

NEGATIVE PORTRAYAL OF MASCULINITY IN YORÙBÁ PANEGYRICS

Kareem Mudasiru Abayomi Ph.D

This paper examines the various ways in which masculinity has been negatively portrayed in some Yorùbá panegyric (Oríkì Yorùbá). Relying much on the rich Yorùbá oral tradition of the Òyó and Ìbàdàn people, the paper discovered that most praise-songs (Oríkì Yorùbá) which tend to praise the men folk implicitly or explicitly condemn them. Apart from seeing men as oppressors/suppressors of both men and women, several Yorùbá panegyric (Oríkì Yorùbá) have alleged men to be thieves, sexual abusers and ruthless tyrants. It is hoped that this attempt will fill a need in the aspect of a critical study in the Yorùbá panegyric (Oríkì Yorùbá). However, we encourage further research on the acceptability of this unequivocal negative portrays by the entire men folk. For the purpose of this paper and literature review the word 'panegyric' and 'Oríkì Yorùbá' are used interchangeably.

Keywords: Negative Portrayal, Masculinity, Yorùbá Panegyrics

Introduction

Yorùbá panegyric is a vital aspect of Yorùbá cultural signpost. It remains one of the easiest and accessible means of pinning down a person to his family heritage and lineage. Languages or dialects (as the case may be), tribal marks and essentially names, are other strong traditional elements used in 'retracing one's root i.e., *orírun*, which means 'source'.

While it is possible to have two different persons from different cultural backgrounds sharing the same name, if events or circumstances surrounding their birth are similar, it is however almost impossible for the same people to share in whole or part the same Yorùbá panegyric. Thus, Yorùbá panegyric, more than other elements of culture, remains a more direct way of identifying where a Yorùbá man or woman hails from. It is the usual practice to have people of the same family backgrounds or lineage: sharing the same or similar Yorùbá panegyric.

In addition, Yorùbá panegyric is both historically and functionally fluid. Historical in the sense that every Yorùbá panegyric is believed to have originated from a particular source as discussed earlier. Its functional fluidity is explained by the several uses to which its expressive mode can be put. For example, when it is addressed to a person, it elicits expected reasons from the addressee depending on the purpose it is intended to perform. Yorùbá panegyric could be used to praise, annoy, incite, indict, appease, appeal, placate, arouse, impress, eulogize and do several other things. Consequently, the reactions you get from the addressee could be positive or negative.

It is a known fact that most aspects of Yorùbá cultural expressions relegate the women folk to the background. This unwarranted relegation, injustice, domination and oppression have come a long way and quietly too without much protest from the women. As an aspect of the function of Yorùbá panegyric, Yorùbá women in the core traditional societies have found expressions to bear out their bottled minds and disapprove the men's domineering posture on them through Yorùbá panegyric. Therefore, it is how women have perceived the men through Yorùbá panegyric that actually constitutes the concern of this paper.

Definition of Yorùbá panegyric

Barber (1990) describes Yorùbá panegyric as attributions or appellations: epithets, elaborate or concise, which are addressed to a subject and which are equivalent to, or alternatives to names.

Yorùbá panegyric provides an essential complementary and corresponding sheen that serves as impetus for a narrative framework in the portrayal of masculinity in Yorùbá culture whether positively or negatively. This is concomitant to Barber, (199: 315) that:

Each Oríkì gestures away from its location within the performed text to a hinterland of meaning outside the text. Not only this, but each may lead to its own hinterland by a different route. Some are literal, some are ironical, some are specific historical references, and some are generalized comments referring to a timeless or idea state of affairs.

Barber (1991: 12) says:

Oríkì are felt to encapsulate the essential qualities of entities. They evoke a subject's qualities, go to the heart of it and elicit its inner potency while their utterances energizes and enlivens the bearer.

Ògunbà, (1975: 80) agrees that:

Yorùbá praise poems in its various forms and contexts are often recited as an early morning piece by a mother or grandmother..., when a young member of the Olówu family in Ìjèbú wakes up in the morning and greets his mother or grandmother or his just returned home from a journey the woman is likely to reply with a recitation of part of the heroic appellation of the family.

Ọmọ Olówu òdùrú Ọmọ Ajífèpèsèré?

Ọmọ ògbògbòndu ẹkùn

Ọmọ Asè- Jèbú -şè-bí Ọyó Akínyemí (1992: 74) explains,

Some of these Oríkì are made up of standard units referring to qualities of character or physical appearance, which are highly specific, referring to incidents in the subject's life - often apparently trivial and even scandalous occasionally. The more Oríkì a subject accumulates over the years, the more important he is in his society.

Awé (1974) has earlier noted that “the importance of oral traditions in the reconstruction of the history of non-literate peoples has virtually ceased to be a mother of debate and is now generally acknowledged”. This shows that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is tremendous. She goes further to state that indeed the genesis of the Yorùbá panegyric and the method of composition confer some authenticity on the contents of the Yorùbá panegyric and highlights its potential historical value (Awé 1974: 33). Barber (1999:37) says further that Yorùbá panegyric are concentration of

utterances that are capable of extension both within the text and beyond it into other modes of discourse. The text of a particular Yorùbá panegyric goes beyond the context of performance in interpretation and application, especially the lineage poetry (*oríkì orílè*). At the same time, Yorùbá panegyric complements history (*itàn*), to have a meaningful construction of the social history of the people in positive and negative ways. It has been pointed out by Barber (2003: 329) that: \

When male elders tell the history of the image, their itàn often depend on Oríkì to move from point to point. A narrator may recount a historical episode and then conclude 'and that is why we are called such-and-such'; or he may introduce a new episode by naming a character in the narrative...

Oríkì Orílè is made up of several units accumulated over time referring to events and qualities of a person or group of persons depending on the subject of the chanter. *Oríkì Orílè* is less fluid than other forms of Yorùbá panegyric due to its function of identifying kin groups through emblematic references to a common origin, (*orírun/orísun*). Yorùbá panegyric is not a distinct genre in and of itself, but it is the thrust of almost every orature among the Yorùbá people. It could be performed as song, chant or recitation. Akínyemí (1991a; 1991b; 1992; 1993; 2000) prove that information embedded in the palace poetry could be used for historical reconstruction.

Culture is the convergence of social, political and economic contexts in which people act and which shape people's expressions. Mechan (2001) adds that culture is what people do to express meaning. Due to the patriarchal structure of many societies of the world, many people, including scholars, are fond of examining images and representations of women in diverse discourses in the societies. But little attention has been given to the image and representation of men in society. An aspect of critical discourse of this sort should also go beyond stereotypes as the main focus of many critics. Before going into the representation of men in Yorùbá panegyric, it is worthwhile to have an understanding of the word patriarchy. Hartman (1997: 97) defines patriarchy as:

A set of social relations that has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enable them in turn to dominate women. The material base of patriarchy is men's control over woman's labour power. That control is maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources and by restricting women's sexuality...

Hartman's summation above proves that patriarchy refers to all acts and devices employed by men folk to oppress, suppress and dominate women in any society. This is a common phenomenon in Africa though in varying degrees, depending on the traditions and culture of the people.

Presentation of the Yorùbá panegyric is by men and women. Portrayals of Yorùbá women and men differ significantly in literature even in those produced by men, but more visible in those that are produced by women. In discourse, power can be defined as the ability to influence the way people think and act. Institutions are of enormous interest for critical discourse analysis because of their control over both the context and structures communication and power-relations in the society. In everyday life, language users speak as members of the discourse group and such a group can be regarded as acting by the actions of their members. These individual social acts are constitutive of higher-level social processes in a given society.

The culture of masculinity and male privileges in a patriarchal society like that of Yorùbá is a means to perpetrate violence against women. Such violence involves the domestic, social-political, and religious arena. The Yorùbá panegyric as a strand of women and men genre in their society incorporates diverse views of Yorùbá women about the culture of masculinity and male privileges that lunges on the gender inequalities.

Hence, an analysis of the Yorùbá panegyric on the depiction of men by women would give meanings to the type of power-relations between men and women and will also bring into the limelight the cultural traits ascribed to men in this genre.

It is even revealing from many examples of this literature that Yorùbá men are violent against their women or themselves. Below is an excerpt from the Yorùbá panegyric of Aláàfin Láwàni. When Láwàni became the Aláàfin of Òyó, he proved stubborn and uncontrollable for his chiefs. Because of his stubbornness, Aláàfin Láwàni is referred to in a negative form by the *Ràrà* chanters as:

A-mú-bí-eyá
 Agogo-ìjà
 Ọkọ akọ
 Ọkọ abo

He who is as sharp as *eyá* knife
 A-fighting-bell
 The lord of the male
 The lord of the female

The role and social construction of women in the society is sequel to the treatment given to them by men. Men are seen as oppressors and suppressors of women or men. This is concomitant with the observation of Iwere (2007: 75) who stresses that:

There is no doubt that there are biological differences between male and female person but the oppression, discrimination and marginalization of women in society result from the social construction of the role of men and women in society.

Beier says our poetry are replete with panegyric. Therefore, we cannot differentiate between one or the other until when it is outlined.

Dáramólá and Jéjé (1967) says:

Oríkì jé òr ò ìṣírí tí àwọ̀n Yorùbá máa n fí yin ara wọ̀n tàbí ẹ̀ni tí inú wọ̀n bá dùn sí.

Panegyric is an encouraging word that the Yorùbá use to praise themselves or who they are pleased with. The belief is that this (culture) is used to enliven somebody doing something good or worthwhile or sometime to showcase somebody that they pleased with him.

If one is working or dancing and hears his panegyric he will be enlivened.

The explanation is that panegyric reveals one's source. It should be understood that it is not only human being that can be praised; animal can also be praised.

Thus, Olatúnjì (1984: 71) says: *Oríkì is not a private property, but a traditional material which its owners know and which others, especially bards, like drummers and raconteurs learn for their own use.*

Ayòrìndé (1973: 63) explains:

Oríkì could be described as a praise-name, cognomen or nickname. It describes the child's character, or the circumstances of its birth, or what he or she is hoped to become. It may be given either of the time of the naming of the child, or alter as a result of the child's subsequent development. The Oríkì is derived from "ori" (head or origin) and "kí" (to cite) and so means to cite ones origin.

Làṣẹ̀bìkan (1958: 32) says: *It is Oríkì which tells, where a person originates from, how wealthy they were, and all the noble things that they had done.*

Panegyric is used for person to enliven him, when it is used, it makes such person to give out something (gift). Panegyric tells what his being is in the society.

The nucleus/core/live of anything resides in its panegyric whatever can be discussed on anything that has panegyric, whatever can be difficulties in terms of fortunes or misfortunes are embedded in it. The Ifa's divination on panegyric bares the whole truth. Panegyric never hides anything whether it centers on elite, nickname, town, family, or lineage.

Ìran Òk òmí

Ọmọ afàjìngòdò gbárúgbó renú ìgbé rẹ é dó

Ó dó ọmọdé bí ẹ̀ni lu bẹ̀m` bẹ̀

Offspring of he/who carries the aged into the bush to have sex with in the dead of the night.

He has sex with youth/child as if beating bẹ̀m` bẹ̀ drum.

(Babalọ́lá, 2000: 65)

The panegyric of this Image shows their men as bestial and merciless. They are adulterous and wayward who makes no distinction between the aged and child that is not matured to have sex with. This is both child and female abuse.

Látòòṣà's Praise Poetry

Omọ pa sílé, pa sójà
Pa sídìi òg èḍ è, pa sídìi òrọ̀ òbó
Pa sí kòtò, pa sí gegele. Isola (2003:12)

The child of he who kills at home, kills on the markets place, kills in the plantain (plantation), kills at the orange tree, kills at the pit, kills at the undulated places.

Látòòṣà is a man. He has no mercy, he is also a murderer.

In the panegyric of male gods, we also observe negative character. For example:

Ṣàngó's Praise Poetry

Òòṣà tíí kìná bọ́lé bọ́jò bá n rọ̀
Iná lójú, iná lénu
Iná lókèè páàmù

The god that sets house on fire while it is raining
Fire in the eyes, fire in the mouth,
Fire on the top of the roofing sheet.

Line 1 showcases Ṣàngó as mighty and warrior, if it were not so, can fire be burning in the rain and rains will not quench it. Yet the Yorùbá says *omi níí poró iná* “water quenches fire” it is not so with Ṣàngó. He is a destroyer that destroys people’s property.

Line 2 and 3 reveal that he is person not to be associated with because we will not want our property to be destroyed or be burnt with fire.

Ògún
Ìbà Ògún onírè ọkọ ọ̀ mi
Eléwèlè ọkúnrin
Èḅ è làwa n bọ́gún
Ko mó gbalé, gbodò,
Kó má gbagi oko lów ọ̀ wa
Òlómí nílẹ̀ fẹ̀jẹ̀ wẹ̀
Ikú ti n forí ja ti n firù jà
Adulation my lord, Ògún, the owner of the ire
Mischievous man
It is plead, we plead with Ògún

*Don't usurp house, river and trees of the forest from us
He who has water in the house but uses blood to bath Death that uses both head and
tail to fight.*

Line 1 and 2 show Ògún as a man. *Ewèlè* means someone who cannot be understood. An impetuous person. Line 3 and 4 reveal that he is to be avoided. He is somebody that can usurp or take over one's house, river, and farm as these are ventures for daily living. Ògún is to be feared. Line 5 shows Ògún as a murderer and who savours blood. Therefore, Ògún is bestial, a murderer and an impetuous person.

Line 6 shows Ògún as an agent of death. Nobody has ever thought of death as good; death is fearful and a discouragement. Ògún is associated with fear. This panegyric mirrors mal-violence which is also fearful and to be avoided.

This aspect drives home while our gods are driven into oblivion. Their panegyric is fearful and one cannot move near them. This is why other religions have taken over from them. No one can run to personality that is death, impetuous and bloodsucking for refuge.

Ọba Lámídì Adéyemí Praise Poetry

In Ajóbíewé Àrè mú Sulaimon album (2008) in Yorùbá lineage panegyric, he praises the Aláàfin Ọy ó, Ọba Lámídì Adéyemí as follows:

Ikú, ọmọ ikú, ọmọ àrùn

Ọmọ ọfò, ọmọ àdánù

Death, the son of death, son of disease,

Son of waste, son of loss

Death - is not wanted by any creature, they run away from death.

Son of diseases - Yorùbá says "disease shouldn't use our house as playground nobody wants any relationship with diseases or death".

Son of waste, son of loss - it is not good for one to waste or loose either property or live, Therefore, Aláàfin Lámídì is clothed in his panegyric as somebody that cannot be related with in any form or shape and should be avoided.

Ọ̀ni Olúbù ̀se

Şjúwadé Olúbùşe Èrí Ogun

Èbitì kìm ọ pìrì mól è

Ò súnmọ sílè, súnmọ ọ sénì

Ò kunmọ lósùn kunmọ láta

Oosa Ilaree fabu kan

Şjúwadé Olúbùşe, war witness

Trap that pinches child to the ground

One who pushes child to the ground, pushes child into mat

One paints child with camwood, paints child with pepper

The praise-song here is bestial and rash. He is a murderer and to be avoided as this panegyric reveals. How can somebody to be related with will be painting a child with pepper and be pushing a child to a bare ground from the mat.

Men are kings in Yorùbá land. Therefore, they cannot be closely related with.

Ìjèṣà

In one of the Ìjèṣà à lineage panegyric, they are praised:

Ọmọ ikàrà ku méjì sagbada ki mi jòkàn

Ọmọ ò gbuṣu lájà obìnrin gúnyán jẹ

Son of bean cake remains two in the pot eat one.

Son of who steals yam from the women's ceiling for pounded yam.

Line 1 shows this man as thief covetous, self-centered, and selfish and who only shows consideration for himself. When bean-cake remains only two units for the whole family and he decides to take a whole one. Line 2 shows man as being lazy. He, whose hands cannot work; he is bread-wined by his wife. This negates Yorùbá culture. Husband is the head of the family. He is to provide for the entire family. It is only the drone of a man that looks up on to the wife before he eats as revealed in the above panegyric.

Olúfè

In Olúfè panegyric, it shows that they are bestial, and murderer,

A è é dúró kí wọn n'Ífè Ọ̀nì

Mo bá yó kélék élé lọ báwọn níbi òòṣà

À sàgbárí ọmọ tuntun ni wón fì í m ẹmu diiwo

(Odejàjò, 1992: 24)

We don't wait to greet them at Ife Ọ̀nì

I stealthily went with them to the shrine of god

It is a new born baby's skull they use to drink palm wine in their cult.

New born baby's skull is used to drink palm wine that is why they would want a stranger or non-initiated to get to the shrine of their god as revealed in line 3.

Òjọ

Òjọ-kurebi, Òjọ rebete

Òjọ jà lója, ó délé k ọyán

Òjọ a bádiyẹ sàba lóri eyin

Òjọ déy ìnkùnlé àna rẹ

Ó mókó làgiri pàrara

Ì kẹ ọyà un, i á b'ale un libi gógó orí imú

Òjọ ì wẹ lódò, kete ọmọge na ò ọṣẹ

Òjọ Kurebi,

Òjọ fought in the market, got home and rejected pounded yam

Òjọ who on the eggs with the hen

*Òjó gets to his in-law's backyard
 He uses penis to split the wall thunderously
 He says may be it will meet the concubine on the tip of the nose.
 Òjó who bath in the river, all spinsters are handling over soap to him*

Òjó is a fighter and highly temperamental. He is also an adulterer. It's a male that bears Òjó. The Baṣòrun Ògúnṁ ólá interpretation of the panegyric shows men as a gender that can be easily carried away by woman's love. Hence, they stand greater risk of heterosexual practices. They can do anything to satisfy the sexual urge. It is a common occurrence for men to be unfaithful to their marriage partners especially in this era of civilization. It has been proved that due to religious affiliation of some men who are Christians and because Christianity preaches monogamy, they have one legal wife but with many mistresses (Fádípè, 1970). Due to the social reality of Yorùbá women's experiences with their men, the presenter of Yorùbá panegyric Baṣòrun Ògúnṁ ólá challenges the brides at the time of marriage to do everything to curb their husbands in order not to lose them to prostitution. An example of such songs is seen below:

*Bó bá dalé ñbò wá t'ákọ fí bá abo lọ
 Omọ a fẹ arúgbó tewútewú
 Omọ a dó'mọ bí èkúté ilé
 I will come in the night makes the male to elope with female.
 He who marries an elderly woman with grey hair He who knows how to have sex like
 house rat.*

The image portrayed in the above song shows that some men cannot control their sexual desire and appetite. Hence, they could be easily carried away with sexual intercourse.

The introduction of new norms of morality within the society have also affected the Yorùbá panegyric in particular. It has had an adverse effect on its authenticity. This is so with the Yorùbá panegyric's value judgements on the subject. Because the Yorùbá panegyric is meant to give a portrait of a subject, it has often, even while praising that subject, been able to criticize it and to point out those traits which will now be considered a moral. In a few cases, such comments have been found embarrassing by the descendants of those concerned and this has tended to encourage the suppression of certain parts of the poem. The case of the Yorùbá panegyric on Olúyòlé, the first real ruler of Ibadàn in the nineteenth century, is a good example. His Yorùbá panegyric which was collected and recorded early in this century was published in a book on Ibadan, by the Late LB. Akinyélé who eventually himself became the ruler of the town After some copies of the book had been sold, Olúyòlé's descendants protested and about two pages, i.e. pages 35 - 36 were removed from the remaining copies of the book.

*Oó gbọdọ bu, o ọ gbọdọ sa, oọ gbọdọ sọrọ è léhìn
 Èni ó bú 'Ba le'ke wọn ó jìyà
 Àṣẹ lá mú rù wọn*

*You must not abuse him, you must not insult him,
 You mustn't backbite him,
 Whoever calls Iba a deceiver will be punished.
 His corpse will be carried away a broken door.*

The whole idea of this verse is to emphasize the immensity of his power, to indicate that he was a man who had power over all and could do anything. This assertion is illustrated by reference to the fate that befell two of his chiefs - Bánkólé and Òṣó who antagonized him: he had them killed in a most ruthless manner. The image shows that some men are naturally wicked, they are nothing but killers. They can do anything to have their ways.

Conclusion

This paper has found out how the women folk perceive the men folk in certain Yorùbá panegyric. It has discovered that masculinity has been negatively portrayed by several Yorùbá panegyric panegyrics. It has also discovered that more than using Yorùbá panegyric to praise or eulogize the prowess and exploits of men, the women folk have utilized the resource of Yorùbá panegyric to subtly lampoon, expose and discredit the negative attributes and activities of the men folk.

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***Kareem Mudasiru Abayomi Ph.D. is a Lecturer in the Department of Yorùbá
 Federal College of Education Okene, Kogi State***