

# The Odyssey of the Nigerian Woman



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Edited by

Oluwakemi Abiodun Adesina,  
Aisha Balarabe Bawa and  
Mutiat Titilope Oladejo

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	x
Foreword .....	xi
Introduction .....	1
Engaging Women's Lives in Nigerian History <i>Oluwakemi A. Adesina</i>	
<b>Women and Colonialism</b>	
Women and Politics in Colonial Ijebu of Southwestern Nigeria, 1900-1951 .....	8
<i>Titilope Olusegun Olalere</i>	
Marriage Practices Among the Edo of Benin .....	19
<i>Oluwakemi Adelaja and Oluwakemi A. Adesina</i>	
Native Courts, Marriage, and Dispute Settlement in Colonial Abeokuta.....	34
<i>Morenikeji Asaaju</i>	
Colonialism and the Egba Woman .....	47
<i>Majekodunmi Oyindamola and Oluwakemi A. Adesina</i>	
Marriage And Divorce in Colonial and Post-Colonial Ibadan, 1914 – 1986.....	62
<i>Lawrence Kolawole Alo</i>	
Colonialism and the Women of Iragbiji .....	76
<i>Christopher Temitope Fagunwa</i>	
Colonialism and Women's Traditional Positions in Lafia and Abuja Emirates, 1903 – 1960.....	93
<i>Musa Umar Sankira and Adamu Jamilu</i>	

## **Gender, Equality, and Sexuality**

'Kasev' Women and the Evolution of Marital Practices among the Tiv.....	110
<i>Bernard B. Fyanka</i>	

African Womanhood: Whose Equality? Which Gender? .....	126
<i>Tunde Decker and Damilola Osunlakin</i>	

"I'd Rather Tell": The Nigerian Woman's Voice on Sexual Health Matters .....	139
<i>F.O. Lanre-Babalola</i>	

Issues of Blood: Interrogating Female Health Care in Nigeria.....	151
<i>Adenike Mopa-Egbunu</i>	

## **Women and Patriarchy**

Patriarchy and Gender Discrimination in Nigeria .....	172
<i>Godfrey Atunu Dibie</i>	

Marital Injustice against some Nigerian Women.....	180
<i>Charity Dandy and Violet Omojan Okokor</i>	

The Influences of Culture and Tradition on the Esan Woman .....	192
<i>Olufunmilayo Fenny Olumese</i>	

## **Women, Market, and Industry**

Kelicha Akpe and the Afia Eze Market Women Association.....	206
<i>Kadishi Oliseh</i>	

Women and the Cloth-Weaving Industry in Esanland .....	220
<i>Julius O. Unumen</i>	

The Ngwa Woman and the Palm Oil Industry.....	236
<i>Nwachukwu Uzoamaka</i>	

**Women, Environment, and the Media**

Women and Sanitation in Ibadan, 1943 – 1978.....	252
<i>J.A. Oluyitan</i>	
Female Participation in the Media in Kano .....	266
<i>Aisha Ni'ima Shehu</i>	
Representations of the Nigerian Woman in Nollywood.....	289
<i>Uchendu Ola Nnennaya</i>	
Linguistic Representation of Women in Nigerian Music .....	306
<i>Ataisi Emiya Gladday</i>	
The Bekwarra Woman's Story Told by Regina Ogar, a Feminist Artist .....	320
<i>Simon Robert Odey</i>	
Igbo Women Association in the Post-Nigerian Civil War Birnin-Kebbi.....	333
<i>Onyenachie Udoka Collins</i>	

**Women, Governance and Politics**

Power Behind the Throne: The Nigerian First Ladies' Role in Governance.....	344
<i>Aisha Balarabe Bawa</i>	
Women as Tokenism: Of Deputy Governors and the Political Space in Nigeria .....	356
<i>Onyendidi Olibamoyo</i>	
Women's Development Policies and Practice in General Ibrahim Babangida's Regime, 1985-1993.....	371
<i>Mutiat Titilope Oladejo</i>	
Songs and Disrobing, Marches and Arsons: A Gender Analysis of the Western Region Crisis in Ibadan (1962-1966) .....	384
<i>Sara Panata</i>	

## **Women and Religion**

Christian Women Religious Leaders in Nigeria .....	408
<i>Omotoyosi Babalola</i>	
Christianity and Widows in Rural Urhoboland of Southern Nigeria.....	422
<i>Akpobome Diffre-Odieta</i>	

## **Professional Women**

The World of Work: Issues in Female Labour Force Participation in Nigeria.....	436
<i>Olusola I. Akinbobola</i>	
Nigerian Women in the Legal Profession, 1935 -1960.....	445
<i>E. Funmilayo Awoyera and Nduka Henry Agholor</i>	
Women and Development in the Nigerian Navy .....	459
<i>Felix Oludare Ajiola and Halimat O. Eleshin</i>	

## **Literary Representations of the Nigerian Woman**

"We Must Be Heard": Reminiscences of Womanhood in Rahma A. Majid's <i>Mace Mutum</i> .....	474
<i>Usman Asabe Kabir</i>	
The Northern Nigerian Woman in Contemporary Northern Nigerian English Fiction.....	485
<i>Aisha M. Umar</i>	
The Historical Evolution of the Female Figure in the Oriki of Ilobu Town in Osun State.....	498
<i>Adeyemo Opeyemi and Stephen Eyeh</i>	

## **Women in International Politics**

Women's Empowerment: The Interventionist Role of Some Non- Governmental Organisations (Ng0s) in Kano State, 1995 – 2006.....	512
<i>Muhammad Wada</i>	

The Nigerian Woman and Gender Equality .....	523
<i>Sarah Laniyan and Oluwakemi A. Adesina</i>	
Contributors.....	546

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## FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to write the Foreword to this important volume, *The Odyssey of the Nigerian Woman*, co-edited by Oluwakemi A. Adesina, Aisha Balarabe Bawa, and Mutiat Titilope Oladejo.

Over the years, many scholars have lamented the marginalization of women in the various histories of Nigeria written in the 1960s and beyond. No doubt the first generation of Nigerian academic historians adopted an Afrocentric perspective as they strove to write Africans into global history. But these histories identified predominantly male actors. There was no concerted effort to reconstruct the history of the Nigerian woman. While several feminist scholars bemoaned this oversight, only a few of them picked up their pens to right the wrongs. In this league are matriarchs such as Bolanle Awe, Nina Mba, LaRay Denzer, and a few others who have consistently reconstructed various aspects of women's past in Nigeria. A second generation, comprising scholars such as Majorie McIntosh, Nwando Achebe and Judith Byfield has also attempted to present women as active agents in the making and writing of their history. One thing is clear though, the history of women in Nigeria will have to be written and re-written by women. It is therefore gratifying that Adesina, Oladejo and Bawa have mobilized a new generation corpus to rise to this challenge.

This volume has embraced a very wide scope of the Nigerian past, from pre-colonial times till the present day; exploring such themes as the plight of women under colonialism, in industry, media, environment, politics, religion, professional vocations, and international politics. It also focuses on matters of gender, and sexuality; and on literary representations of the Nigerian woman. With contributors drawn from different parts of Nigeria, the volume ensures a balanced perspective. This book is unique in the way it brings together a vast array of issues affecting Nigerian women in one volume. This would engender a deeper understanding of, and a more empathetic approach to, the condition of the contemporary Nigerian woman.

I salute the editors for putting this volume together and also appreciate the efforts of individual authors for their contributions to this historical tapestry of women's history. I recommend the volume to every researcher, student, scholar and others outside the academy who are genuinely interested in the

past of the Nigerian woman. I also anticipate that this anthology will encourage other scholars to address similar issues and other matters arising from them in subsequent publications. Nigerian women deserve to be recognized for their labors, and celebrated!

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May 2022

## INTRODUCTION

### ENGAGING WOMEN'S LIVES IN NIGERIAN HISTORY

OLUWAKEMI A. ADESINA

A book on the history of Nigerian women is long overdue. In the annals of Africa's most populous and dynamic country, the knowledge about women boasts a rich history of influential women who have shaped the political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes. Narratives of these powerful women are quite popular and have spread across generations. Prominent among these women are Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Idia of Benin, Emotan of Benin, Nana Asmau, Madam Tinubu, Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Alimotu Pelewura, and more. Though several articles and books have been written on various aspects of Nigerian women's lives, there is no concise volume on the Nigerian woman. In other words, there is no "Groundwork of Nigerian Women's History". Thus, the journey to write *The Odyssey of the Nigerian Woman* was a response to the absence noticed in the contemporary historiography of Nigerian women. This journey began in 2016.

Although a lot of works - fiction and non-fiction - have been written on women in Nigeria, the historicization of women in Nigeria did not occur until the 1980s, even though the documentation of the general history of Nigeria had begun in the 1950s, the decade of decolonization. It started as writings of the past from an Afrocentric perspective in response to the Eurocentric view that Africa had no history. This exercise mainly accounted for the activities of men and rulers while only featuring fragments of women's existence. But this was not peculiar to Nigeria. Epplé and Schaser have asserted a deliberate exclusion of women from historical narratives in history writing over time:

The professionalization of historiography in Europe and the US during the past 200 years has meant ignoring the fact that women have a past. As a

result, women were also disqualified from writing so-called professional history. Those who wrote history nonetheless were left out of the traditional historiographic canon. The comparison may seem extreme, but it is apt nevertheless: the exclusion of female histories ... The marginalisation of female historians and their histories are also deeply affected by the traditional canon written by male historians, which was based on exclusionary practices and covered almost exclusively male-gendered subjects.<sup>1</sup>

The first full-length synthesis in book form of women's role in Nigeria's history was Nina Mba's *Nigerian Women Mobilized*.<sup>2</sup> The work explored women's political and economic activities in Southern Nigeria from 1900 to 1965. It articulated the impact of colonialism on the status of women and the resistance of women to specific colonial policies. Bolanle Awe's *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*<sup>3</sup> built on Mba's work by documenting the life and times of prominent women in Nigerian history. The book recorded the biographies of great Nigerian women like Queen Amina, Efunsetan Aniwura, Omu Okwei of Osomari and several others. The research presented in Awe's volume opened a creative impulse that encouraged the development of other works.

A different mode of thinking about women's lives, most especially on women/gender issues, surfaced in Oyeronke Oyewumi's work entitled, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*.<sup>4</sup> Oyewunmi had asserted that African gender discourses should not be viewed through a Western lens. This amounted to a rejection of the Western perspective in understanding women's issues.

For Marjorie McIntosh, Yoruba women's history contributed to our understanding of the dynamics of life in West Africa. Her work, *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change*<sup>5</sup>, articulated the activities and roles of pre-colonial Yoruba women and the impacts of colonialism on women. All of these books hold that the colonial legacy subjugated women to patriarchal existence in ways hitherto unknown among the people.

Women and gender studies have become an essential field of study in contemporary times. The ever-increasing emphasis on women's activities and the inclusion of women in the development plan of Africa and the United Nations has made it imperative to document the lives of the women of the most populous nation in Africa. Understanding women's lived experiences will furthermore elicit the realization of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the aspirations of Africa Agenda 2063.

As women and gender history/studies began to gain traction in Nigeria, our students continued to grapple with the lack of scholarly works on Nigerian women's history. As scholars of women and gender history who are committed to the writing of Nigerian women's histories, we came together to create a volume that will articulate the past of Nigerian women. We did not envisage the enormity of this great task until we received the first set of responses to our call for papers. Initially, we received papers from a minute section of Nigerian society. This was not going to be representative of our aim for the book. We have had to contend with the country's size, diversity of ethnic groups, the languages which are spoken, and the distinct nature and experiences of women across the cultural landscape of Nigeria. These are symbolic of the realities of women's lives, because there is no generic 'Nigerian woman'. To solve these problems, we had to directly invite colleagues from across the country to contribute their ideas to the volume. This was no easy feat because women and gender history are still not popular subjects. We then embraced a multidisciplinary approach to writing women's narratives in Nigeria.

We have always lived with discourses and narratives that have created the female character and identity from a male perspective. The woman has been invested with mysterious and inscrutable characters - as a witch, evil, lover of money, and a sex symbol. But the traditional vision of the dutiful wife and doting mother is not lost either. Like all women worldwide, the Nigerian woman is a daughter, wife, mother, worker, and spiritual being. While notable scholars have documented various aspects of Nigerian women's lives, this book is a compendium that details significant elements of the Nigerian woman's life from a diversity of perspectives and in a single book. It traverses cultures, regions, vocations, and experiences.

*The Odyssey of the Nigerian Woman* is an edited volume that highlights and documents Nigerian women's lives from the earliest times. The initial title of this volume was *Herstory: The Odyssey of the Nigerian Woman since Precolonial times*. It is a blend of 'her' and history. It establishes a typical feminine past by telling women's stories from all lived experiences, diverse perspectives, and different cultures. Annette Kolodny's concept, 'herstory' has been deployed in the titling of this volume as the female version of history. Other texts with 'herstory' in their titles include Katherine Halligan's *Herstory: 50 Women and Girls Who Shook Up the World*; Deborah Ohm's *Herstory: Women Who Changed the World*; Arianna P. Alloway's *Illuminating HerStory: A Safe Space to Reflect, Rebuild, and Reclaim your Birth Story*; Virginia Hamilton's *Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales*; Diana Lynn Severance's

*Her-Story: 366 Devotions from 21Centuries of the Christian Church (Focus for Women, and Janet E. Chambers' Herstory Revealed.* The key constituents of what is dubbed 'herstory' are Marxism and feminism.

The Nigerian state and its society are composed of many traditions and cultures that have affected women and gender relations. This book attempts to recover and analyse those aspects of Nigerian women's lives that have remained hidden from history.<sup>6</sup> It documents the continuities, changes, and connections between traditions, cultures, external influences, and how women and gender relations have responded to all these. As a study in continuity and change, this book articulates Nigeria's societal norms since ancient times, and the way external influences such as Islam, colonialism, Christianity, education, and global ideals have affected women's lives. It analyses the construction and reconstruction of gender relations as it affects Nigerian women and contributes to scholarship on dialogues involving women and globalisation. It provides new insights and perspectives on women's history, gender history, Nigerian history, Africa, and globalization. Rowbotham suggested that women were hidden from history and time. This volume discusses Nigerian women from different perspectives.

While Herstory tends to focus on accounts of exceptional women,<sup>7</sup> this volume looks at all categories of women. It is a multidisciplinary collection where each chapter discusses Nigerian women from different points of view, ethnic groups, and disciplinary backgrounds. The contributions in this volume consist of thirty-nine articles under ten sub-units where women's issues and lives are examined under important themes that include: women and colonialism; gender equality and sexuality; women and patriarchy; women, market, and industry; women, environment, and the media; women, governance and politics, women and religion; professional women; literary representations of the Nigerian woman; and women in international politics.

The contributors from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria have offered crucial lessons and insights into women's lives across Nigeria from diverse disciplinary perspectives, such as history, sociology, psychology, languages, linguistics, mass communication, theatre arts, and law. The section on "Women and Colonialism" contains seven chapters about women's traditional positions and their involvement in marriage and divorce in southwestern Nigeria, Midwestern Nigeria, and the Tiv and the emirate. In the second section, "Gender, Equality, and Sexuality", contributors analysed issues of womanhood, sex, sexuality, healthcare, and equality as they affect women in Nigeria generally. Section Three contains three chapters under the heading "Women and Patriarchy". These chapters have

drawn connections between culture, patriarchy, marital injustice, and gender discrimination in Nigeria. In Section Four, "Women, Market, and Industry," there are four chapters where contributors analysed women's work in popular women's industries (palm oil and cloth weaving) and market leadership. Section Five, "Women, Environment, and the Media", has five chapters which cover women's involvement in the environment and how they are portrayed in the media, music, and Nigeria's film industry – Nollywood. In Section Six, "Women, Governance, and Politics", the two chapters analyse women's roles and participation in post-colonial governance in Nigeria. Section Seven, "Women and Religion", contains two chapters that explore women leaders in Christianity and Christian widows, all in Southern Nigeria. In Section Eight, women's professionalism is articulated in three chapters under the header "Professional Nigerian Women". Here, contributors discuss women's world of work in the Navy, the legal profession, and generally in the labour force. Section Nine, "Literary Representations of the Nigerian Woman", looks at the representations of women in literary works across Nigeria. In Section Ten, contributors have analysed the place of the Nigerian woman in the United Nations' provisions and concerns, in four chapters under the heading "Women in International Politics".

Finally, it is essential to state that we initiated this volume because it was inspiring to see the rich diversity of women's lives and experiences across Nigeria's cultural landscape and to cover the essentials in any basic introduction to research in and around women and gender studies/histories. This book complements all other books and articles written about Nigerian women in very significant and stimulating ways. It is hoped that this volume will help in opening up more substantial accounts of women's lives and contributions in contemporary Nigerian and African societies.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Epplé, Angelika and Schaser, Angelika "Multiple Histories? Changing Perspectives on Modern Historiography" in Angelika Epplé and Angelika Schaser (Eds.), *Gendering Historiography beyond National Canons* (Frankfurt/ New York: Campus Verlag, 2009), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Awe, Bolanle, "Writing Women into History: The Nigerian Experience", in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall (Eds.), *Writing Women's History*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 211-212.

<sup>3</sup> Awe, Bolanle. *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective*, (Lagos: Sankore Publishers Ltd, 1992).

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<sup>4</sup> Oyewunmi, Oyeronke, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> McIntosh, Majorie Yoruba *Women, Work and Social Change* (USA: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Downs, Laura Lee. *Writing Gender History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> —. “Women’s History and Gender History – What and Why?” In *Early Modern Notes*

<https://earlymodernnotes.wordpress.com/2005/03/22/womens-gender-history-why/>  
Accessed 22 January 2021.

# **WOMEN AND COLONIALISM**

# WOMEN AND POLITICS IN COLONIAL IJEBU, SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA, 1900-1951

TITILOPE OLUSEGUN OLALERE

## Introduction

From pre-colonial times to the early 21st century, the role and status of women in Nigeria have continuously evolved, and the image of a helpless, oppressed, and marginalized group has undermined their formal study. Also, little recognition has been given to the various integral roles women have played in the history of Nigeria. The colonial period witnessed the marginalization of women in politics, in Ijebuland in particular, and Nigeria in general. This was detrimental to their laudable contributory roles in the pre-colonial period. Despite their neglect in the political sphere, Ijebu women contributed to the economic sphere, mainly as a source of revenue for the effective functioning of native administration through the payment of different forms of taxes. This study, therefore, historicizes the political position of women in Ijebuland during the colonial period. It argues that while women were deliberately excluded from politics, they were subject to the payment of various forms of taxes, which enabled the native administration to function effectively. It concludes that the place of women in the development of Nigerian society in general cannot be overemphasized. The paper adopts historical and analytical methods in its analyses, based on primary and secondary sources.

Before the colonialists made their way into Ijebuland in 1892, the Ijebu kingdom had a political structure, with both men's and women's active participation. Although men were in the majority in the political class, the *Erelu* (female chief) represented women in the executive council of the land, and played an essential role in the king-making process.<sup>1</sup> Unlike other Yoruba towns, Ijebuland had no visible *Iyalode* institution. The *Iyalode*'s office was a colonial creation, constituted during the colonial period on the advice of the *Awujale*, who thought that Ijebuland should have a representation in the person of the *Iyalode*, as in Egba and Ibadan, and also that it would ease the tension on Ijebu women's agitation for representation

from 1932.<sup>2</sup> The *Erelu* served the same function among the Ijebu, although today's *Iyalode* still have a great deal of power, particularly in the sphere of exchange and commerce, where market administration and adjudication are their purview.<sup>3</sup> Soon, women protested and decided not to pay the taxes levied against them, due to their belief in the British ideology that there should not be taxation without representation.<sup>4</sup>

## **Women and Politics in Pre-Colonial Ijebu before 1900: An Overview**

Before the arrival of the colonialists, the Oba ruled, in conjunction with his *Igbimo* (Council of Chiefs), without which there was no government and no executive. There were two types of chiefs: the palace chiefs and the town chiefs.<sup>5</sup> Each member of the *Igbimo* represents a quarter/ward (*Itun/Adugbo*) in various Ijebu towns. Collectively, and in collaboration with the *Awujale*, they developed laws when necessary. Although there were no political parties, such as are essential for the success of modern democracy, in Ijebuland in the pre-colonial period, the ancient administrative set-up which ruled Ijebu at that time was, to a large extent, democratic. There were political groups, each with its distinctive functions in the administration of the Ijebu towns – Ijebu Ode, Ijebu Igbo, Ijebu Ife, Idowa, Odogbolu, Ikorodu, Epe, Ikenne, Sagamu, Ode Remo, and others. The administrative pattern in Ijebuland was the same in these various towns in the kingdom under the sovereignty of the *Awujale*, in some areas with slight variations. The *Awujale's* paramountcy was manifested culturally and politically.

However, the political groups in Ijebuland were in the form of societies, and they were as follows: The *Osugbo* (the executives), the *Ilamuren* (the high chiefs), the *Odis* (palace assistants - officials), the *Parakoyi* (equivalent to the chamber of commerce) and the *Pampa* (the people).<sup>6</sup> In all these societies there were women members who played active roles in these various political units. In the *Osugbo*, for example, it is often remarked that:

*Da' gige, da 'gige!*  
*Aake kan, ko le da 'gige*  
*Da' gi la, da 'gi la!*  
*Aake kan, ko le da 'gi la*  
*Laisi Erelu, Osugbo kan ko le da 'wo se*

Meaning:

No axe can cut wood by itself  
 No axe can split wood by itself  
 Without the *Erelu*,  
 No *Osugbo* can perform any cultic activity.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Development of Native Administration in Ijebuland, 1900-1951**

From 1900, British rule in Ijebuland was characterised by official domination, and Yorubaland's incorporation into a British colony occurred via several steps.<sup>8</sup> After the mainland area became part of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1900, the unit was merged administratively with the Colony of Lagos and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1914 to form the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> In 1918, the Ijebu Ode Division under the Egba Province was accordingly divided into six District areas on the introduction of taxation as follows:

#### **Ijebu Division District Areas, 1917**

<b>District</b>	<b>District Head</b>	<b>District Area</b>
Western	<i>Akarigbo</i>	Remo
West-Central	<i>Dagburewe</i>	Idowa, Okun Owa, Odogbolu, and Aiyeye Native Court Areas.
East Central	<i>Olowu</i>	Owu, Makun-Omi, and Itebu Native Court Areas
South Eastern	<i>Ajalorun</i>	Ife, Iwopin, and Ode-Omi Native Court Areas
North-Eastern	<i>Baale of Ijebu Igbo</i>	Ijebu Igbo Native Court Areas
Central	<i>Olisa of Ijebu Ode</i>	Ijebu Ode, Odolagaiye, Oru and Ago-Iwoye Native Court Areas <sup>10</sup>

Source: Oduwobi, Tunde. 2004. *Ijebu under Colonial Rule 1892-1960: An Administrative and Political Analysis*. Lagos: First Academic Publishers, pp. 72-73

Following the creation of Districts and the introduction of taxation in 1918, all District Heads became *ex-officio* members of the Judicial Council. In 1921, Ijebu Province was created, merging all cultural groups belonging to the Ijebu dialectical area.

Under this new arrangement (known as the Ijebu Native Administration), the *Awujale* was the head; he was recognised as the sole authority. It should be noted that the pre-colonial political arrangement of the Ijebu had made it possible for the people, and women in particular, to achieve democratic progress by allowing both men and women to participate in the political life of the Ijebu kingdom. However, attempts by the British to modify the pre-colonial system of government by vesting the *Awujale* with extraordinary powers led to protests by the women against the ruling political class.<sup>11</sup> Under this arrangement, the power of the *Osugbo* was effectively curtailed. This is because the *Awujale* now derived his forces from the British authorities; he was made to pursue politics that were not necessarily in the interest of his people, especially women, who decried the payment of taxes in Ijebuland. For example, in Ijebu towns, women were made to pay flat rate and water rate taxes as contributions to the running costs of the central office in Ijebu Ode. Also, women were made to pay taxes in the form of market dues for stalls that were not adequately constructed, as argued by women in Ijebu Igbo, Awa, Ago Iwoye and Oru. These developments helped to stir disaffection against the *Awujale*.<sup>12</sup> The result of this was that from the late 1930s, many societies with diverse aims were formed, such as the Ijebu Youth Movement, the Ijebu Igbo Patriotic Society and the Ijebu Women's Party, which later metamorphosed into the Nigerian Women's Union in 1949.<sup>13</sup>

## **Women and Taxation in Ijebuland up to 1951**

The areas in and around Ijebu Ode and Abeokuta were the only places in Yorubaland where taxes were levied on both women and men on flat rate bases. Colonial officials argued that many women in those settings had cash incomes from trade or craftwork, and they could afford to help pay for the services they utilized. This, presumably, could be due to the population rate of 58,115 women and 40,760 men paying taxes in Ijebu Province, as at 1948.<sup>14</sup> These taxes were imposed on a flat basis rather than reflecting individual wealth. The *Awujale* decided in 1932 that it would be expedient to appoint three women as *Iyalodes*, one for each section of the town, to lessen female resistance.<sup>15</sup>

The *Iyalodes* were thus being inserted into a system where they had not previously existed to appropriate the prestige of their titles on behalf of the government. Further, the new chiefs were each to receive a salary of £9 per year from the District Native Authority Council. In contrast, *Iyalodes* in other areas like Ibadan and Abeokuta did not receive any payment from the government.<sup>16</sup> However, when colonial officers asked the *Awujale* to notify them of the women he wished to appoint, he provided names, but he emphasized that they had been chosen by the various companies or groups of trading women within the three sections of the town.<sup>17</sup> This also generated protests, as the women in Ijebu Ode did not appoint the new *Iyalodes*, and in 1948, this invariably led to the formation of the Ijebu Women's Party to air their feelings against this development in Ijebuland.<sup>18</sup> Again, the salary being given was a sell-out to the women in Ijebuland. The Ijebu Women's Party stood up for women and they used the platform to write to the Resident Commissioners expressing their views about society's development, especially about the payment of taxes and women's representation on the Ijebu Ode Town Council.<sup>19</sup>

In the late 1940s, however, opposition to Ijebu Ode's *Iyalodes* and their salaries grew, linked to opposition to the taxes imposed on women. A petition submitted to the *Awujale* in 1949, from twelve societies of local market women, objected to the appointment of the *Iyalodes* and the stipends paid to them, which were "not in accordance with the Native Law and Custom".<sup>20</sup> The local branches of the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU) and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) likewise complained that the *Iyalodes* did not represent the women of the town and "were not constitutionally appointed and elected".

### **Women Agitation in Colonial Ijebu up to 1951**

These women's organisations were the first political interest groups that collectively agitated for representation. For example, the Market Women Associations in Ijebuland, The Ijebu Ode Women's Party, The Nigerian Women's Union, the Ijebu Ode Branch, and others, articulated the interests of women which had hitherto not been given expression or represented. Second, the groups applied pressure on the Sole Native Administration in Ijebuland with petitions to the Residents, Commissioners, and the Governor of Western Provinces, during the period under study. In the early 1930s, women in Ijebuland actively protested against the taxes imposed on them, and against a levy which was made more burdensome by the depression of that period, of 1929-1930.<sup>21</sup> The tax rate was then 2.5s. per adult female and

5s per adult male. For example, in Ijebu Ode, the first forceful opposition to the Sole Native Administration was provided by the women of Erunwon, a town near Ijebu Ode. The Ijebu Ode Native Authority had acquired a large part of their farmland as a forest reserve. The Erunwon women protested that they needed their land for farming, and staged a mass demonstration on February 18, 1948, marching to the palace of the *Awujale* at Ijebu Ode.<sup>22</sup> As a result of their protest, an inquiry into the land acquisition was held. The inquiry revealed that only a portion of the land acquired was necessary for the reserve, and the rest was returned to the people of Erunwon.<sup>23</sup>

As of 1948, the number of taxpaying women in the Province exceeded that of men, and there were more female children than male.<sup>24</sup> The population of men was 40,760, against 58,115 women,<sup>25</sup> and they may have had more cash because of their trading activities than their farmer husbands.<sup>26</sup> Most women during this period in Ijebuland were traders. In 1933, the *Awujale* of Ijebu Ode, *Oba Daniel Adesanya Gbelegbuwa II* wrote to the colonial officials about the 'intrigues and riots' caused by women who refused to pay the tax.<sup>27</sup> Further demonstrations about taxation were organized in July 1942, for example, against the Win the War Fund, which had been introduced by the colonial government during World War II, and increased steadily even after the war was over in 1945. This was when craftswomen and traders were suffering from the economic policies. British officials then agreed 'in principle' that, as women had paid tax in Ijebuland since its inception, they should have some voice in town affairs.<sup>28</sup> That agreement, which the King and the people approved, stipulated that the town council would in future include the *Erelu* of the *Osugbo* society and one female representative from each of the three wards in the town.<sup>29</sup>

After the abolition of the women's flat rate tax in Abeokuta in August 1948, the Ijebu Ode Native Authority Council decided to take the initiative to forestall similar unrest in its own area. Thus, on October 11, 1948, an extraordinary meeting of the Ijebu Ode Advisory Council was called by the *Awujale* at the suggestion of the Resident, O. V. Lee. At that meeting, the *Awujale* pointed out that if the women's flat-rate tax was abolished, the Ijebu Ode native authority would have to make up the revenue by increasing the men's tax. Nonetheless, the *Awujale* ruled it would be wise to abolish the tax the following year for the sake of peace, and on October 23, it was announced that the women's flat rate tax would be repealed in 1949. On November 2, despite some opposition from the district representatives of the council, it was decided that the men's tax would be increased from 5s to 10s for 1949.<sup>30</sup> However, nothing was said about the women's water rate until Ijebu Ode women began to complain about their having to pay a tax

that had been abolished in Abeokuta. A meeting of the Ijebu Ode Advisory Council was called on January 13 1949, where seventeen Councillors of the twenty-five representatives in the Council supported the payment of women's water rate in Ijebu Province.<sup>31</sup> However, on May 15 1949, at a meeting of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU), Chief Olufunmilayo Ransom-Kuti proposed the formation of a Nigerian Women's Union, which would be affiliated to the International Federation of Women.<sup>32</sup> The proposal was adopted, and the executive committee of the AWU became the executive of the National Women's Union (NWU), of which Abeokuta became a branch. Mrs Kuti then set about organizing other branches of the NWU. The first branches were formed in those areas where women were still subject to other forms of taxes and the Sole Native Administrative (SNA) system, especially in Abeokuta and Ijebu Provinces. There had already been opposition to the SNA system in Ife, Ijebu Ode, and Benin.<sup>33</sup> In June 1949, with the help of Mrs Kuti, the women in Ijebu Ode were admitted into the Nigerian Women's Union as a branch of the Union. The Union mounted a campaign against the council's decision to maintain the water rate. The women wrote a series of protest letters to the *Awujale*, which were ignored. In July 1949, the women wrote to the Resident Commissioner, saying that the *Awujale* had sent the police to enforce the payment of the water rate despite their letters to him: "Unless he withdraws instructions to his police we shall be forced to pay him a simple visit". The police had arrested and convicted women in Ijebuland largely due to their default in paying the levied taxes.<sup>34</sup> The Resident Commissioner replied that the government approved of the water rate, and that if the women refused to pay the law would deal with them.<sup>35</sup>

The Ijebu Ode branch of the Nigerian Women's Union took no notice of the Ag. Resident O. V. Lee's warning, sending delegations to the Ijebu Ode town council. However, the council refused to meet with them. In response, the Women's Union wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Council on September 12, 1949, protesting against the Council's refusal to meet its delegates. The letter indicted the council for not consulting the people about the water rate, and accused it of not representing the people. The Chairman of the Council ignored the women's protests and reported the Nigerian Women's Union to the Chief Commissioner of the Western Provinces for causing political unrest. The Union, in turn, lodged its protest with the Chief Commissioner on October 12, 1949:

If the water rate which is causing political agitation is ever removed, we make old to say that we shall continue through our male community to the

support of Chief *Olisa*<sup>36</sup> and, therefore, he should have been taught to seek the interest of our union rather than becoming hostile to our interest.<sup>37</sup>

Between September and December 1949, the Ijebu Ode branch of the Nigerian Women's Union held a series of mass demonstrations against the water rate. They closed the markets and clashed with the police. After one of these clashes, in early December 1949, Mrs Kutu sent a telegram to all the local newspapers: "Resident supported and glorified brutally beating and jailing old pregnant women. Assistant District Officer was ashamed of giving up blood-soaked *buba*. All these for 3.6 water rate which should be the responsibility of husbands on behalf of their homes".<sup>38</sup>

In 1949, women in Ijebu Ode were told that they would have to pay an additional three pence, five shillings (3.5s) each as an annual water tax. Already angry about the situation, twelve market women's associations in the town sent a collective protest to the *Awujale*, saying that the new tax would ruin women traders.<sup>39</sup> Statements were also submitted by the local branches of the Nigerian Women's Union and the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NDDP). In Ijebu Ode, the branch of the small but determined (Nigerian) Women's Party, which included both market women and educated women, used strategic rhetoric and displayed some knowledge of Western political thought in its petition to the colonial District Officer and Resident Commissioner against the water tax.<sup>40</sup> This led to violent protests, and several of the women who were arrested for refusing to pay the tax died while in jail, together with the babies on their backs.<sup>41</sup> The following year, the colonial officers announced that women would contest seats in Ijebu Ode in the next local government elections.<sup>42</sup> Although the impact of Native Administration on women in Ijebuland was diverse, our discussion is restricted to political issues in this study.

## Conclusion

The foregoing has interrogated women's position during the British colonial administration of Ijebuland between 1900 and 1951. It argues that, during this period, women were excluded from active participation in the Native Administration. Despite their economic contributions, this was noticed in the payment of different forms of colonial taxes such as the poll tax, the flat rate tax, the water rate tax, etc. To register their grievances against colonial subjugation, women in Ijebuland during this period adopted two major approaches, namely, protest movements and the formation of women's associations. Under these political associations, the women in Ijebuland were able to agitate for their political rights in governance through the

writing of petitions, and protests, among other measures. As a result, the colonial government was forced to concede to some of their demands — a development that continued until the regional government's birth in 1951.

Undoubtedly, the period between 1900 and 1932 witnessed the political marginalization of women in the Native Administration in Ijebuland. Women's political leadership underwent major transformation, from active participation (during the pre-colonial period) to subordinate roles during the colonial period. This political subjugation was because of the British colonial policy of the administration, which favoured male chauvinism.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Akintan, O. A. "Powerful and Powerless: Women in Religion and Culture in the Traditional Ijebu Society in South-West Nigeria" *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3 No. 22 (2013) p.60.

<sup>2</sup> National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), Ijebu Prof/3669 Admin. Taxation of Women

<sup>3</sup> Okome, Mojubaola, "African Women and Power: Labour, Gender and Feminism in the Age of Globalization" in *Women and Power in Africa*, Eno Blankson Ikpe (ed.), Lagos: Supero Academic Publishers, 2015. 146.

<sup>4</sup> NAI/Ijebu Prof/Admin. *Taxation of Women*, Letter to the Resident by the Secretary, Ijebu Women's Union on 1 October 1948.

<sup>5</sup> Denzer, L. "Yoruba Women: A historiographical Study" p.2

<sup>6</sup> Odulami, B. A. "The Changing Roles of Traditional Rules in Ijebuland: From Earliest Times to the Present" in Olubomehin, C. O. (ed.) *The Ijebu of Western Nigeria: A Historical and Socio-cultural Study*. Ibadan: College Press and Publishers Ltd, 2001. pp.48-49.

<sup>7</sup> Akintan, O. A. "Powerful and Powerless: Women in Religion and Culture in the Traditional Ijebu Society in South-West Nigeria" p.6

<sup>8</sup> Adeniji, A. O. "A Survey of Political Developments in Ijebuland from the Colonial Period up to 1983" in Oguntomisin, G. O. (ed.) *Studies in Ijebu History and Culture*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd. 2002.p.39 and Asiwaju, A. I. *The Western Yorubaland under European Rule 1889-1945*. London: Longman Group Ltd, 1976.chps. 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Pim, A. W. "Public Finance" in Perham, M. (ed.) *Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1945. p. 225.

<sup>10</sup> Oduwobi, T. *Ijebu Under Colonial Rule 1892-1960: An Administrative and Political Analysis*. pp.72-73

<sup>11</sup> Oral Interview, Alhaja Alimot Sadia Kukoyi, Age 96+ 16<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Talbot, P. A. *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*. Vol. 1. London: Cambridge, 1926. p.218.

<sup>13</sup> Mba, N. *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. p.167.

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- <sup>14</sup> NAI/ Ijebu Prof/Admin. *Taxation of Women*, Minutes of Meeting, Ijebu Central Advisory Council, 11 October 1948.
- <sup>15</sup> McIntosh, M. K. *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, p.223.
- <sup>16</sup> NAI/Ijebu Prof/Admin. *Taxation of Women*, Letter from The *Olorituns* of Ijebu Ode to the *Awujale*, The Resident, The Chief Commissioner, The Governor of Nigeria, 20 December 1948.
- <sup>17</sup> NAI/Ije Prof.1574, District Officer to *Awujale*, 2 January 1934, *Awujale* to District Officer, 30 January 1934 and sheet, pp.6-7.
- <sup>18</sup> NA/Ije Prof. 3669/80. Taxation of women. The Ijebu Women's Party was founded in 1948 in Ijebu Ode.
- <sup>19</sup> NAI/Ije Prof. 3669/8. Taxation of women. Letter written by Ijebu Women's Party to the Resident, Ijebu Province, 17 May 1949.
- <sup>20</sup> NAI/Ije Prof. 3669/8. Taxation of women in Ijebu Province
- <sup>21</sup> "The Great Depression" of 1929-1930 made British West African countries experience low prices of products which led to low income and unable to pay most of the taxes levied against Ijebu women during the period.
- <sup>22</sup> Mba, N. *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. p.166.
- <sup>23</sup> NAI, *West African Pilot* of February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1948.
- <sup>24</sup> NAI/Ije Prof, Taxation of Women, Prov/Admin. 3669 "Minutes" 16/16/48.
- <sup>25</sup> NAI/Ije Prof, Taxation of Women, Prov/Admin. 3669, Appendix 'A'.
- <sup>26</sup> NAI/CSO 26/30274, p.20.
- <sup>27</sup> Oral Interview with Mrs Solana a retired teacher at Imupa, Odo Egbo, Ijebu Ode. Age 70+, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2016
- <sup>28</sup> NAI/Ijebu Province 2 C55/1, pp.83-84
- <sup>29</sup> NAI/Ijebu Prof/Admin. *Taxation of Women*, Minutes of Meeting, Ijebu Central Advisory Council, 11th October 1948.
- <sup>30</sup> NAI, *West African Pilot* of October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948, and *Daily Times* of March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1948.
- <sup>31</sup> NAI/Ijebu Province 3669/47. Taxation of women. Minutes of Meeting of Ijebu Ode Councils' Representatives on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1949 at Itoro Hall, Ijebu Ode.
- <sup>32</sup> Mba, N. *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. p.166.
- <sup>33</sup> Igbafe, P. A. "Benin Under British Administration" PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1968. p. 68.
- <sup>34</sup> NAI/Ijebu Province 3669/67. Taxation of women. Letter written to His Excellency, the Governor on Women's Taxation in Ijebu Province on 27 September 1948 by the three *Iyalodes* and other women groups in Ijebuland.
- <sup>35</sup> NAI/Ijebu Province 3669/67. Taxation of women.
- <sup>36</sup> Chief Olisa, traditionally the second-in-command to the *Awujale* and Head of the Ilamuren Society, was the Chairman of the Town Council.
- <sup>37</sup> Collection of private papers lodged in the manuscripts section of the Kenneth Dike Library, Africana Section, University of Ibadan. See also Mba, N. *Nigerian women mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. p.168.

<sup>38</sup> Mba, Nina. *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. ...p.168.

<sup>39</sup> NAI/Ijebu Province 1 574, sheet 48.

<sup>40</sup> NAI Ijebu Province 1 574, unnumbered sheets, dated 12 July 1949.

<sup>41</sup> Oral interview with Madam Alimotu Shadiat Kukoyi. Trader at Ita Osu International Market. Age 84+, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

<sup>42</sup> National Archives, Ibadan (NAI) Ije Prof 1 574, sheet 60.