

GENDERED SPACE TRANSGRESSORS: A STUDY OF TWO YORÛBÁ FEMALE *DÛNDÛN* DRUMMERS

by

KAYODE SAMUEL

Abstract: The contemporary Nigerian musical landscape occasionally becomes a site for contesting and negotiating the established ideology of Yorùbá patriarchy. These movements are evident in many women's decisions to venture into drumming, an age-old male dominated musical profession. Informed by the theory of spatial trialectics, this article investigates gendered space in relation to *dùndún* drumming with a view to understanding the changing nuances of gender relations among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria. Ethnographic techniques were used to generate data on Àrà and Àyanbinrin, two well-known urban popular female *dùndún* performers whose aspirations and career trajectories reside outside the Àyan lineage and spiritual tradition. Biographical accounts and lived experiences of both artists suggest that women's agency in Yorùbá drumming is hedged by different, prevailing socioeconomic contexts, including a determination to challenge limitations to a career path and economic progress. By describing how female *dùndún* drumming may be regarded as a response to social and musical change, and discussing how issues of masculinity and femininity are constructed, negotiated and contested, I argue that the belief forbidding women from playing Yorùbá drums is not strictly applicable to the *dùndún* because the *dùndún* ensemble is more connected to social than religious performances.

Keywords: *Dùndún* drumming, Yorùbá music, female drummers, gender issues, male dominance, gendered space.

Introduction

Driving from the main gate onto the campus of the University of Ibadan, one cannot but notice an elegant building strategically located at the end of the road. The popular Trenchard Hall is noticeable as it stands adjacent to a tower. I was seated as part of the audience in the multipurpose hall, on the occasion of the 2012 edition of the annual talking drum festival organized by the Àyan Àgalú Şóúngobí Foundation (a non-governmental organization well-known for promoting Yorùbá drum traditions). After the first round of drum performances by two different all-male groups, the MC came on stage to introduce the next artist. He remarked: "there is a popular saying, whatever a man can do" (he points the cordless microphone in his hand towards the audience expecting their immediate response). They answered in unison: "a woman also can". The MC added, "perhaps better". He continued: "There is no gainsaying that women have really stepped up and are making waves in areas once considered strictly male affairs. I'm talking about celebrating the art of Yorùbá drumming. Yes, drumming is now a profession for both male and female. Without much ado, I'd like to invite on stage the quintessential of female drumming in Africa: Ayanbinrin". With this introduction, the MC brought the dialogue with the audience to an end (Field note, 14 April 2012).

The importance of the foregoing vignette is to illustrate how an unusual phenomenon, such as women performing *dùndún* music on stage, could be afforded recognition and celebrated by people.¹ This event was in contrast to 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. These relations are informed by a popular understanding that men hold dominant positions over women (Omojola 2012). Olaniyan (2001) mentions how *dùndún* drumming by women is considered a taboo in Yorubaland. Due to notions of patriarchy that tend to encourage an imbalance of power based on gender, the Yorùbá music profession has predominantly foregrounded men at the expense of the women (Euba 1990: 27). Moreover, women rarely play drums even though they freely sing without inhibition at various occasions, including funerals and weddings.

Euba (1990) and Olaniyan (1993) are among a few scholars who affirmed that the art of drumming in Yorùbáland is vested in, and exclusively restricted to the Àyàn family, which is a lineage of Yorùbá traditional male drummers. Members of the Àyàn family are identified by the name “Àyàn,” which is attached to their personal names either as a prefix, as in Àyánniyì (Àyàn-is-honourable), Àyánlérè (Àyàn-is-profitable) and Àyándòkun (Àyàn-has-turned-to-sea) among others, or as an infix such as Àsámúàyàn (specifically-chosen-Àyàn) or Aláyandé (the-owner-of-Àyàn-has-arrived) (Samuel 2009). The name, Àyàn, is first and foremost a label and marker of identity, which traditionally means “licensed drummers”. Drummers that do not belong to the Àyàn lineage but who venture into the profession are referred to as “Àyántojúbò” (interlopers) and they are deemed as unlicensed practitioners (*ibid.*). While girls born into the Àyàn family also have the name “Àyàn” attached to their personal names (Àyánnikè, Àyánbánkè, Àyánwùmí, and so forth), they are neither trained on the drums nor encouraged to play them due to their gender. Unlike their male counterparts, young women are traditionally not destined to become drummers.

Musical performances may be microcosms of the social structure of a community. Changes in these performance styles have every potential to offer an opportunity to view changing gender relations and identities in contemporary Yorùbá society. Although more women are emerging in the public space as *dùndún* drummers, discussions of their agency and engagement of Yorùbá gender practices (patriarchy) through contestation and negotiation are lacking in the music scholarship of Nigeria (Samuel 2009 and

¹ The *dùndún*, mostly referred to as the “talking drum,” is the generic name for various hourglass shaped, pressure drums of the Yorùbá with laces that may be squeezed to tighten the goatskin head and alter the drum’s pitch to imitate the human voice. The *dùndún* ensemble comprises the *iyáàlù*, *kerikeri*, *isáájú*, *àtélé*, *gangan*, *àdàmọ* and *kàràngó*, as well as a type of kettledrum known as *gúdúgúdú*. The *iyáàlù* (a fairly large) and *kerikeri* (the largest) drums are both hung on the player’s shoulder by means of a strap and made to rest against their hip-bone. The head-to-head line of both drums is roughly parallel with the ground, inclined upwards at an angle of about 45 degrees. As the lead, the *iyáàlù* is earmarked for master drummers who have the skill to recite praise poetry as well as proverbial and philosophical statements on the drums. The subsidiary drums, in descending order of sizes, are *isáájú* (forerunner), *àtélé* (rearguard), *gangan*, *àdàmọ* and *kàràngó*. These drums rest under the player’s armpit. All *dùndún* tension drums are struck on the surface by a curved stick known as *kọngọ*.

2014). Many authorities have either relegated female involvement in drumming to the background, or willfully ignored or denied its existence. This article is an attempt to break the silence about female involvement in *dùndún* drumming in Yorubaland. Throughout the article, I describe and refer female drummers to “transgressors” because their performance represents a contestation of the gendered space hitherto dominated by male entertainers from the lineage of traditional drummers.

The main objective of this article is to examine the modalities of gendered space in relation to *dùndún* drumming among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria. I interrogate the question of women’s agency in a predominantly male tradition by describing how a form of performative “masculinity” is being displayed by women. I describe many of the ways in which female drummers transcend gender boundaries by simultaneously contesting, yet maintaining (not threatening) established practices within the traditional Yorùbá soundscape. I argue that women’s agency in this regard is hedged by the prevailing socio-economic circumstances and practices in the music industry, that have provided the basis of challenging traditional limitations to a career path and economic progress based on gender practices.

Through a narrative of the life experiences of two female *dùndún* popular musicians, Àrà and Àyánbínrin, whose real names are Àràlólá Olúmúyiwá and Olúwatósìn Esther Olákanyè, and textual analyses of a selection of their compositions, I explore how the notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed, negotiated and contested. In so doing, I seek to extend the debate surrounding the issue of gendered authenticity by arguing that the emergence of female involvement in the art of drumming is a continuum and not necessarily a breach of a time-honoured music profession among the Yorùbá.

The approach to this research is partly in the form of analysing case studies. Although two major forms of practitioners, traditional and urban popular, exist at present, the latter group was purposively selected because of their uniqueness.² My focus on two prominent female *dùndún* practitioners, Àyánbínrin and Àrà is because: both were not born into the Àyàn drumming family but became drummers out of interest; had some level of western education; and are based in Lagos, a cosmopolitan city in southwestern Nigeria. They are not only known for playing the *gáangan*, an hourglass drum held in the armpit, but also for combining drumming with singing. Ethnographic techniques such as key informant interviews and participant observation were used to generate additional data. Audio and video recordings of performances of the artists were obtained during the various stages of fieldwork to provide further analytical content. After listening attentively to recordings and carefully observing live performances of the artists, combined with excerpts from field notes, collected data were then subjected to content analyses.

² An extensive discussion on the traditional style and urban popular forms is contained in the author’s doctoral thesis (2009). Ayanniké Ọdẹdoyin, Aina Ayanbanke Lawani and Ɖeola Ajọke Ayan Adegoke are examples of female *dùndún* drummers associated with the traditional style.

Theorizing gendered space

In theorizing the subject of gender it may be possible to achieve this by exploring its spatial dimensions. For instance, Nzegwu's (1999) work, which focuses on sacral representation in family spaces while examining visual arts as time lines, referred to three possible layers of social space: physical, mental and lived. Gender is often constructed through social rituals supported by institutional power such that gender identities become cultural performances that retroactively construct the "originary materiality" of sexuality. In other words, the generative source for the materialist interpretation of spatiality lies in recognizing that it is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in concrete form and as a set of relations between individuals and groups. In every case, it is the mental cognition and representation assigned to a space or material that affirms its social conceptualization. Similarly, Lefebvre (1991: 40) had drawn a connection among three layers of social space (perceived, conceived and lived) such that a possible movement from one group to another could occur without confusion.

As a framework for analysis, I draw on the theory of spatial trialectics as informed by Sanga (2007) who examined the production of gendered space in *Muziki wa Injili* in Dar es Salaam. Sanga suggested that the physical gendered space comprising various "sites" and "settings," and the mental, gendered words, myths, songs, paintings and literary works are veritable sources where ideas about gender are constructed, expressed, or communicated. The resultant lived, gendered space includes real experiences of individuals who encounter various gendered physical practices and gendered mental representations. Reflecting on the three-dimensional construction of space, one can contend that the mental gendered space is critical and, in many respects, responsible for shaping people's lived experiences of gender. Indeed, it is through gendered space that various gendered stereotypes are constructed, disseminated and sustained. In this article, I use the model of spatial trialectics to explicate the gendered space in which the female *dùndún* drummers operate and to analyze the dynamics of gender in relation to drumming among the Yorùbá. My analysis attempts to reveal how the female *dùndún* drummers attained a reasonable level of success in contesting and negotiating gendered space. The main strategies which the artists employed in navigating the exclusive Yorùbá drumming art included questioning, resistance and dismantling gendered boundaries, an attempt that ultimately transformed them into "gendered space transgressors".

Gender issues and music performance in Nigeria

It has been suggested that African conceptualizations and realities about the musical arts trigger and give meaning to performance, societal action and discourse (Nzewi and Galane 2005). In particular, sex- and gender-related issues are critical to the conception and organization of musical ensembles among the Yorùbá of Nigeria, largely because gender roles are well articulated in ensembles whose performances are organized around gender relations. The intersection of gender and power in both traditional and modern Yorùbá society is evident in bounded, formal performances. Discursive representations of music and gender in this regard have been varied. For instance, Omibiyi-Obidike

(1988/1989) opined that women in contemporary Nigeria feature prominently in the production and performance of music, albeit within specified cultural limits. She notes:

Within this frame of reference, female musicians in Nigeria are mostly singers since drumming or playing of any traditional instruments apart from rattles is usually exclusive to men. As singers, 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 (*ibid.*: 103).

With specific reference to Yorubaland, it is instructive to redirect attention to Drewal's observation that "there are more restrictions placed on women in performances organized by men than there seem to be in women's performances" (1992: 172). Men are prominent and dominate the playing of instruments, while women dominate in singing. Moreover, women are culturally perceived as more proficient and more fluent than men in their grasp of appropriate proverbs and epithets. Based on such a belief, Drewal raised a vital question as to whether or not the construction of gender in African performances is always in fact asymmetrical and whether or not power always resides in the male half of that structure. Gender divisions need not necessarily reflect the superiority of one gender over the other. For example, Koskoff (1989) observed that there are instances in which men and women are perceived not in a conceptual framework of dichotomous opposition, but rather in terms of complementarities, and where control of the performance space is more or less shared. Examples of other scholars in support of Koskoff's position include Nzewi and Galane (2005), Ozah (2010), and Ajibade (2013). Examples abound in Yorùbá spiritual and religious spheres, which affirm that men and women are instead more in a relationship of complementarity than one being an appendage of the other. Evidence suggests that in certain ritual contexts, the crossing of gender boundaries to express or enact the opposite gender roles is inevitable (Ajibade 2013: 970). Whatever the case, to paraphrase Omojola (2012), the gendered space needs not be viewed with lenses revealing its asymmetrical nature, but as a peculiarity reflected in complementarity rather than contestations or inequalities.

Yorùbá drumming tradition: Conformity and breaches

There is ample proof in the literature that Àyàṅàgalú, a male, was the first Yorùbá drummer. As the progenitor of all Yorùbá drummers, he is worshipped as the god of drumming by traditional *dùndún* drummers all over Yorubaland (Bankole *et al.* 1975). Many scholars such as Marcuzzi (2005), Vincent (2006), Klein (2007) and Samuel (2014) have documented many of the well-established traditions of the Àyàn lineage. They identified various factors responsible for the sustainability and dominance of the music, and described how the custodians had preserved their profession against the inevitable onslaught of modernity. The sacred settings in which traditional Àyàn operate are uniquely deep and sophisticated in many respects. Examples include the rites which herald and greet the arrival and naming of any male child born into an Àyàn family (Marcuzzi 2005, Klein 2007). More appropriately is the regular and periodic (special) worship of Àyàṅàgalú, the ancestral and guardian spirit of traditional drummers. The event always involves all male members of each drumming family who gather to offer

prayers, supplications, thanksgiving and sacrifices as well as pay obeisance as they seek the benevolence and blessings of Àyàn in their drumming profession. Strict observance of the prescribed rites and regular renewal practices bind the drummers to their ancestor.

Besides gendering the art of drumming, musical instruments are similarly gendered. Gender rationalizations among the Yorùbá are markedly revealed in the way names and roles are assigned to musical instruments. These are usually based on different factors, including sizes, pitches and the timbres of the instruments. Structural roles are decided on a male and female basis with the lead (coordinating) role assigned to the female. It is customary for the lead drums in ensembles to perform a specialized, extra-musical role as the speech surrogate. The findings of Samuel and Olapade (2013) resonate with Doubleday's (1999 and 2008) treatises on musical instruments and gender. They noted that in spite of the presence and significant spiritual position of any male drum like the *gúdúgúdú* in the *dùndún* ensemble, each family of the numerous Yorùbá drum ensembles has a principal instrument known as *iyá* (mother), which is played by the leader of the ensemble. It is instructive to note that the gendered allocation of musical roles in the organization of musical events neither suggests absolute superiority nor does it translate into an advantage of one gender over the other. Similarly, the general belief that forbids women from playing traditional drums cannot be strictly applied to the *dùndún* because its ensemble is more connected to social than religious ceremonies. Unlike other drum ensembles such as *bàtá*, *ìpèsè*, *àgèrè* and *ìgbìn*, which are associated with the Yorùbá divinities *Şàngó*, *Ifá*, *Ògún* and *Ọbátálá*, respectively, the *dùndún* is not tied to any particular deity. As a result of its eloquence and distinctiveness as speech surrogate, it is performed freely alongside any of the ensembles principally assigned to any of the deities.

Factors that promote female involvement in *dùndún* drumming

Female involvement in drumming resulted from different influences within and outside Yorùbá culture. These included the *dùndún*'s migration from the rural to the urban setting and its attendant effect in expanding the musical space for members not of the Àyàn family, including women. Not being discriminated against by liberal, traditional male *dùndún* drummers and the growth of urban culture were influential factors that encouraged female drummers. The changing contexts and platforms for popular music performance, which readily absorbed innovations on many fronts; commercialism, and the influence of gender roles from outside were contributory factors (Samuel 2014: 38). As mentioned earlier, two strands of female *dùndún* drummers were identified: the traditional, classical-form performers and the urban, popular-form performers. Performers constituting the former were born into the Àyàn family; they are partially literate, rural-based and of low socio-economic status. They generally display proficiency in the *iyáàlù* and *gúdúgúdú* (two prominent drums in the *dùndún* ensemble) and demonstrate a high level of knowledge of traditional *dùndún* repertoires that are well expressed in the three modes of speech, signal and dance. According to Nketia, the afore-mentioned modes form the basis of African traditional drumming (1988).

Urban, popular female *dùndún* performers are distinctly identified by their genre

of music as a subcategory of Nigerian popular music. These are middle to upper class, literate women whose aspirations and career trajectories reside completely outside the Àyàn lineage and spiritual tradition, but who decided to enter the cosmopolitan music industry in Lagos as drummers. Compared to their counterparts in rural areas, these women are based in urban centers and their musical style is mainly hybridized, combining pseudo-traditional elements with modern forms. Unlike traditional female *dùndún* drummers who strictly adopt the *dùndún* ensemble for their performances, popular female *dùndún* drummers represented by Àyánbìnrin and Àrà, combine *dùndún* with western-European musical instruments such as the electronic keyboard, rhythm and bass guitars. Other Yorùbá percussive instruments are included not as mere “additives” but to further enrich the rhythmic content in density and danceability. Interestingly, Àyánbìnrin and Àrà alternate between singing and playing the hourglass drum. Their incorporation of the dance mode (*àlùjò*) is to make up for their limited knowledge of the performing speech and signals. The two icons of popular female *dùndún* drummers, Àyánbìnrin and Àrà, could be labeled as double transgressors; for venturing into a profession stereotypically classified as the exclusive province of men, and because neither of them was born into the Àyàn family.

The role of physical space in the making of the female *dùndún* drummers

The primacy of a combination of temporal and spatial aspects in the development of the musicianship of the female drummers at a young age is evident from the narratives I extrapolated from their biographies. It represents a manifestation of the first leg of the trialectics to which my constructed social space is anchored. There were numerous events and occasions at home and school requiring music performances, which served as stimulating environments to cultivate their musical interests. Àrà recounted that as a little girl, she had always fantasized about growing up to become as famous as Michael Jackson, Diana Ross and other renowned American pop musicians. In the case of Àyánbìnrin, she grew up listening to the music of many Nigerian veteran popular musicians, including King Sunny Ade and Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey as well as Lagbaja, who became her role models.³ The enthusiasm to follow in the footsteps of iconic American and Nigerian artists is noteworthy, largely because it served as an impetus for career advancement and broke the barriers in their line of business.

The participation in the musical groups to which Àrà and Àyánbìnrin belonged as adults, either in schools or as backup singers to artists in established musical groups, helped to build their confidence in many respects. For instance, as an undergraduate, Àyánbìnrin took part in many musical events when she joined a university-based music group. The group staged many productions, which involved singing, dancing and occasionally, dramatic skits, all to promote Yorùbá traditions. Such an experience opened a new direction in Àyánbìnrin’s search for fulfilment in music. It helped her

³ King Sunny Ade is a notable singer-songwriter and virtuoso guitarist associated with *Juju* music; Ebenezer Fabiyi, also known as Ebenezer Obey is a prominent *Juju* music artist whose works and styles have influenced many artists; Lagbaja is a famous mask-wearing Nigerian artist who depicts the apparent facelessness of the common man.

to critically reflect on how seriously she planned to engage in music as a profession, alongside her main course of study, Chemical Engineering. Similarly, Àrà was an amateur backup singer in various bands in Lagos. She ventured briefly into Afrobeat music until she met Wanle Akinbóboye, the founder of Atunda Entertainment, who recognised the potential in her and was willing to present her to the entertainment industry.⁴ A vital point that set both female *dùndún* drummers on the professional path and provided a platform for launching them into the limelight was their coming into contact with professionals in the music industry.

The presence of different, commercial-based, informal drumming schools owned and operated by competent male *dùndún* drummers, where Àyánbínrin and Àrà received individual drumming lessons, had an important role in their acquisition of drumming skills. Both women understood their double exclusion from the traditional art of drumming but cleverly took advantage of opportunities at their disposal to acquire skills. At Atunda Entertainment Organization, Àrà was handed the *gáangan* and was asked to do all she could with it. In relation to the drum, Àrà observed as follows: “I had to eat with it, sleep and wake up with it and do almost everything with it”. She became familiar with the rudiments of playing the instrument after a few weeks of rehearsals and was able to play the drum on her own without much assistance. The male, in-house chief drummer was always available to tutor Àrà in a few techniques peculiar to the *dùndún*. For her part, Àyánbínrin demonstrated her seriousness by procuring a drum as required by her male drum teachers. Both drummers further developed their skills individually by watching videos and live performances of Nigerian artists who adopted the *dùndún* in their music and engaged in long hours of rehearsals. Against the background of a gender(ed) space, which restricts women from drumming, the desire to become female *dùndún* drummers, coupled with the performative acts of Àrà and Àyánbínrin, represents a subversion of existing norms. In addition, the willingness of master drummers to shelve tradition and provide training to both female drummers could be seen as a form of encouragement for the women to continue on their “transgressive path”.

More importantly is the role of the media, which positively promoted the actions of Àyánbínrin and Àrà, and the impact of various entertainment companies that enabled them to realize their dreams. The support of the media and these companies were instrumental in bringing about the level of success the female drummers had achieved in the music industry. The music industry is a highly competitive one; filled with all forms of discrimination, especially against women. There are allegations of financial and sexual exploitation lodged against many male promoters, producers and record label holders in the Nigerian entertainment industry. Loko (2010) discussed these repressive acts of business moguls, particularly owners of recording companies, against their clients. Economic exploitation takes different forms ranging from rigid and inequitable contractual terms, to a lack of transparency in payment of artists’ royalties and poor

⁴ This is a Lagos-based promotion agency that identifies and grooms young recruits.

implementation of signed agreements. In extreme cases, many artists are subjected to inhuman treatment, including forceful and illegal eviction from their residences.

It has become the practice of many emerging artists in Nigeria, especially women, to devise survival strategies and learn how to sharpen negotiation skills as they navigate a precarious environment. The desperate ones among them sometimes succumb to sexual advances, while seeking favours and opportunities for career advancement. My research suggests that Àrà's and Àyánbìnrin's choice of playing the *dùndún* drum in a male-dominated space was strategic and even provided leverage in their quest for recognition in the male-dominated world of music in Nigeria.

There is a sense in which the actions of Àrà and Àyánbìnrin resonate with Butler's notion of an "ethic of responsibility" as an antidote to any form of "ethical violence". Butler (2005) stated that oppressed individuals are factually expected to subvert power and, in doing so, their strategy is guided by a calculation of the probable consequence of actions aiming to maximize some good. It may be argued that both female drummers strategically deployed a subtle, but an effective approach in negotiating the competitive musical space in which they operate. This, in every sense, affirms the liminal adoption of the mental dimension in the trialectic, spatial order. Judging by the frequent invitations for them to perform at social events, it appears the strategy has paid off. As celebrities on multinational corporate shows they are paid more than male musicians appearing on the same stage. Indeed, such platforms have largely secured for them a new status, which they leveraged as entrepreneurs to sell their musical products. Àrà and Àyánbìnrin claim they are the innovators of female drumming in Nigeria. But this claim is debatable because there are more experienced female drummers, such as Àyánnike Odedoyin and Àyánbanke Lawani, both traditional performers, whose involvement in *dùndún* drumming predates these two. The women associated with the traditional form of drumming have remained in obscurity largely because of their disadvantaged locations in rural areas.

When the settings and performance contexts are compared to those of male drummers, the question of an authentic drumming tradition is immediately activated. Euba (1990) sets the tone for the debate surrounding legitimate as opposed to unlicensed drummers. In discussing the drummers' association, he made specific reference to Fadipe's (1970: 254) submission that no one in Yorubaland was allowed to set up a trade unless he was a member of the appropriate guild. Euba cited the example of the Osun Divisional Drummers' Association as the only duly registered organization which was allowed to perform in the various towns and villages. As far as Yorùbá traditional male drummers are concerned, being born into an Àyàn family is a requisite qualification for entering the drumming profession. Male members of Àyàn families often assert their authority as the sole custodians of the Àyànàgalú musical legacy. They proudly make pronouncements such as the following statement either verbally or on their drums: "*iran igún ní jẹbọ, iran àkàlà a jòkú; iran babaà mi, ilù ní nlù,*" translated as: "The family of the eagle relishes sacrifice, that of the vulture enjoys dead bodies, but my own family are renowned drummers". This affirmative declaration is a result of their lineage.

The territorial posturing of the Àyàn family members has not obliterated the reality of an ever-expanding social space in which contemporary *dùndún* performance takes place. Consequently, other interested members, including women, constantly seek a place of expression in this expanding space. The women are indirectly encouraged and further emboldened to contest the gendered space by the positive attitude of many traditional master drummers. A form of support is the inclusion and registration of any interested female *dùndún* drummers as members of the drumming guild in their environment. Another category of male drummers comprises “hardliners and sustainers of stereotypical traditional roles,” who dismiss the female drummers as mere pretenders as far as “serious,” religious Yorùbá traditional drumming is concerned (Samuel 2014). The implication of the foregoing is that although the barriers framing the sacred confines of drumming may appear too hard for female *dùndún* performers to penetrate, the same cannot be said of the social performance space where female drummers have emerged. Such a move constitutes a marked departure from the norm and could be interpreted as transgression.

There seems a counter-narrative that ruptures the normative, territorial posture of traditional male drummers, particularly in the coinage and adoption of the title, “Àyàn” by Olúwatósín Olákanyè (one of the female drummers) who was not born into the lineage of drummers. I interpret her effrontery to adopt and prefix the name Àyàn (the traditional identity marker of drummers) to “binrin” to form Àyànbínrin (her stage name) as transgressive. On another note, Àrà’s refusal to sign a new contract with the Atunda Entertainment Organization could be interpreted as resistance to exploitation by promoters. From the stories of both female artists, one can deduce that women’s agency as far as *dùndún* drumming is concerned, is hedged by commercialism and the influence of the music industry. This is in contrast to the long-standing tradition among the Yorùbá where ancestral veneration of Àyànàgalú, the promotion of socio-cultural activities and other spiritual considerations were the central features of defining a drumming artist in Nigeria.

Songs of negotiation in the music of the female *dùndún* artists

In this section, I draw attention to elements employed in the process of negotiating gender constructs. These include selected texts which have been influenced by the physical and social environment of both performers. A basic assumption is that within the trialectic framework adopted in this article, their lived experiences, mental, gendered space and worldview can further be encountered in drumming or through song texts. The first composition for analysis is Àyànbínrin’s piece entitled: ‘Àyànbínrin nàà dé o’ (Àyànbínrin has arrived):

Drum texts/verbal interpretation

Àyànbínrin nàà dé o (x2)

Ó gbòrin dé, Ó gbé ’lù dé

Àyànbínrin nàà dé o

Àyànbínrin tẹẹ lẹ ò mọrẹẹ o

English translation

Àyànbínrin has arrived (x2)

She comes singing as well as drumming

Àyànbínrin has arrived

Here’s Àyànbínrin, you no longer can deny

<i>Tẹẹ lẹ̀ ò mọ̀</i>	You can't deny her recognition
<i>Àwà nàà rẹ̀é, a ò jù bẹ̀ẹ̀ lọ̀</i>	Here we are, we may not be more than these
<i>Ibi ire n'ílù n gbé waá rẹ̀</i>	This drumming will doubtlessly lead us to good fortunes.

The foregoing piece of music has, more or less, become Àyánbìnrin's signature tune that she performs at the beginning of each of her concerts. The first four lines of section A contain an announcement drawing the attention of the public to an "important event," which is the arrival of Àyánbìnrin on stage or on the music scene. This style of performance could be described as imitative, with the voice taking the form of a direct repetition of the drum texts. The texts, when read and viewed beyond a mere announcement, emphatically introduce two activities of the musician, which are singing and drumming. While singing, especially for women, may not be uncommon or unexpected, the same cannot be said of drumming, as expressed in the texts. This gesture could be interpreted as the artist's attempt to step over her boundary. The announcement is more or less a contestation of the prescribed gendered space, which reinforces her subversive behaviour. Recall Butler's (2005) argument.

Lines 4–5 articulate Àyánbìnrin's readiness to claim her place within the music industry, through her resolve to assert her authority and thus, challenge anyone who tries to deny her recognition. In lines 6–7, Àyánbìnrin affirms that nothing, including the numerical strength of her band could constitute an encumbrance to the good fortune which lies ahead. According to Euba (1990: 97), *dùndún* drummers believe that through drumming their various aspirations for the basic comforts of life would be met. Euba made reference to Àyànàgalú's eulogy where a master *dùndún* drummer expressed confidence in Àyàn's supernatural power to attract good fortunes toward him and have all his needs met, including owning a house and a car. In the same vein, Àyánbìnrin's resolve in making a success out of the music profession, especially drumming, is clearly expressed. Following is Àyánbìnrin's self-proclaimed proficiency on the drum:

Drum texts/verbal interpretation	English translation
<i>Ẹ̀ní máa gbọ̀ wa,</i>	Anyone who would listen to us
<i>Ẹ̀ní máa gbọ̀ wa si ma mọ̀' lù rẹ̀pẹ̀ẹ̀</i>	Our listeners would understand the drum texts
<i>Tó bá jẹ̀ tí ká lù' lù Ẹ̀ ránsẹ̀ p'Àyánbìnrin</i>	If you seek an expert drummer, Àyánbìnrin is your right choice
<i>Ẹ̀ní máa gbọ̀ wa si ma mọ̀' lù rẹ̀pẹ̀ẹ̀</i>	Anyone who would listen to us must understand drum texts
<i>Tó bá jẹ̀ ká jó bàtá Ẹ̀ ránsẹ̀ p'Àyánbìnrin</i>	If you seek an expert dancer, Àyánbìnrin is your right choice.

I interpret this bold declaration as a strategy meant to silence any skeptics who may question her preference for drumming. She unequivocally declares that she is "an expert drummer" whose service should be sought by all and at any time whenever need arises. It is not uncommon for Àyánbìnrin to adopt nonsensical syllables as embellishments specifically addressed to any interested dancers to responsively move their bodies to her *àlùjọ́* rhythms. Elongation and truncation were two vital compositional devices adopted in this song, all presented within the repetitive, responsorial terrain. The performance style took the form of the initial presentation of the main theme, followed

by a juxtaposition of other musical ideas which not only bring about variation, but also a sense of interest and effective audience participation.

On another occasion⁵, I witnessed Àyánbìnrin step down from the podium to interact with members of the audience. She put forward a question (in a call-and-response format) as follows: *Sé lè jó bí òkòtó?* (Can you move your feet rhythmically to the beat?), to which our response was an affirmative “*Ehn!*” (Yes). She repeated the question and received a much louder, positive response. Thereafter, she hung the curved stick (drum beater) on her left shoulder, bent down and began to sway her hips to the wild admiration of her fans. Suddenly, she paused for a moment and switched back to drumming as she played this phrase on her drum: *Ó d̀̀òkòtó* (S/he dances so gracefully), to which we all responded: *Ọmọ a f`idí jó ra-in-ra-in* (swaying her/his hips rhythmically). Such a gesture is indicative of the good rapport with her audience, which in turn makes an effort to decode her drum texts. Àyánbìnrin requested from the dancers, according to the drum texts, vigorous steps. I contend that in Àyánbìnrin’s confidence lies the claim of bearing authority much like any male drummer, combined with her drumming and dancing; a claim that simultaneously suggests a sense of contestation and negotiation of a space which male drummers have always occupied.

The second example of lyrics/drum text containing gender-related messages is a fragment from Àyánbìnrin’s song entitled, “*Ẹ̀ múra*”. It contains a message of encouragement addressed to women, particularly female musicians, imploring them to brace for the challenges thrown at them by their male counterparts. She enjoins women to courageously take their rightful position, as can be seen in the text below:

<i>Àwọ̀n `kùnrin ti gòkè odò, káfàrá ó tó já</i>	The men have crossed the river before the collapse of the bridge
<i>Àwa ló kù káa múra</i>	We (womenfolks), are left, we should brace up.

On a different occasion,⁶ I recall that Àyánbìnrin inverted the original interpretation of the drum texts and directed the statement at men, by wittily declaring:

<i>Ẹ̀yin ló kù kẹ́e múra, (ẹ̀yin ọ̀kùnrin o)</i>	It is you that are left that need to brace up (all you men)
<i>Àyánbìnrin ti gòkè odò, káfàrá ó tó já</i>	Àyánbìnrin has crossed the river before the collapse of the bridge
<i>Ẹ̀yin ló kù kẹ́e múra</i>	It is you that are left that need to brace up.

When I sought to know the reason for the substitution in the text, she simply smiled and quietly responded: “My message is directed at male drummers, informing them that we have taken over. This kind of shift is perfectly in order ... we (*dùndún* drummers) are at liberty to re-compose or even alter any existing composition to fit a new context, which is exactly what I have done” (Interview, Olúwatósín Olákanyè, 2009).

In the case of Àrà, she presents her composition entitled, *Tipátipá*, to demonstrate the diplomatic prowess of the female over her male partner in the context of marriage.

⁵ The occasion was a musical concert organized by a group of students of Lead City University, Ibadan on 20 January 2013, which featured Àyánbìnrin and her band as the special guest artists.

⁶ I made a recording of this piece at a performance by Àyánbìnrin at Motherlan’ night club, Opebi in Lagos on 14 February, 2015.

Àrà reiterates the fact that the wife is wise and possesses skills to manage delicate marital conflicts:

<i>Bòkọọ mí kọ 'yàn aḷẹ màá bẹni síi</i>	If my husband refuses his delicacy (supper) that I prepared
<i>Tipátipá</i>	I will handle him diplomatically
<i>Màá fàá mọra, Màá bẹ nkan mi</i>	I will draw him to my heart, and plead if need be
<i>Màá ní olówó orí mí, Jọwọ dámi lóhùn</i>	I will say, 'Payer of my dowry, please, heed my call,
<i>Dárijì mí o, fòhun tí mo bá se</i>	Forgive all my wrongful acts'
<i>Ahọn àt'èyín ma njà,</i>	The tongue and teeth sometimes fight each other
But they stay, they stay together	But they stay, they stay together.

Àrà's performance style is nearly similar to that of Àyánbìnrin in the sense that they both utilize the responsorial form (cantor/chorus) in terms of presentations. In the texts above, Àrà boasts of how she can tactfully win her husband over and gain his attention in situations of conflict. She likens the relationship between couples to that of the tongue and the teeth. The inevitability of occasional schisms and squabbles between couples is fully recognized, but Àrà submits that such conflicts should never be allowed to degenerate into separation or divorce. Furthermore, Àrà reveals a method for a sustainable, harmonious marital relationship, which includes acceptance of each other, readiness to overlook faults and eagerness to forgive each other's mistakes. Although the term: *tipátipá* means "forcefully" or "compulsorily," the context in which it is rendered in the song connotes "at all costs" or "by all means". The high point of a wife's influence on her husband is found in the second section of the song, which is also in responsorial form. It speaks about the wife's ingenuity in luring her husband to bed whenever he becomes irritable and refuses to eat his dinner. The song continues:

<i>Ó b'ínú wọlé, màá tẹle lọ</i>	If he storms angrily into the room, I will go after him
<i>Màá tẹle wọlé, Màá tí'lẹkùn</i>	I will follow up by shutting the door (on both of us)
<i>Màá tí'lẹkùn tán, Màá sòbìnrin fun</i>	Thereafter, I will ensure we make love
<i>Màá sòbìnrin tán, Màá bí méje</i>	Since he cannot refuse, we will end up making seven babies
<i>Màá bí méje tán, Màá jeun omo</i>	After all these, I will eat the fruit of my labour.

The wife is enjoined, in the above text, to win over her husband through diplomatic means. Àrà predicts the sequence of events that would follow, including pregnancy and to the delight of the couple, the production of multiple babies. Within the context of the spatial trialectic framework, one point is evident from the message of the song. Àrà recognizes and affirms the status of her Yorùbá husband. Otherwise, why should a wife persuade her husband to eat after she had laboriously prepared his favourite meal? She subtly challenges this position by suggesting what she considers a perfect solution, that is, the "female power" that the wife exercises over her husband. In her representation of the contestation between the couple's strategies in the foregoing song, Àrà resolves the matter in favour of the wife. The husband's action and emotional outbursts as expressed in his refusal to eat dinner is covertly presented as childish. The wife, on the other hand, is considered superior and has a more effective means of exercising control.

Responses to female *dùndún* drumming

The response of traditional authorities, including paramount traditional rulers and

traditional *dùndún* master drummers to female involvement in *dùndún* drumming, could be described as ambivalent. On the one hand, they seem to accord it tacit approval as demonstrated by the open endorsements from Ọba Ọlayiwola Adeyemi III—the Alààfin of Ọyo, and Ọba Ẹnitán Adeyẹye—Ọoni of Ile-Ife (two of the most important paramount traditional rulers in Yorubaland). The latter went as far as appointing Àrà as a “culture ambassador” of Yorubá culture in an elaborate and well-publicized event in his palace.⁷ There are liberal, traditional male *dùndún* drummers who support the idea of extending membership of the guild of drummers to any interested female drummer. On the other hand, Yorubá male drummers have not ceded their authority or traditional performance space to the women. There are two major reasons (physical and spiritual) that a number of male drummers claimed in support of their denunciation of female drumming in Yorubaland.⁸

A general observation of audience perception in Lagos, Ogun and Oyo states during fieldwork revealed that both Àyánbìnrin and Àrà are well appreciated by the public. Their performances on stage are received as an extension and modernization of a tradition worthy of promotion. Political officers and government functionaries have been creating avenues to bridge the divide between tradition and modernity as far as the promotion of drumming in Yorubaland is concerned. In conjunction with multinational organizations, many state governments in Nigeria have inaugurated annual music programmes to commemorate notable historical events in Yorubaland. Such programmes include: the annual *Talking Drum Festival* and the *Ojude Oba Festival* spearheaded by the Ogun State Government and the *Atiba Festival* organized by the Oyo State Government. Each event features a display of traditional and modern Yorubá drumming by different *dùndún* performers, including Àrà. From the foregoing, the lived experiences of the female drummers, by and large, complete the third stage of the spatial trialectics proposed in this article, which is their responses to discrimination in the performance space they occupy.

Conclusion

Female involvement in *dùndún* drumming is a reminder that musical expressions are dependent on change in Yoruba society or that musical expressions could in fact propel changes in society. Against this background, the performative nature of artistic expressions as displayed by the two female drummers has the capacity to alter awareness and thereby allow for a radical space where new kinds of gender performances

⁷ The event was widely reported by many media outlets in Nigeria. For instance, see <http://www.pulse.ng/entertainment/celebrities/ooni-of-ife-monarch-appoints-ara-as-cultural-ambassador-id5068888.html>. Accessed 16 May, 2017.

⁸ My finding revealed that hardliner, traditional male *dùndún* drummers strongly hold the view that a perceived lack of stamina on the part of women, due to the rigorous nature of drumming, is a physical factor, while taboos and a policy of not admitting women into arenas where cultic activities occur are spiritual reasons women are not considered as drummers in the truest sense of the word (Samuel 2014).

and gender identities can evolve and bring about a further transgression of gender conventions in Yoruba society.

Although gender identities are largely shaped through sustained social performances, such positions are fluid rather than fixed. The construction and contestation of gender and gendered identities in a performative sense provides a room for negotiation to the point where there is a disjuncture between conforming and contested gender practices. The implications of the foregoing are far-reaching. For example, as expectations begin to change, it could encourage women performers to set new boundaries in society and performance aesthetics.

References

- Ajibade, George Olusola
2013 "Same-Sex Relationships in Yorùbá Culture and Orature." *Journal of Homosexuality* 60 (7): 965–983.
- Bankole, Ayo, Judith Bush, Sadek H. Samaan, K. Anyidoho, M. Alafuele, and I.A. Ebong
1975 "The Yorùbá Master Drummer." *African Arts* 8 (2): 48–56, 77–78.
- Butler, Judith
2005 *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Doubleday, Veronica
1999 "The Frame Drum in the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments and Power." *Ethnomusicology* 43 (1): 101–134.
2008 "Sounds of Power: Musical Instruments and Gender." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 17 (1): 3–39.
- Drewal, Margaret Thompson
1992 *Yorùbá Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Euba, Akin
1990 *Yorùbá Drumming: The Yorùbá Dùndún Tradition*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies.
- Fadipe, Nathaniel A
1970 *The Sociology of the Yorùbá*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Klein, Debra L.
2007 *Yorùbá Bata Goes Global: Artists, Culture Brokers, and Fans*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Koskoff, Ellen, ed.
1989 *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Loko, Olugbenga O.
2010 "Growth and Challenges of the Music Recording Industry in Nigeria 1920–2000." PhD Dissertation, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

- Marcuzzi, Michael
 2005 "A Historical Study of the Ascendant Role of Bata Drumming in Cuban Orisa Worship." PhD Dissertation, York University, Toronto.
- Nketia, Kwabena J. H
 1988. *The Music of Africa*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.
- Nzegwu, Nkiru
 1999 "Art as Time-Lines: Sacral Representation in Family Spaces." In *Sacred Spaces and Public Quarrels: African Cultural and Economic Landscapes*, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Ezekiel Kalipen, eds. 171–95. Asmara: African World P.
- Nzewi, Meki and Sello Galane
 2005 "Music is a Woman." In *Gender and Sexuality in South African Music*, Chris Walton and Stephanus Muller, eds. 71–79. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.
- Olaniyan, C. Olayemi
 1993 "The Dùndún Master-Drummer-Composer, Arranger and Performer and His Devices." *African Notes* 17 (1–2): 54–61.
 2001 "Yorùbá Dùndún Musical Practice." *Nigerian Music Review* 2: 68–79.
- Omibiyi-Obidike, Mosunmola A.
 1988/1989 "Women in Nigerian Music." *Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research* 30/31: 101–115.
- Omojola, Bode
 2012 *Yorùbá Music in the Twentieth Century: Identity, Agency and Performance Practice*. New York: University of Rochester Press.
- Ozah, Marie Agatha
 2010 "Can we Dance Together? Gender and Performance Space Discourse in Ègwú Àmàlà of the Ogbaru of Nigeria." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 42: 21–40.
- Samuel, Kayode Michael
 2009 "Female Involvement in Dùndún Drumming among the Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria." PhD Dissertation, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
 2014 "Male Attitudes to Female Dùndún Drumming in Western Nigeria." *Nigerian Field* 79: 25–40.
- Samuel, Kayode Michael and Jonathan Adeniyi Olapade
 2013 "Igbìn Musical Tradition in Yorùbá Culture." *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts* 9: 187–197.
- Sanga, Imani
 2007 "Gender in Church Music: Dynamics of Gendered Space in Muziki wa Injili in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 19 (1): 59–91.

Vincent, Amanda

2006 "Bata conversations: Guardianship and Entitlement Narratives about the Bata in Nigeria and Cuba." PhD Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Interviews by author

Olumuyiwa, Aralola. Lagos, Nigeria, 27 September 27 2008.

Olákanyè, Olúwatósìn Esther. Lagos, Nigeria, 12 January 2009.

Olákanyè, Olúwatósìn Esther. Ibadan, Nigeria, February 14, 2015.