

## When History Roars Back: Remembering the Lioness of Lisabiland (04/16/2019)

70 years ago, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's Abeokuta Women's Union forced the Alake (king) Ademola to abdicate his throne during a massive uprising against women's taxation. Happening twenty years after another equally significant event (the Women's War of 1929 in southeastern Nigeria), the Egba women's uprising challenged the limit of imperial power. The visual narrative of this event by pioneering Nigerian cartoonist Akinola Lasekan is as fundamental as the real actions of the women. Artists usually tap into the animal world to express human lived experience partly because of the limitation of the human world. While nature is inexhaustible and superfluous, the human world has a limit or a set boundary. Hence, the metaphor of power relations in the animal kingdom gives an extended meaning to human story. Lasekan wants his audience to see what animality actually constitute in real terms by translating his mental impression into both human and animal bodies.

The artistic feminization of the predator (lioness) mauling the prey (goat) was inevitable because colonialism, a thoroughly-violent edifice, conceived women and men as separate bodies—biologically and socially. In addition, Lasekan viewed Kuti as a lioness in both the human and animal worlds because he was convinced that art could give complex meaning to everything, including language. Thus, the visual impression of the abdication of the Alake, especially the animal iconography, takes a historian a step closer to fully exhuming the unprecedented event of 1949. The predatory life in the animal kingdom is ambivalent—it can be benevolent and violence. Hence, there is honor in violence, depending on context and circumstances.

The events of 1929 and 1949 deserve commemorations. We should be talking about them within the context of change and continuity in gendered politics since the precolonial times. We should be asking new questions, guided by a critical understanding of the past. We should be saying something new.

“Anybody can say what he likes about feminine weakness. But I shall be the last to wait for a lioness”—Akinola Lasekan.