

Gender Specifics and Social Relations in North-Eastern Yorubaland: Isua Akoko Example, up to 19th Century

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Abstract

A unique feature of Akokoland is the divergent origins of the people. Like other Akoko communities with multifarious historical backgrounds, the history of origin of Isua Akoko is also shrouded in migrations from different areas: Yoruba and Edo. A major corollary of these two fundamentally different regions is: cultural fluidity in Isua Akoko social relations which cut across several aspects of the people's life such as marriage, widowhood, divorce and especially age-grade. It is on this backdrop that this paper, from the gender perspective, analyses the social grouping of males and females in Isua Akoko with the aims of showcasing the cultural fluidity, especially, in the female grouping and its implications. For instance, while social grouping of males was based primarily on "age" as elsewhere in Yorubaland, grouping of females was, however, largely premised on marriage and motherhood. The work is approached from historical perspective with the methodology of narration and critical analysis of data. Theory of historical feminism is used to interpret gender narratives in the sources. The work submits that the gender specifics of Isua Akoko, a Yoruba community is distinct from Yoruba cultural identity in social relations. Therefore, Isua Akoko does not conform to cultural uniformity of Yoruba in gendering of its social relations.

Key words: Gender; History; Isua Akoko; Age-grade; Motherhood; Bareness; Widowhood; Divorce

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INTRODUCTION

One of the post-colonial transformations in Africa is the emergence of the field of gender, especially owing to erroneous universality of female experience across the globe. The domestication of gender in Africa was necessary to identify gender with black experience (and not Western culture) in order to reconstruct gender history that reflects sexual/gender roles. In Yoruba scholarship, gender scholars like Mary Modupe Kolawole, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Oyeronke Olajubu, LaRay Denzer and Majorie McKintosh have publications that reflect gender roles in the history of Yoruba towns and cities. However, since gender history is still an emerging field in need of encompassing research, this work discusses social relations of Isua Akoko, an Akoko community in north-eastern Yoruba. Cultural fluidity that characterised the diversity of origin of Akoko communities partly explains the reason for the uniqueness in the social relations of Isua Akoko. The uniqueness is examined in age grade system, motherhood, marriage, festivals and divorce.

1. STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In Yoruba historiography, central Yoruba authors like Samuel Johnson, Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin, L. A Fadipe and others have popularised the cultural uniformity of Yoruba. However, this research through the study of Isua Akoko in a Yoruba sub-group, Akoko, does not conform to such cultural uniformity in their gender relations.

Although, Isua Akoko is a Yoruba community, cultural fluidity in the area makes it distinct to Yoruba especially in gender relations. The distinction is explored using gender lens in age grade system, marriage, motherhood, divorce, festival, colonial education and colonial divorce.

In the age grade system, age was the parameter for classification among the males, motherhood was the

indices for classification among the females. The vacuum created by this classification for barren women in the female hierarchy is examined by this work.

2. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF DATA

The historical methodologies of narration and critical analysis of sources are the methodologies employed for the study. These methodological approaches allow for a wide range consultation and consideration of data from different sources, and critical evaluation of them. Relevant information for the study are collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary source records include oral testimony and archival documents. Oral information is obtained from a number of significant individuals, such as the traditional rulers like *Olishua* (king) of Isua, chiefs, priests, community leaders, traditional historians, community elders, etc. Jan Vasina among others, for example, seemed to have recognised the indispensable nature of oral traditions when he argued that in “those parts of the world inhabited by people without writing, oral tradition forms the main available source for a reconstruction of the past, and even among societies that have written historical sources, including the most ancient ones, are based on oral traditions”.(Samuel, 2013, p.5-6) Other forms of primary data such as intelligence reports, private papers, etc. are obtained from National Archive at Ibadan. Secondary source data are derived from published and unpublished relevant books, journals, theses, monographs, seminars papers, pamphlets, internet etc.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Historical Feminism

Oyeronke Oyewumi and Ama Ata Aidoo are two of the main proponents of this theory. To Oyewumi, Yoruba women were not victims of gender socio-cultural disparity until the idea of gender inequality was imported by the British colonial rulers. In Oyewumi’s paper: ‘Decolonizing the Intellectual and the Quotidian: Yorùbá Scholars (hip) and Male Dominance’, she notes that to situate the place of female in Yoruba history, investigation should be carried out to excavate facts needed to reconstruct the history(Oyeronke, 2011, p.9-35).

This theory is relevant to this research, as it bothers on interrogating themes that reflect social relations of male and female needed to properly underscore the place of the two sexes in history during the period under review. This study uses the theory of historical feminism as a needed step to historicize the centrality of women in pre-colonial and colonial Isua history. Meanwhile, like a school of thought that blames colonialism for underdevelopment of Africa, the theory also advances the blame game: colonial culture is responsible for the neglect of the female gender

in historiography. On the other hand, the place of women in pre-colonial history of Nigeria is not adequately represented in oral traditions, which is even one of the sources of colonial records. Since oral tradition was not encompassing, then this defect makes any historical work that emphasises neglect of women before colonial period inadequate. However, since this research has identified the gap, it is not difficult to manage, because the work researches into the place of female and male in social relations of Isua Akoko in pre-colonial period (and not the colonial period identified in the ‘blame game’)

In sum, investigating the place of woman in African history is one of the hallmarks of this theory. While the theory may not be adopted without reservations, it is nevertheless central to this research.

4. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

In carrying out this research work the following literature are reviewed. They shed light on various aspect of the subject matter of the research work. ‘Isua Past and Present’ authored by S.K. Ogidan is relevant to this study as it explains the origin, migration patterns, settlement patterns and development of Isua Akoko from time immemorial. Among other things, the book explains the different traditions of migration of Isua people, tracing the migration of the majority to Benin in current Edo State. According to the author, for example, ‘Isua culture and tradition exhibit more correlation to those of Benin people’.(Ogidan, 2013).(The book also delves into the political transformation of Isua, her experience during the wars of the late 19th century, colonial intervention and how the town has developed since independence. Also, the book touches some cultural aspects of the people such as their belief system, food system, religion and festivals. The socio-political development of the community was also discussed, paying great attention to the clan and age grade system, a major vehicle for development.(Ogidan, 2013). In spite of the fact that the literature is directly important to this study as it discusses the history of Isua, it did not straighten out gender specificities in social relations of Isua (since it was not the focus of the author).

The groundbreaking literature of Oyeronke Oyewumi, “*The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*” is important to the overall fabric of this work. The book is particularly relevant because Oyewumi refutes gender inequality in Yoruba as Western, by extension any attempt at establishing and studying gender relations in Akoko, a geographical area in North-Eastern Yorubaland becomes invalid. Historically, attributing gender to colonial rule of the West did not commence with Oyeronke’s work. One of the earliest publications depicting this was “Women in Class Society” by Heleieth Saffioti in 1969.(Raewyn, 2015). In this book, she linked gender hierarchy and gender politics to the colonial economy. Still, Oyeronke’s work remains a

milestone in Yoruba gender scholarship. Essentially, she solidifies her claim of gender absence in pre-colonial Yoruba in interrogations of social relationships, linguistic differences and historical meanings and interpretations. Linguistically, female and male which traditionally means *obinrin* and *okunrin* in Yoruba respectively are connotatively wrong, because the meanings are beyond anatomical differences according to Oyeronke. (Oyeronke, 1997). Her panacea is *obinrin* and *okunrin* could only translate to anatomical female and male provided “*ana*” is added and used with the two English words: *anafemale* and *anamale*. (Oyeronke, 1997). In her investigation of social differences, she posits that males in Yoruba did not discriminate against the female sex. Rather, it was based on seniority: age difference and outsider/insider factors. An older female or male was senior to younger male or female; marriage bestowed junior status on a woman in spite of her age, because she assumes the position of an outsider and all husband’s relatives irrespective of age factor are culturally her senior.

Expectedly, this work has been assessed by scholars across the globe: firstly, by some who rejects her suppositions and others who shared her thoughts. Bakare Yusuf, Desiree Manicom, Chielozona Eze, Agnes Atia Apusigah and a host of others have appraised her work. To Bakare Yusuf, Oyeronke’s work presents uncritical normative power in her argument on seniority. She did not allow herself to reflect critically on the apparent neutrality of biological difference at the level of language. She could not establish another way of viewing the Yoruba social system except as structured by seniority qua seniority. In Bakare’s response to imposition of Western categorisation, he affirms that apart from linguistic variation, gender distinctions have always been at work in Yoruba society. (Bakare, 2015). Chielozona corroborates this that the linguistic differences that delineate *anafemale* and *anamale* as *obinrin* and *okunrin* respectively, is in itself born out of patriarchal structure which is original to Yoruba culture. (Chielozona, 2007). Apusigah aligns with Oyeronke that gender has cultural specific framings, and as such its meanings differ from culture to culture. It will therefore be misleading and indeed colonizing to impose meanings that are oblivious of cultural diversity and its shaping of social relationships and interactions. (Apusigah, 2015).

Oyeronke may not be wrong to affirm that gender experience differs from culture to culture and that colonial rule heralded gender delineations in Yoruba, if any. However, the question for Oyewumi goes thus: “If gender is foreign to Yoruba, then what is the linguistic term for prejudiced practices against pre-colonial women who rejected subordination from their senior insider”? Records have it that in Akure and Ondo, women who rejected their marriages were either confiscated, *gbesele* by the King or ordered to return part or total of their pride price to the insider seniors. On a whole, to discard gender in Yoruba

history on the basis of Western language conceptualisation is a reflection of post-modernism deconstruction without reconstruction. Probably this among other reasons informed the reservation of the author on Ondo and some parts of eastern Yorubaland: “Ondo and a number of polities in eastern Yorubaland manifest cultural specificities different from those present in Oyo-Yoruba culture”. (Oyeronke). Then, it is not wrong to posit that Oyewumi only the Oyo Yoruba don’t do gender in Yoruba. Therefore, this research is poised to fill the gap of eastern Yoruba region, where Isua Akoko is located.

Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in History and Culture of a Frontier Zone, edited by Olukoju has been identified also as relevant to this research. A section of the book makes an assessment of the implication that the environment of the concerned region had on the political, economic and cultural interactions of the people with their neighbours. It also examines the impact of the environment, especially the hills and the mountains, on the security and defence methods of the people. The work also assesses the nature and pattern of Akoko military, commercial and other forms of interactions with her neighbours such as the Nupe, Benin and Owo. (Olukoju, 2003). In spite of how beneficial this book is to the study, feminine niches in social relations of Isua is not covered in this book, since it was not the focus of any of the authors, but this gap is covered in this research.

‘The Akoko-Yoruba and their Neighbours, 1800-1960: A Study in Inter-group Relations’ is an unpublished PhD thesis by S.T. Okajare that deals mainly with the examination of the patterns and dynamics of relationship between Akoko-Yoruba communities and their neighbours, namely, Owo, Ekiti, O-kun Yoruba, Akoko-Edo (Afenmai), Benin, Nupe and Ibadan within a period of one hundred and sixty years. The book also deals with issues on the importance of geography to the development of the people. It also looks at origin, emergence and growth of some selected Akoko communities, trying to understand the cultural values of the people in pre-colonial times. An examination of inter-group relations of the people, according to the book was demonstrated in terms of political, military, economic and social interactions which had profound impact on the people’s way of life and organisation. (Okajare, 2012). The relations of Akoko with her neighbours, particularly Benin makes the work relevant to this research.

5. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF ISUA AKOKO

In order to understand the nature and dynamics of social relations in Isua, history of origin is briefly discussed. One of the central themes in the traditions of origin and evolution of Akoko is migration. This is due to the fact that Akokoland served and still serves as a meeting point

for different migrants from different parts of Nigeria, especially Ife, Ekiti, Benin and Iyagbaland.

Although, there is a migration account that groups Isua as part of an Akoko group that migrated from Benin, the concern of this paper lies with the account that claims Yoruba origin through Benin. This is argued from the premise of ancestral or blood relationship with *Oranmiyan's* son, Prince *Agberuma*. According to the tradition, when *Oranmiyan* departed Benin, *Agberuma*, his eldest son, was supposed to be crowned the king instead. However, the kingmakers refused to crown him mainly because his mother was not a Benin citizen. Thus, his younger brother, *Ewedo*, who had a Benin mother, was made the King. (Oyolola III & Olisua). This betrayal angered *Agberuma*, who left Benin and was followed by a large number of sympathisers and aides. After a long period of movement, they finally settled at Idoani. Thus, Idoani community got its name from the corruption of the phrase, *ibi ti Ini do si*, meaning, where *Ini* (*Ini* was another name for *Agberuma*) settled. Further migration, however, made him and his supporters to settle at Isua. It was from this process that Epinmi, Ipe, and other Akoko communities along this axis were later established. (Oyolola III & Olisua). According to the King of Isua, *Olisua*: 'blood is always thicker than water' and since they were descendants of *Oranmiyan*, a prominent Oduduwa son, they, Isua could be regarded as bona fide Yoruba people. (Interview with Emmanuel Anjorin, 2018).

Justification as a Yoruba community is provided in the socio-political organisation that could be likened to Yoruba structure. For example, the political structure of Isua community is arranged in hierarchical order of the indigenous Yoruba political structure of *Oba* in the centre, to the *Ijoye* in the suburbs, *Bale* of the extended family, etc. A cultural argument is the adoption of Yoruba language as a mutually intelligible means of communication among the Isua people. (Interview with Emmanuel Anjorin, 2018). Despite the *Uhuami* dialect, the people still speak and see the general Yoruba language as a bridge of communication with other Akoko communities. This is used to prove the Yorubanness of the community.

In the first instance, it is argued that the geographical location of these Akoko towns in Yorubaland has made them to view and imagine themselves for a very long time as Yoruba. This was later consolidated by the modern politics, which has always earmarked them within the 'political spectrum and governance' dominated by the Yoruba speaking people. Having lived and adjusted under these circumstances for so long and strong cultural interaction with core Yoruba groups, the people now perceive themselves as Yoruba, though without forgetting their history. In all, the nuances of historical affinity outside Yoruba partly explain the reason for significant difference in the social relations of Isua and Yoruba.

6. AGE GROUP AND GENDER RELATIONS IN ISUA AKOKO

In Isua, there existed gender delineated roles between the sexes from birth to death. One of the most glaring gender stratified roles lies in the Age Group. While the group was clear cut among the males from age 10 or 15, marriage accorded status on woman, from which her status changes as her child/children gave birth to more children/offspring, otherwise, an unmarried woman may be regarded as *Uvisi*: unmarried girl throughout her life time. (Samuel).

Below is tabulated male age group in Isua.

Table 1

Name of age group	Estimated age gap
Isisi	Above 15
Itali	Above 20
Ohuena	Above 25
Itapo	Above 30
Ude	Above 35
Ofude	Above 40
Iyinegbah	Above 45
Efueru – Ekeka	Above 50
Efueru didi	Above 55
Avade	Above 60

Source: S. K. Ogidan, *Isua Past and Present* (Lagos, Datanomic Publication, 2013), 43.

In same Isua, there is significant distinction in the names and age of age group in Irobo and Ereva quarters. Therefore, second age group of the quarters is presented below:

Table 2

Name of age group	Estimated age gap
Ihurehmoh	Above 10
Inah	Above 15
Amuh	Above 20
Udulah (only Irovbo)	Above 25
Itapo	Above 30
Udeh	Above 35
Ofudeh	Above 40
Iyinegbah	Above 45
Efueru ekekah	Above 50
Efueru didi (obevah)	Above 55
Efueru didi (obesah)	Above 60
Efueru didi (obenih)	Above 65
Efueru didi (obishie)	Above 70

Source: S. K. Ogidan, *Isua Past and Present* (Lagos, Datanomic Publication, 2013), 44.

Representation of families in the age group is central to its configuration. Generally, the parameter for the endorsement of membership is the number of male children in a family. In other words, if male child from a family is absent in a particular age group, a younger son could be catapulted to the such age group. This was to allow for representation of every family in the group. (19. Interview with Chief Ojo Olanrewaju, 2017). This makes

it herculean to assign age limit to each age group, since age is not as paramount in the group representation as family.

In all the age groups, adulthood was always celebrated. The age of initiation to adulthood in both tables 1 and 2 was *Iyengba*, 45 years. After the ascension of this grade to adulthood, they became the backbone of their communities.(Samuel). The age bracket between 25- 40 was responsible for execution of community projects like clearing of bushes from road paths, renovation of palace and construction of bridges. Meanwhile, it should be noted that nobody graduated from the last age grade: *Avade* or *Efueru didi* because it incorporated all later ages from 60 years and 70 years respectively. In fact, old men of over 120 years were found there. This group served as advisory council to the king and entire community.

Since females were not accorded any age group but classified after marriage. The female classification is presented below:

Marriage and Social Classification of Women

Uvisi: Unmarried girl

Orkwufa: From the day of marriage

Ere-dede/Edede: After the first birth of first grandchild

Ikooshi: After the birth of great grandchild

Idasaboh: After the birth of great, great, grandchild

Aaniseh: After the birth of great, great, great grandchild.(Samuel).

After a lady gets married and became *Orkunfa*, she was celebrated as she produced offspring. Since only marriage promoted female and not age like male classification, they married at early age, in order to be promoted and earn societal respect. An *Aaniseh* of Isua attests to this:

The easiest route for which a woman could get to *Aaniseh* age grade is to have an early marriage; have female child very early and marry away the female daughter very early. These children in turn are expected to have female children early. Adopting the custom of a very early marriage enabled the women to quickly attain the “*Aaniseh*” age grade.(Interview with Madam Juliana Agbogija, 2017).

This underlines why women celebrate the birth of first child by their children in marriage. In fact, this was celebrated by all the females in the families of bride and groom as it stipulated automatic promotion to another high cadre in the society. The mothers of both wife and husband would sing around the community to their delight and confidence for the successful marriage of their adult children and the fruitfulness of womb. Expectedly, the women gained automatic promotion to another class.

Also in marriage, married woman must not commit adultery, known as *Osi* in Isua. It was (and still) forbidden for a woman in marriage to attach herself to another man in a relationship. Although, divorce was rare, the woman must engage in a traditional discharging process prior to divorce. Unlike the conventional marriages where death detaches couple, death of the husband was not enough to

discharge the woman, the cultural discharging must occur. (Interview with Madam Juliana Agbogija, 2017).

In lieu of the above, any woman or man found culpable was regarded as an act of infidelity punishable by gods which included: mysterious sickness till death such as mouth tearing or sores, shadow boxing and crowing like cock.(Samuel). Again, punishment could be extended to the children and or generation of the culprit. Meanwhile, a repentant culprit could appease the gods of *Osi* through its priest, *Oku-Oya*. Items like white big cock, kolanut, cowries and old coins must first be presented. However, this did not guarantee total cleansing of the culprit as it could still be visited on the offspring.(Samuel).

Traditionally, a girl must remain virgin until five days after marriage to her husband. A girl must not engage in any amorous relationship with her would-be husband or fiancé. In cases of violation, punishment including mysterious sickness leading to death on the man and woman or the woman alone could be penalty. Again, appeasement did not always mean forgiveness, in fact, the culprit would still have a bite of the sickness after appeasement. Therefore, preservation of virginity was viewed as a matter of life and death or was preservation of life.(Interview with Chief Victoria Imisi). In all, this might be regarded as mythical, but the belief was mechanism used in checkmating anti-society cultures and to preserve the sanctity of Isua.

7. BARREN AND CHILDLESS WOMEN IN THE SOCIAL CLASSIFICATION OF ISUA AKOKO

Not all *Orkunfa* (married women), became biological mothers, hence even a woman old enough to attain *Aaniseh* delineation but could not procreate may not move to another class and probably remained stagnant till death. In other words, marriage was the parameter for societal classification and promotion for women.

However, owing to the polygamous nature of marriage in pre-colonial Akoko, husbands proceeded to marry another wife for child procreation. While the new wife attained a new class at the birth of her children, the old wife without children was expected to care for step-children and adopt them to fulfill the yearnings a married adult is expected to have for nurturing young ones. (Interview with Cecilia Olanrewaju). In some cases, this was used to enlist the barren woman into the social classification hierarchy. These children were culturally bound to perform a befitting burial at demise of the barren woman.(Interview with Emmanuel Anjorin). This way, some barren women were compensated in the social rank.

Meanwhile, there were cases, barren women refused adoption of step-children probably due to polygamy wrangling. In such occasions, the barren woman was labelled derogatory names like witch, who has sacrificed

her children in the spirit world of witchcraft. In spite of this, some of such women soar beyond societal labelling and filled this lacuna by earning respect and status through industrious activities especially in the economy. For example, *Efunsetan Aniwura*, a barren Yoruba woman became popular through her hard work and doggedness such that encompassing Yoruba women history may not be complete without her.

Apart from this category, some women became childless, due to the fact that their child(ren) died before them and they could no longer produce any offspring. Such women like Ojo Amope from *Eberi* quarter became the responsibility of her maternal lineage at old age, (Interview with Elijah Ojo) since a wife without offspring and social status (wealth terms) was not significantly reckoned with. In other words, child(ren) and wealth were the parameters of ascribing relevance to women in precolonial Isua Akoko.

8. WIDOWHOOD AND GENDER IN ISUA AKOKO

Widowhood in Isua Akoko was unique, it bore no significant similarity to Yoruba culture in some climes. While the woman was inherited by a relative of the deceased in Yoruba culture, the woman was discharged (if she so pleases) in these areas. However, prior to this discharging process, the traditional mourning period must be observed by the woman. Here, the woman's hair and children's hair were shaved to reflect soberness. (Interview with Madam Christianah Olanipekun).

However, in cases where the husband did not attain *Avade* age grade before his death, the husband's family could refuse discharge of the woman until all doubts are cleared. Where the woman was found guilty beyond doubts she was required or must present goats or cocks depending on the gravity of her offence.

On the other hand, mutual exclusiveness was not inherent in this practice. In cases, where the wife died before the husband, the husband was never investigated or proven guilty, neither did he require any discharging process. In fact, the society merely viewed such as destiny or fate and advised the man to marry another wife.³⁸ This of course reflects the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society.

In the community, a widow who was old and unable to fend for herself could return to her parents' home, where proper care awaits her:

Iya Julie... had only one daughter who had also died... The woman had a sore in one of her legs. The husband of this woman died long time ago. The woman returned to Odoso after many years of marriage at Isiah in Eberi. This was of course a common practice in Isua. Once a woman was too old to fend for herself at the husband's place, the woman returns to her quarter of origin. (Samuel).

10. APPRAISAL

Drawing from the various accounts of origin and migration, it is not unlikely that Isua Akoko is Yoruba in ancestral origin and location, but Benin in most part of its gender specifics of social relations. This is owing to Yoruba origin claim through Oranmiyan in Benin. Although, Oranmiyan story is not popular among the Benin, especially in this version, is likely that the kingship tussle and subsequent break down in relationship between Isua and Benin that led to Isua founder migration from Benin all impacted the choice of Yoruba affinity. Although, the Benin version of Oranmiyan is different, the fact remains that the name "Oranmiyan" is affirmed in Benin-Ife connection of Benin tradition. Besides, Isua detest affiliation as primary Benin people or Benin outlet, (Interview with Akinyele Adesunloye Oyolola III,) probably because such submission might portray the town as one founded by Benin.

Therefore, provided the premise of Oranmiyan ancestry is right, then it may not be correct to always assume people's origin based on their culture, because the investigated culture might be secondary to their origin. The cultural origin was one if not the only means used by the colonial administrators, especially J.H Beeley to submit that the people are Benin in origin. (N.A.I. CSO, 1934). Again, this conforms with the post-modernism positions that what is regarded as the general truth might not be true in all instances; the investigated culture might be secondary to their origin. In all, it may be correct to posit that the people are Benin migrant with Yoruba ancestry.

The gender specificities in Isua age grade and marriage are distinctively different from Yoruba in some climes. The names and age endorsement into the male groups are dissimilar to Yoruba. In fact, in many Ekiti towns, (also a Yoruba sub-group) the final age grade enlistment starts from the age of 70 and not 60 as the case of Isua.

In classification system of females, the basis of motherhood and gradations of grand children were different in Yoruba grouping. It could have derived from the ripple effect of acculturation with other Akoko communities. Also, it is not unlikely that this tradition was imported from Benin. Nonetheless, it demonstrates unique nuance in the historiography of age grade system in Isua Akoko.

Similarly, the place of barren women in Isua classification is unique in some climes. While marriage guaranteed enlistment of women into the social classification, only procreation of offspring and unbroken chain of children production by offsprings could actualise progression through the social ladder to the apex cadre known as *Aaniseh*. Clearly, this isolated an *Orkwufa*, married woman, who could not procreate. While there were niches to integrate such women into the society, adoption of step-child and wealth such were

not encompassing parameters like their counterparts who procreated. In other words, barren and childless wives juggled between assimilation into the social strata of female classification and permanent isolation as *Orkwufa*.

Again, the widowhood culture of Isua Akoko is gender specific. While the wife was required to pass through discharging process, wife inheritance was practiced in Yorubaland. The men were not required to observe any discharging process in the two cultures. Although, the Olishua observes that the origin of the discharging process could not be traced to any heritage, apart from the fact that is cultural, it could probably be regarded as one of the dividends of acculturation with other Akoko communities.

However, this research does not have final word on these submissions, further investigation from academics is needed, but this research has opened a vista that could be consolidated upon.

CONCLUSION

Isua Akoko community claims Yoruba ancestry firstly through Oranmiyan legend in Benin; secondly through Yoruba origin due to settlement in Yoruba territory and lastly they affirm Yoruba affinity owing to the fact that Yoruba language is mutually intelligible among them and they also bear Yoruba names.

However, social relations in Isua reflect a synthesis of different cultures. The traditional discharging process involved in divorce and some parts of widowhood rites are not Yoruba neither can it be totally regarded as Benin. While a widow was inherited in Yoruba, she was discharged if she wished at Isua. The severe penalty attached to adultery and fornication is peculiar to Benin tradition. In all, this work represents a reconstruction of social history using the lens of gender to reflect masculine and feminine roles. This is a departure from tradition of a sex dominating historical records. It is in consonance with historical feminism that avers thus: to situate the place of female and male in African history, investigation should be carried out to excavate facts needed to reconstruct the gender history.

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- Interview with Cecilia Olanrewaju, 72, at no 5, Oyara quarters, Isua Akoko. 10/08/2016.
- Interview with Chief Ojo Olanrewaju, 78, at no 10, Irobo quarter, Isua Akoko. 10/02/2017. Also, interview with Pa Kia Orungbemija, at no 7, Ereva quarter, Isua Akoko. 05/03/2017
- Interview with Chief Victoria Imisi, 75, the Eyeluwa of Isua, at no 17, Oyara quarters, Isua Akoko. 10/08/2016.
- Interview with Elijah Ojo, 70, at no 5, Eberi quarters, Isua Akoko. 16/09/2017.
- Interview with Emmanuel Anjorin, 68, at no 17, Oyara quarters, Isua Akoko. 18/03/2018.
- Interview with Madam Christianah Olanipekun, 80 an Aaniseh of Isua, at no 13, Irobo quarter, Isua Akoko. 12/08/2016.
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