Chapter 2

Understanding Culture to Fight Patriarchy: Knowledge and Practice of *Oríkì* among Yoruba Women in South Africa

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Introduction

Women's knowledge and understanding of oral arts and the culture that produces them may be the key to advocating against and eradicating the oppressive aspect of cultures and reinforcing the positives. This is especially true where women have to be at the forefront of fighting against patriarchal practices. Such agitation is better done from a position of knowledge, if not power. Weapons to debunk the practices are often embedded in the oral arts, known by different names in different cultures. In Yorubaland, most of the cultures and traditions are embedded in the *Oríkì orile* of the people, as it doubles as the oral repository of history and an identity marker for different lineages in Yorubaland. Identity lies at the heart of every person, whether it is acknowledged or not. As humans, we have an innate desire to belong to someone or something or have someone or something belong to us. We crave nomenclatures to label us as this or that, and we hold on tightly to those identification markers that we like and cherish while attempting to wipe away those we think are a burden to us. Nowhere does this play out more than in the diaspora, where there is a need to blend in or stand out depending on individual preferences and prevailing circumstances.

That women are the main players in the drive to maintain cultural identities and native languages is a known fact (Holmes 1993: 161; Roberts 2005: 260; Hatoss 2003: 75). They are also often champions of upholding language use, sustaining or eradicating cultural practices, and maintaining peace (Fawole 2018: 100). However, they cannot play this role effectively if they have little or no knowledge of the culture or language in question. A lack of knowledge about some of these practices may be the reason why some women continue to insist on cultural practices that are harmful to women, even in the diaspora. Many people in diaspora either largely abandon their culture to assume their host country's culture, become very westernised and lose their identities in

the process, or go to the opposite extreme of nostalgic practice of their culture without adequate understanding of such practices except for the fact that 'it is our culture'.

An example of this may be found in female genital cutting (FGC), which is practised by some people, even in the diaspora. Reasons given for the continuation of cultural female-inimical practices in the diaspora often range from the need for identity, to a desire to uphold traditions, and a lack of knowledge about these practices in their home cultures is often not considered a factor in continued practice. Cassman (2007: 128) argues that the drive to eliminate the practice of FGC may be failing because there is a lack of 'a true understanding of FGC—why it began and why it continues'. She believes that both the proponents of the practice and those fighting to end it need to have a firm understanding of the issues surrounding it to willingly give it up and succeed in stopping it. If those who insist on continuing the practice understand its origin and its ill effects on women, they may be more receptive to ending its practice in the diaspora and in their home countries. Knowledge of these traditions would guard against a nostalgic and adamant return to patriarchal practices in the diaspora.

It is a known fact that women are often the enforcers of practices that are harmful and demeaning to womenfolk. Nkealah (2016: 7365–7366) questions the clamour of some women for cultural practices in her critique of Acholonu's motherist theory of 1991. She wonders how women in the diaspora find it 'easy to glamourise the life of a rural woman' when they have escaped such a life. Nkealah notes that it is 'ironic that someone so far removed from the rural environment can be waxing lyrical about the innocence and unsophistication of its women'. Nkealah further argues that Acholonu's presentation of rural African women is unrealistic. The development of such romanticised ideas about cultural practices can be linked to a lack of understanding of such practices and a sense of nostalgia where everything appears beautiful from afar.

Haideh Moghissi (1999: 210) reports that in the diaspora, 'patriarchal values and sexist norms are revitalized within the family as well as in the community, and the voices of dissent are muted and dismissed as outside influences'. Thus, in cases where people feel the need to be recognised as distinct groups, traditions and cultural practices are likely to be enforced for fear of being rendered faceless in society. Males are often the ones at the forefront of upholding cultural practices in the diaspora, especially if they favour the patriarchal system. A combination of yearning for home, a lack of knowledge about some practices and a desire to maintain identity in the diaspora help to foster the practice of cultures and traditions inimical to women in the diaspora. This chapter will focus on exploring the knowledge that women in the diaspora have of their traditional oral arts as repositories of historical facts and cultural practices.

Background

The practice of oral art has been an effective way for women to teach children language and literary skills and to pass on historical and cultural facts. Different forms of oral literature, like songs and various genres of poetry, have been learnt by women through oral literary performances. While many forms of oral art are passing into oblivion, their usefulness cannot be overlooked, and efforts should be made to ensure their continuity.

Yoruba *Oríkì* and Zulu *Izibongo*

Zululand is home to many foreigners, including the Yoruba people from the Southwest region of Nigeria. Apart from the isiZulu language being of the same Niger-Congo language family, there are many similarities in the cultures of the two African groups. One of these similarities that the Yoruba community from Nigeria residing in King Cetshwayo district share with their hosts, the Zulus, is the culture of praise-singing. This is called *Oríkì* in the Yoruba culture and *Izibongo* in the Zulu culture. In these cultures, the forms are described as praise poetry. *Oríkì*, as a genre of Yoruba oral literature, is described as descriptive composition of attribution or appellation epithets, pithy or elaborated, which are addressed to a subject that may be human or inanimate (Vidal 1969: 53; Barber 1991: 313). Like in the Yoruba culture, Gunner (1986: 33) refers to the *Izibongo* as 'powerful cultural symbols' that 'appeal in a very direct way to their listeners' emotions and attitudes' as they document many historical facts. Turner (1994: 59) distinguished four different categories: the praise of ordinary people (*izibongo zabantu kumbe izihasho*), of inanimate things (*izibongo zezinto ezingaphili*); of kings and great people (*nezibongo zamakhosi/izibongo zabantu abakhulu abagqamile*); and of clans (*izithakazelo kanye nezibongo*).

Although *Oríkì* and *Izibongo* are generally accepted as praise poetry, it should be noted that they contain, in addition to the praise elements, historical facts, warnings and anticipation for the future. In Yoruba culture, *Oríkì* range from a single word to full-length poetry that employs elaborate use of poetic devices. Olajubu (1978) and Awe (1974) identified different types of *Oríkì*, which are discussed below.

a. *Oríkì abiso* is one of the names given to a child during the naming ceremony on the eighth day. A Yoruba child is given many names, as not only the parents but also the grandparents and, in some cases, other elders in the family name the child. *Oríkì abiso* is given in addition to other

names, and it is often the duty of the paternal grandparents to do so. It is considered a special name and used by parents and elders as a form of endearment. Parents use the *Oríkì* often in greeting the child or when the child has done something that is praiseworthy. Examples are Abike, Arike and Asake for female children and Akanji, Ayinla and Ajayi for male children.

b. *Oríkì oruko* (personal praise name) is the descriptive praise of a person who has previously borne a particular name. It is usually attached to a specific name such that it comes to mind when the name is mentioned. For example, the epithet '*Ogidiolu Onikanga ajipon*' is added to the name Ajayi. Other examples include Ojo, usually praised as '*Olu kuloye*', '*Morenike Akaba*'. All people who bear such names are praised in a similar fashion.

c. *Oríkì inagije* is usually acquired by a person in the teenage years and reflects the negative characteristics of that person. *Alokolohunkigbe* is an example of *Oríkì* for a person who steals. *Agbalowomeri* is used to describe someone who is known to collect bribes.

d. *Oríkì alaje* is similar to the *Oríkì inagije*, but it reflects positive characteristics. It often focuses on the person's physical appearance. An example is *Aguntasolo* for a person who is tall and wears his clothes well. A dark-skinned person is praised as '*adumadan*'; a light-skinned person is called '*apon'bepo're*', while a slim person is referred to as '*opelenge*'.

e. *Oríkì borokinni* consist of praise for all types of things, not just humans. They are words that give vivid descriptions of their subjects. Some of them are extensive descriptions, as is found in the *Oríkì* of a lazy person or the cassava plant. An example of such praise among the Yorubas is for food.

1. *Iyán loúnjẹ*
   Pounded yam is food
2. *Ọ̀kà loògún*
   Oka is medicine
3. *Àìrí rárá*
   Only when there is nothing to eat
4. *Là ń jẹ̀kọ.*
   Do we eat cornmeal

f. *Oríkì orile* is a compilation of the descriptive epithets of a lineage. Each lineage in Yorubaland has its own *Oríkì orile*, which is usually quite long and detailed. It is not only used to praise members of the lineage, but, as Olajubu (2012: 35) noted, it is 'a tool for identity reinforcement, validating the authority of some groups while denying others access to power.' *Oríkì* can perform these functions because the *Oríkì orile* is the 'archives' (Olajubu 2012: 36) of the Yoruba people's history based on their lineages.

g. *Oríkì ilu* was identified by Awe (1974) as referring to praises of places. *Oríkì ilu* is primarily concerned with the foundations and reputations of a town. For example, Idepe (in Okitipupa, Ondo State, Nigeria) has her *Oríkì* as:

1. *Oma Jegun a bean meji, Onaja ke he e waro*
   We are the descendants of Jegun
2. *Ji irere ti le uba bi ne, n'ode usoyen* (Usen)
   We were born at Ode-Usoyen (Usen)
3. *Oma Jegunyomi Abejoye*
   The child of Jegunyomi Abejoye
4. *Oge fifun ye se Oba* Usen
   By the white-robed Jegunyomi The Oba of Usen

Another is the Oríkì of Iwo in Osun State:

1. *Iwo olodo oba, omo ateni gbola, teni gbore nile odidere*
   Iwo, of the river Oba, that spreads mat to receive riches and gifts in the land of the parrots
2. *Iwo ti ko nilekun beni koni kokoro, Eru wewe ni won fi n dele*
   Iwo that has no door or key. They use slaves to guard their homes
3. *Iwo lomo Olola ti n san keke, Iwo lomo oloola ti n bu abaja*
   Iwo children with the keke facial tribal marks, Iwo children with the abaja facial tribal marks
4. *Iwo todidere pepepe tenure te ka rogodoo*.
   Iwo that the parrot tried to pronounce, and its beak curled up.

h. *Oríkì ile* is the praise of homesteads in Yorubaland. Apart from divisions along lineage and town lines, families are also divided into compounds, each with its own praise. An example is Ile Owolake in Ogbmoso, Oyo State. The compound is praised as '*Owolake; omolage*' (We take care of money; we pamper children).

i. *Oríkì orisa*: Lindon (1990) also identified *Oríkì orisa,* meaning *Oríkì* of the gods. He cited the example of *Oríkì* of Sango, the god of thunder and lightning, who has a set of 171 *Oríkì* in which he receives at least 30 different appellations, some of which are repeated several times. For him, the significance of all names in Yoruba culture must be seen as an important ingredient of *Oríkì* or praise. It repeatedly focuses the attention of the worshippers on the person of the *orisa* and helps to direct the whole recital as a prayer to him. The praise hymn may have a short introduction, such as a simple expression of respect and worship and a number of praise names and titles that are used as acclamations. Worship and acclamation may be repeated at some points in the body of the hymn and at the end. This feature also has the effect of focusing attention on the *orisa* as personally present. A set of *Oríkì* for Sango begins thus:

Iba Sango. Olu koso, jigi l(i) oko, ewon.
Sango, I bow down. Chief of Koso! Strong-in-the-farm! Chain!

j. *Oríkì Oluwa* is a category of praise that emanated from the praise of gods as a result of people's conversion from African traditional religions to Christianity and Islam. *Oríkì Oluwa* is a compilation of the names and descriptions of God according to the faith in question. Evangelist Bola Are made this type of *Oríkì* very popular among Yoruba Christians in churches' praise and worship sessions.

As similar as the use of praise poetry is in the Yoruba and Zulu cultures, slight differences are noticed in its composition and performance. Gunner (1979: 239) noted that due to the heroic nature of the contents of the *Izibongo*, they are considered male territory, and women are not documented as performers. This is contrary to the Yoruba culture, where women are the main performers of the *Oríkì orile*, even though they are performed by men as royal chanters or musicians. In the olden days, young wives were expected to learn the praise poem of their husbands' lineages and perform it during family occasions.

Barber (1991: 315) noted that in the Yoruba culture, although men are sometimes found performing *Oríkì*, its chanting remains mainly the domain of women, as the performance of *Oríkì* is often a domestic task for which the performers are not paid. Awe (1974: 333–334) noted the following about women as chanters of the lineage *Oríkì*:

> The wives married into a lineage are traditionally the custodians and transmitters of the lineage's *Oríkì* and the *Oríkì* of the important personalities within it. They are expected to show identification with and pride in their adopted lineage by learning to recite the *Oríkì* of its forebears

Women's role as primary caregivers of children in most families makes them responsible for maintaining and continuing oral literary arts like *Oríkì*. When women cease to practise them or teach the younger generation, the arts will pass into oblivion, and so will the historical facts and cultural practices contained within them. Thus, women are pivotal to the survival of the oral arts, the encouragement of literacy and even the continued existence of languages. This role becomes all the more important in the diaspora, where many people may wish to continue communicating in their native language and practising cultural practices to maintain their identities. It has also been noticed that the art of *Oríkì* performance has reduced greatly in Yorubaland, unlike the Zulu culture, where the *Izibongo* is still considered relevant in contemporary times and is practised at official government functions like the entrance of the President to the National Assembly.

Theoretical framework

Feminists use the concept of 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women. The term literally means 'rule by the father'. In political theory, patriarchy refers to particular organisations of the family in which fathers have the power of life and death over the family members. It can refer narrowly to the husband's supremacy within the family and, therefore, to the subordination of his children and wife. As a broader concept, patriarchy is used to characterise society, which is dominated by men within the family and outside. It characterises a society that reproduces male dominance in all areas of its life, in education, work and in its socio-political institutions (Elson 1995: 1). Muller (1975: 4) offers a broader definition of patriarchy 'as a social system in which the status of women is defined primarily as wards of their husbands, fathers and brothers', where wardship has economic and political dimensions. Ortner (1972: 5) argues that,

> the universality of female subordination the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates to me that we are up against something very profound, very stubborn, something that cannot be remedied merely by rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system, nor even by rearranging the whole economic structure.

Patriarchy, as it exists in different societies, seeks to subjugate women. If society is to be rid of it, women are expected to be at the forefront of the fight against it. Hence the need for feminism in its diverse outlooks.

Types of feminism

Feminism has fragmented into several different schools of thought, often reflecting very different emphases and doctrines. The main schools within feminism have acquired something of an orthodox status. Liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism are the three substantive schools most often cited. It is now advisable to include the more recent views of postmodern feminism as a separate category, partly because these have generated such intense interest over the last decade.

a. **Liberal feminism.** Early feminism, particularly the 'first wave' of the women's movement, was deeply influenced by the ideas and values of liberalism. In the first major feminist text titled A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subject,* Mary Wollstonecraft, argued that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men because they were human beings. Liberal feminism combines feminist ideals with humanist tenets, that is, gender justice based on humanism. The philosophical basis of liberal feminism lies in the principles of individualism, the belief that the individual human is all-important and, therefore, that all individuals are equal. Liberals express this belief in the demand for equal rights: all individuals should enjoy an equal opportunity to enter and participate in public life. Any form of discrimination against women in this respect should clearly be prohibited. Liberal feminism is essentially reformist: it seeks to open up public life to equal competition between women and men. Women are judged not only by their talents and abilities but also by social and economic factors. If emancipation simply means the achievement of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, other forms of social disadvantage, such as social class and

race, are ignored. Liberal feminism may therefore reflect the interests of white, middle-class women in developed societies but fail to address the problems of working-class women or those in the Third World.

b. Socialist feminism. Socialist feminism improves the understanding of relations between class and sex. Friedrich Engel's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* pointed out that women are often looked at and treated as the property of men. As such, a woman's position is reduced to that of a commodity meant to be used and disposed of. It advocates the economic independence of women. Socialist feminism explains the nature and modes of women's oppression. According to it, women's oppression is deeply embedded in existing social and economic structures. It challenges the power relations in the patriarchal capitalist system and argues that equality of opportunity can never be possible in society as long as there are fundamental differences in wealth, privilege and power. Thus, socialist feminists' struggle is not against male domination alone but against systems of exploitation that disempower women.

c. Radical feminism. Radical feminism is chiefly concerned with the issues arising out of pornography, prostitution, sexual harassment, rape and women battering. To be liberated from sexual oppression, radical feminists prescribed a strategy to create an exclusively female sexuality through various methods. They are against heterosexuality and traditional roles of women as faithful housewives and child-bearing machines. Radical feminism sees the oppression of women as the fundamental and most basic form of oppression. All other forms of oppression stem from male dominance. The purpose of this oppression is to obtain psychological ego satisfaction, strength and self-esteem. The radical feminists argue that women's liberation requires a biological revolution. They believe that only through technology can women be liberated from the fundamental inequalities of the bearing and rearing of children.

d. Postmodern feminism. The late 1980s saw a steady growth of feminist interest in post-structuralism, deconstruction theory and postmodernism, initially from the areas of literary and cultural criticism. Postmodern and post-structuralist feminism concentrates on the paradigm of language. Its concern is primarily with deconstructing existing language and texts. Language is a potent weapon to undercut and expose patriarchy across the whole domain of culture and literature.

e. **African feminism.** Several feminisms have been identified on the African continent, reflecting the complexities that simultaneously being an African and a feminist (or even African and a woman) entail. Okome (1999) claims that intellectual feminism, in condemning aspects of African culture such as polygamy, genital excision and forced or early marriages, echoes the paternalistic attitude and tone of 'Western' feminists towards African women. Such feminism, which opposes intellectual feminism, also tolerates practices that violate women's rights recognised in many international protocols. So, while popular feminism corresponds to African women seeking to maintain their cultural identity, opening up spaces for women to earn a living and properly care for their families, and seeking better living conditions for women and children, this valuing of family and culture above all else can also include being involved in polygamous relationships and women's own acceptance of genital mutilation and very early marriage.

Contemporary theorisations of African feminism

Feminism in Africa can be seen to originate from a range of sources, in addition to the 'Western' women's movement. These include Africa's colonial and postcolonial history, including its own nationalist movements, as well as subsequent and socio-political factors that include political activism like that of Winnie Mandela and Albertina Luthuli and their fight against apartheid in South Africa and competing for and winning the highest office in the land like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia. Steady (2005) argues that feminism is a strategy African women have developed and adopted to fight for their survival. Most Black women in Africa and the diaspora have developed these characteristics—not always by choice but because of circumstances and the need to challenge the status quo without abrogating their time-honoured roles as nurturers in society.

The chapter is framed by African feminism, which, according to Ekpa (2000: 29, cited in Nkealah 2006: 135), 'seeks to give the woman a sense of herself as a worthy, effectual and contributing being'. African feminism springs from a background of rejection of the feminist movement developed in the Western world, which, according to Oyekan (2014: 1), developed in three waves. The first wave was from the 19th century to the early 20th century, the second from 1960 to the late 1980s and the third from the early 1990s to the present. The first and second waves were rejected due to the belief that they catered to the needs of white, Western, educated women and were not very suited to women of colour. This perception has led to the evolution of various theories for a new agenda, as detailed in Nkealah (2017).

African feminism aims to reshape cultures for the benefit of women in various communities. African feminisms consist of various forms of feminism targeting African women both in Africa and in the diaspora. Nkealah (2016: 7365) notes that these types of feminism are 'modelled on oral literature, cultural practices, familiar flora and fauna, indigenous customs and religious philosophies that form the totality of the theorists' African worldview.' Feminism, in whatever form, involves opposing patriarchal practices and emancipating women. Fighting patriarchy requires background knowledge of the practices and the ability to use knowledge wisely.

In this chapter, I subscribe to the 'cameline' feminist model proposed by Nkealah (2017: 122). She bases her model on the characteristics of a camel, which has the 'ability to draw on its own resources to survive in extremely harsh conditions and to protect itself from danger' (Nkealah 2017: 123). She argues that the camel 'is structurally designed to withstand extreme environmental conditions.' In addition to this, the camel has ample knowledge and understanding of the environment and thus adapts to or fights the adverse conditions in which it finds itself. Such a theory helps explore the behaviour of women in terms of how they use knowledge of their cultures to bring about the eradication of patriarchal cultural practices within and outside their linguistic and cultural societies.

Nkealah's feminist model bridges the gap between educated or privileged women and underprivileged or uneducated African women. The model fits the present study as it explores how women navigate the existing cultural knowledge found in oral art to defend themselves against patriarchal practices in the diaspora and, at the same time, promote healthy practice of these arts in their host communities. Just as the camel eats and stores its food for later use, women are expected to strive to gain knowledge about practices inimical to them to help create a better world for future generations. Each identified theme is analysed against the model to see how the women adhered to it.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative design using focus group discussion to collect data. This design was adopted mainly because it allowed the researcher to engage with the participants in a targeted, goal-oriented, knowledge-producing conversation and to allow the participants to express themselves freely (Brinkmann 2014: 287). The focus group discussion provided the opportunity to explore questions emanating from the participants' responses, thereby eliciting a deeper understanding of the topic under focus.

The participants were all Yoruba women married to Yoruba men and resident in the King

Cetshwayo district municipality of KwaZulu-Natal. Twelve families were identified and approached as possible participants; however, only nine participated in the study. This group of women was purposively targeted in the belief that they were in the best position to provide insights into questions raised in the study, as Yoruba women married to Yoruba men and living in the diaspora. The nine women were recruited based on their willingness and availability to participate. They were between the ages of 31 and 60, had been married for at least five years, had at least two children and all had post-secondary school education ranging from teachers' certificates to doctorate degrees.

The purpose of the study was explained to each woman, and informed consent forms were signed before the commencement of the discussion. The group discussion lasted a total of 55 minutes and was conducted mainly in English. The discussion was audio-recorded and later transcribed for thematic analysis. Where Yoruba words were used, they were translated into English. The pre-prepared questions were used only as a guide, and other issues raised by the participants were adequately discussed. To gain insight into the knowledge, perception and attitudes of women regarding *Oríkì*, questions were asked about their understanding of what *Oríkì* is, their ability to chant it, how they acquired their knowledge of it (if they engaged in the practice in diaspora), and what their views were about its usefulness and the need to preserve and continue the practice, even in diaspora.

An example of how cultural practices are embedded in *Oríkì* (the Oluoje lineage *Oríkì)*

Yorubas regard 'some forms of oral literature as quasi-historical records' (Awe 1974: 333). They believe that oral arts like the *Oríkì* are authentic historical accounts. Examples of how cultural practices are embedded in *Oríkì orile* are given below. The first *Oríkì* is taken from the *Oríkì* of the Oluoje lineage, while the second is from the Foyanmu family. Both highlight practices peculiar to women of the families who have just given birth.

New mothers in the Oluoje lineage were usually served an unseasoned soup of okra leaves and *ewura* yam prepared without salt or palm oil. This is mentioned in their *Oríkì*.

1. *Omo sakiti won-in omo ilasa o ganro*
   Children of the okra leaves that are not affected by the rock salt
2. *Omo osonu ile won ogbo aalo*
   Children of the strong-willed people that do not yield to pacification

3. *Omo ilasa o b'omi tutu re omo Adeori o*
   Children of Adeori; of the okra leaves that are not friendly with cold water
4. *Olu Oje emi l'olomitutu yio f'ilasa se?*
   Olu Oje, what will cold water do to the okra leaves?
5. *Omo obe tii o le'po tii o ni'yo*
   Children of the soup that has no palm oil or salt

The soup (*ilasa oganro*) referred to in the *Oríkì* is a slimy green soup made from okra leaves. It is less favoured than its more common look-alike, the *ewedu* soup made from jute leaves. *Ilasa* is usually prepared as a seasoned, tasty soup with melon seed, but the one mentioned in the *Oríkì* is unseasoned and thus very unpleasant to eat, especially for a new mother. It is mandatory for every woman who has just given birth in the lineage to eat the soup and considered taboo for mothers to refuse to eat the prescribed soup after delivery. It is believed that failure to comply will result in the death of the child. The mother is not expected to eat much of the *ilasa oganro*. This is because the *Oje* people believe that the more the mother eats, the more bad-tempered her child will be.

This custom started during the reign of Onpetu Olusopo, whose wives refused to give his slave-wife good food after she gave birth to a child. She was given unpalatable food like *ilasa oganro* by the other wives assigned to take care of her. To her surprise, different types of food were prepared for the naming ceremony of the child. In annoyance, she cursed all women married into the Oluoje lineage. She said if they did not eat what they served her, their babies would die.

Another example is the *Oríkì ile* of the popular Foyanmu compound in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Southwest Nigeria. The compound is praised as '*Foyanmu*, *keruobeko*' (squash the pounded yam as a drink and let the pap be afraid). Pap made from blended and sieved fermented maize is often mixed with water as a refreshing drink on a hot day. It is not considered a palatable or desired meal for a new mother who is believed to need warm or hot food to recuperate quickly and lactate well to feed the newborn baby. However, members of this family use pounded yam instead of pap. New mothers in the family are given the squashed, pounded yam to drink instead of hot pap as befitting a woman who has just given birth to a baby. As is the case in the story of the Oluoje lineage, this started as a result of a curse placed on the entire family by a maltreated woman. The name '*Foyanmu*, *kerobeko*' (squash the pounded yam as a drink and let the pap be afraid) has since become the name and praise title of the family.

It should be noted that the above excerpts are rendered as praise for members of the lineage and are considered a custom to be proud of. However, an understanding of the origin of the practice reveals them to be less than praiseworthy as it shows feminine insensitivity to other women in their drive to curry the favour of men in a patriarchal society.

Incompleteness or omission of facts behind practices is often noted in *Oríkì*, as noted by Awe (1974). She also noted that 'many *Oríkì* are compact, allusive, and obscure. Often, their meaning is not apparent until it is explained in a separate narrative which is not part of the performance of the *oríkì*' (Awe 1974: 348). While the stories are not fully documented in the excerpts, they immediately raise questions in the curious mind. The fact that these practices are chanted as praises makes it sacrosanct for them to be learned by women and passed on to younger generations.

Presentation of findings

Knowledge of *Oríkì*

As the study focused on assessing the women's knowledge of *Oríkì*, the women who participated in the study were asked questions about their awareness, knowledge, use and learning of *Oríkì* and its practice in their parents' and their husbands' families.

Awareness

All the women indicated that they were aware of the practice of *Oríkì* in its different dimensions but had little knowledge of the content of the lineage *Oríkì Orile* or the meanings of the *Oríkì abiso*. They reported that they all had *Oríkì abiso*, which were still often used by their parents whenever they spoke with them on the phone. This response to the awareness of the practice is expected because of its pervasiveness in its various forms in the Yoruba culture. While the language used in other forms of *Oríkì* may be difficult to understand, it was surprising that the women did not know the meaning of *Oríkì abiso* or *Oríkì oruko*, which could be considered simple Yoruba and thus easy to understand. In this regard, the participants failed to measure up in terms of empowering themselves with knowledge to understand the culture into which they were married. Unlike the camel, which converts its food to fat for storage in its humps, the women had not stored up knowledge to use in the fight against the patriarchy.

Use

Being aware of and having a basic knowledge of *Oríkì* does not guarantee its use. Most women reported that they rarely called their children or husbands by their *Oríkì abiso.* They could not give reasons for this, even though they stated that they understood that these are special names and that they felt special and proud when their own parents called them by them. Some women also noted that their children did not have personal praise names because their parents-in-law had not named them. It is customary for the paternal family to give a child the *Oríkì abiso*. Most of the women said that although they knew their husbands' *Oríkì abiso*, they never called them the names, and the few who did only did so occasionally.

All the women could recite a few words of their families' *Oríkì orile* but knew nothing of their husbands', even though they were aware of it as they had heard it being chanted during special occasions in the family. While it appears that the practice of giving children *Oríkì oruko* or even calling them by it is not common among the women interviewed, other types of *Oríkì* are still evidenced in different aspects of life. For example, *Oríkì* is the basic ingredient for both religious and secular musicians. God is eulogised in all religions as it is believed that praises and thanksgiving create a conducive atmosphere to receive answers to prayers. The fact that *Oríkì* is highly descriptive makes it useful in composing songs using the many descriptive names to praise God.

Oríkì is also still in high demand by secular musicians who may be paid to compose songs to praise notable individuals. Such compositions are used for political campaigns. Carter-Enyi (2018: 87) noted that politicians hire musicians to sing their praise. These praises are often founded on the *Oríkì orile* and embellished with other types. Using the *Oríkì orílè* of a political candidate to compose his praises 'lends veracity to a politician's claim of heritage and connection to ạ village' (Carter-Enyi 2018: 88) in such a way that the people feel a positive affinity for him and may thus vote for him as one of their own. Every culture has its positive and negative aspects, and using the *Oríkì* at home would have provided an excellent opportunity for the women to teach their children about the endearing aspects of the Yoruba culture. Again, in the aspect of use, the women failed to conform to the cameline model. African feminism is rooted in the African worldview stemming from cultural practices (Nkealah 2016: 7365). Apathy towards cultural practices does not contribute positively to fighting patriarchy.

Teaching and learning Oríkì orile

Teaching new wives the lineage *Oríkì* used to be the responsibility of older women in the family, but this is no longer the case because families no longer live together. All the women interviewed noted that only the elderly and the uneducated women chanted the lineage praise during family gatherings. They also did not receive any training from their husbands' female relatives after marriage. Education also seems to be a factor in the teaching and learning of the lineage praise. The women who had educated mothers-in-law were not sure that they knew the praise, but those with uneducated mothers-in-law were sure that they knew it. They all attributed their lack of training to the fact that they lived far away from their in-laws and so did not have the opportunity to learn from the older women in the family who lived in their villages. They lived in towns and cities when they were in Nigeria. The situation seems irreparable now that they live outside the country. Their lack of training means they will be unable to teach their own daughters-in-law in the future. Thus, it appears that the knowledge and practice of the art are slowly dying out as it is not passed on to the younger generation.

Although the mother camel has no need to teach her young to store up fat in its humps because it is innate, she still has to train her child to survive in the desert. Each generation needs to be trained by the one before it to ensure continuity. The failure to use and train younger women in oral arts does not eradicate the practices discussed in them, but it obliterates their rationale and makes it difficult to argue against them.

The importance of *Oríkì*

The participants were asked how important they perceived the practice of *Oríkì* to be in the Yoruba culture. All the women noted that they were aware of its immense importance. They noted that it serves as a historical archive and that it is a useful bolster for the pride and image of their children and husbands. Many recognised *Oríkì* as a link to their culture, as an identity marker. Although the women displayed a lack of in-depth knowledge of the practice of *Oríkì*, they were aware of its cultural significance and expressed sentiments about resuscitating its practice as they remembered the pride and joy they felt when it was chanted when they were children. This, they noted, informed their decision to give their children praise names. This nostalgia is, however, not put to practical use as they do not call their children by these praise names. The women reported that their husbands' parents gave their children *Oríkì abiso* even when they were born in the diaspora. One of the

women reported giving her granddaughter a praise name according to the custom.

It should be noted that all the women who participated in the study were members of the Association of Nigerian Residents in King Cetshwayo District (ANRU). They met once each quarter to discuss Nigerian issues and how they could contribute to their host community. Many looked forward to the meetings as they provided opportunities to bond with fellow Nigerians and eat Nigerian cuisine, suggesting a need to retain their identities as Nigerians and to keep in contact with other Nigerians in the diaspora. This underscores their need to be connected to their home country. Asekun and Arogundade (2017) noted that Nigerians in the diaspora actively seek to identify with the country. However, the lack of communication in their native language and the practice of their culture may suggest the contrary.

Expressed desire by children

Awareness and use of *Oríkì* obviously entail the use of the Yoruba language, and this led to the question of the use of Yoruba language in the families of the interviewed women. The use of the Yoruba language in the nine families fell into three categories. Of the nine women, only one reported that Yoruba was the main language of communication in her home. She and her husband communicated with the children in Yoruba. Three of the women reported that while their children understood the language, they could not speak it, while the remaining five families communicated only in English with their children, although they said they communicated with their husbands in Yoruba. The children, thus, did not communicate in the Yoruba language. Hence, although the children heard the language being spoken by their parents, they did not use it as their parents spoke only English with them.

However, women with grown children reported that their sons had expressed a desire to learn the language as they grew older and often blamed their mothers for not allowing them to learn it. One participant reported that her 21-year-old son, who lived away from home, often phoned to ask for the meaning and correct pronunciation of Yoruba words. Another participant disclosed that her son, a married man, was now attending a Yoruba language class to improve his proficiency in the language. The trend of not communicating in Yoruba raises red flags about the use of *Oríkì* since it is language dependent. It is noteworthy that only the male children expressed a desire to learn the Yoruba language and that they blamed their mothers and not their fathers for their inability to speak it.

The desire expressed by the children appears to be a cry for help to experience their culture and

maintain their identities in the diaspora. It appears that the camel in Nkealah's cameline feminist model relies only on its innate structural design, crafted to 'withstand extreme conditions', and not on teaching its young the skills needed to survive, thrive and flourish in the environment they live in.

Discussion

The fact that the interviewed women were aware of the practice of *Oríkì* but lacked the knowledge of the contents of their *Oríkì orile* is worrisome and lends credence to Gunner's (1986: 31) observations about people's attitude to oral art as 'something to be preserved and noted down, but not something to be taken seriously, not an important channel of communication for contemporary life'. While the women may feel nostalgic about the oral art, their lack of knowledge and practice of it points to a negative attitude towards their culture. This assumption is tenable, as most do not communicate with their family members in Yoruba. It is seen as a language and culture they hold dear as they strive to meet with other Nigerians, but it is not one that they want to pass on to their children.

Unfortunately, the gradual loss of language and culture is evident not only in the diaspora but is indicative of what is happening in Nigeria, where Balogun (2013) and Ayeomoni (2006) raise a concern about the reduced use of Yoruba among young children in preference for English. Aladesote, Johnson, Agbelusi and James (2016: 1) listed six factors responsible for the decline of the Yoruba language. These are the lack of commitment to indigenous language, habitat displacement, colonial legacy, devastating ferocious diseases and defective language planning. Of all these factors, I consider the first one the most germane, as language and culture are likely to survive if the users are committed to keeping them alive.

The women's attitude towards *Oríkì* runs contrary to Nkealeah's cameline feminist model. In failing to learn about the culture often contained in the oral arts, they inadvertently refuse to empower themselves to fight against patriarchy from within the culture.

While the mothers may not appear too interested in the practice of *Oríkì* and the maintenance of their native language in the diaspora, their male adult children seem keener to learn and engage in cultural practices. Female children appear less interested in the culture and are also not grounded in the host Zulu culture. This leaves them ungrounded in their own culture and that of their hosts. The interest of adult children points to a need to pass on correct knowledge to them. Browne (2014: 2) identified 'diasporic identity' as a major factor affecting change in attitudes to harmful cultural

practices. She warns of the danger of 'second generation children' using 'traditional practices for their own purposes'. Knowledge about cultural practices becomes germane, especially in South Africa, with recurrent xenophobic attacks where victims may feel a need to preserve their identities in the face of hostilities.

The concept of reactive ethnicity becomes germane in this discussion as it may increase 'ethnic identification and consciousness'—a desire to assert their cultural practices in the diaspora (Çelik 2015). This is often a reaction, for example, among African Americans seeking information and practising cultures, inimical or not, from where they believe their places of origin to be. Situations like this can be counteracted by equipping the younger generation with knowledge of the history behind these practices. Reactive ethnicity may not be far-fetched in South Africa, with the recurrent and incessant xenophobic attacks. Diasporas may, as a way of feeling a sense of belonging in the face of rejection by the host community, seek to continue practices they may have stopped before.

Nkealah's cameline feminist model must be considered to counteract the negative effects of reactive ethnicity. Women, who should be at the forefront of the battle for emancipation from patriarchal practices, become enforcers of patriarchal practices due to a lack of knowledge. Women need to actively seek information about their cultures, just as a camel learns about its environment to strategise its survival. Fighting patriarchy requires a firm understanding, appreciation and appraisal of the negatives and positives of one's culture to know what to retain or discard for feminine emancipation.

Conclusion

Knowledge about oral cultural arts goes beyond mere awareness to being instrumental in combating inimical practices. Women's knowledge and understanding of oral arts and the culture that produces them may be the key to advocating against and eradicating the oppressive aspect of cultures and reinforcing the positives. Women play an important role in maintaining culture and language, and if the situation of carrying on patriarchal practices in Africa and the diaspora is to end, the knowledge about these practices must be understood and the information passed on to the next generation so that such practices are not accepted as cultural practices or part of positive group identities.

Zondi's various studies on Zulu women and their use of oral arts (2008, 2012, 2015, 2019) emphasise how women may use the medium of oral arts to articulate their concerns in society and make their voices heard against patriarchal practices. They are able to achieve this only because

they have not discarded their traditional oral arts but continue to compose new works to meet contemporary challenges and pass on the arts to younger generations. This is a lesson that should be learnt by Yoruba women, who not only have little or no knowledge about their traditional arts but also increasingly fail to communicate with their children in Yoruba. The notion that the oral arts are for uneducated women needs to be discarded, and efforts should be made to get female children interested in them. The fact that sons accuse their mothers and not their fathers of failing to teach them their culture and language attests to the role that women play in this regard and underscores the power they wield in bringing an end to many non-feminine-friendly cultural practices.

Yoruba is fast becoming an endangered language, and with it will disappear the stories behind traditions and cultures that male children may strive to keep alive to retain their identities in the diaspora. Keeping them alive will ultimately mean continuing practices that should be abolished. It is time for women to go back in history, obtain weapons, and equip their sons and daughters to destroy present and future threats to womanhood. There should be a concerted effort to record these oral arts from older women before they die so that the arts and the information they contain do not die with them.

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