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DISCOURSE AND ITS DISCLOSURES: YORUBA WOMEN AND THE SANCTITY OF ABUSE

Andrew Apter

> It is not uncommon for those who live amongst primitive peoples to come across 'obscenity' in speech and action. This 'obscenity' is often not an expression by an individual uttered under great stress and condemned as bad taste, but is an expression by a group of persons and is permitted and even prescribed by society. [Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 76]

Thus opens an early essay by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, excerpted from his Ph.D. thesis and first published in 1929, on 'Collective Expressions of Obscenity in Africa'. Although lacking the polish of his more mature writings, the essay represents the first systematic approach to ritually sanctioned licence and 'licentiousness' in Africa, bringing together scattered texts in published accounts with his own Azande material. Several important ideas were foreshadowed in this essay, anticipating Radcliffe-Brown's theory of 'permitted disrespect', Gluckman's work on rituals of rebellion, and even Turner's studies of ritual liminality.[1] For central to Evans-Pritchard's argument was the insight that sanctioned obscenities made social sense by channelling repressed desire and 'pent-up emotion' (*ibid.:* 95) into harmless 'palliatives' (*ibid.:* 100) and collective activities that were generally (but not exclusively) sanctified by ceremonial. I am not suggesting that Evans-Pritchard was *ever* a psychological reductionist, despite his flirtation with Freud in the essay.[2] As his 1937 study of Zande witchcraft would later reveal, he might incline toward a social theory of the psychological, but never toward a psychological theory of the social. Nonetheless, the problem of repression remained central to his earlier essay, a problem which has returned, in various guises, to haunt anthropological studies of ritualised licence despite principled stands against psychological explanations (Reay, 1959; Norbeck, 1963; Van den Berghe, 1963; Harris, 1978; Heald, 1982, 1989).

Today Evans-Pritchard's essay is history, and its relevance remains more a matter of intellectual genealogy than of contemporary research. It is now becoming *de rigeur* to locate verbal art and performance within socio-political relations of textual production, exploring the poetic and strategic values, dynamic ambiguities, and complex historicities of what Barber and de Moraes Farias (1989) call 'discourse and its disguises'. The effect has been to destabilise conventional distinctions between oral texts and social contexts precisely because oral literatures produce such instabilities—by remapping social categories, refashioning social identities, and by invoking rival histories and memories to shape and reorient social action.[3] But if discourse masks and disguises, by cloaking protest and criticism in poetry and praise, it also reveals and discloses, giving active voice to hidden passions and secrets that are otherwise repressed. It is this latter aspect of ritual discourse—one first theorised by Evans-Pritchard—which this article will explore, in songs performed during the Oroyeye festival of Ayede Ekiti in north-eastern Yorubaland. Following recent developments in the interpretation of African oral texts (Barber, 1991a; Barber and de Moraes Farias, 1989; Irvine, 1993, 1996), I will locate these songs within a variety of shifting contexts, ranging from the specific social project of the festival itself—which is to ostracise thieves and stigmatise 'evildoers'—to the sexual, socio-political and historical 'sub-texts' which, when voiced, account for its deeper meanings and ritual power.

In so doing, I hope to go beyond canonical accounts of how ritualised ostracism upholds general norms of sociability (although such norms are clearly invoked), for, as we shall see, the 'canalising' functions of sanctioned obscenity and abuse are far from harmless palliatives for those under attack. Nor do they merely redress antisocial behaviour, for the 'grandmothers' (*yeye*) of the Oroyeye festival recover repressed historical memories and dynastic claims that, in times of crisis, can trigger social and political change. True by definition, Oroyeye texts not only constitute an effective form of political criticism—in one famous case rallying the public to depose an errant *ọba* (king)—but also establish a public archive of evidence for local magistrates and historians in adducing testimony, citing precedents, and recalling critical moments in Ayede's turbulent past.

OROYEYE IN THE KINGDOM OF AYEDE

The cult of Oroyeye is not typical of the Yoruba ritual associations conventionally referred to as *òrìṣà* cults, in that its ritual functions are much more specialised. Whereas cults of the *òrìṣà*—such as Shango, Ogun, Yemoja, Oshun, and Obatala, to name the most widely known—have complex priesthoods with various grades of titleholders, ritual specialists and devotees housed in town shrines (*ipara*), the Oroyeye cult is relatively simple, consisting of a core of eight untitled women from Imela lineage in Ayede's Owaiye quarter. And unlike Ayede's dominant *òrìṣà* cults (Yemoja, Orisha Ojuna, Orisha Iyagba, Olua, and Oloke), which, as I have described elsewhere (Apter, 1992), invoke the power of their deities to remake and revise the body politic during elaborate annual festivals, the powers of Oroyeye priestesses are explicitly punitive. Their task as social critics is to expose, abuse, and in the most serious cases curse malefactors, mobilising the force of public censure and condemnation to bear upon their misdeeds and reputations. The consequences of such criticisms vary, ranging from the immediate payment of a small fine to save face in response to mild teasing[4] to full-fledged ostracism, exile, and death resulting from the most serious abuses (*èébú*) and curses (*èpè*). As one Ayede man explained, 'If you provoke the worshippers of Oroyeye, they will mourn for you as if you are dead. If you are not careful you will die.' He went on to illustrate the cult's sweeping powers and indifference to status and office: 'Nobody is too high or too low for the "sting" of Oroyeye. Not even Kabiyesi [lit. 'His Highness', i.e. the king]. People have gone into exile after Oroyeye. In the past, if you mistreated your slaves, you got into trouble.'

Although, as far as I can tell, the Oroyeye cult is regionally limited to certain north-eastern Yoruba towns, such as Iye and Itapaji, within Ayede's wider political kingdom, similar ritual functions have been recorded in the

Orepepee segment of the Oramfe festival in Ondo (Olupona, 1991: 96–105) and in the Gelede festivals of Egbado, Awori and other subcultural areas in south-western Yorubaland (Drewal and Drewal, 1983: xix–xx *et passim*; Thompson, 1976: 14/1–7; Harper, 1970, for the north-western town of Ijio, near Sabe) during the nocturnal ceremony of Oro Efe.[5] Describing an Efe ritual in the town of Ajilete, Thompson (1976: 14/4–5) relates how 'the priestess leads the singers to the night market where they perform criticisms of local society', adding that 'the word, Efe, means "just joking" to emphasise the license by which the singers allude to misdemeanors and other indiscretions . . .'. Drewal and Drewal (1983: 38–61) provide extended documentation and analysis of Efe songs, which invoke the power of witches in the euphemism of 'the mothers' (*ìyá wa*) to lampoon, chastise, and curse targeted enemies of the people.[6] Resembling Oroyeye songs in both substance and spirit, with similarly complex intertextualities and discursive functions,[7] Efe songs belong to an elaborate masquerade association totally absent among Ekiti Yoruba. But, despite their different ritual media and iconographies, both cults seem to share an underlying cultural logic.[8] For, like Oro Efe and its Gelede dancers, Oroyeye appeals to the power (*àṣẹ*) of women and witches to placate 'negative' witchcraft and disclose malevolent agency.

In this respect, the term *yeye* conveys a range of related meanings. Its primary denotation of 'grandmother' (in Ekiti dialect) represents the senior status of female elders who are honoured and feared for their secret knowledge and hidden, self-contained powers.[9] 'Oroyeye', I was told, thus means 'festival [*orò*] of the grandmothers [*yeye*]', referring quite literally to the elderly women of the festival itself. But there is more to the grandmothers than meets the eye. Their very bodies are repositories of *àṣẹ*—the concentrated power of life blood and verbal command which motivates all ritual activity. Describing the 'mothers' of Gelede ritual, the Drewals (1983: 75) explain, 'Elderly women, those past menopause, are most likely to possess this power, not only because of their cool, covert, secretive characters but also because they retain blood that possesses *àṣẹ*, vital force. A praise name for the aged mothers is "the one with the vagina that turns upside down without pouring blood" '. As we shall see, it is precisely this power of elderly women, congealed in the blood of their wombs and unleashed by their speech, which sanctions the discourse of Oroyeye and invests it with such concentrated *àṣẹ*. But if *yeye* refers to the performers of this discourse, it also extends to the figure of their deity, as *Iyeye*, the spiritual grandmother of the cult, who is described by some as an *òrìṣà*. Iyeye is thus grandmotherhood deified, a righteous and vindictive guardian spirit who harnesses the powers of unbridled witchcraft to punish offenders and protect the community. In this sense Oroyeye signifies 'festival of *iyeye*', in honour of the deity herself. This semantico-pragmatic slippage between devotees and deity is of course ritually coherent, since—during the festival—the priestesses become possessed by Iyeye, serving as vehicles of her voice.[10]

The deictic dimensions of ritual speech—more specifically, the grammatical shifting of speaking subjects between devotees, deities, and various social actors and categories—are a critical component of the language of *àṣẹ*

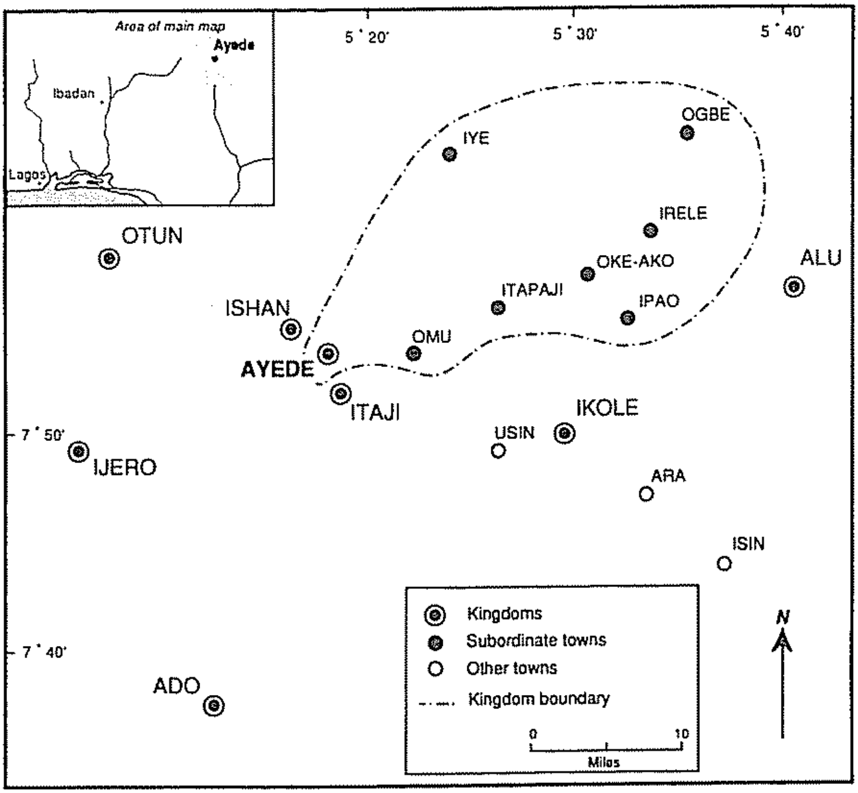
Area of main map
Ayede
Ibadan
Lagos
5° 20'
5° 30'
5° 40'
OGBE
IYE
IRELE
OTUN
OKE-AKO
ALU
ITAPAJI
IPAO
ISHAN
OMU
AYEDE
ITAJI
IKOLE
7° 50'
USIN
IJERO
ARA
ISIN
Kingdoms
Subordinate towns
Other towns
Kingdom boundary
7° 40'
ADO
0
10
Miles
N

FIG. 1 The kingdom of Ayede.

which I have explicated elsewhere in some detail (Apter, 1992: 117–48). As we shall see, the 'I', 'you' and 'we' of Oroyeye texts are in constant motion, not only remapping the 'participation structure' (Irvine, 1996: 132–6) of speech events, but also sustaining multiple possibilities of discursive implication within a given utterance.[11] For now, I will emphasise the most basic consequence of the shifting grammatical subject for the priestesses themselves, which is to provide them with immunity and place their judgements beyond appeal. The priestesses, I was told, can never be challenged. They are incapable of error, not only because they know the details of each case, but because their discourse belongs to their omniscient deity (Iyeye), who communicates *through* them. To illustrate the binding authority of the cult's pronouncements, I was told of an incident in 1975 when a woman in Ayede was abused by Oroyeye for using witchcraft against her husband, his second wife and their son (Fig. 2). Challenging the allegation by the son, the woman called the police, and the case was brought before the Àtá (Ayede's king). The police were abused by the 'grandmothers' and the Àtá told the police to go.

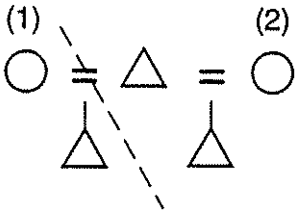

FIG. 2 Lineage segmentation and fission.

The unilateral power and immunity of the Oroyeye cult, which during the festival extend over the king, are all the more significant in the context of Ayede's dynastic history. Like many Ekiti kingdoms of north-east Yorubaland, Ayede developed from a refugee settlement of relatively decentralised villages and village clusters—what Obayemi (1971: 205–9) calls 'mini-states'—that were sacked by Nupe, Ilorin and Ibadan invaders during the nineteenth-century wars and reorganised under strong men who were then recognised as kings. Founded *circa* 1845 by the Ekiti warlord Eshubiyi (Johnson 1921: 308, 403), who led a core of refugees from the town of Iye to resettle between the older kingdoms of Ishan and Itaji, Ayede was augmented by an influx of immigrants who together regrouped into the four 'original' Iye quarters of Owaiye, Isaoye, Ejigbo and Ilaaro and two additional 'stranger' quarters of Odoalu and Egbe Oba. Although there is much disagreement over particulars, since dynastic history always involves a contest of political claims, local historians generally agree that the former Olú of Iye lost his crown to Eshubiyi, who tricked the Iye people into subjection by proclaiming himself the Àtá of Ayede, thereby founding a new ruling dynasty.[12] Eshubiyi's suppression of the Iye chiefs and his usurpation of the kingship not only bears directly upon the history of the Oroyeye cult, which was brought to Ayede from Iye but, more important, underlies the active role performed by the cult in opposing Eshubiyi's rise to power, and in alluding to the repression and potential restoration of Iye kingship in its songs.

The Oroyeye cult would hardly have a neutral voice in dynastic affairs, since it was (and remains) vested in the very lineage—that of Imela in Owaiye quarter—which owned the title of Olú in Iye. In other words, Imela was the former royal lineage of Iye, and its Oroyeye cult took an active role in protecting the kingship from outside claims. The late Michael B. Ayeni, who served as the magistrate of Ayede's first customary court under the British and became a recognised authority on Iye history, told of a struggle before the rise of Eshubiyi, when three factions sought to rotate the kingship between three additional lineages: Abudo of Owaiye quarter, Ilaa of Isaoye quarter, and Ilesi of Ejigbo quarter. During its festival, Oroyeye came out, singing:

Onîmẹ̀là,
Ẹ̀yin mọ̀n la ṣe Olú Ìye.

You people of Imela,
You [alone] make the Olú of Iye.

Although Michael Ayeni quoted the song to illustrate an historical struggle over dynastic succession, the text also illuminates the cult's very engagement within that struggle, voicing its opposition to rival political claims. Given Oroyeye's proprietary interest in the crown, it is hardly surprising that the cult expressed alarm over the rise of the warlord Eshubiyi, anticipating his eventual usurpation of the kingship in the following warning song:

Ọnímògún, ạlákoto,
Ó ńsèrù bà Ìye.

Onimogun, owner of the calabash crown,
He is threatening the people of Iye.

The text plays on the ambiguity of *alákoto*, which doubles as 'owner of a deep calabash' or 'calabash crown', and as a type of military helmet worn in battle.[13] 'The calabash crown' refers to the ritual calabash of the Orisha Ojuna cult in Ayede,[14] which Onimogun brought to Iye and bestowed upon his son, Eshubiyi, who used it to *as a warrior* to consolidate ritual control and build up his power base in Iye, and later in Ayede, where it became a major town cult. Thus the primary meanings of *alákoto* as 'calabash crown' and 'helmet' signify the dangerous potential of Orisha Ojuna as an external source and sign of Eshubiyi's growing military power.

A related Oroyeye song dating from this period warns against the political dangers of the 'calabash crown' to mobilise opposition against Eshubiyi's emerging political agenda:

Olú Ìye kì í dé akoto.

Olú of Iye never wears a calabash crown.

The song responded to Eshubiyi's effort to bring Iye within the ritual field of Orisha Ojuna by demanding that the Olú should pay tribute and express obeisance to its festival, owned by the *bàálẹ̀* of Otunja in Ikole.[15] By rejecting the 'calabash crown' the Olú of Iye would reaffirm his politico-ritual autonomy. Hence an expanded form of this text (which was provided in English):

Bàálẹ̀ Otunja is sending to inform you that the festival of *ọ̀tẹ̀múrù* [the sacred water of Orisha Ojuna in Ikole] is near.
The Olú of Iye never wears a calabash crown.
Are you not preparing for a fight?[16]

The struggle which followed is alive and well in the historical memory of the Iye 'core' of Ayede's citizens, lurking beneath the surface of many contemporary chieftaincy disputes. The Iye settlers eventually lost their fight against Eshubiyi, who developed a military autocracy in Ayede and initiated the 'Eshubiyi' ruling line. But if the Oroyeye cult failed, in the last instance, to thwart the ambitions of the infamous warrior king, it was not for lack of trying. Nor was the struggle completely in vain. Following a common Yoruba pattern, what it forfeited in political authority was retained within the ritual domain, in the cult of Oroyeye itself. Although the Imela lineage lost control over the kingship, its cult remained, as a sort of religious compensation for political dispossession, invoking the memory of the Olú dynasty in its annual crusade against internal enemies. As we shall see in more recent texts, repressed claims of former kingship are repeatedly insinuated in Oroyeye songs, motivating their metaphors and animating their rituals as a continuous historical 'sub-text'.

As the cult's historic struggle against Eshubiyi reveals, Oroyeye's political warnings and directives are not always heeded, and it would be incorrect to assume that the binding authority asserted in principle is always achieved in practice. The cult's pronouncements are always articulated within a competitive political field, and if those abused are sufficiently powerful they can prevail against the voice of the grandmothers, although failed accusations remain as a rhetorical resource which can be resurrected as evidence in subsequent conflicts. In this respect, Oroyeye texts constitute a public record of popular opinion which accumulates over time and resurfaces in other discursive genres when embedded or alluded to in *oríkì* (praise poetry) and in *ìtàn* (history).[17] During the festival of Orisha Oniyi which I attended in Ejigbo quarter (in 1984), for example, the celebrants were 'praised' with an Oroyeye song which warned against cult fission:

Ọmọ Èjìgbò,
Ẹ má pin òrìṣà ṣe èta.

Children of Ejigbo,
Do not split your orisha into three.

When I initially inquired about this text, I was told that it was simply a praise for Orisha Oniyi, but eventually I learned its 'secret' as a veiled attack against Chief Ọbásùn, who was elevated above Chief Ọbasalo by the Àtá Eshubiyi to represent the Ejigbo quarter in the king's council of civil chiefs (*ìwàrẹ̀fà*). Since Chief Ọbásùn originated from Obo Ora, he was not considered a bona fide Iye native, and was resented by the more 'senior' Iye chiefs, who saw their power bypassed by a 'stranger' in collusion with the new Àtá. To consolidate his local power base, Chief Ọbásùn claimed a title in Orisha Oniyi through his mother, thereby 'splitting' the cult into a third lineage segment (Fig. 3).[18] The Oroyeye text was thus produced as a warning against Eshubiyi's political strategy of imposing 'stranger' chiefs over Iye

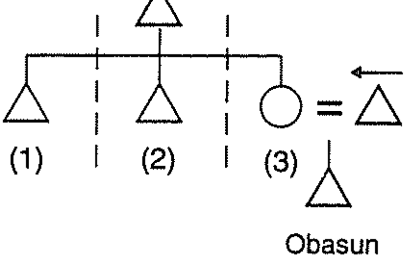

FIG. 3 Lineage segmentation and fission.

quarters, but in concrete terms the warning failed, and today Chief Ọbásùn ranks first among the civil chiefs. Resurrected as a 'praise' during the Orisha Oniyi festival of 1984, the text registered the political resentment of the displaced chiefs in Ejigbo quarter, and could resurface again if Chief Ọbásùn loses his grip and is subject to attack by powerful rivals.

Such strategies of indirection are not typical of all Oroyeye texts but seem to occur when their recommended outcome is uncertain. The songs of warning against Eshubiyi and Chief Ọbásùn do not identify their culprits by name but refer to the ritual icons and associations through which they accumulated power, as in the calabash crown of Orisha Ojuna and the cult of Orisha Oniyi in Ejigbo quarter. The songs thereby objectify ritual as the medium of power competition, as if to stake their challenge and retreat within the interpretive ambiguities which ritual sustains. But not all Oroyeye texts work that way, and when political conditions are right, direct accusations hit their mark like the verbal arrows of incantations (*ọfọ̀*). For example, when Ayede's infamous Àtá Gabriel Osho began to rule autocratically—intimidating his chiefs and punishing his critics—local constituencies and subordinate towns within the district turned against him in an historic power struggle which he eventually lost when deposed and exiled in 1935 (Apter, 1992: 78–81). During this struggle, when the townspeople assembled in the market place to voice their grievances against the king, Gabriel Osho was accused of stealing goats, a charge of heinous antisociality, since goats roam freely in Yoruba towns, unattended for days. The theft of such goats is thus a serious breach of community trust, and when such an accusation is directed against a king it signals public disaffection.[19] Soon afterwards, the Oroyeye cult amplified this accusation in a song of abuse which devotees sang at the palace and throughout the town:

Ìkokò t'ó ńkẹran kó adìyẹ.
Íníjilẹ̀.
Ọdẹ wọ̀nyí ẹ máa kiyèsí
Wọ́n ńkó kẹ̀bukẹ́bu.

Spotted Hyena steals goats and chickens.
It is serious [lit. 'deep'].[20]
You hunters take notice.
He takes indiscriminately.

In addition to its general defamatory thrust, several features of the song text warrant special consideration. First, the cognomen 'Spotted Hyena' comes from the praise name (*oríkì*) of the first Àtá, Eshubiyi, the original infamous warrior king who usurped the kingship to inaugurate his ruling dynasty. Since the praise name, with high office, devolves down the royal lineage, it also denotes the ruling incumbent. Thus if 'Spotted Hyena' referred historically to the first Àtá who 'stole' the crown from the Iye dynasty, it also referred more immediately to his patrilineal descendant Gabriel Osho, who 'stole', as it were, from the public trust. This double interpretation is supported by the fact that the song—like all Oroyeye songs—was sung in Iye dialect, as indicated by *íníjilẹ̀* ('it is serious', or literally 'deep'), which uses a high tone /í/ rather than a high tone /ó/ to mark the third person singular, literally invoking the Iye quarters in Ayede. As such, it recuperates the cult's previous if unsuccessful campaign against Eshubiyi's encroaching 'calabash crown', thereby framing the struggle against Gabriel Osho within an original struggle against the Eshubiyi ruling house. Furthermore, the hunters who were advised to take note of the theft were of course the armed guardians of the community, and *their* invocation raises the threat of armed insurrection against Gabriel Osho. Moreover, reference to the thief as 'Wọ́n' (followed by the continuous present tense marker /ń/) employs the formal or distanced style of third person address in Yoruba (in a sense, the royal 'he' becomes 'they'), indicating in no uncertain terms that the present incumbent is the target of attack. And finally, since the grandmothers (*yeye*) sang the song, the accusation was ritually sanctioned and *de facto* true, beyond dispute.

The eventual deposition of Gabriel Osho does not illustrate the ultimate efficacy of Oroyeye songs as media of political action, since many other factors (including the judgement of the District Officer) were involved in the power struggle, and the king might have survived the crisis had he played his cards differently. What is illustrated, however, is how such songs of abuse brought a repressed past (the usurpation of the Iye chiefs) to bear upon the present (the political crimes of Gabriel Osho), through a poetics of shifting references and revelations which channelled and articulated collective action against the king. Not all targets, however, are so lofty, and not all songs so serious. To grasp Oroyeye's broader discursive field, we can focus on the festival itself, as celebrated in April 1983.

SEXUAL POLITICS

The Oroyeye festival began after sundown in the market place, where Ayede's youths convened beneath the darkness of a new moon.[21] No light was allowed. The kerosene lamps of the night market were extinguished, and flashlights were banned. It was the opening ceremonial *Àjàkadì*, or wrestling match, when the young men of Ayede's junior age sets divide the town into two 'sides', one called Isaoye, representing the four 'original' Iye quarters which migrated under Eshubiyi's protection to their present location during the nineteenth century wars, the other called Odoalu, representing the quarters of 'strangers' who emigrated to Ayede from the Ikole and Yagba

TABLE 1. *Ritual remapping of Isaoye and Odoalu quarters*

Ayede quarters	*Town 'sides'*	*Assoc. subordinate towns*
1 Isaoye	'Isaoye'	Iye
2 Ejigbo	(indigenes)	Omu
3 Owaiye		Itapaji
4 Ilaaro		
5 Odoalu	'Odoalu'	Ipao
6 Egbe Oba	(strangers)	Irele
		Oke-Ako

areas (including Alu) farthest east (Table 1). The town was thus organised into two wrestling teams of indigenes and strangers. Each side was stratified by equivalent age sets which carry the same name but meet on alternating fortnights during the year. The wrestling would last for fourteen nights, ascending from younger to older contestants. The atmosphere was jovial but tense as reputations rose and fell with each match. For if the young men fought with their bodies, it is here that the young girls of Isaoye and Odoalu fought with words, praising the winners with flattery (*ìyìn*) and insulting the losers with abuse (*èébú*).[22] Their stated goal was to provoke the anger of the loser, although such abuse is always cast in the spirit of a joke (*afẹ̀* in Iye dialect, *ẹ̀fẹ̀* in standard Yoruba).

The *Àjàkadì* opened with the young women of Odoalu hurling general insults against their female counterparts from the Isaoye 'side':

Ọni ìyà bí a pa,
Ìsàoyé rí a lọ,
Ìsàoyè súẹ́!

Alábẹ́ riró tótó,
Akó fáńsì okó.
Ọjo iń ṣe yín ni,
Àbẹ́rù í bà ín?
Éè éè!
Ìsàoyè ró dọ́kọ lọ́jà,
Ạ dòbò dé'lẹ pi,
Ẹ̀pípá òbò rẹ́ ṣíjo lọ́jà
Òkúrú ń mú yèyé
Elékò béè kó adìẹ.

Only someone who will die in poverty
Will go (and join) Isaoye.
Isaoye bullshit!

You with dripping vaginas,
Victims of penis dirt.
Are you ashamed,
Or do you feel afraid?

No way!
It is the (women of) Isaoye who are promiscuous in the market place,
Dragging the earth with their vaginas,
The scabs of your vaginas have scaled off in heaps in the market place.
Lady victims of scabies,
Your mouths are like chicken beaks.

The insults are transparent enough. The Odoalu girls are putting the rival side down as disgraceful and impoverished, implying that no Odoalu girl in her right mind would marry into Isaoye (given virilocal residence patterns). Isaoye girls, moreover, are debased and polluted—sleeping with unclean men, their vaginas drip from infections. Rather than feel shame or fear, these girls spread their venereal contagions in the market place, where their vaginal scabs form 'heaps' from their excessive promiscuity. To top it off, Isaoye girls are ugly, with mouths like chicken beaks.

Following these general sexual insults, the song texts become more specific, cursing the male wrestler—named Taye—from Isaoye so that he will fall:

Bírí gbe.
Òyì gbe.
Táyé elétù ń'ńu,
Ìbàjẹ́ a ba tẹ̀re jẹ́,
Ìbàjẹ́.[23]

Let him be carried by the wind,
Let him be carried by dizziness,
Taye, whose stomach is full of gunpowder,
May all that is yours be spoilt,
May it be spoilt.

Taye, as it turned out, did lose the fight, in a battle that echoed men's agonistic struggles against visible and invisible enemies. His defeat was not only personal but seemed to bring Isaoye down with him as the chorus of insults shifted its attack:

Adé ró di,
Bí ọní kọyìn.

The crown has thumped down,
Like a bunch of palm kernels.

In this historically layered insult not only has Taye been deposed like a king, but, more seriously, he has let his 'side' down. Hailing from an Iye lineage in Isaoye, his failure not only recalls the historic failure of the Iye ruling dynasty to keep the crown from Eshubiyi but also echoes Gabriel Osho's shameful deposition in 1935, which was led largely by 'big men' in the Odoalu quarter of Ayede and Yagba subordinate towns.[24] Finally, as the past is brought to bear upon the present, the fallen wrestler reminds Isaoye's 'side' that even the current ruling house is vulnerable from attack by Odoalu wrestlers and warriors.[25]

If such humiliations are painful, however, they are temporary. In the next match, Isaoye's chorus turns to taunt their tormentors:

Odòàlù,
Bẹ̀ẹ̀m̀bẹ́ níkù,
Abọgán wo mọ́ 'yán.

Ọmọdé é gun'gi ọ̀gẹ̀dẹ̀,
A yọ́ báárá, aṣe wì.

Ẹ bá ti mọ́n jà, ẹ wí sí a,
Iwòwò so un gbó lóko?

Odòàlù sí kọ́ o?
Gbogbo wọn ló ti dókó lọ,
Odòàlù d'òúkọ.

B'alẹ́ bá le,
À fọn fèrè polókó.

Odòàlù pa tírà sí bèbè,
Jíngínní-jíngínní,
Okó ló já a dànù poo. (15)

Ó nírun é nìrun,
Odòàlù dídó ni pọnkí!

Ọ́ ń ṣè kuru,
Òbò Àjàyí ń sẹ kuru wọ̀wọ̀.

Ọ̀ní è m'ôbò ṣ'ahun, (20)
Àfẹni okó rẹ bá rọ.

Ìsápá toro mọ́'yán,
Odòàlù toro m'ókó gbọnin.

Odòàlù kòì tẹra pọ̀,
Ọní lóyún sí gẹ̀gẹ̀, (25)
Òwèlèwélé elékó béekó adìẹ.

(People of) Odoalu,
Protruding stomach like the *bẹ̀ẹ̀m̀bẹ́* drum.
One whose fangs hold fast to the pounded yam,

A child that climbs the banana tree
Will slide down and fall from it. (5)

You shouldn't have attempted bashing us with chants.
Naked ones, can you hear us on the farm?

Where is Odoalu?
All of them have gone whoring.
Odoalu has become a he-goat. (10)

When the evening comes,
The owner of a penis is beckoned with a whistle.

Odoalu girls add amulets to their waist beads,
Jinginni-jinginni.
It is the penis that breaks it away. (15)

With or without [pubic] hair,
The vaginas of Odoalu are meant for constant copulation.

Giving out hot steam,
Ajayi's vagina is giving out hot steam profusely.

Oni is generous with her vagina, (20)
Only one whose penis is impotent [cannot have intercourse with her].

[Just as] The sorrel soup clings to the pounded yam,
[So do] Odoalu girls cling to the penis.

Odoalu is never united,
People with pregnant necks [i.e. goitres], (25)
Mouths like chicken beaks.

Isaoye's reply is reciprocally obscene and direct. Comparing their stomachs to the *bę̀ę̀m̀bę́* drum casts a double insult to the people of Odoalu, since the *bę̀ę̀m̀bę́* is basic to Odoalu's festival of Orisha Iyagba, symbolising its ritual power and easterly provenance.[26] Thus the people of Odoalu, and their ritual, are ugly. They are furthermore greedy gluttons, devouring pounded yam with their 'fangs'. And if Isaoye's crown falls down the palm tree like a bunch of palm kernels, the children of Odoalu cannot even make it to the top of the banana tree, but slide down trying. Lines 6–7 introduce a metapragmatic warning not to fight with speech, relegating Isaoye's opponents to the margins of society and earshot, naked on their farms. Odoalu girls are accused of similar promiscuity, whistling at night for any man who walks by, using medicines in their waist beads to attract sexual partners, and copulating before puberty. Lines 18–22 target specific girls reputed to be 'flirts', while the charge that Odoalu as a whole is 'never united' attacks the quarter's political integrity.

In what was a gendered division of ritual labour, young men of Isaoye and Odoalu fought each other to defend the reputation of their respective 'sides', while young women abused each other to defame the reputation of the opposing 'side'. The sanctioned obscenities were clearly uproarious, the vulgarities unthinkable in any other public context, yet the game was played for real stakes. For the young men, victory meant a bigger reputation and better chances with the eligible young women.[27] Meanwhile, the young women could vent their tongues and curse their rivals while surveying the available male talent. By overstating female sexuality, by permitting the impermissible in hyperbolic ritual discourse, and by disclosing that which is 'normally' repressed, young men and women could initiate sexual liaisons in that dangerous twilight zone of pre-marital experimentation. What are the limits of the game? Clearly the voiced parodies of women's unbridled sexual appetites establish a collective limitation, but these remain abstract. The images of rampant sexuality are hilarious because they are absurd. But personal attacks make the abstract concrete, and the absurd suddenly serious. We saw how two young women of Odoalu were singled out by name and humiliated. For them the message was more than just a warning not to overstep the limits of acceptable romantic circulation. It constituted a social sanction, a text for the archive of collective memories which could actually hurt their chances of a desirable marriage.[28]

In the larger context of Oroyeye as a whole, the *Àjàkadì* wrestling remained fun-and-games. It provided a nocturnal backdrop for the real business of the festival, which belongs to the 'grandmothers' of Oroyeye, who target specific malefactors and bring their misdeeds into the light of day. What concerns us at this preliminary point in the festival is the construction of a basic parallelism between male political competition through wrestling and female sexual competition through song, or, more simply, between the return of the politically and sexually repressed. These two modalities of 'permitted disrespect' displace the repressed desires of the socio-political collectivity on to specific individuals in the community. If at night the sexual sub-text dominated the discourse, in the daytime the political sub-text took over.

POETIC JUSTICE

'Anybody can join the Oroyeye cult, but the real people doing it are from Owaiye,' was the reply when I asked how members were recruited. Given the layers of secrecy surrounding Yoruba ritual associations, it is never entirely clear to those on the outside (or even to some on the inside) who all the members are. Oroyeye is reserved exclusively to women, yet I eventually learned that their real leader was the Àró, an elderly man from the Imela lineage in Owaiye who also held the second highest post within Ayede's senior age set (called Erokesin). The connection between male age sets and Oroyeye during the wrestling matches thus extends up the generational ladder through a hidden set of overlapping memberships or points of articulation which become clear only when mapped within the kingdom's entire socio-political organisation and compared with the less centralised village clusters surrounding Ayede, including the now subordinate town of Iye itself.[29] In its basic contours, the Oroyeye cult of women intersects with that level of the senior male age set which includes the four Iye quarters (called *iye-merin*) of the Isaoye 'side' but excludes the 'stranger' quarters of Omole-Akodi and Egbeoba which form the Odoalu 'side'. This is why the Àró of Oroyeye is the No. 2 man in Erokesin. The No. 1 elder of Erokesin stands at the apex of the entire age-set system of the whole town (and kingdom, since he heads all age sets of Ayede's subordinate towns), including the Odoalu 'side'.

In addition to age-set stratification, the Oroyeye cult also articulates with lineage organisation, through a very simple form of ancestor worship called Ààwọ. In this fairly low-key sacrifice, the lineage or household head places handfuls of pounded yam with some meat and melon seed (*ẹ̀gúsí*) soup on the grave of an apical ancestor, adding palm oil, kola nut, and the blood of a cock while asking for protection. The ceremony is consciously associated with Oroyeye, since the two are performed together and form part of a greater ritual complex which not only distinguishes Ayede's Iye indigenes from Yagba 'strangers' but extends the division throughout the historic kingdom at large. Of Ayede's subordinate towns, Iye, Itapaji and Omu perform Ààwọ and celebrate Oroyeye, whereas the Yagba towns of Irele, Oke Ako and Ipao do not.[30] The important point is that Ayede, Iye, Itapaji and Omu perform the Ààwọ sacrifice and celebrate the Oroyeye festival at the same time in their respective ritual calendars, bringing the protection of ancestors to bear upon local events while mobilising an Iye-centric ritual field within the wider kingdom. As we shall now see, the historic allusions of Oroyeye songs resurrect the former glory and unity of Iye in idioms of common descent, while the cult's indictments appear to gravitate around lineage fission.

The inner core of Oroyeye priestesses were eight in number during the first festival which I attended, but not all were present, since some were too old to make the rounds. With the two senior representatives dressed in the white cloth of purity and death—as elderly 'grandmothers' they are already entering the other world—the cult took possession of the town, proceeding from household to household for seven days of ritualised evaluation.[31] I was told that they proceed to the king's palace and abuse him first, after which they abuse Yeye, the deity herself, but I was unable to confirm that this actually occurred. What I did record during several festival outings was a variety of discourse styles or genres, ranging from a relatively fixed stock of ritual refrains to contingent, context-specific accusations and curses against named malefactors. In ethno-linguistic terms, the priestesses began by singing *ìjúbà*, an act of propitiating ancestors to guide the devotees throughout the festival, which involves singing *oríkì* ('praises') and praying for prosperity. As they approached each house with ancestral propitiations their praises were repaid with money, which in turn triggered prayers that the household would prosper. There is perhaps an element of ritual blackmail in this, since a household head could be seen as paying off the priestesses for registering a positive report. But the logic of investment and returns is more complex, since by recognising the power of the cult, and investing in its ritual protection, the addressee's name and status is effectively validated. Such payments are understood as thanks to the ancestors for keeping the household free from scandal—a literal payment of homage.[32] Moreover, when an addressee is indicted by the cult, there are no praises to repay, and hence no opportunities for buying protection.

In more formal terms, the *ìjúbà* follows a parallel structure of four-line stanzas, the first two lines of which are fluid and variable, indexing the addressee with the appropriate *oríkì*, flattery (*ìyìn*) or prayer (*àdúrà*); the second two lines are fixed and repetitive, paying homage to the cult's founding ancestor from Iye. As such the *ìjúbà* is a double homage, the first to the living, the second to the dead, bringing the former into the protective custody of the latter through the very speech act itself, as well as through the subsequent reciprocal payments. The following stanzas illustrate this pattern with paradigmatic simplicity:

A-ti-Kékeré j'ológun,
Mo mọ̀ a kan ní rẹ o.
Aá júbà àró onílẹ̀,
'Mọ aṣẹ̀jẹ̀ 'ye.

Ọmọ tilé olóri-Ilésì,
Orí dára àbo.
Aá júbà Àró onílẹ̀,
'Mọ aṣẹ̀jẹ̀ 'ye.

He who becomes a commander from childhood,
I am bowing low to you.
We shall pay homage to Aro Owner-of-the-land,
Offspring of Iye by blood.[33]

Child of the head of Ilesi (lineage),
May you have a good destiny [lit. may your head be good].
We shall pay homage to Aro Owner-of-the-land,
Offspring of Iye by blood.

In these typical if ordinary examples, the first two lines of each stanza reward specific individuals—and by extension their lineages—for correct behaviour toward the cult and in the community. Thus, in lines 5–6, the Ilesi lineage in Owaiye quarter is praised through one of its sons. The text combines an *oríkì* ('Child of the head of Ilesi') with a prayer ('May you have a good destiny') which simultaneously identifies the 'head' of the Ilesi lineage with the destiny ('head') of the addressee. This fluid, contingently variable couplet contrasts with the fixed refrain of the second couplet, the 'homage' to Aro, owner of the land, which identifies the important founding ancestor from Iye and, by extension, all descendants 'by blood'.[34] The allusions here are 'deep'. Aro is identified as the founder of Oroyeye, who brought the cult from Ife to Iye, whereafter it travelled to Ayede. As 'Owner-of-the-land' he may be related to the deity (Onile) of the Ogboni Society (called Empe in Iye), associating him with the collective authority to judge cases of incest, witchcraft and crimes against the earth (Morton-Williams, 1960b). This is supported by the fact that Abraham (1962: 65) glosses 'Aro' as 'one of the Ogboni Titleholders' and that the Morgan report for Ondo State identifies Aro as first in rank among Iye's five 'traditional' kingmakers (*afọbajẹ*), which are chiefly offices invested with ritual power to install, depose and bury the king.[35] Given the 'mini-state' structure of north-east Yoruba village clusters, with kingmakers vested in age sets (Forde, 1951: 79–80; Krapf-Askari, 1966: 5–9, 12–13), it is likely that the Aro was the senior title of Iye's complex age-set organisation. (For details see Apter, 1992: 40–5.) In any case, line 8, 'Offspring of Iye by blood', refers to the first Aro who was born in Iye but implicitly alludes to the 'original' Iye core within Ayede. Taken together, the fixed refrain of lines 3–4 and 7–8 ground the power and authority of Oroyeye's discourse in an historical charter of Iye kingship and kinship, a grounding in the sanctified power of the earth itself as protector of one blood.

Thus even the simplest Oroyeye songs deploy complex discursive strategies. If the first flexible couplet tags specific individuals through their family names, implicating them in wider social groups, the second fixed couplet brings them into Iye's politico-ritual community, to which they must 'pay' homage. Not all Oroyeye homage follows this strict pattern, since the first couplet can expand into multiple lines, depending on the length of the *oríkì*, prayer or proverb chanted. In some songs, deities such as Shango, Ogun and Orisha Iyagba or spiritual classes like the beings of earth or heaven are addressed, while in others the town as a whole is implored to co-operate (which, given the mounting tensions of the imminent 1983 elections, was no casual command).[36] At times the Oroyeye singers address themselves and foreground their verbal art:

Olórin máa gbọ,
Aláfẹ ní i rónìkèje.
A á 'júbà Àró Onílẹ̀,
'Mọ aṣẹ̀jẹ̀ 'ye.

Àfẹ̀rẹ́ bí somi-yín, (5)
Ìsọgbé-ta'kùn-yan.
A â 'júbà Àró Onílẹ̀,
'Mọ aṣẹ̀jẹ̀ ye.

Listen, singers,
Aláfẹ has sent us to deliver these messages for seven days.
We shall pay homage to Aro Owner-of-the-land,
Offspring of Iye by blood.

Wind (that is) like knocking out teeth [i.e. a force to be reckoned with], (5)
Have you forgotten? Let me quickly remind you [lit. mark it with a rope],[37]
We shall pay homage to Aro Owner-of-the-land,
Offspring of Iye by blood.

In these two stanzas the singers signal a coming shift from 'homage' to accusation, as they identify themselves as incriminating agents (line 2) whose forceful speech, capable of knocking out teeth (line 5), not only punishes the guilty but also polices collective memory (line 6). By drawing attention to the danger of their speech in this warning, the Oroyeye priestesses prepare the indexical ground for highlighting negative 'figures' in the community.

In the Oroyeye festival of 1983 public enemy No. 1 was identified as a man named Oladiran. True, the Àtá of Ayede was mildly rebuked for his poverty and political impotence, but the real vindictive drama focused on the heinous crime of a money-magic murder. As the priestesses reached the culprit's house their homage (*ìjúbà*) switched to curse (*èpè*):

Ọládìran,
Tilé ria raí bèrè rẹ̀ o.
Ilé ò kọ́ sílé rian lọ́gbọ̀n-ọ́n Òkè-Òdò.
Ọmọ ò bá bá ṣiré,
Wọ̀ ọ́ bẹ̀ ẹ́ dàjùlé ọ̀run.

Ọdẹ ò perin lóko
Ó mọ́ járù 'á 'lé o.
Ọládìran, ò-gbé-ni-pa,
Ọ mọ̀ d'Ẹ̀ṣù ṣ'ọ̀rùn rẹ . . .
Èwù rẹ ṣe'pọ́n 'á 'lé. (10)

Ọládìran,
Ọrẹ o gbé a mú ṣ'owó,
Mọ̀ ró d'Ẹ̀ṣù ṣọ̀rùn rẹ,
Ó-wẹ̀wù-ẹ̀jẹ̀-á-'lé.

Oladiran,
All of us are asking for you.
The house you built in their compound at Oke-Odo.
The child should have been playing with,
You instead sent to heaven [i.e. killed]. (5)

The hunter does not kill an elephant
Without [at least] bringing its tail home.
Oladiran, One-who-kidnaps-to-kill,
Eshu is on your neck [you are in trouble/stigmatised] . . .
Your cloth is stained with blood on your way home. (10)

Oladiran,
Ore, whom you used to make money [for money-making *jùjú* medicine],
Has become the Eshu on your neck,
One-who-wears-bloody-cloth-on-his-way-home.

In contrast to the homage, the curse identifies the addressee by his personal name only, conspicuously avoiding his *oríkì-orílẹ̀* (lineage praise name). In effect, Oladiran is nominally isolated from his kinsmen and all other social relations. His house is identified by its place name (Oke Odo, or the lower hill, lit. 'near the river') but not its lineage name, which remains suppressed. He is then accused of killing his kinsman (identified as Ore in line 12) for the egregious crime of money-magic. The story was explained to me with alacrity.[38] What follows is a free translation of the recorded explanation which was narrated *in situ*:

> Oladiran had an elder brother (*ègbọ́n*) named Ore, born of the same father but of different mothers. Ore lived in Ayede, whereas Oladiran had moved to the town of Idanre.[39] One day Oladiran came to Ayede and invited the elder brother to return to Idanre with him. When Ore refused, Oladiran compelled his elder brother to accompany him. Four days after they left, Oladiran came back home (to Ayede) and started asking for Ore, saying, 'Where is my elder brother?' Then those who saw them leave Ayede together replied, 'Haven't you driven him away for the last four days?' Thereafter the relatives sent people to go with him in quest of his brother at Idanre. After getting there, Oladiran took the search team to track the forest. After searching the forest without success, they returned home.
>
> When these relatives gave the report of their abortive effort to locate Ore, the family decided to send a new group to Idanre. These men were sent as emissaries to the king of Idanre himself. They were instructed to tell the king that an Ayede native was lost in Idanre, and that he must be found. The king gave them a cheerful welcome, and told them that human beings would never get lost in his domain without good cause. Oladiran was therefore summoned to confess where he kept his elder brother. The elder brother's son went ahead with the police and arrested Oladiran. They did everything possible but his whereabouts remain a mystery to this day. Oladiran now lives in Ayede, and, it being the time of Oroyeye's festival, he has become a target of Oroyeye's castigating songs. They have gone to his house at Oke Odo (above the stream, north of the river, down the hill area, the southern part of town). They are also singing in the homes of the members of his family.

I have quoted this passage at length because it provides an illuminating example of how a sub-text is glossed by ritual speech. (See also Barber, 1990, 1991a, for sub-texts glossed by *oríkì*.) In this performative context the full story (*ìtàn*), normally known only to insiders, was freely proffered, since Oroyeye's task is to bring such misdeeds into the light of day. Oladiran is accused of leaving no trace of his brother. He is accused of kidnapping Ore and killing him for money-making medicine. Oladiran is in big trouble; indeed, Eshu is on his neck. His cloth is stained with the blood of his kinsman. In lines 8 and 12 Oladiran is effectively renamed. His lineage name is replaced with the incriminating aliases One-who-kidnaps-to-kill and One-who-wears-bloody-cloth-on-his-way-home.[40] Soon afterwards, his house was confiscated by the Àtá of Ayede, and Oladiran was jailed.

Returning to the sub-text, we can see that there is more in this case than meets the eye. The fact that Oladiran and Ore were paternal half-brothers may be significant because it is precisely between sons of the same father and different mothers that Yoruba lineage segmentation and fission occur (Lloyd, 1955). The money-magic crime thus appears motivated by a structural drama of lineage dynamics, since, whatever actually happened, Ore's disappearance and Oladiran's return home would have shifted the lineage headship (and some of its corporately entailed property) to Oladiran, weakening Ore's

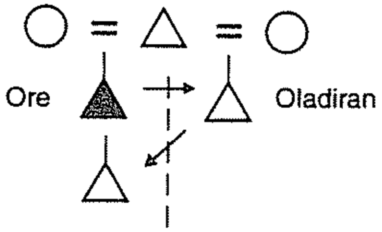

FIG. 4 Lineage segmentation and fission.

lineage segment and possibly transferring Ore's house to Oladiran, since Yoruba family titles and properties can move 'sideways' before moving 'downwards' (Lloyd, 1962: 306; Goody, 1970). In this respect, the fact that Ore's son arrested Oladiran can be seen as an act of filial vengeance which pre-empted the lateral transmission of Ore's lineage title and property to Oladiran, and rerouted it vertically to the son himself (Fig. 4). As for Oladiran, we can only conjecture. Perhaps he did kidnap and murder Ore to make money-magic with his 'head' and body parts, and got caught. Or perhaps he killed Ore to gain his title and property, a crime which was configured in the idiom of money-magic. Maybe he was innocent, the victim of a terrible plot or of misfortune. One thing is certain. After Oroyeye's verbal strike Oladiran was considered guilty by the town, despite the fact that he was acquitted in court, owing to lack of evidence. Banished from his house, he rented a room in another part of town, gradually lost his mind, and, according to popular reports, dropped dead at a crossroads ten years later in 1993.

CONCLUSION

To address the broader significance of the Oroyeye festival, we have tried to relocate its abusive texts in their historical and performative contexts. Within the historical context of Ayede kingdom, we have seen how the cult has had an active 'voice' in important political affairs, including the negotiation of dynastic succession and the deposition of Gabriel Osho. In this respect the voice of the 'grandmothers' has not been exactly neutral but has consistently championed the political claims of the displaced Iye chiefs. By resurrecting a repressed history—the usurpation by the Àtá Eshubiyi of the Iye ruling line—the cult reproduces an historical template of Ayede's founding which is brought to bear on contemporary events in order to explain and shape them. Part of the power of Oroyeye in Ayede, I would argue, is the return of the politically and historically repressed, in that the desire of the Iye order to re-establish its pre-eminence is ritually mobilised and discursively 'canalised' (to return to Evans-Pritchard's original term) by the cult's very shifting from homage (*ìjúbà*) to abuse (*àfẹ̀, èèbú*). If the priestesses protect the 'town' by disclosing the crimes of specific scoundrels, they also protect a specific definition of the town, as 'offspring of Iye by blood'. When the Oroyeye priestesses take possession of the town, they therefore remake it in the image of Iye, the indeed sanctified 'ground' of the cult's more personalised invective.

If the old women of Oroyeye sing for the old Iye order, restoring it rhetorically if not politically in Ayede, the younger girls represent both 'sides' during the nocturnal wrestling contests. In the event the town is ritually remapped into Isaoye and Odoalu, terms which, as we have seen, normally refer to two of Ayede's six quarters but are here extended to embrace Iye 'indigenes' (four quarters) and Yagba 'strangers' (two quarters) as organised by age sets. As the young men wrestle to promote their names and protect their ground, the young women sing jocular obscenities to defend their side and defame their rivals, both collectively (as Isaoye *v.* Odoalu) and personally by name. The 'political' contest between indigenes and strangers is thus explicitly sexualised by sanctioned obscenities. Political and sexual contexts (competition) and sub-texts (desire) are reciprocally encoded to augment the power of Oroyeye with the return of the sexually repressed. And, as we have seen, this power is not merely displaced into harmless palliatives through collective catharsis but is effectively channelled on to targeted culprits through the pragmatics of ritual speech.

This interpretation of Oroyeye can be further developed by framing it within more culturally coherent terms, as a regionally and historically specific expression of Yoruba female power more generally. As I have argued elsewhere, Yoruba women are distinguished from men by two inversely related powers: the procreative power of fertility and the deadly power of witchcraft. If it is according to their 'secret' that women give birth, it is also with their 'secret' that they take life, by consuming the life essence of their kinsfolk, be they co-wives, collaterals, or even their own children, although it is more common for a witch to attack the child of a co-wife. The Yoruba witch is technically a cannibal, since she transforms herself into a witch bird and sucks the blood of her victims until the death. Wealthy women are sometimes accused of exchanging their victims for financial gain, offering a child to a coven in return for illicit profit. All this is, of course, copiously documented by a fairly extensive scholarly and popular literature, and emerges as a common concern among diviners (*babaláwo*) and medical specialists (*onísẹgùn*), in newspapers and in elite households, and among Christians, Muslims, and politicians as well.[41] Since witchcraft, like fertility, is endemic to Yoruba womanhood, all women are potential witches, and a woman becomes a witch and joins a coven (*ẹgbẹ́*) when her witchcraft power is activated. Usually it will happen after menopause, when the woman's procreative fluids have been exhausted and her blood congeals inward. Thus if fertility and witchcraft are antithetical female powers, each may dominate the other at different times in a woman's life. This diachronic dimension of fertility and witchcraft corresponds clearly to the two basic components of the Oroyeye festival—the Àjàkadì nocturnal wrestling and the daytime procession of the 'grandmothers'. In the former, unmarried girls at the height of puberty and fertility sing songs of excessive sexuality, whereas in the latter old women past their childbearing years wreak havoc on public offenders. Each category of singers exemplifies the antithetical powers of fertility and witchcraft, and, with these powers in mind, the 'canalising' logic of abuse can be spelled out more clearly.

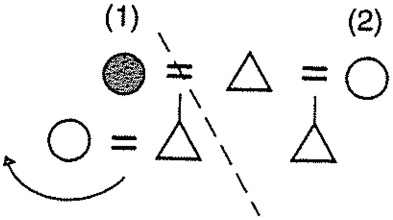

FIG. 5 Lineage segmentation and fission.

Foregrounding the female voice, as Oroyeye does, we might say that the unmarried girls displace male power competition into explicit idioms of female sexuality, which they celebrate and control, and thus effectively transform into socially sanctioned powers of social reproduction. By allowing sexual images to run amok while identifying actual 'flirts' in the town, the singers direct potentially rampant sexuality and unbounded desire toward 'legitimate' fertile unions. The homology between male wrestling and female sexual competition can be seen as a ritual transformation, a conversion of male violence into female sexuality and fertility. Nor is such a transformation 'purely' symbolic, judging from the nocturnal liaisons that occur during the festival.[42]

As for the grandmothers, they can be seen as powerful witches who convert their infertility and malice into socially recognised punitive sanctions. By routing out evildoers they use their witchcraft to protect the town from its enemies within. In this respect, the case of Oladiran is revealing, not only of the dire consequences of ritual abuse but of the cultural logic which motivates it. During my investigations I was struck by the large proportion of Oroyeye songs which focus on individuals implicated in lineage fission. One man who was accused of stealing land from his brother had moved away from his patrilocal compound to set up house on his wife's family land (Fig. 5). Although the 'crime' concerned farmland, was he guilty of lineage fission? Recall the Oroyeye song warning Orisha Oniyi not to split its cult into three by generating a third lineage matrisegment. These and many other examples suggest that the 'witchcraft' which normally focuses on the position of women in lineage segmentation and fission—since, following Lloyd (1955), it is children of the same fathers but different mothers who generally divide—is transformed by the grandmothers of Oroyeye into the crimes of men.[43] In this respect, Oladiran's crime is paradigmatic. He not only initiated lineage fission but did so by killing his half-brother and using his body for making money, thereby mirroring the cannibalistic appetites of witches who are believed to profit by consuming their kin. Oladiran was, in effect, a male witch. For this crime against society, isolated and broken, the man died.

For whom, then, do the priestesses of Oroyeye speak? We have identified a number of localised answers, ranging from young girls and old women to the old Iye order and the kingdom of Ayede at large. We have argued that, as a specific ritual genre, Oroyeye songs encode a particular historicity, a template of dispossession and repression which maps on to all sorts of contemporary relations, and is itself an historical consequence of Iye's experience in the founding and development of Ayede.[44] And it is to this local level of embedded meanings and con/textual strategies that students of oral literature and ritual discourse in Africa should attend, if we are to grasp the history and politics of linguistic practices.[45] Following Evans-Pritchard's lead, we have shown how the 'canalising functions' of obscenity and abuse can be discursively contextualised in relation to homage and praise, and locally historicised in the repressed social memory of lineage fission and 'sexual' politics. If relocating ritual texts in their performative contexts illuminates how they work, however, we need not remain in the local particularities of specific speech communities, and, with this in mind, we can reflect on the more general relationship between Oroyeye texts and female power. Within the broader socio-cultural contexts of fertility and witchcraft, the young girls and old grandmothers of Oroyeye speak—with impunity—for all Yoruba women.[46]

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NOTES

[1] See, for example, Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Gluckman (1954), and Turner (1967) for exemplary statements of these theoretical positions. For related discussions of licentious discourse as 'joking' see Junod (1927, especially the *Annotatio quarta* I, p. 516), Labouret (1929), Paulme (1939), Griaule (1948), and Apter (1983b).

[2] See, for example, Evans-Pritchard (1965: 100 n. 1), who states that 'the explanation I have given here is largely in accord with psycho-analytical theory which would consider that the function of such obscenity is to act as a drive and palliative of labour, regarding the obscenities as a result of a clash between necessary labour (reality principle) and the desire to avoid exertion (pain–pleasure principle)', although he proceeds to distance himself from further developments of this thesis.

[3] The concept of 'entextualisation' has been developed by Silverstein and associates to identify the discursive separation of text from context, which is in a sense the logical

complement of discursive contextualisation. For theoretical elaborations and applications of this perspective see Silverstein and Urban (1996).

[4] After paying the fine and begging the Oroyeye cult for mercy, such a mild offender must sacrifice to his or her ancestors in a ceremony called Ààwọ. The connection between Oroyeye and lineage identity is discussed below.

[5] According to one of the journal's anonymous referees the Edì festivals of the goddess Moremi celebrated in Ife also feature priestesses who 'indulge in obscene songs' and target evildoers. In addition, Ogunba (1982) cites interesting examples of what he calls satirical, political, and interrogatory genres of 'occasional festival songs', some of which are sung by women and resemble Oroyeye songs in content if not in form. He collected them from different Ijebu 'purification festivals' (1982: 37) but neglects to tell us which ones. Moreover, he argues that the songs developed out of earlier ritual genres into more secular performances. Certainly the political song praising Chief Obafemi Awolowo as a 'sanitary inspector' (1982: 43–5) is a gem of neo-colonial allegory.

[6] The Drewals also cite Asiwaju (1975) and Olabimtan (1970).

[7] The Drewals analyse the functions of Efe songs in terms of (1) incantation, (2) invocation, (3) social comment, (4) history, and (5) funeral commemoration, with more specific subdivisions (Drewal and Drewal, 1983: 40). These categories are indeed relevant to Oroyeye songs, and provide a useful heuristic for identifying textual strategies, but they remain descriptive, bearing no analytical relation to each other. From a more generative perspective, Yai (1989: 63) highlights the 'pre-performance criticism' and social production of Efe songs during the *igbalẹ̀* sessions of the Gelede society, which are off-limits to non-initiates. Ideally, I would provide comparable insights into the production of Oroyeye texts, but I had no access.

[8] It is likely that Oro Efe and Oroyeye represent varieties of the Oro cult more generally, which is commonly known as a bull-roarer cult reserved for men, and which is associated with the Osugbo (Ogboni) society among the Ijebu (Abraham, 1962: 484–5). That Oroyeye represents a 'female' voice in a male ritual complex brings the gender contrast into bold relief. But cf. Flynn (1997), who reveals that women traders are in fact significantly involved with Oro cults.

[9] Although Abraham (1962: 678) glosses *yèyé* as 'mother', my assistants in Ayede insisted on 'grandmother', emphasising women beyond their childbearing years. In Ekiti dialect, *yeye* is pronounced with two mid tones, as (un)marked throughout the text.

[10] One of the anonymous referees of this journal observes that Oroyeye may represent a generic praise name for the female ritual power found in many festivals and orisha cults, rather than a specific cognomen as such: '. . . I wish to query the name of this cult. Clearly the Ayede people refer to it as Oroyeye, but this strikes me as an oriki/adura-like epithet or invocation rather than a real name for an *orisa* such as Shango, Moremi, or Yemoja. During the Oshun festival in Oshogbo, for example, one could always hear the recurrent refrain of *orò yèyé o . . . !* chanted by the women who went to draw sacred water from the river. The same invocation could be heard also at the annual festivals of the river goddess Otin in Inisha, Okuku or Oyan.' Indeed, even in Ayede the priestesses of Orisha Iyagba sing the same epithet under similar conditions. I can only reply that indigenous testimony in Ayede repeatedly asserted that Oroyeye was the festival of grandmothers, and treated Iyeye as a deity. It is possible that the priestesses are allied with the Olua cult of Owaiye quarter.

[11] For rigorous theoretical reformulations of the linguistic processes involved in the discursive *production* of context see the editors' introduction to Duranti and Goodwin (1992), with special reference to the essay by Hanks (1992). See also Silverstein (1976, 1993).

[12] For details of the ritual mechanisms by which Eshubiyi effected this dynastic usurpation see Apter (1992: 45–69).

[13] Alákoto also means 'girl no longer a virgin' (Abraham, 1962: 383), suggesting a possible third reference to the scandal of Eshubiyi's adulterous paternity, barring him from royal office as an illegitimate son of a civil chief. Mr Michael B. Ayeni adduced the text while recounting the story of Onimogun's impregnation of the Obasakan's wife (who, because she was married, was no longer a virgin) and the subsequent birth of Eshubiyi, the future king (personal interview, March 1984). I do not know if Mr Ayeni intended to convey this meaning of Alákoto in the text.

[14] For a video clip of this 'calabash crown' during Ayede's Orisha Ojuna festival, 19 August 1993, see http://anthro.spc.uchicago.edu/ ~ aapter/yea.

[15] A *bàálẹ̀* is like the king of a town, but cannot enjoy the privileges of kingship because his town is subordinate to a capital town with its proper *ọba*. Thus the *bàálẹ̀* of Otunja is subordinate to the Elékọ̀lé of Ikole. Relations between kings and their *bàálẹ̀*, capitals and their subordinate towns, are fractious. In the wider kingdom of Ayede, I incited a terrible 'palaver' when I asked the *bàálẹ̀* of Ipao (one of Ayede's subordinate towns) about his relation to the Àtá of Ayede. Since it was during the town's Ogun festival, one of the Àtá's wives, who is the Ológun of Orisha Iyagba, attended. When the *bàálẹ̀* (whose title is Ọbańlá) asserted that he was actually a king, and that Ipao was not subordinate to Ayede, the Àtá's wife flew into a rage and roundly denounced him.

[16] The text was recited by the late Michael B. Ayeni (personal interview, March 1984) to discredit the legitimacy of the Eshubiyi dynasty. An Iye native, Ayeni was ever loyal to the Olu ruling dynasty. During our discussion I forgot to write down the Yoruba text.

[17] For an illuminating analysis of the gendered associations of *oríkì* with women and *ìtàn* with men see Barber (1990: 330–4).

[18] The cult of Orisha Oniyi was already divided between Obasalu and Oloso segments of Ilewa lineage. See Apter (1987: 161–3) for details.

[19] On a basic structural level, the theft of a goat by a king inverts the royal ritual imperative of supplying a goat to the town for collective sacrifice and protection. In Ayede, the Àtá must supply such a goat during the Orisha Ojuna festival, whereas during the Yemoja festival he must provide a ram for Shango. It is interesting to note that when the Resident of Ondo Province investigated the allegations against Gabriel Osho, the theft of goats was recorded as a literal civil offence: '. . . a delegation of Ayede title holders spoke on behalf of all and accused the Ata of the theft of goats and stated that they did not wish to acknowledge him any longer' (Carr, 1934: 1).

[20] The song's assertion that the matter surrounding the king's theft of chickens and goats is 'deep' (*jìnlẹ̀*) offers a valuable glimpse into a more general property of deep knowledge in Yoruba hermeneutics, which is its capacity to challenge authority structures and, when conditions are right, break out into open articulation. The truth of the cult's accusation—against none other than the king himself—is of course predicated on its access to the deep knowledge of the grandmothers.

[21] The festival described began on 25 April 1983. All the texts in this section were recorded by me *in situ*. The songs of homage and incrimination in the next section were recorded over the following seven days.

[22] The term *ọmọgé*, which I am glossing as 'young girls' and 'young women', has no precise equivalent in English. It denotes the specific status and attributes of an attractive unmarried young woman, presumably without children, who is, as Edmund Leach (1958: 133) would say, 'fair game for a love affair'. Unmarried young women with children are sometimes referred to by their female age mates as 'after one' (child) or 'after two' (children) in Nigerian English slang.

[23] This curse exemplifies one of the morphosyntactic features which characterise *àṣẹ* (power, performative efficacy) in ritual speech, namely the transposition of noun forms (in this example, *ìbàjẹ́*) into verb forms (in this example, *bà . . . jẹ́*) within the same utterance. See also Drewal and Drewal (1987: 226) and Olatunji (1984: 152–64) for further discussion and permutations of this grammatical device.

[24] The Yagba towns within the kingdom of Ayede, which are Oke Ako, Irele and Ipao, played a decisive role in the deposition of Àtá Gabriel Osho. In 1934 they formed a Federal Society (joined by Ayede's non-Yagba town of Itapaji) to secede from Ayede district and join with other Yagba towns in what was then the Northern Province. They also rejected the Àtá's tax notification slips. In the interests of district unity, the District Officer deposed the Àtá.

[25] The same rebellious theme is ritually expressed in Ayede's Orisha Iyagba festival, when the Balógun Àòfin's warrior priestesses carry spears and cutlasses 'decorated' with palm fronds. See Apter (1992: 156–60) for details.

[26] For a detailed discussion of the distribution of this drum throughout Yorubaland, in many cases following Nupe migrations and festivals, see Thieme (1969: 146–72).

[27] And to some extent, which I am unable to determine in any statistical sense, the young men who fight each other will marry each other's classificatory 'sisters'.

[28] As it turned out, the young woman here referred to as Ajayi became second wife to a much older, illiterate farmer, a match which according to her age mates suited her profligacy.

[29] See for example the politico-ritual patterns found in Ishan and its subordinate town of Ilemesho (Apter, 1995).

[30] It is interesting to note that this may well be the same Omu which Barber (1991b: 21) identifies in the *orikì orílè* of *ilé* Elemeso in Ikole as performed in Okuku. This correspondence demonstrates the utility of *oríkì* as historical records of lineage migrations.

[31] Most major orisha festivals are preceded by fund-raising visits of priestesses to households throughout the town. What distinguishes Oroyeye's visits is the explicit threat of ostracism. The seven-day 'outing' of the Oroyeye priestesses is identified in an announcement song:

Oròyeye ó dé ò,
Olórò àrí simi kèje.

Oroyeye has arrived,
Owners of the festival that brings anxiety for seven days.

[32] Hence the Oroyeye text 'I pay homage because the child that pays homage will not suffer or go astray.' For the first penetrating analysis of 'paying' for homage as status validation in Hausa society see Smith (1957).

[33] This translation is idiosyncratic, since *aṣèjẹ̀* can be more literally rendered as 'one who bleeds' as well as 'which is the blood'. The 'descent' translation comes from Mr Olusanya Ibitoye, who, in correcting the original translation by 'Dejo Afolayan, consistently wrote, 'offspring of Iye by blood'. Mr Afolayan, for the record, wrote, 'Offspring of he-who-pays the vow and lives', according to a very different morphosyntactic parsing which also makes sense in the socio-linguistic context of paying homage. Since Mr Ibitoye is an Ayede indigene with intimate knowledge of ritual language idioms, I have gone with his translation. This does not mean that Mr Ibitoye is right or even that both translations are mutually exclusive. But I do remain confident that Ibitoye's version represents the spirit if not the 'letter' of the dominant local meaning.

[34] In a sense, the figure–ground distinction in the semantics of deixis (Hanks, 1992: 60–71) extends here to the paradigmatic Oroyeye textual stanza, in which the first fluid (variant) couplet focalises a figure (usually a living person in the community) while the second, fixed (invariant) refrain relates this figure to the (indexical) ground. Is it by chance that Aro is also 'Owner-of-the-earth/ground'?

[35] Actually the Morgan report provides two lists of kingmakers, an older list of nine titles and a more recent list of five. The report misidentifies several lineages with the wrong quarters. In both lists, however the Aro is ranked first.

1. Aro
2. Obalesi
3. Obalohun
4. Olole
5. Ala
6. Onire
7. Odofin
8. Obalopada
9. Obalero

1. Aro
2. Obalero
3. Ewi
4. Alamo
5. Amuwagun

See also Krapf-Askari (1966: 6), who observes, 'Lists of *oróta* titles obtained for different title systems in Kabba Province show a marked degree of concordance in styles and ranking, especially towards the top; the highest title is almost always *Ọbaró* . . .' Finally, we should note that the meaning of 'kingmaker' was changed by the chieftaincy commission, in that civil offices were given priority over ritual offices when the two were differentiated.

[36] Thus, for example:

Ẹ Sà jùmọ̀ rìn,	You should all walk together,
Bí 'mọlèẹ̀ jùmọ̀ rẹ yè.	Just as the deities walk together.
A á júbà Àró-Onílẹ̀,	We shall pay homage to Aro, owner of the land,
'Mọ aṣèjẹ̀ ye.	Offspring of Iye by blood.

For details of the election riots which followed, and their underlying ritual logic, see Apter (1992, 179–91).

[37] These translations of lines 5 and 6 are rather free, based on Mr Olusanya Ibitoye's rendering of local idioms, which may not be found in standard Yoruba but which ring clear to Ayede indigenes. The song is basically a warning to beware of the cult's power.

[38] Anybody who has tried to interview Yorubas about family and genealogical history will know how reluctantly they provide information, since family history is a private affair, full of disputes and secrets. Even simple household survey questions ring alarm bells over dubious paternities, unofficial wives, land tenure, even lineage depth and span. Normally, at least in a small town like Ayede, people will never discuss the affairs of other families, replying that if you want to know about X's family then go and ask them yourself. The zeal with which Oladiran's story was narrated to me by onlookers is itself ethnographically significant, illustrating a suspension of 'normal' discursive constraints.

[39] For a description of Idanre and its connections with Benin see the anonymous article 'Idanre', *Nigeria Magazine* 46 (1955), 154–80.

[40] This image is particularly charged, since it inverts the sartorial idiom of family sociality in 'family cloth' (*aṣọ ẹbí*). Instead of wearing the cloth of his kinsman, Oladiran wears a cloth that is stained by the blood of his kinsman.

[41] See, for example, Beier (1958), Belasco (1980), Morton-Williams (1956, 1960a), Thompson (1976), Drewal and Drewal (1983), Idowu (1970), Hoch-Smith (1978), Prince (1961), Matory (1994), Makinde (1988), Bastian (1993), and Apter (1993) for some representative discussions.

[42] I do not mean to suggest that this ritual transformation explains the *Àjàkadì* wrestling and singing as some cathartic carnival (which it is not), only that within 'the play of tropes' (Fernandez, 1986) such a series of displacements is effected, perhaps through such 'syllogisms of association' as Fernandez (pp. 102–29) notes for Asturian deepsong. Many other readings are of course sustained, although partial corroboration comes from Parkin (1980: 57), who notes that 'sex entails marriage' is one of the three elementary propositions of joking.

[43] See also Schwab (1955) for an insightful if overmechanical discussion of matrisegments and lineage segmentation in the town of Oshogbo.

[44] Thus in Old Iye, for example, the same historical template could not be invoked, since the Olú of Iye was still in charge. We can only speculate about the repressed histories invoked by Oroyeye, although I imagine they involved rival dynastic claims, as in the song which warned against the rotation of the Olú between lineages (and even quarters).

[45] Two of my earliest efforts in this direction (Apter, 1983a, b) analysed southern African praises and dispraises as a form of political action. In a pathbreaking study, Parkin (1980: 47) identifies 'politeness' and 'abuse' as contrastive dimensions of greetings which are deployed to negotiate status relations. In many ways these dimensions map on to authority and power, praise and dispraise, hierarchy and solidarity, avoidance and joking. In Parkin's analysis, the 'creativity' of abuse refers to its transformative potentialities. See Gal (1991) for a comparative formulation of the relations between gender, speech, and power, advocating 'studies [that] attend not only to words but to the interactional practices and the broader political and economic context of communication in order to understand the process by which women's voices—in both senses—are routinely suppressed or manage to emerge' (p. 178). It is my hope that this examination of Oroyeye songs represents a step in that direction by emphasising the transformative power of women's ritual speech.

[46] In this broader connection, Yai (n.d.) argues for an emancipatory focus on the Yoruba goddess Nana as a paradigm for theorising and analysing female literary genres and voices. The study of Oroyeye may well fall within the scope of Yai's project.

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ABSTRACT

If ritual songs of obscenity and abuse have become a familiar topic in Africanist ethnography since Evans-Pritchard's first discussion of their 'canalising' functions in

1929, few studies have paid sufficient attention to the socio-political and discursive contexts of the song texts themselves. The present article moves in that direction by relocating abusive songs of the Oroyeye festival in an Ekiti Yoruba town within the local forms of history and knowledge that motivate their interpretation and performative power. After reviewing the cult's historical interventions in local political affairs, the article examines the repressed historical memory of a displaced ruling dynasty and its associated line of civil chiefs as invoked by the song texts in two festival contexts. In the first—the Àjàkadì wrestling match—which occurs at night, male age mates from different 'sides' of the town fight to stand their ground and topple their opponents while young women praise the winners and abuse the losers with sexual obscenities. In the second festival context, during the day, the elder 'grandmothers' of Oroyeye target malefactors and scoundrels by highlighting their misdeeds against a discursive background of homage and praise. In this fashion the female custodians of a displaced ruling line bring repressed sexual and political sub-texts to bear on male power competition, lineage fission, and antisocial behaviour. More generally, they mobilise the fertility and witchcraft of all Yoruba women to disclose hidden crimes and speak out with impunity.

RÉSUMÉ

Si les chants rituels d'obscénités et d'insultes sont devenus un sujet populaire dans le domaine de l'ethnographie africaniste depuis le premier débat de Evans-Pritchard sur leur rôle de "canalisateurs" en 1929, peu d'études se sont suffisamment penchées sur les contextes sociopolitiques et discursifs des textes de ces chants. Cet article va dans ce sens en replaçant les chants injurieux du festival d'Oroyeye, ville Ekiti Yoruba, dans les formes locales d'histoire et de connaissance qui motivent leur interprétation et leur pouvoir performatif. Après avoir passé en revue les interventions historiques de ce culte dans les affaires politiques locales, l'article examine la mémoire historique réprimée d'une dynastie dirigeante destituée et sa lignée de chefs civils, comme l'évoquent les textes de chants dans deux contextes du festival. Dans le premier, à savoir le match de lutte nocturne Ajakadi, les hommes jeunes de la même classe d'âge et originaires de différents quartiers de la ville se battent pour faire tomber leur adversaire et rester debout pendant que de jeunes femmes font l'éloge des vainqueurs et insultent les perdants à grand renfort d'obscénités sexuelles. Dans le second contexte du festival, pendant la journée, les "grand-mères" d'Oroyeye prennent pour cible les malfaiteurs et les gredins en mettant en lumière leurs méfaits sur fond discursif d'hommage et d'éloge. De cette façon, les gardiennes d'une lignée dirigeante destituée infligent des sous-textes politiques et sexuels réprimés sur la lutte pour le pouvoir que se livrent les hommes, la fission de la lignée et le comportement antisocial. De manière plus générale, elles mobilisent la fertilité et la sorcellerie de toutes les femmes Yoruba pour dévoiler des crimes cachés et s'exprimer franchement en toute impunité.