

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN KETU MYTHS AND ITS SOCIOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS

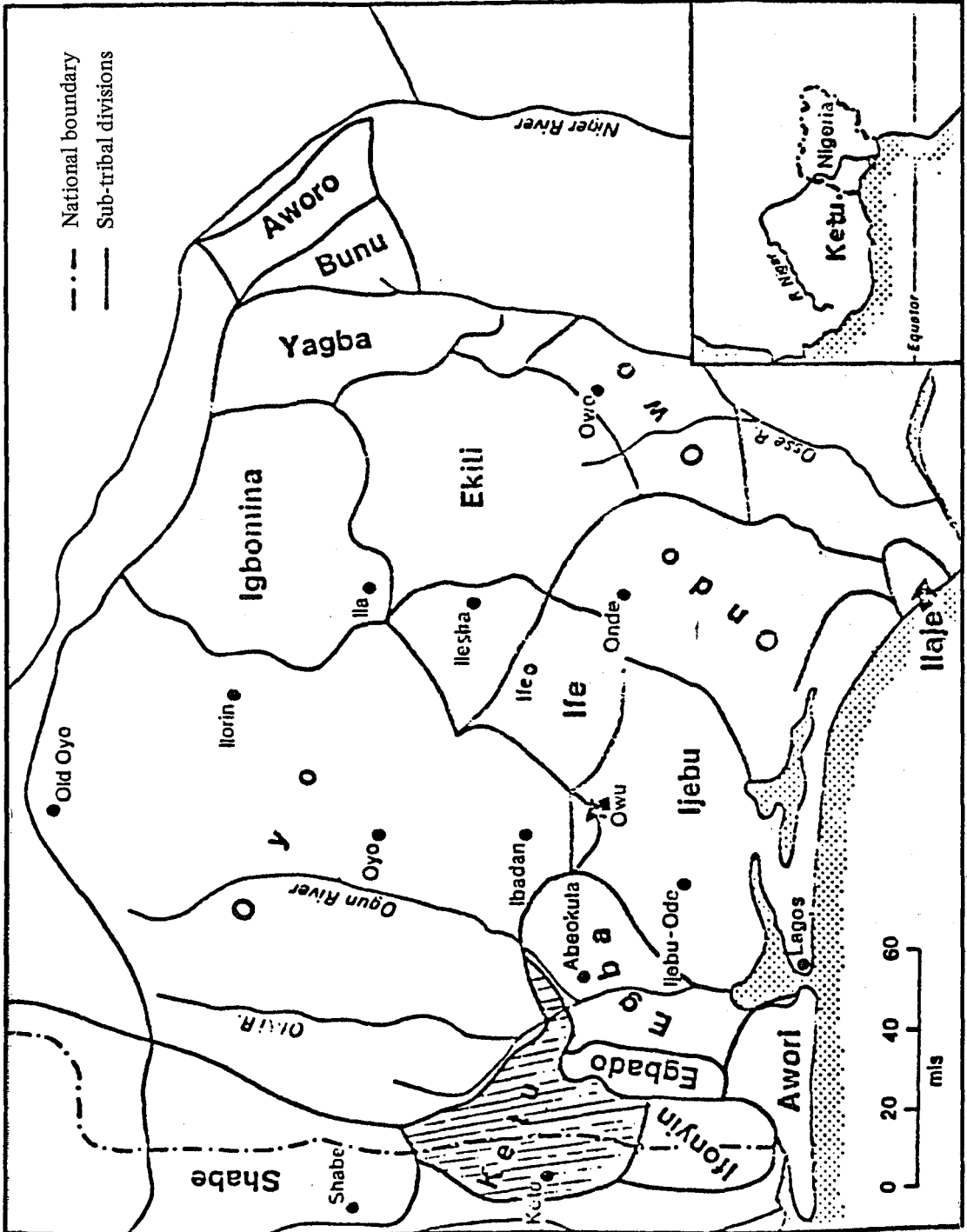
E.D. Babatunde

(ABSTRACT)

In this paper, Yoruba myths of origin and Ketu Yoruba myths of migration are studied. In line with Leach's orientation, *In Genesis as Myth*, structuralism is employed to unearth the deep structural meaning generated by the components of the myths as a communication's structure. It is suggested that the myths are commentaries on dominance of one sex over another, the preference of exogamy over endogamy and the strength of the female sex as far as the rituals and symbols show.

More pointedly, the paper asserts that in order to achieve the necessary mobilization of African women for social action in the developmental effort in Contemporary Africa, some of the efforts must be directed at the salient aspects and traits of culture which served as vehicles for transmitting the male-oriented ideology of female inferiority. Those same traits ought to be re-examined and re-interpreted at a higher level of intellectual abstraction to communicate the significance of the roles of women in the scheme of things. This will lead to a balance so that emphasis on the patterns of male/female relationship will shift from dominance and mutedness of one sex over another to complementarity of the sexes.

Key Words: Yoruba women, Myths, Development, Culture reinterpretation, Africa.



The Ketu in relation to other Yoruba Subgroups.

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THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN KETU MYTHS AND ITS SOCIOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS

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Modern literature on the status of Yoruba women of South Western Nigeria has corrected the view that Yoruba women were suppressed by throwing into relief areas of their prominence. B. Awe has drawn attention to the prominent part women like Iyalode played in traditional Yoruba politics (1977, 1979). J.A. Atanda (1979) and S.O. Babayemi (1979) have stressed the significant roles of women in the palace organization of Oyo. N. Sudarka (1973) and Karanja (1980) have explored the interesting area of Yoruba market women, showing that the economic strength which such economic enterprises confer made Yoruba women not only prominent but independent. Karanja, on the other hand, accepted that although economic enterprise brought considerable measure of strength and prominence to the Yoruba woman, her relationship with her husband may not be interpreted as one marked with complete independence. In drawing attention to the role of women as mothers and as occupiers of the innermost and sacrosanct space within Yoruba domains, H. Callaway has demonstrated the importance of Yoruba women to central features of Yoruba society (1978, 1980). In this work some Yoruba myths will be discussed and analyzed in order to throw into relief, the prominence of women.

I. STRUCTURALISM: LEVI-STRAUSS; LEACH

The credit for establishing the methodology of structuralism as a resourceful analytical method in the social sciences in general, and social anthropology in particular, is given to Claude Levi-Strauss, the French Social Anthropologist. He did not analyze myth structurally to show things like gender relations *per se*. His analysis showed that, contrary to the prelogical assumptions by Lucien Levy-Bruhl, the

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permutations in myths point to the same kind of logical structure found in all human societies. It was his structuralist insight that inspired Edmund Leach, the British Anthropologist, to employ the structuralist orientation to show gender relations in *Genesis as Myth*. As analysis here follows that of Leach, it may be useful to summarize the influences passed through Levi-Strauss.

Hegel, the prior influence on Levi-Strauss, had propounded his dialectics in which he asserted that truth or reality, or indeed historical event is a compound of opposing or contradictory elements. Each aspect is essential to the reality and the reality itself which is the unification of these disparate elements contains the origin of further internal contradictions. There is a thesis — that which moves toward unity or positivity and there is also within the same reality an antithesis — that which moves towards division. It is the concatenation of these centripetal and centrifugal forces that produce synthesis which contains within it the beginning of a new dialectics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Hence history therefore is a continuous reconciliation of events contained in the dynamic march of humankind, through activities to the underlying *Idea* which is divinely inspired.

Marx on the other hand conceives of history as a process, dominated by class struggle and the priority of the collective. In addition to Hegel and Marx, Levi-Strauss was also fascinated by the findings of Ferdinand de Saussure and the Prague school of Linguistics. The contribution of the Prague School was predicated on series of distinctions which clarified the derivation of meaning. Some of such distinctions include, that between *Langue* and *Parole*; the *Signified* and the *signifier*; *synchrony* and *diachrony* and *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* aspects of speech.⁽¹⁾ All these influences are brought to bear to shape Structuralism, which looks beyond the surface of roles to the deep structural meaning generated by the opposition, transformation and contradiction of components in the structure. In other words, roles that institutions perform, though of some interest, are not significant. What is significant is the relations between components in the structure of the myth and the

(1) For a brilliant critical review of the Ferdinand de Saussure and the Prague School of Linguistics, see Edwin Ardmer's Contribution to his edited book, *Social Anthropology and Language* A.S.A. Monograph I.O. 1971.

meaning that they generate in this contextual arrangement.⁽²⁾

Levi-Strauss stresses that myth does not respect chronology. It does not accept a distinction between Nature and Culture as both phase into the other. Hence human beings are said to converse with animals; human beings marry lower animals or even spirits, again and again; that human beings and animals marry divinities and live in the sky. Myths of creation which are common to each culture depict the cultures attempt, not necessarily to explain the origin of the world, but to provide charters to legitimize the present. They also express unconscious wishes which are somehow inconsistent with conscious experience (Leach 1967: 99). An attempt will be made to analyze structurally some Yoruba myths of origin and migration using, to a large extent, this structural orientation.

The Myths of Origin:

The Ketu⁽³⁾ share with other Yoruba sub-groups the myths which attempt to explain the origin of the Yoruba. These fall into two categories; that of migration and a second of creation.⁽⁴⁾ The myths of migration in the hamitic tradition, assert that the Yoruba are not autochthonous to the Western part of Nigeria but that they migrated in two waves from the East. In his journeys, Captain Hugh Clapperton recorded a myth of this kind from the information passed to him by Mohammed Bello Sultan of Sokoto. Bello claimed that the Yoruba originated from the 'remnants of Canaan, who were of the tribe of Nimrod' expelled from Arabia (Clapper-

- (2) Levi-Strauss' Structural analysis focuses on three significant aspects of culture; kinship, primitive classification and logic of myths. He regarded culture as a total communications system. Myth is a particular type of this communication system just as the transfer of women from one exogamous kinship group to another.
- (3) The Ketu of Western Yorubaland are a subgroup of the large Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. The Ketu are located astride the Dahomey-Nigerian Boundary. The town of Ketu from which the subgroup derives its name was the Capital of the ancient kingdom of Ketu (Parrinder, 1956, Asiwaju, 1976) much of which now lies in the Peoples Republic of Ben (Dehomey).
- (4) Lloyd classified the myths of Yoruba origin into two, myths of creation and migration. He identified to a third type, town myths which sanction the position of the King by creating a link between himself and Ile-Ife and its first King Oduduwa. Under this category, comes the lineage myths which fixed them into the social structure of the town (Lloyd 1955: 21-14).

ton 1822-24). A variant of this myth was recorded by Johnson who claimed that the Youruba descended from the son of Lamurudu. Lamurudu, a king of Mecca, was deposed and expelled by Mohammedans on account of his idolatry (Johnson 1921: 3-5). Some Yoruba have even worked out the number of waves of migration and their approximate time: (Johnson 1921: 14; Biobaku 1955 Lucas 1948; Talbot 1926: 276).

The second type of myths have a metaphysical orientation. They attempt to explain how the whole world originated from the Creator *Olodumare* who chose *Ile-Ife* as the spot of creation of the universe. It is this latter category of myth, and what it says about women that will form the focus of my attention.

The first myth of creation can be summarized very briefly. The Surpeme Being (*Olodumare*) resides in the heaven with the divinities (*orisha*). Below this spiritual universe was a great void and a great deal of water. It occurred to *Olodumare* to create another universe populated by human beings. He gave an order to the arch-divinity *Orishanla*⁽⁵⁾ to descend and begin the work of creation: *Olodumare* gave *Orishanla* a five-toes hen, a chameleon and a small quantity of loose earth in a snail shell. The arch-divinity was also given a chain with which to descent into the void. *Orisha-nla* left the presence of *olodumare* determined to carry out this work of creation to the best of his ability. On his way, he became thirsty and helped himself to a copious amount of palm-wine. He became intoxicated and fell into a deep sleep. When he did not return to the heavens at the appointed time, *Olodumare* sent down the archdivinity's junior brother, *Oduduwa* to find out if all was well with him. *Oduduwa* came upon the drunken *Orisha-nla*, took stock of the situation, and quietly proceeded to carry out the work of creation. He descended into the void by the chain, threw the quantity of loose earth onto the water and set the five-toed hen loose on it. The hen scratched the earth and spread it to the end of the world. Then *Oduduwa* let down the chameleon to test the firmness of the earth. The chameleon had been chosen to carry out this test because of its extremely cautious behavior. The creation that took place was called 'spreading' (*Ife*) in commemoration of the event.

(5) *Orisha-nla* is the arch-divinity and the most important spiritual being after *Olodumare*. He may be conceived as the refraction of the creative power of the Supreme Being since he is said to be the Divinity assigned to mould the physique of living.

Orisha-nla appeared not long after, to discover that his task had been accomplished by his junior brother who had, in so doing, usurped his right as the creator of the earth. He quarrelled with *Oduduwa* for his impertinence. The quarrel was reported to *Olodumare*, who effected a reconciliation between the two estranged brothers. In compensation, he commissioned *Orisha-nla* to perform the special duty of molding the human physique. He confirmed *Oloduwa* as the king over the sacred city, *Ife*. *Oduduwa* later gave birth to several children who moved away from *Ife* to establish kingdoms of their own. His second child, a female, gave birth to *Alaketu* whose offspring are the *Ketu*.

A second myth was collected by Ellis (1893). It asserted that the Yoruba originated from a series of incestuous dealings among the divinities. In this myth, *Oduduwa* is presented as a female, the earth goddess.⁽⁶⁾ *Orishanla*, the arch-divinity belonged to the heavens. He married *Oduduwa* and they had two children; 'the land' (*Aganju*) and 'water' (*Yemaja*). These engaged in sibling marriage and gave birth to the air' (*Orungan*) that is, the region between the solid earth and the edge of the heavens. *Orungan* brought the incestuous⁽⁷⁾ relationships to a head when he ravished his mother *Yemaja*, who in an attempt to escape further humiliation, purposely fell and burst open, whereupon a number of minor divinities emerged from her gaping body.

The third myth of *Moremi* does not fall into either category of creation or

- (6) There is disagreement over the sex of *Oduduwa*. Ajisafe (1924: 10) asserts that he was a man who married *Omonide* who gave birth, among others, to *Alaketu*. Parrinder (1956) recorded a *Ketu* tradition which claimed *Oduduwa* to be a female. Idowu (1962: 24-7) said that the historical personality of *Oduduwa* the defied ancestor of the Yoruba was granted onto that of the earth goddess *Oduduwa*, whose cults flourish at *Ado* and *Imedo* in Western Yorubaland.
- (7) For a comparative approach to incest, see Goody (1956). Although incest taboo and marriage rules of endogamy or exogamy are quite distinct, and incest taboos occur for instance in societies, which practice endogamy, the results of incest liaison and endogamy, when compared, using Levi-Strauss principle of reciprocity, agree on the fact that each represents a refusal to engage in mutually beneficial exchange. Levi-Strauss, in preference to the identical nature of incest taboo and exogamy, noted that both conform to a rejection of reciprocity. Incest taboo is the extreme manifestation of lack of reciprocity defined by Levi-Strauss as, 'I give up my daughter on the condition that my neighbour does the same' c.f. *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. 1969: 2-15.

migration but confirms the structuralist analytical tenet of picking an appropriate myth that serves as a link to understand the deeper meaning of the myth already described. It also bears out a message of the myths which emphasize the important position of women in Yoruba society. This third myth recounts the great escapades of a virtuous Yoruba woman of great beauty, *Moremi*. She contrived and succeeded to free her people from the attacks of a neighbouring group called Igbo (these have nothing to do with the Igbo major sociolinguistic group). On previous raids, the Ife warriors, all male, would not defend themselves against their attackers who dressed as if they were super-human. *Moremi* made a vow to the river goddess *Esinmerin* that if the goddess showed her how to overcome the attackers, she would sacrifice her dearest possession to the goddess. At the next Igbo raid she allowed herself to be captured. Being a woman of great beauty, she was given as wife to the king of the Igbo into whose favours she endeared herself. During her captivity, she discovered that the dreaded enemies were human beings who dressed in special type of uniform made from grass so as to look like spirits. She escaped, went back to her people, and revealed the secrets about the Igbo warriors. The attackers were met at the next incursion, with lighted torches. The Ife victory was decisive. In fulfillment of her vow *Moremi* made great sacrifices, to the river goddess who refused all, and demanded *Moremi*'s only child, *Oluorogbo*. *Moremi* complied and her loss was mourned by all her people. *Oluorogbo* rose up and later ascended to heaven on a rope.

Structural Analysis:

In the structural tradition, myths have been shown to express the contradictions in the basic premises of culture. When they do, they show the gap between what the cultural institutions try to achieve and what they succeed in achieving. Although such myths are related to given empirical facts and reality they are not a straight reflection of reality. One must analyze such myths to identify the contradictions which they mediate if one is to get at the message they convey. It is in this light that a close look at these Yoruba myths, will be made following the example of Leach's analysis of the story of Creation in Genesis.

The antimonies of 'Heaven' and 'Earth'; 'God' and "Man"; "Good" and "Bad"; strong' and 'weak'; are built into the structure of each of these myths. In the first myth there is a clear discrimination between the deity and humankind. Thus

Olodumare in the heaven above delegated the arch-divinity to create humankind below.

This introduced yet another set of antimonies; 'above' and 'below'. The link between the sets of opposition comes in the divinities — *Orisha-nla* and *Oduduwa* who symbolize the opposition in their final act of separation with one going to the heavens and the other becoming the ruler on earth. Yet *Oduduwa* on earth is heavenbound having originated there, while the arch-divinity is earthbound having been assigned the duty of molding the figure of human beings who inhabit the earth.

The characters of the arch-divinity and *Oduduwa* develop the theme of opposition. Thus, the 'good and 'strong-willed' *Oduduwa* resisted the temptation to drink and succeeded in accomplishing the task of the 'bad' and 'weak' *Orisha-nla*. In the second story, the 'bad' *Orungan* had an incestuous dealing with his 'good' mother. The permitted incest among the divinities being Brother/Sister and not child/Parent incest. *Yemaja* demonstrated a considerable measure of strength by attempting to escape. In the third story, the 'good and strong' *Moremi* found a solution to the problem of her people, while the scared, 'weak' and cowardly *Ife* men failed to defend the people.

The sets of oppositions which emerge from the relationships may be rendered as;

heaven : good : strong : above : : earth : bad : weak : below.

When we add the set of sexual opposition to the sets above, on the merits of the characters in the stories, we will assign women in the column of strength and man to that of weakness;

heaven : good : strong : above — women : : earth : bad : weak : below — men.

This addition anticipates the suggestion which underlies this work that *Ketu* women are powerful and that the instances of overt expression of male domination are a mechanism of male defence against the perceived power of females.

At the level of discrimination in sexual relations, the analysis offers a more

interesting insight. Most societies recognize some incest taboo (in whatever way it is defined)⁽⁵⁾ and the marriage rule of exogamy. In the second myth, although the divinities regarded sibling incest as 'normal' they viewed child/parent incest differently. The attempted escape and death of *Yemaja* expressed disapproval of child/parent incest. In the story of *Moremi*, the marriage of the heroine to the Igbo king, no matter how brief, exemplifies the exogamous marriage of alliance as against the practice of endogamy. What is of interest is that while the incestuous assault of *Yemaja* by *Orungan* led to the death of Jemeja, the exogamous liaison of *Moremi* with the Igbo chief resulted in the preservation of life of *Moremi's* people. This is an example of transformation where the end result of the second set is a reversal of the first. On the one hand, coercive endogamy led to death, on the other hand exogamy (albeit temporary) led to life.

In the myths about *Moremi* and the incestuous dealings of divinities, women play very active and positive roles. Added to the fact that there is no complete agreement on the sex of *Oduduwa* who is in some areas of Yorubaland, regarded as female, (Idowu, 1962: 24-27) the imbueing of women with such characteristics as strength, life, fertility and courage is clear. The same myths associate the opposing characteristics of weakness, death and lack of courage with men. There are at least three dominant themes in these myths.

- (1) They emphasize the insistence on marriage within the group so as to keep the blood of the group pure.
- (2) They speak of the consequent change necessitated by practical political considerations which suggest the wisdom in the rule of exogamy.

This confirms a major structural principle that the exchange of women between kinship group creates a significant link between otherwise exclusive, uncooperating groups. Thus women become the currency of making political, economic and social links. A link with neighbouring groups is forged through exogamous marriages. This in essence creates a metre of effective communication devoid of the ambiguity characteristic of system language.

(5) Orisha-nla is the arch-divinity and the most important spiritual being after *Olodumare*. He may be conceived as the refraction of the creative power of the Supreme Being since he is said to be the Divinity assigned to mould the physique of living.

- (3) The myths speak of the powerlessness of the Yoruba men who realized that they depend on goodwill of their females to effect these extra-group alliances. The powerlessness of the men is masked by the ideology of male dominance and by the socialization of women which encourages them to accept such dominance.

The Yoruba tradition insists that people marry within the group (not of relations) so as to keep the blood of the group pure. Although this practice created a sense of exclusivity and unity within the group in relation to others, in the *Moremi* affair, the costly price of maintaining such exclusivity is shown. To the conservative elements within the society, the overture to relate with the neighbouring groups was construed as a complete break with tradition. The myths of *Moremi* and the incest of the divinities with their end-results, provide the ideological underpinning and character for the change. In so doing, they help the ordinary Yoruba man to absorb the new practice of being traditionally ordained; thus avoiding the conflict that may accompany social change.

The compromise in tradition implies in the transfer of females had another effect on the relations between the sexes in the society. Yoruba man always wanted to exude an aura of superiority over the Yoruba female. The Yoruba male shows superiority over the female in many subtle ideological ways. The male-oriented culture socializes women to be supporters of men. The more beholden women are to men, the more approved. The Yoruba notion of conception asserts that the sperm is *humunculus*, miniature child so that all the woman does is to provide, in her womb, a fertile field for the growth of the child. In so doing, the male superiority expressed in complete ownership of the child by the father is enhanced as the expense of the female. Even the rule of descent which identifies the male sex as the one that is relevant for tracing of descent, inheritance of property and nomenclature establishes male superiority over the female. The picture is completed when the process of socialization ensures that the "successful" "proper" and "approved" woman are those who have satisfied conditions set up to enhance male interest. Such conditions include begetting many children and being a nurturer who does not need nurture in return. The sexual dominance of Yoruba female by Yoruba male is expressed in the practice of payment of the "virginity price" after consummation at marriage. The sociological significance of this is that man sets into motion the procreative powers in the bride. With these overt social, sexual and political expressions of male dominance, the realization that male ultimately on the female for survival calls to question his dominance. The myths portray the interesting situation

in which the dominant male is seen to be dependent on the "muted" female for survival. The paradox of this dominance and dependence can be seen in the structural analysis of Ketu myths that follow. Thus, these myths portray the contradiction inherent in the patrilineally oriented world of the Yoruba, where the male asserts his dominance over the female on whom he depended for survival.⁽⁸⁾

The Ketu myth of migration for Ile-Ife, the cradle of Yoruba civilization, confirms further the prominence of women. The story will now be analyzed.

II. KETU MIGRATION STORY: A CONFIRMATION

The story of the Western migration of the Ketu from Ile-Ife shows the important role played by women both to speed the progress of Ketu migration and to effect a comfortable settlement and integration of the Ketu back to a normal cultured existence. It also supports the interpretation of the Yoruba myths of origin.

The story, recorded by Crowther (1843), Parrinder (1956) and by Smith (1969) stated that the Ketu sub-group migrated from *Ile-Ife* under the leadership of a prince of *Ife* – a grandson of Oduduwa – named *Sopasan*. Having crossed the *Ogun* river, the migrants split into three divisions. The first division continued westwards under the leadership of *Sopasan* and his nephew *Owo*; the second went, first, northwest, and then, southwards and found the cognate sub-group of Sabe. The third moved northwards and founded *Aro*.

The party under *Sopasan* settled at such temporary sites as Oke-Oyan and Aro. At Aro where *Sopasan* died and was succeeded by *Owe*, the migrants stayed longer and broke camp in the reign of the seventh kind, *Ede*, who revived the westward migrations. Again, the party split into three divisions. The first division founded a village called *Idofa*. . . The second settled at Igbo-Ora and the *Ede* group – the largest of the three – moved westwards guided by the hunter *Alalumon*.

(8) See Babatunde, E. "Kinship Behavior and Patrilineal Ideology: A Case Study of the Ketu Yoruba", in *Journal of Business and Social Studies* New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1 Dec. 1983 for an indepth treatment of the paradox of male dominance and male dependence on the Ketu female.

The members of the *Ede* group ran out of water at a point not far from where Ketu town was founded. They were saved from dying of thirst by the kindness of a woman, a powerful, lonely old sorceress, *Ya Mepere*, who later fulfilled a promise she made to *Ede* by building a powerful charm to protect Ketu town. The migrants continued their westward movement until they come to the site of Ketu. On their first night they had no fire with which to cook. The hunter *alalumon* went in search of fire. In remembrance of this act of service, all lights are put out at the death of a king at Ketu and *alalumon*, one of the leading chiefs, goes to Panku to light a ritual fire (Parrinder 1956; 20).

The main outline of this story exhibits the feature of a rite of passage; separation, transition and aggregation. The group of migrants left the larger Ife group and under the leadership of *Sopasan* and went to found a town of their own. From the movement the migrants separated themselves from the Ife group up to the moment they were incorporated back into the society by the symbolic gesture of the gift of fire. They lived an unclassified, marginal life of the semi-nomads. They lived in 'the wild' of the normal Yoruba society. Although they tried to keep a semblance of the civilized Yoruba cultural way of life by preserving their kingship, they did not belong to the larger Yoruba society. Contrary to the sedentary agricultural Yoruba they were on the move and lived largely by hunting. They lacked two important elements that support human survival, water and fire. Fire, in particular, is associated with culture as against the raw. In asking for fire, the Ketu group was in effect, putting definitive end to their near natural state of existence at the transitional period.

The migrants were aided both to survive and to be integrated into the cultured society by women who, as marginal figures, mediated their transition. One was declared a sorceress who lived alone. The other was an old woman. Old women who have passed the age of menopause are regarded as potentially dangerous by the Yoruba. The sorceress gave them water to quench their thirst and a magical charm to boost their morale and enable them to gain the confidence to ask for integration into normal society. The gift of fire had both a practical and symbolic implication. It effectively ended their transitional state of nature and it also symbolized as welcoming acceptance by the group who already lived in that area.

The myths of Yemaja, Moremi and Ketu migration demonstrate instance of

female power in the face of male weakness. Moremi, the heronine volunteered to move into the unknown in order to free her people at a time when the Ife male population had lost its will-power to defend the people. Yemaja restrained herself from her son's incestuous dealings and preferred to die in protest. The old women, *Ya Mepere* and *Ya Panku* radiate strength. The former saved the Ketu from death and restored their confidence by boosting their morale with 'a powerful magic charm'. The latter retrieved, through her gift of fire, the Ketu from the anonymity of the marginal natural state and elevated them back to the cultural plane.

In Ketu history, women have held important political positions and they still do. Thus, there was the case of Queen Ida of the royal house of Ketu who encouraged the Ketu in exile at Abomey and its environs, to go back to the old site of Ketu and rebuild it. She was the *Chef de Canton* from 1911 to 1919. Today there is the post of *Iyalase* in every Ketu town. The *Iyalase* is the priestess of *Iyanla* and the mediator between her society and *Iyanla* – the earth goddess who serves as the source of fertility. She wields considerable influence and is consulted in the selection of candidate for the office of kingship.

In summary, therefore, the myths comment on the contemporary affairs of the Ketu social and political patterns. At one level, they draw attention to the necessity of maintaining cordial relations with contiguous ethnic communities using among other things, the link of marriage. At another level, although patterns of relationship between the sexes within the Ketu community polity suggest a strong male dominance, the myths reveal that in symbolism and ritual the position of women is preponderant and essential to the whole social and political organization. A forum is provided for the articulation of female views in a milieu of male dominance. The subtle message communicated by the myths in the structural orientation pertains to the necessity of reestablishing the balance in the relations to the sexes so that the much needed mobilization of the efforts of the female population may aid the process of development. Contemporary realities which dictate the harnessing of female and male efforts to survive economically forces a reprisal of the dominance/muted male-oriented structures to shift to a recognition of the fact that male efforts alone will not suffice to meet the needs of family members in the contemporary society. If the dominance of the male was predicated on the economics of being the sole breadwinner for the family, it should suggest itself to the mind that in the changed circumstance of the shared economic responsibilities by the male and the

female a reassessment of this pattern of relationship between the sexes is necessary. The myths draw attention to this reassessment, perhaps in a somewhat female-oriented manner. The necessity to make this shift from one to the other sexual orientation is the initial price that must be paid in order to arrive at that balance. In Contemporary Africa, studies which stress the dominance of the female in male-oriented societies, using the folk-lore, myths and other cultural traits which served in the past to buttress male-ideology, will help to provide a reorientation from the same cultural milieu, a reorientation which will prove invaluable to mobilizing all segments, especially female to contribute actively to the developmental process.

Hence myths often do not record history but rather serve as legitimating Charter for existential relations in contemporary society.

Implications For The Present

1. A situation in which women are made, through cultural items in the process of socialization, to believe that their significant contributions are not crucial, is an injustice which scholarship ought to redress.
2. Internalized aspects of culture, ideologically sprung by male-oriented concerns in order to create in the female population a sense of lower esteem for male control purposes, has an effect of reducing the enthusiasm as well as the level of commitment of the female effort in the process of development. Contemporary Africa, traumatized by recession, inflation, under-utilization and under-production, can ill afford that. Thus, efforts to reinterpret such cultural traits ought to sensitize female to take the initiative.
3. The implication of structuralism itself is that it sees components impacting upon one another to generate meaningful interactional patterns that adjust to meet the changing circumstances of existence. A reassessment of cultural traits to emphasize complementarity rather than dominance and mutedness will enhance the feminist perspective which is significant to social work theory.
4. The consequence of this sensitization to the equality of the sexes and the need for the sexes to seize initiative through individual creativity should provide the desired change in most areas of Africa. The political terrain had been locked

up, since the years of the euphoria of independence, by men who have become bereft of ideas of orderly governance. Country after country in Subsaharan Africa seem to be in dire need of the new lease of life that female initiative can produce. Scholars should cultivate people to be open to this initiative.

NOTES

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