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Empowering the Disempowered: The *Dùndún* Drumming Tradition in a British Prison

Abstract

There are many reasons why people lose their confidence. This may include social discrimination and/or lack of love. As a result of the social practice and value system, some people also experience deprivation within society (like the people in prison), leading to loss of personal identity and power. Hence, the theory of empowerment has been used by many scholars to deal with the issues of the powerlessness of ethnic minority groups who experience denigration (see Collins, 1990). This paper focuses on four workshops that took place in a prison in Hampshire, England where I explored drumming as an empowering activity, using the *dùndún* (the ‘talking drums’), a set of a double-headed hourglass drums amongst the Yorùbá, an ethnic group in Nigeria. The workshops gave the participants the opportunity to express themselves freely within the British prison system. The names of the people are anonymised. I will be introducing a theory called ‘Nonsense Theory’, which I coined and explored with the workshop participants. The main theme is empowerment; other keywords are power, control, self-esteem, tradition and identity. Below is the analysis of the concept of empowerment within the *dùndún* drumming tradition, and why it might have resonance in a prison.

Empowerment within the *dùndún* drumming tradition

The *dùndún*, a set of bi-membranophonic drums with a wooden body of hourglass shape, is the most popular drum amongst the Yorùbá people in Nigeria (Eluyefa, 2013). The *dùndún* has two main sub-family ensembles. The *iyáàlù* sub-family consists of *iyáàlù dùndún*, *ìsáájú*, *ìkehìn*, *kẹ́ríkerì* and *shẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* (shaker), a dried gourd with beads and/or cowries woven into a net around it (see figure 1). The *gáangan* sub-family consists of *gáangan*, *kànnàngó*, and

àdàmò; the *gúdúgúdú*, the only single headed with a kettle drum shape in the ensemble, can be played in both sub-families. Furthermore, there is no restriction in the formation of the ensemble; members of one group can be used as substitutes or parts of another group. However, in both sub-families, only *gáangan* and *iyáàlù dùndún* can function as talking drums; others function as backing instruments with different but stable rhythms. Àyàn Àganlú (simply called Àyàn), a native of *Saworo* in Ìbàràbáland, is believed to be the creator of the *dùndún*. Laoye 1 says; “Àyàn taught some Yorùbá people the art of drumming” (1959: 10) and it is for this reason that “Àyàn is believed by all Yorùbá to be the father of the art of drumming” (Olaniyan, 1993: 54). The *dùndún* is not a religious drum, and its music is not restricted to any specific occasion.



Figure 1: A complete *dùndún* ensemble with the author.

Within the Yorùbá social culture, “the *dùndún* drummer hardly enjoys the kind of adulation showered on musical celebrities in places like Europe and America” (Euba, 1990: 95). The reason for this is that indigenous performing artists – travelling theatre practitioners, dancers, musicians, and poets – are regarded as beggars – *alágbe*, and they are seen as worthless social outcasts. Why are the practitioners called beggars? Firstly, performing arts are integral and fundamental part of the Yorùbá culture. In some cities, there may be as many as twenty community festivals in a year’s cycle of ceremonies and at such occasions, singing, drumming, dancing, magic and acrobatic displays, acting, dance-dramas, proverbial songs and oral poetry can be consumed free of charge. Therefore, doing these for money is seen as begging.

Secondly, the Yorùbá regard performing arts as talent-based jobs. The practice is usually family oriented; the skills and knowledge are passed orally from one generation to another. Therefore, indigenous performing artists do not have or need western education. However, the Yorùbá do not have appreciation for non-qualification jobs. Euba notes that:

Africans qualified in Western music are materially better off than practitioners of African traditional music. A first-class concert pianist can earn more by a single recital than an equally gifted traditional musician could hope to make in a year (1975: 56).

It is for this reason that an average traditional performing artist will ensure that his son acquire western education.

The *dùndún* practitioners have power within the Yorùbá musical culture, and they are respected in the course of performance nonetheless:

A drummer in the act of drumming is considered a sacred person and is immune from assaults and annoyances-nor must he be interrupted; they are not as a rule regarded sacred persons, but while engaged in the actual of drumming, they are protected by the privileges of sacred persons (Danquah, 1928: 2).

The presence of the *dùndún* drum is seen as the presence of Àyàn Àganlú, who the practitioners regard as their god of drumming. The practitioners are considered sacred because of the drum (Àyàn), giving them dual-identity, human and semi-divine. However, the Yorùbá chooses to prize the semi-divine identity of the practitioners higher than their human identity. It is for this reason that they are respected in the course of performance. It is the *dùndún* that acts as a spiritual insignia on every occasion where they are present. The *dùndún* is a symbol of authority and power. The practitioners control everybody in the performance space. They can play the drum to abuse, to console, to advise, and even to instigate a war. They are immune from any prosecutions. Whatever a *dùndún* practitioner does in the course of performance, it is conceived of as the god doing it. This boosts the self-esteem of the practitioners and contributes to their positive self-identity. These are the concepts of empowerment within the *dùndún* drumming tradition that the workshops also tried to explore. How and why might these translate into prison? How does this specific form offer potential to prison inhabitants from a wide and diverse background?

Prison inhabitants, like the *dùndún* practitioners, are regarded as social outcasts. As a result, they are “pathologised, criminalised and ridiculed” (Boyce-Tillman, 2007: 21), leading to low self-esteem and causing them to lose their freedom, identity and power. However, they can explore the embedded power in the *dùndún* tradition, like the practitioners, to increase their self-esteem, regain their lost freedom and power and transform their identity. They can enjoy the privileges of sacred people in the course of workshop irrespective of their status within the British prison system and their cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the *dùndún* can become a medium through which their voices can be heard.

The *dùndún* drumming workshops

In this part, I tend not to use derogatory terms such as inmates or prisoners throughout except where I quote from the literature or other sources. Balfour also thinks “it is wrong to label someone purely by a singular deed they have done” (2003: 30). I have chosen to use the word ‘mate’ to mean friend, the same term that I used throughout the workshops. I believed the use of derogatory terms could do damage to the self-esteem of the prison inhabitants.

I first visited this particular prison in Hampshire on 2 October 2006 – to facilitate a drumming workshop – to celebrate the ‘Black History Month’. Attendance was voluntary; those who attended had already signed the consent forms, and agreed to be interviewed during and/or after the workshops. The prison chaplain, who offered to be my gatekeeper, organised the workshops for me. Tushman and Katz explain that; “gatekeepers are those key individuals who are both strongly connected to internal colleagues and strongly linked to external domains” (1980: 1071). I had received all the necessary paperwork; I went with a complete set of drums from both *ìyáàlù* and *gáangan* sub-families and a number of extra *gáangan* drums, totalling fifteen.

The venue of the workshop was the prison chapel. There were a number of black people (of African descent) amongst the participants, but they were outnumbered by non-black.

However, I will discuss five of the participants. Shaun, born in Liverpool, was seventy five years old at that time. He identified himself as African Portuguese and a son of an African slave. He said his great grandparents were taken as slaves from Africa to Portugal and finally to Britain. He studied the 18th century history of the slave trade and psychology of music (music of Africa according to him). Liam, a guitarist, took a more or less passive role at the beginning. He learnt to play the guitar in prison. Another mate, Tim said he was born in Dominica and not Dominica Republic. Ben is a traditional drummer from South Africa. Charlie, calm and quiet, is from Jamaica; perhaps the youngest of them all in his mid-twenty.

We started with an exercise, which I have explored several times with people, facilitating rhythms, tempo and musical timing through clapping and the use of other body parts. It usually starts from the slowest and easiest pace, but once it gets faster people often lose their concentration. And whoever makes a mistake will be asked to stop; in this way we can have a winner. They were very tense; the process of engaging with the exercise “involved the whole - body, intellect, mind, etc.” (Floyd, 2008: 87). This was because of the significance of the exercise and the opportunity it provided for them. As the game progressed, they dropped out one by one until we had a winner. I rounded the game up, acknowledged their efforts and thanked them for their cooperation.

I talked about the *dùndún* drumming tradition, its associate values and the playing techniques for the two leading drums, the *gárgan* and *iyáàlu*. The notion of a talking drum generated a long debate. For Tim, “any drum could be a talking drum”; it is “how someone expresses

himself through music - emotion”. I acknowledged his views but also explained the concept of a talking drum within the *dùndún* drumming tradition. There was a problem, Tim is blind. Nonetheless, I hung a *gáangan* drum on his shoulder and asked him to press the strings of the drum under his armpit while he played simultaneously. He noticed that the drum has various tones. This was the changing moment in his musical experience. This led to a number of questions. Liam thought he might have seen a talking drum before. He said he had definitely seen Sikh people using the talking drum sticks during a television programme. Shaun’s response was that; “Africans went to India in those days, so talking drums might have gone with them”. He went on to say that; “emotion in music travelled to America and the New World through the African slave descendants in the form of soul music; music from the heart”.

For Ben, every drum can talk; “when there is no rain in the village the priest will perform some ritual and we will play the drums and the rain will come”. In order to appreciate such music, it is important to understand the underlying values of the culture of the people and the drum. Ben was talking about ritual drums, which are made from special ‘materials’, and bound up with the ritual ‘values’ and ‘beliefs’. The sound of the drums travels through the liminal space and establishes spiritual contact with the gods who then release rain. It is upon this belief system that Ben constructed his own meaning of a talking drum.

Ben also believed that drums communicate with each other when drummers play different rhythms during a performance. This interpretation is based on the theory of call and response, a succession of two or more distinct musical phrases usually played by two or many drummers within an ensemble, where one phrase is either a call or a response. In African music; “there are always at least two rhythms going on” (Chernoff, 1979: 42) at the same

time. The *dùndún* music, like any other traditional African music, is celebrated for its complex polyrhythms, which are interlocked.

The theory of call and response became the basis for the workshop. They were given a drum each and they quickly found a partner and started exploring the concept – one person would play a rhythm and another would respond with a different rhythm. This exercise created a context wherein everyone's musical ability was allowed and appreciated. It levelled experiential differences, making them equally capable and blocking the usual feelings of inadequacy and anxiety associated with learning new things. As a result of tone variations in the *dùndún*, they believed every rhythm they played to be a statement. They were laughing and making fun of each other like children. I allowed them to do whatever they wanted with the drums.

On 14 June 2007, they were passionately interested in employing the drums to talk. I had already taught them how this could be done. The two Yorùbá talking drums, *iyáàlù dùndún* or *gáangan*, divide the phrases into syllables according to their tonal patterns, and each syllable stands for a stroke. They are played by holding enough breath in the lungs. The drummer then simultaneously uses his imagination to identify the desired tones in his mind and holds his breath at that level before locating this on the drum. He then gradually releases his breath as he strikes the drum with the stick according to the number of syllables in the phrase. If he releases his breath before striking the drum, there is a possibility of losing the desired tones.

Ben asked me to show them. I played a popular song, 'Oh Lord my God when I in awesome wonder'. This first line of the familiar hymn has eleven syllables according to the *dùndún*

syllabic structure. They all sang along with their faces full of excitement, gazing at me admiringly and wondering how a small drum could speak so clearly. We spent much time learning how to employ the drum to talk. I later asked for a volunteer, someone who could try to talk with the drum, using their own phrases.

Charlie, the Jamaican, came forward. There was absolute quietness in the chapel. Suddenly, I noticed that his face changed as he struck the drum six times in accordance with the number of syllables in the phrase. This prompted me to ask what he thought he had played. There was a connection between what he played and his emotion. He simply replied “nothing”. After mounting pressure on him, he said that he had played; “songs of freedom I cry”. We all gazed at him in mute admiration. At that moment, I regretted that I asked him to tell us the phrase he had played. I did not sympathise with him, rather I empathised with him.

The training of a *dùndún* drummer starts from an early age of about five or six and this continues throughout his life span. Therefore, Charlie did not play the phrase correctly, but I did not pass any judgement. The goal of the workshop was not centred on the ability of the participants to employ the *dùndún* to talk or to make them keep the *dùndún* drumming traditions. Rather, it is to make them have authority over the drums and themselves, giving them the opportunity to be who they preferred to be without being controlled. This parallels Heidegger (1962)’s definition of authentic. The German word (*eigentlich*) translated as ‘authentic’ comes from a word meaning ‘own’ (*eigen*) and carries with it a connotation of owning oneself, owning to what someone is becoming, and taking responsibility for being one’s own. Therefore, to become who you are is to identify what really matters in the historical situation in which you find yourself and take a resolute stand on pursuing those ends.

Charlie was less concerned about his *dùndún* drumming skills. He played it as Charlie and not as a *dùndún* practitioner in Nigeria; he did not pretend to be someone else. He was authentic. The authenticity produced appropriate emotions, which would have not been possible if he had pretended to be someone else. It was this emotion that prompted my question.

We turned the song and the rhythm to a call and response activity. I played the song on the *ìyáàlu dùndún* many times and they responded each time by singing the song. I later gave everybody a drum each and asked them to play the response in any way they could. However, despite this, they kept trying to play the phrase correctly. They were full of energy because they engaged in an activity that produced a lot of excitement. The same phrase that produced sad emotion for Charlie later produced enthusiastic emotion for everybody. I allowed them to play with the drum. This gave them the confidence to express themselves freely without being worried about their mistakes.

Our main task on 18 June 2007 was to learn how to create fundamental rhythms, using improvisational techniques. However, ‘songs of freedom I cry’ has become an anthem for the mates. Therefore, we began where they left last time, learning to use the drum to sing the song. The excitement that this brought was immense. The structure of the original plan for the workshop changed; what I wanted was not what they wanted. However, I was flexible enough to accommodate their wishes. The most difficult part of the task, however, was the identification of the precise location of the desired tones on the drum for the phrase. We therefore spent the whole workshop session on this. I also gave them another task, creating

short, clear and correct phrases. We did this till they went for their lunch, which I also joined them.

On the last day, 5 July 2007, the workshop was centred on improvisation. However, as usual we began by singing and playing the mates' anthem, 'songs of freedom I cry'. The song usually produced the appropriate energy level that one could build on. I used the 'Nonsense Theory' that I created to teaching improvisation on drumming. Simply, nonsense means something that makes no sense. However, if we further analyse the motif behind a particular action, it may be possible to make sense out of it. For example, some people might see a clown's performance as nonsense because he fools himself. The meaning of his foolishness can be found in the happiness of others. If we succeed in reading a meaning to what is previously regarded as nonsense, then it becomes 'good nonsense'. This means that one can make sense out of nonsense by focusing on the end result of or the reason behind an action. To link this theory to practice, participants were asked to play whatever they could on their drums and then tell me what they thought they had played. As anticipated, they all said 'nonsense'. They expressed their disbelief, however, when I said that my interest was in the nonsense rhythms they thought they had played.

I gave them two improvisational techniques, which are vital to the application of the 'nonsense' theory. The first one was "holding: providing a music anchor and container for the music making, using rhythmic or tonal grounding techniques" (Wigram, 2004: 97). This approach is similar to vocal holding technique, which uses the voice to create a stable and consistent musical environment. This is the way the young drummers learn drumming in many African cultures. Nketia acknowledges this; "the instruction was not always on drums...instructor spoke rhythms" (1954: 40). The master drummer speaks the rhythms,

which are usually mnemonic phrases and the trainees say the rhythms with their mouths before playing them on their drums. This is because drummers play what they say, consciously or unconsciously. If you can say it, you can play it. I played a simple rhythm with my mouth and asked them to do the same with their mouths. After mastery of the rhythm, we all played it together at the same time on our various drums.

They were later asked to employ their voices to create individual stable and consistent rhythms, which became the music we all played together on the drums. This method “provides a strong, yet flexible, musical environment that is experienced as very safe and containing” (Austin, 1999: 145). It is safe because it was an individual creativity. An individual had control over the rhythm he created, giving them a sense of ownership.

The second technique that I taught them was “grounding: creating a stable containing music that can act as an anchor to the music” (Wigram, 2004: 91). Eluyefa refers to this as a fundamental rhythm; “the basic and steady rhythm which an individual drummer plays as part of a piece of music and which does not change” (2011: 67). I created a simple fundamental rhythm to serve as an anchor for the whole group and asked them not to pay attention to the ‘nonsense’ rhythm that I played in-between. While this was going, I played my own ‘nonsense’ rhythms on it, and then returned to the same fundamental rhythm that everybody was playing. I later invited participants one by one to play their own ‘nonsense’ rhythms and then return to the fundamental rhythm. While some of them did this well, some lacked the confidence to apply the theory. For example, because Shaun was curious about how others would do, he then lost his concentration and consequently missed his own fundamental rhythm.

Three things are vital to this theory. Firstly, “one must know the basic melodic arrangement” (Olaniyan, 1993: 60) of the ongoing music. This is why a stable fundamental rhythm is vital as it keeps the person improvising (playing nonsense rhythms) within the structure of the ongoing music. Secondly, “a mastery of one’s fundamental rhythm is vital because in a big and professional ensemble, each instrumentalist may have a different fundamental rhythm. Lastly, one must be able to return to the fundamental rhythm neatly” (Eluyefa, 2011: 68). To this end, improvisation is an act of creativity which can only be achieved by a professional drummer.

Creating a space ‘to be’

‘To be or not to be’ is a popular phrase within the theatre practice. The quotation, in practice, allows for a choice to be made. However, this is not the same within the justice system paradigm where the choice has already been made for prison inhabitants. Hence, ‘to be’ in that context is a form of punishment. A new concept of ‘to be’ emerged during the workshops, which provided the participants with an atmosphere that made the venue of the workshop, in the same prison, a place ‘to be’. This is evident in Ben’s personal statement:

Dennis before you came I was here at 2 o’ clock waiting for you, but you did not come, so I went back to my cell but asked the guard to let me know when you are here. Whilst I was in my cell I heard you playing the drum; the sound of the drum was a confirmation that you are here. It was as if the drum was calling me or telling me that I should be here and not in the cell. I could feel the drums calling me, calling me but the guard was not around then and I had to press the bell continuously. That’s why I bang the door. These drums are like electricity.

The workshop was scheduled to start from 2 o' clock, but I was late due to the security check. The warden usually brings the mates out after I have arrived and set up. There was a dramatic shift of power between Ben and the warden. Ben was allowed to leave his cell before my arrival. As Ben was overrun by the excitement that the workshop was able to provide for him, the only place he wanted 'to be' was the chapel. He was later led back to his cell, but Ben started banging the door of his cell when he heard the sound of the drum. Interestingly, his action was not seen as offence.

Voice for the voiceless

Within the *dùndún* drumming tradition, practitioners have a freedom of speech, which is considerably wider in the context of a performance than they would normally enjoy when using the natural medium of speech outside the performance context. Charlie and other mates were protected by this rule. They were able to utter their feelings – songs of freedom I cry – through the drum, which ordinarily they would not have been able to say. Charlie felt relieved that he was finally able to speak his mind. This was his view during our discussion:

Author: Charlie, can I ask you something, why did you choose that song, why not another one?

Charlie: That is what came to my mind straight.

Author: Apologies for saying this. Is it because you are here?

Charlie: Yes, it is everybody's dream here to be free one day, but I don't know, I don't know when that can happen. I think too much.

Author: Do you often sing the song in your cell?

Charlie: No, I only sing it in my mind. You can't sing that kind of a song here.

Author: So, you use the drum to say what is in your mind.

Charlie: Yes, it is another way of expressing my feelings and thoughts.

Voice is an important “channel through which to express or ‘push out’ something from inside” (Newham, 1999:14). This is intimately linked to one’s emotions and may provide a powerful measure of a person’s state of mind. However, if the level of emotion is too high, one may be speechless and not able to push out what is inside. The *dùndún*, through its tone variations, can replace the voice and then provide the opportunity to express emotions that may otherwise be too difficult or traumatic to express through the natural voice. The *dùndún* can be a useful way of providing containment and validation for strong emotions, particularly when the feelings are too intense. An example of this was the ‘songs of freedom I cry’, which Charlie played with the drum.

Within the Yorùbá culture, a *dùndún* drummer is not only able to speak his own mind, he is also able to express the feelings and aspirations of his community and act as a spokesman for specific clients when occasions demand it. The ability to think spontaneously and be creative is a prerequisite of a *dùndún* drummer; they are sensitive to the people around them and the situational context of every event. Charlie seemed to have spoken the minds of other mates without previous arrangement. He acted as their spokesperson, and the drum was their surrogate device.

Control, freedom, authority and authenticity

One of the concepts of empowerment within the *dùndún* drumming tradition is control. The time the mates spent in the drumming workshops was the only period that they were allowed

to take control of themselves. The workshops encouraged and supported the value of providing the mates with opportunities for choice and control. They created their own spaces in a free and relaxed environment. They controlled everything in the space including the drum and the people. For those who were not fit physically or psychologically, supporting them to take control of the space was important. This enabled Tim to attain an authentic sense of his feelings and accomplishments despite the fact that he is blind. I took a flexible and adaptable approach to encourage this.

Hui, Au and Fock define psychological empowerment as “the internal feelings of self-control and self-efficacy” (2004: 48). Psychological empowerment is interpreted here around four cognitions developed by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) – meaning, self-determination, impact and competence. These four dimensions reflect active orientation – an orientation in which individuals, within a group, wish and feel able to shape their activity – rather than a passive set of activities which turn people to mere observers.

Meaning is formed in relation to the individuals’ ability to accomplish a task. It involves a fit between the requirements of a task and beliefs, values, and behaviours (Brief and Walter, 1990). A goal was set with a purpose in mind, and participants were evaluated in relation to how that goal was achieved. The meaning of a task was around the accomplishment of the task and the accomplishment of the task was centred on self-belief, self-motivation and values in oneself. As Thomas and Velthouse suggest; “intrinsic task motivation requires that we value positively experiences that we derive directly from a task” (1990: 668). For example, all the participants perceived and called themselves ‘talking drummers’ and Àyàns because they accomplished the tasks given to them. They acquired a new identity for

themselves because they found their empowerment in the tradition. They believed that they merited the title, and I acknowledged them as such.

There are two categories of the *dùndún* practitioners in Nigeria though they cannot be distinguished during a performance. The first are those who were born and brought up in the *dùndún* drumming families; “they form part of their identity around Àyàn Àganlú by carrying the prefix Àyàn’ in their names to denote their profession, thus Àyántóyè, Àyànkúnlé, Àyányemí, Àyánbùnmi, etc.” (Eluyefa, 2011: 46). The prefix becomes part of the identity of the practitioners, and an important element of authenticity within the *dùndún* drumming tradition. The second are those who practise the profession as a result of interest. These people do not carry the prefix Àyàn in their names. The practitioners in the first category consider themselves to be the ‘authentic’ *dùndún* practitioners because of the prefix in their names. As a result, they use a derogatory term, Àyántójúbò (talking drummers who poked their noses into other people’s profession), for those in the second category in an attempt to stamp their authority within the profession.

A *dùndún* practitioner denied me the title in Nigeria in 2006. He placed the value of the profession on the tradition of being born into a *dùndún* drumming family and not on the talent. But I had negotiated for myself a compromise between the two systems. My value system lay in both the talents and elements of the tradition. Moreover, the Yorùbá do not make a clear distinction between the two. They believe that all traditional and professional drummers must be Àyàn, irrespective of the drum they play and whether they come from the *dùndún* drumming families or not. As a result, all practitioners are readily called Àyàn during the performance; “Àyàn is a name as well as a title” (Eluyefa, 2013: 217). What the people see is the drum, and it is this drum that changes the identity of the drummers. For the mates,

the notion of acquiring the name Àyàns is clearly not possible by birth but only by skills acquisition. If I had refused them the title, I also did not merit the same title, which the people used to call me whenever I performed in Nigeria.

Self-determination is an individual's sense of having a choice in creating, initiating and regulating actions (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989). This includes the opportunity to come up with one's own ideas without being inhibited or intimidated by one's surrounding. This happened to the participants during the workshops. They felt determined to use the drum to sing 'songs of freedom I cry' correctly. They also felt determined to create their own individual piece of music when I asked them to. For them, creating their own piece of music and regulating how they wanted it to go was seen as one of their accomplishments.

Impact is the degree to which an individual is able to influence others and activities in his or her immediate environment. Thomas and Velthouse define it as ““making a difference” in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task, that is, producing intended effects in one's task environment” (1990: 672). It is the effect or result that one's action has over other people around him during the course of that action. On my side, my drumming skills, which I demonstrated on the *dùndún*, had an impact on the participants. This changed their attitudes towards themselves and also made them believe that they could also play the drum to talk. Charlie's song of freedom also had a tremendous impact on other mates and me. This song made me rethink my own position and be thankful to God for giving me the freedom to do whatever I wanted, even to the point of visiting them in the prison. The *dùndún* and certain aspect of its tradition also had an impact on the self-perception of the participants. They saw themselves as talking drummers and not as 'prisoners' during the workshops.

Competence is a personal conviction in one's ability to perform the tasks given to him with skills. Central to this are beliefs, personal mastery, or effort-performance expectancy (Bandura, 1977). Competence can be similar to self-esteem, 'a general feeling of self-worth' (Brockner, 1988). Individuals who hold themselves in high esteem are likely to extend and express their competency in whatever they do. They are also likely to assume an active participation with regard to any task given to them.

Competence is also similar to locus of control; "individuals with an internal locus of control regarding life in general are more likely to feel capable of shaping their...environment" (Spreitzer, 1995: 1446). The locus of control is characterised by internal and personal conviction of individuals regarding their lives rather than the external circumstances and environmental situation. It lies in one's internal urge towards a goal. Charlie had conviction that he could use the drum to talk and he demonstrated his competency. However, individuals with low self-esteem are not likely to see themselves as competent in whatever they do. They are not likely to make a difference or influence their task or group. They are more likely to hold a passive view in a group. On the first day of the workshop, Tim and Liam had low self-esteem. They held themselves with high self-esteem afterwards and became active.

Confidence was a big issue on the first day for all of them. However, this changed by the time the workshop started. They joined in the discussion; they contributed constructively to the debate about the concept of the talking drum. They kept asking questions about how the drums are made. They simply wanted to know everything about the *dùndún* and its drumming tradition. They were not hindered by their environment anymore. Their mood suddenly changed from being passive to being active. They were willing to join in all the activities and undertake any tasks. They made every effort to ensure that they also played the phrase

exactly how I played it. The forum allowed for true expression and because the moment mattered to them, they engaged with the process authentically.

The project has made me realise that there are always elements of children in every human being, and being a child has nothing to do with age. During the workshops, the mates displayed a childlike and innocent quality when I played the drum to sing the song, 'Oh Lord my God when I in awesome wonder'. And when I asked them to work in pairs and create a call and response phrase, I realised that the best grown-up ideas can come from being silly, from being a childlike adult. They were laughing and teasing each other like children. One warden said that such uninhibited displays of happiness and enthusiasm were very rare amongst them. They found their empowerment in the activity. This is because the workshops created a therapeutic space where communication and authentic interactions developed.

They also found their empowerment in Charlie's song. The excitement that the song brought to them was obvious, and because of their emotion, mood and willingness to sing and play this song, I gave them the psychological support they needed. The energy level was high throughout the project. They were enthusiastic as they played the *dùndún* for their own amusement and fun. The atmosphere was relaxing and entrancing, creating a sense of unity made for a great feeling of togetherness and community. Ben's expressed his feelings during our conversation; "Yes, I'm seeing myself outside. I'm dizzy. I'm dizzy. (Everybody laughs). I'm thinking I'm outside. I'm jumping bum-bum-bum-pa-bum...I'm far away – I'm there. I'm dizzy. I'm dizzy. Da Da Da Da-da Da-da Da". At that moment, Ben did not see himself again as someone living in confinement, but as someone performing in their village shrine. This means that only the body can be imprisoned, the spirit cannot be imprisoned.

I realised that many of them were good drummers but the British prison system has denied them the opportunity to engage with the practice. Liam was already a guitarist, and Ben was a drummer from South Africa. They had the sense of rhythms; they could hold the rhythms together. Therefore, when asked if they could call themselves talking drummers or Àyàns, I readily said yes, and this then became part of their identity. They were polite and respectful. There were no traces of criminality in their behaviour or action, and this made me wonder why they got into prison. They showed signs of remorse as they reflected on Charlie's song and the project. However, almost everyone was terribly unhappy when the project was over. When I went back to the prison, many of them had been transferred to another prison for various reasons. This was because of the mobility policy in the prison system in England, which did not give me the opportunity to evaluate and monitor the participants.

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