



Contesting Orthodoxies, Building Bridges in Indigenous Drumming Ecosystem in Ghana: A Phenomenology of Female Indigenous Master Drummers

Dr. Madinatu Bello

University of Cape Coast/ Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Ghana

Abstract

Certain events in the last five decades of contemporary Ghana have ruptured the normalised male-dominated tradition of indigenous drumming which has been an exclusive of men or 'sons of the drums' and which reinforce gendered hierarchies that align with broader socio-political structures of inclusion and exclusion. One of such events is the intrusion of females who, now drummers not singers/dancers, are navigating, challenging and redefining status quos and borders – both literal and symbolic – to challenge such gender norms, marginalisation and stereotypes in indigenous drumming ecosystem. The rejection of the existing status quo suggests that institutional structures, policies and scholarship were not capable of articulating the lived experiences of this marginalised group. Drawing on ethnographic field work through interviews and field observations of practices of female indigenous master drummers, I interrogate existing negative 'norms', status quo and cultural limitations in indigenous drumming spaces, how female master drummers contest these norms and status quo, the repercussions thereof and the pathways they explore to contribute to inclusivity and peacebuilding efforts in their communities. I argue that the act of women mastering and performing drumming is not only an artistic empowerment but a socio-political cultural intervention that challenges conventional gender binaries as pathway to reshaping power dynamics in Ghanaian cultural landscapes.

Keywords: indigenous drumming; Ghana; peacebuilding; inclusivity; female master drummers