ORAL TRADITION

African Oral Traditons

Volume 9, Number 1 March, 1994

Slavica

Volume 9 March 1994 Number 1

Slavica Publishers, Inc.

For a complete catalog of books from Slavica, with prices and ordering information, write to:

Slavica Publishers, Inc.
P.O. Box 14388
Columbus, Ohio 43214

ISSN: 0883-5365

Oral Tradition seeks to provide a comparative and interdisciplinary focus for studies in oral literature and related fields by publishing research and scholarship on the creation, transmission, and interpretation of all forms of oral traditional expression. As well as essays treating certifiably oral traditions, *OT* presents investigations of the relationships between oral and written traditions, as well as brief accounts of important fieldwork, a Symposium section (in which scholars may reply at some length to prior essays), review articles, occasional transcriptions and translations of oral texts, a digest of work in progress, and a regular column for notices of conferences and other matters of interest. In addition, occasional issues will include an ongoing annotated bibliography of relevant research and the annual Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lectures on Oral Tradition. *OT* welcomes contributions on all oral literatures, on all literatures directly influenced by oral traditions, and on non-literary oral traditions. Submissions must follow the list-of-reference format (style sheet available on request) and must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return or for mailing of proofs; all quotations of primary materials must be made in the original language(s) with following English translations. Authors should submit two copies of all manuscripts. Most contributions will be reviewed by at least one specialist reader and one member of the editorial board before a final decision is reached. Review essays, announcements, and contributions to the Symposium section will be evaluated by the editor in consultation with the board.

Oral Tradition appears twice per year, in March and October. Annual subscription charges are $18 for individuals and $35 for libraries and other institutions.

All manuscripts, books for review, items for the bibliography updates, and editorial correspondence, as well as subscriptions and related inquiries should be addressed to the editor, John Miles Foley, Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, 301 Read Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211.

Printed in the United States of America.

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITORIAL BOARD

African Oral Traditions

Contents

Oral Tradition 9/1 (1994): 3-22

Introduction: The Search for Grounds in African Oral Tradition

Lee Haring

The critic J. Hillis Miller has written of the "terror or dread readers may experience when they confront a text which seems irreducibly strange, inexplicable, perhaps even mad" (1985:20). Literary study in the 1980s, he writes, is beset by profound disagreements over whether the "ground" of literature is to be found in social forces, metaphysical presuppositions, individual psychology, or language itself. For the future of criticism, he counsels "slow reading," uncovering assumptions, and continuing interrogation of "the very idea of the ground." Since the West began confronting the irreducibly strange yet compelling power of the word in African verbal art (Calame-Griaule 1963, Peek 1981), terror and dread have never been far from the surface. A classic means of addressing one's terror is mimesis, as my undergraduate aesthetics professor told us: imitation for the sake of mastery springs from a compulsion to order. In the light of Michael Taussig's recent book (1993) exploring the complicated relations of mimesis and alterity, mimesis can be seen to underlie all nine articles in this special issue. All in their various ways attempt to create a correspondence between the artistic human communication of African peoples and a written representation, which may be a set of propositions and correlates, a translation and summary, or an analysis that will imitate and celebrate African oral traditions while making them reasonable and explicable. The issue opens a perspective on contemporary folkloristic issues; this introduction interrogates the ground for scholarly and critical mimesis, assuming that oral and written literature both grow in such a ground.

In a recent textbook surveying the genres and literary features of African oral literature (Okpewho 1992), one looks in vain for any questioning of why anything should be called literature to begin with. "One can always inscribe in literature," Jacques Derrida has said, "something

which was not originally destined to be literary, given the conventional and intentional space which institutes and thus constitutes the text." This inscribing has certainly occurred in the mere transcription and translation of African oral traditions, as well as in the reclassifying of oral histories, genealogies, and personal experience narratives as legends (Okpewho 1992:183-203). Contributors to this issue give new data about how African artists frame some utterances into performances—how they "entextualize." "But if one can re-read everything as literature," Derrida continues, "some textual events lend themselves to this better than others, their potentialities are richer and denser." Ahmed and Furniss and Camara, in this issue, give especially forceful instances of textual events of that sort. Derrida concludes with a warning to those who observe, record, transcribe, and translate: "Even given that some texts appear to have a greater potential for formalization, literary works *and* works which say a lot about literature and therefore about themselves, works whose performativity, in some sense, appears the greatest possible in the smallest possible space, this can give rise only to evaluations inscribed in a context, to positioned readings which are themselves formalizing and performative" (Derrida 1992:46-47). This issue presents nine positioned, formalizing, and performative readings of African oral traditions.

In the past, classic approaches to African oral traditions have sought their ground in anonymous social forces, "primitive" mentality, the entextualizing of words, or metaphysical presuppositions. Often the approaches have been positivist, in the sense of the 1892 definition cited by Raymond Williams, "the representation of facts without any admixture of theory or mythology" (1976:200). Facts in the colonial period were the decontextualized words of spoken performances, captured with the pain voiced by Smith and Dale in what was then Northern Rhodesia (1920:336):

> Ask him now to repeat the story slowly so that you may write it. You will, with patience, get the gist of it, but the unnaturalness of the circumstance disconcerts him, your repeated request for the repetition of a phrase, the absence of the encouragement of his friends, and, above all, the hampering slowness of your pen, all combine to kill the spirit of story-telling. Hence we have to be content with far less than the tales as they are told.

As a ground for folklore research, then, positivism had its discontents and diminutions.

Decontextualization gained new theoretical force when, under the

influence of the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and of Rudolf Carnap, positivism entered the Anglo-American literary world as New Criticism. The ground was an organic conception of literature and a separation of literary criticism from sources, social effects and backgrounds, history of ideas, and politics, for the sake of attention on the object called literary, which was separated from its producer and sociohistorical setting (Leitch 1988:26-35). New Criticism thus unknowingly justified the practice of generations of Africanist ethnographers, who published lists of proverbs and riddles, translations of folksong lyrics, and texts of folktales quite separately from their accounts of economic activity, gender roles, and political organization. The principle of such an "objective orientation," wrote the New Critic M. H. Abrams in 1953, is to regard the work of art "in isolation from all these external points of reference" and analyze it "as a self-sufficient entity constituted by its parts in their internal relations" (21). This "objectivism," now generally rejected in African studies, was classically refuted by a zealous, penetrating researcher of Tanzania, T. O. Beidelman: "if folklore has any lasting merit as a field of study by anthropologists, it is in its relation to other spheres of society and social action. Indeed, this too is the relevance of literature," which, he concludes, can have significance only "within a wider cultural context, including social relations and cosmology" (1971:xiv-xvii). Most students of African oral traditions would concede these points, while regretting the lack of information about social relations and cosmology to inform the collections made in the past. Azuonye and Ahmed and Furniss accord their texts the sort of evaluation that, New Critics held, should be based only on criteria intrinsic to the mode of being of the work itself (Abrams 1972:21). They conceive its mode, however, as inextricably imbricated in social life. Görög-Karady with equal emphasis insists on a correspondence between the values of Bambara narratives and an ideology oppressive to women. To document that correspondence, she presents an exemplar of such informed interpretation within the context of Bambara social relations.

Transcription and translation do not stand alone; they require commentary, as another part of their ground. Our authors thus disagree with critics like Christopher Miller, who believes there is such a thing as "pure transcription." This would be "the degree zero of francophone African literature, the point at which the author is merely a transcriber and translator of oral texts . . . . This degree zero describes large numbers of texts from the early francophone tradition" (Miller 1990:54). It also

describes a goal for many folklorists (e.g. Goldstein 1964) and one relation between folklore and American literature (Dorson 1972:473-74). But there is no degree zero of commentary either. Like literary critical theories, commentary on African oral traditions always "exhibits a discernible orientation" to artist, audience, or universe (Abrams 1972:4). Camara's essay in translation, for instance, is mimetic in the Aristotelian sense: it is a written imitation of the manner in which Mandinka myth operates. Görög-Karady's comparison of two Bambara tales, mimetic in a different sense, explores the relation of imaginative verbal art to the social world from which art arises and to which it is subject. Jama's account of women's literary production is "pragmatic" in showing the bearing of the rules and precepts of Somali poetry. Pragmatic too is Azuonye's story of the effect of folkloric criticism on the performer; his focus on the individual artist classifies his approach also as "expressive." Offering, finally, to put mimetic, pragmatic, and expressive orientations into a new perspective is performance-based research, which up to now has flourished outside Africa (Bauman 1982, 1989, Briggs 1988, Fine 1984, Limón and Young 1986). Several of our contributors apply this approach to their African materials; one interrogates it sternly. Performance research in Africa promises to achieve what Derrida claims for deconstruction, "a *general* displacement of the system" that opposes informants to investigators and text to context.

Transcription, however, is always with us. A reader of Sory Camara's "Field of Life, Sowing of Speech, Harvest of Acts" might at first be tempted to see it as pure transcription. His revelatory interview with the Mandinka Pathmaster Kandara Koyi granted him a precious recording of the narrative of creation, that primordial time when light was confined to the heart of the world and human beings separated into greedy actives and ascetic contemplatives. Transmitting this wisdom, Camara positions himself not as a quasi-scientific invisible observer, but as the successor to the Pathmasters of eastern Sénégal. The Pathmasters assert that their Most Ancient Words constitute a metalanguage, in which they explain to us the proper place of words of power in human life. The means of their explanation is the narration of a past that has been perceived by no one except through their discourse. For Camara to record, combine, and translate their utterances is already commentary, exegesis, and explanation. Because he is their successor, his writing is also *mimesis*. What Terry Eagleton says of literary critics is *a fortiori* true of the Pathmasters, with Camara among them, but also of our contributors. They "are not so much

purveyors of doctrine as custodians of a discourse. Their task is to [hear and] preserve this discourse, extend and elaborate it as necessary, defend it from other forms of discourse [such as Western skepticism], initiate newcomers [like ourselves] into it, and determine whether or not they have successfully mastered it" (Eagleton 1983:201). The Pathmasters' discourse confronts us with what a New Critic would have called a concrete universal, a Mandinka metaphysic of the word, perhaps to be found too among their Bambara and Dyula cousins (Bird 1972:275). As Jacques Derrida says of literature generally, the Mandinka story of the origin of speech and lying "stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself. It's the most interesting thing in the world, maybe more interesting than the world" (Derrida 1992:47). Camara's translation challenges the position of critics like Mamadou Kouyaté, that oral tradition cannot be transcribed or translated without being destroyed (C. Miller 1990:94). Problems of representation and description have long plagued Africanists (Blacking 1972); solutions have often come from in-group spokespersons like our contributors.

A more accurate term for Camara's transcription and translation of myth (not to mention my Englishing of it) would be decontextualization, if that term is properly understood to imply placing the portable in another context. As Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs have shown (1990), narratives, in African or any context, have a portability that makes their words susceptible of decontextualization. This portability becomes problematic when we confront the esoteric nature of narratives about the ordering of the cosmos, of human beings, or of speech. Because these narratives partake of secret or hidden knowledge, like Camara's example, they are less overtly performed. "Field of Life . . . " declares one finding of the issue as a whole: the inaccessibility of the wisdom found in African oral traditions. Only under controlled conditions will Camara's Pathmaster bring to life through his word and gesture the "phenomenologically distinct realm of experience" translated here (Briggs 1990:216). There are two ways of envisaging decontextualization: either the interviewee has prepared and facilitated decontextualization of his speaking, as the Pathmasters have done, or the interviewee, under the pressure of the moment, has offered fragments of a belief system, a literary discourse, or a style in order to satisfy an interviewer. Camara encourages us to believe that we are looking at the gradual outgrowth of a smoothly developing, well guarded tradition, which he recontextualizes for a European audience that may well need its

message: the only mastery human beings can claim in this world is speech in harmony with the strings of life, which are stretched over the abyss of death.

Decontextualization is sometimes misunderstood to mean the mere removal of words from a performance setting, as though the words then were nowhere, or in limbo. But limbo too is a context, and there is no decontextualization without recontextualization. When Camara presented a brief version of this myth as "Pouvoirs de l'homme et puissances de la parole" in the context of a scholarly conference in London on January 12, 1991, no hearer could miss its "decisive mimetic component" (Taussig 1993:109). Many layers of mimesis are involved in the English translation of a French translation-and-summary-and-commentary of several Mandinka narratives in an uncertain relation to one another. It is with Camara as Taussig describes the Cuna chanter: "he creates the bridge between original and copy that brings a new force, the third force of magical power, to intervene in the human world" (1993:106). Not merely that first recitation, but the transcription and translation as well, brings into existence the power of spirit (108). Camara's role as transmitter of Mandinka wisdom invokes a dilemma of artistic politics. When a wisdom master employs trickery to make sure his words are recorded, isn't he an accomplice in his own dispossession? The Siberian shaman has sometimes been regarded as an actor, his tribesmen as an audience, their enclosure as a stage set; the anthropologist Bogoras (1904-9) even describes a shaman's curing as performance. Does performance, then, mean fakery? Does the shaman's use of ventriloquism, or the Pathmaster's use of "mind games," make him a charlatan? And is the anthropologist who so describes him, then, a debunker? Camara is not, but he forcefully brings into the foreground some of the performance elements of Mandinka myth.

After this proclamation of the power of the word, our other contributors regard verbal art as a social reality imbricated in, indeed helping to constitute, social life. Veronika Görög-Karady documents the ways in which the messages of two Bambara tales contribute to the prevailing male-centered ideology. Storytelling here makes no attempt at protesting or even questioning male dominance. "The Bambara tale," Görög-Karady has written, "is at once act and discourse, a consequential cultural fact through which the society's attitude toward itself is expressed" (1979:13). Men's fear and distrust of women and women's capacity for trickery and betrayal dominate the tales, despite the polar opposite figure of

the beneficent mother. In consonance with the androcentrism, the female narrator of "Siriman the Hunter" employs two characteristically African motifs of female negativity, the transformation of an animal into a woman to accomplish revenge and a woman's persuading a man to leave behind his weapons so that she can do away with him (111). Internalizing the prevalent male-dominated ideology of such motifs is one means of female survival. By giving her a larger audience, Görög-Karady here sounds the theme of all our articles: politics and poetics are inseparable.

Again showing that inseparability, Daniel Avorgbedor presents the *haló* of the Anlo-Ewe of Ghana, a "sociomusical drama," as an artistic rendering and perpetuation of conflict—a continuation of war by other means. In contrast to the colonial anthropologists who pictured African life as placid and undisturbed, Avorgbedor reveals the continuity of tension and conflict in a society he knows well. Thus his essay raises the question of the role of poetics and performance in regulating social life. African societies in the post-colonial era seem constantly to be seeking homeostasis, a temporary balance, which is bound to be upset and will again require rectification. Avorgbedor shows a direct relation between the devices and techniques that characterized *haló* in its day, and the aims of aggression and violence in Anlo-Ewe society. For Avorgbedor as for Briggs (1990:239), this relation means that poetics and politics are one. Similarly, in Mexican-American folklore, José Limón (1982) has shown that performances create, refresh, or constitute ideology.

Other connections between poetics and politics inform Sa'idu Babura Ahmed and Graham Furniss's essay on Hausa rap artists, which presents the verbal part of a filmed performance. Their method, deliberately seeking to capture a fleeting moment instead of entering into intimate collaboration with performers, forces the issue of representation. Two generations after independence, how and by whom shall African oral tradition be represented in Africa and to the outside world? The discontents of representation haunt contemporary literary criticism. Ahmad and Furniss's commitment to honoring their artists and extending their audience implies an aspiration to broadening the oral-traditional-literary canon. Does representation by these investigators necessitate exclusion of the artists and their audience, as some writers hold (Spivak 1987)? Though their non-interventionist fieldwork raises difficulties for them in perceiving the parallelisms that key performance by *'yan gambara* artists, it does not impair their connecting the performances with contemporary notions of textuality, that

"open-ended, heterogeneous, disruptive force of signification and erasure that transgresses all closure," whether in Flaubert or Muhammed Duna (B. Johnson 1990:40). Finally, Ahmad and Furniss subtilize our knowledge of the dialectic between monologism and dialogism (Bakhtin's terms). The interlocutory nature of *'yan gambara* performance, instead of generating dialogue, forestalls it. Thus it resembles other forms that effect authoritative, monologic speech by conventionalizing a practice of dialogue (Bakhtin 1981:342, Haring 1992:63-97). Other African instances of this monologism are arrayed by Okpewho (1992:52-57).

Poetics and politics reveal another facet of their identity in Chukwuma Azuonye's study of variation in performance of Igbo epic under the impact of what Alan Dundes (1966) calls oral literary criticism. He reviews the debate over epic in Africa and eliminates one of the criteria for African epic put forward by John William Johnson (1980). In the time since Azuonye began working with him, Kaalu Igirigiri, the Igbo epic bard, moved from a "purist" style to a "novelistic" style. By analyzing performances from two times in the bard's career, Azuonye demonstrates the impact of the most immediate sort of politics, criticism from a rival performer. A close parallel to this bard's movement of style towards greater expansiveness is the experiment in competition carried out by Milman Parry with a performer of comparable rank, Avdo Medjedović, in Yugoslavia in 1935. Avdo listened to a 2,294-line performance of a previously unknown song and replied with a 6,313-line version of his own (Lord 1956). Comparable to this influence from a rival performer is the influence of larger audiences and halls on the Scottish ballad singer Jeannie Robertson, whose performance of a well-known, much anthologized ballad approximately doubled in length during her recording career (Porter 1976). For both the Scottish singer and the Igbo bard, responding to a sense of audience means more volume and comprehensiveness. With such prolonged concentration on a single artist, we are a long way from the anonymity imposed by literacy and colonial oppression.

Performance, as I have hinted, occasions controversy among our contributors as a primary category of analysis for African oral traditions. Rüdiger Schott, on the attack, contends that performance studies are a subterfuge to avoid the content analysis that he believes to be the primary task (so energetically carried out for instance by Görög-Karady). He supports his skepticism and demonstrates his method by analyzing variants and motifs in ten tales of the Bulsa of northern Ghana. Circumstances of

collecting, which he sees as a variable of performance, seem to have no influence on the aesthetic quality of the tales. He finds "coherence, richness in motifs [and] structural and logical consistency" in texts collected in the most "artificial" circumstances. His presence or absence from recording sessions makes no qualitative difference, nor is quality concomitant with length, since boring reciters are also longwinded. Schott rejects the argument of Bauman and Briggs that analysis of text is central to the study of performance. Schott's deliberately controversial assertion that performance studies and content analysis are philosophically antithetical (in which Görög-Karady might concur) is contested in the ensuing articles. Whatever the outcome of that debate, Schott's dedication to collecting and analyzing narrative texts, however, cannot be faulted; it pays tribute to a noble tradition of Africanist scholarship. As Robert Georges has observed, "Nineteenth-century scholars came to regard stories as cultural artifacts and to conceive of them as surviving or traditional linguistic entities pervaded by meaningful symbols" (1969:313). The extensive analysis of keywords, motifs, themes, types, and structures of Bulsa and Lyela tales, which Schott initiated at Münster in 1986, offers the possibility of being extended to other African peoples, at least in West Africa, if scholars are willing to collaborate. The Paris research team of which Görög-Karady is part offers a model of profitable collaboration (Biebuyck 1984). Schott's goal, as he has described it at folk narrative congresses, is to uncover ethos, values, and attitudes from the tales.

Other contributors seek a different ground. The limitations of a strictly verbal orientation to narratives were criticized as early as 1910, when that wisest of folklorists Arnold van Gennep wrote, "In our time, what we want to know is where, when, and to whom a tale is told." Van Gennep goes on to assert that the circumstances of the performance of the tale and the identity of the performer or performers actually constitute the genre of the tale. The time, place, and occasion of the storytelling and the social position and role of the storyteller, he saw, actually have the power to create or establish the kind of story there existing (1910:306). Like many of van Gennep's ideas, this reconceptualization undermines a longstanding assumption, in this case that tales exist in folk memory and await realization in performance. In the second half of the twentieth century, American folklorists such as Georges, Bauman, Briggs, and Abrahams have begun to put much more emphasis than used to be allotted to the role of the individual narrator (as Azuonye does here) and to the social conditions

surrounding a narrator's performance. Moreover (to return to Miller's "Search for Grounds"), the assumption of the stability of works of literature, or in this case the stability-within-variation of African folktales, has been challenged in critical theory as contradictory. "It is just because, and only because, [African folktales] are stable, self-contained, value-free objects of disinterested aesthetic contemplation that they can be trustworthy vehicles of the immense weight of values they carry from generation to generation uncontaminated by the distortions of gross reality" (J. Miller 1985:24). But the only way African folktales can acquire such contemplation is through recontextualization in the scholar's discourse. Görög-Karady, for instance, would not agree that Bambara tales are anything but responsive to gross reality.

The three final articles on the oral traditions of African women show three ways in which the arts of the word help to constitute African social life. Here, perhaps, is a ground for the study of African oral traditions. The authors also defend performance, not as an ancillary context for words but as the primary object of study, and they show African women refusing to accept psychological marginalization evident in Görög-Karady's texts. In Africa, perhaps more than any other region, gender speaks loudly as a "persistent and visible cultural resource in folk models of difference" (Mills 1992:2). If the poetics of particular groups of women must be understood in relation to their experience and their performance practice (Donovan 1987:100), it is from African women that we get the finest and most outspoken data for both the experience of oppression (Görög-Karady) and the practice of protest. The system of marginalizing women as social beings and artists becomes in these articles a fundamental topic. They add Africa, for the first time, to the array of non-western societies where research has begun to reveal that "performances are often overtly concerned with deconstructing dominant ideologies and expressive forms" (Bauman and Briggs 1990:66). African women's poetics are an inseparable part of women's politics.

Here again literary-cultural criticism converges with our concerns. In a brilliant and searching article on Third World women's literature, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) asks, "Can the subaltern speak?" Her bitter conclusion is that she cannot, given the colonial history in India of such a tradition as widow sacrifice (*sati*). "The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'" (297), but, says Spivak, we hear nothing of the

voices of those brown women. In an analogous mutism of American and British literary circles, only middle-class white women's productions are accorded status as real literature, and other women's productions are read as social documents (Robinson 1987). Reading women's verbal art as anthropological documents has been an African commonplace for so long that we have almost ignored it. The role of spokespersons like Agovi, Jama, and Fretz is to disturb this critical standard by examining the difference or specificity of women's folklore (Showalter 1987:39). Spivak's most serious charge against these three articles may be that performance studies are part of the "benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other" (1988:289). Yet she welcomes the sort of information that a folklorist like Zainab Jama, a "brown woman," provides here about Somali women (295). She might acknowledge that Jama is saving brown women from the deafness of white men. In a time of political turmoil and ghastly social torment, Jama shows, poetry by Somali women has broken through to new audiences and channels of distribution and forged new artists. Called forth from the shadow, is the subaltern not speaking, "protesting against patriarchal literary authority" (Showalter 1987:39)? Through Jama's interviews and data collection, we watch the subaltern challenge the Somali division of labor in the production of oral and written traditions. The recent book by Deborah Kapchan, *Gender on the Market* (1993), treats a similar challenge in Morocco, where women confront an increasing marginalization of the marketplace and become increasingly audible actors in it.

The second of the three, K. E. Agovi's "Women's Discourse on Social Change," uses performances of *ayabomo* songs by Nzema women to give insight into women's attitudes towards their oppression. The women move from self-censorship, meeting the expectations of the male stereotype, through a "loosening of tongues" that included mild protest and a few deliberate insults to men, to an aggressive and defiant attitude in the 1950s. The spontaneity of their performances, for an audience comprising both themselves and the rest of their community, demands a hearing for the "collective voice that is entirely their own." The "groupiness" of their traditional performance style contrasts oddly with the increased individual emphasis in the content. Reading their economic situation all too correctly, the women encourage men to achieve material prosperity and benefit their spouses by working in the city. The paradoxical results are twofold: to the extent that men are so persuaded, they will attenuate the marriage relation

by living apart from wives and children, and they will enlarge the pool of "paracapitalist labor," thus throwing into doubt the all-important status of agriculture in Ghana (cf. Spivak 1988).

Oral tradition becomes a tool for modernization, though the women are not yet aware how much they are complying with the ideology of the world economic system. Instead of a simple antagonism between men and women and between tradition and modernity, the ambiguity of these women's performances permits the presentation of their alternative social vision. They proffer a simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of dominant ideology. Agovi's content and style analysis of the ambiguity arises from his scrutiny of the women's performance, in which they "appropriate a profound awareness of changes in their environment" and undermine their audience's fixed perceptions of women. Thus he aligns himself with the performance orientation of Avorgbedor and Ahmad and Furniss, while raising the question of the extent to which folksong performance is or can be used to promote fundamental changes in a society (Dorson 1976:67-73). Perhaps too much remains to be discovered about the articulation of performance to support any generalizations now about protest or ideology.

Concluding this special issue, Rachel Fretz confirms Agovi's insight into the crucial role of ambiguity in African women's performances. "During storytelling," she writes, "Chokwe women of Zaïre express their insights through veiled metaphoric speech. Both as performers and as responders, they address such topics as infertility and co-wife tension from a distinctly gender-specific perspective." One Chokwe woman, in fact, uses ambiguity to respond to a previous performance in the same session by a male. Again the gender system and the social interaction of performance are the inseparable categories of analysis. Fretz offers the most direct refutation of Schott's skepticism by asserting, "the storytelling session functions as the most immediate framework for interpreting." Neither the words of the artist nor even her whole solo performance, she says, should be taken as the minimal unit of analysis: it is the session, the communicative event, that is the object of study. The session, therefore, is not "background" or "setting": it is what brings verbal art into existence (Bauman 1977:11). In a Chokwe performance event, where the male orientation holds sway, it falls to a woman to subvert the expected social values through her use of metaphor, and to her audience to apply ambiguity to the act of interpretation (a form of criticism seen also in Michael

Jackson's 1982 studies in Sierra Leone, and Robert Cancel's 1989 monograph on Zambia).

The three articles on women's folklore pave the way for future research based on questions raised about the literary language of African Americans (McDowell 1989:1140). In any given African society, what are the kinds and profiles of internal differentiation among the folkloric behaviors of women? Do Nzema, Chokwe, or other African women share among themselves some common traditions but not others? What regional variations exist in African women's oral traditions? What differences exist between the folk speech or folktale language of women and men in a given African society (Keenan 1974)?

Though the Africanists who contribute to this special issue do not have to wonder, as medievalists have had to wonder, whether the materials they study were orally performed—they have witnessed the performances themselves—they support the view that poetics and politics are one. The aesthetic not only reflects but also helps to constitute the political. Charles Briggs (1992) has pointed out the danger of rendering invisible the role played in this identity by the folklorist, who collaborates with the artist in deciding what is and is not a text ("entextualization"). Whatever text is, whether words or complex communicative event, the context becomes the waste or rubbish (Thompson 1979). This decisive role needs constant light thrown on it, for (in spite of Okpewho's strongly literary approach), if oral traditions have any claim to study by cultural critics, that claim lies in their relation to such spheres of society and social action as deciding what literature is. For

> there is no text which is literary *in itself*. Literarity is not a natural essence, an intrinsic property of the text. It is the correlative of an intentional relation to the text, an intentional relation which integrates in itself, as a component or an intentional layer, the more or less implicit consciousness of rules which are conventional or institutional—social, in any case. Of course, this does not mean that literarity is merely projective or subjective—in the sense of the empirical subjectivity or caprice of each reader (Derrida 1992:44).

But it does mean, as van Gennep observed (1937-58:20), that what distinguishes the study of oral traditions is not the facts it deals with, not its theory, not its system, but the angle from which the facts are observed. All the multitudinous details of performance and the variations of content and style in time and space become not aberrant, not obstacles to the work, but

normal.

What contribution is the study of African oral traditions making to literary theory? Though critics have long acknowledged the importance of the fundamental folkloric topic of variation in their understanding of Yeats or Henry James, the study of oral tradition, with its local knowledge (Geertz 1983) and its passion for the politically disenfranchised, occupies an oppressed position lower even than feminism. In the hands of performance researchers, the question is changed from "Can the subaltern speak?" to "When, where, and to whom is the subaltern speaking?" and "To what extent and in what ways is her status as subaltern conditioning her speaking?" Thus performance offers "to make visible the unseen," by "addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic, political or historical value" (Foucault 1980:50-51). Folklore studies are generally "disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (82). The emergence of such local popular knowledge as performance-based research will enable criticism to do its work.

The great contribution of oral tradition study to criticism is its insistence on the importance of the actual artistic behavior of oppressed peoples. For many literary theorists and critics (as Gardiner 1987:111 says of feminist criticism), "the notion of theory is invested with values antithetical to those of [folkloric] criticism." Those values declare that articles attesting to artistic diversity, especially those focusing on African women, arrive at formulations applicable only to a marginal, irrelevant, though pathetic social group. Therefore they are "anthropology." Quite the contrary is true. Folkloristics is contributing dramatically new ideas about literary production to criticism, on the feminist model of "theory up from under" (Nader 1972, Ritchie 1992). Africanist folklorists argue that traditional artists, especially women, are breaking through old barriers to publications media, refusing to let differences be effaced, and claiming power through poetics. The precision of field observation offers an alternative to monolithic conceptions of oppressed groups and gives factual answers to the question how specific groups of women and men, actually speaking in history, enter into dialogue with their specific system of oppression. Studies like these close the gap identified so precisely for language twenty years ago by Hymes, whose words I adopt in closing

(1972:41-43):

> For some of the most brilliant students of [African and other oral traditions], the proper strategy is to select problems that contribute directly to current [folklore] theory. A primary concern is relevant to particular problems already perceived as such in the existing disciplines, although the modes of work of those disciplines must often be transformed for the problems to find solutions . . . . [By contrast,] I accept an intellectual tradition, adumbrated in antiquity, and articulated in the course of the Enlightenment, which holds that mankind cannot be understood apart from the evolution and maintenance of its ethnographic diversity. A satisfactory understanding of the nature and diversity of [African] men [and women] must encompass and organize, not abstract from, the diversity.

Taxonomic descriptions and sympathetic interpretations are coming to prove the inseparability of poetics and performance from African social life.

Brooklyn College, City University of New York

References

Abrams 1972 — M.H. Abrams. "Orientation of Critical Theories." In *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*. Ed. by David Lodge. London: Longman. pp. 1-26.

Bakhtin 1981 — M.M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. by Michael Holquist. Trans. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bauman 1982 — Richard Bauman. "Conceptions of Folklore in the Development of Literary Semiotics." *Semiotica*, 39:1-20.

Bauman 1989 — _____. "Performance." In *International Encyclopedia of Communications*. Ed. by Erik Barnouw. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Vol. 3:262-66.

Bauman and Briggs 1990 — _____ and Charles L. Briggs. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19:59-88.

Beidelman 1971 — T.O. Beidelman. "Foreword." In *Kpele Lala: Ga Religious Songs and Symbols*. Ed. by Marion Kilson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. pp. xi-xxi.

Biebuyck 1984 — Brunhilde Biebuyck. "The Many Faces of the French Research Team, 'Langage et Culture en Afrique de L'Ouest.'" *Research in African Literatures*, 15:262-88.

Bird 1972 — Charles Bird. "Heroic Songs of the Mande Hunters." In *African Folklore*. Ed. by Richard M. Dorson. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books. pp. 275-93.

Blacking 1972 — John Blacking. "Deep and Surface Structures in Venda Music." *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 3:91-108.

Bogoras 1972 (1904-9) — Waldemar Bogoras. "Shamanistic Perfomance in the Inner Room." In *Reader in Comparative Religion*, 3rd ed. Ed. by William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt. New York: Harper and Row. pp. 382-87.

Briggs 1988 — Charles L. Briggs. *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Conduct and Communication Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Briggs 1990 — _____. "History, Poetics, and Interpretation in the Tale." In *The Lost Gold Mine of Juan Mondragón: A Legend of New Mexico Performed by Melaquias Romero*. Ed. by Charles L. Briggs and J.J. Vigil. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. pp. 165-240.

Briggs 1992 — _____. "Analytic Rigor or Strategies of Containment? Entextualization and Power in Folkloristics." Conference presentation, American Folklore Society, Jacksonville, FL, October 1992.

Calame-Griaule 1963 — Geneviève Calame-Griaule. "L'art de la parole dans la culture africaine." *Présence Africaine*, 47:73-91.

Cancel 1989 — Robert Cancel. *Allegorical Speculation in an Oral Society: The Tabwa Narrative Tradition*. University of California Publications in Modern Philology. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Derrida 1992 — Jacques Derrida. *Acts of Literature*. Ed. by Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge.

Donovan 1987 — Josephine Donovan. "Toward a Women's Poetics." In *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Ed. by Shari Benstock. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp. 98-109.

Dorson 1972 — Richard M. Dorson. "The Use of Printed Sources." In *Folklore and Folklife, An Introduction*. Ed. by Richard M. Dorson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 465-77.

Dorson 1976 — _____. *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays Toward a Discipline of Folk Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dundes 1966 — Alan Dundes. "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism." *The Monist*, 50, iv:505-16.

Eagleton 1983 — Terry Eagleton. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fine 1984 — Elizabeth C. Fine. *The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Foucault 1980 — Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Writings and Other Interviews 1972-1977*. Ed. by Colin Gordon. Trans. by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshal, John Mepham, and Kate Soper. New York: Pantheon.

Gardiner 1987 — Judith Kegan Gardiner. "Gender, Values, and Lessing's Cats." In *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Ed. by Shari Benstock. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp. 110-23.

Geertz 1983 — Clifford Geertz. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.

Gennep 1937-58 — Arnold van Gennep. *Manuel de Folklore français contemporain*. Paris: A. Picard.

Georges 1969 — Robert A. Georges. "Toward an Understanding of Storytelling Events." *Journal of American Folklore*, 82:313-28.

Goldstein 1964 — Kenneth S. Goldstein. *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates.

Görög-Karady and Abdoulaye 1979 — Veronika Görög-Karady and Diaara Abdoulaye. *Contes bambara du Mali*. Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France.

Haring 1992 — Lee Haring. *Verbal Arts in Madagascar: Performance in Historical Perspective*. Publications of the American Folklore Society. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hymes 1972 — Dell Hymes. "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life." In *Directions in Sociolinguistics*. Ed. by John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. pp. 35-71.

Jackson 1982 — Michael Jackson. *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

B. Johnson 1990 — Barbara Johnson. "Writing." In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Ed. by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 39-49.

J.W. Johnson 1980 — John William Johnson. "Yes, Virginia, There is an Epic in Africa." *Research in African Literatures*, 11, iii:308-26.

Kapchan 1993 — Deborah Kapchan. *Gender on the Market: Transitional Economies and Feminine Discursive Domains*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Keenan 1974 — Elinor (Ochs) Keenan. "Norm-makers, Norm-breakers: Uses of Speech by Men and Women in a Malagasy Community." In *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. Ed. by Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 125-43.

Leitch 1988 — Vincent B. Leitch. *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Limón 1982 — José E. Limón. "History, Chicano Joking, and the Varieties

of Higher Education: Tradition and Performance as Critical Symbolic Action." *Journal of the Folklore Institute,* 19:141-66.

Limón and Young 1986 _____ and M. J[ane] Young. "Frontiers, Settlements, and Development in Folklore Studies, 1972-1985." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15:437-60.

Lodge 1972 David Lodge, ed. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*. London: Longman.

Lord 1956 Albert Bates Lord. "Avdo Medjedović, Guslar." *Journal of American Folklore*, 69:320-30.

McDowell 1989 Deborah E. McDowell. "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism." In *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Ed. by David H. Richter. New York: St. Martin's Press. pp. 1137-46.

C.L. Miller 1990 Christopher L. Miller. *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

J.H. Miller 1985 J. Hillis Miller. "The Search for Grounds in Literary Study." In *Rhetoric and Form: Deconstruction at Yale*. Ed. by Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press. pp. 19-36.

Mills 1992 Margaret Mills. "A Twenty-year Trajectory Toward Theory, Maybe Better Called Slouching Toward Theory (Xeno's Paradox?)." Conference presentation, American Folklore Society, Jacksonville, FL, October 1992.

Nader 1972 Laura Nader. "Up the Anthropologist—Perspectives Gained from Studying Up." In *Reinventing Anthropology*. Ed. by Dell Hymes. New York: Pantheon Books, Random House. pp. 284-311.

Okpewho 1992 Isidore Okpewho. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Peek 1981 Philip M. Peek. "The Power of Words in African Verbal Arts." *Journal of American Folklore*, 94:19-43.

Porter 1976 — James Porter. "Jeannie Robertson's *My Son David*, a Conceptual Performance Model." *Journal of American Folklore*, 89:7-26.

Ritchie 1992 — Susan Ritchie. "Ventriloquist Folklore: Who speaks for Representation?" Conference presentation, American Folklore Society, Jacksonville, FL, October 1992.

Robinson 1987 — Lillian S. Robinson. "Feminist Criticism: How Do We Know When We've Won?" In *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Ed. by Shari Benstock. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp. 141-49.

Showalter 1987 — Elaine Showalter. "Women's Time, Women's Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism." In *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Ed. by Shari Benstock. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp. 30-44.

Smith and Dale 1920 — Edwin W. Smith and Andrew Murray Dale. *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*. London: Macmillan.

Spivak 1987 — Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen.

Spivak 1988 — _____. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. pp. 271-313.

Taussig 1993 — Michael Taussig. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.

Thompson 1979 — Michael Thompson. *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

Williams 1976 — Raymond Williams. *Keywords, a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Oral Tradition 9/1 (1994): 23-59

Field of Life
Sowing of Speech
Harvest of Acts

Sory Camara
translated by Lee Haring

Prologue[1]

Let speech begin with the Master's name:
Yiri
Konko Maa Yiri.
Tranquil spirit of health
Little tree in the pool's brightness
Little pool in the dawn of the Swamp
Master of winter's waters
Height of summer's waters
You who have scaled the burning mountain
You who have contemplated the sea of serenity
You who have entered your nocturnal palace
without deserting your solar kingdom
Witness of the era of nesting
visitor to the savannas of the annunciation
Perpetual dweller in the forest of knowledge:
in the night of the visitation
you contemplate this world
and you leave it
Having found in this land
no path
May grace be given you through speech.
Until the downfall of the ages
may this word never cease watering the fields of life.
Kôndorôn Jimmê
Jimmê Sora
Kandara Koyi

[1] Translator's note: having no competence in Mandinka language, I have made no effort to verify the translations of quoted words.

Konko Maa
Yiri!
So are you named!

Sowing of Speech

Kandara Koyi was the last of the Pathmasters whom I have had the good fortune to meet. In his time he was the youngest and most precocious of the Most Ancient Masters. His public utterances emitted ungraspable meanings that invariably left me bewildered.

In the second sun of the sixth moon of the year of Ordeal, he called me. His message found me very distracted. Ungraciously I abandoned my visitors. The time he chose and his hesitant delivery increased my impatience, which was aggravated by a muffled sense of evil presentiment springing from this unexpected call of his. Then his message flew across my hearing like lightning in a cloudless sky proclaiming a tornado. I had no conception of the gravity of the moment until Yiri Konko Maa had departed this world. I carry the infinite grief of that as day in its cool shadows carries night's phantoms. Kôndorôn Jimmê, who when asleep drove away the wicked spirits of daytime, who when awake repelled the maleficent emanations of night, Kôndorôn Jimmê the Knower, silent among the perilous horde of this world's chatterboxes, Kôndorôn Jimmê the truthteller, who spared neither the scholars lost in the desert of their learning nor the ignorant cut down by the stones of the pathways of ignorance: when this reticent master did me the favor of a private interview, I hardly heard him, I who had traveled so far in quest of a word to use as a foundation!

His utterance fell into the abyss of my inattention. Bred in this untimely interview, the word I report here grew in the swampy fields where forgetful thoughts gestate, wandering in the uncertain confines where ancient words are stored and new words germinate:

Most ancient Words are like seeds
You sow them before the rains
The earth is warmed by the sun
The rain comes to wet it
The water of the earth penetrates the seeds
The seeds change into grasses
then become stalks of millet.
Thus you to whom I have just told the Most Ancient Word
You are the earth.

In you I have sown the seed of the word
The water of your life must penetrate the seed
for the germination of the word to take place.

This was how Kidugu Mahan replied to a question about the meaning of the words he had just entrusted to me. It was an answer I understood only ten years later. When my life's strength began to betray me on the threshold of trial, I found again the Most Ancient Word of master Kidugu, "The Young Man with Empty Hands" (Camara 1982). The text had been lost in the middle of a heroic epic. The Master had wished it so. So surprising were the circumstances in which he recounted the myth to me that over eleven years I had forgotten them. Seeing how eager I was for Most Ancient Words, Kidugu Mahan replied sternly that he was no storyteller. Then he commenced the interview with the history of our people, the Mandinka. When after several nights of interviews, he saw I had abandoned my earlier search, he interrupted his story to say, with a satisfied smile, "Tonight I will tell you the Most Ancient Word!"

He told me the myth of the Young Man with Empty Hands, who is denounced by the hunter whom he has saved from the trap. Then he resumed the story of the Mandinka. That is how I forgot this myth. A dream brought it back to me at a moment when destiny was calling me to account. That was the means the old man had found to preserve the Most Ancient Word from ill-timed or premature exegesis. Just when the water of my soul had so painfully moistened the seed of his speaking, his utterances resonated in me like the howl of earth at the junction where life's paths cross.

Of that moment of grace, however, I did keep some relics: I did record the words. I did not have such good luck during my private interviews with other masters. From those precious moments, all that comes back to me is jetsam memories that wash up, by the hazard of days, on the desolate strand of my consciousness. When I cast myself back to men of another time who now lie in the earth, again I feel the acid taste of fruit that is sharpened by a child's stealing; I feel the unease of a disciple annexing the lands of a dispossessed master. But is not the master an accomplice in his own dispossession when he employs trickery to utter serious speech?

There is the drama. To transmit it with some justice, I shall use prose for the new words that issue from the gestations of my existence, and verse for the remembered pearls that the interval of my absence washes down the sand of the days, distinguishing without separating the memory of the Most Ancient Words from the inspiration of the Emergent Words

(Camara 1982):

> The Ancient Words
> some come out of others
> but they are not identical
> Look at a human being
> He is first a baby
> From this baby
> comes a little girl
> from the little girl
> comes a full breast
> from the full breast
> comes a mother
> But the mother and little girl are not the same
> Ah well—
> Most Ancient Words are like seeds
> some come out of others
> but they are not the same.

At the moment he speaks, a speaker echoes multiple heard words. But he is at the same time the very voice of *Mahambu*, the voice of the Original Man whose speaking brought things together, gave rhythm to their movement, gave shape to their form. He is carried away by *da fara gooto*, the ravening spirit whose violent speech "breaks the mouth" of the one possessed by the word. What is thus expressed is the result of the taming of the wild beast of speech and the conversion of a corporeal hunter into spirit, or *nyama*.

For Kandara Koyi, verbal utterance also had something of the forge about it: the extraction of the verbal ore from one's inner veins, the fusion of the matrix down in the burning of the kidney's furnaces, the sublimation, by the chimney of the mouth, of the metallic liquid in the indefinitely malleable and subtle kinds of breath—there is the word of proof which the miner-smith must realize. He must become a master of this art. For the only mastery man can claim in this world is speech in harmony with life's strings stretching over the abyss of death.

According to Kôndorôn Jimmê, the primordial act of manifestation, which survives today in the laggard echoes of human speech, is *bank kuo*, which means both the advent of speech and the event of creation. It is this correspondence, this harmony that disturbed the Immobile in his immobility and broke the silence of the Silent. And I hear the Master say:

The Immovable conceived
    He begot movement
Movement conceived
    He begot the abyss
The abyss conceived
    he set in motion *fuu faa fuu*
        nothingness begetter of nothingness.
Fuu faa fuu conceived
    He begot breaths/whispers
        Fêh fêh fêh . . .
Made the whirling winds in the desert of the worlds
    that was *jeng kango*
the Voice of the Universe
    that was *foli fôlô*
Primordial Music
    That was *banke qule kan*
        the resounding of the flute of creation.
There was the face of the coming of the whole universe.

In the depths of *denka ba*, the matrix abyss, *fuu faa fuu*, the "nothingness begetter of nothingnesses"—from which ages and worlds continually emerge and into which things continually collapse—*wuyen daga ba*, the great bathing tub, was shaped. Dry cold winds of the first age felt *hinnô*, compassion. They condensed, bringing forth *sama funtanô*, rainy heat. *Sama funtanô* begot *hala fingo*, the black gods, whose avatars are the clouds of existence. These were turbulent creatures: "*Fata fata fata*," like a great drum they moved; they clashed.

Came forth *san fêtengo*, heavenly brilliance. "*Bili bili biliw!*" A lightning flash burst into the face of the Great Forefather of Violation. It struck the *hala fing*. Thus was the world threatened with sinking. Weeping, *woyii* created *N Maama Bulabaga*, the great ancestress of deliverance. "*Pêtê pêtê pêtê, Pêtê pêtê pêtê*" came her tears, compassionate rains to purify hostile fogs from the veil of the world. As the sands of the sea fell into space, they sang the bonding song *kanunko koyo*, "Bright Love," which is sung today by the Mandinka of Niokolon Kôôba at the eve of the turning of the year.

The seeds of compassion begot *san kungo*, the emergent year. But the soul of springtime did not live long. For the shadowy gods had quickly assembled the shreds of their world, which had been riven by the lightning. They set to hunting; they cast out their inheritance into the universe of birth. Under the weight of their sultry breath, Bright Love expired.

The younger brother of *Kanunko Kôkô* was so impatient to come into the world that he pushed himself out. This was *Jusuba*, Great Passion. The

voice of his scalding arrival was *"Gidi Gidi Gidi Gerêh!"*[2] Jusuba fell into the atmosphere. There was a hubbub:

"Taling taling
Taling taling!"

Jusuba bestirred himself, upsetting all the reincarnating forms of Bright Love, dead too soon. Everywhere fiery clamors resounded:

Ta fu fu
Ta fa fa
Barang barang![3]

Everywhere he sowed disarray and desolation. Once burnt, the area of the birth became uninhabitable. Jusuba took refuge in the male heart of the nascent world and became *môônêba bobali*, great pent-up anger. It was his growling that made hearts beat "*diya goya diya goya,*" scattering seed by seed, willy-nilly willy-nilly. These fierce jolts brought forth *fitina mankan ba*, the great perturbation of the threats that periodically come to creation from heaven.

In the female heart of the nascent world, *Jusuba* brought forth *jarabi*, the downfall of beings who collapse in ruin under the weight of passion. *Jarabi* breathed out, giving birth to the sighs and sobs of *nimissa*, nostalgia, the plaints of the beloved counting over her grievances at her lover's lack of compliments: *"Woiyi, Woyi yoh, Wêle wêlê wêlê!"* This was the voice of all that falls, flows away, and gushes. This pluvial voice came to moisten the cinders of the untimely-burnt world. *Nimissa's* precipitations whitened the expanse: *"Lew lew lew."*[4] They formed in their souls the *kombi loolo*, stars of the dew, which still shine and sparkle at life's heart, extinguished and enkindled by myriads at each instant. The shades found their somber recriminations rarefied. Finally came *jenjen kaane*, universal dawn: all became translucid and cool.

The clear sound of *Kanunka Kôyô* reawakened from her swoon. In this time of sweetness she extended her diaphanous loincloth as a veil of

---

[2] *gerêh*: onomatopoeic word evoking the sound of violent fall, also a word signifying boxing.

[3] Onomatopoeia evoking first smoke, then flames.

[4] Onomatopoetic word for whitening.

shame over the nascent things. The hunter soul of *Jusuba* emerged from hiding: it riddled the garment of Clear Love with a shower of *tutugu tambo*, fiery spears. The soul of the dawn was refined: "*Wuyen yen.*"[5] Invulnerable to conquest of possession, she took refuge in the echoing of torrents, in the shadows of sunlit beings, and in the pale brightness of nights of the full moon. There she will reign until ages fall.

The earth was unveiled.

The "bitter breath of a canicular season," of parching, *funtanô tonkolon fôniô*, breathed everywhere.

Lakali Fenba, the great Being of Utterance, World of the human generation to come, still dwelt dozing in the clammy sweetness of the soul of the Great Forefather, *N Maaba Taalga nitodiya.* Yet did signs of the events remain open towards times to come, vibrating with an infinite expanding power. Between the sweetness of that dwelling and the vertiginous call from afar, these archetypes, *ti fôlô*, evolved into "flowing speech," *wuuyu waayo kumô.* The world of human engendering, on the threshold of its realization, hesitated between shame and desire. The Great Forefather of deliverance and impatience shook *karo daga ba*, the great vessel of the plexus of the Great Ancestor of Ravishment. Not yet fixed in their true movements, the signs dispersed themselves in the abyss of *fuu faa fuu.* Caught there, they were separated and petrified. They became opaque in their solitude:

> *Kiling kiling taga*
> *Kiling kiling finki*
> Going one by one
> Each creature blind in its solitude.

This was the voice of the advent of the signs, the music of their transformation into things. There succeeded a world of "beings with carapaces." So did these *fatama fengo* confine their seed of light (*yelen kêsê*). That is how the world of human engendering became *bobo fenda*, the great mute thing. The great ancestor was its originator. To rescue and preserve light against unholy greed, future purloinings and desecrations, he held back his incandescent emanations. Winter's cold was the result. That is how the signs—coalescent, translucid—became opaque, leathery, and closed.

The Great Forefather of Ravishment acted thus to protect the depths of the beings to come from the shameless caprices of the great Foremother

[5] *Yen* onomatopoeically evokes an evaporating/refining liquid; *wuyen* = vapor.

of Deliverance. With their rarefied seeds, *naaje keso*, he seeded the human soul. Out of this humus, out of the germ of things, the shoots of speech were to germinate. Thus did the world, by closing itself up, lose the "clear word"; thus did men, by uttering speech, lose direct vision. That is why the Pathmasters say that the world has turned its back on men's speech. So when humans, who are vassals to their prowess at plundering, knock *Konkon!* at the gate of things, no answer comes to them from closed things. *Lellé!* Then, in their anger and impatience, they arm themselves with burglars' tools and injurious weapons. They violate the world and their own essences. But the subtle seed of revelation is inaccessible to any implement. Only speech can apprehend it. Yet at the very dawn of its advent, speech will denounce its own lying nature and accuse itself of twisting ruses and malversations, to put on guard the very ones who betake themselves to her to guide them. That is why the narrator of such ancient words begins by saying, "I shall tell you lies!" At the end of his narration he will conclude,

> That is how things happened at that time
> That is what ended it.
> You will find that that still happens
> I have seen it.

"You have contemplated the vision!" his interlocutor will attest. But what narrator today knows what is behind those words?

It is thus that with closed eyes, men go smashing against the stones in the road, killing each other on the thorns of the world's underbrush. They have ears and do not hear the world's music. They stamp their feet and dance the world's dance out of time. It is thus that they foment plots to threaten each other and utter words of malediction to cause these plots to erupt. For the dancer is the child of the dance. If he gets out of rhythm, he goes against life's grain.

Now *jen donseng*, the step of the world's dance, makes a great sound:

> *Tisidiba nyiassa*
> *I no donseng fêlê*
> Firewood filled with signs
> Here is the step of your mother's dance!

Indeed every being born and mortal is a badly bound bundle of signs that can only dance in time. The world's music may turn into one string stretching and swelling, answerable to events, in haps and mishaps: a link

with *musu kan kiling tigi*, wife of the unique word, who never deserts the heart of the Great Forefather of Ravishment. This string is at once *ni julô*, the string of life, and *kuma julô*, the string of speech. Man is the musician who strums the strings of life, which emit speech by their vibrating.

It is man's destiny to crack things open—to reveal the burning seed that was penned up at the dawn of creation. Indeed, the dust of the primordial signs, *to fôlô*, has endured since the shaking of the vessel containing them, suspended in the desert of the worlds to come, immobilized in the indiscriminateness of heaven and earth. The face of the Great Forefather was obscured; the heart of the Great Forefather was grieved. The Great Forefather expired. That was the breath of the scattering of the signs, *tio jensen fonyo: "Kêsê kêsê kêsê kêsê Jêsêng!"* Throttled in the immobility of the suspended world at the threshold of its realization, the Great Forefather, at the same instant, powerfully inhaled. There resulted the great whirlwind, mover of primordial things, *tifolo lamaga tonkolon*. That was the dance of the spindle weaving the cotton of the world: *Wala wala walaw!*

Then *san nyang kaba*, incandescent stone of heaven, fled from the confines of the worlds, repelled by the vertiginous expansion of the primordial signs and having witnessed the departure of the Forefather of Ravishment. Turning on itself, earth fell into the depth of the universe:

Dugu daga dingo!
Muntu!
Little pot of earth!
Closed!

That was the voice of men's coming into the world. The expanse bowed: *fuulu faala fulayih* . . . . The ribbon of life linking heaven and earth was twisted by the whirlwind movement of the dust of the primordial signs. It broke. The great maternal waters, *jiba jio*, threw the dust of the signs back down to the little pot of earth:

Foyi kisi kisi kisi
foyi falen falen
foyi kisi kisi kisi
foyi falen falen

Sowing is safety, safety, safety
Sowing is change, change
Sowing is safety, safety, safety
Sowing is change, change

Thus echoed the song of the sowing of fecundating speech, *yidi kuma foïkan*. Space became the field of life and the nesting place of speech, *balo kêna ani kumo nyaa*. And I hear the master say:

> It was the uttering of speech that made the world whole
> It was the uttering of speech that wove the fibers of the world
> It was the uttering of speech that laid the foundation of the world
> It was the uttering of speech that revealed the foundation of the world.

That is what I recall from my private interview with Yiri. It contains numerous lacunae and uncertainties. But the road thus traveled makes it possible to understand what the *Silatigi*, Pathmasters, of Nyokolon, Sirimanna, and Dantilan in eastern Sénégal have expounded in their public speeches: that the performance of speech with correct expression and suitable rhythm, in harmony with the dance of things, causes seedbearers to germinate, solidifies the bones of many things, erects the erectile, bends creatures disposed to fall, raises bodies into their orbits, arranges the objects of the cosmos, ties the creatures of the knot, and releases the creatures of unknotting. Speech wrongly performed engenders "bad life," bad luck, and a bad death. Is it not performance that sows the field of life with verbal germs? Then the shoots of life take root, and the uttered speech brings about germination, tearing the loincloth of the earth.

All things that have come to pass, all present things, all things to come accomplish their destiny by the pathways of speech. At each instant human speaking perpetuates this unending birth. When words aim at healing the cleft of the world, they spring up ceaselessly, opening out into flowers, diffusing into odors, greening in leaves, swelling into fruits. But when they wander off this path of life, they ceaselessly burn the verdant fields of existence, and the fine grasslands of life turn white. When the grassland whitens, then comes the time of falsehood. Moistening by actions is what follows this sowing of fecundating speech in life's field.

Germination, burgeoning, flowering, fructification are the silent voices of life. We can hear them in certain states of grace and inspiration: then, the *kumajerila*, visionaries of speech, contemplating their vision, utter the limpid word, streaming forth and back, splendidly incandescent. The man who forges this word of fire and light becomes, unawares, a demiurge, as the smith of this own destiny. For in that instant, cosmic speech resounds through the human voice, and man enters into the dance in harmony with the rhythm of the world.

For the *Silatigi*, the Pathmasters, the sole calamity is a disharmony between the speech of man and the music of the world. The sole salvation

is the harmony of vocal cords that echo the resonances of the dance of the elements. Their wisdom may be translated thus: "Do not speak lightly; never speak lightly. If you cannot hold speech back, take several nights to follow the spoor of your internal words. During your hunt, breathe in the wind that blows over the four cardinal peaks. Consider with attention every wood, every bush, every blade of grass. Let your soul become an aperture of vigilance, a trench of resonance, where all things reverberate in cascading echoes, without diving off the cliffs of silence. For the wild game of speech is unpredictable, inconstant, and confounding. It is subtle and versatile. Its metamorphoses are innumerable, its ruses are unsuspected, its attacks are unstoppable. O hunter, you wander as a stranger in lands where it knows all routes and haunts all refuges. Keep back any word that tries to escape from your mouth. For the breaths of utterance draw you in their wake towards the fields of trial. The wild beast of speech has awaited you there a long time; he watches for you to appear. He observes your moves long before awareness comes to you. He chooses a moment of your inattention to charge you.

"And that beast has no time for foolery. Once uttered, speech is irremediable. The route it has traced coming out of you abrades, imperceptibly but infallibly, the external channel of your destiny; nothing can disjoin you from this channel. This road no one can retrace without having run its whole length. No one can leave it before having savored the sweet wine of its palms and drunk the bitter sap of the bastard-mahoganies [trees] that mark it."

This, then, is the Mandinka ethic of speech. This ethic is above all a poetics of speaking well, so as to be born well to oneself and the world; so that the music of speech may launch the ship of the soul on the river of life and avoid the reefs of evil speaking, cursing, and scandal mongering; so that man may pick the seeds of speech and not sow tares in the fields of life.

But the journey through the world is not without its clashes. Suffering always begets recriminations and anger. Man swears and blasphemes. At each stumbling block, he sows poisonous speech in the field of life. Hence it comes that humans never stop calling down misfortune, and that misfortune never stops clouding over their sun and envenoming the bruises of their souls. By these roads come to us *nitokuuya*, bitternesses of heart, which spoil the essential oils of the earth with excessive acidity, and *jusu kasi*, tears of the heart, which darken the firmament of existence.

Speech, then, is spun from the cotton of the world. Man weaves its fibers, but sows the seed in the humus of his soul to fecundate the nest of

his body. The words for stretching of cotton into thread, *kêrêtêttê*, bears witness to the winding of destiny on the turning spindle from the instant of creation. The turning device at the base of the spindle is the sphere of the universe. The point of the spindle is the place where the "seed of self-vision" germinates in "the field of the contemplation of the universe." In the shadows of distant worlds it sparkles; in the sun of existence it is obscured. The man who follows with sharp-pointed attention the thread of the word that penetrates, passes through, and escapes from him and draws him on to the pathways of destiny—such a man arrives at the point of the spindle where the vision of the word glitters. That man becomes a *jong jong*, according to the expression of the Pathmasters of Sirimanna and Dantilan. He pulls the thread of speech, starting from the cottony substance of the forming universe. He stretches this material thread, makes it vibrate, and lo! faltering lives are set in motion and defunct souls come to life.

Again begins the dance of the great adventure of manifestation, *dunnya lafôlô janjonba*. This human demiurge is an incarnation of the primordial hunter, whose quest causes savannas to rise up and who beats out the game of destinies' consummation. This man is a *jong jong*. But of all the game animals inhabiting this bush, the only one worthy of a *jong jong* is the Great Reptile. The *jong jong* Nomogo Musa of Dalooto told me about this reptile at our first and last interview, in the year of grace 1973 in the land of Sirimanna.

Harvest of Acts

Nomogo Musa, like any other *jong jong*, was a hunter before he became a master of that inspired speech that incites emotions and achievements. When he abandoned the hunting of meat in favor of the hunt for speech, the *jong jong*'s achievements were prodigious. But in doing so, he lost something of his vital substance, for speech disrupts the life of the speaker. Therefore he exhorts hunters to bring him animal souls in order to nourish his own. Contained within beings of the bush is the seed of vision; they have removed it from its unique position of contemplating the world and watching oneself, to make it into the animating principle of their blind bodies. The word of the *jong jong* circumscribes the territory of these light-fleeing beings, tracks them in the depths of their ways, and subjugates their spirit. Before the den of the wild beast, he stretches the nets of speech. He gives the thread to the hunter of meat. Then begins the harvesting of existences that have been fecundated by the sowing of speech. (When the

Pathmaster speaks, he always has a respondent who replies to his words with the expression *nam*, which may be translated "So it is" [Arabic "Yes!"]. Sometimes he says *sigi kunturing*, which is untranslatable.)

Tiliding muta dantuman, Little eclipse of the sun
karundin muta dantuman, little eclipse of the moon
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
I send you to battle *Gumbo* tomorrow
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
If you do not win out over *Gumbo*
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
He is a being in the savanna
I shall send you to track his soul in the heart of the "secret"
[Respondent]: True!
Are you listening, Sory Saba Jaaje?
He goes through the night wetting the string to braid
He goes through the day wetting the string to braid
He is the elder/ancestor of tortoises
that you go to hunt
to come and offer his soul to me, *Bamba Musa*
[Respondent]: True!
I will make of him a gift to the old women
the two of them are fleshless beings
bonded in friendship
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Now he exclaims, ô Dantuman:
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
being in "the secret"
I will send you to hunt him in the savanna
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Since you have not been able to hit Gumbo mortally
[Respondent]: You say true!
The being who covers his chest with a shield
The being who covers his back with a shield
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Proclaiming that he will be the exterminating genius of death
he declares a lie, *fuusali!*
[Respondent]: You say true, *Sigi Kunturun*
He is the ancestor of tortoises
that you go to pick a quarrel
to come and offer his soul to me, *Bamba Musa*
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
The two of them are hard beings bonded in friendship

He calls on/summons you to go fight with the elder of tortoises[6]
[Respondent]: Here he exclaims, Dantuman:
He is a being roaming far
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
in the savanna
Do you know him?
I do not know him
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
The whole night he washes himself
the whole day he washes himself
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
If his washing produced holiness
then the fly tribe would be sanctified
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Lance him tomorrow with your spear
come and offer his soul to me, *Bamba Musa*.
If that does not satisfy hunter
it will water my *Kaamo*[7]
[Respondent]: Lend him an attentive ear,
Sory Saba Jaajé!
He is a being that goes roaming the bush, Saara!
[Respondent]: *Nam!* What is he?
So now speech lies in the bush
before my face,
I Bamba Musa Ganya, the gnarled crocodile
Drive it out!
Visionaries of speech are not identical!
This is what he cries, Dantuman:
"Cutting iron with iron
comes impurity into one of the irons"
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Not all the wise live past the knowledge issuing from sacrifice
[Respondent]: You say true!
The *Kaamo*, now, have acquired knowledge
So bring me their soul tomorrow.
If it does not appease my hunger
it will water my soul.
[Respondent]: True.
See him exalting Nginya Nginya of the eminences,
the bald mountainous *kokusan maadi*
[Respondent]: True!

---

[6] The respondent addresses himself to me, as he often does in the text, to emphasize the words addressed to me by the master of the path. Dantuman is one of my names.

[7] Hunter's fetishes.

If the wind blows
the elephant goes laughing
If it doesn't blow
the elephant goes laughing
[Respondent]: *Nam*! *Sigi Kunturun*!
Go track him tomorrow
Lance him with your spear
Let him topple with one yell
Come offer me his soul,
me, Bamba Musa
[Respondent]: True again!
Even if I don't give it to the Muslims
the two of them are bowmen linked in friendship
[Respondent]: True!
O Dantuman, he cries out *Allah!*
[Respondent]: *Allah!*
What says he then? He says one single thing
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
sita koto buku naring
Agitation comes and goes under the baobab
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
He is the ancestor of the duiker[8]
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
If you don't give it to the harebrained
what will be done with it?
It will be hard to do anything with it
If you don't lance him tomorrow with your spear
to come offer his soul to me, *Bamba Musa*
If it does not appease my hunger
it will give some flavor to the sauce
[Respondent]: Again you say true!
Here is what he cries, Dantuman:
Many days will be cloudy
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Dantuman, little eclipse of the sun
Dantuman, little eclipse of the moon
You who create the ardor of the fire-stick
[Respondent]: True!
Cutting down the hunter who skins the living
[Respondent]: *Sigi Kunturun!*
He is a being in on the secret of the faraway
What is this other being?
To fight Damba, the male buffalo, is the test
[Respondent]: *Nam!*

[8] A flighty, restless antelope associated with children.

He is going to send you to fight the spirit of that one in the bush
the stumbling block
the iron boulder
the swarm of terror
Dantuman! he doesn't fight without night knowledge
If he charges you in the bush
you will be laid on a "porters' bed"[9]
and eat meat no more
[Respondent]: True!
Damba, who leaves nothing behind him but dust
is pointed out not to a blessed hunter's son
but to a cursed hunter's son
[Respondent]: True!
Damba, who wipes out hillocks
and who charges at rocks
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
If he grinds/pulverizes you in the bush, Dantuman
you will be laid on a "porters' bed"
and eat ground things no more
I shall send you to betake yourself to Damba,
Takikte Birama[10]
[Respondent]: *Sigi Kunturun!*
You will bring his soul to me, Bamba Musa
"Woiyo!" he cries out, Dantuman
Maa Diba Jaaball,[11] Sweet Vision of Hope
salamaga salagija, salamaga banjugu
[Respondent]: True!
If a woman comes down to the river to bathe
Maa Jaaba is pure
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
If a woman does not come down to the river to bathe
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Maa Jaaba is pure
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
If the woman seeks linen
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
Jaaba of the Dawn wears beautiful linen
[Respondent]: *Sigi Kunturun!*
Jaaba of the Ancient Days brings many species into the world

---

[9] Stretcher.

[10] One of the names of the buffalo.

[11] One of the names of Gumbo, the *hippotrague*.

Jaaba of the Ancient Days was the ancestor of many
The horde of Buffalo are his descendants
[Respondent]: You say true
I shall send you to betake yourself to Gumbo
[Respondent]: *Sigi Kunturun!*
If Gumbo withdraws from my enclosure
There! my herds are scattered
[Respondent]: Truth!
Sambantari Gumbo who carries a high load[12]
young warrior who calls for a fight
he is *Gumbo, Tanjalika*
[Respondent]: It is the truth!
How many days are overcast, O Saara;
O Saaya, extinction is always about its business!
I have heard that Yiri has become cold,
that Maafina Yiri[13] has become cold
[Respondent]: True again!
He did not live past the bullet
Allah, what say you?
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
May we replace the ropes
[Respondent]: *Nam!*
For the earth is chilled again.
[Respondent]: That is true!

Thus sang *jong jong* Nomogo Musa of the Sirimanna country. Often he spoke in the third person, "He declares," not out of vanity nor humility, only as an act of gratitude. He pays homage to the genius of inspiration, whom certain masters of speech name *n da fara gooto*, genius who has opened my mouth, and whom *jong jong* Nomogo Musa here identifies with the Muslim God Allah. Inside him he hears whispering words that correspond to the modulation and rhythm of his heartbeat, conformable to the breathing of the inspired word. And this genius of utterance, who calls forth the visionary moment of speech, reveals a field of pursuit, the performance place of the primitive hunter tormented by a hunger whose only sustenance is a quarry of meat. Now in this field of pursuit, all quarries resemble each other; all are confused. The hunter is threatened with goring by the horns of a wild attack. And indeed that is the unknown goal of this quest, which transports him to confront the murderous beast

[12] Refers to the animal's big horns.

[13] Legendary hunter.

Damba, the male buffalo:

> Damba, who leaves nothing behind him but dust
> is pointed out not to a blessed hunter's son
> but to a cursed hunter's son
> [Respondent]: True!
> I send you to betake yourself to Damba.

The hunter who has not confronted Damba does not deserve the name Danna. And Nadjan Danfaga, the Master of Bantakokuta, said, "The battle against Damba is the war against Allah!" So what can one say about the fight against Gumbo, the waterbuck, whose spirit begot the horde of buffaloes? It is pitching oneself into the tomb. Indeed that is the hunter's dream, for in that death lies a hope of being reborn as a master of speech. This spiritual conversion was recounted on another occasion by Mandjan, the initiate of the swamps of Tumbir Fara. Destroyed by Gumbo, assimilated into the earth he had traversed so long, and exhumed by the buffalo, Fanta La Mamadi, archetype of the hunter, is initiated into the word by Dembô the hyena, Dembô the spirit of nocturnal knowledge. From Dembô he receives the lute of the *jong jong*, whose silver calabash and golden strings evoke the horns of Gumbo. With the end of his quest in view, he forgets the hunt for meat. He takes up the instrument. Thanks to the music of the word, thanks to the word of music, he gives himself over to a subtler hunt: catching forest spirits in the net of speech, souls that resonate to the radiance of human vision. Thus he grasps the correspondences between wild species and the races of men. He gains access to the contemplation of the vision.

But to contemplate this vision annihilates both the object of the vision and the contemplating subject. Everything reduces itself then to the seed of vision, the blinding reflection of the Great Forefather's incandescent face. At that instant *there is neither thing nor person: there is only radiance of light in light*. And in this desert of vision he retains only unheard speech, the unique word whose infinite whirlwinds, sweeping down from the peaks of unknowing, cause all things to entangle. This the hunter who has traversed the bush of solitude and ordeal to confront Gumbo knows, with irrefragable knowledge. He knows that the ultimate object of his quest is the great reptile, the primordial python, from whose folds the opaque world of manifest beings will be begotten, a world where things enfold their original light and leave the human usurpers of speech in blindness. The purpose of the *jong jong*'s hunt is to remove the skin from creatures, so that they may gain access to this incandescence they contain. But the hunter of meat does

not know that, and not knowing it, he sows everywhere devastation, rending, and relentless fury.

In this unpopulated field, the *jong jong* cause the light of speech to stand forth. By no means, however, are all those who speak, or even all who excel in the art, *jong jong*. *Jong Jong* Boukari Kamara of Bula Kuru, a performer of authentic speech in the Sirimanna country, would sing:

> The *griotte* Ngaara is in search of a rich man
> The master of the great drum calls her Namaniya[14]
> Woman coiled
> like a boa
> in intoxicating sensuality
> The master of the lute seeks the conqueror of women
> The *kora* master seeks the warlord
> Speech destroys the soul of the Great Reptile
> [Respondent]: You say true!
> *Jong Jong* seeks the Lord of the hunt
> He knows the bush where speech lies!

And the spirit of the true lord of the hunt is then in quest of the great universal soul, from which emanate all the seeds of light and the incandescence that the opaque beings of manifest existence guard in their lairs. His aim is, by means of speaking, to transform life into a vision.

I must report the story of this great reptile, so as to base everything in truth and reality. I tell the legend of the field of life that called forth the sowing of speech and the harvests of existences.

Field of Life

Silatigi Djeli Mandjan Danfaga, the Initiate of Toumbing Fara, the pathmaster, a speaker of true speech in his time, favored me, on one night of grace, with *kuolu damina kuo*, "The Matter of the Beginning of Matters" of existence. Here is what it was granted me to report from this esoteric interview.

Maaba Tala, the Great Uplifting Forefather, and Maama Bulabaga, the Great Midwife Foremother, were in *sisi fôlô siisi*, the primordial mist of primal smoke. Maaba Taala, the Great Uplifting Forefather, lay in the first dream of *siibo fôlô fôlô*, on the breast of Maama Bulabaga. The spirit of the Great Forefather dwelt confined in his dream of himself. With him

[14] Archetype of the sensual woman.

there was nothing except himself. His breath, in a state of inspiration, was suspended in *fu faa fu*, Nothing Father of Nothings. And the dream was in *jenfango*, the world egg. Maaba Tala experienced the illumination of *san falimô*, the heavenly bolt. And the world egg appeared in his bosom, filled with the totality of *dunya baliba*, the unmanifested archetypes of speech. And the archetypes were great with the *ti fôlô tiô*, primordial signs of signs. And the signs formed the totality of assembled times. In the Great Uplifting Forefather's fantastic lightning, they appeared in the great sphere of numberless seeds of light, *kiima kêsô*. From this sphere burst forth a sparkling jet. Ascending, he shaped the garland of mother stars, *loolo ba*, towards the zenith. Descending, he shaped the garland of the Dews of Trembling Lights, *yelen jêrêjêrê kombi*.

Between the first heaven and the first earth of signs appeared the sea of flames, *ba maamô*. *Ba maamô* was the primordial mirror. The mirror had two faces, one reflecting the earth, the other facing the heaven of signs. All this took place in the infinitesimal instant of primordial fulguration. The mat of the expanse was already rolled up on itself; *tuma*, time, was coiled in the folds of patience, *munya*. Though they appeared in the splendor of divine vision, the first signs were indistinct. The Great Forefather's word would unmix them by calling them into distinct presence. Ceaselessly they flowed back and forth over one another. At the fulguration of the primordial bolt, they leaped forth. But the downward and upward jets were nothing but sparks that burned slowly and then immediately went out, followed by other sparks, in that night of the dream of the universe. These fires appeared and disappeared in the wink of an eye; then nothingness reigned as if nothing had happened. Nothing but a memoryless dream!

But in that instant, the Great Forefather differentiated all the signs and marked their movement and development. As yet, however, none had any consistency of substance or differentiation of form. They streamed out continuously, begetting one another, annihilating one another. The universe of primordial signs was only a universe of anticipation and aspiration: its anticipation resembled a broiling earth as it awaits the rainy whirlwind. As soon as the imaginative intelligence of the Great Forefather grasped a sign to form it, hardly was it outlined before it fled into the evanescence of the expanding ocean. Only the sign of primordial man, *môgô fôlô tio*, was an exception. At the moment of the fantastic lightning-bolt, he unfastened himself. His unfastening made *ningi!* He coiled himself and his coiling

made *nango*![15] Taking the shape of the Python, *Môgô Fôlô*, still called Mahamba, had just enveloped the primordial lightning bolt in the folds of his sides, sparkling from all his scales. Thus Ningi Nango came to be, the great rainbow snake, big with the eggs containing all the human generations to come.

So inconstant and fluctuating was this first creation that the Great Forefather was obliged to recommence the operation of fulguration. Again in his head he took up the world's primordial signs, phenomena, and things. He brought them forth and caused them to give birth. He separated each "according to its face." He counted them without separating them, like the fingers of a right hand telling the beads of a rosary. All this the Great Forefather did instantaneously.

Yet the vigilant divine attention could not maintain the signs in separateness; they were still predisposed to fluctuate. They fell back into their innate minglement as a tornado-filled sky lapses into blue darkness after lightning. Again all was as if nothing had happened. This was the first forgetting, *nyina fôlô*.

In the face of the changeable memory of the primordial signs, the Great Forefather sighed; that was *ba kumaba kôtôma*, speech of the mother of creation. Pronouncing the autochthonous names of the signs, *dugurengo tôgô*, the Forefather's Word arranged them in accordance with the degrees of the scale of creation. Whispered namings and numberings penetrated the hidden universe of signs, bringing on the whirling movement of *tonkolong*, the whirlwind. Creation made it dizzy. It emerged from *jenfango*, the world egg. Then began *faleng fôlô taga*, the primordial cycle of change, from which the primordial plants would emerge.

Smoke conceived
    she brought forth flame
Flame conceived
    she brought forth ash
Ash conceived
    she brought forth *fisaareng*[16]
Fisaareng conceived
    she brought forth *jaaje*
Jaaje conceived
    she brought forth *nanguwêrêto*

[15] Name of the mythical snake, the rainbow, and the python.

[16] All the following names are of plants.

Nanguwêrêto conceived
she brought forth *badô* at *Junfara*

And this was the green ocean of ruby-seeded plants. The expanse was contained. Interior speech produced a lightning bolt. The rolling thunder that followed the lightning was the voice of the emergence of the world, *jen bo kango*; the universe still has not stopped echoing from it. But few are they, according to Silatigi Mandjan, who are capable of hearing this voice without losing their ears.

The grumbling was prolonged by the expiring breath of *da feng ba*, the macrocosm. This first wind of call to the soul, *nilakili fônyô fôlô*, dispersed the river of the word mother of words, *ba kumaba kumô*, into numberless streams, which in all directions irrigated the empty places of the existences to come, preparing the soil of the field of life, *balo kena*. The multiple arms of the river found many holes and innumerable underground streams. There resulted the universe of pools, swamps, wells, and springs: these were *tôgô jikêsê fôlô*, the seeds of the sea of first names. Obeying the Forefather's call, the seeds began to sparkle like pearls of dew quivering on the hollows of morning's leaves. They detached themselves one after another from the rosary of names and numbers. Each of these names, corresponding to a number, was a mark of distinction, identification, and recognition of the being they were to engender. Each of them received an archetypal face, which would be manifested in the created world. They became *têêmantê sawura*, conceivable forms amidst things. These forms only authentic dreams and contemplative ecstasies are capable of revealing.

By naming and counting them, the speech of the Forefather breathed into the signs the power of manifestation, of putting forth buds and being constituted according to their proper nature, movement, degree, form, and consistency. Each one found its place in space and its fixed moment on the thread of the differentiating and numerating word. Its position defined its degree on the ladder of being and its vital power within the confines of its frontier waters, *ji dang*. Telling over the names and numbers, speech resonated within the python's body, which rippled and vibrated imperceptibly from head to tail, from scales to bowels, thus informing its gestating children of the event. Having formed the cosmos thus, the Great Forefather saw it and sighed. His sigh gave a name to that place, *Farabanna*, place of the great swamp.

This world was muddy, with thick fogs floating on its face. Forefather N Maaba Taala threw the python there. As it fell, it went *mahamba*, thus uttering the name of its coming into the world, "Forefather of *Mahan*," or men. Under the force of the resonance of speech, the eggs

broke, and Mahamba's children began to move in the belly of the python. The reptile, uncoiling, crept into the swampy world towards the Mountain *Fuulu Faala Fulaï*, site of the expanse of space in the light of vision. The smoking-hot breaths of *wuyen dibô* blew the wandering python to distraction. Haunted by oneiric apparitions from *siibo faraba*, the great swamp of dreams, he became deranged from without, in the immensity of the swamps; within, in the mirages of his soul, he became unhinged. Randomly erring, changing his path in wayward perturbations, Mahamba felt the distresses of *fakilô wuli*, evasions of the mind. Every time a form rose up out of the gases, the python had the shudders. His rasping scales, echoing the noise of the apparition, reverberated to the very bottom of his entrails in a prolonged wheeze. This was *tôgola fulanjang*, the second nomination, which gave eminence and substance to the spectral beings of the universe of the swamp.

But the python took no notice. Driven by fear, he turned away from the apparition. He did not see the effects of his speaking. Hence the great storehouse, *fuli fen ba*, was lost: an evasion of the mind, a forgetting of the memory the Great Forefather had entrusted to the ancestral python for its time of traversal of the swampy world. The python could not prevent this flight of divine glory, which eluded him upon a word from the ordaining energy. Maaba Taala had to intervene to safeguard life from devastation on the heels of the word. He divided the store of life into three lots. *Tôgôla*, the imposition of the name, was the ancestral Python's lot. *Togolông*, knowledge of names, was the portion of the shedding of the python's sin; it dwelt in the mystery of Maaba Taala's consciousness—his universal consciousness, his essential memory, his penetrating intelligence, his visionary regard, which obscurely reflected the infant soul. *Tôgôfô*, uttering of names, was the lot of the human generation to come.

Being synthetic by nature, *tôgôfô*, the function of affirmation, realized everything that the first two faculties contained in germ: the power of catching the world of created things in the net of speech and subjugating it to human desires; the power of emptying man of his carnal soul and converting it to visionary light, after conferring on all things a present face and a consistency of being.

But the supreme event was this: each name breathed by the python gave to Mahamba the power of knowledge, the authority to act, and the strength to affect the thing named. As a consequence, human speech became a force capable of diverting anything from its characteristic activity. A correspondence was created between the events of the world and the properties of the human soul. Mahamba made no use of this prodigious

power. He left it as an inheritance for his children, who never stopped being impatient inside him.

And the python glided into the swamp of the world, breathing into all things the radiant seeds of name and number. In the swamp he grew, losing drop by drop the ambrosia of eternal existences, which gave rise to fine, verdant plants with ruby seeds, the ancestors of nourishing cereals. Losing his substance by the force of the word, the python swooned at the foot of the mount of vision. With his last breath he tore out his entrails. His soul mingled with the swamp gases. His children, now free, hurled themselves steaming out of the field of the swamp. On terra firma at the foot of the mount of vision, they were illuminated. They rushed towards the peak of the splendid mountain, leaving behind all memory of the ancestral python, dead in the vapors of the swamp.

They arrived at *bantaba kêna*, the field of dawn. There they were struck with wonder: the parks were verdant with earth's nascent life. They glistened from the gold of the fruits. They played with the young animals. In the presence of this place and its splendors, the humans breathed in the balmy atmosphere; that was *diya dula*, place of delight. Then they breathed out; that was *fan mara dula*, place of self-mastery.

But of the two words they had just uttered, Mahamba's children heard only the first. Thus they saw the field of dawn only in delight's daylight. They did not see that the field was encircled by the nighttime of testing. They became drunk with covetousness. Hunters on the heels of the fugitive beings from the shining moon, the greedy children, *hawujadengo*, suddenly lost all memory of their Forefather Mahamba in the thick fogs of the swamp of gestation, at the threshold of existence. This was their innate misstep. Running out of breath, they drummed on the quiet earth, "*Mung feng!? Mung feng!?* What thing, what thing?"

This was a word of both wonder and questioning, for wonder and questioning are inseparable. With their morning quiet sundered by the footstamping of these men running, the spirits of collectedness, *hakili laaring*, made echo to the questioning. The running men then heard the voice of their race, *bori kang*: *"Fang fang! Fang fang! Fang fang!* The very thing! The very thing! The very thing!"[17] Echoing back to the greedy men the voice of their race, the spirits of collectedness said:

"You who are tracking us,
don't you see what we are?

[17] Word for word, *fang fang* equals "Same, Same!" Usually it means, "That is identical to the truth!" or "That is true!" or "That's just it!"

The 'very thing' who gave you the light of vision,
The 'very thing' who favored you with motion!"

But the humans heard only the voice of their greed, *hawuja kang*. They did not hear the pounding of their feet on the earth. By the expression "the very thing," they understood that the field of dawn, with its treasures, was lawfully being offered to their covetousness. All things, echoing their greed, confirmed that they were "the very thing" human beings desire. They heard the speech of the world according to the twisted intelligence of covetousness. They did not hear the spirits of collectednesss say, as they raised themselves from the marred earth, "We are the 'very thing' of reassembling and totality, *kumben ni kamari fang fang*—the restitution and transformation of the Most Ancient Forefather, whom you follow now as you injure the seeds!"

So the men ran. Exhausting their last vestige of recognition and identification in their dizzy race, they lost the native suppleness of their bodies as well. So violent was their pounding on the earth that their bones broke through their flesh and then broke into joints. They lost the grace of fluid movement. They did not hear the fatal sound of their bones cracking, announcing the horrors of death. Seeing that their deafness was deeper than the abysm of ignorance and their blindness thicker than the shadow of nonexistence, Mahamba challenged them to awake: "*Jong*, who?" But in their dizziness, human beings answered with one voice, "*Ntélé jong jong*, Me, that's who."

This word was true, in that it said, "It is I, the voice of the one who names!" but their intention and thought were twisted: they thought they were asserting "It is I, the one who names!" For it was the word that was in question. By asserting themselves as agents of the word, humans committed an offense, the fault of *lèse-majesté*, dispossessing the Most Ancient Forefather from his seignory. Hearing his children speak so, Mahamba deserted his body. His spirit, taking the form of a great diaphanous phantom, went before them into the field of dawn, wishing to shelter the treasures of the field of the forefather from their onrush. He began to gather the flowers of incandescence, *nyan nyang fiiro*, with which the tress were covered, and which the Pathmasters call *londô firi firô*, butterflies of knowledge. Hungry with a bottomless hunger, he instantly brought them to his mouth and eagerly swallowed them. Soon he felt disgust.

Feeling the effect of the gluttony of Mahamba's ghost, *londo tilo*, the sun of knowledge, little by little lost its brightness. Shadow came on. In the dizziness generated by the overcrowding on the paths of knowledge, Mahamba collapsed. All the trees were now deflorated with one exception,

kamari yiro, the tree of reassembling. Driven by his inextinguishable desire for knowledge, he crawled up to the foot of that last tree (still called *dafa yiri*, the tree that fills the mouth; the *jong jong* call it *yiri firi naani*, tree with four flowers).

Stretched out flat, he raised his hand to the first flower. It was the flower of the times before dawn, *jen jen kaanêh fiiro*. He plucked it and swallowed it: cold began to come on him.

He plucked the second flower, the flower of the charming sun, *tilo nya fiiro*; the cold paralyzed his limbs.

He plucked the flower of the bitter sun, *tilo kuna fiiro*, and swallowed it. Instantly the cold immobilized him. But he still had his vision.

He threw *lahio nya*, the look of desire, at the flower of the setting sun, *tilo laa fiiro*. The flower fell into his mouth. He swallowed it. The cold came up to his eyes. Mahamba the seer became Mahamba the shadowy, *finki mana*. He became one with the earth.

All those deflowered trees carry down to today the fruits of boundless enjoyment, *dan matambi dya*, in place of the flowers of knowledge.

Now that Mahamba was dead, men became lords of the world. Before them extended without limit the verdant field with its golden fruits. The field of life was handed over to nascent humanity.

The human multitude of Mahamba's children traversed the confines of the swampy lands. They spied a glimmer piercing the thick fog, illuminating the summit of the mountain of dawn. They were attracted by the splendors of the place. When the humans reached the imposing foothills of the mountain, they stood up, freed from their miring and creeping. They crawled towards the light. Arrived at the peak of *nyan maana kônkê*, the mount of splendors, they beheld a landscape as far as its borders. It was a shining desert. At the foot of the mountain was nothing but swamp that stretched out of sight. The men overran the ground of the light of knowledge, but, befogged by the torments of covetousness and misappropriation, they did not recognize it. And they were "bitter with the bitterness of ignorance," *lonbalya ji kuuma*. Many died of disappointment.

The rest kept on scanning the swampy fogs. Memory enabled them to distinguish islands of dry land in the swamp, peopled with inconstant forms that appeared and disappeared, corresponding to their fickle attention. Where they made the effort to concentrate like a contemplative, the forms stabilized under human scrutiny. Memory begot recognition. Recall became breath. Breath cleared the way for the mouth.

The children of Mahamba were born to speech, and speech

consolidated the world that was born with them. Silent and glistening at first, the breath of naming speech displaced the fog, except for a few diaphanous clouds. Under the ardent regard of the call to existence, the lands freed from the veil of ignorance spread forth and gathered into *dugu kônkêba*, the great mount of the earth. The whirling breaths of speech raised the earth above the abyss: *"Fiuh!"* The bitter tide filling the abyss unveiled by the elevating of the earth went *"Waah!"* Resting in its oceanic bed, the earth went *"Geji!"*, which became the name of the bitter sea. With *geji* supporting the earth, all things acquired solidity, and the earth was consolidated on its foundation, nourished by the ocean's vital currents.

Yet, all this took place as if in a dream. The human multitude did not believe in it with a constant faith. To reassure themselves, men descended to this dry land. They saw that all these things were in fact present. Then they felt their power and were wild with pride. Had they not, by virtue of nothing but speech, just pulled out of their impermanence the things of generation?

Now, every word issues from the Great Forefather; every utterance proceeds from an act of Mahamba. Men are no more than the manifold throats through which his breath escapes. They are no more than the splintered echoes of his voice. But in their arrogance, mystifying, forgetting, they trampled on their lord and father.

Thus occurred the second emergence; that was *Mahamba lombaliya kêna*, the park of ingratitude to Mahamba. Men rushed into the parks of the dawn to pluck the *sanu yiridingo*, the heavy golden fruits, before the time fixed by the owner of that place, *jalang jala kuna*, the bitter bastard-mahogany [tree] of worship. Each fruit plucked from the trees of life cast its shadow on the morning brightness of the field. Imperceptibly, light began to wane. Shadow invaded the earth at the dawn of the ages, and men knew blindness. The bitter sea blazed up with a roar. *Sanfing kêlefitinô ni tinyarila*, the shadowy legion of the somber genius of destruction, weighted down the nascent earth with sinister grumbling. The birds of imagination flew out of the golden park in the wake of *tinbanding kôyô*, the bright turtledove, and *korêh duga*, the initiatic vulture, heavy in flight. They abandoned men to the apprehension fomented by *hakilô wuliba*, the great escape of the spirit. From heaven fell a rain of larval lives and aborted births, escaped prematurely from the eternities that the Great Forefather promised to Mahamba's descendants. This torment raged for the time of "ten great rains, one great moon, and one great sun," according to the count of the Great Forefather.

When *massibo suo*, the night of unhappiness, had raged to its end, a

column of light rose up from the midst of the field. Men ran thither. There stretched forth *hêra dalô*, the pool of quietude. At the bottom of the deep sparkled the stones of light, *yelen kaba*. Men plunged into the pool and rooted up the stones. Once again they gave themselves over to their bent for devastation, forgetting the havoc in the parks of the dawn and its ensuing terror.

The stones of light, indeed, had been deposited in the pool to efface the effects of the effraction men had committed when they plucked the golden fruits prematurely. When he saw what his children were doing, Mahamba felt chagrin at his heart. He wept, and the field became the pool of compassion, *hinno dalo*. The heavenly seeds that had fallen into the heart of the park crystallized into the stones of light, and thus were called *sanji kuna kaba*, crystals of the bitter sea of heaven.

This was the treasure that men were wasting now, emptying the pool of mercy. They roiled the waves. When the bottom of the pool was all muddied, the pillagers came forth and saw that their hands were full of pebbles. Once out of the pool of compassion, the stones lost their brilliance. Where they broke were now sharp edges. Anger invaded the hearts of the ravagers. In their fury, the light-fleeing men flung the flints, ravaging the place, immobilizing the living, spreading silence. First, they repaired to the trees and cut them down; the stones became *têgêrang*, axes. Then they ploughed up the earth, and the stones of light became *sendang*, stakes. Then they hunted the animals of the Park, and the stones of light became *daranbô*, spears. That is how all armaments began.

But a few men remained apart from the havoc. Their cries resounded, prolonged by the echoes from the park of dawn: *Eh. . . eh . . . eh . . . eh . . . !* Their cry of horror was requited by the madness of the furious ones. They were stoned and constrained to silence. Their mouths were shut, but their eyes stayed open to watch the furious in their fury. The mad ones forced them to acknowledge that their act of anger was legitimate; the contemplatives endorsed the disturbances they committed, saying:

> Ignorance leads the Great Event
> Propagators of black fires
> and propagators of white fires
> immobilizers of the living
> Agitators of the Great Event!

In the height of their pride, the drunkenness of fame was added unto them, and the men of greed took it for praise. They did not see that the meanings of these words deviated like the split tongue of a snake. Each one wanted

the praise attached only to his name. They set on one another, and that was the great destruction. Thus it is that men of greed and impatience, the usurpers of the seignory of the Mahamba, became the princes of the world, the lords of war, *kêlêmans*. Wielding the tools of housebreaking and wounding, they violated the earth and oppressed the living. *Tinyariba*, great destruction, caused great tyranny to reign, subduing the vanquished to the field of labor, captivity, and suffering. Hope deserted the heart of the sages.

Now the contemplatives, who never touched the stones of light, had preserved in their souls the bright images of the park of dawn. The sea of compassion in their hearts, *missi jio*, was muted by their continual shock. Because they had the grace to keep hold of that shock, they were named *jeribagô ni fêlêlô*, people of vision and contemplation. Overcome by this interior spectacle, they did not touch the trees with golden fruits; they felt no hunger. But when shadow invaded the park upon the havoc committed by their brothers, they were afflicted with blindness. In a fog, they turned one way, then the other, going and coming, without knowing what they were doing or being able to utter a word. Finally, they collapsed exhausted on the ground and went to sleep.

When they woke up from their numbness, they turned towards the *têman tê dula*, central place of places, the place equidistant from all places, *hinno dalo*, the pool of compassion I spoke of a moment ago. There a column of light descended from a cloud. This was the evidence of Mahamba's compassion. The tears of the Most Ancient Forefather had dug a bed for the pool, but were still invisible. They were only waters in the water. When the contemplatives, at the edge of the pool, concentrated their attention on the prodigy at the bottom, they were moved. The movement of their hearts, inundating their eyes, answered to the Mahamba's mercy. They cried out, *"Luuluô!"* diamond. Then Mahamba's tears crystallized in the water of the pool of mercy. These were the stones of light.

Awaiting them there was a call to human contemplation, "A thousand times one, a hundred times four, ten times four, and four stones of light," according to Silatigi Mandjan Danfaga. From the *dalifenba*, mother creatures, were born all elements and things in existence at present. The contemplatives recognized in these sparklings the brilliance of the fruits gathered too soon and did not touch them.

During this time their brothers, stuffed with the fruits precipitately plucked from the trees, were seized with greed. Like words they writhed on the ground, their stomachs in pain, their eyes blind, their souls in darkness. The cool breath of the men of vision and contemplation rose up

in that place, dispersing the shadows, dissipating the bitterness and malign humors of the hour. The field of life knew verdancy and brightness once more.

Awakened by the cry of shock of the contemplatives, the actives were delivered from their pain and blindness. They set themselves to new havoc. But this time, the *jerijebaga*, with the second vision, had acquired wisdom. They erected between themselves and the men of havoc the wall of ignorance and blindness, *lombalia dandang ni finki dandango*. Separated from the wonder of knowledge, the men of greed overran the field of life in all directions. Seeing things with the eye of ignorance, they could not identify them. All remained opaque, impenetrable to light. *Jalang gundô*, the initiatic mystery, had stripped from them the soul of things.

Then the contemplatives could officiate in peace and serenity as *soma*, priests. With the fine point of *lono kalo*, the arrow of knowledge, they penetrated each being to reach the heart of everything, *suutê kima kêsô*, to name it.

After being recognized and named, each being gradually closed up, confining its seed of light. Now in secret the shining of the world responded to the light of the ancestor's face. But so powerful was the shining that it shone through. Then the *soma* invoked *yelen jija*, the shadow of light, and each being cast forth a shadow from its light, which spread around it. Stealing over the earth, shadow veiled the emanations of the seed of light, ensuring that earth-manifested beings would adhere there. But this veil of projected shadows was not proof against all indiscretions. The *soma* named the *jija kôyô*, bright spirits, to distinguish them from their source. They caught these bright spirits, like live fish, in the net of *kûma kôtôba*, very ancient words—words that since then have become *kûma kôtôma*, words of the foundation. Then they drew out the spear of sagacity, and things permanently closed over their interior incandescence, earth enfolded its treasures in its entrails, time projected its promises beyond the reach of the present so eager for possession. Henceforth, existence required effort, pain, and suffering from men, to win and deserve their subsistence.

Thus, each time man attains some good (said Silatigi Mandjan), time immediately withdraws the seed of light sheltered in it and launches it farther on, into a subsequent good, thus guaranteeing the coveting of things to the world in perpetuity, by means of this flight of essence.

This happened thanks to the wisdom of the contemplatives.

The men of greed, having been kept away from the secret of knowledge, could no longer manipulate things or oppress the living, for they could no longer reach *kiima kêsô*, the seed of fire, sealed in the depth

of creatures. The essence of things lay beyond the reach of their effraction and wounding. The men of greed became, in reality, *faantang*, the unprovided, the powerless in journeying over the world. All they could do was to accumulate stones and dust as if they were treasure and immobilize themselves in the end under the vanity of heapings. Their fury became a terror on the face of the earth, their desires a devastating drunkenness, their action *tatugu waalio*, incendiary deeds. They exerted their aptitude for effraction and wounding, as they had done in ancient times, but now they did so with the cynical despair that makes sport in the hearts of blind heroes. Not a single one could appropriate earth and its treasures for himself. For in this confrontation, said Silatigi Mandjan,

> The Unique Hero who will defeat all heroisms is death
> but however heroic death may be,
> the heart of *lakira gôrêh*,
> garden of the beyond,
> mount of compassion
> where the seeds of vision are set like pearls
> that reveal the light at the world's heart
> and engender new things again and again
> with their endless deaths.

In default of reaching the luminous essence of the world, the men of greed wanted to drain pleasure out of all things. They broke the carapaces of the world. They could not touch the seed of incandescence. But they wanted *dya jijo*, the liquor of enjoyment, to spring up. They made banquets of it, introducing envy into the heart of the priests, and wisdom succumbed to the seduction of so many proffered pleasures. The men of vision and contemplation suffered from that. They began to betray the secret of knowledge, fortifying the strength of the effraction by the men of greed and their power of oppression by arms. And human pride and desire were limitless.

When they were sated, they felt the bitterness of enjoyment and the disgust of excess. They noticed then that hunger and thirst are reborn after disgust. They were ashamed to have been created, and they renounced the Great Forefather, so profound was the abyss of their treason.

The contemplatives were isolated in the world, blinded by the vagaries of their enjoyments. The actives fought among themselves, appropriating the objects of enjoyment, taking advantage of one another by the force of their arms and the ruses of the spirit of appropriation. But nothing could keep the others subdued. "The citadel built by one warlord is

broken by the other," said Pathmaster Kidugu. And anxiety invaded their hearts over this impossible scheme of possessing the world. The fear of arms begot cries and weeping. And everywhere resounded words of suffering that echoed the oppressors' rage:

Do you not hear
children of the great destruction
Do you not hear their lugubrious clamor?
They howl at death
as far as the park of beyond
attacking there the quiet of the Forefather
Do you not hear in your secret heart
all these clamors throbbing with death?
They darken the vision of visionaries
they trouble the light of contemplatives
they trouble the quiet of hearers
they deafen the speech of the *jong jong*
They are *sétigi finkinté*, the powerful blind
They cannot withstand the thunder of speech
they have not turned it aside to their twisted ends.

Menaced by the fury of the actives, prey to their temptation to use the thunder of speech to attract the goods of the earth to themselves, the people of contemplation were afflicted by disquiet. But three *soma*, who had not succumbed to the seductions of enjoyment, clung to tranquillity of mind. To ward off the danger, they invoked grace from the Great Forefather, who took pity on them and revealed to them the secret of the silent word, *dê kumô*. Setting silence into the very heart of utterance, setting occultation into the breast of unveiling, placing a veil of depth over the unendurable exposure of the light of truth, they wove the watered fabric of allegory and symbol. They threw the net of most ancient words over the nudity of the world. That, they saw, was in accord with the will of the Forefather. Through these words of silence passed something of Mahamba's power, which satisfied the men of greed temporarily. But the glowing embers of knowledge remained deeply sealed in the heart of things. And the Great Forefather was satisfied.

It was then that the *soma* perceived that by themselves they could gain access to the secret of vision and contemplation only if they peregrinated the paths of mastery, *mara silô*:

At the gate of the great house of the secret
be stripped of the desire for effraction
think not of knowledge or ignorance

At the gate of the great house of the secret
keep your mouth closed
For here speech is for the speaker

At the gate of the great house of the secret
abandon all companions
renounce all company
Company here is for the one who accompanies
At the gate of the great house of the secret
want to see nothing
not even contemplation of the vision
for wanting is for him who wants

Wayfaring on the testing earth
give way to neither vanity nor humiliation
Traveling to the place of execution
execute the signs revealed
without exaltation or abasement
Traversing the earth of greed
run after no enjoyments
Contemplating the earth of vanity
take refuge in humility.

So spoke Silatigi Saraba, of the mountain of Banyombe, and was silent ever after.

Splendors and Miseries of Human Speech

He suggests that the world is a matter in process of formation; its forms, which are conceived, known, and named in God, are taken up and brought to fulfillment by human action. That is the meaning of that redoubled "Who? Who?" Man is also therefore a demiurge, a singular self somewhat freed from the voice of the great Forefather. The efficacy of man's implements and the strength of his action correspond to that speechlessness of the Great Forefather that is sheltered in the heart of his creation. The nascent world, consequently, has two faces, a beneficent one embodied in contemplative persons and a maleficent one populated by the greedy. Yet, according to Silatigi Mandjan, both greedy and visionary persons together constitute the heroic primordial people, *gêdê fôlô fôlô*. These are two antagonistic but inseparable phratries of one and the same tribe. From their combat results the world of generation, corruption, and death, which is a condition of the Great Forefather's rebirth in heaven.

It is the drama of their antagonism that plays out in existence. Death never stops pursuing life and swallowing up all things. Dragging all this booty behind it, death becomes heavy and immobile before it crosses the threshold of the Beyond. Then, emerging from their mortal numbness, the souls escape the hands of death, which have been crushed by the weight. Lightened by their flight, *saaya* awakens and begins the hunt again. Every man is the place where this drama is rehearsed. But it is contemplative persons who experience it most intensely, for their consciousness is a consciousness of ordeal, and their souls are haunted by unhappiness.

It was when the shadow of death, *saya dibo*, fell on the parks of golden fruits that they felt this numbness. The song of Tibanding Kôyô, the divine messenger, woke them. When he came to the field, he wept. His voice resounded; the shadows turned to dawn. The wind of his speaking came to revive the memory of the contemplatives, as the wind causes embers to glow under ashes. The dazzling purity of the bird's voice was reflected in the surface of the pool of the park. There were the spears of consciousness, *lôndo yelen tambô*. Reflected from the sparkling wave, the sparks from this burning jet touched the contemplatives on the back, between their kidneys. They saw the light of the world being reborn, though they still remembered the former obscurity. Between shadow and light their consciousnesses were subjected to eclipses. Like fireflies they sparkled in the world's limitless night, lighting up and going out at every instant, causing hope to be followed by despair and sadness by exaltation.

Vigilant though the contemplatives were, they were present at the origin of the primordial falsehood, *komayêlêng fôlô*. In fact, when they heard the bright turtledove's sobbing, they were caught up in the drunkenness of speech. They wanted to attain to the continual flux of divine speaking. Seeing the distance that separated their speech from the divine, they began to multiply words. Soon the production of words exceeded the number of existing things, and a discrepancy arose between the universe of words and the world of things. In this discrepancy were born equivocation and illusion, and from them all the possibilities of falsehood and lying with words.

In the drunkenness of speech, the contemplatives also felt the temptation of magical incantation. They wanted to make use of ecstatic revelations to take control of events. So they began to utter incantations. Joining gesture to word, they performed sorcery. Answering their covetousness, Maama Bulabaga, the Great Liberating Foremother, placed the sun and moon within reach of the incantatory rituals. So they made the sun and moon descend and light up the idols they created in their own

image. Before these little magic men, *suya jalang môgoning*, they fell in adoration. They prostrated themselves, covering their heads with dust. They made use of the speech of the Forefather to praise their own images. Then the Great Forefather turned away from his creation, abandoning it to the greed of the men of effraction and wounding. He withdrew his sun from promiscuity with the charred earth. So that it would not consume itself, Maama Bulabaga was obliged to inundate the earth. The water rose so fast that it immersed the moon, which was weighed down and cooled. She dwelt in proximity to the earth, becoming the mirror of human desires. She buried the living under her arm. The idols stayed standing, heads above the diluvian water.

When human beings awoke on the broiling earth, they were all the more surprised at these gigantic statues that could withstand fire and water. Then they disputed over the idols with each other; in the end they disputed with the idols themselves.

It is to prevent these many woes that Mandinka wisdom makes a separation between the time when the heroes of vision call up the contemplation of the first World—the season when most ancient words are spoken—and the time when the acts of the heroes of effraction and wounding are rehearsed—the season when ritual actions are performed (Camara 1992). By so doing, the Mandinka attempt to preserve man from the dangerous attempt to reunite in this world the force of ravishment of Maaba Taala, the Great Uplifting Forefather, and the desiring power of Maama Bulabaga, the Great Foremother, who liberates the tribe of humans from the father's imperium. Thus they avoid the synchronicity that would risk bringing history to a premature end by confounding two distinct moments of evolution and creation.

The Dream of the Golden Key and the Light of Speech

For only *fu faa fu*, nothing destroyer of nothings, on the hither side of time and space, in the absolute reign of immobility, silence, and pure light, reunites in himself the Great Forefather's force of gathering and contention and the Great Foremother's powers of exuberance and dispersion. He dwells alone in himself, inaccessible to any but himself. In his vicinity, action and thought are annihilated alike. Beyond the object of contemplation, beyond the subject who contemplates, beyond the desiring subject, beyond the object desired, nothing subsists outside the word of light, dazzling veil over the unknowable.

Only a dream can comprehend the annihilating effects of proximity to *fu faa fu*. On one night of grace, I had such a dream.

I was on a journey with numerous companions. We arrived at a vast stage. The atmosphere was moonless moonlight. Vision stretched to a horizonless infinite. Descending from the stage, I broke away from my dark companions. Traversing golden paths across verdant fields, I arrived at the great house of the father. The door was closed. I saw the great golden key tacked up in the thatch of the roof over the doorway. Thinking it within my reach, I put my hand to grasp it, but it was higher than I thought. I picked up a pole to unhook it. At that instant, my dark companions arrived. They rushed on the man who was trying to grasp the golden key. They seized him by the legs. They dragged him downward. Like a snake shedding its skin, I escaped from that body being assaulted by those dark companions. I saw the massed crowd of them fighting over a now invisible skin. From above I contemplated the scene, without disturbance of any kind, serene. Then out of me came a single word: "What has become of them?" My question concerned the man who wanted to unhook the key and the one whose body was being fought over by the crowd. On the hither side of the place where the word of interrogation arose, a voice came to me: "Their bones are reduced to dust!" At that moment, having left all places behind, I was the strange witness of several events one after another. The final event, the vision of speech, contained within it all the others, which were:

The quest for the golden key by the man who broke away from the dark companions.

The contemplation of the spectacle of the onslaught of the dark companions on the robber of the golden key.

The interrogation about the growth of the skin.

The apprehension of speech, which by relation to contemplative consciousness came from behind. At that moment, there was no longer person, nor skin, nor rabid crowd, nor speaking subject, nor listening subject. There was only an infinite struggle of word answering word. When I awoke, I had an unmistakable sense that I had just had the revelation of the way that leads to the place, more precisely the non-place, of the vision of speech, *kuma jeri.*

Then I recalled the interview I had had with Djeli Mandjan Danfaga while he was still alive. I understood that "I, the very thing, Who? Who?" with which men answered the Great Forefather's call, corresponded to the skin that the dark companions of my dream fought over. This "I" is rarefied by the grace of knowledge before it can reach the key to the door

of mystery. Afterward, the contemplating "I" faints. All that remains is the light of speech. That, then, is the path of knowledge. That is *jeerije*: contemplating the vision, being nothing more than limpidity for the word, an empty place of listening!

Université de Bordeaux II

References

Camara 1982 — Sory Camara. *Paroles très anciennes, ou le mythe de l'accomplissement de l'homme*. Grenoble: Editions "La Pensée Sauvage."

Camara 1992 — _____. "Fantasmagorie mythique et prodige rituel ou les sentiers de la maîtrise du temps." *Anthropos*, 87:232-39.

Oral Tradition, 9/1 (1994): 60-82

Social Speech and Speech of the Imagination: Female Identity and Ambivalence in Bambara-Malinké Oral Literature

Veronika Görög-Karady
Translated by Lee Haring

Normative discourse and social reality

In the wake of the feminism debate, socio-ethnological studies on the place of women and femininity in occidental civilizations have been multiplying. So have they as well for "archaic" or "traditional" civilizations, which share among other common features the domination of men over women by means of patriarchal, patrilineal, and virilocal family organization. It is not surprising, then, to find that this fate of being dominated appears in the ideological discourses produced by these societies, particularly in the collective representations that are objectivized in religious texts, folklore, and oral literature. In this essay, I propose to examine two female figures in some relevant texts from Bambara-Malinké (West Africa) oral literature. Despite the many resemblances, I do not mean to assert that the social functions attributed therein to women are characteristic in the same terms of other patriarchal societies of Black Africa.

At the outset, I must say that the image of woman visible in my texts unquestionably arises out of the male vision of social and gender relations. Men's control over the "strong speech" that is verbal art is as unlimited as their power over other domains of action and standards of social behavior. This control is spread mainly by channels of collective socialization larger than the limits of the family, especially societies of initiation, in which the fundamental values that initiated adults are obliged to respect are implanted in the rising generation by means of songs, proverbs, and exemplary stories.

A reader of these texts realizes immediately their strong tendency to

polarize the types of female identity. The paradigm is organized around binary oppositions: the woman is either good or bad, giver of life or purveyor of death, nourishing or poisoning. Furthermore, these differing and contrasting roles are always manifested at transitional occasions in the life cycle and in connection with a male relative, especially a son or husband. It all happens as if the essence of a woman's social relations is confined to domestic functions and narrowly restricted to the family circle, while men take on a succession of external functions, professional or political. From the outset, then, the difference between the positions of the two sexes in society is implicitly expressed by their degree of liberty, or the range of choices as to which social roles, private or public, will be accessible and open to the two sexes.

The importance of the process of initiation in sexual socialization and apprenticeship to social roles has already been noted. Young candidates for initiation learn this as one of their first teachings. The contrasting destinies of the two sexes result first of all from exogamy. Men, all their lives, remain in the universe of their infancy, within the compass of their village and their family. Girls, by contrast, leave their home environment at the time of marriage, aged about fourteen or fifteen, and spend the greatest part of their lives in the house of their in-laws, those "other" strangers, who will regularly ensure that they feel their position as intruders. Girls begin at seven or eight to be prepared for this decisive separation from childhood. They are given to understand that in their own family they are only in transit. René Luneau, who spent many years among the Bambara, sums up the situation (1981:58):

> A foreigner in her own family, so much so that she is condemned to be separated from it—her children will be the children of another house—she is just as much a foreigner in her in-law family. Completely integrated nowhere, living under her husband's sway, yet prepared, as a last resort, to obey the dictates of her brothers (for an eventual divorce would oblige her to return to the familial house), she recognizes herself only with difficulty.

Thus the Bambara woman is condemned to a sort of permanent alienation, which can only be alleviated by her unreservedly internalizing the principles of the constraining ideology to which from infancy she has been constantly subjected. The two opposed loyalties she is expected to be able to reconcile are enough to trouble her sense of identity and weaken her sense of belonging to one or another collectivity. Moreover, it is difficult for her to

establish any concord among the range of social duties and affective alliances that imprint tensions on the whole course of her existence.

Initiation is no more than the institutional form of that ideology. Its principles—implanted in girls as much as in boys—postulate that a person's main social duty is to participate in a network of relations comprising blood relatives and relatives by marriage; that collective interests always take precedence over personal interests; and, finally, that one owes absolute respect to all persons conventionally designated as having precedence, by virtue of age or social status. It is in this context that girls learn that their "departure for the others" constitutes a vital act on behalf of group survival, for it is the exchange of women that perpetuates the organic attachments between families: they are the "paths that link the villages" (Diarra 1985:559).

The words of initiation songs emphasize the qualities girls must acquire and exercise in the course of their adult existence. These are qualities of work, patience, and especially obedience towards their male relatives. They must bear to "stand up all day and stand up all night if their husband asks" (*ibid.*:189), since the husband embodies in this particular the same kind of authority as the father.

These decrees of subordination are compensated, at least symbolically, by the importance granted to the maternal function. Motherhood, indeed, is interpreted as the principle whereby feminine destiny is realized. The royal road to social recognition for women goes by way of numerous offspring. Hence the theme of motherhood is one of the main subjects of oral literature, elaborated in initiation instructions in several ways. A related theme is the link between women's suffering as unloved or mistreated wives and their success as mothers. The most ill-fated women, it seems, give birth to the most beautiful children, "children of renown who will never fail in life" (*idem*). Is this hypothetical correlation dictated by a masculine ruse? In any case there is a striking contrast between the consideration shown to mothers, the sources of life, and the disdainful attitude, ready criticism, and frequent scorn cast at women in general and wives in particular. A saying declares, "Every man is between his mother's hands." Therefore a mother's curse is considered the height of misfortune; a deep-rooted belief has it that such a curse never ceases to torment the receiver until the end of his days.

The Speech of the Tale

This brief glimpse at the normative social discourse about women during their initiation period makes possible an interrogation of narratives on the "speech of the imagination." This is assuredly not the discourse of the unconscious, but nevertheless a register of speech that does not align itself with dominant social values; it even opposes them. In these texts both registers appear concomitantly. The fundamental polysemy of this genre is inscribed in a discourse of such semantic density that several strata of signification are therein intermingled. The task of analysis is to distinguish in these texts the reflection of social practices, the normative discourse, and the symbolic modes of linking the two.

For the sake of focusing analysis on texts, and on essential aspects of the feminine condition among the Bambara-Malinké, I confine myself here to studying these two most decisive roles of women, wife and mother, as these are presented in two frequently occurring stories. I select these from the available repertoire because they are structurally related and because they offer a true paradigm of possible cases in the triangular relation comprising the son, the mother (or her substitute the maternal aunt), and the wife (or potential betrothed). The first narrative, built on the action of a beneficent mother who saves her son from the mortal danger represented by the doings of a potential daughter-in-law, is structurally the exact opposite of the second narrative, which introduces a maleficent mother who is a source of perils for her son and daughter-in-law. Thenceforward, the first narrative clearly responds more to the pedagogical care for "social speech"; the second moves away from it. Thus we observe parallel elaborations, in two different directions, of the same problematic. The ways in which the two types of public message handle this theme in narration must be closely observed. The comparison I make between the two tales is also based on various other thematic elements, that seem to be contingent, but whose simultaneous occurrence seems to go back to an ensemble of collective representations forming a system. The manifest elements to be observed include the disguise of feminine protagonists, the place of wrongdoing, the mediating role of a tree in the action, the recourse to magic protective objects serving to retard the action, the interjection of songs in the guise of appeals for help, and finally the presence of helpful animals, namely dogs.

I shall summarize here a tale of which several versions are known (Görög-Karady 1979:106-11, Travele 1977:129-35, Camara 1978:253-55);

one version is translated in the appendix. My summary will be followed by an analysis and by some ethnographic details.

Tale no. 1: The Hunter and the Buffalo

1. A hunter hunts so effectively that the animals fear for the survival of their species. They gather to decide on a course of action to pursue. A female buffalo promises to lead the hunter into the bush so that the others, who will be holding themselves ready, can catch him.

2. The buffalo transforms herself into a beautiful girl with a swelling bosom and presents herself to the hunter invitingly. The hunter receives her warmly and offers to kill for her a bull, a castrated sheep, or any other animal. The girl says she eats only dog meat. The hunter kills his dogs one after another.

3. The mother or aunt of the hunter warns him against the girl, but the hunter does not listen to her. The mother or her surrogate gathers the dead dogs' bones and puts them all into a receptacle. The girl questions the hunter about his secrets; she gets him to say how he escapes from animals that attack him.

4. When all the dogs are exterminated, the girl tells the hunter she is going back to her family. The hunter wants to accompany her with a weapon (a gun, sword, or axe) but the buffalo girl dissuades him. So the hunter goes with her, armed with only a hunting whistle or a magic powder entrusted to him by his mother.

5. The hunter and the buffalo girl go deep into the bush; each time the hunter wants to retrace his steps, the girl dissuades him. Having reached a clearing, the girl asks the hunter to wait for her and goes away. She comes back in her buffalo shape, with the other animals, who prepare to attack the hunter.

6. The hunter takes refuge under a tree (baobab or bastard mahogany), which the animals begin to cut down. (In some versions, the hunter re-erects the fallen tree thanks to his magic powder.)

7. The mother or aunt is warned by the hunter's call to his dead dogs, by means of a whistle or song. The mother or aunt resuscitates the dogs by breathing or spitting on their bones.

8. The dogs go to the aid of the hunter.

The initial conflict opposes the animal kingdom to human beings, represented by the hunter. He renders himself culpable by failing to respect the contract that links the two realms of the living—civilization and bush—to each other. Though bravery is a professional virtue for a hunter, the excess of it is a fault. A hunter may legitimately kill animals, if he scrupulously observes the ritual governing such action, but he must never abuse his powers by overstepping the limits that have been set on his conduct for the sake of guaranteeing the survival of species. The discipline imposed by this self-limitation is undoubtedly one of the tokens of the high social status accorded to the hunter, whose actions are commonly recognized as dangerous, and to whom magical knowledge and power are attributed. Hunters are known to establish strongly structured fraternal orders. Their numerous charms are believed to protect them against the perils of the bush and abet the results of their hunt. The charms are effective too against human adversaries; hence the fear and respect that surround hunters in the Bambara-Malinké setting. The highly developed ritualization of the hunt (a sign of its collective quality), implies also that each member of the fraternal order has a restricted degree of liberty to exercise. It is just this restriction that the hunter in the tale ignores when he overturns the equilibrium between wild animals and human beings, to the animals' cost. The conflict rests, then, on a *social fault*, though one that affects the animals. Their reaction finds its legitimacy here.

This collective, coactive reaction of bush animals is registered by the Bambara-Malinké imagination as part of what is construed as normal. On the one hand, the animal kingdom is regularly represented after the manner of human civilization, as a sort of counter-society organized around collective interests. Especially vital among these is the survival of the collectivity in general, here, concretely, the conservation of the species threatened by the hunter. On the other hand, to pass between the two realms in either direction is conceived as perfectly possible. Finally, the animals' plan for revenge is an obvious inversion of the model of conduct that hunting represents. Instead of the hunter hunting the game, the game proposes to hunt the hunter. The hunt, however, is a regulated and regular practice, which in these representations is based on the basic inequality between men and beasts, quite apart from all the analogies between their behaviors. The reversal of roles, therefore, necessitates exceptional means; hence the buffalo girl's ruse.

Reversed motifs, moreover, notably the reversal of normal roles, are

constituents of the modalities that the animals' strategy utilizes. First there is the direction of movement: the agent from the bush comes to the village, and the hunter's route is exactly opposed. Then, though the hunter is carrying out a masculine activity par excellence, for which his physical strength and courage as an adult male are regarded as essential for success, the character of the avenging animal takes the form of a girl exercising her charms. Thus the reversal is not only of situational roles connected to the narrative action (woman-animal hunting man-hunter) but of quasi-universal sexual roles (think of the expression "skirt-chaser")—roles strongly loaded, at any rate, in the Bambara-Malinké setting; girl chasing man. Reversals follow one another through the succeeding episodes, as the hunter kills his hunting animals instead of hunting the animals with their help, the girl eats only dogs, and the hunter goes into the bush without a weapon and exposes himself to wild beasts. Finally this cascade of reversals leads to the denouement: the hunter's initial flaw and then his later ones overturn the order of established things. As a result, the character becomes so desocialized that, by the end of the story, he has lost all his hunter attributes. Having fallen prey to his flaw, he owes his survival only to his mother and the helpful animals, as well as bringing his magic powers into play. At its base, this story fully develops a conflict that has been unleashed by the violation of an interdiction; subsequent transgressions provoke a repercussion built on a paradigm of reversal, the hunter hunted. The force of the narrative comes from the fact that all his flaws and reversals are given sufficient psycho-sociological motivation to remain credible and to expedite the unrolling of the events almost like a sequence of logical fatalities.

The same is true of the maleficent function assumed by the buffalo girl, which corresponds completely to the prevalent representations by Bambara-Malinké men of the baneful traits of feminine character. We perceive a fear of feminine seduction, which is augmented by the fear inspired by a woman as a being of nature over against men associated with culture and the social world. This vision of "nature women" fits perfectly with the appearance of the buffalo-girl. The woman-animal corresponds to the image of the woman too distant in origin for her family to be known to her husband's relatives. Toward such a woman it is well to impose prudence on oneself, even to manifest frank distrust; this is generally defended. This is the reason why matrimonial affairs are considered so delicate. Wisdom has it that wives should be chosen from known villages and from families

with whom relations go back several generations, since, notwithstanding these favorable conditions for marriage, a woman remains ever a foreigner in her husband's family, where attitudes reserved for a potential enemy are directed at her. Thus a man who trusts too much in an unknown woman goes against the grain of custom and puts himself in a vulnerable position. He forgets the saying, "Woman is dangerous and destructive." Trusting the woman, he risks taking leave of his peers, withdrawing from public life and betraying himself.

To betray secrets is another social misdeed, doubly so. A hunter is expected to share his secrets only with the members of his fraternal order. Now he confides in a woman, a foreign woman indeed, a confidence that aggravates the misdeed; many sayings assert that a woman is incapable of keeping secrets. All versions of the tale make a point of the buffalo-girl's beauty and femininity, qualities that lull the hunter's vigilance into somnolence. Here again is a classic male representation about woman: she is dangerous by reason of her sexual attraction, even unto the domestic functions she exercises. Thus men are taught early to distrust a woman's sexual charms. Even her nurturing quality can appear threatening. Nefarious powers are sometimes attributed to her: she is reputed to be capable of draining a man's vital forces in the course of sexual relations, as well as of concocting potions out of poisonous ingredients and mixing them into the meals served to men.

Reversal of the direction of appearances prevails also in the theme of the buffalo-girl's ruse. Prestigious models for this reversal are known in West Africa. In the Manding national epic *Sundiata* (Niane 1971; Johnson 1986), the hero's sister disguises herself as a beautiful girl to extort the secret of the familiar adversary; the adversary remains invincible to the hero by the usual means. The analogy goes farther: again in *Sundiata*, when the adversary has been circumvented, in honor of the beautiful seductress he kills a bull, an animal whose meat is prized above all others and is offered only to a host of rank.

In both this text and the epic, the girl's ruse unfolds in two phases. In the first, she undergoes temptation, implicitly a sexual prestation, which exacts compensation from the man in the form of a hunter's prestation: offer of the most desirable meat in *Sundiata*, offer of *desired meat* in my tale. The divergence between the two manifestations of the theme is significant. Here the hero commits his second great misdeed by killing his dogs. He breaks the link of solidarity a master owes to his domestic animals,

and he deprives himself of his helpful animals. He wrongs himself morally and weakens himself as a hunter. This is the first stage of the social death toward which he is proceeding. The narrative puts tellingly on stage the effect of blindness that the buffalo-girl's ruse produces. The hero injures himself, remaining unaware of the peril he is liable to, which the kinfolk around him, represented by the mother, perceive immediately. The opposition between kinship links, so trustworthy and reassuring, and external, contingent relations, based on sexual attraction and bringing peril into the household, could not be clearer.

The design especially contains a real consecration of the mother's function: she puts her son on guard against the danger, she provides him with protective objects, and she prepares revenge against the adversary-seductress. The opposition extends also to the two women, beneficent mother and incognito foreigner, woman as donor of death (who has the dogs killed in order to have the man killed later) and woman as giver of life (who arranges for the recall of the dogs to life). The mother continually employs magic: she provides her son with magic powder or a whistle, and she resuscitates the dogs through a positive act of magic.

The second stage of the hero's course brings his departure from home to follow the buffalo-girl, a potential wife. In the order of things, such a departure is normal if the hunter is equipped with his usual professional panoply of dogs and weapons—he would then be departing for the hunt—or if he left temporarily for another village to take a wife and bring her back to the hearth. Here, in a double reversal of the normal, the hero leaves without weapons for the bush, as if he were going to visit his in-laws. At the heart of the episode is only one form of the more general message about the preference to be given, in existential choices, to social regulations over individual impulses. Custom and collective norm are equivalent to wisdom; they must take precedence over personal desires. Thus such desires and impulses are opposed to collective values, with their protective and beneficent function.

The same message is expressed in the denouement. The hero, threatened by beasts of the bush and deprived of his hunter's resources and aids, as a last resort rejoins his people and the social world he so imprudently left behind. His first reasonable act in the tale, according to social norms, is to take refuge on the tree. The tree in fact is the refuge par excellence in Bambara-Malinké representations; it is a characteristic mother figure. I may mention here a few relevant tales in this connection by way of

example (cf. Görög-Karady 1970).

In these tales the motherly tree helps an orphan girl, who has been starved by her evil stepmother, by lowering its branches so that she can pick its fruits. In others, orphans driven from a village will find lodging and protection on a tree as on a mother's lap, or an unfortunate orphan consoles himself for his adversity under a tree growing over his mother's tomb. These parallels all demonstrate that the sanctuary tree has nothing neutral about it, but clearly represents a kind of mother substitute. The mother function of the tree in my tale extends beyond immediate protection. It is precisely there that the hero makes use of the magic powder he received from his mother on his departure, a symbolic prolongation of the protective care linking him to her. It is there that he makes use of his hunter's whistle, which he has brought with him at his mother's insistence, and which will enable him to warn his family of his plight. Again it is the mother who, as she completes her preparations for revenge, calls the dogs back to life to rescue him. At every point, the opposition between the beneficent mother, whose resources exceed the merely human, and the baneful animal-girl, a potential wife, can be seen developing and becoming more specific. Of course materially the hero owes his safety to the intervention of the dogs, which accomplish their duty out of loyalty towards an unworthy master, but it is always the mother who controls the action. She gives warning of danger, equips her son against snares, and finally organizes his rescue.

If I were to sum up the significance of the story, I would say to begin with that we are dealing with a narrative of apprenticeship or, what comes to the same thing, a moral tale aimed at young men of an age to marry. Young men must be warned that relations with women, like relations with the animal world, must keep to the rules that society prescribes. Any failure of social precept will not be slow to bring serious consequences. Here two complementary and fundamentally related misdeeds are involved. Excessive ardor in the hunt, which upsets the equilibrium of the fauna, and excessive trust in the "foreign woman," which arises from ill-advised concession to sexual impulses and upsets human relations, both go back to the same source, a failure to observe the rules of moderation, self-mastery, and self-discipline, which must regulate relations between the realms of the living as much as relations between the sexes. These rules also imply that it is appropriate to keep a certain distance from the animal world as from women, especially non-kin. In this connection, a mother who is a beneficent relative and a "foreign" woman who harbors risks may be

allowed to stand in opposition.

The tale transmits overall a strongly norm-oriented social discourse, whose message emphasizes respecting collective law, suppressing one's impulses, and denying one's individual choices. As for the specifics of female roles, the tale proclaims the superiority of men's bonds with their mothers, the blood relative par excellence, over any bond they can create with a future wife, who is a potential source of threats.

Tale no. 2: The Sorceress Mother

The second tale (Meyer 1985:24-25 and several unpublished versions collected by Görög-Karady and Meyer; translated in appendix) partakes more than the first of an imaginary, fantastic universe and of unsaid or concealed words. It puts before us the character of the cannibal sorceress mother who initiates hostility towards her son or sons or his wife or wives. I point out at the start that this narrative, which has numerous variants in the Bambara-Malinké setting, has not been collected among neighboring ethnic groups like the Peul, Dogon, or Samo, despite the close relations maintained by Bambara-Malinké with them and the sizable literary and mythic patrimony they share. Where in the preceding tale the danger comes from outside, from the exogamous potential wife, here the "danger is in the house"; it comes from the main blood relative.

Knowing that many narratives are held in common by these other groups and the Bambara-Malinké, we may interpret the absence of this tale as a form of social censorship aimed at a subject considered iconoclastic. Such an interpretation seems particularly appropriate to the Peul: their excess of affective investment in the maternal image and in the mother-son relation is an obvious fact of their culture. We may justifiably assume that Peul ethics, the *pulaaki*, could not allow so blasphemous a representation of this supremely privileged relationship, even in a fictional work. However that may be, the non-uniform distribution of this plot in the region poses the fundamental problem of the social status of the tale. More specifically, how much liberty or license is allowed to leave the well-worn paths of social convention in oral literature aimed at public and collective consumption? This amount of liberty seems larger among the Bambara-Malinké than among the Peul in this case, but it might be different for other themes. Only a methodical comparative study of the narrative repertoires of each ethnic

group in contact in this region of Africa would allow an objective approach to this question, which is connected to the still vaster problem of "universal" themes or principles of selection that operate in each culture's repertoire, owing among other reasons to human migration and the intercultural transmission of cognitive goods. Here is a summary of the tale.

1. *Initial sequence, type A.* A mother-sorceress devours her children at birth. The lastborn son succeeds in escaping death and grows up; he arrives at circumcision, then marriage.

Initial sequence, type B. The mother-sorceress devours her daughters-in-law. The villagers refuse out of fear to give their daughter in marriage to the sorceress's son. An old woman, herself possessing "powers" (against sorcery), provides her daughter with a protective charm (a bead belt or magic powder).

2. The son warns his wife not to leave the village with his mother.

3. The mother attempts to kill her daughter-in-law in the village. She orders her to accompany her into the bush to collect wood. The girl protests but finally gives way to her mother-in-law's insistence.

4. In the bush, the mother-sorceress (version A) sends her daughter-in-law to the top of a tree, which she then begins to chop down. In version B, she tries to throw her daughter-in-law into the fire. Perceiving her mother-in-law's strategem, the girl causes a tree to grow by means of her magic powder, and takes refuge in it.

5. The husband's dog runs into the village to warn his master. From the top of the tree the wife calls her husband with a song of distress.

6. Now warned, the husband, with some other men, goes into the bush, kills his mother, and liberates his wife; he returns with her to the village.

Both variants of the initial sequence, which are widespread, are significantly distinct, though the difference does nothing to disturb the narrative economy of the tale. In the first variant, the protagonist's birth is preceded by the disappearance of several of his elder brothers, "eaten" by the mother. The hero will know a better fate, thanks entirely to the resistance he poses to his mother's scheme. In the second variant, the beginnings of the son's marriage are passed over in silence, in order to come to the mother-sorceress's attempts against the life of her daughter(s)-in-law. The first variant is richer, showing the divided character of the mother's attacks. The son defends himself by his natural attributes; his wife will defend herself with the aid of magic objects she has received,

as dowry or otherwise, from her own parents. In some versions the girl's mother is apostrophized as "sister sorceress." Thus magic power is opposed to a counter-power of the same order. The plot of the tale is clearly organized around the powers of sorcery.

To understand its import and significance, we should recall the general status of sorcery in West Africa and the beliefs attached to it. According to the observations of Marie-Cécile and Edmond Ortigues, "sorcery arises out of a conception of evil as a persecuting force coming from outside." A sorcerer is defined as one who "eats the flesh of the night." The fantasy connected to this act of devouring evolves in two directions: "Following the first theme, it is the sorcerer's double who invisibly devours the victim's double. A person under a sorcerer's influence feels inwardly emptied . . . . The sorcerer may [also] transform himself into an animal to frighten his victim and take his or her vital force . . . ." Second is the theme of anthropophagic meals. The sorcerers assemble at night by trees or at a crossroads and eat human flesh together. A person who for the first time, deliberately or through trickery, eats "the meat of the night" thereby contracts a debt. He will have to seize other victims and share their flesh with the other sorcerers who have become his confederates. A sorcerer's relation to his victim is unstable; it may undergo a reversal of roles. As for the female quality often attributed to sorcery, it seems linked "to the ambivalent position of woman on the hinge between nature and culture, between private life and public life" (Ortigues and Ortigues 1973:236, 242, 248-50).

According to psychoanalytic interpretation, anthropophagy corresponds to fantasies accompanying the oral, pre-genital phase of personality development. The literature presents quite an extended array of images embodying the various dimensions of cannibalism as oral incorporation: love, destruction, preservation in one's interior, and appropriation of the qualities of the object.

In our tale, the murderous oral aggressiveness of the mother-sorceress is aimed as much against her own son as against her daughters-in-law. This attitude may represent several facets of anthropophagic fantasies. One is the imposing presence of the abusive mother who refuses to admit the necessary separation between the one born and the one who gives birth to him, and who specifically sets herself against his independent sexuality by eliminating his partners. According to the analysis by Geneviève Calame-Griaule (1982:191), "the theme of being devoured by the mother . . . offers one

obvious interpretation: the ogress mother, or abusive mother in all senses of that word, whether she 'eats' her son sexually—an imaginary representation of incest with the accent on the mother's responsibility—or whether she 'eats' him in the affective sense by loving him too much and by reintegrating him into her breast, which is the surest way of preventing him from escaping her by becoming an adult and marrying." Devouring her son's wives is indeed an expeditious and radical way of removing her rivals. Calame-Griaule further poses the question whether the "incorporation" of daughters-in-law, who are also beautiful young women, should not also be interpreted as the mother's attempt at rejuvenation. At the fantasy level, she may be seeking to take the wife's place at her son's side. At least one Bambara tale, collected but not published by Gérard Meyer (1985), is known in which the mother goes so far as to act on the incestuous desire she feels: she slips into the place of her son's lover under cover of night. He commits suicide when he discovers the substitution, and his younger brother kills the guilty mother.

To clarify the possible meanings of the murderous impulses between mother and child in one direction or the other (not that the direction of the vector makes no difference), I turn to Gérard Meyer's ethnographic observations of the Bambara-Malinké. Many parallels, in fact, exist between beliefs whose validity is part of daily life-experience and the narrative matter of the tale. For example, it is not unusual among the Bambara-Malinké to accuse a young woman who has lost several young children of having "eaten" her offspring. Her husband is recognized as having the right to repudiate her and send her back to her family. Conversely, the same suspicion may be attached to children whose parents have died within a short time. Cases are also reported in which a grandmother is charged with having "eaten" her grandchildren. Maternal over-possessiveness is also often a fact of daily life. Malinké boys may find in it the source of their failures in school: "It's because of my mother; she doesn't want me to succeed" (cited by Meyer, personal communication). The recurrence of such testimonies suggests that young Malinké consider it quite possible that a mother could act in a supernatural way so as to keep them from extensive schooling, which would be bound to remove them from the family hearth on both geographic and sentimental planes.

What about collective representations attached to the family triangle of mother, son, and daughter-in-law, which is one of the classic figures of the "family complex" in virilocal societies (where the daughter-in-law is

integrated into the husband's family)? Relations of authority favor the mother-in-law from the beginning, because of the authority of her age. Augmenting that authority is the daughter-in-law's foreign status, which again contributes to depreciating her family position. This objective relation of domination assigns daughters-in-law to an isolated position in the husband's family and leads them to take their mothers-in-law as beings they must mistrust. It is within this relation that the tale is inscribed, in the imaginary mode of course, in real life.

The character of the adult son, long passive in the face of his mother's maneuvers, especially in type B versions, is clearly opposed to the dynamic, enterprising child-hero, capable of defending himself even against his mother, found in type A. This opposition runs parallel to social norms that grant greater liberty to an uncircumcised child, who is less bound by family status and even affective status, than to an adult living at his parents' home with his wife. Thus it is that in the face of her mother-in-law's hostile threats, the daughter-in-law can rely at first only on protection from her own lineage, which eventually takes the form of counter-sorcery. Certain variants, moreover, underscore the son's tendency to see the conflict as "women's business" in which he neither wants nor dares to play judge (Görög-Karady and Meyer 1984:50):

> "I will not come between her and you
> for she is your daughter-in-law,
> What you know, my mother-in-law knows too,
> She is at your disposal."

Yet it is vain for the hero to hope to keep clear of the intrigue involving the two women to whom his fate is linked. He will be forced into it by a consideration superior to individual options of his convenience or prudence. It is society, in fact, that intervenes in the story, by way of the mediating dog, public opinion, and the word of the elders.

This intervention is dramatized in such a way as to mark the conventional spatial separation between masculine and feminine worlds and the precise motives prompting the son-husband to decide on his action at the last minute. In one place we are present at a life-and-death struggle between women in the bush, the space of nature, an isolated place under the sway of occult forces that, we have seen, are often associated with femininity. At the very moment of this struggle in the bush, we see the son drinking in the

company of the elders in a prominent public place in the village. This peaceable, sociable men's space contrasts with the savage universe of women. The message about the conflict is carried by the dog, principal agent of rescue here as in the first tale. This function, of course, is customary for a dog, as the domestic animal in charge of guarding the hearth and protecting both the herd and his masters; thereby he is the helpful animal that is closest to man. This proximate relation to man is here expressed in a double register. First, his master understands his language. Second, more than his intermediary role as message-bearer, the dog acts on his own account when he takes part in the deadly conflict at the mother's expense. At that point he is the first to express common sense or public opinion. It is his intervention, upheld by the villagers' feeling, that will unleash the hero's decisive reaction. According to the version cited above (Görög-Karady and Meyer 1984:52):

> An old man said to him,
> "Jasun, your dog is speaking to you,
> you are sitting here drinking *dolo*
> while your mother goes about eating your wife."

The son needs the approval of the collectivity for an action so loaded with consequences: he is eliminating his very first blood relative in order to save his principal relative by marriage. Without the weight of public opinion, his act is only a monstrous matricide, which could never be legitimized by a desire to protect his wife. Thus the elders' intervention constitutes a moral justification of the last hour.

Here again society gives its preference to the bond fixed by the rules, which will contribute not only to consolidating harmony at the heart of the collectivity but also and especially to the continuance of society. The wife in this tale is chosen judiciously: by no means is she a "foreigner" of unknown, hence dangerous, forebears as in the first tale. By killing his mother, the son affirms his right to adult existence, in particular to sexuality and procreation, which are all to the advantage of an individual responding to society's values. The abusive mother, by contrast, disturbs social equilibrium by blindly cultivating her libidinal and antisocial impulses, which weaken the community by the loss of children and wives and put its continuance in danger.

Conclusion

In the end the two tales are congruent in imparting the identical morality, which affirms the primacy of collective needs and values over individual choices based on impulses, desires, or affinities whose legitimacy is not socially approved. While between the two narratives there is a reversal of the moral quality of the two female figures, the potential wife and the mother, they play their different roles under the regulation of approved norms. The "social discourse" dominates throughout, but the narrative structures and characters of different connotations in which it expresses itself have divergent connotations. The "speech of the imagination," in sum, only makes its contribution to the varied literary elaboration of what are rightly called social messages to the dominant discourse.

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

References

Calame-Griaule 1982 — Geneviève Calame-Griaule. "Une affaire de famille: réflexion sur quelques thèmes de 'cannibalisme' dans les contes africains." *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 6:171-202.

Camara 1978 — Sory Camara. *Paroles de nuit ou l'univers des relations familiales chez les mandenka*. Dissertation, Thèse d'Etat, Paris.

Diarra 1985 — Tieman Diarra. *Initiation, éducation et société. Les initiations de l'enfance à l'adolescence en pays bamanan de Bélédugu, Mali*. Dissertation, Thèse de 3ème cycle, Paris.

Görög-Karady 1970 — Veronika Görög-Karady. "L'arbre justicier." In *Le Thème de l'arbre dans les contes africains*. Ed. by Geneviève Calame-Griaule. Paris: Société d'Etudes Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de France. pp. 23-62.

Görög-Karady and Diarra 1979 — _____ and Abdoulaye Diarra. *Contes bambara du Mali*. Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France.

Görög-Karady and Meyer 1984 _____ and Gérard Meyer. *L'Enfant rusé et autres contes bambara du Mali et du Sénégal Oriental*. Paris: CILF.

Johnson 1986 John William Johnson. *The Epic of Son-jara: A West African Tradition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Luneau 1981 René Luneau. *Chants de femmes au Mali*. Paris: Luneau Ascots.

Meyer 1985 Gérard Meyer. *Tissages de paroles. Contes maninka du Niokholo (Sénégal)*. Typescript.

Niane 1971 D. Tamsir Niane. *Soundjata, ou l'épopée mandinque*. Paris: Présence Africaine.

Ortigues and Ortigues 1973 Marie-Cécile Ortigues and Edmond Ortigues. *Oedipe africain*. Paris: Plon.

Travele 1977 Moussa Travele. *Proverbe et contes bambara*. Orig. 1923. Paris: Geuthner.

Appendix 1

Siriman the Hunter (Görög-Karady and Diarra 1979:106-11)

I will tell the story of a hunter. This hunter exterminated animals. While he was still *bilakoro*, going hunting gray lizards with the other *bilakoro*, they killed five. By himself he killed ten. That was how it was the whole time he was *bilakoro*. He took his gun, went into the bush and killed animals. All this killing was bad for them.

The animals said, "Wait till we catch that hunter. If we see him, we'll have to find a way to kill him." The hare, who is cleverer than all the other bush animals, said, "It's not worth the trouble. Transform an animal, transform it into a beautiful woman and give her to the hunter." The hare went on, "When a man sees a beautiful woman, he can't sleep. We'll sneak up on him that way; otherwise we won't get him."

The man's name was Kariba, but because he was such a strong killer of animals they changed his name and called him Siriman. God willed that he go back to his house. He had killed two buffaloes and two antelopes. He went home. There was an antelope there.

The hare said, "Change her into a girl, give her to Siriman so we can catch him." They changed her into a girl. She went to Siriman's house. She didn't find Siriman. She went to the village chief. The village chief said to her, "Welcome. Siriman is out in the bush.

If you are good, you will be one of us. If you are not good, we will renounce you. God willing, I'll turn you over to Siriman's mother till he comes back." The village chief called the mother and turned the woman over to her.

Siriman came back. Coming back, Siriman killed two big antelopes and a *koba* and came home. When he arrived, his mother told him, "You have a wife, but I don't like her. I'm afraid of this woman. In fact I asked her about what she eats. She said she does not like anything except toads and plants. People's food can't be made up of toads and plants; that's why I'm afraid of her." Siriman answered, "It's no big thing, mother; everyone to his own kind of food. And if she settles here, she'll get used to our food." The girl settled there.

A week and seven days went by. The girl wanted to go home. On the seventh day, she said to the mother, "Today I am going home." The mother answered, "You're going home." At that moment Siriman said, "Tell me the thing you like best in the world. When you have spent two weeks here, I'll go with you to your parents' house." She answered, "All right," and added that she didn't want anything for the two weeks except dog. Siriman had some fine dogs. Siriman killed all his dogs, cooked them, and gave them to his wife. She ate them all.

Old women are smart. The mother gathered all the bones, put them in a vessel, and shut them away. Right. God made it that she was going to leave next day. That night, she addressed herself to Siriman: "Dear man, when I arrived at your house, your hunting of animals knew no bounds." She went on, "When you hunt an animal, what do you change into?" "When I attack an animal and if I know he wants to catch me, I change into a tree stump." She insisted, "After that, what do you change into?" "I change into grass and the animals walk over me." She asked again, "After that, what else?" "If I attack and miss them, and if I know I can't escape them, I change into a gray lizard and climb a big tree." She said, "Right, I see. Today I'm going home."

The mother said, "Go ahead, I'll have a *bilakoro* come with you. In case you come back, Siriman will go home with you." The girl said, "No, I can't be separated from Siriman." She got ready to leave with Siriman. Siriman said, "Mother, it's no harm, I'll go with her. If I go myself, that'll be a walk in the bush for me."

His wife said, "Now you're carrying your gun; are you going to kill me?" "No, I won't kill you." He left the gun. She went on, "You're carrying your knife; are you going to kill me?" "No, I won't kill you." He left the knife. She went on, "Now you're carrying your axe; are you going to kill me?" "No, I won't kill you, I'll leave it here." He followed his wife, emptyhanded. They walked and reached the bush. She asked, "Do you know this place?" "I've killed antelopes here," the man answered. Then they left. She asked, "Do you know this place?" "I've killed elephants here," he answered. Then they left. She asked, "Do you know this place?" "This is the place where I kill buffaloes." Then they left. They reached an endless bush with no bounds. She asked, "Do you know this place?" "This place, no, I don't know it," he answered. "Right, our house is here. Stay here, I'm going to relieve myself."

She put down her things. She entered the bush [where] Siriman couldn't hear. She put her hand on her head and shouted, "Animals of the bush, all come, I have Siriman in person, animals of the bush, all come, I have Siriman in person!" The animals rushed on Siriman. The whole bush filled up with animals. While they were getting ready to attack

him, Siriman transformed into an anthill. They said, "Hey, he disappeared!" The girl said, "Blow on the anthill, he is there, he told me himself." They blew on it and came up on him. He ran and transformed into grass. They said, "He disappeared." The girl said, "No, blow on it, he said he would change into grass." They arrived at a tree shoot, which ran away. She said, "Blow on it." They said, "He disappeared." She said again, "If he disappeared, he has transformed into a tree stump. Catch him, he has become the stump." They blew on the stump. Siriman transformed himself and became a gray lizard. They said, "He disappeared." She kept on, "Look hard for him. He said he would change into a gray lizard." They did not find Siriman. The girl said, "Look at the tree." There was a big tree at the door of the house; he had climbed it. She said, "The gray lizard you see there is Siriman. Warthog and Buffalo, cut down this bastard-mahogany and bring Siriman down so he falls to the ground and we'll catch him. He has made us suffer, he has made us suffer."

The hare said they ought to cut the tree with their teeth. They cut the tree, they cut it, they cut it. They were on the point of hacking it down and felling it. Siriman's mother took the axe and went out of the house to go fetch wood. As soon as she went out, she saw her son on the top of a tree.

Right, the song Siriman sang, you are going to sing it for me. Siriman sang:

Hmmm, black-mouth, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm, my red-foot, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm, mothers, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today

The mother took out the axe. She said, "That's my son's voice." She went on, "My son is caught in a trap by animals." With the little wood she had gathered, she went quickly and made a fire. She gathered the dogs' bones and put them on the fire in a pot. She gathered the dogs' bones and put them on the fire. The water boiled. All the dogs came back to life and stood up. She said, " Right, your master is caught in a trap by animals in the bush, come, go to him." She left the house with the dogs.

As soon as they reached the door, Siriman sang:

Hmmm, black-mouth, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm, red-foot, yo
Hmmm, *kabajan* yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm, my mothers, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today

The mother said, "Right, that's your master's voice, go that way." The dogs

hurried, they went forward. They went on and got to the tree. At the moment when the tree was about to fall, Siriman saw the head one of the dogs and shouted:

Hmmm, black-mouth, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm, red-foot, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm, *kabajan* yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today
Hmmm, my mothers, yo
Hmmm, animals are going to kill me today

The dogs rushed on the animals. The ones they killed they killed, the ones they let live they let live. They brought down Siriman; they brought him down off the tree.

That's why, ever since that day, you must not argue with your mother. If Siriman had not given everything away, the animals wouldn't have hunted him. I put this tale back where I found it.

Appendix 2

The Sorceress and Her Daughter-in-Law (Görög-Karady and Meyer 1984:49-55)

Right. I'm going to tell the story of an old woman. When she gave birth to a child, she ate it. Yes, when she gave birth to a child, she ate it. Right. She had a son. The day of his birth, when she sat down next to her son, she gave him a kick. She said, "Eh , little boy, aren't you asleep?" "Mother, if you give me the breast, I'll go to sleep." She gave him the breast; he went back to sleep. In the middle of the night, she raised her hand and gave him a hit. The child did the same. "Eh, little boy, are you really not asleep?" "Mother, if you take your hand away, I'll go to sleep." She took her hand away and her son did the same.

Right. Things stayed like that. The boy grew up. They fought every night, every night they fought. But the sorceress didn't succeed in eating her son.[1] The boy became a young man; he got circumcised.[2] She chose a wife for him, but she ate her. Then all the villagers slipped away: they would not give their daughters to that boy, for his mother was a sorceress.

Right. Her co-sister, another sorceress, had only one daughter. She gave her to the

[1] The son too possesses some power, either trickery or sorcery, that enables him to give blow for blow back to his mother.

[2] Literally "[became] a person." It is at the moment of circumcision that one becomes a fully recognized person in society.

boy. Yes, she gave her to him. Then the young man's mother decided she would eat her daughter-in-law. The son answered, "It's not serious. I will not come between her and you, for she is your daughter-in-law. What you know, my mother-in-law knows too, she is at your disposal." She tried to tempt her daughter-in-law by every means; no result. In fact, the girl was protected. Her mother had given her a girdle of *gris-gris*, and her body was covered with it. When the mother came, the daughter-in-law cut one [bit of *gris-gris*], and the sorcery did not succeed. Every time she came, the daughter cut a bit, and the sorcery did not succeed; it failed. One day she wanted to entice the girl; she said to her that they would go fetch wood. The girl answered, this was her answer, "I'm just washing my kitchen things." " Right, but first we're going to go fetch wood." "I'm cold," the girl protested.

But they went all the same. The sorceress saw a big dry *cangara*[3] she wanted to get the girl to climb it, telling her to cut some branches. "Mother, I can't climb." "Sure, you'll climb. If you don't climb the tree I choose, I'll eat you." The girl climbed up the tree, she tried to cut wood, but she couldn't. The sorceress took the axe, the axe for sorcery, stopped down there just beneath the girl, and began to cut the trunk of the tree.

I must say that her son's name was Jasun. The mother was called Nasun. Right. The name of the girl's mother was Nyeba. Right. There she was, cutting down the tree. When it was going to fall, the girl cut one thread from her girdle, and the tree straightened up. Now the son's little dog was lying at the foot of the tree looking at the girl. She had used almost all her *gris-gris*. She began to sing:

Eh Jasun, eh Jasun!
Jasun's mother really eats humans,
Jasun's mother really eats humans,
Jasun's mother is a sorceress, it's true!
If you are named Jasun, I won't let you do it.
If you are named Jasun, I won't let you do it.
I am from the Kusu family,
I am from the Kusu family,
Kusu ba Kan liba Kusa Kusa[4]
Kusu ba Kan liba Kusa Kusa

The girl cut one thread; the tree straightened up. But the girdle on her body was almost falling off; there were only two threads left.

The girl put her hands on her head. She cried from the top of the tree:

Eh Jasun, eh Jasun!
Jasun's mother really eats humans,
Jasun's mother really eats humans,

[3] A tree that burns quickly.

[4] These lines seem to lack meaning. They contain a pun on the word *Kusa*.

If you are named Jasun, I won't let you do it.
If you are named Jasun, I won't let you do it.
I am from the Kusu family,
I am from the Kusu family,
Kusu ba Kan liba Kusa Kusa
Kusu ba Kan liba Kusa Kusa

Right. The little dog began to run. He knew that there were almost no more sons, that there was only one left. When this last one would be cut down, the girl would die. So the dog left. Jasun was engaged in drinking *dolo*. Many old men were sitting around him. The little dog ran up and lay down next to Jasun:

E wewu wewe wewu
e wewu wewe wewu
e wewu wewe wewu
e wewu wewe wewu

One old man said to him, "Jasun, your dog is speaking to you. You are sitting here drinking *dolo* while your mother is busy eating your wife." "Hmmm," said Jasun, "I see!" He got up, loaded his gun, took a club, and followed the little dog. They ran, they ran. The last thread of the girdle was already cut off and cast. The daughter cried:

Eh Jasun, eh Jasun!
Jasun's mother really eats humans,
Jasun's mother really eats humans,
Jasun's mother is a sorceress, it's true!
If you are named Jasun, I won't let you do it.
If you are named Jasun, I won't let you do it.
I am from the Kusu family,
I am from the Kusu family,
Kusu ba Kan liba Kusa Kusa
Kusu ba Kan liba Kusa Kusa

While her mother was going to cut down the tree, Jasun arrived and placed himself behind her. He said, "Mother, here you are, aren't you?" "Sure I'm here." "Mother, it's really you, isn't it?" "Sure, it's really me." Then he said, "But today is your last day!" He took his gun, aimed, and fired. The bullet hit his mother in the head; it came out of her skull. The sorceress fell backward. He struck her with the axe handle. With his arm he held up the tree that was about to fall, got his wife down, and went back with her to his house. There where I got the tale I leave it.

Oral Tradition 9/1 (1994): 83-112

Freedom to Sing, License to Insult: The Influence of *Haló* Performance on Social Violence Among the Anlo Ewe

Daniel K. Avorgbedor

Introduction

Contemporary approaches to performance in folklore, ethnomusicology, and anthropology define and explain performance events in relation to their sociocultural and symbolic universe, and according to contextual and human dynamics. Although these studies are capable of generating important information on the relationships between artistic events and the larger world in which they are situated, there still remains the problem of a precise determination of the boundaries of genres. The factor of genre distinction is important because it can increase our understanding of the social construction of performance, or the notion of cultural performance (Singer 1972, MacAloon 1984). The experience of performance as a social process and the blending of genres are two important characteristics identifying performance in Africa, as confirmed by Margaret Drewal in her review of performance studies in Africa (1991:64). However, work in these two areas is incipient. It is, therefore, the purpose of this essay to further our understanding of performance by exploring the unique ways in which the *haló* of the Anlo-Ewe not only exhibits social conditions but also structures and qualifies them. In this study the multidimensional aspect of *haló* will be highlighted and explained both as an aesthetic strategy and as an integral component in constructing the social significance of *haló* performance. In order to achieve this dual end, the study will focus on selective musico-artistic and social elements that distinguish the performance from other Anlo-Ewe musical or performance types, with focus on performance as a medium for generating and escalating social violence. Finally, the study will summarize *haló*

performance as celebration and affirmation of life, and as a social experience that draws on artistic framing in the consummation of social reality. This approach will thus increase our awareness of the ontological and symbiotic relationships between performance and its sociocultural environment.

Historical background

Haló is musical-dramatic performance popular among the Anlo-Ewe, from ca. 1912 until its official proscription in 1960.[1] The etymology of the name *haló* (*ha* + *ló*, song + proverb) shows three related definitions that cumulatively stress the social consequences of *haló*, that is, the spectacular, the unusual, the precarious, havoc, danger, or challenge.[2] *Haló* can be summed up as a multi-media event, a sociomusical drama that involves songs of insult, dance, drumming, mime, poetry, spoken forms, costume, and a variety of visual icons. Although the music is constructed mainly along Anlo-Ewe models, there are special observances, devices, and techniques that are unique to this genre. As will be elaborated later, these devices and related art forms are employed primarily to effect purposes of aggression and violence, and to establish musical superiority. There are rules and procedures that are shared and observed spontaneously in each performance, and most of these procedures are directed toward achieving coherence in performance and toward minimizing on-the-spot violence.[3]

A performance usually involves two villages or two wards from one village, and is characterized by direct or comic forms of provocation, aggravation, and sung and spoken insults, which are sometimes exaggerated through dramatic enactments. Each *haló* context is a highly provocative and emotional one, with the two factions and their supporters competing at

[1] Records from the National Archives also show that several musical genres have previously been banned in other societies in Ghana on the consent of the chief(s) and the colonial officers. The *haló* ban is in accordance with *Acts of Ghana, Criminal Code Act 29, S 295, 1960.*

[2] There are three basic definitions: *"halòlò"* (big song), *"haló"* (song-proverb), and *haló* (it is song!).

[3] Violence both takes place on the spot and continues long after the performance.

physical, verbal, and musical levels. The numerous police arrests that result from the performance and its related events are further indications of the grave and wider social ramifications of *haló*. This search for superiority in both physical and musical domains is also often accompanied by magical practices and related machinations against opponents. These practices also frequently involve the acquisitions of "singing gods" (supernatural powers with whom the sources of musical creativity are identified). In addition, individuals or groups also take precautions by *fortifying* themselves spiritually against enemy attacks (physical or spiritual). The sociodramatic aspect of *haló* is thus intensified through the physical confrontations, the musical and verbal exchanges, and involvement with the supernatural realm. The performance can, therefore, be described as a unique context for reevaluating and qualifying social and interpersonal relations. Statistics resulting from recent fieldwork show that about 88% of Anlo-Ewe towns have some history of *haló*, and that about 40% of factions have engaged in the genre more than once. These figures, the official ban, and the lingering of veiled forms of insult in contemporary practices confirm the social significance of the art form in Anlo-Ewe society.

The most common precipitates of *haló* are: (1) taking of someone's wife from a different ward, (2) derogatory remarks on the music of another ward, (3) personal insults communicated directly or vaguely in song, and (4) interpersonal hostilities and aggressive posture due to the factor of social competition. Today there are social and musical incidents that intimate *haló*, but these contemporary examples are quickly contained by the traditional rulers in order to avoid breaking the law. Since each performance bears a cumulative effect, exacerbates a previous one, and carries consequences of forms of physical confrontation outside the performance context, one cannot simply describe *haló* as a tension-relieving ritual. The features outlined above would, therefore, suggest unique relationships between the performance and the social milieu, and that violence is central to the definition of *haló*.

Anlo-Ewe Social Framework

The traditional society of the Anlo-Ewe, including government and politics, is generally described as a centralized one, with an official headquarters and a paramount chief. The administrative and political

powers and functions of the paramount office are invoked and acknowledged in ceremonial and parastatal contexts that are related to the welfare of the Anlo state and Ghana nation as a whole.[4] The political and social infrastructure is also articulated and exemplified in the four subdivisions (Đusi or We, Mia, Adontri or Dome, and Lasibi or Klobo) of the Anlo state.[5] Each subdivision has its own head or chief, and these heads owe allegiance to the paramount chief, Awoamefia Togbui Adeladza II, and to his assistant, Agbotadua ("field marshal"). The Anlo society is basically patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal, and the privileges, responsibilities, and achievements of each *tó* (ward) are articulated and celebrated at social and musical levels. A village or town is further divided into a number of wards, each of which has its own heads or leaders (*tokɔmegãwo*, plur.), male and female. Musical participation is among the main social expectations, and since music is an important medium for construction and exhibiting group solidarity and social achievement, the factor of competition seems to constitute an indispensable trait among the performing groups of the different wards. As we have already noted, the element of competition encourages *haló*.

Forms of Anlo-Ewe musical organization also reflect and support the social hierarchy and patterns summarized above, and ensembles are also formed according to sex, age, occupation, and special interest grouping.[6] The system of government and politics described above does not, however, guarantee a trouble-free society. First of all, the existence of such superstructures represents an overt recognition of the possibilities of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts and other social problems. The division of villages into wards/performing groups is, as noted above, one of the inherent structures that is articulated and transformed into a catalyst that encourages group conflict. Any act, symbolic or real, that infringes on the territorial integrity and group solidary of one ward is thus quickly interpreted as a challenge or test.

---

[4] Villages and towns, however, exercise a certain amount of autonomy in many areas of life.

[5] See the "Appendix: Guide to Pronunciation and Transliteration" below, for the values of underlined and other letters.

[6] See Fiagbedzi 1977 for details on the musical types and social organization.

In familial and interpersonal relationships, disagreements and misunderstandings lead to open quarrel. Apart from the use of verbal insults to correct and direct anger at children, the exchange of insults resides at the core of conflicts among adults. These insults often escalate into physical fights, from which long-term interpersonal hostilities are also generated. Due to the influence of the Anlo-Ewe extended kinship system, a conflict originally involving two individuals thus quickly assumes wider social dimensions. Families are also involved because the Anlo-Ewe system of insulting allows the inclusion of relatives as a form of exacerbating the affective impact of the insult. Although there are guidelines and regulations from village elders and chiefs cautioning that individuals register their complaints for official redress and mediation, individuals can still take the case to an elder who has been endowed with the right to mediate minor differences. This elder, who is also of high moral and social disposition, arbitrates the case with the help of a coterie of other men of good repute. When the case is opened for the village chief, the judgment, referred to as *nyadɔdɔ* or *vɔnudɔdrɔ* terminates with some form of punishment and retribution, minor and symbolic when compared with the severer result expected when government law enforcement agencies are involved. A final judgment does not, however, rule out the possibility of a repeat of the offense.

One other source of aggression and violence over which the system of rule has limited legal control concerns a situation where individuals attribute the death of a person to the practice of black magic by an imagined or real opponent. In many cases the mishap is perceived as a collective and calculated attempt to undermine and reduce the manpower of the opponent ward. On occasions of some deaths, effort is made to determine the cause or to find a reasonable explanation. The causes and persons behind the death of a person are, however, not easily determined with precision, even in modern civil lawsuits. Today, when a person is drowned, for example, an autopsy in a government hospital is sought. But in spite of medical reports certifying the type and cause of death, the Anlo-Ewe people do not rule out the possibility of the influence of an adverse magical practice by an enemy, who might well be a lifelong friend of the deceased. In this case the death is interpreted as a case of violence, and this cosmological stance is not much different from what has been reported from other parts of

sub-Saharan African societies.[7] In place of a formal system of inquiry into the causes of the death, the people allow (or compel) the suspect murderer to undergo a ritual ordeal known as *agbadada*. Results of the ordeal, which often confirm the suspicions, are sometimes contested by persons who sympathize with the suspect. Whether the suspicion and allegations are confirmed or not, the factions additionally express their opinions (attacks and counterattacks) through song composition and performance. These performances and singing of songs of insult finally develop into the the *haló* tradition, which may last for a month or linger up to a year or two.

A Prelude to *Haló*

In the survey on the Anlo-Ewe politics and government, we saw how individuals take advantage of the medium of song in aggravating situations of conflict. Let us now briefly examine three common causes of *haló*: wife-taking, interward marriage, and homicide through black magic. While interward marriage is neither forbidden nor sanctioned by any law or regulation, it is considered as an act of threat and challenge to the ward from which the wife is taken. Often these interward marriages raise no issue of contention, but when the incidence increases, then the ward most affected begins to express concern. The concern usually takes the form of the casting of insinuations and veiled attacks in song. The anger, provocation, and challenge are directed toward either an individual opponent or his/her ward as a group. Since the example of marriage across ward boundaries does not represent a particular infraction, there is, therefore, no official channel capable of condemning and punishing the act. The individual thus begins to seek and create his/her own means of vindication and revenge through song.

The employment of song as a medium of redress is a central factor in deciding the gravity, type, and social ramifications of the conflict. This is the case especially when the loyal group of the complainant lends support through a wardwide musical communication of the grievances and aggressive intents. This group support, in turn, aggravates the challenge to

[7] Cf. Heald 1986, Parkin 1986. There are different burial customs observed according to type of death, including that caused by violence.

the other ward, and counterattacks become possible.[8] A wider social dimension of the original conflict is thus created and the entire village becomes an active participant. It is at this juncture that the village chiefs (or chiefs from neutral villages) take the responsibility to call for peace and order, including arrests.

Related to the example of interward marriage is that of wife-snatching, in which a man forcibly takes the wife of another man of a different ward. This is one of the serious threats, challenges, and aggravations against an individual and the ward. Since polygamy is an inherent aspect of the social system and traditional marriages do not require certification from a civil court, traditional authorities are limited in the extent to which they can interfere with such cases. In wife-taking the implications are serious and numerous. The act is perceived as a more direct and assertive form of aggravation that mars the social morale and group prestige of the individual affected. It is also construed as an act premeditated to test, verify, and disdain the collective integrity of the victim's ward. A reaction in a form of counterattack through song performance is therefore the immediate response. There are, however, a few exceptions where, due to the gross outcomes of *haló*, a group would hold back a counterattack, although this reservation would be construed negatively by the aggressors to their own advantage.

Another example concerns the manner in which individual song composers from the different wards perceive themselves in relation to others. Apart from competition at the group level, there is also competition among individual composers due to the search for musical superiority, a situation that increases tension among these composers from different wards. These composers often take opportunity of the song medium to project their individual images through boast, challenge, and provocation. For instance, the following is an excerpt from a pre-*haló* song:

EXAMPLE 1
A
1. Miga tsɔ gbɔsusu mianɔ glodzo domme o — You should not glory in your bigger number

[8] This influence of group support on violence is well noted in the following observation (Burma 1972:2): "Nothing seems more obtrusive in modern society than the dependence of individuals upon groups as means of reading their ends and the collective context in which ends and means assume importance."

2. Adidi le vie ha wɔ edada wo kudɔ	An ant is tiny but performs its mother's burial
3. Be "Aklika mate go gbe	Says "Aklika which you cannot drag outside
4. Ne hawovi te wo kpo dzi natee bali me"....	If you peer drags you uphill, drag him/her downhill"[9]....
5. Miva made rakontee nami	Come, let me explain things to you
6. Mia dze sii be henɔ xoxoe yae menye, hee.	So that you know I am, indeed, an experienced composer.

B
...nukpɔmm, kese sie woxɔ adiba le....
...Gazing, like a monkey from whom pawpaw has been snatched....

In Ex. 1 line A1 there is there is direct reference to the larger size of the opponent ward; this reference is constructed to provoke the opponent. In line A2 the composer and his group accept their status as encoded in the analogy and metaphorical construction. Line A3 introduces a boast of strength, and line 4 completes it by asserting an ability to match an enemy in a duel. In line A6 the composer boasts of his skills and experience, which are calculated to exacerbate anger. The whole text is carefully constructed in such a way that it speaks to the individual (composer for the other ward) and the whole enemy group; this use of second person plural is a common technique in *haló*, which masks the individual addressed and at the same time provides a context for wider interpretation at the ward level.

B is a momentary interjection of an insult in a normal song composition, a technique common in the non-*haló* corpus. The unexpected appearance of this text, although brief, carries much weight and potential for inciting *haló* because of the depth of the insult (personal physical features are among the most affective and incisive according to the *haló* and general Anlo-Ewe system of insult). This example of exchange of aggressive gestures finally leads to full-scale *haló* with diverse and grave consequences for both individuals and the society as a whole. Although the composer is basically negotiating his identity among the many vying for social recognition, the situation gets out of hand as they vent anger and trade tirade, boast, and insult through song. For example, the above

[9] This is a quotation and appropriation of the qualities of a particular "drinking" name. The psychology and power in the *ahanoŋkɔ* or drinking name performance is fully described in Avorgbedor 1983.

excerpts were partly responsible for the two-month *haló* between two wards of a particular village in 1957, which lasted for three months.[10]

Once a *haló* is begun, a vicious cycle is initiated, with each subsequent performance exacerbating anger and violence, until mediation by official intervention. In some cases two factions cease on their own accord without an intervention from a third party. Even when overt hostile activities have ceased, however, violence is continued in the spiritual realm, where opponents secretly practice black magic against each other. This post-*haló* activity is also true of those *haló* events that were formally ended. Deaths are associated with these evil practices, and further suspicions are generated. These suspicions lead to further violence, in both the spiritual and physical domains, and suspects may be made to undergo a ritual ordeal, as described earlier. Songs are again an important social vehicle through which suspects are addressed indirectly. Although *haló* is no longer a sanctioned medium for expressing revenge, the composition and performance of songs of insinuation continue as an integral part of the regular musical tradition. For example, examine the following contemporary non-*haló* song text:[11]

EXAMPLE 2

A

...Kpevɔ̃ be nyɔnu adzetɔwoe	...Kpevɔ̃ says the witch
Kakam de ye nu dua me haa	She is provoking me, in the town
Ye wotsɔ ye*f*e nyavõe	And she took the evil report about me
Gahe yi de asia me, Malata....	Into the market, Malata....[12]

B

Kinkaviawo, nye dzum loo	Kinka performers, (she) is insulting me
Nyɔnuvia ye dzum a	The girl was insulting me really
Nyɔnuvia nɔ ye dzum le atsiawo te	The girl was insulting me under the tree
Be yeme see oo hee....	(She) thought I did not hear it....

[10] This particular example comes from Seva, the author's hometown; other examples are available in Kukuiah 1979.

[11] This song text is an excerpt from the author's dissertation (Avorgbedor 1986). The text was collected among urban Anlo-Ewe performing groups in Accra.

[12] Malata is a popular open market in the sector of Accra known by the same name where many Ewe women do their trading.

Kinkaviawo medi tsa yi a*f*eawo me	Kinka performers, I visited the house
Atago kple dada wonɔ monye kpɔm	Atago and her mother were looking into my face
Modi mo nawo wo katã woto mo deka	Their faces looked similar, they all had the same face
Atago mo lɔbɔ ye do wode gbe....	Atago with long mouth spoke her native tongue....

Performance Strategies and Modes of Aggression

Song Composition and Performance Style

Haló is a multimedia event that begins with formal composition and learning of new songs (they may include contrafacta). Since songs constitute the primary medium of communicating insults, care is taken at the level of creativity and performance. The textual material of each ward composer is built mainly on selections of negative private histories and biographies, specific insults about the individual opponent's physique, and fictive constructions. Ward elders are largely responsible for providing information on individual biographies, and the composer works out the material, drawing on the regular Anlo-Ewe melody, drumming, and general performance models. Since the nature of *haló* assumes the form of attack and counterattack, there is greater pressure on composers to come forth with fresh songs in response to attacks or previous performances by the opponent group. The compositional process also follows the general practice of intense night rehearsals where the songs, dance, dramatization, and drumming type are first learned in secrecy. This secret dimension of the rehearsals is closely guarded in the *haló* context because of the highly provocative nature of the textual material—a targeted individual would want to disrupt the practice sessions prematurely and out of revenge, thus also undermining the aesthetic element of surprise that is part of the Anlo-Ewe musical tradition.[13]

Before a new song is performed publicly in the normal musical situation, a special session known as *havɔlu* is held in secret. In this session allusions, metaphorical references, and facets of personal biography and

[13] For further information on this aspect of the debut of new ensembles, see Ladzekpo 1971.

history not commonly available, which are contained in the song texts, are explained to members of the performing group. In the context of *haló* the *havɔlu* is re-created with added dimensions of meaning and affect; it is then known as as *hagɔmededede* (lit., exposing the inside of song), which will be elaborated later.

The song component of the integrated art form is in the traditional through-composed form, consisting of *hadada* and *tatɔtrɔ,* performed in an ABA format.[14] In the standard drumming types such *adzida, kinka,* or *dunekpoe,* two song types are usually employed: a group of shorter and repetitive ones for the full-scale drumming, and a group of extended ones with a minimal amount of repetition (either of segments of a line unit or whole phrases). This second category, known as *hatsiahawo*, is performed in both *haló* and ordinary contexts during the segment of the drumming known as *hatsiatsia* (lit., main song and stylization).

In *hatsiatsia,* as the name suggests, only the extended song types are performed, to the accompaniment of bells *(gankogui* and *atoke*) and gesticulation. Due to the highly coded contents, a minimum of sound and dance accompaniment enables the audience to focus attention on the text.[15] The structural design and procedures involved in *hatsiatsia* are also manipulated toward an effective transmission of the song to the audience. A select group with lead singers (male and female, in pairs) perform the songs during *hatsiatsia* counterclockwise, within the performance arena circumscribed by the audience.[16] The counterclockwise movement presents shifting visual orientation and enables different pairs (lead singers) to take turns in presenting personal renditions of the same song. This spatial and visual design is also underscored by the *hamekoko* (gestural interpretation) of the lead singer, and in *haló* additional narrative and dramatic devices are employed to enhance the communication of insults and to accent humor.

Additional strategies are adopted in the *haló hatsiatsia:* temporarily halting the performance to allow the insertion of spoken comments, and most importantly the verbal exegesis of the song texts, including

---

[14] See Anyidoho 1983 and Avorgbedor 1986 for full description of the song form.

[15] *Hagbe* or melody is also important in the overall consideration of the effectiveness of the song.

[16] See Avorgbedor 1985 for details.

explanation of allusions and metaphorical constructions. When this segment resumes and the *halóga* (the bell accompaniment identified with *haló* songs) sounds, both performers and audience are usually fully alert and their emotional levels and expectations heightened. Lead singers provide vivid and verbal interpretations *(hagɔmededede)* of the song texts and improvise new text and comments. This is the moment when exaggerations are also appropriate, coupled with selective enactment or dramatization of specific scenes. At this stage audience reaction is influenced most by humor, satire, and exaggeration. Depending on the weight of the false allegations and insults, the opponent may react violently and in physical confrontation with the singer. This highly volatile nature of *haló* is explained in part by the nature of the rules and protocol that factions must observe in order to ensure smooth performance and to support the overall aesthetic impact of the music. These rules and procedures, unique to *haló*, are described below.

Performance Rules and Procedures

There are no written rules in this oral tradition, but performers and factions observe certain formalities in a spontaneous fashion at interward and intervillage levels, as stated earlier. The most significant of these formalities can be reformulated as:[17]

1. The target opponent or a close relative must be physically present to provide the audience
2. The warring groups must perform in turns
3. The audience must be demarcated from the performers/ performance arena by a rope to guard against unexpected and violent reaction from audience
4. The target opponent, or surrogate, must stand on a raised platform or chair to facilitate identification when his/her insults are being performed
5. The two groups must perform before an impartial judge, usually a chief from a neutral village
6. The songs must be "buried" after a winner has been determined

[17] These rules are often broken when opponents can no longer contain their anger.

and differences settled

In order to allow maximum effect and attention from the opponent group, simultaneous performances are discouraged, except in a few cases where a counterattack is also strategically calculated to subvert the efficacy of each group's performance. In this case the two groups would perform, in disregard of convention, either in the same spot or in each ward's own public arena. Such simultaneous performances thus deprive each other of the necessary audience; hence the purposeful encouragement of disorder and defiance at this level of the conflict.[18] Fieldwork investigation also documents cases where targeted individuals were incensed to such a degree that they broke through the line safeguarding the performers from the audience, sometimes with a weapon. The rule that opponents must identify themselves as listed above not only tests the tolerance levels, but also allows the rest of the audience to judge the relevance and applicability of the insult or biographical text. The involvement of a third party in resolving the conflict also explains the factor of musical competition and hence principles of musical excellence.

Haló events take varying lengths of time, sometimes up to a year to resolve. While the conflict may dissolve naturally without any formal cessation, the convention is for the two warring groups to perform before a predetermined judge in a different village. After pronouncing the winner, the village chief (invariably the judge) then symbolically buries the songs in the ground and warns both parties to cease from *haló* acts. The two groups are fined and sanctions imposed. The ritual also portends great personal disaster should one resume the performance of *haló* songs at any time thereafter. Incidents of previous arrests, ritual sanction, and the government ban combine to provide an effective deterrent for anyone who might want to resume the performance of *haló*, either the total event or the just the songs. The elements that are considered in determining a winner include a wide range of musical, poetic, dramatic, and social factors. In the case of the latter, the criteria involved may not be wholly relevant and may therefore influence the ultimate decision from the judges. The proper observance of the rules and procedures outlined above are also essential to the quality of the outcome, and they also influence decisions in the several

[18] Sometimes an opponent group mounts a simultaneous performance to heighten the moment of challenge and aggravation.

domains of the event.

Increasing the Affective Impact of Insult through the Multimedia

In general many of the techniques, materials, and devices employed in *haló* are unique and are capable of inducing specific social responses. The integration of the related art forms is also a special feature of *haló,* as mentioned earlier. We shall now briefly examine samples of these characteristics, noting their impact on audience response and social violence.

Poetic Devices

Scholars have commented on the importance of the skillful employment of poetic speech in African communities; the Anlo-Ewe are not excepted (Anyidoho 1983, Peek 1981, Yankah 1991). Among the Anlo-Ewe the spectacular musical and socio-dramatic context of *haló* provides further justification for the use of highly artificial or decorative language. Judges of *haló* performance therefore pay great attention to poetic language in addition to elements such as good voice quality, level of participation, ensemble coordination, specialized musical skills, and judicious employment of set devices and structures.

Analysis of selected song texts, such as Example 4, shows the following prosodic features: proverbs and idiomatic expressions, metonymy, hyperbole, analogy, ideophone, reduplication, parallelism, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, onomatopeia, apostrophe, and the use of graphic imagery in narrative lines. Proverbs are manipulated in three ways: whole quotation, paraphrase, and original. Interpreted within the cultural framework, the proverb exhibits the wisdom and language skill of the artist, and it also widens the cognitive and affective dimensions of the proverb context.

While the proverb is employed sparingly and at strategic moments to allow maximum aesthetic and incisive communication, the role of simile and related glosses resides at the core of Anlo-Ewe tradition of insult. The simile is employed in the intensified form of insult and insulting known as *dzuvafofo*, subtechniques of which are referred to as *dzumamla* (lit.,

weaving of insult) and *dzutɔtɔ de ame ŋu* (lit., linking insult to another person). The insult phraseology and performance structure also approximates the pattern common to the Anlo-Ewe nickname system known as *ahanoŋkɔ*.[19] For example, here are two verbal insults, *A* first performed by one aggressor, and then *B* by two persons (an aggressor and his/her supporter in insulting a third person):

EXAMPLE 3

A: 1. Emo ʋeʋe wò abe 'kagae ku de adukpodzi ene
Your smelling face like that of a dead vulture at a garbage dump
2. Ekɔ tsralawò abe Klu *f*e abɔ ene
Your tall neck like Klu's arm

B: *aggressor*	*supporter*
1. Emo ʋeʋe wò	abe kagae ku de adukpodzi ene
2. Ekɔ tsralawò	abe Klu *f*e abɔ ene

Since the insult pattern is shaped by them, the artistic constraint of the song mode pattern *A* is favored. In addition, these samples are subject to further linguistic and poetic elaboration: for example, item 2 might be rephrased for added impact: *ekɔtsrala/ne 'kpoe nabube Klu tɔe* [Tall neck / if you see it you will think it's Klu's] (see other examples in 4A-B, 5). Both the *dzutɔtɔ de ame ŋu* and the *dzumamla* (especially by a supporter) serve to widen the social dimension of the conflict through the linking process and the supporters' involvement. In *haló* performance these devices and structures are explored and intensified. Although the song and dramatic modes predominate, the immediate social relevance of the performance encourages the interjection of verbal comments and insults. Thus after a song a two, a pause is observed to allow the re-creation of spoken insults in the pattern described above.[20]

EXAMPLE 4

A:

...Axxx tsɔ aʋa gbɔlo	Axxx then took raw penis
Gakplɔ nyɔnuwo do	Then pursued the women

[19] See Avorgbedor 1985 for further information on the name system.

[20] Due to the highly sensitive matter contained in the song texts all personal names mentioned have been replaced with letters of the alphabet followed by xxx.

Akpɔtɔ vie woado figbe	Very soon he will become a thief
Bxxx lɔfii madi bolobolo tsi	Bxxx tall thin like uncircumcised penis
Totrui, madi avɔkli ye ku de kedzi	Twisted like a dead *avɔkli* on a sand-top
Me*f*i ganɛ	Angled buttocks
Goglome lakpɛ	Thin narrow inner face
Madi aditsi *f*e goglome ene	Like a monkey's inner face
Yae ŋtɔe dzro ha vɛ	He himself courted song
Nayi Cxxx gbɔ nade kuku	You should visit Cxxx to beg him
Nye me lɔ̃ be hanye nadzu Bxxx *f*omeawo	I wouldn't allow my song to insult Bxxx's family
Yaeŋtɔe tsi bome hee	She herself became useless
Wotsɔ koloa de du gbadza	Open wide her vagina to the whole town
Ame katã nɔ mɔmɔm	Everybody was having sex with her
Amenublanui yae woe	She is to be pitied.
Bxxx lee, amenublanuie wɔwò	Bxxx! You deserve pity
Dada Dxxx yae mɔ aʋa la ʋuu	Her mother Dxxx she had sex with men for long
Wokplɔ de xɔ de Xavi	People locked her up in Xavi
Fofoavia ganɔ mɔmɔm	Having sex with her own brother
Wodzi ʋi blibo de me	They even had a child in it
Evi ŋgɔgbia zu fofoʋiawo tɔ	The firstborn is her brother's
Numa ga zu nukpe nawo	This then became a shameful deed
Yee wodzi Exxx	Yes, they gave birth to Exxx
Wova dro de goku gbɔ	S/he came to *goku*
Yee wodzi Bxxx[i]	Yes, they gave birth to Bxxx[i]
Wodze Abɔxoxo la dzi	She fell on old Abɔ
Kplaxakplaxa, wòle dudzi de aʋa ŋu	*Kplaxkplaxa* (onom.), she raced after penis
Ati ŋe de agɔme nɛ	"Stick" got broken in her vagina
Bxxx *f*e atadeka xatsa de aʋa la ŋu	Bxxx's one leg got wrapped around the penis
Woave gbɔgblɔ ge na emɔlawo be	Then she began to tell her lovers
"Tokunɔ mesea nu*f*e vivi o"	"The deaf does not hear sweetness"
Aʋa lokpoa yae tea dome	Thick penis gets vagina swollen
Wotsɔ ŋkɔ na aʋa la bena	She named the penis thus
"Ati kɔtsrala wò	"Long-necked stick
Evivina akpã"	You are too sweet"
Dadadu yae wɔm alea	"Mothertown" (i.e. vagina) made me this way
Đeko makude eme hee	I shall only die in it
B :	
...Alẽtɔ nezɔ mlã	...let the "sheep owner" walk fast
Axxx be alẽtɔ nezɔ mlã	Axxx says let the "sheep owner" walk fast
Mialé alea miadzo	So that we can catch the sheep and go
Wòlé ale la	He caught the sheep
Hedzra na Awusatɔwo	And then sold it to the Hausas

Đɔkɔ kpɔ aleawo dze sii	The "foreign" one identified the sheep
Yee wole Bxxx hede ka ali nee	Then they caught Gxxx and tied a rope around his waist
He kplɔ yi Cxxx gbɔe	Then led him to Mr. Cxxx
Wòzu ʋɔnu wodrɔ na	It turned out to be court arbitration
Axxx tsɔ patapa	Axxx took up defiance
Ade nya de srɔ̃ dzi	He then implicated his wife
Yee wolo Dxxx de mɔ de Keta	They then jailed Dxxx in Keta prison
Awusatowo he mɔna	Hausas had sex with her
Fua le *f*o fifia	She is now pregnant
Yee wogbɔ ve Axxx gbɔ	She then returned from prison to Axxx
Bxxx[dɛ] dzo lã ŋutɔ	Bxxx! You really are a big fool
ŋkume gobui, madi adzexe *f*e mo ene	Deep narrow face, resembling an owl's face
Mo blabui, madi avege *f*e mo ene	Face *blabui* (untrans.) resembling a monkey's face
Nunya deke mele mo nee o	There's no wisdom in his face
Axx+ Axxx yae dzi ha de Exxx be	It's Axxx Axxx who sang about Exxx that
Exxx de nyɔnu	Exxx married a woman
Mekpɔ ahiãnu le ga o	He did not have bridewealth
Fxxx sie woxɔe le	He got the woman from Fxxx
Gxxx movitɔ	Gxxx stupid one
Đe nyɔnua de kɔ di	Married a certain type of woman for us
Lãkevi me dɔa xɔme o	Fishbasket doesn't stay long in a room
Gxxx do kete, nya mele kuge	Gxxx started a "train," I will drive it
Hxxx emo globui, nya mele kuge	Hxxx narrow deep face, I will drive it
Hxxx mo lakpa, nya mele kuge	Hxxx long dry face, I will drive it
Gxxx mo klolui, nya mele kuge	Gxxx face *klolui* (untrans.) I will drive it
Hxxx mo nogui, nya mele kuge	Hxxx small round face, I will drive it
Be hũu, nya mele kuge	Say "*hũu*," I will drive it
Exxx be mado ŋu ne woase	Exxx says let me answer for him to hear
Efififi kple gadodo kae nye nukpe	Theft and borrowing become shame
xxxwo, xxxwo mide gɔme	xxxs, yyys explain it
Dumegãwo mido eŋu nam	Elders, answer me
Miyɔ ixxx madzu kpɔ	Call Ixxx for me to insult a while
Ixxx emo *f*odi, dzofãkala	Ixxx dirty face, diviner with black magic
Wofɔ lãsiwo de abɔ dzia	He carried the switches on his shoulder
Hadzim Jxxx dem	Singing about Jxxx
Meyo Kxxx de hame	I mention Kxxx in song
Ixxx dee	Ixxx! Attention
Đe ne ŋlɔ̃ mamawo bea?	Have you forgotten your grandmother?
Menye lxxx dada yae nye amedɔgã de	Isn't it Lxxx's mother the big benefactor?
Menyea ŋɔ̃ gbe kuna o	Does not flatulate without bushes burning
Tɔgbuiwo Mxxx nye ameklikoa de	Your grandfather Mxxx was a rough careless

	person
Yi wòkua, fe lae ma va gbã de nxxx dzia?	When he died, the debts faced Nxxx?
Wole Oxxx nɔ dzadzram	They caught Oxxx to sell
Fimadzia wókplɔna Pxxx	There they led Pxxx
Fimae lxxx xe fe la le, Ixxx lee	There Lxxx paid off the debts, Ixxx!
Womegblɔ nese oa?	Didn't you hear it said?
Emo nogui madi dzekɔvia de	Round small heavy face like a small mound of salt
Afɔtotrui, madi kpedevi *f*e afɔ	Twisted foot, like an infant's foot
Nyemelɔ madzu de	I did not want to insult
Viwo Ixxx dɔwo hee	It's your child who sent you into this
Exxx be amegbetɔe ma dzɔ lã alegba *f*e dzɔdzɔ	Exxx says no human takes after a sheep's business
Kɔ dom abɔ dzi	Pride showing at his head and shoulder
Ne mia dzi avɔvia de mia do de ŋgɔ	Let's find some small cloth to spread before him
Rxxx kpoe le vovo	Rxxx saw it but thought differently
Ixxx ny vinɔakɔ	Ixxx was nursing a baby
Manye ekpavɔ o	Did not know the cloth which bore him
Ameŋuda la menya dena o loo	"Human hair is not easily removed"
Agɔʋaya wonye do nu*f*o na agɔ	"It was wide-winged agɔ tree that made agɔ talkative
Ixxx yae do nu*f*o na agɔ	It is Ixxx who caused agɔ to talk
Agɔʋaya wonye do nu*f*o na agɔ	It was wide-winged agɔ that caused agɔ to talk
Agɔ ʋayae	It's wide-winged agɔ
Exxx be amedɔ *f*e nya wonɔa gblɔgblɔm la	Exxx says the lazy one's matter people discuss
Medzea ye ŋu o	I never believed it
Miawoe miadzi aha via de	You should try and find some drink
Ada akpee na Nxxx	To thank Nxxx
Sxxx yae nye amenuvea loo	Sxxx is the benefactor, really
Ixxx awo lodonu pɛ	Ixxx caused a thing of proverb
Le tɔgbuiwó de hame	Led grandfathers into song
Tɔgbuiwó, mamawó de hame hee.	Grandfathers, grandmothers into song, truly.

The argument for conflict-escalation is also supported by specific practices. For example, when the factions are invited by a "neutral" village to perform in order to judge the competition, the loser carefully considers elements of bias. When traces of bias are discovered, whether they can be validated or not, the loser may initiate a second round of *haló* in retaliation against the judges and their loyal ward. A cycle of *haló* is thus triggered

and participants increased. In one case studied, the losers not only protested the judgment in song but also took the judges to a district court. The case was dismissed, and the two factions were warned against further violence. In another situation the man who pronounced one faction a winner through the presentation of a white flag was made to undergo a curse for the rest of his life.[21]

The examples above suggest that violence and aggression are escalated and continued in diverse forms, even many years after the actual performance of *haló*. The official procedure of reconciling factions through the imposition of fines by the district and traditional courts is the last resort for ending conflicts. These legal and ritual formalities in controlling *haló* and its associated violence and aggression are not totally safe and reliable. While they provide checks on the direction and extent of individual and group involvement in conflict, they do not guarantee total peaceful coexistence. They do not prevent individuals and groups from internalizing conflict and aggressive behavior. Hostilities, inhibited for a time, are carefully expressed during discussions of affairs that involve cooperation between the two factions. Preliminary results of a comparative analysis of non-*haló* and contemporary song traditions indicate that without the existing instruments of restraint, the genre could still be a popular medium for initiation and escalating conflict.

Speech-Song

The Anlo-Ewe distinguish between the normal mode of singing, *hadzidzi,* and special half-spoken forms collectively referred to as *hamelo* (lit., in-song-proverb). This half-spoken or rhythmically patterned genre is employed strategically in normal music-making to (1) diversify the musical and aesthetic import, and (2) serve as a slogan and a special cue that provides an identity for the music as well as for the performing group. The *hamelo* is a brief tonal and rhythmic construction interjected during the *hatsiatsia* section. In Ewe, which is a tonal language, tone is phonemic: the meaning of a word depends upon one of three basic tone levels, with

[21] The particular individual on whom a curse was supposedly placed entered exile in the Ivory Coast, then returned and died three or four years ago.

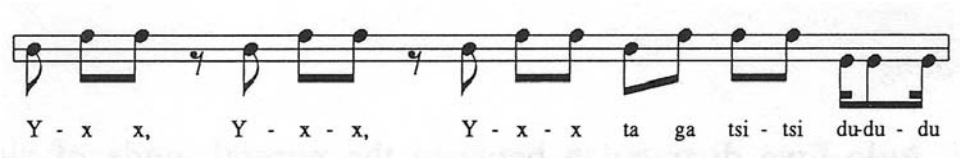
variations between them.[22] The musical and phonemic properties are therefore essential in the construction of the *hamelo* and other forms from the speech-song continuum, as elaborated below.

In *haló* the dramatic and communicative impact of *hamelo* assumes special consideration, and its performance includes mime and gesticulation, all intended to highlight and transport the semantic and musical meaning to the audience (in this case the opponents involved in the conflict). Because of the purposes of provocation, challenge, and the exacerbation of conflict in *haló*, the *hamelo* takes on a more direct and denotative meaning, especially when interpreted further through the media of mime and dramaturgy. In normal musical contexts, the *hamelo* is constructed and performed with parameters that present allusive and ambiguous references. Since the musical contest and contexts of *haló* involve direct confrontation with a target opponent, the references are explicitly formulated and directly communicated through the use of personal names and features unique to the opponent. Here is one illustration:

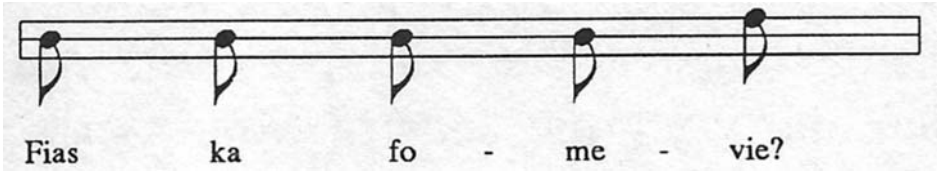
EXAMPLE 5

A Leader: X fi ago ta (X stole and wore a velvet)
Group: Duawo mikpoe (All towns[people], look at him)

B Leader: Yxxx võku võku loto (Yxxx scrotum, scrotum rotund)

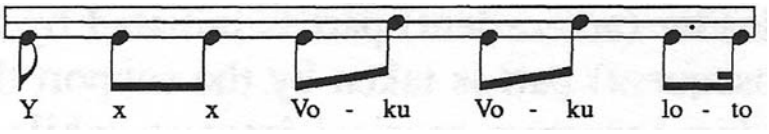


Group: Edzi be yeawo todotodo (It wants to burst)

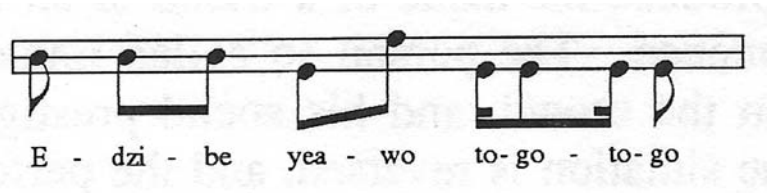


[22] See Ansre 1961 for full information on the Ewe language.

C Leader: Yxxx, Yxxx, Yxxx ta gã tsitsi dududu (Yxxx, Yxxx, Yxxx big head, rheumatism *dududu* (untrans.)



Group: Fia ka *f*ome vie? (What kind of chief is he?)



The semantic construction of the insult is also made more effective and hence more provoking by the ingenious use of such prosodic features as assonance (*ta gã, fia ka*, *lòtò, võku, wò*) and reduplication (*dududu, todotodo*), as illustrated above. The speech-song mode, therefore, not only diversifies the musical moment aesthetically and structurally, but also allows the alternative interpretation of insult, and heightens the drama necessary for an incisive communcation of insult.

Drum Encoding and Visual Display

In normal Anlo-Ewe music performance visual icons or special carvings known as *dufozi* are sometimes displayed to enrich the performance. They also direct the audience's attention to specific segments of song texts that are represented in a concrete form and as part of the *dufozi* complex.[23] In *haló* such visual forms (including a group's insignia or flag) are moldings of personal insults, albeit in exaggerated forms. Insults may also be graphically coded into the inscriptions on flags. In one case, in addition to the verbal depictions and suggestions in the *hamelos*

[23] The use of the concrete medium to emphasize a message is documented in Avorgbedor 1985.

above, an icon in the shape of a scrotum was employed and manipulated to underscore the insult. The rhythmic or musical content of these verbal forms is also usually supported by the accompanying drum ensemble. For example, the leader (antecedent) part is initiated by the master drum, and the group (consequent) part is taken by the support drums.[24] The prosaic rhythmic framing generates musical interest, while the mime and gross icons add humor, drama, and interpretive commentary.

Drum encoding in these examples takes on special advantages for many reasons. For one, in ordinary musical contexts a master drum would take the liberty to reproduce the name of a friend or an important person present at the performance. The person so called immediately receives special attention from the crowd, and his social prestige is temporarily elevated. In *haló,* the situation is reversed, and the performance leaves a lasting negative impression on both the individual opponent and the larger audience. A second reason is that each musical type among the village groups has its own drum vocabulary. Whatever additional vocabulary is invented, accepted, and played often thus becomes an integral part of the standard vocabulary. In addition, people easily remember or identify these vocabularies; the negative ones from *haló* music consequently assume wider social impact. It is, therefore, a strategic way of exacerbating anger and insult whenever insults are reformulated into drum codes. The range of insult represented in *haló* is limited only by the creative skills of composers, singers, and aggressors, and in the performance there is deliberate attempt to provoke an opponent to the highest degree. Exaggerations of physical features and family history, as well as scatological texts of insult, therefore constitute the core of *haló* texts. For example, examine the following complete song text:

EXAMPLE 6

Ha *f*e nya ku le eme agbe le eme	The matter of song involves both life and death
Miyɔ Axxx nam madzu kpɔ	Call Axxx for me to insult
Axxx atala gbabee	Axxx with thin flat legs
Aklito wo *f*u abɔdzɔdzɔ	Bony loins and hanging and loose arms
Axxx klili do kpeta sesi	Axxx *klili* shows a hard buttocks
Axxx hameloe dzrowo hee	Axxx it's "song-deed" that you wished
Kanvas ke de ne duie nye ma ?	Canvas (shoes), Is that how you wear it?

[24] The Anlo-Ewe grade their drums at three basic pitch levels.

Afɔkpodzi mede anyigba o	High heel does not touch the ground (canvas)
Kanvas gobo tɔwoe mavayi hee	It's oversized canvas-wearer passing by
Axxx emo lakpee	Axxx small narrow face (no direct transl.)
Axxx nɔ nu kpɔm	Axxx gazing
Madi kesevi *f*e mo	Like the face of certain small monkey
Axxx do hanye	Axxx caused my song
Bxxx be hanye lae ma li dzo de A*f*egame	Bxxx says my songs set fire in A*f*egame
Afegameviwo di kodzo de ŋunye	A*f*egame people called a meeting on me
Wotsi alɔmadɔ de ye ŋu	They were sleepless on me
Miadzi ʊu, hagbe mele eme nami o	We'll sing it long, you're (plur.) not born with song
Axxx fiadigbɔ yae du hafia	Axxx useless chief became chief of song
Axxx menye fia o	Axxx is not chief
Axxx tso mumevivi xo fia na Adɔtriawo	Axxx obtained the chiefhood for the Adɔtris through lie
Adɔtriawo tsi mavo dzi	The Adɔtris remained disturbed
Axxx du fia gafovi mele esi o	Axxx became chief but did not have an announcer
Eyaha nagblɔ hanya	Should he also talk about song?
Yee wole mavo via de de asi na Axxx	Then they put some regalia into Axxx's hands
Yiha nanɔ kpɔkpɔm	For him to be looking at
Axxx emo yalui yae ble Adɔtriawo	Axxx's face—(insult) he is one who deceived the Adɔtris
Fiadigbɔ *f*e dɔe	That's a useless chief's job
Cxxx be nu menya wɔna na Adɔtriawo o	Cxxx says the Adɔtris are incapable of anything
Meganɔ edzi mave ha dzi ge	Don't force me to start a song
Mava dze agɔ le fiawo dzi o	To infringe the laws of the chiefs
Tanye nu kplɔ lo le tɔ me	(Proverb) A wise head dragged crocodile underwater
Bxxx be makle fiawo madzu Axxx	Bxxx says "Let me inform the chiefs to insult Axxx"
Bxxx be mele do na amegawo	Bxxx says "I entreat the elders"
Dxxx lee enu le do nawo hee	Dxxx (elder) I bow for you
Exxx taflatsee	Exxx (elder) I seek your permission
Cxxx be mede taflatsee nawo le keke etsie daa	Bxxx says "I see your permission" from the distant land of the dead
Madzi aha via de de gu nawo	To find some drink for your pocket
Axxx yae gblɔ ha *f*e nya	It's Axxx who talked raised the matter of song
Axxx aklito gɔdzɔ yae gblɔ ha *f*e nya	Axxx ragged loins spoke the matter of song
Amega Fxxx kple Gxxx hawo	Elder Fxxx and Gxxx's company
Bxxx be mede taflatsee na mi hee	Cxxx says "I seek your permission really"

Adzofia kple Hxxxx Cxxxx be	Adzofia and Hxxx, Cxxx says
Manye treɣi mano miakɔme	To be ritual calabash in front of you
Madzi ha viade madzu Axxx	To sing some songs of insult for Axxx
Aklito gɔdɔ̃ madi adrako	Long ragged loins like an anthill
Axxx aklito bido madi dzogbekɔ	Axxx long pointed loins like a desert anthill
Xeblanawo kple Vezɔ	Xeblanawo and Vezɔ
Ixxx hawo mele do nami hee	The company of Ixxx I entreat you
Dzoku teʃe me voame o	(Proverb)...(untrans.)
Axxx be mede taflatsee nawo hee	Axxx says "I beg your pardon)
Jxxx kple Kxxx	Jxxx and Kxxx
Lxxx be medo ago nami hee	Lxxx says "Lend me your ears"
Mele agboawonu kple ha	I am at the gate with songs
Cxxx de taflatsee madzu Axxx	Cxxx seeks permission to insult Axxx
Made Axxx gɔme miase hee	To reveal Axxx's background for you to hear
Axxx menye duametɔwo o	Axxx is not from the town
Axxx be fia xɔ ge yele	Axxx insists on becoming a chief
Tɔgbuiwo tso Tefle	Your grandfather came from Tefle
Tɔgbuiwo tso Tefle ke	Your grandfather came as far as from Tefle
Gava do de Fenyi	Then came to Fenyi
Wonɔa nudzrawo wɔm	He was tricky
Woamo Fenyitɔwo dufia ʃe nyinoeyɔvi	Had sex with Fenyi chief's female calf
Tɔgbuiwo tsi gbesi	Your grandfather was lost in the wilderness
Ye wole tɔgbuiwo he dzra na Vetatɔwo	Then they caught and sold your grandfather to the Veta people
Vetatɔwo womese egɔme o	Veta people did not understand this
Kaka woaxo dzinu etoa Fenyitɔwo do	As soon as it was three months Fenyi people appeared
Fenyitɔwo de egɔme na Vetatɔwo	Fenyi people explained it the the Veta people
Vetatɔwo melɔ̃ o	Veta people did not consent
Ye wole tɔgbuiwo he dzra	Therefore they caught and sold your grandfather to the people
Na Exitɔwo ʃekaʃli zigbɔzi etɔ	Then they caught and sold your grandfather to the Exi people
Ye wole tɔgbuiwo he dzra na Dzodzetowo	Then they caught and sold your grandfather to the Dzodze people
Adzofia he xɔ	Adzofia (interim chief) then retrieved him
Adzofia xo tɔgbuiwo hedo de Fiagbedu	Adzofia got and sent your grandfather to Fiagbedu
Mxxx ke fiafitɔe ye wotso daʋa dze	Mxxx, a thief, then he became insane
Wodze daʋa la wotso gbeka gaa de	In his insanity they tied a big rope
De ali na tɔgbuiwo	Around your grandfather's waist
He kplɔ yi dzogbedzie	Then sent him to the wilderness
Ye wole tɔgbuiwo he bla de dzogbetiawo	Then tied your grandfather to a tree in the

nu	wilderness
Tɔgbuiwo yi dziesɔ	Your grandfather died
Cxxx be dzogbe laklẽwo he du	Bxxx says wild animals then ate him
Axxx ya mebia hlɔ̃ o	Axxx did not revenge from death
Axxx fia ŋutsu hee	Axxx a "man" chief indeed
Dzadzaglidza tu medi o	*Dzadzaglidza* (onomatopeia) there was no gunshot
Axxx dewo vɔ̃ na	Axxx was a timid one
Axxx be yeadu fia	Axxx insisted on being chief
Woe nayi dzogbedzi naxo tɔgbuiwo *f*e ta	You should go to the wilderness to retrieve your grandfather's head
Hafi nadu fia	Before you become a chief
Fia ma dewo vivina	That type of chief is an enjoyable one
Ameade medu nee o	Not everyone can become one
Axxx du 'daʋafia na Adɔtriawo.	Axxx became an insane chief for the Adɔtris.

Conclusions

The types of violence accompanying *haló* performances are summarized in the following: physical confrontation, including the use of a weapon; destruction of personal property; and magical practices to overcome or destroy an opponent, both physically and spiritually. While activities in the spiritual realm cannot easily be identified objectively, reports of cases linking singer-composers' deaths to such practices are overwhelming. Since much of the violence is perpetrated in the spiritual realm, government courts focus on cases with more overt manifestations, such as evidence from song texts or physical injury. While the Anlo-Ewe kinship and legal systems seek to provide a congenial environment for interpersonal transactions at the familial and societal levels in order to preserve the peace, the phenomenon of *haló* both transcends and challenges the efficiency of such systems; it also brings up the challenge of defining the boundaries of artistic license.

In *haló,* we come across the interplay of humor, play, the ugly, and satire. These techniques are situationally patterned to enhance both the goals of musical superiority and the affective and incisive communication of insult. While the technique of humor and comedy is generally employed to temporarily minimize the level of tension generated in *haló* performance, it is also attention-structuring. Humor and comedy are particular aesthetic devices employed to diversify and elevate the artistic experience, and the

effectiveness of these devices in social conflict has been acknowledged by some scholars (Bateson 1972, Burma 1972). The following observation makes the point clear (Burma 1972:201): "In conflict, the involved parties make use of a variety of techniques to gain ascendancy or temporary advantage. Since subtle barbs often strike more telling blows than gratuitous insult or rational argument, not infrequently these techniques include humor, satire, irony, and wit."

In sum, we can conclude that *haló* is a unique socio-musical drama that draws on a variety of artistic channels for the sake of incisive, aggressive, and superior communication of insult and musical affect. The genre maintains a link with the total culture by drawing on and extending the musical and artistic parameters already available among the Anlo-Ewe culture and society. In addition, social process is exhibited and updated through the musical performance and the social consequences also reflect on the role and status of the music. These examples thus confirm the previous speculations about musical and social relationships, and expands on the nature of performance. Focus on *haló* as a social reality, rather than as merely a symbolic and routine act, allows us to delve deeper into the web of social relations in which performance is situated.[25] While language use is at the core of the performance, the Anlo-Ewe example also shows several ways in which musical excellence is achieved, as well as the mixing of the fictive and the real. The investigator of *haló* is also presented with a rich source of data offering new insights into verbal art and the performative in Africa. This study therefore bears many implications for new perspectives in performance studies, including those of sociolinguistics, ethnomusicology, and ethnonaesthetics. Evidence given above should also urge caution toward those analyses that describe and see the ends of performance as simply tension- or conflict-resolving. The ideas and issues raised in this essay seem rather to support perspectives that acknowledge the continuity of tension and conflict, as properly observed by Igor Kopytoff (1961) in a study of a Congo society. The field study of *haló* also raises many problems that pertain to field theory and practice. For example, new techniques, strategies, and procedures developed and employed during the field investigation provided certain types of significant information that

[25] Some of the sudies that have focused on symbolic and ritual employment of verbal aggression include Avery 1984, Brempong 1978, Eckert 1980, Flynn 1977, Herndon 1971, and Kleivan 1971.

would not otherwise have been available through traditional channels (cf. Avorgbedor 1990-91). The full potential of *haló* as a resource for building new hypotheses and analytical perspectives in performance studies remains to be explored.[26]

City College, City University of New York

References

Ansre 1961 — Gilbert Ansre. *The Tonal Structure of the Ewe Language*. Hartford: Hartford Seminary Foundation.

Anyidoho 1982 — Kofi Anyidoho. "Kofi Awoonor and the Ewe Tradition of Songs of Abuse (*Halo*)." In *Toward Defining the African Aesthetic*. Ed. by Lemuel Johnson et al. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press. pp. 17-29.

Anyidoho 1983 — _____. "Traditions of Verbal Art in Africa." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, Austin.

Avery 1984 — Thomas L. Avery. "Structures and Strategy in Azorean-Canadian Song Duels." Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University.

Avorgbedor 1983 — Daniel K. Avorgbedor. "The Psycho-Social Dynamics of Anlo-Ewe Names: The Case of the *Ahanonko*." *Folklore Forum*, 16, i:21-43.

Avorgbedor 1985 — _____. "The Transmission, Preservation and Realization of Song Texts: A Psycho-Musical Approach." In *Cross Rhythms* 2. Ed. by Daniel Avorgbedor and Kwesi Yankah. Bloomington: Trickster Press. pp. 173-92.

Avorgbedor 1986 — _____. "Modes of Musical Continuity among the Anlo-Ewe in Accra: A Study in Urban Ethnomusicology." Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University.

Avorgbedor 1990-91 — _____. "Some Contributions of *Haló* Music to Research

[26] The fieldwork from which this essay derives was made possible by a grant from the H.F. Guggenheim Foundation, 1988-89.

Theory and Pragmatics." *Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research*, 28-29:61-80.

Bateson 1972 — Gregory Bateson. *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*. San Francisco, CA: Chandler.

Brempong 1978 — Owusu Brempong. "Attacking Deviation from the Norm: Insults in Bono-Ghana." M.A. thesis, Indiana University.

Burma 1972 — John Burma. "Humor as a Technique in Race Conflict." In *Intergroup Relations: Sociological Research*. Ed. by Pierre van den Berghe. New York: Basic Books. pp. 201-88.

Drewal 1991 — Margaret Drewal. "The State of Research on Performance in Africa." *African Studies Review*, 34, iii:1-64.

Eckert 1980 — P. Eckert. "Central Eskimo Song Duels: A Contextual Analysis of Ritual Ambiguity." *Ethnology*, 19, ii:191-211.

Fiagbedzi 1977 — Nissio Fiagbedzi. "The Music of the Anlo: Its Historical Background, Cultural Matrix, and Style." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Flynn 1977 — Charles P. Flynn. *Insult and Society: Patterns of Comparative Interaction*. New York and London: Kennikat Press.

Heald 1986 — Suzette Heald. "The Ritual Use of Violence: Circumcision among the Gisu of Uganda." In *The Anthropology of Violence*. Ed. by David Riches. New York: Basil Blackwell. pp. 70-85.

Herndon 1971 — Alice Marcia Herndon. "Singing and Politics: Maltese Folk Music and Musicians." Ph.D. disseration, Tulane University.

Kleivan 1971 — I. Kleivan. "Song Duels in West Greenland: Joking Relationships and Avoidance." *Folk*, 13:9-36.

Kopytoff 1961 — Igor Kopytoff. "Extension of Conflict as a Method of Conflict Resolution among the Suku of the Congo." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 5:61-69.

Kukuiah 1979 — Yao Emman-Forster Kukuiah. "*Halo* as a Means of Social Control among the Anlo Ewe: The Case of Anlo-Afiadenyigba." B.A. thesis, University of Ghana, Legon.

Ladzekpo 1971 — Kobla Ladzekpo. "The Social Mechanics of Good Music: A Description of Dance Clubs among the Anlo-Ewe Speaking Peoples of Ghana." *African Music*, 5, i:6-13.

MacAloon 1984 — John L. MacAloon, ed. *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

Parkin 1986 — David Parkin. "Violence and Will." In *The Anthropology of Violence*. Ed. by David Riches. New York: Basil Blackwell. pp. 204-23.

Peek 1981 — Philip M. Peek. "The Power of Words in African Verbal Arts." *Journal of American Folklore*, 94:19-43.

Singer 1972 — Milton Singer. *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization.* New York: Praeger.

Yankah 1991 — Kwesi Yankah. "Power and the Circuit of Formal Talk." *Journal of Folklore Research*, 28, i:1-22.

Appendix

Guide to Pronunciation and Transliteration

[ɔ] As in c<u>au</u>ght.

[*f*] Air passes through a narrow opening between the lips, as in blowing out a candle (voiceless bilabial fricative).

[ʋ] Similar to above but voiced (bilabial fricative).

[ɣ] Air passes through a narrow bridge formed by raising the back of the tongue toward the soft palate (voiced velar fricative).

[ŋ] A velar nasal, similar to English ng as in “sing.”

[d] Similar to the Spanish “r”; the upper case is Ð.

[ny] Pronounced as in French gn, as in “igname.”

[dz] As in English “pads” or as j in “jam.”

[ts] As in English “mats” or as ch in “cheer.”

[gb] Pronounced at the soft palate through a simultaneous closure of the lips and relaxed simultaneously without aspiration (voiced labiovelar stop).

[kp] As above but voiceless.

Oral Tradition 9/1 (1994): 113-135

Pattern, Interaction, and the Non-Dialogic in Performance by Hausa Rap Artists

Sa'idu Babura Ahmad and Graham Furniss

Secure in the Knowledge of Context

In early September 1989 we encountered a group of popular entertainers, known as *'yan gambara* ("gambara drum players"), entertaining passersby on market-day at Ladin Makole market near Kano, Nigeria. They included the lead performer, Muhammed Duna, his main partner in performance Idi Dan Gyatuma, and a younger member of the troupe, Dan Bado, who occasionally interpolated responses. Using a video camera we approached and filmed them as they performed; at one stage they broke off their performance to talk for a few minutes before resuming. They were being passed small amounts of cash by members of the crowd; we also proffered money after some twenty minutes of filming. The whole event from encounter to parting lasted not more than thirty minutes.

This discussion represents, for its authors, an experiment. Among other topics, Ahmad (1986) had previously written on Hausa "traditional" narratives and their narrators, Furniss (1977) on a circle of Hausa poets writing in the mid-1970s. In both cases the presentation of texts was accompanied by information on the biographical backgrounds of the narrators/poets. One consequence of such work was to participate in the enhancement of the reputations of certain individuals in Nigeria, and to be seen to be claiming "importance" for certain "products." Reflecting upon the process in which we, as researchers, inevitably participate and the strictures laid upon investigators to provide as full a contextual background as possible in order to best "understand" the nature of the phenomenon, we came to the view that we would rather look to capture deliberately a fleeting moment, for us, in a performance chanced upon rather than pre-arranged, with people we did not know and whose individual backgrounds we would ignore. Our discussion would focus upon the observable

characteristics of the event and the information provided to us in the course of that moment. Nevertheless, we were aware of the existence of the category of performer we did in fact encounter and were familiar with previous performances by others.

The discussion that follows presents extracts from a filmed performance by the *'yan gambara*, with the text transcribed and translated from the spoken Hausa. The focus of the commentary below is upon a number of issues relating to the presentation of subject-matter and the perception of pattern in oral texts and the constitution of textuality and specialness of language—in particular the problematic distinction between everyday speech and special language (issues of genre, register, and style).

On "Genre"

A sense of specialness entails the "bundling" of language and performance characteristics (they may individually be common components of ordinary speech) in regular, recognizable, and recurrent patterns, thus creating identifiable "genres." The question of genre, then, becomes one that relates not simply to the definition of characteristics allowing for comparison and subcategorization of forms but to the significance of specialness in the process of communication. Regular recurrence and recognizability are manifest in the characteristics both of form and of content. For example, on hearing a particular style of recitation with a particular rhyme and rhythmic pattern, there is, in Hausa, an expectation that the content will conform to a certain kind of religious didacticism. For a knowledgeable audience, it is therefore appropriate that the content be of a certain kind when the parameters of the form have been recognized. Thus, genre issues are crucial to considering the acceptability conditions of certain kinds of speech, appropriate content for appropriate "special" forms. In the context of the performance discussed here, we consider what it is that is made "acceptable" by being wrapped in this form. We trace the characterization, the "creation" of certain perceptions, and the evaluative overlay that informs that perception. It is this content that is made appropriate to the communicative situation by being embedded in its very form.

Typification of "drivers"

In the extract from the filmed performance under discussion here there are apparent subject sections sometimes distinguished by "section markers" such as a formulaic interchange between the lead, Muhammed Duna, and his main interlocutor, Dan Gyatuma, consisting of the interchange, sometimes repeated, of *Dan Gyatuma: Na'am* ("Dan Gyatuma": "Yes"). In performance there is, however, no break apparent in the sense of an introduction, title, doxology, or introductory indication of subject change; the subject simply and abruptly changes. In the full text set out below, these changes of subject are indicated by bold headings, but they are not reflected in the performance. In the ensuing discussion we concentrate upon the typification process and the "chains" of association that are to be seen in the discussion of "drivers" and the standard of driving on Nigerian roads. The daily slaughter that occurs on Nigerian roads is a subject of perpetual comment among ordinary people, whose journeys to and from home villages and markets put them at the mercy of local bus and truck drivers.[1]

The section "drivers" begins with the establishment of two parties to a discourse, "me" and the general category "drivers"; drivers as a category are then modulated to a particular driver, the Fulani man, Ibrahim. The notion of a relationship between "me" and Ibrahim is taken forward by the phrase "he amazed me," which is ambiguous: is it amazement at his skill/excellence/goodness, which immediately sets a laudatory tone slotting into the "genre language" of praise, implying potentially a patron-client relationship between "me" and Ibrahim? Or is it amazement at his awfulness, which would imply the other side of the praise coin—a potential vilification? The ambiguity is not resolved in relation to Ibrahim because the topic of one particular driver produces an associational leap to another, "the Kanuri driver." But in this case the question posed by the original ambiguity is resolved in a clear affirmation of a patron-client relationship in "he gave me money (and) . . . clothes to wear." The next link picks up the original notion of a dialogue between "me" and "a driver" but inserts a new factor, the notion of truth, and leads into a "moral" framework of "good"

[1] Wole Soyinka's acceptance of a national role in relation to road safety reflects the ubiquity and seriousness of concern about annihilation on the roads, both of the great and the good and the ordinary citizen.

and "bad." Truths are moral truths. These contrastive categories then provide an alternation sequence of statements about "good" and "bad" drivers prefaced by an authorial disclaimer of bias against the "driver" category as a whole: "I am not opposed to people being drivers."

Duna: Dan Gyatuma!
Dan Gyatuma: Yes
D: I told the drivers
D: You see this Fulani man is a driver
D: He is Ibrahim the driver
D: Yes, Ibrahim the driver amazed us!
D: What about the Kanuri driver?
D: After he gave me money
DG: Yes
D: He also gave me clothes to wear
DG: He did indeed
D: I asked him and I heard the truth
DG: Absolutely
D: I am not opposed to people being drivers!
DG: That's right

The parallel pattern of A, B, A, B, representing "good" and "bad," is then linked on to an expansion of the description of just B, the language of which we will comment upon shortly:

A: Dan Gyatuma, some people do drive
B: And some sons of bitches are crazy
A: When driving is well done it is clear to see
B: Some of these sons of bitches are crazy

B expanded:

D: They'll drive for a year and yet have no decent clothes
DG: Lord preserve us
D: You'll see a driver going crazy and all for nothing
DG: Yes
D: You'll see a rogue in a gown with no sleeves.
DG: Lord preserve us
D: Like a vulture on a tall building!
DG: The bastard!
D: You'll see a slight rise in the road and he can't make it past it,

DG: Just a small one
D: The engine's dead and his eyes are bulging,
DG: The bastard!
D: "Come and give me a push!"
DG: Lord protect us
D: Someone says, "Can't the car manage this slight slope?!"
D: See the rogue with a dark forehead like a barber's bag!
DG: Lord preserve us!

Immediately after the lengthy "expansion of B," which contains the imitation and the pathetic flourish as the rhetorical high point of the discussion, there comes a junction/section marker, "Dan Gyatuma": "yes," at which the performer can make and mark a transition to another topic. Here, however, he opts to go around the subject again, making a loop through the sequence of components referred to above. First the naming of a driver, Sani, then Dan Wali, with whom he was in a patron-client relationship ("he paid for my music"), and a third, Mutari, whom he again praises as "he who drives with the guidance of angels." In contrast with the initial time around, the first two drivers have died and the performer and respondent invoke God's mercy upon them. The possible implication is that they died in road accidents, although that is not stated, thus reinforcing in that ambiguity, the overall point about death on the roads. The rhetorical punch of the second circuit of the topic lies again in the final invective against bad drivers and the invocation, "Lord preserve us from all this."

D: Dan Gyatuma!
DG: Yes
D: May God be merciful to people
DG: Allah amen
D: Sani the driver from Tofa I remember
D: Lord have mercy upon him
DG: Allah amen
D: What about Dan Wali?
D: The Lord has called him
DG: Allah amen
D: Lord make his stay in the hereafter peaceful
DG: Allah amen
D: He paid for my music and no debt was incurred
D: And now Muhamman Mutari
D: Mutari the son of the people of Kabo
D: He who drives with the guidance of angels.

D: But you'll see another driver who's utterly crazy
D: A black-arsed son of a bitch like a monkey on a bicycle!
DG: Lord preserve us
D: With a sleeveless gown like a vulture on a tall building!
DG: Lord protect us!
D: Lord preserve us from all this.

Manifestly, there are repetitive patterns apparent here in the ideational structure that indicate the necessary components in a certain sequence: "me" and "drivers," a clientage relationship (praise), an evaluative framework of "good" and "bad," rhetorical invective, and a junction point. In introducing this discussion we raised the issue of the distinction between special language and ordinary speech; in our estimation none of the individual characteristics outlined above is in itself a mark of specialness. Associational links, moral frameworks, junctions, and many other such features are part of the ebb and flow of all daily conversation; imagery, invective, and proverbial discourse, while sometimes more prevalent in forms of special language, are also a commonly encountered aspect of ordinary speech. What does seem to us to be particular to the constitution of a performance of this kind (in conjunction with the features outlined in the next section) is the parallel construction of sections along very similar lines, as illustrated above.

Orality and the Perception of Text

In an earlier paper by Furniss (1989), a process of attempted persuasion in poetry was analyzed as the deployment of a typification of the subject matter and the overlaying of an evaluative discourse that sets out for the listener or reader an ideological map, by which the listener is supposed to understand the significance of that "typified object." This discussion looks not so much at the ideological overlay as at the "textuality" of this particular oral performance.

As researchers who have worked on oral and written forms in Hausa, we have proceeded, naturally, from tape to paper via transcription, translation, and commentary ordered in a "natural" flow of activity. Text on paper yields up its regularities and patterns through the spatial organization of repetitions, parallel structures, visual representations of rhythm, and so forth. Symmetries and paradigms leap out of the spatial

representations of the text on paper. A parallelism, be it of two or twenty lines set out in columns, is readable up or down. These representational habits are second nature to us. Yet any attempt to investigate the significance of such patterns in rhetorical effect must come to terms with the issue of how such seemingly inherent "spatial" patterns are perceived in performance, since it is primarily in the momentary act of oratory, proposition, or argument that "effect" takes place.

For both of us, the subjective personal experience, as receivers, of the moment of articulation is dominated by the battle to "hear and understand." Standing listening is to be alert to the first impact of meaning, of making sense, and of struggling with bits that were "missed" or bits that were an immediate and transient puzzle, at the same time fearing incomprehension and miscomprehension. In that context form is background to the demands of understanding, yet sometimes serves as an aid to understanding such that, as soon as patterns are grasped, the unknown begins to diminish; expectation based on what has gone before, that the topic will lead to comment, or that repetition will take place, reduces the difficulty of understanding.

The "patterns to be grasped" are not, however, perceived in the neat geometry of paper diagrams; they are perceived only through the linearity of spoken language in performance. Structure, in such circumstances, can only be understood as chains of onward linkages or moments, one after another, when the listener and the performer become aware that something has "come around again" in one form or another. Thus patterning in the language of orality has predominantly to do with the recognition of repetition or of associational linkages; in order to represent the process of perceiving pattern in speech, therefore, there is a need to deploy a vocabulary that tries to render this linearity of sequence in time more clearly. We think therefore of transition points, of branching, of loops and recursion as well as links of association, and the array of sequential possibilities provided by normal syntax: main and concessive clauses, main and causal clauses, and so on.

On the one hand, we see the chains of association, logic, tense, and narrative that lead us on, as listeners, down the track. On the other hand, we see the telegraph posts of rhythm and drum flashing by wherever we are on our journey, and we recognize that sometimes our driver opts to throw the points and run round the loop line, coming back past where we were a minute ago, before switching back to the main line and a new valley that

must come after the next hill. As passengers we can only look out one side at a time, and when we doze for a moment we miss the bridge on the road from one town to the next. As travelers recognize the "train" experience from the nature of the vehicle, the telegraph poles, and the moving view out of the window, so "textuality" in the oral performance needs to be considered in terms of the perception of sequence and concurrence. Manifestly, a key question in considering the ideological and political implications of a text is effect and affectivity at that original perceptual level.

Textuality

Rhetorical questions and epithetic speech

In addition to the ideational structure of the piece, there is a dimension of language use that overlays the patterning apparent in the section: changes in language style corresponding to commonly recognized registers or genres. These referential overtones reverberate through the piece. While we will discuss in more detail the interaction between performer and respondent(s) in a later section, there is a mode of rhetorical question to which the respondent's comments do not constitute an answer; it is the performer who answers himself: "What about the Kanuri driver? After he gave me money he gave me clothes to wear"; "When driving is done well isn't it clear for all to see? Some of these sons of bitches are crazy"; "What about Dan Wali? The Lord has called him." Corresponding to the rhetorical question-and-response form is also a form of direct reported speech:

> I told the drivers:
> "You see this Fulani man is a driver,
> He is Ibrahim the driver,
> Yes, Ibrahim the driver amazed us."
>
> What about the Kanuri driver?
>
> After he gave me money
> He also gave me clothes to wear
> I asked him and I heard the truth.

More significant in terms of the moral framework of the extract is, however, the way in which language use invokes the genre of *kirari* ("epithet"). Epithetic speech is most typical of praise and invective. Redolent with attitudinal rather than propositional characteristics, such speech styles make extensive use of imagery. This performer uses the evaluative density of epithetic speech with its striking imagery to carry the "punchlines" of the piece. But epithetic speech, rather than simply "epithets," comes in a variety of recognized forms. There is the simple use of name plus juxtaposed occupation/place of origin as in "Ibrahim: the driver"; *Dan Barebari: mai tuki*, "the Kanuri man: the driver." But there is also the more extensive vilificatory epithet, consisting of topic plus comment (sometimes extended with simile), as in the following, *direba sai haukan wofi* ("driver: only crazy and all for nothing"), *kafiri: da riga ba hannuwa kamar ungulu kan bene* ("rogue: in a gown with no sleeves like a vulture on a tall building"), *kafiri: bakin goshin sai ka ce zabirar wanzami* ("rogue: with a dark forehead like a barber's bag"). The penultimate epithet of this section is picked up and repeated later in the second half along with an even stronger piece of epithetic invective: *dan burar uba bakar mara: sai ka ce Barau ya hau keke* ("a black-arsed son of a bitch: like a monkey on a bicycle"). The "punchline" of the first part of this extract finishes on a vilificatory epithet, but an important and amusing piece immediately preceding is in a contrastive mode: it is not authorial commentary, as with epithet, but an anecdotal imitation acting out the crazy driver and his useless vehicle:

> You'll see a slight rise in the road and he can't make it past it, the engine's dead and his eyes are bulging, "Come and give me a push!" Someone says, "Won't it manage this slight slope?"

In the extract discussed above there is an ideational pattern through which one topic is linked on to the text, and a moral framework for the piece is established. This pattern is repeated and is overlaid by a series of switches of registers/genres, one of which, epithetic speech, is deployed to provide the punchline of the piece. The epithetic speech genre is most intensely evaluative, providing the strongest vilification of the performer's target, the bad driver.

These components contribute to making this performer's production distinctive. The next section will discuss other aspects of the performance of the text that also contribute to the establishment of distinctiveness before

turning to the significance, for its persuasiveness and ideological "force," of one particular feature—the seemingly interactive, dialogic form of the performance.

Accompaniment, verbal style, and changes of register

Immediately apparent from the video recording is the striking combination of verbal style with drum accompaniment. The drum accompaniment provides a constant rhythmic pattern against which the words operate. We have not investigated in detail the relationship between words and drum, but it appears that each verbal phrase is accompanied by four measures in the drum pattern; this sequence is immediately followed by a pause in the recitation by the main performer during which the respondent interpolates responses of various kinds. This pattern of main line, pause, with accompanying insertion timed according to the drum rhythm, provides a general frame within which the performer operates. This acoustic organization is visually represented here by each line of text.

Perceptually more striking and salient, however, is the style of verbal performance of the words themselves. The performer shouts his words over the top of the loud noise of the drum; great volume is accompanied by speed, since the drum rhythm sets up a considerable tempo. These prime performance characteristics establish immediate perceptual distinctions between this genre and other named genres of Hausa entertainment and oral performance. The shouted spoken word of *'yan gambara* is differentiated from the sung *waka* of popular singers or the chanted recitation of the *waka* of poets.[2] This shouted spoken style is apparently typical of *'yan gambara* and is perhaps most reminiscent of the "rap" style of some modern popular music.

A further distinguishing characteristic of the performance is the language register within which it operates. But again, the performer plays with a number of registers as we will illustrate. The effect of the juxtaposition of such registers is to point up the specificity of the performer's own style and sometimes to throw a degree of irony into the use of contrasting styles. The popular understanding of who *'yan gambara*

[2] For a useful summary of the distinctive characteristics of these two forms of *waka* in Hausa, see Muhammad 1979.

are and what they do is not conveyed by the literal meaning of their name, which simply means "the people who play the *gambara* drum." The popular perception is that they ridicule people, especially by the use of obscene language within which there are many underlying sexual "double entendres." In the text as set out below, obscenity is marked in the translation by such phrases as "sons of bitches" in order to provide something of the flavor of the original *dan burar uba*, which literally translates as "son of his father's penis." This general tone, most clearly signalled by such phrases, is, however, only the most salient feature in a variety of language uses that range from raciness to slang. For example, expressions such as *duk rariya kamar dan akuya nake*, translated as "I am in the brothels street by street like a goat," is in Hausa a racy way to talk but could hardly be construed as obscene. Similarly, *wallahi da ni da gona ko kewaya*, "farmland and me don't mix" (lit., "by God, me and the farm, not even encircle/go near"), is emphatic and has a slang-like feel, but again is neither obscene nor reflective of sexual innuendo (as far as we are aware). Nevertheless, it is clear that the early dialogue talking of moisture from above and from below is one long "double entendre," and the accompanying laughter in the audience, it would seem from the performance, is based upon "getting" that particular joke.

In contrast to this language register stands the switch into laudatory language during those brief moments when the performer is praising individuals, and there is a further contrast with the section headed "God the Almighty," where the performer invokes the names of a number of religious books and the name of the Prophet, as well as praises God for his creation. The first part of that section is linked to an entreaty to the audience to give alms, and is thus very much in the style of religious mendicants and Koranic students who have traditionally lived by the generosity of local communities. That religious entreaty moves on, without obscenity or innuendo, to laud one particular part of God's creation, thereby ensnaring one of the two observers who have authored this paper in the obligations of temporary patronage. Whether the praise was genuinely intended or ironic is a matter of interpretation.

Interaction and the non-dialogic

A striking characteristic of the performance by these *'yan gambara* is

the speed of the interchanges between the lead performer, Muhammed Duna, and his main respondent, Dan Gyatuma. Nearly every line by Muhammed is immediately responded to by Dan Gyatuma, giving the strong impression that not only is the performance dialogically structured but that a dialogue is actually taking place. The issue we discuss in this final section of the paper is the nature of the relationship between the two performers "in dialogue" and between the performers and the audience as witnesses to this performance. This discussion is based upon one particular performance, and indeed only one part of that; the points we make will therefore be relevant to a discussion of the rhetorical effect of what we observe here. It is not necessarily the case that what we say is characteristic of all performances by *'yan gambara* or even of these *'yan gambara* in particular.

In looking at how people argue or how they interact, there are myriad features to explore: propositions, contradictions, counter-propositions, ironic restatements, repetitions, questions, answers, qualifications, additions, silence interpretable as confirmation, silence interpretable as disagreement, and so forth. Generally, however, dialogue takes place where there is at least some independent input from more than one party, "independent" in the sense that the second party does more than simply repeat or affirm propositions from the first. In the performance being discussed here, the overwhelming incidence is of confirmation, in one way or another, by Dan Gyatuma (DG) of what is being said by Muhammed Duna (D). Call and response, question and answer typify the performance. Even where Duna asks a question, it is a yes/no question and he is answered by an affirmation:

D: Any old woman is a mother to you?
DG: Any old woman is a mother to me.

or

D: You hear me tell the truth, don't you?
DG: I hear the very perfection of truth.

or

D: Do they really mint money?
DG: They do indeed, Duna.

Again and again, Dan Gyatuma intervenes to confirm in a wide variety of ways what Duna has been saying. The full text in the Appendix below gives the interpolations as well as Duna's propositions. Only on one occasion in this performance did Dan Gyatuma intervene independently against a proposition by Duna, and then it is a qualification of an apparent self-criticism by Duna:

> D: In all my family I am the only good-for-nothing.
> DG: It's not true! You're no good-for-nothing, you're just earning your daily bread.

While the performance involves a continuous flow of verbal interaction between performers, it is a flow that, in the terms we have outlined above, is predominantly non-dialogic; it is a monologue in dialogic form (in contrast with other performances where a single actor articulates both parties to a dialogue, be it client and oracle in divination, or *griot* representing characters in a drama). However, this flow of interaction does, we believe, have considerable rhetorical effect upon the persuasiveness of the performance in terms of getting across to the audience both the typification of the subject-matter and the ideational evaluations that go with it. While members of the audience exercise, no doubt on reflection, their own independent judgments as to whether they accept and endorse Duna's typifications of prostitutes, of Tofa people, of drivers, of *'yan gambara*, or of white men, the presence at the very same split second or two of a voice that is saying "it's true, it's true" tends to incorporate into the moment of understanding a truth value overtone to the proposition. It is in the dynamics of the relationship between proposer, confirmer, and listener that the confirmation tends to exclude or preempt the possibility of counter-perception in the listener.

It is a commonplace that the presence in a meeting of nodding heads or murmured agreement can obviate, even if only briefly, the possibility of counter-perceptions, or at least make more socially difficult the public articulation of them. In this case such confirmatory interpolations constitute not sporadic moments but rather an integral part of the pattern of the whole performance, perhaps adding to the "bundle" of characteristics that distinguish it as a genre.

Our experiment then has led us to consider the relation between "appropriate" subject-matter and the "appropriate showcase" for it. In discussing the way these performers typify "drivers," we saw the pattern in

the presentation of the subject-matter and sought to comment on the need to understand pattern within the linear constraints of oral articulation and perception. Characteristics of the performance event, from drum accompaniment to call-and-response form, provided the elements of "textuality" contributing to a distinctive, recurrent set of "special language" features—perhaps a "genre." As the audience smiled with recognition and we smiled with them, we participated in the transfer of a particular view—of drivers, of the people of Tofa town, of white people. The major components of that view were a particular typification and an evaluative overlay upon it. What our experiment failed to demonstrate, among other things no doubt, was the articulation of counter-perceptions, either pre-existing or subsequent, that would illustrate the contestation of ideological space, be it over evaluations of farming as an occupation, drivers, white people, or any other aspect of the daily experience of ordinary people. But the constant affirmation in the responses of Dan Gyatuma within the performance itself set up a defensive/offensive position against the possibility of counter-perception—all part of the *rhétorique du quotidien*.[3]

Bayero University, Kano
School of Oriental and African Studies, London

References

Ahmad 1986 — S.B. Ahmad. "The Narrator as Interpreter: Stability and Variation in Hausa Tales." Ph.D. dissertation, University of London.

Furniss 1977 — Graham Furniss. "Some Aspects of Modern Hausa Poetry: Themes, Style, and Values with Special Reference to the

[3] Our thanks go to Bayero University and to the School of Oriental and African Studies for supporting the research upon which this paper is based. An earlier version was presented to the Journée d'Etude 'Rhétorique du Quotidien' organized by Bertrand Masquelier and Jean-Louis Siran at LACITO, Paris, in May 1992. We are grateful to the participants in that meeting for their comments. We would also like to acknowledge the support of the Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages, Kano and the late Malam Waziri in September 1989. *Allah ya jikansa, amin*. Finally, we would like to thank Paul Newman for covering our backs and the Woodward Hotel, Manhattan, for the use of their dactylographic facilities.

'Hikima' Poetry Circle in Kano." Ph.D. dissertation, University of London.

Furniss 1989 _____. "Typification and Evaluation: A Dynamic Process in Rhetoric." In *Discourse and its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts*. Ed. by Karin Barber and P.F. de M. Farias. CWAS Interdisciplinary African Studies, Series 1. Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies. pp. 24-33.

Muhammad 1979 Dalhatu Muhammad. "Interaction between the Oral and the Literate Traditions of Hausa Poetry." *Harsunan Nijeriya*, 9:95-90.

Appendix (Texts)

D: Muhammed Duna
DG: Idi Dan Gyatuma
B: Dan Bado

Introductory conversation	**Gabatarwa**
D: This one is Dan Bado	Wannan Dan Bado ke nan
D: He only blossoms with water	She ba ya toho sai da ruwa
D: May your life last long	Ranka ya dade
D: Without water he will not blossom, he withers	In ba ruwa ba zai tohu ba sai ya langabe
D: But when he gets water, he blossoms	Amma in ya sami ruwa sai ya yi ta toho
D: This one, whenever he sees an old woman he treats her as his mother	Wannan inda duk ya ga gyatuma uwarsa ce
D: That's the way he is	Ka ji yadda yake
D: Meaning when he sees an old woman he sees his mother	Watau shi da ganin gyatuma ya ga uwarshi
D: That is the reason	Ka ji dalili
D: As for me, whatever you see that is black is my favorite	Ni kuma duk inda ka ga baki nawa ne
D: Everything of mine is black	Kome ka gani nawa baki ne
D: My face is jet black	Ka gan ni fuskata baki kirin
D: My teeth are the only exception	Hakora ne kawai suka dan surka fari
D: Even my drum is black, you see?	Ka ga ma gangar baka ce, ka gani?

D: But the moment I pick it up, it's white:[4] I make Naira	To amma da na dauka sai ka ga ta zama fara A sami Naira

(Drum starts)

D: This is how things are	Ka ji yadda al'amarin yake
D: Dan Gyatuma!	Dan Gyatuma!
DG: Yes	Iye
D: You hear me tell the truth, don't you	Ka ji gaskiya in ce ko?
DG: I hear the very perfection of truth	Na ji gaskiya tsantsarta
D: Everything in the world is there for a reason.	Kome na duniya da dalili
D: Now you, Dan Gyatuma	Yanzu wai kai Dan Gyatuma
D: I have a question for you	To ka ga wata tambaya ina so in ma
DG: Go ahead and ask me, if I can I'll answer you	To tambaye ni, in na sani in gaya ma
D: Now in this world is any old woman a mother to you?	Yanzu nan duk duniya ba ka da tsohuwa a nan in ba tsohuwa ba?
DG: Any old woman is a mother to me	Duk gyatuma ni uwata ce
D: No, that can't be right!	A'a sai an gyara!
D: You said any old woman is a mother to you?	Na ji ka ce duk tsohuwa uwarka ce?
DG: Yes	Ee
D: Even a *bamaguje*,[5] a pagan?	Har bamaguje ma arne?
DG: Yes	Ee
D: Is he your father?	Babanka ne?
DG: Yes	Ee
D: They drink beer in their house, is she your mother?	Gidansu fa ana shan giya, babarka ce?
DG: Yes	Ee
D: You agree?	Kai ka yarda?
DG: Yes	Ee
D: There's someone on a bicycle, is he your father?	Ga mai keke nan, shi ma babanka ne?
DG: Yes	Ee
D: Now Dan Bado what do you say?	Yanzu Dan Bado yaya maganarka?

[4] "White" is commonly used in Hausa to imply "advantageous/beneficial": *farin jini* (lit. "white blood"), "popularity"; cf. inter alia *bakin jini* (lit. "black blood"), "unpopularity"; *farin ciki* (lit. "white stomach"), "happiness"; *bakin ciki* (lit. "black stomach"), "unhappiness."

[5] *bamaguje*, "non-Muslim Hausa."

B: Well ask me	To tambayar ni
D: Now you, however wide the pond, if there's no water in it you won't blossom?	Yanzu kai duk fadin kududdufi in ba ruwa kai ba ka tofo?
B: No I won't blossom!	A'a ba na tofo!
D: Well your beard has blossomed so it must get moisture	Yanzu gemunka da toho nan laima ta samu
B: Moisture indeed!	Laima tsaf!
D: Well, there you are	To ka ji fa
D: Wait, I want to ask you a question	To tsaya zan maka tambaya
B: Well ask me	To tambaye ni
D: Upper moisture or lower moisture?	Laimar sama ko kuma laimar kasa?
B: Whichever, I like both!	Kowacce, sonta nake!
D: Dan Gyatuma!	Dan Gyatuma!
DG: Yes	Iye
D: There's something wrong with this statement	Da gyaran maganar nan
DG: Then correct me	To gyara min
D: You Dan Bado there's something wrong with what you said	Kai Dan Bado da gyaran maganar nan
B: Then correct me	To gyara min
D: You see upper moisture is rain and it causes growth	To ka ga ruwan sama shi ne ruwa shi ke sa toho
DG: Absolutely	Kwarai
D: When God brings the rains	In dai Ubangiji ya yi ruwa
D: There'll be guineacorn when it has blossomed	Dawa ta samu ko ga sai ta yi toho
DG: Quite right	Kwarai da gaske
D: Millet will blossom	Gero ya yi toho
DG: Absolutely	Kwarai
D: And other vegetation will blossom	Sauran itatuwa ma su yi toho
D: But the lower moisture doesn't do that	To shi ko ruwan kasa ba ya wannan
B: Not at all, it just wets you	Yauwa, sai dai ya jika ka
D: You see Dan Bado there is something wrong with what you said	To Dan Bado da gyaran maganar nan
DG: Move back, people, move back!	Ja da baya, ja da baya!

Drivers	**Direbobi**
D: Dan Gyatuma!	Dan Gyatuma!
DG: Yes	Iye
D: I told the drivers	Na gaya wa direbobi
D: You see this Fulani man is a driver	Ka ga wannan ma dan Fulanin tuki ne

D: He is Ibrahim the driver	Ibrahim direba kenan
D: Yes, Ibrahim the driver amazed us!	To Ibrahim direba ya burge mu!
D: What about the Kanuri driver?	Dan Barebari mai tukin fa?
D: After he gave me money	Bayan ya ban kudi
DG: Yes	Iye
D: He also gave me clothes to wear	Ya kuma ban tufar da zan sanyawa
DG: He did indeed	Ya ba ka
D: I asked him and I heard the truth	Kuma na tambaye shi na ji batun gaskiya
DG: Absolutely	Kwarai
D: I am not opposed to people being drivers!	To ni dai ban hana a hau bisa mota ba!
DG: That's right	Haka aka yi
D: Dan Gyatuma, some people do drive	Dan Gyatuma wadansu da tuki ake
DG: Absolutely	Kwarai
D: And some sons of bitches are crazy!	'Yan burar uba wadansu da hauka suke!
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: When driving is done well isn't it clear for all to see?	Wai ashe tuki ya yi kyau ido ke nunawa?
DG: Quite right	Kwarai da gaske
D: Some of these sons of bitches are crazy!	'Yan burar uba wadansu da hauka!
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: They'll drive for a year and yet have no decent clothes	A shekara tuki ake amma ba riga
DG: Lord preserve us	Allah ya kiyaye
D: You'll see a driver going crazy and all for nothing	Wai ka ga direba sai haukan wofi
DG: Yes	Iye
D: You'll see a rogue in a gown with no sleeves	Sai ka ga kafiri da riga ba hannuwa
DG: Lord preserve us	Allah ya kiyaye
D: Like a vulture on a tall building!	Kamar ungulu kan bene!
DG: The bastard!	Dan burar uba!
D: You'll see a slight rise in the road and he can't make it past it,	Sai ka ga dan hawa a nan ba fa wucewa,
DG: Just a small one	Ai kankane
D: The engine's dead and his eyes are bulging,	Mota ta mace yana zare idanu,
DG: The bastard!	Dan burar uba!
D: "Come and give me a push!"	"Ku zo ku tura ni!"
DG: Lord protect us	Subhanalillahi
D: Someone says, "Can't the car manage this slight slope?!"	Ana "wannan dan hawan ba za ta wuce ba?!"
D: See the rogue with a dark forehead like a barber's bag!	Ji kafiri bakin goshin sai ka ce zabirar wanzamai!

DG: Lord preserve us!	Allah ya kiyaye!
D: Dan Gyatuma!	Dan Gyatuma!
DG: Yes	Na'am
D: May God be merciful to people	Allah ya jikan maza
DG: Allah amen	Allah amin
D: Sani the driver from Tofa I remember	Sani direba Tofa na tuna shi
D: Lord have mercy upon him	Allah ya jikansa
DG: Allah amen	Allah amin
D: What about Dan Wali?	Wai shi Dan Wali?
D: The Lord has called him	Ubangiji ya yi kiransa
DG: Allah amen	Allah amin
D: Lord make his stay in the hereafter peaceful	Allah ya sa kiyamarsa da sauki
DG: Allah amen	Allah amin
D: He paid for my music and no debt was incurred	Ya biya kidana ba bashi ba
D: And now Muhamman Mutari	Yanzu sai Muhamman Mutari
D: Mutari the son of the people of Kabo	Mutari dan mutanen Kabo
D: He who drives with the guidance of angels	Mai tuki mala'iku na tura mai.
D: But you'll see another driver who's utterly crazy	Amma ka gano direba sai haukan wofi
D: A black-arsed son of a bitch like a monkey on a bicycle!	Dan burar uba bakar mara sai ka ce Barau ya hau keke!
DG: Lord preserve us	Allah ya kiyaye
D: With a sleeveless gown like a vulture on a tall building!	Sai riga ba hannuwa kamar ungulu kan bene!
DG: Lord protect us!	Allah ya kare!
D: Lord preserve us from all this.	Wannan Ubangiji Allah ya kare.

Gambara the Best Music

Gambara Namijin Kidi

D: You see it's *gambara* which has made me like this	To ka ga gambara ce tai min haka
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: But just as I am I thank God!	To ai ko yanzu ma na gode Ubangiji!
DG: Thank God	Mu gode ubangiji
D: Anything to be gained through music has come to me through this drum	Duk abin da kan wa mai kidi gangar nan ta yi min
D: Dry and wet season, I take life without a care!	Rani da damina wannan duniya zaman karya nai mata!
D: Me go out and dig? God forbid!	In sunkuya? Allah ya kiyaye!
DG: Amen	Amin

D: I only ever bend to take a sip or bite,	In na sunkuya fura zan sha ni,
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: Or when I need a crap!	Kashi ya matsa min!
DG: Yes	Iye
D: Farmland and me don't mix	Wallahi da ni da gona ko kewaya!
DG: Yes	Iye
D: If I don't get something to eat my head begins to ache!	In ban sha fura ba kaina ciwo yake!
DG: Absolutely without doubt	Ko shakka babu
D: My drum ensures . . .	Gangar ta yadda
DG: Yes	Iye
D: That today I am in this town and tomorrow another	Yau ina wannan gari gobe in sauka a wancan gari
DG: Absolutely	Kwarai

Prostitutes	**Karuwai**
D: If not for prostitutes I'd be riding a Honda now!	Ba don karuwai ba da kan Honda nake!
DG: The bastard!	Dan burar uba!
D: I am in the brothels street by street like a goat	Duk rariya kamar dan akuya nake
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: You see women don't allow me to save any money!	Ka ga mata ba sa bari in yi ajiya!
D: Dan Gyatuma!	Dan Gyatuma!
DG: Yes	Iye
D: Women like ours in this country	Mata kamar irin namu na nan kasar
D: They're not like in other countries!	Ba irin wadancan ne ba!
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: Our women are very cunning,	Irin namu na nan kasar dabara ta samu,
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: They get a *malam* or a *boka* to work for them[6]	Wai ka gansu nan da malam aiki ake da boka aiki ake,
DG: Yes	Iye
D: They make charms and place them in the pillowcases,	Wasu layu ake a bakin gefen filililika an jera su
DG: Yes	Iye
D: When you get up on the bed,	In dai ka hau gadon,
D: If you lay back your head then you're	In dai ka dora keya to an kama ka!

[6] *malam*, "teacher, Islamic scholar"; *boka*, "traditional healer."

bewitched!	
DG: Completely	Da kyau
D: Whatever she asks of you you'll give her	To kome gare ka in ta tambaye to ka mika shi,
DG: All of it?	Gaba daya?
D: You'll hand it all over	Duk mikawa kake,
D: You won't be able to argue, just as if you were in the next world	Ba ka gardama kamar ka shiga lahira
DG: Dumb son of a bitch!	Burar uba shiru!
D: You wake up without a penny on you!	Sai ka tashi ba ka da ko kwabo!
D: In the morning you have to borrow money,	Gari ya waye da safe sai neman rance,
D: They'll see you boggle-eyed going, "But I haven't had any breakfast!"	Sai a gan ka kana zare idanduna kana "ban karya ba!"
D: Dan Gyatuma!	Dan Gyatuma!
DG: Yes	Iye
D: You know the art of music is not inherited	Ka san kida ba gado ba ne
D: If you follow my genealogy, my father was a *malam*	In ka bi salsala ubana malam ne
D: In all my family I am the only good-for-nothing	Duk gidanmu ni ne shashasha
DG: It's not true! You're no good-for-nothing, you're just earning your daily bread!	Ina! Ba shashasha ba ne kai mai neman tuwo ne!

The People of Tofa Town

Mutanen Tofa

D: Dan Gyatuma!	
DG: Yes	Iye
D: I will ask you in God's name	Zan tambaye ka domin Allah
DG: I am listening	Na ji
D: Well the people of Tofa	Su kau mutanen Tofa
D: I ask you in God's name!	Na tambaye ka domin Allah!
D: Garba, the district head of Tofa!	Garba sarkin Tofa!
DG: Alhaji Garba, the district head of Tofa!	Alhaji Garba sarkin Tofa!
D: Garba, the grandson of Garba!	Garba jikan Garba!
DG: Garba, heir of Garba!	Garba magajin Garba!
D: The chief of village elders!	Sarkin dagatai!
D: May I ask you one question Dan Gyatuma?	Wai nai maka tambaya guda daya Dan Gyatuma?
DG: What is it?	Yaya yake?

D: Well the people of Tofa,	Su kau mutanen Tofa,
D: Do they really mint money?	Wai kudi ko kira sukai?
DG: By God they do indeed, Duna!	Wallahi kau haka ne Duna!
D: Clothes, do they machine weave them?	Riguna ko saka su su kai?
DG: Honestly God has been generous to them!	Wallahi Allah ne ke ba su!
D: Knowledge, do they drink it through their water?	Karatu a ruwa suke sha?
DG: God has blessed them!	Allah ya yarda!
D: Any Tofa man, if you touch him for money you're sure to get some!	Duk mutumin Tofa in dai ka dungure shi yai maka kyauta!
DG: God has blessed them!	Allah ya yarda!

God the Almighty

Allah Mai Girma

D: Allah amen, Allah amen	Allah amin, Allah amin
D: God may our wishes come true	Ubangiji biya mu bukata
DG: Allah amen	Allah amin
D: For the sake of *Lawwali* including *Risala*	Don Lawwali gamin da Risala
DG: Allah amen	Allah amin
D: For the sake of *Kawaidi* and *Iziyya*[7]	Domin Kawaidi da Iziyya
D: Amen Oh Allah	Amin ya Allah
D: Let alms be given	A yi sadaka
DG: Definitely	Kwarai
D: Let tithe be given for the sake of the Messenger of Allah	A yi zakka sabo da Manzon Allah
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: It is not me saying it, it is Allah who has said it	Ba ni na fada ba ka ga Allah ne ya fada
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: Everything I said here is good tidings	Kome na ce a nan wurin na yi bishir ne
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: It is God who has decreed	Don dai Ubangiji ne ya yadda
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: He created the non-believer and the believer	Allah ya yi kafiri ya yi musulmi
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: Then he created men and women	Kana ya yi maza yai mata
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka

[7] A series of well-known religious texts.

D: He made the city and the village	Yai birni Ubangiji yai kauye
DG: Definitely	Kwarai da gaske
D: See he has made people	Duba ka ga ya yi mutane
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: He made the trees and planted them everywhere	Ya yi itatuwa duk ya saka su
DG: Definitely	Kwarai
D: He made the white men, it was here they came into being	Ya yi Turawa nan kuma sun samu
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: And they made vehicles for riding in	Su ma sun yi mota ta hawa
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: And they made motorcycles and bicycles	Sun kuma babura sun mana keke
DG: And airplanes	Ga kuma jirgi na sama
D: And airplanes for you to go on pilgrimage in and to perform *arfa*[8]	Ga jirgin sama ka je haji ka yi arfa yanzu
DG: Without a doubt	Ba shakka
D: Was this possible before?	A zamanin da ai haka?
DG: No way!	Ina!

[8] Part of the religious observances performed during the Haj (“pilgrimage”).

Oral Tradition, 9/1 (1994): 136-161

Oral Literary Criticism and the Performance of the Igbo Epic

Chukwuma Azuonye

Introduction[1]

This paper is a continuation of a series of studies in which I have been looking at various aspects of the possible relationships between the poetics of oral epic performance among the Ohafia Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria and traditional aesthetic principles as voiced by local connoisseurs, ordinary listeners, and the bards themselves, either in the course of performances or in interviews recorded outside the various performance contexts. As I have pointed out in the earlier studies (Azuonye 1983, 1990a-d, and 1992), oral literary criticism is by no means peripheral to the Ohafia Igbo oral epic tradition.[2] My field investigations of its

[1] This paper was originally presented at a conference on "The Epic in Africa, Middle East, and Asia: Current Trends in the Scholarship" organized by the Department of Folklore and Folklife, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, on February 28, 1992. Revised versions were subsequently presented to the faculty and students of the Department of Black Studies, University of Massachusetts at Boston, on April 8, 1992; and at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, under the joint auspices of the Council on African Studies, the Yale Center for International Area Studies, and Silliman College, on April 14, 1992. I am deeply grateful to Professors Margaret Mills (University of Pennsylvania), Jeremiah Cotton (University of Massachusetts at Boston), and Hugh Flick (Silliman College, Yale University), for creating the forums for these presentations. My gratitude also extends to Professor Dan Ben-Amos (University of Pennsylvania) for comments and encouragements that have led to a substantial reworking of the original text.

[2] See also Ben-Amos 1969, Andrzejewski and Innes 1975, d'Azevedo 1975, Dundes 1975, and Arewa and Dundes 1975 for valuable comments on traditional aesthetic principles and oral literary criticism. Monye 1988 uses one model of Igbo oral literary

dynamic interplay with performance confirms Parry's (1928) and similar observations by subsequent scholars that oral literary criticism not only mirrors and defines the ethnoaesthetic standards by which singers, performances, and particular tales are ranked and enjoyed within a society, but that, in addition, it provides valuable parameters for the critical analysis of the features of the oral texts both in relation to their ethnohistorical significance and for the comparative understanding of some cross-cultural features of the genre to which they belong.

In providing further illustrations of the dynamic interrelationship between performance and oral literary criticism, I will focus here on one specific principle invoked by a highly articulate bard and oral critic, Ogbaa Kaalu (OK) of Abia Ohafia, in a detailed critique of the performances of another bard, Kaalu Igirigiri (KI) of Abia Ohafia, which I tape-recorded in April 1976. If I go so far back in time to draw my data, it is simply because the kind of evidence that they represent has since then not turned up again in my field studies with the same kind of clarity that I find in the set of data presented in this paper.

Background: Ethnoaesthetic Bases of Oral Literary Criticism

I devoted my first paper in this series (Azuonye forthcoming [a], originally presented in 1981) to a general survey and discussion of the main ethnoaesthetic principles reflected in the various oral critical testimonies that I recorded in the course of my field investigations. That paper described four main principles that I had identified on the basis of the frequency patterns of certain recurrent phrases both in my tape-recorded interviews with various oral critics and in the on-the-spot comments by listeners in the course of performances. More for convenience than as exact reflections of indigenous terminology, I have chosen to describe these four principles as *functionality, authenticity, variation,* and *clarity*.

Broadly speaking, the principle of *functionality* stresses the various ethnohistorical and sociopsychological functions that epics are expected to fulfill in a heroic society. Among these are inspiration, enlightenment,

---

criticism in his classification of Igbo proverbs from Aniocha. Arewa and Dundes (1975:38) have also observed that what they describe as "native literary criticism . . . could be considered as an aspect of 'ethno-literature'."

historical documentation, awakening of patriotism, and, generally, the perpetuation of the heroic spirit. The closely related principle of *authenticity* insists that the inspiring and enlightening voice of the tradition must also be the voice of "truth" (*eziokwu*) and "reality" (*ife mee eme*). But, for the Igbo oral traditional critic, "truth" and "reality" are defined not in terms of the presentation of the hard facts of experience or in terms of anything approximating a photographic reproduction of reality. Far more important are, first and foremost, the consistency of the bard's message with the widely held beliefs and customs of the community, and second, the authoritativeness of the bard, measured in terms of his popularity and acceptability as a person knowledgeable in tradition and capable of paying balanced homage to the key patrilinear and matrilinear formations in the double-descent Ohafia society and their apical heroes and ancestors. This, of course, means that even the wildest fantasy emanating from a bard who is regarded as authoritative will be evaluated as "true" and "real." But rarely do the bards I have recorded abuse this sacred trust. As will be seen in this paper, they strive as much as possible to locate the fantastic actions of their heroes within a world with clearly recognizable ethnohistorical features.

The principles of *functionality* and *authenticity* are largely concerned with the content and contexts of the epics; but they seem to depend on the other two principles—the more stylistically and formalistically oriented principles of *variation* and *clarity*—for their fullest realization in various performance events. The principle of *variation* demands not only pleasing variety of tale-repertoire, structural patterns, and styles of vocalization, but variety in the range of heroes whose exploits are recounted and the need for balanced representation of the various subethnic formations in the community, in keeping with the well-known republican and egalitarian ethos of the larger Igbo culture. But by far the most frequently invoked of the four is the principle of *clarity*, by which performances are judged in terms of the sweetness and audibility of the bard's voice, as well as in terms of the coherence of the structure, content, and phraseology of the narratives themselves.

Against this background, my second paper in this series (1990a, first presented 1981), set out to examine the extent to which the performances of one bard—Kaalu Igirigiri—are informed by these four principles, of which he revealed himself, in my interviews with him, to be an eloquent exponent. In the third paper (1983), attention was focused on one principle—the

principle of variation as evidenced in the changes in content and structure in variant texts of the same tale as performed by four different singers in different contexts of performance. In general, the same critical voices stressing the value of change and variation also insisted, often in the same breath, on "sameness" of representation, that is, on the stability of the content of the tales. I tried in that paper to tackle this paradox, defining "the heroic essence" that ethnoaesthetics seems to view as "sameness" in a wide variety of texts constructed differently in a wide variety of contexts.

In the present paper, I will move on to the principle of clarity and attempt to illustrate and discuss the various ways in which oral literary criticism based on this principle appears to have resulted in a radical shift in aesthetic orientation in the performances of our chosen bard, Kaalu Igirigiri (whom I shall sometimes refer to by his initials).

A few additional comments on the principle of clarity may be useful as further background for a better understanding of this shift in aesthetic orientation. In the oral literary criticism I recorded in the field, this principle was defined by local connoisseurs, ordinary listeners, and the bards themselves by means of phrases that touch upon practically all aspects of the poetics of composition-in-oral-performance. They speak of the clarity of voice: *ikapusa ife anu anu a nti* (saying things that are clearly audible to the ears); they speak of the clarity of structure: *ikọwakwahụ zhịa ya ishi . . . ruo ụsọtu ya* (clearly explaining everything from the beginning to the end); they speak of the clarity of phraseology: *itiikarị ilu adịghị mma* (excessive use of ornate language is not good); and they speak of the clarity of content: *ịkọwakwahụ . . . ịfe mee eme . . . nne ọ ya-edo anya* (explaining what . . . actually happened . . . in such a way that it will be clear to the eyes).

But, in analyzing the various attempts by my informants to expound on these ideas, it was discovered that there is a sharp division of opinion—especially among the bards themselves—on the ways and means of achieving the goals of clarity. Indeed, two major schools of ethnoaesthetics are noticeable from the recorded testimonies. At one end of the pole are what we may call the *purists*, while at the other end are what we may call the *novelists*.[3] An analysis of their testimonies reveals that, for

[3] I use this latter term primarily with respect to the freedom exercised by the bards of this artistic persuasion in introducing novel elements into their texts. But there is also a sense in which the practice of these artists resembles the art of the novelist in the written

the purists, clarity can only be achieved by the meticulous avoidance of extraneous details, *ife ọdụọ* (lit. "other things," or extraneous matters), and maintenance of the storyline unencumbered by anything else including ornate language. According to the bard and critic Egwu Kaalu of Asaga:

> The poetry of our land is unique. They (the bards) do not get themselves entangled with all sorts of *extraneous things (ife udụọ)*. They restrict their narrations to just those things which they know are the facts of history. They begin by eulogizing, then they proceed to talk about just *those things which they know to have actually happened* (*ife ọhụ wọ ma wụ ife mee eme*). You see.

For this school, therefore, the best heroic narrative tale is one with a balladic linearity, which herocentrically moves with telegraphic precision from one point to another without admitting of digressions or embellishments of any kind.

The novelists, on the other hand, insist that clarity can be achieved only by doing the opposite: putting in more and more details in such a way as to define clearly the background of events and the complexities of character and setting and to involve the listener fully in the dramatic and lyrical moments of the tale. In general, the tenets held by the novelistic school admit of digression, detailed ethnographic foregrounding, and other "retarding elements" (Auerbach 1946) of the kind that, in Eurocentric oral epic aesthetics, are regarded as among the key features of the epic.

In 1971 when I first recorded the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri, he seemed from his showings and comments to be a devoted purist. He scrupulously avoided all the so-called "extraneous elements." The texts performed by him were prim, compressed, and telegraphic in style, generally reminiscent of the Eddic lays frequently mentioned in studies of the heroic poetry of Northern Europe (see, for example, de Vries 1963). When some of the tales of this early phase were played back to the rival bard, Ogba Kaalu, who turned out to be of the novelistic orientation, he subjected them to one of the most rigorous oral critical analyses I recorded in the course of my fieldwork. According to Ogba Kaalu:

---

literary sense of the word. Like novelists, they pay greater attention to developing rounded characters operating in a relatively realistic environment and to revealing their psychological dispositions through dialogue.

> There are many things which we spell out by name, which Kaalu Igirigiri does not put into his songs. Thus, he fails to *represent things as they really are*. He *cuts everything up into small unrelated bits*. But when we, on our part, sing, we *explain to you quite clearly how everything happened from the beginning to the end*. But Kaalu Igirigiri *cuts everything up into small bits*. There is a hero whose story he tells—Amoogu, the hero who first fired the gun with which the short-armed-dwarf of Aliike was killed. If you are told *how this really happened, from its beginning to the end, tears will roll down from your eyes*. But Kaalu Igirigiri *compresses everything far too much!*

When this criticism was played back to Kaalu Igirigiri in one of our recording sessions, he dismissed it as the rantings of a jealous rival. Rather than address the questions raised by his critics, he went on to reassert his credentials as a master in the art of oral epic singing:

> I can tell you all about your ancestors, right from the very God that created you, down to the present time; and I can tell you all about the mode of life your kinsmen lead today. None of my rivals knows anything about these things. Even Ohafia as a whole, I can tell you all about our origins—about the place from which we migrated to this place. None of my rivals knows anything about these things. This compound of ours, I can tell you all about our founding father. About other people's compounds, I can tell you all about their founding fathers. When I go to Amaekpu, I can tell you all about their founding fathers. None of my rivals knows anything about these things. As you will know, Amaekpu is not my hometown, but I know everything that exists there. Asaga, I know everything that exists there, everything about their founding fathers, everything conceivable that happens there. That is what we call *ịkụ aka*—knowledge of the ancestors . . . . My rivals know nothing about such things.

But, unknown to me, the questions about clarity raised in the criticism of his compositions-in-performance were not lost on him. This showed quite clearly in 1976 and 1977 when I went back to the field to record his performances. I noticed that his style had changed radically and that the kind of clarifying details advocated by Ogba Kaalu in his criticism had set in. He had become an incipient *novelist*, striving to achieve clarity, no longer through the purist avoidance of details but through thematic expansions, the introduction of dialogue, digressions, and ethnohistorical foregrounding.

The Principle of Clarity and the Performances of Kaalu Igirigiri

To illustrate the relationships outlined above, I will now proceed to comparing and contrasting versions of five different tales recorded from Kaalu Igirigiri in the period 1971-72, with versions of the same epics recorded in the period 1976-77. For each epic, I will highlight themes, episodes, and other aspects of the performances that seem to have been affected by the hypothesized transformation of his performance strategies. I will reserve my comments on the ethnohistorical and broader comparative significance of this transformation until the concluding section of the paper. But, by and large, I will attempt to demonstrate as clearly as possible the relationship of these transformations to the key ideas contained in Ogba Kaalu's criticism of his earlier texts.

Epic I: *Elibe Aja*

The story of the epic of *Elibe Aja* is essentially a complex of two universal tale-types. It is consequently in two parts. In the first part, a monstrous beast (identified in the course of the narrative as a leopardess) harries the country of Ohafia's neighbors, the Aro, devouring livestock and people.[4] Unable to stem the attacks of the leopardess, which is nursing her cub in a cavern in a thick forest in the Aro citadel, Aro war chiefs set out for the home of their warlike and hunting Ohafia neighbors to look for help. But one by one, the Ohafia patriclans rebuff all their promises of rich rewards, citing past cases of bad faith and perfidy on the part of the Aro. In the end, the Aro come to the patriclan of Asaga, where the hero of the tale, Elibe Aja, defies the consensus of his people and goes to help them. He kills the leopardess and her cub and delivers their bodies to the Aro, who skin them and turn the skins into the mascot of their king. In the second part of the tale, Elibe Aja responds to a plea to save another community (or the Aro, in some versions) from the menace of a porcupine

[4] The Aro are well known to history and anthropology as the community of shrewd businessmen and diplomats who masterminded the slave-trade in the heartland of southeastern Nigeria throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, acting as the main agents of the European slave-dealers on the coast and operating through the widespread fear in the region of their great oracle—the so-called *Long Juju*—which the Aro themselves called *Chukwu* after the supreme God of Igbo religion.

destroying crops in their farms. But his gun explodes in the beast's cavern and the smoke from the explosion chokes him to death.

In the only version of the tale recorded in the 1971-72 period, KI, the purist, manages to compress this great story into just 77 telegraphic lines of balladic narrative. But in one of the versions recorded in the 1976-77 phase, the story had blossomed into a 300-line tale that is not only four times the length of the earlier piece but contains a wide range of additional details. A careful analysis of this and other 1976-77 versions of the piece will show that KI seems, at every point, to be responding to Ogba Kaalu's and similar criticism of his earlier aesthetic orientation. He has learned to flesh out his tale as a strategy for clarifying the story line and its constituent themes and making clear those details of character and setting related to his people's conception of the truth and reality that heroic tales are expected to embody.

In both the 1971-72 and 1976-77 versions of the tale, the theme of the Aro movement from one Ohafia patriclan to another in search of help is given so much attention that it occupies no less that half of each text. But in the 1972 version, no reason whatsoever is given for the unanimity of the Ohafia patriclans in rebuffing the Aro. We are simply told that, in each patriclan visited by the Aro, the people refused to go, "not even one of them." Here, we can hear the voice of Ogba Kaalu interrogating his rival's showing with good reasons. But in the 1976 and other versions of the same period, we can see KI responding with the aplomb of a master artist to every detail of this criticism. He not only includes the rationale for the rebuff, but in the development of this major theme creates a whole range of other clarifying details. To begin with, more communities are named and invoked by their patronymic and matronymic titles. Through these invocations, the bard not only achieves more balanced representation of the major social formations in the community, as required by the principles of authenticity and variety, but he also offers the hearer precise information about the customs, manners, totems, taboos, and other distinctive cultural characteristics of each community, as required by the principles of functionality and clarity. But from a purely aesthetic-dramatic point of view, the overall effect of the serial listing of Ohafia sub-clans is that of the amplification, at every stage, of the superior heroic status of Ohafia and the parallel deflation of the pride of their Aro neighbors and rivals. With the increase in varied details of the heroes and their milieux, and with the repetition of the same desperate pleas for help, suspense builds as the

momentum of the events gathers toward the discovery of the hero.

In addition to these, the precise type of war in which Aro perfidy against the Ohafia manifests itself is described, and we are given an idea of the kind of anxiety that Aro mischief appears to have created in Ohafia at the precise moment of the search for help. In this way, the plot gains in dramatic intensity that foreshadows a major conflict lacking in the 1972 version. That conflict arises from the impression created that the Aro mission to Ohafia is one foredoomed to failure as a consequence of the myopic acts of bad faith on the part of the Aro themselves. Thus, when they arrive in Asaga where they find a hero willing to defy the communal consensus, it becomes necessary to fully dramatize this clash between the community and the individual. In the 1976 version, therefore, KI introduces not only a dialogue in which Elibe Aja defines his decision but a completely new episode is necessitated by the refusal of the patriclan to accept this defense.

First, the complication and the drama. KI introduces the theme of the refusal of the members of Elibe Aja's patriclan to assist the Aro and their insistence that Elibe Aja cannot be allowed to go either. The dialogues and monologues occasioned by this new theme help to clarify aspects of the heroic ethos and its underlying worldview. In the first place, the stiff opposition of Elibe Aja's people deigns Elibe Aja to defend his stance and to go further to request the Aro to disguise him by putting imported articles of wearing apparel on him. This development enables KI to create a new episode: the disguising of the hero. And the manner of the disguise prompts him to delve into an aspect of the history of the slave trade, from which the Aro benefit. The Aro, being chief middlemen between the European slave-traders on the coasts and the hinterland slave-markets, had access to clothing materials of a kind never before seen in Ohafia. Dressed in such novelty, Elibe Aja is able to pass unnoticed with the Aro through the ambush of his relatives.

In the 1972 version, the hero's journey to Arochukwu is dismissed in a single couplet. But in the 1976 version, there are greater details. First, we are told of the time of arrival, his waking up and taking a bath, and having his breakfast before going to the scene of the encounter with the beast. The actual encounter between the hero and the beast is dismissed in a couple of lines in the 1972 version. But in the 1976 version, psychological and ethnological dimensions are introduced to create a more realistic and visually perceptible image of the encounter. First of all, Elibe Aja is no

longer simply an emotionless, bloodless, formulaic entity—*di-egbe-ji-egbe-egburigha-awo* (Wizard-of-guns-for-whom-the-gun-is-a-plaything)—but a human being imbued with the human emotions of fear and the courage to overcome that fear. Second, his ritual utterances before the leopardess reveal another aspect of his character and enable us to appreciate an aspect of the traditional animistic tradition of the people, whose proximity with wild life inculcated in them a strong respect for the shedding of blood, be it brutish or human.

Epic II: *Nne Mgbaafo*

Nne Mgbaafo is the epic of an unusually courageous and loving wife who, when her husband fails to return from a war in Ibibioland, dresses up in the habits of a male warrior and goes to the battleground to search for him. She boldly confronts the inveterate enemy and demands death for herself or the restoration of her missing husband. Impressed and even frightened by her extraordinary courage, the enemy, who has in fact taken her husband prisoner with the intention of selling him into slavery, quickly releases him to her, and she brings him back home in triumph.

In the 1972 versions of this great story of adventure, love, and passion, the motivations of the daring courage of Nne Mgbaafo are rather moot because of the extremely compressed form of the telling. There is no background to the hero's adventure. We are simply told that he went to the war of Nnong Ibibio and failed to return. The focus is on the heroine's courage, but the ambience in which this courage is demonstrated is completely lacking. These missing details are supplied in the 1976-77 versions.

First of all, themes and episodes are developed that help to highlight the intense conjugal love that is, in fact, the primary basis of the heroine's self-sacrificing heroism. Nne Mgbaafo is represented as being not only passionately in love with her husband, but also completely devoted to his family. Hers is an eternal love that she herself sees as enduring beyond earthly existence. In developing this theme, which is merely hinted at in the 1971-72 version, Kaalu Igirigiri works into his 1976-77 texts interesting motifs from the Igbo worldview that stress the continuous flow of human life from earthly to spiritual existence and from spiritual back again to earthly existence (see Azuonye 1990d). Strengthened by faith in this

cyclical worldview, Nne Mgbaafo is able to defy and even court the prospect of death, for this would enable her to move quickly into the spiritual sphere where she hoped she would have the opportunity of being re-married to her husband. This complex of metaphysical motifs rationalizing the heroine's courage is intensified by a fuller development of the theme of the heroine's journey to the battlefield in which attempts are made by those who know her to turn her back. However, true to the novelistic tradition, Kaalu Igirigiri remains restrained in the buildup of the sensationalism of the heroine's journey. In the 1971-72 versions, the absence of any details about moderating influences turns the adventure into the highly incredible fantasy of a lone woman marching into hostile territory dressed and armed like a man. But in the 1976-77 version, Kaalu Igirigiri introduces the motif of the heroine yielding to pressure and allowing herself to be accompanied by four men from the patriclan who took the lead in the battle in which her husband got lost. This innovation not only makes for greater realism, but seems to be in accord with the historical realities of an age in which headhunting was so rampant that the heroine, traveling alone, would in fact never have otherwise been able to get to her destination.

Epic III: *Inyan Olugu*

Closely related to *Nne Mgbaafo*, the epic of *Inyan Olugu* recounts the courage and resourcefulness of a woman whose husband is an idle coward and ne'er-do-well in an heroic age (see Azuonye 1990b), a time in which the freedom, respectability, and rights of the individual in the highly competitive society depend entirely on that individual's ability to show evidence of courage in battle or in single combat. In those days of ubiquitous warfare, the one indisputable proof of such bravery was the head of a stranger taken in war or ambush. Those able to provide such proof of their courage, and hence of their battle-readiness in the event of an unexpected attack on their community, were ritually honored with the title *ufiem* (hero); those who failed to do so were discriminated against as *ujo* (cowards). The life of the *ujo* in the Ohafia Igbo heroic society was a miserable one. Not only was he deprived of access to all titles and social privileges; he was also harassed on a daily basis in everything he did. From time to time, his yam-barns—if he had any—would be raided and all his yams would be taken away with impunity by his age-mates in a penalty

known as *iri-ji-ujo*. Such harassments were extended to his wife, who would readily be stripped naked publicly should she be found wearing any beautiful dress, jewelry, or cosmetics. Unable to put up any longer with this daily cycle of humiliations, Inyan Olugu lures her husband to go and cut palmfruits for her in a piece of land then in dispute with their Ibibio neighbors. As her husband climbs up the palm tree, the Ibibio enemy arrive in their numbers to capture him. But from an ambush, Inyan Olugu fires at the interceptors, kills five of them, and gives their severed heads to her husband, thus enabling him to redeem his honor in the community. For the heroine herself, her resourcefulness and courage earns her the title *ogbu-etuwui-di-ya* (killer-that-gave-the-honor-to-her-husband).

As in the other epics already examined, the 1971-72 versions of the epic of *Inyan Olugu* are prim, telegraphic texts of 41 and 28 lines, respectively. In them all the ethnohistorical details outlined above, which are essential for a full understanding of the motivations of the heroine's actions and are the basis of the heroic alias that she earns as a consequence, are passed over speedily in a rather confusing way because too much is presumed about the hearer's familiarity with these details. But this, it would appear, is precisely what Ogbaa Kaalu's criticism is concerned with. Ogbaa Kaalu and other oral critics of the novelistic school appear to be keenly aware of the great gap in information between the modern audience of the epics and the heroic age to which the epics refer. The times have changed, and the wider the time gap between the world of the modern listener and the original contexts of the narratives, the greater the need "to explain everything," in the words of Ogbaa Kaalu, "in such a way that it will be quite clear to you how everything happened from its beginning to its end." As Ogbaa Kaalu correctly observes in his comments, such clarity seems lacking in Kaalu Igirigiri's 1971-72 performances. Here, for example, is the full text of *Inyan Olugu B2* (1972):

Inyan Olugu was a person of Amaeke Abam and was of Eyen.
Killer-that-gave-the-honor-to her-husband, Inyan Olugu!
Young woman of Eyen, Inyan Olugu e!
Great daughter, young woman of Eyen, Inyan Olugu e!
Her husband won no head in battle and so his age-mates seized his yams as penalty for his cowardice.
Amaeke Abam and Nkalu-people-that-spoke-neither-in-Igbo-nor-in a-stuttering-tongue were then at loggerheads:
Anyone that met his neighbor's child killed him.

Then did Inyan Olugu lure her husband out: "Please, come and cut
palmfruits for me in the Nkalu forest."
Itenta Ogbulopia agreed to go and cut palmfruits for Inyan Olugu
in the Nkalu forest.
She found and slung on a gun.
Inyan Olugu found and slung on her husband's gun.
She charged and charged it full of gunpowder,
She led the way and went and showed the palm trees to her husband.
And she told her husband:
"Look at the palmfruits you will have to cut for me."
Her husband straddled up the palm tree.
He was there straddling up the palm tree,
He was there straddling up the palm tree,
When Nnong-Ibibie people came out in hot pursuit.
Inyan Olugu, who was on the ground, took her gun and fired at
the Nnong-Ibibie people.
She fired her gun at the Nnong-Ibibie people.
She shot and killed Nnong-Ibibie people, five men in all!
She chopped off the heads of all of them and gave them to her husband.
Killer-that-gave-the-honor-to-her-husband, Inyan Olugu!
Young woman of Eyen, that is how she won a head in combat and
gave her husband the glory of battle.
And so Inyan Olugu gave her husband the glory of battle,
Woman of Eyen Ezhiaku, Inyan Olugu e!
Great mother Inyan Olugu, Killer-that-gave-the-honor-to-her-husband!

So compressed and telegraphic is everything in the narrative that it of necessity fills the modern listener who does not know the background with questions: What exactly is meant by *iri ji ujo* ("his agemates seized his yams as penalty for his cowardice," line 5)? Who are the "Nkalu-people-that-spoke-neither-in-Igbo-nor-in-a-stuttering-tongue" (line 6)? And what is the relationship of these people with the main antagonists in the tale, namely the Nnong-Ibibie"? How do these background social situations explain the desperation of the heroine? What kind of person exactly is the heroine's husband, and how does Inyan Olugu manage to lure him to go and cut palmfruits for her in the disputed land? Indeed, practically every line of the text calls for explication and elaboration. It seems to me that these are the questions that Kaalu Igirigiri sets out to answer in the 1976-77 versions, versions that are, as a matter of fact, the basis of the synopsis of the epic as given above. These later versions, responding rather point by point to Ogbaa Kaalu's novelistic viewpoints, run to an average of 187 lines in

contrast to the 35-line average of the 1971-72 renditions.

First, in respect to ethnohistorical foregrounding, Kaalu Igirigiri has worked into the 1976-77 texts important details about the deprivations to which the *ujo* was subjected in the heroic age. After the heroine's failure to purchase indemnity for her husband from these deprivations, a detailed explanation of their character and social contexts is offered in version B3 (1976):

Inyan Olugu broke into tears, young woman of Eyen—
She was a young woman of Eyen—
She broke into tears: "What is the reason why you did not win
a head for my husband
So as to free him from the shame of cowardice, that I may wear
beautiful *okara* cloth,
That I may have a wholesome bath?
I am a beautiful woman!"
In those days, if your husband won no head in battle,
you were not allowed to wear red *okara* cloth.
You were not allowed to have a farm.
You were not allowed to own property,
To wear cosmetics.
If you wore cosmetics, your fellow women would arrest you!
Men in your husband's age-grade would come and seize his yams
as penalty for his cowardice,
And your fellow women would strip you, his wife, of your *okara*
cloth and leave you naked,
Which is not good.
But if you won a head in battle, it was feasting all the way!
Your wife would be hosting feasts every night without exception.
You yourself would be hosting feasts every night without exception.
And you would become a venerable lord of the land!

With this background, the modern listener is better able to perceive the motivation of the heroine's desperation and her consequent act of courage.

In addition to this ethnohistorical foregrounding, two new episodes are included in the 1976-77 versions in order to sharpen the contrast between the characters of the heroine and her husband. The first is the above-mentioned episode in which Inyan Olugu reveals her pragmatic, even Machiavellian frame of mind as she attempts to bribe her husband's age-mates to secure him a head in battle. Oral historical sources outside the epics suggest that such "unethical" means of securing heads were not

unusual in the heroic age, but they were tempered by certain rules that were designed to make heads won in such a way acceptable at home. The person for whom a head was to be won should be physically present at the battlefield, albeit at the rear, and he was expected to claim the head won for him by others by striking the body of the victim with the tip of his matchet, failing which he could lay no claim to the head. Kaalu Igirigiri works details of this rule into his text in a dramatic turn of events that tells us more about the cowardice (or, perhaps, even humane attributes) of Itenta Ogbulopia. The deal between his scheming wife and his age-mates is as good as sealed, but Itenta Ogbulopia is just not able to stand the sight of a dead body, and so Inyan Olugu loses her money. This failure on the part of Itenta Ogbulopia makes Inyan Olugu doubly desperate and necessitates the creation of the second episode, one in which Inyan Olugu clears her kitchen, packs away all food, cooking utensils, and bowls from there, and sentences her husband to a term of starvation that would not be called off until he proved his manhood. But in spite of this very drastic sanction (a woman's last resort in the traditional Igbo society), Itenta Ogbulopia still resists the pressure to undertake any manly action. His immediate response is to accuse his loving wife of plotting to rob him of his dear life and he declares his intention to cling to that life:

> He asked her, "Is that what they have advised you to do?
> That I should go up to cut palmfruits
> So that when the Nkalu people come
> They will kill me and you will go and marry another man?
> You will have to marry another man while I am still alive!
> You will have to marry another man while I am still alive!
> I am not for slaughter!

But, of course, Itenta Ogbulopia would have committed a greater outrage if he had in these circumstances attempted to cook any food for himself; this would have heightened even more the existing public perception of him as a "feminine man." So he goes about begging for food and is, of course, shunned by everybody including his relatives, who ask him to go and fulfill himself like other men. It is at this point that he cracks down and submits to the horror of accompanying Inyan Olugu to the disputed territory.

Epic IV: *Egbele*

Egbele is another epic in which a great deal of attention is paid to the passions of female protagonists in the Ohafia Igbo heroic age. A woman named Ucha Aruodo loses her first three sons in an "earth-sweeping war" (*aha-nrualị*), that is, a total war that involves all the age-grades in the community in active combat. She therefore turns her last son, Egbele, into a transvestite: not only does she dress him up like a little girl, but she also makes him perform the kinds of domestic duties normally reserved for girls. For a time, things appear to be working out in accordance with her anti-heroical desires and Egbele appears fully protected from going to any war. But soon Egbele's paternal uncle, Nna Ugoenyi, becomes worried about his nephew's condition and foresees a very difficult time ahead for him should he be allowed to grow up the way he is being groomed, as an *ujo*. He therefore approaches Egbele in the absence of his parents and apprises him of the grave dangers ahead. Luckily, Egbele is quick to recognize and appreciate these dangers and readily agrees to go secretly with Nna Ugoenyi to a war in the faraway Northern Igbo territory of Okpatu. When Egbele's parents discover what has happened, they arrange for his maternal uncle, the brother of Ucha Aruodo—who lives in a patriclan on the homeward route of the warriors—to waylay and kill Ugoenyi if he should come home without Egbele. The plans are fully laid out, but as fate would have it, Egbele returns home not only with the head of a slain warrior but also with a live captive. His maternal uncle's strategy now changes. Rather than carry out the well conceived murder plan, he welcomes Ugoenyi and Egbele with a sumptuous feast and accompanies Egbele home with a victory dance in which Egbele's parents join. The epic concludes by asserting that the song of joy with which Egbele is welcomed home by his mother is the origin of Ohafia war songs.

Here again, the details given in the above synopsis belong to the 1976-77 versions. These details are either missing or presented snappily in the sole version recorded in the 1971-72 period, which, on the whole, leaves many questions unanswered. First of all, no attempt is made in the 1971-72 version to explain what Ucha Aruodo does to prevent Egbele from going to war. In the 1976-77 versions this information is supplied by the inclusion of the transvestite episode. Second, the 1971-72 version lacks precise details about the manner and rationale of Egbele's persuasion to go to war, details that are rather well developed in the 1976-77 versions. Third, there

is even a great deal of confusion in the naming of the heroes and heroines in the 1971-72 versions. Egbele's mother is named Nne Ugoenyi while Nna Ugoenyi is unnamed. These mucked-up details of naming and kinship relationships are cleared up in the 1976-77 versions. Finally, the 1976-77 versions contain a whole range of other details about preparations for war, the processing of heads won in battle, and the final victory dance, details that are completely lacking in the 1971-72 version.

In *Egbele*, therefore, as in the other epics earlier examined, we can see further evidence of what is all too clearly recognizable as a radical transformation of Kaalu Igirigiri's performance strategies along lines specified by oral literary criticism of the kind offered by Ogbaa Kaalu. The more detailed ethnohistorical foregrounding helps to illuminate character and setting, and dramatic conflict is sharpened through the intensification of dialogue and psychological motivations of actions.

Epic V: *Amoogu*

Amoogu is the epic of the unpromising hero who, in the face of grave danger to communal self-esteem, accomplishes a task vital for the victory of his people where the well established heroes fail. In the heyday of their heroic age, the Ohafia Igbo saw themselves as the most powerful people in the world. But much to their chagrin, there came a time when their warriors found themselves unable to conquer a small community called Aliike Ishiagu ('Liike Ishiagu in the texts) whom they refer to contemptuously as "makers of pots and what not." This situation calls for the offices of a diviner. From the great diviner, Okoro Mkpi, the Ohafia warriors learn that they cannot conquer Aliike Ishiagu until they are able to kill their general—a short-armed dwarf called Omiiko—who is so replete with charms of invulnerability that once he stands on the way he confers his invulnerability on all who come after him; and Omiiko cannot be killed except with one of twelve guns charged by a man sitting naked in a nest of soldier ants. This is the great heroic task that dominates the epic.

In the catalogue of heroes with which all the versions of the epic begin, all the apical heroes come forward one by one, each fully determined to fulfill this great task, but they all fail in their turns. In the end, a little-known warrior from the smallest patriclan in Ohafia comes forward and is allowed to try after much skepticism on the part of the leading warriors.

But surprisingly to everyone, Amoogu bears through and charges all the twelve guns. The Aliike dwarf is killed, the defenses of his people are broken, and the Ohafia warriors, giving vent to their long-accumulated anger, unleash total massacre on the people and set their homes on fire. But at the end of the campaign, jealousy aroused in the hearts of his comrades-in-arms over his spectacular success breeds conspiracy against Amoogu. Fearing that he would outshine them at home, even perchance attract their wives and all the young women to run after him, they agree among themselves to assassinate Amoogu and to bring home his chopped-off head alongside the one hundred and forty heads taken from Aliike. In due course, however, Amoogu's spirit takes his revenge against his assassins. While at watch, they overhear Amoogu's mother lamenting the death of her son and wailing over the carrying off of her chickens by hawks and kites nesting on a silk cotton tree overlooking her house. Pricked by their consciences, they agree to cut down the tree. But they drink palmwine as they do so, and when the tree is about to fall, they drunkenly agree to hold it up so that it does not crash on Amoogu's mother's house. But, informed by Amoogu's spirit, the silk cotton tree falls on the culprits and crushes them all to death.

All these themes are contained in all the versions of the epic recorded in 1971-72 and 1976-77. But, here again, we find that the 1976-77 versions are much more elaborate both in terms of the number of lines they contain and the number of background themes and episodes included in them. It must be remarked at this stage that, in his criticism of the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri, Ogbaa Kaalu dwells at some length on his renderings of the epic of *Amoogu*, and his views were played back to Kaalu Igirigiri himself. This is, however, not to suggest that the 1976-77 versions were directly provoked by this playback. It seems rather that Kaalu Igirigiri was already in the course of reframing his performance strategies before that playback, but in line with oral criticism of a kind which Ogbaa Kaalu's views seem to epitomize and to which, as I have already suggested, he seems to have been exposed all along. Indeed, the overall impression left by the 1976-77 versions is that of a complex of themes and episodes being unscrambled for complete recomposition in a form that would accommodate as many essential and clarifying ethnohistorical details as possible without destroying the central dramatic conflicts.

Signs of recomposition can be seen by comparing the opening lines of the 1971-72 versions with those of the 1976-77 versions. In the former,

we are introduced abruptly to the Ohafia warriors as they set out for war. But the 1976-77 versions introduce and describe a hero-council at Elu before the departure. Elu, the venue of this council of the warriors, is the traditional capital of Ohafia and the usual starting-point of all military operations during the heroic age. It is also the point at which warriors converged after all expeditions for the victory dance and the ritual cleansing of the warriors in the shrine of their great war-deity, Oke Ikwan and his consort Orie. In addition to this traditional setting, which is absent from the 1971-72 versions, the 1976-77 versions also bring in the figure of a paramount war chief who acts as a rallying force and in whose home the problem posed by Liike is first discussed before any action is taken. One can see quite clearly that these fine details in ethnohistorical information are addressed to the modern audience whom, following criticism of his earlier works, Kaalu Igirigiri has come to see as largely uninformed about the conditions under which decisions about wars were taken during the heroic age. In striving for greater clarity through the inclusion of more detailed information about the ambience of the epics, Kaalu Igirigiri succeeds in fulfilling two other ethnoaesthetic principles at the same breath, namely authenticity and functionality. He paints a picture of the past that his audience finds both illuminating and in accord with the known facts about their history and traditions.

Also in the 1976-77 recompositions of the epics, we can see Kaalu Igirigiri filling out a number of gaps in the story itself that detract from the sense of realism he strives to convey. Among many other questions, the audience might ask: what is the connection of the soldier-ants and the invulnerability of the short-armed dwarf of Aliike? By what means does Amoogu succeed in sitting in a nest of soldier-ants and charging twelve guns with gun-powder? And where does the incident itself take place?

Kaalu Igirigiri addresses these questions in his 1976-77 efforts at recomposition. First, through the mouth of the diviner, Okoro Mkpi, it is revealed that the invulnerability of the dwarf stems from some form of sympathetic magic operating on the basis of the law of similarity as described by Frazer (1922). Second, the recompositions lift all mystery out of the hero's power to endure the stings of hundreds of soldier-ants as he sits in the nest charging twelve guns one after the other. According to version B4, Amoogu's skin is covered by scabs similar to those found on water-yams and because of this feature, he is unable to feel any pain at all as the soldier-ants sting him. Ogbaa Kaalu gives an extended description of

Amoogu's thick skin in his commentary and suggests that the hero had a kind of skin-disease that itched persistently. Thus it turns out that, as a matter of fact, Amoogu would find it more pleasurable than uncomfortable to sit in the nest of soldier ants, because the bites would help to minimize the itching. Finally, the scene of the action, which does not appear to have any clear locus in the 1971-72 versions, is now precisely located at the outskirts of Aliike where there are large swarms of soldiers ants associated with the dwarf's magic.

Ogbaa Kaalu's final critique of Kaalu Igirigiri's rendering of the epic of Amoogu pertains to the emotive impact of his style of vocalization:

> The pathetic cry of Amoogu's mother, he did not reproduce it properly. Yes, the pathetic cry of Amoogu's mother, he did not reproduce it properly. That's one thing. The question asked by Amoogu's mother, he did not reproduce it properly. There was a question which Amoogu's mother asked: "O where is my dear son? . . ." And she was told that her son was on the way. But, at night, her son's head was placed for her on a fence in her bathing enclosure and she was told to go there and take her bath so she would see what was placed there for her. When she got there, she found that it was the head of her son. Kaalu Igirigiri did not put this detail into his composition. . . . But when we, on our part, sing it, we put in even the lament of that woman when her son failed to return. There is a way in which one can simulate that lament and tears will roll down from your eyes.

It is difficult to illustrate these largely aural histrionic features of the performances without the benefit of listening to the actual tape-recordings. Nevertheless, in this one facet of Ogbaa Kaalu's criticism, his evaluations seem to differ from those of other oral critics, for whom Kaalu Igirigiri's mellow singing voice and its capacity to change in relations to the changing moods of his tales are very highly rated. Indeed, at the end of version B4, the audience seems so impressed by his representation of the hero's mother's passion that two voices can be clearly heard with the following verdicts.

Voice A: *Olu akpọkị*! (A robust voice.)
Voice B: *Ọ dị ike o*! (It is very powerful indeed.)

But all the same, Kaalu Igirigiri seems impelled by the views of his critics to attempt to touch up the lyrical passages representing the lament of Amoogu's mother, but with dubious results; very little improvement in the

coherence of the narrative seems to have accrued from this effort. Rather, one gains the impression of a certain degree of padding with the inevitable feeling of monotony.

Summary and Conclusions

It seems quite clear from the foregoing that the changes we have observed in the 1976-77 versions of the five epics, examined above, represent Kaalu Igirigiri's responses to criticism of the kind offered by Ogbaa Kaalu of his 1971-72 performances. If this is not so, we will be hard put to find a more logical explanation for what would otherwise be a very elaborate set of coincidences, especially in the light of the fact that oral literary criticism is in fact not only an active part of performances but a dynamic activity of everyday discourse in the Ohafia community in which views, knowledgeable and not so knowledgeable, expert and lay, purist and novelistic, are constantly expressed about singers, performances, and tales, especially at the behest of an interested outside investigator. The evidence considered in this paper seems clearly to suggest that, in line with the views of informed critics of the novelistic school, Kaalu Igirigiri has sought to achieve greater clarity in his compositions-in-performance through the addition of details of the kind that he scrupulously avoided in the earlier phase when he operated as a purist. In general, four main kinds of clarifying details have been added in the 1976-77 versions: more detailed ethnohistorical foregrounding involving the expansion of various themes and episodes presented in compressed form in the performances of the first phase; new themes and episodes vital in furthering the plot of the narratives and clarifying the diegesis of the actions of the heroes; deeper and more elaborate characterization highlighting the mental and psychological dispositions of the heroes; and dramatic conflicts developed by means of dialogue and the intensification of character contrasts.

It also seems quite clear, from the evidence we have examined, that the recognition of the wide gap in information between his modern audience and the realities of the heroic age to which the epic refers is primarily responsible for Kaalu Igirigiri's acceptance of the views of his critics and for the reworking of his performance strategies accordingly. Lord (1991b:109) suggests that "the length of the Homeric poems . . . may well be due to the role of writing in their creation at the moment, or during

the hours and days when Homer dictated them to a scribe." This may well be so. But the evidence we have considered suggests an alternative view of the expansion or lengthening of oral narrative material originally told in compressed form. It seems clear, from the example of Kaalu Igirigiri, that the expansion of his texts from an earlier balladic form is due in large measure to his recognition, under the pressure of informed oral literary criticism, of the wide information gap between his modern audiences and the realities of the heroic world in which the actions of his heroes are located. The situation is implied in Parry's early observations on the relations of performance and oral literary criticism (1928:1):

> The literature of every country and every time is understood as it ought to be only by the author and his contemporaries. Between him and them there exists a common stock of experience which enables the author to mention an object or to express an idea with the certainty that his audience will imagine the same object or will grasp the subtleties of his idea. One aspect of the author's genius is his taking into account at every point the ideas and information of those to whom he is addressing his work. The task, therefore, of one who lives in another age and wants to appreciate the work correctly, consists precisely in rediscovering the varied information and complexes of ideas which the author assumed to be the natural property of his audience.

The closer the audience is to the diegesis of the oral tale, the less the need to load the text with clarifying details of the kind favored by oral critics of the novelistic persuasion in the Ohafia Igbo oral epic tradition.

A second point that emerges from the evidence we have considered has to do with the wider significance of the very fact that Kaalu Igirigiri is able to rework his texts from the highly compressed forms of the 1971-72 versions to the more elaborate forms of the 1976-77 versions. This flexibility shows quite clearly that the epic material on hand is a highly malleable structure of the imagination in which length or brevity is more a function of the aesthetic orientation of the artist and the sociology of audience relations to the matter of the texts than an absolute generic feature of the oral epic. The implications of this observation for the comparative study of the epic need perhaps to be highlighted, since they may be useful in any revisitation of the old debate, emanating from Eurocentric preconceptions, over the existence or non-existence of the epic in Africa.

For example, in defining the features of the African epic, Johnson

(1980) includes "length" in his inventory of what he regards as the four primary characteristics of the epic. But, quite far from that, it would seem rather that there are only three primary characteristics of the epic, namely the *heroic* tone, *narrative* structure, and *poetic* language. "Length" and all other features would seem to be negotiable, a point that emerges from Bynum's (1969) survey of "The Generic Nature of Oral Epic Poetry" and Lord's numerous reflections on the question. As Lord (1991b:109) has pointed out, the idea of "an epic as a long narrative poem recounting in a high style the deeds of heroes of the past" was derived "from a consideration of the Homeric poems and of Vergil's *Aeneid*" as the supreme archetypes of all epics. Thus Bynum (54) refers to post-Aristotelian definitions of the epic as "long verse narrative sharing the qualities of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*." Lord reminds us that Lönnrot's production of an artificial epic—the *Kalevala*—by the stitching together of several independent heroic narrative poems into one long narrative poem was based on this conception of the epic. But the truly traditional epic, like the types collected by Parry and Lord among the South Slavs and the Igbo examples examined in this paper, does not appear to be definable in terms of length. Thus Lord (104) refers to the South Slavic materials as "independent songs, both short and long" that celebrate the doings of heroes.

In the performances we have considered, we have seen that, within the same community, the length of heroic narrative songs or poems depends on the aesthetic orientation of the artist. If Kaalu Igirigiri had chosen to ignore the views of the novelists, he would have continued to produce shorter narratives in which the same materials presented in more elaborate form in the later performances are presented in more compressed form. But the question might arise: can he afford to ignore such criticism? No doubt, there are possibilities of other interpretations of the data we have considered. But judging from the strength of opinion among the *purists* and the *novelists*, there is no reason why an artist of one persuasion cannot reject the views of critics of another persuasion and continue to perform in a style he finds more congenial to his artistic genius, if he is convinced that he can carry his audience along with him. Indeed, not all the epics of the 1976-77 phases underwent the processes of expansion in the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri. In these texts, which we have no space to consider in this paper, it can safely be assumed that he is confident that his audience would have no problem in grasping the background of the actions of the heroes presented in them.

This leads us to our final point. Despite recent trends in oral literary scholarship that emphasize the need to pay more and more attention to actual features of performance, there is still a tendency to comment on oral compositions without proper reference to their dynamic synchronic and diachronic variations and the vectors of their performance and ethnoaesthetic ambience. Had our recordings of the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri been called off after the 1971-72 version, and had we stopped short at this point without recording versions of the same tales by other bards and paying adequate attention to oral literary criticism, a totally different set of conclusions would have been arrived at concerning the character of his performance and the true nature of the wider epic tradition.

University of Massachusetts, Boston

References

Almqvist et al. 1987 — Bo Almqvist, Séamus Ó Catháin, and Pádraig Ó hÉalaí, eds. *The Heroic Process: Form, Function, and Fantasy in Folk Epic*. Dublin: Glendale Press.

Andrzejewski and Innes 1975 — B.W. Andrzejewski and Gordon Innes. "Reflections on African Oral Literature." *African Languages*, 1:5-57.

Arewa and Dundes 1975 — E.O. Arewa and Alan Dundes. "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking." In *Analytic Essays in Folklore*. Ed. by Alan Dundes. New York: Mouton. pp. 35-59.

Auerbach 1946 — Erich Auerbach. *Mimesis: Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

d'Azevedo 1975 — Warren L. d'Azevedo, ed. *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Azuonye 1983 — Chukwuma Azuonye. "Stability and Change in the Performances of Ohafia Igbo Singers of Tales." *Research in African Literatures*, 14, iii:332-80.

Azuonye 1990a — _____. "The Performances of Kaalu Igirigiri, an Ohafia Igbo Singer of Tales." *Research in African Literatures*, 21, iii:17-50.

Azuonye 1990b _____. "The Heroic Age of the Ohafia Igbo: Its Evolution and Socio-Cultural Consequences." *Genève-Afrique/Geneva-Africa*, 28:7-35.

Azuonye 1990c _____. "The Romantic Epics of the Anambra Igbo." *International Folklore Review*, 7:35-47.

Azuonye 1990d _____. "The Eternal Cycle: An Outline of the Igbo Worldview as Reflected in Igbo Oral Literature." Presented at the 3rd Annual Seminar on Igbo Life and Culture, Faculty of Arts/Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, December 3-6.

Azuonye forthcoming (a) _____. "Principles of the Igbo Oral Epic: A Study in Traditional Aesthetics and Oral Literary Criticism." In *Radical Themes in Nigerian Literature*. Ed. by G.G. Darah, Ikeja, Lagos: Malthouse Press. Chapter 6.

Azuonye forthcoming (b) _____. "The Types of the Hero in Representative Texts of the Oral Epic Songs of the Ohafia Igbo." In *The Hero in Igbo Life and Literature*. Ed. by Donatus Nwoga and Chukwuma Azuonye. Onitsha: Africana-FEP Publishers. Chapter 27.

Ben-Amos 1969 Dan Ben-Amos. "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres." In *Folklore Genres*. Ed. by Dan Ben-Amos. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp. 215-42.

Bynum 1969 David E. Bynum. "The Generic Nature of Oral Epic Poetry." In *Folklore Genres*. Ed. by Dan Ben-Amos. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp. 35-58.

de Vries 1963 Jan de Vries. *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*. Trans. by B. J. Timmer. London: Oxford University Press.

Dundes 1975 Alan Dundes. "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism." In *Analytic Essays in Folklore*. Ed. by Alan Dundes. New York: Mouton. pp. 50-58.

Foley 1985 John Miles Foley, ed. *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Frazer 1922 — J.G. Frazer. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. London: Macmillan.

Innes 1973 — Gordon Innes. "Stability and Change in the Griot's Narrations." *African Language Studies*, 14:105-18.

Innes 1974 — _____. *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions*. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.

Johnson 1980 — John William Johnson. "Yes, Virginia, There Is an Epic in Africa." *Research in African Literatures*, 11, iii:308-26.

Lord 1960 — Albert Bates Lord. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lord 1991a — _____. "Homer's Originality: Oral Dictated Texts." In *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. pp. 34-48. Orig. publ. in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 94 (1953):124-34.

Lord 1991b — _____. "The *Kalevala*, the South Slavic Epics and Homer." In Lord 1991a:104-32. Orig. publ. in Almqvist et al.: 293-324.

Monye 1988 — Ambrose Monye. "The Use of the Ideophone as a Taxonomic Element in the Oral Literary Criticism of Aniocha Proverbs." *Proverbium*, 5:117-27.

Okpewho 1991 — Isidore Okpewho. *The Epic in Africa: Toward a Poetics of the Oral Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press. Orig. publ. 1979.

Ong 1977 — Walter J. Ong. "African Talking Drums and Oral Noetics." *New Literary History*, 8:411-29.

Parry 1928 — Milman Parry. "The Traditional Epithet in Homer." Rpt. in *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. Ed. by Adam Parry. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. pp. 1-190.

Oral Tradition 9/1 (1994): 162-184

On the Sense and Nonsense of Performance Studies Concerning Oral Literature of the Bulsa in Northern Ghana

Rüdiger Schott

The Bulsa are an ethnic group of about 70,000 people in the dry Savannah zone of Northern Ghana, practicing subsistence agriculture and keeping fowl and cattle.[1] They live in settlements (so-called "villages" or "towns," *teng*, pl. *tengsa*) consisting of dispersed houses or "compounds" (*yeri*, pl. *yie*). Every settlement is composed of several exogamous maximal patrilineages, that is, localized clans or clan sections, each of which claims to be descended from an original ancestor. Marriage is virilocal; upon marriage the women move to another clan section into the house of their husbands.

Buli, the language of the Bulsa, belongs to the Gur languages of the Voltaïc region. The Bulsa were completely without writing before the coming of the British.[2] The Bulsa had, and still have, a copious oral tradition rich in folktales, songs, riddles, proverbs, and historical accounts.[3] Together with my Ghanaian and German collaborators I collected a corpus

[1] For an introduction to the ethnography of the Bulsa, see Schott 1970.

[2] In a punitive expedition on March 21, 1902; cf. "Diary of Expedition to the Tiansi Country" by Lt. Col. A. H. Morris, Public Record Office, London, CO 879, 78, 05939, No. 25352.

[3] For the latter cf. Schott 1977.

of more than 1,200 Bulsa folktales from 1966 to 1989.[4] During my first stay among the Bulsa, from the end of September 1966 to the beginning of April 1967, I began to gather Bulsa stories in a rather haphazard way, assisted by my interpreter, Godfrey Achaw of Sandema-Kalijiisa, who was keenly interested in the folktales of his people and a good storyteller himself. He wrote down some of the stories as they were told to him by other people in Buli. Most of the stories, however, he transcribed from tape recordings that we had made together. He also added an English translation to each of the stories.

During and following my second stay among the Bulsa, from the end of September 1974 to the end of March 1975, I received invaluable help from James Agalic, also from Sandema-Kalijiisa, and at that time District Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Sandema. After my return to Germany, in 1976, Mr. Agalic worked with me for almost nine months at the Seminar für Völkerkunde (Institute of Ethnology) at the University of Münster in West Germany. He transcribed and translated many stories that I had collected and tape-recorded during my previous stays among the Bulsa. Agalic himself had acoustically recorded quite a number of stories.

During a further stay from September 1988 until March 1989, I recorded the bulk of the Bulsa stories. With the help of Agalic, who was granted leave of absence from his position as Research Officer at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, more than 1,000 Bulsa stories were tape-recorded from tellers in many Bulsa towns and villages.

Immeasurable help in translating the Bulsa stories and in preparing their publication was rendered by Margaret Lariba Arnheim. A native of Gbedem, located in the center of Bulsa territory, she came to Germany in 1979, working here as a nurse. As far as time has permitted, she has untiringly assisted me and my former student and present colleague, Franz Kröger, whose *Buli-English Dictionary* has just been published.[5] Without the constant help of Arnheim we would not have succeeded in our

---

[4] I conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Bulsa for a total of about 21 months with the financial support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

[5] From here on abbreviated as *BED*. The orthography of Buli words and texts used here conforms to *BED*; see pp. 10-13 for explanations.

endeavors in studying the language and culture of the Bulsa. Arnheim also recorded almost 200 stories singlehandedly in her home town, Gbedem, during her stay from August 1988 to mid-summer 1989.

From January to March 1989, my former assistant and collaborator Sabine Dinslage took part in ethnographic fieldwork among the Bulsa; in a relatively short period of time, she also recorded more than 200 stories and songs in Sandema-Kalijiisa and in Sandema-Kobdem. We were both assisted by many Bulsa helpers, some of whom recorded the stories of their people on their own, that is, without the presence of any outsider.[6]

I have detailed the different "sources" of my collection of Bulsa stories in order to make clear that the conditions under which they were recorded varied extremely. Some were written down from memory by literate Bulsa or were dictated to my Bulsa interpreters. Other stories were tape-recorded in a highly "artificial" environment: only the teller and myself and maybe a few other persons were present in a Government Resthouse or on a Mission station in a room of European style. Most of the stories, however, were tape-recorded in or before some Bulsa compound.[7] They were later transcribed in Buli and translated into English by Bulsa collaborators in Ghana; these "rough" transcriptions and translations were and are still being worked on in Germany,[8] where all the acoustic recordings and written stories have been archived in the Seminar für

---

[6] Among our helpers were Melanie Akankyalabey, Headmistress of St. Martin's Junior Secondary School in Wiaga; George Akanligpare of Wiaga-Yisobsa, a student of linguistics at Legon University; Isaac Apaabe of Sandema-Kalijiisa; Akamara Atogtemi of Sandema-Longsa, who transcribed and translated many stories; and Paul Anangkpieng of Sandema-Kobdem, to name only a few. The stories received by Akanligpare, Atogtemi, and Anangkpieng were all recorded without any external assistance. Bulsa stories were also recorded by Barbara Meier and Martin Striewisch, two students from my institute in Münster who assisted me during my last stay in Ghana.

[7] For a description and drawings of Bulsa compounds, see Schott 1970:14-17 and Kröger 1992:396-97.

[8] Pauline Akankyalabey, a native from Wiaga in the Bulsa country and a former student at Legon University, rendered invaluable help in revising the tape-recorded Buli texts and in translating them. I also wish to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for the grant that made possible Akankyalabey's stay from August 1990 to July 1992.

Völkerkunde at the University of Münster/Westphalia.[9]

The "public" storytelling sessions in the Bulsa country that I attended were usually prearranged by a Bulsa assistant. However, in all other respects, I tried to influence the storytelling sessions as little as possible. I never voiced any preferences for certain topics or certain tellers, but left it completely to the tellers and their audiences to decide upon what stories were told and who told them.

What was the nature of the performance of "public" storytelling among the Bulsa? In the early evenings, after the people had taken their meals, some of them gathered either in an interior yard or in front of a compound in or near a shelter called a *kusung* in Buli. Even informal storytelling is rather a formal affair among the Bulsa.[10] When some person starts telling a story, every sentence that the teller voices has to be repeated one-by-one by someone from the audience. While this is going on, no one else may interrupt the two. This practice is in fact customary for Bulsa storytelling performance: the tellers themselves are hardly ever interrupted, but left to finish their tale even if their performance is poor. Immediately afterwards the next teller, who can be anyone from the audience, takes his or her turn in telling another story. There is no fixed order according to age or sex or any other criteria.

The Bulsa storytellers hardly ever indulge in any mimicry or "role playing" while telling stories, and they also use gestures only very sparingly. Even in lively, animated rounds of storytelling (I had the pleasure of being present at many of these while recording Bulsa stories) the tellers hardly ever lost their poise. The reactions of the audience were also limited to occasional bursts of laughter, exclamations of astonishment, or applause at the end of the story told, but I almost never heard any

---

[9] Each of the Bulsa stories has received a consecutive number preceded by the label BUL-E. For reports on the current research project on motif analysis of the Bulsa stories, cf. Schott 1989b and 1990b.

[10] The Bulsa folktales, while being told, undergo the process which Bauman and Briggs (1990:72ff.) have called "decontextualization," that is, they are not part of the ordinary discourse. This process is also revealed by the fact that at least the end of most of the Bulsa folktales are clearly marked by some standardized phrase such as "This ends the whole of my story," or by some standardized nonsensical phrases.

interruptions or other reactions of the public.[11] The tellers were also never corrected by anyone from the audience; the idea that there may be an authority who claims to know the "right" or standard version of any story seems to be utterly foreign to the Bulsa.[12] Everybody is free to tell what he or she likes. There are good storytellers and those who are not so good, but there are no specialists or professional storytellers among the Bulsa; storytelling is a pastime to be enjoyed actively or passively by anyone who cares to do so.

The performance outlined here corresponds to the traditional style of Bulsa storytelling that has been described in detail by Agalic (1978). Instead of repeating his account, I would like to pose a question: what is the sense of studying the storytelling performances if one is, like me, more interested in *what* is told than in *how* it is told? Or, to phrase it differently: does the storytelling performance influence the content of the stories told among the Bulsa and if so, in what way?

Limits of space permit only a preliminary investigation into this question. As examples, I have selected ten Bulsa stories of the tale-type that may be called: "The Slaughtered Girl(s)" or "The Girl(s) Saved by God (or another Supernatural Being) from Being Sacrificed."[13] Two specimens of this tale-type, a variant told and a variant written down, are presented here.

---

[11] The audience may cheer a good storyteller on, but as a rule do not take an active part in the storytelling except in the case of the songs (*yiila,* sing. *yiili*) that form an integral part of many, if not most Bulsa stories (*sunsuelima*, sing. *sunsueli*). The songs are usually begun by the teller, the audience joining him or her as a kind of chorus or by singing a refrain (cf. Blanc in prep.). In many cases, the singing of songs seems to be more important than the storytelling itself.

[12] Cf. Bauman and Briggs (1990:77) who report Hymes' view, according to which "performance consisted in the authoritative display of communicate competence" and that "authority has held a central place in performance-oriented analysis."

[13] There is no equivalent to this tale-type in Aarne and Thompson 1961; it might be classified under II. B. Religious Tales (AaTh 750 squ.). For a content analysis of Bulsa stories about God cf. Schott 1989a. Another publication deals with "African folktales as sources for the anthropology of religion, exemplified by folktales of the Bulsa in Northern Ghana" (Schott 1990c).

The translations keep close to the original texts in Buli.[14]

BUL-E0225

(1) It is said that in former times, when people brought forth girls, they killed them, but when they brought forth boys they left them [alive].

(2) A chief then begot a daughter and left her in a room and hid her. (3) The daughter lived and grew up. (4) The people of the house peeped [into the room], saw that the [chief's] daughter had grown up in the room, [and said to the chief:] (5) "It is you who said: (6) 'If someone brings forth a girl, she should be taken and killed', but you [yourself] begot a girl, took her and hid her and she has grown up"; now they [the chief's people] wanted to kill her.

(7) They sent the chief outside [the house] to the *kusung*, and spoke to him. (8) The chief got up and entered [the house] telling his wife that from now on[15]—he himself said[16] that if they brought forth girls they should kill them, but if they brought forth boys they should let them live. (9) And now that his [own] wife has borne a girl and she has grown up, the people of the [chief's] house disagree [to make an exception for the chief's daughter] and say that his daughter should also be killed; they would not let her live.

(10) And so they got up, took some malt,[17] gave it to her and said that she should go and fetch water. (11) The woman [the girl] took the malt and went into the grinding room. (12) A bird, oho!—called *gbiin*[18]—flew

[14] The full texts of the ten stories of this tale-type are published in Buli and English in Schott 1993.

[15] This sentence is somewhat distorted.

[16] Translation of Pauline Akankyalabey "it was he himself who had given the order."

[17] *kpaama*, n. pl., "malt, germinated millet or guinea corn grains (first stage of brewing pito)" (*BED*).

[18] *gbiim* or *gbiin*, n., onomatopoetic rendering of a sound of an unidentified bird (cf. *BED*). This bird appears frequently in Bulsa tales as a messenger announcing some misfortune or unlucky accident that has happened or will happen.

up and sat down on the grass roof[19] of the grinding room:

[Solo]
(13) Adugpalie,[20] 'dugpalie,
(14) you are grinding the malt of your death!
[Refrain:]
[Solo]
(15) And an ant[21] with a red waist will cook your intestines!
[Chorus]
(16) 'dugpaal-a!
[Solo]
(17) And an ant with a black waist will cook your intestines!
[Chorus]
(18) 'dugpaal-a!
[Solo]
(19) And an ant with a red waist will cook your intestines!
[Chorus]
(20) 'dugpaal-a!
[Solo]
(21) And an ant with a black waist will cook your intestines!
[Chorus]
(22) 'dugpaal-a!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(23) She finished grinding the malt, went out, took her earthenware vessel[22] and set out for a river. (24) The *gbiin* bird came again and blocked the way to the river:

[Solo]
(25) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,

---

[19] *mipili* or *mimpili*, "sloping roof, hut with a sloping (straw) roof" (*BED*); usually conical in form.

[20] Proper name of the girl to be killed; the meaning of the name is not known.

[21] *kingkering*, in this case, a very tiny ant in two varieties: with a red and dark "waist," i.e. back part.

[22] *liik*, n., "earthenware vessel with a narrow mouth (generally used for storing liquids)" (*BED*).

(26) look, you are fetching the water of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(35) She fetched the water and brought it [to the house] and then mixed the flour with the millet-beer, put it on the fire and [began] to stir[23] the millet-beer; it [the bird] came again and sat down on the thing [the straw roof]:

[Solo]
(36) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,
(37) you are stirring the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 6 times]

(46) Then she stood and removed the millet-beer from the pot and put it into another vessel [in order to let it cool]; it [the bird] came again and sat down [on the roof]:

[Solo]
(47) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,
(48) you are taking out the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(57) She began to filter the millet beer; it [the bird] again sat [on the roof]:

[Solo]
(58) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,
(59) you are filtering the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 3 times]

(68) She again stood and put the millet-beer little by little with a calabash into another vessel[24] and added some yeast to it to ferment; it [the bird] sat again [on the straw roof]:

---

[23] The process called *borigi*, "to stir millet-beer," includes: to mix the flour with the water in the pot, to put fire to it and then to stir it constantly.

[24] This vessel is a pot in which the millet beer is to cool and in which it may be sent to the market to be served out to customers.

[Solo]

(69) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,
(70) look, you are preparing to ferment the millet-beer of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 4 times]

(79) At daybreak, they [the people] called one another to come out [and assemble at] the entrance of the house; then they entered, lifted the millet-beer[25] and put it on Adugpaalie's head, saying that she [herself] should carry it, and that they will go to the *tanggbain*[26] to kill [the girl]. (80) They sent her to the *tanggbain*, then sat around it and said: (81) "Formerly, the chief had said [ordered] that if someone brought forth a girl, she should be killed, whereas if someone brought forth a boy, he should be left [to live]. (82) Now they have killed all their girls, yet the chief took his daughter and hid her so that she grew up; [but] they disagreed [with him] and [insisted] that he should [also] kill his daughter." (83a) Today they had brought [her] and they were sitting [round the *tanggbain*] so as to give her [as a sacrificial offering] to the *tanggbain*; (83b) the *tanggbain* should receive her. (84) The "sitting thing"[27] then also sat down on top of the *tanggbain*:

[Solo]

(85) Adugpalie, 'dugpalie,
(86) you are sitting on the resting place of your death!

[Refrain (15-22) repeated 4 times]

(95) Then they [the people] poured [some of the] millet-beer and gave it [sacrificed it] to the *tanggbain*[28] and then went together and seized the woman [the girl] in order to put her down [on the *tanggbain*]. (96) Then

[25] Millet-beer is carried in big clay pots to the market or other places where it is being consumed.

[26] An earth-shrine, or "spirit of an earth-shrine; sacred place of the earth-divinity, inhabited by an earth-spirit, who receives regular sacrifices from the (human) owner of the *tanggbain*; it may be a sacred grove, tree, rock, hill, river, lake, etc." (*BED*).

[27] The *gbiin* bird.

[28] They poured a libation for the *tanggbain*.

a ram came from God and landed beside the *tanggbain* saying that they should not kill the girl; they should rather seize it [the ram] and kill it and let the girl [live].

(97) This is the reason why nowadays, when they bring forth a girl, they let her [live]; in former times, a girl was something to be offered in sacrifice to a *tanggbain*; they took her to be offered as a sacrifice to a shrine (*bogluk*).[29] (98) This was what they did in former times.

BUL-E1267

(1) Once upon a time, there was a man who had a wife, but they did not bring forth children.

(2) The man then went and made a solemn promise[30] to a *tanggbain* by saying: (3) If he begot children, and among them there was a fair-skinned girl,[31] he would give one of the children to the *tanggbain*.

(4) Not long after he had made this promise and returned home, they [the man and his wife] brought forth many children and they also brought forth a fair-skinned daughter. (5) The girl was so very fair that the man [her father] himself admired[32] her.

(6) After some time had passed, the *tanggbain* told the man that he should seize the girl and sacrifice her to it. (7) Since one cannot escape paying a debt to a *tanggbain*, the man agreed that he would sacrifice his daughter to it. (8) They named the girl Atog-tibanyin.[33] (9) In a very short time, the girl grew up and became even more beautiful.

(10) The man informed the girl about his intention to sacrifice her to the *tanggbain*. (11) He got up and made them[34] brew millet beer so that they could first go and give the millet beer to the *tanggbain*. (12) He did this

---

[29] *bogluk*, "shrine or sacred object that receives sacrifices, altar" (*BED*).

[30] *dueni noai*, "(lit. to put down mouth) to swear, to take and oath, to promise, to conclude an agreement, to make a treaty" (*BED*).

[31] A (relatively) fair skin corresponds to the ideal of beauty among the Bulsa.

[32] *maring*, v. "to like, to love, to be fond of, to admire, to be interested in, to be pleased with, to enjoy, to be glad" (*BED*).

[33] The name supposedly means: "Talk and they will go out."

[34] The people in his house.

as a preliminary act[35] to show that they [the parents of the girl] were happy with it [the *tanggbain*], before he [the father] could then give it its human being [the girl]. (13) On the day they were to go [to the *tanggbain*] the girl entered a room, sat down and began to sing:[36]

[(14-15) Song][37]

(16) They came out and went on and on till they arrived at the *tanggbain*. (17) They gave out the millet beer. (18) (They offered the millet beer to the shrine of the *tanggbain*). (19) When they had finished drinking the millet beer, the man went and took his knife and sharpened it. (20) [Then] he told the girl to lie down. (21) The girl lay down. (22) As he was about to slaughter[38] [her], they saw a very old, fair-skinned woman descending "swish!"[39] from the sky; she was wailing:[40] "*Wa ye-eee-ei-eie!*" (23) She descended and told them not to kill the girl, for she [the old woman] was [the girl] herself,[41] so they should let her go. (24) When she had said that, they again heard her wailing again:[42] "*Wa yie-e-e-e-ei-ie!*" (25) The woman rose up into the sky again and they [the people] got up and dispersed.

(26) That is why it is said that one does not take human beings and

---

[35] I.e., he poured the libation of millet beer before he sacrificed the girl.

[36] The writer translated "the girl . . . started her song," and he added in brackets: "(which carried the message about the sacrifice; it was a sorrowful song)." The writer did not give a translation of the song.

[37] The song is in a language other than Buli; it cannot be translated.

[38] *togri*, v. "to cut the throat, to slaughter or kill an animal (only by cutting its throat)" (*BED*).

[39] *"chaan-a!"*, exclamation, imitating the sound of a bird coming down and landing with its wings outstretched.

[40] *weliing* or *wuliing*, n. "ululation, high pitched cry (e.g.) in praise of a dance or a speech (esp. uttered by women)" (*BED*).

[41] I.e., she was identical with the girl.

[42] *ba ngman gaa nya ku ale kumu ain*: lit. "they again went to see[=hear] it cry;", or "how it sounded." The verb *kum(u)* means "1. to mourn, to condole, to cry, to weep, to lament . . . 2. to sound, to make a noise" (*BED*).

sacrifice them to a shrine.

The variants of this tale-type may be classified into three sub-types. In Sub-type 1 **all** girls must be killed (sacrificed), usually by the order of a chief; in Sub-type 2, **one particular** girl must be killed, that is, in most cases she must be slaughtered as a sacrifice to an Earth shrine (*tanggbain*); in the aberrant Sub-type 3, represented only by story BUL-E920, the girl intends to kill herself. In all types, the girl is finally saved by God, who—as in the Biblical tale of Abraham being prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22, 1-14)—sends an animal to be sacrificed in the girl's stead, or she is saved by some other supernatural being.

The motifs found in these stories are listed in Table 1 (see Appendix). Only motifs that occur at least in two of the stories have been considered. The first figure in this table refers to the five episodes into which the story may be divided. The second figure designates the sub-type, with the figure 0 indicating motifs occurring in all or most sub-types. The third figure indicates the number of consecutive motifs in each episode.

A comparison of these lists shows that no less than 12 of the motifs occur in 50% and more of the stories analyzed. These common motifs, printed in bold letters in the lists and compiled in Table 2 (see Appendix), may be called "core motifs." This tale-type proves to be rather homogeneous in comparison with other Bulsa tale-types. Yet at the same time the Bulsa tellers show considerable variation in choosing different motifs when telling stories belonging to the same type and sub-type. How far can the variation found in these stories be attributed to differences in the storytelling performance?

I recorded the first of the two stories, BUL-E0225, in a place called Yuesi (or Wiasi) in the South of the Bulsa District on November 1, 1988. Regarding this storytelling performance, I quote the following extract from my journal:

> Mr. James Agalic had arranged a session of storytelling with the Chief of Yuesi. When we arrived there around 18 hrs., [...] we went to a big house, called Atong-yeri. There we met the Head Teacher of the local primary school, Mr. J. B. Agriba. An old man sitting in the *kusung* declared himself prepared to tell stories. He was later joined by a woman who sat beside him in the *kusung*. The repeater was, in most cases, a young man. About two dozen children and several adults assembled around the storytellers. The children joined in most of the songs vociferously. The general spirit was

lively. The telling lasted from approximately 18 h to 20 h.

The teller of story BUL-E0225 was a woman, called Awenpok, "housewife," of about 35 years, born in Fumbisi, another town in Southern Bulsa District, and married to Yuesi. For the other story, BUL-E1267, Dr. Dinslage registered only one sentence: "Peter Atiniak wrote down the story during his holidays." He was a student, 20 years of age, born and living in Sandema-Kori.

The first story is composed of 79 sentences (the repetitions of the refrain not included) and contains 13 different motifs; the second story is composed of 26 sentences and contains 14 different motifs. Thus, the story BUL-E0225 comprises one motif less than the story BUL-E1267; the ratio between sentences and motifs is 6.08 for story BUL-E0225 and 1.86 for story BUL-E1267. In other words, the story told in the traditional way has more than three times as many sentences for almost the same number of motifs as the story that was written down by a literate person. The written version is, in fact, the shortest of all stories of the sample presented here. The longest story of the sample, BUL-E0259, has 147 sentences and 18 motifs, the ratio being 8.17.

In Tables 3 and 4 (see Appendix), column 4, I have tried to rate the quality of the storytelling a) by the storyteller, and b) by the audience. This rating admittedly rests on my subjective assessment, but I have tried to differentiate between the evaluation of the performance and that of the contents. If we rank the list in Table 3 according to the length of the stories, that is, by the number of sentences, we see that the number of sentences correlates positively with a) the number of motifs and b) the quality of storytelling. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule: stories BUL-E0008 and BUL-E0920, ranking 5th and 7th in length (by the number of sentences), contain fewer motifs than some shorter variants. The story BUL-E1267, which was written down, also forms an exception.

The quality of the performance[43] may be judged by the vivacity of the teller in delivering his or her story and by the response of the audience in keeping with that performance. A good performance and lively response by the audience usually makes the teller lengthen the story told and, consequently, increase the number of motifs he or she reproduces in telling the story. A poor storyteller, on the other hand, will receive scant response

[43] The full record on the performances will be published in Schott 1993.

from the audience and thereupon, as a rule, cut his or her story short. It can be said that in this respect the performance of storytelling has a direct influence on the contents of the story. But in the whole corpus of Bulsa stories that were performed orally, some of the longest ones are of very poor quality in every respect: the tellers could not come to an end, made unnecessary repetitions, mixed motifs from other tale-types into the story, and so on. The audience reacted in these cases with boredom, but, as I said before, the Bulsa are very polite, hardly ever interrupting or correcting the tellers. Thus, the quality of the performance is not *necessarily* expressed by the length of the story told and the length of the story told does not say very much about the aesthetic quality.

Actually, the *core motifs* appearing in 50% and more of the analyzed stories of the present tale-type, listed in Table 2, occur independently of whether the storytelling performance was rated as "good" or "poor." In a way, the story BUL-E1267, although written down by a literate person and thus, in a way, "poorest" in performance (judged by the number of sentences), rated third in the number of motifs contained in this version. Some of the "best" stories I collected among the Bulsa were completely "decontextualized," using the terminology of Bauman and Briggs (1990:72); they were written down by Godfrey Achaw, my assistant and interpreter, in my absence. The word "best" refers to the overall aesthetic quality of the stories, their coherence, their richness in motifs, and their structural and logical consistency. This rating is not only mine, but also that of independent—admittedly "educated"—Bulsa "natives." Some of the "second-best" stories were recorded in a highly articifial environment; apart from the teller usually only my interpreter and myself were present with the tape recorder.

The bulk of the stories were, however, recorded in more or less "informal" gatherings in the evening; as I mentioned above, quite a few stories were recorded by my Bulsa collaborators only, so that no foreign man or woman was present during the storytelling. From the tapes I cannot see that this made any difference, either in the style of storytelling or in the contents or structure of the stories told. Many are "incomplete," garbled, mixed up with other stories, and so forth.

Thus we may conclude that among the Bulsa the influence of the storytelling performance upon the contents of the stories is negligible. On the other hand, I also doubt "that the analysis of text remain[s] central to the study of performance," as Bauman and Briggs (1990:67) paraphrase

Blackburn. Among the Bulsa I have not found that the various themes of different stories have had any influence upon the selection and sequence of stories told in one session. Storytelling among the Bulsa is a rather isolated and formalized event, in which teller and repeater play clearly defined roles, set apart from the audience. The teller also maintains a rather detached attitude to his text, as shown by the fact that most of the time the tellers use reported speech, occasionally wavering between reported and direct speech.[44] The preference for reported speech is so marked that it cannot be due solely to the "artificial" situation of storytelling before the outsider's microphone.

I admit to being skeptical as to the value of performance studies with regard to folktales.[45] Are the performance studies not one of the many subterfuges we use in order not to get seriously involved with studying the contents of African folktales? I take the old-fashioned and maybe heretical view that it makes much more sense to study the meaning and the structure of the texts of African stories than to study the storytelling performance. Much more fruitful than performance studies seems to be an investigation into the variation of African folktales according to the sociocultural context (cf. Schott 1990a), but this is a different matter.

Universität Münster

References

Aarne and Thompson 1961 — Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson. *The Types of the Folktale—A Classification and Bibliography*. 2nd rev. ed. Folklore Fellows Communications, 184. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia. Rpt. 1981.

Agalic 1978 — James Agalic. "Story-Telling among the Bulsa of Northern Ghana." *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 103:261-78.

Bauman and Briggs 1990 — Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social

[44] Cf., e.g., in the story BUL-E0225, sentences no. 5-9, 79-83, 96.

[45] For some critical comments on performance-centered studies, see the report by Limón and Young (1986:439).

Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19:59-88.

Blanc (in preparation) — Ulrike Blanc. "Lieder in Erzählungen der Bulsa." M.A. thesis. Münster [in preparation].

Kröger 1992 — Franz Kröger. *Buli-English Dictionary. With an Introductory Grammar and an Index Buli-English*. Münster and Hamburg: LIT-Verlag.

Limón and Young 1986 — J.E. Limón and M.J. Young. "Frontiers, Settlements, and Development in Folklore Studies, 1972-1985." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15:437-60.

Schott 1970 — Rüdiger Schott. *Aus Leben und Dichtung eines westafrikanischen Bauernvolkes—Ergebnisse völkerkundlicher Forschungen bei den Bulsa in Nord-Ghana 1966/67*. Köln and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Schott 1977 — _____. "Sources for a History of the Bulsa in Northern Ghana." *Paideuma*, 23:141-68.

Schott 1989a — _____. "Gott in Erzählungen der Bulsa (Nord-Ghana)." *Paideuma*, 35:257-22.

Schott 1989b — _____. "Bericht über laufende Forschungen zur Motivanalyse afrikanischer Erzählungen im Seminar für Völkerkunde der Universität Münster." *Fabula—Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung*, 30:83-95.

Schott 1990a — _____. "'La femme enceinte éventrée' - Variabilité et contexte socio-culturel d'un type de conte ouest-africain." In *D'un conte . . . à l'autre—La variabilité dans la littérature orale*. Ed. by Veronika Görög. Paris: Editions du CNRS. pp. 327-39.

Schott 1990b — _____. "Project of Comparative Analysis of Motifs and Themes in African Tales." *Asian Folklore Studies,* 59: 140-42.

Schott 1990c — _____. *Afrikanische Erzählungen als religionsethnologische Quellen—dargestellt am Beispiel von Erzählungen der Bulsa in Nordghana*. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften,

Geisteswissenschaften, Vorträge G 305. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Schott 1993 _____. "Bulsa Sunsuelima—Folktales of the Bulsa in Northern Ghana." In Series S: *Folktales of the Supernatural, Volume 1: Tales of the Sky-God* (*Wen, Naawen*). Münster and Hamburg: LIT-Verlag.

Appendix

EPISODES:

1. Initial situation
2. Dilemma
3. Further developments
4. Sacrifice/killing of girl
5. Intervention of God/Supernatural agent

Sub-types:

0 00 All (most) Sub-types
0 10 **All** girls must be killed
0 20 **One** particular girl must be killed
0 30 Girl kills herself

Table 1: Analysis of motifs in stories of the tale-type "God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed"

BUL-E	0008	0225	0259	0292	0489	0572	0761	0920	1267	1435	
1 01	+a	+a	+p	+a	+p	+p	+p	+dl	+p	+d	**Daughter(s)** (girl[s]) must be killed (a=all d.; d= dl. disliked by parents; p=d. promised to earth-shrine [*tanggbain*]).
1 12	+	+		+							**Kill, all** girls must be killed.

BUL-E	0008	0225	0259	0292	0489	0572	0761	0920	1267	1435	
1 23			+		+	+	+		+	+	**Kill, one particular** girl must be killed
1 34								+			**Kill**, girl intends to kill (burn) herself.
2 01			+			+					**Husband** consults an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*) in order to make his barren wife fecund.
2 02		+	+		+	+	(+)		+		**Earth-shrine** (*tanggbain*), parents (promise to) sacrifice girl to an e. s. ([+] Earth)
2 03			+f		+	+f	+f		+		**Child(ren)** (f= first child) must be sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).
2 04		+	+t			+t			+t		**Beget**, man begets children, (t) after having consulted an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*)
2 05	+	+	+t	+	+	+t	+t		+	+	**Birth**, (barren) wife gives b. to children, (t) after having promised a child to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).
2 26					+w				+m		**Beautiful**, (w) woman gives birth/(m) man begets girl.
2 27					+l			+dl	+l		**Like/Dislike**, father (parents) like(s) (l)/ dislike(s) (dl) his (their) daughter.

BUL-E	0008	0225	0259	0292	0489	0572	0761	0920	1267	1435	
2 28								+		+	**Father** wants to kill his daughter because he does not like her/ because he thinks that she is not of his family.
2 19	+	+		+m							**Hide**, parents (m = mother) hide(s) daughter, although all newborn girls must be killed.
3 01	+h	+h		+h	+b			+b	+b	+b	**Room**, girl is in a r. (house?): h = hidden by her parents; b = before she is taken out to be sacrificed.
3 02	+			+						+	**Cattle yard**, girl is taken into the c. y. before being killed.
3 03	+g	+b	+b	+Br	+Br	+m	+g	+Br	+g	+sBr	**Song** announcing girl's death sung by: b = bird; Br = brother; g = girl; m = mother.
3 04		+c	+e			+r	+r				**Ant** will destroy (c = cook: e = eat; r = remove) the intestines of the girl to be sacrificed [song].
3 05	+b			+Brs	+Brs			+Brs		+sBr	**Brother** (Br) (sBr = senior brother; Brs = brothers; b = boy) has to bring girl out of house/room before she is killed.

BUL-E	0008	0225	0259	0292	0489	0572	0761	0920	1267	1435	
3 06		+	+			+	+		(+)		**Millet beer**, girl ([+] people have) has to brew m. b. before she is sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).
3 07			+			(+)	+				**Mother** orders her daughter to prepare millet beer before the girl is sacrificed / (+) Mother and daughter prepare millet beer together.
3 08		+	+				+				**Carry**, girl has to c. the millet beer she brewed to the earth-shrine (*tanggbain*) to which she will be sacrificed.
4 01			+			+	+		+		**Drink**, millet beer as sacrificial d. of an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).
4 02		+g	+f,g		+g	+f	+g		+g	+g	**Sacrifice**, Earth- shrine (*tanggbain*) receives girl (g) / firstborn child (f) as a sacrifice.
4 03			+	+		+			+	+	**Knife**, girl to be killed (slaughtered) by cutting her throat with a k.
5 02	+w	+G-r	+G-r	+r	+pa	+G-r	+G-a	+s	+w	+s	**Death**, girl saved from d. by G = God (*Naawen*); a = animals sent by God; pa = paternal relative; r = ram; s = supernatural being; w = (old) woman;

BUL-E	0008	0225	0259	0292	0489	0572	0761	0920	1267	1435	
5 03		+r	+r	+r		+r	+				**God** sends animal (+) (r = ram) from the sky to be sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*) instead of a girl.

Table 2: Motifs occurring in 50% and more of the analyzed stories of the tale-type "God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed"

1 01 **Daughter(s)** (girl[s]) must be killed (a= all d.; d = dl. disliked by their parents; p = d. promised to Earth-shrine [*tanggbain*]).

2 02 **Earth-shrine** (*tanggbain*), parents (promise to) sacrifice girl to an e. s. ([+] Earth).

2 03 **Child(ren)** (f= first child) must be sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).

2 05 **Birth,** (barren) wife gives b. to children, (t) after having promised a child to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).

3 01 **Room,** girl is in a r. (house?): h = hidden by her parents; b = before she is taken out to be sacrificed.

3 03 **Song** announcing girl's death sung by: b = bird; Br = brother; g = girl; m = mother.

3 05 **Brother** (Br) (sBr = senior brother; Brs = brothers; b = boy) has to bring girl out of house/room before she is killed.

3 06 **Millet beer,** girl ([+] people have) has to brew m. b. before she is sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*).

4 02 **Sacrifice,** earth-shrine receives girl (g) / firstborn child (f) as a sacrifice.

4 03 **Knife,** girl to be killed (slaughtered) by cutting her throat with a k.

5 02 **Death,** girl saved from d. by G = God (*Naawen*); a = animals sent by God; pa = paternal relative; r = ram; s = supernatural being; w = (old) woman;

5 03 **God** sends animal (+) (r = ram) from the sky to be sacrificed to an earth-shrine (*tanggbain*) instead of a girl.

Table 3: Data of recording, performance, tellers, motifs, and length of stories of the tale-type "God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed"

BUL-E	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
Subtype 1											
0008	GS	89.02.26	RS	4/4	ill.	55	f	KU	08	061	+
0225	YU	88.11.01	RS	2/3	ill.	35	f	FU	13	079	+
0292	YU	88.12.07	RS	4/4	ill.	22	f	YU	10	035	+
Subtype 2											
0259	YU	88.11.06	RS	1/1	ill.?	40	f	YU	18	147	+
0489	KD	89.02.15	MS	4/4	ill.	35	f	KD	11	031	+
0572	KD	89.01.24	RS	2/2	ill.	26	m	KD	15	104	+
0761	GB	89.02.06	MA	2/3	ill.	15	m	GB	13	085	+
1267	NV	89.01.29	FA	wr.	lit.	20	m	SA	14	026	-
1435	SA	89.02.26	PA	?	ill.	40	m	SA	10	042	+
Subtype 3											
0920	SA	89.01.11	AA	4/?	ill.	40	f	SA	07	035	+

Abbreviations of place-names:

FU	Fumbisi	KU	Kunkoak
GB	Gbedem	NV	Navrongo (outside Bulsa District)
GS	Gbedembilisi	SA	Sandema
KD	Kadema	YU	Yuesi (Wiasi)

1. Place of recording
2. Date of recording (year/month/day)
3. Recorded by:
   - AA Akamara Atogtemi (male Bulsa assistant to author)
   - FA Francis Adocta (Bulsa assistant to Dr. Sabine Dinslage, collaborator of the author)
   - GA George Akanligpare (Bulsa assistant to author, student of linguistics in Accra)
   - MA Margaret L. Arnheim (female Bulsa assistant to author)
   - MS Martin Striewisch (German assistant to author)
   - PA Paul Anankpieng (Bulsa assistant to Dr. Sabine Dinslage, collaborator of the author)
   - RS Rüdiger Schott (author)
4. Quality of performance: of the teller/of the audience
   - 1 very good
   - 2 good
   - 3 satisfactory
   - 4 poor
   - 5 very poor
   - /0 no (Bulsa) audience present
   - wr. written version

5. Education of the teller (illiterate/literate)
6. Age (approximate) of the teller
7. Sex of the teller
8. Place of origin of the teller
9. Number of common motifs in the story told
10. Number of sentences
11. Song(s) in the story

Table 4: Length of stories of the tale-type "God Saves Girl(s) from Being Sacrificed" in relation to number of motifs and quality of performance

BUL-E	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
0259 1	YU	88.11.06	RS	1/1	ill.?	40	f	YU	18	147	+
0572 2	KD	89.01.24	RS	2/2	ill.	26	m	KD	15	104	+
0761 3	GB	89.02.06	MA	2/3	ill.	15	m	GB	13	085	+
0225 4	YU	88.11.01	RS	2/3	ill.	35	f	FU	13	079	+
0008 5	GS	89.02.26	RS	4/4	ill.	55	f	KU	08	061	+
1435 6	SA	89.02.26	JA	?	ill.	40	m	SA	10	042	+
0292 7	YU	88.12.07	RS	4/4	ill.	22	f	YU	10	035	+
0920 7	SA	89.01.11	AA	4/?	ill.	40	f	SA	07	035	+
0489 8	KD	89.02.15	MS	4/4	ill.	35	f	KD	11	031	+
1267 9	NV	89.01.29	FA	wr.	lit.	20	m	SA	14	026	-

Oral Tradition 9/1 (1994): 185-202

Silent Voices: The Role of Somali Women's Poetry in Social and Political Life

Zainab Mohamed Jama

Oral literature plays a very important role in Somali culture and has done so for thousands of years. The Somali language is spoken in Somalia, Djibouti, the Somali regions of Ethiopia, and the northeastern region of Kenya. Before 1972 there was no written script; since then, the writing of the Somali orthography has not had much effect on the composition and dissemination of oral poetry. The majority of the Somalis, largely nomadic pastoralists, still remain illiterate. Even a literate populace has little relevance, however, since learned poets such as Hadrawi, considered the best male poet of the present generation, continue to transmit and publicize their poetry orally. Through their performances before live audiences or through their recordings of poetry on cassette or videotape, the oral dissemination process continues unabated. Somali literature is therefore still predominantly oral: it is orally composed, memorized, and recited.

One cannot adequately summarize here the function of oral literature or poetry in the society, because it affects the daily lives of most Somalis wherever they are. Poetry, proverbs, riddles, and other genres are used as acts of communication and as a form of education (elders to the young). They play a significant role in traditional courts and in tribal and political affairs.

In times of conflict, poets adopt the position of journalists, spokespersons, and politicians rolled into one. Poets from different sides of the conflict exchange poetry that is performed at assemblies and traditional courts. These poetic compositions are also passed to different settlements and communities by word of mouth through the professional memorizers and reciters. Proverbs are used in everyday verbal exchanges in both rural and urban societies. Riddles are more commonly used by nomads, who continue to test each other's knowledge and intelligence by presenting complicated oral puzzles to one another. Last but not least, other forms of

oral literature are performed or listened to purely for entertainment.

In this paper women's poetry will be examined. Somali classical poetry—the type of poetry best suited to address issues of serious interest—is divided into four main styles: Gabay, Geeraar, Jiifto, and Buranbur. According to this classification, based on the way the poem is chanted and the rhythmic pattern of words, the Gabay, Geeraar, and Jiifto are seen as male genres while Buranbur is considered the female style (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1974).

During the last few years I have been looking at works of poetry by different Somali poetesses and have concluded that the style adopted by a poet or a poetess depends on that particular artist. There also seem to be regional influences on the artist's style. For example, women from the northwestern regions of Somalia (now Somaliland) who were involved in the struggle for nationalism and who fought against the repressive régime of Siad Barre have composed in the so-called male styles of Gabay and Geeraar. In the past, there have also been examples of poets who employed the Buranbur style. Buranburs by a poet named Haynwade, who was from the central regions of Somalia, were recited by Aden Artan in 1987 when I was recording poetry by women on the struggle for liberation (Jama 1991). Poetry by women concerning matters of political interest, such as clan politics, the liberation struggle, modern government politics, the armed struggle against the régime of Siad Barre, and civil war, is not in wide circulation.

The main medium of publicizing and disseminating poetry is oral memorization and recitation. It is the reciters who pass their favorite poetry from one area to another and from one generation to the next. As Andrzejewski puts it (1985:37), "let us say, a hundred people can memorize a text from one performer, and that each of these hundred can perform it to a hundred more, and so on. In a very short time a story or poem can be known to several thousand people, without recourse to printing or to the radio."

However, this otherwise effective medium of transmission does not work for women artists. The position of memorizer/reciter has always been a male role; because of the restrictions imposed on women by Somali society, there have never been professional female memorizers/reciters. The reciters commit to memory only poetry by male verbal artists, viewing the act of memorizing poetry by women as demeaning and insulting. As a result, women do not receive exposure through the traditional network.

Since the Somali script was instituted twenty years ago, attempts have been made to document in writing orally composed poetry. However, traditionalists and scholars who made such an effort concentrated strictly on poetry by men. The little poetry by female artists collected so far happens to treat subjects associated with what are seen as female roles. These include work poetry, which has now become a folk form without individual authorship, and children's lullabies. But no effort has been made to collect and document verse on "serious, political" themes usually understood as belonging to the male domain and thus reserved for men. So once again, female artists have been let down by another potential medium for publicizing their poetry.

Recently, women artists have benefited from alternative modes of publication, some of which have not been available in the past. Among these are circulation through audio tape and radio transmission, as well as public performances to large audiences (made available due to the sad circumstances of the civil war and the resultant refugee situation).

In this paper I will be looking at examples of poetry by Mariam Haji Hassan and other women whose work has been promulgated through radio transmissions. Some of the work by Habiba Haje Aden, who gained fame by recording her poems on cassettes, will also be cited here. And finally, I will demonstrate how a group of women called Allah-Amin ("those who trusted Allah") managed effectively to reach a large audience through their live performances.

The Role of Radio in Publicizing Poetry by Women

Over the last two decades, most of the publicity for women's poetry came about through Radio Mogadishu, controlled by the government. The national radio frequently broadcast poetry composed by well-known poets and poetesses. The Siad Barre régime used poetry and other forms of oral literature to convey its message to the public. Criticism against the government or its policies was not allowed; in fact, it was a criminal offense to speak against the government. Thus, poetry broadcast contained references to equality of the sexes, the benefits of socialism, and praise for President Siad Barre.

During the first years after the military took power and adopted socialism, poetry was performed before live audiences. The recitals

occurred at meetings and gatherings as well as public rallies held in support of the government. After independence, Somali women felt that though they had participated in all the struggles that led to it, they did not receive any recognition for their efforts. Women were not given opportunities in the newly independent Republic of Somalia. When the Siad Barre régime took power in the 1969 coup, it promised equal opportunities for all, particularly for women.

In 1975, the Islamic inheritance law was amended to provide equal inheritance shares for men and women. This innovation angered the Islamic fundamentalists; as a result, ten male religious leaders were executed by the government. That same year the Somali Women's Democratic Organization was formed and afforded extensive publicity by the government. At least during the first eight years of the Siad Barre régime, women participated in government rallies, gave speeches at orientation centers, and composed poetry in support of the régime. One of the poetesses whose compositions were frequently broadcast by Radio Mogadishu was Halimo Ali Kurtin. In one of her poems, aired in the seventies, Halimo explores the history and role of women in Somali society. In the following stanza, from her long poem, she talks about how women were ignored by the elected government that took power after independence:[1]

Haddii haweenku nafsadoodii oo dhan aanay hurin,
Hiil iyo hoo waxay lahaayeenba aanay hibayn
Hodanow calankeena waligeen ma aan heleen
Hashii markay noo dhashoo caano lagal habcaday,
Haweenku se wali hamuuntoodii ay quabeen

If women did not sacrifice their lives,
If they did not offer everything they had
We would never have attained our flag
When the she-camel gave birth and gave so much milk,
Women were still left in hunger.

In that same poem Halima explains why women offered their support to the régime of Siad Barre:

[1] The Somali alphabet is read the same way as the Latin, except for the letters "c" (which sounds like "a") and "x" (which sounds like "h").

Anagoo meel halisa maraynoon habowsannahay,
Hiyi kacnoo, ciil la hoganoo hantina lahayn
Hillaac noo baxayoo habeen noo dhalatay
towradeenan heegganka ah,
Siyaad hoggaaminayoo ciidankeenna haybadda leh,
Haweenku hanbalyiyo salaan hooyo nimay baxsheen.

We were lost and at a very dangerous stage
Our emotions were aroused, bent with anger
and left with no possessions, we were,
Then lightning occurred one night and our
revolution was born
Siad was leading the charismatic army,
Women are sending greetings and salutations.

Women composed poetry about various subjects in line with the military government, which was then claiming to be socialist. Female artists recited poetry on the theme of equality, self-sufficiency, and socialism. Hawa Aaje Mohamed is another whose poems were broadcast by Radio Mogadishu. Here are lines from her poem, in English translation, on the benefits of self-sufficiency:

If we don't neglect our prosperous land
If we are not afraid of hard work
If we join forces
If we move in hundreds and hundreds
If the collective farmers compete
The imported rice would grow
Onions and garlic will ripen
potatoes and pumpkins will pile up
The flour we make pasta from will be available
We wouldn't be able to finish the maize in
Bakaraha [a market in Mogadishu]
Then we will compete with half the world
Then we will have our fill of prosperity
That is when we wouldn't need to beg others
The Party will assist us so hurry up
And the community of socialists must join hands!

In spite of the contributions made by women in the Siad Barre régime, they felt that the government was not sincere about the promises it made and that its call for equality was only lip-service. There were women

members of the Central Committee of the ruling party during the twenty-one years the government was in power. Several of them were appointed vice ministers. But none had been nominated to a full ministerial position, though most of these women were university-educated and had enough experience in politics. I met and talked to a number of former members of the Somali Women's Democratic Organization who felt that women were used by the Siad Barre régime just as they were used during the struggle for liberation. In a report, Rhoda Ibrahim and Zamzam Aden of the Somali Relief Association in London wrote of the adverse effects this régime had on women: "the changes of some Quranic verses about women by the government resulted in great misunderstanding of the situation of women. It also provided naturally prejudiced men with the ammunition needed to undermine women's position in social development" (Ibrahim and Adan 1991). Most of the women who supported the régime in its early days changed their attitude when they realized it was not really helping them at all There were also those women who were opposing it from the beginning. One of them was Mariam Haji Hassan.

I met Mariam and recorded her poetry firsthand in August 1991 in Nairobi, Kenya. She had been involved in the struggle against the Siad Barre régime from the start. In 1978, Mariam was one of the founding members of an opposition group, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). At the time, she was in exile in Kenya after her husband had been detained by the government. During 1979, immediately after its formation, this group started broadcasting from a clandestine radio station named "Kulmis" (meaning "a meeting place"), which was based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Mariam was one of the first artists to have her work heard on Radio Kulmis, which also broadcast news items and political songs. These programs were of course aimed at raising the political awareness of the Somali people and increasing support for the armed opposition against the military government.

This did not amount to a conscious attempt on the part of the poetess to find a way of publicizing her poetry. In fact, she was not really aware of her talent until 1979, when the managers of the new opposition radio appealed to artists to participate in the struggle. Mariam responded to that appeal, composing her first poem and sending it to Radio Kulmis, which broadcast it under the alias Araweelo Ararsame. She did not use her real name, fearing for her family's safety back in Somalia.

Mariam's poetry was very effective. It was listened to not only for

its artistic expression, but also for the political messages it carried. Here, such poetry plays two functions in the social and political activity of its listeners—entertainment and consciousness-raising. In the following poem, the author makes use of traditional imagery and symbolism by comparing the national flag with a she-camel named Haybad ("Charismatic"). In Somali culture the camel is a very precious animal; not only does it provide meat and milk, but it is highly respected by the nomads for its strength, stamina, and robustness. Most importantly, it is a conspicuous status symbol for the Somalis. Mariam describes the suffering of Haybad in this way:

Haybad oo noo dhashay oo noo haleelo rima.
Horweynteedii la daaqda oon hurgumo ku qabin,
Haud caleenliyo ku foofaysa haro biyo leh
Karuurkeedii ka hanqanoo ku haqab la'nahay,
Koox aan huurna iska saaraynin baa hantiday,
Haar bannaan iyo abaar bay ku heeggantahay,
Midkii haaneed yidhaa by harraatidaa;
Illaah baan ka hadlin mooyee hammay qabtaa.

Haybad just gave birth and rich with milk,
peacefully she grazed with her herd
in the fertile Haud region.[2]
We had so much of her sour milk
Then she fell into the hands of ruthless people.
She ended up in a desert area
Now she kicked anybody who comes near her
If only Allah made her talk, she would tell all of her worries.

In this poem the metaphor of the she-camel represents the nation, the national flag, and the Somali identity. The poetess attempts to portray the suffering of the nation under the military régime (from 1969 to 1990) utilizing Haybad as a vehicle.

In her poetry Mariam employs simple language that is readily understood. In another of her poems, for example, she addresses what she calls *guddi,* which means "committee." This term was well known during the régime of Siad Barre. "The committee" could be interpreted as the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), which was the highest decision-

[2] In eastern Ethiopia.

making committee in the ruling party (Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party) of Siad Barre. Here are some lines from the poem:

> The committee has let us down,
> They eliminated the strong and the intelligent.
> They detain the young as they reach puberty
> The process of avenging these wrongs must begin
> We must support those preparing to fight.

Despite her contributions to the fight against Siad Barre's oppressive régime, Mariam did not gain any recognition from her male colleagues in the SSDF. However, as an artist she benefited from the radio transmissions of her poetry. Broadcasts by Radio Kulmis brought Mariam's work to millions of Somalis who otherwise would not have heard it.

Traditionally, classical poetry is publicized by professional memorizers/reciters, who are always male. It is they who play the crucial role of passing it orally from one area to another and from one generation to the next. Though men have male reciters who follow their favorite poets' compositions, memorize them, and recite these poems to audiences, there are no women who play a similar role. Somali culture and the Somali way of life impose a number of restrictions on women. This problem is compounded by the fact that male reciters shy away from performing poems composed by women; they see it as demeaning for a man to stand up in front of an audience and recite poems by women. There is also a problem of communication between the male memorizers and the female artists: the memorizers would have little access to women except those in their own family, whereas they would have full access to male poets.

Most commonly, women perform their poetry before their female family members, relatives, or friends, who may memorize it and recite it, probably to other female friends. There are very few other occasions in which poetry by women can be recited. These include special gatherings like engagements or weddings, and in modern times, celebrations to mark Independence Day. As a result of this apparent vicious circle, poetry by women tends to die with its author and is not passed down like that of men (Jama 1991).

Radio transmission of poetry has provided those poetesses an opportunity to bypass the restrictions imposed by the society, particularly by the memorizers. Radio has become a viable tool for dissemination of poetry in general, but in particular that composed by marginalized segments

of the society. Mariam H. Hassan herself points out the power of radio in one of her compositions addressing the former president, Siad Barre:

> Those inside the country and the ones outside
> The Somali people have been warned.
> The radio which is broadcast around you conveys the reality
> The discussions aired are far from fabrication.

Dissemination of Poetry by Audio Tapes: The Case of Habiba

Habiba H. Aden is another poetess who made use of new technology such as cassettes. She has in fact reached even wider audiences than those afforded by radio: her poetry was recorded, then distributed in large numbers in the Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Yemen. On cassette Habiba's poetry has reached as far and wide as America and Australia. When it comes to classical poetry, Somali men usually listen to classical male poets. It is surprising to find men in large numbers sitting around a cassette player airing a female voice. But that has been happening in recent years, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where Somali men listen to poems by Habiba both for entertainment and in appreciation for her talent.

Habiba recorded this particular collection of poems in the Gabay and Geeraar styles from 1988 to 1990, when a bitter civil war was raging in the north of Somalia. Naturally, the events surrounding her at the time were reflected in her poetry. The thematic content of her poems is mainly concerned with particular battles, encouragement for those in the war zone, and appeal to other Somalis to join the armed struggle to overthrow Siad Barre's government.

What is most interesting about Habiba's poetry is her utilization of classic Somali linguistic devices, her intimate acquaintance with the language, and her developed cultural knowledge. She uses highly allusive language. In Somali culture, the more indirect and subtle the expression, the more it is appreciated. Listeners enjoy poetry not only for the message the poet/poetess is trying to get across, but also for the mystery associated with solving the coded message. For the audience it is like solving jigsaw puzzles. Andrzejewski explains the importance of indirect language in Somali culture in this fashion (1968:74): "It is considered to be a sign of refinement and wisdom not to come directly to the point but to present to

the audience one's statements or proposals by means of allegorical images, veiled expressions and cryptic allusions, which are subsumed under the term *guudmar* which literally means 'moving over (or above) the surface'."

Habiba draws her rich imagery from living things in the pastoral environment, animals in particular. One of her most popular compositions is called "Dhabannohays" ("Irony"), which has been compared with some of the best poems in classical poetry passed down from previous generations. If she were to be rated, I was told by a Somali elder who would fall into the category of modern literary critic, she would be in the same class as Sayid Mohamed Abdulla Hassan (alias the Mad Mullah), who was a very talented poet and freedom fighter during the colonial period. The language used in this poem is of a very high standard. Those who have managed to decode it assert that it describes some of the major crimes committed by Siad Barre and his supporters. But if one looks at the literal meaning, Habiba is merely talking about animals. In this particular stanza from her poem, she is referring to a hyena:

Dhurwaagii dhaylo cune,
illayn dhiig uu cabiyo
baruur uu dhuuqsadiyo,
dhallaanyo cun buu barte
Dhabtii buu daahaya,
Haddana dhabar muuqda iyo
dhirbiicaa la arkaya,
Kuyee waa dhabannohays.

The hyena which eats the lambs
is used to drinking blood
and grasping its rump
for it's used to eating young goats
it hides the truth
But the evidence can be seen.
It is ironic, they said.

Poems such as the above have been very effective in mobilizing support for the guerilla war effort of the Somali National Movement in the north.

Not all of Habiba's compositions are metaphoric. In her famous poem entitled "Somali," she addresses all Somalis to stop the genocidal war against the people in the north and unite against the government in power. The following translated extracts are from that poem:

Somalis, misfortune has taken place
in this generation
Those who fed me, the ones who deceived and
those who consoled me
Those whose hearts are with me but are trapped
by the enemy
The ones who are suffering and cannot give support
I am addressing you all
Somalis, I am aware of all the good deeds done for me
Every man reaps only what he sows.

Habiba is appealing to the hospitality, generosity, and help Somalis traditionally give each other in times of need or trouble. Some of her poems address all Somalis and appeal to their sense of patriotism, while most of them emphasize the evils of tribalism. Her poem entitled "Qiyas" ("Assessment") is on the subject of clanism and how the régime of Siad Barre exploited it to divide the Somalis, one of the few nations in the world with one culture, religion, and language. Here is a selection from "Qiyas":

Each time he wants to attack or harm a clan
He offers false accounts of a situation to appease the rest.
He claims that they were going to bring in strangers.
He tells the public that colonialists were behind them
After all these lies you then carry weapons for him;
The way you are dividing yourselves is no good.
Why don't you think as one nation and plan accordingly?
The loss of your kinship and the wounded nation
O Somalis, why don't you check your losses?

When the artist composed her poems, it was probably sheer anger at what was happening around her that made her express her feelings in an aesthetic form. But such poetry has fulfilled many functions in Somali society. A poetess like Habiba, who comes from a family well known for their talent, is now respected by all listeners regardless of gender. I believe that one of the reasons her poetry has broken the barriers of sex and segregation lies in the content, specifically its relation to the civil war that was raging in the country. But another very important factor is the exposure through tape to a significantly wider audience, increasingly male,

in particular expatriate Somali men working in the Arabian Gulf states.[3] This is an advantage to poetesses of her generation denied to those of the past.

The Role of Direct Performance before Large Audiences: Poetry by the Allah-Amin Group

When Habiba was composing the above poems, there existed a group of Somali women called Allah-Amin. They were active in the north, where fighting between the Somali National Movement (SNM) and the government began more than two years before the final collapse of Siad Barre's government. Members of Allah-Amin worked in areas controlled by the SNM forces during 1988-1990. They were involved in activities aimed at helping the population of northern Somalia who had been displaced by the war, including thousands of refugees camping around the cities in that region. Allah-Amin, whose members were all female, were doing voluntary work—tending to the wounded, nursing, cooking, and running children's schools (mostly under trees). In addition, they maintained a cultural group who composed and performed poetry and songs before the refugees.

Because Allah-Amin's output was a collective effort, their style of poetry differed from that of Mariam and Habiba. They were ingenious in adapting old and traditional lyrics from work songs or religious poems. In group performances a solo singer chanted their new compositions while the chorus repeated familiar lines from old tunes. This system of dissemination worked very well. The traditional work songs are well known for their lively rhythms, and the group's poems were accompanied by clapping and wailing. At the same time the content of their poems was powerful and adept at touching the emotions of the listeners. The themes were mainly sad, serious issues reflecting the very real war situation.

Work poetry is usually recited by women when performing their customary tasks such as churning milk, weaving mats, or pounding grain. Such poetry has been known to be used by women particularly to express their opinions as well as to advise their daughters about their futures,

[3] Importantly, expatriate workers made significant financial contributions to the struggle against the Siad Barre government.

marriage, housekeeping, and so on. Traditionally, women have used work poetry to express social or political matters, as John Johnson explains (1991): "to mediate social tensions in the extended family and . . . to debate social and political issues both overtly and through the use of veiled speech."

If we look at a few lines from a milk-churning poem, we see that the poem is not about churning: it concerns a woman who feels that her husband is *Qorqode,* a man who interferes in the kitchen, a traditionally female domain. The term is in fact used as an insult to men. The woman who speaks the following lines obviously feels that her husband does not trust her with her part of the house work. She is even afraid he may divorce her because of his mistrust. The poem is addressed to the milk container, which is personified and named Bullo:

> Bullo, my sister,[4] please churn,
> So that I wouldn't be accused of taking the butter
> So that I wouldn't be thrown out and suffer hardship
> Bullo, my sister, please churn.

The use of work and other forms of oral literature as a medium of communication is thus not new. Allah-Amin has been innovative by adapting work and religious songs to the new situations of contemporary politics. I point out that though most of the members of Allah-Amin were literate and could read and write the Somali script, all their poems were orally composed and performed, like those of most Somali verbal artists.

The Allah-Amin group performed their poetry before audiences not merely to entertain them, but to encourage them to fight. Some of their poems, in fact, go a stage further by cursing the enemy. In Somali culture there is a belief that such things work; poets are believed to have magical powers to effect curses as well as blessing. But most importantly, curse poetry, which is known as *guhaan* in Somali, serves as a psychological release of otherwise repressed frustrations and tensions. It is the next best thing you can do to your enemy besides killing him. The following lines are from a curse poem by Allah-Amin:

> *Hoobaalayow hobalayow hoobaalayow heedhe*
> *Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe*

[4] Refers to the milk container.

Big mouth, may you be struck by leprosy
Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe
You killed and destroyed the lives of millions
Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe
We remember the hundreds of heroes murdered
Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe
May you be caught in the name of Allah and his Quran
Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe
May you be struck by misfortune and meet your end
Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe
The men who raped Bureqa and the beautiful Rodha
Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe
May you and your allies go to hell
Hoobaalayow hobalayow, hoobaalayow heedhe
Hoobaalayow heedhe, hoobaalayow heedhe.

The first line and the repeated chorus lines do not express anything distinctly meaningful. They are only there to embellish the poem and make it more interesting. The repeated lines also act as a breather, giving the solo singer time to gather her thoughts or even improvise new lines. When one listens to the above poem, one can be deceived by its seemingly innocuous nature until one grasps the very powerful content of the solo lines.

In another poem the group borrowed the tune and the chorus line from a religious poem and modified it with their own compositions. The repeated chorus line is an Arabic prayer, which means "God save our beloved Mohamed [the prophet]; may peace be upon him." But the content of the solo lines is not theological; rather it is meant to encourage the fighters to keep on fighting and to attract new recruits for the guerrilla warfare. The religious prayer used in the chorus lines can be said on nonreligious occasions. Since Somalia is a predominantly Muslim country, almost everybody knows common prayer lines. Usually the recitation of such lines at meetings and other gatherings creates an atmosphere of unity and cohesiveness. As a rule, whenever the name of Allah and his prophet are mentioned, everybody stops and repeats it. Thus it serves as a way of attracting people to listen to the intended message conveyed by the soloist. Here are a few lines from the poem by Allah-Amin:

Allahu musali wasalim alaa Habibi Mohamed alayhi salaam
O brothers, fight and put your swords in their big bellies.
Allahu musali wasalim alaa Habibi Mohamed alayhi salaam
Take up arms and burn your enemies, Allah will reward you

Allahu musali wasalim alaa Habibi Mohamed alayhi salaam
Muslim or non-Muslim, you have the right to fight if oppressed.
Allahu musali wasalim alaa Habibi Mohamed alayhi salaam

One of the most interesting features about Allah-Amin's performances before large public gatherings is the participation of the audience. I have been told by a relative of mine, who witnessed some of the occasions on which Allah-Amin performed their poetry, that such meetings were electrified by the songs and clapping, as well as by the cries of the listeners. On one occasion when the poem to encourage people to fight was recited, the audience were singing the chorus lines and some of them were shouting encouraging words such as *waa sidaa, sidaa weeye* ("that is it, that is the way it should be"). But when a poem built around a curse, like the above, is performed, the reaction and the participation of the audience may take a different form. Usually, if people are in accord with the sentiment of a curse or a prayer, they will say something to make it more effective. In this context, I think the audience would participate in the condemnation of their enemy by saying something like "Amen, amen" after each line that represents a curse. Recitations of this kind would be very effective when the audience can relate to the content; such occasions are identified by a close relationship between the performer and the audience. The Allah-Amin Women's Group has managed to perform before unusually large audiences, made possible only because of the circumstances of the civil war. Their poetry has played an important social and political function in the lives of their listeners.

During 1990, the Somali National Movement captured the whole of the northwest region from the army and supporters of Siad Barre, who was finally overthrown in Mogadishu at the beginning of 1991. In May of that year, the independent Republic of Somaliland was declared and a new interim government was formed. This new government did not include a single woman. Yet again, women, who constitute more than fifty percent of the general population, were ignored. To add insult to injury, more and more restrictions are now imposed on women in Somaliland by the Islamic fundamentalists who gained strength during the years of the civil war. As far as I know, Allah-Amin are not currently active. The restrictions imposed on women in Somaliland have sadly led to a termination of this group's pioneering work. Most of the Somali women I met are unhappy about the way they believe they have been used by men in different

struggles. Men have been willing to have women as partners in the crucial times when their participation was needed, but they seek to exclude women from sharing in the fruits of these struggles.

Conclusion

Somali women's poetry plays a fundamental role in shaping society, educating children, conveying messages in political affairs, and raising consciousness. Over the years women have been involved in struggles for land, liberation, and freedom from oppression. They have not only participated physically in such struggles, but have also taken a major part in the cultural struggle and the "war of words" by composing poetry and other forms of literature, as the conflict demanded. However, their poetry did not attract much publicity and they consequently did not receive the recognition they deserved. This neglect was mainly due to the fact that they were largely ignored by the male memorizers, who have paid no attention to female artists in the past and continue to do so in the present.

In recent years, poems by female artists have reached a wider audience through radio. However, the stations concerned were selective and partial in the poetry they broadcast. The national radio run by the government was interested only in poetry in praise of the government and its policies, while the opposition radio was interested only in poetry denigrating the state and supporting the armed struggle against the government. Having said that, it is indisputable that this medium has provided an outlet for women to publicize their poetic compositions. Clearly there is a role for non-partisan radio stations in assisting the dissemination process. The Somali Section of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has been instrumental here. During the last few years the Somali Section has been regularly broadcasting poetry and song on a wide range of subjects by new and unknown as well as established female artists.

The written Somali script has helped a great deal in recording and preserving oral literature. But the scholars and traditionalists involved in this work in the past have paid very little attention to women's poetry, particularly that treating the themes of politics, nationalism, war, and civil strife.

It can be said that Somali society still has no place for female

memorizers and reciters. Potential memorizers and reciters find themselves severely restricted by a male-dominated patriarchal society that continues to trivialize women's cultural expressions. Somalia remains largely a pastoral nomadic society; a female memorizer traveling alone would not be tolerated.

However, there are other ways women can avoid this vicious circle. Female artists can follow the footsteps of Habiba Haji Aden and record their poetry on cassette. These cassettes can then be distributed both inside and outside the country to reach the ever-expanding Somali diaspora. I would also suggest, in the future, that women seek as much publicity and circulation as possible. They must become involved in the work of recording and writing poetry specifically by women, making use of the written Somali script. Female traditionalists, scholars, and writers will, I believe, be more effective in recording and transmitting poetry by women. Given the history of indifference and hostility from men, a female facilitator will hopefully offer a more sympathetic and understanding ear to the work. Until these important links are forged and alternative forms of dissemination found, female poetry will continue largely unheard and the voice of Somali women will remain silent.

London

References

Andrzejewski 1968 — B.W. Andrzejewski. "Reflections on the Nature and Social Function of Somali Proverbs." *African Language Review*, 7:74-85.

Andrzejewski and Lewis 1974 — _____ and I.M. Lewis. *Somali Poetry, an Introduction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Andrzejewski, Pitaszewics, and Tyloch 1985 — _____, S. Pitaszewics, and W. Tyloch. *Literature in African Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ibrahim and Adan 1991 — Rhoda Mohamoud Ibrahim and Zamzam Abdi Adan. *The Integration of Women into Development in Northern Somalia*. Task Force Report. London: Somali Relief

Association.

Jama 1991 — Zainab Jama. "Fighting to be Heard: Somali Women's Poetry." *African Languages and Cultures*, 4, i:43-53.

Johnson 1991 — John William Johnson. "Power, Marginality and Somali Oral Poetry: A Case Study in the Dynamics of Tradition." Presented to a conference on "Power, Marginality and Oral Literature in Africa," School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

Oral Tradition, 9/1 (1994): 203-229

Women's Discourse on Social Change in Nzema (Ghanaian) Maiden Songs

K.E. Agovi

Introduction

This paper deals with one aspect of Nzema *Ayabomo* songs. It examines women's discourse on the theme of social change in the songs. In particular, it attempts to analyze the different ways in which Nzema women appropriate a profound awareness of changes in their environment as a form of empowerment to undermine *fixed* perceptions of women and their seeming marginality in the social process.

Of all the cultural productions undertaken in the Nzema area by women, *Ayabomo* is perhaps the most significant. It is the only event that unites a broad spectrum of women of all ages. Its recreational appeal is widespread. Although there are differences in the range of songs from one place to another, common tunes, melodies, rhythmic structures, stock ideas, and themes can be found in the repertoire of all the performing centers.[1] In a real sense, therefore, *Ayabomo* provides an outlet for assessing defined attitudes, perceptions, and reactions as being representative of Nzema women on significant social issues.

Historical Trends in *Ayabomo*

A careful study of the language and themes of the *Ayabomo* reveals that it is a pre-colonial cultural event. A large number of the songs contain archaic Nzema words; in addition, the ideas and world-view in some of the songs seem to reflect epochs of an earlier, pre-colonial Nzema society when hierarchical social structures and values were preeminent. There are songs

[1] For details, see Agovi 1989.

that reflect a "transitional period" immediately following the imposition of colonial rule, and there are still others that deal with stresses and tensions of more recent times. Hence, generally speaking, there appear to be three broad phases of development in the *Ayabomo*.

In the first phase, the *Ayabomo* seem to have emerged as a response to the need for women to bond together as a distinct social unit in order to share their marital problems publicly. Probably as a result of the high incidence of intra-group conflicts, the need was also felt to set up defined standards of moral comportment. Accordingly, there was a marked groping, in some of the earlier songs, towards female self-censorship in which insult, ridicule, and satire became the tools for shaping group morality so that women generally would fit the mold of male expectations.

After the establishment of colonial rule in the early nineteenth century in Southern Ghana, including the Nzema area, the period witnessed a "loosening of tongues" in the *Ayabomo*. Women began to use the *Ayabomo* to assert certain rights in marriage and to mildly "protest" when these expectations were not met or frustrated. Incipient attempts at *deliberate* insult of men on gender lines began to emerge in the songs. Such "loosening of tongues" in this sense also coincided with a certain drive towards openness in Nzema society, particularly towards the early twentieth century. By the end of the 1950s when travel, money, education, trade, and commerce had become intensified in the colonial situation, a new female morality began to evolve in the *Ayabomo*. This new morality was aggressive, defiant, urgent, possessing also a sense of mission. The significance of this third phase in the *Ayabomo*, particularly its success in reordering social perspectives, interpersonal relationships, and in particular male-female power relations in Nzema society, will constitute the subject matter of this paper.

Research Area

The material for this paper was collected from eight villages and towns between Axim and Half-Assini in the western region of Ghana. The area is located between two major cities, Sekondi-Takoradi in Ghana and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, each less than one hundred kilometers away. While the main occupations of the people here are fishing and farming, there is also intense traffic in economic ventures. A large proportion of the

female population in the research area is engaged in trade, commerce, and marketing. The volume of such economic activities has rapidly increased with the completion of the Trans-Africa highway about a decade ago. The highway effectively links the area with a number of other urban and commercial centers in both Ghana and Côte d'lvoire. It has also led to the creation of "seasonal workers," mainly for the fishing and mining industries in both countries. These economic migrants, who are predominantly Nzema males, have helped to reduce the population density in the area. Added to this is the effect of educational institutions that turn out educated youths who are also forced to migrate to the cities as job-seekers.

This pattern is consistent with national demographic trends. Since 1948, urbanization in Ghana has been especially rapid, with the result that today nearly 31% of Ghanaians live in a city or town. According to a recent survey, between 1960 and 1970, more than half of urban growth was caused by migration from rural areas. At the same time, the fastest growing towns in Ghana as a whole tended to be market and transport centers or suburbs of large cities (cf. Nabila 1988:1-8, Dickson 1984). These trends have significantly created imbalances in the age-sex composition of the urban and rural areas "due mainly to the selective nature of migration undertaken by males in the working age groups in search of employment in urban areas" (Batse 1990:61; cf. also de Graft-Johnson 1974). As a significant consequence, the predominantly rural outlook of the communities in the research area seems to be radically affected by this constant interaction with urban trade and commerce. As we shall see, echoes of this phenomenon will form the major considerations in this paper.

In the Arena of Performance

Normally, *Ayabomo* performances are not arranged beforehand.[2] They take place spontaneously but at designated public arenas. These are often located in the center of a village or town and are always open to the general public. Each performance takes place in the evening and is usually initiated by a few participants who are randomly joined by others as they become attracted to the performance-in-progress.

The public location of the *Ayabomo* is significant in many ways. It

[2] They are performed as prearranged events only at the funeral of a maiden.

allows for an open-air dialogue both among the female participants and with the community at large. Hence, audience in this event is bi-focal: the women participants constitute their own primary audience, speaking to each other, sharing knowledge of their real-life experiences, and affirming their common plight in society. Simultaneously, they also engage in a dialogue with the community, represented by those who are present or are within hearing distance. They reach out to this audience in a dialogue whose agenda gradually unfolds from one song to the other. This also includes debates, arguments, and points of view that are intended to inform, persuade, or highlight central issues of female concern (cf. Agovi 1989:15-20).

Indeed, the arena in the *Ayabomo* is considered a place for homely truths. Participants are enjoined to be honest, truthful, and open about their real-life experiences and about social realities. According to one informant, "if you see that your marriage is not going well, you put it in the song. Your friends add to it; your loved ones also add some more. Then it continues."[3] Another observed as follows: "You see, I struggle with you, I work on the farm with you, grow rice with you. Then you leave me, take another woman, and spend the money on her! Why won't I ridicule you in the *Ayabomo*?"[4] At Tikobo, I was told that women find it difficult to criticize their husbands face to face because "they beat us when we do so; but through the *Ayabomo*, we feel free to tell them our piece of mind."[5] Within the performance itself, there are built-in verbal features that tend to suggest the truthfulness of what is said. Spontaneous shouts of acclamation such as "so-ɛ-ɛ" or "yiɛ-ɛ-ɛ" are used to greet not only the imaginative use of language, but more significantly those ideas and viewpoints that are known to be true. These are usually uttered by close friends who are also participants and who happen to know or be familiar with the situations depicted. Embodied in the *Ayabomo* are verbal mechanisms of verification that allow the audience and other participants to assess the factuality of

[3] Interview with Madame Mieza Aku, a 70-year-old resident of Bokazo at an Ayabomo performance on 23 April 1991.

[4] Participant who readily offered this view at the interview with Madame Mieza Aku (see note 3).

[5] Interview with Madame Nyameke Ekputi at Nkroful on 23 April 1991.

utterances and viewpoints as reflecting real-life experiences.

When the women appropriate the public arena for the *Ayabomo*, they also establish a metaphysical relationship with the performance space in order to enact a profound sense of female bonding. An aspect of this bonding is the projection of a collective voice that is entirely their own. Here, voice and space seem to merge together to achieve a certain autonomy. Throughout *Ayabomo* performances, we are made to confront this sense of spatial autonomy as a self-defining entity, a place of empowerment where the women are free to sing, mime, dance, and clap as a group. In this metaphysical space, the women are supremely themselves, expressing wit, sarcasm, and laughter in a common intellectual and creative enterprise.

As the women perform, they group themselves into a *closed* circle. This also emphasizes their sense of bonding. The circular formation, particularly in relation to the space that is appropriated, tends to demarcate performers from the audience; it separates speaker from listener, actor from "acted upon," insider from outsider. It sets the women apart, simultaneously heightening their sense of "togetherness" and "separateness." One can also mention the uniform rhythms of hand-claps as part of this common purpose. Other significant features include verbal shouts of encouragement that stress a continuing sense of bonding throughout the performance. These shouts are spontaneous and short. They can be uttered by any participant who instantly feels the need to reinforce the group's esprit de corps. Seemingly meaningless expressions such as "yɛ-ɛ-ɛɛ," "hɛ-ɛ-ɛɛ," or "ɛɛ-ɛ-ɛɛ" are often used to raise or indicate the intensity of the bonding in the performance. Sometimes, the same effect is achieved through direct verbal exhortations such as "ko yɛlɛ" (unity!), "bɛzɔnu" (let's hold together!), "bɛsa nu" (your hands together), and "bɛ bo nu-ɛɛ" (knock your hands together!). These are further reinforced by special songs that are calculated to evoke bonding. These songs may be introduced at the beginning of a performance or in the course of it. The following song is a good example:[6]

i
Maidens, maidens in a group
We are only singing Ayabomo songs

[6] Recorded at Ehoaka on 24 April 1991.

We are not in a group war!

ii
Maidens, Maidens, youthful maidens
I bid you all a fine evening!

iii
Mothers of the household
I have come to lure
Away your husband!

iv
If you don't leave him alone
I will hit you with something!

v
An erect object: there's nothing to it
Only a piece of half-cut bread![7]

vi
Yes, we are singing Ayabomo songs
No fight is allowed.

vii
We are only playing
There is no fight in it.

viii
Maidens, maidens, yes
We are only singing Ayabomo songs!

The song attempts to establish an "in-group morality" for the performance by highlighting the need for the group to maintain restraint, tolerance, and goodwill. To this effect, the structure of the text insists on only one line of argument: the *Ayabomo* is a group activity; it involves conflict, tension, and ridicule. But it is important for every participant to realize that it is only a game, a play, not a "group war," so "no fight is allowed." For, after all, the bone of contention—"an erect object" that resembles a "piece of half-cut bread"—has nothing to it. This kind of evocation has a sobering effect on personal animosities in the arena while serving to elevate the primacy of

[7] A euphemistic reference to a circumcised penis.

group consciousness.

Thus through such modes of verbal and non-verbal expressions, the women establish "bonding" as an essential factor of the performance. They prime themselves, psychologically, to confront dangers of social, domestic, and interpersonal conflicts by means of a heightened sense of solidarity in the performance arena. From that point onwards, they become empowered to deal with a variety of issues, including especially their collective response to the phenomenon of social change.

Social Change in the *Ayabomo*

A major concern of the *Ayabomo* is the confrontation and negotiation of the changes being experienced in Nzema society. Several issues emerge under this theme—as is true of other themes of the *Ayabomo*—but in this regard, the women dramatize a distinctive relationship to social change. They see it as an avenue for asserting a liberated selfhood; it affords them the opportunity to bring forth an *inner* essence that is then brought to bear on social realities. Above all, they employ the theme of social change to assert a distinctive female voice and identity that is firmly on the side of change and progress. The manipulation of social change and the establishment of a definite relationship to it unfold in the *Ayabomo* as a process of definition.

Broadly speaking, however, there appear to be three related concepts of social change in the *Ayabomo*, each with its own internal discourse. There is first the concept of social change as an "outside force," an alien, external imposition on the women's consciousness. Second, in some of the songs, it emerges as an *alterer* of consciousness in which an alternative point of view on social realities is presented. Finally, closely related to the latter, social change becomes synonymous with a state of being where the values of change are internalized, giving rise to a deeply personal identification with forces of change on the part of the women.

Social Change as an Outside Force

In the songs that deal with this theme, social change is evoked as a *living* reality in the environment. It is both intrusive and pervasive,

affecting all aspects of life. The women take pains to underline its tangibility, manifestations, effects, and, of special significance, their own attitude towards it. This is what is dramatized in the following song collected from Akoto.[8]

i

Soloist: Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Chorus: Yɛ-Sɛɛ-ɛ
Soloist: Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Chorus: Yɛ-Sɛɛ-ɛ
Soloist: Me yeye mahile wɔ kɛ
Chorus: Yɛ-Sɛɛ-ɛ
Soloist: Me suzu mahile wɔ kɛ
Chorus: Yɛ-Sɛɛ-ɛ
Soloist: Ele kɛnlema a enrɛdo yɛmenle Kofi o daa
Chorus: Ayi O ma menga mengile wɔ o daa
Ele kɛnlema a enrɛdo yɛmenle Kofi o daa

My friend, let me tell you
Yes sir!
My friend, let me tell you
Yes sir!
I want to take it out for you (to see)
Yes sir!
I want to suggest to you
Yes sir!
That if you are handsome, you're nowhere
Near Mr. Kofi at all . . .
Yes, let me tell you my friend,
If you're handsome you will never be
Anywhere near Mr. Kofi at all.

ii

Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Yɛ-Sɛɛ-ɛ
Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Yɛ-Sɛɛ-ɛ
Menga mengile wɔ
Yɛ-Sɛɛ-ɛ
Ele kpale a enredo yɛmenle Jimmy o daa

[8] Recorded at Akoto near Anyinasi on 23 April 1991 at about 7 pm.

My friend, let me tell you
Yes sir!
My friend, let me tell you
Yes sir!
Allow me to tell you
Yes sir!
If you are good, you will never be
Anywhere near Mr. Jimmy at all.

iii

Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Me yeye mahile wɔ kɛ
Ele kɛnlɛma a enrɛdo yɛmenle A.E. o daa.

Let me tell you, my friend
Let me tell you, my friend
I want to spell it out to you
If you are handsome, you are nowhere
Near Mr. A.E. at all.

iv

Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Me yeye mahile wɔ kɛ
Me yeye mahile wɔ kɛ
Ele kɛnlɛma a enrɛdo teacher Kwakye o daa.

Let me tell you, my friend
Let me tell you, my friend
I want to spell it out to you
If you are handsome, you are nowhere
Near teacher Kwakye at all.

v

Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Ateaba danger menga mengile wɔ
Ele kpalɛ a enrɛdo Sister Kobla o daa.

Let me tell you, my friend
Let me tell you, my friend
My sweetheart danger, let me tell you
If you're good, you will never
Come near Sister Kobla at all.

vi
Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Me yeye mahile wɔ kɛ
Mebiza mahile wɔ kɛ
Ele kɛnlɛma a enrɛdo yɛmenle Agovi o daa.

My friend, let me tell you
I want to spell it out to you
I want to divine it to you
If you are handsome, you're
Nowhere near Mr. Agovi at all.

vii
Ayi ma menga mengile wɔ
Meka mahile wɔ kɛ
Ele kɛnlɛma a enrɛdo yɛmenle Daniel o daa.

Let me tell you, my friend
I am telling it to you
If you're handsome, you will
Never come near Mr. Daniel at all.

Certain features stand out in the discourse. First, there is a narrative framework in which soloist and chorus move towards a consensus on a given point of view. At the end of each soloist's "testimony" (as fully exemplified in stanza i), the chorus agreeably reiterates, in total agreement, the essential point of view of the soloist. Embodied in the chorus's response is the recurrent feature of "yɛ-sɛɛ-ɛ," a direct re-creation of the English addressive "yes sir." Also related to this is the admixture of honorific addressives in both Nzema and English that are used to precede names: "yɛmenle" (Nzema equivalent of "Mr.," normally used for educated persons), "teacher," "sister," and sometimes "brother." Moreover, in addition to local day names in the text, such as Kofi, Kwame, and Kwasi—names that carry traditional religious assumptions—there are also references to modified Christian names: "Jimmy," "Daniel," and, in a similar version of the song collected from Elena, "Stephen" and "Angelina." Similarly, there are anglicized addressives such as "A.E.,"

"T.K.," and "Baker."[9]

Gradually, as the song unfolds, the women graphically evoke the *distortions* in the social environment that can be traced to identifiable forces of social change: there are language distortions, distortions in identities, and distortions in cultural formulations. These are seen as the direct result of an alien language, religion, and educational system in contact with the Nzema cultural environment. While the magnitude of the distortion seems total and overwhelming, the women regard it as a blessing. Completely unlike attitudes toward similar depictions in contemporary African written literature, the women in this *Ayabomo* song seem to display an uncritical acceptance and admiration for such distortion. There is an insistence on "telling" what has been seen as an *observed* fact, hence the different levels of disclosure: "tell you," "take it out for you," "suggest it to you," "spell it out for you," "divine it for you." At the end of it all there is the awareness that out of the raging distortions in the environment emerges the women's ideal man, their new kind of man who is both "handsome" and "goodness." The notions of goodness and handsomeness are conceived as concepts closely related to modern classroom education and Christian training. They therefore carry the implication of a male who is educated, cultured, neat, morally sound, and well-mannered. Such a male is not only a "new" and "ideal" person, but also the creature of the eruptive processes of acculturation.

The impression of social change as a disruptive and beneficent force in the society is also true of this song:[10]

i
I will buy you underwear
I will buy you spectacles
I will buy you a car
If only no rival will beat me
I will do all these things for you
So send me something in return
When someone comes my way.

[9] These names feature in a similar version of the song recorded at Elena on 25 April 1991.

[10] Recorded at the Ehoaka performance, 24 April 1991.

Chorus:

Oh! my dear seaman boy[11]
I love you so much
That I will do all these things for you
So send me something
When someone comes my way.

ii
I will buy you clothes
And wash them for you everytime
If I wash your clothes for you
And I am not beaten by a rival
I will do everything else for you
So send me something
When someone comes my way.

iii
I will buy you shoes
Buy you slippers
If I buy you all these things
And my rival does not beat me
I will do everything for you
So send me something
If someone comes my way.

iv
I will buy you a watch
Buy a car for you
If I buy them all for you
And no rival beats me
I will do everything for you
So send me something
If someone is coming my way.

v
I will buy you books
I will buy you pens
If I buy them for you
And someone's daughter
Does not beat me

[11] A term of endearment that also suggests an awareness of seafaring activities.

I will do so many other things for you
So send me something in return
If someone comes my way.

vi

I will buy you a bicycle
I will buy you an airplane
If I buy all these things for you
And someone's daughter—Blackie—
Does not beat me
I will do everything for you
So send me something
When someone is coming my way.

vii

I will buy you a tape recorder
Adorn your feet with golden sandals
When you see a new woman, you sack me!
Oh! my beloved seaman boy
How dearly I love you
I will do anything for you
So send me something in return
If someone comes my way.

Although eloquent expressions of love, tenderness, and affection stand side by side with cynicism and fears, there is a clear affirmation of faith in the enhancing power of *imported* material objects circulating in the society. The careful catalogue of the items from "spectacles," "watches," "shoes," "books," and "pens" to "cars," "airplanes," "bicycles," and "tape-recorder" reveals an attitude that regards them as prestigious (cf. Hardiman 1974). They have become representative symbols of "good living" in the modern context; these symbols carry overtones of nobility, decency, and taste associated with education, wealth, and cultivation. The women are aware that this new materialism has a capability, a power, that facilitates, induces, and cements human bonds. It is the means of consolidating interpersonal relationships in the modern context. By means of this itemization, we are suddenly made to confront a new reality in the society—an awful truth, if you like—that there is now a palpable materialism hovering out there in the larger society that it is absolutely necessary to the ordering of human ties.

The compelling nature of the new materialism also affects women's

aspirations in marriage:[12]

i
I will build my aluminum-roofed house
So that my loved one will sleep in it
when he comes

Chorus:

Ayabomo O yanosia

ii
I will build my house of cement blocks
So that my loved one will sleep in it
when he comes

iii
Let us go there
Child of another woman
Let us go there

iv
Let us go there
My friend, let us go there

v
Let us reach there
My friend, let us reach there

vi
I will build my aluminum-roofed house
So that my boy will get a place to sleep
when he comes back

vii
Let us meet there
My beloved, let us meet there

viii
Let us stay here
My friend, let us stay here

[12] Tikobo *Ayabomo* performance, 23 April 1991.

ix
Let us go too
Child of another woman
Let us go there, too.

x
Let us go there
Kofi, let us go there.

The connection between a modern house of cement blocks and aluminum roofs and exhortations to travel may not be readily apparent. In Ghana generally, there is a persistent saying, usually proverbial, that the bird that refuses to fly dies of hunger. In other words, the able-bodied person who refuses to go away or travel to seek his or her fortune away from home is never believed to prosper. To the women in the *Ayabomo*, it is by encouraging their men to go and work in the city that material prosperity can be guaranteed. The need to get their men to travel has become imperative, a necessary condition to the realization of their *new* aspirations in life. Without saying it in so many words, the women make it clear that they cannot continue to live in old-fashioned mud or wooden houses in the village. A marriage has to *move* with the times; it has to prove its success by the acquisition of the most important symbol of "modernity" and "material prosperity"—a cement house with aluminum roofing sheets.[13]

There is the impression that these women are so passionately committed to this ideal of social progress that nothing can be allowed to stand in the way. This comes out in the wide range of collocations of motion used: "let us go there," "let us reach there," "let us meet there," "let us go too," as if, compelled by a certain urgency to travel, the women are ready to hustle their loved ones into the next available means of transport. The desire for a modern house has become synonymous with the achievement of the women's quest for the good life that change now symbolizes. This vision of "modernity" is still dominant in Nzema society, as indeed it is throughout Ghanaian society. It has been largely responsible for the persistent trend of rural migration to the urban areas over the past three decades. It has also been responsible for the radical transformations in physical structures and services in Nzema rural communities. In effect, this

[13] See Hardiman 1974 for collaborative evidence from other areas in Ghana.

is one area in which Nzema women have been able to bring their rural communities to the side of change and progress by compelling their menfolk to take account of women's collective aspirations in this regard.

Social Change as a State of Mind

In this depiction, there is rarely a mention of social change as an "external force" whose features are discernible in concrete form. It seems to have now become *internalized* as part of a recognizable consciousness whose effects tend to alter perspectives on social realities. The process of constituting social change as an alternative form of social consciousness is the most interesting aspect of the discourse in the songs in this category.

In the selection below, there appears to be a simple-minded rejection of women's roles in the traditional domestic setting:[14]

i
A male's bed, I will never lay it again
The *large bed* of young men of Nkroful
I will never lay it anymore.

Chorus:

Yes, a male's bed, I will never lay it again
As for a male's bed, I will never ever lay it again.

ii
Blankets, I will never wash again;
The *near-white* blankets of Nkroful young men
I will never wash them again.

iii
As for their fufu, I will not pound it again
Huge mounds of fufu for Nzema young men
I will not pound it again.

iv
The wild forest, I will not enter there again
The *wild forest farms* of Nzema young men

[14] Nkroful performance, 23 April 1991.

I will never go there again.

v
Marriage, I will not go again
As for marriage in Nkroful
I will never go in again.

vi
Their bed, I will not lay it again
The *withered bed* of Nkroful young men
I will never lay it again

vii
Marriage is no more for me
The *dirty marriage* of Nzema young men
I will never be part of it anymore.

The first line of each stanza embodies a straightforward rejection of some women's role. These principally concern *expected* roles such as preparing the marital bed, washing, cooking, farming, and marriage. However, almost immediately afterwards, each initial statement is also qualified by an image that denotes either "excessiveness" or "sourness." While the women object to *specific* aspects of their traditional roles, there is also the general impression that these particular aspects entail unreasonably heavy burdens, they are labor-intensive activities. Thus the women are in effect saying that they are tired of the "burdens" associated with some of their traditional roles. They are tired of playing the role of "laborers."

Beneath these apparently innocuous statements of intentionality, there is a total rejection of the view of women as "domestic laborers" or "objects of labor." Each image employed to satirize a role also harbors an attitude that rejects toil and drudgery as a necessary part of a woman's role-playing in the household. What appears to be a random protest becomes in fact a well-thought-out objection to a rooted perception of womanhood.

This kind of protest is not different from the one dramatized in the song below:[15]

i
I said I was going to work as a fisherman
But when I went, I could not catch any fish

[15] Ehoaka performance, 24 April 1991.

Come back, then, and let us eat
Our dry cassava food!

ii
These young men who only steal coconut fruits
If you follow them you will get a disease
If you don't get a disease, you'll never prosper.

iii
These young men of three months standing
If you follow them, you'll get a disease
If you don't get a disease, you'll never progress.

iv
Behold! They are only young men for three months
If you follow them, you'll get a disease
If you don't get a disease, you are pulled down (in life).

v
Young men who don't buy fish
How can you follow them?
If you follow them, you'll get a disease
If you don't follow them, you'll get a disease.

On the face of it, the song is a direct attack on the "young men" of the society. They are lazy workers, thieves, pretenders, misers, and above all, sources of disease and retardation. In short, they are drawbacks of the worst kind. The list of "diseases" and forms of "retrogression" associated with the young men seems endless. However, the primary target of the argument in the song seems to go beyond the young men. As far as the women are concerned, young men are the potential "material" for marriage with them. If the material for marriage has now become woefully inadequate, "diseased," and a drag on a woman's soul, then the question arises: what is the point of bothering to marry? By implication, therefore, a fundamental view being advanced here is that marriage of today is not worth the effort. Related to this perspective is yet another view, namely, that if marriage is a potential threat to a woman's well-being and prosperity in life, then the woman has the right to reject it. No one in his/her right mind would favor embracing a "diseased" way of life. In this way, there is a subtle suggestion that the old idea of marriage as necessary and crucial to womanhood is being challenged in the above song. To the women,

marriage is no longer an absolute necessity, at least given the calibre of the menfolk at their disposal nowadays.

A reordering of the relationship between women and men in the institution of marriage is being advocated. Here again this perspective has, in fact, gained currency in contemporary Nzema society for some time. Women are now increasingly consulted on the choice of partners; they enjoy a greater freedom to contract and dissolve marital relationships. While to some extent these developments are generally regarded by men as being disruptive of marriages in the society, women's choice and consent in marriage have now come to stay in Nzema society. Throughout the songs we have examined in this section, there is no overt mention of social change as an abstract phenomenon; however, we see it in the *mind* at work in the texts. It is a mind that examines, analyzes, and argues in a discourse that has the flavor of depth and metaphor, although it is at the same time deceptively direct and simple. The "language of the mind" employed here suggests that the issues discussed or analyzed have been *thoughtfully* internalized. We begin therefore to realize that the depiction of social change in these songs shifts from the earlier objectification to the psychological arena. This shift denotes a closer identification, at least intellectually, with a process that is increasingly becoming painful for these women. In such a situation, analytical tools of satire, wit, and sarcasm become dominant in the discourse.

Social Change as a State of Being

A matter that weighs heavily on the mind and compels a change in one's perspectives is certainly not too far away from engendering defiance and rebelliousness. It is certainly not far away, when, in particular, it also becomes an issue of conviction and commitment, as we witness in the following songs:

TEXT A (Agovi 1989:32):

i
Even if you beat me
And drag me in the mud
Or turn into a python
In the middle of the road

I will follow him to Awiane.

ii
You can beat me on end
And drag me in the mud
Or turn into a cobra
To block the only path (from the village)
I will follow him even if he's in Accra!

iii
Even if you beat me throughout (the day)
And drag me in the mud
Or turn into a cobra
To block my path
I will follow him
Wherever he is abroad!

iv
If you turn into a python
To watch the paths
I will climb over its head
And disappear (forever).

TEXT B (Agovi 1989:24-25):

i
Whether it irritates you
Whether it annoys you
Whether it nauseates you
Whether it gets on your nerves
Whether it irritates you
I will divorce you
And follow the small boys!

ii
Even if annoys you
I will divorce you
So that Amangoa marries me.

iii
If it annoys you or not
I will divorce you
For my sweetheart is ever-ready
To take me along . . . .

The language in both texts is direct and confrontational. The messages are clear and unambiguous. There is no attempt to probe, analyze, or discuss. There is a total outpouring of the *whole* being, a being who is full of outrage and determination. In Text A, regardless of the personal torture and potential dangers placed in the woman's way, she is determined to follow her loved one. In Text B, the protagonist is equally determined to break her relationship (with her husband, presumably) in favor of the man she really loves. Both situations depict a rejection of "arranged" marriages and the lack of individual choice in the matter. However, the most outstanding impression is the intensity of the defiance and assertiveness.

Throughout the text there is an intense focus on individuation. Everything—language, thought, and emotion—is summoned to project a heightened sense of the individual. The agonies, dangers, and determination of the protagonists are highly individualized. Their right and freedom of choice are seen in individual terms. The result is that *individuation* is made to achieve a complete identity all of its own, with the result that the defiance, assertiveness, and rebelliousness that we witness in the texts are seen as the *direct* outcome of a severe sense of individualism that has seized the women. There is some impression that this kind of individualism has changed and transformed them. It has made them desperate.

In yet another song, we see how the women luxuriate in this new-found individualism:[16]

i
I will never count him,
You can bring the oracle of *Kwafobomo*[17]
I will never count him
For he will get into trouble.

ii
"I won't count him" will kill you
Young women in Akoto

[16] Akoto performance, 23 April 1991.

[17] This is one of the dreaded deities in Nzema. It is customary to invoke this deity at the dissolution of marriages.

"I won't count him" will kill you:
You will get into trouble.

iii

Truly, I won't count him
Son of Madame Adwo
I will not count him
For he will get into trouble.

iv

"I won't count him" is so sweet to your ears,
You women of Nzema,
"I won't count" is so sweet to you
He will get into trouble.

v

I won't mention his name
My dearly beloved
I won't mention his name
If I mention his name
He will get into trouble.

vi

"I won't count" is so sweet to your ears,
You young women of the world,
"I won't count" is so sweet in your ears
He will get into trouble.

vii

I won't mention his name for all the world
Women of Nzema, I won't mention his name
For he will get into trouble.

viii

I will never count him
Go and bring all the world
I will never count him;
He will get into trouble.

ix

I will swear all the oaths
And die, my beloved,
I will swear all the oaths
And die, for he will get into trouble.

x
I will go with him
This death of the chest
I will go with him;
He will get into trouble.

xi
I will never count him
You can uproot all the earth
Of the world, I won't count him
For he will get into trouble.

xii
I will go with you
My young boy danger
I will go with you
Otherwise, he will get into trouble!

In spite of the contradictory impulse of arguments and counter-arguments among the women in the texts, *one* point of view seems to emerge, namely, the determination *not* to "count" or "mention the name" of the loved one; for "he will get into trouble." In order to fully appreciate this point of view, it will be necessary to place the insistent refusal in context. In Nzema society, a woman in a recognized marriage is required, on oath, to mention the names of the men she sleeps with outside the marriage. This is also a necessary legal requirement, enforceable by oath sworn on an oracle, deity, or an ancestor at the termination of a marriage. These customary provisions, however, do not apply to men or husbands. For a long time, women in the Nzema society have found this requirement both demeaning and irksome. And from time to time, they have shown a consistent hostility to it that is faithfully recreated in the above song.

The seriousness of the problem and the determination of the women to put an end to it can be seen in the overwhelming posture of defiance in the song. The almost desperate insistence on the right *not* to comply with established expectations is a direct result of the women's new-found freedom in individualism. At the heart of the matter is the issue of gender equality before customary law, morality, and practice.

Before the last two decades, stories of enforced confessions of adultery and oath-taking at the dissolution of marriages were rampant. Through such efforts of the women in the *Ayabomo*, no Nzema man who

prides himself on being cultured or civilized insists anymore on this procedure. It is now normal practice for the families who are party to a marriage contract to meet and dissolve the relationship without either of the two actual partners necessarily being present. In addition, in the past, customary law provided that on the dissolution of a marriage, an aggrieved husband had the right to retrieve not only the dowry, but also goods, properties, benefits, and gifts bestowed on the woman prior to the dissolution. As a consequence of the new morality (signified by the attitude of the women as we have seen the *Ayabomo*), it is now the practice for the husband or the party acting on his behalf to forgo any such right in a public declaration to this effect. It is such a triumph that is permanently recorded and symbolized in the above song. The significance of this triumph can be seen in the fact that versions of the song were recorded in all the performing centers I visited. It was perhaps the only song that was featured in all the centers. At each center, as I found out, the song was performed with gusto, feeling, and commitment, perhaps indicating symptoms of a triumphant conquest and breaking down a bastion of male preserve.

Conclusion

In our examination of the *Ayabomo*, it seems obvious that this genre has been used to promote fundamental changes in the Nzema society. These changes, arising from a new female consciousness concerning social and interpersonal issues, have affected the economic, moral, political, and legal aspects of Nzema society. Interestingly, these changes have coincided with the period of urbanization in Ghana since the late 1940s, increasing in tempo after the last two or three decades. Equally significantly, these changes have also inaugurated an idea of "modernity," which to the women consists of a *humanized* materialism—the use of wealth to acquire status and social decency—as well as values of a negotiated selfhood.

In the arena of the performance, these women, acting together in animated solidarity, compel a reevaluation of womanhood. They inaugurate a new view of womanhood as the primary vessels of change in the society. Women see themselves as the most radical elements in the society anxious to move it to a new sense of "modernity" in which "progress" and "advancement" are the chief ingredients. It also changes their mental outlook as well as their perspectives on social realities

regarding women's roles. Thus their assertiveness is not merely aimed at achieving gender equality (although this is in fact an important aspect of their agenda in the *Ayabomo*), but beyond that at demanding the right to move their society with the times. Obviously, the women have become sensitive to the elemental forces of their historical period—its materialism, individualism, openness, and bold initiatives—and in fact take advantage of them to promote "modernity" in their society. Hence the women reveal themselves as agents of the inevitability of change.

Our analysis also throws into very sharp focus two other issues of theoretical interest. The first is the generally assumed dichotomy between urban and rural communities in African societies, especially given the obvious differences in population density, infrastructure capacity, and the presence or absence of tangible values. While these differences may not be easily dismissed, it is also important, as we witness in the *Ayabomo*, to note that the forces of change tend to establish an umbilical relationship of mobility between the city and the village that reduces urbanity to the probability of a *mental* construct. Urban values, being the bedrock of modernization processes, have so deeply permeated the mental outlook of these rural women that basically there seems to be no difference between their values and those of the city. The changes that these women are able to promote in all spheres of rural life are changes toward modernization. Thus social change in the *Ayabomo* brings us to an awareness of the metaphysical proximity of village and city in contemporary African life.

Related to this issue is the second assumption that in contemporary African society there is always a binary friction between modernity and tradition. This tension has often been explained in terms of a social conflict model. African writing of the immediate post-colonial era has been exclusively seen in these terms.[18] Change is often depicted as an external, alien force working through acculturated agents (who may be members of a given society and culture but trained or educated outside or from within). The individuals or agents are then "set up" against the rest of society with their acquired "enlightenment" as their only tool against established "tradition." The conflict that ensues normally becomes an end in itself, destructive or beneficial to either the representative individual or to him and the society generally. In the *Ayabomo*, something relatively different

[18] The works of Chinua Achebe have especially been analyzed in this light; see Agovi 1988:123-200.

occurs. While initially there appears to be the same model of social conflict, engendering tension between the genders and between tradition and modernity, this is not in fact the case. We realize that a major segment of the total population becomes committed to change and, in turn, attempts heroically to "lift up" the other segment of society to share in its new vision. Through a process of dialogue, persuasion, and argumentation—a process that reflects the reality of inherent doubts, disagreements, and conflicts among the *Ayabomo* participants themselves—the women attempt to provide an *alternative* social vision to that of their menfolk. While this vision is never compromised, it is held up to the men in a spirit of a frank and open demand. What takes place in the *Ayabomo*, therefore, is not an ultimate process of atrophy and stalemate, but an advocation of common consent in refashioning an acceptable social vision in which "materialism" and "progress" also imply values of gender equality, participation, and choice. The success and effectiveness of the women in this regard can be measured by the actual changes that have "opened up" or liberalized Nzema society towards a re-envisioned society. Such advances in the situation of Nzema women in the context of social change have been confirmed in studies of women in the larger Ghanaian society.[19]

Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon

References

Agovi 1988 — K.E. Agovi. *Novels of Social Change*. Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation.

Agovi 1989 — _____. "Sharing Creativity: Group Performance of Nzema Ayabomo Maiden Songs." *The Literary Griot*, 1, ii:1-43.

Batse 1990 — Z.K.M. Batse. "The Role of Population in Planning and Development in the Context of the Economic Recovery Programme." In *Ghanaian Scholars on Quthafi's Thought: Legon Seminar on Planning, Development and the Third Universal Theory*. Ed. by K.E. Agovi. Legon: Soundstage Production.

[19] See espec. Oppong 1974, 1983.

de Graft-Johnson 1974 — K.T. de Graft-Johnson. "Population Growth and Rural-Urban Migration with Special Reference to Ghana." *International Labor Review*, 109.

Dickson 1984 — K.B. Dickson. *Urban-rural Contrast in Ghana: Its Implications for Development*. Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Hardiman 1974 — M. Hardiman. "A Preliminary Study of the Role of Women in Some Akan Rural Communities." In Oppong 1974.

Nabila 1988 — John S. Nabila. *Urbanisation in Ghana*. Legon: Population Impact Project.

Oppong 1974 — Christine Oppong, ed. *Legon Family Research Papers, No. 1: Domestic Rights and Duties in Southern Ghana*. Legon: Institute of African Studies.

Oppong 1983 — _____, ed. *Female and Male in West Africa*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Oral Tradition 9/1 (1994): 230-250

Through Ambiguous Tales: Women's Voices in Chokwe Storytelling

Rachel I. Fretz

Introduction

Chokwe women, living in Zairian villages, always run from mask-figures.[1] Throughout their lives—as children, adolescents, and mature adults—they dart away from the *akishi*'s threatening pursuit. During the dry season, a series of masked figures wander through the bush and village, dancing and chasing women and children away from the men's circumcision camp. For women therefore, a masked figure recast as a story character brings frightening nuances to a scene. His presence evokes anew that threat of attack. Such allusions in the traditional tales called *yishima* (sing. *chishima*) stir vivid memories of the mask appearances during the circumcision festivities (*mukanda*).

What sense then can we make of the following ambiguous tale? The story is puzzling because a mask kidnaps and supposedly kills a woman, but, as the narrator later reveals, actually marries and has children with her. Mama Mwazeya told this tale to an audience of men, women, and children by Chief Shatambwe's fireside. Here is a brief summary of that performance, recorded in Shatambwe village, Bandundu, Zaire.[2]

> A young childless woman repeatedly gives birth to an infant who dies and then returns as the next baby. A healer resolves the "fertility"

[1] This study of traditional storytelling is based on research conducted among the Chokwe of Zaire: in Shaba (1976 and 1977) and, funded by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad, in Bandundu (1982 and 1983). Additional inquiries, in preparation for this article, were supported by a grant from the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, 1989.

[2] See appendix for complete translation.

problem by confining her to a hut (*masolo*) and by giving her an interdiction—"Never go digging for rats." However, when village women go rat-hunting, she joins them because her infant cries for that food only. Unlucky at hunting all day, she stays alone at dusk and keeps on digging until she accidentally unearths a mask. Emerging, the mask-figure sings to her enticingly: "Wait for me, you who cut the raffia knots [and disrobed me]." Dropping her hoe, she races to her village enclosure to hide. Still the mask pursues, so she runs to the men's pavilion where the elders can usually restrain a masked spirit. But the mask enters, cuts off her head, and escapes, kidnapping mother and child.

But actually he whisks them to the spirit world, where mask-villagers greet their mask-chief with his new bride, this Chokwe woman. Years pass and the woman gives birth to many children. Finally the woman and her mask-husband return to present their children to the matrilineal village. The woman's family, rejoicing, gives the mask-husband many goats and chickens; then he leaves and the woman stays with her people.

This tale, about one young woman's encounter with an ambiguous mask-figure, appears to be a subversive rendition. The couple's relationship does not conform to established patterns in *yishima*; for example, listeners expect the woman to be punished. Nor does the tale fit Chokwe behavior in everyday life; a woman would certainly not stay alone in the bush. The narrator, Mama Mwazeya, seemingly undermines Chokwe cultural expectations for gender roles. In the story outcome, she rewards the female protagonist even though she violates her healer's interdiction and breaks a taboo by unearthing a ritual mask. The infertile woman bears many children, apparently as a result of circumventing several gender-specific cultural norms. Does Mama Mwazeya, indeed, voice a dissenting—even subversive—perspective on female roles?

The narrator clearly plays with *yishima* storytelling conventions and cultural symbols in ways that create an ambiguous tale, and in her ending she does offer an alternate version to the usual outcomes for broken interdictions. However, were her point of view explicitly subversive, the Chokwe men and particularly the chief would have objected outright during the performance or even silenced her—as such privileged audience members not infrequently do. Nor was her performance rejected as nonsensical by male or female audience members. Perhaps Mwazeya intentionally creates a puzzling tale. It seems that she imaginatively plays with an ambiguous mask-figure and invites her audience to make sense of reversed outcomes. Without alienating her audience, she leaves a complex

situation obscured by contradictions and ambiguity.

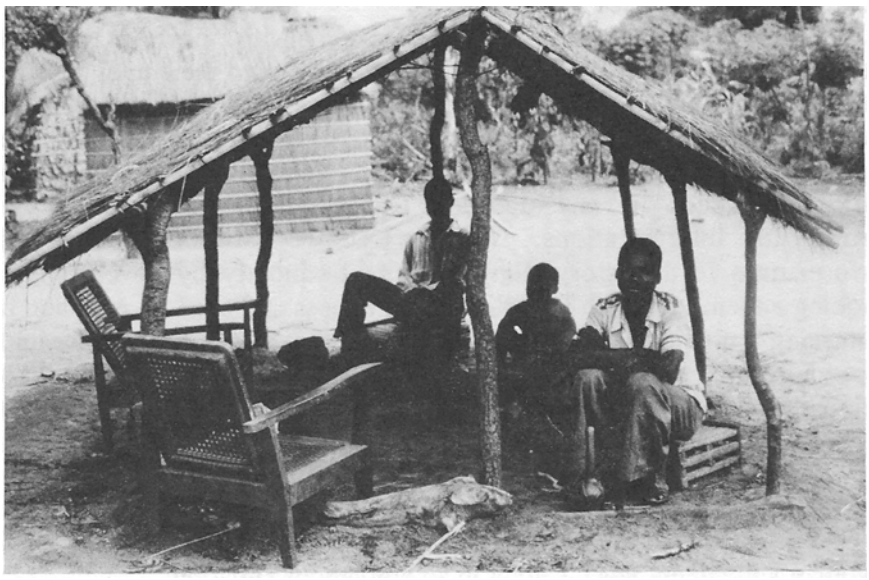
Explanatory Modes: Ambiguity and Narrative Play

Several researchers explain ambiguity as a purposeful strategy in African oral expression (Fernandez 1986; Jackson 1982). Narrative scholars examining other traditions also describe imaginative play as intentional (Basso 1985; Briggs 1988). Thus we might interpret Mwazeya's tale as an artful construction with reversals that listeners can discern by reflecting on the tale, as Jackson suggests. Or we might consider her tale as inviting participants to search for meaning beyond the expression itself, in another framework, as Fernandez does for African riddles. Both suggestions do offer beginning points for understanding some aspects of this tale. Both perspectives suggest that ambiguity can be deconstructed and situated in an explanation. But Mwazeya's tale points to ambiguity itself as her statement about a complex situation typical for Chokwe women. It seems that she invites listeners to ponder and accept ambiguity as irreducible.

Indeed, it is a story's ambiguity, notes Jackson in his study of Kuranko storytelling in Sierra Leone (1982), that invites listeners to create significance. Through pondering ambiguous figures and reversals of expected behavior, listeners explore the possibilities in their universe. They willingly puzzle over paradoxes. Some types of ambiguity are readily deciphered, Jackson suggests; listeners can discern inverted patterns and recognize commonly used ambiguous images. Through reversal or familiarity, these decipherable ambiguities affirm conventional views and established customs (40-54).

But sometimes, I counter, an ambiguous story is not that decipherable: it is just ambiguous and does not convert into conventional patterns. Such stories intentionally validate the experience of uncertainty; they mirror, for listeners, their confusion when faced with irreducible complexities. Fernandez (1986) suggests that many African expressive forms depend on reasoning via images and that expression with mixed or ambiguous images read like a "puzzle." Such puzzling expression, like an indeterminate riddle, inspires a search for a transcendent whole that encompasses the disparate parts—a whole that lies outside the expressive form itself (178-79). In such a reading, the taboo-breaking woman and

ambiguous mask-figure invoke in listeners a search for a framework that encompasses these incongruities. But when pondering ambiguity, Chokwe listeners do not feel compelled to reduce the tale to some clear-cut didactic message or persuasive explanation.



Chokwe people gather in the evenings in the *chota*,
the village pavilion, to visit and tell stories.

Storytelling itself is an explanatory mode, a reasoning through images that invites exploration. As a temporal mode that emerges with one audience's response, storytelling allows for momentarily overridden expectations. As Basso points out (1985:3-6), storytellers creatively manipulate narrative conventions in order to express personal viewpoints or to accommodate cultural changes. Such imaginative play allows people to confront otherwise frightening or risky propositions. Through storytelling, Chokwe women express their dissenting views, their perplexities and frustrations as well as their aspirations. Especially when addressing such potentially explosive and gender-specific topics as a women's failure to bear children or her conflicts with a co-wife, female narrators resort to exploratory play with conventional images. Given a cooperative audience, narrators can imagine the impossible action or relationship even though that

fantasy leaps beyond generic and cultural expectations. Women's voices, though muted in public and male-dominated situations, can be heard by discerning the ways in which they toy with conventional narrative strategies and couch their explorations in sufficient ambiguity so as not to affront the potential silencers in their audiences.

Indeed, because narrators compose during performance for responding listeners, skilled performers always create their tales in ways that accommodate that audience and situation (Fretz 1987:243-50). For this very reason, the ongoing interpretations become embedded in the performance, as Briggs notes (1988:18-22). Textual and contextualizing markers, evident in any detailed transcription-translation, reveal participants' interpretations. Indeed, Chokwe narrators situate their performances in that storytelling session, frequently by developing or invoking a theme set forth in earlier performances and even on occasion by countering a previous storyteller's views. Moreover, narrators also allude to concurrent events and seasonal or situational details easily recognized by their audiences. Thus, the session rather than the solo performance ought to be taken as the minimal unit of analysis (Fretz 1987:360-63). Many clues to participant interpretation become evident as the evening unfolds. For example, the parallels between Mwazeya's tale and an earlier performance by Chief Shatambwe suggest contrasting and gendered interpretations about a woman's judgment when caught in an ambiguous situation.

Based on textual features and contextualizing markers in that session, I read Mwazeya's well-crafted tale as an artful and intentional ambiguity and analyze the narrative strategies through which she establishes that ambiguity. Initially, in the narrative opening she sets up irreducible incongruities; then, by alluding to the concurrent circumcision event, she highlights gender reversals; in addition, she creates a confusing symbolic character, the mask-figure, by associating disparate images. Thus, through incongruity, reversals, and symbolic play, she creates an ambiguous tale and mutes her rebuttal to an earlier performance. In the most immediate sense, then, Mwazeya's tale invites listeners to consider women's fertility crises and delineation of gender roles as inherently ambiguous. At the same time, she uses that "suggestion" to veil her subversive feelings and potentially threatening argument with the Chief about women's decision-making abilities and general wisdom.

Narrative Opening: A Problematic Situation

Chokwe narrators orient their listeners to a problematic situation in the tale opening. In her first sentences, Mwazeya sets forth infertility as the thematic concern by introducing a young mother whose newborn baby always dies. Based on a cultural assumption, Chokwe listeners suppose that the mother repeatedly gives birth to the same infant. Thus, the story topic—a woman's infertility—sets forth a highly emotional situation. Mwazeya places the female protagonist in the nexus of a family crisis. Since Chokwe reckon descent matrilineally, the young woman's actions and decisions have import not only for herself, but also for the well-being of the lineage. Therefore, the husband calls a healer to cure her.

It is a woman's story, for it dramatizes a relational problem causing great anguish to Chokwe women. Infertility—defined as childlessness more frequently than as sterility—is a gender-specific crisis. For although Chokwe men also desire children (fertility), it is men who divorce childless women to remarry and not vice-versa. A woman's fertility ranks among the top priorities for her success in marriage and for her self-realization as a woman. Her biological fertility not only promises a literal abundance—children, working hands, and enlarged influence—but also a symbolic fecundity indicating ancestral blessing.

This woman is digging for field rats out in the bush.

Immediately, Mwazeya complicates the crisis with an interdiction. According to narrative convention, an interdiction in the opening sets up an implicit tension among various possibilities—fulfilling, avoiding, or breaking the interdiction, all of which have consequences. The healer's cure is problematic because his interdiction focuses on a common activity—rat-hunting—that during the dry season is not only a prime food source, but also a time for visiting with other women. Furthermore, the interdiction compounds an already problematic situation because it accentuates the conflict between family-nourisher (digging for food) and lineage-bearer (taking this restrictive fertility cure). Both roles are essential to her success as a Chokwe women.

Through this device of interdiction, Mwazeya's tale also draws attention to opening and closing by linking rat-digging to sexual activity and subsequently to mask-unearthing. During the dry season when women hunt for rodents, they dig into mounds exposed by bush fires and, after catching the rat, they cover the hole. This healer forbids the rat-digging activity that through penetrating action is associated to sexual intercourse. Opening and closing the rodent mounds symbolizes her fertility problems: namely, the infant's repeated entries and exits from her womb. Healers typically give interdictions based on associative thinking that ties two images—the prohibited action and the consequential desired or avoided action—by similar movement or visual details. It is a kind of sympathetic magic. Mwazeya's tale extends the healer's associations to mask- unearthing: rat-digging and mask-unearthing are linked by common time (dry season) and place (bush locale) as well as by the penetrating action (uncovering and removing).

Mwayeza further complicates the initial problematic situation with additional incongruities. She says that this child will eat only the forbidden food, thus implicating the mother in trouble through a double-bind. Caught in a dilemma between her child's needs and her healer's interdiction, the woman listens to the infant's demands and digs for rats, breaking her interdiction.

By *yishima* convention, trouble always comes to a character who breaks an interdiction or who stays alone in the bush. That the woman's digging unearths a mask is ominous but not surprising. When she does this, listeners realize that she has inadvertently crossed a gender boundary by entering the *mukanda* ritual domain, and they know as well that only a male specialist may unearth masks without reprisal. Thus they no doubt surmise

that she will be punished for her dual infractions: crossing of gender boundaries and infringement of fertility mandates.

Indeed, in the very opening, the narrator places her female protagonist in a situation riddled with incongruities. By convention, audiences expect her judgment to bring her inevitable trouble because she is caught in contradictions. But, although this female character crosses many gender boundaries, she cannot be faulted as subversive because she did so inadvertently while caring for her child. In this way then, Mwazeya establishes an initial ambiguous situation. Listeners must ponder whether, given her situation, this young woman could have taken any appropriate, wise action.

Contextualizing Framework: Allusion to Cultural Event

By referencing her tale in another event (text), the *mukanda* ritual, Mwazeya situates the female protagonist in a highly charged and gendered context. Thus she accentuates the thematic focus on a woman's infertility by a contrasting and threatening masculine figure, a *mukishi*, who generally marginalizes women during this central, cultural event.

Called by the narrator simply *mukishi*, the generic term for mask, the figure is associated for listeners with the circumcision festivities. Although Chokwe audiences generally link *akishi* to that ritual event, Mwayeza's listeners in particular would locate a chasing *mukishi* in that context: the performance took place during the dry season when masks regularly appear during the festivities. Mwazeya depends on that implicit contextualizing, for throughout her performance, the dramatic action centers exclusively on the mask's and the woman's evolving relationship. She seems to take for granted the gender-delineated *mukanda* framework.

Both narrator and audience can assume a common knowledge of this major seasonal event and its contextualizing relevance for this tale. *Mukanda* is not only a role-delineating rite of passage for Chokwe boys when mentors instruct them on becoming men, but also a gender-delineating occasion for the whole village when masks guard the masculine rite from female intrusion. During these months, mask figures separate women and children from the initiates by chasing them through the village as well as from the bush paths near the camp. Because women never know when a *mukishi* might attack, they avoid working in the fields

or going to the river alone. Certainly a woman would never intentionally dig for rodents near the secluded male camp, where several masks are buried each year. For even when a mask is unearthed accidentally, that dangerous mask-spirit comes forth.

By having a female character uncover a mask, Mwayeza invokes an unrestrained, and thus threatening, energy. Her listeners assume that only the *nganga-mukanda*, the master of the camp, can unearth these masks without potential harm to the community. They believe that the boundless energy of these "spirits," once called forth, can be contained only by the chief of ceremonies and that therefore only he should direct the unearthing of the masks. During these *mukanda* months, he usually calls forth the whole range of Chokwe masked figures, who are identifiable by appearance and distinctive actions. Each has a particular significance; several mask figures are known to activate potent phallic or fertility energies (Bastin 1988). At this point in the performance, whether the protagonist stirs a mask-figure whose energy will destroy only her or will harm the community is open to listener speculation.

As background then, this ritual resonates through the tale, sharpening the gender contrasts and prefiguring actions between the key characters: a mask must chase and a woman run. Listeners expect the encounter to reflect the gender distinctions that mark activities during this season; they expect the mask to maintain his usual threatening pose and to reaffirm the familiar gender boundaries. And they listen for clues to the mask's identity in order to surmise his potential threat.

Symbolic Play: An Ambiguous Figure

In this tale, however, the mask becomes an ambiguous figure, because unnamed he is identifiable only by his actions. And since his actions evoke a plethora of mask-figures, he accrues multiple nuances. By simply calling him *mukishi* and then playing on associations to several different ritual mask-figures, Mwazeya creates a polyvalent symbol. Even when they appear as story characters, masked figures—as dominant cultural symbols—stir ideas and emotions associated with their ritual performances, as Victor Turner has reminded us (1967:29-32).

The narrator invokes, in turn, *Cihehu*'s eroticism, *Cihongo*'s social control, and *Cikunza*'s fecundity—never settling on a single unambiguous

identity. Initially, the narrator connotes *Cihehu*, a seductive jokester who flashes a long cloth penis; in essence, he is a playful comedian who flirts and dances with women. However, because he often appears during this season, the women run away from his advances just as they do from the more threatening masks. In fact, it is rumored that Chihehu's enormous penis could seriously harm a woman if he caught and impregnated her. Next, when the mask-figure decapitates the woman, the narrator invokes the chastising figure *Cihongo*, the axe-thrower, who as an agent of retribution and social control attacks those who fail to adhere to Chokwe social conventions—such as breaking interdictions or infringing on ritual terrain. But when the mask whisks her away by his magical powers, he transforms her into a chief's bride. Here, the narrator calls up by association *Cikunza*, the chief mask-spirit who opens the *mukanda* season and represents abundance and fecundity. Indeed, by impregnating the kidnapped woman and returning her with many children to her mother, the mask-husband increases the lineage.

By not describing the mask's appearance and only implying characteristic actions, Mwazeya can play with this cultural symbol. She shifts the identifying actions from a chasing-calling seducer, to a killing-punishing figure, to a marrying-fathering one. The mask's incongruous actions—seducing, punishing, and impregnating—induce listeners to grapple with the contradictions; and, through association, the mask-figure eventually links eroticism, social control, and fecundity. By indirection, Mwayeza offers a more complex view of human sexuality, fertility, and gender delineation than the culturally defined one she knows so well. That complexity, she implies, can be grasped only through an ambiguous force.

For listeners attributing meaning, this polyvalent symbol becomes an encompassing "whole" that brings together disparate actions. Subtly persuaded through contradictory images of mask-and-woman, Mwazeya's audience comes to reflect on women's fertility problems: not only do mask and woman link eroticism, control, and fecundity, but they also blur the gender boundaries so clearly delineated during *mukanda* and reverse consequences for broken interdictions.

Mwazeya creates a mask-figure who "runs" as a powerful presence throughout her tale. For Chokwe women, such entities generally loom over them as potent, threatening figures—even as story characters. Not only do they stir memories of specific frightening encounters, but they also "carry" the culturally defined ideas and sensations women have learned to attribute

to them. Indeed, as Armstrong suggests, masked figures running through a village have more than a symbolic impact; their presences have an immediacy and force, an "affecting presence" (1981:5-6). But Mwazeya not only invokes that power, she transmutes it from a dangerous threat into an amiable, though forceful, presence. Especially when set in contrast to Chief Shatambwe's previous tale, the mask-presence delights the women in the audience that night; for, rather than kill, he creates life and leaves the woman with many children. Mwazeya turns the mask-and-woman into a transformative force, not easily forgotten as mere story-figures.

Situational Referents: Session Dynamics

The storytelling session functions as the most immediate framework for interpreting this performance. When attributing meaning to a performance, astute participants listen for indirect talk between performers—for double entendres or oblique criticism. Although each listener brings his or her own interpretive competence to a performance (Fretz 1987:244-45; cf. Briggs 1988:18-19), each also draws on the common experience of that storytelling session. In this instance, the search for a "transcendent whole" encompassing ambiguity also grows out of a situational dynamic—a female narrator's response to an earlier male performance.

Indeed, through storytelling, Chokwe people often address each other in metaphors; that is, in order to convey a message or to comment on the stories told previously, the narrator adjusts the story images to fit the critiqued situation (cf. Cosentino 1982:144-63). Usually, the storyteller obscures the message in an apparent ambiguity so that only the intended might discern the meaning. Only those keyed to the referent context, whether a recent event or the previous performances in the session, will understand the veiled message, called a *misende*. Through an artistry of intentional ambiguity, then, performers can express diverse opinions.

Mwazeya is countering a previous storyteller's presentation of women as lacking good judgment when confronted by an incongruous situation. Unlike Chief Shatambwe, however, she validates the female protagonist's judgment and thus refutes his implications that young women act unwisely. Both performances place a young woman in a problematic situation in which she must demonstrate her wisdom when confronted by

incongruities. Chief Shatambwe's protagonist must judge whether or not to tell her hunter-husband about an antelope who reappears in her fields and plays with her child. She tells him, causing the husband to shoot at the antelope and accidentally kill the child.[3] Mwazeya's protagonist also confronts conflicting role expectations, breaks an interdiction, and inadvertently crosses into masculine ritual territory. But her narrative transforms the mask-woman pair from an antagonistic couple to jubilant, cooperative parents. Mwazeya's tale confirms the woman's judgment. Whereas Chief Shatambwe has the child killed as a direct consequence of the mother's poor judgment, Mama Mwazeya rewards the mother with many children, despite her risky choices and dangerous encounters.

Certainly, Mwazeya's reversed order not only contrasts sharply to Chief Shatambwe's tale but also breaks away from the usual and familiar patterns in *yishima*. Although a broken interdiction and an illicit crossing of boundaries normally bring harm, even death, the woman and her lineage are blessed with many children and continuity. Even though the woman's decision—to feed the babe and ignore the healer—led her onto masculine ritual territory, the female protagonist survives. Mwazeya implies that despite irreducible ambiguities, woman's judgment need not result in death. Not only does her mask-figure rescue an infertile woman from shame and the lineage from decline, but the tale closes with the mask and the whole village feasting together!

Conclusion: Ambiguity as Evocative

African folktales have too long been presented as didactic lessons with self-evident meanings, as Ruth Finnegan points out (1970:20-22). Although many Chokwe tales are straightforward and thematically explicit, especially stories told to children, performances by an excellent narrator before a gathering of adults are rarely explicit. Such ambiguity is a crafted, sought-after opaqueness. These tales often bypass causal resolutions and move to their conclusion through more indirect means such as reversals of common story patterns, associations between disparate images, and even intentional contradictions. These stories address life's complexities. Turning the Chokwe world upside down, such tales end without a clear-cut

[3] See appendix for complete translation.

moral lesson.

Ambiguity in a tale, I suggest, enables people to accept the complexities of life that do not seem reducible to sensible patterns. By clustering disparate images, a story can be a vessel to contain the unnerving frustration and confusion linked to ambiguous situations and people. Similar to those African riddles with indeterminate answers described by James Fernandez, such complex *yishima* provoke ongoing interpretations of images remembered after the storytelling is ended. Fernandez calls this impulse to find answers that lie beyond the riddle "edification by puzzlement" and notes that such ambiguous expression calls for a "plurality of possible answers" (1986:178-79).

In addition, such ambiguous performance might be an immediate exchange among storytellers during a session. Through the artistry of intentional ambiguity, storytellers often veil messages by playing with metaphoric images. *Yishima*, thus, function as symbolic communication among storytellers and listeners, which remains purposefully obscure. That opaqueness allows narrators to play with risky maneuvers and enables listeners who ignore women's talk as "nonsense" not to hear.

Performances often condense multiple layers of meaning and are open to varied interpretations even by Chokwe participants. Indeed, the very nature of such dialogic, interactive performances encourages such multi-layered ambiguity. Because anyone may speak up during these sessions, participants make frequent comments in response to the story action and storytellers often answer by refuting or complicating each other's point of view. The immediacy and fluidity of storytelling inevitably results in performances imprinted with the ambiguities of human relations.

University of California, Los Angeles

References

Armstrong 1981 — Robert Plant Armstrong. *The Power of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Basso 1985 — Ellen Basso. *A Musical View of the Universe: Kalapalo Myth and Ritual Performances*. Philadelphia: University of

Pennsylvania Press.

Bastin 1988 — Marie-Louise Bastin. "Entités spirituelles des Tshokwe (Angola)." *Quaderni Poro*, 5:9-59.

Briggs 1988 — Charles L. Briggs. *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexicano Verbal Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Cosentino 1982 — Donald Cosentino. *Defiant Maids and Stubborn Farmers: Tradition and Invention in Mende Story Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fernandez 1986 — James Fernandez. *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Fretz 1987 — Rachel I. Fretz. "Storytelling Among the Chokwe of Zaire: Narrating Skill and Audience Response." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Finnegan 1970 — Ruth Finnegan. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jackson 1982 — Michael Jackson. *Allegories of the Wilderness: Ethics and Ambiguity in Kuranko Narratives*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Turner 1967 — Victor Turner. *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Appendix

The Woman and the Mask
Narrated by Mama Mwazeya
Shatabwe Village

It's said that long ago a man married a woman.
Now, she gave birth. The child died.
She gave birth again. The child died.

Then the husband said, "I'll go fetch a healer,
to put her in a *masolo* enclosure."

He went to call a healer.

The healer came.
He put her in the enclosure and said,
"Don't be someone who goes digging for, for—
what shall I say—rats."

Then she gave birth to a child.
The child was named.
The name of that child was Yinyingi.

Now when the people went to dig for rats,
they came back, they took the rats,
they gave her some and said,
"Here. So that you can give food to the child."
But the child would not accept them.
The child always asked,
"Did my mother dig them?"

Then early next morning,
the people said, "Today we will burn the bush."

Nayinyingi said, "And I, I am going to dig for rats."
But they said, "Really?
How is it that you are going to dig for rats?
It's said that you were told—'Never be a rat digger.'
Really don't go dig rats.
How dare you say, 'I'm going to dig for rats!'"

She said, "No. The child cries too much.
I'm going to dig."

She dug to the bottom of the holes
and found no rats.
She dug to the bottom of the holes
and found no rats.

When they were ready to go back,
the others said to her, "Let's go.
We'll gather together some rats for you."

She answered, "I . . . .
The child won't accept them."
She saw a mound around the hole

of a large *langi* rat.
She stayed alone to dig.
Then she dug.
She dug.
She pulled out a mat:
"*Mam*! How does a rat bring someone's mat
to his hole!"

Then she dug, she dug.
She took out a blanket.
She pulled it out on top of the mound.

She tried to dig a second time like that.
Then she saw a *mukishi*, a masked figure,
coming out, towards her.

Nayinyingi took her hoe,
she took her basket,
she ran away.

The mask came out.
He began to beat the dust off himself.

He sang a song there.

Song: I say, Wait a-a-a-a Nayinyingi a-a-a-a.
I say, Wait a-a-a-a Nayinyingi a-a-a-a.
You cut the knots off my mask.

Nayinyingi answered, "No. Yinyingi pulled them off."
Then she ran faster.

The mask sang again.

Song: I say, Wait a-a-a-a Nayinyingi a-a-a-a.
I say, Wait a-a-a-a Nayinyingi a-a-a-a.
You cut the knots off my mask.

Nayinyingi answered, singing,

Song: Mama,
Mama-a-a-a.
My son, Yinyingi
pulled this one on me.

Nayinyingi arrived.
She sat down in the *masolo* enclosure.
She took her son and nursed him.

The mask arrived at the edge of the village.

Song: I say, Wait a-a-a-a Nayinyingi a-a-a-a.
I say, Wait a-a-a-a Nayinyingi a-a-a-a.
You cut the knots off my mask.

Then the people took her and hid her.
Still the mask sang and Nayinyingi answered.
Then they took her to the *chota*, the village pavilion.

The mask came.
He cut off her head.
He even took the son Yinyingi and left.

When halfway home,
the mask heard shouts of welcome from his village.
"*Obo*. *Obo*. The Chief has married a woman [has taken a wife].
The chief has married a woman."

They took out mats [for the mask and the woman].
They put them on the ground and walked on them.

Time passed.
Nayinyingi gave birth to children.
Yinyingi married a woman.

Then the mask-husband said, "Let's go.
I'll take you back to your village."

Nayinyingi's mother in her village was sifting flour.
She heard children and said,
"I, I—my child was killed by the mask.
Now why should I have to listen to children around here?"

Then Nayinyingi and her children came up to her.
Nayinyingi said, "Mother, please give me water
to give my children something to drink."

But the mother said, "Ah child.
The way the mask did me in!

He took Nayinyingi, the one who carried water for me.
Even the son Yinyingi he killed and took from me.
I am an old woman.
Water? Where shall I find it to give it to you?"

Then Nayinyingi asked,
"Mother, please give me tobacco."

But the mother answered,
"The way the mask treated me!
He killed my Nayinyingi.
He also took Yinyingi, the one who could buy tobacco.
He killed them.
How then could I find tobacco to give you?"

Then Nayinyingi said, "Mama. Mama.
I say, it's me, Nayinyingi."

Then the mother said, "Really?
That's why people are telling me 'It's Nayinyingi.'
Really? Nayinyingi?"

Then the people shouted welcome.
The husband said, "No. Although you say I killed her,
I didn't kill her.
See, I've brought her back."

The people took goats and chickens
and presented them to the mask-husband.
But he said, "I didn't come to stay many days.
I'm going soon."

He stayed awhile.
When he was ready to leave,
they gave him presents to carry to his people.

The man left
and the woman stayed
with her people.

In telling a story,
you must make it clear,
otherwise the elders will be offended.

A Woman and the Child-Guardian Antelope
Narrated by Chief Shatambwe
Shatambwe Village

A man and his wife had a very small child.
The mother said, "I will cultivate, cultivate I will."
She went, she did, to the place to cultivate.
Arriving at the place to cultivate with her child,
she put the child on the ground.
When she had placed her child on the ground,
an antelope came to look.

This antelope jumped and played,
bulia, bulia, bulia [ideophone]
and said to the woman, "I am the antelope child-guardian.
That which will come to take the child away
to eat it in the future,
it won't be me the antelope coming to eat the child."

She did, she did, the woman, she cultivated and cultivated.
When she was finished,
she left the place of work,
she went to the village.

The next morning she came with her child.
She laid her child down in the same place.
The antelope came,
he came jumping and playing, jumping and playing.

He said to the woman,
"But it won't be me who will eat your child.
That which will take your child away
to eat it in the future,
it won't be me."
Then she left.

The next morning
the woman came again with her hoe;
she laid the child in the same place.
She, with her hoe, she cultivated, she cultivated.
The antelope was there in that place.

He said, "My woman.
I am the antelope, the child-guardian.

Children, I guard them;
that which will take your child to eat it
is in your own mouth."

Eventually the woman went to the village.

She called, "Men, men, men, come to see the antelope;
he is in the bush;
he is very imprudent, exceedingly unwise.
When I go, I take my child and I lay him on the ground.
The antelope comes quickly;
he comes and plays and plays and plays at that place.
My child is quiet.
That's how I cultivate and cultivate there.
I myself tell you.
Antelopes like this—
I, as a woman, see large antelopes.
Men get your guns, get your guns.
Let's go.
Let's hunt the antelope."

"Really," they said.
"Yes, indeed."

The men with guns finally arrived.

"Aha," she said.
"You wait.
You watch when I lay my child down."

She laid the child in the same place
where she usually put him.
Now this one, the antelope,
she finally aha came out.
Thus she did,
she played in order to quiet the child, again.

"You woman. You woman.
I am the child-guardian.
That which will come to take your child to eat it
will come from your own mouth.
Bulia. Bulia."

"Men take your guns. Ehe."

Tashi. *Tashi*. [sound of bullets]

Finally the bullets did not hit the antelope.
The bullets hit the child right there.

The antelope said, "What did I say?
I said, I did, 'Woman, woman!'
Right in this place even—
'I am the child-guardian,
that which will take your child to eat it is yourself.'
Now look."

Eventually they came to the village.
The badly wounded child died.
And that's the end of it.

About the Authors

K. E. Agovi is Associate Professor, Deputy Director, and Head of the Languages and Literature Section of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. A poet and fiction writer, he is the author of *Novels of Social Change* and *Wind from the North and Other Stories*. He has researched and published extensively in African literature, drama, oral traditions, and performance. In 1992-93 he held a Japan Foundation Professional Fellowship in Tokyo.

Sa'idu Babura Ahmad teaches in the English Department at Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria. *Graham Furniss* teaches in the Department of African Languages and Literatures of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Daniel Avorgbedor, formerly a lecturer in music at the University of Ghana, studied at Indiana University and currently is editor of *Abstracts*, the international reference publication on music, based at the City University of New York. He also teaches at City College. His present research focuses on urban Ewe music, the Anlo-Ewe *haló* tradition, and contemporary Christian music in Ghana.

Chukwuma Azuonye was formerly a lecturer in oral literature at the Departments of Linguistics and African Languages in the Universities of Ibadan and Nsukka, where he served as acting head from 1986 to 1988. Since 1992 he has headed the Department of Black Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. His scholarly writings, poetry, and short stories have been published in journals and books in Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Sori Saba Jaaje Camara is Professor of Social Anthropology and Ethnology at the University of Bordeaux II in France. His studies of oral tradition, the nature of utterance, and the "Masters of Speech" include *Gens de la parole* (1975, reprinted 1993) and *Paroles trés anciennes* (1982). His current research builds on ten years of interviews in eastern Senegal on incantations, legends, and myths, to discern Mandinka conceptions of the nature, function, and status of speech.

Rachel I. Fretz, an instructor in the Writing Program at the University of California at Los Angeles, conducted research on storytelling among the Chokwe of Zaïre in 1976, 1977, 1982, 1983, and 1989 for a doctoral dissertation and subsequent writing. In 1992-93, as the recipient of a Fulbright award, she continued her Chokwe research, this time in Zambia.

Veronika Görög-Karady is a member of the French CNRS research team "Language and Culture in West Africa." She has two fields of study, West Africa and her native Hungary.

She has published a study of the image of blacks and whites in African oral literature, the definitive French-language bibliography of African oral literature, and numerous collections of African and Hungarian materials including *Contes d'un tzigane hongrois* (Budapest, 1991). She serves on the editorial board of *Cahiers de Littérature Orale*.

Lee Haring, guest editor, is Professor of English at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. In addition to articles on East African folklore, he has published the *Malagasy Tale Index*, a reference work; *Verbal Arts in Madagascar: Performance in Historical Perspective*, a monograph; and *Collecting Folklore in Mauritius*, a field manual.

Zainab Mohamed Jama trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies before returning to her native Somalia to work for the United Nations Development Program and the World Food Program. In 1983-92 she was a producer for the BBC World Service. Currently she is writing a book on Somali women.

Rüdiger Schott has recently retired as professor of ethnology in the University of Münster/Westphalia, Germany. Between 1966 and 1989 he conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Bulsa of Ghana. He continues to publish his results in European journals; a major collection of Bulsa tales is in press.