaintances with members of OAU: students, academics, and non-academic staff. These different groups of people led me to many other groups and contacts related to dance. I mainly collaborated with four groups of people related to dance: the professional drama group of OAU, called *Awovarsity*, students of the Department of Dramatic Arts who are majoring in dance and music, a secondary school in the town of Ile-Ife, where I observed detailed dance instruction and the creation of a performance, and a chapel’s Sunday school where I assisted in creating a children’s performance.

The first and most important group of people I collaborated with was *Awovarsity*, a group of artists composed by the non-academic staff of OAU. It is currently the professional group of the Dramatic Arts Department and it is the official drama group of OAU. It consists of dancers, musicians, actors, play-writers, light technicians, costume and props manager, and the artistic director. Many of the members of *Awovarsity* teach the “practical” parts of the university subjects. University students of all levels have the opportunity to be guided through dancing, drumming, singing and using technical stage equipment from the artistic professionals. In addition, the group rehearses on a daily basis for upcoming performances, which they showcase at secondary schools, fellow universities, and cultural centres within Osun state and all around Yorubaland. I interacted daily with most of the members and followed some of them on various

events outside the University campus. The professional members, who are mostly involved in dance, are four individuals, two males and two females, all of them being over the age of 35 years. Two of them became my closest interlocutors during my seven-week stay, with whom I collaborated in a variety of dance and music contexts.

Most of my time on the university campus was spent at the theatre hall of the Department of Dramatic Arts and at the office of my main male interlocutor, Adewale, who is a dancer, choreographer and drummer of *Awovarsity*, and a former member of the National Troupe of Nigeria. His office was part of a storage room for all university percussive instruments. At his office there was a photo frame hung on the main wall with a young boy, aged five or six years old, dressed in *agbada*, the Nigerian male attire, and holding a *gangan* drum, one of the two main talking drums I was working on during my stay. The picture belonged to Adewale, who claimed that his history as a drummer derived from his mother's side. His mother learnt how to play the *gangan* talking drum from her father. Such information is surprising as, so far, in my acquaintances, as well as in bibliographical material, the drummer lineage is more often connected to the father's side and is then transmitted to the sons of the family (Bankole et. al., 1975).

I felt very excited to meet someone like Adewale, due to the fact that his broad knowledge and his ways of transmitting dance were very effective during my relatively short stay. Moreover, he seemed to be an exception in relation to the rest of the local drummers I met, because the latter were more or less specialists in one specific drum, as well as in a specific range of music and dance, mostly related to the village they originated from. Even though, all the drummers I interacted with were highly respected from their colleagues as master drummers and 'heirs' of their tradition (Bakka, 1992), Adewale was conceived as a multitalented, well-educated professional in Yoruba culture as a whole, as well as in Nigerian drums and dances in general.

While preparing a theoretical framework before entering the research field, my ability to speak the Yoruba language influenced me. Hence, my preliminary research focus of the dance was deriving from the language and the way a dancer interrelates mostly with the expressiveness of the talking drums. Although, I had made preparatory research on Yoruba dances, through secondary sources, I had never experienced Yoruba dancing neither had I observed Yoruba dances in real space and time. The overall image of a dance and the relationships it creates, was

not yet connected to my lived experiences. After arriving to the field, it seemed like I had miscalculated the time I would have to spend to, actually, learn the dances. It appeared to be that, in order to develop the high skills needed to interact with the verbal ability of the drum, a dancer has to feel comfortable with the basic movements which correspond to the supporting basis of the drum rhythms. Therefore, it was inevitable to proceed with direct research on the relationship between the language and the dancing without learning the dance itself, and without being able to differentiate the movements, which represent each dance. All of my interlocutors insisted that I should learn the movements and the rhythms before I attempted to dance to poems and proverbs. The dancer's relation to the verbal ability of the drums seemed like an advantage that only experienced dancers could be exposed to, and it was considered a special privilege of the Yoruba speaking dancers I collaborated with.

When I was learning Yoruba dances from the members of the dance community of OAU, the focus of their teaching was on the basic movement patterns, which underlie each dance. Each of the dances was taught accompanied by onomatopoeic 'vocables which represent drum patterns' (Locke and Agbeli, 1981:30) and the overall sounds and rhythms produced by specific drums of the ensemble. The type of drum language bibliographic sources offered, while preparing for fieldwork, regarded the ability of a talking drum to articulate words and phrases with meaning through representing the tones and glides of the Yoruba language (Beier, 1954). The field, however, surprised me with an additional type.

Very often during research, my interlocutors and I were distinguishing various parts of Yoruba dances through verbalising their significant differences in the drum syllables that accompanied them. During our collaboration, these articulations seemed to have become a form of communication among us. After becoming more comfortable with this way of expressing dance and rhythm, I began to notice, that it constituted a main tool for communicating with drummers, with fellow dancers or with younger dance students. Therefore, after analysing these circumstances, I have come to distinguish two different interpretations of the term 'drum language'. The first would be in the form of what Stern called an *abridgement*, during which 'each transmitted sign exhibits significant resemblance to a corresponding sound of the base message' (1957:487). In the context of Yoruba talking drums, the language is the main component, which allows this type of verbalisation. In this case, the dancer can understand when

a meaningful phrase is being played and he can relate to it in different ways while dancing, which will be analysed further in this dissertation. A second kind of drum language appeared to be related to the tonal and rhythmic phrases that can be played in different situations by a percussive instrument. These are syllables or rhythmic phrases, which could sound like an unknown language to an outsider, but they do not entail meaning in them. Moreover, they are reproduced by the artist (dancer, teacher, percussionist) directly from the sounds of the drum and they are used to indicate, remind or teach specific sections or moments from the overall dance piece. These two kinds of drum languages are strongly connected to dance and therefore, they are being analysed in detail in this chapter.

Due to lack of experience and knowledge of proverbial language, the ability to hear and understand the verbal parts of the drumming became quite of a challenge. An important interlocutor from *Awovarsity*, who guided me through this practice, was Wuraola, a single mother in her early forties. Unlike Adewale, Wuraola is not a drummer. However, she is an excellent listener of the Yoruba drums and she assisted me greatly in learning how to communicate with the talking drums during my dance participations. Together we attended the 10<sup>th</sup> World Orisa Congress, which took place at the Cultural Institute of Obafemi Awolowo Univeristy, and Wuraola guided me through the numerous performances I got the chance to observe and record. While at times I would feel lost and overwhelmed, because of the richness and large amount of information on Yoruba dance, she was able to enlighten me with details on every dance, theatre and masquerade performance being presented. Immediately after our first encounter in July 2013, Adewale and Wuraola invited me to a secondary school in the town of Ile-Ife. The two professionals were preparing a dance performance for the students to present at their graduation celebration. Our arrival at the school immediately created intense curiosity and attention from the students. Within the first few minutes younger and older students would approach me and state ‘we have heard that you speak our language’. While being surprised on how fast information can spread, I confirmed the “rumour” by responding directly in Yoruba and causing even more excitement to the student population, which by then had gathered in hundreds around me. In order for the atmosphere, that my presence created, to become more tranquil, I was asked to introduce myself to the dance students by offering an introductory class of body percussion. Together with the students, we explored parts of our body where we could produce sound, while moving as a group to a common rhythm I had firstly introduced to them. Dance, in



this case, operated positively as a connecting device between myself and the students, and explained the purpose of my presence in their rehearsals.

I started the session by introducing myself in Yoruba and the students responded very well to the first greetings. I continued in English and gave a short overview of my dance background. I then asked them of ways to play music with our body. We started with claps. The next suggestion was mouth percussion on the cheeks! I was very surprised. We explored different parts of the body where we can create music and sound. Then I asked them what we had forgotten, which could help us create more music and they said 'the voice'. So, I gave them a rhythm: 'tum te tum tum tekere' and we developed it into a short choreography. The students responded fast compared to other children and teenagers I have taught before. Then I asked for them to teach me one of their own dances and they put on some music from their mobile telephones. They taught me some azonto moves. They insisted that I should 'shake my body'. When I asked if azonto is all about shaking one's body they clearly agreed. All of them cheered yes! And we continued dancing together. I immediately felt welcomed and accepted. (personal fieldnotes, 18/7/13)

I later observed and filmed the teaching process of Yoruba dances to teenagers. The dances taught were choreographies prearranged by Adewale and attracted mainly two talking drums played by him and an older-in-age traditional drummer from a neighbouring town, named Ibadan. During these meetings with the students, Adewale and Wuraola used onomatopoeic syllables imitating the drums' sounds for dance instruction purposes. The dance movements I observed at the school were choreographies of traditional dances named *Gbàmù Bâtá* and Ondo Dance. The movement in each dance was rhythmically relating to the drums, as well as to the rhythmical sound articulation the teachers used to remind the students to perform specific movements, or to repeat them a certain amount of times.

The mode of verbal drum sounding used to guide the dance was noticed mainly in teaching circumstances. During my personal transmission process, my two main collaborators would use this type of drum language in order to direct my dancing or to instruct other drummers that were present on which part of the drum language to play. However, some other collaborators from *Awoversity* focused on the movement alone while teaching me their dances. Mr. Afolabi and auntie Kehinde were the other two individuals from *Awoversity*, who were close to me during fieldwork. In the beginning of our interactions, they both seemed less easy to approach and quite shy at times. Nowadays, they consider themselves social dancers rather than professionals. More specifically, through discussions and interviews with Mr. Afolabi, he claimed that he considers himself too old and "rusty" to dance, but his colleagues agree that he was a very good dancer in his youth. The two collaborators contributed mostly to moments of dance improvisation as they often insisted on teaching me, step by step, their personal dance style.

The improvisational part of Yoruba dancing, or what my interlocutors call ‘free dance’, was a fact I had not considered before going to Nigeria, as I had not come across it in my bibliographic references. During interviews with auntie Kehinde, we involved ourselves in long conversations on what ‘free dance’ exactly meant for her and its implicit boundaries. I found out that “free” dancing to the rhythms of the drums, without yet focusing on their talking ability, constitutes an important part of Yoruba dances. It requires experience in listening to the rhythm patterns the drums play, as well as to be prepared for the “calls” played to emphasize on the changing or closing of a rhythmic phrase, also known as ‘call and response’ (Kehinde, August 2013). This aspect of the dancing and music must be differentiated from the talking ability of the drum, although it constitutes another communicative factor between the dancer and the talking drummer.

In Yoruba terminology and the way it was introduced to me by Adewale, there are two important words, which describe the pure rhythm playing in a given improvisational dance. The first relates to the general rhythm playing in between proverbs or in between phrases belonging to the same text. The so-called *arándùn*, (also found as *afíkún* in Euba, 1990) can be defined as long rhythmical phrases, which direct the improvisational dance and prolong the overall duration of a story or poem. The dancer, in this case, had the opportunity to interpret the context of a text and then improvise to pure rhythm drumming while anticipating the next talkative drum phrase. I often witnessed the occurrence of *arándùn*, especially in long lasting dance events, where more time was given to enjoyable rhythm playing and improvisational dancing.

Another important term for Yoruba dances, which helped me greatly in analysing the dances I observed, is known as *ijálù*. This term is strictly related to the dancer, as it is defined by the short and distinct drum strikes the talking drummer plays in between interpretive texts. *Ijálù* seemed like the Yoruba closest related to the ‘call and response’ that Kehinde spoke to me about, as it is used to address the dancers only, and capture moments of trickery between the two performers. Ethnomusicologist and scholar, Akin Euba, defines *ijálù* as ‘dance motifs played by the *iyaalu*’ (1990:545). The definition given by the Yoruba scholar seems limited in its description for a study focusing on dance movement, though more detailed description of *ijálù* are given further in the dance analysis proper of the dissertation.

Before entering the field and while arranging my arrival, I had accepted the offer to teach at the university's department as an opportunity to interact with more individuals. This led me to meet a second important group of people at Obafemi Awolowo University. The group consisted of the university students from the Department of Dramatic Arts, who were mainly specialising in dance. I had proposed to teach classical ballet and tap dance, and despite the university's strike, there was a significant number of student attendances. The students were mostly young men in their early twenties and their dance experiences ranged from structured African dance classes at the university, to grasping information from any other performance or dancer they had the opportunity to observe off-campus or on YouTube, in the genres of hip hop, latin and contemporary. From a teaching viewpoint, the ballet classes were a first attempt on both ends. I had never taught classical ballet to men of that age, neither had the latter ever taken a ballet class before. However, it was a profound experience, as I had the opportunity to be creative in finding new methods of teaching for a group of people with a different conceptualisation of the abilities of the dancing body. The verticality of ballet seemed as a confusing element to the students who often mentioned that they were used to dance with their legs bent and their upper body leaning forward. This information on the one hand urged me to explain in detail what I meant when referring to the 'centre of the body' in ballet, and on the other hand, it gave me fundamental details on Yoruba dance, which became principle elements of my Yoruba dance practice.

Two final-year students of Dramatic Arts became my main interlocutors from this group: Bayo, who was majoring in dance and Pelumi who was learning how to play the talking drum. These two 23-year-olds provided me with a large amount of information about the younger generation's different perspectives on Yoruba dances. More specifically, Bayo presented tremendous effort in our ballet classes and took advantage of the opportunity to involve both of us in a performance project. An on-campus chapel's representative found out about our ballets classes and collaboration, and invited us to teach and choreograph a performance for the Sunday school's children, aged four to thirteen. The Sunday school teachers involved, mentioned that they would like a performance of "expressive dance" on a gospel song. During my collaboration with them, I realised that "expressive" dance was the name for a lyrical dance performed by children, with elements of classical ballet and contemporary dance. From a personal point of view, this instance was another fascinating moment, as it gave me the opportunity to interact with a different generation of Nigerian youths. Moreover, I took this opportunity as a chance to explore my

teaching skills for young children of a different culture, as well as to observe methods of dance transmission from my new colleague.

The above collaboration enhanced my relationship with Bayo and it initiated long conversations. An interesting subject arose, which was related to the perception of Yoruba dancing from the older generation professors, and the conflicts it can generate when being associated with power relations of a teaching environment, such as OAU. Bayo was claiming that the members of *Awovarsity* could not adapt to the forms that Yoruba dance has taken nowadays. They insist on teaching what they were taught without accepting the newer changes the dance form has gone through.

Bàtá dance can be performed in suits rather than in traditional costume. I witnessed it and it was wonderful, so fresh. Also, it can be danced to hip hop music but *Awovarsity* does not accept any of this and they refuse to teach us if they know we might turn it into that. (Bayo, July, 2013)

Indeed, Bayo performed at the 10<sup>th</sup> World Orisa Congress and he collaborated with an American artist by choreographing Bàtá dance with breakdance to a hiphop song. Adewale was present at the performance and he claimed that this is a ‘bastardisation of Yoruba art. I could never do something like this even if they paid me one million dollars’ (July, 2013). Adewale, Wuraola, as well as Mr. Afolabi, often mentioned that young dancers nowadays only know how to “cram” dance movements. After learning everything in a very structured form, they are unable to change their dance style and they end up doing the same dance movements to different Yoruba music, while also lacking meaning and knowledge of what they are actually performing. Moreover, the teachers argued that these facts are related to the influence of “westernization” in Nigeria along with the predominance of the English language. The latter results in the youth neglecting Yoruba language and therefore, not being able to dance to what the talking drums are saying, apart from what they have “crammed” from the other styles that influence them.

All of the biographical and experiential descriptions presented so far aim to illustrate and transmit important elements of the fieldwork research and its main protagonists. I was not living in the centre of town, neither was I interacting with a peasant community found in a village. Hence, I am considering all of my interlocutors as part of an institutionalised community, or rather a population that shares the same interest, which is dance practice. Therefore, I would like to consider them a ‘community of practice’ (Ingold, 2011:9; Barton and Tusting, 2005; Wegner, 1998). During fieldwork, I realised how my primary idea of a university community was now

shaping into a more circumscribed formation, which consisted of specific individuals and their dance experiences. In order to witness their interactions with the drum languages introduced above, the teacher-student relationships, as well as their personal manifestations in the dance, I decided to organise a dance gathering in the department's theatre, where I attempted to invite all of my collaborators so far. Adewale helped me to arrange for a talking drummer from the town of Ile-Ife to join the event, as well as to invite another local drummer who collaborates with *Awovarsity* whenever more drummers are needed. Everybody attended: Adewale, Wuraola, Mr. Afolabi, auntie Kehinde, Bayo, Pelumi and many more. I filmed, observed and participated in the process. The Ife drummer along with the local percussionist was drumming with Adewale and Pelumi. Bayo and Wuraola were dancing together and Adewale was correcting his student at times. It was the only time, which all of my collaborators were teaching me almost simultaneously. Together with the local drummers, they tried to train my ear to listen and dance to the drums. They seemed quite excited to have a drummer outside the academic environment playing for them, as well as an outsider dancer trying to follow along. I got the impression that this event was a good opportunity for both OAU students and teachers to expose their dance knowledge and share it with each other. It was also used as a main recorded device for self-confrontation interviews.

Additionally, this prearranged event helped me in gathering information in a more concentrated form and clarifying many doubts related to Yoruba dance and music. The gathering also led to formal interviews of the participants, during which I tried to have discussions with them on their dance experience through what they remembered from the dance event, as well as through the material I had recorded. While proceeding with formal interviews, it seemed like I was following a methodology of my own, which derived from a dialectical and reciprocal process with the interviewees. In particular, I would firstly ask my interlocutor what s/he remembered from the particular dance event. After trying to explore their memory on a bodily experience, we would seek further information from the recorded audiovisual material. After the interviewees would explain their movements in relation to what they were listening to, I could later generate more systematic thoughts on what happens to dancers, while listening to talking drums and how each individual's background facilitates this ability. We would finally conclude by talking about their artistic life and their dance history up to when they joined the academic institution.

It is crucial to note that many of my collaborators had never confronted themselves dancing through a technical device. This fact had an impact on many levels. After surpassing initial shyness and sarcastic moments, they managed to focus on their movement and their relations to the drumming. However, it seemed like a hard task for them to identify the proverbs played from a recording of a past dance event. Moreover, it is often the case that during a dance event a musical piece is danced simultaneously by many participants, therefore, the proverbs are played and identified in a group-formulated situation, where each dancer's reaction to the drums facilitates the comprehension and the bodily expression of the rest of the participants.

Alongside with formal dance teaching sessions I received from Adewale, Wuraola and Bayo, followed by formal and informal drum lessons from Adewale, Pelumi and local talking drummers, I had many chances on various occasions to observe the dances of these individuals and their relationship with the talking drums and the phrases the latter played. Through observing a variety of dances and interacting with the participants, I was given many examples on how the talking drums operate and how a dancer can react to them. There were moments where the actual verbal ability of the drums was not in focus and the rhythm of the drum ensemble as a whole was highlighted. In other moments and through thorough conversations with the dancers, I realised the wide range of movements dancers can choose from, during a Yoruba dance event. It highly depends on their ability to listen, conceive and understand the content of the phrases played by the talking drums. Like Bayo mentions in one of his recorded interviews:

I am not listening to the lead drum. But the lead drummer will not be far from my head. So, when he will give me the cue, I will know. Your head has to understand what each of the other drums is playing.  
(August, 2013)

In situations where the dancer does not comprehend the proverbs or stories played, it is not frowned upon to continue dancing to the supporting rhythm patterns. However, depending on the content of the narrative part of Yoruba music playing, and on whether the dancer realises and chooses to react to it, it seems like there is quite a wide range for interpretation. Below, I have tried to summarise the various forms of dance interpretation used by my interlocutors and they will be explained in detail further in the dissertation by deriving examples from the collected material. During the Yoruba dances I witnessed, the performers could interact with the talking drums by manifesting themselves through the following dance dynamics:

- *Improvising* with movements which relate only to the rhythm of the drum ensemble or the leading drum (*arándùn*)
- *Moving rhythmically* to a phrase played by a talking drum (rhythm of speech)
- *Mimicking* the content of the proverb/story/poem (in a more theatrical way)
- *Interpreting* the content of the phrases
- *Verbalising* (speaking in words) what the talking drum is saying
- *Marking* the drum strikes by responding to *ijálù*

Based on my experience with my collaborators, in Yoruba dance, the individual exposes his/her knowledge on rhythm, movement, and language. The dancer has the opportunity of making choices on what he/she wants to focus on, and he/she can distinctively present that while dancing. However, Yoruba dance has conventions of its own, which relate to the improvisational, more abstract part (free dance), as well as to the narrative and proverbial part of the dance. For instance, during the improvisational part, the dancer is committed to specific rhythmical rules and short rhythm phrases, which commence, end, or “interrupt” the rhythmic flow. In the narrative part, the content of the text represented by the talking drums can be of different cognitive layers. This means that the proverbs, poems, or stories played can range between more distinct descriptions, such as: ‘I can use my arms to dance, I can use my legs to dance, I can use my whole body to dance’, to less direct images like: ‘my head should not trouble me, God do not trouble me, I am thankful’, or even phrases that entail proverbial meaning, such as: ‘two hundred pidgins are not be as big as a partridge’.

The above examples can be danced in many ways depending on choice and individual creativity of the dancer, but they often operate within specific boundaries. For example, a dancer would most likely not move his feet while interpreting “I can use my arms to dance”. However, the way to move the arms, in order to relate to the phrase’s meaning, is free for the dancer to decide.

Concerning the second example, the collaborators were performing it in a more mimetic way by touching their head and kneeling down in the form of a prayer.<sup>2</sup> The way of mimicking this phrase varied from dancer to dancer. Lastly, the proverb coloured by, what the locals call a “deeper” meaning, was usually performed by marking with their feet the particular rhythm the

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<sup>2</sup> This proverb will be mentioned as ‘adúpé’ [thankfulness] throughout this dissertation.

phrase created, without attaching meaning to their gestures. Often these “deeper” phrases or proverbs were also verbalised by the dancers while maintaining the basic rhythm of the rest of the drums. As Wuraola confirms in one of our discussions:

You can even use your mouth to say it together with the drummers. They will now say ‘ah, you know this’. You may not even use your mouth, you will use your leg to be acting what the man is saying, so people will know that it is a proverb and you too are communicating with it. But if you don’t know it you’ll be just dancing [to the backup drumming]. ( August 2013)

Although, while preparing for the research, I was focusing on the direct link between Yoruba dance and language, the material collected in the field showed me a more complex reality. The language is, indeed, a very important component of the dance and the dancer’s knowledge. However, it is one of the elements used for dancing. The above examples and others, of a larger diversity, which will be presented further in the analysis, have created in me the thought of *dance dimensions* in Yoruba dancing, meaning the variety of conceptual elements a dancer should have in mind while performing. An important contribution to this thought was a discussion I had with a Yoruba choreographer and dance teacher I met in the 10<sup>th</sup> World Orisa Congress, Mr. Peter Badejo. During our conversation, the choreographer mentioned that in Yoruba dances ‘a dancer has to be a listener, and a drummer has to be a mover. You cannot dance unless you know the music, drumming and language’ (July, 2013).

Badejo used *layers of dancing* to describe the multiplicity of Yoruba dance. His words made me reconsider my own thoughts. The way I was thinking of *dance dimensions* at the beginning referred rather to representational characteristics of the dance and the forms it takes. Badejo’s *layers of dancing* prompted me to think in terms of different conceptualisations entailing different cognitive layers an individual may develop to express him/her self.

### **3.2. Layers of dance**

Returning from the field with a full baggage of experiences, memories, fieldnotes and recordings, there was a hard task to accomplish. The wealth and diversity of the audiovisual recordings, written data and academic material made the analysis and transcription more complicated and challenging. In the meantime, many of my interlocutors have been quite eager to continue our communication, and such convenience being offered through technology, made me feel like belonging in never-ending research. By proceeding with the transcription and analysis proper of the material, I have chosen to focus on the different relationships the dancers



encountered with the talking drums during their Yoruba dancing. Through the creation of the multiple dance layers, which have been mentioned previously, a variety of relationships is revealed.

My attendance with Wuraola to the 10<sup>th</sup> World Orisa Congress offered me an excellent opportunity of being confronted with an important layer of Yoruba dance. One of the performances consisted of two female masquerades, called *Geḷeḷe*, accompanied by a drum ensemble, which included talking drums. During the *Geḷeḷe* performance, the masquerades were dancing to a variety of poems, songs, and proverbs. Wuraola identified one of them:

Wòrú <sup>3</sup> oo, wòrú oko	Òjé gídì gbà ni t' òsà,
wòrú oo, wòrú odò,	séké séké ni t'ògún,
wòrú p' okà f' éyè jẹ,	ẹ bá mi kì lò fún baálè,
mo délé mo ró fún babá,	kó fún wa l' ódòdó pakájà,
babá na wòrú jojo,	gbogbo wa l' ògún jobí
lábé ògèdè, lábè òròmbó,	ògún o rírè káre'lé
o ti ẹ dábé ata,	Kíni pekete, pekete, pekete
idẹ wéré ni t' òsun,	

This is a story about a young farmer who harvested some guinea-corn for a bird to eat. The person reciting claims that he will tell on the farmer to his dad, so the dad can beat the young man under the plantain and orange trees. He is also asking someone to help him warn the chief of the village, and therefore, he asks for clothe in the colour of a red flower to tie over his shoulder. After praising the *òrìṣà*<sup>4</sup> gods of water and iron, he ends with a phrase, which claims that we are all sons and daughters of the warrior god, *ògún*. The last words (*pekete*) are onomatopoeic sounds.

The above narration was performed by the masquerades by stamping their feet while the talking drum was telling the story. After learning the story and practicing it with talking drummers, it

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<sup>3</sup> This story will be named 'Wòrú' when being mentioned in this dissertation.

<sup>4</sup> In the dialect of Ile-Ife this word becomes *òsà*.

was clear to me that the phrases played on the talking drums are often adjusted rhythmically and melodically from the spoken language. After seeking more information from the video recording of the masquerade, I was able to understand that the masquerades were stepping to the poetic rhythm of the story, which the main talking drum was telling.

Although the drum does indeed “imitate the tonal patterns of the Yoruba language” (Drewal and Drewal, 1975:39), it is important to highlight that this imitation does not follow religiously the everyday spoken language, in terms of intonation and linguistic style. On numerous occasions, I would ask Adewale and other drummers to articulate different proverbs and stories, including “Wòrú”. Firstly, they would say them as if they were playing them on their talking drums. Soon after that, I would ask them to articulate the same phrases, as if they were reading them from a book or as if they were including them in a daily conversation, and the phrases sounded significantly different. During a dance event, it is possible for minor alterations to occur, in order to make the phrase more melodic and rhythmically sequential, even aiming to confer it to a more “danceable” form.

During my organised dance event at OAU, “Wòrú” was performed once again. Wuraola, Adewale, and Mr. Afolabi verbally articulated what they heard from the talking drum, continuing their rhythmically improvised dance to the backup drumming. These two expressions of “Wòrú” show the different representations of what the talking drums play, depending on the situation and the convenience of the dancer. For example, the Gelede masquerader’s face is covered by the mask and additional scarfs and clothes. As Yoruba specialist Henry Drewal describes:

The mask consists of either one or two basic units. The first represents a head, usually human but occasionally animal, hollowed out to fit over the upper portion of the masquerader’s head. (...) The superstructure is often an elaborate composition sited directly on the first unit or above it on some form of rectangular or circular platform. (...) Gelede superstructures are frequently extended into space by means of stationary and movable attachments. (Drewal, 1974:10-11)

The remaining parts of the costume do not enable free movement of the body, the only exception being the feet, which become the main dancing body part. In contrast with the social dance gathering I organised, the participants are showing their knowledge of “Wòrú” through verbalising all of the verses, since their faces are not covered at all.

A second important aspect that underscores the multiple layers of Yoruba dancing is the possibility of interpretation in this artform. Depending on the content of the phrase said by the talking drums, there are various ways to respond to them. One of them is to mimic the content of a more descriptive proverb, such as the one recorded during Adewale's dancing at gathering of the department at OAU. The proverb says:

Ori eni ko ma fiya jeni	My head should not trouble me
Olorun o pami lekun	God do not trouble me
Mo dupe	I am thankful

Adewale was performing continuous movements of holding his head ('my head should not trouble me'), opening his arms wide ('God do not trouble me'), and then taking a "praying" position ('I am thankful'). Adewale claimed that this is his own style of interpretation and that the most important thing is 'to make the dance look beautiful' (Adewale, July 2013). I realized that this was his personal interpretation when Wuraola joined the event and performed the same proverb by only tapping her feet to the rhythm of the phrase.

However, there is another category of narratives, which are not as "free" of interpretation. One of the most common phrases of this kind is the one, which is used for movement analysis in this dissertation. Its content consists of a narration, which demonstrates different body parts used for dancing. In this case, the dancer cannot avoid demonstrating his/her dance with the specific body parts. The video, which will be analysed, presents what movements the dancer makes in order to show that he has understood what the talking drum is saying and that he can follow the content with his body movements.

All of the above descriptions involve the presence of percussive instruments and the drummers are accompanying the dancers and the master drummer. The latter is the one who generates creatively new phrases to articulate with his talking drum. Therefore, the final result is produced by the Yoruba tonal language, the drummers and the dancer(s). In a different setting, such as a teaching context, there might be lack of drums and due to the young age of the students, the usage of proverbial language through the talking drums may not be affective. In this situation,

which I had the privilege to observe, the teacher, or the dancers themselves have the ability to dance to an imitative drum rhythm. By articulating non-sense syllables, which represent the sounds of the drums playing dance rhythms, the practitioners are able to follow a specific dance sequence as if the drums were present. This circumstance leads to an identification of a second way of drum imitation, this time, deriving from the drum itself and expressed by the performer. In this study, I would like to consider these two types of sound imitations as two different drum languages, each of them serving a different purpose in the dance. The first derives from the onomatopoeic sounds of the drum which are borrowed from a performer. (S)he imitates the ‘non-sense’ drum sounds verbally and guides the dancing, which in turn expresses a level of meaning corresponding to pure rhythm. This thought can be expressed by the following form:

Drum onomatopoeia → Performer → Imitation of rhythmical drum patterns with the mouth → “non-sense” drum language<sup>5</sup> → dance interpretation of *rhythm*

The second drum language relates to the textual performance of the talking drums which imitate the spoken language. The manipulation of the percussive instruments by the talking drummer leads to narrative drum language, where its meaning is interpreted by the dancers in relation to the phrasal content. In a more schematic representation:

Spoken language → drummer → imitation of tonal language patterns with the drum → narrative drum language<sup>6</sup> → dance interpretation of phrasal content

This formation, in relation to the dancing, can be viewed through movement analysis. In the table that follows, I focus on two dance demonstrations in two different social settings by analysing them through verbal description of the dance in relation to the drum languages. The first takes place in a private secondary school, where teenage students are taught the dance “Gbámu Bâtá”

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<sup>5</sup>This drum language will be noted as “drum language 1” in the movement analysis.

<sup>6</sup>This drum language will be noted as “drum language 2” in the movement analysis.

by my collaborators, Adewale and Wuraola. The dance teachers guide their students through the group dance by producing onomatopoeic sounds of the original drum playing. In most cases, the movements do not express significant meaning in relation to the drum articulation.

The second example of movement analysis is during a dance event I organised in the beginning of my stay at Obafemi Awolowo University, where a final-year dance student is demonstrating the same dance. The difference lies on the fact that in the second situation, a drum ensemble is accompanying the dancer and the master talking drum is saying a phrase, with significant intelligible content. The movements during this performance are tied, in terms of meaning, to the content of the main talking drum's speech.

Dance Sections	Rhythm patterns articulated by the dance instructor (drum language 1)	Movements performed by the dancers
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Section A	Te te la te la	Standing on two feet on low level, release left foot, while maintaining weight on the right supporting side. Use the left foot to touch the floor behind the right foot and then place the left foot next to the right foot. The arms are bent from the elbow and their direction is towards the body. Starting in the centre of the body when feet are together, they are moving towards the left diagonal back during the first foot movement and come back to the center of the body when the feet meet again. The direction of the head and the body are maintained in front and the overall movement is executed on the spot.
Section B Version 1	(Enunciated eight times)	Feet and arm movements are performed symmetrically eight times.
	Abula <sup>7</sup> méjì méjì <sup>8</sup>	Repeat Section A once and then turn to face the right side. Conclude fully turned to right side with the toes of the right foot touching the floor slightly in front of the left foot. The arms are maintaining the same angle but are being lifted from the shoulders and finish the movement in front of the body.
	Koin koin	Isolated movement of the shoulder and chest, which create a smasmodic contrakinisis. The shoulders start from moving back and finishing in the front, while the chest projects in front of the body and finishes inwards. Performed twice.
	Abula méjì méjì	Turn leftwards to face the left side. Simultaneously take the left arm in a lateral leftward semi-circle in medium level. Finish on left side with

<sup>7</sup> My interlocutors mentioned that the word abula might have meant “mix” or “blend” in older Yoruba language, however, they could not give an official meaning to the word. It is mostly received as an onomatopoeic sound

<sup>8</sup>The word méjì has been written with Yoruba tonal marks, called àmì, as it literally means “two” or “couple”. The equivalent double movement that follows (“koin koin”) makes the word meaningful and it, therefore, constitutes part of “drum language 2”.

<p>Section B Version 2</p>		<p>the toes of the left foot touching the floor slightly in front of the right foot. The arms are maintaining the same angle but are being lifted from the shoulders and finish the movement in front of the body.</p>
<p>Section C Version 1</p>	<p>Koin koin</p> <p>Abula mēta mēta<sup>9</sup></p> <p>Koin koin koin</p>	<p>Isolated movement of the shoulder and chest, which create a spasmodic contrakinisis. The shoulders start from moving back and finishing in the front, while the chest projects in front of the body and finishes inwards. Performed twice.</p> <p>Turn rightwards to the front. Complete the movement with the toes of the right foot touching the floor slightly in front of the left foot. The arms are maintaining the same angle but are being lifted from the shoulders and finish the movement in front of the body.</p> <p>Isolated movement of the shoulder and chest, which create a spasmodic contrakinisis. The shoulders start from moving back and finishing in the front, while the chest projects in front of the body and finishes inwards. Performed thrice maintaining the body facing in front.</p>
<p>Section C Version 2</p>	<p>Abula mēta mēta</p> <p>Koin koin<sup>10</sup></p>	<p>Maintaining the same arm position lift the right shoulder upwards. Repeat movement symmetrically four times.</p> <p>Isolated movement of the shoulder and chest, which create a</p>

<sup>9</sup> The word mēta has been written with Yoruba tonal marks, called àmì, as it literally means “three”. The equivalent triple movement that follows (“koin koin koin”) makes the word meaningful and it, therefore, constitutes part of “drum language 2”.

<sup>10</sup> Although the response to mēta mēta should be “koin koin koin” and the movement should be performed thrice, Adewale omits the last “koin” in order for the dancers to manage to be on time for the next section.



Section D	Gragi ja <sup>11</sup>	<p>spasmodic contrakinisis. The shoulders start from moving back and finishing in the front, while the chest projects in front of the body and finishes inwards. Performed twice maintaining the body facing the front.</p> <p>Step rightwards with right foot on low level maintaining the left foot in its previous position. At the same time, the upper body is leaning rightwards and slightly downwards. The right arm is folded towards the body from the elbow in medium-side level and has the fingers from a fist. The arm follows the sideways movement of the upper body.</p>
	Gragi ja	Repeat symmetrically once.
Section E	Ti ja	Right foot steps exactly behind the left.
	Ti ja	Left foot steps next to right foot.
	Ja ja tila	Feet together go from middle to high level while the waist and the chest are performing three small rotations contra-kinetically until the feet reach mid level again.
Section F	Ti ja	Right footsteps front left.
	(Repeat twice)	Repeat twice symmetrically.
	Tii	Left foot steps in front.
	Ti	Right foot joins left foot.

<sup>11</sup> Sections D, E, F and the Ending strike's drum language have also been articulated as: Furadi ja, furadija, jakan, jakan, jakan fila, jakan jakan jakan, te te ja ja ja fila, ja (SOASIS, 2008)

Ending strike	Ja ja ja Tila Gbem	Jump and open feet to each side.  Jump to close feet together.  Extend right leg from knee-level to front low level.
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## MOVEMENT ANALYSIS 2

The tones of the language played by the talking drum (drum language 2)	The Yoruba phrase the drums articulate	English Translation	Movements performed by the dancer
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Mi mi re mi re do re re do re re*	Tó bá se pé mi nì wo ni nì wo ni	If I were you, you	Starting from two feet in high level, the dancer stretches his arms to front middle level and points with his index finger to the drummer. While turning rightwards, he folds his arms from the elbow towards his body maintaining the pointing position. The dancer's index finger is now touching his chest. He steps with his left foot leftwards maintaining the position of the right leg, while he stretches his arms to front middle level and points with his index finger to one of the women in the audience. The dancer finally places his arms in front low level.
Mi re mi mi	Nbá f' apá jó	I would use my arms to dance,	The dancer lifts his arms from the elbow to back low level. He continues by moving his right arm from elbow level towards right side high with his index finger being pointed.
Re mi mi	f' apá jó	use my arms to dance	The dancer moves his left arm from elbow level towards left side high creating a circular movement towards the centre of his body and keeping his index finger stretched.
Re mi mi (Ijálù)	f' apá jó  (Five drum strikes)	use my arms to dance	Two times of symmetrical repetition.  The left goes over the right arm, while both arms are folded from the elbow towards the centre of the body and move from front low to front high level. The dancer's head is also facing upwards.  The dancer makes his fingers touch the floor in front of him and his knees are quite bent. His head is also downwards. The dancer repeats the same movement taking his arms behind his body and then front once again. He continues by turning

			<p>leftwards in the form of a jump from two feet to two feet and immediately points with his right index finger to the next person from the audience. Then he points back to his chest with the same arm and turns leftward where he takes his right foot slightly off the floor and both of his arms to parallel high level with palms front. Both arms go to left side low level while completing one full leftward circle.</p>
<p>Mi mi re mi re do re re do re re</p>	<p>Tó bá se pẹ mi nì wo ni nì wo ni</p>	<p>If I were you, you</p>	<p>The dancer is standing on two feet in low level. Both feet are equally open to each side. With his right arm stretched in middle front level, the dancer points with his index finger to the second person from the audience and then points back to his chest. This sequence is repeated twice identically and one more pointing to the audience is added. The dancer then jumps from two feet to two feet joining his feet together and grabs his pants on thigh level with his two hands.</p>
<p>Mi re do mi</p>	<p>Nbá f̣ esè jó</p>	<p>I would use my legs to dance,</p>	<p>Maintaining the arm position, the dancer releases his right foot and touches the floor subsequently four times in a rightward semi-circular pattern and then joins the left foot.</p>
<p>Re do mi</p>	<p>f̣ esè jó</p>	<p>use my legs to dance,</p>	<p>Maintaining the arm position, the dancer releases his left foot, touches the floor subsequently two times in a leftward semi-circular pattern, and then joins the right foot.</p>
<p>Re do mi</p>	<p>f̣ esè jó</p>	<p>use my legs to dance</p>	<p>The movement is repeated once symmetrically.</p>

<p><i>(Ijálù)</i></p>	<p>(Five drum strikes)</p>		<p>Maintaining the position of the arms and joining the feet together, the dancer lifts his heels while keeping his knees bent. At the same time, he lifts the interior part of his feet and his thighs rotate outwards. The feet touch the floor and the legs return to parallel. This sequence is repeated once again. Maintaining the same arm position, the dancer jumps opening his legs to each side. Jumping from two feet to one foot, the dancer's right foot lands back and his weight is quickly shifted towards the front (left) foot, while the arms are released. The right foot joins the left, both heels are lifted and the dancer's hands touch each side of his chest before they extend in middle front level. The dancer jumps first by landing with a wide position with his legs, and then he jumps backward rejoining the feet together. The arms are released beside the body.</p>
<p>Mi mi re mi re do re re do re re</p>	<p>Tó bá se pẹ mi nì wo nì nì wo ni</p>	<p>If I were you, you</p>	<p>The dancer is standing on his toes with bent knees and he is changing his weight from one foot to the other while moving front and back. With both of his arms stretched in middle front level, the dancer points with his index fingers to the second person from the audience and then points back to his chest. This sequence is repeated twice identically and one more pointing to the audience is added.</p>
<p>Mi mi re re re re mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi mi</p>	<p>Nbá fí gbogbo ara jó jó jó jó jó jó jó jó</p>	<p>I would use my whole body to dance dance dance dance ...</p>	<p>The dancer jumps from two feet and lands on two feet opened on each side. He jumps once again in place. He continues by joining the feet and standing on his toes with bent knees and he is changing his weight from one foot to the other</p>

<p>(Ending <i>ijálù</i>)</p>	<p>Ta ta dita dititi Ta da dita dititi</p> <p>Dan dan dan Ta da ti ta</p> <p>Dan!</p>		<p>while performing five leftward turns. At the same time the dancer's arms are bent and kept close to his body. They are extended simultaneously outwards from elbow level and return to the bent position. The arm movements are repeated three times during the dancer's turns.</p> <p>Opening his feet on each side, the dancer moves his left arm from elbow-level towards left side high creating a circular movement towards the centre of his body.</p> <p>Three times of symmetrical repetition.</p> <p>The dancer turns his head to the left to face the drummer, shifts his weight to his left foot, and performs three jumps on the same foot travelling leftwards. He turns rightwards while taking a step with the right foot. Then he takes a step forward with the left foot and turns rightwards shifting his weight to the right foot while maintaining the left foot on the floor.</p> <p>He jumps in place on both feet and sends his arms in high-front level while folding his upper body and his head middle-front level.</p>
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In the above dance analysis, the description of the relationships between the movement descriptions and the drum articulations suggests that drum language with intelligible meaning and drum language without verbal significance are not always distinguishable. In many cases, “drum language 1” entailed words with meaning in Yoruba language. For example, while Adewale is instructing the students through rhythm onomatopoeia, he incorporates the words ‘mèjì mèjì’, which can be translated as ‘two two’ in Yoruba. At that moment, the students perform the same movement twice. A similar movement is noticed when Adewale rhythmically says ‘mèta mèta ’, which means ‘three three’ in Yoruba and the students perform the same movement three times in respect to the verbal rhythmical instruction. Additionally, in the example analysing the dancing to “drum language 2”, onomatopoeia were occasionally involved. After each textual phrase, the drummer performs *ijálù*, which has been defined earlier in this chapter as the marking rhythm cues for the dancer. In this particular analysis, the verbal description of the movement shows the three different ways the dancer used to respond to the *ijálù*.

The movements performed by the dancers in every situation and the meaning attached to their gestures changed in relation to two elements: the layers of dancing, and the meaning encompassed in each drum language. This means that the dance layers occurring during Yoruba dance do not stand individually. They, rather, interrelate to each other by occurring during the same dance piece, or even during an individual drum text. An analysis of this interrelation, thereby, illustrates the complexity of dance in the Yoruba context and prompts the researcher to discuss further the multiple dynamics between the layers of dancing and the meaning entailed in the two drum languages.



## Chapter 4: Interplay, dialogue, and challenge through dancing layers and drum languages

### 4.1. Drum languages and polarisation of meaning

The phenomenon of layering in Yoruba dances has brought to light the importance of the two drum languages in the execution of the dance and the different forms both of these human expressions can take. It is within the framework of the different drum languages that layering occurs. Dance is layered based on its relevance to specific drum language modes, a fact, which becomes more complicated once these layers intertwine during dance performance. Since spoken language finds its place within talking drums, the term *drum language* is being used to distinguish itself from oral speech, especially because both can be found within the dance. Drum language might at first seem a self-explanatory term, however in the Yoruba dance context it is structurally complex and divided into two distinct forms strongly related to meaning and the dance movement. These are, on one hand, the drum language that derives from onomatopoeic sounds, which imitate pure rhythm played by the talking drums, and on the other hand, the drum language that enables the talking drums to imitate the spoken language and transmit messages with social context, such as stories, praise poetry, proverbs and maxims.

In examples of the previous chapter, as well as in more descriptions that will follow, it seems interesting to concentrate on the playful dialogue that takes place between my collaborators' dancing and the speech mode of the talking drums (Ojuade, 2002). The former's bodily movements were notably associated with the content of the phrases articulated in a form of "back and forth" dialectic process of expression. A significant part of the phrases corresponded bodily through deliberate movements of mime or theatrical representation. Others were less explicit through the body, but were articulated verbally or by stamping of the feet to the rhythm of the meaningful phrases. Both forms of interpretation required a considerate level of realisation of the phrasal or proverbial content dealing with the divine, human relationships, animals, nature, and parts of the body. The dynamic relationship between the language and the dancing bodies gave meaning to the dancers' gestures and accounted for their verbal articulations.

The moments when the talking drum ensemble was playing rhythms without concern for linguistically symbolic expression, my collaborators were expressing themselves with excitement and in a rhythmically reciprocal manner. In the background of the recognised rhythm patterns,

there were particular rhythmic and melodic syllables, which governed the movements. They were used predominantly in situations of institutional teaching, for general guidance, or common understanding between the drummer and the dancer. During the actual dancing, this form of drum language was expressed through rhythmical cues and calls. The dancers were reciprocating with movements, which did not imply deeper meaning apart from engaging in a challenging rhythmical exchange with the drummers. Dancing to this second form of drum language consisted of moments of play with the drummer, entertainment, demonstration of bodily skill, and expression of joy and amusement.

Yoruba dance presents itself, through the performances of my collaborators, as a layered art form, which encompasses two different spheres of meaning depending on the drum language it performs. In relation to the talkative ability of the percussive instruments, the dancers present meaningful aspects of their Yoruba social organisation, belief systems and moral values demonstrated in a proverbial manner. The dancing revolves around the symbolically meaningful content of the speech-mode drum language. The latter is articulated primarily from the leading mother drum, which talks during its solo. At those moments, the rest of the instruments are used as background rhythm-keepers, supporting the solo instrument and waiting for it to end the Yoruba phrase and to initiate the purely rhythmic drum language. By beginning, ending or deliberately interrupting the proverbial articulations, the drums play shorter or longer solely rhythmic phrases with no symbolic meaning, known as *arándùn*, while the dancers engage in more abstract, improvisational and emotional movement arrangements. Meaning in the solely rhythmic drum language is not related to ‘imagery and philosophical ideas’ (Turner, 1968:133), but it does explain the execution of specific movements demonstrating dexterity and skill, examples of which will be given further.

The notable dualism existing in drum language and its bodily representations indicates an extended duality of meaning. The first drum language expresses textual phrases, which resemble the tonal continuity of the oral speech. Moreover it is able to imitate the gliding of the vowels of the spoken language, and therefore, communicate to the dancer a linguistically meaningful content. The content revolves around moral issues, cultural values, social hierarchies, stories of the divine, or dance movement instructions, and belongs to different categories of Yoruba oral literature, such as praise poetry (*oriki*), proverbs (*owe*), and stories (*itan*). The texts follow the

structural linguistic order of the spoken language, although they are adapted to the rhythmic and melodic framework of each music-dance piece. An example of this drum language was given to me from auntie Kehinde who described a story (itan) she likes, which incorporates praise poetry (oriki) and dance (ijo).

It is a story of Sango, Ogun and Oya. So, originally Oya was Ogun's wife. But Ogun was a warrior and he was always away from their home. And, you know, Sango is very wild. He can dance, he is a magician, he will go from market place to market place, so people loved him a lot. There was one day that Oya went to the market. Oya was a very beautiful woman. She now enjoyed seeing Sango dance. Though, a woman needs a man. So Sango approached Oya and Oya accepted Sango in her house. After some years Ogun returned to the house. His labour and all that was taken away by his wife. For Sango they would chant all this oriki, oriki, oriki, oriki. And Oyan now became Sango's favourite. Osun then came to settle things, but Sango had already won Oya to his part. (Kehinde, August 2013)

The second drum language refers to 'textless' (Villegastour, 2010:27) tonal and rhythmic sounds, which are played during the same dances as the first drum language and have different names depending on their position in the rhythmic structure (*alujo*, *arándùn*, *afikún*, *ijálù*). Also known as 'pure rhythm' (Ayandokun in Villegastour, 2010:26), this drum language structures the dance rhythms and guides the movements of the dancer. Its different rhythm sections indicate different ways of dancing. The meaning this drum language encompasses, although textless, signifies specific movements in the music-making where the dancer is required to perform in a certain manner. For instance, while commenting on her dancing during the self-confrontation interview, auntie Kehinde explains how she changes her dancing depending on the different rhythms offered:

You dance to the music playing[arándùn] many times until you can change your leg. And it is your leg that will make the body move. So, when you change your leg, your body will change. You are moving the body with you. So, you will dance with your leg when they are beating the drum, and when the drum changes, you will change with it. By then, they[the drummers] will put the 'pam pam pam'[ijálù], you will know and you will enter[the new rhythm]. It is the same like I was trying to teach you in the recording. You must be able to dance for a very long time, maybe thirty minutes, so when the 'pam pam pam' comes you will know. You will not stop dancing because you will have registered that [rhythm] in your brain. But they don't tell you like that before you start dancing, step one step two, you should expect this short 'pam pam pam' at anytime. Just be free when you are doing one leg[movement]. With the other leg[movement] you change, so when the cue comes, just try and enter. (Kehinde, August 2013)

Both drum languages are meaningful for the dancer as they are integral parts of the music and the dance. Philosophical images are juxtaposed with impulsive feelings of rhythmical structure through which the practitioners realise, interpret, and perform their knowledge of two different drum languages. Dancing, therefore, becomes a source of polarisation of meaning, in a sense similar to the ideas developed by Victor Turner on ritual symbolism. The anthropologist

distinguishes two ‘semantic poles’ in dominant ritual symbols. The first pole relates to ideological and moral values, whereas the second one refers to psychological and emotional elements of human experience (1967:54). If the polarisation of meaning in drum languages can be related to Turner’s well-known theory, then the talking drum is able to take the shape of a metaphorical symbol which has the ability to operate either on the so-called ‘sensory’ or ‘orectic’, or the ‘ideological’ or ‘normative’ pole. This analogy in its efficacy projects the exterior characteristics of a drum, as an object, which generates pure rhythm and leads to the emotional ‘meaning content’ expressed by the dancers, who correspond in a playful and leisure way ‘to the outward form of the symbol’ (1967:28), to its literal ability to create rhythms.

In the context of the talking drum as a generator of non-symbolic drum language it can be argued that the moment in dance, where demonstration of physical ability is highlighted, qualifies as an important characteristic of the emotional dimension of the sensory pole. This realisation came to mind when Wuraola was teaching me how to vigorously rotate my pelvis<sup>12</sup> while bending the upper part of the body forward to a medium level in the maiden pride dance, known in Yoruba as *ijo oge*. She was insisting that the point of the dance is for women to show off their female attributes, while the drums were playing the onomatopoeic phrase: ‘pa kenken, ti kenken’<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, in the Turnerian ‘polar term’, it is important that the emotional pole activates ‘a grossly physiological character’ (1967:54).

The ideological and narrative pole of meaning in Yoruba dance expects less physical or acrobatic skill, and more creativity and theatricality in putting the content of the drum language into movement. Adewale often interpreted the enjoyable effort one puts in the theatrical element of narrative dancing as ‘making the dance look beautiful’ or, what Wuraola called the ‘beauty of the dance’. While teaching me the proverb ‘Adúpé’ they would demonstrate different ways on how to interpret the last word of the phrase by joining their hands in a praying position or by turning their palms and lifting their arms towards the divine. Beauty, in this view, is defined through theatricality of gesture and it leads to the realisation that ‘the normative pole becomes charged with the pleasure effect’ (Turner, 1967:55). During our collaborations, Adewale’s and Wuraola’s demonstrations of “beautifying” phrases with structurally linguistic meaning included a dense

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<sup>12</sup> Wuraola used the word waist to emphasise the rotation of the pelvis. In the Yoruba context, ‘waist’ is a commonly used term to indicate the movement of the pelvis, the hips, and the lower torso.

<sup>13</sup> Both, Adewale and Wuraola, used to articulate the onomatopoeic sounds for *ijo oge* with these syllables.

use of specific body parts. Their extremities, their head and their pelvis were used in a personal style to interpret either ‘proverbial thoughts’ (Plancke, forthcoming) or ‘explicitly formulated views’ (Turner, 1969:134). It seemed necessary for this drum language that the social actors embodied explicit gestures to communicate the meaning of the talking drums.

Further examples from my fieldwork, which can address this statement well, are taken from two separate events at the theatre of Obafemi Awolowo University. The first day of my contact with the members of Awoversity began with a demonstration of the dances each of us practiced. I performed some tap dancing and university students were called to introduce Yoruba dances to me. From the very first demonstration, the drums played the well-known phrase ‘if I were you I would use my hands to dance, if I were you I would use my legs to dance, if I were you I would use my whole body to dance’. I knew by then that this phrase would occupy an important position in my research and that it is part of the popular performance repertoire. The content of the phrase focusing on the structure of the body interestingly creates an explicit demonstration from the dancers, who concentrate at first on the separate movement of their arms, followed by their legs, and finally reintegrating them in a movement of the whole body, where the extremities are now close to the body’s centre.

In the Ndembu context, polarisation of meaning exists within the solidarity of ritual symbols. Similarly to Victor Turner’s observation, through the layers of dancing, each drum language finds its particular place in a singular Yoruba dance event. The interweaving of intelligible and non-intelligible drum messages occurs not only within the performance as a whole, but surprisingly also, on a more microscopic level. It seems useful to describe the complexity of the intertwining of polarised meanings with reference to the dance analysis presented in the previous chapter. The movement described verbally alongside the respective drum languages aim to show the polarisation of meaning manifested in the dancing. Although the examples derive from two separate events, their dancing in sequence follows an overall order I observed in performances: beginning with strict rhythm patterns the dancer joins in by getting comfortable in the performing space and awaits a linguistically meaningful phrase to be played by the *iyáàlù*. After interpreting its context, (s)he continues dancing to strict rhythms which end with a closing *ijálù*. The aforementioned pattern may include more than one interpretive drum texts and it might take

a repetitive form with multiple participants. However, the intertwining of the two drum languages can be identified by keeping the examples of the analysis separate.

In the example of ‘drum language 1’ in the dance analysis, that is during the dancing to the onomatopoeic sounds, there are distinct moments of meaningful articulation, such as ‘meji, meji’ and ‘meta, meta’. The words can be literally translated as ‘two, two’ ‘three, three’ and as exemplified in the analysis, the dancers perform specific movements two and three times respectively. Even though the analysis of ‘drum language 2’ presents an interaction with structurally meaningful phrases, it also encompasses the dancer’s responses to onomatopoeic drum sounds in between each meaningful phrase, such as ‘dan dan dan, tigi di ga, dan’. The textless rhythm playing is indicated on the left column of the analysis as *ijálù*, while the dancer is expected to shift from explicit gestures indicated by the previous phrase to pure rhythmic interaction with the drum. During this shifting of drum language, the dancer performs movements which require more physical skill and without entailing direct meaning in them. In the field, it was noticed that the dance became physically more complex when ‘moment-by-moment inventiveness of practice’ (Ingold, 2011:7) took place and the dancers were not concerned about being responsive to the surrounding proverbs or other phrases. Identifying the polarisation of meaning macroscopically and in its microcosm gives a meaningful purpose to the dance analysis as a structural tool and reveals more information on the layers of Yoruba dance, as well as on the characteristics of the drum languages.

A significant element of both the symbolically meaningful and solely rhythmical drumming performed by the *iyáàlù*, which finds its reflection in the dancing, is an appearance of different elements of structure. This structural characteristic is illustrated in bodily movement from the dancers while maintaining the binary meaning within the two drum languages. Subject to the surrounding text of linguistically meaningful drum language, the structural factor often illustrates elements of Yoruba social reality. For instance, Yoruba choreographer Peter Badejo reported to me once:

If you ask someone to write down characteristics of the word ‘Oba’ [Yoruba word for king], they might come up with royalty, elevation, majesty, greatness, honour and admiration, which can then be identified in the dancing. Because in ‘ijo Oba’ [royal dances] the dancer occupies a lot of space, uses big movements and illustrates the greatness of the King. (June, 2014)

Although this dissertation does not examine the ‘semiotics of Yoruba dance’ (Ajayi, 1990) it seems important to acknowledge the way more codified aspects of dance are noticed through the lens of Yoruba dance practitioners. Similar observations took place during the dancing of relationships between humans and the divine, as it has been described earlier<sup>14</sup>, or between humans and animals. Wuraola mentioned a proverb she had noticed herself dancing from the self-confrontation interview, which spoke about the movement and the sound of horses:

Àbídí ẹ̀şin	The body <sup>15</sup> [waist] of the horse
pátá kun, pátá kun	[Makes it produce these sounds with its hoofs] onomatopoeia
Àbídí ẹ̀şin	The body [waist] of the horse
pátá kun, pátá kun	[Makes it produce these sounds with its hoofs] onomatopoeia
Nibo ni kodí mi si ni	Where can I also turn my waist to
Níhi, lóhun	Here, there <sup>16</sup>

The aim in Wuraola’s dance is to perform distinctively the last two words by repeating the same pelvic movement to the directions led by the drum language. She also noted that the pelvis refers to the movement of the horse of the text.

These examples can indicate that in comprehensible drum texts, the content of the phrases illustrates a range of meanings with reference to structure, whether by referring to Yoruba ‘social scaffolding’ (Downey, 2011:86) or bodily structure. Themes of nature, society and anatomy manifest themselves in a creative collective activity (Turner, 2012:48) where dancing individuals use their bodies to express these structural elements.

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<sup>14</sup> Apart from the example given earlier on the form of prayer the dancers used to express thankfulness, I also witnessed proverbs with reference to the Yoruba belief system called Ifa. Apart from Wòrú which mentions the divinities of Ifa (orisa), an additional proverb with spiritual value was performed by Adewale and Wuraola at a secular dance event: *I have got a small tribal mark, I am going to the sacred bush of Ifa, I have got a bigger tribal mark, I am going to the palm tree, the palm tree shakes, I thought it was raining, rain fall on one side of the tree and don’t fall on the second side, rain beat me and you must not beat my friend* (translated by Adewale).

<sup>15</sup> The imagery my interlocutors gave me to describe ‘Àbídí ẹ̀şin’ can be literally translated as the hindquarters of the horse. Although literally meaning waist, during fieldwork I was bodily interpreting *àbídí* as a pelvic movement or rotation of the hips.

<sup>16</sup> Wuraola and Adewale, who helped me with this translation, mentioned that this saying was in ‘Oyo dialect’ (Yoruba spoken in Oyo State of Nigeria) and the last phrase can be also interpreted as ‘right, left’. The actual movement of the pelvis during that phrase was always performed side to side, but not always starting from the right side.

When pure rhythms are predominant in the dance piece, structure may not exist directly in terms of the social. However, rhythm can be considered as a structural component from which the dancers perform their movements. Dancing echoes rhythmic structure by joining the participants in experiencing shared time.

#### **4.2. Layers of dancing: appropriation of and interaction with drum languages**

Within the framework of multilayered Yoruba dance, articulating, dancing, and drumming become the main components of an interesting communication, which creates various means of interpretation and expression. This threefold interaction is unachievable with the absence of one of the components. However, the simultaneous participation of the three elements cannot be considered only as a means of communicating cultural values through symbolically meaningful exchanges. Verbal interaction outside the performance context is a far more efficient mode of socialisation. For my Yoruba collaborators, the latter operates more as a common space of interaction and community making. This impression was given to me from my attendance to a variety of collective dance events, which mainly involved teachers and students of secondary and higher level of education, as well as social events of religious or ceremonial interest.

Maintaining that everyday communication and performance situations are separate in terms of space and context, it is possible to explain the different manifestations of language in everyday life and in special events. Yoruba language in its communication mode can be observed in everyday life situations for purposes of socialisation, necessary interaction or personal achievement. One way in which Yoruba language operates when it enters a special event is its transformation into drum language. This form of the language is given special attention during a dance event. While interviewing Adewale, he would spend time in explaining to me the difference in articulating a phrase in oral speech mode or in drum language. The rhythmical and tonal attention was significant in the latter along with a theatrical tone in his expression. This realisation revealed not only the difference in articulation of the symbolically meaningful drum language, but also Adewale's process of thought on the cognitive dimension of dancing to the drum language. More specifically, during our self-confrontation interview, he recognised a saying that the drummer played while he, himself, was appropriating the phrase with his dance at



the same time. When I asked him which phrase it was he replied not only in relation to content, but also to demonstrate his knowledge on complex, “deeper” meanings of his language:

This is core Yoruba. It is a general greeting. You can say it in the morning, night, even in the middle of the night: “How are you? How is your head? My head is fine”. It is a common thing. You always say it when you are seeing a person for the first time [in the day]. Drummers play it all the time. (Adewale, August 2013)

From a reflexive viewpoint, when Adewale was teaching me how to listen to the articulations of the talking drum, I remember that I was memorising the melodic and rhythmical form the Yoruba phrase developed in. After learning the content of the phrase, I could appropriate it in my movement. It seems important to note the difference between an experienced dancer and Yoruba speaker, like Adewale, and a novice in both Yoruba dance and language, in terms of how one learns to listen to and embody a rhythmic phrase with verbal content. During fieldwork it was of interest for me to observe how symbolic communication can operate in everyday life and dance, in order to explore whether a musical representation of an oral phrase maintains the importance of its content or leads to an ‘inference route’ of interpretation known as ‘phatic communication’ (Zegarac, 1998).

Yoruba dancers, musicians and audience seem to focus on the speech mode of the talking drums while concentrating, not only on the acoustic production of the drums but, most importantly, on the content of what they are articulating. An important element of the dancer’s presence appears at the point where once (s)he has been captured by the vocal production of the drums, (s)he has understood the content, (s)he aims to interpret the language through embodiment. Embodied interpretation of a drum language can be considered as a moment of highlighted creativity from the dancer’s perspective. The intellectual involvement of the dancer with the talking drums is desirable and expected from experienced dancers. However, if the bodily actor experiences moments of unrecognisable phrasal content, it is not frowned upon to maintain the dancing relation with the background drumming.

Wuraola is considered a very diverse dancer in her community and a sophisticated speaker of Yoruba. However, she admits moments of tension, where she cannot always recognise the talkative mode of the leading drum, due to the talking drummers’ way of playing. If that is the case, Wuraola shifts to another layer of dancing, for example by stepping to the backup rhythms, in order to maintain her dancing presence and to show her constant correspondence with the drumming sections. She claims:

It can happen, at times, that you miss a proverb. If you do not know the proverb that the drummer is saying, you can just continue dancing [to the background rhythm]. Then the one [phrase] that you will recognise, you will dance to it. Drummers might confuse you at times, so you have to “cover” yourself in order to make the audience think that you are in line [with the drumming]. (August 2013)

The dance and the event as a whole is considered more of a success, to some extent, if the dancer manages to interpret every phrase played. This does not mean that lacking such success, the event is not considered special, but the transformation of the way the language is expressed along with the dancer’s reactions enhances this realisation. The well-known proverbial phrases articulated by the talking drums operate in what Akin Euba refers to as ‘musical-speech form’ (1990:193). These phrases constitute an extensive range of poems, stories, proverbs, and greetings and are carefully selected by the lead drummer, who uses his imagination and creativity to immediately choose and perform the most relevant maxims. Yoruba drum expressions and sayings, in this sense, formulate an extensive, yet specific *repertoire* (Villepastour, 2010; Euba, 1990), around which all music-dance events are situated and performed. In this regard, the drum language becomes familiar through the frequent and various Yoruba events, which in turn emerge as a common space, where the repertoire is constantly revised and regenerated. Ethnomusicologist and composer Akin Euba, in his comparison of two performances in dissimilar contexts, shows how there is indeed a repetition of more popular phrases articulated by the talking drums even if the lead drummers and the type of the music-dance piece are different. The author compares the performance of the well-known short story, ‘Wòrú’<sup>17</sup>, which has been analysed in the previous chapter of this dissertation. He mentions that:

Textual similarities have also been found in *dùndún* pieces which belong to different contexts. Some texts are not only popular but are apparently suitable for general purposes and *dùndún* drummers tend to use them as often as they can. The more popular and general the text is, therefore, the more likely it is to be found in non-identical pieces. (1990:251)

Although a repetition of the repertoire can be identified in the texts of the drum languages, the way the dancers embody the content constantly changes. An example from my fieldwork situation regarding the same short story took place in two different dance events. The first time I witnessed it, the performers were fully covered Gelede masquerades and the way they showed that they had recognised the text through drum language was by marking their feet to the rhythm

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<sup>17</sup>This name is also the first word of the actual story, so it gradually became the unofficial title of the whole passage, for recognition and communication purposes between my collaborators and myself. However, the story seems quite popular and well known as it is analysed elsewhere under the name ‘Wòrú o Wòrú oko’ (Villepastour, 2010:46; Euba, 1990:242)

of the drum speech. I then managed to relate this to Drewal and Drewal's statement as they describe the *eka*:

The creativity inherent in Gelede choreography emerges within a tightly woven structure. The basis for Gelede choreography is the *eka*, a drum phrase that imitates the tonal patterns of the Yoruba language to communicate movement direction and social commentary. (...) A Gelede dancer is evaluated on his ability to "count" with his feet the rhythmic patterns of the lead drum(s). In other words, he must match his stepping with the drumbeats. The sound of his leg rattles (*iku*), an essential costume element, verifies his precision. (1975:39, italics in the original)

The second occasion where I observed the performance of Wòrú was at the dance event I organised at the university theatre, where I had invited all of my collaborators to dance and interact with a talking drummer from the town of Ile-Ife. Wuraola was the one performing it this time to a different drum ensemble and while moving her legs rhythmically in respond to the backup drumming, she was verbally articulating the story.

The fact that the repertoire can reoccur in different contexts does not erase the individual embodiment of the dancers. Each of the participants in a dance event occupies, in their own way, a meaningful position within an artistic framework of 'kinetic self-exploration' (Downey, 2011:86). The participants, in the dance events I was part of, consisted of individuals belonging to different age groups, social hierarchies, genders, and geographical origins -university dance students coming from the city or the village, dance and drum teachers, young men, older women, social dancers, professional musicians, former dancers- including myself. Each of us, present with our past, and our dance backgrounds coming to the fore, were trying to relate to, and interpret the particular language of the drums. This was achieved by interrelating with each other through the various layers of dancing. While some participants were verbalising the meaningful phrases loud enough for the rest of us to hear, others were interpreting the context through mimicking. As Pelumi mentioned during our detailed discussion while reminiscing on the event:

I remember a specific proverb that we played in the event. It was 'adupe'. I remember it because Adewale danced it to the drum. He put his hands on his head in 'ori e mi ko a fi a jeni', meaning that his head should not suffer. (Pelumi, August 2013)

During absolute rhythm playing, the dancers occupied less space as they were gradually joining in a smaller area in front of the drummers, showing off their personal styles or copying movement patters and directions from each other. The smaller space was gradually formulating a coherent whole, where each dancing body was maintaining its own personal performance. The individual contribution of dancers is articulated through their interaction with the talking drummers and during their personal performance within 'complex, multilayered, multi-semiotic

realms of knowledge' (Farnell and Wood, 2011:108). The multi-layering of Yoruba dance, in its practice, involves a variety of cognitive, sensory and kinetic mechanisms, which are used within the dancer's capacity and aim to interpret the drum languages. Verbalising proverbs, looking at the playing of the talking drummers, listening to what the drums are saying, and theatricalising their contents are only a few of the mechanisms, which can well address this complexity. Going beyond the western construction of the five human senses, the embodiment of those, in addition to the linguistic relation of the dancer and the talking drums, create a larger sense of oneself in the dance space, which can be expressed through 'kinaesthesia' (Farnell, 2011; Sheet-Johnstone, 2011). The fact that the two drum languages are intertwined and are constantly interacting during a performance, make the dance multi-layering fluid and interconnected, as it is presented as if it were an inseparable whole. It, therefore, can be argued that this kind of kinaesthesia, although consisting of special visual and acoustic elements of the self and the other, leads to 'one indivisible and continuous flow of action' (Ingold, 1993:35). Moreover, the Yoruba context allows an additional social action to manifest itself, as the dancers react in response to their spoken language and in that way exemplify their intelligence and knowledge of the linguistically musical repertoire. The poetic and rhythmic artistry embedded in the talkative ability of the drummers translates into a 'somatic intelligence'<sup>18</sup> (Sklar, 1999:17) from the dancing bodies. The latter do not include 'movements of the body that accompany speech' (Kendon, 1993:43), which can be found in everyday gestures or deaf sign language. They rather interpret the speech of the drums and engage in a playful dialogue with the language itself. That means there is a significant difference between repetition and imitation (Farnell, 2011:113). Although repetitive modes of performance can be found in terms of the drum languages and the 'textual content' (Olaniyan, 2012:115), that rarely can be applied on the dance. The layers of dancing allow for different ways of imitation of the drum languages without the need of repetition. As auntie Kehinde once reported to me:

If during 'ijo oge'[maiden pride dance] the drummer is constantly playing 'pam pam pam', you will just say [respond with your body] 'pam pam pam' [she demonstrates with a leg gesture]. It will get monotonous. Because it is 'free dance' you can just keep doing one step without changing...I get bored. It is better if you do different variations and when that 'pam pam pam' comes, you enter it. After that you continue with normal [rhythm dancing]. (Kehinde, August 2013)

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<sup>18</sup> Expressed as 'moving intelligence' in Wood, 2011:97.

The drum languages offer multiple possibilities of interplay through the embodied engagement of the dancer in layered ‘moment-by-moment variations’ (Ingold, 2011:2). Where ‘textual repertoire’ (Villepastour, 2010:79) is articulated by the talking drums, the dancers let go of the usual patterns of thinking about language in everyday life. They rather find themselves in an embodied dialogue and become meaning-responders through the interchanging of cognitive layers. Their dancing becomes what social anthropologist, Tim Ingold, refers to as ‘an intelligence in motion’ (2011:10). The textless rhythm playing is an opportunity for the dancer to present not only bodily skill, but also rhythmic precision, making him or her take part in a playful dialogue with the talking drums and display his/her ‘skill as knowledge’ (Cox, 2011:67). However, the complexity entailed to the individual manifestation in Yoruba layers of dancing cannot depend entirely on personal dexterity, as the movements the dancers were using during fieldwork were governed by a general body stance (see Introduction). Moreover, scholars have described the corporeal attitudes of dances such as the maiden pride dance (*ijo oge*) Kehinde referred to. Ajayi (1989:4) informs that *ijo oge* requires a forward movement of the upper body ‘inclined from the pelvic joint about 80 degrees from its normal upright placement’, bent knees and rhythmical isolation of body parts which can relate to up to four different drum patterns respectively. Apart from the postural and rhythmic standards, their interaction with a common spoken language also indicates the non-exclusive individuality of the Yoruba dancers. That means they are governed by cultural dynamics within a shared space, while making Yoruba knowledge ‘accessible through the moving body to be evidence of a poetic and embodied intelligence’ (Farnell and Wood, 2011:93).

## Chapter 5: Towards a construction of endangered dance

While conducting preliminary research through secondary material and before entering the actual field, I was often exposed to information regarding the loss, the endangerment, and the extinction of the Yoruba language, due to negligence or misuse from the younger generations and the educational system, where English or Pidgin English has prevailed over. Coming across this topic from Nigerian and international media sources, as well as academic material, urged me, at first, to elaborate my research questions and hypotheses. Older and more recent academic research, as it has been demonstrated previously in this dissertation, discuss the communicative ability of the talking drums within the strict contexts of structural and linguistic theories. Influenced by these theoretical frameworks, my research questions, prior to fieldwork, included not only the interrelatedness of the dance and the oral language on a communicative level, but also the effect of such a vibrant voice of concern regarding the loss of language can have on the dancing itself.

From the lack of written material on Yoruba dances, I shortly realised that I was preparing for the field in an overambitious manner. Although it can be positive and exciting to have many research questions related to each other, a process of delimitation of research object and aim is necessary prior to fieldwork, let alone to an initial and short-term field experience. In order for research questions to be taken further, it was first needed to establish an image of the relationship of the dance and the language alone. I was thinking that I could extend my questions of interest in future research projects once material is firstly produced on the dance-language relation. As it has been mentioned previously in the dissertation, preliminary research thoughts and objectives shifted slightly after fieldwork in regards to the position of the Yoruba spoken language within, and in relation to the dance.

It is during and after fieldwork, and through the analysis and recall of ethnographic material that my research focus shifted. New interesting questions came to the fore and hypotheses, which belonged to the past, presented themselves within new frames of thought, as if they were anticipating the right moment for their reappearance. In the case of my fieldwork experience, it is my collaborators and their personal stories that prompt me in reintegrating in my writing the notion of language endangerment. My collaboration on a practical and theoretical level with dance practitioners, who belong to different generations and occupy separate positions in the

social structure of everyday life, has been previously discussed. In the field description of this dissertation, I have briefly described the power relations within the university environment and among the different generations of dance practitioners. It had been noticed, during fieldwork, that new innovative dance practices influenced by traditional Yoruba dances are not appreciated by some of the members of Awoversity based on the argument that the dance becomes a contaminated, ‘crammed’ form, which not only shows the ignorance of the youth, but also ‘bastardises’ the tradition as a whole. In the words of the younger generation, the process of ‘cramming’ which the elders accuse them of, becomes ‘good packaging’ and stems from the threefold creation process of ‘improvise, adapt, overcome’ (Bayo, August 2013). This subject of discussion used to appear in numerous conversations with my interlocutors, and it was often linked with, or explained through the lack of use of Yoruba language and knowledge of Yoruba proverbs from the youth. As Mr. Afolabi once mentioned:

That’s why I said you must have a good ear. When proverbs come along, you must hear what the drum is saying, when the drummer is using the drum to play. If you are not conversant with proverbs, if you are not good in proverbs, then you just keep on doing the basic rhythm, the basic movement. But if you are good in that [proverbs], you will be able to understand what the drummer is using the drum to say, you will be able to move, to dance special movements, to interpret, or to use some specific movement to show that you can flow along with the drummer. (Mr. Afolabi, August, 2013)

Some younger adults agree not being able to audibly recognise and understand proverbs or songs played by the talking drums, as they are not brought up in a suitable environment for such. From their experience, one decides to learn their tradition out of personal interest, because life in the city and the process of institutionalisation cannot offer an immediate integration to some parts of their culture. In Pelumi’s words:

It is our own culture. But even *we* have to study it. Children that are brought up in “old-school” areas, they do not go out. (...) When they come from school they listen to songs. So they have heard it before. You have to stay in the environment so you can see it culturally every day. I had the opportunity to know a little, because I come from Ijebu and I was living off campus when I was younger. (Pelumi, August 2013)

Lack of proverbial knowledge and its reflection in the dance was presented to me as a common argument from the older teachers about the younger students. Supported by academics and the media, it has been, indeed, a topic of discussion broadly proclaimed within the frame of secondary and higher education in Yorubaland. This regards not only proverbial phrases, but also the use of Yoruba language on a general level and in a twofold direction. On the one hand, proverbs in the Yoruba context are said to be used in everyday life situations, where direct

speech cannot reach. As a self-reported proverb has it: proverbs are the horses of words; when words are lost, proverbs are the means to seek them out (Ajetunmobi, 2014; Soneye, 2009:80). On the other hand, the abandonment of proverbial eloquence supplements the weakening of Yoruba, since many “deeper” words are no more part of everyday language and are gradually disappearing from the vocabulary of youngsters and young adults. Fabunmi and Salawu claim that ‘the resting place for most of these dying words is in Yoruba proverbs. The tragedy of the matter is that these proverbs are strange to most of the middle-aged speakers and child speakers’ (2005:403).

Yoruba linguists are currently alarmed with this situation and have initiated attempts of language preservation through ‘sociolinguistic documentation’ (Olaoye, 2014), and of reconstructions of educational models, which integrate Yoruba language practice on a significant and compulsory level (Dada, 2007). They argue that the large amount of native speakers is unrelated to the gradual, yet persistent, endangerment and they consider the complete extinction of the language as a possibility in the near future (Balogun, 2013; Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005). These arguments are drawn from the fact that a ‘language shift’ (Balogun, 2013:72; Dada, 2007:93; Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005:395; Crystal, 2000:17) has been noticed in Yorubaland as well as on a national level. The phenomenon regards most frequently the younger generations to whom the native language is not being transmitted from their parents. This results to a gradual shift from Yoruba to English. Presently, Yoruba language is at a state where it borrows and adapts words to its own linguistic form, such as using the word *pauda*, instead of *atike* for the English word powder, or *wido* instead of *ferese* for the English word window (Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005:400). Even though, the linguists maintain, more than thirty million people speak Yoruba, the language is considered “deprived” due to the domination of English in everyday life (Crystal, 2000:13, Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005).

Conducting fieldwork in the heart of Nigerian higher education made the above subjects of discussion inevitable to be ignored. Ile-Ife, where Obafemi Awolowo University is located, is presently part of Osun State<sup>19</sup>. Media sources speak about the state governor, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, expressing his concern about the future of Yoruba culture in the young generation’s hands. In 2013, Aregbesola initiated a cultural event addressing young students to promote

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Yoruba culture and values and ensuring everyone's awareness of the younger generation's responsibility for the 'future' and 'unity of Yoruba' (Mohammed, 2013). Being associated with May 27<sup>th</sup>, an annual day of celebrating children in Nigeria and a public holiday for Primary and Secondary schools, the so-called 'Oodua World Children's Day' took place in Oshogbo, Osun State's capital, and a smaller neighbouring town named Ede. The future annual event seeks to promote 'youth development and cultural heritage' (Olatunbosun, 2013a, 2013b), while according to the event's Chairman, Honourable Oguntola Toogun, it aims to 'foster oneness and rejuvenate Yoruba cultural values' (Mohammed, 2013). The above event, along with a variety of conferences, lectures and interviews regarding the subject of Yoruba culture and language, are key discussion topics in local and national newspapers. The *Osun Defender*, a local newspaper of Osun State and *The Nation*, a well-known Nigerian newspaper often refer to the opinions of professors from Obafemi Awolowo University deriving from different departments and discourses, such as Public Administration, Agricultural Economics and English language. The professors maintain that, in order for the aspects of Yoruba culture not to be lost, there is a need for the youth to be well equipped with Yoruba knowledge. By reading books of important Yoruba authors in their native language (Adeoti, 2013) and support the innovative attempts of the Osun State governor (Makinde, 2014; Oladipo, 2013), they can better understand their culture as a whole.

In this sense, there is a strong connection of culture to language, as the latter, in the Yoruba context, is perceived as 'the backbone of people's culture' (Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005:398).

There seems to be an association of Yoruba language as a marker of people's identity (Makinde, 2014; Balogun, 2013:70; Rafiu and Adeyemi, 2013:71), which in turn is dependent on the younger population. Although educational initiatives have been put into practice to reintroduce Yoruba language to the youth, Yoruba scholars claim that, still, a large part of Yoruba identity is oral culture, which is currently being neglected. Proverbs, praise poetry, and chants are not integrated in the educational system, rather they are supposed to be transmitted orally and intergenerationally. According to Rafiu and Adeyemi:

Language and culture are inseparable. Hence, the loss of one is a pointer to the loss of the other. Apart from the entertainment part of the Yoruba oral tradition, the history of people are said to be encoded in it and handed down from generation to generation. So, a man without culture is as good as dead. (2013:71)

Even the loss of some aspects of language can lead to the endangerment of other elements of culture, included dancing and drumming. While discussing about this matter with Peter Badejo he expressed his views to me in a metaphorical way: ‘Yoruba language is like a cassava which consists of many segments, such as the dancing and the drumming. Everybody is connected through language’ (June, 2014). However, the choreographer believes that younger dancers will be fortunate if they can relate and dance to at least one of the drum languages: ‘even though the younger generations are losing Yoruba language, they will at least be able to relate to the drum rhythms. If they lose both, then that is when Yoruba dance will be in trouble’ (June, 2014).

Indeed, there were moments in my discussions with dance and drum students of OAU, where the pure rhythmic playing seemed easier to perform or to immediately learn. For example, Bayo can instantly improvise on a dance by the listening and quickly learning the *ijálù* (the marking drum cues for the dancer). When he listens to it a few times, he can join the dance and respond to the cues whenever they occur. He also tries to listen to the lead drum and interpret its context, though it may not be always a success. However, he states that there is always someone in the dance, who will understand and respond to the proverbs and finds the extinction of the talking drummer-dancer relationship highly unlikely to disappear.

[T]he language and dance cannot die. Impossible. They have lived on for years. The talking drum cannot talk in English cause it was not built to talk in English. So, if there are people that can play it, there are still people who can understand it, until there comes a time when nobody can play it again- that is when it might happen. (Bayo, August, 2013)

Pelumi, who is learning how to play the talking drum, described how he experienced the group gathering when he was playing next to experienced drummers. He was confused by the soloing instruments and had to be very patient in order to learn, in that given moment, how to play the supporting rhythm correctly: ‘I had to endure, endure. I thought I was confusing them and I thought I should stop. But I knew that if I would sit there, I would learn it and then I could join again’ (August, 2013).

I often noticed a slight lack of confidence in the younger artists during their dance interaction with their teachers. While watching moments of the video recording of the group dances, they preferred to comment positively on their teachers’ dancing rather than reflecting on their own movements. At times, I would express my admiration for their effort and explain to them moments where I enjoyed their dancing. My comments and focus of attention, however, would

often surprise Bayo who would simply say: ‘You like watching *me*? Me, that I don’t know anything?’

Yoruba dancers of any generation practice and express their knowledge of the well-known repertoire through multiple dancing layers. Dependant on the phrasal content the dancers choose to mimic, interpret, verbalise or step to the drum language. The relationship they build with the talking drummers and the way all participants relate to the spoken language moves away from a solely communicative ability they engage with each other in everyday life events. When Yoruba join in a dance event, they share not only a common space and common musical pleasure, but they also engage in regenerating a dance repertoire based on their native language. Immediate moments of community-making occur through the dancer’s realisation of the phrases articulated from the talking drums. Towards the end of my stay at Ile-Ife, when I organised a dance gathering at the theatre of Obafemi Awolowo University, one of my objectives was to observe, on the one hand, the individual agency of the dancers in relation to the different drum languages, and how they interpret the latter through the layers of dancing. On the other hand, I was eager to explore the collectiveness of the diverse group and the emergence of community-making within given moments of dancing and drumming. Indeed, to some extent, I felt member of a community with reciprocal artistic ties. This sense of community was evident in different ways in the Yoruba situations I faced during fieldwork, and they were strongly related to the two distinguishable drum languages. An enlightening example from my discussions with Peter Badejo on these ideas is worth mentioning. During a general conversation of ours on Yoruba dances, the choreographer contributed a vivid example of Yoruba community ties within the performative contexts, as it shows the coexistence of repetition and continuity with creativity and innovation entailed in the talking drum families. In his words:

During a Yoruba music-dance event, the talking drum ensembles follow the structure of a Yoruba family. The omele [children], the name for the backup drums, are playing the basic rhythms, and maintain the continuity of the dance and rhythm as whole. Just like the children of a family, the younger generation, who are responsible in the continuity in the family. In Yoruba dance and music, we do not have master drummers, we have mother drummers. The iyáàlù [mother drum], she comes, like in Yoruba society, to keep the order. She expresses herself like in everyday Yoruba talk, where there is codification even in the language. We talk with proverbs, which are highly integrated in Yoruba dance itself. (Badejo, August, 2013)

## Conclusion

*“But it is important to remember that meaning lies in relationships as they are lived...”*

(Jackson, 1996:26)

Yoruba dancers of any generation practice and express their knowledge on a well-known musical, rhythmic, and verbal repertoire through multiple dancing layers. Dependant on their content of the drum languages, the dancers choose to react through a variety of embodied actions, such as mimicking, interpreting, verbalising or stepping. The relationships they build with the talking drummers and the way all participants of an event relate to the spoken language, move away from a solely communicative ability they engage with each other in everyday life events. Yoruba tonal language, whether it is expressed in a rhythmical, visual or verbal form, plays an important role in designating the dance as a whole. Dance, in this context, facilitates and enhances the Yoruba community-making process by connecting ‘concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals’ (Turner, 1969:131) to their language and their culture in general.

What has been presented in this dissertation might seem, at first, like an ideal model of social cohesion, where the social actors harmoniously join together and engage in a leisure atmosphere through ‘several levels of embodied meaning’ (Farnell, 2011:92). However, multiple examples provided from the fieldwork experience show the intense and challenging interplay that takes place between the dancers and the talking drummers. As far as the dancer’s perspective is concerned, (s)he is found on a social platform, where (s)he experiences moments of play, conflict and competition with the drums. Trying to identify proverbial language by a talking solo instrument, while dancing in time to polyrhythms produced by an ensemble of percussion, involves a complex combination of cognitive and corporeal ability, which creates moments of tension and excitement. Moreover, the iterative quality of the musical repertoire territorialises Yoruba identity and ensures that all practitioners are able to identify with it. As Wuraola distinctively mentions in one of our discussions: ‘We also use the drum to warn somebody. We use it to make trouble.’ (August 2013) My interlocutors define these texts as part of the category of proverbs used for ‘caution’. A text with moral value that I witnessed in the field is used to alarm individuals of their unacceptable or self-destructive behavior:

‘We have been saying, it is all the same, you do not agree,

we say it through the drum, we say it through the mouth,  
 we repeat like the way the alakara sellers sit on their box every day,  
 it is your conscience worrying you, it is your behavior that makes you fear,  
 somebody provokes and you say the wrong thing,  
 when you worry someone too much, he will misbehave,  
 we still see that you still refuse to listen' (translated and performed by Wuraola)

The sense of community and of collective identity that is presented in proverbial and other textual material of the Yoruba finds its reflected in the dance. Although space and time are common in everyday life, they are realised as something special and communal through movement. As dance anthropologist, Carine Plancke, specifies about dance among the Punu people, 'the added dance phases directly aim at uniting participants in a shared movement and rhythm' (forthcoming). Dance in this context is associated with joy, an emotion that common rhythm can contribute to. Anthropologist Edith Turner supports this sense of oneness through shared rhythm. She claims that 'you can simply clap along with the beat of the drum, and clap hard. All the rest falls into place. Your own body becomes deeply involved in the rhythm, and everyone reaches a unity' (2012:48). It would be useful, therefore, to consider other modes of understanding the close interrelation between Yoruba dancers and the other two components, the talking drummers and the language itself. The unifying power of community explored by rhythms along with the linguistic connection through constant reoccurrence of proverbs and stories can be discussed in terms of community making.

While community can be recognised within the social and spatial boundaries of shared existence, the Latin term *communitas* has been used by Victor Turner to emphasize the relationships shaped between individuals in a specific social context. Although the notion of *communitas* was developed for the analysis of the Ndembu rituals, it has been broadly discussed in other performative events of contemporary culture (St. John, 2008). The performative aspect of ritual (Turner, 1987; Schechner, 1993) has allowed further discussions on *communitas* outside conventional ritual on the basis that it is seen as 'an outgrowth of direct and immediate relations between integral individuals' (Turner, 1969:143). It can be examined outside the ritual context because it regards a common sense of belonging, guided by honesty, equality and individual relationships. 'This relationship is always a "happening", something that arises in instant

mutuality (...)’ (1969:136), Turner writes. Where *communitas* occurs, individuals experience each other and share more than just a common area of living. In addition, *communitas* can often emerge within an environment connected to ancestry (Turner, 1969:138) and from both the dancers’ and the talking drummers’ perspective, ancestors are vivid in numerous dance-music occasions.

I feel fortunate to have witnessed such examples through my attendance to masquerades and Ifa celebrations. An unforgettable memory from the 10<sup>th</sup> World Orisa Congress was the appearance and performance of an Egungun masquerade. The masquerader and his surroundings, which have been researched in different periods of time (Drewal and Drewal, 1978; Rea, 2007), are seen as ‘diverse spirits who manifest themselves (...) as masquerades who honor the ancestors’ (Drewal and Drewal, 1978:28). As John Pemberton III reports in the same year: ‘followed by both men and women the masquerade dances about the compound to the multiple rhythms of the dũndũn drums’(1978:41) and can turn deities into dance.<sup>20</sup> The dũndũn ‘master drummer’ (Bankole et al., 1975) accompanying the masquerade is said to be occupied by the ancestral spirit of Ayan or Ayanagalu, the god of drumming. When referring to masquerades and their participants, such as the masqueraders and the drummers, ancestry of a spirit or the spirituality of an ancestor are both vivid in the Yoruba context, making the division between gods and ancestors less rigid (Drewal, 1978:18). As Akin Euba states in his book ‘Yoruba drumming: the dũndũn tradition’:

Ayan is believed by some Yoruba people to have been the first drummer; he was deified after his death. From this point of view, sacrifices made to Ayan, may be said to be made to the god of drumming; in other words, Ayan is the god of drumming. But the conception of Ayan goes beyond his role as the god of drumming, for Ayan is also the spirit of the drum. (...)It is difficult to argue that Ayan, the god of drumming and the first Yoruba drummer, is different from Ayanagalu, the spirit of the drum. (...)Ayan or Ayanagalu then refers both to the god of drumming as well as to the spirit of the drum. (1990:90-91)

Ayan provides the drummer with all the necessary knowledge and talent to perform what he has taught throughout generations. He is frequently seen as the drumming itself, as the spirit which occupies the music.

Reflecting on the work of Edith Turner, in her book ‘*Communitas: An anthropology of collective Joy*’, there is an important element of *communitas* that finds itself through music:

It is as if music by its very limitation-sound-provides a clean path to spirituality and allows the spirit language to enter it easily. Sometimes music is not merely the vehicle of the spirit, a means or channel.

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<sup>20</sup> This is an approximate translation from ‘yio fi oro dijo’ (Rea, 2007:101).

At certain moments music *is* the spirit; it incorporates all one's consciousness at these times, and spirit is right there. (2012:49, italics in the original)

In his earlier work, Victor Turner has argued that rituals distinguish themselves from everyday life through liminality, a period within ritual action, where *communitas* occurs and social structure disappears. In the Yoruba context, however, one can find ritualistic aspects in dance-music events, although the purpose and organisation of the event itself does not resemble conventional ritual as it is presented in Turner's research of the Ndembu people. More specifically, although, in most cases, the events I attended and participated in were not arranged with ritual intentions, the content of the intelligible drum language, along with the clear rhythms, frequently fostered dance movements associated with Ifa divinities, such as Sango, *Ogun*, *Egungun*, *Gelede*. My Yoruba collaborators would often indicate to me when they performed movements, which in context would be associated with ritual, or they would explain the content of the text and songs they would teach me in terms of the Ifa belief system. My interlocutors were consciously differentiating our gatherings from a ritual event, as several of them were informal and often served learning purposes. There are explicit indications, therefore, that can associate my Yoruba dance experiences with non-ritual events. During my frequent encounters with my acquaintances and through the medium of our collaborations in dance events, the power of dance was predominant and accounted for illuminating moments of *communitas*. I consider these experiences separate from everyday life practices and, at the same time, recognise them not as rituals, but as special events, through which I found myself engaging in a particular process of community making. The exceptional way the body, the language, and the drums operated in these occasions could not have been identified outside the special events, neither could I have arrived to the discussion on *communitas* away from these ethnographic premises.

Within the 'Turnerian framework' (St. John, 2008:164), an essential characteristic of *communitas* is its lack of structure and organisation, whether it is expressed in ritual or other performances that entail 'social drama' (Turner, 1987). Turner's opinion has been critically viewed by scholars (Houseman and Severi 1998: 172; Plancke, 2012; Rowe, 2008), in regards to its anti-structural essence by exploring the different forms structure may manifest itself in different contexts. As it has been mentioned in previous chapters, structure, as well social structure, exist quite vividly within the dance event, through rhythmic and proverbial speaking.

These thoughts lie upon ‘immediate experience’ (Fraleigh, 1991:11) of researching dance events and social relationships in southwest Nigeria. Through observation, participation, and analysis of movement I sought to understand people (Sklar, 1991) and to generate new information from the information I was provided with. The new dance experiences analysed and described, aim to portray aspects of dance, linguistic creativity, and social life of my Yoruba collaborators. Additionally, they might contribute to the intellectual enjoyment of other dance genres, which consist of codified narrative and rhythmic dancing parts, such as classical Indian dance forms. Nevertheless, they have illuminated a deeper ‘kind of cultural knowledge’ (Sklar, 1991:6), which would not have been acquired without the joint effort of my Yoruba collaborators, to whom I will always be grateful.



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