



## **Female Musicianship: Yorùbá Music as Catalyst for Women's Development and Social Change**

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### **Abstract**

*Yorùbá music, rich in oral traditions and cultural expressions, has long served as a medium for social commentary and identity formation. The study examined the fluidity of gender roles and the deconstruction of fixed identities through lyrical content and performative acts of female musicians. The study was guided by Judith Butler post-structural feminist theory. The primary data for the study include the recorded albums of selected artistes on audio CD, live plays, purposive conversation and participant observation. The content and context of selected songs and active role performances of Bàtìlì Àláké, Sàláwà Àbèní, Ìyábò Àwèró, Comfort Òmógè, Halimat Òmowúra and Şolá Allyson-Òbáníyì were employed to deconstruct the patriarchal gender norms prevalent in Yorùbá music. The secondary data were obtained from books, journals, published and unpublished theses, archives and internet sources. Findings revealed that Yorùbá music not only reflects but actively reshapes socio-cultural attitudes, offering women platforms for self-expression, resistance and visibility. Female musicians strategically employ indigenous idioms, spiritual symbolism and personal narratives to critique oppression, articulate feminist consciousness and foster communal solidarity. The paper concludes that Yorùbá music serves as a dynamic tool for challenging hegemonic structures and fostering inclusive cultural discourse. It recommended increased scholarly attention to indigenous musical forms as agents of feminist activism and the promotion of gender-equitable policies that support women's participation in cultural production.*



**Keywords:** Yorùbá music, Female Musicianship, Women's Development, Social Change, Poststructuralist Feminism

## **Introduction**

Yorùbá music, deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual life of the Yorùbá people of south-western Nigeria, has historically served as a vehicle for storytelling, communal memory, and socio-political commentary. From ancient times to the present, Yorùbá musical genres such as Àpàlà, Bálùù, Fújì, Jùjú, Sákàrà, and Wákà, have been instrumental in transmitting values, contesting power, and articulating the lived experiences of marginalized groups, especially women. As both an art form and a mode of cultural communication, Yorùbá music functions beyond entertainment. It acts as a dynamic site for negotiating identity, agency, and societal transformation. The role of music in instigating or supporting social change is widely acknowledged in ethno-musicological and cultural studies. Music often operates as a “resistance discourse” particularly in post-colonial African contexts where indigenous art forms have been mobilized to critique colonial legacies and gendered injustices (Agawu, 2003, p.151). Within Yorùbá society, where traditional gender roles are heavily prescribed by patriarchy, music becomes a powerful instrument through which women have challenged normative boundaries. Female Yorùbá musicians have historically and contemporarily leveraged their artistic platforms to subvert gender hierarchies, voice social injustices, and advocate for women's rights. This development is particularly significant in a cultural context where women's voices were traditionally confined to domestic and reproductive spheres. The intersection between Yorùbá music and feminist consciousness forms the core of this study.

Drawing on post-structural feminist theory, the research investigates how Yorùbá women musicians destabilize essentialist notions of womanhood and re-inscribe new subjectivities through their creative practices. Poststructuralist feminism rejects the idea of a single, unified female experience, emphasizing instead the multiplicity of identities shaped by discourse, culture, and power (Butler, 1990, p.191). In this regard, Yorùbá female musicians like Bàtìlì Àlàké, Comfort Ọmógè, Halimat Ọmowúra, Sáláwà Àbèní, Sọlá Allyson and Ìyábò Àwèró, use music as a discursive space to contest fixed narratives of femininity and highlight the diverse



realities of Yorùbá womanhood. Their lyrics often touch on themes of resilience, spirituality, autonomy, motherhood, and resistance, challenging both cultural norms and societal expectations.

In contemporary Nigeria, where gender inequality remains prevalent across economic, political, and cultural domains, the contributions of women to indigenous music are often under-recognized or misinterpreted. This study seeks to foreground these contributions by analyzing the gendered dimensions of musical expression and the emancipator potential of Yorùbá music in advocating for women's liberation. The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, bridging feminist theory, ethnomusicology, and Yorùbá cultural studies to illuminate how indigenous music functions as a feminist praxis.

Furthermore, this study contributes to de-colonial feminist discourse by shifting analytical attention from Eurocentric paradigms to Afro-centric frameworks. It highlights how local cultural productions, such as Yorùbá music, offer alternative feminist models that are rooted in indigenous epistemologies. As Nzegwu (2006, p.157) posits, African feminisms must account for context-specific realities and honour traditional cultural expressions that support gender equity. Yorùbá music, in this light, offers a repertoire of feminist consciousness that is grounded in the lived realities of African women.

Given the increasing marginalization of indigenous art forms in favour of commercialized popular music, this study also calls attention to the need for cultural preservation and support for women's participation in traditional music-making. By amplifying the voices of female Yorùbá musicians, this research advocates for a broader recognition of music as a form of social commentary and a platform for cultural resistance. The importance of this study is in manifold. First, it fills a scholarly gap by providing a focused exploration of how Yorùbá women have historically used and continue to use music as a medium of social intervention and liberation. Second, it offers a gendered reading of Yorùbá musical traditions, which are often dominated by male perspectives. Third, it contributes to the growing body of work on African indigenous feminisms, highlighting music as a culturally resonant tool for resistance and empowerment. Furthermore, the study is timely and relevant in the context of global conversations around



gender equity, cultural identity, and decolonization. It situates Yorùbá female musicians within these broader debates, asserting their role not just as cultural performers but as agents of change. Finally, by integrating theoretical and empirical insights, the study offers practical recommendations for cultural policy, education, and feminist activism within Nigeria and beyond.

## **Literature Review**

### **Yorùbá Music as Cultural Expression and Social Commentary**

Music in Africa has historically served as a site of memory, resistance, and resilience. Yorùbá music has long been recognized as a vital mode of cultural expression, serving both aesthetic and functional roles within Yorùbá society.

Early scholarly work, such as Bascom (1969, p.112), highlights how Yorùbá oral traditions (including music) serve as vehicles for transmitting culture, history, and social order. According to Bascom (1969), oral performance, including music, reinforces moral codes and community norms.

Haraway (1988, p.583) similarly advocates for “situated knowledges” which highlight how African women’s subjectivities are shaped by context-specific experiences. Allyson’s music aligns with this view, as her work reflects the spiritual, emotional, and maternal dimensions of womanhood within Yorùbá cosmology, without adhering to Western feminist ideals.

Waterman (1990, p.87) deepened this discourse with his ethnography of Jùjú music, asserting that Nigerian popular music, especially in Yorùbá contexts, reflects the everyday struggles, aspirations, and ideologies of its audience. He notes that the genre, while often entertaining, is also deeply political and gendered in its messages. Male artistes shaped these musical forms by embedding patriarchal ideologies, often positioning women as passive subjects or sources of temptation and disorder.

Oláníyan (2004, p.142) emphasizes that music among the Yorùbá is “not merely an artistic pursuit” but “an interventionist act,” often employed to address moral, political, and communal





concerns. Through coded language, proverbs, and metaphor, musicians critique leadership, expose corruption, and challenge social injustice, making music a potent form of socio-political engagement.

Osu (2005, p.9) submits that:

Music that calls for social change is good music: good music is an elixir for social change; it stirs the soul and spirit and energises people into action for positive change. Music has been known to galvanise people in countries abroad for revolution and social engineering.

The above notion of Osu (2005) is very useful to the intent of the present study. That is, using music as a means for social change. The social re-engineering of Yorùbá music is for the artistes to redirect their lyrics towards gender re-orientation by ascertaining gender inclusiveness and dynamism.

Adébáyò (2009, p.194) explores the rise of women in Yorùbá music, particularly those using the Wákà genre to address women's experiences, domestic abuse, and motherhood. Artistes like Sàláwà Àbèní introduced a more subjective, emotionally resonant approach to music, inserting women's voices into the previously male-dominated public sphere.

Omojola (2012, p.35) asserts that Yorùbá musical traditions are intricately linked to social structures, religious beliefs, and oral performance. Genres such as Wákà, Àpàlà, and Sákàrà have historically been used not only for entertainment but also for praise-singing, spiritual invocation, and public commentary on social behaviour.

Fadipe (2016, p.3) affirms that music is a cultural artifact that has the capacity for social orientation or social order. The intent of the present study is to show how Yorùbá female musicians have shifted the narratives from male-centered storytelling to women's experiences, proving their economic and artistic power as creators, innovators and industry leaders.

Òjó and Akégbéyalé (2021, p.105) observe ways by which women perpetuates domestic violence in marriage, drawing samples from selected Yorùbá indigenous music. The study points out women excesses in domestic conflict. Though, it fails to address any female voices of resistance,



but, it is a foundation upon which we can draw out inferences as it offers comparative nuances for this study.

Òjó (2023, p.106) examines Gospel Àpàlà evolution, highlighting its cultural adaptation and role in social commentary. While relevant to this study's focus on music as a tool for change, it lacks a gendered perspective, overlooking women's roles in Àpàlà and Yorùbá music. This study bridges the gap by exploring how female Yorùbá musicians use indigenous music to challenge patriarchy and assert agency, extending Òjó (ibid) cultural analysis into gender activism in Yorùbá music.

### **African Feminist and De-colonial Perspectives**

African feminist scholars have critiqued Western feminist frameworks for failing to accommodate the cultural specificities of African women. Oyewumi (1997) challenges the dominant Western feminist theories and offers a critical perspective on gender from an African point of view. She draws on Yorùbá culture and language to illustrate the ways in which gender is constructed and negotiated in African societies. In contrast to using language and culture, the present study focuses on selected Yorùbá female musicians using their voices and performances to deconstruct rigid patriarchal gender role and identity through music.

Sheba (1997) opines that the objectives of the feminist principle is to enable women to be conscious of the happenings in their society. She maintains that male and female are destined from heaven to co-exist. And this is not an avenue for the male to lord over the female or undermine their rights in the society. The position of Sheba (1997) as regards binary fusion of gender, until now, fails to arrest gendered biases such as domination, subjugation and discrimination in roles and identities. The contemporary hegemony of the gender binary today cannot be separated from the colonial destruction of the indigenous people's cultural, social, and economically expansive genders, sexes and kinship relations. Most of the imported cultures birthed gender ideologies that questions the traditional outlook. This present study hope to



inform the dialectal processes that deconstruct the binary structure through the dynamic of cultural diversities that evolves overtime in Yorùbá music and the society at large.

Waterman (1997, p.51) describes the vitality of songs like indigenous popular music of the Yorùbá people when he submits that:

Hegemonic values enacted and produced in musical performance portray the Yorùbá as a community, a deep comradeship founded in shared language, political interest, ethos and blood. Musical metaphor plays a role in the imaginative modelling of Yorùbá society as a flexible hierarchy anchored in communal values, or as a popular idiom would have it, a hand (ọwọ) comprised of interdependent fingers, Yorùbá popular music portrays an imagined community of some 30 million people – a solidarity that no individual could know in entirety through first-hand experience – and embodies the ideal affective texture of social tie and the melding of new and old, exotic and indigenous within a unifying syncretic framework.

From the above, it has shown clearly that music while performing its role, signals a communicating cultural ideals, ethos and beliefs of a certain class of people. Since musical metaphor plays an imaginative modeling of the Yorùbá society, it is our intent to reshape gender perception of the people as defined in the selected artistes' songs.

Nnaemeka (2004, p.378) observes that African feminism sometimes termed “negofeminism” (negotiated feminism) embraces both resistance and collaboration, drawing on indigenous strategies of empowerment that may differ from Western models.

Sheba (2017, p.781) also criticizes the usual patriarchal stance purported in many of the Yorùbá verbal art against the female gender. According to her, the female gender is always placed at the receiving edge of every literary saga when it comes to attitudinal role depiction. She frowns at how the female gender is given a misplaced priority in most of the Yorùbá folktale narratives. In her statement, women are expected to be socially conformist and obedient to rules and regulations set aside by the patriarchal society. And any disobedient to these social conventions is seen or labeled as conflict provokers. While the past decades have seen an increase in the visibility of Yorùbá female musicians, challenges still persist. The commercialization of



Nigerian music through the rise of Afro-beat, hip-hop, and other popular genres often marginalizes traditional music forms and the voices of women within them.

Bello (2017, p.834) critiques Butler's (1988) gender performativity and Oyewumi's (1998) rejection of Western gender binaries, arguing that both fail to fully capture contemporary Yorùbá gender realities. His work is relevant to this study as it contextualizes gender in Yorùbá and other African cultures. However, he does not explore music as a tool of gender resistance, nor does he examine female artistes' roles in reshaping cultural narratives. This study fills the gap by examining how female Yorùbá musicians challenge patriarchy and reclaim agency through indigenous music, extending Bello (2017) theoretical discourse into practical gender activism within Yorùbá musical traditions.

Olófinṣàò (2017, p.717) examines gender issues in Wákà music, using Sàláwà Àbèní's work to highlight male dominance and encourage female empowerment. While her study focuses solely on Àbèní, this research expands to other female Yorùbá artistes, including Àbèní, to further challenge traditional gender norms in the society.

Aina (2019, p.41) notes that female artists in Nigeria still face systemic barriers such as objectification, limited funding, and gate-keeping by male-dominated industry exhibiting patriarchal structures. Despite these challenges, Yorùbá women continue to innovate. The digital age has enabled more women to share their music, tell their stories, and build transnational feminist solidarities. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify are increasingly being used to amplify indigenous female voices and preserve cultural heritage in ways that bypass traditional gatekeepers.

Adédèjì and Adémilókun (2021, p.103) examine linguistic strategies in Yorùbá songs that construct gender identities. Their study reveals that metaphors, idioms, and tonal emphasis in Yorùbá lyrics subtly communicate expectations of masculinity and femininity.

The literature affirms that Yorùbá music is a fertile ground for feminist expression and cultural resistance. It reveals how women musicians navigate the intersection of tradition and innovation to voice their experiences, challenge gender hierarchies, and contribute to social change. The present study fills the gap through the lens of post-structural feminism, campaigning for the





emancipator potential of Yorùbá music that becomes evident not merely as entertainment but as an act of resistance, identity formation, and community building.

### **Poststructuralist Feminism**

Judith Butler performative approach of Poststructuralist feminism (1990) emerged from a confluence of feminist thought and post-structural theorist like Simone de Beauvoir in 1949. Poststructuralist feminism was developed in the context of the second wave feminist movement that focused on issues such as reproductive rights, workplace equality, and political representation. It also began to critique essentialist notions of gender and identity. The thinkers of Poststructuralist feminism are Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. The tenets of Poststructuralist Feminism are deconstruction of gender norms, intersectionality, agency and resistance language and representation, performativity of gender, critique of essentialism and power and subjection.

Post-structural feminist theory provides a useful lens for analyzing how women in Yoruba music resist essentialist gender roles. Judith Butler (1990) argued that gender is performative, constructed through repeated discourses and actions. This perspective resonates with Yorùbá female musicians who challenge fixed gender binaries through their artistic identities and performances. Through music, they deconstruct patriarchal structures that confine women to domesticity and dependency, offering instead a multiplicity of narratives that is centred on female strength, autonomy, and complexity. This aligns with Haraway's (1988) notion of "situated knowledges," which emphasizes that marginalized groups, including African women, possess distinct epistemologies informed by their lived experiences. Yorùbá female musicians thus become knowledge producers whose work challenges the legitimacy of dominant, patriarchal narratives. The application of Poststructuralist feminism to our study highlights the complex and dynamic ways in which gender is constructed and negotiated through cultural forms like Yorùbá female musicianship.

### **Methodology**



The data for this study comprise a total of five lyrical songs drawn from the records of musicians such as Comfort Ọmógè, Halimat Ọmowúra, Sàláwà Àbèní and Ẹlọ́lọ́ Allyson. That is, two records of Ẹlọ́lọ́ Allyson and one each of Comfort Ọmógè, Halimat Ọmowúra and Sàláwà Àbèní and the observation of Bátili Àlàkẹ́ and Ìyábò Àwẹ̀rọ́'s innovative performances in new musical styles. It is sampled from five different Yorùbá musical genres of Yorùbá Gospel, Ìkálẹ̀ folk song, Àpàlà, Wákà and Bálúù. The selected songs are those that reveal the positive representation of female gender both in roles and performances. The data employed are subjected to rhetorical analysis of communicative import that subverts the negative representation of the female gender. The details of our selected songs and musicians are presented below:

Artiste	Album Title	Genre	Date of Release	
Comfort Ọmógè	Nigeria Settle	Ìkálẹ̀ folk song	1983	
Halimat Ọmowúra	Apala Extraordinary	Àpàlà	2001	
Sàláwà Àbèní	Equal Rights	Wákà	1995	
Ẹlọ́lọ́ Allyson	Eji Ọwúró	Yorùbá Gospel	2003	
Ẹlọ́lọ́ Allyson	Obìnrin Ní Mí	Yorùbá Gospel	2009	
Bátili Àlàkẹ́	-	Wákà	nd	
Ìyábò Àwẹ̀rọ́	-	Bálúù	nd	

## Data Analysis

Yorùbá music as catalyst for women development and social change as identified by Batili Alake, Comfort Omoge, Halimat Omowura, Iyabo Awero, Salawa Abeni and Sola Allyson as social commentator to change the perception of the society towards the representation of the female gender is categorized into:

## Women in Yorùbá Music: Agency and Resistance



The performances of Bàtìlì Àlàké, Comfort Ọmógè, Ìyábò Àwèró, Halimat Ọmọwùrà in music production and the songs of Şolá Allyson, Sàláwà Àbèní are put into play to challenge the notion that Yorùbá music is inherently male-driven, aligning with Poststructuralist feminism's emphasis on dismantling rigid gender roles.

The participation of women in Yorùbá music has been both revolutionary and contested. Early pioneers like Bàtìlì Àlàké and Sàláwà Àbèní challenged gender norms by entering male-dominated genres such as Wákà and Fúji, achieving prominence in a space that was traditionally hostile to female performers (Waterman, 1990, p.87). These women did not merely replicate male musical narratives; they introduced themes central to female experience such as domestic life, motherhood, marital oppression, and emotional resilience).

In Yorùbá musical traditions, this negotiated feminism is evident in the way women musicians strategically navigate cultural norms while pushing for transformation. For instance, Ìyábò Àwèró's innovative use of the Bálùú music birthed out as a variance of the Dadakúàdà genre to reclaim indigenous forms to assert female creativity and leadership, without necessarily rejecting Yorùbá cultural foundations. This dynamic balance between cultural affirmation and resistance is a hallmark of African feminist praxis.

Sàláwà Àbèní used her Wákà music to address issues of female empowerment, fidelity, and societal double standards. Her popular tracks often delivered moral lessons while subtly critiquing male irresponsibility and the societal relegation of women (Oikelome, 2013, p.289). In more recent times, artistes like Şolá Allyson have infused spirituality and feminist ideology into their musical works, pushing the boundaries of Yorùbá womanhood by addressing identity, personal agency, and the sacredness of female existence in songs like '*Obìnrin Ni Mì*' and '*Ejì Òwúrò*'.

### **Şolá Allyson: Asserting Women's Voice**

Şolá Allyson's songs '*Obìnrin Ni Mì*' and '*Ejì Òwúrò*' provide a complex representation of womanhood, oscillating between traditional gender roles and a redefinition of female identity. While her lyrics celebrate women's virtues in ways that align with patriarchal Yorùbá ideals,



they also contain subversive elements that challenge traditional gender stereotypes. The song is a direct declaration of womanhood, emphasizing pride, uniqueness, and self-worth. It does not portray the woman as subordinate but rather as a dignified, invaluable being as:

### Reclaiming Female Identity and Value

Allyson's lyrics resist the notion of women as mere dependents. By repeatedly affirming her worth that:

*Obinrin ni mí mo pé lólá  
Obinrin ni mí ma rìn ma soge  
Ma rìn gbèrè bí ẹni ẹgbé n dùn  
Ma tún s'apá gẹgẹ,  
Èmi lolùrànlówó oko, èmi ni.  
Èmi l'Àngẹ̀lẹ̀lì omọ,  
Elédùmàrè L'ó mọ mí  
Èmi nìyáa kóówá, ẹ kẹ mí.  
Mo fì gbogbo ara s'ẹwà,  
Elédàà mo dúpẹ.  
Kò s'àsìse nìsẹ̀dà mí, ẹ bá mí yò.*

...  
*È má sọ pé tẹ̀mì báwo?  
Ìkẹ l'ó tọ sí mí*

...  
*Èmi ni wúrà iyebíye  
Èmi ni, èmi Sẹ̀gi, èmi l'oyin  
Owó ò le rà mí o,  
Owó ò le rà f'ẹ̀ẹ̀ mí*

I am a woman, am completely endowed  
I am a woman, I will walk majestically  
I will walk in style like I feel a side pain  
I will carry my arm stylishly  
I am a great helper to the husband, I am.  
I am the Angel to the child,  
God created me in such regard  
I am the mother to all, adore me  
I am endowed with beauty  
My creator, I thank you.  
There is no mistake in my creation, rejoice with me.

Do not question my existence  
Care is what due to me

I am an inestimable gold  
Yes I am, I am a costly bead, I am honey  
I cannot be bought over with money,  
Money cannot buy my love

(Şolá Allyson: Obinrin Ni Mí, 2009)

She challenges historical views of women as exchangeable commodities in marriage. This subverts the traditional Yorùbá perception of women's value being tied primarily to bride price and marital status.

### Redefining the Role of a Woman beyond Marriage

Şolá Allyson reiterates the poststructuralist feminist approach of Judith Butler (1990) of Gender Performativity. While she acknowledges the traditional roles of wife and mother in:





*Èmi lolùrànlọwọ ọkọ, èmi ni*

I am a great helper to the husband, I am.

*Èmi l'Ángéḗlì ọmọ,*

I am an Angel to the child,

*Elédùmàrè Ló mọ mí*

God created me a such

*Èmi ní'yáa kóówá, ẹ kẹ mi*

I am the mother to all, adore me

*Ìyá Ọba, Ìyá Ìjòyè, èmi náà lolùtọjú*

I am a mother to the kings, the royals and a care-giver.

*Adùn ayé ni mo jẹ o,*

I am the sweetness of the world,

*Ẹ bá mi yòòò!*

Come rejoice with me!

(Şolá Allyson: Obinrin Ni Mí, 2009)

She elevates these roles beyond passive submission. Instead, she presents them as sources of power, leadership, and divine ordination. This challenge the notion that a woman's worth is solely dependent on her husband or children.

### Subtle Conservatism and Contradictions

Şolá Allyson clamours for positive representation of women through dress code that is in conformity to societal standard. This is in tandem with the poststructuralist approach of representation and language. That is using subtle language in her music as a product of verbal art to correct indecency in women. Despite its empowering tone, the song also reinforces conservative ideals about women's dressing and decorum. This is evident in the excerpt below:

*Ẹ wo'binrin tó gbé gèlè sílẹ,*

Look at a woman that drops the head-tie,

*Tó lọ wa filà mọrí;*

And proceed to wear a cap instead;

*Ìşẹ oníşẹ ló ń jẹ,*

She's been misrepresented

...

...

*Ẹ jẹ ká múra bó şe tọ;*

Lets dress as it befits;

*Kí búbá wá bò'dodo...*

So that our *búbá* will go beyond the navel...

(Şolá Allyson: Obinrin Ni Mí, 2009)

This implies moral duty to maintain modesty. She further criticizes women who wear caps instead of head-ties, which subtly reinforces gendered expectations of appearance. These elements suggest that while the song redefines women's worth, it does not entirely reject Yorùbá cultural prescriptions for femininity.

### Acknowledgement of Women's Reproductive and Emotional Labour:



The song acknowledges the vital role women play in childbearing and nurturing with lines such as:

*Àpò inú mi lómọ n gbé*

*Inú mi ló gbómọ*

*Mo dẹjẹ lómọ lóri;*

*Omú àyà mi ló mu*

*Ẹyìn mi loorun ti n dùn*

*Olùtójú ẹ ni mí*

*Olùbí, olùtọ, ọlọjàà, olùkọ*

*Ọlóbẹ, ọlókà, àjẹsanra, àjẹdàgbà*

*Bí'yàà kúrò léyìn ọmọ;*

*Ìyà nílá á gb'ọmọ sánlẹ*

It is my womb that the foetus lives

It is my stomach the child lives

I gave birth to the child

It is my breast that s/he feeds on

The child enjoys sleep on my back

I am your care-giver.

I am the birth giver, nurturer, mentor, teacher

I cook for the child to grow and develop

If the mother turns back from the child;

A greater affliction will befall the child

(Şolá Allyson: Obinrin Ni Mí, 2009)

However, unlike patriarchal narratives that reduce women to mere child-bearers, Şolá Allyson highlights these roles with pride rather than obligation, referring them as acts of power and continuity. This notion critique essentialism of the female trait as mere child-bearers in homes.

### **Resistance against Subjugation:**

The tenet of the power and subjection of the poststructuralist feminism as exerted by the male over the female is blatantly express by Şolá Allyson. Here, she stand firm as agent of change to assert her position. This is the most revolutionary lines that resist the patriarchal hierarchy in the song. This is given as thus:

*Mi ọ kẹ́ í ṣ'àtẹ́mẹ́rẹ̀*

*Mi ọ kẹ́ í ṣ'àtẹ́mẹ́rẹ̀*

*Ẹmi obinrin*

*A ọ kẹ́ í ṣ'àtẹ́mẹ́rẹ̀*

*Àwa ọ kẹ́ í ṣ'àtẹ́mẹ́rẹ̀*

*Àwa obinrin*

I am not to be trampled upon;

I am not to be trampled upon;

I a woman

We are not to be trampled upon

We are not to be trampled upon

We women.

(Şolá Allyson: Obinrin Ni Mí, 2009)

By repeatedly declaring in the above, Şolá Allyson directly confronts the systemic hierarchical structure that women face in marriage, family and society. This defiance is a radical break from traditional Yorùbá music, where women are often advised to submit to the male authority.



Also, there is subversion of traditional gender representations in 'Eji Òwúrò'. This song is a love-themed piece. It presents an idealized vision of a harmonious marital relationship. However, beneath its affectionate lyrics, there lies a subtle reworking of Yorùbá gender dynamics which is given as thus:

### **Female Voice as Authority**

Şolá Allyson redefines the wife's role in Yorùbá marriages, emphasizing partnership over subordination. She presents women as active collaborators and not passive followers. This is evident in:

<i>Gbá'moràn mi,</i>	Take to my advice
<i>Olólùfẹ́ mi;</i>	My love;
<i>Olùrànlọ́wọ́ l'a fì mí ẹ́ fún ẹ́ látòrun wá.</i>	I have been ordained as your helper.
<i>F'etì s'ámoràn mi;</i>	Give a listening ear to my advice;
<i>Olólùfẹ́ mi;</i>	My love;
<i>Alágbàwí l'a fì mí ẹ́ fún ẹ́ látòrun wá.</i>	I have been ordained as your mouthpiece.
<i>Ká jọ rìn ká sògo f'órúkọ Ọlórún;</i>	Let us walk together to the glory of God
	(Şolá Allyson: Eji Òwúrò, 2003)

The above lyrics position a woman as an advisor whose wisdom and voice are essential for marital unity. Traditionally, women's autonomy has been undermined. But Allyson subtly counters this, asserting that a woman's advice is divinely sanctioned.

### **Mutual Love Rather Than Submission**

Yorùbá marital structures have historically placed emphasis on wife's obedience and duty to her husband. However, Allyson calls for love that is sincere, unconditional, and mutual. She reiterate thus:

<i>Fẹ́ mi bí ojú ti ń fẹ́'mú;</i>	Love me like the eye loves the nose;
<i>Fẹ́ mi bí eyín ti ń fẹ́'nu;</i>	Love me like the teeth loves the mouth;
<i>Fẹ́ mi tẹ̀mítẹ̀mí;</i>	Love me wholeheartedly;
<i>Fẹ́ mi tókàntókàn;</i>	Love sincerely;
<i>Fẹ́ mi taratara;</i>	Love me dearly;
<i>Olólùfẹ́ fẹ́ran mi láìşẹ́etan.</i>	My love, love me without a deceit.
	(Şolá Allyson: Eji Òwúrò, 2003)



By insisting on reciprocity, she challenges the norms that women must endure loveless or unequal right in marriage and call for a definite and unbiased love in marriage.

Ṣolá Allyson's music balances tradition and progress. 'Obinrin Ni Mi' empowers women while upholding cultural decorum, and 'Eji Òwúrò' challenges male dominance by promoting reciprocity in marriage. Her work re-imagines female identity, blending Yorùbá values with modern feminist ideals.

### **Ṣàláwà Àbẹ̀nì: Campaigning for Female Rights**

Ṣàláwà Àbẹ̀nì's song 'Equal Right' serves as a direct challenge to the traditional Yorùbá gender norms that limit women's opportunities in the society. Through her lyrics, she advocates for gender equality in education, career choices and social treatment opposing the patriarchal structures often reinforced by male musicians. Ṣàláwà Àbẹ̀nì's lyrics in 'Equal Right' challenge the patriarchal norms in the following ways:

#### **Challenging Gender Discrimination in Parenting**

The song opens with an urgent call to parents, urging them to put a stop to the act of discrimination between a boy and girl child. In traditional Yorùbá culture, there is a deep-rooted preference for male children, who are often given better education and more opportunities. This is evident in:

*È tẹ́tí ẹ gbó,  
 Gbogbo bímọbímọ ayééé  
 È yé má fíkàn kẹ'kan mó  
 B'ó ẹkùnrin, b'ó ẹbìnrin  
 Ọun l'Ọlórún fì ta wá lórẹ  
 Kí lẹkùnrin n ẹ tóbìnrin ò le ẹ?*

...  
*È fun wa ní equal rights,  
 È jẹwọ ẹ tọ wa dọgbadọgba.*

Listen attentively,  
 All child-bearers of the world  
 Try to put a stop to discrimination  
 Either a boy or a girl child  
 That God blessed us with  
 What can a man do that a woman can't do?

Give us equal rights,  
 Please nurture us equally.  
 (Ṣàláwà Àbẹ̀nì: Equal Rights, 1995)

Àbẹ̀nì rejects this bias, asserting that both boy and girl child deserves equal treatment. This directly contradicts patriarchal beliefs that assign rigid gender roles from birth. Through the





Butler (1990) agency and resistance of the poststructuralist feminism approach, Sàláwà Àbèní campaigns for equal right and nurturing of both genders from the parents.

### Challenging Gendered Career Stereotypes

Sàláwà Àbèní, Halimat Ọmọwúrà and Comfort Ọmógè's lyrics that "What can a man do and a woman cannot do?" is a bold declaration of women's equal capability in all fields of life. She provides real-world examples in:

*Kí lẹkùnrin n ẹ se tóbìnrin ò le ẹ se?*  
*Ọkùnrin n ẹ se doctor o*  
*Obìnrin n ẹ se doctor o*  
*Ẹ fún wa ní equal rights,*  
*Ẹ jòwọ ẹ tọ wa dọgbadọgba.*

What can a man do that a woman can't do?  
 Men takes up medical profession  
 Women takes up medical profession  
 Give us equal rights,  
 Please nurture us equally.

(Sàláwà Àbèní: Equal Rights, 1995)

The lyrics herein challenge stereotypical gender roles where women were historically confined to domestic duties while men dominated professional careers. The Yorùbá society like many others traditionally sees certain jobs (medicine, law, politics, and engineering) as male-dominated, while women were expected to be traders, caregivers and housewives. Àbèní's lyrics reject this limitation, emphasizing that women are equally skilled and deserving of professional advancement. This is the same view in Comfort Ọmógè as she reiterates thus:

*Kí lẹkùnrin n ẹ se?*  
*Tóbìnrin ò le ẹ se yé o?*  
*Ọkùnrin kọ'lé*  
*Obìnrin kọ'lé yú o*  
*Ọkùnrin n ẹ se lọyà*  
*Obìnrin n ẹ se lọyà o*  
*Ọkùnrin n ẹ se tíṣà*  
*Obìnrin n ẹ se tíṣà o*  
*Ọkùnrin kàwé o*  
*Obìnrin kàwé e*

What can a man do?  
 That a woman cannot do?  
 Men build houses  
 Women also build the houses  
 Men takes up the law profession  
 Women takes up the law profession  
 Men do takes up the teaching profession  
 Women do takes up the teaching profession  
 Men are educated  
 Women are educated



*Mó mò fùyà owó jẹ mí o...*

Don't let me be languishing of money...

(Comfort Ọmógè: Nigeria Settle, 1983)

Also Halimat Ọmọwúrà in her song 'Àpàlà Extraordinary' reiterates the female self-worth and achievement in music production even more than the male in:

*Bó ẹ w'Ọlórún òun ló máa ọlọ́  
 Ó ẹ ti Táyé,  
 Ó yàtò sí ti Kẹhíndé  
 Ó mókúú jáde lára alaàyé  
 Kí lẹ ó ẹ sí i?  
 Ó gbálààyé jáde lára òkú,  
 Ịyẹn ò jẹ tuntun  
 B'ọba ò bá bímọ ọkúnrin,  
 Ta ni ó j'Àrẹmọ?  
 Bó ẹ w'Ọlórún ló n ọlọ́  
 Ẹ jẹ ó maa yé e yín  
 Nínú gogbo ọmọ Àyínlá Anígílájé  
 Obínrin kan ọ só tó kọrin bí i baba wón  
 Àwón ọkúnrin wón pò tí wón n kọrin  
 Bó ẹ w'Ọlórún ló n ọlọ́ ẹ  
 Ta ni á mu sí?*

God does as He wishes  
 He provides for Taye,  
 As different to that of Kehinde  
 He created the dead out of the living  
 What can you do about it?  
 He brought out a living out of the dead  
 That is not new  
 If a king did not give birth to male child  
 Who will become the heir?  
 God does as He wishes  
 Let it be known to you  
 Among the children of Àyínlá Anígílájé  
 The only female that sings just like their  
 father  
 There are plenty male child that sings  
 God does as He wishes  
 Who can arrest Him for such?

(Halimat Ọmọwúrà: Àpàlà Extraordinary, 2021)

The above song is a testament of Halimat artistic prowess that she possesses as a female artiste even more than her male siblings. This expression is metaphorically suggesting that as a woman, she can and have actually succeeded in music production even more than the men.

### **Advocating for Equal Rights in a Modern World**

Sàláwà Àbẹnì calls for equal right between the two genders amidst globalization that tends to proffer more opportunities to life. Women career no longer starts and ends in the kitchen anymore. The world has become a global village where people now thrive with the help of unending opportunities. Women too want to harness those opportunities so as to become figures in life. The song acknowledges the changing nature of the society in:

*To ráyẹ ti dayé ọlájú,  
 Ọlájú, ọlájú,  
 Ẹ fún wa ní equal rights,*

For the world has turned a civilized place  
 Civilization, civilization,  
 Give us equal rights,



Here in the above excerpt, Àbẹ̀nì invokes the global feminist movement, suggesting that the Yorùbá society should evolve alongside global progress. This contrasts sharply with other male musicians whose songs reinforce the idea that women should remain submissive and dependent on men. Her demand “Give us equal rights” is a direct feminist call to action, rejecting the patriarchal narratives in much Yorùbá music.

Sàláwà Àbẹ̀nì’s ‘Equal Right’ challenges patriarchal Yorùbá norms, demanding gender equity in parenting, education and career opportunities. Unlike male musicians who reinforce submission, she uses music to advocate for feminist ideals and resist oppression, solidifying her role as a pioneer of gender activism in Yorùbá music.

### **Breaking Gendered Barrier in Yorùbá Music**

Notable female musicians like Bātílì Àláké, Sàláwà Àbẹ̀nì, Halimat Ọmọwùrà, Comfort Ọmógè and Ìyábò Àwèrò have challenged the rigid gender norms to register their legacies in Yorùbá music by birthing new musical style or popularizing the present. Their roles have defied the traditionally male spaces and redefined Yorùbá musical tradition to accommodate and register the female world.

Wákà music is an Islamic-influenced Yorùbá genre that was redefined by Bātílì Àláké, who infused it with female perspectives on love, justice and morality. Her success opened doors for women in a genre once restricted to men. Sàláwà Àbẹ̀nì modernized and commercialized Wákà, earning the title “Queen of Wákà” and ensuring women’s economic independence in the industry. Together, they transformed Wákà into a female-led genre; challenging the notion that Islamic-rooted music belonged solely to men.

Àpàlà music is a genre pioneered by the likes of Hárúnà Ìṣòlá, Kásúmù Àdió and Àyìnlá Ọmọwùrà. It was a platform for male-centered storytelling. Halimat Ọmọwùrà, is the Nigeria’s first female Àpàlà singer, defiling the norms by leading rather than supporting as a dancer or



backup singer. While her father's music reinforced patriarchy, Halimat amplified women's voices, transforming Àpàlà into a tool for female expression and storytelling. This is evident:

*Eré Àpàlà yìi ti wá n' d'ápéwò*  
*Obìnrin àkókó tó n' k'Àpàlà rè ó*  
*Hàlímótù o*  
*Ìyá gbogbo wọn tó n' k'Àpàlà rè ó*  
*Hàlímótù o*  
*Ìṣẹ̀ bàbá mi mo jogún è ni*  
*Àpàlà nàà ni kò dẹ̀ pé méjì o*  
*Wọn máa jó o nílẹ̀ yìi*  
*Wọn á jó o lókè-òkun*  
*Wọn á gbà o!*

This Àpàlà music has fast becoming global  
 This is the first ever female Àpàlà singer  
 Hàlímótù  
 This is their all-in-all mother singing Àpàlà  
 Hàlímótù  
 It is my farther's craft that I inherited  
 It is Àpàlà and nothing else  
 They will dance to it in this land  
 They will dance to it in abroad  
 They will take!

(Halimat Omowura: Àpàlà Extraordinary, 2021)

Halimat Omowura reiterates the importance and worth as the first female Àpàlà musician in Nigeria.

Dadakúàdà genre was pioneered by Odòlayé Àrẹ̀mú and Jáígbadé Àlàó. It saw a shift when Ìyábò Àwẹ̀ró redefined Bàlúù, a variant rooted in storytelling and Yorùbá philosophy. Àwẹ̀ró used Bàlúù to amplify women's voices, addressing their struggles and self-worth, rather than allowing men to define societal narratives. Her success challenged gender norms, proving women could lead in intellectual and wisdom-based music, transforming Bàlúù into a female-dominated genre that continues to inspire new artistes.

Comfort Omogè broke the barrier as a female Òndó South artiste in a male-dominated Yorùbá music industry. She revitalized the *Àsìkò* music (the traditional song of the Ìkálẹ̀ people of Òndó state, Nigeria). Becoming the first female professional musician in her community, she compete with icons like Sunny Adé (Òndó Central) and Orlando Owoh (Òndó North), she proved that talent, not gender, region or religion, defines success. Her music amplified women's voices, reflecting their struggles and resilience. By thriving in traditional Ìkálẹ̀ music, she challenged male dominance by calling for equal and fair treatment in all works of life, paving the way for women and marginalized groups in indigenous Yorùbá music. She disrupts the patriarchal gender norms in her song '*Kí lẹ̀kúnrin lẹ̀ ṣe tí obìnrin ò lẹ̀ ṣe*' (what can a man do and woman cannot do) in:





<i>Kí lẹ̀kùnrin n ẹ</i>	What can a man do
<i>Tòbìnrin ò lẹ ẹ yé o</i>	That a woman cannot do
<i>Ọ̀kùnrin kọ́'lé</i>	Men build house
<i>Obìnrin kọ́'lé yìi o</i>	Women also build the house
<i>Ọ̀kùnrin n ẹ lọyà</i>	Men takes up the law profession
<i>Obìnrin n ẹ lọyà o</i>	Women takes up the law profession
<i>Ọ̀kùnrin n ẹ tìṣà</i>	Men do takes up the teaching profession
<i>Obìnrin n ẹ tìṣà o</i>	Women do takes up the teaching profession
<i>Ọ̀kùnrin kàwé o</i>	Men are educated
<i>Obìnrin kàwé e</i>	Women are educated
<i>Mọ̀ mọ̀ fùyà owó jẹ mí o...</i>	Don't let me be languishing of money...
(Comfort Ọmọ̀gè: Nigeria Settle, 1983)	

The above excerpt is a clear reflection of Comfort Ọmọ̀gè signaling to the society on the potential of the female gender capabilities to thrive as much as their male counterpart. This is the same with Judith Butler (1990) that performance is not about gender but the ability of a particular gender to act according to societal expectations. This corroborates the popular saying that 'what a man can do, a woman can do better'.

### **Contributions of the study**

This paper redefines Yorùbá music as a battleground for subtle gender equity, showing how women have used and still using their voices to challenge patriarchal hegemony that is prevalent in the society. By analyzing female-led musical traditions, it highlights the shifts in gender perception over time, proving that Yorùbá music is a dynamic force in the quest for women's emancipation and national development through artistic expression like music. This research thus fills a gap in African musicology and gender studies, offering a critical feminist re-evaluation of Yorùbá music.

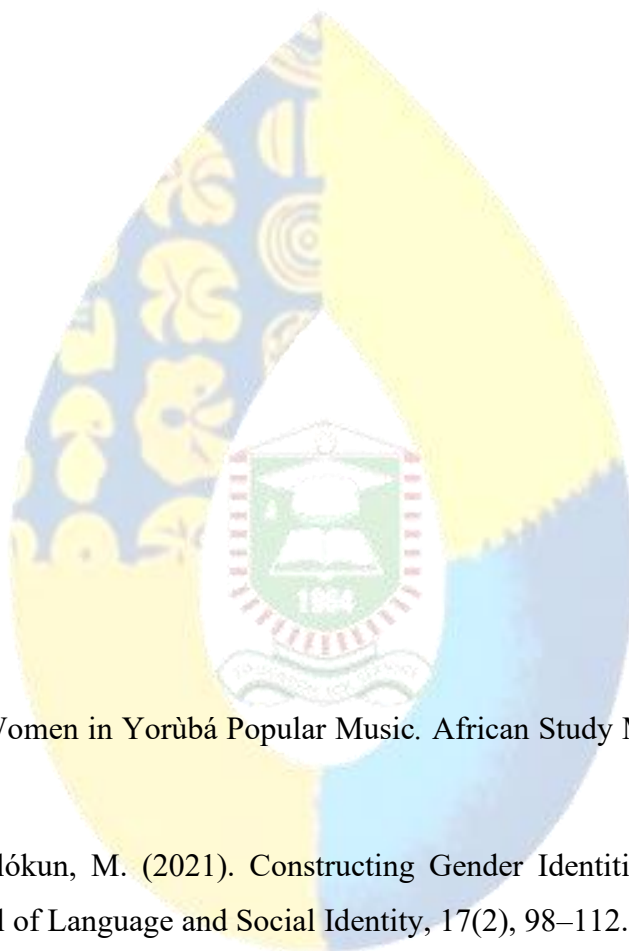
### **Conclusion**

The study emphasizes that Yorùbá music is not just for entertainment but a medium for advocacy and resistance. Female musicians have used their lyrics to reshape gender consciousness, inspiring women to challenge the patriarchal system to achieve development. This contributes to the broader African feminist movement, proving that music can influence cultural transformation.



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