

The Sounds of Silence – As Heard through Patriarchy

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Abstract

It is the drive from work that transmogrifies her even more. She is a black, South African woman. At work, she adapts to meet expectations of her professional competence. At home, she adapts and shifts to her husband and/or father's expectations of a woman in their culture. Within herself, she shifts her needs, emotions, and aspirations to fit into these contexts. Through it all, she carefully chooses what can be spoken, and what remains unspoken. Many factors influence this inner debate, chiefly patriarchy, race, religion, and culture. This article reflects on the premise that many black women are deprived of their spontaneous and natural being, because they have to evaluate their conversations and contexts at all times. Through the lens of patriarchy, the article seeks to identify some of the factors contributing to this inner debate, followed by real-life evidence of the shifting adaptations made by selected black, South African women. These women volunteered to share their stories by answering a questionnaire. The data they provided was then analysed through phenomenology and critical theory. These are the sounds of their silence.

Keywords: African feminism; culture; language; patriarchy; shifting

Introduction

Patriarchy is a social system in which adult males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. In the domain of the family, fathers (or father figures) hold authority over the women and children. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>)



We live in a patriarchal society which is defined as a society organised and run by men. Men make the rules and dominate in business and government. It is said to be a "man's world," men make the rules and dominate in all forums outside the home. A woman's main value is to support a man (behind every good man is a good woman), bear children, and housekeeping duties. This is how it is and has been for millennia in most cultures¹.

Women make up 51.3 per cent of South Africa's population, so they are in the majority. Statistics South Africa Census 2011 revealed the country's population to be 51 770 560, of which 26 581 769 (51.3 per cent) were female and 25 188 791 (48.7 per cent) were male².

Every woman has a HIStory, and some women have a HERstory that is waiting to be told. Victimization of women is a chronic problem in the workplace, home, and society in general. While tremendous progress has been made in the legal establishment of gender equality, much focus has been given to males victimising females. This is still prevalent, with newspapers and crisis centres across South Africa awash with reports of the victimisation of women. A review of the table below confirms this. The statistics on the cases recorded are up to August 2016 (Table 1), and are mainly on abuse by just one crisis centre operating in KwaZulu-Natal—59.22 per cent of the affected were women, and 81.94 per cent of these were black women (Mansfield 2016, 2).

Table 1: The statistics on the cases recorded

<i>Race</i>	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
African	190	304	253	368	320	332	218	373					2358	74.55
Coloured	6	10	9	6	9	11	4	9					64	2.02
Indian	15	23	32	16	12	27	19	26					170	5.37
White	46	71	72	107	70	79	42	84					571	18.05

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	174	250	218	309	206	250	180	286					1873	59.22
Male	83	158	148	188	205	199	103	206					1290	40.78

Thamm (2015, 2) acknowledges that...

The likelihood of our getting murdered, raped, or beaten by a man we know is depressingly high ... Many women are still economically dependent on men and

¹ http://members.iimetro.com.au/~hubbca/our_patriarchal_society.htm

² <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/population.htm>

beholden to deeply held private notions – informed by culture and religion - of what this ‘ownership’ of our minds and bodies means.

It is this silent form of violence that is shared in the case studies following, a silence heard through the lens of patriarchy.

How do women cope with victimisation? In their book, *The Double Lives of Black Women in America*, authors Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden (2003) argue that many Black women spend much “time, thought and emotional energy watching every step they take, managing an array of feelings, and altering their behaviour in order to cope with it all” (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003, 60). They have to adapt their language, behaviour and even their appearance in order to make their white colleagues feel comfortable in their presence. Then, when in the company of their black colleagues, they have to adapt again so that they fit into their own culture.

This adaptation is described as “shifting.” It refers to all the ways black women “cope with racial and gender stereotypes, bias, and mistreatment... all Black women are forced to react or respond in some way to these challenges – and thus all Black women shift” (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003, 62).

Patriarchy is one of the most common, yet accepted, forms of victimisation experienced by South African women, depriving them of their spontaneous and natural being. This problem statement captures the essence of the dichotomy of patriarchy—it is victimisation, but it is accepted. The objective of this article is to tell the stories of how selected, black, South African women silently experience victimisation through the practise of patriarchy. It is premised on the following research questions:

- How do South African women experience and manage patriarchy?
- How does the practice of shifting enable women to cope with the implications of patriarchy?
- What are the factors that silence a woman at home; in the workplace?
- How can the effects of patriarchy be managed better by women in the future?
- What role does language/communication play in the perpetuation of patriarchy?

In seeking to understand and gain insight to the above questions, it became clear that the journeys of local women needed to be told, their voice needed to be heard against the backdrop of patriarchal practices in Africa, and globally. How they shifted, how they managed their experience needs to be shared, specifically so that the next

generation of women can be better prepared when confronted by victimisation in any form. It is through the experiences of the identified women that some of the effects of patriarchy can be established; the trauma-related; the prevention established.

This article reflects on the premise that many black women are deprived of their spontaneous and natural being because they have to adapt to the needs of a racially-charged and capitalist society, and then also to gender abuse in the specific form of patriarchy, which is persistent and insidious. It seeks to identify some of the factors contributing to their inner debates, followed by real-life evidence provided by tracking the adaptations made by selected black, South African women.

The women who volunteered to participate in this local project were finally accepted through purposive quota sampling. A questionnaire was the only method of data collection. Their journeys are credible because of the self-referential technique, which formed the basis of their experiences. The traditions of phenomenology and critical theory, as well as existentialism, are methodologies applicable to the study of folklore and culture. These methodologies were thus used when analysing the experiences of patriarchy as described by the four Xhosa women. Their history, lifeworld, memory, illustrations, and individual experience filtered their stories, exposing what anthropologist Prof Michael Jackson (2016, 1) describes as follows:

their... “struggle for being involves a struggle to reconcile shared and singular experiences, acting and being acted upon, being for others and being for oneself.”

Their experience of patriarchy was clearly negotiated through the endless life experiences, traditions, dilemmas, conversations and the social contexts in which they found themselves. The researcher ethnographer unconsciously becomes a part of their story in recording it, in “writing” HERstory.

Each woman shared her history and HERstory. Having an opportunity to share one’s experience, especially if it is a painful one, is always therapeutic to the victim. It is hoped that the women who shared their stories will inspire other women as they undergo their own victim-to-victor process. These are the sounds of their silence.

HERstory – Stories of South African Women

“Shifting” is alive and present in the lives of black women in South Africa on the very same levels as their sisters in the United States (US). This study recorded and reviewed the experiences of patriarchy by these selected women. The pattern that emerged was consistent—all became aware of and were exposed to the effects of patriarchy as children—and they all accepted it as a norm. And yet, all experienced a shift within themselves as adults, a shift that is symbolically captured in the act of driving home from the workplace.

HER stories are excerpts taken from the reflections of four South African Xhosa women living in the Eastern Cape. They are named Aviwe, Babalwa, Cebisa, and Dudu for the purpose of this study.

Aviwe's Story

Aviwe is a strong, independent Xhosa woman, aged between 50 and 60. She held a prominent position as a marketer at an educational institution before retiring. She has continued to study with the aim of attaining her Master's degree in the future. She recalls being confident and assertive while at work, then acknowledges that she had to shift to the needs of her culture and tradition at home. The advice that she gives to younger South African women indicates that while the Xhosa home has been modernised and changed, it is still expected of a woman to conform to traditional and cultural practices such as joining her husband's family after marriage. Aviwe's poignant reflections describe her version of shifting. This is HERstory.

Aviwe's Personal Memories

My father was from the Eastern Pondoland, a remote and backward area. This is where I saw patriarchy in practice and experienced it. The man is the head of the family, he sets the rules and the wife has to toe the line and not question him. When a girl reaches adolescence, the father would arrange with a wealthy family (with a lot of cattle and cultivated fields) that his daughter was available for marriage in exchange for cattle or a field. The daughter and her mother were not included in the discussion. The poor girl would have to leave school and go.

I remember that it was customary for the wife to walk behind the man. No chit chat was allowed. The man had the liberty of having other relationships with spinsters and widows in the neighbourhood, and the wife would not dare question that. The children and the mother would know, and accept that the father was visiting another 'wife' and would be gone for a number of days. If the man was wealthy, he would plough land for the other wives and build an extra hut for them. The wife and her kids had to assist and join hands (ilima).

My personal memory is of my son having to be circumcised. My son and I were not consulted or notified. Like other mothers, I had an inkling because I saw the father and other men having a meeting (imbizo) in the kraal. My son was then called to have his hair cut and go to the mountain.

That women are treated as objects is clear when a child dies. The mother doesn't have a say on how, where and when her child would be buried. This also applies when her husband dies - his brothers take over. They do not brief her, or ask for her wishes; she is informed of burial rites.

Patriarchy was not just in the home. I experienced it in my church too. Men do not accept women as priests or church wardens... the men would come to church, but would not enter the building if it's the turn of the female priest to conduct the service.

How did Aviwe address her experiences?

When I think back, my way of dealing with patriarchy was to accept that the place of the woman is in the kitchen. Women are to bear children and build a home for the family. To be well respected, I had to succumb and obey as I wanted to have a healthy relationship with my in-laws.

What advice does Aviwe have for younger South African women?

My advice for young Xhosa women is that nothing much has changed. Transformation is needed and should be practised. Men should know and accept that we are not subordinates. When you are a single parent then you have a say in issues relating to your children, more especially if no damages were paid during pregnancy.

The government has introduced new laws, policies, rules and regulations to address patriarchy and promote gender equality. Women should stand up and be bold; we are equal and should be treated as such. It's the 21st century and women should demand to be treated with dignity.

Women can now apply for court interdicts on how to bury their husbands, especially when there is a conflict within the family. In church, I've noted that the clergy had to run workshops to instil change and transformation on patriarchy.

Babalwa's Story

Babalwa is a teacher, aged between 41 and 50. She is a dedicated vibrant personality, always striving to achieve more. She is about to complete her Master's degree. Her life has been difficult, but she has risen above it all in many ways. She realised that she was not given the same respect as her younger brother and that people from her township do not care much about gender equality. Worse still, she noticed that women educators had given up on applying for leadership positions at schools because they knew the jobs were reserved for men. Babalwa sees education as the transforming agent in the fight against patriarchy. This is HERstory.

Babalwa's personal memories

From a very young age I noticed that men always had more authority than women. Women would pander to their needs – cooking, washing, serving their meals. I didn't see men supporting women in the home.

I am the first born in my family, but culturally, it is my younger brother who is regarded as such. He is the heir of the family; he will carry the family and clan name

forward. If we are both at home when an elder visits us, it is accepted that my brother will be greeted and acknowledged first, not me. I clearly remember the sayings... a woman can never be older than a man; age does not count in this regard.

As a teacher, I have noticed that the majority of high school principals are males. Even now in 2016, the perception that this is the natural order of things is still strong, even amongst women. Consequently, very few women even consider applying for a Principal's position in high schools.

How did Babalwa address her experiences?

I have always encouraged my brothers to help with the household chores. I wanted to make them realise that these chores were not just light work, but tiring and emotionally draining as well. I hoped that they would help around the home, and understand when their partners are sometimes too tired after work and do not have the energy to prepare a large meal for them.

I noticed from an early age that this custom of patriarchy was not going to change anytime soon. I decided not to take it personally, but to develop myself through education to be an assertive, strong, and influential woman within and outside the family. Women should never underestimate the power of education for themselves. An educated woman is able to sustain herself economically and because of that, her voice is somehow sought out. Education helps you not to be invisible. It's a fact that male educators dominate as managers, even today. As women, we must be aware of the perceptions that society has on patriarchy. We need to trust and believe that we are capable of being managers. We should apply to become principals. We need to support each other and know that the best 'man' for the job can be a woman.

What advice does Babalwa have for younger SA women?

Get an education. It is the number one deterrent to any kind of domination. Educated and economically active women are treated with more respect when compared with uneducated ones, even in more culturally traditional families.

Empower yourself, advance your qualifications. Attend training workshops related to your career. Know your rights and do not be intimidated by the 'Boys' club.' Strive for excellence. Your work ethic will build your reputation. Be a mentor, especially to other women who are new in your field.

Cebisa's Story

Cebisa is a retired educator, aged between 50 and 60. She is now enjoying being a grandparent and has embarked on further studies. She does not see age as a barrier to improving her education and hopes to continue to promote the study of African languages. She first became aware of the effects of patriarchy at school, acknowledging that parents perpetuated the practice by removing girls from school.

Her concern is that society in general places more value on men than on women. She advises women of today to stand up for their rights. This is HERstory.

Cebisa's personal memories

As a pupil, I noticed that both my primary and high school principals were male. Male teachers encouraged the boys to do better, and I noted that the boys were not comfortable when girls performed better than them in class.

As children we took patriarchy to be the norm, perhaps because our fathers were our providers. This made them the boss! We were socialized to see boys as superior. Some parents did not send their girls to school, as it was a waste of money. Girls had to marry and take care of all household chores. They thus contributed nothing to the family. The elder brother inherits everything from his parents, even if he is not the first born.

In the workplace, almost all higher positions are occupied by men. Most managers are men. If a female reaches here, she is seen as a secretary who is only capable of taking minutes whilst the men discuss items on the agenda. If a women holds a senior position, the men tend to undermine her, often preventing her from working successfully. In some schools, males possess higher qualifications than women, and thus assume that they make better teachers. In some cases, women look down upon each other and this makes life even more difficult.

Currently, our TV news items are debating if women are ready to become President of SA. There are doubts about this. Most of the provinces have male premiers. In the rural areas, community meetings are held at the Chief's great place. Women are not allowed to attend. Men take decisions on behalf of the entire community. Women are not even allowed to know what happens in an initiation school, so mothers are always in the dark about their initiate sons. Many people still do not believe in female priests.

How did Cebisa address her experiences?

I have tried to raise my children as equals. A boy should do household chores so he does not see himself as superior to women. The kitchen is not a girl's place. Inheritance must be divided equally. All children must be part of family meetings, and allowed to speak.

I have always promoted the belief that staff members at work must be utilised according to their expertise and abilities, regardless of gender. Gender equality must be observed in all structures of the workplace. Staff development for everybody is also important.

I encouraged the young women in my family to be involved in community projects. They must do what they do best without trying to prove themselves to anybody. Boys and girls should be encouraged to work together on projects. They need each other and

should know each other better. They should have meetings, share ideas, listen to each other's opinions and learn to respect each other.

What advice does Cebisa have for younger South African women?

A woman of today must refuse to be seen simply as a cook and cleaner. But, she must do this without being disrespectful. She should attend family gatherings, and speak up if she wants to be taken seriously and responsibly. Girls must not let serious matters be handled by men only. Our mothers did that. We should not.

Men should not be allowed to dominate any situation. A women should be assertive, developing herself by studying, attending workshops and networking at conferences. She must boost her confidence. She should see men as equals, and not superiors. She should not be afraid to challenge men in management. A woman should be fully involved in community activities. She should not settle for mediocrity. She must try to excel in whatever she does.

Dudu's Story

Dudu is an educator librarian, aged between 30 and 40. She noted patriarchy in her extended family as a child, and specifically noted how communication took place between a man and his wife and children. The silent acceptance of polygamy is a practice she disdains, while male dominance in the workplace has motivated her to speak out when needed. Dudu sees reading widely as a means of addressing patriarchy. This is HERstory.

Dudu's personal memories

I can't recall patriarchy at home as my parents divorced when I was very young. My extended family made me note that a man is treated like a king. He was served meals first. I noted how the wives could not speak back to him, and that the children spoke to the father through their mother. The wife had to cook, wash his clothes and get groceries. His role was to just give the finance to the wife.

My experiences were mainly in the workplace. As a woman, when you speak in the boardroom, some men do not even look at you. Whatever you say is not even noted, and you feel intimidated. This makes speaking difficult in other meetings. I see how men make so called informed decisions, but women colleagues have to clean up when such plans do not work out. Men hold positions and titles, but women do the work. Men attend meetings and are not questioned if they do not come back. But as a woman, you have to explain to your boss (being a man) why you do things in a certain way.

In my culture, many men have multiple partners, whether they are married or not. As a woman you cannot question this because it's considered a norm.

I see patriarchy very much at church. Men here make decisions on behalf of the family, as if consensus was reached. There is often no consultation with the wife and children. I am glad to see female pastors in churches today.

How did Dudu address her experiences?

In my culture, I think that patriarchy will continue through generations. I didn't need to address it in my own family, but remember feeling sorry for members of my extended family. The father was simply the boss.

As an employee, I became very sensitive to patriarchy. I believe that it should be addressed because women are also breadwinners now, just as only men used to be providers before. Women need to stand up for themselves, especially in the 21st century. I try to participate in different forums to discuss my challenges as a woman. Seminars, workshops, conferences and social platforms are valuable tools that can be used in addressing patriarchy, and men should form part of these gatherings. We should all be trained on how to handle discrimination. This is a way of curing the root causes rather than preventing the symptoms.

In my experience, I know that I should be my husband's partner, not his follower. We are in the relationship together and outdated family traditions should not trouble us when we are married.

What advice does Dudu have for younger South African women?

If I had to mentor a young South African to cope with patriarchy, I would advise her to be vocal about such matters. We are in a democratic country. As women, we stand a good chance of being listened to, as opposed to earlier generations.

Schools should include lessons on patriarchy from Grade 1. Boys and girls should learn how to treat each other with respect, and in turn they will pass this on to their families and social environments. All women should be aware that knowledge is power. Books are valuable tools to address challenging patriarchy, as is the internet. Lerato Tshabalala's new book, *The way I see it: The Musings of a Black Woman in the Rainbow Nation* (June 2016) gives insights into social, political and cultural affairs, relating personal experiences as a black South African woman in post-apartheid SA. I would like young women to read this.

At work, men and women should do interchangeable work. In academic institutions, the staff should work together with students so that by the time they graduate into the corporate world, they are prepared on how to handle gender discrimination. Women need to stand up for themselves. As women we have so much to give, and it is therefore important that we demand recognition and continue to create awareness that times have changed. Patriarchy has to stop for the sake of the next generation.

In the social context, community members can work together according to the needs of their age group. Sometimes these different groups can combine so as to share their strategies. For instance, Generation Y (being technologically savvy) can assist Baby Boomers on how to create awareness of patriarchy using social platforms.

Discussion

African folklore includes thousands of ethnic groups with as many languages and traditions. Women have always featured in African folklore since the 18th century, but became the central focus with the introduction of gender studies in the mid-20th century (Peek and Yankah 2004). Their presence, through oral and written scholarship challenged how folklore was traditionally encoded—with and through male dominance. The discrepancy between folklore and such skewed gender representations can be traced back to the 18th century, with the bias of Johann Gottfried Herder's influential model of a society, which integrated folklore and patriarchy. The male authority figure was elevated, while the female was devalued. Missionaries to African countries used his model to record the cultural practices of local people (Peek and Yankah 2004, 288). This bias towards males was maintained through the 20th century. Nevertheless, Ruth Finnegan (1970 as quoted by Peek and Yankah 2004, 288) observed that in many African cultures, men were more of the “bearers of tradition”—and folklore activities such as story-telling were conducted by men. Practitioners of African folklore thus played a role in “reinforcing or subverting normative gender ideologies” (Peek and Yankah 2004, 289). With this background and context of African folklore, modern African society is further plagued by racism and identity, leading to the development of shifting.

The concept of shifting reveals that Black-American women feel pressured to compromise their true selves within America's racial and gender bigotry. Black women shift by altering the expectations they have for themselves or their outer appearance. They modify how they talk and sound. They shift "white" as they head to work in the morning and "black" as they come back home each night. They shift inward, internalising the pain of the negativity that they encounter daily. And sometimes they shift by “fighting back” (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003, 61, 87).

The women who participated in the study by Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) used various metaphors to describe their shifting processes. They spoke of the masks that they wear; how they become chameleons; how they bend who they are; and what they do in order to please others. In short, they are in a constant state of tension, evaluating whether they are fitting in or not, especially in terms of their language, appearance, and behaviour. This state of flux feeds into the notion of shifting, indicating that black women are deprived of their spontaneous and natural being because they have to evaluate their conversations and contexts all the time.

This then is the reality of a black woman. The act of shifting confirms the impact of racial and gender victimisation against women. The woman question is always a struggle, always potent, always real. It's the drive from work that transmogrifies her and draws attention to patriarchy as a universal form of victimisation, forcing her to shift from professional in the workplace, to ... what in the home?

Women are the caregivers, the homemakers. They keep the family together. But in today's global village and the need for gender diversity, these stereotypes have changed considerably. Women form a critical portion of the labour force, and are visible game changers in many so-called male-oriented career contexts. Yet, they are expected to fulfill the demands of their professions, and still continue the responsibilities of being caregivers and homemakers. German (2006, 9) explains it succinctly, that being responsible for the home and childcare ensures that the oppression continues:

Women's roles as mothers and child rearers structure their whole lives. Part-time working is a product of their role as mothers. Unequal and generally low pay is a product of them not being considered as breadwinners. From the beginning of their lives in capitalist society, the assumption is that they are going to be something different from men. Their pinnacle of achievement is presented as motherhood and marriage... Yet the family remains a stifling, stultifying place where attitudes and roles are taught and learned, where prejudices and values are transmitted through the generations. It changes to fit the needs of capitalism but doesn't disappear.

It becomes increasingly clear that patriarchy and capitalism feed off each other, constantly evolving into a toxic ecosystem that victimises women at every stage, forcing the shifting that all women, both black and white, subconsciously undertake in an attempt to achieve some form of "peace, balance, making-it-work-for-me" context. Hartmann captures this toxic relationship in a concise statement: "Capitalism grew on top of patriarchy; patriarchal capitalism is stratified society par excellence... If women are to be free, they must fight against both patriarchal power and capitalist organization of society" (Hartmann 1976, 33). It is also this symbiotic capitalism-patriarchy relationship that prompts the act of shifting, and makes one wonder why women are still considered inferior in the workplace. Hartmann's explanation is that we "ignore the role of men - ordinary men, men as men, men as workers - in maintaining women's inferiority in the labor market" (Hartmann 1976, 4). For women, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Aviwe's HERstory advises younger women that nothing much has changed. Shifting becomes a way of life.

Serres (2016, 1) reiterates that the oppression of patriarchy convinces us—as per the Crunk Feminist Collective that ... "things are the way they are because they have to be, that they have always been that way, that there are no alternatives and that they will never change." Aviwe's HERstory captures this oppression, especially as

reflected by the lack of communication between men and women on significant life issues. When a son is sent away for weeks to initiation school, when a child or husband dies, the woman is merely informed of decisions taken on these family matters. She is not recognised as having feelings, opinions, needs and wants. Aviwe felt treated like an object. She had to shift to the lowest level of communication because this is how things are, have been and will never change. She had to simply obey. Dudu's HERstory describes how wives could not talk back to their husbands, and how children had to talk to their fathers through their mothers. Cebisa's HERstory also describes the lack of communication between men as husbands, fathers and community leaders... and the women who were directly affected by their decisions. Cebisa shifted to respectfully fit in, but she is very firm in her advice to younger women: "Girls must not let serious matters be handled by men only. Our mothers did that. We should not. Men should not be allowed to dominate any situation." Dudu now knows where she stands: "I should be my husband's partner, not his follower."

In the African context, Kabwila-Kapasula views feminist literary theory as critical to the female liberation struggle because it forces us as Africans ...

to take stock of whatever it is we call Africa, examine how that entity relates with the category woman... a contentious issue because it engages the nerve centers of the race, class and gender of power, its creation and distribution (Kabwila-Kapasula 2009, 3).

She further argues that it is patriarchy and colonialism that work together ...

in a dialectic relationship that oppresses many female characters from birth into adulthood up to old age, in private and public spaces, at individual and collective levels (Kabwila-Kapasula 2009, 6).

Of significance is the fact that Kabwila-Kapasula finally concludes that African men cannot be pathologised as patriarchal in nature, clarifying that patriarchy is a social construct that can be outgrown and destroyed. Kambarami (2006) also describes it as a social, not biological construct.

In a study on Shona culture, Kambarami (2006) found that in a family context, the male child is preferred to the female child. The male may not be the eldest child, but he is automatically granted that status, because he carries the family name forward. This is also why parents choose to educate their sons rather than their daughters. In 2016, Babalwa's HERstory resonates with Kambarami's study—that even though she is the eldest, her brother is granted preferential treatment within the family:

The family, as a social institution, is a *brewery* for patriarchal practices by socializing the young to accept sexually differentiated roles... Shona males are socialized to view

themselves as breadwinners and heads of households whilst females are taught to be obedient and submissive housekeepers (Kambarami 2006, 3).

Despite the fact that patriarchy is consistently challenged in modern society, as described in the guidance provided by the HERstory respondents, it is of concern that “women are not only constantly defined in relation to men, but are defined as dependent and subordinate to them as well” (McDowell and Pringle 1992 as quoted in Kambarami 2006, 3). Differentiation and discrimination are the disorder of the day when defining women.

Recommendations made by the HERstory respondents consistently focused on education as a means of challenging patriarchy, notwithstanding the fact that children do not come to school as vacuums; indeed, they have already been indoctrinated with discrimination at home. In South Africa, a review of some of the content taught at primary school reveals that gender equality is being taught, but HERstory respondents confirm that it is not being consistently reinforced. They further confirm that it is teachers in schools who practise patriarchy, both males, and females, thus perpetuating it by accepting it as the norm. Chirimuuta (2006) criticises the curriculum in Zimbabwe as being “gender insensitive and gender blind as it encourages male models, male-authored textbooks and theories thus spelling out that women should be academically subordinate as well” (quoted in Kambarami 2006, 5). Chirimuuta (2006) poses pertinent questions to the views shared by the HERstory respondents, that if a woman gets an education she will be more respected and liberated from the chains of patriarchy. His view is that even educated women accept the culture of patriarchy, for fear of being considered not marriageable. Often, men choose not to court them. Chirimuuta’s (2006) illustration is drawn from the Shona culture, where a woman is celebrated through marriage and if she is not courted because of her education, then her womanhood is also not celebrated. Discrimination is, in this regard, double-barrelled - as a woman, and as an educated woman. No matter how many degrees a woman can have, no matter what her professional status, she is victimised by both men and other women.

Kambarami (2006) found that the saying that *All men are the same* was advice frequently given by older women to young women. Male infidelity is simply there, it is inevitable. It is significant that the HERstory respondents identified the presence of women, other than the wife, as a practice that is accepted in their culture. More significant is how they have shifted from this practice, choosing to remain single, or insisting that their husbands are their equal partners.

Minna Salami (academic and writer) is a key scholar on the topic of African feminism today. Salami's (2013) articles "connect feminism with critical reflections on contemporary culture and intellectual thought from an Africa-centred perspective"³. She asserts that feminism is the tool of choice for African women today. South African women, specifically, will identify with her conclusion, as is illustrated in the HERstories of just the four respondents in this article. All used feminism as the stepping stone antidote to their lived experience of patriarchy. Modern South African feminist activists include Mamphela Ramphele, Thuli Madonsela, Graca Machel, Winnie Mandela, Leah Tutu, Navi Pillay, Lindiwe Sisulu, Maria Ramos and many others. Salami (2013) adds that across the continent we have "African feminist scholars, activists, artists and politicians such as Leymah Gbowee, Joyce Banda, Simphiwe Dana and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ... No one but African women ourselves can bear the responsibility to protect the histories of African women and to connect them to the situations of today"⁴. She emphatically concludes that feminism is not "unAfrican" because it has always been in Africa. African women use whatever tools they have to transform situations that affect them—thus enhancing the positive and acting against the negative. They do this in their capacity to lead as mothers, wives, and professionals. Feminism is the life blood integrating every such role.

Language and Communication Style Perpetuates Patriarchy

Folklore functions as both "writing" and "voice" (Derrida 1978, 90, as quoted in Preston 1995). The speaker, as the narrator has influence on the content being related and there could be possible gender repercussions (Derrida 1978). Babcock (1987, 83) notes the difference when women speak and when they write. She argues that women writing on folklore should attend "not only to women's folklore and women folk but to examine and redefine disciplinary paradigms and discursive practices of folklore scholarship." In reality, such practices are varied and often conflicting. The case studies of the four Xhosa women illustrate in a way that feminist folklore is simultaneously cultural reconstruction and deconstruction of factors that influence one's understanding of it. One such factor is patriarchy. This framework is examined further by Beverly Stoeltje (1988, 141 – 153) in a special issue of the *Journal of Folklore Research*, where she reveals how the paradigms of "writing" and "voice" may, both consciously and unconsciously, become relevant to the understanding of patriarchy, and the patriarchal understanding of folklore.

The voice of the women interviewed identifies with folklore's oral nature, but in order to keep and study folklore, it was necessary for them to write their stories. This modernises the medium through which folklore on patriarchy presented itself within

³ <https://www.msafropolitan.com>

⁴ <https://www.msafropolitan.com/2013/07/a-brief-history-of-african-feminism.html>

their stories, offering us the paradox of a different paradigm that impacts on contemporary critical theory. This paradigm affirms that for many years now there has been a mix, an overlap, of both oral and written presentations of folklore (Bacchilega 1995, as quoted in Preston 1995). Furthermore, in the HERstory narratives, the feelings of the women were intrinsic to their spoken word, but such emotions were not as emphasised in the written record of their experience of patriarchy.

Derrida (1978, as quoted in Preston 1995) theorised that speaking and writing should not oppose each other, because they essentially complement each other and have critical relevance for folklore. “Modern folklorists ... invoke the concepts of audience, context, register, and tradition to address semantic transformations... by the individual speaker” (Derrida 1978, 85, as quoted in Preston 1995). Derrida’s theory of writing conceptualises the continuity between the oral and the written without erasing their differences and presents their paradoxical relation as constitutive of language as a system” (Derrida 1978, 86 as quoted by Preston 1995).

Language is powerful. Words are powerful. They can make or break a human being simply in the way that they are used. They can be used to keep women in a submissive space, or they can fight the feminist fight to accord her the dignity that she deserves. That language is a code that sustains patriarchy is proved eloquently in Thamm’s (2015, 2) comment:

If terminology that is empowering or that promotes equality or which exposes the matrix of male/white/heterosexual power is relegated to the periphery of a national dialogue, we rob society of the potential to reframe power relations for the greater good.

She illustrates her point further:

President Jacob Zuma understood the power of language when he referred to Lindiwe Mazibuko - when she was still leader of the DA in parliament - as “ntombazane” after she had dared to question him on Nkandla. While he might mutter “umfana” or “kwedin” to himself when Economic Freedom Fighters CIC, Julius Malema, or DA Leader, Mmusi Maimaine, rises to speak, it is unlikely he would dare “insult” them thus. (Thamm 2015, 1)

Clearly, language used by leaders in the public domain do much to continue the oppression of women. Women are usually presented as victims in the media—the Media Tenor Survey found that ... “coverage on women is largely shaped by crime, such as the killing of Reeva Steenkamp and the recent murder of Jayde Panayiotou. This is primarily because crimes committed against females in the country gain media traction.” (Thamm 2015, 2).

Lesser crimes are sometimes overlooked as not being important. Verbal and emotional violence is real, as is the violence of angry silence and non-verbal communication. Dudu's HERstory relates how a woman's voice and person can be ignored by the men in meetings. She felt belittled, intimidated. She therefore, shifted to not speaking in some meetings. Cebisa's HERstory adds that male managers belittle women holding equivalent status to them as capable only of taking minutes. Her contribution to the discussion is not encouraged, even if profound. This tendency to undermine women prevents them from being effective in their workplaces. Worse still is when other women in the forum support men in this belittling syndrome. Cebisa notes that excluding women in the rural areas is worse as they are not allowed to attend meetings, where men take decisions on behalf of the entire community. Babalwa's HERstory summarises these different forms of violence in the perception that this is the natural order of things.

On 31 October 2016, a documentary entitled *GirlRising* was broadcast on CNN. It described Michelle Obama's programme to inspire girls in Liberia and Morocco to rise above their limitations, to rise through getting an education. One father's transformation was informative. He had focused on educating his son, and his language, his story, expressed how much he admired and valued his son. When his teenage daughter, Tina, was interviewed, her request was that Liberian women be afforded more educational opportunities. She wanted the same opportunities as her brother, to be treated as an equal, to be valued in her family and the community at large. The words used to describe Tina were *brave* and *courageous*. Discussions with her father thereafter revealed that he had not considered these qualities in her before. The interviewer commented that he had actually never thought of her as *important*, or *remarkable*. It was the language that he used before, and thereafter, that captured his enlightenment, his paradigm shift in how he perceived his girl child. Both father and Tina shifted from how society had indoctrinated them to think about women, and the shift came through the use of language. It is critical also that patriarchy be addressed not only by girls and women, but by fathers, brothers and all males in society (CNN 2016). The future includes them all together.

It is interesting to note that the language used by the South African Xhosa women was not unduly assertive, yet all spoke out against patriarchy. However, there seems to be a passive aggression towards it based on the underlying premise that patriarchy is present, it is accepted, we must just deal with it. This assertion is supported by the Crunk Feminist Collective (Serres 2016, 1) quoted earlier ...that things will always be this way; they will never change. Note the choice of words in selected comments on patriarchy:

The perception that this is the natural order of things is still strong, even amongst women.

Men have always had more authority than women.

Women are treated as objects.

A man is treated like a king.

A man is the head of the family, he sets the rules and the wife has to toe the line.

The place of the woman in the kitchen still exists.

Women are to bear children and build a home for the family.

The wife cannot answer back to the man, and when walking the woman has to walk behind the man.

The man had the liberty of having other relationships in the neighbourhood with spinsters or widows, and the wife would not dare question that.

Socially, in my culture, many men tend to have multiple partners, whether they are married or not.

A woman can never be older than a man; age does not count in that regard.

When the wife loses a child, she doesn't have a say on how, where and when the child would be buried.

Even if you are educated, men do not take orders from women.

In rural areas community meetings are held at the chief's great place and women are not allowed to attend. Men take decisions on behalf of the entire community.

In describing their awareness and personal experience of patriarchy, the HERstory women chose to write in matter-of-fact statements. Very little emotion came across in their use of language. However, when it came to advising younger women, an acute change was noted. They were forceful in their choice of words, almost instructing that patriarchy be attacked and destroyed at every level. Note the following comments:

It's the 21st century and women should stick to their guns and demand to be treated with dignity.

Know your rights and do not be intimidated by the "Boys' club."

She should not be afraid to challenge management when needed.

Gender equality must be observed in all structures of the workplace.

As a woman, I should be the partner, not the follower of my man/husband.

She must refuse to be seen as a cook and cleaner.

Get an education. It is the number one deterrent to any kind of domination.

Education helps you not to be invisible.

Communication style, and the power of words, of language usage, in the fight against patriarchy, cannot be underestimated. It is through words that the dignity of all women can be restored. It is through words that shifting can be transformed to spontaneous, both here in South Africa and in the United States of America.

Conclusion

For the South African women sharing their stories, it is apparent that adapting to their husband and/or father's expectations of a woman in their culture is a norm. Babcock (1987, 391) confirms that there is almost no folklore in any culture that is "not explicitly or implicitly concerned with gender, sex and power." Shifting has insidiously become second nature to each woman interviewed. Within herself she shifts her needs, emotions, and aspirations to fit into different contexts. However, through it all, she selects carefully what can be spoken, and what remains unspoken. The case studies shared confirm that many factors influence this inner debate, chiefly patriarchy, ethnicity, religion, tradition, and culture. They also confirm that many black women are deprived of their spontaneous and natural being because they have to consciously evaluate their conversations and contexts. This applies to their home, workplace, society, and religion. The inner debate is a constant, even in 2016. However, the reflective experiences of the women reveal also their determination to now challenge patriarchy as it confronts them. Each emphasised what they can do for themselves in the now, and what their younger sisters can do in the future. The baton has been passed. There will no longer be silence.

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