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Who Is Afraid Of Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà? Performing Power in Yoruba Masculinist Oligarchy

By Omolola A Ladele¹ and Abimbola O. Oyinlola²

Abstract

The iconic Yoruba female personage of Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà has, in several studies, been vilified; and at a first glance, it would seem that Akinwunmi Isola's eponymous protagonist and heroine of that play reinforces the image of a villainous, wicked and self-centred woman. Contextualized within the Yoruba socio-political and economic national narratives of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, this image appears both problematic and complexly contradictory. It is therefore useful to appropriately recuperate and verify the status of Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà within the backdrop of Yoruba cultural context. This is illustrated through a feminist re-reading of Ẹfúnṣetán's actions and character against the grain of the Yoruba masculinist cultural backcloth and the uneven devolution of powers of her time. In this essay, we make the argument that Isola's heroine astutely resists and rejects the cultural prescriptivism and master narratives of the powerful masculinist oligarchy of that period. We therefore suggest that in spite of Isola's seeming pejorative representation of Ẹfúnṣetán, the chieftain adumbrates possibilities for more equitable gender relations in her time.

Keywords: Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà, Yoruba cultural context, Masculinist oligarchy, Feminism, Nigeria

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Introduction

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 in the farm.

Owner of many giant slaves in the market.

One who has bullets and gunpowder,

And spends money like a conjurer.

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.

(A panegyric of Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà. Awe, 1992: 65)

Within the context of the development of Nigerian literary, artistic and cultural productions, Akinwunmi Isola's fictional expressions are both prodigious and revolutionary. With a writing career that spans well over the last half century, Nigeria's Isola—playwright, poet, novelist, critic and cultural theorist—is, indisputably, eminent in the ranks of other notable African writers. Irrefutable about Isola's colossal stature is his indefatigable commitment to and advocacy for the use of the Yoruba language as medium for artistic expression and cultural rejuvenation. Isola's potential strength is thus, considerably extensive when we understand that Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa and that the language is spoken and used widely in the Nigerian federation with resonances in other neighbouring West African countries including, Benin, Togo, and Ghana even up to parts of Sierra-Leone. Also, Yoruba survives in some South American countries as well as in some parts of the Caribbean.

Writing in the Yoruba language thus places Isola in two significantly eminent genres or traditions of Nigerian literature. He bestrides two distinct traditions in the development of Nigerian literary-scape; on the one hand, Isola belongs among such writers as J. F. Odunjo who made popular the Yoruba primer series: *Alawiye Yoruba Readers* published by Longman in the seventies. Also, in Odunjo's repertoire are two novels published by African University Press: *Omo Oku Orun* (1964) and *Kuye* (1978). Isola is also in the company of Afolabi Olabimtan who wrote two novels: *Oluwa L'O Mejo Da* and *Kekere Ekun* – both were published by Macmillan in 1966 and 1967 respectively. Again, Isola also compares with the poet, actor, journalist and writer: Adebayo Faleti, among others who write exclusively in the indigenous language explicitly for the purposes of cultural transformation.

It is interesting to note that while providing some historical perspective on Yoruba intellectual history, Toyin Falola (2000) notes that even though some of these writers were outside of the academy, many did not have the skill and talent of Odunjo and Delano (17). Falola's comments thus underscores the importance of these writers using the Yoruba language. On the other hand, however, Isola simultaneously belongs in the company of Soyinka, Rotimi, Osofisan, Omotoso, and Sowande who Dele Layiwola (1991) describes in an his essay: 'The Radical Alternative and the Dilemma of the Intellectual Dramatist in Nigeria' as 'intellectual dramatists' who are university-based exponents of the tradition (64) These intellectual dramatists, as identified by Layiwola and including Isola, may be further situated within the continuum of cultural activism in the country. Possibly in recognition of the value of their works, many of the works of these writers have benefitted from translations from Yoruba into English and other European languages. With regards to Isola's works, the

outstanding efforts of the translator, Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith, is important. Not only has Smith translated D.O Fagunwa's *Igbo Oloдумare* into *The Forest of the Almighty* (1986) she has also translated Isola's plays: *Efunsetan Aniwura Iyalode Ibadan and Tinubu, Iyalode Egba: Two Historical Dramas* (2004) as well as his collection of juvenile stories— *Treasury of Childhood Memories* (2016) – an English translation of *Ogun Omode*.

In terms of the title of this essay, we are tangentially indebted to Osofisan's 1978 play titled—*Who's Afraid of Solarin?* and this is, particularly, in terms of its thematic content. Some background perspective is useful here to properly understand the connections between both titles. Osofisan's play reverberates with Gogol's 1836 play, *The Government Inspector*. There is also a possibility that Osofisan may be remotely indebted to Edward Albee who wrote the play: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* which was first staged in 1962 which is itself a take-off on the fairy tale line: "who's afraid of the big bad wolf" from Hans Christian Anderson's *Three Little Pigs*. Yet, indeed, our title is even more critically connected with Toril Moi's essay— 'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf' in *Sexual/Textual Politics Feminist Literary Theory* (1986). In the essay, Moi points out that in spite of her best intentions, Woolf did not enjoy wide acceptability with feminist critics of her time including Elaine Showalter (Moi, 133). Thus, like Solarin and Woolf, Iyalode Efunsetan even though revered was greatly feared and misunderstood possibly because she lived ahead of her time.

Isola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*:

Efunsetan Aniwura is an actual historical figure whose legendary story is quite popular in Yoruba folk lore. But while Efunsetan was a historical figure, some details of the facts of her life and times may have been lost or corrupted as a result of a lack of adequate documentation. Nevertheless, Efunsetan's story has overtime provided impetus for imaginative writing, historical, sociological, religious and even psychological inquiries. Akinwunmi Isola's 1970 play, *Efunsetan Aniwura Iyalode Ibadan* which won the 1966 Yoruba Literary Competition Prize instituted by the Pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group—the Egbe Iginle Yoruba is based on this popular lore. Efunsetan had attained to the highest position of Iyalode—a honorary, yet highly revered position available to only one woman at a time during the reign of a king, in the expansive Ibadan kingdom of Yoruba people.

As the Director of women affairs, or First Lady of the ruling council, this position places the Iyalode in the all-male decision-making council of the king. In Isola's play, Efunsetan attained to the highly revered position of the Iyalode during the reign of Aare Latoosa sometime in the eighteenth century and no other Iyalode has gained the kind of tremendous power or status of Efunsetan before or since that time. The fictive Efunsetan like her historical prototype, is an industrious entrepreneur, having extensive trade relations within and outside of the Yoruba kingdom as well as with the colonial authorities of her time. She traded in military hardware as well as in the highest currency of the time— slaves; and was a major supplier of these to the ruling king and others outside of her domain. Efunsetan was however, childless and this becomes a sore point for her. Isola's version of her story suggests that on account of this point she became notoriously wicked and combined with her tremendous financial and military power, she is deemed to pose a serious threat to the reign of Aare Latoosa. The Aare, in conspiracy with the other members of his council, decided to oust Efunsetan. In the fray, Efunsetan is captured and taken to the king's palace where she becomes a public spectacle having fallen from grace. Rather than be subjected to public ridicule, shame and ignominy, Efunsetan takes her own life.

In her reading of Isola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*, Ogunleye (2004) painstakingly goes over historical documents to demonstrate the convergences and divergences with historical facts in Isola's play, as well as to also demonstrate that Isola makes 'a selective interpretation and modification of history' through which the playwright achieves his 'male-centric designs'

(Ogunleye, 306). Also, in calling attention to the distinctions between ‘feminine themes’ and ‘feminist themes’ Ogunleye attempts to understand the gender environment of the playwright’s vision. To this end, the critic makes the point that with feminine themes, a writer may centralise women who may not necessarily be empowered; at any rate, such women are often portrayed as ‘choiceless, disempowered [and] sexually oppressed’ while on the other hand, the feminist themes portray the woman as empowered both socially and politically’ (304). She goes further to suggest that feminine themes usually appear in plays written by male authors just to massage their male ego. It is however important to note that femininity as a theme is much broader than Ogunleye’s suggestion. Feminine themes may occur in feminist literature even where the feminine has been defined and controlled by patriarchies. While Ogunleye’s position may not be altogether justifiable going by the thematic thrusts and ideological positions available in some of the plays of writers like Osofisan and even some of the other historical plays by Isola, it may be more useful to do a feminist reading as this essay does, in order to understand the position and nature of *Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà* in Isola’s play.

Indeed, Ogunleye seems to proceed from an overly-determined premise that Isola was overtly ‘male-centric’ in his portraiture of *Ẹfúnṣetán* arguing that Isola’s gynaeophobia results in his demonization of *Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà*. Whereas, in her view, [king] *Ààrẹ̀ Látóósà* was a more pronounced villain than *Ẹfúnṣetán* ever was, yet he is portrayed almost as a saint and a crusader while *Ẹfúnṣetán* is portrayed as satanic’ (311). Also corroborating Ogunleye, Adalakun (2017) holds that the playwright in a bid to make her character (*Ẹfúnṣetán*) more dynamic and memorable, created a malevolent figure without any redeeming virtue (149).

Therefore, in our attempt to appropriately evaluate the legendary and iconic figure of *Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà*, we place her first, within the vibrant context of Yoruba lore and traditions. Within this context and according to the gender structures of the land, women, both mythic and real-were significantly accorded respect, recognition, and honour. We however note that the pre-colonial Yoruba kingdom was typically patriarchal and regardless of such compelling argumentations of Oyewumi (1997), such gendered structures privileged the men. Nonetheless, Yoruba women of pre-colonial times could, within their spaces, achieve great socio-political and economic statuses. Especially excelling in the area of trade, for instance, women emerged as formidable entrepreneurs of international repute. In several other fields of endeavour, Yoruba women prove to be indomitable, resourceful and vivacious; a few examples will suffice here.

Take, for instance, Oya, the deified wife of Sango, god of thunder. Oya, as popular lore records, is said to be a successful trader, her extensive reputation was well known throughout Yoruba kingdom and its environs. But Oya is also reputed to be a complexity of sweet and fearless; a mystical embodiment of feminine power. Oya’s mysterious feminine power enables her to confront, rein in and control the fiery temper of her husband, Sango, thus, often saving him from disaster. But Sango’s powerful narrative somewhat overwhelms and eclipse’s the lesser known story of Oya. Thus, Oya’s important story is often elided in Yoruba narratives—perhaps as evidence of skewed gender discourses. Another important female Yoruba legend is Osun— well known as progenitor of humanity and goddess of the river; and as healer—she continues to be worshipped in contemporary times because of her indisputable ability in providing children to the apparently barren. Indeed, there is a commemorative annual festival held in her honour in the state of Osun in Nigeria and in other Diasporas of Yoruba communities around the world. Also, Moremi Ajasoro is reputed to be a beautiful, Ile-Ife princess who gives up her privileged position in the palace to become a captive slave in the hands of Ijumu people who had continually raided and pillaged her people. Moremi converts her legendary beauty to military strategy thus subverting the battlefield /masculinity narrative. Through espionage, Moremi uncovers the secrets of the military strength of her captors. Having gained the required knowledge, she surreptitiously returns to her homeland and reveals the secrets to the warriors of her village. On the strength of this information, the Ife warriors

ultimately route their oppressors and thus re-establish their superiority. Moremi thus becomes a national hero.

In spite of the outstanding roles of these remarkable Yoruba women in popular lore, it is regrettable that these important stories are threatened by lack of accurate documentation and circulation of these. And perhaps more critically, because women are not often in control of these historical discourses within the culturally gendered institutions of Yoruba kingdom, the prevailing perspectives often presented illustrate the prejudices of the mostly male composers.

It is thus within this backdrop that we situate our study of Isola's heroine—*Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà*, the eponymous protagonist of that play which Nigerian film director, Tunde Kilani, recently turned into a movie. Several studies have investigated various aspects of Isola's historical plays examining, for instance, the intrinsic elements of these plays as Adejumo does in 'Satirical Elements of Akinwunmi Isola's Drama' (2008) and several of the articles carried in *Emerging Perspectives on Akinwunmi Isola* (2008) which is perhaps the most seminal study on the author and his works to date. Also, foremost Nigerian historian and feminist, Awe, has carried out extensive studies on the institution and person of *Ìyálóde Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà* such as in: *Nigerian Women: A Historical Perspective* (1991, 2001). Other scholars across various humanistic fields have also studied the legend—*Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà*. For instance, Ilesanmi's study (2011) presents a psycho-historical study of *Ẹfúnṣetán* in which the critic suggests that the *Ìyálóde* became 'a bitter, heartless and a monster (sic) dreaded by society' (37). Olukoju's (2010) study provides a historio-economic perspective to the study of *Ẹfúnṣetán*. In this present study, however, we attempt to enlarge critical discourse on Isola's portrayal of *Ẹfúnṣetán*, drawing a more composite picture by calling evidence from the content of the play which illustrate the many aspects of the cultural context in which the play occurs.

The Iyalode: Person / Institution

It is perhaps useful to differentiate between the institution of the *Ìyálóde* and the person of *Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà* especially because the operational dynamics of the position may not necessarily always coincide with the personality of the individual. Also, significantly differentiating the character of *Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà*, *Ìyálóde Ibadan*, is the portraiture of Efunroye Tinubu, who was *Ìyálóde Egba*, covering the lucrative axis of Lagos, Abeokuta up to Badagry. In real life, *Ẹfúnṣetán* and Efunroye Tinubu were contemporaries and great friends. Interestingly, Isola in his play—*Olu Omo: Ìyálóde Egba* (1983) depicts Madam Tinubu, the *Ìyálóde*, as more benign and compassionate.

Further to this, it is also important to note that Nigerian Womanist theorist after Alice Walker-- Okonjo-Ogunyemi (1997) provides clear elucidation on the *Ìyálóde* phenomenon. In this dichotomy, the individual has to, in every sense of its meaning, embody the full significance and authority of the position to which she has been called to function. Possibly stemming from her earlier Womanist² persuasion, the critic argues that women are significantly valorized within Yoruba cultural context, calling attention to the fact that Yoruba women; as wife or mother, hold honorific positions. Therefore, as mother within the public space, the *Ìyálóde* position is 'filled by an illustrious, older woman who is politically recognized by being formally installed to minister as mother in the public domain' (45). In other words, the *Ìyálóde* fulfils a political and psychological responsibility to the community based on the 'honorific role attached to motherhood by men and the piety they show to their menopausal mothers' (45). In addition, Ogunyemi foreshadows the potential powers of the *Ìyálóde* remarking that while 'the younger woman writhes in the servility attached to wifeness, the older woman relishes her newfound power over her son's household and community. Part of her authority thus derives from people's fear of her alleged occult power. (46). Thus, as an older mother or perhaps more succinctly, public mother of her community, the *Ìyálóde* wields enormous socio-political and metaphysical powers that may ordinarily overshadow her individuality.

As delineated here, among Yoruba people, women with demonstrable capabilities are able to attain to the highest ranks in the land. Thus, for instance, the position of Ìyálóde is especially reserved for a deserving woman who is selected to represent the women of the community in the king's palace and ranked equally among other titled chiefs who are mostly male. This makes the Ìyálóde something of a feminist/cultural activist, who is highly revered among the women in the entire Yoruba nation. As the highest female titled chief—the Ìyálóde's powers are quite extensive. Sometimes, also doubling as warlord or military strategist for the entire Yoruba nation, as the Moremi epic demonstrates, the Ìyálóde's extensive retinue of slaves, arms and ammunition were often times, deployed in the war programmes and the expansionist projects of the ruling king. Thus, the Ìyálóde exerts tremendous spiritual, political, military and financial influence throughout the extensive Yoruba kingdom. In contemporary parlance, she may be equivalent to an ambassador plenipotentiary as the various studies of Awe, Olukoju, and Ilesanmi attest.

We must however, state without equivocation, that the Yoruba nation of Èfúnṣetán's time was typically patriarchal. Thus, while women seemingly wielded tremendous power, it is clear that powerful masculinist oligarchies, inevitably, often defined, controlled and limited the potentials and capabilities of women including that of the Ìyálóde. Thus, in spite of her seeming established official position and power, any Ìyálóde would necessarily be conscious of her limitations; recognizing her pre-constituted subject position. Indeed, Awe calls attention to the possibilities of exclusion the Ìyálóde may experience notwithstanding her exalted position. This, according to Awe's observation, was a 'big disadvantage, she [the Ìyálóde] was always outnumbered as the only female in any decision-making body... (196). In order for the Ìyálóde to therefore negotiate this seeming conundrum, Awe suggests that:

A great deal of what she could achieve would depend on at least two important factors: (1) the qualities of the Ìyálóde—her personality, her dynamism, and her political astuteness; and (2) the political milieu within which she operated. (198).

Thus, following Awe's argument, it is instructive to understand that Isola's Èfúnṣetán lived in a world that privileged maleness and her operational space was limited by masculinist constraints. We must also understand that in early nineteenth century Yoruba kingdom, masculinity was associated with female conquests and so women were often the objects of male aggression and violence and as such female bodies were sites for the expression of male prowess. Knowing all these intuitively and experientially, it is clear that the institution of the Ìyálóde is at once self-contradictory; simultaneously empowering and yet restrictive. This point therefore, reinforces the idea that femininity may be circumscribed by the masculine and, at any rate, as we have demonstrated earlier, femininity is distinct from feminism.³ Thus, as Isola's play unfolds, Èfúnṣetán is caught between the public demands of her patriarchal society, as it makes demands on her maternal and mothering capacities which appear to be at variance with her radical feminism as an individual. This, therefore marks a significant turning point in our understanding of Ìyálóde Èfúnṣetán.

Dialogues of Silence: Negotiating Alterity and Agency

In Isola's play, we encounter Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà as a woman who had already attained the highest title in the kingdom. While we do not see her in Aare Latoosa's palace, or in any great socio-political arena negotiating power with her male counterparts, we see her in the domestic space of her rambling household and large retinue of slaves. This space is crucial in understanding Ẹfúnṣetán, her role and function. As Ìyálóde—public mother, Ẹfúnṣetán's role is in the king's palace/ public domain, thus by placing her within the confines of a domestic space, it seems that, perhaps, the playwright deliberately controverts Ìyálóde's position by a sleight of hand. Isola seems to reverse the powerful Ìyálóde narrative—stripping Ẹfúnṣetán of her institutional powers.

Beyond this and, regardless of the Ìyálóde's achievement of tremendous acclaim within the Yoruba kingdom, the subsisting, masculinist culture and traditions that merely paid honorific homage to her and other women in the community, innocuously, limit or restrict her powers and influence. In a dramatic twist, however, even as she interacts with other characters, especially her slaves, Ẹfúnṣetán does not conform to traditional expectations of nurturance associated with mothering/motherhood. Thus, as she attempts to redefine herself on her own terms: Ẹfúnṣetán, in a self-conscious and radical process, turns on its head her own symbolic impotence symbolized by the trappings of her official position of 'public mother'. Ẹfúnṣetán turns around the institutionalised and stereotypical images of the compassionate, kind-hearted woman and dramatically rejects and negates motherhood. In Isola's play, Ẹfúnṣetán had lost her only daughter during childbirth thus as a result of this misfortune and according to Adelakun (2017), Ẹfúnṣetán is portrayed by the playwright as 'violently anti-maternal and irrationally evil' (149). What is more, Isola accepts that he casts Ẹfúnṣetán in a negative light, a statement which underscores the degree of the playwright's commitment to historical truth.

Other critics account for Ẹfúnṣetán's negative portrayal using extraneous historical material suggesting that she is reacting to the painful loss of her only daughter and child during childbirth. Thus, in their view, an inconsolable, embittered and vengeful Ẹfúnṣetán unleashes terror on even the most vulnerable in her society—her slaves. Not only does Ẹfúnṣetán personally unleash terror, she also has surrogates who embody the dreadful powers of their commander. Thus, when Ogunjimi, the poor farmer, is deemed to have trespassed on Ẹfúnṣetán's oil-palm farm, her slaves do not hesitate to beat the old man to a pulp and injuries he sustained in this incident lead to his death shortly after. Such is the flagrant, vicious, and aggressive power that Ẹfúnṣetán seems to embody and Ilesanmi (2011) explains this using a psychological disorder theory. Ilesanmi further explains this as the playwright's tilting of the work towards the 'androcentric cultural and social leaning of [the] Yoruba race'; proceeding to suggest that:

His focus was more on the psychotic and sadistic states of this woman rather than on her heroic exploits and economic achievements. He presented her as a wicked cruel, callous bitter, heartless monster dreaded by all and saw her as one whose grip of terror on the society was loosed by the concerted efforts of Ibadan warriors led by Ààrẹ Latoosa (38).

There is no respite from the intractable portrayal of Ẹfúnṣetán as a wicked monster portrayed through the various incidents played out in Isola's drama. The infamous exemplar is her unwritten law which forbids any emotional or sexual interaction among the slaves or with any persons in the community. Thus, male or female, to go against Ìyálóde's law was to face the guillotine in a most gruesome, public killing. This means Ẹfúnṣetán's slaves were forcibly castrated or emasculated, albeit with subtlety and without any genital cutting. This is perhaps a reflection of Ẹfúnṣetán's symbolic impotence as Ìyálóde; gesturing also, her frustration with an institution that did not significantly empower her. Forming the central kernel in the play's

dramatic conflict is that two of Èfúnṣetán's slaves are caught by the Ìyálóde's 'draconian' law and every attempt to persuade Èfúnṣetán not to allow the full weight of her law to fall on the two love birds: Adetutu and Akinkunle/Itawuyi, fall on deaf ears.

Èfúnṣetán's seeming contrariness attains an unprecedented peak even as the other chiefs try to dissuade Èfúnṣetán from taking her hard line. They are completely flummoxed, and fearing for their own lives, they persuade the King, Ààrẹ̀ Látóósà, who is himself confused, to call her to order. We must understand the precarious position for the chiefs and even the king if Èfúnṣetán is allowed to carry out her plans. It is however significantly revealing that Látóósà and his council of chiefs (of course, excluding Èfúnṣetán) appear morbidly petrified by Èfúnṣetán's seeming asexuality—an attribute that is often associated with having extraordinary metaphysical powers. Thus, in their clandestine conversation, Láwọ̀yin, exclaims:

*Láwọ̀yin: kíni káti gbọ́pé obìnrin kan soso,
Àní obìnrin lásánlàsàn,
Ni o n da gbogbo wa láàmú báyìí*

Interpretation:

Láwọ̀yin:

It is unheard of that it is only one woman,
just a mere woman; That is troubling all of us in this manner (57).

From this excerpt it is clear that the male chiefs feel sourly slighted by Èfúnṣetán's provocative audaciousness. Therefore, in order to stem the tide of the consequences of such daring opposition to their manliness, they move to utterly quell their colleague's powers. It must also be understood that within the Yoruba kingdom of the life and times of Èfúnṣetán, slaves were commonly used as sex objects for the sport of the men and especially the chiefs. Therefore, Èfúnṣetán, in their imagination, was deliberately undermining their free access to women's bodies including that of her slaves. Within the patriarchal setting of the play, this is completely unheard of and unacceptable. Thus, invoking the nobility of their moralisation, the chiefs and the king move against Èfúnṣetán to depose her and avert what they would consider a public slight on their masculinity. As Ògúnléyẹ̀ avers, all pleas to Èfúnṣetán to rescind her decision fall on deaf ears portraying her as a 'rabid apostate, having neither recognition nor respect for God' (312).

But perhaps we should understand also that as an astute entrepreneur and one who maintained a section of the army, Èfúnṣetán had to maintain strict discipline within the ranks. Thus, as a woman activist, her actions may be her attempt to protect women's sexual autonomy, and therefore dignity in the face of intense pressures and sexual demands from the men. In this bid, Ìyálóde Èfúnṣetán's position may be at once innovative and radical and her seeming vicious astuteness is therefore her attempt to prevent the male oligarchy symbolised by Ààrẹ̀ Látóósà and his male chiefs from manipulating her singular effort for their own self-preservation.

Conclusion

Several studies strenuously demonstrate Èfúnṣetán's negative portrayal and seem to account for the protagonist's 'wickedness' as resulting from too much power and the [loss of her only daughter and child during childbirth]. However, from this feminist study, we are able to call close attention to the character of Èfúnṣetán and her contentions within a predominantly masculinist oligarchy that effectively curtailed her powers. For instance, while her selection to the enviable and prestigious position as Ìyálóde is popularly determined by her affluence and other sterling qualities not only among the women but also in extensive

trans-border domains; Èfúnṣetán's position is complexified by an innately contradictory, even oppressive reality. The contradiction is thus openly dramatized by Ìyálóde Èfúnṣetán the public mother who is ironically childless!

We also demonstrated that as the only female member of an entirely male parliament, Èfúnṣetán is rendered a minority— subject to exclusions as illustrated when she is deliberately excluded from the king's court when the matter of her so-called treasonable high-handedness is taken and she is not given the opportunity of a fair hearing. Thus, in what may then be seen as a conspiracy to safeguard their own position, the chiefs and Ààṛè Látóósà take action against Èfúnṣetán. Note also their contemptuous disdain for Èfúnṣetán's sexuality as she is described as 'a mere woman' by Chief Láwoyin.

In captivity, Èfúnṣetán reveals that the treachery against her was a result of the conspiracy of the Ààṛè Látóósà who was envious of her wealth and power. Thus, as Èfúnṣetán navigates and resists the powerful mines of male oligarchy of her time, the Ìyálóde of Ìbàdàn, Èfúnṣetán Aníwùrà feels compelled to take extreme positions to confront the powerful sexist oppressions of her time. This feminist reading, therefore, substantiates the position that in spite of her seeming negative portrayals, Èfúnṣetán is, indeed, a great woman of her time who assiduously withstood popularly held traditions even in the face of personal jeopardy.

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