

# **THE GENDERED LIFECYCLE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ABÈÒKÚTA, YORÙBÁLAND (PRESENT DAY SOUTH- WEST NIGERIA)**

Submitted by Temilola Seinab Adunni Alanamu, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History in October 2014.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.





## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a micro-history of gender relations in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland (present-day south-west Nigeria) using the town of Abẹ̀òkúta as a case study. It investigates the lived experiences of men and women in a time of radical and sweeping political, economic, social and cultural changes characterised by violent and debilitating intra-ethnic wars that lasted almost a century; the advent of Christian missionaries and their corresponding influences; the spread of Islam; and the dawn of British colonialism. It challenges existing frameworks for understanding gender in Africa, which often considers sex categories only, by exploring how the intersections of sex, age and socio-economic status shaped the pre-colonial gendered experience. Since nineteenth-century Yorùbáland was essentially a gerontocratic society, it analyses gender from a lifecycle perspective, illuminating how the lived experiences of males and females transformed from childhood, to youth to adulthood and then old age and eventually death.

The study engages with current discourses about the highly contested notion of the presence of gender categories in Yorùbá society. Decades of research have either confirmed or contested the idea that gender categories based on biological sex existed in pre-colonial times. While some feminist authors, such as Oyeronke Oyewumi, have argued that sex-based gendered categories are strictly a western invention in Yorùbáland and most of Africa, others, including Bolanle Awe and Oyeronke Olademo have taken a more middle road. They claim instead that although sexed categories were present in precolonial times, Africans did not view sexual difference in western terms of male superiority and female subordination, neither was sex a significant contributor to a person's life trajectories. They have argued that Western and African experiences had marked differences and that the relationship between men and women in Yorùbáland were complementary.

Using nineteenth- and early twentieth-century written sources and oral traditions and building on the works of certain social historians who contest these constructions of the past, this thesis counters the gender complementarity arguments and contends instead that sex played a more significant role in the nineteenth century than previously realised. It maintains that although age hierarchies played a substantial role in social differentiation, sex was also an important factor in determining a person's quality of life and future aspirations. Although the study is focused on women, a significant portion of the thesis discusses men in order to contextualise women's experiences. It argues that since gender relations permeated all aspects of society including non-discursive practices, to study the experience of only one sex would give an incomplete and perhaps distorted view of society.



## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>TITLE PAGE</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>MAPS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>13</b>
Previous approaches to the study of precolonial Yorùbáland	21
The ‘woman’ question in Yorùbá history	23
Men, women and gender in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta	29
Methodologies	20
Sources	31
Written Records	33
Oral traditions	41
Àlò (Myths and folktales)	43
Odù Ifá (divination corpus)	44
Òwe (Proverbs)	47
Oríkì (praise poetry/appellation)	48
Limitations of thesis	49
Thesis plan	50
<b>1. ABẸ̀ÒKÚTA</b>	<b>54</b>
Migration, politics and warfare in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta	55
Abẹ̀òkúta chiefs	59
War and expansion	61
Social and religious changes in Abẹ̀òkúta	68
Ẹ̀bi (the Yorùbá Lineage)	80
Conclusion	87

<b>2. CHILDHOOD</b>	<b>88</b>
<i>Ọmọdẹ</i> (children) in the nineteenth century	92
<i>Bímọ</i> (Birth)	95
Socialisation in the household	109
Socialisation through <i>iṣẹ</i> (Labour)	119
Acculturation through <i>eré</i> (play)	128
Folktales and socialisation	132
Folktales depicting boys	136
Conclusion	140
<b>3. YOUTH AND MARRIAGE</b>	<b>142</b>
Betrothal	147
Slaves and slave wives in Abẹ̀òkúta	154
Female marital consent in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta	157
Male marital consent in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta	169
The wedding	174
The question of fidelity	176
Infidelity in the Church	181
Married life	185
Women's matrimonial labour	191
Missionaries and women's labour	193
Missionaries and polygyny	197
The question of affection	200
The importance of children	203
Male infertility	214
Divorce	218
Conclusion	225
<b>4. ADULTHOOD AND SOCIAL MATURITY</b>	<b>228</b>
The Abẹ̀òkúta political hierarchy	232
<i>Ògbóni</i> (civil chiefs)	233
<i>Orò</i>	236
The reason for women's exclusion	242
<i>Egúngún</i>	245

Women and politics in Abẹ̀òkúta	249
The <i>Ìyálóde</i> in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta	252
The economy in Abẹ̀òkúta	257
Women and the economy	257
The <i>Pàràkòyí</i> (trade guild)	262
Women and the household	268
Masculinities and warfare in nineteenth century <i>Abẹ̀òkúta</i>	274
‘Big men’ in the nineteenth century	274
Warfare in Yorùbáland	280
Political economy of warfare	281
Soldiering	284
Socio-economic and gendered impact of warfare	289
Women’s roles in warfare	291
The <i>Babaláwo</i> and religious authority in Abẹ̀òkúta	296
Conclusion	306
<b>5. OLD AGE AND DEATH</b>	<b>308</b>
The ‘meaning’ of old age	311
Aged slaves and old childless women	317
Women and witchcraft	324
Concepts and beliefs about <i>ikú</i> (death)	329
<i>Ikú, ìsìnkú</i> and <i>şòfò</i> (Death, burial and mourning)	333
The significance of burial rites	343
Conclusion	348
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>350</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>397</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>398</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Researching and writing this PhD thesis has been an exciting learning experience. The many people I met and interacted with along the way, who molded this project by way of intellectual insight, financial assistance, commentary and critique, were vital to its completion. I am grateful to them all. This PhD was funded by a College of Humanities International Doctoral Scholarship at the University of Exeter. Smaller grants were also awarded by the Snowdon Trust and the British Association of Health Services in Higher Education (BAHSHE). Fieldwork in Nigeria and the UK was sponsored through the Dean's discretionary fund, generously granted by Professor Andrew Thorpe, and the Royal Historical Society's Martin Lynn Scholarship in 2012. This work was also completed with the Kathleen Hall Fellowship 2014 awarded by the British Federation of Women Graduates (BFWG). I am particularly grateful to Helen Lampard, Financial Administrator at the Snowdon Trust and Elizabeth Poskitt, Chair of the BFWG Scholarship Fund.

There are others to whom I owe especial gratitude. I am deeply indebted to my first supervisor, Dr. Stacey Hynd for her support during my time as a PhD student. Her intellectual stimulation, insight and encouragement throughout this process were invaluable and I owe the success of this study to her. The guidance and enthusiasm of my second supervisor, Dr. Staffan Muller-Wille, was also vital. His extensive understanding of philosophy and unique perspective on social phenomena helped me to reconsider this project in original and nuanced ways. I am also appreciative of the staff of the Humanities Postgraduate Office, University of Exeter, for their timely assistance through the years especially Morwenna Hussey, Cathryn Baker and Lizzie Underhill.

The success of my fieldwork was due to the help of all the academic and administrative staff of the University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, University of Birmingham Cadbury Research Archive and the National Records and Archives, London. For their assistance and deep interest in this work and my welfare, I owe particularly gratitude to Prof. Olufunke Adeboye, Prof. A. Idowu Olayinka, Dr. Victor Osaro-Edo, Mr. O. A. Afolabi, Dr. S. Ademola Ajayi, Dr. Olaola, Mr. Yusuf Fadairo, Mrs. Victoria Ajegbomogun, Mr. Tope Adedeji and Mrs. Omisore at the National Archives, Ibadan. I also use this opportunity to thank the entire *Ògbóni Áké* of Abẹ̀òkúta for taking the time to inform me about the town's history and oral traditions. My personal interviews with the *Olúwo*, *Apènà* and *Òsì Ìyálóde* were particularly enlightening. My sincerest gratitude to other informants including Mrs. Mariam Olijimi, Mr. Alani, Mrs. Mosurat Afolabi, Ms. Aderemi Ojomu, Mrs. Sinatu Aduke Amusa (Iya Olumo),

and Iya Osun who graciously gave their time to speak to me about Abẹ̀òkúta's history and religious culture.

Completing this thesis was both very stressful and deeply rewarding. I will like to thank all of those who eased the process through their insights, academic resources, and proof reading. I value the comments and critiques of Rhian Keyse, Catherine Nicholls, Omolara Williams, Temitope Williams-Adewunmi, Oluwaseyi Ibadapo and Maurizio Monti. I also want to thank Prof. J. D. Y. Peel for his feedback and rare resources on precolonial Yorùbáland, and Dr. Stephen Lassonde for his keen interest in my work and his comments and suggestions on childhood. I am also grateful to my father for his comments and assistance. To my mother, who, as always, acted as parent, confidant, therapist, counselor, life coach, informant, translator and interpreter, words cannot adequately express my deep gratitude. *Kò sí òrìṣà bí iyá, iyá rere, iyá ni wúrà, iyá ni alábàárò, iyá á máa jó láì rílù, abiyamọ kú irọ́jú.* Finally, to God, the silent contributor in all my endeavours, I am forever grateful.

## MAPS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Fig 0.1: Re-illustration of Map of the Yoruba Country in 1878 [Inset. Sketch of Abeokuta.]	
Fig 1.1: Re-illustration of Sketch of Abeokuta in 1892.	
Fig: 1.2: Illustration of flight of women and children from Abẹ̀òkúta during the 1851 Dahomean invasion.	63
Fig 1.3: Map of Yorùbáland in 1892 showing political boundaries and CMS stations.	64
Fig 1.4: Illustration of a typical town layout in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland.	66
Fig 1.5: View over Abeokuta in the 1920s.	67
Fig 1.6: CMS Pioneers (left to right): Henry Townsend, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Charles Gollmer.	72
Fig 1.7: Illustration of nineteenth-century 'Mohammedan' dress.	78
Fig 1.8: Illustration of a Yorùbá compound.	83
Fig 2.1: Illustration of <i>Ìbejì</i> idol.	99
Fig 2.2: <i>Èṣù Èlẹgbára</i> idol.	104
Fig 2.3: Nineteenth-century Yorùbá facial marks showing Ègbá marks in the top left	105
Fig 2.4: Depiction of young children caught and enslaved.	107
Fig 2.5: Illustration of young children in missionary schools.	124
Fig 2.6 Young girls (first and last) emulating older woman in fetching water for household.	125
Fig 2.7: Young girl assisting mother in dyeing clothes for sale.	126
Fig 2.8: A Yorùbá market in the early twentieth century.	126
Fig 2.9: Illustration of young Yorùbá girls hawking in the nineteenth century.	130
Fig 3.1: Illustration of prisoner in stocks.	160
Fig 3.2: Illustration of the persecution of a Christian daughter at Ibadan.	166
Fig 3.3: Young Yorùbá man in traditional attire.	170
Fig 3.4: Illustration of a young Yorùbá mother and child.	207
Fig 4.1: An Abẹ̀òkúta <i>Ògbóni</i> (civil chief).	234



Fig 4.2: <i>Ẹdan Ògbóni</i> .	236
Fig 4.3: Yorùbá <i>egúngún</i> .	247
Fig 4.4: <i>Àrojẹ</i> or roadside shops in early twentieth-century Abẹ̀òkúta.	258
Fig 4.5: Illustration of travelling in Yorùbá showing the jobs of carriers.	259
Fig 4.6: Illustration of an <i>Ẹgbá</i> marauding party at Ado.	287
Fig 4.9: Illustration of the process of <i>ifá</i> consultation.	298
Fig 5.1: Illustration of an old Yorùbá woman, in this case, Hannah Afala, the mother of Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther.	319
Fig 5.2: Photograph of home gravesite and tombstone of Baba Ayesufu Shodamola Ainitioku, buried in August 1968 in Ìtokò-Áké, Abẹ̀òkúta.	338

## NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY

All Yorùbá words, except the names of authors, have diacritical marks. All Yorùbá words that have English translations have been italicised, but proper nouns, such as the names of people and towns, are not italicised. When quoting from sources, I have followed the spelling used, often without diacritical marks. Otherwise, I have used the standard Yorùbá spelling. The word '*ifá*', when used as a proper noun, in reference to the deity, also begins with a capital letter 'I'.

## INTRODUCTION

**‘There were no *women* - defined in strictly gender terms - in [Yorùbá] society’.<sup>1</sup>**

**Oyewumi Oyeronke, 1997.**

**‘If a woman should say that *Egungun* is a man, or should even hear it said, she would be put to death’.<sup>2</sup>**

**Thomas Jefferson Bowen, 1852.**

Two words, which can be used to describe the current state of scholarship on gender in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, are silence and misrepresentation. Silence because the entire contribution to the field from the early twentieth century to date can be reduced to a bare few books, chapters and articles. Existing accounts focus almost entirely on adult women while the experiences of childhood, youth, and old age remain largely unexplored, and the gendered lives of men are all but ignored. The extant literature also often misrepresents gender categories, gender order and gender relations in the nineteenth century, and there is often a great divide between first hand accounts of the position of women in society in the nineteenth century and those that appear in the secondary literature. In 1997, Oyewumi Oyeronke argued that ‘there were no *women*- defined in strictly gendered terms’ before colonial intervention.<sup>3</sup> However, in 1857 the missionary Thomas Jefferson Bowen wrote that ‘[i]f a woman should say that *Egungun* [the Yorùbá ancestral masquerade] is a man, or should even hear it said, she would be put to death’ indicating that women were ‘defined in strictly gendered terms’. Simply being biologically female implied that one could not be privy to certain secrets in society. To claim to know such mysteries spelt death.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, while LaRay Denzer wrote in 1994 that ‘[d]uring the pre-colonial era women played active roles in political administration [and] decision-making’, an excerpt from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender*

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson Bowen, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849-1856*, [1857] reprint (Charleston: Lightning Source, 2011), p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Oyewumi, p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, p. 142.

nineteenth-century newspaper *Ìwé Ìròhìn* in 1861 counters such understandings of the Yorùbá past. It reported that 'a three days confinement to their houses of women had been announced to commence Monday, which day was also fixed for an assembly of the town'.<sup>5</sup> How could women participate in political decision-making when they had to be confined to their homes when the very town councils that made these decisions met? Such commonplace inconsistencies between contemporary literature and the primary sources are redressed in this thesis.

While the silences and limited historiography in the literature can be attributed to both real and perceived difficulties in obtaining source material, misrepresentations of gender in the nineteenth century are more difficult to explain. First, these phenomena can be attributed to the conflation of the pre-colonial experience, as scholars have tended to reduce centuries of changes and transformations in gender dynamics to monolithic, and sometimes ahistorical, terms. Denzer writes that in pre-colonial times, '[q]ueen mothers, king's sisters, king's wives, priestesses, and market women's leaders occupied a variety of titled offices through which they influenced domestic politics and foreign affairs either directly or indirectly'.<sup>6</sup> While it is true that women at one time or another held these positions in Yorùbáland, such female spheres of influence existed in different periods over time and across political boundaries. Women did hold prominent positions as queen mothers, king's sisters and king's wives in Old Òyó, but these ranks and their significances ended suddenly when Old Òyó was destroyed and its reign terminated in the early nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Priestesses were also influential political figures from earliest recorded times through to the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> But by the nineteenth century, their political roles had severely

---

<sup>5</sup> LaRay Denzer, 'Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27 (1994), 1-39 (p. 36); University of Ibadan, Department of History, Kenneth Dike Library, *Ìwé Ìròhìn 1859-1867 (English Appendix to Ìwé Ìròhìn: March 1860- December 1865 and Ìwé Ìròhìn English Edition: January 1866- October 1867)*, (hereafter cited as *Ìwé Ìròhìn*), May 1861.

<sup>6</sup> Denzer, 'Yoruba Women', 11.

<sup>7</sup> The demise of Old Òyó will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. by Obadiah Johnson, [1921] reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.43-44.

diminished and they were reduced to mainly ritualistic functions, as decision-making was increasingly concentrated in the hands of men: civil, religious and military men.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, women's roles as market leaders came to fruition only in certain parts of nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, not including Abẹ̀òkúta.

Another reason for gender misrepresentation is the reductionist approach some scholars take which perceives women as a uniform, undifferentiated category and obfuscates the highly gerontocratic structure of nineteenth-century Yorùbá society. Scholars continue to depict nineteenth-century Yorùbá women as economically independent and successful, even more so than most women in other regions at the time. Although Yorùbá women were economically independent and many were known for their 'commitment to and success in trading', women who fit into this category were adult females who had gained social maturity.<sup>10</sup> This thesis argues that other females, including children, youths and, in some cases, the elderly, did not enjoy these trading successes. Although females were taught to trade from an early age, females in the stages of childhood and youth were preoccupied with other endeavours; first with matters of their socialisation and then marriage and reproduction. When they had successfully passed through both stages, only then could they turn their attention to economic advancement.<sup>11</sup> The current literature therefore does not account for the multiplicity of female experiences in Yorùbáland.

Finally, misrepresentations of gender can be attributed to black feminist motivations in African history. Gloria Chukwu argues that the corpus of literature on African women's participation in pre-colonial politics can be split into two distinct and opposing paradigms. The first largely romanticises African women's political history and argues for their enormous political power before it was undermined by 'European colonial domination and Victorian gender ethos'. The other emphasises women's 'political subordination and

---

<sup>9</sup> The roles of priestesses will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Strobel, 'African Women', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 109–131 (p. 118).

<sup>11</sup> Childhood and youth will be discussed extensively in chapters two and three.

invisibility'.<sup>12</sup> These opposing theories however have a direct causal relationship which began at the rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s. Second wave feminism widely generated a new interest in women's studies and women's history. As white feminist fought to rescue history from the normative androcentric paradigms pervasive in academia, they simultaneously sought to discover the origin of women's oppression in society and the reasons for their absence in historical discourses. They traced women's oppression to patriarchy and sought to uncover globally, the dimensions of this repressive male force. Although the idea of a universal sisterhood based on the notion of a shared patriarchal oppression under which all women suffered was 'attractive and inspiring', black feminists soon challenged western paradigms and critiqued it as constituting cultural hegemony.<sup>13</sup> They argued that western feminist concerns were not 'universal', but based on the lives of white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Western women were accused of appropriating feminism for their own purposes, disguising their interests as universal, and consequently homogenising the lives and experiences of black women in the process.

In Africa, feminists also sought to break these sex and racial barriers with extensive research into African gender history. From a wide reading of the secondary literature, one discovers that African feminist historians combined a feminist perspective with an anti-colonial and postcolonial political intellectualism. Such an approach sought to historically liberate Africa women from oppressive androcentric discourses while simultaneously rejecting western feminist paradigms that subordinated African women.<sup>14</sup> These scholars sought to rebuff western concepts of universal gender hierarchy and oppression by asserting that western influences introduced discord and

---

<sup>12</sup> Gloria Chukwu, "Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria, 1800s-2005." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42.1 (2009), (81-103), 81

<sup>13</sup> Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 11; Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Beyond difference: women and coalition politics', in *Making Connections: Women's Studies, Women's Movements, Women's Lives*, ed. By M. Kennedy, C. Lubelska and V. Walsh (London: Taylor and Francis, 1993), (3-10), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Amina Mama, 'Is It Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom', *African Studies Review*, 50 (2013), 1-26 (pp. 3-14)

hierarchy to African gender relations, which had previously been grounded in gender harmony.<sup>15</sup>

However, these interpretations of the past, which span from the 1960s to the present day, tend to be characterised by an over-celebration of history and optimistic nostalgia of women's roles in pre-colonial times. Niara Sudarkasa wrote in 1986 that some writers have incorrectly 'characterized women in African societies as "jural minors" for most of their lives, falling under the guardianship first of their fathers and then of their husbands'.<sup>16</sup> As she iterated, her work aimed to reverse this view of African women, stressing that 'a "neutral" complementarity rather than a superordination/subordination framework more accurately describes the relationship between certain female and male roles in various pre-colonial African societies'.<sup>17</sup> This black feminist emphasis on reversing the prevalent representation of African women from that of subordination, inferiority and dependency to one of equity, parity and independence is common in the works of prominent Nigerian scholars such as Bolanle Awe, Oyeronke Oyewumi, and Nina Mba.<sup>18</sup> With reference to Yorùbáland in particular, some feminist historians have emphasised that the relationship between men and women in pre-colonial Yorùbáland was one of a mutual gender complementarity and balance rooted in Yorùbá cosmology, the significance of which 'obliterated oppression'.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Oyewumi, ix-xvii

<sup>16</sup> Niara Sudarkasa, "The Status of Women" in Indigenous African Societies', *Feminist Studies*, 12 (1986), 91–103 (p. 91)

<sup>17</sup> Sudarkasa, "The Status of Women", 93, 101.

<sup>18</sup> Bolanle Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System', in *Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View*, ed. by Alice Schlegel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 144–160; Bolanle Awe, 'Writing Women into History: The Nigerian Experience', in *Writing Women's History International Perspectives*, ed. by Karen Offen, Ruth Pierson and Jane Rendell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 211–220; Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Oyeronke Olademo, *Gender and Yorùbá Oral Traditions* (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009), p. 44. See also Niara Sudarkasa, *The Strength of Our Mothers: African and African American Women and Families - Essays and Speeches* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1996), p. 225; Diedre L. Badejo, *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power, and Femininity* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1995); Oyeronke Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 10.

Much of the argument for equity between the sexes hinges on the economic importance of Yorùbá women in the pre-colonial era. As will be discussed in detail, women in pre-colonial Yorùbáland were economically active and financially independent of their husbands. Some even gained immense wealth through trade. In consequence, Yorùbá women have been cited as examples of women's economic and political empowerment in pre-industrial societies. Their position has been described as enviable when compared with the status of women in many other societies of the same period and some historians have argued that their significant economic contribution to the region bestowed political clout.<sup>20</sup>

While the motives of African feminists are noble, their attempts to project empowerment onto women's pasts often obscure the lived realities of many women in history. As Chukwu correctly argues, women's position in pre-colonial society often lay in-between oppression and equity.<sup>21</sup> Women's financial and economic importance for example did not lead to gender parity because as this thesis will argue, a favourable position in one area of life did not always translate to others. Although women were undeniably economically independent, other areas of their lives including their political participation were limited in comparison to men. The few women who succeeded in amassing significant wealth through trade and converted their economic capital into political currency did so largely in an informal capacity through their ability to influence men in power.<sup>22</sup> Judith Byfield has even argued that women's economic independence was detrimental to their socio-political position because 'Yoruba men did not celebrate women's success'.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> See Judith K. Brown, 'A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 72 (1970), 1073–1078; Alice Schlegel, 'Towards a Theory of Sexual Stratification', in *Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View*, ed. by Alice Schlegel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 1–40.

<sup>21</sup> Chukwu, 81.

<sup>22</sup> For more on women's economic and political lives, see Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System', pp. 144–160; Sandra T. Barnes, 'Gender and the Politics of Support and Protection in Pre-colonial West Africa', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 810 (1997), 1–18; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, p. ix; Strobel, 118; Claire Robertson, 'Ga Women and Socioeconomic Change in Accra, Ghana', in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* ed. by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp.111-134 (p. 111).

<sup>23</sup> Judith A. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), p. 23-4.



Instead, men deliberately sought to inhibit, and in some cases halt altogether, women's entry into the political arena in order to preserve it as a male domain.

Other social historians such as Simi Afonja, Karin Barber and J. D. Y Peel corroborate Byfield's claims. Afonja wrote that in the pre-colonial status system, rank was determined by sex, age, descent and political role. She argues that although women were successful entrepreneurs, due to certain societal configurations, women often ranked lower than men and on the whole, high-level political positions for women were rare.<sup>24</sup> In her examination of appellation poetry in the Yorùbá town of Okuku, Barber also argued that there were limits to women's self-aggrandisements and women who tried to 'convert their economic success into social and political capital on the patterns of men were regarded as a threat'.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, within a wider discussion of religion, J. D. Y Peel suggested women's limited contribution in pre-colonial politics when he described pre-colonial politics as 'deeply patriarchal' based on the concept of fatherhood and linked to masculine ideals of power, war and polygamy, attributes which few women could embody.<sup>26</sup> Building on the foundational works of these social historians who challenge dominant paradigms of gender equity in the past, this thesis argues that gender dynamics in the pre-colonial era were complex and intricate and were characterised by neither complete female subordination nor full mutual complementarity.<sup>27</sup> It contends that in pre-colonial Yorùbáland, men largely controlled the socio-political sphere and in such areas, women's representation can, to a certain extent, be considered tokenism.<sup>28</sup> It maintains

---

<sup>24</sup> See: Simi Afonja, 'Changing patterns of gender stratification in West Africa', in *Persistent Inequalities: Women and world development*, ed. By Irene Tinker (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), 198-209 (p.204).

<sup>25</sup> Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 234

<sup>26</sup> J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 71-87.

<sup>27</sup> This study also addresses the silences in works of Byfield, Afonja, Peel and Barber because none of their enquiries focus on gender in the pre-colonial era. Rather, women's roles in the nineteenth century are explored marginally in relation to other social phenomena including religion, rural development, oral traditions and labour.

<sup>28</sup> Afonja, 'Changing patterns of gender stratification in West Africa', p.204.

that attempts to depict pre-colonial gender in terms of parity have led to distortions and misrepresentations in Yorùbá history.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned works of Awe, Oyewumi, Mba, Sudarkasa, Denzer and other Nigerian feminist historians must not be disregarded. African feminist scholarship has contributed immensely to historical gender knowledge giving new perspectives, introducing nuanced methodologies to African history and forcing a re-examination of popular assumptions about gender in the past. Their assessments of the past continue to be relevant and indispensable, their input served as a the background to this study, and as will be detailed below, this thesis depended heavily on their scholarship. Hence, this thesis places itself within black feminist discourses and the wider socio-historical dialogues of African gender history.

Essentially, this thesis is a micro-history of gender relations in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland at the verge of British imperialism in the region. It uses Abẹ̀òkúta as a case study to investigate how men and, most especially, women lived their lives in a time of radical and sweeping political, economic, social and cultural changes. By using previously untapped primary sources, it attempts to both reveal areas of people's lives that have so far been invisible or marginalised in the historiography and also to critique academic memory of pre-colonial life in an attempt to correct some of the inconsistencies in the literature. It challenges current frameworks for understanding gender in Yorùbáland and explores how the intersection of sex, age and socio-economic status shaped the pre-colonial gendered experience. Since nineteenth-century Yorùbáland was above all a gerontocratic society, it analyses gender from a lifecycle perspective illuminating how the lives of males and females were transformed from childhood, to youth to adulthood and then to old age. At the end of this study, this thesis will redefine the way scholars understand gender and gender relations in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland.

## Previous approaches to the study of pre-colonial Yorùbáland

The Yorùbá of south-west Nigeria are no strangers to historical inquiry being one of the most extensively studied indigenous groups in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>29</sup> Colonial and postcolonial literature has however dominated historiography.<sup>30</sup> Within the limited scholarship of the nineteenth century, enquiries into Yorùbá politics have been prominent.<sup>31</sup> Toyin Falola attributes this to the radical political and constitutional changes that characterised the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> The nineteenth century in Yorùbáland is popularly known as the age of confusion. The Òyó Empire, the most powerful in the area from the seventeenth century, disintegrated in the early nineteenth century due to a combination of internal and external crises. An advancing Fulani Jihad from the north, the rise of Dahomey in the west, the instability of the central Òyó government, and successive inept Òyó kings known as *Aláàfin*, all contributed to the maelstrom of local instability. This was compounded by the impact of slave raiding and the struggles for the control of trade routes as the region became incorporated into global economies. The kingdoms of the Yorùbá were thrown into a state of crisis that was to last over seventy years. Violent and debilitating wars, slave raids, widespread insecurity, and grave human suffering devastated communities. There was mass migration, desertion of homesteads and destroyed means of livelihood. Entire families were broken up and whole towns and villages were deserted, and large areas of farmland were reclaimed by forest. Fought from the 1820s, these wars ended in the 1890s when the British intervened and forced the signing of peace treaties.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Gary Lynn Comstock, 'The Yoruba and Religious Change', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 10 (1979), 1-12 (p. 1); Jacob K. Olupona, 'The Study of Yoruba Religious Tradition in Historical Perspective', *Numen*, 40 (1993), 240-273 (p. 241).

<sup>30</sup> See: William Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1984); Elisha P Renne, *Cloth That Does Not Die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bùnú Social Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Examples of these are given below.

<sup>32</sup> Toyin Falola, 'Introduction', in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. By Toyin Falola, (Wisconsin, 1991), pp. 1-4.

<sup>33</sup> For a more robust discussion on these wars, see: S. A Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893; Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), pp. xv-xix; Bolanle Awẹ, 'Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example', *The Journal of African History*, 14

With such rapid and widespread change, it is no surprise that inquiry into nineteenth-century politics has been prominent in the extant literature on Yorùbá pre-colonial studies. Authors such as Robert Smith, Peter Lloyd and J. F. Ade-Ajayi have extensively studied nineteenth-century politics detailing the intricacies of events that culminated in nineteenth-century Yorùbá warfare and British conquest.<sup>34</sup> These works however follow an androcentric intellectual tradition and pay little to no attention to the gendered dimensions of politics. Closely linked to politics are enquiries into Yorùbá economies resulting from the effects of war, the advent of slave raiding and trading, the rise of an indigenous elite dependent on war spoils, and the subsequent growth of large-scale 'legitimate' export trade.<sup>35</sup> Due to women's involvement in the nineteenth-century economy, they feature more prominently in such economy-focused literature. Researchers have also enquired into Yorùbá religion, focusing on its proliferation into all aspects of Yorùbá pre-colonial life, the advent of protestant missions in the region, the spread of Christianity and Islam and the resilience of indigenous religion despite foreign influences.<sup>36</sup> Since the rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s, enquiries into Yorùbá social life in the nineteenth century became increasingly popular. Instead of the androcentric history of previous years, historians became increasingly interested in nineteenth-century gender relations and how these evolved over time. However, such scholarly inquiry did not examine the nineteenth century on its own terms; instead they used pre-colonial gender categories as a

---

(1973), 65-77 (p. 65); *Yoruba historiography*, ed. by Toyin Falola (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Sydney Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (University Press, 1964); Peter C. Lloyd, *The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1971); Robert Sydney Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> A. G. Adebayo, 'Money, Credit, and Banking in Pre-colonial Africa. The Yoruba Experience', *Anthropos*, 89 (1994), 379-400; Awe, 'Militarism and Economic Development', 65-77.

<sup>36</sup> See Olatunde B. Lawuyi, 'Studies on Traditional Religion', in *Yoruba historiography*, ed. by Toyin Falola (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 43-49; Iliam R. Bascom, 'The Relationship of Yoruba Folklore to Divining', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 56 (1943), 127-131; Karin Barber, 'How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes Towards the "Orisa"', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 51 (1981), 724-745.

background for their core focus on the development and transformation of gender in the colonial and post-colonial periods.<sup>37</sup>

This thesis differs from others on gender in Yorùbáland because it centres its analyses on the pre-colonial era in order to understand local gendered dynamics before the pervasive influences of western imperialism. To explore this, it uses the Ègbá people of Abẹ̀òkúta as a case study because the town was a prolific settlement, which is often overlooked in historical inquiries that favour other Yorùbá municipalities such as Ibàdàn and Lagos- known in the Yorùbá language as Èkó. Also, the region is an appropriate case study because it was an archetype of the nineteenth-century condition. Abẹ̀òkúta only came into existence when the original Ègbá homestead in the Ègbá forest was destroyed during the intra-ethnic wars and many of their citizens were enslaved. The people that remained abandoned their homes and moved to a new area under Olúmọ̀ rock, which they called Abẹ̀òkúta (under a stone). Here, they rebuilt their political, economic and social structures and embarked on wars of expansion while defending their town from foreign incursion.<sup>38</sup> Although, as will be discussed in chapter one, the Ègbá of Abẹ̀òkúta consisted of many sub-groups, primary evidence shows that the cultural practises of these groups were largely identical. Therefore, the town is explored as a single unit without significant reference to townships.

### **The ‘woman’ question in Yorùbá history**

Before analysing gender in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, one must first ask if gender differentiation based on sex existed. Did ‘women’ actually exist in the nineteenth century? Some scholars argue that asking the ‘woman’ question in the context of pre-colonial Yorùbáland is an ahistorical Eurocentric imposition on Yorùbá history. In *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*, Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that ‘woman’ as a

---

<sup>37</sup> See for example: Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009); Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, p. 1-42.

<sup>38</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta will be discussed in detail in chapter one.

social category did not exist in pre-colonial Yorùbá indigenous culture before 'sustained' European contact. She sees gender differences based on sex in Yorùbáland as 'European cultural baggage' and an 'alien distortion'.<sup>39</sup> Using the Òyó-Yorùbá as a case study, she contends that although the Yorùbá recognised biological sex differences, sex carried no social value and writes that 'unlike the west, physical bodies were not social bodies [...] and the presence or absence of certain organs did not determine social position or [...] social hierarchy [...]'. She maintains that the Yorùbá words for man and women, *okunrin* and *obinrin* respectively have been erroneously interpreted as man and women which denote the norm and superior- man from which the abnormal and inferior- (wo)man is derived. She argues that the Yorùbá language does not make these norm-other differentiation as *rin*, the common suffix denotes humanity and the *okun* and *obin* simply indicate biological differences without social hierarchy. She declares that 'in fact, there were no women- defined in strictly gender terms'.<sup>40</sup> Rather, she suggests that pre-colonial Yorùbáland was a gerontocratic society where rank, status, and hierarchy were determined by age and seniority.<sup>41</sup>

Age hierarchies were intrinsic to Yorùbá pre-colonial society and Oyewumi is right to argue that pre-colonial Yorùbá country was a gerontocratic one where, to a large extent, age determined social status and hierarchy.<sup>42</sup> Within families, sex categories were of lesser importance than age hierarchies, and daughters, sisters and mothers had considerable power depending on their age. Older women outranked younger men, and, as daughters, women had the same rights as sons, which they continued to hold even after marriage. Females could inherit at their consanguineal home, and could return in case of a failed marriage or at old age.<sup>43</sup> The Yorùbá language, which makes little grammatical distinction between the sexes, is a good reflection of the gerontocratic Yorùbá society. First, there are no gendered pronouns in the

---

<sup>39</sup> Oyewumi, p. xi.

<sup>40</sup> Oyeronke Olademo also argues this when she writes that biological determinism was inapplicable in many parts of Africa. Olademo, pp. 12-13; Oyewumi, p. ix-xii.

<sup>41</sup> Oyewumi, p. xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Oyewumi, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Divorce and old age will be discussed in chapters three and five. See Peter C. Lloyd, 'Divorce among the Yorùbá', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 70 (1968), 67-81.

language. Words like he, she, him or her have no direct Yorùbá translation. Additionally, there are no Yorùbá equivalents for words like brother, sister, uncle, and aunt that indicate gendered familial relations. *Ọkọ*, the Yorùbá word for husband, can also mean a lineage member, either male or female, and is also frequently used as a term of endearment for both sexes. Similarly, Yorùbá words like *iyàwó* (wife), *iyà* (mother) and *baba* (father), although gender specific, are used outside familial relations as an expression of fondness and respect.<sup>44</sup> But since the nineteenth century, when missionaries began translating Yorùbá to English, the non-gendered nature of the language has been widely misunderstood and ignored, and as a result, misinterpretations are endemic in Yorùbá translations. For instance, the Yorùbá word *ọba*, often translated as king, is more accurately ruler, a gender-neutral term. *Òrìṣà*, usually interpreted as gods and goddess means deity, while *eniyan*, often translated as man lacks gender connotations and literally means human being.<sup>45</sup>

Rather than sex, the language makes substantial distinctions according to age and seniority. Age pronouns such as ‘*won*’ for elders and ‘*o*’ for those considered to be in the same age grade or younger, are used instead of gender indicative ones. To indicate familial relations, the Yorùbá use the words *ẹgbọn* and *àbúrò*, which mean an elder and younger sibling or relative respectively. Yorùbá proper names are also largely gender neutral. Writing in the nineteenth century, Samuel Johnson, a Yorùbá missionary with the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), stated that the Yorùbá recognised no gender differences in language and any distinctions introduced by missionaries must first be explained to them.<sup>46</sup> If Mikhail Bakhtin is right in suggesting that language is a representation of a people’s worldview, then it is

---

<sup>44</sup> Yisa Kehinde Yusuf, ‘Sexism, English and Yoruba’, *Linguistik online*, 11, p. 15; Rose Letsholo, ‘Patriarchy and Aspects of the Ikalanga Language’, in *Language, Gender and Politics: A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*, ed. by Akin Odeunmi, Arua Arua and Sailal Arimi (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009), pp. 151–62; Taiwo Olorunoba-Oju, ‘Language and Gender Performatives in the Nigerian Context: Citation and de-Citation in Yoruba and “Nollywood” Films’, in *Language, Gender and Politics: A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*, ed. by Akin Odeunmi, Arua Arua and Sailal Arimi (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009), pp. 213–36.

<sup>45</sup> Yusuf, pp. 7–23.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

clear that the Yorùbá saw society in ageist terms.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, despite some merit in Oyewumi's gerontocratic argument, her study includes certain fundamental flaws that render her claims unrepresentative of the social realities of the times. Discursively, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf offers the most vocal and in-depth critique of Oyewumi's work. In "Yoruba's don't do gender": A critical review of Oyeronke Oyewumi's *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Bakare Yusuf argues that Oyewumi's assumption that words have an 'original' meaning that can be accessed is an erroneous one. Citing Oyewumi's argument that *obinrin* and *okunrin* only denote biological differences and not social hierarchy, Bakare-Yusuf argues that language is fluid, shifting and mutable, 'bearing meaning that society projects upon them'. Therefore, one cannot say with certainty what a word meant at a particular time, neither can one assume that culture and language have 'an unhistorical essence that is unaffected by time and change'.<sup>48</sup>

Bakare-Yusuf also critiques Oyewumi's emphasis on gerontocracy and seniority as the only forms of power relationships existing outside other hierarchies such as sex, socio-economic and socio-political position. She suggests instead that different modes of power interact together depending on time and context and 'no form of power is monolithic or universal, existing in isolation from all other modes of social structuration'.<sup>49</sup> Bakare-Yusuf also argues that Oyewumi uncritically equivocates language with social reality.<sup>50</sup> Similar to Helen Crumbley's argument that language may not always equate to social behaviour, Bakare Yusuf contends that discursive practises do not always equate to lived realities and an absence of gender specific pronouns does not confirm that the Yorùbá did not imbue biological differences with

---

<sup>47</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson, New edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 291–2. For gender and language, see also: Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1–2.

<sup>48</sup> Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, "Yoruba's don't do gender": A critical review of Oyeronke Oyewumi's *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, 4-5, [www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/BAKERE\\_YUSUF.pdf](http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/BAKERE_YUSUF.pdf) [last accessed 23 March 2015]

<sup>49</sup> Bakare-Yusuf, 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> Bakare-Yusuf, 6-8.



social significances.<sup>51</sup> For instance, the word *oba* being gender neutral does not preclude the reality that all *oba*, in the nineteenth century, were men.

Oyewumi's argument is also historically flawed as she fails to recognise any gendered division of labour in the nineteenth century despite ample evidence to the contrary, as will be demonstrated in chapters three and four.<sup>52</sup> In a section opposing the existence of sexual division of labour, she disputes the claim that cooking was considered women's work in pre-colonial Yorùbáland. She states that cooking was not a task assigned to women but wives. Since wives were considered social juniors, she sees this gendered division of labour as resulting from an ageist social hierarchy rather than a sex-based one.<sup>53</sup> Surprisingly, she fails to acknowledge the obvious fact that these social juniors were women moving across patriarchal boundaries. Although many western observers detailed that the Yorùbá ate many meals outside the home, produced by professional caterers, these caterers were called *iyá olóhjú* (mother of food), denoting that they were fundamentally women. Indeed Oyewumi tends to explain away or ignore certain aspects of Yorùbá culture that do not fit into her argument of a non-gendered society.<sup>54</sup>

Oyewumi also uses problematic methodologies in her study including her use of societal exceptions, what Pierre Bourdieu terms 'miraculous exceptions', to make generalisations about gender. For example, she used the presence of a few female rulers in the entire dynastic line in Old Òyó to make generalisations about the presence of female rulers in all of pre-colonial Yorùbáland.<sup>55</sup> Another significant methodological flaw is her persistent use of recent sociological material as evidence of historical fact. One instance of this is her use of two female rulers in 1990s Ògbómòṣó and Àroṣe, two towns in Yorùbáland, to justify her argument that female monarchs existed before the

---

<sup>51</sup> Deidre Helen Crumbley, 'Patriarchies, Prophets, and Procreation: Sources of Gender Practices in Three African Churches', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 73 (2003), 584-605 (p. 592).

<sup>52</sup> Oyewumi, pp. 57, 61.

<sup>53</sup> Oyewumi, p. 58.

<sup>54</sup> Oyewumi, pp. 57, 61.

<sup>55</sup> Oyewumi, pp. 86-91.

nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

Contrary to Oyewumi's claims, social constructs based on sex did exist in pre-colonial society. Lorand Matory for instance demonstrates that in the nineteenth century, bridewealth payment and polygyny were common occurrences while dowry and polyandry were inconceivable.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, women's consanguineal and conjugal residences were both patrilocal.<sup>58</sup> Seniority in these patrilocal residences was determined not by actual age, but the length of one's attachment to it. Therefore regardless of her age, a new bride was considered younger than every child born into the lineage before her wedding. Women consequently experienced a mid-life social demotion at marriage to which men were immune.<sup>59</sup> It can therefore be argued that women did exist, and the Yorùbá practised some elements of biological determinism. Indeed, in areas such as politics, the physical body was a basis for social hierarchy, biology determined life trajectories and sex distinctions carried hierarchical dimensions as the body politic was predominantly male.

Using Abẹ̀òkúta as a case study, this thesis will show that women's status in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland was thus a highly complex issue that depended on sex, socio-economic standing and age. To adequately reflect the gerontocratic society within which the Yorùbá lived while accounting for how sex and socio-economic status interacted with age, it examines the lives of women from a lifecycle perspective, analysing how people's experiences changed from childhood to youth to adulthood and then old age.<sup>60</sup> This line of enquiry has significant implications for African gender history. By questioning,

---

<sup>56</sup> This is also an instance of her using exceptions to make generalisations. The Yorùbá region in the 1990s had hundreds of traditional rulers. If only two of these were women, this would indicate an exception rather than the norm. Oyewumi, p. 96.

<sup>57</sup> Bridewealth is used here as a general term for the transfer of wealth and labour from the groom to the bride's family before marriage. This will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

<sup>58</sup> J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yorùbá Religion* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. xxvi.

<sup>59</sup> J. D. Y. Peel, 'Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32 (2002), 136-166 (p. 139); Matory, xxvi.

<sup>60</sup> The author recognizes that these divisions could sometimes be arbitrary and blurred and people may not necessarily have understood life in these terms. However, these divisions were necessary to show change.

and, in some cases, disproving dominant paradigms in Yorùbá historiography, it urges a new contemplation of gender history in Africa.

### **Men, women and gender in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta**

This thesis is principally about women in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. In order to understand women and the nature of gender relations however, it is imperative to study men.<sup>61</sup> Joan Scott argues convincingly that the study of women in isolation ‘perpetuates the fiction that the experience of one sex, has little or nothing to do with the other.’<sup>62</sup> In Robert (now Raewyn). W. Connell’s work on hegemonic masculinities, he states that there has been an increased recognition that all experiences were gendered and not just those of women. Connell also argues that there is a need to make both men and women visible and study both the masculine and feminine experience if one is to understand society.<sup>63</sup> In the nineteenth century, men’s lives were as dynamic and as differentiated and women’s lives but current literature does not reflect this and the lived experiences of men remain largely unexplored. This study addresses this silence by including the experiences of men as an integral part of its analysis. As men went through the four lifecycle stages of childhood, youth, adulthood and old age, their progression through these phases and their status in nineteenth-century society depended on women. For instance, a man’s capacity to advance from the status of child to that of a young man on his way to adulthood depended almost entirely on his marrying a wife, while his ability to sustain and grow his household depended on the productive and reproductive labour of women.

---

<sup>61</sup> Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay, ‘Introduction’, in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, ed. by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 1–18 (p. 5).

<sup>62</sup> Joan W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), 1053–75 (p. 1056).

<sup>63</sup> Robert (now Raewyn) W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender and Society*, 19 (2005), 829–59. See also: Frances Cleaver, ‘Men and Masculinities: New Directions in Gender and Development’, in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), pp. 1–27 (p. 22); Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, 5th Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 7; Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History*, (London: Hodder Education: 2004), pp. 3–5, 84.

In its analyses of the gendered lifecycle, this thesis will collectively enquire into how both biological males and females in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta came to be socially gendered as men and women. In other words, what social processes transformed biological males and females into cultural men and women? Simone de Beauvoir writes that 'one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one'.<sup>64</sup> Judith Butler argues also that becoming a woman was not by virtue of genitalia, but was rather a social process, 'a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate at the end'.<sup>65</sup> Being a woman is therefore not an instrument of biology but a cultural performance.<sup>66</sup> This thesis argues that both processes of becoming a 'man' and a 'woman' were socially constructed. The study asks how boys and girls were socialised as children to recognise their position in society, and what gendered roles males and females were expected to perform during their lifetime as children, youths, adults and elders in order to legitimate them as Yorùbá. By asking these questions, it engages with discourses of childhood, youth, masculinities and femininities and old age. It uses Joan Scott's definition of gender as 'a social category imposed on a sexed body'.<sup>67</sup> However, it identifies that in pre-colonial Yorùbáland, gender was not a category, it was *multiple*, unstable categories, constituted and modified over time and in different contexts.

## Methodologies

In 1991, Bolanle Awe wrote that 'the position of women within [pre-colonial] society was not fully understood'.<sup>68</sup> Over two decades later, this still holds true for both men and women. It is these so far unexplored life experiences that this thesis aims to illuminate. Succinctly, it investigates the lived realities of men and women in the nineteenth century. It does not set out to explore the lives of prominent figures of the time, although this is inevitable in certain

---

<sup>64</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* translated by E. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 301.

<sup>65</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 45.

<sup>66</sup> Butler, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> Scott, 1056.

<sup>68</sup> Awe, 'Writing Women into History', p. 214.

areas. Instead, it seeks to understand how ordinary men and women lived in a time of significant and far-reaching political, economic, social and religious changes. This study focuses on the common man because they made up the largest population of the time and inquiry into their lives will be significantly more representative of the circumstances of the day. It seeks to discover what these ordinary men and women believed, how they acted, their community structures, and how they maintained, managed, negotiated and contested their institutions. As a result, this thesis will make visible the Yorùbá pre-colonial past which has so far been either invisible or obscured in much of the current literature.

To achieve this, this dissertation borrows from various sociological and historical theories.<sup>69</sup> It applies postmodern gender concepts including theories of masculinities and femininities, gender theories, childhood theories, and old age theories to better understand the relationship between the sexes while remaining aware that the imposition of a present-day postmodern consciousness on the past poses potential problems. In her book *Writing Gender History*, Laura Lee Downs questions whether scholars can or should impose gendered categories and make the sex/gender distinction on peoples in history who were not aware of these subjectivities.<sup>70</sup> This thesis argues that researchers should not impose gender categories but must ask these postmodern questions about the past because despite its potential complications, one cannot understand men and women in history without recourse to these concepts. It also contends that although it can be argued that the pre-colonial Yorùbá were neither aware of the sex/gender distinction, nor their gendered subjectivities, they nevertheless enacted it. Evidence of hegemonic military masculinity is notably pervasive throughout the century. Ideals of emphasised femininity in the attainment of motherhood were also present. This thesis is therefore written with the supposition that applying these theories will only serve to enlighten rather than distort our understanding of the past.

---

<sup>69</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory: Ways of Imagining the Past*, Second edition (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Downs, p. 79.

Although this study is about the gendered experiences of the Abẹ̀òkúta indigenous population, men and women's individual experiences in the nineteenth century are largely absent. Since Yorùbáland was non-literate, most of the evidence concerning gender comes through the voices and writings of western and western-trained men including missionaries, travellers, explorers and the indigenous elites that came later. Therefore the voices of those spoken about are silent. However, gender and subaltern theories suggest that if we are ever to comprehend people's realities, or make any claim to 'true' experiences, then these people must speak for themselves.<sup>71</sup> It is argued here that the lack of 'voice' or an 'authentic African narrative' does not mean that attempts to reconstruct Yorùbá gender history should be abandoned.<sup>72</sup> The thesis agrees with Gertrude Mianda who states that it is precisely because these men and women are silent in historical discourses that we must write their history by making use of any source that can give clues into their lives and experiences.<sup>73</sup> It is on these understandings of methodological difficulties that this study is effected. The next section, therefore, critically analyses the sources used for this thesis highlighting their strengths and weaknesses as potential resources on nineteenth-century gender.

---

<sup>71</sup> This fits in with wider women's studies and feminist literature that debates the ethics of speaking for 'others'. See: Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Difference: "A Special Third World Women Issue"', *Feminist Review*, 1987, 5–22; Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory', *Signs*, 12 (1987), 621–643; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 1988, 61–88; Kimberley Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: The Essential Writings of Kimberley Crenshaw* (New York: New Press, 2014); Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Linda Alcoff, 'The Problem of Speaking for Others', *Cultural Critique*, 20 (1991), 5–32; Manjit Bola et al, 'I. Representing Ourselves and Representing Others: A Response', *Feminism and Psychology*, 8 (1998), 105–110.

<sup>72</sup> Luise White, Stephan Miescher and David Cohen, 'Introduction: Voices, Words and African History', in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in History (African Systems of Thought)*, ed. by Luise White, Stephan Miescher and David Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 1-30 (p. 3).

<sup>73</sup> Gertrude Mianda, 'Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The Evolve Case', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 144-163 (p. 145).

## Sources

Writing history is possible only if the sources exist, and the relative rarity of primary sources when studying African history has necessitated new methodological approaches.<sup>74</sup> These nuanced approaches are even more important when studying areas such as pre-colonial African gender history as a limited primary source base demands that historians apply creativity and compromise in gathering sources, often borrowing from other disciplines including sociology, linguistics, and anthropology. Written materials in the pre-colonial era are especially scarce. Where they do exist, they originate from western observers and the few western-educated indigenous elites who were often more concerned with recording their personal experiences in the region than they were about documenting the social lives of people in their host communities.<sup>75</sup> To gain a more robust research base therefore, one must also include other less conventional material. In a non-literate society like pre-colonial Yorùbáland, these materials come in the form of oral traditions, either documented in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or passed down orally through generations. These oral traditions are important if one is to gain an indigenous perspective on Yorùbá culture, beliefs, and attitudes. This section will examine the written and oral sources used in this thesis, exploring their strengths and weaknesses and concluding that ultimately it is important to explore all possible avenues, as this is the only way a study of gender in pre-colonial Yorùbáland can be achieved.

### *Written Records*

---

<sup>74</sup> Awẹ, 'Writing Women into History', p. 214; See also: Jan Vansina, 'Historians, Are Archeologists Your Siblings?', *History in Africa*, 22 (1995), 369-408; White, Miescher and Cohen, p. 2; Robin Law, 'Contemporary Written Sources', in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. by S. O. Biobaku (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), pp. 9-24; Robin Law, 'Traditional History', in *Sources of Yoruba History*, Edited by S.O Biobaku (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), pp. 25-40.

<sup>75</sup> In William H. Clarke's *Travels and Explorations in Yorùbáland* for instance, only twenty-two pages from a total of two hundred and ninety two is concerned with the 'Social life of the Yoruba people'. The bulk of the text narrates his personal journey around the region. William H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972).

The first types of written records used in the thesis are the books of Western travellers and explorers who visited the Yorùbá region during the nineteenth century and published their findings. These include *Pilgrimage to My Motherland: An Account of a Journey among the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa, in 1859-60* by Robert Campbell published in 1861, and *Abeokuta and the Camaroon Mountains: an Exploration: Volume One* written by Sir Richard F. Burton and published in 1863.<sup>76</sup> These books give surprising insights into life in the nineteenth century. Campbell worked as a printer, journalist and teacher and was a descendant of a former Ègbá slave and a Jamaican national. He went to Yorùbáland in the late 1850s to ascertain the regions suitability for black emigration from the diaspora.<sup>77</sup> Due to his mandate, he travelled the region closely observing the people's traditions and practises. Similarly, as a British explorer, ethnologist and linguist, Burton showed a shrewd interest in foreign cultures and he made considerable efforts in observing and understanding them. Both Campbell and Burton's books are indispensable to this historical enquiry. They give significant insight into the politics of the region, their travels across political boundaries allowed a comparative analysis across towns, and their interactions with citizens, both male and female, gave insight into social life. Both men were interested in politics, the economy, marriages, occupation and leisure and other eyewitness accounts corroborate their acutely observant comments on indigenous culture. Nevertheless, their position as western male outsiders created bias in their observations of culture. The limited time they spent in the region also means that researchers cannot use their records to track changes over time.

The published records of nineteenth-century Western missionaries are just as relevant. Their motivation to convert the people necessitated that they devote much time and energy to learning Yorùbá cultures, institutions and language. Their observations of Yorùbá life are therefore insightful and relevant to pre-

---

<sup>76</sup> Robert Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland: An Account of a Journey among the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa, in 1859-60* (Philadelphia: T. Hamilton, 1861); Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Abeokuta and the Camaroon Mountains: An Exploration* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863).

<sup>77</sup> World Digital Library, <http://www.wdl.org/en/item/668/>, [accessed 3/05/2014]



colonial enquiry. Such texts include *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849-1856* by Thomas Jefferson Bowen, a Southern Baptist Missionary in Yorùbáland from 1849-1856; *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland* written by another Southern Baptist missionary William H. Clarke during his time in the region from 1854-1858; and *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country*, the published journals of Anna Hinderer, the wife of David Hinderer, a German missionary in Ìbàdàn from 1852-1869.<sup>78</sup> These publications give insights into the mundane, everyday life of the times, which is useful when studying social history. Nevertheless, most missionaries were armed with their predetermined racist assumptions of African savagery, lack of civility and barbarism. Bowen once referred to Africans as 'deficient and ...stupid' and these prejudices coloured their perception of the Yorùbá.<sup>79</sup> Several missionaries later recognised and discarded many of their biases. Clarke for example wrote in his journal that he had been taught to believe in African 'indolence, stupidity and wretchedness', therefore seeing their 'manifestations of thrift, skill, industry and happiness' was unexpected and astonishing.<sup>80</sup>

Additionally, the journals of Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) evangelists are vital to understanding nineteenth-century Yorùbáland.<sup>81</sup> From 1845 when the CMS began their ministry in the region, missionaries were required to keep a journal of their daily activities which was later sent to the CMS headquarters in London, in order to 'know accurately the state of the mission.'<sup>82</sup> These records now constitute a voluminous and indispensable source for understanding the nineteenth-century Yorùbá. Their daily entries although, primarily concerned with their religious undertakings, also include information on politics, economics and social organisation. In contrast to other Christian missions of the time, the vision of Reverend Henry Venn, the CMS

---

<sup>78</sup> Clarke, pp.231-251; Anna Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country. Memorials of Anna Hinderer* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1877).

<sup>79</sup> Bowen, p. 286.

<sup>80</sup> Clarke, p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> The University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, Church Missionary Society Archive Microfilm Collection, Section IV: Africa Missions, Part 4: Nigeria-Yoruba Mission, 1844-1880 CMS/CA2/O: Original Papers- Missionaries: (cited hereafter as 'Journal' or 'Letter')

<sup>82</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 10.

secretary from 1841 to 1873, was for a 'self-supporting, self-propagating' Yorùbá church, run by trained 'native evangelists', and headed by a Yorùbá bishop. Reverend Ajayi Crowther, one of the pioneers of the CMS Yorùbá Mission, later became the first African bishop of the Church of England.<sup>83</sup> In the nineteenth-century, the CMS preferred African missionaries because they were healthier and could make it further and safer into the African interior unlike Europeans who frequently fell sick and died.<sup>84</sup> CMS missionary journals are therefore a combination of those written by Westerners, those recorded by black Sierra Leonean slave returnees turned missionaries who had been originally captured in Yorùbáland, and later, those of indigenous Yorùbá missionaries. This variation makes for an interesting reading of the sources because depending on their background, missionaries tended to perceive and respond to similar events differently.

Missionary journals as sources do raise some concerns. Like the published journals, there is evidence of frequent cultural and religious bias, prejudices and misunderstandings of the Yorùbá culture. Also, because missionary journals were intended for metropolitan audiences, they mostly contain information considered of interest to the mission and the British public.<sup>85</sup> Due to religious and moral discomfort, missionaries would also often walk out on what they regarded as 'fetish' ceremonies, leaving the reader with an incomplete understanding of these events, and the significance of the ritual. In 1853, the evangelist Thomas King described the last funeral rites of an *Aláké*, ruler of the *Áké* section of Abẹ̀òkúta. After recounting the funeral procession, sacrifices, and dance, King concluded abruptly with 'then all [performed] obscene customs too shocking to relate.'<sup>86</sup> This hasty end to a narration of a ritual leaves many questions in the mind of the reader as to what these 'shocking' customs entailed and their significance. Several other events considered 'unimportant and irrelevant', most notably discussions about traditional dress and fashion were also overlooked. Detailed descriptions of

---

<sup>83</sup> Eugene Stock, *The History of The Church Missionary Society - Its Environment, Its Men, and Its Work* (London, 1899), pp. 449-463.

<sup>84</sup> Samuel Crowther Jnr., Letter to Reverend Venn, 8 December 1851.

<sup>85</sup> Entries from missionary journals were often published in newspapers and pamphlets to encourage donations to evangelical missions.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 14 December 1853.

culture are therefore infrequent. Commenting on the representation of indigenous Yorùbá religion in the CMS journals, Peel remarks that what is missing from the journals are precisely what is essential to social and cultural history; “thick” descriptions of rituals, extensive vernacular texts, and exegeses of myths and symbols’.<sup>87</sup>

Significantly, when the CMS replaced compulsory journals with single annual letters in the 1870s, many missionaries discontinued writing journals. As a result, the richness of information in missionary records became depleted. When missionaries did discuss events, especially social events in detail, they were usually borne out of conflict between missionaries and indigenes on issues of marriage, funerals and conversion. Therefore, similar to Kristin Mann’s argument about the limitations of court records, these missionary entries often give an exaggerated impression of conflict in society, which may not have been representative of the time.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, missionary records are cold and do not adequately depict the tone, emotion, silences, hesitations and other important linguistic tools necessary for an adequate assessment of events.<sup>89</sup> Besides, mission records give only mere glimpses into instances in the lives of Yorùbá people which may not necessarily have been representative of their entire life experiences. The fact that journals are uncritical of the author’s activities also poses a problem.<sup>90</sup> Mission records must thus be read for what they are: arbitrary expressions of how evangelists perceived the Yorùbá, which may not always be consistent or reflective of reality.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 12.

<sup>88</sup> Kristin Mann, ‘The Rise of Taiwo Olowo: Law, Accumulation and Mobility in Early Colonial Lagos’, in *Law in Colonial Africa*, ed. by Kristin Mann and Richard Roberts (Portsmouth, NH; London: Heinemann Educational Books; James Currey, 1991), pp. 85–107 (p. 90).

<sup>89</sup> Rebecca Clifford refers to these tools as the ‘rhythm of the narrative’. Rebecca Clifford, ‘Narrating ‘1968’: Between Dominant Images and Memories of Social Crisis’, paper given at the European Social Science History Conference, Vienna, April 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Olufunke Adeboye, ‘Diaries as Cultural and Intellectual Histories’, in *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*, ed. by Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2006), pp. 74–94 (p. 91).

<sup>91</sup> Nakanyike Musisi, ‘The Politics of Perception or Perception Politics? Colonial and Missionary Representation of Baganda Women, 1900-1945’, in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 95–115 (p. 96).

This is not to suggest that these journals should be dismissed as unreliable. While some scholars such as Ann Laura Stoler try to gain insights about an organisation from the principle and practices of archival forms, this thesis is more concerned with what information can be gleaned about society from archival data.<sup>92</sup> If the archives are read from this perspective, then despite their many shortcomings and hindrances, one discovers that CMS journals in their totality do give a reasonably comprehensive and useful view of life in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. Nevertheless, missionary perceptions of the indigenous Yorùbá can never be extricated from the records to give an 'objective' view of the people. In fact, the very presence of missionaries changed society immensely, contesting local understanding of culture and introducing new, bourgeois Christian ideologies that competed with established traditions. Indeed although the thesis is focused on the lives of the Yorùbá, using CMS records as the primary source base shapes the enquiry as an interplay between indigenous conceptions of gender and gender relations throughout the lifecycle and new ideas introduced by CMS missionaries. This adds texture and colour to the inquiry and dispenses with any notion of an untouched or isolated Yorùbá tradition free from Western influences before the advent of colonialism.

Alongside the above accounts, another indispensable source for gaining insight into the nineteenth century is *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, a bilingual Abẹ̀òkúta newspaper. Founded by Henry Townsend, one of the CMS pioneers of the Yorùbá mission, in 1859, this newspaper was run by CMS missionaries from 1859 until 1867 when the temporary expulsion of missionaries from Abẹ̀òkúta led to the demise of the publication. *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, was aimed at promoting literacy and informing people of happenings in the Yorùbá interior and the newspaper gives a historian CMS perspectives on contemporary issues.<sup>93</sup> In spite of its political motives and some western biases, much of this study's understanding of the political, economic and familial circumstances in

---

<sup>92</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2008); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Maser, Journal, 9 January 1860.

Abẹ̀òkúta was gleaned from the newspaper.<sup>94</sup> One example of the newspaper's insight into social phenomena, however tainted by bias, was an entry in the January 1864 edition. While speaking against Yorùbá marital arrangements, a contributor wrote that '...young married women should be keepers at home and guide the house. In this country, women are consistently in the market, or carrying loads, or doing some work'.<sup>95</sup> Despite the observer's western prejudices concerning the 'proper' duties of wives, his observation that Yorùbá women worked outside the home is correct as his comments are corroborated by other observers and Yorùbá oral traditions. In fact, as will be discussed in chapter three, working was a compulsory duty for every woman and labour was intrinsic to the definition of wifhood. Other nineteenth-century newspapers including the *African Times* and the *Lagos Times* also proved useful to a lesser extent because their news, editorials and letters to editors give a unique indigenous educated male perspective of the period. Additionally, the *Vocabulary of the Yorùbá Language* compiled by Samuel Ajayi Crowther in 1852 and *A Dictionary of the Yoruba Language* published by the CMS in 1911 were key to understanding Yorùbá vocabulary at the time.<sup>96</sup>

Another set of published nineteenth-century records used consists of books published by British government officials and British sociologists and social anthropologists after the Yorùbá region was colonised. These sources include *The Yorùbá Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* by the British army officer, administrator and amateur ethnologist A. B. Ellis published in 1894 and *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: Volumes 1-4* published in 1926 by Percy Amaury Talbot an imperial sociologist and anthropologist.<sup>97</sup> Since the purpose of these studies were to give British imperialists a better

---

<sup>94</sup> Oduntan argues that *Ìwé Ìròhìn* was politically motivated to bring Britain closer to its would-be subjects'. Oluwatoyin B. Oduntan, "Iwe Irohin" and the Representation of the Universal in Nineteenth-Century Egbaland', *History in Africa*, 32 (2005), 295–305 (p. 299).

<sup>95</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, 23 January, 1864.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel Adjai Crowther, *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (London: Hanover Press, 1852) <[http://archive.org/stream/vocabularyofyoru00crow/vocabularyofyoru00crow\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/vocabularyofyoru00crow/vocabularyofyoru00crow_djvu.txt)> [accessed 16 February 2014]; Church Missionary Society, *A Dictionary of the Yoruba Language* (London, 1911).

<sup>97</sup> A. B. Ellis, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc.*, 1894 <<file:///I:/mythology/africa/13/13.html>> [accessed 11 December 2012]; Percy Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, Volumes 1-4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926).

understanding of the indigenous peoples, they contain much more in-depth information about Yorùbá culture and life. However, they often take Yorùbá people as a single category and regional variations cannot be discerned from them.

Publications by early twentieth-century indigenous Christian educated elites were the final key written sources used. These elites frequently wrote about nineteenth-century indigenous practices with nostalgia, contrasting them with what they regarded as profligate contemporary practices. Such authors include E. Olympus Moore's 1916 book *History of Abẹ̀òkúta* and his 1924 *The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People* published under a changed name E. A. Ajisafe Moore, and N. A. Fadipe's 1939 University of London thesis *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, published in 1970.<sup>98</sup> Above all else, the single most important publication on the Yorùbá in the nineteenth century is Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas*.<sup>99</sup> Samuel Johnson (1846-1901) was a Sierra Leonean missionary (originally from Ọ̀yó) with the CMS. He completed the history book in 1897 but it remained unpublished till 1921. His ambitious 684-page text tried to trace Yorùbá history from their initial settlement in the region in the seventh century BC until the end of the nineteenth century. It contains in-depth descriptions of history, politics, language, government, religion, geography, and Yorùbá law and customs. Samuel Johnson is known as the first Yorùbá historian and his book is a crucial- if flawed- text for any student of Yorùbá history.<sup>100</sup>

Biodun Adediran argues that most early accounts of the nineteenth century are unreliable because people wrote them without scholarly intentions. He

---

<sup>98</sup> E. Olympus Moore, *History of Abeokuta* (London: Richard Clay and Sons, 1916); E. A. Ajisafe Moore, *The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People* [1924] (Memphis: General books reprint, 2010); N. A. Fadipe, *Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1991).

<sup>99</sup> Johnson, pp. 1-684.

<sup>100</sup> Robin Law warns that Johnson's *History* must not be taken unquestionably. He argues that the history has many shortcomings including its reliance on the memory of local historians, Johnson's personal Christian biases, and that the very act of recording oral history would have necessarily changed them. This work will also add that another flaw in his text are his frequently unsupported assumptions about gender due to his Western education and socialisation in Sierra Leone. Robin Law, 'How Truly Traditional Is Our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yorùbá Oral Tradition', *History in Africa*, 11 (1984), 195-221 (pp.197-198).

writes that '[c]ertainly the extent to which one can rely on early recorded accounts is limited. Most of them were compiled by enthusiastic amateurs who learned the job on the field or who were spurred into action by some inner motives other than scholarly interests'.<sup>101</sup> Rather than a weakness, this thesis considers this lack of scholarly rigour a strength because it allowed writers convey their thoughts and observations in their individual and subjective way, without an underlying academic motive. This in turn highlighted the writers' personal subjectivity, which gives these sources texture and complexity. Instead, the major weakness of these records, from the perspective of this thesis, is that they are invariably and almost exclusively the voices of men. In fact, the only source written by a woman was by Anna Hinderer, a British missionary wife, who, due to her own western biases, undoubtedly distorted indigenous women's voices. Nonetheless, as stated earlier, it is important to note that even the Yorùbá men studied in this thesis are silenced in the records since their voices are also always mediated by others.

### *Oral traditions*

If one hopes to gain any insight into the histories of non-literate peoples, one must study their oral traditions. Jan Vansina argues that oral traditions ought to be central to the study of culture, ideology, society, art and history. He argues that since oral traditions bear messages from the past but are told in the present, they are simultaneously documentations and reflections of 'both past and present in a single breath'.<sup>102</sup> He and his contemporaries contended that oral tradition contains some truth about the past and that falsities added over generations simply need to be removed to get at the 'residuum' of truth.<sup>103</sup> Contemporary African historians have since criticized this view. Luise White argues that these distortions, silences, inventions and even falsities are

---

<sup>101</sup> Bíódún Adédíran, 'Research on Pre-Colonial Western Yorùbáland: A Note on Source-Materials', *Anthropos* 80(1985), 545-554 (pp. 546-547)

<sup>102</sup> Jan M. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, pp. 10-11.

important to the oral narrative and reveal spatial, intergenerational and cultural conflict.<sup>104</sup> Bethwell Ogot adds that one must never ask if oral histories or traditions are true because when we do so, we are simply asking them to 'conform to our idea of truth' rather than those from which they originate.<sup>105</sup>

In the context of this thesis, oral traditions are historical or cultural knowledge transmitted verbally through generations, which preserve the laws, customs and beliefs of non-literate peoples. For the Yorùbá, these oral traditions include myths, legends, riddles and folktales collectively termed *àlò* or *itàn* (stories); *odù ifá* (divination corpus or prose), *òwe* (proverbs), and *oríkì* (praise poetry or appellation).<sup>106</sup> In 1992, Bolanle Awe commented that there had been no serious attempt to study closely oral traditions- the main source of African history- with a view for eliciting information about gender.<sup>107</sup> This is still the case in present day scholarship of pre-colonial Yorùbáland. Although oral traditions have been used to obtain information about nineteenth-century wars, politics, and religion, researchers have made little effort to use them to further knowledge about gender. Some researchers remain sceptical about oral traditions because they argue that they are dependent on personal and collective memory which is fallible, they are necessarily selective, distortions are pervasive, and chronology is near impossible.<sup>108</sup> These criticisms are

---

<sup>104</sup> Luise White, 'Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History', *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), 11-22 (p.11); White, Miescher and Cohen, p. 16.

<sup>105</sup> Bethwell A. Ogot, 'The Construction of Luo Identity and History', in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History (African Systems of Thought)* ed. by Luise White, Stephan Miescher and David Cohen, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 31-52 (p. 32). See also J. C. Beaglehole, 'The Case of the Needless Death: Reconstructing the Scene- "The Death of Captain Hook"', in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, ed. by Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 279-302 (p. 279).

<sup>106</sup> For examples of *itàn* see: Harold Courlander, *Tales of Yoruba God and Heroes* (New York: Crown Publishers, inc, 1973); Ruth Watson, 'Civil Disorder Is the Disease of Ibadan': *Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City: Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Colonial City* (London: James Currey, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>107</sup> Bolanle Awe, 'Introduction', in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective* ed. by Bolanle Awe (Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992), v-xi (p. v).

<sup>108</sup> Adédíran, 548; Megan Vaughan, 'Reported Speech and Other Types of Testimony', in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History*, ed. by Luise White, Stephan Miescher and David Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 53-77 (p. 56); Jan Vansina, 'For Oral Tradition (But Not against Braudel)', *History in Africa*, 5 (1978), 351-356 (p.351); Bawuro M. Barkindo, 'Oral Tradition and Chronology: The Problems of Dating the History of Mandara Sultanate', in *Oral Tradition and Oral History in Africa and the*



overemphasised. First, all sources, whether written or oral, are selective. Some oral traditions such as proverbs are not easily altered, while changes and ‘epistemic confusion’ in others should be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness because they give clues to people’s changing perspectives of their world.<sup>109</sup> Insofar as oral traditions, in their multiple forms, remain socially relevant to the cultures from which they originate, then they remain valid.<sup>110</sup>

One could argue that oral traditions and oral histories in their ‘real’ forms were not used in this thesis. The oral sources used here were not sourced orally from local historians. Instead, they are traditions documented mostly in the nineteenth- or early twentieth century.<sup>111</sup> Ogot argues that once oral traditions are documented, they become ‘frozen and rigid’, cease to be oral, no longer reflect change, and are thus irrelevant.<sup>112</sup> However, it is for precisely this reason that *written* oral traditions were chosen, because they represent the beliefs of the times in question without being altered and transformed by colonial and post-colonial circumstances.<sup>113</sup>

### Àlò (Myths and folktales)

Myths are indigenous narratives, represented as historical truths, used by communities to explain and justify their beliefs, practices, natural phenomena, and their general worldview. They help to answer questions people have about doctrinal beliefs, metaphysics, and the physical universe.<sup>114</sup> In Yorùbáland, these myths encompass those about creation, the advent of diseases, the purposes for religion, the origin of war, and other such

---

*Diaspora: Theory and Practice*, ed. by E. J. Alagoa (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1990), pp. 165–177.

<sup>109</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 185.

<sup>110</sup> A. E. Afigbo, ‘Fact and Myth in Nigerian Historiography’, *Nigerian Magazine*, 1977, 81-98 (p. 86).

<sup>111</sup> Where unavoidable, late twentieth-century sources were also used.

<sup>112</sup> Ogot, p. 38.

<sup>113</sup> Many of the oral traditions used here were compiled by E. A. Ellis and Ajayi Crowther in the nineteenth century. Unfortunately we do not know how and with what methods these oral traditions were collected, gathered and written up so one cannot speak to the ethics and circumstances of source gathering. Ellis, pp. 88–106; Crowther, p. 1-495.

<sup>114</sup> Bolaji E. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Second edition (New York: African Tree Press, 1995), p. 7.

existential issues. Amidst high mortality rates resulting from nineteenth-century political turmoil and the rapid spread of diseases, these myths helped the Yorùbá come to terms with their radically changing world. Myths can also give insights into gender in the nineteenth century. A popular creation myth, which will be discussed in chapter four, explains the necessity for gender harmony and the dangers of discord amongst men and women. Such information helps researchers understand Yorùbá cosmological beliefs. Therefore, rather than western perceptions of indigenous beliefs, these myths elucidate how the Yorùbá saw themselves and made sense of their world. Yorùbá myths undoubtedly include events that may be considered implausible, impossible, and often contradictory, but as argued earlier, they must not be rejected for this reason because implausibility tell us something about how the Yorùbá conceive the workings of the universe. Contradictory or seemingly contradictory traditions are also valuable because they indicate different schools of thought.<sup>115</sup> While myths serve to impart information that is regarded as truth, folktales make no such claim. Instead, they originate from imagination. They often combine supernatural beings, familiar social scenarios, and some form of moral dilemma to impart a moral lesson.<sup>116</sup> Folktales expressed indigenous notions of morals and were frequently used to explain societal norms to children through an enjoyable media. Since both these genres were recorded in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they provide important primary information about the indigenous beliefs, ideals and ethics of the time.

#### *Odù Ifá* (divination corpus)

Another important genre in Yorùbá oral tradition are *odù ifá* (divination corpus or prose). *Odù ifá* are a body of recitals or tales intricately connected with the worship of *Òrúnmìlà* (also known as *Ifá*), the deity of divination, and used by

---

<sup>115</sup> Idowu, p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> Dolapo Adeniji-Neill, *The Yoruba Oral Culture as Indigenous Education: Praise Poetry, Folktales and Folklore* (Köln: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009); Amos Tutuola, *Yoruba Folktales* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2000); Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 98.

the *babaláwo*, the Yorùbá priest-diviners.<sup>117</sup> These corpuses consist of *ẹsẹ*, which are unique stories that the *babaláwo* regards as history about past trials and difficulties and their resolutions. *Ẹsẹ* are often lengthy, highly complex metaphors, directly relevant to everyday life, and considered to be divine responses to an enquirer's questions.<sup>118</sup> These corpuses are many and varied, touching on all aspects of life, and some give clues to gender in the nineteenth century. N. C. Ejituwu argues that stereotypes are pervasive in oral traditions.<sup>119</sup> His observation is true most of all of *ifá* corpus as they often portray men and women in stereotypical ways: women as conniving, often disrespectful and anxious to conceive, while men are brave, stubborn, and desperate to marry. These typecasts are significant because they demonstrate Yorùbá indigenous beliefs about gender, and the roles and characteristics of men and women in society. William Bascom writes that *ẹsẹ* follow three consistent patterns: the mythological case, which serves as precedent, the resolution or outcome of the case, and its application to the client.<sup>120</sup> Although this is applicable to most *ẹsẹ*, in some cases, the resolution and the outcome are simultaneous and difficult to extricate. A simple example of an *ẹsẹ* relevant to women and gender is:

Precedent: *Mo rú wéré, Mo tù wéré*  
*A d'Ífá fún Ọṣungàgàgà, Tí ñ sunkún p'òun ò bímọ.*  
*Ọṣun tí Ifá ñ sọ yíí, obìrin ni l'áye àtìjọ.*  
*Ojú ọmọ ñ pọn ọn*  
*Ló bá mú eéjì kún ẹẹta*  
*Ló re oko awo*  
*Ñjẹ òun lè bímọ ló dá Ifá sí.*  
*Wọn ní yòò bímọ, ẹbọ ni kó rú.*  
*Wọn yan án l'ẹbọ, ó rúbọ..*

Resolution: *Kò pẹ Ọṣún bèrè sí ñ bímọ.*  
*Ó sì di ọlọmọ púpọ.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ifá* will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

<sup>118</sup> *Ifá* corpuses were first recorded by the CMS missionary E. M. Lijadu in his book *Ifá* published in 1897. Olupona, pp. 240–273; W. Abimbola, 'The Literature of the Ifá Cult', in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. by S. O. Biobaku (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), pp. 41–62.

<sup>119</sup> N. C. Ejituwu, 'Stereotypes in Oral Tradition: The Case of Obolo (Andoni)', in *Oral Tradition and Oral History in Africa and the Diaspora: Theory and Practice*, ed. by E. J. Alagoa (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1990), 156-164 (p. 156).

<sup>120</sup> William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, (John Wiley & Sons, 1969), pp. 120–137.

*Ẹnu tó yà kótó*  
*Orin awo ló bọ si lẹnu*  
*Ó ní: Mo rú wẹré*  
*Mo tù wẹré*  
*Ọ̀ṣungàgàgà lo bímọ bawọnyí*  
*Mo rú wẹré. Mo tù wẹré..*

*Application: Ifá Ogbè-Rosùn, pé kí ẹnì náà ó rúbọ kí ó lè bí ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ ọ̀mọ*

Precedent- I make sacrifice easily, I make sacrifice easily. Divined for *Ọ̀ṣungàgàgà* who was disillusioned because she had no children. *Ọ̀ṣun* that *ifá* is talking about was a woman in ancient times. She was barren; therefore, she went to her *babaláwo* for divination. Her question to *ifá* was ‘Will I ever have children?’ The [*babaláwo*] assured her that she would have children, that she should make sacrifices. They gave her a list of the things for sacrifice. She made the sacrifice.

Resolution- Soon after making the sacrifices she started having children. She became the mother of many children. She started singing: I made sacrifice easily, I made sacrifice easily, *Ọ̀ṣungàgàgà* is the mother of plenty children, I made sacrifice easily, I made sacrifice easily.

Application- Therefore, *ifá* says the person must make sacrifices for child blessings.<sup>121</sup>

The enquirer, to whom this *ẹṣẹ* is told, would be a woman with difficulty conceiving. The corpus first gives precedence for barrenness, suggesting that infertility was a historically problematic issue amongst Yorùbá women. It then explains that women have always visited the *babaláwo* for a cure, and finally, it advises that a sacrifice to *ifá* is the only cure for infertility. This corpus thus suggests that in the pre-colonial Yorùbáland, the Yorùbá believed that barrenness was a condition that all women wanted to avoid, and that sacrifices were the route to fertility.

Idowu regarded *ifá* corpus as the most fixed and reliable genre of Yorùbá oral traditions. He argued that Yorùbá worship is characterised by rigid doctrinal structures, which the priest recognises that if he alters in any way, the ritual will fail. Hence, *odù* and other liturgies, remain unchanged as far as memory

---

<sup>121</sup> Ifayemi Awopeju Bogunmbe, *Iwe Odù Ifá* (Ile Orunmila Communications, 1995), pp. 30–31.

allows.<sup>122</sup> Adediran adds that even if the stories themselves change, the nucleus remained the same.<sup>123</sup> Although *ifá* corpuses do give a clear indication of Yorùbá indigenous beliefs, unlike Idowu, this study argues that new corpuses have been added over time to reflect new concepts introduced to Yorùbáland. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth century *odù* corpuses for instance clearly show some Christian and Muslim influences. These include the introduction of *òrun rere* (heaven) and *òrun àpáàdì* (hell) of which the Yorùbá had no previous notion, and the incorporation of Muslim and Christian characters into *ẹsẹ*.<sup>124</sup> These corpuses show evolution and adaptation to changing circumstances. Again, this should not be regarded as a weakness, but as clues to the necessary modifications in the beliefs and cultures of Yorùbá people resulting from the widespread changes and external influences in the nineteenth century.

### Òwe (Proverbs)

Òwe are another important genre of Yorùbá oral traditions. Ellis wrote that proverbs were essential to nineteenth-century Yorùbá discourse, and a necessary component of every conversation.<sup>125</sup> Proverbs express key Yorùbá concepts in short, succinct phrases while illuminating the society from which they originated.<sup>126</sup> Unlike myths and folktales, proverbs neither claim to be historical; nor do they make moral judgement. They simply state societal facts and sometimes give clues to gendered understandings in society.<sup>127</sup> The proverb *a-já-ni-láyà bí àìlówó-lówó, àìlówó-lówó baba ijáyà* (It frightens like the lack of money, and the lack of money is the father of all frights) explains that money was considered crucial for one's safety and wellbeing. Also, in the nineteenth century, the proverb *ogún ọmọdé kii ọseré fún ogún ọdún* (twenty

<sup>122</sup> Idowu, pp. 7–9.

<sup>123</sup> Adediran, 548.

<sup>124</sup> See for example Bascom, *Ifa Divination*, pp. 11, 104.

<sup>125</sup> Ellis, p. 73.

<sup>126</sup> A. A. Kila, *Owe: Yoruba in Proverbs* (London: Akada Press, 2003), p. 4; Idowu, p. 10.

<sup>127</sup> For more on gender and proverbs, see Rosaleen O.B Nhekisana, 'Gender and Proverbs in Setswana Society', in *Language, Gender and Politics: A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*, ed. by Akin Odebunmi, Arua Arua and Sailal Arimi (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009), pp. 135–50.

children will not play together for twenty years) would have expressed Yorùbá anxieties regarding the insecurities of the time.<sup>128</sup> It articulated the fear that childhood friends were likely to be separated by death or slavery. In the twentieth century, the meaning of this proverb instead illustrated that the changing times characterised by urban migration, neolocal marriage, and education would likely separate childhood playmates. Although it is likely that over the years, many proverbs have been introduced and others forgotten, proverbs are still key to understanding societies where they are used. Moreover, while other oral traditions can be easily manipulated and changed, the grammatical structure of proverbs makes such alterations more difficult.

#### *Oríkì* (praise poetry/appellation)

Finally, *oríkì* is an all embracing and foundational Yorùbá poetic discourse and an invaluable source when studying nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. Karin Barber describes *oríkì* as a ‘master discourse’ from which all other genres of oral traditions are derived.<sup>129</sup> *Oríkì* ‘commemorate personalities’, events and actions that people consider important in melodic appellations. They provide a history of the social relation between people, families, and society and also express the personalities of individuals. *Oríkì* then, are important mediums of preserving and apprehending history.<sup>130</sup> Although *oríkì* is often called praise poetry, they are better described as appellations since it is not always flattering.<sup>131</sup> Like all other oral traditions, *oríkì* can be tapped as an important source of information about gender in the nineteenth century. Although most *oríkì* are lengthy, a short example is:

*Àkàngbé ò sí nílé, Wọn nàyá è*  
*Baba a Fágberé dé, Gbogbo wọn tó o rí ní ñ b’Ọpa*  
*Wọn ní: Bólákànmí, k’ọpa ó pa mí bí mo bá nàyá a rẹ..*

<sup>128</sup> Kila, pp. 31, 49.

<sup>129</sup> Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, p.1.

<sup>130</sup> Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, p. 4; S. O. Babayemi, ‘Oríkì Orile as Sources of Historical Data’, in *Oral Tradition and Oral History in Africa and the Diaspora: Theory and Practice*, ed. by E. J. Alagoa (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1990), pp. 110–118 (p. 110).

<sup>131</sup> Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, p. 13.

*Àkàngbé* was not home, they beat his mother,  
Father of *Fágberè* arrived; they all began to swear sacred oaths  
They said '*Bólákànmí*, may I be struck dead if I had anything to do  
with beating your mother'.<sup>132</sup>

This short *oríkì* speaks volumes about *Bólákànmí*, a feared man in a nineteenth-century Yorùbá town. The *oríkì* explains that for fear of his wrath, no one dared attack his household when he was home. Even when his family was attacked in his absence, the perpetrators faced severe consequences. This *oríkì* expresses the theme of danger in the nineteenth century. The imagery of a mother beaten in the absence of her son illustrates that even households were not safe from attacks by thieves, robbers, and slave raiders. They only remained protected under the vigilance of powerful and feared men.

Researchers cannot conduct any valid research into nineteenth-century Yorùbáland without using a combination of written sources and oral traditions. For gender studies, where written information is even rarer, scholars must rely on oral traditions to understand indigenous perceptions and beliefs. This study uses both written and oral elements to write about the gendered lifecycle of men and women in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland.

### **Limitations of thesis**

Although this thesis is about nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, the study's enquiry begins in 1845 when CMS missionaries arrived in Yorùbáland and begun writing diaries.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate how the Ègbá lived before widespread imperial influences, despite the Ègbá retaining their independence until 1914, the timeline of this study ends in 1893 when the rest of the Western region was colonised and British influences increased significantly in the region.<sup>134</sup> Also, although most

---

<sup>132</sup> Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, p. 210.

<sup>133</sup> This thesis uses the phrases 'pre-colonial' and 'nineteenth century' interchangeably.

<sup>134</sup> Very few examples are taken from the journals and letters of L. A. Lijadu in 1900 to show continuity of traditions despite colonial influences. National Archives of Nigeria, University of

examples of life in the nineteenth century were taken from Abẹ̀òkúta, gaps in archival sources necessitates that some examples be taken from other regions like Òtá whose traditions, culture and language the missionary James White described as being so much like Abẹ̀òkúta that 'it may be inferred with safety that they are from the same origin'.<sup>135</sup> A few examples were also taken from neighbouring Ìbàdàn, Lagos and Ìjorá. Crucially, although the study does not assume that the nineteenth century was a static, unchanging time, the paucity of sources required that the entire period be examined singularly. Where it is possible to show either continuity or change, it does so. Finally, this study assumes heteronormativity in Yorùbáland. Although it makes no claims that there were no homosexual liaisons at the time, an absence of the phenomenon in both the written and oral sources makes problematic any meaningful commentary on the phenomenon.

## **Thesis plan**

The structure of this thesis follows the lifecycle of an individual in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. To gain context, it begins with a brief outline of Abẹ̀òkúta society before it explores the four stages of the lifecycle: childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. This thesis considers Abẹ̀òkúta to be an embodiment of the nineteenth-century condition from which general gender patterns in the region can be identified. As such, chapter one gives a background to the study by discussing Abẹ̀òkúta in the nineteenth century. It details how the Ègbá migrated to Abẹ̀òkúta in the 1830s after their original homestead was destroyed during the intra-ethnic wars. It then explores the reestablishment of political hierarchies in Abẹ̀òkúta and the militarisation of the state. Since social and religious changes were also key to the crucial transformations of the day, it examines the effect of Sierra Leonean slave returnees' immigration to Abẹ̀òkúta and the advent of Christian missionary activities in the region. It also explores briefly the effects of colonial incursion. The chapter also examines the Yorùbá lineage, the foundation of Yorùbá familial relations and

---

Ibadan, LFP 1-11: Lijadu Family papers and records of the missions of evangelist, Ondo, Western Nigeria, (hereafter cited as Family Papers).

<sup>135</sup> James White, Letter to Reverend Venn, 1 January 1866.



the family as the primary basis of all organisation at the time. This sets the scene for a more in-depth discussion of gender in the thesis.

Chapter two discusses the childhood stage of the lifecycle. Since very little has been written about childhood in Yorùbáland, the chapter engages more with sociological theories of childhood than with historical literature. By applying these concepts, or rejecting them when necessary, it attempts to reconstruct the childhood socialisation practices in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. It begins by explaining the biological boundaries of childhood and determining who was considered a child at the time. It then explores the rituals and beliefs surrounding birth and the dangers young children faced in society including wartime violence and kidnapping, illness, and disease. The chapter then explores childhood socialisation within the home highlighting the dynamics of familial bonds, household division of labour and childhood experiences of familial relationships. The next section of the chapter enquires into childhood labour by exploring the significances of children's work. It also highlights how missionaries complicated this process with the introduction of mission schools. The chapter ends with a section on acculturation through play. It explores how adults used leisurely activities to validate and reaffirm cultural ideals of appropriate behaviour by including these messages into playtime stories.

Chapter three examines youth and marriage in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. It investigates the position of youths in the social hierarchy and contends that matters of matrimony were a major concern in the lives of young men and women. By exploring how young people experienced, contested, negotiated and subverted conjugality, it shows how youths used the changing social and religious circumstances of the day to negotiate what they considered to be more favourable marriage terms. It begins with a discussion of bridewealth in the nineteenth-century and examines the status of youths in marriage negotiations. It then asks what happened when people rejected the matches their parents had made for them. Within this context of consent, it explores the position of young slaves to contextualise the experiences of the free. Next, it examines matrimony in the nineteenth century by exploring themes of fidelity,

household conjugal dynamics, matrimonial work, polygyny and the role of affection in marriages. Within this discussion, the roles missionaries played in contesting indigenous matrimonial values will feature prominently. The all-important issue of reproduction and the consequences of infertility follows and the chapter ends with a discussion on divorce.

Adulthood and social maturity are the subject matter of chapter four. Here the thesis explores the period in the lifecycle when men and women were free from matters concerning their own conjugality and reproduction and instead turned their attention to political advancement, economic development and religious proficiency. In the first section it attempts to answer the question of who had power in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, defined here as decision-making power on the town level in both the political and economic sphere. It explores Abẹ̀òkúta power structures and analyses how people conformed to, negotiated with, and contested these structures. The section also investigates militarism in the nineteenth century by investigating the ambiguities of hegemonic military masculinity and identifying how war was waged, who fought in war, the consequences of warfare and the roles women played within the perpetual warring state. Next, the chapter explores religious authority in Abẹ̀òkúta by examining the roles of priests, priestesses and priest-diviners of the nineteenth century. The chapter argues that although women were systematically excluded from formal town politics and its corresponding structures, female power was instead enacted within the important lineage level.

The last chapter, chapter five, is about the concluding period of the lifecycle; old age and death. The discussion begins with the meaning of old age in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta and Yorùbáland in general. It explores the cultural understandings of aging bodies, citing the cultural significances of growing old and the links between aging, work, infirmity and the lineage. It also examines the positions elders held in the community. Next, it investigates the aging experiences of marginalised childless women and elderly female slaves before exploring the links between the aging female body and witchcraft. It then discusses Yorùbá beliefs about death, dying and the

afterlife. It concludes with an enquiry into rituals and the significances of practices surrounding funeral rites.

# 1

## ABÈÒKÚTA

**‘[W]hile the rest of the country was silent, Ibadan was making history’.**<sup>136</sup>  
**Samuel Johnson, 1921.**

In Samuel Johnson’s *History of the Yorubas*, Johnson attempted to chronicle Yorùbá history and culture from their initial settlement in what is now south-west Nigeria in the seventh century BC up to British colonisation of the region in 1893.<sup>137</sup> When discussing the nineteenth century, he emphasised the meteoric rise of Ìbàdàn from a small refugee camp to one of the greatest towns of the era. This town, Johnson wrote, was occupied by self-made men and women, under a new republican regime never before practiced in Yorùbáland, and was characterised by the people’s penchant for war and the town’s inclination to civil disorder.<sup>138</sup> But, Johnson was wrong to say that the rest of the country was ‘silent’ because it was not. Other communities were simply making a different kind of history, as in the case of Abèòkúta.

The Ègbá people of Abèòkúta town are used as a case study for this thesis’ enquiry into gender in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland because despite its astonishing and colourful past, Abèòkúta (also known as Ègbáland) has been neglected in modern scholarship. Saburi Biobaku’s 1957 publication *The Egba and their Neighbours 1842-1872* and Agneta Pallinder-Law’s *Government in Abeokuta 1830-1914: With Special Reference to the Egba United Government 1898-1914* published in 1973 were the last major studies of Abèòkúta’s pre-colonial history discovered.<sup>139</sup> The most recent work on the town is by Judith Byfield who explores the history of textiles and dyeing in the region. Her section on the nineteenth century is however restricted to one chapter and used as a background for a more contemporary study.<sup>140</sup> A

---

<sup>136</sup> Johnson, p. 293.

<sup>137</sup> Johnson, pp. 3–20, 665.

<sup>138</sup> For the initial settlement in Ibadan see Johnson, pp. 238-244.

<sup>139</sup> The author could not obtain a copy of Agneta Pallinder Law’s *Government in Abeokuta 1830-1914*. Saburi O. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours, 1842-1872*, First Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

<sup>140</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, pp. 1–43.

significant amount of information can be gleaned about nineteenth-century gender regimes in Yorùbáland by using Abẹ̀òkúta as a case study because the town was an archetype of the events that characterised the time. This included internal dissention, destruction of towns, mass migration, new settlements, the creation of new states, widespread insecurity and pervasive social transformations. Although these events are recognised in secondary literature, a perspective which the current discourses lack is that these happenings created new ways of doing and making gender in the town which were sometimes unique to Abẹ̀òkúta, but more often representative of more general transformations in the region.

This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the Ègbá migration to Abẹ̀òkúta, before exploring in detail their formation of political organisations in the region and the role of the Ègbá in the nineteenth-century intra-ethnic wars. The chapter will then explore the social and religious changes that took place in the nineteenth century including the advent of missionaries in the region, the arrival of Sierra Leonean immigrants, British imperial incursion and Abẹ̀òkúta's eventual loss of independence in 1914. The section will end with an exploration of the Yorùbá lineage, the primary mode of social, political and economic organisation in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. The main purpose of this chapter is to act as a background to the study of the gendered lifecycle in Abẹ̀òkúta. By examining the political, economic, social, environmental, religious and familial structures of the town, it sets the stage for an in-depth exploration into Ègbá enactment of gender and the factors that supported, influenced and sometimes threatened the socio-cultural order.

### **Migration, politics and warfare in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta**

The Ègbá have not always lived at Abẹ̀òkúta. Their original home in what is now referred to as the Ègbá forest, where they lived in small independent kingdoms, was destroyed when a market dispute between an Ìjẹ̀bú woman

and an Òwu man led to the Òwu war of 1821.<sup>141</sup> After the victorious allied soldiers of Ife, Òyó and Ìjẹ̀bú towns destroyed Òwu, they then turned their attention to one Ègbá kingdom, Ìkijà, which they claimed prevented them from besieging Òwu, and when Ìkijà fell, they invaded the other areas. Internal dissent and disunity between the kingdoms meant that the Ègbá could not raise an effective, united defence and each kingdom fell one after the other.<sup>142</sup> This war is particularly significant because it was the first time gunpowder was used in a war in Yorùbáland. It was also the first war known to have resulted in mass slave raiding in the region. Bowen estimated that more than half a million people were either killed or enslaved in the wars of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the majority of slaves later freed in Sierra Leone were thought to be Ègbá, most of whom had been captured during the destruction of the original Ègbá homestead.<sup>143</sup>

With their home completely destroyed, the Ègbá fled, and some of the inhabitants moved to an encampment that later became Ìbàdàn town. Frictions with the other Òyó and Ife settlers over their kidnapping of Ègbá citizen subsequently forced their departure from the camp. The Ègbá then migrated and settled under Olúmọ rock in 1830 led by their elected leader Šódẹkẹ. This place became known as Abẹ̀òkúta (meaning 'under a rock') situated seventy miles from Lagos, which at the time was a three-day journey.<sup>144</sup> Three sections of the Ègbá emigrated: the Ègbá Aláké led by Šódẹkẹ the Aláké (ruler of Áké) and overall leader, Òkè-Ọ̀nà led by Lùmóyè the Òšìlẹ̀ (ruler of Òkè-Ọ̀nà); and Gbàgúrà led by the Agbo of Ike the

---

<sup>141</sup> Moore, pp. 23–24.

<sup>142</sup> This war has been summarised here because many authors have written extensively about it. See Johnson, pp. 210, 247–8, 317–322; Moore, p. 28; Lloyd, *The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms*, pp. 28–30; Saburi O. Biobaku, *The First 150 Years of the Egba at Abeokuta: 1830-1980* (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, 1983), pp. 3–12; Ade-Ajayi and Smith, pp. 9-54.

<sup>143</sup> Bowen, p. 116. See also: Campbell, p. 32; Akin L Mabogunje, *Yoruba Towns: Based on a Lecture Entitled 'Problems of a Pre-Industrial Urbanization in West Africa' given before the Philosophical Society on 12 April 1961* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1962), p. 1. James Johnson, Letter to Reverend Wright, 10 January 1878.

<sup>144</sup> Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, pp. 16–17. National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan, University of Ibadan, *African Times* (1862-1865; 1876-1882), hereafter cited as *African Times*, 1 October 1879.

*Ògúnna* or *Àgúrà* (ruler of Gbàgúrà).<sup>145</sup> The Òwu people later joined them at Abẹ̀òkúta led by the *Òlòwu* (ruler of Òwu). Ègbá refugees from around Yorùbáland continued to migrate to Abẹ̀òkúta and they soon made up a large population, described by Clarke as ‘a swarm with such myriads of human beings as to arouse every power within the man who contemplates the scene’.<sup>146</sup> By 1860, Robert Campbell and T. J. Bowen both estimated the Abẹ̀òkúta population at over 100,000, which increased to 150,000 by 1878.<sup>147</sup> A. L. Magbogunje estimates however that this number had reduced to 51,000 by 1911 due to migration for colonial labour.<sup>148</sup>

Since their old deities, ancestors, governments, ruling lines, lineages and traditions had been destroyed in the Ègbá forest, the Ègbá set about re-establishing societal and cultural formations in Abẹ̀òkúta including structures of government.<sup>149</sup> While in the old settlement, the Ègbá had lived in over 153 independent villages and hamlets who had managed their own affairs and were governed by their own chiefs, and they re-established these patterns of government at Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>150</sup> Consequently, there was an estimated one hundred and forty five independent townships within Abẹ̀òkúta. This fractured political structure, which was once described by a missionary as being identical to ‘the German principalities and little kingdoms [...] brought together in one town, each acting, but seldom in unison’, made it almost impossible to form a centralised government.<sup>151</sup> Although *Şódeké*, while alive, was considered the ruler of all the Ègbá, theoretically laying the foundation of a centralised government, his leadership was charismatic rather than constitutional. Since his ‘paramouncy’ lacked historical and traditional validation, it did not survive beyond his death in 1845 and Okekenu, the man

---

<sup>145</sup> These sections were further subdivided into townships. For example, Ègbá Aláké was further divided into many sections including Ijéun, Kém̄ta, Ìpóró, Ìgbórè and so on. Johnson, pp. 14, 17–18; Campbell, pp. 30–33; Moore, pp. 30–3.

<sup>146</sup> Clarke, p. 234.

<sup>147</sup> Bowen, p.107; Campbell, p. 33; Biobaku, *The First 150 Years of the Ègbá at Abẹ̀òkúta*, p. 3; Moore, p. 32. James Johnson, Letter to Reverend Wright, 10 January 1878.

<sup>148</sup> Mabogunje, p. 1.

<sup>149</sup> Campbell, p. 32-4; Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 15; Oduntan, “Iwe Irohin”, 297.

<sup>150</sup> *African Times*, 2 September 1878.

<sup>151</sup> Henry Townsend, Letter to Reverend Wilmont, 5 August 1851.

that succeeded him proved unable to sustain the centralised nature of Šódeḱé's government.<sup>152</sup>

Politics at this time was marked by frequent bouts of violence. Abéòkúta had a plethora of ruling chiefs among whom none was able to obtain enough followers and supporters to gain a political monopoly or set up a centralised government. In 1852, there was an estimated 4000 people directly involved in government.<sup>153</sup> This meant that the Ègbá government was weak and nearly crippled at numerous times by intense rivalry and discord amongst chiefs, town jealousies, and succession disputes that almost led to civil war.<sup>154</sup> The succession dispute for the position of *Aláké* between the followers of Oyèékàn and those of Adémólá from 1868 until 1871 notably resulted in serious disturbances in Abéòkúta when various chiefs and their followers who supported either candidate took up arms against the opposition. It was only through the timely interventions of missionaries and the British colonial authorities at Lagos that an uneasy resolution was reached. Adémólá won the bid and was installed as *Aláké*. When he died of smallpox in 1877, Oyèékàn took over.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, in January 1883, there was a 'free township fight' in Abéòkúta between Májèḱódùnmi, the *Balógun* (war general) of the Ìkérékù section of Abéòkúta, and Pópóḱlá, a Christian and *Balógun* of Odò, as well as their respective supporters over the closure of a road leading to Èrúwà market (a market in Abéòkúta). Ten men were killed and town meetings were called to settle the dispute.<sup>156</sup> Despite many attempts by missionaries and the British colonial authorities to convince the Ègbá to form a united government, emphasising that internal stability and unity was crucial to repulsing external attacks, all came to naught and each subsection continued to remain

---

<sup>152</sup> Johnson, pp. 226, 301; Moore, p. 45; Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 31-50; Biobaku, *The First 150 Years of the Ègbá at Abéòkúta*, p. 5.

<sup>153</sup> Earl Phillips, 'The Egba at Abeokuta: Acculturation and Political Change, 1830-1870', *The Journal of African History*, 10 (1969), 117-131 (p. 118).

<sup>154</sup> William Allen, *Journal*, 22 July 1870.

<sup>155</sup> Moore, p. 79; *African Times*, 1 March 1876.

<sup>156</sup> National Archives of Nigeria Ibadan, University of Ibadan, *Lagos Times* (1880-1883; 1890-1881), hereafter cited as *Lagos Times*, 10 January 1883.



independent into the twentieth century.<sup>157</sup> Western observers described Abẹ̀òkúta as being plagued by ‘internal jealousies and feuds’ and lacking a ‘feeling of oneness [...] necessary for the formation of a powerful federation and its permanence and safety’. They also noted that the position of the Aláké as being ‘king in name only’, ‘too insignificant to command attention’, and as a consequence, ‘his influence nil’.<sup>158</sup>

### **Abẹ̀òkúta chiefs**

All the rulers of the Abẹ̀òkúta townships appear to have been weak, nominal monarchs, the townships being controlled by the town chiefs, and principally by the *Ògbóni* (civil chiefs). The *Ògbóni* were so powerful that rulers could not act without their consent. When missionaries first wanted to settle in Abẹ̀òkúta, the Aláké could only grant this after the *Ògbóni* signified their consent.<sup>159</sup> The *Ògbóni* were a group of men, bound by a secret oath, and invested with legislative, executive and judicial power. Each township had its own *Ògbóni* hierarchy and lodge where decisions were made.<sup>160</sup> The *Ògbóni* consisted of the leader, *Olúwo*, and six other chiefs known as *Ìwàrẹ̀fà*. They installed rulers and governed the kingdom through an administrative male cult known as *orò*, which will be discussed extensively in chapter four.<sup>161</sup> Although there were no written laws, traditions and customs, both new and old, were considered to be the established laws.<sup>162</sup> Other town chiefs included the *Pàràkòyí*, a kind of trade guild that organised and regulated all aspects of trade including regulating marketplaces and market prices, overseeing external trade, and arbitrating disputes amongst traders. Finally, there were

---

<sup>157</sup> Lloyd, *The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms*, pp. 30–33; Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, p. 41; Oduntan, p. 297; Anthony Okion Ojigbo, ‘Conflict Resolution in the Traditional Yoruba Political System’ *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, 13 (1973), 275–92.

<sup>158</sup> W. Williams, *Journal*, 19 March, 1869; James Johnson, Letter to Reverend Wright, June 2, 1878; Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 89; Moore, p. 89; Bowen, p. 110; Campbell, p. 33.

<sup>159</sup> Clarke, p. 8.

<sup>160</sup> Ellis, p. 43.

<sup>161</sup> Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 3 December 1849; Ajisafe Moore, p. 93; Ellis, p. 53; Peter Morton-Williams, ‘An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Oyo Yoruba’, *Africa*, 34 (2012), 243–261 (p. 253).

<sup>162</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 10 September 1856.

the *Olórógun* (war chiefs) headed by the *Balógun*, a kind of war general, who were responsible for Abẹ̀òkúta's defence and wars of aggression.<sup>163</sup> However, due to constant warfare, the powers of the war chiefs became increasingly important to domestic town politics in the nineteenth century.<sup>164</sup>

It is important to state here that besides the formal political structure, a complex, unspoken but recognised power configuration existed in Abẹ̀òkúta at the time. Principally, slaves were at the bottom of this extra-legal town hierarchy while chiefs were at the top. Nevertheless, the exact terms of this unofficial dynamic was highly contested and had to be negotiated depending on context and persons involved. The advantage usually resided however with either the older individual due to Yorùbá gerontocracy, or the party with more socio-economic and socio-political influence. This extra-legal hierarchy was more often than not used to subvert the rule of law. For instance, local custom allowed women to divorce their husbands in the event of extreme physical harm.<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, since the *Ògbóni* presided over divorce proceedings, should a husband be part of the *Ògbóni*, he could use his political position to influence the chiefs hearing the case so his wife would be refused a divorce despite her having a culturally legitimate reason.<sup>166</sup> These types of ubiquitous, but unspoken, hierarchies were pervasive at the time and influenced almost every aspect of life. Sometimes, it was used in subordinating social juniors. As will be discussed later, religious freedom was a right for all freemen and women in Abẹ̀òkúta. Nevertheless, indigenous ideas about gerontocracy allowed parent and older kin to prevent their children from converting to another religion using verbal threats and corporal punishments without consequence. Children were forced to bear such treatment until an older person intervened on their behalf.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> The Abẹ̀òkúta political structure will be described in detail in chapter four. W. William, *Journal*, 28 May 1868; Lloyd, *The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms*, p. 29; Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 88.

<sup>164</sup> This will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

<sup>165</sup> The exact meaning of physical harm changed from one situation to the next incorporating incessant beatings or corporeal punishment that caused permanent scarring.

<sup>166</sup> Andrew Maser, *Journal*, 8 July 1856.

<sup>167</sup> Andrew Maser, *Journal*, 17 April 1853.

Another area where this unofficial hierarchy was prominent was in the Abeokuta judiciary. Despite murder and manslaughter being capital offences in Abẹ̀òkúta punished with public executions, rich and affluent men, who were usually chiefs, were given reprieve from public execution.<sup>168</sup> If they were convicted of a capital crime, they were offered a poison and told to return home to commit suicide. Most people obliged because absconding meant that their entire household were punished in their stead. Their entire families would be sold into slavery and their compounds looted and sometimes burnt to the ground effectively completely obliterating their familial lines from the town.<sup>169</sup> Hence, not committing suicide spelt ruin or as Ruth Watson puts it, was 'a greater punishment than death'.<sup>170</sup> Some rich men also evaded manslaughter penalties by paying huge fines as compensation to the families of the victims and the presiding *Ògbóni*.<sup>171</sup> In theory, poorer people could opt to pay manslaughter fines. However, most could not afford to pay the extent of fees the *Ògbóni* demanded and were instead executed.<sup>172</sup> Extra-legal hierarchies were widely accepted as part of the fabric of society and its resultant effect was that the Abẹ̀òkúta political structure was a combination of formal power and informal influence.

## War and expansion

Under *Şódeké*'s military and political prowess, Abẹ̀òkúta became a major power in the region. *Şódeké* sought direct access to the coast in order to trade directly with foreign ships and chose the 'weak and divided' town of

---

<sup>168</sup> Joseph Smith, Journal, 26 August 1864; James White, Annual letter, 1878; John King, Journal, 9 January 1871.

<sup>169</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 17.

<sup>170</sup> Ruth Watson, 'Murder and the Political Body in Early Colonial Ibadan', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70 (2000), 25-48 (p. 26).

<sup>171</sup> William Marsh, Journal, 7 October 1845.

<sup>172</sup> For more on the nuances and complexities of customary law in Africa, see: C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority In A Nigerian Tribe, A Study In Indirect Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937); Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom, and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); *Ideas and Procedures in African Customary Law: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Eighth International African Seminar at the Haile Sellassie I University, Addis Ababa, January 1966*, ed. by Max Gluckman, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (London: James Currey, 1996), pp. 21-23.

Badagry to attain this. Instead of conquering the Àwòrì and the Ègbádò peoples who lived in between Abẹ̀òkúta and the coast, he controlled them by offering them farmland and protection from external aggressors.<sup>173</sup> However, Abẹ̀òkúta's expansion put them in conflict with the town of Dahomey (in present day Benin Republic), which had been recently freed from Ọ̀yó suzerainty and was also expanding in the region.<sup>174</sup> Dahomey saw Abẹ̀òkúta as a rival and an obstacle to their interests and this tension had far reaching consequences for Abẹ̀òkúta. Although Dahomey only tried unsuccessfully to invade Abẹ̀òkúta twice in the century, first in 1851 and then in 1864, there were constant rumors and fears of attacks until the British negotiated peace in the interior.<sup>175</sup> Up until 1883, Abẹ̀òkúta, in preparation for a Dahomean attack intermittently banned all exportation of food to prevent famine should the war effort last longer than expected.<sup>176</sup> These rumors also caused mass anxiety and unrest usually crippling all town activities (see fig 1.2). Joseph Smith, a missionary, described one such time as a period of 'panic [...] people running about trying to leave the town' but prevented from doing so by the warriors.<sup>177</sup> At that particular time, there was no Dahomean attack.

---

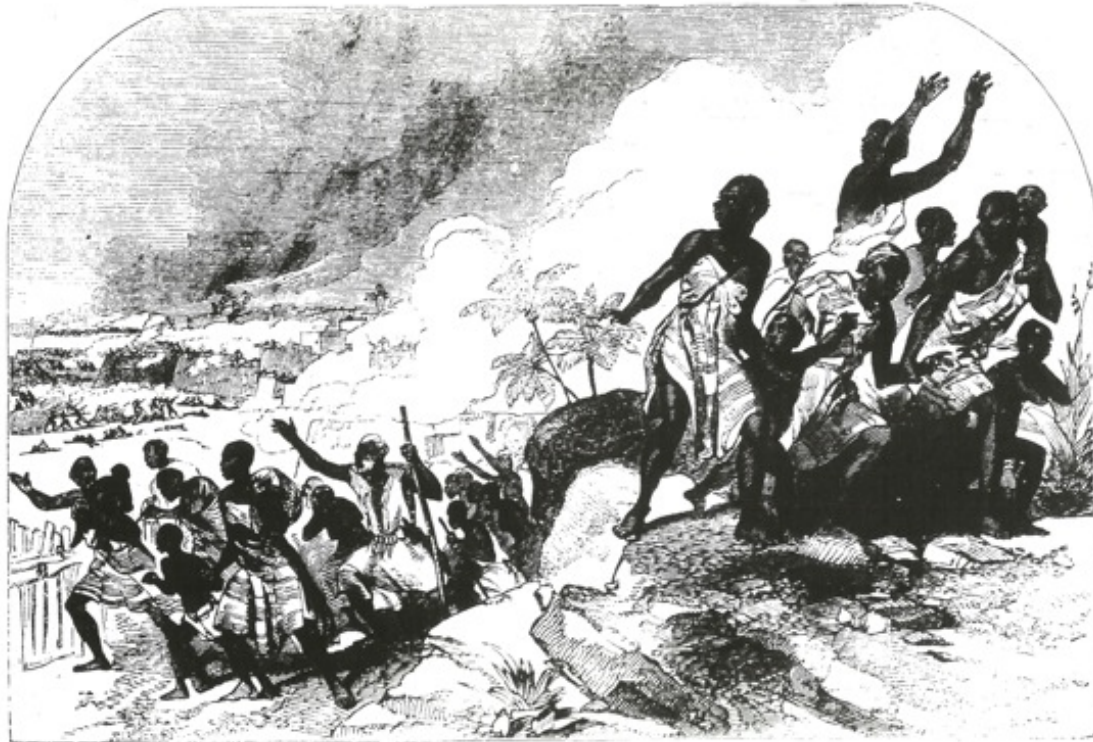
<sup>173</sup> Biobaku, *The Ègbá and Their Neighbours*, pp. 25–6.

<sup>174</sup> *African Times*, 23 May 1864; Ajay Crowther, *Journal*, 13 August 1849; J. F. Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891 : The Making of a New Elite* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 21; Smith, pp. 17–18.

<sup>175</sup> There were other speculations as to how the bitter rivalry between Abẹ̀òkúta and Dahomey came about. Johnson and other missionaries claim that during the Adó war of 1842, Abẹ̀òkúta captured and destroyed the King of Dahomey's divine kingly regalia and chair, which he and successive rulers swore to avenge. Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 28 February 1860, 1 April 1875, 7 October 1875; *African Times*, April 1863, April 1865; Andrew Maser, *Journal*, 23 May 1863; Samuel Cole, *Journal*, 13-21 March 1877; R. E. Dennett, *Nigerian Studies; Or, the Religious and Political System of the Yoruba* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. 10; Smith, pp. 101–5; Bowen, p. 112; Moore, p. 44.

<sup>176</sup> *Lagos Times*, 24 January 1883.

<sup>177</sup> Joseph Smith, *Journal*, 18 February 1857.



FLIGHT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM ABBEOKUTA.—*Vide* p. 195.

Fig: 1.2: Illustration of flight of women and children from Abẹ̀òkúta during the 1851 Dahomean invasion. Source: The University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, Church Missionary Society Microfilm Collection, CMS/M/EL1: *Church Missionary Gleaner* (hereafter *Church Missionary Gleaner* or *CMG*), August 1851.

Dahomey was not the only enemy of the Ègbá. Immediately after they arrived at Abẹ̀òkúta they became the focus of attack from Ìjẹ̀bú. The Ìjẹ̀bú, who were previously the main power in the area, with a trade monopoly to the coast, saw Ègbá settlement as a threat and sought to destroy them before they became established and powerful (see fig 1.3).<sup>178</sup> Despite several attacks however, Ìjẹ̀bú was unable to defeat Abẹ̀òkúta. In 1865, they formed an uneasy alliance with Abẹ̀òkúta, joining together in 1877 against Ìbàdàn, another rising Yorùbá power.<sup>179</sup> Ìbàdàn had also previously attempted to invade Abẹ̀òkúta in 1835 during the Òwíwí war because Abẹ̀òkúta blocked their access to the coast where they could trade directly with Europeans. But their attempt to breach Abẹ̀òkúta failed. Their successes in repulsing attacks

<sup>178</sup> By 1845, the year of Sòdèké's death, Abẹ̀òkúta had broken Ìjẹ̀bú's trade monopoly. Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 23; Phillips, 119-120.

<sup>179</sup> *Lagos Times*, 27 December 1882.

by both Ìjẹ̀bù and Ìbàdàn meant that Abẹ̀òkúta reigned supreme in the western section of Yorùbáland.<sup>180</sup> They fought other wars against Ìbàdàn in the nineteenth century, usually in alliance with other towns, because they perceived Ìbàdàn as a dangerous obstacle to trade, and a growing town that upset the political balance in the region.<sup>181</sup> The most prominent of these wars was Abẹ̀òkúta's alliance with Ìjàyẹ̀ against Ìbàdàn during the Ìjàyẹ̀ war that ended in Ìjàyẹ̀' s defeat in 1862.

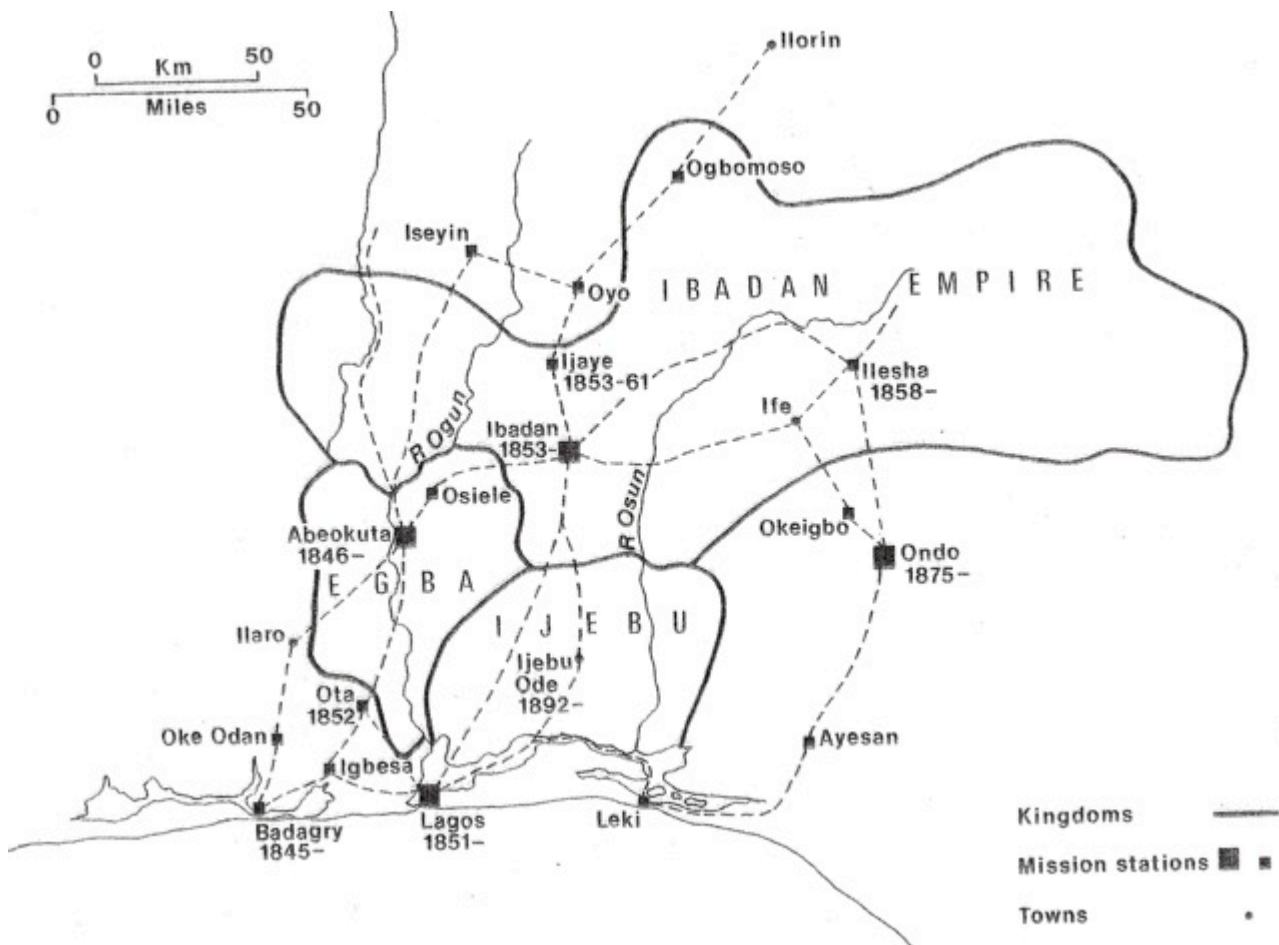


Fig 1.3: Map of Yorùbáland in 1892 showing political boundaries and CMS stations. Courtesy: Prof. J.D.Y Peel, SOAS, London.

Abẹ̀òkúta fought both defensive wars and wars of expansion. They invaded and conquered Òtá in 1842, securing their territory as far as Èbúté Mẹ́ta near

<sup>180</sup> Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, pp. 16–26.

<sup>181</sup> *Lagos Times*, 27 December 1882. For more on these wars see Moore, p. 87; Clarke, p. 65; Johnson, p. 331.

Lagos.<sup>182</sup> They also invaded Adó in 1845 and Mèkùn, Mèkọ, and Ìpèru in 1868. By the time of British conquest, their suzerainty extended to Èbúté Mèta on the coast of Lagos and Badagry and they controlled the Ògùn river giving them access to direct trade with Lagos.<sup>183</sup> Notwithstanding Johnson's claim that 'the Ègbas have no knowledge of the art of war', Abẹ̀òkúta maintained their status in the region throughout the nineteenth century despite facing many formidable military attacks.<sup>184</sup> In the midst of these intra-ethnic wars, rising tensions between Lagos and Abẹ̀òkúta over an Abẹ̀òkúta dispute with the town of Ìkòròdú, Lagos' attempt to post a vice-consul at Abẹ̀òkúta in 1862, Abẹ̀òkúta's closing of trade routes, and Lagos' granting of asylum for Abẹ̀òkúta runaway slaves and wives, culminated in the Ìkòròdú conflict of 1865. When the Lagos government came to the aid of Ìkòròdú during an Ègbá march on the town, the Ègbá were defeated with massive losses of life.<sup>185</sup>

These internal and external disputes left Abẹ̀òkúta in an almost constant state of turmoil. Fighting usually put a strain on the economy since farming and trading activities were disrupted by blockades, and external trade was halted leading to scarcity and astronomical price increases.<sup>186</sup> Wars also resulted in numerous deaths. In the war with Ìkòròdú, Abẹ̀òkúta was said to have lost 8000 men.<sup>187</sup> However, *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, the Abẹ̀òkúta CMS newspaper had a more conservative figure of 400 killed and 500 wounded, perhaps due to the newspaper's affiliation with and loyalty to the Abẹ̀òkúta government.<sup>188</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, there were also frequent military raids on Abẹ̀òkúta farms, trade routes and neighbours. Abẹ̀òkúta also raided the towns, villages and farms of others and was reported to have plundered over two hundred towns in 1877 alone.<sup>189</sup> These raids were primarily carried out for

---

<sup>182</sup> For more on wars in Africa, see: Jeffrey Ira Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 41–45.

<sup>183</sup> Oduntan, 296; Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, p. 27; Moore, p. 80; Lisa A. Lindsay, "'No Need... to Think of Home'?: Masculinity and Domestic Life on the Nigerian Railway, C. 1940-61', *The Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), 439–66 (p. 442).

<sup>184</sup> Johnson, p. 340.

<sup>185</sup> Moore, p. 74; *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1865, October 1867.

<sup>186</sup> *African Times*, 23 April 1863; James Johnson, *Journal*, January 1880.

<sup>187</sup> William Moore, *Journal*, 1865; Johnson, p. 360

<sup>188</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1865.

<sup>189</sup> *African Times*, 1 February 1878.



slave raiding. Henry Townsend, a missionary, noted that anyone could be kidnapped, even royalty.<sup>190</sup> On a visit to Abẹ̀òkúta, Samuel Johnson spoke about the death of a young man who despite being ‘a royal seed of the Ilẹ̀ṣà crown’ was twice enslaved in his lifetime.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, anyone at any time could lose their ‘free’ status. As will be discussed in chapter three, the slave population in Abẹ̀òkúta was very large accounting for about a third of the entire population and this continued to increase steadily as a result of slave procreation and purchase.<sup>192</sup>

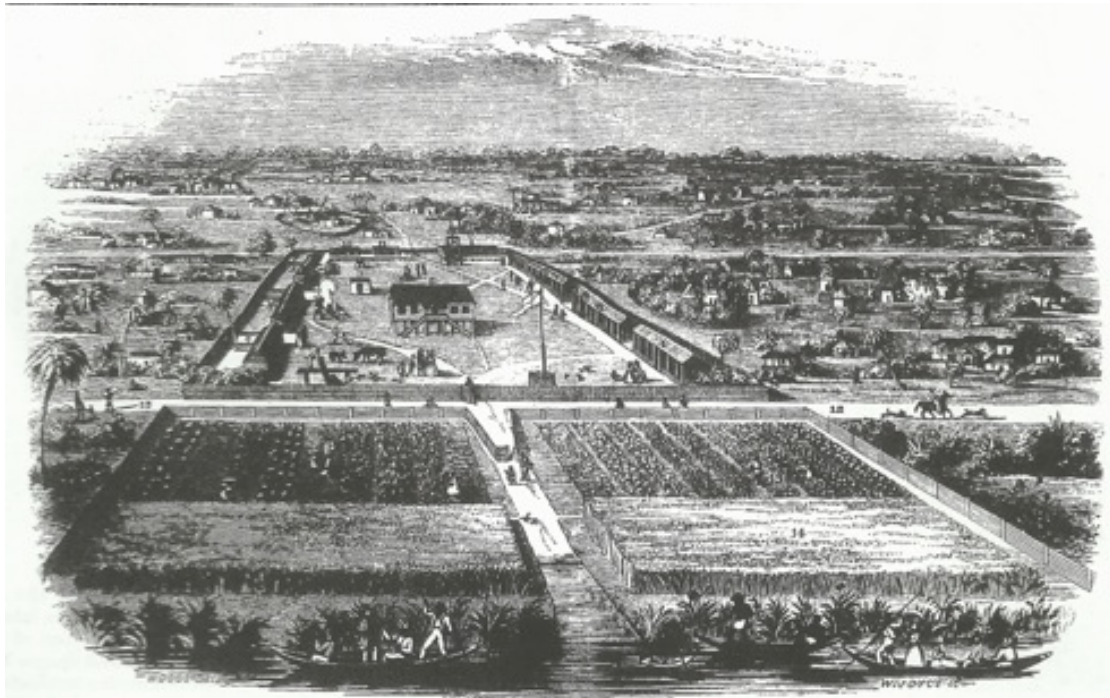


Fig 1.4: Illustration of a typical town layout in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, April 1886.

Due to the political uncertainties of the time, the urban settlement of Abẹ̀òkúta was shaped in an irregular circle with about twenty-three miles of five feet high clay walls for defence (see fig 1.1).<sup>193</sup> Gates were built into these walls

<sup>190</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, 11 October 1847.

<sup>191</sup> Samuel Johnson, Journal, 13 February 1874.

<sup>192</sup> This high slave population was normal in the nineteenth-century. Ìbàdàn had more slaves than free citizens. James Johnson, Letter to Rev Wright, 10 January, 1878; Byfield, p. 21.

<sup>193</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, an urban settlement refers to a large, dense, fixed, permanent community whose inhabitants undertake complex, independent economic activities, socially stratified, and politically unified. Mabogunje, pp. 1–2; G. J. Afolabi Ojo,



for entry and exit and were manned at all times. Due to the rapidly expanding population, some western observers claimed that basic town planning was hardly observed. An influx of immigrants necessitated the extension of town walls while people's preferences for living close to their kin meant that houses were built close together. James Johnson commented in 1878 that Abẹ̀òkúta was 'very irregularly arranged [...] with[out] any regard to neatness and decency and the ordinary laws of sanitation. Houses [were] thickly [and] irregularly built and very often crowded together'.<sup>194</sup> His observation was in direct contrast to that of Bowen who stated two decades previously in 1857 that 'Abẹ̀òkúta towns and cities were beautiful and well organised' and Commodore Wilmont who called Abẹ̀òkúta in 1863 'picturesque'.<sup>195</sup> Therefore James Johnson's observation of irregularity may have been a result of demographic pressures caused by an influx of refugees between 1863 and 1878.



Fig 1.5: View over Abeokuta in the 1920s. Source: Photographs, by Major C. T. Lawrence, 1910-1939, National Archives, London, CO 1069/65.

---

*Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis*, First Edition (London: University of London Press, 1966), p. 29; Clarke, p. 234.

<sup>194</sup> James Johnson, Journal, 20 January 1878.

<sup>195</sup> Bowen, pp. 104, 137; *African Times*, 22 August 1863.

## Social and religious changes in Abẹ̀òkúta

Amidst the rapidly changing political and economic environment, the social and religious climate in Abẹ̀òkúta was also under transformation. Before the arrival of missionaries, people in Abẹ̀òkúta, like other parts of Yorùbáland, practised indigenous religion. Indigenous religion was a type of 'idolatry', based on the worship of deities and connected to a system of divination known as *ifá*.<sup>196</sup> Although Islam, introduced to the Yorùbá by the Malians, Nupe and Fulani in the sixteenth century, had become a recognised religion, the Yorùbá remained predominantly 'pagan'.<sup>197</sup> There were about 300-400 Yorùbá *òrìṣà* (deities) most of which were of little note. The most prominent of them were the rather remote *Olódùmarè* (supreme God) and his second in command and chief deity *Ọ̀bàtálá* (also known as *Òrìṣàńlá*), a god associated with creation, purity and healing. Major deities also included *Ṣàńgó* (god of thunder), *Ògún* (god of war and iron), *Ṣòpònná* (god of smallpox), *Ìbeji* (god of twins), *Ọ̀rúnmìlà* (god of *Ifá* divination), and *Èṣù Èlẹ̀gbára* (the trickster god), a god associated with trickery and wickedness, and later named Satan by Christian evangelists. Each of these gods had priests and followers devoted to their worship.<sup>198</sup> Also prominent among the Yorùbá was the worship of the *itàlẹ̀mọ* (deceased ancestors), occasionally celebrated in a festival known as *egúngún*.<sup>199</sup> Reverend Crowther, a Yorùbá missionary, also added that some people worshipped snakes, rivers, trees, the white anthills, and certain rocks

---

<sup>196</sup> William R. Bascom, 'The Relationship of Yoruba Folklore to Divining', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 56 (1943), 127–31.

<sup>197</sup> Sodiq Yushau, 'The Practise of Islam', in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, ed. by Nike S. Lawal, Matthew Sadiku and Ade Dopamu (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 137-150 (p. 137); Robin Horton, 'African Conversion', *Africa*, 41 (1971), 85-108 (p. 86).

<sup>198</sup> For more on Yorùbá indigenous religion see: O. E. Alana, 'Traditional Religion', in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, ed. by Nike S. Lawal, Matthew Sadiku and Ade Dopamu (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 65–79; Ọ̀latunde B. Lawuyi and J. K. Olupona, 'Metaphoric Associations and the Conception of Death: Analysis of a Yoruba World View', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 18 (1988), 2–14; John A. I. Bewaji, 'Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil', *African Studies Quarterly, The Online Journal for African Studies*, 1998, <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.htm> [accessed 3 August 2014]; O. B. Lawuyi, 'The Obatala Factor in Yoruba History', *History in Africa*, 19 (1992), 369–375; Anthony D. Buckley, 'The God of Smallpox: Aspects of Yoruba Religious Knowledge', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 55 (1985), 187–200; John Pemberton, 'Eshu-Elegbá: The Yoruba Trickster God', *African Arts*, 9 (1975), 20, 92; George Eaton Simpson, *Yoruba Religion and Medicine in Ibadan* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980).

<sup>199</sup> Indigenous religion and *egúngún* will be discussed in detail in chapters three and four.

with caves, which they believed the spirits of gods lived.<sup>200</sup> However, he may have misunderstood this practice because the Yorùbá worshipped deities through certain creatures and objects as they were believed to be manifestations of gods. In 1867, the evangelist William Allen observed a group of people bowing down, offering kolanut and cold water as sacrifice to a swarm of bees hanging on a tree. When he enquired why they sacrificed to the hive, they told him that swarms were manifestations of *Şàṅgó's* wrath and they needed to make sacrifices in order to appease him.<sup>201</sup>

It is important to note that unlike modern-day sensibilities that separate religion from secular life, the nineteenth-century Yorùbá did not view their religious practices as a separate and distinct field of human activity. In fact, the term 'Yorùbá religion' only came to be known as such through Yorùbá interactions with Christian missionaries. J. D. Y. Peel states that in the nineteenth century, Yorùbá religious undertakings could not be separated from other aspects of their daily lives and demands of society.<sup>202</sup> Divination, an act seen as inherently 'religious' by European missionaries, was not viewed as such by the Yorùbá, because it was used in all aspects of life. What missionaries termed 'religion', was rather viewed as culture or custom by the locals. Hence, they referred to such 'religious' activities as '*àşá ibilè*' (custom of our country), later interpreted by CMS missionaries to mean 'making country fashion'. Peel argues that 'country fashion' served to blur divisions between the religious and non-religious, suggesting shifting and unbounded bodies of customary practices, rather than a definite and distinct religion.<sup>203</sup> These religious practices were heavily influenced and altered by the changing social scene in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta.

Unlike *Ìbàdàn* and *Ìjẹ̀bú*, who were hostile to immigrants, the Abẹ̀òkúta government had an open door policy.<sup>204</sup> *Şódeké* was described as a leader

---

<sup>200</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 10 September 1856.

<sup>201</sup> William Allen, Journal, 26 June 1867.

<sup>202</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 89.

<sup>203</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 90.

<sup>204</sup> *Ìbàdàn* was only hostile to certain immigrant settlers due to ethnic rivalries. However, *Ìjẹ̀bú* banned all types of immigration. No outsiders, whether foreign or domestic, were allowed until

who welcomed new ideas and he allowed refugees to settle in Abẹ̀òkúta, a practice that continued throughout the century.<sup>205</sup> When Ìjáyè lost their war with Ìbàdàn and the town was sacked in 1862, those Ìjáyè refugees that came to Abẹ̀òkúta were allowed to stay and were given a separate quarter of the town to settle.<sup>206</sup> This same open-door policy was also applied to slave returnees from Sierra Leone, known locally as Sàró who began to settle in the town from the late 1830s. Christian missionaries and free Africans in the diaspora were also allowed to settle in Abẹ̀òkúta. J. K. Ade-Ajayi writes that because of their mass capture and enslavement while in the Ègbá forest, Ègbá people became more numerous in Sierra Leone than in Yorùbáland.<sup>207</sup> The expectation of seeing their kith and kin return increased Abẹ̀òkúta's readiness to accept immigrants. This also partly accounted for why they accepted Europeans who accompanied them.<sup>208</sup> Another reason why the Ègbá may have welcomed outsiders was to increase their population that had been severely depleted during the destruction of their original homestead. A large population was crucial to rebuilding the Ègbá nation both in terms of economic labourers to bolster the economy and soldiers to fight during wartime. Furthermore, the new skills in terms of education and vocation, held by Saro immigrants, were crucial to the changing times and Yorùbáland's increasing interaction with global economies. By 1861, there were an estimated 2000 Sierra Leonean immigrants in Abẹ̀òkúta some of whom became instrumental in the government.<sup>209</sup>

Some Saro immigrants, under the leadership of G. W. 'Reversible' Johnson, also a Saro immigrant of Ègbá parents, formed the Egba United Board of Management (EUBM) in 1865. The aim of this organisation, according to G. W. Johnson was to form a ' "Christian, civilized state", autonomous of foreign leadership'.<sup>210</sup> The EUBM was an attempt at a central government and

---

the British bombarded the town in 1891. Toyin Falola, 'From Hospitality to Hostility: Ibadan and Strangers, 1830-1904', *The Journal of African History*, 26 (1985), 51–68 (p. 65).

<sup>205</sup> Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 31.

<sup>206</sup> Johnson, p. 153.

<sup>207</sup> Ade-Ajayi, p. 21.

<sup>208</sup> Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 13 August 1849.

<sup>209</sup> Biobaku, *The First 150 Years of the Ègbá at Abẹ̀òkúta*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>210</sup> Agneta Pallinder-Law, 'Aborted Modernization in West Africa? The Case of Abeokuta', *The Journal of African History*, 15 (1974), 65-82 (p. 69).

included in its leadership both traditional elites and Saro immigrants. This organisation did manage some innovations. It organised a postal service to Lagos, opened a secular school and attempted to persuade CMS missionaries to change the official language of instruction from Yorùbá to English, arguing that English was more useful for external political and commercial relations. However, Pallinder-Law states that their greatest significance was their introduction of a central government revenue by placing customs duties on exported goods.<sup>211</sup> These duties were however discontinued in 1870 with the deterioration of export trade.<sup>212</sup> Despite its marginal gains, the rejection of the EUBM by Christian missionaries who regarded their activities as attempts to bring civilisation without Christianisation limited their effectiveness. Also, the death, in 1868, of Baṣòrun (a type of Prime minister) Ṣòmòye, the EUBM's most influential indigenous patron, and the refusal of Glover, the then governor of Lagos, to support the Board's activities due to its focus on independence from British authorities and the Boards suspected complacency, if not participation, in the mass persecution of Christians in 1867, led to the failure of the EUBM and its impact on Abẹ̀òkúta 'ephemeral'. Earl Phillips regarded the EUBM as 'doomed to failure' due to its general lack of support outside the Saro community.<sup>213</sup> After 1868 the EUBM's influence was minimal and it completely collapsed in 1874 when G. W. Johnson returned to Lagos where he had originally resided.<sup>214</sup> Nevertheless, even in its brief period of significance, the civil and war chiefs remained the principal rulers of Abẹ̀òkúta.

---

<sup>211</sup> Pallinder-Law, 70.

<sup>212</sup> Although Pallinder-Law, states that export taxes were removed in 1874, the author's research showed that these taxes were repealed in 1870.

<sup>213</sup> Phillips, 126.

<sup>214</sup> Although Pallinder-Law, states that export taxes were removed in 1874, the author's research showed that these taxes were repealed in 1870. Earl Phillips and Saburi Biobaku have written extensively about the EUBM. See, Pallinder-Law, 68-72; Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, p. 77-94; Phillips, 126-130; Letter to Henry Townsend, 24 May 1870.



Fig 1.6: CMS Pioneers (left to right): Henry Townsend, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Charles Andrew Gollmer. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*.

The first mission to arrive in Abẹ̀òkúta was the Anglican CMS mission. They official began work in August 1846 when Henry Townsend and Samuel Ajayi Crowther arrived in Aké.<sup>215</sup> Although Townsend and Crowther had arrived in Yorùbáland earlier, they had to stay in Badagry due to the death of Şódeķé, the Ègbá ruler, who had invited them. The third member of their party, Andrew Gollmer, remained in Badagry to set up a church there (see fig 1.6). At Abẹ̀òkúta, the CMS were given land in Aké and the freedom to preach to the local community without harassment. Abẹ̀òkúta law was also amended so that free indigenes and immigrants were given the freedom to practise whatever religion they pleased without interference or harassment.<sup>216</sup> Missionaries were also given free rein to expand their mission beyond Aké and soon they had missions in Ìgbórè, Ìkijà, Òşìlè and beyond. One can propose various practical reasons for Abẹ̀òkúta's willingness to accept missionaries and the Christian religion besides Şódeķé inclination to new ideas. One reason may have been the general Yorùbá religious pragmatism that encouraged the worship of multiple and varied gods to gain tangible benefits.<sup>217</sup> Missionaries may also have been welcomed because of the influx of Christian Sàró immigrants who the Abẹ̀òkúta rulers felt might leave should they ban

<sup>215</sup> Townsend had previously visited Abẹ̀òkúta in 1844 with another missionary, William Marsh. When Townsend returned to Sierra Leone to in preparation for the commencement of the Yorùbá mission, William Marsh remained behind in Abẹ̀òkúta.

<sup>216</sup> This law, although legitimate was often contested by ordinary citizens and the members of government. This will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

<sup>217</sup> Yorùbá religious pragmatism will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

missionaries. Ègbá people may also have embraced missions because they perceived Christian missionaries as their link to the British who could potentially be strong political allies during the widespread civil unrest.<sup>218</sup> Whatever the reason, Abẹ̀òkúta was the ‘first strong missionary foothold in Nigeria’.<sup>219</sup>

Whilst missions remained under local political authority and existed largely due to the goodwill of the chiefs, both they and immigrants were given a certain measure of self-government.<sup>220</sup> Although their rights were protected so long as it was not contrary to indigenous laws, some immigrants managed to subvert local customs. As early as 1851, when a Christian Sàró man was found guilty of adultery, Townsend protested to the chiefs when the perpetrator was prosecuted according to local laws. Townsend objected that this was contrary to the agreement he and Šódeḱé had made stating that they ‘should not be amenable to country laws’. He however assured the chiefs that the guilty party would not go free but would be subject to a branch of British common law instead. The chiefs consented and the matter was handed over to the mission.<sup>221</sup>

Missionaries also managed to challenge Abẹ̀òkúta laws in more serious judicial matters such as murder. Murder in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta is an interesting subject. Essentially, what the people considered murder was not simply the physical act of killing. The people’s beliefs concerning the effects of malicious intent, supernatural magic, sorcery, witchcraft and other extra-secular phenomena gave a new dimension to crime. Due to such beliefs, a person could be punished as severely for supposedly killing via malicious intent as for the physical act of murder. In November 1845, two men had a dispute. One told the other ‘if you do not cease from meddling with me, I will cause a heavy stone to roll down upon you’. The man who uttered the curse

---

<sup>218</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 126

<sup>219</sup> A. Babs Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd), p. 82

<sup>220</sup> Unlike missionaries in other areas, such as the case of the Dutch West Indies examined in Ann Stoler’s study, Yorùbá missionaries were not a front for colonialism. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 9; Campbell, p. 137.

<sup>221</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 20 January 1851.

was said to have kissed his magical charm before speaking the words and the cursed fell sick the same day and died the next. The man who cursed him was put to death.<sup>222</sup> Although missionaries could not interfere in cases of physical murder, they contested local understandings of death by malicious intent and were sometimes successful in preventing the execution of their members. Joseph Smith, a missionary, once intervened on behalf of a convert. The young man, allegedly acting in vengeance for an unmentioned slight, was said to have put a poisonous substance in the path of one of his neighbours. His intended victim was said to have touched the substance with his foot, become seriously ill, and died in consequence and the convert was arrested and awaiting execution. Mr Smith regarded the accusation as a ruse to persecute converts and went to the king who pitied the boy saying that 'bad luck and a bitter mouth had caused him all his troubles'. In other words, due to his immaturity, he lacked the verbal restraints that came with adult wisdom, which only proved his youth and not his guilt. He told Mr Smith not to fear, he would ensure that the accused came to no harm.<sup>223</sup> The king's statement reveals that the death by malicious intent was contestable even before missionary challenges to such ideas since such 'murders' could have been coincidental, and in such cases, it was impossible to prove guilt.

During the early days of the mission, Christian missionaries and converts formed a village called *Wáàsimi* (come and rest) in order to protect them from the influences and persecutions of their traditionalist kin. As their numbers increased past the boundaries and capacity of *Wáàsimi*, they began to live within the general Abẹ̀òkúta population and became part of the community, being absorbed into the town's social, legal, economic and political hierarchies.<sup>224</sup> Christians also began to engage in other town activities, including warfare, first fighting as soldiers under their town *Balógun* (war general) and in 1860, John Owulotan a native of Ìtòkú was made the first *Balógun* of the Christian population.<sup>225</sup> Christian involvement in local politics

---

<sup>222</sup> William Marsh, Journal, 15 November 1845.

<sup>223</sup> Joseph Smith, Journal, 26 June 1856.

<sup>224</sup> Burton, pp. 76–8.

<sup>225</sup> Edward Roper, Journal, 1860; William Moore, Journal, 10 February 1862; William George, Journal, 28 April 1874; *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, August 1861.



also became so widespread that by the 1860s, some Christian converts showed interest in joining the *Ògbóni*. This question of whether or not Christians could join the *Ògbóni* caused tensions and controversy in Abẹ̀òkúta churches, especially the church in Aké. According to the account of Jonathan Wood, those against Christian membership of the *Ògbóni* argued that *Ògbóni* membership implied idolatry stating that:

there is an idolatry at the making of an *Ogboni*, that the novice is imbued into the place in which there is a small idol house- his eyes are bound once over with a cloth, he is made to bow three times to a brass image in an idol house, the person officiating promising at the same time certain words which the novice is not allowed to understand.

Those who supported membership stated that these claims were false and that *Ògbóni* initiation was merely a ceremony where the initiate was told *Ògbóni* secrets and given *Ògbóni* paraphernalia. While one side stated that initiations required an oath, others denied this. Many missionaries could not decide for one side or the other because the secrecy of *Ògbóni* meant that they had no clue what forms initiations took. Wood, the European charged with making a decision in 1861 said he saw no reason why locals should be expelled from church for joining the *Ògbóni*, or why the church should regulate the matter at all.<sup>226</sup> It was later decided, in a meeting with Andrew Gollmer, that Christians could not join *Ògbóni*, but the status of those who were members before the controversy went undecided.<sup>227</sup> A compromise was reached on 18 December 1914 when T. A. J. Ògúnbíyì, a clergyman, founded the Reformed *Ògbóni* Fraternity as a Christian alternative to the local *Ògbóni*.<sup>228</sup>

Outside *Ògbóni* membership, missionaries and Christians played a key role both in Abẹ̀òkúta politics and in brokering peace in the interior. One such missionary was Henry Townsend, who participated in choosing rulers, brokering peace between Abẹ̀òkúta and their neighbours, and acting as an intercessor between the colonial government in Lagos and the Abẹ̀òkúta

---

<sup>226</sup> Jonathan Wood, Journal, 1861.

<sup>227</sup> William Moore, Letter to the CMS Parent Committee, 4 September 1861.

<sup>228</sup> For more information, see <http://www.rof-worldwide.com/home.html> [accessed 4/05/2014].

rulership. He also acted as secretary to some of the leading chiefs and advised them on issues concerning Abẹ̀òkúta-Lagos relations.<sup>229</sup> In fact, his involvement in Abẹ̀òkúta politics often put him in conflict with other missionaries in other regions and sometimes with the British government.<sup>230</sup> The Colonial Office once accused him of ‘aggravating the problems of British foreign policy’.<sup>231</sup> Townsend was so influential that both incidents of major persecution of Christians in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta happened when he was on furlough in England. Townsend was heavily invested in the destiny of Abẹ̀òkúta, representing it as the ‘sunrise within the tropic where light would shine into the interior’.<sup>232</sup> Oluwatoyin Oduntan describes him as having an ‘adopted Africaness’ due to his vast knowledge of Yorùbá language, culture and politics.<sup>233</sup> Townsend’s influence on the chiefs however wavered after the Ìkòròdú conflict in 1865 as the chiefs increasingly viewed him as a British agent. He was removed as secretary to the chiefs in the same year and replaced by members of the non-CMS Saro community.<sup>234</sup> While Townsend was on furlough in England, missionaries were expelled from Abẹ̀òkúta in 1867. He could thus not return. By the time Europeans were allowed back into the town in 1878, he was nearing the end of his time in Yorùbáland. He left the region finally in 1880.

The alliance between missions and the Abẹ̀òkúta government was therefore not always friendly or cordial. Even though the Christian population were largely free to conduct their affairs, certain practices such as the deviation from traditional funeral rights led in 1849 to the first Christian persecution in Ìgbòrè, Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>235</sup> The tensions between the British and the Abẹ̀òkúta governments over Abẹ̀òkúta’s closing of trade routes and attempted invasion of Ìkòròdú in the 1865 also led to the second large-scale persecution known as *Ifole* (literally translated as breaking homes) in October 1867 where the

---

<sup>229</sup> Pallinder-Law, 68.

<sup>230</sup> Adolphus Mann, Letter to the secretaries of the CMS in a petition to regain some Ìjaye children from the Reverend H. Townsend and some natives, 19 January 1864.

<sup>231</sup> Oduntan, p. 304; Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 36.

<sup>232</sup> Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 37

<sup>233</sup> Oduntan, p. 305.

<sup>234</sup> Pallinder-Law, 69.

<sup>235</sup> David Hinderer, Journal, 10 October 1849; Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 5 November 1849.

Abẹ̀òkúta churches and mission houses were destroyed, and missionaries were expelled. African missionaries could not recommence work until October 1868 and even this was not without interference from the town authorities, while European missionaries were not allowed to return until a decade later.<sup>236</sup> Some chiefs considered missionary influences too pervasive. When Baṣòrun Ògúndípè, an Abẹ̀òkúta chief and friend to missionaries, spoke against their expulsion in 1867, he was told by the other chiefs that ‘the white man must leave[...] it is not for the white man to do as he pleases but as the Ègbá wished’.<sup>237</sup> Besides these recorded accounts, there were also various rumours of attacks on Christians throughout the nineteenth-century and many instances of individual persecution.<sup>238</sup>

Despite such local concerns, the reach of missionaries must not be overstated as missionary archives bear the inherent risk of overstating the importance of mission. By 1855 there were only 250 adult church attendees and by 1863 their numbers had only increased to 286.<sup>239</sup> Even by the turn of the twentieth century, only one per cent of the Abẹ̀òkúta population were Christian converts.<sup>240</sup> It was only with the advent of colonialism, when it became politically and economically advantageous to be Christian that large-scale conversion occurred.<sup>241</sup> Growing Muslim influences also shaped the region. Since Islamic records are even more elusive than Christian ones and were not used in this study, Islam cannot be commented on at length in this thesis. Notwithstanding, many missionaries spoke of extensive Islamic influences in clothing and manners (see fig 1.7).<sup>242</sup> Crowther once wrote that although the religion of the country was heathenism, ‘Mohammedanism [was]

---

<sup>236</sup> Researchers have written extensively about Ifole, so this thesis will not discuss it in detail. For more information, see: W. Williams, *Journal*, 21 May 1868; Ellis, pp. 10–14; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 135; Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, p. 83.

<sup>237</sup> Jonathan Wood, *Journal*, 27 January 1868.

<sup>238</sup> Reverend Muller, *Journal*, 20 February 1850; *Ìwé Ìròhin*, November 1862; July 1866.

<sup>239</sup> Andrew Maser, *Journal*, 18 March 1855; *Ìwé Ìròhin*, January 1863.

<sup>240</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 242.

<sup>241</sup> See Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 242; Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay, ‘Introduction: Men and Masculinities in Modern African History’, in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* ed. by Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2003), pp. 1–29 (p. 2).

<sup>242</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 19 November 1847.

making rapid progress amongst the people'.<sup>243</sup> Abèòkúta thus developed a complex interaction between all religions: indigenous, Christian and Muslim often representing all three in the chieftaincy hierarches.<sup>244</sup>



Fig 1.7: Illustration of nineteenth-century 'Mohammedan' dress. Source: *Christian Missionary Gleaner*, March 1876.

The dangers and insecurities in life came from environmental dangers as well as human action and Abèòkúta experienced significant health and environmental uncertainties in the nineteenth century. There were several outbreaks of small pox, some of the most severe in 1878 and in 1881 when E.

---

<sup>243</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 10 September 1856 For more on the spread of Islam in Africa, see: Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000); David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sean Hanretta, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>244</sup> Oduntan, p. 304.

Olympus Moore, an early twentieth century historian, claimed that half of the population fell victim to the disease.<sup>245</sup> In 1878 Guinea worm also spread widely amongst the populace, which Reverend Thomas Wright attributed to the poor water and sanitation.<sup>246</sup> There were also frequent fire outbreaks. Yorùbáland had two seasons, the dry season from the end of December until March and then the wet season for the rest of the year.<sup>247</sup> Although observers claimed the heat was not excessive, low humidity during the dry season led to many fires and almost every other missionary journal entry was about a fire.<sup>248</sup> There were also reports of tornadoes that destroyed properties, and one report of an earthquake.<sup>249</sup>

Abẹ̀òkúta was thus a heterogeneous town full of uncertainties whether political, economic, social, religious or environmental. Nineteenth-century observers nevertheless continued to describe the Ègbá as happy and content. They stated that hardly a day went by without the sounds of drumming, dancing and such other amusements. James Johnson, a missionary, noted that the Ègbá 'loved easily and were quick to adapt to new ideas'.<sup>250</sup> William Clarke, another missionary, stated that they were 'empathetically social people, strong in their attachments, ardent in their friendships, fond of life, hilarity and amusement, and spend most of their leisure moments in social intercourse'.<sup>251</sup> When the political climate was conducive, the Ègbá engaged in economic activities including farming, trading and crafts, and were described as a very industrious and hardworking people.<sup>252</sup> Missionaries also introduced mechanised cotton ginning to the region to encourage large-scale cotton production and trading.<sup>253</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta also produced and exported palm oil, shea butter and ivory.<sup>254</sup>

---

<sup>245</sup> Moore, pp. 91–2.

<sup>246</sup> Reverend Wright, Journal, 10 January 1878.

<sup>247</sup> Burton, p. 229; Clarke, p. 207.

<sup>248</sup> Joseph Smith, Journal, 25 February 1851; Ajayi Crowther, Journal, March 1854; Thomas King, Journal, 1877; Samuel Cole, Journal, 7 July 1854; James Okuseinde, Journal, 27 March 1865; *Ìwé Ìròhin*, January 1864, February 1865, May 1866; Moore, p. 89.

<sup>249</sup> Townsend, Journal, 23 January 1847; *Ìwé Ìròhin*, July 1863.

<sup>250</sup> James Johnson, Letter to Reverend Wright, 30 January 1878.

<sup>251</sup> Clarke, pp. 236–7; see also Johnson, p. xxii.

<sup>252</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, November 1861; Campbell, p. 143.

<sup>253</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 25 December 1857.

<sup>254</sup> Johnson, p. xx; Reverend Crowther, Letter to Venn, 10 September 1856.

As British influence in the Yorùbá interior increased, resulting in the end of the nineteenth-century wars and annexation of Yorùbá towns as part of the British colony in 1893, the Ègbá at Abẹ̀òkúta again stood apart from the rest of the region. Due to their relationship with missionaries and immigrants, and the rapport that Abẹ̀òkúta had developed with the British colonial administration in Lagos, they were the only nation allowed to remain politically independent in the interior under the 'Treaty of Friendship and Commerce'.<sup>255</sup> Following British pressure, the second attempt at a unified Ègbá government, the Ègbá United Government (EUG) was formed in 1898.<sup>256</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta also became the headquarters of British rule in the interior, but they lost a good proportion of their conquered territory as a result of colonial incursion because the British government gave towns previously under Abẹ̀òkúta suzerainty their own government.<sup>257</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta remained independent until September 1914 when a dispute between the chiefs that almost led to a civil war annulled the treaty that allowed them self-rule.<sup>258</sup> Therefore, contrary to Samuel Johnson's assertion in *History of the Yorubas*, the Ègbá were in no way silent in the nineteenth century, they were simply making their own history.

### **Èbi (the Yorùbá Lineage)**

Within Abẹ̀òkúta, and all of Yorùbáland, the position of the Yorùbá lineage known as *èbi* was paramount to all political, economic, social and cultural endeavours. It was in essence the primary mode of association and identity in the nineteenth century. Theoretically, the lineage comprised of a group of

---

<sup>255</sup> *African Times*, 27 December 1882; Johnson, p. 626; Biobaku, *The First 150 Years of the Ègbá at Abẹ̀òkúta*, p. 21; Pallinder-Law, 73.

<sup>256</sup> Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 98.

<sup>257</sup> Biobaku, *The First 150 Years of the Ègbá at Abẹ̀òkúta*, p. 7.

<sup>258</sup> The terms of this treaty it will be not be expatiated on here as it has no direct relevance to this thesis and falls outside its timeline. For more information, see: Oxford University Boolean Library, African Archives, Microfilm Collection Micr.Afr.473 (Letter to conduct enquiries into deaths in Abẹ̀òkúta; Treaty succeeding Ègbáland to Britain, 18 November 1909; Abrogation of the treaty of Ègbáland, 16 September 1914); Moore, pp. 134–150; Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 98.

people who traced their origin along agnatic lines to a single ancestor, their wives and their children living together in a spatial patrilocal dwelling known as the *idilé* (compound).<sup>259</sup> In reality however, the nineteenth-century lineage was a flexible, accommodating and heterogeneous entity, which included slaves, pawns, strangers, followers and hangers-on who attached themselves to certain households.<sup>260</sup> Johnson even claimed that in some compounds only the ties of 'friendship' united its inhabitants.<sup>261</sup> With time, non-blood relatives could be fully absorbed into the lineage and became indistinguishable from the primary kin group.<sup>262</sup>

The lineage was an economic, social, political, religious and judicial unit. Land was corporately owned by the lineage and granted to members according to their needs.<sup>263</sup> Marriages were brokered amongst lineages, bridewealth was corporately paid, and everyone was responsible for the conjugal success of its members. Likewise, in the event of death, a levirate-type marriage system ensured that women remained in the household.<sup>264</sup> Chieftaincy candidates and other public officials were also nominated from within lineages, and members collectively worshiped household deities.<sup>265</sup> Lineages also internally policed their members, and disputes were only referred to higher town authorities if they could not be resolved in-house. Outside the household, lineage members were collectively responsible for the behaviour of their individual members, to sometimes dire consequences. In 1851, an entire family in *Ìbàdàn* was sold for gunpowder because one of its members showed no remorse at his execution for a murder he committed. Similarly, an entire household in *Kúdeṣẹ̀tì* was sold into slavery because a member started a fire

---

<sup>259</sup> William Bascom, 'The Principle of Seniority in the Social Structure of the Yoruba', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 44 (1942), 37-46 (p. 37); William B. Schwab, 'Kinship and Lineage Among the Yoruba', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 25 (1955), 352-374 (p. 352); Peter C. Lloyd, 'Family Property Among the Yoruba', *Journal of African Law*, 3 (1959), 105-115 (p. 107).

<sup>260</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 23; Lisa Lindsay, 'Money, Marriage, and Masculinity on the Colonial Nigerian Railway', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* ed. by Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay pp.138-155 (p. 146).

<sup>261</sup> Johnson, p. 98.

<sup>262</sup> Watson, '*Civil Disorder Is the Disease of Ibadan*', p. 27; Bascom, 'The Principle of Seniority', 37; J. A. Atanda, *Political Systems of Nigeria Peoples up to 1900* (Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Limited, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>263</sup> Lloyd, 'Family property', p. 105.

<sup>264</sup> Schwab, 356.

<sup>265</sup> Andrew Gollmer, *Journal*, 25 July 1846.

that burnt down two hundred houses and killed a drunken man.<sup>266</sup> All individuals, free and slave, were born into a lineage and remained in one for a lifetime. Should a member be exiled from a community for committing a crime in which the penalty was excommunication, they would attach themselves to another lineage in the host town.<sup>267</sup> Even death did not release a person from lineage affiliations as they were buried in the compound and worshipped as ancestors who were expected to intervene in the lives of their descendants.<sup>268</sup> Although being born into a lineage gave one the right to permanent residence, male members formed the de facto core lineage group since women married into other lineages.<sup>269</sup> Nevertheless, women never lost their agnatic ties. Contrary to Simi Afonja's claim that usufruct land rights were controlled and inherited by men, women in the nineteenth century were entitled to land.<sup>270</sup> Women also continued to participate in their lineage religion, and in rare cases, returned after the dissolution of a marriage.<sup>271</sup> Their consanguinal bonds also afforded their children rights to economic aid, participation in the household worship, and political protection.<sup>272</sup> The latter was especially beneficial in the turbulent political climate of the nineteenth century and many exiled or deposed leaders found refuge and protection in their matrilineal homes.

The spatial location of the lineage was the compound (see fig 1.8). The compound was physically structured in a way that promoted community and intercourse within while remaining independent and protected from the outside.<sup>273</sup> The compound was a large square or semi-circle structure with walls of about five to seven feet high and a single but strong doorway leading

---

<sup>266</sup> Daniel Olubi, *Journal*, 24 December 1868.

<sup>267</sup> Johnson, p. 608.

<sup>268</sup> Schwab, 357; Helen Callaway, 'Spatial Domains and Women's Mobility in Yorubaland, Nigeria', in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1997), pp. 165-182 (p. 174).

<sup>269</sup> Schwab, 359.

<sup>270</sup> Simi Afonja, 'Changing Modes of Production and the Sexual Division of Labor Among the Yoruba', *Signs*, 7 (1981), 299-313 (p. 305).

<sup>271</sup> Participation in the lineage religion was important because it gave women the protection of the household ancestors and deities.

<sup>272</sup> Schwab, 357.

<sup>273</sup> For more information on spatial significances of housing, see: Lidia Sciama, 'The Problem of Privacy in Mediterranean Anthropology', in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1997), pp. 81-111 (p. 89).



into it.<sup>274</sup> It had a hollow centre that was used for general purposes of livestock rearing, cooking for major feasts and events, economic craft activities such as dyeing, ginning, weaving, and also tending to animals which were tethered there at night.<sup>275</sup>



Fig 1.8:  
Illustration of a  
Yorùbá  
compound.  
Source: *Church  
Missionary  
Gleaner*, 1888.

The compound building was a one-storey structure divided into rooms, numbering up to thirty to fifty depending on the number of occupants, that faced inward.<sup>276</sup> Dwellings were sometimes very large accommodating anything from twenty to two hundred people. Some affluent chiefs even tenanted over three hundred people.<sup>277</sup> For this reason, compounds could have multiple buildings depending on the number of its inhabitants. Nevertheless all compounds were similarly constructed and only high walls and doors distinguished wealthy compounds from poorer ones.<sup>278</sup> Houses were built by the concerted efforts of both men and women. While men erected the framework and roof, women gave the finishing touches by

<sup>274</sup> At night, and in times of danger this door was barred. Peter. C. Lloyd, 'The Yoruba Lineage', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 25 (1955), 235-251 (p.235).

<sup>275</sup> Afolabi Ojo, 'Traditional Yoruba Architecture', *African Arts*, 1 (1968), 14-72 (p. 15).

<sup>276</sup> Bowen, p. 298; Ojo, 'Traditional Yoruba Architecture', pp. 13-16.

<sup>277</sup> Campbell, p. 43.

<sup>278</sup> Burton, p. 79; Talbot, *Volume 3*, pp. 540-7.

smoothing out the walls and finishing floors.<sup>279</sup> Men were allocated separate rooms from their wives, and while younger children slept with their mothers, older ones slept together in a piazza that ran round the entire compound. During the day, this piazza was used for receiving visitors, conducting family meetings, and transacting business. Most of the lineage's activities were conducted within the compound walls, invisible to the outside world.<sup>280</sup> In 1860, Clarke wrote that within the compound walls, 'from morning until night, the gags, the jacoose laugh, the merry tale, the jokes, the proverbs, all intermingled with scolding' could be heard as inhabitants went about their daily tasks, thus illustrating a vibrancy within.<sup>281</sup> Just before the compound entrance stood the lineage deities, represented by idols. Lineage members were expected to worship them before and after the day's labours. In turn, the deity was responsible for the protection of all the household members.<sup>282</sup>

The *baálè* (head of household) was in charge of the compound. This person was responsible for all lineage members and property, and the day to day running of the compound. The *baálè* settled disputes amongst members, led religious rituals, and represented the lineage at public activities. They were responsible for the conduct of the household inhabitants and could punish, put in stocks, or imprison in the compound, any of their charges. They also protected them against ill treatment from outsiders.<sup>283</sup> Every morning, members had to pay their respects to the *baálè*, and if a man occupied this position, they also had to greet daily his first wife called the *iyáálé* who was considered the head of the compound females.<sup>284</sup> The head of household's living quarters was usually opposite the main gateway.<sup>285</sup> This spatial positioning suggests that the *baálè* was considered the protector of the compound, and was also the most vulnerable in times of attack. Except in cases of illness or emergencies, the *baálè* was expected to remain in the compound piazza at all times during the day in order to conduct compound

---

<sup>279</sup> Talbot, *Volume 3*, p. 883.

<sup>280</sup> Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, p. 59; Johnson, pp. 98–9.

<sup>281</sup> Clarke, p. 237.

<sup>282</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Journal*, 2 April 1874.

<sup>283</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 21.

<sup>284</sup> Johnson, p. 99; Clarke, p. 246; Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 45.

<sup>285</sup> Johnson, p. 98.

business and receive visitors.<sup>286</sup> The head of the household used their office for the overall interest of the family and were accountable to the lineage and lineage ancestors. They retained their position so long as they ruled with honesty and fairness. Acts of aggression, corruption, dishonesty, high-handedness, or any desecration of the office led to the termination of their incumbency.<sup>287</sup>

Although many writers have argued that the heads of household were the oldest living males, nineteenth-century evidence demonstrates that neither age nor gender alone qualified individuals for this title.<sup>288</sup> First, there were enough female heads of household in the nineteenth century to indicate that gender was not a primary determinant. Female *baálẹ̀* were sufficiently common and respected. So much so that prominent men sometimes moved into female-headed households. Johnson wrote that when Kuku the *Sẹ́ríkí* of Ìjẹ̀bú Ode town, a prominent Ìjẹ̀bú chief, was expelled from his hometown, he moved to Ìbàdàn and built a splendid house in Madam Èdúfúnńkẹ́'s compound.<sup>289</sup> Some other women in Abẹ̀òkúta also headed their households, including prominent tradeswomen like Madam Tinúbu, Madam Jọjọlọ́lá, Madam Súàdá and Madam Sékùnmádé.<sup>290</sup> Like sex, age was also not considered of primary importance. What mattered in choosing the head of household was socio-economic status.

Wealth was highly valued amongst the Yorùbá.<sup>291</sup> In the nineteenth century, when Yorùbá people spoke about *àlàáfíà*, translated as wellbeing, what they referred to was a combination of physical health, posterity, and wealth.<sup>292</sup> They considered poverty a type of disease to be avoided at all costs. Proverbs such as *ìṣẹ́ ní ń ba orúkọ ẹ̀ni jẹ* (poverty destroys a person's

---

<sup>286</sup> Johnson, p. 98.

<sup>287</sup> Atanda, p. 11.

<sup>288</sup> For argument for male *baálẹ̀* see: Fadipe, p. 105; Lloyd, 'Family property', 110; Tola Olu Pearce, 'She Will Not Be Listened to in Public: Perceptions Among the Yoruba of Infertility and Childlessness in Women', *Reproductive Health Matters*, 7 (1999), 69-79 (p. 71).

<sup>289</sup> Johnson, p. 608.

<sup>290</sup> Samuel Cole, *Journal*, 20 February 1874.

<sup>291</sup> William Bascom, 'Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yoruba', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 53 (1951), 490-505.

<sup>292</sup> Temilola Alanamu, "'The Way of Our Fathers": CMS Missionaries and Yoruba Health in the Nineteenth Century', *Lagos Historical Review*, 10 (2010), 1-27 (p. 3).

reputation) and *òsì ní ñ jẹ ta ní mọ̀n ọ, ọlá ní ñ jẹ mo bá ọ tan* (a poor person has no relation, everyone is a relation of a wealthy person) illustrates just how important wealth was. Therefore, although the head of household title was usually bestowed on the oldest member of the lineage, they could be overlooked if there was an individual more prestigious, wealthy, and charismatic. The reason for this was because heads of households, in addition to all their aforementioned responsibilities, were also charged with providing a large part of the household necessities out of pocket. They shouldered the majority of expenses incurred during child naming, weddings and funerals. They also maintained the compound structure, care of common lineage property was put in their trust, and they provided for the lineage's old, orphans, and followers.<sup>293</sup> Proverbs such as *àgbà tí ñ fọnká láìlówó lówó, bí ìgbà tí akọ ajá ñ gbó ni* (the penniless elder who commands in the yard is like a barking dog) confirm that a poor person could not gain the *baálẹ̀* title as wealth took precedence over sex or age when choosing a head of household.<sup>294</sup>

In order to understand the gendered lifecycle, we must appreciate just how important the lineage compound was to Yorùbá life. Clarke wrote that 'life is more sacred within the compound than anywhere else' and that even town chiefs could not interfere in compound activities.<sup>295</sup> However, this may have depended on the town because although the structure of the lineage was identical across Yorùbáland, there were variations in town politics. Political structures differed across regions, and town officials had varying degrees of control over the lineage.<sup>296</sup> Nonetheless, the lineage was the primary social grouping in the nineteenth century, and no human being could exist outside of it.

---

<sup>293</sup> Bọlanle Awe, 'Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura (Owner of Gold)', in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Bolanle Awe (Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992), 55-71 (p. 65).

<sup>294</sup> A. A. Kila, *Owe. Yoruba in Proverbs* (London: Akada Press, 2003), p. 32.

<sup>295</sup> Clarke, p. 248.

<sup>296</sup> Some important examples of varied political structures are Abẹ̀òkúta, Ìbàdàn, and Ìjàyè that practiced what could be described as a limited monarchy, military oligarchy/ republicanism, and military dictatorship respectively.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed Abẹ̀òkúta in the nineteenth century, a town that was the embodiment of the nineteenth-century Yorùbá condition. Its main focus was the widespread instability of the time. By exploring the circumstances that led to the Ègbá settling in Abẹ̀òkúta, the political difficulties they encountered in their new home, widespread social, religious and environmental changes, it gives crucial context for the more in-depth investigation into gender in the town which follows. The advent of missionary activities in Abẹ̀òkúta is especially relevant because by locating Christian influences in the region, it provides a foundation from which to discuss the interplay between indigenous understandings of gender and new ideas introduced by CMS missionaries. As will be discussed in detail, changes in political circumstances also strongly influenced gender structures within Abẹ̀òkúta. Widespread warfare created a militarised government that supported the exclusion of women, which in turn affected women's socio-economic position in the town. Furthermore, the brief analysis into the Yorùbá lineage, perhaps the only single stable socio-political unit at the time, is crucial to the study. The lineage was the primary structure within which gender categories were first established and through which society derived wider models of sexual and gerontocratic stratification. This chapter on Abẹ̀òkúta was therefore essential to the thesis' gendered life-cycle analysis because only by understanding the society in which men and women lived, and the contexts and structures with which they interacted can we gain any insight into gender relations of the period.

## 2

### CHILDHOOD

**‘The love of children is one of the prevailing traits of the Egba character’.**<sup>297</sup>

**Samuel Crowther, 1855.**

On 18 February 1857, the town of Abéòkúta was in chaos due to an expected Dahomean invasion. A mother fleeing the settlement went to the mission house to retrieve her young son whom she had put under the charge of the missionary Joseph Smith. But when it was time to leave, the boy refused go. When his mother tried to force him, he cried but still asserted that he would stay. After many unsuccessful attempts at persuading him, the mother left him, weeping because she knew that an eminent attack could result in his death or enslavement.<sup>298</sup> This excerpt from Joseph Smith’s journal illuminates some important themes concerning childhood that this chapter will explore. It speaks to childhood experiences of the nineteenth century, highlighting the dangers and insecurities in which children grew up and positions the status of children in Abéòkúta society. It alludes to the childhood period where, although most children were raised and socialised in the family home, circumstances sometimes necessitated that children grow up under the instruction of strangers. It illustrates the relationship between a child and a mother, whose duty it was to protect their offspring from danger. It also depicts children as beings and social actors in their own right who could rebel against the wishes of adults, using the changing conditions of their time, in this case the arrival of missionaries, to negotiate what they regarded as more favourable conditions. Therefore an enquiry into childhood stands to give immense insight into gender and society in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, scholarship into childhood in pre-colonial Yorùbáland, and indeed all of Nigerian history, remains in its infancy. This chapter is therefore a first step to developing knowledge about pre-colonial Yorùbá childhood

---

<sup>297</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 12 September 1855.

<sup>298</sup> Joseph Smith, Journal, 18 February 1857.

using the Ègbá of Abẹ̀òkúta as a case study.

The early stage in the human lifecycle known as childhood is a contentious category. In 1960, Philippe Ariès suggested that in the West, the distinct childhood stage characterised by dependency was unknown in medieval and most of the early modern period because young people were thought of as miniature or small adults. He argued that it was not until the eighteenth century that modern conceptions of childhood, and the category of children as a distinctive group, separate from adult society, became widely accepted.<sup>299</sup> Although his theory generated widespread critique from historians and historical sociologists, who argued that childhood existed in some form or another in all societies, it led to further cross-cultural research. Such enquires determined that childhood was, and is, a social and historical construction dependent on individual communities.<sup>300</sup> Nonetheless, the acceptance of a universal category of childhood did not imply an agreement of who children were and how they developed. Sociologists such as Erving Goffman who belonged to what is known as the deterministic school, popular in the early 1960s, argued that children developed by appropriating society. The school contended that there was nothing intrinsic to being a child.<sup>301</sup> Children were historical and cultural agents onto whom acceptable social conducts, values, beliefs and behaviors were instilled through a continuous ‘molding’ process known as socialisation.<sup>302</sup> During childhood, children learned to understand and interpret their environment and interpersonal relationships, using what they saw, heard, did, and experienced. This in turn influenced their

---

<sup>299</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (London: Pimlico, 1996), pp. 27–49.

<sup>300</sup> Sharon Stephens, ‘Children and the Politics of Culture in “Late Capitalism”’, in *Children and the Politics of Culture*, ed. by Sharon Stephens (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 3–48 (p. 5).

<sup>301</sup> Erving Goffman, 1967 cited in Norman K. Denzin, *Childhood Socialisation*. Second Edition (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), pp. 2–3. See also William A Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood* (Los Angeles: Sage/Pine Forge Press, 2011), pp. 12–14.

<sup>302</sup> See also Robert. A LeVine, ‘Ethnographic Studies of Childhood: A Historical Overview’, *American Anthropologist*, 109 (2007), 247-260 (pp. 247–8); Myra Bluebond-Langner and Jill E. Korbin, ‘Challenges and Opportunities in the Anthropology of Childhoods: An Introduction to “Children, Childhoods, and Childhood Studies”’, *American Anthropologist*, 109 (2007), 241–246 (p. 242); Allison James and Adrian L. James, ‘Childhood: Toward a Theory of Continuity and Change’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 575 (2001), 25–37 (pp. 26–7).

development and future interactions.<sup>303</sup> Through their 'engagement with the adult world', children learned and recognised their roles, duties, and responsibilities in society.<sup>304</sup> The deterministic school came under critique in the late 1960s when developmental psychologists argued that their depiction of childhood positioned children as passive with a 'unilateral' engagement with society shaped by adults.<sup>305</sup> The constructivist model consequently replaced the deterministic school stressing a more reciprocal view of childhood socialisation. It argued that children 'appropriated information from their environment and actively used this information in their interpretation of the world'.<sup>306</sup> Hence it was not simply adults instilling cultural values but children appropriating, interpreting and using this information to construct their own development.

From the 1990s, the constructivist model also came under fire from theorists of interpretive reproduction. They argued that although the idea of children appropriating their surroundings and reinventing them was valuable, the word 'socialisation' was problematic as it had an 'individualistic and forward looking connotation'.<sup>307</sup> They contended that 'socialisation' conjured images of the individual being trained for the future. Instead, they suggested that the term 'interpretive reproduction' was more accurate. According to Corsaro, the term

interpretive captures the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society [...] children create and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns [while] the term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalising society and culture but were actively contributing to cultural production and change.<sup>308</sup>

They also argued that reproduction denoted that childhood development was

---

<sup>303</sup> Jay Belsky, Laurence Steinburg and Patricia Draper, 'Childhood Experience, Interpersonal Development, and Reproductive Strategy: An Evolutionary Theory of Socialization', *Childhood Development*, 62 (1991), 647–670 (p. 650). See Also: Allison James and Alan Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1997), pp. 3–5; Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

<sup>304</sup> James and James, 27.

<sup>305</sup> Corsaro, p. 12.

<sup>306</sup> Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies* (New York, 1968) cited in Corsaro, pp. 12–19.

<sup>307</sup> Corsaro, p. 18.

<sup>308</sup> Corsaro, pp. 20–1.



constrained by the very society within which it occurred and by its structures and members with which children interacted. This was conversely under constant transformation and change from within and without.<sup>309</sup>

Although this study finds the argument for interpretive reproduction valuable and adapts many of its principles, it finds the term socialisation more useful when discussing childhood processes in Yorùbáland. For the author, socialisation does not denote individualism alone since children were socialised in the communal environment of the lineage where they learnt collaboration and cooperation in addition to individual based knowledge. Besides, raising children in Yorùbáland was 'forward thinking' because the purpose of socialisation or acculturation was to prepare children for a future as adults. A. Babs Fafunwa writes that 'in old African society, the purposes of education was clear and 'functionalism was the main guiding principle'. He writes that

African society regarded education as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. Education was generally for an immediate induction into society and a preparation for adulthood.<sup>310</sup>

This chapter bases its argument for socialisation on the premise that like other societies, the Yorùbá of the nineteenth century did have a distinct social category known as childhood. For this chapter, socialisation is viewed as the process by which parents, but mainly mothers, older family members of a lineage, and a community in its totality attempted to model young people along culturally acceptable patterns to prepare them for a future as Yorùbá adults. Conversely, children appropriated these teachings, interpreted and adapted them to the rapidly changing political, social, economic and religious circumstances of the time and then attempted to both 'reproduce' what they learned, and in some cases, rebel against it. Within this context, this chapter investigates how the advent of Christian missionary activities interacted, complicated and reinvented socialisation processes and how all these processes came together to transform biological males and females into cultural beings.

---

<sup>309</sup> Corsaro, pp. 20–1.

<sup>310</sup> Fafunwa, p. 15.

## **Ọmọdé (children) in the nineteenth century**

An enquiry into pre-colonial childhood in the region now known as Nigeria, of which Yorùbáland is a part, remains a largely unexplored topic. This is due in part to a lack of sources, but also to the larger neglect of childhood in Nigerian history. As stated in the introduction, Judith Butler argues that becoming a woman was not a virtue of genitalia, it was rather a social process and a constructing.<sup>311</sup> A. Babs Fafunwa wrote the only comprehensive scholarship discovered on childhood in pre-colonial Nigeria in 1974 in a book that explored the history of education in Nigeria.<sup>312</sup> Although Yorùbá historians continue to speak about men and women in the nineteenth century, they often discount all the processes responsible for producing them. This chapter will try to redress this to some degree as far as the sources allow. It aims to examine childhood as both 'being and becoming'. This implies that it will explore children as 'beings' and social actors in their own right, while also investigating the process of their 'becoming' adults, a process achieved through socialisation.<sup>313</sup> It asks how boys and girls learned their culture and how they came to recognise their position in society.<sup>314</sup> It also asks what gendered roles males and females were expected to perform as sons and daughters, and how children were socialised in the wider context of missionary interventions and widespread insecurity occasioned by perpetual warfare of this period. This chapter fits into the wider argument about the presence of sex-based gender categories in Yorùbáland because it shows that differing socialisation processes for boys and girls after a certain age indicate that they were expected to assume different roles in the society as adults. Consequently, it counters the argument of a genderless pre-imperialist Yorùbá society.

---

<sup>311</sup> Butler, p. 45.

<sup>312</sup> Fafunwa, pp. 7-94.

<sup>313</sup> Emma Uprichard, 'Children as "Being and Becomings": Children, Childhood and Temporality', *Children & Society*, 22 (2008), 303–313.

<sup>314</sup> David F Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 6.

Understanding childhood in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland is difficult. Contemporary discourses on childhood suggest that children's views and voices are crucial to understanding childhood experiences.<sup>315</sup> Regrettably, nineteenth-century sources are devoid of this because children's voices are always mediated through adults. Indeed, these records only discuss children in relation to adults and never in their own right. Even if we did have first-hand accounts of growing up in Abẹ̀òkúta, these recollections of childhood would remain problematic as they would be mediated by memory, nostalgia and the adult experience.<sup>316</sup> For this reason one must piece together childhood socialisation in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta from what is available: fleeting remarks of nineteenth-century missionaries and travellers, comments of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social anthropologists, observations of indigenous elites, and Yorùbá oral traditions. This chapter therefore discusses both 'childhood' as a social category and 'children' as an age-group but not necessarily 'the child' as an individual as diverse as they must have been because the sources only provide clues to general childhood circumstances.<sup>317</sup>

In Yorùbáland the word *ọ̀mọ̀dé* (child) was used in a complex way. Colloquially, *ọ̀mọ̀dé* could refer to anyone acting in a way considered immature, childish and unbecoming of an adult. For example, a person could be told *ò n ẹ̀ bí ọ̀mọ̀dé* (you are acting like a child) or *ọ̀mọ̀dé n ẹ̀ é* (loosely translated as you are a child). However, the actual social category of child denoted the totality of the period that commenced at birth until an individual married. Ajayi Crowther's *Vocabulary of the Yorùbá Language* translated child as *ọ̀mọ̀dé* (written as *ọ̀mmọ̀dé*).<sup>318</sup> Although *ọ̀mọ̀dé* was a unifying term, there were different stages of childhood because the Yorùbá recognised that children had diverse and distinct capabilities at different times. *Ìkókó*, the modern word used for baby in Yorùbáland is absent in both Crowther's dictionary and the 1913 CMS Dictionary suggesting that the word is a fairly

<sup>315</sup> Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 243.

<sup>316</sup> Peter N Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 4.

<sup>317</sup> For contemporary discourses on the inclusion of children's voices, see: Allison James, 'Giving Voice to Children's Voices: Practices and Problems, Pitfalls and Potentials', *American Anthropologist*, 109 (2007), 261–272 (pp. 266, 270); Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 243.

<sup>318</sup> Crowther, p. 235.

recent linguistic development. Crowther wrote however that in the nineteenth century, infants were referred to as *omọ àgbọ* or *omọ ọwọ*.<sup>319</sup> When a child began to show a measure of independence, such as bathing and feeding themselves, running small errands and doing minor housework from about the age of four until puberty, they were referred to with the general term *omọdé* because there was no word for toddler or young child. At puberty, boys could be referred to *màjèsín* or *bàlágà*, and girls, *omidan*. This stage is synonymous with adolescence when youngsters were still considered children, young and immature, but well on their way to becoming adults. Crowther describes this stage as 'coming into maturity'.<sup>320</sup> This stage lasted until marriageable age, which was eighteen to twenty for females and later for males, usually mid to late twenties and sometimes their early thirties. Then, young men and women were referred to as *adélébò* (young married woman) and *ọkọlóriri* (married man). There were no reports of child brides in the nineteenth century. Childhood socialisation known as *ẹkọ* (loosely translated as 'to learn') began after the *omọ ọwọ* stage when the Yorùbá saw the child's measure of independence as a sign that s/he had developed the cognitive capacity to begin learning the skills needed to survive in society. One could also say that it was at this stage that the Yorùbá considered a child an individual.

This chapter is divided into four sections: it begins with childbirth and its accompanying rituals. After this, it examines early infant mortality before moving on to childhood socialisation within the home. Here it examines socialisation within the lineage, its purposes, conflicts and compromises, and childhood allegiances in the household. The chapter then discusses children and labour in Abẹ̀òkúta before exploring socialisation through play. Since childhood socialisation was similar across Yorùbá towns, where necessary, a few examples in this chapter were taken from towns other than Abẹ̀òkúta including Ìbàdàn, Lagos and Ìjorá, a coastal town close to Lagos. These will be indicated either in-text or in the footnotes. Moreover, some writers like A. B. Ellis wrote generally about Yorùbá people without indicating town specifics

---

<sup>319</sup> Crowther, p. 235.

<sup>320</sup> Crowther, p. 59.

and in consequence, it was impossible to extract town peculiarities from such accounts.

### ***Bímọ* (Birth)**

In 1855, Samuel Crowther wrote that ‘the love of children is one of the prevailing traits of the Egba character’. He continued that both males and females sought an endless posterity through their children. ‘They would under any labour, believe anything, however unreasonable, provided it promises them a long life, a large household and children’.<sup>321</sup> His sentiment was accurate as children were crucial to all of Yorùbá, and not just Abéòkúta, life and cosmology. Firstly, children guaranteed the future of a lineage. As will be discussed in detail in chapter three, children were crucial to lineage prosperity because wealth in the nineteenth century was not understood in monetary terms but in the size of a person’s household. Furthermore, children provided parents with security because only they would care and provide for their parents in old age. The desire for offspring was further intensified by the belief that a childless person could never be reincarnated. Yorùbá people believed that *ẹ̀mí* (the soul) when released from the body at death did not cease to exist, but impatiently awaited rebirth. Since ideologically, this could only come to pass through one’s direct progeny, a childless person could never hope to return. Such a person was thus doomed to an endless existence in the ‘ghost lands’.<sup>322</sup> It is no surprise therefore that almost every indigenous prayer missionaries recorded asked for blessings of children.<sup>323</sup>

John Janzen proposed another reason for the desire for children. Referring to Equatorial Africa, he argued that attention to fertility grew in the nineteenth century due to a combination of the insecurities of slave trade, and the appearance of venereal diseases that led to widespread infertility in both

---

<sup>321</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 25 September 1855.

<sup>322</sup> A. E. Southon, *Ilesha and Beyond! The Story of the Wesley Guild Medical Work in West Africa* (London, 1931), p. 85.

<sup>323</sup> For example see William Moore, Journal, 8 August 1851; Andrew Maser, Journal, 21 May 1855; Thomas Wright, Journal, 1869.

sexes.<sup>324</sup> There is some evidence to support Janzen's theory in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland because Samuel Crowther, the head of the CMS dispensary at Abẹ̀òkúta, wrote in 1856 that sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea were rampant.<sup>325</sup> In Yorùbáland, anxieties concerning fertility were deepened further because of high mortality rates resulting from the wars. Samuel Johnson wrote that during the Ìjáyè war, fought between 1860 and 1862, hundreds of thousands died. He wrote that just one Ìbàdàn chief, Ògúnmólá, counted more than one thousand eight hundred fallen slave warriors exclusive of freeborn soldiers.<sup>326</sup> The need to replenish a rapidly depleting population could also have heightened concerns about fertility.

Nineteenth-century primary sources give no clues to Yorùbá pre-colonial ideas concerning the biology of conception and the links between sex, conception and pregnancy. In contemporary times however, the Yorùbá describe *oyún* (pregnancy) as resulting from *ibálòpò* (sexual intercourse) between a man and a woman wherein the *n̄hkan ọ̀kùnrin* (sperm but literally translated as thing of a man) mixes or meets with the *n̄hkan obinrin* (egg or thing of a woman) resulting in a pregnancy that lasted *oṣù mèsàn-án* (nine months), culminating in the birth of a child. In the nineteenth century, women gave birth, locally known as *bímọ*, in their allocated compound room with the assistance of midwives. If there were complications they were aided by traditional healers.<sup>327</sup> Immediately after a baby was born, a *babaláwo* (priest-diviner) was brought to divine for the child.<sup>328</sup> When the *babaláwo* arrived, he declared which ancestor was reincarnated as the child, instructed what *òrìṣà* (deity) the child was to worship, and gave the child's *èèwọ* (taboos) according to the deity. For example, a child belonging to the deity *Ọ̀bàtálá*, could not

---

<sup>324</sup> John M. Janzen, 'Ideologies and Institutions in Pre-colonial History of Equatorial African Therapeutic Systems', *Social Science and Medicine*, 13B (1979), (317-326), p.320.

<sup>325</sup> Samuel Crowther, *Journal*, 13 December 1852.

<sup>326</sup> Johnson, p. 354.

<sup>327</sup> Samuel Crowther, *Journal*, 18 September 1852.

<sup>328</sup> The priest-diviners were very important personalities in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland who were involved in all aspects of life at the time. The significance of the *babaláwo* will be discussed in chapter four.

drink alcohol.<sup>329</sup> The baby's parents then made an idol, a physical representation of the deity, for the baby to worship throughout his/her lifetime. The *babaláwo* also consulted *Ifá* (the divination deity) as to the child's destiny and gave its parents instructions on what they and the child needed to do for it to live a successful life. The child and the mother remained in the room where the child was born until *isomolórúko* (day of naming) also known as *ikómojade* (literally translated as taking the child out) in reference to the first day mother and child left the birth room for the first time. Johnson wrote that '[i]t is on that day the child is for the first time brought out of the room, hence the term applied to this event- *komo jade* (bringing out the child). The mother also, is supposed to be in the lying-in room up to that day'. This day of naming was on the seventh day for girls, eighth day for twins, and ninth day for boys.<sup>330</sup>

On the morning of the naming ceremony, the *babaláwo* was again called in to offer sacrifices to *Ifá* and to the child's *orí* (inner god) represented by the physical head also known as *orí*. In Yorùbáland, *orí* was considered crucial to a person's survival and missionaries often wrote of its importance. In 1846, Andrew Gollmer witnessed a strange ritual. His Yorùbá neighbours visited him for the first time since he arrived in the country and he offered them wine. But, before they drank, they dipped their fingers into the wine and touched it to their head. He enquired the meaning of this, and they responded that they worshipped their *orí* as the principal part of their body and they gave a little to the head before other inferior parts.<sup>331</sup> Similarly, in 1855, Thomas King entered an Abẹ̀òkúta compound and found its members engaged in worship of their *orí*. He asked why they worshiped their heads, and they replied 'to

---

<sup>329</sup> Alcohol was considered one of *Ọ̀bàtálá's* taboos due to a creation myth that stated that *Ọ̀bàtálá's* intoxication allowed another divinity, *Odùduwà*, deprive him of the honour of creating the world. After this incident, *Ọ̀bàtálá* swore off alcohol and in consequence his devotees are expected to do the same. For more on this, see O. B. Lawuyi, 'The Obatala Factor in Yoruba History', *History in Africa*, 19 (1992), 369–375 (pp. 370–371).

<sup>330</sup> The significance of this unknown. Johnson, p. 79, 89; Ellis, pp. 67–8; M. O. Opeloye, 'Evolution of Religious Culture among the Yoruba', in *Culture and Society in Yorubaland*, ed. by Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran, (New York: Rex Charles Publications, 1998), pp. 139–148.

<sup>331</sup> Andrew Gollmer, *Journal*, 11 July 1846.

bless and preserve us'.<sup>332</sup> Karin Barber depicts *orí* as a person's 'destiny', given to them in heaven, which aids them in their daily struggle with the army of forces against them, 'some benign, some hostile, some ambivalent'.<sup>333</sup> Bascom describes it as the fate and distinctive character, given to a human being before he is born, while Olu Makinde sums up *orí* as man's 'whole personality'.<sup>334</sup> For the Yorùbá, *orí* worship was a deeply spiritual act. In Anthony Buckley's anthropological study of 'secrets' in Yorùbá medical thought, he enquired of a *babaláwo* the significance of *orí* worship. The *babaláwo* replied that 'when a man is alive, his *orí* is really in heaven and the man must worship his head because it is close to God [... and] can go to God and petition on the man's behalf'.<sup>335</sup> Accordingly, people needed to worship their heads if they ever hoped to gain a good life from God and their deities. Suffice to say therefore that *orí* was the core of human existence and its worship was the veneration of the very essence of life, represented by the physical head.

After attending to the child's *orí*, the *babaláwo* then washed the child, focusing on the child's head, repeating the names by which the child was to be known three times. The act of naming a child was very important in Yorùbáland because names indicated the circumstances surrounding a child's birth, the family into which the child was born, and the family's hopes for the child's future.<sup>336</sup> In nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, children were given at least three sets of names: *àmútòrunwá* (the name brought from heaven), *àbísọ* (name given on earth) and *oríki* which was the attributive or praise name.<sup>337</sup> *Àmútòrunwá* were special names given to all children born under the same particular circumstances. All children born by breech delivery for example were called *Ìgè*. Boys who were born with their umbilical cord around their

---

<sup>332</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 15 January 1855.

<sup>333</sup> Barber, 'How Man Makes God in West Africa', 729.

<sup>334</sup> Bascom, 'The Relationship of Yoruba Folklore to Divining', 127; Olu Makinde, 'Historical Foundations of Counseling in Africa', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 47 (1978), 303-311 (p. 311).

<sup>335</sup> Anthony D. Buckley, 'The Secret - An Idea in Yorùbá Medical Thought', in *Social Anthropology and Medicine*, ed. by J. B Loudon (London: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 396-421, (p. 411).

<sup>336</sup> Johnson, p.79

<sup>337</sup> Johnson, p. 79.



necks were called Òjọ while girls were named Àiná. Should a child be born face down, they were named Àjàyì and should a male child be born soon after a grandfather's death, they were called Babátúndé (father has come again). If a female was born after the death of the grandmother, they were called Yétúndé (mother has come again).<sup>338</sup> All twins, without exception, were named Táíwò and Kẹ̀hìndé. The first twin born was named Táíwò translated as 'have a taste of the world' because the Yorùbá believed that the second twin, Kẹ̀hìndé (one that lags behind) sent the first twin to appraise the world in preparation for his/her arrival. In fact, the naming of twins was more significant than any other *àmútòrunwá*. The Yorùbá had a high occurrence of twin deliveries. Modern day researchers claim that Yorùbá people have the highest rate of twin births in the world, estimated at about 45-50 sets of twins per 1000 live births.<sup>339</sup> Nevertheless, in pre-colonial times, Yorùbá people credited twins with 'extra-human' powers and their birth was regarded as a deep mystery because the Yorùbá did not understand modern principles of conception.<sup>340</sup> On the day of naming, twins were dedicated to *Ìbejì* (god of twins) and they worshipped this god until their death (see fig 2.1).

---

<sup>338</sup> Johnson, p. 81.

<sup>339</sup> 'The Land of Twins', [bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/highlights/010607\\_twins.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/highlights/010607_twins.shtml) [accessed 8 October 2014]

<sup>340</sup> Johnson, p. 80.

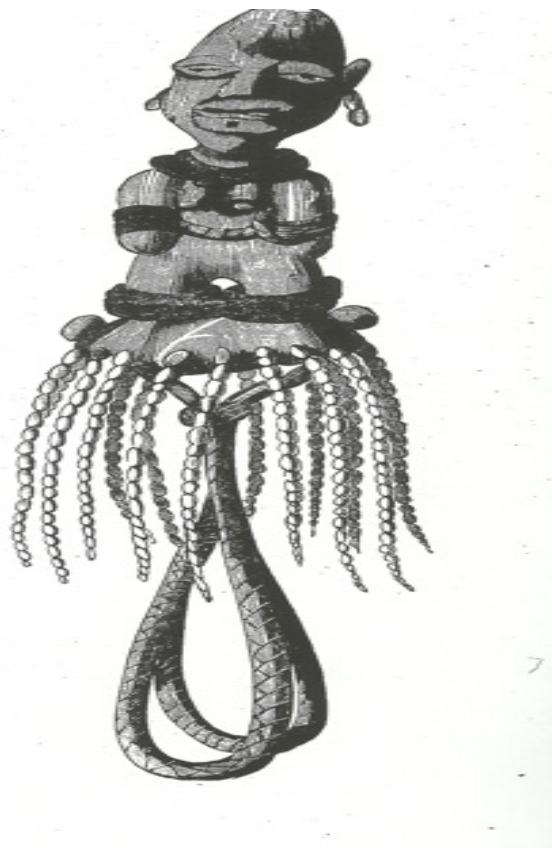


Fig 2.1: Illustration of *Ibeji* idol. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, June 1850.

Due to high infant mortality rates, however, it was common for one twin to die in infancy. Regardless, the Yorùbá still regarded the death of a twin as an evil omen and believed that the deceased twin, now lonely in the afterlife, would do everything possible to take the surviving twin. An idol, also known as *Ibeji*, representing the deceased twin was therefore made for the living one. The missionary James White described this practice in March 1856 when he wrote:

Found a woman with her idol by her. She placed before it small pieces of cake. I purposely asked her its name and she told me *Ibeji* (twins) for her and her deceased brother were twins but now one of them is not, the idol is carved to represent the other that is dead. Prayers [and sacrifice] are offered to it in order that the sister should not be carried away by the deceased one.<sup>341</sup>

The surviving twin was required to take this idol everywhere, treat it as living and give it a share of everything eaten and drunk as a sort of sacrifice to the deceased twin. The deceased twin, now presumed a spirit, was meant to look

---

<sup>341</sup> James White, Journal, 25 March 1856.

upon these foods as offerings. He/she was to receive it and be pacified, and allow the living twin to survive.

After *àmútòrunwá*, children were given their *àbísọ* names which were names given to children depending on the family to which they were born or the familial circumstances into which the child was birthed.<sup>342</sup> For example, children born into royalty had ‘*Adé*’ (crown) as a prefix to their name. Such names include *Adébíyíí* (the crown has begotten this), *Adégbìtẹ́* (the crown demands a throne) and so on. Should a child be born into an already big family, they could be called *Ìbíyíńká* (surrounded by children). Also, should a child be born into difficult circumstances, their names could reflect this, for example *Ògúndálérù* (our home has been devastated by war) or *Ìyapọ̀* (too many trials).<sup>343</sup> On the other hand, *oríkì*, a child’s appellative or attributive name expressed a family’s aspirations for the child’s future. The Yorùbá have an adage that says *orúkọ́ máa ń gbẹ̀’yàn* meaning that a name is crucial to a person’s destiny. They therefore took great care in giving children the right *oríkì* because that name would determine a child’s fate, their role in society, and how people would treat them. Such names include *Àyọ̀ká* (one that brings joy to all), *Àdùnní* (one that is a pleasure to have around), *Àlàkẹ́* (one to be petted). Christian and Muslim influences also introduced a fourth type of name because adherents gave their children religious names.<sup>344</sup> Missionaries also introduced surnames, which were not indigenous to the Yorùbá culture.<sup>345</sup>

After naming, the mother washed herself. Her birth clothes were also taken away and either discarded or washed and she was given new clothes to wear. The birth room in its entirety was then swept and cleaned. Even the embers in the hearth were carried away and new coals were brought in for a new fire.<sup>346</sup> These ritualistic cleanings were significant because shedding blood during

---

<sup>342</sup> Johnson, p. 81

<sup>343</sup> Johnson, p. 82

<sup>344</sup> Johnson p. 87-98

<sup>345</sup> Johnson, p. 88-9.

<sup>346</sup> Johnson, pp. 79–89; Dennett, pp. 73, 77; Peter.C. Lloyd, ‘Osifekunde of Ijebu’, in *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. by Phillip D. Curtin, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 217–288 (pp. 234–6); Ellis pp. 67-8.

childbirth was considered impure. Ellis wrote that this cleansing was one of ‘purification’ because ‘the mother and child are considered unclean, as are women during the menses’.<sup>347</sup> The mother was therefore quarantined to prevent her from polluting the compound. A new mother cleaning herself and the act of sanitizing the room where she gave birth was therefore symbolic of ablution before the mother could be reintroduced into the communal compound space. The entire family, neighbours, friends and well-wishers then gathered to watch mother and child leave the room for the first time. On their way out, the *babaláwo* took the bowl that contained the water permanently placed before the household idols and poured it on the roof of the room from which the mother and child exited. They both passed under the spray signifying the deity’s blessings. When the child cried out from the falling drops, the crowd rejoiced.<sup>348</sup> Family and friends then offered sacrifices on the child’s behalf to the family deities and ancestors, giving thanks for the birth and supplicating for the child’s safety and long life. All attendees then feasted and celebrated during which time the mother took the child around the crowd so that people could pray for it, bless it and give gifts.<sup>349</sup> According to Kòfowórọlá Moore, born in Lagos in 1913, celebrations for the birth of *ọmọ ọkùnrin* (male children) were much greater than those for an *ọmọ obìnrin* (female child).<sup>350</sup> Primary evidence does not indicate whether this was also the case in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. At the end of the day, the family made another sacrifice of fowls to *Ifá* to end the proceedings.<sup>351</sup>

Children were nursed by their mothers for about two to three years during which time mothers observed post-partum abstinence due to the local belief that sexual relations would harm the suckling child.<sup>352</sup> While children in Ìjẹ̀bú remained naked until the age of fifteen, Abẹ̀òkúta children wore clothes from

---

<sup>347</sup> Ellis, p. 68

<sup>348</sup> Johnson, p. 79.

<sup>349</sup> Johnson, pp. 79–89; Ellis, pp. 67–8.

<sup>350</sup> Kofoworola Aina Moore, ‘The Story of Kofoworola Aina Moore of the Yoruba Tribe, Nigeria’, in *Ten Africans*, ed. by Margery Perham, (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), pp. 323–343 (pp. 323–4).

<sup>351</sup> Ellis, pp. 67–8.

<sup>352</sup> This was also an indication of Yorùbá family planning and child spacing techniques. It will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

an early age.<sup>353</sup> Boys wore *sòkòtò*, a certain type of trousers or both sexes wore skirt-like cloths wrapped around the lower body which Campbell described as akin to 'the kilts of Scottish highlanders'.<sup>354</sup> Boys were circumcised locally known as *dákó* or *dá-okó* (to remove the foreskin) either by a lineage male or by a *babaláwo* at a later date, generally before the twelfth year when children were thought to reach puberty. There was no specific time for this and it was performed when the child was considered strong enough and in good health. While most boys were circumcised around this time, there are varying accounts about female circumcision and excision.<sup>355</sup> While Ellis wrote in the affirmative, Talbot claimed the Yorùbá never circumcised females.<sup>356</sup> However, Talbot's claim appears more accurate because no mention of female circumcision was found in the records of nineteenth-century missionaries or other eyewitness accounts of nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. The rarity or absence of female circumcision could potentially reveal Yorùbá indigenous ideas concerning female sexuality. Contemporary discourses regarding female circumcision claim that the main reason for excising girls is to prevent female sexual pleasure and tame women's supposedly uncontrollable sexual urges. As a result, circumcision ensures a female's virginity at marriage and faithfulness in marriage.<sup>357</sup> Since the Yorùbá did not excise girls, it could mean that ideologically, the Yorùbá did not link the presence or absence of some female sexual organs with sexual activity or promiscuity. It is however more likely that the social control of female sexuality was considered more effective than biological controls as Yorùbá society had many social means of regulating both male and female sexuality, which will be discussed extensively in chapter three. The presence of male circumcision is more difficult to explain as neither local moral codes nor indigenous hygiene necessitate male circumcision. The only explanation

---

<sup>353</sup> Lloyd, 'Osifekunde of Ijebu', p. 255.

<sup>354</sup> Campbell, p. 46.

<sup>355</sup> Additionally, while Ajisafe Moore noted that the sons of kings were not circumcised, Johnson wrote that in Old Òyó, the sons of the Baṣòrun, a kind of prime minister remained uncircumcised. Neither gave reasons for this. Ajisafe Moore, p. 35; Johnson, p. 71.

<sup>356</sup> Ellis, p. 31; Talbot: *Volume 2*, p. 390; Lloyd, p. 234; Dennett, p. 73.

<sup>357</sup> Natasha M. Gordon, "'Tonguing the Body': Placing Female Circumcision within African Feminist Discourse', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 25 (1997), 24-27 (p. 25); Melissa Parker, 'Rethinking Female Circumcision', *Africa* 65 (1995), 506-523; Lynn M. Thomas, 'Imperial Concerns and 'Women's Affairs': State Efforts to Regulate Clitoridectomy and Eradicate Abortion in Meru, Kenya, c. 1910-1950', *The Journal of African History*, 39(1998), 121-145.

discovered was given by Ellis who attributed circumcision to the worship of the deity *Èṣù Èḽẹgbára* when he stated that circumcision ‘appears to be a sacrifice of a portion of the organ which the god inspires, to ensure the well-being of the remainder’.<sup>358</sup> By ‘inspires’, Ellis referred to the exaggerated phallus *Èṣù* is believed to have, which is often portrayed in *Èṣù* idols (see fig 2.2). Ellis’ explanation is not implausible because as will be discussed in chapter three, religion and fertility were intricately linked and male fertility was crucial to the Yorùbá lineage. However, unlike many other African cultures, the Yorùbá had no protracted initiation ceremonies during circumcision.<sup>359</sup>



Fig 2.2: *Èṣù Èḽẹgbára* idol. Photograph taken by author at the Aláké palace in Abeòkúta on 4 January 2013.

Around the age of twelve, children were also given the *ila* (facial marks) peculiar to their town to distinguish citizens of one town from another. This was known as *ikọla*. Although this practice went back centuries, facial

---

<sup>358</sup> Ellis, p. 31.

<sup>359</sup> It is not entirely clear why there were no circumcision ceremonies as the sources give no clues into this.

markings were especially relevant in the nineteenth century because should a person be enslaved and taken overseas, they could still identify their townsmen by their distinct facial marks.<sup>360</sup> The Abẹ̀òkúta facial marks were called the *Àgbàjà orò* and were ‘three perpendicular lines each about three inches long on each cheek (see fig 2.3).<sup>361</sup> If children had not been betrothed at birth, a marriage arrangement was usually made around this time.<sup>362</sup>

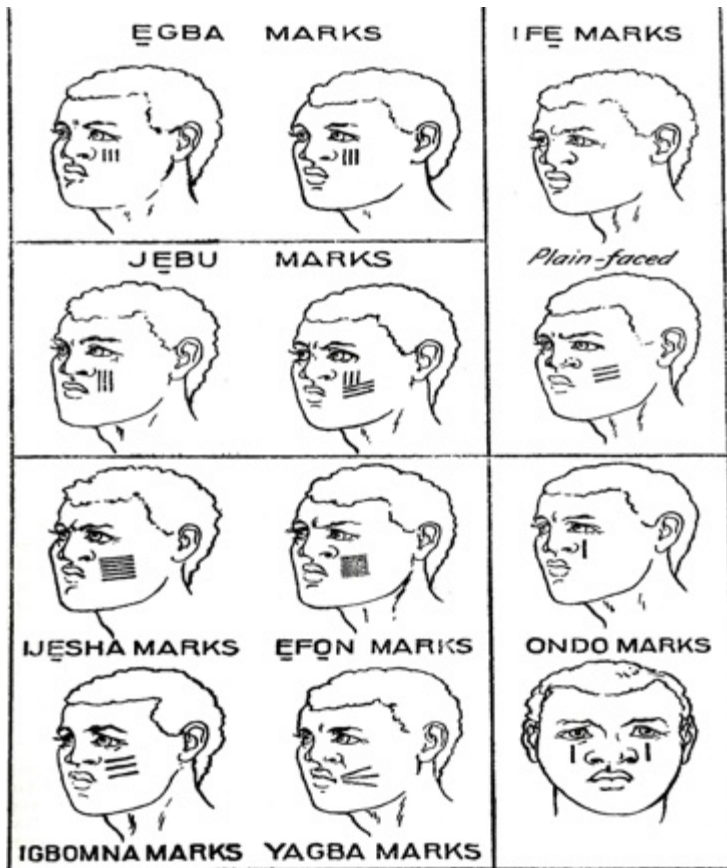


Fig 2.3: Nineteenth-century Yorùbá facial marks showing Ègbá marks in the top left. Source: Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, p. 105.

The early years of childhood were a potentially dangerous time for a child and many children died from the violence of wars. When towns were invaded or sacked, the people were taken into slavery (see fig 2.4). Unfortunately very old people and very young children were considered liabilities rather than assets because they could not work and as such could not be sold for a profit. They were therefore either killed or left to die. Joseph Wright, captured during

<sup>360</sup> Johnson, pp. 104-109.

<sup>361</sup> Johnson, p. 107.

<sup>362</sup> Girls can be betrothed from birth, through the *omidan* years up until marriageable age while some boys were also betrothed at infancy up until they reached societally acceptable ages to marry.

the wars in the Ègbá forest once wrote that he saw 'a child [who] was so young that nobody would buy him. That poor thing was there crying at the point of death for about two days, and none took pity to pick him up'.<sup>363</sup> In some cases, the young children of captured female slaves were also discarded. On 12 August 1857, a Christian convert discovered a young infant boy of about six months old hidden in the bushes who he took to Henry Townsend the head of the Abeokuta mission. Townsend wrote:

We fed it with milk, which it sucked from the bottle quite eagerly. It was the child of a past slave brought down from the interior. It proved an encumbrance to her master, as she was not resalable on the account of the child. Unknown to the unhappy mother it was taken and cast away. After some search, the mother was found but we felt assured that if the child were delivered back to her, she would more effectually and permanently be deprived of it again. There was no other way of relieving this mother's deep distress but to redeem her from slavery and restore her child to her. This we did.<sup>364</sup>

This kind of narrative is common in mission journals and other eyewitness reports. Children were also vulnerable to diseases. Bowen observed that the infant mortality rates in Abẹ̀òkúta were greater than in his home country America.<sup>365</sup> Children were highly susceptible to yellow fever, dysentery, debility, derby, croup, tetanus, guinea worm, smallpox, yaws and other such ailments.<sup>366</sup> Many missionaries wrote extensively about the death of their children or the children of their congregation and kin. On 4 October 1869, Daniel Coker wrote that his baby of eighteen days old was very sick with chest pains and had difficulty breathing. He tried every country cure to no avail and in the evening, the baby died.<sup>367</sup> Coker also lost a one-day-old infant in 1877.<sup>368</sup> Similarly, the pastor, James Okuseinde lost two children within three days to smallpox.<sup>369</sup>

---

<sup>363</sup> Philip D. Curtin, 'Joseph Wright of the Egba', in *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. by Philip D. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 317–333 (p. 328).

<sup>364</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 18 October 1858.

<sup>365</sup> Bowen, p. 306.

<sup>366</sup> Bowen, pp. 235-6. See also Daniel Coker, *Journal*, February 1872.

<sup>367</sup> Daniel Coker (Ìjorá), *Journal*, 4 October 1869.

<sup>368</sup> Daniel Coker, *Journal*, 21 May 1877.

<sup>369</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Journal*, 26 February 1874.





Fig 2.4: Depiction of young children caught and enslaved. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, March, 1851.

Despite high infant mortality, child death was still perceived as something evil and unnatural. Unlike the aged dead, children were not mourned and if their bodies were buried at all, they were interred without ceremony. Sometimes, they were partially buried outside the compound gates with a bit of earth sprinkled over them and left as prey to wild animals.<sup>370</sup> More frequently, their bodies were thrown away into the nearest bush or forest, 'beyond the precincts of the town or village, in the bush', removing them from civilization and giving them over to the elements.<sup>371</sup> This type of burial was meant to sever the connection between the deceased child and the lineage because infant death was regarded as a bad omen that could potentially bring more

---

<sup>370</sup> Johnson, p. 137.

<sup>371</sup> Bowen, p. 306.

death and misfortune.<sup>372</sup> There was an additional local understanding of infant mortality known as *àbíkú*.<sup>373</sup> If a mother repeatedly birthed children that died before puberty, her children were considered *àbíkú* (born but predestined to die). These children could be identified by their distinctive *àmútòrunwá* names including: *Máloṃṃ* (do not go again), *Kòsókó* (there is no hoe (to dig a grave)), *Báñjókòó* (sit or stay with me), *Dúrósinmí* (wait and bury me) and *Tijúikú* (be ashamed to die).<sup>374</sup>

The idea at the time was that there were evil spirits in the environment that suffered from hunger and thirst because no one sacrificed to them. These opportunistic spirits could enter the fetus of a pregnant woman and begin taking the mother's nourishment and depriving the fetus. Moreover, since there were other spirits still roaming, they coerced the parasitic spirit to share the child's nourishment with them. When the child was born, the spirit would continue as before, depriving the child and sharing its foods with others, and as a result the malnourished child would be susceptible to illness and waste away. To dissuade this spirit, the mother first offered sacrifices of food and drink to it and to its peers, hoping that they would leave the child since they now had their own sustenance. If this failed to work and the child remained frail, the mother would then make incisions on the child's body and rub it with spices. 'The mother [then] harden[ed] her heart' in the belief that although the child suffered, the spirit would as well and as a result, would leave the uncomfortable body.<sup>375</sup> She also placed charms in form of metal rings around the child's feet and neck with the reasoning that the jingling would frighten the spirit away.<sup>376</sup> If none of these worked and the child died, their bodies were thrown away into the bush like those of other children. To deter the *àbíkú* causing spirit from returning to the mother's next pregnancy, Ellis wrote that the mother may:

beat, pound, and mutilate the little corpse, while threatening and invoking every evil upon the *abiku* which has caused the calamity. The indwelling *abiku* is believed to feel the blows and wounds

---

<sup>372</sup> The significance of such burials will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

<sup>373</sup> Ellis, pp. 51–2; Crowther, p. 3.

<sup>374</sup> Johnson, p. 84.

<sup>375</sup> Ellis, pp. 51-2

<sup>376</sup> Crowther, p. 4; Ellis, pp. 51–2; Johnson, p. 84.

inflicted on the body, and to hear and be terrified by the threats and curses never to return.<sup>377</sup>

It is likely that *àbíkú* was a collective coping mechanism for the high infant mortality rate of the time and people's attempt to control a situation in which they felt powerless. When infant mortality rates lowered during colonialism, stories of *àbíkú* became less frequent.

### **Socialisation in the household**

Children grew up in their agnatic compound. They received the boliday marks and names associated with their patrilineage, and patrilineal ties took precedence over all others.<sup>378</sup> They were also entitled to residence, inheritance, and marriage and funeral rights there. In some circumstances the maternal family raised the children. When Ajayi Crowther, an ex-Ọyọ slave turned missionary, arrived at Abẹ̀òkúta, he found his sister and her children living with his mother.<sup>379</sup> Raising children in the cognatic home usually occurred when the mother's family was of a higher socio-economic or socio-political status or if there was general insecurity in the patrilineage or agnatic town. However, matrilineal ties were considered secondary and based on what William Schwab refers to as 'mutual bonds of sentiment'.<sup>380</sup> Children raised in such circumstances often returned to the patrilineage either when they were old enough to contribute productively to the household or on request.<sup>381</sup>

Within the lineage, children formed the strongest emotional, intimate and affective bonds with their mother and maternal siblings known as *omọ-iyá*

---

<sup>377</sup> Ellis, pp. 51–2.

<sup>378</sup> Schwab, 366.

<sup>379</sup> J. F. Ade-Ajayi, 'Samuel Ajayi Crowther of Oyo', in *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. by Philip D Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 289–316 (p. 306).

<sup>380</sup> Schwab, 371.

<sup>381</sup> Schwab, 371

(children of the same mother).<sup>382</sup> This group formed the smallest cohesive unit in the household. In her sociological study of childhood, Helen Callaway argues that maternal bonds were forged because mothers were responsible for feeding and clothing their children while the patrilineage only provided shelter.<sup>383</sup> From early childhood, these *omọ-iyá* shared the same living quarters and were directly responsible for each other's welfare. In large lineages where men married many wives, competition and rivalry between wives was often transferred to children, leading to antagonism and sometimes animosity amongst children of the same father known as *obàkan*. Children would most likely identify with their small maternal units, often grouping together against others in case of internal discord. Children in the nineteenth century often enacted this intimacy and familiarity with their *omọ-iyá* by protecting each other's welfare outside the confines of the compound. When Anna Hinderer first arrived in Yorùbáland, the first two children she received into her home were the four-year-old son of Chief Olúnlọyòò, Akínyẹlẹ and his six-year-old sister, Yéjidé. After their first day at the mission compound, Akínyẹlẹ decided he wanted to spend the night, news the sister received with some alarm. When all her entreaties to persuade him to return home failed, she scared him by announcing that when it was dark, 'white people kill and eat the black'. Frightened, he returned home with her. After some time, he resolved to stay and she left him 'with a trembling heart' and arrived anxiously, very early the next morning to see how he had fared.<sup>384</sup>

These kinds of allegiances between children were common in the nineteenth century. Although there is no way to know if these children were from the same mother, the concern the elder sibling showed is indicative of this. The Yorùbá proverb: *okùn omọ iyá yi, şùgbón okùn obàkan kan* (the ties of the children of the same mother are strong, but the ties of the children of the same father are sour) suggests that the Yorùbá believed that closeness between children of the same father was near impossible. Although fathers had official and jural rights over children, they had fewer responsibilities

---

<sup>382</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria*, p. 46; Elisha P. Renne, *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town* (University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 34; Sudarkasa, p. 101.

<sup>383</sup> Callaway, 'Spatial Domains and Women's Mobility', p. 180.

<sup>384</sup> Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, pp. 69–70.

towards them and consequently, less daily interactions. As a result, children of the same father spent little time together impeding the development of affective bonds.<sup>385</sup> Therefore paradoxically, the bonds of *omọ-iyá* were unofficial but strong while those of the father although official, were distant.<sup>386</sup> The value of the relationship between mother and child and the fragility of those between fathers and children is succinctly captured in the proverb: *Ìyá ni wúra, baba ni díjí* (mother is gold, father is glass).

In the compound, children were charged with some of the household tasks. They cared for the old and invalids who were too weak to care for themselves, a task which taught children compassion and care.<sup>387</sup> They, along with new brides were responsible for household sanitation, cooking during feasts, tending to livestock and other such domestic duties.<sup>388</sup> Such chores were intended to promote individual household competencies and through them, children were supposed to learn how to co-operate with others to achieve larger tasks, values that became useful when children were old enough to work on farms, in marketplaces, build houses, or fight in wars. Children were also charged with serving household visitors, a task that encouraged familiarity with strangers and built social and communicative skills.<sup>389</sup> There is some indication that different chores were assigned to boys and girls. Boys tended to horses and ran errands outside the home while girls engaged in household activities such as sweeping and fetching water from the stream.<sup>390</sup> In Abẹ̀òkúta, these tasks often overlapped because circumstances necessitated that boys were taught some household duties stereotyped as female work so they could perform them when girls were unable to do so. When the *Ògbóni* and the other townsmen met for various reasons for example, they used an instrument known as *orò* to confine women to their compounds.<sup>391</sup> Depending on the undertaking, this confinement lasted

---

<sup>385</sup> One could also argue that the lack of affective bonds amongst *obàkan* was due to the competition children engaged in for their father's favour and inheritance after he passed away. However, there is no evidence in the records to support this.

<sup>386</sup> Renne, *Population and Progress*, pp. 34–5.

<sup>387</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 561.

<sup>388</sup> Renne, *Population and Progress*, p. 89; Campbell, p. 55.

<sup>389</sup> Campbell, pp. 55-6.

<sup>390</sup> Bowen, p. 142.

<sup>391</sup> Oro will be discussed in-depth in chapter four

anything from a couple of hours to one report of seven days.<sup>392</sup> During this time, boys took over all the female duties that required leaving the compound. On one such confinement, Campbell wrote that the town usually as 'busy as a hive was deserted'. He noticed that there were a few men and boys about 'looking as if in the perpetration of some guilty action, because [...] they were compelled to perform some office regarded according to their customs, as proper only for women'.<sup>393</sup> Bowen also noted that during such confinements, several boys hawked goods. He described them as 'awkward and sheepish' and 'clearly inadequate to the smiles and chats of girls whose places they were in endeavouring to fill.'<sup>394</sup>

In the nineteenth century, some children grew up outside their patrilineage. These included those who had been pawned when the family incurred debts. Until the British outlawed pawning in the 1930s, when a person or family borrowed money, they could agree to work or pawn a relative to work for the creditor as interest until the debt was repaid. These pawned relatives were usually the children of the household, and they often lived with creditors until repayment, which sometimes took years.<sup>395</sup> Children were also given away due to the insecurities of war and it was in such wartime circumstances that most children first came into contact with missionaries. In 1860, during the Ìjàyè war, many parents gave their children to the missionary Adolphus Mann. He wrote that although he picked some children off the streets, dying parents often begged him to take charge of their children lest they be enslaved. When Ìjàyè was sacked, he kept these children in the care of Henry Townsend in Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>396</sup> Children also came under the care of missionaries if they were regarded as 'evil' or a detriment to their lineage and abandoned as a result. A girl once visited James White at Ọ̀tà asking if she could be admitted to stay permanently at the mission house. She told White that she was born in Lagos

---

<sup>392</sup> David Hinderer, Journal, 17 May 1857; Henry Townsend, Journal, 4 January 1847.

<sup>393</sup> Campbell, p. 78.

<sup>394</sup> Bowen, p. 142-3.

<sup>395</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 10 September, 1856; Johnson, p. 127; Ajisafe Moore, p. 5; Hinderer, p. 92. Elisha Renee has also written extensively about pawning see Elisha P. Renne, 'Childhood Memories and Contemporary Parenting in Ekiti, Nigeria', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 75 (2005), pp. 63-82 (pp. 65-9).

<sup>396</sup> Adolphus Mann, Letter to the secretaries of the CMS in a petition to regain some Ìjaye children from the Reverend H. Townsend and some natives, 19 January 1864.

but both her parents died when she was young. Soon after, she was infected with yaws. As a result, her relatives sent her to live with a man at Ọ̀tà, perhaps a distant relative, but he rejected her accusing her of witchcraft and claiming that she would kill him just as she killed her parents. She was thus left destitute. James White commented that witchcraft accusations were an unfortunately common consequence of being a child orphan in Yorùbáland. He wrote that: '[i]n this country a child who has unfortunately lost her father and mother is supposed to be possessed of the witchcraft and is frequently reproached for killing the parents'.<sup>397</sup> Contrary to White's assertion however, childhood accusations of witchcraft were a rarity rather than the norm in the nineteenth century. As this thesis will discuss in chapter five, the most likely victims of witchcraft accusations were old post-menopausal women.

Children who grew up in their agnatic compound remained under the supervision of their mother who taught them a good work ethic.<sup>398</sup> Through daily observation, emulation and instruction, mothers taught children cultural practices, good morals and proper Yorùbá social behaviour. Fafunwa considers this type of socialisation as crucial to a child's intellectual development as 'observation, imitation and participation' remain crucial to modern day learning.<sup>399</sup> Historians have written that mothers retained control of their children from birth until the age of six to eight, when male and female childhood socialisation began to differ.<sup>400</sup> At that age, some scholars have indicated that boys began spending an increasing amount of time with their fathers and other men learning farming and other male occupations. They were also told the male secrets of *orò* and *egúngún* from which women were

---

<sup>397</sup> James White, Journal, 9 February 1863. For more on child witches, see Jean Sybil La Fontaine, *The Devil's Children: From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations That Affect Children* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009); Terence O. Ranger, 'Scotland Yard in the Bush: Medicine Murders, Child Witches and the Construction of the Occult: A Literature Review', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 77 (2007), 272–283; Filip DeBoeck, 'On Being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the Occult and the Street', in *Reinventing Order in the Congo: How People Respond [i.e. respond] to State Failure in Kinshasa*, ed. by Theodore Trefon (London: Zed Press, 2004), pp. 155–173.

<sup>398</sup> McIntosh, p. 92; Olumbe Bassir, 'Marriage Rites Among the Aku (Yoruba) of Freetown', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 24 (1954), 251–256 (p. 252); Renne, *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town*, p. 8.

<sup>399</sup> Fafunwa, p. 26.

<sup>400</sup> Schwab, 366; Fafunwa, pp. 18; 21.

excluded under the pain of death.<sup>401</sup> Some boys also received instruction in warfare as all adult males in Abẹ̀òkúta were expected to fight when the need arose.<sup>402</sup> They also began spending time working for the parents of their future bride.<sup>403</sup> Girls, on the other hand began to learn their mother's commercial activities, which was usually trade since female socialisation was from then on geared toward preparing them for economic production as well as wifely duties and ultimately motherhood.<sup>404</sup> Although girls began to spend more time with their mothers from age six, scholars have underestimated the control mothers retained over their sons. Nineteenth-century observers at many times reiterate how much control women had over their son's upbringing which they considered detrimental to male development. Their concern with maternal influence is unsurprising when one considers that discourses of childhood in England at the time were increasingly emphasising the father's crucial role in childhood development and specifically the development of boys.<sup>405</sup> It was within this context of maternal control that various conflicts and tensions between mothers and missionaries ensued as they both struggled for power and influence over children.

In the nineteenth century, women continued to exert control over their children beyond the age of puberty.<sup>406</sup> A missionary once observed that '[t]he care of the children devolve[d] almost entirely upon their mother' and he considered this state of affairs 'an inevitable result of polygamy'.<sup>407</sup> In 1864, James Okuseinde at Ògùnpa in Abẹ̀òkúta reported that a man brought his nephew to church after obtaining consent from the boy's father. As soon as the service was over, the mother came to the church 'with intense heat' and dragged the

---

<sup>401</sup> *Orò* and *egúngún* will be discussed in detail in chapter four. Johnson, p. 129.

<sup>402</sup> Henry Townsend, Letter to Major H. Straith, 4 March 1851.

<sup>403</sup> Fadipe, p. 74; Ajisafe Moore, p. 23; Isaac O Delano, *The Soul of Nigeria* (London: T. Werner Laurie LTD, 1937), p. 128.

<sup>404</sup> Olajubu, p. 24.

<sup>405</sup> Priscilla Robertson, 'Home as a Nest: Middle Class Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Europe', in *The History of Childhood: The Evolution of Parent-Child Relationships as a Factor in History*, ed. by Lloyd de Mause (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), pp. 407–31 (p. 407).

<sup>406</sup> Social anthropologists have theorized about this relationship between mother and children placing emphasis on the relationship between children and mothers as the basis for subsequent social development. See: John E. Richters and Everett Waters, 'Attachment and Socialization: The Positive Side of Social Influence', *Social Influences and Socialization in Infancy*, ed. by M. Lewis and S. Feinman, (New York: Plenum Press, 1991), pp. 185–213.

<sup>407</sup> Johnson, p. 125.



boy away all the while raining abuses and 'ill names' on the uncle.<sup>408</sup> In addition to the potency of maternal control that took precedence even over the wishes of a father and his male kin, this entry also expresses a certain anxiety that this and many other mothers felt over losing control of their sons to the church. The competition with which women felt they were engaged to retain the loyalty of their children vis-a-vis the church is evident in other examples in this chapter. These controls can also be viewed as a mother exercising her right to *protect* her children against what she felt were corrupting missionary influences that sought to introduce new and culturally unacceptable ways of being a child that could harm proper childhood development.<sup>409</sup>

Maternal influences were so pervasive that when James White asked Chief Olúkòsì why he had not sent his children to school, the chief exclaimed that he did not yet have 'proper children'. White wrote about the encounter:

Today the chief Olukosi paid me a visit. Among other things I laid before the chief the necessity of sending his children to school. The chief stated that it was in his mind to do so but that the difficulty with him is to get the proper children, that in this town children born of free mothers are unmanageable by the fathers because the mothers exercise so unbounded influence over them. [B]ut that the children begotten by slave women are more at the disposal of the father the mother being slaves exercises no power over them and that as soon as such children are obtainable, he has no objection to give them to us.<sup>410</sup>

In Abẹ̀òkúta and environs at the time, slave women had no rights over their offspring whether they were married to slaves or free men. In the former case, their children belonged to their owner, while in the latter, to their husbands. Slave mothers had no rights, authority or say over how their children were raised and thus, their husbands retained complete control. This is what Chief Olúkòsì referred to as 'proper children'. Since her children were also slaves, their father could sell them if he so wished. The Yorùbá word for children of one slave parent at the time illuminates their position. They were referred to

---

<sup>408</sup> James Okuseinde, Journal, 10 October 1864.

<sup>409</sup> For childhood development, see: Paula S. Fass, 'Children and Globalization', *Journal of Social History*, 36 (2003), 963–977.

<sup>410</sup> James White, Òtá, Journal, 17 August 1871.

as *omọ onídiikan* (the child who sits with one buttock).<sup>411</sup> This indicated that such children sat uncomfortably in their agnatic compound, simultaneously insiders and outsiders, child but slave, and their status could change at anytime.

As children grew up, a free mother's control transformed into influence. Pre-colonial records show a certain bond between mother and child, but most especially between mother and son. This was likely because girls were expected to marry and leave the agnatic compound while boys remained with their mothers until her death. Although she never lost links with her daughter, a mother's proximity to her son, and the control she later had over his family made for a closer relationship. The 'informal bond' women had with their sons were also reciprocal as sons continued to hold influence over their mothers well into adulthood. This is apparent when one considers the relationship between Yorùbá missionaries and their mothers. The mothers of Ajayi Crowther, Thomas King, and Daniel Olubi all converted to Christianity after their sons ministered to them. Crowther's mother was even one of the first people baptised in Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>412</sup> These circumstances are even more remarkable when one considers that missionaries often complained about how difficult it was to convert older women who were deeply rooted in indigenous religion. In fact before her conversion, Daniel Olubi's mother had been 'a devoted priestess' of *Igun*, the deity of cowries and water.<sup>413</sup>

In the household, children in the nineteenth century quickly learned the age hierarchy and recognised that they were low on the societal pecking order. Niara Sudarkasa writes that children learned respect and deference before they learnt to speak and Campbell's eyewitness report confirms it.<sup>414</sup> From a very early age, children were taught to respect the aged, show deference to both biological and social superiors, be polite to all, and other general

---

<sup>411</sup> Crowther, p. 219.

<sup>412</sup> Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 23 September 1847.

<sup>413</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 5 February 1848; Daniel Olubi (Ìbàdàn), *Journal*, 6 February 1875.

<sup>414</sup> The physical manifestations of this respect will be described in chapter five. Sudarkasa, *Strength of our Mothers*, p. 127; Campbell, pp. 55–6.

reverential manners.<sup>415</sup> Discursively, the Yorùbá promoted mutual respect, collaboration, and co-operation between the young and the old. The proverb *owó omọdé kò tó pépẹ, ti àgbàlágbà ò wọ kèrègbè* (the child's hand cannot reach the ceiling, that of an elder cannot enter the hole), emphasised the need for older and younger people to work together for a successful society.<sup>416</sup> In reality however, Yorùbá society was much more gerontocratic.<sup>417</sup> Young people were considered irrelevant, naïve, fickle, and beings of vulnerability and candour, and they were expected to be obedient and unquestioning at all times. Their main duties were to do the bidding of adults, and assist in whatever ways they could. In return, they had the right to food, shelter and care.<sup>418</sup>

However, children were not completely powerless. They had authority over wives recently married into their household, who were considered to be their social juniors. Their seniority manifested in several ways. For instance, wives could not call children born into their husband's lineage before their marriage by their proper names. Rather they used nicknames and referred to them with gender pronouns used for elders. New wives also performed more domestic work than daughters.<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, children often rejected their expected passivity and proved themselves as social beings and agents in their own right. They frequently exhibited remarkable individuality of mind, sometimes going against the wishes of adults and elders.<sup>420</sup> Townsend once suggested that children were so independent that parental control was not strong enough to bend their will.<sup>421</sup> A boy of about ten years of age once attended a church service presided over by James Okuseinde. When his parents and relatives discovered this, the boy escaped punishment by running away to the mission

---

<sup>415</sup> Johnson, p. xxix.

<sup>416</sup> Kila, p. 13.

<sup>417</sup> Olufunke Adeboye, 'The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan, 1830-2000', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16 (2007), 261–78 (p. 264).

<sup>418</sup> Kila, p. 13, 64. The position of children were also similar amongst the Gusii ethnic group in Kenya see Robert Alan LeVine et al, *Child Care and Culture: Lessons from Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>419</sup> Taiwo Makinde, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment of Women in Yoruba Culture', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 13 (2004), 164-174, (p. 167).

<sup>420</sup> For a contemporary study of childhood agency, see Jack Lord, 'The History of Childhood in Colonial Ghana' Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to SOAS University, London (2013), p. 15.

<sup>421</sup> Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-189*, p. 135.

house for protection. The matter was later settled amicably and he was allowed to continue attending church.<sup>422</sup> Some children did not fear confrontation. When a young boy's relative came to fetch from the mission house by the request of his father, Andrew Gollmer wrote that the boy refused to leave to the 'astonishment of his family' who stormed off in anger. The boy remained and was raised by Gollmer.<sup>423</sup> Rebellion was not just a male phenomenon; girls also defied their parents. In 1857 David Hinderer in Ìbàdàn wrote:

I went to see amongst others a woman who some days ago severely flogged her little daughter for going to school upon which I learned that the girl had determined not to do any more work for her mother unless she would allow her to go to school [...] The mother [...] promised to give the child full liberty for going to school and marked other times for her chores.<sup>424</sup>

These children's disobedience would have been considered delinquent as children were supposed to be obedient and respectful to their elders at all times. It therefore shows children's agency in using the changing religious circumstances around them to negotiate what they considered to be more favourable socialisation processes. Nonetheless, children would have been punished for their dissent. It is worthy of note that all the cases of female dissent led to the girl being severely punished or beaten while boys were subject to what Murray Last refers to as 'negative controls' involving verbal coercion and reprimand, or they were simply left to their own devices.<sup>425</sup> This is possibly because female control was considered more crucial since they would marry and represent their patrilineage in a foreign compound. Any indication of waywardness, rudeness, defiance or disobedience would thus reflect poorly on her family. Furthermore, since girls performed more

---

<sup>422</sup> James Okuseinde, *Journal*, 10 August 1873.

<sup>423</sup> Andrew Gollmer, *Journal*, 1 July 1857.

<sup>424</sup> It can be argued that such missionary 'eyewitness' accounts were nothing more than moral tales about who controlled children, school/church or parents/family. Although struggles over controlling children is evident in missionary journals, the author had no reason to doubt their rare accounts of the triumph of church over family because their many failures were also recorded. David Hinder (Ìbàdàn), *Journal*, 10 January 1857.

<sup>425</sup> Anthropologists such as Sarah and Robert Levine have previously argued that beating was not commonplace in 'traditional' African societies and where practiced, was meted out by relatives instead of parents. In Yorùbáland, corporal punishment from parent was commonplace in the nineteenth century. For more on childhood punishment, see Murray Last, 'Children and the Experience of Violence: Contrasting Cultures of Punishment in Northern Nigeria', *Africa*, 70 (2000), 359-393 (pp. 362-3); LeVine et al, pp. 22-56.

household labour than boys, their housework was more essential to the proper functioning of the compound. Female dissent would therefore not only jeopardise a future marriage, but pre-marital disobedience would be more hazardous to the proper workings of the household. As a result, girls were subject to harsher controls. Nonetheless, children's rebellion must not be overemphasised because they had circumscribed agency and their age, size, status, knowledge, experiences and resources limited their choices. As a result they were still expected to adapt their behaviour to adult expectations if they hoped to survive in the community.

### **Socialisation through *iṣé* (Labour)**

Luis H. Zayas and Fabiana Solari argue that socialisation is tailored to prepare children for the society they will encounter. Through an interaction which Lev Vygotsky termed the 'zone of proximal development', experienced members of a culture guide children to acquire the requisite skills needed to become a functional member of society.<sup>426</sup> Archibald Callaway also considers the training of children in labour as a means by which society 'passed on their cultural heritage from one generation to the next'.<sup>427</sup> In Abẹ̀òkúta, childhood was not seen as an end unto itself but a 'becoming' and preamble to adulthood. Since economic independence was crucial to adulthood, socialisation largely consisted of teaching children *iṣé* - translated as work, or labour. All young children, without exception, were taught some means of livelihood.<sup>428</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta citizens were extremely industrious and laziness, known as *ò/ẹ*, was criticised and shunned and any child that refused or rejected work was teased and ostracised. Fafunwa added that 'unemployment, if it existed at all was minimal'.<sup>429</sup> There were some sex-

---

<sup>426</sup> Lev Vygotsky (1978) cited in Luis H. Zayas and Fabiana Solari, 'Early Childhood Socialization in Hispanic Families: Context, Culture, and Practice Implications', *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 25 (1994), 200–206 (pp. 200–1).

<sup>427</sup> Archibald Callaway, 'Nigeria's Indigenous Education: The Apprenticeship System', *Odu: University of Ife Journal of African Studies*, 1(1964), 63 cited in Fafunwa, p. 31.

<sup>428</sup> Campbell, p. 48; Burton, p. 101. It is important to note that an individual's success was not always regarded as a product of hard work. Some people were considered as having good luck provided by their *orí*. Bascom, 'Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences', 498.

<sup>429</sup> Fafunwa, p. 16.

based divisions of labour. Men were typically builders, blacksmiths, iron-smelters, tanners and leather-workers. They were also tailors, carpenters, calabash-carvers, weavers and basket, hat and mat-makers. On the other hand, women wove, spun cotton, dyed clothes, cooked, pressed palm oil, brewed alcohol, made pots and other forms of pottery, produced oils and soap, and dug clay for building.<sup>430</sup> Women also kept livestock, especially poultry as a minor occupation.<sup>431</sup> Additionally, women and girls worked as carriers often transporting goods weighing sixty pounds or more on their heads over long distances.<sup>432</sup> Individuals entered occupations either through personal choice or through family influences. Consequently, if a girl was born into a compound where the women wove clothes for sale, she would most likely be taught the weaving occupation from a young age and become a weaver herself.<sup>433</sup>

A key differential in labour was that men were said to farm and women traded, and boys and girls were socialised according to these patterns.<sup>434</sup> Unlike other parts of Africa, such as Southern Malawi, where women played a major role in agricultural production, women in Abẹ̀òkúta hardly ever farmed.<sup>435</sup> Bowen even proposed that 'women never cultivate the soil'.<sup>436</sup> Sudarkasa argues convincingly that although this pattern of gendered divisions of labour can be traced back centuries in Yorùbá history, the wars and insecurities of the nineteenth century tended to 'intensify' already existing norms.<sup>437</sup> She states correctly that markets venues were located within town walls while farms were situated outside the town, sometimes as far as thirty miles. Since actual or potential farmlands were also the main venues of wars and battles, it made sense that farming was left in the hands of men who's job it was to defend the

---

<sup>430</sup> Campbell, p. 48; Burton, pp. 130–5; Johnson, pp. 123–4, 296, 308.

<sup>431</sup> Burton, p. 125.

<sup>432</sup> Bowen, p. 307; James White, *Journal*, 3 May 1854.

<sup>433</sup> Elisha P Renne, *Cloth That Does Not Die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bùnú Social Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 132–139.

<sup>434</sup> Burton, pp. 130–5; Bowen, p. 308.

<sup>435</sup> Megan Vaughan, 'Which Family?: Problems in the Reconstruction of the History of the Family as an Economic and Cultural Unit', *The Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), 275–283 (p. 277).

<sup>436</sup> Bowen, p. 308.

<sup>437</sup> Niara Sudarkasa, *Where Women Work: A Study of Yoruba Women in the Marketplace and in the Home* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973), p 26.

town from attack and protect its food source. This is because many nineteenth-century wars were won through the isolation of the town from the farms and, in essence, starving the citizens into submission.<sup>438</sup>

Nevertheless, sexual divisions of labour regarding farming and trading were not rigid as there are many examples of gendered crossovers. Writing in the nineteenth century, Ajayi Crowther wrote that the peoples of the interior were very industrious and although men farmed and women traded, a proportion of the men gave a large part of their time to trading while some pursued it as their chief work.<sup>439</sup> Another CMS missionary William Allen confirmed this when he wrote that many men in Yorùbá country were 'shrewd businessmen'.<sup>440</sup> There is also evidence that a few women farmed with reports in mission journals referring to mission trips to farms to visit and minister to women.<sup>441</sup> Furthermore, Kòfowórólá Moore wrote in the early 1900s that she spent most of her childhood partly at home and partly at her mother's farm.<sup>442</sup> Women's farming was thus not an entirely alien concept. Gender divisions of labour were therefore not immutable and could be breached through necessity and positive choice.

Like other areas of children's lives, missionaries were also intimately involved in children's labour and complicated local understandings of gendered divisions of labour when they introduced schools. Although only a small proportion of children received instruction, families who did send their children to school lost essential economic labour crucial to their household. Since children in Yorùbáland were economic actors integral to the financial health of their lineage. To resolve this issue, early missions in Abẹ̀òkúta restricted school time to four or five hours during the day. Children could perform their respective household duties in the morning, and classes were held during the day when the weather was too hot and thus not conducive to farming and

---

<sup>438</sup> Sudarkasa, *Where Women Work*, p. 26

<sup>439</sup> Ade-Ajayi, 'Samuel Ajayi Crowther of Oyo', pp. 292–3.

<sup>440</sup> William Allen, *Journal*, 12 October 1873.

<sup>441</sup> These women were usually elderly women who no longer had the strength to trade. This will be discussed further in chapter five.

<sup>442</sup> K. A. Moore, 'The Story of Kofoworola Aina Moore', p. 325.

trading. These tasks were then resumed at sunset.<sup>443</sup> In other parts of Yorùbáland more resistant to mission schools, parents received remuneration for sending their children to school.<sup>444</sup> Mission schools also created religious friction. Since the main purpose of schools was to ‘convert the ‘heathen’ or benighted African to Christianity via education’, children who attended schools were given religious instruction as an integral part of their education.<sup>445</sup> Fafunwa wrote that ‘[t]he Bible... was the master textbook and every subject, no matter how remote, had to be connected in some way to the holy writ’.<sup>446</sup> This created resistance from families who wished their children remain animists.<sup>447</sup> Furthermore, mission schools also introduced new gender regimes from the West by introducing separate classes for girls and boys and emphasising some activities as male and others female.<sup>448</sup> They also introduced new sex-based gendered labour that threatened to displace old traditions.<sup>449</sup> In Abẹ̀òkúta for instance, women spun cotton while men tailored clothes because at the time, only men’s clothes required extensive tailoring.<sup>450</sup> In contrast, at the mission schools, girls were taught sewing and embroidery while boys were excluded from these classes because missionaries regarded dressmaking as women’s work. Females, encroaching into what was stereotypically male territory, created immense tension and friction in the town and led to women being banned from tailoring.<sup>451</sup>

In Yorùbáland, boys, rather than girls, were more likely to attend school and in 1871, there were 699 boys and 573 girls in Lagos mission schools. Although not a huge divide, the missionary Jonathan Wood wrote in his report on Lagos education to the CMS headquarters in London that the reason for a higher

---

<sup>443</sup> Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, p. 141.

<sup>444</sup> Daniel Coker (Ìjorá), *Journal*, 1873; Education also had other far-reaching effects. It created new forms of knowledge and new knowledge authorities, new role models, new acceptable behaviours, achievements and forms of play and its influences extended beyond the mission compound. For more on this, see Lord, p. 24.

<sup>445</sup> It was not until 1882 that secular education was introduced in Yorùbáland, first in the colony of Lagos, through the education ordinance. Fafunwa, pp. 81; 93.

<sup>446</sup> Fafunwa, p. 83.

<sup>447</sup> Missionaries also provided adult education. However this took place at the church rather than in schools. Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, p. 86; 297.

<sup>448</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge: The Will to Knowledge volume 1*, translated by Robert Hurley, New Edition (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 27–8.

<sup>449</sup> For more on missionaries and childhood, see: Fass, 963–977; Stephens, 3–48.

<sup>450</sup> Bowen, p. 308.

<sup>451</sup> This issue will be discussed in chapter four.



male population in schools was because ‘the female portion of the population in this country is looked down upon as the lowly sex’. He argued that ‘many think the minds of girls are not worthy of cultivation hence parents who have both boys and girls will send their boys to school while the girls are left’.<sup>452</sup> Wood’s British Victorian biases regarding sexual difference and female cognitive capacities however led to his complete misunderstanding of the values and purposes of childhood socialisation that prized practical economic occupations for girls over formal mission education. Parents did not keep their girls from school because they were considered intellectually inferior to boys as Wood suggested. Rather, parents did so pragmatically because productive economic labour was seen as more crucial to female development and survival as Yoruba women were charged with providing for both themselves and their children. On the other hand as will be discussed in chapter four, men largely concerned themselves with providing for their upkeep and acquiring enough resources to marry more wives, buy slaves and grow their household in the quest for self-aggrandisement, assets which could be easier gained via a career in soldiering. Furthermore, parents were more likely to formally educate boys because slaves, helpers and hired hands could easily takeover male labour such as those on farms, practises not encouraged in female work as girls were being trained for a life of rigorous economic activities. It is easy to see why parents would have felt that learning ‘books’ in schools was less valuable than learning a trade. In 1880, mission schools taught Bible studies, algebra, mechanics, political economy, physical science, physiology, natural philosophy, Euclid (geometry), geography, English reading, Yorùbá reading, dictation and English language and music.<sup>453</sup> Parents at the time would not have recognised the delayed value of such lessons and instead preferred to educate their children, especially girls, in more practical profit yielding ventures. It was not until the advent of colonialism throughout Yorùbáland in the 1890s when parents realised that education offered personal and social advancement, that children, both boys and girls, began attending school in overwhelming numbers.<sup>454</sup>

---

<sup>452</sup> Jonathan Wood, ‘Report on Education in Lagos’, 1871.

<sup>453</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Annual letter, 1880

<sup>454</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 156.



Fig 2.5: Illustration of young children in missionary schools. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, September 1875.

For boys to learn an indigenous occupation, they apprenticed either under their fathers or other male specialists. This apprenticeship was known locally as *ikòṣẹ́* ('to learn' or to 'acquire skill').<sup>455</sup> First, they performed minor assistive duties and then took on more responsibility as they grew older and became more skilled. Little boys that trained as blacksmiths for example were first given the monotonous and least dangerous task of alternately lifting and depressing the machinery before they were taught more specialized smelting skills.<sup>456</sup> Girls, from a very early age, learned to work by accompanying, assisting and imitating older women in their domestic and economic duties (see figs 2.6 and 2.7). Like boys, they were initially given light tasks and slowly progressed to harder work. For girls who learned trade, they first accompanied their mothers to the market to observe and assist, and later, they became responsible for trading in their mother's absence. When they could be trusted with this, they began hawking locally, before venturing further afield, first to the rural markets surrounding the towns, and then they joined

---

<sup>455</sup> Crowther, p. 184.

<sup>456</sup> Campbell, p. 48-9.

large caravans to trade in distant towns and markets.<sup>457</sup> These activities prepared girls for a life of rigorous economic pursuits, and ensured that they had the tools needed to survive and excel in the nineteenth-century marketplaces.



Fig 2.6: Young girls (first and last) emulating older woman in fetching water for household. Source: 'Album of 126 photographs taken in Nigeria by C. T. Lawrence 1900-1910', National Archives, London, CO1069/68.

---

<sup>457</sup> Awẹ, 'Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura' p. 60.





Fig 2.7: Young girl assisting mother in dyeing clothes for sale. Source: 'Album of 126 photographs taken in Nigeria by C. T. Lawrence 1900-1910', National Archives, London, CO1069/68.



Fig 2.8: A Yorùbá market in the early twentieth century. Source: Photographs, by Major C. T. Lawrence, 1910-1939, National Archives, London, CO 1069/65.

Nineteenth-century markets were more than places for buying and selling, they were social venues (see fig 2.8). Records explain that markets were social sites where people met, traded, conversed and socialised. It was no coincidence that most missionaries preached in markets where they felt they could reach the most people.<sup>458</sup> The principal market was in the evening after the day's work. Every fifth day, there was a larger market known as *ojo oja* (market day) when a multitude of people assembled to sell numerous and varied commodities.<sup>459</sup> Bowen observed that at this time 'all sorts of people, men, women, girls, travellers lately arrived in caravans, farmers from the field, and artisans from their houses pour[ed] in from all directions to buy and sell, and talk'. He wrote that at the markets, market women were especially noisy, 'and in their glory, bawling out salutations, cheapening and haggling, conversing, laughing, and sometimes quarrelling', with a determination and ability to make themselves heard, and make the sale.<sup>460</sup> Unlike Igbo culture where young girls were not allowed in the marketplace, Yorùbá girls thrived there.<sup>461</sup> In such an exciting and boisterous environment, girls learned the necessary skills of assertiveness, confidence, resolve, effective communication, negotiation, friendliness, financial savvy, and other social abilities needed to be successful at the market. However, some of these skills contradicted the deference and obedience girls were expected to exhibit in the communal environment of the compound. Female socialisation was therefore paradoxical because any attempt on the part of girls to implement some occupational traits in the home, such as resisting what they considered unfair and improper dealings of adults, created tensions between them and their adult kin and most especially their parents. As discussed above, these tensions were resolved through corporeal punishment and other punitive bodily and verbal controls. Girls neither kept the profits acquired from their

---

<sup>458</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 16 December 1877.

<sup>459</sup> Bowen, p. 297.

<sup>460</sup> Bowen, p. 296.

<sup>461</sup> Misty Bastain argues that trading in markets in Igboland was an indication of a senior woman's wealth and status. Misty L. Bastain, 'Dancing Women and Colonial Men: The Nwaobiala of 1925', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 109–129 (p. 123).

commercial dealings nor did they receive a salary or remuneration therefrom. Childhood was seen as a training stage used to acquire skills for later life. Therefore all economic activities were solely for the benefit of their mothers or whichever female with which they apprenticed.

This is very different from some other African societies such as the Fante in Ghana who allowed children accumulate resources to teach financial responsibility.

### **Acculturation through *eré* (play)**

Nineteenth-century eyewitnesses observed that boys had more leisure time than girls. Johnson wrote that 'on the whole the women seem to be far more industrious than the men, for whereas the men always contrive to have leisure hours and off days from work, the women seem to have none'.<sup>462</sup> Campbell confirmed Johnson's observation when he wrote:

Rise as early as you please and enter a native compound, and you will there find the women engaged at their varied occupations. Go at night as late as you please, and there by the feeble light of her lamp she is seen in the act of labor, spinning, weaving or preparing food for the ensuing day.<sup>463</sup>

Girls in Yorùbáland were socialised along these patterns.<sup>464</sup> When one compares the typical day for boys and girls, then one recognizes that boys did have more time for leisure. For men and boys, a typical day began at dawn when they woke up, cleaned their teeth, bathed and groomed either at home or at the brook and then ate the first of three meals bought at the market from caterers, as wives were under no obligation to cook in the mornings.<sup>465</sup>

---

<sup>462</sup> Johnson, p. 125.

<sup>463</sup> Campbell, p. 48.

<sup>464</sup> Campbell, p. 48.

<sup>465</sup> Every healthy individual that could work rose at dawn. If one did not, they risked being called as lazy. This sentiment is iterated in the Yoruba proverb *Kùtùkùtù kì íjín ilẹ̀mẹ̀jì*, *kùtùkùtù ní ñ jẹ̀ òwúrò, bìrì ní íjẹ̀ alẹ̀* (The dawn does not come twice to wake a man; the dawn is the time to begin work earliest). Crowther, p. 188.

Breakfast was usually *ékọ*, a porridge made from fermented ground corn and water.<sup>466</sup> Farmers then went to the farm, businessmen to trade and craftsmen engaged in their craft. In the early afternoon, men either prepared food for themselves or their wives brought food to them at their workplaces. Some men also purchased their lunch. Wealthy men usually passed the rest of the day by 'dressing their hair, consulting *Ifá*, saluting friends, and visiting the *Ògbóni* [town council] lodges.'<sup>467</sup> Poorer men continued to work and we can assume that boys, either from rich or poor families, would also continue working since they were being taught a good work ethic. At dusk, men and boys ate once more, sometimes by buying food from street vendors but more generally in the house from food cooked by their wives and mothers. Then they 'gossiped, played, watched dances or dance themselves, smoked, snuffed, drank palm wine, maize-beer, trade-rum and gin'. They also played *ayò*, a local board game likened to checkers or chess, then they 'retired to rest when they [could] do no more.'<sup>468</sup>

---

<sup>466</sup> Clarke, p. 240.

<sup>467</sup> Burton, p. 304.

<sup>468</sup> Burton, p. 304; Clarke, p. 239.



Fig 2.9: Illustration of young Yorùbá girls hawking in the nineteenth century.  
Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, April 1850.

For girls, a typical day did not include such leisurely pursuits. Their day began by getting up at the crack of dawn and performing their household duties before grooming, eating, and then accompanying their mothers to the market for the morning trade. At midday when there was a 'lull in excitement', they hawked their wares around the town before returning for the evening markets that lasted into the early hours of the morning (see fig 2.9).<sup>469</sup> From these two accounts, it is clear that boys had more time for relaxation. Indeed, most references to play in nineteenth-century records involved boys. When Samuel Johnson saved a little boy from drowning in Abéòkúta, it was because a game between him and other boys had turned dangerous.<sup>470</sup> Boys at play were described as wrestling, tumbling, dancing, drumming, and running collectively

---

<sup>469</sup> Clarke, p. 240.

<sup>470</sup> Samuel Johnson, Journal, 30 October 1874.



known in Yorùbá as *eré-ipá* (to play roughly and dangerously).<sup>471</sup> In fact, the Reverend James Johnson once suggested that boy's deteriorating health at mission schools could be blamed on a lack of physical activity and children 'stuck between benches all day'.<sup>472</sup> Fafunwa argued that these playtime activities were necessary to a child's development of 'physical skills'.<sup>473</sup> However, due to the disproportionate leisure time allowed boys and girls, only boys seemed to have developed these physical skills via play since girls were often too busy working. When girls did have a little time for leisure, their play was noted as more restrained due to what missionaries referred to as 'modesty and gentleness'.<sup>474</sup>

When boys and girls did play together, playtime was spent engaged in activities that further validated and imparted Yorùbá cultural ideals onto children. At play, children usually sat under a shade of trees playing mentally stimulating games such as telling jokes, 'witty sayings' and stories.<sup>475</sup> Sometimes, they sat in groups, and an adult asked riddles and told folktales known as *àlò*. Such riddles included:

Question: A small confined room, with hardly anything in it but pegs. Answer: The mouth, with the teeth.

Question: I am long and slim, I am engaged in commerce, and yet I never reach the market.

Answer: The canoe (which carries the goods but stops at the shore).<sup>476</sup>

While riddles were meant to encourage quick wit, intellect and intelligence, folktales taught cultural knowledge and moral ideals.<sup>477</sup> These folktales expressed indigenous notions of right and wrong and as M. I. Ogumefu wrote

---

<sup>471</sup> Campbell, p. 66; Bowen, p. 302.

<sup>472</sup> James Johnson, 'Report on Abeokuta Churches', 30 January 1878 cited in Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, p. 135.

<sup>473</sup> Fafunwa, p. 20.

<sup>474</sup> Thomas King, *Journal*, 18 August 1853.

<sup>475</sup> Clarke, p. 239.

<sup>476</sup> Unfortunately, Ellis who recorded these riddles did not include the original Yorùbá version. Ellis, p.88.

<sup>477</sup> Bascom, 'Yoruba', pp. 98–9; Fafunwa, pp. 22; 24. For more on childhood development through play, see Melvin Konner, *The Evolution of Childhood: Relationships, Emotion, Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); David Oswell, *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 193–214.

in 1929, 'as a rule, the wicked were punished and the good rewarded'.<sup>478</sup> Ideals of generosity, responsibility, respect, loyalty and even financial acumen were weaved into tales that children could easily understand and learn from. Melvin Konner indicated that adults could use play to subconsciously instill cultural ethics in children.<sup>479</sup> In Yorùbáland, playtime was an effective and important medium for transferring cultural ideals. Since the environment of play did not carry as much tension as other areas of instruction at home, at work or in mission schools, adults wove cultural messages into these stories and delivered them to children via a medium that they were less likely to question or rebel against, with the hopes that they would accept and internalise them.

### ***Folktales and socialisation***

In the book *Yoruba Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa*, first published in 1894, A. B. Ellis, a British ethnologist documented some Yorùbá folktales. Although recorded in English, which will certainly have compromised some Yorùbá concepts and ideas, some of these folktales still effectively articulate pre-colonial understandings of childhood and how children were expected to act and behave. One such folktale is 'the story about a woman whose little girl made palm oil'.<sup>480</sup>

A little girl was an apprentice in her mother's palm oil trade. One day she stayed back at the market to trade long after her mother had left. After dark, a goblin purchased some palm oil from her but paid her fee short of one cowry.<sup>481</sup> She quickly realised this and asked for her complete fee but the goblin said he had run out of money and she would just have to accept the payment given. She began crying insisting that she would be beaten if she went home without the full amount. At this point, the goblin began walking

---

<sup>478</sup> M.I. Ogumefu, *Yoruba Legends* reprint (South Dakota: NuVision Publications LLC, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>479</sup> Konner, pp. 193-214.

<sup>480</sup> This folktale has been paraphrased from the original text for brevity.

<sup>481</sup> Cowries were the official medium of exchange.

away and the girl followed insisting he paid her what she was due. The goblin asked her to turn back because he lived in a distant and dangerous place but the girl insisted that she would not turn away until she was paid in full. They walked for miles and miles, through a town where people walked on their heads, through a river of blood, into a gloomy forest, and over craggy mountains. All the while, the goblin persistently enjoined her to turn back but she refused.

Finally they arrived at the land of the dead where the goblin lived. Here, he gave the girl some palm kernels, told her to make oil, eat it, and give him the kernel to eat. Instead, she gave him the palm oil and ate the kernel. He then gave her a banana, asked her to eat it and give him the peel. Instead, she ate the peel and gave him the banana. The goblin then showed her a place containing many *àdó* and asked her to pick three.<sup>482</sup> He warned her not to pick the ones that cried out to be chosen, but to pick the silent ones instead. He then instructed her to return home breaking one *àdó* halfway, one at the entrance to her compound, and the last inside her compound. The girl did as she was told and when she broke the first, many slaves and horses appeared and followed her. When she broke the second, many livestock including sheep, goats and fowls numbering more than two hundred appeared. And when she broke the third, the house overflowed with cowries, jewellery and clothes.

After relaying the story to her mother, her mother took twenty pieces of cloth and jewellery, twenty heads of cowries and twenty livestock and gave it to the *ìyáálé* (head-wife) as a present.<sup>483</sup> When the head-wife enquired and was told what happened, she refused the gifts and insisted that she would send her own daughter and get as much. So the head-wife's daughter headed off to the market with palm oil. Again the goblin came, did not pay her in full, and the girl insisted she would follow him home for payment. When they reached the land of the dead, the goblin gave her palm nuts, asked her to make palm oil, eat

---

<sup>482</sup> According to Ellis, *àdó* is a very small calabash, commonly used for storing indigenous medicine. Ellis, p. 90

<sup>483</sup> The head-wife was the woman married to the lineage the longest, usually the wife of the *baálè* (head of household).

the oil and give him the kernel. This time, the girl did just that. He then gave her a banana and told her to eat the fruit and give him the peel, which she again did. Finally, he told her to pick three *àdó*, not the ones that begged to be chosen but the silent ones. She disobeyed and picked the ones that cried out. When she broke the first, a number of lions, leopards, and other wild animals appeared and chased, harassed and bruised her. At the door to the compound, she broke the second and more ferocious animals appeared and bit and tore at her. When she cried out to be let into the compound, only a deaf person was about, and her pleas went unheard. So, on the threshold, the girl was killed.<sup>484</sup>

This seemingly simple folktale about young girls gives us a rare insight into the ethics of pre-colonial Yorubaland. It illuminates several Yorùbá concepts including gendered expectations, the nature of trade, insecurity of the time, lineage dynamics, and beliefs about death. First, the title is significant. Although the tale was about a little girl, the title states that it was a story about a *woman* whose child made palm oil. This title emphasises Yorùbá gerontocracy because it trivialises the role of the social junior, the young girl and the protagonist in the story, in favour of the more socially significant mother whose character is of little relevance to the tale. Since the little girl was her mother's apprentice, it demonstrates that girls were expected to learn their mother's occupation at a very young age, and be independent and responsible enough to take control in their mother's absence. They were expected to be enterprising and financially savvy so as to recognise when they were not paid in full, and be willing to do whatever it took to collect their fee. Girls were also expected to be persistent and confrontational when it was required irrespective of the person's age, gender or status. Her weeping also suggests that any economic shortcoming was severely punished. Ellis uses the word goblin to describe the customer and the Yorùbá word for goblin is *iwin*, a type of spirit. These spirits are said to be grotesque, with disproportionate heads and limbs. They are believed to roam market places and can only be seen by people with unique extra sensory perceptions,

---

<sup>484</sup> Ellis, pp. 89–92.

perceptions which children were thought to possess. *Iwin* as a customer expresses Yorùbá beliefs about the nature of markets where human and spirits are thought to co-exist. It also conveys the belief that nobody, no matter their physical appearance or demeanour, should be refused service because we never know the benefits they might bring.

The story then goes on to suggest that girls needed to be brave in the face of the insecurities of the nineteenth century. The journey through strange and dangerous places was a metaphor for the widespread dangers of the time. It expressed Yorùbá anxieties towards travelling in a region ravaged by war, and susceptible to slave raiders and thieves. Finally, their arrival at the land of the dead suggests that the dead were in places similar to the land of the living where they were accessible to the living. The living could communicate with the deceased and the deceased could return to the living. The girl also making palm oil indicates that females were expected to be proficient in complex vocational tasks from an early age. Next, the story turns to the virtues daughters were expected to possess. Justifiable disobedience as expressed by following the goblin and refusing to turn back, humility, generosity, selflessness and self-deprivation articulated through her undesirable diet, and a discerning mind to know when to obey as expressed by her picking the right *àdó*. Her ordeal ends to positive results revealing that both adversity and good character yield immense reward at unexpected times. The nature of her reward also suggests that in the nineteenth century, material wealth was counted in terms of slaves, livestock, cowries and luxury goods.

Back at the compound, the folktale gives clues to familial relationships. The little girl reporting her ordeal to her mother rather than her father is telling of the closeness of mothers and distance from fathers. It also illuminates the role of the head-wife as the most respected female in the compound, to whom the other wives had to give a share of everything. The head-wife's rejection of the gifts warns girls about the jealousy, rivalry and envy amongst co-wives. The story then goes on to give what the Yorùbá considered undesirable characters for girls. The head-wife daughter's selfishness is depicted by her eating the

desirable food, her petulance, disobedience, waywardness, and arrogance portrayed by her picking the wrong *àdó*, her undiscerning mind, and altogether disagreeable attitude which eventually led to her demise, warns girls of the dangers of greed, envy, and a bad character. The folktale also warns against copying and imitating others because it often leads to devastating results. It suggests that people possess different *orí* (characters and luck) and circumstances that may lead to one person's reward may result in another's demise. The girl dying outside her compound is also quite significant to the story. To the Yorùbá, both the death of a child and death outside the lineage compound were considered evil omens. The family would have to perform cleansing rituals to ward off evil and prevent similar occurrences in future. Finally, a child's death was a most devastating experience for all Yorùbá women. It meant the demise of a person with which women shared the most intimate bonds, the loss of a lineage member, and means of production. Also, it sometimes signified the loss of prestige for the wife, and in some cases, led to witchcraft accusations.

### *Folktales depicting boys*

Within the scope of the sources used, folktales that express Yorùbá perceptions and beliefs about boys appear to be rarer than those concerning girls. This is perhaps because as stated earlier, socialising girls according to Yorùbá patterns was considered more important since girls were integral to the proper functioning of the household and they would represent their lineage in their conjugal compound. The few folktales about males that were discovered focus more on issues concerning morality than any other theme, suggesting that boys and girls were perceived differently. When one examines nineteenth-century records, it is evident that instances of deliberate deviant behavior such as murder, theft and slave raiding were predominantly carried out by males. Therefore, folktales that stressed the superiority of moral uprightness and more importantly, the consequences of crime were attempts to put boys on the path of good character from an early age. One folktale that uses two brothers as its central plot is one such story. Although principally

about boys, this folktale depicts much more about life in the nineteenth century, highlighting themes of familial relationships, insecurities of the time, beliefs about death, authority and law.<sup>485</sup>

The story states that there were two brothers who knew and sang the popular songs of the country so well that they were in great demand for festive occasions. One day they were invited to to a festival at a neighboring village, and their mother gave them permission to attend. They went to the village where the people were assembled to play, and they sang their songs and beat their drums so well that the people rewarded them highly. They gave each boy a thousand cowries and plenty to eat and drink, then dismissed them the next morning to return home. On the way back, the elder boy, covetous of the thousand cowries that had been given to the younger one, led him off the path into the forest, and murdered him. He then took the other's thousand cowries, and returned home. When he arrived at the compound, his mother asked after his brother and he said he had left him behind on the road. When day and night passed and the boy was yet to return, his mother and her neighbours searched for him but did not find him. They searched for days without luck and concluded that he had been captured and enslaved.

After several months, the mother went to the forest to gather medicinal leaves. She went to the area where her son's decayed body lay and from it sprung a very large *olu*.<sup>486</sup> As she was about to pick this *olu*, the spirit of the boy began singing through it imploring his mother not to pluck him and telling her the story of how and why he was murdered. When the woman heard this she ran home to get her husband and they both went to the forest. When the father tried to pluck the *olu*, it again sang, imploring his father not to pluck him and relaying the story again. The father then went to the king to report all he had heard. The king followed him to the forest, tried to pick the *olu* and the same happened. The king then ordered that the elder brother be brought before him. When the boy heard the song, he confessed. The king then declared that as he slew his brother, so he would also be slain and the

---

<sup>485</sup> This story is also paraphrased for brevity.

<sup>486</sup> Ellis describes *olu* as a type of edible fungus. Ellis, p. 61.

deceased boy would come to life. The elder brother was then executed and the younger sprang to life.<sup>487</sup>

Ellis used this folktale to illustrate Yorùbá beliefs about the importance of funeral rites, suggesting that because no rituals were performed for the dead brother, his spirit remained with the body instead of proceeding to the 'dead land'. But this story also illuminates Yorùbá perceptions of boyhood. The first interesting thing about this story is its complete lack of reference to boys' economic activity. The brothers spending an entire day and night engaged in leisure verifies the comments of nineteenth-century observers who claimed that boys had more idle time than girls. Since singing was not recognised as an occupation in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, one can assume that singing at a festival would be categorized as leisure, despite their receiving monetary gifts therefrom. Their vocal competencies and the reward of one thousand cowries also suggest that singing was not considered a stereotypical female skill. In order to go to the festival, the brothers needed to obtain permission from their mothers, again confirming that women retained control over their son's socialisation beyond the very early years. It also demonstrates that children were allowed to travel long distances unaccompanied, validating what we know about girls travelling long distances to trade. The elder brother murdering the younger for his money is telling about Yorùbá perceptions of childhood and especially boys. It illustrates that children were not considered innocent and passive but were regarded as social actors and beings, capable of conscious anti-social and delinquent acts.<sup>488</sup> The elder brother displayed covetousness, greed and premeditation when he murdered his brother and his lying about it demonstrates that he understood the difference between right and wrong. Furthermore, killing an *omọ-iyá*, someone with whom he had the most intimate bond, over money, displays a cold and unfeeling callousness and suggests that money created rivalry and division amongst anyone, even close family.

---

<sup>487</sup> Ellis, pp. 59–61.

<sup>488</sup> This is in contrast to what sociologists claim was obtainable in the West where children were believed to be symbols of innocence and authenticity that was lost with age. Lloyd DeMause, *The History of Childhood*, New York, 1974, p. 314; James, p. 261; Allison James and Chris Jenks, 'Public Perceptions of Childhood Criminality', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 47 (1996), 315–331 (p. 322).



Back at the compound, the mother's enquiry into the whereabouts of the murdered brother and the fact that she and not the father went in search of the child again suggest the closeness and bonds between mother and child. His mother taking the elder brother at his word also illustrates trust. The neighbours participating in the search reveals that neighbourhoods possessed a sense of community where people cared and looked out for each other's welfare. Also, people's assumption that the brother had been enslaved speaks to the mass insecurity and dangers of the time. It also suggests people's ultimate acceptance of the circumstances of the society in which they lived. By going into the forest for medicinal leaves, the folktale suggests that the health of the family, and especially her children was within a mother's purview. The brother's supplications beyond the grave is also akin to the previous story about the little girl. It indicates Yorùbá beliefs about death, suggesting that the dead could not only communicate with the living, but could also implicate them in events of foul play.<sup>489</sup> The mother's rush to get the father and then the father going to the king underlines the role of fathers as the legitimate authority over children.<sup>490</sup> The father as the legitimate authority also confirms that although the bonds between mother and child were strong, they remained informal. The king's interest and participation implies that rulers were intimately involved in the lives of their citizens. It also highlights the judicial roles of rulers, while the brother's execution indicates that the rule of law prevailed despite age because murder was a capital offense in pre-colonial Yorùbáland. Finally, the younger brother's resurrection suggests that equilibrium is restored when wrongs are avenged.

These cautionary folktales show varied and multiple perceptions and beliefs about childhood. Despite their varying themes and plots, they both demonstrate that the Yorùbá believed children were competent agents in their

---

<sup>489</sup> This is a common notion in Yorùbáland. For example, if a person dies under what people consider suspicious circumstances, the family performs a ritual after which they believe that the deceased will return in some form to either implicate his killer or avenge his death. This will be discussed further in chapter five.

<sup>490</sup> The Yorùbá word used was *oba*, which is a gender-neutral word meaning ruler.

own right.<sup>491</sup> They were able to make careful, considered and deliberate decisions in situations that affected themselves, their families and society and were fully culpable for their actions and punishable. One could also argue that these folktales were used to discourage sibling rivalry and competition. The competition between household wives, transferred to their daughters, led to tragic outcomes in the first tale, while in the second fable, rivalry and jealousy between brothers led to murder and retribution. These folktales also demonstrate that adults used playtime as an effective medium of socialising children by reaffirming cultural ideals of appropriate behaviour and teaching it to children in a relaxed atmosphere. It is also interesting to note that unlike Western society of the time, and in particular the Anglophone West, there is no indication that the Yorùbá thought of pre-pubescent children as sexual beings in any form as there is no reference to any kind of sexual activity amongst young children. Indeed one could say that children were considered asexual.<sup>492</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed childhood socialisation in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. By examining Yorùbá socialisation processes, missionary interventions into Yorùbá norms, and children's engagement with both indigenous and foreign ideas, it highlighted the cultural processes aimed at transforming biological males and females into cultural entities. It argued that children understood society through three distinct routes: socialisation in the household, childhood labour, and via acculturation during playtime activities. By exploring the rituals and beliefs surrounding birth and the dangers young children faced in society including wartime violence and kidnapping, illness, and disease, it highlighted that children faced vast difficulties before they were old enough to be socialised. Should they survive the odds, the chapter then argued that children first encountered society in the household where they

---

<sup>491</sup> James and James, p. 28; Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, p. 244.

<sup>492</sup> For more on childhood sexuality, see R. Danielle Egan and Gail L. Hawkes, 'Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21 (2008), 355–367.

learned allegiances, household responsibilities, and socially acceptable behaviour. They in turn either enacted these teachings or they rebelled against its tenets.

When children were old enough to learn a vocation, they again encountered difficulties when negotiating indigenous expectations of childhood labour and new ideas introduced by mission schools. Although missionaries hoped that, through education, they could produce a generation who were ‘Nigerian only in blood but European in religion, thought and habit’, their aim was never achieved because many children did not receive formal education and those who did also received indigenous methods of instruction.<sup>493</sup> Through local labour practices and vocational training, children also developed an independence that was valuable to occupational endeavours but brought them, most especially girls, into conflict with familial adults. Finally, within the discussion of leisure and play, this chapter illuminated Yorùbá perceptions and beliefs about children as active social entities in their own right. Importantly, this chapter highlighted the different socialisation processes of males and females in the home, at work and through play. As a result, it showed that males and females were being prepared to, and were expected to, perform separate and distinct roles in society, thus demonstrating that Yorùbáland was gendered according to biological sex differences. Finally, from the chapter’s discussion, one can conclude that the childhood stage was instrumental to an individual’s future development as a productive member of society. Whether in the household, through economic pursuits, or leisurely activities, socialisation stressed the importance of familial relations, the need to be proficient in domestic tasks, the urgency of economic independence, the importance of wisdom, the significance of good character, and the consequences of malevolence.

---

<sup>493</sup> Fafunwa, p. 9.

### 3

## YOUTH AND MARRIAGE

**'You may bind me, you may beat me, you may even kill me but I cannot do otherwise than to serve God'.<sup>494</sup>**  
**G. F. Buhler, 1856.**

In 1856 Abẹ̀òkúta, a father tried to convince his Christian convert daughter to marry an animist to whom she was betrothed. She indignantly refused her father's attempts at persuasion by asserting that she may be bound, beaten and even killed but she could not do otherwise but serve God. Her association of marriage to a non-Christian as being in antithesis to serving 'God' is significant because it indicates new understandings of marriage and religion introduced by missionaries that conflated faith and matrimony. This young woman's bold declaration that despite severe consequences, she would not fulfil her engagement to a non-Christian encapsulates the magnitude of marriage concerns in the lives of young men and women at the time. It emphasises the changing circumstances of the nineteenth century when young people increasingly appealed to new understandings of matrimony occasioned by missionary, colonial and European influences, to give themselves new found agency against established traditions. The girl's anticipation that her defiance may lead to her bondage or even death also reflects the extreme societal controls placed on young women at the time to conform to tradition. It shows that a rejection of such indigenous customs bore the risk of severe punishment. As a result, the young woman's statement captures the subject matter of this chapter that investigates the experiences of youth and marriage in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta.

In nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, the youth stage of the lifecycle, which was between childhood and adulthood, was understood in both biological and social terms.<sup>495</sup> Biologically, it began from around ages eighteen to twenty for

---

<sup>494</sup> G. F. Buhler, *Journal*, 1856.

<sup>495</sup> Susan J. Rasmussen, 'Between Several Worlds: Images of Youth and Age in Tuareg Popular Performances', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73 (2000), 133–144 (p. 133); Richard

girls and mid-twenties to early thirties for boys because this was the age when girls and boys were considered mature enough to marry. Although these young men and women were still regarded as *omòdé*, at this stage, *omòdé* denoted social, rather than biological, immaturity because young people were yet to obtain the necessary markers of adulthood, the most important of which was having adult children. People within this category were collectively known as *ópéèrè* (young people).<sup>496</sup> It included *omidan* (young women) and *màjèsín* (young men of marriageable age), brides and grooms or new wives and husbands yet to have children known as *ayaliyàwó/adélebò* and *okò* respectively, *abiyamò* (new mothers or mothers of young children) or *iyà* (mother). When men had children they were known as *baba* (father) regardless of their children's ages.

The meaning of the social category of 'youth' has changed dramatically. In the nineteenth century, the Yorùbá recognized youth as a time of becoming an adult. This is in contrast to contemporary times where youth is increasingly viewed as a state of being in its own right as well a precursor to adulthood.<sup>497</sup> In pre-colonial Yorùbáland, there were youth but no youth 'culture' and what would come to represent youth culture in Africa, and especially Yorùbáland, was in its early formative stages in the nineteenth century occasioned by new western, colonial and missionary influences in the region. In postcolonial Africa, youth encompass an entire demographic cohort including people as young as fifteen to those as old as forty. They include young students, the unmarried and unattached as well as the newly married, both the young literate and illiterate, young urban migrants, young wage labourers, and the

---

Waller, 'Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 77–92 (p. 81).

<sup>496</sup> Crowther, p. 153.

<sup>497</sup> Mamadou Diouf, 'Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space', *African Studies Review*, 46 (2003), 1–12 (p. 3); John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, 'Reflections on Youth: From the Past to the Postcolony', in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), pp. 19–30 (p. 19);

Alcinda Manuel Honwana and Filip de Boeck, 'Children and Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity, Place', in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), pp. 1–18 (p. 3).

unemployed to name but a few.<sup>498</sup> This section of the population is recognized as having their own culture, identity and philosophies, which are politically, economically and socially motivated and often paradoxical. They are seen as being at once agents of societal transformation and a lazy and 'lost' generation; both creative and destructive; they are simultaneously politically aware and apathetic; the future hope of Africa and the delinquent. Their conduct is supposedly characterised by new modern ideals and its opposition to elders and established traditional authority. They are viewed as anti-establishment and revolutionary and yet alienated from power. They are also rebellious and subversive and have a propensity for violence to both personal and political ends.<sup>499</sup> Although this chapter does not suggest that young people in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland were acquiescent and simply adhered to established structures, it contends that the concerns of youth at the time were different and instead primarily revolved around issues surrounding matrimony and social advancement. It was within this context that conflicts amongst themselves, with elders, and with missionaries manifested.

Niara Sudarkasa proposes that the key difference between Western and African conceptions of familial relations in the past were that the West emphasised conjugal relationships while Africans stressed consanguinity. She states that

the major contrast between [West African family organisation and Western European ones] was in the different emphasis which the two traditions placed on conjugality (relationships based on marriage) and consanguinity (relationships placed on decent, i.e., on "blood ties") [...] Even though African families, like those in other parts of the world, included relationships based on both conjugality and consanguinity, they emphasized the latter.

---

<sup>498</sup> Diouf, 9; Rasmussen, 134–139; Edna G. Bay, 'Introduction', *States of Violence: Politics, Youth, and Memory in Contemporary Africa*, ed. by Edna G. Bay and Donald L. Donham, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), pp. 8–10; Waller, 77, 87.

<sup>499</sup> Honwana and Boeck, pp. 5–6; Comaroff and Comaroff, p. 19; Deborah Durham, 'Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to Parts 1 and 2', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73 (2000), 113–120; Simon Heap, "Their Days Are Spent in Gambling and Loafing, Pimping for Prostitutes, and Picking Pockets": Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island, 1920s–1960s', *Journal of Family History*, 35 (2010), 48–70; Laurent Fourchard, 'Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria, 1920–60', *The Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 115–137 (pp. 116–7).

Sudarkasa contends that family organisation in Africa was misunderstood because it was erroneously analysed through Western (conjugal) understandings of the family.<sup>500</sup> This chapter disputes Sudarkasa's emphasis on consanguinity and contends that matrimony was a major concern of the pre-colonial Yorùbá. It proposes that although conjugal matters were a major part of everyone's life, marital concerns were heightened amongst young men and women. In Abẹ̀òkúta, matters of wedlock were ubiquitous, replete with complexities, anxieties, difficulties, contradictions and conflict. This chapter also challenges the popular idea that pre-colonial Yorùbáland provided an enviable position for all women who were politically, economically and socially significant.<sup>501</sup> This idea of women's socio-political importance is propagated in historical discourses because researchers continue to analyse pre-colonial society with a sex-based lens. However, if society is viewed from an age-based perspective, it is clear that not all women enjoyed prestige. Younger unmarried and newly married women were politically irrelevant, many were economically insignificant, and their previous prestigious social position of daughter meant little in the conjugal compound, because when they married they reverted back to the status of social junior. At this stage of their lives they also faced strong community controls aimed at gearing them towards indigenous ideals of womanhood. Any familial, communal and social prestige had by women came later, when they became mothers as will be analysed in chapter four. Finally, this chapter argues that matrimony, domesticity and reproduction were not only female concerns, men were also intimately involved in all its processes due to their political, economic, and religious significance. Thus, conjugality was a high-stakes affair, laden with broad social meaning, which concerned both men and women, and activated various patriarchal and societal controls.

The missionary journals used in this thesis have extensive implications in this chapter. First, the sources necessitate that this chapter focuses on the lives of

---

<sup>500</sup> Sudarkasa, *The Strength of Our Mothers*, p. 81.

<sup>501</sup> This line of argument is pervasive in existing discourse on women's studies in Yorùbáland. For instance, Nina Mba writes that 'women in Southern Nigeria wielded more political authority, power and influence in the precolonial period than at any other time'. Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, p. 301-2. See also: LaRay Denzer, *The Iyalode in Ibadan Politics and Society, c.1850-1997* (Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers, 1998); Olademo, 44;.

free men and women simply because most journal entries on young people were about freemen and women known as *òlara*. Nevertheless, where possible, the lives of young *erú* (slaves) will be discussed to contextualise the lived experiences of the free. Additionally, all the matrimonial conflicts included in this chapter involved missionaries in some way. This is not to suggest that there were no matrimonial conflicts outside CMS purview but simply that records that detail such conflicts did not survive, and as a result, they are invisible to the modern day historian. Furthermore, missionary records give an exaggerated view of matrimonial tensions in the nineteenth century since journal entries were borne out of conflict. From reading mission journals, it is also evident that the people whom they wrote most often about when discussing social life were young men and women. This thesis posits that missionaries mentioned them frequently because this was the period of the lifecycle when people had the most contact with missionaries. The youth stage was a transitory period in the lives of young people in Abẹ̀òkúta when missionaries had the most influence because it was characterised by liminality and immense changes to their social status that brought new expectations, anxieties and problems. It therefore led youngsters to seek reprieve and solutions through new and sometimes unfamiliar means.

This chapter differs from any other research carried out on nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. Principally, it is the first account to analyse in-depth Yorùbá, and especially Ègbá, pre-colonial conjugal dynamics. It begins by examining the processes and significances of betrothal and bridewealth. It then explores the issue of marital consent in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, exploring the implications of young men and women either refusing the engagements made by their parents, or the consequences of being rejected by their intended spouse. Within this, the choices, or lack thereof, had by slaves will be discussed. The chapter then explores the actual wedding ceremony highlighting issues such as infidelity and investigates the tensions between Yorùbá ideals of morality and the rapidly changing social circumstances in Yorùbá country. This chapter will also explore the beginnings of what would later become 'youth culture'. Subsequently, it explores the matrimonial household, emphasising a bride's status within it, her relationship with her co-



wives, her duties in the home, and her economic roles in the family. The husband's roles and duties within the home will also feature. The chapter will then turn to missionary opposition to women's work and economic roles within the family and will examine how this was connected to missionary stance on polygyny. Next, it will explore affection in marriages in Abẹ̀òkúta before turning to the important topic of reproduction and posterity illustrating the role of indigenous religion, its implication for Christian conversion, and concerns surrounding male infertility. The chapter will conclude with a section on divorce. The main purpose of this chapter will be to explore how people experienced youth and correspondingly, matrimony in the nineteenth century and how these experiences were influenced by other social circumstances at the time such as warfare and indigenous social inequalities and hierarchies within Yorùbá society. It will also emphasise the role that the newly introduced Christian religion played in local matrimonial debates.

## **Betrothal**

Early and mid twentieth-century historians and sociologists who wrote extensively on the wedding process all agreed that in Yorùbáland there were few spinsters.<sup>502</sup> Everyone who could marry did so. LaRay Denzer calls marriage in Yorùbáland 'a condition of adulthood' implying that one could not start the journey to adulthood and social maturity without first getting married.<sup>503</sup> Hence, it was the essential first step to 'self-realisation'.<sup>504</sup> Everyone was expected to marry when they were considered old enough, which was usually around eighteen to twenty for females and mid-twenties to early thirties for males. These relatively late marital ages for both males and females may be linked to Yorùbá attempts to retain the crucial lineage labour of their children for as long as possible. This is because once married, parents

---

<sup>502</sup> A few exceptions included people with severe disabilities, women with important religious roles, and exceptionally successful women who headed their households who may have remained single. Fadipe, pp. 65–146; Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, pp. 59–65; Lloyd, 'The Yoruba Lineage', 235–251; Johnson, pp. 113–7; Talbot, *Volume 3*, p. 431–433; Ajisafe Moore, pp. 23–9; Bowen, pp. 304–6; Opeloye, p. 141.

<sup>503</sup> Denzer, 'Yoruba Women', 3; Laura Lee Downs also discusses important ideas and theories concerning marriage. See: Downs, p. 155.

<sup>504</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 75.

would forever lose their children's labour and the financial gains that resulted therefrom because as will be discussed below, children began working for themselves and their own households. Additionally, the age gap between what was considered an acceptable marrying age for girls and boys could be linked to women's shorter childbearing years that necessitated that they married sooner than men. Like other parts of Africa, marriage was not just a union of two individuals but an alliance of two families who from then onward cooperated and collaborated on matters that involved the entire lineage group. Such alliances could have included financially contributing to large expenses such as funerals, assisting each other in legal matters and male members fighting alongside one another during wartime. These conjugal alliances continued even after a husband's death as the levirate-type institution ensured that women remained within her conjugal household.<sup>505</sup> A person's marriage signified an end to their status as a social child and the beginning of their semi-adult position as a wife or husband. This journey to wedlock began with betrothal either at birth or in infancy.

In nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, the groom's family initiated betrothal. The responsibility of finding suitable wives for male relatives fell to female members; either older wives or daughters of a lineage.<sup>506</sup> When they found a suitable young girl, they informed the male members who then informally told the girl's parents of their intentions. This was known as *ìtọrọ iyàwó* (asking for a girl's hand in marriage).<sup>507</sup> If the girl's family welcomed the idea, a process of extensive and intricate investigations known as *ìwádìí* followed.<sup>508</sup> Both families investigated each other to ensure that they were a 'good' and desirable family, encompassing being free from physical ailments such as epilepsy, leprosy, family diseases, and mental illness.<sup>509</sup> Families also

---

<sup>505</sup> Denzer, 'Yoruba Women', 3

<sup>506</sup> Samuel Johnson, who recorded this, did not give a reason why females searched for potential brides. However, it seems that since new brides would spend most of their time with the other household females, they were given the decision of who was suitable to join their ranks. Johnson, p. 113.

<sup>507</sup> Suitability could have been based on the girl's family social standing, reputation, wealth or simply the fact that she was as yet unbetrothed. Ajisafe Moore, p. 23.

<sup>508</sup> *ìwádìí* means to investigate another's conduct, behavior, disposition and character.

<sup>509</sup> The term 'family diseases' was used here instead of hereditary diseases to avoid anachronism because the Yorùbá did not have an understanding of hereditary diseases.

investigated each other's reputation to ensure that they were free from frequent insolvency, had no members convicted, exiled or executed for crimes, and even had an amicable relationship with their neighbours.<sup>510</sup> They also ensured that both parties were completely unrelated.<sup>511</sup> If both families found themselves satisfactory on all accounts, they then consulted the family deities and *Ifá* before arriving at a final decision. Once both sides gave their consent, the girl was formally betrothed to the man or boy.<sup>512</sup>

At the formal betrothal known as *ijóhun* or *iṣihun*, the family of the bridegroom paid the first instalment of the bridewealth known locally as *popijéhun* or *owó orí* (literally translated as paying for the head). *Ijóhun* occurred at night when the workday was over and most of the important family members could be present.<sup>513</sup> It is however important to note that the end of workday only really applied to men as nineteenth-century observers spoke repeatedly about how women worked until the early hours of the morning only to get up again at dawn. People therefore chose the time convenient for male members. At *ijóhun* the groom and his family brought forty pieces of *obi* (kolanuts) and several pots of *emu* (palm wine) to his intended bride's *idilé* (compound) to entertain those present. They also brought *owó* (money) in form of *owó eyo* (cowries), the amount of which was previously agreed to by both families. Some families brought additional items depending on their affluence. This included *ataare* (alligator pepper), *orógbó* (bitter kola), a good quality cloth for his intended bride, a large cover cloth, and a head tie collectively known as *aṣo* (cloth).<sup>514</sup> At *ijóhun*, the families offered sacrifices to the household *òrìṣà* (deities) and *Ifá* for their blessings. They also offered sacrifices to *Èṣù Èlégbára*, the Yorùbá trickster god. This sacrifice was called *ẹbo iyàwó* (a bride's sacrifice). Since *Èṣù* was reputed to be a cunning god that could wreck all plans, it was important to pacify him with a sacrifice to ensure the success

---

<sup>510</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 24; Fadipe, pp. 70–1.

<sup>511</sup> Talbot, *Volume 3*, p. 713.

<sup>512</sup> A girl could be betrothed to a father's friend to consolidate their friendship or the intended groom could be a complete stranger to the family. Johnson, p. 113; Oyewumi, p. 59; Ajisafe Moore, p. 26.

<sup>513</sup> Delano, p. 125.

<sup>514</sup> Delano, pp.123-125.

of the betrothal and eventual marriage.<sup>515</sup> At the ceremony, the groom's kolanuts were spilt and shared amongst those present. Some kolanuts were also saved for important absentees as partaking meant that these people not only witnessed but also consented to the betrothal.<sup>516</sup> The families then feasted together in the intended bride's compound. *Ijóhun* was very significant as it established the groom's sole sexual access to the girl, and jural rights over all children she bore in future.<sup>517</sup> From that day, any sexual indiscretion on her part was considered *pañságà* (adultery).<sup>518</sup> Furthermore, the intended bride, from then on, could not see or speak to her intended husband. She was also not allowed to converse with any member of the groom's compound if it could be avoided. If her groom already had wives, the intended bride had to avert her eyes if she met them on the street and *kúnlẹ̀* (fall on her knees) to greet them. All these were physical demonstrations of *itijú* (modesty) and *òwò* (respect) for her social, and often biological, seniors.<sup>519</sup> After *ijóhun*, the prospective husband had to perform free manual labour for his bride-to-be's family to show his commitment to the lineage and his dependability as an *àna* (in-law).<sup>520</sup> Such work included clearing land for farming, supplying firewood - sometimes as often as once a week, building or thatching roofs, and other general household repairs.<sup>521</sup> He also began contributing to the financial undertakings of his intended in-laws, including costs incurred during yearly feasts and funeral expenses. W. Williams, a CMS missionary, also added that the intended groom was obliged to send a yearly choice of new corn and yam for as many years until his intended bride could be wed.<sup>522</sup>

When the bride came of age, the bridegroom paid the final brideprice just before the wedding. This was known as *ìdána* (engagement). *Ìdána* marked the alliance of the two families and all the items brought were previously

<sup>515</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 23; Delano, p. 122; Johnson, p. 113.

<sup>516</sup> Johnson, p. 114.

<sup>517</sup> Kristin Mann, 'Marriage Choices among the Educated African Elite in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14 (1981), 201-228 (p. 207); Fadipe, pp. 60-1.

<sup>518</sup> Crowther, p. 243; Peter C. Lloyd, 'Divorce among the Yoruba', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 70 (1968), 67-81 (p. 69).

<sup>519</sup> Bowen, p. 304; Johnson, p. 113.

<sup>520</sup> Fadipe, p. 74.

<sup>521</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 23; Delano, p. 128.

<sup>522</sup> W. Williams, Journal, 23 November 1878.

negotiated and agreed to by both parties. Items in *idána* were identical to *ijóhun* and included kolanut, bitter kola, cloth, cowries, *oti* (alcoholic spirits) and *eran* (livestock), the value of which depended on the affluence of the groom's family. Some of these items were consumed during the actual wedding ceremony.<sup>523</sup> If either the intended bride or groom died or was captured and enslaved after bridewealth payments had been made, the girl's family had to pay back the sum or in some cases, the bride's sister replaced her, or the bride was given to another male member of the groom's family.<sup>524</sup> A missionary commented that this was 'no doubt' to prevent repayment.<sup>525</sup> Prior to the wedding, the bride had her scarification procedure where the marks distinguishing her town of origin and in some cases patrilineage were cut into her back. The husband-to-be provided all the materials necessary for the procedure including *epo pupa* (palm-oil) to be rubbed on the scars, *ita* (firewood) for the hearth in the room where it was performed, one leg of *etu* (chamois) to feed the people present, and cowries to pay those who performed the scarification.<sup>526</sup> Scarification was performed in private without any celebrations and unlike many part of Africa, there were no other elaborate initiation ceremonies for brides.<sup>527</sup>

Historians have proposed several theories as to the significance of bridewealth in Yorùbáland. Rhonda Howard suggests that bridewealth served not only as consent of marriage but also an insurance against its dissolution. This is because 'a man who divorced his wife without cause permanently forfeited the brideprice'.<sup>528</sup> Conversely, if a woman left her husband without a culturally sanctioned reason, such as extreme physical harm, she or her family would have to repay the fee.<sup>529</sup> Bascom argues this point in his study of the Yorùbá in 1960s Ife when he wrote that if it was proved that a man maltreated or brutalised his wife, then she could leave without repaying the

---

<sup>523</sup> Ajisafe Moore, pp. 23–4; Mann, 'Marriage Choices', 208.

<sup>524</sup> If the sister was already engaged then they could substitute with any unengaged female relative provided the groom's family consented.

<sup>525</sup> *Iwé Iròhin*, January 1865.

<sup>526</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 24.

<sup>527</sup> For an example of initiation ceremonies in Africa, see Rasmussen, 133-144.

<sup>528</sup> Rhoda Howard, 'Human Rights and Personal Law: Women in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 12 (1982), 45–52 (p. 47).

<sup>529</sup> Howard, 47.

bridewealth fee. Presumably, the refunding of bridewealth allowed men regain lost funds that could then be used to contract another union. Therefore, withholding bridewealth from violent husbands was a punitive measure, as such men would then need to gather new resources to engage a new bride. Bascom also added that some informants suggested that bridewealth was compensation for the loss of the productive and domestic labour of girls and recompense for a mother's care.<sup>530</sup>

Nineteenth-century records do not elaborate on the purposes of bridewealth but needless to say that it finalised the marriage process.<sup>531</sup> It established the man's sole sexual access and rights to a woman's reproductive labour, and thereafter he could claim compensation from adulterers. In Yorùbáland, it seems that bridewealth was synonymous with parental consent because should a parent not agree to the union, then they would not collect bridewealth. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, when there was already pervasive British influence, bridewealth was still considered indispensable to the marriage contract. In 1900, a family in Abẹ̀òkúta demanded that their daughter Modejo be returned to them because Ade, 'the man she lived with' in Oṅdó, had taken her without their permission or paying the brideprice.<sup>532</sup> This incident illustrates that men were only recognised as husbands after payments were made. The reference to the young man as 'the man she lived with' instead of 'her husband' clearly sent the message that he was by no means recognised as her spouse. Any attempts to subvert bridewealth could therefore lead to the bride's family reclaiming their daughter and any children she bore. It is also noteworthy that at no point did Lijadu, the missionary who recorded this incident, refer to Ade as Modejo's husband even though ideologically missions were against bridewealth payments. Therefore, similar to Margot Lovett's and Brett Shadle's respective studies of bridewealth in

---

<sup>530</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 60-1.

<sup>531</sup> Since nineteenth-century records do not elaborate on the purposes of bridewealth many questions remain unanswered. Such questions include how bridewealth transformed and increased or decreased in consequence of political, economic and social changes. Jack Goody and S. A. Tambiah's book on bridewealth and dowry answer these questions in the context of other parts of Africa and Asia. See: Jack Goody and Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>532</sup> Lijadu, Family papers, 5 June 1900.

Western Tanzania and Gusiiland, Kenya, a man who contracted a non-bridewealth union in Yorùbáland had no legal rights to his wife.<sup>533</sup>

Some nineteenth-century observers, and missionaries in particular, were opposed to the payment of bridewealth. They claimed that bridewealth exchange demonstrated African women's 'slave-like' status and established women as merely currency for men.<sup>534</sup> Andrew Gollmer, one of the first missionaries in Yorùbáland, enjoined, begged and even threatened converts not to take or give any money in an engagement. In reference to bridewealth he wrote in 1857 that he was:

[s]orry to say that our converts still claim part of the heathenish custom, that is paying or receiving a small sum from £1-3, but it is a bad principle which I brought before my people - begging them to adopt the Christian principle and never receive any money on the head of their daughter.<sup>535</sup>

He argued that bridewealth was not only an unnecessary burden on a man and his family, it allowed wives to be blackmailed into compliance with the threat that if they disobeyed, they would be sent home and her family would have to repay the sum.<sup>536</sup> It is likely that these were simply idle threats because a husband that sent his wife away for disobedience forfeited his bridewealth. Therefore, unlike other regions where historians have argued that bridewealth was an 'ideological dimension of female subservience [...] and control' this was not the case in Yorùbáland because it protected both women and men.<sup>537</sup> After all payments were made, the bride moved permanently to her conjugal home in a ceremony known as *igbéyàwó* literally translated as carrying the bride.

---

<sup>533</sup> Margot Lovett, "'She Thinks She Is a Man": Marriage and (de)constructing Gender Identity in Colonial Buha, Western Tanzania, 1943-1960', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 47-66 (pp. 58-9); Brett L. Shadle, 'Bridewealth and Female Consent: Marriage Disputes in African Courts, Gusiiland, Kenya', *The Journal of African History*, 44 (2003), 241-262.

<sup>534</sup> Beecham 1841 cited in Lynn M Thomas and Jennifer Cole, 'Thinking through Love in Africa', in *Love in Africa* ed. by Lynn M Thomas and Jennifer Cole (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 1-30 (pp. 7-8).

<sup>535</sup> Andrew Gollmer, *Journal*, 15 June 1857.

<sup>536</sup> Andrew Gollmer, *Journal*, 15 June 1857.

<sup>537</sup> Lovett, pp. 58-9.

## Slaves and slave wives in Abẹ̀òkúta

Slavery was part of the fabric of Abẹ̀òkúta society and about a third of the population were ẹ̀rú (slaves). A person became a slave in the nineteenth century either through capture, by committing a crime whose punishment was enslavement, or as result of being born to a slave parent. Notwithstanding trans-Atlantic slavery, most slaves remained in Yorùbáland.<sup>538</sup> Since a person could be captured at any time, anybody could be a slave, and the status of slaves in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta was one of contradiction. On the one hand, slaves had a relatively good position in society. Unlike those in the Americas, an observer wrote that ‘the slave population as a rule are not overburdened with work’, lest they run away.<sup>539</sup> Although the majority of their productive labour was for their masters, many were given time to pursue a trade or vocation so as to accumulate enough funds to buy their freedom.<sup>540</sup> They could also emancipate themselves by capturing others as a replacement. Friends, relatives and later missionaries, could likewise ransom a slave.<sup>541</sup> A master could not simply give a slave his freedom, freedom had to be purchased. If a man freed a slave without ransom, after his death, his family could reclaim him/her. Masters who did not give their slaves opportunities for redemption however bore an increased risk of their slaves deserting.<sup>542</sup> Slavery was so integral to Abẹ̀òkúta society that when Reverend James Johnson told Christians not to buy slaves and set those they had free, Christian slave owners were enraged, arguing that they could not do without their slaves. Slaves were not only ‘a sort of currency’ that could be exchanged for goods and services, they also performed household labour, worked on farms, traded for their masters and tended to their master’s livestock. These

---

<sup>538</sup> Olatunji Ojo, ‘Slavery, Marriage and Gender Relations in Eastern Yorubaland, 1875-1920’, in *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture, and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterland (Blacks in the Diaspora)*, ed. by Judith A Byfield, LaRay Denzer and Anthea Morrison (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 144–176 (p. 145); Olatunji Ojo, ‘The Organization of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Yorubaland, ca.1777 to ca.1856’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41 (2008), 77-100 (p. 80).

<sup>539</sup> *Iwé Iròhin*, November 1863.

<sup>540</sup> Samuel Cole, *Journal*, 16-17 December 1877.

<sup>541</sup> Andrew Maser, *Journal*, 3 October 1878.

<sup>542</sup> Nathaniel Young, *Journal*, 12 September 1877; Peel writes extensively on slavery in the nineteenth century. See: Peel, *Religious Encounter*, pp. 63–70.



activities, slave owners claimed, were too herculean to undertake themselves and would be too expensive if they were to hire labourers.<sup>543</sup> Nineteenth-century observers wrote that slaves were so well treated that they could not distinguish between a slave and a freeman. In a compound, only foreign scarification and facial marks distinguished slaves from descendants. A missionary even wrote that ‘we only know slaves by enquiry’.<sup>544</sup> Furthermore, when some slaves ransomed themselves, they chose to remain in their master’s compound rather than return home.<sup>545</sup> Slaves could also reach the highest position in society. The head slave of Ààṛé Kúrúńmí, the military dictator of Ìjàyè was reputed to be wealthier than the town chiefs. When Ìjàyè was destroyed, and its fleeing inhabitants moved to Abẹ̀òkúta, Kúrúńmí’s slave, now free, was ‘acknowledged the Chief of the Ijaye people’.<sup>546</sup>

Nevertheless, a slave was not a freeman. Although it was said to be disgraceful to sell one’s slaves, especially house slaves, who worked in the compound, because their constant presence in the home symbolically made them a lineage member, it remained a common practice.<sup>547</sup> Slaves thus lived with the insecurity that they could potentially be sold at anytime. They did not have freedom of movement, and due to their foreign status and lack of ties to the community, they were more likely to be used as a human sacrifice if the need arose.<sup>548</sup> A master could do with slaves as he pleased, including killing them without repercussions. Should another party kill a slave, rather than a capital sentence passed for the murder of a freeman, the slave’s master chose the punishment, sometimes imposing a fine on the perpetrator.<sup>549</sup> No one could challenge a master regarding his treatment of a slave and neither could they care for a slave in his/her master’s absence. Slaves were also not given the same burial rites as freemen. Only masters could bury their slaves

---

<sup>543</sup> Due to this dispute, Johnson was eventually removed from Abẹ̀òkúta to Lagos. James Johnson, Letter to Reverend Wright, 29 November 1879.

<sup>544</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1863.

<sup>545</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1863.

<sup>546</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1863.

<sup>547</sup> William Allen, Journal, 29 August 1869.

<sup>548</sup> Human sacrifices in Abẹ̀òkúta were very rare. Only slaves in Oṅdó, where the practice was common were in danger of being used as a sacrifice. See Olatunji Ojo, ‘Slavery and Human Sacrifice in Yorubaland: Ondo, c 1870-94’, *The Journal of African History*, 46 (2005), 379–404.

<sup>549</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, June 1864.

and their bodies were often thrown into the bush. Should a slave die in the absence of his master, rather than be buried, their bodies were hanged in public to notify the incoming owner of their death, proving that the slave had not been sold in his absence.<sup>550</sup>

In some cases, the owners of slaves were so ruthless that should a slave die, the people were unsure of what to do with their babies and infants so as not to incur the wrath of their owner. In 1871, Daniel Olubi recounted the circumstances surrounding Mercy Donike's death. He wrote:

At my return, I met little Mercy Donike on a mat having died. Donike was an infant whose mother when she died was put by a brook in Kudeti because she was the slave of a cruel man who would make palaver should she be buried in his absence. In consequence of this, she was thrown away and her poor little infant of about three months was put into a calabash and placed by her deceased mother. Two days and night with a heavy rain passed over the unfortunate child. However she was discovered by crying. A bold young Christian widow of about twenty rushed through the bush by the brook and picked it up by the side of the deceased mother. But she had been lying too long under the cold. She died after eight days of careful nursing and having baptised her, she received a Christian burial.<sup>551</sup>

The unscrupulous handling of dead slaves in Yorùbáland was expressed in the Yorùbá proverb: *ẹ́rú kíí ẹ̀mọ́ ọ̀gí, ẹ́rú kú ìyá kò gbọ́, ọ̀mọ́ kú ọ̀gbé ta, ẹ́rú ẹ̀mọ́ ní ilé ìyá rẹ́ rí* - (a slave is not a senseless block of wood; when a slave dies, his mother hears nothing of it, but when a (free-born) child dies, there is lamentation; yet the slave, too, was once a child in his mother's house).<sup>552</sup>

Many men married slave wives in the nineteenth century to ease the bridewealth burden because men did not need to worry about brideprice when marrying a slave. To wed a slave, one only needed to either capture or buy a female slave from a slave market or a slave dealer, have sexual relations with her, and keep her in his compound. c<sup>553</sup> Campbell commented that 'a less

---

<sup>550</sup> Daniel Olubi (Ibàdàn), Journal, 26 February 1874.

<sup>551</sup> Daniel Olubi, Journal, 6 October 1871.

<sup>552</sup> Crowther, p. 98.

<sup>553</sup> Although the sources make no mention of the appropriate age to wed a slave wife, it is assumed that men also married slave women after the societally acceptable age of eighteen. Furthermore, if a woman was married before her capture and enslavement, her slavery

troublesome way of procuring a wife, with many, is to resort to the slave-marts of Ilorin at once, money in hand, and make their choice'.<sup>554</sup> Although slaves were expensive, men considered them cheaper than the long-term costs of bridewealth. It also saved them time spent in waiting for free women to mature.<sup>555</sup> Furthermore, unlike free women, slave wives did not have to consent to marriage. Since they were quite literally bought, they had no say as to whom they married. Moreover, in contrast to free wives who worked independently of their husbands, slave wives had to work for themselves and their children's upkeep as well as for their master-husbands. Besides, they were an 'investment' because unlike free wives, they could be sold. As Emily Burrill argues, slave wives were at once 'concubine, commodity and worker'.<sup>556</sup> From reading the sources, one gets the impression that slave wives were never married as first wives since in Yorùbáland, the ascension of adulthood required that a man pass through the proper betrothal and bridewealth process.<sup>557</sup>

### **Female marital consent in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta**

One topic which historians have all but ignored when discussing marriage in Yorùbáland is the issue of consent. This section will address this issue by asking what roles brides and groom played within betrothal and engagement negotiations in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland? What happened if a young man or woman came of age and refused the choice their parents had made on their behalf? Could all young men and women reject their engagements? On what grounds could they do this? What were the consequences of doing so and what role did missionaries and Christianity play in these marital

---

invalidated her previous marriage contract and another man could marry her. She could only return to her previous husband if he paid her ransom, if she ransomed herself or if she was redeemed by another party. Campbell, pp. 58–9.

<sup>554</sup> Campbell, pp. 58-9.

<sup>555</sup> In 1847, a young female slave cost 10 heads of cowries, an equivalent of \$5. This was comparatively expensive as labourers typically earned 4-8 strings of cowries per day (4-8 cents. Currency and worth will be discussed below.

<sup>556</sup> Emily S. Burrill, "'Wives of Circumstance': Gender and Slave Emancipation in Late Nineteenth-Century Senegal", *Slavery & Abolition*, 29 (2008), 49–64 (p. 52).

<sup>557</sup> It was common for free men to marry slave wives but male slaves could not marry free women.

arrangements? More succinctly, what kinds of social navigation were possible for young men and women within the indigenous structures of marriage? Were any freedoms or agency possible? This section argues that there were. Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Samuel Johnson remarked that although much depended on the girl liking a man when she was of age, no girl married without her parent's consent and it was rare for a girl to refuse her parent's choice.<sup>558</sup> Whether rare or not, missionary influences in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta precipitated a certain phenomenon whereby young men and women defied their adult kin and refused to fulfill their betrothal. Arising at first as isolated individual incidents, by the end of the nineteenth century, it was a wider social shift. Bowen addressed this when he reported that 'it sometimes happens that [a girl] prefers some other man, and absolutely refuses to fulfil her engagement, [t]hen she is either teased or worried into submission, or else the husband agrees to receive back his dowry and release her'.<sup>559</sup> Although Bowen gave an ideal resolution to a women's refusal of her intended husband, the reality was infinitely more complex.<sup>560</sup>

From the start of missionary activities in Abẹ̀òkúta, mission journals include multiple entries about young, free, unmarried women put in stocks or severely beaten for converting (see fig 3.1). In 1852 a missionary wrote that only Şugbua, the Aláké, could deliver a girl from the hands of her parents and relatives who had confined her for ten days and severely flogged and 'scourged' her because she would not take part in sacrifices, insisting that she wished to convert to Christianity.<sup>561</sup> At first, these entries seem akin to the childhood rebellions of the previous chapter. For girls of marriageable age however, conversion and persecution took on new meanings and implications. G. F. Buhler gave better insight into this when he wrote in 1856 that a 'native convert' came to him to ask his advice about his daughter. She was also a candidate for baptism, and for this reason the 'heathen' husband to whom she

---

<sup>558</sup> Johnson, pp. 116-117.

<sup>559</sup> Bowen, p. 304.

<sup>560</sup> As stated previously, using CMS journals restricts our scope of analysis to events that concerned missions in Abẹ̀òkúta. This is not to say that there were no other vectors for change besides missionaries, neither does it imply that all young men and women consented to their matches prior to the arrival of missions in Yorùbáland.

<sup>561</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, 6 May 1852.

was betrothed had rejected her. She had also implored her father not to marry her to a 'heathen' because she could not 'partake of sacrifices often made to idols'. When her pleas failed, she declared that she could be bound, beaten or even killed but she would not marry a non-Christian man. The father, although a Christian, was very anxious about what to do. He was in a dilemma because he had received exorbitant brideprice and labour from the future husband that he could not pay back. Since he had no way to restore the money, he considered marrying her to a more lenient non-Christian who would allow her remain in the church but again she refused. When Mr Buhler heard this, he and Mr Hoch, another missionary repaid the monetary sum of the bridewealth to the daughter's intended husband from the funds that CMS missionaries set aside for ransoming Christian slaves. Buhler wrote that girl was 'quite free' to make her own marriage choice 'according to the law of the country; the father cannot make an engagement without her consent'.<sup>562</sup>

---

<sup>562</sup> G.F. Buhler, Journal, 1856.



Fig 3.1: Illustration of prisoner in stocks. The *Church Missionary Gleaner* described being put in stocks as '[a] very trying punishment [...] where holes are made in the walls, sometimes two feet high from the ground: through these the feet are passed, and made fast in stocks on the other side. The body is then thrown on the shoulders, and the man is compelled to prop himself on his hands and arms: the sinews are all strained and the sufferer can find no rest'. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, November 1850.

This journal entry sheds light on the anxieties that surrounded marriage in the nineteenth century. Due to the social and religious changes occurring in Abẹ̀òkúta, most especially the arrival of missionaries, young men and women were converting to Christianity and rejecting a lifestyle that they considered incompatible with their new found faith. When it came to matters surrounding marriage, this usually meant rejecting the matches made for them when they were children, and thus breaking from established traditions. According to nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta customs, young people could not be forced into marriage. If a young woman refused her suitor for whatever reason, the family could not forcefully broker a marriage. They could cajole and coerce her, but

ultimately, daughters needed to *consent* to the marriage even under duress. Of course consent in this context is very different from modern day understandings of the term. Consent today means to agree of one's free will without pressure or coercion, but the kind of consent available to these persecuted young women in the nineteenth century was circumscribed consent. This meant that young women only needed to verbally agree to the union and participate in the marriage process. Parents often went to great lengths to ensure that girls consented because if they did not, the bridewealth, paid by the intended husband and his family, had to be refunded. When the *ijóhun*, *ìdána*, free labour and gifts given over the years were converted to a monetary sum, the figure was often so great that the bride's family would not have the means to repay. At this point, the bride's parents would give their daughter to another man who repaid the bridewealth. If she insisted on marrying a Christian, the matter would prove more difficult as missionaries were opposed to their congregation paying brideprice. Sometimes, missionaries intervened and brokered a deal by repaying the sum. Once they did this, a girl could marry whomever she pleased, demonstrating that bridewealth served as the marriage contract.

Young convert girls' objection to their engagement to non-Christians was heightened by the CMS refusal to grant full church membership to people engaged to those they considered 'heathens'. In 1853, Ajayi Crowther married a young couple. The young woman had been a candidate for baptism for five years but her baptism had been delayed because of the 'heathen' husband she was compelled to marry. However, she was later relieved of this obligation and allowed to marry her own choice of husband when her father repaid the bridewealth to her former fiancé.<sup>563</sup> In 1856, Crowther wrote that many young people were 'freeing' themselves from the unions their parents had made for them 'before they were capable of judging for themselves'. He added that before a young woman married:

their intended husband is invited to church by the intended wife and in case of refusal, the intended marriage engagement must be

---

<sup>563</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 13 July 1853.

broken because the convert cannot be unevenly yoked together with an unbeliever.<sup>564</sup>

Missionaries therefore not only linked faith and matrimony, they also indirectly used marriage as a means of gaining converts. Nevertheless, girls were usually at a disadvantage because if her parents were not converts, they often sided with the groom to avoid bridewealth repayments. Young women thus had to bear the consequences of their decisions, often meted out as harsh flogging from family elders and imprisonment within the compound until she agreed to the union.<sup>565</sup>

There were some isolated incidences where some parents, usually those who were friendly with missionaries and Europeans, released their convert daughters from their engagements despite their own religious affiliations. An Abèòkúta chief once paid fifty heads of cowries (the monetary equivalent of the bridewealth he received) to a man to whom his Christian daughter had been previously engaged.<sup>566</sup> He told missionaries that 'she was at liberty to make her own choice according to the religion she had embraced'.<sup>567</sup> Considering the sum the man paid as compensation to the intended groom, we can deduce that he was a wealthy chief and he could afford to pay back the fee. Fifty heads of cowries, the then equivalent of \$25, was a large sum as missionaries often pegged the cost of the average brideprice at ten heads of cowries (\$5). This brings us to a second problem of consent, which is the inflation of bridewealth.<sup>568</sup>

---

<sup>564</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 15 January 1856.

<sup>565</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 6 July 1855.

<sup>566</sup> In Johnson's History of the Yorubas, he stated currency and value in Yorùbáland as follows: 'Cowries were the smallest denominations. 50 cowries equalled 1 string, 50 strings equalled 1 head, 10 heads equalled 1 bag. 50 cowries or one string equalled 1 cent at the time, 2 heads equalled \$1 and 1 bag equalled \$5'. In terms of worth, a labourer received 4-8 strings of cowries daily (4-8 cents); and in 1847 *Ifá* cost approximately 15 heads of cowries (\$7.5) while a female slave cost 10 head of cowries (\$5). Johnson also wrote that 2 strings of cowries (2 cents) generally supplied the want of any man in a day. These values of course fluctuated but Johnson regarded this as representative. Johnson, p. 119; Rev Ajayi Corwther, Journal, 23 September 1847.

<sup>567</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 15 January 1856.

<sup>568</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 15 January 1856.



Missionaries in Abẹ̀òkúta often wrote that the value of bridewealth was often inflated to double, treble and sometimes more in the event of a dissolved engagement and parents had no choice but to pay these fees.<sup>569</sup> In 1857 a girl was brought to Andrew Gollmer for protection. Her parents had brokered her engagement when she was younger and received bridewealth. They had subsequently converted to Christianity at the Aké Church under Henry Townsend and no longer wanted their daughter to marry a non-Christian. Although they wished for a quiet and easy settlement to the broken engagement, agreeing to repay the man thirty heads of cowries, twenty of which he had paid in monetary forms and the remaining ten as a monetary equivalent to the gifts he had given, the man refused and demanded one hundred and eleven heads of cowries, almost five times the value of what they claimed he had paid. When the matter was referred to the chiefs, they ruled that the parents should pay sixty heads of cowries, double the amount the parents considered appropriate. However, due to war, the matter was postponed and we do not know how it was finally resolved. Since the intended husband was a powerful chief, the girl was brought to Gollmer in Lagos because her family feared that he would try to kidnap or injure her.<sup>570</sup> This problem of inflation was prevalent in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. Since it was difficult to quantify the groom's labour and gifts given over time, sometimes up to twenty years, grooms often asked for more than they paid. If parents hoped to dissolve the engagement, they had little choice but to pay the inflated fee demanded. If they could not do this, the matter was referred to the chiefs for an amicable decision or parent appealed to missionaries for help in refunding the amount.

Matters were even direr when a groom rejected his bride for being a Christian either as an individual choice as a form of resistance to missionaries, due to family pressure, or his personal religious beliefs. In such cases, non-Christian parents forced their children to renounce Christianity until they married and the union was consummated because then, the groom could no longer

---

<sup>569</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 15 January 1856; Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 15 June 1857.

<sup>570</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 15 June 1857.

reclaim the bridewealth on the basis of the girl's religious preference. In 1855, Thomas King visited the parents of a young female Aké convert after which he wrote the following entry.

On entering the compound [...] The young woman was lying in the piazza her body quite lacerated over by whips. She was brutally punished because she would not adhere to the advice of the parents which was that she should stop a while from attending church till she reached her husband's house as he determined not to take her as long as she does not abandon going to church. The sole cause of their persecution against her was as I said before to compel her to yield to the husband's wishes and requests who determined not to have anything to do with the woman who follows book religion [Christianity]. The parents affirmed that they never troubled her since she commenced coming to church. Because she would not yield to their admonitions was the cause of this. Having received so much cowries from the husband, consequently they are under the obligation to please him to the great injury of their daughter and therefore they determined to obtain that obedience by severity which admonition failed to produce. When I enquired whether she refused to have the man, it was said that she was quite ready to go with the man anytime he should come for her; only she would not give up her profession in order that the husband may have her. Finding the young woman so firm and resolute after such severe punishment I asked the parents what they intended to do further with her so as to comply with the husband's wishes. They acknowledged that they [knew not] as regards what steps should be taken in the case but that I should help them either to speak to the young woman to comply with their advice or I should try to speak to the husband to take her [...] I told them I would say no such thing to her and I persuaded them to imitate her conduct and turn to God. As for the husband, since his wife has not offended him in anything, neither has she refused to have him but only acts according to the law of the King viz that everyone should be left to follow what religion one chooses, I have nothing to say to him.<sup>571</sup>

Religious freedom in Abẹ̀òkúta not only extended to missionaries and immigrants, but all free residents had the right to practice whatever religion they chose without harassment or persecution. We can gather from this account that the intended husband was probably a man of means and position in society rather than a junior marrying for the first time. The entry says that the man was 'determined' not to have anything to do with a

---

<sup>571</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 6 July 1855.

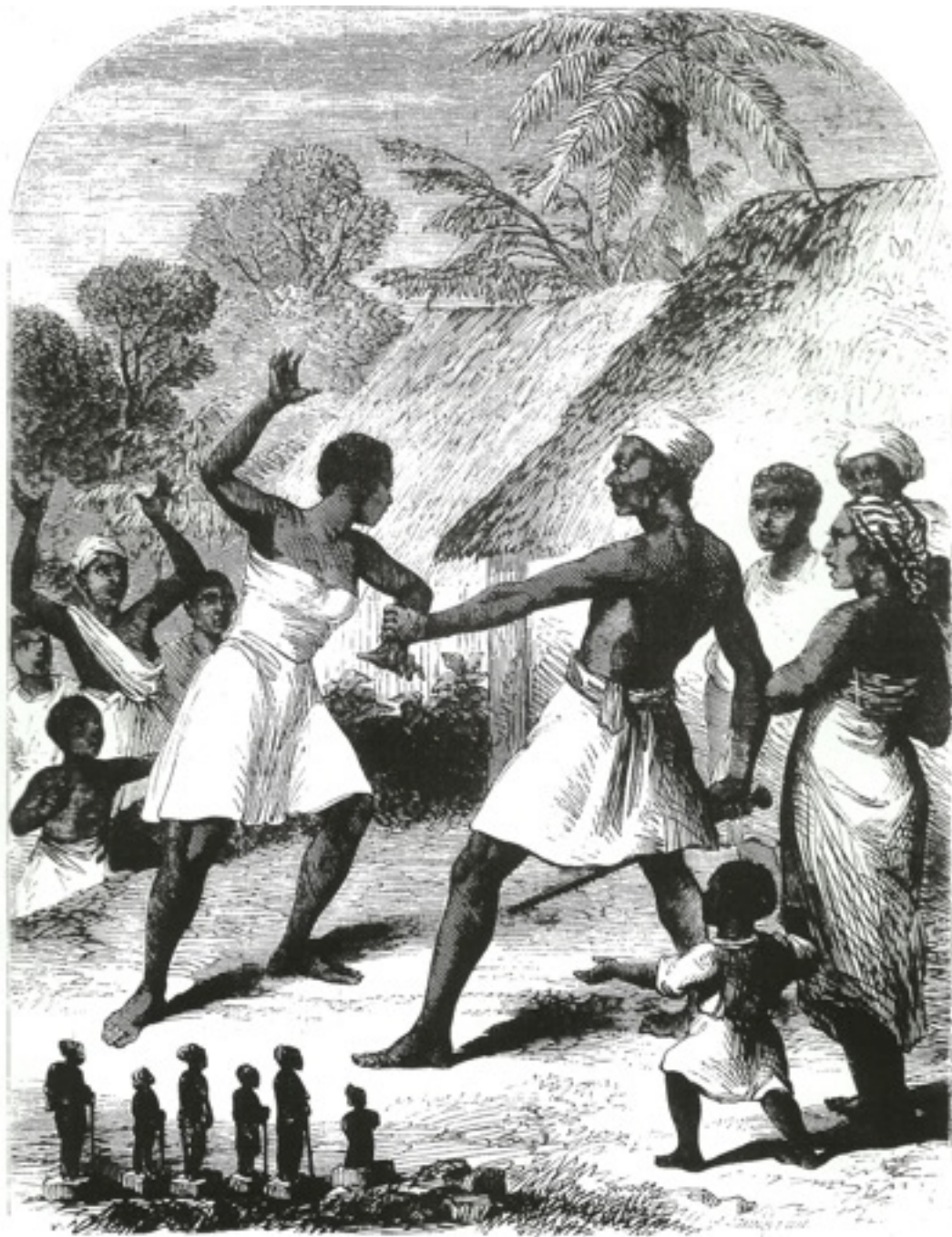
Christian. As will be discussed later, men marrying for the first time were less likely to make such demands as their ascension to adulthood depended on their (first) marriage and for that reason, they often did all they could to keep their brides. Moreover, a bride's religion was not a traditionally legitimate reason for rejecting a union, and a fiancé who did so would have to forfeit his brideprice. But as said in chapter one, the extra-legal societal hierarchy allowed a high ranking man to subvert local customs and insist on a refund, especially if he was wealthier and more respected than the bride's family. His wealth, power and influence also meant that he could intimidate the bride's family into compliance.<sup>572</sup> This entry also shows that physical coercion through beating was seen as an acceptable way to control young girls in Yorùbáland (see fig 3.2).<sup>573</sup> Corporal punishment, considered a corrective measure rather than a punitive one, was used to coerce young women into submission because any dissenting or wayward character reflected poorly in her patrilineage. Despite its construction as corrective, physical coercion could have had unforeseen consequences and lead to death, the most extreme and final form of control.<sup>574</sup> A girl that rejected her engagement therefore took a bold step because the penalties of dissent were dismal. The entry further reiterates that outsiders, whether missionaries, neighbours or chiefs, could not interfere in compound matters without invitation even if certain activities within it, such as the persecution of Christians, went against the laws of the land.

---

<sup>572</sup> The process of law making and its methods of implementation will be discussed in the chapter four.

<sup>573</sup> Emily Burrill writes about the physical coercion of young women with regards to Mali, see Emily Burrill, 'Disputing Wife Abuse', *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 47 (2007), 603–622 (pp. 605–606).

<sup>574</sup> It is important to state here that although many young women declared that they were willing to die for their beliefs, no report of death from these kinds of persecutions were discovered in the records. A lack of fatalities could have been because such deaths would be considered murder and the murderer would be persecuted according to law. But more likely, deaths were rare, if any, because a parent's affection for their children prevented them from inflicting severe wounds that could lead to death.



PERSECUTION OF A CHRISTIAN DAUGHTER AT IBADAN.

Fig 3.2: Illustration of the 'persecution of a Christian daughter at Ibadan'. In this CMS depiction of a young woman's religious persecution, the daughter is being beaten in a compound by the household male, presumably her father, with an iron rod as the compound members (right) look on. A woman, presumably her mother and some children (her siblings) protest on the left corner while the idols she refuses to worship lay on the floor. We also see the daughter attempt to strike her assailant perhaps in an attempt to escape. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, February 1860.

The principle of non-interference however only applied if the persecuted individual physically remained within the compound. If she escaped, then

outsiders could intervene, as was the case of Mọlólú in 1856. Mọlólú was a young woman in a similar position, but she managed to escape from her compound to the mission house in Aké when her ill-treatment became too severe. When the mother went to retrieve her, Andrew Wilhelm, the missionary at the station, told her that if her only complaint against her daughter was that she was Christian then the mission could protect her by the laws of Aké and if she did not desist, the matter would be referred to the *Aláké*.<sup>575</sup> Although the mother agreed to cease the beatings and Mọlólú returned to her compound, the persecution continued. When she escaped a second time, she remained permanently at the mission house where her family could not take her against her will.<sup>576</sup> Not only was religious freedom protected in Abẹ̀òkúta, if a family went against it, they stood to lose their jural rights over their children. Nevertheless, as said earlier, the implementation of indigenous laws in Abẹ̀òkúta depended on the status of the families involved. If the persecuting family was of a high status, cases could be ruled in their favour despite its contradiction to law. Accordingly, when a prominent family in Aké victimised their daughter for not agreeing to abandon Christianity until after her marriage, she fled to the mission house for protection. This time, the family took the matter to the *Aláké* (ruler of Aké) and he decided in the family's favour. He ordered the missionaries to return the girl but 'admonished' the family not to be violent with the girl as religious freedom was a right for all. He added further that 'many of the Christian people who did not serve the *orisha* [...] lived happily'.<sup>577</sup> Missionaries reluctantly restored the girl to her parents stating that the family's affluence swayed the *Aláké*'s decision.

It is impossible to know what consequences a family faced if they simply refused to return the bridewealth because no single instance of this was discovered on record. Most likely, the *Ògbóni* (civil chiefs) would have fined them and should they continue to resist payment, some of their members may have been arrested and sold into slavery to refund the bridewealth fee. It would have subjected the bride's lineage members to constant harassment

---

<sup>575</sup> William Kirkman, Journal, 14 April 1856.

<sup>576</sup> This entry also tells us a little about the limited power of rulers who citizens disobeyed the law without fear of retribution.

<sup>577</sup> Andrew Maser, Journal, 17 April 1853.

and even injury from the offended party without any consequence to the plaintiff. It would have brought the offending lineage great shame and their neighbours and acquaintances would tease and mock them. But most importantly, a refusal to refund bridewealth in the event of a broken engagement would have made it very difficult for the family to broker any other engagement because *ìwádíí* (investigations) would have exposed them as unscrupulous and untrustworthy family. This would have had far-reaching consequences as the bride's family would no longer gain wealth and income from bridewealth, and they would have been unable to form family alliances that were crucial at the period. It would also have meant that their members would remain single and unmarried, a social aberration at the time.

As the century progressed, Christian influences became so widespread in Abẹ̀òkúta that it became quite common for girls, both Christian and otherwise to chose their own husbands, fundamentally weakening the institution of marriage as a communal agreement and a means of striking family alliances.<sup>578</sup> This happened to such an extent that after a certain age, young women were regarded as old enough to make their own decisions even if they were as yet unmarried. This was in direct contrast to the early and mid-nineteenth century where a girl was considered to have begun their ascent to adulthood only after her wedding.<sup>579</sup> In 1871, James White wrote:

This day the eldest daughter of Chief Olokun paid me a visit. I asked her why I had never seen her in church on the Christian Sabbath. I am afraid of my father she said. I told her I do not think your father can object to your coming to serve God as I have often conversed with him on the subject. Besides you are of age in earnest. I do not think he will oppose you.<sup>580</sup>

This phenomenon of being 'of age' before marriage was a new ideal introduced by Christian influences.

---

<sup>578</sup> Jack Goody writes about the Church weakening family alliances in Medieval Europe. See Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>579</sup> Modern day historians cannot know the exact age of those considered mature enough to make independent decisions because the Yorùbá did not track age. From missionary entries, this was probably between 15-17, just before a girl was traditionally considered old enough to marry.

<sup>580</sup> James White, Journal, 23 May 1871.

For slave wives, the situation was quite different. Slave wives, unlike free women, could not openly rebel religiously and had to do the bidding of their master-husbands. Since slaves were considered property, religious freedom was not extended to them. Rather than persecution, a slave wife who rebelled faced the risk of being sold or killed. A slave woman once told missionaries that she wanted to convert but since her master wished to marry her she would not have the privilege of doing so stating that because she was a slave 'he could do with her as he liked'.<sup>581</sup> In another representative case, when Adéṣàtán, an Abẹ̀òkúta trader, converted to Christianity and began attending church, her owner-husband like many others brutally beat her and put her in stocks. However, her slave status meant that she could neither run to the mission house for protection as the law only applied to the free, nor could missionaries interfere. Instead, the mission sent a Christian woman to speak to the husband and negotiate her redemption.<sup>582</sup>

### **Male marital consent in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta**

Young girls were not the only group that faced challenges associated with pre-arranged engagements. Young men who were marrying for the first time also encountered premarital obstacles and complications occasioned by the circumstances of the day. For instance, some young male converts were denied their previously betrothed brides to incentivise their return to indigenous religion. A young convert was once denied his betrothed because he was a Christian and the bride's *babaláwo* (priest-diviner) father intended to force him back to indigenous worship. After years of negotiation, they reached an impasse and four years later, the young man married the daughter of a Christian Sàró (Sierra Leonean) immigrant instead.<sup>583</sup> As stated previously, according to indigenous law, the *babaláwo*'s refusal meant he would have to refund the bridewealth. Although this may have been a deterrent for most

---

<sup>581</sup> Samuel Johnson, Journal, 7 September 1877.

<sup>582</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 16-17 December 1877.

<sup>583</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 27 June 1853; Samuel Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 15 January 1856.

families, as I will elaborate in the next chapter, the *babalawo's* status as an indigenous healer meant that he was probably a very wealthy man of middle or advanced age with religious, political and social authority and so he would likely have had no trouble repaying the fee.



Fig 3.3: Young Yorùbá man in traditional attire. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, August 1865.

Young men were easier to coerce into leaving the Church when threatened with the dissolution of their engagement because if a young man was denied his first bride, it necessarily implied that his ascent to adulthood was delayed. In the nineteenth century, marriage was a necessary condition of adulthood for both women and men. If a boy remained unmarried he continued to live as a social child despite his biological age. He was not allocated a room in the patrilineal compound and continued to sleep in the piazza with the other lineage children. He could not start his own household, was not given land to farm, and the profits from his productive labour went to his father and other elder male relatives. Boys were therefore eager to marry and in most cases would do almost anything to keep their bride. Consequently, they tended to



buckle under pressure. Furthermore, since girls were betrothed at birth or at a very young age, if he lost his intended bride, there were unlikely to be available girls to marry since there was no class of single women.<sup>584</sup> A boy had to engage another child and wait for her to reach maturity further delaying adulthood. This circumstance also sheds some light on why abandoned fiancé tended to inflate the value of the bridewealth they paid. Such inflation could have been to compensate for the time, labour and wealth spent in contracting a failed union, and also for the years a groom would again have to wait and provide such services for his new prospective bride's family. Within the colonial context, Lisa Lindsay argues that since a 'man's first marriage was the foundation of his future existence as a social being', some fathers intentionally delayed their son's assent into adulthood by withholding bridewealth money in order to retain their son's labour. This caused intergenerational tensions and at the turn of the century, marriage money was the primary reason why men took up wage work.<sup>585</sup> Before colonialism, perpetual warfare in Yorùbáland also gave young men who were willing to risk the dangers of war, the opportunity to reduce an average of thirty years of patriarchal servitude by choosing a military career as an *omọ ògún* (warboy) as this brought wealth in form of booty and slaves that could be converted into bridewealth.<sup>586</sup>

Besides, if a boy's marriage was delayed and Abẹ̀òkúta engaged in protracted warfare, he may have had to wait until the war was over to wed. There were fewer marriages in Abẹ̀òkúta in 1864 than any previous recorded year due to war and trade depression.<sup>587</sup> Presumably, the monetary and agricultural scarcity would have made bridewealth too expensive to pay. Furthermore, if his family or kin were killed or enslaved during war then there would be no one to pay his bridewealth, further delaying his marriage. When all this is considered, it is no wonder that young men were desperate to marry and

---

<sup>584</sup> Clarke, pp. 247–8.

<sup>585</sup> Lindsay, "'No Need... to Think of Home'?", 447; Lindsay, 'Money, Marriage, and Masculinity', p. 140.

<sup>586</sup> The roles and functions of young men in war will be discussed in chapter four.

<sup>587</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, February 1864; for more, see Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 49.

often went to extraordinary lengths to keep their betrothed. In September 1852, Ajayi Crowther wrote:

Bánkólé one of our first baptised converts in Abeokuta who had about four years ago entered into an engagement to marry a young person was at this time disappointed by meeting a refusal from his intended wife. He took violent steps to frighten her to consent to the marriage. According to the wicked custom of the country he went so far as to stick himself with a knife on the thigh, an act of an attempt to commit suicide so as to implicate the young woman and her relatives in trouble in case he dies through it.<sup>588</sup>

Bánkólé's actions tied in with Abẹ̀òkúta law which stipulated that if a person committed suicide or died as a result of actions or the malicious intent of another, the person that caused the incident was held responsible for the suicide or death. If found guilty, the accused could be fined, exiled, sold into slavery or even executed.<sup>589</sup> Bánkólé therefore stabbed himself as a warning to the bride and her family that should he commit suicide, they would be implicated and punished accordingly.

The competition for women was so severe amongst men, especially young men, that indigenous custom demanded that should a man take for a wife a girl already betrothed to another, he had to refund the dispossessed man. The offender had to pay whatever amount was demanded as the cost of past expenses without any protest or negotiation before the young lady became his recognised wife.<sup>590</sup> The offending party could not move freely near or around the aggrieved man's house as he was at risk of severe assault and battery from the aggrieved who was not held liable for such attacks and received no punishment, even in the event of the perpetrator's death.<sup>591</sup> E. A Ajisafe Moore also wrote that if the aggrieved man wished, he could challenge the usurper during war, both of them placing themselves at the hottest part of battle. Should neither of the two fall on the battlefield, the one adjudged less brave acknowledged the superiority of his opponents and abandoned all claim

---

<sup>588</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 27 September 1852.

<sup>589</sup> This law was implied in other cases discussed in this chapter and chapter four.

<sup>590</sup> It is unclear how a man could take the betrothed wife of another man. This was presumably by secretly negotiating a higher bridewealth with the parents of an already betrothed girl. This is speculation as there is no evidence of this in the sources.

<sup>591</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 23.

to the woman in question. If either of the two fell, the survivor took the woman, but if both fell, the woman could be held responsible and have to pay the penalty for their lives, which was usually death.<sup>592</sup> This pattern of competition for women and the violence it provoked was commonplace in Abẹ̀òkúta. In 1868 when two brothers of the same father in the Ìgbórè section of the town realised that they were both engaged to the same girl and were making arrangements to marry her, they quarrelled. Their verbal dispute escalated to an altercation where the younger killed the elder with an axe. He was subsequently executed.<sup>593</sup>

The time that young jilted men had to wait for a bride lessened as the century progressed. As more people converted to Christianity and more Christian Sàró migrated to Abẹ̀òkúta, a class of young single women developed because Christian parents adopted missionary opposition to betrothal viewing it as selling their daughters and accordingly left them to make their own decision when they reached a suitable age. Therefore, young male converts could marry a Christian bride relatively quickly if his intended's family refused him. In 1878, when a girl's parents deprived a young male convert of his bride from an engagement he made before his conversion, he refused to give up his religion, and married a Christian girl within the year.<sup>594</sup> This was a far cry from the years or decades young men had to wait for a bride earlier in the century. Nevertheless, this newfound freedom to make marriage engagements was not without its complications. The practise from earlier in the century which stipulated that if a young man chose to marry a non-Christian, missionaries would only grant him a Christian wedding and continued membership of the church if his bride agreed to convert to Christianity was still in effect.<sup>595</sup> Accordingly, should a prospective bride refuse to convert, young male converts either remained Christian and forsook their betrothed or fulfilled their engagement and forsook the Church, a near

---

<sup>592</sup> Ajisafe Moore, pp. 25-26.

<sup>593</sup> It is unclear how two boys from the same family could have been engaged to the same girl. I speculate that one brother was betrothed to the girl while the other was her spousal choice. William Allen, *Journal*, 24 August 1868.

<sup>594</sup> W. Williams, *Journal*, 6 November 1878.

<sup>595</sup> Thomas King, *Journal*, 1852.

impossible choice for some. Young men therefore also faced difficulties on the road to matrimony.

For young male slaves, the matter of consent was moot since they could only marry slaves and had to do their master's bidding. Indeed the sources do not provide any clues regarding informal relations between slaves or marriage procedures amongst slaves. The only record found about slave marriage was written by Ajisafe Moore who stated that '[a] master may give his slave another woman slave of his in marriage. In that case, nothing is paid. Of course, the children, their offspring are included in the property of the master'.<sup>596</sup> Male slaves also had no formal religious freedom. In August 1869 a woman inherited a slave convert from her deceased relative. Although the slave had been attending church with his previous master's consent, the woman, described by Allen as 'a bitter enemy to the religion' warned the slave that she would sell him if he did not cease attending church. The slave, because of his position as a house slave and thus a defacto lineage member, thought this was an empty threat and continued to attend church. On 27 August, she sold him to slave dealers.<sup>597</sup> Marital consent and religious freedom were solely privileges of the free.

### **The wedding**

When all engagement palavers were resolved and all parties agreed to the union, then the *ìgbéyàwó* (wedding ceremony) followed. *ìgbéyàwó* could occur at any time of the year but it was usually performed after June, following the harvest and *egúngún* festival.<sup>598</sup> On the wedding day, the families of the bride and groom feasted in their respective compounds. Before dawn the next day, the bride's unmarried friends and associates took the bride to her new home amidst drumming, singing and dancing. Two elderly women also accompanied them from the bride's compound carrying messages from the

---

<sup>596</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 27.

<sup>597</sup> William Allen, Journal, 27 August 1869.

<sup>598</sup> The *egúngún* festival celebrated the deceased ancestors. It will be discussed in detail in the Chapter 4. Johnson, p. 114.

bride's parents to the groom's. All the escorting party were well dressed and the bride veiled her face with a thin white cloth. The party also carried the bride's idols and all the paraphernalia such as pots, brooms, brushes, and water pots necessary to fulfil her domestic wifely role.<sup>599</sup> When they reached the entrance of the groom's compound, a female member of the house, usually another wife selected for this purpose, washed the bride's feet with water and gin signifying purification before entering the new and permanent home. The bride was then literally lifted across the threshold into the house, hence the term *ìgbéyàwó* (lifting or carrying the bride). In the compound, the household wives took the bride to the bathroom where they 'washed, rubbed down, perfumed and dressed [her] up in fresh clothes'.<sup>600</sup> After this, she was first taken to the head of the compound for blessings and then to the groom's mother also for blessings and prayers.<sup>601</sup>

The bride was taken to the room of the groom's first wife where she stayed until her husband, who was supposed to be absent during these proceedings, returned. If she was his first wife, she was taken to the *ìyáálé's* (head wife) apartment. The *ìyáálé* then took her to the bridegroom's quarters to consummate the marriage on a white cloth to determine her virginity.<sup>602</sup> If she was a virgin, she was given presents and trinkets consisting of corals, costly beads and gold necklaces and the wedding festivities continued for three days. Her companions were also rewarded, and gifts were sent to her parents. The groom's family also sent white cowries to her mother signifying purity.<sup>603</sup> If she was not found virtuous, she was ostracised, treated with discourtesy, and sometimes severely beaten and confined. She was not given ornaments and her companions are chased with flogging and abuses. Her family was disgraced and dirty cowries were also sent to her mother representing her impurity, and the wedding festivities ended. She was forced to give up her lover's name, who was punished with *òjí* (adultery fines), injury

---

<sup>599</sup> Johnson, p. 115.

<sup>600</sup> Johnson, pp. 114-115.

<sup>601</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 24.

<sup>602</sup> Bowen wrote that the bride was not ushered to her nuptial bed until a couple of days after the ceremony. Meanwhile, she slept with her friends in a separate room for a couple of days. Bowen, p. 304.

<sup>603</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 26; Johnson, p. 115.

or death.<sup>604</sup> A new bride was however never sent away for not being a virgin because although adultery was a criminal offence, her reproductive capacity was considered more important.<sup>605</sup> She remained married, but her position in the lineage was severely compromised. A virtuous bride was kept indoors and was neither sent on errands nor seen out of the compound until at least twelve months after the wedding, except escorted. A non-virtuous one may have been sent on errands out of the compound the very next day, exposing her indiscretions to the entire community.<sup>606</sup>

### **The question of fidelity**

To a large extent, researchers have neglected the question of male premarital and extra-marital sexual activity. While historians have largely stressed the need for girls to remain virgins until marriage, the rules surrounding male sexual activity in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland and especially Abéòkúta are still a mystery. John Iliffe attempted to answer this question when he explored the concept of honour in pre-colonial Yorùbáland. He wrote that in the nineteenth century, polygamy created a shortage of marriageable women. He argued that Yorùbá societal structures also guaranteed that men took a long time to reach adult masculinity and marry. A combination of these two factors, he wrote, meant that as much as sixty per cent of all male sexual activity took place outside marriage, either within the extended family or with slave women.<sup>607</sup> Unfortunately, Iliffe's argument is problematic and unsupported by the evidence. Although polygamy was widespread at the time, it is impossible to know if this actually created a shortage of women. In fact, one could argue

---

<sup>604</sup> There is no mention of women accusing men of rape in any of the records. As a result, we do not know how claims of sexual coercion were settled. Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Venn, 10 September 1856; Ajisafe Moore, p. 26; For more on cases of sexual coercion, see: Brett L. Shadle, 'Rape in the Courts of Gusiiland, Kenya, 1940s-1960s', *African Studies Review*, 51 (2008), 27–50.

<sup>605</sup> Although she broke the contractual *ijóhun* agreement that was supposed to guarantee the groom sole sexual access, the desire for offspring superseded infidelity. So much so that it was not in the interest of either party to end the marriage. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria*, p. 62; Renne, *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town* pp. 78–81; Talbot, *Volume 3*, pp. 426–427.

<sup>606</sup> Johnson, p. 115.

<sup>607</sup> John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 79.

that the intra-ethnic wars, which led to the death of many men, created a male shortage as missionaries often spoke about towns being devoid of men during wartime.<sup>608</sup> Polygamy, in the nineteenth century, may have been a safeguard to ensure that every woman had a husband. Also, his figure of sixty per cent for male extra-marital activity is derived from an article that curiously uses statistics gathered in 1973 to estimate sexual activity in the nineteenth century.<sup>609</sup> Similarly, his assertion that sexual activity took place within the extended family is problematic because any and all sexual relations within the familial blood line were strictly taboo and forbidden. It mattered not if such sexual liaisons occurred within the matrilineal or patrilineal family.<sup>610</sup> Peter Lloyd wrote that a man may not marry, and by implication have sexual relations, with people descended from his 'sixteen great-great-grandparents'.<sup>611</sup> It is thus difficult to see how sexual relations would have commonly taken place within the extended family without violating taboos, which would likely have been noted in historical records had it occurred frequently. Also, sources confirm that men who had sexual intercourse with slaves or pawns were obliged to marry them, putting Illife's theory further into question.<sup>612</sup> This is not to say that premarital and extra-marital affairs were completely absent in society. The contention here is that conceptually the Yorùbá did not condone pre- or extra-marital relations for either men or women.

Yorùbá society was designed in a way that made it challenging if not dangerous to have affairs. It is suggested here that in indigenous culture, there were no recognised group of women considered sexually accessible to the public. In fact, the rise of prostitution in Yorùbáland is attributed to western patterns of urbanisation and its corresponding influences.<sup>613</sup> In the nineteenth century, young girls were betrothed at a very young age, divorce was

---

<sup>608</sup> *ìwé ìròhìn*, June 1860.

<sup>609</sup> John C. Caldwell, Pat Caldwell and I. O. Orubuloye, 'The Family and Sexual Networking in Sub-Saharan Africa: Historical Regional Differences and Present-Day Implications', *Population Studies*, 46 (1992), 385–410 (pp. 389–390) cited in Iliffe, p. 79.

<sup>610</sup> Fadipe, pp. 70–1; Schwab, 'Kinship and Lineage among the Yoruba', 365.

<sup>611</sup> Lloyd, *The Yoruba lineage*, 240.

<sup>612</sup> This is because all extra-marital affairs were considered immoral. Ajisafe Moore, p. 27.

<sup>613</sup> See U. G. Oleru, 'Prostitution in Lagos: A Sociomedical Study', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (1979-), 34(1980), 312–315.

uncommon, and should a woman become a widow, the levirate-type marriage system ensured that she remained married usually until her death.<sup>614</sup> The few females who did not have spouses were those whose husbands died when they were either close to menopause or post-menopausal and decided to remain unmarried or were not chosen by her late husband's male relatives during the levirate-type ceremony.<sup>615</sup> Later in the century when more Christian parents opted not to betroth their children, a man who had sexual relations with a non-betrothed girl was required to pay a certain fixed and reasonable amount as bridewealth to the parents and take the woman as a wife.<sup>616</sup> So as Oyewumi argues, the overall Yorùbá system 'formally curtailed sexual activity for the unmarried'.<sup>617</sup>

There was one part of Yorùbáland within which Illife's argument could apply and that was in Oṅdó where contemporary observers noted that sexual etiquette in the town was atypical of Yorùbáland. The reality in Oṅdó was however far more complex than Illife's argument suggests. In Oṅdó, an unequal access to women meant that men married at an older age.<sup>618</sup> Men in Oṅdó married two to ten years later than their counterparts in Ìbàdàn, Òyó and Abẹ̀òkúta. While they waited, young men had affairs with the wives of their patrons, usually their fathers or other senior members of their lineage.<sup>619</sup> If a husband caught wind of this, usually from rumours, the matter was brought to the attention of all lineage adults and a meeting was held in the compound. If the rumour was confirmed, the husband laid a fine on the offending male party. After it was paid, the husband then swore his wife and the offending male together in front of all the compound members and the household deities. The husband then assured them that they could continue their liaisons without any further charge from him until they chose to end their

---

<sup>614</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria*, p. 65. It is important to note that while many nineteenth-century observers claimed that divorce was an anomaly, Bowen had a dissenting view and argued that divorce was fairly common. See later discussion on divorce. Bowen, p. 305.

<sup>615</sup> This ceremony will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>616</sup> Johnson, pp. 116-117.

<sup>617</sup> Oyewumi, p. 63.

<sup>618</sup> This was not due to a shortage of women but because elders in Oṅdó ensured the continued labour of their juniors by withholding bridewealth and delaying their marriages.

<sup>619</sup> There is no evidence of sexual activity outside the compound leading to the conclusion that men carried on affairs with women in close proximity.



relationship. Should their union result in a child however, the husband was considered the rightful father. One must stress that this was uncharacteristic for the rest of Yorùbáland and arose from circumstances specific to Oṅdó.<sup>620</sup> Nathan Young, who gave this eyewitness account of happenings in 1875, added that ‘their ways in Ondo is quite different from the Ègbá and Òyó [...] the brother or son of the Ègbá and the Yorùbá while alive dares not do anything of the kind to their wives but after death, he is liable to claim the woman as his wife.’<sup>621</sup>

In other parts of Yorùbáland, customs demanded sexual fidelity from both men and women and male indiscretions were sternly chastised. Bowen once observed a young man being punished for adultery. The ‘young man was turned loose in the public square, whence [...] he was soundly flogged by nimble runners, headed of, and flogged back again amid jeers and laughter of everybody.’<sup>622</sup> Campbell also witnessed a similar event. He stated that ‘a young fellow was most unmercifully whipped. His offense seems to have been of the sort in which one of the other sex was participant’.<sup>623</sup> Public punishment, which inflicted both physical pain and public ridicule, was intended to shame the offending individual and deter him from such acts in the future.<sup>624</sup> Both actual or intended adultery was punishable by indigenous law. It was permissible and justifiable to severely beat or injure a man found either committing adultery or attempting to entice another to adultery. It is immaterial whether the man was acting on his own behalf or on behalf of others. If the offended individual chose not to act, then the adulterer was subject to heavy fines with flogging from the government.<sup>625</sup> Some plaintiffs committed suicide sealing the fate of the offender. In 1855, a betrayed

---

<sup>620</sup> For more information, see Ojo, ‘Slavery, Marriage and Gender Relations in Eastern Yorubaland,’ p. 151.

<sup>621</sup> Nathan Young, *Journal*, 27 June 1875.

<sup>622</sup> Bowen, p. 143.

<sup>623</sup> Campbell, p. 79.

<sup>624</sup> For more on punishment, see: David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Methods* (The Free Press, 1982); Steven Spitzer, ‘Punishment and Social Organization: A Study of Durkheim’s Theory of Penal Evolution’, *Law & Society Review*, 9 (1975), 613–637; Edward A. Tiryakian, ‘Durkheim’s Two Laws of Penal Evolution’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 3 (1964), 261–266.

<sup>625</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 16.

husband killed himself leading to the execution of the philanderer.<sup>626</sup> One did have to be careful when accusing an individual of adultery or intended adultery as false accusations could prove ruinous. At Aké in 1853 Andrew Maser wrote:

Went to town and *oro* was out in some parts of the town to execute persons. It was said [that] a man was falsely accused of having unlawful intercourse with the wife of another man. The accused denied this but being further troubled shot himself to death. Now the death requires according to the country law also the death of the persons who caused it; therefore the accusing husband and wife were sentenced to die by *oro*.<sup>627</sup>

Although William Clarke wrote that ‘adultery [is] rewarded with death’, as stated above, punishments for the crime varied.<sup>628</sup> When adultery was proved, sentences differed according to social hierarchy. If a woman was betrothed or already married to a powerful man, the consequences could have been fatal for both parties. When Kúruńmí, the Ààrẹ (military ruler) of Ìjàyẹ discovered the infidelity of one of his wives, he killed both his wife and her lover. He then ‘split the woman’s belly, took out her heart and liver and ate it raw in the open street before a very large assembly of his people’ presumably to strike terror and dissuade future attempts to seduce his wives.<sup>629</sup> Conceptually therefore, dominant social mores frowned upon both male and female premarital or extra-marital affairs. The only difference was that women’s indiscretions were easier to discover upon marriage since a women’s virginity was easier to determine.

Nevertheless, despite all the safeguards and punishments, people did have affairs. The Yorùbá recognised this, as evidenced by the many laws put in place as deterrents. Moreover, Campbell argued that political succession was designed with the knowledge that sexual indiscretions were a possibility. In Òyó, for example, sons rarely succeeded their fathers as kings. Although secession was still within the royal family, heirs were either brothers of the

---

<sup>626</sup> Samuel Crowther, Letter to Hutchinson, 10 September 1856; T. B. Macaulay, Journal, 17 July 1855 cited in Iliffe, p. 80.

<sup>627</sup> Andrew Maser, Journal, 5 October 1853.

<sup>628</sup> Clarke, pp. 254-5.

<sup>629</sup> Adolphus Mann, Journal, 6 November 1853; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 82.

same mother or sons of sisters to ensure a blood relation because children from wives could have been a result of an affair. Campbell indicated also that inheritance also followed this rule.<sup>630</sup> Although most indiscretions were kept secret, there were more brazen and public instances. In 1854, one of the chiefs at Aké sent his twenty-year-old daughter and a messenger to Samuel Crowther at the Abéòkúta mission. The chief's message to Crowther stated that his daughter had been a 'notable thief and prostitute' for many years, and though he had advised, threatened, punished, and even given her local medicine, she had not changed. As a last resort, the chief asked Crowther to prescribe medicines to cure her immorality.<sup>631</sup> A young unmarried girl's immorality was therefore perceived as a disgrace to her father. Her prospects as a bride would have been severely compromised and if she were to get engaged, her father's position in negotiating bridewealth would have been weak at best. Furthermore, the daughter's brazen anti-social acts were considered so atypical that it was perceived as resulting not from free will but some kind of illness or disease. This is why the messenger stated that the chief had given her local medicines that had failed and hoped Crowther, who ran the CMS dispensary in Aké, could succeed where he had not.

### ***Infidelity in the Church***

Although reports of premarital and extra-marital affairs amongst the indigenous non-Christian community in Abéòkúta were rare, infidelity was reported to have become near endemic in Church congregations especially towards the end of the nineteenth-century. Widespread colonial influences and Christian traditions created a new class of single youth who tended to undermine traditional chastity laws. Furthermore, new economies, new laws and new youth culture drastically changed the rules governing fidelity. It is difficult to assess these changes in Abéòkúta in-depth. By the time they became pervasive in the 1880s, missionary journals had been largely

---

<sup>630</sup> Campbell, pp. 41.

<sup>631</sup> Although Crowther uses the word prostitute, it is unlikely that in 1852, the girl exchanged sexual favours for material benefits. What he meant here was promiscuous. Instances of what could be considered prostitution came later and according to some missionaries, originated within the church. Samuel Cowther, Journal, 25 September 1852.

replaced with annual Church reports that gave little detail about social life. Nonetheless, we can appreciate the general characteristics of the changes that took place by examining Yorùbá communities in Lagos from the 1870s due to the similar social, religious and economic structures in Lagos and Abẹ̀òkúta.

In 1873, Charles Phillip began a six-page lament about the immoral state of the Breadfruit Church in Lagos with comments about adultery. He wrote that:

The greatest drawback that I find to the cause of the gospel in this place is the prominence of the sin of adultery among the members of the church. We have our leaders meeting once a month and there is so scarcely a leaders meeting before which a case of this sin is not brought and I am sorry to remark that the number of members suspended on account of this sin is far greater than those suspended for other sins.<sup>632</sup>

He speculated that one reason for the rampancy of adultery was because people no longer regarded it as shameful due to the example set by the 'immoral lives of many of the European residents'. In addition to supposed European debauchery, he stated that unlike the interior, adultery had lost its criminality in Lagos and this in turn 'blunts' people to its delinquency.<sup>633</sup> Phillips was right to attribute the rise in adultery to a shift from its criminality according to indigenous law to a matter of morality because without legal punitive deterrents, young men and women no longer feared accusations of adultery. Insightfully, Phillips also observed that the burden Christian traditions placed on young male converts also played a role. Unlike the traditional system where a boy's family arranged the engagement and wedding, the new Christian system required that young couple fend for themselves. Since missionaries stressed the individual union rather than a union of families, couples that married in chapels often excluded their non-Christian kin, who were often the majority. However, people continued to have wedding feasts.<sup>634</sup> As Christians no longer paid bridewealth, the cost of feasts could not be expensed from it and the couple had to incur the cost of the wedding ceremony. Besides, Victorian bourgeois constructs of marriage

---

<sup>632</sup> Charles Phillips, Journal, 3 November 1873.

<sup>633</sup> Charles Phillips, Journal, 3 November 1873.

<sup>634</sup> Charles Phillips, Journal, 3 November 1873; *Ìwé Ìròhin*, December 1862.

introduced by missionaries, which stressed the ideal of the male breadwinner, meant that grooms, and not the family of brides, bore the burden of wedding ceremonies.<sup>635</sup> This responsibility proved too arduous for most and as a result, young people delayed their wedding and instead engaged in casual liaisons. In an article written in *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, the contributor wrote that ‘the costs of weddings [were] becoming something excessive’. He stated that the money spent on clothes and feeding wedding attendees was so extortionate that people should no longer attend weddings except when directly invited.<sup>636</sup> He also advised that ‘young people would be wise to use a little economy and save a little for a time when money will not be so plentiful’.<sup>637</sup>

Furthermore, the pressure placed on young Christian men to live according to European bourgeois ideals of masculinity also increased the prevalence of premarital liaisons. Also in *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, another contributor reported that before a man married, ‘he was to have a house, furnish it, and earn a living on which he depended to keep him, his wife and his children respectable’. Without it, the writer claimed that the marriage would be that of ‘discontent and trouble’.<sup>638</sup> However, the failure of Christian men to find employment and live up to this ideal meant that most young men delayed marrying for longer periods and carried on premarital affairs instead. Some missionaries also blamed a previously non-existent ‘youth culture’ for the rise in premarital sex. They claimed that the ‘worldliness’ of young women who preferred expensive dresses and jewellery to their chastity and godliness were to blame for the rise in adultery. They contended that when these women could not afford these things by ‘honest labour’ and assistance of their parents and relatives, they procured them at the ‘risk of their virtue’.<sup>639</sup> Finally, evangelists blamed young men stating that their expensive clothes, alcohol consumption, and expensive cigars were a sure route to sexual sin.<sup>640</sup> There is no way to

---

<sup>635</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1862.

<sup>636</sup> This was in direct contrast to the traditional system when everyone who heard about the wedding could attend including neighbors and well-wishers.

<sup>637</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1862.

<sup>638</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1863.

<sup>639</sup> Charles Phillips, *Journal*, 3 November 1873.

<sup>640</sup> Charles Phillips, *Journal*, 3 November 1873; Edward Roper, Letter to Mr Hutchinson, 1873.

determine if the assertions about the commoditization of female sexuality were true or if the rise of a young consumer culture precipitated sexual immorality. Notwithstanding, these accusations appear to be borne out of an anxiety of detribalization and the rise of a new and seemingly uncontrollable youth culture rather than fact.

Premarital sexual liaisons were reportedly so common in Lagos that people brought their children born out of wedlock for baptism. They were, as one would expect, turned away.<sup>641</sup> Yorùbáland had thus come a long way from earlier times where Johnson stated that adultery, when discovered by pregnancy was punished by death after the baby was born.<sup>642</sup> Yet, in the interior, due a slower spread of colonial influence, having children before marriage was still considered unacceptable. So much so that even at the turn of the century, young women regarded abortion as a viable option for premarital conception. In 1900, L. A Lijadu performed the last rites of a young lady called Adéfowólé. He wrote that 'being pregnant for her intended husband and not willing to confess was trying to procure an abortion, this meeting up her death'.<sup>643</sup> Premarital liaisons were clearly still frowned upon in the interior regardless of whether or not the people involved were already betrothed. It is important to note here that despite everything we know about sexual etiquette and the breach of sexual mores in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, we know nothing about the actual act of sexual intercourse at the time because none of the sources provide clues to this. Important themes absent from the records include how people gained sex education, the negotiation of sexual practices amongst couples and within marriages, the power dynamics between males and females concerning sex, the presence or absence of non-heterosexual sex and whether or not sex was considered an inherently private act. As a result, the type of sexual analysis possible in

---

<sup>641</sup> Edward Roper, Letter to Mr Hutchinson, 1873.

<sup>642</sup> Johnson, p. 60.

<sup>643</sup> Lijadu, Family Papers, 4 January 1900. For more on premarital pregnancies in Africa, see: Meredith Mckittrick, 'Faithful Daughter, Murdering Mother: Transgression and Social Control in Colonial Namibia', *The Journal of African History*, 40 (1999), 265–283.

gender histories of the Western world is near impossible to replicate in the history of pre-colonial Yorùbáland.<sup>644</sup>

## Married life

Much of what we know about household dynamics within marriage is from research conducted in the twentieth century. Male nineteenth-century observers did not discuss the inner workings of the household in much detail perhaps because they considered the household to be a private, even a woman's domain. Nevertheless, this thesis proposes that some of the early- to mid-twentieth century principles observed are also applicable to the nineteenth century as most of the informants and writers of these studies had lived in the nineteenth century and did not note extensive changes. From these sources, we gather that after the wedding, women lived permanently with their husband's kin group. Like the Igbo of South East Nigeria, a wife retained her outsider status and was never fully absorbed into her husband's lineage.<sup>645</sup> She was referred to *aya-ilé* (wife of the house) regardless of how long she had been married, and remained a 'visitor' or stranger to the compound. In fact the very word *iyàwó* (wife) can literally be translated as *iyà wó* (borrow and see or lend to assess) implying that a woman was only lent to the husband's household. A wife's status as a visitor could be beneficial because as Tola Olu Pearce argues, women were both insiders and outsiders, serving as consultants and mediators between her kin and her in-laws.<sup>646</sup> Nonetheless, as Sandra Barnes accurately observes, in Yorùbáland, outsiders were the lowest people on the social hierarchy.<sup>647</sup> Since status and citizenship were derived from the length of one's membership in a lineage

---

<sup>644</sup> For sexual practices in the West, see Kate Fisher, 'She was quite satisfied with the arrangements I made': Gender and Birth Control in Britain 1920-1950, *Past and Present*, 169(2000), 161-193; Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter, "They prefer withdrawal": The Choice of Birth Control in Britain, 1918-1950, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34(2003), 263-291; Susan Cott Watkins and Angela D. Danzi, 'Women's Gossip and Social Change: Childbirth and Fertility Control among Italian and Jewish Women in the United States, 1920-1940', *Gender and Society*, 9 (1995), 469-490.

<sup>645</sup> Nina Emma Mba, 'Heroines of the Women's War', in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Bolanle Awe (Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992), pp. 73-88 (p. 75).

<sup>646</sup> Pearce, 75.

<sup>647</sup> Sandra T. Barnes, 'Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 20 (1990), 248-268 (p. 248).

group, new wives were at the base of the conjugal lineage order and as a result, experienced a mid-life social demotion from which men were exempt.<sup>648</sup> Although women moved from one spatial domain to another, only their reproductive rights were transferred to their husbands. Their patrilineage retained all jural privileges.<sup>649</sup> Women, therefore, not only retained full membership of their kin, they kept emotional, economic, and social ties to their original lineage group.<sup>650</sup>

An Ègbá myth concerning the roles of young women as daughters and wives is relevant here. It speaks to Yorùbá expectations of a girl's relationship with her husband and her patrilineal kin after marriage. Told by E. Olympus Moore in 1916, this myth concerning girls of marriageable age was used by the Aké township in the nineteenth century to justify the *Aláké's* claim as paramount ruler in Abẹ̀òkúta. The myth states that the early settlers in the Ègbá forest lived independently but peaceably with one another. It states that Késì, an Ègbá kingdom, were the first to obtain corn in the Ègbá forest. To preserve their status as the suppliers of corn to all other towns, Ojoko, the then ruler, decreed that no corn was to be sold to other Ègbá peoples without first being soaked in warm water and dried in the sun to render it useless for planting. The other towns, unaware of this trick attributed their failing corn crops to superstitious causes. In later years, the *Aláké* of Aké gave his daughter Adẹ̀şikù to Ojoko as a wife. The daughter was quick to discover the town secret and when her father asked her to supply Aké with corn, she 'wisely' fed three fowls with good corn and sent it to her father with a private message stating that as soon as the fowls were delivered they were to be killed and the corns found in them, planted without delay. The *Aláké* acted and corn began thriving in Aké farms. Ojoko's deceit was discovered and Késì was besieged and destroyed by the other Ègbá peoples. After this, it was decided that the

---

<sup>648</sup> Peel, 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', 139.

<sup>649</sup> Lloyd, 'Divorce among the Yoruba', 69–70.

<sup>650</sup> In Yorùbáland, the wife did not take the husband's names since there were no such customs, the names given to one at birth remained unchanged until death. Johnson, p. 68. For more on women's movement across spatial domains in Africa, see: Shirley Ardener, 'Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women: An Introduction', in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1997), pp.1–30 (p. 17); Callaway, p. 181.



*Aláké* was to be made the head of all the Ègbá rulers.<sup>651</sup>

This story tells us much about the competition for supremacy amongst the Ègbá groups. It also gives us three important insights into the roles of daughters as wives. First, it shows that daughters were expected to exhibit intelligence and wisdom in their conjugal home and to quickly understand the workings of their new compound. It also reveals that the Yorùbá expected daughters to have a bond with her father and home. These bonds, whether real or imagined, were supposed to endure even after she left for her conjugal compound. But most importantly, the story expresses that a daughter's ultimate allegiance remained with her patrilineage, even after marriage. This allegiance to patrilineage and enduring agnatic kinship ties allowed a wife and her children claim inheritance or land, participate in ancestral and *òrìṣà* cults, seek help during economic hardship, or return to her consanguinial home in case of conflict, divorce or old age.<sup>652</sup> In fact, after her death, a wife's body had to be returned to her patrilineage for burial.<sup>653</sup> Her agnatic ties also meant that her patrilineage inherited her estate if she was economically successful, and were equally responsible for her debts in the event of insolvency.<sup>654</sup> William Schwab and Kristin Mann respectively argue that due to the distance between a woman's consanguinial and conjugal home, women could not conveniently participate in their lineage's meetings and decisions. Schwab wrote emphatically that '[m]arriage is viri-local and after marriage a woman's home is with her husband's lineage and she cannot conveniently participate in her own lineage councils and decisions'. Her full membership was therefore an ideal rather than a reality.<sup>655</sup> However, distance between homes as a result of neolocal marriage was a twentieth-century condition arising from women migrating with their husbands who either moved from rural areas in search of employment or were transferred if in colonial service.<sup>656</sup> In the nineteenth

---

<sup>651</sup> Moore, p. 4.

<sup>652</sup> Thomas King, *Journal*, 4 April, 1852; Samuel Pearce, *Journal*, 19 May 1863; Samuel Cole, *Journal*, 26 March 1871.

<sup>653</sup> Burial practices will be discussed further in chapter five.

<sup>654</sup> *Iwé Iròhin*, February 1862; Lloyd, 'Divorce Among the Yoruba', 69–70.

<sup>655</sup> Schwab, "Kinship and Lineage among the Yoruba", 359; Kristin Mann, "Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos," *Signs* 16(1991): 682–706 (p. 687).

<sup>656</sup> Neolocal marriage occurs when a newly married couple establishes their household and

century, the Yorùbá largely practised town-based endogamy.<sup>657</sup> It was thus common for a wife to see her family often, sometimes on a daily basis, making distance a non-issue.

At marriage, women regressed socially and became juniors in their conjugal compound. As a social junior, a new bride was expected to show deference and respect to both biological and social seniors.<sup>658</sup> Her status meant that she could not call any of her new relatives by their first names. She had to find appropriate 'nick names' for all her senior conjugal kin, including a child born a day before her wedding. Any child born after her wedding she could call by their true name.<sup>659</sup> Hence, like the Basotho women of Southern Africa, she had to use a special language of avoidance and respect.<sup>660</sup> As a show of respect, men were also expected to *dòbálẹ̀* (prostrate) upon meeting every member of the girl's family, including all babies born before the wedding.<sup>661</sup> This was however a formality that was rarely enforced. New wives thus found themselves assuming roles of subservience that were contradictory to their previous prestigious position as daughters.

A new bride also had to negotiate the politics among lineage wives. She had to withstand what Fadipe refers to as the 'petty tyrannies' of co-wives who, depending on the time they married into the lineage, had varying power and authority over her.<sup>662</sup> Unfortunately, nineteenth century sources do not tell us much about the rivalries between co-wives. Lijadu in Oñdó wrote the only

---

resides separate from either couple's kin group. For more on this see Carole Shammas, 'The Housing Stock of the Early United States: Refinement Meets Migration', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 64(2007), 549-590 (p. 582); Steven Ruggles, 'Reconsidering the Northwest European Family System: Living Arrangements of the Aged in Comparative Historical Perspective', *Population and Development Review*, 35(2009), 249-273 (pp. 250-251; 262); Ron Lesthaeghe, 'The "Second Demographic Transition": A Conceptual Map for the Understanding of Late Modern Demographic Developments in Fertility and Family Formation', *Historical Social Research*, 36(2011), 179-218 (p.203).

<sup>657</sup> This was in contrast to the Igbo ethnic group that practised village-based exogamy, Mba, 'Heroines of the Women's War', pp. 76; Oyewumi, p. 55.

<sup>658</sup> Adeboye, 'The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan', 263.

<sup>659</sup> Makinde, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment', 167.

<sup>660</sup> David B. Coplan, 'You Have Left Me Wandering about: Basotho Women and the Culture of Mobility', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 188-211 (p. 188).

<sup>661</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 25.

<sup>662</sup> This condescending language used for women was characteristic of the 1930s when Fadipe wrote his work. Fadipe, p. 80.

record discovered on the topic of conflict between wives. In 1900, he wrote 'two women, wives of the same person at Oke Rowo fought over *akara* and challenged each other to the poison ordeal. Both ate *obo*, one died in the evening and the other is kept in prison awaiting execution'.<sup>663</sup> This journal entry raises more questions than answers. First, we do not know why the women fought over *àkàrà*- a local bean pie. It is also a mystery how the situation got so escalated that it led the women to challenge each other to a poison ordeal where they both drank a supposedly poisonous substance called *obo* that was said to kill only the guilty party, but eventually led to both their deaths. Moreover, we do not know if the fight was as a result of household rivalry or for other unrelated reasons. It is therefore difficult to make any conclusion regarding rivalry amongst co-wives from such a record. What we do know about rivalry is also gathered from modern sociological sources that claim that polygamous compounds bred 'jealousy, envy, hate, and chaos' amongst wives.<sup>664</sup> This is plausible as the very word for a co-wife, *orogún*, means rival or competitor. Nevertheless, other historians argue that rivalry between wives was grossly exaggerated since it was older wives who asked their husbands to marry new brides to relive them of domestic duties and allow them more time to pursue economic undertakings. Peter Lloyd however writes that this argument is an ambivalent one because despite older wives asking for younger ones, when they reached menopause 'they [felt] increasingly isolated as all the affection of their husbands [was] directed toward the younger wives', causing rivalry and friction. He added that there were two images of the head wife; one is that of a matriarch presiding over the polygamous household; another is of a bitter woman using witchcraft to make her husband impotent, and thus denying him the reward of marrying new wives.<sup>665</sup>

New brides had to quickly learn the female hierarchy of the compound, identifying that the *iyáálé* (head wife), was in charge of the women in the house. She settled quarrels, advised the others in childcare and etiquette,

---

<sup>663</sup> The poison ordeal will be discussed in more detail in the chapter five.

<sup>664</sup> Helen Ware, 'Polygyny: Women's Views in a Transitional Society, Nigeria 1975', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 41 (1979), 185–195 (p. 190).

<sup>665</sup> Lloyd, 'Divorce among the Yoruba', 69.

assigned chores, and organised food preparation during feasts and festivals.<sup>666</sup> Since a bride stayed in this senior's wife's room until the birth of the first child, the head wife also instructed her and acted as her confidant. Sometimes they fell out before she birthed a child and in such cases, the younger wife moved into her own room.<sup>667</sup> The new bride was responsible for most of the domestic chores including sanitation duties such as cleaning the compound and sweeping. She also cared for the children of senior wives while they were away. She was expected to bear this burden without complaint.<sup>668</sup> Fortunately, due to the Yorùbá fondness for eating from professional caterers, she was spared the task of cooking at multiple times during the day. Although Mann describes cooking as one of the duties of a wife in the early twentieth century, this was not so in the previous century. Oyewumi's claim that cooking was not central to the definition of Yorùbá family life is confirmed by many nineteenth-century sources. Bowen for instance observed that 'no people are so much in the habit of eating in the streets, where women are always engaged in preparing all sorts of dishes for sale to passers by'.<sup>669</sup> Although scholars have suggested many reasons for this, the most likely explanation was proposed by B. W. Hodder, who argues that women seldom cooked in the home because they put their trading and commercial interests first.<sup>670</sup> Some husbands had to cook for themselves and wash their own clothes as wives were engaged in trading or other forms of labour.<sup>671</sup> These economic activities were of central importance to a woman's role as a wife.

---

<sup>666</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, pp. 45–6.

<sup>667</sup> Johnson, pp. 114–5.

<sup>668</sup> Akin L. Mabogunje, *Yoruba Towns* (Ibadan University Press, 1905), p. 6; Bascom, 'The Principle of Seniority', 39; Pearce, 72.

<sup>669</sup> Oyewumi, p. 58; Bowen, p. 301.

<sup>670</sup> B.W Hodder, *Markets in West Africa: Studies in Markets and Trade amongst the Yoruba and Ibo* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1969), p.103 cited in Oyewumi, p. 58.

<sup>671</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, February 1867.

### ***Women's matrimonial labour***

Within a marriage, men and women had clear economic roles and responsibilities to one another. The bargain of marriage required that a husband gave his wife starting capital to trade and the woman used income from this trade to meet her responsibilities in the home, which included providing for her own upkeep and that of her children, especially when her children were infants.<sup>672</sup> A husband could decide to give his wife more money over time but this was solely at his discretion as only the initial capital was mandatory. Both free and slave wives were expected to pursue trade although to a different degree. Most women traded and even those who had other primary occupations traded part-time. Niara Sudarkaksa's claim that 'virtually all women in [... Yoruba society] are engaged in some type of trade activity' is confirmed by the nineteenth century missionary, William Clarke, who observed that despite women carrying out other occupations, women left their work from about five pm during the peak market period to 'try their fortune at trade'.<sup>673</sup> Although Ajisafe Moore and later Simi Afonja wrote that a wife had to help her husband in his vocation as well as carry on their own independent trading ventures, there is no historical evidence to support this as many missionaries expressly stated that women were not obliged to work for their husbands.<sup>674</sup> It is possible that Ajisafe Moore may have been referring to slave wives since they were expected to both work for their upkeep and perhaps to buy their freedom, as well as work for their master-husbands. Free husbands and wives had complete economic independence and exclusive control over their financial affairs. There was no common purse. They each retained their profits, and neither could be held responsible for the other's debt, either in their lifetime or posthumously. Wives had no rights or claims over their husband's property and vice-versa, neither could a spouse inherit in the event of death. The only property to which a wife was entitled was a room

---

<sup>672</sup> Ajisafe Moore, pp. 28–9; Denzer, 'Yoruba Women', 7; Mann, 'Marriage Choices among the Educated African Elite', 209; Oyewumi, p. 65; Sudarkasa, 'The Strength of our Mothers', 175.

<sup>673</sup> Sudarkasa, *Where Women Work*, p. 2; Clarke, p. 265.

<sup>674</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 28; Afonja, 305; Bowen, p. 305.

for herself and her children at marriage.<sup>675</sup> In practice, the patrilineage and not the husband allocated this room.

A wife's independence was recognised, upheld, promoted and protected by indigenous law, sometimes against the will of her husband. In 1870, Abraham Àjàkà, a convert in Òtá, a neighbouring town to Abẹ̀òkúta, loaned his wife fourteen heads of cowries to buy a slave which cost one hundred and thirty four heads of cowries. After about a year, a scarcity of slaves led to a rise in prices and someone offered him for the slave twice what his wife had paid. Intending to buy his wife's share of the slave, he accepted. However, when he told his wife, she insisted that she needed her slave and refused to sell. When Abraham insisted on selling, the wife took the case to the mission house. James White and John King heard the case and decided in favour of his wife stating that since he had lent her the money, the slave was her property and he had no right to sell him/her. They however ruled that his wife should pay him the fourteen heads of cowries he had loaned her. Unsatisfied with the ruling and instead wanting to sell the slave and make a profit, Àjàkà took the matter to the chiefs who again upheld White's decision and told his wife to restore to him fourteen heads of cowries. Still displeased, Abraham continued to pressure his wife to sell, beating her and once throwing her out of the compound. When the authorities became aware of this state of affairs, they banished him from the town on 25 May 1871 for insubordination to the government. Although insubordination was ordinarily a capital offence, his sentence was commuted because White pleaded on Abraham's behalf.<sup>676</sup> Although an isolated incident, this occurrence revealed the commitment of the Yorùbá to upholding women's economic rights even against all claims made by their husbands. If a spouse provided capital towards his wife's ventures, outside his mandatory initial contribution, he was only entitled to his investment and not the profits. Any transgression of these rules was considered a criminal offence. The only exception to this would be if both parties had previously agreed on alternative terms.

---

<sup>675</sup> Bowen, p. 305.

<sup>676</sup> It is impossible to know if this same judgement would have been passed had the husband been a socio-politically or socio-economically powerful man in Abẹ̀òkúta since extra-legal power dynamics would have come into play. James White, Journal, May 1871.

### ***Missionaries and women's labour***

Missionaries opposed Yorùbá marriage structures, prescribing instead that Christian marriages based on a male breadwinner and patriarch who provided for his wife and children was a better model for society.<sup>677</sup> In Aké, Ajayi Crowther stated optimistically in 1853 that many of the converts who were married in church now entered into male breadwinner/female housewife roles 'with all readiness and happiness', encouraging others to do the same.<sup>678</sup> His assertion may have been true for Christian couples in some parts of Lagos. Mann argues that Christian influences and the introduction of ordinance marriages prompted a rise in marriages modelled along European lines in which women depended first on their fathers, and then on their husbands.<sup>679</sup> However, evidence from Abẹ̀òkúta was markedly different.

In Abẹ̀òkúta, Crowther's comment was more of an aspiration than a reality as very few converts lived up to these ideals. Daniel Coker in his 1875 annual letter stated disapprovingly that women were so intent on trading that some of the candidates for baptism tended to neglect class and Sunday service if the *ojọ ojà* (market day) that occurred every fifth day fell on a Thursday or Sunday.<sup>680</sup> In actuality, the wives of missionaries who were supposed to act as an example to the 'heathen', continued to engage in large-scale economic undertakings separate and independent from their husbands. In 1864, Arthur Harrison wrote a letter to Henry Venn, the secretary of the CMS, expressing his disapproval of Mrs White, the wife of James White, a Sàró missionary. He complained that her trading activities were so large that she had employed three women and two men to assist in her trade of European goods including

---

<sup>677</sup> For more examples in Africa, see Gertrude Mianda, 'Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The Evolve Case', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 144–163.

<sup>678</sup> Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 17 October 1853.

<sup>679</sup> Mann, 'Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos', 203.

<sup>680</sup> Every fifth day there was a big market in which people of the surrounding towns and villages brought their various wares and merchandise to Abẹ̀òkúta to buy and sell. This was larger than the daily town market. Daniel Coker, *Annual Letter*, 1875.

plates, cloth and tobacco. He added that contrary to CMS proscription of the sale and consumption of alcohol, 'Mrs White had received [and traded] one hundred cases of gin'. Harrison was further exasperated by the news that Mrs White had employed Mrs Talabì, a 'disgraced' convert suspended from the church, who had left her husband to co-habit and bear children by another man. Even worse, rather than moving with her husband when he was transferred to Òtá, Mrs White remained in Abẹ̀òkúta to continue her trade.<sup>681</sup> This type of economic independence was typical of Yorùbá missionary wives at the time and was in sharp contrast to European wives, such as Anna Hinderer, who simply supported their husband's ministry. Indeed the wives of Yorùbá missionary seemed to have viewed their activities as separate from the Church hence Mrs White's lack of qualms regarding her sale of alcohol, and the moral status of her employees.

Some wives of African missionaries did not concern themselves with church activities at all, reflecting historical patterns of separate labour spheres. They saw church work as their husbands' duties, which had little to do with their profession. James Johnson expressed his disapproval of Mrs Allen, the wife of another of the town's Ègbá pastors, who did little to identify with her husband's job and church work. He complained that she 'scarcely resided in her station [...] sometimes sleeping there only at night or other times spending only a few hours on Sundays out of the whole week'. She instead lived in Ìpòrò, where they had a house. There she carried out her trade and even had her own slaves despite Johnson's opposition to Christians owning slaves.<sup>682</sup> Judith Byfield proposes a reason for why missions opposed women's economic ventures. She writes that although missionaries admired the socio-economic independence of women, they opposed it because it impeded their

---

<sup>681</sup> Despite missionary opposition to women's labour, they hardly ever spoke about men's labour perhaps because they viewed the latter as normal and as a result unworthy of note. However, this absence leaves many questions unanswered including those concerning young men's labour and its connection to masculinities. Arthur Harrison, Letter to Reverend Venn, 5 February 1864.

<sup>682</sup> Although both Mrs White and Mrs Allen were most likely in the 'mother' stage of the Yorùbá lifecycle rather than the 'wife' stage, these examples were included in this chapter to show the economic conjugal dynamics between missionaries and their wives within the wider discussion of wives' economic activities. Furthermore, unlike the indigenous Yorùbá, missionaries did not distinguish between wives and mothers. They believed that all women's economic activities were unacceptable. James Johnson, Journal, 1878.



desire to create a monogamous family unit modelled after European patriarchy.<sup>683</sup> Missionaries like Bowen thought that the family unit 'lacked unity' since women had independent affairs from their husbands and supported their own children. His call for a 'family unit' was entrenched in his idealised androcentric western view of the family.<sup>684</sup> Some missionaries even suggested that teaching men commerce was the only remedy for women's supposed monopoly on trade. As a result, the CMS introduced a new cotton ginnery to promote cotton trade and teach vocational trading to men, stating that they felt 'it was proper for men rather than women to do so.'<sup>685</sup>

Some missionaries articulated their disapproval of Yorùbá marriage by insinuating that a lack of a common purse somehow led to suspicion and mistrust between spouses. A European missionary wrote in *Ìwé Ìròhìn* that according to indigenous custom, husbands and wives had different purses and interests, and since converts decided to follow this 'native' principle, Christian marriages, like 'heathen' unions, lacked any domestic peace or cohesion. He argued that a husband did not entrust his property to his wife lest she appropriate it for her own use. He added that since husbands were not consulted on financial matters, women would most likely end up 'hopelessly in debt'.<sup>686</sup> Quite telling of missionary biases towards Yorùbá models of marriage, this entry distorted facts about Yorùbá customs, introducing negative connotations. Rather than view the Yorùbá system as an alternative way that promoted women's independence and self-sufficiency, missionaries chose to view it as destructive, breeding hostility and distrust. Furthermore, the missionary's insinuation that men were better traders whom women needed to consult in order to make correct business decisions was completely unfounded. By all indications, women were in a better position than men to make accurate and informed decisions in commerce as they had been socialised for this role.

---

<sup>683</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>684</sup> Bowen, p. 343.

<sup>685</sup> *African Times*, 1 April 1870.

<sup>686</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, May 1863.

Within the discourse of women's labour, a few missionaries changed their stance slightly in the 1860s, perhaps due to a realisation that they could not prevent women from pursuing economic activities. Missionary discourse changed from opposing all women's formal economic and commercial activities to insisting that women perform gender-appropriate 'reasonable work'. Missions asked that Christian wives engage in petty-trading activities at home to earn extra money rather than engage in large-scale, long-distance trade ventures that took them away from their husbands and children for extended periods.<sup>687</sup> Nevertheless, even this was unsuccessful as Yorùbá Christian wives continued to trade along traditional lines well into the twentieth century. In 1900, L. A. Lijadu defended his wife's trading activities to his supervisors by claiming that it was within the 'reasonable limit' specified by the CMS. He wrote that his wife was not 'uncontrollable' as others had suggested and her travels for trade were not as often as people reported. He argued that contrary to accusations, she spent most of her time with him at the mission house rather than off on trading activities.<sup>688</sup> Evidently, up to the end of the century, not much had changed with regards to the economics of the household.

Rather than a system of mutual benefit, most CMS missionaries saw the separate purse system as a hindrance to a 'happy' and successful marriage. They argued that men fancied it cheaper to have their wives working for themselves rather than supporting them.<sup>689</sup> An *Ìwé Ìròhìn* contributor commented that 'a selfish husband makes his wife do all the hard work so that she has no time to attend to her proper duties of minding the house and bringing up the children'.<sup>690</sup> Therefore, men were also targets of this vilifying narrative. Missionaries also added that the usual excuse women gave for trading was that a husband's earning was insufficient. They considered this reason a ruse for women's desire to satisfy their need for gain and luxuries. The only way to amend this was by teaching the new generation of females

---

<sup>687</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, January 1864.

<sup>688</sup> L. A. Lijadu, Family papers: Letter to the Finance Committee, 2 April 1900.

<sup>689</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, January 1864.

<sup>690</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, July 1862.

‘the correct way to live’ which was why mission school curricula for girls put subjects such as cooking and sewing at the forefront of female education.<sup>691</sup>

It is ironic that although evangelists wrote disparagingly about Yorùbá marriage models, many had wives engaged in large scale, long-distance trading, highlighting what little control, if any, missionaries had over their wife’s activities.<sup>692</sup> This African missionary narrative also often flew in the face of reality because many African missionaries depended on the labour of their wives for sustenance as they repeatedly complained of the inadequacy of their salary to provide for their families. Their near perpetual requests for salary increases were seldom granted leading them to rely on spousal labour for support.<sup>693</sup> African missionaries thus lived lives of contradiction; caught between Christian expectations of conjugality and the realities of sustaining a family on an inadequate single income. As a compromise, some missionaries took up a second occupation with James White notably breeding and selling livestock and livestock produce.<sup>694</sup>

### ***Missionaries and polygyny***

Missionaries routinely accused Yorùbá marriages of being ‘contrary to true morality’ and founded on idolatry. They claimed that a woman separated from her husband during trading ventures was mostly likely to be unfaithful as only Christian principles could prevent infidelity.<sup>695</sup> These assertions were not only unfounded but contradicted the state of affairs since the problem of adultery was, as suggested by archival sources, more pervasive in church than amongst non-Christians. It is likely that the vehement opposition to women’s labour was closely linked to European opposition to polygyny and all its tenets. Several historians have extensively discussed polygyny in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland and missionary opposition to it. For this reason, this topic

---

<sup>691</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, February 1867.

<sup>692</sup> James White, Letter to Reverend Venn, 28 October 1858.

<sup>693</sup> Samuel Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 25 September 1856.

<sup>694</sup> James White, Letter to Reverend Venn, 28 October 1858.

<sup>695</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, June 1864.

will not be extensively analysed here.<sup>696</sup> It is necessary to say however that polygyny was near universal in Yorùbáland. Royalty, chiefs and rich men had large numbers of wives, the largest being Adélù, the *Aláàfin* (ruler) of Òyó who was rumoured to have had over three hundred wives. Even ordinary citizens had two or three wives.<sup>697</sup> Simplistically, a man's wealth and status in Yorùbáland was not measured in monetary terms but according to the size of his household. The more wives a man married, the more children he could have. The more children he had, the more productive labour he acquired for economic ventures increasing his profits, which he used to purchase more slaves and marry more wives. This allowed a man progress from junior masculinity when he married his first wife to adult and elite masculinity where he had a large household of wives, children and slaves, which in turn attracted followers to his household.<sup>698</sup> Besides, Yorùbá customs, which prescribed that men and women have separate economic activities, freed male members from having to financially provide for their wives, increasing their ability to acquire more resources in terms of future wives and slaves.

Beyond its many advantages to men, polygyny was also practically beneficial to women. Having other wives in the compound not only freed women from boredom and the burden of domestic tasks, a certain household reciprocity also allowed women to engage in longer periods of trade.<sup>699</sup> When her children were still young, a woman could only engage in limited commercial activities because she had to care for her own children as well as those of the older wives. As her children grew older, they in turn were placed in the care of wives who were new mothers, so she could actively pursue other economic activities, expand her trading interests, and accumulate wealth.<sup>700</sup> Since couples had separate purses, a woman also did not have to support her husbands. She could use her resources as she wished without fear of her

---

<sup>696</sup> For example, see: Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 183-4; Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450- 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 307-321.

<sup>697</sup> Bowen, p. 304-5; Campbell, p. 59-60.

<sup>698</sup> Campbell, p. 58; Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, p. 195.

<sup>699</sup> Brown, 1075.

<sup>700</sup> The presence of domestic slaves on farms and in homes would also have relieved women's household burden and made it easier to pursue trade. Brown, 1075; Afonja, 309.

husband's dealings or debt and some women became richer than their husbands.<sup>701</sup> Polygyny also freed women from constant pregnancies. The Yorùbá practiced a period of two- to three-year post-partum abstinence where women could not have sexual intercourse because cultural beliefs indicated that it would be detrimental to the baby's health and maybe even endanger its life.<sup>702</sup> Oyewumi argues that since children were of paramount importance in Yorùbá society, the two-year abstinence was to ensure that a woman's body was strong enough to carry another healthy child.<sup>703</sup> During this time, a man turned his attention to his other wives. Polygamy therefore facilitated child spacing while protecting against extra-marital affairs.

The post-partum abstinence period was one of the main reasons why most young men in Abẹ̀òkúta refused to convert. Since Christianity only allowed them one wife, a man would have to wait years before having sexual intercourse with his wife after childbirth. Missionary assurances that sex did not harm the baby were not enough to convince most young men, under the enormous influence of their relatives. Townsend complained about this practice when he wrote that

One would have no idea of the difficulty of some young men in having one wife. In some cases they are constrained by their relatives to take a second wife. In fact some women are forced upon them. Others again are kept from their wives by an abused custom. From the time of the birth of a child until it is weaned at about two years. This is done by teaching them that sexual intercourse will injure the health of the child and perhaps endanger its life. Everything in this country is against having one wife.<sup>704</sup>

Furthermore, a man with one wife could not grow his household as quickly, thus delaying his ascent to elitism. Polygamy, as practiced in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, was thus beneficial to both husbands and wives. Nonetheless, missionaries were strongly and actively opposed to its practice, blaming it for what they perceived as failures in society. Samuel Crowther once stated that what he considered a high incidence of sexually transmitted

---

<sup>701</sup> Examples include Madam Tinúbu and Madam Jojòlólá who will be discussed in chapter four.

<sup>702</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, 22 July 1863; Hyam, p. 183.

<sup>703</sup> Oyewumi, p. 60.

<sup>704</sup> Townsend, Journal, 22 July 1863.

diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea in Abẹ̀òkúta was principally due to polygamy.<sup>705</sup> Since polygamy granted men multiple sexual partners, it is plausible that this could have contributed to the spread of disease. However, Crowther's haste in relating the spread of venereal diseases to polygamy rather than other factors such as extra-marital affairs and migration can be traced to the CMS Yorùbá mission's stance on polygyny. Their opposition to the institution was so great that potential male converts could only be granted full Christian status after they had forsaken all their wives save one of their choosing.<sup>706</sup> It was not until 1883 that polygamous men were allowed full membership of the Abẹ̀òkúta, a decision that resulted in opposition and protest from some members.<sup>707</sup>

### **The question of affection**

Missionary biases towards Yorùbá polygyny informed their perception of the relationships between husbands and wives. They believed that economic independence and polygyny destroyed all compassion in marriages because unions were supposedly not for 'mutual support and love'. In the event of illness, an *Ìwé Ìròhin* contributor claimed that wives went to their mothers for care while with regards to husbands, he wrote:

One of the results of polygamy is that a man has no companion in a woman. The friend of a polygamist is one of his own sex, his nurse in sickness is a male friend or slave or relative, seldom a wife. Among his wives, there is none trusted with the care of his household for their interests are separated. That it is so among polygamists that all that dwell among them see. Hence one of the great ends of marriage is frustrated, the husband must seek a bosom friend elsewhere than amongst his women.<sup>708</sup>

Missionaries therefore suggested that the relationship between men and their wives lacked trust and friendship. Instead, they argued that spousal relationships were characterised by self-interest. These missionary

---

<sup>705</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 13 December 1852.

<sup>706</sup> Reverend Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 23 September 1846; William Allen, Journal, 29 August 1869.

<sup>707</sup> *Lagos Times*, 25 August 1883.

<sup>708</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, June 1864; February 1867.

sentiments are echoed in modern-day research. Many researchers have claimed that affection was absent in indigenous Yorùbá culture and that love was only introduced by western influences. Fadipe commented in the 1930s that the romantic element in Yorùbá marriages was almost non-existent.<sup>709</sup> More recently, Marjorie McIntosh also contends that in the nineteenth century, love played little role in spousal choices and marriage while Edna Bay and Donald Doham state more generally that '[t]he jury is still out on the question of compassionate marriage in Africa'.<sup>710</sup> This notion of African and Yorùbá marriages is identical to missionary and colonial texts that reduced African intimacy to sex for procreation purposes.<sup>711</sup> It paints a picture of strictly pragmatic marriage agreements that adhered to rigid societal rules. Mann counters this argument in her discussion of the Lagos elite in the early twentieth century. She writes that the Yorùbá did attach a measure of significance to the sentiment between prospective couples. She argues that although procreation and lineage posterity was the foremost reason for marriage, the Lagos Yorùbá did sometimes express strong feelings about whom they wanted to marry.<sup>712</sup>

It could be argued that these 'feelings' were strictly a Lagosian phenomenon resulting from prolonged contact with Europeans.<sup>713</sup> However, nineteenth-century sources confirm that affection played a role in marriages in the Yorùbá interior. The chief of Òṣìlẹ̀lẹ̀ in Abẹ̀òkúta once showed David Hinderer, a German missionary with the CMS, his breeches and said that they were the first ones he had ever had. He added that being in *love* at the time he got them, a priest who wanted the breeches proposed to exchange them for a charm that would make him successful in his courtship. But he thought that the man only wanted to cheat him and so, he refused.<sup>714</sup> While it is possible that Hinderer or Bowen, who told this story, misrepresent the word *love*, this story still gives a clear indication that some kind of affection played a role in

---

<sup>709</sup> Fadipe, pp. 66–70.

<sup>710</sup> McIntosh, p. 86; Bay and Donham, p. 10; Hyam, pp. 182–186.

<sup>711</sup> Thomas and Cole, p. 3.

<sup>712</sup> Mann, 'Marriage Choices', p. 206.

<sup>713</sup> While the rest of the Yorùbá region was not colonised until the 1890s, Lagos was a crown colony from 1861.

<sup>714</sup> Bowen, p. 137.

pre-colonial marriages. A journal entry by William George on 4 August 1857 also brings this solely pragmatic view of marriage under criticism. He wrote that a young man committed suicide the moment his wife breathed her last. Before shooting himself, the man cried: 'I am loath [...] to see the world again seeing the object of my affection is gone'. George pronounced that such affection was really praiseworthy in a 'heathen'.<sup>715</sup> Although this event may be interpreted as a young man's misery at restarting a marriage process that would take years to complete, the words he used before ending his life were significant. We can speculate that he would have used the word *ifé*, which George rightly translates as affection. In present day vocabulary, *ifé* means love. In the past however, it would have been used to convey a feeling of deep fondness for another human being, indicating an emotional attachment amongst couples rather than a pragmatic marital arrangement. Also, due to the turbulent circumstances of nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, husbands took on the role of protector to their wives and children. Whenever there were wars or rumours of war, before men stood guard at the town wall or left for war camps, they first searched for safe places for their wives and children either at the mission house or by placing them in less exposed towns.<sup>716</sup> This certainly does not indicate a relationship of indifference. Furthermore, contrary to the *ìwé Ìròhin* report, there are many examples of husbands nursing their wives to health and vice versa. There are even reports of men caring for their wives who suffered from mental illness notwithstanding insanity being a culturally valid reason for divorce.<sup>717</sup> From these, it is evident that many Yorùbá marriages did have some basis in affection despite love not being the main reason for marriage or the lack thereof, a valid reason for its dissolution. Although endearment was neither expressed nor articulated in Western terms of love and romance, it nevertheless existed.

---

<sup>715</sup> William George, Journal, 4 August 1857.

<sup>716</sup> *ìwé Ìròhin*, February 1864.

<sup>717</sup> Daniel Coker, Journal, 29 June 1875.



## The importance of children

In Yorùbáland, procreation and religion were inextricably linked and women played central roles in both spheres. As stated in chapter one, religion permeated all aspects of life, and reproduction was no exception. In Abẹ̀òkúta, and all of Yorùbáland, wives played a vital role in the religious wellbeing of their families.<sup>718</sup> From a young age, girls were taught the lineage religion which they continued to practice in their husband's home. Before marriage, the bride's family made sacrifices to the gods under whose auspices she was supposed to have been born and protected.<sup>719</sup> After the wedding, her husband also purchased an idol for her to worship for the continued protection of their family. J. D. Y. Peel comments that spouses entered into a mutual understanding at marriage. The husband provided the *òrìṣà* (deity) and other means of worship to his wife, and she in turn worshipped the *òrìṣà* to ensure his protection and prosperity, as well as the wellbeing of their children.<sup>720</sup> To understand this reciprocal relationship, we must briefly consider what need indigenous religion was supposed to fulfil in the lives of devotees.

Pre-colonial religion was a pragmatic one. It was not concerned with spirituality alone, but geared towards the attainment of material benefits. Ultimately, indigenous religion was aimed at achieving *àlàáfíà* (well-being).<sup>721</sup> Attaining *àlàáfíà* did not mean just freedom from physical or mental malady as the English translation would suggest; it incorporated spiritual health, as well as wealth, longevity and posterity. A person without these key elements was not considered truly well.<sup>722</sup> The Yorùbá believed that only by worshiping the *òrìṣà* and *itàlẹ̀mọ* (ancestors), and participating in all practices and customs connected with this worship, could one attain *àlàáfíà*. Without *àlàáfíà*, one could not hope to succeed in business, have good physical health or live a long life. Without it, people could also not have children, and reproduction was

---

<sup>718</sup> Olajubu, p. 1.

<sup>719</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 16 June 1848.

<sup>720</sup> Peel, 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', 147.

<sup>721</sup> Adolphus Mann, Journal, 26 June 1856.

<sup>722</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 21 June 1853.

the core purpose of marriage in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland.<sup>723</sup> A petition a man made to his *òrìṣà* in 1856, as recorded in the diary of Adolphus Mann, gives us a picture of what of what a true state of well-being meant to the average Yorùbá man:

*Kí n má rí ejọ Ààrẹ. Èni tó bá pé kí tẹmi má sun-àn, kí ti olúwa ẹ dojúdẹ. Ọtá tó kàn mí, ó kan ikú. Ẹṣẹ ni kí n kọ kí n má kọ ẹnu. Kí n má rí ejọ aláduúgbò. Kí n má rí àkóbá. Kí gbogbo irin mi já sí alááfíà. Kí n má rí ọràn, ọràn lẹtá. Kí n rí ilera. Kí n má rófò. Kí ohun gbogbo tí mò n ẹe máa ẹe déédé. Kó ẹẹ (or Àṣẹ).*

May I avoid any palaver with Aare.<sup>724</sup> Whoever wishes I may not be happy [...] may he be ruined. May I come out on top, the enemy who hates me, may he be a dead body. With my foot, may I knock against [things], [not with] my mouth. May I avoid dispute with my neighbour. May I avoid troublemakers. May all my journeys be in peace. May I avoid sickness, sickness is my enemy. May I enjoy health. May I avoid loss. May everything I do turn out well. So shall it be.<sup>725</sup>

This appeal is the longest Yorùbá text in the CMS archives and although the devotee was a man, his wants, as expressed in this prayer, were identical to those of women at the time. Peel suggests convincingly that this prayer was not one of ‘moral reflection, or even a colloquy with the divine’, but an instrument for deriving secular benefits through his charm.<sup>726</sup> Paramount on the man’s mind was the sustenance of good relations with those in authority. His first request to his deity for peace with his *Ààrẹ* (ruler) indicates that harmony with ‘worldly’ authority was believed to be the essential first step towards attaining wellbeing. In *Ìjàyẹ*, the place where this petition was recorded, peace with authority was even more essential than in other parts of Yorùbáland. From 1831 until the town’s destruction by *Ìbàdàn* in 1862, this town was ruled by the military dictator *Kúrúńmí* who Adolphus Mann described as ‘a tyrant, a cruel [...] autocrat who brought his people to unlimited servitude by system of murder’.<sup>727</sup> A certain fear and tension enveloped the entire town during his rule and it is no surprise that peace with *Ààrẹ* was paramount on the man’s mind.

<sup>723</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 28 September 1855; William George, Journal, 18 March 1877.

<sup>724</sup> *Ààrẹ* was the title of the military ruler of *Ìjàyẹ*.

<sup>725</sup> Adolphus Mann, Journal, 26 June 1856.

<sup>726</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 91.

<sup>727</sup> *Kúrúńmí* will be discussed in detail in chapter four. Adolphus Mann, Journal, 20 July 1853.

After this, the man's attention turned to his enemies. *Òtá* (the enemy) was everywhere in Yorùbá cosmology, and it posed an ever-present threat, especially since it was mostly unrecognisable. A Yorùbá proverb says *ení bá wà láyé tí kò l'òtá, onítòhún ti kú tán* (whoever is on earth and has no enemy is already dead), thus indicating that an individual could never be free from *òtá*. To the Yorùbá, *òtá* was not actually an antagonist as the English translation would suggest. Rather it was anyone or anything whose state of being was in antithesis with that of an individual. Usually, it was the more culturally successful entity that attracted enemies from the less successful categories supposedly as a result of envy they felt for the prosperous. In his anthropological study of enemies in Yorùbá belief, Akintunde Oyetade gives examples of those the Yorùbá regarded as enemies. He states that a barren woman is believed to be the enemy of a woman with children, a lazy man the enemy of a hardworking man, and a rich man the enemy of a poor one.<sup>728</sup> *Òtá* could not be easily identified but it was always present and protection from it was crucial. Hence, protection against enemies accounted a substantial part of the man's petitions. Good social relations appeared next in his list of concerns. Peace with family and neighbours, and avoiding 'troublemakers' was important in averting jealousy, and the subsequent sorcery or witchcraft which could result from it. Thus adequately depicting the socially insecure world the Yorùbá lived in. His prayer then turned to sickness. His view of sickness as an 'enemy' shows how devastating sickness was believed to be. In the nineteenth century, sickness and the subsequent quest for healing could prove an expensive and sometimes futile undertaking. It was therefore imperative to preserve one's health. Success in his trade closed his requests for *àlàáfíà*. Poverty was an illness like any other and its evasion was imperative.<sup>729</sup>

---

<sup>728</sup> Akintunde Oyetade, 'The Enemy in the Belief System', in *Understanding Yorùbá Life and Culture*, ed. by Nike S. Lawal, Matthew Sadiku and Ade Dopamu, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 81–95 (pp. 81–3).

<sup>729</sup> I have written extensively about this elsewhere: See: Temilola Alanamu, 'Indigenous Medical Practices and the Advent of CMS Medical Evangelism in Nineteenth-Century Yorùbáland', *Church History and Religious Culture*, 93 (2013), 5–27 (pp. 13–15).

Although this prayer does not include a petition for children, presumably because the old man needed no more progeny, there is overwhelming evidence that reproduction was at the core of *àlàáfíà* and indigenous worship. On 25 June 1846, Andrew Gollmer entered a compound and found its inhabitants offering sacrifices to their deities. When he asked why they did this, they responded that ‘we pray to them for children, for money, for peace and for long life’.<sup>730</sup> Similarly, Henry Townsend wrote on 28 June of the same year that the Yorùbá offered much prayers and sacrifices ‘to obtain peace, wealth, children and a long life’.<sup>731</sup> Regardless of all her other roles, the main duty of a new wife was to procreate. Brides were valued for their reproductive capacity because lineage posterity and a family’s continued existence depended on them. As succinctly put by Babatunde Lawal, women were literally charged with the ‘preservation of humanity’.<sup>732</sup> Although their position as wife was demanding and not altogether prestigious, it was considered a necessary route to motherhood.<sup>733</sup> Young brides were expected to conceive within months of their wedding and this often caused them anxiety from the very beginning.<sup>734</sup> The Yorùbá valued children for both metaphysical and practical reasons. As stated in the previous chapter, a childless person could never hope for ancestor status, neither could they be reincarnated, a most desirable and anticipated aspect of Yorùbá cosmology. Practically, children also ensured the continuation of the lineage and constituted an invaluable means of production. For a lineage to be successful in pre-colonial Yorùbáland, it needed to have enough labour to accomplish various economic tasks including trading and farming. Lineages that aspired to wealth and influence could thus only be successful if they had a large household.<sup>735</sup> A wife’s inability to bear children was viewed as depriving the lineage of this all-important source of labour and social support. A proverb that shows how devastating childlessness was to the Yorùbá lineage reads *eni tó jó oko kò*

---

<sup>730</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 25 June 1846

<sup>731</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, 28 June 1846.

<sup>732</sup> Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture*, (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1996), cited in Makinde, ‘Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment’ 166.

<sup>733</sup> Makinde, ‘Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment’, 166-7; Callaway, pp. 178–9; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 147.

<sup>734</sup> Pearce, 71.

<sup>735</sup> Renne, *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town*, p. 56; Crumbley, 593.

*rungún; ẹni tó jólé, kò rungún; sùgbón ẹni tí a bí tí kò bímọ ló rungún* (anyone who sets the cocoa plantation on fire does not destroy inheritance, anyone who sets a house on fire does not destroy inheritance, but anyone who is born and fails to give birth himself/herself destroys inheritance).<sup>736</sup> In this proverb, children are contrasted with other crucial Yorùbá concepts; wealth signified by cocoa, and familial bonds signified by the house. The proverb demonstrates that childlessness was worse than poverty or destitution.



Fig 3.4:  
Illustration of a  
young Yorùbá  
mother and  
child. Source:  
*Church  
Missionary  
Gleaner*,  
December 1874.

In nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, the highest honor for any woman was the title of mother.<sup>737</sup> The attainment of motherhood conferred on women what R.

<sup>736</sup> Renne, *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town*, p. 129.

<sup>737</sup> 'True' motherhood occurred when women had surviving children old enough to perform her burial rights when she died. Makinde, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment', 165; Winny Koster-Oyekan, 'Infertility among Yoruba Women: Perceptions on Causes, Treatments

W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt refer to as emphasised femininity, which is the realisation of the ideal position of any women within patriarchy. Motherhood gave women the authority they lacked as wives. It increased their power and esteem in their husband's lineages since they had fulfilled the ultimate duty of womanhood. Sandra Barnes argues that as a mother, women 'supported, advised, defended, protected, and nurtured' her children from birth until adulthood.<sup>738</sup> As outlined in chapter two, mothers and children formed long-lasting affective bonds, which, like other parts of Africa, were considered to be the most stable, satisfying and permanent of all relationships. As her children grew older, she exercised authority over her son's wives and was equally respected by her sons-in law, often exerting control over their daughters even after marriage. Children also cared for their aged mothers, hereby giving them the security they would have otherwise lacked.<sup>739</sup>

A woman's inability to become a mother thus began a harrowing process of alienation and frustration. She faced daily ridicule from her co-wives but most especially her sisters- and mother-in-law, who were, like men, invested in the reproduction of the lineage.<sup>740</sup> In her sociological study of infertility in Yorùbáland, Winny Koster-Oyekan states that there are different levels of barrenness ranging from having one or two children and being unable to conceive again which carries the least stigma, to an inability to conceive which carries the most. Women who could not conceive were referred to as *àgàn*. The word *àgàn*, derived from the Yorùbá verb *gàn*, meaning to hold in contempt or despise, reveals the disdain the Yorùbá felt for infertile women.<sup>741</sup> A barren woman was perceived as dead and useless because she could not be counted on to perpetuate the lineage.<sup>742</sup> Since she had no children, she was considered a nuisance to the household, her opinions were often

---

and Consequences', *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de la Santé Reproductive*, 3 (1999), 13–26 (p. 22).

<sup>738</sup> Barnes, 'Gender and the Politics of Support', 13.

<sup>739</sup> Makinde, Makinde, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment', 165–7; For more on the bonds of mother and children see Audrey Chapman Smock, 'The Impact of Modernisation on Women's Position in the Family in Ghana', in *Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View*, ed. by Alice Schlegel, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 192–214.

<sup>740</sup> Pearce, 72, 75.

<sup>741</sup> Koster-Oyekan, 15.

<sup>742</sup> Olajubu, pp. 30–34.

discarded, and her condition became a matter of lineage concern. R. Hallgren captured the predicament of childless women when he confirmed that: '... a woman is either fertile and important, or infertile and of no importance whatsoever.'<sup>743</sup> Besides, since infertility was considered to be the consequence of immoral behavior punished by deities, ancestors, or (spiritually) powerful people in the community, barren women were thought to have transgressed some moral code, and as a result were subject to ridicule and suspicion by the society at large.<sup>744</sup>

Childless women also faced an uncertain future. Since children and not spouses inherited, a childless woman was left with nothing when her husband died. If she was not economically successful, she faced a bleak future of destitution and abandonment. Moreover, since these women had no legitimate conjugal ties, their social isolation increased the likelihood that they would be accused of witchcraft.<sup>745</sup> The Yorùbá proverb, *ta ni òtá àgàn? Abiyamọ* – (who is the enemy of a barren woman? A mother), expresses that the Yorùbá were particularly suspicious of barren women because they were thought to be wicked and envious people capable of harming fertile women and her children. An infertile woman could also be dismissed from her husband's lineage often condemning her to a precarious future. A woman's story from 1849 in Abẹ̀òkúta illuminates this. In previous years, this woman had three children all of who died in infancy. Her husband's lineage saw her as useless to them and dismissed her, demanding a refund of the bridewealth they paid for her. She had no alternative but to return to her patrilineage who repaid the sum by borrowing from a creditor. Her family proposed putting her in pawn until they had repaid the fee but she asked that they let her start a business and repay them in time, to which they agreed. She then began a small business selling tobacco and snuff. Unluckily, these events occurred at a time of turmoil in the town when Şódekẹ́, the first *Aláké* in Abẹ̀òkúta, died. Since trading was not very profitable with Abẹ̀òkúta, she decided to go to neighbouring towns to sell. On one of her trading ventures, she was

---

<sup>743</sup> R. Hallgren, *Good Things in Life*, (Loberod, 1988) cited in Pearce, 72.

<sup>744</sup> Pearce, 73.

<sup>745</sup> Pearce, 74.

kidnapped and sold into slavery. At the coast, as she awaited transportation across the Atlantic, her mother, a slave returnee from Sierra Leone saw her and begged missionaries to redeem her, which they did for three heads of cowries which at the time was the equivalent of \$1.50.<sup>746</sup>

A woman who could not have children was therefore socially vulnerable. She could be sent out of her marital home at anytime as infertility was a valid reason for divorce. Since bridewealth was linked to her reproductive capacity, she had to return it if demanded. Moreover, it was unlikely that she would marry again since no one would knowingly wed a barren woman. Hence, she faced a life as single, childless woman, a conspicuous abnormality at the time. Very few barren women suffered this fate however, as many were allowed to foster and adopt the children of relatives. Infertile women nevertheless faced an ever-present danger of dismissal from the conjugal household. Furthermore, when a barren woman died, she was buried without all the ceremonies needed to ensure that they reached the afterlife, became ancestors and could be reborn in the lineage. In consequence, the ties that bound childless women to their lineage and to the living as a whole were forever severed.<sup>747</sup>

In her sociological study of polygyny in 1975 Western Nigeria, Helen Ware observed that having children was the main reason women gave for entering into matrimony and they all viewed childlessness as a terrible tragedy.<sup>748</sup> This seems also to have been the case in the nineteenth century. Since the Yorùbá believed that children were gifts from the gods and ancestors, women could only hope to conceive and bear children within the boundaries of indigenous religious worship. It then comes as no surprise that missionaries observed that women were more active than men in *òrìṣà* worship, whether in the home or in public. William Moore recorded in his diary a visit to an *Ọbàtálá* temple, where he met a priestess and a woman who had come to offer sacrifice to the god. Moore delayed their sacrifices and spoke to them about

---

<sup>746</sup> Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 1849.

<sup>747</sup> Burial rites and their significances will be discussed in the chapter five. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 69.

<sup>748</sup> Ware, 194.



Jesus, the living God and eternal life beyond the secular realm. The woman replied that she had no desire for eternal life, children were her only concern, and children were all she desired.<sup>749</sup> This link between religion and reproduction is the reason why young married women in Abéòkúta were unlikely to convert to Christianity. Women were genuinely afraid of the *òrìṣà*. When Samuel Johnson asked a woman why she did not come to Church to hear the word of God, she replied that she could not do so saying ‘I fear God but I dread my *òrìṣà*’.<sup>750</sup> Omosade Awolalu, who conducted extensive studies into Yorùbá religion, asserts that the Yorùbá attribute human qualities to the divinities. She argues that the Yorùbá believe that deities can feel, sense, see, hear, and share human emotions, they can also exact vengeance. As a result, people did all they could to remain in their deity’s good graces to gain their heart’s desires, such as peace, material blessings, and most especially, children.<sup>751</sup>

For the women who did convert, they were likely to get suspended or dismissed from Church for participating in indigenous worship either to conceive or for the wellbeing of their children. In 1854, Ajayi Crowther wrote that he had ‘the painful task to dismiss two female communicants from the church [...] one for non-attendance and the other for complying to make country fashion for her children, instead of opposing such heathen practise’.<sup>752</sup> As for the young wives who remained steadfast to Christianity, they encountered severe persecution from their families who believed that their conversion threatened the very existence of the lineage. Peel estimates that three quarters of reported cases of persecution were of young adolescent women, betrothed women and mother of babies, due to their religious function.<sup>753</sup> In 1851, because Phoebe, a young married girl refused to participate in *Ṣàhngó* worship, her in-laws ‘apprehended her [...] and put her in bonds’. After several days without her yielding, Samuel Crowther wrote that ‘though Phoebe was advanced in the family way, she was flogged by the old

---

<sup>749</sup> William Moore, Journal, 8 August 1851.

<sup>750</sup> Samuel Johnson, Journal, 24 March 1874.

<sup>751</sup> Omosade Awolalu, ‘Yoruba Sacrificial Practice’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 5 (1973), 81-93 (p. 86).

<sup>752</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 25 December 1854.

<sup>753</sup> Peel, ‘Gender in Yoruba Religious Change’, 154.

priest (her father-in-law) unmercifully and pushed into the pit [...] and dry leaves were cast upon her with threats to bury her alive'.<sup>754</sup> Phoebe's case highlights that it was not enough to get pregnant: the high rate of infant mortality at the time necessitated that while her children were in infancy, young mothers were still expected to participate in indigenous religion to protect against infant death. It was only when her children had survived into adolescence that she was then free from restraints concerning reproduction. This is why, as we will see in the next chapter, older women near menopause or post-menopausal were not subject to such physical controls.

There is some evidence to suggest that women past their reproductive years, to a lesser extent, still felt responsible for their daughter's reproduction. A mother once gave her daughter twenty bags of cowries (\$100) to help her make a deity for worship when all the children she bore died in infancy.<sup>755</sup> Furthermore, when Samuel Johnson in Ìbàdàn accused a woman of backsliding and not attending church, Johnson wrote that the woman said

she cannot leave her daughter alone in the worship of orisa to drive away bad children from her (for with the exception of her firstborn, the rest are dying in infancy) and that she being her only daughter, she will be abused if she does not show her sympathies by sharing with her in expenses.<sup>756</sup>

Therefore, although older women were not be physically controlled through corporal punishment since they had fulfilled their reproductive responsibilities, a small measure of societal pressure, in the form of verbal derision, incentivised older women to assist their daughters in their reproductive careers.

Conversely, some young women forsook indigenous religion for the same reason others participated in its worship. These women came to the church as a result of the perceived failure of indigenous religion, especially concerning matters of reproduction. When a young woman's child died despite all her propitiations, prayers and sacrifices to her deity, she gave her idols to the

---

<sup>754</sup> Samuel Crowther, *Journal*, 5 January 1851.

<sup>755</sup> Thomas King, *Journal*, 4 April 1852.

<sup>756</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Journal*, 14 March 1874.

missionaries and joined the list of baptismal candidates.<sup>757</sup> Identically, on 9 July 1853, a male convert brought his wife and father to the Andrew Gollmer's house. His wife showed interest in converting to Christianity and Andrew Gollmer wrote that 'his wife brought her *orisha* called Buku [...] this she said she worshipped for the past six years and spent about fifteen heads of cowries (\$7.50) to obtain a child but in vain'.<sup>758</sup> There are many instances where young women went to missionaries asking if conversion would guarantee them children and were disappointed when missionaries could offer them no assurances.<sup>759</sup>

The only way infertile women could offset an uncertain future was through wealth, which allowed her to claim the head of household title and attract followers. By this means, she became a metaphoric or symbolic mother to those in her household rather than a biological one. It may be no coincidence that two of the most successful women in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, Ẹ́fúnṣetán Aníwúrà in Ìbàdàn and Ẹ́fúnṣetán Tinúbu in Lagos and then Abẹ̀òkúta, had no surviving children. Bolanle Awe argues that since Ẹ́fúnṣetán's marriage was childless, it did not last; and as if for consolation, she turned increasingly to her trade.<sup>760</sup> Nevertheless, people remained suspicious of such women. Accordingly, because Ẹ́fúnṣetán was childless, Johnson wrote that she gained an unfounded reputation of being cruel to her female slaves who became pregnant, forcing them undergo unscrupulous abortion techniques.<sup>761</sup> Without children, Yorùbá women forever remained wives and could not move on to the next stage of their lifecycle, unless they gained symbolic motherhood through wealth. If a woman bore children, with time, her position changed from that of wife to the greater valued position of mother.

---

<sup>757</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 4 April 1852.

<sup>758</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 9 July 1853.

<sup>759</sup> For example, see Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 12 August 1858.

<sup>760</sup> Bolanle Awe, 'Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura', p. 60.

<sup>761</sup> Bolanle Awe also refutes this claim. See Awe, 'Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura', p.69; Samuel Johnson, Journal, 30 June 1874.

## **Male infertility**

Male infertility was also acknowledged but was considered less of a problem. Since lineage posterity conceptually took precedence over nuclear ones, families made clandestine arrangements to have other lineage males impregnate an infertile man's wife. This practice was an open secret amongst adults.<sup>762</sup> A child born through this means was recognised as legitimate because the Yorùbá stressed sociological bonds rather than biological ones. Proverbs like *ẹni tó l'àgùtàn ló l'omọ rẹ* (he who owns the she-goat owns the kid), *ẹni bá n'igi ló l'èso rẹ* (he who owns the tree owns the fruit), *oba kii kọ omọ iyàwó rẹ* (a king does not reject any child born in wedlock) expresses that the Yorùbá emphasised jural rights over biological ones.<sup>763</sup> In reality however, the issue of male infertility was a lot more complicated than the proverbs suggest. Although societal pressure fell heavier on women for children, men also felt the burden. Like women, men also tried various religions in their quest to secure posterity. Samuel Cole once met a young man in Aké who he estimated was about thirty years of age. The man had married three wives but had no children from them. To find a solution to this, he converted to Islam and made all the sacrifices and gifts the Muslim clerics required. This also failed and he came to Cole to see if he could offer him any solutions.<sup>764</sup> In their quest for offspring, women had varying control over their husbands, whose religious observance they felt was intimately linked to their reproductive capacities. For this reason, women often opposed their husband's conversion as they felt it was detrimental to their reproduction. As most men submitted to almost anything to retain their wives, many young men left the church due to spousal pressures. Gabriel, a Christian convert, left the church and returned to indigenous religion when his wife told him that without him returning to *ifá* worship and making an idol for her to worship, it would be impossible to bear a child for him. Nevertheless, after years went by without conceiving, his wife left him and moved to another town.<sup>765</sup>

---

<sup>762</sup> Pearce, 75.

<sup>763</sup> Yorùbá translation by informant Mrs. Bola Alanamu, Lagos, Nigeria, March 2014; Callaway, p. 179.

<sup>764</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 27 June 1873.

<sup>765</sup> Mr. R. Cross, Journal, 1879.

Although Rhonda Howard states that in sub-Saharan Africa, a husband could divorce a wife for barrenness while she could not do the same, many women in Yorùbáland left their husbands due to infertility.<sup>766</sup> In 1858, Andrew Maser visited Mág̀bàgbé̀òrun, a *babaláwo* and former convert who had stopped attending church because of his wife's hatred of the Christian religion. He wrote:

Whilst we were speaking, she [the wife] came in with a child on her back apparently in great excitement. I tried to speak quietly with her but she flew very soon in a frightful passion and cried [that] she had formally had a Mohammedan [Muslim] husband and had been childless but now she had one. *Ifa* having given it unto her because her (second) husband was his priest and now, she would rather be cut to pieces and thrown into the river than have her husband give up *ifa* again.<sup>767</sup>

This threat was effective because Maser states that this *babaláwo* never again attended church. These two instances not only reveal women's influence over their husband's religious choices, it also shows that wives could and did leave their husbands for impotence. Since reproduction was to ensure lineage and not necessarily individual posterity, families also persecuted men for converting as their conversion was detrimental to the lineage longevity. In 1873, a woman threatened Táíwò, her son-in-law for attending church. She told him she would take his wife away from him should he not return to indigenous worship. Although likely an empty threat as the family would have to return the brideprice, Táíwò resisted despite his mother-in-law gaining the support of his kin who later joined in his harassment and victimisation. After ample verbal abuses and further threats to chain him and sell him into slavery failed, they let him alone.<sup>768</sup> This is in sharp contrast to how women were treated. Similar to childhood, while women were subject to harsh, physical controls, men were either verbally coerced or left to their own devices.

---

<sup>766</sup> Howard, p. 48.

<sup>767</sup> Andrew Maser, Journal, 9 July 1858.

<sup>768</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 26 January 1873.

The final form of persecution men encountered was arguably the most effective method of coercion and this was pressure from *òrẹ* (friends) or *ẹgbé* (peers). In the nineteenth century, men were constrained by masculine norms, values, behaviors and ambitions.<sup>769</sup> Manliness was not simply determined by getting older but by consciously attaining cultural markers and qualities of manhood.<sup>770</sup> Peel argues this when he wrote about the first wave of young male converts to the Christian church. He contends that their conversion meant that they could not strive to attain all the cultural markers of successful indigenous masculinity such as polygyny and as iterated in chapter one, joining civil and religious cults.<sup>771</sup> This delayed, limited, and some cases eliminated altogether their prospects of attaining senior and elite masculinity, values which their *ẹgbé* strongly upheld. Young male converts faced social sanctions in terms of ridicule that were often potent enough to deter young men from converting. This because verbal derision damaged a man's reputation and many people told missionaries that the reason why they did not attend church was because they feared what others would say.<sup>772</sup> Peel argues that it was not until the 1890s when colonial influences extended into the interior and young men realised that Christianity offered personal socio-economic advancement, that peer influences turned in favour of Christianity.<sup>773</sup>

Peel's observation is supported by archival evidence as missionaries often complained that many young male converts left the church due to peer pressure, either returning to indigenous religion or converting to Islam, which allowed young men similar routes to elite masculine status. In 1846, Ajayi Crowther lamented that many men had left the church and dedicated their children to indigenous gods and even married more wives.<sup>774</sup> Samuel Johnson also wrote on 29 March 1878 that he was 'sad to say that the son of

---

<sup>769</sup> Cleaver, p. 4.

<sup>770</sup> John Tosh, 'Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 41–60 (p. 41).

<sup>771</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 237.

<sup>772</sup> Theophilus Kefer, Journal, 1 February 1855.

<sup>773</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 156.

<sup>774</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 23 September 1846.

the headman of our church who died last year has withdrawn himself from the church, his heart being stolen by a Mohammedan friend'.<sup>775</sup> Similarly, in 1870, a young man in Abẹ̀òkúta told Samuel Cole that did not attend church 'because he was afraid of persecution and what his friends would say'.<sup>776</sup> The fear of verbal derision was not the only reason why men caved under peer pressure. The change of lifestyle that conversion necessitated sometimes created distance between male converts and their friendship networks which was a most important bond amongst men at the time, second only to the bonds men forged with their mothers.<sup>777</sup> Networks of friendships were perhaps more important for men than for women. Boys formed friendships with people in close proximity from an early age and due to the leisure time they had in childhood, they were able to develop these friendships much more intimately than the female schedule allowed.<sup>778</sup> Furthermore, unlike girls that moved to their conjugal homes, boys usually remained in close proximity to their childhood companions further strengthening their networks.<sup>779</sup> These friendships were based on mutual emotional attachment and support and despite the *Ìwé Ìròhin* contributor's biases about spousal attachments stated earlier, he was accurate in stressing the importance of male companionship that endured in times of illness and distress and gave rise to intense grief in the event of death.<sup>780</sup> When Thomas John, a friend to the pastor William Allen died on 22 March 1870, Allen cried '[w]e have no continuing city here!' He wrote about his deep distress at the funeral service. 'It was very difficult for me to go on' he said. 'I had several times [to] stop and give way to tears when looking at Mr John's place and found him no more with us [...] two men shall be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other one left'.<sup>781</sup> Furthermore, male *ẹgbẹ* (friendship networks or age groups) provided mutual financial, economic and social support by alternatively working on one another's farms during labour intensive times such as planting and harvesting. They also assisted in intensive construction jobs such as building houses and

---

<sup>775</sup> Samuel Johnson, Journal, 29 March 1879.

<sup>776</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 4 July 1870.

<sup>777</sup> Peel, Religious Encounter, p. 54.

<sup>778</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 29 September 1852.

<sup>779</sup> Peel, Religious Encounter, pp. 54-5

<sup>780</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, June 1864; February 1867.

<sup>781</sup> William Allen, Journal, 22 March 1870 cited in Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 54.

contributed to large financial undertakings including funerals. Therefore, the social isolation a young man sometimes stood to endure if he converted was a deterrent to most.<sup>782</sup> However, despite Peel's accuracy regarding the importance of peers, his assertion that the first wave of converts were unmarried men and 'the people most free [...] from the nexus of concerns around marriage and reproduction' appears mistaken because if this section has shown anything, it is that all young people whether male or female were fully immersed in the complexities and contradictions that surrounded matrimony in Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>783</sup>

## Divorce

It seems apt to end a discussion of nineteenth-century matrimony on the conditions of its dissolution. Despite ample debate about divorce in Yorùbáland, historians are yet to articulate exactly what constituted divorce.<sup>784</sup> There is no Yorùbá word for divorce. Neither Crowther's 1852 dictionary nor the 1913 CMS Yorùbá dictionary have an indigenous word for divorce. Even in modern day speech, no word has arisen for it. Rather, the Yorùbá use makeshift words including *ikòsílẹ̀* (to reject) or *jáwèé fún* (literally meaning to give someone paper but colloquially defined as filing for divorce). This development or lack thereof in Yorùbá language is interesting because Yorùbá is a most accommodating and evolving language that allows new words derived from English to be transformed into Yorùbá and absorbed into daily use. It therefore seems that resistance to name the practice of divorce is an unconscious defiance because naming gives legitimacy. Despite the frequency of divorce in modern day Yorùbáland, a refusal to name it incorrectly marks it as foreign and alien to Yorùbá culture.

---

<sup>782</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, 18 September 1847. See also Fafunwa, p. 48.

<sup>783</sup> Peel, 'Gender and Religious Change', 153.

<sup>784</sup> For more on divorce in Yorùbáland, see: Lloyd, 'Divorce among the Yoruba', 67-81; Judith A. Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State in Abẹ̀òkúta (Nigeria) 1892-1904', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 27-46; Mann, 'Marriage Choices among the Educated African Elite', 221; Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p.60.



Despite a lack of a Yorùbá word for divorce, it nevertheless took place. It is important to define what circumstances confirmed that divorce had occurred as this differed from one society to another. This thesis understands divorce in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta as the state whereby the principles of marriage no longer applied. From discussions in this chapter, these principles were: a wife's residence in the husband's compound, a husband's reproductive rights over his wife, a man's jural rights over the children she bore, and a family's receipt and retention of their daughter's bridewealth. The final principle may or may not apply because a woman did not have to refund the bridewealth if divorce occurred after she had surviving children. This study contends that if these four principles no longer applied, then indigenous divorce had taken place. Historians agree that divorce, although present in the nineteenth century, was strongly discouraged. Ajisafe Moore even noted that divorce was conceptually against indigenous laws and it was a last recourse after all possible avenues to reconciliation had been exhausted.<sup>785</sup> Nevertheless, although, as Byfield argues, 'public opinion weighed heavily against divorce', it was still a viable option for couples in Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>786</sup> The absence of a recognised term for divorce could perhaps be associated with its initial rarity. There were specific grounds for divorce. Johnson observed that men could divorce their wives for adultery with his or her blood relatives, kleptomania, and repeated insolvency that brought embarrassment to his compound; while a woman could divorce in cases of extreme cruelty. Of course what constituted 'extreme cruelty' was ambiguous and open to debate.<sup>787</sup> He also added that either party could initiate divorce for insanity and chronic illness, while women divorced men for laziness, and men could dissolve a marriage for a wife's infertility.<sup>788</sup> From the above discussions, one can also add that women could also initiate divorce on the basis of male impotence.

---

<sup>785</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 36; See also: Lloyd, 'Divorce among the Yoruba', 67; Denzer, 'Yoruba Women', 4.

<sup>786</sup> Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State', p. 30.

<sup>787</sup> See: Burrill, 'Disputing Wife Abuse', 603–622.

<sup>788</sup> Johnson, pp. 114–6.

One could ask why divorce was such a possible, albeit rare, option in Yorùbáland. Writing in 1979, Willie Pearson and Lewellyn Hendrix argued that women's economic independence is directly correlated to divorce rates in society. Using their cross-cultural research on divorce, they argued that a wife's economic autonomy from her husband meant a reduced dependence, and this directly led to an increased divorce rate in society.<sup>789</sup> Their theory cannot be effectively applied to nineteenth-century Yorùbáland because although women were autonomous economic entities, divorce was still rare. Peter Lloyd gives a different suggestion. Rather than economic independence, he argued that the very nature of Yorùbá marriage meant it had a higher disposition to dissolution. In his 1968 study of divorce in Northern Yorùbáland, he argued that since marriage transferred only reproductive rights to the husband while the patrilineage retained jural rights, marriage did not, in any way, hinder a woman's continued membership of her own kin group. Such divided loyalties caused tensions that could later lead to divorce.<sup>790</sup> Lloyd's theory seems a more plausible explanation as strong ties to a wife's patrilineage meant that a woman could return in case of dissent. Furthermore, as argued earlier, the practice of town endogamy also meant that women never lost touch with their kin, making the transition back to her agnatic home easier.

Perhaps another reason why divorce was a feasible option for men and women was the relative ease of the process.<sup>791</sup> If either couple wanted to initiate divorce, they brought this to the attention of their kin who tried all they could to reconcile the couple through private counselling from older members or group discussions in the compound. If this did not work, the matter was taken to the town chiefs who again tried to reunite them. If they insisted, they agreed upon the terms of the dissolution and then divorced.<sup>792</sup> As each

---

<sup>789</sup> Willie Pearson and Lewellyn Hendrix, 'Divorce and the Status of Women', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 41 (1979), 375–385 (p. 376).

<sup>790</sup> Lloyd, 'Divorce among the Yoruba', 69–70.

<sup>791</sup> Nineteenth-century observers were in disagreement regarding this. While Bowen saw divorce initiations as a male preserve, Ajisafe Moore wrote that usually it was the woman who left the man and it was also always because she wanted to live with another man. Since both men were writing over half a century apart, inconsistencies in their accounts could have been a result of societal changes. Ajisafe Moore, p. 26; Bowen, p. 305.

<sup>792</sup> Johnson, p. 116.

spouse was economically independent and had no claim to the other's estate, there were no messy divisions of property. The wife simply took her belongings and returned to her patrilineage, leaving her children.<sup>793</sup> If a man divorced his wife without due cause, he forfeited the bridewealth. If she divorced him without due cause, she or her family had to return the bridewealth. If she left him for another man, the new partner repaid the fee. Bowen wrote that 'further than this, he [the husband] has no [other] claim'.<sup>794</sup> Divorce proceedings were somewhat different amongst Christians in Abẹ̀òkúta. Sàró Christians established a court of redemption in 1881 that offered funds for the redemption of slaves, and in 1886, it began granting Christians divorce. Chaired by Reverend J. B. Wood, a European missionary, the court deliberated and judged cases, determining terms of dissolution. When parties agreed and fulfilled these terms, husband and wife went their separate ways.<sup>795</sup>

People in Abẹ̀òkúta observed certain etiquette after divorce. If a woman left her husband for another man, the woman's family would not regard the new partner as a husband. According to them, he forever remained a lover because in Yorùbáland, a woman only married once in her lifetime. Every woman had one *ìgbéyàwó*, which was never repeated under any circumstances, and the only husband recognised was the person who paid bridewealth to a woman's parents.<sup>796</sup> Thus the proverb: *a kii mọ ọkọ ọmọ tán kí a tún mọ àlẹ rẹ* which Ajisafe Moore translated as it is 'repugnant to regard the husband and the sweetheart as the member of one's own family'.<sup>797</sup> A more accurate translation is 'one does not give recognition to a child's husband and her concubine'. Indigenous law also did not recognise the new spouse. The proverb *a kii ẹ̀pọ aláàyè* (no one inherits the relics of a living man), illustrates this. This is not to suggest that Yorùbá regarded wives as property. This proverb can be tied to the Yorùbá levirate-type system where

---

<sup>793</sup> Bowen, p. 305

<sup>794</sup> Bowen, p. 305.

<sup>795</sup> Nineteenth-century sources provide little information about this court. Therefore, it cannot be discussed extensively here. For more information, see: Judith Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State in Abẹ̀òkúta, 36.

<sup>796</sup> Johnson, p. 116.

<sup>797</sup> Moore, pp. 26–7. Also see: Johnson, p. 116.

upon a man's death, wives were 'inherited' by other male members of his family.<sup>798</sup> Consequently the proverb states that while a woman's husband was alive, he remained her only recognised spouse.

When divorce was not a viable option, some women simply ran away. Mann and Byfield were right to argue that women took advantage of colonial opportunities to leave their husbands.<sup>799</sup> In the mid- to late nineteenth century, before colonial suzerainty was established over Abẹ̀òkúta, women used the colonial government in Lagos to free themselves from unwanted unions. In the nineteenth century, the major cause of discontentment between the male citizens of Abẹ̀òkúta and the colonial Lagos government was the complaint that their wives who ran away to Lagos were not restored to them.<sup>800</sup> These women were often wives of prominent men who had difficulty securing a divorce due to their husband's high social status. These women's families were usually of a lesser social strata than their husband. Since the extra-legal power hierarchy in Abẹ̀òkúta favoured the party with a higher socio-political and socio-economic influence, their request for divorce would be denied if it was against her husband's wishes. Some women whose husbands were members of the very town council that heard divorce cases, saw no point in trying to divorce, while others did not initiate proceedings because they feared their husband's retaliation and retribution. Başòrun Ògúndípẹ̀, the head chief of Abẹ̀òkúta until his death in August 1887, lost many of his wives when they ran away to Lagos and the colonial government refused to deport them back to Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>801</sup> Ògúndípẹ̀ frequently complained to missionaries about his wives, children and slaves, running to Lagos where he could no longer recover them, once interrupting a Sunday service to voice this grievance.<sup>802</sup> His character, as described in the newspapers of the day, sheds some light on his situation. Ògúndípẹ̀ was said to be a wicked, ruthless and cruel man

---

<sup>798</sup> Although rare, a woman may decline being inherited and choose to move out of her conjugal home when her husband died. This will be discussed further in chapter four.

<sup>799</sup> Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State', 27-46; Kristin Mann, 'The Dangers of Dependence: Christian Marriage among Elite Women in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915', *The Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), 37-56.

<sup>800</sup> *African Times*, 23 July 1863.

<sup>801</sup> *African Times*, 22 August 1863.

<sup>802</sup> During this service, Ògúndípẹ̀ complained that he had lost eighty-two members of his household from absconding. Samuel Cole, *Journal*, 15 February 1874.

despite his being the friend and protector of the missionaries. He was called a 'master of cruelty' who had murdered more than forty persons, mostly slave wives, in fifteen years with his own hands. He was rumoured to enjoy starving his slaves to death and had at several instances compelled his slave wives to drown their offspring in the river. He was alleged to delight in human sacrifices and drank the blood of his victims. One of his slave wives, Owódé, who escaped to Lagos, had no outer ear because he had 'looped them off' and also 'cut off part of her eyelids'.<sup>803</sup> Due to Ògúndípè position, despite accusations of extreme cruelty, which was considered a legitimate reason for divorce, his wives dared not initiate proceedings. Instead, they subverted their lack of choice to initiate divorce by absconding to Lagos. Lagos therefore became a place where wives could find refuge. Since it was a British Crown Colony from 1861, where common law and English statute applied, all slaves who made it to Lagos were free. They also could not be forcibly removed, although for a time, the Lagos Government made payment to the owner of runaway slaves for their market value.<sup>804</sup> An unnamed man of note from Abẹ̀òkúta once attempted to take a runaway wife of the *Aláké* from Lagos back to Abẹ̀òkúta. When he was discovered, he was convicted of kidnapping and sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour, despite the entreaties of the chiefs and other Abẹ̀òkúta citizens for his pardon.<sup>805</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta women thus saw Lagos as a haven and valuable resource, and used it to escape undesirable marriages. When Betsy Bekuale's husband beat her for the sixth time for going to church, her parents and friends advised her to run to Lagos for protection. They told her that if her husband asked why she ran away, they would say it was because of 'his cruelty, which she has born patiently these three years'. Even though her family and some missionaries had been to the *Aláké* on her behalf, it had brought no change to her circumstances.<sup>806</sup> The incidence of runaway wives was so high that it constituted every other

---

<sup>803</sup> *African Times*, 1 July 1882.

<sup>804</sup> *African Times*, 22 August 1863.

<sup>805</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, June 1862.

<sup>806</sup> Betsy Bekuale's husband's continued cruelty despite the king's intervention could have been because her husband was affluent and powerful. Andrew Maser, *Journal*, 8 July 1856.

headline concerning Abẹ̀òkúta in *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, the *African Times* and the *Lagos Times*.<sup>807</sup>

As indicated in the Baṣòrun Ògúndípẹ example, most wives who ran away to Lagos were slaves, especially slave wives, because they could not divorce their husbands and they knew that reaching Lagos meant freedom. The frequency with which slave wives fled to escape cruel marriages was linked to their status in society as described earlier in the chapter. Nevertheless, slave wives who ran away usually did so without their children in order to avoid detection. However, this left these children in danger of their father's retribution. In 1879, Andrew Maser wrote:

Another incident which came to my knowledge was the murder of the son of Ogundipe by his cruel father in March because his mother made her escape to Lagos. Perhaps it will be remembered that she was seized [and enslaved] at the time of Abeokuta outbreak in 1867 when she sought refuge with us.<sup>808</sup>

The potential danger that the children of slaves would suffer should a women runaway no doubt circumscribed slave-wives' agency, as some would have remained with cruel men and continued to endure unfavourable unions for the sake of their children. For some slave converts, instead of escaping, they appealed to missionaries, or other friends and converts appealed to missionaries, to redeem them instead. Due to limited funds for the purpose of redeeming Christian slaves, missionaries first considered the conjugal circumstances of these women. If their situation was thought to be particularly precarious, they would oblige, in which case a women and her children would be free.<sup>809</sup> However, if the master-husband refused such an agreement, missionaries could do nothing.

Although some missionaries wrote that the children of slave wives were free, this was incorrect.<sup>810</sup> The children of slaves were slaves whether or not their

---

<sup>807</sup> See for example *African Times*, 22 August 1863; *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, June 1862.

<sup>808</sup> Andrew Maser, Annual Letter to the CMS headquarters, 1878.

<sup>809</sup> Andrew Maser, Journal, 4 July 1858; Henry Robbin, Journal, 4 November 1865; Samuel Cole, Journal, 16-18 December 1877.

<sup>810</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1863.

slave mother was married to a freeman. As stated previously, children of one slave parent were known as *omọ onídiikan* (a person who sat with one buttock) aptly depicting their insecure status. Some observers could not contemplate that a man could sell his own children, even if these children were begotten from slaves.<sup>811</sup> It was nevertheless rumoured to happen frequently. An inquiry was once launched into Mr Henry Robbins, a slave owning indigenous Saro missionary, who was, amongst other allegations, said to have sold his children begotten from slaves.<sup>812</sup> With these types of constraints, it is understandable that slave wives chose the only option available to them for escaping undesirable unions, fleeing.

## Conclusion

This chapter set out to investigate how people experienced youth in the nineteenth century and how such experiences were influenced by the changing socio-political, economic and religious circumstances in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. It determined that experiences of pre-colonial youths were very different from those experienced by young people in the modern day. It demonstrated that for young people in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, concerns of youth were replete with difficulties and ambiguities that centered on issues concerning matrimony. It showed that unlike Niara Sudarkasa's claim, conjugality was not only a Western concern, it was also very important to Yorùbá life.

The societal pressures placed on young people to fulfill indigenous ideals of adulthood were often great, resulting in extreme social controls should these young men and women deviate from acceptable cultural paths. By exploring the processes of betrothal, it identified the ideal route to marriage for young men and women and also analysed how young people contested these ideals in the nineteenth century. The first contest manifested in debates surrounding

---

<sup>811</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1863.

<sup>812</sup> Henry H Pilkington, Deposition of Awa, a slave woman of Mr Henry Robbins at Abeokuta, 4 November 1865. Located in CMS/CA2/:080: Henry Robbin.

matrimonial consent where free young men and women in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta rejected their expected passivity in marriage engagements and demanded a measure of choice of their intended spouse. They did so by using the changing social and religious circumstances in Abẹ̀òkúta to their advantage either by appealing to their parents, rejecting their matches outright, or seeking places, such as mission houses, where they knew they would find allies. Similar to Heidi Gengenbach's research in Southern Mozambique, religion to young people was not just about faith, they applied the social skills they learned to enhance their position.<sup>813</sup> However, help from missionaries came with the price of adopting marriage arrangements that were incompatible with nineteenth-century circumstances. In response, some young men and women developed a new youth morality that allowed them delay their marriage and engage in premarital relationship previously unavailable to them under indigenous law. However, women paid more dearly than men for dissent. Parents' apprehension over losing control of their daughters and being forced to return bridewealth which they considered rightfully theirs by law, led to the persecution of girls as parents aligned themselves with tradition over kin. Nevertheless, young free men and women still had choice which was a privilege denied to young slaves as their very slave status limited their options and freedoms that could only be subverted by absconding.

When young people married and began conjugality, young men and women again faced strong social pressures to either adopt indigenous ways of doing matrimony or, if Christian, to adopt European bourgeois marriage arrangements. These conflicts touched every aspect of life including conjugal labour, polygyny, affection, fertility and posterity, and even divorce. But again, young men and women showed initiative by navigating the chasm between old traditions and new ideas, taking elements that suited them from each, negotiating some, and discarding others as it suited them. One message that comes across strongly in this chapter is the increasing anxieties of adults -

---

<sup>813</sup> Heidi Gengenbach, "What My Heart Wanted": Gendered Stories of Early Colonial Encounters in Southern Mozambique', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 19–47 (p. 27).



both Christian and non-Christian- over the shifting terrain of culture and young people's roles within it.<sup>814</sup> Although changes in youth behavior were often articulated as a moral crisis using discourses of disrespect, immorality or uncontrollability, it was more than anything an anxiety over shifting power relations between young people and their elders, the full extent of which would only later be realised with the advent of colonialism. When young men and women had children who survived past childhood, their status as youths ended. They then took on the more prestigious position of adults.

---

<sup>814</sup> For other examples of the shifting terrain of culture in Africa, see: Dorothy L. Hodgson, "My Daughter...Belongs to the Government Now": Marriage, Maasai, and the Tanzanian State', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 149–167 (p. 152).

## 4

### ADULTHOOD AND SOCIAL MATURITY

**‘[E]very woman is a free dealer, who labors for herself and supports herself’.**<sup>815</sup>

**T. J. Bowen, 1857.**

**‘[Yorùbá] women were as hardy as men’.**<sup>816</sup>

**Samuel Johnson, 1912.**

**‘Should a woman pretend to know or if it is proved that she knows the secrets of egungun, oro, [...] she is executed.’**<sup>817</sup>

**E. A. Ajisafe Moore, 1916.**

In nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, adult women lived paradoxical lives. On the one hand, they were as Samuel Johnson and T. J. Bowen emphasised ‘hardy as men’ and ‘free dealers’ who were economically active, and in some cases very successful. They supported themselves, their children, and occasionally entire households. Nonetheless, women’s economic triumphs did not bestow them with political power as they had little, and sometimes no, opportunities to influence the political affairs of their town. Abẹ̀òkúta politics was instead a male-controlled apparatus that systematically excluded women, using an instrument of silencing known as *orò*. A. B. Ellis described *orò* as a ‘celebration of male mysteries’ which women had no means of infiltrating.<sup>818</sup> Should a woman claim to know such secrets, she was immediately put to death.<sup>819</sup> It is this power dynamic between adult men and women that this chapter will examine.

By adulthood, this chapter refers to the stage in the lifecycle when men and women had attained full social maturity, which was directly linked to biological age and reproductive success. To be considered an *àgbà* (adult) in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, one needed to have had children that had

---

<sup>815</sup> Bowen, p. 305.

<sup>816</sup> Johnson, p. 245.

<sup>817</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p.13.

<sup>818</sup> Ellis, p. 50.

<sup>819</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 13.

survived past childhood and who were either mature enough to marry or were already married themselves. In order to have children at that stage, both men and women would necessarily be biologically middle-aged because women ideally married between the ages of eighteen to twenty. By the time they had children in the youth stage of the lifecycle, they would be at least forty years of age. Men would be even older since their first marriage often occurred into their early thirties. After their successful reproductive careers, the pressure society placed on these men and women to procreate was lifted and people then focused their attention instead on social development through the pursuit of lucrative economic careers, political and military advancement, and religious authority. The question this chapter will answer is how successful men and women were in these pursuits within the formal and informal structures of Abẹ̀òkúta society. This chapter is concerned with power, authority and legitimacy. It asks who had power in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta? How was it exercised? How was it contested and who was excluded from formal power structures? This thesis has so far argued that individuals in the previous stages of the lifecycle both in childhood and youth had little culturally legitimate power because authority was concentrated in the hands of the socially mature who both exercised power and determined its terms. It asks how executive, legislative, judicial, economic, military, religious and familial power was negotiated amongst those with legitimate authority.

It is within this chapter that the study really engages with the current literature on pre-colonial Yorùbáland. So far, this study has argued that people in the previous stages of the lifecycle have remained largely hidden from historical literature because researchers view men and women as monolithic entities predicated on sex rather than from an age-based perspective required in a gerontocratic society such as that of the Yorùbá.<sup>820</sup> Due to the skewed view of Yorùbá society, it is this adult life stage that has been most visible to researchers because it was at this point that men and women engaged with 'public' power structures rather than 'private' familial ones. Nevertheless,

---

<sup>820</sup> Strobel's 'African Women' for example attempts to explore how women's power changed as a result of colonialism. However, she makes no differentiation amongst women of different ages. Strobel, 109-131.

despite the historical visibility of both men and women at this stage, this section argues that researchers have often misrepresented the power dynamics between adult men and women. It contests prevalent feminist paradigms concerning gender in Yorùbáland that argue that women in the nineteenth century had far-reaching political power and status. LaRay Denzer argues that '[d]uring the pre-colonial era women played active roles in political administration, decision-making, and household production'. She however contends that 'in marriage, they were subordinate socially to their husbands and his lineage'.<sup>821</sup> This chapter contests this and argues instead that in the nineteenth century women held very prestigious positions in lineages, sometimes heading their own households. Outside the family, they also had prominent roles in the economy as large-scale, long distance traders. Some women even exercised some religious authority as priestesses. It argues however that these familial, economic and marginal religious gains did not equate to political power. Building on the works of social historians such as Karin Barber, J. D. Y Peel and Judith Byfield who emphasise the limits of women's political contribution, it states that rather than legitimate political authority, a few Abẹ̀òkúta women had informal political influence over men in power.

The chapter also contends that despite Yorùbá cosmological ideals about gender balance and harmony in all aspects of life, these concepts rarely translated into practice.<sup>822</sup> It states that the position of the *ìyálóde*, a female chief, often used by scholars as an example of female political power in Yorùbáland, actually held little political significance in Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>823</sup> It also questions the existence of the *Erelú* (female *Ògbóni* chiefs) in Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>824</sup> By analysing the various political structures and processes in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, it demonstrates that women were systematically marginalised in government. The author recognises that as important as it is to not

---

<sup>821</sup> Denzer, 'Yoruba Women' 36.

<sup>822</sup> For Yorùbá cosmology, see: Badejo, pp. 68–9; Olademo, pp. 20–1.

<sup>823</sup> For an example of this argument, see Strobel, 118.

<sup>824</sup> For *Erelú* arguments, see: Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, p. 5; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, p. 5.

disempower women of the past, it is untenable to project a modern-day consciousness of empowerment on those who had no such awareness.

Women, however, are not the only focus of this chapter as it also discusses men in the nineteenth century in great detail to contextualise women's experiences. It explores the roles men played in the economy, politics and religion of nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. It examines their roles as *Ògbóni* (civil chiefs), *Olórógun* (war men), *Pàràkòyí* (trade guild) and *babaláwo* (priest-diviners). It considers how political decisions were reached, while exploring the routes used to simultaneously exclude and control women. Within this, it investigates the concept of hegemonic elite military masculinity, illuminating its often contradictory nature, and examines how some men resisted such ideals.

This chapter starts by considering the formal power structures in Abẹ̀òkúta. It explores the political hierarchy by analysing the roles of the *Ògbóni*, *orò* and *egúngún*. It then investigates women's position within these institutions first by exploring Yorùbá cosmological beliefs about gender balance in the public sphere, and then the position of the *Ìyálóde* and *Erelú*. After this, it analyses women's economic activities. Within this, the role of the *Pàràkòyí* (trade guild) is discussed. The chapter will then discuss the household, the area where it argues that women held the most power and influence. It analyses women's increased authority in the conjugal lineage, sometimes heading their own household. It also considers women's newfound religious freedom and their power to refuse marital traditions such as the levirate-type marriage system. The next section then turns to the important subject of warfare in Abẹ̀òkúta. It will first explain elite 'big man' masculinity as the hegemonic ideal before considering how war was waged, who made decisions regarding warfare, who fought in war, the effect of war on the state, and the roles of women within it. It will close with an exploration of religious authority in Abẹ̀òkúta citing the crucial role of the *babaláwo* and the reason for women's marginalisation from religious power.

Unlike the previous chapters, this investigation into adulthood does not discuss extensively missionary influences on the socially mature. Although most of the information used was sourced from Christian evangelists, they had the least influence on adults because these men and women were in the stage of the lifecycle when they reaped the most benefits from the Yorùbá gerontocratic society. Adults were therefore least likely to appeal to, or accept new ideas such as those introduced by missionaries. In actuality they were more likely to reject, oppose or discard it, claiming that Christianity was for the younger generation.<sup>825</sup> When David Hinderer tried to preach to some Abẹ̀òkúta men on 30 July 1846, they responded that '[o]ur children must learn the word of God, but we old people are too old for changing our fashions'.<sup>826</sup> Hinderer later wrote that the normal reason adults gave for rejecting the Christian religion was 'we are too old to change, our children will follow the new way'.<sup>827</sup> Such snubbing meant that missionaries often wrote about adults in a speculative manner; observing them, detailing their actions and criticising those with which they disagreed. Only those few missionaries, such as Henry Townsend, David Hinderer and Samuel Johnson who actively participated in Yorùbá politics, actually interacted with the socially mature enough to influence adult Yorùbá experiences to a significant degree.

### **The Abẹ̀òkúta political hierarchy**

Robert Campbell rightly described Abẹ̀òkúta as a combination of the monarchical, patriarchal, and republican.<sup>828</sup> It was a monarchy because as described in chapter one, the four main townships each had royal rulers and practiced limited monarchies. It was patriarchal because men made most political decisions; and a republic because all men were part of the decision making process. The *Ògbóni* headed the political arm of government, the economy was controlled by the *Pàràkòyí*, and the war or military chiefs known as *Olórógun* were charged with military matters. There was also an additional,

---

<sup>825</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 6 October 1860.

<sup>826</sup> David Hinderer, Journal, 30 July 1849 cited in Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 238.

<sup>827</sup> David Hinderer, Journal, September 1859.

<sup>828</sup> Campbell, p. 36

but lesser known branch of government known as the *ode* (the hunters).<sup>829</sup> In peacetime, the *ode* simply hunted. During wartime, their roles were more important because they scouted for the army and reported back to the *Ògbóni* and *Olórógun*. They also guarded the town and repaired the roads for the army.<sup>830</sup> Little else is known about them. This section will first consider the *Ògbóni*.

### ***Ògbóni (civil chiefs)***

The *Ògbóni* were a powerful body of men bound by a secret oath. Their powers were said to be religiously sanctioned by the earth, and they were thought to be the closest living people to the ancestors and, like the ancestors, were a source of moral order.<sup>831</sup> They were political chiefs who were to act as intermediaries between the monarch and the people, but who in practice ruled unilaterally when performing legislative, executive and judicial functions. They also selected rulers in combined consensus with male citizens.<sup>832</sup> Indeed, in Abẹ̀òkúta, the powers of the *Ògbóni* exceeded that of the monarchs and as Ellis noted, the *Ògbóni* Society '[held] the reins of government, and kings themselves [were] obliged to submit to its decrees'.<sup>833</sup> One reason why their powers were greater than those of monarchs was because in the nineteenth century, rulers were considered divine beings who, during coronation, had transcended mere human status and were more like the *òrìṣà* (deities). For this reason they were 'too sacred for the popular gaze'.<sup>834</sup> They were not permitted to leave the palace except on special occasions when they were attended to by a convoy of chiefs, wives, children and slaves. Rulers in Abẹ̀òkúta could also leave the palace for important *orò*

---

<sup>829</sup> Moore, pp. 14-15.

<sup>830</sup> Moore, pp. 14-15

<sup>831</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 57; Idowu, p. 24.

<sup>832</sup> Part of the *Ògbóni* revenue was derived from king-making because whoever wished to ascend the throne had to give the chiefs lavish gifts. For example, during Oyèékàn's second bid for *Aláké* in Abẹ̀òkúta, Madam Tinúbu ensured his success through her gifts of money and other items to the chiefs. This will be discussed in further detail below.

<sup>833</sup> Ellis, p. 43.

<sup>834</sup> This was the popular belief at this time but since coronation ceremonies were secret, one cannot speculate on how this transition to deity status was achieved. Campbell, p. 31.

meetings. But even then, they still remained within the locality of the palace or Ògbóni house.<sup>835</sup> Rulers remained mainly within the palace walls and had to depend almost entirely on others to govern their town. In Abẹ̀òkúta, monarchs depended on the civil chiefs. In consequence, while the monarchs were figureheads, the Ògbóni held the real political power.



Fig 4.1: An Abẹ̀òkúta Ògbóni (civil chief). Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, April 1875.

---

<sup>835</sup> It was not until the early twentieth century that Yorùbá monarchs began making public appearances at the invitation and sometimes summons of the colonial government. In 1904 *Aláké* Gbádébọ made history by being the first *Aláké* to leave the shores of Yorùbáland when he paid a state visit to England. Watson, '*Civil Disorder Is the Disease of Ibadan*', pp. 117–144.



The leadership of the *Ògbóni* consisted of the head known as *Olúwo* and six other men called *Ìwàrẹ̀fà*, one of whom was the *Apènà* (summoner of persons) who was also the secretary.<sup>836</sup> Although any free man could join the *Ògbóni*, the principal members were the leaders, officers, and a select number of elders. They, in turn, chose successors from male relatives, but never sons due to adultery suspicious as discussed in chapter three.<sup>837</sup> The officers of the *Ògbóni* performed executive, legislative and judicial functions of government using *orò*.<sup>838</sup> Some individuals joined the *Ògbóni* for the title and prestige while others were pressured to join either for being relatives to existing members or because of their wealth.<sup>839</sup> Most men joined the *Ògbóni* from childhood and were brought up in the knowledge of the system, but people could also join mid-life after attaining a measure of economic success. Their material symbol of authority was the small double-figured brass staffs called the *ẹ̀dan*. It represented the *Ògbóni*'s presence and was often used to calm disputes or summoning offenders.<sup>840</sup> Should the *Ògbóni* wish to summon an individual to appear before them for example, they sent a representative with *ẹ̀dan* to the individual's home. The *Ògbóni* conducted their business in a house or lodge built in every township where they met regularly every seventeen days, or sooner in an emergency.<sup>841</sup>

---

<sup>836</sup> Moore, pp. 13-14; Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, p. 6.

<sup>837</sup> Campbell, pp. 41-42

<sup>838</sup> We do not know exactly how people were ranked as elders or officers. Since the *Ògbóni* was a secret cult, most of its activities are undocumented. Campbell, pp. 41-42.

<sup>839</sup> Wealthy men were forced to join because they paid high membership fees that were then divided amongst existing members. If they refused, they could be initiated posthumously. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 57.

<sup>840</sup> Peel, *'Religious Encounter'* p. 57.

<sup>841</sup> Moore, p. 13.



Fig 4.2: *Edan Ogboni*. Source: <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/316605> [accessed 26 April 2014]

## *Orò*

While judicial functions were performed via a traditional court system, the *Ogbóni* performed their executive and legislative functions through *orò*.<sup>842</sup> *Orò* was practised in towns such as Abèòkúta Oñdó, and Ijèbú perhaps due to their close proximity to each other, but appears to have been absent in other

---

<sup>842</sup> Although the complexities of the judiciary cannot be discussed here, it is important to say that a select number of *Ogbóni* elders performed judicial functions, adjudicating criminal and civil cases including divorce. These cases were heard in makeshift courts set up anywhere from the bush to the king's court and involved the plaintiff, defendants and witnesses. Judgements were passed soon after cases were heard and there were routes to appeal civil cases. For more, see Ajisafe Moore, pp. 17-19; Thomas King, *Journal*, 9 April 1856; Joseph Smith, 26 August 1864; Andrew Gollmer, *Journal*, 9 March 1874.

towns including Ìbàdàn and Lagos. As practised in Abẹ̀òkúta, *orò* was simultaneously an event, an instrument, and a deity. It was an event because when male citizens met to discuss political and military matters or when judicial sentences were executed, it was used to confine women indoors. People referred to such events as *orò*. *Orò* was an instrument because during *orò* meetings a loud ‘whirring’ noise could be heard around town. This sound was produced by tying a thin slip of wood, about a foot long by a few inches in breadth, fastened to a stick by a long string that allowed it to ascend and descend, thereby raising and lowering its tone.<sup>843</sup> People referred to this sound as *orò* and some westerners compared it to the bullroarer used by young English boys during playtime.<sup>844</sup> The sound appeared to be everywhere at once because many instruments were stationed around the city to give the confined women the impression that *orò* was omnipresent.<sup>845</sup> Finally *orò* was a deity because although all men knew the origin of the sound, it was produced to convince women that *orò* was an omnipresent, omniscient, and dangerous deity, scare them, and consequently keep them indoors during political town meetings. Hence, *orò* has been referred to as the ‘civil government deified’.<sup>846</sup>

*Orò* meetings were used to offer town sacrifices in times of pestilence and disease, drought and war. It was also used to carry out judicial sentences such as executing criminals, and flogging, whipping or beating adulterous men; hence its reputation as a ‘public police’, ‘vindictive power’ and ‘retributive power’.<sup>847</sup> It was also used when conducting general public meetings, deliberations, discussions and other executive duties. For example on 24 January 1863, an *orò* meeting was held in Abẹ̀òkúta to discuss repairing the town walls in anticipation of a Dahomean attack.<sup>848</sup> *Orò* was also used to preserve public order, settle political quarrels, quash rebellion and dissent, and maintain the authority and dominance of adult males.<sup>849</sup> In 1874, *orò* was

---

<sup>843</sup> Ellis, p. 50.

<sup>844</sup> Ellis, p. 50.

<sup>845</sup> Bowen, p. 142.

<sup>846</sup> Burton, p. 197; Ellis, p. 43.

<sup>847</sup> Burton, p. 195-204; Campbell, p. 74; Ellis, p. 50; Bowen, p. 141.

<sup>848</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, February 1863.

<sup>849</sup> Ellis, p. 50; Peel, ‘Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change’, 144.

called to put a stop to 'some abusive songs sung about in the street by young men and women'.<sup>850</sup> Likewise, when women's tailoring of men's garments became a major issue of contention in Abèòkúta in 1853, it was decided, at an *orò* meeting, that women were to cease tailoring immediately. It therefore cut off women's inroads into the occupation and protected and preserved it as an exclusively male profession.<sup>851</sup> *Orò* was thus a 'town conservatism' used to control women, and sometimes, young men.<sup>852</sup> *Orò* also performed legislative duties because it was used to pass provisional laws. Though there were established oral laws and customs, rapidly changing circumstances resulting from recent migration and perpetual warfare in the region necessitated that the town government make temporary edicts. In May 1870, an *orò* meeting was called to discuss the continuance of export duties in Abèòkúta. It was decided at the meeting that export duties were injurious rather than beneficial to trade and should be discontinued.<sup>853</sup> Despite *orò* edicts being somewhat provisional, they were enforced and the punishment for breaching them were severe. In 1883, it was decided at an *orò* meeting that all exports of provisions were to cease immediately to prevent scarcity during an expected Dahomean attack. Two men, who disobeyed the law, were executed.<sup>854</sup>

*Orò* was a patriarchal power because women were supposed to be ignorant of its processes. Certainly, it was its secrecy that gave it such power. Women were not supposed to see *orò*, know the secret, or even say the name.<sup>855</sup> Any woman who knew or claimed to know the secret was put to death along with the man who divulged the secret.<sup>856</sup> When *orò* was called, women were expected to remain indoors lest they be put to death. This rule extended to females of all ages, so much so, that a man once took his three-month-old baby daughter to an *orò* meeting, and despite her lack of cognitive abilities, she was put to death.<sup>857</sup> *Orò* was therefore a male instrument of silencing

---

<sup>850</sup> Samuel Cole, *Journal*, 3 March 1874.

<sup>851</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>852</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 57.

<sup>853</sup> Letter to Henry Townsend, 24 May 1870.

<sup>854</sup> *Lagos Times*, 24 January 1883.

<sup>855</sup> Bowen, p. 142.

<sup>856</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 13.

<sup>857</sup> Moore, p. 17.

used to keep women out of politics. Men ensured their continued political power and women's exclusion from power networks because if women could not even discuss *orò*, they could not question the status quo, and if they could not question, then they could not challenge it.<sup>858</sup> Some women apparently used the prohibitive nature of *orò* to commit suicide. A female slave in Abẹ̀òkúta whose children had been taken from her and sold ran into the street during an *orò* confinement and cried 'orò'. She was executed immediately.<sup>859</sup> Similarly, during the burial rites of *Aláké Şódeké*, performed during *orò*, one of his wives ran into the street and shouted 'orò' and was killed.<sup>860</sup> Missionaries attributed both actions to grief over losing loved ones, their children and husbands respectively.

During *orò*, all trading, farming and industry were formally suspended.<sup>861</sup> There were however differing opinions as to whether or not *orò* disrupted women's schedules. While Ajisafe Moore stated that *orò* withdrew each morning until sunset in order to allow women pursue their daily vocations, other nineteenth-century observers described enclosure during daytime.<sup>862</sup> David Hinderer once wrote that 'oro had shut the women in for two days in Abeokuta'.<sup>863</sup> Likewise, during the burial rites of *Şódeké*, women were reportedly shut up for seven days and the voice of *orò* was heard from morning until night.<sup>864</sup> The likely scenario was that most times, women were confined for only parts of the day. If they were required to remain indoors for more than a day, a bell ringer would go around town announcing the dates of confinement so that women could prepare.<sup>865</sup> Although the mission house

---

<sup>858</sup> The idea that discussion leads to questioning, which eventually encourages organising and challenging is very popular in women's empowerment literature and is derived from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of doxa. For more information see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Jacques Charmes and Saskia Wieringa, 2003. 'Measuring Women's Empowerment', *Journal of Human Development* 4(2003), 419-435 (p.420); Sarah Mosedale, 'Accessing Women's Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework', *Journal of International Development* 17 (2005): 243-57; Naila Kabeer 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment'. *Development and Change* 30 (1999): 435-64.

<sup>859</sup> Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 7 May 1849.

<sup>860</sup> William Marsh, *Journal*, 24 June 1845.

<sup>861</sup> Bowen, p. 142.

<sup>862</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 41.

<sup>863</sup> David Hinderer, *Journal*, 17 May 1857.

<sup>864</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 4 January 1847

<sup>865</sup> Moore, pp. 17-19.

was also supposed to be shut during *orò*, the government made some concessions for Christian women due to the cordial relationship that developed between missionaries such as Henry Townsend and the *Aláké* and other town chiefs during the early years of the mission. When *orò* was supposed to take over Aké on a Sunday in 1859, the *Aláké* decided that instead of a full enclosure, the town was to be divided in two. According to Gollmer, the king decreed that

*oro* must take the lower town (where the king, elders and many people reside) and we and our church people must take the upper part of the town (where the mission house and church and most of our converts now reside) and he added that *oro* shall not come up to molest us, and our women must not go down to be seen by any of the men.<sup>866</sup>

Later in the century, some chiefs suggested that *orò* should no longer be called on Sundays.<sup>867</sup>

The structure of *orò* meetings and the extent to which men participated in them reveals interesting insights about power relations between men, and not just between men and women. Although only the *Ògbóni* could call *orò* meetings, Abẹ̀òkúta was a male-dominated republic because males of all ages, ethnicities and social status could attend *orò* meetings, and, in some cases, could also speak. *Orò* meetings took various forms. The most common form were meetings held in open spaces, either in markets or in front of the *Ògbóni* lodge, presided over by either by a ruler, or, more frequently, a senior chief. Every male who wanted to speak at these types of meetings could do so, starting with the biological youngest and ending with the most socially senior attendee. A meeting was called in January 1847 to deliberate on the intention of the chiefs to prohibit kidnapping and make it a capital offence. The meeting was held in front of the *Ògbóni* lodge and about two thousand men attended. At this meeting, the youngest person who wished to speak spoke first and the *Aláké* who presided, spoke last.<sup>868</sup> All attendees agreed to the

---

<sup>866</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 31 July 1859.

<sup>867</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, January 1863.

<sup>868</sup> The *Aláké* may not necessarily have been the biological eldest but he was the social senior.

law, thus depicting a measure of equality amongst men.<sup>869</sup> When meetings involved guest from other towns, it took a more formal structure. In 1862, *orò* was called to receive messages from Lagos and Ìjẹ̀bú-Odé town regarding the state of affairs there and their stance on the Ìbàdàn-Ìjáyè war. *Ìwé Ìròhin* described the procedure of this meeting:

These *oro* meetings have much of the nature of a parliament and are conducted according to the ancient custom. The king sits on his Chair of State surrounded by his *Ogboni* chiefs who are the civil rulers and the ancient aristocracy of the country. The war chiefs take up a separate position and appear surrounded by their personal retainers and the general population find places as best they can, but for the most part they assemble around their local chiefs. The Mohammedans are expected to appear and take up position by themselves and white people are expected to do the same.<sup>870</sup>

People at these meetings spoke only when asked to do so. At this meeting, the kidnapping of all Ìbàdàn and Ìjáyè peoples was outlawed as a preliminary step towards peace.<sup>871</sup>

When matters were time sensitive, decisions were made by the *Ògbóni* elders and officers and then brought to the people for their approval.<sup>872</sup> In 1860, *orò* was called to determine the Ègbá duties in the Ìbàdàn-Ìjáyè war. When the king and the *Ògbóni* arrived at the *Ògbóni* lodge already teaming with townsmen outside, they went into the lodge and deliberated in secret. When they had made their decisions to join the war as Ìjáyè allies, the *Ògbóni* informed the people of their decision, seeking their approval because no chief in Abẹ̀òkúta was strong enough to execute his plans arbitrarily without the support of the people.<sup>873</sup> Therefore, *orò* meetings tended towards republicanism and consensus amongst men. People were banned from firing guns during *orò* because this signalled its end after which the town returned to normal activities.<sup>874</sup> Men could neither speak to women about *orò* proceedings nor tell them about decisions made. For women to hear about decisions, they

---

<sup>869</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, January 1847.

<sup>870</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, December 1862.

<sup>871</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, December 1862.

<sup>872</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, March 1862.

<sup>873</sup> Campbell, p. 58.

<sup>874</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, November 1861.

had to wait for a bell ringer who went around the town to convey the decisions made to women en masse.<sup>875</sup> There were no structures in place for women to contest such pronouncements. Hence, not only were women excluded from decision-making, they were also denied a method of appeal.

### ***The reason for women's exclusion***

The above discussions have highlighted that women were excluded from the important Abẹ̀òkúta political hierarchy. The question now is why? In 1910, R. E. Dennett wrote that there were two reasons why women were excluded from *orò* and at the time, *Ògbóni*. He wrote that the first reason was that

wherever a man was, a woman came from here and another from there and both wished to become his friend (lover) and hence quarrels and fights ensued, and that men had formed this fraternity of "Oro" out of self protection.<sup>876</sup>

Wanton women as the reason for the development of *orò* can neither be verified nor disproved. It does however seem rather unlikely because in Yorùbáland, men and women participated in unisex organisations and *ẹgbé* (age groups). There is also evidence to suggest that the Yorùbá did not historically view the close proximity of men and women as a problem. Samuel Johnson wrote that a peculiar custom was prevalent amongst the Old Òyó. He stated that:

[y]oung men were permitted to have intimate female friends and they were often the guests of one another. At the annual festivals, the young man and his female friend would meet and take an active part in the ceremonies and render pecuniary services or manual assistance to each other. At a time of harvest the female friend with the full consent of her parents would go for about a week or fortnight to assist her male friend in bringing home his harvest while he himself may be engaged on his father's farm. Notwithstanding so much mutual intercourse, strict chastity was the rule not the exception.<sup>877</sup>

Since ideas about friendship and companionship were identical across

---

<sup>875</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, December 1862.

<sup>876</sup> Dennett, p. 27.

<sup>877</sup> Johnson, p. 102.



Yorùbá country, it is unlikely that the close proximity of men and women was the reason for women's exclusion. Furthermore, in Òyó, where Ògbóni originated, women participated quite prominently in all aspects of the organisation.<sup>878</sup>

Dennett also wrote that another reason why women were excluded from *orò* was their inability to keep secrets.<sup>879</sup> This is again questionable because as Henry Drewal argues, in Yorùbáland, women were believed to be inherently secretive.<sup>880</sup> Drewal states that men often saw themselves as unable to keep secrets because secrecy was a feminine character. He added that people articulated secrecy in terms of the position of genitalia because the penis projects outward and exposed 'while the vagina, a dark, small orifice remains concealed in pubic hair'.<sup>881</sup> Women's ability to keep secrets was further intensified post-menopause. A praise name for elderly women is *ibà òbò tó dorí kodò láì sẹ̀jẹ̀* (honour the one with the vagina that turns upside down without pouring blood). The metaphor of menstrual blood, congealed upwards, signified the ability of older women to keep and retain secrets and thus depicted them as covert and clandestine. Drewal argues that due to their ineptness at keeping secrets, men created elaborate procedures of protecting cult mysteries *supposedly* from women (emphasis mine).<sup>882</sup>

This study contends that the most plausible reason for why women were excluded from Ògbóni, and, as will be discussed later, the Olórógun (war men), was because both organisations evolved from exclusively male Ègbá farmers' associations. Ègbá oral traditions state that in earlier times (seventeenth century) when the Ègbá were still in the forest living in independent kingdoms, they were for a time under the suzerainty of the ruler of Òyó, then referred to as the Òlójó (owner of Òyó). As king, he sent representatives to all his tributary townships to rule on his behalf and send him yearly gifts of slaves, livestock, agricultural produce, jewellery, clothes and

---

<sup>878</sup> For more details, see: Johnson, p. 66.

<sup>879</sup> Dennett, p. 27.

<sup>880</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 547.

<sup>881</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 547.

<sup>882</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 547.

other valuables. The representatives sent to the Ègbá acted crassly and irresponsibly, performing all manner of atrocities; killing dissidents, seizing property and the like.<sup>883</sup> Líṣàbí, a man born in Ìtòkú, but who lived in Ìgbèhìn, both Ègbá kingdoms, wanted to throw off the burden of these representatives and formed a society known as *Ègbé àáró* (farming group). This society was exclusively male because as previously stated, farming was a predominantly male occupation. The society gave free assistance, for one or two days, to fellow farmers when performing tasks too large to undertake singularly. Each farmer would then return the favour when requested. This *Ègbé àáró* was so successful that branches were formed throughout the Ègbá hamlets and villages. Líṣàbí himself worked whenever asked but never requested assistance in return. When asked why, he replied that he would require the society's services someday.<sup>884</sup> Líṣàbí then proposed that a meetinghouse for the society be built in every town where the men could meet. Soon, these male farmers began discussing issues extending beyond farming in the meetinghouses, and all matters of state were privately discussed, deliberated, and decided. Líṣàbí and some chosen representatives attended meetings in other towns to preside over them. At one of these meetings, it was decided that the Ègbá should free themselves from the yoke of Òyó and the men decided on military action as the route for doing so. They changed their name from *Ègbé àáró* to *Ègbé olórógun* (military group) and their meeting places were called *Ilé olórógun* (military chambers). These men then orchestrated their revolt, removing their wives and children from the towns before they did so. On the day of the rebellion, over six hundred Òyó representatives were slain and their revolt was successful. The *Ègbé àáró* and *Ègbé olórógun* then took over the reigns of government. For his patriotism, Líṣàbí was given the title of father of all the Ègbá people and the Ègbá still call themselves *omọ Líṣàbí* (children of Líṣàbí) to this day.<sup>885</sup> It is plausible that nineteenth-century *Ègbá Ògbóni* and *Olórógun* were modeled after, or indeed vestiges of, the exclusively male *Ègbé àáró* and *Ègbé olórógun*. It also explains why the

---

<sup>883</sup> Moore, p. 6.

<sup>884</sup> Moore, pp. 6–8.

<sup>885</sup> This revolt is said to have occurred in the late eighteenth century. Moore, pp. 6–8.

Abẹ̀òkúta Ògbóni excluded women from their activities while Òyó, where Ògbóni originated, did not.

### ***Egúngún***

There was another executive male power in Abẹ̀òkúta called *egúngún* (known as masquerade but literally translated as bones or skeleton).<sup>886</sup> *Egúngún* was the cult of the *itàlẹ̀mọ* (ancestors). They were said to be the deceased ancestors, returned to earth to determine the conditions and conducts of the living, but most especially women, and punish or take away those upsetting the established order. As such, *egúngún* was a 'supernatural inquisitor'.<sup>887</sup> Ellis argued that 'just as *Egungun* is now used for social purposes, and to preserve order in private life, so is *Oro* used for political purposes, to preserve order in the community at large.'<sup>888</sup> In other words, while *orò* maintained community order through the patriarchal control of women, *egúngún* upheld domestic order and reasserted male dominance and control by punishing individual women's familial transgressions that threatened the male status quo. Should a wife become 'uncontrollable' and challenge her husband repeatedly, William Clarke wrote that the husband elicited the assistance of *egúngún* who first gave her a warning, but should she persist, returned to give her a thrashing 'not soon to be forgotten and takes his exit with the thanks of the victorious husband'.<sup>889</sup> This type of control manifested in 1861 when William Moore enquired why a woman's daughter had stopped attending school. He wrote that mother replied that it was:

the deceased father, whose *egungun* came out to her last week at Abeokuta and made her prostrate herself before him when she had been there to make sacrifice to him and asked with a great rage who has committed her to send the girl to school and told her that if she dares again to send the child to school, she (the mother) will fall into great trouble and the child shall die.

---

<sup>886</sup> Ellis, p. 50; Bowen, pp. 142–3.

<sup>887</sup> Ellis, p. 49; Ajisafe Moore, p. 13.

<sup>888</sup> Ellis, p. 50.

<sup>889</sup> Clarke, p. 284.

Moore commented that the ‘poor woman’, believing *egúngún* was her father, heeded his warning.<sup>890</sup> As Judith Byfield argues, *egúngún* reaffirmed ‘male authority, investing it with ancestral validation’.<sup>891</sup>

*Egúngún* were beings covered from head to toe in cloth and although all men knew that *egúngún* were people, women were supposed to be ignorant of this and instead believe that they were ancestral spirits. In Abẹ̀òkúta women were said to be forbidden from climbing to the ceiling of houses under the pain of death, supposedly to guard this secret because that was where *egúngún* clothes were kept.<sup>892</sup> On meeting *egúngún* in the street, Richard Burton described him as a tall man ‘most fantastically clad’. His face was covered with a mask, his head with a hood, his entire body covered with cloth, and his shoes, like moccasins, completely hid his feet (see fig 4.3).<sup>893</sup> It was said that if anyone touched *egúngún*, they died. Although women were allowed to see *egúngún*, they were never initiated into the cult. Madam Tinúbu, a prominent Abẹ̀òkúta female chief, once tried to use her wealth and influences to buy the privilege of initiation. She however had to spend just as much to recant her request when *egúngún* came to her compound to reveal itself and take her life.<sup>894</sup> Like *orò*, all men were to keep this secret from women.

---

<sup>890</sup> William Moore, Journal, 17 July 1861.

<sup>891</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, p. 24.

<sup>892</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 13.

<sup>893</sup> Burton, p. 195. For more on *egúngún* see Mary Ann Fitzgerald, Henry J. Drewal and Moyo Okediji, ‘Transformation through Cloth: An *Egúngún* Costume of the Yorùbá’, *African Arts*, 28 (1995), 55–57.

<sup>894</sup> Dennett, p. 19.



Fig 4.3: Yorùbá *egúngún*. Source: University of Wisconsin digital collections.  
<http://digioll.library.wisc.edu/UWDCNew/view/uwdc:TIRIS.1992.09.001> [accessed 18.04.2014]

In the nineteenth-century, there were disagreements amongst male observers as to whether or not women knew the secrets of *egúngún* and even *orò*. Some missionaries like William Allen, Thomas King and William Marsh believed that they did not. Marsh wrote in 1845 that women believed that

executed men were swallowed by *orò*, while King called women ‘deluded’.<sup>895</sup> Others were more sceptical. Burton remarked that ‘women were not supposed to see or know the secret of *orò* [...and] *egungun*- if that were possible!’<sup>896</sup> Campbell also stated that although any woman would be slain for saying she knew the secrets of *orò*, it was ‘certain that they all knew’, while Johnson also added that women only ‘feign to believe’ that *egungún* came from the spirit world.<sup>897</sup> Although it is almost certain that most adult females knew these male secrets, they continued to feign ignorance.

It is impossible to determine exactly why women pretended to be ignorant of *orò* and *egungún* or if they in fact pretended at all. One simple reason could be self-preservation because they would be killed should they suggest that they were not deceived. But precisely because women could not speak of it, missionaries could only speculate as to women’s thoughts and motives and as such, historians can never be privy to women’s reasons. However, this thesis postulates that women feigning ignorance is akin to Helen Callaway’s argument about the seemingly contradictory roles Yorùbá women were expected to assume. Callaway asks why women were expected to be subservient to their husbands in their homes but domineering in their economic endeavours. She asks ‘how are we to understand the scene of a Yorùbá wife curtseying deferentially to her husband before going out to spend the day in the marketplace as an energetic entrepreneur?’<sup>898</sup> Callaway perceives this incidence in ideological terms. She agrees with Peter Lloyd that women’s deference in her household was a consequence of her economic independence.<sup>899</sup> In other words, women’s submissiveness maintained an illusion of her subordinate position to her husband in order to keep her marriage peaceable. In matrimony and in politics, women had to socially navigate existing power structures in order to survive and operate peaceably.

---

<sup>895</sup> William Marsh, Journal, 24 June 1845; Thomas King, Journal, 18 February 1854.

<sup>896</sup> Burton, p. 197.

<sup>897</sup> Campbell, p. 77; Samuel Johnson, p. 29.

<sup>898</sup> Callaway, p. 166.

<sup>899</sup> Peter C. Lloyd, ‘The Yorùbá in Nigeria’ in *Peoples of Africa*, ed. By J. L. Gibbs, Jr. (New York, 1965), p.566 cited in Callaway, p. 166.

During the annual festival of *egúngún*, held in either May or June and lasting seven days, people were supposed to lament and pray to the dead while women made sacrifices and prepared enormous feasts for *egúngún* to propitiate their ancestors for *àlàáfia*.<sup>900</sup> All women, no matter how poor, had to make these sacrifices and feasts.<sup>901</sup> Johnson maintained that although women were not deceived, they upheld the custom. He regarded *egúngún* festivals, as 'lucky times for men' because the fowls, goats and other livestock prepared for *egúngún* but enjoyed by men was phenomenal. He concluded by stating

[s]uch is the force of habit engendered by blind superstition that although in reality the women are no longer deceived, as regards these alleged visits of their dear departed, yet they make their offerings with cheerfulness and with a sure expectations of blessings.<sup>902</sup>

Judith Byfield considers the feasts women prepared as a male tax resulting from male envy and tension, created by women's economic position and success.<sup>903</sup> Since *egúngún* was connected to ancestor worship, it was also connected to funeral ceremonies, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### ***Women and politics in Abẹ̀òkúta***

From the above discussion, it is certain that the Abẹ̀òkúta body politic was predominantly male and women were excluded from legitimate town authority in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, prevalent academic discourses hardly reflect this past reality. Researchers such as Niara Surdukasa argue that in West Africa, the 'public domain' was not conceptualised as a world of men but rather, 'one in which both sexes were recognized as having important

---

<sup>900</sup> Ellis, p. 49.

<sup>901</sup> Thomas King, *Journal*, 15 February 1854.

<sup>902</sup> Johnson, pp. 29–30.

<sup>903</sup> Byfield's argument is derived from that of Robin Law. Robin Law, "'Legitimite' Trade and Gender Relations in Yorubaland and Dahomey", in *From Slave Trade to Legitimate Commerce: The Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-century West Africa*, ed. By Robin Law (Cambridge University Press, 1995), (pp195-214), p. 207 cited in Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, p. 24.

roles to play'.<sup>904</sup> In Yorùbáland, scholars argue that before prolonged colonial influences, the pre-colonial Yorùbá did not view gender with negative connotations of subordination and powerlessness. Rather, they believed that males and females had complementary roles to play in every sphere of life.<sup>905</sup> They argue that Yorùbá gender structures emphasized balance amongst the sexes rather than the superiority of one sex over the other. They stress that the pre-colonial Yorùbá believed that if this balance was upset in either the political, economic, social or religious sector, it would be detrimental to their very existence.<sup>906</sup> Evidence of this conviction is derived from Yorùbá oral traditions that highlight indigenous cosmologies.<sup>907</sup> Yorùbá cosmology does call for gender balance. Indigenous ideals consider men and women as a binary complementarity rather than opposites and males and females are said to possess different characteristics needed for cosmic balance. For instance, the male principle, which is regarded as tough, aggressive and hot-tempered, needs the female principle of softness, calmness and coolness. Scholars of Yorùbáland argue that gender balance is central to Yorùbá cosmic philosophy, mirrored in all areas of life and its significance 'obliterate[s] oppression'.<sup>908</sup>

One story, which has been used as an example for Yorùbá understandings of cosmological balance, is the creation myth involving male deities and *Ọṣun*, a female deity. According to this myth, *Olódùmarè* (God) sent certain deities to create the world including *Ọbàtálá* (*Olódùmarè*'s second in command and chief deity), *Ògún* (deity of war and iron), *Ṣàṅgó* (deity of thunder), *Ọrúnmìlá* (the divination deity), *Èṣù* (the trickster deity), some other male deities, and *Ọṣun* (a female deity of fertility and witchcraft). These divinities came down and began creation but when they assembled and held meetings, they never invited *Ọṣun*. Being an *àjé* (witch), *Ọṣun* destroyed their plans and they were

---

<sup>904</sup> Sudarkasa, 'The Status of Women', 99.

<sup>905</sup> Olajubu, p. 15.

<sup>906</sup> See Olajubu, pp. 1–16; Peel, 'Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change', 136–166.

<sup>907</sup> Cosmology as defined by Diedre Badejo is 'the metaphysical nature of the universe [that] offers an ethno-cultural view of the original organisation of the world and the objective relationships between human beings and nature, between human beings and divinities, and among human beings themselves'. Badejo, p. 67.

<sup>908</sup> Olademo, p. 20; 38–44; Olajubu, pp. 20–25.



unsuccessful in every endeavour. They returned to *Olódùmarè* and reported their frustrations. When *Olódùmarè* asked about *Ọ̀ṣun*, they said she was not invited because she was a woman. *Olódùmarè* then pointed out their mistake and told them to go and beg her forgiveness, which they did. Before she forgave them, *Ọ̀ṣun* asked to be included in matters from which she had previously been excluded. She demanded that in future, all powerful women like herself must also be initiated. They agreed to this and showed her everything.<sup>909</sup>

From this myth, Badejo concludes that without women, the whole Yorùbá life cycle is 'arrested' because mortal women mirror *Ọ̀ṣun*'s cosmological power on earth. Hence, without the female, males are rendered impotent.<sup>910</sup> Although a valid observation, this myth also indicates that the Yorùbá did acknowledge that women tended to be excluded from matters considered of political or cosmic importance. But rather than gender balance, one female in the midst of many men seems to imply that only a token representation was required to maintain equilibrium. Such notions were especially obvious in the pre-colonial political scene. In *Ìbàdàn*, the decision-making council consisted of many men and one woman, the *Ìyálóde* (mother of the outside).<sup>911</sup> Although ideologically, the *Ìyálóde* as the sole woman in a male dominated counsel denoted equilibrium, in reality, the *Ìyálóde* title although legitimate, was not an effective representation of female contribution. Indeed, this nominal balance disadvantaged women. The *Ìyálóde* suffered the disadvantage of always being outnumbered. If her opinion differed to those of the counsel, she was expected to defer to the decision of men. If she failed to do this, it could have led to her removal, and in the case of *Ìyálóde* *Ẹ́fúnṣetán*, her death.<sup>912</sup> Therefore, Yorùbá pre-colonial ideals about gender balance did not always, indeed hardly ever, translate into practice. It is important to state that researchers do recognise gender inequalities in politics, but the argument here is that the extent of these inequalities is grossly understated.<sup>913</sup>

---

<sup>909</sup> Badejo, p. 73.

<sup>910</sup> Badejo pp. 67-9, 72-4.

<sup>911</sup> Denzer, *The Iyalode in Ibadan Politics and Society*, p. 5.

<sup>912</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Journal*, 30 June 1874.

<sup>913</sup> See Strobel, p. 123; Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yorùbá Political System', p. 145.

## The *Ìyálóde* in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta

Above all female chiefs, the *Ìyálóde* is regarded as the true signifier of women's power in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. Scholars regard the *Ìyálóde* as the voice of women in government and a recognition that women could contribute meaningfully to politics.<sup>914</sup> The *Ìyálóde* was an established title in Ìbàdàn, conferred on the most successful female trader who also had the ability to articulate the concerns of women in the council of chiefs. She was the fourth in line in the hierarchy of chiefs after the *Olúbàdàn* (ruler), *Balógun* (commander-in-chief), and *Séríkí* (war-chief).<sup>915</sup> Although a kingmaker, she was excluded from the office of *Olúbàdàn*. She was therefore neither in competition for supreme power, nor was she a challenge to male dominance.<sup>916</sup> In Ìbàdàn, the *Ìyálóde* acted as an intercessor and arbitrator between the townswomen and the chiefs and settled disputes between women. In collaboration with the *Ìyálójà* (mother of the market) she supervised women and markets, and generally looked after the welfare of women.<sup>917</sup> Although Modupeolu Faseke writes that the office of the *Ìyálóde* in Abẹ̀òkúta and Ìbàdàn was very powerful and important, giving women an opportunity to participate in decision-making, this was only true of Ìbàdàn.<sup>918</sup> In Abẹ̀òkúta, these were the duties of men. The only identical roles the *Ìyálóde* performed in Ìbàdàn and Abẹ̀òkúta was providing soldiers and ammunition in times of warfare.

The title of *Ìyálóde* was weaker in Abẹ̀òkúta than in Ìbàdàn. Whereas Ìbàdàn had an unbroken succession of *Ìyálóde* through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Abẹ̀òkúta had only two and there was a long interruption between the death of the second *Ìyálóde* of Abẹ̀òkúta, Madam Miniya Jojọlọlá in 1930

---

<sup>914</sup> Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yorùbá Political System', pp. 145, 157.

<sup>915</sup> Denzer, *The Iyalode in Ibadan Politics and Society, c.1850-1997*, p. 5.

<sup>916</sup> Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yorùbá Political System', p. 158.

<sup>917</sup> Denzer, *The Iyalode in Ibadan Politics and Society, c.1850-1997*, p. 6; Awe, 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yorùbá Political System', pp. 146–7.

<sup>918</sup> Faseke, p. 150.

and the installation of third *Ìyálóde*, Chief Bísóyè Tájúoşó in 1982. In Abẹ̀òkúta, the *Ìyálóde* title was not institutionalised, and she was not a member of the ruling council. Like Ìbàdàn, the title was not hereditary but conferred on economically successful women as a reward for services to the town. In the case of the first *Ìyálóde* of Abẹ̀òkúta Madam Ẹ́fúnpòróyè Tinúbu, it was a reward for her role during the attempted Dahomean invasion of Abẹ̀òkúta in 1864 as explained through her brief life history below.<sup>919</sup>

Ẹ́fúnpòróyè Ọ̀şuntinúbu was born in Ọ̀wu to Nijeede and Ọ̀şunşóla. She had two brothers and was the eldest daughter of her mother. When Ọ̀wu was destroyed in 1821 along with the Ẹ̀gbá towns, her family moved to the Ọ̀wu section of Abẹ̀òkúta. She learnt trading from her mother and grandmother, married an Ọ̀wu man, had two sons, and began trading on her own. After a couple of years, her husband died and she moved back to her father's compound. On one of the visits of Prince Adele of Badagry to Abẹ̀òkúta, he called on her father, a then affluent man, and took a liking to Tinúbu. He married her and took her to Badagry. She took her two sons along but they soon died, apparently from malaria. She never had any more children. Her marriage to Adele launched her into the politics of Badagry and Lagos. In 1835, after the death of Idewu, the Ọ̀ba (ruler) of Lagos, Adele ascended the throne making Tinúbu a queen, but he soon died in 1837. After his death, she again married a Muslim junior Chief Yesufu Bada, who after the ascension of Olúwọ̀lé, the next King of Lagos, became a courtier and Tinúbu, being an ex-queen and wife to a courtier, had free access to the palace. Her husband later became a war captain.

When Olúwọ̀lé died in 1844, Akíntóyè, grandson of a previous Lagos *ọ̀ba* called Ọ̀ba Kútere ascended the throne. His coronation began a period of disquiet in Lagos because Kòsókó, Akíntóyè's nephew contested the throne and at one time defeated Akíntóyè in war. Akíntóyè fled Lagos and found refuge in his maternal home in Abẹ̀òkúta. Badà and Tinúbu's alliance with

---

<sup>919</sup> Life summary adapted from Oladipo Yemitan, *Madame Tinubu: Merchant and King-Maker* (University Press, 1987).

Akíntóyè also resulted in their exile to Badagry. While they both gathered support for Akíntóyè there, Tinúbu used her influence in Abẹ̀òkúta to gain support for Akíntóyè, and in a second war, Kòsókó was defeated and Akíntóyè returned to the Lagos throne in 1852. Her support gave her increased influence in the palace, which she used to expand her trading enterprise. Her business acumen and fortitude enabled her to seize every opportunity and her trade in slaves and tobacco, and later arms and ammunition, grew to enormous proportions. Andrew Gollmer described her in 1851 as 'Akíntóyè's sister and a great woman in this town' while Thomas King referred to her as 'a woman of acute judgement and manly courage who with all her men was a great support to Akíntóyè'.<sup>920</sup> When Akíntóyè died in 1853 and Dòsùnmú his son succeeded the throne, her influence in Lagos increased even more, as he was described as a weak king whom she could easily manipulate. The British Consul, Benjamin Campbell's, dislike for her slave dealing activities, his resentment of her influence on Dòsùnmú who accepted her council rather than his, and her near monopoly of the arms trade, meant that European merchants, Lagos merchants, and British interests no longer welcomed her residency in Lagos and this culminated in her expulsion to Abẹ̀òkúta in 1856.

She left Lagos without her husband and soon re-established herself as an economic, and later political, force in Abẹ̀òkúta as well. She returned with a large number of slaves, followers, soldiers and dependents, and could not practically move into her paternal compound. Instead, she took land from her patrilineage, built her own compound, and settled there. When the Ìbàdàn-Ìjàyè war broke out in 1860, Tinúbu used her contacts to start a booming arms trade that brought her great success. When the Dahomeans attacked Abẹ̀òkúta in March 1864, Tinúbu used her resources to support Abẹ̀òkúta. She supplied soldiers for war, gave large quantities of ammunition to the Ègbá forces, and organised the Ègbá women into a rallying force to help the men get ready for war. She used produce from her farm to feed the fighting men, set up a bay where the wounded were treated, and stationed herself at the

---

<sup>920</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 18 November 1851; Thomas King, Journal, 15 August 1853.

gate to return defectors to war with encouraging words. She herself dressed like a warrior ready to fight if necessary. After the war, the Ègbá conferred on her the title of *Ìyálóde* in appreciation of her contribution. She continued to assist in subsequent Ègbá war efforts but to a lesser extent with money and materials.<sup>921</sup>

Tinúbu used her title to political ends in 1868 when the town chiefs undertook to appoint a new *Aláké*. Two men Oyèékàn and Adémólá, both from the Jíbódù family contested the throne. While Tinúbu supported Oyèékàn, the *Ògbóni* supported Adémólá. Her influence was so great that the town was divided between her supporters and those of Adémólá. However, Oyèékàn lost the bid and Adémólá was installed in 1869. Tinúbu and other Oyèékàn supporters refused to acknowledge his coronation and the disagreement almost led to civil war, but John Glover, the then Governor of Lagos, mediated and settled the matter in 1871.<sup>922</sup> When Adémólá died on 9 September 1877, Tinúbu again renewed her lobbying for Oyèékàn and her 'generosity with gifts in cash and kind' to the chiefs was this time successful and Oyèékàn was installed in 1879. When he died in 1881, Tinúbu was already an old woman and no longer participated actively in politics. She died in 1889. Even though she had no children, she was given a befittingly impressive burial by the chiefs amidst the presence and cheers of all of Abéòkúta.<sup>923</sup>

Aside from her influence in king making, Tinúbu was never spoken of as a chief with legitimate power. Unlike the *Ìyálóde* of Ìbàdàn, she did not attend council meetings, and she was not part of the recognised political hierarchy. She was rather a symbolic mother figure to the people, to whom she gave encouragement in times of distress and arbitrated conflict within her lineage and compound.<sup>924</sup> The missionary W. Williams once wrote that he and Mr

---

<sup>921</sup> This entire narrative was sourced from Yemitan, pp. 1-75. See also Saburi Biobaku, 'Madam Tinúbu', in *Eminent Nigerians of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Bolanle Awe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 33-41 (p. 33); Moore, pp. 72-3.

<sup>922</sup> Tinúbu most likely supported Oyèékàn because he would serve her interests in power. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>923</sup> A befitting burial means one that involved all the rites and rituals necessary to ensure ancestorhood and reincarnation. This will be discussed in detail in the chapter five. Moore, p. 92; Kola Onadipe, *Footprints on the Niger* (National Press, 1980), pp.52-53.

<sup>924</sup> For Tinúbu's role in lineage arbitration, see Samuel Cole, 26 January 1876.

Gerber visited her after Ifole, when missionaries were expelled from Abẹ̀òkúta, and she encouraged and reassured them.<sup>925</sup> The *Ìyálóde* title in Abẹ̀òkúta was therefore a ceremonial one characterised by political influence resulting from a woman's economic capacities rather than any legitimate authority.

Some researchers of nineteenth-century Yorùbáland also state that in Abẹ̀òkúta, there were female chiefs known as *Erelú* who formed as much as twenty per cent of the *Ògbóni* in Abẹ̀òkúta. These women are also identified as another attempt by the government to include women.<sup>926</sup> Curiously, there is no evidence of these *Erelú* in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta records. *Erelú* did exist in Lagos and James White described them as the 'queen of the women' but their presence in Abẹ̀òkúta is undetermined.<sup>927</sup> J. D. Y. Peel confirmed the author's suspicions about the *Erelú* title when he wrote that 'from my own reading, there's nothing on women's participation in *Ògbóni*'.<sup>928</sup> In fact, when discussions were held in the Abẹ̀òkúta church about *Ògbóni* membership, only men participated as it was regarded as only relevant to them. Although the absence of any mention of the *Erelú* may simply have been an oversight of nineteenth-century observers, it seems unlikely as they mention other titles.<sup>929</sup> Arguments for the existence of *Erelú* in Abẹ̀òkúta are most likely a twentieth-century projection into the nineteenth century. For example, Nina Mba's evidence for the participation of the *Erelú* in Abẹ̀òkúta is said to be through fieldwork conducted in the 1970s and 1980s and a colonial intelligence report and she was in turn cited by Faseke.<sup>930</sup> Notwithstanding, if these female chiefs did exist, their presence was nominal. Women could not

---

<sup>925</sup> W. Williams, *Journal*, 20 October 1868.

<sup>926</sup> Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, p. 5; Faseke, p. 150; Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours*, pp. 5–6; Judith A. Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State' p. 29; Bọlanle Awẹ and Omotayo Olutoye, 'Women and Warfare in 19th Century Yorùbáland: An Introduction', in *War and Peace in Yorùbáland 1793-1893*, ed. by I. A. Akinjogbin (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998), pp. 121–130 (p. 122).

<sup>927</sup> James White, *Journal*, 14 May 1865.

<sup>928</sup> Email correspondence with J. D. Y. Peel, 11 November 2012.

<sup>929</sup> Campbell does state in 1861 that 'almost every free man, woman and child is a member of the *Ògbóni* Lodge' but his statement seems a hyperbole for mass male membership rather than fact. Furthermore although he mentions other titles, he never uses the word *Erelú*. E. Olympus Moore also wrote in 1916 that there was one *Erelú* in earlier times when the Ègbá lived in the forest before they moved to Abẹ̀òkúta. Again there is no evidence of them in the nineteenth century. Campbell, p. 36; Moore, p. 14.

<sup>930</sup> Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, p. 5; Faseke, p. 150.

and did not participate in formal decision-making due to the political structures of nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta consisting largely of *Ògbóni*, *orò*, and *egúngún*, which were not conducive for female participation.

## **The economy in Abẹ̀òkúta**

### ***Women and the economy***

Nineteenth-century Yorùbá women were renowned for their involvement in economic activities including crafts but most especially trade.<sup>931</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta women were particularly observed to be very enterprising taking advantage of every opportunity to make profits. During the dry season when the weather was hot and water was scarce, women sat along the roadside and sold water to thirsty travellers.<sup>932</sup> William Clarke commented that

being aware of this strong uncontrollable appetite of the travelling public and knowing that they generally had ready cash, [women] traders are to be found at many points on the road with their supplies ready to cater to the tastes of the many hungry carriers.<sup>933</sup>

These provisional markets, known locally as *àrojẹ*, sometimes catered to travelling caravans of thousands (see fig 4.4).<sup>934</sup>

---

<sup>931</sup> For example, see Strobel, p. 118; Remi Adeyemo, 'Women in Rural Areas: A Case Study of Southwestern Nigeria', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 18 (1984), 563–572 (p. 565).

<sup>932</sup> Bowen, p. 234.

<sup>933</sup> Clarke, p. 13.

<sup>934</sup> Crowther's dictionary defines *àrojẹ* as a place of refreshment, a market place on the road, where travellers halt. Crowther, p. 43; Clarke, p. 23.



Fig 4.4: *Àrojẹ* or roadside shops in early twentieth-century Abeòkúta. Source: Photographs, by Major C. T. Lawrence, 1910-1939, National Archives, London, CO 1069/65

Burton also observed that both men and women worked as *alágbàrù* (carriers), carrying loads, often on their heads, from one town to another for a price. But while men carried only about forty to eighty pounds of goods, women ‘stagger[ed] as if about to faint under [...] one hundred and twelve pounds’ (see fig 4.5).<sup>935</sup> Women carrying heavier loads demonstrate their resourcefulness because carrier fees were paid according to the weight of the luggage ensuring higher returns. However, missionaries sometimes regarded women’s enterprising character as a dangerous act of cunning. In 1857, Townsend stated that he did not like employing women to work because when employed, women used every means to get the greatest amount of wages. He wrote that women often agreed to a wage but then reneged once the work started to force desperate employers to increase their fee. If the employer

---

<sup>935</sup> Burton, p. 130.



remained firm, they yielded and worked well.<sup>936</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn* reported a similar observation in 1864. A contributor wrote that:

You wish to start a journey and you hire the number of carriers you think sufficient and perhaps agree with them for the wages and at the last minute before starting, the carriers strike for higher wages for some of them refuse to go. If you are fresh in the country or the journey is pressing you perhaps submit for the time to the extortion.<sup>937</sup>

Clarke similarly claimed that traders were 'keen and shrewd and well experienced in making large profits'. He stated that women did not regard two, three or five hundred per cent profit too much to make from individuals who did not know better, particularly new immigrants and Europeans.<sup>938</sup>



Fig 4.5:  
Illustration of  
travelling in  
Yorùbáland  
showing the jobs  
of carriers.  
Source: *Church  
Missionary  
Gleaner*, June  
1865.

<sup>936</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, 16 July 1857.

<sup>937</sup> Although this contributor never mentions women in particular, they were the defacto carriers and they, rather than men gained this reputation. *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, January 1864.

<sup>938</sup> Clarke, p. 265.

Alice Schlegel and Judith Brown argue that women in pre-industrial societies, including Yorùbáland, did not perform tasks that were considered stressful, exposed them to danger, or took them away from home for long periods.<sup>939</sup> Schlegel contends that long-distance trade or dangerous tasks were incompatible with child bearing, as a result, most women were not socialised to, or expected to, perform such tasks.<sup>940</sup> In the same vein, Niara Sudarkasa wrote that 'normally too, men predominated in long-distance trade, and women were pre-dominant in local markets'.<sup>941</sup> These arguments are not applicable to the nineteenth-century Yorùbá. Captain Clapperton, a British explorer, commented that women were everywhere in [Yorùbáland] carrying heavy loads from town to town.<sup>942</sup> Such long-distance trading activities often left them and their children vulnerable to danger. Thomas King, a Saro slave returnee with the CMS, recalled how he was captured by slave raiders when he was home alone with some younger siblings because his mother and elder sister had gone to a town about fifteen miles away for several weeks of trading.<sup>943</sup> Likewise, in 1860, four hundred women traders were either killed or taken into slavery when they travelled to Èrìn town for provisions.<sup>944</sup>

Telling of his gender prejudices, Johnson described women as 'hardy as men' who engaged in the long-distance trade of cotton, palm oil, ammunition and slaves.<sup>945</sup> Even the insecurities of the day were not enough to deter them from doing so. When war broke out in particular areas and women could no longer safely buy and sell goods from there, they went to other places for their supplies. During the Ìjàyè war, women, who had previously bought goods in large quantities in Ìjàyè for the Ìbàdàn markets, turned their attention instead to Òṣìèlè in Abẹ̀òkúta for supplies.<sup>946</sup> Women usually travelled in caravans ranging in number from tens to thousands of people, protected, for a fee, by

---

<sup>939</sup> Schlegel, p. 35; Brown, p. 1075.

<sup>940</sup> Schlegel, p. 35.

<sup>941</sup> Sudarkasa, 'The Status of Women', 100.

<sup>942</sup> Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: From the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (Carey, Lea and Carey, 1829), p. 28 cited in McIntosh, p. 127.

<sup>943</sup> *Church Missionary Gleaner*, March 1851.

<sup>944</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, October 1860.

<sup>945</sup> Johnson, p. 245.

<sup>946</sup> William Moore, *Journal*, 1862.

guards and escorts who were either soldiers or professional guards.<sup>947</sup> Some men exploited women's long distance trading ventures. In 1855, Àiná, a neighbour to the missionary Adolphus Mann, made his living by supplying armed guards to protect caravans. For a year or two previous, the roads had been safe and people had stopped paying for his services. To force patronage, he sent his people to cause havoc on trade routes and rob traders. After this, people, especially women, again requested his services.<sup>948</sup>

Trading in local markets was transacted via simple purchase with cowries or trade by barter. Long distance trade, and especially trading with Europeans at the coast, was however conducted through a credit system. If the demand at the coast for goods such as palm oil and cotton exceeded supply, or if the window of demand was time sensitive often involving a ship waiting for cargo incurring demurrage costs, coastal merchants often gave European goods or money in advance to indigenous traders who could obtain such articles quickly from the interior. These local traders would in turn trade European goods in the interior for the goods demanded at the coast, and brought the supplies back to the ships, selling them at a higher rate than the purchase price.<sup>949</sup> Therefore, people could trade profitably without using their own capital. This is how many successful women made profits and amassed wealth. Oladipo Yemitan noted that Madame Tinúbu's 'commercial empire' was also acquired via this means. By the time she was expelled from Lagos, 'she was owing her creditors to the tune of £5000 – a colossal amount in those days! (emphasis his)'. Her biggest creditor was Captain James Pinson Labulo, a foreign merchant.<sup>950</sup>

Despite women's predominance in trade, there is no evidence that they regarded themselves as a distinct group, with separate and specific interests that needed protection. They neither organised collectives nor formed guilds. *Èsúsú*, the money rotation scheme often cited by historians such as Funmi Soetan as examples for 'women's association', were a by-product of women's

---

<sup>947</sup> Henry Townsend, Letter to Reverend Venn, 30 August 1852.

<sup>948</sup> Adolphus Mann, Journal, 18 March 1855.

<sup>949</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, November 1864.

<sup>950</sup> Yemitan, p. 24.

proximity to one another rather than an example of collective consciousness.<sup>951</sup> Women were more likely than men to form *èsúsú* because they traded communally in marketplaces while men tended to perform isolated economic tasks such as farming. However, *èsúsú* was seemingly never used as a springboard to then discuss political, social and economic interests. In fact, women in a collective did not even have to interact at all. Besides, although *èsúsú* largely consisted of women, they were not necessarily gender specific and some had both male and female members.<sup>952</sup> *Èsúsú* assisted with monetary matters. Up to fifty persons paid the same amount of money at regular intervals of five to eight days to an appointed representative, usually a member of the scheme. This representative went around to collect the money from members instead of members converging together to donate. The total amount paid at each interval was given to one member in turn for his/her personal use until all the members had collected at least once. This scheme acted as a kind of short-term bank facilitating larger investments through savings. *Èsúsú* was universal in Yorùbáland and helped with expenses that required a lump sum. Ajayi Crowther regarded it as a 'great inducement to industry and is preventive of waste and [encourages] frugality'.<sup>953</sup>

### ***The Pàràkòyí (trade guild)***

Although women outnumbered men in trading, in Abẹ̀òkúta, they were neither in control of trade, nor did they regulate it. Unlike parts of Igboland that had an *Omu* (head of market women) or other parts of Yorùbáland that had *Ìyálójà* (mother of the market), in Abẹ̀òkúta, trade was under the purview of a group of men known as the *Pàràkòyí*.<sup>954</sup> From the historical evidence, one gets the impression that women were intentionally excluded from the Abẹ̀òkúta economic power structures for the purposes of transparency and neutrality. Since men had lower stakes in trading, an all male *Pàràkòyí* may have been

<sup>951</sup> Funmi Soetan, 'The Economic Empowerment of Nigerian Women: Some Determinants of Access to Resources', *African Economic History*, 1999, 117–35 (pp. 119–120).

<sup>952</sup> Samuel Johnson, p. 119; Campbell, p. 72.

<sup>953</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 10 September 1856; Ajisafe Moore, p. 22.

<sup>954</sup> For more on *Omu* and *Ìyálójà*, see Strobel, 123; Awe, 'Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yorùbá Country', 74.

an attempt to ensure that decisions concerning commerce remained impartial to trading interests.

*Pàràkòyí* were a trade guild or a council of the chamber of commerce that both regulated trade and implemented trade laws.<sup>955</sup> The head of the council was the *Olórí Pàràkòyí* (head of the *Pàràkòyí*). They met every seventeen days to discuss how to advance Abẹ̀òkúta's commercial interests, visited the markets regularly and mediated any disputes that arose in the course of trading.<sup>956</sup> In Bascom's study of Ile-Ife, he stated that the *Pàràkòyí* made a living from the town's trade. When citizens sold goods in Ife, they were required to give half their profits to the *Pàràkòyí*. Conversely, when people from other towns brought goods to sell in Ife, they were taken to the *Pàràkòyí* who bargained for a whole or part of their merchandise. If they could not reach an agreement, traders had to take their goods to another town. Whatever the *Pàràkòyí* did purchase, they gave to Ife traders to resell, after which half the daily profit was turned over to them.<sup>957</sup> There is no way to say for certain if the powers of the Abẹ̀òkúta *Pàràkòyí* were equal to their Ife counterparts but they did co-ordinate all aspects of trade. Any man or woman who wanted to trade in Abẹ̀òkúta needed first to inform the guild.<sup>958</sup> The *Pàràkòyí* acted as intermediaries between market women and civil chiefs, taking the concerns of traders to them and implementing trade legislations.<sup>959</sup> When Abẹ̀òkúta introduced import duties on ammunition, tobacco, cigars and spirits in 1862, the *Pàràkòyí* implemented this by stationing men at the gates and the river to collect taxes.<sup>960</sup> If the Chiefs ordered the rivers and roads to Abẹ̀òkúta closed because of warfare, the *Pàràkòyí* implemented the order. They closed the gates into town preventing traders from entering, seized goods smuggled in, and sent back canoe men from other towns. They also oversaw *ẹ̀súsú*. Moreover, whenever British Consuls came to confer with the Abẹ̀òkúta chiefs about trade, they were directed to the *Pàràkòyí*.<sup>961</sup>

---

<sup>955</sup> Moore, p. 15.

<sup>956</sup> Moore, p. 15.

<sup>957</sup> Bascom, *The Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 26.

<sup>958</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 22.

<sup>959</sup> Moore, p. 15.

<sup>960</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, January 1862.

<sup>961</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, May 1860.

There were allegations that the *Pàràkòyí* often abused their power. Rather than close the river and trade routes when instructed, missionaries wrote that they used such opportunities to carry out exclusive trade. A writer for *Ìwé Ìròhìn* commented that

Whenever the river or roads are ordered to be shut, the Parakoyis [...] are the police to whom of right belong the execution of this order. The execution of it becomes a privilege, for in the loose manner in which laws are executed there are abundant opportunity for them to carry out exclusive trade, permitting their own friends a passage, and taking large bribes from others to be allowed to pass.<sup>962</sup>

A contributor in the *African Times* even alleged that the *Pàràkòyí* often instigated the shutting of trade routes for their own personal interests.<sup>963</sup> This abuse of power led to the *Ògbóni* taking temporary custody of the river from them in 1879.<sup>964</sup>

The *Pàràkòyí* also settled matters pertaining to debt especially amongst women traders. One case worth considering in detail were the events preceding 15 February 1862. Four days prior, an Abẹ̀òkúta woman had died after succumbing to wounds inflicted on her by a female creditor. The deceased woman's debt was for ten bags of cowries (approx. \$5), a debt she inherited from her mother who died some months previously. Although the creditor had gone to the woman several times for payment, the debtor could not pay and in consequence, the creditor applied to the *Pàràkòyí* for help. Despite the *Pàràkòyí's* entreaties to the creditor for patience, she insisted on receiving her money immediately and the guild advised her to give the debtor *ògò*, 'an impudent hired debt demander'.<sup>965</sup> *Ògò* was a type of bailiff used to force debt repayment who Johnson described as a destrainor.<sup>966</sup> If a creditor found it near impossible to retrieve a debt, they applied to the town authorities for *ògò*. This individual or group, usually men, was said to *dògò tì ajẹgbèsè*

---

<sup>962</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, July 1860.

<sup>963</sup> *African Times*, 1 January 1879.

<sup>964</sup> *African Times* 1 January 1879.

<sup>965</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, February 1862.

<sup>966</sup> Samuel Johnson, p. 131.

(sit on the debtor).<sup>967</sup> They would enter the debtor's premises and sit in front of his/her room until they made an appearance. They then made themselves 'an intolerable nuisance to the debtor and to the members of the house till the money is paid'. Johnson described *ògò* as a 'man of imperturbable temper, a foul tongue, a veritable Thersites'.<sup>968</sup> They followed the debtor everywhere and anywhere, denying them any privacy while reigning abuses on him/her. The debtor could not retaliate either verbally or physically because to do so was an affront on the authorities that sanctioned his presence. Sometimes, the *ògò* sat at the entrance of the compound, insulting all the inmates and refusing entrance or exit to all.<sup>969</sup> The *ògò* demanded any food he liked and could not be denied, helping himself if not quickly served. He could eat or drink anything on the premises. He could even kill any livestock he found on the premises and prepare it at the expense of the debtor, as long as he consumed it there because he could take nothing away. If there was no food in the compound, he bought from passing vendors telling them to collect payment from the debtor inside. All these further increased the debt. 'Loud in his abuses, intolerable in his manners to all in the house whilst going in and out with the debtor', he went day after day until even the compound members got tired of him, and quickly found means to pay off the debt.<sup>970</sup>

It is no wonder that after three days, the debtor, deeply distressed by *ògò*, ran to the *Pàràkòyí* again to implore the creditor to take him away and give her a fixed time for the payment. The *Pàràkòyí* recalled the creditor and pleaded with her to remove *ògò*. Out of respect, she complied, but still filled with anger, she went to the debtor's house and with all her strength struck the deceased on the chest with her head. The deceased fell to the ground and the creditor crouched on her and inflicted several more blows. From that moment the deceased could no longer speak and spat blood until her death. At the time the case was recorded, the authorities were yet to decide the fate of the

---

<sup>967</sup> *Ògò* were probably men because women were too busy engaged in economic tasks.

<sup>968</sup> Samuel Johnson, p. 131.

<sup>969</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 30.

<sup>970</sup> Ajisafe Moore added that if the *ògò* system failed to secure payment but simply increased the debt. The creditor had the right to seize anything and anyone belonging to the debtor's clan and kept it until the debt was repaid. This was called *Èmú* (to catch). Ajisafe Moore, p. 31; Samuel Johnson, p. 131.

creditor.<sup>971</sup> The *Pàràkòyí* thus arbitrated conflicts amongst women in Abẹ̀òkúta rather than the *Ìyálóde* as scholars have claimed. Since the dispute between these women was not directly related to their trade, it shows that the *Pàràkòyí* were regarded as arbitrators for general issues concerning women and not just those that ensued in the marketplace. We also see from the event that the women adhered to every suggestion they gave also signalling their legitimacy as mediators. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the *Pàràkòyí*, most likely, only arbitrated disputes between women because men seemed not to have invoked their assistance in cases of conflict, as indicated in the case of Shadinot Agodo who died in 1856.

A few days before his death, Shadinot went to collect payment from Shadrach, a man indebted to him, because Shadinot himself was also indebted to a creditor who had caused him great anxiety by threatening to commit suicide in his home. Shadinot did everything he could to collect his debt from Shadrach once unsuccessfully attempting to hang himself in Shadrach's house. On the day of Shadinot's death, although very ill, he insisted that he preferred to die in Shadrach's house by sickness than for his creditor to trouble him further and he resolved not to return before getting the money but died that day in Shadrach's home.<sup>972</sup> This and other similar occurrences indicate that men tended to try to resolve disputes themselves and referred the matter to the *Ògbóni* only if their personal attempts were unsuccessful. In October 1845, two men quarrelled because one of the men had at sometime or another, taken the slave of the other. However, when the owner demanded that his slave be returned, the other man refused. As a last resort, the plaintiff summoned the defendant to appear before the *Ògbóni* for arbitration.<sup>973</sup>

The social changes of the nineteenth century sometimes threatened the power and position of the *Pàràkòyí*. In the mid 1860s, elderly Sàró men and some other male Abẹ̀òkúta immigrant commercial stakeholders formed an

---

<sup>971</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhin*, February 1862.

<sup>972</sup> Thomas King, *Journal*, 7 November 1856.

<sup>973</sup> William Marsh, *Journal*, 7 October, 1845.



association called the Abẹ̀òkúta Commercial Association (ACA) registered at the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. They assembled regularly to consult on, and adopt, means for the advancement of trade. They subscribed to this association out of their own funds and, from time to time, gave gifts to the chiefs. They also acquired ammunition for the Abẹ̀òkúta military to help secure beneficial trading legislations for themselves.<sup>974</sup> Although they never involved themselves in indigenous government, their association could have been a deliberate attempt to side-line the *Pàràkòyí*. Residents in Abẹ̀òkúta soon accepted the ACA as legitimate and consulted them on matters relating to export trade, and by so doing, compromised the authority of the *Pàràkòyí*.<sup>975</sup> After about a decade, the ACA stalled as many Chamber members died or left Abẹ̀òkúta.

After Ifole in 1867, when missionaries were forced to leave Abẹ̀òkúta, the ACA was replaced by what an *African Times* writer called a 'Parakoyi gang', which people originally felt was a progeny of the ACA. Instead, young men, who the contributor described as 'mischievous and reckless', formed it. Calling themselves 'Christian *Pàràkòyí*', they meddled in local politics, harassed market women for money, and brought false charges against those who did not bribe them.<sup>976</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know how this 'Parakoyi pain' was resolved. However, it is evident that these changes in Abẹ̀òkúta upset the economic hierarchy. The *Pàràkòyí* changed further in 1878 when Betsey Désólá, a successful female entrepreneur, Christian convert, and slave owner, joined the previously all-male guild and was given the title *Ìyálóde* of the *Pàràkòyí*.<sup>977</sup>

The powers of the *Pàràkòyí* call into question the popular claim that the *Ìyálóde*, a female chief, co-ordinated, monitored and regulated trade, resolved disputes amongst women, and acted as a spokeswoman for market women in

---

<sup>974</sup> *African Times*, 1 January 1879.

<sup>975</sup> We do not know how the *Pàràkòyí* responded to this threat.

<sup>976</sup> *African Times*, 1 January 1879.

<sup>977</sup> Byfield, Judith Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State in Abẹ̀òkúta', p. 46; Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, p. 46.

all Yorùbáland.<sup>978</sup> In Abẹ̀òkúta, this was the job of the *Pàràkòyí*. As Oyeronke Oyewumi suggests, it appears that nineteenth-century women did not see themselves as a distinct group, separate from men, with shared interests, desires, or social position.<sup>979</sup> Cheryl Johnson's argument that women in Yorùbáland 'possessed a long and rich history of collective organization through which they articulated and protected their interests from pre-colonial times onward' is therefore questionable. She wrote that since women traded, making them invaluable to distribution, they were 'imbued [with a] group consciousness and solidarity based on mutual interests and needs.'<sup>980</sup> Proposing a similar argument, Nina Mba wrote that women's associations of the twentieth century, including the Abẹ̀òkúta Women's Union (AWU) formed in 1946, which advocated for the rights of women in Abẹ̀òkúta and called for a reduction in royal powers, reflected continuity with old market associations of pre-colonial times, despite the colonial threat to these organisations.<sup>981</sup> To the contrary, nineteenth-century evidence from Abẹ̀òkúta affirms that such women's organisations were rare, if not completely absent. It is more likely that these market associations, especially the AWU, were a colonial creation arising from a newfound gender consciousness rather than any continuity with the pre-colonial past.

## Women and the household

Women's exclusion from state power does not imply that they were completely powerless. Women had other forms of informal power and authority that manifested within the household or lineage level rather than on the *public* town arena. Since the lineage was the primary basis of social organisation, women's authority within it was very significant. Despite being in their conjugal homes, women with adolescent children were no longer considered *ìyàwó* (wives), they were *ìyà* (mothers), a most esteemed title

---

<sup>978</sup> For example, see: Cheryl Johnson, 'Grass Roots Organizing: Women in Anticolonial Activity in Southwestern Nigeria', *African Studies Review*, 25 (1982), 137-157 (pp. 137-138).

<sup>979</sup> Oyewumi, p. ix.

<sup>980</sup> C. Johnson, 'Grass Roots Organising' 137.

<sup>981</sup> Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, pp. 290-291.

within their conjugal lineage that every woman aspired to. They would have risen in the wifely ranks to a senior position. They would also have cast off the burden of childcare and would be acting as advisers to younger wives. Their lack of childcare responsibilities also created more time for economic activities and trade and some women at this stage amassed great wealth. In essence, these women would have attained emphasised femininity.<sup>982</sup>

Motherhood was a position of power where the servility of wifhood was replaced with newfound authority in the household. Many writers emphasise a mother's authority over her daughters-in-law resulting from their influence in their son's household. They argue that mothers were only 'respected' by their sons-in-law because daughters had moved out of the patrilineage and as a consequence, out of the purview of their mothers.<sup>983</sup> There is however evidence that indicates that in the nineteenth century, mothers exercised authority in their daughter's conjugal home as well. A woman in 1861 persecuted her daughter for attending the Aké church. She was a high priestess in another town but still forbade her daughter from going to church from her daughter's matrimonial home. Reverend Jonathan Wood who recorded this event, wrote that on one of the mother's visits, the mother threatened the daughter and threw the girl out of her husband's compound. He added that 'the husband and brother were merely following her because they were afraid of her [the mother]'. The mother later conceded to her daughter's Christianity but insisted that her grandchildren be raised according to local customs.<sup>984</sup> Likewise, a woman once went to her daughter's conjugal compound and threatened her husband stating that she would take her daughter back if he did not cease attending church services.<sup>985</sup> Women thus retained some control over their daughters even after they married and moved out of the patrilineage. Of course, we must not discount both these mothers' personalities, and in the first instance, the mother's religious position. As a

---

<sup>982</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, 831.

<sup>983</sup> Makinde argues this when he writes 'she will be highly respected by her sons-in-law and their families because it is the custom of the Yorùbá to give due respect to the parents of one's wife'. Makinde, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment' 167.

<sup>984</sup> Reverend Wood, Journal, 17 May 1861.

<sup>985</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 26 January 1873. For more examples of this, see Henry Townsend, Journal, 9 July 1856; Samuel Johnson, Journal, 27 August 1877.

priestess, the girl's husband may have feared her religious power.

When women became mothers, many of the patriarchal controls they previously experienced as wives ceased. One such change was the near absence of the corporal punishment that most young women suffered when they challenged indigenous authority. Physical punishment, aimed at correcting or changing attitudes, was replaced by more verbal and spiritual controls. When an *egúngún* worshipper and cult leader in Ìbàdàn in 1874 heard that one of his older wives had converted to Christianity and begun attending services, he called her privately and begged her to renounce her new religion.<sup>986</sup> The woman refused and after a few months of unfruitful persuasion, he threatened to murder her and commit suicide, but despite pleas from family and neighbours, she remained firm. After some time the husband gave up, claiming that she had taken a Christian charm and would never change.<sup>987</sup> His sentiment that his wife had taken a Christian charm was a common one amongst animists. Since the Yorùbá were religiously pragmatic, trying different religions, often simultaneously, to obtain material benefits, they rarely understood the rigid and steadfast stance of Christian converts, often attributing their attitude to charms administered by missionaries to retain the loyalty of their converts. The encounter also demonstrates that for mothers, physical restraints were replaced by verbal threats. Since they had fulfilled their role as wives, their conversion was no longer a threat to lineage posterity and as such, there was no justification for physical controls. Peel accurately argues that after women 'completed their child-rearing years, they entered a phase of greater freedom and opportunity than they had known before, as social controls over them were loosened', and at this point, many older women chose to convert. Adult baptism statistics in mid 1870s Abẹ̀òkúta for example showed twice as many female than male converts.<sup>988</sup>

---

<sup>986</sup> This woman was asked to cease attending church because her conversion would reflect poorly on him as a religious authority.

<sup>987</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Journal*, 22 June 1874.

<sup>988</sup> Peel, 'Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change', 157–8; 160.

Mothers also had increased influence over their marital arrangements. In nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta, and like most of Yorùbáland, when a man died, his male relatives inherited his wives, including his brothers and his sons who could inherit all women except their own mothers. This arrangement protected women was long-term widowhood and ultimately homelessness as women could not remain in her conjugal household without a spouse. Bowen wrote that most women welcomed this arrangement.<sup>989</sup> The levirate-type process known locally as *şúpó* (to marry or inherit a widow) was quite straightforward. After a man's death, the wives mourned for a three-month period, then the lineage men offered to marry the women.<sup>990</sup> Usually, the head of the household, if male, inherited most of the deceased's wives, and if the deceased was the head of household, then this privilege fell to whoever succeeded him. The custom was simple. All the men and widowed women gathered together in the compound and the head of household first sent his chewing stick (a type of toothbrush) round to the woman of his choice, who were expected to modestly decline once or twice and then accept the third time. If a woman refused all three times, her refusal was taken as final.<sup>991</sup> When he had picked, other male members did the same. As amicable as this process seems, there is evidence that sometimes the process was not so harmonious as some women were forcibly inherited against their will. These women were usually younger wives and slaves who had little say in who inherited them. In 1879, after a reallocation ceremony in Ìbàdàn, a young woman hanged herself by her head tie from a tree because she wanted to marry someone else and not the man to whom she was given.<sup>992</sup>

Slave wives could also not choose their husbands. Should their husbands die, his kin immediately inherited them. Sometimes, despite gaining their freedom, their previous status as slaves put them in a precarious position. In 1850, a slave wife's husband was killed on a kidnapping expedition. Prior to his death, he had told the entire family that should he die, the woman was to pay the

---

<sup>989</sup> Bowen, p. 305.

<sup>990</sup> Mourning will be discussed in chapter five.

<sup>991</sup> Samuel Johnson, pp. 115–6.

<sup>992</sup> James Okunseinde, Journal, 28 September, 1879 cited in Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 62.

lineage ten heads of cowries for her freedom, which she did. When Ìgè, a relative of her husband, showed interest in inheriting her, she refused and since she was no longer a slave, she thought herself at liberty to go where she pleased. Being a convert, she moved into the mission house under the care of Henry Townsend. After six years, Ìgè sent a messenger to return the ten heads of cowries to her with the remark that 'if she thinks herself and her children free because she paid these cowries, she may go with the cowries and her children'. This was a clear threat as his restoring the money back to her was meant to send the message that she had been re-enslaved. When missionaries went to discuss with him, he was indignant insisting that the woman must return to his yard but he had no objection to her going to church. The woman had no choice but to return to her deceased husband's patrilineage.<sup>993</sup> This again shows informal, extra-legal power relationships at play in Abẹ̀òkúta. According to indigenous law, the man had no claim to the woman since a person who paid their ransom was free and could not be re-enslaved except if recaptured. However, the fact that she was an ex-slave, probably without kin in the area, put her in a vulnerable position to the man and an established lineage.

Despite the predicament of younger free wives and slaves wives, older free women could refuse levirate marriages with little consequence. Some older women rebuffed suitors and chose not to remarry, a few as a result of Christian conversion. A relation of the missionary Samuel Cole lost her husband in 1871. Although she was a Christian, her husband had remained an animist and a high-ranking chief. Cole wrote that:

After the funeral some attempt was made by the husband's relation to claim her as a wife in the husband's stead, but she totally refused and told them that she could not have any husband again whether heathen or Christian. Telling them that Jesus, through his holy word, said he is the husband of the widow.<sup>994</sup>

After this, her husband's kin no longer bothered her. Although this entry did not state that the woman moved out of the compound, she would have had to

---

<sup>993</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 5 November 1856.

<sup>994</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 29 July 1871.

because women could not remain in their conjugal compound without a husband. Most converts moved into the mission compound or to the Christian village *Wáàsimi* (come and rest) as was the case of the slave woman discussed previously, whilst others moved back to their patrilineage. When a convert woman, Sarah Akifémidé's husband abandoned the Christian church and moved away from *Wáàsimi* to assume the head of household title and marry more wives, his wife refused to follow him. She returned to her father's compound where William Allen reported that she lived alone and quite content.<sup>995</sup> A great amount of social mobility was thus afforded to older women who seemingly moved freely about and were able to resist marital constraints.<sup>996</sup>

If women were financially prosperous, they found it easier to strike out on their own, move out of their conjugal compound, request land from their patrilineage, and set up their own household. It was at this stage of their lives that their bond to their patrilineage benefitted them most because they could either return or claim land. Since land was not sold but granted, women did not need capital, they only needed to be part of the lineage.<sup>997</sup> Consequently, Simi Afonja's claim that even in societies with bilateral kinship relations, 'land, a fixed instrument of production, passed through the men, who also controlled the usufructs of the land' is inaccurate.<sup>998</sup> In Abẹ̀òkúta, some women established their own compound at a later age and went on to be heads of households. Although undoubtedly a minority, these women existed. Samuel Cole wrote about visiting a Madam Súàdá whose compound had burnt down twice in 1871 seemingly by accident. He went to console her and met some chiefs doing the same.<sup>999</sup> He also wrote about calling on Madam Sékùnmádé, a Christian woman, who used her household as a haven for orphan girls, adopting them and raising them as Christians.<sup>1000</sup>

---

<sup>995</sup> William Allen, Journal, 16 July 1879.

<sup>996</sup> Samuel Pearce, Journal, 19 May 1863.

<sup>997</sup> This changed with the monetisation of land in the late nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta. Johnson, p. 95.

<sup>998</sup> Afonja, 305.

<sup>999</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 26 March 1871.

<sup>1000</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 23 February 1871.

Besides widows leaving their conjugal homes, it was also at this adult stage that women most commonly divorced or separated from their husbands, especially if they were financially secure. In 1855, a woman was granted a divorce and moved out of her conjugal compound because of the disgrace her husband brought her from his public petty thefts.<sup>1001</sup> Both *Aláké Gbádébó* and *Aláké Adémólá II* were children of their mother's second marriage. Madam Jojọlọlá who succeeded Madam Tinúbu as *Ìyálóde* of Abẹ̀òkúta after Tinúbu's death also moved out of her conjugal home despite her husband being alive.<sup>1002</sup> She was a wealthy *àdirẹ* (tie-and-dye) maker and cloth seller with ample farmlands, slaves, and pawns. At one point, she left her husband's compound and returned to her natal home due to friction with her husband and because the other wives were envious of her wealth. She eventually obtained land from her family and established her own compound that later became a major *àdirẹ* compound.<sup>1003</sup>

Although women were to a large extent excluded from Abẹ̀òkúta's state hierarchy, they were not completely powerless. The adult stage of the lifecycle gave them a freedom they had previously not experienced. They were free from most marital and reproductive controls and were free to move about both physically and socially. Those that were economically successful took this opportunity to leave conjugal relationships and some set up their own compound, attracting followers and hangers-on, thereby attaining some of the cultural markers of elite masculinity.

## **Masculinities and warfare in nineteenth century Abẹ̀òkúta**

### ***'Big men' in the nineteenth century***

For both men and women in the nineteenth century, in order to attain adulthood and social maturity, one had to have adult children. However, many

---

<sup>1001</sup> T. B. Macaulay, *Journal*, 1855 cited in Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State', p. 30.

<sup>1002</sup> Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State', p. 30.

<sup>1003</sup> Byfield, 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State', p. 36.



men did not just aspire to adulthood but also to elite status. As iterated in chapter three, wealth in Yorùbáland was not conceived in monetary terms but in the size of one's household consisting of a large number of wives, children, and slaves. Elitism was created on public affirmation because a man with a large household was recognised and gained a reputation that attracted followers and thereby further boosted his reputation.<sup>1004</sup> Elitism and wealth were thus created in a mutually reinforcing pattern. Since elite men had to compete for followers, it bred what Barber calls a 'competitive ambitious ethos'.<sup>1005</sup> These 'big men' acted as symbolic fathers to their followers, characteristics of which incorporated 'benevolence, control and punishment'.<sup>1006</sup>

Men were more constrained than women by culturally sanctioned gender norms. Such constraints were especially manifested in religious affairs as power and influence discouraged elite or 'big men' from converting to Christianity.<sup>1007</sup> Since competition amongst men was intense, converting, and as a consequence, losing their ability to participate in *Ògbóni*, be polygamous, in some cases own slaves or enact other markers of successful indigenous Yorùbá manhood meant that 'big men' were the least likely to convert. A man once told Samuel Cole after Cole spoke to him about Christianity that he knew all about the religion and would have embraced it long ago but could not on account of his title and office in the town.<sup>1008</sup> Similarly in August 1872, a chief told James Okunseide that 'I am a titled man and cannot easily embrace Christianity'.<sup>1009</sup> Of course there were a few elite men who converted despite their status to the surprise of missionaries and indigenes alike. The most famous of such men was David Kúkò mí in Ìbàdàn who claimed that he

---

<sup>1004</sup> Campbell, p. 58; Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, p. 195; Meredith McKittrick, 'Forsaking Their Fathers? Colonialism, Christianity and Coming of Age in Ovambo, Northern Namibia', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (New Hamshire: Heinemann, 2003), 33–51 (p. 35).

<sup>1005</sup> Karin Barber, 'Documenting Social and Ideological Change through Yorùbá Oriki: A Stylistic Analysis', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 10 (1981), 39–52 (p. 40) cited in Mann, 'The Rise of Taiwo Olowo', p. 90.

<sup>1006</sup> Lorelle D. Semley, *Mother Is Gold, Father Is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yorùbá Town*, (Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>1007</sup> For more on culturally sanctioned masculinity, see Cleaver, p. 4-20.

<sup>1008</sup> Samuel Cole, *Journal*, 11 December 1873.

<sup>1009</sup> James Okunseinde, *Journal*, 20 August 1872.

converted after he was miraculously healed of dropsy when, as a last resort, he prayed to the Christian God.<sup>1010</sup> Nevertheless, such conversions were extremely rare.

'Big man' status was the hegemonic ideal in the nineteenth century and because of the insecurities of the time, it was most easily gained through a military career that allowed men capture slaves en masse and gain booty.<sup>1011</sup> This route to wealth was even quicker than joining the *Ògbóni* and having a civil career. Toyin Falola observed that in nineteenth-century *Ìbàdàn*, what constituted masculine power and elitism was holding a large household, a chieftaincy title, and control over a 'large, disciplined and effectively organized private army' mostly populated by *ọmọ ọgún* (war boys).<sup>1012</sup> These war boys, who were junior military men, were usually in the youth stage of the lifecycle. They attached themselves to military leaders in order to gain war spoil and increase their means which potentially gave them greater bargaining power within their lineages. War booty also accelerated their accent to manhood since wealth in form of slaves and booty procured during war could be used as bridewealth.<sup>1013</sup> War men and war boys thus had a symbiotic relationship, each using the other in their own way to gain wealth and legitimacy within their lineage and society at large.

It was not enough however to simply have wealth, elite men also had to express their affluence publically because that was what brought acclamation. Performative masculinity included extravagant feasting and moving around town with many followers.<sup>1014</sup> Elite men were also required to sustain their dependants, as feeding their followers, whose numbers sometimes ran into

---

<sup>1010</sup> Peel writes extensively about David Kúkòmí. See: Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 55, 67, 163, 262, 241, 268, 299. In *Abẹ̀òkúta*, another lesser-known figure who converted was Elisha Fájìbí, the elder brother of the *Aláké*, who died in 1862. But since we only hear of him in his obituary, we do not know his motive for converting. *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, July 1862.

<sup>1011</sup> Campbell, p. 58. R. W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as 'the configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy. It embodied the most honoured way of being a man and required all men to position themselves in relation to it'. Connell and Messerschmitt, 'p. 811; 833. For more on masculinities in Africa see the edited volume *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. By Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2003).

<sup>1012</sup> Falola, 'From Hospitality to Hostility', 55.

<sup>1013</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, May 1860.

<sup>1014</sup> For more about this, see: Watson, '*Civil Disorder Is the Disease of Ibadan*', pp. 113, 127.

thousands, was one of their main responsibilities.<sup>1015</sup> A missionary once wrote that nobody could claim to be a great warlord unless he had at least a thousand slaves.<sup>1016</sup> Affluent men were also expected to be overly generous and lavish, because entertaining properly was a big man's principal obligation.<sup>1017</sup> Elite men were required to celebrate festivals excessively and ostentatiously and it was a show of such flamboyance that led a young man in Ìbàdàn in 1875 to declare that 'if I enjoy such glory for only one day and I die the next, I shall be content'.<sup>1018</sup> A rich man who did not spend money was considered a 'miser' and went unrecognised.<sup>1019</sup> If a man did not continuously exhibit these shows of wealth and generosity, he therefore lost the essential element of recognition needed to grow his household.

Asides from these extravagant shows of wealth, elite men were also renowned for their hyper-masculinity. As John Horne observes, war led to 'rapidly accentuated masculinity'.<sup>1020</sup> In the nineteenth century, successful war men needed great strength and courage to survive years of rigorous campaigning and fights in bloody battles where they faced the possibility of an agonising death if captured, and risked obligatory suicide if defeated.<sup>1021</sup> From pre-colonial times to the present day, people speak of nineteenth-century war chiefs as men with militarized hyper-masculinities. They were regarded as fearless war heroes with many victories, who had copious amounts of charms, and were valiant and daring in all situations. In other parts of Africa, young men were expected to enact these types of militarised masculinities but in Yorùbáland, this was the masculinity of senior military men. Notably, Ààrẹ Kúrúńmí of Ìjàyẹ was reputed to have performed great exploits during the Ìjàyẹ war. It was rumoured that once, on the field of battle, an umbrella said to be that of the military commander Ògúnmólá of the enemy Ìbàdàn army was

---

<sup>1015</sup> Awẹ, 'Militarism and Economic Development', 70.

<sup>1016</sup> Iliffe, p. 375.

<sup>1017</sup> Hyam, p. 184.

<sup>1018</sup> Johnson, p. 395.

<sup>1019</sup> Bascom, 'Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yorùbá', 496–7.

<sup>1020</sup> John Horne, 'Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850-1950', in *Masculinities in politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 22–41 (p. 30); *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1860.

<sup>1021</sup> Iliffe, p. 71.

pointed out to him. Immediately he mounted his horse and charged into the Ìbàdàn army. On reaching his destination, he realised he was misinformed but still came out unharmed, slaying many in his wake.<sup>1022</sup> Despite such enviable bravery, he was cited as reckless and Kúrúńmí was fined six bags of cowries (\$30), a heavy fine indeed, for needlessly exposing his life.<sup>1023</sup> Similarly, Samuel Johnson wrote that in the last battle fought by Àfònjá -the Àrẹ̀òńòkakańfò (military commander) who first seceded from Òyọ́ and is credited with the fall of the Òyọ́ empire and the subsequent age of confusion-, he fought ‘most desperately’ despite being ‘surrounded by the corpses of some of his faithful attendants’. Johnson wrote that:

Seeing the day was lost, some of his followers became disheartened and deserted him, but the rest chose to die with him. He fell indeed like a hero. So covered was he with darts that his body was supported in an erect position upon the shafts of spears and arrows showered upon him.<sup>1024</sup>

Despite hyper-masculinity being the ideal, elite military manhood was not monolithic and must also be queried. When investigating gender, it is important to always distinguish between ideals of manhood and men’s actual lived experiences of their own masculinity and subjectivity.<sup>1025</sup> In other words, it is imperative that we inquire into how elite men saw themselves. Did they also live a life of fearless and reckless disregard as the stories of them suggest? In most cases, the answer to this question is no. In the case of militarised masculinity, there was usually a great divide between normative ideas of what defined a successful ‘war man’ and their actual experiences. Since pre-colonial Yorùbáland was non-literate, people did not keep journals, consequently this section does not claim to understand men’s innermost thoughts. Clues to their psyche, however, manifest themselves in their actions, conduct and behaviours, which were recorded in oral traditions, missionary journals, and by various observers of nineteenth-century Yorùbáland.

---

<sup>1022</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1860.

<sup>1023</sup> The line between recklessness and bravery was vague. Its shifting boundary was determined within individual contexts.

<sup>1024</sup> Johnson, p. 199

<sup>1025</sup> Chris Dolan, ‘Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States- a Case Study of Northern Uganda’, in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), pp. 57–83 (p. 60).

To return to Kúrúńmí, despite stories of his heroic escapades, Kúrúńmí was reputed to be a fearful and paranoid man. The reports of Adolphus Mann, the CMS missionary stationed in Ìjàyè, indicated a certain hyper-vigilance and pervasive distrust in the military dictator who believed all activities from which he was excluded were plots to have him deposed. Chiefs were not allowed to interact with one another in private as this aroused Kúrúńmí's suspicion and may have led to their detention and execution. Nothing, neither big nor small, could be done without Ààrẹ's consent. In one instance, Mann gave a young boy a fork as a gift. The boy's father immediately ran to Kúrúńmí to ask if the boy could keep it.<sup>1026</sup> The chiefs were not allowed to be richer than he and he monopolised many economic activities. He constantly surrounded himself with powerful medicine men to keep him safe from harm and danger, and ensure that he remained in power.<sup>1027</sup> Although it was normal for military men to have such magic and charms, from the way he is described, one gets the impression that his collection was considered excessive. Kúrúńmí executed people on the slightest suspicion of treason. In 1852, he killed a Sierra Leonean merchant and sold the man's wife into slavery because he suspected the trader of adultery with one of his wives.<sup>1028</sup> Even his kin were not protected. He banished Akiọlá, his first son for allegedly receiving tributes illegally and confiscated his property including his wives and children. In 1853, he executed some of his sons and wives whom he tried and found guilty of adultery.<sup>1029</sup> By 1861 however, when it was clear that he was losing the Ìjàyè war, Samuel Johnson wrote that he became a dejected recluse, and in June 1861, he committed suicide.<sup>1030</sup> Ìjàyè was eventually defeated and sacked in 1862. This hardly seems the story of the fearless, daring warrior he was reputed to be.

---

<sup>1026</sup> Adolphus Mann, Journal, 20 July 1853.

<sup>1027</sup> Adolphus Mann, Journal, 20 July 1853.

<sup>1028</sup> G.O. Oguntomisin and Toyin Falola, 'Power and Wealth in Kúrúńmí's Ìjàyè, 1831-1862', *African Studies*, 1986, 75–85 (p. 77).

<sup>1029</sup> Oguntomisin and Falola, 77.

<sup>1030</sup> His suicide in this instant was not an honourable death. The honourable death would have been committing suicide *after* one's army had been defeated. But Kúrúńmí's suicide left his army without a leader damaging the army's morale, and the people's hope, and this arguable led to their imminent defeat. Johnson, p. 350.

Although not contesting the bravery or heroics of Kúrúńmí or other war men, this section argues that the humanity of these men is often lost in these gallant stories and the scholarship that has resulted from them. To give another example, nineteenth-century records indicate that even at the battlefield, rather than boundless bravery and heroism, many men were fearful and vulnerable. On the evening before the war between Adó and Abẹ̀òkúta in 1854, Samuel Crowther wrote that a warrior convert came to him asking for help on the battlefield. The man said that all the other warriors were fitting their charms from their *babaláwo* or Muslim *Àlùfáà* (cleric) in preparation for war so that they may be preserved from the shots of the enemy and from death. Since Crowther had asked him to throw away his idols, he came to ask for a Christian charm on which he could depend during the war. Crowther told him to take his bible and pray always.<sup>1031</sup> This warrior is not spoken of again so we do not know whether or not he survived. Nonetheless, this entry tells us a little about the state of mind of warriors before war. Rather than bold and fearless, we find that these men were vulnerable individuals who feared for their lives like most people in similar situations would. Hegemonic elite masculine ideals were just that: ideals. They were standards and idyllic models that men were expected to aspire to but in reality, hardly ever fully enacted.<sup>1032</sup>

### Warfare in Yorùbáland

In Abẹ̀òkúta, the men who were supposed to embody hegemonic military masculinities were the *Olórógun* (military chiefs). Like the *Ògbóni*, they also had a chamber where military matters were discussed privately. They met every seventeen days but could meet sooner in an emergency. The *Olórógun* elected their officers amongst themselves consisting of the *Balógun*

---

<sup>1031</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, 15 November 1854.

<sup>1032</sup> For more on hegemonic masculinity, see: John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire* (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), p. 48; Stefan Dudink and Karen Hagemann, 'Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1750-1850', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 3–22 (p. 18).

(commander-in-chief) and others such as the *Ọtún* (right-hand-man), *Òsì* (the left hand) and *Èkẹrin* (fourth-in-command).<sup>1033</sup> Townsend regarded the war chiefs as the strongest governing party in Abẹ̀òkúta. This was due perhaps to incessant warfare and as Agneta Pallinder-Law argues, the fact that the principal interest of the ruling class lay in the defence of the town and expansion of its territory.<sup>1034</sup> Warfare was precipitated not only by the insecurities of the time but also by the desire of the war chiefs to amass wealth. One may ask how men, even military chiefs, no matter how wealthy, could afford to feed hundreds and sometimes thousands of followers on a daily basis without descending to poverty. Furthermore, one wonders why *omọ ọ̀gún* (warboys or young junior military men) attached themselves to chiefs rather than fight on their own. Besides, if power, authority and the attainment of hegemonic military masculinity was ultimately based on war success, then why didn't every person who participated in war gain such glory? And of course what role, if any, did women play in warfare? The answer to these questions can be gleaned from the process of warfare in Abẹ̀òkúta, as described by contributors to the *Ìwé Ìròhìn* newspaper.

### ***Political economy of warfare***

In the event of war, the *Olórógun* first consulted *ifá* about the steps to take and sacrifices to make in order to be successful in their campaign. When this was determined, a bell ringer went around the town announcing the date and time of the next *orò* meeting. Although E. Olympus Moore referred to these meetings as 'public' meetings, they were not because as discussed earlier, women were excluded. His phallogocentric view as to what constituted a 'public meeting' is evident when he wrote that the chiefs often called 'meetings of the general public' to discuss war affairs, only to write on the next line that 'women especially would make all necessary preparations for the occasion for they must be kept closely confined during the whole period'.<sup>1035</sup> In 1860

---

<sup>1033</sup> Moore, p. 15.

<sup>1034</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, January 1847; Pallinder-Law, 67.

<sup>1035</sup> Moore, pp. 19–20.

Abẹ̀òkúta, the chiefs (both *Ògbóni* and *Olórógun*), called an *orò* meeting to discuss the possibility of joining *Ìjàyè* in their fight against *Ìbàdàn*.<sup>1036</sup> When they declared war on *Ìbàdàn*, the chiefs laid a war tax on the various townships and divisions. This tax was then placed on each household, which, in turn, collected the sums from their dependents, both male and female. Women were therefore compelled to make donations to a cause they had no say in determining.

Some of the revenue from this war tax was used for sacrifices to propitiate the deities for protection and success in war, while the greater proportion was given to the war chiefs to purchase war materials. These chiefs were not expected to give an account of how these monies were spent; instead they used it at their own discretion. The chiefs then obtained ammunition on credit from arms-dealing tradesmen and tradeswomen to be paid back from a percentage of their war booty. However, some chiefs never paid back these debts but continued to extend their credit on the promise of payment. Bolanle Awe notes similar practices in *Ìbàdàn*. She argues that the initial rift between *Èfúnṣetán* the *Ìyálóde* and the *Ìbàdàn* warriors, especially *Ààrẹ̀ Látóòṣà*, the head chief, occurred because they 'stretched increasingly her credit facilities and failed to pay their debts. When [...] another expedition was [launched] in 1874, she therefore refused to field any soldiers, to give ammunition on credit and to declare her solidarity with [them]'.<sup>1037</sup> In *Abẹ̀òkúta*, after the war chiefs obtained weapons without charge, they did not give them to the slave or free soldiers gratuitously; rather, arms were distributed to war boys with the understanding that the greatest share of whatever property, slave, or booty they obtained belonged to the chiefs. Therefore, these chiefs retained their followers because war boys had few ways of procuring weapons and munitions on their own without attaching themselves to a chief.<sup>1038</sup> Clearly, even before going to war, the war chiefs drew the greatest benefits without inputting much capital, capital that a peacetime era would surely have denied them. Although they did not invest their own resources heavily in war, since

---

<sup>1036</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, May 1860.

<sup>1037</sup> Awe, 'Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura', p. 69.

<sup>1038</sup> Unfortunately the records do not state how much weapons cost. *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, May 1860.



this burden fell on the populace, they still gained the largest share of war spoils.

Furthermore, when war chiefs conquered a town but did not destroy it, the towns were made tributaries and the chiefs kept and shared the tributes amongst themselves. The chiefs did not even have to feed their followers during wartime because warboys raided the farms of rival and conquered towns and villages for food and other provisions on behalf of the war chiefs.<sup>1039</sup> When enemy farms were plundered, farmers were killed or taken as captives increasing the chiefs' resources. Even the farms of Ègbá citizens and dependent towns were not immune to such raids.<sup>1040</sup> When there were no farms to pillage and supplies ran low at the war camps, the chiefs sent word back to town for provisions. When they did, every house in Abẹ̀òkúta was compelled to send food supplies for the army. On one occasion in 1860, each of the large houses were ordered to send a basket of corn and a basket of beans.<sup>1041</sup> If we consider that Abẹ̀òkúta in 1860 had a population of over 100,000 people, then we can understand the full extent of the provisions sent. Nevertheless, since these decisions were again made at *orò* meetings, women had to contribute without any input in the decision-making process. To supplement provisions, crops were also planted at war camps and tended to by junior soldiers.<sup>1042</sup>

This excessive gain of the war chiefs gives credence to missionary claims that chiefs used real and fabricated excuses to attack small towns or villages so the people could be captured and sold and their villages plundered. By so doing, the military chiefs perpetuated incessant warfare in Yorùbáland.<sup>1043</sup> In 1851, the town of Ìbejì was destroyed by the Ègbá under the premise that they had acted as spies for the Dahomeans before an attack on Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>1044</sup> Scarcely a year went by that the Abẹ̀òkúta did not engage in some kind of

---

<sup>1039</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, June 1860.

<sup>1040</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, June 1860.

<sup>1041</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, October 1860.

<sup>1042</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, October 1862.

<sup>1043</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 3 January 1847; 4 January 1847.

<sup>1044</sup> Henry Townsend, *Journal*, 5 November 1851.

warfare.<sup>1045</sup> Although all the Ègbá chiefs were supposed to fight collectively for a common cause, the quest for self-aggrandisement meant that at certain times, personal ambition prevailed over community interest.<sup>1046</sup> In 1868, the Ègbá decided to attack Mèkọ, a neighboring town, for their suspected alliance with Dahomey and Ọyọ against Abẹ̀òkúta. To prevent this, Mèkọ sent gifts to *Başòrun* Ọ̀gúndípẹ̀ (the-commander-in-chief), which Ọ̀gúndípẹ̀ shared with several senior officials. In consequence, Ọ̀gúndípẹ̀ refused to participate and when the others went ahead, they were badly routed and their commander was killed. On their return to Abẹ̀òkúta, but for the timely intervention of the Ọ̀gbóni, the other forces would have attacked Ọ̀gúndípẹ̀ resulting in civil war.<sup>1047</sup>

### **Soldiering**

Abẹ̀òkúta had no standing army; every male considered old enough was expected to fight.<sup>1048</sup> Some men did choose a career in soldiering, others volunteered during wartime, while others were compulsorily conscripted. If the need arose to defend the town against attack, many men voluntarily took up arms. Both patriotism and self-preservation explained men's enthusiasm for their defence of the town. On 3 March 1851, the Dahomeans attacked Abẹ̀òkúta for the first time. Townsend wrote that he was with his interpreter when the first shot was fired outside the town walls. Immediately the interpreter:

[w]ith great impetuosity of manner called his son to bring him his gun, powder and shots that he might hasten to fight, and with extreme difficulty, I restrained him, he frequently exclaiming I cannot bear it; I must hasten to battle. He was restrained however. My cook without saying anything or knowing of it took his gun and ran off and fought until the Dahomans were retreating, and shot in the fight one of the female warriors. Another confidential servant ran off in the same manner; having no arms, he purposed stoning

---

<sup>1045</sup> Moore, pp. 63–4.

<sup>1046</sup> For more on the theories of male ambition, see Dudink and Hagemann, p. 5.

<sup>1047</sup> Moore, pp. 80–81; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, pp. 75–76.

<sup>1048</sup> It is hard to say at what age was considered old enough since the primary records make no reference to this. This thesis would posit that it would be in the *màjèsín* years from ages sixteen to eighteen as the sources make no mention of child soldiers.

the enemy, if they gave him an opportunity. Goodwill, who is Mr Smith's interpreter, and was left by Mr Smith to look after the premises, ran also into battle and all seemed to be beside themselves.<sup>1049</sup>

This rather comedic scene of converts abandoning their mission station to fight was characteristic when it came to defending Abẹ̀òkúta. It was a man's task to 'fight for hearth and home'. Fighting was especially important to Christians because they were often thought to be cowardly due to missionary opposition to warfare in Yorùbáland.<sup>1050</sup> Although missionaries were not opposed to men fighting, they were against the spiritual dimension of warfare including the charms men wore for protection. Christians still fought and like the warrior described in Samuel Crowther's journal entry above, fought without indigenous charms. Soon, Christians were not only commended for their bravery in war, they had their own *Balógun* (commander), the first of which was John Òwulòtan in 1860.<sup>1051</sup>

However, men's enthusiasm to participate in warfare greatly reduced when it came to other types of wars, be it those of expansion, invasions, or allying with friends against other towns. Despite the efforts of military chiefs to impose hegemonic ideals of military masculinities on others, some men resisted, preferring to carry on other occupations. Abẹ̀òkúta, therefore, had a multiplicity of routes to manliness rather than a single one.<sup>1052</sup> One route through which these resistant masculinities contested hegemony was by simply refusing to go to war, either by ignoring the call to arms or through open refusals. When soldiers in Abẹ̀òkúta first went to join the *ljàyè* war against *Ìbàdàn* in 1860, their first camp was set in *Àtádí*, the location of some *Ègbá* farmlands. But immediately the camp was set up, *Àtádí* farms became 'prey'.<sup>1053</sup> The farms were pillaged of everything including livestock and

---

<sup>1049</sup> Henry Townsend, Letter to Major H. Straith, 4 March 1851.

<sup>1050</sup> Edward Roper, Journal, 1860.

<sup>1051</sup> E. A. Ajisafe Moore, p. 13; Edward Roper, Journal, 1860; William George, Journal, 28 April 1874.

<sup>1052</sup> Tosh defines manliness as 'the most clearly articulated indicator of men's gender in the nineteenth century. Always used in the singular it implied that there was a single standard of manhood which was expressed in certain physical attributes and moral dispositions'. Tosh, pp. 2–3; 43–4. For more on manliness see, Tosh, pp. 4–14; Cleaver, p. 5.

<sup>1053</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, June 1860.

agricultural products. Whatever they found, the soldiers took (see fig 4.6). The reasons the chiefs gave for this plunder was that the owners of the farms had no right to 'remain at home quietly getting their gain without trouble when a call had been made upon all to appear as soldiers to fight for their common welfare'. They argued that it was wrong for others to fight without remuneration while some remained in profitable employ.<sup>1054</sup> Certain parties, such as men who had remained on their farms for considerable periods without appearing to 'do their duty in town as citizens', were singled out for victimisation.

Traders were also targeted. Missionary journals are full of reports of traders, especially female traders, being raided, their goods taken by the war boys to the chiefs, and they themselves captured as slaves. Decisions were also often made to close trade routes and the Ògùn river leading into Abẹ̀òkúta so all profitable employment ceased and people would be forced to go to war.<sup>1055</sup> The December 1862 edition of *Ìwé Ìròhìn* reported that 'vagrants' robbed canoes coming in and leaving Abẹ̀òkúta. When the people complained, the chiefs again insisted that it was unfair for people to engage in trade or canoe work on the river in profitable employment whilst others were obliged to bear the chances and dangers of war.<sup>1056</sup> No restitution was given to the owners of these goods and these types of raids continued throughout the nineteenth century. It is difficult to understand how targeting traders would have incentivised men to war as women predominated in trade. These attacks most likely likely to have been raiding expeditions justified as forceful conscription.

---

<sup>1054</sup> Fighting without remuneration was not an accurate representation because a soldier's reward or fee was plunder. *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, June 1860.

<sup>1055</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, October 1862.

<sup>1056</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1862.



Fig 4.6: Illustration of an Ègbá marauding party at Ado. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, August 1861.

Asides from the authorities at Abẹ̀òkúta prohibiting trade and agriculture, they sometimes used force to compel men to go to war. Occasionally, in addition to plundering and robbing their own civilians, the war chiefs had some men flogged. But men avoiding conscription did not mean that they were pacifists. Some of them actively defended their farms and trade. One instance of civilians defending their property was reported in *Ìwé Ìròhìn*. in 1863, it was reported that:

A few days ago a party was sent to rob a farm belonging to the Toko [Ìtokò] people. A large party of the scene of the same township on hearing of this assembled on the road the war party pass on their return, fell upon them, retook the plunder and drove them home severely beaten.<sup>1057</sup>

After this incident, it was reported that the Ìtokò area was comparatively safe. Furthermore, in places like Ìbàdàn, many wealthy men from the Ègbá and

<sup>1057</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, February 1863. See also *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1862.

Ìjẹ̀bù sub-groups preferred to trade, did not join the army, and used their slaves for economic pursuits. This was very different from the prevailing militarised Ìbàdàn masculinities where the political hierarchy in the military republic was based on war prowess.<sup>1058</sup>

Nonetheless the consequences of dissent could, sometimes, be severe and these resistant or protest masculinities paid a high price for non-conformity, considerably limiting their benefits of patriarchal norms.<sup>1059</sup> In Abẹ̀òkúta, the Ìtokò men who overpowered the war boys were threatened with military action in which case they gathered ammunitions to protect themselves in case of attack. Before the matter escalated further, the *Ògbóni* pleaded with the military chiefs not to retaliate and the event passed without retribution.<sup>1060</sup> In Ìbàdàn however, civilians were not so lucky. Civilians were disqualified from receiving any titles because Ìbàdàn was a military republic with a military hierarchy only.<sup>1061</sup> This confirms Chris Dolan's claim that in a period of protracted conflict, the ability of civilian men to achieve normative masculinity into which they were socialised is greatly reduced.<sup>1062</sup> Those who did not aspire to ideal military masculinities were wholly despised. John Iliffe writes that the ordinary people were the worst victims of the nineteenth-century wars. He argues that the military looked down on them, especially the farmers, with great contempt and no chivalry was shown to them. Ìbàdàn was especially ruthless. Offences by civilians were punished more severely than those committed by military men. Men who stayed back during wartime were regarded as lazy and cowardly.<sup>1063</sup> Falola argues that some civilian Ìbàdàn sub-groups such as the Ìjẹ̀ṣà, Àkókó, Èkitì and Ìgbóminà were not only excluded from the ruling hierarchy, but the Ìbàdàn people derided them and

---

<sup>1058</sup> Falola, 'From Hospitality to Hostility', 56.

<sup>1059</sup> For more on resistant or protest masculinity see: Connell and Messerschmidt, p. 847; Cleaver, p. 7; David Forrest, 'Lenin, the Pinguero, and Cuban Imaginings of Maleness in Times of Scarcity', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 84–111 (p. 88); Prem Vijayan, 'Nationalism, Masculinity and the Developmental State: Exploring Hindutva Masculinities', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), pp. 28–56 (p. 35).

<sup>1060</sup> *Ìwé Iròhìn*, February 1863.

<sup>1061</sup> Falola, 'From Hospitality to Hostility', 57.

<sup>1062</sup> Dolan, p. 67.

<sup>1063</sup> Iliffe, p. 77.

they were often referred to as 'àwọn ẹrú wa' (our slaves), 'people with little wits' and 'people without plenty [sic] intelligence'.<sup>1064</sup> Evidently, 'alternative masculinities were marginalized by silencing or stigmatizing'.<sup>1065</sup> Anna Hinderer, the wife of David Hinderer, the premier CMS missionary in Ìbàdàn, wrote that these oppressed (civilians) were crying out and sighing for peace.<sup>1066</sup>

However, having inexperienced traders and farmers forcibly conscripted to war not only caused higher casualty rates, it also led to numerous cases of desertion. During the Ìjàyè war, many men abandoned the war camps and returned home to supposedly tend to their farms, while some men simply ran away.<sup>1067</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn* once reported that the people of Ìbàdàn were greatly discouraged by the ferocity of warfare during the early days of the Ìjàyè war and as a consequence, there were numerous deserters from the Ìbàdàn camp. When the Ife *Balógun* was killed, the Ife ally army also left the camp in consequence. The Iwo people, who were also Ìbàdàn allies, signified their intention to retreat.<sup>1068</sup> Some chiefs also deserted. Samuel Johnson once wrote of an Òyó official fled a town under attack and took refuge in Dahomey. There, he encouraged the king to destroy Yorùbá towns. He was eventually handed back and executed at the market place in Òyó.<sup>1069</sup>

### ***Socio-economic and gendered impact of warfare***

Compulsory conscription of farmers and traders had an adverse effect on the Abẹ̀òkúta economy. Since economic activities and other industrial pursuits were neglected, provisions in the towns became very scarce. If war broke out

---

<sup>1064</sup> Falọla, 'From Hospitality to Hostility', 56.

<sup>1065</sup> Jacobus Adriaan du Pisani, 'Hegemonic Masculinity in Afrikaner Nationalist Mobilisation, 1934-48', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 157-176 (p. 157).

<sup>1066</sup> Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, p. 77.

<sup>1067</sup> Edward Roper, *Journal*, 1860.

<sup>1068</sup> It is possible that these reports were simply propaganda since *Ìwé Ìròhìn* was an Abẹ̀òkúta paper, an enemy of Ìbàdàn at the time. *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, June 1860; December 1861; November 1879.

<sup>1069</sup> Samuel Johnson, p. 229.

during planting season, the situation was even more severe because a low yield harvest created even more scarcity and forced prices up. This could also have created further incentive to conduct war to counter scarcity through plunder. Missionary journals are rife with complaints of famine and extreme food shortages. In Abẹ̀òkúta, they complained that more food was consumed than grown and since trade routes were also closed, traders from other towns could not bring goods into Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>1070</sup> The situation affected all of Yorùbáland. During the Ìjàyẹ̀ war, money and food were so scarce at the mission house in Ìbàdàn that Anna Hinderer and her household survived on the charity of other more affluent Ìbàdàn women.<sup>1071</sup> In some places like Ìjàyẹ̀, where Ìbàdàn purposefully isolated the farm from the town to starve its citizens into surrender, the food shortages reached dismal proportions and people died in the streets from starvation.<sup>1072</sup> Regarding Ìjàyẹ̀, Johnson wrote:

At this time, all the farms being in the hands of the Ibadans, the distress, starvation and consequent mortality at Ijaye were indescribable. Hundreds, nay thousands died in the streets from starvation, whole families perished without anyone to bury them. All the livestock had been consumed, the garden, the streets, and the yards were all planted with corn, but the cornstalks were devoured when they could not wait for the corn to develop. The herb Gboro. a common creeper in the streets, was planted in every available place and used for food.<sup>1073</sup>

Lagos, and other towns that traded frequently with the interior, were also affected because scarcity in Abẹ̀òkúta and Ìbàdàn and the stoppage of trade also left them without supplies.<sup>1074</sup>

One gendered dimension to the economic implications of warfare was that despite women's exclusion from decision-making processes, men's decisions acutely affected them. Since they were long distance traders, often leaving home for weeks at a time, their business was the most likely to be disrupted by war leading to a loss of income and livelihood. When *orò* meetings decided upon river and road closures to force men into war, women could also not

---

<sup>1070</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1861; October 1862.

<sup>1071</sup> Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, pp. 238–240.

<sup>1072</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, October 1860.

<sup>1073</sup> Johnson, p. 344

<sup>1074</sup> *African Times*, 10 July 1865; *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, November 1879.



trade and their businesses were crippled. During one of such *orò* meetings, the chiefs forbade the Ègbá from trading with the neighbouring Ijẹbú, Ọtá or any of the towns across the Ogun River who were considered Ìbàdàn sympathisers.<sup>1075</sup> This decision affected women who made their living trading across political boundaries. It was such disruptions to trade that led Èfúnṣetán Aníwúrà, the *Ìyálóde* of Ìbàdàn, to withdraw her support for Ìbàdàn's war effort which eventually led to her assassination ordered by Látòòṣà, the head chief of Ìbàdàn.<sup>1076</sup> No such resistance is recorded of women in Abẹ̀òkúta. Furthermore, women comprised the greatest number of captured slaves outside the field of battle.<sup>1077</sup> Since women could frequently be found along trade routes, they were more vulnerable than men to attack and as a result often fell victim to kidnappers. Ultimately, women were victims of wars they had little say in initiating. Despite these restrictions on ordinary men and women, some of the chiefs continued to engage in their own agricultural and economic endeavours without consequence. Many had slaves on their farms and some engaged their slaves in trade. Even when the rivers were shut to the public, chiefs continued to use them.<sup>1078</sup> Again, the extra-legal power structures, spoken about previously, permeated warfare as well. When a canoe bringing gifts from Lagos to the Abẹ̀òkúta chiefs was stopped and robbed in 1862, the thieves were caught and put to death on the charge of theft, and their lineages were fined.<sup>1079</sup> There were, therefore, two sets of rules: one that applied to ordinary citizens and one for wealthy affluent individuals and chiefs.

### ***Women's roles in warfare***

Bolanle Awe and Omotayo Olutoye state that women were fully involved in the politics of nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. They write that there were three major stages of warfare: deliberation on whether or not to declare war; actual

<sup>1075</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, May 1861; August 1861; May 1865.

<sup>1076</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Journal*, 30 June 1874.

<sup>1077</sup> For examples of kidnapped women, see *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, October 1860.

<sup>1078</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, July 1860; *African Times*, 1 January 1879.

<sup>1079</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1862.

warfare; and peace settlements. They regarded the first and third steps as political decisions made by all the townspeople with which women were ‘certainly involved’ since they were traders whose interests were impacted by warfare.<sup>1080</sup> They argue that women ‘constituted a major interest group and certainly had inalienable rights as citizens ...to make decisions affecting their lives’, discuss public policies and to be represented in decision-making bodies. They cite Townsend’s journal entry in 1860 which stated that before Abẹ̀òkúta town decided to join the Ìjàyẹ̀ war, the town called a public meeting to deliberate on the issue. This entry, they argue, revealed that women participated at a high level and that both women and men had a chance to comment on the issues at stake such as war and peace. But the second process; actual warfare, they argue was mostly a male preserve.<sup>1081</sup> They also argue that when women did not agree with decisions made, they sang witty songs and made provoking comments that summed up their position more succinctly.<sup>1082</sup> They give the example that during the initial tensions between Ìbàdàn and Ìjàyẹ̀ that later led to war, Ìbàdàn sent consuls to Ìjàyẹ̀ to calm the rising antagonism between the two towns. However, Ìjàyẹ̀ women expressed their disapproval of truce by singing ‘*Ìbàdàn a kò gba ajéjẹ, orogún ni àwa ẹ̀*’ (Ibadan we will not accept your consul, we are rivals).<sup>1083</sup>

As optimistic as Awe and Olutoye’s analysis of women’s roles in politics and warfare is, it is not an accurate depiction of women’s roles and position at the time. From the discussion above, it is clear that in Abẹ̀òkúta, women were not involved in the first and third processes. We know already that these ‘public meetings’ were not open to all but a male preserve. Like Moore, Townsend’s male bias tended to equate male republicanism to universal participation. Nevertheless, their arguments regarding women using songs and comments as a means of articulating dissent possibly occurred in Abẹ̀òkúta as well because the chiefs once called *orò* to stop the ‘abusive songs’ sung by young women and men.<sup>1084</sup> The nineteenth-century eyewitness who recorded this

---

<sup>1080</sup> Awe and Olutoye, p. 122

<sup>1081</sup> Awe and Olutoye, p. 122.

<sup>1082</sup> Awe and Olutoye, p. 124.

<sup>1083</sup> Awe and Olutoye, p. 124.

<sup>1084</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 3 March 1874.

entry did not elaborate on what women were singing or why they were singing these songs. Therefore, it is difficult to properly assess the situation.<sup>1085</sup>

Unlike Awe and Olutoye's observation, this study argues that it was actually the second phase of warfare; actual warfare, that women in Abẹ̀òkúta participated in most. Similar to Reverend Wood's observation that the Ìbàdàn war camp had an equal representation of the sexes where women cooked, gave psychological boosts, made sacrifices and 'gave the comforts of home' to men, in 1864, the *African Times* also reported that wives, mothers and daughters followed men to the war camps.<sup>1086</sup> They wrote that in the Abẹ̀òkúta camp, women would not be separated from the 'objects of their affection' and tended to the wounded.<sup>1087</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn* once reported that during the Ìjàyè war, an Ìbàdàn woman asked to go to war with her only child because wherever he went, she followed. During one of the battles, the Ìbàdàn soldiers returned to the camp but her son was not amongst them. She immediately left the Ìbàdàn camp and entered Ìjàyè and asked to be taken to Ààrẹ̀ Kúrúńmí to whom she said 'I have come to seek my son who was taking in the battle. If you have killed him, kill me. If you have beheaded him, behead me. If you have put him into fetters, put me into fetters also. Only let me be as he is and I am satisfied'. In astonishment, Kúrúńmí asked that she be taken to view the executed and imprisoned. She found her son a prisoner and asked to be imprisoned also. Ààrẹ̀ was so impressed with the woman that he ordered that her son be released and gave him the prestigious position of his personal sword bearer in the army.<sup>1088</sup> For many other women however, despite their presence, many were orphaned, made childless, or widowed by war.<sup>1089</sup> Women lamented this reality during the Ìjàyè war with their war song:

---

<sup>1085</sup> In the case of Abẹ̀òkúta, one would tend to agree with Flora Ntunde and Leonard Ugwu who state that women are victims of war and yet powerless to stop it. Flora O. Ntunde and Leonard I. Ugwu, 'The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution', in *Crisis and Conflict Management in Nigeria since 1980* ed. by Mahmood Yakubu et al (Kaduna: Nigerian Defence Academy, 2005), pp. 636–649 (p. 642).

<sup>1086</sup> Awe and Olutoye, p. 125.

<sup>1087</sup> *African Times*, 22 October, 1864.

<sup>1088</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, December 1863.

<sup>1089</sup> For more on women's loss in warfare in Africa, see: Victor S Akran and Anna Y. Akinga, 'The Need for Greater Participation of Women in Conflict Management in Nigeria', in *Crisis and Conflict Management in Nigeria since 1980* ed. by Mahmood Yakubu et al (Kaduna: Nigerian Defence Academy, 650), pp. 650-664 (pp. 657–9).

*Bàbá mi ñ re igbó òdájú o! o! o! níbi tí ọlómọ méjì yóó ti ẹkù ìkan,  
níbi tí ọlómọ kan yóó ti pòórà*

My father is going to the field of the heartless! Where the parent of two will be left with one, where the parent of one will be left all forlorn.<sup>1090</sup>

Women who stayed in the town when it was devoid of men as a result of war took over some stereotypical male tasks such as farming. When it was dangerous to go to farms, they traded petty goods within the town or kept livestock for sustenance. War, therefore, brought about a change in gender roles.<sup>1091</sup>

Abẹ̀òkúta women's most active role during warfare occurred when the town was attacked and it was here that the militarisation of female labour was most evident.<sup>1092</sup> Abẹ̀òkúta women did not fight as soldiers during wartime. In fact, Abẹ̀òkúta men did not conceive it possible that women could be soldiers and thought the Dahomean Amazons, the female regimen of the Dahomey army, were myths until some were captured and stripped in the first attempted Dahomean invasion in 1851.<sup>1093</sup> Notwithstanding, Abẹ̀òkúta women performed other important roles. During the first Dahomean invasion of Abẹ̀òkúta in 1851, the women shouted the war cry *elemè m'elè* (every man to his machete), alerting the town to danger and hurried the men to the wall.<sup>1094</sup> Missionaries wrote that the courage and noble deeds of the Ègbá women demanded special notice. In the severest areas of fights, 'with bullets flying right and left', the Ègbá women went within the ranks with water and mashed *ẹkọ* (a cooling corn drink) to prevent exhaustion from thirst.<sup>1095</sup> They also encouraged deserters to return to war, and tended to the wounded. They

---

<sup>1090</sup> Awẹ and Olutoye, p. 121.

<sup>1091</sup> For more on women's roles in wartime, see: Jane Bryce, 'Conflict and Contradiction in Women's Writing on the Nigerian Civil War', *African Languages and Cultures*, 4 (1991), 29–42 (p. 30); Meredith Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya, *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa* (London; New York: Zed Books, 1998).

<sup>1092</sup> Cynthia H. Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 3–8.

<sup>1093</sup> The Dahomean Amazons also acted as the king's guard. Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 7 May 1851.

<sup>1094</sup> Samuel Johnson, pp. 313–4; 361.

<sup>1095</sup> Samuel Johnson, p. 135.

performed these duties again in the 1864 attack.<sup>1096</sup> Missionaries, Abẹ̀òkúta chiefs, and townsmen commended women for being instrumental to the Dahomean defeat.<sup>1097</sup> Despite their exclusions from decisions regarding warfare, they were, nonetheless, a key component to its success.

In conclusion to this section on politics, economy and warfare, it is evident that in Abẹ̀òkúta, women were systematically excluded from the political hierarchy. It is possible that Abẹ̀òkúta was a peculiar Yorùbá town that particularly excluded women from politics and this could have been for a number of reasons. The situation in Abẹ̀òkúta may simply have been a more severe dimension of what Byfield refers to as a sort of male tax in Yorùbáland.<sup>1098</sup> Men in Abẹ̀òkúta may have intentionally excluded women from politics due to the envy they felt for women's strong economic position. Women's exclusion from politics could also have been a continuation of the all male *Ẹgbé àáró* (farming group) and *Ẹgbé olórógun* (military group) established while the people still lived in the Ẹgbá forest. The continuation of old traditions, even though it marginalized women, was one way in which the people could hold on to the vestiges of old traditions in their rapidly changing world. The Ẹgbá political situation could also have been an attempt to separate male and female spheres of influence. In other words, while men controlled the city and its political affairs, women provided the lifeblood via social and economic reproduction through trade. Whatever the reason, the people did not perceive or articulate the status quo in western terms of oppression or subordination but women were, nevertheless, marginalised in political affairs. Pre-colonial gender relations were not 'consensus seeking and incorporative' and claims that women's important pre-colonial position in Abẹ̀òkúta deteriorated under colonialism need to be reconsidered.<sup>1099</sup> Colonialism may have exacerbated the gender divide but it certainly did not introduce it.

---

<sup>1096</sup> *Iwé Iròhin*, March 1864.

<sup>1097</sup> Ajayi Crowther, *Journal*, 7 May 1851; Johnson, pp. 313-4.

<sup>1098</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, p. 24.

<sup>1099</sup> Morolake Omonubi-McDonnell, *Gender Inequality in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2003) cited in Olademo, p. 22. Cheryl Johnson, p. 149; Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, p. 302.

Despite women's economic significance and Yorùbá cosmological ideals of gender equilibrium in all spheres of life including politics, this hardly ever translated to reality. One would have to agree with Michelle Rosaldo who asserts that in many societies, 'women may be important, powerful, and influential, but relative to men [...] women lack generally recognized and culturally valued [political] authority'.<sup>1100</sup> Similar to David Iyam's study of Biase women, although men appreciated women for their personal achievements, such recognition rarely elevated their social, or in this case political hierarchy.<sup>1101</sup> Despite wealth being directly correlated with authority for men, this did not apply to women. Women had very little say in the government of Abẹ̀òkúta and the only female resistance to the political status quo discovered in the records was in 1870 during the Adémólá-Oyèékàn coronation palaver in Abẹ̀òkúta when an *African Times* contributor wrote that in support of Adémólá 'some of the women dare[d] to deny provisions to Oyekan's people'.<sup>1102</sup> We must not, however, discount any informal influence women would have had on their husbands in positions of power. Unfortunately, such influences are unrecorded and normally hidden from the historian's gaze.

### **The *Babaláwo* and religious authority in Abẹ̀òkúta**

Similar to politics and warfare, the sphere of religious authority was dominated by men known as *babaláwo* (priest-diviners). Every chapter in this thesis has in some context, made reference to the *babaláwo* who practiced their craft through the cult of *ifá*. This is because religion in Abẹ̀òkúta permeated all aspects of life. Although the *babaláwo* were independent entities, outside the state apparatus, they influenced all aspects of town activities including politics, the economy and warfare. From the word '*babaláwo*', which literally means knower or father of secrets, it is clear that Yorùbá believed that their

---

<sup>1100</sup> Michelle Rosaldo 1974, 19 cited in David Iyam, "Full" Men and "Powerful" Women: The Reconstruction of Gender Status among the Biase of Southeastern Nigeria', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 30 (1996), 387–408 (p. 390).

<sup>1101</sup> Iyam, 401.

<sup>1102</sup> *African Times*, 24 August 1870.

priest-diviners had knowledge of spiritual matters to which ordinary men were not privy.

The *babaláwo* practised a form of divination known as *ifá*. To divine, he first collected a divination fee from an enquirer. He then gave the enquirer sixteen *ikin* (palm nuts) to hold for a time and hand it back to him. The *babaláwo* then held the *ikin* and shook them together in the hollow of one hand. With the other, he made sixteen marks on a *oṣṣon ifá* (flat board) dusted with *iyèrè osùn* (yam flour or powdered camwood). Each mark suggested to the priest innumerable *ẹṣẹ* (stories or verses), grouped under sixteen sections known as *odù ifá* (see fig 4.7).<sup>1103</sup> The sixteen palm nuts were then thrown on the board, and interpretation could be gained from the way the seeds fell. These *ikin* could fall in any two hundred and fifty six possible ways, and each of these had numerous *ẹṣẹ* attached to them.<sup>1104</sup> The *babaláwo* then needed to select the verse that was directly significant to an enquirer's problem with suggestions for a solution, which commonly took the form of sacrifices. Sacrifice ranged from plants to birds and livestock. Since Yorùbáland was non-literate, the *babaláwo* had to commit hundreds or even thousands of *ẹṣẹ* to memory. In order to practice this craft, the *babaláwo*, therefore, required a different type of masculinity from war men. Instead of physical strength and bravery demanded of military men, the *babaláwo* needed intelligence, memory, and self-discipline. One began training as a *babaláwo* from a young age and could only be considered proficient after decades of study by which time they were middle aged and in the adult stage of the lifecycle. Nevertheless, a person could never learn all the *ẹṣẹ*. One could say that the *babaláwo* were the intellectuals of Yorùbá society, or, as colourfully put by Olu Makinde, 'the poet laureate' of ancient Yorùbá wisdom.<sup>1105</sup>

---

<sup>1103</sup> *Ẹṣẹ* were tales of 'heroic deeds' of Yorùbá ancestors or other stories and 'myths' about the Yorùbá past that the *babaláwo* regarded as history. These stories were metaphoric in nature and were directly relevant to everyday life. Johnson, p. 33; Thomas Mákanjúolá Ilésanmí, 'The Traditional Theologians and the Practice of Òriṣà Religion in Yorùbáland', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21 (1991), 216–226 (p. 224); J. D. Y. Peel, 'The Pastor and the "Babaláwo": The Interaction of Religions in Nineteenth-Century Yorùbáland', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 60 (1990), 338–369 (p. 343); Campbell, pp. 75–6.

<sup>1104</sup> Thomas Ilesanmi has compared *ẹṣẹ* to Bible verses and Koran tira. Ilésanmí, 224.

<sup>1105</sup> Olu Makinde, 'Historical Foundations of Counselling in Africa', *Journal of Negro Education*, 47 (1978), 303-311 (p. 308); Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p.114.



Fig 4.9: Illustration of the process of *ifá* consultation. The *babaláwo* (middle) sits with the female enquirer (right) and her escort (left). The *opon ifá* covered with *iyere osun* and the *ikin* are at the *babaláwo*'s feet and the *opon igere* (container) where divination materials are kept when not in use stands empty to the left. Source: *Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1876.

As indicated in the introduction, divination prose tends to portray men and women in stereotypical ways. Women, for example, are often depicted as anxious to conceive while men would seemingly go to extreme lengths to marry, reflecting wider fertility concerns in Yorùbá society. As stated earlier, *ese* follows a pattern: the mythological case, which serves as precedent, the resolution or outcome of the case, and its application to the client.<sup>1106</sup> An *ese* depicting women's fertility concerns includes:

Precedence: *Ìláun a díá fún wọn ní Mọre Agbada*  
*Níbi tí wọn gbé torí omọ dá Ifá.*  
*Wọn ní wọn a bí omọ.*  
*Ìgbá ẹwà mẹwàá,*  
*Àgbẹ̀bọ̀ adìẹ̀ mẹwàá, àti ẹgbẹ̀wá ni ẹbọ.*  
*Wọn ni omọ yóò ká wọn l'órí.*

Resolution: *Nígbà ti odún fi máa yípo gbogbo wọn ni ó bímọ...*

<sup>1106</sup> Bascom, *Ifa Divination*, pp. 120–137.



Application: *Ifá ní ọmọ ñ pọn obirin kan lójú kí ó rú ẹbọ igbá ẹwà mẹwáá, àgbébọ adìẹ mẹwáá àti ẹgbẹwá. Bí ó bá lè rú ẹbọ, ní idá yìí òmìíràn ọmọ ni obirin yìí ó máa pọn*

Precedence: The town of *Iláun* were the ones who cast *ifá* for the people of *Agbada* ward when they cast *ifá* because they had no children. They said they would bear children. Ten calabashes of boiled corn and beans, ten hens, five shillings was the sacrifice. They said each of them would have a child.

Resolution: When the year had run its course, they all bore children...

Application: *Ifá* says a woman is troubled by the desire for children. She should sacrifice ten calabashes of boiled corn and beans, ten hens and five shillings. If she is able to make that sacrifice, by this time next year she will be carrying a child on her back.<sup>1107</sup>

This verse informs us that people, and especially women, consulted *ifá* on issues concerning infertility and were given potential solutions. In contrast, gendered divination prose concerning men focus less on reproduction and depicts men as desperate for wives as articulated in the following *ẹṣẹ*:

Precedence: *Ogbè wo ẹyìn wò bí ajá rẹ yóo bá pa ikún ló dá ifá fún Ọrúnmilà tí ñ sun ẹkún àiní obinrin. Wọn ní kí ó rú ẹbọ pé ni ọdún yìí ni yóò rí ire aya. Ọrúnmilà rú agbọn ẹpà kan, àgbébọ adìẹ méjì àti ẹgbàájilékan owó ẹyọ. Nígbà tí ó rú ẹbọ tán, wọn bù fun nínú ẹpà náà pé kí ó lọ máa gbìn. Nígbà tó pé ẹpà gbó, ó sì tí tó látí wà. Ọrúnmilà bèrẹ sí rí ọwọ nínú rẹ, ó sì rò pé ikún ni ó ñ wá jẹ ẹ, Ọrúnmilà sì bèrẹ sí sọ oko ẹpà rẹ.*

Resolution: *Ní ọjọ kan, bí ó tí ñ sọ ẹpà rẹ, ó rí àwọn wúndiá méjì, bí wọn tí wọ inú oko ẹpà Ọrúnmilà, wọn bèrẹ sí wú ẹpà, béẹ ni Ọrúnmilà jáde sí wọn, ó sì mú wọn lólè, àwọn wúndiá yìí sì bèrẹ sí bè ẹ pé kí ó jòwọ kí ó máṣe mú àwon ní olè. Ọrúnmilà dáhùn ó ní nítorí kí ọún bàá ní aya ni wọn ṣe sọ fún ọun pé kí ọun gbìn ẹpà yìí, sùgbọn bí ẹ tí wá ñ jì wú yìí, báwo ni mo tí ṣe lè fi fẹ obinrin mó? Wọn ní kí ó jòwọ àwon yóò kúkú fẹ ẹ, bá yìí ni Ọrúnmilà ṣe fẹ àwon méjèjèjì.*

Application: *Àwọn wúndiá méjì kan wà, aya ifá ni wọn kí a mú wọn fún ifá kí wọn má bàá kó àbùkù bá àwon ará ilé wọn. Ọkúnrin kan sì wà tí ó fẹ fẹ aya kan, yóò rí aya náà fẹ. Bí ó fẹ ní obinrin náà yóò*

<sup>1107</sup> Bascom, *Ifá Divination*, pp. 198–202.

*tẹ ẹ l'ọwọ, bí ó bá lè rú ẹbọ. Kí obìnrin kan ọ́ọra kí a má bàá mú ní olè ọdún yìí.*

Precedence: 'Ogbè look back and see if your dog will kill a squirrel' was the one who cast *ifá* for *Ọrúnmilà* when he was weeping because he had no wife. They said that he should sacrifice that he might find a wife during that year. He sacrificed a basket of peanuts, two hens, and one shilling plus twenty cowries. When he had finished sacrificing, the diviners put aside some of the peanuts for him to plant. When these peanuts were ripe enough to harvest, *Ọrúnmilà* noticed that someone was stealing them. He thought that a squirrel was digging and eating them, and he began to keep watch over his peanuts field.

Resolution: One day as he was watching his peanuts, he saw two maidens. As they entered his peanut field and began to dig, *Ọrúnmilà* came out from where he had been hiding and caught them in the act of stealing his peanuts. The maidens began to beg him to spare them and not take them as thieves. *Ọrúnmilà* replied that it was in order for him to get a wife that the diviners told him to plant these peanuts, but that if they came and stole them, how would he ever be able to get married? They said that he should spare them; they would rather marry him than be taken as thieves. So *Ọrúnmilà* married them both.

Application: There are two maidens together, they are wives of *Ifá*, we should give them to *Ifá* so that they may not bring disgrace upon their family. And there is a man who wants to take a wife, he will marry her without giving bride wealth if he is able to sacrifice. And a woman should be careful lest she be taken as a thief this year.<sup>1108</sup>

Despite the other themes in this *ẹsẹ* alluding to theft, some women's predetermined spouses and the activities of deities in this case *Ọrúnmilà* (god of *ifá*), this verse also indicates that men are quite anxious about finding spouses. They would go to great lengths to marry a wife including sacrificing, taking up second occupations, and even taking thieves as spouses.

The *babaláwo* also practised as a doctor of indigenous medicine, and sick persons consulted them for cause, diagnosis and cure.<sup>1109</sup> In this case the patient paid a fee, the *babaláwo* divined and the *ẹsẹ* was recited. According to missionaries, the priest 'feels no part of the body, looks not at the tongue,

---

<sup>1108</sup> Bascom, *Ifá Divination*, pp. 179-181.

<sup>1109</sup> Thomas King, *Journal*, 24 November 1850.

enquires not after the precise time of the attack'.<sup>1110</sup> After reading the *ẹṣẹ*, the priest then announced the cause of the illness. If it was a natural cause, local medicines were prescribed. But if the illness was of a spiritual nature - the result of sorcery, witchcraft, or an act of the gods - the patient would be instructed to offer sacrifices to propitiate the entity involved before medicine was prescribed. Otherwise, medicines would be ineffective.<sup>1111</sup> The therapy of the *babaláwo* worked over many different boundaries apart from medical ones. For the individual, he was consulted on all affairs be it social, psychological, physiological, and otherwise.

*Ifá* held a paramount role in nineteenth-century Yorùbá country, guiding most aspects of daily life. Like other priest-healers in Africa, the *babaláwo*, through *ifá* performed social, political, business, judicial and military services for the wider society.<sup>1112</sup> Nothing could be done without first consulting *ifá*. It was consulted when a child was born, before marriage, before war, during pestilence and at death. In his description of the role of *ifá* in Yorùbá society, Reverend Edward Roper stated that:

No African idol is more interesting than *ifa*. The hold of which this idol has on men and the extent to which its worship enters daily affairs is almost unbounded. If a man is to be married, *ifa* has to fix the time; if one wants to build a house, *ifa* must approve of the place; if a man is to make an agreement or bargain in business, *ifa* has to express his approval. *Ifa* fixes the time for going to war and for making peace; and if a friendly message is sent by one chief to another, *ifa* has to be consulted as to whether or not the sender is sincere. Nothing was done, great or small, by chief or king, friend or foe, by freeman or slave without first consulting *ifa*.<sup>1113</sup>

The power of *ifá* touched every aspect of society and its influence was so extensive and varied that one could say the power of life and death was at the disposal of the *babaláwo*.<sup>1114</sup> Hence, these men were part of the elite class. If we consider that there are indications that reading *ẹṣẹ* was not a passive skill

---

<sup>1110</sup> Samuel Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 25 September 1856; Southon, pp. 25–6.

<sup>1111</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 24 November 1850; Samuel Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 25 September 1856; Samuel Johnson, Journal, 11 April 1876.

<sup>1112</sup> Karen Elizabeth Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 67.

<sup>1113</sup> *Church Missionary Gleaner*, June 1846.

<sup>1114</sup> Samuel Crowther, Journal, March 1854.

but one that could be manipulated to the *babaláwo*'s will, then we can comprehend just how much power these men had. One Ègbá story demonstrates such manipulation clearly.

Immediately after the destruction of their home in the Ègbá forest, the Ègbá refugees first lived in a newly founded war camp that later became Ìbàdàn. There they lived under Màyé, an Ife man described as the commander-in-chief and field marshal of the army. At the camp, the Ègbá fell prey to the other inhabitants and were constantly kidnapped by hostile sections in the settlement such as the Ìjèbú, and Òyó. The Ègbá decided to move away but when they expressed this to Màyé, he charged them with treason and insurgence perhaps at his concern at the thought of losing so many followers. He stated also that unless they could prove that their move was divinely sanctioned and not secession, they would be massacred and destroyed. The burden of proof fell to one of the Ègbá chiefs, Lósi of Aké who cast kolanut (a type of divination similar to *ifá*). Legend states that 'through certain tact and dexterity, he succeeded in showing the kolanut appear[ed] in favour of the Ègbá people' and they were allowed to leave.<sup>1115</sup> There was thus an understanding that any kind of divination, and by implication *ifá*, could be manipulated in favour of a party. Undoubtedly, the *babaláwo* had great, but understated, power that they could potentially use to manipulate society and all its individuals to their will.

When one considers that before every divination, one had to pay a fee and then offer money and sacrifices afterward, it is clear that these *babaláwo* were both influential and wealthy. Due to their affluence, they had no other occupations and depended solely on the cult for their sustenance and livelihood, a situation threatened by the arrival of missionaries. This is confirmed in a confrontation between a *babaláwo* and a missionary in 1854. Challenging Reverend Theophilus Kefer while he preached, a *babaláwo* said:

The chiefs have their sources they get money from to live,  
farmers farm their food, the Mohammedans have their living  
by selling charms, my own portion like all the other *babaláwo*

---

<sup>1115</sup> Moore, p. 31.

is to make country fashion and sacrifices for the people and from this I eat. Why do you come here and spoil my living with your preaching and [your] fashion? I cannot allow this else I see in a short time nobody would care for me [neither will I have] money and food.<sup>1116</sup>

Although the *babaláwo* were predominantly male, there were no rules against women learning *ifá* because the Yorùbá recognised that women had the aptitude for the profession. A few women did learn *ifá* and they were called *Ìyánifá* (mother of *ifá*). In her 1995 study of Yorùbá indigenous religion, Deidra Badejo asked a *babaláwo* why very few women practised *ifá*. He responded that women could study *ifá* if they wished but that the mastery required decades of study with various master *ifá* priests in different parts of Yorùbáland. Since this period of apprenticeship would ordinarily occur in women's marriage and childbearing years, they would have to make a choice because the two were near impossible to do simultaneously.<sup>1117</sup> As a result, women who devoted their lives to *ifá* were often required to forgo concerns of personal fertility. Since marriage was normative for all in Yorùbáland and there was immense societal pressure on both men and women to procreate, it is understandable why *ifá* divination remained male-dominated. Furthermore, because menstruation was regarded as unclean and polluting, capable of destroying native medicine, a woman's education in the craft during her reproductive years would have been disrupted monthly.

Rather than *ifá*, women's religious authority came in the form of priesthood. Priestesses were mostly post-menopausal because of the supposedly polluting nature of menstruation. These women, now free from reproductive concerns, could devote more time to pursuing religious development and proficiency just as others pursued economic gains. There were many priestesses devoted to the worship of the deities to whom citizens went to obtain *àlàáfíà*. In 1855, the women of Abẹ̀òkúta rushed to Akéré, a newly arrived prophetess of *Yemoja* (a river goddess), who professed to heal all manner of diseases and hold the power to give the townspeople children,

---

<sup>1116</sup> Theophilus Kefer, *Journal*, 3 September 1854.

<sup>1117</sup> Badejo, pp. 91–3.

something they believed was essential to *àlàáfìà*.<sup>1118</sup> It was common for priestesses to cater to the childbearing needs of citizens. Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring argue that women's religious roles were geared towards reproduction because their cultural and religious roles were directly linked to their fertility and conception.<sup>1119</sup> Whenever women were spoken of as public priestesses in Yorùbáland, it was usually with regards to reproduction. Even female goddesses functioned in reproductive capacities as the goddesses *Ọṣun*, *Ọya* and *Yemoja* were all associated with child bearing. When Samuel Johnson tried to preach to a non-Christian man in 1876, the man responded that he was and would forever be an *Ọṣun* devotee stating that:

Before my birth my father was told [...] he must offer sacrifice to the goddess *Osun* which is worshipped in the stream and she will give him a child. My father did so and I am the son of that promise... I dare not embrace any other religion for fear of *Osun's* vengeance.<sup>1120</sup>

Even the priestesses of male deities often acted in reproductive capacities. As stated previously, William Moore recorded in his diary a visit to an *Ọbátálá* (a male deity) temple, where he met a priestess and a woman who had come to offer sacrifice to the god for conception purposes.<sup>1121</sup> Therefore, whilst male religious authority was built on acumen and intelligence, those of women were based on innate abilities and biological capacities linked to their reproductive function.

It is interesting to note that besides from the *babaláwo*, missionaries hardly ever spoke about other priests. Almost every mention of priests referred to the *ifá* priest rather than those of other deities, and when they are mentioned, it was usually in passing as evidence of what they considered the deep-seated 'heathenish' and idolatrous nature of the Yorùbá.<sup>1122</sup> For example, Andrew Gollmer said in 1846 that he saw a procession of high priests and a

---

<sup>1118</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 15 September 1855; Samuel Crowther, Journal, 25 September 1855.

<sup>1119</sup> Anita Spring and Judith Hoch-Smith, 'Introduction', in *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, ed. by Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring (New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1978), pp. 1–23 (p. 14).

<sup>1120</sup> Samuel Johnson, Journal, 13 November 1876.

<sup>1121</sup> William Moore, Journal, 8 August 1851. For more on women's religious roles, see Barnes, 'Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge', 248–268.

<sup>1122</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 1856; James Okuseinde, Journal, 25 April 1871..

lower order of priests ministering. In front of them was a young woman carrying a calabash who, ‘from her peculiar movement, appeared to be intoxicated’. He was told that the spirit of a deity had possessed the girl.<sup>1123</sup> James Okuseinde also mentioned in 1871 that to avoid execution for manslaughter, a man took refuge under a *Şàṅgó* (deity of thunder) head priest in the *Şàṅgó* shrine. The authorities believing that *Şàṅgó* would take vengeance on them should they arrest him, instead received a ransom of ten bags of cowries and forgave him.<sup>1124</sup> Like other mentions of priests, these entries do not discuss the priests in any detail but, instead, are focused the processes and functions of indigenous religion. Therefore, *òrìṣà* priests, who were not *babaláwo*, are somewhat of a mystery to the modern-day researcher. While there is no doubt that they existed, their religious authority seems to have been overshadowed by the multitalented *babaláwo*.

The very presence of missionaries in Yorùbáland threatened the religious authority of priests, priestesses and the *babaláwo*. Missionaries in Yorùbáland came first and foremost to abolish indigenous religion and convert the ‘heathen natives’ to Christ, and from the very start of their mission, almost all their efforts were directed to this purpose. For missionaries to be successful, they had to try to render implausible, and in some cases, destroy entirely, indigenous religion.<sup>1125</sup> Those identified as the propagators of the belief system, were defamed. The *babaláwo* in particular were branded as frauds and money hungry deceivers.<sup>1126</sup> Missionaries engaged in virulent debates with traditional priest-diviners and their devotees in the hope of convincing them of the ‘futility’ of their ways.<sup>1127</sup> When preaching in a market during 1846, Henry Townsend tried to convince the people that their rituals and cultures were naught. He told them that ‘the gods were not gods’, and their priest deceived them. Although they had made the prescribed sacrifices and offerings in the manner taught to them by the priests, to obtain

---

<sup>1123</sup> Andrew Gollmer, *Journal*, 1856.

<sup>1124</sup> James Okuseinde, *Journal*, 25 April 1871.

<sup>1125</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, ‘The Study of Yorùbá Religious Tradition in Historical Perspective’, *Numen*, 40 (1993), 240–273 (p. 244).

<sup>1126</sup> Samuel Crowther, *Journal*, 25 September 1852.

<sup>1127</sup> Olupona, p. 244.

peace, wealth, children, and a long life, yet, their children die or are carried away into slavery. Their sustenance is taken away by these “benevolent” gods, till they are left with nothing, and the life they lived, whether long or short, was one of continued anxiety and fear.<sup>1128</sup>

Like other missionaries, Townsend maintained that only conversion to Christianity could provide salvation and peace. Evangelism often brought missionaries in conflict with Abẹ̀òkúta religious authorities resulting in numerous individual persecutions throughout the century and two cases of mass Christian persecution: Ìgbòrè in 1849 and Ifole in 1867.<sup>1129</sup> Unfortunately evangelism alone was insufficient to encourage conversion and it was not until the turn of the twentieth century, when Christianity brought concrete benefits in terms of education and employment prospects, that there was a mass conversion to Christianity.

## **Conclusion**

For male and female adults in Abẹ̀òkúta, the adult stage of the lifecycle was a time of contradictions. For women, this time symbolised the end of their wifely servitude and the beginning of greater power and authority in their conjugal compounds. They were free from reproductive restraints and could turn their attention to large-scale economic pursuits that brought some women enormous wealth. Others went on to establish themselves as religious authorities as through priesthood. Nonetheless, these familial, economic and religious gains did not translate into political authority. Women in Abẹ̀òkúta were systematically excluded from the male-dominated political decision-making bodies and although they had little say in the town trajectories, their person, family and businesses were severely affected by the decisions made by men. Moreover, their inputs, both economically and during wartime were crucial to the success of the town.

---

<sup>1128</sup> Henry Townsend, Journal, 28 June 1846.

<sup>1129</sup> I have spoken about religion and conversion extensively elsewhere. See Alanamu, ‘Indigenous Medical Practices’, 7; Alanamu, “The Way of Our Fathers”, 1–27.



For men, this period of seniority brought a different set of ambiguities. By marrying and having children, they had fulfilled the parameters for adulthood and had begun expanding their households. This period brought great potential for self-aggrandisement and success that culminated in careers as civil and military chiefs, but it also brought restrictions to their personal choices. For example, men of affluence and position found it harder to convert to Christianity despite their personal convictions. Furthermore, those who tried to enact hegemonic ideals of masculinity often fell short, while those that resisted these ideals were punished for their dissent through silencing and systematic exclusions from the gains of patriarchy. But those in religious roles were seemingly immune from these contests of masculinity as their positions were regarded as divine and they were not expected to strive to mainstream understandings of elite status. However, the advent of missionaries in the region threatened to displace them entirely. When men and women aged further and approached the end of their economic, political and religious careers, they moved on to the next stage in the lifecycle, old age and eventually death.

## OLD AGE AND DEATH

**‘The aged are the repositories of wisdom and knowledge, hence the younger generation regard their seniors as guides and prophets’.**<sup>1130</sup>  
**Samuel Johnson, 1921.**

**‘Àgbà dídà ò lóògùn’- ‘There is no cure for old age’- Yorùbá proverb.**

Old age is difficult to define. It is an ambiguous category with its very meaning embedded and dependent on the society under consideration. Pat Thane argues that the most striking feature of old age is its sheer breadth and diversity. It incorporates a wide spectrum of people in the society ranging from people as young as fifty years old to those over a hundred. It includes the healthy as well as the decrepit, the wealthy and powerful to the most impoverished and marginalised individuals in society.<sup>1131</sup> Since the meaning of old age also changes over time, it is historically contingent. John Vincent comments that in order to understand old age and aging bodies, we must grasp how social, economic and political institutions interact with cultural values within a society at a particular time.<sup>1132</sup>

Some scholars, such as Simone de Beauvoir, argue that old age is a category imposed by society.<sup>1133</sup> She contends that society takes a person’s physical and psychological characteristics and assigns them a role and position within it. Through this imposition, people with aged bodies begin to adjust their behaviour and experiences according to societal norms and people’s attitudes and expectations.<sup>1134</sup> Referring to her interviews with aged men and women, she argued that the elderly did not necessarily see themselves in these terms and often maintain that ‘old age’ did not exist, and that some people were

---

<sup>1130</sup> Johnson, p. 37.

<sup>1131</sup> Pat Thane, ‘The 20th Century’, in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 263–302 (p. 263); Pat Thane, ‘The Age of Old Age’, in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 9–30 (pp. 9–10).

<sup>1132</sup> John A. Vincent, *Old Age* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>1133</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age* (London: Deutsch, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), pp. 4–

7.  
<sup>1134</sup> de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, pp. 9–11.

simply less young than others 'and that was all it amounted to'.<sup>1135</sup> Similarly, Haim Hazan wrote that during research conducted in an old age home, whose average age of the residence was eighty-one, eighty three per cent were 'unwilling' to describe themselves as old.<sup>1136</sup>

Similar to these accounts, researchers of 'old age' often identify inconsistencies between societal expectations of the elderly and their own experiences of aging.<sup>1137</sup> Unfortunately, this type of insight into the personal views of the aged in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, like most places in Africa, is largely absent from surviving sources. This is undoubtedly one reason why so little literature exists about old age in pre-colonial Africa. However, in a society such as Yorùbáland, which has been unequivocally declared gerontocratic from ancient times, it is quite surprising that so little historical research exists on the elderly who supposedly have most of the power. One could argue that the study of old age is comparatively lacking in Africa when compared with the West. Since the emerging field of gerontology in Western countries is occasioned by a growing aging population, a case could be made that the study of old age and the process of aging hardly seems relevant in Africa which has a declining aging population.<sup>1138</sup> In some countries like South Africa, about ninety-four per cent of its populace is below the age of sixty-five.<sup>1139</sup> Indeed, many studies of gerontology carried out in Africa are cross-cultural analyses contrasting aging in Africa to the West.<sup>1140</sup>

---

<sup>1135</sup> de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, p. 1.

<sup>1136</sup> Haim Hazan, *Constructions and Deconstructions of Old Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 16.

<sup>1137</sup> John W. Traphagan, 'Contesting the Transition to Old Age in Japan', *Ethnology*, 37 (1998), 333–350; Thane, 'The 20th Century', p. 298; Vincent, p. 28.

<sup>1138</sup> Nancy R Hooyman and H. Asuman Kiyak, *Social Gerontology* (Boston, Mass.; London: Pearson, 2011), p. 19; Ian Stuart-Hamilton, 'Introduction', in *An Introduction to Gerontology*, ed. by Ian Stuart-Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1–20 (p. 9); Kate Davidson, 'Sociological Perspectives on Aging', in *An Introduction to Gerontology*, ed. by Ian Stuart-Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 226–250 (p. 230); *Gerontology: Responding to an Ageing Society*, ed. by Kevin Morgan (London: J. Kingsley Publishers, 1992); Lawrence Cohen, 'Old Age: Cultural and Critical Perspectives', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994), 137–158.

<sup>1139</sup> South Africa Demographics Profile 2013, [http://www.indexmundi.com/south\\_africa/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/south_africa/demographics_profile.html), [accessed 10/05/14]

<sup>1140</sup> See Leo W. Simmons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (New York: Archon Books, 1970); Donald O. Cowgill and Lowell D Holmes, *Aging and Modernization*. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972); Sandra Torres, 'Cross-Cultural Differences in Aging', in *An*

Nonetheless, a young population and a scarcity of sources should not deter scholars from the historical study of old age in Yorùbáland because it is still important to understand the lived experiences of the elderly in the past and how this has evolved over the years. Furthermore, there are some historical records that do give insight into old age. In Yorùbáland, some nineteenth century sources give enough information to allow a partial, but effective, historical analysis of the aged, which is discussed in this chapter. Such insights include cultural ideas about aging, the lived realities of some of the most marginalised aged, and beliefs and philosophies about death, dying and the afterlife. Like the quotes which opened this chapter, these sources give us insight into the contradictory nature of old age. The first quote which states that the 'aged are the repositories of wisdom and knowledge, hence the younger generation regard their seniors as guides and prophets' suggests that old age was a prestigious time of the lifecycle. People were supposed to eagerly anticipate old age because elders were at the peak of the social hierarchy.<sup>1141</sup> In contrast, the proverb '*àgbà dídà ò lóògùn*' (there is no cure for old age) gives a grimmer view of aging. It implies that growing old was regarded as an inevitable circumstance of life. The reference to a 'cure' for old age intimates that it was likened to malady and demonstrates that aging may not have been so prestigious after all. Such contradictions are explored in the chapter.

The main aim of this chapter is to illuminate the previously unexplored experiences of the aged in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta while analysing how missionaries also observed, interacted with and influenced this stage of the lifecycle. The chapter begins with a discussion of the meaning of old age in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta and Yorùbáland in general. It will explore the cultural understandings of aging bodies, citing the cultural significances of growing old and the links between aging, work, infirmity and the lineage. It will also examine the position elders held in the community. Next, it will

---

*Introduction to Gerontology*, ed. by Ian Stuart-Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 340–362.

<sup>1141</sup> Johnson, p. 37.

investigate the experiences of marginalised old childless women and elderly female slaves before exploring the links between the aging female body and witchcraft. It will then discuss Yorùbá beliefs about death, dying and the afterlife before finally examining the actual process and significance of death and burial.

### The 'meaning' of old age

In nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, the term old age referred to people who were biologically advanced in age. These people were known as *àgbà/arúgbó* (old or elderly). Socially, the elderly were also people who had middle-aged children and so were called *àgbàlagbà* (old people who had begot old people), and were now *iyá-la and baba ñlá* (grandmothers and grandfathers) or *arómọdómọ* (great grandparents).<sup>1142</sup> These people had reached the zenith of life and the next stage in their lifecycle was death and ancestorhood. Similar to the *Ògbóni* who were social elders, the aged were biological elders who were thought close to the 'ancestral world' and venerated for this reason.<sup>1143</sup> For this discussion, this chapter uses the terms elderly and old age interchangeably to refer people to whom the Yorùbá considered to have reached their *ọjọ alé* (night-time) or concluding stage of their life as opposed to *òwúrọ* (morning), considered to be the time of childhood and youth.<sup>1144</sup>

Unlike the West, where the most common age reminders were calendric cues, the Yorùbá did not keep track of exact age. Old age indicators took the form of physical markers, that is, when the physical body looked older and became weaker, and generational reminders, indicated by seeing people of a younger generation growing older.<sup>1145</sup> There were also event reminders where a person could estimate their age by stating that they were born during a

---

<sup>1142</sup> Crowther, pp. 12, 42, 167.

<sup>1143</sup> de Beauvoir, *Old Age* p. 86; Adeboye, 'The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan', 262.

<sup>1144</sup> For more on this, see Adeboye, 'The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan', 263.

<sup>1145</sup> Vincent, pp. 13–14. For more on age, see Sheila M Bytheway, 'Age', in *Researching Social Gerontology: Concepts, Methods, and Issues*, ed. by Sheila M. Peace (London; Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 9–18.

particular war or during the reign of a particular ruler. This system of tracking age would however only have been possible when Europeans began estimating calendrical events. Given the limited archival sources on old age, one can speculate that people aged seventy and above were normatively considered 'old'.

The Yorùbá had quite a large aged population. Notwithstanding wars and disease, longevity sometimes extended into one hundred years and although no one knew their precise ages, there were some reported cases of extreme longevity. Osifekunde, an Ìjẹ̀bú slave, who gave account of his capture and enslavement thought his grandfather died at either at 140 or 150 years of age and did not think this extraordinary.<sup>1146</sup> Since this type of extreme longevity is unlikely, there are two possible reasons why Osifekunde said this. First, he may have given this age estimate in national pride as an indication of the strength of his people who lived well beyond the years of ordinary men. Second, since the Yorùbá did not keep track of exact age, he could have believed that his grandfather actually lived to be that old.<sup>1147</sup> Whatever the reason, Marie Armand Pascal d'Avezac-Macaya, the French geographic archivist who published this account in 1845, noted that Osifekunde's account did not 'lean towards exaggeration' and noted other reports of such longevity recorded amongst the slave population in the Americas.<sup>1148</sup> Referring to Yorùbáland, William Clarke also noted that the Yorùbá grew very old when he wrote that 'in many of my tours, I was presented to the elders of a certain town, large number of aged men seated around the chief from 60 to 80 years old. I have no hesitancy in saying that the proportion of aged people is very large and that the longevity of many would reach 90 and 100 years.'<sup>1149</sup>

---

<sup>1146</sup> Lloyd, 'Osifekunde of Ijebu', p. 261.

<sup>1147</sup> Early modern Europe likewise has accounts of extreme longevity. See the edited volume *How Well Do Facts Travel?: The Dissemination of Reliable Knowledge*, ed. by Peter, Morgan, Mary S. Howlett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>1148</sup> On 5 October 1780. the London Chronicle reported that a black female lived to be 175 years. Lloyd, 'Osifekunde of Ijebu', p. 261.

<sup>1149</sup> One can presume that he made this judgement by comparing the physical characteristics of the elderly Yorùbá to those of old people in the Europe and America. Clarke, p. 213.

The period of old age in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland was identical to that of the pre-nineteenth century West where people retired, or in the case of Yorùbáland, stopped working at whatever age they felt unable to carry out their daily economic and political pursuits rather than a fixed retirement age.<sup>1150</sup> Some people would also have been judged as old when they could no longer support themselves socially and economically as a result of physical and mental decline. These included those that had developed *ifójú* (blindness), *jarán* (mental deterioration and dementia), *ekun* (protracted sickness) and other general physiological and pathological changes.<sup>1151</sup> In its totality, these people would have reached a time of dependency and physical weakness.<sup>1152</sup> But not all 'old people' fit within this category. Others were referred to as old simply due to their longevity as many old people remained fit and healthy. Some elderly people although retired from active economic and political life, still acted in an advisory capacity to political and military councils or supervised their business ventures now delegated to their children, relatives and slaves. Others however continued to actively pursue these lifestyles until their deaths. Clarke observed that throughout the streets in Yorùbáland there were people of advanced ages looking strong and keenly engaged in useful vocations.<sup>1153</sup> Similarly, Campbell spoke of a chief in Abẹ̀òkúta whose age he estimated at 80 years old. Despite the chief's age, he maintained much 'youth, rigour and comeliness'. Although less powerful and wealthy than the other chiefs, he remained an active member of the *Ògbóni* council, which Campbell thought was due to his cunning nature as all task requiring such mannerisms were entrusted to him.<sup>1154</sup> This is similar to

---

<sup>1150</sup> Vincent, p. 10; Janet Roebuck, 'When Does "Old Age Begin?: The Evolution of the English Definition', *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1979), 416–428 (p. 419).

<sup>1151</sup> In 1852, Crowther defined *j'ran* as the 'decay of mental faculties through old age'. Crowther, pp. 40, 81.

<sup>1152</sup> Thane, 'The Age of Old Age', pp. 17,21–22, 27–28; David G Troyansky, 'The 18th Century', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 175–210 (p. 176); Thomas R. Claudia Edwards, 'The 19th Century', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 211–262 (p. 238,259); David Wilkin, 'Dependency', in *Researching Social Gerontology: Concepts, Methods, and Issues*, ed. by Sheila M. Peace (London: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 19–31.

<sup>1153</sup> Clarke, p. 213.

<sup>1154</sup> Campbell, p. 38.

Thane's observation that politicians hardly ever retire and their 'age is rarely seen as a disqualification for high office'.<sup>1155</sup>

In Yorùbáland, there were no simplistic associations between chronological age and physical and social dependency.<sup>1156</sup> In actuality, many people tried to maintain their independence and autonomy for as long as possible. Constant supervision and care was not a characteristic of the old, but rather the old and infirm.<sup>1157</sup> In fact, there were certain duties and jobs that were regarded primarily as occupations for the old. Samuel Johnson noted that ginning, carding, spinning thread and shelling palm kernel were performed by old women.<sup>1158</sup> When old women could no longer participate in rigorous trading activities, many of them helped out on lineage farms doing activities such as harvesting which was considered less physically strenuous. Old female slaves who were neither married nor strong enough to trade were also employed in agriculture.<sup>1159</sup>

Unlike England where, from the eighteenth century, there was an increased emphasis on the relationship between grandparent and grandchildren, there was no such emphasis in Yorùbáland.<sup>1160</sup> Some old women did however raise their grandchildren if the parents could not do so due to death, slavery, war or other such circumstances. When Ajayi Crowther returned to Abẹ̀òkúta in 1846 he found his sisters, who had been enslaved the same day as he, and their children, living with his mother in Abàkà town just outside Abẹ̀òkúta.<sup>1161</sup> Old women, along with young children and wives, also cared for the sick and disabled in the lineage. Campbell also noted that in Abẹ̀òkúta and throughout Yorùbá country, old women nursed infants, usually those of relations.<sup>1162</sup> Nevertheless, as men and women grew older and inevitably became less independent, their duty of care fell to their children and grandchildren.

---

<sup>1155</sup> Thane, 'The 20th Century', p. 275.

<sup>1156</sup> Vincent, p. 29; Faina Jyrkilä, 'Society and Adjustment to Old Age', *Acta Sociologica*, 5 (1961), (87-90), p. 88.

<sup>1157</sup> Troyansky, p. 177; Cole and Edwards, p. 221.

<sup>1158</sup> Johnson, p. 123.

<sup>1159</sup> William Allen, 8 September 1873, 12 October 1873.

<sup>1160</sup> Troyansky, p. 181.

<sup>1161</sup> Ade Ajayi, 'Smauel Ajayi Crowther of Oyo', pp. 101-2.

<sup>1162</sup> Campbell, p. 68.



Crowther's mother later lived with him until she died. There is no mention of what happened to his sisters and children when she did this.<sup>1163</sup>

Researchers of old age argue that modern Western culture views old age negatively and with repugnance and often in terms of decay.<sup>1164</sup> De Beauvoir asked '[a]re old people really human beings? Judging by the way our society treats them, the question is open to doubt.'<sup>1165</sup> She writes that because of their physical and economic dependence, the elderly are considered burdens and 'useless mouths to feed'.<sup>1166</sup> Ideologically, the nineteenth-century Yorùbá perceived old age differently as a time of honour and esteem. In Yorùbáland, elders were considered wise, knowledgeable and worthy of respect. Due to their longevity and experience, they were thought to have an understanding of the world well beyond that of youths.<sup>1167</sup> They were regarded as the link between ancestors and the living and they were revered as a result. They also acted as advisers to the next generation. The Yorùbá considered wisdom a direct result of age and one may argue that elders were thought to have a monopoly on wisdom. Proverbs such as *omodé kan ò lè jókòó sí ipò àgbà* (a child should not thrust himself into the seat of the elders) and *omodé kò lè pítàn àṣà fún àgbà* (the young cannot teach the elders traditions) reiterated that the wisdom that came with age was of greater value than youthful innovation because youths did not know enough about the community to make for it intelligence decisions.<sup>1168</sup> In the nineteenth century, Johnson proposed that elders were venerated because in non-literate societies where history is undocumented, elders were the 'sole repositories' of wisdom and knowledge. Elders' knowledge of the past and their vast experiences were the only links the younger generation had to history.<sup>1169</sup> Furthermore, the foresight they demonstrated from this experience was seen as extraordinary, perhaps even prophetic, and accordingly, they were perceived as mystical guides.<sup>1170</sup>

---

<sup>1163</sup> Ade-Ajayi, 'Samuel Ajayi Crowther of Oyo', pp. 101–2.

<sup>1164</sup> Vincent, p. 131; de Beauvoir, p. 39; Stuart-Hamilton, pp. 3–4.

<sup>1165</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, 'The Coming of Age' cited in Thane 'The 19<sup>th</sup> century', 292.

<sup>1166</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 39; Thane, 'The 20th Century', p. 290.

<sup>1167</sup> Adeboye, 'The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan', 263.

<sup>1168</sup> Yorùbá translation by informant Mrs. Bola Alanamu, Lagos, Nigeria, March 2014. For more proverbs about elders, see Ellis, p. 77.

<sup>1169</sup> Johnson, p. 37.

<sup>1170</sup> Johnson, p. 37.

The proverb *àgbà kò sí ní ilú, ilú bàjé; baálé ilé kú, ilé di ahoro* (when there are no elders, the town is ruined; when the master dies, the house is desolate) confirms that the very presence of elders was considered vital to the continuity and functioning of the town and lineage.<sup>1171</sup>

Respect and deference for elders was physically manifested in the way younger people conducted themselves in their presence. The Yorùbá were often very respectful of the aged and many observers wrote that the young and middle-aged often prostrated themselves in the dust for their biological, and often social, elders regardless of where and when they met.<sup>1172</sup> As noted previously, prostration was a physical demonstration of respect.<sup>1173</sup> Ajisafe Moore also wrote that an individual might call his/her mother by their real name, which was a symbol of social equality, but one could not call their grandmother by name, indicating her seniority.<sup>1174</sup> As with other life stages however, there were cultural expectations of the appropriate behaviour of elders. Elders could not engage in *òrò èyìn* (idle gossip or literally back talk), hence the proverb *òrò èyìn kí ẹ iwà àgbà* (gossip is unbecoming in an elder).<sup>1175</sup> To do so, was to invite ridicule. Elders also had certain obligations to their juniors. They had to be responsible and discreet, and not divulge matters discussed with them in confidence. They also needed to fulfill their familial and societal obligations if they were to earn people's respect and deference. If an elder was a *baálẹ̀* (head of household), s/he had to divide lineage assets equitably, contribute financially to the care of lineage members and property, judge lineage disputes fairly, and advise members appropriately. If they could not reach a fair decision on their own, they had to consult other elders lest they be considered biased. This is succinctly depicted in the proverb *àgbà męta ò lẹ pe ekulu ti, bí òkan bá pẹ é ní ekúlu tí ikeji ní ekulú, òkan tó kù á pẹ é ní ekulu* (three elders cannot all fail to pronounce the word ekulu; one may say ekúlu, another ekulú, but the third will

---

<sup>1171</sup> Crowther, p. 60.

<sup>1172</sup> Clarke, p. 245.

<sup>1173</sup> Fafunwa, p. 25

<sup>1174</sup> Ajisafe-Moore, p. 43.

<sup>1175</sup> Crowther, p. 29; Ellis, p. 77.

say ekulu).<sup>1176</sup> The proverb is the Yorùbá equivalent of the English adage ‘two heads are better than one’ meaning that there were advantages to consulting others. People lost regard for elders that did not exhibit these characteristics. As succinctly put by a Yorùbá proverb: ‘àgbà tó jẹ àjẹ̀wẹ̀yìn, yóò ru igbá rẹ̀ délé’ - (the elder who shirks his responsibilities should not count on his juniors’ respect).<sup>1177</sup>

### **Aged slaves and old childless women**

Despite indigenous ideals about the veneration of elders, respect and deference for the aged only applied to people of a certain status. Men, women with children, and wealthy women, whether childless or otherwise who acted as symbolic mothers to their followers, were venerated and allotted respect and courtesy in old age. In contrast, for old childless women and aged slave women, many faced an uncertain and often wretched old age, characterised by both physical and financial neglect.<sup>1178</sup> In the nineteenth century, economic and social experiences of the elderly were shaped by personal wealth, sex and most importantly, the presence of lineage ties. Since the duty of caring for the old, especially when infirm and dependent, fell on their children, it was at this stage that childless women were at the greatest disadvantage, and their living circumstances became more perilous as they aged. As they grew weaker and could not continue to work in a capacity that could maintain their previous standard of living, they experienced financial uncertainty. Such women could also be widows and due to their age, the lineage males would not have picked them during levirate inheritance ceremonies. They would therefore, also have lacked support in their conjugal homes. For those that

---

<sup>1176</sup> Ellis, p.77

<sup>1177</sup> Adebayo, 'The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan', 264.

<sup>1178</sup> Andreas Sagner also observed this among the nineteenth-century Xhosa when he wrote that ‘while respect for old persons was a fundamental cultural norm, social age per se was no guarantee that a person would be respected, could exert influence or would enjoy happiness. The experience of later life was shaped by gender, kinship and differences in social class as well as by health and biographical factors’. Andreas Sagner, “The Abandoned Mother”: Ageing, Old Age and Missionaries in Early and Mid Nineteenth-Century South-East Africa’, *The Journal of African History*, 42 (2001), 173–198 (p. 176). For more of this in the West, see de Beauvoir, pp. 85–6; Cole and Edwards, p. 214.

returned to their patrilineage at an old age, their advanced age would also mean that those with whom they shared emotional bonds in their youth would either be deceased, or if women, in their conjugal compound. In consequence, such women would be socially isolated and their marginalisation significantly increased their risk of deprivation.<sup>1179</sup> This was also the case of elderly slave women who had no kin relations in their area of captivity.

A prayer, which an old woman made to her deity as recorded by S.W Doherty reveals the realities of the lives of old childless women in the nineteenth century. Her prayer read:

Oh thou god *Sango*, my maker and preserver in life, thou hast caused me to wake again this morning, I thank thee. Thou knowest that I am old and childless, also that I am a widow and have no husband to care for me, send me kind persons to do me favour today and guide me through the day not to fall into any evil.<sup>1180</sup>

Her supplication to *Şàṅgó* (the god of thunder), her deity, for a person that would do her a 'favour' is telling of her social isolation. Her lack of familial ties meant that no one was responsible for her care and she had to depend on the rare kindness and help of others. Another old woman Samuel Cole encountered in 1877 expressed a similar sentiment. This woman stayed by the road side blessing people in the name of her deity *Oya* (goddess of the river) in return for cowries. When Samuel Cole asked her why she did this stating that she could not possibly make enough money to sustain herself, she stated that

I take up this goddess to go about to ask for cowries because I have no helper. I am too old to have a husband and a supporter. I [had] many children at Oyo but they are all dead hence I have no supporter and none to look to again but to the goddess *Oya* that is now supporting me.<sup>1181</sup>

---

<sup>1179</sup> Vincent, p. 23.

<sup>1180</sup> S. W. Doherty cited in Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 92.

<sup>1181</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 29 May 1877.



Fig 5.1:  
Illustration of  
an old Yorùbá  
woman, in  
this case,  
Hannah  
Afala, the  
mother of  
Bishop  
Samuel Ajayi  
Crowther.  
Source:  
*Church*

Old, childless and impoverished women were neither respected nor revered by their juniors who sometimes treated them quite poorly. Lacking primary kin relations, they also had no one to protect them. In 1873, an old female convert showed the missionary William George her bruises and told him how she had been badly treated by one of her relatives with whom she lived in the same compound. This woman is described as 'very old having not much strength to [...] walk'. She told him that one day she was hungry and having nothing to eat, she took some of her own possession to sell in the market in exchange for cowries she could use to sustain herself. On her way back from the market, she met a female relative who asked her how she came about the money. When she explained, the younger lady beat and dragged her about bruising her severely, stating that she had no right to sell anything in the

compound. William George wrote that he consoled her the best he could.<sup>1182</sup> It is important to note that the younger female was not punished for this. Another Christian woman chastised her for acting so insensitively but the matter ended with reproach. This indicates that harming this woman was not judged as an affront to the lineage, society or tradition. Childless or slave women were also routinely ignored and disregarded, so much so that locals often turned a blind eye to their abuse and maltreatment. In 1870, William Allen saw a woman he described as ‘poor, aged and sickly’ fall down in the street dying. When she did, twelve children gathered around her and began stoning her as part of their play. William Allen reproved them and their mothers who stood silently by declaring that ‘though the women be a slave with no one to care for her, yet the eye of the Lord is on her.’<sup>1183</sup> Indeed, a Yorùbá nursery rhyme passed down through oral traditions surprisingly depicts old women as targets of children’s ridicule. The rhyme states:

*Mo níní mo níní, mo r’árúgbó kan lódò, mo ní kó b̀nmí lómi mu, ó ní òun ò b̀n mí lómi mu. Mo ní ó ̀apá p̀l̀éngé, mo ní ó ̀s̀s̀è p̀l̀éngé, bí igbákọ abiamo. Minì ká yìi kò.*

I met an elderly person at the brook. I told them to give me water but they refused. I told the person they had a crooked hand, I told the person they had a crooked leg, like the pot of a mother.

This nursery rhyme passed down through generations tends to support the idea that elderly women were ill-treated. The rhyme refers to an elderly person, rather than a woman, but this is due to the lack of gender pronouns in the Yorùbá language, rather than the rhyme being gender neutral. Fetching water at the brook was a stereotypical female role. Furthermore, the elderly hardly fetched water themselves because they had children and grandchildren to perform such tasks for them. Therefore, the elderly woman getting water from the brook suggests she was childless. When we analyse the dialogue between the child and the elder, it illuminates children’s behaviour towards elderly childless women. In Yorùbáland, it is almost inconceivable for a child to ask an elderly person to perform an errand. The child’s brazen disregard for

<sup>1182</sup> William George Journal, 12 August 1873.

<sup>1183</sup> William Allen, Journal, 9 February 1870.

tradition, and the fact that she orders, rather than requests, the old women to give her water, illuminates that she had little respect for the elderly woman. When the woman refused, the child then proceeded to ridicule her referring to her frail and deformed limbs, again suggesting a lack of regard for the elder. The comparisons made between the elderly woman and *abiyamọ* (mother) was an obvious taunt about her childlessness. Although not suggesting that the Yorùbá actively encouraged children to disrespect their elders, childless or otherwise, the fact that this rhyme exists reflects the society from which it originated.

Even at the turn of the century, the position of old childless women had not changed significantly and these women were most likely to be affronted, disparaged or assaulted. L. A. Ligadu in Oñdó wrote that he tied up Ọmọyẹ, presumably a young woman, for slapping 'old' Pricilla Bánjókòò to whom she had always 'shown an ungovernable spirit'.<sup>1184</sup> One common similarity of the above missionary examples is the compassion missionaries showed these marginalised women. The church and its members cared both physically and financially for their aged converts and many elderly females joined the church in old age for such support. Peel argues that the social benefits of church membership must have had great appeal for those elderly women who lacked the security of kin relations.<sup>1185</sup> Since missionaries also tended to target for conversion those alienated from society, they may have consciously focused on these isolated women to win them to the congregation.

For slaves who were captured at old age, their situation was even more precarious. As said in chapter two, slave raiders viewed old people and very young children as liabilities rather assets since they could not work and in consequence were either unsellable or would not fetch a profit if sold. As a result, they were often 'killed without mercy' instead of taken captive.<sup>1186</sup> For those who were captured, they were described as a sorry sight. When a slave hunting party returned to Abẹ̀òkúta in 1861, they brought back four captives,

---

<sup>1184</sup> L. A. Lijadu, Family Papers, 1 February 1900.

<sup>1185</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, pp. 92, 238–240.

<sup>1186</sup> Curtin, pp. 326–7.

two men and two women. One of the women had lost all her teeth due to old age and she was described as ‘a most sorrowful sight with a rope around her neck being dragged like cattle’.<sup>1187</sup> The predicament of old childless women was summed up by an old woman who cried to William Allen because she had no cowries for food and knew not how to get any. The women told him when he tried to preach to her that ‘if God had taken her away from the world, it would have been better for her’, suggesting that death was preferable to their circumstances.<sup>1188</sup>

Impotent men and economically successful childless women were however less likely to encounter such decrepitude in old age. For men, they often lived permanently with their kin and always had relations to assist them. If they were infertile, the clandestine arrangements made within the lineage ensured that they had children biologically fathered by male relations. Old men were also less likely to be enslaved during wartime because they committed suicide rather than risk capture. Joseph Wright, who was captured during the destruction of the original Ègbá homestead in the Ègbá forest, summed this up when he wrote about the morning after his town was sacked. He recalled that many had fled and aged men who could not flee had put an end to their lives as this was the ‘moral’ thing to do rather than be taken as a slave.<sup>1189</sup> Suicide was therefore the honourable option for men when faced with capture and enslavement. Suicide by elderly males during a period of perpetual warfare is probably the reason why there are hardly any records of elderly men in such impoverished conditions in the records. For wealthy childless women, their wealth ensured that they always had followers. One such woman was the childless wife of the convert Joseph Fábíyíí in Ìbàdàn. When Joseph converted to Christianity, he ‘put her away’ when he had to divorce all but one of his wives. By that time, she was too old to remarry. Although she was childless, her benevolence and financial generosity with her wealth gained her children by ‘adoption’ who respected her as their adopted mother

---

<sup>1187</sup> *Lagos Times*, 11 July 1861.

<sup>1188</sup> William Allen, *Journal*, 10 October 1866.

<sup>1189</sup> Curtin, p. 325.



and did their duty in her old age and for her funeral.<sup>1190</sup> This type of adoption was similar to that of Madam Tinúbu, who although childless, was a motherly figure to all her followers who treated her accordingly.

Andreas Sagner is understandably skeptical of missionary rhetoric about the treatment of the aged. In his study of elderly abandonment amongst the Xhosa, he argues that missionary orotund language about the desertion of the elderly was partly to influence the image of Africans in Europe. Like John and Jean Comaroff, he argues that narratives of abandonment in old-age were used as part of nineteenth-century propaganda to present Africans as barbaric citing the ‘inhumanity of heathen customs’ in order to justify their colonisation as a civilising mission.<sup>1191</sup> It is tempting to apply his critique to Yorùbáland as well because mission journals were sometimes published to gain funding and support for the mission. The more dire missionaries could portray the circumstances in Yorùbáland, the more support they would have gained. However, the idea that Africans were purposefully misrepresented is not necessarily the case in this context. First, CMS missionaries in Yorùbáland were not agents of the empire and as stated in chapter one, some of its agents actively acted against British interests.<sup>1192</sup> Second, the customs that led to elderly abandonment amongst the Xhosa, which revolved around the cost of elderly care, the concept of frailty, and ideas about post-humanity were markedly different from those in Yorùbáland.<sup>1193</sup> Furthermore, CMS journal entries did not articulate the predicament of the elderly as manifestations of an uncivilized society. Rather, they were isolated reports that were intended to show conflicts amongst women, tensions in church, and the position of slaves. In essence, the reasons for missionary report about the treatment of elderly slave women and old childless women were more specific and complex than just subscribing to the ‘civilizing mission’ of the Empire, and their reports did reflect the social reality of Yorùbáland. Elderly, childless women and elderly slaves were undoubtedly one of the most vulnerable

---

<sup>1190</sup> There is no indication of whether these children were orphans or children of relatives. But by ‘adoption’, Johnson probably meant children put in her care since there were no formal adoption processes at the time. Samuel Johnson, Journal, 10 March 1874.

<sup>1191</sup> Sagner, 176.

<sup>1192</sup> Oduntan, p. 304; Biobaku, *The Ègbá and their Neighbours*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>1193</sup> Sagner, 177-179.

categories of people in Abẹ̀òkúta and indeed, the entire Yorùbá society.

### Women and witchcraft

In Yorùbáland, post-menopausal women were the most likely to be accused of witchcraft because the end of the menstrual cycle was thought to imbue women with supernatural powers unavailable to men. Menstrual blood was believed to drain women's life force and since older women no longer bled, they retained this lifeblood, considered to be very powerful, within them.<sup>1194</sup> This power made their bodies the very repositories of *àṣẹ*, which Henry Drewal describes as the concentrated power of lifeblood that could make any verbal command a reality.<sup>1195</sup> Furthermore, their inherent ability to be secretive also intensified this power. Although all women were regarded as innately secretive due to the internal position of the female genitalia, young women, assumed to be impatient and quick-tempered, were not thought to possess the secretive powers of elders because their fickle nature depleted power that should have remained a mystery.<sup>1196</sup> Elderly women who exercised self-control, patience and perseverance collectively known as *irójú*, were more likely to have this power.<sup>1197</sup> Thus, 'composure and containment' were essential qualities of elderly women.<sup>1198</sup> Older women's longevity, which imbued them with wisdom and knowledge such as medical knowledge and techniques, also inspired fear.<sup>1199</sup> They often outlived men and were thought to not only hold the power of gestation and childbirth, but also of longevity.<sup>1200</sup>

---

<sup>1194</sup> Andrew Apter, 'Discourse and Its Disclosures: Yoruba Women and the Sanctity of Abuse', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 68 (1998), 68–97 (p. 88); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 2-9.

<sup>1195</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 550; Henry Drewal and Margaret Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 75.

<sup>1196</sup> Drewal and Drewal, pp. 73-75.

<sup>1197</sup> Judith Hoch-Smith, 'Radical Yoruba Female Sexuality: The Witch and the Prostitute', in *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, ed. by Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring (New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1978), 245–268 (p. 250).

<sup>1198</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 550.

<sup>1199</sup> Thane, 'The Age of Old Age', p. 14; de Beauvoir, pp. 82–4.

<sup>1200</sup> Sociologists argue that women outliving men is near universal and in almost every culture across history and it often results in gender tensions. However, such tensions manifested in different ways across different cultures. Diane Gibson, 'Broken Down by Age and Gender:

Longevity, *irójú* and their additional innate powers of *àṣẹ* increased old women's chances of being regarded as *àjẹ*, a term often translated as witch. This translation may be inappropriate in the Yorùbá context because *àjẹ* were believed to have both benevolent and malevolent powers.<sup>1201</sup> Drewal writes that the Yorùbá *àjẹ* were neither 'antisocial or the personification of evil' as Europeans witches were believed to be.<sup>1202</sup> In Yorùbáland, witchcraft, like fertility, was considered innate to womanhood, and all women were potential witches. Since women gave life through birth, the Yorùbá believed that they also had the ability to take it by spiritually consuming the life-essence of their victims who were usually those with whom they were in close daily contact, that is, their kin.<sup>1203</sup> This power was most likely to be unleashed at menopause when women's procreative fluids had been exhausted and the blood had congealed upwards. Therefore, witchcraft and fertility were thought to be antithetical, dominating the body at different times.<sup>1204</sup>

Since women's propensity for witchcraft was directly linked to their reproductive capacities, their benevolence and malevolence was also directed towards reproduction. *Àjẹ* could use their power to beneficial ends to enhance reproduction in their lineage and protect their families, but these efforts were less recognised as only their destructive proclivities created recognisable discord in the lineage and society. Henry Talbot argued that the main difference between witches in Yorùbáland and those of the West was that Yorùbá witches 'apparently had no desire to promote fertility'.<sup>1205</sup> Their negative influence on reproduction included their ability to cause infertility in their husbands thereby denying men the advantages of polygyny and offspring.<sup>1206</sup> They were also thought to cause difficulties in menstruation, stillbirths, miscarriages and false pregnancies. They were credited with the

---

'The Problem of Old Women' Redefined', *Gender and Society*, 10 (1996), 433–448; Davidson, pp. 228, 235.

<sup>1201</sup> Talbot, *Volume 2*, p. 208.

<sup>1202</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 549.

<sup>1203</sup> Apter, pp. 87–88.

<sup>1204</sup> Apter, p. 87.

<sup>1205</sup> Talbot, *Volume 2*, p. 203.

<sup>1206</sup> Spring and Hoch-Smith argue that their ability to cause impotence in men was directed at thwarting the control of male-dominated societies. Spring and Hoch-Smith, p. 21.

ability to prevent delivery of a child in the womb, sometimes for years, and were thought to kill children by eating their ethereal bodies.<sup>1207</sup>

While all old women were suspected of witchcraft, those likely to be accused and persecuted were those who lacked lineage ties as a result of slavery or infertility owing to the envy they were presumed to feel at the reproductive success of others. Without strong kin support, or sons and daughters to stand for them, these women tended to be convicted and killed.<sup>1208</sup> Their victimisation was due to the fact that not only was the very existence of childless women antithetical to Yorùbá beliefs about the ultimate purpose of womanhood, that is to procreate, their inability to bear children was regarded as a motive for envy and the wish to disrupt other more successful women's reproductive careers. Unfortunately, the information available on witchcraft in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta is limited. Although there is mention of witchcraft ordeals and executions in missionary journals, the exact social circumstances and conflicts that led to witchcraft accusations are absent. Nevertheless, modern sociological sources provide possible answers to these questions. Elisha Reene writes that witchcraft accusations were manifestations of jealousy, resentment and competition amongst co-wives.<sup>1209</sup> Peel gives an identical suggestion when he wrote that 'witchcraft was a projection of the emotions of envy and malice that flowed between women who were in close daily relations of co-operation, rivalry and mutual comparison, usually co-wives'.<sup>1210</sup> This is probably why witchcraft accusations arose from within lineages. Peel contends that what made witchcraft so heinous was that women were supposed to give life and 'motherhood was the supreme realization of their gender'. Instead, witches killed; an act in direct opposition to a woman's supreme purpose.<sup>1211</sup> Furthermore, not only was their target other women with whom they were supposed to share familial bonds, they also disrupted the reproductive careers of other women, therefore

---

<sup>1207</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 549–550; Talbot, *Volume 2*, pp. 203, 206–7; Spring and Hoch-Smith, p. 21; Drewal and Drewal, p. xvii.

<sup>1208</sup> Makinde, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment of Women', 168; Drewal and Drewal, p. xv; Peel, 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', 143.

<sup>1209</sup> Renne, *Cloth That Does Not Die*, p. 50.

<sup>1210</sup> Peel, 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', 143.

<sup>1211</sup> Peel, 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', 145.

endangering the lineage and the society itself. Judith Hoch-Smith however considers witchcraft accusations to be about more than rivalry amongst women. She argues that witchcraft accusations were also a manifestation of gender struggles, due to the ability of women to also impede male reproduction.<sup>1212</sup>

To carry out their activities, witches were thought to take leave of their physical bodies at night. When they slept, their spirits or souls turned into nocturnal creatures that roamed at night, devouring their prey and attending their meetings and gatherings, which were usually held at the foot of a big tree.<sup>1213</sup> Drewal points out that the praise names for elderly women thought to be witches aptly expressed the duality these women were thought to possess. These women were called *olójú méjì* (one with two faces), *alabara méjì* (one with two powers), *aláwò méjì* (one with two bodies), depicting their ability to 'turn' themselves into nocturnal creatures such as owls, bats, snakes, rats, and especially birds.<sup>1214</sup> Concerning the transformative nature of *àjé*, an indigenous missionary once wrote:

In a compound near me, the *Aje* (witch bird) come [sic] near and began to cry after night: the people all came out of their houses and told it to go away.<sup>1215</sup>

Although some *àjé* were thought to be fully aware of their 'evil proclivities and powers', others may have ignorant of it since they practiced unconsciously while they slept. Nevertheless, they still unwittingly brought sickness and misfortune to those around them.<sup>1216</sup> A CMS catechist, William Marsh gave a short description of witchcraft in Yorùbáland stating in 1846 that:

Witchcraft is of various descriptions among the Africans; and it is universally believed that there are certain individuals who possess supernatural powers, who are able to transform themselves into the shape of some bird, and fly invisibly in the night to suck the blood of individuals whom they wish to destroy; that they are a body or

---

<sup>1212</sup> Hoch-Smith, p. 266. For more on this, see Crumbley, 584–9.

<sup>1213</sup> Talbot, *Volume 2*, p. 208; Renne, *Cloth That Does not Dye*, p. 40.

<sup>1214</sup> Drewal, 'Art and the Perception of Women', 548-549.

<sup>1215</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, February 1863.

<sup>1216</sup> The Yorùbá used certain 'medicines' to protect their families from the mechanisation of witches. This usually took the form of household charms. Talbot, *Volume 2*, p. 208.

company in any country they live, they are the cause of almost all the deaths of adults, infants and abortions among females.<sup>1217</sup>

From the above, we can conclude that women were the predominant victims of witchcraft accusations. Men were however the principal witch-finders and executioners, but a woman known as *Ìyá* (mother) presided over all the men in one witch-finding authority known as *òrìṣà oko* (god of the farm).<sup>1218</sup> Marsh considered these witch-finding authorities 'pretenders'.<sup>1219</sup> Participating in witchcraft was judged as a capital offence, whether or not a particular victim could be identified, and suspected witches underwent witchcraft or poison ordeals.<sup>1220</sup> The exact process of witchcraft accusations and ordeals is unclear because there were only few of them in Abẹ̀òkúta, perhaps as a result of missionary influences in all aspects of Abẹ̀òkúta life.<sup>1221</sup> Essentially, an ordeal involved a suspected witch drinking a concoction missionaries considered as poison. If the individual was innocent, then the drink had no effect. If guilty, the poison was said to have a certain negative effect such as choking.<sup>1222</sup> When guilt was determined, they were executed either by dragging, clubbing or decapitation and their bodies were either displayed under trees to be devoured by vultures and animals, or they were buried in the sacred grove of the witch-finding authority.<sup>1223</sup>

---

<sup>1217</sup> William Marsh, Journal, 31 March 1846 cited in Peel, 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', 142.

<sup>1218</sup> There is no report of just how many witch-finding cults existed at the time. Thomas King, Journal, 4 April 1852; Johnson, p. 37; Peel, 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', 143–5; Crumbley, 593.

<sup>1219</sup> William Marsh, Journal, 25 October 1853.

<sup>1220</sup> Talbot, *Volume 2*, pp. 206–7.

<sup>1221</sup> Burton, p. 221.

<sup>1222</sup> Talbot, *Volume 2*, pp. 201–4.

<sup>1223</sup> William Marsh, Journal, 25 October 1853; James White, Annual Letter, 1878. For more literature on witchcraft in Africa see: E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Eva Gillies, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Gerrie ter Haar, *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007); Henrietta L Moore and Todd Sanders, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft, and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (London: Routledge, 2001); Filip DeBoeck, 'On Being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the Occult and the Street', in *Reinventing order in the Congo: How People Respond [i.e. respond] to State Failure in Kinshasa* ed. by Theodore Trefon (London: Zed, 2004), pp. 155–173.

## Concepts and beliefs about *ikú* (death)

One cannot discuss old age without considering Yorùbá beliefs about death, burial and the afterlife. When exploring beliefs about death, the first impression one gets is Yorùbá people's deep-seated fear of dying. Despite the dangers men encountered at war and suicide being considered the honorable option for defeated generals and old men, the overall sentiment expressed by most, including the aged, regarding death was one of dread. Anna Hinderer observed this in Ìbàdàn when she wrote that

[i]t is fearful to see the poor heathens intense love of life, they will do anything, spend anything and everything, to be assured by priests and *orisa* that they shall live long; and their principal salutation [...] is *Olorun bulemi* (God grant you long life!).<sup>1224</sup>

Bowen also commented that the another universal greeting amongst the Yorùbá was *aikú* meaning “may you not die or more accurately “immortality””.<sup>1225</sup> Hinderer concluded that this intense love of life was due to a lack of knowledge of the afterlife and because the people had ‘no hope or knowledge of what ensued beyond the grave...and many had no idea what followed death’. She argued that the grave was ‘so very dark to them; they never like to talk about it.’<sup>1226</sup>

Hinderer was accurate in her observation that the fear of death was a most potent one for the Yorùbá, and many indigenous prayers and sacrifices were directed to the sole purpose of keeping it at bay.<sup>1227</sup> Not only was long life one of the principal components for *àlàáfíà*, when faced with the possibility of death, indigenes did all they could to prevent it. During the illness of an Ìbàdàn *Başòrun* (a kind of prime minister), many cowries were spent, and a boy and a girl were offered in sacrifice to prevent his death. Only a day before his death, no less than sixty sheep and goats were killed in sacrifice, each tied in a bundle and thrown about in front of his house. It was thought that when

---

<sup>1224</sup> Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, p. 139.

<sup>1225</sup> Bowen, p. 303.

<sup>1226</sup> Hinderer, *Seventeen Years*, p. 139.

<sup>1227</sup> Peel, ‘The Pastor and the “*Babaláwo*”’, 356-7.

death came, and saw these victims, it would feed up on them instead and spare him.<sup>1228</sup> The Yorùbá love for life is indicated in James White entry about his attempt to preach to a group of people in January 1861:

Tried to preach to the people and they [...] argue that as the Christians die as well as the heathens, they cannot see why they should exchange their religion for Christianity and that had the Christian religion been an antidote against death, they would have readily forsaken their religion for it.<sup>1229</sup>

Despite general local scepticism, some aged or dying Yorùbá did convert to Christianity because for them, the religion delayed death. Although many elderly people referred to Christianity as a religion of the future, some stating that ‘our children must learn the Word of God, but we old people are too old for changing our fashions’, some changed their minds when confronted with their own mortality.<sup>1230</sup> Mission records have multiple examples of those, both young and old, who converted when they thought they would die.

In 1854, a man visited Thomas King telling him that he went to Lagos on a commercial trip and fell ill with ‘violent pains’. When the man believed he would die from the illness, in desperation, he prayed to the God of the Christians asking that if God spared him, he would devote his life to Christianity. He said that his prayer was answered almost instantly and he recovered without administering medicine. Therefore, he came to present himself for baptism because he was convinced that the Christian God could do what *ifá* could not.<sup>1231</sup> Similarly, two decades later, an elderly woman named Lífora went to Daniel Coker in 1877 and told him that she wished to join the candidates for baptism. She said that she had been an idol worshipper all her life but she was now convinced of its ‘folly’. She testified that she had been critically ill for three months and despite all her propitiations to her deity, she did not get better until she prayed to the Christian God who granted her recovery through prayers and without medicine. She was now

---

<sup>1228</sup> Daniel Olubi, Journal, 29 March 1875.

<sup>1229</sup> James White, Journal, January 1861.

<sup>1230</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 104.

<sup>1231</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 15 May 1856.



resolved to serve Him.<sup>1232</sup> Many more people - including prominent men like David Kúkò mí, an elder in Ìbàdàn discussed in the last chapter - testified that such healing 'miracles' led to their conversion. Some people also came to Christianity due to a perceived failure of indigenous religion to protect from death. In 1887, W. E. W Oyenga, a missionary, wrote that a woman brought her idols to church stating that she had seen the 'nothingness of idolatry' due to the illness and death of first her sister and then her husband.

The deceased husband had on the day previous to his death worshipped his deceased parents and consulted his own *ifa* and was told in each case that sickness and death were far from him and in honour of the news, he made a great feast to which he invited all relations and friends. But the following day just a few hours after he had received joyful congratulations from many, suddenly he was seized with a malady that ended his life.

This event gave her the final conviction and made her decide against worshipping any idol. For about a year, she had attended divine service regularly.<sup>1233</sup>

One explanation for this fear of the grave, was as Anna Hinderer observed, the Yorùbá lacked a coherent and cohesive belief about the afterlife. The Yorùbá had what Peel calls 'imprecise and unelaborated' ideas about what ensued after death. Their beliefs involved the spirits of the dead returning to the afterlife whence they came.<sup>1234</sup> Once there, they could be reincarnated as descendants, become ancestors that could be called on periodically to intervene in the lives of their descendants through worship; or they could manifest themselves in the form of *egúngún* (ancestral cult). As a result, Christianity's clarity about life after death was advantageous to their mission. An afterlife of judgement, salvation for believers, and condemnation for non-believers gave a previously unknown insight into the death-process.<sup>1235</sup> Believers no longer had to fear death, and this seemed more reassuring when the end was near.

---

<sup>1232</sup> Daniel Coker, Journal, 2 January 1877.

<sup>1233</sup> Annual letter, January 1887; For more on this theme, see also Samuel Johnson, Journal, 22 April, 1879.

<sup>1234</sup> Peel, 'The Pastor and the "Babalawo"', 357

<sup>1235</sup> Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa since 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 341-359 (p. 352).

In reference to religious conversion, Jack Goody observed that because in some cultures death is the ultimate but unavoidable misfortune, religions that offered hope of dealing with it by not only warding off death but comforting the bereaved and the dying stood a greater chance of gaining adherents.<sup>1236</sup> This was the situation in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland because locals frequently converted and gave up indigenous practices in old age or when afflicted with fatal illnesses. When a man took ill in Abẹ̀òkúta during 1851, he became a convert. When all local and available western medicines had been exhausted to no avail, he pleaded for baptism. Townsend granted the sick man's request 'especially under such pining disease'. He was baptised and died a few days later.<sup>1237</sup> The rhetoric of these dying men and women are also indicative of their newfound comfort in their afterlife. People often told missionaries on their deathbed that they were 'ready to die' because they were 'going home', 'going to my redeemer' or 'following Christ', showing new, clear beliefs about the afterlife.<sup>1238</sup> Of course, these were missionary translations of indigenous speech. As such, it is unclear what these indigenes actually said and equally difficult to judge their actual meanings. Furthermore, words like *olùgbàlà* (saviour or redeemer) were introduced into the Yorùbá language by missionaries and expressed new and previously unknown understandings about death.

As the century progressed, indigenous concepts began to take on Christian characteristics. In 1873, Samuel Johnson met a man he described as a 'very bigoted *babalawo* and charmer'. As their conversation turned to religion, the *babaláwo* proceeded to give Johnson proof of the existence of Yorùbá gods. He claimed that a friend of his who had died and later risen from the dead, gave them the following account of the afterlife:

He began his tale by exhorting all to be faithful for there is a God who will render [judgement] unto all according to his deeds. That he is a great high God who he saw enthroned in a spacious place from top to bottom in white. On his right is the

---

<sup>1236</sup> Jack Goody, 'Death and the Interpretation of Culture: A Bibliographic Overview', *American Quarterly*, 26 (1974), 448-455 (p. 449).

<sup>1237</sup> *Church Missionary Gleaner*, August 1851.

<sup>1238</sup> For example see Andrew Maser, *Journal*, 28 March 1854.

god *Orisanla (Obatala)* and on the left is the god of *Orunmila (Ifa)*. Behind him is a pit, [the] condemned are cast into and before him and in active service are the gods *Ogun* and *Sopona*. *Ogun* is armed with 4000 short swords and he goes out daily on earth to slay for his meat and to drink the blood of the slain. *Sopona* also has 4000 viols about him he is also in the work of destruction bringing in victims [continuously]. As for *Sango*, he is a very mighty god and when he is about to go into the world he is always cautioned by *Orisanla* to deal gently with his own special devoted worshippers.<sup>1239</sup>

From this account, one recognises that indigenous Yorùbá religion had begun to incorporate Christian characteristics and imagery. The image of a God draped in white, and sitting on a throne, who judged all of mankind upon death was undoubtedly Christian. The gods who stayed in heaven but daily went into the world to do their bidding, invokes the image of Christian angels. A 'pit for the condemned' where the wicked were cast for an eternity of torment goes against the original, though vague, Yorùbá belief of vigilant ancestors and reincarnation. Thus, essentially rendering ancestor worship, and the festival of *egúngún* obsolete. The extensive effect of Christianity's influence on indigenous ideas is further confirmed by the fact that the *babaláwo*, a custodian of Yorùbá religion and ritual, believed and relayed the story.<sup>1240</sup>

### ***Ikú, isìnkú and ọ̀fọ̀ (Death, burial and mourning)***

Immediately after an old man died, there was an outburst of grief, loud cries and lamentations from both the men and women of the compound. Afterwards, the eldest son of the deceased or his brother if he had no son, sent for the *babaláwo* to determine if the death was of natural causes or a result of malicious devices including witchcraft and sorcery. If the *babaláwo* divined and determined that it was a result of malevolence, then he made further enquiry to determine if other lineage members were in danger of the same fate and if the spirit of the dead was still in danger of further

---

<sup>1239</sup> Samuel Johnson, Journal, 7 February 1875.

<sup>1240</sup> Temilola Alanamu, 'Missionary Interventions in Yorùbá Health and Healing Practices in Africa, Unpublished Masters Thesis Submitted to the University of Cambridge, 2010, p. 72-3

'molestation'.<sup>1241</sup> The *babaláwo* also sought the source of the misfortune and if a spirit, deity or ancestor, the being was appeased accordingly. If death was a result of witchcraft, sorcery or murder then the offending party was sought and if found, they were punished accordingly with execution. The *babaláwo* also made a cleansing sacrifice usually of sheep or goats and a purification liquid made out of a combination of *òrí* (shea butter), the liquid from *ìgbín* (snails) and *omi* (water) was sprinkled on the corpse and the room where the body was kept. The deceased's spirit was then invoked and told to leave peacefully when the funeral proceedings were over.<sup>1242</sup> Similar to the burial practices of the Ashanti in modern day Ghana, the town chiefs were also informed of the death.<sup>1243</sup>

After these proceedings or if *ifà* determined that the deceased died of natural causes, the body was washed with gin and herbs and the corpse was wrapped up or bound in a cocoon with numerous layers of expensive clothes, the best and finest amongst his belongings when alive, and the best cloth his family could afford to buy.<sup>1244</sup> The *òkú* (corpse) was then placed in the room he occupied while alive. If he had been wealthy, the walls were draped in green, blue and purple velvet signaling wealth and affluence. If not, the room was draped with the best the family could afford.<sup>1245</sup> The body was then placed on a mat in the room for viewing. While the lineage males prepared the corpse, the compound women, except from the deceased's wives and daughters, prepared the first of many feasts for the men and sympathizers consisting of neighbours, friends, and other members of the community of both sexes. When both these tasks were completed, a celebration of eating, drinking, drumming, singing and dancing and firing of muskets commenced in honour of the deceased. Campbell recalled that when he went to pay his condolences to Chief Atambala on the death of his brother, the chief was not in a sombre mood. He recorded that:

A brother of the chief Atambala having died during my sojourn at

---

<sup>1241</sup> Ellis, p. 69.

<sup>1242</sup> Ellis, p. 69.

<sup>1243</sup> R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 146.

<sup>1244</sup> Campbell, p. 71.

<sup>1245</sup> The act of dressing the dead in finery is similar to customs of the Ashanti see Rattray, p. 149. James White, *Journal*, 20 February 1854.

Abbeokuta, I went over to his house to condole with him on his loss. I found the old chief in no condition to receive the sort of condolence I was prepared to offer, as both himself and almost every other person present was intoxicated. His compound was crowded, a large number of his friends being there to participate in the ceremonies. Drums were beating, the women singing, and as many as had sufficient command of their legs were dancing.<sup>1246</sup>

The widows and daughters of the deceased did not participate in the celebrations. Instead, they mourned and lamented their new position as lonely and unprotected. This process was known as *şòfò* (mourning) and the women mourners were known as *isòkún* (mourner).<sup>1247</sup> Their *ohùnréré* (lamentations) included:

*Mo lọ sí ojà tò kún fọfọ. Èró pọ̀ jọjọ şùgbọ̀n kò sí níbẹ̀. Mo rosè dè é tífí, şùgbọ̀n kò wá. Yéè pà! Ó ku èmi nikan. Ñ kò ní fi ojú ri láéláé. Ó ti parí ó ti lọ. O di gbéré, mi ò ní ri mó. Yéè pà! Ó ku èmi nikan şoşo*

I go to the market; it is crowded. There are many people there, but he is not among them. I wait, but he comes not. Ah me! I am alone. Never more shall I see him. It is over; he is gone. I shall see him no more. Ah me! I am alone.

*Mo lọ sí pópó ọ̀nà. Àwọ̀n èniyàn ní kọ́já şùgbọ̀n kò sí níbẹ̀. Alẹ̀ lé, kò dé. Yéè pà! Ó ku èmi nikan. Yéè pà! Ó ku èmi nikan. Emi nikan lójú mọ̀mọ̀, èmi nikan lógànjọ̀. Yéè pà! Bàbá mi (ọkọ mi) ti kú. Ta ni yóò wá tójú mi báyii?*

I go into the street. The people pass, but he is not there. Night falls, but he comes not. Ah me! I am alone'. Alas! I am alone. Alone in the day, alone in the darkness of the night. Alas! my father (or husband) is dead. Who will take care of me?<sup>1248</sup>

The wives and daughters performed *àwẹ̀* (fasting) as they were forbidden to wash and had to refuse all food for the first twenty-four hours from the deceased's passing. After this, they allowed themselves to be persuaded to

---

<sup>1246</sup> Campbell, pp. 70–1.

<sup>1247</sup> Crowther defines *Isòkún* written as *Isonkun* as a 'mourner (a name applied to female children, as they are the chief mourners on the death of a parent)'. Crowther, p. 59.

<sup>1248</sup> Yorùbá translations by informant, Mrs Bola Alanamu, March 2014. Ellis, p. 70.

eat.<sup>1249</sup> Therefore, while women mourned, men celebrated.<sup>1250</sup>

On the afternoon of the third day, the lineage males bound the corpse in clothes, placed it on a wooden plank and carried it around town in a procession singing, dancing and throwing cowries to those present.<sup>1251</sup> If a man died on his farm, he would be buried there. But if his relatives could afford it, they paid the town authorities to have his body moved to the compound. On the procession day, men were paid a fee to carry the corpse to town from the farm. An announcer walked twenty feet or more in front of the procession shouting loudly ‘*ọfẹ*’ (it is light) referring to the weights of the corpse. This was to warn those for whom it was considered bad luck to see a corpse, including pregnant women.<sup>1252</sup> Since many men died in battle outside the town walls, one can speculate that where possible, their bodies were also brought into town in a similar manner on the third day since the Yorùbá placed great emphasis on burials in the home. When the procession returned in the evening, the body was interred in a grave in the compound, either in the deceased’s room or in the piazza. If it was not possible to bring the deceased home, perhaps due to cost, a small fragment of his remains such as his hair or nails was brought to the compound and the funeral rites were performed with this. This fragment was known as *etta* (part of a dead body).<sup>1253</sup>

*Pósí* (coffins) were not originally used for indigenous funerals but as the decades passed, affluent families took on European techniques and families buried their dead in coffins, but still in the compound.<sup>1254</sup> The *boji* (grave or place of interment) was usually five feet deep and four feet wide.<sup>1255</sup> The families placed in the grave all the deceased’s expensive clothes sometimes amounting to twenty or more pieces and his other valuables along with food such as *obi* (kolanut) and *ẹja gbígbẹ* (dried fish), drinks including *oti* (rum) and

---

<sup>1249</sup> *Awe* according to the 1852 dictionary was fasting, religious abstinence from food; mourning for the dead, at which time the relatives of the dead do not wash their clothes. Crowther, p. 52; Ellis, p. 70.

<sup>1250</sup> The significance of having only women mourn is this is unknown.

<sup>1251</sup> Ellis, p. 70; Bowen, p. 306.

<sup>1252</sup> Ajisafe-Moore, p. 36; Delano, pp. 107–8.

<sup>1253</sup> Crowther, p. 39.

<sup>1254</sup> Johnson, pp. 137–138.

<sup>1255</sup> Delano, pp. 107–8.

owó ẹyọ (cowries).<sup>1256</sup> They made animal sacrifices, usually those associated with the deity the deceased worshiped, and sprinkled the blood of the animal on the man while the family said prayers to the deceased.<sup>1257</sup> The family did all this to aid the man's passing to the land of the dead, ensure that his spirit did not bother them, and also to guarantee that he heard and answered their prayers. When a *Şàṅgó* worshipper died in Abẹ̀òkúta, the families sacrificed a bitch and a goat. Nathan Young wrote that:

[T]hey suspended the animals over the corpse and cut off the head at once and dropped the blood on the forehead of the corpse, on the breast, and on the toes and said 'this is your bitch, this is your goat, and also this is your rat and fish- don't let us die, let us not meet with any trouble and sickness'. They split the kolanut and threw them on the ground and some of them opened flat and others covered. These are certain sign by which they know their prayers are answered or not answered.<sup>1258</sup>

In places such as Oṅdó, slaves and wives were also sacrificed to accompany the dead and cater to him in the afterlife.<sup>1259</sup> This was however uncommon in Abẹ̀òkúta perhaps due to missionary influences. The entire area around, under and immediately above the man was then filled with his possessions because there was a superstition that a grave could not contain any empty spaces.<sup>1260</sup> The deceased was wished a pleasant journey and the grave was covered with earth. When the deceased was later worshipped as an ancestor, they put offerings on the *ilẹ̀pa òkú* (surface of the grave). This room did not remain vacant and was occupied as soon as the mourning period was over.<sup>1261</sup> After the interment, the feasts and merriment, which had been suspended for the burial, recommenced and continued all night.

---

<sup>1256</sup> Johnson, pp. 137–138.

<sup>1257</sup> Nathan Young, *Journal*, 1875.

<sup>1258</sup> Nathan Young, *Journal*, 1875.

<sup>1259</sup> Ojo, 'Slavery and Human Sacrifice in Yorubaland', 379-404.

<sup>1260</sup> These burial materials were the reason why conquered towns in the nineteenth century were susceptible to grave robbing by the victors. Johnson, p. 139; Curtin, pp. 327–8.

<sup>1261</sup> The procedure for interring the next room occupant after death is unknown. Ellis, p. 71.

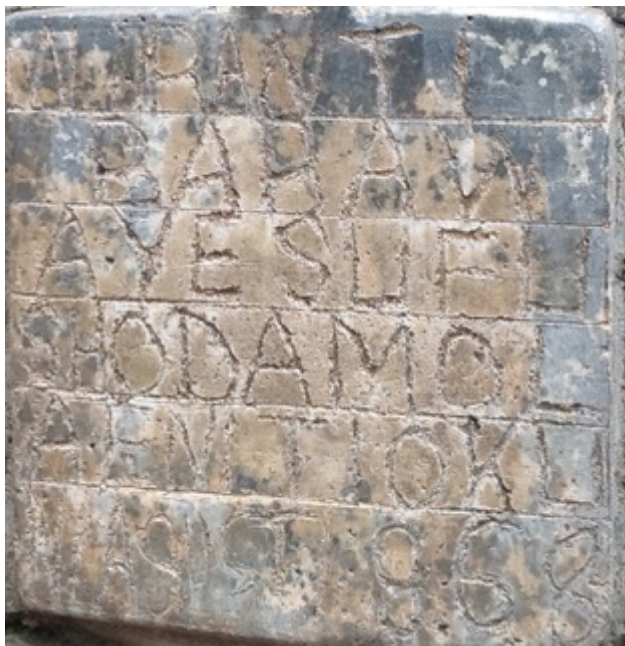


Fig 5.2: Photograph of home gravesite and tombstone of Baba Ayesufu Shodamola Ainitioke, buried in August 1968 in Itokò-Áké, Abeòkúta. This grave is in the compound rather than in the deceased's bedroom because of colonial and postcolonial sanitation laws that banned burials in rooms. Photograph taken by author, 3 July 2014.



The next day, the male members of the family took the articles the deceased used daily, such as his pipe, his sleeping mat, cutleries, plates and other things of small value, out to the bush and burned it. Until then, the spirit of the deceased was thought to linger close to the compound and the destruction of his property was intended to signify to the deceased that he was to depart because all his earthly possessions were gone.<sup>1262</sup> They called his name three times, telling him that 'he was now done with this world and must not come back to haunt it'.<sup>1263</sup> A few days after the funeral, *egúngún* appeared accompanied by several men. Observers gave differing times for *egúngún* some stating thirteen, seventeen or even forty days after interment.<sup>1264</sup> A. B. Ellis stated that the *egúngún* that appeared was that of a previously deceased kin who went to his compound to give news of the deceased's safe arrival in the land of the dead. In return for the news, the women prepared food, and set it, rum and *emú* (palm wine, a local alcoholic drink made from the sap of a palm tree), in the deceased's room and left because no one could see *egúngún* eat. When he finished the food, *egúngún* made a loud sound to signify that he was leaving and the family re-entered the room and gave him messages for their dead.<sup>1265</sup> In contrast, Issac Delano and Samuel Johnson respectively state that the *egúngún* was actually that of the deceased to say his final goodbye to his family, thank them for the funeral and bless them. Johnson wrote that he 'embraced all his children, sits them by turns on his knees, and blesses them, promising to bestow health, strength, long life, and the rest. He accepts presents from all the relatives'. He then left until his next visit during the annual *egúngún* festival.<sup>1266</sup>

After *egúngún* left, the celebrations, feasting and drinking ceased and all family members, both male and female, showed physical signs of mourning. Men did not shave their heads, and widows and daughters neglected their personal hygiene and beautification.<sup>1267</sup> According to Ajisafe Moore, widows were not allowed to shower throughout the morning period and they remained

---

<sup>1262</sup> Ellis, p. 71

<sup>1263</sup> Bowen, p. 306.

<sup>1264</sup> Ellis, p. 49; Delano, pp. 117–120; Johnson, pp. 138–140.

<sup>1265</sup> Ellis, p. 49.

<sup>1266</sup> Johnson, p. 138.

<sup>1267</sup> Johnson, pp. 138–140.

in the clothes they wore when their husband passed away.<sup>1268</sup> Therefore they were called *ofo* meaning unwashed.<sup>1269</sup> Wives were not allowed to go outdoors or do any work that would take them outdoors, but other female sympathisers who came to mourn with them in the compound helped them run errands. Other household wives could also take over their economic activities until the mourning period was over. Johnson also added that during mourning, the wives of the deceased slept on the bare surface of the deceased's grave. Men were mourned for three months and after that, the relatives of the deceased, both men and women, shaved their heads.<sup>1270</sup> The women could then leave the compound and all paraded the streets dressed in their best, singing and dancing in honour of the dead. Then, the deceased's wives and property were inherited and life resumed as normal.<sup>1271</sup> Old women received a similar burial as sexes gained gender equality in death because ideologically, ancestors were considered genderless.<sup>1272</sup> However, the bodies of old women were taken back to their patrilineage for interment and their husbands and children mourned them for seventeen days. A woman's son could ask permission from his mother's kin to bury her in his compound and some families agreed to this. If not, her corpse was covered with a cloth and carried back to her fathers compound.<sup>1273</sup>

If a man was part of the *Ògbóni*, the family had to do a variation of these funeral rights as the *Ògbóni* buried the physical body.<sup>1274</sup> The spiritually powerful such as the *babaláwo* and other priests and priestesses, were also buried according to the rites of their sect with some input from the family.<sup>1275</sup> The only funeral ceremony that was not considered the responsibility of the family was the death of an *oba* (ruler). In such cases, the burial responsibilities were taken up by the State. Here, the burial ceremony was

---

<sup>1268</sup> Ajisafe Moore, p. 37

<sup>1269</sup> Ellis, p. 71.

<sup>1270</sup> Moore, pp. 37–8; Johnson, pp. 138–140; Samuel Cole, Journal, 9 October 1877.

<sup>1271</sup> Johnson, p. 140.

<sup>1272</sup> The gender-neutral nature of ancestors was discernable during *egúngún* festivals as masquerades represented both male and female ancestors.

<sup>1273</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 66.

<sup>1274</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 29 July 1871; Ellis, pp. 69–71.

<sup>1275</sup> Renne, *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town* pp. 117-118 For funeral rites of priests in Ashanti, see Rattray, pp. 175–8.

entirely secretive. However, Clarke wrote that in Yorùbá country, ‘on the death of a king, who as befitting the grand occasion, must leave on his exit from the world so many of his wives and slaves to accompany him to his future state’.<sup>1276</sup> Although it is unclear if rulers in Abẹ̀òkúta were also buried with human sacrifices, it was rumored that the body of the *oba* was cut into pieces and buried in different places inside and outside the town. His heart was also removed and preserved for the ruler’s successor to eat after he had officially taken the throne.<sup>1277</sup> Hence, succession in Yorùbá is called *j’oba*, which colloquially means ‘to succeed,’ but literally means ‘to eat the ruler’.

Not all people died of old age or natural causes. In cases of contagious diseases like smallpox, known locally as *Şòpònná*, people who succumbed to the disease were buried by *Şòpònná* (god of smallpox) worshipers in a private ceremony. These people would also have cared for sufferers during their illness, away from the compound to prevent contagion, and they inherited the deceased’s small property including clothes and jewelry.<sup>1278</sup> As discussed in chapter two, infants and children were not buried in the house, but their dead bodies were either thrown away into the nearest bush or forest, or they were partially buried outside the compound gates with a bit of earth sprinkled over them, and left as food to wild animals.<sup>1279</sup> This was to sever their connection with the lineage because although there was high infant mortality at the time, their deaths were nonetheless perceived as unnatural and a bad omen that could potentially bring more misfortune to the lineage. Lepers, albinos, hunchbacks, women who died during pregnancy, people killed by lightning, and others who died in ways considered unnatural were interred in the sacred groves of the specific groups or religious cults dedicated to these events, to prevent future recurrences.<sup>1280</sup> The bodies of executed criminals, witches and other dissidents were disposed of secretly by the *Ògbóni* or witch finding sects, while slaves were either buried without ceremony or thrown into the

---

<sup>1276</sup> Clarke, p. 257

<sup>1277</sup> Delano, p. 120; Ajisafe-Moore, p. 35.

<sup>1278</sup> Charles Young, *Journal*, 29 July 1884.

<sup>1279</sup> Johnson, p. 137.

<sup>1280</sup> Ajisafe-Moore, p. 36; Bascom, p. 66.

bush.<sup>1281</sup> Childless women, although buried within the compound, were also buried without ceremony.<sup>1282</sup>

Goody considers funeral rituals as part of a system of social control because final rites act as a sanction for positive and negative behaviours. In reference to the LoDagaa ethnic group in West Africa, he argues that differential funerals acted as a threat to the delinquent and social aberrations because the actual burial of 'socially disapproved categories' separated them both from the ordinary dead and from the living.<sup>1283</sup> His observation is identical to the nineteenth-century Yorùbá because as previously stated, the *ilé òkú* (final resting places) of the bodies of those the Yorùbá considered either unnatural (children's bodies), or sick and diseased were interred, or rather disposed of, differently. Furthermore, the disposal of delinquent bodies (the bodies of criminals and witches), were also significant. While some other cultures, perhaps in the West, would simply have released the body of executed persons to their family for burial, the Yorùbá ensured that these bodies did not return to the populace. These 'socially disapproved categories' were thus physically removed from society and civilisation and thrown into the bush symbolically giving them over to nature and severing their connection to society. This physical removal ensured that cosmologically, their lifecycle was forever broken. In contrast to the aged dead, who were buried in the home signifying continuity with society, the disposal of the bodies of social aberrations ensured that they were not worshiped, could not be ancestors, and could never return as descendants. One could argue that the removal of diseased bodies, such as the bodies of smallpox victims and lepers from society, was a necessity to prevent contagion rather than any kind of communal social disapproval. Although this may be true, their lack of proper burial rites would still have, ideologically, halted their lifecycle.

---

<sup>1281</sup> Ellis, p. 50

<sup>1282</sup> Bascom 'The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria', pp. 65-69.

<sup>1283</sup> Jack Goody, 'Death and Social Control Among the Lodagaa', *Man*, 59 (1959), 134–8 (p. 136). For more contemporary discussions on death and burial in Africa, see Lee and Vaughan, 'Death and Dying', 341–59; Rebekah Lee, 'Death in Slow Motion: Funerals, Ritual Practice and Road Danger in South Africa', *African Studies*, 71 (2012), 195–211.

For childless women, the indigenous reasons for their differential burials were slightly different. Although they were buried within the compound, signifying their membership of the lineage, they were interred without ceremony.<sup>1284</sup> Since, as will be discussed below, funeral rites were to ensure the continued link between the deceased, now an ancestor, and the living, and also guarantee that the deceased could return as a descendant, the Yorùbá saw no need to continue the link between themselves and barren women. Their childlessness meant they had no descendant through whom they could return. Therefore, funeral costs would be lost on them. Exceptions to this rule were wealthy childless women who had children by adoption and their own followers. Although cosmologically, these women could not return as a descendant because they lacked biological progenies, their status in life usually meant that their lineage or town (as was the case with Madam Tinúbu) gave them a full funeral, thus showing that social and town hierarchies also manifested in death.

### **The significance of burial rites**

People's final responsibility to their parents was an indigenous funeral where all the rites, rituals and celebrations were observed, and their duties were not completed until they did this. Funeral costs were so high that it frequently put lineage members into heavy debt.<sup>1285</sup> Sometimes, lineages had to pawn members in order to borrow the money required and families often began saving for funerals when an elderly person's illness became critical.<sup>1286</sup> This was especially the case if the deceased was a member of the *Ògbóni*. When an *Ògbóni* man died, he was buried according to their secret rites irrespective of whether or not he converted to Islam or Christianity in his lifetime and ceased attending their meetings.<sup>1287</sup> Fees required to bury an *Ògbóni* man were so large that an *Ìwé Ìròhin* contributor described the death of a chief as

---

<sup>1284</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria*, p. 69.

<sup>1285</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Letter to Reverend Venn, 10 September 1856.

<sup>1286</sup> Delano, p. 102.

<sup>1287</sup> These burial ceremonies were secret and for this reason, we do not know the processes. Samuel Cole, Journal, 29 July 1871.

ruining the deceased's family because the richer a man was, the more his funeral was likely to cost. He wrote that there was no advantage to being the relative or son of a chief because when a man died:

If a man is an *Ogboni* [...] the *Ogboni* are paid for burying him [...] the grown-up sons are required to provide a bag of cowries and sheep or goats towards the expenses of the funeral and if they cannot provide, then they are put in pawn for perhaps three bags.  
<sup>1288</sup>

These costs were in addition to the already expensive funeral rites discussed above.<sup>1289</sup> After the burial, *Ògbóni* members took whatever property or belongings of the man as they saw fit. A man not being an *Ògbóni* in his lifetime did not guarantee a family reprieve because if the deceased was wealthy, he could be initiated posthumously and buried accordingly.<sup>1290</sup> It was a disgrace if a family could not give their aged dead a befitting funeral and sometimes families concealed corpses for months until they had obtained the necessary fee to carry out elaborate funeral rites. They treated the body with local herbs to prevent decomposition and continued to provide the corpse food and drink because the people believed that the soul of the dead remained in the compound until the rituals were performed.<sup>1291</sup>

Funeral ceremonies were extremely important because the welfare of the deceased spirit and the family's very existence depended on the funeral. If the burial ceremonies were carried out haphazardly, then the spirit of the deceased could not depart and continued to 'trouble' the living causing some to 'follow him to the grave'.<sup>1292</sup> Furthermore, without the proper rites, the deceased could not become an ancestor and watch over and protect his family from the afterlife. Whether or not the people believed that *egúngún* was actually the spirit of their dead, both men and women believed that they could communicate with their deceased and vice versa.<sup>1293</sup> When King Akintoye of Lagos was asked why he still worshiped his long deceased father, he

---

<sup>1288</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, August 1861.

<sup>1289</sup> *Ìwé Ìròhìn*, July 1861.

<sup>1290</sup> William Moore, Journal, August 1861.

<sup>1291</sup> Ellis, p. 71.

<sup>1292</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 69.

<sup>1293</sup> Nathan Young, Journal, 1875; Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 10 July 1846.

responded that it was so his father might keep him and all his friends from evil, and strengthen him in this world.<sup>1294</sup> None of which would have been possible had he not given his father a befitting burial.

Ancestor worship was a more personal form of devotion than that of the *òrìṣà* (deity). Since ancestors represented deceased kin and lineage members, living relations had more intimate relationships with them.<sup>1295</sup> However, the most important reason for ancestor worship was the belief that the ancestors gave children.<sup>1296</sup> Many times, missionaries asked people why they partook in the worship of their deceased parents and they replied it was so they would conceive. In 1853, at the imminent death of her grandmother, a young lady yelled, 'dear mother, fail not to send me children without delay, as soon as you are gone.'<sup>1297</sup> Burial rites also ensured that the deceased could be reincarnated, that is, their *ẹmí* (departed spirit) could return as a descendant.<sup>1298</sup> With regards to the persistent belief in the afterlife found in many societies, Goody theorised that belief in the hereafter was used to negotiate the contradiction between the continuity and permanence of the kin group and the impermanence of its members. He argued that 'this conflict between the mortality of the human body and the immortality of the body politic is resolved by the belief in a future life'.<sup>1299</sup> In the case of Yorùbáland, the conflict of mortality and immortality did not only manifest in the belief in the afterlife but also the idea that the dead could continue to participate in the lives of the living, could return periodically as *egúngún*, or permanently as a descendant, usually the same sex as the deceased, thus granting lineage members a form of immortality.

The importance and significance of indigenous burial rites were the origins of many conflicts concerning the burial of Christian converts. Christian burials were straightforward. When a person was declared dead, s/he was interred,

---

<sup>1294</sup> Andrew Gollmer, Journal, 18 January 1846; 10 July 1846.

<sup>1295</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, p. 94.

<sup>1296</sup> The sources give no explanation for exactly how ancestors gave children but one can posit that one way was by returning as descendants.

<sup>1297</sup> Thomas King, Journal, 29 October 1853.

<sup>1298</sup> Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*, p. 69.

<sup>1299</sup> Goody, 'Death and Social Control', 135.

usually the next day, at the church cemetery after a service.<sup>1300</sup> When Christians were dying, many, both male and female, insisted that they wanted to be buried according to Christian customs. On 19 June 1862, when Elisha Fájibi, the eldest brother of the *Aláké*, was about to die, his last request was that he be buried in a Christian way. Missionaries wrote that he manifested ‘much anxiety’ for this.<sup>1301</sup> Additionally in 1873, Ògúndínà, an old Christian convert on her death bed asked missionaries ‘not to suffer her heathen relations to take her body to be buried in the heathen way’.<sup>1302</sup> These requests are understandable because if the Yorùbá believed that one’s funeral determined their afterlife, Christian converts would have made a direct connection between their funeral and their hereafter. Accordingly, they would have been anxious to be buried according to Christian customs so that they could pass to a Christian heaven, rather than the indigenous afterlife to be called on as an ancestor. Non-Christian relatives of converts often objected to these types of funerals because they considered such a burial as shameful and dangerous because burials away from the compound were for undesirables and ‘socially disapproved categories’ and forever severed lineage bonds. Elisha Renne comments that the vision of elderly people buried and resting within the compound and being greeted daily by the household emphasised a sense of community and continuity between the living and the dead.<sup>1303</sup> If their relatives were buried at a cemetery, this ‘community and continuity’ would be broken. They would be unable to make requests of their dead, and their loved ones could never return. The ‘heathen’ relatives of a Christian man once objected to the man’s burial in a Christian cemetery, which they regarded as ‘bush’ burial highlighting the negative perception indigenes had of such funerals. However, his son insisted that it was his father’s wish to be buried by Christians and they later acquiesced.<sup>1304</sup>

---

<sup>1300</sup> The burial ceremonies for Muslims are unclear but it is said that they were buried under verandas or at crossroads.

<sup>1301</sup> Iwé Ìròhìn, July 1862.

<sup>1302</sup> Samuel Cole, Journal, 15 November 1873.

<sup>1303</sup> Renne, *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town*, p. 116.

<sup>1304</sup> William George, Journal, 9 February 1873. For more on conflicts concerning death and burial in Africa, see G. O. Aduwo, *The S. M. Otieno Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya* (Nairobi University Press, 1989); C. K. Meek, *Law And Authority In A Nigerian Tribe, A Study In Indirect Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 303–324.



Conversely, should a convert refuse to participate in indigenous family funerals of their non-Christian kin, it left them isolated from their families and their community as a whole. The unwillingness of Christian converts to choose between family and religion meant that they often contributed to, and participated in the indigenous funerals of their non-Christian relatives. This created tension in the church because missionaries were opposed to Christians participating in what they considered heathenish practices. In observing this phenomenon, James Johnson wrote:

Funeral expenses are no doubt a heavy item in this country [costing] from fifteen to thirty pounds [...] Christians consider themselves obliged to incur such expenses on Christian or heathen deaths. They say it would bring a reproach upon them among their heathen relatives if they do otherwise in the case of a death among them.<sup>1305</sup>

Some Christians were also coerced. Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan have argued that the ban missionaries placed on converts from participating in 'pagan' funerals of family members risked arousing serious social conflict, and the anger of the ancestors.<sup>1306</sup> This was true in Yorùbáland as observed from the events of Ìgbòrè in November 1849. When indigenous converts in Ìgbòrè, Abẹ̀òkúta refused to partake in funeral rites and *egúngún*, it led to the first widespread persecution of converts in Yorùbáland. Ajayi Crowther reported the dramatic events in his journal on 20 November:

Today, the Igbore people broke out upon our converts [...] *Oro*, was called out in Igbore town, the *Ògbóni* drums were hearty in fury and a great multitude were around with hillock, dubs, and whips, catching and dragging our converts to the council house where they were unmercifully beaten and cruelly tormented [...Even] the women were cruelly whipped and shackled. In the meantime, their houses were plundered, their household utensils destroyed and their belongings carried to the *Ogboni* house [...] Before they were released... they were [collectively] fined 200 heads of cowries, about 50 pounds.<sup>1307</sup>

---

<sup>1305</sup> James Johnson, Journal, 22 June 1877.

<sup>1306</sup> Lee and Vaughan, 'Death and Dying', 349.

<sup>1307</sup> Ajayi Crowther, Journal, 20 November 1849.

This persecution was a reaction to the threat converts posed not only to ancestor worship, but also to the very legitimacy of indigenous male power in Abẹ̀òkúta of which *egúngún* and the *Ògbóni* were a part.

## Conclusion

The period of old age was the final stage in the lifecycle of Yorùbá men and women. Old age was considered a time of prestige and honour in Yorùbáland. The aged were believed to have wisdom and understanding well beyond those of the youth and were venerated for this reason. It was also a time of rest, because children were expected to care for their elderly parents as they had been cared for in their childhood. Although for some, old age was accompanied by weakness, infirmity and dependence, others remained healthy until their death continuing active economic and political pursuits, or acting in an advisory capacity. However, not all elderly persons had a positive experience of old age. Old, childless women and elderly slave women were disadvantaged because their lack of primary familial ties left most of them destitute and impoverished. Furthermore, although all old women were suspected of witchcraft, their childlessness and lack of kin support increased their chances of being accused and convicted of the crime.

It is not enough to explore only the life of old men and women. Goody rightly argues that a culture's ideology regarding the anticipation of death, death itself, and interment gives important insight into the culture's beliefs about life, the afterlife, and the relationship between the two.<sup>1308</sup> When we explore Yorùbá ideologies about death, burial rights and understandings of the afterlife, we recognise that the Yorùbá feared death and did all they could to keep it at bay, but inevitably, death always came. For the dead considered unnatural, diseased, evil or delinquent, their connection to the community was severed through the physical removal of their bodies to the bush. But for the aged dead, burial involved the entire community where people performed

---

<sup>1308</sup> Goody, 'Death and the Interpretation of Culture', 448.

elaborate funeral ceremonies and rituals to ensure that they transitioned to ancestorhood and the living retained communion with them. Although the spirit of the dead was required to leave the compound, s/he was to remain vigilant over their living relatives in the afterlife and return to them once a year during *egúngún* festivals. When in the afterlife, the ancestor now waited impatiently for reincarnation as an *ọmọ ọwọ* (baby) into his/her lineage to begin the lifecycle anew.

## Conclusion

The central argument of this thesis is that the gendered experiences of males and females in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland were diverse, varied and often contradictory to dominant discourses about gender in the era. Following in the tradition of decades of feminist and gender research on African history, the original aim of this study was to explore how colonialism and its corresponding effects eroded women's prestigious pre-colonial gendered political, economic and social position. This 'paradise lost' paradigm has been the dominant narrative concerning the gendered lives of women. Many feminist and African scholars have proposed that women in pre-colonial Africa had culturally legitimate authority in political, economic and social matters.<sup>1309</sup> Whilst historians of Yorùbáland have not claimed equality among the sexes, they have however argued that gender relations were not characterized by western ideals of male superiority and female subordination, and that sex was not a significant contributor to a person's life trajectories. They contend instead that the relationship between men and women in Yorùbáland was a mutual gender complementarity rooted in Yorùbá cosmology, which dictated that a gender-balanced society was necessary to the stability of the community and the universe.<sup>1310</sup>

Building on the foundational works of social historians like Karin Barber and J. D. Y Peel who challenge dominant paradigms of gender equity in the pre-colonial past, this thesis has shown that sex, gender and life in general in pre-colonial Yorùbáland was infinitely more complex as evidence from the nineteenth century contradicts some of the claims made by modern-day gender researchers make about gender consensus and balance in all aspects of pre-colonial life. Primary evidence reveals that although the nineteenth-century Yorùbá did not perceive gender differences in terms of male superiority and female subordination, gendered roles were, in practice,

---

<sup>1309</sup> Brown, 1073–1078; Schlegel, pp. 1–40; Sudarkasa, *The Strength of Our Mothers*, p. 225.

<sup>1310</sup> See for example Badejo, p. 67-9; Olademo, p. 20-1.

imbalanced. Although females held prestigious roles in the economy and after a certain age, within the lineage, females were disadvantaged when compared to males in political affairs. Therefore, Yorùbá cosmological ideals of gender balance were hardly reflected in reality. More importantly, biology greatly determined a person's status in society and future life trajectories. Nevertheless, how sexed bodies experienced society was also greatly influenced by age and socio-economic status.

By analysing gender in the nineteenth century, this thesis also interrogated how indigenous practices found 'middle ground' with Christian ideals. In his book *The Middle Ground*, Richard White explored the cultural exchanges, which took place between Native Americans and Europeans around the Great Lakes region after initial European settlement in America. Rather than acculturation which he describes 'as a process in which one group becomes more like the other by borrowing discrete cultural traits', he considers the cultural exchange between the two groups in terms of a 'middle ground' where both cultures imbued elements of the other from which arose 'new meanings and through them new practices'.<sup>1311</sup> White's idea of a middle ground is relevant to this thesis because as discussed, the cultural exchange between Yorùbá people and CMS missionaries took place at every stage of the lifecycle creating new ways of doing gender that forever altered both indigenous and Yorùbá Christian models. Using Abẹ̀òkúta as a case study, this thesis showed how such hybrid cultural practices, resulting from contact, affected an individual's gendered experiences as they progressed both biologically and socially from childhood to youth to adulthood and then to old age and eventually death.

As a child, people learned the social hierarchy and their expected roles within society through a complex process of socialisation in the household, through labour and through playtime activities. In some aspects, male and female socialisation differed, indicating that the sexes were expected to perform

---

<sup>1311</sup> Richard White, *Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. x

disparate roles in society. Although both sexes were taught the importance of labour and work, the socialisation of girls emphasised this more prominently in order to prepare them for their future roles as economic actors and sole providers for themselves and their children. Despite the fact that the process and purpose of male socialisation is articulated less in the sources, given the important roles men played in politics, one can speculate that boys would have been initiated into the male secrets of *Ògbóni*, *orò* and *egúngún* during childhood. Boys would also have been given some kind of military training to prepare them as future soldiers. This period of childhood was often fraught with conflict as children proved themselves to be social actors with their own agency, however circumscribed, in the socialisation processes. They appropriated adult teachings, interpreted and adapted them to the rapidly-changing political, social, economic and religious circumstances of the time, reproducing some, rebelling against other social constructs while sometimes seeking allies against their kin in the new Anglican CMS mission in the region.

After this period of socialisation, boys and girls, usually over the age of eighteen, progressed to the youth stage of the lifecycle where their experiences were dominated by conjugality and matrimony. Although according to cultural norms and ideals, young men and women were supposed to be passive entities in the marital negotiations, evidence shows that they were anything but. Young men and women had to negotiate societal and familial expectations surrounding chastity, fidelity and labour, and new ideas of matrimony introduced by CMS missionaries. It was also at this stage of the lifecycle that male and female experiences became markedly similar. Both sexes passed through the process of betrothal, faced strong societal control over their sexuality and encountered intense familial and societal pressure over fertility and reproduction. Furthermore, to varied extents, both young men and women faced the possibility of divorce should they fall short of indigenous ideals concerning marriage and reproduction.

When males and females passed successfully through the youth stage, success being measured at the time as having adolescent children, they then moved to the adult stage of the lifecycle. It was then that the differences

between the sexes became most prominent. At the adult stage, women found new power and freedoms within the lineage and converted their childhood training in labour and small-scale independent trading activities in youth into thriving businesses. Now free from matters of their own reproduction, some women even attained immense wealth through large-scale trading enterprises. However, they were unable to convert these economic gains into legitimate political currency. Men instead seemingly held all the political power. They performed executive functions, made, revised, and changed indigenous laws, they brokered war and peace, and executed judicial functions through male instruments of *Ògbóni*, *orò* and *egúngún*. Men's additional religious power –in the person of the *babaláwo*, who directed almost every aspect of secular life through religious divination- also demonstrates the male advantage in political affairs. The lack of women's political power in Abẹ̀òkúta made their position especially precarious when one considers that these laws made by men directly affected women's trading capacities and livelihoods. However, some men also faced difficulties at this adult stage as many men disagreed with, and even refused to enact, hegemonic masculine ideals that privileged being a successful warrior who, through war booty, attained a large household of wives, slaves and children. Men who disregarded this construction of ideal manhood were both openly victimized and systematically excluded from Abẹ̀òkúta's hegemonically male-dominated power hierarchy and the gains of patriarchy, putting them in similar (political) positions to women. Besides, even religious male authorities, such as the *babaláwo*, who were seemingly immune from these competitions of masculinities, faced external danger from Christian missionaries who intended to obliterate completely their power in society.

After this adult stage came the elderly stage which ideologically, was supposed to be characterised by prestige and respect from younger members of society. Furthermore, when the elderly individual felt unable to work, they were then to retire and their duty of care was to fall to their children. Again however, the evidence has shown that these ideals of old age were only true for a fraction of the aged population, which included most old men, women with children and economically-successful women who gained children

through adoption if they did not already have biological offspring. Slave women and infertile women did not share in the comforts of old age and their experiences were often characterised by neglect, deprivation and abuse. Their lack of kin relations and support also increased their chances of being accused and executed for witchcraft. Even in death, they were separated from fertile and/or wealthy men and women. The lack of elaborate funeral rites, after the death of infertile and slave women, also made certain that they could never be reincarnated and return as descendant, a most sought after posterity at the time. However, some of these marginalised women found allies in the Christian church who's members became their surrogate families, caring for them in old age and performing their burial rites in death.

The social experiences of sexed bodies and the relationship between the sexes in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland was therefore highly complex and often dependent on age and socio-economic status. It was not however, at any time fully based on Yorùbá pre-colonial cosmological ideals of gender balance or parity. Although British imperialism may have aggravated the gender divide, it certainly did not introduce the concept to Yorùbáland. How then can one explain the position of scholars like Oyeronke Oyewumi who claim that there were no women defined in biological terms in pre-colonial Yorùbáland?<sup>1312</sup> Even less controversial positions taken by feminist and African historians should be reconsidered in the face of archival evidence. Such positions include those taken by writers such as Bolanle Awe, Omotayo Olutoye, Niara Sudarkasa, Oyeronke Olabuju and Oyeronke Olademo who argue that although there were gendered differences based on sex, women held prestigious political positions in pre-colonial society.<sup>1313</sup> They argue further that women's position only became eroded with imperialism and its corresponding influences.<sup>1314</sup> This thesis attributes their positions to four key

---

<sup>1312</sup> Oyewunmi, p. xiii.

<sup>1313</sup> Awe and Olutoye, pp. 122-125; Sudarkasa, "The Status of Women", 93; 101; Olabuju, pp. 20-25; Olademo, p. 20-25.

<sup>1314</sup> Some variations of this argument can be found in Awe and Olutoye, 121-30; Sudarkasa, 'The Status of Women', 91-103; Olabuju, p. 10; Olademo, pp.12-13.



factors and attempted to correct these misconceptions using a lifecycle methodology. The first reason the author discovered for this misrepresentation of the past is the tendency of researchers to summarize centuries of changes across Yorùbá towns and conflate the entire pre-colonial experience into a monolithic discourse of balance or parity. One of the strengths of this thesis was its ability to break with this narrative of a single pre-colonial past that often spans centuries, and instead focus its attention solely on the nineteenth century. This methodology allowed for a microanalysis of gender in the region using a finite timeline. As a result, the study revealed previously undiscovered ways of doing gender in Yorùbáland that were specific to the time, which would have been impossible to uncover had the entire pre-colonial era been analysed singularly.

Another reason for the misrepresentation of the gendered past is that scholars often reduce women's heterogeneity and diversity into a singular female experience and as a result, they obscure the complex gerontocratic, and often oligarchic, Yorùbá society of the past. This thesis avoided such homogenising discourses by viewing gender from a lifecycle perspective. Only with such a methodology could the heterogeneity of both men and women be fully realised. The lifecycle approach demonstrated that although they were two biological sexes in the nineteenth century, sex categories intersected with other factors including age, socio-economic divisions, religion, enslavement, fertility and even the length of one's marriage. This created a multiplicity of gendered categories that greatly affected an individual's life experiences and choices. Such gendered categories included young male children, young female children, unmarried Christian/animist female youths, unmarried Christian/animist male youths, married males, married females, new mothers, new fathers, impotent males, infertile females, mothers, fathers, successful adult tradeswomen, successful war men, adult civil chiefs, slave men and slave women to name a few. By highlighting such multiplicity of genders, this study revealed the heterogeneity and complexity of nineteenth-century Yorùbá society while revealing the shortcomings of previous studies that espoused a singular female or male experience.

Scholars of Yorùbá history also misrepresent the past by attempting to gain insight into pre-colonial Yorùbá life and gender relationships using colonial and postcolonial sources. For example, evidence for the presence of the *Erelú* (female *Ògbóni* chief) in nineteenth-century Abẹ̀òkúta were gained from colonial intelligence reports and field research conducted in the late twentieth century.<sup>1315</sup> This thesis attempted to avoid anachronisms by using sources written in the nineteenth century, sources written by eyewitnesses of nineteenth-century Yorùbá culture and sources that used informants that lived during the nineteenth century. When the study could not avoid using some contemporary sources, their findings were checked against Yorùbá oral traditions and primary sources, minimizing the projection of modern categories into the past. Nevertheless, the most significant reason this thesis proposed for the misrepresentation of the Yorùbá pre-colonial gendered past is black, African and most especially Yorùbá, feminists' motives that seek to reclaim African gender history from the appropriating and homogenising discourses of white feminism that highlight patriarchal dominance and female subordination in all societies. These noble attempts to reclaim women's positions however tend to romanticise the African past and distort, rather than represent, women's pre-colonial experience. While the author cannot claim to be free from biases and prejudices, this thesis attempted to reduce such feminist biases through the recognition of such prejudices and a close reading of the primary sources, with the understanding that they too were flawed.

Since the case study for this work was Abẹ̀òkúta, there is a possibility that the gender roles discovered were specific to the town and therefore different from other parts of Yorùbáland. As stated earlier, this could have been due to male envy of women's economic successes.<sup>1316</sup> The gender disequilibrium in Abẹ̀òkúta could also have been a continuation of old *Ẹgbé àáró* and *Ẹgbé olórógun* traditions, or the purposeful separation of men and women's sphere of influence. However, despite some important town peculiarities, it is the contention of this thesis that, based on archival evidence, Abẹ̀òkúta was

---

<sup>1315</sup> Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised*, p. 5.

<sup>1316</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, p. 29

generally representative of the wider roles and experiences of the sexes in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland. Evidence for this claim can be found in many areas of Yorùbá life at the time including the complete absence of female rulers, the existence of only a few legitimate female political positions in the region, the domination of the male *babaláwo* in the religious sphere and women's predominance in nineteenth-century trading activities.

What then does this thesis suggest for future scholarship on gender in pre-colonial Yorùbáland? This study has shown that there is a significant gap in current knowledge of the pre-colonial Yorùbá past. While inaccuracies persist in the purported roles of women in society, there is a dearth of knowledge about other important areas of Yorùbá life including experiences of childhood, youth and old age. Certainly, many aspects of pre-colonial Yorùbá life will remain hidden to the historian's gaze, both due to the very fact that the past can never be relived and also because of the non-literate nature of Yorùbá society. However, the sources that do exist have many important things to say about life as a child, a youth and an elder in the nineteenth century. These must be explored further if we are to gain a working understanding of Yorùbá pre-colonial life. Furthermore, the all-important topic of masculinities, and the conflicts and compromises surrounding relationships amongst men, also requires further examination. Not only is this subject very topical, but only by understanding masculinities in pre-colonial times can we recognise how Yorùbá ideals of masculinities evolved over the years through the colonial and post-colonial years.

Another area that requires urgent attention is historical geography. This thesis has shown that although there were in fact general patterns of gender in Yorùbáland, town peculiarities existed. In this light, more research needs to be carried out into local gender practices of other towns in pre-colonial Yorùbáland. Towns such as Ìbàdàn, Lagos and Oñdó show the most promising potential for these studies because missionaries stationed in these towns gave extensive accounts of life in the area. Most importantly however, this thesis has shown that the discourses on gender in nineteenth-century Yorùbáland, and especially women's roles within that society, are widely

misunderstood. As a result, one can propose also that much of the research about the effects of colonialism on gender relations, gender order and women's position in society based on these mistaken assumptions about gender in pre-colonial Yorùbá society are also mistaken. There is therefore an urgent need to reexamine women's position in colonial and post-colonial Yorùbáland in light of these pre-colonial findings. Only then can we grasp the nature and extent of the changes to women's status in Yorùbá society.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Manuscript sources:

1. The University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, Church Missionary Society Archive Microfilm Collection, Section IV: Africa Missions, Part 4: Nigeria- Yoruba Mission, 1844-1880, Original Papers- Missionaries, CMS/CA2/:

018/019 Rev William Allen (1856-1876)

021 James Barber (1853-1858)

023 Jonathan Buckley (1857)

024 Rev Gottlieb Frederick Buhler (1856-1865)

027 William Clarke (1863-1864)

028 Rev Daniel Coker (1872-1879)

029 Samuel Cole (1870-1878)

030: R. Cross (1867, 1875-1879)

031 Rev Samuel Adjai (Ajayi) Crowther (1844-1857)

032 Samuel Crowther Junior (1851-1862)

035 Samuel W. Doherty (1866-1879)

041 William George (1865, 1868-1879)

043/044 Rev Charles Andrew Gollmer (1845-1861, 1878-1879)

049 Rev David Hinderer (1849-1876, 1880)

056 Rev James Johnson (1874-1880)

058 Samuel Johnson (1870-1879)

059 Rev J. Theophilus Kefer (1853-1855)

060 John F. King (1866-1868, 1870-1872)

061 Rev Thomas King (1850-1862)

062 William Kirkman (1856-1857)

065 Rev Thomas Babington Macaulay (1852-1877)

066 Rev Adolphus Christian Mann (1852-1880)

067 William Marsh (1845-1850)

068 Rev John Andrew Maser (1853-1879)

070 Rev William Moore (1851, 1861-1879)

072 Rev John Christian Muller (1848-1850)  
074 James Okuseinde (1866-1879)  
075 Rev Daniel Olubi (1866-1879)  
076 Rev Samuel Pearce (1854-1879)  
077 Charles Phillips (1852-1858)  
080 Henry Robbin (1856-1874)  
081 Rev Edward Roper (1860-1874)  
083 Rev Joseph Smith (1857-1866)  
085 Rev Henry Townsend (1845-1880)  
087 Rev James White (1850-1879)  
096 Rev Jonathan Lawton Buckley Wood (1860-1880)  
097 Rev Thomas Benjamin Wright (1864-1879)  
098 Charles Nathaniel Young (1872-1879)

2. The University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, Church Missionary Society Microfilm Collection, CMS/M/EL1: *Church Missionary Gleaner*.

3. National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan, University of Ibadan, LFP 1-11: Lijadu Family papers and records of the missions of evangelist, Ondo, Western Nigeria.

4. National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan, University of Ibadan, *Lagos Times* (1880-1883; 1890-1881).

5. National Archives of Nigeria Ibadan, University of Ibadan, *African Times* (1862-1865; 1876-1882).

6. University of Ibadan, Department of History, Kenneth Dike Library, *Ìwé Ìròhin 1859-1867*.

7. Oxford University Boolean Library, African Archives, Microfilm Collection Micr.Afr.473.

## Published Primary Sources

Bowen, Thomas Jefferson, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849-1856*, First published in 1857 (Charleston: Lightning Source, 2011)

Burton, Sir Richard Francis, *Abeokuta and the Camaroons Mountains: An Exploration* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863)

Campbell, Robert, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland: An Account of a Journey among the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa, in 1859-60* (Philadelphia: T. Hamilton, 1861)

Church Missionary Society, *A Dictionary of the Yoruba Language* (London, 1911)

Clapperton, Hugh, and Richard Lander, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: From the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (Carey, Lea and Carey, 1829)

Clarke, William H., *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972)

Crowther, Samuel Adjai, *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (London: Hanover Press, 1852)  
<[http://archive.org/stream/vocabularyofyoru00crow/vocabularyofyoru00crow\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/vocabularyofyoru00crow/vocabularyofyoru00crow_djvu.txt)> [accessed 16 February 2014]

Ellis, A. B., *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc.*, 1894  
<<file:///I:/mythology/africa/13/13.html>> [accessed 11 December 2012]

Fadipe, N. A., *Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1991)

Hinderer, Anna, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country. Memorials of Anna Hinderer* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1877)

- Johnson, Samuel, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, ed. by Obadiah Johnson, First published in 1921, Reissue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- Moore, E. A. Ajisafe, *The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People*, First published in 1916 (Memphis: General books reprint, 2010)
- Moore, E. Olympus, *History of Abeokuta* (London: Richard Clay and Sons, 1916)
- Moore, Kofoworola Aina, 'The Story of Kofoworola Aina Moore of the Yoruba Tribe, Nigeria', in *Ten Africans*, ed. by Margery Perham (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), pp. 323–43
- Southon, A.E, *Ilesha and Beyond! The Story of the Wesley Guild Medical Work in West Africa* (London, 1931)
- Stock, Eugene, *The History of The Church Missionary Society - Its Environment, Its Men, and Its Work* (London, 1899)
- Talbot, Percy Amaury, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Abstract of the 1921 Census* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926)
- , *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Abstract of the 1921 Census: Volume 2: Reprint* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1969)
- , *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria: A Sketch of Their History, Ethnology and Languages, with an Abstract of the 1921 Census: Volume 3: Ethnology*, First Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926)
- , *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria Volume 4: Linguistics and Statistics* Reprint (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1969)



### Published Secondary Sources:

- Abimbola, W., 'The Literature of the Ifa Cult', in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. by S.O Biobaku (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), pp. 41–62
- Ade-Ajayi, J. F., *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969)
- , 'Samuel Ajayi Crowther of Oyo', in *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. by Philip D Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 289–316
- Ade- Ajayi, J. F., and Robert Sydney Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (University Press, 1964)
- Adebayo, A. G., 'Money, Credit, and Banking in Precolonial Africa. The Yoruba Experience', *Anthropos*, 89 (1994), 379–400
- Adeboye, Olufunke, 'Diaries as Cultural and Intellectual Histories', in *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*, ed. by Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2006), pp. 74–94
- , 'The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan, 1830-2000', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16 (2007), 261–78
- Adédíran, Bíódún, 'Research on Pre-Colonial Western Yorùbáland: A Note on Source-Materials', *Anthropos*, 80 (1985), 545–54
- Adeniji-Neill, Dolapo, *The Yoruba Oral Culture as Indigenous Education: Praise Poetry, Folktales and Folklore* (Köln: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009)
- Adeyemo, Remi, 'Women in Rural Areas: A Case Study of Southwestern Nigeria', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 18 (1984), 563–72

- Aduwo, G. O., *The S. M. Otieno Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya* (Nairobi University Press, 1989)
- Afigbo, A. E., 'Fact and Myth in Nigerian Historiography', *Nigerian Magazine*, 1977, 81–98
- Afonja, Simi, 'Changing Modes of Production and the Sexual Division of Labor among the Yoruba', *Signs*, 7 (1981), 299–313
- , 'Changing patterns of gender stratification in West Africa', in *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development*, ed. By Irene Tinker (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 198-209
- Akintoye, S. A., *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893; Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971)
- Akran, Victor S, and Anna Y. Akinga, 'The Need for Greater Participation of Women in Conflict Management in Nigeria', in *Crisis and Conflict Management in Nigeria since 1980* ed. by Mahmood Yakubu et al (Kaduna: Nigerian Defense Academy, 650)
- Alana, O. E., 'Traditional Religion', in *Understanding Yoruba life and culture*, ed. by Nike S. Lawal, Matthew Sadiku and Ade Dopamu (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 65–79
- Alanamu, Temilola, 'Indigenous Medical Practices and the Advent of CMS Medical Evangelism in Nineteenth-Century Yorubaland', *Church History and Religious Culture*, 93 (2013), 5–27
- , "'The Way of Our Fathers": CMS Missionaries and Yoruba Health in the Nineteenth Century', *Lagos Historical Review*, 10 (2010), 1–27
- Allman, Jean, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi, 'Women in African Colonial Histories: An Introduction', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002)

- Apter, Andrew, 'Discourse and Its Disclosures: Yoruba Women and the Sanctity of Abuse', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 68 (1998), 68–97
- Ardener, Shirley, 'Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women: An Introduction', in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1997), 1–30
- Ariès, Philippe, *Centuries of Childhood* (London: Pimlico, 1996)
- Atanda, J. A., 'Islam and Jihad: The Fulani Jihad and the Collapse of the Old Oyo Empire', in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. by Toyin Falola (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 105–17
- , *Political Systems of Nigeria Peoples up to 1900* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, 2006)
- Awe, Bolanle, 'Introduction', in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Bolanle Awe (Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992), v–xi
- , 'Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura (Owner of Gold)', in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Bolanle Awe (Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992), pp. 55–71
- , 'The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System', in *Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View*, ed. by Alice Schlegel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 144–60
- , 'Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example', *The Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), 65–77
- , 'Writing Women into History: The Nigerian Experience', in *Writing Women's History, International Perspectives*, ed. by Karen Offen, Ruth Pierson and Jane Rendell (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 211–20

- Awe, Bolanle, and Omotayo Olutoye, 'Women and Warfare in 19th Century Yorubaland: An Introduction', in *War and Peace in Yorubaland 1793-1893*, ed. by I. A. Akinjogbin (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998), pp. 121–30
- Awolalu, J. Omosade, 'Yoruba Sacrificial Practice', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 5 (1973), pp. 81-93
- Babayemi, S. O., 'Oriki Orile as Sources of Historical Data', in *Oral Tradition and Oral History in Africa and the Diaspora: Theory and Practice*, ed. by E. J. Alagoa (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1990), pp. 110–18
- Badejo, Diedre L., *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power, and Femininity* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1995)
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. M., *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson, New edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982)
- Barber, Karin, 'Documenting Social and Ideological Change through Yoruba Oriki: A Stylistic Analysis', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 10 (1981), 39–52
- , 'How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes Towards the "Orisa"', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 51 (1981), 724–45
- , *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)
- Barkindo, Bawuro M., 'Oral Tradition and Chronology: The Problems of Dating the History of Mandara Sultanate', in *Oral Tradition and Oral History in Africa and the Diaspora: Theory and Practice*, ed. by E. J. Alagoa (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1990), pp. 165–77

- Barnes, Sandra T., 'Gender and the Politics of Support and Protection in Precolonial West Africa', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 810 (1997), 1–18
- , 'Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 20 (1990), 248–68
- Bascom, William, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, First Edition (John Wiley & Sons, 1969)
- , 'Social Status, Wealth and Individual Differences among the Yoruba', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 53 (1951), 490–505
- , 'The Principle of Seniority in the Social Structure of the Yoruba', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 44 (1942), 37–46
- , 'The Relationship of Yoruba Folklore to Divining', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 56 (1943), 127–31
- , *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1984)
- Bassir, Olumbe, 'Marriage Rites among the Aku (Yoruba) of Freetown', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 24 (1954), 251–56
- Bastian, Misty L., 'Dancing Women and Colonial Men: The Nwaobiala of 1925', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 109–29
- Bay, Edna G., 'Introduction', in *States of Violence: Politics, Youth, and Memory in Contemporary Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 1-15
- Bay, Edna G., and Donald L. Donham, (eds.), *States of Violence: Politics, Youth, and Memory in Contemporary Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006)

- Beaglehole, J. C., 'The Case of the Needless Death: Reconstructing the Scene- "The Death of Captain Hook"', in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, ed. by Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 279–302
- Belsky, Jay, Laurence Steinburg, and Patricia Draper, 'Childhood Experience, Interpersonal Development, and Reproductive Strategy: An Evolutionary Theory of Socialization', *Childhood Development*, 62 (1991), 647–70
- Benhabib, Seyla, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Routledge, 1992)
- Bewaji, John A. I., 'Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil [electronic Resource]', *African Studies Quarterly, The Online Journal for African Studies*, 1998 <<http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i1a1.htm>> [accessed 3 August 2014]
- Biobaku, Saburi, 'Abeokuta When We Were Young', *Olumo Echo*, 1 (1980), 9–11
- , *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957)
- , *The First 150 Years of the Egba at Abeokuta: 1830-1980* (Institute of African Studies, 1983)
- , 'Madam Tinubu', in *Eminent Nigerians of the Nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 33–41
- Bluebond-Langner, Myra, and Jill E. Korbin, 'Challenges and Opportunities in the Anthropology of Childhoods: An Introduction to "Children, Childhoods, and Childhood Studies"', *American Anthropologist*, 109 (2007), 241–46

- Bogunmbe, Ifayemi Awopeju, *Iwe Odu Ifa* (Ile Orunmila Communications, 1995)
- Brown, Judith K., 'A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 72 (1970), 1073–78
- Bryce, Jane, 'Conflict and Contradiction in Women's Writing on the Nigerian Civil War', *African Languages and Cultures*, 4 (1991), 29–42
- Buckley, Anthony D., 'The God of Smallpox: Aspects of Yoruba Religious Knowledge', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 55 (1985), 187–200
- , 'The Secret - An Idea in Yorùbá Medical Thought', in *Social Anthropology and Medicine*, ed. by J. B. Loudon (London: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 396–421
- Burrill, Emily S., 'Disputing Wife Abuse', *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 47 (2007), 603–22
- , "'Wives of Circumstance": Gender and Slave Emancipation in Late Nineteenth-Century Senegal', *Slavery & Abolition*, 29 (2008), 49–64
- Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Reprint (New York: Routledge, 2006)
- Byfield, Judith A., *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002)
- , 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1892-1904', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 30 (1996), 32–51
- , 'Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1892-1904', in *'Wicked' women and the*

*reconfiguration of gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 27–46

Bytheway, Sheila M, 'Age', in *Researching Social Gerontology: Concepts, Methods, and Issues*, ed. by Sheila M. Peace (London; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications in association with the British Society of Gerontology, 1990), pp. 9–18

C. K., Meek, *Law And Authority In A Nigerian Tribe, A Study In Indirect Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937)

Caldwell, John C., Pat Caldwell, and I. O. Orubuloye, 'The Family and Sexual Networking in Sub-Saharan Africa: Historical Regional Differences and Present-Day Implications', *Population Studies*, 46 (1992), 385–410

Callaway, Helen, 'Spatial Domains and Women's Mobility in Yorubaland, Nigeria', in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1997), pp. 165–82

Chanock, Martin, *Law, Custom, and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Charmes, Jacques and Saskia Wieringa, 'Measuring Women's Empowerment'. *Journal of Human Development* 4 (2003): 419-435

Chukwu, Gloria, "Igbo Women and Political Participation in Nigeria, 1800s-2005." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42.1 (2009), 81-103

Cleaver, Frances, 'Men and Masculinities: New Directions in Gender and Development', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 1–27

Cohen, Lawrence, 'Old Age: Cultural and Critical Perspectives', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994), 137–58



- Cole, Thomas R., and Claudia Edwards, 'The 19th Century', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 211–62
- Comaroff, John, and Jean Comaroff, 'Reflections on Youth: From the Past to the Postcolony', in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), pp. 19–30
- Comstock, Gary Lynn, 'The Yoruba and Religious Change', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 10 (1979), 1–12
- Connell, Robert (now Reawyn) W., and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society*, 19 (2005), 829–59
- Coplan, David B., 'You Have Left Me Wandering about: Basotho Women and the Culture of Mobility', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 188–211
- Cornwall, Andrea A., 'To Be a Man Is More than a Day's Work: Shifting Ideals of Masculinity in Ado-Odo, Southwestern Nigeria', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2003), 230–48
- Corsaro, William A., *The Sociology of Childhood* (Los Angeles: Sage/Pine Forge Press, 2011)
- Courlander, Harold, *Tales of Yoruba God and Heroes* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1973)
- Cowgill, Donald O., and Lowell D. Holmes, *Aging and Modernization*. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972)
- Crenshaw, Kimberley, *On Intersectionality: The Essential Writings of Kimberley Crenshaw* (New York: New Press, 2014)

- Crumbley, Deidre Helen, 'Patriarchies, Prophets, and Procreation: Sources of Gender Practices in Three African Churches', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 73 (2003), 584–605
- Curtin, Philip D., 'Joseph Wright of the Egba', in *Africa remembered: narratives by West Africans from the era of the slave trade*, ed. by Philip D Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 317–33
- Davidson, Kate, 'Sociological Perspectives on Aging', in *An Introduction to Gerontology*, ed. by Ian Stuart-Hamilton (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 226–50
- DeBoeck, Filip, 'On Being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the Occult and the Street', in *Reinventing Order in the Congo: How People Repond [i.e. respond] to State Failure in Kinshasa*, ed. by Theodore Trefon (London: Zed, 2004), pp. 155–73
- , 'Youth, Death and the Urban Imagination. A Case from Kinshasa' <<http://www.ascleiden.nl/Pdf/youthconfdeboeck.pdf>> [accessed 16 February 2014]
- De Beauvoir, Simone, *Old Age* (London: Deutsch, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972)
- , *The Second Sex* Translated by E.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1973)
- Delano, Isaac O, *The Soul of Nigeria* (London: T. Werner Laurie LTD, 1937)
- DeMause, Lloyd, *The History of Childhood*, New York, 1974
- Dennett, R. E., *Nigerian Studies; Or, the Religious and Political System of the Yoruba* (London: Macmillian, 1910)
- Denzer, LaRay, *The Iyalode in Ibadan Politics and Society, c.1850-1997* (Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers, 1998)

- , 'Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27 (1994), 1–39
- Denzin, Norman K., *Childhood Socialisation. Second Edition* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009)
- Diouf, Mamadou, 'Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space', *African Studies Review*, 46 (2003), 1-12
- Dolan, Chris, 'Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States- a Case Study of Northern Uganda', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 57–83
- Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005)
- Downs, Laura Lee, *Writing Gender History* (London: Hodder Education, 2004)
- Drewal, Henry, and Margaret Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990)
- Drewal, Henry, 'Art and the Perception of Women in Yorùbá Culture (L'art et Le Concept de Féminité Dans La Culture Yoruba)', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 17 (1977), 545–67
- Dudink, Stefan, and Karen Hagemann, 'Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Democratic Revolutions, 1750-1850', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 3–22
- Du Pisani, Jacobus Adriaan, 'Hegemonic Masculinity in Afrikaner Nationalist Mobilisation, 1934-48', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 157–76

- Durham, Deborah, 'Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to Parts 1 and 2', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73 (2000), 113–20
- Durkheim, Emile, *The Rules of Sociological Methods* (The Free Press, 1982)
- Egan, R. Danielle, and Gail L. Hawkes, 'Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21 (2008), 355–67
- Ejituwu, N. C, 'Stereotypes in Oral Tradition: The Case of Obolo (Andoni)', in *Oral Tradition and Oral History in Africa and the Diaspora: Theory and Practice*, ed. by E. J. Alagoa (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1990), pp. 156–64
- Enloe, Cynthia H, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E, and Eva Gillies, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976)
- Fafunwa, A. Babs, *History of Education in Nigeria* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd)
- Falola, Toyin, 'From Hospitality to Hostility: Ibadan and Strangers, 1830-1904', *The Journal of African History*, 26 (1985), 51–68
- , 'Introduction', in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. By Toyin Falola, (Wisconsin, 1991), pp. 1-4
- , 'The Yorùbá Wars of the Nineteenth Century', in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. by Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991), pp. 136–45
- Faseke, Modupeolu, 'The Role of Women in Traditional Yoruba Society: A Review', in *Culture and society in Yorubaland*, ed. by Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran (New York: Rex Charles Publication in association with Connell Publications, 1998), pp. 149–56

- Fass, Paula S., 'Children and Globalization', *Journal of Social History*, 36 (2003), 963–77
- Fisher, Kate, 'She was quite satisfied with the arrangements I made': Gender and Birth Control in Britain 1920-1950, *Past and Present*, 169 (2000), 161-193
- Fisher, Kate and Simon Szreter, "They prefer withdrawal": The Choice of Birth Control in Britain, 1918-1950, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34(2003), 263-291
- Fitzgerald, Mary Ann, Henry J. Drewal, and Moyo Okediji, 'Transformation through Cloth: An Egungun Costume of the Yoruba', *African Arts*, 28 (1995), 55–57
- Flax, Jane, 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory', *Signs*, 12 (1987), 621–43
- Flint, Karen Elizabeth, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008)
- Forrest, David, 'Lenin, the Pinguero, and Cuban Imaginings of Maleness in Times of Scarcity', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 84–111
- Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge: The Will to Knowledge v. 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley, New Ed (London: Penguin, 1998)
- Fourchard, Laurent, 'Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria, 1920-60', *The Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 115–37
- Fulbrook, Mary, *Historical Theory: Ways of Imagining the Past*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2003)

- Garland, David, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)
- Gengenbach, Heidi, “‘What My Heart Wanted’: Gendered Stories of Early Colonial Encounters in Southern Mozambique”, in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 19–47
- Geschiere, Peter, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013)
- Gibson, Diane, ‘Broken down by Age and Gender: “The Problem of Old Women” Redefined’, *Gender and Society*, 10 (1996), 433–48
- Gluckman, Max, ed., *Ideas and Procedures in African Customary Law: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Eighth International African Seminar at the Haile Sellassie I University, Addis Ababa, January 1966* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969)
- Goody, Jack, ‘Death and the Interpretation of Culture: A Bibliographic Overview’, *American Quarterly*, 26 (1974), 448
- , *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)
- , ‘Death and Social Control Among the Lodagaa’, *Man*, 59 (1959), 134
- Goody, Jack, and Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973)
- Gordon, Natasha, M., “‘Tonguing the Body’: Placing Female Circumcision within African Feminist Discourse’, *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 25 (1997), 24-27
- Haar, Gerrieter, *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007)

- Hafkin, Nancy J., and Edna G Bay, 'Introduction', in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, ed. by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 1–18
- Hanretta, Sean, *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- Hastings, Adrian, *The Church in Africa: 1450- 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- Hazan, Haim, *Constructions and Deconstructions of Old Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Heap, Simon, "Their Days Are Spent in Gambling and Loafing, Pimping for Prostitutes, and Picking Pockets": Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island, 1920s-1960s', *Journal of Family History*, 35 (2010), 48–70
- Herbst, Jeffrey Ira, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000)
- Hoch-Smith, Judith, 'Radical Yoruba Female Sexuality: The Witch and the Prostitute', in *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, ed. by Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring (New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1978), 245–68
- Hodgson, Dorothy L., "My Daughter...belongs to the Government Now": Marriage, Maasai, and the Tanzanian State', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), pp. 149–67
- Honwana, Alcinda Manuel, and Filip de Boeck, 'Children and Youth in Africa: Agency, Identity, Place', in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. by Alcinda Honwana and Filip de Boeck (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), pp. 1–18

- Hooyman, Nancy R., and H. Asuman Kiyak, *Social Gerontology* (Boston, Mass.; London: Pearson, 2011)
- Horne, John, 'Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850-1950', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 22–41
- Horton, Robin, 'African Conversion', *Africa*, 41 (1971), 85–108
- Howard, Rhoda, 'Human Rights and Personal Law: Women in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 12 (1982), 45–52
- Howlett, Peter, Morgan, Mary S, *How Well Do Facts Travel?: The Dissemination of Reliable Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- Hyam, Ronald, *Empire and Sexuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991)
- Idowu, Bolaji E., *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, second edition (New York: African Tree Press, 1995)
- Ilésanmí, Thomas Mákanjúṣá, 'The Traditional Theologians and the Practice of Òrìṣà Religion in Yorùbáland', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21 (1991), 216–26
- Iliffe, John, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Iyam, David, "'Full' Men and 'Powerful' Women: The Reconstruction of Gender Status among the Biase of Southeastern Nigeria", *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 30 (1996), 387–408
- James, Allison, 'Giving Voice to Children's Voices: Practices and Problems, Pitfalls and Potentials', *American Anthropologist*, 109 (2007), 261–72



- James, Allison, and Adrian L. James, 'Childhood: Toward a Theory of Continuity and Change', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 575 (2001), 25–37
- James, Allison, and Chris Jenks, 'Public Perceptions of Childhood Criminality', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 47 (1996), 315–31
- James, Allison, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998)
- James, Allison, and Alan Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1997)
- Jayawardena, Kumari, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, (London: Routledge, 1993)
- Johnson, Cheryl, 'Grass Roots Organizing: Women in Anticolonial Activity in Southwestern Nigeria', *African Studies Review*, 25 (1982), 137–57
- Jyrkilä, Faina, 'Society and Adjustment to Old Age', *Acta Sociologica*, 5 (1961), 87–90
- Kabeer, Naila, 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment'. *Development and Change* 30 (1999): 435-64
- Kila, A. A., *Owe. Yoruba in Proverbs* (London: Akada Press, 2003)
- Konner, Melvin, *The Evolution of Childhood: Relationships, Emotion, Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010)
- Koster-Oyekan, Winny, 'Infertility among Yoruba Women: Perceptions on Causes, Treatments and Consequences', *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de la Santé Reproductive*, 3 (1999), 13–26

- La Fontaine, Jean Sybil, *The Devil's Children: From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations That Affect Children* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009)
- Lancy, David F., *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- Last, Murray, 'Children and the Experience of Violence: Contrasting Cultures of Punishment in Northern Nigeria', *Africa (Edinburgh University Press)*, 70 (2000), 359
- Law, Robin, 'Contemporary Written Sources', in *Sources of Yoruba history*, Edited by S. O Biobaku (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), pp. 9–24
- , 'How Truly Traditional Is Our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yoruba Oral Tradition', *History in Africa*, 11 (1984), 195–221
- , 'The Atlantic Slave Trade in Yorùbá Historiography', in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. by Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991), pp. 123–34
- , 'Traditional History', in *Sources of Yoruba history*, ed. by S. O. (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), pp. 25–40
- Lawuyi, Olatunde B., 'Studies on Traditional Religion', in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. by Toyin Falola (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 43–49
- , 'The Obatala Factor in Yoruba History', *History in Africa*, 19 (1992), 369–75
- Lawuyi, Olatunde B., and J. K. Olupona, 'Metaphoric Associations and the Conception of Death: Analysis of a Yoruba World View', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 18 (1988), 2–14

- Lee, Rebekah, and Megan Vaughan, 'Death and Dying in the History of Africa since 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 341–59
- Lee, Rebekah, 'Death in Slow Motion: Funerals, Ritual Practice and Road Danger in South Africa', *African Studies*, 71 (2012), 195–211
- Lesthaeghe, Ron, 'The "Second Demographic Transition": A Conceptual Map for the Understanding of Late Modern Demographic Developments in Fertility and Family Formation', *Historical Social Research*, 36(2011), 179-218
- Letsholo, Rose, 'Patriarchy and Aspects of the Ikalanga Language', in *Language, Gender and Politics: A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*, ed. by Akin Odeunmi, Arua Arua and Sailal Arimi (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009), pp. 151–62
- LeVine Robert Alan et al, , *Child Care and Culture: Lessons from Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- LeVine, Robert Alan, 'Ethnographic Studies of Childhood: A Historical Overview', *American Anthropologist*, 109 (2007)
- Levtzion, Nehemia, and Randall Lee Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000)
- Lindsay, Lisa A., 'Money, Marriage, and Masculinity on the Colonial Nigerian Railway', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2003), 138–55
- , "'No Need... to Think of Home"? Masculinity and Domestic Life on the Nigerian Railway, C. 1940-61', *The Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), 439–66
- Lloyd, Peter C., 'Divorce among the Yoruba', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 70 (1968), 67–81

- , 'Family Property among the Yoruba', *Journal of African Law*, 3 (1959), 105–15
- , 'Osifekunde of Ijebu', in *Africa Remembered; Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. by Phillip D. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 217–88
- , *The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1971)
- , 'The Yoruba Lineage', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 25 (1955), 235–51
- Lord, Jack, 'The History of Childhood in Colonial Ghana' (unpublished thesis submitted to SOAS University, School of Oriental and African Studies), 2013
- Lovett, Margot, "'She Thinks She Is a Man": Marriage and (de)constructing Gender Identity in Colonial Buha, Western Tanzania, 1943-1960', in *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. by Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2000), 47–66
- Mabogunje, Akin L, *Yoruba Towns: Based on a Lecture Entitled 'Problems of a Pre-Industrial Urbanization in West Africa' given before the Philosophical Society on 12 April 1961* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1962)
- Makinde, Olu, 'Historical Foundations of Counseling in Africa', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 47 (1978), 303
- Makinde, Taiwo, 'Motherhood as a Source of Empowerment of Women in Yoruba Culture', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 13 (2004), 164–74
- Mamdani, Mahmood, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (London: James Currey, 1996)

- Mama, Amina, 'Is It Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom', *African Studies Review*, 50 (2013), 1–26
- Mann, Kristin, 'Marriage Choices among the Educated African Elite in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14 (1981), 201–28
- , 'The Dangers of Dependence: Christian Marriage among Elite Women in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915', *The Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), 37–56
- , 'The Rise of Taiwo Olowo: Law, Accumulation and Mobility in Early Colonial Lagos', in *Law in Colonial Africa*, ed. by Kristin Mann and Richard Roberts (Portsmouth, NH; London: Heinemann Educational Books; James Currey, 1991), pp. 85–107
- , 'Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos', *Signs*, 16 (1991), 682–706
- Matory, J. Lorand, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994)
- Mba, Nina Emma, 'Heroines of the Women's War', in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Bolanle Awe (Ibadan: Sankore/Bookcraft, 1992), 73–88
- , *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1982)
- McKittrick, Meredith, 'Forsaking Their Fathers? Colonialism, Christianity and Coming of Age in Ovambo, Northern Namibia', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2003), 33–51

- , 'Faithful Daughter, Murdering Mother: Transgression and Social Control in Colonial Namibia', *The Journal of African History*, 40 (1999), 265–83
- McIntosh, Marjorie Keniston, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009)
- McNay, Lois, *Foucault and Feminism*, 5th Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007)
- Mianda, Gertrude, 'Colonialism, Education, and Gender Relations in the Belgian Congo: The Evolve Case', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 144–63
- Miescher, Stephan F., and Lisa A. Lindsay, 'Introduction: Men and Masculinities in Modern African History', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, ed. by Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay (New Hamshire: Heinemann, 2003), 1–29
- Minh-ha, Trinh T., 'Difference: "A Special Third World Women Issue"', *Feminist Review*, 1987, 5–22
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 1988, 61–88
- Moore, Henrietta L, and Todd Sanders, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft, and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (London: Routledge, 2001)
- Mosedale, Sarah, 'Accessing Women's Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework'. *Journal of International Development* 17 (2005): 243-257
- Morgan, Kevin ed., *Gerontology: Responding to an Ageing Society* (London: J. Kingsley Publishers in Association with the British Society of Gerontology, 1992)

- Morton-Williams, Peter, 'An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Oyo Yoruba', *Africa*, 34 (2012), 243–61
- Musisi, Nakanyike, 'The Politics of Perception or Perception Politics? Colonial and Missionary Representation of Baganda Women, 1900-1945', in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 95–115
- Nhlekišana, Rosaleen O. B., 'Gender and Proverbs in Setswana Society', in *Language, Gender and Politics: A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*, ed. by Akin Odeunmi, Arua Arua and Sailal Arimi (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009), pp. 135–50
- Nolte, Insa, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed": Yoruba Women in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria', *Africa* 78(2008), 84-106
- Ntunde, Flora O., and Leonard I. Ugwu, 'The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution', in *Crisis and Conflict Management in Nigeria since 1980* ed. by Mahmood Yakubu et al (Kaduna: Nigerian Defense Academy, 2005), 636–49
- Oduntan, Oluwatoyin B., "'Iwe Irohin" and the Representation of the Universal in Nineteenth-Century Egbaland', *History in Africa*, 32 (2005), 295–305
- Ogot, Bethwell A, 'The Construction of Luo Identity and History', in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History (African Systems of Thought)*, ed. by Luise White, Stephan Miescher and David Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 31–52
- Ogumefu, M. I., *Yoruba Legends* (South Dakota: NuVision Publications LLC, 2007)
- Oguntomisin, G. O., and Toyin Falola, 'Power and Wealth in Kurunmi's Ijaiye, 1831-1862', *African Studies*, 1986, 75–85

- Ojo, Afolabi G., 'Traditional Yoruba Architecture', *African Arts*, 1 (1968), 14–72
- , *Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis*, First Edition (London: University of London Press, 1966)
- Ojo, Olatunji, 'Slavery and Human Sacrifice in Yorubaland: Ondo, c 1870-94', *The Journal of African History*, 46 (2005), 379–404
- , 'Slavery, Marriage and Gender Relations in Eastern Yorubaland, 1875-1920', in *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture, and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterland (Blacks in the Diaspora)*, ed. by Judith A Byfield, LaRay Denzer and Anthea Morrison (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 144–76
- , 'The Organization of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Yorubaland, ca.1777 to ca.1856', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41 (2008), 77-100
- Ojigbo, Anthony Okion, 'Conflict Resolution in the Traditional Yoruba Political System (La Résolution Des Conflits Dans Le Système Politique Traditionnel Des Yoruba)', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 13 (1973), 275–92
- Olademo, Oyeronke, *Gender and Yoruba Oral Traditions* (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009)
- Olajubu, Oyeronke, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003)
- Oleru, U. G., 'Prostitution in Lagos: A Sociomedical Study', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (1979-), 34 (1980), 312–15
- Oloruntoba-Oju, Taiwo, 'Language and Gender Performatives in the Nigerian Context: Citation and de-Citation in Yoruba and "Nollywood" Films', in *Language, Gender and Politics: A Festschrift for Yisa Kehinde Yusuf*,



- ed. by Akin Odebunmi, Arua Arua and Sailal Arimi (Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, 2009), 213–36
- Olupona, Jacob K., 'The Study of Yoruba Religious Tradition in Historical Perspective', *Numen*, 40 (1993), 240–73
- Omonubi-McDonnell, Morolake, *Gender Inequality in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2003)
- Onadipe, Kola, *Footprints on the Niger* (National Press, 1980)
- Onuzulike, Uchenna, 'Children Accused of Practicing Witchcraft in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria: A Qualitative Analysis of Online News Media', *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 4 (2013), 447–66
- Opeloye, M.O, 'Evolution of Religious Culture among the Yoruba', in *Culture and Society in Yorubaland*, ed. by Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran (New York: Rex Charles Publication in association with Connell Publications, 1998), pp. 139–48
- Oswell, David, *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Oyetade, Akinwunmi, 'The Enemy in the Belief System', in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, ed. by Nike S. Lawal, Matthew Sadiku and Ade Dopamu (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 81–95
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)
- Pallinder-Law, Agneta, 'Aborted Modernization in West Africa? The Case of Abeokuta', *The Journal of African History*, 15 (1974), 65-82
- Parker, Mellissa, 'Rethinking Female Circumcision', *Africa* 65 (1995), 506-523

- Pearce, Tola Olu, 'She Will Not Be Listened to in Public: Perceptions among the Yoruba of Infertility and Childlessness in Women', *Reproductive Health Matters*, 7 (1999), 69–79
- Pearson, Willie, and Lewellyn Hendrix, 'Divorce and the Status of Women', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 41 (1979), 375–85
- Peel, J. D. Y., 'Gender in Yoruba Religious Change', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32 (2002), 136–66
- , 'Long-Dead Sociologists and African History', *The Journal of African History*, 32 (1991), 501–6
- , *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003)
- , 'The Pastor and the "Babalawo": The Interaction of Religions in Nineteenth-Century Yorubaland', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 60 (1990), 338–69
- Pemberton, John, 'Eshu-Elegba: The Yoruba Trickster God', *African Arts*, 9 (1975), 20–92
- Phillips, Earl, 'The Egba at Abeokuta: Acculturation and Political Change, 1830-1870', *The Journal of African History*, 10 (1969), 117-131
- Ranger, Terence O., 'Scotland Yard in the Bush: Medicine Murders, Child Witches and the Construction of the Occult: A Literature Review', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, 77 (2007), 272–83
- Rasmussen, Susan J., 'Between Several Worlds: Images of Youth and Age in Tuareg Popular Performances', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73 (2000), 133–44
- Rattray, R. S., *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927)

- Renne, Elisha P, *Cloth That Does Not Die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bùnú Social Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995)
- , 'Childhood Memories and Contemporary Parenting in Ekiti, Nigeria', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 75 (2005), 63–82
- , *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town* (University of Michigan Press, 2003)
- Richters, John E., and Everett Waters, 'Attachment and Socialization: The Positive Side of Social Influence', in *Social Influences and Socialization in Infancy*, ed. by M. Lewis and S. Feinman (New York: Plenum Press, 1991), pp. 185–213
- Roebuck, Janet, 'When Does "Old Age Begin?: The Evolution of the English Definition', *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1979), 416–28
- Robertson, Claire, 'Ga Women and Socioeconomic Change in Accra, Ghana', in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, ed. by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 111–34
- Robertson, Priscilla, 'Home as a Nest: Middle Class Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Europe', in *The History of Childhood: The Evolution of Parent-Child Relationships as a Factor in History*, ed. by Lloyd de Mause (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), pp. 407–31
- Robinson, David, *Muslim Societies in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Ruggles, Steven 'Reconsidering the Northwest European Family System: Living Arrangements of the Aged in Comparative Historical Perspective', *Population and Development Review*, 35(2009), 249-273
- Sagner, Andreas, "'The Abandoned Mother": Ageing, Old Age and Missionaries in Early and Mid Nineteenth-Century South-East Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 42 (2001), 173–98

- Sawicki, Jana, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991)
- Schwab, William B., 'Kinship and Lineage among the Yoruba', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 25 (1955), 352–74
- Schlegel, Alice, 'Towards a Theory of Sexual Stratification', in *Sexual Stratification: A cross cultural view*, ed. by Alice Schlegel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 1–40
- Sciama, Lidia, 'The Problem of Privacy in Mediterranean Anthropology', in *Women and Space: Ground rules and social maps*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1997), 87–111
- Scott, Joan W., 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), 1053–75
- Semley, Lorelle D., *Mother Is Gold, Father Is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yoruba Town*, First Edition (Indiana University Press, 2010)
- Shadle, Brett L., 'Bridewealth and Female Consent: Marriage Disputes in African Courts, Gusiiland, Kenya', *The Journal of African History*, 44 (2003), 241–62
- , 'Rape in the Courts of Gusiiland, Kenya, 1940s-1960s', *African Studies Review*, 51 (2008), 27–50
- Shammas, Carol 'The Housing Stock of the Early United States: Refinement Meets Migration', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 64(2007), 549-590
- Simmons, Leo W, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (New York: Archon Books, 1970)
- Simpson, George Eaton, *Yoruba Religion and Medicine in Ibadan* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980)

- Skar, Sarah Lund, 'Andean Women and the Concept of Space/Time', in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1997), 31–45
- Smith, Robert Sydney, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988)
- Smock, Audrey Chapman, 'The Impact of Modernisation on Women's Position in the Family in Ghana', in *Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View*, ed. by Alice Schlegel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 192–214
- Soetan, Funmi, 'The Economic Empowerment of Nigerian Women: Some Determinants of Access to Resources', *African Economic History*, 1999, 117–35
- Spitzer, Steven, 'Punishment and Social Organization: A Study of Durkheim's Theory of Penal Evolution', *Law & Society Review*, 9 (1975), 613–37
- Spring, Anita, and Judith Hoch-Smith, 'Introduction', in *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, ed. by Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring (New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1978), 1–23
- Stearns, Peter N, *Childhood in World History* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011)
- Stephens, Sharon, 'Children and the Politics of Culture in "Late Capitalism"', in *Children and the politics of culture*, ed. by Sharon Stephens (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 3–48
- Stoler, Ann Laura, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2008)
- , *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2002)
- Strobel, Margaret, 'African Women', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 109–31

- Stuart-Hamilton, Ian, 'Introduction', in *An Introduction to Gerontology*, ed. by Ian Stuart-Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1–20
- Sudarkasa, Niara, "The Status of Women" in Indigenous African Societies', *Feminist Studies*, 12 (1986), 91–103
- , *The Strength of Our Mothers: African and African American Women and Families - Essays and Speeches* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1996)
- , *Where Women Work: A Study of Yoruba Women in the Marketplace and in the Home* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973)
- Thane, Pat, 'The 20th Century', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 263–302
- , 'The Age of Old Age', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 9–30
- Thomas, Lynn M., 'Imperial Concerns and 'Women's Affairs': State Efforts to Regulate Clitoridectomy and Eradicate Abortion in Meru, Kenya, c. 1910-1950', *The Journal of African History*, 39(1998), 121-145.
- Thomas, Lynn M, and Jennifer Cole, 'Thinking through Love in Africa', in *Love in Africa* ed. by Lynn M. Thomas and Jennifer Cole (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–30
- Tiryakian, Edward A., 'Durkheim's Two Laws of Penal Evolution', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 3 (1964), 261–66
- Torres, Sandra, 'Cross-Cultural Differences in Aging', in *An Introduction to Gerontology*, ed. by Ian Stuart-Hamilton (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 340–62
- Tosh, John, 'Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by

- Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 41–60
- , *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire* (Harlow, England; New York: Pearson Longman, 2005)
- Traphagan, John W., 'Contesting the Transition to Old Age in Japan', *Ethnology*, 37 (1998), 333–50
- Troyansky, David G., 'The 18th Century', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. by Pat Thane (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), pp. 175–210
- Turshen, Meredith, and Clotilde Twagiramariya, *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa* (London; New York: Zed Books, 1998)
- Tutuola, Amos, *Yoruba Folktales* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2000)
- Uprichard, Emma, 'Children as "Being and Becomings": Children, Childhood and Temporality', *Children & Society*, 22 (2008), 303–13
- Vansina, Jan, 'For Oral Tradition (But Not against Braudel)', *History in Africa*, 5 (1978), 351
- , 'Historians, Are Archeologists Your Siblings?', *History in Africa*, 22 (1995), 369
- , *Oral Tradition as History* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985)
- Vaughan, Megan, 'Reported Speech and Other Types of Testimony', in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History (African Systems of Thought)*, ed. by Luise White, Stephan Miescher and David Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 53–77

- Vaughan, Megan, 'Which Family?: Problems in the Reconstruction of the History of the Family as an Economic and Cultural Unit', *The Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), 275–83
- Vijayan, Prem, 'Nationalism, Masculinity and the Developmental State: Exploring Hindutva Masculinities', in *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development*, ed. by Frances Cleaver (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 28–56
- Vincent, John A., *Old Age* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003)
- Waller, Richard, 'Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 77–92
- Ware, Helen, 'Polygyny: Women's Views in a Transitional Society, Nigeria 1975', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 41 (1979), 185–95
- Watkins, Susan C., and Angela D. Danzi, Women's Gossip and Social Change: Childbirth and Fertility Control among Italian and Jewish Women in the United States, 1920-1940, *Gender and Society*, 9 (1995), 469-490
- Watson, Ruth, '*Civil Disorder Is the Disease of Ibadan*': *Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City: Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Colonial City* (London: James Currey, 2003)
- 'Murder and the Political Body in Early Colonial Ibadan', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70 (2000), 25-48
- White, Luise, 'Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History', *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), 11–22
- White, Luise, Stephan Miescher, and David Cohen, 'Introduction: Voices, Words and African History', in *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History (African Systems of Thought)*, ed. by Luise



- White, Stephan Miescher and David Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 1–27
- White, Richard, *Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- Wilkin, David, 'Dependency', in *Researching Social Gerontology: Concepts, Methods, and Issues*, ed. by Sheila M. Peace (London; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications in association with the British Society of Gerontology, 1990), pp. 19–31
- Willcox, William B., 'The Strange Nature of Pure Joy: The Historian's Pleasure Principle- 'The Psychiatrist, the Historian and General Clinton', in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence*, ed. by Robin W. Winks (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 497–512
- Yemitan, Oladipo, *Madame Tinubu: Merchant and King-Maker* (Ibadan: University Press, 1987)
- Yushau, Sodiq, 'The Practise of Islam', in *Understanding Yoruba life and culture*, ed. by Nike S. Lawal, Matthew Sadiku and Ade Dopamu (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 137–50
- Yusuf, Yisa Kehinde, 'Sexism, English and Yoruba', *Linguistik online*, 11, 7–23
- Yuval-Davis, Nira, 'Beyond difference: women and coalition politics', in *Making Connections: Women's Studies, Women's Movements, Women's Lives*, ed. By M. Kennedy, C. Lubelska and V. Walsh (London: Taylor and Francis, 1993), 3-10
- Zayas, Luis H., and Fabiana Solari, 'Early Childhood Socialization in Hispanic Families: Context, Culture, and Practice Implications', *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 25 (1994), 200–206