

## An Ethnomusicological Study of Bòlòjò Music of Yewa Land in Ogun State, Nigeria

Taiye Shola ADEOLA<sup>1\*</sup>, Laja Solomon ADEYEMI<sup>2</sup>, Taiwo Adebusola OLALUSI<sup>3</sup>, Oluwatosin John IBITOYE<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Performing and Film Arts University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Federal Government College, Odogbolu, Ogun State, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Performing and Film Arts University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

<sup>4</sup>Department of Performing Arts and Film Studies Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria.

\*Corresponding Author: [adeola.ts@unilorin.edu.ng](mailto:adeola.ts@unilorin.edu.ng)

**Citation:** ADEOLA, T. S., ADEYEMI, L. S., OLALUSI, T. A., & IBITOYE, O. J. (2025). An Ethnomusicological Study of Bòlòjò Music of Yewa Land in Ogun State, Nigeria. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(4), 1071–1082. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i4.2974>

**Published:** December 07, 2025

### ABSTRACT

One of the dynamics of the traditional African societies is that music is a common feature of cultural expression. In Nigeria, traditional music which is rooted in the belief system and the socio religious activities of the people finds space in the musical practice of the country and therefore attracts attention of scholars for documentation and analysis. Bolojo music, a traditional genre rooted in Yorùbá oral tradition from the Yewa people of Ogun State, Nigeria serves as a cultural expression that embodies the socio-cultural dynamics, historical contexts, and musical heritage of the Yewa people. This music has received scholarly studies in aspects such as its history, sociology, its dance forms, and song texts, but its ethno musicological study is still under explored. This study is therefore an ethno musicological examination of Bòlòjò music. Engaging established theories in ethnomusicology and African cultural studies as its theoretical framework, the study examines the musical structure, social functions, adaptability, and communicative roles of Bolojo within Yewa society. The study employs qualitative research methods including participant observation, interviews with local musicians, and audio-visual recordings of Bòlòjò performances. Through participant observation, the researchers engage in communal events where Bòlòjò music is performed, gaining first-hand insights into its social functions. Interviews with Yewa elders and Bòlòjò musicians provide valuable perspectives on the genre's cultural meanings and evolution over time. Audio-visual recordings further aid in analyzing musical structures, rhythmic patterns, and lyrical themes with Bòlòjò music. Bòlòjò music is renowned for its unique rhythms, showcasing the call-and-response patterns that foster community participation and engagement during performances, also with the variety of traditional instruments integral to Bòlòjò performances, particularly the distinctive use of drum such as talking drum (gáangan), àkùbà or kóngà, bembé, bàtá, which create complex rhythmic patterns, as well as agogo (metal gong), sèkèrè (rattles), and the introduction of guitar by King Jossy Friday. As an essential cultural practice, Bòlòjò music plays a central role in rites of passage, festivals, weddings, funerals, communal gatherings, where it not only entertains but also reinforces Yewa identity and heritage in social cohesion, cultural expression, and moral instruction. This study concludes that Bòlòjò music serves as a vital expression of the Yewa people's identity and cultural heritage. Its origins are rooted in the historical, social, and spiritual fabric of the community, making it not only a form of entertainment but also a powerful medium for preserving cultural memory and fostering community unity. As Bòlòjò music continues to adapt and evolve, it remains a testament to the resilience and creativity of the Yewa people in navigating their cultural heritage. The need to preserve and promote Bòlòjò music has become urgent, particularly in the face of globalization and changing social landscapes. This paper recommends that archival documentation, festival support, gender inclusivity and international collaborations should serve as safeguard for the preservation of Bòlòjò music.

**Keywords:** Ethnomusicology, Bòlòjò Music, Yewa People.

## INTRODUCTION

Music as a fundamental aspect of human culture, serves as a powerful medium for expression, communication, and social cohesion. Ethnomusicology, being the study of music within its cultural context, provides invaluable insights into how music reflects and shapes the identities, values, and histories of communities. Bòlòjò music, deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the Yewa people of Ogun State, Nigeria, stands as a unique and vibrant genre that transcends mere musical expression. It is an essential medium for storytelling, social education, and community bonding. The Yewa people, belonging to the larger Yorùbá ethnic group, have nurtured Bòlòjò as part of a wider tradition of musical and oral heritage that embodies their values, history, and communal identity. Through its dynamic call-and-response structure, rhythmic dance, and moral narratives, Bòlòjò serves both as a form of entertainment and a tool for reinforcing societal values, making it an integral aspect of daily life and cultural practice in Yewa land.

Historically, Bòlòjò music has been passed down through generations as an oral tradition, with each performance carrying elements of history, folklore, and collective memory. The songs are often imbued with proverbs and moral lessons, addressing themes of respect, unity, and social responsibility. This tradition has been kept alive by community elders and griots, or custodians of oral history, who serve as both performers and educators. According to Adegbite (1991), "Yorùbá music serves not just as art but as a repository of cultural knowledge and societal norms." In Yewa land, this is particularly true for Bòlòjò music, which remains a living reflection of the people's philosophy and worldview.

Bòlòjò music also plays a prominent role in community gatherings, festivals, and ceremonies, where it fosters a sense of belonging and collective identity. Events like the Orónà festival in Ilaro feature Bòlòjò performances as a way to celebrate heritage, engage the community, and pass down traditions to the younger generation. At these gatherings, the interactive nature of Bòlòjò allows for audience participation, with listeners clapping, singing along, or responding to the lead performer, creating a vibrant communal atmosphere. This interactive style is a hallmark of Yorùbá music, where the boundary between performer and audience is often blurred.

Despite its deep-rooted cultural significance, Bòlòjò music faces several challenges in modern society. The forces of urbanization, globalization, and modernization have influenced the lifestyles and preferences of the younger generation, which may lead to a declining interest in traditional music forms. Many youths in Yewa land, exposed to Western and popular Nigerian genres like Afro-beats and hip-hop, view traditional music as outdated. Consequently, the cultural relevance of Bòlòjò may be at risk unless active efforts are made to preserve and promote it. Scholars such as Nketia (1974) and Nzewi (2007) have highlighted the need to protect African music traditions, emphasizing that "preserving traditional music is essential for sustaining cultural diversity and identity."

The study of Bòlòjò music, therefore, extends beyond an exploration of its musical structure to a broader investigation into its role as a cultural institution, a means of preserving heritage, and a bridge between generations. An ethno musicological study of this music provides a framework to examine Bòlòjò not only as a musical form but within its cultural context, as a social practice that reflects and shapes the values, beliefs, and identity of the Yewa people. This study utilizes an ethno musicological approach, drawing from fieldwork, interviews with practitioners, and participant observations at festivals and community gatherings. By understanding the underlying principles, themes, and social functions of Bòlòjò music, we shed light on its importance and explore strategies for its preservation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Bòlòjò music, a vibrant traditional genre of the Yewa people in Ogun State, Nigeria, has sparked significant scholarly interest in the fields of ethnomusicology, oral literature, and cultural studies. Scholars have approached Bòlòjò music from various perspectives, examining its role as a social tool, a form of oral history, and a medium of cultural identity for the Yewa community. The literature reflects the multidimensional nature of Bòlòjò music, underscoring its importance not only as a performance art but as a vehicle of cultural preservation, moral education, and community cohesion.

One of the primary areas of study in the literature on music is its function as a cultural institution that preserves the peoples' heritage and values. Agawu (2003) describes African music, as a "living archive of cultural expression," serving as both a means of cultural continuity and a space for community dialogue. Bòlòjò music is not merely about musical entertainment; it embodies the socio-cultural and moral frameworks within which the Yewa people operate. Euba (1977) highlights the communal role of Yorùbá music as a whole. Euba's study on African musical

practices emphasizes the call-and-response structure typical of Yorùbá music genres, which he views as inherently democratic and reflective of the communal spirit in African societies.

Similarly, Adegbite (1991) explores the role of Yorùbá music in social, political, and economic contexts, asserting that it is through traditional music that communities reinforce their collective identities and values, which serves as an “ethical guide”, for the Yewa people, educating young listeners on values like respect, honesty, and social responsibility. Traditional music like Bòlòjò music functions as a tool for socialization, helping to instill cultural norms and values in each generation. Olajumoke (2018) adds to this perspective by discussing the role of women in Yorùbá music, noting that women often use music as a means of storytelling and moral instruction.

The historical and adaptive nature of Traditional music has also been a focal point for scholars who examine how traditional music can respond to external influences while preserving its core identity. Nketia (1974) notes that African music is characterized by a high degree of adaptability often integrating new elements to remain relevant across generations. Bòlòjò music, like many African musical genres, has adapted to modernization and globalization by absorbing elements from popular genres, this is seen in the introduction of guitar by King Jossy Friday allowing it to resonate with younger audiences while retaining its traditional base. Nzewi (2007) echoes this point, suggesting that the survival of African music depends on its ability to evolve without losing its connection to cultural roots.

The role of music as a medium for oral history and collective memory is another significant area of scholarship. Barber (1991) in her study of Yoruba oral traditions describes music as a vital form of historical documentation. Bòlòjò music serves as repositories of collective memory, preserving the Yewa people’s stories, myths, and genealogies in a manner that is both engaging and accessible to all ages. Vansina (1985), explains that oral traditions in African societies act as “living archives” that retain historical narratives and cultural knowledge. Bòlòjò’s lyrical content, often centered on historical figures and events, allows Yewa communities to preserve their heritage through performance, thereby bridging the past and present. Oludare (2018) writing specifically on Apala Music observes that music aids in preserving their musical cultures, as the musicians are regarded as custodians of history.

Scholars such as Obafemi (2003) have investigated the significance of festivals and communal gatherings in maintaining traditional music practices. In his research on Yorùbá music, Obafemi emphasizes the role of festivals in celebrating and revitalizing indigenous music forms. Bòlòjò music is performed to reinforce cultural pride and create a space for community engagement with such events as the Òrónà festival in Yewa land, which provides opportunities for younger generations to connect with their heritage through music and dance. Stone (2005) also underscores this idea, arguing that music in African cultures is fundamentally tied to community events, where it serves as “social glue” that unites people in shared identity and purpose.

African music in contemporary society is however confronted with challenges of Urbanization, globalization, and shifting cultural preferences which have influenced the ways traditional music is perceived, especially among younger generations who may view it as outdated. According to Akinyemi (2011), the rise of Western and contemporary Nigerian music genres has created a divide between older and younger audiences. Gwervevende and Mthombeni (2023) have observed and rightly so that like other forms of intangible cultural heritage, indigenous music and dance cultures have been adversely affected by significant social, economic, technological, and ecological modifications. They submitted further that “the resultant transformations in cultural contexts, functions, mode of transmissions, and performance have endangered the sustainability of several music and dance traditions and their transmission languages”. Without deliberate efforts to engage youth in traditional music, Bòlòjò and similar genres risk becoming marginalized and may ultimately go into extinction. Some scholars like Barber (1991) and Nzewi (2007) have proposed strategies for preserving African music, emphasizing the need for educational programs, cultural festivals, and archival documentation. They suggest integrating traditional music into school curriculums as a way to expose young people to indigenous music forms early in life. Through education and media exposure, Bòlòjò music can be revitalized and maintained as an integral part of Yorùbá culture.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study relies on established theories in ethnomusicology and African cultural studies as its theoretical framework. Alan Merriam’s (1964) Tripartite Model “Concept, Behavior, and Sound”: Concept involves the cultural meanings and values associated with traditional music. For the Yewa people, Bòlòjò music is more than music; it serves as a medium for transmitting cultural values, reinforcing social norms, and maintaining a collective identity. By examining these underlining beliefs, the study explores why Bòlòjò music is significant to Yewa society. Behavior encompasses the performance practices, rituals, and interactions surrounding indigenous music. Observing behaviors at Bòlòjò music performances (such as the interaction between singers, instrumentalists, and the audience) reveals the social rules, roles, and expectations tied to Bòlòjò music. This study considers how performers and audience members participate in and respond to Bòlòjò music, thus examining the music’s impact

on community dynamics. Sound focuses on the music's structural elements, including rhythm, melody, and form. Bòlòjò music is known for its lively rhythms and call-and-response patterns, which mirror African oral traditions. By analyzing these sonic features, the study gains insights into the music's cultural symbolism and aesthetic appeal. Merriam's model, therefore, allows this study to explore Bòlòjò music as a cultural practice, a social activity, and an art form, capturing its full complexity.

Akin Euba's *Theory of Adaptability in African Music* (1989) is also relevant and engaged in this study. The theory posits that African music is adaptable and can absorb external influences while retaining its essence. Euba describes African music as dynamic, evolving to reflect changing societal conditions and challenges. Helle (2024) observed that Euba's adaptability theory is further advanced in his African pianism, creative musicology and intercultural musicology. Scholars like Meki Nzewi (2025) have expanded on Euba's ideas, examining the complexities of modern art music in Africa and its relationship to global musical trends. Adaptability theory is relevant for analyzing Bòlòjò's response to modern influences, such as urbanization and the popularity of global music genres. This study investigates how Bòlòjò music incorporates new elements or modifies performance styles to remain relevant for younger generations. For example, the pioneer musician adopts guitar as new instrument to the Bòlòjò music so as to modify the rhythmic pattern and also to make it appeal to the contemporary audiences while preserving traditional lyrics and themes.

Adélékè Adéèkó's *Communicative Framework* (1998) postulated in his work "Music as a Linguistic Tool for Moral Instruction" presents African music as a form of communication that conveys moral lessons and social values. He describes music as a "linguistic tool for moral instruction," where proverbs, idioms, and symbolic language in lyrics offer guidance on ethical behavior and societal norms. This communicative framework is crucial for analyzing Bòlòjò's lyrics, which often use metaphorical language to address themes such as respect, community harmony, and resilience. Adéèkó's theory helps frame Bòlòjò music as a tool for educating and socializing listeners, particularly youth. By examining the proverbs and social commentaries embedded in Bòlòjò lyrics, this study illustrates how the genre functions as a moral guide, shaping individual and collective values within Yewa society.

Integrating these theories creates the framework for analyzing Bòlòjò music. Merriam's model facilitates an examination of Bòlòjò music as a complete cultural practice, including the beliefs and behaviors tied to its performance. Euba's adaptability framework explores how Bòlòjò music negotiates modernity, and Adéèkó's communicative framework highlights its use as a medium for moral education. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive approach to understanding Bòlòjò music as a multifaceted, adaptable, and communicative form of cultural expression within Yewa society.

### **Brief Historical Background of Yewa Land**

Yewa land, located in the western part of Ogun State in southwestern Nigeria, is historically significant for its unique cultural heritage, strategic geographic position, and complex social dynamics. The Yewa people, sometimes referred to as the Ègbádò, are part of the larger Yorùbá ethnic group, sharing linguistic, cultural, and religious traditions with other Yorùbá subgroups, while also maintaining distinct cultural characteristics.

The origins of Yewa land trace back several centuries, with the Yewa people believed to have migrated from various regions of Yorùbá land, including the ancient city of Ile-Ife, regarded as the spiritual heart of the Yorùbá civilization. Over time, the Yewa people established settlements throughout the region, forming communities that developed unique cultural practices and customs. Geographically, Yewa land lies along the Nigerian border with the Republic of Benin, a strategic location that historically influenced the people's social and economic interactions. Due to this border location, Yewa land has long been a center for trade and cross-cultural exchange, with its people engaging in commerce, agriculture, and artisanal crafts. The region's economy historically relied on farming, with crops such as yam, maize, cassava, and palm oil products being vital to both subsistence and trade. The trans-regional trade networks allowed Yewa people to exchange goods and cultural influences with neighboring communities, which enriched Yewa traditions.

In recent decades, Yewa land has been undergoing a period of cultural renaissance, with renewed interest in preserving and promoting its heritage. Festivals, such as the Òrónà festival and Bòlòjò music, celebrate Yewa history, music, and dance, offering opportunities for both local and diaspora Yewa people to connect with their roots. These cultural celebrations are significant for their role in strengthening community bonds and asserting Yewa identity within the broader Yorùbá and Nigerian contexts. The location of Yewa land as a border area also plays a role in its contemporary economy, facilitating cross-border trade and cultural interactions with neighboring Republic of Benin. This continued exchange adds a layer of diversity to Yewa culture, as the people interact with diverse influences while preserving core aspects of their heritage.

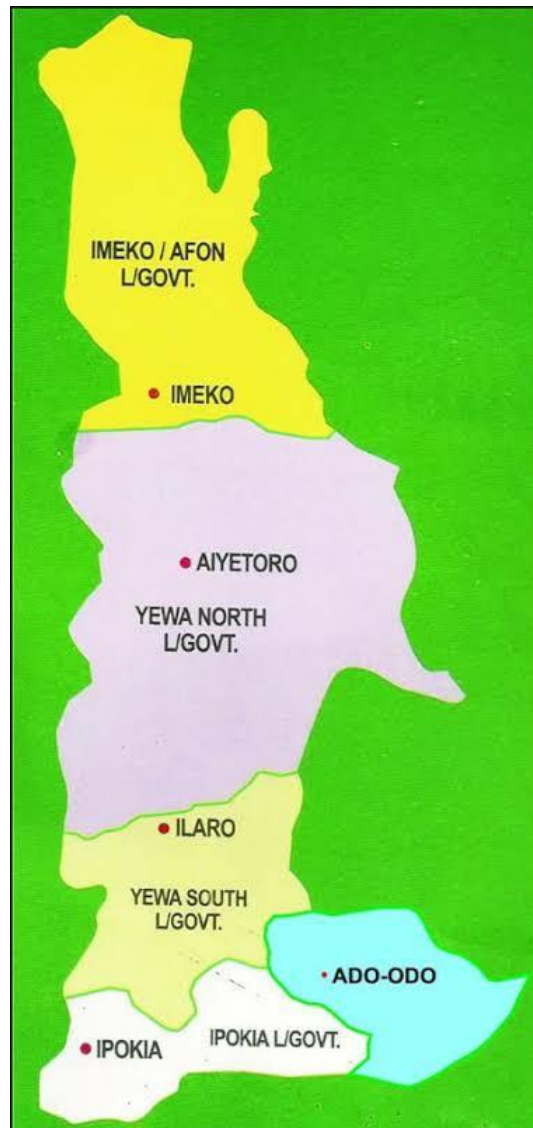


Figure 1. Map showing the Yewa Land. Source:<https://yewapdc.com> surfed on 02/10/2025.

### Historical Context and Evolution of Bòlòjò Music in Yewa Land

Bòlòjò music holds a unique place in the cultural history of Yewa land, which comprises areas within Ogun State, Nigeria, bordering the Republic of Benin, where it has been an essential vehicle for preserving identity, educating communities, and strengthening social bonds. Its roots are intertwined with the socio-political and religious history of the Yewa people, who are part of the larger Yorùbá ethnic group but retain distinct linguistic and cultural practices. The evolution of Bòlòjò music reflects the adaptability of Yewa traditions over centuries of external influence, migration, and modernization, while its core elements have remained symbols of the Yewa people's resilience and cultural continuity.

The origins of Bòlòjò music are rooted in Yorùbá oral tradition, with specific development in the Yewa-speaking regions. As an indigenous musical form, Bòlòjò music has historically been linked to storytelling, folklore, and ritual. In early Yewa society, music was not merely a form of entertainment but a medium for moral instruction, historical documentation, and community bonding. The cultural purpose of Bòlòjò music emerged within a broader Yorùbá framework where music and dance were deeply integrated into daily life, religious practices, and communal gatherings. Oikelome (2020) submits that there are many structures shared by both music and dance that makes them interrelated, such structures include theme, phrase, dynamics, rhythm, metre, form and so on. He observes that "Music and Dance, which in the African societies unites body, mind and emotion in expressive action based on repetitive rhythm, is essentially a ritualistic activity and an integral element of all religious ceremonies" as such music and dance influences different aspects of the daily lives of the people. Agawu (2003) suggests that music in African societies, especially in the Yorùbá regions, "functions as an archive of oral knowledge," Ramesh (2023) has also discussed the intricate relationship between dance and society, submitting that dance transcends entertainment to become a mirror reflecting the values, beliefs, and aspirations of the societies around the world. Genres like Bòlòjò music encapsulate shared values, beliefs, and historical memories.

Bòlòjò's core components, its call-and-response format, rhythmic drumming, and lively dances are symbolic of the communal values in Yewa society. The call-and-response structure, common in Yorùbá music, reflects a collective approach to storytelling and performance, where community participation is encouraged and often expected. This format serves to unify performers and the audience, fostering a sense of togetherness that aligns with Yorùbá cultural philosophy. Euba (1977) discusses this element in traditional Yorùbá music, stating that “the participatory nature of call-and-response allows music to act as a community-binding tool,” and this is evident in the ways Bòlòjò music has historically been used to unite the Yewa people during festivals, ceremonies, and informal gatherings.

### **Bòlòjò as a Tool for Socialization and Moral Education**

Throughout Yewa history, Bòlòjò music has played a crucial role in socialization and the transmission of cultural values. The Yewa people have traditionally used Bòlòjò music to impart lessons on morality, respect, unity, and social responsibility, often through the lyrics, which are rich in proverbs, allegories, and folk tales. The genre serves as a medium for teaching younger generations about societal norms, expectations, and the importance of community solidarity. According to Adegbite (1991), Yorùbá music functions as a “repository of social norms and ethical principles,” where musicians act as educators and custodians of culture. In Yewa land, Bòlòjò musician who are often respected elders or skilled storytellers were historically tasked with reinforcing social order and teaching through their music.

Bòlòjò's instructional role has also been reflected in its association with rites of passage. During events such as weddings, naming ceremonies, and age-grade initiations, Bòlòjò music is performed to mark important milestones in the lives of community members. The themes of the songs often reflect the responsibilities and expectations associated with each stage of life, serving as a means of preparing young people for adulthood. In the communal Yewa setting, these performances are highly interactive, with the audience participating by singing along, clapping, or responding to the performer's cues. Barber (1991) observes that “African oral traditions are performative acts that convey cultural wisdom,” and in the case of Bòlòjò music, this wisdom is embedded within the music's content and the communal experience of its performance. For example a song by King Jossy Ade titles “Ijoye” (Chieftancy) is given below:

Asíwájú, oyè yó je ti eni a kì í yo je	Leader, the chieftaincy is yours and you can't hide to be installed
Oyèkàn lú lí gbangba	Is a chieftaincy title known by all
Asíwájú, oyè yó je ti eni a kì í yo je	Leader, the chieftaincy is yours and you can't hide to be installed
Sèb'ílé lo b'óyè, kògbodò hunni ò /2ce	The chieftaincy can't cause any harm, because it belong to you/2ce
À n'íleláb'oyè, kògbodò hunni ò	The chieftaincy can't cause any harm, because it is a family title
Oyèyó ò jéti baba omo kì 'wú omo	The tittle that belong to father can't be taking by the child
Oyèkàn lú lí gbangba	Is a chieftaincy tittle know

### **The Influence of Historical Events on Bòlòjò**

The evolution of Bòlòjò music has also been shaped by major historical events affecting the Yewa people, including migration, colonialism, and religious shifts. During the 19th century, as parts of Yorùbá land experienced wars and migrations, Yewa communities sought to preserve their cultural identity in the face of external pressures. Bòlòjò music became a form of resistance and a means of asserting Yewa cultural identity amid the disruptions brought on by migration and inter-ethnic contact. The lyrics of Bòlòjò songs from this period often focused on themes of resilience, unity, and loyalty to tradition, reflecting the community's efforts to preserve its cultural distinctiveness.

Colonialism in the early 20th century introduced new dynamics into the Yewa cultural landscape. Missionary activities and British colonial policies affected various aspects of Yoruba society, including traditional religious practices and social structures. While many indigenous practices were discouraged or suppressed, Bòlòjò music adapted by incorporating new themes and occasionally adjusting its format to align with emerging societal changes.

### **Bòlòjò in Contemporary Yewa Society**

In the modern era, Bòlòjò music has continued to evolve while maintaining its traditional elements. The advent of urbanization and globalization has introduced Yewa society to new cultural influences and musical genres. Younger generations in particular have gravitated toward popular Nigerian music forms like Afrobeats, juju, fuji, and hip-hop, creating a cultural shift that challenges the preservation of traditional genres like Bòlòjò music. According to Nketia (1974), traditional African music must “adapt to remain relevant in the face of modernity,” and Bòlòjò music has responded to this challenge by integrating contemporary rhythms and instruments while retaining its core values. For instance, the introduction of guitar by King Jossy Friday on his Gbànjàrè album and

drum set by Zeynab Habib on her song *Bòlòjò Medley*, this blending of tradition and modernity has enabled *Bòlòjò* music to attract new audiences.

However, efforts to preserve *Bòlòjò* traditional form continue, especially through cultural festivals and community gatherings. Events like the *Óronà Festival* in Ilaro, a significant celebration in Yewa land, provide a platform for showcasing *Bòlòjò* music performances and promoting cultural pride. Such festivals play an essential role in the genre's survival, allowing *Bòlòjò* music to be performed in its authentic style and experienced by younger audiences in its cultural context. Barber (1991) underscores the importance of festivals in maintaining African oral traditions, stating that "festivals act as a cultural reinforcer, providing a communal space for the transmission of heritage." The *Óronà Festival* exemplifies this role, as *Bòlòjò* music becomes a focal point of the festivities, reinforcing the community's connection to its heritage.



**Figure 2.** Fatimoh Fadare performing during Orona-Ilaro festival Bolojo music night. Source: Vidmate Application download 10/11/2024.

### Cultural Significance and Resilience of *Bòlòjò* Music

The historical journey of *Bòlòjò* music illustrates its resilience as a cultural institution in Yewa land. Through centuries of change, including migration, colonialism, and globalization, *Bòlòjò* music has adapted and endured, reflecting the flexibility and strength of Yewa traditions. Today, *Bòlòjò* music remains an emblem of Yewa identity, serving as both a link to the past and a means of adapting to contemporary challenges. Traditional music like *Bòlòjò* is essential for sustaining cultural identity in an increasingly homogenized world.

Beyond its historical roots and cultural significance, *Bòlòjò* music encompasses a range of aspects that highlight its role in Yewa society. From its musical structure to its performance dynamics, and from its social and economic implications to its impact on identity, *Bòlòjò* music stands as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon. These aspects reveal how *Bòlòjò* is not only a traditional music genre but also an evolving art form with various functions in modern Yewa communities.

### Musical Structures and Composition

The musical structure of *Bòlòjò* is distinct, featuring rhythmic complexity and a strong emphasis on percussion. The musical ensemble of *Bòlòjò* music typically includes indigenous Yorùbá instruments such as: Talking Drum (*Gáangan*), known for its tonal versatility, the talking drum is used to mimic speech and convey messages during performances, *Bàtá* Drums are set of double-headed drums that produce polyrhythmic patterns and are central to Yorùbá music traditions, *Agogo* (Bell) is a metallic instrument that provides a steady rhythmic pulse, guiding the dancers and other instrumentalists, *Sèkèrè* (Beaded gourd) adds texture to the overall rhythm and also the guitar, which was introduced by King Jossy Friday makes the music more appealing both rhythmically, melodically and harmonically. The call-and-response format is central to *Bòlòjò* composition, where a lead singer initiates a verse and the audience or a chorus responds. This format is highly participatory, reflecting the communal nature of Yewa culture.

*Bòlòjò* performances often start with a slow, steady rhythm and gradually increase in intensity, this structure helps to sustain audience excitement, leading to a climactic moment where everyone is actively involved in singing and dancing. Strophic form (verse-refrain repetition), songs are structured in repeated verses, often with a refrain (chorus) after each verse, the lyrics may change in the verses, but the chorus remains constant, this makes it easy

for the audience to participate and reinforces key messages or proverbs. Cyclical structure, many Bòlòjò performances rely on repeated melodic and rhythmic cycles that create a trance-like effect, these cycles allow for improvisation, especially by the lead singer and drummers, the repetition builds momentum, making it ideal for dance and extended performances. Vocally, Bòlòjò songs are known for their use of proverbs, metaphors, and word play, reflecting the Yorùbá people's love for linguistic artistry. Singers often convey complex ideas through simple phrases, making Bòlòjò a rich source of cultural wisdom and intellectual engagement. Another example is a song by King Jossy Friday titled "Gbanjare" (Alert);

#### **GBANJARE**

Gbànjàrè o, è bá mi wá 'yàwò o, bós'ómo síkíní /2ce  
 Nínú Omolará, nínú Omoniyí,  
 k'ebá mi wá omobirin kan jòjòlò  
 Adébáyò kófún mi n mús'aya /2ce  
 N kò kòdí nlá, n kòkòdí rèpètè  
 Ìdí égbénijù s'èwòn,  
 oba kógbé f'orí eni  
 Ení f'owó kanyàn, àpò méjò á pé  
 Ení f'owó pàdí, á t'ako á ta 'lé /2ce  
 Adébáyò e gbàmí, mof'arun ó d'ejó /2ce  
 case/2ce

Ìlèkè idí f'owómíkàn, eníkí n wá re 'lé oba  
 palace

Adéolù pèmi n ilé, maà lo, maà lo kí un wá o maà lo  
 Àjò ò nídùn k'òdídemá r'èwò o  
 home

Maà lo, maà lo, kí n wá o maà lo

#### **ALERT**

Alert, help me look for a wife, even if it's little child/2ce  
 Between Omolara and Omoniyi,  
 Get me a little girl  
 Adebayo should give me for wife/2ce  
 I don't mind big buttock or fatty buttock  
 The buttock that will take someone to prison,  
 May God avert it from us  
 Anyone that touch breast, will pay eight pounds  
 The one that touch buttock, will sell his farm land and houses/2ce  
 Adebayo help me, I've touch the hair is now

My hand touches the buttock beads, you invited me to the king

Adeolu is calling me at home, I will go and see him

No matter how the journey may be sweet, the bird will return

I will come home, I will

#### **Musical Textures**

Bòlòjò music features a polyphonic and polyrhythmic textures influenced by its traditional roots:

- i. Call and Response (Antiphonal Texture): A lead singer (soloist) sings a phrase, and a chorus or audience responds, creating a dynamic and participatory sound.
- ii. Polyrhythmic Texture: Multiple rhythmic patterns are played simultaneously, especially on traditional drums like the talking drum (gàngan), rattle (sèkèrè) and bell (agogo), producing a layered effect.
- iii. Heterophonic Texture: Variations of the same melody are played or sung at the same time, with slight improvisations by different performers.
- iv. Homophonic section: At times, the chorus sings in harmony while the instrumental accompaniment provides a steady background, creating a fuller sound.
- v. Percussion-Dominated Texture: The interplay of drums, clapping, and (sèkèrè) shakers contributes to a rhythmically rich and dense texture.

These textures make Bòlòjò music vibrant, expressive, and deeply rooted in the oral tradition of the Yewa people.

#### **Performance and Dance Elements**

Dance is integral to Bòlòjò music, often with highly energetic movements that mirror the music's rhythm and tempo. The dance style in Bòlòjò music performances is characterized by swift footwork, body gyrations, holding of horse tails and hand gestures, all of which are performed in sync with the drumming. The physical expression in Bòlòjò music dance is seen as an embodiment of community values and shared identity, where each movement reflects a sense of joy, freedom, and unity. Bòlòjò music performances are typically held in open spaces within communities, creating a vibrant social gathering. The interactive nature of Bòlòjò music allows audience members to join in, making each performance a dynamic and evolving experience. This participatory aspect reinforces community bonds and enables a shared emotional and spiritual experience.



**Figure 3.** Zeynab Habib performing Bolojo music at Orona-Ilaro festival. Source: Vidmate application download. 18/11/2023.

### Religious and Ritualistic Significance

While Bòlòjò is not inherently tied to any specific religious practice, it often holds a place in various Yewa rituals and ceremonies. For example, Bòlòjò music is commonly performed during the Òrónà Festival, and also Gèlèdé masquerade festival, a cultural celebration that pays homage to Yewa ancestral heroes. During such events, Bòlòjò becomes a means of connecting with spiritual elements, celebrating the ancestors, and honoring the divine forces believed to influence the community. The use of Bòlòjò in these rituals also signifies respect for the past and reverence for traditional beliefs. Even though modern-day Bòlòjò may be secular, its origins carry spiritual undertones, as music in Yorùbá culture is often considered a channel to the divine.

### Role in Social and Political Commentary

Historically, Bòlòjò music has served as a medium for social critique and political commentary. Performers often use the platform to address social issues, from corruption and inequality to moral decay and communal disputes. In pre-colonial times, Bòlòjò was used by community leaders to reinforce moral standards and to criticize those who violated communal norms. During colonial rule, Bòlòjò became a subtle form of resistance, with songs incorporating veiled criticisms of colonial authorities and their policies. Today, Bòlòjò artists continue to address social and political themes, using their music to reflect contemporary challenges such as urbanization, unemployment, and the erosion of traditional values. This aspect of Bòlòjò highlights its role as a “voice of the people,” where musicians articulate collective concerns and call for social change. The next excerpts by King Jossy Friday illustrates this:

#### OWO UDOJI

**Lead:** Mo P'owó Údóji mo wá bèrè

**Chorus:** Ètò ní ká pin kó kárí

**Lead/Chorus:** Àgbè ò r'ówó Údóji gbà,  
kíni kón'ísé owó ó wí/2ce

**Lead/Chorus:** À bál'ákòwé nikan níkó jeun  
K'árò ó lo, k'álè fún àgbè o o

#### MA S'EKA

**Lead:** È má a s'ore e, è más'èkà

**Chorus:** Í e kó ma s'ore, ikàkò da nkan

#### Influence of Bòlòjò on Modern Music and Fusion Genres

In recent years, Bòlòjò has influenced other genres in Nigeria, blending with popular music styles like Afrobeat, Fuji, Juju, and Afro-jazz. Young musicians have integrated Bòlòjò rhythms, drumming patterns, and lyrical themes into their compositions, bringing elements of the genre to a broader audience. This fusion preserves Bòlòjò traditional essence while allowing it to evolve with contemporary tastes, appealing to younger generations who might otherwise overlook traditional music. The genre's integration into modern music serves as a way of bridging generations and ensuring cultural continuity in a rapidly changing world. Fusion genres not only honor Bòlòjò

#### UDOJI MONEY

I asked for Udoji money

It is right to share to all

The farmer didn't get Udoji money,  
What should the artisan say/2ce

Is it only the literate that should eat?  
Lets think deeply, and give farmers

#### DO NOT EVIL

Do good always, not evil

Learn to do good, evil does not pay/2ce

heritage but also expand its reach, making it accessible to those outside Yewa land. Examples of these musicians are:

**Alhaja Jemeelat Opeyemi Alagbe**

**Lead:** E wí fún baba kójé a kèwú

**Chorus:** Kójé a kèwú ooo, Egbé Múmíní re Mecca

**Lead:** E wífún yèyè kójé a kèwú

**Chorus:** Kójé a kèwú ooo, Egbe Múmíní re Mecca

**Lead:** Mòlè gbéwa re Mèdína gbangba

**Lead/Chorus:** Ká gun Àràfá ee, ká gun 'Ràfá ká sì tún sòkalè We'll climb the mount Arafat and descent

Another excerpt is by Tope Alabi titled "E je ka yin Baba"

**E JE KA YIN BABA**

**Lead:** B'áyé mawí, wón l'áwa o nì 'sémé jì o

Ju kágbé Jèsù ga èyin èniyàn /2ce

**Chorus:** B'áyé ma wí, wón l'áwa o nì 'sè méjì o

Ju kágbé Jèsù ga èyin èniyàn /2ce

**Lead:** E bèrè k'ájó o

**Chorus:** E bèrè k'ájó,

kò s'òun tó dàbí ká yin baba l'ógo

**Lead:** E jéká yin baba

**Chorus:** Agbani lágbàtán o,

Olódumarè tós'ànú fún gbogbo wa

**Lead:** Ikú ré wa kété, àrùn ré wa kété

**Chorus:** Mímò ó se kó, e jé ká gbósùbà fún olórí ayé It's not by our doing, let's eulogies our creator

**Cultural Preservation Efforts**

Furthermore, initiatives such as recordings, archives, and documentaries on Bòlòjò are part of efforts to document and protect the genre. By preserving performances in audio-visual formats, cultural custodians are creating resources that can be accessed by future generations, researchers, and cultural enthusiasts. These preservation efforts emphasize the importance of Bòlòjò as a key element of Yewa heritage, providing a tangible link to the past.

For the Yewa people, Bòlòjò music is more than just a form of entertainment; it is a source of cultural pride and identity. It represents the unique heritage of Yewa land and serves as a means of asserting their distinctiveness within the larger Yorùbá and Nigerian landscape. During community celebrations, Bòlòjò performances foster a sense of belonging and pride among Yewa people, reminding them of their shared history, values, and resilience. This identity aspect of Bòlòjò is particularly important in contemporary Nigeria, where regional identities are sometimes overshadowed by national and global influences. Bòlòjò enables the Yewa people to celebrate their heritage and affirm their cultural identity in a way that resonates with both younger and older generations. This sense of pride not only strengthens communal ties but also empowers the Yewa people to value their tradition in an increasingly interconnected world.

**FINDINGS**

Bòlòjò music is deeply embedded in the cultural practices of the Yewa people. Traditionally, it was performed during festivals, social gatherings, and rites of passage. The genre has a strong oral heritage, with songs often passed down through generations, keeping local folklore and history alive. Also basically, Bòlòjò music typically employs a call-and-response vocal structure, which engages both performers and the audience. This interactive style fosters a sense of unity and shared experience among listeners. Instrumentation is traditionally percussive, with instruments like the talking drum (gáangan), bata drum, sèkèrè, and agogo. The introduction of the guitar, attributed to the influence of Juju and highlife music, has modernized the sound, adding a harmonic layer to the rhythm-dominated genre.

This study also finds that Bòlòjò music is known for its narrative quality and often explores themes of love, community, family values, and social morality. Songs may also contain moral lessons, proverbs, and cultural wisdom, serving as educational tools for younger generations. Over time, Bòlòjò has evolved from its strictly traditional roots to incorporate modern elements. The introduction of guitars, keyboards, and studio-produced sounds has broadened its appeal, allowing Bòlòjò to reach audiences beyond its traditional setting. Artists like Joseph Àsàmú Elegbede (with stage name as King Jossy Friday) have been instrumental in this adaptation, blending traditional themes with modern influences to appeal to younger listeners. This evolution has helped sustain interest in Bòlòjò music and has introduced it to a broader Nigerian audience.

Further findings made during this study show that Bòlòjò music remains a crucial element of Yewa cultural identity, helping to preserve language, proverbs, and folklore. Performances are often in the Yewa dialect, reinforcing linguistic heritage while fostering community pride. The genre serves as a vehicle for cultural expression, especially in an era where globalization has led to the dilution of indigenous practices. Artists who perform Bòlòjò continue to act as cultural custodians, ensuring that future generations are exposed to Yewa traditions.

## RECOMMENDATION

The following recommends are put forward:

i. **Financial Support and Grants for Artists:** Financial backing from government bodies, cultural organizations, and private sponsors for annual Òrónà and other Yewa festivals to celebrate and showcase Bòlòjò music will attract visitors and enhance the cultural pride. Support grants for artists will make them to focus on developing their craft without the stress of economic barriers, also support for album production, promotional activities, and international tours, all of which are essential for sustaining Bòlòjò music in today's competitive industry.

ii. **Archival Documentation:** In today's digital world, the use of YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music will make Bòlòjò music more accessible and musically relevant by uploading recordings, live performances, and educational content about Bòlòjò music, with these, artists and promoters can reach a global audience. This will encourage younger generations, who rely heavily on digital media, to engage with Bòlòjò music and also provide resources for research, education, and future generations of artists.

iii. **Mentorship Initiatives:** Facilitate mentorships where experienced Bòlòjò artists train younger generations.

iv. **Modern Fusion and Collaboration with Contemporary Artists:** Collaborations can introduce Bòlòjò distinct rhythms and themes to mainstream audiences, making the genre more appealing to younger generations. This cross-genre approach allows for artistic growth while respecting traditional elements, enabling Bòlòjò to stay relevant. For instance, the success of Afrobeat fusion has shown that traditional sounds can thrive within globalized, modern music frameworks.

**V. Gender Inclusivity:** Support female participation in Bòlòjò music, offering women-led workshops and performances.

## CONCLUSION

The impacts of Bòlòjò music stands as a testament to the rich cultural legacy and evolving identity of the Yewa people of Ogun State. Beyond being a form of entertainment, Bòlòjò music is a profound medium for cultural transmission, embodying the community's oral traditions, values, and social unity. Through its call-and-response structure, rhythmic dance, and moral themes, Bòlòjò has fostered cohesion and identity within Yewa land, offering an avenue for both collective expression and personal creativity. The genre's resilience is also evident in its adaptability, as it seamlessly integrates modern musical elements while maintaining its cultural roots.

The need to preserve and promote Bòlòjò music has become increasingly urgent, particularly in the face of globalization and changing social landscapes. Ultimately, Bòlòjò music exemplifies a living heritage that not only celebrates the past but also embraces the future. Its continued vitality will ensure that the Yewa people's unique cultural identity is sustained, celebrated, and shared both within Nigeria and across the world. Through concerted efforts in preservation, Bòlòjò can thrive as a cultural bridge, connecting generations and communities while reinforcing the pride and resilience of Yewa heritage.

## REFERENCES

- Adéèkó, A. (1995). Festivals and Cultural Preservation in Yoruba Society. *African Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12(3), 45-57.
- Adegbite, A. (1991). Traditional Yoruba Music: An Analysis of Social, Political, and Economic Roles. *African Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 3(1), 75-91.
- Agawu, K. (2003). *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*. Routledge.
- Ajibola, A. (2010). The Role of Music in Preserving Cultural Identity: A Study of Bolojo Music in Yewa Land. *Journal of Nigerian Cultural Studies*, 12(3), 45-59.
- Akinwale, T. (2010). Music and Identity: The Role of Traditional Yoruba Music in Shaping Cultural Consciousness. *Journal of African Musicology*, 25(2), 77-89.

- Akinyemi, A. (2011). Yoruba Oral Tradition in Islamic Nigeria: A History of Dàda and the Bolojo Performance Art. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 23(1), 34-55
- Barber, K. (1991). *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Belle, B. (2024). Akin Euba: African Art Music, Intercultural Composition and Creative Ethnomusicology. In Gavin S.K. Lee *Musical Modernism in Global Perspective: Entangled Histories on a Shared Planet*. Cambridge University Press. pp 153 - 177
- Chernoff, J. M. (1979). *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*. University of Chicago Press.
- Euba, A. (1977). African Music as Communication: The Call-and-Response Structure in Nigerian Folk Music. *Musicology Africa*, 3(2), 115-130.
- Euba, A. (1989). Dynamics of African Traditional Music: Adaptation and Preservation in a Modern Context. *Ethnomusicology Journal*, 17(2), 51-64.
- Gwerevende, S and Mthombeni, Z.M (2023). Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Exploring the Synergies in the Transmission of Indigenous Languages, Dance and Music practices in Southern Africa, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 29:5, 398 – 412, DOI:10.1080/13527258.2023.2193902
- Merriam, A. P. (1964). *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Nketia, J. H. K. (1974). *The Music of Africa*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Nzewi, M. (2007). *A Contemporary Study of Musical Arts: Informed by African Indigenous Knowledge Systems*. African Minds.
- Nzewi, M. (2025). "Lives in Musicology: The Humanning Musical Arts Heritage of Original Africa." *Acta Musicologica* 97, no.1(2025):1-15
- Obafemi, O. (2003). The Cultural Identity of Yoruba Folk Music and the Role of Bolojo in Community Cohesion. *African Musicology Review*, 6(1), 32-46.
- Oikelome, A.(2019). The Music of the Dance: A Study of Music and Dance in African Culture, *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts (AJRMA) Vol.13.No 1(2019)*
- Olajumoke, F. (2018). Women in Yoruba Music. *Monist Studies Journal*, 21(4), 22-39.
- Olanipekun, O.G and Ajewole, J (2024). Musical Genre and Styles in the Palace of Alafin of Oyo. *Niger Delta Journal of Gender, Peace and Conflict Studies* Vol.4 No 1. March 2024
- Olupemi, O. (2018). Preserving Indigenous Yoruba Musical Heritage: A Study of Ayinla Omo Alayan's Apala Music. *Journal of African studies*. 9 (1), 214-229 (2018).
- Omibiyi-Obidike, Nzewi, M. (2002). African Music and Oral Traditions: Theory and Practice. *Journal of African Cultural Musicology*, 15(1), 9-20.
- Omojola, B. (2010). *Yoruba Music in the Twentieth Century: Identity, Agency, and Performance Practice*. University of Rochester Press.
- Ramesh, S. (2023). Dance and Society: An Exploration of Cultural Expression and Social Impact, *Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance*, 3(01), 17-19 <https://doi.org/10.55529/jhmd.31.17.19>
- Vansina, J. (1985). *Oral Tradition as History*. University of Wisconsin Press.