# TRANSCENDING THE SONIC AND THE TEXTUAL: *SENWELE* MUSIC PERFORMANCE IN ILORIN, NORTHERN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** Among Muslim women in predominantly Islamic societies, music-making remains a contested subject. At the core of these contestations are questions of boundaries, agency, taboos, resistance, and generalisations of the socio-musical experiences of Muslim women. This article explores the development of *senwele* music, a socio-religious music form of the Ilorin in northern Nigeria, from its origin as *orin-kengbe* (calabash music) to its transition into a translocal music form. Given influences of the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and Islam, *senwele* music is examined as a compendium of history; one that is not only reflective of the Ilorin traditional music scene, but also the north-south dualism in Ilorin, tensions in music-making and Islam, and regio-political remapping in Nigeria. Based on fieldwork with a major exponent of *senwele*, Alhaja Iya Aladuke, and her music group in Ilorin, the article explores the practice, ambivalences, convivialities and sustainability of *senwele* music performance within its predominantly Islamic context. I argue that while established societal conventions, such as those in Ilorin, function as a standard for the acceptance of music, a woman musician such as Alhaja Iya Aladuke continues to thrive through a musician-community exchange that takes into cognisance the sensibilities of the people while retaining their patronage and her artistic autonomy. Beyond its sonic, textual, and entertainment prerogatives, the sustained practice of *senwele* music in Ilorin presents a continuum for interrogating and negotiating cross-cultural encounters, socio-religious binaries, gender boundaries, and the multiplicity in the socio-musical experiences of Muslim women.

**Keywords:** Hausa-Fulani, Ilorin, music, *orin-kengbe*, Qur'anic, *senwele*, women, Yoruba

## Introduction[1]

When music performance is considered in predominantly Islamic communities, many such discourses are often delineated along binary lines of the permissible, *halal,* and impermissible, *haram* (Al-Atawneh 2012; Lengel 2004; Nielson 2012). While a form of contestation regarding music-making in Islam holds, an extra layer of contestation emerges with Muslim women's engagement in music-making. The complexity of music-making in Islam is broadly rooted in the tension which emanates from the perception of music as a catalyst for perceived vices (Shiloah 1997, 145). These contestations have been further attributed to the lack of a unified position regarding the legality of

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music in Islam (Al-Atawneh 2012), sects of Islamic practice (Sufi, Sunni), different interpretations of the *hadith* (*hadith* refers to various collections of holy Islamic texts made up of talks, actions, and traditions of Prophet Muhammed during his lifetime), and divergent views regarding musical performance in Islam and the socio-cultural expectations of Muslim women. Despite notions of a restrictive engagement with music for Muslim women, the music-making experiences of Muslim women are not universal. They are area, item, and context-specific; they are determined by subjectivities of the mode of Islamisation; and political, economic, and social organisation. Although the range of music-making for women in Islamic societies has been a subject of many scholarly investigations,[2] there remains a lacuna in research on the musical activities of Muslim women in hyphenated societies such as Ilorin, where performance is shaped by external, ethnic, religious, and multiple influences. While the plethora of traditional music forms in Ilorin and various parts of Nigeria, such as *dadakuada (*Adeola 1997)*, baalu* (Abiodun 2000), *apala* (Lasisi 2012)*,* highlife (Emielu 2013), and *fuji* (Klein 2017)*,* have been explored from various standpoints, *senwele* music has yet to receive scholarly attention despite its popularity and patronage within and outside Ilorin.

My opportunity to attend an annual event in Ilorin, in December of 2011, became one of my most enduring encounters with *senwele* music. This was shortly after I arrived in Ilorin for the mandatory one-year of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) for young Nigerians. The NYSC year follows after graduation from an institution of higher learning. With a moderately long scarf covering my head and neck in an attempt to blend with the teeming crowd of spectators at an outdoor performance, I watched the foremost exponent of *senwele*, Alhaja[3] Iya Aladuke Abolodefeloju,[4] engage the audience as her famous song, *Won l'asewo ni wa* (They say we are whores), rented the air. This was accompanied by her intermittent, energetic dances, backup singers, elaborate instrumental accompaniment on different types of percussion, and various forms of audience participation, including "spraying"[5] money. As the performance progressed, songs such as *Won l'asewo ni wa, Fun ra re ni otu* (She will undress herself), and others which followed were rendered in Yoruba, although sung in a slightly different variant of Yoruba. Although I am not Yoruba, my extended interaction with the Yorubas growing up in Lagos—an indigenously Yoruba and cosmopolitan city in Nigeria— provided me with the ability to speak and understand Yoruba language to a reasonable degree. As these performances continued, I tried to reconcile the texts of some of the s*enwele*

[2] See Mack 2004; Rasmussen 2010; Sakata 1989; Stuffelbeam and Wumbei 2012.

[3] Alhaja is an exclusive honorific title for a Muslim woman who has visited Mecca and participated in the Hajj- Islamic holy pilgrimage.

[4] The real name of the musician is Alhaja Hawawu Alake Adisa; however, throughout the article I use the name Alhaja Iya Aladuke, which is her stage name.

[5] Within the context of music performance, "spraying" money, also known as *owó-níná* in Yoruba is a social practice in many Nigerian cultures, where members of the audience or guests express their appreciation of a music performance by placing money on the neck, head, or foreheads of the musician. While spraying money is considered an act of reciprocity and solidarity, it is also often considered a demonstration of socio-economic status.

songs, the nature of their performances, and the level of audience participation with the predominantly Islamic performance context. My experience at the event and within other spaces of Alhaja Iya Aladuke's performances, fused with my interest in how women negotiate socio-musical spaces, stirred my interest in *senwele* music.

This article begins by exploring the historical development of *senwele* music. I situate the practice of *senwele* music within its socio-political and predominantly Islamic Ilorin context and interrogate the convivialities, ambivalences, and sustainability of *senwele* music against the background of some of its suggestive texts. I describe the exchange between the Ilorin community and *senwele* music from its onset as a local music form to its transition to a translocal socio-religious music form. Considering its Yoruba, Fulani, and Islamic influences, *senwele* music is also explored as a compendium of history, reflecting the cultural dualism in Ilorin's cultural landscape, Islamisation of Ilorin, and a history of regio-political remapping in Nigeria. Against this background, I ask, how is the convergence of a hybridised Ilorin culture, Islam, and gender politics embodied in *senwele* music? How are notions of "vulgarity" *(al-fahsha)*,[6] social-cultural and religious binaries negotiated in the performance and sustainability of *senwele* music performance?

Information for this article is primarily based on fieldwork conducted in Ilorin between September 2012 and January 2015, with follow-up research until November 2019. The research includes interviews and informal discussions with Alhaja Hawawu Alake Adisa, more popularly identified as Alhaja Iya Aladuke, members of her music group, members of the Ilorin community, and audiences at her performances. Other sources of data include extensive observation and analysis of her live performances and recordings. While the article examines *senwele* music and points of conjunction where *senwele* music reflects Ilorin's history and culture, this article is not an exhaustive description of the Ilorin cultural landscape.

**Historical contextualisation of Ilorin**

Ilorin is the capital city of Kwara state, the current seat of the state government, and the former seat of the ancient Oyo Empire in the pre-Islamic era. Located in the North-Central geopolitical zone, Ilorin occupies a pivotal position given its marginal north-south location in Nigeria.[7] The location of Ilorin also presents it as the southernmost Emirate in Nigeria and a mosaic of diverse ethnicities (see Figure 1). Accounting for three of the sixteen local government areas in Kwara State: Ilorin-south, Ilorin-east, and Ilorin-west, the 2006 national census pegged the population of Ilorin at 864,755, with an estimated population growth of about 1,272,908 people by 2020 (Babatunde et al. 2014, 4).

The population of Ilorin is broadly organised into three major groups. The first has its origins in an amalgam of villages comprised of early town settlements such as

6 Contextually, *Al-fahsha* in Islam refers to obscene, immoral, foul speech or gestures.

7 Nigeria is broadly stratified into northern and southern regions. There is a geopolitical zoning system that further divides the northern and southern regions into six geopolitical zones.

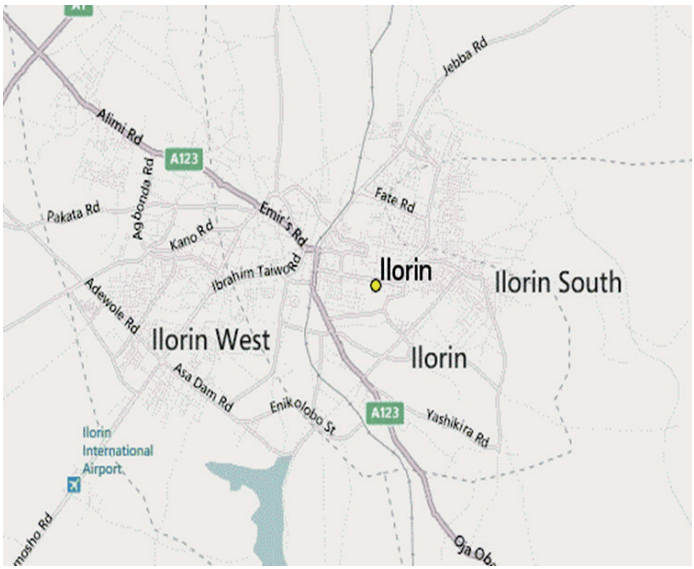



**Figure 1.** Map of Ilorin. Source: www.weatherforecast.com

Oloje, Okesuna, and Oko-Erin, which are mostly Yoruba. The second group consists of migrants to Ilorin from surrounding villages such as Megida, Alapa, Ogbondoroko, Reke, and Amoyo, in Kwara state. The third group includes people of different ethnic affiliations from more distant parts of Nigeria (Jimba 1981). The scope of this article is mostly limited to the first group, which is composed of Indigenous members of the Ilorin community.

Commonly referenced as *Ilu Alufa* (City of Islamic Scholars) and the cradle of Islam for the Yoruba in Nigeria, indigenes of Ilorin are predominantly Muslims. The ascendancy of Islam in Ilorin is most evident in the current Emirate system, the prevalence of Islamic schools, Arabic/Islamic words, names, forms of greeting, and the infusion of Islamic habits into everyday life. Fundamentally, the preponderance of Islam in Ilorin is mobilised by cross-cultural contact between the Yoruba and Fulani, and further incentivised by intermarriage, common lexicons, and commonalities in local cultural practices. The references to Ilorin by the demonym, *Banza Bakwai*; that is, copycats of the Hausa-Fulani Kingdom (Olaniyi 2017, 59), "a Yoruba state imprisoned by Fulani[8] oligarchic imperialism of Sokoto caliphate" (Owolabi and Adio 2013), and a "city with no masquerades", allude to a history of cross-cultural encounters and proselytisation. Before Fulani migration to Ilorin, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ilorin was a Yoruba settlement under the suzerainty of the old Oyo Empire.[9] Ilorin was governed by Aare Afonja, a lieutenant to the Alaafin of the

[8] The Fulani loosely referenced as Hausa-Fulani are an ethnic group in Nigeria mostly found in northern Nigeria. They are credited with the propagation of Islam in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in northern Nigeria.

[9] The Old Oyo Empire was a point of central authority for a large part of the Yoruba people in the

Oyo Empire and commander of the Yoruba army. This administrative structure was interrupted by an internal crisis in the central authority of the Oyo Empire, and the revolt of Afonja. A further outcome of this crisis was that it served as a catalyst for a successful Jihad in Ilorin, and subsequent establishment of the Emirate system in 1823. Consolidating this socio-political shift in Ilorin was the emergence of the first Ilorin traditional head of Fulani descent, Emir Abdulsalami dan Salih Alimi, and the consequent adoption of the title, Emir, as a replacement for Oba or Alaafin in referencing the head of Ilorin's traditional institution.

Ilorin occupies a position of "in-betweenness", largely enabled by its Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani cross-cultural convergence. Although Ilorin remains mostly Yoruba speaking, the establishment of the Emirate system has given rise to a diffusion of Yoruba identity in Ilorin and the emergence of a hybridised or "new" culture. Among its several impacts, the institutionalisation of Islam in Ilorin saw the eradication of Yoruba deities and allied practices, such as the worship of *Egungun*[10] (Na'Allah 1992, 320), which were considered expressions of paganism. In addition, Ilorin does not celebrate any traditional Yoruba festival, has no masquerades, and all sculptures in strategic locations in Ilorin have been removed.[11] The absence of sculptures in Ilorin could be premised on the contentions regarding graven images in Islam (Gruber 2019; Kaminski 2020).

From a broader standpoint of ethnic, religious, and geographical politics in Nigeria, an outcome of the overlap in Ilorin is an ambiguous cultural identity of neither Yoruba nor Hausa-Fulani. Over time, this has crystallised into multivalent dispositions of ownership, disownment, acceptance, non-acceptance, belonging and not belonging. To this end, people from Ilorin are sometimes considered northerners by the southwesterners (Yoruba), and northerners sometimes do not recognise Ilorin as belonging to the north (Aribidesi and Falola 2019, 7). The concurrent reference to Ilorin as "Ilorin Afonja", (alluding to a Yoruba identity), as opposed to "Ilorin Garin Alimi" (alluding to Fulani links) (Jimoh 1994, 58), gives further credence to Ilorin's Yoruba Hausa-Fulani complex and territorial identification. This complex has been summarised as a "crisis of identity" (Babarinsa 2021, Luqman and Amusan 2019). While there is a propensity towards aligning the Ilorin-Hausa-Fulani cross-cultural mix with Wallis and Malm's cultural domination variant, where the forms of a more powerful culture are imposed on another culture in more or less systematic ways, under various conditions of political domination (1984), cross-cultural interactions are not uncommon, especially in a vast multi-cultural country such as Nigeria. Over time, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani cultures have blended into a conglomerate identity,

pre-colonial era in Nigeria. Ibiloye notes that Oyo was the dominant military and political power in Yoruba land (2012, 106).

[10] *Egungun* is a form of ancestral worship among the Yoruba, with masked men representing the spirit of the living dead. It is associated with a popular Egungun masquerade and festival, which is still in practice in many Yoruba towns.

[11] Sculptures are totems of communities in Nigeria and provide an inlet into the historical epochs in the lives of the people.

incorporating simultaneities of these multi-layered connections, with Islam forging a crucial point of commonality. Alluding to this coalescence is the prevalence of Yoruba names, titles, and Oriki[12] blended with Islamic names in Ilorin, such as *Mogaji Aare, Baba Isale, Balogun Gambari, Balogun Alanamu, Balogun Fulani,* and *Balogun Ajikobi,* in Ilorin's traditional Emirate structure. While the Emirate system subsists as the dominant traditional structure in Ilorin today, elements of Yoruba culture remain evidenced by the presence of Yoruba compounds or wards such as *Ile Osogbo, Ile Oyo, Ita Egba, Ile Offa,* and *Ile Ijesha*. Further evidence lies in the prevalence of Yoruba language as a medium of communication in Ilorin; Yoruba trades such as metal casting, pottery, Aso-oke textile industry, dyeing, and Yoruba musical instruments.

**Traditional music scene in Ilorin**

The traditional music scene in Ilorin is composed of various genres such as *dadakuada, pakenke, molo, orin-olomooba* (Ilorin-Fulani royal nuptial performance), *apala*, *fuji, baalu, bembe, woro, waka, were,* and *senwele*. While music forms such as *dadakuada* and *senwele* could be considered indigenous in their origin and predominance in Ilorin, forms such as Fuji and Juju are ubiquitous and belong to a group of vibrant music forms spread across various Yoruba communities. At the core of Ilorin community life are various forms of music-making activities punctuating events, such as childbirth, rites of passage, marriage, and initiation ceremonies. Traditional music in Ilorin can be broadly stratified into religious and socio-religious music forms, with most Ilorin music forms falling under the socio-religious category. The religious category, which emerged in post-Islamic Ilorin, includes the Islamic call to prayer, *were, ajisari, awurebe,* and *seli.* This category features during religious occasions, such as Ramadan, where men would render improvisational *were* songs to call Muslims to early morning prayer and to prepare for fasting. Artists who perform *were, ajiwere* (early risers), usually employ loud, noisy instruments that can produce enough disturbance to wake people. In addition to *were* is *ajisari*, an early morning music form also performed during Ramadan, usually before *saari* (the meal before the commencement of the day's fast). *Ajisari* is similar to *were,* with the difference being that *were* is performed by a group with a leader, while *ajisari* is usually a solo performance. Based on its reflective nature, the religious category is typically characterised by minimal or no instrumentation. These music forms, excluding the Islamic call to prayer, are not used in worship but are rendered during other religious events. Although only the Islamic call to prayer is conventionally used during Islamic worship, chant forms such as *waka* are sometimes employed by Islamic preachers to strengthen their sermons.

The socio-religious category in Ilorin covers traditional music forms, which mostly serve social purposes but have also experienced the impact of Islam at varying levels. While some of these forms such as *ìjálá* (hunters chant) and *ofo* (incantation) are rarely

[12] Oriki refers to an attributive oral praise poetry among the Yoruba, which eulogises the lineage of an individual or institution while implicitly expressing expectations of the individual.

performed in Ilorin, forms such as *dadakuada* (originally associated with the Yoruba Egungun masquerade and cult) have been recontextualised to reflect their links to Islam. Generally, the proliferation of Islam in Ilorin gave rise to a form of cultural apathy as many traditional musicians began to disassociate themselves from cultural practices which were regarded as "pagan." They began to "redefine" the origin of some of these music forms as in, for instance, the denial of the link of *dadakuada* to Iwi Egungun (Na'Allah 1992, 320). In another vein, the dawn of Islam in Ilorin expanded the frontiers of the Ilorin musical landscape and precipitated a hybridised musical identity in Ilorin. Added to the Islamic music forms that emerged with the establishment of Islam in Ilorin were social music forms and musical instruments, such as *kakaki*, a royal music form and royal trumpet exclusive to the Emir.[13] Despite Islamic and Hausa-Fulani influence on Ilorin traditional music, the resilience of Yoruba culture is substantiated by the Yoruba names of Ilorin music genres, Yoruba music styles, Yoruba song texts, Yoruba musical instruments, and costumes.

Also known as "Islamic-influenced music" (Vidal 1993), the socio-religious category encompasses music forms associated with ceremonies marking the arrival of a child, marriage, the return of pilgrims from Mecca, housewarming, and funerals. The socio-religious category consists of mainly vocal music forms accompanied by traditional instruments. Examples of socio-religious forms include *dadakuada, baalu, waka, sakara, fuji, apala, bembe,* and *senwele.* Extending the categorisation, Ọláwálé delineates Ilorin music forms as "male-based, female-based, age-based, vituperative songs, religious-based, palace songs, nuptial, and epithalamium" (2015, 47). These classifications reflect social and gender boundaries in Ilorin, with the designation of forms such as *orin-olomooba*, *baalu*, and *iyami-loiloo* as genres for women, and *dadakuada* and *kakaki/bembe* as genres for men.

Prominent in Ilorin traditional music scene are Yoruba Muslims.[14] While the term, "Yoruba Muslims", does not explicitly suggest marked differences in Islamic practice, it implies slight variances between Islam as practised by the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria. An example is the rise of "Charismatic Islam" or "Islamic charismatisation" among Yoruba Muslims, which started among Lagos-based Yoruba Muslims and spread to areas such as Ilorin (Obadare 2016, 76). "Islamic charismatisation" represents an Islamic/social movement with a revivalist, neoliberal orientation towards Islam. "Islamic charismatisation" is common among popular Islamic organisations in Nigeria, such as the *Nasirul-Lahi-L-Fatih* Society of Nigeria (NASFAT), *Al- Fathu Qareeb* Muslim Organisation*, Jamatul Ar-Risalatul Islamiyyah of Nigeria* (A.K.A. Islamic Message Group of Nigeria, IMGN), and the Islamic Platform Society of Nigeria (Ibid.,

[13] *Kakaki* is a common musical tradition in many areas of northern Nigeria and adjoining areas where the Emirate system holds. A similar music form and musical instrument known as *kakati* is also found among the Nupe in northern Nigeria.

[14] This distinction is mostly based on the implied belief in a superior and puritan form of Islam practised by the Hausa-Fulani. Further difference lies in the prevalence and adherence to sharia Islamic law in many of the Hausa-Fulani states in Nigeria.

83). Other variations in Islamic practice manifest in the expected conduct of women in Islam and questions of the Muslim woman's identity. While this remains a debate, movements such as "Islamic charismatisation" have propelled a shift in Muslim women's engagement in, for instance, women speaking at mixed public gatherings. In this realm, "Islamic charismatisation" has enabled the emergence of women Muslim preachers in many Yoruba Muslim areas from a small but increasingly assertive cohort, such as Hajia Kafila Hamadu Rufai in Ibadan and Alhaja Khadijat Imam Olayiwola in Ilorin (Ibid., 85). Although "Islamic charismatisation" resides mostly within religious frameworks, its significance extends to non-religious spheres, influencing general musical practices and daily community life based on the sense of liberalism and modernity it inheres.

**The woman in Ilorin culture**

The Ilorin woman, commonly referenced as *Obinrin,* is among other factors shaped by established socio-cultural conventions, Islam, and Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani socialisations. An offshoot of these influences are variances in the framing of gender relations, morality, community respectability, and socio-cultural expectations from the standpoints of Yoruba culture, Hausa culture and Islam. These influences become clarified in a range of cultural and religious divergences, bordering on aesthetic considerations, (the Yoruba versus Islamic sense of decent attire), access to power, and distribution of wealth.

In pre-colonial or pre-Islamic Ilorin Yoruba society, women held important social status. The social organisation is grounded in the Yoruba philosophy of a dualistic society, where the man and woman are considered important and interdependent. The Yoruba sense of duality (*ejiwapo*) is represented in phenomena such as day/night, sun/moon, life/death, hot/cold, wet/dry, right/left, and man/woman (Lawal 2008). In explaining the Yoruba sense of gender, with an emphasis on femininity and women's power before colonialism, Oyewumi (1997) draws a distinction between the Yoruba concept of *obinrin* (woman) and *okunrin* (man), and western constructs of gender. Oyewunmi describes an egalitarian Yoruba society where age as opposed to being a man or woman was a determinant for establishing social hierarchy, access to power and distribution of wealth. This was also based on a Yoruba framework of "gender balance", where gender relations were interpreted based on complementarity rather than superiority or inequality. Alluding to an egalitarian Yoruba society, Olademo (2022) considers patriarchal framings of gender as a propagation of Christianity and Islam. Although Yoruba words for man and woman have always been part of the Yoruba lexicon, the distinction between both terms was mostly based on recognising biological differences and reproductive roles than social hierarchy and power.

Located within this convergence of multicultural and religious influences, Ilorin women continue to engage in a wide range of economic activities through which they express agency by fending for themselves and assisting their families. The economic activities of Ilorin women predate the Ilorin Emirate and dates to early Yoruba society, where women were considered the mainstays of the marketplace. This economic

structure still holds in many Yoruba town markets as seen in the position of *Iya Loja*, head of the market or mother of the market, which is usually held by a woman. Major economic activities of Ilorin women include forms of trade, such as weaving and dyeing, bead making, iron smelting, agriculture, craftwork, food processing, pottery, and livestock production, through which they establish local and long-distance commercial networks (Raji, Olumoh, and Abejide 2013, 44). With increased commercialisation and globalisation, Ilorin women also engage in white-collar jobs and professional occupations. These economic activities offer a means through which Ilorin women continue to express agency and contribute to sustaining the economy and their socio-economic independence. In addition to their wide-ranging social, economic, and domestic roles, Ilorin women contribute to the development of the Ilorin traditional music scene as praise singers, poets, composers, and dancers. This is evidenced by Ilorin traditional women musicians such as Alhaja Ameerat Obirere, Iyabo Awero, Alhaja Amope Alapata Eja, and Alhaja Iya Aladuke.

**Development of *senwele* music in Ilorin**

*Senwele* is a socio-religious vocal music form and a collective idiom for the music and its associated dance movements. The use of an encompassing term for music and dance resonates with the understanding of the unification of music and dance in Ilorin and in many other societies. For example, the Igbos' use of *egwu* and the Nupes' use of *enyan* refer to both music and dance. *Senwele* music is mostly performed at social events such as weddings, naming ceremonies, housewarmings, and funerals. The scope of *senwele* performance is often extended to include socio-religious events such as Sabaka night, to celebrate a successful Hajj (Islamic pilgrimage). Within such contexts, the song texts are modified to include Islamic text and Quranic verses to suit the performance context.

Similar to many orally based traditional music forms, tracing the origin of *senwele* presents multiple narratives. Prominent among these narratives is Abiodun's study, which presents *baalu* as the origin of *senwele* (2000, 14, 17). He further describes *senwele* as a modified version of *baalu* music, an Ilorin music type performed by women to welcome pilgrims from Mecca and within other social milieus. Along the same lines, Abiodun identifies Alhaja Amope Alapata Eja as the progenitor of *senwele* music (Ibid., 34). Although *senwele* and *baalu* share points of commonality; as socio-religious music forms performed by women, the language used (Ilorin-Yoruba), and the predominantly Islamic performance context, findings of this study, however, challenge Abiodun's submission. While *senwele* music has existed since the 1940s, *baalu* music evolved from *dadakuada* in the 1970s. Adeola argues that the third stage of the development of *dadakuada* brought forth *baalu* music. *Baalu* emerged in the late 1970s because of the interest of the womenfolk in *dadakuada* (1997, 21). To this end, *baalu* shares similar features as *dadakuada* except that it is a performance by women, and dance is accorded more prominence. The invalidity of *senwele* as an offshoot of *baalu* is further strengthened considering that Alhaja Amope Alapata Eja, who is cited as the originator of *senwele* music, is well known as a *baalu* musician in Ilorin. This is evidenced by the

*baalu* album titled, *Abere Alate*, by Alhaja Alapata Eja and her Onibaalu group (see Discography).

In establishing the origin of *senwele* music, Alhaja Iya Aladuke draws a correlation between *senwele* music and Fulani migration to Ilorin. She describes *senwele* music as a product of an earlier adapted music form, *orin-kengbe* (calabash music), which was transplanted by the Fulani to Ilorin.[15] Alhaja Iya Aladuke notes that while herding their cattle, the nomadic Fulani employed the readily available calabash, which provided musical accompaniment. Among the Fulani, also identified as Fulbe or Poullo, the calabash is a symbol of pastoral Fulani identity and features in different aspects of their lives, ranging from its aesthetic function to its use for storing water, grains, and curdled milk. Also generated from the calabash is a prominent percussion drum among the Fulani called *tuumbude*. The calabash as a musical instrument and the production of sound by playing the calabash with rings on the fingers is common practice in many cultures in Nigeria, especially those that have encountered Fulani and Islamic incursions. For example, the calabash as a musical instrument is prominent in the performance of *bumbu* and *epun* women's music forms of the Nupe in northern Nigeria.

In a similar account, Alhaji Olatunji traces the emergence of *senwele* to *orin-kengbe* (calabash music) of the Yoruba Oyo Empire.[16] The *kengbe* was and remains a prominent musical instrument at the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo Empire and in the Igba-titi court music ensemble. Besides the mutual connection of *orin-kengbe* to *senwele* in both narratives, linguistic considerations lend more validity to the Oyo *orin-kengbe* narrative. This is cognisant of the term, *orin-kengbe*, as a compounding of two Yoruba words; *orin*—music or song, and *kengbe*—calabash, as well as the use of Yoruba song texts in *orin-kengbe* and *senwele*.

Similar to many traditional music forms such as *egwu-ogene*, *orin-dundun*, and *kakaki,* which derive their names from factors ranging from the dominant musical instrument, accompanying dance, performers, performance context, or proverbial sayings associated with them (Nketia 1974), *orin-kengbe* (calabash music) derives its name from the dominant musical instrument, *kengbe* (calabash). *Orin-kengbe* is a communal music form in every Ilorin family and is usually performed by women. The designation of the *kengbe* for women could perhaps be linked to one of the cultural significances of the calabash as a symbol of domesticity. During marriage ceremonies, all young unmarried girls in the family would perform *orin-kengbe* on two of the most important days in Yoruba Islamic marriages in Ilorin, *Aisun Iyawo* and *Osan Iyawo. Aisun Iyawo*, also known as *Wolimatul-Nikkah*, refers to the vigil on the eve of the wedding, which usually lasts until the early hours of the next day. *Osan-Iyawo (nikkah)* is the solemnisation of marriage and is considered the climax of all the ceremonies.

In discussing the etymology of the name of the genre, *senwele*, Alhaja Iya Aladuke

[15] Alhaja Iya Aladuke (*senwele* music exponent), in a discussion with the Author, 6 March 2013, Ilorin.

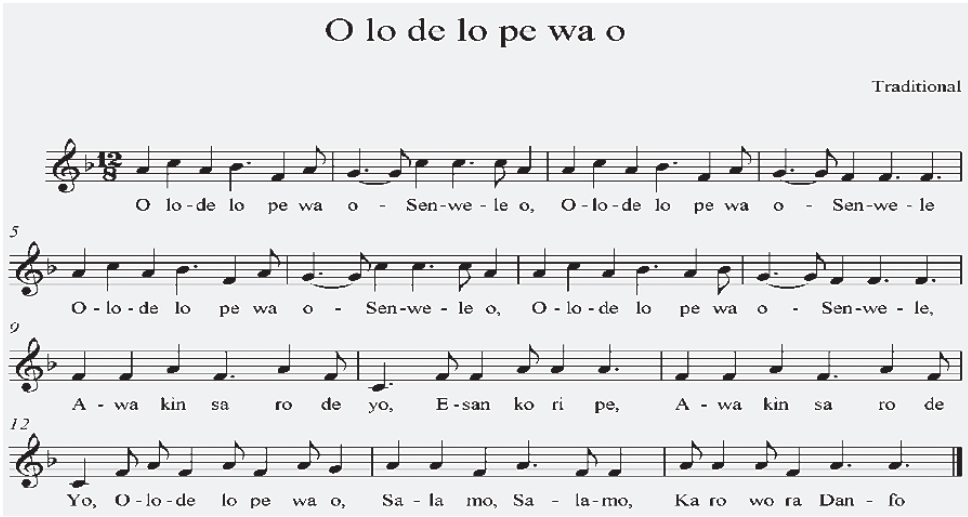
[16] Alhaji Olatunji (Assistant Manager of *senwele* band), in a discussion with the Author, 20 June 2014, Ilorin.

notes that *senwele* has no specific meaning in Yoruba language. Rather, she describes *senwele* as an onomatopoeic word or neologism for music and dance.[17] In providing more context, Alhaja Iya Aladuke traces the etymology of *senwele* to the celebratory exclamation in one of the *orin-kengbe* songs. Below is an excerpt of the words of an *orin-kengbe* song that uses *senwele* music in this way:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ol'ode lo pe wa o senwele o* | We were invited by the celebrant *senwele* |
| *Ol'omo lo pe mi o senwele* | I was invited by the parents of the child, *senwele* |
| *Awa kii s'arode yo* | We are not stalkers |
| *Esan ko ri pe* | You better get it right |
| *Awa kii s'arode yo* | We are not stalkers |
| *Ol'ode lo pe wa o senwele o* | We were invited by the celebrant, *senwele* |
| *Salamo, salamo* | Greetings, greetings |

Translation from Yoruba into English by the Author.

Transcription 1 is an excerpt of the music:




**Transcription 1.** Excerpt of *Olode lo Pewa o.* Transcription by Author.

While the origin of *senwele* music remains yet to be clarified given the multiple Oyo-Yoruba and Fulani narratives, the collective space of *orin-kengbe* performance was a major catalyst for Alhaja Iya Aladuke's interest in music performance, cultivating her musical skills and by extension, the development of *senwele*.[18] Currently, *senwele* music has coalesced into a music form that embodies multiple influences of Islam, Yoruba, and Fulani cultures. An illustration of Yoruba and Fulani convergence is in the Ilorin-Yoruba language used in *senwele* performance. With a different linguistic distinction from the central Oyo-Yoruba dialect, which is considered the standard Yoruba for

[17] Alhaja Iya Aladuke (*senwele* music exponent), in a discussion with the Author, 23 May 2014, Ilorin.

[18] Alhaja Iya Aladuke, (*senwele* music exponent), in a discussion with Author, 14 November 2016, Ilorin.

communication and writing in pre-Islamic Ilorin society, Ilorin-Yoruba displays lexical borrowings from linked origins of Fulani and Hausa extraction such as "*fa*" (commonly used at the end of a sentence for emphasis). Other Hausa-Fulani extractions in the text of *senwele* music include *lele, fa, too, and haba*.

**Alhaja Iya Aladuke: An exponent of *senwele* music**

Alhaja Iya Aladuke was born on 1 December 1931, at Mogaji-Ose, Ita Mogaji, in the Ilorin-East local government area of Kwara State (see Figure 2). Alhaja Iya Aladuke did not obtain a western education but attended an Arabic Quranic centre in Ilorin (1936–1940), combined with the informal home training she received from her parents. Alhaja Iya Aladuke's foray into music performance began with her engagement in communal musical practices such as *orin-kengbe*. Although common systems through which Ilorin traditional musicians developed their musicianship was through musical descent[19] and apprenticeship, Alhaja Iya Aladuke was neither born into a musical family nor involved in a direct form of musical apprenticeship. She considers her frequent exposure to women musicians in the community as influential in her decision to take on music professionally.[20] As a young girl, Alhaja Iya Aladuke used to watch women such as Alhaja Saddi and Alhaja Ode, who were outstanding in their performance of *orin-kengbe*. Both are both from the Kangile area of Ilorin. To further hone her music skills, Alhaja Iya Aladuke began to engage in freelance performances and made sure to participate in most *orin-kengbe* performances in the community.

**Figure 2.** Alhaja Iya Aladuke during a live performance. Photograph by Author, July 2014.

An important shift in Alhaja Iya Aladuke's music career, which was also pivotal

[19] An example of musical descent is the *Ayan* lineage of drummers and drum makers among the Yoruba in Nigeria.

[20] Alhaja Iya Aladuke, (*senwele* music exponent), in a discussion with Author, 14 November 2016, Ilorin.

to the commercialisation of *senwele* music, was her contact with a community record producer, Mr Bola. This meeting led to the recording of some of her freelance performances, which were sold without any financial returns to her. In a revealing observation, Alhaja Iya Aladuke said she did not mind being "exploited" because she considered the opportunity to record her performances as compensation, especially given the rarity of recording technology at the time.[21] Alhaja Iya Aladuke continued to practise *senwele* music mostly within the community until she encountered another major break in 1990 with the release of her debut album, *Won l'asewo ni wa*. Although this album was charged with controversy, it became a major catalyst for launching Alhaja Iya Aladuke's career into the mainstream. During my discussions with Alhaja Iya Aladuke, recurring themes included originality and ownership. This could perhaps be due to the rise of several *senwele*-inspired musicians across secular and religious spheres. In one of our interactions, she noted that despite the emergence of various *senwele* musicians, she remains the "creator of *senwele* and the only authentic Alhaja Iya Aladuke."[22] Within Ilorin society, Alhaja Iya Aladuke is considered successful. Being successful takes into consideration her economic agency, status as an Alhaja, her marriage to Alhaji Aminu Adisa, and her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. With over fifty years of performing *senwele* music and the release of twenty-one music albums up to now, Alhaja Iya Aladuke, who became a nonagenarian in December 2020, remains indefatigable in her performance of *senwele*.

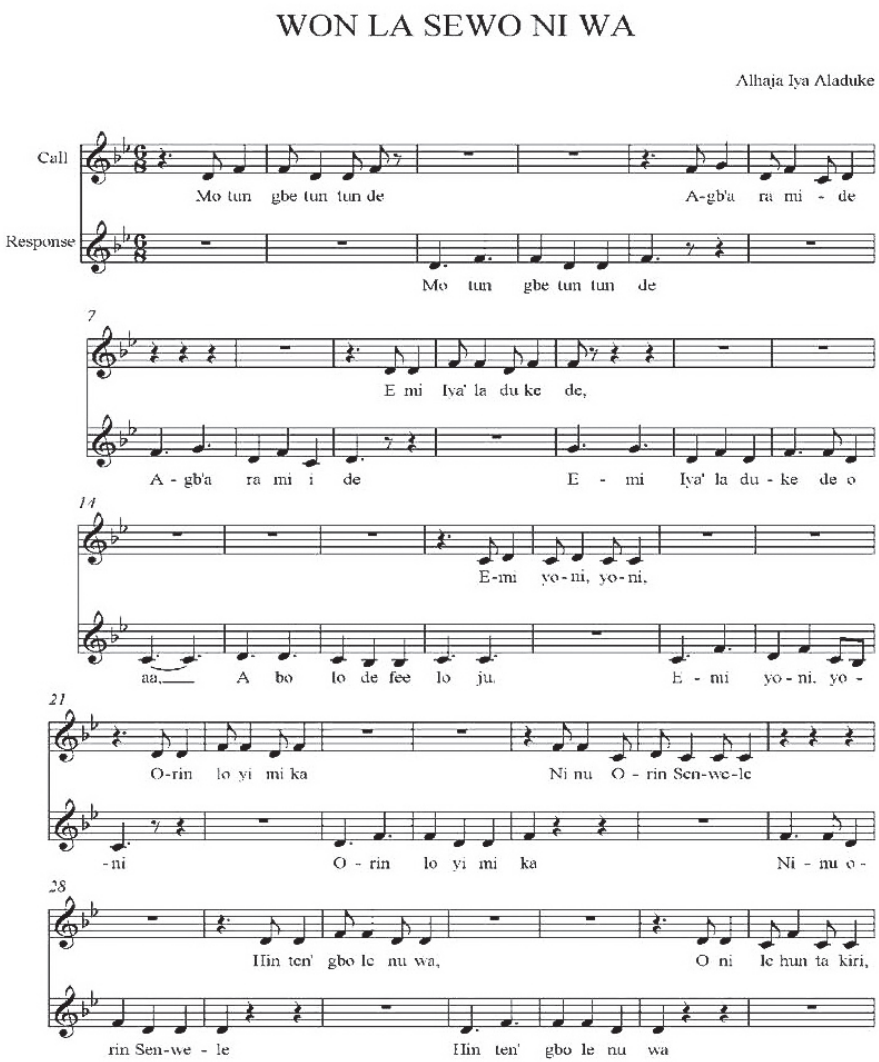
**Musical form and style of *senwele* music**

Every musical tradition possesses concepts and rules that guide and enable its performance. These conventions are regarded as musical style, further explained as "a manner of expression characteristic of an individual, a historical period, or an artistic school" (Hickok 1993, 28). Musical style includes form, melody, rhythm, vocal style, harmony, and instrumentation, which gives a piece of music its overall character. The basic form of *senwele* music is call and response. Crucial to the organisation of *senwele* performance is its call and response structure, which facilitates a dialogue between Alhaja Iya Aladuke, members of her band and the audience. Typically, call and response in *senwele* music features the introduction of a musical phrase or section by Alhaja Iya Aladuke, and the response by her backup singers and instrumentalists. This order is sometimes varied where, for example, the talking drummer or lead instrumentalist introduces the performance with a melo-rhythmic passage, which is imitated by Alhaja Iya Aladuke or the chorus. While s*enwele* music is primarily structured in the call and response style, the call and response patterns may range from exact repetitions of the AA form of calling to modified versions of the call (for example, the AB antiphonal form), and, in instances, entirely different responses to the call. Other seldom used forms include the ABA ternary form, which features a chorus A section, a solo or call

[21] Alhaja Iya Aladuke (Senwele Music Exponent). in a discussion with Author, 23 May 2014, Ilorin.

[22] Ibid.

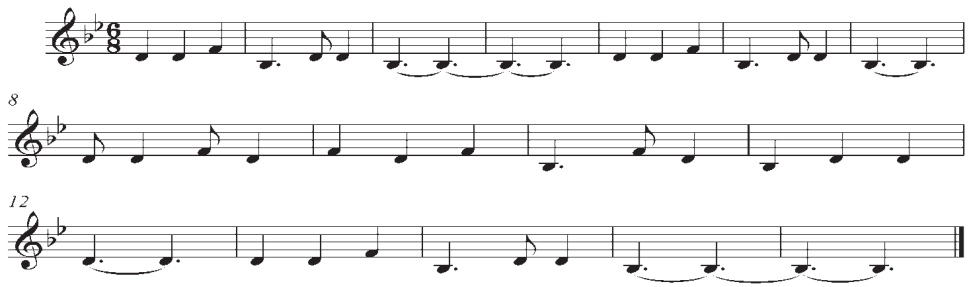
as the B section and a repeat of the A section, the ABCA and ABCDA forms. The following excerpt in Transcription 2 is an example of the common AA and AB call and response style in *senwele* music.




**Transcription 2.** Excerpt of *Won l'asewo ni wa.* Transcription by Author.

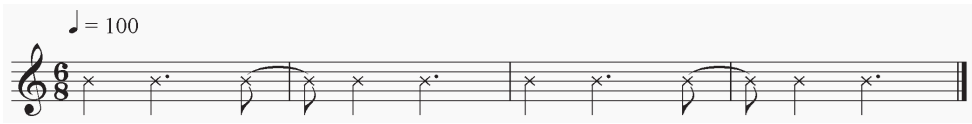
Another feature of *senwele* music is its lengthy, narrative structure. The lengthy nature of *senwele* songs combined with repetitive, interjecting responses provides a means for commenting directly or metaphorically on a wide range of themes and topical issues. Repetition is extensively used to emphasise certain aspects of *senwele* music and

as a unifying and organising principle. Considering the lengthy, narrative structure of many *senwele* songs, which could last for as long as twenty to forty minutes, repetition is typically deployed for refocusing the previously established central theme of the song. The repeated section could be a phrase, rhythmic passage, or melodic line by the lead vocalist, chorus, or lead instrumentalist. While principally subject to the tonal inflection of the language (Yoruba), *senwele* melodies consist of short melodic phrases typically repeated in the call-and-response form, and dominated by intervals of major thirds, and minor thirds with perfect fifths rarely occurring. In addition, the melodies are largely organised around the tetratonic scale (the four-tone scale), pentatonic scale (a five-tone scale), and the heptatonic scale (seven-tone scale). An example of a *senwele* song using the pentatonic scale is shown in Transcription 3:




**Transcription 3.** Excerpt from *Aje Kun Iya Ni Oje.* Transcription by Author.

In terms of rhythm, *senwele* music is characterised by its overlapping polyrhythm. This is most clearly illustrated in the interlocking rhythmic patterns that emerge when multiple *senwele* musical instruments, with different rhythmic patterns, are played together. Rhythm in *senwele* is broadly organised around 6/8 or 12/8 time signatures. Rhythmic roles are undertaken by percussive musical instruments such as the talking drum (*gangan*) and the mother drum (*iya-ilu*). A prominent rhythmic style in *senwele* music is the use of a timeline or ostinato, a constantly repeated melodic, rhythmic, or melo-rhythmic pattern that flows throughout a music section, or an entire piece of music. The use of ostinato is pivotal to the overall structure of *senwele* music as it provides a base upon which the lengthy musical narratives, satires and other forms of storytelling are built (see Transcription 4 below).




**Transcription 4.** Ostinato rhythm in Senwele music. Transcription by Author.

As *senwele* music has evolved, so has its musical instruments. From its inception as *orin-kengbe*, with the *kengbe* calabash being the primary instrument for producing idiophonic accompaniment, the range of *senwele* musical instruments has over time expanded to include western and African types. While developments in *senwele* music have seen the addition of western musical instruments, the traditional musical instruments used are mostly of Yoruba origin. *Senwele* musical instruments include the talking drum, *iya-ilu*, *sekere, omele, agogo*, *sakara* drums *akuba, dundun*, with western instruments such as the keyboard, bass guitar, and western trap set.

**Ambivalences of *senwele* music in Ilorin socio-religious culture**

At the heart of the discourse of ambivalence in the practice and patronage of *senwel*e music in Ilorin are tensions between the socio-cultural ramifications of musical performance and orthodox Islamic sensibilities. While a dominant indigenous Muslim population subsists in Ilorin, there is also a relatively significant Christian population and a few practitioners of traditional African religion. Before the proselytising impact of Islam and Christianity in Ilorin, a polytheistic African religion was the dominant belief system. This was based on the belief in the existence of a supreme being, who was worshipped through the intermediary of Yoruba gods such as Sango, Egungun, Ifa, and Orunmila. Given the dominance and currency of Islam in Ilorin, Islam has over time become a pivotal determinant of the perception and acceptance of music and music-making in Ilorin.

The complexity of music-making in Islam remains a recurring subject, with divergent voices emerging in reaching a point of agreement. Shiloah's study on music and Islam, observes that some authorities tolerate a rudimentary form of cantillation and functional song but ban any instrumental accompaniment. Others allow the use of a frame drum but without discs and forbid all other instruments, particularly chordophones (1997, 144). Hence, music-making has often been labelled by pejorative terms, such as *malahi*—a term for various forbidden pleasures and amoral activities (Ibid., 146). The negative connotation of music in Islam is predicated on several factors, including its consideration as a catalyst for perceived vices such as drunkenness and sexual immorality (Ibid., 145). Despite these perceptions, the disposition towards music-making and Islam and the lived experiences of Muslim women are not homogenous. For example, among the Ilorin are two broad groups of Muslims. First, the Ilorin Muslim purist or fundamentalist, who advocates for a puritan or orthodox form of Islam that is devoid of any external influences. The second group is the Ilorin Muslim liberalists, who permit "syncretism" to a degree and believe in the co-existence of culture and religion.

Compared to Islamic religious forms in Ilorin, such as *were, awurebe, ajisari, waka,* and *seli,* the performance and patronage of *senwele* music in Ilorin have been fraught with ambivalence. Although *senwele* music is classified as a socio-religious music form, its orientation is more towards a social than a religious framework. The acceptance of Islamic music forms juxtaposed with the ambivalences trailing the practice of

*senwele* music is not unusual considering the prevalence of Islam in Ilorin, as well as the divergences in the perception of music-making in Islam, especially for women. In addition to the general complexities of music-making in Islam, further ambivalences are embedded in notions of the sacredness or sanctity of the woman's voice in Islam. Explaining the idea of the sanctity of the Muslim woman's voice in Hale's study of the creative activities of women in Arab communities, Wisel al-Mahdi notes that "a woman's voice being heard is analogous to a woman showing off her breast. A woman's voice is a private part that must be concealed" (Hale 2005, 19).

In discussing the ambivalences of *senwele* music, it is important to bring to attention the primacy of text over musical technicalities. Corroborating the importance of text in Yoruba music, Omojola argues that "Yoruba music forms are word-oriented besides the musical aesthetics of a particular form; performances emphasise the words embedded in the music" (1989, 143). Further, the interpretation of these music texts is subjective. The ambivalences of *senwele* music are particularly embodied in the career of Alhaja Iya Aladuke, who has experienced various forms of criticism owing to claims of "vulgarity" (*al-fahsah*) in many of her songs and performances., Alhaja Iya Aladuke recounts her experience following the release of *Won l'asewo ni wa*. She says, "I suffered over the record, but God rewarded me in His own way…So many people castigated me because of the record; they claimed it contained foul language."[23] For Alhaja Iya Aladuke, songs have always been a "safe" means of responding to criticisms and resisting the conditioning of her musicianship. Alhaja Iya Aladuke describes *Won l'asewo ni wa* as an offshoot of some of her experiences as a musician:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Won l'asewo ni wa* | They say we are whores |
| *A l'ale kekeke* | We have small, small boyfriends |
| *Ale mesan l'awa ni* | We have nine male concubines |
| *A d'oko ma gbo'wo* | We sleep with men without collecting money |
| *Ata'ja la win kiri* | We sell our bodies without value |
| *Ko ma wa si lu rara* | We don't know how to calculate the worth of our body |
| *Ala'le merin la* | We have fourteen boyfriends |
| *Ninu n car kan* | All in the same car |
| *Iya n gba'lu do o* | The mother is busy frolicking with men |
| *Iya o ni'di ba luje* | The mother sells her private part for money |

Translation from Yoruba into English by the Author.

*Won l'asewo ni wa,* which could be defined as a satirical song, epitomises the complexities of being a secular woman musician in Ilorin, who is sometimes considered a "woman of the night", and engaging "outside the norm." *Won l'asewo ni wa* satirically echoes these sentiments, including being labelled a prostitute. While the above texts may suggest "vulgarity", Alhaja Iya Aladuke further explains that *Won l'asewo ni wa* came from what some men used to say about women who were well dressed. They would call such a

[23] Interview by Agency Reporter, Premium Times, 8 July 2018. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/music/275400-one-of-my-saddest-moments-as-a-musician-iya-aladuke.html. Accessed on 3 December 2019.

woman "*Asewo.*"[24] Beyond its aesthetic ramifications, "well-dressed" in this context holds economic and gendered implications. "Well dressed" is denotative of flamboyance and affluence, and implicitly questions the source of such flamboyance and affluence for a woman. The expression, "well dressed", is further grounded in subtleties of power and expectations of affluence for the woman, which suggests that a "well dressed" woman must be connected to a man or sponsored by a man.[25]

In describing the ambiguities of *senwele* music in Ilorin, Alhaja Iya Aladuke cites another "vulgar" song, which has elicited controversy and criticisms: *Fun ra re ni otu*:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Fun ra re ni o tu* | She will willingly undress herself |
| *Fun ra re ni o tu o* | She will willingly undress herself |
| *B'Obirin wo sokoto* | When a woman wearing trousers |
| *To ba fi oju kan owo* | Sets her eye on money |
| *Fun ra re ni o tu* | She will willingly undress herself |
| *B'Obirin wo sokoto* | When a woman wearing trousers |
| *To ba fI oju bòko* | Sets her eye on a penis |
| *Fun ra re ni otu* | She will willingly undress herself |

Translation from Yoruba into English by Author.

Two fundamental interpretations emerge from the above excerpt. On the periphery, the song, *Fun ra re ni otu* may be indicative of perpetuating the objectification of women, woman stereotypes, and other forms of essentialisations for women. On the other hand, the song texts which are perceived as vulgar inhere some form of resistance when located within their context. By echoing these thoughts through singing, Alhaja Iya Aladuke explains that these songs not only succeed in drawing attention to some of her travails as a woman and a woman musician, they also present a base for interrogating and deconstructing these narratives. Explaining notions of resistance in the song, Alhaja Iya Aladuke notes that by self-acknowledging and singing about these negative constructions, she demystifies them, thereby taking away the power embedded in the mystique and unspoken.[26] Music-making as thresholds for expression further defines itself and lends its voice within a tradition of women's cultural production, where women employ musical spaces for saying the usually "unsayable", expressing consonance or dissonance with political, social, and religious systems, and reappraising cultural codes and gender binaries (Mack 2004).

Along further lines of *senwele* music performance in Ilorin, Alhaja Iya Aladuke recounts the opposition she faced from Islamic religious leaders who considered a few of the texts of *senwele* music contradictory to the Ilorin Islamic environment.[27] One such incident was when she was reported to the Emir of Ilorin, Alhaji Ibrahim Gambari,

[24] Alhaja Iya Aladuke (*senwele* music exponent) in a discussion with the Author, 10 January 2015, Ilorin. *Asewo* is a colloquial word for prostitute in Yoruba language.

[25] Alhaja Iya Aladuke (*senwele* music exponent) in a discussion with the Author, 10 January 2015, Ilorin.

[26] Alhaja Iya Aladuke (*senwele* music exponent), in a discussion with the Author, 14 March 2014, Ilorin.

[27] Ibid.

by Imams in the community, who considered her songs a negative influence on other women in the community and un-Islamic.[28] Despite the controversy surrounding the performance of *senwele* music, a paradox emerges as some of its critics are patrons at social events and other non-religious contexts. Beyond the delineation of *senwele* music as being "vulgar", *senwele* music holds further significance. By leveraging on the immunity that music performance affords to express the "unsayable", *senwele* music presents a tool for interrogating patriarchal framings of womanhood, prescriptive ideas of respectability for women, and other socio-cultural expectations and boundaries for Ilorin women. While contestations may arise from the religious standpoint, the suggestive texts are also read as satirical exchanges from a socio-cultural viewpoint and enjoy acceptance in many quarters.

**Continuity of *senwele* music in Ilorin**

Despite the ambivalences associated with *senwele* music, its performance continues to thrive in Ilorin, largely enabled by a negotiation of social-cultural and religious binaries. As the community continues to function as a benchmark for music through shared history, shared norms, and other established socio-cultural conventions, traditional musicians continue to devise means of negotiating their challenges. Part of this negotiation includes an exchange that takes into cognisance the social, cultural, and religious sensibilities of the people while retaining their patronage and autonomy. For *senwele* music, Alhaja Iya Aladuke attributes its retention and sustained patronage to permutations such as the incorporation of Qur'anic verses, Islamic cantillations, and Islamic salutations (*bisimillahi*, *assalamu alaikum)*. These Islamic infusions sometimes feature as a prelude or at other points during *senwele* performance in a free-flowing, rhythmic style, fused with panegyric texts that praise Prophet Mohammed. An Islamic influence on *senwele* music is heard in the vocal style employed: prosaic monodic cantillations, microtonal glides, and slurs. A culmination of the above Islamic infusions in *senwele* music, with the incorporation of Islamic aesthetics, such as the use of the Muslim veil by Alhaja Iya Aladuke during some of her performances, has been significant to the transition of *senwele* music from a purely social music form into a socio-religious form.

The sustained practice of *senwele* music relies on what may be described as an endorsement mobilised by its spread, popularity, and acceptance outside Ilorin. A key factor in the expansion of *senwele* music outside Ilorin has been its development from an indigenous music form to a translocal music form that integrates musical styles and influences from outside Ilorin. The spread of indigenous music forms outside their local communities is commonly driven by the need for economic agency and more patronage. As musicians continue to perform and expand the scope of their musicianship, musical interactions occur. The growth of *senwele* music based on its popularity and endorsement has been incentivised by musical collaborations between

[28] Alhaja Iya Aladuke. Interview by Tunde Oyekola, *Punch*, 5 April 2020. https://punchng.com/i-was-so-beautiful-men-fought-to-marry-me-iya-aladuke/. Accessed on 17 May 2020.

Alhaja Iya Aladuke and popular musicians such as Wasiu Alabi Pasuma, Wasiu Ayinde, and Saheed Osupa.[29]

Equally crucial to the growth of *senwele* music in Ilorin is the social currency Alhaja Iya Aladuke enjoys based on what she considers "her connection to the low and mighty."[30] An outcome of the popularity of *senwele* music over time has been its performance in many contexts, including political events. During election campaigns or other political events, politicians hire musicians to perform as a means of increasing their socio-political capital. Alhaja Iya Aladuke has been active in these spaces, having performed for several politicians, including the former governors of Lagos state (Bola Tinubu), Osun state (Rauf Aregbesola) and the former senate president of Nigeria, Bukola Saraki. During these events, *senwele* repertoires are often altered to incorporate texts that eulogise the politicians, emphasise their achievements, and galvanise votes for them. In addition to providing a platform for expression, Alhaja Iya Aladuke's engagement within these political spaces has afforded her the social currency of "connection to the high and mighty."

Further illustrating the popularity and resilience of *senwele* music is its spread across non-traditional, secular, and religious contexts. *Senwele* music has given rise to several *senwele*-inspired musicians and variants of *senwele* music. For example, *senwele* music has been adapted into Christendom by a gospel musician, Bukola Akinade, popularly known as *Senwele Jesu,* who employs the same style but with Christian texts. Also crucial to the perpetuation of *senwele* music has been its transition from a music form for women into a mixed-gender form, thereby facilitating the incorporation of men as instrumentalists and patrons at *senwele* performances and the emergence of male *senwele*-inspired musicians. One such musician is Alhaji Mukaila, a male musician who primarily identifies as a *senwele* musician but incorporates other styles. Alhaji Mukaila has collaborated with Alhaja Iya Aladuke on songs such as *Ajike, Istijaba,* and *Tori Oko.*[31]

**Conclusion**

This article has examined the development of *senwele* music in Ilorin covering its emergence from *orin-kengbe* (calabash music) and its transition to a socio-religious and translocal music form. The origin of *senwele* was premised on two dialectics: its links to *baalu* and *orin-kengbe*. As an embodiment of diverse socio-cultural and religious influences, *senwele* music was employed as a locus for explicating the "in-betweenness", cross-cultural encounters, Islamisation, adaptation, and readaptation of identities in

[29] The above-named musicians are Yoruba popular musicians, who sing a style of music known as *fuji*.

[30] Interview by Agency Reporter, *Premium Times*, 8 July 2018. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/music/275400-one-of-my-saddest-moments-as-a-musician-iya-aladuke.html. Accessed on 3 December 2019.

[31] See an example of Alhaji Mukaila's style of *senwele*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIUlHcteKww. Also see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAXdoIpuDBg for *Baba Oloja* by Alhaji Mukaila.

Ilorin. Although the reference to Ilorin as "a city in-between" may be suggestive of an absent or ambiguous cultural identity, this situation could be delineated as a form of progressive traditionalism (Emielu 2019; Waterman 2002). This perspective reimagines these encounters as contributing to a continuum that transcends linguistic, religious, and cultural boundaries, thereby allowing more possibilities for innovation in the Ilorin musical ecosystem.

The convivialities and ambivalences of *senwele* music practice in Ilorin, based on socio-religious tensions, gender considerations, cross-cultural tensions, and notions of "vulgarity" were explored. While a cursory encounter of *senwele* music connotes "vulgarity", the article found that this perceived "vulgarity" holds deeper implications. The perceived "vulgarity" in *senwele* represents a means of articulating experiential realities of being a woman musician within a multicultural, Islamic Ilorin context, and a means of performing resistance to essentialised constructs of *senwele* music performance. Despite the ambiguities associated with *senwele* music, its resilience is substantiated by its continued performance and dissemination, aligning with processes of continuity and change in conformity with the progression of the music. For *senwele* music, this progression includes the recontextualisation of *senwele* music performances, expansion of its gender ramifications, and socio-religious exchanges. Beyond its sonic, textual, and qualities, the practice of *senwele* music presents a continuum for interrogating and negotiating cross-cultural encounters, socio-religious binaries, gender boundaries, and the multiplicity of the socio-musical experiences of Muslim women.

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