

**GENDER ROLES IN *IFÁ* CULTURAL PRACTICES
AMONG THE *ÌJÈBÚ* OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA**

BY

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CERTIFICATION

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to God Almighty who saw me through the entire work regardless of the travails of life and to my loving wife Cecilia Olufunke Onanuga who solidly stood by me all through.

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ABSTRACT

The construct of gender, its dimensions and the disposition of a people towards it, manifest in their cultural and oral traditions. The *Ifá* cultural practice is one of the enduring and respected legacies in Yorùbá land. Existing studies have examined *Ifá* traditions, especially training of *Ifá* priests, divination processes as well as literary appreciation of content and form of *Ifá* verses. However, the role of gender in *Ifá* cultural practices is bereft of adequate scholarly attention, and understudied in Ijebu. This study was, therefore, designed to examine gender and gender roles; the interface of gender and its cultural contents in *Ifá* cultural practices and highlight *Ifá* verses that lend credence to gender among the Ìjẹ̀bú people of south-western Nigeria.

The African Womanist and Sapir-Whorf hypothesis provided the framework, while the ethnographic design was adopted. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 60 respondents in five local government areas in Ijebu land comprising 50 *Ifá* priests and 10 priestesses/adherents who perform prominent religious and social roles in the different *Ifá* cultural practices. Key Informant Interviews were held with six *Ifá* priests and four *Ifá* priestesses. Four Focus Group Discussions were held with *Ifá* priests, *Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí* and followers of *Ifá* in Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bú, Òsòsà-Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó, Igbílẹ̀-Èrúnwón and Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n-Ìjẹ̀bú, being core areas in Ìjẹ̀bú land where respondents were readily forthcoming and cooperative. Participatory observations were also used to generate data regarding specific gender roles through *Ifá* sessions involving the participants. Secondary data were also extracted from *Ifá* literary verses collated from the study area. Data collated were thematically analysed.

Men and women participate in *Ifá* cultural practices in general terms, as a *Babaláwo* can publicly make use of *ikin* ritual nuts for divination, while a woman can use *eẹ̀rindínlógún*, both *Ifá* paraphernalia. However, women were found to be precluded from participating in some crucial aspects of the vocation and not accorded the same 'rights and privileges' as their male counterparts, such as found in the *Igbódù* rites, considered to be the peak of initiation process for *Ifá* adherents. Thus, in *Ifá* practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land, gender roles, though complementary, were found to be in favour of the male-folk. In addition, women in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land were not prepared to challenge the status quo, which will give them parity with the male-folk, because the tradition as inherited must be sustained. Women practitioners hardly show interest in the rendition of *Ifá* poetic verses. Female *Ifá* trainees cannot graduate to become '*Ìyáláwo*' as an equivalent of a *Babaláwo*. The hierarchical structure is mutually exclusive for the male and female practitioners, while the *Ifá* poetic verses showed both female benignant and malignant characterisation.

Gender roles in *Ifá* cultural practices, though complementary among the Ìjẹ̀bú of south-western Nigeria, are not in ascendancy. Similar research efforts in other parts of Yorùbá land will avail a comparative perspective and will shed more light on the scope and level of cultural homogeneity or otherwise among the Yorùbá people.

Keywords: *Ifá* cultural practice, Gender complementarity, *Babaláwo*, *Ìyáláwo*

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GLOSSARY OF YORÙBÁ WORDS

Àlọ – Folktale in Yorùbá land

Apètèbí – A woman married to a *babaláwo*

Babaláwo – An *Ifá* priest

Èẹ̀rìndínlógún – Use of cowries for divination purposes, especially by a woman

Èsẹ̀ Ifá – Poetic, literary rendition associated with *Ifá* practices

Ifá – System of divination among the Yorùbá people; sometimes used to refer to *Òrúnmilà*.

Igbódù (Igbó Odù) – The forest of *Odù* where the rituals of initiation to *Ifá* cultural practices requiring seclusion is held.

Ìjálá – Hunters' poetic rendition

Ikin – Special palm-nuts, considered sacred and used for divination purposes only by male *Ifá* priests in *Ìjẹ̀bù*-land

Ìrèmòjé – Hunters' dirge

Iwì Egúngún – The poetic rendition of the *Egúngún* (masquerade) cult

Iyánífá/Ìyálífá – A woman leader in *Ifá* circle; seen more of an honorific title holder who cannot perform full roles played by a *babaláwo* in *Ìjẹ̀bù*-land

Ìyèrè- Ifá – *Ifá* poetic chants

Odù – The mysterious being of *Ifá* in Yorùbá belief

Odù(-Ifá) – *Ifá* corpus

Ọ̀dún Ifá – Festival devoted to *Ifá*, with a lot of social interaction

Olódùmarè – God in Yorùbá belief

Òpèlẹ̀ – Originally from *òpèlẹ̀* seeds, strung together and used for *Ifá* divination purposes

Òrìṣà – A generic name for divinities in Yoruba belief

Orò – An *òrìṣà* in *Ìjẹ̀bù*-land, with restricted women participation. Also found in some other parts of Yorùbá land

Òrúnmilà – Yorùbá divinity of wisdom and divination, usually personified as *Ifá*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The Ìjẹ̀bù people are a subset of the Yorùbá people of south-western Nigeria. The Yorùbá people, generally held as a single ethnic group, are domiciled within and beyond the Nigerian borders, sharing some commonalities particularly about their historical and linguistic background. Johnson (2001: xix) places the expanse of land inhabited by the Yorùbá people situated within Nigeria as being between latitude 6° and 9° North and longitude 2° 30' and 6° 30' East. The various sub-groups of the Yorùbá people situated in Nigeria include the Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà, Ìjẹ̀bù, Òyó, Èkìtì, Ìlájẹ, Ifón, Òwò, Àkùré, Òkè-Ògùn, Ìbàràpá, Ègbádò (Yewa), Ègùn and Èdó. (See Makinde 2012:14). They inhabit Lagos, Ògùn, Òyó, Òṣun, Èkìtì, and Oṅdó States and are found in parts of Kwara Kogi and Edo States (cf. Olajubu 2003:17; McIntosh 2010:7ff). Outside Nigeria, the Yorùbá people are found in parts of the Democratic Republic of Benin, lying immediately westwards of Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Brazil and Cuba (McIntosh, 2010:9). Further to this, the Yorùbá people, as aptly noted by McIntosh, “are defined as those people who speak any language or dialect within the Yorùbá linguistic family.”

While it is true that the Yorùbá people constitute “one of the largest and most influential groups in Nigeria” (McIntosh 2010:3), it may not be true that their cultural and religious practices are entirely the same. This is because of the identification of different sub-groups of the people as noted in the preceding paragraph. This aligns, again, with McIntosh’s submission that “[a] though most Yorùbá people also shared certain religious and cultural practices, economic and social patterns and forms of government varied considerable by region.” A quick example is the various oral genres in Yorùbá land. There are some of these oral renditions that are acknowledged to be performed in most, if not all parts of the Yorùbá land. Examples are *Ìjálá*, *Ìrèmòjé*, *Iwì Egúngún*, *Àlò*, *Eṣẹ Ifá* and *Ìyèrè-Ifá*. However, some others are performed in just some areas within Yorùbá land. These include *Èkún-Ìyàwó* among the Òyó/Ìlòrìn, *Orin*

Apépe among the Ìjẹ̀bú, *Şenwele* among the Ìlọ̀rin, *Orin Obìtun* among the Òndó, *Şòkòróghò* among the Ọ̀wò, *Ègè* among the Ègbá. The import of this background is to establish that while the Yorùbá people are regarded as constituting one single ethnic entity, there are some identifiable differences, even if slight, in their cultural and religious practices.

In addition, the Yorùbá people are generally assumed to be culturally patrilineal, with their women subjugated and marginalised (Drewal 1992:187f; McIntosh 2010:17ff; Adagbada 2006:105ff; Ishola, 2006: 343ff; Onabanjo, 2011:3646; Adebile, 2012:308f). Such assumptions, are extensively discussed by Olajubu (2003:1, 13,113,124). However, this assumption cannot be over-generalized (Fadipe 1970:134f; Adetugbo 1982: 222) since practices also vary across ethnic sub-groups. It is within this premise that the present research is located – to investigate the gender presentations and representations in *Ifá* cultural practices among the Ìjẹ̀bú people of south-western Nigeria. The findings of this research will ultimately indicate the possibility of engendering further studies in future, which may compare our results here with other possibilities on similar issues in some other parts of Yorùbá land, including for example, whether the practice of *Ifá* can be ascertained to be same in Ìjẹ̀bú land as in other places or otherwise, at least in relation to the gender roles within the cultural practices of the Yorùbá people in general.

Ifá is an oracular system associated with the Yorùbá of south-western Nigeria as well as those in the diaspora (cf. Arifalo 2002:28). The oracular system consists of the various practices, including the divination and worship of *Ifá*, which also combine a huge accompanying body of literary corpus. The system at large is a cultural praxis with religious dimension. Concentration by scholars had been on the divination processes, collection and collation of the literary corpus and the general philosophy of *Ifá*, as practised by the practitioners and those who patronise the deity. In addition, although a few in-depth research efforts had been done on the gender role or portrayal of the womenfolk in *Ifá* practice as will be shown later in this work, the focus had not been on Ìjẹ̀bú land. Such efforts can be seen in works of Ilesanmi (2013), Opefeyitimi (2009) and Olajubu (2003). Ferraro (2004:392ff.) gives a clue that primordial cultural practices may influence existing social order. Aksornkool (2004:28) buttresses this by submitting that such influences include gender constructs, especially in view of the current interest in gender issues by scholars. Apparently, gender roles are viewed by Aksornkool as culturally-specific set of characteristics that explains the social

behaviour of women and men and the relationship between them and the way it is socially constructed. Consequently, it could be used as an analytical tool for understanding social processes. In effect, it refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. This opinion which identifies ancient cultural practices as being capable of influencing existing societal gender constructs (Ogundipe 2007:15ff.) is a crucial issue this research seeks to verify. Since gender attributes differ from society to society and may change over time (Ferraro 2004:383ff and Aksornkool 2004:28), it makes the outcome of our verification in this work the more important. From the foregoing, our interview efforts and the *Ifá* corpus we shall examine, as highly revered and respected cultural artifact, will reveal how gender roles are enacted and perpetuated both in practical and literary terms in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. This is because the *Ifá* corpus, being one of the reliable sources of Yorùbá oral renditions within the Yorùbá traditional society, can bring to the fore the perception of the female-folk among the Ìjẹ̀bù people.

This study is ethnographic in orientation. It examines the Ìjẹ̀bù people of South Western Nigeria where *Ifá* divination practice has continued to exist till today. Discussions and conclusions were derived from the analyses elicited from interactions with the stakeholders of the *Ifá* practice as well as corroborations from the *Ifá* literary corpus. To achieve this, this research critically examined the activities, roles, functions, responsibilities, tasks and the characterisation of the female-folk. This is realised through the analysis of the portrayal of gender roles among the Ìjẹ̀bù people, as depicted in the *Ifá* corpus and divination system. To fully investigate the issue of gender roles, some salient concepts were examined in order to fully understand such concepts. For example, the concept of gender sensitivity, which we considered a pivot upon which our discussion rests, was appraised. No doubt, gender sensitivity emanated from the various developments relating to the wider issue of gender practices and feminism. Diallo (2004:1), for instance, said that:

The concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce barriers to personal and economic development created by sexism. Gender sensitivity helps to generate respect for the individual regardless of sex. Gender sensitivity is not about pitting women against men. ... It helps to determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. ... It opens up the widest

possible range of life options for both men and women.

To this extent, gender sensitivity seeks to understand the male-female roles within the Ìjẹ̀bú-Yorùbá society. This can be extrapolated from the socio-economic, political and religious situations of the people, usually encapsulated in their cultural disposition. With this, the complementary nature of gender roles, gender parity or disparity of the people can be understood. Consequently, apart from having such an understanding, the society may consciously initiate a process whereby the disparities that have been noted can be addressed and adjusted. Such efforts may lead to fairness, justice, equality and equity within the concerned or similar environments. Gender sensitivity to us, therefore, involves conscious attention being paid to the social relationships between the male-folk and the female-folk within the same cultural environment with a view to analysing such relations in order to effect possible changes, if found necessary. Since *Ifá* cultural practices and literary corpus form the bulk of the pedestal upon which this research is based, our effort, has provided a veritable avenue for reaching some conclusions about the Ìjẹ̀bú people, in relation to their cultural mind-set on gender matters, as highlighted in the final chapter of this work. Further discussions on how gender sensitivity correlates with gender roles, how it relates to *Ifá* literary corpus and the opinions by scholars are made in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 below.

As earlier noted, this research relied on excerpts from the *Ifá* oral corpus to corroborate views generated from the fieldwork in order to substantiate its submissions. Ogundipe (2007:35), described the Yorùbá *Ifá* literary corpus as a “knowledge system...a philosophical record, testimony, and encyclopaedia of their (i.e. the Yorùbá) culture as it evolves”. This is regardless of the generally accepted stance that ‘culture is dynamic’. Indeed, the ‘core’ and ‘essence’ of culture is usually preserved, even in the face of different winds of assailing tendencies. Abimbola (1977: v), who had worked extensively on the *Ifá* oracular practices and related studies, was cited in Ogundipe (2007: 32f):

the Yorùbá regard *Ifá* as the repository of their beliefs and moral values...and the extensive poetic chants associated with it are used by (the people) to validate important aspects of their culture...In traditional Yorùbá society, the authority of *Ifá* permeated every aspect of life because the Yorùbá regard *Ifá* as the voice

of the divinities and the wisdom of the ancestors.

The kernel of our research on the *Ifá* practices and literary corpus is the portrayal of the gender roles within the system. The notion of gender sensitivity, as related to gender roles, stems out of the general belief and assumption in many cases that women are usually discriminated against worldwide and in Africa in particular (Akintunde, 2001:v). This is mainly because religious and cultural matters are believed to be responsible for this trend. Akintunde, for instance, highlighted an opinion raised by Oduyoye (2001) about cultural bias against women as being part of what makes people trample on women's rights (p. v). Indeed, Akintan (2001:125) identified same when she remarked that “[m]any scholars have argued that some of the factors which affect women's rights have cultural values.” Quoting Erinsho (1997), Akintan (2001:125) identifies that:

[s]ome of the factors affecting inequalities in all societies include cultural beliefs, problems of religious practices, which are retrogressive and discriminatory against women.

Akintan further mentioned both the ‘*Orò*’ and the ‘*Agemo*’ festivals which are celebrated in Yorùbá land, including Ìjẹ̀bù land, mostly to the restriction of women, as part of the ‘religious life of the people which is mixed up with the culture (as being) used to the detriment of women (p. 125).’ Such claims as Akintan’s here, to our mind, gloss over the complementary nature of gender in Yorùbá land, as pointed out by Ilesanmi, which he called “the binary theory of complementarity” (2013:7)

It should be noted that there are some pointers, which made the need for this research quite compelling. One of such is the seeming differences in the details of the cultural patterns existing among the various groups in Yorùbá land. An example is the lineal structure of the Ìjẹ̀bù people as compared with some other Yorùbá sub-groups. Adetugbo (1982:222), for instance, said that “in NWY (North Western Yorùbá), lineage is uni-lineal and descent is agnatic.” The North Western Yorùbá includes places like Şakí, Ògbómòşó, Ìşéyìn, Òyó, Ìbàdàn, Òşogbo, Ede, Ìkìrun, Abèòkúta, Ayétòrò, Ìlaro among others. The Ìjẹ̀bù people however belong to the SEY (South Eastern Yorùbá), like the Ońdó and Òwò people. For these set of people, Adetugbo also mentioned, lineage is multi-lineal and descent is traced both paternally and

maternally”. This is why the Ìjẹ̀bù people are considered not completely patrilineal like some other Yorùbá sub-groups.

Related to the above is the historical submission that some females are also on record as having been crowned as the *Awùjalẹ̀*, the paramount ruler of the entire Ìjẹ̀bù people (see Sonubi, 2012; Okubote, 2013) in the past, though this may not be exclusive to Ìjẹ̀bù land. Such female *Awùjalẹ̀* include Ọba Ọrẹ̀ Aláànu (see Okubote, 2013:64f.), Ọba Ọrẹ̀yéye, Ọba Ọrẹ̀-Gẹ̀jẹ̀, Ọba Rúbakóyẹ̀ and Ọba Ayọ̀ra (see Sonubi, 2012:123f.). Inheritance, including chieftaincy titles, can also be claimed both from the matrilineal and patrilineal lineages. Indeed, Adetugbo, earlier cited, again mentioned that, “Evidences of inheritance through maternal descent abound in Ìjẹ̀bù and Ońdó areas.” These issues border on gender roles and perception, which formed the crux of this research work.

In the light of all the above, and bearing in mind that culture can be regarded, in a nutshell, as the ways of life acquired, learnt and shared by people among social groups, this work responded to the felt need to carry out a thorough academic investigation on this present subject of enquiry (see Osagie, 1985:119f). This is in order to reveal, ascertain and understand the gender roles and perception of the Ìjẹ̀bù people, from the perspective of the age-long *Ifá* practices with possible corroborating evidences from the literary corpus.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Explanations can be made through studies and analyses carried out to properly understand, situate and possibly make academic prognostication about a group of people, based on the collection of materials on their cultural heritage. Such collections could be in form of traditional practices held for ages, verbal or oral renditions and such other pieces of information that can be useful in carrying out academic research works. In essence, the cultural activities and records of a people can be used as a pedestal upon which the past can be understood and some conclusions be drawn about such people.

The issue of understanding the gender perspectives of a people in order to explain their world-view, cultural attitudes and general disposition cannot be over-emphasised. This particular research effort was geared towards the exposition of the gender traits of the Ìjẹ̀bù people in Ògùn State of south-western Nigeria as exemplified

through the *Ifá* cultural practices and the oral genre associated with it. There is no gainsaying the fact that there are different agents of socialisation within any given society. Such agents can also cause social changes to be effected within their respective environment. Consequently, we saw the need to bring into adequate focus the operations of such agents in this work. This was not in any way an assumption that gender traits are only peculiar among the Ìjẹ̀bù people in south-western Nigeria. What we have examined was the dimension and implications of the level of gender consciousness among the Ìjẹ̀bù people being investigated.

The female-folk are veritable components of the human race. To choose to ignore, undermine or under-estimate their roles within the society is to put such a society at a risk of under-utilizing a good percentage of their human resources. The female-folk will be put under some threat if they are not sufficiently understood or recognized as agents of positive change in the society. Relating to the issue of gender analysis in its various shapes and forms over the years, it must be stated that traditional ideas about women are held in various societies all over the world. Opinions about this had not been static or unchanging. In addition, we observed that in the bid to ensure that there is gender consideration that will put issues relating to the female-folk on the front burner from time to time, matters on feminism had been in the domain of public discourse over time too (Dembele, 1999:47,49).

The observed lacuna that propelled the urge to conduct this research was to further enrich the work already done on Yorùbá cultural studies at large and particularly on *Ifá* practices and its associated oral literature. Furthermore, a new vista upon which subsequent academic research can be carried out, particularly in gender studies was also expected to be opened to scholars desirous of pushing further the frontiers of intellectual pursuits. In a nutshell, revelations from this work has indicated that it will serve to bridge some perceived work yet to be done as well as unlocking areas still needing to be addressed.

In specific terms, most of the entire *Ifá* system, including its ancillary practices had attracted enormous attention from scholars worldwide. The gap, which we noted at the commencement of this work, was that concentration by previous scholars had been on the divination processes, collection and collation of the literary corpus and the general philosophy of *Ifá*, as practised by the practitioners and those who patronise the

deity. Although the efforts had been in varied dimensions, an in-depth research effort on the gender-role or portrayal of the womenfolk in *Ifá* practice and its literary corpus vis-à-vis their male counterparts with focus on the Ìjẹ̀bú people was yet to be known to us. Scholars like Drewal (1992), Ogundipe (2007), Olademo (2009) and Kumari (2014), for example, who dealt on related matters, did so, more as a strand of many other considerations than being the focus of their respective works, thereby curtailing the depth of their particular works, in relation to our proposal here. Some other works on women and *Ifá* (Opefeyitimi 2009 and Ilesanmi 2013) focused on cultural assessment of the Yoruba woman, none paying particular attention to Ìjẹ̀bú area, to which this work is devoted.

On another level, we also observed that most of the academic efforts on *Ifá* studies such as Abimbola (1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1977 and 2015), Bascom (1969), Yemitan and Ogundele (1985), Agboola (1989) and Olatunji (2005) were based on the experiences of the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá people, mainly found in the Ọ̀yọ́-Ọ̀ṣun axis of Yorùbá land, whereas we have the presence of *Ifá* practice in Ìjẹ̀bú land yet to be critically examined. The choice of *Ifá* cultural practices as the means upon which this work was predicated was mainly because it remains a practice that can be found within the entire Yorùbá race, including Ìjẹ̀búland. *Ifá* is also considered a foremost deity and a “mouth-piece” that can be relied upon. Indeed, Elebuibon, a notable *Ifá* practitioner and a Chief Priest who has authored several books on *Ifá*, stated that:

Ifá is a principal divinity in Yorùbá religion, culture and belief systems. It is the repository of all wisdom... *Ifá* is all-embracing. He is the mouthpiece of all other divinities. ...*Ifá* represents the repository of all information concerning the language, culture and belief system of the Yorùbá as a people. The scope of *Ifá* literary corpus is so encompassing that it entails details about all the socio-cultural peculiarities of the Yorùbá people. ... Since *Ifá* literary corpus is claimed to be an encyclopaedia of Yorùbá knowledge, it therefore becomes the rightful authority to which we can resort for any form of information on their world-view. (Elebuibon, 2004: vii-viii).

Elebuibon’s submission above can be said to be the general notion of the typical traditional Yorùbá person in Yorùbá land. It is pertinent to say that one of the basic

anthropological questions that impel research works of this nature is to inquire about how societies developed and changed from the past to the present times. The answer to such a question may assist us in understanding what it generally means to be human. Furthermore, it can help us to learn the ways to meet with the present-day needs of the people and plan how the future can be better lived.

Consequent upon these submissions, this research effort inquires the intricacies of gender-role as portrayed in the practice, worship and patronage of *Ifá* among the adherents. This is hinged on the identification that *Ifá* verses are repositories that exemplify the representation and portrayal of women in the traditional Ìjẹ̀bú society. This is achieved through a juxtaposition of textual materials and focus group discussions. In conclusion, such analyses were interpreted to indicate the Ìjẹ̀bú perception of gender roles and the relationship between the male and the female-folk among the people.

1.3 Research Questions

Against the background of our discussions so far, the following questions constitute the focus of the present study:

- (i) Is *Ifá* practice in Ìjẹ̀bú land open to both the male- and female-folks on the same terms and levels? If not, what is the extent of the differences in gender roles?
- (ii) Are there *Ifá* verses that corroborate the findings in (i) above about how the female-folk is reflected or portrayed, in comparison with the male-folk, by way of Characterisation and/or language use?
- (iii) Are the findings in (i) and (ii) above in consonance with contemporary opinions on gender issues, reflecting day-to-day life patterns of the Ìjẹ̀bú people?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to examine the gender perspectives of *Ifá* practices as reflected among the Ìjẹ̀bú people and substantiate same from the content of *Ifá* literary verses.

The specific objectives are:

- (i) to determine whether the entire *Ifá* practices are open to both the male and female-folks on the same level; and if found not to be so, to assess the extent of differences, or restrictions in establishing the gender roles;
- (ii) to examine and highlight *Ifá* verses that lend credence to (i) above; and,
- (iii) to examine the cultural contents of the findings if they are congruent with modern opinions on gender issues, reflecting the everyday life patterns of the Ìjèbú people.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The general perception is that gender discrimination, particularly against the female gender, is rife and cuts across all human societies (Chambers, 1983:135). This is reflected in many areas of human endeavours whereby females are viewed as being subjugated by their male counterparts, through relegation to the background or being unfairly treated where equity and equality is expected to be exercised and exhibited. Indeed, it is usually assumed that women are to be subordinated to their male counterparts because they have been so created. Appeals are usually made to the biological or outward physical characteristics of women, which have made some people to tag them as the weaker sex, such as the muscular nature of men as opposed to the tender feminine disposition of women (see Diallo, 2004: vii).

This stereotypical assumption “perpetuates the view that men are dominant, capable, and natural leaders while women are submissive, weak and dependent on men” (Diallo, *ibid.*). Further to this, many areas of human interaction have been demarcated to reflect this line of thought. For example, in terms of work selection and vocational leaning, some roles have been thought to be ‘naturally’ assigned to men and others to women. This stereotypical fixation can also be seen even in modern day education, where some jobs, courses or callings are thought to be exclusively meant for men, carrying some prestige along, whereas some other callings are ascribed as ‘soft’ and so they should be designated for women (cf. Gbenda, 2006: 147ff). At a time, only men were considered capable of becoming scientists, electricians, auto mechanics, pilots, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs and managers, whereas the areas of hairdressers, nurses, kindergarten teachers and chefs were considered as comfort zones for women (Joerger and Taylor, 2004:158; Olusanya, 2000:5ff). The current situation on this is

now being interrogated by scholars, as pointed out by Joerger and Taylor in this same work.

Religion and cultural activities are some other areas usually pinpointed as ‘guilty’ of promoting gender-role imbalance and insensitivity. From these, the legal status of women, in contradistinction to men, the process of decision-making, public administration and popular public opinion among some other salient issues have been noted to be seriously flawed, thereby seen to be promoting gender insensitivity. While this may be so, it may be hazardous to make a sweeping generalization that the above scenario must be true at all times for every cultural environment (cf. Omoyibo and Ajayi, 2011:3735). The possibility could be there to indicate that some differences can still be seen in some places. After all, as we have patriarchal cultures so also we have matrilineal communities and even those that practice the two systems combined.

This research is undertaken to examine gender practices among the Ìjẹ̀bú people, through the practice of the *Ifá* divination system – where the *Ifá* literary corpus can be considered as the encyclopaedia and repertoire of the Yorùbá world view. This was with a view to determining whether the cultural trait highlights the gender roles of the people, thereby showing their level of gender sensitivity. In one breath, for instance, we have some very powerful cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land depicting that the female-folk are ‘discriminated’ against. In particular, the *Agẹmọ* festivals (general and localized) forbid females from either full or partial participation, up till this day. The *Orò* in the entire Yorùbá land, including Ìjẹ̀búland, women participation is strongly restricted. For the *Agẹmọ* festival, the female-folk can participate in some aspects, including the watching of the *Agẹmọ* public dance, but are strictly forbidden from seeing the *Agẹmọ* load (*‘Erù Agẹmọ’*) all through the days-long festival. In contrast, however, the Ìjẹ̀bú culture is both matrilineal and patriarchal in nature. That is, there is ample recognition conferred on the maternal lineage, just as it is done for the paternal lineage. As earlier stated and listed, it is on record that female *‘Ọba’* had reigned before as the *Awùjalẹ* or paramount ruler of Ìjẹ̀bú-land. These practices may differ in some other Yorùbá cultural settings, as only men can presumably be made an *Ọba* in most Yorùbá settlements.

In recognition of the above, we found that there was the need to probe further the perception of women within the Yorùbá cultural milieu. The outcome of this research will either lend credence to previously held beliefs on gender roles and *Ifá* cultural practices or refute same. The highlight of this work are the gaps noticed in the

previous research works on *Ifá*, gender issues and other cultural studies on the Ìjẹ̀bú people of south-western Nigeria which, so far were yet to be known to us. This should be a significant contribution to scholarship. In essence, the outcome of this study will provide substantial input to previous studies made on the *Ifá* cultural practices, as it is not known to us that a similar effort had been made on the Ìjẹ̀bú people or such other group in particular, or the Yorùbá people in general.

This work also took interest to ask if there has been any issue that marks the Ìjẹ̀bú people out as peculiar. Interestingly, *Ifá* is one of the cultural practices that are not 'locally' restricted to a few places in Yorùbá-land. In fact, *Ifá* is projected as being universal in nature. The outcome of this research will, hopefully, impel scholars to examine some other dimensions or different gender patterns of *Ifá* practices in some other areas of Yorùbá-land. In effect, long-standing notions may be validated or refuted, from one area to the other. In consequence, this work may be an eye-opener in examining whether some aspects of the practice of *Ifá* in Ìjẹ̀bú land is indeed not different in some ways from what obtains in some other parts of Yorùbá-land. Finally, this current effort may provide the needed vigour to encourage other scholars to undertake similar researches in some other related fields and academic endeavours.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study probed into the issue of gender roles among the Ìjẹ̀bú people in Ogun State of south-western Nigeria, through the investigation of its various dimensions as espoused in *Ifá* cultural practices. In doing this, we deeply examined the various activities and processes of *Ifá* practices to unravel the elements and depth of gender complementarity, parity or disparity. This work, from the onset, sought to corroborate, if so supported, with excerpts from the oral corpus associated with *Ifá* practices, where in-depth cultural attitudes of the people are highlighted, to verify how the female-folk are portrayed. We are of the opinion that our findings are sufficient clues on how the female-folk were culturally perceived from the times past, providing us with the needed basis for understanding the current views on gender roles among the people, upon which we have hinged our prognosis for future dimensions on the issue.

The research was conducted among the Ìjẹ̀bú people in Ogun State, south-western Nigeria, specifically represented by the research population sourced from the different parts of the land. The study population selected was from Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde, the

widely accepted metropolis of the Ìjẹ̀bù people from time immemorial and some other locations outside but proximal to the town. Since the Ìjẹ̀bù people are regarded as part and parcel of the Yorùbá stock, the study is considered as a representation of the Yorùbá gender attitude. It should however be stated that regardless of the fact that *Ifá* is said to be generally practised in Yorùbá-land, this assumption may need to be corroborated by similar studies in other parts of Yorùbá land. Otherwise, we may be glossing over some other cultural dimensions that may cause differences in some other Yorùbá sub-groups apart from the Ìjẹ̀bù, upon which this research has focused.

1.7 Area of Study

1.7.1 Description

This research work was conducted among the Ìjẹ̀bù people in Ogun State, south-western Nigeria. The Ìjẹ̀bù people are part of the larger stock of people known as the Yorùbá. The Ìjẹ̀bù are found mainly in Ogun State, Nigeria. They form a monolithic group and “operated as a separate cultural and political entity” especially before the nineteenth century (Ogunba, 1985:281).

As highlighted by the Longman’s *Senior Secondary Atlas* (2005:12), Ìjẹ̀bù land is bounded to the north by the Ìbàdàn Ọ̀yọ́ sub-group, to the east by the Òndó, westwards and north-westwards by their Rẹ̀mọ́ and Ègbá neighbours in Ọ̀gùn State and southwards by the Àwòrì of Lagos State (cf. Babalola, 1976:2). The Ìjẹ̀bù people inhabit a part of the administrative area known as the Ọ̀gùn East Senatorial District of Nigeria. Further, they are located in six Local Government areas, namely Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde, Ọ̀dogbolú, Ìjẹ̀bù North, Ìjẹ̀bù North East, Ìjẹ̀bù East and Ọ̀gùn Waterside. The delineation of these Local Government Areas appear to be mainly for administrative purposes because there are areas that flow and dovetail from one area to the other.

There are strong contentions as to whether the Rẹ̀mọ́ sub-group of the Yorùbá are part of the Ìjẹ̀bù people or not (Ayandele, 1992:120; Ogunnaike, 2015:84). Therefore, for the purpose of this research work, the Rẹ̀mọ́ sub-group of the Yorùbá shall be excluded, as the Rẹ̀mọ́ people themselves do not agree that they are part of the Ìjẹ̀bù population. Indeed, there has been some controversy and distinction purporting to distinguish the Ìjẹ̀bù people as different from the Rẹ̀mọ́, though they share some cultural, linguistic and other affinities (Ayandele, 1992:126ff). Accordingly, this work has been delimited to include a convenient geographical and manageable area. Precisely, the research population was drawn from Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde in Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde Local

Government Area; Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó in Ìjẹ̀bú-North Local Government Area, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bú and Òsòsà in Òdogbolú Local Government Area, Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n-Ìjẹ̀bú and Ìgbílẹ̀-Èrúnwọ̀n in Ìjẹ̀bú North-East Local Government Area and Ìjẹ̀bú-Imuṣin in Ìjẹ̀bú East Local Government Area. Efforts to source respondents from Ogun Waterside Local Government Area proved futile as the only cooperating informant from the area died at the preliminary stages of this work.

Since this research is about the Ìjẹ̀bú people inhabiting Ogun State of Nigeria, the Ìjẹ̀bú people in some parts of Èpẹ̀, Ìbọ̀nwọ̀n and Ikòròdú, who have been excised to Lagos State, mainly for administrative convenience and such others are excluded in the work.

While this research covers Ìjẹ̀bú land, it should be noted that Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde is the central, recognized traditional headquarter of the ethnic group. Geographically speaking, while Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde is located on latitude 6°49'N and longitude 3°53'E, the expanse of Ìjẹ̀bú land covers from about latitude 6°30'N to 7.04'N and about longitude 3°29'E to 4°10'E (Longman, 2005:12,143). Apart from being the traditional and historical headquarters of Ìjẹ̀bú land from time immemorial, the town is the headquarters of the Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde Local Government Area, and it covers an area of about 192km²(72 square miles). Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde is situated at about 100 kilometres away from Abẹ̀òkúta, the capital of Ògùn State (see Ògùn State College of Education, 1990:24). It is centrally placed in relation to the other towns and villages, which altogether make up Ìjẹ̀búland, showing the prime position the town occupies. The six (6) Local Government Areas inhabited by the Ìjẹ̀bú people within the Ògùn East Senatorial District that make up Ìjẹ̀búland and the names of the respective headquarters in brackets are: Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde Local Government (Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde), Ìjẹ̀bú North Local Government (Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó), Òdogbolú Local Government (Òdogbolú), Ìjẹ̀bú East Local Government (Ìjẹ̀bú-Imuṣin), Ìjẹ̀bú North-East Local Government (Atan) and Ogun Waterside Local Government (Abígi) (cf. Ogunnaike 2015:84).

Table 1.1: The Local Government Areas of Ìjẹ̀bú land, in Ogun State

S/N	Local Government Area	Local Government Headquarters
1.	Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde	Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde
2.	Ìjẹ̀bú North	Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó
3.	Òdogbolú	Òdogbolú
4.	Ìjẹ̀bú East	Ìjẹ̀bú-Imuṣin
5.	Ògùn Waterside	Abígi
6.	Ìjẹ̀bú North-East	Atan

Source: National Population Commission Nigeria, 2016

In one breath, the proximal location of Ìjẹ̀bù-land to Lagos has influenced the life-style of the people in some ways, particularly in modern times. For example, the city life-style and the perceived civilization and its attendant opportunities and threats, as obtainable in Lagos, must have had its effects on the Ìjẹ̀bù populace. In another breath however, Ìjẹ̀bù land was historically, relatively insulated or separated from other parts of Yorùbá land because of what Ayandele (1992) called the policy of ‘Splendid Isolation’, until 1892 when the British forcefully opened up the Ìjẹ̀bù routes, particularly for trade purposes. These antecedents will be borne in mind in the course of the research work.

In this work, some details of the historical background and traditional administrative structure of the research area will be presently discussed, in order to have a full grasp of the area under discussion.

1.7.2 Historical Background

Like many ancient African societies, it is difficult to present a theory of monogenesis on the origins of the Ìjẹ̀bù people. The traditions of origin rely heavily on oral sources which are wrapped in myths and legends. Accordingly, there are a number of versions about the early history of the Ìjẹ̀bù people. We shall however present some of these versions and thereafter point out some commonalities which feature in them.

The first version which we are presenting is said to be an “official” version. It is contained in the 1991 brochure of the Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde Development Association for the Annual Ọbańta Day ceremony (IDAAOD – 1991:7-11). This version says that “the word Ìjẹ̀bù is derived from very ancient sources (at least 4,000 years old) and is of obscure meaning”, but “it is said to imply a “flourishing essence” according to popular folklore”. Today, the term Ìjẹ̀bù’ implies four main things: the people, the culture, the dialect and the domain of the Awùjalẹ̀. This source further states that the Ìjẹ̀bù people are believed to have originated from the Biblical lands of Canaan alongside Semitic races such as Jews, Aramaeans and Arabs who are said to be the descendants of Shem, the eldest of Noah’s three sons. This school of thought believes that the Ìjẹ̀bù are the descendants of the Jebusites mentioned in the Holy Bible (1 Chronicle 11:4 and Genesis 10:16). The Ìjẹ̀bù are thus said to be the children of Noah as evidenced from the title “Noah” (corrupted to “Onúwà” and then to “Olú-Ìwà”), used since the times of

the patriarchal Ìjẹ̀bú Emperor, Ajibota, in Abbyssinia (Ethiopia) till the advent of Ọ̀bańta (Ọ̀gbòrògánńdà or Ajogun) to Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode.

The IDAAOD (1991) brochure, from which we will now copiously turn, goes on to state that according to history, Ajibota was the first ‘Olú-Ìwà’ and he reigned as emperor over the Ìjẹ̀bú people in South-East Sudan during the advent of the Negede Orit, the earliest immigrants into Abbyssinia (Ethiopia) about 4,000 years ago. The Ìjẹ̀bú of this era were said to have occupied the ancient kingdom of Owódayé in Abbyssinia (Ethiopia) and had countries such as Punt, Nubia, Tigre, Axum and Egypt around them (cf. Lucas 1948:290). Thus, the Ìjẹ̀bú retained some cultural peculiarities from other Yorùbá groups, despite similarities shared with Axumites, Tigrans, Puntites, Nubians and Egyptians in the tribal marks, funeral rites, the Agẹmọ deity, the Erikiran, royal flutes, lingual intonations and names. Interestingly, this source claims that Ajibota was the elder brother of Ọ̀mù, from whom Lámurúdu and Odùduwà descended. This aspect of Ìjẹ̀bú history may be of utmost interest to historians, because hitherto, the history of the Yorùbá people was hardly traced beyond Lámurúdu and Odùduwà.

Going further, this same source states that because of Arab-inspired military campaigns, which started about AD 632, the Ìjẹ̀bú people in the kingdom of Owódayé had to migrate. They later came to inhabit the multi-ethnic desert state known as the “Waddai” or “Quaddai” and lying across most of western and south-western Sudan. At Waddai, the Ìjẹ̀bú eventually submitted to southern migration due to the insecurity that permeated Waddai as from the seventh century.

The first group of Sudan-based immigrants (mainly Yorùbá) that entered today’s Nigeria, according to this version, was led by Ìwáşẹ and arrived in Ilé-Ifẹ during the reign of Èşùmàrè of Ifẹ, Ọ̀ba Erinrin. Afterwards Lámurúdu came, then Odùduwà. The Ìjẹ̀bú were the next group of immigrants to reach Ilé-Ifẹ during the reign of Odùduwà. They were led by Olú-Ìwà alias “Èlẹ̀wù-Èlẹ̀” (literally “metal coat bearer”). On his arrival at Ilé-Ifẹ, Olú-Ìwà offered the hand of his daughter Gbórowó (also called Ọ̀şungbórowó) to Odùduwà in appreciation of Odùduwà’s hospitality. This union culminated in the birth of Ọ̀gbòrògánńdà (also variously called Ọ̀bańta, Ajogun, Awùjalẹ, Ọ̀gbòrògánńdà-Ajogun, Olú-Ọ̀gbòrògan, Ọ̀gbòrògánludà or Ọ̀gbòrògan) who was groomed for the patrimony left by Olú-Ìwà at Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode, as we shall later see, when he subsequently became the first Awùjalẹ. The primacy of Ilé-Ifẹ was thus established in these times as the cradle of the Yorùbá race.

When Olú-Ìwà and his retinue (including Àrísù, Aḗbù and Olóde) were at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ as guests of Odùduwà, they stayed at Òkè-Igàn, where he (Olú-Ìwà) practised extensive farming and was very prosperous. He was said to be of very good disposition. His noble and gracious demeanour encouraged other inhabitants at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ to describe the Ìjẹ̀bù of character and integrity as “Ọmọ Olú-Ìwà bí” (one descended from Olú-Ìwà), later compressed to “Ọmọ́lúwàbí”, as used by all Yorùbá people later, for persons of good, unimpeachable disposition today.

Olú-Ìwà led the first migration and demarcated the limits of the Ìjẹ̀bù territory through the assistance of his warrior companions, Aḗbù and Olóde. He also planned the ancient city of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode which has since then been the acme of Ìjẹ̀bù civility. The main city was named Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde after Aḗbù and Olóde, Olú-Ìwà’s lieutenants. Àrísù, a relation of Olú-Ìwà who also came from Ilé-Ifẹ̀, led the next migration. His son, Ọ̀ṣìmọ̀rẹ̀ (or Ọ̀ṣìn) became the regent after the death of Olú-Ìwà. In his dying days, Olú-Ìwà had secured the promise of Ọ̀ṣìmọ̀rẹ̀ that he (Ọ̀ṣìmọ̀rẹ̀) would abdicate the throne upon Ògbòrògánndà (Ọ̀bańta)’s arrival at Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode.

The most significant migration was by Olú-Ìwà’s grandson, son of Gbólówó (born to Odùduwà at Ilé-Ifẹ̀) called Ògbòrògánndà (Ọ̀bańta) who later became the first Awùjalẹ̀ of Ìjẹ̀bù-land. His elder brothers Lénúwà and Líkẹ̀n settled at Odè-Omi and Iwòpín respectively in present-day Ìjẹ̀bù Waterside. Ògbòrògánndà (Ọ̀bańta) had his war-chequered life predicted by the Ifá oracle; hence, he was assigned the best royal handlers by Odùduwà from his childhood. This preparation in military tactics was to be of immense value to him during his campaigns en-route Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde. He left Ilé-Ifẹ̀ with a large followership including Lúkòtún, Awàpetu (his oracle or ‘Ifá’ priest), Lápòkùn (bearer of his leopard skin), Onípàkálà, Agẹmọ̀ priests and other warlords. Also in this group was Ajíṣegírí (or Ẹ̀kírí), leader of today’s Itsekiri people.

The situation in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ prior to Ògbòrògánndà’s departure was critical. Ilé-Ifẹ̀ was a beehive of princes whose regal posturing eventually attained incendiary proportions. Odùduwà, under the direction of the *Ifá* oracle, decided to disperse his princes to avoid anarchy. Under the guise of according each of them regal powers to found new settlements within the Yorùbá territory, he dispersed them after a medicine-meal of a whole sheep and herbs. Portions of this were given to each prince as the *Ifá* oracle deposed. History reveals that it was the head that fell the lot of Ògbòrògánndà, whom Odùduwà was hardly pleased to bid farewell. Odùduwà then summoned Ògbòrògánndà in the presence of his mother, as he did for all his princes. His prayers

for him were as follows: “Ajogun, you will be ruler over princes and your brethren. Your kingdom shall be great and neither you nor your people shall ever be slaves to any man.” Odùduwà then gave him protective charms for his campaigns. Thus, Ajogun (Ògbòrògánndà) left Ilé-Ifè at the head of a large retinue of princes, warriors and powerful *Ifá* priests who served as his protection and guide.

His mother, Gbólówó got lost midstream at the River Òṣun (the famous Òṣun River that passes through Òṣogbo) and is thus worshipped annually, by this riverside. A shrine in her memory is at Ìtèlé. At Ìjèbú-Muṣin where he (Ògbòrògánndà) planted an ‘Iṣin’ tree, akee apple (*Blighia sapida*) as a marker. At Ìlése, meaning the “cat-town”, he lost a sacrificial cat due to the carelessness of one of his aides to whom it was entrusted. He thus sent him to find it or never let him set eyes on him. This explains why it was made a taboo for an Awùjalè to set eyes on Ìlése or an Elése (the head of Ìlése) after ascending the throne.

Ajogun arrived in Ìjèbú-Òde through Odò-Èṣà where he set down the “Obinrin Òjòwú” deity in the care of “Erelú” and its high priest, the “Òlówá-Ìbèrù”. He marked this spot with an Ìròkò tree. He then approached the Ìpèbí where he was met by the Apèbí who departed to announce his arrival to Oṣimorè that “The King is outside” or “Oba n’íta”. This became “Obańta”, for short. Subsequently, Oṣimorè abdicated the throne for Obańta. As a mark of appreciation, Obańta married Oṣimorè’s daughter Winniadé, to restore his share of the royal lineage.

Talking about colonial influence on the Ìjèbú people, this same source says that the Portuguese were the earliest colonial visitors in 1592 when they camped at Ìjàdà quarters in Ìjèbú-Ode as guests of the Awùjalè. This encouraged the beginning of colonial trade with the Ìjèbú people at Ejìnrìn (then West Africa’s largest market). The Portuguese brought cassava, rubber, etc. The Ìjèbú however, first produced “gàrí” (fried cassava flakes) from cassava in 1600 initially as food for hunters and farmers (who left the townships for months). Gàrí only became popularised later. The British came later through several visits between 1850 and 1860. They then settled in Lagos but discovered that the Ìjèbú people did not permit free trade through the territory. This compelled the prosecution of the “Imàgbon War” (otherwise called “Dánásungbó War”) under Captain F.C. Scott in 1892. This war was said to be the second, in terms of costs (men and materials) to the “Ashante War” which was also prosecuted by the British. After the war, a treaty was signed with the Awùjalè. Èpé, Ìbèjù, Itòikín, Lèkkí, Àgbówá, Ìkòsì and Báyéku were taken into the Lagos colonial area with yearly

compensations paid to the Awùjalẹ̀ by the British. The Ìjẹ̀bù customs' posts at Ikòròdú, Ìpẹ̀ru, Odò-Ọ̀nà were then dismantled to allow free trade.

A more critically examined presentation is the compilation made by Okuwa on behalf of the incumbent Awùjalẹ̀ of Ìjẹ̀bù-land, published in another “official document” – the Silver Jubilee Coronation Anniversary Brochure of the Awùjalẹ̀, 1985. This presentation, quoting I.B. Odukoya who wrote a book on the history of the Ìjẹ̀bù people, states that the term “Ìjẹ̀bù” is an ancient one, because no living historian knows its exact meaning. Johnson (2001:18) however said “Ìjẹ̀bù” was coined from “Ìjẹ̀-Ibù” (food of the deep) and associated the origin of the word to an Olówu of Òwu. Okuwa (p. 4) however states that this interpretation is controversial and not acceptable to the Ìjẹ̀bù people.

Okuwa (p.4) points out that an interesting aspect of the immigration of the Ìjẹ̀bù into what is now known as Nigeria is the fact that the people divided themselves into several groups and took temporary residence in different parts of the country. Some of the groups stayed in Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Èkìtì, Orílẹ̀-Oko, Ìjamò and others. They also extended their settlements to Ìwàyà, Iwòpín and some other coastal towns between Ìjẹ̀bù and the Niger Delta. Some members of the Àrìsù group, who came after Olú-Ìwà founded Ìjàsí, while a part of the Ajẹ̀bù /Olóde group settled at Ìdokò Imuṣin. The Ògbòrògánndà (Ọ̀bańta) group included the ancestors of those who now inhabit Alá, Ògèrè, Ìlápòru, Ìlìṣàń, Òdo-Ọ̀bańta (now part of Ayépe), Ìlòdà, Òdo (both now part of Òdogbolú), Mokò and Mese (now part of Ìkénne). Another group, under the leadership of the Àjàlòrun and Balùfẹ̀ settled at Ikòròdú, Abígi and some other areas of Ìjẹ̀bù Waterside. Those who now inhabit Àgò-Ìwòyè came under the Èbumàwé and Òsemàwé, while Ọ̀fin, Èpẹ̀, Pakòdó and Igbogbo were founded by those who came with the Kòyolú group from Ilé-Ifẹ̀, in search of Ògbòrògánndà (Ọ̀bańta).

Quoting Odukoya further, Okuwa (p.5) expressed that the Ìjẹ̀bù are said to be children of Noah through one of his sons known as Ajíbọta who arrogated to himself the title of “Noah” or its corruption “Onúwà”, which is now after many centuries of further corruption known as “Olú-Ìwà”. As a result of this noble connection, Olú-Ìwà had been the title of the Emperors of Ìjẹ̀bù from earliest times of their history. Okuwa therefore identifies a school of thought which believes that the Ìjẹ̀bù are the same people described as Jebusites or Jebus in various places in the Bible (1 Chronicle 11:4; Genesis 10:16). There is however no conclusive evidence to support such view.

Further in the write-up, Okuwa (p.6) points out that when the Ìjẹ̀bù emerged into the full light of history, they were dominant people not only in the south of Sudan but also exercised a great influence in the Arabian Peninsula. He refers to a manuscript written in Geez language under the title, “History of Ethiopia” by one Haile Marian, where it was pointed out that “the most powerful people that the Negede Orit” (ancient Ethiopian immigrants into Africa) met in the East Africa were the Jebus”. This manuscript, he says, is silent about Olú-Ìwà, King of the Jebus. The name ‘Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode’, Okuwa agrees, is a combination of the names of two persons, namely, Ajẹ̀bù and Olóde, who were conspicuous as leaders of the original settlers and founders of the town. Olóde was said to be a relative of Olú-Ìwà, the first King of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. The location of the town was said to be an uninhabited dense forest, but upon consultation with the *Ifá* oracle, it was directed that Ajẹ̀bù should go and settle on a spot now known as Imẹ̀pẹ̀, while Olóde and Àjànà were to remain together at a place known today as Ìta Àjànà. Going further, Okuwa (p.7) stated that the grave of Ajẹ̀bù is still marked by a tomb erected by his descendants at Imẹ̀pẹ̀ near Òyìngbò market on Ejìnrin Road, while Olóde’s grave is also marked at Olóde Street at Ìta Àjànà Quarters, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. The two persons, Ajẹ̀bù and Olóde were more conspicuous among the original settlers; hence the town derived its name from their names to become ‘Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode’.

A third source for this work is Okubote’s *The History of the Ìjẹ̀bù* (2013). The opening statement in Okubote’s book, which relies on both mythological presentation as well as diary entry of events says, “Foundation history has pointed out that the Ìjẹ̀bù migrated from the East, from the land of *the Jebusites*.” Okubote also spoke about the various migrations to Ìjẹ̀bù-land as well as the prominent roles played by individuals such as Olú-Ìwà, Odùduwà, Àrísù, Ajẹ̀bù, Olóde and Ọbańta. Notable places such as Ilé-Ifẹ̀ (which Okubote also called Ọrai), Wòdé/Wádàì, Imuşin and Rẹ̀mọ among others were also mentioned. In addition, the role of *Ifá* in the determination or resolution of issues also caught the attention of Okubote (p. 7 and 8). He also agreed that the name ‘Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode’ was derived from the names of Ajẹ̀bù and Olóde (p.14), while disagreeing with Samuel Johnson’s narration in *The History of the Yorùbás* (p.14).

The versions of the early history of the research area presented above, even if with some variations in matters of the details, represent the popular historical opinion of the Ìjẹ̀bù people. Some of the highlights and commonalities derivable from the different submissions above are:

- (a) The Ìjẹ̀bù people are believed to have migrated to their present site from elsewhere, possibly from some place in the Middle East, generally agreed to be Waddai, in the Arabian Desert. The migration view cuts across the various historical presentations about the Ìjẹ̀bù people.
- (b) There is a connection between the Ìjẹ̀bù people and Ilé-Ifẹ̀. This nexus, spatial or otherwise connects the Ìjẹ̀bù people with the other Yorùbá groups. It is noteworthy that this connection also emphasises the filial mother-son (that is, Gbórowó-Ọbańta) relationship, as well as a subsisting tradition in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, whereby the royal throne can be matrilineal by ascension.
- (c) There were waves of immigration to Ìjẹ̀bù-land, one group coming after the other. The Ọbańta group appears to be the most influential and has made the most enduring impact on the Ìjẹ̀bù people.
- (d) Olú-Ìwà, Àrísù, Ajẹ̀bù, Olóde and Ọbańta were very prominent, amongst others, on the list of the early settlers of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode.
- (e) All the versions of immigration were silent on the name or detailed identification of the group of people met on ground by the earliest batch of Ìjẹ̀bù settlers.
- (f) The present site of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode is believed to have been occupied by the Ìjẹ̀bù people for some thousands of years now, but we are yet to discover any strong historical or archaeological evidence or data to support such claims or views.
- (g) The *Ifá* oracular system had been in existence as at the earliest times of the founding of the Ìjẹ̀bù nation.

From the foregoing, the Ìjẹ̀bù people are not autochthonous to the present site they inhabit. They also have a relationship with the people of Ilé-Ifẹ̀, through Odùduwà. The implication of this is that the Odùduwà period at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ was about same for the Ìjẹ̀bù people as well, especially through the Ọbańta dynasty. It should be noted that Ọrẹ-Aláàánú, the first daughter of Olú-Ìwà, succeeded her father as the head of the Ìjẹ̀bù settlement (Okubote, 2013:4f), signifying the participation of the women folk in the administration of the Ìjẹ̀bù people.

1.7.3 Cultural Background and Traditional Administrative Structure of Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode

As described in the Silver Jubilee Coronation Brochure of the incumbent Awùjalẹ̀ of Ìjẹ̀bú-land earlier referred to (1985), the traditional administrative set up in Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode was democratic in principle (see also Fadipe, 1970:212), although political parties as we know today were non-existent. What we had then were political societies or structures which had functions in the administration of the town. The societies, which still exist today, but without such wide powers as they used to have in those days, are:

- (1) The Pàmpá
- (2) The Òṣùgbó
- (3) The Ìlámùrẹ̀n
- (4) The Òdì
- (5) The Pàràkòyí

The outline of the functions of each of the societies is as follow:

1. The Pàmpá

This is considered as the ‘mother’ and spring-board of the other societies. They are more or less an equivalent of the electorate in the modern day democracy – the people, in general. It is from the Pàmpá that the other societies derive their authority. Without the Pàmpá, the *vox populi*, the functions of the Òṣùgbó, Ìlámùrẹ̀n, Pàràkòyí and even the Ọba (King) would have come to naught, so the Pàmpá must be needed if the administration of the town must continue unhindered. Title holders in the Pàmpá include (cf. Okubote 2013:60):

- (a) The Agbọ̀n, whose traditional area of domicile was Iwáde Ìsàlẹ̀
- (b) The Kakańfò, whose traditional area of domicile was Pòrògún
- (c) The Lápò-Ẹ̀kùn, whose traditional area of domicile was Iwáde Òkẹ̀

All the above mentioned title holders are of equal status in their respective ward of domicile. Some of the other title holders among the Pàmpá are:

- (d) The Jagun

- (e) The Líkòtún
- (f) The Aşípa

2. The Òşùgbó

This is a fraternity of chiefs and elders, which also functioned as the “Executive Authority” of the town. They “wielded legislative and judicial powers” (Ayandele, 1992:6). The Òşùgbó also has a religious character, having two brass images known as “Èdan” or “Onílẹ̀” which are presented as equals (Drewal 1992:175). It is instructive to note that the two images are cast in male and female moulds. Drewal (1992) further wrote about this symbolic emblem which was regarded as the centre of worship in the Òşùgbó cult:

A chain at the top often links the castings together and evokes the importance of the bond between males and females, both within the judiciary and in the larger society ... they have joined them together to make one couple. It is for oneness ... It is a symbol of unity. (p.175)

This society, being the highest statutory body in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, commanded the respect and obedience of the people. Usually, only women of substance (who should have passed the child-bearing stage) were initiated and accepted into this group (McIntosh 2010:221), including the Erelú, who “were consulted in all matters that concerned the female community”. Titles in the Òşùgbó, in order of precedence were:

- (a) The Olúwo
- (b) The Apèná
- (c) The Olúrìn
- (d) The Akòṅòràṅ

The Òşùgbó enforced the law and executed judgment in capital crimes. They were also members of the “Qwá” – the King’s court.

1. The Ìlámùrẹ̀n

This is a class of high chiefs – the Nobility. Ayandele (1992:6) referred to them as “the traditional aristocrats” who advised the King. They include:

- (a) The Olísà
- (b) The Ègbò
- (c) The Ògbèni Ọjà
- (d) The Olótùfọrẹ
- (e) The Bọbaşùwà
- (f) The Ọlówá
- (g) The Ológbẹn

The level of influence or affluence of the individual usually played a paramount role in the appointment of most of the holders of this title. They were usually automatic members of the Òşùgbó (Ayandele 1992:6).

1. **The Òdì**

This was composed of the Ọba’s slaves, captured at war or purchased in the slave market, before the abolition of slave trade (cf. Fadipe 1970: 203). Their descendants were also grouped into this rank. They were employed as messengers of the Ọba; but they were first styled as “Agùnrìn” before being promoted to the status of an Òdì. The “Àsáforíjì” which formed another category of this class were the refugees who sought the protection of the Ọba after fleeing from their homes or countries for one reason or the other. Members of this class can be promoted; and they can then leave the Ọba’s compound to occupy land given to them by the Ọba to live with their family members. They may be promoted to a position of honour and rank with the Ìlámùrẹn class of chiefs. They may also join the Òşùgbó and take such high titles as the Olúwo, as in the case of an Ògbèni Òdì (Head of the Òdì), Chief Mobulejo who became the Olúwo of Ìjẹbù-Ode during the reign of Ọba Gbólẹgbùwà II. (1933-1959). Ayandele referred to the Òdì as “sacerdotal” (p.6).

2. **The Pàràkòyí**

This society was said to be initially military in nature. Gradually, however, it assumed a nature that was more commercial than political – a kind of “Chamber of Commerce”. Trades and market disputes, regulation and enforcement of commercial policies were some of their main functions (cf. Okubote 2013:130). The military

background of this group probably informed the reason why they were referred to as “a group of male chiefs who supervised the market and trade” by McIntosh (2010:248). The Olórí Pàràkòyí and Aşípa Pàràkòyí led the society.

3. **The Awùjalè**

This is the Oba (King) and paramount ruler of the Ìjẹ̀bù people. His official title is the ‘Awùjalè’. He wields supreme spiritual and political powers over all Ìjẹ̀bù people (cf. Ifie, 1991:156). His demeanour is believed to reflect the well-being of all his people. He had power over life and death in times past. Till today, he remains the rallying point for all Ìjẹ̀bù people. He gave names to the various age grade societies, called the ‘Rẹ̀gbẹ̀rẹ̀gbẹ̀’. He also awarded chieftaincy titles. He remains the main authority in Ìjẹ̀bù-land.

4. **The Ancient Town Council**

What could be described as the ‘Town Council’ in those days was the Council of Olóritún, known as the “Olóritún Mèèdògbòn”, that is “the twenty-five Quarter-Heads”. There are twenty-five quarters, called “Itún” in Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode and each had its own Quarter-Head called “Olóritún”, whom the people respected and was respected by the Awùjalè too. The twenty-five traditional quarters were as follows, in the three traditional wards:

- (a) Iwáde -Òkè – with four (4) quarters, namely: Ìjàsí, Ìta-Ìtẹ̀bọ̀, Odò-Ègbọ̀ and Ìta-Àfin.
- (b) Iwáde -Ìsàlẹ̀ – with thirteen (13) quarters, namely: Ìdómòwó, Ìyánrò, Ìdèlé, Imẹ̀pẹ̀, Ìjàdà, Ìpámùrẹ̀n, Ìkànígbò, Ìşàdó, Ìsókù, Odò-Èşà, Agùşẹ̀bí, Imùpà and Ìta Àjànà.
- (c) Pòrògún – with eight (8) quarters, namely: Ìdẹ̀wọ̀n, Mobáyégún, Mòbeègelú, Ìta-Alápò, Ìdogi, Ìşasà, Ìdómòwó-Mùjà and Ojófà.

The people of each quarter met regularly in the house of the Quarter-Head to deal with issues of concern about the quarter or the town, including matters of general public interest. All these Quarter-Heads also met in the house of the Quarter-Head of Ìjàsí, the ‘Olúwo Àgbádágbòdò’, to discuss other crucial matters affecting the common interest of the town, where each Olóritún represented the people of his own quarter. It also served as a tribunal where minor civil matters were settled. However, the

‘Régbérégbé’ (age grade) form an essential basis for the meetings held in each quarter (see Okubote, 2013:177; Fadipe 1970: 213).

1.8 Overview of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction where the Background to this Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Research Questions, Objectives of the Study, and Significance of the Study are discussed. The first chapter also discussed the Scope and Limitation of the Study, as well as giving an insight on the Area of Study. The second chapter is the critical review of some existing literature relevant to the study. From the discussion on the existing literature, existing gaps which this study intends to fill were identified. The chapter further highlights some concepts on gender practices, its cultural implication as well as discussions on the *Ifá* cultural practices particularly as it relates to the Ìjẹ̀bú ethnic sub-group of the Yorùbá people of South-western Nigeria. The theoretical framework of the study is also discussed in this chapter. The third chapter is on the research methodology and design, where the study population, location, sampling procedure and methods of data collection are discussed. Being an ethnographic study, in-depth interview sessions, non-participant observation, interview of key informants and focus group discussions were employed as key anthropological tools of qualitative research investigation. Library sources including published books, articles, and other relevant materials, including on-line sources were also consulted. Chapter four of this work, which is the core section of the research, probed extensively into *Ifá* cultural practices especially among the Ìjẹ̀bú, vis-à-vis the gender role praxis. The synopses of the interview sessions and group discussions were presented in this chapter. The portrayal, analyses and implications of the findings are highlighted with copious texts from the *Ifá* literary genre, to buttress the outcome of the study. The fifth chapter, which is the last, dwells on the summary, conclusion and recommendations arising from the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The review of existing literature and adoption of an eclectic theoretical framework

Two important issues are discussed in this chapter. The first relates to the review of relevant existing scholarly materials. This is with a view to critically assess the magnitude and depth of these existing studies, how such works are related to this present work and how the present study can successfully fill the identified gaps observable in these previous works. This is expected to assist in adequately strengthening the focus and resultant outcome of this work. In achieving the review, the enquiries revolved around the different concepts of gender concerns, the *Ifá* literary corpus and its gender implications, *Ifá* cultural practices. In addition, where necessary and possible, these were domesticated in line with the focus on the gender relations among the Ìjèbú people.

Secondly, this section also highlights the theoretical framework upon which this research work was predicated. Although, as background, various gender theories were discussed, the choice of the “Indigenous African Womanism theory” was justified. The theory is tailored to the African setting and is central to the perspective of the present research. In addition, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis was employed. This theoretical viewpoint asserts the centrality of language to human thoughts and performative experiences, hovering between deterministic and relativistic wave lengths. Relevant excerpts from the *Ifá* literary corpus are used to either buttress or rebut issues collated from the field work. This eclectic combination is adopted in order to yield reliable outcomes.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Concept of Gender Practices

Gender discourse is not known to have emanated from Africa (Fall 1999b:1), though gender practices could not have been culturally alien altogether to Africa (Adagbada 2005:19, 24). Even at this, the concept of gender sensitivity, as a conscious

human academic enterprise is not native to Africa as well. This is however not to impute that Africans had been culturally deficient in gender considerations in their past. The interest in gender matters as an academic pursuit is also not very new in Africa (Adagbada 2005:24; Ogundipe 2007:9f). These have to be stated in view of the fact that the focus of this research is on the Ìjẹ̀bú people in Ogun State of south-western Nigeria in Africa.

One of the areas of discourse in this regard relates to the issue of gender sensitivity. Gender sensitivity, as a concept, emanated as a strand of the various developments that attended the notion of 'feminism'. The word 'Feminism' itself was derived from the Latin root *femina/femininus*, meaning 'woman' (Sotunsa, 2008:4). While it has been difficult to ascribe a concise, singular definition to *Feminism*, the unpagged Microsoft Encarta English Dictionary pointed out that it could refer to one of these two meanings. One, belief in women's rights, that is, "belief in the need to secure rights and opportunities for women equal to those of men, or a commitment to securing these". Two, it may be a reference to the movement for women's rights: "the movement committed to securing and defending rights and opportunities for women that are equal to those of men". Sotunsa (2008, 3) indeed stated that, 'since feminism means various things to various people, it becomes difficult to have a concise universal definition of the term'.

Sotunsa's submission should not be surprising. This is because it is commonplace to find scholars facing the difficulty of adopting a single definition for a phenomenon, idea, notion or experience. This could be caused by the fact of the varied experiences, backgrounds, exposure, perception or understanding inherent in undertaking such a humongous task. To corroborate this, Offen (1988:119) expressed that, "to many people, inside and outside of the academy, the word feminism continues to inspire controversy." In effect, based on the slant or discernment of each investigator, different opinions and definitions come up. Invariably, however, each 'definition' is a description and explanation of the same notion, in different ways, as perceived by each scholar. This is probably why Grimshaw (1986:7) stated that it will even be an error for anyone to believe that "a brief and clear definition in a sentence or so" could be made about feminism. Klock (2013:1) indeed submitted that, "[t]here are as many definitions of feminism and feminist theory as there are people who declare that they are feminists". All the same, Grimshaw (1986:7) was able to give an opinion that

Feminism is [...] a response to a belief that women have been oppressed and unjustly treated, and sometimes also to a belief that they have available to them more than to men certain resources for developing a critique of the damaging and destructive aspects of human institutions and social relationships, and for tracing the links between these things and the subordination of women to men. (p. 21)

This opinion sees feminism as a struggle and a means of freedom from subjugation and oppression. It is “the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2004:430). Sotunsa further traced the history, developments and diversities of feminism. These range from Marxist Feminism, Humanist Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Analytic Feminism and Lesbian Feminism. Feminism as a global phenomenon however had some challenges in its adoption in Africa and among some Black activists. This is due to the variation in experiences and history among the Blacks/Africans, as opposed to the Europeans and Americans (cf. Okoli, 2011:159f). This, according to Sotunsa, led to the preference of the label ‘(Africana) Womanism’ or ‘Black Feminism’ among some proponents of the term ‘Feminism’. Sotunsa noted that some of the notable scholars in this school of thought include Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Hudson Weems and Barbara Christian. Therefore, it may be accepted that various academic discourses on gender practices emanated from feminism. Accordingly, some efforts that have been made to trace this development would be attempted presently. Nwakaeze-Ogugua (2006) for instance, wrote that,

Feminist movement, which sparked off in the 19th century geared towards emancipation of women from supposed shackles of patriarchy. Equality of men and women in every facet of life is its central theme. The feminists do not think there is any other difference between male and female outside the biological one. (p.805f)

In our mind, it is to be expected that if a diachronic study were made of the period when feminism ‘sparked off in the 19th century’ up until now, the various aspects of development would be seen in clear terms (cf. Adeniran, 2000:49-50). Suffice to say however, that discussions, opinions and advancements have since gone beyond the

issues of equality of men and women or simply biological differences between the male and female folks. This is in tandem with Nwakaeze-Ogugua's submission.

From this level, different waves, sub-movements, variants and tendencies started to occur (Akorede, 2011). With time however, further clarifications and developments came with the notion that, in the first instance, there should be equality in the treatment of the male and the female folks within the society. However, it was thought that equality connotes mainly parity in terms of figures and therefore inadequate to describe an acceptable standard. Therefore, there would be need for further elucidation of terms. Oraegbunam (2006) alludes to this when he stated that,

...equality here does not mean physical equality, nor does it mean obliteration of all differences between men and women. Certainly, there are differences – physiological, emotional and psychological –, which of course account for differences in endowments and behavioural attitudes. ... Hence, equality does not mean egalitarianism. It only means complementarity with and help for one another. (p.864)

It is from the above notion that one notes that the concept that human beings, male and female, should strive for equity, which connotes equal treatment and equal opportunities, without undue discrimination and/or restriction, that gender sensitivity emanated from (see Olaoye, 2002:197; Akintoye, 2000:31,33). To that extent, gender parity seeks to strike a balance in the gender expectations between the male and female folk within the society. It moves a little further away from the stereotype assumptions that we find in feminism which Sokoya (2006:873) related as:

...emancipatory struggles signaling the refusal of all forms of women oppression, suppression, repression and subordination; be it internal, external, physical, socio-economic, political, emotional, psychological or otherwise.

Sokoya's submission above could be seen as a direct response to the previously highlighted assumption that feminism is the answer to tackle the imbalance posed by the observed inequalities women experience in the hands of men. To understand that there is indeed much more to be considered when critically examining the male-female relationship within a given society, there is the concurrent need to expand the horizon on which the academic enterprise is domiciled as well. It is to this extent that we need

to probe beyond the initial level of understanding on which feminism was premised. Therefore, the ‘emancipatory struggles’ purporting to shield women from suppressive, repressive and oppressive tendencies noted by Sokoya above, cannot be an end to itself; rather, it will serve as a means towards achieving some broader objectives. This is not to deny that oppressive tendencies were noticeable in African settings, including among the Yorùbá people as well. Such proverbs and dicta as:

- (i) *Pàṣántí a fì na iyálé, ó n bẹ lájà fún iyàwó* (The whip used in lashing the senior wife is safely kept in the ceiling for use when it is the turn of the junior co-wife to be flogged).
- (ii) *‘Pa mí n kú’ obìnrin ni í ṣe orí bẹnbẹ sí ọkọ.* (‘Beat me to death’ is the attitude of the stubborn woman to her husband).
- (ii) *A kì í mọ ọkọ ọmọ, kí a tún mọ àlè rẹ.* (One should not know a daughter’s husband and also know her concubine).
- (iii) *Èni tí ó fẹ̀ arẹ̀wà obìnrin fẹ̀ iyọnu, èni gbogbo ni í bá wọn tan.* (One who marries a beautiful woman marries trouble; everybody claims relationship with her).

The first two examples above attest to the fact that physical or corporal punishment meted out to women (wives) by their husbands was part of the social life of some Yorùbá people. The last two examples cast suspicion of infidelity on women. It should be noted that similar proverbs casting suspicion on men appear scarce to find.

This stereotypical representation sees all matters relating to gender issues, or more particularly, feminism as “talking about dismantling the entire rubric of social Organisation that oppresses women” (Para-Mallam, 2011:26). Regardless of this typecast, there are other skeptical opinions that tend to deny that women are oppressed especially in Africa. Akorede (2011:52) for example, mentions that,

Sunday Oke (1996:1) denies that women are marginalised in the African society. He argues that the pollution of traditional African way of life by foreign agencies of civilization is responsible for women’s “restlessness” and their perceived oppression.

In this wise, Akorede is saying that the traditional African perception of feminism, or more generally, gender issues, as expounded by Oke, should be differently viewed (see also Faturoti, 2012:155). The traditional African setting has been seen as culturally undiluted in this wise, and feminism, in its original garb should be considered as no

more than the pollution of an otherwise 'sane' environment. While each cultural environment may possess its own peculiar cultural traits as the Africans certainly possess theirs, we should be cautious in this type of scepticism, since no cultural environment has a permanent cultural boundary that cannot be influenced or penetrated. In short, we tend to view this submission along the common parlance that no cultural environment is an island to itself. Our position here however has not in any way negated the observation made by Oke as quoted by Akorede above.

Akorede (2011:53) mentioned J. Epstein (1989:40) as another critic on this other side of the divide while Akorede (2012: 154-155) listed others like Samuel (1996:32) and Olaitan (1994:18). The situation made Akorede (2012:155) to intone that from the foregoing submissions, it is patently clear that feminism is yet to be fully embraced in Yorùbá society. As a matter of fact, there are people who do not believe in it at all.

Adagbada (2005) discussed gender issues, tracing the development of feminism while doing so. Her argument that it was a wrong assumption to assert that "feminists' struggles can be generalized" or "the opinion that the struggle for the emancipation of the female gender originated in the Western part of the world and from there, spread to the other parts like Asia and Africa...is very wrong" (p. 24) should be noteworthy. For her, every dynamic society regardless of where it is located is capable of challenging the patrifocal *status quo* once "marginalization that calls for a re-ordering of the social order" is noticeable (p. 26).

For Odejide (2012:3), in attempting to define gender, she submitted that:

[Gender] is not a code for "women."
The term is generally applied to the socially constructed roles which we acquire as a result of being born female or male in a particular time, space, class and culture. It may be defined in simple terms as the differing roles and expectations a given society imposes on women and men as a result of being born female or male...Society and culture apportion characteristics, requirements and expectations to males and females.

The import of Odejide's submission is that gender issues are society and culture based. To understand how these operate in each society or cultural group therefore requires careful studies, as making sweeping generalisations covering different societies and

culture may not give the needed clue on gender perspectives as may be scholarly required.

From the submissions made so far, we shall now situate these notions properly to our research interest. Pogoson (2010:41) noted that the issue of gender can be regarded as a ‘social identity’ capable of changing as time and space demand. It spells out the appropriate cultural, functional roles assigned for men and women. This, Pogoson notes, may differ from one society to the other, particularly because they are ‘culturally and institutionally embedded’. The concerns here are about both men and women, though specific attention are paid to the needs and contributions of the female folk. In this manner, the possibility of building a healthy society will be guaranteed (cf. Gbadero 2006:195). McIntosh (2010:19) in a way corroborates Pogoson, specifically about the Yorùbá people:

...that Yorùbá did not have a concept of gender similar to that found in Western societies. ...however, the Yorùbá did associate certain qualities with women rather than men and assigned certain roles only to women. Male dominance in practical terms, a form of patriarchy quite different from that found in nineteenth-century Britain, could thus exist even without a gender-based ideology.

To further espouse on the Yorùbá people of south-western Nigeria, Olademo (2009:50) indicates that, ‘in theory and practice, expected roles for male and female – human and nonhuman – was an integral part of Yorùbá daily living experiences in the traditional setting’.

Furthermore, Adesina (2011:13) states that the roles and activities of the Yorùbá male and female folks are largely defined and such roles are meant to be complementary. This situation is recognised by the Yorùbá dictum that “*tako-tabo la dá ilé ayé*”, implying that the world is equally made up of both the male and the female folks. Ajibade (2013:970) writes about this notion of complementariness among the Yorùbá, adding some spiritual dimension, and comparing same with the Chinese Yang and Yin. The perception is not to see one gender as dominating the other, but as complements. Hence, Ajibade said, “Men and women in Yorùbá spirituality and religion spheres are more of complementariness than seeing women as subservient to men or vice versa.” Even in some situations where a role was purportedly assigned to

the man, it was not frowned at if such a role was performed by the woman. Hence the saying that,

*-Bí ọkùnrin bá rí ejò, tí obìnrin pa á, kí ejò má
ti lọ ni. (If a man sees a snake, and the snake
ended up being killed by a woman, it does not
matter; the important thing is that the snake
should not escape being killed.)*

In fact, there are some critical areas of interest where the Yorùbá women in the traditional culture actually dominated (cf. Onabanjo, 2011:3645ff). Thus, “the Yorùbá woman in history was relatively independent in mind set and status.” (Adesina, 2011:13). The Yorùbá society, in gender matters, could therefore be considered as liberal; but Adesina’s submission was not without a caveat. While he grouped the Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá, Ìjẹ̀bú- and Ègbá- Yorùbá as liberal, the Ìkálẹ̀-Yorùbá was singled out as “not independent in mind set and status.”

Our discussion so far has shown us that ample academic work has been done on the concept of gender practices in different respects. This has guided our research work through a well-grounded understanding of the terms in the midst of previous scholarly perception. Of importance is the fact that none of the works directly investigated the roles of women, vis-à-vis men in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land. This gap is what we intend to fill with this current research effort.

2.2.2 *Ifá* Literary Corpus and Gender roles in Perspectives

Academic efforts have been made in different ways and by different scholars in the past to scrutinize the *Ifá* literary corpus. Indeed, the *Ifá* literary corpus may be regarded as one of the most researched areas of Yorùbá literary genres that emanated from the oral version. For example, Olatunji (2005:195) noted that many collections of the *Ifá* verses have been made. He listed the notable ones to include Èpéga (1937), Ogunbiyi (1952), Sowande (1965) and Abimbola (1968, 1969, 1970, 1971), all written in the Yorùbá language. Both works of Bascom (1969) and Abimbola (1977, 2015) were accompanied with the English translations of the collected verses. In addition, Olatunji further noted that there are other works, which are mainly transcriptions of the collected *Ifá* verses, sometimes containing descriptive introductions. In acknowledgement of the fact that some considerable works had been done on *Ifá* literary corpus, Olatunji further submits that,

Apart from several collections of texts of *ẹsẹ Ifá*, there are as well numerous writing on various aspects of the verses so much so that we can safely claim that *ẹsẹ Ifá* is the most documented of Yorùbá poetic forms. (2005:109)

Indeed, many scholars from diverse fields of African Studies have previously worked on the *Ifá* literary corpus, cultural practices and related matters among the Yorùbá people of south-western Nigeria. Prominent among these scholars is Abimbola (1976; 2006; 2008; 2015). Ogundipe (2007: 33) referred to Abimbola “as one of the most erudite scholars in the science of *Ifá*, and perhaps the most published in Anglo-Western terms”. However, most of Abimbola’s works, as earlier noted, centered on transcribing the literary verses of the *Ifá* corpus and explaining the contents to the readers (Abimbola 2006; 2008). Some of the collections made by Abimbola were also translated to English language in order to gain a wider readership (Abimbola 1976; 2015). Abimbola however took time to discuss some stylistic features of the *Ifá* literary corpus, the usual form and contents of the verses, as well as some other salient points in *Ifá* cultural practices in all the works cited.

The printed literature on *Ifá* texts and the divination process is enormous, some of it in Yorùbá. The most extensive works are by Abimbola (1968; 1969; 1976; 1977; 2015); Bascom (1969); Beyioku (1971); McClelland (1982); and Epega (1987). They tend to focus on the content of the texts, literary devices, the instruments of divination, and the casting process...

Drewal (1992:208) noted that,

As much as Abimbola is renowned for his works on *Ifá*, all the same, his works on the gender implications of the *Ifá* cultural practices are not as prominent; neither did Abimbola make any substantial gender analysis of the literary corpus he collected and analysed in his notable works. Abimbola’s *Ìjìnlẹ̀ Ohùn Ẹnu Ifá, Apá Kejì* (2006 edition) for instance contained some thoughts about women from different *ẹsẹ Ifá* (*Ifá* verses). In *Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì* verses (p. 26-33) we find:

Wọ̀n ò jẹ́ sígun ilòbìnrin
Kí n bá wọ̀n lọ:
Mbá mú pa,
Ma mú tà
Mbá mú relé lọ sòbìnrin...

(If a war is ever waged on *ilòbìnrin* – a town populated by women only
I would have loved to go to such a war
I would have killed some (women) at the war
front
I would have sold some of my (female)
captives
I would have taken some captives back home
as wives.)

At some other point within the same fairly long *Òyèkú Méjì* verse another perception of women was unfolded in the *Odù*, that

Òkan soṣo póró lobìnrin dùn mọ lówó ọkọ
Bí wón bá di méjì
Wọn a dòjòwú
Bí wón bá di méta
Wọn a dẹta n̄ túlẹ...

(A woman is best enjoyed as an only wife.

When a man marries two wives
They become jealous beings
When a man marries three women
They end up disorganising the entire home)

The concluding part of this same *Ifá* verse told of how *Olójòngbòdú* the wife of *Ikú* (Death) betrayed her husband and handed the powerful *Ikú* to the hands of his enemies who thoroughly disgraced him. That portion of the long verse was introduced thus:

Obìnrin lèké
Obìnrin lẹdàlẹ
Kéyàn mọ finú hàn fóbìnrin
A díá fún Olójòngbòdú,
Obìnrin Ikú

(A woman is a liar
A woman is a betrayer
No one should confide in a woman

As it happened when divination was performed for *Olójòngbòdú*,

The wife of *Ikú*).

The excerpts from *Ifá* above, clearly shows that the view that women are perceived as commodities that could be obtained as spoils of war, who can be quarrelsome or become treacherous cannot be waived aside. But such scrutiny on the womenfolk was absent from Abimbola's work under reference, since that appears not to be the focus addressed by the work. It should however be noted that Abimbola is also an *Ifá* practitioner, indeed a *babaláwo* (priest), having come from a family with a strong background in Yorùbá traditional religion (Faládé, 2011).

It is worth mentioning that some other scholars have also done some appreciable work on *Ifá* literary corpus in different dimensions. However, most of the works are not related to gender issues. For example, a notable scholar whose work on the *Ifá* literary corpus we had already referred to is Olatunji (2005). In this work, Olatunji discussed many types of Yorùbá oral literature including the *Ifá* verses. The analysis, however, delved mainly on the literary and stylistic features of the different genres treated. In the work, Olatunji examined the *Ifá* divination system, the content of the *ẹsẹ Ifá* (where he discussed the issue of *Ori*, the benevolent and malevolent forces in the universe, the place of man in the universe, human problems, obedience and sacrifice), the features of *Ẹsẹ Ifá* (the structure, narrative essence and continuity, symbolism and word play). In all these, Olatunji said nothing about gender considerations in the *Ifá* literary corpus. This will be mainly because the issue is not within the purview of his work.

Agboola's work (1989), another notable publication on *Ifá*, is the product of some research efforts between the author, an *Ifá* practitioner and some scholars at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, led by the erudite scholars, Adeboye Babalola and Afolabi Olabimtan. The work, patterned mainly like some other previous efforts, concerned itself with the transcription of the *Ifá* verses collected in the course of the research work, with explanations given of the difficult words and phrases. No attempt was made to give some measure of prominence to any issue related to gender reflection in the collated write-up.

Olunlade (1999), which discussed some themes in *Ifá* which excludes gender issues, focused very briefly on the origin of *Ifá*, the training of an *Ifá* priests, the paraphernalia of *Ifá* divination and some stylistic features of *Ifá* poetic verses, cannot be taken as attempting to address the work which our research here intends to undertake.

Yemitan and Ogundele (1970) also centered on the *Ifá* literary verses. The work, mainly written in the prosaic format, was *Ifá* verses reduced to stories, elaborating on the central theme of each particular verse that was treated. The target audience was the secondary school students preparing for the Senior School Certificate Examination in Yorùbá. It will be understandable therefore, that beyond the explanation of difficult words in the passages, no serious scholastic presentation was made in the works. While we have stories that portray the female-folk in one way or the other in the collected verses written in this book, no time was devoted to the

examination of such issues by the authors. The whole effort appears to be didactic-centered.

Oyesakin (1985:50-60) highlighted the prose narrative content in Ifá poetic rendition, pointing out that folklorists may wish to pay further attention to this literary aspect of Ifá practices. This, to us, is a scholarly, stylistic impression of Ifá literary corpus and no more.

Lijadu's work (2001) is a compilation and transcription of Ifá verses, all written in Yorùbá language, with each verse numbered as we have it in the Holy Bible, which also contained a few Ifá songs at the end of the book. There were no explanatory notes on Ifá cultural practices by the author.

Ogundipe (2007) focused on "Gender Concepts and Issues" and how these relate to national development in Nigeria. In doing so, the author appealed, generously, to the oral tradition in Africa, including the *Ifá* poetic rendition. This should not be unexpected because the oral tradition remains the main source of the authentic African background (Ogundipe 2007:35). Some notable and relevant submissions made by Ogundipe (2007) include the paradoxical dynamic state of the oral tradition and its obvious state of immutability:

Ifá divination poetry, being oral and memorized, is not monolithic and does not proceed through time seamlessly. As the various priest/priestess narrators include or exclude items from their repertoire, basic stories, adages and philosophical bents remain, though gendered perspectives may be affected by the politics of the narrator or his historical and social context (p. 34).

In addition, Ogundipe (p. 35) further shows the level of reliance the Yorùbá people attach to the *Ifá* corpus when she intoned that: 'It (i.e. *Ifá* corpus) is still, however a knowledge system of the Yorùbá and a philosophical record, testimony, and encyclopaedia of their culture as it evolves'.

Ogundipe also foregrounded the belief that the *Ifá* literary corpus can be relied upon for the analyses of the Yorùbá cultural patterns and behaviour. She however fell short in giving an analytical presentation on the gender patterns that could be read into the *Ifá* poetic renditions, beyond giving an opinion to make an assertion on the "pre-feminist recognition of the possible independence of women in Yorùbá originary vision". (p. 35)

An even more critical submission by Ogundipe which sets a cue for the present study is the assertion that “[i]ndependence is not a feminist or foreign perversion of Yorùbá culture in modern-day Nigeria.” She clarifies this when she says:

Yorùbá culture may be patriarchal and male dominant in certain practices and ideological statements but it also emphasises very frequently and importantly the androgyny of reality and existence, making central the importance of the female principle as life’s mainstay. Yorùbá culture tends to be integrative of the sexes and gender roles. Such conceptualization makes the culture balanced, at least at the conceptual level while it puts seniority and gender roles before sex in the question of status between men and women, succeeding in possessing the rare African characteristic that women can be valued and respected outside of directly sexual relationships with men.

Olajubu (2003), Opefeyitimi (2009) and Ilesanmi (2013) all researched into the cultural and religious activities of women in Yorùbá land. The works were indepth and detailed in the respective chosen focus. Curiously, however, none of the scholars focused on women in Ijèbú land, especially when their references were to Ifá cultural practices. Olajubu’s work under reference “included the peoples of Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo, Lagos and some parts of Kwara States of Nigeria (Olajubu, 2013:17)”. Both Opefeyitimi and Ilesanmi also drew examples from other places in Yorùbáland, but Ijèbú land as well.

Elebuibon is a notable Chief Priest of *Ifá* who also holds the traditional title of the *Àwíṣẹ* of Osogbo, Nigeria. In his 2004 book, he collated thirty-five different short stories based on excerpts from the *Ifá* corpus. Substantially written in English language, with relevant portions of the *Ifá* verses written in Yorùbá and then translated to English, Elebuibon obviously intended to make the textbook a reference material for school children particularly for examination purposes. Sample questions and a glossary of terms were provided in the book, without any critical academic discourse. Only two out of the thirty-five stories, ‘Epo: The Daughter of Olotá Odo’ and ‘Motherhood Deserves Commendation’ are stories directly related to women activities.

Kumari’s *Ìyánífá: Woman of Wisdom* (2014):

is a collection of stories, essays, and explorations of the role of Ìyánífá and its resurgence particularly in the Diaspora. Gleaned from the perspective of the elder mothers who broke the glass ceiling to reclaim the tradition, they share their divine wisdom teachings, candid personal experiences, joys, and growing pains drawn from their lives as Ìyánífás and women in the tradition. (Outer back-cover).

The book contains some *Ifá* verses, interviews and experiences mostly of *Ifá* ‘priestesses’ who are in the diaspora, most of who believed their historical roots are in Africa. Obviously most of the accounts in the book afford the opportunity to crosscheck whether the experiences of those in the diaspora are congruent with experiences in Yorùbá-land.

Ogunnaike (2018) discussed the “controversy over women practicing *Ifá* divination”, where “the previously male-dominated composition of its priesthood has become challenged” (p. 15), and new trends occurring especially in the United States of America, some rigid posture in Cuba and some measure of ambivalence in Africa. He specifically traced and highlighted considerably the debate surrounding the initiation or otherwise of women into the *Ifá* cultural tradition and their ability to perform *Ifá* divination publicly before their clients. The work is an interesting contribution to a robust debate, which did not make any reference to the practice of *Ifá* in Ìjẹ̀bù land and the developments there. The debate only narrowed itself down to just an aspect of *Ifá* cultural practices, as just noted.

Olademo (2009: 47-80) explored gender and the *Ifá* literary corpus, albeit marginally. Olademo treated the issue of gender in selected Yorùbá oral poetry, including *Ifá*, *Oríkì* and *Ìjálá*. The work was an explicatory analysis of collected texts in the respective oral presentations. The work interrogated issues of cultural expression, societal conventions and Yorùbá philosophy at large. She made very useful observations and statements about the different dimensions of *Ifá*. For example, she identified *Ifá* as referring to any of these two: (i) a deity, also known as *Òrúnmilá*, who is believed to have lived as a human being on earth and (ii) the practice of *Ifá* as a divinatory system. As part of the divinatory system, Olademo (2009: 49) further posited that,

... (the) functionaries of the *Ifá* practice are custodians of Yorùbá philosophy and world view as documented in the *Ifá* verses. Yorùbá practices and cultural paradigm could be discerned, studied and appreciated from many *Ifá* verses.

The above submission is to vouch for the level of reliability inherent in the *Ifá* literary corpus, a point that is widely acclaimed too (Ogundipe 2007, Apter 1992:20, McIntosh 2010:40; Oluwole, 2014:81). Arifalo (2002:28) also noted that “*Òrúnmìlà* was regarded as the wise counsellor, the historian and the custodian of divine wisdom.”

While Olademo (2009) mentioned that her focus was on *Ifá* practice through the analyses of collated *Ifá* verses, we notice that her submissions on the gender implications that could be deduced in the cultural practices could be more in-depth. In addition, the analyses given to the *Ifá* narratives she selected concentrated mainly on the explanations given to the expected roles for the male and female, as “an integral part of Yorùbá daily living experiences in the traditional setting.” Regardless of this however, we agree with her submission that:

It is pertinent to state that these *Ifá* verses were accounts on various subjects but a careful examination of them shows that gender construct was an assumption in the society that produced them. (Olademo 2009:50).

In her conclusion, Olademo submitted that:

In sum, *Ifá* – the Yorùbá storehouse of wisdom – asserts that the Yorùbá had gender construct in their philosophy and practised gender classification in daily social interactions. The peculiarities of Yorùbá gender construct do not obliterate its existence or relevance in the people’s historical and contemporary experience. (p. 78).

Regardless of this, it should be noted that almost all the *Ifá* verses collected by Olademo were sourced from the *Òyó* area of Yorùbá-land, with a few from Osogbo. In line with an observation made by Ogundipe (2007: 34) that “[t]he myths of *Ifá* have always had variants depending on (various) factors...” it will be a worthwhile effort to research and compare the situation in *Ìjẹ̀bú* land with the outcome of Olademo’s efforts.

However, Olademo's study reveals some gaps which the present study sought to resolve. For instance, this study explored the functions of the female gender in the practical processes of the *Ifá* divinatory system and the roles played by each gender, in order to assess whether either of them was placed at a position of disadvantage. In addition, our analyses will include the interpretation of roles assigned particularly to the women-folk, as depicted in the respective *Ifá* verses examined.

2.2.3 *Ifá* Cultural Practices

The kernel of *Ifá* cultural practices is its use as a process of divination among the Yorùbá. Adekola (2009:1) noted that:

Divination is a universal phenomenon ...
(and) the functional role played by this
practical art in the society cannot be
undermined or ignored.

The art of divination, therefore, is not unique or peculiar to the Yorùbá people alone. Of course, it is not a new development among the people all over the world wherever it is practised. Further, Adekola (2009) submitted that,

It is also deduced that the knowledge and
practice of divination originated from the
primordial period when man perceived that he
was living among some spiritual forces which
are more powerful than himself. Man,
therefore, thought of the ways or means by
which he could understand these forces and
communicate effectively with them to avoid
their wrath or seek their favour when and
where necessary. (p. 9)

Ifá cultural practices involve a myriad of inter-related activities, central to which is its reputation as a divination system. Olatunji (2005:110) quotes Bascom (1969) as saying that,

Of all the methods of divination employed by
the Yorùbá, *Ifá* is regarded as the most
important and the most reliable.

The poetic genre that accompanies the *Ifá* divination processes cannot be less reliable. Hence Olademo (2009:50) submits that the "*Ifá* corpus remains the most reliable body of oral literature among the Yorùbá".

McIntosh (2010:248) describes *Ifá* as “a form of Yorùbá divination (foretelling the future or revealing hidden causes) based upon contact between the human world and that of the spirits coupled with a large body of poetry.” She further says that “[i]n the oral poetry that accompanied *Ifá* divinations, women were praised for their bravery and the contributions they made to the standing of their husbands and children.” This submission shows the relevance and importance of women to the *Ifá* divination and worship.

The *Ifá* divinatory process usually involves, on one hand, the client, who has gone to seek an intervention, and the diviner, who is the other party in the course of the action. Hence, Olademo (2009:48) opined that “...*Ifá* practice is primarily that of a relationship between the adherent and *Ifá*, and not a collective issue”, where the diviner is seen as the earthly representative of *Ifá*. The diviner, in most instances, is a man who is well advanced and versed in *Ifá* cultural practices, because of very many years of apprenticeship, tutelage and practice. Sometimes, the future-diviner is born into the family of *Ifá* practitioners where he learns the art over time as he grows up. He is expected to be able to assure the clients of his ability to keep secrets and maintain high level of confidentiality. Hence, he is called the ‘*babaláwo*’, meaning ‘the father of secrets’.

The above stance, which makes it imperative for the diviner to firmly keep his reputation untainted as a result of long years of experience, is further emphasised by Olademo (2009: 48) that:

The principal person in the practice of *Ifá* is the priest or priestess, i.e. the *Babaláwo* or the *Ìyánifá* respectively. These individuals undergo rigorous training and discipline before graduating to become a *Babaláwo* or *Ìyánifá*.

Olademo went further to submit that:

Examples of male titles in *Ifá* group include: *àràbà*, *olúawo*, *akódá*, *aşèdá*, *àgbongbòn*, *òtún awo*, *òsì-awo*, *alákeji* and *òdòfin*. Examples of female titles are: *iyánifá*, *iyálóde-awo*, *olómitútù*, *yèyé-awo*, *iyá-lódù* and *iyá-èwe*. The same demarcation may be found in all other religious groups in Yorùbá-land. (p. 77)

Besides, Olademo is of the opinion that “Yorùbá practices and cultural paradigm could be discerned, studied and appreciated from many *Ifá* verses” (p. 49)

Whatever the case may be, the incidence of female title-holders as quoted by Olademo may not be as high as that of their male counterparts. Of course, again, there is the need to find out whether both male and female title-holders are equally entitled to exactly the same status and treatment in the circle of the *Ifá* practitioners. A question to be answered, for instance, is whether there is any form of discrimination meted out to any of the title-holders on account of gender. We may consider Akorede (2011:70), for instance, in her submission on traditional religious practices in Òyó area of Yorùbá land when she cited Johnson (2001:64) that:

Religious practice in traditional African set up did not consciously relegate women. They took significant and active part in the religious life of the kingdom. Virtually all gods and goddesses have both male and female priests, adherents and worshippers.

Women priestesses also held important positions in the administration of pre-colonial Yorùbá nation. They held sway over the rank and file of the citizenry. Both men and women consult them. Their sex did not hinder the performance of their roles...

The *Iya'lemole* was ... very active in *Ifá* worship. *Ifá* worship is a semi-secret and predominantly male cult, but *Iya'lemole* was the “head of the Babaláwo (*Ifá* priests) in the city”.

Clearly, there is the need to ask the question; is there any advantage or disadvantage in the course of discharging the responsibilities of the office of an *Ifá* practitioner simply based on the gender for any of the devotees of *Ifá*? This clearly becomes germane in view of the debate earlier pointed out in Ogunnaike (2018) in 2.2.2 above on the initiation of women into the *Ifá* cult as well as training them as ‘Màmáláwo’ or ‘Ìyánífá’, especially in the United States of America.

This research work, in furtherance to the above elucidation, sets out to investigate the different cultural practices of *Ifá* practitioners as they relate to the gender biases, if any, among the Yorùbá people of South-Western Nigeria, as exemplified by the Ìjèbú sub-group of the Yorùbá population.

2.2.4 Gender Practice/Status among the Ìjẹ̀bú

Olademo's work (2009) implicitly, erroneously though, portrayed the Yorùbá people as homogeneously culturally patrilineal. This impression is argued by Drewal (1992:187) where she says that "[t]he literature often stresses that the Yorùbá family is patrilineal and patrilocal, although reality does not always bear out this assertion." A closer look however, as corroborated by Fadipe (1970) and Adetugbo (1982) shows that this is not so. Fadipe clearly states that "[a]lthough the patrilineal form of Organisation prevails, the Yorùbá reckon descent bilaterally" (p.134). Adetugbo tried to establish that apart from linguistic characteristics that could be said to be responsible for the various dialects in Yorùbá-land, there are some other factors serving to bond each area of dialectical operation, which sets them apart. Adetugbo (1982:211) classified Ìjẹ̀bú dialect and its variants as belonging to the South East Yorùbá (SEY) group. This group stretches through the Ìjẹ̀bú/Rémo/Òndó/Ìkálẹ̀/Òwò axis. One major factor that distinguishes the SEY group from other groups identified by Adetugbo is the fact that, while most other parts of Yorùbáland had been and still largely remain patrilineal, (especially in the North-West Yorùbá, NWY), the SEY (which includes the Ìjẹ̀bú people) are culturally both matrilineal and patrilineal in nature. This is why a person can lay claim to a chieftaincy title in the mother's lineage. Adetugbo asserted thus:

In SEY-CY areas, lineage is multilinear and descent is traced both paternally and maternally. Evidences of inheritance through maternal descent abound in Ìjẹ̀bú and Òndó areas. In NWY areas, lineage is unilinear and descent is agnatic. (p. 222).

In consonance with the above assertion, the Ìjẹ̀bú history shows that some of the past *Awùjalẹ̀*, the King/paramount ruler of Ìjẹ̀bú-land, were females, as previously noted in 1.1 (see Sonubi, 2012:123f.). Although the percentage of such female rulers in Ìjẹ̀bú land is quite low and the occurrence considered as very few and far in between, the fact remains that such cultural opportunities hardly exist elsewhere in Yorùbá land. The closest realization, exists among the Àkùré and some Èkìtì populations where, upon the demise of a king, the eldest female child of the deceased king was installed to hold fort as a regent, for the period of interregnum pending the appointment of a new king (see Salaw-udeen, 2014; Ogunnaike, 2018:24). This appointment is temporary, not substantive. Interestingly, these other areas fall within the Central Yorùbá (CY)

area, described by Adetugbo (1982:222) as “behaving like a transitional zone which often shares features with SEY and sometimes with NWY.”

In the same vein, and as corroborated by Adetugbo in his work earlier cited (1982:222), is the existence of the ‘age-grade’ societies in Ìjẹ̀bù land. Whereas this tradition is absent in the North West Yorùbá (NWY) areas, a different version of it could be found among the Èkítì of the Central Yorùbá (CY), earlier referred to as a ‘transitional zone’ in Yorùbá land. A notable feature about the societies in Ìjẹ̀bù land is that the male-folk and the female-folk of the same age group run parallel sets. Although the male and female groups of the same age-grade are separated, they collaborate occasionally when the need arises.

There are also many traditional chieftaincy titles obtainable in Ìjẹ̀bù land. Both men and women have access to these titles. It should however be noted that the high-ranking titles such as the Olísà, the Ègbò, the Lápòkùn and the Olíwo are bestowed on men as our investigations could not trace the occupation of any of the titles by any woman in the past till date. The Erelú however is an exclusive title for women in Ìjẹ̀bù-land.

The import of the above submission is to show that, in spite of the generally held belief that gender sensitivity is low especially in Africa, such generalizations may not entirely hold true or be representative of experiences in all parts of Africa. Ogunbiyi, as cited by Olatunji (2005:195) corroborates this position when she said that “African women were in fact honoured, hallowed, (and) indispensable to their communities...” The present study thus seeks to validate Ogunbiyi’s observation through its examination of cultural practices among the Ìjẹ̀bù people in Ogun State, south-western Nigeria.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Every scholarly work of this nature must necessarily adopt an appropriate analytical framework as this is expected to guide, direct and drive the research effort. This study is concerned with the exploration of cultural practices, focusing on gender implications and using materials gathered from the field of investigation for our analyses. To achieve this, an eclectic approach is considered for use because by the nature of the issues concerned in the work, applying a single framework may be inadequate. The consideration of gender issues in the work makes the examination of

different dimensions of feminism inevitable. African Womanism as espoused by C. Okonjo-Ogunyemi and subscribed to by Sotunsa and Mary Kolawole (see Sotunsa, 2012:97ff.) was therefore adopted as one of the theories on which this work is hinged. African Womanism can be described as a domesticated or African version that developed in response to the Feminist Theory which is generally seen as a foreign design to Africa (Sotunsa, 2012:96; Olajubu, 2004:42; Eyeh, 2012:53ff.). This is used especially in determining the level of gender-sensitivity and roles in its entire ramifications in *Ifá* practice, this being the focus of the study.

In addition to using the Indigenous African Womanism theory, excerpts from the *Ifá* corpus are used to corroborate or refute submissions gathered from the field. The Sa-Whorf hypothesis was adopted to situate the cultural dimensions of the use of language in the poetic rendition collected in the field (see Asiyanbola, 2012:339). The study therefore adopts a combined theoretical framework to examine, analyse and review the issues under focus. This is considered appropriate because of the relevance of each perspective in ensuring a wholesome analysis of data.

2.3.1 Indigenous African Womanism: The African Response to the Feminist Theory

Some relevant literature had been reviewed on Feminism and the ensuing opinions on same highlighted in 2.2.1. Regardless of this, we want to reiterate that different scholars have variously defined, explained and expounded the concept of 'Feminism'. As quoted by Okoye (2006:43), for example, Jane de Gay describes 'feminism' as "a general term covering a range of ideologies and theories which pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society." This indicates that it has a wide range of coverage, which inevitably makes the concept a rather complex one. It is to this extent that Sotunsa (2008:3) pointed out the difficulty associated with having a single concise definition of 'feminism' (). Further to this, Ogundipe (2007:10) notes:

that we need to speak of "feminisms" rather than "feminism" due to the various forms that feminism takes worldwide to express the differing cultural and national objectives and needs of women.

Consequently, while accepting the aggregate of opinions about the multiplicity of what feminism stands for, Akorede (2011:19) submits that

Feminist ideology rests firmly on the proposition that women should be given equal rights and opportunities as men. It articulates the politics of gender discrimination, exploitation and liberation. It is an ideology that articulates the yearnings of most women who become conscious of the negative impositions being a woman have brought on them in their different cultural environments.

Both Sotunsa (2008:5f) and Akorede (2011:22f) copiously quoted Sheila (1980:4-5) in what Sotunsa called 'Manifesto of Feminism', an expression of what they consider to be "some beliefs, values and attitudes which constitute some of the aims and aspirations of feminism as a theory:

- (i.) Feminists value women in and of themselves and for themselves not in the hypocritical fashion of male dominated culture.
- (ii.) Feminists value and prize the fact of being women as much as being human. They affirm women's capacities to be strong, capable, intelligent and successful ethical human beings.
- (iii.) Feminists value autonomy as individuals and for women as a group, who desire to develop the conditions that will enable women to control their own political, social, economic and personal destinies.
- (iv.) Feminists reject attitudes that regard the traditional masculine characteristics of aggression, power and competition as good and desirable, as opposed to the traditional feminine characteristics of compassion, tenderness and compromise as weak and ridiculous.
- (v.) Feminists desire the evaluation of positive qualities determined by merit and relative to its effect on the quality of life as it is exhibited by either woman or man. They reject the practice of separating human qualities into two categories one for men and one for women and the belief that what is described as the best is exhibited by men.

- (vi.) Feminists recognize that beliefs about women in many cultures are false and wrong-headed based on myth, ignorance and fear. Thus, they believe in the necessity of replacing these myths with reality, and ignorance with knowledge created by women, first for women and finally for all people.
- (vii.) Feminists point out the denial of their rights as humans for centuries. These are rights to vote, earn a substantive living commensurate with their work, freedom to determine whether to bear children etc. Feminists argue that these denials constitute the concrete instances of oppression.
- (viii.) Finally, feminists recognize women's persistent strength in the face of such oppression and are optimistic about the possibilities of a change. (See Akorede, 2011: 22-23)

In all of these, a few issues become apparent. Feminism, in its different strands and manifestations, makes a number of assumptions. It assumes that over the years, women have been perennially subjected to oppression, repression, ridicule, suffering and untold subjugation by men (see Usoro, 2012:169). As it recognises a tilt of imbalance to women's disadvantage and inequality to an undue advantage of men, the reversal of the inequality of women in the society lies at the core of this theory. As quoted by Okoye (2006:43), Jane de Gaye is of the opinion that Feminism prods scholars into "undertaking research that draws attention to neglected female concerns, and they are exposing the patriarchal assumptions that underlie traditional approaches to scholarship". Feminism, as a movement, however also seeks to champion women's rights and combat male domination over the female counterparts. Because of the very wide range of perception associated with the concept of feminism, we consider it rather too broad for our purpose in this work, particularly for the fact that cultural experiences may differ from one cultural setting to another, and the African experience may not be adequately captured through this approach.

As said, the opinion of some scholars, bearing in mind that the experiences of women in the Western world is not exactly the same with the African experiences (Shifferaw, 1992:91f), generated discussions on the need to domesticate a theory that will take care of such differences and background. Odejide (2012:5) highlighted that among the Yorùbá people in particular, "colonialism ... destroyed existing pre-colonial institutions" and "[d]ue to the negative gendered effect of colonialism on

women's status, women lost most of their relevance...". The experience described by Odejide here is about Yorùbá people in Africa. It may become incongruous to apply a theory that does not encapsulate their experiences to assess them. Oyewumi (1997:16) indeed noted that "Western theories ... are applied universally, on the assumption that Western experiences define the human", when it should not be so. This led to the need for "indigenising the gender theory" in Africa (Sotunsa, 2008:30f). Falola (2020:6) said,

In the past, the definition of woman and their experiences were homogenized and centered on the experiences of women in the Global North, but the field of Women's Studies across the globe are beginning to take into consideration differences of race, class, sexuality disability, nationality, and ethnicity, drawing in more diverse perspectives to the study of women around the globe...

Adagbada's work (2005) also dwelt substantially on the need for domesticating the feminist theory in Africa, in order to suit the cultural and historical background of the people. We are of the opinion that the theory of "Indigenous African Womanism" which distinguishes between other strands of Womanism, such as the "Black Womanism", "African American Womanism" or "Africana Womanism" is best applied as a framework for this research. The theory disambiguates any shroud of abstruse understanding of the various feminist approaches and theories. For example, "Indigenous African Womanism" centres on the experiences of the African woman domiciled in Africa with African cultural background, whereas "Black Womanism" and "Africana Womanism" will include other blacks in diaspora (Sotunsa, 2008:131-135; Babawale, 2008:29). To disambiguate this notion of "Womanism" relevant to African experience with a precise label, Sotunsa appended "Indigenous African" to qualify the term (p. 135). She further expounds on this theory as possessing, "in addition to the general features of womanism", the following characteristics:

- (i) A dialogic approach
- (ii) Healthy appreciation of African cultures
- (iii) Recognition of heterogeneity of African cultures
- (iv) Realistic and wholesome strategies devoid of any unnecessary aggressiveness

- (v) Pragmatism and sensitivity to fellow women (p.136)

This is the theoretical premise that we intend to use in analysing the gender perspectives of the Ìjẹ̀bù people, as portrayed in the *Ifá* cultural practices and the relevant contents of the *Ifá* verses, bearing in mind the notion of complementarity in gender relations in Africa as well (Olajubu, 2004:43; Ajibade, 2005:103; Falola, 2019b:7,14; Ilesanmi 2013:6f; Eyeh, 2012:69).

2.3.2 Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

Simple as the notion of ‘Culture’ appears to be, it is not easy to give the concept a singular definition (see Babawale, 2007:8). Very many scholars have worked and spoken widely about this issue while Andah (1988:27) noted that “culture has been defined in various ways by different schools of thought.” However, we shall not be concerned here about the details of their submissions. Suffice to say, “[e]very society has a culture” (Fageyinbo, 2002:50), explaining further that “Culture represents the sum total sum of all what a human society has accumulated over the whole period of its existence.” It is an inheritance (Fageyinbo 2002:50). Both Ferraro (2004:24) and Fageyinbo (2002:50) also quoted Tylor (1871) as defining ‘culture’ as “synonymous with civilisation”; “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” This is close to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2004:284) entry which defines ‘culture’ as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life, and social organisation of a particular country, or group, (including their) music, literature, thought as a group; attitudes about something they share”.

Briefly, culture is believed to be the totality of the ways of life of a people. (cf. Omolade, 1998:72f; Prah, 2009:17f). The Microsoft Encarta Dictionary says the word ‘culture’ has a Latin origin, *cultural* meaning ‘to cultivate’.

From the above, it is clear that each group of people, in different societies all over the world, have their peculiar culture. It may not be wrong to say that the people and their culture are the same. The culture reflects the people and the people reflect their culture. The culture of the people says virtually everything about them. It is the identity of the people. For a people to lose their culture in its entirety is for them to

have lost their identity. Any individual or group of people who loses its/their identity becomes anonymous.

Our contention at this point is to relate the cultural orientation of the Ìjèbú people with the gender portrayal. Being an ethnic group that is both patrilineal and matrilineal by way of social construct, there is the need to highlight and analyse both the cultural and literary contents of the *Ifá* practices to determine the level of gender sensitivity it contains. To the extent that “language is a means of preserving the people’s culture”, Kehinde, (2013:103; Fawehinmi and Fabiyi, 2012:322) explained that,

Language is a vehicle which human beings explore to relate with and understand their environment. It involves custom, tradition and ways of life of the people. Hence, it is through language that a people’s cultural heritage can be passed on to the younger generation. ... (Language) is a means of preserving the people’s culture.

Ajibade (2013:972-973) stated in concurrence that:

“... language is both an expression of culture as well as a vehicle of cultural transmission. ... The large bulk of human communication is verbal communication. Language and culture are intimately related in that language is both a vehicle for and an expression of culture. ... Summarily, explicating language use will make it possible to relate the social effects of art not only to its artistic merit, but will also elucidate the cultural practices of the people.”

To anchor this research in this direction, the anthropological method of focusing on the way people use language to study social class, group status, gender or ethnicity in a cultural milieu is adopted (see Nwagbara, 2001:213; Albert, 1999:93). This dimension which also examines the way people use language to negotiate their role in society and to achieve positions of power, delves into an aspect of Sociolinguistics that borders on Anthropology as advanced by the Sapir-Whorf school of thought. This approach is preferred because the cultural interpretation observed in both the *Ifá* practices and the verses collected will be subjected to semantic analysis. This methodology supports that “language... actually shapes our thoughts and perceptions, the very way we see the world.” (Ferraro 2004:124f). One of the scholars who propounded this methodology,

Edward Sapir was quoted by Ferraro (ibid.) as explicitly stating the notion as follows, that:

... the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (p. 124)

The methodology, according to Ferraro, suggests “that language is more than a vehicle for communication; it actually establishes mental categories that predispose people to see things in a certain way.” To this extent, the content of the *Ifá* verses collected will be treated to highlight the gender bent substantially portrayed in them.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

This research, mainly concerned with a segment of a particular cultural group in respect to some patterns of their cultural life, is ethnographical in nature. As an ethnographic enquiry, this work set out to study some underlying cultural patterns of a people, which in itself is the fulcrum of cultural anthropology. An obvious advantage of this researcher in this wise is that he is from the cultural group under scrutiny by birth and long stay in the environment. This makes the enquirer an insider. This ‘insider’ approach, also known as the emic approach in anthropological studies (Ferraro, 2004:14; Adekola, 1999:178; Omibiyi-Obidike, 1999:143), was of immense benefit in understanding the cultural nuances of the research population.

Arising from the above, this research adopted qualitative method of data collection and analyses. Focus group discussions, participant observation and in-depth interview sessions were conducted for the key informants to gather and collate primary data (Albert, 1999:97f). Apart from the conduct of the aforementioned series of interviews, relevant oral materials were sourced both from existing documents and those collected from the resource persons and groups. The content of such materials were used for comparative or corroboratory purposes on the subject. The qualitative methodology was essentially deployed for the analysis of the portrayal of gender roles in the content of the *Ifá* literary corpus, especially selected from both the newly-collected *Ifá* verses on the field and those already collated and published. Texts from library sources formed the main secondary sources of materials.

The researcher undertook initial pre-field investigations which entailed various discussions with some selected *Ifá* priests (*babaláwo*) from the study area. Four (4) of these respondents eventually became Key Informants with whom in-depth interview sessions were carried out. They gave some clues leading to the linkages in finding the four (4) Focus Groups that held discussions with the researcher. The pre-field sessions

informed the delimitation of the research work to Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode and four (4) other contiguous local government areas of Òdogbolú, Ìjẹ̀bù North-East, Ìjẹ̀bù North and Ìjẹ̀bù-East. Two other informants who were part of the pre-field discussions could not conclude this research effort due to sudden death. The materials collected from a third informant who relocated from one part of the study area to another were however used for this research. The researcher took advantage of observing an “*Ọ̀dún Ifá/Ìṣẹ̀ṣe*” (*Ifá* festival/ traditional festival) as well.

3.2 Study and Sample Populations

Both men and women practitioners as well as those who patronise the *Ifá* oracular system formed our core study population. The *Ifá* practitioners and patrons/clients among the Ìjẹ̀bù people of Ogun State, south-western Nigeria formed the focus of this research. Despite the fact that the *Ifá* priests, trainees and other practitioners have occasions to come together, their population was not documented and different “guesses” that are far, wide and unreliable were mentioned in the course of our investigation, ranging from two hundred (200) to one thousand (1000) respectively. The involvement of women in the *Ifá* oracular cultural practices as well as views expressed about the female folk in collected *Ifá* verses is the core of this work. Therefore, conscious involvement of women in this research was made.

The National Population Commission (NPC), Nigeria puts the population of the people in the six (6) Local Government areas where the core Ìjẹ̀bù people can be found in Ogun State as eight hundred and fifteen thousand, six hundred and eighty-one (815,681) in its April, 2010 figures (see Table 3.1). The population of the five contiguous Local Government Areas which constituted the study area was seven hundred and forty-one thousand, four hundred and fifty-nine (741,459).

It should be noted that a large percentage of people in Ìjẹ̀bù land are believed to be adherents of the Christian and Islamic faiths. Among this population of Christian/Moslem adherents, we have those who practice syncretism, whereby they also consult or believe in indigenous/traditional religious practices, even if surreptitiously. *Ifá* worship and cultural practices constitutes a crucial practice in Yorùbá traditional religion.

The population used for the purpose of this research comprises: sixty (60) persons constituting the four (4) Focus Groups, each led by a Key Informant; six (6) other Key Informants. As noted in 3.1 above, two (2) other Key Informants who were

part of the pre-field discussions could not conclude this research effort due to sudden death. One of the dead informants actually came from the Ogun Waterside Local Government Area, leading to leaving out the area after futile attempts to replace the dead respondent. The exact number of people who attended the “*Odún Ifá/Ìṣṣẹ*” (*Ifá* festival and traditional practices) which was more of a social event, organised by one of the Key Informants, *Babaláwo* Sunday Kesinro Ifátunmise Santos, could not be ascertained because participation was very fluid. The involvement of both genders within the research population was to make for a balanced view and opinion, in order to accommodate, corroborate, assess, balance and analyse the divergent opinions, posturing and findings we might make, to give the work the academic depth required.

The population highlighted above is made up of relevant *Ifá* stakeholders, including practitioners, patrons and patronesses in Ìjẹ̀bú land, constituting the bulk of human materials that served as the target study population. Attention was paid to the origin and location of the selected population, as only the relevant indigenous population was considered. The Key Informants are:

- (1) Chief Ìdòwú Olúbódún Dàda Adeoye, Male, the Akódá-Awo of Ọ̀sọ̀sà and Akódá-Awo of Ìjẹ̀bú-land (and others)
- (2) Chief (Mrs.) ‘Dr.’ Ọ̀ṣọ̀yẹ̀mí Adétólá, Female, Yèyè-Oge TIfálàṣẹ Akilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bú and Alágbo Ọ̀ṣọ̀ṣi, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode
- (3) Ọ̀mọ-Ọ̀ba Adeleke Adeyemi, Male, Àwíṣẹ àwọ̀n Onífá Akilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode
- (4) Olóyè Ifáneye Adesina Odusanwo, Male, Olúwo Ifá, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bú
- (5) Madam Florence Odusanwo, Female, Apètẹ̀bí Olúwo Ifá, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bú
- (6) Madam Iyabo Gbadamosi, Female, Apètẹ̀bí Àràbà Ifá, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bú
- (7) Mrs. Olúwadámiláre Adéọ̀lá, Female, Líkàá Ifá, Ìjẹ̀bú-Imuṣin
- (8) Babaláwo Mubasiru Adekoya, Male, Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbo (and others)
- (9) Olóyè Ifákorede Ifáfunmi, Male, Àràbà Ifá. Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n (and others)
- (10) Babaláwo Sunday Keṣinro Ifátunmise Santos, Male, Igbile-Erunwọ̀n, (and others)

As previously mentioned, the population of both the male and female professional practitioners of the *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land could not be ascertained. Much more difficult to ascertain was the number of people who patronise the *Ifá* practitioners, as no track is taken of such patrons and patronesses, as revealed in our pre-field work. This dearth of statistics is probably fallout of the general trend of a national problem: lack of reliable statistics. While this was not the exact focus of this research effort, the attempt to have a count of the practitioners in the course of our study could not materialize, mainly due to time constraints as well as the lethargic response from the group of people. Regardless of this situation, sixty (60) individuals making up the practitioners, patrons and patronesses of *Ifá*, randomly but purposively selected, participated as earlier broken down as the research study population. Out of this population, only ten (10) were females. The remaining fifty (50) respondents were males. The reasons for the lop-sidedness of the research population in terms of gender will be discussed under our findings.

3.3 Study Location

Ìjẹ̀bù land is in Ogun State, South-Western Nigeria. The Ìjẹ̀bù people occupy six (6) Local Government Areas (LGAs) out of the twenty (20) in Ogun State. These are Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde, Ìjẹ̀bù North, Ìjẹ̀bù North-East, Ìjẹ̀bù-East, Òdogbolú and Ogun Waterside (See Figure3.2). Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde, the accepted historical and administrative headquarters of Ìjẹ̀bù land lies between Latitude 6°49'N and Longitude 3° 53'E. It is about 100 kilometres away from Abẹ̀òkúta, the capital of Ogun State. Beyond the capital, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode (see OSCE, 1990), the expanse of Ìjẹ̀bù land covers from about latitude 6°30'N to 7°04'N and about longitude 3°29'E to 4°10'E (Longman, 2005:12,143).The Ìjẹ̀bù people share boundaries with the Ìbàdàn-Òyó sub-group to the north, the Ońdó people to the east, Lagos State to the south and the Rẹ̀mọ and Ègbá people to the west and the north-west.

Table 3.1 on the next page summarises the LGAs inhabited by the Ìjẹ̀bù people in Ogun State, showing both the headquarters and population of each LGA.

Table 3.1: The Ìjẹ̀bú People – Population and Local Government Areas

S/N	Local Government Area	Local Government Headquarters	2006 Population	2016 Projected Population
1.	Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde	Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde	157,161	218,600
2.	Ìjẹ̀bú North	Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó	280,520	390,200
3.	Òdogbolú	Òdogbolú	125,657	174,800
4.	Ìjẹ̀bú East	Ìjẹ̀bú-Imuṣin	109,321	152,100
5.	Ògùn Waterside	Abígi	74,222	103,200
6.	Ìjẹ̀bú North-East	Atan	68,800	95,700
Total			815,681	1,134,600

Source: National Population Commission Nigeria, 2016

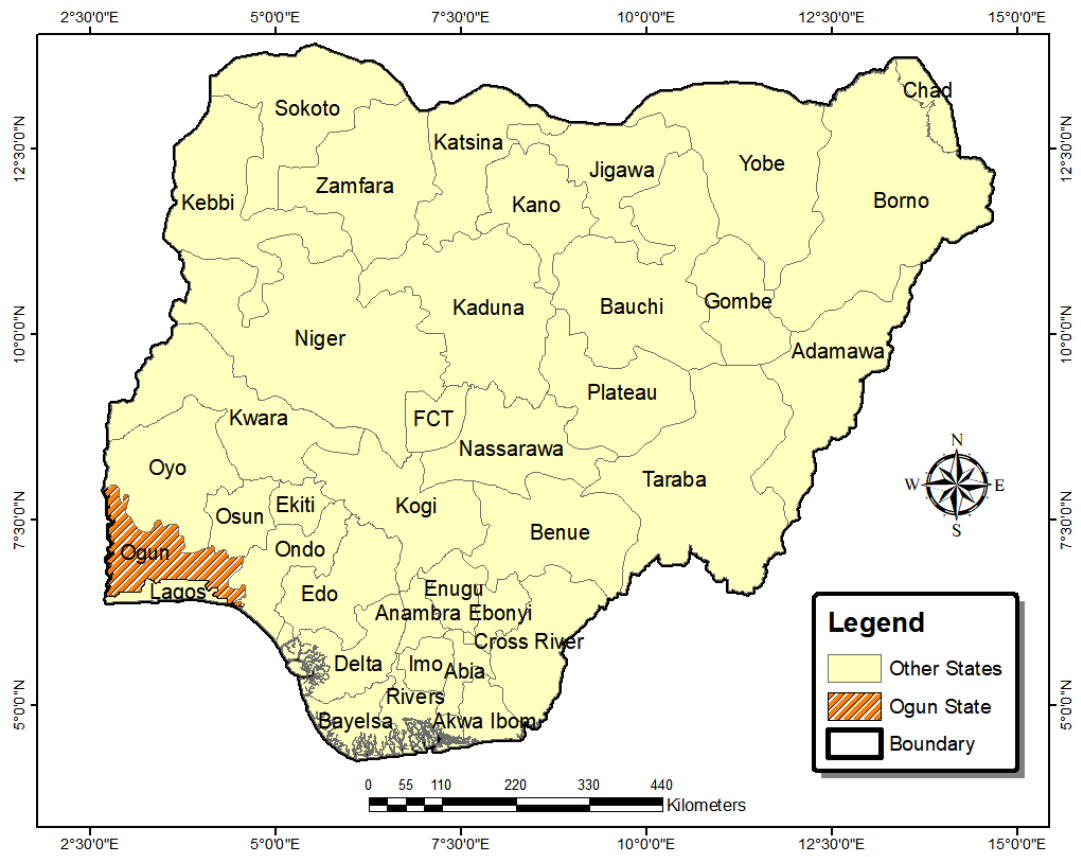


Figure 3.1: Map of Ogun State, Nigeria

Source: National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), 2020

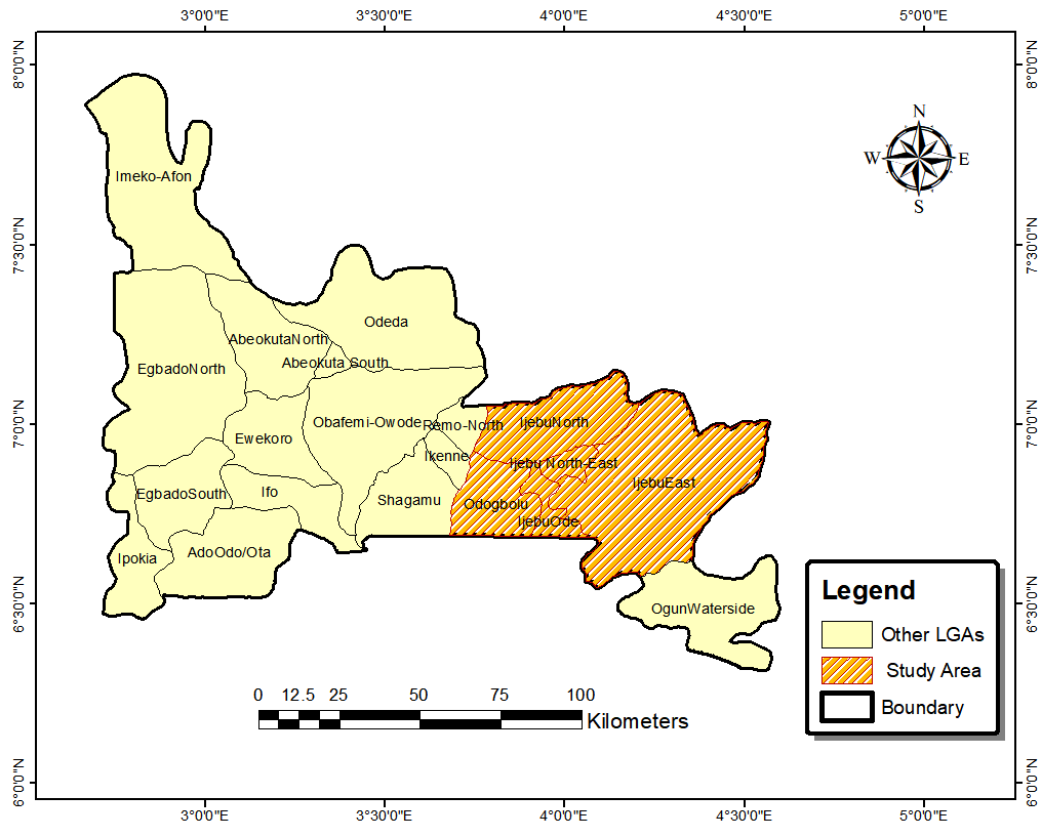


Figure 3.2: Map of Ogun State showing the Study Area
Source: National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), 2020

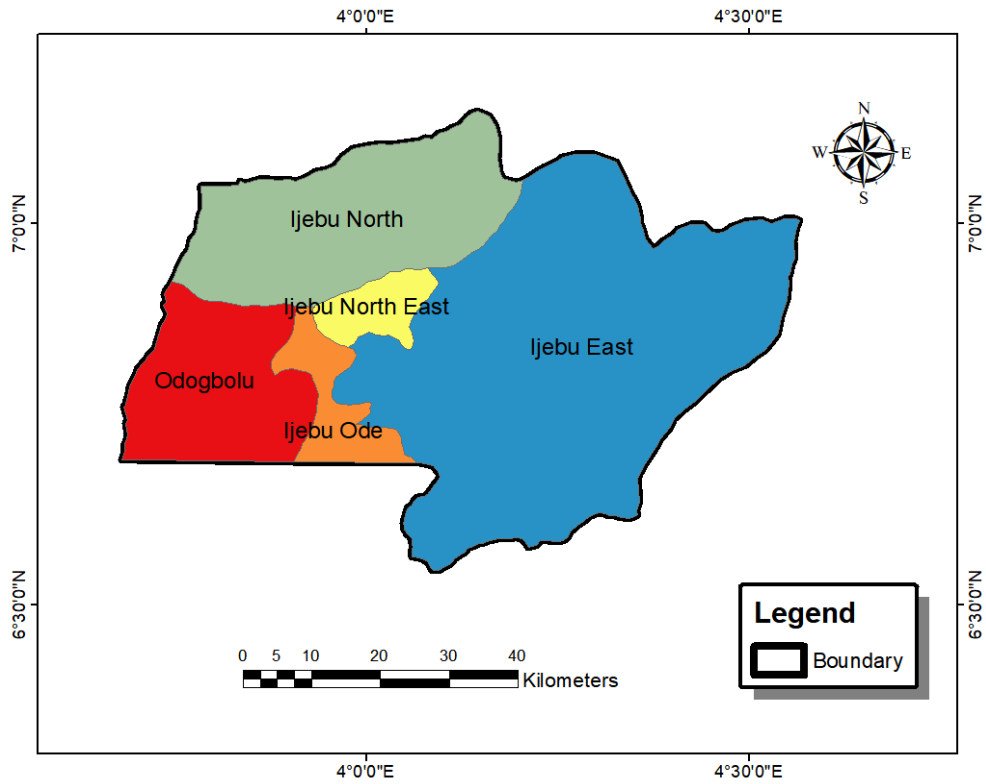


Figure 3.3: Map showing Ijebu land: The Study Area
Source: National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA), 2020

3.3.1 Sampling Procedure

The experience of most of the respondents, the relatively limited pool of choice, their availability and contiguity did not allow for random sampling. In essence, respondents for this research were purposively selected from amongst the population of the active practitioners of the *Ifá* cultural practices and those who patronise them. The respondents were necessarily Ìjẹ̀bù also living or practising in Ìjẹ̀bù. It should be expressed that in as much as the Ìjẹ̀bù people are now, for modern administrative purposes, located in six different local government areas, the Ìjẹ̀bù people inhabiting the areas are culturally homogeneous. To this extent, samples taken from any of the areas can be considered to be representative of the needed population. The sample population came from five of the six local government areas namely Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde, Òdogbolú, Ìjẹ̀bù North-East, Ìjẹ̀bù North and Ìjẹ̀bù East as the respondent earmarked for the research from the Ogun Waterside Local Government area died before the work proper commenced.

Gender consideration was initially emphasised in selecting the samples as much as possible, but the dearth of such respondents eventually restricted their population to only ten (10) out of the total sixty (60) respondents. The samples taken were thoroughly investigated through the various means as discussed in 3.5 below and the results analysed, compiled and conclusions thereafter drawn.

3.3.2 Method of Data Collection

A qualitative method of data collection was adopted in this research work. This included In-depth Interviews for the Key Informants, Participant Observation and Focus Group Discussions. The interview sessions were used in lieu of a written questionnaire, as most of the respondents were not academically literate enough to fill the conventional questionnaire. The oral interview sessions were used to elicit the necessary and required information from the respondents. When necessary, repeat visits were made to clarify issues. Materials collected during the various interview sessions were recorded on audio or video hardware while the researcher jotted down points made as well. The researcher was also accompanied by an assistant all through the interview sessions and other interactions. Library sources including published books, articles, and other relevant materials, including on-line sources were also consulted.

3.3.3 In-depth Interviews

The In-depth oral Interview method, as a veritable anthropological means of eliciting needed responses, was used to obtain clues relating to issues being investigated in this research. The interviewees, sixty (60) of them, included persons of both genders who are participants in the *Ifá* cultural practices. They were severally and rigorously interviewed and recorded through both audio and audio-visual means. The recordings not only enhanced the research reports, they also made cross references possible as the occasion demanded. To enable generalized conclusions to be drawn, a good representational number of seventy people were initially earmarked for the research; however sixty were successfully involved in the work. Out of this number, ten (10) were females and fifty (50) were males. Ten of this population participated individually in the process of the in-depth interview sessions, in both structured and unstructured formats. In addition, through this method, *Ifá* literary collections, which also served as the repertoire for the treatment of gender depiction in the corpuses, were also sourced. The lead respondents involved in this research work are as listed in 3.2.

The core areas of interest of the questions asked covered the following:

- (i) Do both men and women participate in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land?
- (ii) Are women discriminated against in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land?
- (iii) Are there *Ifá* verses that portrayed discrimination or similar depiction against women in Ìjẹ̀bù-land?
- (iv) Should the *status quo* be maintained about the roles women play in *Ifá* cultural practices, even if contemporary opinions support that there should be changes?

A sample of the questions posed to the respondents, done in Yoruba language and translated to English is as attached in Appendix 1.

Pre-field interaction had indicated that quite a good number of practitioners earmarked for interaction for this research were not very well lettered. They also tended to have a ‘closed’ disposition. Accordingly, ten (10) Key Informants were selected from among those who have been found to be very well disposed, who also have a leaning for such academic enterprise as this. It should be noted that two (2) of the Key Informants who were a part of the pre-field discussions could not conclude this research effort due to sudden death. Another Key Informant relocated from one local government area to another in the course of the work. Through the Key

Informants who were also interviewed, access to other relevant groups and individuals was facilitated; thereby enhancing the level of information elicited from other respondents. The intervention of the Key Informants was also very useful in ascertaining or corroborating the views collated from other respondents on the field. Information elicited from the Key Informants was recorded on tapes, thus further enhancing the outcome of the research effort as well.

3.3.4 Participant Observation

This method, which is considered central to anthropological studies, was used to allow for an objective observation of some day-to-day cultural activities of the *Ifá* practitioners as well as some of their other relevant social undertakings, as they relate to the subject of this study. Since the researcher is considerably familiar with the research terrain, both in geographical and linguistic terms, the employment of this method assisted in penetrating into the labyrinth of local socio-cultural relationships of the people. For this research, this method was used in observing the “*Ọdún Ifá*” and the “*Ìṣẹ̀ṣe Day*” celebrations, both of which were combined socio-cultural activities involving the *Ifá* practitioners. Conducting serious interview sessions were not conducive for the events, which saw most of the participants in a rather high spirit. In addition, this method was adopted in observing *Ifá* sessions involving some of the participants. This rather less-formal means of information-gathering made it possible to draw a line between professed and observed attitudes. Observations made through this approach, though not too robust as envisaged, were recorded to complement some other detailed field notes as a part of the data collection processes for this research. It should be mentioned that the level of participation of the researcher was not as an initiate. It was rather in line with Ilesanmi’s submission that “[t]his is practically the work of a researcher and not that of an initiate; but that the researcher is not an initiate does not negate the results of this research.” (Ilesanmi, 2013:69).

3.3.5 Focus Group Discussion

This method was used particularly in the collection and discussion of the *Ifá* literary genres that specifically touched on gender issues. Through the discussions too, further opinions on the understanding of the *Ifá* cultural practitioners as they relate to gender participation were brought to the fore. This method of research investigation was employed for four groups, each led by one of the key informants. Contributions

gathered through this means were used to objectively corroborate views and data collected through other research methods. Documentation of the FGD was made through hand notes and audio/audio-visual recordings.

3.3.6 Content Analysis

The data collected and collated in the course of this research effort were presented and analysed through qualitative method. The qualitative data collected for this work were analysed using the descriptive and narrative styles, while using excerpts emanating from the *Ifá* verses collated to corroborate the findings from the field work to gauge the cultural content of the oral genre.

In analysing the data collated for this work, the commonalities and salient issues raised in the various interviews and discussions were presented. Some other issues that were highlighted include our findings in the training of people to become *babaláwo*, the organisation and composition of *Ifá* hierarchical structure, role restriction and complementarity of roles and portrayal of the female-folk in *Ifá* practices. A cultural analysis of gender roles in among *Ifá* practitioners and adherents was also done.

Overall, the data from all the sources were used for descriptive and comparative analyses of the subject of study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Synopses of Interviews and Interview Guide

The bulk of our findings in this research were based mainly on the various information gathered from the interviews conducted with our informants, who sometimes were accompanied by their cohorts to form a Focus Group. There were four (4) of such Focus Groups, each headed by a key informant. Altogether, sixty people were involved in the investigations. The four Focus Groups had fifty-four (54) individuals, fifty (50) men and four (4) women. The other six key informants, two (2) men and four (4) women were singly interviewed. In all, ten (10) in-depth oral interview sessions and interactions were conducted, either as a group or as individuals.

For all the respondents, the focus of the enquiries was to find adequate responses to the issues relating to the research (see Appendix 1). Therefore, the interviews were guided to elicit answers to the following issues:

1. Do both men and women participate in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land?
2. Are women discriminated against in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land?
3. Are there verses from the *Ifá* literary corpus that portrayed women in a particular way to suggest being discriminated against?
4. Should the role of women be changed now if contemporary opinions dictate that there is a need for such changes?

The synopses of interviews conducted are presented below.

4.1.1 Interview conducted with Ọmọ-Ọba Adélékè Adéyẹmí (Ọmọ-Ọba-nílẹ-Ifá), the Àwíṣẹ-Onífá of Akilẹ̀-Ìjẹ̀bù (Ìjẹ̀bù-land) and the findings

Name: Babaláwo Ọmọ-Ọba Adélékè Adéyẹmí (Ọmọ-Ọba-nílẹ-Ifá)

Position/Title: Àwíṣẹ Onífá, Akilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bù

Age: 55+ years

Address: Odò-Ègbò/Okò Onírùgbá Olíwòrò Quarters, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode Local Government Area

Date of Interview: Wednesday 15th July, 2015

Background: Full time *babaláwo*. He is a university graduate and former banker who holds the title of “Àwíṣẹ Àwọ̀n Onifá, Akilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bù”. He inherited *Ifá* practices from the forebears. The father, named Odùwọ̀lé, who earned a popular alias, ‘*Ọ̀ba-nílẹ̀-Ifá*’ was born into the Aníkíláyà royal family of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. When he (Odùwọ̀lé) was approached to contest for the royal stool of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode when there was a vacancy, he declined the offer and recommended a younger person, because according to him, the demands of the royal office will disturb him from his *Ifá* practices. Being over eighty years old, he supported Fọ̀lágbadé who eventually became the king. He was said to have intoned that he would rather be an ‘*Ọ̀ba-nílẹ̀-Ifá*’ (that is, King-in-the-house-of-*Ifá*) instead of ascending to the royal throne. This became a sobriquet which stuck to him and his descendants, including Ọ̀mọ-Ọ̀ba Adeleke, until today. This respondent came back from his overseas sojourn to take up full time *Ifá* practices as a *babaláwo* when things were not going smoothly for him and his family.

Submissions

Ifá practices can be inherited from the family lineage. Some other people are advised to learn *Ifá* practices because the prosperity of such a person lies in doing so. Indeed such a person will prosper if he is truthful and loyal to *Ifá*.

In Ìjẹ̀bùland, *Ifá* apprenticeship is only reserved for men. The apprenticeship usually lasts for a period of twelve to fifteen years. Among the Ọ̀yọ Yorùbá sub-group however, females do learn *Ifá* practices as well.

In Ìjẹ̀bùland, we have women who practice divination by using cowries or kolanuts; but they cannot practice divination with *Ifá* beads called *òpẹ̀lẹ̀*, like a *babaláwo* (*Ifá* priest). It is only people who are ignorant of the knowledge about *Ifá* that will refer to such women as *babaláwo*, because they are not regarded as such. Women can only practise what Ọ̀rúnmilà allowed his wife to practise and bequeathed to her during his life time. Women who practise with cowries or kola nuts learn portions of *Ifá*, but not into details like the men (*babaláwo*) who cast with *òpẹ̀lẹ̀* or *ikin*. Such women are also relevant to *Ifá* practices, but their understanding of *Ifá* is limited when compared with their male counterparts. So, the women who learn *Ifá* do

so minimally in Ijèbù-land. When divination is performed through the use of kolanuts and cowries, the *Ifá* corpus that emerge from the consultation are similar but not as detailed as those who cast *òpèlè* or *ikin*. Most women who are in this practice do so for subsistence. Most *babaláwo* are also very familiar with the process of casting kolanuts and the use of cowries, called *ẹ́rìndínlógún*, like the women do.

Women are limited in the learning and practice of *Ifá* because they experience menstrual cycles. This limits the types of incantations they can render because it has to do with blood. Women who have reached the age of menopause can learn more stories about *Ifá*, but they cannot chant the verses learnt like a *babaláwo*. Women can only learn the stories of *Ifá* corpus like ‘*Èjìogbè*’ ‘*Ìwòrì*’ and so on.

Women can join in singing, chanting, beating the gongs and dancing during *Ifá* ceremonies. Women also assist in preparation of herbs if it forms part of the issues to be addressed by a *babaláwo*. When there are roles that men are to perform, the women will not dare to perform such; rather they will invite men to help them out. Some women take up cases of clients needing consultation with *Ifá*. They may even know what they needed to do to resolve the issues at stake, but they can only attend to only those things women are permitted to undertake. Referral will thereafter be made to a *babaláwo* who will take competent care of other portions of the divination reserved for men.

From the beginning of creation, men lead while women follow. Men, not women had been given the power to communicate with the spirit beings. Women have limited roles to play in *Ifá* practices because they are not expected to lead men in this area. To that extent, they can be regarded as subordinates to men.

There are titles such as the *Ìyálifá*, *Yèyè oge*, *Ìyálóde Ifá* and the *Ìyálóde Egbé* accorded women in *Ifá* circles. This is because women are regarded as ‘our mothers’ and they are so honoured. They are referred to as our mothers because they are the ones who give birth to all human beings, both male and female. On the other hand, *Ifá* chieftaincy titles are accorded to *babaláwo* in accordance with their knowledge and experience in the practice. *Àràbà* is the foremost leader, followed by *Olúwo*, *Akódá*, *Aşèdá*, *Áwíşẹ* and so on.

Apètèbí is not a chieftaincy title, it is a designation for any woman who is a wife of a *babaláwo*, just as a king’s wife is designated *Olorì* in Yorùbá land.

Women do not undertake *Ifá* consultation with the use of the palm kernel ritual seeds (*ikin*) in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. Even, if this is allowed in the northern parts of Yorùbá land, ‘our’ fore-fathers say it is forbidden in Ìjẹ̀bù-land.

During some *Ifá* divination processes when it is so required, women take charge of buying some items needed from the market, they cook food, sing *Ifá* choruses, beat gongs and dance. In the olden days, women were not allowed to lead in singing *Ifá* songs; but nowadays they know and even lead in singing almost all the *Ifá* songs available, even in an open gathering. In the past, a woman cannot participate in the initiation of a person into *Ifá* tradition like the *babaláwo*. That is no longer frowned at, as well; except that such women cannot ‘set their eyes on *Odù*’, whereupon a ‘male’ *babaláwo* is allowed to undertake those aspects reserved for males. Nowadays, unlike in the past, women who are so interested also learn to chant the *Ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ Ifá* though informally, at their own leisure or by just listening to the men. When they are familiar with the tunes, they can sometimes hum or chant them leisurely or even openly thereafter, to showcase their ability, notwithstanding that such actions have repercussions. This is because there are instances of such women becoming barren, having menopausal problems or some other problems traced to this obduracy (cf. Ajibade, 2005:106).

On the way to the *Igbódù* ceremony, the *Apètẹ̀bì* helped in carrying such items like cage of fowls to be used for rituals, keg(s) of palm oil, gas lamp and other materials needed for the ceremony. But they are not allowed to go into the grove where all the detailed rituals will take place, because they cannot witness some aspects, especially the sighting of *Odù*. When females are to undergo similar *Igbódù* rituals, some aspects are skipped, as they cannot perceive *Odù*. The aspects that are skipped are done to protect the women from harm, as menstruating women are generally excused from such activities while those still in their youthful age but not menstruating are believed to reach menopause prematurely if allowed to participate. Such women, if yet to bear children will remain barren for life. There are examples of such women even in the Ọ̀ba-nílé-Ifá family.

The woman that is renowned as Ọ̀rúnmilà’s wife was named Ọ̀sùnfúnmiláyò, although he was said to love women so much and detests anyone cheating a woman. Ọ̀rúnmilà’s love for women transcends sexual love. It is said that when some other items of good value, like animal or money fail to appease him, he would readily get appeased by a woman. That shows *Ifá* holds women in high esteem. We also respect

and honour our women in accordance with the tenets of *Ifá*. Irrespective of the number of wives anyone would ascribe to Ọ̀rúnmilà, Ọ̀sùnfunmiláyò stands out.

When Olódùmarè (God) created the world, a woman was part of the contingent of seventeen He sent to inhabit the world; other sixteen being males. These other sixteen ignored and had no respect or honour for the only female amongst them. Consequently, they were unsuccessful in their endeavours and faced many difficulties until they reconciled with her, as contained in the *Odù Ọ̀ṣẹ̀tùrá* corpus, thus:

Ká ní kó rọ̀ lawo Èwí ní Adó
Ọ̀run sù dudu lawo Ọ̀de Ọ̀fà
Alákàn tí n bẹ̀ lódò ni í lu àikàrá ipé rẹ̀, pẹ-pẹ
pẹ
A dífá fún àwọn Olódù métàdínlógún
Wọn n tìkòlé ọ̀run bọ̀ wá kòlé ayé
Wọn lọ bá Elédùmarè
Wọn ní kó jogún ire fún wọn
Elédùmarè wá jogún ire fún wọn

(A certain ‘*Ká ní kó rọ̀*’ – (that is, ‘It should rain’) was the diviner at Adó
‘*Ọ̀run sù dudu*’ – (that is, ‘the sky was heavily clouded’) was the diviner at Ọ̀de Ọ̀fà
The carapace of the crab at the shore continuously make a crackling noise
It was so divined for the seventeen owners of the *Odù*
Who came from their heavenly abode to inhabit the world.
They went to Elédùmarè to ask for His blessings/to bestow his blessings upon them
Elédùmarè granted them their hearts’ desires.)

Ọ̀ṣẹ̀tùrá was the only female and seventeenth being in the team, who was ignored by her counterparts while undertaking the special journey. Things got rough for them and they could not make headway in the absence of Ọ̀ṣẹ̀tùrá. They made a recourse to Elédùmarè to enquire about what led to the failure of their journey. Elédùmarè admonished them to go back and reconcile with Ọ̀sun-Ọ̀ṣẹ̀tùrá because the power and authority to make headway resided with her. Having done so, the journey started to record success upon success. The propitiation items did not come cheap: two hundred (200) pieces each of rats, fish, snails; a barrel each of drinks and tobacco snuff. The corpus ended with this song:

Ẹ̀jẹ̀ àwà n lọ jubà fòbìnrin
Obìnrin ló bí Ọ̀ba, kí ọ̀ba tó dòòṣà.

Ògúnyán Ifẹ, obìnrin ni
Ònrókà Ifẹ, obìnrin ni
Obìnrin ló bí ọba, kí ọba tó dòòsà
Ọsun jẹwó, má mà bẹbọ mi jẹ o
Àwa n lọ jubà obìnrin

(We are on our way to pay homage to women
A woman gave birth to a king
Before the king was accorded the status of an
òrìsà
Only women pound *iyán* in Ifẹ
Only women prepare *ọkà* meals in Ifẹ
A woman gave birth to a king
Before the king was accorded the status of an
òrìsà
May Ọsun not spoil my sacrifice
We are on our way to pay homage to women.)

In another corpus called ‘*Òtírà-ori-mi-gbè-mi*’, it says:

Agbe sunkún tíí
Wọn ò lómi lójú
Àlùkò sùnyèrẹ tíí
Wọn ò ríyèrẹ sun
Àtìòro lóun n kígbe
Bẹẹ ni kò lóhùn igbe lẹnu
A dífá fún Ọrúnmilà
Baba n lọ gbé Àrònişàn níyàwó

(Agbe wept for long
But Agbe could not shed tears
Àlùkò, in a mournful mood, tried for long to
sing a dirge
But then Àlùkò’s voice could not be heard
Àtìòro wailed for a long time
But Àtìòro’s wails could not be heard
Divination was carried out in Ọrúnmilà’s
respect
When he set out to marry Àrònişàn)

When Ọrúnmilà married Àrònişàn, the couple was of one accord and they both cooperated in all things they did. Things were going on smoothly for everyone. Whenever they went out with others to perform *Ifá* rituals, Àrònişàn received the same portion or the equivalent of anything given to Ọrúnmilà in kind. Ọrúnmilà’s acolytes started to murmur and complained about this and Wondered why Àrònişàn should accompany them to every outing thereby short-changing them. They therefore stopped Àrònişàn from accompanying them to *Ifá* outings. Upon this, they started to record

failure in their *Ifá* practices. They realized their folly and had to plead with Àròṅṣàṅ to accompany them to get the desired results. So it happened.

The *Ifá* corpus related above emphasises the importance of women in the process of ‘*Ifátítẹ̀*’. A woman must place her leg on the relevant *Ifá* paraphernalia during this process if the desired results must be obtained. This she does alongside the initiate for whom the *Ifá* process was being done.

Another *Ifá* corpus, *Odù Irẹ̀tẹ̀ méjì* indicated that there is nothing as precious as a woman. As such, Òrúnmìlà could not be impressed by any gift as much as a woman.

Ifá o jùre
Òrúnmìlà o jùre
Aládé o jùre
Mo léku méjì olùwéré
Òrúnmìlà ní iyẹn kò tó ohun tí àgbàlagbà í jí sí
Mo léja méjì abìwẹ̀gbàdà
Òrúnmìlà ní iyẹn ò tó ohun tí àgbàlagbà í jí sí
Òrúnmìlà jùre
Aládé o jùre
Mo ní mo léwùrẹ̀ méjì abàmú rẹ̀dẹ̀rẹ̀dẹ̀
Kò tóhun tágbàlagbà í jí sí
Òrúnmìlà o jùre, Ifá o jùre
Mo látùtàn méjì aborí lááṣolááṣo
Kò tóhun tágbàlagbà í jí sí
Mo ní mo lẹ̀sin méjì abìrù bọ̀lọ̀n̄jì-bọ̀lọ̀n̄jì
Kò tóhun tágbàlagbà í jí sí
Òrúnmìlà jùre
Mo ní ẹ̀ranlá méjì tó fìwo sòsùkà
O ní kò tóhun tágbàlagbà í jí sí
Òrúnmìlà, o ò jùre?
Mo ní mo lómìdan méjì tó wójú
Òrúnmìlà wá jùre!
Aládé wá jùre!
(Ifá, good morning
Òrúnmìlà, did you wake up peacefully?)

The kingly one, did you wake up peacefully?

I have two good looking fast rats I preserved for you.

Òrúnmìlà said that is not appealing enough to make an elderly one wake up

Then, I offer you two good-looking pieces of big fish

Òrúnmìlà said that is not appealing enough to make an elderly one wake up

Òrúnmìlà, good morning

The kingly one, did you wake up well?
 Then, let me offer you two big goats
 That is not worthy enough to make an elderly
 one wake up, he responded
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, good morning; *Ifá* good morning
 I have two big sheep to offer you
 That is not worthy enough to make an elderly
 one wake up, he still responded
 I offer you two big, long-tailed horses to offer
 you
 That is not worthy enough to make an elderly
 one wake up, he still responded
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, wake up, good morning
 Let me offer you two oxen that I have
 He insisted, this is not appealing enough to
 make an elderly one wake up
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, how are you this morning?
 I have two beautiful damsels to offer you
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, upon this offer quickly woke up
 The kingly one woke up!

This shows that women are important in *Ifá*. This is an example of *Ifá* corpus talking about the importance of women in *Ifá* practices.

We also have *Ifá* verses portraying women as being capable of overdoing things. For example, in *Ogbèyónú* corpus it says:

Inú bíbí wọ̀n ò da ǹnkan f̀nni
S̀ùúrù ni baba iwà.
Àgbà tó bá k̀lẹ̀, tí ò bá k̀p s̀ùúrù
Ahoro ilé ló k̀p
A dífà f̀n Ọ̀rúnmilà
Nijọ̀ tí baba ǹ lọ gbé Kolombo niyàwó.

(There is nothing to gain by being impatient
 Patience is golden; the greatest of all virtues
 An impatient landlord, however aged
 Has built nothing but an empty house
 A divination process was carried out for
 Ọ̀rúnmilà
 On the day he set out to marry *Kolombo* as
 wife)

Kolombo, personification for being naked, got married to Ọ̀rúnmilà. She found it difficult to undertake some expected house chores like setting up the fire to cook food. After futile attempts to set up fire on one day, *Kolombo* picked the husband's divination staff, *Ìrókẹ̀ Ifá*, in his absence and used it to stoke the fire. When Ọ̀rúnmilà

came back and discovered the incident, *Kolombo* claimed that she merely wanted to satisfy her husband by cooking food for him, hence her using the divination instrument in stoking fire. Ọ̀rúnmilà was not very pleased, but he forgave his wife, warning her not to repeat such a mistake in future. At another time, in Ọ̀rúnmilà's absence again, *Kolombo* used the *Ikin* palm kernel ritual seeds which her husband used for consultation with clients to stoke fire. And at another time yet, she split the wooden divination-tray to stoke fire. Her intention was to cook food for her husband, but the frustration of not knowing how to make fire was her excuse, which will eventually 'strip' her husband of best *Ifá* practices and make him 'naked'. Yet Ọ̀rúnmilà forgave her all these acts. Of course, she claimed she acted under ignorance. This made Ọ̀rúnmilà to say:

*Ñjẹ́ ká fiṣe fóniṣe,
Kolombo
Ó fọpón Ifá dání
Kolombo
E jẹ́ ká fiṣe fóniṣe
Kolombo
Ó firóké Ifá koná
Kolombo
E jẹ́ ká fiṣe fóniṣe
Kolombo.*

(Let the misdeeds of a wrong doer be overlooked
Kolombo
She used the divination tray to stoke fire
Kolombo
Let the misdeeds of a wrong doer be
overlooked
Kolombo
She used the *Ìróké Ifá* to stoke fire
Kolombo
Let the misdeeds of a wrong doer be
overlooked
Kolombo

Women, sometimes do behave in a way that can be considered to be unbecoming, as revealed by the *Ifá* corpus just presented.

Relationships do exist between the *Ifá* and the witches, euphemistically referred to as 'powerful women of the night'. In the *Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀ méjì Ifá* corpus, for instance, Ọ̀rúnmilà made a covenant with the witches, to the effect that they should never kill him, his children and whosoever identifies with him. In another verse, *Èjìogbè*, he says:

Baba Gbúruwó
Baba Gbùrùwó
Baba Mọ̀nà tọ́
Baba Mọ̀nà wọ́
Àwọ̀n ni babaláwo Òwú, nígbà ijìnjì
 (Baba Gbúruwó
 Baba Gbùrùwó
 Baba Mọ̀nà tọ́, the one who makes the road
 straight
 Baba Mọ̀nà wọ́, the one who makes the
 crooked road
 They were the Babaláwo, priests of Òwú, the
 cotton seed from the very beginning of
 creation).

The corpus explained that a coven of witches, in form of birds (*ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀*) attacked and ate up cotton seeds planted in a farm. Ọ̀rúnmilà ordered their arrest for the trespass. When they were brought before Ọ̀rúnmilà for the treatment of the case, he ordered their release when he found out their status when they pleaded with him. Thereupon, the women made a covenant with Ọ̀rúnmilà to the effect that they will never eat or attack anything that belongs to him. They went further to teach Ọ̀rúnmilà on better ways to deploy the use of cotton seeds that will be more profitable for him.

In *Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀ méjì* corpus, Ọ̀rúnmilà said:

Lábinijọ ni í sawo Òde Ísélú
Jegúnrè ni í sawo Ọ̀tún Màbà
Gbèmide ni í sawo Òde Ìrẹ̀sà-apẹ̀lọ̀ko
A dífá fún baba Jẹ́-káláyé-ó-jayé
Baba Ẹ́-jẹ́-kónígbà-ó-lògbà
Àwọ̀n ló şefá fún Baba Àrà-tó-yẹ́-mí-kò-yẹ́-
ẹ̀lòmù-mọ́
Baba Àrà-tó-yẹ́-mí-kò-yẹ́-ẹ̀lòmù-mọ́
Àwọ̀n ni wọ̀n şoore fún Baba Àrà.
Báa bá şoore fọ̀bìnrin, obìnrin ò moore
Ibi ni wọ̀n fi n san án fúnni
Àwọ̀n Baba táa bá şoore fọ̀bìnrin, obìnrin ò
moore
Àwọ̀n ni wọ̀n şefá fun Ọ̀rúnmilà
Baba n lọ bá àwọ̀n àgbàlagbà, àwọ̀n ẹ̀lẹ̀yẹ̀
mulẹ̀ ní pọ̀rọ̀pọ̀rọ̀ odò.
 (Lábinijọ, was the diviner of Òde Ísélú
 Jegúnrè, was the diviner of Ọ̀tún Màbà
 Gbèmide was the diviner of Òde-Ìrẹ̀sà-
 apẹ̀lọ̀ko
 Divination was performed in respect of old-
 man Jẹ́-káláyé-ó-jayé

Also known as È-jẹ-kónígbà-ó-lògbà
 These priests initiated Baba Àrà-tó-yẹ-mí-kò-
 yẹ-ẹlòmíi-mọ
 The man named Baba Àrà-tó-yẹ-mí-kò-yẹ-
 ẹlòmíi-mọ
 He showed some kindness to Bàbá-Àrà
 If a woman is showered with some measure of
 kindness
 She reciprocates like an ingrate
 And she repays kindness with evil deeds
 The cohort of Baba táa bá ọore fòbìnrin,
 obìnrin ò moore
 Were the ones who performed divination for
 Ọrúnmilà
 When he (Ọrúnmilà) decided to go into a
 covenant with the elderly ones, the witches
 At the riverside.

Ọrúnmilà had a covenant with the witches that they will never betray him by troubling anyone who belongs to his fold.

Ẹjẹ àjẹ tó bá ọmọ awo, ilẹ ló dà
Ilẹ ló dà LÁké
Ilẹ ló dà LÓkò
Tó fi dé ilé Ọwá Ọràngún, ọmọ Ọgbóyè
 (Any witch that kills any associate of Ifá is a
 betrayer
 It is a betrayal in Aké
 It is also a betrayal at Òkò
 It is a betrayal up to the land of Ọwá Ọràngún,
 the offspring of Ọgbóyè.).

This *Ifá* corpus reveals that the witches, euphemistically called ‘ẹjẹjẹ’ (the ones who own the birds) and ‘Àwọn àgbàlagbà’ (the elderly ones), and Ọrúnmilà had a pact whereby the witches will not allow any evil from their own end befall any associate of Ọrúnmilà.

There are some other *Ifá* verses that mentioned about the understanding the witches had with Ọrúnmilà on their journey to this world from their heavenly abode, whereby the witches agreed not to cause any problem with any follower of *Ifá*. No competent *babaláwo* will ever experience the troubles of the witches. That is why a *babaláwo* who is faithful to the teachings of *Ifá* will sleep soundly without having any bad dreams traceable to the witches.

Ifá is universal and the corpus remain the same worldwide. It is no less universal even when we observe some differences we now notice in *Ifá* practices from one geographical area in Yorùbá land to the other. In Òyó area, from their experience, they believe that there is nothing that a man can do in *Ifá* practices that a woman cannot do. Some of their female children would have been familiar with *Ifá* practices from young such that they would have gathered adequate experience by the time they become grown up. They found that it caused no harm for the female ones and their menstrual cycles were not adversely affected as they believe in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. Rather, their women were pro-creating abundantly. Women involved in *Ifá* practices in the northern part of Yorùbá land (ilẹ̀-òkè) are usually very vast and versatile. Despite the fact that one can say the parity among men and women in *Ifá* practices is higher among them compared to experiences in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, but I am yet to hear that the women in other parts use *òpẹ̀lẹ̀* for divination purposes. Their women learn *Ifá* verses and the *Ìyẹ̀rẹ̀* chants. Some of them may recite up to twenty-five or fifty verses from a particular *Ifá* corpus without any hindrance. This is regardless of the fact that they are mainly patrilineal in those other areas, while the Ìjẹ̀bù people are both patrilineal and matrilineal. Indeed, the use of *ẹ̀rìndínlógún* is not as common among their women as it is common in Ìjẹ̀bù-land.

Babaláwo Adeyemi Ọ̀ba-nile-*Ifá* personally believes that a *babaláwo* should strictly follow the practices as inherited from the forebears. Whatever was handed down by the fore-fathers should be jealously guarded without acting contrary to the dictates. It should be borne in mind that at the end of our earthly sojourn, each person would be made to recount how well s/he upheld the traditions while on earth, before those long gone. Women should be contented to operate within the sphere dictated by the ancestors as females, without encroaching to activities prescribed for men.

During the meetings of the *babaláwo* in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, their wives *Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí* and their chieftains like *Ìyálífá*, *Yẹ̀yé-Oge*, *Ìyálájé*, *Ìyálóde*, *Olóri Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí* may also be in attendance, particularly to cater for the meals and other needs of the *babaláwo*. The females may wish to hold their separate discussions, which were usually social in nature, while the *babaláwo* hold their own meeting separately. The female chieftains have no role to play in the presence of men at such gatherings. They only coordinate the other women and mediate between the women and their respective husbands in times of misunderstanding or marital crises.

We have *Ifá* verses that instruct that the husband is the head of his wife. *Ifá* teaches that no matter how wealthy a woman is, she should submit to her husband as the head as contained in *Ògúndákètè* verse:

Mà ʒe jéjé, mà ríre
Pèlèpèlè mà nìwàdá Ọ̀rúnmilà
Baba n lọ ʒokọ Ọ̀sùnfúnmiláyò
 (The gentle-one courts favour and goodness
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, the cautious, thoughtful one who
 decided to take Ọ̀sùnfúnmiláyò as his wife).

Ọ̀rúnmilà wanted to marry Ọ̀sùnfúnmiláyò. A divination was performed for him in this regard. He was advised to perform some propitiation rituals. He did; thereupon he was cautioned to be patient and gentle with his wife, while Ọ̀sùnfúnmiláyò was also advised to fully respect her husband. Both of them complied and they thereafter enjoyed marital bliss.

Findings from the submissions

- (i) Only a male person can engage in *Ifá* training in Ìjẹ̀bú-land; it is however possible to see female apprentices in other places, especially in northern parts of Yorùbá land (ilẹ̀ òkè)
- (ii) A female person cannot carry out divination processes with the use of ‘*Ikin*’ like men do. Rather the femalefolk use ‘*ẹ̀ẹ̀rindínlógún*’ (divination cowries) or kola nuts. Ọ̀ṣun, one of Ọ̀rúnmilà (*Ifá*)’s wives was the first to use the ‘*ẹ̀ẹ̀rindínlógún*’.
- (iii) There is a limit to which a woman can be exposed to *Ifá* teachings or practices. In Ìjẹ̀bú land, the female-folk may learn about stories in *Ifá*, but not to panegyrics and other ‘deep teachings’.
- (iv) A woman has no established role in *Ifá* divination process.
- (v) The wife of a *babaláwo* is called an ‘*Apètèbí*’. This is simply a designation, just as the wife of an Ọ̀ba (King) in Yorùbá land is called an ‘*Olori*’.
- (vi) A woman, especially the wives of a *babaláwo* (‘*Apètèbí*’) may participate in ‘washing’ *Ifá* (*wíwẹ̀ Ifá*) but cannot undergo full *Ifá* ritual of initiation (*títẹ̀ Ifá*).

- (vii) Women perform some sundry assignments to assist their *babaláwo* husband, some of which are, going to the market to buy and prepare materials needed for carrying out sacrifices, plucking the leaves to be used in the preparation of concoctions, singing and dancing, jingling clapper bells when and where appropriate, preparation of food to be served during *Ifá* feasts, and such other purely social activities usually assigned to women.
- (viii) In the past, during social gatherings of the *Ifá* practitioners, women did not lead in musical renditions. They merely chorus the songs dictated by men. But this is gradually changing: women now sometimes lead in singing *Ifá* songs and some of them are very versatile in doing so. This change in role was gradual, and spread from Òyó area to Ìjẹ̀bú land, more so when nothing untoward happened to those who did so in Ìjẹ̀bú land too.
- (ix) In Ìjẹ̀bú-land, a woman seldom chants the *Ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ Ifá* publicly, because it is believed that she is incapable of using the ‘powers of the spoken word’ in dealing with the stubborn unseen spirits in the bushes. Some women nowadays dare to chant the *Ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ Ifá* in the open. We, the *babaláwo* know this is not proper because it could be dangerous for such women when it backfires. This is because there are instances of such women becoming barren, having menopausal problems or some other problems traced to this intransigence. There was no deliberate training for such women, but they learn the art by paying attention when practices were made in their presence.
- (x) If a woman is approached by a client who requires *Ifá* divination services, the woman cannot offer such services on her own. She is expected to take such a client to a *babaláwo*. For example, if a woman had used the ‘ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún’ method of divination, but further probing was still needed through the consultation of *Ifá*, recourse must be made to a *babaláwo*.
- (xi) In *Ifá* practices, the men lead while the women follow. Women are there to assist the men. When the *babaláwo* has performed the divination and it requires some rituals, for instance, the woman can assist in procuring such materials from the market or other relevant sources.

- (xii) The title-holders in *Ifá* are: *Àràbà*, *Olúwo*, *Akódá*, *Aṣẹ̀dà*, *Àwíṣẹ*. These titles are the exclusive preserve of (male) *babaláwo*, based on experience and expertise.
- (xiii) On the other hand, women in the *Ifá* fold, especially the *Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí* aspire to the following titles, also preserved for women only: *Yẹ̀yé-Oge*, *Ìyánífá*, *Ìyálájé Ifá*, *Ìyá Egbẹ̀ àpapọ̀ Àwọ̀n babaláwo* and *Ìyálóde Ifá*. These are titles conferred to honour deserving women, since they are considered to be ‘our mothers’. Women are referred to as ‘our mothers’ because they are the ones who gave birth to all humans, both male and female. These titles are different from the ones conferred on women by the entire *Ìjẹ̀bú* community or town (*Akilẹ̀-Ìjẹ̀bú*) which are also similar, like the *Ìyálóde*, *Ìyálájé*, *Ìyálójà* and so on.
- (xiv) In *Ìjẹ̀bú*-land, a woman is not allowed to use the *Ikin* divination nuts at all, but it is possible to find women doing so in some parts outside *Ìjẹ̀bú*-land (cf. McIntosh 2010:190).
- (xv) In the past, women have no business when it comes to performing rituals at the *Igbódù*. But these days, women partake in some rites meant to be undertaken at the *Igbódù*, even if such rites are curtailed and not as extensive as the men’s. So far, this has had no adverse effects on the women who dared to undertake the previously-curtailed aspects which they now undertook. This change came as a result of the fact that *Ifá* practitioners in the northern part of Yorùbá land (‘ilẹ̀-òkè’) were seen condoning this practice without any unpleasant repercussion. Since the *Ìjẹ̀bú* *babalawo* had been condoning this partial restriction too, no side effect had been noticed.
- (xvi) When going to the *Igbódù*, it is the responsibility of a woman, usually an *Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí* to carry the materials and other loads to be used for the rituals at the *Igbódù*. Such materials include the gas lamp (since the ceremonies are conducted at night), tin(s) of palm oil, cages containing the sacrificial birds/fowls, and so on. It is considered awkward for men to carry such loads while the women follow them empty handed. These women will be eventually prevented from entering the venue where the *Odu* will be

brought out and exposed. Indeed, only men who are initiates are allowed to witness this aspect of the rituals, which involves ‘sighting the *Odu*’, from which women are entirely barred from participation.

- (xvii) *Ifá* treasures women very dearly, and will not permit that they are cheated. If someone has done any wrong and *Ọ̀rúnmilà* needed to be appeased, he may not oblige forgiveness even if appeased with plenty of money, cows or other expensive items. But once he is offered a woman, *Ọ̀rúnmilà* will readily forgive, because of his tremendous respect for women. The implication of this is that women are very precious before *Ọ̀rúnmilà*.
- (xviii) During the special initiation rituals (*títẹ Ifá*) in a selected, secluded location, a woman must first place her foot on the place, as a mark of seeking and ensuring the success of the ritual before the subsequent steps can be taken (cf. Olajubu, 2004:43; Abiodun, 1989:7,12)
- (xix) Highlights of the *Ifá* verses collected here:
- To abandon a woman, isto prevent her from performing the role assigned to her by the Almighty God (*Olódùmare*) in the midst of men is to ask for utter failure and confusion in the entire project, as shown in the *Ọ̀ṣẹ̀túrà* verse. The example of *Ọ̀ṣun-Ọ̀ṣẹ̀túrà* here also shows that once a woman is embittered, she withdraws her ‘services’ and to restore normalcy, she has to be handsomely appeased. A woman must be amply regarded and respected for the various roles they perform within the society.
 - The *Ọ̀túrà-orí-mi-gbè-mí* verse, just like the *Ọ̀ṣẹ̀túrà* verse indicates that it becomes rather hard and tedious for the menfolk to become successful in a venture when the woman is side-lined and not properly recognized.
 - There is nothing as precious as a woman, as *Ọ̀rúnmilà* could not be impressed by any gift except a woman.
 - A woman can be destructive, destroying all valuables in the home if she is oblivious of some required rubrics, as reflected in the example of Kolombo in *Ogbèyónú* corpus.

- The *Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀ méjì* corpus shows that there is an alliance between the witches and Ọ̀rúnmilà. This is also shown in *Èjìogbè*. Both presentations also show that witches can be destructive.
- Women may not be appreciative of good gestures extended to them, as shown in the last *Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀ corpus* of the *OdùIfá* – “...Obìnrin ò moore!”
- Women, as wives, are expected to be submissive and respectful to their husbands, who are to be accepted as the head, no matter how wealthy a woman is. Men on their own part should be patient with women, in order to have a successful marriage and enjoy marital bliss, as shown in the *Ògúndákẹ̀tẹ̀* corpus. This is an example of the complementary nature of gender roles in *Ifá* cultural practices (see Olajubu, 2004:43; Ajibade, 2005:1003; Falola, 2019b:7,14).

4.1.2 Interview conducted with Chief (Mrs) ‘Dr.’ Ọ̀şóyẹmí Adétólá, the Alágbo Ọ̀şóòsì and Yẹ̀yẹ Oge Tifálàşẹ of Akilẹ̀Ìjẹ̀bú (Ìjẹ̀bú-land) and the findings

Name: Chief (Mrs) ‘Dr.’ Ọ̀şóyẹmí Adétólá

Position/Title: The ‘Alágbo Ọ̀şóòsì’ and ‘Yẹ̀yẹ Oge Tifálàşẹ’ of Akilẹ̀Ìjẹ̀bú (Ìjẹ̀bú-land).

Age: 61+ years

Address: Igbẹ̀bà Road, Olíwòrò, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode in Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode Local Government Area

Date of Interview: Thursday 16th July, 2015

Background: Both parents were adherents of traditional religion: the father an *Ifá* priest and the mother a devotee of Ọ̀rìşàálá. Both the nuclear and extended family members are traditionalists – no Christians, no Moslems. She is married to an *Ifá* priest. A trader.

Submissions

She is married to an *Ifá* priest. That automatically makes her an ‘*Apètèbì*’. In line with the chieftaincy title which she holds (i.e. ‘*Tifálàṣẹ*’ meaning ‘*Ifá* is bearer of authority’), *Ifá* is an authority in the spiritual affairs of the world.

In her submission, *Ifá* training can both be inherited and/or also learnt. When a baby is newly born and *Ifá* consultation specifies that the child, to be successful in life, should be a *babaláwo* in the future, even if the child is from a background that has nothing to do with *Ifá*, he could be trained to become one. Any person fore-ordained to be an *Ifá* priest will be easily recognized by general disposition and demeanour: a deep thinker, easy-going, contented, just and fair.

As a woman, though this informant was born into an *Ifá* family, she still underwent tutelage for about four years. The tutelage was more of assisting in procuring herbs, buying materials needed for performing rituals from the market and sometimes in its preparation and so on.

She submitted that men’s apprenticeship is different from that of men. Women are mostly taught herbal medication and its processes. They are also taught how to recite some *Ifá* verses that accompany the performance of *Ifá* sacrifices: verses before consuming medicinal concoctions or before taking special baths. Women are limited in the scope of *Ifá* training they can receive in order not to affect their child-bearing ability, which involves blood. Men can however learn up to the highest level, which qualifies them to be able to take others to the ‘*Igbódù*’. Women have limitations in learning *Ifá* and there is no way women can know whatever transpires in their absence after they have been excluded from certain aspects of the training. If women attempt to go further, they may not be productive in child-bearing. Men can however learn everything without fear of any repercussion. Women do not feel cheated about this kind of arrangement because that is the prescription of *Ifá* and it cannot be questioned. In addition, *Ifá* cannot be related with, with a doubting mind. If women protest that men are treated with preference, it may backfire. Indeed, an *Ifá* verse states that “*Èké ò sunwòn nilé Ifá, inú mímọ́ la fi ń sin ikin.*” (Falsehood is not tolerated in *Ifá* worship, *Ifá* worship must be truthfully done). To that extent, women comply with the precepts of *Ifá* without questioning.

The wife of an *Ifá* priest (*babaláwo*) naturally assumes the title of an “*Apètèbì Ifá*”. She undertakes the cleansing/washing ceremony for *Ifá*, for which she may be appreciated by receiving pecuniary tokens from other worshippers. Only an *Apètèbì Ifá*

undertakes this assignment. Indeed, the assignment is a mandatory one for a woman, reserved for an *Apètèbì Ifá*. Failure to do this renders the whole exercise null and ineffective.

While males can participate in all the rites that relate to *Ifá* worship, females cannot do same. Women are restricted. During the initiation rites, for example, it is a woman's role to "carry" the materials needed for the rituals on the journey to *Igbódù*. The assignment is reserved for women. Such a woman must not be observing her menstrual period as at the time of performing this function. But this assignment has a limit to which a woman can participate. Women on the entourage to *Igbódù* venue, where other secretive rites are to take place, including the carrier, will be stopped at the point of entry or "gate" of the *Igbódù*. While all the women stay behind from this point, the men proceed to the conclave to continue with the other rites. The woman who carried the "load" is normally "compensated" with a gift of a hen upon reaching vicinity of the *Igbódù*. The distance from the point where the women were stopped is usually a stone throw from the *Igbódù*, hence their own level of participation will be to sing along with the males who are performing from within the *Igbódù*. The womenfolk therefore only continue with the social aspects of the ritual, which is restricted to dancing, eating and generally making merry, to make the ceremony interesting for all the participants. The men are left to deal with the more serious business of the rituals. Both men and women are involved in the entire process. Men alone cannot do it; women alone cannot do it either.

Another assignment reserved for women is the "*Lilé Ìtẹ́ Ifá*", that is the laying of the "saddle" or "throne" for the new initiate. An *Apètèbì* lays the seat on which the new initiate is expected to sit on, to mark the conclusion of the *Igbódù* rites. After the seat is laid, a woman must compulsorily sit on it, as a tester before the new initiate is allowed to sit there. This testing is interpreted to mean "ọwọ ẹ̀rọ" or starting off on a peaceful note.

A woman cannot assume the full responsibilities of an *Ifá* priest. Indeed, it is a taboo for a woman to use the "*Ikin*" paraphernalia for divination purposes. Only men, *babaláwo*, are permitted to do this. For women, they are only permitted to use some other alternative modes like kola nuts or cowries shells (*ẹ̀rìndínlógún*). Claspings the "*Ikin*" nuts intermittently by a woman is seen as a rude way of a woman "beating" the husband.

A woman, no matter how knowledgeable and vast she may be in *Ifá* traditions, cannot on her own directly propitiate *Ifá* for her clients. Even if she discovers the need to do so, she must approach a competent *babaláwo* to do so on her behalf. It is a taboo. If a woman deliberately flouts this regulation, she will find it difficult to thrive in the *Ifá* vocation, since she has ventured to tread on an inappropriate path. It is unacceptable for women to do this in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, even if it is permitted in some other parts of Yorùbá land.

The chieftaincy titles bestowed on men include the *Àràbà*. The *Àràbà* is accepted as the most senior of them all, hence the *Ifá* song:

Àràbà o rí baba o, éẹ ri wò
Àràbà ni baba o, éẹ ri wò
Àràbà rí baba o
Baba wa Àràbà ló ránni wá tẹ̀wé rán ee ò
Ayé rée,
Àràbà rée ránni wá tẹ̀wé rán o.
 (*Àràbà* is the father of them all
Àràbà, is the father
Àràbà is the father of them all.
 We have come to perform this divination
 exercise on the authority of the *Àràbà*, our
 father.)

There are *Àràbà* title holders at different local levels, to oversee their respective domains, but there is only one overall *Àràbà*, who oversees the entire Ìjẹ̀bù-land. We also have an *Àràbà* at the state level - *Àràbà* for Ogun State; *Àràbà*, Òyó State and so on. There is an *Àràbà* for the entire Yorùbá land as well.

Other title holders include the *Olúwo*, *Akódá*, *Aşèdá*, *Ajùbònà*, *Àwíşẹ Ifá*, *Akápò*. The titles are numerous. Only men are entitled to be conferred with these titles. They are exclusively preserved for men.

Chieftaincy titles for women are more of honorary types. They include *Òdití*, *Ìyánífá*, *Yèyè Òpèlè*, *Ìyálóde*, *Ìyálájé*, *Ìyá-Egbé*, *Yèyè-OgeIfá*. The wife of the *Àràbà* of any territory also automatically becomes the *Olóri-Apètèbí* of the area.

Ifá verses abound on women. Many of such verses touch on the virtues of women. In some others, they show how Òrúnmilà condones and tolerates the excesses from women.

No woman will ever succeed without being obedient to the husband. The *Ifá* verse “*Olósùn-méjì*” pointed this out, that if a woman is subservient to the husband, she shall prosper. This has been so from times immemorial. That was as created by God. Great pity that I am not capable of reciting the relevant *ẹsẹ-Ifá*.

To say that what a man can do, a woman can also do is a blatant lie. For example, I cannot participate in the ‘*Orò*’ tradition which is exclusively for men, simply because I am an *Apètèbí* (wife of a *babaláwo*). It is simply an over-ambition or greed for a woman to seek to be on the same pedestal with a man or seeking to rival men. Men desire to put women in positions of responsibilities, but women’s tendency to cry wolf where there is none thereby creating confusion precludes them. All the same, women are now occupying many positions of distinction in modern days. For example, when the royal fathers are seated, the women representatives like the *Ìyálóde*, *Ìyálájé* and *Yèyè-Oge* will also be in attendance. In addition, women are also conferred with the *Ọtúnba* chieftaincy titles, given to notables who are not kings but born into the royal families, in *Ìjẹbú*-land. But this cannot be automatically extended to *Ifá* cultural practices.

Findings from the submission

- (i) There is a difference in the content of *Ifá* training and instructions given to male and female apprentices: women are usually made to concentrate on herbal preparations and medicinal concoctions that accompany divinations, and they also support in the singing of *Ifá* choruses to lend assistance to the *babaláwo*.
- (ii) Women are restricted in *Ifá* training in order not to jeopardize their child-bearing ability.
- (iii) Women are not allowed to know whatever transpires in their absence when excluded from some *Ifá* cultural rites and rituals.
- (iv) Women are contented with their being excluded from some rituals, because it was prescribed by *Ifá*, in their own interest.
- (v) If women should protest against the roles assigned to them in the *Ifá* fold, the protest will be seen as a protest against *Ifá*, and it may backfire, as doing this amount to going against age-long traditions.

- (vi) “*Apètèbì*” is an automatic title preserved for an *Ifá* priest’s wife.
- (vii) Tokens of appreciation are usually extended to an *Apètèbì* by *Ifá* clients in pecuniary terms.
- (viii) Only an “*Apètèbì*” is assigned to undertake the “*wíwẹ Ifá*” (washing of *Ifá*) ceremony.
- (ix) On the journey to “*Igbódù*”, only a woman is allowed to carry the load of ritual materials to be used for the rites. However, she must not be menstruating as at the time of the exercise. She is subsequently “compensated” with a gift of a cock.
- (x) Both men and women are involved in the *Igbódù* initiation processes; one particular gender will not suffice, because God created humanity both male and female.
- (xi) At the point of entry to the “*Igbódù*”, women are stopped and restricted, while the men proceed to the “*Igbódù*” conclave.
- (xii) At the point of barricade to “*Igbódù*”, the women join in singing songs and performing other socials, the men within “*Igbódù*” conclave continue with the “more sacred” aspects of the rituals.
- (xiii) When the “throne” or saddle prepared as a seat for the new initiate has been prepared for “ascension” by an *Apètèbì*, a woman must be the first to sit down on it. This gesture, on one hand is interpreted as “testing the seat” to ensure that it has not been laden with any dangerous materials to harm the new initiate and on the other, it is seen as a blissful act (“*ọwọ-ẹrọ*”). The former reason is actually a conjecture because such an experience has not been witnessed nor heard by the respondent before. This could be regarded as a precautionary measure. Opting to undertake the initiation rites is not a feud; as such participants do not harbour ill-feelings of this nature about each other to warrant such a happenstance.
- (xiv) A woman cannot use the “*Ikin*” for divination purposes; neither can she be publicly consulted like a *babaláwo*. A woman who attempts to use the “*Ikin*” would be seen as “beating” *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*, hence it is forbidden.

(xv) It is forbidden in Ìjẹ̀bù-land that a woman should personally prescribe and make sacrifices to *Ifá*, as a priest does, without the input of a *babaláwo*.

(xvi) A woman cannot assume the full responsibilities of an *Ifá* priest. It is curtailed.

- No *Ifá* verses were collected as the resource person said she was not proficient enough to render any.

4.1.3 Interview conducted with Chief Ifánéyẹ Adésínà Odùsanwó, the Olúwo-Ifá of Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bù and the findings

Name: Chief Ifánéyẹ Adésínà

Position/Title: Olúwo *Ifá*, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bù, Òdogbolú Local Government

Age: 62+ years

Address: 30, Ejìnrìn Road, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bù

Date of Interview: Friday 24th June, 2016

Background: Inherited *Ifá* practices from the father. He was born into *Ifá*; he was marked out as “a child of *Ifá*”, hence the father did not allow him to acquire western education beyond primary six, so that he would not abandon *Ifá* practices in future as a result of the education acquired. He thereafter learnt more about *Ifá* from other *babaláwo*, apart from the father.

Submissions

Ifá is both a religion and a vocation for those who practice it. Sometimes in the past, some of our forefathers could go to the church or mosque for prayers and thereafter take *Ifá* up as a vocation. Now, *Ifá* is a religion of its own, though this stance is not a new development. We now have the “Ìjọ Adúláwọ̀”, where the doctrines of Òrúnmìlà are propagated.

Ifá loves women and holds them in high esteem. He forgives them very easily whenever they offended. *Ifá* asserts that without women, the world will not be interesting.

The ‘*Apètèbì Ifá*’ is always a wife of a *babaláwo*. Other women join her in making *Ifá* practices interesting with their presence and praise-songs. Nowadays, women who are talented learn and recite *Ifá* verses. It should be pointed out that though the women may not be as perfect as their male folk in these matters, a few of them still chant and sing relevant *Ifá* verses as occasions may demand.

Only a *babaláwo* is expected to use the ‘*òpèlẹ̀*’ instrument to consult *Ifá* on behalf of his clients. It is a rarity to find a woman do so. *Ọ̀rúnmilà* only authorized women to make use of cowries shells (*ẹ̀fẹ̀rìndínlógún*) for divination purposes. I have never seen any woman use an ‘*òpèlẹ̀*’ before, but I heard about a particular woman who was a very strong *Apètèbì* who lived around Apèbí area of Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode, who did, from stories related to us when we were young. (This presumption could not be verified elsewhere, so the authenticity and reliability of this story could not be ascertained.)

Indeed, I have never seen a woman consulting *Ifá* all my life. It does not exist in Ìjẹ̀bú-land, to the best of my knowledge.

Some women may be able to cast the ‘*Òpèlẹ̀*’, but they may not be able to give its interpretation. We may have some others who may even be able to interpret, but the opportunity will not be there to do so, since they are women.

A woman cannot carry out divination through the use of ‘*ikin*’, the sacred nuts. It is forbidden. Only men are allowed to use the ‘*ikin*’.

Women do not enter the ‘*Igbódù*’ because it is a secluded area for *Ifá* initiation, where only men are allowed to enter. Even when *Ifá* instructs that a woman should be initiated, there is a limitation in the rituals that will be performed for her; yet she cannot enter *Igbódù*. The initiation of such women is even very rare and it occurs only when *Ifá* compels that it should be done. Such a woman cannot undergo all the rites that men undergo. They are curtailed.

It is the tradition that *Ọ̀rúnmilà* established from one town or community to the other that dictates the tradition of the place. Some things are traditionally kept as secrets away from women. Women observing their menstrual cycle are prohibited from doing certain things or getting to certain places. This tradition has been kept from time immemorial.

Women play supportive roles during the ‘Igbódù’ rites. The *Apètèbí* in attendance sit around to sing and participate in the other social performances. When the men continue to proceed to the secluded ‘Igbódù’ proper, the women stay behind, continuing with the socials.

To show how much Ọ̀rúnmìlà loves women, regardless of prevailing situations, an *Ifá* verse (*Òdì*) states:

*Àdán doríkodò, ó n wòṣe eyẹ
 A difá fun Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 Baba n lo fẹ́ Ewémiléré nìyàwó
 Wọ̀n ní kó rúbọ
 Kó lè jẹ́ àjẹmónú fun un.
 Ó rúbọ.
 Ọ̀jò lóun á rọ́ dúdú
 Ọ̀jò yìí á rọ́ funfun
 Ojo yìí á rọ́ pupa
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà ní ọ̀jò ìbáà rọ́
 Ewémiléré,
 Ọ̀un á mú un délé koko.*

(The bat, in an upside-down position
 Watched the birds in their own acts
 Divination was made for Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 When he wanted Ewémiléré for a wife.
 He was advised to make a sacrifice
 In order to marry her permanently without
 regrets he made the sacrifice.
 Then, it threatened to rain cats and dogs
 In spite of threats of heavy rainfall
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà vowed that no matter the situation,
 He must marry Ewémiléré for keeps in his
 homeland.)

Another *Ifá* verse from *Ọ̀yèkúlogbè* says:

*Bí kò bá síkú ilé,
 Tòde ò lè pani.
 Ló difá fun Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 Nìgbà tí baba n lo fẹ́ Amóbíojó nìyàwó.
 Wọ̀n ní kó rúbọ, ó rúbọ*

(A vulnerable situation from within the
 household effectively kills
 Otherwise, no deadly situation from without
 can be effective
 Divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 When he decided to take Amóbíojó for a wife.

He was advised to offer a sacrifice, and he did.)

Òrúnmìlà was asked to make a sacrifice in order to ensure that Amóbiójó does not misbehave in future, and he heeded the advice. Despite this, Amóbiójó still misbehaved grievously such that Òrúnmìlà had to impose a fine of a dog on her. Amóbiójó became restless, ran away from Òrúnmìlà's home and eventually became mad in the forests.

The presence of women make *Ifá* ceremonies to be interesting. They provide lively entertainment (cf. Kukah, 2007:31; Ogundiran, 2012:15).

It is possible that in some parts of northern Yorùbá land like Òyó, women may not be involved in the “*wíwẹ Ifá*” (washing of *Ifá*) ceremony. It is however permissible in Ìjẹ̀bù-land to allow women participate. These differences are caused by the fact that the “foundation” laid by Òrúnmìlà in different areas and towns differ. What Òrúnmìlà established in Ìjẹ̀bù, Òyó and Ègbá, for example, differ from one place to the other. So it is all over the world. Propitiation is an area of strength for which Ìjẹ̀bù *babaláwo* are known for, while he gave the knowledge and art of *Ifá* praises to some other places. The Ègbá people are noted for their mastery of the ‘*Odù-Ifá*’.

Women can learn about *Ifá* if they so wish. Both the use of kola nuts and cowries which women are permitted to use also belong to *Ifá*. However, women are not allowed to use the ‘*òpẹ̀lẹ̀*’. A woman cannot make *Ifá* practices her vocation, even if she was born to an *Ifá* family. Having good knowledge about *Ifá* is not the same as practising *Ifá* as a vocation. No *babaláwo* will train a woman in the use of ‘*ikin*’ and encourage her to practice publicly. No woman in Ìjẹ̀bù-land will attempt practising as a *babaláwo*. A little boy who is knowledgeable in *Ifá* practices will take precedence before a woman in an *Ifá* gathering, even if a woman who is more knowledgeable is in attendance. Regardless of this, women have some roles reserved for them, which cannot be usurped by a man. An example is the “washing of *Ifá*” ceremony, which must be undertaken by a woman, an *Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí*. It is possible that in some other areas, a woman may not be allowed to perform this function, but a woman must necessarily do it in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. The same thing applies to the “*títẹ Ifá*” (*Ifá* initiation) ritual. The importance of women to *Ifá* is contained in an *Ifá* verse, *Òtùrà-orìgbèmi*:

Agbe sunkún títí, Agbe ò lómi lójú

Àtíòro sùnyèrè, ko ri Ìyèrè sun
Òwòrán kígbè, kò rẹni kígbè òun
A dífá fun Ọrúnmilà
Nígba ti baba n lo gbe Àròniṣà nìyàwó
 (The Agbe bird wept, but could not shed tears
 The Àtíòro bird tried to invoke Ìyèrè chants,
 but failed
 Ọwòrán cried loudly, but no one echoed his
 lamentation
 Divination was performed for Ọrúnmilà
 When he undertook a journey to have
 Àròniṣà as a wife.)

The story continued, that after Ọrúnmilà married Àròniṣà, he started going with her on all his *Ifá* expeditions, coming back home success after success. This closeness of Àròniṣà to Ọrúnmilà made others, including Ọrúnmilà's children to get jealous and therefore queried the relationship. The verdict was that Àròniṣà should no longer accompany Ọrúnmilà on his journeys. At the subsequent expedition, Ọrúnmilà did not take Àròniṣà along, and the expedition failed woefully. Upon enquiry, they found out that Àròniṣà's absence caused the failure of the mission. Ọrúnmilà called Àròniṣà to join the group forthwith and instantly their fortunes changed for the better.

The 'Ìyánifá' is a title conferred on an experienced 'Apètèbi'. A *babaláwo* with many wives can even choose one of them to be an 'Ìyánifá'. There are some other titles such as the 'Ìyálóde' and the 'Òjídí'. None of all the titles conferred on the women supersedes the titles conferred on men. Men actually decide and confer titles on women. . A woman can also be conferred with the 'Yèyè-Oge' title. It must be emphasised that all these titles for women are actually socially oriented as a mark of recognition.

The titles conferred on *babaláwo* in Ìjẹbú area, in hierarchical order include 'Àràbà', 'Olúwo', 'Akódá', 'Aṣẹdà', 'Erìnmi', 'Àgbọngbọn', and 'Ajùbònà'. A woman cannot aspire to any of these titles, no matter how deeply knowledgeable she is in *Ifá* practices.

We have *Ifá* verses on different women dispositions. An example here (Ọyèkú) Characterises a woman as a traitor:

Obìnrin lèké
Obìnrin lẹdàlẹ
Ifá á pelékèé
Ọdàlẹ á pọdàlẹ

Kò sí ohun tí a n̄ se lókùnkùn
Tí ojú Ọlórún kò tó
Ìgbà tí baba n̄ lọ bá Ọkété mulẹ
 (Women are liars
 Women are traitors
Ifá will kill a liar
 A traitor get killed by his/her own acts
 There is nothing done in secret
 That God does not see
 When Ọrúnmílà went into a covenant with
 Ọkété, the Rodent).

In the times past, many animals that we know today were in human form. Ọrúnmílà was forewarned about relying on his proposed Rodent wife. Ọrúnmílà made an imprecation that would make the Rodent wife die anytime she betrayed him. In the course of time, the Rodent stole the divination materials that Ọrúnmílà used, the ‘*ikin*’, in his absence. She subsequently died and Ọrúnmílà met her dead body upon return. Ọrúnmílà not only cursed her at death, he also established that she should henceforth be used as propitiation material to *Ifá*.

Another verse, ‘*Odù Ọgbẹje*’ says:

Ègbè ni mo gbẹje
Ọun ló dífá fun Ewu
Tí í şaya Àjàgùnmàlẹ
 (Ègbè ni mo gbẹje, an *Ifá* priest
 Made divination for Ewu, the Rodent
 Who was Àjàgùnmàlẹ’s wife.)

The situation was the same in this instance as it was in the previous case: the Rodent betrayed Àjàgùnmàlẹ by committing adultery with another man. She would turn into a snake, come to swallow the man and take him to a hideout for sexual escapades. Thereafter, the snake would return the partner. A trap that was set up after strong suspicion about Ewu’s movements and it got caught sooner rather than later, thus exposing the unfaithful woman.

There is a relationship between the *babaláwo* and the “*birds of the night*” or “*our mothers*” (witches). This is contained in the ‘*Ọsá Eleyẹ*’ verse of the *Ifá* corpus. Indeed, Ọrúnmílà led them into this world. They are very powerful beings. However, there is a pact between them and the *babaláwo*, which make the two parties come to terms when things go wrong. That makes the *babaláwo* capable of appeasing them

when the need arises. The stubborn ones amongst them who are not easy to placate often end up badly disgraced within the community, while the more reasonable ones live long, meaningful lives.

Findings from the submission

- (i) *Ifá* loves women and holds them in high esteem. He forgives them very easily whenever they offended. *Ifá* asserts that without women, the world will be less than interesting.
- (ii) The *Apètèbí Ifá* is always a *babaláwo*'s wife.
- (iii) Other women join the *Apètèbí* in making *Ifá* practices to be interesting with their presence and praise songs.
- (iv) Brilliant, talented women can learn and recite *Ifá* verses.
- (v) Only a *babaláwo*, a male, is permitted to use the 'òpèlè' strung beads for divination purposes.
- (vi) Women *Ifá* diviners can only use cowrie shells and kolanuts, both which also belong to *Ifá* practices for divination purposes.
- (vii) This resource-person had never seen a woman employing the use of 'òpèlè' as an instrument of divination in Ìjẹ̀bùland before, but heard about the story of a particular one, when he was a young boy, which could not be corroborated.
- (viii) He believes there is not a single 'woman *babaláwo*' in Ìjẹ̀bù-land today.
- (ix) Even if a woman understands the intricacies of casting the 'Òpèlè' for divination purposes she understands much less how to interpret *Ifá*'s message contained therein. Being a woman precludes them from engaging in such practices.
- (x) A woman is strictly forbidden to use the 'ikin' spiritual nuts for divination purposes. The 'ikin' are for the exclusive use of a *babaláwo*.
- (xi) No *babaláwo* in Ìjẹ̀bù-land will train a woman or allow her on the use of *ikin* spiritual nuts for divination purposes.

- (xii) While the male participants are allowed to participate fully, without restraints, during the '*Igbódù*' rituals, the female counterparts do not enjoy similar latitude because they are limited both in space and in content of the procedure.
- (xiii) Women mainly play supportive, social and sacred roles during the '*Igbódù*' rituals, notwithstanding that their participation is viewed as restricted.
- (xiv) *Ifá* initiation rituals for women, though a possibility, are very rare. This is done only when *Ifá* specifically compels that this step must be taken. Even at this, the activities and rituals performed are curtailed, compared to men's.
- (xv) It has been a tradition kept from time immemorial to keep some secrets away from women, bordering on the notion that women cannot be trusted not to divulge such secrets.
- (xvi) Women observing menstrual cycle are prohibited from doing certain things or going to certain places in *Ifá* practices.
- (xvii) Women are allowed to participate during the '*wíwẹ Ifá*' ceremony in Ìjẹ̀bù-land unlike practices in some northern Yorùbá areas like Òyó where women are not permitted to take part. The women undertake prominent roles and exclusively so too.
- (xviii) Women must be involved the '*lilé ìtẹ̀*' or '*títẹ̀ Ifá*' in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. Before the person for whom the throne was laid sits on the special 'throne', a woman must first sit thereon. The interpretation is that the seat will not be 'hot' for the occupant.
- (xix) A woman cannot make *Ifá* practices her full-time vocation like men, even if born into an *Ifá* practising family. Even if a woman has good and in-depth knowledge of *Ifá* practices, she is not allowed to practice as a *babaláwo*.
- (xx) A young boy or man who is knowledgeable in *Ifá* practices takes precedence over a woman of equal or even superior ability, regardless of the woman's age.

(xxi) An experienced ‘*Apètèbí*’ may be honoured with the title of *Ìyánífá*. This title, like others bestowed on women, like *Ìyálóde*, *Yèyé-Oge*, *Òjídí* and such others, are considered as honorific titles for social recognition. None of these titles supersedes any of the titles attainable by men within the *Ifá* circle. Consequent upon this, a woman cannot aspire to the positions of the *Àràbà*, *Olúwo*, *Akódá*, *Aṣẹdà*, *Erìnmì*, *Àgbongbòn* and *Ejùbònà*, because these are exclusively preserved for men.

(xxii) Highlights of the *Ifá* verses collected here:

- The *Ewéléré* experience shows that when *Òrúnmìlà* falls in love, he does so without minding the odds or attendant consequences.
- *Ifá* punishes recalcitrant women who misbehaved and are not prepared to make amends as shown in the *Amóbíojó* verse.
- The absence of a woman in undertaking an assigned role may lead to the failure of the entire enterprise, except steps are retraced. (*Àròniṣàn*)
- When a woman betrays, she has death waiting for her (*Òkété*). The story also emphasises why women are not allowed to use ‘*ikin*’ for divination purposes.
- A woman adulterer will sooner or later be caught and disgraced. (*Ewu/Òkété* and *Àjàgùnmalè*)
- *Òrúnmìlà* led the body of “the birds of the night” from the heavenly space to the world. Accordingly, there is a pact between the *babaláwo* and the witches.

4.1.4 Interview conducted with Mrs. Florence Odùsanwó, the *Apètèbí Olúwo Ifá* of Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bù and the findings

Name: Mrs. Florence Odùsanwo

Position/Title: *Apètèbí Olúwo Ifá*, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bù, Òdogbolú Local Government Area

Age: 56 years

Address: 30, Ejìnrìn Road, Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bù

Date of Interview: Friday, 24th June, 2016

Background: Trained fashion designer; petty trading. Married to a *babaláwo*.

Submissions

A woman who is married to a *babaláwo* automatically assumes the title of an ‘*Apètèbì Òrúnmilà*’.

I have good knowledge of what an *Ifá* priest does, although I am a Christian who attends the Cherubim and Seraphim Church. Sometimes, my husband will give a message through his *Ifá* consultations and the same message will be revealed at the Church in an exact manner, or vice versa.

One of the assignments given to women is to undertake the ‘*Ìdè síso*’ (tying of beads on the wrists) for beneficiaries, who are females. Women also undertake the ‘washing of *Ifá*’ (*Ifá wíwẹ*) and offer prayers when new entrants are being initiated. An *Apètèbì* is designated to perform the aforesaid functions. Men do not contest this assignment with women, but they offer monetary gifts to the women in charge as a matter of appreciation.

When the initiation rites are to be performed at the ‘*Igbódù*’ (a secluded place earmarked for the ceremony), a woman carries the materials to be used, which is symbolically called ‘*gbígbé Odù*’ (see Adekola, 2011:258). *Odù* is the essence of *Ifá* which must not be perceived by any woman. It is not the *Odù* that a woman carries *per se*, but the sacred materials to be used for the rituals, though it is termed as ‘*gbígbé Odù*’. A woman also prays for the prospective initiate(s). A woman must also be present during the ‘*títẹ Ifá*’ or ‘*títẹ Odù*’ (initiation). At a point, the women will stop while the men proceed to carry on with the remaining rituals.

Women are not complaining about their being excluded from some aspects of the rituals, though we do not know the reason(s) for the exclusion, except that, that was the way the tradition was inherited. Women do not see this as being relegated to the background. This has been so for ages past; from our forebears.

When a woman is to be initiated, the rituals involved are not exactly the same as that of men. Some rituals are said to be performed for men only, and not women. A woman may not be able to tell you the difference, since they have been excluded from men’s initiation.

I have neither seen nor heard of any woman using the ‘*Òpèlẹ̀*’ instrument to carry out divination process.

A woman can chant *Ifá* praises, in honour of *Òrúnmilà*. Women also respond to choruses of *Ifá* chants, as in this example, to honour *Ifá*:

Yéèèpà Odù!
Gbórowó tó ẹ̀ se Yéèèpà! (exclamatory remarks), the great *Odù* Gbórowó the great one.

Daughters and wives of *Ifá* priests, by an advantage of proximity are in a position to learn and know more about *Ifá*, especially if they show keen interest.

Findings from the submission

- (i) A woman who is married to a babaláwo automatically assumes the title ‘*Apètẹ̀bí Ọ̀rúnmilà*’.
- (ii) As a woman, I understand and have a good grasp of what my husband’s vocation entails.
- (iii) Women undertake the ‘*idè siso*’ (bead-tying) and ‘*Ifá wíwẹ̀*’ (washing of *Ifá*) rites. They also join in offering prayers when the new *Ifá* candidates are initiated. Men do not contest these assignments with women, in *Ijẹ̀bú*-land.
- (iv) Women are offered pecuniary gifts by men when they carry out such assignments as mentioned immediately above to appreciate them.
- (v) It is a woman’s responsibility to carry the “*Odù*” towards *Igbódù* and also to be present during the ‘*títẹ̀ Ifá*’ or ‘*títẹ̀ Odù*’ rituals. At a point, however, women are debarred from proceeding further with men into the inner chambers, where other rituals that women are not allowed to witness are continued.
- (vi) The women folk are not complaining about their exclusion from *some* rituals, an example of which was stated above, though they do not know the reason(s) for such exclusion.
- (vii) The exclusion of women is not, and should not be perceived as a sign of inequality or relegation to the background, because the situation has been so for ages past.

- (viii) This resource person has never seen a woman practising as a ‘*babaláwo*’ or using the ‘*òpèlẹ̀*’ or ‘*ikin*’ for divination purposes. A woman can however chant *Ifá* praises in honour of Ọ̀rúnmilà.
- (ix) Daughter(s) and/or wives of a ‘*babaláwo*’ may take advantage of learning more about *Ifá* practices, especially those who show keen interest.
- (x) She hardly knows any *Ifá* chant or corpus because of her lack of interest.
 - No *Ifá* verses were collected as the resource person said she was not proficient enough to render any.

4.1.5 Interview conducted with Mrs. Ìyábò Gbàdàmósí, the *Apètẹ̀bí Àràbà Ifá* of Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bù and the findings

Name: Mrs. Ìyábò Gbàdàmósí

Position/Title: *Apètẹ̀bí Àràbà*, Òmù-Èlẹ̀ní, Òdogbolú Local Government Area

Age: 50+ years

Address: Òmù, Ògùn State

Date of Interview: Friday 24th June, 2016

Background: Fashion Designer. An *Apètẹ̀bí Ifá*, married to a *babaláwo*, Olóyè *Àràbà Ifá* of Òmù-Èlẹ̀ní.

Submissions

The word “*Apètẹ̀bí*” originated from “a-pa-ẹ̀tẹ̀-bí” meaning “the one who gave birth to children after being healed of leprosy (ẹ̀tẹ̀)”.

There are some responsibilities attached to the position, which may not be obligatory, but to assist the husband in carrying out his own responsibilities. The situation may not be same in all areas because *Ifá* established different traditions in different places. In some areas, there could be specific roles reserved for an *Apètẹ̀bí* to assist her husband which may differ in some other areas. The reason is that the traditions left behind by Ọ̀rúnmilà himself while he was alive differ from one place to the other. In our own case here (in Ìjẹ̀bù), for example, an *Apètẹ̀bí* has the responsibility of starting off the ‘*títẹ̀ Ifá*’ (initiation rites). When a *babaláwo* has

visitors, it is the *Apètèbí*'s responsibility to extend hospitality to them. Some *babaláwo* teach their wives who show interest in the *Ifá* processes, some basic knowledge. I have shown interest, unlike my 'senior wives' who hardly assist our husband in his vocation. I also assist my husband in doing some write-ups, because I am fairly literate. He gives me instructions on medication which will complement the spiritual treatment to be administered on the clients and I also assist him in this wise.

I believe that a man can hardly be successful in any chosen vocation without the support of a woman, even if she only plays advisory roles. Men and women are inter-dependent. Neither of the two can live in isolation.

A woman may have good knowledge of *Ifá*, but she cannot practice it as a vocation. Some women can use the '*Òpèlẹ̀*', though I only heard so, I have never seen one; but a woman cannot use the '*ikin*' nuts in performing divination. The '*ikin*' is considered masculine. Women are only allowed to use cowries and kola nuts, which are considered feminine. A woman may not be able to explain the reason why they are prohibited from using the '*ikin*' nuts for divination. Men should know the reason, but would not like to say it.

Women do not feel marginalised by men for keeping secrets away from them. It is in the character of men to keep secrets from women. For example, in the past, women were said to be in charge of the '*Orò*'cult activities, but they lost the prerogative to men, because of love! But now, men refuse to divulge secrets to their wives.

I blame our foremothers for the situation, because they gossiped and were unable to keep secrets. While they (our foremothers) believed that nothing should be kept away from their spouses, nowadays men would not reveal secrets to their wives. Only God can now change the situation.

At least one woman must be in attendance during the '*títẹ̀ Ifá*', part of the initiation process on the way to '*Igbódù*', in *Ìjẹ̀bù*-land. This may be different in some other areas of Yorùbá land. For example, in *Rẹ̀mọ̀* area of *Ògùn* State, it is not compulsory that a woman should be present. The roles expected to be played by women could be taken up by the men as well. Women are generally expected to perform social functions.

At a point during the ‘*Igbódù*’ procession, women are not allowed to proceed with the men. Only men can explain why this is so.

Women cannot know all the secrets of men. Any woman who strives to know all the secrets of her husband may face some consequences, but a woman who is not too inquisitive follows her husband’s instructions.

Women who are competent are allowed to chant *Ifá* verses, although I am not good enough in this aspect.

As women, our knowledge about *Ifá* is very limited, compared with men’s abilities. Except a woman goes out of her way, and has the necessary skills, there is little or no time for women to dedicate to learning *Ifá* verses.

We do not have the ‘*Ìjọ Adúláwọ̀*’ (‘Church of *Ọ̀rúnmilà*’) a congregation dedicated to the worship of *Ọ̀rúnmilà* in line with modern style, in our neighbourhood here. What we have is the fortnightly meeting of *Ifá* priests and the women devotees which holds at the *Àràbà* (the highest ranking *Ifá* priest)’s residence. The men hold their meetings separately, but simultaneously, as the women too. The discussions of each group are not so secretive. The groups are divided mainly because of space constraints and the men are numerically more than the women.

There are no titles held by men that can also be held by women. A woman who is well versed in the use of cowries, kola nuts and ‘*ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀*’ for the consultation of *Ifá* may be honoured with the ‘*Ìyánífá*’ title. Women who farm and collect the scarce, special breed of palm nuts used for *Ifá* divination are also called ‘*Ìyá Onífá*’, but this is not a title. None of these women is competent enough to use the ‘*ikin*’ divination seeds like the *babaláwo* would do.

Only men hold titles such as *Olúwo*, *Apèná*, *Ajùbòná*, *Súrèpawo* and so on. Since God has made men the head over women since the beginning, we cannot expect equality between men and women. The roles played by men must necessarily exceed that of women because the major part of the *Ifá* work is performed by them. As women, our own role is to support the men. No matter how seriously and strenuously a woman strives, she cannot consult *Ifá* with ‘*ikin*’.

In places like Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ilésà, their young women are proficient in chanting *Ifá* praises, but this is quite rare in Ìjẹ̀bú-land. All the same, no matter a woman’s

proficiency in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, she cannot become an *Ifá* ‘priest’. Indeed, I have never heard of any woman who, out of her own volition walked up to a ‘*babaláwo*’, requesting to become an apprentice, so that she can be a future *Ifá* ‘priest’.

Babaláwo are healers too. That is why many of them combine herbal practices with divination. An ‘*Apètẹ̀bì*’ may assist her husband in this wise: curing with herbs. It should also be noted that women generally take care of the home front, bearing children and taking care of them as they grow up, which leaves them with little or no time to concentrate on the demands of *Ifá* training.

When there is an *ètùtù* propitiation procedure or sacrifice to be performed, women have no role to play. Women may be present during such events or even assist in the preparation of materials to be used, but it is only a *babaláwo* that is considered competent to handle such affairs.

I am not in a position to comment on the spiritual, nocturnal powers ascribed to women in the dead of the night, whether it can assist women or not in being at par with men in *Ifá* practices.

Findings from the submission

- (i) An ‘*Apètẹ̀bì*’ is a *babaláwo*’s wife. The designation was derived from ‘a-pa-ẹ̀tẹ̀-bì’, meaning, “the one who gave birth to children after being healed of leprosy (ẹ̀tẹ̀)”.
- (ii) An ‘*Apètẹ̀bì*’, *babaláwo*’s wife only supports or assists her husband in carrying out his responsibilities. Such assistance are not obligatory. It depends on the interest shown by the ‘*Apètẹ̀bì*’ and the confidence reposed in her by her husband. An example is that, an ‘*Apètẹ̀bì*’ extends warm hospitality to the *babaláwo*’s visitors.
- (iii) Women’s participation in *Ifá* practices may not be exactly the same in different parts of Yorùbá-land, because the tradition established or emphasised by Ọ̀rúnmilà during his life time differ from one place to the other.
- (iv) In Ìjẹ̀bù-land, an *Apètẹ̀bì* starts off the ‘títẹ̀ *Ifá*’ rituals, signifying ‘*ọ̀wọ̀-ẹ̀rọ̀*’, signifying a ‘peaceful take-off.’

- (v) It is believed that without a woman complementing or supporting a man's efforts on earth, such a man may not be successful in life.
- (vi) Men and women are inter-dependent; neither can survive in isolation.
- (vii) A woman cannot take up *Ifá* practices as a 'professional' vocation like men, even if she has very proficient grasp of the practices.
- (viii) Though this resource person says she has never seen a woman using the 'òpèlẹ̀' chain for divination purposes in her life, she believes it is more far-fetched that a woman should dare to use the 'ikin' spiritual nuts for the same purpose. This is because the 'ikin' is considered to be 'masculine' and therefore restricted for use by men only.
- (ix) Kola nuts and cowries shells are considered to be 'feminine' equivalents of the 'ikin', hence women who are knowledgeable about the use are allowed to use them for divination purposes.
- (x) Men are actually in charge of *Ifá* practices. No explanations are however given by men on the reasons why women are prevented from undertaking some activities in *Ifá* practices.
- (xi) Regardless of the submission mentioned immediately above, women do not feel marginalised by the treatment meted on them by men simply because it is in men's character to keep secrets away from women.
- (xii) Our female forebears should be blamed for the situation, because of their inability to keep secrets at that time.
- (xiii) In Ijẹ̀bù-land, during the 'ítẹ̀ *Ifá*' rites, at least one woman must be present. She will also accompany them on the way to 'Igbódù'. Conversely, a woman may not be present at all in Rẹ̀mọ̀-land, within the same Ògùn State.
- (xiv) During the procession to 'Igbódù', women are stopped at a point, while the men proceed further. It is the respondent's opinion that "only the men are in a position to explain why this is so"!
- (xv) Generally speaking, women usually perform social functions, like singing and dancing to make *Ifá* outings and ceremonies lively.

- No *Ifá* verses were collected as the resource person said she was not proficient enough to render any.

4.1.6 Interview conducted with Chief Ìdòwú Olúbódún Dàda Adéoyè, the Akódá Awo, Ọ̀sòsà-Ìjẹ̀bú and the Akódá Awo of Akilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bú (Ìjẹ̀bú-land) and others and the findings

Name: Dàda Adéoyè

Position/Title: The Akódá-Awo, Ọ̀sòsà-Ìjẹ̀bú and the Akódá-Awo of Akilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bú (Ìjẹ̀bú-land)

Age: Over fifty years

Address: Ọ̀sòsà-Ìjẹ̀bú, Ódogbolú Local Government Area, Ọ̀gùn State

Date of Interview: Sunday 3rd July, 2016

Background: He was born to an *Ifá* family, where all male children were made to learn the rudiments of *Ifá* practices. The female children were less exposed because they aligned more with their respective mothers who were *Apètẹ̀bí Ifá*. He is a full time *babaláwo*.

Others in attendance were:

- (1) Chief Adeniyi Olanrewaju – Male, 64 years
- (2) Ifáfẹ̀mi Adéoyè – Male, 52 years
- (3) Awosola Taiwo Fatosin –Male, 33 years
- (4) David Taiwo – Male, 33 years
- (5) Fatai Olukoya – Male, 28 years
- (6) Fakeye Sunday – Male, 27 years
- (7) Taiwo Opeloyeru – Male, 30 years
- (8) Azeezat Olundegun – Female, 25 years
- (9) Odunsi Bolaji – Male, 53 years
- (10) Olusuji Fayemi – Male, 57 years

- (11) Owoaje Olumoroti – Male, 60 years
- (12) Adedotun Sakariyau – Male, 41 years

Submissions

Ifá encompasses many things, all at once. *Ifá* is a religion, it is a vocation/profession and at the same time an aspect of the Yorùbá culture, because all of these are interwoven. The *Ifá* religion had been in existence since time immemorial, but most people do not value it, particularly because of the advent of Islam and Christianity. Many females show interest in *Ifá* training. Some of them are very well versed and knowledgeable about *Ifá*. However, no matter how knowledgeable a female *Ifá* devotee could be on *Ifá*, she may not be able to go through the whole length of the *Ifá* training. She may be distracted by marital and family issues. In another wise, there are aspects of *Ifá* training that will preclude women observing menstrual cycles from participation. Another reason is that some aspects of *Ifá* training may make a woman become barren or having motherhood problems. We have seen before. *Ifá* is the original religion of the Africans, although a lot of people do not value it the way it should be, because they now proclaim to be adherents of Islam or Christianity.

Many females learn *Ifá*, but their learning processes have some limitations for reasons of curtailment. At a stage, they are stopped from learning further because if they do, it may negatively affect them. Men who learn *Ifá* however do not have such limitations. A woman who goes beyond the expected limitation may end up becoming insane or barren. Examples of such areas where women are not permitted to learn or practice include the “*Àásán Ifá*” which is considered deep secrets or occult pronouncements of *Ifá*. Even when a man learns it up to a certain stage, he will be asked to stay in a bedroom separate from the wife’s, because staying with a woman may be injurious to the man’s well-being or lead to the woman’s death. In very rare cases, a woman who is past childbearing stage may return to learn these special aspects of *Ifá*, usually as a means of self-defence. Any woman that is privileged to get to this stage of *Ifá* would have accepted not to bear children again in her life. She then becomes a threat to the male folk, including the men who are not as versed as she is, when such a man crosses her path. *Àásán Ifá* are dangerous, deadly esoteric pronouncements that take immediate effect when it is employed.

Another thing a woman is not allowed to do, is to attend to the public and devotees using the “*ikin*” special kernels, used only by the *babaláwo* (a male) to undertake the divination process by the clients. It is however possible for a woman to have learnt and understood the processes, but she cannot practice openly like the men. She can also use the “*òpèlẹ̀*” privately for her own purpose, but not publicly like the men. In addition, a well-versed woman can understand or interpret the configurations of the *òpèlẹ̀* or the *ikin*, but she is forbidden from openly practising. Only selected few among the women who are very well advanced in *Ifá* practices, as earlier stated can even reach this stage, as they are prohibited from these high-level practices. This is because the woman is regarded as Ọ̀rúnmilà’s wife. It is usually those women who are privileged to be born in homes where *Ifá* is fully practised, and the father is a *babaláwo*, that sometimes get to such a high level, because of their background. Rather than use the *ikin* or *òpèlẹ̀*, a woman may be trained in the use of “Sixteen kolanuts” to be used for divination purposes, especially if she desires to attend to a public clientele. Ọ̀rúnmilà himself also endorsed the use of kolanuts by women when he gave his wife, at an initial event, to use the materials in his absence when he went away on a long journey, as instruments of divination. However, when a woman uses this kind of method for divination purposes, all she will be able to do is to explain the outcome of the divination and no more. She will not be able to perform propitiation rites and other rituals. However, only ladies from (children of) an *Ifá* priest have that kind of privileged training, because they are born into it and the opportunity is there for them to observe.

Such “extra-ordinary” women as described above cannot be exposed to “*Odi*” as a *babaláwo* can do. Such women are quite uncommon, but I came across one woman from Ọ̀yó in Lagos, who knew *Ifá* verses extremely well. My interaction with her indicated she was from a background similar to the one earlier described. Any “half-baked” *babaláwo* will have himself to blame if he encounters this type of woman.

(An intervention by Chief Adeniyi Olanrewaju)

One of the daughters of my mentor who hailed from Imodi (an Ìjẹ̀bú village very close to Ìjẹ̀bú-Òde) was well versed in *Ifá* practices. But as versed as she was, she could only use the *òpèlẹ̀* privately for divinations, and never the *ikin*.

The possibility is there for *Ifá* practices to differ, as a matter of details, from one area to the other. For example, if the people of Ọ̀yọ́ area allow their females to use *ikin* for divination purposes, it is not allowed at all in Ị̀jẹ̀bú-land. It depends on the foundation laid by Ọ̀rúnmilà in different towns while he was alive and practising. The foundation he laid in each area determined what is emphasised in such an area, which subsequently becomes their area of strength. For instance, in some places like among the Ègbá and the Ọ̀yọ́, *Ifá titẹ̀*, one of the stages in the process of *Ifá* initiation, can be conducted during the day time; but in Ị̀jẹ̀bú-land, it is a late evening affair.

Women are not allowed to participate in the entire processes of the “*Igbódù*” initiation rites, although they are needed to carry out some specific tasks. Conversely, men are not allowed to perform such roles assigned to women. For example, the “*Ìbò lílẹ̀*” rite is performed by a woman, although not done within the inner *Igbódù* conclave, but outside. This rite is to allow for any special, direct or specific message to be delivered by *Ifá* (Ọ̀rúnmilà), through the woman, to the new initiate. Only women who have been initiated can enter into the inner recesses during the *Igbódù* rituals. Even at that, such a female initiate must be excused at an advanced point, after the “*Ìbò didi*” process has been done. The tradition is that the woman is allowed to take her leave at that point. Other things that women are assigned to do are the social roles of singing *Ifá* praises, dancing and making merriment.

The important traditionally recognized chieftaincy titles in *Ifá* circles are: *Àràbà, Olúwo, Akódá, Aşẹ̀dà, Àgbọ̀ngbọ̀n, Agírí, Olóòtú Ejúbọ̀nà* and *Èrínmì*. Women are not entitled to any of these offices. Women have no rights to them. They are all reserved for men. Women however have their own parallel titles, but most of the titles are for social recognition or decoration. For example, we have the “*Ìyánífá*”. We also have the “*Agbákeke Ọ̀rúnmilà*” who coordinates social events as well as the “*Ìyá OgeIfá*”, bestowed on a woman considered to be very fashionable among the *Ifá* women practitioners. These titles are modern developments in *Ifá* circle except the *Ìyánífá*; all other titles are peripherals meant to appreciate people of substance within the society. Even the researcher here can be conferred with a title such as “*Balógun Ọ̀rúnmilà*” just to honour him, if he is a man of means. Such titles are only honorific for social recognition, they are not titles traditionally inherited or recognised.

The reason for preserving some titles exclusively for men is that, it is absurd for women to take charge of things when we have capable men around. A woman is not expected to be in charge or control affairs as the *Àràbà* where other *babaláwo* (men) are available in a gathering or group.

Three things in particular that women in *Ifá* cannot do are: a woman cannot set eyes on “*Odù*”; a woman can never be conferred with a title such as “*Aṣẹ̀dà*”; and a woman can never be allowed to go beyond the “*lilé itẹ̀*” rite, which is the preparation, laying and setting up of a throne or stool for a new initiate – no matter how well versed or deep a woman could be in *Ifá* practices.

(Back to Chief Ìdòwú Olúbódún now)

Regardless of the fact that a woman is not allowed to go beyond the “*lilé itẹ̀*”, yet a female has a role to play after the throne has been laid. The first person to sit down on the throne before the person for whom the throne was laid must be a woman. It is a precaution for the man who will eventually sit on it. It is like an antidote; a precaution for the real occupier of the throne.

In Ìjẹ̀bù-land, before the real rituals begin, women are allowed to be in attendance and all the people, including the initiates will be in a procession to “*Igbódù*”. Up till the point when the women will be excused, a woman carries the “*Odù*”, which is the load of ritual materials to be used, as no woman can perceive the *Odù*. A man is not allowed to carry out this assignment in Ìjẹ̀bù-land; only a woman does. In some other places, a man is allowed to do so and not a woman. The reason for such differences is that what Òrúnmilà emphasised differed from one place to the other. For example, one important thing that *Ifá* brought to Ìjẹ̀bù-land was *ètùtù* (propitiation). That is why propitiation is considered one of the areas of strength for the Ìjẹ̀bù *babaláwo*. Areas like Ègbá, Ìbàdàn and Òyó are not as versed as the Ìjẹ̀bù when it comes to propitiation, although their own area of strength is the rendition of *Ifá* verses. In most places in Òyó, a goat (which they call ‘*òbélẹ̀kẹ̀*’) is usually the sacrificial item for almost all issues brought before *Ifá*, whereas in Ìjẹ̀bù, the tradition is to ask for the definite material to be used for each *Ifá* consultation.

A *babaláwo*’s wife(s) automatically assumes the title “*Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí*”. The title has some historical dimension, as contained in this verse, *Òbàrà-àìkútán*:

È kú alálé ni iyì a-tan-iná
 Àgò yà ni iyì a-rin-òkùnkùn
 Àwọgbó-ì-fòhùn ni àwọn ẹranko fi ñ ọ̀ sùni lára
 A dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà
 Ó ń lọ sájò tí kò níye ọ̀jọ̀
 Ó lọ bá alárùn kan sùn lẹ̀hùn-ún
 Ẹ̀gbà tí Ọ̀rúnmilà máa dé ilú yẹn
 Alárùn tó bá pàdẹ̀, kò mò pé adẹ̀tẹ̀ ni
 Ó wá bá a sùn.
 Obìnrin yẹn ń sá fún un
 Ọ̀rúnmilà sáà ń tọ̀jú ẹ̀
 Ó ń tọ̀jú ẹ̀, ó ń tọ̀jú ẹ̀
 Bó ọ̀ ẹ̀ gbádùn niyẹ̀n
 Bí ó ọ̀ ẹ̀ níyẹ̀n
 Ẹ̀gbà tí àwọn ènìyàn wá ń pè é,
 “Adẹ̀tẹ̀, aya Ọ̀rúnmilà”
 Ọ̀rúnmilà wá ní, kí wọn má pè é bẹ̀ẹ̀ mó
 Ó ní kí wọn máa pè é ní “Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí, aya Ọ̀rúnmilà”
 (A person who announces his presence with
 greetings at night, earns adequate respect,
 A person who announces his presence while in the
 dark earns adequate respect,
 Entry into the thick forest without making any sound
 makes birds stool on a person
 Divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà when he
 went on a long journey
 While abroad, Ọ̀rúnmilà had sexual relations with a
 leper.
 When Ọ̀rúnmilà got to that town
 He met a sick woman but never knew she was a
 leper
 The woman started avoiding Ọ̀rúnmilà
 But Ọ̀rúnmilà sought to take good care of her
 He persisted in treating the woman
 And eventually the woman was healed
 Ọ̀rúnmilà thereafter married her.
 When people wanted to refer to the woman or call
 her
 They will say “Ọ̀rúnmilà’s wife, the leper.”
 Ọ̀rúnmilà cautioned that they should stop referring
 to her as such
 Rather, they should call her “Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí (the-new-
 being-that-emerged-after-being-healed-of-leprosy),
 the wife of Ọ̀rúnmilà”.

Hitherto, the woman was simply called a leper. But after she was healed and she
 settled down with Ọ̀rúnmilà as a wife, she was called “A-pa-ẹ̀tẹ̀-bí”, (*Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí*) meaning
 “the one who was healed of ‘ẹ̀tẹ̀’ (leprosy)”.

Ifá spoke about women from time to time. An *Ifá* verse *Ogbè-atẹ̀*, for example, says:

Gbọ̀ tọkọ, tọkọ là á gbọ̀
Obìnrin tí yóò bóṣì kú
Tó bá jí lówùúrọ̀
A mọ̀ ọkọ lójú
A ní olóri-burúkú jí tàbí ó sùn lọ?
Gbọ̀ tọkọ, tọkọ là á gbọ̀
Obìnrin tí yóò bá ọlà kú
Tó bá jí lówùúrọ̀ kùtùkùtù
Á rẹ̀rìn-in mísín-mísín sọkọ
“È fẹ́ jẹun ni, àbí ẹ́ fẹ́ wẹ?”
(Honour your husband, husband must be
honoured
Only a woman who wants to die in poverty
Wakes up in the morning
Only to dishonour her husband
Saying, “You this man of ill-luck
Are you still sleeping or you have woken
up?”
Honour your husband, he must be honoured
A woman who desires prosperity
When she wakes up early in the morning
Usually smiles at the husband
“Your food or your bath?” she inquires.)

In ‘*Odù Kẹ́rúmátẹ̀*’ an *Ifá* verse advised a man to marry ‘*Ògé*’, the personified name of a bird, because she will be a good wife who will attract success and prosperity to the union and home:

Ẹ̀jẹ́ Ọ̀gé, o dé lónì
Èyẹ ire
È wolé ire, ẹ́ fí Ọ̀gé wọ̀
(Mother Oge, here you come today
A good bird
Take care of her in an enabling, settled
home)

These depict women as honourable home-makers when the husband is pleased; but a woman who displeases her husband stands the risk of attracting ill-luck to herself.

In another *Ifá* verse named *Ogbèsá*, it says:

Şen-n-wẹ̀lẹ̀, şen-ń-wẹ̀lẹ̀
Dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà
Ifá ń şawo lọ sí Ilúbìnrin
Wón ní kí Ọ̀rúnmilà rúbọ̀

*Nítorí ibi tí ó n lọ yìi
Ọkùnrin kì mà í débèẹ!
Şen-n-wẹẹ, şen-n-wẹẹ*

Divination for performed for Ifá

Ifá was on a working visit to Ìlúbìnrin ('Town of women only')

Ọrúnmilà was advised to offer sacrifice because the place he has chosen as his destination is forbidden for men to visit).

Ọrúnmilà was advised to make a sacrifice before embarking on that journey, because no man had ever returned from a journey to the place. Well determined to succeed on the journey, Ọrúnmilà adhered to the advice by offering a goat as a propitiating sacrifice. A drum was thereafter made for Ọrúnmilà with the skin of the goat. A short distance from the town, Ìlúbìnrin, he started beating the drum. On finally reaching the town, the women had started dancing to the drumbeats and had been so much carried away, such that they came back home with Ọrúnmilà. The song which Ọrúnmilà sang then was:

*Şen-n-wẹẹ, şen-n-wẹẹ
Şen-n-wẹẹ, şen-n-wẹẹ
Eré l'Èdú wá şe o, kò mà jà o
Şen-n-wẹẹ, şen-n-wẹẹ
(Şen-n-wẹẹ, şen-n-wẹẹ
Şen-n-wẹẹ, şen-n-wẹẹ
Èdú is a friend and not an enemy
Şen-n-wẹẹ, şen-n-wẹẹ)*

With his wisdom, Ọrúnmilà brought all the women home. His hitherto lonely home became a beehive of interesting activities. Having brought so many women, Ọrúnmilà allowed other men to marry some of them. Not minding that the women were brought in large numbers, some of the men only married one wife each. Some others married more than one: two, three, four and so on. Some others yet showed no interest and picked none. It is believed that those who marry one wife since that incident are the descendants of those who picked one woman then. The same apply for those who picked more than one woman and indeed those who picked none.

In another *Ifá* verse, 'Odùlkáwònrín', Ọrúnmilà tags women as capable of shameful sexual behaviours, because when a woman is in the 'mood', the location of the act would not matter:

Káwo í fèdìdì mórùn
A díá fún ajá, tílẹ̀ ọmọ Olóbòótó
Tó n dókó láààrín ọjà
Tó sọ gbogbo ayé di afóju
Şé kò mọ pé ará ọjà n wo òun ni?
Şé ó sọ ará ọjà di afóju ni?

(The cult-man hangs a seal round his neck

Ifá divination was performed for the dog (ajá),
the offspring of Olóbòótó
Who was having sexual relations in an open
market
With an assumption that everyone else was
blind
Otherwise, does she not realise that other
people in the market
Were looking freely at her?
Or did she assume that other people were
blind?)

It is true that women are endowed with enormous supernatural power that cannot be controverted; yet it is obvious that women cannot be trusted with secrets. Although if a woman had sexual relations with a man, she may keep it as top secret, even if the heavens fall. That is why women are regarded as next to God in terms of the powers they hold. Women control the world. Some women inherited the powers from their mothers. Such powers cannot be queried except by a person looking for trouble. That is why we *babaláwo* do not want to talk about this aspect of women.

It is the duty of male *Ifá* practitioners to carry out full initiation ceremonies and also to 'sight *Odu*'. When an *Apètẹ̀bí* (wife of an *Ifá* priest) arrives in the midst of other women in an *Ifá* gathering, they sing:

Apètẹ̀bí dé ooo
Kó wá gbé e gègè tí wá láyà
Apètẹ̀bí déee
Unrun un wá şe o, ààà
Kó wá gbé e gègè tí wá láyà

(*Apètẹ̀bí* has come
To dance systematically towards us
honourably *Apètẹ̀bí* has come
She has come for a purpose to dance
systematically towards us honourably)

My own *Apètèbí* resides in Canada but comes home regularly. She is my only wife. It is true that one can marry as many as ten wives, if the person has the capacity. However, polygyny makes no sense if the children are not well trained and catered for. All that matters to me is to train my own children. No man can live in isolation. Marrying more than two wives breeds quarrels and matrimonial hostilities; how much more marrying up to five wives? Such a man may not live long!

Findings from the submission

- (i) Females show interest in *Ifá* training and some of them turn out to be well versed and knowledgeable about *Ifá*
- (ii) *Ifá* training for women gets terminated at a point, usually because of marital distraction and the belief that it could be spiritually dangerous for the women to do so, while the men could proceed further. Not to heed this termination may negatively affect such a woman. E.g. becoming insane or barren.
- (iii) Women are not permitted to learn or recite the “*Àásán Ifá*”, which are considered “too deep” for women because of the esoteric pronouncements they contain.
- (iv) When men learn “*Àásán Ifá*”, they must abstain from women including the wife/wives. To do otherwise may lead to the death of the woman or very injurious to the man’s well-being.
- (v) Women cannot use the “*ikin*” special kernels for (public) divination purposes, even if she knows and understands the processes and interpretations.
- (vi) Some roles are exclusively preserved for women in *Ifá* practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. For example, during the “*Igbódù*” initiation rites, “*gbígbéOdù*” (carrying the materials for sighting the *Odù*), “*ibò lílẹ̀*” (preparation for casting of votes) and “*jíjókòó-lé-itẹ̀*” (initial person to sit on the throne) are done only by the female folk. These roles are also ritualistic and sacred.
- (vii) Women are only allowed to participate in the “*ibò dídì*” (casting of lots) at an earlier stage during the “*Igbódù*” initiation rites, before they are excused.

- (viii) During the “*Igbódù*” rituals, women attend mostly to social activities: dancing singing and merry-making.
- (ix) Only men are exclusive traditional *Ifá* title holders: *Àràbà, Olúwo, Akódá, Aşèdá, Àgbongbòn, Agírí, Olóòtú Ejùbònà* and *Èrìnmi*.
- (x) Women only hold social, honorary titles: *Ìyánífá, Agbákẹkẹ Ọ̀rúnmilà, Ìyá-Ogèlfá*. The *Apètẹ̀bi* is normally an automatic title of a *babaláwo*’s wife.
- (xi) Men too, including those not well versed in *Ifá*, but seen to be supportive, can be conferred with honorary titles such as “*Balógun Ọ̀rúnmilà*”.
- (xii) The *Ifá* verses collected here highlight the following:
- Ọ̀rúnmilà does not discriminate: she slept with a woman with leprosy, who later became his wife and got healed;
 - Women who honour their husband prosper;
 - When a woman is taken care of by the husband, the husband becomes successful;
 - When a man impresses a woman, the man easily gains control over the woman;
 - Women are capable of indulging in shameful, reckless sexual behaviours without minding the environment or on-lookers, once she is in love;
 - Women cannot be trusted with secrets.

4.1.7 Interview conducted with Chief Múbàşírù Ifáyẹmí Adékòyà, Ìjẹ̀bù-Igbo and the findings

Name: Múbàşírù Adékòyà

Position/Title: *Babaláwo*

Age: Over seventy years

Address: 43, Apoje Road, Ìjẹ̀bù-Igbo, Ìjẹ̀bù-North Local Government Area, Ògùn State

Date of Interview: Sunday 3rd July, 2016

Background: He was born to an *Ifá* family. He inherited *Ifá* practices from the father. *Ifá* practices run in the family. He is a full time *babaláwo*.

Others in the team:

- (1) Asifu Kazeem – Male, 35 years
- (2) Akolawole Odùsanya – Male, 42 years
- (3) Babatunde Adebajo – Male, 45 years
- (4) Fafunke Osobamiro – Female, 32 years
- (5) Leke Onabanjo – Male, 53 years
- (6) Yesiru Káká – Male, 64 years
- (7) Kikelomo Aina – Female, 36 years
- (8) Awodele Balogun – Male, 60 years
- (9) Fasilat Omoṭunde – Female, 35 years
- (10) Olúwole Kazeem – Male, 48 years
- (11) Sunday Otukelu – Male, 50 years
- (12) Afeez Dauda – Male, 55 years

Submission

Women are very special to *Ifá* that is why Ọ̀rúnmìlà holds them in high esteem. Many of the experiences Ọ̀rúnmìlà gathered were through his relationships with women. In fact, Ọ̀rúnmìlà interacted with women of different characters and dispositions.

I have never seen any woman in Ìjẹ̀bù-land using the *ikin* divination materials openly. It is not allowed, because there are repercussions believed to attend non-compliance. No sane woman will want to risk such repercussions. The closest I heard about was about a cousin of mine who is late now, who was privately using the *òpẹ̀lẹ̀* divination seeds, but it was not for public use at that time. I am yet to meet a woman publicly using *òpẹ̀lẹ̀*.

It is only the males that were openly encouraged to be trained in *Ifá* divination, though some females may be exposed to it, but it is not towards becoming a *babaláwo*. As a *babaláwo*, I have never trained a woman. Women may be trained by other senior women in the practice of using *ẹ̀rìndínlógún* for divination purposes, but this should not be misconstrued to mean that they were being trained to become *babaláwo*.

There are a number of things women are not allowed to do within *Ifá* circles. For example, a woman is not allowed to use *ikinand ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀*, because they cannot practise as *babaláwo*. They can only support men in *Ifá* practices. A woman cannot follow them to *Igbódù* for rituals. There is a limit to where they can reach, where they will be left singing and dancing, while the men, including male children seeking to be initiated, will proceed to the inner recesses of the *Igbódù* for the necessary rituals. Women are now being initiated into the *Ifá*, but they cannot become *babaláwo*. Not all men who are initiated too must become *babaláwo*. But the rituals performed for women initiates are limited, because they cannot see the *Odù*. It is a strong taboo for a woman to see *Odù*, more so because for even men to see *Odù*, a lot of spiritual fortification must have been done for such males, otherwise they too may suffer some calamities, like getting blind. There were instances of such occurrences in the past.

Not very many women show interest in *Ifá* practices, though they constitute a larger percentage of our clientele, seeking solutions to one problem or the other. Women's participation is usually for socials. The late wife of this *babaláwo* hardly bothered about *Ifá* matters beyond helping him in some chores like buying ritual materials from the market, because she was a hair dresser.

It is possible that *Ifá* practices may differ, only to a little extent on matters of details, from one area to the other because *Ifá* is universal. For example, *babaláwo* among the Ọ̀yọ́ Yoruba sub-group are noted for their ability to recite *Ifá* verses very fluently, while *babaláwo* from Ìjẹ̀bù are respected for the use of sacrifice in solving issues for their clients. This should not be surprising because there are many sides to the life of Ọ̀rúnmilà. It is the side of Ọ̀rúnmilà that each area finds to be attractive to them that they emphasise. For instance, in some places among the Ọ̀yọ́ Yoruba sub-group, *Ifátítẹ̀* and visitation to *Igbódù*, which are parts of the process of *Ifá* initiation, may be conducted during the daytime; whereas in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, it is a late night affair.

The traditionally recognized chieftaincy titles in *Ifá* circles are conferred only on men. The titles include the *Àràbà*, *Olúwo*, *Akódá*, *Aṣẹ̀dà*, *Àgbọ̀ngbọ̀n*, *Agírí*, *Olóòtú*, *Ejùbọ̀nà* and *Erinmì*. Women are not entitled to any of these offices because they have no rights to them. However, women have their own titles which are mostly for social recognition or for services rendered in the community. Examples include the “*Ìyánifá*”, seen as the foremost; “*Ìyá OgeIfá*”, bestowed on a woman considered to be very fashionable among the *Ifá* women practitioners and “*Agbákeṣe Ọ̀rúnmilà*” for a woman put in charge of social events in the *Ifá* circle. Some of such titles were coined in recent times to appreciate those who identify with *Ifá*, especially in pecuniary terms. We also have similar honorific titles such as “*Aṣíwájú awo Ọ̀rúnmilà*” or “*Baba Egbé awo Ọ̀rúnmilà*” given to men, just to honour them, even without being a *babaláwo*.

Women are excluded in taking titles reserved for men because they are supposed to support the men, not to take over their responsibilities. Women are duly recognized and given their own portion of relevant assignments in the scheme of things. After all, men have their responsibilities just as women too have theirs, without causing any conflict or misunderstanding. When the ritual stool is prepared for a new initiate to sit on, for example, the initiate, usually a male is not allowed to sit on it directly. It is not allowed because it is not appropriate: a woman must sit on the stool first as a sign of ‘peaceful entrance’ for the new entrant – *owó ẹ̀rò ni ó gbọ̀dò bá wọ̀lé*. Women are symbols of peace and tranquillity and that is how Olódùmarè created them. Men may prepare the stool, but a woman must be given the privilege to sit thereupon first, before allowing the new initiate sit on it. That is what we met our ancestors doing.

There are *Ifá* verses that dealt with women issues. For example, in *Ìwòrì-Ọ̀yẹ̀kú*, it is stated that women were formerly in charge of the *Egúngún* cult in Yorùbá land, until they lost the privilege to men, due to their overzealousness and high-handedness. Women misused the opportunity by ill-treating men, particularly when they felt offended by men.

Oko etilé, oko ẹ̀gbin
Àdàpọ̀ owó, owó iyà
Èmi ò jù ó, ìwọ̀ ò jù mí
Ni ó n fa àfojúdi ará ilé ẹ̀ni
A difá fún wọ̀n ní Ìlùbìnrin
Níbi tí abo Egúngún ti n lé akọ̀ kiri.

*Wọn ní Ìwòrì kò ru èkú
Egúngún, wọn ò gbòdò na babaláwo*

(A farm cultivated nearby is never appreciated
Going into partnership in business encourages
inadequacies
Arguments on who is older among two people
Encourages contempt from close quarters
Ifá divination was performed for the
inhabitants of Ìlúbinrin
Where the female *Egúngún* were busy lording
it over their men
It is said that *Ìwòrì* does not wear a
masquerade's clothings
Egúngún masquerade must never beat a
babaláwo.)

After a long period of suffering under women, men of Ìlúbinrin consulted with *Ifá* and after performing the necessary sacrifice, they were instructed on what to do any other time the women's masquerade attacked them. On the day when women *Egúngún* struck under the pretext of being provoked by a particular man, while the women brought out their whips to cut the men to size, the men brought out swords to counter the women. When a few women masquerades were beheaded by the male masquerades, others fled and were overpowered, bringing to an end the era of women's exclusive rights on *Egúngún* masquerade. That is the reason why women are still permitted to reasonably participate in the *Egúngún* cult. The women, in their resolve to still deal with their male counterparts one way or the other, then decided that while they will leave the men to take charge of the *Egúngún* cult when it comes out during the day, women will hold their own cultic activities in the dead of the night.

Another verse from *Òtúrá-méjì* talks about women being capable of truncating positive human endeavours.

*Ká búrìn búrìn, ká ẹ̀ àkíyèsí
Ló dífá fun Ọ̀rúnmilà
Wọn ní kó rúbọ̀ nítorí aṣeni
Ọ̀rúnmilà ní "Aṣeni bíi báwo? Àwọn wo
laṣeni?"
Wọn ní "Àwọn obìnrin laṣeniù"
Ni Ọ̀rúnmilà bá kò, kò rúbọ̀
Ó loun ò leè rúbọ̀ nítorí obìnrin lásán lásàn
Ni gbogbo ohun tí Ọ̀rúnmilà n ẹ̀ tó ti n dára*

Bá bèrè sí ní dojú rú
 (As we walk along, we should endeavour to be observant
Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 He was asked to perform sacrifice for the sake of those who would thwart one's efforts
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked "What manner of beings would thwart one's efforts?"
 He was given a reply, "Women are the ones who thwart the efforts of others"
 Ọ̀rúnmìlà refused to perform the sacrifice,
 He said "I cannot perform any sacrifice for the sake of ordinary women"
 Then things started going awry for Ọ̀rúnmìlà
 From good to bad).

The *Ifá* verse continued to inform us that Ọ̀rúnmìlà went back to *Ifá* who confirmed that his predicament was caused by his refusal to obey the earlier instruction. He was advised to comply this time around though the sacrificial items had increased manifold. Ọ̀rúnmìlà did and also found a way to confirm that witches, believed to be women, were behind his travails. As soon as Ọ̀rúnmìlà was able to perform the sacrifice, things started going on well for him once again. He was also able to strike a bargain with the women, such that thenceforth they offered each other a high level of mutual respect.

Findings from the submission

- (i) A woman, no matter how knowledgeable she is in *Ifá* practices cannot publicly use the *òpèlẹ̀ andikin* paraphernalia for divination purposes
- (ii) A woman is permitted to use only the *ẹ̀rìndínlógún* cowries for divination purposes
- (iii) A woman cannot train or practise as a *babaláwo*
- (iv) A woman can be initiated to *Ifá* practices, but that does not equate the initiate to a *babaláwo*. In the same manner, a male initiate does not necessarily become a *babaláwo*.
- (v) Chieftaincy titles like *Àràbà, Olúwo, Akòdá* and *Aşèdá* are restricted to *babaláwo*, but there are other honorary titles for both men and women, different from the ones reserved for the *babaláwo*.

- (vi) The *Igbódù* rituals performed for females are not as detailed as that of males. There are limitations for women.
- (vii) It is mandatory that a woman should be the first person to sit on the stool prepared for a new initiate, as a mark of creating “easy” entrance for the initiate,
- (viii) The *Ifá* verses collected here highlight the following:
 - When women are in privileged positions, they may become overzealous and high-handed, which may cause them to lose such a privilege.
 - Failure to give due recognition to women by men may lead to losses and low-level achievement on the part of men.
 - There is a pact that was established based on mutual respect that men shall give due respect and recognition to women considered to be witches.

4.1.8 Interview conducted with Chief Ifákóredé Ifáfúnmi, the *Àràbà* of Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n-land, Ìjẹ̀bù and his cohort of *babaláwo*, Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n, Ìjẹ̀bù and the findings

Name: Chief IfákóredéIfáfúnmi, a.k.a. Ògèé, ẹ̀yẹ̀ Àgbọ̀nmìrẹ̀gún

Position/Title: The *Àràbà* Awo, Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n-land, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ìjẹ̀bù North-East Local Government Area

Age: 56 years

Address: Ile *Àràbà*Awo, Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n, Ìjẹ̀bù

Date of Interview: Wednesday 15th May, 2018

Background: He inherited the job from his father. His mother’s lineage were also *Ifá* practitioners. He thereafter underwent tutelage under various *babaláwo* in Ìjẹ̀bù land.

Others in the team of *Ifá* priests:

- (1) Chief Babatunde Sogbesan, Baale Àkó Onigbagbo, Ago-Iwoye – Male, 68 years
- (2) Olóyè Julius Akinlaja, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode – Male, 38 years

- (3) Ogbeni Ifáyemi Olabode, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 62 years
- (4) Ogbeni Olukade, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 53 years
- (5) Ogbeni AbiOdùn Soyóde, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 26 years
- (6) Ogbeni Soniyi Olusola, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 32 years
- (7) Ogbeni Oṃodayo Ade, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 48 years
- (8) Babatunde Olorunnisola, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 59 years
- (9) Alao Bankole, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 72 years
- (10) Adeyemi Oluyinka, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 61 years
- (11) Sina Oluwakemi, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 68 years
- (12) Oluduti Okubanjo, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 63 years
- (13) Odùfolahan Hassan, Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode – Male, 60 years

Submissions

Òrúnmilà, the custodian of *Ifá* practices descended from heaven and lived for one thousand, nine hundred and forty years before he departed from earth. Ọ̀ṣun, who lived for six hundred years, was one of his wives. She assisted her husband in curing the sick with the magical water contained in the pot she brought from heaven, any time the husband was not around to attend to his clients. For her exceptional care, Ọ̀rúnmilà loved her exceedingly. This lends credence to the powers that God had bestowed on women from the very beginning. The *Ifá* corpus in *Odù Ọ̀ṣẹ̀tùrà* highlights thus:

*Ifá ni, Kóo kọ̀rò, awo Èwi
Ó ní ọ̀run sù kanlẹ̀ dẹ̀dẹ̀, awo Esiko
Ó ní alákan ni í tàikàtàragbá pẹ̀-pẹ̀-pẹ̀ létí ẹ̀ri
Dá fún igba irúnmalẹ̀ ajikòtún
Dá fún igba irúnmalẹ̀ ajikòsì
A dá fún Ọ̀ṣun, àwára-olú
Lójó tí wón n tilẹ̀ ọ̀run bọ̀ wálé ayé
Wón délé ayé tán
Wón la igbó orò
Wón la igbó ọ̀pa
Wón la ọ̀nà tí ó ti Ọ̀tù-Ifẹ̀ wá.
Wón pe eégún tíí, eégún ò jé
Wón pe orò, orò ò fòhùn
Wón pe ọ̀pa, ọ̀pa ò mú yangan-yangan lóko*

Wọn pa obì, obì ò yàn.
Elédùmarè ní, níbo ni wọn fi Ọ̀ṣun àwára-olú
sí?
Wọn ní ó n bẹ lágbede–méjì ayé òun òrun
Elédùmarè ní kí wọn ó padà
Kí wọn ó lọ fi ìmò jẹ tỌ̀ṣun
Wọn wá padà,
Wọn lọ fi ìmò jẹ tỌ̀ṣun
Wọn wá n pe eégún, eégún n jẹ
Wọn wá n pe orò, orò n fòhùn
Wọn n pe opa,
Opa n mú yangan-yangan lóko
Wọn pa obì, obì n yàn kedere.
Njẹ gúnnyán-gúnnyán tó n bẹ lóde Ídó
Tí kò bá fi ìmò jẹ tỌ̀ṣun
Iyán a máa ní kókó
Rokà-rokà tó n bẹ lóde Ìjèsà
Tí kò bá fi ìmò jẹ tỌ̀ṣun
Ọ̀kà a máa méré
Àwa ti fi ìmò jẹ tỌ̀ṣun
Gbogbo ire kó máabá wapé lùmò
Àwa ti fi ìmò jẹ tỌ̀ṣun
Ọ̀ṣun, oore-yèyè ò!
Ọ̀ṣun, oore-yèyè ò!
Omi ò!
Ota ò!
Eri ò!
E kóre yèyè ò
E kóre yèyè Ọ̀ṣun
E kóre yèyè ò
E kóre yèyè Ọ̀ṣun

(Ifá says:
Kóo kórò, was their priest at Èwí
Ọ̀run sù kanlẹ̀ dèdẹ̀, the priest at Esíko
The crab makes noise with its carapace beside
the waters
Divination was performed for the pantheon of
two hundred deities on the right
Divination was performed for the pantheon of
two hundred deities to the left
Divination was also performed for Ọ̀ṣun, alias
‘àwára-olú’
On the day all of them embarked on a journey
from their heavenly abode to inhabit this earth
When they arrived on earth,
They created a route towards the veneration
grounds of Orò
They created a route towards the veneration
grounds of Opa

They created a route to link *Òtù-Ifẹ*
 But when they consulted with *Egúngún*,
Egúngún refused to take heed of them
 When they consulted with *Orò*, *Orò* refused to
 take heed of them
 When they consulted with *Ọpa*, *Ọpa* refused to
 take heed of them
 They tried to resolve issues through divination
 processes, all to no avail.
 Olódùmarè, Supreme Being asked them about
 the whereabouts of Ọṣun, also pet-named
Àwàrà-olú
 They answered, “she has been left behind,
 mid-way between heaven and earth’
 Olódùmarè instructed them to go back
 And be of one accord with Ọṣun.
 They went back, resolved their differences,
 and were of one accord with Ọṣun
 Thereafter they consulted with *eégún*, and they
 got good results
 They consulted with *Orò*, and they got good
 results
 They consulted with *Ọpa*, and they got good
 results as well
 They made efforts to make divination, and
 everything went well
 Whoever, like the yam-pounder, who refuses
 to honour Ọṣun (women)
 Will have things go rough
 We are of one accord with Ọṣun (women)
 Good things shall be our lot.
 Ọṣun, the great one!)

Ifá practices consists of two major aspects: learning of the *Ifá* verses and performance of sacrifices as prescribed by *Ifá*. *Ifá* actually emphasises the practical aspects of divination, hence the area of expertise and concentration for the *babaláwo* in Ìjẹbù-land.

Ifá gave birth to numerous children – two hundred and fifty-six of them, both male and female, according to the history of *Ifá*. The female children, who were permitted to use the *òpẹlẹ* divination seeds, were not as famous as their brothers and other sisters who refrained from *Ifá* practice. This is an indication that the practice is not meant for them lest they encounter life drawbacks. Most of Ọ̀rúnmilà’s wives also betrayed him. One example was ‘*Òkété*’ (giant bush-rat) who indulged in having secret sexual relationship with one of Ọ̀rúnmilà’s apprentices named Beje. Ọ̀rúnmilà angrily

beheaded *Òkété* when he got to know, cursing her to be used as sacrificial material thenceforth, while Beje was consigned to the bush.

Ọ̀ṣun was another of Ọ̀rúnmìlà's wives. When Ọ̀rúnmìlà was to travel on a long journey that will take quite a long time, Ọ̀ṣun protested and demanded for wherewithal to take care of herself in the absence of her husband. Ọ̀rúnmìlà therefore gave her sixteen cowries to make divination for clients who might come visiting. That will enable her to raise stipends for her upkeep. A man is not expected to make *Ifá* divination with cowries except women; otherwise such a man will be considered lazy.

A woman must not use the *ikin* for divination purposes. It is forbidden. The *ikin* is the ultimate instrument of a *babaláwo*. The *ikin* gives more revelation on divination than the *òpèlẹ̀* which is faster when used. Even if nobody frowns at a woman who uses *òpèlẹ̀* for divination, it is forbidden that a woman should clasp her hands with the *ikin* seeds in-between. It is a taboo established by Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself. The *ikin* is regarded as personification of Ọ̀rúnmìlà himself. For a woman to 'beat' the *ikin* (that is clasping the ritual nuts with the two palms) is to indicate that the 'wife' is 'beating' the husband 'on the head'. However, a woman can learn the *Ifá* verses if she so wishes.

In Ìjẹ̀bù-land no woman will dare to use either the *òpèlẹ̀* or the *ikin* for public consultation. The use of *òpèlẹ̀* may however be permissible in some other parts of Yorùbá land, as we have in Ilé-Ifẹ̀.

Women in Ìjẹ̀bù-land are not too enthusiastic about *Ifá* as their counterparts in some other parts such as Ilé-Ifẹ̀. That will explain why a number of things that are not permissible in Ìjẹ̀bù are allowed to hold elsewhere.

The wife of a *babaláwo* is called an '*Apètẹ̀bí*'. The *Apètẹ̀bí* perform functions like singing, dancing, cooking and '*wíwẹ Ifá*' ('washing' of *Ifá*) during *Ifá* festivals. During the 'washing of *Ifá*', the *Apètẹ̀bí* will tie only a white wrapper round her body without any other wear: not even a brassiere.

It is a taboo for a *babaláwo* to commit adultery with another *babaláwo*'s wife. To do so is to commit a crime against *Ifá*. Any man who commits adultery with the wife of an *Ifá* priest is looking for trouble. It is forbidden. *Ifá* says that such a man shall die in ignominy. This shows that *Ifá* has very high regards for women.

When the *Odù* is to be venerated or sighted during the *Igbódù* initiation rituals, a woman must not be in attendance. It is a very serious affair for which only the male initiates can observe. Even for the initiates, they must be spiritually cleansed and prepared, lest the man goes blind. In Ìjẹ̀bù-land, a liquid preparation made from snail, coconut, alcohol, blood of a particular animal and some other secret substances are applied to the eyes of the initiates before they can behold the *Odù* without risking the loss of their eyes. It should be noted that *Odù* is a special essence of *Ifá*. It is the power of *Ifá*. If a snake or rat enters any room where it is kept, such a pest dies off. Anyone with transparent character who sleeps wherever the *Odù* is kept will come to no harm.

The *Ìyáláwo*, as a title for women does not confer priesthood on them. Those we can call *Ìyáláwo* in the true sense of the word probably existed in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in the past, they would only be able to use the *òpẹ̀lẹ̀*, but not the *ikin*. This could be because Ilé-Ifẹ̀ remains the source of the Yorùbá people. These days, most of them actually have just a fair knowledge of *Ifá*, which may not be in-depth enough. Women may belong to high profile cultic groups such as the *Òṣùgbó*, Reformed Ogboni Fraternity or its aborigine version, or practice as herbalists. They may also use the cowries for *Ifá* consultation. All these groups are also known as ‘awo’ hence we may have an *Ìyáláwo* from amongst them. The fact that *Ifá* practices are not well publicized due to ignorance by many could be a factor why many women are not showing adequate interest. This is caused by lack of awareness. Indeed a number of *Ifá* practitioners take *Ifá* as a meal ticket, when in actual fact it is a total way of life. Such practitioners are syncretic who practice more than one religion at a time.

In Ìjẹ̀bù-land the *Àràbà* is the highest title holder among the *babaláwo*. Next to him is the *Olúwo*. This is different from what operates in Ègbá-land, where the *Olúwo* takes precedence over the *Àràbà*. After the *Olúwo* we have the *Akódá Ifá*, *Aṣẹ̀dà*, *Àgbongbòn*, *Agírí*, *Èrìnmì*, *Àwíṣẹ*, *Gbénáwojúèlú* and the *Ajùbònà*. These titles are traditionally conferred on a practising *babaláwo* only. No female *Ifá* practitioner can be conferred with any of the aforementioned titles. There are also some other honorific titles like the *Bàbálífá*, *Ṣòkinlójú* and *Sárépawó* which are accolades for the beneficiaries. Such beneficiaries may not be well versed in *Ifá* practices. They can be bestowed on the individual for identifying with or giving financial support to the *babaláwo* of a particular area. In the same vein, women can also be conferred with such honorific titles such as the *Ìyálífá* or *Yèyé Oge*. These honorific titles are for

social recognition. It must however be stated that an *Ìyálifá* is expected to pray on the *ikin* divination seeds when a request is made from *Ifá* to resolve a communal problem. She thereafter hands over the *ikin* seeds to the *Àràbà*, who also prays over it and finally hands over to the *Akódá* who eventually uses same for the crucial divination. In a nutshell, not even the *Ìyálifá* can use the *ikin* for divination purposes except a competent *babaláwo*.

As it happened to one of *Ọ̀rúnmìlà*'s wives named *Àròniṣàṅ* several years ago, when she used to accompany her husband to perform certain rites during the *Ifá ṣiṣe* ceremony, so it is till today in *Ìjẹ̀bù*-land. Without her presence, the rituals may not be considered adequate and acceptable. This is contained in the '*Òtùrà Orígbè*' *Ifá* verse thus:

Agbe sunkún títí
Agbe kò lómi lójú
Àlùkò sunkún títí
Àlùkò kò lóhùn igbe lẹnu
Àtìòro kígbé títí
Wón kò lóhùn igbe
Dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmìlà
Nijó tí baba n lọ gbé Àròniṣàṅ niyàwó
Baba tẹ ikintítí, ikin ò dún
Baba n denu pe òriṣà ara ẹ dandan
Àròniṣàṅ, kí o má tii lọ.
Mo ti ní eku méjì olúwéré
Àròniṣàṅ, kí o má tii lọ
Mo ti léja méjiabìwẹgbàdà
Àròniṣàṅ, kí o má tii lọ
Mo ti léwúré abàmú reḍereḍe
Àròniṣàṅ, kí o má tii lọ
Mo ti ní òbìdiẹ abẹdò gbẹdẹ
Àròniṣàṅ, kí o má tii lọ
Ìyá Àròniṣàṅ, dúró kí o wá tẹkin àwé ráwo
Àròniṣàṅ!
Orin- Lílẹ: *Ìyẹn ni kí o tẹ o*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lílẹ: *Ni kóo tẹ o*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lílẹ: *Ni kóo tẹ ní Mowó o*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lílẹ: *Ni kóo tẹ ní Mòbà*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lílẹ: *Kóo wá tẹkin àwé o*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lílẹ: *Wa tẹkin owó o*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ*

Lílé: *Wa tẹkin ọlómọ*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lílé: *Wa tẹkin àwé ooo*
Ègbè: *Àròniṣàṅ-àṅ*

(Agbe wept for long
But Agbe could not shed tears
Àlùkò wept for so long
But then Àlùkò's voice could not be heard
Àtìòrò wailed for a long time
But Àtìòrò's wailings could not be heard
Divination was carried out in Ọ̀rúnmilà's
respect
When he was to marry *Àròniṣàṅ*
He consulted with his *ikin*seeds, but he got no
clue
Then he called upon his estranged wife very
loudly, saying:
Àròniṣàṅ, do not depart from me
Because I have prepared two healthy rats
Àròniṣàṅ, do not depart from me
I have prepared two big fishes
Àròniṣàṅ, do not depart from me
I have a big she-goat now,
Àròniṣàṅ, do not depart from me
I now have two big hens
Àròniṣàṅ, do not depart from me
Mother *Àròniṣàṅ*, wait and ensure your friend
has a clue to his problems
Song – Lead: Make that divinatory move
Refrain: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lead: Make this divinatory move
Refrain: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lead: Make this move while at Mowó
Refrain: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lead: Make this move while at MỌ̀bà
Refrain: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lead: Assist your loved one to get a clue for
this divination exercise
Refrain: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lead: Please divine for riches
Refrain: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lead: Come, divine for the birth of children
Refrain: *Àròniṣàṅ*
Lead: Assist your loved one to get a clue for
this divination exercise
All: *Àròniṣàṅ*

In the *Ifá* corpus recounted above, both Ọ̀rúnmilà and *Àròniṣàṅ* got married and things went on very smoothly for them and Ọ̀rúnmilà's *Ifá* practice boomed. But there came a

rift between the couple upon which the wife, Àròniṣàṅ, decided to divorce her husband, Òrúnmílà, whereupon she left him. Immediately Àròniṣàṅ left Òrúnmílà, things started going awry for him. His *Ifá* practice recorded no success. Upon this downturn, wise counsel came his way that he should reconcile with Àròniṣàṅ. He enticed the estranged woman, assuring her that good things of life awaited her if she reconsidered the offer. Upon reconciliation, life got better for Òrúnmílà and successes attended his ways.

A woman does not witness the *Igbódù* initiation rites no matter how highly placed in *Ifá* practices. However, a woman must be on hand to offer prayers for the potential initiate(s) in order that the rituals are successful. In addition, a woman may carry the ‘*Odu*’ ritual load provided she is not menstruating at that time, otherwise her menstrual cycle may prematurely, abruptly but permanently cease. A man may also carry the ‘*Odu*’.

There could be instances when *Ifá* establishes a bond between himself and a female possibly from birth. The same may happen when a woman repeatedly gives birth to *àbíkú* (born-to-die) children and a bond is said to exist between her and *Ifá*, if the unfortunate trend was to stop. In both cases, the female was expected to marry a *babaláwo* otherwise special rituals must be undertaken to break the existing bond. Failure to abide with either of these options will make life quite unbearable for the concerned female. Breaking the bond or marrying an *Ifá* priest will however ensure prosperity and success in life.

Ifá taught the same set of precepts and practices in different places while on earth. However, each area chose whatever was most convenient for them to remember or emphasise. This is why *babaláwo* in Ìjẹ̀bù-land are very proficient in rituals but not recitation of the *Ifá* corpus. Conversely, *babaláwo* in some other parts of Yorùbá land are more proficient in *Ifá* recitation than the rituals.

Since *Ifá* was not opposed to the workings of witches, euphemistically called the ‘powerful women of the night’, *babaláwo* too are not opposed to them. Indeed, they collaborate with the *babaláwo*.

Ifá portrays women in different lights as contained in the corpus. For example, *Ifá* warned that men should be careful when dealing with women. In the *Òbàrà-tírà* corpus, for example, ‘Lápàándèdè’ (also the name a bird, ‘Swallow’ – *Hirundinidae*) married a woman whom he trusted so much. ‘Lápàándèdè’ was the head of the *Oro*

cult. Whatever transpired in the course of his duties at the cultic circle were meant to be kept secret by men, who took care of the *Orò* activities exclusively. But each time ‘Lápààndèdè’ came back from his *Orò* assignment, he would recount everything that happened there to his wife. The wife in turn would reveal all the secrets divulged to her by her husband to some of her ‘trusted friends’. It took little time for investigation to reveal that ‘Lápààndèdè’ was the source of the information leakages. He was subsequently arrested and punished. *Ifá*’s message here is that men should be cautious of women when it comes to keeping secrets:

Òbàrà túrá
Òbàrà tùlọ
A dífá fún Alápààndèdè
Níjọ tó lọ fòrọ han obìnrin
‘Lápààndèdè’, má tì fòrọ han obìnrin
Ewu wà níwájú
Ewu wà léyìn
‘Lápààndèdè’, má tì fòrọ hanbìnrin

(Òbàrà túrá
Òbàrà tùlọ
 Divination was performed for ‘Lápààndèdè’
 When he revealed corporate secrets to a woman
 ‘Lápààndèdè’ be circumspect and do not reveal secrets to a woman
 Danger looms before you
 And it will be perilous thereafter too
 ‘Lápààndèdè’ be circumspect and do not reveal secrets to a woman)

In another *Ifá* corpus, ‘*OdùOgbè-rúkú-sá-wọlẹ-èdú*’, it was stated that in the times past, men and women inhabited separate locations and never interacted, although aware of the existence of the other group. ‘The other group’ was usually viewed with a lot of suspicion and animosity especially against the men by the women’s group. Any man that strays to the women’s camp was summarily executed. But *Ọ̀rúnmilà* was determined to visit the women and even bring some of them back home, against all odds. When *Ọ̀rúnmilà*, the dark one, got there, he was to be killed by the women. But he was quick to assure them that he came on a friendly visit. Acting from his script, *Ọ̀rúnmilà* started bringing out mouth-watering and attractive items. Using the items as baits, *Ọ̀rúnmilà* was tricky enough to get friendly with the hitherto unfriendly women.

Before they knew it, the women started dancing and following Ọ̀rúnmilà till they left their territory only to find themselves at the place inhabited only by men before then.

Şennwele, şennwèlè
 A difá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà
 Baba n şawo lo sí Ìlúbìnrin
 (Orin)
 Lílè: Njé eré lèdú wá şe, kò wá jà
 Ègbè: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lílè: Njé eré lèdú wá şe, kò mà jà
 Ègbè: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lílè: Njé eré lèdú wá şe, kò mà jà
 Ègbè: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lílè: Èrò tó n jeku ò, gbeku jẹ
 Ègbè: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lílè: Ó ní èrò ọ̀nà, mà gbaja jẹ
 Ègbè: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lílè: Èyí tó bá n jẹ nija, kó máa lo
 Ègbè: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lílè: Eré ló wá şe, kò mà jà o
 Ègbè: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè

(Şennwele, şennwèlè
 Ọ̀rúnmilà consulted for Ifá's divinatory
 intercession
 When he wanted to embark on a journey to Ìlú
 Obìnrin – Women's town
 Song:
 Lead: The 'dark one' is here on a friendly
 mission and not for war
 Refrain: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lead: The 'dark one' is here on a friendly
 mission and not for war
 Refrain: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lead: Those of you who like eating rat, here I
 offer you some for your consumption
 Refrain: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lead: Those of you who like eating fish, here I
 offer you some for your consumption
 Refrain: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lead: Those of you who profit from warring,
 kindly depart
 Refrain: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè
 Lead: I am here on a friendly mission
 Refrain: Şénnwélé, şennwèlè)

Another Ifá corpus, Ọ̀sá-Ìwòrì, cautions that men should be careful in their relationship with women because they could end up being sources of enemy attack, after exposing one's weaknesses. In this corpus, Ọ̀şunyemí Èlùkù was to be used by Ọ̀rúnmilà's

adversaries to ensure his death. Hitherto, Ọ̀rúnmilà, upon consultation with *Ifá*, was advised to sacrifice with a cockrel when he showed his intention to marry Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù. Ọ̀rúnmilà adhered to the advice. It should be noted that whoever Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí stared at with the intention of putting an end to the person's life, the unfortunate person will surely die, hence her sobriquet, '*Woniwoni tí í woni pa*'. But at the point when Ọ̀rúnmilà was to die, the cockrel crowed, waking up Ọ̀rúnmilà back to life. After three attempts that failed, Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù 'surrendered' and thereafter married Ọ̀rúnmilà in good faith, since her mission could not be accomplished. Upon getting married to Ọ̀rúnmilà, she started helping her husband in his vocation by divulging secrets not known about life to him. The *Ifá* corpus runs thus:

Ìbábá kurudu
Ìkòkò kurudu
Ó ní eşinşin wiriwiri nilé ọ̀tí
Bó şe n şe nígbó ẹ̀fọ̀n
Ló n şe nígbó erin.
A difá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà tí ó n lọ gbé Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí
Ẹ̀lùkù níyàwó
Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù,
Woniwoni tí í woni pa
Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí n kọ̀rin, ó ní
(Orin)
Lílẹ̀: Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù
Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù
Bí mo bá wò ẹ̀
Wà á kú dandan
Ègbè: Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù

(Within the nooks
 Within the crannies
 Plenty of flies throng the wine-seller's shop.
 As it occurs in the habitation of the buffaloes
 So it occurs in the habitation of the elephants
Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà
 When he decided to marry Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù;
 Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù
 The one who stares at people to death.
 Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí sang:
 Lead: Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù
 Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù;
 If I stare at you, you will surely die.
 Refrain: Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù
 Lead: If I stare at you, **you** will surely die.
 Refrain: Ọ̀şunyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù).

When Ọ̀ṣúnyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù's ploy to end Ọ̀rúnmilà's life came to nought, she changed her song:

Lead: Ọ̀ṣúnyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù

Ọ̀ṣúnyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù;

If I stare at you, I will surely die.

Refrain: Ọ̀ṣúnyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù

Lead: If I stare at you, I will surely die.

Refrain: Ọ̀ṣúnyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù).

Ọ̀ṣúnyẹ́mí Ẹ̀lùkù had to abandon her mission without accomplishing it and went ahead to marry Ọ̀rúnmilà, thenceforth cooperating with him in his endeavours.

In yet another *Ifá* corpus, 'Odù Ọ̀gúndákẹ̀tẹ̀', Ọ̀rúnmilà married Ìwà (Good behaviour) and his life was quite rosy. Ìwà took good care of Ọ̀rúnmilà's friends, relations and clients whenever they came calling. Her warmth endeared her to many and this rubbed off positively on Ọ̀rúnmilà's *Ifá* practices. Unfortunately, some neighbours succeeded in driving Ìwà out of Ọ̀rúnmilà's home in his absence. On his return, not finding his wife, Ọ̀rúnmilà became uncomfortable, as things immediately started going awry for him. He brought out drums and left home singing of his search for Ìwà. On getting to the third town, he found Ìwà his wife among the crowd that came to watch the 'entertainer'. Ọ̀rúnmilà saw her, held her and took her back home, whereupon things changed for better again for the couple. This is rendered thus:

Şennwele, şennwèlè

A dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmilà

Baba n lọ gbé Ìwà níyàwó

Orin:

Lílé: Njé, kí là n wá o?

Ègbè: Ìwà la mà n wá o, Ìwà!

Lílé: Ká mú ràgbà ta ràgbà

Ègbè: Ìwà, Ìwà là n wá, Ìwà!

Lílé: Ká mú ràgbà ta ràgbà

Ègbè: Ìwà, Ìwà là n wá, Ìwà!

(Şennwele, şennwèlè

Ifá divination was carried out for Ọ̀rúnmilà

When he decided to marry Ìwà, good character

Song:

Lead: I ask,

Who/what, do we seek to find?

Refrain: We seek to find Ìwà, Ìwà we seek to find

Lead: When we do all the needful...

Refrain: We seek to find Ìwà, Ìwà we seek to find

Lead: When we do all that we are required to do...

Refrain: We seek to find Ìwà, Ìwà we seek to find

In ‘*OduOgbè-tètè*’, Ọ̀rúnmìlà married Ìyẹ̀, a fair complexioned woman. She was very helpful to Ọ̀rúnmìlà and he loved her so much. (Note that Ìyẹ̀ is also the name of the powdery substance, placed on the *opón-Ifá* (wooden tray), used by the *babaláwo* for divination purposes.) Each time Ọ̀rúnmìlà made a sacrifice, the two of them would pray for each other. Ìyẹ̀ however warned Ọ̀rúnmìlà never to touch her with wet hands. That is why, up until today, a *babaláwo* will never venture to touch the powdery Ìyẹ̀ substance used for divination with wet hands. The ‘*OduOgbè-tètè*’ corpus runs thus:

Ìbábá kurudu

Ìkòkò kurudu

A dífá fun Ọ̀rúnmìlà

Baba lọ gbé Ìyẹ̀ níyàwó

Orin:

Lílẹ̀: *Njé kí la ó máa bù sọwó?*

Ègbè: *Ìyẹ̀, Ìyẹ̀la ó máa bù sọwó o, Ìyẹ̀*

Lílẹ̀: *Ọ̀rúnmìlà lọ gbé Ìyẹ̀ níyàwó o*

Ègbè: *Ìyẹ̀, Ìyẹ̀la ó máa bù sọwó o, Ìyẹ̀*

(Within the nooks

Within the crannies

Ifá divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmìlà

When he decided to marry Ìyẹ̀.

Song:

Lead: I ask, what/who is it that brings prosperity?

Refrain: It is Ìyẹ̀ that ensures prosperity; Ìyẹ̀ certainly.

Lead: Ọ̀rúnmìlà married Ìyẹ̀

Refrain: It is Ìyẹ̀ that ensures prosperity; Ìyẹ̀ certainly.

‘*OduIrosun tówón nnú Ifá*’ is another *Ifá* corpus that relates to women, warning that a beautiful woman’s sexual organ, compared to a snake, could be an ‘instrument’ of quick death. Àwẹ̀ró, the woman mentioned in this *Odu* was found to be sexually satisfying but the husbands she married, one after the other, succumbed to premature death. It is a warning against marrying a woman with unparalleled sexual prowess that can send the husband to an early grave.

Sìn mí tíí ní í sawo sìn mí tíí

Sìn mí jìnnà ní í sawo sìn mí jìnnà

*Mi ò lè sìn ó jìnnà kí n délúú Írosùn tó wón
gógó nínú Ifá
A difá fÁwèró nílúú Òpenléke
Èyí tí í ẹ olóbò mà pọkọ, mà pọkọ
Áwèró mà dé o, eléjii òpenléke
Òbò Áwèró dùn, ó n jáni jẹ bí ejò*

(It is he who accompanies a friend for a long distance that can be repaid in kind as such
It is he who escorts a friend endlessly that enjoys such a return gesture
However, I dare not accompany you over a long distance only to reach 'Írosùn tó wón gógó nínú Ifá' town.
Ifá divination was performed for Áwèró in Openléke town
She was the one having a vagina that kills one husband after the other in succession
Here comes Áwèró, the wonderful gap-toothed one
Áwèró's sweet but deadly vagina kills fast like a snake.)

Yet, another corpus in 'Ogbè-àtẹ', Ifá warns about marrying an enemy for a wife. To achieve this, the man must be prepared for a battle royal. It runs thus:

*Epo àtẹwà
A difá fún Òrúnmilà
Baba n lọ gbé Òtá niyàwó
Orin:
Lílẹ: Kí n ráde fi ẹgun òtábinrin
Ègbè: Epo àtẹwà, laláde fi n ẹgun òtábinrin*

(Palm oil and beans
Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmilà
When he intended to marry Òtá, an enemy
Song:
Lead: Provide me with royalty, so that I can conquer my female enemy
Refrain: With palm oil and beans, a king conquers the female enemy.)

Findings from the submission

- (i) The major assignments carried out by women which include care for the sick, as done by Òşun, one of Òrúnmilà's wives, were as ordained by God from times immemorial.

- (ii) Ọ̀rúnmilà precluded women from some aspects of *Ifá* practices because in the early times, his female children who indulged in *Ifá* practices were not as successful as those who refrained from doing so and the sons who practised as *babaláwo*.
- (iii) In lieu of the elements of divination which (male) *babaláwo* can use such as the ‘*ikin*’ and ‘*òpèlẹ̀*’, women are allowed to use sixteen cowries, as established by Ọ̀rúnmilà himself several years back. It is strictly forbidden for a woman to make divination with ‘*ikin*’.
- (iv) The wife of a *babaláwo* is called an ‘*Apètẹ̀bí*’, who performs social functions like singing, dancing, and cooking during *Ifá* festivals and other ceremonies. She also performs sacred assignments during the ‘*Ifá wíwẹ̀*’ ‘washing of *Ifá*’ ceremony.
- (v) A woman must not, no matter how highly placed she is in *Ifá* practices, be present at the main *Igbódù* rituals, because it is a taboo for a woman to behold the *Odù*. A woman is however expected to start off the process of going to the *Igbódù* with prayers.
- (vi) Women in Ìjẹ̀bù-land are not as enthusiastic as their counterparts in some other parts of Yorùbá land when it comes to *Ifá* practices.
- (vii) The *Ìyáláwo* or *Ìyánifá* title for women do not confer priesthood on them.
- (viii) The titles *Àràbà*, *Olúwo*, *Akódá Ifá*, *Aṣẹ̀dá Ifá*, *Àgbọ̀ngbọ̀n*, *Agírí*, *Èrìnmi*, *Àwíṣẹ*, *Gbénáwojúẹ̀lú* and *Ajùbọ̀nà* are conferred **only** on (male) practising and deserving *babaláwo*. No woman can aspire to such traditional titles.
- (ix) Women can be conferred with such honorific titles as *Ìyálifá* and *Yẹ̀yé-Oge*, just as men have honorific titles like *Ṣọ̀kinlọ̀jú*, *Bàbálifá*, *Sárépawó* which are just for social recognition.
- (x) If an *Ìyálifá* is however present at a communal divination, where urgent matters of interest are to be considered, she is given the privilege to pray over the *ikin* seeds before it is used for divination.
- (xi) As Ọ̀rúnmilà was not opposed to the ‘powerful women of the night’-witches -*babaláwo* are not opposed to them; they indeed collaborate.

(xii) When there is a bond between *Ifá* and a female devotee, the bond may be difficult to break without suffering repercussions.

(xiii) Highlights of the *Ifá* verses collected here:

- In *Òtúrá Orígbè* verse, it is emphasised that without the presence of a woman, some rituals may not be considered acceptable. The presence of a woman ensures success and progress for the *babaláwo*. A man who lacks a woman's support lacks everything.
- *Òbàrà-túrá* corpus warns men to be very careful on the issue of trust when dealing with women, as this could be dangerous (*ewu*). Secrets kept with a woman can no longer be regarded as secrets. While the woman may be left off the hook, the man will need to face the music for his indiscretion. Be cautious with women; it is difficult to have a woman as a confidant.
- In *Odù Ogbè-rúkú-sá-wólé-èdú*, the message is that it is easy to sway or cajole women with attractive materials. Women, being materialistic are easily influenced when offered materials.
- In *Òsá Ìwòrì*, it is pointed out that a woman could be a source for enemy attack, when the woman is in custody of the man's weaknesses.
- *Odù Ògúndákètè*, the corpus also asserts that without a woman, a man may not succeed. Once 'Ìwà' (Good character), the personified wife of *Òrúnmilà* left her husband, good living condition also vacated *Òrúnmilà*'s place. This is a metaphoric message which also emphasises the place of 'Good character' in the home.
- Where there is good understanding between a husband and his wife, there will be no cause for any alarm as we saw in *Òrúnmilà* and his wife, *Ìyè*. The *Odù Ogbètètè* mentioned this issue of mutual respect between couples as a recipe for marital harmony and stability.
- *Odù Ìrosùn-tó-wón-ńnú-Ifá* cautions that having unbridled sexual relations with a woman is a quick and sure way to death for a man.
- In *Odù Ogbè-àtẹ*, it was mentioned that a man must have the wherewithal to make constant provisions for the wife.

4.1.9 Interview conducted with *Apètèbí Ifá* Chief (Mrs) Olúwadámiláre Adéolá, Olóyè Líkàá *Ifá*, Imuṣin, at Ìgbílé-Èrúnwón and the findings

Name: Chief (Mrs) Olúwadámiláre Adéolá

Position/Title: *Apètèbí Ifá* and Líkàá Òrúnmilà, Ìjèbú-Imuṣin, Ìgbílé-Èrúnwón Ìjèbú

Age: 50 years

Address: Ilé Líkàá, Èṣúré Road, Ìjèbú-Imuṣin, Ìjèbú-East Local Government Area

Date of Interview: Sunday, 20th May, 2018

Background: Daughter of an *Ifá* priest, married to an *Ifá* priest. A petty trader.

Submissions

I am an *Apètèbí*, meaning that I am married to an *Ifá* priest. My late father was a renowned *babaláwo* during his life time.

The titles conferred on women in *Ifá* circle are mainly honorary. Such titles include the *Ìyálifá*, *Ìyálájé*, *Ìyálátẹ* and so on. They are mainly for social recognition. Only men are conferred with the titles such as *Àràbà* and *Olúwo*.

A woman is not allowed to enter the '*Igbódù*' no matter how highly placed the woman can be, during the *Ifá* rites of initiation and seclusion. Only the men are permitted to the '*Igbódù*' where they sight the *Odù*. This explains the reason why a woman cannot become a *babaláwo* (*Ifá* priest). Women can only stay outside the venue, they cannot enter the conclave with the men.

Only women undertake the '*Àjàgùnmalè Ifá*', also called the '*wiwe Ifá*' (washing of '*Ifá*') rites. This is compulsory. While the *babaláwo* prepares and offers the sacrifices, he cannot alone 'wash' the *Ifá*. A woman must do that for him. Conversely, a woman cannot perform the roles of the *babaláwo* by making sacrifices.

A woman cannot handle the special, sacred palm kernels, the '*ikin*', for divination purposes as men do. It is not permissible in Ìjèbú-land and I have never seen a woman doing it. I have never seen a woman use the *òpèlẹ* strings for divination as well. Women are meant to support the men, socially. Women can only play supportive roles to men.

The 'Ìjọ Òrúnmilà' is just a congregation that gives opportunity to those who want to practice the Yorùbá traditional religion. It is not part of the original *Ifá* worship and divination.

Women are allowed to learn or memorise the *Ifá* verses, if they so desire but it is not a requirement for anyone who is a female *Ifá* practitioner. For example, I hardly know any *Ifá* verse, even as an *Apètèbì* and daughter of an *Ifá* priest.

Women's roles in *Ifá* practices are very limited. This is because it is only those things for which you are invited that you can participate. When they chant, I chant along with others if I know the chants, otherwise I just keep mute. In the same manner, when they sing, I also sing along if I know the tune.

As a woman, I am not prepared to take any title that is traditionally reserved for men. It is an abomination for a woman to be titled *Àràbà Ifá*. It has been so from times immemorial. It shall continue to be so forever. I don't consider this as cheating women in any way.

I hear about 'women of the dark' (witches), but not familiar about their relationship with *Ifá*.

A lot of things are shrouded in secrecy in *Ifá* practices and kept away from women. The reason is simply because we women gossip a lot and we find it difficult to keep secrets. There is nothing wrong if women are kept away and not deeply involved within such circumstances.

Findings from the submission

- (i) This resource person considers herself as quite knowledgeable in *Ifá* cultural practices, as both an '*Apètèbì*' and a *babaláwo*'s daughter.
- (ii) The titles conferred on women in *Ifá* circle are mainly honorary. Examples are *Ìyánifá*, *Ìyálájé*, *Ìyálátẹ*, and so on. They are mainly for social recognition.
- (iii) Only men are conferred with titles such as *Àràbà* and *Oluwo*.
- (iv) It is an abomination for a woman to take the *Ifá* title of *Àràbà* and other titles that are the exclusive preserve of men.

- (v) A woman is not allowed to enter the 'Igbódù', no matter how highly placed. It is an abomination for a woman to enter the conclave with men. Only men are permitted to enter the *Igbódù* during the *Ifá* rites of seclusion.
- (vi) The 'complete' *Igbódù* ceremony is a prerequisite towards become a full-fledged *babaláwo*. Only men are allowed to undertake this, while women go through an 'incomplete' set of rituals. Consequently, only men can become *babaláwo*; a woman cannot.
- (vii) In Ìjẹ̀bù-land, only a woman or group of women are allowed to superintend over the 'Àjàgùnmalè *Ifá*' rites; men do not. Conversely, only 'male' *babaláwo* can prescribe, prepare and offer sacrifices in *Ifá* practices; women do not.
- (viii) A woman cannot use the 'ikin' special sacred nuts for divination purposes in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. This resource person has never seen a woman breaking this long time cultural rule. Neither had she seen a woman use the *òpẹ̀lẹ̀* for divination purposes as well.
- (ix) Women are only supposed to support the men socially in undertaking *Ifá* cultural practices. It is believed that women can only be supportive of men.
- (x) An individual female *Ifá* devotee may wish and decide to memorise several *Ifá* chants and verses, borne out of interest. This is not a requirement for women. However it is quite expedient that a trainee *babaláwo* takes this aspect of his training very seriously.
- (xi) As an *Apẹ̀tẹ̀bí* and daughter of an *Ifá* priest, this resource person hardly knows any of the *Ifá* verses.
- (xii) The roles women play in *Ifá* cultural practices are very limited. This has been so for a long period of time and it will remain so forever.
- (xiii) The fact that women are not exposed to some *Ifá* practices should not be misconstrued as cheating or relegating the womenfolk to the background in any way.

- (xiv) A lot of things are shrouded in secrecy and kept away from women by the men in *Ifá* practices. They also shield men who are not initiated into the *Ifá* practices away from a lot of their activities.
- (xv) This resource person is of the opinion that “we women gossip a lot and find it difficult to keep secrets. Therefore there is nothing wrong if women are kept away and not allowed to be deeply involved such circumstances”.
- No *Ifá* verses were collected as the resource person said she was not proficient enough to render any.

4.1.10 Interview conducted with Babaláwo Sunday Kéşinró Ifátúnmişe and his cohort of babaláwo, Ìgbílé-Èrúnwón Ìjèbú and the findings

Name: Ọgbéni Sunday Kéşinró Ifátúnmişe

Position/Title: Babaláwo

Age: 55 years

Address: Ìgbílé-Èrúnwón, Ìjèbú, Ìjèbú North-East Local Government Area

Date of Interview: Sunday, 20th May, 2018

Background: Son of a Babaláwo who trained as an electronic repairer but advised to revert to the vocation of his forebears.

Other members in the team:

- (1) Ogbeni Babalola Oluseye – Male, 57 years
- (2) Ogbeni Alaba Ogunsanya – Male, 40 years
- (3) Adeyemi Dudu – Male, 60 years
- (4) Adenuga Johnson Ayodeji – Male, 44 years
- (5) AdéoláOlúwadámiláre – Female 50 years
- (6) Segun Banjo – Male, 71 years
- (7) Fakunle Abiodun – Male, 40 years
- (8) Bola Banjo – Female, 46 years

- (9) Adéoyè Akanji – Male, 48 years
- (10) Samisideen Odùkoya – Male, 29 years
- (11) Kunle Odùwole – Male, 40 years
- (12) Seyi Fakoya – Male, 45 years
- (13) Fatolu Adebiji – Male 37 years

Submissions

I am an *Ifá* priest. I inherited the vocation because my father was a *babaláwo* and my mother was an ‘*Apètèbí*’. My elder brothers are also *Ifá* priests. We all toed the same line of traditional vocation, though through different means, because my mother was also renowned for her herbal practice. In addition, I also went through apprenticeship under the late Adebisi Ọbańlé-Ifá, the Olúwo Babaláwo of the entire Ìjẹ̀bú Zone. My apprenticeship lasted for ten years, even as a married man with children. The entire training instils discipline, humility, patience and contentment in the learner.

There were no females learning the vocation while I was under tutelage. Women are not allowed to go through training to become a ‘*babaláwo*’. Indeed, we do not have ‘*Ìyáláwo*’ as an equivalent for ‘*babaláwo*’. Women may undertake tutelage in the use of herbs or divination through some other means, such as the use of cowrie shells or kola nuts, but they are not trained to practice in *Ifá* divination as a *babaláwo* does. As a result of personal interest and observation, a *babaláwo*’s daughter or wife may gain some information but not in-depth knowledge or experience as will be necessary to become a ‘*babaláwo*’.

A woman cannot use the ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀ beads nor the *ikin* ritual palm kernels for *Ifá* divinatory consultation. She can however make good use of kola nuts and cowrie shells (*ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún*) for the same purpose. The ọ̀pẹ̀lẹ̀ and *ikin* are exclusively preserved for the use of (male) *babaláwo*.

The menstrual cycle women undergo is one of the reasons their activities in *Ifá* cultural practices are curtailed. In addition, some powerful pronouncements are not spiritually friendly to a woman’s physiological make up.

A *babaláwo* belongs to the most senior of all the cults, ‘*baba ñlá awo*’ and his sphere of influence bestrides all other cults. Therefore, the word ‘*babaláwo*’ is a shortened form of ‘*baba ñlá awo*’.

A woman’s presence amongst *babaláwo* during *Ifá* practices is more for social recognition, which is why their participation is usually curtailed. It is believed that involving women in some sacred *Ifá* rites will have some grave implications on them in future. Even women of advanced age who have reached menopause and virgins are not exempted from exclusion from such rites like the sighting of the *Odù*.

The chieftaincy titles in *Ifá* hierarchy are *Àràbà*, *Olúwo*, *Akódá*, *Ajùbòṅà* and others. A woman cannot hold any of these titles, because she is not qualified to practise as a ‘*babaláwo*’. No matter the level of affluence, experience and achievement of a woman, the male titles can never be extended to her.

Women are conferred with titles that are purely social and honorary. An example is the ‘*Ìyálifá*’, bestowed on a woman for her interest in, and support for, *Ifá* practices but not because she is an *Ifá* diviner. An ‘*Apètèbì*’ can be conferred with the title as well. ‘*Ajé*’, the Yorùbá divinity in charge of money and business ventures is also associated with *Ifá*, hence we also have the title of ‘*Ìyálájé Ifá*’.

Ifá loves women so much, but they cannot be superior stakeholders over men. *Ifá* deals fairly but very firmly in matters relating to women. Women are regarded as ‘helpers’ to *Ifá* priests, but they cannot be independent *Ifá* ‘priestesses’ on their own like a *babaláwo*.

Women have roles they play in *Ifá* practices. They are involved during the process of ‘*wíwẹ Ifá*’ (washing *Ifá*) and when going to ‘*Igbódù*’ for rituals. The processes of *Ifá* rituals cannot be said to be complete if a woman is not involved in the *Igbódù* rites. There are some roles reserved for a woman in this wise, especially for the ‘*Àjàgùnmalè Ifá*’, that is, the ‘*wíwẹ Ifá*’ aspect. Women are seen as symbols of easiness or gentleness, therefore their involvement is seen as an antidote to resolving difficult situations. The importance of women can be underscored by the fact that great men, including kings were born by women.

It is a woman’s responsibility to lay the ritual stool for a person for whom the ‘*Igbódù*’ rituals was to be performed. It is also mandatory that a woman should first sit

on the prepared stool, before the new *Ifá* candidate, for whom it was prepared is allowed to sit thereon. This is regarded as ‘*ṛwó ẹ̀rọ̀*’, (see Olajubu 2003: 9), making the new initiate start off the voyage into *Ifá* practices without any difficulty. The woman prays on the stool and this symbolic gesture is expected to bring success to the person. This process cannot be skipped, otherwise the rituals cannot be considered as complete.

When rituals of initiation are to be performed, the content or steps to be followed for a female initiate is different from that of a male initiate, essentially because while a male initiate is capable of sighting the *Odù*, the essence of *Ifá* worship, a female can not. The rituals performed for a male in this instance is considered to be more in-depth than that of a woman.

Women are forbidden from seeing ‘*Odù*’, which is regarded as the core or essence of *Ifá* practices. A man must also be well advanced in *Ifá* practices before he ventures or is allowed to see the ‘*Odù*’, otherwise such a man may risk getting blind. Hence, some rituals are performed for the man before he is exposed to ‘*Odù*’. Without the ‘*Odù*’, the work of the *babaláwo* becomes meaningless. While the men continue with the some other sacred aspects of the rituals, the women now become more concerned with the socials: entertainment, wining and dining. The major ritual which a man can undertake but not to be undertaken by a woman is any ceremony that involves ‘sighting the *Odù*’.

There is a relationship established between the ‘elderly females’ (a euphemism for witches) and the *babaláwo*. These set of beings have the roles they play on earth, because God has specially endowed them. They are capable of playing different parts in virtually all spheres of human endeavours. *Ifá* will not go on collision course with them, rather he appeases them. *Ifá* respects and deals with them with caution. Such a woman, though considered to be ‘powerful’, will not venture to go into *Ifá* practices. They know there is a limit to the ‘powers’ conferred on them. There is an understanding between them and *Ifá*, such that neither of them will venture to cross over the acceptable boundaries.

There is no ‘*ídógba*’, equality between men and women in *Ifá* practices. A woman can only make use of kola nuts or cowrie shells for divination purposes, while a *babaláwo* can use the *òpèlẹ̀* and *ikin* for the same purpose, the latter regarded as

reserved for the use of men only. The use of kola nuts, cowries or even sand for divination purposes are part of knowledge inherited from *Ifá*, but they are not exactly the same as consultation with *Ifá* for divinatory purposes.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà during his life time, was married to many women. An *Ifá* verse from Ọ̀ṣéṅhúnpe corpus tells us about when Ọ̀rúnmìlà married Àròṅìṣàṅ and all was well with him. Later, a problem arose which caused separation between Àròṅìṣàṅ and Ọ̀rúnmìlà. Ọ̀rúnmìlà started witnessing a downturn of fortunes thereafter. Upon divination, Ọ̀rúnmìlà was advised to make sacrifice and to ensure reconciliation with Àròṅìṣàṅ, his estranged wife. Ọ̀rúnmìlà heeded the advice, upon which he regained good life and prosperity, after Àròṅìṣàṅ returned to Ọ̀rúnmìlà's home. This verse says:

Agbe sunkún tíí
Agbe kò lómi lójú
Alúkò sùnyèrè,
Wọn kò ríyèrè sun
Àtìòro dóhùn igbe
Wọn ò róhùn igbe
Dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmìlà
Lójó tó n lọ gbé Àròṅìṣàṅ niyàwó
Ọ̀rúnmìlà lọ gbé Àròṅìṣàṅ niyàwó
Gbogbo ǹkan è, ó ǹ dára
Nígbà tó yá,
Ni ijà bá dé sí ààrín wọn;
Gbogbo ǹkan wá ǹ dàrú.
Ó tọ ilé aláwo lọ
Wọn ní níṣe ni kó ṣe ètùtù,
Kí Àròṅìṣàṅ iyàwó rẹ̀ lè padà.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà ṣe ètùtù,
Iyàwó bá padà bọ.
Ọ̀rúnmìlà wá ǹ yinfá
Ó ǹ pé,
Agbe sunkún tíí
Agbe ò lómi lójú
Alúkò sùnyèrè tíí
Wọn ò ríyèrè sun
Àtìòro gbóhùn igbe
Wọn ò róhùn igbe
Dífá fún Ọ̀rúnmìlà
Lójó tó lọ gbé Àròṅìṣàṅ niyàwó.
Babá tẹkin tíí
Ikin ò tiẹ̀ hónu rárá
Ó wá ránṣẹ̀ p̀ Àròṅìṣàṅ aya rẹ̀ tantan
Njẹ̀ Àròṅìṣàṅ kóo sáré wá tẹkin àwé rẹ̀ni

(The *Agbe* bird wept for long, but could not shed tears
 The *Àlùkò* bird tried to invoke *Ìyèrè* chants, but failed
 The *Àtìòrò* bird cried loudly, but no one echoed his lamentation
 Divination was performed for Ọ̀rúnmilà
 On the day he went to have *Àròniṣàn* as a wife.
 Ọ̀rúnmilà married *Àròniṣàn*
 Everything in life went on smoothly for him
 After some time
 The couple had a quarrel
 Life thereupon became hard for Ọ̀rúnmilà
 He therefore sought for a solution from diviners
 He was advised to make a sacrifice
 So that his wife *Àròniṣàn* will return to him.
 Ọ̀rúnmilà offered the sacrifice as advised
 The wife subsequently returned (to her husband's house)
 Ọ̀rúnmilà became joyous and started praising *Ifá*
 Saying:
 The *Agbe* bird wept for long, but could not shed tears
 The *Àlùkò* bird tried to invoke *Ìyèrè* chants, but failed
 The *Àtìòrò* bird cried loudly, but no one echoed his lamentation
 When Ọ̀rúnmilà went to marry *Àròniṣàn*
 The old one practised *Ifá* divination for so long
 And his paraphernalia never got aged
 Thereupon he called his wife in a loud voice
Àròniṣàn, be quick in your supplies of good things of life to me!).

Another *Ifá* verse, *Ìrètè méjì*, says that Ọ̀rúnmilà would prefer that people greeted his wives before greeting him, else he will not respond to such a greeting. Ọ̀rúnmilà's three wives given this special recognition are named *Ìbọ́rú*, *Ìbọ̀yè* and *Ìbọ̀-ṣíṣẹ*. The correct way to greet an *Ifá* priests is:

Ọ̀rúnmilà, mo yin *Ìbọ́rú*
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, mo yin *Ìbọ̀yè*
 Ọ̀rúnmilà, mo yin *Ìbọ̀-ṣíṣẹ*

(Ọ̀rúnmilà, I praise/greet *Ìbọ́rú*)

Òrúnmilà, I praise/greet Ìbọ̀yè
Òrúnmilà, I praise/greet Ìbọ̀-şíşẹ̀

The above greeting has however been wrongly corrupted to “àbọ̀rú-bọ̀yè” or “àbọ̀rú-bọ̀yè-bọ̀ şíşẹ̀” by the non-initiates. To this greeting, Òrúnmilà will respond: “Ogbó, ató, àìkú”, meaning, “May you live long”.

From another *Ifá* verse (Òşẹ̀-ogbè), yet we have an explanation on why it is now possible for a man to have multiple sex partners or wives:

Òrìşà jẹ̀ n pé méjì obìnrin kò sí
Ìbì şónşó ẹ̀nu ló mọ̀
A dífá fún Òrúnmilà
Ó n şokọ̀ Agbe
Ó lọ̀ n gbé Òjòjò nìyàwó
(That a woman says she does not bother if her
husband marries another wife
Is easier said than done;
Ifá divination was performed for Òrúnmilà
Who was married to Agbe
And at the same time about getting married to
Òjòjò)

The *Ifá* verse told of a story when Òrúnmilà was married to Agbe but was secretly entering into another nuptial arrangement with Òjòjò (also meaning ague or high fever). In those days, the penis was detached from a man’s body, so it was wound round the body like a belt. The man only unties it when it was needed for sexual purposes. Out of intense love and trust, Òrúnmilà gave his penis to Agbe for safe custody and only retrieves it when they wanted to copulate. Upon learning that her husband, Òrúnmilà was about to bring in Òjòjò, the new wife home, Agbe packed her bags and baggage, and absconded with the penis, thereby separating from Òrúnmilà. Consequently, Òrúnmilà could not have sexual relations with the new wife. Upon enquiry, Òrúnmilà was advised to make sacrifice in order to make his run-away wife return home with the penis. Òrúnmilà complied. The *Ifá* priests carrying the sacrifice were singing along thus:

Agbe bọ̀ wálé,
A ti lé Òjòjò lọ̀
A lé Òjòjò lọ̀
Agbe bọ̀ wálé,
A lé Òjòjò lọ̀
A lé Òjòjò lọ̀

(Agbe, kindly return to your matrimonial home
We have sent Òjòjò packing
We have sent Òjòjò away
Agbe, come back home
We have sent Òjòjò packing
Indeed, Òjòjò has been sent away.)

Agbe returned to Òrúnmilà when she heard the song. Meanwhile, Òrúnmilà had kept Òjòjò away in another house nearby. This was unknown to Agbe. At night, Òrúnmilà demanded for the penis from Agbe in order to copulate with her. Agbe surrendered the penis. While the sexual act between Òrúnmilà and Agbe was going on, Èṣù, the ‘òriṣà’ (deity) in charge of security matters among the pantheon of divinities in Yorùbá-land sneaked in, and ‘nailed’ the penis to the loins of Òrúnmilà, such that it became irremovable thereafter. Since that day, man’s penis had stuck to him as we have it until today. If not for Agbe’s reaction and behaviour, it is possible that women could have continued to be the custodians of men’s penises.

Findings from the submission

- (i) There were no female apprentices known to the respondent when he was training to become an *Ifá* priest because women cannot aspire to become ‘*babaláwo*’ or ‘*ìyáláwo*’.
- (ii) Women were only be trained in the use of herbs and divination through some other means, like the use of cowrie shells, kola nuts and sand.
- (iii) Even if a woman is smart enough to acquire some knowledge about *Ifá* divination through personal observation and sheer interest, she cannot practice as a *babaláwo*.
- (iv) A woman cannot use ‘*òpèlè*’ ritual beads or ‘*ikin*’ ritual palm kernels for *Ifá* divinatory consultation.
- (v) The menstrual cycle women undergo is one of the reasons why their activities in *Ifá* cultural practices are curtailed. In addition, some pronouncements considered to be ‘too powerful’ are not spiritually friendly to a woman’s physiological make-up.
- (vi) A woman’s presence among ‘*babaláwo*’ priests during *Ifá* practices is more for supportive roles and social recognition. It is not in a woman’s interest to be involved in some sacred *Ifá* practices, as this will have some grave implication

on such a woman in future. Even women who have reached menopause or virgins are not exempted from such exclusion.

- (vii) Women are not qualified to become ‘*babaláwo*’. Only a (male) *babaláwo* can be conferred with the traditional chieftaincy titles of *Àràbà*, *Olúwo*, *Akódá*, *Ajùbòná*.
- (viii) Women’s titles in *Ifá* circles, such as *Iyalifá* and *Ìyálájé-Ifá* are purely social and honorary, even if they perform some sacred roles.
- (ix) *Ifá* loves women and deals fairly with them, but they cannot be superior stakeholders over men in *Ifá* cultural circles.
- (x) Women can be ‘helpers’ to *Ifá* priests, but they cannot be independent *Ifá* priestesses.
- (xi) Women are saddled with the responsibility of undertaking the ritual of ‘washing *Ifá*’ and it is mandatory that a woman must be present to partially participate in the ‘*Igbódù*’ ceremony of initiation.
- (xii) Mandatorily, a woman is to prepare, lay and be the first to sit on the ritual stool and offer prayers before the new *Ifá* candidate is then allowed to sit on the stool, during the ‘*Igbódù*’ ceremony.
- (xiii) The rituals to be performed for a new male initiate is more in-depth than that of a female initiate, as some aspects will be skipped for the female, being considered to be detrimental to the female well-being.
- (xiv) Women are not allowed ‘to sight’ *Odù*. Only an initiated, male *Ifá* practitioner is privileged to do so.
- (xv) *Ifá*, through the *babaláwo*, maintains a cordial relationship with the ‘elderly women’, a euphemism for witches. While the *babaláwo* treads cautiously in his dealings with them, they too respect the bond of understanding between them; none of the parties will cross over acceptable bounds and standards.
- (xvi) There is no equality (*idógba*) between men and women in *Ifá* cultural practices. Men are accorded a superior level of recognition.
- (xvii) Òrúnmílà (*Ifá*) married many wives during his life time.
- (xviii) A *babaláwo*’s wife automatically assumes the title of ‘*Apètèbì*’, which is for social recognition.
- (xix) The *Ifá* verses collected here highlight the following:

- A woman (wife) in the life of a man brings along prosperity and good living. In the absence of this, a man becomes unsettled and disoriented. (*Òséhungbè* verse).
- Òrúnmilà (*Ifá*) loves that women should be accorded adequate respect and recognition. (*Ìrètè méjì* verse).
- While men desire to engage in polygynous relationships, no woman enjoys her husband bringing home another wife (*Òṣé-ogbè* verse).
- Women's overzealousness and jealousy robbed her of having absolute control over men's sexual activities.
- When a (wo)man is ill (*Òjòjò*), s/he may not be able to perform his/her conjugal responsibilities.

Table 4.1: Responses from Respondents

S/N	ISSUES	Ọmọ- Ọba Adeleke (Ìjẹ̀bù- Ode) MALE	‘Dr.’ (Chief) Mrs. Adétólá (Ìjẹ̀bù- Ode) FEMALE	Olúwo Adesina Odusanwo (Òmù- Ìjẹ̀bù) MALE	Mrs. Florence Odusanwo (Òmù- Ìjẹ̀bù) FEMALE	Mrs. Íyábò Gbàdàmósí (Òmù- Ìjẹ̀bù) FEMALE	Chief Dàda Adéoyè (Òsòsà) MALE	Chief Mubasiru Adekoya (Ìjẹ̀bù- Igbo) MALE	Chief Ifákorede Ifáfunmi (Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n) MALE	Mrs. Damilare Adéọlá (Ìjẹ̀bù- Imusin) FEMALE	Sunday Kẹ̀şinró (Ìgbilẹ̀- Èrúnwọ̀n) MALE
1.	Do both men and women participate in <i>Ifá</i> cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
2.	Are women discriminated against in <i>Ifá</i> cultural practices?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
3.	Are there <i>Ifá</i> verses that portrayed discrimination against women?	YES	-	YES	-	-	YES	YES	YES	-	YES
4.	Should the <i>status quo</i> be maintained about the roles women play even if contemporary opinions support that there should be changes?	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

4.2 Outcomes from Focus Group Discussions

4.2.1 The discussions

This research method was employed to further substantiate some other views and data which were also collated through other means for this work. Altogether, fifty participants took part in the discussions in four different groups. The groups were from Ososa-Ijebu with twelve participants, Ijebu-Igbo with twelve participants, Irewon-Ijebu with thirteen participants and Igbile-Erunwon with thirteen participants respectively. The fifty participants comprised of six women and forty-four men

The discussions held with the respective groups were to elicit reactions on the salient issues being investigated by this study, which were in congruence with the investigations conducted through the indepth interviews with the key informants. The discussions were mainly guided to evoke responses to the following issues:

1. Do both men and women participate in Ifá cultural practices, regardless of gender in Ìjẹ̀bùland?
2. Are women restricted in one way or the other in Ifá cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bùland?
3. Can you, as a man/woman, render Ifá poetic verses which depict women in one particular way or the other?
4. Would you support gender parity in Ifá cultural practices to eliminate the restriction on women (if any) in Ìjẹ̀bùland?

The following are the synopsis of the responses of each Focus group:

i. **Òsòsà Focus Group**

The participants from this group all agreed that both men and women who desire to practice Ifá are allowed to do so. Most women who were children of babaláwo or married to a babaláwo are involved in Ifá cultural practices in different ways, especially in assisting the father/husband who practised as a babaláwo. Women who so desire can use the *ẹ̀rìndínlógún* for divination purposes, but are not permitted to use *ikin* nuts. The only woman in the group could not render Ifá poetic verses like the men. It was the group opinion that changes are not arbitrarily brought into Ifá cultural

practices in such a way that will make both men and women perform the same functions.

ii. **Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó Focus Group**

Since all the participants in this group, both male and female, were involved in Ifá cultural practices, this, they pointed out showed that both men and women can practise Ifá, even if the level of participation differ for male and female practitioners/adherents. Roles were differently assigned to men and women respectively. Women generally support the men to become successful in their chosen Ifá vocation, like assisting in procuring the needed ingredients for sacrifices from the market and also in the preparation of the items as may be necessary. None of the participants would want gender parity in all the aspects of Ifá practices because that has not been the acceptable tradition. None of the women in this group could render Ifá poetic verses.

iii. **Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n-Ìjẹ̀bú Focus Group**

The group is an all-male group. Efforts to include women in the group proved abortive. The participants in this group were unanimous in their discussions and responses. They submitted that some females show interest in learning about much about Ifá, but maternal/marital obligations prevent them in going as far as men normally would. No matter how vast a woman could be in Ifá practices, she cannot make use of *ikin* divination nuts, but can use *òpẹ̀lẹ̀* only privately and not for public use. All the participants can recite Ifá verses though the level of competence varies from one person to the other.

iv. **Ìgbílẹ̀-Èrúnwọ̀n Focus Group**

Members of this group without exception agreed that Ifá cultural practices are open to both men and women. Women are however precluded from “seeing *Odi*”, the very essence of Ifá practices. Without the participation of women, Ifá practices cannot be complete, because there are definite roles assigned to them. A woman must be part of the *lilé itẹ* rites during the *Igbódi* initiation ceremony, before the rituals can be said to be complete and valid in *Ìjẹ̀bú* land. While all the men in this group were capable of rendering Ifá poetic verses, none of the women could do so. For the sake of maintaining tradition as handed down for many years, it was the opinion of this group

that changes in male/female roles should not be effected to put both men and women at par in Ifá practices.

4.2.2 Summary of FGD responses

As presented in Table 4.2 below, it could be observed that there was a complete concurrence in the responses collated during the FGD as well as the Key Informant interview sessions. The discussions established that:

- i. Both male and female practitioners and adherents of Ifá can participate in Ifá cultural practices.
- ii. There are restrictions placed on women in certain areas of Ifá cultural practices, such as their inability to “perceive *Odù*” during the *Igbòdù* rituals; use of *ikin* ritual nuts for divination purposes as well as practising as a “*babaláwo*” within the public domain.
- iii. All the male participants in all the groups affirmed that they could render Ifá poetic verses, though at different levels of competence, while the females said it was beyond them to make such a claim since they were not proficient in the exercise.
- iv. None of the participants in the four groups supported the idea of gender parity in Ifá cultural practices, as complementary roles had been assigned to both men and women; to do otherwise will be in opposition to the established traditions, which they were not ready to flout.

Table 4.2: Responses from Focus Group Discussions

FGDs	Do both men and women participate in Ifa cultural practices, regardless of gender?	Are women restricted in one way or the other in Ifa cultural practices?	Can you, as a man/woman render Ifa poetic verses?	Would you support gender parity in Ifa cultural practices to eliminate the restriction on women (if any)?
FGD I (Ososa-Ijebu)				
Male = 11	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Female = 1	Yes	Yes	No	No
FGD II (Ijebu-Igbo)				
Male = 09	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Female = 3	Yes	Yes	No	No
FGD III (Irewon-Ijebu)				
Male = 13	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Female = 0	---	---	---	---
FGD IV (Igbile-Erunwon Ijebu)				
Male = 11	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Female = 2	Yes	Yes	No	No

4.3 Commonalities and issues raised from the results

Table 4.1 above shows at a glance, that there is a complete unanimity in the responses provided by the various respondents, on the issues raised by this researcher with them. The only areas that were left void relate to the fact that none of the female respondents was able to render *Ifá* verses from where the necessary results could be sourced.

The table reveals that indeed both men and women are open to participate in *Ifá* cultural practices. While the men train to become diviners (*babaláwo*) who can practice publicly, the women lend their support without any aspiration to become one. Rather, the women have been provided with an alternative way of divination process, the use of *ẹ́rìndínlógún*, considered to be below what a ‘man’ should ordinarily aspire to become. The exposure of women to *Ifá* practices can therefore be considered to be limited in scope and content, even if complementary.

The submission above supports the fact that women are discriminated against in *Ifá* practices. The extents to which they are discriminated against include:

- (i) *Igbódù* process: women’s participation in this very important ritual of initiation is curtailed. Only men who have been prepared for this assignment are permitted to participate fully, while women are not allowed to witness the entire processes, the crucial one being the ‘sighting of *Odù*’.
- (ii) Difference in Chieftaincy titles: The chieftaincy titles attainable by men in *Ifá* practices are not open or available to women. Instead, women are allowed to take only honorific titles for which men also have similar equivalents (cf. Opefeyitimi, 2009:32).
- (iii) Use of *òpèlẹ̀* and *ikin*: A woman cannot independently and publicly use both *òpèlẹ̀* divination chain and *ikin* ritual nuts for divination purposes. It is the exclusive preserve of a ‘male’ *babaláwo* to publicly use these very important elements of *Ifá* practices.
- (iv) *Ifá* training: While the male ‘trainees’ are fully exposed and encouraged to become *Ifá* priests, the women are not similarly encouraged. Women who are interested can only glean and acquire from whatever is available through their interaction with the men.

- (v) Assignments for women: Some assignments have been preserved for women who are part of *Ifá* cultural practices. Such assignments seem to be a ploy indicating that women are considered very important and crucial in the scheme of things in *Ifá* practices. However, this submission should be made with caution, as the intention may not necessarily be so. An example is the fact that a woman is expected to be the first person to sit on the *ité* (throne) prepared for a new *Ifá* initiate. This could be a delicate one if the *ité* had been laced with deadly charms. In such a circumstance, the woman will fall a victim. A follow up on this indicates that this is just a conjecture as no past experience of this nature could be cited. This may even be far fetched because the ritual of ‘sitting on the throne’ is hallowed, devoid of any rancour or mischief that may lead to an unhealthy occurrence. The important point to note here is the fact that women must necessarily be part of the *Ifá* practices, the absence of which the activities may not be considered complete and valid. This corroborates Ilesanmi’s submission (2013:72) that “... there is no Yorùbá native cult without women as its backbone.”
- (vi) The fact that all the female informants in this work could not recite any relevant *Ifá* verse shows the extent to which they have been consciously or unconsciously relegated to the background although they claim lack of interest. The female informants felt things should be left the way they met it as they had no explanation for their lack of interest, yet they do not see anything awkward about this trend.

The outcome of the interviews also showed that women are sometimes painted in bad light in some *Ifá* verses that were collected: as promiscuous, indiscreet, high-handed, vindictive and unappreciative (cf. Falola 2019a:11). Even when a man is involved, as in the case of promiscuousness, the man is not mentioned as culpable.

Regardless of the situation that apparently subjects women to the background in *Ifá* cultural practices, the interviews revealed that both male and female respondents would prefer the *status quo* to be maintained, without giving any leverage to women in the scheme of things, such that there will be parity in the roles played by men and women in *Ifá* cultural practices. There is a sign of resignation on the part of the female

informants who were interviewed, regardless of Opefeyitimi's submission that "[w]omen's reluctant resignation to men's overlordship therefore, is insincere" (Opefeyitimi, 2009:164).

4.4 Training towards *Ifá* Practices

The person trained and expected to take charge of *Ifá* practices in its totality is called the *babaláwo*, which literally means 'the father of secrets' (Abimbola 2015: 6) signifying being an expert in the art of *Ifá* practices. This was corroborated by Babaláwo Ọmọ-Ọba Adeleke during an interview session with him. This informant went further to highlight that the 'work' of a *babaláwo* can be viewed from different perspectives. It is a means of divination; it is also a source of livelihood. Our discussion so far here has indicated that some level of bias could be observed against the womenfolk. As we have the male trainees graduating to become full-fledged *babaláwo* over a period of time, we do not have women who can be said to become *Ìyáláwo* as equivalent counterparts. What we have, at best, are the *Ìyánifá*, which is simply seen as a mark of recognition. This recognition, which is largely regarded as honorific and a status symbol, especially among the female practitioners, does not indicate that the woman is well grounded as a practising *Ifá* 'priestess'.

From the interviews conducted, all our respondents submitted that the type of training given to men is different from women's. Women may be trained towards becoming a diviner of some sort, but not to become a *babaláwo*. The male trainees take very many years before they are considered fit to practice. For example, Babaláwo Kẹşinró started his training as a married adult, yet it took him well over ten (10) years before he was found worthy of practising independently. In his many years of apprenticeship, he never came across a woman apprentice. It is noteworthy that while the men are said to undergo the 'full' training without exempting them from participating in any aspect, the women are rather trained to provide support services for the *babaláwo*. The women are trained towards identifying different leaves and roots that are used to supplement the divination performed for clients. They become familiar with the songs and chants that accompany the various 'Odù'. Apart from saying that the knowledge passed to the females are different and limited from that of their male counterparts, one of our respondents, 'Dr.' Chief Mrs Adétólá also mentioned that women may only be trained towards the use of cowries (ẹẹrindínlógún)

and the use of herbs. The females are tutored by experienced female practitioners or 'Apètèbí'. These trainings are not geared towards making the female a *babaláwo*. In a nutshell, the tutelage that a female undergoes, usually as a result of being a *babaláwo*'s daughter or wife, cannot be said to be the same as offered to their male counterparts.

4.5 Organisation and Composition of Hierarchical Structure

Each *babaláwo*, according to Babaláwo Ifátúnmiṣe Kẹṣinró of Ìgbílé-Èrúnwọ̀n, upon the completion of training and apprenticeship, becomes independent and recognized to practice. Within the assembly of *babaláwo* in a particular area however, a coterie of chieftains are appointed among them as leaders. Leadership in this wise is attained upon several years of untainted practice and the antecedents of the *babaláwo* in question, including positive contributions and mentorship within and outside the league of *Ifá* priests. The chieftaincy positions assigned to the *babaláwo* are exclusive to men only. The positions are regarded as 'superior' to the various positions in the circle of women practitioners of *Ifá* cultural practices, which are taken to be 'merely' social positions. The men also have such social chieftaincy titles bestowed on those who support *Ifá* practices even when they are not *babaláwo*. The following are the prominent titles attainable by a *babaláwo*, starting from the highest title, in Ìjẹ̀bú-land: *Àràbà*, *Olúwo*, *Akódá Ifá*, *Aṣẹ̀dà Ifá*, *Àgbọ̀ngbọ̀n*, *Agírí*, *Èrìnmi*, *Àwíṣẹ*, *Gbénáwojúèlú* and *Ajùbọ̀nà*. The social titles given to men include *Babalífá*, *Ṣọ́kinlójú*, and *Sárépawó*. The women titles include *Ìyálífá*, *Ìyálájé-Ifá*, *Yẹ̀yé Oge Ifá* and *Ìyálátẹ-Ifá*. While Babaláwo Ifákorede is of the opinion that even if a woman is titled or called 'Ìyáláwo' it does not suggest or confer on such a woman any form of priesthood or 'babaláwoship', conversely *Apètèbí* Adéplá was not prepared to accept any title exclusively preserved for the men to be bestowed on her, because it runs counter to traditions and what she was familiar with.

When the *babaláwo* meet, especially to discuss issues relating to their welfare or for social purposes, their wives may also separately converge within the meeting premises. In the case of the women, their meeting in this instance will be to assist the wife of the particular *babaláwo* who is hosting the meeting in cooking and serving their husbands after their own meeting. The women do not join in the meetings of the *babaláwos*, because they are not one.

In conclusion, it is apparent that there is discrimination in the way women and men in *Ifá* practices are treated and accepted in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. Women are seen as only supporting the men in this vocation. They are separately regarded and considered and not placed at par with the men.

4.6 Role Restriction, Gender Stereotyping and Complementarity of Roles

From the responses collated in the course of this work, it is apparent that we have role restriction and gender stereotyping occurring in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. The items highlighted in the Table 4.1 above mostly indicate that we have role restriction and gender stereotyping. For example, while men are exclusively stereotyped, as ‘superior’ stakeholders, to be the only ones who are permitted to go through the whole hog of apprenticeship to become a full *babaláwo* priest; to make good use of the *ikin* and *òpẹ̀lẹ̀* for divination purposes; practise as an *Ifá* priest and also to witness, participate and function during the *Igbódù* rituals, women are not so permitted. Conversely, women are assigned the responsibility of ‘supporting’ the male *babaláwo* in procuring items needed for rituals and sacrifices from the market, cooking, singing and dancing during the social sessions (see Karanja 1992:19;23; Lalobo-Lubwa and Jawoko, 2005:165). Women are also honoured with social titles that are not part of the recognized ones within the *Ifá* traditional circle. While there is no rule that precludes a *babaláwo* from going to the market himself to purchase items needed for sacrificial purposes, it is considered odd because a woman is assumed to be able to take charge of the assignment better. The Yorùbá proverb that “*àwárí ní obìnrin ñ wá ǹnkan ọ̀bẹ̀ lójà*” – a woman has the capacity to get all materials needed for cooking soup from the market – succinctly lends weight to the expectation that it is a woman’s portfolio to buy household condiments for soup-making from the market.

The other assignments reserved for women are the ‘*Àjàgùnmalẹ̀ Ifá*’ rites which is the ‘washing’ of *Ifá* paraphernalia as well as the ‘*lilé itẹ̀*’ rites. In the former, the symbolic washing is performed by a woman while in the latter, a woman is made to first sit on the special seat prepared for a new *Igbódù* initiate after being laid. For both rites, the interpretation is that a woman’s participation signifies ‘*owó-ẹ̀rọ̀*’ (easiness or gentleness) – (see Olajubu, 2004:43; Abiodun, 1989:7, 12) - that will make things easy, gentle and rewarding for the new initiate. However, it can be observed that in the

previous case, part of gender stereotyping that has remained from a long time until date is the role assigned to the woman in the home set-up to wash and clean the children every morning and at any other time necessary. This role, to us is what has been extended to the female-folk in *Ifá* cultural practice. In the latter case, the woman is given an assignment similar to that of the taster, who foretastes a menu prepared for a dignitary in case the food has been poisoned. The woman is unwittingly exposed to possible danger while the male initiate is protected, in case anything went awry. As noted earlier, this will remain a conjecture as no occurrence of this nature had been experienced before. Besides this, according to Opefeyitimi (2009:166) women are endowed with power to “incapacitate and neutralise men’s power, medical or otherwise, if and when they choose to do so.”

Further, a woman is allowed the use of the ‘*ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún*’ to practise as a diviner, but not the *ikin* or *òpẹ̀lẹ̀*. It should however be noted that a male *babaláwo* may encroach on this or be trained only in this branch of *Ifá* divination process, supposedly considered the preserve of women. Such a male practitioner however may not receive the respect of other male *babaláwo* who will condescendingly equate him with a woman, because according to Babaláwo Ifákorede Ifáfunmi, a man worth his pride will not limit himself to practising as an ‘*ẹ̀ẹ̀rìndínlógún*’ practitioner.

In all of these, the complementary nature of gender roles in Africa, which is one of the fundamentals of the Indigenous African Womanism (Sotunsa, 2012:103) can be observed in *Ifá* cultural practices. It is not about “competitions or dichotomies between the gendered roles” (ibid.). We share Falola’s opinion (2019a:2) that “Gender is today regarded to be a social construct, a system that groups human beings into two separate groups where they are expected to conform to the behavioural patterns considered acceptable for their groups”. Ajibade (2005:105) also said, and we agree with him, that “Nature in reality dictates that men and women are to complement each other”. To this extent, we have seen the female roles in *Ifá* cultural practices, including the sacred or ritual roles of *idè síso* (bead tying), *gbígbé Odù* (carrying the load for *Odù* initiation rites), *lílẹ̀ itẹ̀* (preparation and sitting on the sacred stool), preparation of herbal concoctions and care for the sick as well as social functions of singing, dancing and entertainment as complementary to some other things that men do. The male role include making sacrifices, conducting initiation ceremonies and casting the divination

seeds, *ikin* or *òpèlẹ̀*. An instance of further collaboration is the relationship between the *babaláwo* and the witches, otherwise labelled the ‘powerful women of the night’ or ‘our mothers’. Opefeyitimi (2009:167) labelled them as women with “spiritual powers” and Ilesanmi (2013:96), women with “mysterious feminine powers”. Importantly, “[M]en and women played complementary roles and knew the boundaries to their authorities” (Falola, 2019a:19).

4.7 Ifá Literary corpus, Portrayal of the Female-folk and Contemporary Views

4.7.1 Learning Factor along gender lines

The collection of *Ifá* literary corpus from our respondents gave some clues as to how the female-folk are perceived. It should be highlighted that some differences, along gender lines, were noticeable in the process of collecting the verses. The first observation is that none of all the four female respondents we interviewed could render any *Ifá* verse. The reasons for this is mainly lack of interest in learning the *Ifá* verses on the part of the women, particularly because the men were more encouraged to learn them than the women. This is an indication that their male counterparts were more favourably disposed and exposed to learning *Ifá* verses. Consequently, it will not be out of place to conclude that the male *babaláwo* are the main custodians of the *Ifá* verses at the expense of the women who showed little or no keen interest in this aspect of *Ifá* cultural practices.

4.7.2 Female Characterisation

The woman is variously characterised in the *Ifá* verses. These can be broadly categorized as benignant characterisation and malignant characterisation. Olajubu (2004:43) noted that “gender classifications have always existed in Yorùbá but may be tranversely manipulated, as is the case in social structures and the ritual space”. It is her opinion that “the Yoruba concept of gender ... is not unitary, monolithic or rigid” (Olajubu 2004:17). It will be misleading to generalize, as Ogunsina did in his work cited by Falola (2019a:11), that “Oral narratives of south-western Nigeria is replete with images of women as treacherous and evil”, presenting them as “perfidious and deceitful” (p.11), thereby concluding that they can only be malignant. A balanced

opinion will rather also take cognizance of Abiodun's opinion that "women [are] in charge of all the good things on earth" (1989:7).

4.7.2.1 Benignant Characterisation

The benignant characterisation is exhibited when the woman is shown in a positive light in an *Ifá* verse. In such instances, the woman is presented as supportive of the husband, serving as good home-makers, associated with success, good life and prosperity. Contributions from women account for the well-being of whosoever they have relationship with at such times. A constant feature for this situation to occur is the provision of an enabling environment, cooperation and support from the male-folk. If and when the situation is reversed however, the possibility of reversal in character may occur. Since the character and disposition of the female in question is tied to the prosperity and well being of the male, there will also be a corresponding dip in the fortunes of the man involved. Babaláwo Ifáneye indeed submitted that behind a successful *babaláwo*, there is a woman and that the roles of the male and female collaborators in *Ifá* practice is more of complementary assignment than discrimination (see Akande, Awosika and Albert, 2005:87). Each gender has a role designed for him or her. This notion of symbiotic relationship between a man and a woman is also shown in *Odù Ogbè-tètè* where Ọ̀rúnmilà married Ìyè, a personification of the important powdered substance used by a *babaláwo* for divination purposes. The understanding between Ọ̀rúnmilà and Ìyè was that Ọ̀rúnmilà must not touch her with wet hands, lest she will refuse to perform! As long as a *babaláwo* kept this understanding, for so long that Ìyè will continue to cooperate with him.

In *Odù Kérumátẹ* collected from Babaláwo Dàda Adéoyè, the woman was said to be a good home-maker. Indeed, women are seen to be the force behind a successful woman as seen in *Odù Ọ̀túrámogbè* and *Odù Ọ̀gúndákẹ̀tẹ̀* collected from Babaláwo Fakorede. In *Odù Ọ̀gúndákẹ̀tẹ̀*, Ọ̀rúnmilà married Ìwà, which can be interpreted to be a personification of a virtuous woman. In *Odù Ọ̀sẹ̀hungbè*, Ọ̀rúnmilà married Àrò̀nìṣà̀n and everything went well for the couple. Upon a quarrel and separation of Ọ̀rúnmilà and Àrò̀nìṣà̀n, Ọ̀rúnmilà's success story took a plunge and was reversed. When he discovered the cause of his woes and retraced his steps to reconcile with Àrò̀nìṣà̀n, things went back to the good times they had previously experienced.

4.7.2.2 Malignant Characterisation

These are characters that have been negatively portrayed in the *Ifá* literary corpus. The role such women play, as opposed to the men in the literary pieces, is less than virtuous. In *Òbàràtúrà* verse collected from Babaláwo Ifákóredé for example, it is stated that a woman cannot be trusted. Lápààndèdè was leader of the *Orò* secret cult, exclusively open to men. But he so much loved the wife to the extent of divulging all the secret matters discussed at the *Orò* outing to her. Meanwhile, the wife also betrayed her husband by telling her trusted friends the secrets divulged to her by her husband. It took little time before the source of leakages was discovered. Lápààndèdè lost his position as a result of his indiscretion.

Odù Ìkàwọnrín collected from Babaláwo Dàda Adéoyè portrays a woman as someone capable of exhibiting indecorous, shameful behaviours. The woman, derogatorily called “*Ajá, (Dog) Ọmọ Olóbòótó*”, who would carry her sexual escapades to the market, as if everyone in the market was blind. This *Ifá* verse was itself blind to the fact that such sexual activities will only be possible when there is a male partner. While castigating the woman, the verse was silent on the recklessness of the man. In *Odù Ìrosùn-tó-wón-ńnú-Ifá* from Babaláwo Ifákorede, Àwèró an unlucky woman was referred to as “*olóbò mà-pọkọ, mà-pọkọ*”, the one who possesses a ‘killer vagina’, like a snake.

In *Ọsá-Ìwòrì*, collected from Babaláwo Ifáfunmi Ifákorede, the female character, Ọşúnymí Ẹlùkù, also known as ‘*Woniwoni tí í woni í pa*’ (the one who stares at a person to death), got married to Ọrúnmilà with the intent to put an end to his life. This gives the message that a woman is capable of being a source of enemy-attack for a man, especially when the woman is in custody of the man’s weakness(es). Only a smart, discerning man can escape the trap set for him by a desperate woman. Indeed, *Odù Ogbè-atẹ* collected from the same source warned that care should be taken by a man when he wants to get married, so that he would not marry an enemy for a wife. The *Ifá* verse prescribed that a man should possess a combination of the following: power/position or respect (royalty) and the wherewithal to appease (*epo àtẹwà* – palm oil and beans), for him to escape the machinations of an enemy-wife.

Women are also portrayed as capable of being easily cajoled by men whenever inducements are dangled before them. At a time when women and men were living separately in the world, women were said to be very hostile to the men, who they summarily put to death whenever they saw one. But all the hostility ended when Ọ̀rúnmilà went to ‘Ìlùbìnrin’, where the women resided, with sweet words, promises and captivating items to woo them. The women succumbed and followed Ọ̀rúnmilà to where the men resided. This literary corpus from *Ogbè-rúkú-sá-wonú-ẹ̀gún* collected from Babaláwo Dàda Adéoyè may explain why a woman will need to leave her parents for the husband’s house upon marriage in Yorùbá-land. Furthermore, *Odù Ọ̀tírá-orígbe* from Babaláwo Ifákorede corroborates the notion that a woman can be lured by a man with good things of life, including edibles like *eku* (rat), *ẹ̀ja* (fish), *ewúrẹ̀* (goat), *obidiẹ̀* (hen).

In *Odù Ogbèyónú* collected from Babaláwo Adeleke, women are portrayed as lacking discretion and can be destructive in character, when Ọ̀rúnmilà married Kolombo who ended up destroying his *Ifá* paraphernalia while using them for stoking fire in cooking meals for Ọ̀rúnmilà, her husband. Relatedly, *Odù Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀ méjì* from the same informant states that women are ingrates – *Bá a bá ọ̀soore fòbìnrin, obìnrin ò moore.*

The *Odù Ìrẹ̀tẹ̀* which told about Ọ̀rúnmilà’s wife, Ọ̀jòjò having the custody of the husband’s penis, only for her to release same when Ọ̀rúnmilà was to use it for her, smacks of selfishness and self-centredness on the part of the woman, viewed from a society that is patrilineally skewed (cf. Siwoku-Awi, 2012:252).

4.8 Cultural Analysis of the Gender Roles

From the submissions made by the informants selected for interviews it is obvious that, stemming out of *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, a man and a woman are not culturally accepted to be on the same pedestal in the society. The man is presented as taking charge of affairs while the woman is seen as supporting the man. For example, the etymology of ‘*Apètẹ̀bi*’, the designation given to any woman married to a babaláwo emanated from a story that Ọ̀rúnmilà got married to a female leper, hitherto abandoned and seen as an outcast, after treating and healing her of the disease. Hence the word formation: ‘*A+pa+ẹ̀tẹ̀+bi*’, meaning ‘the one made whole after being

cured of leprosy'. While the man was painted as being magnanimous, without discrimination and placed on the point of strength, the woman was pictured from the point of weakness, pity and needing help.

In another instance, a woman was viewed more or less in the category of a commodity that a man could treasure, aspire to acquire or have as a gift. *Odù Ìrètè méjì*, as collected from Babaláwo Adeleke, listed items that a man could supposedly desire and be proud of, to keep life moving. Of the entire list - *eku* (rat), *eja* (fish), *ewúrẹ́* (goat), *àgùtàn* (sheep), *eşin* (horse), *eranolá* (ox) *omidan* (virgin) – Ọ̀rúnmilà said none of the items was weighty enough to require him to wake up from his sleep, except *omidan* (virgin). This notion that a woman can be 'purchased' or 'gifted' like any other item, tend to place women at the background while men are prominently placed in the scheme of things within the society.

Women are generally seen as subordinates in *Ifá* circles in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. They are not placed at par with the men in terms of training, for instance. It appears that adequate encouragement has not been adequately forthcoming in this regard. This will probably explain why women in *Ifá* circles, as exemplified by our female informants shy away from learning deeply about *Ifá*. None of the female informants could render any *Ifá* verse. More confounding is the fact all the female informant was unanimous in their opinion or disposition that the *status quo* should be maintained, in which case women should be contented with how things are without any challenge whatsoever (Lalobo-Lubwa and Jawoko, 2005:170). There is no reason whatsoever why a woman should be interested in aspiring to chieftaincy titles preserved for 'male' *babaláwo*, for example, according to *Apètẹ̀bí* Damilare Adéọ̀lá. This indicates a situation of utter resignation as intoned by *Apètẹ̀bí* Ìyábò Gbàdàmọ̀sí that "Only God can change the situation".

The way the women have seen themselves as discussed above is hardly in tandem with the submission of Babaláwo Kẹ̀şinró that Ọ̀rúnmilà himself place women on very high pedestal, quoting *Odù Ìrètè Méjì* corpus. The said *Odù*, said Ọ̀rúnmilà will not respond to anyone who greeted him without first acknowledging the three women he loved so much, named Ìbọ̀rú, Ìbọ̀yẹ̀ and Ìbọ̀-şíşẹ̀.

4.9 The Ìjẹ̀bù Experience and other Influences

From the outcome of this research, it becomes obvious that the extent of women participation in the affairs and Ìjẹ̀bù culture cannot be said to be enough to conclude that matriarchy has been an acceptable cultural pattern in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. At best, the situation will pass for occasional incursion of the female gender in performing roles reserved for men. This is why such occurrences are few and far in between. This is the case with the historical presentation that a few females had reigned as the *Awùjalẹ̀*, paramount ruler of Ìjẹ̀bù-land. Out of fifty-eight listed *Awùjalẹ̀* that reigned over Ìjẹ̀bù-land to date, only three – Ọrẹ-Yẹyẹ, Ọrẹ-geje and Rúbakóyẹ - were women (Ojude Ọba Festival 2019, *Ojude Ọba: The Uniqueness of the Ìjẹ̀bù Nation*: 87). In addition, the personal experience of this researcher is that apart from monogamy which probably gained ground as a result of the introduction of Christianity, some Ìjẹ̀bù men are into polygyny while no notable case of polyandry can be cited.

The cultural practice of *Orò*, though not restricted to Ìjẹ̀bù-land, is another pointer that the men folk are rather ‘favoured’ and considered to be in charge of affairs. It should be noted that the *Orò* festival is one of the important festivals celebrated in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. The *Agẹmọ* festival, which is a central feature of cultural practices of the Ìjẹ̀bù people and considered to be a unifying force for them, also heavily discriminates against women without regret. Women are not allowed to see the *Agẹmọ* load, the fundamental essence of the entire *Agẹmọ* cultural activities, under whatever guise or condition, without attendant untoward repercussion.

Our work has been able to corroborate that the roles assigned to women in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land has placed some disparity on them when compared with their male-folk. This is in agreement with Ferraro’s submission (2004:257) that:

Although it is possible to identify societies where gender distinctions are kept to a minimum, the overwhelming evidence suggests that in many critical areas of life women are subordinate to men. To be certain, from time to time women in various cultures have wielded considerable power, but there is no ethnographic or archaeological to support the notion of matriarchy – rule or domination of women over men - exists ... the evidence does suggest a general gender asymmetry

among most cultures of the world in the expression of power and influence.

Further to the above, Ferraro (2004:257), in reference to Frenzl (1978) noted that “the person controlling the allocation of resources (which men do most of the time) possesses the currency needed to create and maintain powerful political alliances and obligations.” Conversely in a way, a theme that runs through McIntosh’s work (2010) is that where women have adequate economic spine, the tendency is to have them gain some measure of recognition and/or authority (cf. Noah, 1985:24). McIntosh gave examples of the Ìjẹ̀bù experience (p. 223). This will probably explain some cultural patterns found in Ìjẹ̀bù-land. One of such is the Organisation of age grades among Ìjẹ̀bù citizenry. This cultural arrangement of the age grade groups is gender sensitive because the women groups are run parallel to and independent of the male groups (Ojude Oba Festival 2019, *Ojude Oba: The Uniqueness of the Ìjẹ̀bù Nation*: 68). In addition, “evidences of inheritance through maternal descent abound in Ìjẹ̀bù... (where) lineage is multilineal and descent is traced both paternally and maternally”, as opposed to what operates in Northwest Yorùbá areas where “lineage is unilineal and descent is agnatic” (Adetugbo 1982: 222).

In a nutshell, we are in agreement with Odejide (2012: 3) where she submits that:

“Society and culture apportion characteristics, requirements and expectations to males and female. Society determines what resources men and women will access jointly or separately, what norms of behaviour, roles and duties are acceptable from them as males or females”

For the Ìjẹ̀bù people, the *Ifá* cultural practices as well as the content of the *Ifá* poetic renditions show clearly that gender roles of women and that of their male counterparts are assymmetrically placed in favour of the male-folk, regardless of the “flashes in the pan” situations in some of their other socio-cultural practices.

4.10 Implications of the Conventional and the Contemporary Dimensions on the ‘Future’

It is a generally accepted notion that culture is dynamic and can undergo changes (Ogundipe 2007: 35; Ferraro, 2004: 384ff). Some contents of some cultural patterns however resist or are very slow in yielding to changes and are thus retained

over a long period of time. However, the speed and spate of some changes are so much accelerated that Alvin Toffler (1971) spoke about what he called ‘future shock’, as cited by Ferraro (2004:384.). What we have found out through *Ifá* cultural practices indicate that in many ways, women are not placed on the same level as men, except when their roles are interpreted as complementary to that of men. That is what the past has reflected into the present. The question is, can the ‘agitations’ and opinions of the present day, which tend to favour equity between men and women in gender roles, be sustained and propelled to such an extent that a ‘future shock’ can be attained in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bú-land in the nearest future? In attending to this crucial question, we should note what Aksornkool (1997: 12), while citing Nganunu (1995) mentioned that, “in most cases the separation of training areas for girls and boys is rather arbitrary and serves to maintain the status quo.” If the situation we discovered in this research work, that the women-folk shy away almost completely in learning not only the *Ifá* literary corpus, but also not encouraged in taking up the vocation of an *Ifá* priest is anything to go by, our answer cannot be in the affirmative. That the women respondents we encountered in the course of this work themselves are nonplussed about the possibility of effecting changes that will give women in *Ifá* practices the needed impetus that will boost their status is a direct indicator to buttress our submission. This also lends credence to Aksornkool’s observation that timidity is one of the obstacles to cultural change, especially in Africa (p. 15).

Another factor that may make it rather slow or impossible to effect cultural changes in gender roles in *Ifá* practices is what Aksornkool (1997:24) called “prevalent myth that responding to women’s needs means ‘pitting women against men’, (which) needs to be deconstructed and understood as baseless.” Our female respondents in this research saw any attempt by a woman to aspire beyond what she has been ‘offered’ in *Ifá* practices as challenging the *status quo* or the status of the male-folk. Until the ‘deconstruction’ is effected, we dare to submit that the current situation will endure for quite a long time to come.

Our conclusion here is that the current situation, as it is reflected in this research, is not envisaged to yield to drastic changes in the nearest future that will either change the gender roles of women for better or place them at par with the roles played by the male-folk, as far as *Ifá* cultural practices are concerned.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

It has been noted “that gender as constructed by the Yorùbá is essentially culture bound and should be differentiated from notions of gender in some other cultures” (Olajubu 2003: 8). This suggests that by examining the cultural past of a people, the Ìjẹ̀bù sub-group of the Yorùbá in this case, we will be able to analyse their gender perspectives. *Ifá* cultural practices incidentally combine an oral tradition, which also “constitute the primary source of any information on Yorùbá religion and culture” (Olajubu 2003: 8). With a background that contains some flashes of gender independence in favour of women, one will ordinarily expect that the gender roles of the Ìjẹ̀bù people will reveal a women-folk that are placed at par with their male counterparts, when *Ifá* cultural practices are examined. This is bearing in mind that the reference to this “social dynamics that Characterises the way men and women relate to each other on a given historical time frame” (Fall 1999a: 1) will also be able to project into the gender construct of the Ìjẹ̀bù people in the future. This we set out to undertake at the outset of this work, using *Ifá* practices, a “subject of many formal and detailed studies” (Apter 1992: 26), since this aspect of *Ifá* was not known to have been thoroughly undertaken before now.

In specific terms, the first of the objectives of this research is two-pronged: to determine whether the entire *Ifá* practices are open to both the male and female-folks on the same level; and if found not to be so, to assess the extent of differences, or restrictions in establishing the gender roles. Next, we set out to examine and highlight some *Eṣẹ Ifá* (*Ifá* verses), collected in the course of this work, to check the content, in order to verify whether they may lend credence to our first objective earlier mentioned. Finally, we examined the cultural content of our findings to see if they are congruent

with modern opinions on gender issues or reflecting current life patterns of the Ìjẹ̀bú people. Accordingly, the following research questions were set out to be answered:

- (i) Is *Ifá* practice in Ìjẹ̀bú land open to both the male- and female-folks on the same terms and levels? If not, what is the extent of the differences in gender roles?
- (ii) Are there *Ifá* verses that corroborate the findings in (i) above about how the female-folk is reflected or portrayed, in comparison with the male-folk, by way of Characterisation and/or language use?
- (iii) Are the findings in (i) and (ii) above in consonance with contemporary opinions on gender issues, reflecting day-to-day life patterns of the Ìjẹ̀bú people?

In making our analysis after collecting data from the field, an eclectic approach was adopted. The Indigenous African Womanism, which became an offshoot or response of Africans to the various strands of feminism, was adopted for use because of its closeness and relevance to the subject. In addition, the place of language in culture came to the fore because we needed to analyse or give some interpretation to the *Ifá* poetic renditions that were collected in the course of the research. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was adopted to undertake this.

Upon concluding the work, our first finding shows that both men and women are allowed to participate in *Ifá* cultural activities, broadly speaking. This, at a glance falls in line with the expectations of the womanists who “believe in partnership with their menfolk” (Sotunsa 2008: 20). This puts a huge line of demarcation between feminists and womanists, since feminism is viewed as a separatist ideology (Sotunsa 2008: 20). This finding under discussion also supports the Yorùbá world view that “Female principles are generally regarded as symbols of coolness (*èrò*)” (Olajubu 2003: 9). This played out particularly in the course of the *lilé itẹ́* ceremony, whereby the ritual stool prepared for a new *Ifá* initiate must necessarily be first occupied by a woman before the real occupant, a male, is allowed to sit on the stool. However, it is our considered opinion that such gestures that seem to symbolically eulogize a woman be taken with some measure of suspicion, because the woman, in this instance is

placed under enormous risk, should any harm be planned for whosoever first occupies the stool.

Further to the first finding stated above, while women are allowed to participate in general terms in *Ifá* cultural activities, they are precluded from participating in some very crucial aspects of the vocation. In this wise, women are viewed more like ‘important’ supporters, who are not accorded same rights and privileges as would be accorded a man, who the women are supporting. This finding is in agreement with Ferraro’s submission on a ‘gender ideology’ which can be defined “as a system of thought and values that legitimize gender roles, statuses and customary behaviour” by universal male dominance (Ferraro 2004: 262). The very essence of being an *Ifá* practitioner is to be able to practise as a *babaláwo*, an *Ifá* priest. This is not attainable for a woman in Ìjẹ̀bù-land today. Any woman that aspires to be one will be offered alternative(s) which, in *Ifá* circles, may not be seen as being ‘original’ and dignifying enough. To buttress this further, a man in *Ifá* cultural practices who decides to take on these other options open to the women-folk is considered lazy and earns little or no respect among other *Ifá* priests and he is not regarded as a *babaláwo*. This is the major finding of this work, which affirms that gender roles in Ìjẹ̀bù-land are tilted in favour of the male folk, even when the complementary nature of the set-up could be inferred. This is more interesting in the light of what was mentioned in McIntosh (2010: 190) that

Even those religious activities that were normally carried out by men, such as *Ifá* divination, were not reserved exclusively for them. In the 1920s a woman in Òkukù learned the system of divination from her father and husband. After mastering the poetic texts, some of which celebrated women, and passing an examination, she qualified as a full-fledged practicing diviner.

This is not the case with our findings about the Ìjẹ̀bù people. It should be noted that Òkukù is a town in the Odò Ọ̀tìn Local Government Area of Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria; about sixteen (16) kilometres north of Ìkirun, Ọ̀ṣun State.

Having subjected the process of collection and the content of the *Ifá* literary corpus gathered in the course of this work to scrutiny, we were able to find out two major things. The first was at the point of collecting the *Ifá* verses. While the male

respondents were able to readily offer the poetic rendition upon asking, the female respondents could not. All of them showed scant or no interest at all in learning the verses. This is further evidence that the gender role in *Ifá* cultural practices is tilted in favour of men. Secondly, the content of the verses in some instances showed women in uncomplimentary terms. Largely, women were perceived more like commodities that a man will want to acquire. Instances where they were shown in better light were more of baiting them in order to get the best of their understanding, cooperation and services in the interest of the male-folk. This manner of presentation cannot be regarded as being ambivalent; rather it is more of gender asymmetry skewed in support of the male-folk.

Finally, the overall outcome of this work has revealed that the female folk in Ìjẹ̀bú-land are differently treated in *Ifá* cultural practices, more as subordinates to the men. To address this outcome, one will ordinarily expect that given the opportunity, the female folk will want to take good advantage and improve their lot, reverse the situation or demand for parity with menfolk in the least. While one would not be surprised if the male respondents remain hesitant or bluntly refusing to accede to this situation, simply because the *status quo* favours them and will accordingly want to perpetuate the current condition, this runs counter to Aksornkool's recommendation (1997:14) that

Opening up opportunities for women also means increasing options for men. Once the rigid demarcation lines of tasks, roles and functions are broken down, men would be freer to take up tasks which were formerly stigmatized as being only for women.

The more surprising is that the female respondents we encountered in the course of this work did not appear to be agitated at all that they were at a disadvantage when compared with the men-folk. Even if given the opportunity, they are not eager to change their status for the better. They are not in any way prepared to change or take advantage of alternatives that may be open to them, even if presented, because they see doing so as up-turning existing beliefs and patterns. They do not see the situation changing at all.

5.2 Limitations

This work was faced with a number of issues and limitations. For example, a good number of the envisaged respondents were not prepared to cooperate in volunteering information as they considered the research effort as being a meddlesome incursion into the supposed secret activities of *Ifá* practices. This made the work to drag unnecessarily in a bid to source for other respondents who readily cooperated.

Apart from the major hindrance of un-cooperative attitude experienced from some of the respondents who we consider as relevant for interview purposes and other forms of interaction, some of them were of the opinion that researches are conducted so that the researchers may collect fat pecuniary gains from whatever sources they imagined. Others still considered the content of *Ifá* practices as esoteric and only meant for the initiated ones. While it took a lot of time to convince some of such respondents to open up, some others had to be left out of the scheme after several futile efforts. The percentage of those so left out (9%) was considered insignificant as to affect the outcome of our results.

In addition, much as we tried, the actual statistics of priests, trainees, patrons and devotees of *Ifá* in the study area could not be sourced or ascertained. We consider this to be a reflection of a general problem of dearth of statistics noticeable in many spheres of our national life in Nigeria.

This work was originally designed to cover all the six Local Government Areas of Ìjẹ̀bù land. It was upon strenuous efforts that a respondent from Ogun Waterside Local Government Area was got. Unfortunately, this respondent earmarked for the research from Ogun Waterside Local Government Area at the pre-field stage was deceased before the work proper commenced. With a population of 103,200 from Ogun Waterside Local Government out of the total of 1,134,600 in Ìjẹ̀bù land (see Table 3.1) 9% was thereby left out, which we consider not significant enough against the remaining 91%.

Apart from the Key Informant from Ogun Waterside Local Government Area who was part of the pre-field discussions who died, another Key Informant from Ogun East Local Government Area could not conclude this research effort due to sudden death. Another Key Informant relocated from one local government area to another in the course of the work.

While on the field, it was discovered that fewer women showed interest in *Ifá* cultural practices compared with the population of the men-folk. Women were scarcer as resource persons than men. The situation was worse when it came to the issue of rendition of *Ifá* poetic verses by the few women who were eventually sourced. In contrast, all the men were able to render the *Ifá* verses almost effortlessly. Even at that, many of the interviewees submitted that the rendition of *Ifá* verses was not an area of strength for many *Ifá* practitioners in Ìjẹ̀bù-land when compared with their counterparts in some other areas of Yorùbá land. It was submitted that the Ìjẹ̀bù practitioners were more noted for their acuity when it comes to issues relating to making sacrifices and finding solutions to spiritual problems. This particular situation buttresses the outcome of this research that both men and women are not exposed to equal treatment or placed on the same pedestal as men in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, when it comes to gender roles among the people.

5.3 Conclusion

It has been found out from this research effort that there is no parity in the gender roles played by women when compared with men's in *Ifá* cultural practices. The portrayal of women in the *Ifá* poetic rendition also tends to treat men in more positive terms than women. The exposure given to the male-folk in *Ifá* practices, generally also gives a clue that men are more favoured and encouraged to learn the details of *Ifá* without let or hindrance. To make the situation more confounding, it was found that both the male- and female-folk respondents in this work would want this trend to be perpetuated, even if the opportunity for change is given or conceded. This is simply because they will not want to change the cultural norms as handed over to them over the generations.

In agreement with Ferraro (2004: 392), that

In every culture there are always two opposing sets of forces: those promoting the status quo and those promoting change. At certain times, the forces of conservatism are in control, but at other times, the forces of change are in ascendancy.

This work has shown that the period of effecting changes in gender roles in *Ifá* cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bù-land do not seem to be near at all, because forces of change are not

apparently in ascendancy. Consequently, while academic postulations may desire to promote and theorize about gender parity among the Ìjẹ̀bú people of South western Nigeria, our findings show that such changes may take a very long time to come. To lend weight to this submission is the fact that apart from *Ifá* cultural practices, there are two other cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bú-land that are still very strongly practised, which seriously curtails the participation of the women-folk, including outright banning of females of any age at certain times during the celebration of the respective festivals. These are the *Orò* and *Agẹmọ* festivals.

Some of the areas usually emphasised for consideration for gender parity generally in Africa include education, politics and sports (cf. NCPE, 2008: 5, 16, 61). It will not be out of place to seek for parity in gender roles in the cultural realm as well. What we envisage is that while the situation may not readily improve in favour of the women-folk in Ìjẹ̀bú-land, care should be taken to avoid the situation from getting worse as it occurred, as pointed out by McIntosh (2010: 196) in her observation and submission in relation to the religious roles of women at a point in time in Yorùbá land that:

The religious roles of women were profoundly affected by the introduction of the “world religions”. Oyeronke Olajubu concluded that although patriarchy existed in Yorùbá land before the coming of Islam and Christianity, the new religions had a momentous and generally deleterious effect upon women...But the strength of Yorùbá culture and the determination of women to maintain their traditional rights resulted in considerable compromise between older and newer religious practices.

The people have a choice between moving with the times, in which case the women in *Ifá* cultural practices will need to seek for parity in gender roles in Ìjẹ̀bú-land. Even if this were to be attainable, the content of the *Ifá* literary corpus that had been stored for centuries may not readily yield to such changes. This option may also fall into the rut of what Ojah (n.d.: 68) called “loss of identity culturally” and paint a situation where Africans strive to change anything that is African because it needs to follow the trend that is in vogue in other parts of the world. To switch to the other option, which is to retain the status quo and allow gender roles continue being tilted in favour of the male-folk, will mean that culturally speaking, gender space in Ìjẹ̀bú-land will continue to be

dominated by the male-folk. Whichever case it turns to be, it is the people's will, within the circumstances that they have found themselves, that will dictate wherever the pendulum swings.

5.4 Contributions to knowledge

In justifying the need for this research to be conducted, it was highlighted that many of the previous works on *Ifá* focused more on the Òyó/Òṣun axis of Yorùbá land. This research has succeeded in opening up academic efforts in *Ifá* studies especially on the cultural practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land which has been under-researched hitherto. It is therefore expected that this work, as a major work on *Ifá* practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land, be seen as a precursor to other scholarly efforts to expand *Ifá* studies and other cultural issues among the Yorùbá of south-western Nigeria.

This research also corrects the notion that Yorùbá land is culturally homogenous and entirely patrilineal. The Ìjẹ̀bú experience has shown that there could be differences from one sub-group to the other in Yorùbá land (see McIntosh 2010:7f; Apter 1992:8). In the final analysis, this research work has shown that there is need to domesticate research theories or develop a fresh but relevant one for use, in one part of the world to the other. Wholesale adoption of such research instruments may end up in misapplication of theories, which may not allow the researcher to get the desired results in a particular research effort.

This point becomes relevant in view of the various dimensions in researching into gender issues world-wide. In particular, it calls for attention on the need to scrutinise parameters for conducting researches on gender matters in Africa. The experiences and background of each cultural setting should be considered before doing so. We have shown this abundantly with the use of the African Womanism template in this research, instead of popular Feminism theories in most parts of the world. This work has thus established that gender practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land is largely complementary in nature and not a case of one gender taking undue advantage over the other.

5.5 Recommendations and suggestions for further studies

In the course of this research work, a few references were made to indicate that the experience of some other areas of Yorùbá land may be different from our findings in Ìjẹ̀bú-land. McIntosh's (2009:190) example of a female *babaláwo* practising in

Òkukù in the 1920s also buttresses this point. This calls to question the assumed blanket homogeneous nature of the various ethnic areas making up Yorùbá land (McIntosh 2010:7f; Apter 1992:8). McIntosh's position that care must be taken to recognise the possible differences that can be obtainable from one area of Yorùbá land to the other is well taken. In this wise, we suggest that further academic examination be carried out as a comparative study on the subject in other parts of Yorùbá land. This will give further insight into the various areas where there are differences or similarities, which may explain some other tendencies among the Yorùbá people.

It has been mentioned that Ogun Waterside Local Government Area of Ìjẹ̀bù land had to be left out of this work. We therefore want to recommend that a similar research of this nature can be replicated to ascertain the outcome from this area. This will be a veritable academic venture particularly noting that the area is a boundary between Ogun State and Ondo State.

From a cultural perspective, relying on the *Ifá* cultural practices, the gender roles as it affects the women-folk in Ìjẹ̀bù-land have been highlighted in this work. It is our considered opinion that this current effort is just an aspect on the status of women in Ìjẹ̀bù-land that has been investigated. Further interest can be shown in investigating the status of women in Ìjẹ̀bù-land, in which case it will go beyond the cultural interpretation of roles, which may include the economic (see Garba and Garba, 1999:26;33), political and educational dimensions, among others.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO RESPONDENTS

The following are sample questions were posed to the various respondents and focus groups with a view to eliciting relevant responses from them. Follow-up questions were asked where further clarifications were needed. The questions were posed in Yoruba language.

SECTION A – Questions on the background of respondents:

E jòwó, ẹ dárúkọ yín fún wa ní kíkún, ibi tí ẹ n gbé, ọjó orí yín, akọ-n-bábo, iṣẹ tí ẹ n ṣe, bí ẹ ṣe jẹ sí ọ̀rò Ifá dídá tàbí oyè tí ẹ jẹ nìbè, bí ẹ bá joyè.

(Can you please tell us your names in full, your home address, your age, sex, occupation, how you are related to *Ifá* practices and your chieftaincy title there, if you hold any.)

SECTION B – Questions on *Ifá* Cultural practices

1. *Báwo ni ẹni kan ṣe lè di babaláwo; Báwo sì ni ẹyin alára ṣe di babaláwo?*

(How can a person become a *babaláwo* and how did you become one?)

2. *Ẹ̀jẹ̀ tọ̀kúnrin tobínrin ni ó lè kọ̀ iṣẹ̀ Ifá dídá ní ilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bú?*

(Are both males and females qualified to learn *Ifá* practices in Ìjẹ̀bú land?)

3. *Irú ilànà wo ni àwọn obínrin tí ó bá nifẹ́ sí kíkọ̀ iṣẹ̀ awo/àyèwò Ifá ṣiṣe máa n tẹ̀lé láti ṣe bẹ̀ẹ̀? Ẹ̀jẹ̀ a lè pe irú wọn ní Babaláwo/Ìyáláwo léyìn ẹ̀kọ̀ṣẹ̀?*

(What method of divination is open to females who desire to learn *Ifá* cultural practices? Can such women be referred to as *babaláwo* or *Ìyáláwo* after successfully completing the training?)

4. *Ẹ̀jẹ̀ a lè pe gbogbo ilànà àyèwò tí ó tẹ̀lé ilànà Ifá ní ọ̀kan-ùn-kan-ùn?*

(Are the various methods of *Ifá* divination given the same rating?)

5. *Kí ni idí rẹ̀ tí a fi n dá àwọn obínrin lówó kọ̀ lẹnu ẹ̀kọ̀ṣẹ̀ Ifá, tí àwọn ọ̀kúnrin kò sì ní irú idánilówókọ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀?*

(Why are women limited in their process of learning *Ifá* unlike men who are capable of going through the entire training?)

6. *Ñjé ̀tok̀unrin -tob̀inrin ni ̀o m̀aa ǹ k̀opa ninù aẁon ayeyeỳ ati etutù Ifá gbogbo? E fun wa ni aẁon àpẹ̀ẹ̀rẹ̀ irù è ati ipa abala kòòkan.*

(Do both men and women take part in *Ifá* ceremonies and rituals? Give examples of such ceremonies and the roles.)

7. *Şé tok̀unrin -tob̀inrin ni ẁon lè lo gbogbo aẁon eroja Ifá láti fi dIfá ni gba-n-gba?*

(Can both men and women diviners attend to their clients publicly, using the same type of paraphernalia?)

8. *Kí ni ̀o fà á tí ̀o fi joun pé aẁon ok̀unrin ni ̀o sábaá m̀aa ǹ lé wájú aẁon ob̀inrin ninù etò Ifá?*

(Why is it that women appear to be usually led by the men in *Ifá* practices, and the women follow?)

9. *Irù aẁon oyè wo ni a m̀aa ǹ jẹ̀ ní agbo Ifá? Şé tako-tabo ni ̀o ní etò sí aẁon oyè náà?*

(What chieftaincy titles are available to *Ifá* practitioners? Are they obtainable by both men and women in the vocation?)

10. *Ta ni ‘Apètèbí’? Ipa wo ni ̀o ǹ kò ninù awo Ifá?*

(Who is an ‘*Apètèbí*’ and what are her roles in *Ifá* cultural practices?)

11. *Ñjé a rí aẁon ohun ti a kò gba aẁon ob̀inrin láyè láti şe ní agbo Ifá, eyí tí aẁon ok̀unrin lè şe? Ñjé a rí eyí tí ob̀inrin ti déjàá rí, kí s̀i ni àyọ̀rísí idéjàá bẹ̀ẹ̀?*

(Are there activities that men can undertake but women not allowed in *Ifá* practices? Is there any experience when a woman flouted such undertaking and what was the outcome?)

12. *Irù aẁon ohun wo ni ̀o ti yí padà lóde oní nípa ikopa aẁon ob̀inrin ninù etò Ifá, kí ni ̀o s̀i fa irù ayípadà bẹ̀ẹ̀? Kí ni àyọ̀rísí rẹ̀?*

(What are those things that have changed about women participation in *Ifá* practices, how and why? Any consequences in the aftermath?)

13. *Kí ni òye Ifá (Òrúnmìlà) nípa àwọn obìnrin? Njé a lè rí àpẹẹrẹ ẹsẹ Ifá láti gbe èyí lésẹ?*

(What is *Ifá (Òrúnmìlà)*'s impression about women? Can we have some samples of these from *Ifá* literary corpus?)

14. *Njé ẹ lérò pé ó yẹ kí a ẹ àwọn àyípadà sí ètò Ifá kí a lè túbò fí àyè gba àwọn obìnrin? Bí ó bá rí bẹ̀ẹ̀, kí ni àwọn àbá tí ẹ ní?*

(Do you believe some cultural aspects of *Ifá* traditions should be adjusted to further accommodate female participation? If so make your suggestions.)

15. *Kí ni ó n fa iyàtò tí a n rí nípa ètò Ifá láti agbègbè kan dé òmíràn nílẹ̀ Yorùbá, nígbà tí a gbà pé ọ̀kan náà ni Ifá jakejado?*

(What could be responsible for the differences noticed in some details of *Ifá* cultural practices indifferent parts of Yoruba land regardless of the acclaimed universality of *Ifá* practices?)

APPENDIX 2

List of Key Informants

S/N	Name	Age	Gender	Address	Occupation	Date of Interview
1.	Chief Idòwú Olúbòdún Dàda Adéoyè	50 years	Male	Olubodun Compound, Oke Ijoku, Ososa-Ijebu	<i>Ifá</i> priest	Sunday 3 rd July, 2016
2.	Chief (Mrs.) 'Dr.' Ọ̀şóyemí Adétólá	61 years	Female	19, Olokodana Street, off Igbeba Road, Oko Onirugba, Ijebu-Ode	Traditional herbal practitioner (<i>Alágbo ọ̀mọ</i>) / <i>Apètèbí Ifá</i>	Thursday 16 th July, 2015
3.	Ọ̀mọ-Ọ̀ba Adeleke Adeyemi	55 years	Male	5, Adebisi Street,	<i>Ifá</i> priest	Wednesday 15 th July, 2015
4.	Olóyè Ifáneye Adesina Odusanwo	62 years	Male	Ile Oluwo Ifa, Ago, Omu-Ijebu	<i>Ifá</i> priest	Friday 24 th June, 2016
5.	Madam Florence Odusanwo	56 years	Female	Ile Oluwo Ifa, Ago, Omu-Ijebu	Seamstress/Traditional herbal practitioner (<i>Alágbo ọ̀mọ</i>) / <i>Apètèbí Ifá</i>	Friday 24 th June, 2016
6.	Madam Iyábò Gbàdàmọ̀sí	50 years	Female	1, Adegorsin Street, Omu-Ijebu	Seamstress/Traditional herbal practitioner (<i>Alágbo ọ̀mọ</i>) / <i>Apètèbí Ifá</i>	Friday 24 th June, 2016
7.	Mrs. Olúwadámíláre Adéọ̀lá	50 years	Female	Ile Likaa, off Esure Road, Ijebu-Imusin	Petty trader/ <i>Apètèbí Ifá</i>	Sunday 20 th May, 2018
8.	Babaláwo Mubasiru Adekoya	70 years	Male	43, Apoje Road, Ijebu-Igbo	<i>Ifá</i> priest	Sunday 3 rd July, 2016
9.	Olóyè Ifákorede Ifáfunmi	56 years	Male	Ile Araba Awo, Irewon Village, Irewon-Ijebu	<i>Ifá</i> priest	Wednesday 15 th May, 2018
10.	Babaláwo Sunday Kẹ̀şinró Ifátunmise	55 years	Male	Ifatunmise Compound, Igbile-Erunwon Village, via Erunwon Ijebu	<i>Ifá</i> priest	Sunday 20 th May, 2018

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF FOCUS GROUPS

FOCUS GROUP 1

Name: DàdaAdéoyè

Position/Title: The Akódá-Awo, Ọ̀sòsà-Ìjẹ̀bú and the Akódá-Awo of Akilẹ̀ Ìjẹ̀bú (Ìjẹ̀bú-land)

Age: 50 years

Address: Ọ̀sòsà-Ìjẹ̀bú, Ọ̀dogbolú Local Government Area, Ọ̀gùn State

Date of Interview: Sunday 3rd July, 2016

Others in attendance were:

1. Chief Adeniyi Olanrewaju – Male, 64 years
2. IfáfemiAdéoyè – Male, 52 years
3. Awosola Taiwo Fatosin – Male, 33 years
4. David Taiwo – Male, 33 years
5. Fatai Olukoya – Male, 28 years
6. Fakeye Sunday – Male, 27 years
7. Taiwo Opeloyeru – Male, 30 years
8. Azeezat Olundegun – Female, 25 years
9. Odunsi Bolaji – Male, 53 years
10. Olusuji Fayemi – Male, 57 years
11. Owoaje Olumoroti – Male, 60 years
12. Adedotun Sakariyau – Male, 41 years

FOCUS GROUP 2

Name: Mubasiru Adekoya

Position/Title: Babaláwo

Age: Over seventy years

Address: 43, Apoje Road, Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbo, Ìjẹ̀bú-North Local Government Area, Ògùn State

Date of Interview: Sunday 3rd July, 2016.

Others in the team:

1. Asifu Kazeem – Male, 35 years
2. Akolawole Odùsanya – Male, 42 years
3. Babatunde Adebajo – Male, 45 years
4. Fafunke Oṣoḃamiro – Female, 32 years
5. Leke Oṅabanjo – Male, 53 years
6. Yẹsiru Kaka – Male, 64 years
7. Kikẹlọmọ Aina – Female, 36 years
8. Awodele Balogun – Male, 60 years
9. Fasilat Oṃọtunde – Female, 35 years
10. Olúwole Kazeem – Male, 48 years
11. Sunday Otukelu – Male, 50 years
12. Afeez Dauda – Male, 55 years

FOCUS GROUP 3

Name: Chief Ifákorede Ifáfunmi, a.k.a. Ògèé, ẹyẹ Àgbọnmìrègún

Position/Title: The *Àràbà* Awo, Ìrẹwọnland, Ìjẹbú, Ìjẹbú North-East Local Government Area

Age: 56 years

Address: Ile *Àràbà* Awo, Ìrẹwọn, Ìjẹbú

Date of Interview: Wednesday 15th May, 2018

Others in the team of *Ifá* priests:

1. Chief Babatunde Sogbesan, Baale Ago Onigbagbo, Ago-Iwoye – Male, 68 years
2. Olóyè Julius Akinlaja, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 38 years
3. Ogbeni Ifáyemi Olabode, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 62 years
4. Ogbeni Olukade, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 53 years
5. Ogbeni Abiodun Soyode, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 26 years
6. Ogbeni Soniyi Olusola, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 32 years
7. Ogbeni Oṃodayo Ade, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 48 years
8. Babatunde Olorunnisola, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 59 years
9. Alao Bankole, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 72 years
10. Adeyemi Oluyinka, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 61 years
11. Sina Oluwakemi, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 68 years
12. Oluduti Okubanjo, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 63 years
13. Odùfolahan Hassan, Ìjẹbú-Ode – Male, 60 years

FOCUS GROUP 4

Name: Ogbeni Sunday Kéşinró Ifátunmise

Position/Title: Babaláwo

Age: 55 years

Address: Ìgbílé, Èrúnwón Ìjèbú, Ìjèbú North-East Local Government Area

Date of Interview: Sunday, 20th May, 2018

Background: Son of a Babaláwo who trained as an electronic repairer but advised to revert to the vocation of his forebears.

Others in the team:

1. Ogbeni Babalola Oluseye – Male, 57 years
2. Ogbeni Alaba Ogunsanya – Male, 40 years
3. Adeyemi Dudu – Male, 60 years
4. Adenuga Johnson Ayodeji – Male, 44 years
5. Adétólá Kémi Olúwadámiláre – Female 50 years
6. Segun Banjo – Male, 71 years
7. Fakunle Abiodun – Male, 40 years
8. Bola Banjo – Female, 46 years
9. Adéoyè Akanji – Male, 48 years
10. Samisideen Odùkoya – Male, 29 years
11. Kunle Odùwole – Male, 40 years
12. Seyi Fakoya – Male, 45 years
13. Fatolu Adebisi – Male 37 years

APPENDIX 4

Pictures From Fieldwork



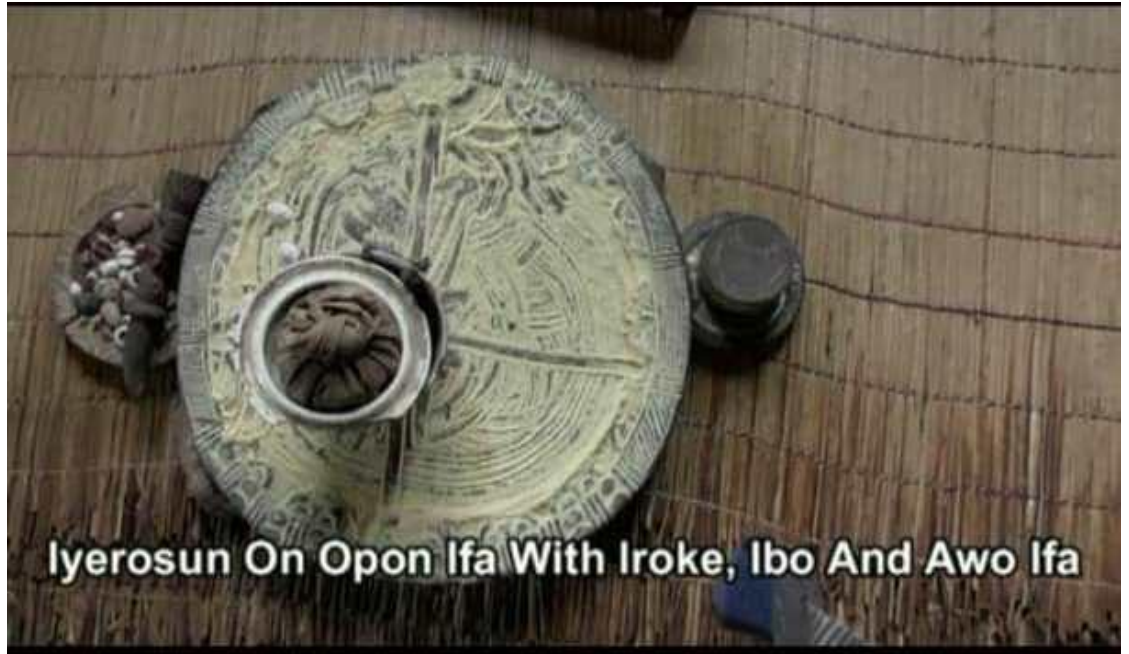
Picture 1: An Interview Session with Chief Mrs. ('Dr') Oshoyemi



Picture 2: Interview Session with *Ifá* Priest *Babaláwo Ifákóredé Ifáfúnmi*, Àràbà-Ifá Ìrẹ̀wọ̀n



Picture 3: Ọpón Ifá



Picture 4: Ìyèrosùn on Ọpón Ifá with Ìróké, Ìbò and Àwo Ifá



Picture 5: Òpèlè Ifá



Picture 6: Interview Session with Ifá Priests, Babaláwo Adéníyì Olanrewaju (left) and Akoda Awo Olubodun Dada Adeoye (right)



Picture 7: Interview Session with *Ifá* Priest, Babaláwo Sunday Késhinró Ifátúnmiṣe (left)



Picture 8: Interview Session with *Apètèbí* Florence Odusanwo (right), Òmù-Ìjẹ̀bú



**Picture 9: Interview Session with a Female Ifá adherent and *Apètèbí*, Chief (Mrs.)
Olúwadámiláre Adéolá, Líkàá Ifá, Ìjèbú Imuṣin**