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Gangbe in Badagry, Nigeria: Ogu Women's Performance Practice, Social Status, and Creative Agency

JOSEPH KUNNUJI

Abstract
Before colonialism, Gbe women enjoyed a social status on par with men. However, there has been a shift in the postcolonial social structure of Gbe societies. Modern capitalism, which accompanied colonial structures, privileged men, eroding many woman-empowering practices. This article examines Ogu women's marginality through an ethnographic study of *gangbe* (a musical genre exclusive to married Ogu women). I argue that the sources of Ogu women's marginality are interlocking, involving oppression stemming from colonial structures and the values of contiguous Yorùbá people. I propose a collaborative intervention that upends typical power structures that privilege Western and Yorùbá ideation over Indigenous Ogu knowledge, values, and practices.

INTRODUCTION

This article uses a gendered musical practice, *gangbe*, as a window into the status and creative agency of Badagry's Ogu women. Badagry is a border town in Lagos State, Nigeria, with at least two road access points to Cotonou and Porto Novo in the Republic of Benin. The Indigenous Ogu population of Badagry is primarily descended from fifteenth-century (and onward) settlers from different parts of the Dahomey Kingdom. Nineteenth-

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Joseph Kunnuji (PhD, University of Cape Town, South Africa) is a Senior Lecturer in Ethnomusicology and African Musics at the Odeion School of Music, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. In his exploration of African musics, Kunnuji combines teaching, research, and performance to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of Indigenous African knowledge and skills. Consequently, he unearths some of the lesser-known African musical heritages and pushes for their traction in academe and the broader society. His research interests include reimagining marginal and historical musical practices within his vicinity.

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century colonial delineation processes spatially separated Ogu people from their ancestral homes and related Gbe ethnolinguistic groups (Law 1994).[1] As a result, Ogu people emerged as a minority group in southwest Nigeria.[2] Today, they account for about 5 percent of the total population of Lagos State and a putative 15 percent of its Indigenous population (Ofulue 2016, 45). Yorúbà account for a majority of the population,[3] dominating the political, economic, and media spheres of Lagos State civic life. For example, in Nigeria’s federal system of governance, delegates from each state are elected to the National Conference. As evidence of Ogu people’s marginal status, however, there is no Ogu representation among National Conference delegates (Fasinu 2014), and Ogu are often assumed to be a Yorúbà subethnic group (Ofulue 2016, 45). Under conditions of Yorúbà paternalism explicated in Fasinu (2014), traditional Ogu beliefs, values, and customs have also been marginalized.[4] Ogu women, in particular, have been subject to a loss of status and control under the regional Yorúba hegemon.

Whereas African feminist scholarship has hitherto paid much attention to the role of colonialism and Christian missions in propelling cultural shifts that led to the current relegation of women in Gbe societies (Oyewumi 1997, 2002; Nzegwu 2006; Montgomery 2017), I understand Ogu women’s relatively low status to be the result of two interlocking sources of patriarchal oppression. One stems from European colonialism and capitalism; the other stems from their spatially contiguous relationship to Yorùbá society in which women hold a lesser position to men. I identify with the Ogu ethnic group, and I, like numerous Ogu individuals raised in Lagos State, am well acquainted with Yorùbá and Ogu cultural subtleties. Drawing inspiration from the Yorùbá adage, *bí’kúu lẹ́ ò bá pa’ni, t’òde ò lè pa’ni* (if a close relative does not succeed in orchestrating one’s death, an outsider’s plan to execute one will also fail), I find resonance with the idea that an external assailant often requires an internal collaborator to advance their agenda. Thus, in this article, I address the erosion of Ogu values and practices as a function of the combined effects of European colonization and Yorùbá hegemony in Badagry. I make this contribution through a case study of *gangbe*, demonstrating how the gendered musical practices of Ogu women are shaped into cultural frameworks that perpetuate their subaltern status.

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[1] The Gbe ethnolinguistic cluster includes Ewe, Fon, and Ogu. The ethnonyms Gun or Egun are used in some literature in lieu of Ogu. Colonization imposed new West African borders, effectively splitting Gbe peoples into different countries.

[2] The marginalization of Ogu people in Badagry is longstanding, dating back to precolonial battles among some West African kingdoms (including the Oyo Kingdom, Dahomey Kingdom, and Lagos Dynasty) over control of the city’s pivotal seaport and slave market (Law 1994, 47–51).

[3] There is a discrepancy among online sources regarding the precise population figures for Nigeria and, consequently, for Lagos State and its ethnic groups. These figures are significant for the allocation of federal resources; as a result, they are often contested and inaccurate. Still, some fairly reliable online sources (e.g., Lagos Population 2023 [worldpopulationreview.com]) say that the Yoruba ethnic group constitutes the majority in Lagos City, but precise figures and percentages remain elusive.

[4] By “marginalized” I do not refer to conscious efforts to undermine Ogu culture. Instead, it should be understood as encompassing the inadvertent, ethnocentric mannerisms and sayings that subtly suggest that one group is better than another.

At the same time, I argue that *gangbe*, the only enduring secular genre performed by married women, is a singular source of their creative agency. This article makes a case for an applied intervention that gives Ogu women further agency through the recontextualization of their music.

During my childhood, I had the opportunity to witness *gangbe* performances as they took place during various events within my family and community in Badagry. These events ranged from funerals and weddings to naming ceremonies. However, it wasn't until 2018, when I returned to Badagry to continue my doctoral fieldwork, that I examined this performance practice more closely. As a male researcher with little knowledge of matters relating to women and recognizing the gatekeeping and "protective" role of the male relatives of *gangbe* performers over their artistic expression, I was disinclined to document the genre. However, considering its potency as a repository of Indigenous Ogu ideation and values, I became motivated to defy my incompetencies in the gender discourse in the hope that my documentation of Ogu women's practices would have some educational and practical value and could propel more in-depth exploration of its associated issues in the future. Initially, I engaged with the male members of the families of the leaders of the *gangbe* bands I was studying. I discussed my research objectives and coordinated convenient meeting schedules with these men. This allowed me to conduct individual interviews and focus group discussions with *gangbe* performers as part of my study.

The primary data that informs this discussion was collected through five in-depth ethnographic interviews and two focus group discussion (FGD) sessions with the Akran and Krititin *gangbe* bands. I observed one performance featuring Akran and several other *gangbe* bands, and attended a rehearsal session of Kristitin. These were followed by a few telephone conversations with representatives of these groups. The issues highlighted here are those that emerged most strongly following the transcription of interviews and FGDs. To capture the perspective of a notable non-*gangbe*-playing woman, I included Mawuyon Ogun among the interviewees. She is a theater luminary from Badagry who is well known for her activism toward reclaiming the esteemed collective social status of Ogu women. In addition, I considered comments on gender-related topics by male participants in the larger doctoral research project that provided context and allowed me to deepen the discussion in this article. These comments and interviews were in conversation with my experiential knowledge derived from residing in Badagry from age two through my formative years (1983 to 1993). I have mentioned the names of some of the study's participants with their permission; the use of pseudonyms was not necessary as these participants want to be identified with their contributions to the study.

My discussion begins by positioning the article's central theme within the discourse on African feminisms and gender performativity. Here, I place gendered practices in Badagry's Ogu community in sociohistorical context by highlighting women's roles in some Gbe groups and by contrasting them with two other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Then I address *gangbe*, an Ogu married women's musical genre, as a creative practice and social support system. Last, I suggest a model of musical recontextualization to reclaim the collective social status of Badagry's Ogu women, arguing that a transstate cultural formation is necessary for *gangbe*'s continuation and, by extension, the continuation of Ogu values that empower women.

African Feminisms and Gender Performativity Among Ogu, Yorùbá, and Hausa Women

Gender (as opposed to biological sex) is a social construct, and its realization differs from one society to the next. Given distinctions in the issues affecting women of different racialized groups, creeds, and societies, differentiated approaches, foci, and types of advocacies for women are necessary (see Greer 1970; Crenshaw 1989; Cook and Tsou 1994; Amadiume 1997; Oyewumi 1997; De Beauvoir 2011; Nkealah 2016). Indeed, Nzegwu cautions about the colonizing tendencies of Western feminist theorizations that seek to "remake every family and every society in the image of its own" (2006, 14). As early as the 1980s, Walker (1984) introduced the term "womanism" (as opposed to feminism) to capture the multiple lived realities of African American women, thereby differentiating the experiences of women of different racialized groups and their attendant approaches to advocacy. In essence, womanism is concerned with dismantling systemic repression while reclaiming an Afropositive structure in which women and men play noncompetitive, nonhierarchical, and complementary roles within the same matrix, realizing that no gender is complete without the other (Molehe et al. 2020).

Historically, West African Gbe women enjoyed a social status on par with men (Bay 1998). Female exclusivity in various Gbe social and religious practices, as well as the Dahomean all-female army (*agoodjie*), bespeak the prominent public roles played by women and the immense power they wielded. Ogu practices that empowered women in the precolonial era include spiritual practices that existed in semipublic spheres, such as the *nabluku. Nabluku* was a religious society, which not only sanctioned women's leadership but also was, in fact, exclusive to women (Dosu, interview, 22 November 2017). It served the purpose of averting potential social problems arising from areas under women's control. Due to their coastal location, fishing was one of the main economic activities among Ogu people, and fish smoking in thatched huts was widely practised by Ogu women. The activities of *nabluku* served to protect Ogu communities from fire outbreaks and other disasters, and spiritual practices were in place to prevent such occurrences. This religious institution, unparalleled among the Yorùbá, marks a testament to female authority and contribution in Ogu communities of the past.

The precolonial Dahomey Kingdom is the ancestral source of many among Badagry's Ogu people and the site with which they continue to maintain familial homes and connections. Most parts of the defunct Dahomey Kingdom are now within the territories of the Republic of Benin. However, the cultural connections among Ogu people of different citizenships have been retained today. I cite the Dahomey Kingdom's *agoodjie* —an all-female army responsible for protecting Dahomey Kingdom's sovereignty into the late nineteenth century—as indicative of the social status of precolonial Gbe women;

members of the *agoodjie* were as responsible as the men for maintaining the social fabric (see Alpern 1998; Ross 1985; Somda 2022).[5] The high status of these women suggests that the male dominance that characterizes present-day Badagry Ogu communities are an import from external cultural influences.

Vestiges of Ogu women's historically high status are, nonetheless, embedded in current kinship roles, which may be contrasted with Yorùbá women's positionality. Distinctions in the ways that Ogu and Yorùbá address female relations are suggestive of different gender norms and hierarchies. Among Ogu people, for example, a *tayin* (paternal aunt, different from *nafi* [maternal aunt]) has historically wielded more power over a child than their *tafe* (paternal uncle) or any other male in the child's life. A *tayin* offers special prayers at a child's naming ceremony, and special prayers and consent offered at her nieces' and nephews' weddings are unmatched in importance by those of a *tafe*. The *tayin*'s role thus suggests the social positionality of women in Ogu communities as authoritative within the family. Conversely, the common Yorùbá practice of wives esteeming even the youngest of their in-laws by addressing them with the respectful "ẹ" second-person pronoun (as opposed to the "o" pronoun used for peers and younger ones) is more indicative of an infantilized female gender.[6] While both Ogu and Yorùbá traditions are patriarchal, gender performativity varies with the Ogu practices that empower women within the family structure. However, considering Oyewumi's (1997) analysis of the nongendered characteristics of precolonial Ọ̀yọ́, one could make the case that Western gender norms might have impacted Yorùbá culture, and subsequently, these influences were transmitted to neighboring minority communities such as the Ogu people of Badagry. Accordingly, given the context of Nigeria—with Yorùbá as the hegemon in the southwest region—it is plausible to suggest that assimilation to neighboring Yorùbá practices was one way that colonial gender constructs made their way into contemporary gender performativity among Badagry's Ogu people. Such cultural shifts demonstrate the unidirectional flow of influence in Lagos State, blurring initial distinctions between cultural groups that inhabited the region.

There are diverse influences on the performance of gender in different African societies. For instance, some precolonial African societies were Arab influenced (Mack 2004; Hale and Sidikou 2014; Gueye 2014) and exhibited characteristics different from those of Gbe peoples, where, as I have noted, women occupied important positions as spiritual and military protectors of their communities. Mack (2004), in her study on the music of Hausa women, in northern Nigeria, observed that while wife seclusion may be simplistically (mis-) construed as backward, the functionality of gendered Islamic practices suggests the contrary.[7] She notes that for Western scholars, the public/male and private/female paradigm carries the expectation of power/powerlessness, but Islam's focus is inward: Families and the private sphere, which mothers oversee, are central to Islamic societies (2004, 7–8; see also Hale and Sidikou 2014 for similar discussion on women in Sahel culture). Wife seclusion is functional and, in fact, only practised by very wealthy men, such as royalty; secluded wives in Hausa societies are considered privileged among their peers (Mack 2004, 6). The point to be made is that this example reiterates Nkealah's (2016) position (which is held by many other scholars, some of whom are cited in the preceding text) that African gender performativity is vastly different within the continent and that distinct challenges are faced by women from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

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[5] The *agoodjie* fought the French and prevailed on many occasions until their eventual defeat in 1894, during the reign of King Gbehazin Hosu Bowele (referred to in some literary texts as Behanzin, see Alpern 1998; Law 1993). The works cited here, apart from Somda (2022), refer to *agoodjie* as the Amazons, following a common practice of European scholars of previous decades referring to African phenomena by names that are convenient for them.

[6] This practice belongs to a constellation of interactional codes associated with the status of ìyá and bàbá ọkọ, literally mother-in-law and father-in-law. However, the interactional codes apply more broadly to all in-laws from a husband's family in ways that may repress a woman.

While scholars have rightly identified colonialism and Christian missions as disruptive to the balance of gendered relations in certain African societies (Freedman 2004; Ozah 2008; Audu and Eregare 2021), it should be noted that male dominance was ingrained in the precolonial history of other African ethnic groups (Gueye 2014; Mack 2004; Mama 1995; Okojie et al. 1996; Zeleza 1988). It is in the context of postcolonial sociocultural mashups that specific practices honoring Ogu women have waned, owing partly to influences from neighboring societies. Through the complex workings of unconscious assimilation and conscious cultural adoption, some widespread practices among Badagry's Ogu people today reflect the positionality of women within Yorùbá social structure.

Gender-based differences in social status cannot be adequately explained through membership in particular ethnolinguistic groups alone. Distinctions in education, social status, marital status, and cosmopolitan formations (Turino 2008) inform lifestyles, habits, and habitus. These factors have all proven critical in delineating groups of women and the issues they face. While this article emphasizes the marginalization of Ogu women through the overlapping influences of Western colonization and Yorúbà ideologies, it is important to note the internal diversity of Badagry's Ogu women and the differing ways that they are affected by these influences, depending on factors like education. Badagry's Ogu women, with different Western-educational statuses, are likely to have varying gender-related experiences despite their shared ethnicity and propinquity. There is also a trend of shifting to the regionally dominant Yorùbá habits of thought among Badagry's Ogu people, particularly upwardly mobile and mostly formally educated Ogu youth (Olaoluwa 2018; Senayon 2016, 2021 [2018]). As a result, the older and less educated have emerged as the most economically vulnerable among Ogu women within the capitalist system that privileges men and that values Western ideation over Indigenous knowledge.[8] Nevertheless, in Badagry, with continuous identity negotiation and conscious cultural shifts to regionally dominant Yorùbá practices, *gangbe* exists as a repository of Ogu values and customs, as well as a safe space that reinforces the agency of many economically vulnerable Ogu women.

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[7] It should be noted that although Islam is not Indigenous to West African Hausa people, it predates the colonial era and remains the most popular religion among the Hausa people of northern Nigeria. According to Mack and Boyd (2000), *Bori* is one major Indigenous religious practice of the Hausa people.

Gangbe: Ogu Women's Creative Agency, Artistry, and Positionality

Ajogan and *gangbe* are the only enduring historic female Ogu musical practices in Badagry. *Ajogan* is a sacred genre, performed only occasionally during rituals and special events involving an Ogu *aholu* (monarch). As only wives married into a royal family perform it, *ajogan* is too exclusive to represent the cultural practices and concerns of Ogu women more generally. *Gangbe*, however, is a secular Ogu female genre, ubiquitous in Ogu celebrations and rites, from funerals and naming ceremonies to wedding ceremonies. Unlike some African genres performed by women for other women in the private sphere (Gueye 2014, 30; Mack 2004, 4), *gangbe* performances take place in multiple public contexts. Traditionally, each Ogu extended family had a *gangbe* group comprised of the wives, who performed in family celebrations. Today, the membership of *gangbe* bands in Badagry is no longer restricted to women married into the same family. Wives from the same hamlet or community may now belong to the same *gangbe* band; there is the freedom to either join a *gangbe* band of one's choice or not to associate with any. *Gangbe* performers are often full-time housewives who busy themselves with various activities within the informal economy to make money considered their nest eggs. *Gangbe*, now existing in attenuated forms, serves a vital function for this category of women, providing them with the opportunity for camaraderie and social support. Unfortunately, with the age of *gangbe* performers in Badagry being skewed toward sixty and above, the continuity of the genre beyond the current cohorts is a shared concern among *gangbe* performers.

Gangbe is performed with a minimal complement of portable and easily accessible instruments: *panu* (the indigenized word for pan), *oganvino* (literally, a bell with a "child"), and *gankeke* (an onomatopoeic name for a different type of bell; see Figure 1). A *panu* is beaten and shaken to produce rhythmic patterns, and it is played by almost every member of a *gangbe* group, apart from those playing the two bells (see Figure 2). (Given the central role of the *panu*, the genre is also called *panugbe.*) The bell and *panu* players also double as vocalists. Women who perform *gangbe* also fabricate their *panu.* A *panu* is made by first purchasing a metal plate at the Badagry open market, Agbalata. It is then perforated along its edges, and metal rings are affixed to it (see Figure 3). In this way, the musicians assert their creative agency by recontextualizing utilitarian tools associated with mundane domestic chores performed in kitchen spaces into public works of art; silent, passive objects become sounding, active ones. The artistry of *gangbe*-playing women thus echoes the historic iconicity and skilfulness of Ogu women as it ensounds their gender identity.

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[8] See Gimenez (2005) for men's privileges within capitalist settings and Turino (2000) for an analysis of how Western-derived modernity privileges cosmopolitans in postcolonial Africa.

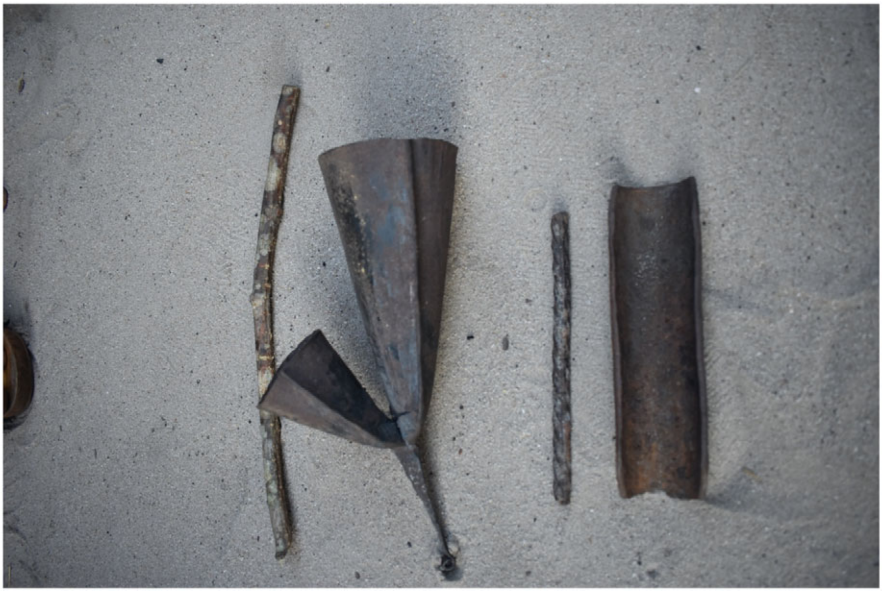

Figure 1. Picture of the bells used in gangbe performance. On the left is oganvino (bell with a child) and on the right is gankeke. Photo credit: Author.

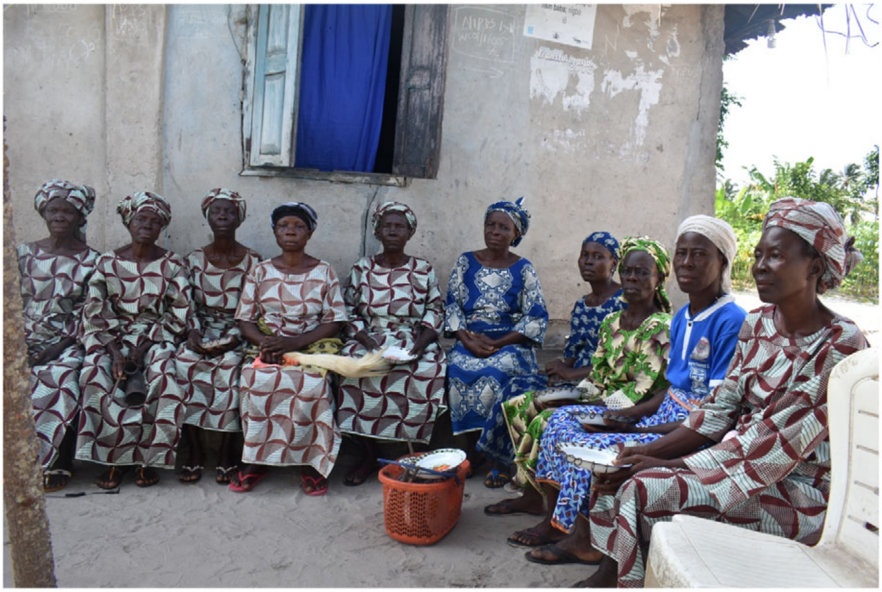

Figure 2. Picture of *panu*, showing its perforated edges with attached rings, as well as a section without rings (for handling the instrument). Photo credit: Author.

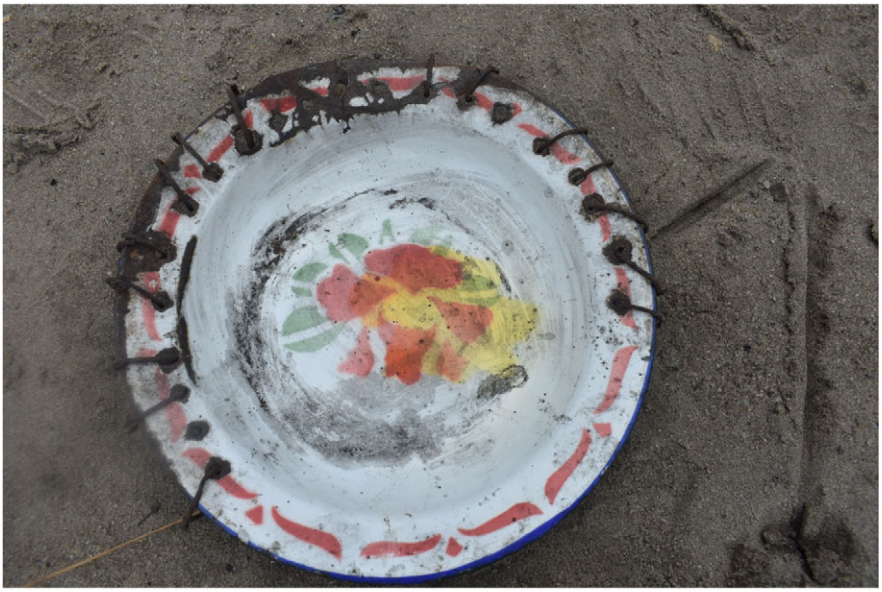

Figure 3. A cross-section of Kristitin members, holding a *panu* or bell. On the floor is a plastic basket containing extra *panu*. Photo credit: Author.

Like other Ogu praise singing genres, the *gangbe* repertoire features a dense percussive foundation; what sets it apart, however, is that it does not use drums. *Gangbe* incorporates other characteristic features of Ogu music, such as call-and-response structures, pentatonic scales, *asha* (rhythmic vocables), and distinct cadential practices.[9] Alongside improvisational praise singing aimed at party guests, *gangbe* repertory also features comic songs. Indeed, comedy is ingrained in *gangbe.* For example, a Kristitin original composition mocks the big handsets that were introduced into Nigeria in the early 2000s, at the advent of mobile telephony. "Pè Mí Padà" (literally, "Call Me Back," in Yorùbá), is a humorous song about a suitor who tries to woo a lady over the phone without success due to the size of the handset he bought for her. In the story, which is a deliberate exaggeration, the lady always ends her suitor's call at important points of their conversation because the handset is too heavy for her to carry beyond a few minutes. Their dialogue is always punctuated with her statement, in Yorùbá, "pè mí padà, ọwọ́ ń ro mí," which means "call me back, my hand is sore." Kristitin's bandleader, Mrs. Elizabeth Wasiu, remarked that the humorous component of *gangbe* performances is to "make the performance more interesting—the audience would laugh and reward the performers with money" (Wasiu, interview, 21 June 2018). Other songs contain commentary on other social and political issues and this way, *gangbe* empowers women to be heard and contribute to social discourses in a context that has changed over time to suppress female voices.

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[9] Generally, in Ogu songs, it is common to encounter nontraditional cadential practices, such as resolving on the supertonic instead of the putative tonic. I and a colleague elaborate on this in Kunnuji and Wium (2023).

Gangbe bands perform a combination of original songs and covers of Indigenous songs. While Agawu has remarked on the ubiquity of communal composition in Africa (2016, 316), Ogu *gangbe* bands are important exceptions to this tendency. Indeed, the band leader of Kristitin (a *gangbe* band from Igbogbele suburb in Badagry) composes the band's songs. Other Indigenous Ogu bands in Badagry operate similarly, with either the band leader or the lead vocalist (where different persons hold those posts) doubling as the sole composer for the band. In many cases, these composed songs become widely used among *gangbe* bands, highlighting how individual acts of creativity contribute to shared repertories in a primarily communal setting that focuses less on individual contributions. As with the other Indigenous Ogu bands in Badagry, the cover versions of Indigenous songs that Kristitin performs are copied from other *gangbe* groups in and outside Badagry; some of these songs are sourced from the Republic of Benin, while others are derived from neighboring Nigerian communities. Kristitin's repertory maintains a popular practice among bands in Badagry of singing in Alladah, the most widely spoken dialect of Ogu Gbe, laced with Yorùbá lines.

Suffice it to say that the instrument-making, ensemble-playing, entertainment, and compositional skills of *gangbe* performers are rarely acknowledged and celebrated within their local context. This is not to suggest that the importance of *gangbe* is not generally acknowledged in Ogu circles. The monetary gifts and attention that *gangbe* bands enjoy at events are evidence of their importance.[10] However, the general lack of praise for *gangbe* performers' instrument-making and compositional skills, besides their performing skills, hints at the relatively low value placed on the totality of their artistry, which is also evidenced by the meagre performance fee *gangbe* bands request from clients. As of mid-2018, an average *gangbe* band in Badagry would perform at an event if paid 10 percent of the rate charged by a male band from the same hamlet. Mrs. Wasiu cited a divine calling as one reason for her band's willingness to "help people" with their musical skills (Wasiu, interview, 21 June 2018).

Mawuyon Ogun identifies a recent positive trend in the trajectory of Ogu women's social positionality that seems to have moved from highs in precolonial times to lows in the colonial and postcolonial eras. The current, perceived upward trend in the social position of women in Badagry may be attributed to increased awareness and advocacy for women's rights in the broader society. The following excerpt from my interview with Mawuyon Ogun captures the trajectory, beginning with Ogu women's historic ingenuity:

> I grew up listening to my mum sing (not my dad), it's always the women and they are very expressive. An Ogu woman has a song for everything. If she wants to insult you, there is a song; if she wants to praise you, there is a song; if she wants to pass a message,

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[10] The word "spray" is used in local parlance to describe the practice of putting currency notes on the foreheads of performers in a symbolic gesture of appreciating and rewarding them for their high level of artistry.

> there is a song. But she has been relegated to singing her songs in the bedroom or her kitchen or to her children, as against the man who can go out there and probably get to a studio, record his thoughts and get the world to hear it. The women have always made their songs lullabies for their children until the very recent past where the women are now gaining a voice for themselves and now taking the songs from being cradle songs and kitchen songs to the studio. (Ogun, interview, 19 June 2018)

As Yankah (2016) points out, many African societies have demonstrated that only some cultural practices buckle in the face of social change. Rather, some practices are reimagined in newer contexts, a phenomenon that Emielu (2018) identifies as "progressive traditionalism." Unlike other Ogu genres, *gangbe* survives in its acoustic form without being overtly recontextualized or reimagined in newer contexts and through newer mediums. The main concern with the form in which *gangbe* is preserved and presented today is whether it appeals to the youth.

Speaking on the aging population of *gangbe* performers, Mawuyon Ogun draws attention to a distinct concern within the general Ogu performance sphere—that of an uneven gender representation, which she attributes to several layers of cultural domination imposed on Badagry's Ogu people since their colonization. Ogun's sentiment that *gangbe* has become associated with less-formally educated women against the backdrop of youth emigration, upward economic mobility, and attendant youth preferences for Yorùbá names, music, and other practices is shared by Senayon (2016, 2018). Conversely, some educated elites, especially those residing outside of Ogu communities, are increasingly adopting Ogu names, music, and other markers as significant symbols of cultural identity. On visiting Badagry, these persons relish practices such as *gangbe*, but are often neither skilled and acquainted enough nor considered socially suited to join in such performances. As a result, *gangbe* seems to be the exclusive preserve of full-time housewives and older women, a population often vulnerable and susceptible to male dominance. However, *gangbe* remains firmly embedded within a communal ethos that fosters support for individuals engaged in this performance practice, enabling them to manage the challenges associated with their marginalized status. In the following section, I examine this communal ethos shared within the broader context of Ogu musical culture.

THE COMMUNAL ETHOS OF OGU MUSIC CULTURE

In Lagos State, Nigeria, Ogu music exists on the fringes as an othered category; *gangbe* is further marginalized within the Badagry Ogu musical formation. Some male Ogu bands in Badagry, including Gigoyoyo and Gogoke,[11] have embraced playing amplified music, which helps them to reach a larger audience and create a stronger presence; *gangbe*, in contrast, remains entirely acoustic and an alternative option to the male genres such as *kaka*, *wale*, and *pakre*. Nonetheless, *gangbe* continues to be rejuvenated in Badagry through shared repertory and by referencing other *gangbe* groups in neighboring communities across the international border of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. Indeed, ancestral connections to the now-defunct Dahomey Kingdom support translocal cultural formations. For instance, the Ogu bands in Badagry primarily reference iconic musicians from various parts of the Republic of Benin, modeling their music after their Beninese musical role models. Perman (2012) observed the potency of cultural formations that cut across international boundaries and that are reinforced through a loop of exchange, inspiring new musical genres and styles in postcolonial southern Africa. *Gangbe*, and more broadly Ogu music in Badagry, with its epicenter in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin, is illustrative of this transcultural process.

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[11] Gigoyoyo and Gogoke are male Ogu bands in Badagry that specialize in performing Indigenous Ogu music. Much like the *gangbe* bands, they play a crucial role in preserving Ogu's musical heritage. However, due to male dominance in contemporary music-making settings, these male bands tend to have greater access to opportunities and control over their music and performances.

A self-preservation mechanism is also evident in the intra- and interband support structure engendered by *gangbe* groups. For example, *gangbe* groups support members through difficult times, such as the loss of relatives. Such support may include physical presence during the mourning period and at funeral events, *gangbe* performances, and monetary gifts. *Gangbe* bands also celebrate with members on joyous occasions, such as a child's graduation, grandchild's naming, and housewarming. Again, physical presence, *gangbe* performance, and monetary gifts are common. Notably, one does not have to belong to the *gangbe* group for such supports to be offered, highlighting the groups' nondiscriminatory ethos. Although this is not unique to *gangbe* bands, as other Ogu bands also support community members in similar ways, it signals a communal ethos of social support and the centrality of locally sourced solutions to contextual challenges among the most economically vulnerable of Badagry's Ogu people.

Gangbe creates a sense of belonging among economically vulnerable Ogu women who hone their creativity within *gangbe* formations. In *gangbe* groups, the members' musical and compositional skills and instrument-making talents emerge. Moreover, *gangbe* groups also serve as a social network, providing social capital and a mutual support system. For instance, Kristitin started as a thrift society.[12] The band's fundamental ethos is to support its members and other Igbogbele residents through its musical performances at social occasions, and for camaraderie. Thus, it highlights a communal ethos of reciprocity and conviviality in contemporary Igbogbele. It could be argued that the nonprofiteering disposition of *gangbe* performers toward their art is the preservation of traditional Ogu communalism centered on one's immediate community. Thus, maintaining cordial relationships with neighbors and other community members is valued over wealth acquisition. In the event of a capital-requiring occasion, neighbors and community members contribute financially and, where possible, offer the skills required. The ethos of Kristitin's performances as "community service" is even more easily achieved due to these women's status as housewives, as they are not under pressure to earn a living with their performance skills.

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[12] It is common practice for people in the informal economy in this locale (and more broadly in Lagos, Southwest Nigeria and the greater West African region) to form voluntary savings associations that help individuals to raise capital for projects. These societies are called thrift societies. One of the ways in which thrift societies operate is for all the members to contribute the same (agreed-upon) amount daily, weekly, or monthly. One of the members takes the lump sum amount from all contributions at the end of each month. This is rotated until every member has had a turn to take the lump sum; each cycle of contributions will only end after every member has received the lump sum. It is a system based on trust and a common conscience, stemming from shared beliefs and philosophy of life, and centered on concepts similar to *ubuntu*.

An area where the views of male and female bands dovetail is the perception of musical gifts as divine endowments for which they must demonstrate gratitude. As noted earlier, Mrs. Wasiu understands the purpose of the Kristinin band, perceiving its effort to sustain its art as a service to God and humanity (Wasiu, interview, 21 June 2018). Addressing the topic of preserving Ogu music, the band leader of Gogoke (a male band also in Igbogbele) expressed similar sentiments on being divinely endowed with Ogu music, and as such, the band feels a religious and social responsibility to sustain its art (Tonukunmeh, interview, 15 November 2017). This perspective, shared by female and male musicians, indicates that an intervention that foregrounds Ogu music, in general, would already partly address the challenges of women performing *gangbe.* In other words, in this situation of interlocking Western colonial and Yorùbá hegemony, it is only reasonable to address the different layers of domination to reach the most vulnerable of the lot. In keeping with womanism's proposition, isolating the challenges relating to women only implies treating the symptoms without addressing their root causes.

GANGBE WITHIN A YORÙBÁ AND MALE-DOMINATED SOCIAL ORDER

Still, it is important to examine some of the challenges affecting *gangbe*-performing women specifically. These challenges arise from shifts in social structure due to colonialism and the influence of the prevailing Yorùbá culture, leading to the relatively recent trend of male domination within *gangbe* practices. *Gangbe* groups in Badagry have male patrons who wield authority over the groups' performances. The patrons have the power to sanction members or even disband a group entirely. Though the role of the patron is now customary, there is no evidence in Ogu oral history that men traditionally fulfilled this function. This practice seems connected to the stereotypical notion of women as gossips and busybodies whose freedom to form gendered associations without male supervision may be socially damaging (see Kartzow 2005). It seems likely that the practice of having male patrons is externally derived, considering the female exclusivity of some historical Ogu formations, such as *nabluku.* The control exerted by patrons and the relentless domestic tasks that *gangbe* members carry out impose restrictions on female autonomy, hindering women's ability to realise their musical capabilities fully. Reflecting on Mack's (2004) examination of Hausa female singers, which revealed that among seven outstanding female singers studied, only one was married (while the rest were divorced or widowed), the extent of men's involvement in fostering their wives' artistic development among the Ogu people in present-day Badagry gains significance.

Furthermore, various social expectations and the naturalized roles of women as home keepers are also limiting for *gangbe* performers. For instance, *gangbe*-performing women are required to notify their husbands a week or more before a performance (Wasiu, interview, 21 June 2018). This is at variance with the practice of male bands, which the band leader of Gigoyoyo described as "military work" because they "could be called at any time for a performance" (Towheyon, interview, 11 July 2018). When called for impromptu performances, members of male bands may inform their wives and families on their way to the gig or even after the performance. Towheyon added that such short notice would be unacceptable for female performers due to their role as home keepers. Given their domestic responsibilities, *gangbe* band members rarely perform after dusk, at which time male performances are only just starting. Some male performances sometimes go on until as late as midnight or the early hours of the following day. In contrast, the female performers begin to hurry home to prepare family meals or take care of their children from around 5:00 pm.[13] At this stage, should the female band still be performing, one may notice a decline in concentration, with a few members whispering to the lead vocalist to end the performance. And with these social expectations, Badagry's Ogu women's artistic autonomy remains compromised.

In Porto Novo and Cotonou in the Republic of Benin, a few bands performing Ogu popular music are led by women. As a few male Ogu bands in Badagry have started to do, some of these female-led bands in the Republic of Benin perform with a mixture of Indigenous and Western musical instruments. Notable among these Beninese female band leaders are Sèssimé, Pélagie La Vibreuse, and Oluwa Kemy. These band leaders administer their own bands, notably mainly comprising male members. The music styles they perform may be seen as progressive, and their leadership signals a more inclusive popular music scene across the border. Again, the Benin Republic music scene, where Ogu and other Gbe music practices are mainstream, is better suited for such parity. However, similar examples of female leadership are unlikely in Badagry until Ogu people's marginality is addressed. Over the past century of existing in contiguity with Yorùbá culture within a nation-state created by the colonial administration, Yorùbá culture has worked in tandem with Western apparatuses to, perhaps inadvertently, perpetuate the oppression of Ogu women. Despite the imposition of patriarchal structures that may be constraining (e.g., male patrons), *gangbe* continues to serve as an outlet for their artistic agency and a source of social support.

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[13] I observed a disagreement that broke out among Akran *gangbe* group members over leaving a performance as it dusked. It was obvious that most of the band members were still enjoying the performance, but it had to be cut short as they mostly had to hurry home to attend to their family duties.

Advocacy for Ogu (minority) Feminism: Theorizing Recontextualization for Mitigating Interlocking Oppression

This article has argued that older non-Western-educated women in Badagry are marginalized by multiple layers of oppression that can be understood as resulting from the vestiges of Western colonialism and enduring Yorùbá cultural hegemony. An effective intervention should address these layers of marginalization. Western-educated Badagry Ogu women are showing a trend toward gender consciousness, as seen in the rise of Ogu female professionals who are circumventing social limitations placed on them (Ogun, interview, 19 June 2018). This trend is most apparent in urbanizing settings, and advocacy for women in such contexts have often excluded more conservative and non-Western-educated women (cf. Mama 1995; Bithell 2003). Indeed, different "communities of taste" (Nketia 1974: passim), resulting from differences in Western education and socioeconomic status, complicate the creation of a unified advocacy for Ogu women. To cater to the most vulnerable, such as *gangbe* performers, it is essential to harmonize approaches to advocacy and centralize the needs of the most marginalized. Reclaiming lost Ogu values requires looking to practices across the Nigeria–Benin border. Collaborating with academics and community-based advocates can support Ogu cultural preservation and women's rights. I describe such collaboration in reference to Indigenous music production as "musical re-contextualisation" (see Kunnuji 2022).

Musical recontextualization is a pragmatic, applied approach to foregrounding marginal Indigenous musicians and their music through collaborations with music producers, arrangers, composers, and performers trained in the Western or popular canon; the aim is to upend established power structures and centralize the voices of marginalized people. It is a nonhierarchical collaboration among people who inhabit different musical worlds or communities of taste to create a more broadly accessible musical nexus for multiple communities of taste. Musical recontextualization is not commercially driven, as with most popular genres; instead, it is an advocacy model that seeks to leverage the apparatus of contemporary genres to unearth the knowledge and social functionality inherent in Indigenous musical practices.

Recontextualization is applicable beyond the sphere of music making. For instance, it may be applied to collaborative initiatives between vulnerable, less-Western-educated women and those familiar with mechanisms of control in contemporary society, namely academics interested in applied work, mainstream feminists, and political office holders, among other technocrats. Among the potential collaborators mentioned, in the following text I highlight the pivotal role that academics are positioned to play. This choice is influenced by my firsthand experience within the academy and an understanding that many African institutions expect academics to actively engage with social issues through practical interventions (Bruinders and Kunnuji 2022).

Drawing on my prior collaboration experience with Gogoke, a local male band from Badagry mentioned earlier, I can imagine a recontextualization of *gangbe* music. I propose a process that involves recording a pseudo-live studio performance of the group, granting the band autonomy to steer its own creative direction, a proxy for engendering greater self-determination. The process of recontextualizing *gangbe* could, as in the case of Gogoke, include working with the band through every stage of adding popular aesthetics, such as additional rhythm and horn section arrangements. Regardless of aesthetic desires, this consultative approach would place central emphasis on allowing the women to lead discussions about benign, workable, practical interventions to reimagining their own music. This artistic process would be mirrored in the social domain, where female academics, in a more appropriate role, would engage with the marginalized Ogu women to identify challenges and suggest plausible interventions tailored to their sociocultural needs. In this endeavor, an ongoing spirit of inquiry would be paramount, echoing Nyamnjoh's perspective (2017) that definitive answers are elusive; instead, continuous critical examination and questioning are vital for refining even seemingly functional strategies. Acknowledging that no universal solution to the issue of marginalization exists, collaboration with each *gangbe* band and activist initiative would be context specific. Partnership with existing support structures like gendered religious groups might be essential in some instances, while in others, the establishment of community training centers may be needed. The overarching point is that customized approaches to advocacy for marginalized and vulnerable women are essential, and each group of women would navigate its unique path toward reclaiming the esteemed positionality of Ogu women that has been eroded over time.

Overall, as Hudson-Weems (1993) suggests, looking at historical African practices bears the potential for collective liberation from interlocking oppression. But much more importantly, the collaboration I envision would necessarily upend the typical power asymmetry, which privileges Western ways of "seeing" over Indigenous African ones. It is a call to responsibility and humility on the part of those privileged by the current social structure, to recognize that less-Western-educated women are capable of significant contributions to social discourses. Among these women are cultural cognoscenti who are well informed about valuable but obsolete institutions and can help reimagine them to suit contemporary needs.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has raised the salient question of what African feminisms may look like, considering the vast differences in the concerns of the continent's women. Different needs and concerns are due to many factors, including levels of Western formal education and the disparate positions women occupy in different African cultures. This article focused on *gangbe*-playing women, a category identified as having some of the most vulnerable women within the modern capitalist system. The majority of Ogu women in Badagry remain excluded from feminist and African music scholarship. Using *gangbe* as a window into their world, the article highlights their artistic acumen and creative agency. I maintain that colonialism and contiguity with the majority Indigenous culture in the southwest region of Nigeria are complicit in the marginalization of women in Badagry. Returning to the Yorùbá saying quoted at the outset of this article, "bí'kúu lẹ́ ò bá pa'ni, t'òde ò lè pa'ni," Yorùbá culture may be construed as an internal collaborator that has worked in tandem with Western colonial culture to achieve the silencing of minority cultures within the context of Lagos State. In response, I suggest a collaborative intervention involving the vulnerable women in Badagry and academic activists, with marginalized women leading the conversation.

The subject of this article is merely a miniature of the concerns of minority groups in postcolonial Africa. Indeed, the case of marginalized Ogu women has only provided a single example of the more encompassing topic of ethnic minority marginalization. The deeply seated issues of ethnic minority marginalization include the glossing of an entire region as belonging to the most populous group, which has implications for seats at the proverbial political table. As long as majoritarian cultural hegemony persists without intervention, minorities are likely to continue being assimilated into dominant cultures. This results in the relegation of unique knowledge systems, values, and skills that could otherwise contribute to addressing contemporary societal issues. Other implications of the marginalization of minority groups include social upheaval and threat of violence from those groups (Fasinu 2014).

As it has become apparent through the resourcefulness of African heritage to popular culture in recent times (Tamari 2011; Smith and Coleman 2022), one of Africa's unique selling points in the global context is its diverse cultural heritage. African cultural diversity can thus be seen as a form of cultural capital offering the continent a unique advantage. By leveraging their soft power mechanisms—including the music of marginalized women—African countries have the potential to harness their diversity for cultural diplomacy, thereby strengthening their global influence.

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Glossary of key terms

Aholu: King in Ogu gbe (language)
Ajogan: A sacred genre performed by wives married into an Ogu royal family.
Asha: A dance break featuring rhythmic improvisations on drums as well as vocables and nonlexical syllables.
Gankeke: An onomatopoeic name for a type of bell used in some Ogu musical genres, including *gangbe*.
Gbe: A west African ethnolinguistic cluster including Ewe, Fon, and Ogu.

Nafi: Maternal aunt.
Oganvino: A bell with a child.
Panu: An instrument made from a metal plate to which rings are attached. It is central in gangbe performances.
Tafe: Maternal or paternal uncle.
Tayin: Paternal aunt.

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