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The Sociocultural Functions of Selected Kengbe Song-texts in Contemporary Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study explores the sociocultural significance of *Kengbe*, a female-led oral performance tradition rooted in the Ilorin Emirate's Yoruba-Islamic heritage. Drawing on performance theory, ethnomusicology, and African cultural studies, the paper investigates how *Kengbe* functions as a dynamic medium for cultural memory, moral instruction, and communal identity. Far from being a mere form of entertainment, *Kengbe* performances serve as cultural texts that articulate praise, moral guidance, social critique, and identity negotiation through rhythmic calabash percussion and lyrical chants. Employing a qualitative methodology that includes ethnographic observation, interviews with tradition bearers, and textual analysis of chant excerpts, the study reveals the multi-layered functions of *Kengbe* in contemporary Ilorin society. Key findings highlight *Kengbe*'s role in affirming communal identity, reinforcing social hierarchies, and facilitating the intergenerational transmission of values—particularly within marriage ceremonies. Praise-singing in *Kengbe* is shown to perform both recognition and moral affirmation, while lyrical guidance addresses gender roles, familial responsibilities, and spiritual cautioning. The performance also dramatizes social stratification through repeated invocations of elite lineages and titles, situating power and leadership within genealogical and economic frameworks. Moreover, *Kengbe* embodies Ubuntu-based principles of interconnectedness, community participation, and ancestral reverence. The study recommends the preservation of *Kengbe* through digital archiving, integration into educational curricula, and support for female performers. Ultimately, the research affirms the resilience of African oral traditions as tools for cultural continuity and critical engagement in the face of modern transformations.

Keywords: Kengbe Performance, Cultural Memory, Sociocultural Resonance, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Performance Theory

Introduction

The Ilorin Emirate, situated in the heart of Nigeria's Middle Belt, stands as a compelling intersection of Yoruba and Fulani cultures. This cultural fusion finds rich expression in oral traditions, particularly musical performances that transcend mere entertainment to embody collective memory, spiritual identity, and communal values. One such tradition is *Kengbe*—a unique performance genre rooted in Yoruba musical heritage but heavily influenced by the socio-religious dynamics of Ilorin. Africa's oral traditions, of which *Kengbe* is a distinguished example, serve as vibrant cultural archives. These traditions—comprising songs, folktales, chants, myths, and rituals—are performative acts through which societies encode history, morality, gender roles, and spiritual cosmologies. Scholars such as Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Dan Ben-Amos emphasize the significance of oral literature as both an aesthetic and functional component of African societies. Far from being primitive vestiges, oral performances like *Kengbe* are dynamic repositories of indigenous knowledge, transmitting

ethical codes, social expectations, and resistance narratives across generations (Na'Allah 42; Ngũgĩ 14; Ben-Amos 13).

In Ilorin, *Kengbe* is often performed during wedding ceremonies, led by women who wield the calabash (a directly-struck idiophone) as both a musical instrument and a symbol of female agency. The term *Kengbe* itself derives from the rhythmic sounds produced by the calabash when struck with either the hand or a mallet, resting on a bed of water. This seemingly simple performance conceals a complex interplay of rhythm, social commentary, gendered performance, and communal participation. The performers—often girls trained from a young age through an informal apprenticeship model—use song and rhythm to articulate praise, rebuke, memory, and desire within ceremonial and communal contexts.

Previous studies, such as those by Ibitoye and Abdulraheem, have focused on structural and instrumental aspects of *Kengbe*, noting its pedagogical methods and material culture (Ibitoye 109; Abdulraheem 78). However, there remains a striking gap in understanding its broader sociocultural implications. While Ibitoye and Tume identifies *Kengbe* as a space for emotional and cultural expression, especially among women, there is little sustained research on how *Kengbe* performances mediate social identity, reinforce cultural continuity, and negotiate communal values in a rapidly changing Ilorin society (Tume 55). The pressures of urbanization, globalization, and technological transformation have placed this tradition at a crossroads, threatening its transmission and symbolic relevance.

This study therefore, seeks to explore the sociocultural resonance of selected *Kengbe* performances within Ilorin Emirate. It investigates how these performances serve as cultural texts; both preserving and reshaping the Emirate's identity. Through a close analysis of lyrical themes, performance techniques, and audience interactions, this work aims to illuminate the multilayered functions of *Kengbe* in its contemporary context. By analyzing these performances through the lens of performance theory and cultural studies, this research also interrogates how *Kengbe* embodies shared memory and sustains traditional values, particularly in relation to gender, praise-singing, and communal participation. It draws attention to the resilience and adaptability of indigenous oral traditions even in the face of societal transformation.

The inquiry is framed by a qualitative methodology that combines ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with tradition bearers, and close readings of selected performances. Live events were observed and recorded across various locations in Ilorin, offering insights into not only the musicality but also the performative strategies employed by *Kengbe* artists. These were supplemented by a review of relevant literature and transcribed narratives to allow for a holistic interpretation. This chapter thus sets the stage for a deeper engagement with the tradition of *Kengbe*, not just as a form of entertainment, but as a living cultural phenomenon that continues to evolve, challenge, and affirm the values of the Ilorin Emirate.

The African Concept of Sociocultural Resonance

The African concept of sociocultural resonance is intrinsically linked to the interconnectedness of individuals, communities, and cultural traditions, creating a shared sense of identity, meaning, and belonging. It is a dynamic process where social values, customs, and historical experiences interact to sustain cultural continuity and collective consciousness. This

concept is deeply embedded in African worldviews, which prioritize communal relationships over individualism, emphasizing the importance of interdependence, reciprocity, and ancestral wisdom.

Several scholars have explored aspects of sociocultural resonance in African contexts. Archie Mafeje (2001), a prominent Pan-African intellectual, critically examined the decolonization of African identity and the impact of Western-centric anthropology on African societies. He emphasized the need to remove imperialist and Western ideals from African anthropology to authentically represent African social realities (Mafeje, 2001). This reflects sociocultural resonance by emphasizing the importance of maintaining cultural authenticity in the face of external distortions.

Molefi Kete Asante (2003), a leading figure in Afrocentricity, advocates for centering African experiences and perspectives in scholarly discourse. His work emphasizes the importance of cultural and historical contexts in understanding African identities, promoting a framework that resonates with African cultural heritage. Through this, he encourages Africans to connect deeply with their own histories rather than rely on external definitions (Asante, 2003). Similarly, in On the Postcolony, Achille Mbembe (2001) analyzes contemporary African social realities, exploring themes of power, identity, and the legacy of colonialism. He highlights how African societies absorb, resist, and adapt to outside influences while holding onto their cultural roots (Mbembe, 2001). Paulin Hountondji, in African Philosophy: Myth and Reality (1983), critiques the external construction of African identities and emphasizes the value of indigenous knowledge systems. His analysis underscores the necessity of preserving these systems as central to sociocultural resonance (Hountondji, 1983).

Together, these scholars provide valuable insights into how African societies navigate cultural identity, historical influences, and external forces. Their work underscores the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge, resisting cultural erasure, and fostering continuous connections between past traditions and contemporary realities.

Key Aspects of Sociocultural Resonance in Africa

i. Ubuntu and Interconnectedness

Ubuntu is a foundational African philosophy emphasizing communal life and mutual care. Rooted in the Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanness," it is often encapsulated by the proverb "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" - "a person is a person through other persons" (Tutu, 1999). Philosopher Thaddeus Metz (2007) describes Ubuntu as the pursuit of a genuinely human way of life, where human excellence is achieved through relationships and communal harmony.

Mbigi (2005) highlights community as the cornerstone of African thought, while Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) define Ubuntu as "a collection of knowledges, values and practices that Black people of Africa view as making people more human" (p. 84). Mogobe Ramose (2002) goes further to assert that Ubuntu entails an ethical injunction to "become" human through social participation and moral commitment.

ii. Oral Tradition and Collective Memory

Oral traditions including proverbs, folktales, songs, and rituals, serve as vehicles for transmitting moral teachings, histories, and communal values. UNESCO (2003) asserts that oral traditions are crucial for preserving collective memory and ensuring cultural continuity. In African contexts, oral tradition is tied to identity and memory. Oduyoye (2001) and Ukpong (2006) argue that oral narratives function as repositories of lived experience, shaping cultural and religious life. Scholars like Maluleke (2005) emphasize the importance of oral methods in constructing inclusive, community-driven archives. The role of oral tradition is further reinforced by Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1994), who notes its capacity to adapt and remain relevant across generations. These practices strengthen sociocultural resonance by ensuring that communal memory is both preserved and dynamically reshaped.

iii. Spiritual and Ancestral Connection

Spirituality and ancestral reverence are foundational to African cosmologies. Ancestors are viewed as moral guides and intermediaries between the spiritual and physical worlds. According to Olupona (2014), ancestors are believed to "bestow good fortune and act as custodians of moral order" (p. 89). African spirituality permeates everyday life, with rituals, agriculture, and communal events imbued with spiritual significance (Mbiti, 1990). This holistic integration nurtures a collective identity and moral compass rooted in the wisdom of the ancestors.

iv. Communal Decision Making and Participation

Many African communities have historically engaged in participatory and egalitarian decision-making processes. The Igbo, for example, practice an acephalous political structure, relying on consensus and communal dialogue (Afigbo, 1981). Contemporary resource management studies affirm that active community participation enhances sustainability and governance outcomes (Ostrom, 1990). These systems of inclusion reinforce communal responsibility and are vital to sociocultural resilience.

v. Music, Dance, and Expressive Arts

African expressive arts—music, dance, storytelling, and visual forms—serve as central conduits of sociocultural resonance. Music and dance are deeply rooted in communal life, accompanying rituals, social commentary, and everyday activities. Akin Euba (1990) categorizes African music into diverse types and highlights its natural presence throughout life's stages. Albert Oikelome (2013) emphasizes the inseparable relationship between music and dance, while Modesto Amegago (2011) frames these forms as integrated arts that include voice, movement, and visual expression. These expressive arts are not merely aesthetic; they are pedagogical tools for transmitting values, narrating histories, and enacting social critique. Through them, communities adapt and reaffirm their identities in contemporary contexts.

Praise and Recognition of Individuals in Ilorin's Kengbe

Praise and recognition are integral to African oral traditions and social performance systems. In Ilorin's Kengbe tradition, these expressions serve not merely as compliments but

as performative tools of social ordering, value reinforcement, and identity affirmation. As part of the broader Yoruba-influenced Islamic oral aesthetic, Kengbe utilizes praise as a rhetorical and poetic device for honoring individuals, solidifying their social standing, and establishing communal memory. In theoretical terms, praise-singing, or oríkì in Yoruba, can be understood as a performative speech act that enacts what it names (Austin, 1962). It is not simply descriptive—it is constitutive. Praise not only affirms status but helps construct and stabilize identity in the public sphere. In the Kengbe chant examined here, this function is foregrounded through the public recognition of Isiaka, son of Aliagan.

The distinction between praise and recognition is worth examining in this context. Praise tends to be expressive and often momentary—used to extol virtues, actions, or appearances. Recognition, however, denotes a broader and more enduring acknowledgment of social contribution, moral character, or lineage. In Kengbe performance, these two elements are often entwined: praise operates as a medium through which recognition is made visible and culturally legitimate.

The chant excerpt below (Appendix 1A, lines 20–50) provides a vivid example:

Lílé: Olú yé	20	**Lead Chanter:** My fellow
Se engbo hùn mi,		Are you listening to me,
ọmọ réré ni Isiaka óò		Isiaka is good man
Omo réré ni Isiaka o		Isiaka is a good man
Olórí asiki ×2		Leader of destiny x2
Odára	25	He is good
Odára l'eniyan,		He is a good man,
Isiaka omo Aliagan óò		Isiaka the son of Aliagan
Ègbè: Olú yé		**Chorus:** My fellow
Se engbo hùn mi,		Are you listening to me,
ọmọ réré ni Isiaka óò	30	Isiaka is a good man
Omo réré ni Isiaka o		Isiaka is a good man
Olórí asiki ×2		Leader of destiny x2
Odára		He is good
Odára l'eniyan		He is a good man
Isiaka omo aliagan óò é	35	Isiaka the son of Aliagan
Lílé: Olú yé		**Lead Chanter**: My fellow
Se engbo hùn mi,		Are you listening to me,
ọmọ réré ni Isiaka óò		Isiaka is a good man
Omo réré ni Isiaka o		Isiaka is a good man
Olórí asiki ×2	40	Leader of destiny x2
Odára		He is good
Odára ọ'réwà,		He is good and handsome,
Adisa omo Aliagan óò é		Adisa son of Aliagan
Ègbè: Olú yé		**Chorus**: My fellow
Se engbo hùn mi,	45	Are you listening to me,

ọmọ réré ni Isiaka óò		Isiaka is a good man
Omo réré ni Isiaka o		Isiaka is a good man
Olórí asiki ×2		Leader of destiny x2
Odára		He is good
Odára ọ'réwà,	50	He is good and handsome,
Adisa omo Aliagan óò é		Adisa son of Aliagan

This excerpt functions as a panegyric—a genre of oral poetry designed to eulogize and honor. The lead chanter (lílé) initiates the call with "Olú yé" (My fellow), signaling a collective witnessing of the praise performance. This invocation is a strategic act of communal engagement, drawing the audience into shared affirmation.

The repeated line, "Ọmọ réré ni Isiaka óò" (Isiaka is a good man), becomes a performative refrain—affirming moral and social virtue while invoking a sense of reliability, dignity, and communal pride. The use of repetition here performs a dual function: it emphasizes the praised individual's worth while embedding the praise into collective memory. This aligns with Ruth Finnegan's (2012) view that African oral performances are not merely for entertainment but serve as "public texts" of cultural memory and values.

Further, the designation "Olórí asiki" (Leader of destiny) elevates Isiaka beyond personal virtue to symbolic representation. He is not merely good; he is positioned as a leader, one whose presence and actions shape communal fate. In Ilorin's sociocultural landscape, such language carries deep implications: it validates one's political, spiritual, or genealogical significance. The term "asiki" (destiny) resonates with Yoruba metaphysical beliefs about ayanmo—the spiritual trajectory each individual must fulfill—suggesting that Isiaka embodies a fulfilled or fulfilling destiny.

Moreover, the chant highlights physical and aesthetic attributes: "Odára ọ'réwà" (He is good and handsome). In this, the chant reflects Yoruba holistic understandings of personhood (iwa) that integrate character (iwa rere) with appearance and comportment. As Olajubu (2003) notes, Yoruba communities often value a fusion of moral, spiritual, and aesthetic excellence in their conceptualization of leadership and virtue.

By stating "Isiaka omo Aliagan óò" repeatedly, the chanter not only honors Isiaka but also anchors his identity within a genealogical frame. In African praise traditions, reference to one's patrilineage (oríkì baba) serves to legitimize status and trace moral legacy. The mention of Aliagan reinforces historical continuity, familial prestige, and intergenerational recognition. Kengbe, as exemplified here, thus operates as a culturally encoded performance genre in which recognition is embedded in linguistic poetics, performative repetition, and communal participation. The use of call-and-response between the lílé and ègbè (chorus) underscores the collective agreement of the audience, which is crucial for authenticating recognition. Recognition, in this sense, is not merely given—it is ritually performed and communally affirmed.

This aligns with performance theorist Victor Turner's (1982) notion of "social drama," where public rituals like praise-singing serve to negotiate social roles and reaffirm cohesion.

Similarly, Richard Bauman (1977) underscores how performance is a mode of cultural expression that validates social identities and communal norms.

In Ilorin's sociocultural context, where Islamic values interface with Yoruba traditions, such praise performances also reveal how moral virtue, aesthetic appeal, and religious standing are fused in articulating personhood. The Kengbe chant, therefore, serves as both social commentary and political validation—praising not merely to admire but to place the individual within a structured matrix of value, power, and belonging.

Moral Guidance and Social Responsibility in Ilorin's Kengbe

Moral guidance and social responsibility are foundational principles embedded within African oral traditions, serving as mechanisms through which communities promote ethical behavior, regulate social relations, and transmit cultural values. In Ilorin's Kengbe tradition, these principles are not merely abstract ideals; they are operationalized through poetic expression, performance aesthetics, and communal participation. As part of its pedagogical and performative function, Kengbe songs serve as ethical blueprints, offering counsel, warnings, and instructions on appropriate conduct within the community. Moral guidance in this context refers to culturally sanctioned advice or principles that help individuals navigate complex life situations, discern right from wrong, and act in ways that align with communal norms. It draws from religious, philosophical, and traditional belief systems, often manifesting in proverbs, chants, and lyrical poetry. In Kengbe performances, moral lessons are delivered through metaphor, repetition, and direct address, thereby enabling performers to function as both entertainers and social reformers.

Social responsibility, on the other hand, implies an individual's or group's obligation to act in ways that benefit the wider society. In the Ilorin context, this includes respecting elders, fulfilling family obligations, and upholding community values, especially within institutions such as marriage. The interconnectedness of both concepts is reflected in how Kengbe artists use their platform to shape collective ethics, reinforce accountability, and social cohesion. Ilorin society places a high premium on these values, integrating them deeply into cultural and religious life. As revealed through oral interviews and textual analysis, Kengbe performers play an instrumental role in reinforcing these ideals during public gatherings especially wedding ceremonies, where songs serve as didactic tools. In an oral interview conducted on October 3, 2024, Alhaji Lanre emphasized:

> The Kengbe lyrics itself is message! Not just any random singing it's message. Once you listen, you'll know they're passing message to the wife and to the family she's entering into (the groom's). And likewise to those attending the wedding. They warn the bride on how to behave herself in her new home, to be a good ambassador of her family. After the warning comes the advice and that's still part of the chant.

Similarly, Mrs. Aminat, interviewed on September 14, 2024, noted "in the olden days, the song was something that women used to entertain themselves, but it was also a form of admonishment and warning to the bride." An example of this guidance is found in Appendix H, lines 671–682, where the lead chanter warns young women against abortion, framing it not only as a moral transgression but as a spiritually perilous act:

Lílé: Eyìn ẹlẹgbẹ mi kékèké		**Lead chanter**: You my junior colleagues
Abé be tan Mọfe b'eyin		I want to deeply beg you
Te ba lóyún Ema má ṣe		Do not abort a pregnancy
Àti seyun lati lọrùn		Because abortion is a call for death
Ati lọrùn làti wò iná ọ	675	And a death for such is hell fire
Ìdí òrò rẹ ayé lè o		This is the truth, life is hard
Ègbè: Eyìn ẹlẹgbẹ mi kékèké		**Chorus**: You my junior colleagues
Abé be tan Mọfe b'eyin		I want to deeply beg you
Te ba lóyún Ema má ṣe		Do not abort a pregnancy
Àti seyun lati lọrùn	680	Because abortion is a call for death
Ati lọrùn làti wò iná ọ		And a death for such is hell fire
Ìdí òrò rẹ ayé lè o		This is the truth, life is hard

This excerpt underscores the pedagogical role of Kengbe in moral instruction. The use of direct address ("Eyìn ẹlẹgbẹ mi kékèké") personalizes the message, while the stark imagery of death and hellfire invokes spiritual consequences to dissuade listeners from abortion. Furthermore, the line "Ìdí òrò rẹ ayé lè o" ("This is the truth, life is hard") shifts the tone from judgment to empathy—acknowledging the socio-economic factors that may influence such decisions, yet still affirming moral standards.

The Kengbe tradition also articulates social responsibility within the institution of marriage. In lines 713–745, performers offer both men and women moral guidance on their roles, obligations, and expectations, using the wedding setting as a critical moment of communal instruction:

Ègbè: Ìyàwó dùn losikin óò		**Chorus**: Marriage is very sweet
Ọkọ tún mi gbè èyí wumi o		Can we re do it because it's fantastic
Ọkọ ti ìyàwó ọjọ ẹni	715	The husband and wife of today
Èbá rayin gbè t'ifẹ t'ifẹ		Leave together with love
Kesi fi owo so'wopo so tiye		And be united in all
Lílé: Ìwòìyàwó ọjọ ẹni		**Leadchanter**: you the wife of today
Àti lọkọ ṣe pèlé pèlé		To have husband requires patience
Má fí ọkọ silẹ ṣe iranu ló	720	Don't leave husband at home and start promiscuity
Ki oma ba kabamo bọ di ola		So that you won't regret it later
Ègbè: Ìwò ìyàwó ọjọ ẹni		**Chorus**: You the wife of today
Àti lọkọ ṣe pèlé pèlé		To have husband requires patience
Má fí ọkọ silẹ ṣe iranu ló		Don't leave husband at home and start promiscuity
Ki oma ba kabamo bọ di ola	725	So that you won't regret it later

Lílé: Ọkọ tún ra mú òrùn wó ló	**Lead chanter**: You the husband, ready yourself well
Àti gbè ìyàwó kò tó rọ fà	To have a wife is not the problem
Àti fi owò silẹ ló sòrò	To drop money is the problem
Kosi òwò kosi oro fún obìnrin	No money no talks for woman
Te ipa máṣe ki oma ṣe ọlẹ	Be hardworking
Kò lé ba sike ìyàwó rẹ	So that you can take care of your wife
Ègbè: Ọkọ tún ra mú òrùn wó ló	**Chorus**: You the husband, ready yourself well
Àti gbè ìyàwó kò tó rọ fà	To have a wife is not the problem
Àti fi owò silẹ ló sòrò	To drop money is the problem
Kosi òwò kosi oro fún obìnrin	No money no talks for woman
Te ipa máṣe ki oma ṣe ọlẹ	Be hardworking
Kò lé ba sike ìyàwó rẹ	So that you can take care of your wife
Lílé: Ọdòwòré, kúlúmbú ọmọ elépo	**Leadchanter**: It is left to you now my dear
Ọdòwòré kúlúmbú ọmọ álátá	It is left to you now my dear
Ìyá ọkọ dówóré	Your mother in-law is left to you
Bàbá ọkọ dówóré	Your father in-law is left to you
Ègbè: Ọdòwòré, kúlúmbú ọmọ elépo	**Chorus**: It is left to you now my dear
Ọdòwòré kúlúmbú ọmọ álátá	It is left to you now my dear
Ìyá ọkọ dówóré	Your mother in-law is left to you
Bàbá ọkọ dówóré	Your father in-law is left to you

This segment of the performance encodes moral lessons within culturally resonant metaphors and expressions. The wife is encouraged to embody patience and loyalty, while the husband is admonished to be a responsible provider. These are not merely private marital expectations but reflect communal ethics, the assumption that individual behavior impacts familial honor and social stability. The transition to in-law responsibility symbolizes the expansion of marital duties into the wider kinship network, reinforcing the idea that marriage in Ilorin is a communal institution bound by reciprocal obligations.

Through performance, Kengbe serves as a dynamic space for moral instruction and the reinforcement of social responsibility. The strategic deployment of metaphor, repetition, and direct address in song lyrics enables performers to engage audiences in ethical contemplation while preserving cultural identity. This tradition reflects the broader sociocultural logic of Ilorin society, where oral art forms do not merely entertain but educate, correct, and sustain the moral fabric of the community.

Communal Identity and Social Stratification in Ilorin's Kengbe

The Kengbe musical tradition in Ilorin offers a unique cultural lens through which communal identity and social stratification are not only represented but ritually enacted. Communal identity refers to the collective sense of belonging that binds members of a social group through shared practices, values, history, and cultural symbols. In Ilorin, a city marked by the intersection of Yoruba, Fulani, and Islamic traditions, this identity is not monolithic but layered, integrating linguistic diversity, religious devotion, and performative heritage. Kengbe performances, typically led by women wielding the calabash, serve as dynamic sites where communal belonging is affirmed through collective memory, praise-singing, and the reenactment of lineage and honor. The recurrent invocation of "Nínú Ìlọrin" (In Ilorin) and "Ìlù olówó pẹlú ọjọgbọn" (The city of the rich and professors) in the chants not only celebrate the city's expansiveness and prestige but reinforce a shared civic pride that unites diverse identities under a singular sociocultural emblem.

The articulation of communal identity in these chants is not abstract; it is materialized through poetic enumeration of elite virtues and shared values. References to Ilorin's wealth, academic excellence, and philosophical depth speak to the sociocultural aspirations of the community, where success is associated not only with economic prosperity but also with moral wisdom and educational attainment. Through repetitive call-and-response patterns, the lílé (lead chanter) and ègbè (chorus) reinforce collective consciousness and inscribe communal memory into the public domain. This ritual of naming and praising creates what Richard Bauman calls a "performance frame", a space wherein identity is actively constructed and legitimated through aesthetic and cultural means.

Lílé: Wasir alakọkọ.		**Leadchanter**: The first "Wasiri"
Ajeigbe Gobiri óò	325	Ajeigbe Gobir
Bàbá kó pa		Baba impacted
Bàbá kópa tó pọ̀ ni ngeri.		Baba impacted Ilorin greatly
Ló oba ìlù fi yàn wọn		Triggered the king to appoint him
Ègbè: Se ẹri pé wọn gbin iyànjú ×2		**Chorus**: You see that they tried ×2
Ìkópa t'oyẹ	330	The Great impacts
Ìkópa t'oyẹ fún aláwùjọ		The Great impacts they have on the people
Ló oba ìlù fi Yàn wọn		Triggered the king to appoint them
Lílé: Saadu alanamu		**LeadChanter**: Saad Alanamu
Wasiri ẹlẹẹkeji rẹ		The second "Wasiri"
Wọn kò pá to ye	335	He impacted
Wọn kópa t'oyẹ to po ni ngeri		He impacted Ilorin greatly
Ló ọba ìlù fi Yàn wọn.		Triggered the king to appoint him
Ègbè: Se ẹri pé wọn gbin iyànjú ×2		**Chorus**: You see that they tried ×2
Ìkópa t'oyẹ		The Great impacts
Ìkópa t'oyẹ fún aláwùjọ	340	The Great impacts they have on the people

Ló oba ìlù fi Yàn wọn	Triggered the king to appoint them
Lílé: Olusola Saraki	**Lead chanter**: Olusola Saraki
Wasiri ẹlẹẹkẹta ni óò	The third "Wasiri"
Bàbá dára	Baba is nice
Bàbá kópa t'oyẹ ni ngeri	Baba impacted Ilorin greatly
Ló oba ìlù fi Yàn wọn	Triggered the king to appoint him
Ègbè: Se ẹri pé wọn gbin iyànjú ×2	**Chorus**: You see that they tried ×2
Ìkópa t'oyẹ	The Great impacts
Ìkópa t'oyẹ fún aláwùjọ	The Great impacts they have on the people
Ló oba ìlù fi Yàn wọn	Triggered the king to appoint them
Lílé: Bukola Saraki	**Lead chanter**: Bukola Saraki
Wasiri eleekerin rẹ óò	The fourth "Wasiri"
O sì iṣẹ gan	He worked greatly
O sì iṣẹ gan fún ìlù àwa	He worked greatly for us
Ló ọba ìlù fi Yàn wọn	Triggered the king to appoint him
Ègbè: Se ẹri pé wọn gbin iyànjú ×2	**Chorus**: You see that they tried ×2
Ìkópa t'oyẹ	The Great impacts
Ìkópa t'oyẹ fún aláwùjọ	The Great impacts they have on the people
Ló oba ìlù fi Yàn wọn	Triggered the king to appoint them
Lílé: Madawaki ìlù Ìlọrin ×2	**Lead chanter**: Madawaki in Ilorin
Ọlọlá lò ma jè oye yi	The rich are often the appointee
Olówó ló ma jè oye yi óò	The wealthy are often the appointee
Ki ọlọhun kò pẹlú gbógbo wà	May God help us all
Ègbè: Madawaki ìlù Ìlọrin ×2	**Chorus**: Madawaki in Ilorin
Ọlọlá lò ma jè oye yi	The rich are often the appointee
Olówó ló ma jè oye yi óò	The wealthy are often the appointee
Ki ọlọhun kò pẹlú gbógbo wà	May God help us all

In parallel, the performance simultaneously enacts a vivid tableau of social stratification, where hierarchies of power, wealth, and lineage are ritually affirmed. Social stratification in Ilorin, as depicted in the Kengbe chant, is embedded within traditional structures of leadership and reinforced through hereditary privilege and economic status. The chant's detailed listing of officeholders such as the Waziri, Madawaki, and Turaki, including the Saraki political dynasty, reveals a genealogy of power that is both patriarchal and elitist. Notably, the recurrent phrase "Olówó ló ma jè oyè yi óò" (The wealthy are the appointees) signifies an entrenched meritocracy rooted in affluence and elite status. Leadership, in this context, is not simply

earned through individual virtue but inherited and sustained through financial capital and social prominence as seen in the following lines:

Lílé: Madawaki alakọkọ	**Lead Chanter**: The first "Madawaki"
Ègbè: Se ẹn gbo mi	**Chorus**: Are you listening
Lílé: Yahaya orí oko	**Leadchanter**: Yahaya Ori-Okoh
Ègbè: Seẹn gbo mi	**Chorus:** Are you listening
Lílé: Madawaki ẹlẹẹkeji.	**Lead chanter:** The second "Madawaki"
Ègbè: Se ẹn gbo mi	**Chorus**: Are you listening
Lílé: Justice Saidu yahaya	**Lead chanter:** Justice Saidu Yahaya
Ègbè: Se ẹn gbo mi	**Chorus**: Are you listening
Lílé: Yakubu Garuba gobiri	**Lead chanter:** Yakub Garba Gobir
Ègbè: Se ẹn gbo mi	**Chorus**: Are you listening
Lílé: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Lead chanter:** Turaki in Ilorin
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Lead chanter:** Turaki in Ilorin
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Olola lò ma jè oye yi óò	**Lead chanter**: The wealthy are the appointee
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Olówó ló ma jè oye yi óò	**Lead Chanter**: The rich are the appointee
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Gbajúmò ló ma jè oye yi óò	**Lead chanter**: The celebrities are the appointee
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Eni àkókò to jé oye yi óò	**Lead Chanter**: The first appointee of this post
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Lanrewaju Buremo óò	**Lead chanter**: Olanrewaju Ibrahim
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Sanni Òkín ma ma ni	**Leadchanter**: Sanni Okin
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Eni Kejì tò tún jẹ́ oyè yi óò	**LeadChanter**: The second appointee of this post
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Olusola Saraki óò	**LeadChanter**: Olusola Saraki
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Eni kẹta to tún jẹ́ oyè yi óò	**Lead Chanter**: The third person is
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Bukola Saraki óò	**Lead Chanter**: Bukola Saraki
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: Eni kẹrin to tún jẹ́ oyè yi óò	**LeadChanter**: The fourth person is
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin
Lílé: soliu musitofa óò	**LeadChanter**: Soliu Mustapha
Ègbè: Turaki ni Ìlọrin	**Chorus**: Turaki in Ilorin

Moreover, the chant provides ethnographic evidence of how symbolic capital is circulated and consolidated through public performance. Leaders are celebrated not only for their personal achievements but also for their contributions to community development, thereby justifying their appointments by the "oba ìlù" (king of the town). This aligns with Victor Turner's theory of "social drama," where public rituals serve to reaffirm societal roles, resolve tensions, and maintain equilibrium within the social structure. In reinforcing titles and ancestry, the Kengbe chant inscribes leadership within a sacred continuum, where authority is sanctified through performative repetition and collective validation.

Further, by emphasizing intergenerational transmission of honor, "Afe kì omo kékèké mó wọn" (We want the small children to know them), the performance functions as a pedagogical tool, shaping the moral imagination and social expectations of younger generations. This intergenerational consciousness ensures the perpetuation of social norms and cultural hierarchies. The praise of titled individuals as "Fari Ìlọrin" (the pride of Ilorin) underscores the symbolic role of leaders as cultural embodiments of the city's ideals. Their prominence, then, is not merely personal but representational, serving as mirrors of collective aspiration and identity. Ultimately, Kengbe operates not only as a musical form but as a living archive of Ilorin's social organization. It dramatizes the city's layered hierarchy, celebrates communal values, and preserves ancestral memory through performative poetics. In doing so, it reveals how oral traditions remain vital instruments for negotiating power, belonging, and continuity in African societies undergoing rapid transformation.

Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations

This study has critically examined the sociocultural significance of *Kengbe* performances within the Ilorin Emirate, highlighting their central role as performative instruments of cultural memory, moral instruction, social regulation, and identity formation. Far from being mere entertainment, *Kengbe* emerges as a dynamic oral tradition that embodies indigenous epistemologies and reflects the interface between tradition and modernity, ethics and aesthetics, individual identity and communal values. Drawing from ethnographic observation, textual analysis, and oral interviews, the research demonstrates how *Kengbe* performances communicate values such as integrity, humility, patience, diligence, and respect for hierarchy; values which remain foundational to Ilorin's socio-cultural space.

One of the study's key findings is that *Kengbe* performances serve as both symbolic affirmations of communal identity and structured enactments of social stratification. Through the ritualized invocation of place, ancestry, and honorific titles, *Kengbe* chants reinforce a collective memory and civic pride among the Ilorin people. Simultaneously, these performances highlight the hierarchical structuring of society by emphasizing wealth, lineage, and political authority as determinants of social mobility and recognition. The sequential listing of elite figures such as the Waziri, Madawaki, and Turaki reveals a hereditary and economically mediated pattern of leadership selection, suggesting that *Kengbe* both reflects and reinforces the existing power structures within the Emirate. The tradition's pedagogical value is further evident in its use as a medium for intergenerational transmission of knowledge, particularly in

marital contexts, where it instructs brides and grooms on social responsibility, ethical behavior, and communal expectations.

In light of these findings, the study recommends an urgent investment in the documentation and preservation of *Kengbe* performances through digital archiving, audio-visual recordings, and ethnographic cataloguing. Cultural policymakers, local institutions, and academic researchers should collaborate to create accessible repositories that safeguard this rich oral heritage. Furthermore, *Kengbe* should be incorporated into formal educational curricula, especially within literature, performance studies, and civic education, to promote cultural awareness and critical engagement among younger generations.

Additionally, community-led cultural festivals and heritage programs should feature *Kengbe* performances as core elements to revitalize public interest and encourage intercultural dialogue. Special emphasis should be placed on supporting female performers through mentorship schemes, performance grants, and capacity-building initiatives that ensure the sustainability of women's participation in cultural preservation.

Finally, future scholarship should continue to explore *Kengbe* as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. Approaches drawing from performance theory, ethnomusicology, gender studies, and African political anthropology will not only deepen our understanding of *Kengbe*'s sociocultural functions but also uncover the ways in which oral performance traditions in postcolonial African societies simultaneously resist, reproduce, and negotiate the dynamics of power, identity, and memory.

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