



## **Assessing Representation and Learning About Women's History in Two Museums in Osun State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This study focused on the different types of documentation about women's history in museums in Osun State, Nigeria. It identified the types of documentation available about women in the museums; assessed how women were represented in museums documentation; examined how museum visitors considered the representation and identified the types of learning that took place among museum visitors. The population for this study consisted of all museum workers and visitors to the two Federal Museums in Osun State namely: Natural History Museum, Ile-Ife and National Commission for Museums and Monuments, in Osogbo, Osun State Nigeria. Convenient sampling technique was used to select 16 curators and 14 museum visitors from the two museums. Data for this study were collected using interview guide. Findings revealed that there were several documentations about women's history in museums in Osun State that presented women as women of substance and some that detailed the achievements of heroines in Nigerian societies. Findings also showed that some women were presented as weak, some were viewed as traitors, some as wicked and others as helpers/subordinates to men. The study recommends among others, that as museums hold a significant potential in showcasing the significance of women in history and promoting gender equality, curators should present historical women carefully in order to shape discourse around women representation versus their achievements, and thus foreground the value of their heroic contributions to human history.

*Keywords:* gender, women, history, museums, documentation; learning

## Introduction

A museum in its simplest form consists of a building which houses collections of objects for inspection, study and enjoyment. Museums have a long history going back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C., when the first known museum was opened in the University of Alexandria in Egypt. Over the years, however, the museum culture has spread to nearly every part of the world and today it has become uncommon to find any country that does not have a museum, no matter how small it may be. Museums have been described by many authors and organizations as extraordinary places where visitors have an incredible range of experiences and where advancement and diffusion of knowledge, and the enhancement of that awareness engender pleasure and delight. Museum has been described as a non-profitmaking, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education, and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment (Allan, 1960; Arinze, 1999; Perera, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2007).

By function, museums have been described as research institutions, as educational institutions, and as potential collaborators in the national effort to provide education for different individuals. It is a place for the advancement and diffusion of knowledge, and the enhancement of that awareness which affords pleasure and delight. The ideal museum was understood to be a type of school which is advanced for self-instruction and the place where teachers should easily go for help to learn. (American Association of Museums, 1969; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Hein, 2005; Gibbs et al., 2007; Kiev, 2012).

In terms of roles, museums have been described as having the traditional role of collecting objects and materials of cultural, religious and historical importance, preserving them, researching into them and presenting them to the public for the purpose of education and enjoyment. Museums have taken on major educational roles in many countries through programmes and exhibitions intended to benefit various segments of the population. They have also become active preservers of (often vanishing) cultures, not just passive collectors of cultural artifacts (Arinze, 1999; Hein, 2005; ICOM, 2018; Perera, 2013).

In addition to educational activity, museums have a significant, though not always fully developed, role in cultural tourism and leisure. The role of cultural tourism is closely related to educational, although it varies among museums with different work profiles. Art, history, and local lore museums are traditionally attractive for both local

and foreign tourists, whereas most natural history and technical museums are oriented towards the local visitors as well as students. The museum as an institution tells the story of the world and how humanity has survived in its environment over the years. It houses things created by nature and by man and in our modern society, it houses the cultural soul of the nation. It holds the cultural wealth of the nation in trust for all generations and by its function and unique position, it has become the cultural conscience of the nation (Hein, 2002; Arinze, 1999; Perera, 2013).

As a place of preservation; museums, libraries, zoos and parks were created to preserve history that is passed on to future generation, to provide public places for learning and recreation, to offer educational resources for both formal education and promotion of lifelong learning. Cultural institutions were also considered laboratories of learning to be used by scholars (Taylor et al., 2010). Learners bring their own personality and contextually situated perspective when interacting with other learners and with the local narratives located in the commons offered by cultural institutions (Barr, 2004; Elmborg, 2006; Taylor et al., 2010). Today, museums have progressed from being mere spaces where arts and science products are displayed and all treasures of the past are conserved to being informal educational areas and tools for communicating mass culture (Gunay, 2012).

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the museum is an ideal place for promoting learning, distil knowledge and promote scholarship. Learning can be seen as an active participation of the learner with the environment which is what usually happens in the museum. This conception of learning has elevated experience (as distinct from codified information contained in books) to a more important place in the effort to educate. Learning within a museum can be informal, casual, or even accidental as far as the learner is concerned, or non-formal learning opportunities such as decent training programmes and educational lecture series, which are guided by museum-structured objectives. Visitors may leave a museum knowing more than when they arrived because they would have gained knowledge, understanding, insight or inspiration that helps to make a positive difference to their lives. Museum exhibitions, for example, were mounted in support of public campaigns for purposes like health education; showing off of magnificent developments in industry or advances in technology; or to exhibit curiosities, marvels, and wonders for public entertainment (Hein, 2005). Exhibitions are also commonly used to educate individuals about specific content. In museums and zoos, each object or specimen exhibited has its own complex presence, offering the learner the possibility of multiple interpretations.

Investigation of the development of museums from the Ancient Greece to 20<sup>th</sup> Century shows that museums have progressed from merely exhibiting collections to being the centres for observation, learning and questioning (Guany, 2012). The museum shares the responsibility with other educational institutions to enrich learning opportunities for all individuals and to nurture an enlightened, humane citizenry that appreciates the value of knowing about its past, resourcefully and sensitively engage in the present, and be determined to shape a future in which many experiences and many points of view are given voice (Allan, 1960; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Hein, 2005; Vartiainen & Enkenberg, 2013). Museums contain a physical environment that is not usual in our daily lives (Falk 2013). Ideally, these environments which are more active educational systems enable students to connect with their own interests, provide interactive spaces for learning, and encourage in-depth exploration of current or relevant topics on demand (Bell et al. 2009; Guany, 2012).

Education is critical for development, and one of the fundamental objectives of the museum is to educate, and it is only the museum that has the capacity and the ability to impart cultural education effectively as it houses the tools and materials for doing so in its collections (Gibbs et al., 2007). Museums that have been accumulating civilization experience of the humankind for centuries along with universities and scientific and research institutions, represent valuable sources of such information (Gibbs et al., 2007). As a unique intermediary between the object of historical and cultural heritage and the recipient of cultural codes, museums offer almost unlimited possibilities in the area of education.

The representation of women in museums, both globally and locally, has been a subject of significant academic interest (Cannon, 2021). Throughout history, museums have tended to reinforce gender stereotypes whether through a deliberate omission of women generally, or by presenting women in traditional gender roles (Jones & Tabassum, 2024). Globally, studies have revealed that museums have found it customary to favour male achievements and often marginalize or fail to highlight women's contributions (Fleming, 2021). For instance, Porter (2018) notes that narratives in Western museums have tended to privilege male figures with women playing either subservient or domestic roles in them. This exclusion not only distorts historical narratives but also perpetuates gender inequality by denying women visibility in cultural memory. However, there has been a growing recognition of the need to rectify this imbalance. Gender advocacy groups and feminist movements have called for more inclusive and diverse representations in museum collections and

exhibitions (Pei, 2019). Feminist art historians and curators have pushed for the inclusion of women's histories, arguing that museums should reflect the diverse experiences and contributions of women across different spheres of life (Pollock (1988). In response, some Western museums have undertaken initiatives to highlight women's roles, curating exhibitions that focus on women's achievements in art, science, politics, and social movements (Porter, 2018).

In the context of Africa, including Nigeria, the representation of women in museums is influenced by cultural, historical, and social dynamics. Akinwumi (2015) highlights that African museums often mirror the patriarchal structures prevalent in a society, leading to the marginalization of women's narratives. In Nigeria, traditional gender roles have historically confined women to domestic spaces, and this cultural perception is frequently reflected in museum displays (Oyilieze et al., 2024). Women's contributions to religious life, political leadership, and economic development are often underrepresented, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes (Shabliy, 2020). Despite these challenges, there are notable efforts within Nigerian museums to showcase the significant roles women have played in history and culture. For example, the National Museum in Lagos has curated exhibitions that celebrate women's roles in Nigeria's independence movements, traditional leadership, and artistic contributions (Akinwumi, 2015). However, such initiatives are still limited and often lack the depth and breadth necessary to provide a comprehensive portrayal of women's diverse experiences. A critical comparison between global and local practices reveals both similarities and divergences. While Western museums are increasingly embracing feminist approaches to curation, many African museums, including those in Nigeria, are still grappling with deeply entrenched cultural norms that influence their narratives (Mubaya, 2015). Nonetheless, integrating feminist theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality, as discussed by Crenshaw (2018), can aid in addressing these gaps. Intersectionality allows for a nuanced understanding of how overlapping identities such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity shape women's experiences and their representations in cultural institutions.

Feminist theoretical frameworks are pivotal in analysing how museums curate and represent women's histories. Intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (2018), emphasises how overlapping social identities contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Butler (2011), discusses how gender performativity influences societal perceptions of femininity, which can shape how museums choose to portray historical female figures. Postcolonial feminist theory offers valuable insights into how colonial histories have influenced gender representations in African

museums (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005). Mohanty (2003) argues that colonial narratives often imposed Western gender norms on colonized societies, thereby reshaping indigenous gender relations. Museums, as cultural institutions, can either perpetuate these colonial legacies or challenge them by presenting alternative narratives that highlight indigenous understandings of gender and power. Mohanty (2003) further critiques the universalization of Western feminist perspectives, emphasizing that women's experiences are diverse and context-dependent. In Nigerian museums, where colonial histories have shaped cultural narratives, postcolonial feminism can help deconstruct Eurocentric gender norms (Chowdhury-Mohammad, 2022). This approach encourages museums to highlight indigenous gender dynamics and roles, offering more authentic representations. Haraway (1988) argues that all knowledge is influenced by the social position of the knower. Museums can adopt this perspective by acknowledging how curatorial decisions reflect particular viewpoints, often those of dominant groups. By incorporating diverse voices, especially those of women from marginalized communities, museums can offer more nuanced and inclusive exhibitions.

Museums hold significant potential in promoting gender equality by shaping public discourse and challenging societal norms. Sandell (2003) posits that museums can act as agents of social change by curating exhibitions that confront issues of inequality and injustice. Through thoughtful curation, museums can highlight women's contributions across various sectors, thereby challenging traditional gender roles. In the Nigerian context, museums can play a crucial role in redefining gender narratives. Eze (2017) argues that cultural institutions in Nigeria have the power to reshape societal perceptions by showcasing stories of women who have made significant contributions to nation-building. For example, exhibitions that highlight female leaders, entrepreneurs, and artists can inspire future generations and promote gender inclusivity. Museums can engage in community outreach programmes that focus on gender education. According to Hein (2002), educational initiatives within museums can foster critical thinking and promote social awareness among visitors. By organizing workshops, lectures, and interactive sessions that address gender issues, museums can extend their influence beyond their physical spaces. Collaborations with gender advocacy groups can enhance the impact of museum exhibitions. Such partnerships can ensure that curatorial decisions are informed by gender-sensitive perspectives, leading to more inclusive narratives. By adopting these strategies, museums can serve as powerful platforms for promoting gender equality and empowering women in society.

Understanding audience perceptions is crucial for museums aiming to present inclusive and engaging narratives. Falk and Dierking (2013) emphasise that visitors' backgrounds, including their cultural beliefs, educational levels, and personal experiences, influence how they interpret museum content. This understanding is essential for curators who wish to design exhibitions that resonate with diverse audiences. In regions like Osun State, where cultural and religious beliefs significantly impact gender perceptions (Akintunde et al., 2023), museums must consider these factors when curating exhibitions about women. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) suggests that museums should adopt audience-centred approaches, which involve understanding the needs and expectations of different visitor groups. Such approaches can help museums create exhibitions that are not only informative but also relatable and impactful. Moreover, studies have shown that interactive and participatory exhibits can enhance visitor engagement and learning. Bitgood (2016), noted that when visitors actively engage with exhibits, they are more likely to retain information and develop a deeper understanding of the content. Incorporating multimedia elements, storytelling, and hands-on activities can make exhibitions about women's histories more accessible and engaging. According to Macdonald (2010), museums should not shy away from presenting complex narratives, including those that challenge prevailing gender norms. Art museums can foster critical thinking and promote social change by facilitating open discussions and providing diverse perspectives.

The methods used to document and present historical narratives in museums significantly influence how gender is represented. Marstine (2008) argues that traditional documentation practices often reflect patriarchal values, leading to the marginalization of women's stories. To counter this, museums must adopt gender-sensitive documentation methods prioritizing inclusivity and diversity. Oral histories are a valuable tool for capturing women's experiences that may not be documented in written records. According to Thompson and Bornat (2017), oral history projects can provide unique insights into women's lives, particularly those from marginalized communities. By incorporating oral testimonies, museums can present more comprehensive and nuanced narratives. Community-based documentation approaches also play a critical role in ensuring gender-inclusive representations. Crooke (2008) highlights that engaging local communities in the documentation process can uncover underrepresented stories and perspectives. Such participatory methods not only enrich museum collections but also foster a sense of ownership and connection among community members. Additionally, digital documentation

techniques offer new opportunities for inclusive representation. According to Cameron and Kenderdine (2007), digital platforms allow museums to present multiple narratives simultaneously, providing visitors with diverse perspectives on historical events. By leveraging digital technologies, museums can create dynamic and interactive exhibitions that reflect the complexities of women's histories.

Indigenous knowledge systems are essential for understanding women's roles in various cultural contexts. Ndlovu (2011) emphasises that integrating indigenous narratives into museum exhibitions can challenge colonial epistemologies and highlight the contributions of women in sustaining cultural heritage. In African societies; oral traditions, rituals, and cultural practices are primary means of transmitting knowledge. Okonkwo (2016), affirms that these indigenous knowledge systems often emphasize the roles of women in community leadership, spirituality, and economic activities. Museums can incorporate these narratives by collaborating with local communities and cultural practitioners. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge systems provide alternative frameworks for understanding gender relations. Oyewumi (1997) argues that precolonial African societies often had fluid and complementary gender roles that were disrupted by colonial interventions. By highlighting these indigenous gender dynamics, museums can offer more authentic and diverse representations of women's histories. Collaborative curatorial practices are also essential for integrating indigenous knowledge systems. According to Peers and Brown (2003), involving indigenous communities in exhibition planning ensures that representations are accurate and respectful. Such collaborations not only enhance the authenticity of museum narratives but also empower communities by giving them a voice in how their histories are presented.

The representation of women in museums is improving globally, but there is still work to be done in local contexts like Nigeria (Falola & Genova, 2009). Museums in Osun State can become spaces for gender advocacy by curating inclusive narratives celebrating women's contributions. By adopting feminist theories and engaging with local communities, museums can promote gender equality and enrich cultural heritage (Hartley, 2017). Integrating feminist theories into museum studies can enhance understanding of gender construction and representation, challenge patriarchal narratives, and enhance the educational value of museums while promoting gender equality and social justice (Vujadinović & Zaharijević, 2024).

From a feminist museology standpoint, this study examines how museums generate, frame, and disseminate knowledge about gender, particularly women's histories. Sanford et al. (2020) argue that feminist museology subverts the presumption of

museum neutrality by demonstrating how patriarchal norms and power relations shape documentation and exhibitions. Because museums are institutions where informal and adult education occur, feminist museology examines how representations of women are constructed and how they shape visitors' learning experiences. To this end, this study conceptualizes museums as environments of active knowledge production that document practices that are central to shaping historical narratives. Sanford et al. (2020) contend that documentation is not a passive repository of facts, but rather a selective and interpretive process shaped by curatorial decisions and institutional agendas. Feminist museology examines whose histories are recorded, the roles women played within these narratives, and the ways in which they either contest or reinforce prevailing gender stereotypes. Within this approach, feminist museology is regarded as containing three interconnected dimensions, which involve: 1) studying how documentation presents women as actors in the history of our society, or as passive, nurturing, or stereotypical. In its coverage of this work, the museum documents the diversity of women's experiences, which closely relate to social status, cultural roles, and historical contributions. 2) examining how women are represented, whether these representations uphold stereotypical gender roles, and how colonial and postcolonial histories shape depictions of women in Nigerian museums. In this light, representations are considered as culturally and historically situated constructions rather than objective reflections of the past. 3) analysing representations with visitors' knowledge and learning, appreciating museums as places of informal and lifelong study. Learning is conceptualised as situated and conditioned by guests' gender, cultural background, and previous experiences. In this context, visitor's learning is analysed with respect to what is learned about women's roles in history, affective responses to museum narratives, and the extent to which exhibitions stimulate critical reflection on gender relations and inequality. Feminist museology aligns with adult education practices and conceptualises experiential learning and meaning-making as central to visitor interpretation.

Feminist museology theory, therefore, informs museum documentation practices, which, in turn, influence representations of women and how these representations affect visitors' perceptions and learning experiences. Applying this theory to museums in Osun State provides a structured approach to examining how institutional practices shape the visibility of women's histories and the role of museums in promoting gender awareness and social understanding. The study, therefore, attempted to answer the following questions.

- i) What are the types of documentation available about women in the museums?
- ii) How are women represented in museums documentation?
- iii) How do the visitors view women as documented in the museums?
- iv) What types of learnings take place among museum visitors?

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how women's histories are documented and interpreted in two museums in Osun State, Nigeria. A qualitative approach was used because the study seeks to understand the meanings, perspectives and interpretive experiences of museum staff and visitors, which may not be appropriately captured through numerical measures. The two museums in Osun State: the National History Museum, Ile-Ife and the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo, were selected using purposive random sampling technique based on their cultural significance and convenience during the period of the study. The study population comprised museum curators and visitors. The sample for this study consisted of 30 respondents. Sixteen curators (eight from the National History Museum, Ile-Ife) and eight from the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo using purposive random sampling technique as well. The purposive sampling technique was used to select museum workers who have spent at least five years on the job and have experience relevant to the study. Fourteen museum visitors (seven from the National History Museum, Ile-Ife and seven from the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Osogbo) were selected using convenient sampling technique. Convenient sampling technique was used because of the availability of museum visitors and their willingness to participate in the study. The workers and visitors were selected not taking into consideration their level of education. Their educational backgrounds were not considered to be a key factor to determine their level of understanding of the representations in the museums. The participants were categorized into two groups: museum workers and museum visitors. For the purpose of this research, the museum workers were represented as *MW*, while the museum visitors were represented as *MV*. The interview guide tagged "Representation, and Learning about Women's History in Museums in Osun State, Nigeria" was used for the study. Information that was tape-recorded and documented interviews that lasted for 8-15 minutes was drawn from the participants. At the point of interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the research to each of the participants and obtained oral consent from each of them before the interview was conducted. The interviews were tape-recorded. Some of the interviews that were

conducted in the English language were later transcribed, while the ones conducted in the Yoruba language were translated to the English language, and then transcribed. The method of data analysis was content analysis. This involved coding and classification of verbal or behavioural data, for the purpose of summarization and tabulation which were used to analyse the responses on the representation and learnings about women's history in museums in Osun State Nigeria.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Research Question One: What are the types of documentation available about women in the museums?**

Findings from the interview with the respondents showed that, the Education Department in the museum is responsible for visitors' learning in the gallery. The curators provide visitors with necessary information about ancient sculptures that are displayed in the museums. The curators explained histories behind those sculptures. These are some of the responses of the respondents to the research question one:

There may not be many documentations about women like men but there are some that show that women also make significant contributions. (MW 10)

There are many documentations about women but men's own are many than women's objects and the reason is that men are the pillars of the house. People obey men everywhere and whatever they say is the final. (MW13).

In the olden days, it is men that build house, beat drums, mold sculptures, and also in masquerade. Everything you see in this gallery are mostly men's work. (MW14)

"There are tiles made by Luwo Gbagida (a female king) tiles at the entrance of National History Museum Ile-Ife, Olokun's head sculpture in the entrance, Moremi's statue at the back of the palace (MV6).

Adunni Olorisa's documentations (MV4)

Also, documentations like Iyamopo's drawing (like books on women of substance like Susan Wenger, Nike Art Gallery, Moremi,) point to the history of women (MV5)

Moremi's story books in the museum's library" (MW6).

We have documentation, journals, and artefacts on Susan Wenger, Nike Art Gallery, Iya Ibeji, Iyalodes of Osogbo land, Osun, Arugba, Yeye Osun (MW1).

We have the sculptures of Iya Mopo, Osun, Sanponna, Ela, around the groove (MW2) Sculptures in the museum talk about Arugba (Votary Maid), Iya Osun, Aworo Osun, Osun, Olutimeyin, Laroooye (MW3).

Sculptures in the museum and also books in the museum library are about Yemoo, Moremi, Olokun (MW7).

Osun Olomowewe's portrait, the river symbolizes Osun, the monkeys symbolize fertility (MV12).

The types of representations on women in the museum mentioned by respondents were about their heroic deeds and their contributions to solving their society's problems. Moremi a female was a great heroine in the history of Ile-Ife. She helped indigenes of Ile-Ife to defeat warriors from the eastern part of Nigeria. She conquered the war for her people and prevented them from being enslaved. There is a statue of her erected at the back of the palace (Moremi's statue), a community was named after her (Moremi's community), a secondary school was named after her (Moremi High School) and also a female hostel was named after her in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State (Moremi Hall). Arugba Osun used her supernatural powers to help the society by cleansing it from any form of sickness and bringing prosperity to them. Iya Mopo was a very tall woman with supernatural abilities to foresee and prevent evil. She foresaw the war against Osogbo town and prevented it from happening. Women like Olokun, Luwo, Yemoo during their times invented new things for the betterment of their society. Olokun taught the people of Ile-Ife how to make beads, Luwo Gbagida taught them how to make local tiles (which she used to walk on during her time), and Yemoo on her part taught them how to make local pots. Luwo Gbagida (who was the first and last female king in Ile-Ife) during her time was said to be very wicked and cruel and her evil deeds forbade the reign of any other woman as a king in Ile-Ife till date. The Osun goddess was a woman who had powers of fertility and was known for bringing joy to her devotees especially people that were looking for children, therefore she was regarded as a deity. The picture of Osun goddess with drawings of many children attached to it is explained as a symbol of Osun who is goddess of fertility.

The different documentations about women in the museums in Osun State identified by participants can be categorized as follows:

“Textbooks about the story of Moremi”

“Documentations about the life of Susan Wenger (Adunni Olorisa)”

“Journals on the deeds of notable personalities like Iya Ibeji who contributed immensely to the development of Osun Osogbo's Groove.”

“Sculptures in the galleries which talk about our heroes and heroines like Osun Olomoyoyo, Eegun Alatan, Arugba, Opa Oranmiyan, and others.”

“Objects in the galleries are also a reference to some notable past men and women in our society, for example: Osun's pot in the gallery.”

“Lastly, there are artefacts around the galleries which are the artefact of Ela, Sanponna, and Iyamopo in Osun Groove, also Luwo’s tiles and Ori Olokun at the entrance of the Gallery in National Museum Ile-Ife.”

All these documentations are on women of great substance who have contributed immensely to the development of the nation and thus, their sculptures are displayed and represented in the museums. Gender advocacy groups and feminist movements have called for more inclusive and diverse representations in museum collections and exhibitions (Pei, 2019). In response, some Western museums have undertaken initiatives to highlight women's roles, curating exhibitions that focus on women's achievements in art, science, politics, and social movements (Porter, 2018). Globally, studies have revealed that museums have found it customary to favour male achievements and often marginalize or fail to highlight women’s contributions (Fleming, 2021). For example, it was noted that the documentation of the men was more than that of the women and that men were the pillar of the society. Women’s contributions to religious life, political leadership, and economic development were often underrepresented, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes (Shabliy, 2020). According to Macdonald (2010), museums should not shy away from presenting complex narratives, including those that challenge prevailing gender norms.

### **Research Question Two: How are women represented in the museums?**

Data collected concerning research question two were analysed through coding and the themes that emerged were documented. The process of coding and the themes are shown in Table 1. The words and phrases that were central to participants’ narratives and the purpose of this study are bolded in Table 1.

**Table 1: How women are presented in the museum**

<b>Participant Codes (Words, Phrases, and Sentences)</b>	<b>Theme</b>
MV4 They are being presented as strong most especially the Arugba who portrayed strong woman’s virtues.	Women as symbolic power
MV5 women are strong and powerful.	Women as strong and powerful
MV10 They are presented as brave and very industrious	women as brave and industrious
MV2 They are regarded as deities especially women like Iya Mopo and Osun, ... they are extraordinary and not like their mates.	Women as deities and extraordinary personalities

Participant Codes (Words, Phrases, and Sentences)	Theme
MV3 They are being portrayed as brave	brave
MV2 Iya Mopo and Osun, (Osun goddess is known for bringing joy to her devotees especially people that are looking for children), and god like Ela cannot be called human being since they are extraordinary and not like their mates.”	Women as deities and extraordinary
MV14 They are presented as brave for example Moremi was a warrior and very great heroine in the history of Ife because she conquered the war and prevented her people from being enslaved by another tribe.	Women as heroines and cultural icons
MV10 This heroic deed can never be forgotten in Ife history); and very industrious, for example women like Olokun, Luwo, Yemoo during their lifetimes invented new things for the betterment of their society. Olokun taught the people of Ile-Ife how to make beads; Luwo taught them how to make local tiles (which she used to walk on during her time), and Yemoo on the other hand taught them how to make local pots.	Women as industrious
MV8 They are being presented as brave and strong. There is a statue erected at the back of the palace (Moremi’s statue), a community was named after her (Moremi’s community), a secondary school was named after her (Moremi High School) and also a hostel was named after her at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Osun State (Moremi Hostel). All these are done so that history will never forget her and her story will be known by generations to come. .	Women as brave and strong
MV1 They are being portrayed as brave	Women as brave
MV9 They are being presented as brave and strong (except for Luwo Gbagida).	Women as brave and strong
MV7 Some women here are being presented as brave and strong except for Luwo Gbagida, the first and last female king in Ile-Ife who was very strict and wicked during her tenure.	Women as strict and wicked
MV13 women are represented in the museums documentations as strong.	Women as brave and strong
MV6 Women are represented as competent; effective, and well talented personalities;	Women as industrious

Table 1 shows that women were represented in the museums documentations as women who had extraordinary power. According to Hein (2002), educational initiatives within museums could foster critical thinking and promote social awareness among visitors. Amidst these attributes, there are notable efforts within Nigerian museums to showcase the significant roles women had played in history and culture. For example, the National Museum in Lagos has curated exhibitions that celebrate women’s roles in Nigeria’s independence movements, traditional leadership, and artistic contributions (Akinwumi, 2015).

The responses also showed that some women in the museum were being presented as extraordinarily powerful and having great personalities. Museum visitors said that women were regarded to have done and achieved a lot that earned them places in history. Eze (2017) argued that cultural institutions in Nigeria had the power to reshape societal perceptions by showcasing stories of women who had made significant contributions to nation-building. For example, exhibitions that highlight female leaders, entrepreneurs, and artists could inspire future generations and promote gender inclusivity. Museums could engage in community outreach programmes that focus on gender education.

### **Research Question Three: How do the visitors view women as documented in the museums?**

Data collected concerning research question three were analysed through coding and the themes that emerged were documented. The process of coding and the themes are shown in Table 2. The words and phrases that were central to participants’ narratives and the purpose of this study are bolded in Table 2.

**Table 2: How visitors view women as documented in the museum**

<b>Participant Codes (Words, Phrases, and Sentences)</b>	<b>Theme</b>
MV2 When viewing from the religious perspective, women like Arugba, Osun and everything related to Osun are viewed as negative.	Women as negative
MV6 Women are weaker sex; they are not capable and cannot do many things like the other gender. For instance, they cannot participate in all cults.	Women as weaker sex
MV7 Moremi was criticized by Igbo people for exposing their secret. To me, Moremi will be represented as a traitor.	Women as traitor
MV7 “During our tour, we were told about the first female king whose action put an end to female reign, this to me is not a good sign... because of her	Women as dominating

Participant Codes (Words, Phrases, and Sentences)	Theme
<p>dominating ability in Ile-Ife. If she had done it right women might still continue to have a say in the kingdom by being crowned Kings.”</p> <p>MV9 The female King Luwo should have done well during her time but we were told that her tenure did not favour the people at all, and that is why female never rule in the kingdom again, this is because you know we women seem to make things difficult and don't take matters too easy.</p>	Women as dominating
<p>MV5 Positive (and also negative since Moremi was criticized by Igbo people for exposing their secret) but to her people, she is a saviour.</p>	Women as traitor
<p>MV14 So, men are naturally superior to women. Women are seen as helpers to men according to the bible too. And women are forbidding to participate in some traditional rites/ Rituals. Islam also supports it that it is men (Alfa) that should go out, women (Eleha) should stay at home. So, religion and culture support men than women.</p>	Women as weaker sex
<p>MV12 Both men and women should work together... an instance of this can be seen in the oracle when the other gods left Osun alone because of her gender and things get difficult for them until they accommodate Osun...it now can have both negative and positive side, women can start to gossip about men and may want to take over forgetting that men are supposed to be their head according to the creation and the bible.</p>	Women as weaker sex
<p>MV11 Museum is a place where we put objects about traditional culture. Our society respects and gives more glory to men. Our brave ones are usually men, most activities in the Yoruba land talks about men... women have also tried as we can see here.</p>	Women as weaker sex
<p>MV13 Women are contributing theirs to the society but...Men are usually king and masquerade, warriors, men wrote more stories in the olden days... the society gives more honour to the male gender...we have heard it in oral history that men dominate... our fingers are not equal and women are taken out of the ribs of men...Men are the head here.</p>	Women as weaker sex
<p>MV10 It is not all things that women can do especially in the traditional rituals.</p>	Women as weaker sex

It should be noted that how people perceive and view circumstances, phenomenon and situations differ from one individual to another, from one society to the other in relation to the context in which such situation occurs. This is so because people's exposure, cultural background and religious belief differ. For instance, Osun as well everything related to the goddess was perceived as an act of sin against God by some

religious sects. Findings also revealed that workers in the grove are viewed as idol worshippers because of their relationship with Osun. This is so because Western religion frowns and views anything pertaining to traditional religion and traditional gods as a sin against God.

Findings also showed that women were regarded as the weaker sex that were not capable of performing some spiritual rites like their male counterparts. Women were said not to be strong enough to carry out some tasks like the other gender and this is why they sometimes referred to them as the weaker sex. However, throughout history, museums had tended to reinforce gender stereotypes whether through the omission of women generally, or by presenting women in traditional gender roles (Jones & Tabassum, 2024).

Findings also showed that no matter the level of women's achievement, men would still and forever have upper hand. In the context of Africa, including Nigeria, the representation of women in museums was influenced by cultural, historical, and social dynamics. Akinwumi (2015) believed that African museums often mirrored the patriarchal structures prevalent in a society, leading to the marginalization of women's narratives. In Nigeria, traditional gender roles had historically confined women to domestic spaces, and this cultural perception was frequently reflected in museum displays (Oyilieze et al., 2024).

Some women unfortunately were viewed by museum visitors as traitors in the likes of Moremi, who betrayed Igbo people to save her own people. Moremi was said to have performed extraordinarily by saving her people through cunningly deceiving the Igbo king who got married to her. However, her opponent saw her as a traitor who deceived and revealed their secrets. Therefore, some respondents said that Moremi could not be viewed in the positive way. Moremi, to the Yoruba tribe was a heroine and saviour, but was seen as a traitor by the Igbos.

Findings also showed that women were viewed as dominating and wicked in the case of Luwo Gbagida (who was the first and last female king in Ile-Ife) who was regarded as very wicked and cruel and this evil deed of hers put paid to the reign of any other woman as king in Ile-Ife till date. However, within the history of Yoruba, Obatala who was the first king in Ile-Ife was reputed to be extremely strict and cruel. He oversaw the killing of many people and his reign was said to very difficult for the people. So, stigmatising Luwo's reign alone as being bad and blaming her for putting an end to female's reign was an act of gender inequality since she was not the only king that ruled with iron hand.

## Research Question Four: What types of learnings take place among museum visitors?

Data collected concerning research question three were analysed through coding and the themes that emerged was documented. The process of coding and the themes are shown in Table 3 below. The words and phrases that were central to participants' narratives and the purpose of this study are bolded in Table 3.

**Table 3: Types of learnings that take place among museum visitors**

Participant	Codes (Words, Phrases, and Sentences)	Theme
MV4	We can get fact about culture and heritage. I have learnt through the factual representation of what have happened in the past (for example Adunni Olorisa (Susan Wenger).	Culture and heritage.
MV8	It educates a lot. I learnt that some of the technology that we now use have been invented years ago before the advent of the white men like tiles that was invented by Luwo Gbagida.	Ancient technology
MV7	It helps me to relate with our culture. I have learnt about women's deeds like Moremi.	Culture
MV1	There are lessons about tradition and culture. I have learnt about life, culture and how to relate with elders.	Tradition and culture.
MV6	It educates us about our tradition. I have learnt about the relentless deeds of past women like Moremi, Yemoo, Osara, Olokun.	Tradition and relentless deeds
MV9	It reveals the deeds of our past legends. I have learnt about the deeds of women even more than that of men.	Deeds of our past legends.
MV10	The museum embodies our culture and tradition. I have learnt that we should not abandon our culture.	Culture and tradition
MV3	... "the sculptures here teach us history about our past heroines and the usefulness of the Yoruba idols, that they are not totally bad as oppose what people think of them, and also what I know about them before coming to the museum here.	History about our past heroines
MV2	Because it educates and enlightens us. I have learnt that there is freedom here and it is lively. I have also learnt about Osun Osogbo goddess.	Osun Osogbo goddess.
MV12	I learnt that there is difference between culture and religion. I also learn that the idols judge the evil doers instantly.	Culture and religion

Participant	Codes (Words, Phrases, and Sentences)	Theme
MV5	I have learnt about heroic deeds of our past legend and the usefulness and the effectiveness of the Osun River.	Heroic deeds of our past legend
MV11	I learnt about Osun sculpture of fertility and the river which point to Osun goddess	Osun goddess

Museum had been established in literature as a place where people learnt. This therefore meant that museum was very significant in our educational system. It enhanced and facilitated teaching and learning in a classroom setting and also in our day-to-day life. When visitors were asked what they had learnt so far, some explained that museum was an ideal place of acquiring knowledge.

Findings showed that respondent identified ancient technology in the examples of the local tiles that were invented by Luwo Gbagida, and also the local beads that were made by Olokun. The museum shared the responsibility with other educational institutions to enrich learning opportunities for all individuals and to nurture an enlightened, humane citizenry that appreciated the value of knowing about its past (Vartiainen & Enkenberg, 2013).

Learnings about tradition, cultures, past leaders and their deeds had also been listed as part of what people learnt in the museums. Investigation of the development of museums from the Ancient Greece to 20th Century showed that museums had progressed from merely exhibiting collections to being the centres for observation, learning and questioning (Guany, 2012).

Museums contained a physical environment that was not usual in our daily lives (Falk 2013). Ideally, these environments which were more active educational platforms enable students to connect with their own interests, provide interactive spaces for learning, and encourage in-depth exploration of current or relevant topics on demand (Bell et al. 2009; Guany, 2012).

Museum was viewed as a place for history about our past heroines. Findings showed that after the tour, one of the respondents confirmed that he could now view Yoruba idols who were once women in the past in a positive way now, all thanks to his learning in the museum.

Findings also showed that women as cultural ambassadors and repositories of traditional knowledge were also documented in history about our past heroines. This is important because respondents confirmed that was that Yoruba tradition and all

their idols were totally bad and must not be associated with, but since some of them started coming to the museum, they had seen the usefulness of some of these idols. In the same vein, museums had taken on major educational roles in many countries through programmes and exhibitions intended to benefit various segments of the population; they had also become active preservers of (often vanishing) cultures, not just passive collectors of cultural artifacts (Arinze, 1999; Hein, 2005; ICOM, 2018; Perera, 2013).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The result revealed that there were different sculptures, objects, journals, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, artefacts and all sorts of documentations about women in the museums. It also revealed that women were presented in museums documentation as symbolic, powerful, strong and brave and extraordinary, but there are few who were viewed as negative and some as traitors while some were seen as wicked. Finally, museums were very significant in education and documentation of both tangible and intangible history as it enhances people's knowledge about culture, tradition, and the heroic deeds of the past legends.

This study concludes that museum is significant in education, because vast knowledge like learning about our traditions, cultural heritage, inventions in our various local areas, knowledge about wars and histories, and so on can be acquired in the museums. Different learnings about our cultural heritage which portray women generally as very strong, brave and extraordinary personalities and sometimes as traitors are all in the museums documentations for people to see and learn from. All these show that museum is significant in our educational system.

Based on the findings on the representations and learnings about women history in museums in Osun State Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. Women's representations should not be viewed from the religious perspective.
2. Cultural heritage should be promoted through representations about women in the museums without any bias.
3. Visitors and museum guides must not be gender bias when learning about the objects displayed in the museums; equal credit and equal explanation should be given to both genders.
4. Museums hold a significant potential in promoting gender equality therefore curators should shape discourse around women representation to show the value of the heroic contributions of women to human history.

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