

Adultery as a Threat to Progressive Structures, Political and Economic Stability in Yorùbá Society

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Abstract

This work focuses on the manifestation of adultery which has been a limitation to the progressive social structure and the economic stability in Yorùbá society. It is established in this study, as a general belief in Yorùbá society, that any person found of perpetual irrational love for women is regarded as a fanatic of iyámòpó (god of women). This fact is, therefore, attested to in oríkì iyámòpó (praise poetry). Hence, this study analysed some of the Yorùbá wise sayings about irrational sex abuse against females which their male counterparts enact. Then, the study employed both social-historical and hermeneutic analyses. The study eventually concluded that adultery is not only a death trap but also an impediment to peace, unity, love, economic and political stability in the society.

Introduction

The concept of adultery is apparently a universal phenomenon among the people of different countries of the world; Yorùbá people are not an exception. It is, thus, a general belief in Yorùbá society that any person found of perpetual irrational love for women is regarded as a fanatic of “iyámòpó” (god of women). Put differently, an iyámòpó is an adulterer. This fact can, accordingly, be attested to in the following iyámòpó praise poetry (oríkì):

*Igbó súúrú deǵó,
Àkàkà obìnrin dọ̀ràn
Ohun tí bàbá ǵẹ̀
Tí kò lẹ̀ fọ̀mọ̀ ǵẹ̀
Àpótí Olódùmarẹ̀ tí kò ní kọ̀kọ̀rọ̀”*

(Small bush becomes legal tussle / Women's fight becomes problematic /
Food that father eats / But cannot give to his son / God's box that has no
lock)

The aforementioned excerpt reveals that unlawful seduction of females by

their male counterparts has been problematic from time immemorial as it is the focus of this study.

Some scholars, as a result, have contributed to the discourse at hand. Among the scholars are Agbájé (2016) who concentrated on a sociocultural study of negative portrayals of masculinity in the Yorùbá oral literature but failed to analyse the evil effects of men in the Yorùbá wise sayings. Also, Ajíbádé (2006) enumerated the social interaction between men and women in Yorùbá society which is making reference to Yorùbá philosophical sayings as a yardstick. Additionally, the work of Anadhi and Jeyaranyan (2002) enumerated masculinity and domestic violence in Tamil Wadu village without making reference to Yorùbá society. Gilbert (2006) based his work on boys becoming men in general and not in Yorùbá society in particular. Besides, Ògúnwálé (1998) analysed the derogation of masculinity in Yorùbá proverbs while Qlófínṣao (2011) examined the presentation of men in Alámò chants and Qbitun without special reference of Yorùbá wise sayings. Moreover, Pinda (2000) based his work on partners in women house emerging masculinities while Agbaje (2009) concentrated on cultural production as a strategy for social sanction in Yorùbá society without reference to the effect of adultery in Yorùbá society.

It is, therefore, important to note that, none of the above writers researched the discourse of this study. Therefore, this work was fully analysed via social-historical and hermeneutic literary theories.

Analysis of the selected Yorùbá wise sayings

This study discusses Yorùbá wise sayings as one of the African weapons/device primarily fashioned out to prevent, expose, caution, teach moral and to punish adultery. The Yorùbá people are the most resourceful of all the people in the possession of such weapons so as to secure marital stability within their community and the society at large. One of their popular wise sayings is: “Bèbòwò kó o tó tokó bọ ọ, nítorí pé ikú n ń bẹ lóbò obìnrin tí n ń pani. (Be cautious of women’s vagina, because at times it is like a death-trap). This Yorùbá saying is used to caution men against adultery and draw the attention of traditional thought system to what is socially unapproved.

Example 1

Wón ní kínni ikú ọkọ rẹ ò gbọdò je

Tó fi n pọmọ ọlómọ kiri?

Ó ní kíni wọ ó fún òun?

Ó ní òun ó gba igba ọkẹ lówọ wọn.

Ìgbà tó gba igba òkè tán,
 Ó ní ikú ọkọ òun ò gbòdò jeku
 Wón ní bó bá jeku ní kọ?
 Ó ní ọwọ ikú a máa wá iróróró iróróró
 Ó ní ikú ọkọ òun ò gbòdò jeja
 Wón ní bó bá jeja ní kọ?
 Ó ní ẹsẹ ikú a máa gbòn iriririririri
 Ó ní ikú ọkọ òun ò gbòdò jeyin pépéyẹ
 Wón ní bó bá jeyin pépéyẹ ní kọ?
 Ó ní ikú a máa bi igòròrò igòròrò
 Ó ní ikú ọkọ òun ò gbòdò jẹlébutẹ
 Wón ní gbogbo ara ikú a máa hù ibùtẹ ibùtẹ
 Wón fún ikú léku,
 Ó jeku tán
 Gbogbo ọwọ ikú ní wá iróróró iróróró
 Wón fún ikú léja,
 Ó jeja tán,
 Gbogbo ẹsẹ ikú ní gbòn iriririririri.
 Wón fún ikú léyin pépéyẹ,
 Ó jeyin pépéyẹ tán,
 Ikú ní bi igòròrò igòròrò
 Wón fún ikú lélébutẹ,
 Ó je lébutẹ tán,
 Gbogbo ara ikú níhù ibùtẹ ibùtẹ
 Ikú wáá yò tẹrẹ,
 Ó wáá figẹ Ẹálẹ;
 Ikú wáá yò tẹrẹ,
 Ó wáá di gbìràmù nílẹ,
 Ó wáá fariwo ta sáále sáále.

(Abúmbólá 1969 pp. 31-32)

(They asked her (Ikú) death, what her husband must not eat / That she
 was killing another people's children. / She asked what they wanted to give
 her, / She said she would collect 200 cowries / After collecting 200 cowries,
 / She said death, her husband must not eat rat. / They asked, supposed

he ate rat, / What would happen. / She said the legs of Ikú would be shaking uncontrollably / She said her husband Ikú must not eat duck egg. / They asked, supposed he ate duck egg / What would happen. / She said Ikú would be vomiting terribly. / She said her husband Ikú, must not eat powdered maize. / They asked, supposed he ate powdered maize, / What would happen. / She said Ikú's body would be decaying. / They gave Ikú rat, / He ate it, / The leg of Ikú was shaking uncontrollably / They gave ikú duck egg / He ate it, / He was vomiting terribly / He ate powdered maize / Ikú's body began to decay / Ikú slipped down / He fell on her chest / Ikú slipped down / He fell down suddenly / He cried out aloud.)

The above myth from Ifá verses shows that Ikú (death) is named a dishonest wife. Ikú was killing other people's children indiscriminately and this made the townspeople to inquire how to conquer him. Ayùnré, one of Ikú's victims in the community went secretly to meet Ikú's wife known as Olójògbòdù to ask the secret behind her husband's power. She revealed the secret behind the taboos about her husband. Ayùnré, having known the secret behind the power of Ikú, acted according to Ikú's wife, Olójògbòdú. This led to the sudden death of Ikú.

As a result, in Yorùbá society, one must be very careful when it comes into the matter of marriage. This is because, if one should make a wrong choice by picking a dishonest wife like Olójògbòdú, the outcome becomes disastrous. This is to say that if one should make a mistake, by engaging a devilish woman and a betrayal of trust as a wife, perhaps sudden death may likely be the end of the man.

Example 2

Another example from Ifá poetry goes thus:

...kí àwọn ọmọ àlẹ mèta tí ó Ẹawo lọ nàà tó dé,

Ọ̀rúnmilà da iyèrosùn

Ó safásí àwọn babaa wọn,

Ó sì pa wọn.

Ó safásí onídàárò

Ó pa á

Ó safásí Ońgòòsùn

Ó pa á

Ó safásí Olùùkòlọ́lọ́

Ó pa òun nàà

(*Abúmbólá 1969 pp 71*)

(Before the arrival of the three bastard sons from / Ifá divinity's journey,
/ Òrúnmilà consulted iyèrosùn, / He made Ifá / charms to their fathers /
And he killed them / He made Ifá charms to Ońdààró / He killed him / He
made Ifá charms to Ońgòósùn / He killed him / He made Ifá charms to
Olùùkòólò / He killed him also)

In the aforementioned myth, Òrúnmilà named a wife known as Òrò. As time went on, Òrúnmilà left her at home for Ifá's journey to Olókun's house which was far away from his town. Along the line, the wife, Òrò, joined a group of adulterous women where she met a man called Ońdàró who toasted her and gave her 100,000 cowries and then impregnated her. After a while, she met another man known as Ońgòósùn who toasted her and gave her 200,000 cowries and impregnated her. After a while, she met another man known as Olùkòólò who later toasted her and gave her the sum of 400,000 cowries and impregnated her. Later, Òrúnmilà came back from his long journey and he met his wife Òrò with three strange children whom she gave birth to when Òrúnmilà was far away. The incidence baffled Òrúnmilà to the extent that he planned to kill the fathers of the strange children. Òrúnmilà executed his plan by using Ifá charms to kill the fathers of the three strange children.

In Yorùbá society, we must be very careful before making love advance to any woman either within or outside our immediate environment. The three strange men namely: Ońdààrò, Ońgòósùn, Olùùkòólò fell in love with Òrúnmilà's wife at different times without knowing or verifying who the husband of the woman was. Unfortunately for them, Òrúnmilà the husband of Òrò with whom they committed adultery was not an easy man. Consequently, a man whoever attempts to commit or engage himself in any unlawful sex adventure will likely end up his life suddenly.

Example 3:

Bí Àgbìgbò tí dé àgbàlá

Tì òun àti obìnrin òdòkọ náà fojú kanra a wọn,

Ní obìnrin náà bá sẹ́jú sí Àgbìgbò

Nígbà tí Àgbìgbò náà o leè faradà á mọ

Ló bá ki obìnrin náà mọlẹ

Wón sì bèrẹ́ sù fẹ́ ara a wọn.

.....

Nígbà tí Oníkòrómẹbí débẹ,

*Tí ó bá àwọn méjèjèì kakakúkú,
Ló bá fi ìbínú yò idà lákò,
Ó sá a mó àwọn méjèjèì
Ó sì gba orí lówọọ wọn.*

(Abímbólá 1969 pp. 111-112)

(When Àgbìgbò reached the backyard / He and the adulterous woman set eyes on each other / And the woman seduced Àgbìgbò / When Àgbìgbò could not bare it anymore / He grabbed the woman / They continued to make love

.....

When Onìkòròmébi got there / He met two of them in the act / He brought out his sword with annoyance / And he beheaded them)

The above myth from Ifá verses, reviewed that, one should be mindful of the ethics of his profession. Onìkòròmébi and Àgbìgbò belonged to the same profession of Ifá divination.

According to the myth, Onìkòròmébi called Àgbìgbò, Ifá-diviner to divine for him on the misbehaviour of his wife. But on getting there, Àgbìgbò betrayed the ethics of their Ifá divination profession by making love to the wife of co-diviner. When Onìkòròmébi met Àgbìgbò and his wife at the back of his own house making love to each other, he got very angry and he decided immediately to do away with both of them by beheading them.

In essence, one should try as much as possible to do away with any illegal love advance which may likely result to one's sudden death as it happened to Àgbìgbò. This incident also marred the marital progress of Ọ̀rúnmilà homes.

Example 4

Ọ̀ṣùpá jéré yèré, awo Oníbarà

Ló dífá fún Oníbarà

N wọn ni kó fi àgbò kan

Ategbòkànlà rúbọ

K'ágbèrè obìnrin má ba kósóràn.

(Yemitan & Ogundele 1979: pp 9-11)

(Bright moonlight, Diviner of Oníbarà / He divined for Oníbarà / They asked him to offer a ram / And 22,000 cowries to make sacrifice / So that an adulterous woman would not lead him into trouble.)

The aforementioned myth from Ifá poetry reviewed that one must not forget about the cultural system and tradition of the society. The king in question Oníbarà, consulted an Ifá oracle accordingly but unfortunately he turned his deaf ear to Ifá oracle's instruction which eventually landed him in disaster. What we are saying in essence is that, Oníbarà was a popular king in Yorùbáland in those days. His diviner told him or warned him not to marry an adulterous woman but he bluntly refused the instruction. He married the woman and the woman told him that she fed on meat alone; Oníbarà began to slaughter all the domestic animals within his palace to feed his new wife when all the domestic animals were exhausted, King Oníbarà had to look elsewhere to get alternative animals. This made him to use power and miraculous means to steal other people's domestic animals within his town. Every night he used to turn into leopard to catch other people's animals, like sheep and goat but unknown to him, the elders in the town called on the hunters and night-guards to look and do away with the leopard that use to kill their domestic animals at night. One day, Oníbarà went out as usual. But, unfortunately he was caught by the night-guards and hunters. In an attempt for Oníbarà to save his live and his dignity, he ran back to his palace. Along the line, he died. When the night-guards and the hunter got that it was their king Oníbarà, Oníbarà was unable to utilize his magical power to turn back fully to human being. Consequently, he eventually died half animal and half human being. This wise saying is telling us that one should avoid excessive love. This led to Oníbarà's death. He died mysteriously because of his irrational love affairs. Besides, Oníbarà was thrown into political disorder.

Example 5

During the Kiriji War of 1826, that is, during internecine war between Èkìtì-parapò and Òyó, there was a powerful administrator called Awópetù, who was sent to Èkìtì community by Aláàfin Òyó to administer the people. This administrator was power drunk to the extent that he used his position to mess up with the women of the Èkìtì people. He did this because he believed that nobody would ever challenge him. One day, he saw a woman who was going to fetch water from a nearby stream near Òkèmèsí-Èkìtì, he attempted to rape the woman. However, the woman escaped narrowly. On getting home, this woman narrated her ordeal to her husband Fábùnmi, one of the warriors in Èkìtì then. Fábùnmi saw this rape attempt on his wife as ridicule on his great integrity in the community.

Consequently, Fábùnmi took up his sword to confront Awópetù, the Òyó administrator. During the argument, Fábùnmi beheaded Awópetù. The incident

not only resulted into the untimely death of Awópètù the womanizer but also eventually led to the beginning of the remarkable war between the Èkìtì-para-pò and the Òyós. In essence, the Òyó administrator used his position to mess up with women indiscriminately which led to his disastrous end. According to Yorùbá proverb which says, “Ohun tí èniyàn bá mò-òn jẹ lájẹjù pípa ní pani” (Whatever one is fond of doing will eventually lead to one’s miserable death). Besides, the above situation led to an unstable economic mess-up in Yorùbáland for good nine years.

Example 6

In the recent past, there was a case of one of the Nigerian heads of state who used his influential position to mess up with women in groups. He did not care about whatever any person might do to challenge or stop him. He forgot the Yorùbá adage which says *Òbọ̀ n̄ jògèdè ó n̄ rẹ̀dìí, òbọ̀ tí gbàgbé pé ohun tó bá dìn pípa níí pani* (Monkey eats banana with great pleasure, the monkey forgets whatever is sweet can lead to death). In essence, the indiscriminate love affairs by the above-named personality in company of group of women led to his mysterious and sudden end. Besides, the Yorùbá people believe that an adulterer or womanizer can meet his Waterloo shamefully not minding his social, religious and political capacity in the society.

Example 7

The Yorùbá people believe that there are two types of death, “*ikú àpasáyé àti ikú àparòrun*” (Death of earth and death to heaven). In Yorùbá society, people believe that one can live as though not on earth and one can die and go away forever. This type of situation usually happens to people in power; that is, those in political power or those with traditional power. For example, in 1968, there was a great rancor between the farmers or commoners in the then Western State of Nigeria and the military government in the same zone. The farmers/commoners had a great and powerful leader who championed the people’s course with the no-nonsense military government on ground then. The group was known as Àgbékòyà. The then military in government tried in vain to arrest and suppress the Àgbékòyà leader known as Tàfà Adéoyè. This man was believed to be traditionally and spiritually equipped that no human being could get him arrested or suppressed. One Yorùbá adage says, “*Tí ọ̀gbọ̀n bá tán nínú, àgbà yóò wa òmíràn dá*” (If wisdom diminished from an elder’s mind, he then looks elsewhere). This proverb made the military government to find other means to get rid of Àgbékòyà leader at all cost. Research findings revealed that the military government continued to find out the area of the man’s interest and eventual-

ly got to know that he loved women. According to a Yorùbá wise saying which goes thus:

Eni tí a wífún tí kò gbó
Eni tí a sòrò fún tí kò gbà
Èjòwó rẹ̀ fún Şèpètèrì
Èjòwó fún obìnrin
Nítorí àwọn nù ikú tí ń pa akọ̀nì”

(He who refuses to hear advice / He who refuses to accept advice / Leave him for Şèpètèrì / Leave him for women / Because they are death that kills heroes)

The aforementioned mercenaries or tactics worked out for the then military government. They sent a harlot to secretly fall in love with Àgbèkòyà leader by all means. Initially, the tactics proved abortive. Still, the woman lived with this powerful man as a wife until she gave birth to a child to him. This child made the powerful man to release all his secret powers and tactics to this new lover. Eventually, this woman contacted the then military governor who sent her on how they could arrest Àgbèkòyà leader. Finally the man was arrested and he was carried away into where they could not locate him. The research reviewed the whereabouts of this powerful man was not known whether he was on earth or otherwise for so many years. Hence, one could conclusively say that too much romance with women could be dangerous at any point in time.

Example 8

Another example was the case of civilian governor in one of the Southwestern States. This civilian governor became almost a terror in the nooks and cranies of the state he governed. The governor used his political power to suppress, victimize and oppress everyone such as kings, chiefs, the rich and the poor and so on that crossed his path. When the people of the state in question were fed up with the barbaric way of ruling the people, they looked elsewhere for solution. The research revealed that, the people got to know that the so-called civilian governor was a great womanizer. Without wasting time, they connected a security woman from another part of the country to befriend the so-called governor. This method worked very well because the security woman played her game neatly and confidently until the so-called governor was arrested at Iḱẹ̀jà Airport on his way to London. Without much ado, the civilian governor in question was eventually removed or impeached by all the members of his State House of Assembly.

The worst situation is that, when they went to arrest him in the governor's

house, he was shamefully smuggled out from the government house by hiding him in the boot of a car. The above is telling us that sexual pleasure and abuse of power can lead to total downfall.

Example 9

The following example rests on the people who often use their profession or wealth to mess up with women anytime, anywhere. In the recent past, there was a case of a popular farmer in one of the Èkìtì popular towns. He was known as a great farmer. He concentrated on planting food crops majorly. The area of the farmer's concentration of farm product usually led to the influx of women customers or buyers of the man's products. Research revealed that, this notorious farmer built a small hut within his farmland where he used to seduce women customers. When the information about this man's attitude reached the people, they planned to curb the situation. One day, one of the women from the nearby villages came to this man's farm to purchase maize from him; this farmer attempted to seduce this strange woman as usual and eventually succeeded. But, unfortunately for the farmer in question, the strange woman's husband had put "mágùn" (don't climb) on her, of which it was unknown to the woman in question.

According to Yorùbá adage which says:

*Ikú tí ń pọdẹ ń bẹ nínú apó,
Ikú tí ń pa àgbẹ ń bẹ lórìn ebè,
Ikú tí ń pa alágbèrè ọkúnrin,
Ní bẹ ni pópótan obinrin"*

(The death that kills hunter is inside sword-sheath / The death that kills farmer is on hips, / The death that kills adulterous man, / Resides in-between women tight)

In essence, the unfortunate farmer somersaulted three times after fun with the woman customer and eventually died immediately. Also, research revealed that the sudden death of the farmer brought an end to his agricultural profession.

Example 10

There was a case of another man, Àlàbá ẹlẹran (Àlàbá the meat seller) in Yorùbá town of the Òyó North. The man was a popular meat seller. But, unknown to many people in the town, he was a secret lover to one of the king's wives in the town. In the Ọba's palace, there was a gateman who was very sincere and loyal to the king. Sometimes, the king travelled for long period of time and entrusted

the security of the palace into the hand of the innocent gateman. The most junior wife of the king was left in the palace but unfortunately this woman got impregnated by Àlàbá ẹ́lẹ́ran unknown to the gateman who was also a close friend to the meat seller. When the king arrived from his journey, he got to know that the young wife he left behind had been impregnated by an unknown person. Later, the king thought within himself that the only person who could commit such act was the gateman he entrusted both the security and the affairs into his hand. The Oba planned secretly to get rid of the gateman for impregnating the young wife. The Oba prepared (àrokò) a traditional secret message and gave it to the gateman to hand it over to another king in a far away town. The message read that the person who brought this message should be beheaded and the head should be put in the calabash which the àrokò was kept. The gateman travelled with àrokò to deliver message and on getting to the destination of the àrokò the gateman met his old friend on the entrance of the gate. They greeted each other carefully and he took his friend Àlàbá ẹ́lẹ́ran to the king. Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran joyfully and sincerely wished to do favour to the gateman by helping the gateman deliver the secret message to the Oba. The gateman insisted that he would deliver the message by himself to ensure the message got delivered. After much persuasion, the gateman allowed his friend Àlàbá to deliver the message and he waited at the entrance of the palace. When Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran delivered the message to the king and the calabash was opened. The oba saw the àrokò inside and the meaning read that the person who brought this àrokò should be beheaded and the head be put in the calabash to be sent back; that is, the master of the gateman. The king did not waste much time, he asked one of the messengers to the backyard and cut his head.

When the deed was done, and Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran's head was neatly parked in the calabash and the king was looking for through whom the message would be delivered, the messenger who beheaded Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran said that Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran came in company with a friend who waited outside the gate and the calabash was sent back by the innocent gateman to his master (king). When the gateman got home, the king who sent him on an errand was surprised as he opened the calabash and saw that Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran's head was in the calabash. This made the king to call the junior wife who exactly the owner of the pregnancy she carried was. Then, the wife confessed that it was Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran.

What we are saying in essence is that eventually Àlàbá Ẹ́lẹ́ran reaped the fruits of his adulterous life by ending up with a mysterious death. Not only that, his profession as a butcher ended abruptly and left his family who depended on him in problems.

Conclusion

This study analysed some of the Yorùbá wise sayings about irrational sex abuse against females which their male counterparts enact. Both socio-historical and hermeneutic theories were utilized for analysis. And, it was discovered that the penalty, naturally attached to this criminal offence is of two types as follows: *ikú apasáyé àti ikúàpasórun* (death on earth and death to heaven). Also, it is established in this study that some of the crimes were committed as a result of using undue influence such as professional, career, social and political placements in the society. This study concluded that whoever involves in this immoral act can never escape nemesis as it has been also well established in the previous scholarly studies. Besides, the current study established that adultery has been a limitation to the progressive social structure and the economic stability in the Yorùbá society. Therefore, adultery is not only a death trap but also an impediment to peace, unity, love, economic and political stability in the society.

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