

EXPLORING FEMININITY IN TRADITIONAL DRUM CONSTRUCTION: ALOYINLAPA PERSPECTIVE

Tèmítópé Olúwatósín Pópóla
Department of Music
Lagos State University of Education
Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos, Nigeria
Email: Email.popoolato@lasued.edu.ng
&

Precious Samuel Ayodele
Department of Music
Lagos State University of Education
Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos, Nigeria
Email: Email.ayodeleps@lasued.edu.ng

Abstract

Existing scholarly studies have largely focused on the construction and production of traditional Yoruba drums from the village perspective among the *Àyàn* family lineage, usually dominated by men. Historically, in traditional Yorùbá society, women are restricted from participating in the construction of traditional drums due to the patriarchal ideology and mythology of Yorùbá tradition. This tradition has led to a significant setback for women in the construction and production of Traditional Yorùbá Drums and their practices. This study examines women's participation in the construction and production of Yorùbá traditional drums, such as Bata drums, Dùndún drums, and Sakara drums in urban spaces. Moreover, the study identifies the materials used and the teaching and learning methods in *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute, Lagos. The study relies on data from *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute, Lagos, focusing on female traditional drummer's technologist, using ethnographic techniques. The study argues that the involvement of women in the construction and production of traditional drums in urban areas has yet to be addressed despite their relevance to the sustainability of the Yorùbá traditional knowledge system in contemporary Yorùbá Society. Findings revealed that the emergence of established training centres such as Aloyinlapa African Drumming Institute in Lagos has created an avenue for women to learn the construction and production of drums, for cultural, social, and economic empowerment. In conclusion, stakeholders, including the Ministry of Women Affairs, should embrace this initiative and collaborate with established training centres to empower more women in the construction and production of traditional drums for the preservation and transmission of the knowledge system from one future generation to another and to avoid gender discrimination.

Keywords: Traditional, Yorùbá, Aloyinlapa, Construction, and Production

Introduction

The construction and production of African drums varies from one region to another, however in southwest Nigeria, among the Yorùbá ethnic group, the construction and production of traditional drums are within the confines of the *Àyàn* family lineage, dominated by men due to Yorùbá ideology and mythology. Over time, ethnomusicologists, music scholars, and music enthusiasts in Africa and beyond have raised opinions on the dearth of research and exclusion of the female gender in traditional drumming practices, which include the art of playing, construction, and production of traditional drums in Nigeria. The patriarchal ideology of the traditional Yorùbá society is communal in nature. The gender discrimination, especially among the Yoruba ethnic group, started right from birth, as preference is been given to a male child as the expense of a female child. In most cases female gender are vulnerable to vices, and negative treatment with stereotypes and biased judgments that undermine their potential, capabilities, and career trajectories. Samuel (2014), affirms that this is has a result of the patriarchal nature of Yorùbá society, which is generally expressed in asymmetrical power relations between men and women, as evident in several of its traditional institutions and practices, such as kingship, masquerades, and cults''(P.7).

Therefore, Yorùbá belief system sees women as a supporting system rather than a contestation with men, which over time undermined their capacity in the social, economic, political, and musical landscape. More so, women are not allow to play heavy traditional drums or involved in their construction and production, even though they sing and play light instruments like rattles and gongs, and also dance freely at any social gatherings without any inhabitation. This is not to undermined their capacity, however the restriction is put in place to allow them focus on family matters while the men presuppose work . Omibiyi-Obidike (1989), asserts that

''Female musicians in Nigeria are mostly singers, since drumming or playing any traditional instruments apart from rattles is usually exclusive to men. She also notes that, female musicians have distinguished themselves as soloists as well as leaders of singing and dancing groups and have operated as performers in the various categories of music'' (p.103).

Nevertheless, the participation of women in the construction of drums in contemporary Yoruba society has become increasingly evident, and their contributions have not only

shaped the musical landscape but served as a catalyst for empowerment and social change. Ajay (1987) in Sasan (2014) states that “drumming is an art that requires skill and perfection that cannot be attained without adequate training” (p.40). In the case of *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute, the training of women involves many activities, such as learning the art of playing traditional drums, understanding the drum’s language and rhythmic pattern, the maintenance of drums, constructions, and the production of new drums.

The aim of this paper is to recognize the artistic innovations displayed by women in the construction of traditional drums, and underscores their significance and creative capacity in the sustainability of cultural heritage and in fostering social cohesion through the training in Aloyinlapa African Drumming Institute. The specific objective is to ascertain the relevance of the training to their musical careers and economic empowerment in the urban space of Lagos. This study relies on data from the female participants in the training using ethnographic techniques, such as in-depth interviews (IDI), participant observation (PO), and observation methods (OM). Through these methods, data were documented on the materials used in the construction and production of Bata and Dundun drums, and also the Biographical Accounts and lived experiences participants were sought.

The involvement of women in the construction and production of traditional drums in urban areas has yet to be addressed despite their relevance to the sustainability of the Yorùbá traditional knowledge system in contemporary times. Hence, this paper is an attempt to break the silence and bring to the limelight the women's participation in the construction and production of traditional drums in the urban space of Lagos, using *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute as a paradigm. This study argues that the patriarchal notion of Yoruba society forbidding women in traditional drumming systems such as playing and construction of traditional drums are no longer relevant in contemporary Yoruba society because the training of traditional drummers, which is usually done in the village among the *Àyàn* family lineage, has found its way to the urban space of Lagos through the migration of most traditional drummers who moved from the rural area to the urban centre in search of greener pastures eroded many of such beliefs. Consequently, this phenomenon increases the participation of women in traditional drumming practices reflects a significant shift in gender discrimination, challenging age-long male-dominated traditions and enriching the cultural and musical landscape makes this work significant.

Significant of the study

This study is significant because it focuses specifically on women's involvement in construction and production of Drums from Aloyinlapa perspective. This study close a gap in the existing literature on the traditional Drumming System and inclusion of women in construction and production of traditional drums This study helps to bring out the experiences of women who are involved not only in performance but also in drum making and other aspects of craftsmanship that were traditionally dominated by men. This study will serve as a useful references for students and researchers in African music, genders studies.

Looking at the Aloyinlapa perspective in training women, noticed that women participation in the traditiona Drumming have stepped up beyond singing and dancing and have taken part in playing and making the traditional drums such as Dundun, and Bata Drums. This shows that even in a tradition that has always been dominated by men, women have found their own place in it. This study encourages more women to take part in drumming and drum-making in many societies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by feminist theory. Feminist theory was first propounded by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 in her book *The Second sex*. In that book, De Beauvoir made a very important argument that has shaped the way people think about women and society (till) today. She said that a woman is not born a woman, but rather becomes one. What she meant by this is that the way women behave, the roles they are given, and the things they are not allowed to do are not decided by nature. They are decided by the society and culture that a woman grows up in.

Society teaches women from a young age what they are expected to do and what they are not expected to do. De Beauvoir used this argument to show that the limitations placed on women are not natural or permanent. They are created by people and can therefore be changed.

After De Beauvoir, other scholars continued to develop and use Feminist Theory in different areas. Bell hooks (2000), in her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, used the theory to argue

that feminism is simply about making sure that women are not treated unfairly or denied opportunity. She explained that women should be free to take part in areas of life without being stopped because of their gender.

In the area of African traditional music, scholars have used Feminist theory to examine the position of women. Oludare (2018) used feminist ideas to examine masculinity and femininity in Yoruba traditional musical instruments. He found that even though women were excluded from playing the drums, the instruments themselves were given feminine names and identities. For example, the lead drum in the dundun ensemble is called *iya ilu*, which means mother drum. Oludare (2018) argue that the exclusion of women from drumming was a social decision, not something that the tradition itself demanded. His work shows clearly how Feminist Theory can be used to cover the contradictions and injustices that exist within African musical traditions.

In this study, Feminist Theory is used to understand and explain why women were traditionally not allowed to play or make the talking drum. Just as De Beauvoir argued, the exclusion of women from this tradition was not because women lacked the ability. It was because Yoruba society and its traditions made people believe that drumming was only meant for men.

Feminist Theory also helps this study to explain the changes that are now happening in the tradition, where women are beginning to take part in talking drum performance and craftsmanship. This was not common before, as the tradition had always been seen as belonging to men. However, things are gradually changing, and women are now finding their place in it. This study uses Feminist Theory to look closely at the experience of these women, understanding the challenges they still face, and make sure their contributions to the tradition are recognized, particularly within the Aloyinlapa perspective.

Gender in African Musical Landscape

Gender in Africa, especially among the Yoruba ethnic group, started right from birth, as families prefers a male child over a female one, and some went to the extent of denying their female child quality education, exposing her to inhuman and difficult conditions. In most cases, women's career development is not taken seriously, which makes them vulnerable to vices, and negative treatment with stereotypes and biased judgments that undermine their potential, capabilities, and contribution to society. Nzewi and Galane (2005), in Samuel

(2014), have suggested that African conceptualizations and realities about the musical arts trigger and give meaning to performance, societal action, and discourse. In particular, sex and gender-related issues are critical to the conception and organization of musical ensembles among the Yoruba of Nigeria, largely because gender roles are well articulated in ensembles whose performances are organized in gender relations. In traditional Yoruba society, women are restricted from participating in supposing masculine activities, because of the rigorous activities involved in traditional drumming practices. Finding revealed that women are only restricted not prohibited in the traditionl drumming practices, the restriction is put in place for division of labour whereby women takes care of the home front and the children while men go out to work so as to provide for his wife and family.

Idamoyinbo (2008) asserts

that when our forefathers restricted women from being close or from participating in some rituals and ritual music, or from playing some musical instruments, it is not for evil but for protection. It is for the fact that women are specially created with certain spiritual powers to procreate and to defy; thus, her touch in any form is capable of defying the potency certain traditional medicine, particularly when she is in her period. Most musical-rituals that men perform are intended to protect the family and the entire community from impending danger. If restricting the woman would ensure the efficacy of the protective devices, thereby protect the family it is therefore no evil. (p.22).

More so, the general view about women is that they are a weaker vissles. This phenomenon has led to a significant setback in their endeavors, which by prudence, will be beneficiary to their cultural, social, and economic development. Nevertheless, despite the dearth of knowledge on women involvement in Yoruba traditional drumming practices, new Institutes like the Alóyinlápá African Drumming Institute are opening new ways to engage and preserve Yorùbá drumming practices among the young women, to be trained in the act of drumming, performance, construction, and production of traditional drums in the city of Lagos.

Women's Participation in the Construction of Traditional Drums

The construction and production of traditional African drums are unique skills developed through African knowledge passed down orally from one generation to another. The materials are sorted locally from the soil, woods, meters, animal skin, and other natural resources without any form of Western influence. This agrees with Popoola (2021), who notes that traditional drums are musical instruments made from African resources, usually from nature, materials such as wood, gourds, turtle shells, animal horns, animal skin, tread, and many other materials locally available (p.360). *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute trains participants how to repair drums velums and construct and build a new drum.



Miss Aduni Balogun constructing Omele Bata Drum

In an interview with the key informant, Mr. Akeem Ayantunji *Alóyinlápá* (2023) explains that wood and animal skin are the primary materials used to produce traditional drums, although there are specific woods used to curve for traditional drums, but the most preferred wood is the Omo tree. He also explains that people whose work is to carve out the woods in large quantities, while they buy from them, these people specialize in curving woods alone. This family is known as wood carvers. In other words the process of making drums are in different stages, the wood cutter from the forest, people that carve the wood, the drum maker then buys the already carved wood, animal skin, needle, perforator, and a piece of cloth to build the drum in such as Dundun and Bata drums, and so on.

Miss. Adeoluwa,(2023) affirms that during the constructon of Bàtá and Duṇḍuṇ drums confirms that the training procedure involves steady and gradual exercises that involve participation, observation, imitation, and practice. Explaining the process of training to the researcher, says, in the first instance, the participant learns about the art of drumming, the historical background of the drums, the parts of the traditional drums, and a brief explanation of the material used in construction. Although the training does not take place within the four walls of a school system, it is systematically organized to accommodate participants who are still going to school. One of the trainees who have graduated and was empowered through the training in Aloyinlapa Africa Drumming Institute were also visited Lagos mainland. Miss Oyindamola Adebisi, In an oral interview on the 3rd of October, 2023, explained that she learned to construction of Dundun and Bata drums from Aloyinlapa Institute and After her graduation she was given a certificate which enable her open shoe to repair traditional drums, construct a new drum, and as well sell them. She further said that through the training she has been empowered and using the knowledge for economic purposes.



Fig 2: Oyindamola Adebisi constructing the Dundun drum

Olorunsogo (2019), Olaniyan (1993), and Ogli (2002) posited that music training in the Dundun ensemble is most often through apprenticeship. The trainee must follow the laid down (oral) syllabus of gradual progression from one drum to the other depending on appreciable mastery. This is evident in Aloyinlapa African drumming Institute in which

people are been train in the repairs, construction and production of drum as as apprentice through oral methods. The training follows a systematic approach of indentifying the art and science of the Dundun drum are purely African wisdom, locally developed, with the materials sorted locally without any form of material from the Western world. The materials are usually obtained from the soil, woods, and animals.

Materials used in the construction of traditional drums

The construction and production of African traditional drums are unique skills and wisdom of African ancestors. Popoola (2021) posits that traditional drums are musical instruments made from African resources, usually materials from nature, like wood, gourds, turtle shells, animal horns, animal skin, tread, and many other materials locally available(p.365). In an interview with Oyindamola Adebisi highlighted some materials and tools used to construction and building of traditional drum. The Dundun drum.



Awo ole

This is used as the velum to cover the surface of the wooden hourglass. It is usually obtained from a fetus's animal skill.



Osan Ilu

This is another major material used in the construction of the Dundun drum. It is used as the tension cord. Osan Ilu is made from goat skin and is usually used to control the drum's tone.



Ogan

Ogan is another material used in the construction of the Dundun drum. It is obtained from an animal. Ogan is like tining rob around the leather ring within the surface membrane.

Odo



The wooden resonator accommodates other materials.



Ora Eran

Egi



Tools for construction include;

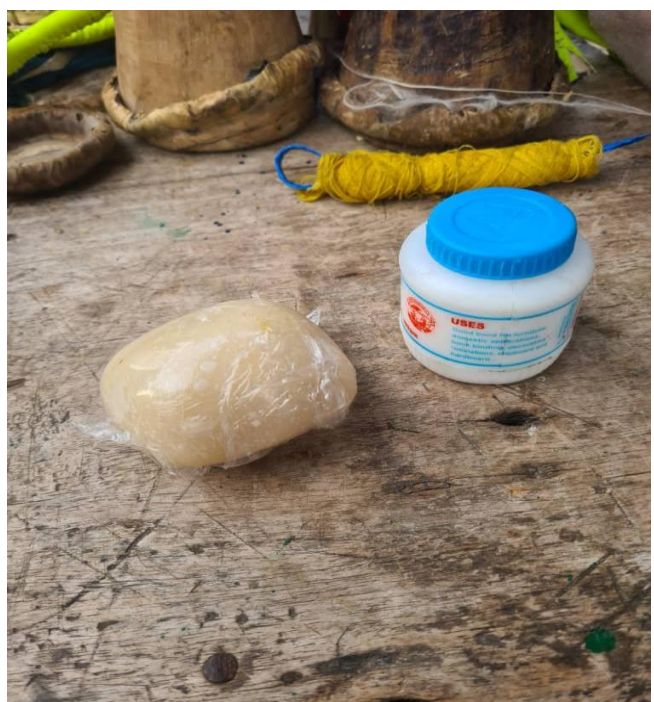
Scissors and Blade; used for cutting



Perforator; used to create a hole



Tread and needle



Fufu and Top bond

Recommendation

Based on the study carried out, the following recommendations are made:

1. Stakeholders including the Ministry of Women Affairs, should embrace this initiative and collaborate with established training centres to empower more women in the construction and production of traditional drums for the preservation and transmission of the knowledge system for future generations.
2. Government and Private individuals should encourage women in acquiring skills in traditional knowledge as it helps their cognitive thinking and affects their social life by acquiring skills and providing job opportunities in vocational careers.
3. Public and private individuals should support the practice, promotion, and preservation of Yoruba traditional Culture through the construction and production tradition drums by women for posterity sake.
4. The public and private organizations should support Aloyinlapa Drumming Institute by providing a bigger venue for the training.
5. Public and private institutions and primary and secondary schools should encourage using traditional drums in schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, women's participation in the construction and production of traditional drums will not only bring about sustainability of cultural heritage but serves as a powerful tool for skill acquisition, social and economic empowerment. which gives them the opportunity and encourages them to pursue their dreams beyond the confines of tradition. The involvement allows women to challenge societal norms, break gender barriers, and gain a sense of self-confidence and pride. This paper explores the contemporary system of traditional drumming practices in the urban space of Lagos among the women in the Aloyinlapa African drumming institute. The study discussed women's involvement not only in the playing of Bata and Dundun drums but also in the repairs and building of new drums for economic empowerment. This paper concludes that the patriarchal notion forbidding women among the

Yoruba people from playing traditional drums is either no longer available or is not effective in the urban spaces of Lagos, or civilization has overwhelmed its effect.

References

- Ajayi, O. O. (2017). Importance of music and the effects of modernity in Nigeria. *Journal of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists*, 13(), 321-334.
- Akoro (2016). Inculcating feminization work role through Indigenous Journal of Nigerian Music Education: No 7, published by Association of Nigerian Musicologists ISSN 1597-2445
- Euba, A.C. (1990). The Yoruba Artistic and Traditional significance of Indigenous musical instruments. *Journal of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists*, 13(), 203-213.
- Samuel K. O. (2012), Yoruba Indigenous Drums: An Aesthetic Symbol In Ecological Ritual of the Yoruba People. *European Scientific Journal*. Edition vol.11, No.5 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431214
- Omibiyi-Obidike, M.A. 1999, "Theory and Practice of Field Investigation in Ethnomusicology" A Handbook of Methodology in African Studies D. Layiwole Editor Ibadan: John Archers Ltd. 141-152.
- Oluwadamilare (2023), Yoruba Indigenous Drums: Music Documentation as Viable Instruments of Information Transfer Towards Sustainable National Development. *Journal of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists*. Edition vol.11, No.14 ISSN: 1597 – 0590
- Omibiyi-Obidike (1989). The Manifestation of the Poetic Aptitude of the Yoruba Dundun within the Framework of Dundun Music. *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts*, 5, 95-110.
- Samuel, K. O. (2012). The interrelationship of Yoruba traditional music's musical and social structure: A perspective on music as an art. *Journal of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists*. 13 (), 190-195.

Oyetoro A. (2019), The Musical Culture of the Oto-Awori Communities, Journal of Arts and Culture and Social Sciences vol 11, No.1 published by Association of Nigerian Musicologists ISSN 1596-0397

Euba (1990), asserts that due to notions of patriarchy that tend to encourage an imbalance of power based on gender, the Yoruba music profession has predominantly foregrounded men at the expense of women” (p.27).