

## **Yoruba African Women and Patriarchal Excesses in the Context of Globalization and Sustainable Development Goals**

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates how cultural practices as they relate to men's treatment of women in the Yoruba culture align with or contradict globalization ideals and the principles of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), given that globalization and the SDGs are conceived as yardsticks for global development in the twenty-first century. Globalization and the SDGs are two contemporary phenomena with universal applicability and impact because they impart African culture, particularly gender, patriarchy, and femininity as cultural signifiers. This paper is anchored on Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's gender theory of Stiwanism which advocates women's social inclusion, and George Herbert Mead's Interactionism which centers on inclusivity. Nigeria is yet to implement the SDGs goals due to insecurity and, this paper argues, cultural variance. The existing Yoruba customs seen in native assumptions, aboriginal wisdom or knowledge systems, and superstitions, as well as social practices regarding women, threaten gender unification as conceived of in SDG 5. The Yoruba cultural belief that women cannot be family icons threatens SDG 10. The new practice of Yoruba men using women for money-making rituals is an objectification of women, contradicting gender best practices as enshrined in Goal 5. The continued practice of levirate marriage among the Yoruba because the widow cannot inherit a late husband's property, arising from the economic disempowerment of the women concerned, undermines SDG 8, relating to decent work and economic growth. Existing Yoruba attitudes toward women are therefore inimical to global best practices in relation to women and the successful implementation of the SDGs in Southwest Nigeria by 2030. This calls for further investigation into the cultures of Nigeria's other regions to assess the feasibility of the SDGs initiative in these parts of the country.

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### **Key words**

Yoruba women, African culture, gender, SDGs, globalization, Yoruba men, Southwest Nigeria

## Introduction

Ascertaining whether or not current Yoruba cultural practices in Nigeria as they relate to women in general are in line with global best practices as expressed through globalization and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is considered germane. This is because globalization has transmitted values, practices, and initiatives as well as tangible and intangible products from one part of the world to another, indeed to all parts of the world. This functionality of globalization is capable of bringing about immense opportunities and benefits, resulting, for example, in profitability and industrial growth as well as a tremendous expansion of productive markets in Asia and Africa (Martin, 2011). This has transmitted the cultural features of one society to other parts of the world, and in the context of scientific and technological initiatives and outputs, ubiquitous transmission through globalization has made societies across the world share the same, or seemingly the same, features and thereby making them appear alike (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). This means that cultural situations in the Western part of the world, especially those motivated by science and technology and gender culture, cannot be resisted in Africa. This is particularly so when one considers the ruthless force and intimidating intensification of globalization in today's world (Rigg, 2007). However, if globalization traffic has originated from the West or the East, and is not yet multidirectional, as Soyinka (2019) opines, it can be argued that Western and Eastern cultural values, possibly including gender roles and social practices, have not yet been transmitted to Africa. In Africa, it is the globalization of science and technology as agents of the transmission of Western and Eastern values that is known as modernity. This can be deduced from the following assertion:

The globalizing effects of modernity on Africa's social, cultural and religious life are real and far-reaching. Like in the West, the dynamic elements of modernity have transformed and shaped traditional social relations in Africa. Africans are now able to engage with the global community more than ever before, even as the global community intrudes into their intimate personal life as never before. The effects of this interaction between the rest of the world and Africa, which are made possible through modern print and electronic media, are not to perceive [*sic*]. (Bitrus, 2017, p. 74)

In the same vein, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United

Nations is an initiative of global significance intended to develop the world on the basis of modernity or Westernization. Such societal development is hinged on certain values, such as the rights and freedom of women as represented by the concepts of gender equality or gender-based dignity, hard work or industry, mutual respect, austerity, and enlightenment among other cardinal objectives of the initiative. If no society in the world, including the Yoruba society in the Southwest of Nigeria, can isolate itself from the rest because of the effects of globalization and modernity, and given that Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations whose initiative the SDGs are, it is therefore relevant to assess how Yoruba culture still treats women. This is in order to ascertain whether Yoruba society is aligned with the development yardstick of contemporary global society, especially on the basis of gender and gender roles.

The need for this is critical as, according to President's Muhammadu Buhari's Senior Special Assistant on SDGs, Princess Adefunke Orelupe-Adefulire, Nigeria is encountering some challenges in implementing the SDGs, including insecurity. This means that the SDGs are not yet being implemented in Nigeria, within which the Yoruba region (the Southwest, our research geo-focus) is situated. The non-implementation of the SDG agenda in Nigeria has become even more conspicuous because planning is still being discussed for the successful achievement of the global initiative since its launch in 2015. This can be deduced from Orelupe-Adefulire's viewpoint that the SDGs are achievable within the remaining 10 years if all hands are on deck, in an enabling environment, devoid of violence and other forms of criminality which discourage investment (Ikhilae, 2021). However, the factor of insecurity cited in government circles as a hindrance to the implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria is not the primary reason; the immediate cause is civil, the non-compatibility of the local culture with the aspirations embodied in the SDGs.

### **Women in the History of the Yoruba People**

The Yoruba people are believed to originate from Ife, a town in Southwest Nigeria. Their population has grown since the aboriginal tie to Ife in the ninth century, making this region of Nigeria heterogeneous and cosmopolitan (Agbaje-William, 2005). This cosmopolitan attribute of the Yoruba in Southwest Nigeria has been responsible for the cross-continental spread of its people, who are now found in Togo, Brazil, Cuba, the Benin Republic, Togo, and Ghana, and because of access to coasts (Agbaje-William, 2005; Ologundudu, 2008; Soyinka,

2006). In the course of this ethno-geographical growth and expansion, Yoruba women have grown and developed and have displayed iconic traits. For the purpose of this paper's focus, three phases have been identified: Ancestral, the middle period, and contemporary, and each has its iconic representative women.

The ancestral period in the Yoruba ethno-geo-political space which is situated within the early pre-colonial era in Nigeria for the purpose of this paper is represented by Efunsetan Aniwura "who was so distinguished that many legends have been created around her as a dynamic and energetic trader in the 1820s" (Awe, 2020, p. 74). This is a complement to Moremi's achievement in Ife, who played a decisive role in the history of her people, the Yoruba. The middle period is represented by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti who fought for the rights of women during Nigeria's colonial period (Awe, 2016; Irukwu, 1994). The contemporary time is represented by Folorunso Alakija, a Yoruba woman who, according to Forbes, is Nigeria's wealthiest woman and who supports the community through her Rose of Sharon Foundation (Nsehe, 2014). Yoruba women have been distinguished by their achievements and examples, as has been discussed, are seen, diachronically, in Moremi's wars contributions, Efunsetan Aniwura's trade acumen, Ransome-Kuti's struggle against the taxation of women (Mba, 2020), and the generosity of Folorunso Alakija.

### Literature Review

Culture is a significant aspect of human life. The significance relates to its various roles in any given society. Culture is also multi-relational in the sense that it involves many ramifications in the life of a people. The crucial functions of culture in a society have motivated different opinions from different perspectives. For example, it has been observed that though cultures have different manners of expression, the primary goal of such cultural expression is the same in different parts of the world. (Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014). This echoes the universalism of human cultures and this universal tendency is underscored by Neuliep (2009) to stress the terrestriality of all cultures of the world. This implies that culture is peculiar to humans in this world, which introduces a theo-philosophical perspective to the perception of culture. To Yerima (2013), culture, especially in the Third World, is a tool for administration which is important in the negotiation of modernity. According to Awosusi (2018), culture is a tool for the definition of a society. However, it has been observed that there are "radical shifts in global patterns of cultural consumption" (Power & Scott, 2004, p. i). It could be asserted that such

shifts in the consumption of culture is in line with the opinion that in Africa closed cultures give rise to problems but open cultures lead to positive outcomes (Yerima, 2015).

Africans display a dogmatic commitment to their culture, including religion, and this has contributed to their defying fundamental principles such as gender equality. This is made worse because the Yoruba are committed to Christianity and Islam, both of which promote the subjugation of women. This attitude contradicts global best practices and SDG principles regarding women. The opening of culture is Yerima's way of emphasizing that cultures in Africa, or "African culture" as a bloc, needs to tolerate Western culture because if Africa is not able to link to the West (which stands for science) in the cultural production process, "neocolonialism will always keep the postcolonial states in perpetual dependence" (Layiwole, 2010). What Layiwole is underscoring here is the power of culture and its capability to rescue the Third World, especially African countries. This is also underscored in observation by Brijavac (2012) that culture along its value has the potential for tremendous efficient productivity. Layiwole's theory on links to the West in cultural production, which incidentally emphasizes Brijavac's hypothesis regarding the potential of culture for efficient productivity, emphasizes Abodunrin's (2014) assertion on the significance of Africa's cultural link with the West, that cultural contact with Europeans and the inter-fusion of the African experience have dictated the direction of modern Africa. This comment is also in line with Yerima's "opening of culture" theory. The crux of the foregoing is that African culture necessarily needs to link to the West for cultural productivity and global relevance.

One area of African culture which needs to be in sync with the West in the context of global best practices is the condition of African woman. It has been alleged that African women have been subjected to untold hardship in the African social system. For example, Ali (2010) reveals that her Somali parents are not happy when she does well at school but would rather have her scrub floors and clean because she is female. Similarly, as a result of frustration from being a woman in Egypt, Saadawi (2000) thanks God for the calamities of women because God looks on while men suffocate women in the country. Such suffocation refers to the blatant oppression that women suffer in both traditional and modern African society (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007). Aidoo (2007) has also lamented that women in Africa experience sadness at the idea of being African women. This sadness is an obvious reflection of the suffocation and oppression women experience in an intensely patriarchal African society. The oppression is so intense that Akpah

(2018, p. 222) describes African patriarchy as “toxic machinations,” uncouth practices relegating women to the margin. This is in line with the assertion that African patriarchy relegates the female sex to a position of insignificance and inconsequentiality” (Eruaga, 2018, p. 212).

What can be deduced from Eruaga’s observation in the foregoing in relation to the “insignificance” and “inconsequentiality” hypotheses is that to the African man, women are not important, perhaps worthless in the social scheme of things. However, this may not be the genuine nature of the African woman, or women generally, as shown by the opinion that one quality which is singled out for the economies of sub-Saharan African countries, and especially the Ugandan economy, is the fact that women play enormously significant economic roles, just as much so as their male counterparts (Ellis, Manuel, & Blackden, 2006). This revelation by Ellis et al., highlights the fact that women in Africa are individuals of industry. This is because, according to them, African women work for economic productiveness on the basis of gender intensity, in that women are a majority of the agricultural labor force while men constitute the majority in industry and services. However, this argument only coexists with the patriarchal features of the African society. Whether Africa’s patriarchal features and practices are in line with the modern-day lifestyle as governed by globalization and the SDGs is therefore something that requires examination. This appears not to be the case because globalization originated from the West and one major feature of the social system in Western countries is freedom. Yet, if globalization has made everywhere in the world the same (Mowforth & Munt, 2009), then this should not exclude the freedom and rights of women. In addition to this, the SDGs also frown on violations of the rights of women. The United Nations, through the SDGs, tends to define contemporary society as progressive or not solely through the lens of gender equality.

### **Yoruba Traditional Religion and the Perception of Women**

Yoruba traditional religion is based on the veneration of divinities or deities as a way of reaching the Supreme Being. These deities are symbolized in appropriate inanimate objects. It originated in and is being sustained by the claimed spiritual inadequacies of the religions from foreign climes (Idowu, 1991; Ologundudu, 2008). The perception or the place of women in Yoruba traditional religion is determined by the cosmological bloc of deities under consideration. This is because the Yoruba pantheon is divided into two based on gender, the male and the female

deities. Male deities include *Ogun*, *Oro*, *Sango*, *Obatala*, *Obaluaye*, *Ifa*, *Egungun*, *Eyo* (of *Lagos*), and *Esu*, while the female deities include *Oya*, *Osun* *Oshogbo*, and *Yemoja*. The female deities value women and men while curators, custodians and worshippers of the male deities feel superior to the female deities and the worshippers of the latter. The cosmological relationships between certain pairs of deities have created this attitude of superiority. For example, *Oya* was wife to *Ogun* and *Sango*; *Oba* was also married to the same husband; *Yemoja* was the wife of *Oranmiyan* (Ologundudu, 2008). This marital factor, especially the one between *Sango* (male) and *Oya* (female), is particularly significant. This is because it has given rise to the expression, *Sango l'okoOya* (*Sango* is the husband of *Oya*). *Oso ni okoaje*, (wizards are superior to witches) the philosophical assertions that traditional Yoruba men constantly utter to emphasize their headship over and ownership of their wives with the intention of silencing the women.

We can also note the male superiority complex deriving from the Yoruba traditional religion excluding women from the *Oro* worship; they say *b'obinrin ba foju kan oro, oora gbe* (if a woman sees *Oro*, *Oro* will take her away), and *Oso ni oko aje*, that is wizards are superior to witches. This disregard for Yoruba woman as it manifests among the Yoruba deities suggests that women are weak. This is, however, not consistent with contemporary times where women are winning laurels for their nation.

### **Christianity, Islam, and the Dark View of Women in the Context of SDGs**

The Yoruba people are a deeply religious ethnic group and generally devout practitioners of Christianity and Islam. They equally practice traditional religions as a majority of the people still consult their corpus of traditions in terms of religious beliefs and social practices (Mbiti, 2011). The commitment of the Yoruba to religion is a reflection of their African characteristics because, in the opinion of Mbiti (2011), Africans are known for their intense religiosity. The Yoruba commitment to religious tenets affects their treatment of women. Christianity and Islam, the two dominant acculturated foreign religions among the Yoruba people, assert the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. This uniformity and agreement might be attributed to their monotheistic nature and the conception of their worshippers that their God is the only true Supreme Being (Berto, 2021). As Christians and Muslims agree on the monotheistic nature of their religions, so also do their worshippers agree on the maltreatment of women. For example, Crandall

(2012) asserts that the tone in which women are described in Genesis, the first book of the Christian Bible, is demeaning, and in the same vein, Paul's First Letter to Timothy contains demeaning comments on women, and these have constituted the standard for justifying the dishonorable patriarchal maltreatment of women. Jones and Kendall (2002) corroborate this by positing that it is a priceless truth that a woman is no woman when she liberates herself but when she does the will of God. Yet this will is as stipulated in the Bible. In addition to these, Poonen (1999), based on the example of Ruth in the Bible, encourages women to look up to their husbands spiritually. In Poonen's word:

I thought of Ruth, a girl in the Bible who had left her people and married someone outside her own culture and race. She remained true to her husband and to his people. She started life as a poor woman. But God blessed her ... even though she was from the Moabite race—a race that originated in incest (Gen. 19: 30–37) (p. 26)

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that Christianity, through biblical stipulations, encourages the subjugation of women to the will of men.

As it is with Christianity so it is with Islam because the latter preaches that men are superior to women. In fact, this declaration is more specific in Islam, as Crandall (2012), citing Sura 2 vs 228, affirms:

The Quran makes it clear that men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because good women are obedient. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to their beds apart and beat them (p. 164).

The section in Clandall's exposition which permits men to beat their wives for disobedience represents the utter peak of the objectification of women which, Clandall claims, the Islamic religions permits. Abid (2020), on the other hand, states that Islam does not permit the outright beating of women by their husbands, it only permits the "gentle hitting" of women. This position is contained in the declaration that:

Therefore, it is irresponsible to conclude from Qur'an 4:34 or the numerous *hadiths* on the topic that Islam somehow allows domestic violence or physical abuse. The conditions the Hanbalis set before the



husband could even get to the point of “gentle hitting” are so strict that it is preposterous to assume what many Muslim husbands do with their wives today could be considered religiously justifiable. Even the rules related to “gentle hitting” itself are very strict in Hanbali law. (p. 2)

However, Abid’s position tends not to be to condemn and dismiss the claim that Islam permits men to beat their wives, the emphasis tends to be that the extent or degree of this beating is such that domestic violence is generally avoided.

In any case, it can be shown that certain verses in the Qur’an, such as Qur’an 4:34, have been cited and relied on by Muslim men to objectify their wives. This is also the situation with Christianity which, through biblical injunctions, demands the absolute subjugation of women in their relations with men. Yoruba men who are, generally speaking, either devout Christians or dedicated Muslims, constantly justify their maltreatment of women as a religious obligation. The consequence of this is that the SDGs gender goal as enshrined in Goal 5: Gender Equality, may not be realized in Southwest Nigeria as the men see what they do as a religious obligation with which they must comply.

### **Yoruba Aboriginal Wisdom System on Women, Globalization, and the SDGs**

At this juncture of the study, we need to contextualize the belief system or knowledge yardsticks of the Yoruba people in the Southwest of Nigeria. This belief system or knowledge is enshrined in the proverbs of the people which represent their disposition toward each other or toward certain ideals or social concepts. For example, Yoruba proverbs portray the perception people have of their kings and vice versa, the disposition of parents to their children, or the disposition of the generality of the people to peace, war, anger, and God. In the context of this paper, the focus is on the disposition of African men to women as suggested in the proverbs selected for this analysis.

One of the proverbs which indicates the prejudice that Yoruba society (as a cultural bloc) and Yoruba men (as another cultural bloc) have against women in the course of the social interaction between either of the blocs and women is *ile oko omo lomo n gbe* (“a wife must stay in her husband’s house or a girl child must not run away from her husband’s house”). This proverbial assertion is characteristically uttered by either parent to a married daughter who has returned to her original home as a result of marital turbulence and violence. *Ile* in the Yoruba proverb-

bial expression above means “house”; *okeo* in Yoruba means “husband”; *omo* generally means “a child,” referring to either sex. But in this context, since *okeo* (husband) is used in contrast to *omo*, then *omo*, which normally refers to both sexes, now specifically means “a married daughter.” Also, *gbe* above signifies “live in” or “stay in” or “reside at.” This proverb is a ready utterance that a dutiful parent is culturally expected to utter if a married daughter intends to leave her marriage and return to her parents due to the hardship, havoc, or violence that she is currently experiencing in her marriage.

This situation is, however, being exploited by those Yoruba men with a “Wild Masculinity” ideological orientation, who constitute a dominant percentage of Yoruba men as a whole. The “Wild Masculinity” African patriarchal ideology preaches that the income that men make should be solely for the use of men and as such is expended on drugs, alcohol, cars, fashion, and any other form of conspicuous consumption as bait to lure multiple women into sexual affairs. Such Yoruba men combine epicurean indulgences with a sense of possessing their wives. This is because they know for a fact that their wives have nowhere to go since their parents will return them to their husbands if they attempt to flee home. The consequence of this practice is patriarchal violence against the women. Yoruba parents have been practicing this on the basis of religious doctrine. Those who are Christians believe that what God has joined together no man should put asunder and the biblical directive that wives should be submissive to their husbands and serve their home (Proverbs 31: 11–15). This similarly applies to those who are Muslims. However, this practice is not in accord with the tenets of globalization relating to fundamental human rights, which are core social and cultural values of the West and are also championed by the United Nations through the SDGs which advocate gender equality as a cardinal goal, as codified in SDG 5: Gender Equality.

The attitude of Yoruba parents to their married daughters is having dire and grave consequences. For example, the Oyo State government, one of the six states in Southwest Nigeria, has enacted a law, the 2016 Violence Against Women Law, as a legal tool for punishing men who are violent to their wives and who run away from their marital financial responsibilities. In spite of this legal framework, however, there is a critical developing issue to contend with. This is the fact that Yoruba men’s maltreatment of and violence against their wives continues and pits the government against culture and society. The law offends against the cultural beliefs and practices of the people in the context of gender. The implication is that the law is a source of conflict in itself and the ideal situation is the cultural for-

mation of a new practice evolutionary within the people. Again, since globalization is a universal phenomenon and the Yoruba region of Southwest Nigeria is part of the global village, the rights of women as best practice are non-negotiable. Any contradiction of this would be a violation of Nigeria's membership of the UN and SDG 5: Gender Equality.

Apart from this, the Yoruba cultural society believes that *bi ko ba ni idi, obinrin ki i je Kumolu* ("except in a rather complex or inexplicable situation, a woman cannot be an icon of the lineage"). The implication of this is that since a woman cannot be seen as an icon, she is therefore considered not human enough to be seen as head. By implication and application, a woman is not considered intelligent enough to exercise administrative power. A woman cannot be a monarch (and no woman is a monarch among the Yoruba). A woman cannot be seen as exercising financial authority. However, do these conceptions and cultural barriers apply in the contemporary world, the age of globalization and SDGs? Examples from elsewhere show the traditional Yoruba perception of women to be outdated, impracticable, and unrealistic. The English monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is a woman; Margaret Thatcher was British Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990; and the recently retired German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, is a woman, and these latter two women have been remarkable in governing the UK and Germany, respectively. Condoleezza Rice was U.S. Secretary of State between 2005 and 2009, while Christine Lagarde from France served as Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These significant examples from the global community prove that the Yoruba conception of the Yoruba African woman as subhuman in terms of administrative acumen may not be tenable in the age of globalization and SDGs. If *Kumolu* in the cultural belief as outlined above expresses the belief that Yoruba women lack the capacity to assert financial authority, or to assert their lack of knowledge, this is contradicted by the fact that many women across today's world do control or are capable of wielding financial power. Oprah Winfrey in the United States and Folorunsho Alakija in Nigeria are two of many women who have been heading organizations and asserting financial power.

Yet, when one considers the case of Tolu Arotile, the first Nigerian female combat helicopter pilot, who was of Yoruba descent from Kogi State but who was killed in curious circumstances in 2020, it becomes incontrovertible that women can indeed be iconic. The suspected foul play surrounding her demise caused an angry reaction from Yoruba socio-cultural groups such as *Afenifere* (Good Wishers) on the basis of autochthonous and aboriginal affiliations. One might wonder why a group like *Afenifere*, populated by old men, would even raise an eyebrow because of the

death of a female combat helicopter pilot. It is because Tolu Arotile, a 24 year-old woman, was seen as a symbol of Yoruba pride a Yoruba icon in the Nigerian Air Force.

To the extent that Yoruba women have distinguished themselves in different walks of life, the cultural conception that a woman cannot be iconic in the family line because she is perceived to be incapable in terms of IQ and finance is a contravention of global best practices on gender. It also contradicts the actualization of the objectives of SDG 5 among the Yoruba in Southwest Nigeria. This is a substantial loss for and setback to the primary goal of SDG 5 as well as the spirit of the SDGs themselves. The reason for this is that Southwest Nigeria has a substantial population, meaning that the SDGs' objective of elevating the social status of women as represented by Goal 5 may have been defeated in a sizeable part of the global community.

The same sub-human perception of the Yoruba African woman can be detected in the proverbial philosophical saying *bale ile ku, ile d'aboro* (the house or family disintegrates and falls empty when the male head of the house e.g., father or husband, dies). The claim the expression embodies, in today's world of globalization and SDGs, could be conceived as belittling the potential of the African woman. The conclusion therein is that once the man of the house/family is dead, the woman as wife or mother cannot cope with the financial responsibility of caring for the family. It could also mean that the wife does not have the ability to coordinate or manage and is depicted as unable to serve as the pillar of the household. This is not to suggest that the impact of the loss of the man and the vacuum created as a result of his death would not be felt by every member of the family. The reality, however, is that such a conception of women is unknown in the present world except in a society determined to see women as lacking all capabilities. Women elsewhere do engage in productive economic undertakings. Women in the developed world engage in economic activities because they have a sound education or artisan training, or both in certain situations, which has granted them financial freedom. Contrary to this, it is the practice among the Yoruba to forbid their wives from productive economic engagement so that the women are completely dependent on their husbands for survival. This goes against the spirits of SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

Such a conception of women as financially incapable is further echoed in *Owo l'obirin mo* (all a woman knows is money from her husband) and *a ti gbe'yawo o le'jo owo obe l'o soro* (getting married is easy; feeding the wife is the burden). When

considered critically, neither of these proverbs is a compliment to Yoruba African women. Both betray a patriarchal bias against women whom Yoruba men perceive as unable to make money on their own and reliant on men for survival. The cultural conception embodied by *owo l'obinrin mo* is twofold: Yoruba men feel a man can get anything from a woman with money, while it also signifies that a woman is a liability in a marriage. This attitude or perception has led to a situation whereby men among the Yoruba (perhaps as elsewhere) see women as commodities that can be purchased. This encourages the men to bruise women's fundamental human rights.

We can see this in particular in the saying common to the "patriarchal circle" among the Yoruba, *bi obinrin ba pe ni'le oko aje ni da* (a woman becomes a witch if she stays for long in a marriage). Based on this attitude, Yoruba men treat their wives with disdain, even as something worn out or no longer wanted. The intention is frequently to get rid of their wives so that they do not become "witches." The intention of disposing of the women after a period of time may come from the idea that witches constitute the greatest dangers to men's destinies as their activities can destroy the plans of individuals; this is common belief in the Yoruba world (Nu, 2013). For the most part, Yoruba men climb on or hide behind this cultural claim to ease their wives out of their lives. However, this proverbial claim could be seen as a superstition because prior to the twenty-first century traditional Yoruba wives stayed for many years with their husbands but, quite obviously, vast numbers of them were not witches.

However, can it be said that this patriarchal conception is universal? Or it is a practice that the rest of the world can copy from the Yoruba society in the spirit of the globalization of Yoruba values? The same applies to the Yoruba belief that *Obe ti bale ile kii je iyale ile kii se* ("a woman/wife should not eat the delicacy that the husband does not eat") and the belief that *oke oku l'oku re baba omo l'o l'omo* ("though the estranged wife is displeased because of the husband's neglect of a child, the child belongs to the father at the end"). These conceptions promote the Yoruba patriarchal ego and parental insensitivity, respectively and contradict SDG16, which emphasizes peace and justice, Goals 1-4 (No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well Being, and Quality Education) and Goal 5: Gender Equality, as well as representing a contradiction of SDG 10: Reduced Inequality. These situations as they inter-connect in an adverse trajectory (that is the Yoruba African beliefs and the global development instruments i.e., globalization and SDGs) go to show that Yoruba society is disconnecting from the rest of the world in terms of gender best practices.

### Women as a Money-Ritual Sacrifice

One major problem that women face in Africa, with a specific emphasis on Yoruba society, is the money-making sacrifice which most men engage in as a means of becoming rich suddenly. This appears to be a scary patriarchal excess among the Yoruba, in modern times. In any case, it could be suggested that this ritual onslaught against women among the Yoruba represents a patriarchal bias in Yoruba cosmology with a particular emphasis on the pantheon, as constituted by the Yoruba gods and goddesses. It is the specific roles of the various deities in the invocations that give efficacy to the rituals since these rituals are an engagement with, in this case, the Yoruba extra-terrestrial agents such as *Ifá*, *Ogún*, *Èsù*, *Oya*, and *Osun*. This is particularly so because rituals are traditional spiritual exercises which are a necessary adjunct to the physical or worldly money rituals because the spiritual reinforces the physical (Nwolise, 2013). The gender factor becomes relevant because the female Yoruba deities have been described as having human attributes. For example, according to Walker (2021, p. 2):

Oshunis “The Goddess of love, freedom, fertility, and water, using her abilities to create and heal the world’ while Oya is the Goddess of weather, known to be one of the most powerful [...] she is also known as a strong protectress of women, who call on Her to settle disputes in their favor ... Nana Buluku, the supreme Goddess, the mother of all mothers, she is an ancient goddess in the image of an old woman who is believed to be the creator of the world including the cosmos.

In contrast, however, the male Yoruba deities, represented by *Èsù*, may be seen as being responsible for accepting the rituals. This is also because “apart from providing this most important service to both human and gods, what *Èsù* is probably most famous, or infamous, for is his association with chaos and disharmony” (Sellers & Tishken, 2013, p. 47). *Ogún*, a male Yoruba deity, has been described as wearing clothes of fire and blood, while *Sango*, another male Yoruba deity, is capable of summoning fire to destroy people and objects (Olaoye, 2005). These are attributes of rage, fear, and death.

The money ritual phenomenon is rampant among younger Yoruba, the result of a growing sense of laziness among the young generation of the Yoruba people who form a part of the Nigerian people described by Nigeria’s president, Muhammadu Buhari, as “lazy” during a panel discussion with world leaders at the

Commonwealth Business Forum in London (Ogundipe, 2018, p. 1). This alleged indolence has led to inefficiency and a lack of economic productivity in the country. This social vice is common among some the Yoruba runs counter to SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. This is laziness among Nigerian men has led to adverse consequences. It needs be stressed that Yoruba men are among those to whom the President was alluding. It is common among Yoruba men to attempt to make money using their wives as a instrument/ingredient of ritualistic sacrifice.

It should be stated that, in addition to this lazy tendency among the people, the factors of globalization and economic hardship need to be taken into account. The former has spread, among other things, technological products and innovations such as the Internet, phones, tablets, and social media. Through these, Western glamour and Far Eastern glitz have permeated the lives of men and women across all classes of Yoruba in Nigeria. The sense of Western glamour has been used by Yoruba men to prove their civilized consciousness, especially when they want to practice their craft as “Yoruba Demons.” A Yoruba Demon is a modern-day phenomenon in the aesthetics of being a Yoruba man. Such a man pays exaggerated attention to expensive fashion to enhance his masculine presence. The immediate reason for this is to attract women with the eventual intention of exploiting them sexually and then abandoning them, particularly when pregnancy has occurred. The Yoruba Demon’s tools include expensive phones, a “Senator’s Suit” (a local name for a particular outfit of men’s clothing), rented cars, and all kinds of designer products. All of these are to create an impressive social media presence.

Maintaining such a lifestyle is, however, expensive. The Nigerian economy is weak, having collapsed into recession in recent times (Ebi, 2017), and Nigeria is the poverty capital of the entire world. The situation of a Yoruba Demon in relation to women is that of inordinate and expensive desires (or consumption) predicated on an indolent culture in a disabling economy. The option usually available is a money ritual involving human blood. This is conceived as priced, potent, and invaluable for the money ritual. The money ritual involves a hungry hen picking at kernels of corn with the number of kernels-eaten determining the number of years the person carrying out the money ritual will live after the money ritual has been completed. This is because usually the artificially hungry hen picks one or two kernels. Therefore, the human blood option is common today, though it is not *easy* (technically speaking) to come by. The usual targets are wives, girlfriends, and female children who are easy prey because of their affection (or love) for their husbands and partners or, in the case of children, their trust or gullibility. In recent

times, there has been a high incidence of ritual killings in Southwest Nigeria involving women and girls, though there have been killings of males, too. For example, *PM News* (a Nigerian evening news paper), Saturday April 13 reported that “graphic and horrifying details have emerged on how a herbalist and his friend allegedly killed an known man for ritual in Ogun State”(PMnews, 2019, April 13). According to the police, Oloruntoyin allegedly lured the victim to his home near Mesioye’s residence at night, and then called to the herbalist that he had brought the man to be used for the ritual they had talked about. Though this reference suggests that men and boys are also used for rituals, the main attention and concern are attached to the high incidence of the ritual murder of females in the Southwest of Nigeria. This is evident in a report from the commissioner of police in Oyo State:

The first recorded ritual killing took place on June 1, 2020 at Akinyele Town. It involved Miss Baraka Bello, a female student of the Department of Sciences Laboratory Technology [...] Moor Plantation, Ibadan. She was reportedly raped and killed (Ojo, 2020, p. 1).

The killing was gory, as Ojo says that the killer smashed her head against concrete. Ojo further revealed that ritualists also killed Azeezat Somuyiwa, a 29-year-old woman on June 13, 2020. This was followed by the murder of Mrs Olusayo Fagbemi, a 42-year-old woman, at Ajibade Street, Sasa. The serial killings also involved a woman and her daughter near the Moniya headquarters of Akinyele Local Government but police arrested and paraded seven suspects in connection to this gruesome killing. Ojo further reported that the suspect “[...] explained that his modus operandi is to target females [...]” (p. 2). The horror these incidents inspire is made worse by the case of another young woman, Favour Daley-Oladele, who was alleged to have been murdered by her boyfriend. PMnews on Saturday January 4, 2020, reported that:

The deceased was allegedly killed by a prophet, Segun Philip, 42 and her boyfriend, Adeeko Owolabi, 22, in Ikoyi-Ile, Osun State on Dec. 8 for money rituals [...] Accordingto him he lured the deceased to Ikoyi-Ile and lodged her in a hotel before killing her. The police commissioner said [...] the police would ensure that justice prevailed in the matter. (PMnews, 2020, January 4, p. 2)



Brutal ritual killings focused on women also occurred in Ogun State as well as Oyo and Osun. This suggests that money rituals involving the blood of women cut across the Southwest of Nigeria. In the Ogun crime against women, it was reported that:

The Ogun State Police Command has arrested three suspected ritual killers who beheaded a 17-year old puff-puff seller at Arigo Ijofin in Ipokia Local Council Area of the State [...] Tanlaju, 35, confessed to our reporter that he lured the teenager to a place and after buying puff-puff from her, strangled her to death. Tanlaju also revealed that his first victim was a 40-year-old woman and he was paid N10,000. (PMnews, 2017, November 14)

All of the examples cited indicate that men in the Southwest of Nigeria use the blood of women for money rituals. This forms part of their bid to live a life of opulence and conspicuous consumption in order to impress and oppress women and the generality of the people. This is the fate of women in Southwest Nigeria. The positive dimension is that the security agencies are usually on top of the situation, as can be gleaned from the examples cited above. This is the only indicator of safety for women in the midst of this onslaught by a sizeable number of men, especially the unskilled, uneducated, and lazy men of Southwest Nigeria. The protection that the security agencies provide, however, is only reactionary and not preventive, and culprits are only arrested after such crimes have already been committed. Only then are they tried and jailed, yet the women concerned have already lost their lives.

It needs to be stressed that the money ritual is not a new phenomenon among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria. There are different types such as the hen-and-corn type, the one involving wounds on the man, and the ritual that uses the man's sexual organ, but all of these inflict pain on the man or he will die. Men have run away from these forms of ritual, transferring the burden to women who are used and lose their lives. This hinders the attainment of the primary essence of SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, with particular emphasis on peace and justice. Again, the lethal activities of these men against women are an indication that the men see women as subhuman, and such a perception suggests male supremacy. This harms the concept of gender equality as enshrined in SDG 5.

### Indicators of Men's Objectification of Women among the Yoruba

Many culture-motivated practices exist among the Yoruba that attest to men's objectification of women. Such practices indicate that Yoruba men, generally speaking, see women as pieces of property which they possess. It can be stated incontrovertibly that such practices and the evidence they represent of a lack of respect for women do not accord with global best practices in the context of gender. For example, we see the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) which is a legal tool to protect women in America. VAWA, according to Lynch (2009, p. x), is:

U.S. federal legislation that expanded the juridical tools to combat violence against women and provide protection to women who had suffered violent abuse. It was initially signed into law in September 1994 by U.S. Pres. Bill Clinton. Beside changing statutes, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was notable for calling attention to the issues of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

In the above comment and observation, American society (the archetype of globalization and epicenter of SDGs) is protecting women. This marks the respect that the global society (as represented by American society) has for women. However, contemporary socio-cultural practices among the Yoruba are not consistent with the best practices globalization and the SDGs stand for. For example, the superstitious conceptions and beliefs of the Yoruba represent a disdain for women. This is seen in the beliefs of the Yoruba men, for example that their wives should wash their pants but a man must not touch his wife's pants because it is believed that doing so brings ill luck to the man. Yoruba men believe that women's biological traits destroy the efficacy of *juju*, the Yoruba man's main source of power. The Yoruba believe in the power of *juju* and that it exists and functions in all spheres of society. Politicians use it, those who call themselves pastors use it, traders use it, individuals use it. This is because, as claimed, it grants undue advantage to its users. Such claims can be seen in the instance of a debtor hypnotizing the lender so that the lender will not remember to demand repayment of a loan. This makes people, especially men, attach much significance to *juju*. Many men in Yoruba society earmark a room in their houses where they keep their traditional *juju* power and their wives are not usually allowed to enter such a room because they are assumed to be unclean. However, the women cannot have such "safe" rooms in the house. Therefore, this allows men to perpetrate atrocities against

their wives and widens the inequalities against women even today among the Yoruba.

Women are further seen as just pieces of property in the context of the *Me* marital philosophy which Yoruba men use to justify polygamy: *Me L'olorun ni* (that is, God says you can marry any number (which begins with *me*) of women). Such numbers in the Yoruba numbering system include *meta* (three), *merin* (four), *mefa* (six), *mejo* (eight), *mesan* (nine), *mewa* (ten), *metala* (thirteen), *merinla* (fourteen), *meedogun* (fifteen), *merindinlogun* (sixteen), *metadinlogun* (seventeen), and *metalelogun* (twenty-three) and so on up to *metalelogorun* (one hundred and three). Yoruba men often refer to the Quran to legitimize their selfish and self-serving approach to matrimony. This has been debunked as a manipulation and a travesty of the true directive of Quran. The actual directive by the Holy Book can be described as follows:

Marriage is a sacred institution in Islam with very important objectives. In most cases, the objective is achieved through monogamy. However, in certain situations, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife, with the condition that he treats his wives with justice, and takes the decision with Taqwa or God Consciousness. The idea that Islam allows polygamy so that men could pursue lust and as an excuse to fulfill sensual desires is a far cry from what Islam actually wishes to achieve. Polygamy is allowed, though not mandatory, as a remedial measure for certain situations that may arise from time to time. (Iqbal, 2020)

In Islam, men should not indulge themselves by marrying too many wives but should only marry the number of women that they (the men) can take care of. The signification of the *Me L'olorun ni* philosophy is that women can be acquired and that the woman's stake in a marriage is nonexistent. This could be described as a denial of justice and peace as it relates to SDG 16 which stresses the importance that the United Nations attaches to peace and justice across the world.

Another patriarchal cultural practice which signals Yoruba men's objectification of women even in the age of globalization is levirate marriage, which is described as "unions ... in which a widow is taken by one of her late husband's brothers in order to raise up children for him" (Ogolla, 2014, p. 1). This practice could be seen as slavery, enslavement, or bondage when considered in a number of ways, particularly in the context of the man inheriting the woman. The man sees the woman as not having any options but to marry him because this is what the tradition or

culture stipulates. It is also because most women, having been systematically economically disempowered by their Yoruba husbands to ensure the man's absolute control of the marriage, cannot take care of themselves and the children that the deceased husband leaves behind. This act of economic disempowerment is a patriarchal strategy to make women powerless. Yet this fact is known to the brother inheriting the widow. This is the core point in the revelation that:

Under customary law among the Yoruba, widows are considered part of the estate of their deceased husband and, therefore, have no inheritance rights themselves (WACOL n.d.a, 15; Bamgbose July 2002, 12). A brother or son of the deceased husband, but not the son of the woman, was traditionally allowed to inherit the widow as a wife (*ibid.*, 13). The inheritance of the youngest wife of the deceased by the eldest son reportedly continues to be practiced in Yoruba land (Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa, 2006)

As the foregoing makes clear, Yoruba society or culture makes wives a form of common property. This is what is indicated in the women being part of the estate, and economic exclusion makes the women unqualified to inherit their husbands' property. This again offends against SDG 1: No Poverty, as the woman has no economic resources; Goal 2: Zero Hunger, as she cannot feed herself; Goal 3: Good Health, as there is no money for nutrition; Goal 4: Education, as the woman cannot invest in the education of her children; Goal 5: Gender Equality, because men assert their supremacy; Goal 8: Economic Growth, as women are unable to contribute productively to the economy despite being a majority of the population; and Goal 16 in relation to peace and justice.

### Conclusion

Implementation of the SDG agenda among the Yoruba in Southwest Nigeria appears impracticable as the SDG initiative in defense of the rights of women globally runs significantly counter to the cultural philosophies and social practices of the people in this region of Nigeria. It has been stated that the SDG goals in general are not yet being implemented in Nigeria and the government of Nigeria has argued that the non-implementation is due to challenges such as insecurity. However, this excuse is tenable only when a viewpoint is adopted that the implementation of the SDGs is exclusive of the cultural orientations of civil society.

It is posited in this paper that cultural factors or considerations supersede the political and administrative factors. This is because the people concerned are first of all of an aboriginal leaning and disposition, and the policies that a public office holder makes or does not make is affected by that person's worldview. A public administrator and policy maker who is a Christian or Muslim, and often also a devotee of traditional religion, may not truly believe in or support the rights of women or support a government policy such as the SDGs in this regard.

As currently constructed, the Yoruba cultural perceptions of women constitute a huge obstacle to the realization of the objectives of the SDGs as they are conceived to defend the dignity of women globally. This is because Yoruba men's views of women are not targeted at gender balance and human rights such as freedom which globalization has spread to Africa. The *Ile oko omo l'omo n gbe* philosophy, the *Kumolu* hypothesis, the ritualization of the blood of women, the deliberate economic disempowerment of women, and levirate marriage as well as the *Me* marital conceptions constitute denigrating cultural practices among the Yoruba. Realistically, these practices are counterproductive to the spirit of the SDGs and globalization. This suggests that successful implementation of the SDG initiatives on gender equality, industry, economic empowerment, peace, and justice, all of which relate to the social well-being of women in the Southwest, requires cultural renewal and a new attitudinal orientation of the Yoruba people in this section of the global community.

It needs be emphasized that the cultural rebirth hypotheses presupposes a significant extension of the 2030 deadline for the implementation of the SDGs goals. This is because the impediment to the implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria, with specific emphasis on the Southwest, is a cultural one and implementing cultural changes tends to be a slow and difficult process. This is especially so as the Yoruba patriarchal practices are embedded in a religious and/or animist context. The Yoruba men's low regard for women and their consequent maltreatment has a metaphysical link to the Yoruba cosmic space where the nuptial interrelationships between the divinities is such that the male divinities, such as *Sango*, are shown as exercising patriarchal supremacy over the female divinities, such as *Oya*. In addition to this, Yoruba men are, in general, either Christians or Muslims and their holy books can be interpreted to mean that women should submit themselves to men. This religious orientation can only cease if Yoruba men cease practicing these religions, and this is doubtful. However, a shift in the intensity and incidence of gender-related infractions can be attained with an extension of the SDG implementation date and intense follow-up gender advocacy led by the government

and civil right groups for the protection of the dignity of Yoruba woman. The cultures of other political and cultural zones in Nigeria could be investigated in order to ascertain the compatibility of the cultures of these regions with the tenets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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