Wombs, Waters, and Wort

Infertility, Ethnobotany, and Pharmacognosy Among Female Healers in Southwest Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Interest in Yorùbá fertility and childbearing practices arises from deeply embedded cultural values that prioritize reproduction as central to social identity and continuity. Building on the works of Thomas Bowen, Karin Barber, and Ade Dopamu, this study argues that fertility in Yorùbáland transcends biological function, representing a critical dimension of cultural survival. Drawing on oral histories and indigenous traditions, the paper examines conceptions of pregnancy, infertility, and reproductive health within Yorùbá society. It highlights how infertility is often attributed to spiritual or malevolent forces, necessitating the intervention of traditional medicine and female healers. These practitioners play a crucial role in addressing both physical and ontological barriers to conception, demonstrating resilience and specialized knowledge. The study further explores local medical systems and gendered experiences, revealing Yorùbá maternity care as a holistic and culturally grounded practice. Ultimately, the analysis underscores the enduring relevance of indigenous knowledge in shaping reproductive health outcomes despite colonial and modern influences.

Keywords: Yorùbá fertility, Indigenous knowledge, female healers, infertility, reproductive health, cultural practices

Introduction

I met Amope Iretioluwa Grace in autumn 2024 at her seventieth birthday celebration. I was captivated by her closing remarks and persuaded her to share her past experiences. She is the first and only child of her mother and the eighth of her father's thirteen children. Like her mother, Amope was unable to conceive after seven years of marriage. While she found comfort in her husband's presence, her mother-in-law and her own mother were impatient and could not refrain from punishing her. Their explanations for Amope's infertility largely attributed it to witchcraft. They advised her only to consult an herbalist. This conflicted with the Christian faith of Amope and her husband. After years of waiting to have a child, Amope finally relented and sought the help of *Iyanifa*, a female herbalist. As she recounted her experiences with a series of herbal remedies and rituals before she became pregnant, tears of joy involuntarily rolled down her cheeks.

Amope experiences echo Yorùbá oral poetry. Wasiu Monkelegbe, an herbalist, recalled this poetry during our discussion. Monkelegbe learned oral poetry from his father as part of his training. He narrated how Orunmila persuaded a diviner after the latter was mocked for lacking a companion.[1] The diviner was then asked to offer sacrifice with *ogosan eyin* (180 palm nuts); *eku mesan* (nine rats), *eja mesan* (nine fishes), *ijapa* (a turtle), *igbin* (a snail), *ataare mesan* (nine alligator pepper), *obi mesan* (nine kolanuts), *orogbo mesan* (nine bitternuts), and *apo owo mesan* (nine bags of money).[2] Orunmila gave the resulting mixture of the sacrifice to his menopausal mother. She conceived four months later.

Interest in Yorùbá fertility and childbearing practices stems from distinctive traditions that define African peoples. Thomas Bowen's depiction of 'infertile women' in Yorùbáland supports Karin Dame Barber's view. According to Barber, the desire for children is more significant than prosperity, good health, or long life.[3,4] Ade Dopamu contends that the capacity to conceive and the desire for motherhood are deeply rooted in the Yorùbá worldview;[5] therefore, women who struggle to conceive are often seen as victims of societal humiliation and marginalization.[6] Although these scholars wrote in an earlier period, their central argument remains that fertility serves as a form of cultural survival rather than merely reflecting a biological truth in Yorùbáland.

This paper draws on oral history and traditions related to fertility rituals and practices to understand conception, pregnancy, and reproduction in Yorùbáland. It begins with an overview of gender and medicine that leads to discussions of infertility. Since cases of infertility were often linked to malevolent forces, traditional medicine and female healers became vital in overcoming social and ontological barriers to fertility in the region. The second section explores local approaches, knowledge systems, and methods related to fertility, highlighting the resilience and resourcefulness of female healers in combating infertility and maternal mortality in Yorùbáland. By offering a new perspective, it portrays Yorùbá maternity care as a complex and holistic tradition, deeply rooted in cultural beliefs despite the influence of colonial changes. This analysis enriches our understanding of Yorùbá history and emphasizes the vital role of indigenous knowledge systems in supporting women's reproductive health.

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[1] Oral Interview with Wasiu Monkelegbe, a Native Doctor, 89 years old, Lagos Island, Lagos, June 29, 2025.

[2] Oral Interview with Wasiu Monkelegbe.

[3] Thomas Jefferson Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856* (London: Frank Cass, 1968).

[4] Karen Barber, "How Man makes God in West Africa: Yorùbá Attitudes Towards the "Òrìsà," *Journal of the International African Institute* 5, no. 3 (1981): 735.

[5] P.A. Dopamu, "Traditional Medicine in Health Care Delivery," in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*, ed. N. S. Lawal, N. O. Sadiku, A. A. Mathew, and P. A. Dopamu (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), 429.

[6] Roland Hallgren, *The Good Things in Life: A Study of the Traditional Religious Culture of the Yoruba People* (Lund: Plus Ultra), 91.

Susan Rasmussen's work, *Those Who Touch: Tuareg Medicine Women in Anthropological Perspective*, provides insights into how Tuareg medicine women assert their legitimacy. She describes how they navigate the dominant influences of Islam, market economies, and modernizing social structures.[7] By emphasizing the ongoing interaction between sacred and secular logics, Rasmussen suggests that Tuareg women actively negotiate within religious spheres. In contrast, I assert how reproductive knowledge was preserved, adapted, and transmitted. It goes beyond healing touch to include healing substances. This shows how indigenous infertility treatments coexisted within parallel epistemic worlds alongside laboratory pharmacology. By focusing on infertility as a key practice of female healers in Southwest Nigeria, I show how wombs became sites of experimentation. This paper also shows how female healers assumed the roles of custodians of reproductive knowledge both before and after the postcolonial era.

Female Power, Reproduction, and Yorùbá Cosmology

Perspectives on gender, reproduction, and female power in Yorùbáland rekindle interest in re-evaluating assumptions that have shaped the writing of African medical and social history. In Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender*, Oyěwùmí encourages scholars to reconsider the Yorùbá understanding of gender in African societies.[8] Oyěwùmí argues that the cultural construction of gender in pre-colonial

Figure 1
Osun Groove illustrating motherhood
Source: Photo taken by the author

Yorùbá society centers on seniority, lineage, and relational authority, in contrast to Western explanations of gender and its origins. Oyèrónkẹ́ shows that the social dynamics of gender in Yorùbá culture focus on seniority, clearly defined roles, and moral justification. This perspective offers new insights into debates within the historiography of reproduction and healing in Yorùbáland. Women wield authority over fertility, and herbal knowledge differs from Western portrayals of women. In Yorùbá cosmology, women are involved in ritual knowledge, fertility management, diagnosis, divination, herbalism, and the careful stewardship of reproductive knowledge. These roles are embedded in Yorùbá

[7] Susan J. Rasmussen, *Those Who Touch: Tuareg Medicine Women in Anthropological Perspective* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 45.

[8] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

social and spiritual power. In this context, women's participation in fertility management and healing constitutes a vital aspect of social power rooted in Yorùbá cosmology.

Colonial rule shaped many of these arrangements. As Oyěwùmí notes, colonialism introduced a new gender dynamic that emphasizes a dominant society based on sexual identity, hierarchy, and professionalism.[9] Colonial medical officers and missionaries brought European ideas about gender hierarchy and professional authority. Maternity care improved notably with the rise of trained male professionals, mission birthing homes, dispensaries, and hospitals. These developments often overshadowed indigenous healing practices and knowledge, which were seen as informal and outdated.[10] Local authority over fertility became distorted, limited, and often ignored, despite restricted access to medical facilities in Nigeria's rural areas. Even so, expectant and pregnant women continue to seek various options for care while relying on local healing methods—a legacy that colonial powers could not entirely erase.

A brief examination of Yorùbáland through Oyěwùmí's work shows that female influence over reproduction in the eighteenth century persisted into the nineteenth even as the British established a formal presence in the region. This influence was never fixed or singular; it changed along with shifts in religion, medicine, and political authority. Ignoring this in the history of reproduction in Yorùbáland misrepresents both past and present. The record shows that women actively shaped reproductive health.

Oyěwùmí cites Yorùbá deities to support her argument that gender was not the primary organizing principle in precolonial Yorùbá society and cosmology. While she recognizes the significance of the universe to humanity, Oyěwùmí's ideas emphasize the importance of the metaphysical world from a Yorùbá perspective, particularly the roles of fertility and reproduction.[11] She values the vital contributions women made in ritual and procreation. To acknowledge the views of Yorùbá scholars that female deities played a prominent role in promoting maternal health in Yorùbáland, she highlights the significant roles of Osun.[12] The specific functions of female deities in nineteenth-

[9] Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*.

[10] See Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 56. Charles Good adds a new perspective to the roles of medical missionaries in British colonies. Accordingly, he established that European powers solely vested the missionaries with the provision of healthcare services and education in the colonies. For more on the provision of maternal health services by missionaries, see Charles Good, *The Steamer Parish: The Rise and Fall of Missionary Medicine on an African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 278. See Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); David Maxwell, *Christianity, and the African Imagination: Essays in Honour of Adrian Hastings* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Megan Vaughan, "Healing and Curing: Issues in the Social History and Anthropology of Medicine in Africa," *Social History of Medicine* 7, no. 2 (1994): 283-295; and Jean Comaroff, "Medicine, Colonialism, and the Black Body," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19, no. 3 (1986): 513-536.

[11] Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 81-96.

[12] The roles of Osun and Yemoja in fertility, procreation, and motherhood cannot be overestimated. See Tolulope Fadeyi, "Indigenous Knowledge and Healing: Traditional Obstetric Care and Global Maternal Health in Southwest Nigeria," in *Critical Approaches to Heritage for Development*, ed. C. Cross and J. Giblin (London: Routledge, Press, 2022), 180-195; Diedre L. Badejo, *Osun Seegesi: The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power and Femininity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996); and Mei-Mei Sanford and Joseph M. Murphy, eds., *Osun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

century Yorùbáland influenced the shaping of gender roles and continue to be reflected in the roles of female healers today. Concepts such as *Iyanifa* and *Iyalawo*, within the *Aje framework*, exemplify the powerful influence of women in Yorùbá fertility, rituals, and reproduction. Drawing on these examples, I advance Oyěwùmís arguments by analyzing female cultural power in pre-colonial Yorùbáland.

Scholars like Ayele Kumari and Susanne Wenger, help explain the complex and often paradoxical roles women played in Yorùbá society. The contradictory nature of these roles is symbolized by the feminine institution known as *Awon Iya Wa* or *Aje* (Our Mothers).[13,14] Kumari describes Iyami, a Yorùbá term, as signifying feminine powers and the biological features of women.[15] *Aje* is often perceived as cruel and mysterious, but also as reflecting the creative powers of motherhood. Karin Barber notes the link between female fertility and witchcraft. This link lies in *Aje's* ambiguous power to support reproduction or manipulate pregnancy and childbirth.[17] The primary role of *Aje* is to aid reproduction, increase fertility, and empower priestesses to fulfill the mandate of motherhood. That focus is central to this paper.

The connection between spiritual authority and fertility is also evident in Ifa divination practices.[18] The title *Iyalawo* refers to a woman with sacred knowledge of healing and medicine. *Iyalawo* as *Aje* is widely recognized in the Ifa corpus—Odu Ifa forms the system through which humans express their destiny. At the same time, Orisha Orunmila holds the exclusive authority over Odu Ifa. *Iyalawo* memorizes and interprets the 256 Odus, learns the various divinatory methods, and is skilled in examining and diagnosing patients. Through these verses, healers identify cases of infertility and pregnancy issues, interpret spiritual states, and prescribe rituals or medicines.

Like their male counterparts, Iya Mọlę̀ and Agbaye Arabinrin Oluwa, notable healers with specialization in gynecology and obstetrics care, are among the many priestesses in Yorùbáland who use divinatory tools such as *opon Ifa* (tray), *opele* (divining chain), and *ikin* (sacred palm nuts). Oyěwùmí highlights a cultural understanding of gender, emphasizing the importance of female power in fertility and reproduction today.

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[13] Ayele Kumari, *Magical Calabash: Sacred Healing from the African Ancestral Mothers* (Dover, New Hampshire: Maat Group, 2010).

[14] Susanne Wenger and Gert Chesi, *A Life with the Gods in Their Yoruba Homeland* (Wörgl, Austria: Perlinger Verlag, 1983).

[15] Ayele Kumari, "The Great Mother's Function in the World," accessed 6 September 2025, https://ayelekumari.com/ifayele-blog/iyami-as-the-great-mothers- function-in-the-world/.

[16] Oluwatoyin Vincent Adepoju, "Womb Wisdom to Cosmic Wisdom: Women and African Spiritualities in Africa and the Diaspora," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, ed. Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1-21.

[17] Karin Barber, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

[18] Toyin Falola, "Cosmologies and Epistemologies," in *Global Yorùbá: Regional and Diasporic Networks* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2024), 89.

Figure 2
Osun priestesses performing divination
Source: Photograph taken by the author

Further evidence of female authority in reproductive health emerges within the Ifa corpus itself. My interaction with Ajawesola, an Osun priestess with over four decades of experience, highlighted the roles women play in traditional healing.[19] She believed that women gained prominence, supporting Oyeronke Olajubu's view that women were visible in traditional medical practices. An example from the Ifa corpus is Eji Ogbe, which describes how Orunmila's daughter learned the practice of Ifa to support female reproductive health.[20] Other verses, including Iwori Meji and Odu Oturupon Irete, recount how Alara and Oluwo took on the roles of Iyanifa respectively to improve fertility in pre-colonial Yorùbáland. In the old Oyo kingdom, Arugba Ifa, called Onigbogi's mother, was not only a renowned Iyanifa but also initiated Alado into the Ifa cult.[21] These accounts reinforce Oyěwùmí's broader argument about women's prominent and influential roles within Yorùbá social and religious structures.

Yorùbá mythology offers further insights into the cosmological basis of female authority. In one account, Olodumare empowered three deities. To the only female orisha, he gave a calabash shaped like an ellipsoid. This calabash was infused with *ase* (power) from Olodumare.[22] The strength of

[19] Oral Interview with Olosande Raliatu Ajawesola, 72, Osun Priestess, Sasha Community, Moriya, Ibadan, August 16, 2025.

[20] Oyeronke Olajubu, "Seeing through a Woman's Eye: Yoruba Religious Tradition and Gender Relations," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 58.

[21] Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas from the Earliest of Times to the British Protectorate* (Lagos: CMS Nigeria Bookshops, 1921).

[22] Andrew H. Apter, *Black Critics & Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1992), 243.

this power lies in the female orisha's capacity to punish her offenders as well as to use it for the benefit of humanity. Babatunde Lawal has also provided an explanation for female power related to fertility. He suggested that women persuaded Esu, who granted them *Aje* powers.[23,24] Accordingly, Esu instructed them to meet Orunmila, who asked the women to swear before Olodumare that the power would be used for the good of humanity.[25,26] The dominance of Aje over all deities is significant; their spheres of influence extend beyond fertility, as they act as mediators between Olodumare and other deities.[27]

Drawing on Ifa divination verses, Wande Abimbola discusses ideas on female power, agency, and fertility. He highlights Olodumare's gift of power to women (*Aje*), which surpasses that of men.[28] Likewise, Olodumare warns women against the reckless use of this power. Wande asserts that women hold prominent roles in fertility management and that these roles predate the arrival of the British in Yorùbáland. Similarly, the Ifa corpus, Odu Ose Otura, offers insight into the rivalry between the female deity (Osun) and sixteen male deities.[29] This unhealthy rivalry caused chaos on earth, prompting them to seek help from Olodumare. He told them they undermined Osun's power and instructed them to seek her forgiveness. Osun, already conceived as a female child, affirmed her support if the child in her womb was male. In this context, Obatala secretly changed the child's gender to male in Osun's womb. Since Ifa verses can explain such ideas of female power, Oyěwùmí's argument about the visibility of women in Yorùbáland and their vital roles in maintaining women's health cannot be overstated.

A key perspective is the sacredness of Osun water, which marks a watershed in the history of indigenous medicine, particularly regarding fertility regulation in Yorùbáland. Specifically, it signifies a developmental phase in women's reproductive health and the expression of feminist strength as a symbol of motherhood. The importance of Osun water as a major form of hydrotherapy used to enhance maternal healthcare was reevaluated during both the colonial and modern periods. Infertile women favor non-biomedical practices rooted in the social and cultural aspects of the health system. Unlike its previous roles in treating various diseases, Osun water's primary function became to diminish the shame associated with infertility and to elevate expectant mothers to the status of joyful motherhood, leading to the global institutionalization of Osun.

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[23] Babtunde Lawal, *The Gèlédé Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (University of Washington Press, 1997).

[24] Raymond Prince, "The Yoruba Image of the Witch," *Journal of Mental Science* 107 (November 1961): 795- 805.

[25] Lawal, *The Gèlédé Spectacle*.

[26] Prince, "The Yoruba Image of the Witch."

[27] Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Yoruba Women, Work, and Social Change* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 194.

[28] Wande Abimbola, *Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance and Drama* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife, Department of African Languages and Literatures, 1975).

[29] *Odu Ose Otura* on witches and fertility in Yorùbáland.

Scholars have shown great interest in *Aje* and their roles in fertility. Some argue that *Aje* are connected to infertility, miscarriage, and menstrual problems. Apter suggests that the name *Aje* refers to women who consume life and interfere with reproductive fluids.[30] Conversely, others acknowledge that, despite possessing both negative and positive powers, *Aje* play a significant role in supporting fertility in Yorùbáland.[31]

The influence of female spiritual authority also clearly manifests in Yorùbá ritual festivals. For instance, the Gelede festival celebrates motherhood and honors the spiritual powers linked to *Àwọn Ìyá Wa*. Babatunde Lawal points out that the festival is heavily influenced by *Aje*, fertility, and motherhood, which explains why more women participate, believing it will boost their fertility.[32,33] Notably, *Iyalase* (the chief priestess), who leads the Gelede society and the shrine, performs sacrifices for fertility and acts as a mediator between *Iya nla*, the Gelede society, and the broader community. As Henry and Margaret Drewal observe, “the sole aim of Gèlèdé spectacle is to honor and harness female mystical power.”[34]

The themes of fertility and ritual power are expressed in festivals dedicated to Yemoja. In Ayede village in the Ekiti region, for example, a ritual calabash bearing a red parrot feather symbolizes the potentiality of *Aje* in female fertility.[35] According to Andrew Apter, this symbol represents the link between female spiritual power and reproductive potential. The calabash itself is interpreted as a symbolic womb containing both fertility and transformative spiritual energy.[36] Rituals are performed to enhance the revitalization of female reproductive health and procreation. In this sense, the symbolism of the womb, water, and ritual power reflects the broader cultural understanding of reproduction as a domain deeply intertwined with female spiritual agency,[37] resonating with Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí’s perspective on women's representation in Yorùbá society.

Another vital element of Yorùbá fertility traditions is the sacred water linked to the two female deities Ọ̀ṣun and Yemoja.[38] Specifically, the healing properties of water play a crucial role in their practices; therefore, many priestesses are strategically situated near rivers. In some cases, water is consistently available at their shrines to speed healing, especially if they are not near a river. Fertility is a key aspect of Yorùbá health and well-being. This is reflected in the Yorùbá saying, *Eni ti o bi omo kan ti kuro ni agan*, which means "She who has a child cannot be regarded as barren."[39] As previously noted, ‘*agan*’ describes

[30] Apter, *Black Critics & Kings*, 113.

[31] Teresa Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Ajé in Africana Literature* (Oya's Tornado, 2015), 14.

[32] Lawal, *The Gèlédé Spectacle*.

[33] Prince, "The Yoruba Image of the Witch," 798.

[34] Henry J. Drewal and Margaret T. Drewal, *Gẹlẹdẹ: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1970), 7.

[35] Apter, *Black Critics & Kings*, 113.

[36] Apter, *Black Critics & Kings*, 113.

[37] Apter, *Black Critics & Kings*, 113.

[38] It is important to note that in difficult encounters, traditional healers appease other deities like Esu.

[39] Yorùbá proverb depicting fertility and wellness.

the condition of infertility. Therefore, fertility among the people means more than just having children; experiencing fulfilling motherhood after childbirth is a significant part of a good life in Yorùbáland. Such benefits can be obtained from deities through priestesses.

The prominence of priestesses in these traditions demonstrates that female authority has long been woven into Yorùbá cultural structures. Gender roles in Yorùbá society were shaped not only by biological differences but also by complex cultural, spiritual, and social dynamics. Therefore, it becomes clear that gender existed before the British arrival in Yorùbáland. As Gayatri Spivak has suggested in another context, such forms of authority often remain "doubly in shadow," overlooked within dominant narratives yet continuing to influence social life.[40] The symbolism of the *Igba Àjẹ́*—the sacred calabash captures this enduring presence. As Jacob Olupona notes, any attempt to think that women did not exist in pre-colonial Yorùbáland overlooks the deep cultural traditions that still sustain reproductive knowledge and healing practices across generations.[41]

Herbal Knowledge and Reproductive Care in Yorùbáland

Reproductive care in Yorùbáland has traditionally been rooted in a rich body of herbal knowledge, closely intertwined with social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of the ecosystem. Women's health, fertility, and childbirth were managed by female healers through the use of plants, rituals, and pharmacological preparations. Conditions such as infertility, menstrual irregularities, pregnancy loss, and fibroids, as observed by Yeye Mole during our discussion, were associated with physiological imbalances, poor nutrition, emotional stress, ancestral neglect, and spiritual neglect.[42] Herbal remedies, therefore, act as a bridge between the reproductive body and larger cosmological orders.

Anovulation, understood locally as a disruption of the menstrual cycle following a period of bleeding, was addressed through remedies, rituals, and herbal preparations.[43] Fayemi Omotola, an aged herbalist with specialty in ritual preparation and appeasement during the interview, described a remedy that emphasized patience and routine as much as the use of plants: the root of asọ́fẹ́yẹ̀jẹ̀ (*Rauvolfia vomitoria*), carefully measured, was combined with six tablespoons of ọ̀sùn ilé Yorùbá (*Diospyros alboflavescens*) and simmered in a clay pot, then allowed to cool and filtered. One cup of the decoction would be taken before sleep.[44] Akeju Olubukola, a local fertility specialist who learned the art of traditional medicine from

[40] Gayatri Spivak, "Can The Subaltern Speak?" in *Reflections on the History of an Idea: Can the Subaltern Speak?*, ed. Morris, Rosalind (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 258.

[41] Jacob K. Olupona, "Yorùbá Goddesses and Sovereignty in Southwestern Nigeria," in *Goddesses Who Rule*, ed. E. Benard and B. Moon (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 258.

[42] Oral Interview with Yeye Mole, 85, Healer, Ire-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, August 17, 2025.

[43] Diana Hamilton-Fairley and Taylor Alison, "Abc of Subfertility: Anovulation," *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 327, no. 7414 (2003): 546–49.

[44] Oral Interview with Fayemi Akinfisoye Omotola, Herbalist, 80 years old, Yidi Arole Apete, Idi Community, Ibadan, Oyo State, September 18, 2025.

her mother, however, framed treatment in more activating terms, favoring a hotter and more pungent preparation in which aridán (*Tetrapleura tetraptera*), ẹ̀rù alámo (*Xylopia aethiopica*), and ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ (*Piper nigrum*) were boiled in large volumes with a pinch of salt, with the resulting liquid consumed in sharp, warming doses before breakfast and after dinner.[45] These oral recollections illustrate how TBAs guide prospective mothers to live with these remedies and restore reproductive balance.

Menstrual irregularities received equally detailed attention. Silifat Ayilara, a herbs seller, described a "local flushing" using *agbo aparun*, a potent mixture of lime water and local gin designed to clear internal blockages. This was followed by an infusion of white and red leaves of *asunwon* (*Senna alata*), lightly fortified with *kaun* (potash), taken morning and night until bleeding resumed.[46] Ayilara said that in resistant cases, one should grind together the dried head of a parrot, *ewe owu* (cotton leaves), *ewe lali* (*Lawsonia inermis*), and *ewuro* (*Vernonia amygdalina*), then swallow with hot pap at night. Arifadele Ifakunle, an Ifa Priest, however, emphasized heat, circulation, and persistence, recommending mixtures of bitter kola, ginger, and cloves soaked patiently in water and lime juice, taken in doses, along with simpler nightly brews of ginger, cloves, and *aidan*.[47] Arifadele Ifakunle's practice easily combines local and imported substances, incorporating maca root powder alongside Yorùbá botanicals, and in more severe cases, extending treatment to vaginal insertions made from dried *Jatropha curcas* seed and potash alum. My interactions with these female healers show that menstrual irregularity is a complex condition, managed through ongoing therapeutic relationships rather than a quick fix. Uterine fibroids (*Iju*) were regarded as a serious threat to pregnancy and childbirth. Omotola Fayemi explained that smaller fibroids could be managed with daily doses of *ewe ibale* (broom leaf), *oparun* (bamboo), and *ataare* (*Aframomum melegueta*) steeped in schnapps, along with potent preparations of *aidan toro* (*Senna fistula*), *pandoro* (*Kigelia africana*), *osan ganhin*, and *iyere* (*Piper guineense*) taken with hot pap or fermented pap water (*omidun*) to reduce and break up hardened growths.[48] High Chief Ifalere Odegbami Odegbola, head of the Ifa cult in Ibadan, described an intricate layering system: roots, barks, seeds, and potash mixed in clay pots with *omidun*, sealed for slow extraction, while simultaneous gin infusions of shallots, gladiolus, and *epakun* were consumed each morning to warm and prepare the womb for pregnancy.[49] In private notes, Pa Raheem Sangotedo recorded grinding *Allium ascalonicum* with *ogbe ori akuko* (*Heliotropium indicum*), citrus bark, bitter leaves, kola nut, and forest

[45] Oral Interview with Fayemi, 55, Local Pharmacist, Mowe, Ibafo, Ogun State, June 30, 2025.

[46] Oral Interview with Silifat Ayilara, 76, Herbs Seller, Sango-Ota, Ogun State, November 6, 2025.

[47] Oral Interview with Arifadele Ifakunle, 61, Ifa Priest, Sango-Ota, Ogun State, November 5, 2025.

[48] Oral Interview with Fayemi Akinfisoye Omotola, Herbalist, 80 years old, Yidi Arole Apete, Idi Community, Ibadan, Oyo State, September 18, 2025.

[49] Oral Interview with Chief Ifalere Odegbami Odegbola, 73, Ifa Priest, Araba of Ibadan, Oyo State, October 5, 2025.

roots, given with pap, lime water, or palm oil, sometimes reduced to ash for ingestion.[50] Across these remedies, healers demonstrated a deep understanding of the female reproductive system and the ritual effort needed to restore balance.

Figure 3
Herbal plants
Source: Photo taken by the author

Among the healers I interacted with, worm infestations were regarded as both spiritual and biological threats. Chief Ifalere Odegbami Odegbola notably identified especially stubborn types—*aran ginisa, aran ewuru*, and *aran latanlatan*—that were believed to lodge in the uterus through malevolent spiritual intervention.[51] Remedies included *egbo ota*, taken daily with pap, or soaked in water with strict dietary discipline, especially avoiding sugar, which was thought to nourish worms. Similarly, Silifat Ayilara prescribed decoctions of *epo igi aworoso* (*Acalypha wilkesiana*), *eru* (*Croton lobatus*), lemon juice, sugar, and cow bile in measured doses. Dense powders of *egbo ewuro* (*Vernonia amygdalina*), forest barks, roots, and seeds were also used.[52] These treatments emphasized the moral and cosmological aspects of reproductive health, blending physiology, ritual, and ethics.

There was a clear consensus among the healers I interviewed. Sexually transmitted infections, collectively called *aarun ìgbálòpò*, were believed to migrate inward, causing pelvic inflammatory disease and obstructing conception or safe childbirth. Some healers began with simple yet potent mixtures—dried bark of *Securidaca longepedunculata*, ground with *Allium sativum*, and taken with hot pap at dawn to draw the infection outward. Others

[50] Oral Interview with Raheem Sangodola (Baba Sango), 107, *Oluawo* Herbalist, Igbo-Ile, Igbo-Ora, Oyo State, September 28, 2025.

[51] Oral Interview with Chief Ifalere Odegbami Odegbola, 73, Ifa Priest, Araba of Ibadan, Oyo State, October 5, 2025.

[52] Oral Interview with Chief Ifalere Odegbami Odegbola.

preferred stronger decoctions: the hollowed flesh of bara (*Citrullus lanatus*) cut and boiled in a clay pot with *Gladiolus psittacinus*, bark of *ijebo* (*Entandrophragma utile*), and potash, taken morning and evening in half-cup doses.

Most of the healers I interviewed agreed that Pelvic Inflammatory Diseases appeared in multiple interconnected forms, including *ooru inú*—an internal heat that smoldered unseen—and ẹ̀dá. This persistent leucorrhea is evidenced through odor and discharge. Baba Sango described treatment as a matter of careful sequencing and bodily timing: a filtered decoction of *Allium sativum* and *kanafuru* (cloves), combined with a brew of guava leaves, was effective.[53] He also mentioned that a small morning ritual involving warm water mixed with a teaspoon of lemon juice, apple (*Malus pumila*), or even sodium bicarbonate could help reset the body gently before the day began.

To manage discharge and vaginal odor, Silifat prescribed a stronger, aromatic boil of *Ocimum gratissimum*, *ewe igbálẹ̀* (*Moringa oleifera*), garlic, *aidan* (*Tetrapleura tetraptera*), turmeric, ginger, and cloves simmered in two liters of water, strained, and stored, with women taking half a glass twice daily.[54] When *ẹ̀dá* proved stubborn, other practitioners resorted to slower infusions: hot water poured over the roots of *atori* (*Glyphaea brevis*), roots and leaves of *asunwọ̀n* (*Senna podocarpa* and *Senna alata*), shallots, and potash, left overnight and drunk for three mornings before breakfast. More pungent remedies included ground seeds of *Garcinia kola* and *Aframomum melegueta*, roots of *àjẹ́ kò bàlé* (*Croton zambesicus*), leaves of Acacia nilotica and *Mimosa pudica*, taken with cold pap; or fermented leaves of *pantanmo* (*Mimosa pudica*) and ginger soaked in gin or lime and sipped each morning. For internal heat, the body was cooled rather than purged: onions and garlic crushed into a paste and fermented in wild honey, a tablespoon taken three times daily for weeks, alongside lighter vegetable infusions made from *Talinum fruticosum, ewedu* (*Corchorus olitorius*), and lemon.

Infertility was once traditionally associated with moral or spiritual imbalance.[55] Neglecting family deities, forgetting ancestors, breaking oaths, or neglecting obligations could hinder conception. In Yorùbá cosmology, deities are not distant abstractions, but active beings involved in fertility, and infertility was often viewed as a sign of having offended them. This imbalance needed acknowledgment rather than concealment.[56] Healers explained that each person has spiritual ties even before birth, and that forgotten promises, whether made intentionally or unintentionally, could quietly obstruct pregnancy until they were ritually addressed. However, the dual roles of witchcraft in reproductive health remain a contentious

[53] Oral Interview with Raheem Sangodola (Baba Sango), 107, *Oluawo* Herbalist, Igbo-Ile, Igbo-Ora, Oyo State, September 28, 2025.

[54] Oral Interview with Silifat Ayilara, 76, Herbs Seller, Sango-Ota, Ogun State, November 6, 2025.

[55] Oluwafemi J. Alabi, "Perceptions of Surrogacy Within the Yoruba Socio-Cultural Context of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria," *F1000Research* 9 (2020): 103.

[56] Yemi Elebuibon, *Invisible Powers of the Metaphysical World: A Peep into the World of Witches* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Creative Books, 2008).

issue among scholars.[57] Such perspectives have frequently been regarded as either positive or negative.

Chief Yisau Adebayo Alapinni prescribed ètùtù Agba, an atonement intended to restore harmony between a woman and the unseen forces believed to influence her fertility. He described rituals involving the slaughter of a lamb, a kid, and a piglet, all generously coated in palm oil and taken to a T-junction precisely at 1:00 a.m.[58] The woman moved without clothing, symbolizing vulnerability and honesty. He emphasized that the remains of these animals were untouchable; consuming them would breach the sacrifice and nullify its purpose. He further explained that the woman would sleep with *epo ebo* (*Erythrophleum suaveolens*) placed beneath her pillow, add it to her bath, and drink water. Another sacrifice took place in the dead of night, at exactly 2:00 a.m., when red oil and the intestines of a goat were again carried to a T-junction, underscoring the rite's liminal nature. This was accompanied by frying *akara* in palm oil; three pieces were used to ritually cleanse the entire body, then discarded at the crossroads. The woman was required to remain silent until morning. The carefully prepared mixtures, often involved in these acts, included *agbaarin* (*Dioclea reflexa*), leaves of *lapa* and *agbalumo* (*Chrysophyllum albidum*) cooked with a female duck, palm oil, and *ata ijosi* (*Capsicum frutescens*), or *Croton lobatus* combined with the root of female pawpaw (*Carica papaya*) and catfish (*Clarias gariepinus)*.[59]

On spiritual beliefs, Chief Yisau Adebayo was clear that divination was vital, for only through consultation could one learn what *ọkọ orun* or *ẹgbẹ*—the spiritual guides believed to accompany individuals before birth must be released from the womb.[60] He described a ritual that was both personal and solemn: carved wooden figures, one male and one female (*ọmọ langidi*), tied together with *ìlàrùn* (a cotton comb) using black and white thread, symbolizing the balance of forces that govern life. She would offer a prayer of motherhood to the carved sculpture and cast it into a flowing stream, not looking back until she departs. In this ritual logic, fertility was not forced but petitioned for, entrusted to moving water and unseen companions, with the woman's obedience, composure, and faith forming the final and decisive elements of the cure. These herbal practices reveal their roots in Yorùbá healing traditions and ongoing engagement with changing social and religious worlds. As argued by Tolulope Fadeyi, Yorùbá reproductive medicine, thus, was as much a moral and spiritual endeavor as a medical one, shaped by knowledge, experience, and sustained patient involvement.[61]

Indigenous Knowledge and Herbal Medicine in a Changing Yorùbáland

Local people's knowledge of their health, illnesses, and diseases, also known as indigenous

[57] See Margaret T. Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 177–78; Taiwo Mankinde, "Motherhood as a Source of Enpowernment of Women in Yoruba Culture," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 13, no. 2 (2004): 170; and Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts*, 13-14.

[58] Oral Interview with Chief Yisau Adebayo Alapinni, 72, Jagun-Olukoyi of Ikoyi, Osun State, August 24, 2025.

[59] Oral Interview with Chief Yisau Adebayo Alapinni.

[60] Oral Interview with Chief Yisau Adebayo Alapinni.

medical knowledge, is vital for improving maternal health. Following the United Nations' declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples in 2007,[62] the recognition of traditional medicine and the safeguarding of herbal plants were promoted as valuable cultural heritage, without discrimination. In Yorùbáland, traditional medical practitioners have called for integrating indigenous knowledge into Western obstetric practices.[63] On an individual level, efforts have been made to orally pass down this knowledge to younger generations. Despite these initiatives, the cultural and epistemic importance of indigenous medical knowledge remains underappreciated within Western medicine. The historical study of Yorùbá medicinal practices shows how environmental changes, colonial influence, and technological progress have impacted the indigenous health system. Herbal medicine was used to meet the community's economic, biological, and spiritual needs. As Anthony Buckley notes, the main aim of Yorùbá medicine is to eliminate *kokoro* (germs or insects) and *aran* (worms) from the body, as they interfere with processes like digestion and fertility.[64] Buckley describes traditional Yorùbá ideas of the human body as similar to a cooking pot prone to overflowing. He explains that the female monthly blood flow is essential for insects and worms to overflow their containers. In this context, the female menstrual cycle is seen as a physiological process that allows harmful agents to leave the body. Herbal decoctions, called *egboogi*, played a crucial role in regulating fertility, preventing conception problems, and reducing maternal mortality.

Understanding indigenous medical knowledge requires attention to the social contexts in which it was conceived and produced both before and after colonization. During these periods, traditional healers served as crucial mediators in safeguarding the cultural legacy of the Yorùbá people, not only at the threshold of British invasion but also throughout the colonial period and into modern times. This reality challenged the Eurocentric view of insurmountable differences between indigenous lifestyles in British colonies before and after invasion. On the other hand, the role of 'history' in stabilizing the cultural meanings and values of indigenous medical knowledge became increasingly significant.

A seemingly justified explanation of the role of history in stabilizing indigenous medical knowledge has sparked a lasting debate among scholars about the nature of the indigenous knowledge system itself. On the one hand, it is referred to as traditional herbal knowledge; on the other, it is positioned within a pre-colonial, non-modern framework. The implication of this term has led to viewing it as static. In response, Edward Said argues that "the elusive nature of the past and the uncertainty that characterized the past, or whether it continues or has concluded,

[62] United Nations, "United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," accessed November 11, 2025, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html.

[63] Fadeyi, “Indigenous Knowledge and Healing,” 183-185.

[64] Anthony D. Buckley, *Yoruba Medicine*, 2nd ed. (New York: Athelia Henrietta Press, 1997).

albeit in different forms, gives rise to traditions and indigenous African knowledge systems."[65] Said further explores the past as an attempt to uncover African indigenous institutions, leading to a reorganization of knowledge. According to George Sefa Dei, this knowledge encompasses the spiritual, material, and non-material aspects of existence, emphasizing that indigenous knowledge is not static.[66]

Oral tradition has long been crucial in preserving historical and medicinal knowledge in Yorùbáland. Jan Vansina consistently highlights the importance of oral tradition from past generations as an authentic source of historical information. He describes oral traditions as accounts from the past that transcend current generations. Oral tradition can be viewed as history itself, not merely a source.[67] Since oral societies lacked writing systems, they preserved their history through oral transmission. It provides a reservoir of evidence from which historians can select relevant and meaningful material to reconstruct the past and write history. Gerald Vizenor's interest in oral tradition is to explore the survival of knowledge. Vizenor agrees with Vansina that oral traditions should be preserved because they verbally reconnect us with the past.[68] However, this issue has now resurfaced within the context of reproductive politics, as historians and custodians of oral tradition are called to offer solutions to major maternal health crises through their historical knowledge.

The transmission of indigenous medical knowledge, an oral tradition, was undertaken by priests, diviners, herbalists, Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs), local pharmacists, and elderly people. In centralized kingdoms like Yorùbáland, the creation and dissemination of knowledge were controlled and regulated because of their cultural and economic importance. Such traditions may be passed on informally at home, within the family, or during ceremonies such as marriages and naming rituals. These are often linked with initiation through age grades, secret societies, puberty rites, or during the training and apprenticeship of future traditional healers.

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[65] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), 1.

[66] George Sefa Dei, "Indigenous Knowledge Studies and the Next Generation: Pedagogical Possibilities for Anti- Colonial Education," *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 37, (2008): 5-13. Other scholars have written about the dynamic nature of indigenous herbal medicine. One example is Rachel Opeyemi Odunlade and Christopher Okiki's article, which explores how traditional herbal healers, such as *elewe omo*, acquire the knowledge of herbal medicine. A distinctive argument raised in the article is that not only is herbal medicine and knowledge dynamic but also free of any secrecy or spiritism. On their part, Saheed Amusa and Charles Ogidan argued that the resilience of Yoruba indigenous medicine and knowledge is overwhelming and plays an integral role in health management in contemporary Yoruba land, despite the great influence of modernization, colonization and Western medicine. See Racheal Opeyemi Odunlade and Olatokunbo Christopher Okiki, "Exploring the Role of Information Managers in Knowledge Transfer and Preservation among The 'Elewe Omos' (Indigenous Herbal Medicine Practitioners) of the Yorubas in Nigeria," *Journal of Information and Knowledge Management* 9, no. 4 (2018): 142-159; Fadeyi, "Indigenous Knowledge and Healing," 180-195; and Saheed Amusa and Charles Ogidan, "Yoruba Indigenous Medical Knowledge: A Study of the Nature, Dynamisms, and Resilience of Yoruba Medicine," *Journal of Knowledge Economy* 8, no. 3 (2017): 977–986.

[67] Vansina's definition of oral tradition connotes that historical knowledge must have passed down or been stored by more than a generation or century and that such knowledge cannot be found in the present except they investigate the past. See Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1985), 27.

[68] Gerald Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance," in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln,Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1-23.

Although few media exist to preserve this knowledge, the tendency to balance the ongoing dynamic of lived change with the cultural need to remain objective is crucial.

As stories of historical figures and events become part of oral tradition, their accuracy regarding chronology, objectivity, and interpretation can be influenced. This is evident in the evolving cultural processes that have shaped society over time. A perspective includes different interpretations of the role of *Aje* (witches) in supporting pregnancy, reproduction, and motherhood in Yorùbáland. The annual Gelede festival ritual aims to honor *Aje*, with masks symbolizing and celebrating the spiritual powers of women-witches.[69] The traditional dance performance depicts Yemoja, a fertility goddess, who was invoked to perform a ritual due to fertility issues with Oluweri. After the ritual, she gave birth to Efe (a boy) and Gelede (a girl). Lawal Babatunde argues that these rites were preserved and gradually evolved into the Gelede mask dance to address infertility. Naturally, the validity of the story of Yemoja's fertility powers, as mentioned in Odu Ifa, has been questioned by scholars. Supporting this view, Ileana Alcamo suggests that the possession of *Aje* power and elements of *eleiye* by primordial mothers does not equate to the representation of Eve in the Christian biblical account but rather justifies the distortion of the cosmology.[70]

The resilience of oral tradition and indigenous medical knowledge has created opportunities for healers to provide solutions to significant infertility issues caused by malevolent forces. Writing on the literature of sacred cults, Wande Abimbola argues that the Ifa literary and divinatory corpus contains historical evidence of past implements and tools used in Yorùbáland, derived from the personal names of people (Ifa priests).[71] Will Coleman elaborates on this perspective within the context of reproduction and motherhood as reflected in Odu Ifa. In his geometric illustration of the 256 sacred *odus* of scripture, Coleman depicts Ose Meji as a conqueror who empowers women to overcome the trials of infertility and find joy as mothers of children. [72]

From the pre-colonial era to modern times, indigenous medical knowledge has persisted as new ideas about treating diseases have emerged, evolving through a dialogue with changing environments. The capacity of local communities to adapt to shifting circumstances throughout history underscores the broader significance of indigenous knowledge. Yorùbá practitioners of indigenous medicine are included within this understanding. While epistemic responsibility

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[69] Odu Ifa Iwori Meji offers great insights into the mythic origin of the Gelede festival. Such an explanation has aroused thoughts on the roles of aje (witches) as a fertility plower or plunderer. Lawal argues that aje engenders fertility. By recounting Iwori Meji's account of Yemoja, Lawal captures the impact of ritual sacrifice in fertility enhancement. For more details, see Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press,1997), 39.

[70] Ileana S. Alcamo, *Ìyá Nlá, Ìyá Nlá, Primordial Yoruba Mother* (Brooklyn, NY: Athelia Henrietta Press, 2006), 23, 29.

[71] Wande Abimbola, "The Literature of the Ifa Cult" in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. Saburi Oladeni Biobaku (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 41-62.

[72] Will Coleman and Awo Fa'lokun Fatunmbi, *African Traditional Religions: Ifá* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Center - Robert W. Woodruff Library, 2021).

values memory and personal ownership of knowledge, it is essential to recognize that no indigenous knowledge based on oral tradition produced after the British invasion of Yorùbáland can be regarded as a legitimate tradition. The question of who holds authority over a tradition has shaped how history assesses the value of indigenous knowledge, both past and potential.

Along this line, it is appropriate to regard the production and transmission of local medical ideas in Yorùbáland as 'legitimate indigenous knowledge.' Firstly, it is generated through oral traditions, both formally and informally, during the pre-literate era, when no written records existed. Secondly, its development and dissemination served to fulfill the traditional social and cultural mandate of nurturing human lives and society at large. Following encounters with certain leaves and herbs during hunting, hunters and custodians of oral tradition were entrusted with protecting the lives of the people. This knowledge was passed to individuals to help conserve herbs and plants in their environment for human use. It also reflects the shaping of religious and cosmological ideas, with no clear boundary between history, religion, and philosophy. Thirdly, knowledge of herbs has been acquired and, to some extent, enriched by the historical context of religion. Gods and ancestors imparted this knowledge to healers, hunters, and priests, who also established the core institutions of the medical community. This has compelled these practitioners to adhere strictly to the principles laid down by their ancestors to prevent endangering the community's health. Lastly, this knowledge has been transmitted either secretly or openly, illustrating the processes by which pre-colonial indigenous knowledge was transmitted. Memories of fertility rites, sacrifices, incantations, literary verses, and the use of herbs and leaves are now passed down as historical knowledge. Such knowledge was similarly handed down through generations, markedly different from what was obtained during the pre-literate period.

Conclusion

This paper investigates infertility in Southwest Nigeria as a cultural, social, and historical issue. It explores local knowledge systems where women act as healers, diagnosticians, and guardians of reproductive health. Moving beyond biomedical science, it demonstrates how herbal remedies and ritual practices are vital in supporting fertility. Female healers employ ethnobotanical knowledge, herbal medicine, oral traditions, and personal experience to promote fertility and reproduction. It emphasizes that indigenous fertility care and healing roles reflect a consistent worldview.

This paper demonstrates that Yorùbá ideas about infertility and motherhood are well reflected in their cosmology and beliefs; whether originating from natural, preternatural, or metaphysical forces, the influence of malevolent forces cannot be ignored. In this context, Yorùbá female healers served as intermediaries between the community and deities regarding fertility issues. They recognised fertility rituals rooted in local knowledge, performed using herbs, plants, and sacrifices. The Yorùbá conceptualisation of

fertility also laid the foundation for collective efforts by healing institutions to address infertility and promote maternal health. It highlighted how male herbalists (Eeski Awo) assist female healers in fostering fertility.

This paper further asserts that indigenous methods for addressing infertility are dynamic and constantly evolving in response to shifting religious and social beliefs. In Yorùbá cosmology, reproductive wombs are linked to lineage continuity, ancestral worship, and deities such as Osun, Esu, Ifa, Yemoja, and Obatala. The paper argues that Yorùbá women carefully validate and preserve traditional therapeutic knowledge alongside religious expressions. The persistent presence of female healers highlights the cultural understanding of the womb and demonstrates how the transmission and safeguarding of reproductive knowledge continue across generations.

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