

Pounding Yam Is Not The Will Of God

This is seventy-nine percent of a true story on the ungodly and self destructive exercise of yam pounding — by Mof'Oluwawo O MojolaOluwa



The Kalahari Review [Follow](#)

Aug 28, 2019 · 4 min read

I pounded yam today. I wish I never have to again. For the act, the art, the skill of pounding yam is one I do not possess, nor do I think I ever will. See for eons, I have held the belief and preached same to anyone and everyone who cares to listen, that pounding yam is an exercise in futility. The energy you expend is the exact same you gain, eating the pounded yam, if not less. I like to liken it to riding a bicycle, whereof you expend the same energy you might have expended walking, to cover the same distance. Again, not much gained, so much lost.

Have you ever watched a yam pounding scene? Aren't you rather worried at the thought of humans hitting a pestle mercilessly and repeatedly against innocent cuts of cooked vine root, in a mortar, mashing them up, massacring their destinies, pulping up their glories? Is it not rather scary that humans would stop at nothing in beating this creation of God up into their palate's preferences and wants?

I pounded yam today. I have never felt so punished. My hands became jittery, my fingers stiff and numb after about ten minutes of continuous pounding. I was only helping out at the cook's behest, and then she left me to myself, to cook soup. I was going to collapse before it dawned on me I could not tell my Maker I returned to Him so early because of food, ordinary food. So I restored my senses to factory settings, dropped the pestle and walked out of the kitchen. Indeed it took a while for my own father and mother to believe I did not actually have the ability to pound and was not feigning weakness. But I live with a different family now. The very first time I was asked to help with the pounding, I gladly obliged. In these parts one is under constant pressure to save face and

not disgrace one's local government in public. Besides, who wants a sermon on how to be a good wife for not being able to do something as mundane as pounding yam? Not me! When I was done, or thought I had done a good job, the result was a lumpy mass of an off-white edible that didn't really make the cut by kitchen standards. And the cook had to pound it again. But that did not stop her from asking me a second time- I guess people just never take the cue! And no, I was not trying to make a point? Even when I went out of my way to pound with my spirit, soul and body like I did today, I could never get the right consistency. It was either not as thick or as elastic as it should be, or simply lumpy.



I know that pounding yam is not the will of God. I was fourteen when my only maternal cousin permanently dislocated a forearm while pounding yam. The arm actually detached from the socket, we were all shocked! It took five months of therapy and constant medication before she could write another alphabet with that hand. She was twelve. I could not bear to eat pounded yam for the next five years. The mere thought of it irked me. It's why Uncle Francis banned me from ever visiting his family on holidays- I would never join his pounded yam loving wife in the exercise. And no, she did not really like pounded yam, she just happened to believe it was a sacred, man pleasing, husband

securing tradition which must be upheld no matter what. Even when she was eight months pregnant the last time I visited, pounded yam still happened every other day.

I pounded yam today, I have no blessings in my heart for the man who invented this exercise. And yes, I call it an exercise- an exercise in futility. I know he's a man because women do better. We make life easier- we invented the chocolate-chip cookies for crying out loud! So also the dishwasher, the disposable diaper, the windshield wiper, the ice cream maker, the ironing board and a lot of other things that basically make human life and living easier but hey, we're still talking about pounded yam.

There are innovations on this exercise now. I was quite happy when I first learnt one could blend boiled yam into pounded yam or use a mechanical yam pounder. I was even more elated when I learnt of pouno yam, packaged pounded yam flour. But no, my conservative family members would have none of it, if they did not think the one was chemical, they thought the other was a sacrilege, a blatant disrespect to the original act of mortar and pestle yam pounding. It's appalling to think that pounding yam is still a yard stick for determining if a young girl is wife material, it is even more appalling to think that some so called educated and exposed folks would not accept the innovative alternatives to this ungodly act. Times without number, I have been excluded from lunch simply because I did not participate in the pounding, but I have no qualms not eating from food I did not prepare. If only I could go scot free, without the accompanying persecution.

I pounded yam today, this is seventy-nine percent of a true story.

. . .

Mof'Oluwawo O MojolaOluwa is a Nigerian writer and a lawyer. She has written for a number of literary and legal research publications in print and electronically — and has been published in six anthologies of fiction and poetry. She is currently working on a novel and an anthology of poetry. She blogs at oluwapelumimojolaoluwalivingstone and follow her on Twitter [@leslivingstones](https://twitter.com/leslivingstones).

[Fiction](#)

[Mofoluwawo O Mojolaoluwa](#)

[African Literature](#)

[African Food](#)

[About](#) [Help](#) [Legal](#)

