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## **Appraisal of the Impacts of Women in Musical Culture of the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria**

**ABSTRACT.** Musically, world over, women have played outstanding roles in musical practices in various cultures of the world. Women have played the role of educator at one time or the other while teaching their children traditional social values through folktales, folk songs, proverbs, poetry, praise songs, praise names, religious and secular songs. Oral history and oral traditions in every culture in Africa have stories about the achievement of women in such cultures. Ever since pre-historic times, lessons on morals, history and practical knowledge, have been passed from one generation to another, through oral tradition. In this way, the accumulated experiences of the older generation that have been gathered at one time or the other were passed to the younger ones through oral tradition. This paper therefore appraises the impacts of Women in Musical Culture of the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that women are custodians, promoters and transmitters of cultural values in the society through song, dance and folktales; women are good organizers, managers and promoters of musical performances; women do use music to educate people and correct some erring members of the society and also, that women play active role in the advancement of music scholarship and patronage in Nigerian society. It is therefore recommended that more of indigenous/traditional songs be encouraged in in our society in the present day Nigeria where civilization tends to have rendered such songs ineffective.

**KEYWORDS:** Women, Oral History, Oral Tradition, Musical Culture, Musical Practices.

### **Introduction**

Women in every society and culture at one time or the other have played significant roles in the sustenance and transformation of such particular societies in which they live. These significant roles being played are multifaceted and beneficial to all and sundry cutting across every sphere of human endeavours not only within their own cultural background and boundary, but also globally at one time or the other, affecting lives positively. Women have also distinguished themselves as exceptional, diligent and

hardworking individuals in their chosen career or profession on one way or the other, upholding the dignity of womanhood.

In Yoruba traditional society, women occupy prominent positions in politics, economy, religion and traditional cultural education. They occupy such positions as *Iyawo* (wife), as *Aya oba* (the king's wife), as *Iya* (Mother), as *Iya Oba* (King's mother), as *Iyaloja* (head of the market women), as *Iyalode* (political chieftaincy title), and so forth. Aina (2001) opines that:

Among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria, the position of the 'Iyalode' was the channel through which women participated in political activity. In many of the Yoruba kingdoms, the 'Iyalodes' were powerful political figures, who ably represented the interests of the women as a group. Many Yoruba women also gained economic fame, and became 'Iyaloja' (head of the market women), who in many instances led various market women's groups to fight for their economic and political rights during the colonial administration.

In all of these musical activities, women's significant role as custodian and promoter of cultural values cannot be overemphasized. Women have played the role of educator at one time or the other while teaching their children traditional social values through folktales, folk songs, proverbs, poetry, praise songs, praise names, religious and secular songs. Collette Suda (1996) stresses that "African women have been in the business of moral teaching since time immemorial, that under the traditional family system, African women played a key role in teaching children social ethical and moral values which were part of cultural standards for evaluating 'proper' behaviour". Mohammed (2003) also observes that: "women used stories, poetry, songs and proverbs to depict the important role of women as transmitters of knowledge and builders of a stable social fabric for society from the pre-colonial through the post-colonial era.

He stresses further that before becoming adults, we attend a basic school, and that basic school is mother, that the values with which children are brought up precede their actual birth and they are transmitted by mothers even while the child is still in the womb. The poem in Mohammed (2003) cited here encapsulates this thought: Mother! Without you, it would have been impossible to utter alphabet. Mother! Without you, it would have been impossible to learn how to speak. A child deprived of your care sweet lullaby and soft touches would not grow up. Mother! You are the source of love, the epitome of kindness.

## Women and Music in Nigerian Society

To understand gender structure of any given society, it is important to examine musical performances that are inherent in such society, for according to Koskoff (1987) as cited in Marshall (2001):

Indeed musical performance provides one of the best contexts for observing and understanding the gender structure of any society. This may be so because in many societies the underlying conceptual frameworks of both gender and musical/social dynamics share an important structural feature; they both rely, to a great degree, on notions of power and control.

In musical performances, contrary to popular belief, the involvement of women in music is not just a new or uncommon phenomenon. Women have been involved in a range of roles within musical performances be it vocal music, instrumental music/vocal music and dance, though not in all cases.

Stressing the impact of women in musical performances in the society, Omibiyi (2013) opines that “among most linguistic groups in Africa, specifically Nigeria, women occupy special positions in musical performances during traditional events...they distinguished themselves as vocalists-specialist Singers of songs and chanters of praise poems”. She debunks the opinion of some writers with bias mind on the participation of women in some musical performances in the society, with reference to their female gender. Omibiyi (2013) further asserts that:

It has been suggested that women by virtue of their gender are excluded from specialized musical events and performances but recent studies have not only proved this to be a fallacy but have gone ahead to identify specific roles that women play in musical performances.

Scholarly works carried out by men and women on feminine gender in musical performances not only support the assertion made by Omibiyi (2013), but also shed more light on the various level of involvement of women in musical performances, mentioning specifically the significance of such impact on musical practices in the society. Examples of some of these songs are presented here in notation form:

S/N	Song title	Translation
1	Song No.1: Ki Le N Se? Call: Ki le 'n se ti e fi po bawonyi o? Response: Iyawo la ngbe o. Call: Ileke so, ileke so wowo. Response: Iyawo la 'n gbe o.	Why are you as many as these? It's a wedding ceremony. Let's dance! Let's dance! It's a wedding ceremony!
2	Song No.2: Iya Mo N Lo Iya, mo n lo, f'adura sin mi o Iya, mo n lo, Iya mo nlo, f'adura sin mi o Ki n ma k'esu, Ki n ma k'abamo ni'le Oko Iya mo n lo, Baba mo n lo, e f'adura sin mi o.	Mother, I am leaving, send me forth with prayer. Mother, I am leaving, Mother, I am leaving, send me forth with prayer. Not to experience evil or regret getting married. Mother, I am leaving, Father, I am leaving, send me forth with prayer.
3	Song No.3:Omo ni un O fi gbe Call: Omo ni un O fi gbe e e e Omo ni n O fi gbe! Call: Owo osun l'owo mi. Response: Omo ni n o fi gbe.	I'll carry my children with my hands!  My hands are beautiful hands. I'll carry my children with my hands.
4	Song No.4: Omo o, e 'ipe d'agba. Call: Omo o e i pe d'agba 2ce , Kekere jo-jolo ma bi temi Response: Omo o, e i pe d'agba.	A child grows up very fast, younger and tender; I will have my own too. A child grows up very fast.

### Textual Analyses of the Songs

Yoruba music like any other ethnic music is entirely governed by the tonal inflection of words. The songs notated here are sung to the tonal inflection of Yoruba words as seen in the musical pieces. The songs are poetic, rhetoric and recitative in nature and include songs of the Bride; songs to anticipate conception of a child; songs at child birth; songs during naming ceremony; lullaby/cradle songs; moral songs; education—related songs, etc. Yoruba folk songs perform various roles which include the following: it teaches the community the value of respect for parents and elders; it promotes self-reliance; it respects and keeps the tradition; it is used for acquiring character education; it teaches religious education; it teaches socio-economic education; it serves Physical & Health Education functions; and it serves intellectual education.

## Structural Analyses of the Songs

The following guidelines have been selected for the structural analysis of the songs:

1. **Scale:** The old school songs are in pentatonic scale, hexatonic scale and heptatonic scale.
2. **Time Signature:** The time signature falls within the simple and compound time e.g 4/4 6/8.
3. **Melody:** The melodies of the songs are made up of succession of notes with varying intervals, which are divided into phrases. The melodies consist of short phrases and at times repeated. The melody contours of most of the songs follow the stepwise and leap movement. Most of the melodies start on a low tone rising to a high tone, some on a middle tone rising to a high tone, others starting on the high tone and descending to a low tone.
4. **Rhythm:** The value of the notes used in the melodies includes semiquavers, quavers, crotchets, minims and dotted notes. As it is common in African music, the rhythmic modes used in the songs are the *iambic*, the *trochaic* and *spondee*.
5. **Form:** The structural content of most of the songs are call & response, call & response with refrain, solo, unison while some follows the binary form (AB) and Ternary form (ABA).
6. **Instrumentation:** Hand clap, gong, *sekere* (rattle) and traditional drums.

Most of the songs cited here were some of the songs the author was taught as a pupil while in primary school by female teachers who did not even have formal training in music. However, folk songs like these are not easily common in present day Nigerian educational system. Western oriented songs have filled schools in Nigerian educational system at the expense of teaching the pupils/students African-oriented songs that reminds them of their roots.

## Results and Discussion

The table above is the respondents' opinion on the impacts of women on Nigerian musical culture.

From the table above, as shown in item number 1, 85% of the respondents agreed that women usually play specific roles in musical performanc-

es during traditional and socio-religious events in vocal, instrumental or vocal instrumentals, while 15% of the respondents disagreed about the statement. Item number 2 shows that 95% of the respondents agreed with the statement that women are custodians, promoters and transmitters of cultural values in the society through song, dance and folktales while 5% of the respondents disagreed. Item number 3 shows that 90% of the respondents agreed that there are several traditional and contemporary female music performers in Nigerian society while 10% disagreed concerning the statement. As shown in item number 4, 95% of the respondents agreed that women are good organizers, managers and promoters of musical performances while 5% disagreed. Item number 5 revealed that 80% of the respondents were in agreement that women do use music to mobilize people towards a given national cause or goal (patriotic music) in the society while 20% disagreed. Item 6 showed that 85% of the respondents agreed that women do use music to educate people and correct some erring members of the society while 15% of the respondents disagreed on the statement. As revealed in item number 7, 95% of the respondents agreed that women play key role in using music to teach children social, ethical and moral values of the society while only 5% decided otherwise.

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Agreed	Dis-agreed	Decision
1	Women usually play specific roles in musical performances during traditional and socio-religious events in vocal, instrumental or vocal instrumentals	3.30	1.81	17 (85%)	03 (15%)	Agreed (85%)
2	Women are custodians, promoters and transmitters of cultural values in the society through song, dance and folktales	3.70	1.92	19 (95%)	01 (05)	Agreed (95%)
3	There are several traditional and contemporary female music performers in Nigerian society	3.65	1.91	18 (90%)	02 (10%)	Agreed (90%)
4	Women are good organizers, managers and promoters of musical performances.	3.60	1.89	19 (95%)	01 (05%)	Agreed (95%)
5	Women do use music to mobilize people towards a given national cause or goal (patriotic music) in the society	2.60	1.61	16 (80%)	04 (20%)	Agreed (80%)

6	Women do use music to educate people and correct some erring members of the society	3.55	1.88	17 (85%)	03 (15%)	Agreed (85%)
7	Women play key role in using music to teach children social, ethical and moral values of the society	3.75	1.93	19 (95%)	01 (05%)	Agreed (95%)
8	Women are involved in all Nigerian Musical genres	3.15	1.77	15 (75%)	05 (25%)	Agreed (75%)
9	Women do use music as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building in the Nigerian society	3.55	1.88	18 (90%)	02 (10%)	Agreed (90%)
10	Women have no place in Nigerian musical culture and as such they are not contributing to the sustenance of Nigerian Musical culture	3.20	1.78	04 (20%)	16 (80%)	Disagreed (80%)
11	Women play active role in the advancement of music scholarship and patronage in Nigerian society	3.55	1.88	19 (95%)	01 (05%)	Agreed (95%)

From item number 8, the respondents who agreed that women are involved in all Nigerian Musical genres were put at 75% while those who disagreed were 25% as shown in the table above. The respondents' opinion on item number 9 which states that women do use music as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building in the Nigerian society had 90% for those who agreed and 10% for those who disagreed. As shown in item number 10, 20% of the respondents agreed that women have no place in Nigerian musical culture and as such they are not contributing to the sustenance of Nigerian Musical culture while 80% disagreed concerning this statement.

Finally, item number 11 revealed that 95% of the respondents agreed that women play active role in the advancement of music scholarship and patronage in Nigerian society while only 5% decided otherwise as represented in the table above.

Thus the table revealed that women are custodians, promoters and transmitters of cultural values in the society through song, dance and folktales; women are good organizers, managers and promoters of musical performances; women do use music to educate people and correct some erring members of the society and also, that women play active role in the advancement of music scholarship and patronage in Nigerian society.

## Impacts of Women on Nigeria Musical Culture

The findings in this study have revealed that women have great impacts on Nigerian musical culture as seen in the result of the field study. The impacts of women on Nigerian musical culture include the following, that:

- Women usually play specific roles in musical performances during traditional and socio-religious events in vocal, instrumental or vocal instrumentals;
- Women are custodians, promoters and transmitters of cultural values in the society through song, dance and folktales;
- There are several traditional and contemporary female music performers in Nigerian society;
- Women are good organizers, managers and promoters of musical performances;
- Women do use music to mobilize people towards a given national cause or goal (patriotic music) in the society;
- Women do use music to educate people and correct some erring members of the society;
- Women play key role in using music to teach children social, ethical and moral values of the society;
- Women are involved in all Nigerian Musical genres;
- Women do use music as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building in the Nigerian society;
- Women play active role in the advancement of music scholarship and patronage in Nigerian society

This finding is in agreement with the findings of Mohammed (2003) that: “women used stories, poetry, songs and proverbs to depict the important role of women as transmitters of knowledge and builders of a stable social fabric for society from the pre-colonial through the post-colonial era. The findings also supported by Nwoye (undated) in Isike and Uzodike (2009, p. 10) when it was observed that in different pre-colonial societies, women used songs, proverbs, and poetry to transmit positive social capital values upon which peace is predicated and that these values include patience, tolerance, honesty, respect for elders, community and mutuality, compassion, regard for due discretion, gentleness, modesty, self-control, moderation, flexibility, and open-mindedness.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been observed inter-alia that women have always played the role of a teacher, albeit informally. This is evident in the upbringing of their babies. As mothers, they also serve as the first teachers to teach their wards lessons through day—to—day activities. Furthermore, women always play the role of a musician during naming ceremonies, in the singing of lullabies, during initiation rites of adolescent boys and girls into adulthood, and in preparing their children especially daughters (and sons) for marriage. They also perform this role during religious and cultural activities, chieftaincy title/coronation ceremonies, singing of dirges during funeral ceremonies, and so forth. It is therefore recommended that more of indigenous/traditional songs be encouraged in our society in the present day Nigeria where civilization tends to have rendered such songs meaningless.

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