

1 Proverbs and Gender Equalities and Equities in African 2 Cultures: Yoruba Culture as A Case Study

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6

7 **Abstract**

8 Proverbs in Yoruba culture recognize the natural dichotomy that exists between male and
9 female. But while it recognizes their co-existence, it as well underlines the fact that the
10 relationship between women and men should be founded on equality. It is part of human
11 nature to want to dominate one another. When this happens, both the oppressed and
12 oppressor invent a proverb to back his or her position. And so while the oppressor would event
13 one to justify his or her position, the oppressed would also think deeply and invent one that
14 would show that the oppressor is oppressing him or her. To invent a proverb one must be
15 intelligent and have vast human experience of sociocultural activity of his or her environment.
16 It is not enough to be intelligent it has to be combined with age steeped in wide and vast
17 experience. It is this that makes a good proverb stands the test of time.

18

19 **Index terms**— Gender Equalities and Equities, natural dichotomy.

20 **1 Introduction**

21 Proverbs play a lot of roles in the culture of the Yorubas, and its application depends on the situation at hand. It
22 is used to buttress or stress a point in the course of discussion. Because of the natural sex dichotomy between
23 female and male, Yoruba culture also assigns roles to these two entities based on the natural differences. In
24 short, there is gender in role, which females and males perform in the Yoruba society. But from time immemorial
25 there have always been attempts by either of the two sexes trying to cross over each other's lines. A successful
26 attempt in this provides precedent from which a proverb could then be invented. In short, while Yoruba proverbs
27 recognize the natural dichotomy in sex, it does not always recognize the extension of these to other social roles.

28 In Yoruba culture for instance males dominate governance but females were not totally excluded, though
29 they were underrepresented. Truly, traditional rulers are mostly males but there are instances where females
30 also become traditional rulers either in acting capacity (regents) or substantive in some communities. Ekiti and
31 Ondo communities are typical examples of these. Some communities in these two areas even have parallel female
32 and male political institutions that are still maintained up till today. So, while there are princes, so are there
33 princesses, kings and queens, gods and goddesses. And while there are priest, so are there priestesses. All these
34 led to invention of proverb such as *meji meji ni Olorun da 'le aye, tako tabo* (God created the world in binary
35 form, female or male, positive or negative).

36 This paper tries to examine proverbs that emphasize the equalities and equities of female and male in power
37 allocation and distribution, governance, religion and economy etc. In so doing evidences to justify these will be
38 provided.

39 **2 II.**

40 **3 Definitions**

41 Two important words that need to be defined here are gender and proverb. Yoruba language defines proverb
42 thus: *Owe lesin oro, ti oro ba so nun, owe la fi ng wa a.* (Proverbs are the horses words ride, when word is

43 lost, proverb is used to detect it). Oxford Advanced learners' dictionary defines proverb as "a short well-known
44 sentences or phrase that states a general truth about life or gives advice" ??Hornby et al, 1974:933) Gender, in
45 its simplest definition, is defined by Ada, as the socially constructed roles given to men and women in a society.
46 According to her, Gender is different from sex because it is not biologically determined. While one's sex does
47 not change, gender roles can change from culture to culture and over time ??Ude, 2006:1). Ritzer on the other
48 hand says gender is A Year often used euphemistically in sociology for "women", the sociology of gender is more
49 precisely, the study of socially constructed male and female roles, relations and identities ??Ritzer, 1996:446).

50 4 III.

51 Equalities and Equities of Women with Men

52 One of the proverbs that unequivocally state the equality of men and women is ibi ko ju ibi, bi ati beru bee
53 la bi ome (the process of birth is not different, the way a free child was born so was that of a slave). Similarly
54 is the one that states that aparo kan ko ga ju okan lo afi eyin to ba gori ebe. (Literally it means all animals are
55 equal but some are more equal than others). The justification of these proverbs for the equality of women with
56 men is supported by two Ifa verses. In fact these verses emphasize superiority of women over men. These two
57 Ifa verses -OGBE-WATE and OSA-GUD -respectively state that:

58 Odu-Ifa Ogbe-Wate Ifa Verse (Ogbe-Wate)

59 Yemowo ni obinrin ekini ti o ko Yemowo was the first woman to be Wa laye, oun si ni olori gbogbo in this
60 world, and she was the leader Obinrin ati jo. Ilu okunrin wa kete, of all women in those days. The town of
61 obinrin wa kete nigba atijo, Men was far apart, that of women was also Far apart in those days Sugbon ni igba ti
62 ara awon obinrin When women could no longer endure this Ko gba a lati ma nikan gbe Yemowo Yemowo carried
63 out rituals, she carried Ru ebo yii tan, o ko gbogbo obinrin All women to the town of men. As soon as Lehin lo
64 si ilu okunrin. Bi gbogbo won they got near the border of the town Ti de ehin odi ilu naa, Yemowo ati Yemowo
65 and Mesan that brought owa to the Mesa Ti o mu owa naa lowo wa si lu u na Town begged them, instantly
66 women a bee Awon obinrin, won wa ng yoju wo won began to peep at men from their camp Lati ori odi, won
67 fi owo pe won ki won Using hands; they beckoned on men to come Wo le wa, awon okunrin si n fowo pe Using
68 hands, men also asked women to come Awon obinrin pe ki awon obinrin jade to them. wa Bayi ni won n se titi
69 ara awon okunrin They engaged in this for a long time until men were unable to endure it any longer.

70 5 Ko gbaa mo?Nigba ti aka gbogbo won

71 When they were all brought to Obatala De odo Obatala Obatala lo mu Yemowo Obatala took Yemowo Ti o si
72 pin obinrin fun olukuluku okunrin and distributed the rest of the women to men Lati ojo naa ni okunrin kii tiile
73 fi ife since then it became difficult for men to hide Obinrin pa mo si nu, sugbon tii maa wi their affection for
74 women and have to Jade ni enu tire: bi o si ti wu ki obinrin express this verbally: but no matter the Fee to, yoo
75 fi pamo sinu interest of woman, they would hide it.

76 (Akinwovo, 1986:120) (Our translation)

77 The other Ifa verse, Osa-Guda, corroborated this story. According to it: Igba ti Ela tabi Olofin-Otete, ti as si
78 tun n pe ni Oduduwa atewonro to lo gba ado-asuwa ni awon eniyan bere sii se ajumogbepo. Saaju eyi, okookan
79 laa da gbe. Iyawo kii gbe odo oko re. Bi took-taya ba fe bara won lopo, o di ki won wa ara won kan. Bi won
80 ba si ti se tan, o di ki won pinya ??Akiwovo, 1986:120) When Ela or Olofin-Otete, that is also referred to as
81 Oduduwa atewonro went to collect secret of existence, and this marked the beginning of cohabitation of men
82 and women. Before then, we lived separately; wife did not co-exist with her husband. But when they wanted
83 to mate, only then they searched for each other. When they had finished with themselves, they fall apart again
84 (Our translation)

85 The emphasis of these proverbs is that the halved of male and female by nature is not intended for one to
86 exercise dominion on the other but rather acting as supplements, complements and companion to each other. An
87 Ife historian and a versatile traditional exponent of Yoruba culture, Chief Fabunmi, as Ilesanmi noted, used to
88 say during many public gatherings that:

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92 Meji meji l'Olorun daye wa yii: God created our world in binary forms: Tosan-toru, toke-tile, tako-tabo Day and
93 night, hill and valley, male and female Tarugbo-toyiti, tile-toko, toba-tijoye

94 The aged and the young, the house and the farm, The king and the chief Toorun-tosupa, tonile-talejo,
95 The sun and the moon, the resident and the tawo-togberi

96 The sun and the moon, the resident and the Visitor, the initiated and the uninitiated Teniyan-teranko, toko-
97 taya,

98 The human and the brute, the husband the wife, teru-tomo.

99 The slave and the son, etc. ??Ilesanmi, 1998:29) But because males have taken advantages of females' weakness,
100 especially in the acts of carrying pregnancies and nursing of children, during which time they became less active,

101 females had thus resolved to limit themselves to less strenuous roles. However, society erroneously accepted this
102 as societal value and thus felt that there are male and female roles. Biologically, yes, there are male and female
103 roles. While females carry the pregnancy, deliver it and feed it with breast-milk, males produce the semen that
104 result in pregnancy. But in gender, this is not true. This was what Ada meant when she said, "While one's
105 sex does not change, gender roles can change from culture to culture and over time" ??Ude, 2006:1). Women,
106 by themselves, have however proved this wrong as is evident mostly in how they have challenged their male
107 counterparts spiritually and temporally: governance and power sharing arrangements in traditional rule.

108 **8 IV.**

109 **9 Proverbs, Women and Spirit**

110 Yorubas belief in male and female spirits (god and goddesses) but hold that male spirit (god) is superior to that of
111 male (goddess). This informed the invention of proverb that says Sango loko oya (god of thunder is the husband
112 of goddess of river, Oya). The word 'husband' is used euphemistically to mean superior. But realistically, Yoruba
113 culture regards goddesses as wives of gods. For instance while Sango (god of thunder) has Oya (goddess of river)
114 as wife, and Yemoo (goddess of the grove) is the wife of Obatala (god of divinity), Olokun (goddess of the sea, the
115 giver of children, healer of abdominal diseases) is the wife of Oduduwa the progenitor of Yoruba race (Akorede,
116 1997:81-82) Sunday ??ribune, 2003:32).

117 But classification of Oduduwa, the progenitor of Yoruba race as male god is seriously disputed. As a matter
118 of fact, fresh evidences shows that the progenitor of Yoruba race was a female. While Bishop Samuel Ajayi
119 Crowther "makes Oduduwa not a male ancestor but a goddess, Lt. Col. A.B. Ellis, in his "The Yoruba speaking
120 people of the Slave Coast of West Africa" wrote about Oduduwa thus: "Oduduwa is the wife of Obatala, but
121 she was coeval with Olorun (God) and not made by him, as was her husband" ??Nigerian Tribune, 2006:35).
122 "Oduduwa represent the earth, married to the anthropomorphic sky-god. Obatala and Oduduwa, or heaven
123 and earth resembling, says the priests, two large cut-calabashes, which when once shut can never be opened"
124 (Nigerian Tribune, 2006:35).

125 V.

126 **10 Proverbs, Women and Power**

127 In traditional Yoruba society, as in other areas, there is power in gender exercised by traditional ruling elites. But
128 most men and women do not know this because while the one exercised by men is temporal that of the women is
129 spiritual and hence erroneously held the view that women had no power of their own, or if they had at all, it was
130 inferior to those of men. But our research has proved this wrong. To Ayo Opefeyitimi, women's power as against
131 that of their male counterpart is "celestial, terrestrial, sophisticated and unrivalled, transcending those of men".
132 Ilesanmi, on the other hand, identifies women's power as "power of endurance coupled with psychological, cultic,
133 menstrual, lunar and water". Added to these mosaic powers were women's beauties and good conducts they used
134 to influence not only their husbands but other admirers of their beauties and conducts.

135 Whereas, Ilesanmi argues, men dominate temporal power women not only dominate spiritual powers but also
136 monopolize it. In his terms, "While men rely on force and medicinal power in fighting wars, women rely on
137 psychological and cultic knowledge, which are by far superior. Women can use their knowledge to disarm the
138 strongest of men" ??Ilesanmi, 1998:36). Simi Afonja sums it all up when she said "Women's power over men and
139 women therefore derived from supernatural sources and could consequently be classified as a negative mechanism
140 which developed in part from the weaker position of women relative to that of men in Yoruba households" (Simi
141 Afonja, 1983:150) But men's domination of temporal world is even contested. Professor Akinjogbin contested
142 this on three grounds: first is "the power and influence of women in Ebi which you might call 'home'". To him
143 the affairs of the home: bearing and rearing of children, taken care of the husband and home in terms of cooking
144 and feeding the children as well as the husband is dominated by women. In short the entire management of the
145 homes are under the control of the women. But more than that they also keep two homes: their natural homes,
146 birthplace, and their matrimonial homes. Secondly, is

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149 "the power and influence of the woman in the political order". Here, women disagreement with any political
150 decision emanating from the palace is reflected in the way they stormed the "palace" ground wearing their dresses
151 inside out under the leadership of Iyalode (women leader) (Akinjogbin, 2002:141).

152 In extreme cases, they had power to force the king out of the palace by appearing stark naked to him. "To
153 prevent the king from seeing this he was rushed out of the palace or else "it meant he had seen his heaven (i.e.
154 the passage through which he came into the world and could therefore no longer live. If fortunately he did not
155 see them, the women would be placated and the issue settled in their favour" ??Akinjogbin, 2002:142). This
156 informed the proverb Ogboju lokunrin ni, Obinrin lo lagbara (men own boldness while women own power)

157 Most men, through proverb, often deride women on the source of temporal and spiritual powers exercisable
158 in the society. One of such proverbs is awo egungun lobinrin le se, awo gelede lobinrin le mo, t'obinrin ba fo ju

159 doro oro agbee (only the secret cults of Masquerade and gelede could women be part of, if they dare to be part
160 of that of Oro, Oro would consume them). But there is a counter proverb that says in defense of women: bi a o
161 ba ri obinrin awo ee pe (any secret activity without women is incomplete).

162 Traditional power in Yorubaland comes under two classifications, temporal and spiritual. The "two coexist
163 with spiritual powers being given slightly greater authority" (Akinjogbin, 2002:151). It is conceptualized to mean
164 power shared among the traditional rulers, their council of chiefs, religious leaders, cults of various types such
165 as, in the case of Yorubas, Egungun (masquerade), Oro (this is an annual event in Yorubaland when women and
166 indeed females: young or old are not expected to go out of their houses for certain number of hours -6A.M to
167 2P.M -the most useful part of the day, for a period of seven days. On the seventh day, it is in-door throughout),
168 Gelede, Osugbo and others.

169 Of all the priestesses of various gods the most important ones are the cults because their function is unique
170 and thus membership restricted but the restriction never precluded women. According to Barber, cults are "ones
171 of the most important arenas in which women exercise power and influence" (Barber, 1991:274). Asked about
172 powerful women in the past, Chief Sobaloju, according to Barber, said:

173 Those whom we can call great women in the old days were those who practiced traditional religion. They
174 could say what was going to happen, and it would happen. There were many of them, in all cults. Some were
175 greater than other. I don't know their names. They were devotees of Oya, Osun, (Ebe in Igbo) (goddesses of
176 rivers), Sango (goddess of Thunder), of Enla, of Orisaala -all kinds (Barber, 1991:274)

177 These cults according to Biobaku, "stood between the sacred chief and his subject, preventing one from
178 becoming despotic and ensuring proper subordination of the other" (Ekong, 1989 ??132, Ikelegbe, 1989 ??147,
179 Osaghae, 1989:59).

180 As a matter of fact the pre-eminence of woman in secret activities is underscored by an Ifa verse, which states
181 that the first woman to be created controlled all secrerets including that of Oro. But the woman divulged these
182 secrets to a male deity who upstaged her and decreed that women should henceforth be less involved in secret
183 matters (Guardian, 2003:BB22).

184 However, special class of women exercises these power types, and varied nomenclatures are ascribed to them:
185 Iya-aye (Women of the world); Iya-mi or Awon Iya wa (witch or witches; 'our mothers') or Obinrin-kunrin
186 (Women-men). They are the ones "divinely let into the secrets of life (awon la kole aye le lowo) (Simi Afonja,
187 1983: 150, Opefeyitimi, 1998:44, Faleti 1972: P29, ??lesanmi, 1998:31) A demonstration of how women exercise
188 some of these powers could be found in the government and administration of old Oyo Empire. If Alaafin of
189 Oyo, in the days of Oyo Empire, wanted to misbehave, women, especially Palace women had power to check him.
190 Within the then Oyo traditional institution, Johnson identified a woman that constituted an institution of her
191 own able to arrest the king for misdemeanor. The power of the king and that of his official mother (Iya-Oba) was
192 checked by another woman official, though lower in rank to the king's official mother but more powerful than her.
193 This powerful woman official was called Olosi. She had power to arrest the king and "put in irons if he offends".
194 This powerful woman was said to be the "feudal head of Aseyin, Oluwo and the Baale of Ogbomosho (these
195 traditional ruler were kings in their own rights, in their various towns, Iseyin, Iwo and Ogbomosho). However,
196 once a woman ascended into this office, according to Johnson, "she is, of course, to be celibate for life" (Johnson,
197 1921:58).

198 12 VI.

199 13 Proverbs, Women and Governance

200 In traditional rulership, women have for long been marginalized. Most traditional rulers in Yoruba cities, towns
201 and villages are mostly male. Where females traditional rulers are found at all, they are there as regents. It has
202 thus become a tradition in every Yorubaland for male domination of traditional rulership. And this is backed up
203 by a proverb which according to Mary Modupe Kolawole, states that Iyalode ko ni dagba dagba ko ni o un fe je
204 Oba ilu (The women chief will never aspire to the king's throne) (Mary ??olawole, 1998:21) Year circumstances
205 such as war stresses, women inability to keep secrets and treachery forced them out of contention; even then their
206 exclusion was not total. War stresses as one of the reasons is anchored on the fact that the kingdoms were often
207 engaged in wars against each other, and against other neighbouring people. Thus, because of these incessant
208 wars, most of the "states had male war-gods as their protective deities" (Alagoa, 1992:Pv.)

209 Inability of women to keep secret as a result of which they lost their pre-eminence in traditional ruler ship
210 is underscored by an Ifa verse, which states that the first woman to be created controlled all secrets. But the
211 woman divulged these secrerets to a male deity who upstaged her and decreed that women should henceforth be
212 less involved in secret matters.

213 Treachery as part of the reasons for pushing women out of being traditional rulers in the pre-colonial days has
214 to do with men. If the male deity to whom the woman counterpart divulged the secret had kept the confidence
215 reposed in him and was not power ambitious it would not have been easy for the man to make use of the
216 information made available to him by the woman to organize a putsch against her (Guardian, 2003:BB22).

217 Added to the above-mentioned reasons were the rigours of childbirth and marriage. Among many Nigerian
218 communities were the wrong notions that women were weaker sex and therefore can never be head although they
219 are disciplined and harsh ??Faseke, 1998:151) These form the basis of women challenge of male domination of

220 traditional ruler ship. These in turn form the basis for the proverb: ki lokunrin ng se ti obinrin ko le se? (What is
221 it that men do that women cannot do). In the pre-colonial days there are evidences of women traditional rulers in
222 two of the most important kingdoms in Yorubaland: Ife and Oyo and even today you have some of them (women
223 traditional rulers), in part of Ondo, Ekiti and Oyo states. See Tables 1&2. Sources : Dailies, Periodicals, books
224 and fieldwork.

225 The equality of women with men in traditional rule is nowhere more prominent in proverbs than in a popular
226 proverb among the people of Owu kingdom, which according to Johnson, says: Abimo l'Owu oni ako tabi abo
227 ni, ewo ni yio se omo ni be? (a child is born at Owu, and you ask male or female: which will be a proper child?)
228 ??Johnson, 1921:206). By this proverb, among the people of Owu, sex has nothing to do with who occupies
229 traditional stool but ability to perform.

230 However, in places with rigid patriarchal domination, females rebelled by embarking upon formations of similar
231 governing institutions to intervene in monopolization of governance by males. This, in the pre-colonial days, led
232 to establishment of what is variously called "dual-sex political system", "dualism of nature" or "man-woman bi-
233 polarity" (Uchen, 2001:42&43, McDonnell, 2003:11, Yoruba voice, 2005:14). In Ilesha, Osun State, for instance,
234 in response to the tyranny of male rule, each neighbourhood had its own female chief chosen by the female members
235 of that neighbourhood and she represented them in the council of women chiefs. Among the Ondos and Ijero-
236 Ekiti as well, women had their own complete governing institutions and leaders "Oba"(king) called Lobun or
237 'Oba obinrn' (Queen) in Ondo and Ijero-Ekiti respectively. They had their own palaces, High Chiefs, chiefs and
238 attendants like their male counterparts (Makinde and Aladekomo, 1997:78, The Westerner, 2006:2). See the
239 organogram below. Their own council of chiefs also deliberated separately on matters affecting their towns. In
240 fact they also have the power to confer chieftaincy title on the deserving people like the male monarchs, although
241 in the case of Eyegun in Ijero-Ekiti, permission to do this, especially in this modern time, must first be sought
242 from the king ?? The calendar below illustrates the manner of relationship between male and female kings in the
243 communities where this tradition prevails in Africa:

244 Above is a calendar of Male and Female kings with their respective chiefs at Ile-Oluji in Ondo State of Nigeria.

245 **14 MALE PALACES**

246 The palace of Osemawe of Ondo. Related to this is the equality of women in provision of certain services to
247 the state. One of the traditional state services, which women provided in the pre-colonial days, was security
248 not only for the king and the state but themselves as well. For instance in the days of Oyo Empire, the Ilaris
249 (Female bodyguards of the king numbering up to 48 but denizens of the king's harem provided security for the
250 king ??Johnson, 1921:67). When the security of the empire was breaking down as a result of the disagreement
251 between the ruler of the Empire, Alaafin Aole, and his prime-minister Basorun Gaa, it was the Palace women
252 that intervened not only to support the king but more importantly took over his personal security. They said:

253 **15 FEMALE PALACES The palace of Lobun of Ondo**

254 A wa lehin re.

255 We support you Gbogbo irunmole aafin yi wa lehin re All the spirits in this palace are behind you Awon Iyami
256 wa lehin re?.

257 My mothers (the witches) are behind you Osoronga -a-pa-ni-ma-wa-gun Osoronga -one that kills without a
258 trace Olokiki oru at'ori jeran One prominent at midnight, that eats Ati'idi j'edo enia? Animals from the head
259 Awon l'lolobe ide They are owners of the bronze knife Awon l'ogalanta ti mu 'mi talotalo They are ogalanta that
260 drinks water talotalo Awon ni ifa, awon l'Odu-aiye -Iya ooo! ?? Faleti 1972: P29).

261 They are the Ifa, they are the hidden truth-of

262 The World -Oh Mother! (My translation)

263 For them as well, where the traditional state fails to provide security for women, especially the traders, they,
264 (women) responded appropriately. According to Faseke, Mabogunje and Ade-Ajayi:

265 The women, like the men, traveled in caravan for protection. In 1833, Lander observed that one hundred wives
266 of the Alaafin trading at Ilora.

267 Writing of Ibadan in the second half of the 19 th Century, Johnson says: the women of those days were as
268 hardy as the men and often went in a body of caravans to Ikere and Apomu for corn and other foodstuffs although
269 the road was unsafe for the kidnappers ??Faseke, 1998:153) Hugh Clapperton in 1825 also found the wives of the
270 Alaafin of Oyo trading far away from home at 'Duffo', south of Shaki, and noted "like other women of the common
271 class they carried large loads on their heads from town to town". Other travelers in 19 th century Nigeria who met
272 trade caravans along their journeys emphasized the considerable number of women amongst them ??Mabogunje,
273 1961:15) Traders gathered at agreed times and places and traveled together in caravan (Ade-Ajayi and Smith,
274 1964:3)

275 **16 VII. Proverbs, Women and Tyranny**

276 The proverb ki lo kunrin se ti Obinrin ko lese (what do male do that female could not do) is exhibited in the fact
277 that there is gender in tyranny and war. Yoruba history record a powerful high chief in Oyo Empire (Basorun
278 Gaa) that became the head of Oyo mesi and became so tyrannical that he installed and removed not less than

279 four Alaafins in succession, all of whom he made to commit suicide ??Akinjogbin, 2002:38). Ibadan kingdom
280 provided a female counterweight to this. In it emerged a tyrant woman chief, Efunsetan Aniwura (owner of Gold)
281 Iyalode Ibadan (woman leader in Ibadan) Many factors contributed to seeing Efunsetan as arch-tyrants. One,
282 she was alleged to have refused A Year her female slaves to marry. Two, in her court, she tried, found guilty
283 and executed expectant mothers among her slaves -without recourse to the traditional ruler of the community,
284 Latosa (Awe, 1992:69), Akinyemi, (1998:174). Although Awe tries to white wash this by claiming that Efunsetan
285 was so powerful that no one dared take liberties with her female slaves. "Indeed" Awe continues, "many of them
286 got married to other slaves or contracted marriages with free men outside Efunsetan's compound on the payment
287 of the usual redemption price. There is also strong evidence in the traditions of her humane treatment of these
288 slaves". The defence, being put up by Awe to rub off these accusations of tyranny against Efunsetan, continues
289 thus. "For instance she" Efunsetan "developed great attachment to one of her slave whom she nicknamed Bobore
290 (i.e. if you have a real friend she is worth more than a host of relations). Part of other defence of Awe, for
291 Efunsetan, was that, after Efunsetan's death, one of her slaves was still well enough to go back to his home in
292 Ilesha and rise to become the ruler, Owa Ataiyero".

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294 But these are weak defense that cannot clear Efunsetan of this accusation of tyranny. Efunsetan was not the
295 supreme authority in the community of her time. Latosa, the traditional ruler of the then Ibadan kingdom, who
296 installed her as Iyalode was. Even Latosa was not himself absolute, as Alaafin of Oyo was then Ibadan's overlord.
297 When similar case of murder took place within the same kingdom at that time, Latosa referred the case of the
298 convicted murderer to Alaafin ??Awe, 1992:69). Why didn't Efunsetan take Latosa, her ruler, into consideration
299 before she carried out execution orders her court passed on the expectant slaves? The convicted and executed
300 slave ladies should have been allowed to appeal to this higher authority, Latosa, who could have in turn sought
301 the view of his overlord, Alaafin of Oyo. On similar case of murder committed in his domain Latosa sought the
302 view of Alaafin before he carried out the death sentence passed on the accused. If Efunsetan's paramount ruler,
303 Latosa, could do this why must Efunsetan by passed not just her ruler, under whom she was a chief, but also
304 her community overlord, Alaafin of Oyo? That she did not consult with the higher authority of her community
305 of those days but took laws into her hands was a serious crime against the traditional state. Hence, she stands
306 condemned as a tyrant.

307 18 VIII.

308 19 Proverbs, Women and War

309 Initially in Yoruba history, there was gender in war roles. While men went to war front to fight, women, according
310 to Akinjogbin, formed "a kind of rear army to organize food for the soldiers and organize civil defense for the
311 town" -chasing back any soldier who ran home from the war front (Akinjogbin, 2002:147). But when women
312 discovered that men were not properly securing their securities, they picked up the gauntlet. Hear Madam Tinubu
313 for example: Eyin e wo o. Obinrin lo n jiya ibe.

314 Look. Women bear the brunt. Boko ba ku gbogbo eru a di toun nikan.

315 When husband dies all the belongings Go to him alone. Bomo ba ku, a dagan osan gangan, When the child
316 dies we became barren. A donibanuje okan we became sorrowful Obinring lo n jiya ibe! Eran ku o fise Women
317 bear the brunt! When animal dies Sile fawo the skin bears the brunt Iwofa ku, o da aawo sile serf's death create
318 problem. Eni to ku, eku isimi, eni to ku He that is dead, rest in peace, he that is alive E kuu wahala Carry on
319 your stress.

320 20 Awa o nii gba ki okunrin kan sa lo

321 We wont allow any man to run away Awa o nii gba ki ogun wolu Egba we won't allow incursion of war into
322 Egba Eyin okunrin Egba e ye e ma fiya yi You Egba men stop punishing us women je waa (Isola, 1983:5) (My
323 Translation)

324 This clarion call of Madam Tinuubu was heeded not only in Egba kingdom but other ones in Yorubaland.
325 For instance a woman said to be the daughter of Ogunmola, a powerful Ibadan warlord, "gathered a small army
326 of her own, rode on a horse back and patrolled the boundaries of Ibadan to make sure Ijebus did not come in".
327 In Benin, Queen Idia was believed to have her own army that she once led to war that defeated the Idah army.
328 Similarly, in the pre-colonial inter kingdom wars, "Of the total force of sixteen thousand (16000) that attacked
329 Abeokuta" according to Uku, "during the warfare with the Amazons of Dahomey, over six thousand (6,000) were
330 women" (Uku, 1991 ??28, Akinjogbin, 2002 ??147, Awe, 1992:27) (Owner of Gold) and Madam Tinuubu. While
331 Efunsetan mingles with military leaders in Ibadan at that time, and had large number of slaves she readily put to
332 the use of these military leaders, Madam Tinuubu had her own standing army. Besides, both of them, Efunsetan
333 and Tinuubu, also dealt in ammunitions such as gunpowder, Year guns and other related ammunitions, which
334 they sell to war leaders mostly on credits ??Awe, 1992:67). Madam Tinuubu testified to this when she said:

335 As a matter of fact two leading Yoruba women who were wealthy, influential and high chiefs of their respective
336 kingdoms, who also dealt in arms and had their own standing armies, were Efunsetan Aniwura Mo lomo ogun,

337 mo lota mo letu, I have warriors, I have bullets, I have gunpowder, Mo lowo, mo leeyan, mo si lenu I have money,
338 I have people and I have mouth (Our translation) (Isola, 1983 :7) These activities of women regarding war and
339 war related matters are buttressed by a proverb that says, ki lobinrin ng se ti obinrin ko le se? (What do men
340 do that women cannot do? IX.

341 **21 Proverbs, Women and Economy**

342 Evidence of dual sex economic system, just as dual sex political system, also existed in the economy of the
343 pre-colonial Yorubas. While males dominated the farming activities, females dominated trading and craft. But
344 farming, being the largest and most important economy, men used their patriarchal advantage by making women
345 assistants to their husbands in the farms. In fact the institution of polygamy arose from this system of farming
346 that made women subservient to their male counterpart. However, when market economy developed, women
347 who formed the bulk of the traders and crafts rushed into it and dominated it (Vagale, 1971:1, Osinubi and
348 Amaghionyeodiwe, 2005:74).

349 The humbleness of women was reflected here unlike males who believed in rigid stratification. Queens, wives
350 of the monarchs were not left out in the development of the state economy. They carried large loads on their
351 heads from market to market not only within the town but also between them, including long distance ones
352 such as Shaki, Apomu and Ikire (Mabogunje, 1961 ??15, Faseke, 1998:153). This never reduced their royalty,
353 as they were deferred to in the area of tax. While ordinary women traders carrying loads were taxed, wives of
354 the various kings were exempted as a mark of respect for the institution they represent ??Hodder and Ukwu,
355 1969:27). According to Hodder and Ukwu:

356 "these asses were the first beasts we had observed employed in carrying burdens, for hitherto people of both
357 sexes and of all ages, especially women and female children, have performed these laborious duties. Taxes were
358 usually imposed on those traveling along the roads" ??Hodder and Ukwu, 1969:27) Given these, ki lokunrin ng
359 se ti obinrin ko le se? (What do males do that females cannot do?). As a matter of fact the dominance of market
360 by women led to the creation of market deity whose priestess was called Eni-Oja (owner of the market) before
361 who even the king leaned on the day he went to worship in the market (Johnson, 1921:66).

362 X.

363 **22 Proverbs, Women and Religion**

364 Initially, goddesses in Yorubaland were wives to the male gods. The varieties of gods with their goddesses are
365 Oduduwa, the progenitor of Yorubas (this is contested) and his wife Olokun (the goddess of the sea); Sango
366 (god of thunder) and his wife, Oya, (goddess of the rivers); Obatala (god of divinity) and his wife Yemoo (the
367 occupier of the groove). With time ordinary women began to see these goddesses as pro establishment, since
368 their husband priests controlled them. Proverbially, they (ordinary women) derided the wives of the priest who
369 also doubled as priestesses thus: ta lesinsin ki ba gbe fun bi kii se elegbo (whom would the flies support if not a
370 person with sore). See

371 **23 Year**

372 In the Yoruba traditional state, religion is used as a powerful means of checking the rulers. Among the Yoruba
373 people, the king is perceived as "Alase Ekeji Orisa", (meaning the Chief executive and the next in rank to the
374 gods). Whatever he does as the traditional ruler or king of a particular community is believed to be derivable
375 from the supernatural forces -guide against misuse of power and growing despotism, it also acted as a check.
376 ??Ekong, 1989:132

377 **24 Year**

378 With this, ordinary women began to realize their potentials as individuals and groups. They discovered that they
379 are, by nature, "patient, methodical and, in some cases, endowed with supernatural power"supernatural power
380 they can exercise through witchcraft and ritual roles as priestesses and guardian of religious cults. Thus, those of
381 them having supernatural power (witchcraft) constituted themselves into cults that were exclusive to males. But
382 a sizable number of them are also present in other male dominated cults such as Ogboni, Egungun, Gelede, Oro
383 and Osugbo. These cults exercised a lot of powers in the selection of a new king, constituting a check to his power
384 and deposing him if necessary (Ekong, 1989:132&136; Ilesanmi, 1998:38; Makinde and Aladekomo, 1997:74). As
385 a matter of tradition, in some communities, women were organized into junior and senior cults that served as
386 machinery for inspiring and mobilizing women to play these specific roles in the society. In Akure, Ajashe-Ipo
387 and Igboimina, for instance, association of princesses of the royal family constituted the kingmakers for choosing
388 the next traditional ruler of the town ??Afolayan, 1998:24). In Akure, the association of the princesses became so
389 prominent that the monarch of the town began to give them recognition. While the official recognition for them in
390 Akure came about in 1533, in 1599 Oba Atakumosa created one in which "Members were his own daughters and
391 the other princesses in the kingdom" but ensured that one of his own daughters headed it ??Afonja, 1983:146).
392 Post-colonial continuation of this was the constitution of Orangun, another association of princesses, by Oba
393 Adesida in 1940.

25 CONCLUSION

394 Women without any supernatural power also had raw power to check the excesses of not only the king
395 but cults as well, where they (cults) appeared to gang up against traditional processes or procedures of doing
396 things, especially if it concerned selection or deposition of unwanted traditional ruler. Owu women of Abeokuta
397 demonstrated this in 1938. In their protest, according to Bola Ajibola:

398 "women removed all their dresses and marched out and protest naked, and Somoye was prevented from
399 becoming the Olowu of Owu ??Comet, 2005:11) Women in this same place demonstrated again in 1948 against
400 the imposition of the autocratic Sole Native Authority system on the people of Egba., women in Abeokuta, under
401 the leadership of Mrs. Ransome Kuti,, protested. Their disgust with the Sole traditional ruler was expressed
402 thus:

403 The system of Sole Native Authority (SNA) had been a great source of oppression and suppression to the
404 Egba people. Even most of the members of the council were not free to express their minds. The Alake always
405 passed as 'Mr. Know all" Parts of the dirge composed by Abeokuta Women Union (AWU) for their traditional
406 ruler, Alake, who asked them to pay tax, ran thus:

407 . The Egba women would very much like the power of SNA removed because we are not happy under it. It is
408 foreign to the custom of Egba ??Awe, 1992:139).

409 Ademola Ojibesho Big man with a big ulcer Your behaviour is deplorable Alake is a thief Council members,
410 thieves Anyone who does not know Kuti will get into trouble White man you will not get to your country safely
411 You and Alake will not die an honourable death ??Awe, 1992:79).

412 (Translated by Mrs. Ransome-Kuti)

413 The women's protest culminated in the abdication of the Alake, the traditional ruler of the town, from office
414 and was exiled to Osogbo in 1948. He abdicated with these words: I cannot bear any longer the sight of turmoil,
415 strife and discontent. I have decided ?in order to avoid blood shed, to leave the environs, of my territory in the
416 hope that after a time, frayed tempers will subside and atmosphere of calm prevail ??Awe, 1992:143).

417 Inspired by these developments in Abeokuta, women in Ijebu and Iseyin followed suit by fighting their
418 paramount rulers, the Akarigbo of Remo and Aseyin of Iseyin, for asking them to pay taxes ??Uku, 1991:29).
419 So ki lobinrin ng se ti okunrin ko le se? (What do men do that women cannot do? XI.

420 25 Conclusion

421 In all, about six proverbs that challenged patriarchy and demonstrated women equality with their men
422 counterparts have been examined. They show women relegation in all spheres of human life in Yoruba traditional
423 society is as old as the society itself. As well, they show that the struggle to rectify this by women in particular
424 and all believers of gender equality in general, are as well antiquated as the gender inequality and brutality. Thus,
425 modern efforts to elevate women, hooked down by traditional and cultural biases, are catalysts to addressing
426 Yoruba traditional biases against women but not the initiator. Proverbs are. They not only highlight the
427 problems but also took steps to concretely address them. However, the intervention of United Nations and its
428 globalization of gender problems, as well as ways forward, more than three decades ago, have impacted strongly
429 in addressing the gender problems raised by Yoruba proverbs.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

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¹²Year



Figure 1:

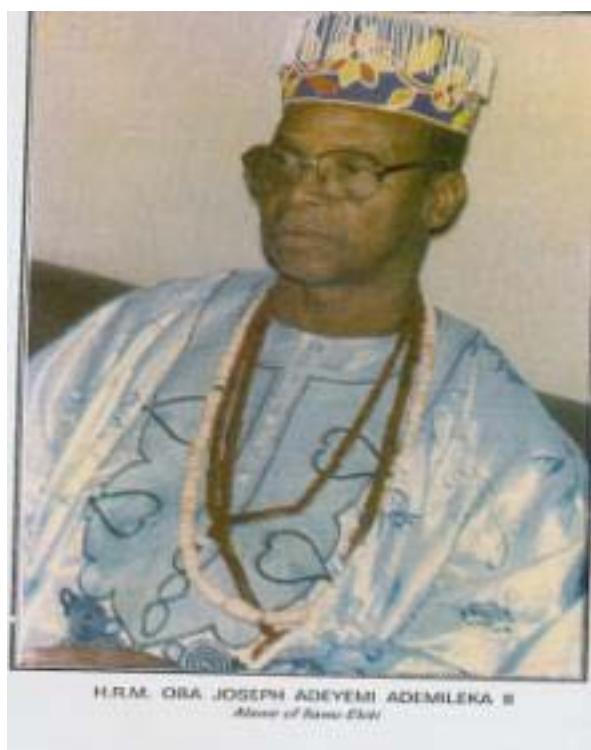


Figure 2:



H.R.M. ALAYELUWA OBA JOSEPH ADEBAYO ADEWOLE JP.
Alaari of Ilaro Kingdom, Ekiti State

Figure 3:



OBIA JOSEPH ADEBOLA AWOLEHIN III
Asari of Ilaro, Ondo State

Figure 4:



Figure 5:



Figure 6:



Figure 7:

1

	NAMETOWING.	STATUE	DATE	TIME
	OR	RULERSHI	SPENT	IN
	VILLAGE	P	OFFICE	
1	Oduduwa	Ife	Osun	Progenitor Pre-colonial
2	Terracotta	Ife	Osun	Queen Between evidence or Ooni of Ife 12 th and 13 th
3	Luwo	Ife	Ife	Ooni centuries Gbadiga Cent. of Ife Pre-L.G D D)

colonial days ———Sources : (4 Debooye Ife Ife Cent. LG Osun Ooni of Ife -5 Moremi Ife Ife Cent. LG O

[Note: A Year]

Figure 8: Table 1 :

2

S/N	Name	Town or Village	L.G.A	State	Type of Rulership	Date	Time Spent in Office
1	Oba Comfort Adesida	Ondo	Ondo L. G.	Ondo	Substantive	1992- 2006	14years
2	Oba Kokumo Bolatito Unice	Ijero	Ijero L.G.	Ekiti	Substantive	1990 -2006	16 years
3	Princess Adeyinka Adesida	Akure	Akure L.G	Ondo	Regent	2000- 2004	5 years
4	Princess Adejoke Adekanye	Akungba	Akoko South	Ondo	Regent	2002 date	4 years
5	Princess Joke Adesunloye	Ifira Akoko	Akoko South	Ondo	Regent	2001 date	5 years
6	Princess Janet Adigun	Iye Akoko	Akoko North	Ondo	Regent	2003- date	3 years
7	Princess Ade Gbolarin	Ire-Ekiti	Oye L.G	Ekiti	Regent	1999- 2004	5 years
8	Princess Fehintola Omolewo	Ayegabju - Ekiti	Oye L.G	Ekiti	Regent	1997- 2004	7 years
9	Princess Bosede Elizabeth Fadiya	Oloje- Ekiti	Oye L.G	Ekiti	Regent	2002- 2004	11 1/2 years
10	Princess Adeboboye Aladeyelu	Igbara Odo Town	Ekiti South West	Ekiti	Regent	1996- 2006	11years

Figure 9: Table 2 :



[Note: Source : Dele Olowu and John Erero,(1997) *Indigenous Governance System in Nigeria, Ife: Research group on Local Institutions and Socio-Economic Development, Department of Public Administration, Obafemi Awolowo University.*]

Figure 10:

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