

**REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN FICTION: A READING OF THE NOVELS OF  
D.O. FAGUNWA**

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***Abstract***

*Most Yoruba female critics have accused early Yoruba male writers including D.O. Fagunwa, a Yorùbá literary legend, of condoning patriarchy and that male writers are deeply entrenched in one dimensional, minimalized presentation of women in their novels which ignites and perpetrates hegemonic patriarchal discourse in Yoruba literary criticism. This paper attempts a re-analysis of the representation of gender from the lenses of literary narratives of D.O. Fagunwa. The five novels of the novelist namely: Ògbójú Ọḍẹ, Igbó Olódùmarè, Ìrèké Oníbùdó, Ìrìnkèrindò, and Àdìtù Olódùmarè constitute the sources of data for the analysis. The paper concludes that Fagunwa's works show evidence of an existing stereotypical image of the sexes both in personality traits, and occupation among others, yet, his literary works negate marginalization of women and reject the peripheral roles assigned to women folk in the Post-colonial Yoruba society.*

(Key Words: Gender, Gender discourse, Representation ,Yoruba novel).

**INTRODUCTION**

Representation is one of the broad areas of contestation in postcolonial discourse. Colonialists theorists have used texts and textuality to give authoritative pictures of themselves and derogatory and distorted image of others. The need to strip away the layers of distortion and misinterpretation gave impetus to early Yoruba writers to produce literary narratives in splendid Yoruba language. It was a matter of claiming and reclaiming a voice, one that would allow them to represent themselves rather than being represented by outsiders with the bias attached to such representations, that brought out and promoted iconic figures of Yoruba literature especially Fagunwa. The correcting and negotiating the distorted portraits of the African people has been the pre-occupation of many African writers for many years. One area that has received

tremendous attention in recent years is the gender discourse.

In fact, the last century witnessed an upsurge in literature triggered by the feminist movement. This unprecedented event has transformed the various literary genres that are being deconstructed to suit the changing times. African literature including indigenous literature has not been spared by the universalized world order. The World Health Organization (2002) defines gender as a term used to describe those characteristics of men and women, which are socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. The division of people into two categories- men and women, termed gender has generated debates, counter-debates and contentions among scholars of diverse disciplines.

There are contentions that the term “gender” originated from Western European epistemologies and actually misinterpreted African women realities. In the book, *The Invention of women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyewunmi (2005) interrogated gender as a western construct based on binary biologic categories that are inappropriate to Yoruba society. The work questioned the usefulness of gender as an analytical category and its hegemonic influence on African knowledge production, the identity of women, marriage and bride wealth, division of labor, women’s control of property and women’s sexuality. She dismissed the relevance of the concept to African reality because of its rootedness in western gender discourse.

In *Re-creating ourselves: African women and Critical Transformations*, Ogundipe- Leslie (1994) challenges the motion of African tradition being inherently restrictive to women and she supports the claim that these patriarchal structures were actually western imports. She declares that the British simply swept aside previous female political structure in society, replacing them with completely male structures and positions. There existed a complementary between male and female roles in pre-colonial African societies and it is during and after colonization that the downfall by the African woman from a position of power and self-sovereignty to becoming man’s helper occurred (Fonchingong, 2006:46).

Mohanty (1991) claims that there are three basic problems that exist within western feminist and gender discourses-the first being the assumption that women constitute a coherent group with identical interests, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location. Secondly, she identifies the unsubstantiated universality placed on these women’s experiences. Mohanty’s third claim addresses the binaries that exist within these discourses. She discusses the juxtaposition of

men and women, as well as the polarization of the Third World Women who is represented as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic and family oriented” with the white, western feminist who is depicted “educated, modern, having control over(her) own [body, sexuality]” etc.( Mohanty (1991:56).

Mohanty (1991) reiterates the importance of discussing the lives of women within specific contexts. She believes that feminists need to examine the peculiarities of the structures that exist rather than apply their own biased conclusions. These and other debates lead to emergence of diverse gender discourse in African literature. Gender related issues are discussed under different nomenclatures, concepts and terminologies.

Some of the terminologies fashioned out under which gender issues are discussed are: Ogun-dipe- Leslie’s (1994) “STIWANISM”- Social Transformation including Women In Africa to discuss women’s agenda in Africa without having to answer charges of imitativeness. Ogun-dipe Leslie advocates the use of the term to free African gender discourses from the critiques of and comparisons to Western feminism. Clenora Hudson-Weems, author of *Africana Womanism*, Alice Walker’s *Womanism and Black’s Feminism*, Kolawole’s *Womanism* among numerous others.

In Yoruba literary circle, gender discourse was christened “Ìṣẹ̀gbẹ̀fábo” by the Yorùbá studies Association of Nigeria. The term Ìṣẹ̀gbẹ̀fábo has been challenged by Yorùbá feminist writers such as Adebowale (1999), Adejumo (1999) and Sheba (1999), they suggested Ìṣètófábo (doing the right things for the women) instead of “Ìṣẹ̀gbẹ̀fábo” which carries a sympathetic or partiality mark on it. While the issue of terminology has remained significant to several African women writers, indigenous writers inclusive, many have objected to the use of labels in the struggle for women’s empowerment. Nevertheless, the varying terms that are being created and championed in the light of the inefficiencies of western feminism, are bound by a common interest-the complete liberation of Africa’s land and peoples.

Yorùbá male writers have been criticized for “the adverse and false simplistic image of women” (Adagbada (2006) for example some titles of Yorùbá novels devalue the dignity of womanhood e.g. *Filà lobinrin* (Bode Akinola), *Ṣadé Èdán* (Bisi Oyewole) while names given to women characters in *Atótó Arere*, one of the novels of Okediji are criticized. For example Bolabola, is a rogue, Idi Osè, Idi Arẹrẹ, portray the sizes of their buttocks. These are books written after colonization. Toward extent is this true of Fagunwa the Yorùbá literary legend?

Does Fagunwa give a dignifying representation of the womanhood in his novels? How does the Yorùbá hold women in the pre-colonial era as reflected in the novels of Fagunwa? What lesson can the contemporary feminists and writers gain from the representation of gender in Fagunwa's novels? These and other questions constitute the problem of the study.

A background knowledge of the biography of D.O. Fagunwa would assist us in the objective criticism of his novels especially in the ways he represents gender. According to Olabimtan (1975), Fagunwa's grandfather, Asungaga Beyioku was an Ifa priest in Oke Igbo. His father was also very knowledgeable in Ifa before he was converted to Christianity and took Joshua as his Christian name. He (Joshua) later became Baba Ìjọ (father of the congregation) of St. Luke's church, Òkè-Igbó. His mother, Òşunyomí, was also converted to Christianity, took Rachael as her baptismal name, and later became Iyá Ìjọ (mother of the congregation) of the same St. Luke's church Òkè-Igbó. From the above, it is clear, that Olorunfemi, was born in 1903 to parents who had been worshippers of Oşun (a river goddess) and Ifá (the Yoruba god of divination and wisdom) before they were converted to Christianity.

Olorunfemi started formal schooling in 1916 at St. Luke's school, Òkè-Igbó. During his formative years 1903-1916, his home was his school and it was probably this period that he imbibed much of his knowledge of Yoruba culture and ways of life. He went to St. Andrew's College, Oyo an institution founded in 1876 to produce evangelist teachers who would help in the propagation of the gospel of Christ in the Yoruba society. By the time he passed out of the institution in 1929, he had become a believer of the Christian religion.

The motivation for Fagunwa's novels probably stemmed from his cultural nationalism and ecumenism. Fagunwa belongs to two traditions- the foreign Christian tradition and the Yoruba tradition. He tries to protect, promote and project the Yoruba cultural values and at the same time embrace the foreign culture he considers useful to the Yoruba society. Thus, Fagunwa's poetics has not only an ideological allegiance to Western values and beliefs but also to Yorùbá cultural values. It is within the context of these two divides that he represents all issues relating to the women.

## **REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN FAGUNWA'S NOVELS**

### **THE SYMBOLIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE**

The Yoruba believe that the bird of the sky cannot fly with one wing, so also, the human

society cannot stand without the women and the men living together. In *Ìrèké Oníbùdó*, Fagunwa presents two cities, one city for men and one city for women. The women city is populated by women alone with no single man, while the men city has no single woman. The main character observes the following events and scenes in the two different cities;

In the men's city, there is no parental love toward the children. The children are disobedient to their fathers. The fathers have no time for the children; they attach less value to the children because none of them have childbirth experience. They are very crude in action, shabby in dressing and coarse in speech. There is so much noise in the town because they talk loudly and laugh noisily. Whatever they do is done with harshness and hardness. When they dance, sing or drum, it is always hard. There is nothing like deep love. They hardly fight and when they fight they settle the matter immediately. They prepare good food but their soup is not always delicious. They do not know how to organize their sitting rooms. The street is neat but the house is not well arranged. They drop their caps anyhow.

In the women's city, things are not equally satisfactory, *Ẹyẹ ọrun* is the king, and she collects children for the women from heaven. Most women walk about naked in their houses, the young ladies dress well but they untie their clothes anywhere. All the works of men are done also in the women's city. They are very fashionable than the men but they love to backbite. Their houses are not as neat as the men's city, the town's street are full of bushes and trees. Even though their women are neatly dressed, still, they occupy their rooms with excess luggages. Whenever they are going to any journey, they go with different bags of loads. The women are always in fear in the night. They are emotional and can weep on any matter. They are merciful than the men. Some of the women are simple; some are good while some of them are hard and harsh on their servants. They are deeply religious, committed and faithful. The experience of the main character in the two cities makes him to conclude that:

*Nígbà tí mo wo gbogbo wọn, tí mo sì tún wo ohun tí mo rí ní ìlu àwọn ọkùnrin, mo rí i pé ogbón Ẹlédàá pò púpò tí ó da ọkùnrin àti obìnrin sí òde ayé àwọn ọkùnrin dúrò bí egungun, àwọn obìnrin sì dúrò bí i ẹran ara èniyàn. Láìsí egungun, ara kò lè ẹ nnkan. Láìsí ẹran, egungun kò lè ẹ nnkan.(p.109)*

*When I looked at all of them and looked again at what I saw in the city of men, I realized that the wisdom of the creator is great to have created human beings male and female in the world. The men stand for the bones, while the women stand for the flesh. Without the bones, the body cannot do anything, without the flesh, the bone cannot do anything either (p.109).*

The metaphor of 'bone' and 'flesh' to depict male and female symbolizes the symbiotic relationship between the two sexes. Neither of the sex is created to live separately from the other. The creation of human being as male and female has a divine purpose. The co-existence of men and women in the society is to bring out the potentials in each sex to complement each other. They are to live together, plan together enjoy life and struggle together. In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, the narrator describes the relationship between men and women as follows.

*Ìkarahun ni obìnrin, ìgbín ni òkùnrin ibikíbi tí ìgbín bá n lẹ,  
ti òun ti ìkarahun ní n lẹ (p.102)*

*The woman is the covering shell; the man is the snail,  
wherever the snail goes, it carries its shell along.(p.102)*

The 'bone' and 'flesh' (metaphor and "shell and snail" metaphor are reflected in all the representation of gender in the five novels of D. O Fagunwa. Many of the attributes and faults attributed to women characters in Fagunwa's novels are stereotyped ones generally associated with women in the traditional Yoruba society. For example they love fashion and jewelry, clothes and shoes (*Adiitu*, 45, 46, 65). They are easily frightened and very emotional (*Ireke*, 111-112). They are secretive and only few of them can be trusted (*Adiitu* 65), they stay with a man while the situation is rosy and disappear or desert him in the time of trouble. (*Ireke* 89- 90). These views are based on the metaphor, that the flesh is weak while the bone is strong.

## **YORUBA FAMILY LIFE AND THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN**

Each of the main characters in Fagunwa's novels marry. Akara Oogun in *Igbó Irúnmolẹ* marries up to nine wives until he experiences broken home. Ìrèké ayé has up to 22 wives while Ìrèké Oníbùdó has only one wife- Ìfẹpàdé. In *Ìrìnkèrindò*, the hero marries only one wife and that is Ìfẹpàtàkì while *Adiitu* marries *Iyunade* as his only wife. *Olowoaye* marries *Àjẹdìran* and two more wives when he becomes wealthy. Even the minor characters in the novels of Fagunwa

marry wives. All the kings in the five novels have harem of wives, there is hardly a male character without a wife. In traditional Yoruba society there is no room for “lesbianism or gay”. The first wife of Akara Oogun in *Ogboju Ode* states the duties of a housewife when her husband informs her about his guest-the storyteller. She responds to her husband’s request of food:

*Mo mọ pé iṣẹ rẹ pọ̀ sùgbón ṣiṣe ni iṣẹ, n o o tójú ilé rẹ, n ó ò tójú ònà rẹ, n ó ò tójú omọ rẹ, n ó ò si wa oúnjẹ pàtàkì si ọ ni ònà òfun (p.8).*

*I know that your work is much, but the work must be done. I will take care of your house, I will take care of your ways, I will take care of your children and I will prepare delicious food that would satisfy your throat.(p.8)*

The traditional responsibilities of a housewife in the Yoruba society are mentioned by the speaker namely: domestic work, care of the husband, children and food preparation for the household. However, these responsibilities are most of the time carried out by both the wives and husbands. For example, in *Ìrinkèrindò*, when the storyteller comes to the hero of the novel in the night, he prepares the food himself instead of waking up his wife. Fagunwa believes that the family’s responsibilities should be collectively carried out by both sexes. Akara Oogun’s wife gives a magic handkerchief to her husband to provide any type of food whenever he is hungry. Here, Akara Oogun has to follow the procedures before the magic handkerchief produces food. Ajeḍiran refreshes her husband during the battle of Olowoaye with Anjonu ibèrù while he too provides partridge for his wife to make her happy during pregnancy.

The role of women as wives vary greatly in each of the novels, however, there is no place where they are portrayed as voiceless, timid or feeble. The female characters never allow the men to tread upon them or oppress them. The only place that we see oppression by women is in the story of kako, a fiery, bold and courageous hunter with insignificant intelligence. After waiting for seven years to marry his wife, on the day of his wedding he used brutal force to disgrace his wife and eventually killed her. The repercussion is quick and on the way to the mount Òke Lángbódò, they lost the way, it took the mercy of God before he and others received forgiveness.

The wives of the heroes are portrayed as wonderful counselors. Whenever they give

counsel to their husbands, such counseling has divine backing. They are usually exact, correct, deep and insightful. In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Àjẹ̀dìran gives the following counsel to her husband about the dangers of Igbó Olódùmarè:

*Ìwọ ọmọkùnrin, igbó Olódùmarè lewu gidigidi, ilé ijàmbá ni, igbó ibànújé ni, bí iwọ kò bá sọra, iwọ yóò kábààmọ lílọ rẹ sùgbón tí iwọ bá gba imòràn, iwọ yóò ni orúkọ rere lẹyìn ọla, àwọn ọmọ èniyàn kì í lọ sí ibẹ́ kí wọn padà bọ. Sùgbón bí Èlédàá tí mú kí iwọ ẹ alábàápàdé wa yìí nkó, iwọ yóò padà bí iwọ bá gbóràn sí wa lẹnu (p.27)*

*You man, the forest of the Almighty God is dangerous. It is the home of danger, it is the forest of sorrow, if you are not careful you will regret your going there but if you listen to counsel you will have a good name in the future. Human beings do not go there and come back alive, but now that the creator has brought us together, if you listen to our counsel, you will come back in safety (p.27)*

Olowoaye listened to the wise counsel of his wife and he came back from the forest safely. In *Àdìtú Olódùmarè*, Adiitu equally listened to the counsel of Iyunade on the secret plan of Eṣu-lẹyìn-ìbejì to terminate his life, he succeeds. However, most of the major male characters and other functional characters who refuse to listen to the right counsel of their wives at critical time end in disgrace and/or death. Obiri aye the husband of Iponjudiran in *Àdìtú Olódùmarè* rejects the counsel of his wife and ends in penury. Obiri-aye was well-to-do but by wasteful spending especially on his secret lovers and his refusal to listen to the wise counsel of his wife he becomes extremely poor. In *Ìrèké Oníbùdó*, Ìrèké-aye, the father of the hero rejects the counsel of his wife and he ends in shame. The hero laments:

*Ìgbẹyìn bàbá mi kò dára, ayé rẹ kò bá sì ti rí bẹ́ bí o bá jẹ pé o fi etí sí imòràn iyá mi (p.46)*

*The end of my father was terrible, had he listened to my mother, it would not have been so for him. (p.46)*

So, the woman is not only to rare children and take care of the homes, she is the “shell” covering the “snail”. She is the counselor of the family. Somebody that has the special grace to



monitor not only the children but the husband too. The role of monitoring the family is adequately portrayed in the woman as a mother in the novels of Fagunwa. Fagunwa presents the woman as a mother whose unique position in the family is referred, honoured and respected by all and sundry. Fagunwa portrays the mother as one who cherishes her role as a home maker as well as her status as a mother, a loving mother, caring, and full of grace to counsel the children at all times. The Yorùbá believe that even when the mother –joins her ancestors, she still has the power to guide, help and sustain her children on earth. In all the novels of Fagunwa, whenever the main character enters into a very difficult situation or faced with danger, he calls his mother for help.

In *Ògbójú ọ̀dẹ̀ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọ̀lẹ̀*, when Akara oogun escapes to ilú àwọn iwín (the city of spirits) in his second trip to the forest, he makes friends with the king of the town, whom he saves from treacherous plot by his wife and subjects by foiling their plans to assassinate him. In order to get rid of Akara-oogun, the townspeople, including his very good friend, conspire against him and accuse him of stealing the king's dog which has a silver body and golden teeth. At the end, the youths of the town descend on him and punish him by burying him vertically in a pit from which he later escapes by divine intervention. The intervention of a beautiful girl who nurses the hero back to health gives him hope until suddenly the girl died all her servants died also. Akara oògùn in this dilemma invokes the spirit of her dead mother as follows:

*A! iyá mi ọ̀wọ̀n, iyá mi tòótó, iyá tí ó pé, iyá tí o níláárí, iyá tí ó mú yányán, iyá tí kì í ẹ̀ iyá lásán, iyá tí kì í ẹ̀ iyá kékeré, iyá tí kì í ẹ̀ iyá búburú, iyá tí ó jẹ̀ bọ̀kíní láyé, iyá tí ó jẹ̀ gbajúmọ̀ lórún, iyá tí ó rí jẹ̀ láyé, iyá tí ó rí mu lórún, A! Ìwọ̀ iyá aláìlábàwọ̀n, ibikibi tí ìwọ̀ bá wà lóníí, má sàì jẹ̀ kí n rí ọ̀ (o.i : 39)*

*A! My dear mother, my true mother, the mother that is complete, the mother that is important; the mother who is smart, the mother who is not vain, the mother who is not small, the mother who is not wicked, a very famous mother in the world, important dignitary in heaven the mother who has food to eat on earth and has something to drink in heaven. A! You spotless, stainless mother, wherever you are today, let me see you. ( p.39)*

The mother of the hero appears, full of mercy, concern and love for her son. She comforts

him, counsels and guides him to the place of safety. In the Invocation of the hero, the attributes of a mother are clearly brought out. The mother is a dearly beloved one in the Yoruba society. She cares for the child and she is always ready to sustain the happiness, progress, safety and protection of the mother till life. Even though, Akara Oogun, at that time, is of age, yet the intervention of her mother at that critical time confirms the sayings of the Yoruba people that: “Abiyamọ kii gbékún ọmọ rẹ kó má tatí were” (the mother never hears the cry of her child without rapt attention).

In *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Olowoaye, the main character is left in the forest for three years without help; she appears to save her son from the hands of lion brass stationed at the gate of Baba Onírungbòn yéúkẹ. She consoles and comforts the hero and gives him a bean cake from heaven which can never be exhausted. She also offers guidance and help.

In *Ìrèké Oníbùdó*, the hero suffers a shipwreck and is captured by mermaids and taken to the queen of the fishes, Àrògìdìgbà who sets him three tasks to perform. These tasks are: to build a house in one day, to plant yams and reap them the same day, and to fight with a fire-breathing monster Ewúrẹ- Ìbèrù. The hero performs all the tasks successfully through the help of his mother. In *Ìrìnkèrindò*, when the travelers are faced with difficulties leading to a fierce battle with the gate keeper of the forest and the animals, the travelers manage to overcome them only through the intervention of the Irinkinrindo’s dead mother. In *Àdìtù Olódùmarè*, the correct and timely counsel of Iyunade’s mother prevents her from taking a wrong step in the matter of her marriage with Àdìtù.

From the brief analysis of the events involving mothers in the plot of the novels, it is clear that the mothers are not only breeders of children, they sustain the children, and they sustain the children with direct help, counsel and rare words of wisdom to help the family. They are gifted with uncommon grace to help others, they are merciful, loving and they utilize whatever power or resources in their husbands. The incursion of colonialism has changed the souls of mothers. Today, many mothers involve their own children in trafficking and prostitution.

## **CHARACTERIZATION AND THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN IN FAGUNWA’S NOVELS**

The mode of characterization in Fagunwa’s novels is favourable to women. Fagunwa depicts character by description, use of a symbol, names and by giving a historical sketch, but the most favourable way of depicting character in Fagunwa’s novels is through names.

According to Bamgbose(2007p. 75), the author seems to believe in the use of names that immediately sum up a character or give a clue about his behaviour. Most of the names that show negative human attributes and character are found in the male character e.g. Ayédèrú-èdá (Traacherous creature), Òmùgòdiméjì (Foolishness multiplied twofold), Àgùntàn-inàkí (sheep-Gorrila), Ìgbín-èniyàn (Snail man), Ìlábùru (Monkey), Èsùlèyìnibèjì (Satan behind the twins). In *Ìrìnkèrindò*, we are told that Tèmbèlèkùn (Trouble is a brother to Bìlísì (Temptation) and father to Ìdàrúdàpò (Confussion) or that Òmùgòdiméta (Foolishness multiplied threefold) king of Edidarè (The foolish ones) is the son of Òmùgòdiméjì (Foolishness multiplied twofold) and Ìlábùrù (Monkey) Monkeys are generally associated with idiocy by the Yorùbá and that his brother is Dánásungbó (Silly errand boy). These are attributes conveyed by the names of the characters.

However, Fagunwa gives names to the female characters in such a way that it dignifies the value of women folk. Such names are attractive beautiful, meaningful, eventful and loaded with meanings. For example: Ìfèpàdé. In *Ìrèké Oníbùdó*, Ìfèpàdé's lips are described in the following words:

*Ètè rẹ mọ ní iwòntunwònsí, kò níṣọn púpọ, kò fẹlẹ púpọ, kò dúdú rékojá,  
kò pupa tayọ, ó bá ẹnu mu (Ìrèké, 73)*

*Her lips are moderate, they are not too thick, they are not too thin, they are not too black, they are not too red, they fit in with the mouth.*

In *Ìrìnkèrindò*, Ẹwàdàpò is described as follows:

*Ẹwàdàpò dára ní ọmọ ẹgàn ló kù. Gbogbo ara rẹ bá ara wọn mu: orí kò tóbi ju ibi tí ó yẹ, ọrùn kò kéré kojá iwò, bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni tapátẹ̀sẹ̀ bá ara wọn jọ (o.i : 93)*

*Spite apart, Ẹwadapọ is a beautiful girl, her whole body is well proportioned: the head is not bigger than it should be, the neck is not too small, and the limbs match one another. (93)*

Other names are Ìfèpàtàkì, Ìfèpínyà, Iyùnadé, Obìnrin arẹwà kan, Ahòndiwùrà among others. Even though the names portray the attractiveness and beautiful nature of women they also show the priceless value of women. The names confirm the saying of the Yoruba about the

invaluable nature of women – “*iyá ni wúrà*” mother is gold.

In the character of Iyunade in *Àdiitú Olódùmarè*, we see a living character, the type of character we encounter in modern day Yorùbá society. She is a vivacious and willful, full of humour and highly intelligent lady. She cannot be oppressed or deceived by the riches of men. When Adiiitu wants to befriend her and displays his wealth with glamour, he is disappointed because Iyunade disgraced him and condemned his pride. Adiiitu himself admits that Iyunade is full of wisdom, strength and courage.

Another way in which Fagunwa depicts the character is to associate the character with a symbol. Most of the female characters that assist the heroes in one way or the other always appear in white garments e.g. *Ìrànlòwó*, “*obìnrin aláṣọ funfun*” that helps Ireke Onibudo, Akara Oogun’s late mother and the daughter of Baba Onirugbon *yẹukẹ* among others. A white dress symbolizes goodness. Thus, a character described as wearing white is assumed to have one or more of these qualities. Majority of the male characters appear in filthy, multicolored garments, for example *Àgbákò* (trouble) wears garment with snakes, cowry shells, skulls, *Èrù* (fear) wear, fearful garment while *Ègbin*’s (filth) garment is polluted with dirt. Fagunwa is indeed respecter of women.

The few derogatory names given to the female characters are *Àjẹdiran* in *Ògbójú Ode*, *Ìpọnjúdiran* (*Àdiitú*) *Ọmọ owu* and *Ìfẹpínயà* (love is parted) in *Ìrèké Oníbùdó*. *Àjẹdiran* is the mother of Akara Oogun, she is wrongly accused of witchcraft and because of this wrong accusation she decides to look for the power of witchcraft which she uses later to kill her co wives and their children. *Ìpọnjúdiran* is the mother of *Àdiitú*. Even though she is poor, she is full of wisdom and insight. She counsels her husband against misuse of opportunities, the counsel is rejected and he pays dearly for it. *Ìpọnjúdiran* is a symbol of the poverty level of rural women generally in the post-colonial Yorùbá society.

The belief in witchcraft is not new in Yoruba society. The power of witchcraft is a hidden power exclusive to the initiates both men and female. Those who have this hidden power are called *Ìyàmi*, “*Àwọn Àgbà*” (The Elders) or “*Awo Abiyamọ*” (The cult of the mothers). The Yoruba call the cult members “*Àjẹ*” if they are women and “*oşó*” if they are men. Fagunwa merely reinstates Yorùbá belief in the character of *Àjẹdiran*. And *Àjẹdiran* happens to be the rescuer of life, helper of the helpless and provider of extraordinary provision to the hero in the novel. One source of power that the women can use to curtail the oppression of the men is

witchcraft and she used the power to the women's advantage. We see an example of the mystery power of women in *Ìrìnkèrindò* when a woman is advertising her goods for sale; the men are put in fear

*Nígbà tí a rí i, ẹ̀ ẹ̀ ní nnkan náà la gbogbo ara wa já  
Pátápátá tó bẹ̀ẹ̀ tí ẹ̀nikẹ̀ni kò lè gbé apá,  
tí ẹ̀nikẹ̀ni kò lè gbé ẹ̀sẹ̀, tí a kò tilẹ̀ lè  
la ẹ̀nu wa sòrò jáde lẹ̀nu .(27)*

*When we saw her, something penetrated our bodies, to the extent that  
nobody could lift up his arm or leg, we cannot even open our mouth to talk  
(27)*

The travelers could not talk or do anything until after the woman has left them.

## **NEGATION OF CULTURAL AND PATRIARCHAL VALUES ON WOMEN**

Fagunwa negates all those cultural and patriarchal values and practices that marginalize the women folk in traditional Yorùbá society e.g. polygamy, inheritance of women as wives, giving female children to husbands without their consent among others. All the major and even minor male characters that have more than one wife in the novels live a life of turbulence, and failure but those who adopt monogamy as a way of life, succeed in all things they do. The ideology of monogamy is the impact of Christian religion in the narrative of Fagunwa. Èniyàn-Şapèlẹ̀ (Gentleman) is an handsome man, wealthy and famous among his contemporaries in *Igbó Olódùmarè*. He is given twelve beautiful ladies to marry but he refused to marry them. He married only one wife and has a blissful married life. He composes a song as follows:-

*Obìnrin kan, ìgbádùn púpò  
Obìnrin méjì, ìjàngbòn méjì  
Obìnrin méta, ìjàngbòn méta  
Obìnrin méréin, ìjàngbòn méréin  
Obìnrin márùn un, ìjàngbòn márùn un  
Obìnrin méfà, ìjàngbòn méfà  
Obìnrin méje, ìjàngbòn méje (o.i : 132)*

*One wife, much enjoyment*

*Two wives, two troubles*

*Three wives, three troubles*

*Four wives, four troubles*

*Five wives, five troubles*

*Six wives, six troubles*

*Seven wives, seven troubles (p.132)*

Fagunwa attributes the troubles in the polygamous families to the weakness of the males' character and not essentially to the women. In *Ògbójú Ọde*, Akara oogun marries nine wives because of his sudden wealth. His father Olówóayé, in *Igbó Olódùmarè* marries three and loves one more than other wives. This leads to jealousy and malicious living until the senior wife terminates the life of other wives and their children. In a polygamous family there are bound to be jealousy, hatred and wickedness because the husbands are always partial leading to vices in the family: the narrator describes the second wife of the poor palm wine tapper who becomes rich after receiving favour from the animal kingdom:-

*Obìnrin náà ti gbé ìlara wò bí èwù, O fi owú jíjẹ san yèrèrì, O ró aṣọ wòbìà sí ibàdí, O sì fi iborùn ojú kòkòrò lékè àṣọ (o.i : 100)*

*The woman has put on envy like a garment. She makes jealousy her skirt, and put on the garment of stealing on her buttocks, with neck garment of coveteousness on top.*

Most of the women in the novels who are victims of polygamous families always make sure that their female children do not fall into this same type of family in future. They always plead with their children's suitors to make sure that they do not marry other wives. The mother of Ifẹ̀pàdé gives counsel to Ìrèké Oníbùdó, who is set to marry her daughter

*Ṣùgbón kí ni kan ni mo fẹ sọ fún ọ kí o tó dipé ọràn náà bèrè, n kò fẹ kí o ní obìnrin mìràn pèlú ọmọ mi o, nítorí bí emi pàápàá ti wà nínú ilé yìí, mo mọ nnkan tí ojú mi ti rí lówọ àwọn orogún ...*

*Bí orogún bá n fi ojú rẹrìn ín, oró ejò n bẹ ní oókan àyà wọn, bí iwọ pàápàá bá sì n fẹ gbádùn ayé rẹ dáadáa, sọra lódò àwọn obìnrin. Kìlò fún ojú rẹ (o.i : 85)*

*But there is something I want to tell you before the matter commences, I don't want you to marry another wife after my daughter, because as I am in the palace here, I know what I suffer in the hands of other co-wives... If the co-wives are smiling, there is the poison of a snake in their hearts, if you want to enjoy your life fully, you must be careful with women – warn your eyes.(p.85)*

Here, Fagunwa negates the Yorùbá polygamous institution. He sees it as a breeding place for wickedness, jealousy, malice keeping, hatred and unending troubles that usually affect the children. Ìrèké Oníbùdó agrees with his in-law and faithfully adheres to the counsel. Even, when Ìfẹ̀pádé dies few months after the marriage, he refuses to marry Ìfẹ̀pínýà who intentionally wants to give herself freely to Ìrèké Oníbùdó.

In Yorùbá culture, it is more or less a taboo for a woman to approach a man for friendship or marriage. It is the men who go after women to woo them and ask them for marriage. Fagunwa sees this age-long tradition as oppressive and unjust. He advocates gender equality in this matter. The narrator in *Ìgbó Olódùmarè* states:

*Bí ọ̀kùnrin wu obìnrin láti fẹ́ ati sọ ọ́ jáde lẹnu a di ìṣòro fún obìnrin. Àṣà àwọn ọmọ ènìyàn yìí n fi ìyà jẹ́ apákan nínú àwọn ọmọ ènìyàn bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni bí ọ̀kùnrin ri ejò bí obìnrin pa ejò, bí ejò kò bá ti lọ, kò lòdì sí òfin. Mo fẹ́ kí o yé ọ́ kedere pé bí ọ̀kùnrin bá sì n fi ifẹ́ yìí hàn sí ọ̀kùnrin eleyini kò lòdì sí òfin (o.i : 26)*

*If a woman has interest in a man, to say it becomes a difficult thing for the woman. This human culture is making a segment of the people to suffer. And if a man saw a snake, and a woman kills it, so that the snake will not escape, it is not against the law. I want you to understand that if a man is loved by a woman and shows it, it is not unlawful(p.26).*

Here, Fagunwa advocates gender equality in the matter concerning marriage. Women can show interest in men and tell them so contrary to the views that it is a taboo for women to open up to men and woo them. In the episode, Àjẹ̀dìran violates the tradition of the people and asks Olówóáyé to marry her instead of Olówóáyé's request. Àjẹ̀dìran says:

Ìwọ alágbára ọkùnrin, ìwọ kò sí láàárín àwọn aláìmòye. O wù mí gidigidi, mo fẹ́ kí o jẹ́ baálè mi, mo fẹ́ kí n jẹ́ aya rẹ́, kí a jọ máa wọlé, kí a jọ máa jáde (o.i : 26)

You man of valour, you are not in the midst of the ignorant people. I love you so much, and I want you to be my husband, and I your wife, we will be going out and coming in as husband and wife. (p.26)

Fagunwa also opposes the patriarchal ideology of *ifomofokọ* (i.e. giving female children to husbands without their consents). In the traditional Yorùbá society, the father can give her daughter to anybody without the consent of the child, as long as the suitor-to-be is hardworking and morally upright. The girl child has no say; she cannot reject whosoever she is given to. Fagunwa sees this tradition as oppressive and unjust. In *Ìrèké Oníbùdó* Ifẹ̀pàdẹ́ assures Ìrèké Oníbùdó that her father, who is a king, has no right to give her to any chief apart from Ìrèké whom she loves dearly. She states:

*Baba n sọ tirẹ́ ni, kò lè fì agbára mú ẹnikẹ́ni fẹ́ ọkùnrin, nígbà tí kì í bá ẹ olúwarẹ́ ló mú ọkùnrin náà wá sí ilé pé ó wu òn (o.i : 81).*

*The father is saying his own, he cannot enforce anybody to marry any man, unless the person brings him home as her lover(p.81).*

In *Àdìtú Olódùmarẹ́*, Fagunwa presents a fully liberated woman from the clutches and domination of patriarchal ideology and practices. Iyunade refused to be subordinated to men and all their traditional-tricks. Right from her youth, she is rascal, intelligent, courageous and morally upright. She cannot be oppressed. She is hardworking and has focus. She sidetracks all the traditional values that negate her freedom. She is highly disciplined and when she is set for marriage, she rejects all the enticement of men. She uses songs as a subversive weapon against the patriarchal pride which forces Aditu to retreat. Iyunade is portrayed as an actor not as a spectator; she is in the centre of the novel, not in the periphery. She explores, deplores and subverts and redresses the status quo of women in the novel. Iyunade fights against the deep rooted norms and practices that foster female subordination, in the area of marriage. She refuses premarital sex with Àdìtú and exposes the wicked treachery of Eşù-léyìn ìbejì, his husband's closest friend. Iyunade's story is a replica of the modern Yorùbá woman struggling against



patriarchy, male supremacy, social custom and capitalist consumerism of the post-colonial Yorùbá society. The rural back house, timid, subservient, lack-luster woman in the traditional Yorùbá setting has been replaced by her modern counterpart, a rounded human being, rotational, individualistic, assertive and highly committed to equality and justice. Fagunwa portrays Iyunade as this modern Yorùbá woman who replaces Àjédìran and her type in *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ*

## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to add another dimension to the issue of gender representation in the novels of Fagunwa. The study shows that women have not been terribly trivialized for their instrumental roles in family and community in Fagunwa's novels. Even though Fagunwa's era was marked by a fight to restore the tenets of Yorùbá tradition that suffers denigration from imperialist influxes, he represents the women in a dignified manner. All the practices that are considered inimical to development like widowhood, polygamy, succession rites, discrimination against the girl child, and forced marriages among others are attacked by Fagunwa in all his novels. Fagunwa celebrates motherhood but he totally rejects lesbianism or anti-family ideology of the radical feminists.

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