

# Gendered Species of Yoruba Plants: An Ecofeminist Perspective

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## Abstract

The phenomena of female and male collaboration or concurrence towards making positive and progressive impact in most environmental situations in Yorùbá land cannot be over-emphasized. From published works of Yorùbá literature and other oral data, such as in poetry texts, findings show extant research on many herbs [plants]. Such findings show that there exists a dichotomy between the gendered species of plants. In addition, evidence reveals that within the Yorùbá belief system, some cultural practices are evident in support of the ecofeminist thought spanning various contexts in politics, warfare or conflict resolutions, as well as Yorùbá Òrìṣà cults. Therefore, this essay seeks to explore the feminine relevance and significance in some contexts of herb or plant growth and their nature. The theory of ecofeminism and sociology of literature are applied. The study shall make use of relevant orature to support the validity and essentialism of creation and the strengths deposited in the female gender regarding its purpose and values in contents and context, modern diversity, and contemporary views at large on nature. This is to emphasize the significance of the *abo*-female as supported by nature and other iconic materials within the sacred/metaphysical realm.

**Keyword:** Feminine relevance, *ẹbọ rírú /ètùtù ṣìṣe*, Ecocultural context, *abo*-and Ecofeminism.

## Introduction

The phenomena of female and male collaboration or concurrence towards making positive and progressive impact in most environmental situations in Yorùbá land cannot be over-emphasized. However, more and more research appearing over the years has reflected the relevance of feminine power as it relates to the natural world. Olújinnmí (2016), and Fáléyẹ (2016 & 2018), for instance, points to a number of facts that reflect the relevance and significance of the feminine gender. Moreover, in most instances, scholars have noted that the female gender positively compliments the efforts of other classes of masculinity.

In particular, some literary texts, such as Daniel Oròwọlẹ Fágúnwà's *Ìrèké Oníbùdó* (The Sugar Cane of the Guardian- (1949) and *Ògbójú-ọdẹ nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ*<sup>1</sup> (The Forest of a Thousand Daemons - (1938) for instance, while creating female characters along gender binaries, created some as i.e. the very pleasant, progressive and positive-natured, and some are presented as very wicked, back-bitters, unfriendly and retrogressive personalities; to expand Yorùbá folktales into novel as (Geider 320 - 321) have shown<sup>2</sup>. The author, using human beings, the plants and the animals to speak to his readers' about creatures and the nature, represents the progressive and the positive creatures. The likes of positive, good-natured characters of the feminine complementing nature exist in the attributive nature of Ìfẹpàdẹ, and in her supports for the character - *Ìrèké Oníbùdó*. In the same vein, is Ìfẹpàdẹ's mother's characters in *Ìrèké Oníbùdó*, while the author informs his readers of the opposite beings in the characters of Ifẹpínyà and her mother as well. In the same manner are some plants, birds, and animals presented in the creative piece of the author. In general, the attitude, nature and usefulness of some feminine none-human creatures; even to the needs of human characters as seen in these two referenced creative pieces; also validates the perception of people about the feminine world. This perception is such that a fragment of people within the society and culture see women and the positive creatures complementing the hard-natured creatures in men, while some are of the view that in both men and women, dual representations of similar attributes exist. This is what the author's representation indicates. The general idea of Fágúnwà in his entire works however show that most female characters are soft-natured, very close to the nature and are possible of showing dual attributes according to nature, because of the qualities of feminine natural endowment. However, according to Merriam-Webster (1995, 401), "Every event points up a moral;

1 *Ògbójú-ọdẹ nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ* was the first full-length novel published in the Yorùbá language by Campbell and King in (1995, 788).

2 Geider, Thomas. "Fagunwa, Daniel Orowole (1903 – 1963)." In *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales: A–F*, edited by Donald Hasse, 320–321. Westport: Greenwood Press.

this moral tone is reinforced by Fágúnwà's use of Christian concepts as well as traditional and invented proverbs. His imagery, humor, wordplay, and rhetoric reveal an extensive knowledge of 'deep' (classical) Yorùbá". No doubt, Fágúnwà's in-depth knowledge of his environment, and his sound exposure to Yorùbá culture assisted the various submissions on nature and human beings.

This is not to say that there are no negative-attributive male characters created by the author. Such character creation is a response to the male counterparts' characters that can also be negative or positive to people around them, or generally to life; and even to the flora and fauna. What we refer here exists in Fágúnwà's created characters, such as found in Àgbákò, Ànjànnú Ìbèrù, *Kakó* and his wife- *Pamínkú*. What we have observed to say here, is to validate the fact that people see the feminine folks from different perspectives as their write up indicates. This is why in most Yorùbá folktales, different characters are found with varied behavioral traits which human beings also exhibits in real life. Fágúnwà exhibits this so much in the two creative works of examination, to balance the Yorùbá thoughts and as enshrined in the saying: *ìṣe èniyàn ni ìṣe ẹranko*" – (as found in human character, so are the behaviors of the animals). However, it is good to note that the feminine world has also been either positively portrayed with several nomenclatures such as 'home-managers', 'friends of the family', '*abiyamo*' (a passionately-caring personage), *olójú-àánú* (a kind-natured being), and so on; as against other condemnable names given to women folks in some other circumstances; which is often a follow up of some very outstanding attributes and nature found in their characters. It is essential to note that Fágúnwà is not the only creative author who suggests these negative or derogatory names, as found given to women folks. Evidences of these bad or tough characters exists in other creative works of repute in Yorùbá literature or folktales and such name include *KúSORÓ* (a very impious person), *gbéborùn* (a back bitter), and so on. In fact, it is taken that the perspectives at which people within the Yorùbá worldview sees women is what these tales or creative authors represents in their works. This is not to say that the male-authors sees men folks as totally free from such dual character portrayer too; but often, the women folks fall more of victims of such attributes as pointed out in Fágúnwà's masters piece.

As part of our task here, the focus in this chapter is to address the relevance of gender issues with reference to the use of herbs, growth of plants, and administration of *ẹbọ rírú* or *ètùtù ṣíṣe* in the sacred texts; bearing in mind the efficacies required. Additionally, this study shall discuss the larger feminine role played in contexts of human collaboration such as in conflict resolution, in divination parlance and other various important cults, such as Yorùbá Òrìṣà cults. While this chapter engages a proper literature review of earlier scholarly works, new findings which support some claims with respect to the theory of

ecofeminism, take into consideration also an ethno-science premise. Therefore, delving into the use of incantation and analysis of some excerpts of Ifá corpus of *odu* texts, to exploring the underlining semantics and various connotations in reference to our focus of discussion is paramount. In the same vein, we shall apply the use of most popular genres such as songs and proverbs that Yorùbá employ to communicate in their bid to solving some difficult issues within situations where expression is necessary.

### The Focus for Discussion

This work shall explore some published works of Yorùbá oral, selected written literatures and other oral data, such as in songs and poetry texts to validate research findings showing several uses of herbs and nature of plants. Our findings shall further show that there exists the dichotomy of gender species of plants within the ecocultural and ecological contexts of creatures as it thus exists among the human beings. Also, the study shall focus attention on the Yorùbá believe system, as they have been traditionally practiced, as well as some cultural practices that have also evidence supports with respect to ecofeminist perspectives in specific contexts.

Before proceeding with the interests of this chapter, it is important to provide an overview and explanation of specific key term terms and definitions.

### Definition of Keywords

**Feminine relevance:** In the creation of the world, observed that species of creature called female, otherwise known as “woman” in English word, is made of some specificity, which continues to make them different among several creatures of the supreme beings. Some of the feminine specificity is physical while most are hidden or sacred. In our observation as found in the Yorùbá world-view also, the feminine species exists among human beings, in plants, animals, herbs, water, metals and iron within the concept of Yorùbá cultural belief system. This is why the nomenclature *abo àbí akọ* or the reference - *ta-koṭabo la dálé ayé* – (the male and female beings created to exist in the world) - forms an expression within the basic discussion of people to confirm the binary nature of creation. In fact, this is where the use of folktale narratives of the Yorùbá as a literary material comes purposeful, and as a useful point of reference with which to validate our points. In most Yorùbá tales<sup>3</sup>, the plants, the animals, and/or human beings are found to dominate. Although, there are

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3 The published texts of Àkójopò Àlò Ìjápá, ìwé kìn-ín-ní and ìwé keji by Adeboye Babalola- and Yémiitàn's *Ojú Òsùpá* are a typical example of material showing the portrayal of animals, herbs or plants as living creatures in Yorùbá folktales which elucidates our reasoning here.

instances of the animal and plants featuring in some folktales, the characters portray nature, and other terrestrial creatures. In some contexts of the folktales, these animals or plants co-function with real human beings for educating the young ones and adults alike that, human beings are able to co-exist with non-human beings. The pioneering creative writers' works of Fágúnwà and Ọdúnjọ offer valuable points of reference. These authors have been able to entertain, educate and inform society about the settings of the Yorùbá culture, both with reference to the feminine worldview and relevance in their societies.

It is discovered that in Yorùbá oral narratives, mythological stories and even in other written literatures to date, there exist a high reverence to the feminine thoughts, and contributions to human growth, and usefulness of co-existence for impactful life, in rearing children and for transforming lives. This is why in some contexts, the reference to feminine spirit, such as in *abo* or *aboniyàn*, specific mentioning of the feminine world –*ayé obinrin* - in Yorùbá worldview, is to delineate the masculinity (*akọ*) from the former. Therefore, the term feminine - *abo* or *aboniyàn* spirit shall be used within our discussion as duly clarified.

***Ẹbọ rírú, Ètùtù síṣe or Èsè pípa***<sup>4</sup>: In the Yorùbá belief system which is also found to be universal among the Africans, this is an act or a process of pacifying the sacred beings of the world otherwise known as the unseen spirits, Ọriṣà, Ẹbọra, Ajogun, Eníyán or other forms of Ànjòn-*n-nú* (spirits) as the case may be. These groups of people are construed to be the hidden to a none-sacred eye and powerful forces created by the Supreme Being with their own given powers. These powers are taken to be used positively or in negative forms; to against or in use for support of their chosen ones; who placates or pacify them. In taking these procedural measure(s) in most cases, either by an individual person, a collective group of people or a town/community (as the case may require). *Ẹbọ rírú, ètùtù síṣe or (èsè pípa)* is often a step taken for either seeking for extraordinary supports on an issue; such as a support to twisting a case, to plead for an offense committed, for favor or to melt out a deserving punishment<sup>5</sup>. Highlighted that *Ẹbọ rírú, ètùtù or èsè pípa* however comes in different forms, shapes, color and in content community<sup>6</sup>. *Ẹbọ* or *èsè* are all offered and placed for acceptance at various locations such as under sacred or iconic trees, at crossroads, special junctions leading to towns or

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4 These terms simply refer to the context of spiritual offerings, placations or appeasing some spiritual unseen beings. The three terms differ in context of use but they all refer to issues of sacred spirituality.

5 Summary of findings from this researcher's interviews with some selected women and male Priests between 2020 and 2021.

6 Also read more views from Awólálú, J. Ọmoṣade. 1979. *Yorùbá Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. London: Longman Group Limited.

pathways in the remote areas of a community and beside the waters. It is not surprising to note that even in current age, people who takes to the traditional belief system of worship and some who takes to other forms of religion also get engaged in the process of applying *Èbọ rírú, ètùtù síṣe or (èsè pípa)* when situation calls for its use. Therefore, in reference to our discussion and analysis in this chapter, these terms shall come to term in use, as the case may demand.

**Abo:** In reverence, the term *Abo* stands for all living and non-living elements, known as female, or femininity. This is why some human beings, stones, plants, herbs, trees, water; seeds identified as feminine in nature. Hence, the use of these words in Yorùbá: *aboniyàn* (feminine personality) *abo òkúta* (the female stone), *abo igi* (the female wood/plank), *abo egbò-igi* (the feminine herb-root), *abo obì ipa* (the reddish feminine kolanut specie), *abo omi/odò* (feminine river), *abo eso-igi* (the feminine fruit) with other descriptive texts to demarcate the context of feminine being in reference. This study shall employ the use of the word *abo or aboniyàn*, which also be interchangeably utilized in the course of our discussion where obligatory.

**Ecofeminism:** Ecofeminism is a theoretical framework drawing from a group of thinkers that are gender-based with a notion that there exists a relationship between human being and the nature. The term Ecofeminism was coined by a French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 with a mindset to delineate from the radical feminist, but to addressing the issues of feminine relevance and need for cultural balance as against world of male dominance. This theory is also sometimes called ecological feminism, a branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. In essence, Ecofeminism is a brand of ecofeminist thinking with various branches which sees women as sharing some closeness with the nature. It's a theory that asserts a feminist perspective of green politics which calls for an egalitarian, collaborative society in which there is no one dominating any group. From our survey, there are several branches of Ecofeminism, with varying approaches and analyses, including liberal Ecofeminism, Spiritual/cultural Ecofeminism, and Social/socialist Ecofeminism. Interpretations of Ecofeminism how it might be applied to social thoughts, including religion and poetry, ecofeminist art, contemporary feminism, social justice and political philosophy abounds. Therefore, in this chapter, our focus is to apply the tool to justifying or bringing out our points for relevance in the data analysis.

## The Feminine Nature in Yorùbá Literatures

In Yorùbá oral and written literatures, the word *Obinrin* is the general nomenclature given to women and the opposite word for their male counterparts is *Okunrin*. Many reasons are evident for this choice of, and of naming with

its meaning in Yorùbá culture. In the same vein are the words: *Abo* and *Ako* which refer to the female and male species of human and non-human creatures in nature. Therefore, the terms within the English word: feminine, as it shall be used in this presentation, communicates the various physical, spirituality and other component markers demarcating the inherent and sacred strength features, which are central to *Obìnrin*, and as thus far different from their male counterparts. Bearing in the mind, that Yorùbá also have ways of differentiating other living things that share both femininity and masculinity in this content: *Okùnrin* as in *Ako irin*, and for *Obìnrin* also, the feminine nature as in *Obí*, meaning that which can conceive, as found in the word *abo-irin*, connoting the female strengthened-iron, and *abo-igi* meaning the male plant and so on.

Fundamentally, various lines of reasoning abound when mention is made about the nature of feminine endowment. The feminine creatures are therefore unique with specificity and viewing their importance to growth or multiplication tendencies compared to other species of creations of the Supreme Being. As we advance, it is essential to note that we shall be drawing most of the notions and instances from the Yorùbá worldview, not necessarily from ancient traditional thinking, but also accommodating the contemporary relevance of, and in contexts following the fact that the ideas have been tested, proven to be real, over the years of their existence in history, in Yorùbá literature and in other universal literary works.

As earlier works of Margaret Drewal (1985), Àkàndé, (2013), Fáléye, (2015) and other scholars reflect, the divinities in company of the Ọ̀ṣun as contained in the odù Ọ̀ṣétúrá have roles to play in their journeying to the world. The corpus mentions the shared notion that these divinities among others, were given different functional roles to play as intercessor among the human and their needs, while they are also accountable to their Creators: Olódùmarè. The notion found of the divinities as sent by the Supreme Being is that: Ifá, although young, but as the all-knowing called *Elèrì-ìpín*. Ọ̀gún, the pathfinder, who happens to be the first goldsmith, and given the honor as being in charge of all iron works. Ọ̀bátálá, as the eldest of all Ọ̀riṣà should be in charge of molding shapes of beings. Èṣù *Elégbàárá-Àgbó*, the eye that checks all activities of the divinities, while also serving as their errand friend or youngster. *Yemoja*, mother to all species of fishes, and Ọ̀ṣun *ṣẹ̀gẹ̀ṣí*, the beautiful mother should be in charge of curatives, fertility, fashion, feminine activities and moderations of all spiritualities (see Ọ̀lademọ, 2009<sup>7</sup> and Fáléye 2016). In spite of the strengths, individual role, and power enabled this feminine creature, as

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7 Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónké. 2009. *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions*. Lagos: Center for Black Art and Civilization (CBAAC)



seen in the corpus, this *odù* is an archetypal example of Yorùbá oral account and somewhat in other print literature that speaks to the male dominance on their female counterparts; and that which shows the level of inequality of the feminine world from creation.

In another circumstances, one can interpret the involvement of a singular divinity *Òṣun ṣẹ̀gẹ̀ṣi*<sup>8</sup>, in that corpus, with other several males as a special favor and strength which the supreme being had actually endowed the feminine gender from the world beginning. However, quite a number of lessons are accessible through the content and teachings of this particular corpus, which serves as a template from which the modern age men and leaders should borrow. While the feminine world and nature in a larger term is a world with its complexities and softness, several lessons are available to learn from, and to embrace for a progressive ending.

## **Feminine Creatures: Negative and Positive Angles**

### **The Dual Nature of Women**

Within the Yorùbá cultural worldview, women have been evaluated using different angles such as attitude to life, total make-up in terms of built and characterization or carriage in the society. The feminine gender is considered as ‘a weakling’ or ‘the weaker vessel’ by some people, especially when they are viewed from their romantic and emotional state of mind. When an expression such as ‘*abo igi ló n ̀soje*’ (the feminine plant extracts liquid) is expressed in some contexts to harden the male counterparts in matters of death or loss of valuables, the statement is indirectly referring to the feminine nature as rather softer compared to the tough nature of the male gender. In Yorùbá philosophy, it is considered unfitting for a man to cry when a lost is recorded, no matter how serious the case may be. The feminine nature is therefore likened to the nature of plants naturally built with secretion of fluid - *Oje-igi*. This is where in the expression ‘*abo igi ló n ̀soje*’ - the feminine plant extracts liquid - symbolically alludes to the women’s natures, which are rather compassionate in most cases of life matters; are thus likened to the secretion of some plants. However, the fact that the feminine world in nature shows love, care and emotion, more than their masculine counterparts does not make them a weakling. This is nature as they are endowed.

In another vein, the feminine nature as viewed through other lens have posited that women are home managers, good-natured, child-bearers and

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8 *Ṣẹ̀gẹ̀ṣi* is a popular appellation of the *Òṣun* feminine divinity. Some publications already documented the importance of the feminine divinity among others; such as found in Diedre Badejo’s novel (1996) have also mentioned or discussed the powers, beauties and other relevance of the feminine divinity.



exceptionally loving when it comes to family and kinship ties<sup>9</sup>. In fact, Fágúnwà exemplifies these traits in some of his characters in most of his novels. This is why good-natured women called *Olùkù-omọ* meaning - friends to children-, *Olùrànlọ́wọ́ ẹbí* – (the family helper) and *Obìnrin or Aya rere* (good / wonderful woman or wife). Even though, there have been series of arguments or simply put, analytical exercise to argued for, or against the backdrop of the thoughts on the view that women are naturally endowed to be protective<sup>10</sup>; and thus protective or sometimes being over-protective of their children. It is observed that when the nature speaks cool and calmness to the people of in a given society, in Yorùbá worldview. Considered feminine in nature – and this is why it is referred to as *ọwọ́ ẹ̀rọ* – i.e. when things are super good, as against when the nature is harsh or tough; this is considered - *ọwọ́ èlẹ* - masculine in nature. Women are closer to mankind, just as nature dictates. It is also observed that the feminine species of animals are closer to their little one than the male species. This is why the understanding of a child and the mother's closeness is unquestionable.

A typical example of this over-protectiveness of a mother to a child is what Fágúnwà replicates in the characters of Akàrà-Oògùn's mother in *Ògbójú-ọ̀dẹ* text. The mother is seen and portrayed as almost wicked and a witch 'àjé' because she is over-protective and supportive of her children, in particular, the protagonist - *Akàrà-Oògùn* in the narrative. This over-protective tendencies or over-shielding nature of women is practically well illustrated with respect to a female-hen with its chicks. The love of the hen for its chicks sometimes disallows its owner from getting so closer to its chicks while feeding. Therefore, the nature of over protection as shown in chickens is often displayed in human being such that women are mostly compared to nature at large. The popular Yorùbá axiom, '*ìṣe eníyán ni ìṣe ẹranko*' (human behaviors are evident in animals) subsists here. The best illustration that comes to mind is that of a feminine chicken, the chicks, and the hawk in context of preying and protection.

Additionally, in discussing the woman nature, the centrality of energy as relating to them is also connected to children, family progressive growth, and other achievement in life. In Yorùbá worldview, women have also been referred to as '*iyò ayé* - 'salt of life'. The question is, why such a nomenclature? The sense in that is salt has its sweetness, which in our survey from the interview we had, connotes beauty, attractiveness and radiance of joy. However, the value in salt is not limited to its sweet taste, but also as a solid measure of preservative. This is a strength which in the Yorùbá notion the feminine

9 See analytical works of Ogunsina (1997), Olujinmi (1999 and 2004), Faleye (2016) and Sangotoye (2016).

10 See Familusi (2012), Bateye (2013), Makinde (2014), Ajala, A. S., & Wulemat (2016) views.

portrays when their entire world is considered and used in tandem with, or as 'salt of life'.

For instance, among the Yorùbá, divination or consultation are made using *òpèlè*, *agbigba*, *èndínlógún* or *obì* - kolanuts. The process which is known as *obì pípa* or *obì didà* (for confirmation of findings at Ifá divinity worship any or contexts) signifies and communicates directions with the faces of kolanuts lobes, when broken into pieces during consultations for communication. So, at divination towards finding out the *èsèntáyé* and the *Èbò ifá rírú* for a feminine child whose revelation *odù* is Ògúndábèdè for instance, the process of *Èbò ifá rírú* (the required sacrifice to apply) for such a female child is often very vast and it calls for immediacy as it is often tough<sup>11</sup>. This is as against the process required for a male child. This is one of the evidences with issues related to feminine at certain levels of development; actualization of goals in life, which differs in content; which could also, speaks to the nature of some women as a tough-bread with some complexities and specificity at times. This is not to say that if the same *odù* Ògúndábèdè comes revealing for a male child that the rites required will not be consummated immediately, but the need for that of a feminine process comes with some yardsticks of differences to avert some negative character or image carriage when such a child grows up. This can also be said to be special relevance of the feminine gender in perception.

Findings also revealed that when planting the seed of àgbòn (coconut), or *Osè* (the Baobab tree), cautions are always applied in reference to the nature of the planter, for its growth output comes with some feminine outlook. Mostly, people prefer that a feminine hand plant the seed for its preferred output; which is often more rewarding if planted by the female gender. This happens because the outcome of the growth of such àgbòn (coconut) reflects the nature of whoever plants the seed. Often the seed planted by a feminine personality comes out in solid height, healthy, fruitful in content, and in similar physique of the coconut planter. For the various results which nature demonstrates around the feminine world as exemplify in few of our discussion here, one is made to point out that there is evidence showcasing the need for required care, equity, touch of sacredness with caution and specificity that the feminine gender is endowed with. However, in modern age agricultural farming and processes, it is not unlikely that the findings in this respect of the Yorùbá ideology, technology and notions shared here is very valid. This is where more research is required to validate or dissociate from this thought. Our perception of the findings as stated here is very valid.

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11 This view is extracted from one of my interviews with an Ifá priest in Òyó State, Nigeria.

Another example is the reference to *abo ọsàn* (feminine species of orange), *abo-ibepe* (feminine species of pawpaw), *abo-mángòrò* (feminine species of mango), among other fruitful plants. There exist the male species of these fruits and plants with their strengths. The feminine species are the ones physically producing fruits as food for the enjoyment and nutrition of people, while the male species do not produce any fruit. However, in matters of herb production, its usages and efficacies, the roots, the tree-back and the leaf of these plants, both the male and the female species are very useful, but they have some vital functions which differ in relation to its efficacies. In reality, when talking of the feminine world of multiplication and nature, nature has its diverse effects on every aspect of human life and existence. While the feminine species of these fruits serves as edible, and their other elements as mentioned above also secrets usefulness for the purpose of creation of herbs, or concoctions for the use of humankind, depending on in-depth knowledge of the user(s), the male species also function in that direction but definitely not at par. The point we are raising here is that instances have been discovered where only the *akọ igi* (masculine plants), *egbò akọ igi* (the male root-plant) of particular trees are required for its effectiveness, and instances have been seen where both are required for the efficacy of the herb production. So, nature sometimes speaks to the complementarity of both genders, such that one functions as a necessity of the existence of the other.

### **The Feminine Relevance, Validity and Essentialism of Creation**

No doubt there have been important arguments and connections between the oppression of women by their male counterparts in most African societies<sup>12</sup>, culture or tradition which is non-human in nature. However, it is not a gainsaying that the creation of women is for various positive purposes just as in their counterparts. Every being is created with a purpose, and it is in this purpose driven concept that assists the vision of individuals. In fact, nature addresses this such that there are species of plants or leaves that cannot be readily or naturally available in some seasons while some are potent at all seasons. This is a typical example of concept to adopt in approaching issues of relevance, as well as knowing that nature and femininity as established by God remains a mystery.

Also, taking cognizance of the strengths so deposited in them as found in most of the activities in reference to growth, management, leadership acumen, mentorship and in perseverance or even preservation; as proven evident in herb production, in warfare (see Awe, 1975), in academics (see

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12 See also Familusi (2012), Bateye (2013), Makinde (2014), Ajala, A. S., & Wulemat (2016) views.

Folorunso, 2011), in politics (see Ajala & Wulemat 2016), in family and cultural matters (see Faleye, 2017<sup>13</sup>) among others. One cannot but continue to marvel at such an enigma of successes that the feminine world has continued to record (see Oyeweso, 2011). For various reasons which are connected to multiplication, advancement and sustainability issues as concerned, the feminine nature has come to term, proofing that these species of beings are capable, very essential and that they have no match in comparison in the world when given the space within the notion of equity and fairness to function.

In furtherance to the content of *odù Ọ̀sẹ̀túrà*<sup>14</sup> as mentioned earlier, essentially good to note that, it provides detailed information about the supremacy of God at the creation of world as well as the relationship of other gods classified as belonging in the primordial divinities. Relevant information about the nature of functions and role-play given to all the òrìṣà and the only woman among them is explicated in the corpus of *Odù Ọ̀sẹ̀túrà* that reads:

*Kónkórò awo Èwíládó* 1.  
 Ọ̀run mú dẹ̀dẹ̀ kanlẹ̀ awo òde Ìjẹ̀ṣà  
 Alákàn n bẹ̀ lódò, ó n lu àákàrà iyẹ̀ pẹ̀ pẹ̀ pẹ̀ fún Olúwẹ̀ri  
 A dífá fún Irúnmolẹ̀ ojùkòtún,  
 A bù fún igba imolẹ̀ ojùkòsì 5.  
 Lójò tí wọn n tọ̀run bọ̀ wáyé...  
 Ọ̀ṣun níkan ló jẹ̀ obinrin ninú wọn  
 Àwọn akọ̀ òrìṣà kò, wọn kò fi tỌ̀ṣun ẹ̀  
 Layé bá dojúrú... 9  
 (Odégbolá Ifálẹ̀rè 2019)

(Kónkórò, the Èwíládó's spiritualist 1.  
 Ọ̀run-mú-dẹ̀dẹ̀-kanlẹ̀, the Òde Ìjẹ̀ṣà diviner,  
 Alákàn which lives in the water stridently drumming for Olúwẹ̀ri,  
 They all consulted for Irúnmolẹ̀ Ojùkòtún,  
 They divined for a two hundred Irúnmolẹ̀ Ojùkòsì 5.  
 While sojourning from their heavenly abode to the world...  
 Ọ̀ṣun was the only woman.

13 This view can be read in 'Ìkúnlẹ̀ Abiyamọ̀ ninú èrò ijìnlẹ̀ Yorùbá: Ìdí abájo agbára obinrin' In *Current Studies in Yorùbá Language and Literature- A festschrift for Prof. Olúgbóyèga Àlábá*. Deji Medubi, Debo Gbadebo and Abiodun Bello (eds.). 2017. Pp. 117-131. Jolan Printing Press, Ibadan.

14 This is one of the ifá corpuses that speak about the spirituality of the feminine gender and a purposeful creation.

The male-divinities refused to accord Ọṣun all her honors  
So, the entire situation became chaotic...

9.

(My translation- 2022)

The above corpus is a reflection of the coming of the various divinities into the world for different role-play with Ọṣun as the only feminine counterparts of the others. The corpus indicates that she was underrated and not given the autonomy or space to function while their several engagements turned unsuccessful. The fact that she was not allowed to function in the direction of their creator negated the functions and fruitfulness of others. This is a reflection of special endowment in knowledge, spiritual and sacred power endowed her, which others lack. In essence, the strength, areas of relevance and energy of the species of being called *Obinrin* - feminine creature, is an ordained one, which accounts for their significance as a creation of God.

In the same manner, *odù Ọṣémósàá*<sup>15</sup> corpus x-rays the depth of sacredness and endowments of the feminine strengths and spirituality. While Ọṣóláké, a character from the corpus, who is well versed and knowledgeable in charms. A bold man thinks he is mostly powerful to entangle the feminine world, the women as revealed by the corpus show him that it's not in the number of charms that a man possesses that can softens them. In appeasing and finding favor of the women, and in a pleasant manner, than proving energetic or enigma to win the heart of the feminine beings. This is where in the traditional Yorubá culture, and belief system, the use of *Ẹbọ rírú*, *ètùtù* or and *èsè pípa* comes to play vital role as a tool to seeking favor or to appease the annoyance of the femininity through metaphysical context or in reality. In essence, in Yorubá socio-cultural belief system, the use of *Ẹbọ rírú*, *ètùtù* or and *èsè pípa* is considered as a tool to speak faster to the minds of the powers-that-be (as in the *iyà-mi*, or other sacred creatures), and these are used to seek favor or softness of the heart to the feminine gender. In fact, Fágúnwà in his two novels also validates the instances of the use of *Ẹbọ rírú* and *èsè pípa* by some of his characters. To appease the annoyance of the birds when the hunters could not have headway after Kákó had killed his wife in annoyance; and at Ọ̀gò̀ǹgò - the king of birds' den, at Ọ̀jò̀lá-Ìbínú's and at *Odò Ẹ̀jẹ̀*, and at other instances in his piece.

Additionally, the lesson from the corpus validates the view that 'Caring is essential to validate existence'. Every human or creature enjoys caring. However, just as Janet Biehl argues that 'even the most 'caring' people cannot extend their care to all other human beings'. We see that in the Ọṣóláké's view;

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15 This is another Ifá corpus that speaks to the relevance of our discussion.

he would have simply oppressed the female counterparts through his trusted charms if not through the extra-ordinary strengths the metaphysical realm by which the women suppressed him too. Just as the use of *Ẹbọ rírú*, *ètùtù* or and *èsè pípa* in the Yorùbá culture has limitations and it may be subjective of who offers it, to who and at what point of its acceptability, this study also feels that ecofeminism has the capacity to transcend its various difficulties which has to do with the reliance on women's biological functions to establish a connection between women; and nature, or the uncritical over-privileging of women's experiences, the inappropriateness of designating ideal female characteristics, and the regressive political implications of associating women with nature. All the same, the concept is viable and more research can validate our claims. Just as *Ifá Ọ̀sáméjì*<sup>16</sup> also speaks so much of the '*iyà mi*' (the witches) and the *eníyán* (the malevolent) who covers the entire world and as created by the Supreme Being. In effects, the world is a complex seat which occupies the feminine throne; their creation is real, and the feminine world of relevance cannot be doubted.

### **The Significance of the *Abo* in Matters of Sacredness or Metaphysics**

As nature and other iconic materials of use within the sacred and metaphysical realm have shown, the feminine world and nature is exclusively outstanding. Among the *Ifá*, *Ọ̀lòṣun* devotees, and in the parlance of other traditional worship, a popular Yorùbá expression as found below thus:

*Ẹ jé ká kúnlẹ̀ kí obìnrin*  
*Obìnrin ni iyá*  
*Obìnrin làgbà*  
*Obìnrin ni ipilẹ̀ ayé...*  
*Obìnrin ló sọ wá dì ohun tí a dà yìí o...*

(...Let us kneel - paying obeisance to the women  
 Women are our mothers  
 Women are the elders  
 Women are the base, the source of creation  
 Women molded us into what we are...)

The above except shows that in Yorùbá oral literature, different thought exist which shows various angles at which the women are seen and adored. The feminine world of the sacred is largely seen as being occupied by the

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16 This is *Ifá* corpus from the major sixteen *odù*.

‘mothers’ – ‘*iyà mi*’. The base of life and one that must be kept revered is that power given to them. Because of the power given to them to know, to control and to discern whatever they want, the world at large honor them always<sup>17</sup>. This is why is it opined in the Yorùbá belief system that, ‘*àrà-gbé-ni-ayé, kí ó lè ʃe é gbé fúnni*’ which literarily means that, ‘one must plead and pacify the elderly ones to live in a peaceful world. This is not to say the bulk of group of these sacred mothers are wicked, or not consultable, but the ‘fear of the given’ in terms of ‘power endowment’, makes people to fear any counter-attack or none-supportive role of these mothers in any activities involving life. This is an indication that the feminine creatures are very important and are actually the basis of what anyone becomes in life.

In matters of making some powerful charms effectively useful, findings<sup>18</sup> have shown that the female periodic fluid (‘blood circle’) of a woman remains very essential. It is in the same vein that findings revealed that, that same periodic flow of a female being is capable of rendering a charm or herb useless when a woman in that circle nears the herb or any form of spiritual concoction. What this communicates is the dual strengths that the feminine composition is made up. Additionally, some tree and plants exist which cannot co-habit or co-function towards a positive end. Some other leaves are also best planted far from each other to enable easy growth and fruitfulness. Such leaves are *àbámódá*, *àsúnrín*, *òdúndún* among others. This is not to say that the leaves when planted cannot grow, but in some cases, like in the *àbámódá*, any other plant that attempts a growth near it is often being overshadowed. The illustration here is a typical nature of some form of strength naturally donated or given to some species of human beings, or trees that are considered the most powerful among others. For the less given to survive around them, they require a long rope of space for others to co-habit with them. This is also found in human nature. Perhaps this is why in the case of the ‘*iyà mi*’ people within the socio-cultural context tend to understand the philosophy of their creation, their existentialism and validity of their being. This is what often informs the reverence given to the ‘*iyà mi*’ in such expressions of *ìbà* (homage) being paid to them at any public or sacred domains of indigenous circles or traditional oratory circles; and such have yielded good results in enabling people to thrive in their ways.

However, the non-spiritual among the human beings who understands the relevance and significance of these creatures do come to term with these supernatural powerful creatures. This is what often brings the cases of offer of

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17 This is an extracted view from our series of interviews conducted with Ifa priests by this researcher.

18 This is from our series of documented oral interview.



*Ẹbọ rírú, èsè pípa* or *ètùtù síṣe* as it has been earlier highlighted in the discussion. Also, as rightly highlighted, the process and essence of *Ẹbọ rírú, èsè pípa* or *ètùtù síṣe* is often to source for their help to forge ahead in matters that seems tough, or sometimes; the offer is to seek for supports on issues of metaphysics or sacredness beyond human control<sup>19</sup>. In fact, the world of *eniyán* (the malevolent) to *eniyàn* (the benevolent) is such a complex one, which often is not solved with levity but with some level of seriousness and deep thoughts of environmental philosophy.

Since Ecofeminism offers a new way of thinking by encouraging interconnectedness with the environment, the need to see co-habitation for mutual supports, mutual benefits of each other become very essential than dehumanizing any specie of a creation. There is no need for woman subjugation or any kind of marginalization. Rather than segregating a set of people in the society, a new mindset as encouraged by ecofeminism concept created for organizing human endeavors. This will no doubt create an enabling environment for useful and sustainable development. For positive, innovative results in most of human involvements and environmental connections, to paving way for a broader perspective, which generates outstanding we-win events, there should be avenues for people's involvement in less overt social recognitions of particular gender to the detriment of others.

By inference, from our readings of Ecofeminism theory, the central principle frowns at mistreatment of women, and people of color, while giving prominence to the environment and inclusiveness. These philosophies are in tandem with the Yorùbá philosophy of *ìbì kò ju ìbì, bí a tí bí ẹrú, nì a bí ọmọ* (it simply communicates equity and fairness of individual births). The proverb simply embraces the ecofeminist perspective which is equally enshrined in the popular song / statement '**gbogbo ọmọ, ẹ má yan ọkan nípòsìn**' (all structure of a child are useful children, there should be no segregation). This ideology in Yorùbá situation sees every individual living child as a potential icon of his/her environment, in particular when such a child is given the right accessibility to knowledge, exposure to education and training, as fairness and when equity is collectively applied by all stakeholders in any society. The good news is that a practice of inclusiveness of the concept of ecofeminism which embraces all, femininity or masculinity as useful entities are evident in most modern settings of the Yorùbá culture and at large.

In addition, the theory of Ecofeminism encourages a life in nature maintained and sustained through cooperation, mutual care, respect and love. This is what most of the animal and human dominated characters of the Yorùbá

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<sup>19</sup> Typical examples in reference are documentary films in celluloid entitled *Ayé* and *Jáiyésinmi* by Hubert Ogunde – 1978/1979.

folktales, the herbs, fruits and other creatures with different gender specificity as discussed shows and encourages. Each of the *ako* or *abo* (male or female) species of the plants have their given strengths, while some can function alone, some with other lesser plants, some cannot be effective without the use of their counterparts. This is the same content which human beings should provide themselves at all spheres of life. However, it should be in the mind, the saying ‘*ànikànrìn ejò níú šekú pawón*’. The notion shares in the popular Yorùbá adage that encourages unity and oneness of purpose, which in effects combats suffering, and provides a kind of shield onto everyone in the conglomerate.

Speaking with a voice in most cases on any challenges by people that share similar opinion in love, and concern for each other genuinely, while respect comes to play; often there would be positive results. This is evident in various traditional associations as found in the Yorùbá history such as found among these groups; *Egbé Ògbóni*, *Egbé Oniṣèṣe* and *Egbé Àgbékòyà* and others as found in the various cooperative societies in existence among the *Egbé Elépo* (the Palm-oil sellers’ association), *Egbé Olóúnjẹ* (the food vendor’s association), or *Egbé Alájesékù* (the Cooperative societies) in the modern settings now; or of any kind should not begin to see gender as a template for bias. Once the primary aim that binds any group together is to address and eliminate all forms of domination while recognizing and embracing the interdependence and connections that human beings have with the earth, quite a lot of advancement in success are attainable.

## Conclusion

In this study, which is sub-divided into sections, we have highlighted various essences of relevance of the feminine spirituality, their essence of being, and the spirit of oneness which calls for mutual respects and co-existence for a positive result in any community or society. We have also identified various notions or concepts of Ecofeminism with a highlight of the challenging issues as raised by scholars or critiques of the theory. In addition, we have applied the concept of ecofeminism with a central principle that frowns at mistreatment of women, people of color while giving prominence to the environment and nature. Some basic concepts in Yorùbá philosophy have been applied using some popular texts of Ifá corpus, proverbs, songs and examples from written prose narratives in prints such as Fágúnwà’s creative works and others, and some popular Yorùbá expressions to illustrate the need for a useful co-existence within eco-cultural knowledge and ideology shared in the theory of application. We have shown in different perspectives how the female creatures are portrayed and projected in Yorùbá literary texts; and society, with a view to emphasizing nature. We have also advocated for the right of accessibility

to knowledge, to exposure as fairness and equity is collectively applied by all stakeholders in any society. While prominence of some plants, leaves, use of herbs and the efficacies of the feminine strengths are highlighted, this study have further encouraged for more research into the feminine world to sustain proper care of the environment and societal influence where necessary.

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