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## A Critical Examination of Feminism Themes in Selected Yorùbá Written Poetry Oyèwálé, Ayòdélé Solomon

### *Abstract*

*In patriarchal societies, like Yorùbá, there is tendency to erroneously think that women are generally marginalised and oppressed by their male counterparts. Little wonder then that the socio-cultural conflict and struggle for “equality” engendered by modern movement called feminism is raging in Yorùbá modern society, just like other climes. There is no gainsaying that all-inclusive beneficial communal life (between men and women) among the Yorùbá has been grossly misrepresented. This paper examines the Yorùbá belief system and ideology on gender-equitable, gender sensitivity, gender balance and the rightful positions of men and women in the society as being portrayed by some renowned Yorùbá written poets like: Ọdúnjọ (1961), Olúránkinṣé (1987), Abîmbólá (2001), Adébòwálé (2003), Èlẹ̀bùìbọ̀n (1999, 2007), Adéjùmò (2007), and Ṣòtẹ̀tán (2012). The controversial theme of feminism and erroneous impression that Yorùbá women are being suppressed by their male counterparts are critically analysed in this paper, using some purposively selected written Yorùbá poetry as our data. The data were subjected to contextual and historical analyses using the womanism theory expounded by Mary Wollstonecraft and Alice Walker. The theory identifies and criticises anything related to sexism and racism in feminist community as it affects African women. The finding of this research paper shows that the poets tackle the contemporary unhealthy gender rivalry from feminists movement that*

*has crept into the Yorùbá society. With logical assertions and pragmatic analyses that are evidence-based, the poets lay emphasis on the legacy of the existing peaceful co-existence within the Yorùbá communal setting as worthy of emulation by the modern Yorùbá society. They strongly condemn individualistic lifestyle and advocate that the status quo of mutual understanding and enabling environment for complimentary roles between men and women without rancour remains. This study also debunks the claim that feminism, as applicable to Yorùbá context, is Western ideology imbibed by Yorùbá women.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchal Society, Feminism, Gender-equitable, Womanism, Western Ideology.

### **Résumé**

*Dans les sociétés patriarcales, comme celles des Yoruba, on a tendance à penser à tort que les femmes sont fréquemment marginalisées et assujetties par leurs semblables masculins. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que le conflit socioculturel et la lutte pour « l'égalité » engendrés par le mouvement moderne appelé le féminisme provoque la colère dans la société moderne yoruba et sous d'autres cieux. Il est indéniable que la vie communautaire bénéfique à tous (entre les hommes et les femmes) parmi les Yoruba a été brutalement déformée. Cette communication examine le système de croyances et d'idéologie des Yoruba en matière de l'égalité des sexes, de sensibilité aux questions de genre, d'équilibre entre les sexes et de position légitime des hommes et des femmes dans la société, tels qu'ils sont décrits par certains poètes yoruba renommés : Ọdúnjọ (1961), Olúránkinṣẹ́ (1987), Abímbólá (2001), Adébòwálé (2003), Èlẹ̀bùìbọ̀n (1999, 2007), Adéjùmò (2007), and Ẓòtán (2012). Le thème controversé du féminisme et l'impression inexacte que les femmes Yoruba sont réprimées par leurs homologues masculins sont analysés de manière critique en utilisant certains poèmes yoruba sélectionnés à dessein comme données. Les données ont été soumises*

*à des analyses contextuelles et historiques en utilisant la théorie du féminisme de Mary Wollstonecraft et Alice Walker. Cette théorie identifie et critique tout ce qui est lié au sexisme et au racisme dans la communauté féministe et qui affecte les femmes africaines. Les résultats montrent que les poètes s'attaquent à la rivalité malsaine contemporaine du mouvement féministe qui s'est infiltré dans la société yoruba. Avec des affirmations logiques et des analyses pragmatiques fondées sur des preuves, les poètes mettent l'accent sur l'héritage de la coexistence pacifique existante au sein du cadre communautaire des Yoruba comme étant digne d'être imité par la société moderne yoruba. Ils condamnent fermement le mode de vie individualiste et préconisent de maintenir le statu quo de la compréhension mutuelle et d'un environnement propice à la complémentarité des rôles entre les hommes et les femmes sans rancœur. Cette étude réfute également l'affirmation selon laquelle le féminisme, tel qu'il s'applique au contexte yoruba, est une idéologie occidentale adoptée par les femmes yoruba.*

**Mots-clés:** *Société Patriarcale, Féminisme, Egalité des sexes, Womanism, Idéologie occidentale*

## **Introduction**

Contrary to some scholars thinking, the critical issue of feminism in African context and the factors that may trigger it is not a strange phenomenon in Yorùbá society. It should be stated clearly that different reasons with peculiarities that may engender feminism vary from one society to another. Essentially, the existing works been reviewed in this paper are scholarly works on feminism in the African (Yorùbá) cultural milieu to have an idea of what have been done and to ascertain the critical gap we want to fill in this paper. Scholars like: Adébòwálé & Adéjùmò (1999c), Adébòwálé (1999d, 2006a & 2006b), Ogbomo (2005), Akintúndé (2005), Adéjùmò (2011, 2016,) Ajùwòṅ (2016), Olújìnmí (2016) Şàngótóyè (2016) & Sheba (2017) have worked

on feminism from different perspectives. Despite this copious scholarly works, there is no analysis on feminism theme through a comparative study of selected Yorùbá written poetry to the best of our knowledge.

From time immemorial, Yorùbá people have adequate provisions in place for empowering their women for self-reliance or self-expression as being portrayed in Yorùbá literature. Consequently, there is virtually no much ado about women agitating for equality with men as applicable in the modern time. Traditionally, the Yorùbá men have the culture of intimate relationship and peaceful co-existence with their women counterparts. This indisputable cultural ideology is a crucial fact that gives women a sense of belonging as major stakeholders in critical decision-making and societal development till date. Therefore, an appraisal of feminism theme, at comparative level, in the Yorùbá written poetry would definitely enhance the societal perception on the subject-matter. The analysis is done in line with the existing legacy in the ancient Yorùbá setting and the modern trends and how the poets tackle this topical issues.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Womanism theory first emerged as early as 1794 in publications of Mary Wollstonecraft, "The Changing Woman", "Ain't I a Woman" etc.<sup>1</sup> Besides, Alice Walker introduced the "womanist" into feminist parlance in her 1983 book "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose."<sup>2</sup> Africana womanism" It is a term coined in the late 1980s by Clenora Hudson-Weems intended as an ideology applicable to all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and Afrocentrism and focuses on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women.<sup>3</sup> It distinguishes itself from feminism, or Alice Walker's womanism. Africana womanism pays more attention to and gives more focus on the realities and the injustices in society with regard to race.<sup>4</sup> Such realities include the diverse struggles and

experiences, and needs of Africana women. The Africana Womanism Society lists 18 characteristics of The Africana womanist, including self-naming, self-defining, family-centred, flexible and desiring positive male companionship.<sup>5</sup> Clenora Hudson-Weems<sup>6</sup> Professor of English, University of Missouri, author of *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, coined the concept Africana Womanism in the late 1980s. Hudson-Weems argues that "Africana Womanism is not an addendum to feminism, Black feminism.

According to Patricia Hill Collins "Although some Africana women may support the very ideas on which feminism rests, however, many of them reject the term "feminism" because of what they perceive as its association with white women's cause. They see feminism as operating exclusively within the terms white and American and perceive its opposite as being Black and American.<sup>7</sup> According to Hudson-Weems, "there is a general consensus in the Africana community that the feminist movement, by and large, is the White woman's movement for two reasons. First, the Africana woman does not see the man as her primary enemy as does the White feminist, who is carrying out an age-old battle with her White male counterpart for subjugating her as his property. Africana men have never had the same institutionalized power to oppress Africana women as White men have had to oppress White women.<sup>8</sup> Womanist means having or expressing a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race and class. One whose beliefs or actions are informed by womanist ideals.

The second part of the term Womanism, recalls Sojourner Truth's powerful impromptu speech 'Ain't I a Woman?', one in which she battles with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana Woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood. The practice of cultural womanism is not limited to Africana women. Italian, Japanese, Hispanic, East Indian, Arab, Jewish women, etc., all

utilize this approach to decision-making, and know the value of maintaining indigenous cultural autonomy. The concept Africana Womanism that has been shaped by the work of women such as Clenora Hudson-Weems, Ifi Amadiume, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, and others. Africana womanism brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct, and create a cultural integrity that espouses the ancient principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness, order, and so forth.

### 3.0 Analysis of Feminism in Yorùbá Selected Written Poetry

#### 3.1 Modern Yorùbá Feminists Contention Over Family

##### Unit Headship

The new trends of agitation by some Yorùbá feminists striving for equality with men represents a movement that is promoting a voice concerning perceived “oppression” against the womenfolk. Yorùbá tradition places the sole responsibility of catering for the family on a man as the head of family, among other social obligations of an extended family and in-laws. The Yorùbá poets examine the struggle by some women who are motivated by self-acclaimed women liberation cause to “transform” the society from what they perceive to be an “old order”. For this reason, Abîmbólá (2001:39) in *Ş'ókò L'olórí Ab'áya* laments that:

Pàtàkì ọ̀rọ̀ mi t'ọ̀jọ̀ òní  
 Lórí àwọn abo ìwòyí ni  
 Ọ̀rọ̀ àlùfàńsá sǐ kọ̀ rára  
 È jẹ́ ká wá gbọ̀ làbàrè  
 Ìran oşó l'ọ̀kọ̀ àjẹ́  
 Abíkú ò sǐ l'ọ̀kọ̀ méjì lẹ̀yìn awo  
 Agbàdo ò lẹ̀kọ̀ méjì lẹ̀yìn ọ̀wàrà òjò  
 Awọn baba nílá wa nílẹ̀ yǐ  
 Ni wọn ti n'ş'olórí àwọn aya wọn  
 Ó wá jónilójú  
 P'ábo fẹ́ẹ̀ d'ọ̀kọ̀ nílée wa

Èyí ha lè ẹ́e ẹ́e nílẹ̀ yí bí?

My important message of today  
Is about the present-day women  
It is not an obscenity at all  
Let us all listen to the information  
The wizards are the husbands to the witches  
Abíkú has no other husband except the witch doctor  
Maize has no other husband apart from torrential rain  
Our forefathers in this land  
Have been the heads of their wives  
It now surprises us  
That women want to become the husbands in our  
society

Is this possible in our community?

Abímbólá compares the ancient Yorùbá communal life when couples married for companionship and procreation with trending issue of feminists' competition over family headship. There is Yorùbá tradition of peaceful co-existence between husbands and wives till date. The poet's emphasis is on the Yorùbá cultural ideology on man overseeing the family affairs contrary to the oppression feminists usually lay emphasis on. The three symbolic metaphors: Oşó/Àjé (wizards/witches), Abíkú/Awo (Àbíkú cult/witch doctor), Agbàdo/Ọwàrà ọ̀jò (Maize/torrential rain) follow a logical symbiotic relationship through which the poet affirms his submission about how reciprocal responsibilities and relationship are naturally intertwined in marriage. The Yorùbá philosophy on what could foster marital union could be understood in the context of these symbiotic relations of nature. Rhetorically, Abimbólá concludes on how Yorùbá feminists intention of stepping into men's shoes could produced great frustration and unrealistic goal. There are certainly mutual obligations

that must be clearly understood when a man and a woman are married in African context, as being affirmed by the poet. Through deeds of example, the dichotomy between husband's and wife's responsibilities are well defined and expressed in familial relationship. Similarly, in Ayé ní dayé Obìnrin, Olúránkínṣé (1987:33) asserts that feminists efforts to be self-independent as inexplicable or impracticable endeavour. He affirms that:

Orí lílẹ̀ ní ń b́a inú lílẹ̀ wáyé;  
 Ọkàn òkúta ní ń b́i Tálákùúta lómọ.  
 Ibi tí olùrànlọ́wọ́ bá ti di olùṣe,  
 Tí “gbà ràn mí!” tí di ẹlẹ̀rù  
 Mo ńńílú tí a-ǵi-ni-fẹ̀ tí di ọkọ ẹni  
 Olú méǵi kǵi jẹ ńbẹ̀,

Stubbornness engenders bad temper;  
 Being stone-hearted is responsible for abject poverty.  
 A place where an helpmeet becomes the focal person  
 Where a load carrier becomes the owner of a load  
 A town where a concubine becomes the legal husband  
 Two kings cannot reign there,

Olúránkínṣé uses metaphor to validates his view that there can never be peace, progress or marital fulfilment anywhere husband and wife are at loggerhead over headship. In African (Yorùbá) settings, the privileges, responsibilities or roles of both husband and wife rarely overlaps. Therefore, feminists attempt to reconstruct this clear-cut distinction, as nature ordains the age-long obligations of the man and woman underscores the feminist's agitation that is trending. Olúránkínṣé's keen observation depicts and brings to fore the contemporary socio-cultural conflict between the Yorùbá cultural norms and Western ideology. According to the poet, feminism in the Yorùbá society, poses threefold threats: women tendency of showing audacity of self-reliance to men, being unwavering to reaching



characteristic compromise of African couples and self-assertion of gender-bias authority. The poet cautions Yorùbá women on the far-reaching effects of the feminists agitation. Similarly, Adébòwálé, a Yorùbá female poet, does not mince words on the trending issue of feminism in the modern Yorùbá society. In her poem titled Ohun Èlégé, Adébòwálé (2003:18) logically draws a distinctive line between the status, freedom and responsibilities of both man and woman in Yorùbá culture. She affirms that:

Ọkọ ladé orí aya  
 Akọ ladé orí abo  
 Ọkọ ni baálé lóòdè  
 Ọkọ l'Elédeùà dá lápàṣe  
 Aya l'Elédùà ṣe lágbàṣe  
 B'Olú bá dá ọ lágbàṣe  
 Yára fayò rẹ ara rẹ sílẹ  
 Kó o tẹríba fáṣe Ọba Nlá

Ibi a pè lórí ẹ má fibè tẹlẹ  
 Èwò ni, apàṣe ò le dagbàṣe  
 Èwò ni, agbàṣe ò le dapàṣe

Husband is the crown of a wife  
 Male is the crown of female  
 Husband is the family head  
 God created husband to be instruction-giver  
 God made the wife to be the instruction-receiver  
 If God created you to be an instruction-receiver  
 Gladly humble yourself  
 Humble yourself to God Almighty order

A designated head should not be a foot  
 It is taboo, a leader cannot become a subordinate

It is taboo, a subordinate cannot become a leader

Marriage, as a mutual institution, is exquisitely established to be an enduring union between matured man and woman. In the Yorùbá culture, man is regarded as “baálé lóòdè,” (the head of the family), as rightly stated by the poet. Therefore, Adébòwálé's opinion corroborates Biblical injunction which is similar to a Yorùbá proverb that “lbi a pè lóri a kǐ ì fibè tẹ̀lẹ̀,” meaning that, “a distinguished leader does not deserve an attitude of insubordination.” To the poet, feminists' unhealthy rivalry for equality with men is tantamount to working against the Yorùbá marital ethics. Much as the poet does not subscribe to women to be subjugated or passive partners with men, she validates her standpoint that women cannot be self-sufficient by themselves. It is Western or feminists' ideology to contend equality or supremacy with men. The verb “dá” for man and “şe” in line the 4th and 5th lines of the excerpt respectively have Biblical allusion for women as companions for men. Hence, she affirms that modern feminists should embrace reaching a compromise on ascribed status, bi-sexual roles or responsibilities within the framework of Yorùbá societal norms.

As applicable in some African society, Adébòwálé understands the peculiarity of Yorùbá culture which acknowledges a responsible husband, not only as a breadwinner but head of family as well. However, the logicity of a saying that, “behind a successful man, there is always a woman” can hardly be eloquently disputed by any philosophical stance. Yorùbá believe that wife is a strong pillar (òpò pàtàkì) or partner-in-progress (alátìlẹ̀yìn) to her husband. Evidently, an husband could be far motivated to achieve greater things or daunting task with seemingly illogical piece of advice or words of encouragement from his wife. “While women were clearly seen as being unequal to men, they are fully recognised as the fairer sex” (Bóláǐ,1984:38). Olúránkínşé (1987:33-34), in Ayé ní dayé Obìnrin,

cautions feminists on the effects of seeking equality with men. He counsels with admonition that:

Ìgbà obìnrin náà  
Tí àwà n' l'ò l'ò w'ò l'ò w'ò  
Tí ohun gbogbo fi gba òdòòdì y'í  
A óò máa wo'ìhà  
Tí àtubòtán r'è y'òò k'ò sí wa

This reign of women  
That we are witnessing  
That is causing things to be lopsided  
We shall watch the effect  
Of the consequences on us

The poet's major concern is on the paradigm shift among some womenfolk that gives birth to African feminists' scepticism about men's fairness and the resultant different attitudinal dispositions. Olúránkínṣé, foresees that feminists' campaign for liberty would eventually boomerang. He anticipates that the modern-day feminists' movement would have far-reaching negative effects of disillusionment on the women and ripple effects on the society at large. But, rather than being prognostic, the poet's silence is embedded with thoughtful meaning for society to continually observe an eventuality, if the phenomenon persists. The rise of feminism in Nigeria is counter-productive considering a pocket of violent behaviours, familial issues, high rates of divorce among other catastrophes being witnessed virtually every day. Feminism engenders illusions and presenting deceptive certitudes and hopes of having elusive "liberty", especially among some classy modern-day wives, choosy single-mothers and sophisticated young ladies. The poet opines that the Yorùbá feminists are pursuing white women ideology in Yorùbá cultural milieu without having capacity to troubleshoot the impending consequences. However, Adéḃòwálé (2003:18) in *Ohun Èlégé*, strikes a balance with

caution to both men and women in their inter/intra-personal relationship. She rhetorically questions that:

Ọgá, emi lo ní f'èèkù idà tìẹ ẹ?  
Èèkù idà àìgbọdò má lò  
Amó, àşẹ a bá fifé pa níí mórí ẹni yá  
Aşẹ a bá sǐ fayò gbà níí múnú ẹni dùn

Master, how are you using your authority?  
The inexpedient authority that must be used

But, order given with love engenders excitement  
An order received with joy gladdens the heart

Considering marginalisation from gender-based perspective may be synonymous to sexism. Adébòwálé's counsel for both husband and wife reveals an important truth that has often been neglected. She rightly observes that husband's dispositions towards his wife could be proportionate to the wife's positive or negative responses to her husband. Consequently, the need for a husband to be very cautious in using the traditional influence or constitutional rights as a lawful husband. The poet awakens spouse on the necessity of having mutual understanding on critical issues. This brings out three vital matters of cultural principles: first, husband is recognised as “head” of a family unit. Second, with the position, husband is vested with certain abilities and responsibilities. Third, using his authority is not one-dimensional, it is subject to carrying his wife and by extension the entire family (as stakeholders) along. A Yorùbá adage that, “Ohun tó dé bá ojú, ló dé bá imú,” meaning that what affects the eyes, also affects the nose is a metaphorical way of saying that a whole family members get affected, resulting from a member's problem.

Thus, the principle of “injury to one, is an injury to all”, applies to every

united nuclear or polygamous family. Therefore, speaking for women, Adébòwálé counsels on the pragmatic approach couples should employ for supporting and strengthening each other, psychologically handle sensitive issues in a social context or different situations. The poet stresses on spouse reciprocating each other with corresponding gestures of affection on the premise of “give-and-take.” She tackles indispensable problem of “alágbára-má-mèrò” (egoism tendency) on the part of some men and also appeal against some women nature of insubordination and headstrong provocation to their husbands being pointed out by Olúránkínṣé. This is in line with a Yorùbá axiom “pa mi n kú, ṣoṛí bẹnbe ṣòkò”, meaning that “a dare-devil wife habitually confronts her husband to near-death fight.”

#### Assessment of Feminists Contention over Economic and Political Matters

Economic and political power in every clime is key to the development and well-being of everybody in a community, especially on gender-basis. This is more reason why the issue of being marginalised should not be allowed to occur. A Yorùbá proverb that says “lṛéjẹ nì fọ ẹgbẹ” (cheating breaks up an association) underscores their worldview on cheating or oppression in any form, irrespective of age, sex or status that is involved. In reality, there is a keen competition that women are apparently facing in terms of breaking even with their male counterparts in Nigerian political system rat race. The modern survival of the fittest in the nation's economic sector is actually posing great challenges to women as well. The political and economic themes and how it affect women run through some selected poems that we examined. Ọdúnjọ (1961: 9), in *Àwọn ibi àṣà ìkóbìnrinjọ*, (the side-effect of polygamy) presents an example of women economic empowerment as typical of the Yorùbá culture thus:

Sàlámótù wà nìyèwù.  
Sàfú mbe ni 'kùlé,

Ẹ̀bùn sǐ tún ními l'ójà  
T'ó nṣòwò pẹ̀rẹ̀u'  
Sé owó tó o ní ni wón nfẹ̀ gobogbo.

Sàlámótù is in her room.  
Sàfú is at the backyard,  
Ẹ̀bùn is in the market with gaiety  
Engaging in a profitable business  
They are all after your money

A crucial issue in this excerpt is how the women, despite being married to a polygamist, are usually gainfully engaged in one profitable venture or the other. Such enterprise could either be on the husband's even-handedness or by the personal initiative of each wife. The poet observes that woman empowerment to a Yorùbá man is a reflection of respect to womenfolk and a preventive measure from being an indolent or burden to the husband in question. By tradition and for liberty's sake, a Yorùbá man would not make his spouse a full house wife except on religious basis or for health-related challenges. This may be due to the unpredictable reality of life according to a saying that “A lè sọ pé yó pẹ̀, kó yá, a sǐ le sọ pé yó yá; kó pẹ̀.” (life may be shorter or longer than expected for a family head).

Though, polygamy is acceptable in Yorùbá tradition, Ọ̀dúnjọ, in strong terms, totally frowns at it. “How does a man with six wives arrange love-making session?...Culture definitely plays a role in many experiences of women....” (Fálọ́lá, 2018:525-526). Rarely do perfect accord exists among the harem of wives in a polygamy family due to inherent female hostility or act of vengeance over sensitive or trivial issues.

The question may be whether the poet perceives polygamy as an act of deliberate oppression and subjugation of women's' right by men? “A polygamous home was and still is a hot-bed of mistrust, envy and

intrigues with many negative potentials. However, the issue of mother-in-law problem do not usually arise.” (Bóláǹjǐ,1984:38). Given the peculiar situations by which some women married in the ancient time and even now, the poet may not be absolutely right in his sweeping affirmation that all women are after men's money for marrying them. To this end, we can affirm, just like the theory of womanism, that peculiarity of African woman's challenges differs greatly from the women in the developed nations. As such, Yorùbá women should always apply native intelligence in tackling marital issues such that mutual understanding would permeate the home for stability. Another female Yorùbá poet, Adéjùmò (2007:30), in her divergent view asserts that married women should face the current economic reality by being more proactive on being gainfully employed. She counsels in Alábòdòd that:

Ọ̀pò obǐnrin ní bẹ̀ nílẹ̀ yǐ  
Tí ị̀sẹ̀ òun ỳà ti wò lẹ̀wù

Bómọ̀ béèrè kọ̀bọ̀  
Wọ̀n a ní ó dúró de dádí  
Bí rú wọ̀n rí pátá tó wuyí  
Wọ̀n a ní ẹ̀ kiri wá tí baba bá dé  
Owó irú  
Owó iyò  
O digbà baba bá wọ̀lé kí wón tó rí l san  
Àìlójútí nìyí àbì òlà?

There are many women in this township  
That are wallowing in abject poverty

If their children ask for kobo  
They will tell them to wait for daddy  
If such women see a beautiful pants

She would tell the seller to come when her husband  
returns  
Money for locust beans  
Money for salt  
They cannot pay until daddy returns  
Isn't this a shame?

In accordance with the Yorùbá custom, it is the obligation of the husband to cater for the needs of his immediate family. This is according to a Yorùbá proverb that “A ti gbéyàwó ò téjọ, owó ọbẹ ló sòro,” meaning that “for a man to be married is not a problem but ability to cater for subsequent responsibilities is fundamental.” So, Yorùbá people would not consent to a young lady marrying a man without future ambition or legitimate source of income to prevent preventable open-confrontations between husband and wife. Substantial number of women, by nature, are very influential, creative, dynamic and multi-tasking creatures. These type of women being figuratively portrayed in the Yorùbá prose narratives showcase women dexterity and activeness in control of economic power. Thus, the poet charges some dependent women not to be laid-back but independent beings that should be able to cater for some minor expenses. In the present economic reality in Nigeria, there are some wives that are almost at the same level in sharing family responsibilities with their husbands, if not playing the breadwinner's roles. “As culture is a dynamic and socio-economic conditions change over time, so do gender patterns change with them. Thus, in sudden critical situations like war or famine, there could be radical changes in the designated roles for both genders.” (See Akintúndé, 2005:346).

So, considerable Yorùbá women as applicable to women globally, are industrious and not financially dependent in reference to a disparaging way of describing full house wives without employment in police or army barracks as (alábòódó-aya-baráàkì) in the time past.



Consequently, to cater for emergencies, Adéjùmò counsels that wife's affection and loyalty to her husband does not preclude her from engaging in profit-oriented ventures for the purpose of having self-esteem in the community. Such pragmatic efforts gives women ample opportunity to be economically established or independent through petty trading or self-employed venture(s) as it could be seen at Oyingbò, Láfénwá, Ojé, Igbònà, Owódé, Akèsán and other Yorùbá markets. It is adequate to add that economic power truly belongs to the Yorùbá women right from the ancient time. "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 seems to have none." (Johnson, 1921:149). Furthermore, Ojo (2014:177-178) affirms in her submission that:

While many women depicted in most Shakespeare's Writings were prone to frailty, fiendish and filial ingratitude, in the Yorùbá life and culture, Ojo, Elizabeth D. indicates that Yorùbá women from generation to generation are known to be strong, highly intelligent, lively, expressive, elegant, forbearing, determined, devoted to family, loyal, versatile and very enterprising. These women never ceased from work. They are hard working individuals driven by the desire to utilize their abilities and strength to the fullest.

Ojo's affirmation above is a clear indication that, at no point in time, has Yorùbá women been relegated to the background by men in their pursuit of economic empowerment. One point that deserves consideration is for modern Yorùbá women to devise suitable options for tackling peculiar problems, either real or imaginary grievances, with their men counterparts. The radical change is to imbibe indigenous methodology as embedded in womanism principles contrary to what obtains in foreign ideology of feminism. Women, on their free volition, have been playing leading role in virtually all human endeavours in the Yorùbá society till date. Láwore (2004:8) explains

the diverse traditional ways by which the Yorùbá women do make permissible money. Olurode (1999:175) also corroborates the existing culture of women emancipation and self-empowerment among the Yorùbá. He asserts that:

A European woman merely apes the European man. The emancipatory capacity is thereby weak whereas the potential for emancipation is bright for African women...Yoruba women could be said to be free socially, politically and economically. She has her own circle of friends which needs not necessarily coincide with her husband's. She had been known to play active role in community politics. There had been women warriors in the Yoruba society of old. There were women kings in the past and as the *Iyalode* (political head of women)...

The scholars have established that African women are reasonable on the essence of preventing unpleasant marital consequences based on equitable convictions about men's responsiveness. This does not rule out the fact that there could be marital challenges, which are often resolved amicably (with or without communal intervention); provided it does not involve domestic violence which permits divorce if the life of either of the spouse is at risk. Therefore, ability to draw the line between unswerving commitments to familial experience as opposed to trending fanaticism of fighting against "inequality" is worthy of emulation in the modern-time. Observably, the dynamic nature of women and meticulous home-training, especially for female child, usually prepares African child to face intimidating or inevitable challenges of life. Observably, few indolent wives or career women could always hide under the guise of feminists' movement in crying foul play against men generally. Olúránkinṣé (1987:33), in *Ayé n' dayé Obìnrin*, also attests to how some ancient women attained the vantage position of *Ọbaship* in affirming that Yorùbá women are not politically marginalised. In retrospect, he recalls that:

Ob̀nrin ti j`oba rı́,  
W`on wı́ fún mi gb`o;  
Ob̀nrin ti gbé odidi orılè-èdè ka àyà rı́,  
Ojú àwa ı̀şın yı́ l`o kúkú şe.  
Kò sí ohun titun m`o;  
Q`orò àbòşı́ kò sí nı́bè rárá.

A woman was made a king before,  
I heard about it;  
A woman had ruled a whole community before,  
It happened in my early life.  
There is nothing new anymore;  
It is not a matter of prejudice

The poet confirms with historical facts that there was no sex discrimination in respect of choosing people for the prestigious position of Q`obaship in the ancient Yorùbá land. Therefore, the word “Q`oba”, should not be taken in a gender exclusive sense. Ajíkòbı́ (1999:43-46) lists six prominent female traditional rulers as Q`owá Obòkun of ı̀jèşàland, three female traditional rulers as Q`oba of Lagos and Lúwo Gbàgidà, first woman that was crowned as Q`òni of Ifè; to mention but a few. Till date, the post of regency is exclusively reserved for the women among the Yorùbá people. Although some options may seem reasonable than others, however, a regent in the Yorùbá cultural milieu commands as much respect and recognition as substantial Q`oba, during a tentative search for a prospective king. Historically, there was no institutionalised power in Yorùbá culture which precludes women from vital decision-making within each community till date (See Oyèwálé, 2019:29). This open window gives room for reaching a compromise between the men and women due to the consciousness of gender-balance society.

The Influence of Western Matrimonial Ideology on the Modern

## Yorùbá Women

The modern Yorùbá society is gradually jettisoning the traditional values on marriage and imbibing the Western ideology. The Yorùbá benchmark of marital ethics before, during and after marriage consummation are gradually getting distorted or compromised. With impunity, some contemporary Yorùbá youths are choosing what could be termed as “alternative approach,” to marriage contrary to societal norms without parental approvals. On this trending issue, Èlèbùbò (1999: 23) in *Ayé Oníkorókó Jabele*, laments that:

Nílùú Amẹ́ríkà wọn kǐ ̀şòjò ara wọn  
Ojú àánú tí fọ́, ojú kan ̀kà ló kù  
Ègbààgbèje obìnrin rọ̀gbòdò  
Tí wọn n bẹ́ l'Amẹ́ríkà  
Wọn ̀ relé ọkọ  
Bèè ni wọn ̀ yé lóyún  
Bèè ni wọn ̀ yé ọmọ bí wẹ̀wẹ̀  
Mo wá n bí wọn wí pé torí kín ni?  
Bóbìnrin bá lóyún tó bímọ  
Kò wí pé kóun ọkọ rẹ́ ó jẹ́ tọkọ taya  
Alájogbé ni wọn  
Wọn kǐ ̀ şe lọkọ láya bí àwa  
Ènìmọ̀ rẹ́!!  
Ojú mi rǐ nńkan lábúlé ẹni funfun

The people in America do not care about one another  
They don't empathise but are hard-heartedness  
Uncountable robust women  
That are in America  
They do not get married  
Yet, they are getting pregnant  
They are continually giving birth to children  
I asked for what could be responsible?  
If a woman got pregnant and gave birth

That does not make her wife to the man that  
impregnated her  
They are co-habitants  
They are not husband and wife as applicable in our  
culture  
This is a strange phenomenon  
I saw a wonder in the white man's society

A reflection on the Yorùbá cultural norms prompts the poet's important embedded question: What does marriage entails? He compares the Yorùbá orientation about model marriage with what obtains in the contemporary feministic world. Èlèbùìbọ̀n laments what he observes as prevalent and shocking marital culture in America in comparison with the Yorùbá society. This reveals the divergence of cultural belief and centrality of societal ideology on what is ideal or acceptable. Indeed, Yorùbá marriage institution is measured by the quality of what each partner is willing to sacrifice to begin and nurture a matrimony. Ideally, Yorùbá women do not relate with their husbands like strangers or co-tenants as applicable to some couples being referred to by the poet. Culturally, it is an aberration among Yorùbá for both husband and wife to live together like co-tenants or separately together like squatters, as observed by Èlèbùìbọ̀n. Shameful of all, is for a woman to return to her parents after marriage in what is known as (*dálémoşú*).<sup>1</sup>

The new trend by which uncountable American women are getting pregnant without being legally married is very strange and worrisome to the poet. "Prior to the 1960s, unmarried cohabitation- the status of couples who are sexual partners, not married to each other, and sharing a household- was rare in America. In 1960, there were around 439,000 Americans cohabitating. Today, that number has increased sixteen-fold to around 7.6 million. Most younger Americans now spend some time living together outside of marriage, and unmarried cohabitation commonly precedes marriage. It is estimated that about

a quarter of unmarried women age 25 to 39 are currently living with a partner and an additional quarter have lived with a partner at some time in the past. More than 60 percent of first marriages are now preceded by living together, compared to virtually none 50 years ago.”

2

Among permissible acts that are reflections of feminism ideology in American are: being sex partners with no strings attached, living as cohabitants for sometime before marriage, marriage with same sex or contract marriages among other phenomena that are weird in African context. These type of marriages, engineered by feminists and their cohorts are alien to Yorùbá people. What Èlèbùìbọ̀n laments about the American is confirmed by Abím̀bòlá (2001:40-41) in *Şókọ l'olórí Abáyá?* as a realism in the modern Yorùbá society. He details his comparison thus:

Aşà tiwa ni o gba bẹ̀ẹ̀  
Nítorí àşà ilẹ̀ yí  
Kò jọ tiwọ̀n níbòmíràn  
Aní kò jọ t'awọ̀n Èèbó  
.  
.  
.  
Lájọ wọ̀n abo l'olórí  
Gege bi abo se j'olórí wọ̀n  
“DONT BE SILLY”  
L'aya ní wí fókọ nílée funfun  
T'ẹ̀bí t'òrẹ̀ ọkọ ò tó pọ̀n  
“ME AND MY HUBBY” ìyẹn l'àşà.

Our culture does not permit such  
This cultural milieu  
Is dissimilar to that of other climes  
It doesn't resemble that of the whites

In their assembly, women are the leaders

Just like a woman is their ruler

“DONT BE SILLY”

Is wife's remarks to her husband in white's society

Husband's family members and friends are not  
consider worthwhile

“ME AND MY HUBBY” is the trending phenomenon

The poet compares the Western marital culture with Yorùbá customs, women fundamental rights and other related familial concepts. In most American and European countries, women are being institutionalised. Therefore, more often than not, women constitutional rights constraint legally married men from engaging their women in verbal or legal confrontation which could be tantamount to women abuse, harassment, sexual assault, rape or marginalisation. Understandably, the self-restriction of American men being affirmed by the poet is due to stringent conditions of alimony or outright forfeiture of property which favour women and children; especially in case of divorce in court of law. An applicable question that could be asked is: How did most men in the Western world treat their wives in the time past before the latter got emancipated through “revolutionary war” of feminism? Suffice to say that African women are not, in any way, suppressed by the men but for the influence of mutual compromise embedded in their norms and values as explained earlier. On the issue of marriage in African context, Fálólá (2001:119) clarifies that:

Marriage is one of the most important social customs...Through it, kinship is formed, the lineage is maintained and expanded, and new household units are created... A marriage unites not just the couples but the lineage and clans.

The customary marriage does not imply that the African men, in their own ways, do not treat their wives with dignity, love, care and attention among other adoring or romantic indulgence every woman naturally

craves for. For example, “Igbo have a pattern of spousal names in which the husband and/or wife bestows upon each other a special name....These spousal names go a long way to aid the couples in maintaining good marital relationships and in sustenance of the marriage.” (See Anyachebelu, 2015:220). As applicable to Western world, a typical African man may not be using Western romantic coinages, spousal or modern pet names like: “Honey”, “Darling”, “Sweetheart”, “Sunshine”, “Bea,” “Sweetie”, “Hubby” or “Baby.” This does not portray most African men as not being sensitive, loving, caring, and realistic in making their women perpetual or obsessive dreamers of lovable spouse that every woman wishes to be.

Logically, what it takes to be a self-assertive husband or wife with good self-esteem and charisma, especially in the modern society, could not be learnt in a formal school setting, socio-media or through feminism. But, its home-training principles coupled with communal interpersonal relation and self-re-training known as (ìtúnra-ẹni-kọ) is embedded in the Yorùbá customs on how a couple could have a reciprocated conjugal bliss. Little wonder that Sóètán (2012:22) in Ẹ̀yàwó ní ẹ̀ àbí aya? portrays a relevant modern development that:

Ẹ̀ni tí ò dúró gbẹ̀kọ̀ òbí  
 Kò le dúró gbélé ọ̀kọ̀  
 Irú wọn laya t̄t̄i ya kiri  
 Irúu wọn ládélébò, t̄t̄i n̄ r̄inr̄in àrè

Afigbà t̄t̄i Ẹ̀se ilé  
 T̄i wón jáde n̄ilé ọ̀kọ̀  
 Kí lọ̀kọ̀ ó ẹ̀ se ni wón báá ká  
 Mi ò gbàwòsì  
 Ni wón t̄t̄iràn mọ̀  
 Ẹ̀yàwó lón̄t̄i, aya lóla  
 Ọ̀mọ̀ m̄erin, bàbá m̄erin  
 Gbogbo ayé ló di baba ọ̀mọ̀ fún wọn



A woman who fails to internalise parental home-  
training  
Cannot be stable in her husband's house  
Such woman always hop from one husband to  
another  
Such is a married woman that roams about aimlessly

Your habitual bad character eventually  
Forces you out of matrimonial home  
Your disposition is “what would my husband do?”  
I won't take nonsense  
Is your flimsy excuse  
Bride today, a re-married wife tomorrow  
Four children for four different fathers  
Every man is a father to your children

It is erroneous impression to assume that the quality of being a husband or wife-material is a natural feature that every man or woman possesses and perpetuates. On the essence of being exposed to certain experiences of life before marriage, Arẹ̀ògún, 2014:5 sounds a note of warning that:

Marriage is an institution that people enter with high expectations and low preparation...There are principles that guide the practices of marriage, and engaging in practices without principles produces mediocrity. Many people enter into the practices of marriage without the principles to guide them, and so face mediocrity and a lot of problems.

In line with the Yorùbá belief, mystifying (ọjà òkùnkùn) as marriage may be, one may rightly infer from Arẹ̀ògún's assertion that, more often than not; most marital problems are self-induced (àfọwọfà).

Consequently, Sóetàń, opines that imbibing the core values of Yorùbá home-training from parents can induce a woman to have understanding of cultural values, self-discovery, tolerance among other virtues that are key for woman to have established and secured marital relationship. Truly, gullibility about the trending phenomenon of feminism is preventing some modern Yorùbá women from differentiating between the existing gender autonomy for women and fruitless pursuit of white women feminism agenda. Therefore, feminists' agitation, especially in the Yorùbá communal system would be synonymous to a breakdown of social order in the Yorùbá communal system. As rightly pointed out in 5th and 6th lines of the excerpt, the problem of marital instability; especially in the contemporary Yorùbá society is an ethical issue that is beyond signing the legal marriage document or religious affiliation that joins a couple in the first place. Abìmbólá (2001:41), in *Şókọ L'olórí Ab'áya?* concludes that the importance of women in the every society cannot be overemphasised. He concludes that:

Kii'şe póbìnrin ò pàtàkì rará  
 Awọn ló şá wà lẹyìn àwọn baba wa  
 Tí wọn fi ní lè şe 'hun tó dárá  
 Itójú àşìkò lówó aya ló wà  
 Ajá tó l'èni lẹyìn níi pòbọ  
 Bì ò sí 'gi lẹyìn ogbà  
 Wíwó níi wó ó dá mi lójú  
 Enyàn şìi lẹyìn olè  
 Qkùnrin ò le dá dúró  
 Láíşì àtìlẹyìn obìnrin rere

It is not that women are not important  
 They are the supporting strength behind our  
 forefathers  
 That made them to achieve great accomplishments

A wife has wherewithal for timely care  
A dog with hunter's support kills a monkey  
A fence without supporting trees  
Will collapse that I'm sure of  
A crowd behind a thief  
A man cannot stand alone  
Without the assistance of a valuable woman

Without mincing words, Abímbólá eulogises the prominent roles of responsible women with good character in men's lives generally. Through the usage of figurative language, flora and fauna imageries, he asserts that women are gifted with natural attributes that could boost their husbands' success in life. Reasonable perception on what a woman stands for differs greatly from one culture to another. There is no gainsaying that Yorùbá men have high regard for women. Symbolically or proverbially among the Yorùbá, women are synonymous with treasure, strength, power, influence, grandeur, succour, continual existence, "death", among others. In retrospect, Abímbólá refers to Yorùbá women as a strong unifying force behind the progress of the most forefathers and by extension, Yorùbá community at large. The poet rationally concludes that women are indispensable given their diverse roles that are vital to men's achievements. Abímbólá's affirmation portrays women as outstanding and, sometimes, unsung heroines behind virtually every man's accomplishments. It could be inferred from the poet's conclusion that an exemplary woman has capacity building for the admiration of their appreciative husbands. With a view to striking a balance, Èlébùbọ̀n (2007:77), in *Iya Ni Dágbé*, counsels women that:

Ti obìnrin ò bá ti ni ọkùnrin  
Kò ní adé lórí  
Ohun tó yẹ obìnrin tó lọgbọ̀n lórí ni  
Kó máa gbélé ọkọ

If a woman doesn't have a husband  
She doesn't have a “crown” on her head  
What is befitting to a wise woman  
Is to be living in her husband's house

The Yorùbá concept of, “*adé orí*”, in marriage context, which symbolically means a responsible husband is entrenched in different terminologies in virtually all the poems we used as excerpts. This underscores the importance of man in a woman's life and vice versa. A Yorùbá proverb also affirms that “*Àpónlé kò sí fun Ọba tí kò ní olori.*” meaning that, “A crowned king who has no queen commands no respect.” (See Sheba, 2006 for Yorùbá proverbial sayings on women). The poet, through societal and personal experience as Ifá priest who truly understands the dilemma of being a single-parent woman; gives a piece of advice that a woman ought to live in the house of her legitimate husband. There are quite a lot of psychological challenges with living solitary life by woman, as being counselled by the poet. Furthermore, (Ẹlébùbọ̀n 2007:77), in *Ìyá Ní Dágbé*, laments the infiltration of Western ideology of separate living by husbands and wives, or better still, the slogan of “sugar daddy” and “sugar mummy” in the 60s that has now become so rampant. He questions that:

Mo lórò kan àti bá gbogbo yín sọ  
Ẹ gbọ  
Kí ló dé táwọ̀n obìnrin ò fi gbélé ọkọ mọ?  
Ìya ní dágbé ni  
Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni bàbá ní yọ wá  
Ọkùnrin ò le dáyẹ̀şe  
Láìsì sóbìnrin  
Obìnrin pàápàá wọ̀n ò le dáwà.

I have a word for all of you

Lend me your ears  
Why are women not stable in their husbands' houses  
any longer?  
Mother is living alone  
Also father comes secretly  
Men cannot conveniently live alone  
Without women  
Women also cannot live in isolation without men

The slogan “*l’ya n d’agbé, bàbá n yó wá.*” (“mother” is living alone, “father” is visiting her secretly) is associated with two legally married or unmarried individuals that are opposite sex who may be concubines (*àlè/alámòrí/olùkù/òké*). It is commonly used as a lewd joke or euphemism about a man and woman that are having open-secret affairs. This slogan is a fitting representation of a woman that decides to live alone as opposed to living together with a man legally. This phenomenon is by no means something new. However, the fundamental issue being portrayed by *Èlébuìbọ̀n* is a prevalent situation in the modern Yorùbá society. The poet's observation goes beyond “sugar daddy and sugar mummy” terms that was in vogue in the early 60s and 70s, especially in the mega-cities. Today, the first trending school of thought on socio-media are different cases of young but successful career ladies or women, especially among the celebrities, who may not be serious about getting married let alone giving birth to a child on time. The reasons are not farfetched: With extreme dedication to career development or striving to make fame and wealth, such ladies or women find it extremely difficult to be “controlled” by men.

More often than not, they set up false dichotomy between working and raising a family. Whereas, a typical Yorùbá woman in a wedlock values being a mother and having good inter-personal relationship with her husband and others within a community. Besides, the second

school of thought are some young ladies who passionately desire to maintain and enjoy their attractive womanly physique for as long as nature could permits them. Therefore, the trending culture is to “engage” a man, young or adult, and get pregnant to have a baby or two without strings attached. These set of modern ladies are otherwise known as “Baby Mama,” “Slay Queen,” “Slay Mama,” etc. Majority of “high-class” ladies or women that are out of wedlock today are replica of the prevalent situations the poets mentioned earlier. “The precise impact of social change on gender role perception remains unclear. Implicit in some of the early and even later writing on social change is the conception of change as having a universal (sometimes unilineal impact) and triggering off similar consequences across societies.” (Olurode, 1999:165).

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have critically examined how some poets have established the Yorùbá socio-cultural position on feminism. Through their poetry, various pragmatic trending phenomena, terminologies associated with feminism, and practicable suggestions, they create awareness about the new trends and tackle the issue headlong. The poets establish that not imbibing home training, indolence and acculturation are responsible for the Yorùbá feminists that are emulating the Western culture. They lament the feminist's attitude of not taking cognisance of the peculiarities of symbiotic relationship between men and women in the (African) Yorùbá society. From the Yorùbá poetic perspective, we gain realistic view of Yorùbá modern-day feminism and the poets' projection about the likely resultant effects if precaution is not taken on time. Findings show that Yorùbá ideology on gender-equality gives recognition and encouragement for women as clearly stated by the poets.

It is evident that the modern-day Yorùbá feminists imbibe the Western orientation about the perceived “imaginary disparity” that exist

between men and women hook line and sinker without subjecting such ideology to critical appraisal with a view to taking cognisance of environmental peculiarities. It is apparent from our analysis of the poets works that men and women are like inseparable two sides of a coin. We conclude and concur with the poets' submission that the paradigm shift on feminism and its effects in the modern Yorùbá society would always be counter-productive. The devastating effects of the so-called “feminism” on the Yorùbá family system of peaceful co-existence between men and women could be more pronounced, especially on the children who may be nurtured without a combined efforts of husband and wife. Consequently, the Yorùbá cultural ethos and indigenous knowledge, as been portrayed by the poets, should be employed by Yorùbá feminists to tackle the supposed socio-marital problems. Feminists agitations for freedom to live unhindered live or not to be “enslaved” is opposed to the Yorùbá communal system of complimentality as embedded in their cultural norms and values.

## End Notes

1. The term “dálémoşú”, means that when a woman who has misunderstanding with her husband, she could be sent out of matrimonial home by the husband or on her own free volition. to live again with her parents. Given the fact that there was no rented apartment among the Yorùbá then, such a woman had no choice but to return to her father's house. The modern day, has given women opportunity to rent an apprtment till, possibly the misunderstanding is settled amicably.
2. <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/5-facts-about-marriage-in-america/>:text.-Accesed on 7/08/2020.

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