

# The Yoruba Indigenous Metaphysics: A Comparative Study of Conflict and Diplomacy in *Ifa's Ogbe-Suuru*

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**Abstract:** The perception and treatment of women as delicate objects of tolerance, identity, courtship, procreation and double-standard during the Elizabethan era may equally be prevalent in other societies. The study investigates the *Ifa* corpus that portrays the power of *Orunmila* to tame *Petebi* through his docile, pliant, and civilised behaviour of *Orunmila* in the *Ifa* corpus whose wife is ungovernable, promiscuous, and wayward with the recognition of parallels in both the text and the indigenous societies. The paper investigates the approach of *Orunmila* in his relationship with his wives and the conclusion that force may be counterproductive where patience is needed. While dwelling on the indifference of *Orunmila* to the waywardness of *Petebi*, the paper concludes that the goal of art may be geared towards reality, entertainment, and appeal to conscience in engendering manners through established values, conventions and approaches that are culturally peculiar to different people the world over.

*Keywords:* Indigenous, folktales, *Ifa*, comparative study, cultural relativism

## Introduction

Annually, *Ifa* devotees propitiate their *Ifa* through thanksgiving, and recognition of the place of the *iken* in their successes in a three-day festival. The annual performance of *Ifa* festival at Chief Adesulu Adeniyi's residence at Ore, Ondo State in June 2022 witnesses the chanting of some *Ifa* verses for the devotee. The mandatory celebration by *Ifa* priests remains the means of mitigating challenges that may befall them during the year. The ritual involves the literal washing of the head of the devotee in order to prepare him for the year, negate whatever problem may plague him, and thus an avenue to admonish him to steer clear of some behavioural traits in the course of the year. The devotee is required to bathe during the three-day festival with concoction made from some carefully selected leaves. The festival doubles as a religious ceremony, and exhibition of indigenous wealth of knowledge latent in *Ifa* indigenous metaphysics.

The washing of the *iken* is a significant recognition of the sacred nature of the ceremony. The devotee's *Ifa* is washed, and the third day witnesses the divination that spells out all that the priest would face, and the taboos to avoid towards ensuring a prosperous, and hitch free year. Other clients who throng the arena to felicitate the devotee take advantage of the festival to investigate their private, and business activities. The same festival witnesses the presence of the researcher whose research interest is festival which availed the transcribing, and interpretation of salient *Ifa* verses that are chanted for clients and thus the subject of this paper.

The scholar is quite familiar with *Ifa* religious and mythical essence. In this paper, the goal of art is questioned. The annual performance becomes an opportunity for further research into some secondary materials such as the treatise by authorities like Campbell (1988). Inherent in the tales of the stubborn and promiscuous wife of *Orunmila*, therefore, are consciously scripted tales that may en-

gender the study of individual manners, and through which different approaches may be deployed in addressing similar challenges when confronted by individuals with the conclusion that whatever anyone may be facing has parallels in myths, and reality.

Authorities, the world over, have attributed different negative tendencies to both men, and women. However, elites consider such comments, and negative representations as ill directed. Rather than being considered truth holistically, such submissions are allegories of human nature. The tale of Adam with the loss of Eden, for example, symbolises women as weaklings, and men as gullible, and inconsistent. Solomon is said to have lost his spiritual essence as a result of his uncoordinated dotage on women. Shakespeare's examination of Antony's dotage on Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* is considered a negative influence that distracts him from his duty as one of the triumvirates with catastrophic consequences, such as the untimely death of his wife Fulvia; loss of his dignity among the triumvirates, and thus becoming an object of ridicule among his lieutenants. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth nags Macbeth endlessly that he caves in to the idea of assassinating the visiting King Duncan so that he could become the King of Scotland. Many such tales represent women as proud, self-conceited and paradoxical, and men as objects of manipulation and indiscretions.

The paradox in both the male and female genders emanates from their ambivalent capabilities. Women, for instance, may regenerate, and annihilate society as some authorities tend to claim as wars are fought and cities are destroyed. Troy, for instance, was destroyed because of the elopement of Helen of Sparta, wife of Menelaus, by Paris otherwise known as Alexander, son of King Priam of Troy through the instrumentality of a goddess named Aphrodite. Many men who had given in to their wiles had paid dearly for this which is instrumental in the concept of *femme fatale* simply defined as fatal women. However, some men may dare them, and conquer their supposedly domineering traits. Among such heroic men are *Osepeletu* (a persona in the *Ifa* chapter and *Orunmila* (the symbol of perfection in *Ifa* corpus named *Ogbe-Oligun* or *Ogbe Siuru*) who, by virtue of his name, is docile, patient and unruffled in the face of debilitating challenges such as the effrontery of the canoe-paddler to sleep with his wife during a sojourn from one end of the town to the place of coronation; unlike his late brothers namely: *Asipale* (weird one) and *Afuwagale* (the uncontrollable one) who died untimely by virtue of their riotous nature, and inability to sacrifice the moment for future bliss by allowing the same paddler to sleep with their wives on their way to the coronation ceremony. Even when the patient one seems like a fool, he got the crown by virtue of the recognition that it is unwise to engage the paddler in a fight at his stronghold.

Perhaps more illuminating analysis on the patient one in the preceding story may be necessary. The youngest of the brothers is crowned as king while basking in the uncanny knowledge bestowed on him by the wise men of the land whose divinatory power recommends some unrealistic but potent resolutions. As the emissaries are arriving at his residence from Ile-Ife (the mythical source of all the activities of *Orunmila*) the young man is escaping from his residence through the backdoor. (The nature of *Ifa* divination is such that the same narratives permeate every chapter of the same reading during divination.) He, however, leaves words for the visitors that they should return in another seven days. All through the period, he is hibernating in the shrine of some diviners known as *Babalawo*. He is initiated into the *Ifa* cult where he makes the first divination for himself at *Ugbodu* (*Ugbodu* is an enclosure that is a bit removed from the compound. It could be the back of the house where the ritual load is deposited). His first divination reveals the *Ifa* chapter named *Ogbe Ligun*. The ceremony finally ends on the seventh day. Renowned priests reveal to him all that would be his lot throughout his existence chief of which is that he would be cuckolded. No man wants another person to enjoy his honey. He is warned that he must accept the reality of his destiny if he must not die untimely.

More revelations about the reasons his elder brothers died in the boat accident on River *Osun* are mentioned. The paddler's attempt at sleeping with their wives ends in disaster. They must have engaged the paddler in a scuffle at a strange terrain. It is the paddler's stronghold. He navigates the river on a daily basis. He must have been an adept at swimming. No doubt, he capsizes the boat at the

refusal of the princes at his overtures at their wives. These narratives are far from real. They are symbols or what St. Paul considers to be allegories in Galatians 4: 21 to 5:1 on the metaphors of Sarah and Hagar and for which adherents in both Christianity and Islam kill one another for accepting the stories too literally rather than metaphorically. The charge to *Osepeletu*, (if only he were Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine he would have remembered that what it takes to mitigate war is lesser than what it takes to prosecute a war), is that he should accept the humiliation with equanimity; allow the oppressor to have his way momentarily. He accepts every detail of the divination and would not risk his life because of the waywardness of a lady or the debilitating circumstances of the moment. Let the details of the ritual and other deployments be skipped. He arrives at the palace to the chorus of *aba ye o* meaning, the king has arrived.

The strange man who dotes on another person's wife may not be joking. He, no doubt, wants the wife and possibly the life of the husband. Indigenous knowledge recommends absolute patience in handling the issue lest it consumes the husband. *Osepeletu* unlike Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine would have eased himself out of the position of authority in order to save the lives of millions of people and the legacies of his forebears. Debatable as this may seem in politics and diplomacy, the Russian president Vladimir Putin who dares Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine in his domain is tantamount to attempting to sleep with his wife in his full glare. As indigenous wisdom would say, *you don't brutalise your scrotum in attempting to kill a tsetse fly that perches on it*. Rather, it takes decorum to handle such a humiliating circumstance. Upon assuming the throne of his forebears, *Osepeletu*, even when writhing in the pain of the humiliation and the irreparable death of his brothers, invites the paddler to his palace where he is celebrated for bringing the king safely to his domain. Right there, the king appreciates him with three vibrant young men as assistants in his daily business of paddling his canoe. In the third year, the king is still fuming in anger. He invites the paddler and his assistants to the palace. The paddler might feel he would be celebrated and appreciated once more.

It is far from appreciation this time. The king, in anger, reveals to the chiefs that it is the same paddler that kills his two elder brothers while attempting to sleep with their wives and that he would have killed him too if not for his patience. In the course of the discussion, the paddler bolts from the palace and jumps into the river. The king charges the assistants to go after him. He is brought back and justice is served as he meets with an instant death. The king tarries in anger in dealing with the paddler for some reasons. He does not want to kill the only paddler in the domain as he won't be replaced easily. Again, you may not want to seek justice until you have the means and wherewithal to do so. The paddler would have bolted successfully without the three assistants to arrest him. The king waits that long to allow the assistants to be knowledgeable enough in paddling, swimming and mastering the terrain. The thrust of it all is that the king does not forget and that anyone who must be great would endure humiliations on the way to greatness.

The *Ifa* corpus, far from ascribing perfection to anyone, considers humanity as an embodiment of three typologies that keep regenerating all through time. The typologies are not exclusive to humankind to the exclusion of birds, reptiles, and animals. A breakdown of the features reveals salient traits traversing human, animals, and birds. Apart from humankind being a direct representation of species in the animal kingdom, it can be demonstrated through indigenous metaphysics that creation is not the exclusive preserve of any supernatural being to the exclusion of other entities. Although this claim may be beyond scientific validation, entities such as *Oluorun* (the owner of heavens), *Oluaiye* (the owner of the earth), *Oluigbo* (the owner of the forest), and *Olhuveri* (the owner of the sea), all have their contributions to the evolution of humanity. This exemplifies the belief that a single god may not be singularly responsible for the emergence of the human race.

Man is both a cock, and a parrot in *Ogunda-Meji* (a chapter in the *Ifa* corpus). As a cock, he is knowledgeable, and could mimic human beings, and report developments to their owners, and wise in computing time with unrivalled accuracy that it alarm human folks and consequently becoming

the time keeper of the whole community. In spite of this spectacular capability, the cock displays childish descent by defecating at home which the wife abhors, and consequently seeks divorce. Man is equally a parrot whose body is full of wealth. The tail is money personified just as he is a block-head. However, the parrot has a visible flaw reflecting through eating with the foot. The wife of the parrot named *Irepe*, seeks divorce on account of this rare nature till she marries *Orunmila* who is renowned for patience. His tolerance takes her to another level of indiscretion by negating his taboo of taking a bath once in a year. Only then does it occur to her that her husband, a personification of *Orunmila*, could be angry like every other human being. This humble and unruffled nature of *Orunmila* does not absolve him from inherent negative traits, and flaws. He is a thief in *Ogundabede*. He finds some valuable properties stolen and hidden by some burglars and brought them home.

*Femme fatale* is defined as the power in women to sway their husbands towards negative traits, and there is an array of examples: The concept of *femme fatale* is an archetype in literature, and it simply means fatal woman. The irresistible charm in them takes an unnatural form that they are often considered to be a witches, seductresses, and enchantresses. Examples of women in this category are: Mohini in Hindu mythology; Aphrodite in Greek mythology whose indiscretion led to the elopement of Paris with Helen of Sparta and the consequent destruction of Troy; Medea; Clytemnestra, whose anger on account of the offer of Iphigenia as sacrifice to Artemis towards having a smooth sail to Troy during the Trojan War makes her a ready ally to connive with Aegisthus, her concubine, and assassinate Agamemnon immediately he returned from the Trojan War; the biblical Herodias and Salome, Delilah and Samson, and Jezebel and Ahab; Cleopatra and Antony in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* through whose excessive dotage, the emperor lost his throne and his life; Lady Macbeth and Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* who propped up her husband to murder the visiting king Duncan, and many others.

The non-violent nature of *Orunmila*, far from being mistaken for cowardice, is a virtue on emotional management. This rare display of exceptional calmness is a cultural trait in dealing with nagging, problematic issues, especially promiscuous women finding expression in *Ogbe Suuru* captured through the exemplary calmness of the husband in order to avoid the snag of death hanging upon him like the Sword of Damocles through the knowledge of the injunction that the man who would harbour a wife would pretend as if he is blind, and the woman who would stay long in her matrimonial home would pretend that she is dumb. This virtue, finding expression in his relationship with his wife named *Irepe-One-Obinrin-Omuro* provides *Orunmila* the opportunity to evaluate the nature of his wife.

*Orunmila* marries *Irepe*, and they live happily with each other. However, she negates all the taboos of the husband. In other words, she is an exact opposite of what the husband represents. Yet, the husband does not betray any anger. He informs *Irepe* that his peculiarity is that he takes his bath once in a year. He endures the antics of *Irepe* till she invites him to visit the river with her one day. While she takes her bath, *Orunmila* savours the beautiful landscape. There and then, she pours water on his body and negating the taboo of *Orunmila* that he could only take his bath once in a year. *Orunmila* could not contain his anger. He takes *aba* (desire) with his right hand and *ase* (say-it-so-be-it-so) with his left hand and curses *Irepe* without delay.

## Literature Review

Cole (2019) situates cultural relativism within cultural context as exemplifying behaviour, knowledge, and values. According to her, cultural relativism is "the idea that the values, knowledge, and behaviour of people must be understood within their own cultural context." It is in this context that the value associated with marriage, childbirth, and funeral of folks in different societies may be understood. According to Onigbinde (2020), "...we could say that whatever counts as good reason for one person must also be an equally good reason for all other persons who are similarly placed."

(196). The question of “who are similarly placed” as expressed in the claim of Onigbinde (2020) is a reference to the environment. In other words, folks from the same environment tend to share similar traits and nuances that delimit them. This is what makes culture. Nickerson (2022) evaluates cultural relativism from the perspective of differential understanding of values depending on different environments. According to her, “cultural relativism is the claim that ethical practices differ among cultures, and what is considered right in one culture, may be considered wrong in another culture.” The underlying assumptions in the two definitions are that societies evolve through basic values that are considered sacrosanct to the people. Fallout of the above is that no single culture may constitute “a universal truth.” (Nickerson, 2022).

Imputed to the study, therefore, *Orumila*'s treatment of his wife is relative to him and may equally be drawn from his membership of the culture. It is not out of place that he would have heard about such a character in myths which might have informed his application of the maxim of what may be considered the right treatment for the right behaviour. In this wise, it may be affirmed that *Orumila*'s treatment of *Irepe* is a result of indoctrination arising from the knowledge that the man who must keep a wife must pretend that he is blind. All through the excesses of *Irepe*, he maintains a philosophical calmness, especially with the knowledge that a bride must behave strangely in her new environment as if she was not prepared for marriage prelude to the final admission of the finality of her betrothal. The above premise enjoys further illumination from philosophers in their postulations about humankind and whatever values that may be salient to folks the world over.

Visions and judgements are subject to time, and the environment. This is so because the artist, even when considered to be the chronicler of manners, can hardly avoid manifesting traces of the strengths, and shortcomings in the immediate milieu. The insights may be a possible influence from the ideological thrusts of the environment. It is noteworthy that art, through creativity, is an instrument for the exhibition of the thoughts, conventions, beliefs, and human frailties, as well as the means towards addressing such mind-boggling realities. Ideological thrusts too may be tacitly embedded in tales, festivals, and axioms. This is the reason for the ever relevance of indigenous performances. It equally explains why some artists are considered to be tilting towards some ideologies in their efforts; while others are drifting away from them: “most people assume that the object of art is some kind of teaching, that it must now fortify conscience, now perfect manners, in sum, demonstrate something useful” (Baudelaire, 1965). Recourse to art generally may be borne out of the fact that creativity, generally, tilts towards registration of parochial or cultural ideologies that may be fundamental to inter-personal relationship, and the cultural truths in these scripts may inform their being upheld as intellectually illuminating.

Entertainment is an insignificant aspect of the goals of art, and may not be absolute as may be imputed to indigenous performances. If it were, the obsession for art might have filtered into oblivion over the years. Within the portrayal of the vision of the artist, certain far-reaching summations are embedded, and these may be buried in symbols, images, codes, and signs with the results that the audience may be inadvertently acculturated towards a peculiar reasoning pattern. Different tools, such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, and stylistics, among others may be needed to unravel the web of meanings in a work of art. This is due to the complexity involved in the search for meaning. Dutton (1996) sums up the goal of literature succinctly by laying it within reality that the goal of entertainment may be considered secondary: “literature, that is, informs us, shapes us: it is not something separate from the business of daily living, but concomitant with it.” 76). It is in this regard that the *Ifa* script may be expressing relative cultural truths even when gender prejudice may be suspected. However, inherent in the *Ifa* chapter are basic traits in men and women that gender-politics may be ruled out as no gender is free of blame in the business of existence and occasional descent into indiscretion. Folks, from the least to the most distinguished member of the global society, exhibit traits that are not far removed from bestial qualities, even when diplomacy and organised pretensions tend human behaviours.

### Synopsis of the Texts

*Orunmila* engages in a relationship with a beautiful but promiscuous woman who he later names *Ewure* (Goat) the symbol of a stubborn animal. It is interesting to investigate whether *Irepe* is a symbol of *Ewure* (a Goat) or not because she is presented as stubborn, unyielding and aggressive. *Ewure* (Goat) is the name of *Petebi*, the wife of *Orunmila*. Earlier, *Orunmila* embarks on a journey to the town of *Iwo* and meets with the beautiful princess of the town. She is known to negate whatever anyone might represent. She has been twice married and divorced simply for preparing the very dishes that her two former husbands abhorred and her behaviour may be traced to her imperial-birth.

*Orunmila* meets with a beautiful lady named *Iyawo* who later becomes his wife, and reveals all his taboos to her. Within three days of their relationship, she negates them by preparing dishes that are taboos to *Orunmila*. The would-be husband eats the dishes with relish while drawing her attention mildly to the fact that the dishes are taboos to him, after all. Not quite long, she brings a lover home on the pretence that he is her brother. Before then, *Orunmila* has prepared a delicious dish and water in the bathroom for the lover. In the full glare of *Orunmila*, the lover ravishes her, and the husband does not retort. The following morning, *Orunmila* provides water in the bathroom as well as food for the duo. Having savoured the delicacy, the lover takes his leave and *Orunmila* chooses to chaperon him to the crossroads in order to lead him to the right way to his abode.

While on their way, the lover hits his toe on a bump. He immediately turns to a snail. *Orunmila* picks the snail, and breaks the butt. He sprinkles the water on the head of his would-be wife with a prayer that God would forgive her. She quickly calls the attention of her parents to the presence of a man she is ready to marry. *Orunmila* pays the needed dowry and takes her to his town at Ile Ife. At home, *Orunmila*'s relations ask for the name of the wife and he quickly calls her *the-insult-he-endures-at-Iwo* which translates to *Iya-Iwo*. Ever since, newly-wedded wives are referred to as *Iyawo* in Yoruba land. *Iyawo* is the symbol and height of tolerance that a man may have. She is the symbol of stubbornness; and it is arguable if anyone may be married for so long without overlooking the excesses of a woman. A wife is the demonstration of the humanity of every man as responsible, and qualified to be bestowed with a position of authority. The tale also sums up the defeat of *Oyo* people through the bewitchment of the princess of *Iwo* as she lures *Eleengba* from *Oyo* to *Iwo* and, consequently, prepares a safe ground for the people of *Iwo* to defeat *Oyo* people.

The challenges a man may face may not be limited to his wife. The Yoruba cultural milieu records the tale of a man named *Kinlo* or *Akinlo*. He remains a bachelor for long that leaves his relations gossiping that he probably might be a mare, gelding or impotent and bereft of virility. *Akinlo*, as a matter of fact, could not successfully win the hands of a lady because of the snags surrounding his personality particularly, coming from his relations. He decides to travel out of the community one day and wins the heart of a beautiful lady. He brings the lady home after paying the bride price. In fact, he does not invite his relations to the ceremony during the marriage. He is already too informed to dignify his relations with his personal affairs. He brings the wife home, and everyone throngs to the compound to behold the lady who becomes the wife of the supposed impotent member of the community. The eldest among the visitors asks him the name of the wife. He is, however, prepared for them. He simply replies them in his witty essence: *Iabajehan* which literally translates to: "it is not good to assassinate people's character." The folks truly take that to be the name of the bride and would add the name of the husband when calling her: *Iabajehan-aya-Akinlo* (*denigration-is-evil-the-wife-of-Kinlo*). Those with discerning minds in the environment truly could understand the metaphor in the name based on the prevailing knowledge of the rumours prelude to the arrival of the bride. It has since become a wise-saying in the milieu.

*Orunmila*'s wives are commonly named *Petebi*. *Ewure* (Goat) and *Irepe* are notorious among the women. One of them is named *Ewure* as a result of her stubborn nature. She is wayward and ungovernable. These two wives of *Orunmila* are examined in order to demonstrate the inimitable

capacity of the individual for patience and perseverance. *Petebi* is renowned for promiscuity. She keeps nagging *Orunmila* about her numerous admirers who she claims are handsomer than her husband. It is the height of indiscretion when she informs her husband of her resolve to invite her lover home. She threatens to divorce her husband should he refuse to accept her proposal. He accepts the plot in order to protect her from the danger of losing her life as a result of her infidelity and the recognition that he must be patient like a dove if he must marry a woman.

*Petebi* invites the lover home while the latter is oblivious of the fact that the old man in the house is the husband of the lover. Before their arrival, *Orunmila* prepares a sumptuous meal for the duo. Not only that, he prepares his bed for the wife and her lover just as he sleeps in the other room. The lover named *Sanponna* (the god of small-pox) suspects foul play and refuses the sexual overture of *Petebi*. He recognises the fact that the old man might be the husband of *Petebi*, after all. He is equally afraid of the fury of the patient husband. At dawn, *Sanponna* leaves the house having savoured the food that *Orunmila* prepares for them. He even fetches water for them in the bathroom. With the lover's disappearance from her matrimonial home, *Petebi* decides on another line of action. This time, she resolves to elope with *Sanponna*. She visits her hairdresser and plaits a special hairdo named *Suuku* that looks like the horns of a goat. She takes her leave and spends exactly three years with the lover in spite of the afflictions she endures there.

*Orunmila*'s patience pisses off the remaining one hundred and ninety-nine deities in the clime. They consider the effrontery of the lover named *Sanponna* a slap on the faces of the remaining divinities and, therefore, resolve to avenge the injustice that is meted unto the patient *Orunmila*. *Ogun*, the iron divinity, calls *Orunmila* a fool. *Orunmila* asks him if he is angry over the development, and he charges him to do whatever he considers necessary to retrieve the wife from the clutches of *Sanponna*. *Ogun*'s response is fierce, and he promises to fight like a wounded lion. At night, *Ogun* hits *Petebi* on her head with a sledgehammer. She wakes up with a nagging headache and her lover quickly visits *Orunmila* to make divination about the possible solution to the ailment. With the procurement of the needed ritual materials, *Petebi* regains her health and remains adamant.

*Sango*, the thunder divinity, too could not stomach the injustice. He pays a solidarity visit to *Orunmila* to express his disapproval of *Sanponna*'s immorality. He too resolves to fight on behalf of *Orunmila*. Thunder visits the home of *Sanponna*, and roars like a lion. *Petebi* develops heart attack. *Sanponna* quickly takes her to the home of the former husband for possible clue to the cure of the ailment. *Petebi* consequently, regains her health and returns to the home of her lover. At this stage, *Orunmila* invokes *Esu*, the trickster divinity, to visit the ungovernable wife. *Esu* ties her feet, hands and afflicts her with paralysis. She remains in a coma while the lover takes a few of his belongings, and disappears into the bush. Before then, he pays a visit to the mother of *Petebi* to charge her to retrieve the corpse of her daughter from his home. Her mother takes her back to *Orunmila*, and he offers meet sacrifices. *Petebi* regains her good health. At last, *Petebi* kneels down, and begs *Orunmila* for forgiveness. In her posture, especially with the two protruding hairdo that take the semblance of horns on the head of a goat, and her two hands on the floor, *Orunmila* pronounces her as *Ewure* (a goat).

### Comparative Analysis

The *Ifa* verse named *Ogabe-Ogunda*, *Ogabe-Yonu*, *Ogabe-Oligun* or *Ogabe-Suuru* lucidly presents women as difficult and promiscuous. This verse exemplifies *Orunmila*'s attributes of perseverance, patience and diplomacy unlike the sheer indiscretion of women and their insatiable crave. The *Ifa* verse discloses the inexhaustible patience of *Orunmila*. *Orunmila* declares that although he looks weak and feeble, however, when he decides to move, he can be as swift as lightning: "When he is offended, it takes him three years to react, thus leaving enough time for the offender to repent and seek forgiveness. Even when he decides to take offence, his reaction is as slow as the movement of the snail, although his feet are as many as those of a millipede, who although is endowed with two hundred pairs of feet, nonetheless moves slowly and gracefully." (Osamaro, 1992).

The treatment of women in *Ogbe-Suuri* is an indirect examination of women in both the Ile-Ife milieu and the global society in general. In the *Ifa* tale, women are considered symbols of subtle tolerance as may be captured by the *Ifa* folk tale in the Yoruba milieu. However, *Orunmila* is too hard on his wife by referring to her as a goat. If women are considered to be goats by virtue of their stubbornness, it is apt to refer to men as he-goats in view of their inordinate appetite for sex. The allusion to goats here emanates from the fact that bestial tendencies are innate in both male and female that one may find a parallel between a human being and an animal. The *Ifa* corpus deploys animals in several tales to represent human beings. Antelopes, giraffes, big-rats, lions, monkeys and others are carefully chosen to bring home significant messages that one may be fair in absolving the sages of the Yoruba clime of bias in the treatment of women.

If women are symbolic representations of goats, men are considered pythons and big-rats that are sworn friends and enemies. As pythons, they betray their friendship and kill each other for food in spite of the bond subsisting between them. Men are giraffes whose friendship with the hunter is betrayed as they devour the hunter's okra farm. Men are full of double standards as they betray each other. Examples are the earthling and his heavenly companion who were friends. The first to betray the other is the earthling who murders the dog of the heavenly being with the consequent reprisal and murder of the mother of the earthling. Men are snakes. They pretend to be docile and harmless. They go after lofty things and have no moral scruple in sleeping with the wife of a monarch. Unknown to them, the monarch might be looking for ritual objects through his wife. They are trapped because of their illicit affairs with the wife of *Olofin* and their concubine severs their heads and tails in order to conceal their identities.

Women are antelopes who seek dwelling with the forest deity. They are warned to steer clear of the bush as there are traps that could ensnare them. Even when they are strangers in the terrain, they gallivant without caution. A Yoruba tale admonishes men not to marry and take their brides to the cities. The tale of the Antelope and the king of the wood exemplifies this. Antelope (a symbol of a beautiful lady) approaches a man who lives in the city and comes home once in a year. The lady is fascinated by the colourful dresses on the young, vibrant man. She takes the bull by the horn and makes a pass at the man. The man warns her that it would be suicidal to take her to the city because of the fatal traps surrounding the metropolitan environment. He tells her that he is usually cautious when traversing the length and breadth of the city. She agrees to tread with caution. They both leave for the city. While there, the Antelope begins to jump from street to street to savour the bubbling city; she is now fascinated by the city boys and rich dudes. She is no longer governable and becomes trapped in a snare and begins to roar like a lion that she is doomed. *Orunmila* avers that whoever takes a lady to the city will not reap from her. They are eventually trapped.

*Orunmila* is a personification of humanity in general. Like every human being, he is capable of both good and bad; depending on the situation. It is significant to note that the Yoruba society has a category for whatever behaviour may be recognised in individuals at a particular time. This is represented by the symbol of a market and the kind of articles of trade that may be traded: *it is what the market dictates that determines the articles of trade*. Imputed to *Orunmila*, therefore, is the reality of an ugly situation that determines his patience and the desire to have a wife irrespective of the misconduct of his would-be wife. The lesson on patience, and tolerance is brought to the fore here for whoever determines to attain laudable heights, as this is symbolic of the travails of men, and women of substance, and their readiness to accommodate several demeaning situations in order to accomplish their set goals. The sages seem to claim that women and other worldly possessions constitute distractions from the attainments of feats except the right attitude is cultivated. *Orunmila* is the metaphor of an individual who may be capable of patience, frustration, and self defence depending on the situation.

Far from exhibiting negative stereotypes about women is the recognition of the power of regeneration that is latent in them. Procreation, for instance, is a means of engendering continuity, and

women have the capacity to ensure growth, continuity as well as the correspondent annihilation of their male counterparts through sex and manipulation. Sex, for instance, may be instrumental in childbirth, but it is inimical to longevity if the quest for the pleasure in it is not curtailed. It is instructive to know that women have the capacity to withstand whatever sexual exploit may be launched by their male counterparts. This seems an innocent desire, but whatever they receive is geared towards growth while their partners pay dearly for it through power-decimation, loss of energy, and eventual death. *Ogbe Ligun* is probably echoing the philosophical and social thrusts of Yoruba folks about childbirth, and the need to regenerate the land. If men are not goats, they are either lions or snakes and both should be approached with caution.

Some thoughts and ideologies are obscure. They may have been hidden in symbols and allusions and some efforts may be required to unravel their inherent or underlying imports. Such images, codes and signs dot indigenous Yoruba scripts that their meanings are not transparent, but are time and environmentally constrained. In the Yoruba milieu, it is plain that a rough edge may tend marriage that to survive in it is to learn the virtue in tolerance at the beginning, and possible summations about whether the relationship would last or not from the commitments that the women may exhibit in the course of the relationship. The other option left for the husband is to seek divorce when such a relationship may be life-threatening. The women in *Orunmila*'s life are symbols of rebels who negate acceptable societal norms and rules of etiquette. They remain human as no one is infallible. No doubt, the culture contact between the Yoruba and the western worlds may have altered the "Yoruba mode of interrelation, interpersonal, inter societal ... as enshrined in their culture and political system before the assimilation of western ideology and foreign traditions." (Adeleke, 2020: 254).

The Yoruba ideological and cultural space is cohesive in the consideration of some behaviours, practices, and phenomena. The goat, which becomes the name of the wife of *Orunmila*, is a symbol of stubbornness and consequently the name of every newly wedded wife. She is endowed with uncanny capabilities as the water that her husband uses in washing his face, she uses in foreseeing the future. Is it not clear that the wife is wiser than her husband and his assumed superhuman aura? Across cultures, the same belief about the animal may be similar. It is not out of place, therefore, to refer to human beings who may display stubborn tendencies as goats. High-handed folks too may be considered goats in view of their lack of self constraint and inability to accommodate the opinions of others. They take to anger even when intellectual contest might be required to tackle simple filial issues. According to Onigbinde (2020), *Orunmila* may be adjudged right as "in the Kantian view, an action has moral worth only if it is done for the right reason." (196). The goal in both personalities is to get the best of their relationships.

*Ogbe-Suuru* may be considered glorious even in the flimsy treatment of fundamental human realities, for what else is marriage other than the search for the "missing dead" (Campbell, 1988). Marriage according to Campbell is not a fusion of two lovers because marriage is hardly contrived out of love but the desire for relationship. The union may be fashioned originally from a relationship that is devoid of love but time may inject the needed love out of compromise, filial bond, and consideration of the welfare of the children. That explains why relationships that are devoid of children may collapse completely. It is arguable whether the phenomenon that is termed love exists. *Orunmila*'s preoccupation is not the desire for love but relationship, fulfilment of cultural necessity and the quest for regeneration. This truth is salient in everyone; otherwise, many relationships would hardly survive in view of the ugliness permeating the inglorious past of individuals that are involved in the unions.

Marriage, in the Yoruba setting, defines the relevance and humanity of individuals. That explains, for instance, why respect is hardly accorded individuals that are single. The choice of a chief may be based on the ability to have a wife or more. Such individual is considered mature enough to manage a society or group of people. This is because basic qualities are associated with marriage such as tolerance, longsuffering, patience and dynamism and these must be exhibited by leaders. It would

have been pretty difficult, for instance for anyone in the modern society to marry in view of the immorality that characterises the past of individuals that are involved in the relationships but a recipe exists in the Yoruba milieu: “we pretend not to see the faeces beneath the mango in order to pick some to eat”. Herskovits cited in Gershengorn (2004) considers cultural relativism thus: “judgements are based on experience and experience as interpreted by each individual in terms of his own acculturation.” The experience under focus in the cultural milieu is the acceptable recipe for peaceful coexistence. Time is changing and individuals are equally moving away from the centre where morality, virginity and decorum are sacrosanct. The modern era is witnessing a great descent from the moral tempo and individuals are deviating from societal norms and the state remains a mediator and amplifies individual’s rights because the people constitute the state.

Far from ascribing perfection to any of the characters in *Ogbe-Suuru* and the indigenous society is the recognition of the multi dimensional nature of every character in the texts. *Iyawo* who maltreats *Orunmila* at the outset becomes a good wife who learns to respect the sanctity of her marriage. In making value judgement about the treatment of women in the two texts, Onigbinde (2020) becomes a credible referent as he claims that “a sufficient reason for any particular action must implicitly appeal to some sort of general rule all the cases similar to the one at issue” (196). *Orunmila*’s behaviour to his bride may be geared towards concluding that human beings are a bunch of imperfect creatures whose selfish crave may subdue the challenges of the moment. It is from the aforementioned that texts are registers of manners; as they equally spell out recipes for behaviours as well as means through which manners may be regulated.

### Conclusion

The goals in *Ogbe-Suuru* may be considered myopic and chauvinistic when viewed against the background of gender politics. The level of myopic consideration may be considered from the far reaching claims that tend to proclaim women in negative forms as if men are pure and devoid of negative traits. The level of chauvinism may be considered from the fact that society is already considered phallic that suppresses women and reduces them to hewers of wood and drawers of water. Above all, society tends to portray women as second class human beings who are not better than animals and thus the association with goats, antelopes and others. However, this is far from gender bias as the subject matters are serious, glorious and representatives of human inadequacies from which both sexes may not be absolved.

There are male equivalents of *Petebi* and *Iyawo* the promiscuous wives of *Orunmila*. The male equivalents of the promiscuous wives of *Orunmila* are modern parallels that divorce immediately marriages are contracted and new women are found. They claim to be monogamists whereas they keep harems of mistresses. This informs the claim that men are pythons and big rats. They are as deadly as they are dubious. From the point of view of Dutton (1996), therefore, these characters are “curious mirror-image(s) of the individuated “judging spectator” or “reader extraordinary” that are universally present in all climes and tongues and whose traits may match those characters under focus. The texts are far from mocking women but the treatment of the characters is a subtle reference to traits that are present in humanity generally that may lead to value judgements such as the temptation of referring to some neighbours as goats, antelopes and lions.

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- Note: Adesulu Adeniyi, an *Ifa* priest aged 50, who doubles as a farmer, narrates the *Ifa* verses to the researcher.  
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