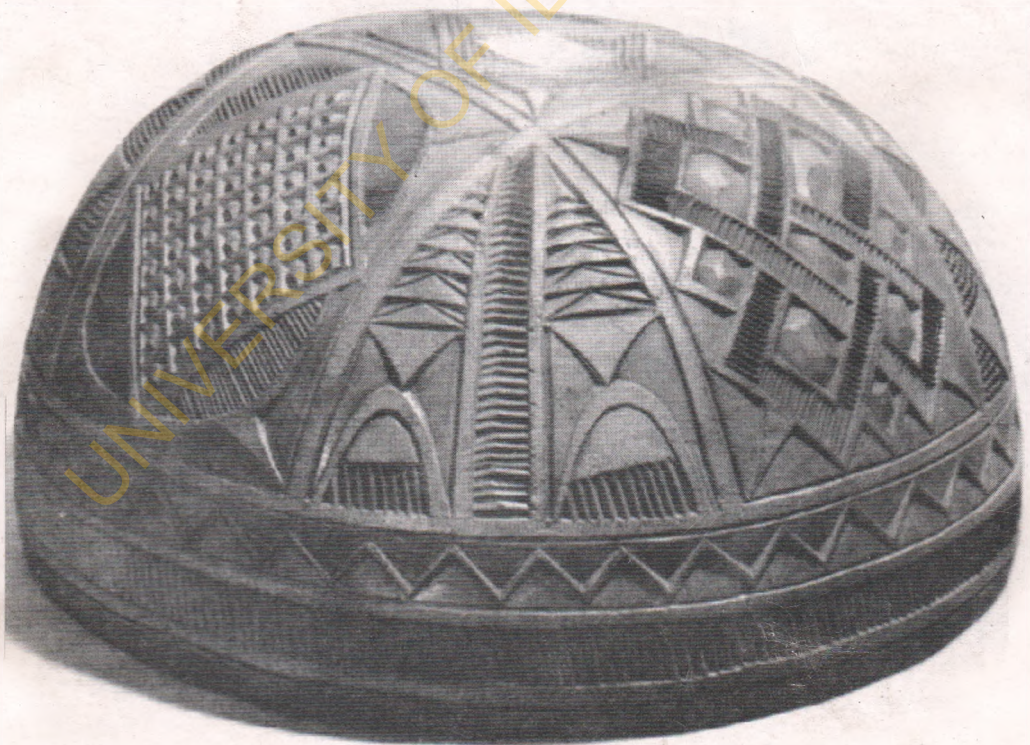


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April & October 2014



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MALE ATTITUDES TO FEMALE DÙNDÚN DRUMMING IN WESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Although *dùndún* drumming has been a stereotypically male-dominated profession, female *dùndún* drumming is emerging as an established musical art form among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria. This paper examines the perception and attitude of Yoruba male drummers to this relatively new development. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from *dùndún* master drummers in selected Yoruba towns and cities. Two divergent viewpoints were expressed by the male drummers. The liberal ones have not only accepted change, but have also given due recognition to female *dùndún* drummers as colleagues and partners in progress. The other group — hardliners and sustainers of stereotypical traditional roles — however cited spiritual and physical reasons, such as taboos and the non-admittance of women into arenas where cultic activities take place, as well as physical inadequacy and lack of stamina due to the rigorous nature of drumming for their non-recognition of female drummers. Besides the fact that the physiological make up of women makes the carriage and playing position of the drum inconvenient, this paper argues that drumming is a profession for both men and women. Also, the success stories of some popular female *dùndún* artistes appear to mirror the shifting paradigm in the societal perception of professions in relation to gender.

Dùndún, the hourglass tension drum ensemble, is the most common and popular of all Yoruba drums. It comprises *iyáàlù*, *isáájú*, *àtélé*, *kẹrìkẹrì* (*aguda*), *kàràngó*, *gàngan*, *àdàm ọ* and *kósó*. Samuel (2012) and Omojola (2012) both observed that of all the membranophonic instruments in Yorubaland, *dùndún* is the most common. The reason for this is that *dùndún* music is performed at most social occasions and *dùndún* drummers are found ordinarily in the course of one's daily activities. The players of the bigger drums such as the *iyáàlù* (lead drum), *isáájú*, *àtélé* and *kẹrìkẹrì* carry the drums over their shoulders by means of a shoulder strap. Each drum is made to rest against the hip-bone of its player, such that the head-to-head line of the tension drum is roughly at an angle of about 45 degrees.



Figure 1. A set of *dùndún* drums

From left: *iyáàlù*, *isáájú*, *kẹrìkẹrì*, *àtèlẹ̀*, *gáangan* and *kàràngó*
 Front row: *gúdúgúdú* (with two black wax spots in the front row).

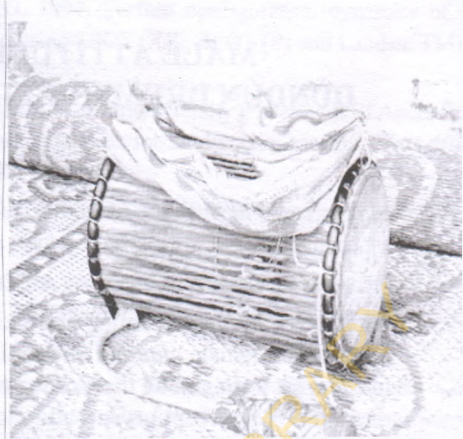


Figure 2. *Gáangan* (An hourglass drum manipulated with the armpit).

The player strikes the surface of the membrane with a beater known as *kọngọ* held in the right hand. The smaller tension drums such as *gáangan*, *àdámọ*, *kàràngó* and *kósó* are usually made to rest under the player's armpit, while another important member of the *dùndún* ensemble is a type of kettledrum known as *gudugudu*. Its player wears the *ọjá* (neck strap) around his neck in a manner that allows the drum to rest on the player's stomach with the head facing outwards.



Figure 3. The playing position of *gúdúgúdú*.

The *iyáàlù dùndún* is notably used as a speech surrogate because of its wide range of pitches. It acts as the leader of the ensemble and has more variety in its patterns than other instruments in the ensemble. Through appropriate manipulation of the tension thongs, the *iyáàlù* is made to imitate the pitch, inflections and accents of the Yoruba language, as well as slides and glissandi. It is clearly distinguished from other members of the ensemble in terms of size and, most

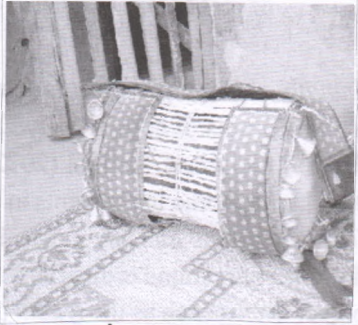


Figure 4. *Iyáàlù dùndún* — mother drum decorated with *saworo* (bells).

is clearly distinguished from other members of the ensemble in terms of size and, most

importantly, because of the decorative bells (*saworo*) attached to it. In performance mode, the drummer raises the pitch of the drum by pulling the thongs to tighten them, while releasing the thongs causes the lowering of pitches to be produced.

Ayan: The god of Yoruba drumming

There are various accounts in oral traditions directly linking the origin of the membranophonic drum (*dùndún*) to *Àyàn Àgalú Sougobi*. One of them is based on the creation myth as documented by Thieme (1969). According to this legend, the first drummer of *Oduduwa* invented the *dùndún* drum and gave his children the name 'Àyàn', which until now is prefixed to the name of everyone born into the family of *dùndún* drummers. Indeed, when anyone bears such names as Ayanleke (Ayan is victorious), Ayanwumi (Ayan pleases me), Ayandokun (Ayan has turned into a sea) and so forth, it is an indication that such an individual is of a drumming lineage. The legend concluded that after the drummer's demise, *Oduduwa* deified him and he became the god of drumming. A different tradition (from *Oyo*) claimed that after the *Alaafin* left *Ile-Ife* (the cradle of the Yoruba race) to found *Oyo* (the new political headquarter), God caused *Àyàn* to descend with a drum in his hand at *Oyo* to amuse the *Alaafin*. Another tradition (from *Ogbomoso*), similar to the creation myth, attributes the invention of *gangan* and *dùndún* to a professional drummer by the name *Sabigana* (a palace



Figure 5. An elderly *dùndún* drummer pouring libation and making supplication to *Àyàn Àgalú*.

indentured servant to *Obalokun* who reigned in the seventeenth century). This man gave his children the name *Àyàn*. However, *Oba Laoye* (1959) reports that *dùndún* was first used by *Àyàn*, a native of *Saworo* in *Ibaribaland*, who established the lineage of the Yoruba family of drummers. They loved him so much that after his demise, he was deified as the god of drumming. *Ojo* (1966) added another dimension to the many versions of the origin of *dùndún*, when he suggested that *Àyàn* is a Yoruba name for the African satinwood (*Distemonanthus*), a wood used for drum making. According to

him, the spirit inhabiting the *Àyàn* tree was the Yoruba god of drums.

A recurring theme in all the foregoing traditions is the conspicuous reference to the name "Àyàn", which referred to a specific person who once bore that name, but became venerated after his demise. More important is the fact that it is common for members of traditional drumming families to engage in regular and special worship of *Àyàn Àgalú*.

They gather periodically to offer prayers, supplications and sacrifices in order to solicit his assistance in their public engagements. Regular worship is held as a mark of respect and to fully acknowledge the power of Àyàn Àgalú to bring about the desired inspiration, enhance their performing capabilities and attract good patronage.

According to Euba (1990), members of a drumming family make a joint sacrifice annually to Àyàn Àgalú, their ancestral guardian spirit and god of drumming. At such annual meetings, the *gúdúgúdú*, though the smallest in size, takes the centre stage and signifies the object or platform of worship. Items for sacrifice include an animal, usually a goat, whose blood is offered along with *èkuru* (a type of food made from cowpea), kolanuts and a bottle of wine or gin. However, special sacrifices on an individual basis can also be made from time to time as prescribed or simply to express gratitude after particular lucrative engagements. Samuel (2012) reports that a special worship of Àyàn Àgalú may be organized by concerned elderly members of a drumming family to atone for any member's indecorous behaviour, avert or reverse any impending or on-going misfortune and restore any broken fellowship with the god of drumming.

Patriarchal nature of the Yoruba society

The Yoruba society is patriarchal in nature, possessing a collection of social systems and practices often used to maintain some form of asymmetrical power relations between men and women in the society, whereby men hold a dominant position over women. Sanga (2001) noted that there appears to be a system of beliefs that keeps ideologies of domination unchallenged. To this end, there are culture agents such as parents, religious leaders and elders among others who act as regulators to reinforce these long-standing traditions. The debate surrounding when, how and why the Yoruba culture became patriarchal may be inconclusive, but there is no gainsaying that patriarchy is evident in many Yoruba traditional institutions such as kingship, masquerades and cults. However, female regency (*adele omoba 'binrin*) may be allowed based on the doctrine of necessity and invoked as a stop gap measure, representing an interim arrangement to forestall a prolonged interregnum, thereby ensuring smooth running of the town until all contending matters and disputes relating to the election of a new paramount ruler are resolved. Based on available statistics, women are not traditionally considered as contenders for the paramount rulership where the position is reserved for princes (*omo-oye*).

Another example of male domination is the celebration of the traditional *Oro* festival, which is primarily carried out by the Ogboni society — the judicial arm of government in some pre-colonial Yoruba towns and cities — during which land cleansing and judicial execution of condemned criminals are carried out. Women are prevented from viewing the activities of the group, through the imposition of a dawn to dusk curfew.

Although a role is assigned to an elderly woman to announce the commencement of the festival with the cry *Baba Oro o* (Oro, the father), such a woman must have reached menopause. She is, therefore, traditionally no longer referred to as a woman. In spite of modernity, the traditional *Oro* cult remains purely an all male affair and women are known to comply with the directive to stay indoors to this day (Samuel, 2005).



Figure 6. Aralola Olamuyiwa (Ara - A female drummer).

Gender roles in music

Itinerant male drummers are a common sight all over Yorubaland. Women participate more in singing than in playing instruments. Music is thus one of the numerous areas where women tend to adapt to the patriarchal definition of femininity. Women are restricted from participating in some specific musical activities. Though, they can freely sing without inhibition, especially at occasions such as funerals, weddings or other ceremonial events. They are rarely known to play membranophonic drums. Consequently, it is not customary to find female drummers of either *dùndún* or *bata*, two prominent drum ensembles in Yorubaland. Some scholars such as Bankole et al (1975), Euba (1990) and Olaniyan (1993) repeat the common belief that the art of drumming is restricted exclusively to men.

However, as a result of transformative responses to the existing order within each society, there seems to be increasing evidence to suggest that many of the prescribed gender roles are either being deconstructed or renegotiated. The dynamic



Figure 7. Ayanbanke Lawani (a female drummer) and members of her group during a performance.

nature of culture directs attention to the fact that through adaptation, contestation and transformation, women have progressively engaged the patriarchal gender ideology in many societies and Yoruba society is no exception. Bowman (1998) and Munoz (2003) argued that culture is constantly being created, recreated, modified, contested and negotiated. In other words, certain customs, belief systems and practices are sometimes subjected to modifications through further learning, acquisition of other habits, contacts with other customs, beliefs, social structures and institutions. On the music front, certain changes which have taken place in the contemporary Yoruba society, including the emergence of female *dùndún* drumming and its gradual development into an established musical art form, can be described as a form of contestation of space in the stereotypically male-dominated profession. The public performances of female *dùndún* practitioners such as Ayanbanke, Ayannike, Ayanbinrin and Ara are noteworthy. It is therefore important to interrogate the cultural and attitudinal changes to female involvement in *dùndún* drumming in Yorubaland because of a dearth of literature addressing this socio-musicological phenomenon, which was, until quite recently, a rare occurrence.



Figure 8. Oluwatosin Esther Olakanye (Ayanbinrin - another female drummer).

This study was conducted to examine the perception and reactions of Yoruba male drummers in Western Nigeria to the emergence of female *dùndún* drumming and its gradual development into a musical art form in Yorubaland. The paper also discusses some factors associated with changing gender roles with regards to drumming within the Yoruba culture as a whole.

Methodology

Experienced male *dùndún* drummers from Oyo/Ilorra, Ede and Ogbomosho were interviewed as the custodians of the traditional Yoruba drumming legacy with a vast experience in the art of drumming, to discuss their perception of, and reaction to female involvement in *dùndún* drumming in Yorubaland. Focus group discussion sessions were also held with some renowned male *dùndún* drummers from the foregoing towns as part of the qualitative study.

Liberalists-hardliners divide

Two divergent viewpoints were expressed by the respondents. The first group could be described as the liberals, who have not only accepted that female *dùndún* drummers have emerged and are developing, but also see them as partners in progress. They have clearly demonstrated this in the inclusion and registration of any interested practising female *dùndún* drummers as members of the drumming guild within their locality. Euba (1990) and Omojola (2012) both confirmed the existence of drumming guilds and associations across Yorubaland, and each bona fide member was required to present proof of membership in the form of a registration card before any approval could be granted for such an individual or group to perform at any social function.

Those who belong to the liberal group have daughters or sisters who have shown an interest in playing the instrument and have encouraged them by acting as their teachers and mentors. For instance, Pa Ayandele Lawani, a notable *dùndún* master drummer in Ilora, did not only teach his daughter (Ayanbanke Lawani) how to play the *dùndún* at a tender age, but also allowed her to join his *dùndún* ensemble for outside engagements. According to Pa Lawani, the mode of training of Ayanbanke was not different from that of her brothers, and was in accordance with tradition. He constructed a little drum called *kanango*, which he gave to her to practise with whenever the group had a performance. Thus, she received training similar to that of boys born into and raised in the Ayan family. Pa Ayandele Lawani noted that:

At the initial stage, many people, especially the audience, did not recognize her as a girl since it was often taken for granted that only men play the drums...

As time went on, I taught her how to handle omele isaaju and also atele (two secondary members of the òndún ensemble), from which she graduated to playing the gudugudu.

It is noteworthy that Ayanbanke Lawani is today a household name in the Ilora/Oyo axis as far as female òndún drumming is concerned. In addition, she is well travelled and known to have performed in several Yoruba towns and cities. She has also incorporated into her drumming modern styles such as *fuji* and *apala*, in addition to *alujo*.

Similarly, there is a prominent female òndún drummer (Ayannike Odedoyin) based in Osogbo, the capital city of Osun State. Her father, Pa Ayantayo Fasola (now deceased), was reported to be a liberal òndún expert who encouraged her inquisitiveness into the art of òndún drumming. Some of his colleagues even accused him of allowing her to take part in many activities traditionally associated with men. He allowed her to assist him in carrying his drum along to some performances. Not only did he allow her to play the drums on some occasions, he also showed her a few tricks at home on how to handle the *gudugudu* (the bowl-shaped secondary drum in the òndún ensemble).

One of Ayannike's uncles said that Pa Ayantayo rejected all forms of traditional belief preventing women from drumming and created special time to teach Ayannike many Yoruba *owe* (proverbs) and *orin ibile* (folksongs). According to him:

At home, she enjoyed the rare privilege of watching us (members of her father's group) rehearse òndún music; no doubt this entire experience was largely responsible for making the acquisition of drumming skills easier for her much later in life.

However, the second group of male òndún practitioners, who could aptly be described as hardliners and sustainers of stereotypical traditional roles, refused to give any recognition to female drummers in the Yoruba society. As far as they are concerned, female drummers are not 'serious or real' practitioners of the art. Their objections are based on spiritual and practical reasons.

Spiritual reasons

a. Belief in consequent physiological disorders in the female reproductive organ

There is an age-long belief among male drummers that the physiological structure of any female drummer, particularly her reproductive organ, would be adversely affected and supernaturally disordered with time. The notion is that the sexual partner of a female drummer, usually the husband, would not derive sexual satisfaction during coitus due to the slackening of the vaginal muscles.

b. Notion that women are usually more susceptible to spiritual attacks during public performance

Unless a drummer takes precautionary measures, including fortifying himself with highly potent charms, the drummer is open to attacks. This can possibly occur if the performer displays a high level of dexterity in playing the drum and is adjudged a more famous or better drummer than his peers. An unsuspecting and unprotected drummer might fall victim to attacks, including the frequent and mysterious breaking of his drum heads irrespective of the number of spare *dùndún* drums available to him for performances. In some cases, such an individual risks being afflicted with sudden ailments, including temporary or permanent paralysis of the hands. The first type of attack is usually meant to forestall a successful performance. In the second instance, the victim might suffer partial or permanent paralysis of his hands, thereby being prevented from playing the drum for a long time or in very severe cases, for the rest of his life.

A male *dùndún* drummer in Ogbomosho stated that the Yoruba believe in the existence of inexplicable diseases and the possibility of an individual being mysteriously afflicted with diseases known as *aarun-afise* through the exercise of *ajogun* (malevolent forces) by envious persons. Another *dùndún* drummer in Ilora explained that one of his peers in the *dùndún* profession informed him at an event of failed attempts by some disgruntled and envious older drummers in the town to harm him through diabolical means. These drummers were grumbling against his rising fame as well as the preference of many patrons in town for him as a performer on many special occasions. His colleagues advised him to 'get closer to the elders', by either joining a cult, or consulting powerful herbalists who could grant him protection through charms against any evil intentions. The drummer strongly believed that he probably would have been negatively affected by the wicked acts of those envious older drummers if he was a female drummer. Although, he claimed he neither possessed any talisman nor any form of protective charms, he explained that his late father had taught him how to prevent such attacks. He usually made a tiny hole with a needle on his *dùndún* on a spot very close to the *osan* (leather thong), which is carefully hidden. According to him: "it always serves as a preventive measure to keep my drums from breaking." Also, he always played a specific composition known as *ijuba* (homage) before commencing any performance with his musical group on social outings. He quoted a Yoruba proverb to support his practice: *bi ekolo ba 'juba ile, ile yio la'nu* (if the earthworm pays homage to the earth, it will surely open up to its demand). The drummer boasted that both actions were infallible ways of forestalling any mysterious harm befalling him whenever he performs. *Ijuba* is a verbal acknowledgement of the existence of superior forces and a call to those forces to remove all obstacles or impediments that might stand in the way of the performer who is the supplicant.

c. *Non admittance of women into ile agbara (cult houses)*

The hardliner male drummers considered drumming in Yoruba culture as highly spiritual; a craft which has grave and deep implications which a woman cannot handle. A master drummer in Ede stated that no matter the level of proficiency of a woman on the drums, she is never considered a 'drummer' in the strict sense of the word. He explained that there are certain cultic and ritualistic activities which are carried out in shrines and groves referred to as the power house (*ile agbara*), some of which have certain spiritual implications for women, hence their exclusion from such venues.

In addition, women are excluded from some specific secret cults because they are not supposed to have knowledge of esoteric matters. Even though Frobenius (1913) suggested that men merely used the occasion of the *Oro* to terrify women in order to keep them in holy fear of the 'great bull roarer'. However, there seems to be some other obvious reasons. One of them is that women are believed to be inquisitive and cannot keep secrets. More important is the fact that women's tenderness might hinder swift and drastic decisions, which elders of the *Oro* cult were bound to take from time to time as executioners of condemned criminals during the *Oro* festival in the pre-colonial Yoruba society. Despite the change in the administrative system of the Yoruba, whereby judicial authority is now vested in courts of law instead of the *Ogboni*, the tradition preventing women from taking part in many of the cultic organizations has been sustained till date.

Practical reasons

The male drummers identified at least three practical reasons for their non-recognition of female *dùndún* drummers. The first was physical weakness. The rigours of drumming are energy sapping, especially if the player has to perform continuously for a very long period of time. It was their consensus that female drummers are not as physically strong as men, hence, drumming remains a male profession.

Secondly, the period which a girl child has to interact with her father at home is much shorter compared with her male counterpart, because she is traditionally expected to assist her mother with the domestic chores rather than follow her father to public musical performances, where avenues for learning are naturally created. Traditional male *dùndún* drummers, therefore, hide under the pretence that the girls do not have enough time to learn the craft.

The last reason given for discouraging female drummers from performing in public, especially in the past, was to prevent women from becoming promiscuous. This is because *dùndún* is seen as the drum for merry making. Many of these celebrations often necessitate drummers travelling for days. It was, therefore, the view of the male

drummers that itinerant female drummers are at risk of getting involved in promiscuous behaviour.

The position of male drummers who refused to accord female *dùndún* drummers any form of recognition could be explicated in the light of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, whereby an individual's gendered behavior is not only regulated, but any non-conformist and those who tend to disrupt societal gender norms are also disciplined. To this end, these male drummers invoke proverbs, sages' sayings, ideas about gender and various forms of communication and representation through which ideas about gender are constructed, expressed, or/and communicated.

Some of the reasons adduced by male drummers in this study, especially the notion that it is a taboo for a woman to play the *dùndún* drum can be faulted. One characteristic feature of taboos is the consequence(s) attached to them whenever they are broken. Applying this specifically to *dùndún* drumming, there are no known taboos banning a woman. While it is true that many taboos are still in force in Nigerian societies today, it is equally noteworthy that quite a number of them have been demystified, especially in the light of new realities. Idamoyibo (2008) noted that in the late 1990s, an all female Okpe Disco ensemble emerged among the Okpe of Delta State, Nigeria, where young ladies played musical instruments including drums. According to him, the ladies who beat the drums did not suffer any afflictions. He, therefore, argued that the restriction placed on women was only to honour and protect them. In the modern Okpe society, any woman who has a flair for playing any musical instrument can do so without any fear. Assuming, but not necessarily conceding that women are forbidden to play traditional Yoruba drums, this cannot be strictly applied to the *dùndún*. This is because *dùndún*, as an ensemble, is associated more with social than religious ceremonies.

It is not tied to any particular deity, unlike other ensembles that are associated with one particular Yoruba divinity or the other. For instance, the *bata*, *ipese*, *agere* and *igbin* are the traditional drums for the worship of Sango, Ifa, Ogun and Obatala, respectively. According to Sayre (1999), gender prohibition exists as far as *bata* drumming is concerned. This is reinforced by the cultural belief that since a woman cleanses herself through menstruation, she should not play the *bata*, since playing itself is a form of cleansing. Therefore, there might be a likelihood of creating an imbalance of gendered energies. In addition, it is considered dangerous for women to approach consecrated drums, especially during menstruation. This is because their menstrual blood may be mistaken as an offering to the deity of drumming and the menstrual cycle is associated with the *Aje* or witches (antisocial feminine spiritual forces). Female contact with the deity of the drum will void the consecration of the drums. Furthermore, since the *bata* drums belong to a deity whose temperament epitomizes virility, a female player cannot assume the kind of masculinity that is appropriate for the Sango ritual event, simply

because feminine energy is of the earth, while masculine energy is of the heavens. Consequently, if the drums are to be used to invoke heavenly energy (*Orisa*) to earth, men are the appropriate ones to do so. Finally, women are believed to be susceptible to



Figure 9. A typical Yoruba social function featuring dundun.



Figure 10. Dundun drummers during the royal procession at Timi of Ede's coronation.

spirit possession, hence the responsibility of playing the drum is given to men. Indeed, men who are susceptible to possession are also forbidden to play.

In his discourse on performance, practice and group organization of *kiriboto* music in Oyo, Omojola (1990/1991) asserted that *kiriboto* music is an all-male performance. Women are not allowed to take part. The *aare onilu* (president of the drummers) said that *kiriboto* music, as far back as the pre-colonial days, was performed in the king's palace during sacred rites to appease *Obatala*. Since women are generally not allowed to take part in such sacred rites in Yorubaland, it was automatic that women could not participate in *kiriboto* performances. Although *kiriboto* music is now being performed during non-ritual social ceremonies, the taboo still survives.

From the foregoing, it could be suggested that as long as women are traditionally restricted from viewing or taking part in specific cult activities, avenues for performing serious traditional music, especially drumming, are rare. This is because such music performances are conducted at their various shrines and groves by the custodians of culture who are exclusively cult members. All the female *dùndún* drummers known and studied by this author testified that they neither belonged to any cult nor ever participated in any private forms of festivals (in the traditional classic idiom) within their vicinities (Samuel, 2009). Female practitioners, whose performances extend to traditional festivals, confirmed that their participation was limited to public outings. As a result, their activities are limited to the social aspect of festivals. An example is

Ayannike Fasola, who performs in the full glare of the general public during the Osun Osogbo festival, but does not join the male drummers in the private aspect of the festival.

Omojola (1990/1991) submits that there is nothing spectacular about drumming other than the fact that the rigorous nature of drum beating is an activity which is more suited to a man than a woman. This probably explains why there are few female drummers. Marshall (2001) shared her experience as a female drummer in some West African ensembles for close to a decade, when she had come to recognize physical differences between male drummers and herself. She specifically noted that apart from having blisters and cracks on her hands, she also felt a burning sensation in her arm muscles whenever she played in a *Djembe* ensemble (a Senegalese band). She noticed that men in the same group could play faster, longer and with more strength than she could. Marshall, throughout her years of studying West African drums, had come across numerous master drummers who found blood in their urine after a rigorous performance.

On the issue of insufficient time to train girls, we cannot overstress the fact that in Yoruba culture, preference is given to the male child over his female counterpart, a practice which stems from the conviction that it is the male child that perpetuates the line because he bears the family name. In the case of female children, they are sooner or later married into another family. It is therefore not uncommon to find that men practice polygyny in order to have at least one male child when previous marriage(s) have not succeeded in producing a son. Furthermore, the investments in training a female child in the art of drumming or sending her to school for the acquisition of Western education, let alone the encouragement of the acquisition of skills related to her father's trade/profession, are generally considered a colossal waste by many male traditional drummers.

Many of the reasons adduced by male *dùndún* drummers for not considering female *dùndún* drummers as 'real' drummers are not justifiable. However, the playing position, especially of the *iyaaalu* or *gangan* (lead drums in any typical *dùndún* ensemble), appears more suited to men than women because of their physiological make up. Observations and comments by many other traditional male drummers confirmed that there have been significant changes in the traditional attitudes of relegating the womenfolk to the background. As observed earlier, some male drummers have developed a more liberal attitude towards female drummers by welcoming them into their domain as partners in progress. They have moved another step forward by enrolling interested female *dùndún* drummers into their drumming guilds. However, this change is slow judging by the small number of female *dùndún* drummers publicly recognized as active practitioners of the art.

“ . . . I want to commend you for all you have been able to achieve at such a young age. You have done very well for yourself; You have succeeded in placing our culture on the map of the world. The talking drum used to be associated with old men, but with your smartness, talent and doggedness, you have added glamour and value to the act of playing the talking drum. I urge our youth to take a cue from you and promote our culture because that is all we have and who we are.”

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Changing gender roles in dùndún music: A reflection of a living art

Remarkable changes in Nigerian cultural practices became evident with the growth of urban culture since the country's independence in 1960, and became even more rapid towards the end of the twentieth century. Changing contexts include women's rights movements, education, communication, the influence of modern technology, as well as the influence of gender roles from outside communities.

It is not only in the field of music that changes in the traditional occupation associated with specific lineages have been documented among the Yoruba. Aronson (1984) cited examples from Yoruba communities in Oyo, where blacksmiths' wives and daughters would pound the ore, wash it in the river and also smelt it in the furnace. These women can even describe the design of the furnace as well as the process of smelting. In the same vein, Marshall (2001) noted that blacksmiths known as *namu* among the Bambara, are made up of both men and women of a particular lineage. All of them, irrespective of gender have access to the supernatural powers associated with blacksmithing, as well as knowledge of the smelting process itself. However, there seems to exist as a rule, division of labour among the *namu*, wherein men work with metal and wood, while women are confined to clay as potters. The foregoing underscores the fact that women are knowledgeable in male-dominated fields of work, despite gender restrictions. One cannot overemphasize the influence of the family, particularly liberal fathers, who most times, jettison cultural restrictive practices to teach their daughters the art of their own profession.

Conclusion

A survey of the contemporary Nigerian educational system indicates that the number of women applying to pursue science-based and engineering-oriented courses, which were once dominated by men, has significantly increased. Indeed, Ayanbinrin, who is a prominent female dùndún drummer based in cosmopolitan Lagos, is a graduate of chemical and polymer engineering, attesting to the fact that there is no basis for gender discrimination any longer. Her success as a female drummer, as well as the success of other female dùndún drummers such as Ara (also based in Lagos), Ayanbanke in Ilora and Ayannike in Osogbo, all confirm that more talented women will become proficient in the art of dùndún drumming if they are given early and proper musical training, and a stimulating and enabling environment to provide the much needed adequate exposure.

A Post Script

Obasanjo, in a well-crafted message, described the drummer girl as one of Nigeria's greatest entertainment exports and a pride to African youth.

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