

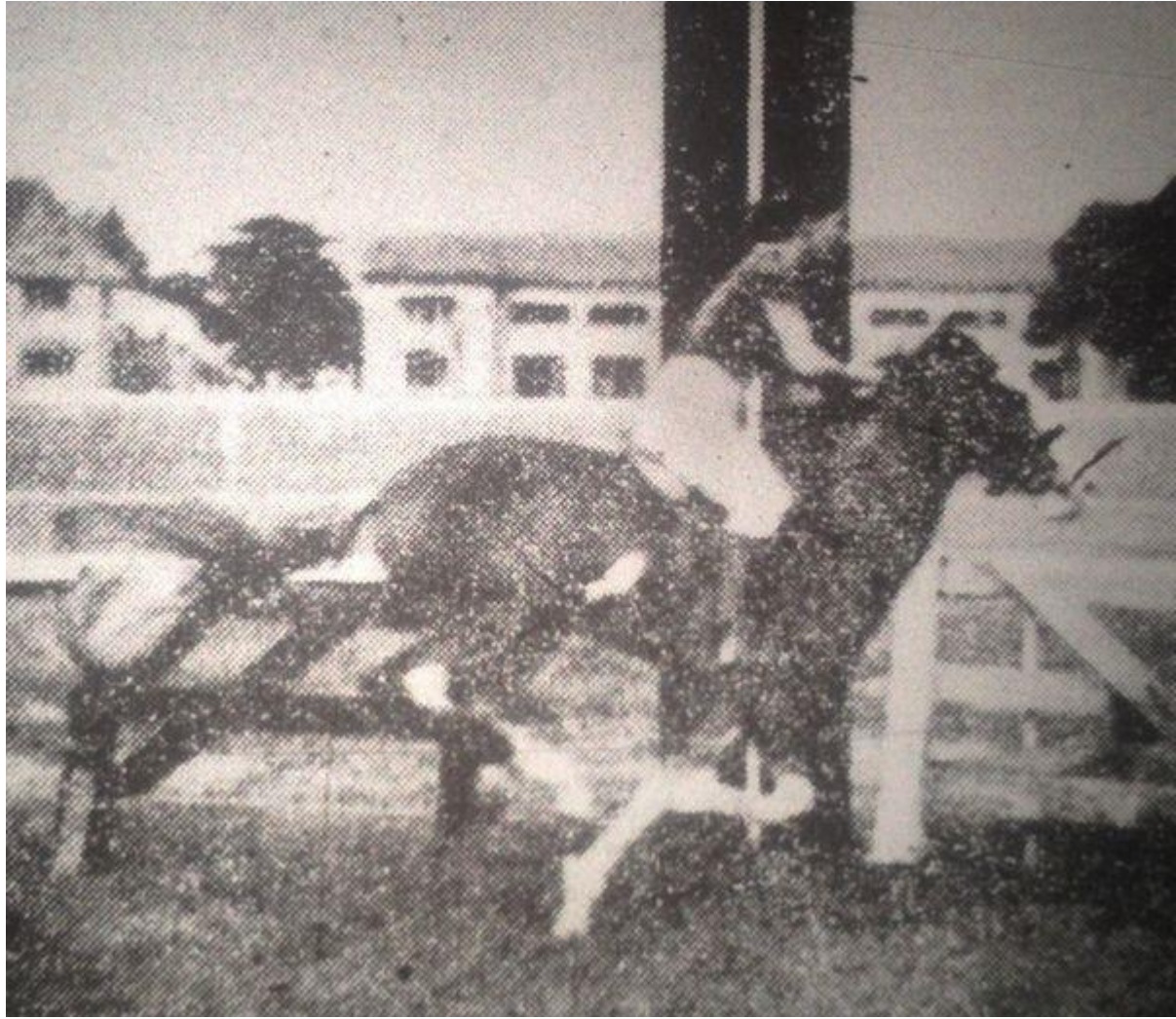
Of Gender, Race, and Class: Two Women's Fight to Decolonize the Horse in Southern Nigeria  
(Posted on Facebook on 03/02/2019)

Just when you think you know enough about gender and prejudice in historical perspective, you are confronted with new evidence that compels you to rethink the follies of the past that continue to shape present realities. For countless years, men have monopolized important sites and symbols of power (education, politics, economy) to establish and sustain patriarchy. Yet, how the image of the horse was grafted into the politics of imperial masculinity is fascinating. During the colonial era, the horse held a trans-cultural identity as the noblest and the most aristocratic of all animals. Thus, many thought it must be the exclusive preserve of men. However, those who subscribed to this notion were ignorant of some facts—Queen Amina of Zazzau (Zaria) did not fight her 16th century wars on her feet, but on horseback. We know that Omosa, Bashorun Ogunmola's daughter, was firing rifle (not Dane gun) and kicking butts from horseback in 1880s Ibadan.

Activist Adunni Oluwole, founder of the Nigeria Commoner's Liberal Party, was among the few women who attempted to de-masculinize the horse in 1940s and 1950s Lagos. She would ride on horseback on regular days, "chin up and looking straight ahead without caring." "Taunted by men, she was unmoved...It took a woman of unusual courage to do this in Nigeria of that period," a writer established. Oluwole was making an uncommon political statement that challenged the prevailing gender of horse respectability.

Similarly, a white woman named G. Winterbottom, was a professional jockey in 1940s Lagos. Praised by the press as a person "whose expert jockeyship has become a matter of common knowledge and admiration," Winterbottom was suspended by the Lagos Race Club in 1947 because she was beating the men on the turf. She attempted to disrupt prevailing gender norms by expanding women's participation in horse racing beyond their conventional roles as spectators, horse owners, and wives of colonial officers and African elites. A press war between the "Nigerian Daily Times" and "Daily Service" over Winterbottom's saga would humble people of the 21st century who think they understand gender politics better than their predecessors.

For Oluwole and Winterbottom, horsepower was real power.





Miss Adunni Oluwole on horse back.

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