

**“TRUTH FIGHTERS WITH NO VESTMENTS”: RELIGION, FUMILAYO
RANSOME-KUTI AND WOMEN’S RESISTANCE IN ÈGBÁ LAND, 1930-1950**

by

Olorunfemi Dada

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Olorunfemi Dada

Approved: _____
Wunyabari O. Maloba, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: _____
Kimberly D. Blockett, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of Africana Studies

Approved: _____
Caleb Everett, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences

Approved: _____
Louis F. Rossi, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education and
Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the religio-historical dimension of Ègbá women's resistance to colonialism, 1930-1950. Studies have considered the Ègbá women's resistance led by Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti. However, little consideration has been given to the religious dimension of the Ègbá women's resistance. Primary and secondary sources affirm that women were active in Yorùbá public spaces in the pre-colonial period. However, during the colonial period, women were relegated, made passive, and unrepresented, and their welfare was neglected and oppressed by the colonizer and traditional ruler in Ègbá land. This thesis uses Terence Ranger's theory of the invention of traditions to study how colonial exploitative and rigid traditions were invented, the impact of the invented traditions on Ègbá women, and Ègbá women's resistance against the imposition of taxes and discrimination. Theory of African womanism by Chiwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and concept of prophethood by Pious Abioje was also employed to argue that African Traditional Religion and culture were potent agencies in the Ègbá women's resistance, and women were active agitators against colonialism in Nigeria. This study contributes to research on African Traditional Religion and women's role in resisting colonialism.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The history and experiences of Ègbá women during the colonial period in Ègbá land center on the invention of traditions. To put it another way, the oppressive experiences of Ègbá women during the colonial era were caused by the colonizer through the concept of the invention of traditions, which were re-invented by the privileged colonized. There was a clear difference in women's experience between the pre-colonial and colonial periods. African Women enjoyed high-level autonomy, flexibility, representation, inclusion, pluralism, and multiple identities during the pre-colonial period.

In contrast, the colonization of Africa brought about systemic "rigidities of invented traditions."¹ Terence Ranger, the proponent of the theory of invention of traditions in colonial Africa, noted that "for Africa, the divide with the past was especially clear, corresponding as it did to the cleavage between pre-colonial and colonial societies."² The differences occurred, according to him, as a result of "the importation of European neo-traditional inventions of identity - the regiment, the boarding school, the re-feudalized country house - and the inclusion of Africans within them as subordinate but also by systematic invention of

¹ Terence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa*, in Terence, Ranger & O. Vaughan (eds.), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa*: London: Macmillan, 1993. 63.

² Ibid.

African traditions - ethnicity, customary law, 'traditional' religion"³ In the case of Nigeria (see appendix A), British colonial authority invented African traditions for Africans based on what they thought were African traditions.⁴ The discontinuity existed because the colonizer/inventor was not an insider, and the motive of the outsider and some insiders who lived by the European ideology was to maximize profit.

The term "invention of tradition" expresses how colonialism disrupts African culture and reveals the process and agency behind this disruption. The process was indirect, pretentious, and psychological in terms of process. It is indirect and pretentious, as the invention was said to be a continuity of African traditions, but it was strange to Africans. The unfamiliar invention of traditions made women passive actors in African communities and led them into resistance to oppression and exploitation. It is psychological because it makes Africans feel inferior and obey the command and controlling power of the inventor.⁵ It created a sense of having a colonizer and colonized, and White and Black, but the aspect of colonization of the mind played a more critical role than the skin color.⁶ The agencies for inventing traditions in colonial Africa include colonial administrators, African traditional leaders, indigenous elite, missionaries, European anthropologists and ethnographers, and capitalists. To Eric Hobsbawm's description, the invention of traditions is "a set of

³ Ibid.

⁴ Terence Ranger. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." in *The Invention of Tradition*. ed., Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge University Press, 2002). 212.

⁵ Ibid, 211.

⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Grove Weidenfeld, 1963); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (Grove Press, 2008); Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and Colonized*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."⁷ However, the continuity with the historical past is primarily fictional.⁸ The traditions were "invented, constructed and formally instituted" rapidly.⁹ Invented traditions in colonial Africa were social constructions that were fabricated versions of African culture.

Ranger explained the invention of traditions as tools for manipulating Africans and justifying colonial actor's control as "natural and undisputed masters of vast numbers of Africans" ... and providing models of subservience into which it was sometimes possible to draw Africans."¹⁰ The colonizer and all its agents imposed European traditions of social hierarchies, classism, and gender oppression to reinforce their authority over Africans. Flowing with Ranger's thoughts, Maloba noted that the colonizer aimed at protecting, conserving, and continuing their presence as an undisputable "lord and master" of Africa.¹¹ The words "lord" and "master" are peculiar to the invented traditions because, according to Nandy, colonialism is "a manly or husbandly or lordly prerogative."¹² Hence, the British

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*. ed., Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge University Press, 2002),1.

⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁹ Ibid, 1.

¹⁰ Terence Ranger. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." ... 211; Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Traditions in Colonial Africa," in *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, 2nd ed., (eds.), Roy Richard Grier, Stephen C. Lubkemann, and Christopher B. Steiner, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 450-451.

¹¹ W. O. Maloba, *African Women in Revolution*, (African World Press, 2007), 5.

¹² Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 5.

colonial authority in Nigeria, for instance, was the man or husband, while Nigerians under their control were the women or wives. In the invented traditions, as the Bible justifies, women are controlled by their husbands within the homes and religious spaces (Ephesians 5:22-25; I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Timothy 2:11-12).¹³ European missionaries used these Christian scriptural passages to justify sexism and the exclusion of women in public religious spaces.

Under colonialism, women suffered double effects of traditional invention. The colonizer perpetrated the first effect, and the traditional leaders did the second through the reinvention of European traditions. Also, Oyeronke Oyewumi noted that "African females were colonized by Europeans as Africans and as African women."¹⁴ This means that "they were dominated, exploited, and inferiorized as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorized and marginalized as African women."¹⁵ Just as they existed in Britain, women were excluded from colonial Africa's political scene and corridor of power.¹⁶ The

¹³ "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (Ephesians 5:22-25 Revised Standard Version); "The women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." (I Corinthians 14:34-35 Revised Standard Version); "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. ¹² I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent." (I Timothy 2:11-12, Revised Standard Version).

¹⁴ Oyeronke Oyewumi. *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 122.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 123.

impact of the invented traditions on African women was oppressive. Maloba expressed it thus:

European invention of African traditions had a decisive and long-lasting impact on the status of women in colonial (and postcolonial) African societies. There was "a conscious determination on the part of the colonial authorities to 'reestablish' order and security and a sense of community by means of defining and enforcing 'tradition.' In almost every case, these efforts toward the definition of tradition led to the systematic demotion in the status of women which, in turn, seriously limited their opportunities for social advancement... Thus, 'men's dominance in society, that is, their control over religious beliefs and political organization' was expressed even more clearly in colonial invented custom than it had ever been before. Moreover, African men were quite prepared to appeal to the colonial authority to enforce 'custom' upon women once it had been defined."¹⁷

African elites and traditional leaders like Aláké of Ègbá re-invented European traditions to acquire more power. In the case of Aláké of Ègbá, this was done by his collaboration with the British colonizers to exploit women through unfair taxation and seizure of market goods. The collaboration was employed to legitimize the Africanness of the invented traditions, but the tradition was still colonially constructed. The re-inventors of the traditions got a chance to enter "into the colonial world, though almost in all cases it was entry into the subordinate part of a man/master relationship."¹⁸ Africans who re-invented European traditions became subordinate to colonial authority and conflicted with other Africans, such as Fúnmiláyò, who were anti-colonialists. The colonists used the re-inventors of the tradition to suppress resistance against the colonization of Africa.

The invention of traditions in colonial Africa is dynamic and complex and was

¹⁷ W. O. Maloba, *African Women in Revolution*, 6-7.

¹⁸ Terence Ranger. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." ... 227.

constantly studied.¹⁹ It is complex and dynamic because the invented tradition includes present practices. Isiko and Isabirye noted that Ranger and Hobsbawm's invention of traditions created a paradigm shift in the theory's earlier conception of it as static and unchanging.²⁰ The past and its historical elements were reinterpreted to suit present needs, but historical elements of the past were amended and some removed.²¹ Internal and external forces determine the current traditions in the communities. The external forces played a more mono-crucial role in constructing a new tradition during the colonial period in Africa. Spear argued that the traditions were invented, frequently reinterpreted, and reconstructed by the colonizers and colonized to meet every immediate need of the African communities.²² Spear was right to state that traditions emerged and were adaptable over time.²³ However, he needs to rethink doubting the invention of traditions by the colonizers for their interest. Taking power and sovereignty from Africans and exercising control over them was the height of the invention. It is not viable for him to argue that the Europeans did not create a new tradition because he did not compare the pre-colonial structures with the colonial structures in Africa. He claimed that Europeans employed the existing pre-colonial elements and rulers to invent the

¹⁹ Alexander Paul Isiko and Joy Mukisa Isabirye, "Fluidity and Hybridity of Customary Marriage Traditions in Contemporary Uganda," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2023): 359-360.

²⁰ Ibid, 359.

²¹ Ibid, 360.

²² Thomas Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *The Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003): 26-27.

²³ Ibid

traditions.²⁴ Hence, he asserted that Ranger's thoughts on the invention of traditions are limited.

In contrast, the new tradition was a pervasion of African tradition. Most traditional rulers had no absolute power to make decisions solely due to community checks and balances, but the colonizers vented absolute power over the leaders. Giving absolute power to the kings relegated the officials of many chiefs, especially political positions held by women, corrupted kings, and made African communities authoritarian societies. Kings also became subject to colonial authority and colonial system created confusion and conflict within African political structures.²⁵ He argued that the historical past was debated repeatedly and actively reinterpreted by the colonizer and Africans as an agency for the invention.²⁶ However, it is surprising to talk about a debate taking place where the colonizers have no legitimacy. Europeans were not legitimate occupiers of African land. Albert Memmi called the colonizers an "illegitimately privileged" or "usurper" who used the invented traditions to legitimize inequality and oppression.²⁷ This is the point Maloba noted as the cruelty and inhumanity of colonialism.²⁸ The debate and negotiation were never based on equality and friendship but on oppressor and oppressed.²⁹ Africans were the oppressed, while the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Sunday Abraham Ogunode, *Kingship and Power Politics in Akokoland, 1900-1999* (PhD thesis, University of Ibadan, 2021), ii.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and Colonized ...*9.

²⁸ W. O. Maloba, *African Women in Revolution*, 7.

²⁹ Ibid.

European colonizers were the oppressors. Spear's argument on the debate between Africans and Europeans was contradictory in the light of having Europeans and Christian missionaries demonized and condemned almost everything about Africa. Adu Boahen asserted that the colonizers, through the agency of White missionaries, tagged African culture, religion, norms, clothes, language, political, social, and marriage systems as primitive.³⁰ The colonizer's exploitative and ethnocentric act, Igboin wrote, was placed and done on African institutions to make its European institution superior to that of Africa.³¹ This method was applied on African Traditional Religion.

African Traditional Religion was misconstrued as ancestor worship, superstition, magic or fetishism, animism, or paganism.³² In his book *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Mbiti stated that early European scholars denied African religiosity, spirituality, and culture.³³ He noted that "one of the dominating attitudes in this early period was the assumption that African beliefs, cultural characteristics, and even foods, were all borrowed from the outside world."³⁴ Later, Awolalu and Dopamu added that, as it was difficult to deny the existence of a belief system in Africa before the advent of Europeans in Africa, these scholars came up with a fabricated idea that Africans have "some faint idea of

³⁰ A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 107.

³¹ Benson O. Igboin, "Colonialism and African Cultural Values," *African Journal of History and Culture* 3, no. 6 (July 2011): 101, <http://www.academicjournals.org/ajhc>.

³² John, S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1978). 16-18.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 6.

knowledge of God."³⁵ African religion was tagged outdated and primitive, but the involvement of Yorùbá religion as a weapon of resistance against colonialism is a proved that Yorùbá religion is not a primitive and obsolete religion.

Prior to the resistance, women were heavily oppressed under the invented traditions. The colonizers trampled on their welfare and rights. Women were discriminated against and made to become passive members of African communities. Ranger's theory of the invention of traditions in colonial Africa mirrors the history and experiences of Ègbá women during the colonial period in Ègbá land. It was employed to show the source of Ègbá women's oppression. This study used Ranger's thoughts on the invention of traditions in colonial Africa to assert that (i) against the gender inequality, oppression, and discrimination promoted by colonialism, women were actively resistant to the colonization of Ègbá land; (ii) and religion played a crucial role in resisting colonialism in Ègbá land.

It is essential to study the religious involvement in the Ègbá women's resistance because Africans are "notoriously religious," and it is difficult to find an African without a religious system or belief system.³⁶ Furthermore, according to John Mbiti, "religion permeates all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it" because it is the "strongest element in the traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned."³⁷ Mbiti positioned religion as an significant variable that could influence and be influenced by other

³⁵ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu. *West African Traditional Religion*. (Macmillan Publishers, 2005). 13.

³⁶ John, S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. 2nd ed. (Heinemann, 1969). 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

variables such as politics, gender, education, and economics in African communities. Also, Olupona argued that religion was integrated into Africans' daily, private, and public lives, and the sacred and secular spaces influence each other for a holistic society.³⁸ Olupona's thought aligns with Mbiti's position, revealing the value and significance of religion in Africa, 1930-1950.

Considering the position of women in Yorùbá land and the role religions played in the Ègbá women's resistance led by Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti, this study examines the place of religion in the Ègbá women's resistance against colonialism in the Ègbá land from the lens of Terence Ranger's theory of invention of traditions in colonial Africa, Abioje's idea on prophethood, and African womanism by Chiwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. The thesis employed historical and hermeneutical approaches to present archival materials and theological data. This study argues that Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti and Ègbá Women strategically used Indigenous religion and cultural tradition as tools to resist colonialism and assert women's roles in traditional religious spaces and Nigerian culture.

³⁸ Olupona, Jacob K. *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford University Press, 2014). 1.

Chapter 2

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

The placement of the burden of taxation on women and the oppression of women forms the bases of Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti's activism. The burden of taxation, the oppression of women, and religious discrimination of African traditional religion, amongst others, are three critical negative impacts of colonialism in Nigeria. The British colonial rulers imposed taxes on Nigerians to maintain the expansion of capitalism and exploitation of Nigeria, enjoyment of British citizens, and "for the upkeep of the governor and police who oppressed them."³⁹ It was done to make Nigerians responsible for the finances of the British administration of Nigeria because the colonizer saw colonialism as a lottery given to Nigerians.

Also, the British colonial rulers viewed the imposition of taxes on Nigerians during the colonial period as a tool for testing imperial control and possessive power. As noted by Toyin Falola, this is evident in the statement of Goldsmith, the lieutenant governor of northern Nigeria to Lord Lugard, which affirmed that "no native tribe, I am convinced, really appreciates that it is under control until the people pay taxes: so long as the people can evade taxes, they are under the impression that they have been able to resist conquest successfully."⁴⁰ Therefore, taxation is interwoven with power and control, but there is more

³⁹ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. (Verso, 2018). 196-197.

⁴⁰ Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*. (Indiana University Press, 2009). 83.

to this. The British colonizers imposed direct taxes on their African colonies to shift the cost of World Wars to their subjects.

The imposition of direct taxes increased as the wars caused economic imbalance and financial depression, placing a heavy burden on the British economy. The British colonial office demanded that their representatives in the colonies generate more revenue through taxes to cover the cost of war and sustain the British Empire.⁴¹ Apart from exploiting raw materials and demanding hard labor from people, direct taxes such as poll and hut taxes were forcefully collected from Nigerians. Under poll taxes, the material assets of people living in an area are calculated to determine the amount individuals pay as tax.⁴² The British "calculated the gross income of a village based on a crude determination of harvests, prices in produce markets, and the value of livestock."⁴³ This tax was unfair to poor farmers, who paid the same amount as wealthy farmers. Most poor farmers sell their goods to pay taxes.⁴⁴ Also, paying taxes on huts where Africans dwelled was strange to Africans and created an economic burden on each household income. In Sierra Leone, for instance, ten shillings were paid by homes with four or more rooms, while homes with three or fewer rooms paid five shillings.⁴⁵ These taxes were burdensome, inequitable, and unfair that a wealthy farmer, for instance, paid the same tax as

⁴¹ Ward, Daisy. "World War I and the Rise of Direct Taxation in Colonial Africa." Accessed November 15, 2024. <https://priceschool.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ward.pdf>. Also, see, Gardner, Leigh. *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British imperialism*. (Oxford University Press, 2012). 1-14.

⁴² Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*. 81-82

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Takehiko Ochiai, "In a Grove? Sierra Leone's 1898 Hut Tax War Reconsidered." *Asian Journal of African Studies* 41 (2017): 64.

poor farmers. Further, British colonizers did not only impose heavy taxes to cover war expenses but also to use the money generated from taxes for post-war reconstruction. The imposition of taxes connoted British their ability to exercise authority over the colonies. Also, it represents a way of making the colonies pay for and subscribe to the services the colonizers rendered to the Africans. It stands for the colonies' contribution to the growth and sustainability of the British Empire. The imposition of taxes and other colonial exploitative measures, such as forced labor, caused the Adubi War or Ègbá Uprising. The war was fought from June 1918 to July 1918.⁴⁶ The uprising of men and women was suppressed through British military weapons of firepower. After the war, the British colonial rulers weakened the Ègbá United Government as the Indigenous leadership body lost autonomy, and the direct taxes were temporarily suspended. Still, the aftermath of the resistance was the shifting of the tax burden on women in the market. Market women were exclusively exploited and oppressed through the burden of taxes. They were forced to pay flat-rate taxes and water rates.

British colonial administrators shifted attention to market women. They avoided men and Ègbá traditional rulers (who the colonizers believed were the only gender active during the Adubi War) because they (colonizers) saw women as being weak, voiceless, powerless, and objects of oppression.⁴⁷ The colonizers did not recognize the fact that women played supportive roles during the war by supplying men with food and offering moral support, so women played an indirect role during the war.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, market

⁴⁶ Oladipo, Yemitan, *Adubi War: A Saga of Ègbá and British Administrations*. (John Archers Publishers, 1998). 15-24.

⁴⁷ "Fúnmiláyò Ransom Kutí." YouTube video. 44:06-1:23:00.

⁴⁸ Osuntokun Akinjide. "The Adubi War of 1918: A Study in Resistance to British Colonial Rule in Nigeria." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1970): 477–490.

taxes were levied on market goods and activities, which made trading and life miserable for women in Ègbá land in the 1920-1930s, leading to psychological, economic and social unrest among women. Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti (October 25, 1990- April 13, 1978) was in the market to visit one the mothers of her student who could not come to school and witnessed how the colonial police officers harassed market women and seized and destroyed the goods of those who could not pay the high amount of taxes. In response to this unpleasant incident, she visited the king and the representative of the colonial governor, but her visits were not appreciated.

She was not given an audience even by the traditional rulers because they operated under the British "invented traditions" theory that determines the relationship between the leader and the citizens.⁴⁹ The Ègbá traditional ruler worked for the colonizer's profit at his people's expense. His loyalty was to the colonizer, not to his citizens. The invented tradition made the Ègbá traditional rulers answerable and loyal to the British colonial rulers rather than their people. The British invented traditions were adopted from the British monarchical system and used by the British colonial administrators in Nigeria to gain command and control over Nigerians. This tradition made women subordinate to men in Yorùbá communities where women, in the pre-colonial period, were "integrally incorporated into the economic and socio-political structure" in Yorùbá land.⁵⁰ Women also play active roles in Yorùbá traditional religions as priestesses, queens, community organizers, and revolutionists, and Yorùbá communities are both patrilineal and matrilineal.

⁴⁹ Terence Ranger. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." ... 221.

⁵⁰ Cheryl, Jeffries Johnson, *Nigerian Women, and British Colonialism: The Yorùbá Example with Selected Biographies*. (A Ph.D Diss., Northwestern University, 1978). 10.

Scholars on Yorùbá history, religion, politics and culture agree that women have a pride of place in Yorùbá pre-colonial period. For instance, Biodun Adediran and Olukoya Ogen stated that Ife art features women in leadership to support the claim of matrilineal in Yorùbá land.⁵¹ John Mbiti also speaks of women as sacrifices during worship, offering sacrifice to God, acting as medicine women, diviners, and traditional doctors. They are pictured as fervent people offering prayers for children, husbands, families, and communities.⁵² However, colonialism created gender division to the point that men were not speaking for women, and women had to fight their battles themselves, which was contrary to African communalism, collectiveness and solidarity. Left with no other option, Fúnmiláyò organized the women's fight against oppression through the Ègbá Women's Union. Women protested as a form of resistance to British colonial unfair flat taxes and market taxes, which included payment of water taxes for market women. Women led by Fúnmiláyò made the front space of the king's palace the battlefield.

The battle of resisting oppression from the colonizers was not an easy one, as there was counter-resistance to women's protests. The colonizers and traditional rulers employed verbal and military threats to suppress Ègbá women's resistance against oppression. Many women were beaten, brutalized, and wounded, including Fúnmiláyò, during the protest. Women re-converged to continue the protest with protest songs and words that have religious tones. They invited women from other Yorùbá cities to join the protest. The Ègbá

⁵¹ Biodun, Adediran and Olukoya, Ogen. "Women, Rituals and Politics of Pre-Colonial Yorùbá land." In *Shaping our Struggles: Nigeria Women in History, Culture and Social Change*. (eds.) Obioma, Nnaemeka and Chima, J. Korieh, (Africa World Press, 2010). 146.

⁵² John, S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969). 60, 62, 64.

women's resistance made the front page of national newspapers in Nigeria (see Appendix B). The British colonizers mounted pressure on Ègbá traditional rulers to address and curtail their women.⁵³ Ègbá traditional rulers used the powerful agencies of the Ògbóni and Òrò cults (two Yorùbá religious secret cults reserved for men, and Ògbóni is called the legislature while Òrò is the executive arm of Ogoni⁵⁴).

In Yorùbá land, it is a taboo for women to watch or see the ritual procession of Òrò.⁵⁵ Still, the Òrò festival cannot be held without the pre-festival ritual that must be performed by a woman called *Iya 'lòrò*, meaning a mother in charge of Òrò. Fúnmiláyò and other women involved in the protest were familiar with and prepared for any attempts to use Ògbóni and Òrò against them. She was a preacher and advocated for the recognition of African traditional religion. The film made in her name shows her arguing against her father-in-law, who was a Reverend and used to condemn African traditional religion.⁵⁶ She said that African ancestors knew God and were properly cultured before the coming of White missionaries and that Yorùbá religion has the potency to lead human beings to salvation. Being equipped with this religious knowledge, women exposed their nude breast as a form of resistance when the Ògbóni and Òrò cults came out to attack them. The cults ran back, and the king was dethroned. This research argues that women's nudity is a powerful tool for women's resistance, and its usage by Ègbá women created a connection between Wangari Maathai's activism and Fúnmiláyò's activism.

⁵³*The Nigerian Daily Times*, "Ègbá Council Reaffirms Decision: Taxation of Women must continue." December 15, 1947, Front page.

⁵⁴ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu. 249-251.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 250-251.

⁵⁶ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," 1:01-1:06.

In the Ègbá women's resistance, the use of Yorùbá Religion as a weapon for resistance and women as agitators against colonial rule had not been considerably studied. This study examines the involvement of religion in the resistance led by Fúnmiláyò and how that made her and other women religious leaders by practice. This thesis examines religion's role in Fúnmiláyò and Ègbá women's resistance against colonial and Ègbá traditional rulers' oppressive tax policies. This study states that religion is an essential agency, variable, and tool through which women were mobilized, re-mobilized, empowered, and re-empowered as they stood in solidarity and resisted the British colonizers and their subjects' exploitation of women in Abẹ̀òkútá.

Research Questions

This thesis answers the following questions: (i) How did religion shape the Ègbá women's resistance led by Fúnmiláyò? (ii) How did the Ègbá traditional rulers use religion as a tool for silencing the Ègbá women? (iii) What was Fúnmiláyò's view on indigenous and Western religion? (iv) What were the religious strategies and practices used by Ègbá women to ensure solidarity and resist oppression? (v) How did women's resistance impact gender and religious liberation in Nigeria?

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to state that women are not passive actors in the struggle against colonialism and that Yorùbá religion and culture are the agencies for the expression of women's power in the face of oppression and gender disparity in Ègbá land. This research examines the roles of religion in the Ègbá women's revolt. Religion, as Hassan Kukah

noted, was used as a double-edged sword.⁵⁷ The colonizers and traditional chiefs used religion to perpetuate the exploitation of women. Meanwhile, Ègbá women employed religion constructively to liberate the Ègbá land. Women were liberated from men's domination and exploitation from colonialism. This study explains how colonizers and traditional rulers employed colonialism and religion to oppress and silence Ègbá women. This research also provides views on Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti's views on African traditional religion and Western religion. The study offers insights into Ègbá women's resistance strategies. This thesis also states how the Ègbá women's revolt could impact gender and religious freedom in contemporary times.

Significance of the Study

The Western invention of hierarchy, classism, the inferiority of women, discrimination, and oppression of the less privileged are still active in Nigeria. It finds expression even in modern times because the traditions invented by the colonizer were re-invented by indigenous leaders who were devoted to the empire and ideologies.⁵⁸ Hence, some African traditional leaders operate and rule their subjects with the principles of mental colonialism. This study reveals how women have been under-rated, challenged, and overcome oppression. This study is relevant in Africana studies as it could serve as a template for present and future resistance or revolt against oppression. Black women and communities can also learn and employ the strategies Fúnmiláyò and Ègbá women used. This work also significantly re-examines Fúnmiláyò and Ègbá Women's resistance within the framework of religion,

⁵⁷ Matthew Hassan Kukah. "The Weaponization of Religious Identity: A view from Nigeria." *Premium Times*. November 3, 2022. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/563670-the-weaponisation-of-religious-identity-a-view-from-nigeria-by-matthew-hassan-kukah.html>.

⁵⁸ Terence, Ranger. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." 252-260.

gender, politics, and economics. Including the religious dimensions of the history and activism of Fúnmiláyò and Ègbá women's resistance further makes this study interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, comprehensive, and holistic. This study is significant as gender discrimination still manifests in contemporary Nigerian society. Nigeria has the lowest rate of women entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigerian women were systemically forced into low-skilled labor, casual, informal, and low-paid jobs.⁵⁹ In politics, women only had 3.9% of seats in parliament in February 2024.⁶⁰ Women make up 56% of the labor force, while men make up 80%, which means men are first and preferably considered for employment before women.⁶¹ Also, women earn 45% less than men working in the same capacity.⁶² It contributes to knowledge by (i) asserting the understanding of African womanist resistance, collectivity, and community well-being; (ii) expanding the place of Yorùbá religion in resisting the excesses of colonialism; (iii) re-establishing women as political actors and agents of anti-colonial objectives in Nigeria; and (iv) stating activists as religious leaders by fighting for justice and liberation of the oppressed.

⁵⁹ Oyeronke, Olademo. "Equality of Genders is Progress for all." In *Religion and Human Capital Development, Essays in honor of Professor Yasir Anjola Quadri*, ed. Y. O Imam *et al.* (Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, 2017). 180.

⁶⁰ United Nations Women. "Nigeria." Accessed January 10, 2025. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/nigeria#:~:text=As%20of%20February%202024%2C%20only,in%20the%20previous%2012%20months>.

⁶¹ Nkechi Ilochi-Kanny, "Women's Month; Accelerating Gender Equality," *ActionAid Nigeria*, March 13, 2024. Accessed March 26, 2025, <https://nigeria.actionaid.org/news/2024/press-statement-womens-month-accelerating-gender-equality>.

⁶² Ibid

Research Methodology

This historical and theological study periodizes from 1930 to 1950. Though the revolt occurred from 1946 to 1948, this study focuses on 1930 to 1950 to examine the formative period of Fúnmiláyò's activism. She began community organizing before the 1930s, but the 1930s are significant because the Abéòkútá Ladies Club was established in 1932 as a charitable organization, which became an activist group in 1944.⁶³ This work used primary and secondary materials. The primary data for this research was gathered from the Kuti Museum in Abéòkútá and Morris Library, University of Delaware. The primary materials used include the YouTube biographical film of Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti and newspapers such as *Daily Times* and *The Nigerian Daily Times*.

This study also employed a hermeneutic approach to interpreting religious texts and views. One theological view is Abioje's idea of the critical prophet, which was utilized to assert that Fúnmiláyò and Ègbá women functioned as religious leaders by standing and fighting for justice. This study recognizes that Fúnmiláyò (meaning, God gives me joy) Ransome-Kuti is not a trained church pastor or prophetess or reverend but based on Pius Abioje's idea of critical prophet, which is in conversation with the patterns of Israelite Prophets and Yorùbá diviners as people who revealed and stood for the truth against oppression and manipulation and impact their communities, leading to liberation.⁶⁴ Abioje sees every truth fighter, liberator, revolutionist, and community organizer as a Prophet or critical

⁶³ "Purple Hibiscus Research: Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," Accessed February 10, 2025. https://webbschool.libguides.com/PurpleHibiscusResearch2021/Fúnmiláyò_Ransome-Kuti.

⁶⁴Abioje, Pius. "Christian Prophets and other Prophets in Nigeria" The 167th Inaugural Lecture. (The Library and Publications Committee, University of Ilorin, 2017). 35-37.

prophet.⁶⁵ This study also acknowledges that although she is not a trained religious specialist and has no vestments, she is a religious, political, and economic truth fighter. This theory applies to her because she led women in the liberation struggle against men's domination, Western and religious manipulation and exploitation, misuse of natural elements, burden taxation on women, and economic exploitation of women, and has a continuous legacy of resistance against oppression in her children (for instance, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the famous Afrobeat musician). Related to this is James Cone's expression of the involvement of action in faith, showing concern for the oppressed as proof of authentic theology and belief in Jesus Christ.⁶⁶ Jesus was with the oppressed, standing and fighting for their liberation.⁶⁷ So, getting involved in the struggle for liberation means true theology, and Fúnmiláyò as a true Black theologian by action or practice.

Also, Chiwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's thoughts on African womanism are relevant to this study because they address the issues of culture, colonialism, race, harmonious relationship between men and women, and economic oppression regarding the state of Black women.⁶⁸ These various aspects covered in her writing made her thought inclusive and holistic for African women. Her thoughts defined Black women's experiences as not monolithic; that is, the experience of women in the diaspora is quite different from the experience of women in Africa. She noted that White feminist literature concentrates on arguing

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ James, Cone. *God of the Oppressed*. (Orbis Books, 1975). 134-136.

⁶⁷ James, H. Cone. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970). 197-205.

⁶⁸ Chikwenye, Okonjo Ogunyemi. "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English." *Signs*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 63-80.

against sexism and patriarchy. Between 1997 and 1998, she stopped using the term Black womanism and adopted African womanism.⁶⁹ African womanism scholars' focus is diversified and includes colonialism, race, patriarchy, economic oppression, sexism, race, and culture. She defined Black womanism thus,

Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a "brother" or a "sister" or a "father" or a "mother" to the other. This philosophy has a mandalic core: its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative endings of womanist novels. Black American female writers share with black males the heritage of the blues, whose spiritual dynamics ensure equilibrium in a turbulent world—perhaps because, as Stephen Henderson points out, there is a connection between the blues and the capacity to experience hope. The blues have had a tremendous impact on the Afro-American womanist novel, and, in contrast to feminist novels, most Afro-American womanist novels, culture-oriented as they are, abound in hope.⁷⁰

Fúnmiláyò, with her community empowerment activities and struggles against colonialism and men's domination, fit into the above description of Africana womanism. In some ways, her discourse on Africana womanism relates to Alice Walker's thoughts on applying womanism in the sense of metamorphosis, denoting how girls grow, "discover self," "recover self," and "define self" after a series of unpleasant experiences. She further explained that a "young girl inherits womanism after a traumatic event such as menarche or after an epiphany, or as a result of the experience of racism, rape, death in the family, or sudden responsibility."⁷¹ Enduring or overcoming these challenges made girls creatively grow beyond "self" to adult

⁶⁹ Layli, Maparyan. *The Womanist Idea*. (Routledge, 2012). 24

⁷⁰ Ibid 72.

⁷¹ Ibid.

womanists.⁷² According to Layli Maparyan, after Ogunyemi's process, women become the protector of "cultural traditions against the forces of annihilation."⁷³ In the context of Ègbá women's experience, they experienced unpleasant treatment from the colonizers and traditional rulers. It made women, under the leadership of Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti, come together and resist the oppression that wanted to deny their humanity. This aligns with the role of Ègbá women in upholding Yorùbá religious and cultural traditions on the pride of place women have in Yorùbá society.

Ogunyemi's thoughts posit womanism as a philosophy that acknowledges the oppression women face within their communities and through colonialism or White people's racial discrimination.⁷⁴ The dual experiences led Black women to focus on solving gender discrimination, discourse on cultural identity, racial unity, and collectivity. But her theory has some minuses; it does not include Black queer people, predominantly lesbian; black women outside Africa cannot fit into her idea of African womanism that emphasizes on child reproduction.⁷⁵ Child reproduction is represented in her theory by Osun (a Yorùbá water divinity or goddess of fertility). She (Osun) was used to reveal the spiritual power given to women by God.⁷⁶ The power of women was symbolized by water, and "water is an active ingredient in the Yorùbá preparation of ero 'a softening agent /medicinal preparation' as also is the fluid

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Layli, Maparyan... 12

⁷⁴ Chiwenye, Okonjo Ogunyemi. *Africa Wo/man Palava: The Nierian Novel by Women*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1996). 106-109.

⁷⁵ Layli, Maparyan ...24.

⁷⁶ Chiwenye, Okonjo Ogunyemi. *Africa Wo/man Palava...* 24-25.

from a snail and oil from red palm kernels...ero is capable of normalizing, negating, or rendering impotent any other power, life, or substance."⁷⁷ Osun was said to be oppressed and marginalized by other divinities in the Yorùbá pantheon.⁷⁸ She (Osun), like Ègbá women, was marginalized because they were women. Ogunyemi's thoughts are relevant to this study as she incorporates Yorùbá religion, spirituality and culture into womanism. This aspect of women's power is significant to this thesis as women's nudity was employed in the Ègbá women's resistance as a powerful weapon of women in fighting oppression.

This study is hinged on Terence Ranger's theory on the invention of traditions in colonial Africa. It provides the foundation for this thesis, asserting that gender discrimination, classism, patriarchy, men's domination, and race were not rooted in pre-colonial Africa. His theory examined how colonial rulers and African rulers and elites invented and re-invented systemic inequalities through colonialism. He stated that the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890 marked the period when Europeans invented their traditions and their coming to Africa.⁷⁹ The traditions were invented in Europe and Africa, but Africa experienced the effects of the invention of European traditions.⁸⁰ The ultimate effect was that the colonizers and African leaders employed the traditions to achieve their economic, political, social, and religious interests.

According to Ranger, "the invented traditions of nineteenth-century Britain were a way of running an immensely complex industrial society, a way of managing and accommodating

⁷⁷ Ibid, 25.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 214.

⁷⁹ Terence Ranger. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." ... 211.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

change."⁸¹The colonizers needed African raw materials and free labor to manage and accommodate the change. These needs could not have been met without the invention of traditions, which made the British appear as agents of change. They took authority and had the confidence to present themselves as an agent of change to Africans through the invention of tradition. The colonizers invented the tradition as an attempt to modernize and transform Africans, whom they believed were uncivilized people. Ranger stated two ways in which the colonizer intended to employ the traditions. First, the invention of traditions was used to train Africans to become "members of the governing class of colonial Africa."⁸² The British colonial rulers had the idea that some Africans could participate in the governing class, but they must be trained in the "neo-traditional" way. Second, British traditions were invented in Africa to restructure and redefine the relationships between master and servant, leader and follower, and men and women.⁸³ This created hierarchies in society and entitled African leaders to some privileges.

Having been empowered by the colonial ruler, African monarchies functioned under the control of the British ruler. African leaders also re-invented the traditions. The traditions were used by elders against youth and by men against women. Concerning women, Ranger was in conversation with Denise Paulme. Ranger coined two thoughts from the conversation. He noted a total breakdown of African customary institutions under colonialism.⁸⁴ The breakdown affected women's economic mobility and prosperity. Second, the

⁸¹ Ibid, 220.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, 221.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 257.

breakdown led to male domination as men re-invented the traditions.⁸⁵ African women were marginalized in the colonial record because male informants were only consulted. Their voices were not heard in colonial records to justify the false impression that women were passive actors in Africa. This led to men's domination of Africa's social, economic, and political spheres. African society became paternalistic and individualistic because of the invention of Western traditions.⁸⁶ Ranger proposed two ways forward for African women. First, they can "turn to missionary Christianity and its notions of female rights and duties."⁸⁷ Second, African women can "use the counter-propositions available within African culture."⁸⁸ The last suggestion is preferable, and Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti and Ègbá women employed it, although she (Fúnmiláyò) has a Reverend as her husband. The first suggestion may not be tenable and practical in all African regions because Christian missionaries and colonial rulers worked together.

Also, the Bible has often been used as a tool to justify the exclusion of women in the church. For instance, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 states, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." Also, 1 Timothy 2:11-12 noted that "let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." White missionary churches have

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 259.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 258.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

used these passages from the Bible to enhance male domination.

He argued that the European traditions and practices were colonial constructs fabricated to have mental, social, and physical control and to legitimize their colonial control over Africa.⁸⁹ The principle of command and control governed the British Empire in Africa. The command and control principle overturned the African pre-colonial structure, accommodating women's and men's harmonious relationships, fluidity, flexibility, and adaptability.⁹⁰ However, during colonial rule, African communities became hierarchical, rigid, and static because the traditions were unevenly presented to Africans.⁹¹ The invented tradition was constructed around African custom to make African tradition static and hierarchical in the political, economic, religious, and gender spaces.⁹² To achieve their aims, the colonizers introduced central chieftaincy in places where power was decentralized in the pre-colonial period. They operate by indirect rules and customary laws. In the context of this thesis, the idea of inventing and re-inventing the tradition speaks of the invention of unfair taxes on women and the re-invention of taxes on women.⁹³ Invented traditions have long-term effects on African sociocultural, religious, and political identities and systems. It is a truism that some impacts were challenged during nationalists' struggle for independence, but Africa still lives with many invented traditions. Gender discrimination and ethnic division are among the continuing effects of colonialism and its inventions. This thesis

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 212.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, 212, 220-236.

⁹³ *The Nigerian Daily Times*, "Ègbá Council Reaffirms Decision..."

examines how Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti, a female nationalist and voice of women,⁹⁴ challenged one of the traditions invented in Ègbá land.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter one of this study provides a background of the work. It states the relevance of the biographical film of Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti to how interest was developed for further interrogation. This chapter explains the issues this work addresses, and the methods employed in this study. The study is approached historically and theologically. The questions that this study tackles are stated in this chapter. This chapter significantly provided an overview of the thesis. Chapter two provides a historiography of Yorùbá women in pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria. It gives the arguments advanced by scholars, the periodization of the work, methodology, strengths and weaknesses of the literature, and the relevance of the secondary materials. The third chapter is titled The Historical Background of Ègbá Land. It examines the history and socio-religious life in Ègbá land before the advent of the British colonizers and during the colonization of Ègbá land. It explains the religious terrain of Ègbá land. Chapter four centers on the history, activism, involvement of Yorùbá Religion, and Ègbá women's resistance. The last chapter provides the closing remarks.

⁹⁴ *Daily Times*, "2 Tombs for the Voice of Women: Where will she be buried?" April 28, 1978.

Chapter 3

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF YORÙBÁ WOMEN

This chapter synthesizes Terence Ranger's thoughts on the invention of traditions (mainly as applied to women) in colonial Africa. It considers scholars' positions on the place of women in pre-colonial and colonial Yorùbá land, Nigeria. Scholars' thoughts on religion and history, among others, are reviewed to test, affirm, and reaffirm Ranger's theory. This enables this study to provide paradigms on Fúnmiláyò and Ègbá women's resistance to colonialism, which was introduced (through diplomatic and/ or military methods) in the 19th century in Yorùbá Land.⁹⁵

Yorùbá Women during Pre-Colonial Period

In the introduction of her edited book, *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on Politics of Sisterhood*, Oyeronke Oyewumi argued that gender hierarchy and binary were not pronounced in Yorùbá before the colonial period.⁹⁶ She further claimed that pre-colonial Yorùbá communities acknowledged and operated by seniority, based on age, but not by gender disparity.⁹⁷ Oyewumi explained that gender discrimination was alien to Yorùbá people before the advent of colonialism. The invention of the gender binary in Yorùbá

⁹⁵ Toyin Falola. *The History of Nigeria*. (Greenwood Press, 1999). 51-52.

⁹⁶ Oyeronke Oyewumi. "Introduction: Feminism, Sisterhood, and Other Foreign." *In African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, ed. Oyeronke Oyewumi, (Africa World Press, 2003). 1.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 2; Oyeronke Oyewumi. *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. xiii, 13-14.

land marginalized women. It also distorted the Yorùbá pre-colonial harmonious and complementary relationships between Yorùbá men and women. Her work examined the Yorùbá socio-cultural structures in the pre-colonial period. Oyewumi's work was interdisciplinary, involving Yorùbá linguistic discourse analysis to establish that there were no gendered pronouns in the Yorùbá pre-colonial era. Her research also employed historical records and Yorùbá oral histories. Her work is relevant and significant to this study as it provides socio-cultural linguistic supporting evidence for Ranger's theory. Her work also revealed that biological sex was not the basis for assigning social roles in Yorùbá land. Also, her work challenged future researchers to focus on indigenous evidence to verify Western materials, which may not truly represent African realities.⁹⁸

In another book, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyewumi argued that "Woman" as a fundamental gender classification or biological sex was a Western ideology invented through colonialism in Yorùbá land.⁹⁹ She deconstructs Western ideas that claim that men's domination and the subordination of women are universal.¹⁰⁰ In the pre-colonial period, Yorùbá people did not use gender as a method of social classification. In Yorùbá land, social classification was based on lineage and seniority.¹⁰¹ Oyewumi's work addressed the Yorùbá pre-colonial period to reveal male

⁹⁸ Oyeronke Oyewumi. "The White Woman's Burden: African Women in Western Feminist Discourse." *In African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, ed. Oyeronke Oyewumi, (Africa World Press, 2003). 25.

⁹⁹ Oyeronke Oyewumi. *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses...* ix.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, xii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, xiii, 43-49.

and female relationships within the social structures in Yorùbá land. She used discourse analysis of Yorùbá sayings, proverbs, Ifa corpus (Yorùbá divination chapters and verses), oral histories, and historical records. Her work revolved around religion, linguistics, and history. The use of discourse analysis to discuss the various oral traditions made her work reliable. Her book would be better if it had archival materials. Her work is significant to this study as it has established that Yorùbá women in the pre-colonial period had a pride of place. It also confirmed Ranger's theory on the invention of traditions in colonial Africa by stating that the colonizers introduced gender discrimination. This study agreed that gender discrimination or the oppression of an individual because of their sex was not present in the pre-colonial Yorùbá land. However, it should be noted that there were positions that only men could occupy.

In "Yorùbá Women in Politics and Society since the Pre-Colonial Era," Mary Aniefiok William argued that "although pre-colonial Yorùbá land was generally patrilineal and power beyond the household was dominated by men, women still attained high political positions and became prominent in their localities."¹⁰² Aniefiok posits that women occupied important political, social, and economic positions in the pre-colonial period, while men became women's rivals.¹⁰³ She needs to clarify this statement on having men as rivals of women because the Yorùbá pre-colonial society had positions that were reserved for females. Also, it is significant to explain it because men and women have an understandable

¹⁰² Mary Aniefiok William. "Yorùbá Women in Politics and Society since the Pre-Colonial Era," in *Yorùbá Nation and Politics Since the Nineteenth Century: Essay in Honor of Professor J. A. Atanda*, ed., Toyin Falola and Dipo Olubomehin, (Pan-African University Press, 2020). 327.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

gender relationship, and they were not rivals. Aniefiok's article is appreciated for providing historical details on women's various political positions in the pre-colonial period. In the Yorùbá pre-colonial period, women functioned as female regents, queens, the king's mother, the king's representatives in the Òyó empire, and female warriors, conquerors, and god-mothers for aspiring kings. She noted that women were once enthroned as leaders of villages, towns, and cities in Yorùbá land.¹⁰⁴ Her work aligns with Ranger's theory by showing that Yorùbá women were not passive politically in the pre-colonial era. This justified Ranger's point that the colonizers were the inventors of Western traditions that made women the oppressed.

In "Women in Yorùbá and Igbo Indigenous Spirituality," Oyeronke Olademo argued that Yorùbá gender interaction is clouded by mutual respect and complementary relationships.¹⁰⁵ The realities of the manifestations of mutual respect and complementary interactions between men and women mean that women were not subordinate to men in the pre-colonial period. She explained that women were allowed to lead some sections of society. For instance, women functioned as priestesses, diviners, female chiefs, and herbalists.¹⁰⁶ Being a religious scholar, she asserted that the role of women in society was dictated by religious narratives emerging from the cosmological account of the people.¹⁰⁷ The cosmological tradition states

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 330.

¹⁰⁵ Oyeronke Olademo, "Women in Yorùbá and Igbo Indigenous Spirituality," in *African Indigenous Religious Traditions in Local and Global Contexts perspectives on Nigeria, a Festschrift in honor of Jacob K. Olupona*, ed., David O. Ogungbile, (Malthouse Press Limited, 2015). 307.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the social role of women and men in the Yorùbá communities. She said that appointing individuals into positions of authority is trust. Whether male or female, people holding public offices must be trustworthy; her finding aligns with Oyeronke Oyewumi. She agreed with the idea of seniority, which Oyewumi advanced. She added that Yorùbá believed that the older a woman, the wiser she is. The religious and historical concept of Olademo is significant to this study as it aligns with Ranger's theory. It has shown no gender discrimination in the Yorùbá pre-colonial period. It also aligns with the thought of Ogunyemi, stating that feminism is Western and involves competing with men. Her paper employed primary and secondary sources, as well as oral traditions. The combination of Yorùbá and Igbo in the paper did not allow a deeper explanation.

Alanamu, in her thesis, provided an antithesis of the work of Oyeronke Oyewumi, Oyeronke Olademo, and Aniefiok 's thoughts on the place of Yorùbá women in the pre-colonial period. Alanamu argued to critic Oyeronke, Oyewumi, and Bolanle Awe's thoughts on the place of women in the Yorùbá pre-colonial period.¹⁰⁸ Her thesis argued that biological sex or gender played a crucial role in forming and shaping individual experiences in the Yorùbá pre-colonial period.¹⁰⁹ She explained that since women were restricted during the Òrò festival and rituals, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Bolanle Awe, and Oyeronke Olademo's argument should be re-considered.¹¹⁰ Women are forbidden to come out when the Òrò

¹⁰⁸ Temilola Seinab Adunni Alanamu, *The Gendered Lifecycle In Nineteenth-Century Abẹ̀òkúta, Yorùbáland* (Present Day South West Nigeria), (Ph.D diss., the University of Exeter, 2014). 3, 13-14.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Òrò is a male-dominated secret society in Yorùbá. It is the executive arm of Ògbóni (Ògbóni is another secret society in Yorùbá. This society advises kings as the custodians of Yorùbá tradition and punishes offenders because they possess mystical power). It functions

festival is ongoing. However, Alanamu's research should add that the Òrò festival cannot begin without IyalÒrò (the mother in charge of Òrò) performing the ritual. This means that though women must not come out during the festival, the festival cannot start without a woman. The restriction of women during the Òrò festival cannot be counted as oppression of women like the heavy taxes placed on Ègbá women. The reality is that gender binaries began during the colonial period. Her micro-history focused on gender interactions in the 19th-century historical account of Abeòkúta. The period she addressed includes historical activities such as wars, early colonial rule, and Christian and Islamic missionary activities. The advent of colonialism, Christianity, and Islam (patriarchal religions) might have influenced her argument. Her argument does not align with Ranger's theory and the position of this thesis. However, some other sections of her work provided background information on Abeòkúta.

In the book, *Gender in Yorùbá Oral Traditions*, Olademo argued against the strength of Oyewumi's position on the non-existence of gender until the advent of colonialism. Olademo engaged and criticized Oyewumi's work thus:

Oyewumi has clearly stated that, based on her research among the Òyó Yorùbá of South-Western Nigeria, the Yorùbá had no notion of gender prior to the contact of the people with colonialism. According to her ...the time of gender was to come during the colonial period... Her arguments hinge on the absence of gender pronouns in Yorùbá language and an analysis of some Yorùbá practices. For example, whereas the English Language uses son for a male child and daughter for a female child, the Yorùbá language uses Omo (child) for both male and female children. This argument is, however, weak as the English Language also uses cousin for both female and male relations with the same degree of affinity... It is best to state what a people's conception and practice of gender is, as it is derived from their philosophy ...

as an agent of social justice and community cleansing through spiritual means. Yorùbá tradition has it that spirits move around during the festival, which is dangerous for women, strangers, and the uninitiated.

Olajubu submits that Yorùbá have always had gender (prior colonial contact) but in distinct ways from the notions of gender in the Western countries.¹¹¹

Her work examined gender as a concept and practice from selected oral traditions. She argued that gender relations in Nigeria are not competitive.¹¹² She noted that the contemporary gender discrimination in Yorùbá land was due to the gender class and control that colonial ruler invented to dominate Africans.¹¹³ Her work employed oral traditions to study gender in the Yorùbá pre-colonial period. The book revealed the complexity of gender in the pre-colonial period, showing it as it was in conversion in Ogunyemi's theory on African womanism. Ogunyemi stated that Osun was marginalized because she was a woman.¹¹⁴ Does this negate Olademo's argument on the absence of gender competition in Yorùbá land? The Yorùbá religious myth revealed there is a notion of gender but not gender competition and subordination. Olademo's work provides a link with the theory of Ranger by showing that gender discrimination and competition were invented by the colonizers.

In *Women in the Yorùbá Religious Sphere*, Oyeronke Olajubu examined the nexus between gender and power in Yorùbá religious spaces. Her work also explored the role of women in Yorùbá Religion and Yorùbá Christianity. She argued against assertions that stated that women had no pride of place in Yorùbá Religion and Yorùbá Christianity.¹¹⁵ She affirmed that women not only play significant and central roles in Yorùbá Religion and

¹¹¹ Oyeronke Olademo, *Gender in Yorùbá Oral Traditions*, (Center for Black and Africa Arts and Civilization, 2009), 14.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 23.

¹¹³ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁴ Chiwenye, Okonjo Ogunyemi ... 214.

¹¹⁵ Oyeronke Olajubu, *Women in the Yorùbá Religious Sphere*, (State University of New York Press, 2003). 1.

Yorùbá Christianity, but they are also the "repository of these traditions and have contributed to the formation and growth of the religions" and Yorùbá communities.¹¹⁶ Further, she noted that gender is crucial in conceptualizing Yorùbá Religion and Yorùbá Christianity. She employed comparative and theological approaches to study Yorùbá Religion and Yorùbá Christianity. Her study of Religion began in the pre-colonial time frame and continued till the post-colonial religious time frame. Oyeronke conversed with Mbiti, who also expressed that women are active players in African religions. Mbiti stated, "African Religion is neither an exclusively patriarchal nor predominantly matriarchal religion."¹¹⁷ African Religion is not gender discriminatory, and being the first religion in Africa, it means that the existence of gender discrimination was foreign to African society.

In addition, Oyeronke's work correlates with Awolalu and Dopamu's discourse on having the Ijaw people of Nigeria perceive or call God as "She" and Ewe and Fon people of Dahomey addressing God with pronouns "He" and/or "She."¹¹⁸ Having both male and female divinities in African Religion is a testament to the mutual gender relations in the Yorùbá pre-colonial period.

In "Women, Ritual, and Politics of Pre-colonial Yorùbá land," Biodun Adediran and Olukoya Ogen argued that Yorùbá women are not passive as written literature made them

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ John, S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy ...* xiii

¹¹⁸ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu. *West African Traditional Religion...*41-42.

appear.¹¹⁹ Olukoya and Ogen noted that a careful study of the Yorùbá history, missionary and travelers' records, and intelligent and assessment accounts written by colonial rulers of the 19th Century would convince us that women were active political, social, religious, and economic actors in the Yorùbá pre-colonial period.¹²⁰ This is possible when researchers compare the oral history and history made from the Yorùbá perspective with those written by European missionaries, travelers, and administrators. Also, Olukoya and Ogen affirmed that European records revealed women's absolute and reliable position in the pre-colonial period. For instance, they cited an excerpt from the wife of David Hinderer, Anna Hinderer: "These Yorùbá people have some very nice arrangement about their form of government. I found out that there was an 'Iyalode,' mother of the town, to whom all women palavers are brought before they are taken to the king. She is, in fact, a sort of queen."¹²¹ This explains the political role of women in the Yorùbá pre-colonial communities. It also shows that the voice of women counts in society, and measures were put in place to ensure that women's voices were heard. They explained that Yorùbá pre-colonial communities were both patrilineal and matrilineal.¹²² They conversed with scholars like Bolanle Awe, Oyeronke Olademo, and Oyeronke Oyewumi. They employed an analytical approach to present and analyze missionaries, travelers, Yorùbá oral history, and colonial accounts of Yorùbá women in the pre-colonial period. Their work correlates with Ranger's theory by speaking

¹¹⁹ Biodun Adediran and Olukoya Ogen, "Women, Ritual, and Politics of Pre-colonial Yorùbáland," in *Shaping our Struggles: Nigerian Women in History, Culture and Social Change*, eds. Obioma Nnaemeka and Chima J. Korieh, (Africa World Press, 2011). 144.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 145.

about the role of women before the advent of colonialism. However, Olukoya and Ogen must state that European missionaries, travelers, and colonial records must be carefully verified to ensure they express African realities.

Yorùbá Women under Colonial Rule

Josephine Beoku-Betts, in "Western Perceptions of African Women in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries," stated that Western ethnographers had problems studying women because they have a larger population than men. Also, she noted that the wrong perception of people about African women spread widely because many readers read Western literature where the story was documented from Western perspective.¹²³ She explained that some Western anthropologists were either ignorant or misunderstood the role of women in Africa. She stated that Western perception of Africa through evolution theory, which sees Africans as a backward race, lacking civilization, and unintelligent, was transferred to African women.¹²⁴ The negative attitude about Africa was indeed transferred to African women, but Europeans also have inherent stereotypes against women. Europeans see women as subordinates of men. There were two issues then: (i) women were seen and treated as a subordinate gender to men; (ii) Africa was said to be inferior to Europeans.¹²⁵ She summed that the West perceived African women as a "demarcation line between being human and animal" in the 19th Century.¹²⁶ They have little or no respect for women's bodies and

¹²³ Josephine Beoku-Betts, "Western Perceptions of African Women in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, (Indiana University Press, 2005). 20.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 24.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.

beings. Her historical and anthropological work is significant to this study as it was in conversation with Ranger's theory that acknowledged that the colonial rulers invented the tradition of viewing and treating women as subordinate to men. The dehumanization expressed in her work and experienced by African women from Western actors necessitated resistance and the emergence of African womanism. Her work was in conversation with Ogunyemi's discourse on African womanism.

In *Yorùbá Women, Work, and Social Change*, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh examined the lives of Yorùbá women in the southwest part of Nigeria from 1820 to 1960, the pre-colonial to colonial periods.¹²⁷ She studied how women's roles changed due to colonialism's advent in Yorùbá land. Her research employed Yorùbá oral histories, missionaries, travelers' and colonial accounts of Yorùbá history. Her work was in conversation with Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, which challenged Oyeronke Oyewumi's thoughts on the absence of the term gender, manifestation of gender distinction, and gender discrimination in pre-colonial Yorùbá land.¹²⁸ Her book upheld Oyeronke Oyewumi's perception of the unavailability of the concept of gender, comparable to the gender distinction in the West.¹²⁹ She argued that "Yorùbá customs were modified by the Christian, class-based attitudes introduced by the British."¹³⁰ The agents for the modification of Yorùbá customs in the 19th and mid-20th Centuries were European merchants, missionaries, colonial officials, and ex-enslaved people

¹²⁷ Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Yorùbá Women, Work, and Social Change*, (Indiana University Press, 2009). 3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 18-19.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 20

who returned to Nigeria.¹³¹ These actors promoted Victorian ideology, which sees women as weaker beings who must be under the supervision of men. Yorùbá women played an active role in the economic, political, religious, and social spaces, but they were restricted and relegated to domestic duties under colonial rule. Her work has further shown the role of European Christianity in establishing and facilitating gender discrimination in Yorùbá land. Also, it aligned with Ranger's theory to confirm that gender distinction was a Western invention. Her work is significant to this study as she was able to document the lived experiences of Yorùbá women despite being a non-Yorùbá scholar.

Falola examined how colonialism and British governance in Nigeria generated violence from the second half of the 19th Century to the early 1950s.¹³² Falola employed primary and secondary sources to explain how the British colonial ruler used violence to subject Nigerians to obey them and how Nigerians employed violence to resist inequalities. He argued that inequality was glaring during the colonial rule.¹³³ The British colonial ruler employed violence as a strategy to conquer Nigerians and dominate the colonies, and such was never questioned. However, the use of violence as a weapon of resistance by Nigerians was criminalized and punishable by the colonizers.¹³⁴ The colonizers brutally suppressed the resistance against their inequality and exploitation.¹³⁵ He noted that colonialism established, perpetrated, and legitimized gender discrimination in Africa. The discrimination

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*. Ix.

¹³³ Ibid, x.

¹³⁴ Ibid,

¹³⁵ Ibid, 51.

against Nigerian women led to the imposition of unfair taxes on women. The imposition of heavy taxes on women led to women's resistance, such as the Aba women's protest of 1929 and the Ègbá women's resistance. The violence experienced during the colonial period was considered the source of violence in Nigeria. His work connected British colonial rule to violence in Nigeria. The violence includes police brutality, violence against women, and classism, amongst others. Falola's work significantly aligns with Ranger's work, showing that gender discrimination emerged because of the invention of traditions by the British colonial ruler in Nigeria.

In *African Women in Revolution*, Wunyabari Maloba examined the significant roles of African women in post-World War revolutionary movements in Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.¹³⁶ He argued that African women were the backbone of these movements, and this reality contradicted Western ideas from European missionaries, explorers, administrators, and colonial accounts, anthropologists, colonial rulers, and scholars that presented African women as "passive, ignorant and helpless" members of African society.¹³⁷ They described women as weak and the property of men or their husbands. He stated that discrimination began during the colonial period and continues to express itself in Western scholarship and media, one of the agents of globalization. African women were portrayed as older women who only knew how to give birth to children, they could not take good care of.¹³⁸ Maloba's work directly conversed with Ranger's theory on the invention of traditions. He explained that "European invention of

¹³⁶ Maloba, W. O, *African Women in Revolution*, ...1.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 1-2.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 4-5.

African tradition had a decisive and long-lasting impact on the status of women in colonial (post-colonial) African societies," leading to women having limited grace for economic, social, political, and religious advancement.¹³⁹ Also, colonial records were gathered from only male informants, excluding women's voices.¹⁴⁰ African women were denied access to education and land, and their workload skyrocketed.¹⁴¹ Colonialism was very hostile to the well-being of African women. Maloba's work and personal interaction with Professor Maloba introduced this study to the theory of the invention of traditions in British colonial Africa. His work is foundational to this study.

In *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*, Nina Emma Mba examined African women's political activities in Southern Nigeria from 1900 to 1965.¹⁴² She noted that women were represented in the Nigeria pre-colonial political setting as rulers' wives and leaders who determined the affairs of human life in the Nigerian communities.¹⁴³ Also, women played a crucial role in the economic and social spaces. She stated that there was no gender segregation in the pre-colonial period.¹⁴⁴ Colonialism changed the order of social structures in Nigeria because it "is not just a system of

¹³⁹ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 6-7.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴² Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*, (the University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1982). vii.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

administration but a whole way of living and thinking."¹⁴⁵ In addition, colonialism presented more active and more significant opportunities to men. It made women more dependent than being independent.¹⁴⁶ Women were not given leadership or clergy roles in the European churches.¹⁴⁷ In resisting colonial rule in Nigeria, women actively mobilized one another for the liberation of women and Nigerian communities. Mba employed archival documents such as letters, colonial records, and newspapers. She also gathered research data through oral interviews.¹⁴⁸ Her work is relevant to this study as it aligns with Ranger's theory. However, Mba was soft and contradictory in stating the effects of colonialism on women. She explained that colonialism diminished women's active role and enhanced women's positions in Nigeria.¹⁴⁹ Colonialism cannot relegate women to the state of being passive and still enhance women's position in Nigeria.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 38.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 52.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 59.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 68-99.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 67.

Chapter 4

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ÈGBÁ LAND

Sir Richard Burton, a European traveler and author, was quoted by Thomas Hodgkin stating that the Ègbá "are a race of bushmen, farmers, clothiers, and blacksmiths, compelled by their enemies to collect and centralize."¹⁵⁰ Burton said the king of Òyó was the only king in Yorùbá land with absolute power over his people. Also, stating that Aláké, the king of Ègbá, was not as powerful as his chiefs and councilors is incorrect.¹⁵¹ Burton does not understand the check and balance approach in the Yorùbá monarchical system. It is erroneous to describe Ègbá people as bushmen. The history of Ègbá land was told with the exaggeration that the Ògbóni cult consisted of men, women, and children.¹⁵² Children are not allowed to become members of the Ògbóni cult. Against this background, this chapter provides a brief historical background of Ègbá land, the place of origin for Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas, Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology*, 2nd Edition, (Oxford University Press, 1975). 344.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 341.

Pre-Colonial Ègbá Land

Toyin Falola deconstructs the Western account that stated that the Ègbá people were bushmen and women.¹⁵³ They migrated from other Yorùbá cities to found Abẹ̀òkútá in the early 19th century. The migrants moved from Òyó Ile, Ile Ife, Ibadan, and Ketu during the Yorùbá civil war, the Fulani conquest against the Òyó Empire, and political instability in Òyó Ile.¹⁵⁴ They migrated in search of a new abode for safety purposes. Ègbá land is the confluence point where these migrants from different Yorùbá cities meet and dwell. The beneath side of Olumo Rock was their hideout during the war around 1830.¹⁵⁵ There are spiritual and physical explanations for this. First, the spiritual explanation was that the Ègbá people believed that a spiritual force inhabiting Olumo Rock protected the Ègbá people from attacks. Second, the natural structure of the rock enabled the Ègbá people to live under it so that enemies could not overcome them in battles. Living under the rock and the impact of the rock on their safety caused them to name the newly founded city Abẹ̀òkútá. Abẹ̀òkútá means "Under the Rock."¹⁵⁶ Ègbá people have historically sought 'refuge under a rock.¹⁵⁷ The rock is a cultural and historical and natural tourist attraction in Nigeria. The significance of Olumo Rock is pronounced in Abẹ̀òkútá's National Anthem, composed by Reverend Israel Oludotun, which states thus,

On a rocky and plane ground,
Is the place of my birth;

¹⁵³ Falola, Toyin. *The History of Nigeria...* 51.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 51-2

¹⁵⁷ Oladipo, Yemitan ...1.

T'was there I was nurtured-Land of freedom.
 I shall glory in Abẹ̀òkùtá,
 I shall perch on top of Olumo Rock
 And rejoice in the name `Ègbá, I, a descendant of Lisabi
 Chorus: I shall rejoice and rejoice again
 Atop Olumo Rock.
 I shall rejoice and rejoice again
 Atop Olumo Rock.

Verse 2: Abẹ̀òkùtá, city of the `Ègbá
 I shall forever hold you And put dear
 And put you uppermost in my mind,
 City on the land of the River Niger
 I shall rejoice on Olumo Rock,
 I shall take pride in my mind
 That it is a famed city
 Wherein live the `Ègbá people.¹⁵⁸

Abẹ̀òkùtá is a city that has many towns and villages, such as Aderupata, Seriki Sotayo, Ajebo, and Ogunmakin under its jurisdiction. Abẹ̀òkùtá is also a confederation of towns such as Ibara, Owu, Itoku, Kuto, Sapon, Ijemo, Idi-Aba, Ijeun, Gbagura, Ake, and Oke-Ona. Each town has its traditional rulers, with Aláké as the leader of all traditional rulers. Aláké (the king of Abẹ̀òkùtá or `Ègbá land) heads the `Ègbá land power structure but does not have absolute power as the chiefs and Ògbóni could check him against misuse of power.¹⁵⁹ `Ègbá sustained its existence after its creation in 1830 by fighting battles with cities like Ibadan, Ijebu, and Igbado.¹⁶⁰ `Ègbá people are known for solidarity and unity with one another. They are expected to speak with one voice or always unite. Before the advent of colonialism, Christianity, and Islam in `Ègbá, African Traditional Religion was

¹⁵⁸Ibid, 9-10.

¹⁵⁹ Harry, A. Gailey, *Lugard and the Abẹ̀òkùtá Uprising: The Demise of `Ègbá Independence*, (Frank Cass, 1982). 5-9.

¹⁶⁰ N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of Yorùbá*, (Ibadan University Press, 1970). 51.

the only religion. Ègbá people engaged in economic activities such as farming, pottery, blacksmithing, weaving, and manufacturing Àdirè clothes. Abéòkútá is very popular in the production of Àdirè clothes (tie-and-dye). To date, Ègbá people speak a variation of the Yorùbá language called Ègbá. Abéòkútá is one of the cities known for upholding cultural heritage, often used for filmmaking, as it houses many Yorùbá film actors.

Ègbá Land under Colonial Rule

Colonialism was introduced into Ègbá land in the late 19th century.¹⁶¹ The signing of treaties and the impact of European missionaries on the people of Ègbá land made colonialism possible. The Ègbá united government was scrapped in 1914 and replaced with the British system of indirect rule.¹⁶² The attempt at introducing colonialism in Ègbá land was challenged through the Adubi War of 1918.¹⁶³ Ègbá land caused the Ègbá people to resist their leaders and led to violent experiences, such as those during the time of Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti. Ègbá had a system that curbed corruption without necessarily leading to public violence. The Ègbá traditional rulers became the subject of British colonial rule. Ègbá land and its leaders lost their autonomy, and the ability to achieve self-determination was lost to the British colonizer.¹⁶⁴ The Ègbá traditional leaders became agents of colonial rule, making them loyal and first responsible and obliged to the British ruler rather than to the people of Ègbá land. The invention of traditions in Ègbá land empowered the traditional rulers to act as their representatives, enforce British colonial rules, ensure that taxes were

¹⁶¹ Harry, A. Gailey, ... 68-69.

¹⁶² Ibid, 70-72

¹⁶³ Toyin, Falola, *Colonialism and Violence* ... 89.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

paid, and re-invent the British-invented traditions.

The invention of British traditions in Ègbá land made Ègbá society hierarchical and authoritative. The people of Ègbá land had to obey the traditional rulers as they (the conventional rulers) obeyed the British colonial authority. Colonialism used the Ègbá traditional system, but the colonizer determined the system's contents. The invented traditions challenged Ègbá's political, social, economic, and religious systems. The people of Ègbá freely worked for the British farmland seized from the people of Ègbá. The British purchased the farm produce of the Ègbá people at exploitative prices.¹⁶⁵ The most painful and violent impact of colonialism in Ègbá land was the imposition of taxes on Ègbá women. Women were not only discriminated against but were also exploited through the heavy taxes imposed on them.

Religions in Ègbá Land

Ègbá land is a multi-religious community with the Yorùbá dimension and manifestations of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam. It is called the Yorùbá dimension and manifestations of religions because they were interpreted, practiced, and connected to Ègbá's cultural heritage. However, from my five years of living in the axis of Abéòkútá, Christianity and Islam condemned Ègbá's cultural heritage connected to African Traditional Religion.¹⁶⁶ African Traditional Religion was the first and oldest religion in the Ègbá land.¹⁶⁷ The religion is called Yorùbá Religion since Ègbá is part of Yorùbá land. The

¹⁶⁵ Walter, Rodney ... 196-197.

¹⁶⁶ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu, ... 20

¹⁶⁷ John, S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion... 12-13.

religion believes in the Supreme Being, divinities, spirits, and ancestors as spiritual forces that can make or mar human existence. The religion believes in natural elements being powerful because spirits inhabit them.¹⁶⁸ Christianity tagged this as worship of nature and idolatry without the full knowledge that the religious focus of the adherents of the Yorùbá Religion is on the spiritual forces and not the representational tree.¹⁶⁹

Christianity also condemned the veneration of the ancestors in Yorùbá Religion. Lisàbí is one of the ancestors of Ègbá land. He fought for the liberation of Ègbá land from external oppression from Òyó Ile.¹⁷⁰ Departed members of the communities' become ancestors if they live an impactful life, have good character, die in their old age, have biological children, or are used to taking good care of children around them.¹⁷¹ With these, they are seen as living-dead because they have the interest of their living family at heart. They function as agents or guardians of public morality, and being in the spirit world, they can make known the prayers of their living family. Ègbá land represents the definition of Yorùbá Religion given by Simpson. Simpson defined it as "a mixed bag of individual cults."¹⁷² Ègbá Land integrated the cults into the political system from the pre-colonial period. Ògbóni and Òrò were very popular before the advent of Christianity. However, the Ògbóni and Òrò

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 66.

¹⁶⁹ John, S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy ...* 50-56.

¹⁷⁰ A. k. Ajisafe, *Iwe Abéòkútá*, (Richard Clay and Sons, 1924). 3-67.

¹⁷¹ John, S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy ...* 81-89.

¹⁷² G. E. Simpson, *Yorùbá Religion and Medicine in Ibadan*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980), 1.

cults were condemned by Christian missionaries who arrived in Ègbá in 1842.¹⁷³ Henry Townsend, a missionary under the Church Missionary Society, came to Ègbá. Thomas Birch Freeman and Samuel Ajayi Crowther followed him.¹⁷⁴

The Christian missionaries in Ègbá land condemned the Yorùbá Religion. For example, members of the Ògbóni cult who wanted to practice Christianity were commanded to either do so or leave the church. Given this, many who refused were not allowed to become church leaders.¹⁷⁵ The invention of traditions by the British missionaries caused the Ògbóni to lose her powers to customary courts and local administrators.¹⁷⁶ Their "functions are limited to ceremonials like title takings, funerals, and sacrifices."¹⁷⁷ Ègbá people welcome White missionaries because Ifa, Yorùbá divination, or Yorùbá divinity of wisdom and foreknowledge, had prophesied that White missionaries would come to Ègbá land and the people of Ègbá should accommodate them.¹⁷⁸ They welcome Christian missionaries, but Christian missionaries want them to abandon their faith and embrace Christianity. It should be noted that Christianity was first introduced in Yorùbá land in Badagry.¹⁷⁹ The

¹⁷³ J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Longmans, 1965), 90–112.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu, ... 20

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 50.

¹⁷⁸ Rotimi Williams Omotoye, "Religious Experiences in the Post Colonial Era in Nigeria: An Examination of the Challenges of Pentecostal Churches in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria," in *Religious Experiences in a Multi-Religious State*, eds. Suleiman M. Jamiu and Raphael A. Akanmidu, (Kwara State University, 2012.), 102.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

people of Badagry were unwilling to leave the African Traditional Religion. Hence, Christian missionaries left Badagry and moved to `Ègbá land. `Ègbá land is regarded as the gateway to Christianity, where Christianity began in Yorùbá.¹⁸⁰ Christianity was intended to replace the African Traditional Religion as the only religion of the `Ègbá people. However, African Traditional Religion is still active despite the condemnation.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 102-103.

Chapter 5

FÚNMILÁYÒ RANSOME-KUTI AND ÈGBÁ WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

The history of the activism, resistance, and experience of Fúnmiláyò Ransome Kuti and Ègbá women involve commitment, resilience, passion, dedication, fearlessness, solidarity and community organizing. It also involves self-realization, self-definition, self-identity that women are not weak. It is a testament that reveals that challenging existing order is possible. It shows that the collective voices of women are powerful and able to change things in the Black communities. Their history explains the naturally endowed power of women. On this note, this chapter provides explanation on the Ègbá women's resistance to colonial exploitation and gender discrimination against women. The resistance was led by Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti from 1943 to 1949. They agitated against the Sole Native Authority, Aláké, and unfair taxes imposed on women. Her braveness in organizing and leading women to liberation against the British invented traditions and re-invented tradition by Aláké, was recognized with a title, "Lioness of Lisabi." The title was conferred on her by the West African Pilot.

Historical Background of Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti

Fúnmiláyò Ransome Kuti (see appendix F and H), with the née Thomas, lived from October 25, 1900, to April 13, 1978.¹⁸¹ She died after sustaining injuries when the Nigerian

¹⁸¹ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria*, (University of Illinois Press, 1997). 21.

soldiers threw her from upstairs. The soldiers invaded the Kalakuta, Fela's house, to arrest Fela for criticizing the government and found Fúnmiláyò.¹⁸² She married Reverend Israel Oludokun Ransome-Kuti in 1925.¹⁸³ Oludokun was the son of an Anglican Reverend, Reverend Josiah Ransome-Kuti, a famous singer and song composer. Fúnmiláyò and Oludokun's marriage had four children (see appendix D): one female (Dolupo in 1926) and three males (Olikoye in 1927, Fela Anikulapo in 1938, and Beko in 1940).¹⁸⁴ While in Abéòkútá Grammar School, they met and became friends. Later, Oludokun moved to Fourah Bay to complete his education. They met when Fúnmiláyò was resisting some boys who bullied her in school.¹⁸⁵ These formed parts of Ogunyemi's experiences in her thoughts on African womanism as a source of empowerment. These experiences enable women to develop a way forward to liberation. The Fúnmiláyò Biographical film revealed that Oludokun was influenced by his father to become an Anglican Reverend.¹⁸⁶ Also, from 1919 to 1932, Oludokun worked as the principal of Ijebu-Ode Grammar School. He resigned in 1932 to become the principal of Abéòkútá Grammar School.¹⁸⁷ He was instrumental in establishing the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Nigerian Union of Students (NUS). He was the only Nigerian appointed to the Elliott Commission

¹⁸² “Fúnmiláyò Ransom Kuti.” YouTube video, 1:25:27-1:26:27...

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 1.

¹⁸⁵ “Fúnmiláyò Ransom Kuti.” YouTube video, 11:45-13:30 ...

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 19:19-22:48.

¹⁸⁷ Cheryl, Johnson-Odim, “For their Freedoms’: The Anti-Imperialist and International Feminist Activity of Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria”. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009). 54.

in 1943.¹⁸⁸ The commission was responsible for reporting the state and prospect of higher education in West African countries colonized by the British.

Fúnmiláyò and Oludokun came from the families of Christian religious leaders in Ègbá land. Mr. Ebenezer Shobowale Thomas, the grandparent of Fúnmiláyò, was an Anglican Catechist. Also, her parents, Lucretia Phyllis Omoyeni Adeosolu and Daniel Olumeyuwa Thomas were Christian, but upheld Yorùbá culture.¹⁸⁹ and She was the first-born girl of her parents. Fúnmiláyò was seriously encouraged by her parents to go to school.¹⁹⁰ She had her primary education at St. John's Primary School, Igbein, Abèòkútá, from 1906 – 1913.¹⁹¹ She attended Abèòkútá Grammar School for her secondary education. Her secondary education was peculiar to having her as the first girl or one of the first girls attending the school. She was a brilliant student; hence, the Church Missionary Society and her family co-sponsored her college education in England.¹⁹² She majored in education. She minored in Domestic Science, French, and Music. In stature, physical look, and character, Johnson-Odim and Mba described Fúnmiláyò as being:

five feet four inches tall and had a slender frame. Her high cheek bones and piercing gaze could be quite intimidating. She had a hearty laugh and a strong, clear voice... She spoke rapidly, often gesticulating with her hands when making a point, and displayed a great deal of passion in her speeches. Though many people commented that her manner could be brusque, they

¹⁸⁸ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspectives*, ed., Bolanle Awe, (Sankore Publishers Limited, 1992) 136.

¹⁸⁹ Cheryl, Johnson-Odim, “For their Freedoms’: The Anti-Imperialist ...54.

¹⁹⁰ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” ... 135-136.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 136.

¹⁹² Ibid,

remember her as warm and concerned about people.¹⁹³

This shows that she is nice but also a no-nonsense person. She was a principled and firm person.

Formerly, she bore Abigail, Thomas and Frances, but she dropped the names.¹⁹⁴ The names sound Western, and she dropped them, possibly due to her love for Yorùbá culture and its preservation. It is a form of identifying with her culture and resisting westernization. Instead of calling herself Olúfúnmiláyò, she decided to use the short form of her name, Fúnmiláyò. She was an educator who knew and appreciated the value of culture and community engagement. Her teaching career began after her secondary school education. However, she officially started teaching in 1923.¹⁹⁵ She established a nursery school in Ijebu-Ode. It was then that Mrs. Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti started teaching in Abẹ̀òkútá. Her school contained a double stream of six classes up to a standard 6. Her husband died of prostate cancer in 1955.¹⁹⁶

Fúnmiláyò established Reverend Kuti Memorial Evening School to keep the memory of her late husband and fulfill her social responsibility to the community. The school was later renamed as Reverend Ransome-Kuti Memorial Grammar School in 1962.¹⁹⁷ As an educator, she was the school's principal till around 1976, making her an active educator for

¹⁹³ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, ... 76.

¹⁹⁴ Carlee, Goldberg, "They Made the Rulers Run: Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti and the Fight for Free and Equal Nigeria," *Historia Nova: Duke Historical Review*, IV:1 (2021): 19.

¹⁹⁵ Nina, E. Mba, "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," ...136.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 137.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

about 56 years in Nigeria. She served as a member and executive of the Nigerian Union of Teachers. Similarly, she was appointed chairman of the Advisory Board of Education Western State, Nigeria, in the early 1970s.¹⁹⁸ The Ministry of Education usually consulted her regarding recruiting foreign teachers. She contributed to the development of Nigeria. Notably, she was an employer of labor, contributing to job creation in Nigeria and abroad. She employed both Nigerians and foreigners to teach in the school. To her credit, she received many awards, such as an honorary Doctor of Law from the University of Ibadan in 1968.¹⁹⁹ She has won many prizes, such as the Lenin Peace Prize.²⁰⁰ She was given the honor of becoming a Member of the Order of the Niger (MON). She also did her activism and community empowerment through women's organizations such as Abẹ̀òkúta Women's Union.

Abẹ̀òkúta Women's Union

There are two versions of the history of Abẹ̀òkúta Women's Union. Purple Hibiscus Research explained that the Abẹ̀òkúta Ladies Club existed in 1932.²⁰¹ Johnson-Odem and Mba also noted that “in March 1944, a revitalized Abẹ̀òkúta Ladies' Club (ALC) expanded its ranks to include market women, who were most often neither Christian nor Western-educated, generally poor.”²⁰² The second version stated that the union was established in 1944. Still, Mba advanced the account that stated 1944 as the date for establishing the

¹⁹⁸ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” ...137.

¹⁹⁹ Sophia, Florakas Petsalis, *The Silent Power: A Portrait of Nigerian Women*, (Meridian Press, 1990), 137.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Purple Hibiscus Research ...

²⁰² Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba,...64.

union.²⁰³ She noted that the organization changed its name in 1946. Judith Byfield referred to these differences as the Ransome-Kuti papers featuring two selves that offer “interrelated and sometimes comparing perspectives on the larger world they tried to understand and engaged.”²⁰⁴ What is certain is that the club was transformed into a more inclusive group by metamorphosing into the Abẹ̀òkútá Women’s Union. Metamorphosing into the Abẹ̀òkútá Women’s Union also means the union included activism and politics. The union became more inclusive, consisting of educated, uneducated and market women that were determined to liberate women and their communities.²⁰⁵ The union rendered community services that involved teaching and empowering women in sewing, catering, and adult education.²⁰⁶ Empowerment of women and the community is an aspect of Africana womanism's theory by Clenora Hudson-Weem. The concept of empowerment furthers Ogunyemi's theory of African womanism.²⁰⁷ Fúnmiláyò was the founder and president of the union. The executive committee members were Mmes. F. W. Fagbemi, Victoria Soley, Eniola

²⁰³ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” ...138.

²⁰⁴ Judith, A. Byfield, “In her Own Words: Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti and the Auto/biography of an Archive,” *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, 5, Issue 2 (2016): 109.

²⁰⁵ The act of accommodating market women who were uneducated and poor into a club like Abẹ̀òkútá Ladies’ Club resembles Jesus eating with sinners and consistently identifying with the poor and oppressed in Luke 19:1-10, Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 2:16. The act also relates with Yorùbá religious culture and morals on helping the poor and defending the oppressed. It should be noted that some women pulled out of the club because they could not belong to the same club as poor and uneducated market women. So, Fúnmiláyò and members of the club belong to the practicing rank of prophetess in the thought of Abi-oje on prophethood.

²⁰⁶ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,... 138.

²⁰⁷ Layli, Maparyan. *The Womanist Idea* ... 26-28.

Soyinka, and S. F. Adeyinka.²⁰⁸

Fúnmiláyò taught Ègbá women and market women how to read and sew. Ègbá market women complained to Fúnmiláyò about the unfair taxation of their goods. Fúnmiláyò also witnessed the horrible experience faced by Ègbá women at the hands of the British colonial tax officers. The market women in the union were oppressed in the name of war-time emergency needs for the British colonial rule. The British colonizers seized the rice of market women in 1945 and claimed that the “government required eighteen hundred tons of rice for Lagos and that no one in Abẹ̀òkútá could sell rice until that need had been met.”²⁰⁹ Rice was an essential commodity to meet the requirements of the food reserve for the Second World War. The British seized the food to store it for emergency reserve.²¹⁰ Also, under the food and price control regulations during this period, market women were compelled to sell foodstuffs to the British colonial government at a very low price. In Ranger’s thoughts, buying farm produce cheaply was one of the manifestations of the invention of traditions in British colonial Africa.²¹¹ The oppressive traditions empowered colonial officials to confiscate goods from market women and use the food to feed soldiers during the World War.

The Abẹ̀òkútá Women's Union's outlook was radically concerned with social welfare, justice, and equality for women. The objectives of the union are: (i) “To defend, protect,

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized...* 144.

²¹⁰ Judith A. Byfield, “Feeding the Troops: Abẹ̀òkútá (Nigeria) and World War II,” *African Economic History*, 35, (2007):80.

²¹¹ Terence Ranger. “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa ... 218.

preserve and promote the social, economic, cultural and political rights and interests of the women in Ègbáland; (ii) To co-operate with all organizations seeking and fighting genuinely and selflessly for the economic and political freedom and independence of the people.”²¹² The union aimed to uproot the cause of injustice, inequality, and hardship for women. The union was aware that all women were oppressed in Nigeria. The members pushed for the equality of all women. To show their commitment to this goal, Mrs. Kuti, the president, always spoke in Yorùbá and wore Yorùbá attire so the women would know she identified with them.²¹³ Mrs. Ransome-Kuti and her small core of educated assistants articulated the grievances of the market women to colonial rulers. However, negotiation or dialogue did not change the course of the oppression. Hence, there was a need for resistance through protest. Meanwhile, it was evident, and Fúnmiláyò maintained, that the illiterate women were much bolder and more willing to sacrifice their comfort than their educated sisters.²¹⁴ The educated women also participated in the fight against exploitation. Also, Fúnmiláyò was educated and brave, and nothing dismayed her (see appendix E and G).

Causes of Ègbá Women’s Protest

The British colonial administrators demolished the political structure they met Ègbá people operating for years through the invention of traditions. The check and balance system that placed Aláké, the king of Ègbá land, into check was suspended and replaced with the Sole Native Authority system.²¹⁵ The system empowered the Aláké and some chiefs

²¹² Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized...* 146.

²¹³ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” ... 138-139.

²¹⁴ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” ... 138-139.

²¹⁵ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, ... 74.

beyond measure, and no Ègbá man or woman could question them except the British. Nearly absolute power was concentrated in the hands of the king. The king dethroned the kingmakers, chiefs that enthroned and/or sometimes dethroned a king. The king also withdrew power from Ògbóni chiefs, who could have checked his power, though they were council members.²¹⁶ Women who are chieftaincy holders, such as Èrèlú and Ìyálòdé,²¹⁷ were automatically removed from the system.²¹⁸ They were without representatives in the political structure of Ègbá land. The council existed and functioned as an advisory body to the throne. By playing advisory roles, they cannot say no to whatever the king, especially the colonizers, decide.

The Native Authority Council and Court, as well as the Sole Native Authority, were dominated by men. The Ègbá Native Authority Council was also exclusively occupied by men.²¹⁹ The resistance occurred to abdicate Ademola II, the Aláké of Ègbá land. Abdicating Ademola was a direct resistance to the British colonial ruler because Ademola was a subject of the British colonial government through the British indirect rule system. Also, since Ademola was at the center of the Sole Native Authority, his removal would automatically terminate the council that excluded women. Other grievances against Aláké include abuses of

²¹⁶ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” ... 139.

²¹⁷ Èrèlú is a female chief who acts as the king's female advisor. She also has an excellent knowledge of the town or city's culture and assists in organizing festivals and rites of passage for female members of the communities. At the same time, Ìyálòdé acts as the female kingmaker in Yorùbá land. She also functions as the mother of every woman in the community. Hence, she is seen as the most powerful female chief in Yorùbá land. It should be noted that Fúnmiláyò held a chieftaincy title as Ìyálòdé of Ègbá land.

²¹⁸ Nina, E. Mba, “Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,” ... 139

²¹⁹ Ibid.

food and price controls, trade interference, mismanagement of his position to obtain privileges from firms by setting up monopolies, corruption, exploitation, land issues and regulations, abuses in payment of dowry, and interference in court matters.²²⁰ The absolute power invested in the Aláké was foreign and strange to the people of Ègbá land. Further, the Sole Native Authority was downright oppressive and not impactful to the communities.

There were also instances of Sole Native Authority police and Parakòyí (those in charge of market affairs or commerce) harassing and brutalizing market women in the name of taxes. Women were beaten and injured, and their goods were wasted and confiscated whenever they could not pay taxes. They were willing to pay the taxes to avoid these consequences but could not afford it. They did not benefit from the provision of amenities and social facilities, welfare, medical interventions, and aid and educational facilities from the heavy flat-rate taxes paid.

Women were mandated to pay income tax based on their income. At the same time, they must pay the flat rate or poll tax. Male members of the community pay poll tax from age 17, while females pay from age 15.²²¹ This disparity was evidence that the invented tradition in Ègbá land had no interest in women. Wives were taxed separately from their spouses.²²² The process of collection was brutal and duress. Women were stripped naked by the tax collectors to know whether they were mature enough to pay taxes. Aláké justified the brutal acts of the tax collectors by agreeing that the methods of chasing tax defaulters

²²⁰ Ibid

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid

were more effective than prosecuting offenders.²²³ The Ègbá people were against this method and criticized it, but nothing was done to their complaints.

There were also instances of Sole Native Authority police and Parakòyí (those in charge of market affairs or commerce) harassing and brutalizing market women in the name of taxes.²²⁴ Women were beaten and injured, and their goods were wasted and confiscated whenever they could not pay taxes. They were willing to pay the taxes to avoid these consequences but could not afford it. They did not benefit from the provision of amenities and social facilities, welfare, medical interventions, and aid and educational facilities from the heavy flat-rate taxes paid. The British officials and the Aláké proposed that women could afford the payment of thirty thousand naira (30,000) per annum.²²⁵ The Aláké and colonial ruler were only interested in improving the revenue that comes into the account of the colonial office in Abéòkútá.

The Aláké and colonial rulers were only interested in improving the collection of taxes from the Ègbá people, especially women. In 1938, I. W. E. Dods, a notable political officer, was invited to Abéòkútá to improve tax collection.²²⁶ He operated the Native Revenue Ordinance, which appointed the head compound or headmen to collect tax from members of his compound. He would get 5% rewards from the taxes collected. However, he would be prosecuted if he failed to collect taxes or make his people pay taxes. Some Ègbá

²²³ Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized...* 148-149.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Nina, E. Mba, "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," ... 139-140.

²²⁶ Judith, A. Byfield, "Taxation, Women, and the Colonial State: Ègbá Women's Tax Revolt." *Meridians*, 3, no 2, (2003):263.

people were arrested and prosecuted for not paying taxes. Judith provided the record of taxes in Ègbá land from 1928 to 1938 thus: 1928-1929 (\$35 317), 1929-1930 (\$36 304), 1930-1931 (\$36 945), 1931-1932 (\$33 994), 1932-1933 (\$36, 204), 1933-1934 (\$35, 411), 1934-1935 (\$35,083), 1935-1936 (\$36,172), 1936-1937 (\$36,264), and 1937-1938 (\$35, 274).²²⁷ The record showed quite a consistency in collecting taxes over 10 years using force and brutality against women and men. Plans were made on how to collect taxes, but there was no plan to engage in developmental projects. The Ègbá women's resistance occurred to dethrone Aláké, eliminate the Sole Native Authority, abolish unfair taxes, and ensure that women were adequately represented in society. The resistance was necessary because the traditional ruler and colonial officials turned deaf to the pleas, petitions, and dialogues from Ègbá women.

Strategies of Ègbá Women's Resistance

The Abèòkútá Women's Union first employed a gentlewoman's or official strategy to tackle the issue of Ègbá market women's oppression in Ègbá land. In June 1940, they wrote and submitted a petition to the Sole Native Authority Central Council.²²⁸ In the petition, they contended that the authority dually taxed women. Asking women to pay double taxes was peculiar to Ègbá land as such was not found or done in places like Ibadan.²²⁹ However, in Ègbá land, women were illegally charged with paying the salaries of the market supervisor, Parakòyí.²³⁰ Market women were burdened with and exploited through

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*78.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Bolanle Awe, *Nigerian Women Pioneers and Icons*, (Childsplay Books Limited, 2016). 13.

income and water taxes. They believed these issues happened because there was no one in the council to defend women.²³¹ Hence, they demanded that women be allowed to have their representative, or they would not pay taxes.

Fúnmiláyò and the Abẹ̀òkútá Women's Union also wrote letters to the Ègbá chiefs detailing how Aláké oppressed and exploited women. The letters were written and sent to the chiefs on July 5, 1946, and meetings were held at the palace of Aláké to discuss the letter.²³² The Ègbá women also sent letters of petition to colonial authority.²³³ Fúnmiláyò visited the colonial official in charge of Ègbá land. Several letters were written, and meetings were held to end the oppressive attitude of the traditional ruler and colonial authority over Ègbá women. However, in line with Ranger's theory of invention of traditions in colonial Africa, the British colonial ruler saw their invented traditions as African traditions, which they only assisted the Ègbá people to invent.

In contrast, the historiography of women in the Yorùbá pre-colonial period revealed that gender discrimination was not inherently part of Yorùbá culture. Aláké only re-invented the traditions invented by the British. The invention and re-invention of the traditions made the oppressive system of colonialism appear untouchable in Ègbá's land, as women had unfruitfully petitioned against it for many years. Fúnmiláyò also wrote letters to the editors of newspapers such as Daily Service and West African Pilot. Some of the letters were published. She also made it a duty to speak on the issue at all her conferences.

²³¹ Nina, E. Mba, "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,"...141.

²³² Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*78.

²³³ Ibid.

For instance, in 1949, she was appointed to represent the Ègbá people at the Western Provinces conference on the change of Richards Constitution of 1946.²³⁴ She was the only woman in the conference and argued for the inclusion and enfranchisement of women in Nigeria.

In May 1947, she employed the tactic of non-cooperating or refusing to pay taxes to show how burdensome the heavy and double taxes were on Ègbá's women.²³⁵ However, to her surprise, an anonymous person paid her taxes. This strategy failed as it did not achieve the purpose of why it was done. The union adopted mass protest as the strategy for liberating women in Ègbá. The first protest was done on November 29-30, 1947, by thousands of women who came to Aláké's palace.²³⁶ Ègbá women employed songs to reveal the evil committed by Aláké and colonial rulers. They sang:

Ademola
A big man with a big ulcer
Your behavior is deplorable
Aláké is a thief
Council members are thieves
Anyone who does not know Kuti will get into trouble
White man, you will not get to your country safely
You and Aláké will not die an honorable death ...²³⁷

The song revealed that women knew colonialism and its agents were the source of oppression. It spoke of women's formidable unity and solidarity around Fúnmiláyò's leadership. Women cooperated with one another. They all closed the market, marched, and stayed in

²³⁴ Ibid, 79.

²³⁵ Nina, E. Mba, "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,"...141.

²³⁶ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*82.

²³⁷ Ibid, 83.

front of the king's palace.²³⁸ Some women were arrested during the first protest, which was the reason for the second protest. They protest to demand the release of women who were arrested. Many women got injured in the first protest but were not discouraged from fighting for their liberation. Another serious protest was held from December 8 to 10, 1947, for 48 hours.²³⁹

The protest was done by over 10,000 women who slept outside Aláké's palace.²⁴⁰ As they did before the first protest, women prepared enough food and drinks for every protester. As part of their activities during the protest, they made sacrifices and sang abusive funeral songs in the name of Aláké of Ègbá land.²⁴¹ On the last day of the second protest, the colonial administrators and Aláké released the arrested women. The release of these women did not mean the end of taxation of women, as some women were still arrested and jailed for their inability to pay taxes. The resistance continued, and while protesting women's oppression, on February 12, 1948, Aláké banned Fúnmiláyò from entering his palace.²⁴² She was threatened with assassination, but she did not relent in her campaign against injustice. They were tired of voicing out against Aláké. On April 28, 1948, Ègbá women held a five-hour protest to resist the oppression of women in Ègbá land. They came out protesting on July 7, 8, 27, and 28.²⁴³ The protests of July 27 and 28 were held because

²³⁸ Nina, E. Mba, "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,"...141-142.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation*...84.

²⁴¹ Nina, E. Mba, "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti,"...141-142.

²⁴² Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation*...85.

²⁴³ Ibid, 87.

Aláké stepped down as the leader of the Sole Native Authority, but he was still the head of the Ègbá Native Authority.²⁴⁴ Women protested this because both bodies were the same and represented the same oppressive system. Women wanted him to be dethroned and colonialization to be eliminated. In a short time, they want the flat tax and water rate to be abolished and pay the salaries of Pàràkòyí from tax collected rather than making women pay for that.²⁴⁵ The biographic film revealed that women broke into his palace, fought with the guards, defeated them, and seized Aláké's office staff. Aláké had to escape to Òşogbo, and it showed that his chiefs advised him to run to Òşogbo.²⁴⁶

However, Johnson-Odim and Mba noted that the "British resident and the chief commissioner for the Western Provinces then advised him to leave Abèòkútá to prevent further "disorder."²⁴⁷ In both ways, there was a movement, but not yet a removal of the Aláké of Ègbá land. During his move to Òşogbo, an Ègbá Interim Council was instituted. The council recognized women and included four women to represent the women of Ègbá land.²⁴⁸ A small group of women called the Májékóbájé Society supported the Abèòkútá Women's Union. The council appointed four women from the Májékóbájé Society.²⁴⁹ The council aimed to attend to the petitions of the Abèòkútá Women's Union. The union

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome Kutí." YouTube video. 1:04:56-1:06:40.

²⁴⁶ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome Kutí." YouTube video. 1:16:14-1:19:12.

²⁴⁷ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*87.

²⁴⁸ Nina, E. Mba, "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kutí," ...143

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

successfully campaigned for the dethronement of the Aláké of Ègbá land in 1949.²⁵⁰ The unfair taxes were also abolished, and women were given the opportunity to be ably represented in the public spaces. The Ègbá Women's Union metamorphosized into the Nigerian Women's Union in 1949.²⁵¹ Fúnmiláyò became a global voice in advocating for gender freedom for women (see appendix C).

The Role of Religion in Oppression and Resistance

Religion played a significant role in the Ègbá women's resistance. Reverend Josiah Ransome-Kuti, the father of Fúnmiláyò's husband, made it known in the biographical film that Western education is not for everyone. He said this statement when Fúnmiláyò visited them to be introduced to the family. Fúnmiláyò argued with him that education is for everyone. This statement shows the inequality that colonialization manifests, which was also seen in Christian Churches in Ègbá land. In addition, Oludokun's cousin asked about Fúnmiláyò's life in England. She responded thus: “Ah! Dreadful. Some British had notice outside their houses: no Irish, no Blacks, no dogs. And Yet, here we are in Africa, carrying the White as high and mighty. God saves the king.” She was challenged by her intending father-in-law, Reverend Josiah: “I think you are being a bit judgmental. You know, if I may remind you, it was the British who brought Christianity to our pagan land.” Fúnmiláyò said: “But truth be told, sir, before the white man set foot in Africa, we Africans had our religion; we had Ogun, Sango, Oya, Obatala, Osun, and Esu. Why must you think the only way to salvation is through the white man's Christianity? The same white man who enslaved

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 144-145.

some of our ancestors, who treats us like aliens and strangers when we are in their land.” Discriminatorily, Reverend Josiah told her: “So, you do not believe in the Holy Trinity...”²⁵² Fúnmiláyò understood that Christianity was used as a tool for colonization in Africa. She not only understood it, but she expressed and resisted it. She revealed that no religion has a monopoly on knowledge and salvation. Her relationships with people from diverse religious backgrounds portrayed her as a believer and practitioner in religious freedom and pluralism.

She believed in religious freedom and truth and did not condemn any religion. For instance, she said, "You could be a pagan and be godly...Many pastors, as I see them, will end up in hell."²⁵³ This resonates with the words of Apostle Peter Acts of the Apostles 10:34-35: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." She and other women in Abéòkútá Women's Union could be stated to fear the Lord and did righteously by fighting for justice and liberation of market women. This act, in line with Abioje's concept of prophethood, could be referred to as prophetesses in Christianity and priestesses in African Traditional Religion.

The men of Ègbá land met at Sapon during the Ègbá women's resistance to discuss the oppression of their women. All the men in the meeting expressed their full support for

²⁵² “Fúnmiláyò Ransome Kuti.” YouTube video. 19:27-22:26.

²⁵³ "Mrs Fúnmiláyò Kuti, Crusaders for Rights of Women," *Daily Times*, February 10, 1969, p.8.

the actions of Ègbá women.²⁵⁴ However, they did not go to the battlefield with their women. It would not be bad if men began the protest on behalf of their women. This event raises the question of whether women must always fight for women. Why can't we have men also fighting for women's liberation and women fighting for men's liberation? This is why African womanism is necessary: It involves community-based or collective empowerment.

Initially, Ègbá men refused to permit their wives to participate in the meetings where women prepared for the protest. Once a man disallowed his wife, the wife called on other women through the window as they were going to that meeting, notifying them that her husband did not release her to attend the meeting.²⁵⁵ These women would immediately move into the house and make force with the man till he allowed his wife to attend the meetings.²⁵⁶ This method was used to get support from Ègbá men. The solidarity and women's community organizing seen by men also made men support women.

The support expressed by men who met at Sapon made the colonial administrators and Sole Native Authority believe that Reverend Kuti was bankrolling the Ègbá women's demonstration since men supported it and his wife, Fúnmiláyò, was the ringleader of the resistance.²⁵⁷ In response to this allegation, Protestant church leaders or ministers in Abèòkútá held a meeting at Canon Green's Hall. They passed a resolution that Christian

²⁵⁴ "Protestant Ministers Defend Reverend Kuti: Christian Leaders not Responsible for Abèòkútá Agitation: Use of Obscene Language by Demonstrators Deprecated," *Nigerian Daily Times*, December 31, 1947, Vol. XXII, No. 8, 590.

²⁵⁵ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*82.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*

²⁵⁷ "Protestant Ministers Defend Reverend Kuti: Christian Leaders not Responsible for Abèòkútá Agitation

leaders were not responsible for the demonstration carried out by Ègbá women. They asserted that:

Whilst deprecating the use of the obscene language of the dancing women about the town in connection with the women's demonstrations, we fail to see the justification of making the Christian leaders responsible. "On the evidence of the ministers present at the men's mass meeting held at Sapon and after careful investigation of what transpired at the meeting under reference. As leaders of the Christian Church in Ègbá land, we disagree with the 'Nigerian Daily Times' comment about Rev I.O Ransome-Kuti leading a " mob Demonstration" or a rabble and strongly commend his Christian Leadership to all sincere disciples of Christ. We earnestly recommend that the authorities go into the women's grievance most sympathetically to arrive at a peaceful settlement as early as possible.²⁵⁸

The church came out to exonerate Reverend Kuti, but there was no evidence to show that Reverend Kuti dissociated himself from the resistance. He is aware of what his wife was doing and gave her the go-ahead. The position of church leaders expressed timidity and passiveness. The church leaders stating that colonial authority sympathetically consider the demands of Ègbá shows that the church took a neutral position. African Protestant church leaders did not intend to resist colonialism in Ègbá land. Hence, they called for reformation instead of revolution, which would have ended the colonization of Africa. The Protestant Church during this period was a tool of colonial authority that could not be used to resist colonialism. However, in the case of Ègbá women's resistance, African Traditional Religion and culture played a significant role in resisting the oppression of women in colonial Ègbá land.

African Traditional Religion and Islam were reflected through songs sung during the protest. Johnson-Odim and Mba noted some songs and comments thus:

Some songs, to boost morale, were ecumenical, reflecting the diverse religious allegiances of the members: Because we are fighting on the right the

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Lord will make us victorious... for we are on the right. The streets of Mecca are as bright as daylight, paradise is our home. The women also praised the Òrìṣà, the Yorùbá pantheon of gods and goddesses. Others expressed women's determination not to pay taxes, no matter what: "We are not paying tax, if you like, take us to prison ... If you like keep us in prison, no we are not paying tax. They expressed a sense of power: Idowu [Aláké], for a long time, you have used your penis as a mark of authority that you are our husband, Today we shall reverse the order and use our vagina to play the role of husband on [sic] you ... O you men, vagina's head will seek vengeance.²⁵⁹

The first song, "Because we are fighting on the right, the Lord will make us victorious... for we are on the right," speaks of women's belief in the just course they were fighting for and their assurance that they would have victory. The second song, "The streets of Mecca are as bright as daylight, paradise is our home," reveals the eternal reward they believe God will give them because they were truth fighters. Noting that women sang songs of praise to Yorùbá divinities shows that they are adherents of Yorùbá Religion.

However, Johnson-Odim did not cite the songs sung to praise Yorùbá divinities; other sources were silent about this kind of song. This study does not doubt if songs were sung to Òrìṣà. The priestesses of Oya (goddess of the river), Sango (deity of thunder and lightning), and Osun (according to Elebuibon, she was "the only female among the deities that God sent to maintain the world. She is an Òrìṣà of water, a very powerful woman. She started witchcraft") participated in the protest.²⁶⁰ Women who were initiated and those devoted to Òrìṣà were also active participants in the protests. Fúnmiláyò is also an adherent of the African Traditional Religion. This was evident in her conversation with her

²⁵⁹ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*82-83.

²⁶⁰ Yemi Elebuibon, *Apetebi: The Wife of Orunmila*, (The Ancient Philosophy International Production, 2020), 71.

father-in-law, in which she defended the African Traditional Religion.²⁶¹ Also, Kuti's family is one of Nigeria's families devoted to African Traditional Religion. For instance, her son, Fela Anikulapo (literally, the one who has death in his pocket; that is, he has overcome death and will not die young), the popular Afrobeat musician, was a devotee of Ogun (Yorùbá divinity of iron and war), Professor Wole Soyinka (Fela's cousin) is a devotee of Yorùbá Religion, Seun Kuti, Femi Kuti, and Omoyeni Anikulapo Kuti are adherents of African Traditional Religion. The Kuti family opened the New Afrika Shrine, where African Religion and culture are celebrated. The family does not practice foreign religions, especially Christianity, due to how Christianity was used to manipulate people in Nigeria. So, songs were rendered to the Òrìṣà to praise them and seek help from them to win over their enemy (Aláké).

Women also perform sacrifices to appease divinities for victory.²⁶² Johnson-Odim and Mba did not mention the items used for sacrifice, and the divinity to whom the sacrifice was offered was not named. There is archival silence on this important aspect of the history of Ègbá women's resistance to colonialism. Sacrifices offered during the protest like this were meal and drink offerings offered to divinities and ancestors.²⁶³ It was also in the form of libation, pouring water, beer, palm wine or spirits on the mother earth or land as a symbol of respect, veneration of the divinities and ancestral spirits to ensure that prayers were answered without hindrance.²⁶⁴ The sacrifices were also preventive and appeasement

²⁶¹ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," 1:01-1:06.

²⁶² Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*83.

²⁶³ J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu. *West African Traditional Religion*.134.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 135.

sacrifices. Sacrifices were offered to prevent protesters from evil incidents.²⁶⁵ The appeasement sacrifice was offered for divine support. However, the when, how, and where the sacrifices were made and placed were also not mentioned. The mentioning of sacrifice connotes that some women carried out divination because offering sacrifices is always recommended by Ifá or Èérìndínlógún.²⁶⁶ Elebuibon noted that "when a man is faced with a problem, the Babalawo" or diviner "would prescribe sacrifice for him."²⁶⁷ The divination points out if sacrifice is needed, what to sacrifice, and how the sacrifice must be made. Women also used sacrifice as a performative tool to express their wishes. Johnson-Odim and Mba stated that "women performed mock traditional sacrifices and funeral rites for the Aláké and were in concert with tradition by collectively and publicly demonstrating against policies inimical to their interests."²⁶⁸ The sacrifice, and performance of funeral rites were not only ways of mocking the Aláké but also ways of showing their wishes for him as an enemy of women and society. Their wish was to remove the Aláké, and they achieved it through the combination of spiritual and physical efforts.

Aláké called on a diviner or Ifá priest when he could not handle the situation. After enquiring from Ifá, the diviner said, "The gods say there is war, problem has struck this town."²⁶⁹ At this moment, he knew there was trouble because Ifá did not prescribe any

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 135.

²⁶⁶ It is the use of sixteen cowries by Babaláwo (the father who has a secret for divination). It is also used by a female diviner called Ìyálórìṣà. Ifá is another name for Orunmila (Yorùbá deity of wisdom and foreknowledge). Ifá is the primary form of divination, which is done by Babaláwo or by a female diviner called Ìyánífá.

²⁶⁷ Yemi Elebuibon, *The Healing Power of Sacrifice*, (Athelia Herietta Press, 2000), 85.

²⁶⁸ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation...*83.

²⁶⁹ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," 1:18:00-1:18:53.

sacrifices, and the only way out was to abscond from the throne. It was Yorùbá traditionally wrong for him to consult Ifa in the middle or almost the end of the issue. Bade Ajayi noted that:

Ìgbà t'áyé n bẹ nígbà déwiri láéláé ojó
Ifá ni wón dá
Kí wón to máa kólé
Ifá òhún náà ni wón n dá
Kí wón tó máa fún ni lómọ
Òpèlè là á sán
Ká tó lọ rèé múlẹ

In the far distant time
It was Ifa they consulted
Before they put up a building
It was the same Ifa they consulted
Before they gave one a girl for marriage
We cast Òpèlè.
Before we take a new farmland.²⁷⁰

Ifa is the foundation of Yorùbá Religion, and Aláké's failure to consult Ifa before taking any action shows the impact of the invention of traditions that condemned Yorùbá Religion. He abandoned religion and only wanted to consult Ifa in troubled times.

The position of a king in Yorùbá land is sacred. According to Mbiti, African kings are regarded as "God's earthly viceroys...saviors, protectors, children of God, chief of the divinities, lord of earth and life."²⁷¹ Yorùbá refer to them as the deputy of Òrìṣà, and some see them as Òrìṣà. They are one of the religious leaders in the traditional African Religion. Considering his spiritual power, Johnson Cheryl Jeffries quoted an observer who noted that "it would take a good knowledge of the traditional African system of government to realize

²⁷⁰ Y. Bade Ajayi, "The Voice of Ifa in Yorùbá Political Affairs," in *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*. Eds. Razaq D. Abubakre et al, *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*, (Ilorin: NASR, 1993), 16.

²⁷¹ John, S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. 178.

what great influence an African traditional ruler wields over his people, and therefore to appreciate the depth and seriousness of an uprising that would force such a ruler to abdicate his throne ... Throughout the length and breadth of Ègbáland (people) looked up with amazing respect to the women who led the give-women-their-rights agitation that shook Ègbáland and the entire Nigeria at that time."²⁷² It is stated that it takes women's spiritual and collective effort to dethrone King Oladapo Ademola, the Aláké of Ègbá land. Chiefs and Ògbóni could dethrone him, but not by citizens.

Prayer is another religious element that Ègbá women employed in the resistance against colonialism. Ègbá women pay homage to the Divine and divine. Homage, or Ìjúbà in the Yorùbá language, was the first thing Ègbá women did before praying.²⁷³ They reverence the ancestors in everything. In distress, Ègbá women called on the Alàlẹ" (the ancestral spirit, believed to have founded the city).²⁷⁴ They prayed consistently as the protest was going on. For instance, Fúnmiláyò prayed that "we will get victory over Aláké."²⁷⁵ Other protesters responded, Àṣẹ. Àṣẹ represents "spiritual power, the power to make things happen." She also prayed that "You will not cry ... not die."²⁷⁶ Other women said, Àṣẹ. By this prayer, there was no report of the death of a woman from the Ègbá women's resistance.

Yorùbá Religion found much expression in how women used their vaginas, or nude breast to resist oppression and suppression. During the protest, Aláké and his council

²⁷² Cheryl, Jeffries Johnson, *Nigerian Women, and British Colonialism*..219.

²⁷³ Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation*...82.

²⁷⁴ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," 54:53-55:00.

²⁷⁵ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," 58:40-58:45.

²⁷⁶ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome-Kuti," 59:30-59:40.

attempted to scatter or chase away the protesters by sending the Òrò and Ògbóni cults to the protesters. The Òrò and Ògbóni cults came to the Ègbá women in the name of performing a ritual that women were forbidden to witness. Ògbóni and Òrò cults were used as a tool to silence women. Older women amongst the protesters revealed their nude breast to the Ògbóni and Òrò cults.²⁷⁷ It was also forbidden for the cults to see the nude breast of older women. Nudity was used as a counter-reaction to the actions of the Ògbóni and Òrò cults. It was also employed as a powerful tool for women's resistance. Using women's nudity for resistance was a common phenomenon in Africa. Revealing women's bodies was employed during the resistance led by Wangari Maathai in Kenya. The Women for Liberia Mass Action for Peace threatened the delegate at the peace negotiation in 2003 that this resistance method would be employed to avert the second Liberian Civil War.²⁷⁸ Nakedness was employed by women during the Aba women's riot against unfair taxes on women in 1929.²⁷⁹

The exposure of women's, especially older women's nudes' breast, is a spiritual and traditional way of addressing critical issues in African communities. Women use this warfare method to seek social redress, liberation, and justice and rebuke evil doers in the community.²⁸⁰ As an African, my forebears told me that the Supreme Being spiritually

²⁷⁷ “Fúnmiláyò Ransome Kuti.” 01:01: 01-22:26.

²⁷⁸ Gcotyelwa Jimlongo, “When Women have Reached the End of their Politics: Nakedness as Resistance,” Accessed on March 10, 2025, https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/politics/Nakedness_as_Resistance-_Gcotyelwa_Jimlongo_.pdf.

²⁷⁹ Marc Matera, Misty Bastian L. and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). 192-193.

²⁸⁰ Laura S. Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke: Female Genital Power in Ritual and Politics in West Africa*, (Duke University Press, 2018). 81-96.

empowered women, and one of the ways of manifesting the power is through nudity. The use of this spiritual force by Ègbá women was the turning point in their resistance against oppression. It was a turning point because Ògbóni and Òrò were the last hope for Aláké to silence Ègbá women, but they (the Ògbóni and Òrò cults) failed. Having failed, they backed out from supporting Aláké, and the British colonial officials continued to mount pressure on Aláké to stop the protest. He was not able to suppress the protesters through Ògbóni and Òrò. Hence, he lost his power to women. Celebrating their victory, they dance WÒrò dance around Ègbá land.²⁸¹ They later gathered for Thanksgiving at the Central Mosque, Ijeun, Abèòkútá.²⁸² Prayer as a religious tool was employed while resisting injustice and exploitation.

²⁸¹ Wòrò is a Yorùbá musical dance that Yorùbá Muslims integrated into Yorùbá Islamic dance. It is a celebration dance during the festive period in Yorùbá land, especially among the Ijebu-Egbe and Ikòròdu people in Lagos State, Nigeria.

²⁸² Cheryl, Jeffries Johnson, *Nigerian Women, and British Colonialism...*219-220.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the history of Ègbá women's resistance to taxes and gender oppression by Aláké and British colonial officials in Ègbá land through the lens of the invention of traditions in colonial Africa, the theory of African womanism, and the concept of prophethood. The theories and concepts were employed to discuss women's position and experience. It was noted that women occupied significant and active positions during the pre-colonial period in Ègbá land. Women functioned as priestesses, singers, dancers, businesswomen, medicine women, traditional chiefs, warriors, and regents after the demise of a king in Yorùbá land. Women not only occupied these positions, but they also functioned actively for the growth of the Ègbá communities.

However, the advent of colonialism and the invention of traditions led to gender discrimination, which made women lose their position and became subjects of oppression in the colonial period. Women lost their political representation in the Ègbá political system. From the lens of the invention of traditions in colonial Africa, women lost their political, economic, religious, and social roles under the invention and re-invention of traditions in Ègbá land. The invention of traditions empowered colonizers to command Ègbá traditional rulers, as they (traditional rulers) also obeyed the rules and re-invented the oppressive traditions against their people. Ègbá women, especially market women, suffered double taxes. Also, women were not allowed to have representatives at all levels. Hence, Ègbá's political

system and society became patriarchal and rigid, losing sovereignty to the colonizers. It was explained that men also suffered under the invention of traditions. However, women suffered a double portion of oppression as Africans under colonial rule and as women through gender discrimination.

The colonial authority forced Ègbá market women to pay double taxes, including income and flat-rate taxes. They were also responsible for paying the salaries of the colonial government market officials called Parakoyi. The colonial authority needed the taxes to meet the cost of war and post-war financial obligations. Rice was seized from Ègbá market women to store and supply emergency food for soldiers during the Second World War. Women were treated with no dignity. This is reflected in how Ègbá's traditional rulers and colonial authority did not pay careful attention to the demands of Ègbá women. The Ègbá women, through the Abèòkútá Women's Union, requested the complete abolition of all flat-rate taxes for women, the water rate was also eliminated, and the salaries of the Parakoyi must be paid not from the pocket of the market's women. Ègbá women employed letter writing, holding meetings with colonizers and traditional rulers, and demonstrations as ways of resisting colonialism.

Through Ègbá women's public demonstrations against the exploitation of women in Ègbá land, the dignity of women as the womb of life and indispensable creatures in the Ègbá communities was restored. They won by never accepting no as an answer to their request. Also, they were fully aware of women's power; they knew their identity as mothers of all human beings, which positioned them as individuals of great dignity. This shows that future resistance must begin with identifying oneself and planning. Women held meetings to plan for the protest. The adequate planning made them formidable. They planned and

made food available for protesters through collective contributions from every woman. Another thing Ègbá women's resistance suggests to future resistance is the values of solidarity and collaboration. Some educated women refused to join the struggle against oppression, but the number of women who joined the protest was far greater than the few elite women who did not join. Fúnmiláyò accepted to fight for market women and other women, and these women stood boldly behind her. Women outside the Ègbá land joined the fight in the spirit of love, collaboration, and solidarity. After the first protest, and seeing how women were injured, they secretly sent for women from other Yorùbá cities. The fight was seen as a collective struggle. Market women closed their shops, and women handed their children to their husbands at home. Collaboration and collectivity won the fight against oppression. Even guards in Aláké's palace could not withstand them.

Their determination was strong and unshaken. As the song says, " We will not get tired, we will be victorious in battle," and "We shall fight to death."²⁸³ They were determined to sacrifice themselves for women's liberation in Ègbá land. Also, using or wearing the same color or type of cloth symbolizes oneness and makes it easy for them to identify with one another. They spoke with one voice. Another value this added to women's resistance in Nigeria is selflessness. Selflessness began in Fúnmiláyò. She was privileged, educated, and could afford to pay her taxes, but she put the burden of the market and uneducated women upon herself. This selflessness made her, and other women endure threats and persecution from the colonizers and Aláké.

The history of Ègbá women also reveals petitioning, negotiation, refusal to pay tax,

²⁸³ "Fúnmiláyò Ransome Kuti." YouTube video. 01:01: 01-22:26.

and protest as various forms of resistance. This study contributes to Africana Studies by showing that African Traditional Religion and culture are tools for resistance. This study asserted that African Traditional Religion and culture were employed to resist colonialism and reclaim the pride of place women occupied in the pre-colonial Ègbá land and Nigeria at large. They employed religious songs, offered sacrifices, and paid homage to Òrìṣà. African traditional religious and cultural force of older women's nudity was used to silence the Ògbóni and Òrò cults during the resistance. Ègbá women won the fight for truth despite the timid attitude of church leaders and passive support from Ègbá men. This work calls them truth fighters without vestment because they were not ordained. This study positioned them as genuine religious leaders because they fought for the truth. This study concludes that women are active agitators against colonial rule by using African Traditional Religion and culture, which subsequent resistance can employ in the struggle against gender discrimination in Africa and other Black communities, as gender discrimination is still a menace in Nigeria.

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Appendix A

MAP OF NIGERIA



Kelvin Brown Bomah, “Map of Nigeria showing the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Accessed March 21, 2025. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Nigeria-showing-the-36-states-and-the-Federal-Capital-Territory-Abuja_fig3_275350414

Appendix B

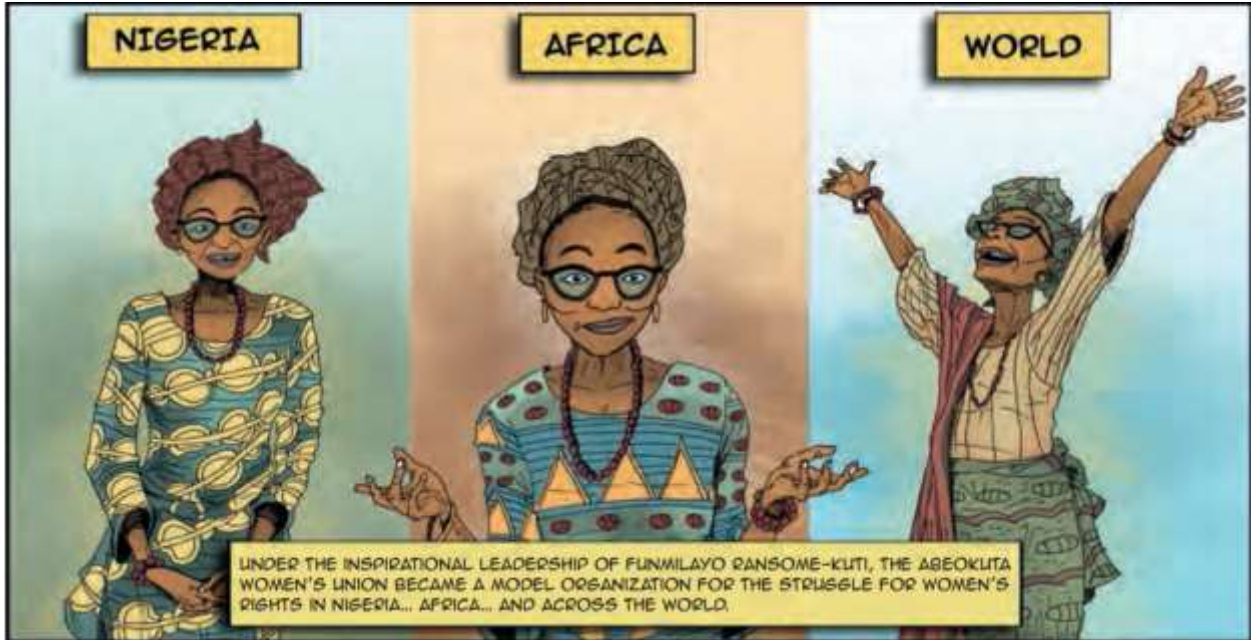
ÈGBÁ COUNCIL REAFFIRMS DECISION



Archival material accessed from Kuti Museum, Abèòkútá. January 12, 2025.

Appendix C

GLOBAL FIGURE

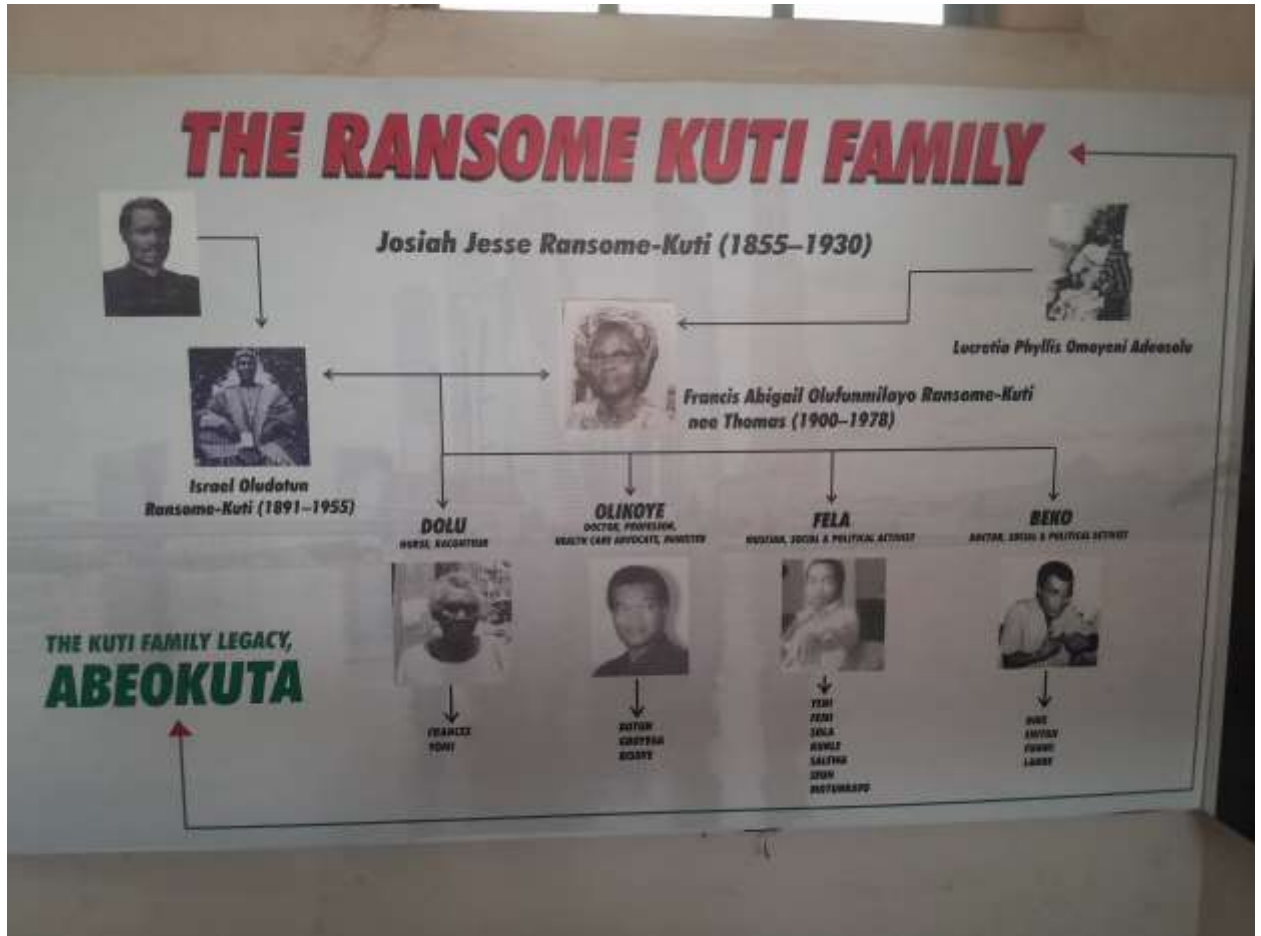


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Appendix D

FÚNMILÁYÒ'S FAMILY MEMBERS



Appendix F

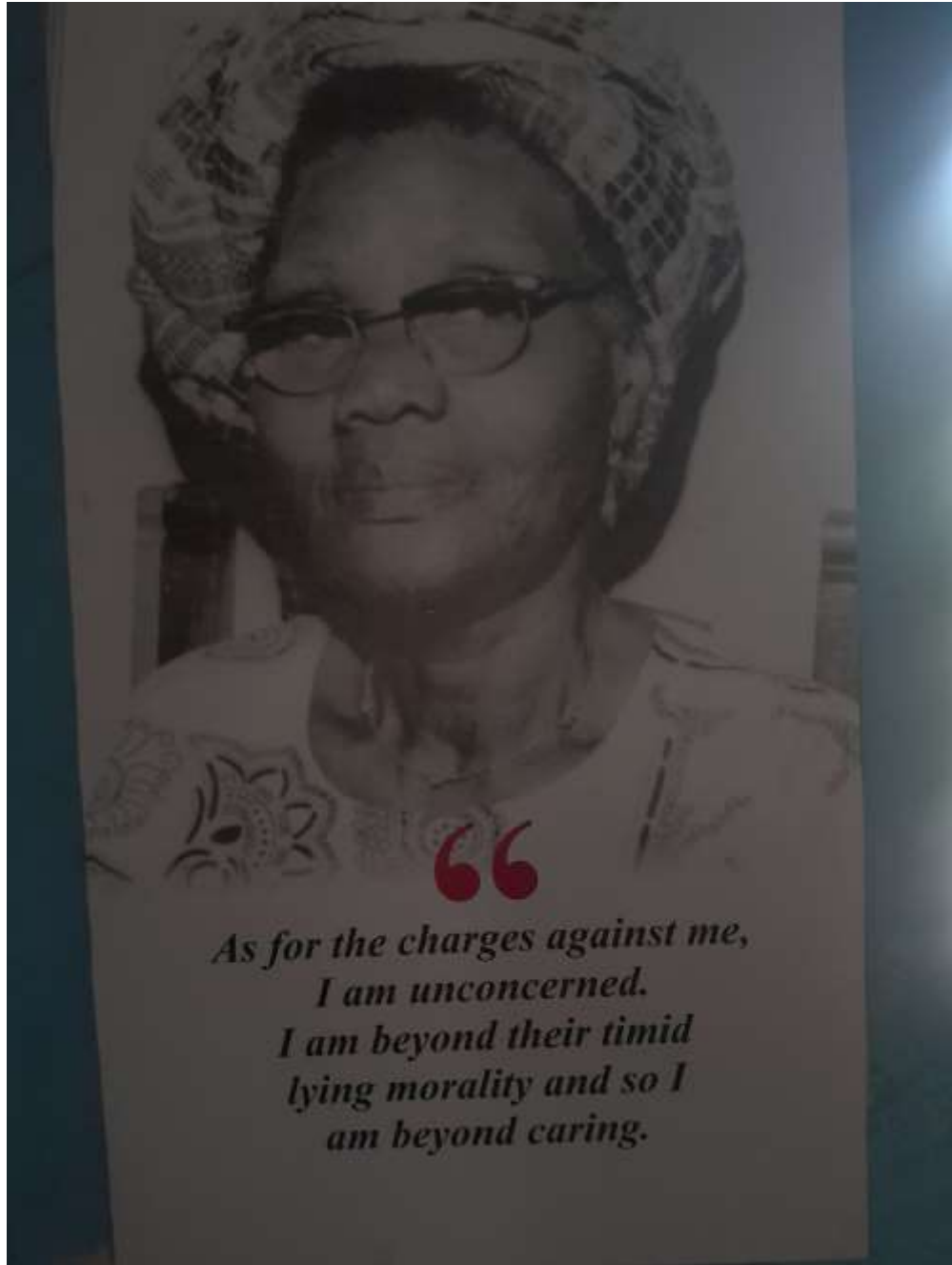
BIOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF FÚNMILÁYÒ RANSOME-KUTI



Source: Kuti Museum, Abẹ̀òkúta. Accessed on January 12, 2025.

Appendix G

NO WORRIES



Source: Kuti Museum, Abéòkútá. Accessed on January 12, 2025.

Appendix H

FÚNMILÁYÒ'S BIOGRAPHIC PICTURE

Funmilayo Ransome Kuti

Francis Abigail Olufunmilayo Thomas was born in Nigeria in 1900. Funmilayo (the name she went by) was the first female student at her elementary school and then studied in England before returning to Nigeria and becoming a teacher. In 1932, she gathered a few young women together to start the Abeolata Ladies Club (ALC) which began as a small, polite group focused on learning proper etiquette, drinking tea, and doing crafts.

In 1944, a former student came to see Funmilayo, and introduced her to a market woman who wanted to learn to read. Most of the market women were poor and illiterate, and wanted the ALC to help them learn to read. Under Funmilayo's direction, the club expanded its membership to include the market women, and began holding literacy classes. But literacy was not their only obstacle; Nigeria was then a British colony, and under British policies, market women also faced daily injustices at the hands of police and government officials.

Their products, especially rice, were often seized for no reason. In 1945, the members of the the ALC held a press conference to draw attention to the exploitation of women workers. The newspaper ran an article about it, and one week later, the rice seizures stopped. The ALC, emboldened, quickly grew to 20,000 members committed to reforming the country and empowering women through education, health care and suffrage. In 1947, Funmilayo was the only female member of a delegation who went London to advocate for Nigeria's independence.

Funmilayo's legacy lives on in many ways, including the fact that her son, Fela Kuti, became the country's most popular musician, singing about corruption, neo-colonialism, and people's struggles.



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People's
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