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## Gendered Roles in Traditional Musical Practice: A Study of Pondo Women Drummers

Benjamin Obeghare Izu <sup>a,\*</sup>, Alethea de Villiers <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa

### Abstract

Studies in various countries on gender roles in traditional musical practices portray women as people whose music-making potential is dictated by their role and status in their various communities, among other factors. This article examines the gendered roles of Pondo women drummers in the traditional music played among the Pondo people, a sub-tribe of the Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This article presents a discussion of the Pondo community's gender ideology and how gender-related behaviours affect its musical thought and practice, and how traditional music functions in communities to reflect Pondo women's musical roles in traditional ceremonies. This article outlines the role played by Pondo women in traditional ceremonies and their drumming in those ceremonies. The research method adopted was a secondary data analysis of the study by Nombeko Ndzobongo (2007) titled "Women drumming among the Pondo people of Eastern Cape Province of South Africa: implication for gender music education". Her study outlined several factors that directly and indirectly affect Pondo women's musical activities. As indicated in the study, these reflect society's perception of these women; as women and as female musicians. Their place in the community, their role and their value in making music were also discussed.

**Keywords:** Pondo women, drumming, gender, traditional music.

### 1. Introduction

Gender roles have been an important and recurring topic in the global conversation since the last decade of the twentieth century. This trend may be based on the anticipated benefits realised if gender equality was ever attained. While efforts are made every day to address the visible inequalities, certain factors such as religious beliefs, cultural views and social variables tend to serve as barriers to eradicating inequality in African society (Aluede, 2005). Despite women's crucial functions in society, the division of roles between males and females prescribed by most cultures often assigns the subordinate position to women. Consequently, women are subjected to various forms of discrimination and inequality. According to Ekwueme (2005, p. 231), men have superior functions, and women have inferior functions in society because gender functions have been structured in such a way that these roles are perpetuated. People have absorbed these positions throughout time, and they have become customs and traditions. The gendered role of making music in traditional and cultural music practices is highlighted in several studies (Doubleday, 2008; Kgafela, 2009; Koskoff, 1995; Omibiyi-Obidiki, 1988; Samuel, 2005; Scharfenberger, 2011; Stein Hunt, 1993; Teffera, 2006).

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\* Corresponding author  
E-mail address: [benjaminizu@gmail.com](mailto:benjaminizu@gmail.com) (B.O. Izu)

In modern times, women are fighting for equality in all settings and changing gender roles and expectations by breaking the taboo of traditional musical practices such as drum playing in their cultural settings. Research that describes the dynamism of culture and women adopting roles originally assigned to men, for example, female Dùndún drumming in Yorubaland, Nigeria, has been undertaken by several authors (Mullins, 2003; Samuel, 2005, Samuel, 2014a, Samuel, 2014b). These studies documented how the Anlo-Ewe women of Ghana adopted the djembe drum from Guinea and started their Takada dance drumming – performed for themselves and their daughters – to express their right to free speech. While this seems to be making an impact, many societies still adhere to centuries-old customs that prevent women from playing particular instruments, one of which is the drum.

The drum has always been an important facet of oral tradition in Africa and is the instrument most commonly associated with African traditional music (Davis-Craig, 2009; Teffera, 2006). In East Africa, drums are used for signalling, as accompaniment for singing and dancing, for processions, state proclamations and royal coronations (Teffera, 2006: 37). Each culture has developed unique ways of communicating through the drums, and as most drum sounds mimic the tonal language of the tribe's culture, rhythms not only vary according to the occasion but also the location (Davis-Craig, 2009). According to Koskoff (1995) and Johnson (2018), in many African cultures, it is taboo for women to be seen at or actively participate in some cultural events or ceremonies that require drumming, making it challenging for women to play the drums. Traditionally, women were the dancers and singers, and the men played the drums. Women's domestic responsibilities and expectations did not allow them to perform such important roles as playing the drums in their society. It was unlikely for a girl to abandon her home to pursue a drumming career at the cost of learning how to run a household, from older women that were also unable to leave their homes and families to attend and perform at events. It was easier for men to fill those positions as they were socially acceptable and available. Anku (2009, p. 38) and Kgafela (2009, p.31) opine that musical practices in any given culture are limited by tradition and history, and where culture defines the limits of social and cultural life, particular traditions, for example, drumming, tend to be similarly confined in most African societies.

According to Kayode (2014, p. 29), female drummers are uncommon in both Dùndún and batá, two well-known drum ensembles in Yorubaland. Kayode (2018, p. 161) discusses how it is frowned upon for women to play the Dùndún drum in Yorubaland. The Yorùbá indigenous music profession has always prioritised men over women because patriarchal ideas tend to foster a gender-based power imbalance. Similarly, women are not permitted even to touch the djembe drum in Guinea because it is customary for men to play it (Flaig, 2010: 3). In Guinea, it was prohibited for women to learn how to play the djembe drum; punishment can include their families disowning them, being asked to find another job and having their performance costumes burnt (Conde, 2002).

Despite these taboos, there is a growing trend to reconstruct many of the traditional gender roles due to the transformative responses to the current order within each community, and numerous women now play the djembe drum among the Guinea people (Flaig, 2010: 3; Sue, 2007) and the Dùndún drum among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria (Kayode, 2014: 29). The dynamism of culture has allowed women to gradually challenge the male-controlled gender ideologies in many civilisations, including the societies mentioned above, through adaptation, contestation and transformation. Musical events may be offshoots of a community's social structure, and changes to performance styles can provide a window into contemporary African society's evolving gender dynamics and ideologies. Although more women are emerging as traditional drummers in public spaces, music scholarship in most African societies lacks discussion of their participation.

The exploitation of African gender practices and female participation in drumming have been relegated to the background by numerous researchers who have either deliberately overlooked or dismissed these facets (Samuel, 2005; Samuel, 2018; Scharfenberger, 2011). This research, which explored the role of women in traditional African music practices with a focus on female Pondo drummers in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, is situated in the academic discourse of redressing the exclusion from the scholarship of the role of women as players of musical instruments in traditional culture.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This article utilised the functional theory of social stratification proposed by Davis (1948) and Davis and Moore (1945), which accounted for what they termed the ‘common requirement’ for social inequality in any social order. According to the hypothesis, multiple social roles exist in every culture, which are not all appreciated equally. The unequal distribution of power, influence and reputation, among other factors, is caused by diverse societal positions. According to this theory, inequality is a natural result of society’s value consensus on the one hand and individual differences on the other.

The functional theory of social inequality is applied to this study to understand the gendered roles in traditional music practices. Women in most traditional African societies are believed to belong to a lower class. The theory implies that women, whose way of life has been influenced or determined by society, would be disadvantaged in performing as musicians. A further consequence of the theory is that women on this unfavoured side will suffer due to the unequal distribution of roles and influence.

## 3. Results and discussion

### Women Drumming

Ndzobongo (2007) posits that among the Pedi people in South Africa, women are recognised as excellent drummers; they are believed to be the custodians of drumming. According to Malan (1982, p. 362), cited by Ndzobongo, “Women who are the chief exponents of their percussion instruments, play the *meropa* with a sharp staccato movement of the tips of their fingers, palm or heel of the hand, or in the case of their large wooden timpani bowl-type drums using a stick with a flattened beating end”. The *meropa* is a wooden drum the Pedi uses to accompany their singing and dancing. This accompaniment is essential for women’s dance songs. The drums traditionally used for social and ceremonial music were conical, usually open at the base, and had a single skinhead. They were made from a single, hollowed block of wood from the marula tree, found in abundance in rural parts of South Africa and associated with various legends and beliefs in African culture.

The Venda tribe in South Africa is another example of a society where women play the drums. Kruger (1996, p. 54) asserts that the *wada* drum is used in the *tshikona* dance, and *tshikona* drummers are traditionally female. *Tshikona* has been dubbed the Venda national dance and was performed on all significant occasions, including the coronation of a new monarch, commemorating a ruler’s death and the sacrificial rituals at the graves of a ruler’s ancestors. *Tshikona* exemplified the importance of the Venda’s communal life to which people felt a sense of belonging (Kruger, 2007, p. 36). Other occasions in the Venda culture when women drum are girls’ initiation ceremonies. In Venda culture, the *ngoma*, *thungwa* and *murumba* drums are played by women and girls except in possession dances when they are played by men (Kirby 2013: 39-41). Further evidence of women’s drumming traditions can be found in the Wagogo community in Tanzania. Howard (2014) describes *muheme*, as a specific drumming style in which women participate.

In the study upon which this article is based, the researchers investigated women’s roles in a predominantly male tradition in other African cultures by describing ceremonies in which Pondo women’s performative masculinity is displayed. The researchers describe how female drummers transcend gender boundaries by simultaneously contesting yet maintaining established practices within the traditional Pondo culture. This article argues that women’s roles in this regard are hedged by the prevailing practices in the traditional music realm that have provided the basis for challenging traditional limitations to gender-related musical practices.

The approach to this research was partly a secondary analysis of Nombeko Ndzobongo’s (2007) study titled “Women drumming among the Pondo people of Eastern Cape Province of South Africa: implication for gender music education”. This article explored the traditional ceremonies and rituals women perform as chief drummers. In so doing, the study aimed to extend the debate surrounding the issue of gendered authenticity by arguing that the emergence of female involvement in the art of drumming is a continuum and not necessarily a breach of a time-honoured music profession among African societies.

The Pondo people are a group of Nguni-speaking peoples who have for several centuries occupied the area between the Mthatha and Mtamvuna rivers in the Eastern Cape Province bordering KwaZulu-Natal in the north (Mcetywa, 1998: 15). The Pondo people occupy the areas of

Bizana, Port St Johns, Lusikisiki, Ngqeleni, Ntabankulu and Lidobe. Pondoland was divided into seven areas. Eastern Pondoland comprised four regions, namely Lusikisiki (Qaukeni), still considered the capital of Eastern Pondoland, Flagstaff (Sporeni), Bizana and Ntabankulu. Western Pondoland comprised three regions, namely Ngqeleni, Libode and Port St Johns (Nyandeni), with the latter serving as the capital of western Pondoland (Kepe, Ntsebeza, 2011).

### **Gender Roles and their Effects on Women's Musical Practices**

A society's gender structure displays culturally maintained relationships based on culture-specific gender norms, and structures and beliefs vary significantly from society to society and within societies (Bullindah, 2002; Stein Hunt, 1993). Every society has its method of doing things, which is the key feature of culture. According to Taylor (1973), not everyone in a society acts the same way, and men and women are expected to behave differently in any community due to gender differences. These differences are also reflected in their musical roles. Hoffman (1990, p. 116), Stein Hunt (1993, pp. 41-43) and Bullindah (2002), in writing about the concept of music and gender in society, opine that the division of labour according to gender is a basic as the organisation of musical roles in the society.

Burns (2009) explains the cultural backdrop of female musicians in Eweland in Ghana by observing that women's roles as custodians and nurturers of Ewe culture have not been rewarded with a comparable social status. With this research, Burns lends credence to female musicians who have been marginalised in West Africa. In Akan and Ewe cultures in Ghana, women are traditionally forbidden from drumming despite making up most of the mixed-gender ensembles and men providing backup as drummers in female ensembles (Anku, 2009). According to Ampene (2005), numerous African societies are affected by this issue. The Kpelle and Vai of Liberia, as well as the Akan and Ewe of Ghana, regard chorus singing as a feminine activity and playing instruments as a male activity, as is true in most African traditions. This influence explains why men are assigned to play instruments while women sing and dance (Bullindah, 2002).

Burns (2009, p. 59) asserts that women may not have an environment that encourages them to pursue creative music aspirations. Nonetheless, the contributions of female Ewe musicians to society are viewed as simply procreative. It is perceived that women's input regarding music does not entail significant development or make use of their creative faculties due to gender-restrictive practices and cultural taboos in some societies. Women may struggle to excel in traditional music practices because they do not have the forum to challenge their creative music skills.

Ndzobongo (2007), while describing how gender roles affect Pondo women, posited that women perform a variety of roles in musical performance; these roles vary from community to community depending on the traditions of the community they live. She states that women play a major role in traditional music practices among the Pondo people and construct and play local musical instruments during cultural ceremonies. For instance, Pondo women make and play the *ingqongqo* drum during the initiation ceremony of their sons into manhood. The drumming performance often accompanies the dances or songs the male initiates perform during the ceremony. Ndzobongo continues, "Pondo women are renowned for their dexterity in playing of drums, and this is the reason why they are the main people responsible for making and playing of drums". This is contrary to the practices of other nations or tribes. Mbonyingingo and Constantin (2020) assert that in recent times, the absence of women is noticeable in the field of drumming in Burundi. Traditional drums in Burundi have been recognised as the "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO since 2014, but in 2017 the Burundi Government banned women from participating in traditional drumming practices.

The preceding discussion explains why women's roles in traditional musical performances rely on their fundamental social obligations, which are important to women's gender identity. These social roles are referred to as a society's gender belief, and every society has its own set of built-in beliefs. These factors all have an impact on women's participation in musical activities.

### **Gender Roles and Musical Practices among the Pondo People**

The study of gender roles in traditional musical practice is not new in the field of music, but the study of gender and Western music has been the dominant focus. As a result, academic literature is scarce on African music and gender in general. Historians have defined African music in Western terms by overemphasising sound structure even though music and gender are

inextricably linked in most African societies. Limited attention has been paid to the interaction of music and gender and the consequences for understanding social processes in societies (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2013).

Gender roles strongly influence the types of musical performances of any ethnic group. This is evident in the gender-defined roles among the Pondo people. Men have their music, and women have theirs, but mixed-group performances also occur without any restrictions. Mixed group performances are mainly for entertainment and leisure, normally organised according to age, clubs and associations. Men's visions and ideologies are well-articulated in the type of music they perform. Among most African tribes, men have advantages over women in musical performances involving ritual, wrestling, hunting and war.

Pondo women excel in musical performances, focusing mainly on the rites of passage due to their gender roles. For instance, among the Pondo people, women dominate musical practices from the time children are born until they become adults, music dominated by women accompanies each stage of their development. This differs from other groups in which women's musical roles are connected mainly with womanhood and are related to birth, initiation and marriage as well as work activities, which reflect their role in food production in society (Stein Hunt, 1993: 41-42).

### **Traditional Events in Which Women Play Dominant Musical Roles in Pondoland**

Within the complex dynamics of gender relationships and roles among African peoples, women often exercise power through musical performances. Such is the case among the women of Pondoland in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, who, in their drumming performances during ceremonies, serve as custodians of knowledge and tradition and transmitters of culture. To grasp the significance of women dominating the traditional musical practice space among the Pondo, one must first understand the events or ceremonies that warrant women playing a dominant role and how this is expressed in various religious and cultural practices. The Pondo people, like other African peoples, have a belief system grounded in nature and human contact. Still, within the complex structures of gendered roles in traditional African musical practices, Pondo women exercise power through drumming, thus serving as the custodians of Pondo drumming traditions. They document and enact the history and culture of their people as they relate to traditional musical practices, in addition to being a source of knowledge about the people's artistic practices. The events or traditional ceremonies in which women play the dominant musical role are discussed hereunder.

- **Ibhundele** is an event to raise funds for the hosting household. It consists of an assemblage of *amadikazi* and *amatshawe* who raise funds for the household they meet (Ndzobongo, 2007). Historically, Pondo women had several means of helping one another, such as money games (*ibhundela*). This fundraising event is seen as a way of helping one another and redistributing wealth amongst the people. During this event, women compose songs about whoever or whatever event may have occurred within the community. They voice their grievances through the songs they compose. The singing is accompanied by traditional instruments such as the *igubu* and *umasengwana* (traditional musical instruments) (Ndzobongo, 2007).

- **Intonjane**, which according to Ndzobongo (2007) is "an initiation of a girl into womanhood"; the ritual bonds a prospective umkhwetha (initiate) with the ancestors. It is a means of awakening *umbilini* (intuition), marked by several rituals and events signifying the rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. During the ceremony, a girl is secluded at her homestead, where she is taught the values and norms of femininity and prepared for marriage. The young girls are taught the responsibilities and rights of being a wife, mother and leader. On the day, a girl is taken out of the initiation hut by various female groups who perform the traditional *umxhentso* dance accompanied by the *igubu* drum played by women (see Figure 1). They also perform *umngqungqo*, a traditional dance and take charge of the musical performance and display during this ceremony (Ndzobongo, 2007).

- **Intlombe yamaGqirha** – This ceremony is the central ritual for all the ceremonies and/or activities performed by *amagqirha*. According to Mlisa (2009, p. 206), this ceremony is dominated by singing, clapping hands, clan praises and dancing, all demonstrating a shared sense of belonging; the songs reflect the lifestyles and historical and existential experiences of the people. According to Ndzobongo (2007), the ancestors tell the *amagqirha* (diviners) about future occurrences and tasks the ancestors would like to be undertaken. If the ancestors are displeased

about something, they will communicate with the *amagqirha* who will, in turn, relate their displeasure to the relevant people and inform those people what has to be done to appease the ancestors.

- The diviners, who are women, dance in a circle, or if inside a house, they dance around the *iziko* (fireplace) in the middle of the house. According to Ndzobongo (2007), this is a sacred place where the ancestors live and where the Pondo people observe traditional religious and social practices. The circle also resembles the form of a full moon, a symbol of completeness and togetherness. The diviners form a linked chain when dancing around the *iziko* (Mlisa, 2009: 207). The *amagubu* (drums) are played during the gathering to evoke the ancestors. A sick diviner is cured by playing the *amagubu*. The ancestors become excited upon hearing the *amagubu* and rejoice because having the *amagubu* played for them is a sign that they are recognised, and their presence is still felt (Ndzobongo, 2007).

### **Drumming tradition among Pondo women**

Drums have been an intrinsic part of the cultural life of the Pondo people for countless generations; ancient instruments used to celebrate all aspects of life – are decorated in various colours and kept at the chief's residence. Traditionally, drums hold a deep, symbolic and historical significance for the Pondo people, and women dominate the drumming during traditional and religious events. Among the Pondo people, drums have a unique and more profound symbolic meaning when compared with Western music. Various types of drums are used by Pondo women, representing the community's soul. They are used for celebrating ceremonial events and rituals within the community. Depending on the ceremony, the importance of these drums changes. Several popular drums used among Pondo women during performances are described hereunder.

- **Igubu.** The *Igubu* is cylindrical and double-headed, with the heads laced onto the ends of the cylinder, which is made from tin or (less common) wood. According to Levine (2005), the instrument was a wooden drum made from a hollowed tree trunk sculpted into a cylindrical shape before European influence. A stretched cow or goat skin is used on both ends. It is beaten with two sticks that may be padded at the ends, unpadded, and slightly curved or straight. Some drummers utilise curved strips of rubber cut from a vehicle tyre. The beaters are called *umphini*, with the plural form being *amaphini* (meaning a handle, helve, or paddle) (Hansen, 1981). Diviners and Zionists mainly use this drum. According to Dargie (2015), the modern *igubu* is modelled on the European bass drum. Players are usually women or girls and, less commonly, men or boys (Hansen, 1981). The drum is played on various occasions and for a variety of ceremonies, particularly in the Zion church (Levine, 2005). In the Zion church, the *amagubu* are used to communicate with God, with the *amagubu* creating a connection between the church members and God. Praising the Lord is facilitated by the *amagubu*. Playing the *amagubu* in a church is based on the belief that it heals sick players (Ndzobongo, 2007).



**Fig. 1.** Igubu drum  
Source: Malonde (2019)

- **Isidiphu.** This is a friction drum found around the Flagstaff area, according to Dargie (1988), who described *isidiphu* as a drum with one skinhead to which a stick is attached. The drum is played by rubbing the attached stick with a wet hand or cloth, producing a loud fricative sound. Pondo women play the *isidiphu* at weddings and traditional celebrations.

- **Ikawu.** This drum is like a shield made from ox skin that is beaten with a knobkerrie and slammed onto the ground with force. The skin is cut to be the widest in the middle, narrowing towards the top and bottom. A small piece of skin is sewn near the top, in the middle of which is a hole designed to receive and hold the knobkerrie (Kirby, 2013). The *ikawu* is traditionally played by women during boys' initiation ceremonies during the *abakhwetha* dance, a special dance performed by the boys. Women form a semi-circle when playing the *ikawu*, mostly as an accompaniment to their chants and songs. The beating of the *ikawu* is accompanied by battle cries (Levine, 2005). Traditionally, playing the *ikawu* represents the survival of the ceremonial use of the shield, which at one time was a weapon used by the Pondo people in battle (Kirby, 2013).

- **Ingqongqo.** The *ingqongqo* is a local drum made from a stiff dried ox hide and beaten with sticks (*amagoga*) by a group of women (See Figure 2). The skin is alternatively placed on the ground; the women sit on it and beat it with sticks as an accompaniment to their singing during events celebrating the initiation of boys into manhood (Ndzobongo, 2007). This basic beat is accompanied by handclapping (*ukuqhwaba*) and dance movements, alternately striking the thighs with the palms of the hands. This was sometimes done during performances of the divination song. In the past, it was widely used by women during male circumcision and diviners' ceremonies (Levine, 2005: 81). According to Ndzobongo (2007), women are experts at dramatisation and must therefore take the lead role in the drumming performance.



**Fig. 2.** Women playing the *ingqongqo* while sitting  
Source: Levine (2005)

### **Pondo women and drum-making expertise**

Technically, drums are described as membranophones and consist of animal skin stretched over the open end of a frame constructed from wood or tin. The sound is generated by striking the drumhead with hands or a stick. Their form can be circular, bowl-shaped or round within a frame. Making drums is a specialised skill and is sometimes gender-restricted, determined by the cultural beliefs and ethos of the specific ethnic group. Among the Pondo people, drums are mostly made by women and often played by women. These drums are made from animal skins and vary in size. For instance, the *ingqongqo* (ground drum) is made of a series of poles stuck in the ground with a membrane stretched across them (Beck, 2013). The skin of a ritually-slaughtered ox or buffalo is dried in the sun and then stretched but left sagging slightly between sticks at about a metre above the ground or held with one hand by the women standing in a circle (Levine, 2005). Holding a stick in the other hand, the women hit the skin, which they then put aside for ceremonial use after the

dance. The *ingqongqo* drum has no trunk (Nkosi, 2013), while the *ikawu*, an equally ancient ritual instrument, was a shield once used as a war device, the membrane covering which was beaten with sticks (Levine, 2005). Methods employed to tune the different drums include exposing the skin to heat (fire or sunshine), dampening the skin with water, pulling and loosening the skin (as with the *ingqongqo* drum), pulling or loosening the tuning strings and hitting the tuning pegs with a brick or mallet to tighten the skin (Nkosi, 2013).

### Artistry And Aesthetics Of Pondo Women's Drumming

Art includes a wide range of human activities, crafts and expressions that appeal to the minds of an individual or a community. The term 'art' may refer to various artistic endeavours, including singing, dancing, drumming and other forms of creativity. In general, art is a product of human activity, created to stimulate the human mind and transmit emotions. Female Pondo drummers use their drumming skills to add artistic elements to events and ceremonies. The various types of decoration on the drum frame define the Pondo people's traditional artistic elements and characteristics of beauty. These characteristics are present on drums not only as a means of stimulating the human senses but also as a functional phenomenon that aids in differentiating the various drums. Female Pondo drummers undergo a variety of processes as drummers. They must master the rhythmic arrangements of the different drums, the development and use of rhythmic spaces through alternating drum players, the creation of additional sounds from non-core sound sources such as the drum frame and the creation of silences and variations within drumming phrases by constant practice.

The art of drumming is a communal asset that illustrates Pondo women's cultural and social expressions. These expressions provide satisfaction for the performers and spectators, enabling them to engage in mystical experiences, convey their imaginings, articulate ideals, and perform ritualistic and symbolic functions.



**Fig. 3.** Pondo women playing the *ingqongqo* while standing.  
Source: Levine (2005)

Pondo women's drumming artistry is not just for show; it has a place in the human or social fabric, showcasing mysterious cultural creations and highlighting often-overlooked artistic precincts. Drumming is a tangible expression of its creators' imaginations and a part of everyday life. Drum players are affected by their cultural contexts and individual life experiences, while cultural customs have a role in uncovering hidden potential and promoting both creativity and improvisation. The drummers do not seek to entertain the hypothetical worlds of their imagination. Instead, they wish to share their cultural history. According to Ndzobongo (2007),

drumming has the power to call on the ancestors, and this power stems from the drum's cultural significance in Pondo society.

### **Implications of Gender in Musical Performances**

Gender has been defined as a state of being male or female and influences the types of roles one performs as an individual or as a group and invariably affects or has some implications for the type of musical performances engaged in by either of the sexes. It is uncommon in African tradition for one to play a role contrary to one's gender. For instance, childbirth songs, weaning songs and lullabies are purely women's business due to the type of bond between mother and child. As such, any man who indulges in such a performance may be perceived as displaying aberrant behaviour. Domestic activities such as scrubbing floors, grinding and pounding spices, and cooking are all women's responsibilities. All of these activities are normally interspersed with corresponding music that is purely the purview of women (Ibekwe, 2009).

Similarly, it is unusual for women to engage in any music solely utilised by men. In some societies, women are forbidden to watch such music, let alone play or perform it themselves. According to Ibekwe (2009), while demonstrating Egwu Omaba of Nsukka – (xylophone music), “women are strictly banned from watching or taking part. It is not considered proper in Igbo tradition for women to overstep their boundaries or do the obvious in matters or roles strictly meant for males. All these check the type of music being performed by any categorised group, male or female.” Despite the changing times, most African tribes still practice traditions that exclude women from important cultural and musical performances. African tribes maintain ancient practices that prevent women from excelling in traditional musical performances. Ironically, women are marginalised musically and culturally within the very culture to which they are integral.

### **4. Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine the gendered roles in traditional musical practice with specific reference to female Pondo drummers in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. In the Pondo culture, women take on the role of drummer, a role traditionally assigned to men in numerous African cultures. Their role as drummers is not restricted to rituals associated with womanhood. Still, it extends to all aspects of communal life and includes performances for female initiation, male initiation, weddings, traditional and religious celebrations and diviners' rituals. Besides being active drummers, women also manufacture drums. This article will hopefully be useful in providing a platform for further study of the gendered role in musical performance in other traditional communities in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa. The study also opens the discussion on the changing roles of gender in making music, which traditionally restricts women, as most African societies strictly adhere to gender roles and any defiance is viewed as a taboo and may attract either sanctions or cleansing.

### **5. Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors of the manuscript declare that there is no interest in conflict, and all reference materials were dully acknowledged.

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