Contributions of Women to Yoruba Cultural Music through Traditional Drumming Performance and Promotion of Cultural Advocacy and Social Activism

By

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Abstract

The Yoruba traditional drumming occupy an important cultural space in South-west, Nigeria; and scholars have affirm that Yoruba traditional drumming has spiritual and cultural significance. However, musical performance in Yoruba traditional drumming in relations to the contributions of Women to the social-political life of their societies; particularly through cultural advocacy and social activism remains underreported. Also, the potentials of Yoruba traditional drumming as a tool for cultural advocacy and social activism by Women seems to be underrated. Therefore this study investigate the contributions of Women to Yoruba cultural music through traditional drumming and musical performance and promotion of social activism and cultural advocacy. The study adopted Content analysis research design and data was gathered from documentary evidence from photos, blogs, audio and video recordings as well as Key Personality Interview conducted as part of the fieldwork. Data was thematically analysed. Findings revealed that contributions of women to Yoruba traditional drumming through the study of Ayanbirin Aduke's creative works revealed that the female drummer beliefs that her traditional drumming styles reflect a blend of traditional Yoruba rhythms and modern instrumentation, which she viewed as not just cultural entertainment but as a spiritual channelisation with some ancestral powers. Findings also revealed that, the female cultural creative works are both tools for advocacy towards cultural preservation and activism reinforcing female drummers as political agents in womanhood identity. The study concludes that contributions of Women drumming tradition extend beyond personal recognition to cultural advocacy, social activism and cultural revival, but she uses

Yoruba drumming as a platform for community development through mentorship of the female gender towards cultural awakening and empowerment geared towards Yoruba traditional music sustainability. The study recommend promotion of traditional drumming among girls and young females to reinstate the drive towards Yoruba cultural music renewal among Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria through drumming practices.

Key Words: Women, Yoruba cultural music, traditional drumming, and musical performance, social activism, advocacy.

Introduction

Drumming, as part of many cultures, has been interpreted and well-defined by various scholars across disciplines, which reflects the composite nature of drumming, encompassing its musical, communicative, social, and spiritual dimensions. For instance, Blacking (1973) define music beyond mere aesthetic object but regarded music as a culturally embedded, socially significant practice. In describing drumming as a "humanly organized sound" with intentionality of what is behind musical structures including rhythm, timbre, and form shaped by human experiences and cultural values. Based on this arguement, drumming is not just rhythm but a social act, a medium through which individuals and communities negotiate identity, hierarchy, ritual, and social change. In African traditions, for instance, drumming marks communal rites, mediates between the physical and spiritual worlds, and regulates social order.

Robert Farris Thompson (1983) documents a rich art historical and performative perspective to African expressive cultures emphasizing that African drumming is not solely auditory but also a visual and performative art, integrated with dance, gesture, and ritual performance. The author notes that drumming performances are often multisensory spectacles, where the movement of the drummer's body, the appearance of the drums, and associated dance sequences create a total art form. Drumming, therefore, serves as both a sonic and visual language within ritual and social events.

Steven Feld (1984) also assert that drumming is not merely music but a knowledge system, an epistemic tool through which individuals experience, interpret, and make sense of their world. Most especially, African drumming, with its subconscious spiritual, ceremonial and communicative roles, thus becomes an acoustic way of expressing social relationships, histories, and cosmologies. For example, in West African societies, different drums are associated with specific rituals, age groups, or social roles, and the complex interplay of polyrhythms often mirrors the interdependent roles within the community. Implying that, drumming is not only an art form but a cultural text that can be read for insights into societal organization and historical experience. Again, Paul Berliner (1993) investigates the dynamics and improvisational nature of African music traditions, particularly with African musical practices that highlights improvisation as a central communicative tool. Improvisational aspect of African drumming allows drummers to respond to audience energy, ritual demands, or social occurrences in real-time, making each performance unique. Hence, drumming becomes a dialogic and interactive medium, where players and listeners participate in an unfolding conversation expressed through rhythmic variations, call-and-response patterns, and spontaneous embellishments.

Victor Kofi Agawu (2003) reports on interpreting African drumming as a semiotic system and framework assert that drum sounds are not arbitrary but function as signifiers that convey specific meanings understood by members of the cultural group. This aligns with semiotic theories of communication, where non-verbal signs, like drumming patterns, act as carriers of social, political, and spiritual messages. Agawu (2003) also observe that in many African societies, drums signal everything from ritual summons to coded political commentary, with distinct rhythmic motifs symbolizing particular persons, events, or circumstances.

Another study on Ghana traditional music documented Ewe Dance-drumming Community in Ghana, James Burns (2009) discusses how African drumming operates as a form of historical narration. Rhythms and drum sequences are not arbitrary but carry embedded meanings, recounting genealogies, historical events, and cultural memories. For instance, specific drumming patterns might signal ancestral lineages, commemorate battles, or mark significant communal

milestones. In this way, drumming serves as a living archive, preserving and transmitting oral histories and collective memory across generations.

In another similar study Bode Omojola (2012) provides a contemporary interpretation by analyzing drumming within the Yoruba cultural contexts as a medium for both artistic expression and social commentary. The author argues that Yoruba drumming transcends entertainment, offering a vehicle for public discourse, satire, as well as for social resistance (Omojola, 2012). The author further submit that through complex rhythmic patterns and carefully crafted drum texts, drummers can praise, critique, or subtly challenge social norms and political figures. This dynamic underscores the drum's enduring relevance as a tool of cultural production and negotiation in both traditional and modern African societies.

Invariably, in most African traditional communities, certain drums are exclusively reserved for royalty, chiefs, or religious leaders, and their sounds are imbued with spiritual and political significance (Omojola, 2012). The performance of such drums often accompanies installations, coronations, funerals and judicial ceremonies, serving as sonic markers of social hierarchy and divine sanction. Thus, the drum becomes not only a musical instrument but a political artifact and emblem of leadership.

Consequently, Yoruba traditional drumming has been recognized not only as a musical practice but also as a spiritual and social institution associated with religious rituals (Akinyele, 1999). Yoruba drumming also represents a strategic position in the political arena that occupy an important space in the cultural domains of the people of Southwestern Nigeria. Scholars argue that Yoruba indigenous music can serve as a form of advocacy and resistance against cultural erosion (Agawu, 2003). This article situates Aduke's work within this framework, emphasizing her role in using drumming for advocacy, mentorship, and cultural preservation. Yoruba drumming has been traditionally male-dominated, but emerging female drummers are redefining cultural participation (Adegbite, 1991). However, with the modernisation of Yoruba traditional drumming coupled with

Western musical instruments blending has emerged with the involvement of Women in traditional drumming (Omojola, 2012).

To this end, this article examines Yoruba traditional drumming as a tool for cultural advocacy, social activism towards lending a voice to the improvements in the political economy of the nation Nigeria. Again, the study focuses on the musical and performance experiences of; Olayinka Racheal Omotayo a popular and well-known Yoruba drummer with the stage name: Ayanbirin Aduke. The study highlights the importance of Yoruba drumming which transcends entertainment but with potentials to become a vehicle for social change, through cultural advocacy and activism, as well as lending a voice to intergenerational education.
Further, the study dwells mostly on the experiences of Ayanbirin Aduke and her creative works in relations to the narratives that highlight how resilience and creativity challenge entrenched patriarchal and political economy norms, towards transforming Yoruba drumming into a space for promoting cultural advocacy and social activism geared towards inclusivity, cultural reawakening and preservation. Therefore, this study investigate the contributions of Women to Yoruba cultural music through traditional drumming and musical performance and promotion of social activism and cultural advocacy.

Statement of the Problem

The Yoruba traditional drumming occupy an important cultural space in South-west, Nigeria; and scholars have affirm that Yoruba traditional drumming has spiritual and cultural significance. However, musical performance in Yoruba traditional drumming in relations to the contributions of Women to the social-political life of their societies; particularly through cultural advocacy and social activism remains underreported. Also, the potentials of Yoruba traditional drumming as a tool for cultural advocacy and social activism by Women seems to be underrated. Therefore this study investigate the contributions of Women to Yoruba cultural music through traditional drumming and musical performance and promotion of social activism and cultural advocacy. Consequently, the study focus on the experiences of Ayanbirin Aduke and her creative works in relations to the narratives that highlight how resilience and creativity challenge entrenched patriarchal and political economy norms, towards transforming Yoruba drumming

into a space for promoting cultural advocacy and social activism geared towards inclusivity, cultural reawakening and preservation.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the contributions of Women to Yoruba cultural music through traditional drumming and musical performance and promotion of social activism and cultural advocacy. The objectives of the study are to:

1. identify traditional drumming styles of women that are involved in Yoruba traditional music with particular reference to Ayanbirin Aduke.
2. ascertain the spiritual implications of Yoruba traditional drumming performances of Ayanbirin Aduke.
3. acsertain social activism and advocacy themes in Ayanbirin Aduke's Yoruba cultural rumming and musical performances as contributions towards cultural preservation.
4. identify strategies towards strengthening and promoting Women involvement in Yoruba traditional drumming as exemplified in Ayanbirin Aduke initiatives.

Towards training younger female drummers for promoting Women involvement in Yoruba traditional drumming as exemplified in Ayanbirin Aduke creative works.

Research Questions

1. What are the traditional drumming styles of women that are involved in Yoruba traditional music with particular reference to Ayanbirin Aduke?
2. What are the spiritual implications of Yoruba traditional drumming performances of Ayanbirin Aduke?
3. What are the social activism and advocacy themes in Ayanbirin Aduke's Yoruba cultural rumming and musical performances as contributions towards cultural preservation?
4. What are strategies towards strengthening and promoting Women involvement in Yoruba traditional drumming as exemplified in Ayanbirin Aduke initiatives?

Methodology

Reesearch Design: The study adopted Content analysis research design and data was gathered from documentary evidence from photos, blogs, audio and video materials.

Description of the Research Instrument: One research instrument was used for data collection i.e. Key Personality In-depth Interview Guide (KPIIG) which was structured in accordance with the research objectives and questions.

Method of Data Collection: Documentary sources were analysed through previews of the selected photos, blogs, audio and videos of stage performances; while Key Personality Interview was conducted as part of the fieldwork.

Method of Data Analysis: Data was thematically analysed from the photos, audio, blogs and video materials which provided a rich source of qualitative data for a nuanced appraisal of the drummer's creative works in relations the promotion of social activism and cultural advocacy within the purview of Yoruba traditional drumming.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: What are the traditional drumming styles of women that are involved in Yoruba traditional music with particular reference to Ayanbirin Aduke?

Ayanbinrin Aduke's traditional drumming styles reflect a blend of traditional Yoruba rhythms and modern instrumentation, which exemplifies the creative strategies that women drummers use to gain cultural relevance in the context of male-dominated practice and field. Her traditional musical styles are generally, enhanced through Social Media, participation in mixed-genre of Music collaborations and involvement in secular performance spaces that offer avenues where the traditional gatekeeping mechanisms of lineage and gender can be bypassed or challenged.

Hence, Ayanbinrin Aduke through her Yoruba traditional drumming performances implies that the gendered nature of Yoruba drumming practices is being actively rewritten. More over, the Drummer asserts through one her quotes

that; "I wanted to do what will make people to see a man in me despite the gender"; this assertion underlines her conscious strategy to transcend prescribed gender roles through her drumming styles. Figure 1: Present the drummer on set



Fig. 1: Ayanbirin Aduke on Stage

Research Question Two: What are the spiritual implications of Yoruba traditional drumming performances of Ayanbirin Aduke?

Finding on research question two revealed that Ayanbinrin Aduke's understanding of the Yoruba traditional drumming through her talking drum performance is perception as a sacred instrument that reveals the spiritual depth which defines Yoruba drumming. Hence, Ayanbinrin Aduke as a Drummer believes that her cultural creative works as reinforcing the view that female drummers are not just

cultural entertainers but also as spiritual intermediaries of Yoruba ancestral gods and goddeses.



Fig. 2: Ayanbirin Aduke on Stage

Research Question Three: What are the social activism and advocacy themes in Ayanbirin Aduke's Yoruba cultural rumming and musical performances as contributions towards cultural preservation?

Finding answers to research question three involved in-depth personality interview with Ayanbirin Aduke, as well as analysis from literature respectively.

Ayanbirin Aduke recounted a deeply personal and inspiring journey into drumming, that is rooted in a desire to challenge societal expectations and affirm motherhood dignity within a patriarchal context. Thus, finding revealed that Ayanbirin Aduke uses her Yoruba traditional drumming and performances as form of folklore music as a vehicle for cultural advocacy, towards gender empowerment, and social activism against gender discrimination and exclusion.

Summarily, Ayanbirin Aduke as a Yoruba traditional Drummer sees her cultural creative works as tools for both advocacy towards cultural preservation and activism reinforcing female drummers as political agents in womanhood identity. This narrative also reveals her personal cultural resistance that she continues to experience as a female drummer. Invariably, such personal experiences are a reflection of how she subverts the limitations through consistent performance excellence and community-based activism. Hence, this dynamics further reveals the she not only performs across various traditional and modern platforms which is a demonstration of the interplay between tradition and transformation.

Research Question Four: What are strategies towards strengthening and promoting Women involvement in Yoruba traditional drumming as exemplified in Ayanbirin Aduke initiatives?

Research question four relates to the strategies deployed towards strengthening and promoting Women involvement in Yoruba traditional drumming as exemplified in Ayanbirin Aduke initiatives. Finding revealed that Ayanbirin Aduke is dedicated to raising new generation of female drummers is examplifed in her commitment to training younger female enthusiasts the rudementary of Yoruba traditional drumming by engaging them in cultural education and musical skill development outreaches and the creative arts generall. This deliberate action is directed towards creating a generational ripple effect that validates female participation in Yoruba traditional drumming.

The drummer further stayed that she is also committed to organising special musical performances and concerts within correctional centers in Nigeria and in orphanages so as to reach out to the people who are confined to restricted locations

as a result of certain conditions and are hitertho not allowed to move around freely; such considerations extends beyond personal fame.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the contributions of Women in Yoruba traditional drumming through the commitment and creative works of Ayanbirin Aduke, a bold Yoruba cultural drummer and innovator; who is reshaping perceptions of gender within a deeply traditional performance space. Her, personal contributions through community engagement and artistic excellence, reflecting cultural advocacy and social activism offers a rare example of how the culture of Yoruba drumming has evolved and is no longer an exclusively male-dominated space. The study largely showcased the contributions of Women through Ayanbirin Aduke's drumming tradition extend beyond her personal recognition to cultural advocacy, social activism and cultural revival. Ayanbirin Aduke's creative works further redefines Yoruba drumming as a platform for community development through mentorship of the female gender towards cultural awakening and empowerment geared towards Yoruba traditional music sustainability.

Finding on research question one revealed that traditional drumming styles reflect a blend of traditional Yoruba rhythms and modern instrumentation, which exemplifies the creative strategies that women drummers use to gain cultural relevance in the context of male-dominated practice and field. The study affirms that Yoruba drumming has historically, been a male-preserved tradition, grounded in spiritual and ancestral nuances. However, in agreement with the postulations of Omojola (2012) Ayanbirin Aduke, through personal resilience and symbolic reclamation of the Àyàn identity, has exemplifies how women are increasingly contesting and re-constructing the male-dominance traditional drumming practices and norms (Omojola, 2012).

Again, finding on research question two revealed that Ayanbinrin Aduke's understanding of the Yoruba traditional drumming through her talking drum performance is perceived as a sacred instrument that reveals the spiritual depth which defines Yoruba drumming. This submission align with the submission of Akinyele (1999) who asserts that African music is not just entertainment but is

connected to religious rituals. Hence, Ayanbinrin Aduke as a Drummer believes that her cultural creative works subsist as reinforcing the view that female drummers are not just cultural entertainers but also as spiritual intermediaries of Yoruba ancestral gods and goddeses.

Finding on research question three revealed that Ayanbirin Aduke uses her Yoruba traditional drumming and performances as form of folklore music as a vehicle for cultural advocacy, towards gender empowerment, and social activism against gender discrimination and exclusion. So also, Ayanbirin Aduke as a Yoruba traditional Drummer sees her creative works as tools for both for advocacy towards cultural preservation and activism reinforcing female drummers as political agents in womanhood identity. This finding reinforces the view of Blacking (1973) who beliefs that African traditional drumming promotes social acts and changes as well as that of Agawu (2003) who also postulates that traditional drumming represents and porayals of political ideology as well as promotes royalty.

Lastly, finding on research question four revealed that Ayanbirin Aduke's dedication in raising new generation of drummers is examplifed in her commitment to training younger female drummers by engaging them in cultural education and outreaches that can create a generational ripple effect that validates female participation in Yoruba traditional drumming and the creative arts generally. The drummer further commits herself also to organising special musical performances and concerts within correctional centers in Nigeria and in orphanages so as to reach out to the people who are confined to restricted locations as a result of certain conditions and are hitertho not allowed to move around freely; such considerations extends beyond personal fame.

Invariably, Ayanbirin Aduke as a Yoruba traditional Drummer sees her cultural creative works as both "advocacy towards cultursl preservation and activism," reinforcing the view that female drummers are not just cultural entertainers but political agents and advocates for womanhood identity. This is because Women like Ayanbirin Aduke continue to perform, teach and advocate, thereby, laying new cultural musical tracks; that are all-inclusive with dynamics that are reflective of the Nigerian transformational society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Ayanbirin Aduke's drumming performance and works reflect a commitment to a self-initiated community-based projects implemented through her Yoruba traditional drumming training and mentorship agenda of young female drummers; which exemplifies cultural preservation, cultural sustainability and societal transformation through inclusive participation. Hence, Ayanbirin Aduke's traditional drumming and musical creative works truly reflect a nuanced form of social activism and cultural advocacy geared towards transformation of the socio-political system within our societies which also reflects the enduring power of Women within the African society through the deployment of traditional drumming in the context of Your a cultural musical performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommends as follows:

1. Stakeholders should intensify more effoets towards promotion of Yoruba traditional drumming among girls and young females to reinvent the drive towards Yoruba cultural music renewal among Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeriathrough drumming practices.

2. Media outlets should actively highlight the stories and contributions of female Yoruba traditional artistes so as to feature them as part of cultural documentaries, interviews, and should balance gender portrayals that challenge stereotypes that continue to marginalize women's visibility in cultural production. Also, performing arts scholars should refocus their attention on ethnographic studies and cultural-based research works that relates directly with the Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge and those relating to female Yoruba artistes and performers.

3. Corporate organisations and governments should offer grants and residencies to support female drummers and artistes who are working to preserve cultural traditions. Support should include mentorship, equipment acquisition, training facilities and travel for cultural exchange.

4. Festivals, museums, performance academies, and heritage commissions should integrate female drummers like Ayanbirin Aduke into programming, archiving, and documentation efforts. This would encourage broader cultural participation and preserve evolving traditions.

5. Lastly, stakeholders in the cultural industry including; Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as policymakers, institutions and cultural enthuasts should support Women in traditional drumming industry and female artistes.

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