

**FEMALE AUTONOMY IN DECISION-MAKING: AN  
EXPLORATION OF HOMERIC EPIC AND AKINWUMI  
ISOLA'S EFUNSETAN ANIWURA (IYALODE IBADAN)**

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*If you want something to be said, ask a man, but if  
you want something to be done, ask a Woman*  
*Margaret Thatcher*

**Abstract**

*Generally, women who live in patriarchal societies have been portrayed as incapable of making informed and realistic decisions, as revealed in some literary texts, both ancient and modern. With this, over the years, many scholars of gender studies have focused on gender roles and discrimination against women, without paying attention to how women are capable of making informed decisions without patriarchal interventions. This study aims to examine women's decision-making power as female agency in the Homeric and Yoruba cultural societies with two selected texts, namely *Odyssey of Homer* and *Efunsetan Aniwura– Iyalode Ibadan of Akinwumi Isola*. While some ancient epics have not quite brought to light women's political inclination or roles that they play in society, others give them no credit for all their socio-political affairs. However, *Homer* and *Akinwumi Isola* both present *Penelope* and *Efunsetan* as female agents capable of decision making, though not without preconception. This study, using the comparative qualitative research method, analyses female agency in women's autonomy and decision-making power as presented in *Homer* and *Akinwumi Isola's Odyssey* and *Efunsetan Aniwura: Iyalode Ibadan*, respectively. The selected texts constitute the primary data, while recent related journal articles and books serve as grist for the mill of this study and constitute secondary data.*

**Keywords:** *Female agency, Odyssey, Efunsetan Aniwura, Penelope*

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### **Introduction**

Traditionally, women are primarily responsible for domestic affairs; they are empowered to make decisions on issues relating to choices on health care, control over finances, child discipline and daily family household expenditures. Thus, female decision-making autonomy starts in the household. Researchers like Bloom et al (2001), Basu (1992), and Dyson and Moore (1983) have noted that female decision-making ability is a pivotal indicator of women's autonomy and empowerment. Decision-making is a significant indicator of women's status in the family and society, since the household is central to most policy initiatives. Women's bargaining power in household decision making cannot be overemphasised in analysing women's decision-making autonomy.

Scholars have painted various images of women in the ancient Greek and Yoruba societies in relation to decision making. For instance, Adebowale (2015/2016) considers the Homeric society as a misogynistic world where women held no independent life; in other words, all decisions relating to their lives were made by the male guardian. It is of little wonder that O'Pry (2012) asserts that being a woman in Ancient Athens, "to say the least, was not fun nor was it in any way an equal society." The portrayal of women by ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle gives a reflection of a patriarchal community where women were not allowed to own property, buy or sell, participate in politics other than to oversee household duties, cook, clean, weave and manage the home finances. Explicitly then, the life of an ancient Greek woman was incorporated into the *oikos* (household) which was headed by *kyrios*, regarded as her master, owner or male guardian (Adebowale and Akinboye, 2017).

The study of women in the traditional Yoruba society is multi-dimensional, with varied analyses of women in Yoruba literature. On the one hand, like in the ancient Greek society, the traditional Yoruba society has been described as patriarchal, where women were seen as objects consigned to the kitchen. On the other hand, some scholars have described Yoruba women as independent. For example, Sheba (2008) focuses on the economic activities engaged in by Yoruba women. In the same vein, Johnson (1921) had earlier described these women as being involved in occupations like food processing, mat weaving, pottery-making, cloth-weaving and cooking. However, decision making, authority roles and leadership were given to men,

which gave men access to power and on this note, Olajubu (2003: 24) asserts:

The Yoruba woman in history was relatively independent in mindset and status. As a child, her training guided her toward designated societal roles, which included motherhood. Wifely duties, and an occupation (trading, pottery, or cloth dyeing), she was tutored in those areas in order for her to attain self-fulfilment.

Various descriptions of women, both in ancient Greek and traditional Yoruba societies, portray women as incapable of making decisions. However, Homer's epic, *Odyssey* and *Efunsetan Aniwura* of Akinwumi Isola show female autonomy in decision making. This study examines the roles played by women in decision making both in the Homeric and the Yoruba cultural societies.

#### **A Synopsis of Homer's *Odyssey***

The *Odyssey* is an ancient Greek epic poem attributed to Homer, serving as a sequel to *The Iliad*. It focuses on the Greek hero Odysseus, King of Ithaca, and his arduous ten-year journey home after the Trojan War. The poem begins *in medias res*, focusing first on the situation in Ithaca. Twenty years have passed since Odysseus left for Troy; he is presumed dead, and his palace is overrun by a mob of arrogant suitors draining his estate's resources while vying for the hand of his faithful wife, Penelope. His son, Telemachus, is a young man struggling to assert himself. The goddess Athena, Odysseus's divine protector, encourages Telemachus to travel to the mainland (Pylos and Sparta) to seek news of his father, which helps him mature and gain confidence. At this period, Odysseus is held captive by the nymph Calypso, Athena persuades Zeus to intervene, and the messenger god Hermes is sent to the island of Ogygia, where the nymph Calypso has held Odysseus captive and in love for seven years. Calypso reluctantly releases him. After his release, Odysseus sets sail but is shipwrecked by the vengeful sea god Poseidon (whom Odysseus blinded in the person of his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus). Odysseus washes ashore on Scheria, home of the Phaeacians, who welcome him. At a banquet, he reveals his identity and recounts the harrowing tale of his ten years.

While waiting for her husband's return, many suitors come forward asking for her hand as she is now the queen of Ithaca with an absent king. This made her susceptible to all sorts of proposals. Cunningly, she devises various plans to delay her reply to these numerous proposals. One of her ploys was that she was weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law. She keeps telling them that she would pick a suitor as soon as she's done with the shroud. She weaves by day, and at night, when they are asleep, she loosens them out again until one of her maids uncovers the ploy and tells her suitors. Meanwhile, the Phaeacians sail Odysseus to Ithaca after hearing his tale. At Ithaca, Athena disguises Odysseus as an old, ragged beggar so he can secretly assess the situation. He is welcomed by his loyal swineherd Eumaeus. Odysseus first reveals his true identity to his son, Telemachus, and they begin to plot the suitors' massacre. Upon entering his palace, still disguised, he is recognised only by his old dog, Argos, and his nurse, Eurycleia (by a scar on his leg), who both keep his secret. He endures abuse from the suitors. Penelope finally proposes an archery contest: she will marry the man who can string Odysseus's great bow and shoot an arrow through a line of twelve axe heads. None of the suitors can even string the bow. Odysseus, still disguised, requests a turn, effortlessly strings the bow, and completes the shot. The disguise is dropped, and with the help of Telemachus and two loyal servants, Odysseus and his allies slaughter all the suitors and the disloyal maids. Penelope finally proposes an archery contest: she will marry the man who can string Odysseus's great bow and shoot an arrow through a line of twelve axe heads. None of the suitors can even string the bow. Odysseus, still disguised, requests a turn, effortlessly strings the bow, and completes the shot. The disguise is dropped, and with the help of Telemachus and two loyal servants, Odysseus and his allies slaughter all the suitors and the disloyal maids. Odysseus is reunited with a cautious Penelope, who finally believes he is her husband after he describes details of their immovable marriage bed. The poem concludes with a final conflict with the vengeful families of the slain suitors, which is ultimately ended by the intervention of Athena, restoring peace and establishing Odysseus on his throne.

### **Female Representation in Ancient Literary Sources**

Ancient literary sources, including tragedies by dramatists like Euripides, provide insight into the multifaceted roles of women in

Greek literature. These texts often explore various themes such as tragedy, agency and resistance, offering a broader context for understanding different portrayals of women. While Hesiod, a contemporary of Homer, leans towards objectification, other authors present women in a more empowering light, highlighting the diversity of female representation in ancient literature. The language and imagery used by Hesiod frequently depict and perpetuate stereotypes about women. Hesiod uses descriptions that accentuate beauty and temptation to objectify women, thereby reinforcing their role as secondary to men's narratives. Often, female figures in Hesiod's narratives are depicted as objects of desire or tools for male ambition. In various myths narrated by Hesiod, he presents a pantheon of gods and goddesses where female deities like Gaia, Rhea and Hera play vital roles that exhibit both strength and agency in contrast to the subdued role often assigned to mortal women. The characters of these female deities are portrayed as holding positions of power and influence, sometimes challenging the stereotypical gender roles. They are not merely passive figures; instead, they actively shape events and intervene in human affairs. An example is the goddess Athena, embodied with wisdom and war, showcasing a form of empowerment which contrasts with the submissive roles often ascribed to mortal women. For instance, Hesiod portrays Pandora, the first woman created by the gods, as a woman endowed with beauty and charm but whose creation is rooted in the gods' desire to punish humanity. Her opening of the box that releases evils into the world symbolises the fears and anxieties surrounding female influence and agency in a patriarchal society. The depiction of Pandora by Hesiod encapsulates the idea of women as harbingers of chaos. Unlike Hesiod, Homer presents female figures with more complexity in his works, such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. The female figures like Penelope, Clytemnestra and Helen exhibit agency, showcasing different aspects of womanhood that include loyalty, cunning and influence (Wilson, 2017).

### **Female Agency and Autonomy in Homer's Epic**

The *Odyssey* of Homer is a profound exploration of the human experience; though an epic tale of a man's heroic quest, the theme of female agency and autonomy plays a significant role. Within the epic, women are not merely passive figures; they assert influence and

power in various forms, presenting a complex portrait of femininity in the ancient world. This section delves into the multifaceted ways female characters navigate their autonomy with a focus on Penelope. In the *Odyssey*, the king of Ithaca, Odysseus, has a loyal and dutiful wife, Penelope. Though Odysseus is the main character in this epic, his wife plays a large role. Penelope has a son, Telemachus, whom she bore for Odysseus before he was called away to fight in the Trojan War. Patiently, she waits twenty years for his return; he fought for ten years and journeyed for another ten.

At the time Homer wrote *Odyssey*, women were not only deprived of political rights but of every other socio-political right. Homer, however, using the unique character of Penelope, shows that women have the tools needed for decision making. In a male-dominated world, Penelope protects herself and her family from external predators with her personal strength and sheer will. Homer can almost be called a feminist as he depicts women as having all the characteristics it takes to be a part of politics and decision making, that they have all the qualities required to be outstanding politicians. Penelope is a strong and witty woman, with the power of autonomy in decision making, especially decisions in protecting her family. She withstood all the pressure mounted by her numerous suitors and made a decision that kept her person, kingdom, and her family intact.

One would have wondered why she did not relinquish power to her son after he had come of age, knowing full well that that is what her husband would have wanted, but she refrained from doing this. As revealed in *Odyssey* (1: 345-444), Telemachus' actions and the comments of people, including his mother and the goddess Athena, show he was too weak to assume his position as king of Ithaca. At this stage, Telemachus does not command the respect of the people; he also lacks the qualities expected of a king. His mother's suitors continually ridicule him for not being able to command respect or authority from them. Plato would have suggested that Telemachus' spirited part of the soul, which is the motivating force accounting for self-assertion and ambition, is lacking in him (Adebowale, 2014). Seeing this, Penelope displays wisdom by holding on to powers to ensure that her son does not throw to the winds all she has been protecting, the throne of Ithaca. Morgan (1991) emphasises Penelope's commitment to marriage and chastity, contrasting her actions with those of Helen of Troy. Her faithfulness and loyalty are excellent qualities of a decision maker and politician. Adebowale

(2015/16) gives a vivid description of the personality of Penelope and the success of her decisions as follows:

Penelope is a woman of valour who proves that it is possible for a woman to gain power and earn fame, though she shares power with her husband both in his presence and absence. Being a woman, it could have been easier for the enemy to take the throne away from her, but no one dared to do it. Also, Penelope does not have the status of a king, but she had been compared to a king; she was considered an equal to Odysseus in intelligence, as well as a perfect soul mate for Odysseus. She outwitted her suitors in various ways and showed them that she was the ruler of Ithaca ... She stood out among the women of her epoch.

Like Adebowale, Wilson also provides a vivid description of Penelope thus:

She's canny, she's strong-willed, she has grit, she has a vivid imagination, she's loyal, she's a competent, mostly single mother who shows deep love for her difficult, moody son, and she keeps a big and complex household running for two decades. You have to love her for all these things, and I do. [...] But many students, scholars, and general readers want even more from this literary character: they want her to fit the ideal of an empowered woman. (Wilson, 2017)

Penelope really proves herself as possessing the power of autonomy in decision making, which helped her in keeping and protecting the throne for both her absent husband and weak son. With this, Homer shows that many women have some great qualities, such as helpfulness, loyalty and cleverness, and are just as good as men. Homer's epics provide contrasting representations of Helen and Penelope as mortal women. Helen is seen as a legendary figure, like Pandora of Hesiod, "not for her great achievements and not for woman's virtue, but for her guilt and suffering." Penelope, on the other hand, "is admired and remembered for her faithfulness."

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(Lefkowitz, 1987). In Book 24 of *Odyssey*, the ghost of Agamemnon in the Underworld is seen praising Penelope's unmatched faithfulness and wisdom to the shade of Amphimedon, one of the deceased suitors of Penelope and other spirits, contrasting her with his wife Clytemnestra. Agamemnon states:

What sound intelligence (agathai phrenes) blameless Penelope had, the daughter of Icarius! How well she waited for Odysseus, her husband! So the fame of her excellence (arete) will never perish, and the immortals will make a delightful song to steadfast Penelope for mortal men. She did not plan evil deeds like the daughter of Tyndareus [Clytemnestra], and kill her husband. About her, a hateful song will come down to men, and she will give a bad name to all women, even if a woman does good deeds. (*Odyssey*; 24, 192 -196).

Penelope's devotion to her husband, Odysseus, differentiates her from her cousin, Queen Clytemnestra.

### **Background and Overview of *Efunsetan Aniwura: Iyalode Ibadan***

The play, *Efunsetan Aniwura: Iyalode Ibadan*, was first written in the Yoruba language in the early 1960s by Akinwumi Isola. His interest in the story was fuelled after reading a one-page description of the life of Efunsetan in Isaac Babalola Akinyele's *Iwe Itan Ibadan (A History of Ibadan)*, which was first published in 1911 (Adeboye, 2018). According to Falola (2000), the documentation of Ibadan history, upon which Isola's play is based, was "part of a broader wave of cultural nationalism that started in the late 19th century in the British colonial territories." As asserted by Adeboye (2018), Akinyele's presentation of Ibadan history is from a political perspective that highlights the "achievements of local leaders as well as their political challenges and crises", which often excluded women. However, in his narrative, Akinyele includes a one-page account of Iyalode Efunsetan described by Adeboye thus:

His (Akinyele's) one-page account of Iyalode Efunsetan alludes to her ownership of numerous slaves as the basis of her wealth, and to the '*oniruru iwa buburu*' (various wicked acts), '*ti... ko se fi enu so*' (too numerous to recount), that she

perpetrated against her slaves. Thereafter, he briefly narrates the particular instance of 'wickedness' that got her into trouble with local Ibadan authorities and led to her tragic end.

It is against this backdrop that Akinwumi Isola decided to dramatise the story of Efunsetan with details of his own, as stated in the preface of the play.

Akinwumi Isola's play, *Efunsetan Aniwura: Iyalode Ibadan*, is a powerful historical drama, myth and fiction that tells the tragic story of the second Iyalode of Ibadan, who, according to Johnson (1921), reigned between 1867 and 1874. According to Ladele and Oyinlola (2020), the setting of the play is the late 19th century. The play stages a political and ideological conflict between a powerful female leader and a "masculinist oligarchy", thereby suggesting that Efunsetan "resists and rejects the cultural prescriptivism and master narratives" enforced by male authority.

The play is built around the life of Efunsetan Aniwura, a formidable woman who amassed phenomenal wealth through trade, farming, and the extensive use of slaves (she was known as the "owner of gold"). Her riches gave her a unique level of political and military power, culminating in her appointment as the Iyalode, or Mother of Public Affairs. The tragedy of the play begins after the death of her only daughter during childbirth. This devastating loss is presented as the turning point that transforms Efunsetan from a successful, ambitious woman into a cruel and vengeful tyrant. Consumed by grief and a sense of loss, since children were the ultimate measure of wealth in traditional Yoruba society, Efunsetan becomes heartless. She imposes a ruthless decree, banning all her female slaves from becoming pregnant. She carries out the decapitation of a pregnant slave, Adetutu, for flouting this rule, a cruel act that shocks the town's ruling council, the *Ibadan Chiefs*. This act of extrajudicial murder brings her into direct conflict with the political establishment, particularly the *Aare Ona Kakanfo* (war-lord) Latoosa.

Aare Latoosa, who also resents Efunsetan's independent power and influence, because she opposes his war policies, uses the public outrage over the slave's death as an opportunity to move against her. The Chiefs confront Efunsetan, but her defiance, wealth and spiritual power initially shield her from direct punishment.

However, Latoosa's persistence leads to her being deposed as Iyalode and publicly disgraced. Faced with utter ruin and unable to accept the shame of defeat, Efunsetan commits suicide by poisoning herself.

### **The Representation of Efunsetan Aniwura as Female Autonomy in Decision-Making**

*Efunsetan Aniwura*, as a play, explores various themes, including the power and limits of wealth, which showcases how wealth can elevate a person to political power, but also how a lack of progeny, especially heirs, can render that wealth meaningless and lead to a psychological crisis. Gender conflict is another theme explored in the play; this shows Efunsetan's struggle as a dramatisation of a woman fighting for power in a patriarchal, male-dominated society, with her downfall framed by the manipulation of male political rivals. The theme of hubris and nemesis illustrates how the play follows a tragic structure, suggesting that Efunsetan's own overreach, arrogance, and cruelty were ultimately responsible for her demise.

In *Efunsetan Aniwura*, Akinwumi Isola depicts the androcentric worldview embedded in Yoruba culture. As noted by Ilesanmi (2014), the focus of Isola "appears to be more on the psychotic and sadistic states of Efunsetan rather than on her heroic exploits and economic achievements. He presented her as a wicked, cruel, callous, bitter, heartless monster dreaded by all". The defeat of Efunsetan took the concerted efforts of Ibadan warriors led by Latoosa, and instead of assisting her, the society she had helped build "declared her wanted and got her murdered" (Ilesanmi, 2014). However, a feminist rereading of the text shows Isola portraying her as a woman of valour who dies by suicide to avoid public disgrace at the hands of Aare Latoosa, invoking the Yoruba cultural principle of "*iku ya ju esin lo*"— death is preferable to ignominy. Thus, in heroic bravery and self-pride, Efunsetan committed suicide. It is noteworthy that the historical accounts by Samuel Johnson and Isaac Babalola Akinyele both claim that Efunsetan was assassinated by her slaves. However, in the play by Isola and the ensuing films, she is presented as committing suicide. Akinwumi Isola's conclusion is in line with the Ibadan cultural environment of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where suicide was more honourable than assassination.

The personality of Efunsetan Aniwura in the play reveals that women were also central to trade in traditional Yoruba society. Among the Yoruba, they were the major figures in the long-distance

trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles (Adebowale, 2021). Akinwumi Isola uses the play to show that women were not as docile or powerless as contemporary literature tends to portray them. The basic unit of political organisation was the family, and in the matrifocal arrangement, which gives a woman considerable authority over people in her household. A woman and her offspring could form a major bloc in a household. Power and privileges in a household were also based on gender, thereby allowing senior women to have a voice over many issues. Because the private and public arenas are intertwined, a woman's ability to control resources and people in a household was, at the same time, an exercise in public power.

From the historical point of view, as reported by Awe (1992), Efunsetan Aniwura was born in the 1820s of Egba<sup>1</sup> ancestry; she was brought up in Ikija quarters of Abeokuta. Efunsetan followed the footsteps of her mother, who was a petty trader. In time, she decided to relocate to Ibadan from Abeokuta, where she established herself as a successful businesswoman (Morgan, 1992). Awe asserts that Efunsetan was one of the "wealthiest personages in Ibadan and deployed a part of her considerable wealth to philanthropy." It is noteworthy at this juncture that she extended a credit facility to the Ibadan war chiefs. In this regard, long before she became the Iyalode, it was her custom to sell arms and ammunition to Ibadan war chiefs on credit (Falola, 1984 and Awe, 1998). Efunsetan was indeed a woman of substance worthy of the panegyric accorded her by Awe:

*Ẹfúnṣetán, Ìyálóde*

One who has horses and rides them not

The child who walks in a graceful fashion.

Adekemi Ogunrin!

The great hefty woman who adorns her legs with  
beads

Whose possessions surpass those of the Aare

Owner of several puny slaves on the farm.

Owner of many giant slaves in the market.

One who has bullets and gunpowder,

And spends money like a conjurer.

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<sup>1</sup> Egba is one of the Yoruba tribes in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

The Ìyálóde who instils fear into her equals.  
The rich never give their money to the poor.  
The Ìyálóde never gives her wrappers to the lazy.  
(Awe, 1992)

### **Textual Analysis**

In the ancient world, women were considered weaker than men, a notion that positioned them as subservient to men and incapable of making crucial decisions. Many ancient and modern literary texts have projected the world as patriarchal in nature. While many historical and mythological accounts portray female deities as holding positions of power and influence, mortal women are described as passive figures. Homer's *Odyssey* and *Efunsetan Aniwura: Iyalode Ibadan* of Akinwumi Isola depict women from the patriarchal perspectives, either as virtuous and obedient or transgressive, unfaithful and dangerous. However, the major female figure characters in the two texts, Penelope and Efunsetan, are pictured as idealised women in the patriarchal tradition.

Homer gives a vivid picture of Penelope as the most significant and exemplary character in the epic; she is portrayed as possessing the ability to endure hardship like her husband, Odysseus. Penelope is set by Homer as the epitome of the virtuous and clever woman in a world dominated by men, while other female characters like Circe, Calypso, Clytemnestra and Helen, who bend the patriarchal rules, are pictured as dangerous and unfitting to the Greek norms. Penelope possesses many attributes with matrilineal power, which she transferred to her husband through marriage, but that comes to the fore in the absence of her husband for twenty years. In Odysseus' absence, Penelope faces all difficulties alone and cleverly controls not only the house but also the people of Ithaca. She is an exceedingly patient and clever wife. She wittily makes decisions that affect the economic maintenance of their estate on the island of Ithaca and raises her son on her own.

As a wife in a male-dominated society, Penelope takes on the role of a female heroine and capably deals decisively with the situation she finds herself in. She finds herself with many suitors hanging around her, persistently trying to take advantage of her husband's absence. With the presence of the suitors, Penelope is presented with an opportunity to betray her husband, who is yet to return from Troy after twenty years. She does not give in to sexual temptation (Olson, 1990). Harry and Platzner (2004) suggest that

after waiting for such an extended period, Penelope would have been allowed to remarry; nevertheless, she is determined to wait for her husband even though there is little hope of his return." She remains devoted to her marriage and family, securing the throne for her husband and son. Penelope is able to translate her intelligence into action, which enables her to exhibit a large extent of control over her situation. She is able to intelligently manipulate her suitors while still according them respect as expected of the social role of women in ancient Greek society. She does not sit in a corner, sulking as "a passive victim waiting to be rescued" (Harris and Platzner, 2004). Her patience helps her to stay calm, not to violently revolt against her suitors; she holds them off for several years, hoping that her husband may return.

Penelope is an ambitious character who knows what she wants and goes after it. Her intelligence helps her to remain devoted and unwavering. She develops a plan that effectively arms her disguised husband, allowing him to kill the suitors. A woman in her position could have been easily taken advantage of by an imposter, but not cautious and wise Penelope, who intelligently devised another test to ensure that the disguised Odysseus is truly Odysseus. To achieve this, she asks her nurse to bring the bed out of her room and, after bringing the stout bedstead, put bedding upon it (Odyssey, 23, 179). She does this to detect if the disguised stranger claiming to be her husband remembers the secret of their marriage bed, which is part of the house and cannot be removed. This test proves that the disguised stranger is truly Odysseus and reunites with his family.

The female figure of Efunsetan, Iyalode Ibadan, in Akinwumi Isola's text, though portrayed as a villainous and selfish woman, possesses great qualities like Penelope of Homer. At the beginning of the play, Isola establishes Efunsetan's extraordinary power and wealth, portraying her as a successful tobacco and slave trader, reportedly having two thousand slaves and multiple farms in Ibadan. Apart from this, Efunsetan occupies the highest female position, the second *Iyalode* of Ibadan, which makes her an official leader of all the women. She famously supplied weapons, ammunition, and provisions to the Ibadan army during the Yoruba wars, demonstrating her economic and political power. She was even said to have a private army. Influential among chiefs: As the *Iyalode*, she held a powerful position in the traditional governing council of Ibadan, advising the

king, warriors and representing the interests of all women. This portrayal of Efunsetan is in line with Yorùbá traditions of female authority (Awe, 1992, 1998). Explaining the origin of the tension in Efunsetan's household and life, from history and the play, she is single and childless, having lost her only child during child labour. With a deep sense of loss, Efunsetan becomes wicked and cruel to neighbours and slaves; she pronounces draconian rules which forbid pregnancies among her slaves and metes out brutal punishments for defiance.

Analysing the character of Efunsetan from a feminist viewpoint, it readily comes to mind that her harshness is a form of coping mechanism in a patriarchal society that values women mainly as mothers and wives. The character of Efunsetan in the historical play does not go along with the patriarchal idea of submissiveness, of an ideal domestic Yoruba woman. Rather, she commands the respect of all, including the armies and courtroom authority. The influence of Efunsetan cannot be overlooked by men in authority, particularly by the warlord, Aare Latoosa, who considers her a threat. Envious of her admiration, according to Morgan (1992), Latoosa levels an allegation of insubordination against her, informed by "(1) her refusal to accompany him on the Ado campaign of 1874; (2) her refusal to come to the town gate to welcome his army back from the campaign; and (3) her refusal to send him supplies during the campaign". Defending Efunsetan of these allegations, Denzer (2000) argues that her refusal to accompany him on the Ado campaign cannot be regarded as an act of insubordination because, as Iyalode, Efunsetan belonged "to the civil line of chiefs and was not obliged to personally take part in military campaigns". Johnson (1921) mentions that the Tajo, the Otun Bale, who, as a civil chief, did not accompany Aare Latoosa on his campaigns, but he was not accused of insubordination. Efunsetan's downfall is motivated by sexism as much as politics, showing that the power dynamics in the historical drama underscore the patriarchal structures confronted by Efunsetan. Isola's text shows Efunsetan crossing into the male domain by financially and materially supporting Ibadan's war efforts (Dairo, 2021). Instead of her generous patronage to earn her respect, it fuels male insecurities. Ladele and Oyinlola note that Latoosa's actions against Efunsetan were "politically motivated allegations" possibly driven by "sexism and jealousy".

Despite the threats and pressures, Efunsetan unwaveringly demonstrates female agency. Like Penelope of Homer, she makes unilateral decisions about her life, trade, slaves, and religion, which is often consulting no man. She adheres to her own moral code: even when faced with treachery, she remains proud and defiant, refusing to beg for mercy. For example, when her adopted son leads her to the execution pit, she demands to know “*for what crime*” she is to die, publicly challenging the chauvinistic judgment against her (*Efunsetan* Scene 10). Her refusal to be silent or submissive, even in death, marks her agency. Isola depicts her death not as a docile surrender but as a tragic climax of her resistance. In Isola's hand, then, Efunsetan's final speech and refusal to yield can be read as a form of feminist martyrdom. Finally, the narrative arc itself invites reinterpretation. Early in the play, local bards sing the praises of Ibadan's warriors and founding figures, and Efunsetan is grouped with past *Iyalodes* and heroes.

### **Conclusion**

The classical world has always been a source of many memorable historical and mythological figures who have played vital roles in both ancient and modern societies. The *Odyssey* and *Efunsetan Aniwura: Iyalode Ibadan* recount the patriarchal fear about women's power and agency. As Penelope is made almost a heroine when it is indeed Odysseus, her husband, who is the hero of this epic, she is still restricted by the authority of her husband and the patriarchal system. Homer and Isola's attitude towards women is traditional and reflects the general patriarchal attitude towards women, elevating and condemning them based on their virtue, silence, and chastity. As chief, Aniwura became a formidable force in the old Ibadan province. She was a woman of immense power and influence—her name commanded respect and fear. Bold, wealthy, audacious, and fiercely determined, Aniwura stood in defiance of several policies enacted by the ruler of Ibadan at the time, Aare Ona Kakanfo Latoosa, challenging authority with courage and conviction. This paper analyses *Odyssey* and *Efunsetan Aniwura* at the intersection of male dominance influences, the legacy of female agency and the encroaching structures of patriarchy. Penelope and Efunsetan's leadership should not be considered as insubordination to male

dominance but as an assertion of authority within a historically legitimised structure.

#### **Notes on Contributor**

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