
Masculinity as a Trace Element of Relationship: The case of IFÁ and AYÒ OLÓPỌN among Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria

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Okewande, O.T.^{1*}

¹ Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin, P. O. Box 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Different cultures of the world have gender specifications for cultural and professional activities- religious or social. Among the Yoruba, Ifá is the foundation on which the culture rests. That is, every cultural activity is connected back to and referenced in Ifá. Ayò Ọlọpọ̀n is an indigenous Yoruba game that has gained an international nomenclature in the present time. Despite the influence of Ifá on every aspect of the Yoruba life, no work has been carried out linking or relating ayò Ọlọpọ̀n with to Ifá, particularly on gender. This gap is filled by this study. Cultural studies, which emphasize the social power that encodes the culture in society are adopted using the comparative method. Adopting a cultural approach offers an opportunity for using appropriate analytical tools necessary at any point of analysis. The scope of cultural studies accommodates interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fields of academic inquiry. Relying on Ifá corpora texts, incantation and interviews from Ifá practitioners and ayò Ọlọpọ̀n's players and author's observations from the field, gender specificity in Ifá is compared with gender roles in ayò Ọlọpọ̀n to establish gender synergies between the two cultural elements. It is found that there is a cultural confluence between male gender activities in Ifá and ayò performances. It is also found that there is communities' cultural change resulting in growth and development, with the involvement of the female gender in ayò Ọlọpọ̀n in contemporary times among the Yoruba. This study concludes that the male gender relates ayò Ọlọpọ̀n to Ifá.

Keywords: Ayò Ọlọpọ̀n, Ifá, Gender, Socio-cultural, Religion, Cultural studies.

INTRODUCTION

^{1*} **Corresponding author:** Tel.: +23408034769271; Email: okewandeo.t@unilorin.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9242-4227>

Gender “refers to the cultural traits and behaviors deemed appropriate for men or women by a particular society” (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 334). Masculinity as used in this study has to do with male cultural roles. Among Africans in general and the Yoruba people in particular, cultural elements such as religion and sociocultural activities are more associated or appropriate with one gender than another. This is why gender roles in between a cultural activity or element and another can be used as trace elements of relationships within a culture. The Yoruba believe that “life is an aggregate of relationships” (O’Connell, 2013, p. 2). The relationships can be within and between different cultural activities. such as the gender relationship being investigated between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọppón*. *Ifá* can be described as the compendium of the Yoruba culture. This means all aspects of Yoruba life are evinced from it. *Ayò ọlọppón* is an indigenous Yoruba game that is played in many nations of the world today.

The interrelationship in the male gender association with *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọppón* is a tilling ground of cultural research establishing reasons behind gender similarities between the two cultural elements among the Yoruba. This is justified by the fact that, while some reasons have been established with *Ifá* male gender, reasons behind the male gender in *ayò ọlọppón* is hazy till the present time, the inquiry of which can be traced from *Ifá*, the reference-point of all cultural activities of the Yoruba. As “Sometimes it is difficult to determine, or even to imagine, how certain elements of ideology originated or what they can possibly tell us about the past experience of a society” (Lenski & Lenski, 1987, p. 41). This is the case with *ayò ọlọppón* where the male gender cultural ideology remains daunting. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to validate that, male gender restriction to *ayò ọlọppón* is an extension of *Ifá*’s male gender influence. That is, the male gender is a cultural relationship that connects *Ifá* to *ayò ọlọppón*. The objectives of this study are to compare the male gender roles in *Ifá* with male gender players in *ayò ọlọppón* and to account for that *ayò ọlọppón* male gender evolves from *Ifá* male gender specification.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background to gender

Different cultural activities prescribe what is appropriate for men and women. However, those cultural prescriptions are not on the same aggregates between male and female genders. That is, the end result of gender prescription in different cultural activities is gender disparity or inequality. There have been different postulations on the causes of gender inequality. Some believe that gender inequality can be biologically determined and to some authors, gender can only be socially accounted for (Giddens 1996 & Haralambos 1980). Those who believe in biology or nature as the basic cause of gender inequality are sociologists. And those who are of the opinion that society is the basic cause of gender inequality are known as socioculturalists. In between these two opinions come the suggestion that both the sociobiologists and the socioculturalists to be blamed for gender inequality are the bioculturalists (Asue 2010).

Asue classifies the proponents of gender inequality into four categories; using Nigeria’s experience: “creationists (sociobiologists), naturalists (sociologists), structuralists (socioculturalists, and survivalists (bioculturalist)” (2010, p. 7). The creationists rest their case on gender inequality to creation; citing references from the bible (Genesis 1-3),

where a woman is to be subordinate to man, and Quran (7: 19-21) “follows the trajectory typified in the Judeo-Christian understanding. African Traditional Religion simply believes that a woman is a man’s property. This is reflected in the Nigerian constitution whereby a woman seldom exists independent of her marital life” (2010, p. 7). This opinion is criticized by the facts provided by Archaeologists from Europe and Near East that “Paleolithic civilization practiced goddess worship and were organized as matriarchies” (2010, p. 8). The gender prescription in religious activities is implied. The order of gender spiritual roles is spelled out in the sacred books guiding the activities of the religion. This is the case, among the Yoruba. There are prescribed male and or female gender roles in worshipping Yoruba deities. For example, among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria, goddesses such as *Oya* and *Ọṣun* who are river goddesses; where the female gender is actively involved. However, there are women gender limitations on some religious practices, and in some cases, there is total exclusion of women’s gender on some religious rites such as the case of *Orò* (the divinity of wild wind); which must not be sighted by women. The deity has zero tolerance for the female gender. In the case of *Ifá*, there is a limit to which women can get involved in some religious activities. However, gender restriction is also perceived to be activated in some social activities because of the synergy between the deity and the social system or event. This is perceived to be the case with *ayò ọlọppón* male’s connection being investigated in this study.

Naturalists are of the view that the natural division or allocation of labor as a result of biology accounts for gender inequality. Therefore, women are not being maltreated by men. The biological composition of women’s nature makes them weak beings. This opinion is further buttressed by the fact that the genetic construct of human beings has a relational influence on their behaviors (Tiger & Fox 1972). The opinion of the naturalists is believed to be one of the major reasons (in some cases) why gender is preferred for some activities. However, religious activities have their own gender assignments not bound by the cultural division of labor in society. However, one assumes such should not apply to social activity such as *ayò ọlọppón*. The perceived gender synergy between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọppón* is to establish that *ayò ọlọppón* have some religious collocations. This resemblance is believed to be occasioned by the relationship that exists between the two cultural elements and events.

The structuralists based their opinion on gender inequality on the structures of the society. This can be associated with the cultural gender prescriptions in a society; while the survivalists are of the view that gender inequality arises as a result of class struggle. That is, men are seen as powerful and women as weak; making the men to overpower the women in performing some cultural activities. This opinion can, to some extent, be true in relation to some cultural activities that have no gender specification. The opinion of the structuralists can be an extension of the naturalists’ view, in a situation like this, one can argue that men are naturally or biologically created stronger and more powerful than the female gender. However, this is not to overrule the possibility of some women being powerful or stronger than men.

McIntosh’s study of the lives of Yoruba women between 1820 and 1960 “is a welcome addition to the literature on gender, power, and culture in West Africa. Yoruba women in the precolonial and colonial eras were involved in other

aspects of community life. Among the Yoruba, gender specifications in cultural activities are just like the Victorian notion of separate spheres for women and men" (2009, p. 1). Some religious and sociocultural activities functions are gender specific. Some authors are of the opinion that religious and cultural activities play a central role in the propagation of patriarchal gender norms because "they believe that God destined men to be in charge and women to be governed by men is evident in many passages of the Islamic and Christians Holy Books" (Adeniyi-Ogunşakin, 2014, p. 12). The men's domination of some religious and cultural activities is not limited to the Islamic and Christianity religions alone but extends to the African religion as well.

It can be summed up from different views on gender above that there are gender roles, which are "positions in societies that can be filled by individuals" in relation to gender (Lenski & Lenski, 1987, p. 44) in a society. The reasons for gender role specifications arise because roles are an important mechanism of social control; encouragement of specialization, cooperation among people, and specialization results in interdependence by empowering the people (Lenski & Lenski, 1987). Male or female specializing in a profession is influenced by cultural transmission, which relates to how cultural activities (including gender specification) are transmitted acquired, or inherited by the successive generation. The male gender in *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is influenced by tradition. Since *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* being related in this study is not a religious activity, one expects that there should be gender flexibility in its performance. This is because, unlike religion which is divine, social activities are culture-made.

Ifá and Ayò ọlọpọ̀n: A review

Ifá "is a divination system created by the Yorùbá people of South Western Nigeria some 2000 years ago. In the course of succeeding centuries, The *Ifá* priests (Babalawo) have developed the original form bequeathed them by **ORUNMILA**, the reforming prophet of the **ODUDUWA ERA** of Yorùbá history (5000B.C. – 500A.D.) in many ways but have kept its canons essentially unchanged to this very day" (Lijadu, 1908 translated into English by Emanuel, 2010, p. ix). Because of the nomenclature of *Ifá* that cut across nations of the world, *Ifá* is known to different people by different names throughout the world. For example, *Ifá* is known as "*Fá* among the Fon of the Republic of Benin, *Eva* to Nupes, *Ifá* in Cuba, USA, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Surinam, and Togo. *Ifá* is referred to by the Ewe as *Afa*, *Ephod* by Jews, *Geomancy* by Europeans and Margays" (Qđeyemí, 2013, p. 5). The divination system is universal among these nations like with the Yoruba people. The divination system is a specialized knowledge that makes it a religious cult. The language and the system of the denomination cannot be understood by an "outsider-" non-member.

Various aspects of Yoruba culture cannot be properly understood without awo- cult; as walks and works of life may fall into the applicatory tentacles of culture. Interestingly, there can be no culture without a 'cult'. Here, I do not use the word cult in its esoteric sense; rather, I use it to mean specialized knowledge reserved for a certain group of people. Our earth is full of specialized knowledge and consequently of 'cults'. Only trained lawyers can practice; the untrained are looked upon as educated but not 'learned'. Without borrowing ideas from the

West, the Yoruba system of professional training is also based on a 'cult' (awo or guild) pattern. Each professional discipline has a prefix of awo. Thus, awo means specialized training involving a gradual and graduated system of acquisition of knowledge whereby one does not proceed to the next step until one has mastered the preceding steps. Thus, *Ifá* is given the cognomen 'babalawo' (father of all cults) not only because he is the father of all the apprentices and advocates of his art, but because this 'cult' has to enlighten every other 'cult' or guild, and every individual Yoruba person about the first step to take in life. *Ifá* itself has its own peculiar nuances of professional operation which each apprentice has to learn and master. Like *Ifá*, there are other different awo- cults, "awo Ọdẹ (the cult or guild of the hunters), awo abiyamọ (the cult of incarnation) which deals with fertility, childcare, agriculture, and reproduction of all living beings; awo ọgbóni or awo ọ̀ṣùgbó (the cult of politics), awo ìyàmi otherwise known as awo àjẹ (the cult of the witches), awo ịṣẹ̀gùn (the cult of the herbalists), etc. All these 'cults' have special roles to play in the thorough organization of the Yoruba community (Ilesanmi, 2004, pp. 8-10).

The opinion above posits that there is no activity: religious or non-religious that is not guided by cultural participants in terms of gender. Some cultural activities and professions are more prominent to gender than others. Gender influences why it is rare for the female gender to be an active member of the hunters' guild among the Yoruba. Likewise, the male gender rarely gets involved in "*awo ìyàmi* otherwise known as *awo àjẹ* (the cult of the witches)" (Ilesanmi, 2004, p. 10). However, as being investigated in this study, there seems to be a crisscrossing of gender specifications around cultural activities that relate them together. In this case, there are gender relationships in-between the cultural activity as being investigated between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* gender relationships in this study.

Various *Ifá* corpora prescribe gender specificity to various cultural activities among the Yoruba. In addition, the limitation, and consequences of violation of cultural gender prescriptions are sometimes encapsulated in *Ifá* corpora epistles. Yoruba cultural structure in *Ifá* is developed to and capable of influencing society positively, not only among the Yoruba people but to humanity in general. As a result of *Ifá's* influence on human development, in 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared that *Ifá* is one of the 86 traditions of the world to be recognized as masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity (Robinson 2008). By this pronouncement, *Ifá* is added to the world heritages contributing to human development. The prominent roles of *Ifá*, as a religion, science, or literary text, has over time been a concern to scholars in different areas of human endeavors, like medicine, philosophy, religion, art, history, socio-political, social, economic, and culture.

This is why *Ifá* serves as a trace element in different aspects of Yorùbá and human life in various ways. This is why the scope of *Ifá* is multifarious. *Ifá* establishes the intra-cultural relationship among the Yoruba and it authenticates the validity of Yoruba cultural activities. *Ifá* is the reference point of Yoruba culture. That is, one will gain more insights into some other cultural aspects such as religious, social, economic, political, and scientific systems of the peoples'

life (past and present); because *Ifá's* knowledge extends to them. Gender specificity and peculiarity of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is perceived believed to be influenced by the proto-gender the game derived from *Ifá*. It is believed that the relationship of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* to *Ifá* can only explain why some activities around the game are hazy, such as the male gender limitation or restriction known with *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*.

Like *Ifá*, the international status of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is also not in doubt. For instance, apart from its popularity among the Yorùbá it is called *Gisoro* in Burundi, *Oware* in Ghana, *Achochodi* in Ivory Coast, *Adjito/Vadjito* in Benin, *Ayo Eleh* in Igbo and *Kalati* in Sweden. (Appiah-Aggy, 2013). *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* has been incorporated into some activities of some Yoruba festivals, such as *ọlọjó* festival in Ilé-Ifè, Ọsun State, Nigeria. There are other *Ifá* corpora that address *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* in different forms. However, the gender correlation between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is within the scope of this study.

The roles of *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*, just like *Ifá* have been found to span beyond relaxation or entertainment but in addition have health functions for the players. *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* has equally been established to have effects on the health of the players. The game has been developed to be played in social media for necessary accessibility to the derived benefits of engaging in *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*. In the opinions of Oyeleke et al, "Since *ayò* is the most ancient traditional board game, it implies that sufferers will once again have the feel of their culture on mobile platforms...Its acceptability by demented people and potential sufferers will not be an issue...These attributes we believe will help African sufferers to recover faster" (2014, p. 25). However, the cultural limitation of the female gender may be an impediment to giving the male gender equal opportunity as the male gender counterpart or maybe, there is likely to be no such a barrier because of the non-physical contact with some cultural materials such as *ọpọ̀n-ayò*- game board and *ọmọ ayò- ayò* seeds. This is, however, subject to further research beyond the scope of this research work.

Among scholars that have worked on *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is Kòmọláfẹ (1978). He estimates Yorùbá traditional games to be over twenty, which *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is one of the leading indigenous Yoruba games. All the games are grouped into four categories: indoor, outdoor, children, and adult games. *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* is found to have more material associated with it than any other indigenous Yoruba games. (Aromọlaran & Mustapha 1976). *ayò* is also one of the indigenous Yoruba games (if not the only one) that has gained international nomenclature. This is perceived to possibly be a result of some affiliations the game has to *Ifá* such as the gender being investigated in this study. Other authors such as Ládélé et al (1986), Dáramọláfẹ & Jẹjẹ (1967), Arómọlaran and Mustapha (1976) likewise work around some principles governing *ayò ọlọpọ̀n*. However, there is no work that examines any links *ayò ọlọpọ̀n* have with *Ifá*. This research shortfall denies us to be able to account or give reason to some cultural activities and symbolisms around the game.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Material

Materials for this study are majorly sourced from established findings on *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ̀n's* texts, relevant *Ifá* corpora, Yoruba incantations, and interviews.

(i) Only men can become *babaláwo* and he never encountered a single female *Ifá* priest acting as a diviner

during any of his extensive field studies in the cities of Ifè, Igànnà, Meko, Ọyó, Ilẹ̀sà, Abẹ̀òkúta, Ọ̀sogbo, Sàgámú, Ilárá, Onódó, Ijẹ̀bú-Óde or Èkìtì in Yorùbáland in 1937-38, 1950-51 in 1960 and 1965, nor did any of his informants mention such a thing. Sources from Yorùbáland going back to the mid-19th century state that only men can become *Ifá* diviners (Wikipedia, 2012, p. 4).

(iia) It was related to one of or respondents that the final graduation to becoming an *Ifá* priest, that is, *Babaláwo*, involves many rituals at the *Ifá* grove known as *Igbódu*. During the initiation, only men are allowed into the sacred place while women stay at a "market" referred to as *ọjà obínrin* located close to the grove which explains why there are few female diviners. A popular myth that supports the restriction of women from popular participation in *Ifá* divination states that since one of *Ọrúnmìlà's* wives is *Odù* (*Ifá* corpus), female diviners should not have her included in their system of divination. Thus, the sixteen-cowry system of divination (*ẹ̀ẹ̀rindínlógún*) which is popular among women borrows most of its ideas from the *Ifá* divination...The myth surrounding the involvement of women in the sixteen-cowry divination system is that *Ọrúnmìlà*, the founder of *Ifá* thought one of his wives, Ọ̀sun, the art of divining with sixteen cowries to keep her busy when he was not at home. In recognition of some other domestic responsibilities of his wife, *Ọrúnmìlà* knew the *Ifá* text will be too difficult for her. He, therefore, made her own system of divination easier to comprehend by incorporating the central message of each of the sixteen principal *Ifá* corpora into the relevant corpus of the sixteen cowries system of divination (Ọ̀sunwọ̀le 2018, pp. 49-50).

(iib) Àgbá ṣubú làgbá"

An old person fell on another old person"

Poro agogo

"It sounds like the echo of a bell: poro agogo"

A dífá fún Sẹ̀yó,

"Cast divination for Sẹ̀yó,"

A b'ọmọ-ọyọyọ-àgbo.

"The one with a multitude of children roundabout"

Ẹ wo'lé ayò,

"Look at the holes of Ayò,"

Ẹ wọmọ...

"Look at children..."

(iii) ení kóró,

"One inside",

ẹ̀jì kóró,

"second inside",

lọ dà ko ọpọ̀n ayò

"cast divination for Ayò",

to ng f'omi ojú sògbéré ọmọ:

"that is crying for children..."

Ẹ wo 'le ayò, ẹ wọmọ;

"look at the house of Ayò and see children."

a kì í bá 'lé ayò lài kún...

"The house of Ayò is always full of children."

Ẹ wo 'lé ayò ẹ w'ọmọ .!

"see the house of Ayò and see children."

(Fábùnmi, 1972, p. 6).

Approach: Cultural Studies

Cultural studies are adopted for this study because it incorporates other approaches such as gender, sociology, and anthropology among others. The inclusion of gender in relation to culture makes the choice of approach apt for this study. The cultural field was first formulated by the Centre for Contemporary Studies, Birmingham University, Britain in 1964 as a graduate program to extend literary approaches to a wider perspective of historical, cultural, and political issues. Raymond Williams (1921-1983), a Welsh socialist of the center was of the view that; literature and works of art cannot be not separated "from other kind of social practice" (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 665). *Ifá* as a religion and *ayò ọlórún* as a system of social practice relate to the cultural field being expanded by Raymond Williams. He called the approach cultural materialism which was later described as cultural criticism and cultural studies. The study focuses on Marxist and Feminist criticism along with the techniques of historical criticism with political analysis based on social class, race, and gender issues.

Even though, in theory, cultural studies critics might employ any methodology, however, in real terms, it lends from the "deconstruction Marxist analysis, gender criticism, race theory, and psychology" (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 665). Gender is one of the concerns of cultural studies as there are roles and specifications in every culture. Cultural studies borrow from gender criticism and race theory considering the social inequality between sexes and races. It seeks to investigate how these inequalities have been reflected in the texts or cultural activities within the historical period of society. The "social inequality between sexes" being canvassed by the cultural approach advocates is relevant to examine the gender relations between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún*. A cultural approach is adopted because "a single approach will miss too much, will overlook important aspects of culture not perceptible to that particular angle of vision. A multitude of approaches will pick up an insight here and a piece of knowledge there and more of culture will enter into the inquiry. A diversity of methods will match the diversity of culture, thereby sheltering the true nature of culture from the reductive appropriations of formal disciplines" (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 667). Considering the various cultural elements in religion which *Ifá* is more associated with and social element in *ayò ọlórún*, the adoption of a cultural approach will give room for employing relevant aspects of culture that will account for adequate and comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural and religious activities being examined at a time. It is believed that, an approach such as cultural studies that has broader perspectives capable of embracing different cultural elements such as religion (*Ifá*) and social (*ayò ọlórún*) in this study.

It is believed that religion, as the foundation of culture reflects and influences peoples' patterns of life in society. Because, in Africa, there is not much difference between the culture and religion of the people. It is canvassed that "religion is a most important aspect of life. It pervades and permeates all aspects of life" (Ejizu, 2017, p. 3). That is, the absence of African religious practices in the other aspects of their life results to a "deformed culture" (İşöğüt, 2010, p. 36). The implication of these opinions is that religion, especially, indigenous religions has a greater influence on some other cultural aspects of the peoples' life.

A cultural approach requires a proper understanding of the cultural materials in relation to the context of use in a text

or activity. Culture or "tradition is what determines the question and the answer within the framework of interpretation" (Okonda, 2017, p. 50). That is, cultural symbolism and meanings are contextual. Meaning that, no constant meaning associations to cultural symbols. "It is only by ancient symbols that have numberless meanings besides the one or two the writer lays an emphasis upon" that one can account for their cultural values" (Kennedy & Gioia, 2007, p. 250).

Cultural studies encapsulate different cultural activities that require different knowledge for adequate understanding. The whole notion about culture has to do with "words that have their roots in 'culture' certainly possibly have some things in common – the least common factor initially at times the terms were in vogue. The word 'cult' connotes the preferential treatment which exclusively monopolizes and denies to others, which is the essence of the cult. The idea of exclusiveness is embedded in the notion of 'cult' and 'culture'" (İlesanmi, 2004, pp. 14-15). This means the *Ifá* and *ayò* cults are to be examined within the purview of the Yoruba culture- the extent to which the Yoruba precludes sex to the inclusion of the other; the cultural appropriateness of cultural activities.

METHODS

Cultural gender elements in *Ifá* are related to *ayò ọlórún* to account for their relationship. One of the ways to establish relationships among the Yoruba is by using the principle or knowledge of pairing two similar things including human beings that share related features, values, and forms in common, "such a symbolic association allows one thing to be used as a cue for the other" (Combs & Freedman, 1990, p. 126). The notion of relating two things or individuals with each other is further demonstrated in the Yoruba belief that life is based on relationships.

Sociologists believe that:

"comparison is the basis of all scientific knowledge. A scientific understanding of anything depends on comparisons of it with other things. To understand a pine tree, we have to compare it with other kinds of trees, and then compare trees with other kinds of plants, and plants with other forms of life, noting the similarities and differences involved in such comparison and using them to draw inferences about their causes and consequences. Only in this way, we can begin to understand what a pine tree is and why it is as it is" (Lenski & Lenski, 1987, pp. 3 -4).

The implication of the above opinion is that it is by comparison we can establish relationships within and in-between cultural elements or activities and society. By comparing the gender specification in *Ifá* with *ayò ọlórún*, we can be provided with cultural information which "is knowledge acquired through experience and conveyed through symbols" (Lenski & Lenski, 1987, p. 38). That is cultural information on why there are some gender prescriptions and limitations in *ayò ọlórún* that remain unresolved and unanswered today.

There are two major cultural groups in culture: primary-cliques and families and secondary- communities, associations and movements. The communities comprise geographical and cultural (Lenski & Lenski, 1987). However, the scope of this study is cultural communities within which the Yoruba people are united with common cultural

tradition in relation to *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún* among the Yoruba communities of South-West Nigeria.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Among the Yoruba, it is believed that *Ifá* is a reference point for all the cultural life and activities of the people. However, no relationship has been established between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún*. Before now, the male gender commonly engages in *Ifá* divination practice and playing *ayò ọlórún* especially, in the past. It is imperative to ask and investigate whether there is male gender similarity between *Ifá* diviner and *ayò ọlórún* player. That is, why are *ayò ọlórún* players known with male gender just as *Ifá* practitioners? The outcome of the findings will account for the extent of male-gender similarities between the two cultural elements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The result of this study shows that gender is an element of the relationship between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún* among the Yoruba. The male gender affiliation with *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún* as investigated in this study is inflected by structuralist, biocultural, and naturalist views. The structuralist view (as earlier explained) has influenced the male gender with *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún* because of the cultural belief and societal structures of the Yoruba about women. Women are mostly engaged in domestic work; especially, in the evening time (before light is put on) when they will be busy preparing dinner. This may be one of the reasons why the female gender is rarely engaging in playing *ayò ọlórún*. The involvement of cultural permission for women to be indulging in *ayò ọlórún* is only allowed for women that have reached the menopause stage. This is because of the links between *ayò* seeds and women's wombs. The gender specification in *Ifá* has greater effects on the male gender in *ayò ọlórún*. The end result of the gender similarities between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún* is that *ayò* is related to *Ifá*.

The involvement of the Female gender in *ayò ọlórún* in contemporary times is a cultural "growth and development, ... that many members of the societies will prefer not to make changes in beliefs and values, changes in patterns of social organization, changes in institutional arrangements" (Lenski & Lenski, 1987, p. 71). It is observed that there is a change in the belief of Yoruba communities in regard to gender about *ayò ọlórún*, even though, not marginal in the female gender involvement in *ayò ọlórún*. Unlike *Ifá* is a religion- believed to be sacred, there may be rigidity in the cultural modification. The effect of technology and science in contemporary times excludes the human- participants. However, since *ayò ọlórún* is basically believed to be a sociocultural event for entertainment and relaxation, further denial of the female gender will prevent them from the benefiting in the derived benefits in playing *ayò ọlórún* that was discussed earlier. However, the effects of the violation of the cultural belief of the societies on the deprivation of the female gender from playing *ayò ọlórún* are subject to future research that is outside the scope of the present study.

Discussion

Gender-Based Relationship in *Ifá* Divination and *Ayò ọlórún*

Generally, there is gender inequality in cultural activities which "allows us to see the world through the eyes of the opposite sex" (Kennedy and Gioia, 2007, p. 287). Some cultural activities are prominently performed by one gender than the other. Some scholars such as Spence & Helmreich (1978), Diamond & Karlen (1980), Gilligan (1982) & Nelson (1988); are of the view that "gender" is different from "sex", with the view that, "sex is said to be biological and deals with the physical characteristics which make a person male or female at birth. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the socially constructed role ascribed to women and men, as opposed to biological and physical characteristics" (Asue 2010, p. 11). Buttressing further on gender and sex, Akintunde reports "Basow has succeeded in the classification of sex roles and gender roles, and she identifies four of each. According to her, gender roles may differ from society to society, but sex roles are the same. For example, all over the world, it is only women who give birth to children. Second, gender roles can change with history; nothing can change sex roles. Third, gender roles can be performed by both sexes, sex roles can be only performed by one of the sexes. Finally, gender roles are socially and culturally determined; sex roles are biologically determined" (2005, p. 347). The differences between sex and gender give more insights to the understanding that *Ifá* and *ayò ọlórún* are related to gender than sex because it is gender induced. For example, there are some Yoruba cultural activities that exclude some women from performing some religious and social functions and allow some. For example, women who are still rearing children are discouraged from openly playing *ayò* game among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. That is, even though, "women also played a great role in the rituals and cultic religions of Yoruba land...It is arguable that this role is limited to certain and specific cults. Mostly, Yoruba women priestesses are associated with fertility cults and young women's initiation rites into womanhood and marriage" (Odeyemi, 2013, p. 7). Even though, "there are priesthoods held exclusively by women by men while some may be held irrespective of sex" (Fadipè, 1970, p. 140), however, the religion of *Ifá* divination has been strictly restricted to the menfolk. In addition, children that are not mature, for instance, below the age of twenty as well as women are excluded from *Ifá* divination. Women are discouraged from involving in *Ifá* divination because, *Ifá* works through *odu* symbolism and, it is prescribed in *Ifá* religion that, a woman must not be initiated into *odu* cult as opines by William Bascom in (i)

Bascom research covers a wide Yorùbá geographical area. He establishes that *Ifá* divination is exclusively men's profession. The stage of initiation to *Odu* cult in *Ifá* disqualifies the women. The whole system of *Ifá* is based on *Odu* symbols. For a diviner to know the secret of *Odu*, he must be initiated into *Odu*. The cult of initiation to *Odu*, in which women are restrained by tradition, disqualifies women to be *Ifá* priests. In other words, if some women are involved in *Ifá* divination, they practice it within the pre-initiation stage. This is a stage whereby, they are permitted to recite a few numbers of *ese-Ifá- Ifá* verses without introducing them to the secret behind *Odu*. Women that are involved in *Ifá* divination are therefore operating around this stage and not in the core cult of *Ifá* divination. Meaning that "there are some female diviners who are sometimes called *ifá* priests, but they do not belong to the inner core of cult members. It may therefore

be said that the *Ifá* cult is essentially a cult of male adherents" (Abimbólá, 1976, p. 14).

The power and authority of *Awo*: diviner (in *Ifá* divination) or *Ọta*- the winner in the *Ayò* game, resides in *Odu*- the wife of *Ọrunmìlá*: *Ifá*'s progenitor, (Adéoyè, 1985, pp. 360-5, Akinyemi 2012, p. 10, Yemitan & Ọgúndélé 1970, pp. ix - x). According to Murphy "Because *odu* is the power of *Awo* no woman must look upon her form ... One who does not have *Odu* will not be able to consult *Ifá*" (2012, p. 4) *Ifá Olódù* is the basic, powerful and dependable form of five classes of *Ifá* priests listed by Abimbólá (1976, pp. 13-14). Whoever will see *Odu* must be initiated into the cult of *Awo*. "Èni tí yòò fọ́jú bodù olúwa rẹ̀ yòò di awo" (Adéoyè, 1985, p. 238). That is, whoever will sight *Odu* must have been in the cult of *Awo*. Many *ayò* seeds are harvested or captured by *odu kíkún*- accumulation of seeds (Daramola & Jeje, p. 1967). The mystical power behind *Odu* in both *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* is a Yoruba cultural symbol that restricts the female gender in both religious (*Ifá*) and social (*Ayò ọlọpọ́n*) activities.

It is noticed that the female gender is strictly barred from initiation into *Odu* cult. This was reported by Ọṣunwọlẹ' work in (ii). Some women are practicing divination found to be a variant of *Ifá* divination called *ẹ́ẹ́rindínlógún*. However, there are disparities between it and *Ifá*. For example, unlike *Ifá*, *ẹ́ẹ́rindínlógún* was devised so as to keep women less busy. That is, the system wasn't devised for serious religious inquiry. This is why *ẹ́ẹ́rindínlógún* system is not complex. The *odu* poetic chants and the divination symbols are much easier to interpret than *Ifá* divination system. In addition, the contents of the divination are more of women's cultural feminine issues such as marital and marriage problems, infertility, social insecurity, and other psycho-social problems.

In a Yoruba-dominated community, there are gender limitations and restrictions to some cultural events or activities such as *Ifá* divination profession. As a result of this limitation, *Ifá* profession is prominently occupied by the male gender. Few pockets of *lyánífa*- regarded as a female/mother *Ifá* diviner; are, however, excluded from some core-cult activities of *Ifá*. In addition to the exclusion of the female gender in some *Ifá* activities, there are prescribed requirements to be met before a female can successfully engage in the profession. Likewise, in *ayò ọlọpọ́n*, there are perceived male gender similarities which can be a cultural parameter to establish a relationship between *Ifá* and *ayò ọlọpọ́n*.

In an interview conducted with *Ifá* diviners, Akalalfá and Ifátókí, they corroborate the opinions above that there are limitations of females' involvement in *Ifá* divination practice as they are restricted to some core activities in the profession. Akalalfá maintains that is not a gain saying or exaggeration when the Yoruba adage says *obinrin ò gbọdọ mawo. Bòbirin ba mawo, awo ya niyẹ*. That is, a female must not be initiated into the cult of *Ifá*. *Ifá* that is violated, the cult is modulated. He cited that, the restriction or limitation of females from some *Ifá* activities is not only known with *Ifá* worshippers but is prominent till today among the *Oro* worshippers that women dare not see *Oro* in cult or costume.

A similar situation is observed in the management of *Ifá* profession. Official members are mostly dominated by men. It is observed here that, women are not among the sixteen *Ifá* chief priests in Yorùbá tradition. For instance, there has never been a woman professional *Ifá* chief priest

that is *Àràbà* (The leader of the *Ifá* priests). It is forbidden for women to see *Odu* face; even, an uninitiated man must not also see *Odu*'s face. In addition, an initiated priest, who will see *Odu* in her shrine, must be naked. From these peculiar nature of *Odu*, it is clear that women are restricted in one way or the other to be closely associated; especially; in cultic form with *Odu* (Adéoyè 1985).

Relating this to the female gender, women's restriction also extends to the playing of *ayò ọlọpọ́n*. Both *Ifá* divination and *ayò* game are performed in an open (public) place as explained earlier. Sometimes, "women also play against men but never in public place. *Ayò ọlọpọ́n* games are played by elders, adult men and young men" (Climent, Vincient & Casanovas, 2009b, p. 2). This shows that both women and the children are rarely seen playing *ayò ọlọpọ́n*. It is however possible to have variants of *ayò ọlọpọ́n*, just as we have a variant of *Ifá*: *ẹ́ẹ́rindínlógún*, that resemble the real *ayò ọlọpọ́n*, but in a predominantly Yoruba cultural society women are rarely seen playing *ayò* game publicly.

Ayò seeds and boards sometimes determine their names and gender performance of the game. O' Connell calls the basic *ayò ọlọpọ́n* be "refer to it as *Ayò*; but the Yoruba people will also refer to it as *Ayòayò* meaning 'real *ayò*' which distinguishes the male version from those played by women and children" (2013, p. 1). It is observed that some variants of *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* accommodate the female gender however, there is restrictions from the "real or core" practices as earlier explained. In other words, *Ifá* divination and *ayò ọlọpọ́n* players belong to male adherents.

Fádípẹ (1970) gives the reason why women are rarely involved in playing *ayò ọlọpọ́n* as *ayò* seeds symbolize children in the womb. The sanctity of womanhood is to be preserved by discouraging the women from playing *ayò ọlọpọ́n*. There is the possibility that women are traditionally discouraged to play *ayò ọlọpọ́n* in the open because *ayò* seeds in the holes of *ọpọ́n ayò* are said to be an icon of a woman's womb and the seeds occupying the holes is iconized by the state of pregnancy of a woman. In other words, there is a general assumption that there is a power of procreation in *ayò ọlọpọ́n*. It is observed that "among the Yorùbá, what has made the continuity of *Ayò* game possible is their belief in it. This gives credence to their psychological assurance that a particular household where people play *ayò* game becomes endowed with children and wealth" (Orimòògunjẹ, 2014, p. 49). Perhaps, it is inappropriate for the women, to be playing or toying with a symbol with which they are iconized. This is known with other Yorùbá systems of belief as well. For instance, an image that represents a cult of ancestors is respected. This is why totemic images such as the family of *Ikòyí* must not kill or eat rodents. It is rather preserved from being harmed or killed because of the ancestral cult associated with it in Yorùbá tradition.

It is a tradition that "ìdílé Ikòyí kí í jẹ Ọkété, atúgun ni baba wọn fi nṣe. Bẹẹ sì ni àwọn Ọ̀ndó kì í jẹ Ọkété" (Ọlájubù, 1978, p. 29). That is, it is forbidden for the *Ikòyí* family to eat giant rats; it was always used to scatter people in war by their forefathers. So also the *Ọ̀ndó* people don't eat giant rats. It is equally possible that women are discouraged from playing *ayò ọlọpọ́n*, because of the task of domestic work, because of the rigors of childbearing and child-rearing. However, women who have gone beyond the stage of childbearing and child-rearing, and domestic work

may play *ayo* when they are free. Females (who fall within age limits) are discouraged from playing *ayo ọlọpọn* in an open place (as the game demands or requires) because, of some cultural repercussions of engaging in *ayo* without meeting some requirements.

The iconisation of *ayo* (ọmọ *ayo*) with procreation can as well be substantiated within a Yorùbá incantation text as indicated in (iii). The association of *ayo* seeds in the game board with children is also expressed in (iib), *Odù Ọwónrín Mejì* as reported in Agboqlá (1989, p. 89). As earlier explained in this study, there are some gender age specifications in performing some cultural activities. This is the case with *ayo ọlọpọn*; which prohibits women who are still rearing children to play the game in the open.

One can sum up the gender denotative features in *Ifá* and *ayo ọlọpọn* as +human +male (20 years +). The appropriateness of gender association's with *Ifá* divination and *ayo ọlọpọn* can be presented with plus (+) and minus (–) signs as follows:

Gender	Ifá Olódù	Ayò Ọlọpọn
Adult-Male	+	+
Adult-Female	–	–
Children Male/Female	–	–

TABLE SHOWING GENDER SPECIFICATION FOR IFÁ DIVINATION AND AYÒ ỌLỌPỌN

From the above table, the adult males are associated with *Ifá olódù* and *ayo ọlọpọn* indicated with positive (+), while both the women and the children are associated with negative signs (–). From this analysis, one can describe the adult age associated with *ayo ọlọpọn* to twenty years plus (20+), as earlier explained.

FINDING, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

This study found that both *Ifá* and *ayo ọlọpọn* performances belong to the male gender. Female gender that involves in the two cultural activities are rare and where female gender is found, there is a limit to which they are engaged in the activities of the two cultural elements. That is, there is a female restriction from engaging in *Ifá*, and female that is under reproduction from playing *ayo ọlọpọn* in public. This finding establishes that on the one hand, *ayo ọlọpọn* is related to *Ifá*. On the other hand, the global nomenclature of *Ifá* has relative effect and influence on the international status of *ayo ọlọpọn* in recent times.

Before now, no cultural element or activity of in *Ifá*, especially on gender has been found to be related or connected to *ayo ọlọpọn* as validated in this study. The relationship established between *Ifá* and *ayo ọlọpọn* has increased our knowledge of understanding on the gender roles in the performance of *ayo ọlọpọn*. With gender relationship established in this study, there is a need to carry out research on the involvement of the female gender in *Ifá* and *ayo ọlọpọn* in the present time since both *Ifá* divination and *ayo ọlọpọn* are performed on the social media. Future investigation being recommended here will account for the effects of the female engaging in *Ifá* and *ayo ọlọpọn* on the culture of the Yoruba people. This study concludes that *ayo ọlọpọn* male gender is influenced by *Ifá* male gender.

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