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Singing between What Culture (DIS) Allows: The Expression of Emotion by Muslim Women Singers in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Women in the Northern Nigeria who are predominantly Muslims are not allowed to sing in the public places; whereas singing and dancing performance is not meant for hall/auditorium in Africa. The paper explores and investigates how the Muslim women in Ilorin within the Islamic restriction perform music to enhance the process of empowerment and an avenue to express their emotions. Ilorin is a typical city where music performance at a communal level does not arise. This study therefore relies on individual music ensemble performances to generate its data. A total of 20 ensembles were observed and 20 husbands/men involved in the performance were interviewed. The bands were not exclusively women as the instrumentalists were men.

The paper while investigating the process of empowerment rather than the outcome discovered that in a subtle way these female Musicians negotiate their stand and express their feelings through music performances where they shared marital agony, societal discomfort, agitations about public opinion and what Islam demands of them. The paper concludes that while an outcome of women empowerment is in focus, the process of resistance remains a source of momentum for women's Muslim in Ilorin, Nigeria to relieve themselves of some psychological tensions.

Keywords: *Islam, Muslim women, resistance in disguise, empowerment, psychological tension*

1. Introduction

Empowerment, (Rekha and Kornberg 2002, 4) note is a fluid that cannot be easily assessed. While they also differentiated between empowerment as a process and not as an outcome, (Hogan 2008, 78) points out that the outcome of resistance may be intangible; the process of resistance remains a source of strength and momentum for women's organization to express psychological feelings.

For many decades, the voices of women in Ilorin were heard and danced, but the message has produced an intangible outcome to change the power and agency of male dominance, Islamic position about women subjugation and African patriarchal system. Various degrees of the process of empowerment rather than outcome are examined in this study in order to relate how Islam, culture and music interact and interpret empowerment of women in Ilorin emirate in Nigeria.

Men in Ilorin like in many other African cultures dominate not only the political, economic and religious affairs, but even the musical scenes. Apart from some cultures in Nigeria, Ekpe culture in Delta region for instance where women cannot play some musical instruments (Idamoyibo, 2006), many of the women in Nigeria sing and play musical instruments; Alakutu women music in Ekiti Yoruba is an example (Abiodun 2000, 64) and Shantu music in Kaduna (Jatau 2006, 169). The southern Nigeria can boast of many women singers and musicians in the gospel arena, (Bola Are, Tope Alabi, Sinach...), waka genre (Salawa Abeni), Reggae, hip-pop, R&B, Pop singers (Sade Adu, Asa, Onyeka Onwenu, Stella Damasus...) Islam has equally enhanced the dominance of men in all ramifications through the doctrines of Islam about women's position. Muslim women in Music also suffer silently from this unfair treatment. Many studies in literature have confirmed this unjust interpretation of the restrictive legislation of the Quran verses that restrict women in public music performance.

Unlike in the literary studies, women in music have no opportunity to write on their positions about this inequality and injustice with the volume of discourses of Islamic feminism across Africa and beyond. The power of their opposition is in the song. Due to the paucity of research in this area of Muslim women's music, the study uses the literary approach and discographic method to analyze the level of the effect of the music as a process of empowering women in Ilorin socially, politically, religiously and musically. The paper, exploring oral forms of expression, investigates how the Muslim women in Ilorin within the Islamic restriction perform music to enhance the process of empowerment through expression of emotions. Unlike other communities in Nigeria where communal music performances take place among women, children and men; Ilorin is a typical city where music performance at a communal level does not arise. This study unfolds factors militating against this. This study therefore relies on individual music band performance to generate its data. A total of 20 bands of such were observed and interviewed with 20 husbands/men involved in the performance. The bands were not exclusively women as the instrumentalists were men.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. *Islam and Women in Performing Arts in Northern Nigeria*

Are we in perpetual bondage of culture and are we going to remain entangled in men dominance culture? The Muslim women singers expressed their feelings openly during a symposium organized in Ilorin by Muslim women singers in May 13, 2015. Women who are Muslims are between two cross cultures- the men dominance culture and Islamic culture. This often generates mixed feelings, mental torture and psychological mindset. Cohen, Wu and Miller (2017) reviewing Gebauer and his colleagues (2013) note that psychological tendencies to conform or rebel can manifest themselves in pro or anti-religion sentiment depending on whether people live in a religious or non-religious context. In the same manner, psychological tendencies to conform or rebel can manifest themselves in pro or anti-musical sentiment (play music or do not) depending on whether people live in a musical (Christian core south in Nigeria) or non-musical context (Muslim core north in Nigeria). The question thus arises: how are the Muslim women fairing between these two cultural contexts. Islam does not allow music during prayers, yet the manner of rendering Islamic prayers is musical (chanting, which is a musical type of singing). Islam does not allow music, yet they dance to music in a social context. The Muslim women singers in Ilorin know about these sentiments and in a way sing in disguise to maintain these two extreme cultures. The analysis in this paper is premised within this framework.

The tradition of writing music or writing about women has not been part of Northern Nigerian literature. As a member of Northern Nigerian literature Conference, I discovered that history, methods and theory about music in Northern Nigeria is still very sparse. But yet, there are numerous women music practiced daily among the Northern women who are predominantly Muslims.

2.2. *Islamic and Islamised Music*

No musical genre can be termed Islamic music. To venture into definition may bring confusion. (Frishkopf 2008, 501) notes that exclusive definitions appear arbitrary while inclusive definitions entail a heterogeneity that calls into questions the meaningfulness of the term. What is paramount is that there is Islam, there is music and there are Muslim faithful who perform music. There are music performed outside Islamic context by Muslim faithful; there are also music performed to celebrate Islamic activities but not as part of Islamic worship (many Imams claimed). Whereas the music used in Islamic activities (Vidal 2012, 135) refers to as Islamized music (waka, apala, sakara, fuji are examples of such music) while according to him Islamic music consists of Quranic chants and recitation of the Islamic liturgy before, during and after divine Islamic worship. The call to worship and Quranic renditions by this latter category is in form of chant which is a musical style that illustrates singing un-metrical words in a sing-song tone. Nonetheless, there are contentions that music is not part of Islamic worship, and Muslim women are not to sing in public.

(Igwe 2012) posits that the Quran corroborated by the Hadiths as interpreted by the Sheiks, Mullahs and Imams, sanctions and decrees that Islam is a male-made religion, founded on masculinity, patriarchy and male domination. Quran, Sura 43: 15 confirms the African mentality about a male child which in Ilorin is specially celebrated. Music in Ilorin therefore is not only a per formative arts, it is equally a celebrative art. Music is not performed uncelebrated. There is always a musical and non-musical celebration of music performance (Abiodun 2000, 136) calls this celebrative musicology.

2.3. *The Power of Language*

Language has been identified as a tool for demonstration of power in literary studies, political arena, legal power and choral performance. (Yusuf 2002, 132) notes that language disability is one of the reasons why women are not involved in Nigerian politics; to her, 'language and politics are inseparable'. To a musician, the voice is the most important tool in a vocal performance of which text is the medium of disseminating the message coded in a language. A musician must be vocal and text-bound for him/her to be able to improvise musically, linguistically and aesthetically when the need to substitute a set of text for another arises. Language is therefore an indispensable tool in vocal music. Is Islam against possession of language skills? Are Muslim women versatile in Arabic text to enhance musical performance of Quranic text? Does the mind-set of Muslims align with the thought of the Women musicians? Language is a powerful tool in enhancing performance and in expressing feelings. (Yusuf 2002, 128) also notes that "one who suffers a disability in language-use is not likely to reach self-realization. It is therefore plausible that a person should be exposed to a wealth of opportunities in language (Arabic) to perform music acceptable to Muslims.

2.4. *Music, Women and Politics*

In Nigerian politics, women who were part of the struggle to earn Nigerian independence were not considered "fit" to hold political opportunities in the 1st and 2nd republics. A very few, who were mostly Christians were considered in the third republic while a handful Muslim women were in the 4th republics. To date, no Muslim women have been considered fit to be Governors or Deputy Governors in the Muslim dominated zones in Northern Nigeria. The Southern States in Nigeria have featured some Muslim women as Deputy Governors (Lagos State). Now we have few in the legislative houses in Nigeria and in the Executive arms of the government. A Christian woman has been a speaker of the national house of representative (though for a short time), no Muslim woman in Northern Nigeria has risen to such positions in Nigeria. A prominent Muslim woman would have been a governor in Ilorin, but alas Islamic injunctions do not allow a woman to be a leader over men; so she was dropped after much controversy.

Educate a woman, educate a nation. This slogan has not been part of the Northern Muslim states in Nigeria. For 'Islamic reasons' many of the Muslim female children do not go to school. The case is a little different in Ilorin where for Yoruba cultural influence, quite a number of Muslim female children go to school. This is also because they have to compete with Christian female children in the state. Female Muslims now occupy significant positions in Ilorin.

A new government in Nigeria will always search for a Christian woman for the position of Minister of Finance. Are there no Muslim women who could occupy that position? In Ilorin, where Muslims and Christians live together, different organizations, unions, associations involving the two will always reserve the position of treasurer for Christian Women. Does it mean Muslim women are not trustworthy for such positions? This practice may be a cultural antecedent that women are softer in matters relating to money. Currently in Nigeria, no woman had been mentioned about the 2.1 billion dollar saga being probed in Nigeria. Are Muslim women saints in this regard? Are female Muslim musicians' saints in matters relating to money? What do they preach about morals in their musical practices?

There have been calls for the empowerment of the Nigerian woman and in particular the Northern women who were predominantly Muslims. Zanaib Alkali (2011) stands out among Muslim women from Northern Nigeria fighting for discrimination and injustice of all kinds against women in the Northern Nigeria. (Az-Zubair 2012, 12) notes that poverty is a key determinant to the status in which women in the North find themselves. With the inadequate or in many cases the near- absence of food, shelter, access to health facilities, water sanitation and basic education, there simply is no foundation on which to empower women. She concludes that investing to fight inequality is a key to women's empowerment and policies must create a women friendly environment.

2.5. Muslim Women in Literary Scene

Within the literary studies on female peculiar situations in the Muslim core North in Nigeria, writers' position includes synthesis of upholding God's law of mutuality, and co-existence of men and women, equality between men and women. They dropped the idea that men are heads and women heart; and posited that the women are both the head and the heart. (Opera 2008, 6) notes that the low status of Islamic women is evidenced by the regressive masculine dominance. The interpretation of the female sexuality forms a subtraction for the tendency to keep women in *Purdah* or 'scared and vital' role of wife and mother. Women education is thus a rarity in Northern Nigeria.

Women have made concerted effort to break the jinx and unveil the masks keeping a female Muslims under veil and at home perpetually. (Usman 2007, 161) remarks that "though men were earlier in the movie industry as actors and producers...women have deemed it fit to defy religion, culture and tradition to join in recent times, the global trend by participating actively in the movie industry. Other cultural issues include the position of the father, mother and in-laws who do all within their power to uphold the culture at the expense of the women in public performance. In Zaynab Alkali's play 'The Descendants' Ajia Ramta (a character in the play) says a little beating from your husband; and you run back home like a spoilt child. If your mother had run away each time your father had beaten her, would you have been born... Responses like this call for domestic violence, psychological trauma, frustration, exploitation, taboos, immoral virtues and oppression that keep Muslim women at home. How Muslim women in Ilorin break this hurdle remains the focus of this paper.

While Usman (2006), Jatau (2006), Opera (2008) Z. Alkali (2011) Az-Zubair (2012) are women in literary gender studies, men like (Gimba 1994, 30) reiterates that women are equal to men, no more, no less...this is a divine pronouncement, nothing to add, nothing to prove. This position "deconstructs the embedded ideology" to reconstruct the patriarchal ideology. This is not a detached viewpoint, the illusion of seamlessness, the narrative power but a negotiation of meaning to contradictions. (M. Alkali 2007, 130).

How often do Muslim women perform in public and what Islam allows remain frankly a debatable issue in ethno-musicological and feminine research. Do wives in seclusion perform in the public? (Mack 2004, 4) notes that the need for women to fulfill their responsibilities as mothers and wives in a predominantly Islam environment often dictate that they perform in private spaces located in the harems of their husbands and inside family compounds. That Muslim women perform in the public is haram (sin). Whereas in Western part of Nigeria, Muslim and Christian women perform in the public. (Omojola 2009, 49) shares the experience of Ekiti Yoruba women on how they use music to draw attention to the ways in which public performance speaks to the agency and status of women in traditional Yoruba societies. What then determines the performance of music in Ilorin by women- (mis) interpretation of Islamic legislation, inter/intra cultural factor or the weakness of Muslim men in Ilorin.

3. Ilorin, Music and Muslim Women

3.1. Islam and Music

Islam is a principal factor in what unites the Ilorin people in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. It has been a driving force in determining what can be termed Ilorin Islamised music rather than Islamic music. This music is not an outcome of Islam but built around Islam and an aggregated culture which has enhanced the process of women empowerment; status and music profession.

The development and interpretation of Islamic ideology in Ilorin is historical, religious, cultural and psychological. Ilorin people are mixture of Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Baruba and migrants from Mali (West Africa). Interpretation of Islamic ideology in Ilorin is a factor of history and culture which can best be explained and analyzed within the migration theory that what goes round, comes around. A little of culture and little of religion, dictation of the men and a little enforcement of Islamic laws determine the songs of Muslim women in Ilorin. This gives an overview of different musical

styles in Ilorin dominated by men in such musical genres like dadakuada and dundun sekere music which are men music. The Islamized music (waka, baluu and senwele) later developed by women were initially referred to as dadakuada obinrin (women dadakuada).

Ilorin has no other traditional rites performed outside Islamic rites. No traditional festivals, and the belief in ancestral spirit or the worship of any deity, gods and goddesses, has been subdued by Islam. They were abandoned for Islamic festivals even through a part of the main streets in Ilorin is called Oloje, the abode of the masquerades. Oral historical sources affirmed that Ilorin people were ardent masquerade worshippers. They celebrated this in a festival lasting three weeks (21 days). The worship of traditional gods like Ogun, (god of iron) Oya, (the river goddess) Sango (god of thunder) as practiced by Idi – ape community of the city has gradually given way to Islam in disguise. Not less than 98 percent of the indigenes of Ilorin are Muslims. They are acclaimed ardent Muslims who are fervent in Quranic citation having won the first position severally in international Quranic competition.

The policy of male dominance is extremely observed in Ilorin than in any other Yoruba land. This has differentiated them from other parts of Yorubaland and because they bear Yoruba names and speak Yoruba language, the core northern Nigerians do not admit them holistically as northern people. No Hausa/ Fulani from the northern Nigeria will worship in a mosque where an Ilorin – Yoruba Imam leads a prayer. And yet, they are Muslims from the north. This discrimination by ethnic variation is evident in the natural dominance of the Hausa/ Fulani in Nigeria who always claim, they are born to rule.

Islam is all about submission to Allah. Women's submission to Quranic verses that force women to refrain from NUSHUZ (rebellion) is a call to worship and submission to Allah. Women in public music performance are seen as acting differently to these Quranic verses and therefore portrayed as being rebellious. (Quran, Sura 4; 34). This portion is been interpreted in Ilorin to mean that the woman is pompous because she is likely to be richer than the husband thereby calming superiority over her husband. Most women in Ilorin, when they are richer than their husband, men do not have control over them. This female appropriation of superiority is seen as being rebellious contrary to (Quran, Sura 4: 34). Most husbands resolved to have other wives as permitted by Islam. This within the Yoruba culture is referred to as "Bata Wahala" (problematic shoes), who dared wear them?

3.2. Analysis of Song-text

From the data analyzed, out of the 20 Ilorin Muslim women musicians I interacted with, all of them are from polygamous homes. The data shows that the husband of eight of them has 4 wives each; the next 10 has 3 wives each and only 2 of the husbands have 2 wives each. The implications of this over the musical practices are enormous. One of such implications is that such Muslim woman musician will be subjected to purdah. (a long veil or other all-enveloping clothing worn by Muslim women) One out of the 20 women interviewed; one sings with the purdah on. Wearing purdah itself is the highest oppression of the Muslim women hood. (Lengel 2004, 223) notes that "real conservative men would not allow their wives to sing in public". Freedom of movement which Nigerian constitution allows is interpreted in Ilorin to mean freedom to "mess around" (prostitution). Three non-generic words are used in Ilorin to describe a concubine: Alaanu mi – someone sent to have mercy on me Onitiju mi – someone I revered Oloore mu – someone doing me a favor The women singing have issues about marital life. The husband lamented about refusal of their sexual right whereas women complained that they are like fowls in the hand of men; used, dumped, neglected, abandoned and discarded. Wives are on shift and on roster basis in Ilorin. If you have four wives, each is on weekly roster basis when she has to fulfill the sexual contract that week and prepare meal for the husband. This may coincide times with a performance that has been scheduled previously. One of the women lamented that men are like 'fish bone' in the throat of a woman. You cannot swallow, you cannot vomit it and yet, they (men) are pains and gains in their endeavor.

In all this, the women musicians are submissive. They sing songs to create avenue for peaceful co-existence of wives and husbands. Their songs are therefore reactionary rather than revolutionary. This principle applies in Muslim women music when they sing: Help me to plead with my husband The owner of my head Who does not play with the salat (prayer)? For Allah's sakes as alamaleku (peace be unto you)

Ilorin women have no battle to fight against tradition. The only battle is religion. Islam is a unifying factor in Ilorin. They stand to triumph in political, economic and social matters under the umbrella of Islam. The women realized that the power to break this Islamic hegemony or the power to defy the Islamic injunctions through music requires a radical approach in a subtle, cautionary approach within the Islamic principle of submission in Islam. They therefore sing:

I am a Muslim woman Though I sing, I am close to my God Allah the great, the magnificent In another song, one of the women sings Olowo ori mi ja mi lole Oko mi ko mi lowo, o fi fe aya Aya to rewa, ko fi p'owo wale My husband stole my money To marry another wife A beautiful woman she is He (the Husband) should make money out of her (Lengel 2004, 228) notes that "woman performers confront the interlocking system of hegemonic discourse that permeates all levels of Muslim life". Women singers in Ilorin do this by singing songs that talk about Islamic principles: Onigbagbo ododo Yo saka Yo kirun mararun To ba l'owo, yo lo Mecca Muslim faithful Will give alms Will pray five times a day If he has money, he goes to Mecca

The Muslim women would never sing songs that will evoke troubles among the Muslim world or that will distort the religion policy even though they are under religion and social pressure. They avoid songs that will preach equality of men and women in such a way that men will feel insulted. They sing what Ilorin is all about – Islam
A lazy man cannot live in Ilorin

We wake up 4 am daily to pray. The Ilorin women would want to be seen as “women of the prophet”, a good wife and mother. So they sing about their womanhood, to reaffirm their traditional gender roles. They sing. We are good Muslim women We observe Zakat, salat, SawinWe take care of our homes Allah is our witness.

‘Women of the prophet’ refers to a Muslim woman within Ilorin Islamic culture that observes the five pillars of Islam; so Muslim women in the music profession struggle to make Hajj. The study shows that 18 out of the 20 Muslim women singers have made hajj. This we find out enriches their status because they earn a title “Alhaja” (a pilgrim to Mecca). They sing various songs to celebrate this achievement:

Alhaja to re Mecca to boBarika re Alhaja who had safe trip to Mecca Congratulations The Muslim women in Ilorin sing about the history of Alimi whom they believe is the head of the Ilorin dynasty. They will never sing about Afonja, the controversial Yoruba generalissimo who lived in Ilorin. While the historical controversy was still on, they changed the text of the following song:

E sin wa de ‘Lorin oe, E sin wa de ‘Lorin allorin Afonja e sin wa de Lorin (changed to) Ilorin Alimi, e sin wa de ‘LorinBehold and beloved Ilorin The city of Afonja was changed to the city of Alimi (while Alimi was a Muslim, Afonja was not) While musicians tell stories, they can also distort historical facts for political reasons. The Emir is from Alimi dynasty and therefore they must sing the praises of the dynasty. (Hogan 2008) notes that “women of all ages in West Africa despite the relative scarcity of their voices in contemporary histories and political discourses continue to confront local social issues and transnational political conflicts through performance acts of resistance”. Such performance act of resistance makes Muslim women musicians in Ilorin to comment in a song that:

Obinrin I seru Olorun lo da won Won loju, won lete E gb’obinrin larun ke Women are not slaves God created them as men They have mouth and eyes like men All hail the womanhood. Though subtly put, the women in their craftiness and skilful musical ingenuity have shown the power of music by saying what cannot be said ordinarily in speech utterances. In the words of (Lengel 2004, 212) “it is the disguised or offstage political acts...” that illuminate women’s resistance.

4. Conclusion

The paper from a literary approach, focused on Islam, music and Muslim women who are musicians is Ilorin, Nigeria. Ilorin being a Muslim dominated city in the northern Nigeria, the paper argued that Islam has dominated all religious, cultural and historical affairs. Muslim women in Ilorin have no opportunity to perform music as a communal enterprise. However, individual women in different bands have played critical roles in the process of empowering women to combat man’s social, political and religious dominance in subtle manner referred to in this study as reactionary rather than revolutionary approach. The language of the music is Yoruba, but Arabic text enhances acceptability of the music by Muslim faithful. These female Musicians negotiate their stand through music performances where they shared marital agony, societal discomfort, agitations about public opinion and what Islam demands of them.

This study discovered that despite the dominance of religious pressures, Muslim women in Ilorin still say their mind without provocation, intimidation and violence. Actions and reactions are subtly buried in what Ilorin people cherish and admonish – Islam. While an outcome of women empowerment is in focus and almost accomplished, the process of resistance remains a source of strength and momentum for women’s Muslim in Ilorin, Nigeria.

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