

# **Subsidiary Role of Women in Warfare in Ilorin Emirate in the Nineteenth Century**

**Oladimeji Mohammed Alabi, Ph.D,**

Department of History and International Studies,  
Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin.

## **Abstract**

In many precolonial African societies, war was regarded as an exclusively masculine sojourn. Consequently, studies on precolonial warfare have concentrated on the role of men leading to a paucity of literature on the contribution of women in military activities. The objective of this study is to examine the role of women in precolonial wars in Ilorin, particularly, in the wars of establishment, expansion and consolidation of her emirate in the Nineteenth Century. The historical research method comprising oral interviews as primary sources, and written materials as secondary sources, was employed in the study. The contributions of women to Ilorin economy has enjoyed considerable attention from scholars, particularly in vocations like agriculture, commerce and indigenous industries in the production of beads, pots and traditional cloth. However Ilorin women's subsidiary role in military has not been so captured. This is partly due to Yoruba belief, as in much of African societies, that military service was the exclusive domain of the men; and also because of the influence of Islam on Ilorin, which excluded women from military service. This study however, discovered that the Ilorin women played significant subsidiary roles in facilitating success for the men. These include cooking, preparation of herbs for treating wounded warriors, advising warriors and giving spiritual support in the form of prayers. Women were also used as spies on the enemy and were good tools for thwarting the plans of the opponents. One remarkable role of Ilorin women in the military was the delivery of praise songs and chants in appellation of the warriors, particularly the Baloguns. It was common to find women who were versed in the cognomen and agnomen of warriors in Ilorin, particularly in the compounds of the warriors. Their role was to boost the morale of the soldiers and to caution them on critical issues concerning the prospective mission. The study concluded that even though Ilorin women did not bear arms like the men, their contribution to the emirate's wars of defence and consolidation were quite significant.

## **Introduction: The Concept of War**

Armed conflict or war has an old history and often results in undesirable consequences like forced migration, loss of lives and properties, enslavement and

sometimes, the falling of states. War is a paradox because it may, sometimes, be a necessary condition for peace in spite of its negative consequences. Carl Von Clausewitz, a famous Prussian Army General, sees war more or less as a continuation of politics, which intends to compel an opponent to accept and fulfill one's wishes. He states: "War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse, with a mixture of other means... War, according to him, can never be separated from political intercourse, should it be, then all the threads of different relations are broken and we have before us, a useless thing without an object."<sup>1</sup> The idea that willingness to wage war can serve as a guarantee for peace has had adherents from Antiquity down to the present era, hence, the Latin dictum *Si vis pacem parabellum*, which translates as: "If you want peace, prepare for war". It is also observed that the post-1945 nuclear standoff between NATO and the Warsaw Pact directly contributed to an era of peace and prosperity in the Western world and are instances which buttress the paradoxical nature of war.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in spite of its horrific consequences, war sometimes leads to a more stable and peaceful society.

Even though it is difficult to trace the origin of warfare in pre-colonial African societies, from the Nineteenth Century, when revolutionary theory came into being, social scientists have proposed theories of social evolution, which relate the origin of war to various levels of political setup and human relations. Spencer opines that leadership first developed from the military before it was transferred to political society.<sup>3</sup> Man has exhibited his warring tendencies since the ancient time, it is not surprising that the first recorded histories, the first written accounts of the exploits of mortals, are military histories. For instance, the earliest Egyptian hieroglyphs record the victories of the first Pharaoh, the Scorpion King and Narmer. The first Cuneiform recounts the adventures of the Sumerian Warrior-King, Gilgamesh. The earliest written parts of the Books of Moses, the J-Strand (called so because in its passages, the name given to God is Yahweh or corruptly, Jehovah), culminate in the brutal Hebrew conquest of Canaan. The earliest annals of the Chinese, Greeks and Romans are concerned with wars and warrior kings. The argument here is that war has been a part of man since before civilization and recorded history.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the validity of these arguments, they have in common one idea; that is, societies generally become socially and politically more developed through time and as societies developed, they came to wage war in more efficient ways. However, the warriors remained a constant element in warfare because the opposing sides needed men to prosecute their campaigns. Men in this sense refers to the warriors, which encompasses both males and females involved in the campaigns. . Thus, this paper attempts to explore the contributions of women to warfare in precolonial Africa, using Ilorin as a case study.

### **The System's Theory and the Role of Women in Warfare**

Spencer's concepts of the general system theory as it relates to war found relevance in this study. His analysis of the relations between social organisms and their environment was greatly influenced by the writing of Auguste Comte (1793 – 1857). Spencer uses the term "system" or "aggregate" for a set of interacting components that form a complex whole and that are in constant interaction with

surroundings that can themselves consist of one or more systems.<sup>5</sup> The cooperative needs of these structures stimulate the growth of a regulating system. The most urgent and thus the oldest functions of this regulating system are of a defensive and offensive nature. In addition, social systems have substantive functions (economic production) and distributive functions (transport and communication). Since women were fundamental in the economic (productive and reproductive), socio-cultural and even, sometimes, political sectors in the precolonial African society, the system theory is employed to explain their significant contributions to the success or failure of military missions. The traditional position of women as support for men also placed an obligation on them to contribute to the latter's ventures, including military service.

Thus, the subsidiary role of women in military began with those preliminary activities like collecting materials for the production of weapons, intelligence gathering and spying on the enemy camp. This became expedient because in the military circle, women were always treated with some measure of respect by warriors with the usual belief that they were weak and harmless. However, this softness and complacency of warriors towards women could have serious positive or negative impact on the course of the campaign. Emotional and psychological elements like beauty, expression and attraction, which were natural endowments of women, sometimes had vital influence on the course of the encounter as some weak opponents could be deceived by these feminine ploys. Women are more poised to hypnotise unsuspecting soldiers during encounters and turn the fortune of the war in favour of their group. The foregoing therefore indicates that women played vital role in the success or failure of the military campaign and justifies the use of the system theory in this study. Since women constitute an important part of the precolonial society, their role cannot be ignored.

### **Patriarchy and Warfare in Africa**

Every society is known to prescribe traditional roles, either expressly or implicitly, for its members. Such roles, are however, determined by societal values and ideologies, (culturally approved actions) in the society. These prescribed roles are jealously guarded until new developments create room for change and flexibility for the roles to be switched. Thus, every culture, by default, always resists and embraces change as circumstances demand. The study looks beyond the biological classification of citizens as male or female, which tend to label and limit certain roles for specific gender. In this sense, a strong criticism against traditional gender (sex) stereotyped patterns is that by making assumptions about the roles that men and women should play, there is every tendency to restrict the choices open to an individual and this would ultimately impede on the ability to fulfil individual potentials and could result in waste of talent.

Male dominance in socio-political setting seems to be a deep-rooted trend in African societies in spite of the stiff opposition from women's rights activists or feminists and the campaign for gender equity. In most African societies, patriarchy is almost seen as a sacred doctrine which must be strictly obeyed and sustained. The belief is that there are natural lines of distinction between men and women just

as there are differences which the traditions and norms of the society have created. Consequently, in many traditional African societies, any attempt to bring equity in the role of male and female is immediately seen as an abnormality and consequently, repulsed. Patriarchy reserves certain critical aspects in most African societies for men, even if there are capable women. Top echelons of power, leadership and decision-making for instance, are the exclusive reserves of men. Culture and religion, which define the limits of the females are also within the full grasp of the men, with only a few exception in the traditional beliefs. Critical decisions like going to war and the timing of encounters, which also affected the women, were often taken without their input. Women have historically been known as nurturers, home-makers, life givers, and soothers. Even though these roles are important, they are seen as only relevant to the male roles of providers, leaders and decision-makers. All of this indicate how deep-rooted the patriarchy system has been in African society.

By this standard therefore, the military and indeed, warfare, is regarded as the exclusive domain of the men, since they fall within the critical aspects of political decision-making in the society. Therefore, African women do not really have any input in the choice of who their community should engage in battle or the strategy or tactics to be employed. In fact, on the few occasions the women participated in field operation, they were largely sub-ordinated to the men warriors. It was also possible that few selected women accompanied men on battlefields to sing, transport goods and even advise the husbands (warriors) when in bed. This shows that, while women have not been entirely absent in precolonial warfare in Africa, their roles were largely secondary and shadowed by those of the men.

However the role of women became more critical as wives who took care of the emotional and psychological needs of the warriors, their husbands. The women were the closest pals of their husbands and were, in this sense, strategic to the realization of war plan and objectives. If the women were not properly managed, the collective goal of the war might be compromised. Therefore, in spite of the extant conditioning of the patriarchy tradition, African women had a fair share in precolonial warfare, if not directly involved in battles in physical term, they contributed in emotional and psychological spheres as wives and supporters of the men warriors, who were their husbands. According to Oladejo, Yoruba worldview, particularly in the precolonial society, supported political consciousness in the application of gender element. This was entrenched in the traditional leadership hierarchy among women in the extended family compounds of their husbands, where a form of convention and unwritten law fundamentally supported respect for the elderly women during vital decision-making.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, adult women, who had passed child-bearing age were referred to as *Iya-Ile* (elderly women) and they played important role in decision taking among women in the compound. In fact, Oladejo stresses that their power status was manifold because they partook in rewarding entrepreneurial ventures to sustain the household, that is, the *Agbo-Ile* (compound). They mentored the junior wives within the household on matters of crafts and domestic works, and from their own family they could be entitled to some power status such as access to land and as a reference point in decision-making.<sup>7</sup>

The *Agbo-Ile* and *Iya-Ile* concepts gave vital responsibility and thus, authority to Ilorin women, especially the elderly ones in decision-making regarding mentoring, prevention and settlement of disputes and pronouncing appropriate punishment on erring women within the family in accordance with laid down convention. The elderly women, *Iya-Ile* also played significant role in mobilizing younger women on critical issues bordering their economic, social and political life. Their moral and spiritual support through prayers during military engagements in Ilorin was also very vital as recorded in the wars of expansion, consolidation and defence at different period in the emirate.

### **Women's Military Exploits in Africa**

Women have often been depicted as victims of warfare while the men are regarded either as perpetrators or protectors in war situations. This conclusion stems largely from the masculinity of warfare and its activities, and seems to overly downplay the place of females in warfare. However, this notion started to reduce in view of the steady increase in the participation of women in military service across Africa particularly, after independence. In traditional warfare, women often accompanied men to battlefields to sing, treat the wounded, bury the dead, transport goods, and even advise the men-warriors while in bed. These traditional roles have been transferred to modern armies with some modifications. Even though women were still largely restricted to supportive services in the military after independence, they are now officially recognized as part of the armies as nurses, secretaries, and cooks. In recent times, women have demonstrated the desire to enlist in regular and irregular armies in some parts of Africa. This desire stems from their quest to defend themselves and to do what the men are doing in order to become more relevant in what they consider as a men-dominated society.

Meanwhile, in few precolonial African societies, women have proven to be vital support to the male warriors and a reliable tool against the opponent. Uzoigwe maintains that the warrior, the fighting man or the man in action, is always the executor of violence but not necessarily always the originator. The man is, in the context of the state, the instrument of political action.<sup>8</sup> The position of Uzoigwe emphasises the political obligation which the state placed on the men in precolonial Africa. This does not however, mean that females were completely absent in the military. It is therefore undemocratic to attribute the success or failure of military activities exclusively to the men without recognizing the secondary role of women. Furthermore, doing so would present a narrow path to the appraisal of the dynamics of warfare and its protagonists. This is imperative considering the increasing role of women in military activities in different parts of Africa after independence, which indicates that there is a legacy of women participation in military venture in precolonial Africa.

However, while the theory of men domination in warfare is quite popular considering the masculinity of warfare, there are few outstanding cases in African history where women have played remarkable military roles as field soldiers, and as important ancillary to the men-warriors. For instance, Moremi Ajasoro, a princess in Old Ile-Ife, volunteered herself as a captive of the Igbos who were constantly

attacking and plundering the Yoruba and offered herself to be captured as slave by the intruders. She took this courageous decision in order to spy on the military secrets of the Igbo and through the strategy, was able to save Ife from its assailants. The legend of Moremi also records that she offered her only son, Oluorogbo, as sacrifice to the river goddess of *Esinminrin* stream as part of the preparation and propitiation for success in her proposed mission. The children of *Oduduwa* in Ile Ife were full of gratitude to Moremi for her heroic deed and they decided to commemorate her bravery and keen sense of patriotism every year by the celebration of the *Edi* festival.<sup>9</sup>

In the early stages of Hausa society, the queen *Magajiya* of Daura, a small state in far northern part of the region, in the present-day Katsina State, was to play a decisive role. It is recorded that Daura descended from a long list of queens: some traditions make her the ninth while others make her the seventeenth on the throne. The high point of Queen Daura's reign was the *Bayajida* legend and the rescue of the society from the hands of a dangerous snake.<sup>10</sup> The exploits of Queen Amina of Zazzau (c. 1533-1610) in Hausaland, remain good reference point on the role of women in military and political spheres in precolonial Nigeria. In the same vein, Efunsetan Aniwura (c. 1790-1874), the Second *Iyalode* of Ibadanland, was a woman of great valour and spiritual strength. She was one of the pre-eminent slave traders in Yorubaland in the Nineteenth Century. Her influence traversed politics, military and religious circles in Ibadan in the Nineteenth century. Indeed, Efunsetan was so powerful to have challenged Lotoosa, the then Aare of Ibadanland by flouting his orders.

The case of the Queen Mother, *Iyoba Ede* of Uselu in Benin, Nigeria, (Mother of King Eresonyen) in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (early 1700 to 1750) is also noteworthy. The *Iyoba Ede* of Uselu.

Successfully fought the rebellious chiefs and restored power and legitimacy to the Benin monarchy. As Queen Mother, she was a senior town chief. She lived in her own palace outside the capital. She did not appear in public and did not have an official role in the political system, but she was always "consulted" for important political decisions, and her vote was necessary in the political decision process.<sup>11</sup>

In Dahomey (now Republic of Benin), the Amazon, was a sterling model of female warrior group and it formed an important part of the national defence of the kingdom. The female warriors were said to have started as elephant hunters before translating to bodyguards of the Dahomey Kings. King Gezo (1818-1858), expanded the female corps from around 600 women to as much as 6000. From about 1840 onwards, the Amazon started to get involved in foreign wars and soon earned a reputation as particularly ferocious and often cruel fighters. Dahomean female warriors, the Amazons, had a separate field leader like their male counterparts. While the male warriors were headed by the *Migan* and the *Meu*, female fighters were headed by military equivalents known as the *She-Migan* or *Gudeme* and the *Meu*.<sup>12</sup>

In Libya, Herodotus, the great Greek historian, wrote of men "whose wives drive their chariots to battle" apparently indicating the participation of women in precolonial warfare in North Africa. Furthermore, the women warriors of the famous

Monomotapa Kingdom in what became Modern Zimbabwe were hailed as “quick and swift, lively and courageous”. These are qualities which put them almost on the same pedestal as their male counterparts on the battle field. Actually, few of these precolonial women warriors passed their bravery to the first generation of liberators of Africa during the fight against colonial rule, while some participated in post-independence political struggles and civil wars against African leadership in their countries.

For instance, the ability of the Nigerian woman in standing for justice and defending her society has been amply shown by the exploits of her forebears during the precolonial period. As indicated by All Africa.com, in an article entitled “Nigerian Women Crucial to Politics, women have played important roles in community since the beginning of time. The innate tendency that women have for nurturing and taking care of their own render them loyal citizens of their various communities. As a result, women readily contribute towards the development of their communities, and in some instances were willing to go the extra mile in order to sustain the societies they belong.”<sup>13</sup>

This strength was further indicated by the role of Igbo women in the Aba Women Riot during colonialism which has remained a reference point in Nigerian history. Indeed, the Aba Women Riot of 1929 was a rallying point that clearly epitomizes the outstanding efforts of women in shaping Nigeria’s political history during colonialism.

In the same vein, Franz Fanon documented the contribution of Algerian women in the national war of independence, even highlighting the revolutionary role of prostitutes as fighters in the national struggles. Between 1954 and 1962, when the Algeria War for independence was fought, majority of Muslim women became active participants fighting on the side of the National Liberation Front of Algeria. The French army also included some Muslim and French women in their war effort, even though they were not as fully integrated, neither were they charged with the same tasks as their Algerian counterpart.<sup>14</sup>

In some cases, men’s job of assailing and defeating the enemy, was made easier by the women through the use of tricks, cunning disposition, distraction and by rendering the enemy defence-line impotent. Women were reliable instruments for effecting surprise attack on the enemy. African military commanders and warriors sometimes deliberately gave false information about their war plan with the hope that their wives would help to spread the message during interaction at the market place and other gatherings in order to distract the opponents. They also sometimes helped to destroy the defence line of the opponents and sabotage their logistics. For instance, King Agaja of Dahomey, according to a tradition, which Akinjogbin pronounces ‘quite credible, preceded his attack on Whydah in 1727 by suborning his daughter, a wife of king Huffon of Whydah, into pouring water over the gun powder in her husband’s arsenal. In addition, the Dahomeans employed the strategy of deliberately spreading false reports about the route to be followed by their armies and generally approached the plan circuitously, often doubling back on their tracks in order to take the enemy from an unexpected position.<sup>15</sup>

In post-Independence Africa, women's role in warfare and struggles became quite elaborate in few countries, Liberia and Sierra-Leone being sterling examples. Indeed, official records from the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone indicate that at least 1,000 girls participated in direct combat. This was in addition to those who were either persuaded or forced to enlist in rebel armies and others who joined in order to guarantee the safety of their lives. Rebel movements across Africa have a reasonable following of women as a result of the hope for liberation which the rebel movements always advocated. In fact, some national leaders and rebel movements even made public pronouncements of their trust for women in order to win their support. Examples include Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, African National Congress in South Africa, Zanu P F of Zimbabwe, and Charles Taylor of Liberia, Kone of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda and Forday Sankoh of Sierra Leone. Women's contributions were felt in the struggles of these rebel movements.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, national armies now officially recognise the need to reserve certain quota of their recruitment, however small, for women because their role is considered significant. In the majority of fighting forces in Africa men have in general held the leading positions, but a few young women have also been known to hold positions of command and authority. To give some examples from the Liberian civil war, well-known female commanders were Martina Johnson in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), Ruth 'Attila' Milton in Liberia Peace Council (LPC) and 'Black Diamond' in Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).

### **Women and Ilorin Wars**

There is ample evidence of women participation in the economic activities of precolonial Ilorin. The pivot role of trade in the development of Ilorin in the Nineteenth Century and the significance of women in the local production and distribution of various merchandise have been adequately articulated by scholars.<sup>17</sup> Women for instance, were very active in economic activities like the short and long distance commerce, weaving and dyeing, bead-making and jewelry, food processing, pottery, agriculture, livestock production and iron-smelting.<sup>18</sup>

However, the role of women in warfare was quite limited in precolonial Ilorin due to prevailing Islamic doctrines, which generally restricted military duties to the men. Indeed, the Quran maintains that defending the congregation is an obligation of the adult Muslim males. This is in line with the cultural practice of most African societies with regard to military duty. In Yorubaland, for example, military role was the exclusive obligation of the men. Notwithstanding the Islamic reforms, which further curtailed the social and economic roles of women, they appear to have remained relevant in Ilorin up to the period of the British conquest.<sup>19</sup> They were, for instance, involved in certain ancillary activities that were no less important in contributing to the success of the various military encounters, particularly before and after the establishment of the emirate system. These include the provision of food for the warriors and managing the home while their husbands went on military voyages. Also, trading role gave some of them the opportunity to participate in the distribution of few non-sensitive military items like garments, caps and sandals.<sup>20</sup>

### **Treatment of the Wounded**

Another critical aspect of women contribution to precolonial warfare in Ilorin society was the provision of herbs and healing mixtures for the treatment of the warriors. This aspect of women's role was significant to the military in the management of the wounded warriors and the provisions of first-aid materials to soldiers.<sup>21</sup> Here, women served as herbs merchants for taking care of several ailments, including the treatment of injured warriors. This role was in line with that of modern nursing and First Aid givers at war-front. It would be recalled that Florence Nightingale, founder of the nursing profession started her trade at the warfront during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Furthermore, women's role in precolonial military activities in Nigeria included care for the casualties of war and most time, also to manage a bigger family on account of the captives from battles. This is perhaps why Kontagora believes that war leads to an increase in the double burden of productive and reproductive labour on women, being saddled with larger number of dependents (including the injured and the orphaned), increase in gender based violence, disease, rape and other sexual violence and malnutrition.<sup>22</sup>

### **Blacksmithing**

Women also participated actively in the blacksmithing industry in precolonial Ilorin, particularly in the aspects of iron-smelting, blowing the furnace in the workshop and marketing of the finished products. This contribution was quite fundamental because the blacksmithing industry provided weapons for game hunting and warfare.<sup>23</sup> These were important activities in Precolonial Ilorin.

### **Spiritual Role**

Ilorin women played significant role in the spiritual aspect of warfare through prayers, appeasement and support for the warriors during encounters. For instance, during the Eleduwe/Borgu War, Ilorin was reported to have pushed a naked woman in the forefront of its army, carrying a calabash of charms and shouting: *a i wo o, eewo, a i woo, eewo, eewo omode ki i wo ihoho iya re!!!* Meaning: "don't stare at it, it is a taboo, don't stare at it, it is a taboo, a child does not stare at his mother's nakedness!!!... Whereupon the enemy collapse wholesale."<sup>24</sup>

It is pertinent to emphasise that the Bariba, supporters of Old Oyo, were noted for their charms, which made them very powerful mercenaries during precolonial wars. They were always prepared to pitch their tent with whoever was ready to satisfy their demands in exchange for military service. Johnson adequately documented the Bariba role in this regard at a number of instances in his work on the history of the Yoruba. One occasion was Ojo Agunbambaru's invitation of Bariba mercenaries in his revenge mission on the massacre of his father and the invasion of Ilorin. Another was King Oluewu's invitation of the Bariba mercenaries as allies in his attack on Ilorin during the reign of Emir Shitta, (c. 1842-1861).<sup>25</sup>

Eleduwe, the Bariba king (also known in Ilorin as *Worukura*), was a fiery, monstrous and highly spiritual warrior. He was reported to have, sometimes wielded multiple heads to either confuse his assailants or to instill fear in them so that they might be cowed into submission. In fact, Bariba inclination to spirituality in warfare

was buttressed by Captain (later Lord) Lugard, when he visited Borgu (Baribaland) in 1894 for the purpose of making treaties on behalf of the Royal Niger Company. He emphasised Bariba's belief in the use of spiritual element in warfare, describing them as a "fetish people". Indeed, in his address to the Royal Geographical Society in 1895, Lugard attributed the successes of the Bariba in warfare to two factors: first, their reputation for a knowledge of witchcraft and of deadly poisons, which rendered their poisoned arrows very dreaded; and the second, was their fighting tactics.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the Ilorin group perhaps employed the service of the woman as strategy to neutralize this spiritual powers of the Bariba invaders in the course of the Eleduwe War.

### **Praise-songs and Chants**

Women played a vital role in precolonial Ilorin warfare through the delivery of praise songs of the warriors. The use of various appellations and songs to praise warriors in order to arouse their psyche was a common practice in precolonial Nigeria, particularly in Yorubaland. It was common in traditional societies to compose songs and ballads for warriors before, during and after their encounters. Ilorin women were quite prominent in this regard because they were versed in the praise-names and the historical antecedents of the warriors. For example the various *Baloguns* (War Commanders) of Ilorin had peculiar praise names and appellations that illustrated their military exploits. It was thus common to see women in the compounds of *Baloguns* delivering praise songs much to the delight of their husbands.

Songs were significant in precolonial warfare because they were used to boost the confidence of warriors. Indeed, this practice survived into modern military with soldiers engaging in singing and dancing as a way of keeping fit and being lively before their engagement with the opponent. Songs were also employed in the precolonial period to remind warriors of their ancestors' military exploits and how they accomplished their missions on the battles. Songs and *Oriki* (praise poem) were sometimes used to awaken the spiritual potency of the soldiers as certain incantations and chants were sometimes included in the composition.<sup>27</sup>

*Oriki* as a form of poetry, is specially designed for eulogy to portray virtues of a given subject. It is also considered as the most significant Yoruba poetry because it serves as the depository of the culture, civilization and narratives of peoples, political figures, kings and heroes. It also commemorates personal achievements, memorable events and activities that people consider important. At the individual level, the concept of *Oriki* performs the function of self-aggrandisement and glorification as it recalls the past deeds of the person concerned.

However, in the military circle, eulogy in different forms performs vital role in raising the morale of the warriors in any given encounter. For instance, *Aare* Latoosa was recognized as one of the most courageous warriors in Ibadan land; he was praised in the following lines:

Agbaku olopo Ayan  
Asubiaro, Agadagudu  
Olode okuta

Ab'oke die se ogun  
 Ko mu ko wale  
 Ajanaku Moriola  
 Agbe igi nla soko

Meaning:

Agbaku who made pillars (of his house) from *Ayan* tree  
 Asubiaro, the great  
 He who beautified the front of his house with marble  
 Who used hill as charm  
 He who refused to return home until he accomplished his goal  
*janaku Moriola,*  
 He used big tree for hoe stool.

In Ilorin, the women were more inclined to giving praise songs of their husbands (warriors) and because of the city's cosmopolitan nature, it was common to find war appellations and praise songs of different people. Even though groups like the Hausa, Fulani, Bariba, Nupe, Kanuri, Gobir are well represented in Ilorin, they have, with time, been acculturated by the dominant group, the Yoruba. Therefore, most of the praise-song and appellations were composed in Yoruba language but also giving adequate recognition to the diversity of the Ilorin society.

An example is the Ikoyi praise poetry (*Oriki*), which portrays them as brave and gallant warriors. The following excerpt can help to illustrate:

*Ikoyi Eso omo a r'erin ko iku loju*  
*Iwaju ni won fi n gb'ota*  
*Ikoyi to ba gba ofa l'eyin ojo lose*  
*Omo mo duro ni 'jo ogun le*  
*Mo sun kaaka ma gbo ariwo orun ran-in ran-in*  
*Aroni Gudugudu, ako eyin tin je okuta*  
*Ikoyi Eso omo agbon tii beree ija*  
*Ogun a ja aiweyin lo mu Ile Eso wumi, ogun ojojumo lo mu Ile Igbon su mii*  
 lo

*Omo aku t'apo t'orun: Aroni ku t'ori t'idi*  
*Ikoyi omo eleru fisan fisan*  
*Obinrin Ikoyi won kii pa Agbon n'koyi Ile*  
*Ti won ba pa Agbon n'koyi Ile, eti ogun ni won n ran Baba won*  
*Omo onikoyi o gbodo je okete,*  
*Atungun ni Baba won fi n se*  
*Omo olofa kan aramanda ojosi, o fi offa kan soso pa eyan mefa.....<sup>28</sup>*

Meaning:

Ikoyi warriors who face death with smiles  
 The great fighter who encounters war head-on  
 He that is shot from the rear is but a coward  
 Gallant soldiers who stand when the battle is hot  
 They summersaulted, head audible sounds heavenward

The great being with a tough teeth that crushes stone  
 Ikoyi the guard, descendants of a mysterious daring basket  
 Unrelenting military exploits endears Ikoyi to me  
 Unending encounters bore me of Ikoyiland  
 Great warriors that die only but with their arrows and sheath  
 Offspring of dangling loads carriers  
 Ikoyi female do not break coconut  
 If they do they are sending war signal to their forebears  
 It is an abomination for descendants of Ikoyi to eat matured rats  
 Their fathers used to stab them countless times  
 Descendants of the mysterious archer who used one arrow to kill six persons at  
 once.....

Ilorin women were also poised to give the praise song of Abubakar Karara, the fiery Hausa Balógun Gambari of Ilorin. Karara's short Yoruba cognomen (*Oriki*) is *Iyanda Edu*, the latter, representing the section of the Balógun Gambari Family to which he belonged. His Yoruba agnomen (*Alaje*) is *Igbalajobi*, but his full Yoruba cognomen which in many areas, revealed his bravery and activities during his military engagements, particularly, in Offa, is as follows:

Ìgbálájóbí, onìgbàwò o gbari, Lánl'g' okoo labiwon, Karara okoo Mayi. O pa keekeke 'badan, o koi bon won dele. Nwa nretii Asubiaro (Are Latoosa) babaa won, Tasu loru, o tese alosi bo okoo Offa. Bo bagun idandan nii pa ara Ogbomoso, Boba gun Maago ni i pa ara Ede. Paaka lo fi tu Iragbiji. Agogo ode lofi tu Iyapa. Okanjuwon okunrin, oyanu pamu ogun. Papa bata, a wuwo bii apaboo beere. A begun apa lo bii serin. A boogun danidani lapo. Nibo lode nlo ti ko mu apo lowo? Nibo ni algbede nlo ti ko mu ewiri? Lanlege, agbongbe okun. Alagabalugbu Osa. Iku perin o pa owaja erin merila, iku p ajanaku o pa ajelii re, Igbalajobi, Ajanaku lo tuu loju alaja. Karara, Iyanda lo tuu loju Ilorin. Igbalajobi, o ku abo o! O sun lo ni?

Meaning:

Igbalajobi, onigbawo o ogbari (Karara's cognomen), Lanlege husband of Labiwon, who killed the small ones of Ibadan and sent their guns home. And began to wait for Asubiaro (Latoosa) their father. He lay Iyapa desolate with the hunter's flute. One man too many! As heavy-set as a well erected roof! Where would the hunter go without a knapsack? Lanlege (another agnomen of Karara) the undriable ocean! The fathomless lagoon! Death that killed the elephant and killed the elephants' fourteen tusks. Igbalajobi the elephant went away unchallenged in the dog owner's presence. Karara Iyanda went away like that in the presence of the people of Ilorin. Igbalajobi, welcome! Are you asleep? <sup>29</sup>

In Ilorin, women residents in compounds of the *Baloguns* had the duty to praise the warriors by diligently recounting with nostalgia, the exploits of past warlords, particularly the progenitors of the warriors in question. This was a major

part of the preparation for war and a significant morale-booster for the proposed mission. Warriors were reminded of the bravery, gallantry and resilience of their forefathers in the battle field and how sacred it was to maintain that tradition of military prowess for posterity. Ilorin women also used songs to recap the inadequacies in the previous encounters and sound some notes of warning to the prospective warriors. This could be in the form of tales recounting how precarious it was to over-trust warrior colleagues or how the opponents betrayed their fellow warriors at critical moment during encounters.

### Conclusion

This study examines the contributions of African women to the military during the precolonial period using Ilorin as a case. Most African societies in the precolonial period regarded military service as the exclusive responsibility of the men. This was in line with the doctrine of patriarchy which gave leadership role to the men in the African cultural setting. Thus certain critical decisions were reserved exclusively for men including warfare and its paraphernalia. The work recognizes the extant position of patriarchy in African traditional society and the undisputable role of the men in political and military service as leaders and defenders of their societies. Few examples of women who immortalized themselves by playing men-like role in politics and military include Moremi Ajasoro in Old Ile-Ife, Efunsetan the Iyalode of Ibadanland, Queen Amina of Zaria, the Amazon Female warriors of Dahomey. However, even though Ilorin women did not bear arms, neither were they directly involved in the prosecution of battles, they contributed in aspects like food supply, weapon gathering, espionage and spying on opponents, treatment of the wounded and advising their husbands (warriors) and more importantly, they gave praise songs which were full of eulogy, warning, encouragement and lessons. Indeed, women praise-singers were common in the compounds of the *Baloguns* and other important warriors in Ilorin.

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