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Gender Visibility and Audibility in Selected Kengbe Performances in Ilorin

Visibilité et audibilité du genre dans des performances sélectionnées de Kengbe à Ilorin

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Abstract :

Gender relations in Ilorin, Kwara State, are deeply expressed through oral performances such as Kengbe, a female-dominated song-text tradition that serves as both entertainment and socio-cultural commentary. This study focuses on Kengbe performances to examine how women negotiate visibility, identity, and authority within a patriarchal society. Anchored in Womanist theory and using an interpretive design, three Kengbe song-texts by the renowned chanter Ramat Iyoaye: "Iyawo Sara," "Awa Obinrin," and "Kengbe", were purposively selected, observed, and analyzed from live and informal performances. Findings reveal that Kengbe performances both affirm and challenge gender norms through symbolic creativity and spatial reconfiguration. Female performers deploy metonymic strategies by transforming domestic tools: calabashes, cooking sticks, and spoons, into musical instruments, thus converting symbols of domesticity into tools of artistic power and social critique. This act of material subversion redefines women's roles beyond homemaking, positioning them as assertive cultural agents and commentators on social realities. The performance space itself is female-ordered, granting women audibility and visibility that transcend traditional seclusion. Through their lyrical content and physical expressiveness, the singers contest male dominance and articulate a vision of gender parity rooted in cultural self-awareness. Ultimately, Kengbe emerges as a performative site where Ilorin women reconstruct gendered subjectivities and assert their voices within the cultural and moral order. The genre functions as a creative counter-discourse to patriarchy: an alternative mode of empowerment through which women negotiate space, identity, and authority in Ilorin's oral performance landscape.

Keywords: Gender space, Ilorin, oral literature, performance studies, Kengbe.

Résumé :

Les relations de genre à Ilorin, dans l'État de Kwara, s'expriment profondément à travers des performances orales telles que le Kengbe, une tradition chantée dominée par les femmes, qui sert à la fois de divertissement et de commentaire socioculturel. Cette étude se concentre sur les performances de

Kengbe afin d'examiner la manière dont les femmes négocient leur visibilité, leur identité et leur autorité au sein d'une société patriarcale. S'appuyant sur la théorie womaniste et utilisant une approche interprétative, trois chants-textes de Kengbe de la célèbre chanteuse Ramat Iyoaye — « Iyawo Sara », « Awa Obinrin » et « Kengbe » — ont été sélectionnés de manière raisonnée, observés et analysés à partir de performances en direct et informelles.

Les résultats révèlent que les performances de Kengbe confirment tout en remettant en question les normes de genre grâce à une créativité symbolique et à une reconfiguration de l'espace. Les interprètes féminines recourent à des stratégies métonymiques en transformant des outils domestiques — calebasses, bâtons de cuisine et cuillères — en instruments de musique, convertissant ainsi des symboles de domesticité en instruments de pouvoir artistique et de critique sociale. Cet acte de subversion matérielle redéfinit les rôles des femmes au-delà des tâches ménagères, les positionnant comme agentes culturelles affirmées et commentatrices des réalités sociales.

L'espace de performance lui-même est organisé par les femmes, leur accordant une audibilité et une visibilité qui dépassent la réclusion traditionnelle. Par le contenu lyrique de leurs chants et leur expressivité corporelle, les chanteuses contestent la domination masculine et articulent une vision de la parité des genres fondée sur une conscience culturelle de soi. En définitive, le Kengbe apparaît comme un espace performatif où les femmes d'Ilorin reconstruisent des subjectivités genrées et affirment leurs voix au sein de l'ordre culturel et moral. Le genre fonctionne comme un contre-discours créatif face au patriarcat : un mode alternatif d'autonomisation par lequel les femmes négocient l'espace, l'identité et l'autorité dans le paysage des performances orales d'Ilorin.

Mots-clés : espace de genre, Ilorin, littérature orale, études de la performance, Kengbe.

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Introduction

Social institutions and cultural forces continuously reconfigure gender spaces, with each gender having associated roles. It is generally perceived that men are assigned the role of providers and protectors while women are regarded as homemakers, nurturers and carers. Capturing this reality, Oyeronke Alademo (2009) describes gender "as a process filled with the notions of differences and oppositions which sometimes widens the differences between the two sexes and often translates into the domination of the male and oppression of the female" (12). Sharing similar view, Oluwatoyin Jegede (2018: 34) argues that "the woman is subtly trained and raised to play support roles so that she eventually accepts her roles in her family and can fit into a new family when she grows up and gets married. The roles and stereotypes are imbibed in such a way that one of the sexes becomes dominant and the other, submissive." Women are considered subordinate entities, to be provided for and therefore to be confined with specific sociocultural expectations. In Ilorin, like other patriarchal communities, the woman's role is

subservient; one is born a female but one becomes a woman through impressions, role segregation, social and religious structures which prescribe roles for each gender.
Among the Ilorin people, patriarchy holds sway as entrenched; there are certain social and cultural expectations attached to being male or female. These guide their philosophy, performance, objective and appearance. For example, in traditional Ilorin settings, it is expected that a woman should be fully and suitably covered at all times when she appears in public. She is discouraged from aspiring to professions such as field engineers or medicine like the male members of her family because that would not only mean she would be competing with the men, she would be visible and exposed; it would mean she will not be available to perform homely duties as expected of a wife; it would mean an association with men who are not related to her and her ability to perform favorably in those professions would challenge the age old beliefs that boys are more valuable than girls.

Following Ilorin's subscription to a largely Islamic theology, the girl-child must not be heard in public spaces, which means she cannot dream to be a singer of any kind, especially one who appears in public. Initially, Ilorin women were discouraged from participating or performing folksongs which is considered a male sphere and when a few of them like Batimoluwasi Rukayat dared to embrace it as a profession, they were branded negatively. One of the reasons for discouraging women from such artistic productions is largely to stop them from seducing men with their voices as well as "their dancing which involves swinging their hips and moving their bodies" (Jegede 2018). Gender space in Ilorin oral performances are basicly built around Ilorin customs and Islamic precepts . A woman in Ilorin is put in seclusion and it is almost always expected that the woman should be invisible and inaudible as a result of Islamic practice which forbids women to occupy the center stage in society. She is not allowed to socialise with men who are not related to her. In addition to being a female, a woman is expected to be feminine in her dressing and behavior. She is expected to be a good wife, a good cook, a good mother, and submissive to her father, uncles, and brothers and later to her husband. Despite these social constraints, the performers have been singing in seclusion while adhering to the dictates and constraints of society.
One of the traditional performances done by these groups is called Kengbe. This genre of Ilorin oral tradition is performed at leisure hours, after a day's work as a form of entertainment within female circles. It was only performed in the privacy of the womenfolks until it gained wide acceptance for public presentation. Some of the women's traditional performances include lullabies, work songs and songs for special purposes composed with no overt offensiveness. It is evident that seclusion brought out the women's creativity; they had to find ways of easing their boredom and creating some form of entertainment to fill the time spent indoors during the day. Ironically, the seclusion ignited their creative skills and became a motivation in honing their creative sensibilities. Within the dictates of Ilorin culture, women's oral performances are done only for their fellow women. However, during such performances, underaged boys and male relations may come in and go out at will. Whereas, men's performances were mostly carried out in public. Whereas, performances by women are rarely recorded because they are rendered in private female quarters. However, the modern period has ushered in a paradigm shift from the norms of Ilorin traditional perception of performance. Many of the Ilorin folkloric performances

like Senwele, Ijo-Olomooba, Kengbe, and Waka later became musical forms dominated by Ilorin women.

Statement of the Research Problem

Ilorin oral performances are forms of African oral arts that are among other reasons, given impetus by the desire to change certain cultural and religious limitations that are gender-specific.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to examine gender space in selected Ilorin oral performances, particularly Kengbe song-text renditions. The objectives are to:

i. describe elements of Kengbe performances which foreground gender cultural norms;
ii. examine performance strategies in the renditions that negotiate an alternative to patriarchy;
iii. explore the semiotic properties in the selected song-texts which negate established male-guided gender ideologies. .

Literature review

From the inception of the Emirate dynasty in Ilorin, the people have inculcated Islamic ways of life until most of their customs became subsumed. Even though their religion (Islam) constitutes the most important aspects of their lives, traditional beliefs continue to influence their lives and direct the roles they play according to their gender as male or female. Gender has been defined as the polarization of the two sexes into social categories of masculinity and femininity.

In Ilorin, these categorizations hold sway. And this is realized through social agencies and their allied structures. Among the spectacular aspects of Ilorin culture is Kengbe verbal performances. Quoting Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah, Ali-agan (2014) avers:

> Ilorin cultural and linguistic diversity results into cultural productions of festivals and other performances that have made Ilorin a unique community. For example, an Ilorin person enjoys the many voices of the recitation of the Quran that easily attracts historical and lineage connections. (?)

Na'Allah believes that these performances possess more cultural essence than religious. Ilorin community contributes several kinds of oral poetry of Yoruba expression with all of these cultural resources, Ilorin has become a single most vibrant contributor to traditional form of oral performances in Africa.

The growth of Islam, particularly following the ascension of the Fulanis to the political leadership of the town, gave rise to a new form of religious chants to replace the heathen ones (Na'allah, 1997). There are several forms of oral poetry rendered by the people of Ilorin such as Pakenke, Dadakuada, Waka, Kengbe, Were, among others. According to Na'Allah's (2006), Alimi is believed to have been the first to chant Waka which he composed in his native Fulfulde language. Kengbe is performed exclusively by women on invitation at homes, wedding/ naming ceremonies or in royal courts. During performances at weddings and naming ceremonies, the audience dance and appreciate the performers; whereas in the royal courts,

dancing is controlled when the emir and his court are around. The audience of Kengbe performance is restricted to women or both men and women depending on the place of the performance; if it is done in the courts, men are allowed to be in the audience .

Kengbe performance is one in which a group of women beat calabashes placed face down on the floor or in up-turned, water-filled bowls, using short, whittled sticks, slippers or the palms of their hands, providing instrumental effects to the chants. Its themes include women's empowerment, education, marriage, jealousy and politics. In spite of all the restrictions placed upon women, they have been challenging and contesting patriarchal values which have become deep-rooted and accepted by all. Ilorin oral arts are often composed spontaneously depending on the context of the performance. Consequently, the performance is one way by which women redesign or reconfigure their spaces the way they want them. Jegede (2002 & 2006) argues that women create their own spaces and within their world, create their music. This is representative of what happens in the Emir of Ilorin's palace and some family compounds in Ilorin, where the chanters beat the calabash when performing Ijo Olomooba (Dance of the royal blood), Kengbe and Waka. When they do this, they perform with little restraint. This is more evident in Kengbe performance. Such places include the kitchen, bathroom and the family compound. They have rejected the stereotypes by moving from the private (compound) to the public space (stage/palace).

The performance affords them the opportunity to do something for themselves and say things the way they see them; they sing, drum and dance, creating for themselves a place of relaxation and enjoyment in contrast to the space of boredom created by culture. By being audible and visible, they move from the sidelines to the center. Similarly, the study affirms Mary Kolawole's (1997) view that women's domestic empowerment sometimes shapes public issues. In most cases, when women move from private to public spaces, it is as a result of the support they receive from home.

Perspectives on African oral literature

In *Historic Essays on African Literature, Language and Culture* (2009), Ime Ikiddeh, as cited by Al-amin El-nasir (2018), opines that "literature, particularly of the oral mould, is a social product that has its root in a defined cultural context" (59). Ikeddeh's submission is pertinently related to this study. Ademola Dasylva (2006:2)asserts that "each major group in Africa has its peculiarities and cultural idiosyncrasy which determine the form, structure and scope of its oral traditions. Some of these peculiarities are often unlikely to be common in other cultural regions." Dasylva's position on oral literature is further enunciated by Ayinde, A.K (2010: 1) when he contends:

> African oral tradition and folkways deal with man's existential being. It grapples with man's dilemma and adventure in life. The utilitarian value of the oral tradition is to utilize its various conventions for instruction and entertainment and to stimulate human feeling through songs, song-tales, riddles, beast-fables, parables, jokes, proverbs, anecdotes, legends, myths, fables, spics, folktales and stories. In traditional African literature, the oral performer spoke in prose and verse and song. The dynamism with which the performer exhibits the aesthetic potency of the oral forms

> makes the African poets and storytellers the community chroniclers, entertainers and collective consciousness.

The above concept of oral literature is also supported by Carlos Nogueira (2003:164). It is regarded as the knowledge, memories, values, and symbols. IFor Nogueira, these are generally configured in linguistic objects of aesthetic-literary nature, without consignment in written testimonies, accomplished vocally and recognized collectively, therebybuilding the law of traditionalism. Oral literature could be in form of songs found in the indigenous practices of the people who render them . Ruth Finnegan (2012:1) opines that

> Music can be used to entertain, educate, enlighten, as a means of propaganda, forming public opinion and comment on current affairs. In passing across this message, there is a need for the musician to connect with his audience, in such case; oral literature is one medium of connecting with them. Society as an integrated collectivity of human beings possesses the remarkable property of self-expression. The experiences gained by the community or the society when find spontaneous expression with some degree of aesthetic and artistic skill, it is termed as folk-literature.

African oral literature is characteristically ambivalent regardless of the divergence and meaning that the different constitutive generic forms may convey, or its apparent overwhelming universal correspondences. This is largely responsible for the controversies generated by previous attempts by critics at evolving appropriate taxonomy.

It is believed that the folk-songs are the soul of folk literature and folk culture. The folk-songs may take various forms such as religion, incantations, music, lyrics and narrative songs. These songs are rendered in various vocations and places, and are classified according to their functions..

Methodology

The research design for this study is qualitative and analytical. Critical content analysis is a method of exploring, evaluating and analyzing recorded, printed or visual material in a systematic, critical, and objective way (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000; Adogo & Ojo, 2003). Data were sourced and collected largely through attending several ceremonies where Kengbe performances were rendered in Ilorin. The electronic version of the performances is rarely made available on the internet database, so there is need to visit the places where the actual events are taking place.

Similarly, oral interviews were recorded and analysed for the purpose of this research. The song-texts were collected in recorded forms: audio and video formats. They were transcribed, translated and analysed with a view to examine the aim and objectives of this study. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Mary Ebun Kolawole's model of womanism.. It is a theory which prioritises the need for positive gender self-definition within historical, geographical and cultural contexts. It encourages women to raise consciousness and seek emancipation with consideration for collective values. It acknowledges the complementary roles of men and women and respects the family unit and motherhood. Womanist theory is here adopted in analysing movement of space, rejection of stereotypes and construction of new images in Ilorin oral performances.

Gender space in Kengbe performances

Kengbe and Waka performances provoke and elicit positive and negative responses through their chants. They create a set of role appropriations and criticisms that establish women's subordination and at the same time question their fundamental premises as women in Ilorin.

Women have been culturally stereotyped as housewives and homemakers in Ilorin. This is evident in Kengbe performance as the instruments used in the kitchen are brought to the stage of rendition and re-created as music instrucments . These kitchen utensils include: calabashes, sticks, wooden spoon, water, and so on. This usage indicates the women's rejection of their stereotypes as cooks and kitchen dwellers, but initiators of cultural propagation for societal inclusiveness. These two positions show the dichotomy that is involved in the performers' attempt to assert their position in the society.

Similarly, the choice of costumes during Kengbe performances is precipitated by the dictate of Ilorin culture and tradition. Ramat Iyoaye (2023), in an oral interview carried out by this researcher, contends that "the space of women in Kengbe performance began to see certain gender-based changes when they realised they are within their own environment where women are predominantly the center of action." She further agrees that Kengbe is a female-dominated genre for leisure hours when their husbands are away. She opines that the performance is sometimes used to create an enabling environment for women to know each other and to advice one another.

The performers use calabashes and sticks among other items that are used for house chores especially for cooking, washing and cleaning, as their musical instruments; these items are usually associated with women. Their musical instruments can, therefore, be described as metonymic because they are items that are associated with women and their stereotypes. So, in that sense, the song-texts affirm the women's socio-cultural space. Moreover, the women's creation of Kengbe musical beats by hitting the calabash is a reversal of a role mostly considered being male . This is another way the women subvert men's roles and establish their authority and independence to resist male-guided traditional power relations and ideology .

Marital space and contractual issues

Since the inception of gender-based inquiry and other women rights-related struggles, women have sought for recognition and equal representation in many activities that will make their voices heard and be accepted in society. This they have been achieving by challenging the norms and the existing sociocultural gender parity impedeimnets in Ilorin. Among the various social structures which undermine the realization of female aspirations is the tradition of marriage among the people of Ilorin. The institution of marriage is considered a critical rite in personal and societal wellbeing.

However sacrosanct the marriage union is, the female party in the contract has little or no voice in the choice of who is to be her partner. This practice among the people of Ilorin is known as 'Iyawo sara' (gifted-bride).. In most cases, these women do not have a say in deciding who to marry; it is mostly an internal arrangement between the families of the intending couple. This practice does not necessarily include a heartfelt acceptance from the woman as most women give in to their parent wish after a lot of pressure and persuasion. They accept their fate and

trust in their parents' judgment in determining their marital choice. Mubaraq Olohuntoyin, in an oral interview cited by Ahmad Jimba (2021), contends that "In the olden days at Ilorin, people sing around from one household to another with a new bride to be offered to whomever her parent wishes she marries" He continues that the songs mostly goes thus:

Ìyàwó sádákà re	This is a gift wife
A ò mo ibi tí ó selè sí	Chorus : We don't know where it is going
Ìyàwó sádákà re	This is a gift wife
A ò mo ibi tí ó selè sí	Chorus: We don't know where it is going
Ilé akéwú	The house of Quran
Ilé akéwúsolá	Chorus:The house of joy
Ilé onítá	Ile onita
Ilé onítákàdá	Chorus: Ilé onítákàdá
Olóhunòjé	May God let it
Olóhun jé ó se ànfàní	Chorus: May God let it be favourable

The bride is taken to the groom's house without her consent or prior knowledge. Often, the groom is old enough to be the bride's father. Olabisi (1998) agrees that "arranged marriages happen when marriages are contracted without the consent of the bride; and child marriage is where a girl of about 9-11 years old becomes a victim of rape by the would-be husband (an adult male who can be as old as the girl's father)". Many women fall within this tradition of arranged marriages..

Once the marriage rites are finalised, the bride's family then begins to admonish the groom's familyto be faithful, loyal, God-fearing and caring towards their daughter, the bride. This can be seen in the following Waka lines as performed by Alhaja Oloye::

Wọ́n ní á fun yín nítorí ọlóhun	They said we should give you for the sake of God
Egbe: Ẹni ta bá fún ọ́ bẹ̀rù ọlóhun	Chorus:Those given should fear God
Wọ́n ní á fun yín nítorí ọlóhun	They said we should give you for the sake of God
Ẹgbe: Eni ta bá fún ọ́ bẹ̀rù ọlóhun ọba	Chorus: Those given should fear God
Ẹni ta bá fún ọ́ bẹ̀rù ọlóhun	Those given should fear God
Egbe: Ẹni ta bá fún ọ́ bẹ̀rù ọlóhun ọba	Chorus: Those given should fear God
wọ́n ní á fun yín nítorí ọlóhun	They said we should give you for thesake of God
Egbe: Ẹni ta bá fún ọ́ bẹ̀rù ọlóhun	Chorus:Those given should fear God.

Although this practice is mostly done out of goodwill, the bride's parents decide to gift their daughter to another man without expecting any reward in return and sometimes it is done to strengthen the bond between the two families. Alhaja Hafsah Bello, who was also gifted out as a bride, stated in an interview with this researcher, that:

> "I was not scared, but I was nervous, I was not scared because I trust my guardians, and Iwas sure they would do good by me. Although, I have been informed about this arrangement since I

> hit puberty and with this knowledge in mind I refused advances from any man who approached me. My wedding was splendid and my guardians gave me a lot of gifts. When I was brought to my husband's house I felt like any bride would have felt, happy, and nervous. The only difference was that I didn't know who my husband was going to be.

Similarly, she was asked if every gifted wife was as successful as she was in marriage. Her response was negative. She revealed that many of her friends who were also gifted wives were not as lucky as she was; some of them had husbands who were as old as their fathers; some had husbands who were not committed to oath of matrimony; while others ended up terminating their marriages due to resentment and dashed hopes..

The aforementioned reveals that some parents end up giving out their daughters as they so wish, with no expectation or rewards from the beneficiaries. This is done with the intention to strengthen the bond of the families ties involved, irrespective of their social status. Alhaja Oloyebuttressed this point in the following performance:

Ládá sàráà (2) The reward of giving
Ègbè: ó di òdò olúwa (2) Chorus: Is with God
A sore fún enìkan mó jé enìkan ó mò (2) You that did good for other without letting other know
Ègbè: ládá sàráà ó dí òdò olúwa(2) Chorus: The reward of giving is with God
Mò jé a kúrú èmí olá Ànóbì May he not shortening your life because of the prophet
Ègbè: ládá sàráà ó dí òdò olúwa Chorus: the reward of giving is with God
Wàláhì wón fún wa ní ìyàwó inú àwa dùn I swear they gave us a wife and we are Happy.

Lewis (1995) avers that...African cultural practices have been a weapon for enforcing women's obedience." Any Ilorin woman that is given out in marriage must find a way to keep and maintain her home even if she is not happy as divorce is frowned at in the society. If a woman is divorced, she is considered a failure and if she is lucky enough to remarry, she would be categorised as a harlot. However, this is not the case for the male gender. If he is unhappy with his gifted wife, he is free to choose another wife while retaining his bequeathed first wofe. .

Ilorin female chanters have made such gender-based issues noticeable. Their performances depict such negating realities against women.. Alhaja Ruqayah Batimoluwasi, Alhaja Oloye, Alhaja Hafsah Onisese, Ramat Iyoaye and many others in their oral performances assert this trend depicting an interest in gender-based issues. They foreground how the female gender has been placed on an unequal position compared to her male counterpart.

One of Ilorin's rich cultural heritages is its marriage ceremony which is filled with different traditional activities despite the modernist and colonial influences. Unlike many other cultures in Nigeria where two to three days are used for wedding ceremonies, Ilorin people have set five to seven days aside for marriage rites depending on the families involved. In all of these, the

bride is the most important character during the wedding rites. This is enacted in Ramat Iyoaye's Kengbe chant:

Lílé;	**LEAD CHANTER;**
Gbangba mo jòkó, gbangba mo jòkó o e.	I sat at the veranda, at the veranda I sat.
Wọn han nlobì o.	They shared bouquet.
Bẹ́ ẹ dẹ̀ wọn ha nobì.	So, they shared bouquet
Mo ní kílódé.	I asked "what happen?"
Mo ní kílódé o e.	I asked "what happen"?
Ẹ ha nobì o.	That you shared bouquet,
Bẹ̀ ẹ dẹ̀ ẹ ha nobì.	So, you shared bouquet.
Wọ́n ní wọn dajọ́ Alákànkẹ́ o ọmọ ore.	They said they pick Àkànkẹ́'s wedding day.
Ìyàwó n sunkún èmi nà n sunkún o e.	The wife is crying likewise me too
Ìyàwó mọ́ jà o.	Dear wife, don't fight
Bẹ̀ ẹ dẹ̀ dákun mọ́ jà o.	Yes, please don't fight
Ilé ọkọ sá ni ilé ẹ̀kọ́ o ọmọ ore…	Matrimonial home is a lesson home for a good child…

Starting from the first to the last day of the marriage rites, the bride is expected to perform different culturally inclined roles while the groom could remain unknown to the entire bride's family .

Gender consciousness in Kengbe performance

The two sexes are integral part of the society. Both men and women are societal builders who perform undisputable roles for cordial cohabitation in the society. They help each other, without women in the society such society will not grow, nor will it prosper. However the male gender has dominated the society, men believe they have all the power and the capability to think and make decisions, they have brought it upon themselves to help women think and make decisions as women are weak and incapable of rendering certain things in the society.Radika Kapur (2019) argues that "...women have important role to perform, the role of women are primarily recognized in a social, political, economic, cultural and religious spheres" this assertion justifies that women are important in every society. Their support and contribution is needed in every sphere of life be it social, economic or political.

Mbogiri cited in Radika (2019) while discussing the roles of women in capacity building opines that "when women are engaged in the implementation of various tasks and activities, then it is vital for them to possess the essential skills and abilities". If women were giving the opportunity to acquire the necessary skill, definitely they will support men in capacity building. The fulfillment of womanhood goes beyond nurturing children and building a household. Alhaja Oloye in an oral interview describes that "women are spices of life, they are specially created by the God, and they should always be accorded with respect".

Within this scope, women involvement in oral chants in Ilorin has garnered more reception than that of their male counterpart. Even though, the tradition of the Ilorin people does not give

room for women inclusion in the outward disposition of social skills and public performances, we now see them championing the cause of sociopolitical evangelism through their various chants. In Iyoaye's songs, we can see vividly where Kengbe is used to portray societal decadence through the use of sarcasm and innuendos. This is captured in the following lines:

Lílé ;- Ọlọrun kó sànú ọmọge o.	May the Lord be of help to maidens
Ọlọrun kó sànú ọmọge o.	May the Lord be of help to maidens
Tán bá wí wọ́n á lọ́mọge ni.	When they speak, they would say she is a maiden
Adélébọ̀ nà n ṣe ṣìnà.	Married women are adulterous also
Tí wọ́n tún ju ọmọge lọ.	More adulterous than young lady.

Here, the chanter speaks against the stereotypes towards maidens in the society. They are believed to be promiscuous and wayward before settling down in marriage. This is a condemned act among Ilorin people, even though it is rampant in most places. The chanter here, reveals the adulterous nature of married women who engage in extra-marital affairs like the maidens they all criticized. The lines above are typical representation of the societal decadence in the polity, which the female chanters of Kengbe, Waka and other genres speak against.

When we take into consideration narratives by Kengbe chanters, a radical view of female characters can be discovered, particularly in the following song-text:

Lílé Ti múndíá ìsín lẹ rí wí.	You only talk of the maidens
T'adélẹ́bọ̀ sá ń pelemọ.	Married women are so adulterous
B'ọ́mọ bá ti wọ́n wọn a yege.	They free once their child grow up
Kọ̀rọ̀ ìlú ni wọn yóò mọ gbà ká o.	They take through cranny
Wọ́n a sorí ọmú pẹlẹbẹ.	With their nipples unprotected
Lílé;- T'adélẹ́bọ̀ ìsín lẹ rí wí.	You talk only of the married women
T'arúgbó ìsín kọ yọyọ.	The aged women are more
Wọn a sín irun orí sinrinwinrin.	With their hair neatly plaited
Wọn a kọjú rẹ̀ s'áwọn kàwú.	Have it directed to their aged husbands
Kàwú tó sorí pọndanran.	The aged man with shinny head

This showcases a form of 'misogyny' taking place: the infidelity of all women is asserted through the sequences of actions by women chanters and is overly manifested in the morals of a narrative declaiming that women are worse than men. In these chants, they tend to moderate the principle of male superiority and unity of the agnates. The mechanism at work is the positive emphasization of female qualifications which is their appearance is already present in the song pattern and models. Ilorin oral performances outline gender dialectics within the frame work of a definite division of social roles. Though, the negativity of women is linked mainly to 'age'in the text, but no anathema is pronounced on femininity.

We can see how the female characters are connoted as uncertain but they are allowed certain autonomy: they have their own goals and these goals are recognized within the systemic of cultural logic. In Ilorin oral chants, there is space for female characters to express and represent collective as well as individual interests, though this space is certainly limited by the paradigm of the ideological preference for masculinity. At the same time, genderrelated views of the story tellers consciously and unconsciously emerge. These views lean on the shared models and are connected to the complementary perspectives of men and women with respect to their positions in their culture.

Binary opposition within the gender space

The patrilineal logic as the fundamental principle of the Ilorin community is not open to discussion. In most of the songs, the spatial dichotomy in gender terms is well established. However, there are spatial opposition evidence of 'house' versus 'street', which concerns only women, since men have a right to the outdoor space, as well as dominate the indoors. In the song-texts, the spatial and social dichotomy embedded in the performance is radicalized, as it is presented in an absolute form, then it is stigmatized. This is evident in "datum 3"

Lílé Mo rí kísà níbi mo lọ.	I witnessed a lot at the party.
Mo rí kísà níbi mo lọ.	I witnessed a lot at the party.
Níbi ká sùn ká tún fẹ̀dí o.	By uncultured sleep of our maidens
Ajá gbé tòbí ọmọge.	Dog carried maiden's pant.
Lílé Onímọ́tò tí yó jẹun ọmọ.	Dear driver who will enjoy the fruits of his labors.
Onímọ́tò tí yó jẹun ọmọ.	Driver who will reap the joy of parenthood
Sọ̀mí kalẹ̀ ní idi ẹmi.	Drop me at berry tree.
Ọkọ mi ń bẹ nídi ìgbá	My husband is under the locust grove
tó tanná ojú rokoso.	Whose eyes is staring like halogen.

The lines above resonate the promiscuities engaged by women within the polity, as some of them took it upon themselves to reveal any act of immorality in the society. "Drop me at berry tree" is a line that reveals the awareness of the adulterous woman who would not want her husband to know her whereabouts. The husband is described to be waiting under the locust grove in search of her. The necessity of renewing the commitment to societal decadence is thus strengthened by the Kengbe chants. On this point, one is forced to ask the question of whether this interpretation in the chants is due to the present hardening of what is defined as a conventional 'spatial dichotomy' (29) as cited by Daniella Merolla (1996). The community has subjected itself to a physical and intellectual prudery that almost requires silence from women. These women through the chanters have revealed the silence and seclusion imposed on them for the sake of their counterparts' honour which are said to be desired, through religious and cultural annihilation of women's space.

In “Datum 2”, the chanter condemns the unhealthy status of polygamy, which is specifically a competitive domain for most women. The song affirms and destabilizes generally accepted views about gender and sexuality. This attempt is made to validate women’s identity through the creation of an absent center which is ‘child bearing’. This affirms Judith Butler’s (1999) claim that “identity emerges as a result of lack or an absence”. She argued that the self finds fulfillment and completion only when the ‘other’ is incorporated. The self only becomes a self on the condition that it has suffered… a loss which is suspended and provisionally resolved through a melancholic incorporation of some ‘other’. (27) Similar to this is what Adrienne Rich termed as “an expression of the obscure bodily hatred peculiar to women who view themselves through the eyes of men” (1977: 220). In this case, the ‘other’ is the woman’s ability to procreateand be regarded as a mother in the husband’s house. From this perspective, motherhood is subjected to procreation, and the number of children one has would determine the level of respect she commands. For instance, the “Datum Three” portrays the radical intention behind the motherhood net, as thus:

Lílé Bẹ̀ẹ́ni, pàkúté ọlọ́mọ la dẹ.	We have set a motherhood trap
Pàkúté ọlọ́mọ la dẹ.	We have set a motherhood trap
Ọlọ́run jé ìyàwó ó tẹsẹ̀ bọ́ o.	May the wife's legs get trapped, by God’s grace
Kó bí mẹ́fà lẹ̀kan ṣoṣo, Àmín.	And conceive six at once, Amen.

The above lines have established the womanist praxis combined in the chanter’s critique of women’s stereotypes and creation of acceptable women’s image. A barren woman is not welcome to the gathering of women upon her failure to procreate. “The cultural patterns have reduce the value of women to their physical appearances or the beauty of their bodies (Jegede, 2013: 214). The woman space is inscribed into the chants in such a way that the singer explores the biological features as sources of power and relevance and as an proclamation of the existential potency of the female gender.

However, men are equally mocked in their failure to fulfill their cultural obligations as thus:

Lílé;- Bẹ̀ẹ̀ni, agbádá la rí yẹpẹrẹ.	Yes, it's only the agbádá that we see
Agbádá la rí yẹpẹrẹ.	It's only the agbádá that we see
Kò sí kọ́bọ̀ lápo bọ̀ọ́dá,	It's only the agbádá that we see
agbádá la rí yẹpẹrẹ.	It's only the agbádá that we see
Lílé;- Kẹ̀kẹ́ ló ń gùn tó ń sagbaja.	You rides bicycle yet, you are full of pride
Kẹ̀kẹ́ ló gùn tó ń sagbaja.	You rides bicycle yet, you are full of pride
Èèyàn sá ni Siaka ọ̀tẹ́ o.	Take Siaka for example
Tó ra gínnì f'áwọn ọmọge.	Who is blessing maidens with good clothes

The chant thus becomes a transgressive speech act (AderemiRaji-Oyelade2012:89), "a violation of religion, a deviation from culture and a strategy of resistance against patriarchy. These performances are considered dangerous and may lead many astray." Though, this is done in a playful manner but its connotation is plainly exposed. It further emphasizes the performers' visibility and audibility within the gender consciousness space. They have found their voices in a hitherto sociallyimpeding environment for such consciousnesswhich they have survived.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that tribe and culture/ religion are important elements in the struggle for gender space, positioning and self-retrieval. Ilorin female oral performers uphold acceptable Islamic values and deconstruct male-guided societal ideologies which undermine the place and relevance of women. . The feminine consciousness is expressed in the traditional Ilorin Waka, Kengbe and Senwele songs, and gender discursive spaces are occasioned where feminine difference is articulated. They do not only seek to achieve emancipation by castigating men for their wrongdoings and incapacities, rather they awaken the consciousness of women to negotiate their ways through oppression and attempt to maintain a middle space as an alternative to patriarchy.

Gender space has been explained as emanating from the performers' attempt to reconfigure and extend their spaces beyond limiting cultural spaces. This is realised through metonymic construction of musical instruments such as kengbe, stirring sticks, and poetic strategies such as irony, repetition, refrain and paradox. Their attempt at asserting themselves becomes contradictory because in one breath they maintain their Ilorin norms, and in another, they uphold deviant cultures which counter Islamic and cultural norms. The metonymic musical components that occur in their performances sustain and enhance their creativity, disavow and celebrate femininity, define and redefine sexuality while challenging confining and restrictive customs.

What is certain is that the women want freedom from oppressive traditions, they have spoken for their gender (audible), and they are seen by some people (visible); but not much has been achieved from their performances with regard to their emancipation. Thus, the current study has foregrounded the elements and strategies of performance which affirm and transgress gender cultural norms in selected Ilorin oral performances. .

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