

Journal of African History, Archaeology and Tourism (JAHAT)

E-ISSN 3049-9623 (Online); ISSN 3049-9615 (Print)

formerly

Journal of African History and Archaeology (JAHA)

E-ISSN 2753-3204 (Online); ISSN 2753-3190 (Print)

Indexed by EBSCO and SABINET

Volume 2, Number 2, December 2024

Pp 99-118

**The Role of Women in Political Activism in
Pre and Post-colonial Yorubá History:
Lessons for Contemporary Society**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2753-3204/2024/v2n2a5>

Samuel Kayòdé Olaléyè PhD

Department of Religious Studies

University of Ìbadàn, Ìbadàn

Oyo State, Nigeria

kayodeleye2005@yahoo.com

Phone: +2348036777305

Olúwátòyìn Adébólá Gbàdàmòsí PhD

Department of Religious Studies

University of Ìbadàn, Ìbadàn

Oyo State, Nigeria

tygbadamosi@gmail.com

Phone: 08036857692



Julius Sunday Adekoya PhD

Department of Religious Studies

University of Ìbadàn, Ìbadàn

Oyo State, Nigeria

adekoyajulius@gmail.com

+2348034888617

Abstract

Women are stakeholders in every aspect of human endeavor. Their roles can be seen in the economy, social, religion and political system of every society particularly in Yoruba society of south western Nigeria where they were/are not found wanting in the aforementioned areas of life, most especially in the political field that men often dominate. Even in the times of the gods, the role that Osun, goddess of river Osun played in the political administration of the world then for the recognition of women fold amongst the male gods sent to the earth by Olódùmare, the Supreme God in Yorubá belief, earned women their due respect till today. In pre- and post-colonial history of the Yorubá, Èfunróyè Tinubú remained politically active in both Lagos and Abẹ̀òkúta. Subuola, Efunsetan Aniwura, Iyalode Ibadan and Feedge of Gbangan to mention a few were notable women in Yorubá society with political activism in the 1800s until the time of Fúnmiláyò Ransom Kútì who led the Ègbá women protest against taxation in Egba land. What were the secrets of their political activism? What lessons should contemporary women learn from their involvement in the politics of their time? These are some of the questions that this study tried to find answers to . The paper adopted historical, descriptive and empirical methods in its analysis.

Keywords: *Women, Political Activism, Pre- and Post-colonial Yorubá History, Contemporary Society*

Introduction

Women all over the world are biologically the same. However, culturally, religiously, socially and politically, they are different as viewed by Ilesanmi¹. Women in Yorubá society of southwestern Nigeria are unique, hardworking, sociable, enterprising, religious and politically active. History reveals their feats even from the time of the gods when Osun, Oya and many more championed the cause of women in the political administration. This was evident till the time of Efunroye Tinubu of Lagos and Egba; Efunsetan Aniwura, the Iyalode of Ibadan; Aye, the powerful, rich and politically influential matriach of Ado-Ekiti; Yeyenirewu, the female king in Ado-Ekiti of whose 41 years tenure as a king ushered in many developments and fame. We also cannot forget

¹ T. M. Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obinrin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd, 156

others such as Fúnmiláyò Ransome Anikulapo-Kúti,² who championed the liberation of Egba women from heavy and unreasonable taxation, Kofoworola Ademola, Bisi Adeleye Fayemi and in the contemporary time, great women like Kudi Abiola, Oyinkansola Abayomi, Bamidele Abiodun, Oluranti Adebule, Elizabeth Adekogbe, Mojisola Adekunle-Obasanjo and many more. The rise of Yorubá women in politics in Yorubá society of southwestern Nigeria is not new. However, there is the need to discuss the factors responsible for their increasing growth in this contemporary time. We need to note however that in spite of the notable contributions of women in governance, their population is still small compared to their male counterparts and we can only hope that the situation will improve over time. This paper therefore discussed the roles of women in political activism in pre and post-colonial Yorubá history with lessons for contemporary society. In order to achieve this, there will be an overview of governance in pre-colonial society. We shall showcase some prominent women in pre-colonial Yorubá society and the factors that contributed to their success and we shall compare these women with their contemporary counterparts.

General Overview of Governance in Pre-colonial Yorubá Society

There is a saying in Yorubá that *Aṣẹ lóhà npa, Oba kii d'ába*-King gives order he does not offer suggestions. This saying may be indirectly interpreted to mean that Yorubá kings are dictators. However, a closer look at the political administration of governance in Yorubá society, shows that there are no dictatorial tendencies in their administration. Although one cannot rule out tyranny in its totality among a few of them, however, there were established institutions to checkmate their activities. Some of such institutions were Ògbóni/Òsùgbó and Oro. Again, governance in pre-colonial Yorubá society was a decentralized one with a defined system of separation of powers and checks and balances based on unwritten constitution³. Governance was "bottom heavy and very light at the top" and this gave birth to the saying "*okú ejó lóhà ndá*- the

² Yemi Adewunmi, 2024, *Celebrating 7 notable women in Nigerian politics and advocacy*, <https://pluralpolicy.com>, Accessed 7/5/2024

³ Adelegan Adegbola, 2009, *Ile-Ife: The Source of Yoruba Civilisation*, Nigeria: Oduduwa International, 63

king preside over a dead case⁴. Before the amalgamation of all the sub groups in Yorubá society, each was living in their kingdoms headed by the king and other chiefs. Though they all had a common progenitor, they ran their governments with slight differences from one kingdom to another.

For instance, during Oduduwa` period, there were about three groups which were assisting him in the running of his government; *Igbimò*, *Ajo Modéowá* and the *Àwòrò*. The *Igbimo* were selected people that were the “think-tank” of Oduduwa`. They were the Iwarefa and Elu as number seven. They hold important positions in Ile-Ife till today and are like kings in their domains. Ajo Modewa were the chiefs from different families. They were so powerful to the extent that whatever they rejected or accepted was final. They assisted Oduduwa in deciding and delivering judgment on minor cases. The *Àwòrò* were in charge of rituals and religious matters for peace to reign in the kingdom.⁵ Outside Ile-Ife, all the towns and villages under Ife were divided into five provinces and ruled by provincial chiefs namely Obalaye, Obawara, Onpetu, Owafegun and Obajugbe⁶.

In Oyo empire, Alaafin was the head and there were *Ọyọ́ Mèsì* (equivalent of *Ìwàrèfà* Ile-Ife) headed by Basorun, there are also *Baafin* who acted like kings without crown. They were the secret agents of the king who could direct the king to the right path or mislead him. They were usually castrated because they were in charge of king’s wives in the palace. There were also *Yẹyẹ Láfín* that comprised the king’s mother who may not necessarily be the biological mother of the king but an adviser to the king, *Iya Kékéré* who was the head of all the king’s servants and keeper of all the valuable treasures in the palace, then the *Àwewò*, who were the wives of the *Baafin* whose duty was to assist *Iya Oba* and *Iya Kékéré*. There were the *Ìlari* that were called *Emesè* in places like Ekiti and Ijesa. They were servants to *Baafin* and *Yeye Lafin*. Whatever message they were sent

⁴ Olu Daramola ati Adebayo Jeje, 1975, *Awon Asa ati Orisa Ile Yoruba*, Ibadan: Onibon-Oje Press & Book

Industries (Nig.) Ltd, 182

⁵ C. L. Adeoye, 1979, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 277

⁶ J. A. Atanda, (G. O. Oguntomisin Edited), 2007, *A Comprehensive History of the Yoruba People up to 1800*,

Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Limited, 32

in the name of the king, was binding on the people because, at that moment, it was the king that was talking⁷.

In summary, whether slightly different from one kingdom to another or not, the political administration in Yorubá society began from the Baalé, the head of *Agbo Ile*-family head, then there is *Idile*-a compound headed by the *Eḷéḷbí* or *Mógàjí*. We also have *Adugbo*-quarters controlled by chiefs of each quarter. There is also *Ìlétò*-a small village under the custody of *Baalé* as the head. There are also high chiefs' parts of who are the Iwarefa and the Aworo-Ifa Priests, the *Oníségùn*-Herbalists, the *Èsò*-Warriors. Then, we have the king at the top who preside over every issue of which his decision is always the final after many deliberations through all the stages mentioned above..

Case Studies of Prominent Women in Pre-colonial Yorubá Society

Women had contributed and are still contributing to the wheel of progress of the Yorubá society in every ramification, economically, socially, politically and in the area of religion. Economically, their contributions are enormous even right from the time when farming was still the only profession. They were at the fore front in carrying Yam seedling for planting, and harvesting of both food and cash crops. They also play major role in the preservation and of course cooking of these food items for their families. They keep the house clean and give children basic home education because children are always with the women most of the time. They are also successful in business like men. A good example is *Èḷékò' dèrè* in *Odu' Iròsùn Méjì*⁸ who became wealthy through her business of *Èkò* - Solid pap production and selling⁹. Another good example is *Ajè*¹⁰, the wife of *Òrúnmilà* who had two hundred slaves that were assisting her to carry her wares to the market. This without any doubt affirms that she was rich and successful in her business. Though she was said to be the daughter of *Olokun*, the owner of all the wealth on earth, notwithstanding, on her own, she was a successful business woman.

⁷ C. L. Adeoye, 1979, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, Nigeria: Oxford University Press, 293

⁹ Wande Abimbola, 1968, *Ijinle Obun Enu Ifa Apa Kinni*, U.K: Wm, Collins, Son & Co. Ltd, 63-64

Women also play prominent roles in the politics of Yorubaland starting from the time of the gods, when divinities, according to the belief of the Yorubá were the first occupant of the earth. *Ọ̀ṣun* was a prominent member of the ruling class then and was the only female among the gods that first came to the world. She held all her male counterparts to ransom by thwarting their efforts on every occasion until they admitted and placed her in her rightful position as found in *Ọ̀ṣẹ̀túra* the seventeenth *Odu*, also known as *Odusọ́*¹¹ where *Ifá* says:

Konkoro lawo Ewi níle Ado
Oorun mú dede kanle lawo ode Ijero
Alakan ni nbe lodo
Ti nlu asakara aya pe pe pe
A dija fun igba Irunmole Olukotun
A lugin fun Igba Irunmole Olukosi
A da fun Ofalelegbeje Irunmole

Ti won datari ona gbangba
A dija fun Orunmila baba Ifa
Nijo ti won nturun bowa sile aye
Won lagbo Oro
Won lagbo Opa
Won lana te e re ti Olufe nto
Won o fi t'osun se
Won wa ngunyan,
Iyan won nlemo
Won mroka,
Oka won ndipele
Won pegun ile
Eegun ile o je won
Won pe Oro,
Oro o tile dabun
Won pe Opa
Opa o tile sobun
Aperegede Ajuba
Ajuba naa aperegede
A dija fun yeyemi sengese
Olooya iyun
Eyi ti gbe koka
Ti wa nba gharunmo le e ja
Won n wa lo d'Ifa lawo Orunmila
Won ni ta lo nbeba awon je?
Orunmila wipe, kilode

Konkoro is the priest of Ado Ewi
The shining sun is the priest of Ijero
It is the crab that was in the water
That was using its chest to make noise
Cast divination for the right hand two hundred divinities
Oracle was consulted for the left two hundred divinities
Oracle was consulted to for one thousand four hundred and sixty divinities
On the centre of the road
Divination was made for Orunmila the father of Ifa
On the day they were coming from heaven to earth
They pass through Oro sacred grove
They pass through Opa forest
They made a narrow path which Olufe passes
They did not consider Osun
They made pounded yam
It was not good
Then made oka (yam flour)
It was not good
They called household masquerade (ones father)
They did not respond
They call on Oro
Oro rebuffed them
They call on Opa
Opa did not voice out
Openly we pay homage
The homage was paid openly
Cast divination for Osun my mother
The owner of iyun comb
The one that stayed in the secluded place
And fighting with two hundred divinities
They went to Orunmila to go and consult Ifa
To ask for the person that was voiding their sacrifice
Orunmila asked why

¹¹ Babayemi S.O. & Adekola O.O. (Edited), 1987, *Iseda Awon Odu Ifa, Apa Keji*, Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 18

<i>Tẹ̀ ẹ̀ fi tobinrin inu yin se?</i>	They refused to marginalized the woman among them
<i>Wọ̀n ni Oṣun lobinrin inu awọ̀n</i>	They said it was Osun that was a woman among them
<i>Oṣunmila wa ni</i>	Orunmila said
<i>Ki wọ̀n lẹ́ fi t' Oṣun se kúá kúá</i>	They should go and obey Osun
<i>Wọ̀n wa fi t' Oṣun se</i>	They harking to her voice
<i>Wọ̀n gunyan</i>	They made pounded yam
<i>Iyan wọ̀n o lẹ́mọ,</i>	Their pounded yam was okay
<i>Wọ̀n ro'ka,</i>	They made Oka,
<i>Oka wọ̀n o dipẹ̀tẹ̀</i>	Their Oka was good
<i>Wọ̀n pe Oro</i>	They call on Oro
<i>Oro dun</i>	Oro voiced out
<i>Wọ̀n pe Opa</i>	They call Opa
<i>O pa nje wọ̀n</i>	Opa answered them
<i>Nje iye wa bawá penimọ̀</i>	Oh you Osun! Come to our aid today
<i>Oṣun a fimọ̀ je tirẹ̀ o</i>	Osun we respect you
<i>Iye wa bawá penimọ̀</i>	Oh you Osun! come to our aid today
<i>Gunyan gunyan ile Ido</i>	The pounded yam maker of Ido
<i>Obinrin ni I se</i>	Is a woman
<i>Roka roka ile Ido</i>	The Oka maker of Ido
<i>Obinrin ni I se</i>	Is a woman
<i>Iye wa bawá penimọ̀</i>	Oh you Osun! Come to our aid today
<i>Oṣun a fimọ̀ je tirẹ̀ o</i>	Osun we harking to your voice
<i>Oke lode Ibadan</i>	Oke in the city of Ibadan
<i>Obinrin lo ba ba</i>	It was woman that gave birth to the king
<i>Ko ba o to doriṣa</i>	Before Oba became divinity
<i>E je ka lo</i>	Let us go
<i>Ka lo re kunle f'obinrin</i>	And knee for women
<i>Gbogbo elegbe mawo</i>	All the initiates
<i>Obinrin lo ba ba</i>	It was woman that gave birth to the king
<i>Ko ba o to doriṣa</i>	Before Oba became divinity
<i>Obinrin lo biwa</i>	Women gave birth to us
<i>Kawa o to denyan rere</i>	Before we became good human beings
<i>E je kalọ re e kunle f'obinrin</i>	Let us go and knee down for women
<i>Obinrin lo biwa</i>	Women gave birth to us
<i>E bani kore yeye f'Oṣun</i>	Join me to hail Osun
<i>Ore yeye mo le Oriṣa.</i>	Homage to the mother of the divinities

Apart from this, the remarkable role played by Mórémí has remained indelible in the history of Ifẹ̀ city. She was able to rescue the people of Ife from the hands of Ugbò secret society who frequently come around to raid and squander the land. Following this success, she became a heroine that is always being celebrated in Ifẹ̀ till today as *Iyá Ayé gbogbo* – mother of all and female deity of Ifẹ̀.¹²

¹² Adelegan Adegbola, 2009, *Ile-Ife: The Source of Yoruba Civilisation*, Nigeria: Oduduwa International

Aye was a daughter of *Eḍemo*. She was a powerful and rich woman of her time in Ado-Ekiti. She engaged herself in so many businesses like dye, selling of kola nuts and many other minor works prevalent in her days that turned to wealth for her. Aye was a queen in her area (*Eḍemo* house) in Ado-Ekiti. She lived a life of affluence with a lot of riches. Her power as a rich lady was great and her fame as a warrior was also high. She had the command of the rich and was obeyed by everyone and had many slaves and servants at her command. She was influential and her house was better than that of Yeyenirewu, who was the king of Ado at that period¹³.

Likewise, the *Ìbàdàn* people will not forget easily the role that *Èfúnṣetan Aniwùrà*, the *Ìyálóde* of *Ìbàdàn* (A woman who rose from a retail food trader to a commercial magnate with business connections in Lagos)¹⁴ played in the political and economic life of *Ìbàdàn*. She was economically influential with so many slaves, and was made the *Ìyálóde* of *Ìbàdàn*, one of the highest chieftain titles for women then in Ibadan city. Many other women in addition to those mentioned above also played important roles in modern politics of Yorubaland. For instance, under the leadership of *Àlímótù Péléwùrà*, a socio-economic and political activist, the Lagos market women rose against water rate, women taxation and some other levies in Lagos during the colonial period¹⁵.

It is worthy of note that, the power and influence of women is also recognized in the spiritual parlance. During *Iḡa* worship, homage is paid to women because it is believed that women gave birth to men, and through their reproductive organ, they populate the world. This largely explains the reason why the following song was composed to pay homage to women for bringing human to the world:

<i>Obinrin lo b'oba o</i>	Women are mothers of kings o
<i>Ko ba o to d'oriṣa</i>	Before kings became divinities
<i>E je ka wole f'obinrin</i>	Let us go and knee down for women
<i>Obinrin lo b'oba o</i>	Women are mothers of kings' o
<i>Ko ba o to d'oriṣa</i>	Before kings became divinities ¹⁶

Communications, 112

¹³ A. Oguntuyi, 1978, *A Short History of Ado-Ekiti*, Nigeria: Bamigboye & Company Press (Nig.) Ltd, 24

¹⁴ Omiko Awa, 2019, *Madam Efunsetan Aniwura, Unforgettable Ibadan Heroine*, <https://guardian.ng>, retrieved On 9/5/2024

¹⁵ Femi Olugbile, 2023, *In Search of Alimotu Pelewura*, <https://businessday.ng>, retrieved on 9/5/2024

¹⁶ Lijadu E.A., 2001, *Iḡa Mimo Alabalase*, Ondo: J. A. Ifeoluwa Printing Press, 167

Women do not only give birth to children, they also nurture them from pregnancy to maturity. Women educate the children at every stage of life: they teach them how to feed, walk, talk or respond to issues at home, within his or her peers, and before the elders; and how to do all these things outside the home. They teach them sex education and how to relate with the opposite sex. They ensure their wards married from good homes and later have their own children. These are the important roles that women played in the Yorubá society and African generally. Although, it is not that men do not partake in the training of their children, there is no gainsaying the fact that women play the greatest role because children are mostly with their mothers. This could be further affirmed in the words of Ilesanmi¹⁷: Yorubá women are not lazy, neither are they all images of a real gem, they are rather sensible and full of projectable traditions. They are also very gifted. Whatever men owned to women who are their strength in Yorubaland. The women are mothers, and they are like gold to be preserved.

Women also played significant role in the religious cult of the Yorubá, which is contrary to the people's general assumption that women in Yorubaland only get pregnant, give birth to children, take care of both their husband and children, and do a little bit of trading¹⁸. Thus, it is worthy of note that there is no cult in Yorubaland that one would not find women playing prominent roles. If any cult exists that women are not allowed access such as Agemo, and Oro, it should be noted that it is their fellow women that prevented them in such a cult because of jealousy or due to the fact that powerful women in the religious cults would not feel happy to see their husbands being controlled or ruled by a woman like them. The implication is that such a man would not be able to direct the affairs of his home in such a situation.

There are several Ifa verses supporting the fact that Women are behind the establishments of most of the cults in Yorubaland. It was reported that a woman brought to the world, the binding and unifying factor in Ifá cult as we have it today, that is *Odu* – the thirteenth wife of *Ọ́rínmílá*, who he had an agreement with such that till today, other women are prevented from seeing *Odu*. Also, in the *Oro* cult, women are

¹⁷ T.M. Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obirin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd, 54

¹⁸ T.M. Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obirin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd 165

prominent. They are found in Ogboni cult with powers surpassing that of Apẹ̀nà, the head of Ogboni. They are the leaders in Gelede cult, where men played subordinate roles in the activity of the cult¹⁹. The witches' cult is mainly for women. According to Agboola, they always have a bargaining power with Babaláwo without which the Babaláwo becomes powerless. This is seen in *Òdú Òtúrú Méjì*²⁰ which says:

Akiyesi lodin abere
A d'Ifá fun Òrúnmìlà
W'ọ̀n ní ká baba o rubo Asení

Nje avon Lasubulobun
Mo mo yin, e dese
Eyin Aseni
Arin-njo-ote
Eyin Aseni
Mo mo yin, e dese....

Akiyesi lodin abere
Cast divination for Orunmila
He was asked to offer sacrifice against his
enemies
Now those that fall on things
I know you, you should desist
You that implicates
You that walks on the day of evil planning,
You that implicates
I know you, you should desist...

For Babaláwo to be successful in his career as a priest, he must be in alliance with the witches. *Odu*, the head of witches and the wife of *Òrúnmìlà* still receive patronage and homage from all the *Babaláwo* till today²¹. We should also note that the power associated with men in the secular world does not operate like that in the religious cults. Rather, women control every cult.

Factors that Contributed to the Success of Prominent Women in Pre-colonial Yorubá Society

Yorubá society, like Jewish society is a male dominated society. However, as noted earlier, this does not indicate that women do not have roles to

¹⁹ T.M. Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obinrin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd

²⁰ Fasina Agboola, 1989, *Ojulowo Oriki Ifa Apa Kini*, Lagos: Project Publications Limited, 187

²¹ Babayemi S.O. & Adekola O.O. (Edited), 1987, *Iseda Avon Odu Ifa, Apa Keta*, Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, ii

play in the society. They were obvious pillars in the society whose influence could not be underestimated. However, there were some obvious factors that actually contributed to the success of many of these women in their fields which allowed them feature successfully in the governance of the land. The major factor for this is the way Yorubá society was organised from the beginning. For instance, political administration in Yorubá society begins from every family where the head of every compound is the Baalé who oversee the affairs of every member of that family. However, in the political administration of Baalé, Ìyáníkàà who is usually the oldest woman in that Agboolé-compound is charged with the duty of overseeing the affairs of all the women in the compound. It is only cases that are beyond her power that are referred to the Baalé. In the same vein, in a small village where the head is the Baalé, his wife is also the head of all the women in the village. She will only report some cases to her husband for noting²².

Similarly, because the elders realised that women are gifted in different ways, this is the reason why some are made Iyalode, Iyalaje, Erelu, Iya abiye and other various chieftain titles in Yorubá society as observed by Ilesanmi²³. Likewise, in the larger society where the king is the paramount ruler, whenever any king joins his ancestors, it is customary to make a woman regent who will hold the political administration of the town till another male successor is found (with the exception of Ibadan city where they have a peculiar system of appointing the king). However, there were cases where such regents transformed themselves from temporary head to full permanent leaders. Such was the case of Yeyenirewu in Ado Ekiti who governed for 41 years (1511-1552)²⁴. Her reign witnessed a lot of developments which included the rebuilding of the palace. She also built Orewu, Okeyinmi and Okelaja all in Ado Ekiti. In her time, many villages around merged with Ado Ekiti.

Luwoo Gbagida was another regent who ruled as a female Ooni. She was nicknamed Ayare and was the only female Ooni²⁵. The flexibility is

²² C.L. Adeoye, 1979, *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 278

²³ T.M. Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obinrin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd, 169

²⁴ A. Oguntuyi, 1978, *A Short History of Ado-Ekiti*, Nigeria: Bamigboye & Company Press (Nig.) Ltd, 21

²⁵ Adelegan Adegbola, 2009, *Ile-Ife: The Source of Yoruba Civilisation*, Nigeria: Oduduwa International

Communications, 220

as a result of the consideration given by men to their female folks with the believe that *Eyẹ kii f'apá kan fò-* a bird does not fly with only one hand/wing. At the same time, *k'a f'otún wẹ otún, k'a f'osì wẹ osì, lọwọ́ fí nmọ́-* when we wash hands together, the hand becomes clean.

Another factor responsible for the success of these prominent women in Pre-colonial Yorubá society centred on the extra power possessed by women through their craft. According to Ilesanmi²⁶, women's powers are universal but these powers are not universally used. It is only few among the women that have the understanding and usage of these powers. He went further to say that many of these women do not know that they possess some naturally endowed powers. Some call this power 'female intuition' which is expressed in instances where empirical bases or reasons cannot be provided for decisions even by the women themselves and oftentimes, these instincts are correct. Feminine powers are natural and generally available to all women, however, some people (both male and female) see such powers as evil that comes from the devil. As a result, such powers are viewed from the negative angles. Those who are found in this act of condemnation are mostly those that have embraced religions like Christianity and Islam. However, for those who are aware and who made use of the opportunity, they tend to benefit immensely from it. Such was the case of Osun mentioned in this paper. She used her power of craft to frustrate all the efforts of the remaining gods sent on an errand by Olódùmarè.

Oya was a tough and powerful woman than Sango her husband. As said earlier above, Odu, otherwise known as *Oromòdìmòdì* was tougher than Orunmila to the extent that she became an object of worship among the Babaláwo till today²⁷. Olojongbodu, Obinrin Iku-wife of Death was also a powerful woman who subdues her husband as found in *Oyeku Meji*²⁸.

Another factor is the will of Olódùmarè that is binding on every individual through what they are destined to come and accomplish on earth. Almost all the religions in the world share common believe in destiny with little variations from one faith to the other, it is believed that whatever one is destined to come and fulfill in life will be attained. This

²⁶ T.M. Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obinrin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd, 86

²⁷ S.K. Olaleye,

²⁸ Wande Abimbola, 1968, *Ijinle Obun Enu Ifa Apa Kinni*, U.K: Wm. Collins, Sons and Co Ltd, 38

is regardless of circumstance one might find himself/herself, it must come to pass, because of this idea of fate, the Yorubá as a group will not do what will jeopardize the will of the Creator in the life of humanity.

Contributions of Contemporary Women in Political Administration of the Yorubá Society and the Responsible Factors

Yorubá women have contributed immensely to the progress of the Yorubá society in the past as noted earlier and they are still contributing in this contemporary period. In fact, the post-colonial contributions to the political administration of the Yorubá society and Nigeria as a whole seems to be higher than that of the precolonial period. One of the first and prominent office occupied by a woman was the speaker of the House of representative in Nigeria, in the person of Patricia Etteh (June-October 2007)²⁹. That is to show that Women are a formidable force in contemporary Nigerian politics, even though they still have a very long way to go in comparison to the male folks.

However, there are factors responsible for the great contributions we are witnessing among women in this contemporary time. According to Ajala and Olarinmoye, since the 1990s, a number of socio-cultural agencies have played a significant role in the rise of Yorubá women in civil politics. Amongst these are the increasing value of monogamy and women's greater access to Western education; the culture of first ladies in government; and female socio-economic empowerment through paid labour are some of the factors responsible for the growth³⁰. Access to western education played a pivotal role in the participation of the Yorubá women in politics. It gave them opportunity to work as civil servants, established their own vocational training, trading in different kinds of goods and the knowledge of this western education gave them the opportunity to make use of their domestic skills to earn better money. For those who had the chance to be educated abroad, their knowledge of western cooking enabled them to establish

²⁹ Meet Yoruba Women in Politics, <https://businessday.ng>, Accessed on 11/10/2024

³⁰ Aderemi Suleiman Ajala & Olarinmoye Adeyinka Wulemat, 2013, *From kitchen to corridor of power: Yoruba women breaking through patriarchal politics in south-western Nigeria*, <https://unisapressjournals.co.za>, Accessed on 7/5/2024

business as baker, confectioner or caterer, café restaurant and hotelier³¹. Some of these enlighten minds also ventured into politics.

The culture of first ladies in government started in the months following Nigeria's independence in 1960. According to Asiegbu³², "First Lady" began emerging in political atmosphere to describe Nigerian female figureheads popularly known as wives of heads of state. However, the office of first lady has witnessed a radical change in Nigerian politics since General Ibrahim Babangida's military presidency. Since then, first ladies, particularly Maryam Babangida, Maryam Abacha, Stella Obasanjo, Patience Jonathan, Aisha Buhari and the current first lady, Oluremi Tinubu have ditched the traditional in-activeness associated with the office to play a vanguard role in feminist advocates as viewed by Ajayi³³. Though the office of the first lady is not constitutionally defined, yet they have been playing prominent roles in the political and social life of Nigeria as wives of the president. While some first ladies support the presidency behind the scenes, others have utilized their offices and pet projects as gender-mainstreaming platforms to negotiate the corridor of power for women³⁴. Remi Tinubu, the current first lady in Nigeria is herself, a seasoned politician and a senator for many years representing Lagos in the upper house. She has been using her position as a first lady ever since her husband becomes the president to advocate for investment in girl-child for the best interest of the nation³⁵. She believes that investing in women is not just a matter of Social Justice, but also a

³¹ Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, 2009, *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change*, London: Indiana University Press, 171

³² Chinaza Asiegbu, 2021, *Overcoming the Extravagant Woman Phenomenon: The Evolving Political Role of Nigerian First Ladies and the Influence of the African Union, 1960-1998*, from Journal of African Union Studies (Vol.10, Issue 2), <https://go.gale.com>, Retrieved on 8/5/2024

³³ Ajayi Kunle, 2010, *The Concept of First Lady and Politics in Nigeria*, <https://dataspace.princeton.edu>, retrieved on 8/5/2024

³⁴ Jonathan Nda-Isaiah, Christiana Nwaogu, Patience Ivie Ihejirika, George Okojie and Royal Ibeh, *5 Days To Go...*

Curious Public Peeps Into Politics, Fashion, Style Of First Ladies, <https://leadership.ng>, retrieved on 8/5/2024

³⁵ Bukola Kukoyi, 2023, *nigeria's First Lady Celebrates the Girl Child*, <https://statehouse.gov.ng>, retrieved on 8/5/2024

catalyst for National Development³⁶. Among other Yorubá women politicians who are in various levels of political offices, ranging from Senate to House of Representatives, States and Local Governments at the same time successful in numerous businesses include: Elizabeth Adekogbe, Tejumade Alakija, Amina Titi Atiku-Abubakar, Grace Folashade Bent, Abiola Dosunmu, Wuraola Esan, Patricia Ettet, Abimbola Fashola, Simi Johnson, Olusola Obada, Iyabo Obasanjo, Omotayo Oduntan, Olajumoke Okoya-Thomas, Lateefat Okunnu, Funmilayo Olayinka, Adunni Oluwole, Yetunde Onanuga, Adejoke Orelupe-Adefulire, Dolapo Osinbajo, Kafayat Oyetola, Gbemisola Saraki, Toyin Saraki, Sarah Adebisi Sosan, Remi Tinubu, Josephine Oluseyi Williams, Funke Akindele, Bukky Wright.

In 2023 election, for instance, Idiat Oluranti Adebule won the Lagos West senatorial seat under the platform of All Progressives Congress (APC), While Adewunmi Ariyomi Onanuga of the APC won Ikenne/Shagamu/Remo North constituency of Ogun State, Salako Oyedele is the deputy governor in Ogun. Bolaji Egbeyemi Olagbaju was elected to represent Ado Constituency 11, while Okuyiga Eiyato Adeteju won for the Ayekire/Gbonyin constituency. Olowokere Bose Yinka won to represent the Efon constituency, while Ogunlade Maria Abimbola was elected to represent the Emure constituency. Also, Fakunle Okiemen Iyabo won the Ilejemeje constituency seat, while Abimbola Solanke secured the Moba1 constituency seat all in Ekiti State. In Oyo State, Olajide Olufunke Comforter won Ibadan North 1 constituency and Bisi Oluranti Oyewo Michael won the Ogbomoso North constituency. Mojisola Lasbat Merranda, Sangodara Mosunmola Rotimi, Princess Omolara Oyekan-Olumegbon and Osafie Foluke Stella were elected to represent Apapa, Surulere, Lagos Island I and Amuwo-Odofin1 constituency respectively in Lagos State. In Ogun State, Bolanle Lateefat Ajayi and Bakare Omolola Olanrewaju were elected to represent Egbado South and Ijebu Ode constituencies. These and many more are successful women politicians/business³⁷ even today.

³⁶ Samuel Anyanwu, 2023, *First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria says Empowering Women is not just a*

Matter of Social Justice, but also a catalyst for National Development, <https://fmino.gov.ng>, retrieved on 8/5/2024

³⁷ Meet the Nigerian Women Political Leaders Elected in the 2023 General Polls , <https://www.bellanaija.com>.

Retrieved on 10/10/2024

Comparative Analysis of Prominent Women in Pre-colonial and Contemporary Yorubá Political Administration

Socio-economic status of the Yorubá women played a significant role in enhancing their participation in political administration of their society in pre-colonial period. There was no notable woman mentioned in this paper that contributed to the politics of their time that was not financially influential with solid economic base which enhanced their political participation. However, in this contemporary time, women participate in politics not necessarily because they have strong financial base. Rather, some believe that they can get money from elected candidates if their political party or candidates win in an election. Sometimes they ventured into politics because of their interest in politics not minding the risk involved and they have the hope that they too could contribute to the progress of their community.

Cultural and traditional norms were hindrances in the past. The Yorubá patriarchal system in which family control and decision-making powers are in the hands of males was a big clog in the past³⁸. In precolonial period and early postcolonial era, most women in politics were free women who were not under the control of any man. Aye, Efunsetan Aniwura and Madam Tinubu were good examples. Traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes concerning women's roles and status in society laid a strong hold and remained strong, most especially in rural areas as viewed by Sadie³⁹. Traditional roles and the division of labour were formidable factors in the past while social rules that make it more difficult for women to leave their traditionally domestic roles for more public roles outside of the home were strongly in place. In this contemporary time however, there is a little flexibility in the roles that women played at home these days. In some homes, responsibilities are shared and that gives room for women that are interested in politics to participate. These days, most women in politics still keep their homes and remain married. Very good examples are Fúnmiláyo, Ransome Kuti,

³⁸ R. George, 2019, *Gender norms and women's political participation: Global trends and findings on norm Change*. <https://www.alignplatform.org>, Retrieved on 10/5/2024

³⁹ Y. Sadie, 2005, *Women in political decision-making in the SADC region*, <https://www.jstor.org>, Retrieved on 10/5/2024

Kudi Abiola, Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, Naimot Salako-Oyedele, Monisade Afuye and many others.

Reduction in the number of children that a woman give birth to has also reduced drastically due to emulation of foreign culture that gives room for women to attend to some other things of interest. Besides, there are care centres for these children, though not without their own disadvantages.

Western education, travelling, civilisation, change of orientation, assimilation of foreign culture in thinking that exposed people's perception beyond their immediate environments and power of digital media through the activities of science and technology (unlike before that the only source of information were through *Ifá* divination and *Oṣanyìn*) are other factors that have made contemporary women in Yorubá society to be more interested and involved in politics than when they were not educated beyond how to care for their children, husbands and their families. Traveling to places have also exposed more women to new ways of doing things. Though they were civilized in their own right but they were not as much exposed to other people's culture as we have it today. In the past, no one questions the authority of the elders. Therefore, once a thing is pronounced forbidden, it remains so.

Recommendations

There is still a very wide gap between men and women participation in politics. Husbands should be willing to support their wives who have the intention to go into politics. The society at large should be more open to female leadership.

Regardless of modernity and development, Women going into politics should be willing to recognize the position of their husband in families and accord them the respect they are due. This will make other men to be more amiable to support their wives' dreams of holding political offices.

Families should raise girl-child with confidence and self-worth. There are remarkable improvements in girl-child education but more can still be done to raise girls without the sense of inferiority to their male counterparts which will improve their chances of maximizing their potentials in the future.

There is an urgent need to re-shape the orientation of the present female youths. A good number of them have low self-values and know little about current affairs but more about those that are actively dancing

half-naked on TikTok and other social media applications. Since these are the potential female leaders of tomorrow, Government and non-government agencies should make it a priority to orientate young females beyond just going to school to have a certificate.

Religious organisations also have a role to play. They should ensure that leadership training are included in their activities. The Holy Books have examples of notable women who contributed politically in their times. The stories of such women can be influential to the development of future leaders.

It is believed that women are the enemies of themselves. Women should henceforth be more open to support other women who have political ambitions and they should not allow jealousy to sabotage the dreams of their fellow women. Women who have the privilege of occupying public offices should not abuse their power. It is believed that women are better managers, but some women have proven otherwise when they were in positions of power by involving themselves in mind blowing corruption cases, dis-regard for the rule of law and other illicit activities. Such women affect the chances of other women in the future.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that women in the Yorubá society are a formidable force that cannot be ignored from the pre-Colonial era to the contemporary times. Prominent women in Yorubá history were discussed in this paper such as *Èlẹ̀kọ̀'̀dèrè* in *Odù Irosuǹ Méjì* who became wealthy through her business of *Èkọ̀* - Solid pap production and selling. Another woman was *Ajé*, the wife of *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* who had two hundred slaves. *Ọ̀sun* was another woman, a prominent member of the ruling class of the gods. *Mọ̀rẹ̀mí* was also discussed as she remained unforgettable in the history of Ifè city. *Aye* was another female who was powerful and rich in Ado-Ekiti. In Ibadan, the role that *Efunsetan Aniwura*, the *Iyalode* of Ibadan remains indelible in history. Contemporary and future women can learn from the histories of these great women, who were bold and fearless and who did not allow any stereotype or patriarchal ideologies to rob them of their potentials and abilities. Men and the society at large can learn from these historical figures, nobody would have heard about *Ajé*, who is still mentioned in Yorubá commerce till today if *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* had stifled her abilities and denied her the opportunity she had.

Contemporary women can learn from the factors that contributed to the success of Yorùbá historical women who were political activists such as recognizing the role of women in the family. A woman who is not successful in the family setting will find it challenging to succeed in the public state. The society, elders and even the gods did not look down on the gifts of women, this allowed them to contribute their quota to the growth and development of the society at large. How sad would it have been if the prominent female figures in pre-colonial and contemporary times were unable to play their roles in political activism only because they were women. Men should not feel threatened by women. Thus, anyone regardless of gender should be allowed to attain great heights whether in politics, education, trade, sports, religion or any endeavor.

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