

# **Perception of Women Entrepreneurship in Ancient Greek and Traditional Yoruba Societies**

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## **Abstract**

Globally, economic growth and national development may be the result of the success registered by Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMEs). In the societies or nations where the intervention by SMEs is a thriving practice, credit often is given mainly to the male entrepreneurs while the contributions of their female counterparts hardly receives much robust consideration in existing literature. Thus, this paper takes a diachronic approach in explicating the perceptions and contributions of women. The study is delimited to the antiquated Grecian society and the Yoruba society of Nigeria in the pre-colonial and colonial periods and adopts a comparative hermeneutical approach in the analysis of the historical findings and textual materials peculiar to both societies. Its findings reveal that significant dichotomies existed in both societies in relation to the entrepreneurial activities of women. In Greece, women were inhibited by their cultural value to engage in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurial activities they were allowed to carry out were more passive than active. Nonetheless, they excelled and provided stability at the home front and the nation overall albeit on a micro-managed scale. On the other hand, Yoruba women in Nigeria were privileged to engage in entrepreneurial activities with minimal restrictions. This afforded them the opportunity to translate their business enterprises into money spinning ventures. With such wealth in their hands, they could conveniently delve into politics and have a telling influence in the political affairs of their various communities. The study therefore underscores the historicity that women in different societies have found a way to counter patriarchy through diligence, dexterity, creativity and innovation to ensure domestic stability and sustainable development in every society. Thus, women should not be perceived as belonging strictly to the 'other room'. Such perception is tantamount to a subtle denial of their pivotal contributions to economic development and socio-political advancement whether in the past or present times.

### **Introduction**

World over, economic growth and national development are largely dependent on the business success ratio recorded, particularly, in the informal sector. That sector is often controlled by businesses that fall in the category of Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMEs). In the societies or nations where the intervention by SMEs is a thriving practice, the credit should go to business owners or entrepreneurs who have business acumen that complement entrepreneurial skills. The process by which such acumen is put to use with those skills is regarded as entrepreneurship.

Scholars have yet to reach universal consensus on how to encapsulate the term entrepreneurship. To have a fair idea of its meaning, it is best to consider its etymology and begin from the definition of an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship is derived from the French word 'entreprenre' meaning 'to undertake an enterprise'. The masterminds of an enterprise are referred to as entrepreneurs.

Thus, Schumpeter (1965) defines "entrepreneurs as individuals who exploit market opportunity through technical and/or organizational innovation". An important characteristic shared by such individuals in the view of Bolton and Thompson (2000) is the desire to be constantly creative and innovative so as "to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities". Hisrich (1990) further opines that an entrepreneur is "one who demonstrates initiative and creative thinking, is able to organize social and economic mechanisms to turn resources and situations to practical account, and accepts risk and failure". These perspectives foreground the fact that entrepreneurs are the pivots to the success of an enterprise. Therefore, the art of demonstrating business astuteness can loosely be referred to as entrepreneurship.

The term entrepreneurship is defined from varying perspectives. According to Onuoha (2007), entrepreneurship "is the practice of starting new organizations or revitalizing mature organizations, particularly new businesses generally in response to identified opportunities." A more concise definition is given by Chell (2007), who, defines it as a "process of identifying and developing both economic and social opportunities through a person's efforts which can result in establishing new businesses which can be enterprises or with an incumbent organisation".

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2005) describes entrepreneurship as a vital factor for economic growth of the society. Defining entrepreneurship from an economic perspective, Olatunji, as cited by Aderinto et al (2018) sees it "as an enterprises (small or big), not only for personal gain, but also for social and developmental gains". As such, the entrepreneur establishes his/her "enterprise to promote one idea or the other for the benefit of the society from which he derives his living". No wonder, Knight (1921) and Drucker (1970) say that entrepreneurship involves some risk taking.

It is not an exaggeration then, to conclude that entrepreneurship can have a positive impact on the economy of a nation and on the quality of life of the people. While gender or sex is generally not a barrier to being an entrepreneur, the assumption in available studies is that it is male dominated. This informs the focus

of the present study which is narrowed to the entrepreneurship of women in ancient Greece and the Yoruba traditional society of the precolonial and colonial era.

### **Women as Entrepreneurs**

From the earliest time, women have been contributing numerous ideas and a great deal of energy, including capital resources to the economy of their various societies. Women have also been known to make sacrifices for the survival of their families inter alia, their reproductive functions. Women entrepreneurs, both in the ancient and modern worlds, have been major contributors to the economic development of their nations as they make a difference in the socio-economic arena.

Women entrepreneurship has generated a great deal of interest among scholars. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD, 2000), there has been a global increase of women in entrepreneurship from the early 80s. Women entrepreneurship can be described as women taking initiative to engage in business enterprise, organise and combine all factors of production, operate the enterprise and undertake the risks and handle economic uncertainty involved in running a business enterprise. Chant (2007) argues that women entrepreneurship is one of the key factors that contribute to the economic development of a country.

In relation to Chant's opinion, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1997) identifies women entrepreneurship as a major force for innovation, job creation and economic growth. Allen et al (2007) consider women entrepreneurship as an important contribution to the development of the world economy. Vossenbergh (2013) regards women entrepreneurs as rising starts of the economies in developing countries to bring prosperity in economic growth and social change as well as welfare of women folk.

Since the role of women entrepreneurs in economic growth and social change in modern societies cannot be overemphasised, it is germane to examine how they fared in the times past and that may have been the catalyst to the success of women in modern era. To situate the objective of this discourse the following questions are given attention in this study.

How did women entrepreneurs fare in ancient Greek communities? Did ancient Greek women engage in any form of entrepreneurial activity? To what extent were Yoruba women involved in entrepreneurship in their communities during the precolonial and colonial eras? What are the effects of cultural values on the development of women entrepreneurship in ancient Greek and traditional Yoruba communities?

### **Status of Women and Female Entrepreneurship in Ancient Greek World**

The writings of Homer and Hesiod give insights into Greece as a patriarchal society, one that viewed women as inferior to men. In the same vein, McKeown (2018) agrees that "the ancient Greek was a patriarchal – man-centred – society in every aspect of societal and family life". Just as it occurs in other patriarchal and

agrarian cultures, at birth, female children were at a much higher risk of being abandoned by their parents than their male counterparts. However, it is surprising to know that, though ancient Greece was a male-centred society, girls were given the same education as boys, but with a greater emphasis on dancing, gymnastics and musical accomplishment, which could be shown off in musical competitions and at religious festivals and ceremonies (Cartwright, 2016).

Although women in ancient Greece did not often enjoy political and equal rights as the males, they enjoyed relative freedom of movement before the period known as the archaic age. After the archaic age, however, “the status of women got worse, and laws on gender segregation were implemented” (Nardo, 2000). The women had limited rights which differed from one Greek city state to another. This is supported by surviving early records of civilisations of antiquity from ancient Greece.

For instance, in ancient Athens, women lived under the domination of the males, as opposed to what obtained in Sparta where women enjoyed more freedom. Spartan women did have more legal rights dealing with their property and inheritances. The Athenian women, on the other hand, were not allowed to own land or dispose of property as they chose. The Athenian woman’s life was incorporated into the *oikos* (household) headed by her *kyrios*, who was her male guardian. Prior to her marriage, a woman was under the guardianship of her father or a male next of kin upon the death of her father. Under the law, the married women were under the complete authority of their husbands. After her marriage, her husband became her guardian. The guardian whoever he may be- father, husband, son- “was expected to protect and ensure her economic maintenance and to take responsibility for her overall welfare” (Adebowale and Akinboye, 2017). The Athenian woman was not regarded as a free citizen, since only Athenian property owners who were free adult males were regarded as citizens (Modrak, 1978).

However, generally, the Greek women were expected to raise children and manage the daily activities of the family household. Some women, whose husbands could afford it, had slaves to assist them in caring for those chores. Mostly, women were not allowed to have contact with non-family males. They mainly occupied their time with indoor activities such as wool-work and weaving. The women were also allowed to go out and visit the homes of friends and were allowed to participate in public religious ceremonies and festivals. According to Cartwright (2016), though women were allowed to go out, it is still disputed amongst scholars, whether or not they were allowed to attend theatre performances. It is however obvious that women could not attend public assemblies, vote or hold public office, and even a woman’s name was not to be mentioned in public (Seitkasimova, 2019).

Ancient Greek writers, especially the historians provided little information on the status of women; however, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle in many of their surviving works directly and indirectly extensively describe the general perception of women in ancient Greek society. For instance, Plato, though in his work, the *Republic*, while constructing his ideal state, acts as an advocate for women, arguing that women should not be relegated to the background based on

their nature or sex and advocates equal right for both men and women in his ideal state (*Republic* 455d), however, he considers women to be weak, and portrays them as inferior when it came to issues regarding inheritance. He declares women as being unworthy of inheriting or managing properties. Hence, he states:

The following law should stand, as the best that can be done in such situation: if a man who hasn't made a will should leave daughters after he has died, a brother from the same father, or from the same mother and without an allotment, is to have the daughter and the allotment of the deceased. If there should be no brother, but the son of a brother, the same shall hold for him, if the spouses are of an age with one another. And if there should be not one of these, but the son of a sister, the same shall hold. Fourth shall be a brother of the deceased father; fifth, a son of this latter; sixth, a son of the father's sister (*Law*, 924e).

From the above, it is obvious that Plato, like every other Greek, believed that women were not capable of rational thinking much more of managing inheritance. Aristotle, like his famous master Plato, believed that women were not intellectually capable of making important decisions for themselves (*Aristotle, Pol.* 3.4 1277b20). In describing Aristotle's perception of women in ancient Athens, O'Pry (2012) notes that he (Aristotle) believed that women should not heed or pay attention to public affairs. O'Pry further explains that women in ancient Greece were not allowed to participate in politics, buy and sell goods or services. Aristotle was of the opinion that women brought disorder, evil, and were utterly useless and caused more confusion than the enemy (Aristotle). Further describing his conception on the rationality and nature of women, Aristotle states:

... a man would seem a coward if he had the courage of a woman, and a woman would seem garrulous if she had the temperance of a good man, since even household management differs for the two of them... Practical wisdom is the only virtue peculiar to a ruler; for the others, it would seem, must be common to both rulers and ruled. At any rate, practical wisdom is not the virtue of one who is ruled, but true opinion is. For those ruled are like makers of flutes, whereas rulers are like the flute players who use them (*Pol.* 3.4 1277b21-30).

This passage reveals Aristotle's perception of women by men in general in that society. This implies that women were perceived as incapable of thinking, and a subject to be dominated by either her father or husband. Relating with this notion, Aristotle further argued that women's main economic activity is that of safeguarding the household property created by men. According to him, the labour of women added no value because "the art of household management is not identical with the art of getting wealth, for the one uses the material which the other provides" (Gerhard, 2001). Describing the attitude of ancient Greeks towards women, Dover states:

The element common to all that was said of women by the Greeks is the woman's inability to resist fear, desire, or impulse. ... A woman, in fact, was thought to have a 'butterfly mind,' equally incapable of intelligence, (Dover, 1994).

Dover suggests that it was not only men who viewed women in this manner, but also that women too were made to believe and to say such stereotype things about themselves. For instance, in Euripides and Aristophanes, women were made to say that their sex is weak, weepy, impulsive, irresolute, perfidious, gluttonous, bibulous, and lascivious. Similarly, Nardo (2000) observes that "throughout antiquity most Greek women had few or no civil rights and enjoyed little freedom of choice or mobility."

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the ancient Greek tradition, like other patriarchal societies, is a representation of men at work and women at home. The limited social roles of women in antiquity suggest that the common perceived position for women was in the home. She occupied herself with the running of the household, weaving, bearing and caring for her children. With all these activities, the woman in antiquity is assumed to have had little or no time to get involved in the social-economic activities or political goings on in her area. Blundell (1995) observed that women were straight forward in the back streets and focused on their job which is carrying water or going to wash clothes in the running water.

Besides this tradition of making women live in seclusion, the language as deployed for female trades then was sexist. D'Ercole (2013) stresses that only one term out of many of the ancient Greek merchants' terms existed in feminine form. This then raised the question: Were women less involved in commercial activities? As opined by Sebillotte, (2016), though men had the distribution of public functions, this did not imply that women were exclusively not involved in the running of the economy. This means that while men were at the public function, the female members of the family were also at work. In reference to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Chanderzon explains:

the responsibility for bookkeeping in the estate falls not on the overseer but on the mistress of the house, Ischomachos' wife, who plays the role of the tamias, the treasurer. She has to receive the harvests, calculate and organize the expenditures, assess the amount of reserves to be kept and 'make sure she does not spend in one month the expenses planned for one year' (Chandezon, 2011).

Here, Xenophon expresses the responsibility of a woman as not just being the mistress of the house, but also a business partner of the husband. He (Xenophon) presents husband and wife as playing complementary roles of managers, each one organising his or her own sphere, the indoors and outdoors independent of each other.

Researchers have provided evidence to show the involvement of women in economic transactions. We reference the various *stelai*- inscriptions- found in

Thespieae (Beotia). The inscriptions are dated within the second half of the 3rd century BC and analysed by Pernin (2014) as reported by Sebillotte. They contain the lease contracts on behalf of the city as the landowner of public estate. In this instance, twenty five plots were leased to sixteen persons. Of the sixteen persons, three were women a ratio of about four to one. Interestingly, despite the disparity in ratio, the terms of the transaction were not applied differently to both genders. The women had to also produce guarantor(s) - *δῆμιόδοῦσάδω*- sometimes called *ὀέεῖε*- close relations. Unlike the men though, the women had to present a witness referred to as an assistant. But that is not all. This brings us to another reference— showing the involvement of women in economic transactions.

The transactions are contained in an important document called the *stele*, an attestation sale contract which dates back to the end of 4th century BC. The stele contains forty-seven agreements. Of that number, thirty were transactions carried out by women, who are listed in chronological order covering a period of one and half years (Sebillotte, 2016).

Records also show that women in ancient Delphi, Gortyn, Thessaly, Megara and Sparta were owners of land which was the most prestigious form of private property at the time (Gerhard, 2001). Pomeroy asserts that by the Hellenistic period, some of the wealthiest Spartans were women who had control over their own properties. However, the Athenian women were not privileged by law to enter into any contract beyond the value of one *medimnos* of barley. A *medimnos* was a measure of grain with a value just sufficient to feed a family for five to six days. This meant the amount would only be large enough to engage in petty trading activities, such as selling vegetables, which some Athenian women engaged in “but could have ruled out any major transaction” (Blundell, 1995).

It would be out of place to assume that on this basis the Athenian women were legally barred from owning property. Foxall (1989) argues that the existence of a regulation under which women were not able to dispose of property proves only that one of the several relationships which people might have with property was not available to them. This is in contrast to the common notion that the Athenian women did not have access to property or that they were property owners but could not exercise any right over the properties. In other words, the Athenian women, like other Greek women, were also property owners, but had limited power, when it came to controlling their own possessions. On the other hand, the woman’s *kyrios* – guardian— did have the legal right to dispose her property even without her consent.

While the Athenian women could not engage in entrepreneurial activities, it was accepted that a woman’s dowry “gave a wife considerable economic power within the marriage... the dowry was regarded as the wife’s contribution to the household” (Bundrick, 2008). The dowry was a share of a woman’s patrimonial inheritance which she received in marriage rather than on the death of the father.

Although there is not much evidence of women in entrepreneurship in the ancient Greece society, some evidences can be found in pottery of the everyday lives of Ancient Greek citizens. That pottery provides much information about the entrepreneurial activities of women which were generally depicted as goddesses,

keepers of domestic life, or whores through the lens of Greek ideology. Hence, Blundell declares:

Scenes of adornment within vase painting are a window into the women's spheres though they were not entirely realistic, rather, a product of the voyeuristic and romanticized image of womanhood rooted in the male gaze (Blundell, 1995).

The Greek pottery shows goddesses and women as weavers of wool. There are abundant mythological and poetic legends that are associated with the importance of weaving. The art of weaving is associated with the mighty goddess Athena which elevated its importance to women. Homer described the divine ability of weaving within his epic poems of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to depict women and the art of weaving.

The Greek myths, as presented by Homer and Hesiod, portray women as spinning the wool, thereby inferring that working at wool in ancient Greece was a women's task. Mothers, housewives and young girls wove for many reasons and functions. One important reason for the weaving was to ensure a successful marriage. According to Pomeroy (1995), a woman's textile would show her intelligence and dexterity for her future husband, as well as add to the monetary value of her dowry. In support of this notion, Barber (1994) states that the girls learnt and mastered weaving not only to show that she was educated in domestic skill, but also, that the art would contribute to her marital wealth. Thus, textile produced within the home helped to maintain the balance of the ancient Greek marriage.

From the above, it can be surmised that either working at home or in collective workshops, ancient Greek women must have contributed to the production of their regional wealth since it is hardly possible that there were only male workers. Women of lowest social strata were allowed to engage in petty trading activities, such as selling vegetables, for economic reasons, but were not allowed to own any major business transactions.

However, the status of Greek women has changed dramatically during the past decades. According to Buchanan (2015), Efharis Petridou was the first female lawyer in Greece to join the Athens Bar Association in 1925. In 1955, women were allowed for the first time to become judges in Greece. With this development, it is obvious that women entrepreneurship have improved in Greece in the modern era. This comparative analysis brings us to the position of the women in entrepreneurship in the Yoruba society.

### **Women Entrepreneurship in Yoruba Traditional Society**

Yoruba is one of the three largest ethnic groups of Nigeria. Historically, the Yoruba people predominantly occupy Ekiti, Lagos, Osun, Oyo and Ogun States. They also occupy parts of Edo, Kwara and Kogi states in Nigeria. They also occupy some other parts of African countries, such as the Republic of Benin and Togo (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979). However, the focus of this paper is on the



Yoruba women in Nigeria. Some of the women of repute include Efunsetan Aniwura, Iyalode of Ibadanland and Madam Tinubu of Lagos to name but two.

The Yoruba traditional society, like every other traditional African and ancient Greek societies, is fundamentally patriarchal. Ubrurhe (1999) describes a patriarchal society as that which is characterised by male super ordination and female subordination. It is a community where men display the air of superiority to the female counterparts, who are usually relegated to the background. Therefore, socially, politically, economically and religiously, women are to a very large extent, disadvantaged since major decisions were taken mostly by the males.

In the past, in some of these patriarchal societies, like in Athenian society, the participation of women in establishing businesses was not positively supported because business creation was viewed as men's affairs. The husbands had the responsibility of providing for their families, while the women stayed behind to manage the home front. Some religious sects also restricted women from moving around in the public without male escorts. Therefore, women in this community could not have the liberty of engaging in real business activities that would involve their leaving the home environment. However, in some parts of these patriarchal societies, women were given free hand to engage in various business activities so as to contribute to the economic development of the family. Some men engaged in polygamous family in order for their wives to support and help them in the farm work.

From the precolonial period down to the 21st century, Yoruba women have played a vital role and actively participated in political, social, and economic development of their various communities. Since then, they have occupied a significant position in the political structure, in religion, in business and in the domestic setting. Denzer (1994) observes that Yoruba women have occupied a pivotal position in the local and state economy, especially, in the manner they organised household industries, operate local market system as well as establish a long distance market network.

Using gender as parameter for division of labour, women have controlled such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery making, tie and dye, as well as cooking. They have also facilitated trade. Among the Yoruba, women were the major figures in long distance trades. This gave them enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles. Yoruba women were popularly known as traders within the internal marketing system of Nigeria. They played important roles in the distribution of goods across the West African region.

The position that women had in the traditional Yoruba society derived from their status as daughters in their father's lineage and as wives in the lineage of their husband. Barnes (1990) considers marriage as the basis for women's ability to translate social power into political and economic power. Examining the role of wives in intra-family and intra-community political and economic relations, Barnes argues as follow:

At all levels, marital alliances were created to secure allies in waging factional battles, in effecting trade arrangements, or in mounting expeditions. From the male point of view, propitious marriages could provide an important entry into another social group where, as in-laws they were entitled to seek advice, protection, or economic help in time of need. The entitlements, however, did not flow in one direction. From the female point of view, marital alliances presented numerous opportunities. The greatest of them was that, as an outsider, a woman had an automatic opportunity to act as a bridge between her husband's community (or descent group) and her own. For example, out-marriage provided an enterprising woman with an opportunity to trade or oversee trade between two communities (Barnes, 1990).

Unlike the ancient Greek society, marriage did not strictly confine women to domestic roles; rather, it offered them new frontiers for the exercise of power and influence in the society. Thus, the western concept of the full-time housewife, who earned no income, is foreign to the Yoruba tradition.

According to Olusanya (1981), only one per cent of Yoruba women earned no income. Fadipe (1970) opines that Yoruba women exercised important legal rights in their natal homes. These rights include access to land, the use of their fathers' properties and an entitlement to the share of profit from their fathers' farm produce. Though Yoruba women had access to land, unlike the ethnic group of Midwestern and eastern Nigeria, they did not engage much in land cultivation; they helped with the harvesting and transporting the harvested crops as well as processing them into a variety of household products and selling them in the market. Apart from this, they also engaged in other skilled works, such as bead making, mat weaving, soap making, beer brewing, dyeing, potting, and processing palm oil.

There are ample evidences to show the crucial entrepreneurial role played by Yoruba women in the organisation of the local market and in trade. For instance, the nineteenth century travellers and missionaries like Hugh Clapperton (1826), Richard and John Lander (1830), Thomas Bowen (1857) and Anna Hinderer (1873) gave accounts of multitude of tasks carried out by these industrious women. In 1826, during his expedition to Sokoto, Clapperton gave an account of his impressions of Badagry's market thus:

Here the crowd rolled on like a sea, the men jumping over the provision baskets, the boys dancing under the stalls, the women bawling, and saluting those who were looking after their scattered goods.... The king of Eyo's [Oyo's] wives are to be found trading for him, and, like other women of the common class, carrying large loads on their heads from town to town.

The early missionaries' account continued to refer to the ubiquitous market women, trading in town markets, selling different items, such as cooked food in their communities and well-travelled roads, and "traversing Yoruba-land in long-

distance caravans” (Hinderer). Hinderer, in her catalogue of the occupations engaged in by the inhabitants of Ibadan in 1853, included many industries that were monopolised by women. She mentioned occupations as pottery making, cloth dyeing, palm nut processing, oil production and soap making.

The most detailed account of women entrepreneurship and the contribution it had on the economy was provided by Johnson. This account revealed that with exception of the very elderly and the infirm, all Yoruba women engaged in household production, crafts, or trade, and sometimes combined careers in all of these areas.

Denzer (1994) reports that new brides normally expected their husbands to provide the initial capital they needed for independent trading. The form of trading activities embarked on by these women varied and depended on their capital base. Some of these women engaged in selling small quantity of food items outside their compound, or in the local markets while others engaged in long distance trading on a very large scale. Some of these women travelled far and near to buy goods to be sold in their local markets.

Two different traditional and popular terms have been used to describe women entrepreneurship among the Yoruba people. These terms refer to two different groups of entrepreneurs in the community. The first group *alajapa*, can best be described as itinerant or caravan traders, while the second group *alarobo*, refer to petty traders. The major difference between both groups is that while the former are wholesalers the latter are retailers.

Both groups dealt with different commodities ranging from agricultural products to textile materials. One of the major reasons for the dominance of Yoruba women entrepreneurs in the pre-colonial period was the fact that they could supplement the income of their families. Their entrepreneurship brought enormous wealth to some of them. As stated by Akinwumi (2000), most of the Yoruba women in this period became popular because of the wealth accumulated from their commercial activities. These women, in turn, translated their wealth into political powers. The colonial period was not so different.

During the colonial era, women continued to dominate small scale businesses, though there was a negative impact of colonial rule on the status of women. The cash crop policy introduced by the colonial government offered Yoruba women entrepreneurs more opportunities to diversify their economic activities. However, it is noteworthy that at this period, in comparison to their male counterparts, they did not get much wealth at this period.

Becoming an *alajapa* (itinerant or caravan trader), in the pre-colonial and during the colonial eras, required not special qualification, but capital and a good knowledge of the goods to be bought and places to get them. In order to gain this knowledge, some women underwent training from older *alajapa*. In relation to this, Denzer (1994) explains that it was common for girls to learn under the tutelage of their mothers, female relatives, or guardians. The entrepreneurship of women at this period could be regarded as informal. This is because their business activities were not registered under the law as a company or business organisation as obtainable in the twenty-first century. The entrepreneur operated from her house or at her market stall.

The *alajapa* ((itinerant or caravan trader) in most cases operated together. They travelled together to buy goods in bulk, especially food items from different parts of the country where it was cheap. The following table shows some of the goods and places where they got them:

Goods	Towns
Beans	Sokoto/ Kano
Yam	Abuja/Zaki Biam (Benue State)
Gari	Ogun State (Ijebu Ode and parts of Abeokuta)
Rice (imported)	Lagos and Cotonou (Benin Republic)
Rice (local)	Nupeland (Gbugbu and Mokwa, Niger State)
Yam Flour	Kishi (Oyo State), Kaima (Borguland)
Kola Nuts	Ilesha, Ile-Ife, and Ondo State
Palm Oil	Ile-Ife, Ondo and Okiti Pupa (Akinwumi, 2000).

Since most of these women entrepreneurs did not have vehicles of their own, they made arrangement with transporters who frequented those places and then travelled in the company of one another. At times, they spent days or even weeks before returning home to their families. Johnson observed that these indefatigable women traders traversed Yoruba-land and beyond in large caravans, sometimes numbering hundreds of people, trading in foodstuff, kola nuts, palm oil, cloth, arms and ammunition. In his summation, these women put their lives at great risks. Expressing his opinion about the Yoruba women entrepreneur in Ibadan, Johnson states:

The women of those days were hardy as the men, and often went in a body- as caravan- to Ikire and Apomu for corn and other foodstuffs although the road was unsafe from kidnappers. They supplied the town with food whilst the men engaged in slave hunting (Johnson, 1960).

From the above, it is apparent that Yoruba women controlled their own economic activities, fixed the prices, and also controlled the movement of goods, as well as their profits. They also established and ran their own craft guilds. Like the Athenian women, Yoruba women also engaged in thread weaving. In traditional Yoruba weaving industry, both men and women were involved in the weaving of threads. The women could work together on the same looms with the male counterparts, or they could weave all by themselves on their own loom.

Asakitikpi (2007) noted that women assisted men in planting and harvesting cotton, spun the cotton into thread, and dyed the thread ready for weaving. The cloth produced is called *aso-oke* and was mostly produced in towns, such as Oyo, Saaki and Iseyin. The *aso-oke* was often used as a symbol of political and social prestige depending on the name, quality and pattern. Examples of the *aso-oke* associated with prestige are *Sanyan, Etu, Alaari, Jawu, Olowojokosaga* among others.

Unlike women in ancient Greece, in the midst of the male-dominated professions in Nigeria, women generally and the Yoruba women especially, proved that they were not prepared to be mere spectators or benchwarmers in the different fields of endeavours. This was reflected in the manner they carried out entrepreneurial activities. Indeed, Yoruba women have come a long way in demonstrating entrepreneurship development and practice in their societies. The reasons why they thrived in their businesses are not so farfetched. By nature, women are more empathetic, and more resilient in the face of tragedies. Furthermore, their approach when issues arise is markedly different from that of the male folk. They can be patient and daring enough to take some calculated risks that men, generally would shy away from. The claim that it is a man's world may be true in some cases, but in the case of entrepreneurship, some women have done more than enough to lay claim to stakes they have won because of being astute, flexible, democratic, and sensitive to cultural dynamics. As suggested by Johnson, they can be ruthless when it comes to making business decisions and are always ready to take risks. Without gainsaying therefore, one cannot, but concur with the saying that "anything men can do, women can do better".

### **Conclusion**

This essay has examined the interventions of women in the world of entrepreneurship, specifically, in the time of ancient Greece and the Yoruba nation before and during colonisation. Archaeological findings and ethnographic materials were identified and used to buttress the fact that women had a latent presence in the business world even in a society as patriarchal as antiquated Greece. Related paradigms were also used to highlight the position that Yoruba women were and are still a potent force to reckon with, despite the underlying domination by men in that given society, even becoming political masterminds.

Comparatively, the Yoruba female entrepreneurs had more freedom to excel in local and international trade as opposed to their counterparts in the pre-modern Greek society. This liberty made led to some being miniaturised kingmakers or mega powerbrokers depending on perspectives. Placed in the light of the more recent entrepreneurial interventions by women in both societies and others by extension, it could arguably be said that the Grecian and Yoruba models as examined in this essay may strongly have been the catalysts that have galvanised into the progressive dominance or unwavering presence of women in politics and various other endeavours in our globalised world.

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