



## A Critique of Females' Representation in Àyínlá Òmọ̀wúrà's Songs

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**Abstract.** Our societies comprise of both male and female with individual playing their expected roles towards the successful growth of the society. Also, in our society, little respect or recognition is given to women based on the culture of the land. Some artists are also conversant in presenting the female as a second fiddle in the society. Therefore, it is on this note that this paper seeks to focus on the critique of females' representation in Àyínlá Òmọ̀wúrà's song. The research methods involved appropriate and objective analysis of Àyínlá Òmọ̀wúrà selected songs from the feminist perspective or point of view. This will assist to determine the effect of the selected songs on the females' and its implication. At the end, this paper clearly shows and establish the fact that artist sincerely play on the intelligence of the females not minding whose ox is gored. Only the females are point or focus of attack in his song and failed to address the lapses of men who are the real causes of most of female's accusation.

**Keywords:** Songs, Critique, female, representation.

### 1. Introduction

There are different types of music, some of which are Fùjì, Jùjú, Àpàlà, Wákà, Àwùrèbe and Dadakùdà which are secular social songs. There are also songs of ritual annual festivals, as well as those of social festivities, like marriage, child-naming, chieftaincy and burial ceremonies. In short, music is a common phenomenon in every human society and the Yorùbá society is not an exemption. Musical composition and rendition involve both male and female members of the society. Many scholarly works have been done on the socio-economic life of women in human societies, notable among them are Oyesakin (1982 a, b),

Ilesanmi (1987, 1991), Adebowale and Adejumo (1996 a) and Sheba (1999).

Adebowale examines the position of female in marriage setting and the culture of the society in it. The culture of the society was seen or viewed as not on the good side of women and therefore looked down on them. The work also observed that there are some rites that women are denied. Adejumo's work is based on using the feminist theory to examine Yorùbá written play. The work concludes that women are very frank in presenting both positive and negative attributes of women in their work and so are very objective. Adeyemo (2001) was based on collection of Àyínlá Òmọ̀wúrà's song. Each song was written out as presented by Àyínlá Òmọ̀wúrà. Ilesanmi (1987) discusses the role of women in Yorùbá Society as exemplified in Yorùbá Oral Poetry while Oyesakin discusses the image of women in Ifa literary corpus, and Sheba examined *Orin Aremọ* (lullabies) and its usefulness in the society.

Based on the prior studies enumerated above, this work examines critically, women's presentation in Àyínlá Òmọ̀wúrà's song, using the feminist approach. This is to fill the gap created by the scholars' studies of having not examined late Ayinla Omowura's view on women in his music. My bid in this study is to do a critique of woman representation in Ayinla Omowura's songs from critical and objective perspectives. This will highlight and bring to the fore, of the songs on female generally. The analysis of the songs will allow us to know how far it has affected women and the need for corrective measures. Another objective of this paper is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the socio-cultural impact of music in Yorùbá society.

### 1.1 Feminism

Feminist was carved out from Latin word “Femina” which means pertaining to women. It was founded in America and Europe in 1800. The theory was aimed to free women from all forms of bondage. Kolawole 1997:11 said:

Feminist theory is not one, but many theories or perspective and that each perspective attempts to describe women’s oppression to explain its causes and consequences and to prescribe strategies for women’s liberation.

The aim of the theory is an attempt to research into various problems that women are facing generally in our society and to propound solution to it.

The theory is not agitating equality, with men but with the focus that their rite or freedom be recognised and respected. Kolawole (1997:27) have this to say:

Womanhood is central and this is neither controversial nor conflictual to African women... So they are not seeking to be like men or necessarily act like men.

And in support of the above, Chukuma (1990) submits:

(African) Feminism is not a question of superiority or inferiority, it is a question of complementarity and recognition.

This means that African women are only asking for their deserved rite that is due to them and not competing unnecessarily with their male counterpart. It must be noted too that African woman still cherish her role as a caring mother and hence this observation: *The African woman cherishes her role as a home maker as well as her status as a mother or potential mother.*

Therefore, feminist theory is mainly concern with how women will continue to maintain and improve on their roles, both at home and in society with the expected recognition that they deserve. It must be equally noted too that the view of women in African society is quite different from that of their American counterpart.

### 1.1 Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà

Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà, also known as “*Éégún Mọgají*” (The dreadful masquerade), was born in 1933 in Itoko Compound, Abẹ̀òkúta in Ogun state, Nigeria. His father was Yesufu Gbogbolowo while his mother was Morẹ̀nikẹ̀ Àṣàbí. Àyínlá did not have any opportunity to formal education at all and was a butcher before he took to singing. He was said to have inherited the art

of composing songs from his father. He used basically the Ègbá dialect in most of his songs.

He was a popular and recognized Apala musician whose songs cut across all aspects of life with many lessons to learn from. Some of his other records include: *‘Àbòdẹ̀ Mẹ̀kà* (The Return from Mecca), *Àjẹ̀jì kìí bónlẹ̀ dulẹ̀* (A stranger does not compete with the land owner), *Àlùjònnú eléré* (A singer like a spirit), *A ti dàrìyọ̀* (We are the acceptable ones), *Àwa kít ẹ̀ olódi wọ̀n* (We are not their rivals), Challenge cup 1974, *Eja lónibú* (The fish owns the ocean), *Èyin olóṣẹ̀lú wa* (Our politicians), *Iré wọ̀lé dé* (Goodness has come), *Ìṣe ilé ló ñ bá wọ̀n déta* (Charity begins from home) *È mọ̀kàn* (Be calm), *È gbọ̀ tuntun* (Listen to new things) where his views on female are presented, positively and otherwise.

He produced many records before his deaths and the last album he produced was *Ebi kì í pagún dojọ alẹ̀* (A vulture does not go hungry endlessly). Ayinla Omowura died on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1980. His records continued to be popular even after his death.

## 2. Ayinla’s Presentation of Females

### 2.1 Bleaching

This is a practice whereby skin colour is changed from its original look. In one of Àyínlá’s records titled *A ti Dàrìyọ̀* (We are the acceptable ones), he sings:

Lead: Ọ̀rò tó jẹ̀ mí lógún ni mo fẹ̀ sọ  
Omọ̀ge iwòyí wọ̀n fẹ̀ bayé jẹ̀...

*(I want to discuss a pressing issue  
Ladies in present days are very morally loose...)*

Chorus: Dúró b’Ọ̀lórún bá ẹ̀ dá ọ̀  
Má bàwọ̀ jẹ̀ fẹ̀ni bí ọ̀  
Kán mò sị ọ̀ mò torí afẹ̀ ayé...

*(Accept how the Lord created you  
Spoil not your skin colour for your parents’ sake  
So as not to become faceless because of worldly pleasure)*

It is now common among many females to bleach their skin with body creams from black to fairer complexion. This they believe to be more superior and attractive. Uncountable number of dark and beautiful African ladies have bleached their skins. Those who engage in this do so either to satisfy their husbands/boyfriends or as a symbol of identifying with the high-class ladies. Some ladies also indulge in the practice to make themselves attractive to men who engage them in carnal affairs. There are time-frame required for the bleaching to become effective. It is a common knowledge that some of these ladies are really attractive in their new fair skins, while the

outlook of some is really unattractive. Àyínlá points to this in his song:

*Ó fẹ̀ dọ̀yìnbó ni lójìjì  
Ó dàbí ọ̀pòlọ̀ ara hunjọ  
Ó wá rí pàtápàtá bí ẹ̀bọ̀ra  
Qşę tí wón fì ñ bóra ni...  
(She wants to become a white suddenly  
She resembles a frog with wrinkled skin  
She looks haggard like a ghost/fiary  
The soap used to bleach causes it...)*

It must be noted that bleaching has a lot of associated health risks for those who engage in it. Àyínlá noted this and used his song to caution ladies to be contented with their natural colour.

Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà used his profession to condemn this social menace; prevalent among females in our society. He has also proffered useful suggestions that could assist in arresting this attitude. However, his song seems to point accusing fingers only at ladies, while neglecting the menfolk who not only encourage their ladies to indulge in this social malpractice, but also bleach their skin too. Our contention is that Àyínlá spared the male accomplices in his rod or rebuke, because he is a male. This is one instance of male chauvinism over women in traditional African society.

This male chauvinism is also prominent among the Jews of Jesus` days. This was an instance whereby a woman caught in adultery was the only person arraigned for judgement, while the male counterpart was not accused or punished. Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà`s critique would have been justified if he had included the menfolk who also bleach their skins or encourage women to do so.

## 2.2 Abortion

Another social misdemeanor berated by Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà`s song is abortion. Abortion is the act of giving untimely birth to foetus, premature delivery, miscarriage, the procuring of premature delivery so as to destroy the offspring.

In Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà`s song, he says:

*Tóyún bá dúró sí wọn lára  
Wọn mọ̀ bí wọn şe ñ şe ẹ...  
(If they get pregnant  
They know how to abort it...)*

There is a Nigerian legislation which prohibits abortion either by an intending client or by any health worker. This legislation carries a penalty. However, abortion still contributes to high mortality rate in Nigeria. It is not solely performed by women, men folk also actively participate in it by encouraging/forcing

women to do it. On the other hand, housewives abort on the excuse that they have completed their family, any extra pregnancy is therefore considered a burden.

Another reason behind unmarried ladies opting for abortion is that pregnancy before or outside marriage carries a social stigma. In order to avoid social rejection from the man responsible for their pregnancy as well as by colleagues and family members, they opt for abortion so as to save their faces. Their fear of being single parents also contributes to the procurement of abortion. Though, there may be reasons for abortion whenever the financial implication is considered, especially on the side of the females who are not financially capable when compared to males. To eradicate this, there is a development on the part of government by introducing family planning methods at affordable rates.

It is our view that Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà is supposed to be liberal enough in his song to counsel both sexes against this act as the side effect has heavy consequences on women than men who lured them into the act.

## 2.3 Barrenness

The Yoruba people place a lot of premium on owing children and frowns at barrenness. Having children is the essence of marriage among the Yoruba. Therefore, the Yoruba`s view on procreation is at par or in agreement with the biblical view that says: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28b). A barren woman among the Yorubá is not entitled to her husband`s estate whenever the husband dies. This is because sharing the husband`s property is done according to *ídí igi*, that is the number of wife/wives who are mothers.

To buttress the fact that not only the females that are faced with the problem of barrenness, the orthodox system has confirmed that there are also men with low sperm count; which render their sperm inactive and therefore makes it difficult for their wives to be pregnant. In such case, Àyínlá Ọmọwùrà`s assessment of judgement can be seen to be very partial, and traditional in outlook. He sings:

*Mo mọ̀ pé bíbí nìyá bí ẹ̀ lómọ  
Ìwọ náà múra kí o bí 319ire...  
(I know that you were given birth to by your mother  
Struggle to conceive your own...)*

The negative attitude of African society to barrenness pushes women to go to any length immediately they realize that they find it difficult to conceive. Though in the olden days, our forefathers are well disposed to having many wives to raise many children especially

male where they are later expected to assist their parents on the farm. Having many children was the practice in recent past among many Africans including the Yoruba. This is because they practice manual farming whereby, they need many hands on the farm for mass production. As a result of this, the number of wives and children a man has determines his wealth among the folks. Now, prevalent economic situation in many African nations especially Nigeria, does not favour this. This has led to parents cutting down on the number of children per family. Àyínlá Omowúra should have realized that no African Yoruba woman will willingly remain barren. The affected female should be encouraged that all will soon be well with them and be assisted to have proper medical attention.

#### 2.4 Recalcitrance

This is an act of uncooperative attitude. To make a child imbibe the spirit of obedience among the Yoruba, he/she is trained at home from infancy. This is because whatever a child learns in his/her family determines his/her behaviour in the larger society. In one of Àyínlá's album titled *Ìṣe ilé lo n bá wọn déta* (*Their attitude at home always show who they are outside*), Àyínlá sings thus:

Lead: *Ìṣe ilé lo n gbe wọn déta o*  
*Ìyàwó òṣì eléjò wéwé...*

*(Charity begins from home*  
*Useless and talkative wife)*

Chorus: *Mo n wí tó*

*Kí ẹ gbòrò sọkọ yín lẹnu*  
*Àwúgbò yín ma n pò jù*  
*Ṣe báwọn ẹgbọn yín láya nílẹ*

*(I have said it repeatedly*  
*That wives should obey their husbands*  
*Your rebellious attitude is becoming too much*  
*After all, your brothers have wives at home...)*

Women are viewed here as uncultured, stiff necked and disobedient. For this attitude, many men indiscriminately beat their wives. This view held by Àyínlá is common to most men in Yorùbáland. The same view is shared by Ọ̀rúnmilá (male deity) when he says:

*Obìnrin lèké*  
*Obìnrin lẹ̀dàlẹ̀...*  
*(Abúmbólá, 2006:30)*

*(Women are liars*  
*Women are traitors...)*

Although both the Bible and the Quran recognize man as the head of the family, men are also counseled to love their wives. Both are enjoined to love and honour each other. There is virtually no scripture that instructs

a man to beat his wife on grounds of disobedience, or any misbehavior. It must be said that misbehavior is not exclusive to women. Many men are stubbornly addicted to drugs, drunkenness, adultery and the likes. Are their wives allowed to beat them for these vices? Some men never take advice from their wives over any matter – should women punish them for this?

Although Àyínlá has a positive view on the importance of good home-training of a child as a basic foundation later in life, he does not see it as an effort to be contributed by both parents. As if this is not enough on women, Àyínlá, in his album title: *È gbọ tuntun* (*Listen to new things*) sings:

Lead: *Agídí ò ṣéé loolé oko*  
*Ìwà irẹ̀lẹ̀ ló n yọkọ́ nínú...*

*(Stubbornness must not be used in a matrimonial home*  
*Humility always impresses the husband).*

Chorus: *Igí dá ẹyẹ fò obìnrin*  
*A lójú okọ́ ló ga*  
*Ṣùgbọn kì í gbóhun tọkọ́ bá n wí*

*(Peck and go type of wife*  
*Complaining that the face of her husband is not*  
*enticing*  
*But never listen to the husband's directive)*

Lead: *Okọ́ rẹ̀ ò dáràn*  
*Ìwọ náà lọ́ jára mọ́ṣé*  
*Ìyàwó kẹ̀buyẹ*  
*Ó n wù mí kí o fọkọ́ nísínmi...*

*(Your husband has not committed any offence*  
*You should go and work hard too*  
*Ceremonial wife*  
*I wish you allow your husband to rest...)*

Here, Àyínlá views women as parasite on men for subsistence. This is an age-long view as some women in present times are gainfully employed and can even feed their family conveniently. Therefore, the question of absolute dependence on the husband is fast becoming a thing of the past.

#### 2.5 Sexual Promiscuity

In another album titled *Omi Tuntun* (New Water), Àyínlá condemns the incidence of sexual promiscuity among ladies:

*È ò mára Èkó*  
*È ó mará Ègbá o*  
*Wọn á sọ ẹ dapèrè àjàṣé.*

*(You do not know Lagos people*  
*You do not know Ègbá people*

*They will turn you into a used basket...)*

In this track, Àyínlá sends a warning signal to women of easy virtues, to beware of men who can overuse and make them worthless. He exemplifies such men as ‘Lagos and Ègbá people’ who use and dump gullible women. Àyínlá views this adulterous act with contempt as very rampant among women and men patronizing them. No wonder he sings further:

*Àbí èyin ni?(2ce)*  
*Èyin lomọ olọjà ìròlẹ̀*  
*Tí wọn n sọ pé kò gbọdọ̀ polówó rárá?*  
*(Are you the one? (2ce)*  
*That sell in the evening time*  
*Forbidden to advertise their goods?)*

This act is seriously frowned at by the society. Some women have deserted their homes and live in brothels, while some young girls refuse to marry. Àyínlá sings further:

*Àwá mọ̀ wọn nínú aṣẹwọ̀*  
*Tí wọn rihun jẹ*  
*Tí wọn n dán bí kóró isin*  
*Tí nátrà n gọ sí wọn lówó*

*(We easily recognize those who are harlots*  
*Who are well to do*  
*That always look fine*  
*And have naira in abundance)*

Àyínlá is noted here as being inconsistent. He is the one to condemn an act and later be in support of it. In the song above, he exonerates some female prostitutes, those who have made money from prostitution.

In another album titled *Àwa kì í ṣolódìi wọn* (We are not nursing grudges with them), Àyínlá Omọwùrà sings:

*Màá lẹ̀bòsì ayé á gbọ*  
*Péyàwó yín lójú méjì*  
*Tòtúntòsì lojú aṣọ́ ó ní*  
*Ojú ọlọ́tí ò gbé bíkan*  
*Má rojó jìnnà lóri owó ní...*

*(I will shout and the world will hear*  
*That your wife is double-dating*  
*Your cloth has two sides*  
*A drunkard always looks here and there*  
*Don't discuss further for all is based on money...)*

Àyínlá appear to be pointing accusing fingers at only females, as if men are blameless. The only aspect of Àyínlá's song which sends a warning signal to both male and female is:

*Wobíwobí ò dára ṣé ẹ̀ gbọ*  
*Kò wúlò...*

*(Looking here and there is not good*

*It is not profitable...)*

Although Àyínlá might be thinking it is addressed to females alone, it is equally good for men.

## 2.6 Passing Insults on Women

Àyínlá is found of playing on the intelligence of women, hence this song:

*Èkọ̀ sì ni fún ọ̀ bó o lọ (2ce)*  
*Òyìnbó pàlò mo máa fẹ̀ silé...*  
*(A lesson for you if you leave*  
*A light complexioned wife will be married)*

This is an insult on women. Àyínlá continues:

*Bó bá ti rẹ̀nikẹ̀jì*  
*Jagunlabi á máa dígá*  
*Kí lo mín-in-nì o*  
*Mi ò tori ẹ̀nikan dákó*  
*Bó bá sù ọ̀ kó o mí a lọ*  
*Omọ oní wóko-wòko*  
*Àwọn màamá ẹ̀ ló kọ̀ nísẹ̀ owú...*  
*(When she suspects a rival,*  
*She immediately puts up attitudes*  
*What did you mean?*  
*My private part is not meant for a particular person*  
*You can leave if you are tired*  
*You useless person*  
*You have taken after your mother)*

Àyínlá confirms here that men are free to marry as many wives as they like, and disgruntled wives can leave if unsatisfied. This implies cheating on women, for they cannot marry more than one husband at a time. Ayinla directly support polygamy; without any apology.

The accusation by Ayinla on women that they do not like rivals also happens among men as well. No sane man can tolerate his wife dating another man. One can therefore say that jealousy is not peculiar to men. No wonder, Grimke (1937: 40), in support of this, observed that “All history attests that man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification”

## 3. Conclusion

In this study, we have observed that Àyínlá Omọwùrà's songs point accusing fingers to the female alone. The songs portray women in very dark perspectives and presents them in all sorts of negative images. To worsen the situation, all the blames were to the exclusion of their male counterparts, who are not seen as the brain behind some women's reactions at home or in the larger society. Àyínlá has viewed

women from the culture of Yorùbá people that has relegated or looked down on women from time immemorial. It must be noted that the dynamic nature of the sociology of Yorùbá as it relates especially to women, has made this musician's view not totally relevant in modern times. It was noted too that what Àyínlá Omowúra was saying in these songs were only relevant to the occurrence in Yorùbá society in the 70s and 80s than what is obtainable now among women. There is no gainsaying that there has been a considerable improvement among women.

In our own view, we suggest that women should continue to be more pushful and focused. Women should not rely solely on their husband, but should see themselves as partner in progress and should continue to be of assistance at home no matter how minimal. Men need to work together with women in the spirit of complementarity to move their society forward.

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