Distribution Agreement

In presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now and hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some restrictions as part of the online submission of this dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the dissertation. I also retain the right to use the future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this dissertation.

Signature:

_____ _____

Date

Masquerading Politics: Power and Transformation in a West African Kingdom

By

John. C. Willis
Doctor of Philosophy

_____
Kristin Mann, Ph.D.
Adviser

_____
Sidney Kasfir, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Edna Bay, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

_____
Date

Masquerading Politics: Power and Transformation in a West African Kingdom

By

John C. Willis
B.A., Clark Atlanta University, 1998
M.P.S., Cornell University, 2000
M.A. Emory University, 2004

Adviser: Kristin Mann, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
History
2008

Abstract

Masquerading Politics: Power and Transformation in a West African Kingdom

By John C. Willis

My dissertation, *Masquerading Politics: Power & Transformation in a West African Kingdom*, examines the history and politics of masquerades in an ancient Yoruba kingdom from 1770 to 1901. It explores the ways in which masquerades shaped and were transformed by changes in Yoruba social, economic, and political history in the pre-colonial period. Masquerades, which have long been central to many West African cultures, are ritualized spectacles of performance. They often involve masked individuals who temporarily assume the status of spirits or of historical figures (who were prominent and looked up to in their communities). Masquerades mark seasonal changes and major political events as well as natural or social events significant to the life of the community, such as births, weddings, and funerals in addition to harvests and epidemics. Operating under the control of masquerade organizations, these performances have provided important spaces where participants could comment on, and actively engage in shaping, rapidly changing political orders. My research focuses on the complex ways in which masquerades helped Yoruba speakers negotiate a number of major transformations that occurred over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These changes included: the decline of kingdoms and the rise of warrior states; the expansion and eventual abolition of the Atlantic slave trade; the emergence of agricultural production for European markets; the introduction of Christianity and the spread of Islam; and, finally, the imposition of British colonial rule. I draw on both oral and archival evidence

to reconstruct the history of Otta, a Yoruba town and capital of kingdom, through an examination of traditions surrounding the origins and development of its masquerades.

Masquerading Politics: Power and Transformation in a West African Kingdom

By

John C. Willis
B.A., Clark Atlanta University, 1998
M.P.S., Cornell University, 2000
M.A. Emory University, 2004

Adviser: Kristin Mann, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
History
2008

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the product of my growing dialogue with countless individuals, institutions, and communities spanning three continents. It represents the fulfillment of dreams shared by many individuals.

The University of Lagos provided an intellectual and institutional home in Nigeria, from which I was able to pursue my research on Otta. I am particularly grateful for Ayodeji Olukoju and the faculty members that comprise the Department of History and Strategic Studies along with the graduate students: Paul O., Olufemi Lawal, Gboyega, and many others.

I am thankful to the secretary and personal assistant of the Olota of Otta and to Oba Moshood Adetoro Oyede III, the Olota, himself for their contributions to making their home a wonderful site of study of masquerades, Yoruba speakers, and African history. Drs. Adalemo and Salami were essential in helping me commence my research at Otta. Yinka Dada and his family provided a home for me at Otta. Prince Kunle Andrew and Mr. Egi Ogbe introduced me to many of the masquerade chiefs and families. I am most indebted to the Oloponda, the Iya Agba Oje, the families the produce the many alagbada masquerades in the town, including the Itimoko, Arogunmola, Owolafe, Ajofoyingbo and Ajofoyinbo Iyesi, Lebe, and Ayoka families. The Olori Gelede, as well as other Gelede chiefs and performers (i.e. Wasiu Ojugbele), provided an opportunity for me to intimately experience the Gelede spectacle.

Various individuals in other Yoruba towns also enhanced my knowledge of Egungun and gender in Yoruba history and culture. These include Chief Adedoyin and Shangodare of Oshogbo, Iya Shango of Oyo town, Chief Oyelami of Iragbiji, and Remi

and Toyin Ajala of Ibadan. My experience at Oshogbo was made particularly sweet through my dialogues with many of the children living at the house of Adunni Olorisha on Ibokun Road. I am also grateful to the Omolola and Yetunde Olarinde and Dr. Ademola Olarinde as well as Barrister Smaranda Olarinde for their hospitality and assistance with my research.

I also developed a life-long relationship with two families in Nigeria: the Animashawuns and the Adelekes. Taiwo, Kehinde, Segun, and Fela, Abi, Bukky, Femi, Shubumi, Dele, Rev. and Mrs. Aishida, Sofi, Tinu, Deola, Sade, Shonola, and Mrs. Adeleke have all demonstrated exceptional generosity and love toward my family and friends who visited Nigeria, as well as to myself. I am also grateful to the Farunkmi family for their varied forms of support, and to Seye in particular, for teaching me so many lessons about life. Taiwo Animashawuns and Wole Adeleke have taught me so much about Nigeria and manhood. Their collegial and diplomatic natures have shown me new ways to engage and resolve conflict. They examples are exemplary.

The scholars based at the Centre of West African Studies at the University of Birmingham have played an important role in my development. Karin Barber has not only provided a model of groundbreaking research into African oral traditions and performance culture, her warmth, humility, and charisma have been both inspiring and welcoming. Insa Nolte has been a gem from our first conversations in Nigeria to our repeated encounters in England. I am thankful to Insa as well as her husband, Simon, and her three children, Ana, Taiwo and Kehinde for welcoming me into their home and hearts.

I owe much of my intellectual and professional development over the last eight years to a number of awards. A 2005-2006 Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship, an Emory GSAS Sawyer Fellowship, and an Emory Internationalization Funds Research Grant offered me the opportunity to conduct nearly two years of field research in Nigeria. A Mellon/Mays Graduate Research Assistantship enabled me to spend seven summers working with the UNCF Mellon Summer Research Institute and one summer participating in the UNCF Mellon International Faculty Seminar in Cape Town, South Africa. Through Mellon, I have become part of a powerful intellectual community, whose vision of transforming the academy I share. In particular, I must thank Cynthia Spence, Rudolph Bird, Akeba Harper, Shirley Toland-Dix, Zakiya Farris, Ada Jackson, Brenda Tindal, Stacy Boyd, Denise James, Kamili Hayes, Miriam Petty, Chante Baker, and Ulrica Wilson.

From January to August 2008, I have enjoyed good food, hospitality, and a productive work environment at the Panera Bread Emory Village. I am grateful to the following people who make Panera a wonderful place. These individuals include Frank (the G.M.), Paris, Agnes, Shameka, Tawana, Denise, Tony, Justin, Rafael, Jose, Jonathan, Danna, Ashley, Justin, Frank, and many others. I am particularly appreciative of Agnes for her friendship. The Panera family made working on the dissertation fun from the time I arrived at 6 a.m. to the time I left (and the store closed) at 9 p.m. Furthermore, April Battiste, Natisse Mitchel, and Chitope Bala have also opened their homes and been great roommates.

The administrators at Emory's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences are second to none, and they have done a wonderful job of ensuring that students like myself receive

the academic and personal support needed to successfully navigate graduate school. Prior to my arrival at Emory, a friend informed me that I must meet Kharen Fulton; thus when I arrived, I went to her office and met the Legend, Diva, and Angel herself. Kharen Fulton has been a reservoir of wisdom and inspiration. Her office has become almost a sacred site where I have been reminded of my purpose. Like others worthy of the status of "Elder," what she does not know she admits and then helps you find someone with the answer or teaches you how to discover the answer yourself. It was upon meeting Kharen Fulton that I became aware of the other invaluable administrators in the graduate school office. Sherice Henry aided me in submitting my grant applications. Ms. Jerry helped me keep my receipts in order so that I would receive all of my Fulbright-Hays money. Patsy and Becky helped me stay on task with my History Department obligations.

Virginia Shadron has been another essential mentor and ally at Emory. Her wisdom and the resources at her disposal are like an oasis in a dessert. She skillfully balances sternness with compassion. It is from VA, as Dr. Shadron is also known, and her colleague Rosemary Hines that I have gained a vision of the university faculty and administrators as being part of the same team, and not adversaries struggling for power.

This dissertation has also been realized with the unending support of Jean DeSilva. Her time, commitment, patience, persistence, and flexibility leave my speechless. She has taught me so much about the art of writing. Carrie Crompton also played an important role in distinguishing the different stages of writing. Her support, particularly, as it relates to helping me revise the dissertation were essential to the project's completion. Other individuals whose assistance with the writing was critical

include Yvette Wing and Jennifer Miller. Leah Lewis and Maurita Poole have been dear friends and colleagues and their support has been vital.

My advisers were the backbone of this work. Sidney Kasfir's course, "Masks and Theory," and her research on masquerades provided my initial introduction to West African masquerade traditions. It also was in this course that I first learned of the need for historians to study masquerades and other African art forms. Similarly, in Randall Packard's "African Historiography" course, I first encountered Edna Bay's work on Dahomey. Her book spoke to my interests in African ritual traditions. Both Sidney Kasfir and Edna Bay served as excellent mentors and advisers on my research. I hope that this dissertation realizes the standard of scholarship befitting of someone who has had the pleasure of learning from them.

Kristin Mann, my primary adviser, has been an exceptional steward of my intellectual maturation. She has supported me as I have struggle to envision, create, and carve out an original and sustainable research project. She has been gracious in sharing her knowledge of African history in general and Yoruba historiography as well as of nineteenth-century archival sources. She has work tirelessly to ensure that I get the best training that Emory has to offer, and for her matchless efforts I am eternally appreciative. My prayer is that I not only realize but also exceed the standards that Sidney Kasfir, Edna Bay, and Kristin Mann have set for me.

Two interrelated elements of a graduate student's life are purpose and social life. These elements converged for me through my ongoing participation in the Ndugu-Nzinga Nation, a rites of passage community based in the Atlanta University Center. Learning that to be an intellectual means to always seek wisdom, knowledge, and personal

fulfillment even in social endeavors. This community reinforces something that academics often assume, that the personal is political. The elder of this community include Baba Oluiyapo, Umi Mawu, Bahati, Nazapa, Chitope Bala, Azikiwe, Lindiwe, Akua, Ifetayo, Njemile, Osizwe, Ande, Ofetalo, Edima Ifama, Tchseseret, and Azize and the the masterful writer, intellectual, and sage Daniel Black (Baba Omotosho). The Yerutu (Chris, James, Eric, Reggie, James, Rob, Adam, Stephon, Janise, Shamone, K.P., Jennifer, Ms. Pat, and Karlye) reminded me that I strive to clear a path for those coming behind me. Without, them this dissertation would not have been completed.

My family saw long ago that his day would come. Ms. Lucy started calling me the professor when I was five years old. My family members from Newark, NJ made their home one of my favorite places to visit. They are Rene, Wayne, Tallia, Janaya, John, Shawn, Monique, Aunt Mary, and Uncle Stan. My Uncle Bobby, Aunt Shirley and my grandparents were pillars of support. My stepmother and stepsister provided me with role models as I looked to pursue graduate education.

It is to my parents that I am most appreciative. My mother, father, and stepmother have demonstrated the work ethic, professionalism, character, and values that it takes to not just live life but to thrive and be an agent of change in the world. I am so proud of them for all that they have become in their professional and personal lives, and I pray that this dissertation reflects the expectations that they first set for me. It is not possible to fully do justice to what they have done for me. May my life, the way that I treat people and live do them justice.

CONTENTS

List of Figures

Introduction

On Friday, April 26, 1996, the Honorable Justice G. O. Shoremi ruled on a case involving a dispute between the plaintiff, the owner of an Egungun masquerade named Oya Arogunmola, and the defendant, the most senior Egungun masquerade chief, the *Oloponda* of Otta. The latter stood accused of fixing the schedule of performances at Otta, a town in Ogun State, Nigeria in 1993. At the heart of the case was the question of whether or not the Egungun Oya Arogunmola was, in essence, the Oya Otta—the oldest and most prominent Egungun in the town. If it was, the plaintiff argued, then his Egungun should have been the sole masquerade to appear on the last day of the Egungun festival at Otta in 1993. The schedule of performances at this festival has great significance because, according to tradition, "*Egunla lo keyin igbale*" ("the biggest Egungun departs last from the Egungun shrine").

A number of changes marked the 1993 Egungun festivities. From at least the 1950s up to the 1988 Egungun festival, the Arogunmola and Ijemo families together paraded an Egungun bearing the name Oya and the designation Oya Otta. The conflict did not prevent their members from uniting for the sake of the Oya performances. In 1993, however, for reasons disputed in the 1996 case, these families discontinued their collaborative venture, and each decided to parade its own Oya masquerade in the festival. Each family argued in and out of court that the other family had split from it and created a new Oya. Beginning in 1993, there were two Oya masquerades at Otta: Oya Arogunmola and Oya Ijemo. Charged with deciding the order of masquerade performances during the festival period, the council of chiefs had scheduled the

plaintiff's masquerade (Oya Arogunmola) in the fifth slot, which took place in January, the first month of a five-month long festival season, and the other Oya masquerade (Oya Ijemo) in the second slot, which occurred in April. Both of these Oya masquerades were also scheduled to appear on the closing day, alongside other Egungun. However, the most prominent position in the closing day's festivities—the final performance— was reserved for Ege, which had ties to the family of the defendant in the 1996 case and seems to have, for the first time, appeared on the last day of the festival.

When the Oya Arogunmola did not appear on its scheduled day in January, the council of Egungun chiefs, together with the other organizers of the Egungun festival, banned it from all further participation in the festival, which would continue until May. Soon thereafter, the owner of the Oya Arogunmola masquerade initiated a court case pressing two claims against the defendant: 1.) that as Otta's senior masquerade chief, he had the ultimate authority to determine the performance schedule, and 2.) that, for the same reason, he had a responsibility to adhere to established precedent and tradition. That tradition, according to the plaintiff, established that Oya Arogunmola was the oldest of the *alagbada* type Egungun masquerades in Otta and the most prominent of all the Egungun in the town. Wanting to reclaim his Egungun's status as the oldest and most prominent of the *alagbada* Egungun type in Otta, the owner of Oya Arogunmola sought redress from outside the Egungun society.[1]

This historic event marked the first time that a matter pertaining to Egungun masquerades and to the council of chiefs who oversee their performances had come before the Otta Judicial Division in the High Court of Justice, Ogun State. The case

[1] R. Ajibade vs. A. Fatusi, "HCT/45/93," (High Court of Ogun State, Otta Judicial Division: Honorable Justice C. O. Shoremi, 1996).

polarized the community. Some citizens criticized the plaintiff for filing a complaint in a civil court.[2] During a separate masquerade festival, the performers and chiefs of another masquerade tradition, Gelede, expressed their concerns about the case in songs calling for a peaceful resolution.[3]

In the past, the King of Otta usually adjudicated disputes involving masquerades, not the civil courts. However, in this instance, the vacancy on the throne provided an opportunity for the plaintiff to seek an alternative authority.[4] In his judgment on the case, Justice Shoremi made the following statement before declaring a ruling: "There is no doubt that each party would want me to believe the traditional evidence adduced by them. There is no doubt that one side or the other must be mistaken yet both may be honest in their belief. In such case demeanor is little guide to the truth. The best way to test the traditional history is reference to the facts in recent years as established by evidence and seeing which of the two competing history is more probably."[5]

The judge ultimately determined that the defendant was not at fault since it was not his responsibility to set the schedule in the first place. He also ruled that the Oya Arogunmola masquerade had the right to perform last based on the evidence of a woman he described as the "oldest masquerade chief" and "a witness of truth."[6] Neither the plaintiff nor the defendant clearly won or lost.

---

[2] Ibid.
[3] Mr. Salawu Abioru Olaniyan holds the position of Olori Gelede, meaning he is the most senior Gelede chief in Otta. Interview with Salawu Abioru Olaniyan, March 12, 2006, Oruba Ward, Otta.
[4] HCT 45/93 Ajibade vs. Fatusi, "Reply to Statement of Defense," (High Court of Ogun State, Otta Judicial Division: 1994). Ruhollah Ajibola Salako, *Oba Moshood Oyede, The Olota of Ota: So Far So Good* (Otta: Pennik Publicity & Co., 2004), 4, 59.
[5] R. Ajibade vs. Chief A. Fatusi. *HCT/45/93*. High Court of Ogun State, Otta Judicial Division: Honorable Justice C. O. Shoremi, 1996.
[6] Ibid.

In the aftermath of the court case, a number of developments have occurred at Otta that suggest a renewed commitment to the Egungun tradition as a unifying force in the town.[7] Since 1996, Otta has hosted two Egungun festivals, the last of which I attended. King Oyede III, who assumed office in the year following the Justice Shoremi's ruling, has overseen the creation of the *Odo Oje Otta*, an organization whose motto is "for the 'betterment' and positive changes in the Egungun tradition."[8] At the beginning of the January, 2000 festival, moreover, the king unveiled a statue of Ege (Figure 1), the "King of Egungun Masquerades at Otta," which was commissioned in the central square of Otta, where the Egungun festival's opening ceremonies and weekly evening *alagbada* masquerade performances occur.[9]

Figure 1. Ege Statue, Okede Square, Otta. Photograph by author, May 3, 2005

[7] Oba Moshood Oyede III, Olota of Otta, expressed his commitment to unifying the town and the importance of Egungun to that endeavor. Interview by author, May 5, 2005, Otta.
[8] Deji Kosebinu et al., *Odo Oje Otta: Launching and Commissioning of "Ege" Statue* (Otta: Bisrak Communications, 2000).
[9] Ibid.

Pamphlets and brochures circulated during the festival indicate the centrality of Egungun to the cultural identity of the town and their claims to the town's unique position in Yorubaland. A local publisher committed to historical documentation produced 2000 and 2004 Egungun festival brochures; these sixty-page booklets include short articles devoted to such subjects as the "Importance of Egungun in the Socio-Cultural Development of Otta-Aworiland," "Egungun in Otta: Its Spread, Forms, and Celebrations," and "The Origin of Egungun (Masquerade) in Yorubaland." The booklets also include the town's anthem, the names of its Egungun chiefs and most prominent Egungun masquerades, and lists of various organizations involved in the festival, along with other leading officials. The booklets declare Otta to be the "Pilgrim's City or Holy Land of Egungun," and boast that its Egungun festival has achieved the level of a "Carnival" in the twenty-first century. They further declare this masquerade to be the "symbol of unity of the Awori," the people who founded the town.[10]

The visitors from other towns who attend the festival may not embrace these claims and titles as unreservedly as the inhabitants of Otta, but there is no doubt that the town gives itself passionately over to the Egungun festival. The regular, ordinary conduct of the town seems to be suspended. No matter what one's age or role, everyone from schoolchild, to merchant, to elderly relative, all one's activity seems to be directed in the service of the festival. I witnessed a gathering of thousands at the opening ceremony of the Egungun festival on December 12, 2004, which included an appearance of the Governor of Ogun State. More than 100 Egungun masqueraders appeared on

[10] ———, *2004 Egungun Carnival in Otta Aworiland* (Otta: Bisrak Communications, 2004), 49-50.

ninety-seven scheduled days over a four-month period.[11] The 2004 festival did not conclude until April 17, 2005, the day set aside for the Oya Arogunmola masquerade mentioned above, when the King of Otta declared the event officially closed.

The events surrounding the court case and the festivals that followed raise a number of issues about the politics and history of masquerading among the Yoruba and in West Africa more generally. As an institution historically known to have a range of legislative and executive powers within a town, Egungun is recognized on many levels to be a political institution. However, the complexity of its politicking and the relationship of that politicking to other institutions and figures with power and authority has received little study and is little understood. The 1996 court case highlights many of the important themes this dissertation will investigate. At issue is the dialectic character of Egungun within African societies; masquerades are institutions that both shape and are shaped by other dynamics of power and forces of history. The very fact that this court case created tensions within the town at many levels suggests the masquerades' importance. The case underscores the centrality of Egungun to the wellbeing and the culture of Otta, as well as the extent to which an Egungun masquerade can, affect social and political relationships within it.

The case also shows the way that a prominent individual can engage in politicking of his own. To own an Egungun, even one whose prominence is disputed, is to hold a certain amount of power and authority. The Arogunmola family was able to challenge someone as prominent and important as a senior chief within the Egungun hierarchy and call him to task for allegedly failing to fulfill his duty, which they insisted had to be guided by tradition. On the other hand, the Arogunmola family came under a great deal

[11] Ibid., B-D.

of criticism for breaking tradition, as some saw it, and seeking redress for a grievance over the status of its Egungun within another institution of power, the modern court system. This episode, then, reveals what has often been overlooked in African political histories, in general, and in histories of Yorubaland, more specifically: masquerades have long been, as they are now, key political actors in their own right. They have been integral to the politics of Yoruba towns.[12]

The 1996 court case also touches upon the relationship of women to masquerades. The scholarship on Egungun (and masquerades more generally) has long emphasized their role in disciplining and subduing the power of women.[13] Yet in this court case, the judge, ironically, regarded an elderly woman as the voice of traditional authority before handing down his decision. Indeed, missionaries in pre-colonial times and European authorities in the early colonial era regarded Egungun as "women

[12] A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897* (Harlow: Longmans, 1969); S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964); Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, 1600 - 1836: a West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic slave trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Historiography* (Madison: African Studies Program University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991); ———, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900* (Ibadan: University of Ife Press, 1984); Andrew H. Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: the Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*; Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998). S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (London: Longman, 1971); J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire* (London: Longman, 1973); Emmanuel Ayankanmi Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland, 1850-1950: Politics, Economy, and Society* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1992).

[13] George W. Harley, "Masks as Agents of Social Control in Northeast Liberia," *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology* 32, no. 2 (1950); Peter Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms," *West African Institute of Social and Economic Research* (1954); Ulli Beier, "The Egungun Cult," *Nigeria Magazine* 51 (1956); Peter Weil, "The Masked Figure and Social Control: the Mandika Case," *Africa* 41, no. 4 (1971); Margaret Thompson Drewal and Henry John Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Marc Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); S. O. Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba* (Ibadan: Board Publication Ltd., 1980); Sidney L. Kasfir, ed., *West African Masks and Cultural Systems*, vol. 126 (Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1988).

terrifiers."[14] Yet in 1996, an elderly Otta woman's knowledge of Egungun and seniority among the masquerade chiefs gave here the deciding voice in a conflict between powerful male figures in Egungun.[15] However, in another sense, the judge's decision to turn to this woman as the final arbiter in the conflict between the owner of the Egungun Oya Arogunmola and the *Oloponda* was fitting, because Otta has long had a reputation among the Yoruba for the respect it accords to women.[16] As we shall see in chapter five, the Oya Arogunmola masquerade flourished historically under a triumvirate consisting of a man, Arogunmola, and his two influential and powerful wives, Moniyepe and Oshungbayi. Both the judge's action in the 1996 case and the role of women in the development of the Oya Arogunmola and other Egungun masquerades throw into question the conventional view of Egungun as an institution that men use to control women.

Literature on Masquerades and History

Historians have by and large overlooked the place of masquerades within African history, treating them as peripheral to the political, economic, and cultural forces that have shaped the past. They have focused on figures and institutions and, unconsciously or not, have sought the motives and theories of causation that make sense within a

[14] Law citing Clarke. Robin Law, "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations in Yorubaland and Dahomey," in *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce: the Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-century West Africa*, ed. Robin Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[15] R. Ajibade vs. A. Fatusi, "Suite No. HCT /45/93 (Judgement)," (High Court of Ogun State, Otta Judicial Division: Honorable Justice C. O. Shoremi, 1996).
[16] Interview with Oyinade Ogunba, March 13, 2006, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye; Interview with Chief Ifagbade Oduniyi and Chief Adedoyin Faniyi, November 27, 2006, Ibokun Road, Oshogbo; R. A. Salako, *Ota: Biography of the Foremost Awori Town* (Ota: Penink Publicity and Company, 2000), iv.

western paradigm.[17] In addition, western-trained historians have tended to rely heavily upon written documentation as source evidence, rather than examine the artifacts of material culture or collect information about the nature and meaning of ritualized spectacles of performance; the latter activities and approaches are more typical of art historians and anthropologists.[18] Much of the early written sources on masquerades came from missionaries, who regarded them alternately as primitive tools of social manipulation and coercion or primitive displays of ritual superstition and barbarism.[19] Indeed, the difference between the two views resides in the degree to which, according to the missionary, the masquerade performers and organizers truly believed in the supernatural forces embodied by the masked figure; to the missionaries, the reality of

[17] Masquerades in my study behave at times like the monarchy or the spiritual forces the monarchy sought to control and channel, whether promoting or suppressing, along with the appointment of priestly officials and the status of their congregations or followers. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard*, 5-24.

[18] Sidney L. Kasfir, "One Tribe, One Style? Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art," *History in Africa* 11 (1984); ———, *Art in History, History in Art: the Idoma Ancestral Masquerade as Historical Evidence* (Boston: African Studies Center Boston University, 1985); Henry John Drewal, "African Art Studies Today," in *African Art Studies: the State of the Discipline; Papers Presented at a Symposium Organized by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, September 16, 1987*, ed. Rowland Abiodun (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of African Art, 1990); Margaret Thompson Drewal, "The State of Research on Performance in Africa," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 3 (1991).

[19] Elizabeth Tonkin references an eighteenth-century European account a West African mask. The European observer describes it as an idol and as a '"kind of mystery."' Here the mask is associated with the beguiling craft of a native doctor, as Tonkin suggests. Tonkin citing F. Moore's *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa*, 1738, in Elizabeth Tonkin, "Cunning Mysteries," in *West African Masks and Cultural Systems*, ed. Sidney L. Kasfir (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1988), 247-248. Also, see William Hart for a discussion of other earliest descriptions of West African masking. Hart examines a late sixteenth century trader's description of maskers as lawyers pleading cases in front of a king's court in Sierra Leone. Hart references a number of instances in which later seventeenth missionaries translated a published the account by sixteenth century trader. The account, according to Hart, is inconsistent with what has been known about judicial proceedings on other parts of the Guinea coast, and therefore appears to reflect a European misunderstanding of an African masking tradition. William A. Hart, "The "Lawyer" of Poro?: A Sixteenth-Century West African Masquerade," *RES* 23, no. Spring 1993 (1993): 83-95, 95. See explorer Hugh Clapperton and the Church Missionary Society catechist James White for some of the earliest accounts of the Egungun and Gelede, Yoruba masquerade traditions. Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London: John Murray, 1829), 53-55. Art historian John Nunley references several early accounts of Egungun recorded by missionaries and British colonial officials in Sierra Leone in the 1830s. John W. Nunley, *Moving With the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), Chapter 1.

these supernatural forces was patently false.[20] Given the missionaries' interpretations, historians' neglect of the political impact of masquerades and their influence upon historical developments in Africa were perhaps inevitable.

However, a few historians have taken African ritual performances more seriously.[21] Edna Bay's *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* weaves the political history of this West African kingdom in the pre-colonial period together with its religious history. More specifically, Bay defines the monarchy as an evolving coalition of individuals whose membership and motives changed with respect to the hierarchy of spirits, ritual specialists, and devotees.[22] My thinking on the relationship of masquerades to other institutions, groups, and actors wielding power and authority is particularly indebted to her analysis of the evolving intimate relationship between political actors and their agendas, on one side, and the spiritual forces and those entrusted with their upkeep, on the other. Bay's latest work *Asen, Ancestors, and Vodun: Tracing Change in African Art*, also served as a valuable guide for this study, in that it tracks political change and historical developments among the Fon people in the pre-colonial period through a particular art form. In this work, Bay

[20] See anthropologist J.D.Y. Peel for missionary perspectives on African ritual traditions, which applies to masquerades. J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), Chapter 1.
[21] S. O. Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo c., 1706-1905: A Study in the Traditional Culture of an African Polity* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1980); Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*; ———, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter: a History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Bay, *Wives of the Leopard*; John K. Thornton, "Religious and Ceremonial Life in the Kongo and Mbundu Areas, 1500-1700," in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, ed. Linda M. Heywood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[22] Bay, *Wives of the Leopard*, 7.

demonstrates how changes in *asen*, metal sculptures constructed to honor the ancestors, reflect the changing relationship of form, aesthetics, meaning, and politics.[23]

To date, the bulk of our knowledge about African masking traditions comes from art historians and anthropologists. Their investigations have done much to establish the significance and meaning of masquerades within a broad socio-cultural context. This scholarship has demonstrated that for many of the people who produce them, masks are more than art objects; they are spirits with the capacity to influence all aspects of human existence by bestowing blessings or carrying out punishments.[24] A masquerade, however, involves more than the spiritual power and the aesthetic value of a masked figure. Another dimension of its meaning derives from its performance aspects.[25] Masquerade enactments or performances include singing, dancing, healing, praying, cursing, fighting, arbitrating disputes, and executing punishments. Masks appear in compounds, markets, and streets and in the company of drummers, praise-singers, ritual specialists, and other individuals; together these individuals form a masquerade. When all of its aspects are taken together – spiritual, aesthetic, performative, and social – a masquerade becomes a complex, powerful event, one where the masked figure and other

[23] Edna G. Bay, *Asen, Ancestors, and Vodun: Tracing Change in African Art* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
[24] Herbert Cole, "Art as a Verb in Iboland," *African Arts* 3, no. 1 (1969); Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974). The collection of essays in the book edited by art historian Sidney Kasfir place emphasis on masks as events and not merely objects of study. Kasfir uses the term mask event as encompassing the entire cultural setting of a mask performance, instead of masquerade, which refers to the enactment or performance alone. Sidney L. Kasfir, "Masquerading as a Cultural System," in *West African Masks and Cultural Systems*, ed. Sidney L. Kasfir (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1988), 2, 12.
[25] Thompson, *African Art in Motion*; Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

participants honor and attempt to harness the power of ancestral spirits in order to direct the nature and force of their impact.[26]

Finally, art historians and anthropologists, the latter in particular, have examined masquerade organizations, the societies that govern the masquerade performances and events. Its members include high-ranking chiefs, representatives of the families or age-sets who own the masquerades, artists and craftsmen who create the masks and costumes, and the various performers and practitioners who wear the mask and accompany the masker. In their investigations, scholars have elucidated the important social, economic, and political roles that masquerade societies fulfill, such as educating and entertaining the community, circulating wealth, conferring status onto individuals or groups, resolving disputes, enforcing laws, and diagnosing illnesses.[27]

The understanding of masquerades that anthropologists and art historians have unveiled begs for further work into the political efficacy and historicity of these complex institutions. Their scholarship has shown that the contexts in which masks appear are essential to understanding what masks mean and do.[28] These contexts include not just the socio-cultural forces that are operative within a town or community, but also the forces of politics and history that impinge from without. Anthropologists and art historians have also been attentive to the effects of colonialism and post-colonialism upon masquerades.

---

[26] Tonkin, "Cunning Mysteries," 241, 244.

[27] Weil, "The Masked Figure and Social Control: the Mandika Case."; William R. Bascom, "The Sociological Role of the Yoruba Cult-Group," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association* 46, no. 1, Part 2 (1944); Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms."; Peter Morton-Williams, "The Atinga Cult among the South-Western Yoruba: a Sociological Analysis of a Witchfinding Movement," *Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* 18, no. 3/4 (1956); Henry John Drewal, "Efe/Gelede: the Educative Role of the Arts in Traditional Yoruba Culture," (Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1973); Frances Harding, "Performance as Political Action: the Use of Dramatisation in the Formulation of Tiv Ethnic and National Consciousness," in *Self-assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa*, ed. Karin Barber (Birmingham, England: Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990); M. C. Jedrej, "Structural Aspects of a West African Secret Society," in *Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zürich* (Bern, 1980).

[28] Tonkin, "Cunning Mysteries," 244.

Colonialism displaced and usurped the power and authority of indigenous groups and institutions. In the case of masquerades, the colonial apparatus sought variously to eradicate, depoliticize, and secularize them.[29] Forms of response to these efforts likewise varied. Some masquerades emphasized their character as play rather than their power and function as religious ritual.[30] Others recast themselves as institutions celebrating founding myths or traditional cultural heritage, disguising or suppressing their religious and political dimensions.[31] Yet, even masquerades that concentrated on the creative and entertainment components of performances did not wholly retreat from engagement with the cosmic order, nor from commentary upon the ruling political order.[32] Anthropologists and art historians have studied how masquerades sought to resist and subvert colonial rule by mocking colonial figures, practices, and values.[33]

---

[29] When Atinga, an anti-witchraft society, arrived in Nigeria, the colonial government quickly banned its activities, reflecting just one example of how the state hindered the ability of masquerades to perform some of their antisocial functions. Kasfir describes how in the case of the Idoma of central Nigeria, the colonial government outlawed the Oglinye masquerade, which in turn responded by "going underground;" it changed its the context of its performance from daytime to nighttime and from using trophy heads to masks. Sidney L. Kasfir, *African Art and the Colonial Encounter: Inventing a Global Commodity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 73-74.
Morton-Williams, "The Atinga Cult among the South-Western Yoruba," 315-316; Andrew Apter, "Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 1950-1951," in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[30] Nunley, *Moving With the Face of the Devil*.

[31] Eli Bentor, "Aro Ikeji Festival: Toward a Historical Interpretation of a Masquerade Festival," (Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 1995), 147-149; John Picton, "What's in a Mask," *African Languages and Cultures* 3, no. 2 (1990): 200.

[32] Historian A. I. Asiwaju and art historian Babatunde Lawal have noted the Gelede masquerade's involvement in ridiculing and protesting against the colonial order in communities along the Benin-Nigeria border in the 1920s and 1940s. A. I. Asiwaju, "Gelede Songs as Sources of Western Yoruba History," in *Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama*, ed. Wande Abimbola (Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975), 202; Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 278-279. Among the many other masquerades that made caricatures of Europeans, British district officers in particular, was the Ibibio masquerade which the Afikpo of eastern Nigeria borrowed from the Ibibio people and used to portray other non-Igbos people as well as westerners. See Fritz Kramer, *The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa* (London: Verso, 1993), 168.

[33] Other masquerades such as Mami Wata surfaced during the colonial period, and they have included representations of local water spirits as well as foreigners. Henry John Drewal, "Mami Wata Shrines: Exotica and the Construction of Self," in *African Material Culture*, ed. Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christraud M.

In the post-colonial period, the spread of evangelical Christianity and fundamentalist Islam has accounted for the most sustained and concentrated efforts to eradicate or undermine masquerades. Yet, at the same time, new forces and conditions operating within post-colonial states have once more put masquerades into play as agents and instruments of political coercion and social control, the principle role that western missionaries had first attributed to them. In some areas, masquerades have found new expressions and renewed purpose as local police forces, militias serving particular ethnic groups or private concerns, or backers of oppositional leaders and groups.[34] During the first Liberian Civil War (1989-1996), masquerades were mobilized to train and mount political resistance and military aggression against the government then in power.[35]

The body of scholarship on masquerades strongly suggests that they are institutions of significant, even central, importance in West African communities. It further suggests that their character and agency has been responsive to the specific local and regional contexts in which they are embedded, or embroiled, as the case may be. However, since most of that scholarship has come from anthropologists and art historians, a study of masquerades that seeks to focus on their historical development, and to situate that development within changing political orders and conditions, has

---

Geary, and Kris L. Hardin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Charles Gore and Joseph Nevadomsky, "Practice and Agency in Mammy Wata Worship in Southern Nigeria," *African Arts* Spring 1997 (1997); Misty L. Bastian, "Married in the Water: Spirit Kin and Other Afflications of Modernity in Southeastern Nigeria," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 2 (1997).

[34] Groups that employ elements of masking include the Bakassi Boys of eastern Nigeria. For literature the Bakassi boys, see Innocent Chukwuma, "The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture," *Law Enforcement Review (the quarterly magazine of CLEEN)* 14, no. 5 (2000); HRW/CLEEN, "The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture," *Human Rights Watch Report* 14, no. 5 (2002); Daniel J. Smith, "Violent Vigilantism and the State in Nigeria: the Case of the Bakassi Boys " in *States of Violence: Politics, Youth, and Memory in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Edna G. Bay and Donald L. Donham (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

[35] Scholar of contemporary African politics, Stephen Ellis, describes how a masquerade tradition long associated with governance among the Mende of West Africa to understand the behavior of soldiers in the Liberian Civil War. Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), Chapter 6.

generally been lacking.[36] Given the challenges in gathering and interpreting sources from the pre-colonial era, this period in particular has been unplumbed with respect to the forms, function, and significance of masquerades.

It is in light of these studies that I explore the historical and political developments of masquerades in the pre-colonial context. This study focuses on the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria and two masquerade traditions for which they are famous: Egungun, a northern Yoruba masquerade associated with venerating ancestors that spread with the growth of the Oyo Empire; and Gelede, a western Yoruba masquerade linked to honoring female power that spread during the same period.

Background on Yoruba Masquerades

The Yoruba reside in parts of southwestern Nigeria and southern Benin, Togo, and Ghana, in addition to Sierra Leone. Generally, they share a common language, Yoruba, and common traditions of origin, claiming descent from Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The Yoruba have lived in towns for centuries, and a number of scholars have regarded the town as the primary unity of Yoruba social organization.[37] Most Yoruba towns have a king, who claims descent the king of Ile-Ife.[38] Among the Yoruba, men alone wear

[36] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*; Ade Obayemi, "Origins of the Masquerade: Socio-historical and Archeological Perspectives," in *The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture*, ed. Nwanna Nzewunwa (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980), 16-17; Kasfir, "One Tribe, One Style?."; ———, *Art in History, History in Art: the Idoma Ancestral Masquerade as Historical Evidence*; Henry John Drewal, "Ritual Performance in Africa Today," *TDR* 32, no. 2 (1988); Drewal, "African Art Studies Today."; ——, "The State of Research on Performance in Africa."; Bentor, "Aro Ikeji Festival."; William Rea, "No Event, No History: Masquerade in Ikole," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1995).
[37] G. J. A. Ojo, *Yoruba Culture: a Geographical Analysis* (London: University of London Press, 1966); N. A. Fadipe, *Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970); J. S. Eades, *The Yoruba Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); J. D. Y. Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians: the Incorporation of a Yoruba kingdom, 1890s-1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[38] Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921); Robert S. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London: Methuen, 1969).

masks, and with few exceptions, masquerade associations are domains that men dominate. While there are a number of masquerade traditions among the Yoruba; Egungun and Gelede are the most well known.[39]

In the most general sense, "*egungun*" refers to any masquerade or masked figure. The mask is believed to conceal a supernatural force, i.e., an *orisha* (deity) or an incarnated ancestor. More particularly, "Egungun" refers to a specific masquerade tradition associated with an Oyo masking society and devoted to honoring the ancestors and to enhancing the reputation of the mask's owner(s) and his or her lineage.[40] An individual, male or female, may come to own or possess an Egungun mask by creating, inheriting, or seizing it by force. If the owner is male, he may carry or wear the mask, or he may enlist the help of another individual, who possesses certain skills that are desirable in a performer. A female must rely on a male to carry her Egungun mask.[41]

Egungun are regarded as *ara-orun* ("departed relatives" or "heavenly beings"), and their appearance and behavior reflect their otherworldly status. An Egungun's mask may include a headdress made from animal bones or skin, net, mirrors, or wooden carvings. If a headdress is worn, a layer of fabric, palm fronds, or animal skins under it covers the body of the wearer from head to toe, including all appendages. The cloth costume may take the shape of a large sack, with swirling panels of damask, velvet, lace,

---

[39] J. R. O. Ojo, "Epa and Related Masquerades among the Ekiti Yoruba of Western Nigeria," (M. Philosophy, University of London, 1974); Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*; Nwanna Nzewunwa, ed., *The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture* (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980); Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); Benedict M. Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu-Yoruba Subgroup in West Africa* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1993); Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*.

[40] Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, "The Arts of Egungun Among Yoruba People," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978): 18.

[41] Babatunde Lawal, "The Living Dead: Art and Immortality Among the Yoruba of Nigeria," *Africa* 47, no. 1 (1977): 51, 59.

or other fabrics. The arrangement of materials in an Egungun's costume gives it an appearance that ranges from distinctly human or animal to supernatural. To complement the visual disguise of the Egungun, the performer speaks in an unrecognizable, often gutteral voice.[42] Egungun have been charged, in early and modern times, with upholding the moral authority of unseen forces, and therefore they are afforded the privilege of performing rituals, adjudicating disputes, and punishing criminals. For the purposes of this study, Egungun may refer to a single Egungun masquerade or the Egungun society, which includes all of the masquerade chiefs and practitioners in a town. The Oya masquerade, for instance, includes the person under the Oya mask, as well as the drummers, singers, and other ritual specialists who accompany Oya during outings or performances.

A number of types of Egungun masquerades have existed, and their classifications have varied across communities and time. Egungun differ in their names, forms, and functions, both within and among communities. Today, at Otta for instance, the following types appear in the annual festival: *alagbada* (wearer of agbada attire), *onidan* (owner of magic), *oloogun* or *wariwo* (medicine or warrior), *alabala* (associated with a monkey), *baba muko* (elderly), *soja* (soldier man), *elebiti* (peaceful mediator), and *alarede* (entertainer). There are separate categories for some Egungun identified by their name and attire: Ege, Apaje, Apaje Ishorun, and Amuludun. During the evening performance of the Egungun *alagbada*, this Egungun removes the *agbada* costume at one

[42] Interview with Oba M. A. Oyede III, Olota of Otta, May 5, 2005, Otta.

stage of the performance to reveal another costume underneath known as *onidan*, which represents various animals in the local cosmology.[43]

A second masquerade tradition, Gelede, has long existed at Otta. Found principally among Yoruba speakers living in the Ketu, Egbado, and Awori communities of western Yorubaland, Gelede honors the power of women. Through Gelede masquerade performances, communities petition both human and spiritual forces to act in harmony, reminding them that they are all children of the same archetypal mother, Iya Nla. Gelede also placates Iya Nla and asks that she use her influence among her children to promote human and agricultural fertility and discourage the use of force in resolving conflicts. Gelede in addition satirizes social misfits.[44]

Two distinct types of masking events comprise Gelede. The first event is a night concert centered on a figure known as Efe, the social and political critic. Efe begins by invoking and appealing to the spiritual forces and those who have come before him. He then comments on people or events affecting the community. The following day, a second event occurs. It features masked male and female figures properly known as Gelede. These masks usually depict Imams, market women, Europeans, and other colonial or post-colonial figures, such as porters, engineers, bus drivers, pilots, or pastors.

Three elements make up the Gelede attire. Carved wooden headdresses depict the masquerade figure. In addition, panels of fabric, associated with women's skirts or baby-

[43] Deji Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival in Ota Awori: Special Program Brochure* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000).
[44] Ulli Beier, "Gelede Masks," *Odu: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies* 6 (1958); Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*; Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama*; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*.

sashes cover the body of the performer. Large metal anklets that rattle during the dancing generally comprise the third element.[45]

As this dissertation will show, the histories of Egungun and Gelede are linked, although in different ways, to the imperial project of Oyo. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Oyo kingdom became the center of political power in the Yoruba-speaking world and the capital of an expanding empire.[46] The Egungun masquerade society's introduction into Oyo preceded the emergence of the empire, but its masquerades and chiefs gained greater prominence in Oyo political life during the imperial period. Oral traditions contend that the Nupe kingdom, Oyo's northern neighbor, used a masquerade as it invaded Oyo during the sixteenth century, ultimately causing Oyo's ruler to flee into exile and the people of Oyo to reorganize themselves politically along the lines of the invaders. Oyo's leadership subsequently introduced and spread the Egungun society in Oyo's governmental administration in order to centralize power.[47]

Oyo was strategically located south of the Niger River and along trans-Saharan trade routes, which enabled it to import horses from the north across the river in exchange for slaves acquired via tribute and warfare. Oyo soon developed a successful cavalry and used it to gain regional dominance and embark on a long period of imperial expansion. Military conquest and territorial expansion in the southwest toward the Atlantic Ocean were particularly important to Oyo's rulers, as they sought control of trade routes linking

[45] Beier, "Gelede Masks."; Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*; Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama*; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*.
[46] Law, *The Oyo Empire*.
[47] Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms."; Robert Smith, "The Alaafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History," *Journal of African History* 6, no. 1 (1965); Joel Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre: The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from Its Earliest Beginnings to the Present Times," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1969); Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*.

the north with growing ports of the Atlantic slave trade on or near the coast.[48] In the imperial period, Oyo found in Egungun, among other things, an instrument of territorial expansion and control. Egungun masqueraders often led Oyo armies in battles, because the magical powers of the charms and amulets that were part of masquerade costumes were thought to give an advantage to the armies.[49] To consolidate control over southwestern trade routes, Oyo colonized a number of Yoruba-speaking communities, including Otta, the site of this study. Oyo's king, the *Alaafin*, sent officials to oversee the provinces, and he employed them to extend Oyo's control in the southwest.[50] According to traditions at both Oyo and Otta, Egungun became established at Otta through this process. As I will discuss below, Egungun became part of Oyo's political culture in the capital and in the provinces, and it has retained political importance to the present, as demonstrated in the 1996 court case.

Shortly after Oyo consolidated control over its trade routes in the southwest, a Ketu prince who founded the royal dynasty in ancient town of Ilobi introduced the Gelede masquerade sometime between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In an effort to resolve a Ketu succession dispute, the prince is said to have commissioned and dispatched a masquerade to terrorize the inhabitants of the town Ketu. Thereafter, the Ilobi taught the Ketu the secrets of Gelede. Gelede flourished along the trade corridor in the southwest passing through Ketu and Egbado areas and connecting Oyo to the coast. The masquerade seems to have appealed to market women, Oyo administrators, Hausa

[48] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 250.
[49] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 178-180; Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 2; ———, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 44.
[50] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 90, 92, 96.

traders, and European travelers around the turn to the nineteenth century because of its contributions to the maintenance of peace and prosperity in the region.[51]

When the Oyo Empire collapsed in the 1830s, tens of thousands of refugees fled into southern and western Yorubaland. Within a decade, they established new states, organized around warlords, not kings. Oyo's collapse left a power vacuum that precipitated rivalry among these new states and struggles to control trade routes linking the coast and interior. These conflicts sparked a half-century of warfare that destroyed many communities and destabilized a wide region.[52] When reconstituting their governments and communities, Yoruba speakers drew on cultural institutions and practices from their past, including, I argue, masquerades. While some scholars have linked masquerades to the centralization of power in Oyo during the imperial period, they have largely neglected masquerades in their discussions of the shifting political orders that characterized the period between Oyo's collapse and the imposition of British colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century.[53]

The Yoruba town of Otta between 1770 and 1901 is an ideal place to investigate the relationship between masquerades and political, economic, and social transformations during a period of tremendous upheaval. Otta was the capital of a small, old kingdom and a regional market town and bulking point for long-distance traders from the north and merchants from the port towns of Badagry and Lagos in the south.[54] It is known around the Yoruba speaking world for its rich masquerade traditions and where witchcraft and

[51] Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 234-236.
[52] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 35-38.
[53] See chapter 4, Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 166-207; Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 27-29.
[54] B. A. Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria, 1850-1950, A History of the Cultivation of Cola Nitida in Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo and Ota Areas," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972), 18-24.

magic have been particularly strong. Furthermore, it was strategically located just south of an area where the main conflicts between Oyo and its provinces played out, Otta enjoyed relative peace during the height of Oyo's imperial dominance, between 1770 and 1789.[55] However, as metropolitan dissent and provincial disaffection weakened Oyo, ambitious warrior states seized the moment to wrestle free from Oyo's yoke and pursue their own imperial aims.[56] Otta struggled to adapt, caught between three different powers vying for regional dominance in southwestern Yorubaland throughout much of the nineteenth century. The states that most affected Otta were the Fon Kingdom of Dahomey to the west, the new Egba settlement of Abeokuta to the north, and the major coastal trading center of Lagos to the south.[57] Otta was also on the frontier of the Yoruba interior and the British colony based at Lagos in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In 1842, Otta was defeated and subjugated by Abeokuta; that same year, British evangelists began establishing missions in Otta.[58] Located along the north-south trade route from the coast to the interior, Otta struggled to 1.) regain its economic footing in the face of a declining Atlantic slave trade and a new European commerce in palm produce, 2.) resist Dahomey's and Abeokuta's occupation and control, and 3.) maintain its independence through selective engagement with British evangelical, mercantile, and imperial demands. After the establishment of a British Crown Colony at Lagos in 1861, the British became increasingly involved in Otta's unstable political, economic, and social environment until 1893, when Great Britain formally imposed colonial rule

[55] Salako, *Ota*, 61-65.
[56] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 261-277.
[57] Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria," 19-20, 56-57.
[58] Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 27.

throughout the region. In 1901, the last king to have been installed at Otta in the pre-colonial period died.[59]

Sources of Evidence and Methodology

This study investigates the role of masquerade performances and associations in the political and social conflicts that played out in Otta during the period 1770 to 1901. Otta provides an excellent site for my research not only because of its rich masquerade traditions and the fact that it experienced the upheavals that plagued the broader region in a direct and clear way, but also because of the exceptional quality of its historical sources. Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries, some of Yoruba origin, arrived in the town in 1842 and lived there continuously to the end of the century. The missionaries' journals, letters, and reports to their superiors in London as well as a number of traveler accounts provide vivid written descriptions of Otta's nineteenth-century masquerades, along with much information about local politics and warfare.[60] These sources yield rich data about the dialectical relationship between masquerades and politics.

[59] Salako, *Ota*, 65.
[60] Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa*; T. J. Bowen, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa, from 1849 to 1856* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857); R. F. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountains: an Exploration*, vol. 2 vols. (London: 1863); Anna Martin Hinderer, *Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country: Memorials of Anna Hinderer, Wife of the Rev. David Hinderer, C.M.S. Missionary in Western Africa* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1872); *Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*, vol. CA2 (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879); Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*; Stephen Farrow, *Faith, Fancies and Fetich, or Yoruba paganism: Being Some Account of the Religious Beliefs of the West African Negroes, Particularly of the Yoruba tribes of Southern Nigeria* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); Jonathan O. Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C. M. S. Bookshop, 1948); William H. Clarke, *Travels and explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972).

The most important missionary evidence pertaining to Otta comes from the writings of the Reverend James White.[61] In 1854, White, a CMS agent of Yoruba parentage, arrived in Otta, and he remained there for twenty-five years. Fluent in English and in his native language, White regularly wrote texts documenting life in Otta. Of the many Yoruba agents who served in their homeland, White was the most interested in local cultural practices, including masquerades.[62]

James White was raised in Sierra Leone, then a British colony, and educated by the British in mission schools. His Yoruba parents had been enslaved when their village was destroyed and exported into the Atlantic slave trade after legal abolition by most nations. The British intercepted the slave ship on which they sailed, rerouted it to Sierra Leone, and after legal enquiry freed its slave occupants. During White's formative years, many Yoruba former slaves lived in and around Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital. Thus, although White grew up in exile and was educated in British mission schools, he was raised by his Yoruba parents in a heavily Yoruba mission community.[63]

Indeed, White acknowledges his observation of Yoruba masquerades along with the Otta people and their traditions while growing up. However, he did not participate in such cultural practices, and he later wrote about them as if they were "heathen" spectacles. Insofar as British missionaries were uninterested in or hostile to practices that they perceived as heathen, and to the extent that James White and his parents, as Christians, distanced themselves from such practices and sought to emulate British

[61] James White, *CA2/087 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879).
[62] Peel, *Religious Encounter*.
[63] White, *CA2/087 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*; Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: the "Sierra Leonians" in Yoruba, 1830-1890* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965); John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: a History of Sierra Leone, 1787-1870* (London: Faber, 1969).

customs, we may infer that White was unfamiliar with many of the subtleties of masquerade practices. Even if he was at times inclined to view masquerades as serious, complex, and worthwhile institutions, as a missionary his role and his awareness of the audience for which he wrote inhibited expression of such views. As a young Christian missionary sent to Otta to convert the heathen Yoruba and report on his progress to his British superiors in London, James White was undoubtedly circumspect in what he wrote. White's journal was a formal document, in which he often wrote several times a week and that he forwarded to his London superiors, along with quarterly, semi-annual, and annual reports.[64]

In his monumental work, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, anthropologist J. D. Y. Peel makes several points that I believe are crucial to my project of evaluating and interpreting nineteenth-century missionary narratives regarding masquerades and other aspects indigenous beliefs and ritual practices. According to Peel, the information these documents contain, must be read with a "hermeneutic of deep suspicion," because the missionaries' primary aim was to supplant local religious beliefs and practices and replace them with Christianity.[65] Peel contends that the missionaries lacked a concept of culture with which to comprehend the ways of life and systems of beliefs that they encountered in Yorubaland. The missionaries saw idolatry and heathenism, Peel argues, as evidence of an absence of legitimate spiritual power or authority on the one hand and the presence of an organizing principle whose hold they

[64] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 9.
[65] Ibid., 12.

needed to break, on the other.[66] This outlook made it easy for them to miss many details of Yoruba myths and traditions. The missionaries simply could not see them.[67]

One consequence of the missionaries' blindness to Yoruba culture was their lack of attention to cultural change through time, linked to the outbreak of warfare and the fall of old states and rise of new ones. White and other missionaries in Otta were not alert to how cultural institutions were changing in response to the demands of warfare. Nor were they aware of the impact of their own presence on institutions such as masquerades.

In reconstructing Otta's political and cultural history, I also draw on documents housed at the Nigerian National Archives in Ibadan and Abeokuta, Nigeria. The *Abeokuta Profile 8/2: Abeokuta Intelligence Report* and *Abeokuta Profile 5: Otta Intelligence Report* along with a document known as *Otta Affairs: Brief History of Otta* are located at the Nigerian National Archives in Ibadan. The Egba Archives, as the Abeokuta site is named, holds another set of documents, *The Otta District Council Meetings Minutes*.[68] These reports illuminate changes in local economic activities. They also document long term transformations in the structure of local government, yielding data about the role of masquerade associations and their leadership in both. Furthermore, these records chronicle major political events in the town during the period I am studying. In all these ways, the government documents in Nigeria supplement the religious cultural material in the missionary record.

---

[66] It is here where modern anthropology/ethnography has as its strength—in extensive discussions of rituals, vernacular texts and, explanations and interpretations of myths and symbols. At the same time, however, these sources are rich because they offer innumerable observations of daily religious life by multiple observers spending, in many cases, decades in the communities they describe and often reporting similar phenomena.

[67] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 12.

[68] I consulted the minutes from council meetings in the following years: 1934-35, 1950-52, 1956, 1963, 1970-71.

I have also consulted a number of written texts produced by local historians of Otta. Dada Agunwa wrote during the colonial period, and offers accounts that supplement British colonial sources and missionary writings. R. A. Salako and Dele Kosebinu are contemporary writers who discuss the history of Otta, providing detailed narratives of the reigns of Otta's kings.[69] Among these writers, Kosebinu's publications have been particularly informative for my study of Egungun in the town. Kosebinu produced the brochures for the 2000 and 2004 Egungun festivals at Otta, which identify many of the town's prominent Egungun and discuss their historical significance. He also includes some of the praise songs (*oriki*) that accompany masquerades belonging to the *alagbada* group.

Oral data are also critical to my project, because they provide an essential indigenous perspective and address issues about which the written records are silent. Oral data include historical narratives, poems, and songs that have long served as indigenous historical records and are recognized as such by scholars(Awe 1974; Barber 1991).[70] Asiwaju, a historian, contends that *Efe* songs, recited during Gelede performances, express the views of the masses through songs that narrate and comment on events and individuals.[71] Peel has shown that *itan*, or oral stories, represent self-contained or limited episodes from the past related to individuals, lineages, communities,

---

[69] Dada Agunwa, *The First Book on Otta: In Memory of King Aina and King Oyelusi Arolagbade*, trans. Gbamidele Ajayi (Otta: 1928); ———, *Iwe Itan Bi Esin Imale ti se de Ilu Otta ati Ilosiwaju ninu Esin Imale*, trans. Gbamidele Ajayi (Otta: 1947); Salako, *Ota*; ———, *Oba Moshood Oyede, The Olota of Ota: So Far So Good*; Deji Kosebinu, *Alani Oyede: The People's Monarch* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000); Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*; ———, *Odo Oje Otta: Launching and Commissioning of "Ege" Statue*; ———, *2004 Egungun Carnival*.

[70] I collected this material during semi-structured and open-ended interviews and conversations with representatives of Otta's masquerade lineages and royal and chieftaincy lineages, as well as through my own observations of masquerade performances.

[71] Asiwaju, "Gelede Songs as Sources of Western Yoruba History."

or religious groups.[72] While these oral traditions are, for the most part, transmitted by men, another genre, *oriki*, is mostly transmitted by women. *Oriki* (praise poems) narrate events surrounding and attributes of individuals, lineages, towns, and mythological figures.[73] Together, these oral sources constitute local histories of masquerades from the perspective of men and women, elite and popular. Drawing from the insights of Bolanle Awe and Karin Barber on *oriki*, Wande Abimbola on Ifa divination poetry and narratives, and A. I. Asiwaju on *Efe* songs, I probe these oral texts alongside the written sources to reconstruct the history of masquerading in Otta.[74] These sources provide much needed detail regarding 1.) the origins and development of masquerades, 2.) the role of masquerade in implementing policy and buttressing royal and chiefly power, and 3.) their relationship of masquerade to important historical figures and events. Although *oriki* mix historical and mythological narratives, scholars recognize it as the most fixed and reliable of oral traditions because of the intense training its transmitters undergo. Also, their emphasis on accuracy in reciting these oral texts gives them a level of integrity that leads Yoruba people to lean heavily on them for information regarding Yoruba history.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter One of my dissertation, I examine the origins and development of Egungun in pre-imperial Oyo. It demonstrates how members of Oyo's ruling elite turned

[72] J. D. Y. Peel, "Making History: The Past in the Ijesha Present," *Man, New Series* 19, no. 1 (1984).
[73] Bolanle Awe, "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oriki," *Africa* 44, no. 4 (1974); ———, "Notes on Oriki and Warfare in Yorubaland," in *Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama*, ed. Wande Abimbola (Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975); Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).
[74] Wande Abimbola, "Ifa Divination Poems as Sources for Historical Evidence," *Lagos Notes and Records* 1 (1967); Awe, "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oriki."; ———, "Notes on Oriki and Warfare in Yorubaland."; Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*.

to Egungun as they consolidated their power and affirmed their position atop Oyo's political hierarchy. Chapter Two looks at Egungun's role in Oyo's expansion as an imperial power. It focuses on the masquerades place within two conflicts: one between the rulers of Oyo (its king and chiefs) and the other between Oyo's imperial administrators and provincial rulers and their subjects. Taking Otta as a case study, this chapter shows how one particular administrator named Odikaye, who was both a Shango and Egungun priest, introduced in the town an imperial Egungun that promoted the status and interests of the monarch of Oyo and those of his local allies. Thereafter, Shango and Egungun worship converged and created new possibilities in law enforcement and political culture. Imperial Egungun surfaced at Otta during a time of relative peace and prosperity, and this masquerade helped Oyo immigrants and their local collaborators carve out an important place for themselves in a growing provincial town.

Chapter Three deals with the period of Oyo's imperial decline and collapse. During this era, ambitious warrior states emerged to challenge Oyo's hegemony in the southwest, and, in the process, they threatened Otta's autonomy and existence. As the town struggled to adapt to a far more militarized political environment, Otta welcomed consecutive waves of immigrants and offered them a prominent place in the town's political hierarchy, in exchange for their aid in defending and policing the community. It was in this context that Egungun and Gelede both became important in integrating these newcomers and shaping political, military, and legal authority in the town.

Chapter Four focuses on the role of Egungun and Gelede in the process of reconstituting Otta's government and community following the town's monumental war with the neighboring state of Abeokuta. Masquerades played a vital role in mediating

conflicts between the monarchy and the chiefs and in fostering community in the face of enduring threats from old and new states seeking to supplant Oyo as the sole imperial power in the region. Chapter Five looks at the end of the nineteenth century, when warfare was ending and new economic and political opportunities were emerging in an era of British colonization. The focus in this chapter is on the role of Egungun in enabling a warrior and his two wives. I argue that an examination of this trio's varied contributions to the development of the Egungun Oya, which was at the center of the 1996 court case discussed above, offers an opportunity to rethink that relationship between women and Egungun.

Chapter One

The Origins and Development of Egungun in Pre-Imperial Oyo

This chapter focuses on the origins and development of the Egungun masquerade tradition during the pre-imperial period of the Oyo kingdom in West Africa. This history corresponds to the reigns of the following rulers of Oyo: *Alaafin*s Shango, Onigbogi, Ofinran, Ogbolu, and Jayin. In this chapter, I examine evidence from Johnson's (1921) work with respect to Egungun in Oyo as well as Smith's (1965), Adedeji's (1969), and Babayemi's (1980) readings of Johnson in light of their own ethnographic research.[1] I then employ insights from recent ethnographies as well as my own conceptualization.[2] An examination of Egungun's historical development reveals that it has manifested a

[1] The nineteenth-century Yoruba missionary and historian Samuel Johnson provides the master narrative of Yoruba history that subsequent generations of Yoruba speakers and scholars of pre-colonial Yoruba history reference. Historian Robert Smith focuses on Egungun with respect to the reigns of *Alaafin's* Onigbogi, Ofinran, and Ogbolu. The theatre historian J. Adedeji traces the historical development of Egungun, focusing on its theatrical elements, through the reigns of all of the rulers of Oyo mentioned above. S. O. Babayemi only historicizes Egungun when he mentions the debate around its traditions of origin, Abiodun's impact on Egungun's development as well as its use nineteenth-century warfare. Also see historian Robin Law for further discussion of Oyo's history. Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921); Robert Smith, "The Alaafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History," *Journal of African History* 6, no. 1 (1965); Joel Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre: The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from Its Earliest Beginnings to the Present Times," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1969); Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, 1600 - 1836: a West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic slave trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); S. O. Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo c., 1706-1905: A Study in the Traditional Culture of an African Polity* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1980), 40-45.

[2] Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Andrew H. Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: the Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); James Matory, *Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); William Rea, "No Event, No History: Masquerade in Ikole," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1995); James Matory, *Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

variety of meanings and functions overtime: reincarnated ancestor, warrior, court and public entertainer, judge, and executioner, and secret society.

From its inception, Egungun was largely under the jurisdiction of the rulers of Oyo. Egungun membership offered high status at the court. Performances offered members the opportunity to flaunt their own status and to challenge the status of their rivals. As Egungun evolved, it began to expand its religious association to include a range of coercive functions, one of which included the dispensing of justice. Egungun performances both affirmed and commented on societal behavior and contradictions through ritualizing the masquerade.[3] In essence, Egungun both affirmed the traditional system of checks and balances that called for decisions to be made in council and periodically obfuscated or suspended that same system.[4]

My analysis focuses on the place of Egungun within Oyo's changing pre-imperial politics. It investigates two historic moments that illustrate the changing functions of Egungun in the domestic politics of Oyo. First, in the wake of the Nupe invasion, which occurred around 1500 during the reign of *Alaafin* Onigbogi, Oyo's Egungun society was formally organized to address the challenges facing Oyo's leadership in the aftermath of the invasion and subsequent exile of the community.[5] Second, after the Oyo people had become accustomed to living in exile, *Alaafin* Ogbolu took the unpopular decision of attempting to return the Oyo kingdom to its sacred home, Oyo-Ile.[6] During those years, around 1600, the Egungun society was a vehicle through which the Oyo leadership

---

[3] Peter Morton-Williams, "Yoruba Responses to the Fear of Death," *Africa* 30, no. 1 (1960): 38-39.
[4] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 44.
[5] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 158. Adedeji cites *Awon Oriki Ile* (a collection of lineage oriki) and a number of oral traditions that he recorded: oriki Egungun, Odu Oworinse and the Odu Oworin Meji from Odu Ifa corpus. He interprets the content of these mytho-historical traditions as reflective of Egungun's dual heritage: Oyo and Nupe. Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 81-92, 96-97.
[6] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 164-166. Law provides the dates of Onigbogi's and Ogbolu's reigns. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 59.

competed over the future direction of the kingdom and dominance within its hierarchy.[7] Read together, these moments suggest the following: first, Egungun was a battleground where the *Alaafin* (the king) and the *Oyo Mesi* (the council of chiefs), who together ruled Oyo, asserted their power against one another; second, Egungun's leaders used their influence on Oyo's rulers to promote the status of the Egungun society as a whole and of the individuals who vied for dominance within it.

This chapter traces the development in Oyo of Egungun as a performance spectacle and a religious-political association whose leadership both organized performances and increasingly became enmeshed within Oyo's political elite. The history of Egungun in Oyo demonstrates that from its inception Egungun performances were important arenas within which key political actors (kings, ruling chiefs, warlords, and lineage heads) participated in struggles over religious and political authority. More specifically, these performances provided opportunities for members of Oyo's political elite, seeking to harness spiritual forces, to vie for dominance atop the sociopolitical hierarchy. During other moments, the introduction of Egungun, or changes in its practice, continued to reflect attempts by the elite to structure the relationship between the human beings and the supernatural forces that influenced their world, and also resolve differences amongst Oyos elite and marginal groups within the kingdom.

What is most important here is that Egungun manifested a multiplicity of meanings shaped by specific historical contexts, as well as by the desires and actions of

[7] My thinking here is largely informed by the extensive scholarship on the conflict among Oyo's elite throughout much of the pre-colonial period. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*; Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 65, 69-72; I. A. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century: A Re-assessment," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 2 (1966): 451-456; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, Chapters 5-6, 12; Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, Chapters 1-2; J. A. Ajayi, "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo," in *History of West Africa*, ed. J. A. Ajayi (London: Longman, 1987), 136-144.

individual actors wielding authority and power within the institution. In other words, Egungun emerged as a dynamic phenomenon that different, often competing, groups (kings, chiefs, and warlords) enact to confront the challenges they faced.

Alaafin Shango and Oyo Ancestral Egungun

Scholars have yet to reach a consensus about the precise origin of Egungun. However, some of the most influential traditions of Egungun's origin focus on a mythic-historical *Alaafin* and deity known as Shango and assert that he introduced a new form of ancestral worship among Oyo's elite; non-royal families later adopted this ritual to honor their own ancestors.[8] In addition to the Shango tradition, other traditions allege that the first Egungun emerged from recreational, yam, or harvest festivals that demarcated agricultural cycles.[9] At its most basic level and general conception, Egungun is an

[8] A number of scholars (i.e. Johnson, Law, and Babayemi) believe that Shango was not a historical figure. However, many of Shango's and Egungun's devotees (as the Chief Priest of Shango at Otta expressed during an interview) attribute the origins of Egungun to Shango. This tradition is published in a brochure by local historians and circulated at Otta during the Egungun festival. Deji Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival in Ota Awori: Special Program Brochure* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000), 24-25. Adedeji appears to accept the historicity of Shango's contribution to the development of Egungun. What Adedeji has in common with scholars who are more skeptical is that the traditions that link Shango to Oyo reflect the cultural influences of Nupe on Oyo. Babayemi references Nadel and Mason in this regard. Babayemi speculates that Shango represents a mythic archetype that emerged from the convergence of several cultures: Nupe, Yoruba (Oyo), and Borgu, to name a few. He adds that Shango also represents the introduction of a new ruling dynasty. He suggests that the deification of Shango occurred after the Nupe invasion and expulsion of the Oyo kingdom that led to its exile, the topic of Smith's article, "The Alaafin in Exile." What scholars do accept the historicity of is that Shango was deified and elevated above all other orisha at some historical moment before Oyo's ascension to the status of empire. S. O. Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba* (Ibadan: Board Publication Ltd., 1980), 28-33. Law believes that it is more likely that Shango was a humanized orisha than a deified man. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 34, 50. For the purposes of argument, I treat the tradition as a whole as factual or at least as reflective of a moment in which a new ritual was introduced the merged funeral rites and ancestral worship for the Oyo monarchy. The people of Oyo subsequently adopted this new form of ritual. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 145-155; S. F. Nadel, *Nupe Religion: Traditional Beliefs and the Influence of Islam in a West African Chiefdom* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954); Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 69-72; M. D. Mason, "The Nupe Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century: a Political History," (University of Birmingham, 1970).

[9] Robin Poynor, "The Ancestral Arts of Owo, Nigeria," (Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 1979). Dele Layiwola, "Egungun in the Performing Arts of the Yoruba," in *Readings in African Studies*, ed. A. T. Oyewo and S. A. Osunwole (Ibadan: Jator Publishing Company, 1999), 147.

ancestral masquerade tradition devoted to honoring the ancestors.[10] The idea behind it is that the masquerade offers a medium through which the relationship between the living and the dead is maintained.

According to the Shango tradition, when he reigned as the *Alaafin*, Shango introduced an ancestral masquerade as part of the funeral rites and ancestral worship in honor of his father, the former ruler of Ile-Ife. To buttress his own political and ritual authority and to honor his predecessor, Shango requested that the remains of his late father be brought from Ile-Ife to Oyo. Unable to obtain the remains, Shango developed an alternate plan: he ordered the creation of a masquerade to represent the spirit of his departed father. He then organized a special ceremony in which this new masquerade paraded from the outskirts of the Oyo capital to the *Alaafin*'s palace at the center of the city. After it arrived at the palace, the masquerade entered a newly created royal mausoleum known as the *bara*. This building became the home and worship center of this masquerade. According to tradition, Shango placed an old woman of the palace, known as the *Iyamode*, in charge of overseeing the worship and calling out the royal masquerade from its sacred resting place, the royal mausoleum, during the annual festivals in Oyo.[11]

Sometime thereafter, nonroyal lineage heads within the kingdom also began organizing masquerade performances to honor their own ancestors. When the masquerade appeared, the people hailed it as "*ara orun kenken, orisha oun aso re meji*"

[10] Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, "The Arts of Egungun Among Yoruba People," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978): 19.
[11] Adedeji builds on traditions that Johnson documents. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 43-44; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 71.

("direct visitor from heaven, the deity who is inseparable from his two garments").[12] Thus, Egungun came to mean "*ara orun*" (departed ancestors), who periodically return to the world in the form of a masquerade.[13]

Devotees of Egungun often refer to the previous account or other traditions involving Shango when discussing the origins of Egungun.[14] Since ancestral reverence has been one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of worship among the Yoruba, this account suggests that Shango transformed ancestral worship from an observance with emphasis on inanimate objects, i.e. the bones of the deceased or objects representing the dead, to an emphasis on the incarnation of ancestors in the form of a masquerade.[15] From a political and ideological perspective, Shango's Egungun innovation legitimized his status as both 1.) the successor to Oranmiyan, the founder of the Oyo kingdom, and 2.) the guardian of values deemed critical to the well-being of the kingdom. Shango ensured that the ancestors received their due recognition in order to assure that they would continue to protect the Oyo kingdom from misfortune.

The Shango tradition highlights a practice that has been common among "divine" kings—that is, the use of rituals that often enact myths to demonstrate the king's authority within the spiritual realm, channeling spiritual power in ways that have strong political implications.[16] As Sidney Kasfir has explained:

---

[12] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 71.
[13] Ibid. 71.
[14] Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*, 24-25. Interview with Chief J. O. Akingbola, the Atokun of Otta 2005, Ijana ward, Otta.
[15] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 71.
[16] Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, Chapter 1; Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 21-24.

> If myth is a model which validates the cosmology by grounding it in society, the mask system can be understood as its obverse: a model which validates the social order by grounding it in the cosmic order.[17]

In the Shango story, the tradition suggests two different approaches to harnessing to spiritual power to the larger end of legitimizing the dominant political and ideological order. In ordering that an ancestral masquerade be created in honor of his father, he affirmed the ideology of seniority, which privileges elders and ancestors as social, political, and religious authorities.[18] In addition, Shango reinforced the ideology of the kingship as the head of the entire community and the mediator between the human community and the spirits. In essence, the reenactment of this masquerade ritual during funeral rites and annual festivals reaffirmed Shango's spiritual authority, essential for legitimizing his right to rule.

The adoption of this practice by other lineage heads represented yet a further opportunity for the *Alaafin* to centralize power throughout the kingdom, because lineage heads deployed their own ancestral masquerades during the annual festival at the same time that the *Alaafin* deployed his royal ancestral masquerade. The implication is that lineage heads were not only affirming their own status within their respective lineages but also that of the *Alaafin* as the head of all lineages within the kingdom.[19] Furthermore, by establishing the worship of the royal ancestors through the medium of a masquerade performance, *Alaafin* Shango affirmed not only his political authority over the lineage heads, but also his spiritual rule over the ancestors of the lineages as well.

---

[17] Sidney L. Kasfir, "Masquerading as a Cultural System," in *West African Masks and Cultural Systems*, ed. Sidney L. Kasfir (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1988), 6.

[18] Yoruba sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that scholars have underestimated the importance of seniority as an organizing principle in Yoruba society historically. Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 41.

[19] Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 45.

Long after the period in which Shango is believed to have reigned, he was venerated as not only an ancestor of subsequent *Alaafin*, but also as one of the most revered *orisha*, or deities, in Oyo and subsequently in the Yoruba speaking world, surpassing the status of other *Alaafin*.[20] As I will discuss later, the reverence of Shango as an *orisha* and of Egungun as reincarnated ancestors spread throughout the areas under Oyo influence during its imperial period.

To this day, Shango is often visually represented in mural drawings on Egungun shrines. The image in Figure 2 shows a Shango devotee holding a crown in the right hand and the *oshe* Shango, the deity's trademark implement and symbol, in the left hand.[21] To the left of the devotee is an Egungun masquerade named Ege. Two smaller Egungun belonging to a category of Egungun known as alabala appear to the right of the devotee.

Figure 2. Mural depicting Shango devotee amidst Egungun masquerades appears inside the Egungun Shrine of the Female Egungun Chiefs, Itimoko Compound, Ijana Ward, Otta. Photograph by author, February 12, 2006.

[20] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 33-37.
[21] Eva. L. R. Meyerowitz, "Notes on the King-God Shango and His Temple at Ibadan, Southern Nigeria," *Man* 46, no. 27 (1946): 26.

Reflecting the relationship between Shango and Egungun in terms of his offices and commentary, one Egungun chief who is also the head priest of Shango in Otta said, "Shango and Egungun are one. Egungun cannot exist without Shango."[22]

Alaafin Onigbogi and the Nupe Warrior Masquerade

While Oyo tradition credits Shango, whose mother is said to have been Nupe, as having created the ancestral masquerade among the Yoruba, many scholars attribute the origin of Egungun specifically to a Nupe invasion. They believe that Nupe invaders introduced new ideas of masquerading to the Oyo people during the reign of *Alaafin* Onigbogi in the first half of the sixteenth century.[23] A summary of key events in Onigbogi's reign suggests that during this period a common feature of Egungun masquerade performance practice manifested itself—that is, the propensity for Egungun to take part in political rivalries and perform acts of violence as a terror tactic. Moreover, it illustrates how a masquerade performance contributed to the Nupe's assertion of spiritual and military power in Oyo to the degree that Oyo's rulers and people abandoned their home (Oyo-Ile) and wandered in exile for many years. The account also indicates that this invasion was often referred to and reenacted through symbolic and literal acts of violence—revealing that Egungun was often a hegemonic tool of the political elite. Egungun provided a way of causing disorder to help establish a new order that advanced a given group's socio-political interests.

---

[22] Interview with Chief J. O. Akingbola, Atokun of Otta, May 4, 2005, Otta. Wall paintings and woodcarvings, along with oral traditions (oriki, Ifa verses), contain innumerable references that link Egungun and Shango.

[23] Morton-Williams cited in Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 72. Discussion of the Nupe origins of Egungun in Oyo is based mostly on Johnson and Babayemi. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 159-160; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 72-78; Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 40-42.

Johnson recounts that when Onigbogi ascended to the throne, his mother, an Otta woman named Aruigba-Ifa, traveled from Otta to Oyo and advised the leadership of Oyo to adopt Ifa as the sacred oracle for the entire kingdom. The Oyo leadership as a whole rejected her recommendation, and shortly thereafter the *Alaafin*'s mother departed from Oyo.[24] Soon after Aruigba-Ifa's departure, a minor rebellion against *Alaafin* Onigbogi began in a nearby town. The *Alaafin* sent his war minister, the *Bashorun*, to suppress the rebellion. The rulers of neighboring communities learned of the *Bashorun*'s temporary absence from Oyo. Perceiving the town as defenseless, a Nupe king acted swiftly and attacked Oyo-Ile. Most relevant to note about the attack here is that a Nupe masquerade reportedly led the invading army. The *Alaafin* was overthrown; he and his supporters fled from Oyo-Ile into exile.[25]

Citing Johnson's account summarized above and consistent with the broader literature on masquerades, Adedeji posits that the Nupe used the masquerade to terrorize the people of Oyo.[26] Adedeji further speculates that the Nupe masquerade was nonhuman and grotesque in form, qualities common among masks used in warfare or in maintaining social control through inspiring fear in observers. The use of "terrifying" masks may have represented an attempt to appropriate the power of violent spirits, a practice that was widespread in sub-Saharan African communities where masquerades exist.[27] Adedeji believes that the Oyo people viewed the Nupe masquerade as a spirit or

---

[24] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 159-160.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 73-75. George W. Harley, "Masks as Agents of Social Control in Northeast Liberia," *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology* 32, no. 2 (1950); M. C. Jedrej, "Structural Aspects of a West African Secret Society," in *Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zürich* (Bern, 1980). Fritz Kramer, *The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa* (London: Verso, 1993).
[27] E. J. Alagoa, "The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture: Keynote Address," in *The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture*, ed. Nwanna Nzewunwa (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt,

ancestor of the invading Nupe army, and possibly perceived it as arriving to punish them for immoral behavior.[28] Adedeji concludes that two distinct masquerade concepts converged during the Nupe invasion: the masquerade as a reincarnated ancestor (Yoruba) and the masquerade as a disguise technique utilized by a secret society for political purposes—i.e. to enforce law and order, to critique policies, and to challenge or defeat political rivals, such as the instance with the Nupe.[29]

Adedeji also calls attention to an event recorded in the kingdom of Ile-Ife's oral traditions that reportedly predated the Nupe invasion of Oyo in order to further explain the Oyo people's reaction to the Nupe masquerade. According to the tradition, a group of Igbo people used a masquerade during an attack on the inhabitants of Ife. The record of this Igbo masquerade attack was incorporated into the lore of the Oyo people.[30] Adedeji speculates that when the Nupe masquerade led the attack on Oyo, its inhabitants may have recalled oral traditions referring to the earlier attack on Ile-Ife by the Igbo masquerade.[31] The memory of the masked Igbo invaders may have resonated with local notions of the sometime hostile qualities of Oyo's masked ancestors. This association between the Nupe invaders and the Igbo may have increased fear of the Nupe masked warrior in the eyes of the Oyo people, as they witnessed this masked figure advance on the battlefield. Adedeji's point—that the Ife oral tradition of the masked Igbo invaders could have been known by Oyo people at the time of the Nupe invasion—illuminates the

---

1980), 4; Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), Chapter 6.

[28] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 75.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 40.

[31] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 74-75.

layers of trauma that existed in the minds in the minds of the Oyo people at the moment of Nupe invasion.

The Nupe attack illustrates that masquerade performances often involve a double violence. They invoke and reenact the memory of violence from a previous moment while carrying out present violence, thereby exacerbating the power of the abuser. Whether or not the Nupe knew that the Oyo people had a preconditioned fear associated with the Igbo masquerade in Ife, it seems that the presence of the masquerade on the battlefield worked to the Nupe's advantage. At the moment of their invasion, the Nupe were involved in masquerading politics that became a recurring theme in Oyo political culture, as subsequent analysis will illustrate.

Alaafin Ofinran and the Creation of the Egungun Society

Following the Nupe invasion and subsequent flight of Oyo's citizens, Oyo's rulers faced an array of military and political obstacles. They needed to consolidate their power, to bolster Oyo's defenses against another invasion, and to reduce the risk of internal divisions. Given the vulnerability of Oyo while in exile to external threats from Nupe and internal dissention, the creation of Egungun was probably intended to strengthen the hegemonic control of its leaders.[32] The formal introduction and development of the Egungun society as a socio-political institution, embedded within Oyo's political hierarchy, reveal how it become part of the traditional system of checks and balances intended to protect Oyo from collapse and invasion.[33]

[32] Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 61-65; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 159-160.
[33] Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 45.

Around 1500, *Alaafin* Onigbobi arrived with his supporters at Gbere, a Borgu town, and immediately began making significant changes in Oyo's constitution and military organization.[34] However, when relations between the *Alaafin* and Borgu's rulers deteriorated, the *Alaafin* and his followers moved to Kusu, a place that figures prominently in Egungun oral traditions. At Kusu, during the reign of *Alaafin* Ofinran, the son of Onigbobi, Oyo's political elite introduced further innovations, which included the adoption of Ifa as the national oracle and the creation of an Egungun society.[35]

According to tradition, Oyo's political elite ascribed their misfortunes, at least in part, to their rejection of Ifa during the early part of Onigbogi's reign. With this in mind, the Ofinran dispatched a party to find his grandmother, Aruigba-Ifa, to initiate his court into the secrets of Ifa. On their way to Otta, the *Alaafin*'s party found the *Alado* (the ruler of Ado, a town neighboring Otta), who had been initiated into Ifa by Onigbogi's grandmother upon her return from Oyo. Ofinran's party brought the Alado back to Oyo, and he allegedly initiated the *Alaafin*'s court into Ifa.[36]

The introduction of Ifa probably figures prominently in the tradition of the Egungun society's origins because the two institutions have worked closely together. It has been through the performance of Ifa divination that a client has been directed to create an Egungun. Moreover, Ifa often identifies the name to be given to a particular Egungun masquerade, as well as the types of rituals it needs to perform in order to be efficacious. Ifa divination poetry contains many accounts of the history of Egungun,

[34] Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 24.
[35] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 160; Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 63.
[36] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 160; Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 65.

including traditions of origin as well as references to innovations made within Egungun practice.[37]

Oral traditions indicate that the first Egungun society of chiefs was formed while Ofinran and his supporters were in exile at Kusu. Johnson claims that the mysteries behind the Nupe masquerade were revealed to Saha, the head slave of the *Alaafin*, who subsequently shared this knowledge with the king. Then, a group of Nupe migrants, along with others from the Bariba region, joined forces with the *Alaafin*'s supporters and further instructed them in the secrets of the Nupe masquerade. Among the Nupe contingent were the *Alapinni* from the Igbori lineage, as well as the Elefi, Olohan, Oloba, Aladafa, and Oloje—all of whom became the first Egungun priests and chiefs in Oyo. The creation of the Egungun society was one of the reforms instituted at Kusu to reorganize Oyo's political and military structure.[38]

Subsequently, the Egungun hierarchy was divided primarily between two lineages: the Igbori (from Nupe) and the Oloba (from a neighboring Yoruba town). The principal members from the Oloba lineage, the Oloje and the Aladafa, were each given a post at the court, the 'Arokin' (rhapsodist or praise singer) and the 'Ologbo' (sword-bearer), respectively. However, the *Alaafin* gave precedence to the *Alapinni* from the Igbori (Nupe origin) lineage over the officials from the Oloba (Yoruba origin) lineage. Adedeji contends that by favoring the Nupe faction, the *Alaafin* set in motion a conflict

[37] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 75-78, 81-92, 96-97. Joel Adedeji, "The Origin of the Yoruba Masque Theatre: The Use of Ifa Divination Corpus as Historical Evidence," *African Notes* 6, no. 1 (1970): 81-97.
[38] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 160. Adedeji cites traditions contained within lineage and Egungun oriki and Odu Oworinse and the Odu Oworin Meji from Odu Ifa corpus and interprets them as reflecting the cooperation of Nupe and Oyo people in creating the Egungun society. Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 78-97.

within the Egungun society over the ownership of the institution that continued throughout the Oyo pre-imperial and imperial periods.[39]

The introduction of the Nupe masquerade's secrets by Nupe immigrants reflects a broader pattern of behavior that scholars have identified among West African peoples. According to anthropologist Sandra Barnes, outsiders have often used their knowledge of religious ideas and practices to secure important political positions in the communities that have adopted them.[40] In the case of Egungun, the *Alapinni*, a member of an immigrant Nupe lineage, offered his expertise in Nupe masquerade traditions in exchange for one of the most politically prominent positions within Oyo's political hierarchy. The *Alapinni* was appointed as the political head of the newly created Egungun society; he also became one of seven members of the *Oyo Mesi*. As Oyo's political elite reconsolidated its power, it looked to Egungun to help protect the kingdom from future Nupe invasions.[41]

However, Egungun was also incorporated into a system of checks and balances within Oyo's political structure, suggesting compromises between the foreign and indigenous elements within the kingdom. Igbori and Oloba were the dominant lineages within the Egungun society and the Oyo state in exile. An individual from the former lineage of Nupe origin served as the "political head" of the Egungun society and represented the society on the *Oyo Mesi* council. Conversely, an indigene from the Oloba lineage acted as the "ritual head" of Egungun and represented the interests of the *Alaafin* in the Egungun the society. Thus, Egungun was a space within which both the foreign

[39] See chapter four, Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre." Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 43-46.
[40] Sandra T. Barnes, "Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 20, no. 3 (1990): 248-250.
[41] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 160; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 75-78.

and indigenous elements in society, as well as the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi*, contested power. Balancing these different interest groups was a primary concern during the reconstruction of Oyo political authority, because Oyo's survival during the period of exile was contingent upon assistance from its neighbors. In essence, Egungun provided a way of reconciling the conflicting interests between the foreign and indigenous inhabitants of Oyo by providing both with positions of prominence in the new political order.[42]

Adedeji further argues that other significant elements of Ofinran's political reforms strengthened the status of the Oba clan (Oloba lineage) in the Oyo court. For instance, two of the major chiefs of the Oloba lineage became court officials with Oyo chieftaincy titles. One of these chiefs, the *Oloje*, organized the performance of court entertainments and rituals.[43] The *Oloje* reported to the *Iyamode*, the female official in charge of the royal masquerade group at the *bara*, its palace home.[44]

Babayemi argues that the creation of the Egungun society was the product of a process of cultural mixing occasioned by the intermingling of Nupe and Borgu with various Oyo groups (i.e. Ogbin, Ikoyi, Iresa, and Oba). He believes that Egungun provided a means of "ordering society" in the context of the culturally heterogeneous and fluctuating environment at Kusu. His argument seeks to explain the multiplicity of influences and traditions of origin of Egungun. The essential point is that Egungun offered Oyo's rulers and people an administrative apparatus and a set of ritual practices

[42] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 75-78.
[43] Adedeji contends that funeral rites, part of the ritual play organized by the *Oloje*, formed the roots of the Alarinjo performance group, which later emerged in Oyo and spread to southwestern Yorubaland during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Ibid., 76-77, 98.
[44] Ibid.

through which they could gain socio-political cohesion and ritual authority and protection.[45]

Alaafin Ologbu, the Ghost-catcher

The reign of *Alaafin* Ologbu, also known as Abipa, around 1600, marks another critical moment in the historical development of Egungun among the Oyo people.[46] During this period, tensions between the *Alaafin* and *Oyo Mesi* over the reoccupation of Oyo-Ile both shaped the activities of Egungun's hierarchy of chiefs and performers and were affected by them. Egungun performances became a battleground on which the *Alaafin* and *Oyo Mesi* mobilized their "secret" agents, Egungun performers, to enact "ritual plays" that challenged one another's policies. These ritual plays or competitions formed, cemented, and restructured political and social relations and agendas. The following episode from Egungun's history in Oyo shows that masquerading was a useful method for carrying out religious-political practices that promoted individual or factional interests in secret, and giving them spiritual justification. Both public and hidden dimensions of these ritualized practices also used violence or the threat of it to manufacture consent. The practice of masquerading disguised politics in ghostly costumes.

Piecing together information from a number of sources allows us to reconstruct a detailed narrative of Ogbolu's reign and ultimately discern the politics of performances in

[45] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 41-42.
[46] *Abipa* is a contraction of "*a bi si ipa*" ("one born on the wayside"). It is believed that Abipa was born to one of *Alaafin* Egunoju's queens while the royal party was traveling along the road toward during Igboho. Smith claims that an Igboho informant told him that Abipa was born twenty years after the abandonment of Oyo-Ile (Old Oyo). Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 69-70.

this period. Johnson provides a general outline of the *Alaafin*'s rule.[47] Smith offers a more nuanced and well-researched narrative of the history of *Alaafin*s who reigned in exile at Igboho, another temporary home of the Oyo people.[48] Adedeji provides additional historical information about Egungun personalities and performances based on his own fieldwork in Oyo.[49]

Shortly after Ogbolu began his reign as the last *Alaafin* to rule at Igboho in the late sixteenth century, he voiced his determination to move the Oyo kingdom from Igboho back to Old Oyo.[50] Johnson claims that Ogbolu's desire to return to this sacred site was inspired by his father, while Smith claims that his brother who inspired him.[51] Despite Ogbolu's desire to reclaim the glory of Oyo's past by returning the kingdom to its homeland, tradition recalls that his plan was unpopular with the Oyo people. Many of those born in exile had spent the early part of their lives roaming the marshes of Borgu and Nupe along the lower banks of the Niger River before they arrived at Igboho. Since then, they had established a secure and sizable community in their new home. Many of them were content with their life in Igboho and found the idea of moving undesirable. However, the greater obstacle to executing Ogbolu's plan was to be found in the chiefs born at Igboho.[52]

The "ghost-catcher story," embedded in an Egungun performance that narrates a critical moment in the history of Oyo, illustrates how far the chiefs were willing to go to thwart the *Alaafin*'s plan. It also shows some of the ways in which Egungun society

[47] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 164-167.
[48] Smith, "The Alafin in Exile."
[49] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 134-138.
[50] Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 72.
[51] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 164.
[52] Ibid.

influenced how the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* voiced and implemented their respective political agendas and policies and challenged those of their opponents.[53] Traditions indicate that when the *Oyo Mesi* realized they would not be able to persuade the *Alaafin* to abandon the idea of returning to Old Oyo, they secretly conspired to ensure that the move would never occur. The council knew that, according to custom, the *Alaafin* would send his emissaries to inspect the abandoned site and offer sacrifices to the gods as part of the preparations for the return home.[54] The *Oyo Mesi* looked to the *Alapinni*, the Egungun society representative on the council, to develop a strategy that would covertly foil the *Alaafin*'s plans. The chiefs likely deemed the *Alapinni*'s skill in using the element of disguise to achieve political ends as appropriate to the situation.[55]

As the story goes, the *Oyo Mesi* secretly dispatched six figures, whom Adedeji identifies as "ghost-mummers," to terrify the *Alaafin*'s emissaries when they reached Old Oyo. The ghost-mummers were figurative representations of the individual councilors on the *Oyo Mesi*: the hunchback (*Bashorun*), the albino (*Alapinni*), the leper (*Asipa*), the prognathic (*Samu*), the dwarf (*Laguna*), and the cripple (*Akiniku*). Johnson argues that these figures symbolized "unnatural beings, suffering the vengeance of the gods," therefore they were known as *eni orisha* ("the belongings of the gods").[56] When the *Alaafin*'s group began making sacrifices to the gods associated with Old Oyo to prepare the way spiritually for the successful return of the kingdom to its old site, the ghost-mummers appeared and started shouting "*ko si aye, kio si aye*" ("no room, no room").

---

[53] Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 70. Johnson and later Smith both narrated these events, with the latter mostly referencing the former's account, with little variation. However, Adedeji account differs from that of Johnson and Smith in that the *Alapinni* figures prominently in the conflict that emerged.
[54] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 164-165.
[55] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 134-135.
[56] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 165.

These masqueraders then roamed about hooting and cooing with lighted torches in their hands. The *Alaafin*'s emissaries thought that they were witnessing the gods' rejection of their request to return home to Oyo-Ile and they informed the *Alaafin* of this.[57]

The *Oyo Mesi*'s use of the ghost-mummers to terrorize the *Alaafin*'s party echoes the *Alapinni*'s ancestors' use of a Nupe masquerade during the Nupe invasion of Old Oyo. If one takes seriously Adedeji's belief that these characters were masked and that the *Alapinni* had developed this plot, the implications for Egungun become all the more apparent. As a descendent of the Nupe invaders, the *Alapinni* was presumably an expert in political strategies linked to Nupe masquerade traditions, from which the Egungun society had modeled itself.

The apparitions' behavior during the episode in late-sixteenth century Oyo, and their evocation of the historical memory of the Nupe masquerade invasion, correspond to what Margaret Thompson Drewal observed in Egungun performances in the late twentieth century. She describes an Egungun masquerade in the late 1980s as reenacting the terror of the nineteenth century Yoruba wars. Drewal writes:

> The scene re-creates the disruptions of war that characterized the nineteenth century. This re-creation terrorizes people for the duration of the performance even though spectators know it is not real warfare.[58]
>
> Sometimes the spectators spoke of the person inside the mask, commenting on his performance. At other times, they operate as if the mask was really a spirit. Even at this level, there was a great deal of play back and forth in people shifting their assumptions."
>
> Everybody knows that the spirit images are human beings, but at the same time they protect the secret of the mask, which is really not secret at all. As Karin Barber has pointed out, this way of operating does not mean that people do not really believe in the power of the ancestors. Rather, ritual specialists bring the idea of the spirit into a tangible existence. If men as maskers were performing an illusion, then women as spectators were engaged in performing the belief that their illusion was reality. If on the other hand, action transforms consciousness and is indeed efficacious, then there was no such thing as suspension of disbelief. Rather, the spectator looked through multiple levels of reality and moved back and forth between them at will. There was no puncture in illusion; there

[57] Ibid; Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 70; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 134-135.
[58] Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 99.

was no puncture in reality. There was only a reorientation of working assumptions.[59]

Drewal's comments enable us to consider several perspectives on the flight of the *Alaafin*'s party after it witnessed the apparitions. The emissaries may have fled based on the "working assumption" that the apparitions were representing the gods' displeasure with the *Alaafin*'s plan to reoccupy Old Oyo. In addition, the observers may simultaneously have recognized the six mummers as representing the six councilors who comprised the *Oyo Mesi*, the advisers of the *Alaafin*. Moreover, the party may have been "performing the belief that their illusion was reality"—that the masked figures were spirits or imbued with spiritual power that the *Alaafin*'s group could not counter.[60]

When the *Alaafin* learned that apparitions had once again terrorized Oyo people at Old Oyo, he was distressed. However, Ologbo, one of the *Alaafin*'s most trusted allies in Egungun, was suspicious. Ologbo, a sword-bearer and Egungun performer who was both a member of the *Alaafin*'s court and the Oloba lineage (the rival of the *Alapinni*'s Nupe lineage in the Egungun society), likely knew of the *Alapinni*'s conspiracy. He advised the *Alaafin* to send another group to investigate the matter. The *Alaafin* responded by sending six famous hunters (Boni, Igisubu, Alegbata, Loko, Gbandan, and Olomo) armed with weapons and charms. The hunters arrived at Old Oyo, discovered that the ghost-mummers were not spirits but human beings, and then captured the "ghost-mummers." They later brought the "apparitions" before the *Alaafin*, who forced these imposters to betray their *Oyo Mesi* counterparts and answer the king's questions about their actions.[61]

Adedeji suggests that Ologbo, the *Alaafin*'s trusted representative on the Egungun council, revealed the *Alapinni* and *Oyo Mesi*'s conspiracy. Given his status in the

[59] Ibid., 103.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 165-166.

Egungun society, Ologbo must also have found a way to keep the capture of the ghost-mummers from the *Alapinni* and those loyal to him. Adedeji speculates that by siding with the *Alaafin*, Ologbo reinforced the clash of interests between the powerful Oloba and Igbori lineages and their leaders, Ologbo (from the Oyo lineage) and the *Alapinni* (from the Nupe lineage).[62]

Next, the *Alaafin* ordered that the conspirators and ghost-mummers be brought to the court and placed under the authority of Ologbo, the *Alapinni*'s rival within the Egungun society. He then formulated a strategy to skillfully communicate his discontent to the *Oyo Mesi*. The *Alaafin* had the ghost-mummers moved to a special room at court for entertainment. When after one of their weekly meetings with the *Alaafin*, the *Oyo Mesi* recessed to a banquet hall for refreshments, the *Alaafin* requested that a calabash of beer be delivered to each of his advisers by the representative (ghost-mummer counterpart) that each of them had sent to Oyo-Ile to disrupt the *Alaafin*'s plan. The council members were astonished to see their ghost-mummer counterparts, whom they thought were still in Oyo-Ile, delivering their refreshments in the *Alaafin*'s palace at Igboho. The hall fell silent, and after the period of refreshment ended, both the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* departed quietly.[63]

The *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* were all operating under the same "working assumptions" as to the significance of the actions of the ghost mummers in the presence of both the king and his counselors. The counselors knew that the king was using the mummers to undermine the *Alapinni*'s and the *Oyo Mesi*'s authority. However, because of the secrecy involved in both the *Oyo Mesi*'s conspiracy and the *Alaafin*'s counter plot,

[62] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 137.
[63] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 165-166.

the *Oyo Mesi* could not publicly confront the *Alaafin* on the matter. This event thrust the Egungun society to the center of power struggles between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi*. The *Oyo Mesi* had attempted to use the ghost-mummers to tip the balance of power between them and the *Alaafin* in their favor, but when *Alaafin* Ogbolu exposed their plot; it strengthened his position atop Oyo's political hierarchy. Thereafter, *Alaafin* Ogbolu became known as "*Oba Moro*" ("The Ghost Catcher"). To commemorate his success, the *Alaafin* authorized an Egungun performance of the "ghost-catcher story," which celebrated his exposure of the ghost-mummers as imposters sent to prevent him from leading the people of Oyo back to their ancestral home.[64]

Annual reenactments of this story later preserved the memory of Egungun's involvement in affirming the *Alaafin*'s hegemony, in the face of challenges to his authority by the *Oyo Mesi*.[65] According to tradition, the *Oyo Mesi* sought to halt the Egungun performances of the ghost catcher story by using their spiritual powers to invoke the rain. Initially, they succeeded, but Ologbo used his power to stop the heavy rains in order that the ghost-catcher performance could continue uninterrupted.[66] Ologbo was thereafter hailed as "*Ologbo Ojo*" ("the king's rhapsodist who can also control the rain").[67] The *Alapinni* and the rest of the *Oyo Mesi* resented the *Ologbin*'s decision to support the *Alaafin* against them. They believed that he had betrayed them by revealing their plans to the *Alaafin*, and by using his position as a member of the Egungun society to side with the *Alaafin* against the ghost-mummers. The *Oyo Mesi* responded by

[64] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 134-138.
[65] Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, 19.
[66] The use of magic (juju) to manipulate nature (i.e. rain) is a common demonstration of the power of high-ranking Egungun members.
[67] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 137.

attempting several times to get rid of Ologbo, and they ultimately succeeded in fatally poisoning him.[68]

The death of Ologbo evidently saddened the *Alaafin*. To demonstrate his appreciation, *Alaafin* Ogbolu ordered a large state funeral for his loyal supporter. Ologbo's body was wrapped in an animal's skin and taken to Old Oyo, where it was buried in a court dedicated to him. Thereafter, Ologbo also became known as *Ode Ogboluke*, "*eni ti Ogbolu fi Ode-Ile ke*," which means "the one whom [*Alaafin*] Ogbolu honored with a court."[69]

The ghost-catcher story raises a number of important issues for understanding the place of Egungun in Oyo history. For one, it suggests that at one time the *Alapinni* was a dominant figure within the *Oyo Mesi* and that he may have approached the *Alaafin* in terms of his power and authority in Oyo politics.[70] In addition, the role of the *Alapinni* and Ologbo in this account also suggests that Egungun as an institution and its chiefs as individual personalities were at the center of Oyo political circles.

Adedeji has argued that the power struggle between Ologbo, a ritual performer, and the *Alapinni*, a political leader reflected several layers of tension. It included a conflict between the indigenous and the foreign elements: the Oloba lineage claiming Yoruba descent and the Igbori claiming Nupe descent. These leaders embodied the tension between the religious and political spheres of the Egungun society. They also struggled to assert their dominance or ownership over the Egungun society. He contends that between the time that the Egungun hierarchy had been created and the ghost-catcher

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 137-138.
[70] Johnson positions the *Alapinni* as fourth in ranking on the *Oyo Mesi* council. This ranking seems to be associated with the late nineteenth century and not necessarily reflective of the status of the *Alapinni* since the creation of the office. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 72.

episode, power had shifted between these two sets of actors and their domains. In the beginning, the *Alaafin* had supported the *Alapinni* as the head of Egungun by making him a member of the *Oyo Mesi*. However, during the ghost-catcher episode, alliances were reconstituted as Ologbo, possibly seeking to shift the balance of power in his favor, exposed the *Alapinni* as having worked against the *Alaafin*, who responded by lending his support behind Ologbo against the *Alapinni*, the Oloba against the Igbori, and the religious over the political. [71]

Adedeji's characterization of the Egungun leadership as having been starkly divided between religious and political heads can seem misleading. The roles and responsibilities of the *Alapinni* were not necessarily more political than religious, nor were those of the *Alaafin's* loyal supporter Ologbo only religious and ritual. The *Alapinni* clearly wielded authority over important ritual actors, the ghost-mummers. Moreover, he demonstrated his ritual power through the use of medicines in fighting Ologbo. The latter appears to have acquired the ghost-mummers, who were previously under the control of the *Alapinni*, and responsibility of organizing the reenactment of the *Alaafin's* triumph as the "Ghost-Catcher."[72] It might be more accurate to note the different ritual-political spheres in which they operate, i.e. as the king's personal adviser vs. as a member of the Oyo Mesi council, whose members all have held different ritual functions as Johnson notes.[73]

Indeed, the ghost-catcher episode did elevate Ologbo's status in several ways. His loyalty to the *Alaafin*, which the king rewarded by establishing a court in his honor

[71] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 76-77.
[72] Even today in Otta, Egungun politics are deemed so contentious and threatening that they can and do result in the premature death of Egungun chiefs.
[73] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 72-73.

after his death, ultimately contributed to his fame. During his life, the successes that Ologbo achieved in his ritual battles with the *Oyo Mesi* must also have enhanced his reputation, at least in Egungun circles. Furthermore, Ologbo organized the "ritual plays" or public performances of Egungun both inside and outside the palace. Although these performances were intended to affirm the godlike supremacy of the *Alaafin*, the Ologbo's leading of them surely lifted his own status as well. Insofar as Ologbo's prestige would have allowed him to manipulate or exert subtle pressure over the *Alapinni*, the other head of the Egungun society, and insofar as Egungun performances supported the *Alaafin's* power and policies, it can be argued that the Ologbo was as much a political actor as a religious one in the affairs of the Oyo kingdom.

In the power struggles that occurred within the Egungun society and between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi*, the *Alaafin* Ogbolu appears to have triumphed.[74] His reputation as the "ghost-catcher" suggests that not even those who opposed him within the Egungun society, or the gods themselves, could successfully oppose him. The *Alaafin*'s authority was so great that, through the assistance of the Ologbin, he was able to wield enough control over the Egungun society to keep it from thwarting his policies and posing a threat to his own life. Some subsequent *Alaafin*, as we shall soon see, were not able to achieve this feat.

The power struggles within the Egungun society not only provided the Alaafin with a way of challenging the policies of the Oyo Mesi, it also allowed him to draw upon Egungun to shape political culture and consciousness in the public realm. For, following the Alaafin's organization of the ghost-catcher story in the palace court, it became an important part of the festival culture of Oyo, being reenacted three times annually. The

[74] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 137-138.

ghost-catcher story provided entertainment as well as instruction on the cleverness and power of the Alaafin. Egungun, through its association with the ghost-catcher episode, actively participated in the political battles being played out over the direction of the kingdom and the respective powers of the *Alaafin*, the *Alapinni*, and the other chiefs of the *Oyo Mesi*.[75]

Egungun's engagements with other ritual groups in these annual festivals, and the different contexts in which they took place, I argue, further extended its influence over the Oyo people. According to tradition, the ghost-catcher story was first reenacted publicly at the royal market as part of the annual Orisha Oko (*orisha* of farming) festival.[76] Some of the qualities of the masked spirits of Egungun parallel those of Orisha Oko and give an indication of how the mysteries and powers of the masquerade tradition could contend in various ways with the mysteries and powers of the Orisha Oko tradition.

According to legend, Orisha Oko was a hunter who trapped guinea fowls on the farm of a wealthy man, and gained fame as a soothsayer and powerful medicine man. Orisha Oko was said to be able to detect whether an accused person was innocent or guilty of committing witchcraft or other crimes. The accused would be taken to a cave inhabited by a fierce deity (Polo), where Orisha Oko would try their cases. If the person was guilty, Polo decapitated the convicted and rolled the head out of the cave. If the person was innocent, Orisha Oko would walk out of the cave with the individual. Orisha Oko became venerated as the *orisha* (god) of farming after his death, and his followers also became known for their ability to identify witches and criminals. What is important

[75] Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 70-71.
[76] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 138.

here is to consider what the incorporation of the former into the latter's annual festival may have signified.

The performance of the "Ghost Catcher Story" during the Orisha Oko festival during the reign of *Alaafin* Ogbolu suggests that Egungun played an important role in extending the *Alaafin's* power into other ritual communities. It implies that those who challenged the *Alaafin*, even in secret, would be identified and punished in a manner consistent with Orisha Oko's treatment of criminals. In addition, as has been the case with the *Alapinni* to Egungun and the *Oyo Mesi*, the *Laguna* was the head of Orisha Oko ritual group as well as a member of the *Oyo Mesi*.[77] The *Laguna*, a conspirator in the Oyo Mesi's plot against the *Alaafin*, may have switched loyalties and sided with the *Alaafin* after the plot was foiled; or the king may have found other allies among the membership of the Orisha Oko society as he had done with Ologbo in Egungun.

Besides its appearance during the Orisha Oko festival, the "ghost-catcher story" was also performed during the festival of Orisha Monle (Ifa) and at the Oduduwa festival, providing the Alaafin with more opportunities to assert his power and authority in other ritual spheres.[78] Both events occurred in the *afin* (palace), a location that can be understood as mutually reinforcing of the power and authority of the *Alaafin* and that of the *orisha* (Ifa) and the divine ancestor (Oduduwa), respectively honored in the two festivals. In one sense, the *Alaafin* was acknowledging their power by hosting these events in the palace. At the same time, they may have been affirming the importance of the *Alaafin*'s support by seeking to have the events at the palace.

[77] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 74.
[78] I have mentioned the relationship between Ifa and Egungun and their arrival in Oyo above.

Ifa, it may be recalled from earlier in this chapter, was the divine oracle embraced by the political elite and consulted for important decisions concerning the kingdom. We have already seen how Ifa and Egungun meaningfully converged during the reign of *Alaafin* Ofinran. By rejecting Ifa, the ancestors punished Oyo via the Nupe invasion; later by embracing Ifa and Egungun, the *Alaafin* could affirm the notion that the *orisha* and the ancestors were not only pleased but would protect the Alaafin and the kingdom anyone who sought to limit their power or intrude on their authority.[79] A similar affirmation could take place by situating Egungun and the ghost-catcher story within the Oduduwa festival. Oduduwa was celebrated as the progenitor of the Yoruba people and the first divine king. The festival established the link between the ruling Yoruba king and the first king, legitimizing the power and authority of the present ruler. [80] The story was also reenacted during the installation of a new Alaafin that occurred privately in *aganju* (the royal reception hall) at night.[81]

The *Alaafin* and his supporters reoccupied Old Oyo around 1610.[82] Since then, Old Oyo has also been known as "Oyo Oro", the "Oyo of the Ghosts," in reference to the ghost-mummers sent by the *Oyo Mesi* to deter the resettlement of Old Oyo.[83] By the middle of the seventeenth century, the ghost-mummers, Adedeji believes that, had become well-established at court. They became known popularly as the "Oje," a term used to represent one's affiliation with the Egungun society. They were also responsible

[79] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 44.
[80] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 3-7, 12.
[81] Smith, "The Alafin in Exile," 70.
[82] Ibid.: 70-73; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 56-59.
[83] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 166.

for managing the "ritual play" of the funeral rite. By this time, the Egungun society was a mainstay at the *Alaafin's* court and in the performance of funeral rites in Oyo.[84]

Alaafin Jayin and the People's Egungun

The events pertaining to the death of *Alaafin* Jayin highlights one of the roles that Egungun has been known to play in the violent overthrow of an unpopular ruler. Jayin (1665–1670) was known during his reign as the *Alaafin*, for being wicked and weak in a line of despotic *Alaafin*.[85] However, *Alaafin* Jayin's son, Olusi, was a popular figure in Oyo and had the reputation for being kind and generous. The king became jealous of his son's growing popularity and decided to have him killed. Following the unexpected death of their beloved Olusi, the people of Oyo were deeply saddened. They mourned Olusi's death and performed his funeral rites, also creating an Egungun in his honor. Olusi's Egungun appeared adorning the same cloths in which he had been buried, and led a crowd that marched toward the palace. When *Alaafin* Jayin learned that his son's Egungun was parading toward the palace as if it was coming to kill him, Jayin poisoned himself. A song was later created that described this event:

> *O ku dede ki a ko iwi wo Akesan,*
> *Oba Jayin te ri gba so.*
>
> At the approach of a company of chanting ghost-mummers to the Akesan,
> King Jayin buried his head in a shroud [died].[86]

The ghost catcher story reveals how a group of Egungun masqueraders went from opposing *Alaafin* Ogbolu by terrorizing his supporters to backing him through appearances and enactments that legitimized his status atop Oyo society. The march of

[84] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 138.
[85] Ibid. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 51-52.
[86] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 171.

Olusi's Egungun toward the palace parallels that of the Nupe masquerade during the invasion of Oyo; a masquerade performance led the overthrow of an Oyo regime, with different outcomes.[87] The actions of these Egungun reflect elements that have long been linked to Egungun masquerades—the power to bless and to curse.[88]

To understand the full implications of Jayin's death, it is important to understand another belief. It is a taboo for Yoruba parents to bury their child, that is, to be alive to bury one of their own children. It is plausible that Jayin's death could have been interpreted as an act of vengeance on the part of the gods and/or ancestors. Olusi's popularity and his death as well as his father's bad reputation may have raised suspicions on the part of high-ranking leaders in Oyo. These leaders may have determined that Jayin was culpable and thereafter taken steps to avenge Olusi's death. These steps culminated in the death of Jayin.[89] Although in previous moments (i.e. ghost-catcher events) Egungun had been at the center of power struggles within its ranks, Jayin's death marks a moment when Egungun—in addition to performing funeral rites—voiced the dissent of the masses, became a site of political protest, and ultimately removed the most powerful person in the kingdom.

[87] For rejection of an Alaafin, see Ibid., 70; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 73-74.
[88] Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta, August 16, 2006, Otta; Interview with Prince Kunle Andrew, May 4, 2005, Otta; Interview with Oyinade Ogunba, March 13, 2006, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye. In some instances, Egungun chiefs will utilize their medicines, particularly their powers of sorcery, to injure or kill an accused person.
[89] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 171.

Chapter Two

Egungun in Oyo Imperial Administration and the Province of Otta

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Oyo kingdom developed and expanded to become a true imperial power. Initially, it consolidated power within its immediate environs, and then it extended its political and economic power to the east and the southeast then to the southwest.[1] To maintain its authority in the provinces, Oyo developed an administrative system that enforced the political and economic supremacy of the imperial elite. Scholars have identified two different power struggles occurring within the empire: one between the *Alaafin* (the king) and the *Oyo Mesi* (the council of chiefs), and another between Oyo provincial administrators and local rulers and their subjects.[2] In this context, Egungun entered a new phase of its history, serving as a medium through which imperial authority was displayed, asserted, and challenged.[3] This chapter explores how changes in Oyo's imperial administration and power struggles associated with those changes shaped the dispersal and development of Egungun in the provinces.

---

[1] This area, otherwise referred to as the Oyo kingdom or the 'Yoruba Proper,' includes the capital of Oyo-Ile and surround area, which was populated by the Oyo Yoruba and under the control of the *Alaafin*. Conversely, the area occupied by Oyo's tributaries, outlying dependencies, or semi-subject kingdoms. See Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, 1600 - 1836: a West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic slave trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 126-144, 173-182.

[2] I. A. Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century: A Re-assessment," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 2 (1966); Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 234; J. A. Ajayi, "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo," in *History of West Africa*, ed. J. A. Ajayi (London: Longman, 1987), 136-144.

[3] See theater scholar Joel Adedeji and historian S. O. Babayemi for discussions of Egungun's place in the rise of the Oyo Empire. Joel Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre: The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from Its Earliest Beginnings to the Present Times," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1969), Chapters 3-4; S. O. Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba* (Ibadan: Board Publication Ltd., 1980), Chapters 1-2; ——, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo c., 1706-1905: A Study in the Traditional Culture of an African Polity* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1980), Chapters 1-2.

It was also during the Oyo imperial period that Egungun arrived at Otta, a town at the center of the kingdom that is the larger focus of this study. An ancient town that had formerly been independent, by the early seventeenth century, Otta was absorbed into the southwestern edges of the Oyo Empire.[4] The second half of this chapter investigates oral traditions from Otta that link Egungun's arrival to this era. I then argue that, just as this Egungun developed through the needs and concerns of the imperial administration, the Oyo Egungun in Otta would in turn shape the masquerade practice and politics within the town even when the empire crumbled and Otta was no longer positioned as one of its outer provinces.

As several scholars have noted, Shango and Egungun priests played an important role in Oyo's administration of its provinces.[5] Both sets of actors worked closely with imperial administrators. These priests promoted the religious authority of the *Alaafin* throughout the empire and, in the process, they also advanced their own influence and wealth. While scholars have examined how the growing influence of the *Alaafin*'s imperial agents affected the power struggle between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* in the capital city, they have not looked closely at the role of these agents in the introduction of Egungun in the provinces during the imperial period. This chapter examines how the introduction of the imperial Egungun by these agents perhaps shaped the character of

[4] The following sources provide accounts of Otta's independent origins. R. A. Salako, *Ota: Biography of the Foremost Awori Town* (Ota: Penink Publicity and Company, 2000), 13-14, 61; R. A. Asalu, "The History of Otta: Ijemo-Isolosi Ruling House," in *Akinsewa ni Oba Akoko ni Otta* (Otta: 2006). Interview with Chief R. S O. Ojolowo, June 13, 2006, Ijana ward, Otta. They do not mention the town's relationship with the Oyo Empire. The missionary James White likely was the first to mention Otta as paying tribute to Oyo during the imperial period. December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855. Colonial officials writing in the early twentieth century also mention Otta as having been not only paying tribute to Oyo, but having several of its early kings travel to Oyo for confirmation of their appointment by the *Alaafin* of Oyo. CSO 26/2 NAI, 20629, F. C. Royce. *Assessment Report of Otta District, Egba Division, Abeokuta Province*, 1927; Abe. Prof. 5 NAI, ED 491, H. Spottiswoode. *Intelligence Report on Otta District*, 1942.
[5] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 104, 110-114; Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 35-46, 54-55, 69-74, 81-87.

Egungun in the provinces in addition to importing Egungun as a new masquerade tradition in other towns. Furthermore, the prominent position of the imperial agent and the power associated with imperial Egungun evidently introduced new elements to existing Egungun and opened new possibilities for the interplay between this masquerade and other institutions of rule and its enforcement.

To reconstruct the role of Egungun in Oyo imperialism, the chapter begins by outlining Oyo's expansion to the east and south. It then provides a more detailed discussion of Oyo's colonization and administration of the Egbado province, the area closest to Otta or where Otta was located, focusing on the administration it established there and the actors involved in it.

Oyo Expansion in the East and Southeast

By the time *Alaafin* Ogbolu led Oyo's reoccupation of Oyo-Ile early in the seventeenth century, the kingdom was already focusing attention on securing and expanding its eastern and southern borders. Since the time of the initial Nupe invasion discussed in chapter one, Oyo had been concerned with protecting itself against Nupe raids in the east. As part of that process, Oyo spread into areas occupied by the Igbomina and Ekiti (both Yoruba sub-groups) to the east and southeast, as well as into the Ijesa- and Ife-occupied areas in the south. Oyo is thought, for example, to have founded the Igbomina town of Igbaja as a base to check Nupe raids into that region. *Alaafin* Ajigboyede ultimately defeated the Nupe invaders in the seventeenth century.[6]

[6] Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921); Robert Smith, "The Alaafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History," *Journal of African History* 6, no. 1 (1965); Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 56-59.

As Oyo became increasingly interested in areas to its south and southeast, it encountered the provinces and outposts of another long-standing kingdom at the center of its own expanding empire—the Edo state of Benin. The Edo people had founded a kingdom at Benin City in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Its *Oba* (or king) had subsequently seized control of the military and embarked upon imperial expansion in the middle of the fifteenth century. During the sixteenth century, Benin became one of the largest and most powerful kingdoms in the region. Benin's military expansion coincided with its economic growth, the latter of which was linked to the development of trade relations with the Portuguese, who had arrived at the end of the fifteenth century. By the seventeenth century, however, conflicts between Benin's Oba and the leading chiefs weakened the empire. It is during this period that Oyo began to rival Benin's influence in southwestern Yorubaland.[7]

Rivalry soon led to conflict, and Oyo clashed with Benin militarily in the early seventeenth century. Law suggests that the northern Ekiti town of Otun became a neutralized buffer zone between Oyo's province in Igbomina and the Benin's in Ekiti. He cites a Benin tradition, which asserts that Oyo had established military control over the Igbomina area but had not incorporated it into the kingdom. He refers to another tradition about a campaign against the Igbomina during the reign of *Alaafin* Ojigi in the 1720s or 1730s. These traditions aside, to date the history of Oyo's involvement in the east and southeast is less known than that of its expansion in the southwest.[8]

[7] A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897* (Harlow: Longmans, 1969). Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).
[8] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 126-134.

Oyo Expansion in the Southwest

Like Benin, its southern rival, Oyo's interest in the southwest, where Otta is located, was centered on gaining access to the growing trade between coastal Africans and Europeans. In the early seventeenth century, Oyo's contact with Europeans began during the reign of *Alaafin* Obalokun, Ogbolu's successor.[9] In the second half of the seventeenth century, Obalokun's successor, *Alaafin* Ajagbo, began extending Oyo's rule beyond the central Oyo Yoruba area towards the coast to the southwest. Morton-Williams claims that just before 1670, Oyo began supplying a portion of its slaves to the kingdom of Allada near the coast for export to the Americas.[10] Shortly thereafter, Oyo adopted a more aggressive policy toward Allada, invading the kingdom in 1698.[11]

By the time Oyo conquered Allada, it had probably also gained military control of the northern Egbado and Anago Yoruba areas. It later established formal rule in this region. Law identifies three stages of Oyo colonization in the southwest. During the first stage, around 1700, immigrants from Oyo founded the Anago towns of Ifonyin and Ihunmbo. During the second, Oyo established the northern Egbado town of Ewon, which became a base for Oyo's subsequent colonization of other towns in the area from the 1750s into the 1770s. The third stage (1774-1789) included the colonization of southern Egbado towns, namely Ilaro and Ijanna.[12]

---

[9] Johnson says that this contact was established during the reign of *Alaafin* Obalokun. Law finds Johnson's evidence consistent with the written accounts of Europeans. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 168; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 217-218.

[10] Peter Morton-Williams, "The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* III, no. I (1964): 25.

[11] This process cannot be traced in detail because the evidence is scanty. According to Law, the only detailed chronology pertains to Oyo's expansion in the extreme southwest. Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 92, 151-157.

[12] Ibid., 113-118.

The *Alaafin* exercised authority in Oyo's provinces through *ajele*, *ilari*, and other officials. He appointed agents known as *ajele*, or *asoju oba*, meaning "those who act as the king's eyes," to serve as his permanent administrators in subordinate towns and kingdoms under Oyo authority.[13] *Alaafin* selected *ajele* from among palace slaves, Oyo immigrants, and members of the royal family in the capital. The *ajele* collected tolls and tribute, adjudicated local disputes, and oversaw local rulers. The *ilari*, on the other hand, were administrators who traveled throughout the provinces. They supervising the *ajele* and accompanied some local rulers to Oyo to honor the *Alaafin* with tribute and gifts during the annual festivals.[14]

While Akinjogbin and Law consider that the primary role of the *ajele* and *ilari* was to protect the interests of the *Alaafin* in the provinces, they disagree about the exact nature of these officials' responsibilities.[15] Their debates have focused on several areas of authority: tax collection, political control, and religious mobilization. At the center of this debate lies the question of whether the *ajele's* and *ilari's* roles were more symbolic and religious than effective and political. For example, some scholars have suggested that the *ajele* collected taxes and tribute and that they or the *ilari* transported these resources to the *Alaafin*'s palace in Oyo.[16] Law challenges this idea claiming instead that 1) that the local rulers themselves normally carried the tribute from the provincial towns to the capital during the Bere festival, and 2) the *Alaafin*'s agents, with the exception of those in the Egbado province, did not generally function as tax-collectors. Law maintains

[13] Robin Law, "The Constitutional Troubles of Oyo in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): 110-113.
[14] Morton-Williams, "The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade," 40-41; Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century," 451-452; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 110-113; J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire* (London: Longman, 1973), 26.
[15] Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century," 451-452; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 110-113.
[16] Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century," 451; Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 54-55.

that the palace slaves were responsible for the collection of taxes. In addition, he disputes that the *ajele* adjudicated local disputes, citing a lack of evidence for such behavior in the traditions.[17] However, Law's evidence, drawn from early nineteenth-century sources, should not be assumed to reflect accurately the status of *ajele* one hundred years prior, when Oyo initially colonized the southwest.

Whatever the real or symbolic power of the *ajele* elsewhere in the empire, the *ajele* in the Egbado region are known to have exercised real power and authority. These administrators collected tolls from traders using the road linking Oyo and Badagry, an Atlantic port, and they sent the payments to the capital city. New traders using the route had to present signs of the *Alaafin*'s approval of certain trade privileges; thereafter, the *ajele* dispatched special messengers to accompany these travelers to other areas to ensure that their commercial privileges were recognized. Oyo's status in the Egbado region provided a strategic advantage in its control of the ports at Porto Novo and Badagry.[18] Folayan contends that Oyo's dominance in Egbado towns kept Benin and the emerging kingdom of Dahomey from making incursions into those communities. Moreover, he believes that the Ijebu and Egba kingdoms also did not disturb Egbado because of Oyo's presence there. Folayan concludes that Oyo imperialism kept other neighboring kingdoms from trying to conquer Egbado.[19]

Oyo's provincial towns generally paid an annual tribute. The most common form of tribute was *bere* grass, which was used to thatch palace roofs.[20] The grass was offered

[17] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 113.
[18] Morton-Williams, "The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade," 40-41; Kola Folayan, "Egbado to 1832: The Birth of a Dilemma," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 1 (1967): 22-24; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 112-118.
[19] Folayan, "Egbado to 1832," 22-24.
[20] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 49, 98; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 99.

as a sign of the provinces acknowledgment of its subordination to the *Alaafin* and support of him. While in some instances the tribute consisted solely of *bere*, towns usually paid additional tribute in cowry currency and kind, the latter of which varied. For example, the town of Saki was said to have paid two rams and ten bags of cowries to Oyo, while Iganna offered dried meat and yam flour.[21] The Awori town of Otta, on the other hand, contributed locally made rush-mats.[22] Law claims that in most cases the amount of tribute was fixed but that in some places such as Igboho a portion of the toll on goods passing through the town gates had to be paid to the *Alaafin*. Furthermore, the *oba* (king) and *bale* (lineage head) of many of Oyo's provincial towns was obligated not only to pay a tribute, but also to take gifts to the capital in person during the annual festivals and whenever a new *Alaafin* was crowned.[23] In some instances, the local rulers of provincial towns were either appointed or approved by the *Alaafin*. As a further reminder of his subordination and the loyalty he owed the *Alaafin*, the local ruler often traveled to the *Alaafin*'s palace in Oyo for confirmation of his installation.[24]

The place of the *Alaafin*s at the center of imperial expansion and enabled them to amass considerable wealth and power with the aid of the *ajele* and *ilari*.[25] It set in motion a struggle between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi*, and between Oyo administrators (the *ajele* and *ilari*) and local rulers. Egungun emerged as an important site of these struggles.

---

[21] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 100.
[22] James White, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*.
[23] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 100.
[24] CSO 26 NAI, C. T. Lawrence. *Assessment Report on Otta District: Abeokuta Province*, 1926; NAI. *Assessment Report of Otta District*.
[25] The *Alaafin* derived income from the foodstuffs that slaves produced and the profits of his commercial agents in addition to taxes paid in money and goods. The *Alaafin* also derived prestige from his privileged access to trade goods, and his agents, and his trading wives, enjoyed competitive advantages in that they were exempted from paying various taxes and duties and the chiefs of the towns where they passed were obligated to provide for their visits. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 168-187; Akinjogbin, "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century," 451-456; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 232-236; Ajayi, "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo," 133-134, 146-147.

As noted in the previous chapter, Shango and Egungun have long been overlapping ritual spheres. During Oyo's expansion and assertion of control in the provinces, *ajele*, *ilari*, and their companions spread Shango and Egungun worship.[26]

Several scholars have posited that, beyond the mere fact of this exportation, the Shango priesthood played a critical role in helping *Alaafin* coerce local people in the provinces into accepting imperial rule. The priesthood venerated Shango (believed to have been one of the earliest *Alaafin* of Oyo) as the *orisha* (god) of thunder and served as his most prominent living emissaries.[27] Biobaku characterizes the status of Shango in the Oyo Empire as a kin to "emperor worship in the latter Roman Empire."[28] The Shango priesthood of the provinces was controlled from the capital. Provincial priests traveled to Oyo for both initiation and further instruction from the *Mogba*, the Shango priests of the royal shrine at Koso.[29] Through the Shango priests, *Alaafin* punished those in the provinces who transgressed the norms of Oyo society or violated his wishes. A Shango priest who claimed that an individual had offended the deity could demand retribution on the grounds that such behavior might incite the *Alaafin*, Shango's living counterpart.[30] As we shall see, Egungun also developed a more elaborate priesthood in the capital; its masquerades and priests traveled throughout the empire, infusing imperial politics, spectacle, and ritual with local traditions.[31]

---

[26] Peter Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms," *West African Institute of Social and Economic Research* (1954): 90-91; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 145; Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 24-29; ———, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 35-39, 42-46.
[27] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 66, 68, 104, 139-140, 230; Ajayi, "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo," 133.
[28] S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 8-9.
[29] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 35-36.
[30] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 139-140, 230.
[31] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 39-40.

Bashorun Gaa's and the Challenge to the *Alaafin's* Power

The rise of *Bashorun* Gaa marked a new phase in the history of the Oyo Empire, and it had long-term implications for the history of Egungun.[32] Power struggles between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* date back to the time of Ogbolu. However, the developing imperial apparatus, which gave the *Alaafin* singular power over the political and economic structures of the provinces, only exacerbated these tensions between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* in the capital. This imbalance of power favoring the *Alaafin*s may have encouraged a new or intensified arrogance and rigidity in their ruling style.[33] According to Johnson, many of the early to mid-eighteenth century *Alaafin* were despotic rulers.[34] This despotism may not have been based solely on individual *Alaafin*s' characters or their growing political and economic power in the provinces, but also from their growing religious stature throughout the empire. As the living embodiment of Shango, the *Alaafin* may have been less willing to negotiate with or bend to the counsel of the *Oyo Mesi*.

Gaa would challenge the *Alaafin*'s new supremacy. He originally gained fame as a powerful war chief. He had led the colonization of the northern Egbado kingdom of Ewon prior to his ascension to the post of *Bashorun* in 1754. Ewon became a base from which Oyo later established colonies in Imala, Tibo, Aibo, and other towns neighboring Ewon. Gaa's influence in the Egbado region enabled him to wield power and authority in the provinces after he became the *Bashorun*.[35] He had a favorable reputation in the

[32] Ibid., 50.
[33] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 81-82.
[34] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 168-178.
[35] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 93; Folayan, "Egbado to 1832," 17.

provinces, which put him in a good position to maneuver against the *Alaafin*'s power base there. While the *Alaafin* had a large administrative apparatus in the provinces, Gaa's role as the *Bashorun* and his experience as a warrior in the provinces gave him a military base of support to carry out his aim to act against the *Alaafin*.[36]

Upon becoming the *Bashorun*, who had the final voice in the selection and removal of *Alaafin*s, Gaa attacked the *Alaafin*'s authority both in the capital and in the provinces. His reputation grew in the capital as he forced the removal of four consecutive *Alaafin* (Labisi, Awonbioju, Agboluaje, and Majeogbe) from office. Gaa's supporters praised him as their champion against the perceived tyrannical rule of these *Alaafin*. According to Johnson, "Gaha had great influence with the people, and a great many followers who considered themselves safe under his protection, from the dread in which they stood of the kings because of their cruel and despotic rule."[37]

As already shown, the *Alaafin* administered the empire through both *ajele* and *ilari*, resident and traveling officials. Gaa's next move was to organize the overthrow of the *Alaafin*'s administrators in the provinces, and replaced he them with his sons. According to Johnson, Gaa's men thereafter "sons were scattered all over the length and breadth of the kingdom, they resided in the principal towns and all the tribute of those towns and their suburbs were paid to them. No tribute was now paid to the *Alaafin*."[38] Gaa did not just disrupt the *Alaafin's* economic and political power, however, for in the process of removing the *Alaafin's* administrators, he also challenged the *Alaafin*'s religious authority and spiritual authority.[39] It would have made sense for Gaa's

[36] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 178; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 93.
[37] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 178.
[38] Ibid., 180.
[39] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 104; Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 35.

supporters to attack or remove Shango priests and devotees in the provinces, even were they not part of the official administrative apparatus, because the cult of Shango was deeply implicated with the power and authority of the *Alaafin*.[40] Thus, in leading the overthrow of the *Alaafin's ajele*, Gaa was also challenging the spiritual authority of the king.

When Abiodun became *Alaafin* in 1774, Gaa was the "effective leader" of the Oyo Empire. The *Alaafin*'s imperial status had been reduced to that of a figurehead whose power and authority were more symbolic than real. However, hostility to Gaa soon developed in both the provinces and the capital, as he too began to be viewed as a tyrant who primarily looked after his own interests. Johnson offers one explanation for the growing resentment, claiming that Gaa favored his own lineage. He soon went from being viewed as a man of the people to being seen as their chief oppressor.[41]

In spite of the growing resentment to Gaa, he still held sway over politics in the capital. Recognizing Gaa's power and role in deposing previous kings, *Alaafin* Abiodun initially placated Gaa. The *Bashorun* had a military advantage over the *Alaafin* in the capital because the former headed the Oyo metropolitan army.[42] Therefore, if the *Alaafin* aimed to challenge Gaa in any significant way, he would need assistance from outside the capital. In an effort to overthrow the *Bashorun*, *Alaafin* Abiodun solicited the assistance from the provinces, where Gaa had developed a reputation as a despot. Abiodun turned to the *Are-Ona-Kamkamfo*, the commander-in-chief of the provincial army, to lead Oyo provincial forces against Gaa's supporters. The *Are* complied, leading the massacre of *Bashorun*'s troops, first in the provinces and later in the capital. Having removed Gaa,

[40] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 104.
[41] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 182-187; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 80.
[42] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 74.

Abiodun implemented a series of policies aimed at returning power and authority to the *Alaafin*. Among other initiatives, he reorganized the 200-mile trade route from Old Oyo to Badagry, on the Atlantic coast. Abiodun achieved this goal by once again appointing members of the Oyo royal dynasty as *ajele* in small towns and trading posts along the new route. In the Egbado region, one of Abiodun's sons was later installed as the *Olu* of Ilaro, a town that was an important administrative center for the Egbado region. The *Olu* was initially responsible for leading local rulers, when they carried tribute to Oyo. However, *Alaafin* Abiodun reportedly later appointed the first *Onisare* of Ijanna, a town near Ilaro, and entrusted him with responsibility for collecting tribute and sending it to the *Alaafin* in Oyo. Law claims that Abiodun appointed his sons in the region to counteract those of Gaa.[43] This system of administration also was eventually extended to Egbado proper, as well as to Anago and Awori areas, including Otta.[44]

The *Alagbaa* (*Alaafin*) and *Alapinni* (*Oyo Mesi*) Compete for Control of Egungun in Oyo

Adedeji asserts that from the time of the people of Oyo-Ile's exile at Koso, lineages claiming Nupe and Oyo origin fought for supremacy within the Egungun society. The conflict over *Alaafin* Ogbolu's movement to reoccupy Old Oyo, in which the ghost-catcher episode analyzed in chapter one played a central role, provides one of the earliest examples of this struggle. In Ogbolu's time, the major conflict within Egungun, at least according to Adedeji's evidence, was between the *Alapinni* (from the

[43] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 168; Peter Morton-Williams, "The Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo," in *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Cyril Daryll Forde and Phyllis Mary Kaberry (London: Oxford U.P. for the International African Institute, 1967), 41; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 94-95.
[44] NAI. *Assessment Report of Otta District*.

Igbori lineage of Nupe origin) and the *Ologbin* (from the Oloba lineage of Oyo origin).[45] By the time of Abiodun's reign, however, the conflict was between the *Alapinni* and the *Alagbaa*, then the ritual head of Egungun drawn from the Agbin lineage of Oyo descent. The roles of these chiefs and, indeed, of the institution of Egungun itself had changed significantly by Abiodun's time.

For one thing, by then the *Alapinni* played an important role in the recruitment of youth into the Oyo metropolitan army through the *Eso* system, the junior war-chiefs. During the annual Egungun festival, young men participated in flogging exercises in front of the *Alaafin*'s palace. These exercises served as a form of physical training for youth, which was believed to imbue them with the spiritual power of the ancestors. Those who excelled at these exercises often later became military leaders and acquired the right to possess their own Egungun. Babayemi argues that by controlling Egungun training and acquisition, the *Alapinni* exercised considerable authority in the Oyo army. Like his Nupe ancestors who had used masks in warfare, the *Alapinni* oversaw the Egungun owned by the Oyo's military elite.[46]

Babayemi is not the only scholar to have noted the connection between Egungun and the Oyo military. Egungun masks often led Oyo armies in warfare.[47] Warriors also acquired the Egungun masquerades of their enemies in battle and later paraded them as war trophies or appropriated them for the purpose of warfare. Warriors even carved out places for themselves within the political hierarchy of their communities. Subsequent chapters explore more fully the relationship between Egungun and warriors.

[45] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 138-144.
[46] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 44-45.
[47] ———, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 45.

In contrast to the *Alapinni*, the *Alagbaa*, on the other hand, oversaw the ritual functions of Egungun during lineage ancestor reverence, ritualized theatrical performances, and ritual purification rites. There were many *Alagbaa*, but the head of them all lived in the capital, Oyo-Ile. He oversaw regional *Alagbaa*, who in turn supervised the *bale*, lineage heads who led Egungun worship within the family. Through the *Alagbaa* in the capital, the *Alaafin* used Egungun to exert influence at the center of the empire, where the Egungun society upheld the *Alaafin*'s ritual power over both the community of the living and the world of the spirits. In addition, the *Alaafin* worked through the local *oba*, or kings, who in turn looked to the area *Alagbaa* to deploy Egungun to protect their communities from evil spirits or other harm. Thus, at the micro level of the family, Egungun stood at the end of a long chain of command that owed ultimate allegiance to the *Alaafin*. The *Alagbaa* system, from the head *Alagbaa* in Oyo-Ile to the *bale* within families, represented another means by which the *Alaafin* centralized power and authority and developed hegemony throughout the kingdom—from the palace to the households of commoners.[48]

To resolve the growing conflict between the military and new ritual leaders of Egungun, which had implications for the conflict between the *Oyo Mesi* and the *Alaafin*, Abiodun organized a contest between the *Alapinni* (the political head of Egungun and a member of the *Oyo Mesi*) and his supporters and the *Alagbaa* (the ritual head of Egungun who was loyal to the *Alaafin*) and his supporters to determine which group was supreme in the Egungun society.[49] The *Alagbaa* reportedly won the competition. Babayemi concludes that this victory represented "the victory of the Alagbaa over the *Alapinni*, the

[48] ———, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 44-46.
[49] The chief *Alagbaa* here parallels the *Ologbon* that Adedeji discussed in the context of the ghost-catcher episode.

victory of the *Baale* [lineage head] over the *Eso*, the victory of the lineage over organizations without the lineage, and, embracing them all, our first point, the victory of the *Alaafin* over the *Oyo Mesi*."[50] Babayemi's analysis of this competition illustrates clearly that during Abiodun's reign Egungun remained a site where clashes for power between different groups were staged.

Alarinjo, Egungun, and Imperial Wealth and Power

Abiodun also played a seminal role in the creation of a new class of Egungun. When he became the *Alaafin*, the Egungun society in Oyo already included what Adedeji has identified as a theatrical group that performed during palace entertainments and the major annual festivals in Oyo, the capital city.[51] As the "ghost-catcher story" of chapter one illustrates, these performances shaped and were shaped by power struggles in the capital. Abiodun innovated by creating a new class of Egungun distinguished by its function and the location of its performances. This new class accompanied the *ilari*, or traveling imperial administrators, from the palace to the provinces of the empire to entertain important members of the *Alaafin*'s royal family and the *ajele*, as well as members of provincial royal families and their important guests. In addition, within the southwestern Yoruba kingdoms (Egba, Egbado, and Awori), Abiodun established or extended the professional performance troupe arm of the Egungun society.[52] Many scholars and non-Oyo Yoruba people attribute the spread of Egungun beyond the area of

[50] Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 43-45.
[51] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 145-146.
[52] Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms," 144; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 145-146.

metropolitan Oyo to this period.[53] Abiodun's innovations in Egungun were part of a broader plan to consolidate the *Alaafin*'s political and economic power and restore his religious authority in the aftermath of *Bashorun* Gaa's assault on them. Abiodun's policy of having an Egungun (*alarinjo*) parade throughout the provinces was designed to enhance his status in these communities vis-à-vis the *Oyo Mesi*. More specifically, it affirmed his association with those who supported him in overthrowing Gaa's sons.[54]

A number of scholars have associated growth in the arts and expansion of festivals with periods of economic security and prosperity.[55] Developments during the reign of Abiodun affirm this notion. Adedeji cites traditions purporting that Abiodun commissioned guilds of artists to carve new masks, sew new attire, and perform funeral rites, in this instance for his late mother.[56] Such an endeavor illustrates how the display of artistry through the venue of elaborate spectacles enhanced the theatricality of Egungun in addition to enhancing Abiodun's legacy.

Abiodun also organized an elaborate masquerade competition that would determine supremacy among Egungun's leading members at Oyo; and this event had political implications for the display and assertion and the structure of imperial power in the provinces. The competition was between the *Alapinni*, representing the *Oyo Mesi* and the family claiming descent from the Nupe creators of Egungun, and the *Alagbaa*,

---

[53] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 144-145, 158. Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 54-55. ———, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 26-27; Wale Ogunyemi, "Egungun Cult in Some Parts of Western Yorubaland: Origin and Functions," *African Notes* 21, no. 1 & 2 (1997): 100-101; Deji Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival in Ota Awori: Special Program Brochure* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000), 39-60.

[54] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 168; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 94-95; Folayan, "Egbado to 1832," 24-25.

[55] Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, "Masks from the Towns of the Dead," in *Igbo arts: community and cosmos*, ed. Herbert M. Cole and Chike Cyril Aniakor (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History University of California Los Angeles, 1984), 163.

[56] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 146-148.

supporting the *Alaafin* and claiming indigenous descent. What makes this competition even more interesting is that a number of members of the Egungun society came forward claiming their respective rights to own and lead it at Oyo. Thus, in addition to the *Alapinni* and the *Alagbaa*, the costumier and the wood carver along with the *Oloponda* (a prominent Egungun chieftaincy title in the southwest) all asserted their individual claims to supremacy within the Egungun society. The *Alagbaa* emerged as the declared winner, wearing a mask and an attire created by the carver and the costumier.[57]

Building on the *Alaafin's* triumph over the *Oyo Mesi*, the outcome of the competition suggests that the prosperity associated with Abiodun's reign provided opportunities for exceptional figures within the Egungun society. They forged or redrew powerful allies and enemies as they inserted themselves in the political battles that had plagued Oyo politics since the period of exile, the time of *Alaafin* Ogbolu, the "Ghost-Catcher." Adedeji suggests that the winner gained the added privilege of being a permanent participant in funeral and other ceremonial performances featured at the royal court of Oyo. The *Alagbaa* became the official royal court and the head of a large network of Egungun performers and priests who traveled through or settled in various provincial towns and labored as imperial agents.[58] Adedeji does not indicate what happened to the other competitors.

Babayemi suggests a somewhat alternative outcome. He claims that the *Alapinni*, a member of the *Oyo Mesi*, lost his dominance in Oyo and that the *Alagbaa* did not increase his influence in the capital despite his victory. He does say that Oyo officials, following orders from the capital, went to the southwest to aid provincial *Alagbaa* and

[57] Ibid., 146-157.
[58] Ibid., 159.

Egungun masquerade performers in perpetuating Egungun throughout the empire. He claims that the Shango priests residing in the provinces directed the religious lives and the political, social, and economic institutions of Oyo's imperial administrators and their followers, while the presiding Egungun chief and Egungun masqueraders dictated other unspecified aspects.[59] Adedeji and Babayemi conclude that those associated with Shango and Egungun were agents of imperialism.[60]

While Egungun changed significantly at Oyo as the empire grew and its ruling elite vied for power and control of resources, it also spread to communities on the fringes of the empire. Scholars have examined contemporary Egungun traditions among a number of Yoruba ethnic groups: Awori, Egbado, Igbomina, Iganna, Owo, Ijebu, and Egba.[61] Adedeji and Babayemi suppose that Egungun first gained prominence in the provinces as a result of the Oyo Empire's administrative practices.[62] Morton-Williams, in particular, offers only a brief commentary on the place of the Egungun society within the political system of the Awori people at Otta, a system he identifies as having been modeled the according to the Oyo pattern.[63] Nonetheless, as stated at the start of this chapter, these scholars have not closely examined how Egungun's imperial origins and

[59] Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 26-27.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms," 90-103; Oyinade Ogunba, "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People: A Study of Indigenous Festivals," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1967); Margaret Thompson Drewal and Henry John Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Marilyn Houlberg, "Egungun Masquerades of the Remo Yoruba," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); John Pemberton, "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba," *African Arts* XI, no. 3 (1978); Robin Poynor, "The Egungun of Owo," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Marc Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Norma Wolff, "Egungun Costuming in Abeokuta," *African Arts* 15, no. 3 (1982); Henry John Drewal, "Flaming Crowns, Cooling Waters: Masquerades of the Ijebu Yoruba," *African Arts* 20, no. 1 (1986).
[62] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 145-157; Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 26-29; ———, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, Chapter 2.
[63] Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms," 90. Judith Gleason examines the mythology surrounding Oya, the orisha and the Egungun, citing evidence from the Awori of Lagos and Otta. Judith Gleason, *Oya: in Praise of the Goddess* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987).

the historical and political conditions through which Egungun's spread affected its status in those towns. I now turn to the Awori town of Otta as a case study to examine traditions linking Egungun's origins to Oyo's imperial administration of the town.

The capital of an old Yoruba kingdom, Otta was located on the periphery of the empires of Oyo and Benin and the kingdoms of Badagry and Dahomey, all of which played important political and economic roles in southwestern Yorubaland during the eighteenth century. Otta has long claimed an independent founding, explaining its settlement as a consequence of the Awori migration from Ile-Ife, which would date its origins to around 1621.[64] If this date is accurate, then Otta emerged around the time that the Oyo kingdom was consolidating its power in northern Yorubaland and before it established major trade relations with southern states such as Allada. The founders of Otta settled in two wards, Otun and Osi, each with its respective ward chiefs, the *Olukotun* and *Olukosi*. According to local tradition, during this same time, a king known as the Olota united the two wards. Otta later became an Oyo outpost and, in consequence, as tradition relates it, Egungun masquerades were brought to the town, although exactly when and under what circumstances is a matter of debate. In an effort to understand the character and reception of Egungun in Otta during the period of Oyo imperialism, my analysis will now turn to traditions surrounding the entry of Egungun into the town. In subsequent chapters, I will trace the development of Egungun in Otta town, showing the role that it played in a number of important transformations in the community's political history.

[64] Salako, *Ota*, 61.

The Empire Comes to Otta: the *Ajele*, Shango, and Imperial Egungun at Otta in the Age of Abiodun, 1770-1789

While there are no written accounts of Egungun in Otta prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, evidence from local oral traditions suggests that the masquerade surfaced in the town during the eighteenth century.[65] These traditions do not provide information that discloses the exact moment of Egungun's arrival in the town, but they do situate it during the time of Oyo imperialism. The event probably occurred during the reign of *Alaafin* Abiodun, when he reorganized trade routes from Oyo to the nearby coast, established a new group of *ajele* and *ilari* in the southwest, and supported the establishment of a professional Egungun performance group, known as *Alarinjo*, that traveled throughout the empire.[66]

According to one widely accepted tradition at Otta, one of the imperial *Alaafin* of Oyo sent one of his sons to Otta, with the aim of establishing his authority in the area. This tradition relates that the *Alaafin* appointed this son, Odikaye, to the position of *ajele* for the town of Otta.[67] The tradition conforms to the *Alaafin* Abiodun's policy of tightening his grip on the region by sending a new group of officials to collect tribute and promote his divinity and sovereignty, replacing those who had been in place during the two decades in which Gaa had dominated Oyo politics.[68]

---

[65] On October 16, 1855, White records the first Egungun performance that he observed at Otta. This marks the first recorded Egungun to have appeared in the town. White, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*. Evidence for Egungun at Otta in the eighteenth century comes largely fromoral traditions narrated by the *Oloponda* of Otta, a member of the Itimoko family.

[66] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 143-144.

[67] Chief S. Asanbe, the Oloponda (the most senior Egungun chief at Otta), narrated this history during my interview with him. He is from the Itimoko family. Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta, August 16, 2006, Otta. The Oba M. A. Oyede III, the current king of Otta, also cited this tradition when I asked him about the origins of Egungun at Otta. Interview with Oba M. A. Oyede III, Olota of Otta, May 5, 2005, Otta.

[68] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 143-144; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 94-96.

This tradition comes from the Itimoko family of Otta, which claims to be the descendants of *ajele* Odikaye. Initially, according to them, he periodically traveled from Oyo to Otta to collect tribute on the *Alaafin*'s behalf, which suggests that he may at first have been an *ilari*, a traveling official, rather than an *ajele*.[69] He later settled at Otta and established a residence known as the Ajele Oloyo, at the center of which was the Ijele compound, his home. Today, this court is located within the Ijana ward, which was established sometime between 1789 and 1821, shortly after *Alaafin* Abiodun's reign.[70] Odikaye's change in status may suggest that Abiodun implemented his administrative apparatus in the town in phases, relying first solely on an *ilari* before settling an *ajele* there. Even with an *ajele* in place, Otta seems to have been only loosely overseen by the imperial administration, probably because of its location on the far reaches of the empire.

The location of Odikaye's residence would have well positioned him to be the *asoju oba*, or "eyes of the king" of Oyo, because it allowed a clear view of the king of Otta's palace. The tradition relates that as the *ajele*, Odikaye collected tribute for the *Alaafin*. Most importantly, it identifies Odikaye as having been instrumental in introducing both Egungun and Shango to the people of Otta, a practice associated**,** as we have seen, with those occupying this office. However, two different versions of this basic narrative circulate within the Itimoko traditions, offering further insight into the place of Shango and Egungun within Oyo imperial policy and its influence upon local religious and political culture.[71] These accounts also yield information about the position of an imperial administrator in a provincial town and clues to his reception there.

[69] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 110-114.
[70] Interview with Oloponda of Otta, August 16, 2006.
[71] Ibid.

According to one version, Aina Ege, a younger brother of *ajele* Odikaye, arrived at Otta sometime after his sibling. Ege settled at a place that later became known as *Iga Ege* (Ege's compound), instead of living with Odikaye at *Iga Ijele*. In spite of his youth, Aina Ege is said to have gained authority over the Egungun masquerade that Odikaye brought to Otta, because Ege wore the Egungun costume during performances. Odikaye, on the other hand, was a Shango priest, and he organized the performances. The costume of this Egungun comprised an elaborately decorated cloth that displayed the wealth of its owner. Its distinguishing feature, however, was a beaded crown that identified it with the royal family in Oyo. Aina Ege died before his older brother, and to honor him, Odikaye modified the masquerade and named it Ege. In time, Odikaye became the first *Oloponda*, the most senior Egungun chief at Otta, implying that after the introduction of the imperial Egungun, others followed or were created.[72] Since then, according to this tradition, the Ege masquerade has been the head of all Egungun masquerades at Otta, a mark of its historical significance.

Today, Ege's prominence among the Egungun masquerades is apparent. As we may recall from the Introduction, Figure 1 shows a statue of the Ege masquerade, erected in 2004, that stands in the middle of a major square in Otta and marks the location of Iga Ege, the residence of Aina Ege. This is the only statue of Egungun in the town. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the Ege masquerade in a mural that local artists have painted on the Egungun shrine, or *igbale*, at Otta. The mural likewise depicts Ege as first among the other senior Egungun masquerades of the town. Note that in the murals and during festival appearances (Figure 5), the *Atokun* stands next to him. The current *Atokun*, Chief J. Akingbola, also serves as the most senior Shango priesthood in Otta. Being the *Atokun*

[72] Ibid. Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*, 24-25.

and the chief Shango priest parallels Odikaye's status as an organizer of the Ege performance and a Shango priest in the tradition.[73]

Figure 3. Ege masquerade, second storey of Egungun Shrine, Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta. Photograph by author, May 3, 2005.

Figure 4. Ege masquerade (left) appears in mural, second story of Egungun shrine, having been freshly painted prior to the beginning of the 2004-2005 Egungun Festival, Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta. Photograph by author, May 3, 2005.

[73] Interview with Oloponda of Otta, August 16, 2006; Interview with Chief J. O. Akingbola, Atokun of Otta, May 4, 2005, Otta. The two images of the mural note the appearance of the Egungun shrine before and during the 2004 festival period. Prior to each Egungun festival, artists repaint the individual Egungun masquerades that have registered to appear during the event.

Figure 5. Ege, right, and the Atokun, left, leading a procession of prominent Egungun masquerades and chiefs during the Egungun festival, Ijana ward, Otta. Photograph by author, May 4, 2005.

This version of the Itimoko tradition affirms scholars' claims that Shango priests played an important role in the introduction and organization of Egungun masquerade performances during the imperial period. That is, Odikaye, an *ajele* and Shango priest, the embodiment and emissary of the deity Shango, organized and performed the first Egungun in the provincial town of Otta. Both ritual traditions upheld the *Alaafin's* status as a divine ruler, whether as the incarnation of Shango or the ancestors. Odikaye's knowledge and mastery of these traditions, however, not only enabled him to celebrate and glorify the *Al3aafin*, but they also afforded him the opportunity to carve out and maintain his own high status within the town. As an *Alaafin*'s son and an *ajele*, Odikaye would have been primed to enter Otta with elevated power and authority. His later position as the *Oloponda*, the most senior Egungun chief at Otta, is revealing, because it implies that the local elite accepted, if not embraced, his power and authority.

This notion is supported by another Itimoko tradition, which relates that the king of Otta sought Odikaye's advice and assistance in halting the spread of an epidemic. Odikaye constructed a shrine to Shango and performed a ritual sacrifice to appease the gods. The tradition also relates that in conducting this ritual, Odikaye invoked both Shango and Agan; the latter is a deity who is traditionally invoked to cleanse the community before an Egungun festival begins.[74] This tradition is also illuminating for its implications that the ritual traditions brought with imperial administrators, presumably to help oversee and enforce power, were also brought forth into the service of the people being overseen, whether or not the motivation was one of altruism, or of political shrewdness, or a combination of the two.

From the traditions he collected regarding Egungun in various Yoruba towns during this period, Adedeji believes that Abiodun deployed the *alarinjo*, a genre of Egungun that traveled throughout Oyo provincial towns, entertaining members of the royal family, their guests, and local rulers.[75] The Itimoko tradition does not necessarily conflict with Adedeji's research concerning the *alarinjo*. Odikaye's Egungun may well have had this character, although it is not identified as *alarinjo* in Otta traditions. The Ege masquerade, with its beaded crown and rich attire, undoubtedly celebrated and upheld the status of the *Alaafin*. The modifications in honor of Odikaye's brother likewise suggest a commemorative, celebratory character, as opposed to the aggressive, punitive character that Egungun at Otta would later acquire. It is hard to extrapolate the

[74] Interview with Oloponda of Otta, August 16, 2006. Agan first appears in the written record in Johnson's account of an Egungun performance at Oyo, 1858. Morton-Williams was the first to document Agan's existence at Otta in the 1950s. Both Kosebinu and Salako provide contemporary accounts of Agan rituals. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 330; Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms," 91-94; Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*, 61-62; Salako, *Ota*.
[75] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 143-144.

precise character of Shango in Otta based on this version of the Itimoko traditions. The Shango priesthood is often associated with confrontation and coercion, even oppression, in its ritual conduct. Yet, however stern or confrontational a priest invoking Shango could be, the event that endures in the Itimoko family tradition suggests a powerful, yet benevolent, Shango who, through his priest Odikaye, saved the town from plague.

The second prominent version of the entry of Egungun into Otta within the Itimoko tradition also links it to the children of the *Alaafin* and to the Shango priesthood. According to this version of the Ege tradition, the younger sister of Odikaye, a woman named Olafaya, traveled to Otta to visit her brother. She first stayed at a place known as Ijogbo and awaited him there. Olafaya is said to have been a Shango priestess who brought with her the *shere* Shango and *oshe* Shango, ritual instruments associated with the deity. According to this tradition, it was customary for such priestesses to take these items with them when they left home. Olafaya placed the *shere* Shango on the wall at Ijogbo and took the *oshe* Shango with her when she went to Odikaye's residence at Iga Ajele (i.e., the *ajele*'s compound). As time passed, she moved between Odikaye's residence at *Iga* Ajele and a place set aside for her at *Iga* Ege (i.e. Ege's compound), although she is reported to have spent most of her time at her brother's compound. Odikaye's followers built a small house there for Olafaya. According to this version of the story, when she died, an Egungun masquerade known as Ege was created. In addition to wearing the crown, it carries the *shere* Shango in its hand while other performers follow behind, one of who carries the *oshe* Shango.[76] While in the previous version of the tradition, the masquerade is named after and honors Odikaye's brother, in this version it was created to honor the sister, Olafaya.

[76] Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005, Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta.

The different accounts that link the origin of Egungun at Otta to the *ajele* Odikaye may well reflect different moments in its development. It is entirely possible that Aina Ege arrived at Otta and took control of the Egungun, which was renamed in his honor upon his death. It is equally possible that, either before or after Aina Ege's death, his sister Olafaya gained authority over the Egungun, which was modified to carry the symbols and power of her offices as a Shango priestess. Taken together, these accounts can be understood to explain the introduction of various elements within the attire of this Egungun. The first account focuses on the crown, a symbol of royal authority and the masquerader's relationship to the royal family. The second account emphasizes the incorporation of Shango's instruments into Ege's regalia: the *oshe* Shango and the *shere* Shango. Like the crown, Shango's ritual implements mark authority.[77] While the crown was more directly associated with the *Alaafin*, the ritual instruments of Shango evoked the *Alaafin* as well, since the latter was considered the deity's most direct living emissary.

The traditions surrounding Odikaye and his siblings present the arrival of Egungun and Shango as interlocking ritual traditions, a tandem association that conforms to their symbiotic relationship under the reign of *Alaafin* Abiodun. Interestingly, however, the traditions do not identify Aina Ege and Olafaya as members or officials within the formal imperial apparatus. It is possible that they, as their elder brother had done, initially served as *ilari,* arriving in Otta to carry back to Oyo the tribute that he, now an *ajele*, had collected from the king of Otta. Whether or not Odikaye's younger siblings were formally appointed officials, the Itimoko traditions support the notion that

[77] Eva. L. R. Meyerowitz, "Notes on the King-God Shango and His Temple at Ibadan, Southern Nigeria," *Man* 46, no. 27 (1946); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), Part 1; Henry John Drewal and John Mason, *Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998), 144-147.

the Oyo royal family drew upon its members to form and replenish the ritual networks connecting Shango and Egungun.

The accounts also do not yield information about the relation of Otta's *ajele* and his siblings to their counterparts in other nearby towns. We do know that in the premier Egbado towns, the Oyo administrators were part of an elaborate political and economic network that linked them to the capital and to other towns under their domain. Otta's location on the periphery of the empire may have rendered it of nominal significance in the eyes of the empire. Traders traveled between it and other regional markets in Egbado and the port towns of Badagry and Lagos on the coast. Nonetheless, it was beyond the main Oyo-Badagry trade route and was not actively involved in the affairs and politics of the other larger towns.[78] These conditions may have guided Odikaye's own actions and policies within the town and serve as another explanation for the presence of his family members within the town. Together, these three could have drawn upon a formidable degree of spiritual, political, and economic power in their capacity as *ajele* and Shango priest, Egungun performer, and Shango priestess. Yet, at the same time, remote from the contentious politics of the Oyo metropolis and in the absence of serious local rivalries, Odikaye may have had little need to establish his status and authority in the town in an overly assertive or aggressive manner. Otta's relative isolation and distance from the center of Oyo may have influenced Odikaye's conduct in yet another way: too strong a display of power and aggression could have invited retaliation from the people of Otta, which Odikaye may not have been able to withstand.

[78] NAI. *Assessment Report on Otta District: Abeokuta Province*; ———. *Assessment Report of Otta District*.

Odikaye and his siblings seem to have been satisfied with establishing their power and authority without dismantling the local ruling apparatus. In other provincial towns, the relatives and supporters of the *Alaafin* made themselves rulers, replacing or setting themselves over the local kings and chiefs. The *Alaafin*'s children could have followed that precedent, especially since they owned an Egungun with the crown. Nothing in the traditions, however, suggests that the administrators and related family members who came to Otta from imperial Oyo had such aspirations during this period. Instead, the traditions commemorate the introduction of powerful new ritual traditions and celebrate the imperial representatives who brought them in ways that indicate that Otta's inhabitants came to value their presence in the town.[79]

Odikaye, Aina Ege, and Olafaya supported the interests of the *Alaafin* and successfully integrated themselves among the local elite by establishing Egungun and Shango within the town of Otta. In this, they bear similarity to the innumerable other Oyo administrators, Shango priests, and Egungun performers and ritual leaders who traveled throughout the empire promoting the Shango and Egungun traditions. However, while in Otta these administrators evidently were embraced, in some provincial towns and kingdoms they were deeply resented. Referring to Oyo administrators, who also were Shango priests, who came to Egba towns either during or immediately after Abiodun's reign, 1774—1796, Egba historian Biobaku poignantly narrates that they "exploited the religious fears of the people to feather their own nests and in order to exact enormous tribute for the *Alaafin*."[80] An Egba warrior named Lishabi led a rebellion that

[79] Interview with Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005; Interview by Gbamidele Ajayi, May 30, 2005, Oyo, Oyo State.
[80] Abe. Prof. 8/2 NAI, John Blair. *Intelligence Report on Abeokuta*, 1937; Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 8-9; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 266.

turned into a massacre. He organized a military movement under the banner of an Egba mutual aid and farmer's society. In the end, the Egba reportedly killed approximately six hundred *ilari*, traveling administrators, in a single day.[81]

The contrasting reception of Oyo administrators at Otta and in the Egba region underscores what would surely have been a reasonable hypothesis anyway, i.e., that even if the spread of Egungun and Shango occurred with a certain degree of uniformity and regularity throughout the Oyo empire vis-à-vis the imperial administrative apparatus, the reception and development of these ritual traditions would vary according to local conditions and the goals, ambitions, and power of individual officials who brought them. Other prominent traditions in Otta today, traditions that seem to counter or challenge the Itimoko family accounts of the origins of Egungun in the town, offer insights that may go further to explain how and why the imperial Egungun came to be adopted and embraced by the town.

One such tradition recounts that among the items that the founders of Otta brought with them was a masquerade cloth (what I have referred to in the introduction as "*egungun*," to distinguish it from Egungun, an Oyo masquerade tradition and masking society), which they ritually offered to spiritual forces to call down blessings upon the town.[82] Another account claims that the Baba Muko was the first type of Egungun to exist in Otta. Baba Muko is a type of Egungun that honors the elderly people of a community. It recites prayers to bless the community or curses to punish it during its performances.[83] This account is sparse on details that would allow other means to date it

[81] Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 8-9.
[82] Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*, 10.
[83] Interview with Prince Kunle Andrew, May 4, 2005, Otta; Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, May 3, 2005, Otta.

historically. But if it were an early or one of the first Egungun in Otta, it could date back to the early seventeenth century, an era in which a woman from Otta allegedly was the wife of one *Alaafin* and the mother of his son.[84] To its favor, this tradition presents as Otta's earliest Egungun one of a type that conforms to those associated with Oyo in the period prior to the Nupe invasion (discussed in chapter one). The Baba Muko typically performs in the context of funeral rites and ancestral veneration, elements most associated with the earliest Egungun traditions.

Taken together, these traditions allow the historian the opportunity to reconstruct the history of masquerading in the town. The development of Egungun at Otta during the imperial period and its relationship to Egungun at Oyo in the same period illustrates the power of performance, the ways in which subtle and overt political dramas were enacted as administrators arrived, performed their duties, found acceptance, and built community. Egungun spread largely with the aid of Shango priests and priestesses. In the case of the Ege, which I identify as an imperial Egungun, distinguished by the crown it wears and its relationship to the Oyo royal family, the more ceremonial and benevolent qualities of the *orisha* Shango were embodied. The conditions in which the administrator and his siblings found themselves at Otta made it more advantageous to them to embrace these qualities of Shango, at least during this era. Yet as the Egba case suggests, different conditions provide opportunities for different elements of Oyo imperial culture to take root.

[84] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 158-160.

Chapter Three

The Emergence of New Warriors, Wards, and Masquerades: The Otta Kingdom in the Era of Oyo Imperial Collapse

The previous chapters discuss the origins and development of the Egungun masquerade tradition among the Yoruba-speaking people. Egungun emerged among the Oyo, a Yoruba group, during the period of the Oyo Empire, between 1600 and 1789.[1] As we have seen, although there are conflicting narratives among modern Yoruba-speaking peoples regarding the origins and early development of Egungun, nearly all such narratives offer accounts that explain its religious and political dimensions; moreover, these narratives make clear that absorbing, containing, and reconciling the tensions between the religious and the political, and the competing groups which drew their support and power from them, lay at the heart of the masquerade. The origins of Egungun are reflected in its organizational structure, which consists of two hierarchies, the first of which is essentially religious in its duties, and the second, political, in the sense of exercising leadership, pronouncing judgments, and carrying out punishments. As previously established, the two hierarchies of Egungun can be traced historically back to the encounter of two peoples, the Oyo and invaders from Nupe, who came into conflict just prior to the ascendancy of the Oyo Empire.

At the height of Oyo imperialism, from 1774 to 1789, and as Egungun was acquiring new masquerade types and a more elaborate administrative structure, another

[1] Joel Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre: The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from Its Earliest Beginnings to the Present Times," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1969), Chapter 3; S. O. Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo c., 1706-1905: A Study in the Traditional Culture of an African Polity* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1980), Chapter 1; ———, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba* (Ibadan: Board Publication Ltd., 1980), Chapters 1-2.

historically prominent Yoruba masquerade tradition known as Gelede was emerging among the Ketu, another Yoruba group.[2] While there are also a number of conflicting accounts of the origins of Gelede, they tend locate it within or slightly after the era of *Alaafin* Abiodun's reign as the ruler of Oyo. During the height of the Oyo Empire, the Kingdom of Ketu lay just beyond the empire's borders, and, its capital was an important city along Oyo's trade route to the coast. One account of the beginnings of this masquerade traces it back to an entertainment competition at the capital of Oyo. Whereas an Egungun tradition identifies Abiodun as having organized a competition in which one of the masquerade chiefs, the *Alagbaa* in this instance, emerged as the victory (as noted in the previous chapter), a Gelede tradition contends that a Gelede masquerade put on the most elaborate spectacle.[3] Another account makes no mention of Oyo or a competition, but explains that Gelede emerged as a masquerade introduced by one Ketu prince to defeat his rival.[4] Whether or not Gelede originated within Oyo culture, Oyo helped fuel its spread because the Kingdom of Ketu and other parts of western Yorubaland were more prosperous and peaceful during the period when Oyo maintained its empire. As seen in the last chapter, Egungun flourished during the empire's expansion and

---

[2] Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 224-236; Emmanuel Bamidele Bolaji, "The Dynamics and the Manifestations of Efe: The Satirical Poetry of the Yoruba Gelede Groups of Nigeria," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1984), 59-75; Emmanuel D. Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," in *West African Masks and Cultural Systems*, ed. Sidney Kasfir (Tervuren: Musee royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1988), 53-54; Benedict M. Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu-Yoruba Subgroup in West Africa* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1993); Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 46-50.

[3] Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 225, 231, 234.

[4] Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," 53-54; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 68-70.

consolidation because its peculiar organizational structure made it a masquerade that was particularly suited for administering imperial control.

This chapter now turns to an examination of both Egungun and Gelede during the next pivotal period in Oyo history. Using events in the southwestern kingdom of Otta as a case study, it argues that these masquerades were critical to how some communities responded to new political instabilities and social pressures unleashed as the empire weakened and ultimately broke apart. The relative peace and security that Otta enjoyed when Oyo was at its peak gave way to distress and bloodshed as provincial communities rebelled and asserted themselves in ways that had devastating repercussions for Yoruba peoples. The ways in which these masquerades engaged in politics at Otta reflect the new political orders that were forged and contested in Yorubaland, as Oyo became a remnant of its former self.

Following the death of *Alaafin* Abiodun in 1789, Oyo's imperial power declined, and the kingdom fell apart in 1834. Oyo's decline was marked by the combination of dissension among Oyo's rulers and rebellion in the provinces. In the capital, the conflict between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* (the council of chiefs) gain new momentum, and drew in several provincial rulers, the most important of which was Afonja, the ruler of Ilorin, who was also the *Are-Ona-Kakamfo*, the commander-in-chief of the provincial army. When the chiefs removed *Alaafin* Awole, Abiodun's successor, Afonja made an unsuccessful attempt to ascend to the throne. His attempt, however, proved unsuccessful; thus he returned to Ilorin, invited the aid of the Fulani Muslims, who proclaimed a jihad against Oyo, and provoked a revolt involving northern slaves. Afonja's Muslim allies

betrayed and killed him and continued their encroachments upon Oyo territories, before reducing Oyo to tributary status in the early 1830s and sacking the capital in 1836.

Meanwhile, as Oyo was losing control over its northern territories, its power in the south was also weakening. Toward the end of *Alaafin* Abiodun's reign, the Fon Kingdom of Dahomey, then a tributary of Oyo's just beyond western Yorubaland, embarked on a series of military campaigns that had far-reaching consequences for southwestern Yorubaland, and particularly for a number of Egbado and Awori communities under Oyo's control. In 1784 and 1793, Dahomey attacked the Gun in Badagry, a port town, from the lagoon side in an effort to regain a greater share of the European slave trade on the coast, which had moved east from Ouidah, Dahomey's historic port. Oyo had previously protected both Badagry and the beach between that town and Porto Novo, another major port west of Badagry. However, Oyo had changed its policy, withdrawn protection from Badagry, and shifted its support to Porto Novo alone. The concentration of trade at Porto Novo provoked hostility from Badagry and other rival lagoon-side ports further east. With Porto Novo and Oyo's aid, Dahomey eventually mounted a successful attack on Badagry and nearly destroyed it. Many of the Gun survivors of the Dahomey onslaught abandoned Badagry and sought refuge in Otta, the Kingdom of Lagos (an emerging port east of Badagry), or elsewhere.[5]

Hoping to avoid Badagry's fate, the Awori Kingdom of Otta welcomed the Gun migrants, many of whom were warriors. The Awori rulers of Otta offered them land, as well as military and political titles, in exchange for their support in defending and

[5] Robin Law, "The Gun Communities in the Eighteenth Century," (paper presented at the 34th Annual Meeting African Studies Association of the U.S.A., St. Louis, Missouri, November 23-26, 1991). ———, "A Lagoonside Port on the Eighteenth-century Slave Coast: The Early History of Badagri," *Canaadian Journal of African Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994): 47-52.

policing the town. The titles gave the immigrant warriors a status second only to that of the king in Otta's political hierarchy.[6] While Dahomean aggression created a need to develop Otta's military, internal factors encouraged the transfer of local law enforcement privileges to the new Gun immigrants.

Oyo's collapse thus left a power vacuum across Yorubaland that precipitated rivalry among these new and old states, rivalry that principally took the form of attempts to seize territory or, equally violently, to control trade routes linking the coast and interior. This state of affairs sparked a half-century of warfare that destroyed many communities and destabilized the region from the northern savannah into the central and southern forests of Yorubaland.[7]

In reconstituting their communities and states, Yoruba speakers drew on cultural practices from their past, including, as I will demonstrate, masquerades. Scholars have noted, although sparingly, how refugees and natives, warlords and kings, young men and elders contested for power and authority within Yoruba states in the pre-colonial period, both through and with the assistance of masquerade performances and organizations.[8] However, scholars have not considered how masquerades were themselves political agents whose members and allies advanced a range of collective, overlapping, and competing interests that enabled masquerades to become a prominent and enduring feature of local and regional politics in southwestern Yorubaland. Consequently,

---

[6] R. A. Salako, *Ota: Biography of the Foremost Awori Town* (Ota: Penink Publicity and Company, 2000), 14.

[7] J. F. Ade Ajayi, "The aftermath of the fall of Old Oyo," in *History of West Africa*, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi (London: Longman, 1987), 145-156. J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 35-38.

[8] J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964); J. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: the Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, 1965); Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900* (Ibadan: University of Ife Press, 1984); J. A. Ajayi, "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo," in *History of West Africa*, ed. J. A. Ajayi (London: Longman, 1987).

scholars have overlooked how the politics of these masquerades have shaped and been shaped by major political, economic, and social transformations in the communities in which they existed.

In the first era following the death of *Alaafin* Abiodun, 1789–1830, the Awori rulers of Otta—fearing a Dahomean invasion—welcomed and transferred significant military and political power to a group of Gun warriors, who immigrated to Otta from Badagry. Gun warriors founded a new ward, Ijana, in an area already settled by a group of Oyo immigrants who had brought Egungun to Otta prior during the reign of *Alaafin* Abiodun. I postulate that the Gun formed an alliance with the Oyo in this ward. Together, these "strangers" (Oyo and Gun peoples) looked to Egungun to assist them in performing their new military and political roles as warriors and dispensers of justice and, in the process, these strangers began to threaten the power of the Awori (indigenous) rulers of Otta.

At the same time, Egungun's leaders—who were mostly likely comprised of Oyo immigrants, looked to the Gun warriors for guidance in how to entrench themselves within Otta's political apparatus. I posit that Egungun went from being esteemed as ancestral worship and royal court entertainment to being revered and almost feared as an arm of state- sanctioned violence. Egungun became part of Otta's system of law enforcement.

An analysis of the development of Egungun and Gelede in Otta throughout these two periods reveals how these masquerades shaped and were shaped by the power struggles between the Ijana ward on one hand and the Otun and Osi wards on the another. I hypothesize that Egungun initially emerged as the dominant masquerade and then

declined in status at the same time that Gelede grew in influence during the post-imperial era at Otta. I also propose that during this period a conflict was set in motion that has persisted up to the twenty-first century. This conflict is between the descendents of the Oyo immigrants and the Awori indigenes in Otta for dominance in the Egungun society.

Even at the zenith of Oyo's imperial dominance, intense political rivalries between Oyo's rulers, the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* (council of chiefs), threatened stability. The *Alaafin* had gained a brief victory when he successfully solicited the *Are-Ona-Kakamfo*, the commander-in-chief of the provincial army, to lead Oyo provincial forces against the head of the *Oyo Mesi*, Gaa, and his supporters. However, as a number of leading historians of Oyo have argued, by involving the provincial rulers in politics at the capital, *Alaafin* Abiodun did not resolve power struggle in the capital, and he introduced another complicated factor. Less than a decade after the *Alaafin's* victory in the capital, the empire began to suffer a number of military defeats by its northern neighbors. While the first of these defeats occurred during Abiodun's rule as *Alaafin*, the most crushing occurred later, ultimately weakening the power of this office. The Oyo Empire declined following the death of *Alaafin* Abiodun in 1789, and it collapsed entirely by the first quarter of the nineteenth century. When the Oyo kingdom, the seat of the former empire, fell apart in 1836, tens of thousands of refugees fled into southern and western Yorubaland. Within a decade, they either established new states or integrated themselves into older ones.[9] During the reign of the empire, these older states had either

[9] S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 9-17; Samuel Johnson, *The history of the Yorubas: from the earliest times to the beginning of the British protectorate* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1960), Chapters 10-11; Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, 1600 - 1836: a West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic slave trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), Chapters 12-14; Falola, *Ibadan*, 15-18; Ajayi, "The aftermath of the fall of Old Oyo," 145-156; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 35-47.

paid tribute to or were subjugated by Oyo, but many were beginning to reassert themselves, often around the dominance and leadership of warlords rather than kings.

The Decline of Oyo and the Rise of Dahomey in Southwestern Yorubaland, 1789–1830

Following the death of *Alaafin* Abiodun in 1789, his successor, *Alaafin* Awole, and the *Oyo Mesi* became embroiled in disputes that created instability in the capital and weakened Oyo's ability to maintain control over its provinces. The *Oyo Mesi* had chosen Awole to succeed Abiodun because the chiefs thought they would be able to control him. When they found themselves unable to do so, the *Oyo Mesi* solicited support outside the capital. It invited Afonja, the ruler of the Oyo's subject town of Ilorin and the *Are-On-Kakamfo*, or commander, of the provincial military to back a coup against Awole. Afonja supported the proposal in the hope of becoming the next *Alaafin*. However, after deposing Awole, the *Oyo Mesi* chose another candidate as *Alaafin*, and for the next few decades, it continued to be entangled in disputes with successive kings. Meanwhile, Afonja returned to Ilorin furious about the *Oyo Mesi*'s choice and determined to exact revenge. Over the next two decades, provincial states such as Ilorin seized the opportunity created by dissension in the capital of Oyo and began to assert their independence. Afonja sought to strengthen his position by appealing for Muslim support. He invited to Ilorin a Fulani cleric, Alimi, who soon proclaimed a jihad against the pagan Oyo, winning widespread support from Yoruba and non-Yoruba Muslim dissidents and provoking a revolt of northern slaves in the capital city.[10]

[10] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 255-260.

The Rise of Ijana Warriors and the Egungun Gbodogbodo at Otta, 1789–1830

Prior to the arrival of the Gun refugees, the king of Otta, known as the *Olota*, was the highest-ranking official in the town's political hierarchy. The *Oba* or king of Otta was chosen from one of three families residing in the town's oldest quarters or wards, Otun (the left) and Osi (the right).[11] The inhabitants of these quarters claimed to be descendents of Awori people who had originally migrated from Ile-Ife and stopped at the town of Isheri, a secondary dispersal point, before settling at Otta. The *Olota* of Otta claimed descent from the *Olofin* of Isheri, who in turn was said to have descended from Oduduwa, the progenitor of Yoruba kingship, at Ile-Ife. Each of the two Awori wards of Otta had a local head who presided over the affairs of his ward: the *Onikotun* for the Otun ward and the *Onikosi* for the Osi ward. The *Onikotun* and the *Onikosi* performed a number of political functions, including serving on the council of town chiefs that advised the *Oba*. They maintained law and order within their wards, represented them in civic affairs, and advised the king on matters pertaining to the town as a whole. These ward chiefs were also warriors, who led residents of their wards in battle against external enemies and one another.[12]

Whereas Awori people had founded the oldest wards, Otun and Osi— non-Awori "strangers"— had founded a third ward, Ijana, with the support of the town's Awori rulers. Oyo immigrants, including Otta's *ajele*, the Oyo administrator responsible for collecting tribute, settled this quarter during the reign of *Alaafin* Abiodun, 1774–1789, prior to the arrival of the Gun. When new immigrants began arriving from Badagry, Otta's rulers invited them to live in the Ijana quarter and offered their leaders chieftaincy

[11] James White, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*.
[12] Interview with Chief S. A. Matoro, Onikosi of Otta, February 6, 2006, Osi ward, Otta.

titles in exchange for their help in defending the town against invasion. This might also have been a ploy to check the power of the Oyo people in the ward, in hopes of bolstering Otta's autonomy. One of the new chiefs was made the senior *Balogun* (war captain) of Otta, while another was named the *Ajana*, or the head of the Ijana quarter. The name *Ajana*, a shortened form of *ajalona*, meaning "one who fights on the side of the road,"[13] reflects this ward's growth in the context of war. The new Ijana chiefs subsequently helped defend Otta against Dahomean invasion between 1794 and 1821.[14]

The status of Ijana's chiefs derived not only from their ability to lead and defend the town in warfare, but also from their capacity to maintain internal security and enforce laws. Around the time that the new Ijana chiefs were created, older chiefs of the Otun and Osi quarters appear to have been failing to dispense justice fairly to their inhabitants.[15] James White, the CMS missionary who lived at Otta in the middle of the nineteenth century, left an account of a crisis in Otta that provided an opportunity for the ambitious Ijana chiefs to gain new power and authority:

> In former days, the legislative and executive power of the [Otta] nation lodged in the hands of the true Otas [the Awori people from] Otun and Osi, but two circumstances served to transfer the executive power to the Ijana whilst the legislative power and the power of making a king were the prerogative of the Otun and Osi. On one occasion, a man of Osi was guilty of a capital offence, for which according to law he was to suffer death. But natural affection prevailed against justice and regards for the laws, and there was not found an Osi man who had so much resolution as to execute the sentence of the laws. Some time afterwards, a similar circumstance occurred at Otun, but not one man [there] could be found to lift up his hand against his fellow [man]. This failure of punishment on the part of the chiefs afforded a wide scope of men immortality and led to the commission of vices of every description. Whereupon the chiefs declared that

[13] Salako, *Ota*, 90; Adeboye Babalola and Olugboyega Alaba, *A Dictionary of Yoruba Personal Names* (Lagos: West African Book Publishers Limited, 2003).
[14] Salako, *Ota*, 62. Salako claims that during the reign of *Oba* Adelu, the *Olota* of Otta from 1794-1821, Dahomey waged war against Otta for barring the passage of slaves from the interior through Otta. However, other sources contend that Otta was involved in the slave trade. Thus, the Dahomean invasions of Badagry in 1784 and 1789 and the slave raids it embarked on annually in the region as well as the emergence of the Ijana quarters all lend support to the claim that Dahomey attacked Otta.
[15] The failure of the Otun and Osi chiefs to carry out state executions of the people from their own ward parallels a kind of bond cemented by blood oath that one could not betray.

> whereas delicate feelings have prevented the putting in force the laws of the country, the executive power of the nation is henceforth transferred to strangers.[16]

White's evidence suggests that the Otun and Osi chiefs had failed to punish lawbreakers from their respective wards. In essence, they had placed blood or brotherhood before justice, which ultimately created a crisis of confidence that led the *Olota* to transfer the authority to inflict capital punishment to the new Ijana chiefs.

The *Balogun* and the *Ajana* of Ijana quarter benefited most from the transfer of political authority. These chiefs had initially been responsible for leading and defending Otta during wartime and for keeping and punishing war captives, some of who became slaves. Once given added authority to police the town, they also held and punished criminals in their residences. This new authority opened the way for the *Balogun* and the *Ajana* to target, scrutinize, and punish Otun and Osi men who had previously enjoyed great political autonomy. Furthermore, as the threat of war became more pervasive and its conduct demanded experienced warlords to defend against attack, the military leadership that the Ijana chiefs provided became a more important feature of Otta's political culture.[17]

Around the same time that the *Ajana* gained new executive and judicial responsibilities, he also acquired new economic privileges. Agiri claims that the *Ajana* benefited from policies introduced to resolve local disputes over trade. The Otun and Osi chiefs disagreed about their roles in the slave trade, in which Otta people acted as middlemen between long-distance sellers from the north and coastal buyers from the south. The chiefs reportedly resolved the issue by determining that the Ijana chiefs

[16] White, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*. Emphasis mine. Also, it is worth noting that what White refers to as executive power, westerners call it judicial power. Much of the literature on African kingdoms makes not distinction between executive and judicial power.
[17] Salako, *Ota*, 90.

would monitor caravans moving along routes north and northeast of Otta, while the Osi chiefs would monitor those moving south and southeast. Agiri adds that both sets of chiefs derived wealth both from the trade in Hausa slaves and from trade in agricultural produce. They also employed slaves to produce maize and yams for sale to passing slave caravans as well as to the growing slave port of Lagos to the southwest. Agiri suggests that through their involvement in the trade, the Ijana and the Osi chiefs became the wealthiest in Otta at that time.[18] By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the wealth, power, and prestige of the *Ajana* had exceeded that of the Otun and Osi chiefs and begun to rival that of Otta's king.

Prior to the *Ajana*'s ascendancy, it appears that in Otta, Egungun was primarily a ritualized performance spectacle that centered on ancestor worship, fertility rites, and court and public entertainment. The Egungun association was controlled by the Oyo population in the Ijana quarter and possibly their new Gun co-residents. If Egungun existed in Otta at that time beyond the control of the Ijana population, it was probably confined to family ancestor worship. Many people in Otta and nearby towns, such as Ilogbo, claim that Egungun was the traditional religion of their ancestors.[19]

The *Balogun* and the *Ajana* looked to Egungun for assistance during the transfer of judicial and executive power from the Otun and Osi chiefs to the Ijana chiefs. In the process, change began to occur within Otta's Egungun. The *Balogun* and *Ajana* introduced a new warrior or medicine Egungun into Otta known as Gbodogbodo.[20] This

[18] B. A. Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria, 1850-1950, A History of the Cultivation of Cola Nitida in Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo and Ota Areas," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972), 42.
[19] Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005, Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta; Interview with Oba of Ilogbo 2006, Palace, Ilogbo, Ogun State, Nigeria.
[20] Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, January 5, 2006, Otta; Interview with Chief Wasiu Dada, the Ekiyo of Otta, May 10, 2006, Ijesu Compound, Ijana Ward, Otta.

Egungun was a "soldier man" Egungun that still appears in Otta today, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6. A twenty-first century "Soldier or Soja Man" Egungun masquerade, Egungun Festival, Otta. Photograph by author, May 3, 2005.

Unlike the soldier-man Egungun in modern-day Otta, Gbodogbodo carried a cutlass as a symbol of one of its main functions—to kill criminals, including witches. These killings reportedly occurred in Igbale, the Egungun grove.[21]

In ancient and in modern times, the existence of an Egungun grove in a town has required the presence of an Egungun priesthood or a council of Egungun chiefs. Egungun performances have long been understood as collective affairs that require the

[21] Interview with Ojugbele, January 5, 2006; Interview with the Ekiyo of Otta, May 10, 2006.. This was around the same time that Adele Ajowan, the then Oba of Lagos, and encourage the introduction of Egungun between 1816-1821 at Lagos. Robin Law, "The Career of Adele at Lagos and Badagry, c. 1807-1837," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 2 (1978): 42-46. The leading chiefs at Lagos, led by Adele's brother Osunlokun, deposed Adele from the Lagos throne. Adele settled at Badagry, where he soon met a contingent of Lagos forces and Dahomey and Porto Novo forces in 1822.

support of one or more families working together, whether publicly or in private.[22] Prior to the Gun migration, the *ajele* and other Oyo immigrants to Otta had apparently established an Egungun priesthood that oversaw the performance of Egungun masquerades in honor of their ancestors and the *Alaafin* as well as Otta's political elite and their guests.[23]

Egungun changed, however, under the rule of the *Balogun* and the *Ajana*, who turned to Egungun to carry out executions at the Igbale, the sacred site of the Egungun society.[24] Under these leaders, Egungun was not simply a masquerade that performed on special occasions; it was also an organization whose mission included executions, often at the request of high-ranking political leaders. The political hierarchy in Oyo's provincial towns commonly overlapped with the Egungun society's hierarchy; the same occurred at Otta. As later developments will reveal, Egungun was often a nexus where ruling chiefs and kings engaged in power struggles, as well as an arena in which different factions competed for loyalty and power.

The Ijana quarter and its chiefs benefited from being the central location of the Egungun shrine, priesthood and its other leading members. However, the relationship between Egungun and the Ijana chiefs was dialectical, not unidirectional. Just as the Ijana warrior-chiefs used Egungun masquerades to assert their power, so the Egungun cult or priesthood, acting in its own interest and on its own authority over Egungun performances, sought to entrench itself within Otta's political culture and hierarchy.[25] As

[22] Interview with Ojugbele, January 5, 2006.
[23] Interview with Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005.
[24] Interview with Ojugbele, January 5, 2006.
[25] Law, "The Gun Communities in the Eighteenth Century," 17. Although Oyo was complicit in the attacks on Badagry, in spite of the intense rivalry between factions in Badagry at the time of the Dahomean attacks of 1784 and 1789. Also, Law's note that religious life in Badagri was organized around the ward and in light of the claim that Oyo people brought Egungun to Otta and settled in the Ijana ward, Egungun could

the Ijana ward became dominant in Otta, Egungun became a significant feature of the town's judicial processes.

There are several parallels between the emergence of Egungun among the Ijana chiefs in Otta between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and among Oyo's leadership while in exile at Kusu in the second half of the sixteenth century. In their respective eras, each community faced the threat of invasion by its more powerful neighbor, Oyo by Nupe and Otta by Dahomey. In response to these threats, the rulers of Oyo and their Otta counterparts formed alliances with their neighbors and consolidated their power in order to defend themselves against attack. These rulers also introduced significant changes in their military organization and constitutional arrangements that gave significant power to newcomers—Nupe in Oyo and Gun in Otta. In the process, they set in motion conflicts that subsequently played a major role in the political life of their communities. Ultimately, these conflicts precipitated the fall of both kingdoms. In the case of Oyo, the conflict between the *Alaafin* and the *Oyo Mesi* sparked Ilorin's intervention and culminated in the destruction of Old Oyo. Later I will discuss how a similar struggle played out in Otta.[26]

The Dahomean invasion of Badagry in the late 1780s did not destabilize the Egbado and Awori communities in the years between 1789 and 1821 as severely as

---

have become or continued to develop as a ward-wide religious practice, ancestral worship in particular, during the incorporation of the Gun warriors into the Ijana ward. A counter claim supports that the Oyo people arrived to find the Awori people in Otta already practicing Egungun and only subsequently allowing the one of the Oyo people to become the *Oloponda*, the head of the Egungun priesthood of Otta. Moreover, given the intense debates regarding claims to chieftaincy titles, traditions of origin and migration, etc., it is important to note that the arguments, hypotheses, claims, noted in this dissertation only reflect available information from local communities and particularly that which could be most easily supported by archival and other historical evidence. It is more suggestive than conclusive.

[26] However, in the case of Oyo, Egungun was introduced to redress the misfortune associated with having rejected it at a previous time. Conversely in Otta, there are no traditions of Egungun having been embraced by the *Balogun* and *Ajana* and back by the Awori indigenes (from Otun and Osi) 's in an attempt avoid the misfortune associating with having previously abandoned Egungun. Yet this has long been a motivation for introducing or reintroducing an Egungun.

subsequent attacks would between 1830 and 1859, because in the earlier period Oyo remained dominant in the region. Yet the Egbado territory was becoming increasingly attractive to Dahomey because of its proximity. Moreover, major trade routes linking Atlantic ports in the south to the Niger River, Hausaland, and beyond passed through the area. Once it had defeated Badagry, Dahomey needed to establish political domination over the Egbado region to control trade passing to coastal ports. Dahomey, therefore, aspired to replace Oyo's supremacy in Egbado territory, and it took steps to do so.[27] Before turning to Dahomey's and Oyo's struggles for control of the Egbado region, however, it is necessary to examine Oyo's struggles with other provincial towns.

The Collapse of Oyo, 1821-1842

The gradual erosion of Oyo's regional dominance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to violent clashes that threatened existing states and fueled the birth of new ones. To begin with, a war broke out in a central Yoruba town, Owu, which accelerated the breakup of the Oyo Empire and the emergence of a number of new states. The origins of the war are linked to the growth of the slave trade on the coast between the newly developing port of Lagos and its hinterland, in which Ijebu traders played a prominent role. In the 1790s, Lagos began to eclipse Oyo's client kingdom at Porto Novo as the main outlet for the Atlantic slave trade.[28] With this shift, the Ijebu, who lived on the mainland north and east of Lagos, acquired new prominence as slave suppliers. By the early nineteenth century, slave raids on the Ijebu frontier had

[27] Kola Folayan, "Egbado to 1832: The Birth of a Dilemma," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 1 (1967): 27-33.
[28] Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

intensified. The kidnapping and enslavement of foreign merchants and officials by the Ijebu triggered warfare that resulted in the conquest and destruction of weaker states by more powerful ones.[29]

During one incident, Oyo traders were kidnapped at Apomu, a market town controlled by Ile-Ife (an old Yoruba kingdom from which many other Yoruba kingdoms claim descent) on the border between Owu and Ijebu. Oyo responded by demanding that Owu, its local ally, retaliate. Owu then sacked Apomu and defeated warriors from Ife. In response, Ife formed an alliance with Ijebu, and together they defeated the Owu army in 1817 and then sacked the town in the early 1820s.[30] During these encounters, Ijebu introduced firearms into Yoruba warfare.[31] By this time, refugees and warriors fleeing the unrest in Oyo to the north had begun joining the Ijebu and Ife armies. Together, these warriors began attacking small Egba towns, once subject to Oyo, which had overthrown and massacred their Oyo *ajele* near the end of *Alaafin* Abiodun's reign. The Egba who fell prey to the onslaught were either enslaved or fled and regrouped on the western edge of Egba territory, founding the new town of Abeokuta.[32] Meanwhile, refugees displaced from Oyo settled at the sites of two old Egba towns and founded the new settlements of Ibadan and Ijaye.[33]

Although this chapter focuses primarily on southwestern Yorubaland where Otta is located, readers should remember that in the first two decades of the nineteenth

---

[29] Akin L. Mabogunje and J. D. Omer-Cooper, *Owu in Yoruba History* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1971); Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 273-276; Ajayi, "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo," 145-158.
[30] Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921), 206-210; Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper, *Owu in Yoruba History*.
[31] Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, 30-36.
[32] Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 13-15.
[33] S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (London: Longman, 1971); Falola, *Ibadan*, 15-18.

century, the center of political gravity in the Yoruba-speaking world still lay in the north. As historian Robin Law has demonstrated, however, "metropolitan dissension, provincial disaffection, and Muslim rebellion" in Oyo soon led to the collapse of its empire, which resulted in the emergence of powerful new states in the south, as well as prolonged struggles among them for regional dominance.[34] To understand these events, it is necessary to return briefly to developments in Oyo.

As suggested earlier, one of the deathblows to the Oyo empire occurred when Afonja, a ruler of the provincial town of Ilorin, together with his Muslim allies, organized attacks against other provincial towns and the kingdom of Oyo itself, in retaliation for failing in his bid to be selected as Alaafin. In 1823, Afonja's Muslim allies at Ilorin killed him and seized control of the town. Once under Muslim authority, Ilorin declared allegiance to the Islamic Sokoto Caliphate and invaded Oyo. By this time, the empire's eastern provinces had already rebelled, sending thousands of refugees into the forest to the south. The capital city of Oyo was semi-deserted for almost a decade before its attack by the Fulani. Even so, the old Oyo trade routes in the southwest remained relatively secure and peaceful, according to European travelers who visited the area between 1826 and 1830.[35]

The Fulani of Ilorin reduced Oyo to tributary status between 1831 and 1833 and then killed the *Alaafin* Oluewu in 1835/6, so that the capital city's remaining inhabitants fled south in 1836.[36] Atiba, the son of *Alaafin* Abiodun, won the support of Oyo's surviving senior chiefs and warriors and was acknowledged as Oluewu's successor. He

[34] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 245-260.
[35] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 32-49. Citing the following European explorers: Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London: John Murray, 1829), 53-56.
[36] Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 288-296.

established a new Oyo kingdom to the south at a placed called Ago Oja, which then became known as Oyo or New Oyo. Atiba also conferred high Oyo titles on two preeminent warlords: *Oluyole* of Ibadan became the *Bashorun*, and Kurunmi of Ijaye became the *Are-Ona-Kakamfo*. Oyo, Ibadan, and Ijaye then forged an alliance and soon began attracting further immigrants, founding powerful new states at Ibadan and Ijaye. The political and military alliance demonstrated its power when it defeated Ilorin at Oshogbo, decisively checking the Fulani's southern advance in 1838.[37]

"We Carry Gelede Idahomi": A Western Yoruba Response to Dahomean Invasions

As a consequence of these regional power shifts, Oyo lost its struggle with Dahomey for control of the Egbado region. Throughout the 1820s, Dahomey was preoccupied with its northern and western neighbors. Not until 1830 did it try to expand further into Egbado territory to the east. The Dahomey conquered Ijanna, an Egbado town and Oyo stronghold, in 1830.[38] Shortly thereafter, Dahomey carried out a number of military campaigns in the Egbado region, including at Ijanna, sending those inhabitants who escaped death and enslavement into flight. Abeokuta soon followed suite. The combined havoc that Dahomey and Abeokuta wreaked on Egbado communities sparked a chain of migration, resettlement, and warfare that profoundly affected Otta and fueled the emergence there of a Gelede masquerade known as Idahomi.[39] This masquerade

[37] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 38-48.
[38] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 226-230.
[39] For further discussion of Dahomey's and Abeokuta's attacks on Egbado territories, see Folayan, "Egbado to 1832," 26-33; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 276-277. For discussion of the Gelede Idahomi masquerade, see Margaret Thompson Drewal and Henry John Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978): 62-63; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 100.

flourished as a symbol of Egbado and Awori resistance to Dahomey and, perhaps more covertly, to Abeokuta.

Abeokuta's attacks on Egbado communities were inspired in part by the events surrounding the Owiwi War of 1832. The Owiwi War was fought between the Egba and a combined Ibadan-Ijebu army.[40] The Egbado town of Ijanna allied with Ijebu, while the Egbado towns of Ibara, Ishaga, and Ilewo supported the Egba. The war was fought to a standstill on the banks of the Owiwi River, where both parties ran out of munitions. The Egba, however, were able to obtain fresh supplies from Adele, a former *Oba* of Lagos, then in exile at Badagry. The town of Ishaga, moreover, helped the Egba intercept an Ijebu supply convoy. The *Ajana* of Otta offered to protect one of the Egba's flanks.[41] With the advantage of a fresh supply of munitions and support from Adele and the *Ajana*, the Egba routed the Ijebu. An Egba *oriki* commemorates this event:

> Excepting *Ajan*[*a*], of Otta,
> Excepting Adele, of Lagos,
> Abeokuta people befriend no one.[42]

As a result of this war, the Egba gained control of trade routes that opened an outlet for their slaves at Lagos.[43] Seeking to punish those Egbado settlements that had sided with Ibadan and Ijebu against the Egba in the conflict, Egba warriors then plundered several Egbado towns, including Ijanna.

Events following the Owiwi War had major repercussions for the population of Otta and the development of the town's masquerades. During 1833, the Egba began to attack many Egbado towns, turning their attention to Ilaro as well as Ijanna. Local

[40] Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 18-21.
[41] I have to make sense of the *Ajana* action, why Otta was attacked early and now decided to support the Egba.
[42] Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 20.
[43] Ibid.

dissidents in Ilaro were unhappy with their ruler, the *Olu*, because he allegedly imposed exorbitant fines and prolonged his term in office.[44] They consequently invited the Egba to intervene in Ilaro's affairs, with the aim of removing the *Olu* from office. However, when the Egba warriors arrived, they killed inhabitants of Ilaro indiscriminately and plundered the town. Most of the survivors fled to Ijanna, which the Egba then accused of collaborating with the Ijebu. At the time, the Egbado were still nominally vassals of the *Alaafin* of Oyo. For that reason, the Egba may have believed that Oyo's ally Ibadan sent a contingent to help the Ijebu. The Egba may have suspected that Ijanna supported the contingent.[45] Whatever the truth of the matter, the Egba attacked and destroyed the Egbado town of Ijanna, after which many Ijanna and Ilaro refugees sought refuge in Refurefu, another Egbado town.[46] Adele of Lagos, who had helped the Egba obtain munitions during the Owiwi War, later joined company with the Egba forces and attacked the Egbado town of Ilobi in 1836. The Ilobi people, whom some traditions claim originally created Gelede, had previously held off Egba raids. However, they gave way when faced with the combined attack, and Ilobi was sacked in 1839.[47] Many of the town's survivors fled to Okeodan.[48] Evidence suggests, however, that a significant number of the Egbado people who fled as refugees from Ilaro, Ijanna, and Ilobi also

[44] Ibid; Kola Folayan, "Egbado and Yoruba-Aja Power Politics," (M.A. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1965), 30-49.
[45] This comes on the heels of Oyo having lost control of the Egbado region just a few years prior to Dahomey.
[46] Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 19-21.
[47] ED 1146/6 NAA, J. Hinian Scott *Otta District Council Chieftaincy Committee Meetings: Minutes of the meeting held at Olota's Palace Otta on Wednesday the 10th of April*, 1935. Oloregan T. T. Dada, from the Minutes of the Meeting Held at *Olota*'s Palace, Otta on Wednesday the 10th of April, 1935. Egba Archives, Abeokuta, Nigeria
[48] Dada Agunwa, *The First Book on Otta: In Memory of King Aina and King Oyelusi Arolagbade*, trans. Gbamidele Ajayi (Otta: 1928), 70.

formed a new wave of immigrants to Otta, where they established their own quarter and soon introduced an important new masquerade, Gelede Idahomi.[49]

Before discussing the historical context in which this new Gelede arose, it is important to recall the precedent previously set between 1789 and 1830 by the Ijana ward. The Dahomey attack on Badagry ultimately led to the arrival of Gun warriors and the establishment of the Ijana ward under its head chief, the *Ajana*, who came to wield significant power with the aid of an Egungun masquerade. Similarly, consecutive Dahomean and Egba raids on Egbado areas caused inhabitants to flee to Otta and establish another new ward and masquerade.

The refugees to Otta who had fled the Dahomean and Egba raids settled in an area of the town that became known as the Oruba quarter. The precise date of its founding is unknown. However, it was populated in the 1830s, and by 1842 it was incorporated into Otta's political structure.[50] According to a contemporary informant, the name Oruba comes from the phrase *Eru Oba*, meaning "baggage of the king."[51] In this instance, the baggage refers to the sacrifices offered for the well-being of the community, a practice that was commonplace in both Egungun and Gelede masquerade worship and in Esu and Ogun orisha worship during this period. These sacrifices may have been placed in calabashes, an important trope in Awori traditions of origin and migration.[52] However, the missionary James White provides a slightly different yet seemingly plausible name for this quarter. He refers to Oruba as *ile oriba*, which he translates as "the bending of

[49] White, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*; Interview with Chief Wadudu Deinde, January 24, 2006, Oruba Ward, Otta.. Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 72-73; CSO 26/2 NAI, 20629, F. C. Royce. *Assessment Report of Otta District, Egba Division, Abeokuta Province*, 1927; Salako, *Ota*, 14, 63.
[50] Salako, *Ota*, 14, 63, 96. Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.
[51] Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.
[52] Deji Kosebinu, *Alani Oyede: The People's Monarch* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000), 1-5; Salako, *Ota*, 13; Kehinde Faluyi, "The Awori Factor in the History of Lagos," in *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, ed. Babatunde Agiri Ade Adefuye, Jide Osuntokun (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1987), 222-225.

the heads in token of submission." White claims that slaves belonging to the king of Otta inhabited this area.[53] My contemporary informant contends that slaves were no more prominent in Oruba than in any other quarter of Otta.[54] In fact, both stories may contain elements of truth. If the "baggage" refers to sacrifices, those killed may have been slaves, who were often sacrificed during communal crises, such as war, in the hope of ensuring a favorable outcome. Furthermore, refugees from the Dahomean and Egba wars had settled in the town to escape slavery. Whatever their origins, the people of this ward played an important role in Otta's subsequent resistance to Dahomean and Egba aggression, as well as in the history of the town's masquerade practices.[55]

During the late 1830s and early 1840s, tensions continued to mount between Otta and the Abeokuta. In addition, Dahomey revived military activity in the area. These conflicts culminated sources in the Otta-Abeokuta war of 1842, in which Dahomey also played a part. The origins of Gelede Idahomi at Otta stretch back to the Otta-Abeokuta War.

Historians disagree about the immediate causes of the war, however, much of the evidence points to two phenomena. The first is conflict over the control of trade routes passing through Otta, which linked the Egba and beyond to the port of Lagos. The second concerns kidnapping and enslavement, which probably became more frequent in the area with the breakdown of regional security. According to one source, the Ijana chiefs had become wealthy from their position as middlemen in the growing commerce in

[53] White, December 3rd, from Journal for quarter ending December 25, 1855.
[54] Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.
[55] In my attempts to acquire more information regarding whether slaves comprised a significant percentage of the population of the Oruba quarters, I learned that slaves often married into families or were incorporated into families. Interview with Ojugbele, Jauary 5, 2006. In addition, White mentions a case in which man sought to have a child with his slave because his wife was "unable to provide him with a child" in his own estimation.

slaves and other goods between the interior and the coast. Further efforts on their part to tighten control over trade provoked charges of kidnapping, enslavement, and price fixing from Egba traders trying to make their way to Lagos. Egba authorities claimed that the abuses of the Ijana chiefs made the journey to the coast unsafe.[56] From this perspective, the Owu war and the Otta-Abeokuta war had a similar catalyst—kidnapping and enslavement, except that the victims were Oyo traders in the former case and Egba ones in the latter.[57]

The Otta historian Dada Agunwa believes that a different spark ignited the war. He claims that when Adele, as *Oba* of Lagos between 1835 and 1837, sent messengers on an errand to Abeokuta, Otta people kidnapped the messengers and held them hostage, unbeknownst to the town's *Oba* Elewi. According to Agunwa, Adele informed Elewi that Lagos would attack his town unless the hostages were released, and Elewi replied that he would settle the matter. The king then sent for an Ifa priest and consulted the oracle. However, after performing the divination and receiving instructions to make sacrifices, the Otta people present cursed the Ifa priest and rejected the sacrifices, common tropes that signal impending disaster when recounted in historical narratives. Adele then conspired with the Egba to attack Otta. Agunwa argues that the kidnapping of

[56] NAA. *Otta Affairs: Brief History of Otta*. Abeokuta, 1933.

[57] The Otta historian Dada Agunwa claims that when Adele (the then Oba of Lagos) sent his messengers on an errand to Abeokuta, the Otta people—unbeknownst to the Oba Elewi, the king of Otta, kidnapped the messengers and held them hostage. The king Adele of Lagos informed the king Elewi of Otta that Lagos would attack Otta unless the hostages were released. Elewi replied that he would settle the matter. Elewi then sent for an Ifa priest and consulted Ifa. However, upon performing the divination and declaring the required sacrifices, those present cursed the Ifa priest and rejected the sacrifice. King Adele of Lagos later conspired with the Egba to attack Otta. Agunwa claims that the kidnapping and the rejection of Ifa's sacrifices were the catalyst for the war between the Egba and the people of Otta.

Adele's messengers and subsequent rejection of the sacrifices ordered by Ifa were the catalysts that started the war between the Egba and Otta.[58]

Still another historian, Babatunde Agiri, claims that the *Ajana*'s greed provoked the war. He argues that in 1841, the *Ajana*, head of the Ijana chiefs, overcharged Egba traders for safeguarding the trade routes through Otta. According to this version of the story, the Egba then sent an army led by Lumloye, the Otun chief of the Egba, to attack Otta, igniting in the Otta-Abeokuta war.[59]

Agunwa posits that prior to the onset of the war, some of the Otta people were kidnapping not only foreigners but also local inhabitants, which fueled dissension within the town and made it more vulnerable to attack. According to him, one of the inhabitants of the town kidnapped the child of a *Balogun* of Otta and sent it to Aguda.[60] The story also refers to kidnappings, greed, and Ifa, tropes that figure in the other accounts.[61] According to a tradition recounted by Agunwa, however, the kidnapper then betrayed Otta to the Egba. He went for a drink of palm wine and after becoming intoxicated revealed to the Egba how best to attack Otta.[62] The drinking of palm wine is a trope common in Yoruba oral traditions. Its appearance in this account should be considered as a moral reflection upon the past rather than as an event that actually occurred.

Regardless of whether the kidnapping of Egba traders, Lagos messengers, or Awori children sparked the war, most traditions agree that once the battle erupted Prince Kosoko of Lagos, whose mother was from Otta, called upon Ibadan to assist in the

---

[58] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*. 70.
[59] Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria," 17.
[60] Aguda refers to either a Brazilian or a Brazilian-owned plantation.
[61] Biobaku claims that the Ajana's greed, demanding a high price for friendship and the safe passage of Egba traders, caused the war. Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 27. Colonial records, which Biobaku likely consulted, support this idea. NAI. *Assessment Report of Otta District*; NAA. *Otta Affairs*; Abe. Prof. 4 NAI, D33. *Abeokuta Province: A Report on the Otta District, Egba Division*, 1936.
[62] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*. 71.

defense of the town against the Egba. With the help of its allies, Otta was able to hold off the Egba onslaught. According to the Yoruba missionary and historian Samuel Johnson, "[t]he Ottas were known to be an obstinate people, and in the defense of their homes every man amongst them was a hero!" The Egba fled the town, and Otta won the battle.[63] In Otta, this interpretation has emerged as the official history of the war; indeed, I believe that many popular oral traditions in the town about its valiant defense against the Egba and Dahomey refer to this battle.

A contemporary Otta historian, Salako, contends that Dahomey fought on the side of the Egba during the Egba-Otta War. According to his account, the Egba approached through the Ijana ward, while Dahomey approached through the Oruba ward. The Otta people devised a strategy for defending their town against these enemies. According to Salako, the adult men hid from the invading armies as they approached. When the Egba and Dahomean warriors arrived in Otta, they found the women of the town roaming around as if the men had abandoned the place. The invaders lustily approached the women. Abruptly, the women removed U-shaped picks (*ponpodo*) and ear-cleaning pins (*ikoti*) and used them to pluck out the eyes of their invaders. Almost simultaneously, the men of Otta, who some traditions claim were led by a warrior named Iganmode, appeared and used their cutlasses (*ele* in Awori dialect) to fight the surprised invading armies. In describing this event, Salako cites arguably the most popular verse of Otta's *oriki*, in which several common tropes appear—a warrior, enemies, and tools of warfare.

> *Iganmode*
> *Af' eleja,*
> *Afi' koti yoju Egba,*
> *Afi ponpodo yoju Ketu.*
>
> A bundle of soldiers

[63] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 255-256.

Who fight with a cutlass
Who use an ear-cleaning needle to remove the eyes of the Egba
Who use a U-shaped pin to remove the eyes of the Ketu.[64]

If this is interpreted literally as a military strategy, then a single warrior or a group of warriors from Otta targeted the eyes of their enemies. If taken more metaphorically, the reference to "removing the eyes" refers to the Otta people's attempt to counter the violence they experienced by inflicting violence of some kind on their enemies.

Despite the popularity of Salako's account, there are divergent stories regarding this battle. Agunwa claims that the Otta people used the pin and other instruments not as part of a deliberate plan, but as a result of happenstance. Agunwa makes no reference to the gender of those who defended the town. According to him, the Egba army took the Otta people by surprise. The only weapons the inhabitants of the town had to defend themselves were needle- and U-shaped pins and the ear-cleaning needle. Under the circumstances, the Otta people fought valiantly. From that moment on, the Egba began to refer to the Otta people as the children of Iganmode, "a bundle of soldiers" who fight with a needle and pin.[65]

Traditions recounted by several contemporary Otta chiefs perhaps not surprisingly support Salako's claim that the Otta people devised a deliberate strategy to protect their town. However, they emphasize the importance of an additional object introduced in a different part—of the town's *oriki* in interpreting the success of the battle. These lines, which appear in the final stanza, mention a mask, another tool of warfare, often acquired as a war trophy in the nineteenth century:

Otta, a platoon of soldiers, who use the cutlass to fight
Who use the iron bud (ear-cleaning needle) to remove the eyes of the Egba
Who use a two-edged sword to remove the eyes of the Ketu

[64] Salako, *Ota*, 64.
[65] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 72.

Who use the carved mask to remove the eyes of the Idahomi.[66]

According to these stories, when Dahomey approached the Oruba quarter, elders of the town called a council meeting with the intent of developing a strategy to defend it.[67] The elders consulted Ifa, as was customary during moments of crisis, and the oracle demanded that they make three sacrifices. The first involved an offering at a shrine known as *Oju Otuku*, near Iju, which was then part of or later became incorporated into the Oruba quarter. The second sacrifice was the "*Eru Oba*," or slave of the king mentioned above.[68] In this case, the king's slave carried sacrifices on behalf of the king to a junction in the town, possibly the site of the *Oju Otuku* shrine. The slave was then buried alive or killed and buried along with the sacrificial objects, providing sacred blood believed to be necessary for success in battle.[69] The terms *Eru Oba* ("the king's slave/load") and *Ile Oriba* ("bending the head in submission"), from which the name of the Oruba quarter may derive, probably to refer to this second sacrifice.[70] According to contemporary informants, Ifa also prescribed that a mask be carved to resemble the Dahomeans, as part of a third sacrifice. This mask became known as Gelede Idahomi. Traditions recount that it was used to alert the Otta people as the Dahomean army approached, to remove the eyes of the enemy, and to terrify them because its appearance was so grotesque.[71]

While contemporary inhabitants of Otta identified the Gelede Idahomi figure with

---

[66] This *oriki* is written on a plaque hanging in palace of the present *Olota*, Oyede III.
[67] Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.
[68] Babalola and Alaba, *A Dictionary of Yoruba Personal Names*, 320.
[69] As Peel reminds us, the sacrifice of human beings has and continues to be regarded as the most powerful form of sacrifice to the orisha. Peel, *Religious Encounter*. J. A. Adefila and S. M. Opeola, "Supernatural and Herbal Weapons in 19th Century Yoruba Warfare," in *War and peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, ed. I. A. Akinjogbin (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1998), 221.
[70] Babalola defines the term as "the father's head." Father in this instance refers to the king, the Father, or Baba, of the community. Babalola and Alaba, *A Dictionary of Yoruba Personal Names*, 613.
[71] Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.

Otta's defense against a Dahomean invasion, it is also possible that the Idahomi associated with the Dahomean invasions first surfaced, or simultaneously surfaced, within the Egungun masquerade tradition during that period.[72] This conjecture arises because an Egungun named Idahomi appears today in Otta's Egungun festival, as I observed in 2005 (see Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7. A contemporary image of Egungun Idahomi appears on the wall of an Egungun Shrine, Ijana Ward, Otta. Photograph by author, May 4, 2005.

Figure 8. Egungun Idahomi during the 2005 Egungun festival, Okede Square, Otta. Photograph by author, May 3, 2005.

[72] Ibid.

The behavior and appearance of Egungun Idahomi today reportedly parallels the behavior and appearance of the modern Gelede Idahomi, suggesting that the figures share similar origins. According to a senior Gelede chief, this figure has been banned at Gelede masquerades in Otta for some time because of its troublesome behavior (see Figure 4).[73]

The physical appearance of the Gelede Idahomi then and now contains elements suggesting its role in battle. The Gelede Idahomi mask was carved to look like a Dahomean warrior. However, scars and boils are carved and painted on the face of the mask and over the body of the masker. Contemporary Gelede Idahomi and Egungun Idahomi masks from Otta, Abeokuta, Ilaro, and Iganna often have amulets on top of the headpiece of the mask (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Gelede Idahomi. Photograph provided by S. A. Olaniyan, Oruba ward, Otta, March 12, 2006.

[73] Interview with Salawu Abioru Olaniyan, March 12, 2006, Oruba Ward, Otta.

Figure 10. A contemporary Gelede Idahomi mask, in possession of Chief S. A. Olaniyan, the Olori Gelede, Oruba Ward, Otta. Photograph by author, June 13, 2006.

The presence of scars, boils, and amulets reminded audiences visually of ritual items and practices linked to warfare.

Contemporary chiefs claim that Gelede Idahomi removed the eyes of Otta's enemies. There was in the past a charm or *juju* called *Ogun ifoju* ("medicine that removes the eyes") that was believed to extract the eyes of enemies. A wooden image of an adversary was carved, such as the Gelede Idahomi mask. Incantations that included praise-songs or *oriki* were recited over it and the eyes of the image were pierced. At that moment or shortly thereafter, the eyes of the actual enemy were believed to go blind. The *Ogun ifoju* was generally used at war camps.[74] However, during the Egba-Otta war, this charm may have been used in Otta as the Dahomean army approached.

[74] O. Olutoye and J. A. Olapade, "Implements and Tactics of War Among the Yoruba," in *War and peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, ed. I. A. Akinjogbin (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998), 209.

I believe that the scars and boils carved on the mask were incorporated into it to have a similar effect. The aim was for the scars and boils on the mask to afflict the adversary via the same process as that which occurred during of the *Ogun ifoju*. The approaching Dahomean army would have been familiar with such medicines and would have felt alarmed. It probably also felt the need to bring its own juju.[75] The mask was an effigy of the Dahomean combatant that reflected the Otta people's attempt ritualistically to channel the spirit of the Dahomean soldier into the mask, and, thereafter, to inflict harm upon the mask and ultimately upon the spirit and body of the soldier. The mask reflected the workings of a people, the inhabitants of Otta, who were renowned for their medicine and witchcraft.

Salako's account of the war relates that the Dahomeans were attacked and defeated in the Oruba quarter, while the Egba suffered the same fate in the Ijana quarter. The people of Otta even sing a song to commemorate their victory over the Egba:

> The Egba are running away
> Wait for me, let me put on my trousers
> The Egba are running away.[76]

However, as all but the contemporary accounts make clear, Otta's success was short-lived. The Egba soon returned with reinforcements and, according to Johnson, inflicted severe retribution on the Otta people. Ado, Ibadan, and Prince Kosoko of Lagos offered to help the town. The Egba responded by attacking caravans that supplied the Ibadan troops, as well as by quickly surrounding the town before its allies could arrive. The Otta people kept the Egba army at bay temporarily. However, the Egba warriors nearly starved their Otta counterparts, who had no access to provisions, before staging a final

[75] Edna G. Bay, *Asen, Ancestors, and Vodun: Tracing Change in African Art* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
[76] Interview with Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005.

attack, during which they razed the town's walls and nearly destroyed it.[77]

Three factors converged at Otta to produce the emergence of Gelede Idahomi there. For the Egbado refugees who had settled in the Oruba ward, the Dahomey attack marked an opportunity to unite with the other wards in an effort to end nearly the decade of extreme violence. For the Gelede devotees among them, the creation of the new Idahomi mask represented an attempt finally to defeat their enemies, solidify their place within the town, and to establish Gelede as a budding masquerade tradition within their community. Moreover, for the men and women who defended the town, the place of Gelede Idahomi amidst other elements of town resistance highlights the gendered politics of both warfare and the town's identity. This episode reflects one of the many ways that men and women worked together to defend their communities. It surely reinforced, and may have helped give birth to, Otta's reputation as a community inhabited by powerful women. Whereas women were not expected to fight in battle, this episode shows how the women of Otta departed from the norm of women's behavior and asserted themselves in war, generally the domain of men. Finally, in the sectional political conflicts that pitted the Ijana people against the Otun and Osi people, the mask's emergence fostered solidarity against common enemies.

I believe that, given the absence of evidence to support an actual Dahomey invasion of Otta prior to or during the infamous Otta-Abeokuta War, the emergence of traditions linking the Gelede Idahomi masquerade to a Dahomean invasion of Otta may reflect the convergence of Egbado, initially, and later a shared Egbado-Awori experience of Dahomean invasion. After the Egba established themselves as the predominant power in the Egbado-Awori region, it is likely that they too would have supported the creation

[77] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 255-256; Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 27.

of a Gelede mask made to attack and ridicule Dahomey. Such a hypothesis would explain the prominence of this mask in Egbado and Awori areas from the middle of the nineteenth century until today and the absence of popular traditions regarding an equivalent Gelede Egba mask. Taking this hypothesis even further, I believe that the emergence of this mask not only unified the Egbado and Awori people against the Dahomey, but also against the Egba, who were thought to have aided Dahomey in its attack on Otta. Yet, the mask likely gained widespread acceptance among the Egba as well, after their friendship with Dahomey ended in the mid-1840s.

Egungun and Gelede

The use of the Gelede in warfare resonates with the behavior of both warrior and medicine Egungun. There is one major difference between the warrior Egungun and the medicine Egungun. Powerful warriors carry warrior Egungun, adorned with charms, into battle to give them extraordinary powers such as invisibility, imperviousness to bullets, and the ability to inflict disease upon the enemy. Conversely, powerful medicine men carry medicine or ritual Egungun adorned with powerful medicines (which tend to come from the same source as the charms of warrior Egungun), to help them manipulate weather patterns, eradicate disease or perform witchcraft for the wellbeing of the town.[78] The use of the Gelede Idahomi in this case seems more akin to practices and functions of the warrior Egungun.

The importance here lies in the Otta rulers' use of the Gelede Idahomi in a manner that has long been unique for Gelede. Scholars and practitioners alike almost exclusively refer to Gelede as an entertainment masquerade that uses humor and

[78] Interview with Prince Kunle Andrew, May 4, 2005, Otta.

sometimes ridicule in its treatment of foreigners, particularly Hausa and Europeans. Asiwaju and Lawal claim that the Efe performances, which are part of the Gelede tradition, provided a space for the Yoruba to protest against and ridicule the colonial government.[79] That is to say, Gelede has maintained a reputation as an entertainer (daytime Gelede) and, to a lesser degree, as a social critic (nighttime Efe). The literature is silent on the involvement of Gelede in violent conflicts such as battles. Yet in Otta, the Gelede Idahomi has departed from its role as entertainer and maintained a reputation for being a violent performer. As stated above, its performances have been recently discontinued for an indeterminate period of time as a result of its continued violent activities. In addition, Gelede Idahomi's violence reflects that which has long been common among warrior and medicine Egungun. This pattern of behavior or use of Egungun to ritualistically and physically purge afflictions from a community was rampant during the nineteenth century, a period of drastic social, political, and economic changes in which trauma and violence burst forth so readily of the nineteenth century.

There is evidence that Egungun was involved in warfare during the nineteenth century. Egungun appeared on the battlefront of the Ibadan army to both entertain the troops and ritualistically prepare them for warfare by imbuing them with charms and medicines aimed at making them invincible. The Egungun recited the *oriki* of great warriors past and present and invited the hearers to imagine themselves as being invincible to their enemies' attack.[80] It is said that the experience of hearing one's *oriki*, in the context of having just undergone rituals and acquired charms to make one immune

[79] A. I. Asiwaju, "Gelede Songs as Sources of Western Yoruba History," in *Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama*, ed. Wande Abimbola (Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975), 200-204.
[80] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," Chapter 4; Bolanle Awe, "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oriki," *Africa* 44, no. 4 (1974): 347.

to enemy attacks, makes the warrior believe and fight as if he is invincible.[81] Egungun were also often captured during battle and confiscated by the victor, who returned home with the Egungun of his enemies as a war trophy. The victor would even introduce his newly acquired Egungun as an illustration and extension of his military and spiritual supremacy, which of course are intertwined.[82]

The use of the Gelede Idahomi in a violent conflict challenges the conventional view of the norms for Gelede. Academic discussions of the relationship between Gelede and Egungun tend to focus on their functional differences. On one hand, there is Gelede representing the nonviolent approach to social conflicts. On the other is Egungun representing individual rivalry and the violent approach to social conflicts. I believe that this Gelede-Egungun dichotomy overlooks the diversity of types and behaviors expressed by the variety of masquerades within each tradition, Gelede and Egungun alike.[83] There are many Egungun that women may view and other Egungun that women and non-cult members must not view, under threat of violence or even death. The point here is that there are many different types of Egungun, distinguished by function.

[81] Adeagbo Akinjogbin, ed., *War and peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998).
[82] Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 204.
[83] Drewal and Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other," 34-35.

Chapter Four

The Warlord, the Prince, and Masquerading Politics: Reconstituting Community in the Face of Continuing Threats from Abeokuta and Dahomey, 1848–1859

This chapter examines the role of masquerades in reestablishing the political hierarchy and the role of senior political officials in the Otta community and government in the aftermath of the Otta-Abeokuta War of 1842. As part of the conditions for resettlement, Otta was obliged to submit to the authority of Abeokuta and was not permitted to reestablish its military or rebuild it protective walls.[1] The need for law and order within the community offered opportunities for masquerades to play a critical role in resettlement. Between 1848 and 1859, various constellations of high-ranking political actors emerged at the center of political struggles among the Otta people, each group seeking to establish its own vision of order. Analysis of four specific episodes suggests that masquerades represented the vision not of one person, but of a coalition of actors or people. These events also reveal how individual actors, namely the ward chiefs and the monarchy, influenced and were influenced by the activities of the masquerade performers and organizational leaders.

The first episode occurred around 1848, after the 1847 peace agreement permitted the people of Otta, the losers in the Otta-Abeokuta war, to return to their town and reestablish their government, now headed by the *Ajana*, the head of the Ijana ward and

[1] S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 27.

the highest-ranking ward chief, and supervised by Abeokuta's rulers.[2] The *Ajana* had already emerged as a leading political figure at Otta in the period before the war; he was, according to some sources, the catalyst for the war.[3] In the post-war era he imposed his rule with an iron fist, aided by the Egungun masquerade Gbodogbodo, which carried out his will with acts of violence.[4] Otta's supervisors from Abeokuta sought to further impose their authority and power within the *Ajana*'s regime by punishing several people from Otta. Either these same supervisors or other local chiefs attempted to restrict the *Ajana*'s powers by banning his Egungun Gbodogbodo. The *Ajana* responded by introducing another Egungun, known for entertaining visitors instead of threatening them with violence.

A second episode occurred in 1854 on the heels of another major attempt by the Egba chiefs of Abeokuta to check the Otta chiefs, the *Ajana* in particular. Rumors had circulated that the chiefs of Otta were planning to abolish the monarchy altogether and rule the town as an oligarchy. In response, the Egba backed the monarchy by supporting Prince Oyede's claim to the throne after they had held him captive at Abeokuta since 1842 and under the condition, it seems, that he would serve the Egba's interests. After Oyede's return, the people of Otta, with the support of the town's rulers, organized a Gelede festival to foster unity within a community that had increasingly become divided, and possibly to signal to Abeokuta that order and peace had returned to Otta. Shortly thereafter, the Otta chiefs backed a coup under the auspices of a secret society, marking a

[2] James White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*. Dada Agunwa, *The First Book on Otta: In Memory of King Aina and King Oyelusi Arolagbade*, trans. Gbamidele Ajayi (Otta: 1928), 72-73.
[3] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 70; NAA. *Otta Affairs: Brief History of Otta*. Abeokuta, 1933; Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 27. White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*.
[4] NAA. *Otta Affairs*; Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, January 5, 2006, Otta; Interview with Chief Wasiu Dada, the Ekiyo of Otta, May 10, 2006, Ijesu Compound, Ijana Ward, Otta.

third episode that occurred between 1857 and 1858. The members of this society comprised the chiefs and other prominent people in the town, and they regarded themselves as the devotees of a deity named Oloru. This society performed rituals at night that sometimes fulfilled the town's need for law enforcement by punishing criminals. In this instance, it targeted Oyede and his supporters. When the coup failed, the fourth episode began as Otta's ward chiefs and monarchy reconciled by supporting the introduction of a new Egungun to serve as a mechanism to check each other's power. Through an analysis of these episodes, I demonstrate how the ritual traditions of Egungun and Gelede operated alongside and interacted with other ritual-political traditions at Otta to shape political history, a process that scholars have by and large neglected. I also illustrate how Egungun and Gelede offered contrasting approaches to the factional conflicts that pervaded Otta during this era.

A Warlord's Ambitions: Egungun and the Politics of Repression, 1848–1853

After the Otta-Abeokuta War of 1842, the Egba warriors from Abeokuta killed, enslaved, or temporarily captured the people of Otta and took many of the survivors to Abeokuta, later releasing some and allowing them to return to Otta, beginning in 1847. The Egba chiefs at Abeokuta claimed dominion over Otta by right of conquest, and they placed it under the administration of a group of Egba chiefs residing in the Igbein ward of Abeokuta.[5] Olukori, the king or *Olota* of Otta, died either during the siege or in captivity

[5] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 72-73; Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 27. One source, labeled Otta Affairs in the Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan, claims that a figure named Sorunke, a leading Egba chief holding the title of Jaguna of the Igbein ward at Abeokuta, oversaw Otta. Sorunke's name does not appear in James White's correspondance from Otta, which begins in 1854 and ends in 1879. White does, however, identify an Egba chief named Ogunla as the resident representative at Otta. It is plausible that Ogunla was Sorunke's local representative at Otta. White later documented Igbein's continued authority

at Abeokuta, leaving behind his son, Prince Oyede, as heir to the kingship.[6] While in captivity, Oyede somehow sent word to the *Oba* Kosoko of Lagos, whose mother was from Otta, that he had been captured; he pleaded with Kosoko to negotiate peace between Otta and Abeokuta, which included allowing the Otta people to return to and rebuild the town. Kosoko agreed, petitioning the rulers of Abeokuta on his kinfolk's behalf. Abeokuta's officials responded by demanding that Kosoko pay a substantial sum before sanctioning the resettlement of the town in 1847.[7] Following the war of 1842, Otta's existence was characterized by its efforts to resist Abeokuta's hegemony.

Without a military or a king, Otta's leadership turned over power to the *Ajana*, its leading ward chief and enforcer of law and order.[8] As the highest-ranking political figure in the town, the *Ajana* was poised to assume what must have been unprecedented power for a chief in the town. That power, however, was undoubtedly constrained by the fact that the Egba chiefs of Abeokuta sent one of their number to Otta to live in the Ajana's ward. While this Egba chief in residence did not rule directly, records from the period make it clear that he oversaw the workings of the town. On the one hand, the *Ajana* may have perceived the installation of a foreign official in his ward as a serious check on his own authority. Conversely, the Egba chief's presence may actually have furthered his ward's status as the seat of power in this period. It also offered him the opportunity to

---

over Otta in James White, *from Journal ending March 25, 1868*; ———, *from Journal ending March 25, 1869*.

[6] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*; NAA. *Otta Affairs*. Agunwa claims it was Elewi, not Olukori, who died during the war. Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 72. Kosebinu and Salako contend that Olukori died in 1853. Deji Kosebinu, *Alani Oyede: The People's Monarch* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000); R. A. Salako, *Ota: Biography of the Foremost Awori Town* (Ota: Penink Publicity and Company, 2000), 64-65.

[7] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*. Dada Agunwa, *The First Book on Otta: In Memory of King Aina and King Oyelusi Arolagbade*, trans. Gbamidele Ajayi (Otta: 1928). "Historical Events, Otta District Court," (St. James Church, Otta, Ogun State, Nigeria, 1962).

[8] NAA. *Otta Affairs*.

build upon the reputation that he had formerly established as a loyal friend of Abeokuta by aiding it in the Owiwi War of 1832.[9]

However, the conditions of resettlement posed significant challenges to the *Ajana*'s ability to fulfill his primary roles of protecting and policing the town. One condition required that Otta's military be banned from protecting the town and only allowed to operate at the Egba's request. This condition robbed the Ijana ward, headed by the *Ajana*, of its most critical resource: its warriors and their function as the defenders of the town. Such a circumstance left the town perpetually vulnerable to attack in an environment of recurring warfare. Abeokuta and Dahomey, the warrior states most responsible for destabilizing the Egbado and Awori communities (Otta being predominantly one of the latter), repeatedly threatened Otta. From the 1840s to the 1860s, these states conducted raids in the Otta vicinity, causing Otta's inhabitants to repeatedly flee their undefended homeland.[10]

In order to create some semblance of order in these conditions, the *Ajana* struggled to garner enough resources to attract and maintain followers and to protect himself from rivals; simultaneously, he had to share enough resources with his peers to lessen their motivation for attacking him. Sources conflict on the place of the *Ajana* in

---

[9] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 27; ED 309 NAA. *Otta District Council Meetings: Minutes of Proceedings of Meetings of the Otta District Council*. Abeokuta, 1952.

[10] White daily documented of the impact of the Dahomey threat on the populace of Otta: James White, *March 3, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*; ———, *March 23, from Journal ending March 25, 1863*; ———, *Letter, May 4, 1863*. White also offers insightful observations of the reoccurring threat and reality of Egba attacks on Otta: ———, *June 7, from Journal ending June 25, 1855*; ———, *November 8, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*; ———, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*; ———, *Annual letter to Hector Straith, January 1, 1857*; ———, *January 27-30, from Journal ending March 25, 1858*; ———, *August 10, from Journal ending September 25, 1859*; ———, *December 16, from Journal ending March 25, 1862*; ———, *September 28, from Journal ending March 25, 1863*; ———, *October 23, from Journal ending March 25, 1863*; ———, *October 28, from Journal ending March 25, 1863*; ———, *March 25, from Journal ending March 25, 1863*; White, *Letter, May 4, 1863*; James White, *from Journal ending September 25, 1865*; ———, *January 9, from Report ending March 25, 1866*; ———, *from Journal ending September 25, 1867*; ———, *March 27, from Journal ending September 25, 1872*.

Otta's politics during this era, and it is worth pausing for a moment to probe the possible reasons for this discrepancy. There are several bodies of sources that discuss the era of the *Ajana's* reign: nineteenth-century missionary records, British colonial government documents, local history texts written by natives during the colonial period and during the twenty-first century, and oral traditions.

The missionary James White arrived at Otta just after the *Ajana*'s reign had ended and the monarchy had been restored. His perspective was shaped by one of his converts, Abraham Ajaka, a relative of the monarch, who frequently informed White about the origins of the conflicts he observed, and in doing so Ajaka drew on memories of prior events. In discussing the state of political affairs during the *Ajana's* reign, White virtually omitted the *Ajana*. He only referred to Otta's leaders as the "chiefs selected from the four divisions [or wards] of the town."[11] This type of commentary supports the idea that all the chiefs were equally complicit in the instability of the time. It also presents them as faceless and indistinguishable. Of course White had just arrived in the town in 1854, and he may have been overwhelmed by the volatile political climate he entered and by the demands of missionary work.

Yet archival documents from the Egba Archives characterize the *Ajana* of this era as having ruled with an iron fist.[12] Moreover, the archives associate this ruler with extreme violence. British colonial officials writing between the 1920s and the 1940s offer a different perspective on the *Ajana*'s reign. These officials presented narratives told to them by informants from Abeokuta and Otta who were born in the middle to late-nineteenth century. They characterized the *Ajana*'s reign as a time of lawlessness and

[11] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*; ———, *January 27-30, from Journal ending March 25, 1858*.
[12] NAA. *Otta Affairs*.

violence, for which the *Ajana* was responsible.[13] It is unclear the extent to which the distance from the moment as well as the events that followed the *Ajana*'s reign may have influenced the local people's perspective. It is also uncertain to what extent the events that occurred between the 1850s and the 1940s may have elevated the status of the Ajana and interests in his role in Otta's history. The role of the *Ajana* in the aid Otta provided during Egba military campaigns, such as the Owiwi War discussed above, and the historical role of this office holder in representing the interests of Otta to foreign powers. may have made him a more important figure from the Egba's perspective. After all, the British placed Otta under the authority of the Egba of Abeokuta during the colonial period. Egba sources as a whole, which include the histories of Abeokuta, and the British colonial sources depict the *Ajana* as the villain.

Otta historians, writing during the colonial and post-colonial periods and narrating oral histories, offer a different perspective than the missionary and the British colonial sources.[14] These historians have been less critical of the *Ajana*. Writing from the 1920s to 1940s, Dada Agunwa identifies the *Ajana* only as having aided the Egba during the Owiwi War and then no longer mentions him even as he goes on to address a number of important issues in Otta's history. He ultimately praises the British for intervening in Otta's affairs.[15] Twenty-first century historians, such as Deji Kosebinu, R. A. Salako, and Wasiu Dada, in both written and oral texts, seem far more hesitant to discuss the details of the *Ajana*'s reign along with other turbulent episodes that occurred in the nineteenth

[13] Ibid.
[14] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*; Salako, *Ota*.
[15] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 70.

century. They do, however, identify the *Ajana* as having been "troublesome" and needing restrictions. Yet they stop short of making him a scapegoat.[16]

Taken as a whole, these sources provide evidence for the history of nineteenth century Otta that I present here. They offer a series of vignettes from which to reconstruct the relationship between the *Ajana* and Egungun in particular and the period of 1848 to 1859 in general. Any evaluation of the *Ajana* must consider the extent to which the terms of resettlement may have hampered his ability to maintain stability in the town. The evidence suggests that at least initially, he likely had the support of the Egba chiefs.[17] In fact, an Egba faction may even have felt some loyalty to the *Ajana* because the holder of that office in the early 1830s aided the Egba in winning the Owiwi War of 1832.[18] The following Egba song, commemorating the *Ajana*'s contribution to the victory, has survived long beyond that moment and despite recurring conflicts between the people of Otta and the Egba of Abeokuta.

> Excepting Ajan[a], of Otta,
> Excepting Adele, of Lagos,
> Abeokuta people befriend no one.[19]

Either the same or another contingent among the Egba may have felt that the *Ajana*, having become Otta's premier warrior and chief second only to the king of Otta, was best equipped to impose order and promote Egba interests. Regardless of the motivation for failing to stop the *Ajana* from acting as the Regent at the moment of

---

[16] Kosebinu, *Alani Oyede: The People's Monarch*; Salako, *Ota*, 14, 63-65, 90; Interview with the Ekiyo of Otta, May 10, 2006.
[17] The relationship between the *Ajana* and the Egba officials was complex. They likely supported his position as the Regent of Otta in the interim period. If not, they probably would have held him captive at Abeokuta as they had done in the case of Oyede, the heir to the throne. White says that the Ijana ward, which was also the residence of the Egba overseers of Otta, allied with the Abeokuta.
[18] Dada Agunwa recalls that the Egba asked for and received Otta's support in the Owiwi War of 1832 and in the Aibo War of 1856, discussed later. Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 70.S. O. Biobaku recorded the song. Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 20.
[19] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 70; Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 20-21.

resettlement, what we must consider are the resources that the *Ajana* was in a position to harness in the face of the challenges imposed by the conditions of resettlement.

I contend that Egungun provided a resource particularly useful to the *Ajana* in his quest to secure the town, establish order, and pursue his personal ambitions. An analysis of the interactions between the *Ajana* and two Egungun masquerades during political conflicts that erupted in this period illustrates how the Egungun interacted with powerful political figures to shape Otta's history.

As noted in the previous chapter, Gbodogbodo, a warrior Egungun involved in warfare and law enforcement, came to prominence during a time when Otta was struggling to adapt to external and internal threats, i.e. Dahomey's military raids from the west and struggles within the town itself over law enforcement. The Egungun was poised to assert an even greater power and authority than it had in the previous era.

The *Ajana* likely found his Egungun particularly helpful as he ruled Otta under the conditions of the peace agreement mentioned above. Anthropologist J. D. Y. Peel's description of Egungun speaks to qualities of them that likely made the masquerade desirable for the *Ajana*. According to Peel, Egungun were "a more personalized form of ancestral cult whose form encouraged individual self-promotion and often rowdy rivalry between groups of supporters. It was presumably this potential which made it necessary for Egungun to be headed by a senior chief or high-profile elder . . . Egungun sometimes adopted a style of provocative confrontation." Peel adds that its role was to "expose the living to the power of the dead and so to underwrite the community." Missionaries often referred to Egungun as "'a thing which the Yorubas take to govern their town.'"[20] Peel's

[20] J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 53, 57-58.

commentary suggests that Egungun could easily be co-opted by a single individual seeking to expand his authority. To mobilize an Egungun, little bureaucracy had to be engaged. The *Ajana* benefited form this Egungun's activities because Gbodogbodo was already responsible for punishing criminals.[21]

Tradition holds that in 1848, the Gbodogbodo became so dominant and abusive that it was banned and exiled to the nearby town of Iyesi, the hometown of the *Ajana*'s mother.[22] The circumstances of the banning are unclear. The *Ajana* may have called Gbodogbodo out too frequently on behalf of himself or others; or the other ward chiefs or a rival Egungun may have campaigned to remove Gbodogbodo from the town, in an effort to promote their own Egungun. It is also possible that those lacking an Egungun to rival Gbodogbodo may have felt that the masquerade was too much of a threat and therefore needed to be banned. Despite ambiguity about the details, the available evidence suggests that the Egba were most likely behind Gbodogbodo's removal.[23]

Following Gbodogbodo's departure from Otta, the *Ajana* introduced a new Egungun. The *Ajana*'s second son had had trouble fathering a child. The young man consulted Ifa, which directed him to create an Egungun masquerade. The *Ajana*'s son followed Ifa's directive and inaugurated a new Egungun around 1848.[24] This new Egungun became known as *Ajofoyinbo*, meaning "we dance for the white man or westerner," perhaps because missionaries began to frequent the town during the *Ajana's* reign as the Regent.[25] In essence, the *Ajana* switched from promoting an Egungun that

[21] Interview with A. Ojugbele; Interview with the Ekiyo of Otta.
[22] Interview with the Ekiyo of Otta.
[23] NAA. *Otta Affairs*.
[24] Interview with the Ekiyo of Otta.
[25] Ibid; Adeboye Babalola and Olugboyega Alaba, *A Dictionary of Yoruba Personal Names* (Lagos: West African Book Publishers Limited, 2003), 112.

expressed aggression toward outsiders and local people to supporting one that demonstrated hospitality toward both. The *Ajana* may have interpreted the banning of his Egungun as a warning, and therefore seized the opportunity, through promoting another Egungun, to appease the new foreign power, which at Otta appears to have been the British at this time. These newcomers are said to have influenced not only Abeokuta's peace agreement with Otta but also Abeokuta's treaty with the nearby Awori town of Ado that prevented Abeokuta destroying Ado.[26] Furthermore, entertaining Egungun mimicked and honored Europeans, a practice that the explorer Hugh Clapperton documented in the late 1820s near Oyo.[27]

Recalling that the British based at Badagry had helped negotiate treaties between Ado and Abeokuta (1843) and between Otta and Abeokuta (1847), and considering that the *Ajana* must have been well aware of their power, we may presume that in promoting Ajofoyinbo, his Egungun that performed for the British, the *Ajana* was appealing to them to intervene in the Otta-Abeokuta relationship and prevent the Egba from imposing their authority at Otta. William Morgan and James White, the first two missionaries to serve at Otta, indicated that the chiefs of Otta had requested that the Church Missionary Society establish a mission in the town. On one occasion, White even says that he believed the chiefs wanted the British to protect the town from the Egba.

Between 1847 and 1854, the Egba chiefs at Igbein took steps to assert the authority of their own shrines and priests over Otta's leaders and people. For example, officials from Igbein beheaded an Otta man named Aina Opa at an Igbein shrine in

---

[26] A missionary named Henry Townsend approached the Egba and helped negotiate a peace treaty between Abeokuta and Ado. ED 1146/6 NAA, J. Hinian Scott *Otta District Council Chieftaincy Committee Meetings: Minutes of the meeting held at Olota's Palace Otta on Wednesday the 10th of April*, 1935.
[27] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London: John Murray, 1829), 53-56.

Abeokuta.[28] Both the Egba chiefs' subordination of Prince Oyede and their efforts to promote the authority of their shrines and priests in Otta suggests that they were trying to assert political and ritual control over the town's leadership in the aftermath of the Abeokuta-Otta war, which in time influenced local masquerade practices.

The Return of the Prince: Gelede and the Politics of Appeasement, 1854

While the *Ajana* struggled to maintain his authority, Prince Oyede, the heir to the throne and a survivor of the war, remained in captivity at Abeokuta until 1854, seven years after the resettlement of Otta.[29] Several factors appear to have stalled his return. According to White, who began his tenure at Otta within of year of Oyede's return, the prince did not have the money to perform the ceremonies required for his coronation. Following the death of his father, the property of the king and his successor, Oyede, had been stolen in their absence.[30] Lacking material resources and slave labor, as the Egba had confiscated Otta's slaves during the war, Oyede was unable immediately to procure his release.

Political factors also may have hindered the prince's ability to ascend quickly to the throne. While in exile, Oyede seriously discredited himself in the eyes of his subjects. After his capture, one of his companions had advised him to prostrate himself and roll on the ground in front of a shrine devoted to Abeokuta's Ogun, the town's orisha

[28] NAA. *Otta Affairs*.
[29] Ibid. According the Otta's history, as recounted by local historians and other residents of the town, Oyede became king in 1853 or 1854. They do not indicate that Oyede was helped captive or remained in exile from the end of the war until his ascension to the throne. "Historical Events, Otta District Court." Kosebinu, *Alani Oyede: The People's Monarch*, 50; Salako, *Ota*, 200.
[30] Oyede lived in exile for a total of twelve years, five between the war and the peace treaty, plus seven more between resettlement and his return to Otta. White, *January 27-30, from Journal ending March 25, 1858*.

of war.[31] To avoid execution, the prince was also reputed to have uttered the phrase "*Ori mi di ti Ogun Onigbeyin*" ("I give my head/swear my allegiance to Ogun Onigbeyin").[32] Agunwa, however, does not identify Oyede alone with these ignoble events; he says that the people of Otta had to swear an oath to Ogun as part of the terms of the peace agreement with Abeokuta.[33] Agunwa leaves open the possibility that Oyede was not responsible for the shameful oath of submission to Abeokuta's war deity. White reported hearing from one of Oyede's relatives that the chiefs had initially agreed to crown Oyede king. However, the missionary suggests that because the prince could not immediately assume the throne because he lacked the resources and because he spent a long time in exile leaving the chiefs to rule in his place, he lost favor with the chiefs and people of Otta. The chiefs soon rejected him and organized a coup.[34] In this context, the chiefs could have retrospectively condemned him for swearing the oath and looked for any opportunity to remove him from power. For, by committing such acts, Oyede (and the people of Otta for that matter) signed a political and spiritual contract to serve the interests of the keepers of the Onigbeyin Ogun shrine. In effect, he made a blood oath of loyalty to the Egba as his overlords. People throughout the region regarded such oaths as binding; they could not be broken without disastrous consequences for the individual, his family, and even his kingdom.[35] If this tradition is accurate, the incident must have been deeply humiliating and shameful not just to the prince himself, but also to the people of

[31] Ogun refers generally to the Yoruba god of war. But many townships or kingdoms in Yorubaland had its own Ogun. The Ogun in question, Ogun Onigbeyin, was under the control of Abeokuta.
[32] NAA. *Otta Affairs*.
[33] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 73.
[34] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*; ———, *January 27-30, from Journal ending March 25, 1858*.
[35] J. D. Y. Peel, "A Comparative Analysis of Ogun in Precolonial Yorubaland," in *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New*, ed. Sandra T. Barnes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

Otta. To violate an oath sworn on an Ogun shrine or in the presence of an Ogun priest was to ask for a death sentence.[36]

As it happened, Abeokuta aided Oyede in returning to Otta in 1854 with the intention of not simply restoring the monarchy, but also of limiting the power of the *Ajana*.[37] When Oyede finally returned to the town, with Egba approval, the prince found the *Ajana* well entrenched as Regent and plotting a coup against him.[38] Moreover, three of the chiefs, according to James White, had committed acts during Oyede's absence that made them state criminals.[39] Two of the chiefs had taken possession of some of the late king's wives, while a third had obtained the late king's crown and sold it. These acts were punishable by death under local law, which mandated that the property and wives of a deceased king passed to his successor. Having committed acts of high treason punishable by death, the three chiefs feared that Oyede would seek vengeance upon his ascension to the throne.[40] When Oyede returned, a series of events occurred over a five-year period leading up to his installation as king in 1859. These events illustrate how the town in general and its leadership in particular asserted themselves in a rapidly changing environment. An analysis of the events reveals that by backing Oyede the Egba at Abeokuta and the British at Lagos were attempting to exert greater control over Otta.

---

[36] Abe. Prof. 8/2 NAI, John Blair. *Intelligence Report on Abeokuta*, 1937; Jacob K. Olupona, *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society* (New York: Paragon House, 1991); Peel, "A comparative analysis of Ogun in precolonial Yorubaland."

[37] In Otta's political hierarchy, the king was supreme. The *Ajana* was second to the king. Thus, by assuming office, Oyede assumed a status higher than the *Ajana*.

[38] NAA. *Otta Affairs*.

[39] White does not name them and local traditions do not record them but it is more then like that these chiefs were the *Ajana* (the head of the Ijana ward), the Olukosi (the head of the Osi ward), and the Olukotun (the head of the Otun ward). The aforementioned chiefs were entrenched within Otta's political and economic life and therefore were in the best position to seize the property of the monarchy. The Akogun (head of the newly forming Oruba ward), converse, was a recent appointee and therefore he was in a lesser position vis-à-vis the other ward chiefs.

[40] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*.

On December 31, 1854, shortly after the return of Prince Oyede, a Gelede performance took place in Otta.[41] The masquerade occurred at a time when a number of crises threatened the town. The chiefs and quarters were divided internally, largely over the extent of their support for the *Ajana*. The chiefs were also at odds with Oyede, and they feared that he would retaliate for the crimes they had committed against the monarchy during his exile.[42] Finally, the chiefs and Oyede both confronted a third challenge. They were faced with governing a town far more diverse than it had been before the war.[43] Many refugees and other immigrants from Egbado and elsewhere had recently settled in the town, especially in its new Oruba ward. These immigrants needed to reconstitute community and the Otta chiefs to promote unity as they incorporated the newcomers into the town's political, social, and cultural life.[44] Gelede played an important part in both reconstructions.

In addition, the people of the town and the region needed to foster solidarity if they were to defend themselves against external threats, namely Dahomey's and Abeokuta's continuing kidnapping and warfare.[45] Dahomey and Abeokuta had been allies when they attacked Otta during the war of 1842; however, they became bitter rivals

---

[41] Ibid.
[42] White, January 27—30, from Journal ending March 25, 1858.
[43] Ogunla, a chief from the Ijana ward, tells White that the population of Otta was overwhelmingly comprised of strangers, bearing different customs and laws and, seemingly difficult for the indigenous inhabitants, who, he adds, number only 40, to control. White, *June 7, from Journal ending June 25, 1855*. Writing a few months later in that same year, based on a conversation he had with another individual, a convert, White says that the "population consists of fragments of the various shattered towns from the various tributaries to the chief town, Otta." ———, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*.
[44] Chief Wadudu Deinde, whose father was the secretary of the king who ruled Otta in the 1920s and therefore documented the history of the Oruba community, claims offers a vivid account of the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Oruba ward. Interview with Chief Wadudu Deinde, January 24, 2006, Oruba Ward, Otta. Salako provides brief references to the early history of the Oruba ward. Salako, *Ota*, 14, 64.
[45] Ogunla told White that as of 1855, the Egba had on seven occasions attacked and forced the people of Otta to flee their homes, taking many as war captives and allowing some only to return in the previous year, seemingly with Oyede. White, *June 7, from Journal ending June 25, 1855*.

in 1843 when Abeokuta attacked the Awori town of Ado, then under Dahomean authority.[46] The conflict between Dahomey and Abeokuta dragged on; in 1851 and 1864, Dahomey attacked Abeokuta. On both occasions, the Egba leaders of Abeokuta summoned men from Otta to join their armies in defending the Egba homeland, which they could do because Otta was a subject kingdom of Abeokuta.[47] Each time, the Egba defeated its enemy.[48] However, Otta's support of the Egba against Dahomey did not prevent men from Abeokuta from repeatedly raiding Otta's farms and disrupting the town's trade. Meanwhile, the king of Dahomey periodically threatened to attack Otta for fighting alongside Abeokuta against Dahomey. Repeatedly, attacks or rumors of attacks by Dahomey or Abeokuta sent the women and children of Otta fleeing to nearby towns. While some of Otta's inhabitants returned when tensions subsided, others settled permanently in neighboring communities, including Lagos, where the British had recently established a presence and were developing a reputation for interfering in Yoruba politics.[49]

In 1851, a dispute over the throne of Lagos between two claimants, named Kosoko and Akitoye, and their supporters provided an opportunity for the British to intervene in the politics of the coastal kingdom. During this dispute, Kosoko had found an ally in the king of Dahomey, both of whom had rejected anti-slave trade treaties with the British. Akitoye, on the other hand, who was of Egba descent on this mother's side,

---

[46] CSO NAI, 13, S2141/51, J. Hinfan Scott. *Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Olota's Palace*, 1935.
[47] The Egba also summoned able-bodied men from Otta to assist them in the Aibo war of 1856. Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 70.
[48] Ibid., 69-75; NAA. *Otta Affairs*; Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, June 24, 2008, Otun Ward, Otta; Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 186; Salako, *Ota*, 14, 64; Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.
[49] White, *June 7, from Journal ending June 25, 1855*; ———, *November 8, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*.

had a long-standing alliance with Abeokuta. Seeking an edge over his rival, Akitoye sought an alliance with the British. He appealed to British naval and consular representatives on the coast to remove Kosoko and reinstate him as the *Oba*, or king, in exchange for his support of their movement to abolish the slave trade and promote the spread of Christianity. The British agreed, bombarding Kosoko's forces at Lagos, driving him and his followers into exile, and allowing Akitoye to claim the throne.[50]

During the 1850s, Otta struggled to survive and maintain its autonomy appealing to the British for help as Akitoye had done. However, for a variety of reasons, mainly having to do with their ties to the Egba, the British did not intercede on Otta's behalf.[51] Thus, raids, wars, and internal instability continued to plague the people of Otta.

A further change compounded the challenges facing Otta's male chiefs and elders. A part of its project to abolish the external slave trade, Britain was promoting the development of a new foreign trade in palm produce. The growth of the new palm produce trade exacerbated tensions between men and women within households and throughout Otta, because of the opportunities it created for women. Palm production had traditionally been women's work, and women likewise dominated the palm produce trade. Initially, women benefited from the growth of the new trade more than men, who were slower to capitalize on the development of the new market.[52] Thus, at a time when

---

[50] Robert Smith, *The Lagos Consulate, 1851-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); ———, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[51] One man informs White of his frustration with White's predecessor for not offering food to the children the man and his neighbors sent to the mission school. The man's frustration reflects the community's expectation that they would derive immediate tangible benefits from the presence of the mission, an extension of British power based at Lagos. White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*.

[52] Francine Shields, "Palm Oil and Power: Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition in 19th century Yorubaland (South-western Nigeria)," (University of Stirling, 1997), 34-40; Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*.

Otta's male traders were suffering from a loss of revenue from the slave trade, many of the town's women were earning greater income than ever had before. Though men later entered palm production and trade the initial redistribution of wealth between men and women caused jealousy and greater conflict.[53] Meanwhile, Dahomey and Abeokuta periodically disrupted trade in Otta through their threats of attack.

In these uncertain times, the community of Otta looked to Gelede to resolve or lessen the impact of multiple crises. If nineteenth-century Gelede practice was similar to its twentieth-century incarnations, the masquerade provided an opportunity for participants to vaunt, satirize, or ridicule the behavior of anyone residing within the general vicinity of Otta. Even the inhabitants of Abeokuta or Dahomey were possible targets of Gelede.[54] Oyede, the heir apparent to the throne, and the chiefs, who had violated norms of behavior, were eligible objects of Gelede commentary. The tone of Gelede performance in the 1850s, however, appears to have been harmonious and celebratory. They afforded Otta's rulers an opportunity to generate communal goodwill and attract positive attention. An 1854 Gelede, in particular, offered them the opportunity to galvanize support for themselves and promote unity among contentious groups within the town, not only between immigrants and indigenous peoples, but also between men and women.

---

[53] Robin Law, "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations in Yorubaland and Dahomey," in *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce: the Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-century West Africa*, ed. Robin Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 109-110; Shields, "Palm Oil and Power," 198.

[54] We may recall from the previous chapter that western Yoruba peoples have created masquerades depicting Dahomean warriors in both the Gelede and Egungun contexts. See the Drewal's or Lawal for more discussion of Dahomean warriors, which are known as Idahomi in some Yoruba contexts. Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 63; Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 100.

Before discussing the 1854 Gelede in more detail, let us examine the nature of Gelede more generally during this era. Though very little evidence of the nineteenth-century masquerade tradition has surfaced, two written accounts of Gelede in that era come from the journal entries of James White.[55] In the first account, written in 1854 shortly after his arrival in Otta, the missionary describes in some detail the proceedings of a "great public amusement occurring within the town to which inhabitants of the adjacent towns and villages [were] invited." Although, he does not actually identify the spectacle as Gelede, in noting that it departed from the practices of "the Egun[gun]," he recognized it as such. In his second account, written in 1871, White described "a grand play in this town which may be called the Gelede exhibition—the principal amusement of the nation."[56] Given White's designation of the first event as an "amusement," his description of the masquerade's masks, costumes, and other adornments, and his discussion of the town's involvement in the celebration, it is clear that the 1854 event was also a Gelede.[57]

Taken together, these accounts indicate that the twentieth-century practice and performance of Gelede have much in common with those of the previous century. It is important to keep in mind that most of the twentieth-century research on the Gelede masquerade tradition has been ethnographic. Asiwaju, Drewal and Drewal, and Lawal have gone the furthest toward examining Gelede historically. Historian A. I. Asiwaju has pointed out that songs sung in particular locales during the colonial era serve as reflections of and commentaries upon local inhabitants' anger and resistances to elites in the colonial regime. His work is a reminder that Gelede performances responded to

[55] These events occurred in 1854 and 1871.
[56] James White, *January 13, from Journal ending March 25, 1871*.
[57] ———, *December 31, from Journal ending March 25, 1855*.

particular historical conditions.[58] Drewal and Drewal rely upon oral traditions to date the origins of Gelede in the late eighteenth century and to account for its nineteenth century spread shaped by regional history and politics.[59] Lawal's emphasis is on elucidating Gelede's cultural significance and aesthetic forms.[60] My approach is indebted to these scholars' historical awareness; however, lacking the actual songs and commentaries uttered during the 1854 Gelede festival, I must rely on a combination of White's accounts of the event, knowledge of twentieth-century Gelede performances (at Otta in particular), and other data about the historical context of the 1854 event when interpreting it.[61] I analyze this evidence in an attempt to link the challenges then facing Otta and the shape of the 1854 Gelede masquerade.

Twentieth-century research on Gelede describes it as an annual masquerade that marks seasonal changes, typically including observances or rituals involving fertility, both agricultural and human.[62] In this fertility rite, the feminine takes prominence. In the Yoruba language, "Gelede" translates as "soothing a woman's private parts."[63] In its attention to fertility, Gelede largely pays homage to and shows recognition of female power. As the translation of the name of the masquerade suggests, such power has always been viewed warily. One of the things Gelede has attempted to do is channel the

---

[58] A. I. Asiwaju, "Gelede Songs as Sources of Western Yoruba History," in *Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama*, ed. Wande Abimbola (Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975).
[59] Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 224-236.
[60] Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 46-49.
[61] I attended Gelede performances at Otta on August 6, 2004 and April 6 and 7, 2006.
[62] Henry John Drewal, "Efe: Voiced Power and Pagentry," *African Arts* 7, no. 2 (1974): 26; Babatunde Lawal, "New Light on Gelede," *African Arts* 11, no. 2 (1978): 67; Emmanuel D. Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," in *West African Masks and Cultural Systems*, ed. Sidney Kasfir (Tervuren: Musee royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1988), 45; Emmanuel Bamidele Bolaji, "The Dynamics and the Manifestations of Efe: The Satirical Poetry of the Yoruba Gelede Groups of Nigeria," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1984), Chapter 2.
[63] Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, xv; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 74-75.

female power of gestation and reproduction so that it operates peacefully instead of dangerously, sustaining life instead of taking it, healing instead of doing harm. Thus, among other things, Gelede both celebrates female power and seeks to placate or appease it.[64]

In a typical performance, Gelede performers don vividly carved and painted wooden masks or headdresses, generally products of local artistry. Attached to the mask headdress or waist of the wearer are silk and other cloths. Iron or brass anklets are worn on the feet, making a rattling sound when the performer moves. Together, the headdress, the cloths, and the anklets—which do not totally conceal the wearer—identify a mask as Gelede.[65] Modern Gelede performances are also marked by the appearance of masked figures who signify the main actors in the community, both human and spiritual, whose collaboration is necessary for its survival. The human actors typically include, for example, the elites who provide rule and leadership, the women who run the marketplace and sell their wares and produce, and the foreigners or outsiders who bring trade into the town. Gelede also includes masked figures representing less powerful people in the town, such as mothers, tradeswomen, electricians, porters, drunkards, and prostitutes.[66]

Contemporary Gelede performances reveal that the masquerade cultivates social cohesion by providing space for community members to playfully chastise one another without retribution, instead of allowing tensions to erupt into violence. The Gelede

---

[64] Ulli Beier, "Gelede Masks," *Odu: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies* 6 (1958): 6-10; Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 8-9; Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," 45-46; Benedict M. Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu-Yoruba Subgroup in West Africa* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1993); Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 74-75, 78-79, 81.
[65] Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 183-188.
[66] Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 152, 197-201; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 163, 174, 184-190.

aesthetic of play rejects open confrontation.[67] Like many public spectacles involving ritual performances, Gelede ultimately serves to foster unity and solidarity, and it specifically aims to resolve conflicts; through peaceful, playful means.[68] In a shared public space, maskers embodying all ranks of society engage each other through dance and song, commenting on the behavior of individuals or groups and addressing public issues. Gelede provides an open, fluid forum in which the lowly can comment upon their status vis-à-vis the more prominent and even chastise or challenge them, albeit in a playful, nonviolent way. In other words, while other masquerades (i.e. Egungun and Oloru) restore order and harmony through punitive methods involving violence, vengeance, and an overall authoritarian manner, Gelede achieves order through methods that lend to peaceful conciliation or appeasement, such as humor, satire, mimicry, and other indirect, gentle, or "soft" styles of conduct.[69]

Twentieth-century, western-trained observers of Gelede have also linked this masquerade's nonviolent approach to conflict. Gelede encourages community members, social deviants in particular, to regard each other as children of the same mother. The spirit at the center of Gelede's propitiation is known by various names: *Iya Nla* (the great mother), *Iyami* (my mother), and *Iya Osoronga* (the witch mother). In the ritualistic aspects of this masquerade, the inhabitants of the community collectively appeal to this spirit or principle of motherhood to rid them of the evils that plague them.[70] Compared to Egungun, Gelede allows more room for collective action.

---

[67] Scholars have highlighted how Gelede festivals used protest and satire to challenge colonial policies. Asiwaju, "Gelede Songs as Sources of Western Yoruba History," 203-204; Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 197-199; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 75-78.
[68] Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, Chapter 4.
[69] Peter Morton-Williams, "Yoruba Responses to the Fear of Death," *Africa* 30, no. 1 (1960).
[70] Beier, "Gelede Masks," 5-8; Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 7-16; Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While

Since, as I am asserting throughout this dissertation, masquerades have both molded and been molded by their historical contexts, I cannot make definitive assumptions about the meaning and function of nineteenth-century Gelede in the town of Otta. Nonetheless, twentieth century Gelede have been extensively studied, and to the extent that modern Gelede resemble accounts written by White, can make plausible inferences about Gelede's influence during an earlier period in Otta's history.

Based on the preceding discussion of modern Gelede performances, the case can be made that the Otta Gelede of 1854 provided a way of addressing and defusing social, political, and other tensions plaguing the town. As a public performance involving worship and entertainment, it offered the people of the town respite and an opportunity to comment on the world around them. As a masquerade geared toward appeasement, conciliation, and the recognition of diverse groups, some of which had limited power in ordinary circumstances (women, children, youth, immigrants), Gelede offered the opportunity to celebrate diversity and to channel it toward solidarity. Also, as the chiefs of the different wards participated in Gelede's festivities, they had the opportunity to harmonize; a spectacular Gelede performance had the potential to redirect the different powers and authorities competing within the town and channel them into a balance of power. Finally, as a masquerade tradition that is particularly festive and characterized by the spirit of cooperation, Gelede would have provided the means to revivify the flow of wealth throughout the town and the means for Otta to reposition itself favorably in the eyes of its neighbors.

Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," 45-46; Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama*, 28-42; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 71-74.

To move my argument from what the Gelede of Otta in 1855 *could* have done to what I am claiming it *did* do, we must turn to a report written by the missionary James White. Sent to Otta on December 13, 1854, White had lived in the town for little more than two weeks when he witnessed an elaborate Gelede performance on December 31.[71] Based on White's journal entries, this Gelede performance was a one-day event, although other Gelede performances sometimes lasted nearly a month.[72] White provides a lengthy and illuminating description of the festival, one that suggests that this Gelede was timely and spectacular in nature:

> The whole force of [Otta's] attention is directed to their public amusement to which the inhabitants of the adjacent towns and villages are invited. In these games, the most superstitious fineries are exhibited. To render the scene attracting and pleasing—they dressed the actors who appear with wooden masks in silk and, which they either borrow of their neighbors after paying a reasonable sum of money or purchased by a subscription of the whole town and which are solely devoted to the public use. Then the sculptors and painters display their skill in endeavoring to present to the public such, in their opinion, elaborate masterpieces of masks intended to delineate as nearly as possible the human features…[The following masked figures] "The woman with plaited hair,"[73] "the old man with white hair," and the "Mohammedan with his long beard and head-dress" …appear alternately in public and dance as mightily as possible in the center of a large circle formed by a crowd of spectators who join in the music and dances…From the neck to the feet, the actors are covered with a great quantity of clothes. [The Gelede performers] tie iron and brass rings about their legs, which tinkled as they danced along. [The] actor is concealed in his masks and clothes and [although they are punished] severely for not being dexterous enough to prevent disgrace by a fall, yet the people do not as in the case of the Egun[gun] impose on the credulous by identifying the actors with some deceased friends. Nevertheless speaking of the actors, the people say—"this stick is handsomely dressed"—"this stick knows how to dance well." While the game is performing, it is a subject of dispute among the spectators, which actors are more richly adorned and which mask is most excellently done and painted. Their industry at trade, and agriculture is not prompted so much for the sake of satisfying their wants as to be enabled to join in these games. The chiefs take a considerable part in them and not even are they ashamed to appear in public as actors. Any one who is not able to subscribe towards them does not take a part, but is held under disgrace and is even excluded from the society of his respectable companions.[74]

---

[71] White, *December 31, from Journal ending March 25, 1855*.
[72] The 1871 Gelede festival involved performances that spanned nearly a month. ———, *January 13, from Journal ending March 25, 1871*; James White, *January 15, from Journal ending March 25, 1871*; ———, *February 12, from Journal ending March 25, 1871*.
[73] Figures 1 and 2.
[74] White, *December 31, from Journal ending March 25, 1855*.

One of the first things to note is White's use of the habitual present tense, suggesting timelessness, rather than the past. His choice to do so is obvious: White was new to Otta and one of his duties as a missionary was to report his observations of the customs of the town and the manners of its people to his superiors, who were of another country and culture and interested in supplanting these traditions.[75] It is likely that this was not his first Gelede performance, although he neither confirms nor denies this. He may have witnessed Gelede masquerades in Sierra Leone, even those involving people originally from Otta. In the same entry, December 31, that he describes the Gelede at Otta, he recalls from his younger years that the Otta people who lived in Charlotte Village, Sierra Leone, where he was born, had the reputation of being particularly obstinate and strong in their commitment to honoring the *orisha*.[76] Thus, White presents the historically specific Gelede of 1854 in the tense that allows him to generalize this particular masquerade as indicative of a type; his goal was not to distinguish this Gelede from any other ones, per se, so much as it was to note the extent to which such elements easily identifiable with "paganism" captured the interest of the "heathen" populace. Since my argument holds that this very Gelede was historically particular and significant, White's choice of tense and overall representation of the performance as timeless makes the task of historicizing it all the more challenging.

---

[75] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 11, 18.

[76] White, December 31, from Journal ending March 25, 1855; White, October 16, from Journal ending December 25, 1855. Gelede, as nineteenth- and twentieth-century evidence presented by the following writers suggests, has long been a western Yoruba tradition and refugees from western Yoruba, along with White's own family, had settled in Sierra Leone. Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921), 31; Beier, "Gelede Masks," 5; Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 7; John W. Nunley, *Moving With the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 33; Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," 45; Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama*, 29; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 71.

Despites these problems, White's description of the event provides a number of clues as to its significance; when we consider this account in light of the conditions in the town, its importance becomes more apparent. First, this Gelede intended to foster unity as it galvanized the "whole town" with the "whole force" of attention. This Gelede also demanded that anyone who can contribute must, or else face ridicule and ostracism. It affirmed Otta's relationship with its immediate neighbors, the adjacent town and villages in attendance. The event was so important that White suggests that the Otta's economic and social life seemed to revolve around such spectacles. While this last detail may be a bit of an exaggeration, the point stands that the 1854 Gelede offered a common purpose and thus built community.

An analysis of a number of historical and contemporary sources suggests that the 1854 Gelede performance played a particularly important role in integrating the Egbado immigrants into the town of Otta. Taken together, White's journals, colonial documents, modern locally published histories, and contemporary oral evidence reveal that Egbado people from communities located west and northwest of Otta arrived in the town in significant numbers between the 1830s to the 1850s, settling in the Oruba ward.[77] Several sources claim that the Oruba ward has been the center of Gelede activity in the town, although other wards have embraced the masquerade as well.[78] One local tradition at Otta claims that the Egbado immigrants introduced Gelede and created the mask

[77] White, *June 7, from Journal ending June 25, 1855*; ———, *December 3, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*; Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 73; Salako, *Ota*, 14; Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, May 3, 2005, Otta; Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006; Interview with A. Ojugbele; Interview with A. Ojugbele; Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.

[78] Ojugbele, Deinde, and Olaniyan characterize the Oruba area as the center of Gelede in the town. Interview with A. Ojugbele, May 3, 2005; Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006; Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006; Interview with Salawu Abioru Olaniyan, March 12, 2006, Oruba Ward, Otta.

Gelede Idahomi to aid in the town's defense against Dahomey in 1842.[79] This tradition is consistent with the research of twentieth-century ethnographers, who conclude that Gelede originated as a Ketu tradition that spread among the Egbado, who in turn introduced the people of Otta to Gelede in the first half of the nineteenth century.[80] In addition, according to one chief whom White repeatedly engaged in dialogue, Otta had by 1855 become comprised primarily of "strangers," and these outsiders or people of non-Awori descent had customs and laws that differed from those of the indigenous inhabitants, the Awori people. The chief told White that these strangers were difficult to control without a king on the throne, which we may interpret to imply that they did not conform to Awori norms.[81] Gelede, a Ketu masquerade tradition repackaged as an Egbado practice, could easily have been interpreted as foreign. Given the longer history at Otta of Egungun as a masquerade tradition that encompassed similar ideas of performance, Gelede may easily have become a tradition embraced by the entire populace, which had become predominantly strangers—Oyo, Egun, and Egbado in particular.[82]

The *oriki* or praise name of Otta refers to the people of the town collectively as those who "used a Gelede mask to remove the eyes of the Dahomean warriors," commemorating an important episode in Otta's history discussed in the previous chapter.

---

[79] Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.
[80] Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 229, 231, 236; Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," 53-54; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 49.
[81] White, *June 7, from Journal ending June 25, 1855*.
[82] Keinde Faluyi claims that the flexibility of the Awori social system has enabled them to continuously assimilate immigrants into their kinship system, increasing their population and building social solidarity even as they have been confronted with new challenges. I believe that this applies to their ability to embrace Gelede, for instance. The Awori's success in this endeavor resurfaces in Faluyi's labeling of Gelede as common among the Awori of contemporary states of Lagos and Ogun, Nigeria. Kehinde Faluyi, "The Awori Factor in the History of Lagos," in *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, ed. Babatunde Agiri Ade Adefuye, Jide Osuntokun (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1987), 229.

This *oriki* indicates that at some point Gelede became part of the collective consciousness of the town.[83] While White's evidence neither mentions the town's *oriki* nor refers to the role of Gelede Idahomi in defending Otta against Dahomey, and while the 1854 Gelede was not referenced in the colonial sources, the theme that connects White's accounts to the *oriki* and their associated *itan* (historical narratives) is that Gelede has lent itself to uniting the town, particularly vis-à-vis a common antagonist. We might deduce that the Gelede performance of 1854 was particularly important to the Egbado population, based in the Oruba ward. This Gelede masquerade reminded the Egbado and the Awori that they were united in their resistance to common oppressor, Dahomey, and even Abeokuta.

White's commentary about the reputation of the Egbado people provides yet another lens through which to grasp the importance of the 1854 Gelede to these relative newcomers to Otta. According to White, the Egbado people generally excelled in the "arts of the Yoruba…of which music is a part." He suggests that they manifested their overall artistic brilliance in sculpture, painting, music, and dancing, and that they tended to receive preference over other Yoruba performers.[84] White's reflections about the Egbado suggest that this group's aesthetic sensibilities complemented those of the people of Otta, which included Awori, Oyo, and Egun as well as Egbado. In spite of the Egbado's brilliance, it is the people of Otta who were regarded as "superior" among the

[83] Kosebinu published Otta's oriki in the brochure of the Egungun festival. Deji Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival in Ota Awori: Special Program Brochure* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000), 42-43. Kosebinu's version of Otta's *oriki* was translated by Bamidele Ajayi. What is most important for my purposes is the following verse of this *oriki*: "Otta, the bundle of soldiers who uses a carved mask to removes the eyes of the Idahomi." It is this that Deinde claims refers to the Gelede Idahomi. This figure, Gelede Idahomi, has been a popular figure in Gelede as it reflects the environment in which this tradition emerged and flourished, as a tradition embraced by many western Yoruba groups who shared a common experience of torment by Dahomey. Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 49, 62-63.
[84] White, *Annual letter to Hector Straith, January 1, 1857*.

Yoruba in the area of sacred music, according to White.[85] If he was indeed correct, then based upon my own ethnographic research in 2006, the people of Otta have maintained a reputation as being particularly skilled in the performance of praise songs for Egungun. Several contemporary individuals claim that Otta's Egungun performances are renowned for including uniquely elaborate Egungun poetry.[86] Thus, public spectacles provided an environment in which newcomers and natives pooled their resources and affirmed their common and unique talents.

Other elements of the masquerade may have been commonplace for Gelede festivals in this era; however, I believe they took on particular significance because of the challenges facing the community at that historical moment. White's account further demonstrates that Gelede promoted the circulation of wealth throughout the community at a time that it was struggling to revive its economy. Supporters of the event provided loans or purchased masks for their neighbors or the community at large. With communal support, sculptors and painters showcased their skills by making masks that vividly portrayed human features. Cloth sellers and tailors either sold or marketed their respective goods and services to performers who paraded in large quantities of fine cloths. In contemporary (and possibly past) times, women donated cloth in keeping with Gelede's emphasis on cooperation.[87] White's description of what the masked individuals borrowed for their attire suggests that this pooling of resources may also have been the case in 1854. Gelede performances have long mobilized entire communities, as citizens contribute money, services, and other material resources to their staging. In addition,

[85] Ibid.
[86] Interview with Oloponda of Ilaro and M. A. B. Ajayi, November 20, 2006, Ilaro; Interview with Chief Ifagbade Oduniyi and Chief Adedoyin Talabi Faniyi, November 27, 2006, Ibokun Road, Oshogbo.
[87] Interview with Olaniyan, March 12, 2006.

Gelede and other communal festivals were prominent in the town's trade and agricultural cycle. The appearance of the different masked figures signifies the main actors of the community, whose collaboration was critical to its survival: "The woman with plaited hair" (the market woman), "the old man with white hair" (the local male elite), and the "Mohammedan with his long beard and head-dress" (the wealthy Muslim trader).[88] The scale of the 1854 Gelede spectacle at Otta and its occurrence in the face of civil disputes and external menaces that sparked seasonal flights from the town, invited locals and visitors to view the town as a safe place to settle and do business instead of as a community fraught with volatile tensions. In addition, the Gelede offered respite and distraction from the internal strife and threat of external attack that preoccupied the minds of the entire community.

Historically, women have had greater prominence in Gelede than in Egungun. Gelede celebrates women or uses satire to display disapproval of their behavior, whereas Egungun tends to instill caution and even fear when it imposes curfews and uses violence to control women.[89] Whereas conflict regularly drove women and children away from the town for fear of being physically harmed or enslaved, Gelede encouraged women and children to focus on the pleasure they derived from participating as singers and dancers. Similarly, the masquerade would have encouraged male youth to concentrate on their opportunity to perform and become the object of the community's praise and affection.

[88] Market women, elders, and foreigners have been critical to the lives of Yoruba communities such as Otta as well as to Gelede, both in terms of their appearance in the carved masks and in terms of their contribution to the event as a whole.
[89] Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 121; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 79; J. D. Y. Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2002): 144-146.

Women and children were very important to Otta's labor force in the 1850s, because the town had lost so many slaves and able-bodied men during the war of 1842.[90] In the post-war period, Otta's chiefs and the broader community relied on women and children to be the primary transporters of goods, including palm oil, to Lagos and other important trade centers along the coast.[91]

White's account and anthropological and modern studies of Gelede allow us to see how the 1854 Gelede performance helped the town meet the challenges facing it; offering respite, it commented on the world in which participants lived. It celebrated diversity, yet channeled difference toward solidarity. It integrated the Egbado people of the Oruba ward into the town's administration. It allied the town with its neighbors and promoted the circulation of wealth among its inhabitants. Finally, it enabled women and children to view Otta as a safe and pleasant place.

But the Gelede festival only delayed the face-off between the chiefs and the monarchy. Although it invited political actors to enact their political criticism through ritual drama, Gelede's brotherhood of communal solidarity gave way to another kind of alliance from which the monarch was excluded. In an effort to maintain his stranglehold on power and keep a king from ascending to the throne, the *Ajana* formed an alliance with the other quarter chiefs (the *Olukotun*, the *Olukosi*, and the *Akogun*). With the aid of a night masquerade, Oloru, to which all the chiefs swore their loyalty, the *Ajana* then organized a coup against the monarchy that evolved into a civil war in 1857–1858.

---

[90] Agiri adds that in the absence of a significant slave population to provide labor, Otta relied upon cooperative work gangs of free laborers as well as women and children. B. A. Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria, 1850-1950, A History of the Cultivation of Cola Nitida in Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo and Ota Areas," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972), 18-22.

[91] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*; ———, *January 27-30, from Journal ending March 25, 1858*; Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria," 20; Shields, "Palm Oil and Power," 34-56.

The Monarchy and the God of the Night, 1857–1858

As the *Ajana*, the highest-ranking authority in Otta's interim government, struggled to maintain his dominance within local politics, he and the remaining chiefs united against a common enemy, Oyede. The *Ajana*, it appears, could not look to Egungun for assistance in these high-level political machinations. He needed an institution with a more diffuse power base, something that appealed to the other chiefs and political elites, and he found it in Oloru. As this night masquerade mobilized, it repeatedly confronted the agents of foreign powers casting their lot with Oyede. In this context, the Egba at Abeokuta and the British at Lagos, in conjunction with the local missionary, increasingly played the role of arbitrator in the internal politics of Otta. This signifies a point in time when a local spirit and its followers, the chiefs, found their power and authority challenged by a constellation of forces best characterized as foreign.

Oloru seems to have occupied a prominent place in Otta's politics in the middle of the nineteenth century.[92] This deity was similar to Oro, the spirit representing the collective male dead among the Egba.[93] Oloru and Oro were both deities that Otta's chiefs invoked to punish state criminals, enforce public curfews, and perform communal rituals during moments of crisis. At such times, the deities' devotees drummed unique rhythms or sang songs to alert community members that women, children, and uninitiated

[92] These events are chronicled in the following passages from White's papers: January 10th & 13th, February 8th, 9th, 10th, 14th, 17th, from the Journal for quarter ending March 25, 1857; Letter, May 28th 1857; January 27th-30th, from the Journal for the quarter ending March 25, 1858; and Annual Letter to Rev. H. Venn, January 1, 1859. Captain F. C. Royce, the assistant district officer for Otta provides a vivid account of an Oloru ceremony. He does not, however, indicate when the ceremony he chronicles occurred. It most likely occurred in the mid-1920s, around the time that he collected the data for his report. CSO 26/2 NAI, 20629, F. C. Royce. *Assessment Report of Otta District, Egba Division, Abeokuta Province*, 1927.

[93] Stephen Farrow, *Faith, Fancies and Fetich, or Yoruba paganism: Being Some Account of the Religious Beliefs of the West African Negroes, Particularly of the Yoruba tribes of Southern Nigeria* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 4, 69-70; Jonathan O. Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C. M. S. Bookshop, 1948), 121, 124-127; Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 7; N. A. Fadipe, *Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), 249; J. R. O. Ojo, "Ogboni Drums," *African Arts* 6, no. 3 (1973); Law, "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations," 209.

men needed immediately to leave public areas and hide from view of the deity. If their devotees captured transgressors, the deities killed them without exception. White, who as a missionary denied the existence of such deities, wrote:

> The Oloru is with the Ota, the god of the night in whose hand is lodged the legislative and executive power of the nation and that of life and death. In this light, women and the uninitiated are taught to regard it, but the secret is nothing more than a body of the principal chiefs who occupy the night to transact business.[94]

Oloru performed state executions as well as rituals aimed at ridding the community of plagues and evil-doers. White characterized Otta's Oro as a "borrowed superstition of the Egba," and subordinate to the town's own Oloru.[95] A contemporary Otta chief says that Oloru enforced the commandments of the king by informing transgressors that they needed to leave the community before daybreak or be killed.[96]

When the Otun and Osi chiefs transferred executive power to the *Ajana* in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the Egungun Gbodogbodo assumed the role of police, judge, and executioner and for a time, I believe, usurped many of Oloru's responsibilities. After the Gbodogbodo Egungun was banned, however, in response to its abuses and those of the *Ajana*, the Oloru managed to reclaim much of its former authority. In the late 1850s, the quarter or ward chiefs, at odds with Oyede, mobilized Oloru in their efforts to prevent Oyede from being installed as king.

On the night of January 10, 1857, Oloru descended on Oyede's compound to remove some of his supporters, allegedly for poisoning cattle. The use of poisons was strictly forbidden among the people of Otta. Secretly, one of the society's members had informed Oyede that Oloru had been mobilized against him and his supporters. When the

---

[94] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*.
[95] James White, *November 7, from Journal ending December 25, 1855*. Oro also supported Osugbo, the Ijebu equivalent of Ogboni.
[96] Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005, Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta.

devotees of Oloru arrived at Oyede's residence, they found a group ready to oppose them. Oyede's supporters began identifying the Oloru members present by name, a taboo and a crime. Women in Otta recognized the volatility of the situation and began fleeing the town with their children for fear that a civil war would erupt.[97]

Shortly thereafter, Oyede arrived at the missionary James White's residence with Chief Ogunla, the Egba representative who accompanied Oyede from Abeokuta in 1854. Oyede entered White's private study and asked what he needed to do to become a Christian.[98] White perceived Oyede's request as a plea for political support in the face of opponents who had resolved to execute him and many of his supporters. Even so, White saw the occasion as an opportunity to make converts and spread the Gospel regardless of Oyede's motivation.[99] As it happened, not only White but also other powerful and influential external actors—the British Consul and King Dosumu at Lagos and the Egba officials—all wanted at the time to avoid bloodshed and keep Oyede and the institution of the monarchy in power.[100] These actors all needed a stable government headed by the king to support their diverse interests: Christian conversion, foreign commercial development, and Egba control of the trade routes linking the interior and Lagos.[101] They

[97] White, *January 10, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*.
[98] Oyede's appeal for Christian conversion corroborates Peel's argument that some indigenous elites in southwestern Yoruba towns looked to the missionaries and the British at Lagos as objects of prestige and protective charms that would defend them against their rivals. Peel, *Religious Encounter*.
[99] James White, *February 8, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*.
[100] ———, *February 17, from Journal ending March 25, 1857*.
[101] Moreover, the presence of a newly converted Christian king, Oyede, could forward British evangelical interests and had the potential to advance Britain's policy of commercial change. Also, having backed Oyede's return to Otta in 1854, the Egba were interested in securing the stability of the monarchy in order that they could indirectly rule Otta through a single individual, the king, instead of having to contend with several individuals, the ruling chiefs headed by the *Ajana*.

pressed the chiefs of Otta to find a resolution with Oyede that did not involve bloodshed.[102]

Meanwhile, Otta's chiefs sent repeated messages filled with accusations against the prince to Egba authorities at Abeokuta. The chiefs protested Oyede's role in revealing secrets of Oloru, and they asked that the deity should be appeased with the man's blood. After much delay, the Egba chiefs sent representatives to Otta, who arrived on January 27, 1858. After examining the case, they fined Oyede two slaves and ten bags of cowries, and the prince's relative and adviser Anoda, a lesser amount. The Egba officials found two men of guilty of murder. They sentenced one of them to decapitation, and after his executor fastened his head to a tree for public viewing, and took the second man to Abeokuta. However, these officials also supported the immediate installation of Prince Oyede as the King of Otta, to the disappointment and dismay of the chiefs.

On February 15, the same day that the Egba authorities proclaimed Oyede as the king, the Prince's enemies -- the *Ajana*, the *Olukotun*, the *Olukosi* and their followers -- demonstrated their disapproval and desire for revenge by dispatching Oloru at about 7:00 that night. Oloru attacked and executed one of Oyede's uncles, as well as another prominent man in town. The followers of Oloru then mounted the decapitated heads of these men on a tree for public viewing, a gripping reminder of the fate that awaited enemies of the chiefs. Consul Campbell and King Dosumu of Lagos admonished the Otta chiefs and the Egba officials to do everything in their power to maintain peace and avert a civil war, imposing fines on the Otta chiefs. On February 23, the Egba deputies, who had traveled to Otta to collect the fines, left Otta for Abeokuta reportedly with one

[102] White, *January 27-30, from Journal ending March 25, 1858*.

hundred bags of cowries, three male slaves, and approximately eighty sheep.[103] This event suggests that the Egba felt the chiefs had violated political norms by attacking Oyede's supporters after it had been decided that his installation was imminent. It even seems that the Egba may have interpreted the behavior of the chiefs as a direct challenge to Abeokuta's authority.

The attempted coup of 1857 and its immediate aftermath were the culmination of a long conflict between Otta's chiefs and Oyede, the presumptive king, one that ended in a costly victory for the latter. Several of Oyede's loyal supporters died in the conflict, and he himself lost money and slaves. However, he won the right to the kingship and preserved the institution of the monarchy. Ultimately, the chiefs' appeal to Oloru did not bring about the demise of Oyede, in part because he was able to draw on the support of external allies—the Egba, the British Consul, and the King of Lagos—that the local deity could not overcome. The event foreshadowed a trend in Otta during the second half of the nineteenth century: the curbing of local deities and their supporters outsiders by outsiders, the Egba at Abeokuta and the British at Lagos.

Sometimes during the first few months of 1858, Oyede was installed as Otta's *oba* (king), reestablishing the monarchy. White omitted any discussion of the details of Oyede's installation, despite his vivid commentary on the circumstances immediately preceding and following the event. According to White, Otta had lost its king and a number of state officers during the war with Abeokuta. The chiefs then headed Otta's interim government, when no king was on the throne, and they later opposed Oyede's attempts to reclaim the throne. Finally, Oyede was eventually installed and within a year

[103] Ibid.

all of the ward chieftaincies and other leading offices became vacant.[104] It is unclear what happened to the chiefs during the year between Oyede's installation and the point when the vacancies were documented.[105] As the losers in internecine conflicts, they may have left the town, been removed from office, or been killed or died of natural causes.[106]

Shortly after Oyede completed his coronation, an entirely new regime assumed office. The positions of *Odota, Onisata, Owoye, Ajana, Olukotun, Olukosi*, and *Akogun*, the latter four of which comprise the head chiefs of Otta's four quarters, were all filled anew. White claims that some of the candidates who filled these offices were selected from neighboring towns, where Otta people had taken refuge since the war with Abeokuta.[107] The office of the *Ajana*, which was thought to have been occupied previously by a tyrant who dominated politics and exerted his wrath through the Egungun Gbodogbodo in the 1840s and Oloru in the 1850s, was now filled by someone whom Oyede's supporters selected.[108] Although White does not document what happened to the *Ajana* or the other chiefs, it is clear is that a new political regime had emerged, supported by foreign powers that had supplanted the older, more autonomous regime.[109] In Otta, for years to come, those seeking to dominate political leadership would need to gain the support of either the Egba, the British, or both, the predominant regional powers.

White does describe the ceremony in which Oyede conferred the title of *Ajana* on its new holder. King Oyede poured dust on the head of the candidate, and he then used the leaves of a plant called *osan* to pat the head of the man three times. Next, Oyede

---

[104] James White, *Annual Letter to Rev. H. Venn, January 1, 1859*.
[105] Ibid.
[106] J. D. Y. Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians: the Incorporation of a Yoruba kingdom, 1890s-1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 28.
[107] White, *Annual Letter to Rev. H. Venn, January 1, 1859*.
[108] James White, *November 24, from Journal ending March 25, 1859*.
[109] White, *Annual Letter to Rev. H. Venn, January 1, 1859*.

placed a kind of "bill hook" on the head of the man. Upon completion of these acts, the recipient became the *Ajana* of Otta, the office retaining much of the power it had previously enjoyed. As White emphasizes, "[h]e proclaims the laws and enforces their observance and he executes criminals."[110] However, the *Ajana* could no longer rely upon the Egungun Gbodogbodo, which had once been so central to the power and authority of this office.

Egungun Apaje—"Killer of Witches" and Appeaser of "Unseen Powers," 1858–1859

Around the same time that Oyede and a number of high-ranking chiefs underwent the installation ceremonies for their respective offices, a new Egungun entered Otta and assumed the role of executioner previously held by the Gbodogbodo masquerade. According to tradition, the families of Osorun Eyo and Ekide Bangbopa had brought an Egungun from Oyo named Apaje, meaning "killer of witches."[111] The tradition excludes many of the details surrounding this masquerade's origins at Oyo and emergence at Otta. However, an analysis of the few details known about Apaje, along with an examination of the masquerade's *oriki* reveals that Apaje was shaped by and responded to the changes occurring within Otta's political culture and Egungun practice during the mid-nineteenth century.

Today, a portrait of Apaje, identified as Apaje Isorun, on the Egungun shrine pictured in Figure 11, illustrates the rank of this masquerade within the Egungun society.

---

[110] ———, *November 24, from Journal ending March 25, 1859*.

[111] Mr. Ajiboga recites the oriki of Apaje and cites the references to Osorun Eyo from the oriki in his account of how Apaje emerged at Otta. Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele and Nurudeen Ajiboga, March 4, 2006, Otta; Interview with A. Ojugbele, June 24, 2008; Interview with Chief Keinde Odunlami, November 15, 2006, Akran Palace, Badagry, Lagos State.

Apaje stands behind Ege, discussed in Chapter Two, the head of Egungun masquerades at Otta. Apaje is said to be second in seniority to Ege. The masquerade holds a club, at the end of which appears a blade, signifying Apaje's charge to swiftly dispense justice among Egungun performers, ordinary viewers, and Egungun priests alike.

Figure 11. The most senior Egungun masquerades appear on the top level. Apaje Ishorun (or Apaje) is on the far right. The mural was painted on the Egungun shrine in December of 1999. Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta. Photograph by author, May 4, 2005.

While the Egba chiefs had played an important role in creating the conditions that enabled the king and the chiefs to take their offices, it is unclear what role they played in Apaje's emergence at Otta. An Owu woman from Abeokuta, according to tradition, brought an Egungun bearing the name Apaje to Badagry during the middle of the nineteenth century.[112] If that was the case, the Egba chiefs at Abeokuta may have found

[112] Interview with Odunlami, November 15, 2006.

it advantageous to support the introduction of a similar Egungun at Otta to supplant the warrior Egungun Gbodogbodo.[113]

With the introduction of Apaje at Otta, an outsider once again gained prominence as the executioner among the town's Egungun. Both Gbodogbodo and Apaje repeated a pattern of behavior associated with the *ajele* Odikaye and his Egungun Ege, both discussed in Chapter Two. Like Ege's, Apaje's association with Oyo gave it prestige.[114] The owners of Apaje settled at Ijana, where the majority of the town's Oyo immigrants and its Egungun officials lived or were based.[115] Thus, with the emergence of the Apaje masquerade, entrusted with performing state executions, the Ijana ward remained the center of Egungun power and law enforcement.

Apaje also gained important ritual responsibilities. As one of the leading Egungun in Otta, Apaje performed rituals to ensure the well-being of the town. Apaje's *oriki* affirms the masquerade's ritual functions by identifying it as "the killer of witches…the calabash bearer of charms in the midst of charms." This juxtaposition is illuminating. We can interpret the calabash that contain the charms as what Apaje used to kill the witches, and hence, to secure the safety of the town. In this functionally respect, Apaje paralleled the Gelede Idahomi, a masquerade that carried ritual offerings

---

[113] The historical record does not suggest that Oloru was likewise banned. Relative to his length discussion of Oloru's involvement in the plot against Oyede in the 1850s, White barely mentions Oloru in the 1860s and 1870s. His discussion of it is limited to moments when, from all indications, the followers of Oloru perform their roles in a manner consistent with established norms. Therefore, White does not reveal Oloru to have been at the center of controversy after the 1850s. James White, *May 25, from Journal ending September 25, 1870*. C. T. Lawrence, a colonial writer, reported that it continued to have the reputation of occasionally killing innocents, and an Osi chief even informed the colonial police that he had a misunderstanding with the authorities associated with Oloru in the 1920s. CSO 26 NAI, C. T. Lawrence. *Assessment Report on Otta District: Abeokuta Province*, 1926.

[114] Alaafin Atiba was celebrating the Bebe (Royal Jubilee) at Oyo. The event evolved hundreds of Egungun masquerades. Adedeji claims that the event reestablished the prominence of Egungun in the Oyo kingdom and throughout surrounding areas. Because Egungun from many Yoruba communities attended, Egungun from Oyo may have been particularly prominent at the time. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 329-330.

[115] Interview by author, March 4, 2006, Otun Ward, Otta.

to protect the town from its enemies, as discussed in Chapter Three. However, while for the Idahomi masquerade, the enemy was Dahomey, for the Apaje masquerade, it appears to have been witches.

Upon contemplating the significance of Apaje, I initially assumed that it had a negative relationship with witches. However, as I investigated the tradition of the Gelede Idahomi masquerade, I began to consider another possibility. According to the person who narrated the tradition of the Gelede Idahomi to me, "witches" and "elders" were synonymous: these were the individuals who consulted the Ifa oracle to determine how to defend the town against the Dahomean invaders.[116] Some Yoruba ritual protocols consider the term "witch" or "*aje*" to be offensive and derogatory.[117] Pondering this point caused me to rethink even my assumption about the meaning of the name Apaje and the relationship it assumes between the *aje* and the Egungun. As scholars of Gelede have vividly demonstrated, the *aje* or witches have been regarded as the mothers, who are also known as *aye* (the world), *onile* (owners of the land), and *Iya agba* (the elderly women or grandmothers).[118] What I began to consider, following the leads of some of my informants, is that many Egungun have performed rituals to placate the "mothers" instead of to attack them. From this perspective, Apaje's relationship to women as mothers parallels Gelede's relationship to women. In the next chapter, I further explore

[116] Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006.
[117] Ibid. Professor Remi Ajala, a Yoruba speaker from Oshun State, Nigeria, and the Oloponda of Egungun at Ilaro echo Chief Deinde's point about the problems associated with the term witch. Interview with Deinde, January 24, 2006; Interview with Remi Ajala, November 3, 2006, Department of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan.
[118] Beier, "Gelede Masks," 10; Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*, 9-11; Babatunde, "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology," 45, 52-53; Ibitokun, *Dance as Ritual Drama*, 29-42; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 31-34.

the relationship between women and Egungun.[119] However, based on the evidence just presented here, we may ask whether the discourse on witchcraft has been misleading and whether the name "Apaje" can be understood within a particular Yoruba-speaking context as a play on the meaning or idea of a "witch."

Shifting the analysis to the historical context at Otta in 1858, an examination of a number of missionary documents reveals that the tumultuous political, social, and economic changes that shaped a number of mid-nineteenth-century Yoruba communities, including Otta, fueled fears of witchcraft.[120] These tensions often manifested themselves within the household between husbands and wives, between co-wives, and between patriarchs and the many individuals thought to be seeking their downfall.[121] Otta faced several challenges. In addition, the town confronted the need for the equitable sharing of political and economic resources within the elite and between the elite and the masses.

One idea that emerges powerfully from the discourse around witchcraft is that men felt threatened by women's growing wealth in a volatile socio-political and economic environment, in which warfare had long been a main motor of change. The rise of the palm produce trade and the opportunities it provided for women, primarily in small-scale production and trade allowed a number of them to compete with men in the public sphere.[122]

---

[119] Interview with Eshorun of Oshogbo and Chief Adedoyin Faniyi, August 28, 2006, Ibokun Road, Oshogbo; Interview with Ajala, November 3, 2006.
[120] James White, *February 18, from Journal ending March 25, 1862*; Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," 145.
[121] Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 208-212, 234-236; Law, "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations," 209-210; Shields, "Palm Oil and Power," 280-285; Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," 142-146.
[122] Shields, "Palm Oil and Power," 280-285; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 27.

The rhetoric of witchcraft and the manner in which it contributed to the desire for an Egungun bearing the name Apaje, or performing the role associated with the meaning of this name—"killing witches"—reflects one of the challenges posed by the new order. I posit that the new order that was emerging at Otta in the form of new gender relations and foreign regional powers influencing internal political struggles, complements the rhetoric of witchcraft in terms of the struggle to harness or eradicate unseen power.[123]

Beyond that, the precarious situation of the warriors and the warlords also fits into this pattern. The warriors had very little power, while the warlords had tremendous influence. The Ijana warriors' propensity to engage in a socially destructive exercise of power and the pursuit of wealth at the expense of warriors and chiefs from other wards in Otta along with elites from Abeokuta provided a fertile environment for witchcraft fears to heighten. Not only did the *Ajana* abuse his political power by executing or sanctioning the execution of innocents, he also amassed considerable wealth as the recipient of tolls on commerce passing through or traded at Otta. By kidnapping and enslaving Egba, Lagosians, and local residents (as well as by making excessive demands for Egba merchants seeking to conduct business in Otta), the *Ajana* is thought to have provoked the Otta-Abeokuta war. After the war, the enduring threat and reality of violence by Abeokuta and Dahomey toward Otta, alongside the *Ajana*'s inflammatory rule as regent, provided chilling reminders of his destructive impulses. In essence, his actions led to the loss of property and innocent life, behavior commonly associated with witches.

Warlords such as the leaders of the Ijana warriors were extraordinary men. Their feats, aided by spiritual resources, enabled them to achieve what ordinary men found impossible. Peel notes how these warlords gained power and authority as big men

[123] White, *Annual Letter to Rev. H. Venn, January 1, 1859*.

through their ability to distinguish themselves from others and to embody the qualities of the spirits (*orisha*):

> To go beyond what was the norm for ordinary men—in this culture which so strongly prescribed courtesy and restraint in all social interaction—was to behave more like an *orisha* than a man…it is likely that big men and *orisha* were so attractive to the Yoruba precisely because they actually did what lesser men, in their positions of relative weakness and dependency, could only yearn to do.[124]

By behaving like *orisha* and lacking restraint, warlords behaved like witches. The problem was that these men were so powerful, they were difficult to check.

The paradox of their existence was that these same men who regarded themselves and were regarded by others as more than human also thought of themselves as being vulnerable to witches in the form of the malice of their enemies. These fears may have fueled the ambition of the *Ajana* and the other Ijana chiefs to target the monarchy for extinction and at the same time, these fears may have made them the object of attack. The Otta people, in general, constantly feared attack from a host of elusive foreign agents, Dahomey and Abeokuta, and in some instances the British at Lagos. Rumors of Dahomey targeting Otta for siding with Abeokuta, vice versa, and of Abeokuta threatening Otta for aiding Kosoko all enflamed insecurity in the town and inspired women to repeatedly flee their fathers and husbands for refuge at the local Church mission house or at Lagos or in other communities. Also as Otta struggled to repopulate itself and its big men struggled to attract and/or maintain followers, men looked to reassert establish their authority in the household and in the town. Thus, political and regional rivalries aroused household tensions all of which contributed to fears that witches undergirded the town's demise. Anthropologist Karin Barber describes how such

[124] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 82.

an environment of intense social and political competition and with enemies near and far fueled concerns of witches:

> This view of the world as pervaded by 'enemies', declared and undeclared, whose intentions are unknown but who can be assumed to be full of malice and envy, is deeply rooted in Yoruba culture...In their most crystallized form, 'enemies' are represented as witches, malevolent, destructive and -according to most people- always female. Witches are rarely exposed and expelled from the community; they are dimly suspected, half-known, and half-tolerated for long periods. No one can be sure which women in their own household are witches. But the strongly drawn picture of 'the witch' merges into a while shadowy region of ill-intentioned people, simply known as aye, 'the world.' The world can be assumed to be hostile. Men as well as women inhabit this region, but no one can be sure who they are. They use their own powers, the powers of witches, the powers of hired-medicine men, and the powers of the orisa, who are regarded as deeply embroiled in human struggles...These conceptions are pervasive, and I have argued, appropriate to a society driven by the dynamic of competitiveness of big men, each of whom is indeed a potential threat to his rivals.[125]

Fear of the malice of their rivals and enemies often led these near-immortal men (and women) to take care not to provoke the anger of their rivals. Therefore they expended great energy in seeking to appease the most powerful of the would-be offended as if they feared the vengeance of the gods. At the same time, they looked to secure any and all means of protection and forces seen and unseen. Masquerades were an important tool whereby men could obtain such protection. Masquerades afforded powerful men an ally in their pursuit of victory in battle and to further distinguish themselves from their peers and suppress their rivals by targeting and executing the latter as criminals and witches. Added to that, it was their propensity to harm innocents that solidified the association of their rule with witchcraft. In essence, masquerades offered a sense of immortality, both protection from and infliction of death.

[125] Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 210.

Chapter Five

Warriors, Women, and the Emergence of a New Egungun at Otta, 1882–1901

The previous two chapters focus on the role of Egungun and Gelede masquerades at Otta in an evolving political order fueled by warfare and marked by the rise of warriors and warrior states. This chapter explores yet another moment in the interplay between masquerades and politics in the town of Otta. It focuses on a pivotal moment in the transformation of the practice of masquerading in the town, one where elements of two prominent types of Egungun converged in a manner that catapulted Egungun into the premier masquerade tradition in the town. This transformation was fueled by the return of a warrior, Arogunmola, from the warfront with a new, second wife, Moniyepe, and an Egungun, Oya, which he obtained through her.

An examination of this masquerade through the figures most involved with its arrival and its transformation, i.e., the warrior, Arogunmola; his senior wife, Oshungbayi, a market woman; and his second wife, Moniyepe, reveals yet another dimension of the ways in which masquerades are institutions that both shape and are shaped by various historical actors and broader historical forces and trends. In this instance, I argue that the three above-named actors drew upon the power and authority of the Egungun masquerade tradition to solidify and advance their positions in the town. They did so through their alliances with each other, which, channeled through the Egungun Oya, enabled them all––and allowed Arogunmola and Oshungbayi in particular—to transform it into a new kind of masquerade practice. In doing so, the three elevated their status both as individuals and as a domestic group. In addition, this masquerade helped harmonize different groups

within the town, reconciled tensions, and helped the town and its inhabitants adjust to new political, economic, and social realities.

To better understand the nature and significance of this new Egungun in the context of those realities, we must elucidate the external and internal conditions and conflicts facing Otta in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Externally, the town, which was strategically located along the north-south trade route from the coast to the interior, was still caught between two different powers, who clashed and contributed to tensions in the town as they vied for regional dominance. These powers were the warrior state of Abeokuta to the north and the colonial authority of the British to the south in Lagos. Abeokuta had conquered and begun occupying Otta in 1842; in that same year, British missionaries started erecting in the town's southernmost ward the structure that would become their mission house.[1] The British had bombarded Lagos, a major coastal trading center, in 1851. In 1861, the British established Lagos as a Crown Colony, eventually extending the boundaries of that colony into the southernmost ward of Otta.[2] Ultimately, by 1893, the British formally imposed colonial rule throughout Yorubaland, including Abeokuta and the remaining wards of Otta.[3] Throughout the period we are examining, Otta had to contend not only with Abeokuta's occupation and control but also with Abeokuta's challenges and resistance to British rule. After 1893,

[1] For discussion of Abeokuta's war and ultimate conquest of Otta, see the following works: James White, Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921), 255-256, 657; NAA. *Otta Affairs: Brief History of Otta*. Abeokuta, 1933; Dada Agunwa, *The First Book on Otta: In Memory of King Aina and King Oyelusi Arolagbade*, trans. Gbamidele Ajayi (Otta: 1928), 71-72; S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 27.

[2] James White, *August 8, from Journal ending September 25, 1861*; ———, *Letter, May 4, 1863*; J. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: the Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, 1965); Robert Smith, *The Lagos Consulate, 1851-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[3] B. A. Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria, 1850-1950, A History of the Cultivation of Cola Nitida in Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo and Ota Areas," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972), 19-20.

the question of regional dominance between the British and Abeokuta was settled, but that resolution only added to the political and economic burdens of Otta, for the British colonial administration placed the town under Abeokuta's control. Otta thus labored under two levels of colonial administrative authority.[4]

Otta's ability to maintain its own political and social cohesion in the face of external authorities was complicated internally by sporadic conflicts of two kinds. The first involved the continued underlying power struggles among the ward chiefs and the monarchy (detailed in the previous two chapters); the second, which overlaps the first, involved the desire of one warrior chief, the *Ajana*, and the warrior class from his ward, Ijana, to dominate the town.[5] Dominated by warriors who had gained chieftaincy titles near the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ijana continued to attract more followers than the other wards, making it the largest and best positioning its warrior chief and his followers to impose their will throughout the town. Ijana's development of a warrior identity, a reputation that endures up to today, fueled tensions between the monarchy and the ward chiefs in general. As previously noted, Otun and Osi were the wards from which kings were chosen, and the power struggles between these wards first provided room for the ascendancy of Ijana.[6] In the period discussed in this chapter, tensions among the wards and chiefs did not erupt into civil war or violence, as they had in the previous era; instead, they found expression in various other political and social arenas, including masquerades.

---

[4] NAA. *Otta Affairs*; Abe. Prof. 4 NAI, D33. *Abeokuta Province: A Report on the Otta District, Egba Division*, 1936; Otta District Court NAI. *Population Census, Historical Events*, 1962.
[5] Agiri, "Kola in Western Nigeria," 17. These conflicts are discussed in detail in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.
[6] Ibid.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the period of endemic warfare in Yorubaland came to a close, warriors were forced to look beyond military service to other alternatives for paths to wealth and self-aggrandizement.[7] This was further complicated by new conditions operating within their towns. The enduring nature of nineteenth-century Yoruba warfare had kept many warriors, who were also fathers, husbands, and brothers, on the warfront away from their homes for long periods of time. During their absence, some women had found new opportunities to accumulate wealth and exert influence within their family units and larger society.[8] This occurred because the end of the slave trade, coupled with increased overseas demand, helped fuel the market for palm oil. Since women were traditionally responsible for the production of palm oil for the home and the local population, they were quickly able to respond to this growing demand. Using their already established small networks and expanding them, some women eventually become larger-scale palm oil traders who were able to supply foreign as well as local and regional markets.[9] Indeed, a few scholars have suggested that in this context men turned to masquerades in general, and Egungun in particular, as a means of reestablishing their power and authority in the domestic and economic spheres.[10] Quickly, slave traders and other male merchants became heavily involved in

---

[7] Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 220-230; Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 138-150.

[8] LaRay Denzer, "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27, no. 1 (1994); Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*. Edna Bay demonstrates how in the case of Dahomey women participated in warfare as warriors in addition to playing a number of other roles such as being owners of plantations and high-ranking political officials. Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 1-9, 13-16.

[9] Francine Shields, "Palm Oil and Power: Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition in 19th century Yorubaland (South-western Nigeria)," (University of Stirling, 1997), 38-40; Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*.

[10] Law notes the historical involvement of Zangbeto, a Gun masquerade society, in monitoring market prices in Porto Novo, a major coastal trading port, in the nineteenth century. Robin Law, "'Legitimate'

the palm produce trade, too. Nonetheless, in some households, wives increased their wealth.

Such changes in external and internal conditions enabled a new generation of ambitious men and women to elevate themselves through their own efforts and ingenuity. Participation in commerce, small- and large-scale production, and colonial administration became more important for the pursuit of wealth. Previous generations of warriors, who had dominated the regional political economy for much of the nineteenth century, had resorted to direct, violent means for the acquisition of wealth and titles, whether military or civilian.[11] However, a new generation of warriors and merchants were forced to develop other strategies to advance themselves socially, economically, and politically. Their ascension, I argue, was based on their ability to promote themselves as wealthy, generous, and powerful, yet non-threatening males.[12] This new path to upward mobility culminated in the emergence of a new masquerade practice at Otta. In the era that followed solidarity and generosity superseded dominance and conflict as primary values.

In my earlier chapters, I discussed Egungun and Gelede as complex phenomena that harness the power of spirits or ancestors, to which people turn for order, direction,

---

Trade and Gender Relations in Yorubaland and Dahomey," in *From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce: the Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-century West Africa*, ed. Robin Law (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 209-210; J. D. Y. Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2002); Shields, "Palm Oil and Power," 250-252, 280-285. I am also indebted to Folasade Hunsu for the paper presented on Zangbeto at the 5th Cadbury Workshop, Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, UK, May 24, 2008.

[11] J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964); I. A. Akinjogbin, "The Prelude to the Yoruba Civil Wars of the Nineteenth Century," *Odu* 2, no. 2 (1965); S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (London: Longman, 1971); Toyin Falola and Dare Oguntomisin, *The Military in Nineteenth Century Yoruba politics* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1984); Adeagbo Akinjogbin, ed., *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998); Toyin Falola and Dare Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001).

[12] The qualities that Barber associates with big men in Okuku from the 1930s through the 1980s I believe apply to big men at Otta in the 1880s and 1890s. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 236-241.

and the resolution of the challenges they confront. The body of scholarship accords with this view of masquerades, emphasizing that Egungun, in particular, embodies the ancestors and channels their power to order human relations.[13] Yet, the scholarship also views Egungun as a male dominated performance practice commonly mobilized to control women.[14] The general character of Egungun is interpreted as reflecting an antagonistic relationship between men and women. Scholars have argued that during the period of tension between men and women in the second half of the nineteenth century

[13] For literature on Egungun see the following: Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 29-31, 160, 172, 329-330; William R. Bascom, "The Sociological Role of the Yoruba Cult-Group," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association* 46, no. 1, Part 2 (1944): 50-59; Peter Morton-Williams, "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms," *West African Institute of Social and Economic Research* (1954); Ulli Beier, "The Egungun Cult," *Nigeria Magazine* 51 (1956); Peter Morton-Williams, "Yoruba Responses to the Fear of Death," *Africa* 30, no. 1 (1960); Ulli Beier, "The Agbegijo Masquerades," *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 82 (1964); Joel Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre: The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from Its Earliest Beginnings to the Present Times," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1969); Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974); Oludare Olajubu and J. R. Ojo, "Some aspects of Oyo Yoruba Masquerades," *Africa* 47, no. 3 (1977); Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, "The Arts of Egungun Among Yoruba People," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Margaret Thompson Drewal and Henry John Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other: An Egbado Classification of Egungun," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Marilyn Hammersley Houlberg, "Notes on Egungun Masquerades among the Oyo Yoruba," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Marilyn Houlberg, "Egungun Masquerades of the Remo Yoruba," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); John Pemberton, "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba," *African Arts* XI, no. 3 (1978); Robin Poynor, "The Egungun of Owo," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); Marc Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1978); S. O. Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba* (Ibadan: Board Publication Ltd., 1980); ———, "Traditions and Functions of the Egungun Cult among the Oyo Yoruba," in *The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture*, ed. Nwanna Nzewunwa (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980); Ade Obayemi, "Origins of the Masquerade: Socio-historical and Archeological Perspectives," in *The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture*, ed. Nwanna Nzewunwa (Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980); Norma Wolff, "Egungun Costuming in Abeokuta," *African Arts* 15, no. 3 (1982); Sunday Adeleye, "Costume in Egungun Onidan masquerade of the Yoruba," (M.A. Thesis University of Ibadan, 1990); C. O. Adepegba, "Intriguing Aspects of Yoruba Egungun Masquerades," *Nigeran Field* 55, no. 1990 (1990); R. O. Rom Kalilu, "The Role of Sculptures in Yoruba Egungun Masquerade," *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 1 (1991); Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*; R. O. Rom Kalilu, "Costumes and the Origin of Egungun," *African Studies* 52, no. 1 (1993); William R. Rea, "'No Event, No History': The Masquerades of Ikole Ekiti," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1994); Wale Ogunyemi, "Egungun Cult in Some Parts of Western Yorubaland: Origin and Functions," *African Notes* 21, no. 1 & 2 (1997); William R. Rea, "Rationalising Culture: Youth, Elites, and Masquerade Politics," *Africa* 68, no. 1 (1998); Dele Layiwola, "Egungun in the Performing Arts of the Yoruba," in *Readings in African Studies*, ed. A. T. Oyewo and S. A. Osunwole (Ibadan: Jator Publishing Company, 1999).

[14] Beier, "The Egungun Cult," 389-392; Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," 52; Drewal and Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other," 38-39; Pemberton, "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba," 43. Scholars of Gelede have furthered this idea and promoted Gelede as what Yoruba men have used to placate women and Egungun to control them. Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 75-79.

men used Egungun to restrict women's wealth and the power that they derived from it.[15] Such an emphasis on the contentious relationship between women and Egungun, I argue, misrepresents a far more complicated relationship.

The history of the Oya Egungun's introduction into Otta in the last two decades of the nineteenth century counters the dominant view, calling attention to how women asserted power and authority within Egungun. I ultimately conclude that Egungun was an arena in which men and women engaged in a range of complex interactions to negotiate the deployment of resources for the assertion of their autonomy.

An analysis of the history of the Egungun masquerade figure Oya reveals how Egungun performances have offered both men and women opportunities to remake themselves and gain status and wield power, ultimately advancing themselves in society. It also reveals how this Egungun was adapted to the changing historical circumstances that confronted Arogunmola, his wives, and indeed the town as a whole. Within the space of two decades, these three figures collaborated to help transform Egungun and Otta. In the process, they inspired a category of Egungun performance that remains a central feature of the social life of the town to this day.

The Oya Tradition

According to local tradition, Idowu Arogunmola, a warrior from Otta, encountered Moniyepe the woman who conferred on him the Egungun Oya, while he was on a military campaign in the Oyo region.[16] The tradition is silent about the moment

[15] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 29-31; Law, "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations," 209-210; Shields, "Palm Oil and Power," 249-252, 280-285.
[16] Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, May 3, 2005, Otta. Oya also represents a female deity, river goddess and former wife of the Oyo king Shango.

when the Egungun was first presented at Otta. However, historical clues in the *itan* (story) that comments on the *oriki* (praise poem) of Oya and its wealthy patrons, Arogunmola and his first wife, Oshungbayi, as well as evidence in an important 1996 court case suggest that the Oya masquerade was introduced in Otta during the 1880s or the 1890s.[17] It is possible that the Oyo military camp mentioned in the tradition refers to one of the many Ibadan war camps that existed in the 1870s and 1880s. Many of Ibadan's founders were warriors who had fled south with their followers from Oyo.[18] Arogunmola may have journeyed to an Ibadan war camp to show appreciation for the town's support of Otta during its war with Abeokuta.[19] He may also have gone because at a moment when Otta itself was demilitarized, Ibadan's battlefields were places of economic and political opportunity.[20]

The tradition goes on to say that when Arogunmola reached the battlefield he wanted to acquire a second wife. His first wife, a wealthy cloth trader, is said to have traveled back and forth between Otta and the war camp, presumably to visit and supply her husband and to conduct trade.[21] History tells us that war camps were places where

---

[17] Several people from Otta provided versions of the *oriki* that liken the Egungun Oya to Arogunmola. These individuals include Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, a descendent of Arogunmola, and Babatunde Asanbe, who is the son of Chief Asanbe, the Oloponda of Otta as well as the producers of the 2000 and 2004 Egungun festival brochure. The last source includes a printed version of the *oriki* of Oya Arogunmola, as there are three Egungun bearing the name Oya in Otta. Ibid; Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005, Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta; Interview with Babatunde Asanbe, May 3, 2005, Otta; Deji Kosebinu et al., *2004 Egungun Carnival in Otta Aworiland* (Otta: Bisrak Communications, 2004), 42-43; HCT 45/93 Ajibade vs. Fatusi, "Reply to Statement of Defense," (High Court of Ogun State, Otta Judicial Division: 1994).

[18] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 244-246; Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900* (Ibadan: University of Ife Press, 1984), 15-18.

[19] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 255; Biobaku, *Egba and Their Neighbours*, 27.

[20] Falola, *Ibadan*; Toyin Falola, "From Hospitality to Hostility: Ibadan and Stranger, 1830-1904," *Journal of African History* 26 (1985): 53-62; J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 35-37, 41-43.

[21] Interview with A. Ojugbele, May 3, 2005.

men did acquire wives, both freeborn and slaves captured in battle.[22] War camps were also places where Egungun were desired. For one thing, they became increasingly important in battle.[23] Egungun not only participated in the fighting, making use of their sword along with magic and charms, but they also executed war captives brought to the war camp after battles.[24] Victorious warriors would seize the Egungun of their enemies and later parade them as war trophies.[25] Furthermore, possession of or affiliation with a prominent Egungun could help warriors in their competitive struggles with other soldiers on the same side, because it brought them prestige. The competition among Egungun at war camps during elaborate festival performances offered their sponsors and supporters an impressive venue through which they could assert their dominance and garner support, much as their descendents now do in contemporary masquerade performances.[26] At war camps, warriors vied with one another to acquire masquerades and wives because through these valuable resources, they could achieve immortality; wives produced

[22] Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics*, 149-151; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 35-37.
[23] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 178-191; S. O. Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo c., 1706-1905: A Study in the Traditional Culture of an African Polity* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1980), 43-46.
[24] A number of scholars discuss the spiritual powers associated with Egungun and their use in warfare. J. A. Adefila and S. M. Opeola, "Supernatural and Herbal Weapons in 19th Century Yoruba Warfare," in *War and peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, ed. I. A. Akinjogbin (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1998), 220-225. O. Olutoye and J. A. Olapade, "Implements and Tactics of War Among the Yoruba," in *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, ed. Adeagbo Akinjogbin (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998), 208-213; Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 43. Missionaries tended to focus on the involvement of Egungun in violence. A resident missionary named David Hinderer provides a vivid account of an Ibadan war chief's support of an Egungun that killed one of his female slaves accused of having been sexually involved with a junior warrior thought to have offended his superior. David Hinderer, *October 1, from Journal ending September 25, 1851. CA 2/049/104*.
[25] Barber notes the acquisition of an Egungun headpiece through war. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 204. Veronica Uzoigwe, "The Masquerade," in *Ibadan Mesiogo: A Celebration of a City, Its History, and People*, ed. Dapo Adelugba, et al. (Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd., 2001), 148. Interview with Afolabi Oguntade, December 10, 2006, Oloolu compound, Ibadan.
[26] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 170-175, 178-191; Babayemi, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 43-46.

children to continue their bloodline, and Egungun performances propitiated them as ancestors.[27]

In his quest for a new wife, Arogunmola is said to have asked for the hand of Moniyepe in marriage. She allegedly agreed on the condition that he adopt Oya, her father's Egungun. Moniyepe's capacity to confer an Egungun on her future husband demonstrates that women exercised considerable influence over the preservation and movement of Egungun. Custodians of Egungun generally possessed knowledge of their *oriki* and the charms and rituals that precede and accompanied their performances. As the possessor of Oya's history and the ritual knowledge associated with it, Moniyepe had the power to reshape and interpret her family's Egungun. My argument runs counter to the conventional view of Egungun as an institution that men used to control women.[28]

The Oya tradition next relates that soon after their marriage, the warrior Arogunmola returned to Otta with Moniyepe, his second wife, and the new Egungun masquerade. When it had belonged to Moniyepe's father, Oya wore an Egungun attire known as *egbudu*, in the style of the sack favored by Egungun in Oyo, which may have looked something like the costume shown in Figure 12.

[27] Babatunde Lawal, "The Living Dead: Art and Immortality Among the Yoruba of Nigeria," *Africa* 47, no. 1 (1977): 54; Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 183-184.
[28] Beier, "The Egungun Cult," 389; Henry John Drewal, "Art and the Perception of Women in Yoruba Culture," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 68, no. XVII (1977): 547-548; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 75, 79.

Figure 12. This *Ago*, one of the oldest types of Egungun masquerade attire, is in the possession of Chief Eshorun, Oshogbo, Oshun State, Nigeria. Photograph by author, August 28, 2006.

Yet, soon after their arrival, as the story goes, Oshungbayi, Arogunmola's first wife, who as was noted earlier was a prominent cloth seller, transformed this Egungun by supplying it with a new attire, an *agbada*, a long flowing garment historically worn by Hausa men and adopted later by the Yoruba elite.[29] The *agbada* that Oshungbayi provided for Oya probably consisted of one or more kinds of cloth, including velvet, damask, cotton, or *aso oke* (a valuable, locally produced material). The image in Figure 13 shows the Oya of Arogunmola's descendents dressed in the manner established by their forebear, wearing an *agbada* and holding a sword in its right hand and a horsetail, symbol of chiefly or royal authority, in its left.

[29] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 8; Justine M. Cordwell, "The Art and Aesthetics of the Yoruba," *African Arts* 16, no. 2 (1983): 58.

Figure 13. Oya Arogunmola (front) wearing a purple and silver *agbada* made from damask. An *alabala* Egungun masquerade (rear), wearing an orange and green attire made from assorted fabrics and accompanies Oya during performances, Osi ward, Otta. Photograph by author, January 28, 2006.

The tradition then recounts that Arogunmola invited the entire town to his compound, Ikotun, to witness the performance of his newly acquired Egungun. Oya appeared parading the *agbada*, and Oshungbayi followed closely behind the Egungun, performing the *oriki*. This marked the first time that the entire population of Otta descended on one compound to witness the performance of an Egungun wearing an *agbada*.[30]

Warriors and the Transformation of Egungun in the Late Nineteenth Century

To better understand the historical significance of the tradition surrounding Arogunmola's acquisition of the Oya masquerade at a war camp, his subsequent return with it to Otta, and his role in transforming the practice and meaning of masquerading in the town, we must first explore his status and position within the town. Insights into his behavior and possible motives come from his names. According to local tradition, the

[30] Interview with A. Ojugbele, May 3, 2005.

two names by which the man was identified were Idowu and Arogunmola.[31] The first name, *Idowu*, would have been acquired at birth; it is one commonly bestowed among the Yoruba and literally means the "child born after twins." We know therefore that he was at a minimum his parents' third child; there could have been others preceding him in birth order. [32] The fact that the local tradition is silent on the subject of Arogunmola's inheritance of his own father's Egungun reinforces the inference that he was a middle or last-born child.

The second name, Arogunmola, which literally means "he who becomes wealthy through war," could have been acquired during childhood or youth, as a name to aspire to, or it could have been bestowed later in life, as a means of honoring the man's demonstrated accomplishments.[33] Both ways of applying names are common in Yoruba culture.[34] The strong character and leadership and fighting skills of great warriors were evidently present within Arogunmola's extended family, for local tradition relates that his father was a prominent hunter, and such individuals usually served as warriors during times of war. Furthermore, one of Arogunmola's other relatives rose to become a *balogun,* or senior war chief.[35] Arogunmola's elders may have sought to encourage and develop a similar path for him. According to Yoruba naming traditions, if Arogunmola was given this *oriki* by his elders during his youth, it was because they saw the attributes

---

[31] Ibid.
[32] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 80.
[33] Arogunmola is a derivation of the name *Arogun-wonla-danu*, meaning "he who neglects wealth for war." The name was later turned to Arogunmola, although the precise moment when this occurred is unclear. Ibid., 85.
[34] Ibid., 80-85; Bolanle Awe, "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oriki," *Africa* 44, no. 4 (1974): 333. Interview with A. Ojugbele, May 3, 2005.
[35] Interview with A. Ojugbele, May 3, 2005. The following brochure, which includes the oriki associated with the title, Balogun of Otta, also links Arogunmola with an important historical Balogun of the town. *Historic Brochure for the Installation Ceremony of Chieftaincy Title to Chief Isiaka Idowu Balogun as the Balogun of Otta, Aworiland*, (Otta: Tin-Woo and Pat-Excel, 2005).

of a strong and wealthy warrior in his character or hoped that he would grow to embody those attributes.[36]

Arogunmola's motives for journeying to the war front probably had much in common with those of many other young warriors of his day.[37] Any young man departing Otta for a war camp would have sought to uphold family honor and expectations, as well as to strive for personal advancement through the acquisition of booty and fame on the battlefield.[38] However, if a young man journeyed to the war front with the attributive name of *Arogunmola*, then he probably had even more motivation than usual to return having fulfilled the expectations associated with his name.

Yet, it appears that Arogunmola did not acquire in war a number of the resources that warriors most coveted. He does not seem to have acquired a military office or civilian title, as did many members of the warrior elite. Such offices and titles could be gained on the war front following victory in battle.[39] Arogunmola's *oriki* do not record any titles or the prestige associated with them, which they surely would do if he had earned them.[40]

However, in the event that "Arogunmola" was a name attributed later in life, local tradition reveals that it was accurately bestowed. To see how an Egungun could have been a path to wealth and status for someone like Arogunmola, who lacked titles or high position, we need to understand the development of Egungun in relation to warfare and

---

[36] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 75-80, 85.
[37] Bolanle Awe, "Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example," *Journal of African History* 14, no. 1973 (1973): 66-69; Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 93-95; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 71-77.
[38] The program from the installation of the most senior *Balogun* at Otta identifies Arogunmola in the oriki of this title.
[39] Awe, "Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example," 66-69.
[40] Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 193-194.

the warrior class during this period, a development whose roots extended back to the previous century.

During the Oyo imperial period, two types of Egungun, the warrior type and the entertainment type, arose and flourished.[41] The warrior type gained prominence during Oyo military campaigns, as warrior Egungun led many of these campaigns. Potential warriors participated in military training exercises during annual Egungun performances, and the most distinguished among them won the right to wear an Egungun mask in battle.[42] Conversely, the entertainment type became more prominent during performances for the royal court and as part of the cycle of annual festivals. This type of Egungun fueled competition among the monarchy and the leading chiefs in Oyo, who enlisted the service of Egungun performers to flaunt their riches and assert their power.[43] The entertainment Egungun acquired increasingly elaborate attire (both the cloth costumes and the wood headdresses), *oriki* (praise poetry), and *ewi* (a genre of poetry recited during some Egungun performances). Such Egungun performances also incorporated acrobatic movements and dance steps, as well as the performance of magic. A number of Oyo oral traditions highlight such changes in the practice of Egungun.[44]

Later, in the nineteenth century, when the Oyo Empire collapsed and the warrior states arose, unprecedented turbulence and mobility among Yoruba and non-Yoruba peoples occurred, leading to increased cultural encounters and cultural transformations in many arenas, including Egungun.[45] In this post-imperial era, the warrior and

[41] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 178-191.
[42] Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, 2, 43-45.
[43] ———, *The Fall and Rise of Oyo*, 41-46, 54-55.
[44] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 146-157.
[45] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London: John Murray, 1829), 53-56; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 178-191.

entertainment Egungun were neither new nor the only types of Egungun practiced among the Yoruba. However, they became the most politically and militarily potent, thereby gaining new prominence and acquiring new and more elaborate expressions. These types of Egungun also came to follow significantly divergent paths, as they emphasized different functions, performed for different audiences, and tended to adopt different attire.

Broadly speaking, the warrior type, which generally displayed an aggressive character and function, reached or maintained ascendancy and took on new roles and political purposes during this era. It punished those who broke laws, customs, or norms through violence or expulsion. As warriors asserted their dominance through the threat of war, this type of Egungun became more commonplace. The warrior Egungun performed for a small segment of society, i.e. warriors, their attendants or "war boys," and initiated men. The visual presentation and performance of these Egungun complemented their different audiences and functions. The warrior Egungun were more rudimentary or crude in their physical appearance then entertainment Egungun; they were adorned with animal skins, teeth, bones, and horns as well as potent herbs, all of which might have been soaked in human or animal blood to harness the ritual power of the Egungun.[46]

Yet during this period, warriors on the warfront and in various towns were also reclaiming elements of Oyo's imperial entertainment Egungun. This type of Egungun was open to the entire community, and therefore generally did not exclude women, children, and uninitiated men, as was the case with the warrior Egungun. So far as their

[46] These elements appear in many contemporary Egungun, which the following ethnographers have documented in detail: Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 178-191; Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 75, 79; Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," 52-53; Olajubu and Ojo, "Some aspects of Oyo Yoruba Masquerades," 258-259; Interview with Oloponda of Otta, May 3, 2005; Interview with Prince Kunle Andrew, May 4, 2005, Otta; Interview with Oguntade, December 10, 2006.

functions were concerned, entertainment Egungun provided amusement or at worst used satire, mockery, or ridicule to chastise. They often were adorned in a more aesthetically pleasing way, appearing in visually stimulating attire composed of rich and elaborately and colorfully decorated fabrics, highlighting the Egungun's economic and social power.[47]

I highlight these distinctions between the two prominent Egungun types because the nineteenth-century warlords and the warrior class co-opted different Egungun for different purposes: the warrior Egungun for their military and political purposes, and the entertainment Egungun for their economic, social, and political purposes. In the case of the latter, the public spectacles created by entertainment Egungun provided opportunities for warriors to showcase their power, wealth, and status in ways that royals and hereditary rulers had previously done in the service of imperial ambitions. Adedeji identifies this type of Egungun with royal court entertainers.[48] One of his most striking contributions to our understanding of the historical development of Egungun is his distilling of a major shift in the development of Egungun. He claims that during the post-imperial era, the royal court entertainer Egungun appeared on the war front and at war camps to entertain warriors for the first time.[49] What this development demonstrates is how the war front and war camps became a stage for a new performance tradition.

---

[47] Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, 53-56. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 29-31, 329-330.

[48] Drewal and Drewal have demonstrated the problems posed when trying to classify Egungun into different types. For instance, some Egungun change attire during performances and in doing so shift from one category to another. Drewal and Drewal, "The Arts of Egungun Among Yoruba People," 18-19. Egungun from the middle of the nineteenth century are also difficult to fix into one category or another. While the categories presented here are not rigid, they do offer a broad repertoire of elements from which to identify major trends. What we see in the case of the entertainment Egungun is that they began to inhabit spaces (i.e. the war camps) generally dominated by warrior Egungun.

[49] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 178-191.

By looking at Arogunmola's experience on the warfront and the events that followed his return to Otta, we have an opportunity to learn how warriors of this era helped shape the development of Egungun, even as Egungun provided a new path through which they could elevate themselves. I believe that Arogunmola observed these changing types of Egungun on the warfront, and, after acquiring an Egungun there, brought it back to Otta as the Oya tradition indicates. I further contend that in the process of introducing this Egungun, he enhanced warrior entertainment elements that displayed and increased his wealth, because they appealed not only to warriors but also to the entire town. This new Oya Egungun later birthed a new genre of entertainment Egungun that became the predominant Egungun and spectacle performance tradition at Otta in the twentieth century.

Having provided a general overview of the development of warrior and entertainment Egungun in the nineteenth century, I now return to developments in the history of Egungun at Otta during the same period. In the early decades of the century, changes in the status of warriors and Egungun were underway in Otta. It is likely that Arogunmola observed these changes prior to his departure for the warfront. The hegemony of warrior masquerades coincided with the rise of the Ijana warriors, led by the *Ajana*, and their challenge to the power and authority of the indigenous chiefs and king. As discussed in Chapter Two, the *Ajana*'s Egungun, Gbodogbodo, manifested a violent, tyrannical character that in the long run proved too turbulent for the town to sustain. After its expulsion, the Ijana ward and Egungun chiefs and the monarchy, backed the emergence of another Egungun, Apaje, from the ward. Subsequently, it

replaced Gbodogbodo, the *Ajana*'s masquerade, in performing executions at the Egungun shrine.[50]

Several decades after the ascendancy of Apaje, Arogunmola brought a new Egungun, Oya, from the war front and transformed it in a manner that appealed to the people of Otta, who, had grown tired of the violence associated with warrior Egungun. What inspired Arogunmola's acquisition and transformation of an Egungun was the performance of entertainment Egungun, which Adedeji identifies as having gained prominence in war camps during this era.[51]

At Otta, Arogunmola inspired a new category of Egungun known locally as *alagbada*, meaning "owner of *agbada* (a long flowing gown)."[52] This new category was less concerned with instilling fear through violence and more with displaying wealth and prestige and inspiring respect by extending generosity and hospitality during entertaining Egungun performances.[53] As an entertainment Egungun, the *alagbada* was also associated with what is more popularly known as *onidan*, meaning "owner of magic" according to Drewal's research in Ilaro.[54] Endowed with the ability to perform miracles or magic, the entertainment Egungun is a magician, "a master of the art of

[50] Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, January 5, 2006, Otta; Interview with Chief Wasiu Dada, the Ekiyo of Otta, May 10, 2006, Otta.
[51] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 178-191.
[52] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 111.
[53] The contrast between the *alagbada* (entertainment) Egungun and the warrior Egungun parallels how Lawal describes the aesthetic differences between Gelede and Egungun; the former is more concerned with beauty and cleanliness and a conscious desire to display wealth while the latter appears more frightening as it includes sacrificial elements (blood and animal parts) and behaves in a dangerous manner. Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle*, 178-191. The Oya masquerade blurs such boundaries insofar as it carries a sword that it wields in a threatening, yet displays flamboyant attire.
[54] Drewal and Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other," 31.

transformation."[55] This Egungun marks the change from a less violent or diffused warrior Egungun to a new entertaining Egungun.

It seems that Oya's emergence represents a double, if not a triple, transformation of the Egungun tradition. First, the owners of the Egungun transformed the attire of Oya. Second, they changed the mode of Egungun performance at Otta from an affair that people from the performing compound attended along with their guests to a spectacle that the entire town attended in the host compound. Third, the warrior Arogunmola found in Oya a new opportunity to remake himself as a generous patron. In Oya, the *alagbada* tradition converged with that of the *onidan*, displaying the Egungun's transformative powers.[56]

I am making a claim about the kinds of Egungun and big men (warriors) that existed and how their status fluctuated with that of the prevailing political and economic conditions. Inspiration for this claim comes from Karin Barber's work on *oriki* in which she compares and contrasts the *oriki* of big men before, during, and after the era of warfare.[57] Whereas Barber's emphasis is on the role of *oriki* in the building of a big man's reputation, I assert that Egungun extended the medium of reputation-building from the oral to the three-dimensional visual field. Here I also draw from Margaret Thompson Drewal's research on the role of the performer and his patrons in Egungun and other Yoruba rituals. Drewal claims that when the period of warfare ended, public displays of power and wealth became even more important for warriors. She illustrates this through a big man's role in the introduction of a new festival. While the big man's father, a

[55] Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 97-98.
[56] Ibid., Chapter 6; Drewal and Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other," 30-38; Houlberg, "Notes on Egungun Masquerades among the Oyo Yoruba," 25-27; Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," 55.
[57] See Chapter Six, "The Oriki of Big Men," Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*.

warrior, had acquired status through victory in battle, he looked for inspiration to his mother, a market woman, who had become successful through new forms of trade. The big man in Drewal's scenario, named Sote, was inspired by a woman who was a cloth seller, as was Arogunmola's first wife, Oshungbayi.[58]

Upon his arrival at home, Arogunmola faced a number of challenges that demanded his immediate attention. He had to reestablish his authority in the home, including with his first wife, who had amassed her own wealth as a prominent market woman. He also had to integrate his new wife into his family and community. In such circumstances, there was a tendency for rivalries to develop among co-wives or between the husband and his wealthy senior wife and to cause discord and even erupt into witchcraft accusations.[59] Thus, Arogunmola had to reestablish his authority and incorporate his new wife in a manner that fostered cooperation instead of hostility.

Arogunmola achieved these objectives in part through the development of his new Egungun. In doing so, I believe that he was inspired by knowledge he had acquired on the battlefield, if only through observation, of many different modes of Egungun performance and how they contributed to the aggrandizement of warriors, kings, and other powerful men.[60]

Arogunmola and his wives transformed the Oya Egungun, by altering some existing elements and adding some new ones. Moniyepe was most closely linked to the old elements. We can assume that as the masquerade's custodian, she had observed its

---

[58] Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 148.
[59] Peter Morton-Williams, "The Atinga Cult among the South-Western Yoruba: a Sociological Analysis of a Witchfinding Movement," *Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* 18, no. 3/4 (1956); Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 208-210, 235; Andrew Apter, "Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 1950-1951," in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 116-121.
[60] Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 173-191.

performances in her hometown. As the sole voice on how the masquerade looked and behaved prior to its arrival at Otta, she was in a prime position to shape the development of the masquerade, highlighting, suppressing, and revising elements at her discretion.[61]

Analysis of the *oriki* of the Oya masquerade from Otta alongside those of Oya masquerades from other Yoruba towns, as well as of the *oriki* and *itan* associated with Arogunmola and Oshungbayi, indicate that a number of verses illuminates the masquerade's history in the household of Moniyepe's father prior to Arogunmola's encounter with it.[62] The beginning verses of Oya Arogunmola's *oriki* incorporate the personal *oriki* of Arogunmola, Moniyepe, and Oshungbayi. The masquerade's *oriki* then shifts to elements that are less clear and more difficult to interpret, but which refer to the symbols of power and authority associated with hereditary rulers. For instance, Oya appears as the one who "rode on the donkey to the house of Ira…the camel down the hills of the Ogun [River]…and the fancy horse to the house to Ipo," and she also "sat so fitted on the horse." The reference to Oya riding on an animal may refer to her, her devotees,' and their descendents' ability to tower over or distinguish themselves from their peers and subordinates. The horse in particular, signals that the rider is not only elevated but also able to crush others.[63] The horse serves as a symbol of the cavalry, the basis of Oyo military might during the imperial period. It was linked to chiefly and royal power in the

[61] Barnes demonstrates how women as wives brought new ritual knowledge and networks to their husband's family and community. Sandra T. Barnes, "Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 20, no. 3 (1990): 262-265.

[62] Salako (2000) provides an *oriki* of the Arogunmola family. He also recounts some of Oshungbayi's *oriki* in his 2004 text. R. A. Salako, *Ota: Biography of the Foremost Awori Town* (Ota: Penink Publicity and Company, 2000), 198; Ruhollah Ajibola Salako, *Oba Moshood Oyede, The Olota of Ota: So Far So Good* (Otta: Pennik Publicity & Co., 2004), 41. Kosebinu prints several verses of the oriki of Oya Arogunmola in the Egungun festival brochures. Deji Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival in Ota Awori: Special Program Brochure* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000), 43. Babatunde Asanbe has provided me with substantive renditions of two of the Oya masquerades that appear at Otta today, Oya Arogunmola and Oya Ijemo. Chief A. Ojugbele performed the longest version of the *oriki* of Oya Arogunmola as well as an equally long chant, a genre of Egungun performance literature known as *ewi*.

[63] Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 206.

south, where horses appeared infrequently, and in the north, where horses were commonplace.[64] It is to the vicinity of the Oyo kingdom, more specifically in towns such as Ira, sacred to the worship of Oya as an *oriki* or Egungun, that this *oriki* refers. Moniyepe may have witnessed her father performing these verses of the masquerade's *oriki* during her childhood, or she may have interjected them to enhance or legitimize the status of this Egungun as having come from Oyo.[65]

Other verses from the Oya masquerade's *oriki* highlight elements of Arogunmola's character that were well suited to the new economic and social realities he faced. At the time Arogunmola brought the Oya masquerade to Otta, the town was experiencing a downturn in the palm produce trade.[66] One phrase that appears in different versions of the Oya masquerade's oriki, "*okuta lokapa inoja*," meaning "poverty or the dull market overpowers the trader," points, I believe, to Arogunmola's ability to overcome the obstacles (i.e. recession) that hinder others.[67] This line speaks to Arogunmola's immunity to the recession, and his ability to thrive in the midst of economic challenges.[68] Arogunmola's economic success is evident in other cognomens for him, which refer to one who creates cloth for himself and also for the lazy ones and to the person who "overcomes the vagabonds." In the midst of these struggles, Oya "was nursed with the 'Aran'" (an expensive, prestigious fabric), yet another appellation that points to the wealth and opulence of this Egungun and its owner.

---

[64] Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, 1600 - 1836: a West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic slave trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 127.
[65] This is consistent with what Barber illustrates as what women have long done with oriki. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 184.
[66] Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*.
[67] Salako, *Ota*, 198. Interview with A. Ojugbele, May 3, 2005; Interview with B. Asanbe, May 3, 2005.
[68] Barber identifies these traits as characterizing big men of this era. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 204.

An analysis of the Oya masquerade's *oriki* suggests some of the ways in which Arogunmola may have recruited supporters, which any big man needed to establish and maintain his status. Oya's *oriki* refers to Arogunmola's possession of material wealth and weapons and to his accomplishments on and off the battlefield. However, what made him unique was that he embodied the qualities of a new generation of peacetime big men, as well as those of their wartime predecessors.[69] According to several verses of the *oriki* that praise his generosity and hospitality, he was known as the owner of *agbada*-cloth and an *agbada*-wearing Egungun—and this cloth was regarded as prestigious. He possessed so much cloth that "he created his own cloth and created cloth for the lazy ones, too." Thus, it seems that he not only possessed but also shared his wealth with his followers and in doing so provided for their material needs, even during periods of hardship. Also, since he was a warrior, and since his father before him had been a reputable hunter from a family claiming descent from one of the town's earliest settlers, Arogunmola likely possessed wealth, or access to wealth, beyond the expensive cloths contributed by his wife.

The oral tradition also identifies a feast as having accompanied the inauguration of the Oya masquerade. Egungun festival performances often involved public displays of material wealth, including not only rich cloths, but also the wild game that would have been killed and prepared for a feast.[70] By displaying and sharing his resources,

[69] Wartime big men came to dominate from approximately 1825 up to 1893, the moment in which the British extended their colonial rule from Lagos throughout the majority of Yorubaland. Arogunmola represented those big men who made the transition into new class of peace time big men. Ibid., 203-204.
[70] A number of missionaries accounts offer details of these events. Henry Townsend, *October 14, from Journal ending 1875. CA2/035*; William Moore, *Annual Letter, 1878. CA2/070/75*; Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 30.

Arogunmola enhanced his reputation in the eyes of the Otta community as well as its visitors from neighboring communities.

Oriki also reveal Arogunmola to have been powerful, a quality that big men needed to keep their followers. Arogunmola was described as the carrier of a gun, a weapon that was introduced into Yoruba warfare during the nineteenth century. Another verse, which includes the expression "Arogunmola, capable of handling any child," implies that he was able to withstand any challenges from younger warriors. References to the volatility of his Egungun might also suggest that he was also a danger to those who even inadvertently offended him. These references surface in the form of pleas for Oya not to cause any harm to the supplicant or to his or her property, i.e. "Oya, do not cut down the tree at my backyard." "Oya, as scary as the outbreak of fire" and "Death mixed with wealth" reflect a need to supplicate Oya to avoid suffering from its wrath. One of the closing lines of the oriki makes an appeal for initiation either into the Egungun society or into the priesthood of the *orisha* Oya, and thereby to become a follower of Arogunmola and his masquerade.

It is unclear exactly which of the verses of the Oya Egungun's and Arogunmola's *oriki* that I collected in 2005 and 2006 and that local historians at Otta documented in 2000 and 2004 were recited in Otta at the end of the nineteenth century.[71] However, we can infer that whatever *oriki* existed then served to build Arogunmola's reputation. The performance of *oriki* during of celebration of Arogunmola's Oya Egungun was one of the most powerful and dramatic ways of communicating Arogunmola's status. It also signaled the transition into a new era in the history of Egungun, Otta, and the Yoruba.

[71] Oriki recitations by Ojugbele and Asanbe. Interview with A. Ojugbele, May 3, 2005; Interview with B. Asanbe, May 3, 2005. Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*, 43; Salako, *Ota*, 198.

The Oya Masquerade and New Perspectives on Women and Egungun

Thus far, we have examined the development of the Oya masquerade with regard to the contributions of Arogunmola. He focused on transforming and promoting an Egungun to display and distribute his wealth, and to attract followers after the war had ended. However, he did not transform the Oya masquerade single-handedly.

As the tradition reveals, Arogunmola's wives also played critical roles as the custodian and innovator, respectively, in the development of this masquerade and, in doing so, elevated their own positions within the town. Oshungbayi is known to have been a cloth seller, and, Moniyepe was a market woman; they were among the growing numbers of women who gained status on the war front and at home through marshaling their own and others' labor to increase their involvement in production and trade. Such women supplied warriors with food, weapons, and other supplies on the war front, and they were the main traders, producers of palm oil, and transporters of goods in local and regional markets. They often served as the heads of households when their husbands were away. They sought to maintain or elevate their status even as their husbands were returning from battle and seeking to reassert their authority in the home.

While much of the literature on Egungun and women suggests that through Egungun, men collectively mobilized to restrict women's economic, political, and social influence, the case of Arogunmola's wives and the Oya masquerade offers evidence that challenges this view. Moniyepe's and Oshungbayi's contributions to the development of this masquerade suggest the formation of an alliance between these women and their husband that ultimately solidified and advanced the positions of all three in the town. An

analysis of this scenario raises some important questions about the relationship between women and Egungun.

Much of the existing scholarship portrays Egungun as a religious-political institution that men have used to discipline or control women's this-worldly and otherworldly influence, particularly as it relates to their possession of an inherent mystical power, *aje*.[72] A number of factors have fueled the view of the relationship between Egungun and women as being inherently antagonistic. Overwhelmingly, scholars and Yoruba speakers themselves have translated the term *aje* to mean "witch."[73] There are some similarities between the Western notion of a witch and the Yoruba idea of *aje*. Both identities tend more to be imposed upon individuals than self-selected, i.e., most people do not declare themselves to be or have *aje*. Also, women disproportionately tend to be viewed as the perpetrators and victims of witchcraft or *aje* power. These terms, furthermore, often reflect an association of women with antisocial behavior, which in a patriarchal society manifests through their capacity to politically, economically, socially, and/or spiritually challenge the authority of men.[74] This way of thinking about *aje* has influenced interpretations of the status of women in Yoruba culture generally, and in Egungun more particularly, oversimplifying and misrepresenting the complex historical relationship between Egungun, women, and *aje*. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that by focusing on the relationship between this masquerade and the power of women as witches, current scholarship has left the impression that the

[72] Drewal and Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other," 38.
[73] James Matory, *Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 75; Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," 142.
[74] Apter, "Atinga Revisited," 116-121.

relationship between Egungun and women was inherently antagonistic, rather than also marked by respect.

Missionaries were the first to articulate this view, and their purpose and worldview were at the root of it. Missionaries came with the purpose of converting Africans, which included supplanting the propitiation of *orisha* and ancestral spirits with the religion of Christianity. They also came with their own worldview, which involved portraying Africans as barbaric and Europeans as civilized and, therefore, justified their purpose of imposing their religious, educational, political, economic, and social norms on Africans at all costs. This worldview offered an ideological basis for their project. Although there were differences among the missionaries who labored among the Yoruba, overall, at least initially, they embraced the British evangelical project. Even someone as culturally sensitive as James White, whom Peel identifies as the most interested in Yoruba cultural practices associated with the arts, was still biased, as I note in the previous two chapters. [75] While he and other missionaries provided a range of evidence from which readers can interpret the relationship of Egungun to women in several ways, the ideology that informed their project and their writings framed and colored their perspectives and ultimately represented this relationship as contentious.

Some of the earliest observations of Egungun masquerades come from British missionaries working during the 1830s in Freetown, Sierra Leone, a colony the British had established as a launching point for the spread of their evangelical, imperial, and economic interests in West Africa. Here, missionaries portrayed Egungun as "deceivers of the people" and "women terrifiers." In one incident recorded in 1833, a missionary reportedly ripped the Egungun costume off its wearer in order, we can deduce, to

[75] Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 298.

demystify Egungun's sacredness before converts and those who resisted conversion. This evidence reinforces a number of points to which I shall return to later. For now, it illustrates that the missionaries intended to attack the belief of the Yoruba that Egungun are masked ancestral spirits.

This illustrative account reads as follows:

> This represents a scene now almost impossible in the colony, though it was common enough forty years ago—a heathen "greegree" or "charm" man—at that time a visit of a "greegree" man was terrible to the people. The greegrees were men, covered from head to foot, to whom particular pieces of ground were held sacred. Their deeds of darkness and secrecy were as little called in question as those of the inquisition were, formerly, in Europe. I833, an egugu came into Freetown, Sierra Leone, with a party of drummers. This missionary, Mr. Beale, determined to expose the cheat. He ran out, seized the egugu, and dragged him into the mission yard. Mr. Beale tore his upper garment to shreds, and drew his gown over his head. When the crowd saw that the egugu was only a human being like themselves, and known to many, they raised a loud shout of derision. The man was delivered to the constable.[76]

Here, the missionary exhibits an aggressive, even violent, behavior that is unmatched; and in that respect it surpasses any of the accounts of Egungun observed in Yoruba towns during this period. The missionary could have taken such a violent approach because in the colony, he was part of the same order that dictated the environment, whereas he was only a guest of the rulers of Yoruba towns.

One of the contexts in which missionaries referenced Egungun most frequently was domestic dispute. While missionaries in general expressed views of Egungun as one of the coercive measures available to or used by men to control women, they saw this as particularly the case in relations between husbands and wives. In the following entry, Clarke notes the manner in which husbands request the assistance of Egungun whenever the wife challenges his authority. The Egungun will then terrify the wife, sometimes

[76] John W. Nunley, *Moving With the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 13.

even resorting to violence, to force her into submission or bring about consent. Discussing Egungun, Clark says:

> by this means the female population is kept in subjection. If a man's wife becomes uncontrollable, or offers any resistance to her husband, he has but to call to his assistance one of these women terrifiers and his success forthwith becomes complete. If she dares resist, Egungun gives her a drubbing not to be forgotten and takes his exit with the thanks of a victorious husband.[77]

Clark, like other missionaries of his time, including James White, appears to not to take the spiritual authority of Egungun seriously. His commentary reflects a functionalist perspective of Egungun as a tool of social control of women by men. Here, the wife, as the missionary Clarke leads the reader to believe, is the victim of abuse. From the narrative the missionary provides, it is hard to take issue with him.

The problem with the prevailing view, however, is that it has tended to treat Egungun masquerades in a monolithic, static, and ahistorical manner. This view reflects a focus on one type or facet of Egungun and from that formulates a general opinion about the character of all Egungun. It hinges on a translation of *aje* as "witch," and in concert with the depiction of the witch in the Western world, emphasizes the destructive capacity of *aje* instead of acknowledging the benevolent aspect of *aje*, its association with mothers.[78] Beyond the factors mentioned above, missionaries lacked an awareness of the particular historical moment in which they entered Yorubaland, and this in turn contributed to them articulation of a static and ahistorical view of Egungun. They arrived during an era of acute warfare, featuring the ascendancy of warriors and warrior states, as previously noted. They did not, I argue, understand that the conditions at this time affected Egungun so much that Egungun practices became more marshaled toward violence or even oriented toward militarism than they had been earlier or would later be.

[77] Law citing Clarke. Law, "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations," 51.
[78] Ulli Beier, "Gelede Masks," *Odu: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies* 6 (1958): 6-7.

In spite of their biases and oversights, the missionary view has remained dominant for several reasons. As mentioned above, missionaries were the first to document Egungun and in doing so they established the meta-narrative, the predominant image of Egungun. Some of the main features of their view have been picked up by subsequent generations of writers and scholars and have even been referenced by Yoruba speakers as the most authoritative record of their history, beliefs, and practices. Johnson, the progenitor of Yoruba historiography, conveys the sentiment that women only pretended to believe that Egungun masqueraders are reincarnated ancestors and that women faced a burden of having to prepare feasts for the men and give up some of their wealth during the annual Egungun festival period.[79]

In response to the dominant view held by missionaries like Johnson and many subsequent writers, three scholars have presented a far more complicated image of Egungun and its historical relationship to women in their essays by beginning with a critique of the perception of women as *aje* and the association of that term with witchcraft, an issue to which I shall return shortly. Beier challenges the view that the chief function of Egungun was to discipline women by citing women's roles in Egungun performances as devotees, as owners of individual masquerades, and as leaders in the Egungun society.[80] Verger references Beier's argument yet offers his own evidence in the form of myths to conclude that there is a dual nature of women as *aje*, one malevolent and the other more benevolent and in control of the power associated with Egungun.[81] Drewal invokes both Beier and Verger and even more forcefully challenges the view that

[79] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 29-30.
[80] Beier, "The Egungun Cult," 389.
[81] Pierre Verger, "Grandeur et decadence du culte de Iyami Osoronga: Ma mere la sorciere chez les Yoruba," *Journal de la Societe des Africanistes* 35, no. 1 (1965): 142-143.

Egungun was antagonistic to women, citing evidence from his predecessors.[82] In spite of the evidence these scholars have provided in support of an alternative view, others scholars have continued to pick up on the view of Egungun as being antagonistic to women, and in doing so they have overlooked and oversimplified the complex relationship expressed in those seminal essays.

Returning to the debate about *aje* and its association with female power, a number of scholars and *orisha* and Ifa priests take issue with the tendency to translate the term *aje* as "witch." As the artist-scholar Ulli Beier contends, *aje* should not be equated with the witch because they are not channels for Satan, as the witches of medieval Europe have long been characterized.[83] The *aje* embody the mystical powers of women, their ability to create, sustain, and destroy life as well as any human endeavor.[84] They manifest both positive/benevolent and negative/malevolent qualities, consistent with such other dualities as hot-cold and fire-water that art historians like Babatunde Lawal and Rowland Abiodun articulate as being central to Yoruba cosmology, philosophy, and aesthetics.[85] Like any of the *orisha* (divinities) and other beings in Yoruba cosmology, *aje* must be

---

[82] Drewal, "Art and the Perception of Women in Yoruba Culture," 547-548. Drewal and Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other," 38.

[83] A number of contemporary *orisha* and Ifa priests from Nigeria and either living in the United States or Nigeria have also made the case that anthropologist have inaccurately translated the term aje as witch. Awo Fatunmbi defines aje as the force or power to effect change or a prayer its efficacy. He goes on to say that the association of this power with the natural birthright of women has made it easy to associate it with witchcraft. The Africana literary scholar Teresa Washington cites Fatunmbi's discussion of *aje*. Teresa N. Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Ajé in Africana Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 15-17.

[84] Beier, "Gelede Masks," 6-7. Washington draws a similar conclusion; she references an Ifa priest, Samuel M. Opeola, from the ancestral home of the Yoruba, Ile Ife, who contends that the aje exhibit a superbly composed character, embodied in the concept of *iwa-pel*e, gentle, calm, patience character. It is when an individual fails to embody this ideal that the *aje* make their presence felt. Commenting on Opeola's explanation, Washington says that the *aje* are said to be typically cool in temperament and disinclined to emotional outbursts, unlike witches who are temperamental, vicious, and quick to take offense." Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts*, 15.

[85] Babatunde Lawal, "Ejiwapo: The Dialectics of Twoness in Yoruba Art and Culture," *African Arts* (2008): 24.

placated in order that they will use their powers toward human prosperity. If neglected, they will use them in destructive ways.

The philosopher Barry Hallen also takes issue with Christian missionaries and social anthropologists who, according to him, in translating *aje* to be witches and sorcerers confine them to the domains of Western magic and superstition. Relying on evidence he collected from a Yoruba *onisegun*, Hallen posits that *aje* are not witches because they can exhibit good or bad character and can be men or women; and though witchdoctors, a category of men hired to identify and counter the destructive behavior of witches, cannot be witches, a *babalawo* (a diviner of the Ifa oracle) or an *onisegun* (a medicine man) can also be an *aje*. He proposes that *aje* should be understood as human beings with superior intelligence and ability because he believes this better reflects the terms used in Yoruba discourse.[86]

Some of the texts from Ifa make similar references to Egungun. According to the renowned *babalawo* (Ifa priest) and Awise Agbaye (a title meaning the spokesperson for Ifa worldwide) from Oyo, the renowned spokesperson for Yoruba culture and religion worldwide, Wande Abimbola, claims that according to the text Otuurupon Meji, Egungun was created to help human beings limit the impact of the destructive powers of the

[86] Hallen and Sodipo's research allows us valuable insight into the nature of *aje* that other scholars have not taken up. These two scholars offer a unique approach to the study of *aje* in that they present *aje* as one of many types of people with exceptional abilities; that is, whether you are a man or woman, if you are seen as a person possessing exceptional skills or resources, it may be assumed that you have the power of *aje*. Other studies of *aje* do not account for the range of categories (i.e., wizard, wise person, superior person), whom Hallen and Sodipo claim to be more gifted than *aje*. Other writers and informants, almost without exception, use the term *aje* to refer to those persons which Hallen and Sodipo contend have more than one self (*aje*, *emere*, *alajanun*, etc.). Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*, Reprint, with a new foreword by W. V. O. Quine and a new afterword by Barry Hallen ed. (London: Ethnographica Publishers, 1986), 86-117; Barry Hallen, *The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 62-91.

witch.[87] He often characterizes the witches as malevolent forces that torment human beings, who therefore turn to the *orisha*, benevolent beings in Abimbola's framework, and others spirits such as Egungun for protection.[88] Another leading *babalawo*, Yemi Elebuibon, from Oshogbo (the town in which Verger researched), cites Osa Meji (which Verger also cites) as he makes an important distinction, which I heard from time to time, between the different categories of *aje*, ranging from benevolent to malevolent.[89] It is this distinction that is all too often overlooked in discussions of Egungun, although the traditions and scholars surveyed here speak to the more complex nature of *aje*.

However, a close analysis of the Oya masquerade and the traditions about it suggests a very different relationship between Egungun and women. According to Otta's Oya tradition, a woman possessed a masquerade, albeit one inherited from her father. Arogunmola acquired the masquerade through his relationship with her and turned it to his own ends, as seen in the previous section. Furthermore, Oshungbayi's position in this tradition indicates the power that women had to transform masquerades, embellishing and enhancing their appeal in entertainment and establishing their popularity. Through her contributions to the development of this Egungun, Oshungbayi appropriated it toward her own advancement at least as much as Arogunmola had done.

In emphasizing that Egungun have long fostered collaboration between men and women, I am also asserting that gender is only one of the many categories, i.e. lineage, age, and ethnicity, around which individuals forged alliances and engaged in complex negotiations and struggles for power and authority. The manner in which Arogunmola

---

[87] Wande Abimbola, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria, 1976), 165-167. ———, *Ifa Divination Poetry* (New York: Nok Publishers, 1977), 119.
[88] Abimbola, *Ifa*, 165.
[89] Chief Priest Yemi Elebuibon, *The Healing Power of Sacrifice* (Brooklyn: Athelia Henrietta Press, Inc., 2000), 67, 70-71.

and his two wives worked together to develop this Egungun suggests collaboration based on Arogunmola's lineage and embodied by a new Egungun, the *alagbada* or owner of *agbada* cloth, named Oya. Through their Egungun, this warrior and his wives shared their wealth in the form of prestigious cloths among the members of their domestic group and other individuals and families within the town.[90] What is also interesting here is that only one of the three was originally attached to an Egungun masquerade in an intimate way, and that person was Moniyepe, who provided her husband Arogunmola and his senior wife Oshungbayi with a powerful Egungun. It was through Moniyepe that the latter two were able, through their innovations, to establish a place of prominence for themselves in the arena of Egungun. They were able to transform the practice of Egungun in the town even though they did not have titles within the Egungun society or control over an Egungun prior to their encounter with Moniyepe. While many scholars and practitioners have talked about Egungun as being hostile to women, this case shows how a man and two women cooperated with one another to elevate their standings in the arena of Egungun masquerades and chiefs and the town at large.

In order to better assess Moniyepe's experience and how its revises our understanding of Egungun to women, let us look at her presence on the warfront and the implications of her marriage bargain to Arogunmola. Recent scholarship reveals that some women acquired a good deal of wealth and influence in conducting trade and supplying warriors with weapons, food, and other goods. Not all free women on the warfront achieved that level of prominence. Nonetheless, their labor and income made

[90] What we see here is the allusion to the breaking down of male and female spaces; and such a view is consistent with the mythology around Oya. Oya represents a woman who dominated male-centered spaces, i.e. warfare, where she served as a bearded warrior; and Egungun, often regarded as the domain of men. She has been one of the most prominent Egungun in many communities where the practice exists.

them desirable and sought-after.[91] It is possible that Moniyepe was enslaved as a woman taken in battle, although the tradition does not mention this. The fact that her family had an Egungun and she was its custodian means that she and her family had had, at least at one time, a degree of wealth and status. One reason to conclude that Moniyepe was a free woman when she entered into her negotiations with Arogunmola lies in the fact that the tradition portrays their agreement to marry as an exchange of resources. Arogunmola received a wife, Moniyepe, and her family's masquerade, in exchange for his promise to support and promote it. Such a transaction required that Moniyepe possess knowledge of Oya's prayers and sacrifices and its ritual objects, i.e. its sword, costume, and other paraphernalia. What she received was the status of having been the individual who possessed and harnessed these valuable resources in a manner that could benefit Arogunmola's family.[92]

By bringing with her into marriage the resource of her family Egungun, Moniyepe probably entered the Arogunmola family with a degree of authority and influence. Her knowledge of prayers and *oriki* were essential to harnessing the potency of the Egungun. She would thus have been valued and respected by her husband, and if his first wife was not equally predisposed to value and respect her, she would have had something of power to leverage against her. Moniyepe represents those women who as outsiders used their ritual knowledge, materials, and clientele to secure places of prominence in communities that adopted them.[93] It is worth speculating how much inquiry Moniyepe made into conditions in Otta and the number and kind of Egungun already there. Moniyepe's family Egungun, Oya Egungun, was one of the oldest and most prominent types of

[91] Barnes, "Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge," 251-253, 264.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

Egungun, one whose origins were linked to the beginnings of the Oyo Empire.[94] Records show that the most prominent cities surrounding Otta (Lagos and Badagry) had been in possession of an Oya Egungun for several decades.[95] Otta, however, did not yet have this kind.[96] In linking her fortunes to the ambitious Arogunmola, a warrior who did not yet have his own Egungun, and whose town did not yet have an Egungun Oya, Monieype may be seen to have been shrewdly positioning herself and her family Egungun to their best advantage. It is easy to presume that Arogunmola, who lacked titles and other masquerades, would have devoted his resources to the development of this masquerade. There would also have been good reason to assume that the town of Otta would be pleased to receive this kind of Egungun and look with favor on the outsider who had brought this prestigious masquerade to the community.

Given what is known about subsequent history, Moniyepe's decisions and calculations were borne out. Not only Arogunmola but also his senior wife Oshungbayi developed Moniyepe's family Egungun and modified it in ways that made it much admired and celebrated. Today it is the most prestigious of all the masquerades in the town of Otta, and Monieye's name is revered and honored in connection with it. One of the elements of power and honor among the Yoruba is to be respected and revered n the afterlife. By bestowing her masquerade on Arogunmola, Moniyepe, an outsider, acquired an honored place.

---

[94] Jonathan O. Lucas, *The Religion of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C. M. S. Bookshop, 1948), 138; Kalilu, "The Role of Sculptures in Yoruba Egungun Masquerade," 22; Schiltz, "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna," 49, 52.
[95] Judith Gleason, *Oya: in Praise of the Goddess* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987). Interview with the Alaagba, Oyadolu Family, Badagry, Lagos State.
[96] Interview with Ojugbele, May 3, 2005.

All these elements in the Oya tradition suggest that Moniyepe was aware of the political power and utility as well as the ritual power of Egungun. Surely, too, this Egungun could not have become what it is today without her awareness of how it could build her family's reputation. As we turn to the next actor in the story, Oshungbayi, it should become clear that Moniyepe and Oshungbayi likely cooperated in transforming this Egungun at Otta. Indeed, if it is true, as the tradition holds, that Oshungbayi traveled back and forth between Otta and the warfront, she may have met and approved an alliance with Moniyepe before the marriage took place.

When Oshungbayi's husband returned to Otta with a new wife, the evidence suggests that Oshungbayi decided to help aggrandize the Egungun masquerade they brought with them. In the process, she advanced herself, Moniyepe, Arogunmola, and the town as a whole. As a market woman who traded in textiles, she was well positioned to know the capacity of cloth to enhance the physical and symbolic presence of the wearer, including in masquerade performance.[97] According to tradition, she furnished her husband's masquerade a new costume made of cloth sewn in the form of an *agbada*. Oya became the first Egungun at Otta to wear this style of attire, inaugurating a new category of masquerade known as *alagbada*, meaning the "owner of a long-flowing gown" or owner of *agbada*. The Oya masquerade wore this new attire from the moment of its first performance at Otta, and Arogunmola's wives, Moniyepe and Oshungbayi, followed behind praising it and those associated with it by singing its *oriki*.[98]

[97] Ibid; Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 148.
[98] Interview with Ojugbele, May 3, 2005.

The tradition portrays the scene reminiscent of White's descriptions of the Gelede festival he described in 1854, which I discuss in Chapter Four, and the festival of 1871.[99] The inhabitants of the town and their guests from neighboring communities descended on one place, which in case of the Oya performance was Arogunmola's compound, Ikotun. There, they feasted and observed the Oya masquerade parading elaborately decorated cloth. Later, Arogunmola's wives likely accompanied it, with a large following of men and women, in a parade throughout the town in a manner consistent with many of the non-violent performances that missionaries documented during this period.

By performing the *oriki*, Moniyepe and Oshungbayi not only drew attention to their masquerade and their husband, the most obvious subjects/objects of their praise, they also interjected themselves into the performance, boasting of their personal achievements and praising themselves. In discussing the mode and content of *oriki* that women perform as wives, Karin Barber reveals that women often vacillate between showmanship and substance, entertainment and reverence, self-aggrandizement and enlarging the egos of others.[100] Oshungbayi probably gained immediate attention as the most prominent local actor associated with this masquerade, since, unlike Arogunmola, she had not gone away to fight on the war front or remain their to trade or care for her husband, and unlike Moniyepe, was not a new comer to the town. Of the three, Oshungbayi would have had to longest continuous presence as a woman of means in Otta. Significantly, the *oriki* of the Oya masquerade incorporates some of Oshungbayi's personal *oriki* and both refer to cloth, a symbol of prestige. In the masquerade's *oriki*, the Egungun, the warrior, and his two wives are collectively regarded as "owners of the big

[99] James White, *December 31, from Journal ending March 25, 1855*; ———, *January 13, from Journal ending March 25, 1871*.
[100] Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 185-194.

cloth." Oshungbayi's *oriki* identifies her as "the one who ties her wrapper (a cloth worn by women in a skirt-like manner) so well that she takes the crown of the lazy"; the crown is most likely a reference to the title of Iyalode, which Yoruba speakers often translate as the "Female King"; the title is a reflection of her wealth and boldness.[101] Similarly, a cognomen of Oya refers to this Egungun as the one "who is nursed with the 'Aran'" (a very expensive fabric).[102] This evidence suggests that Oshungbayi provided very valuable cloth, measured both in amount and quality.

The crown mentioned in the *oriki* is worth noting, because it may be seen as having encoded an effort on the part of the Oya Egungun's supporters to both highlight and appropriate the authority associated with royals, whose status had earlier been threatened by the nineteenth-century warriors. The crown in Oshungbayi's *oriki* may refer to her acquisition of the title of "Iyalode."[103] The conferral on her of such a title suggests the harmonizing of male and female royal power, an outgrowth of cooperation among men and women in general and among the males and females in Arogunmola's household in particular.

In providing her husband's Egungun with a new cloth, Oshungbayi demonstrates one of the ways in which women have used their wealth to shape Egungun masquerades and the entire practice of masquerading more generally. Recent scholarship has suggested that in Egungun masquerade performances, men extracted a portion of women's new wealth during an era of economic transition, when women were gaining

[101] Translated by Olayinka Dada, a native of Otta and a speaker of the Awori dialect spoken in this town.
[102] Interview with Ojugbele, May 3, 2005.
[103] Ibid.

considerable income and power from the expansion of the palm produce trade.[104] Citing missionaries who recorded that men closed markets, drove women from their trading stalls, and stole their goods and money, scholars such as Law and Shields speculate that men through these activities appropriated a portion of women's commercial wealth.[105] It is difficult to deny the exploitative tendencies of many men of this era, particularly the warriors whose fame was established in part through their ability to terrorize and manipulate. However, the antagonistic relationship between men and women, husbands and wives, Egungun and market women only offers one perspective.

The antagonistic view articulated by missionaries does not allow for the role that conflicts between families, wards, or generations might have played in many of the same cases these scholars assess. It might have been that a woman in one household or section of town might have called out her family's Egungun to target her rival. This perspective does not account for the role that women's economic power could have played in women's ability to shape Egungun performances. Several missionaries observed the presence of large numbers of women at Egungun festival performances in different communities.[106] Missionaries also recorded moments when the mass of market women in a given town offered goods as gifts for the Egungun festival in exchange for its blessings.[107] However, missionaries did not see these women might have asserted a significant degree of power through the dependence of Egungun on the contributions of these women. Yet, are readers to assume that women were passive and peripheral and

[104] See CA2 series for William Clarke, James White, and Henry Townsend in addition to Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 29-30.
[105] Law, "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations." Shields, "Palm Oil and Power."
[106] James White, October 16, 1855; Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 29-31.
[107] Charles Phillips, *May 4, from Journal ending June 20, 1853. CA 2/077*; John F. King, *Journal for October 14, 1875. CA2/035*; Moore, *Annual Letter, 1878. CA2/070/75*. Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*, 30, 330.

not assertive and essential? More than that, this view all too easily uncritically embraces the missionary outlook. It does not consider what dissenting voices might surface in local histories and oral traditions, which, although not subject to bias, will surely lead other important insights and perspectives into the complex alliances and allegiances that influence Egungun performances.

While the antagonistic view, no matter how subtle, may hold in some cases, such conclusions should not be drawn about the general relationship of women to Egungun. A more fruitful approach might be to examine the relationships between individual Egungun masquerades and the Egungun society; relations among individual patrons, families, and wards; as well as the categories of Egungun involved.

I posit that Moniyepe's ability to ensure that her father's Egungun survived and Oshungbayi's capacity to provide it with the material resources, i.e. cloth, to enhance its stature and that of its owners and their followers, indicate that women exercised considerable influence over the migration and modification of Egungun. In the annual Egungun festivals and on other occasions when a large number of Egungun appeared, women's collaboration with Egungun maskers was essential. To interpret women's collective mobilization and, in some instances, individual support of Egungun purely in terms of consent to male hegemony is not helpful because it runs the risk of obscuring an important historical trend in women's relationship to Egungun and their status in the era of transition to colonial rule.[108] The implication here is that in the arena of Egungun the relationship among men and women often reflects cooperation.

[108] Denzer, "Yoruba Women."

While Moniyepe was an outsider who introduced Oya to Arogunmola and Otta, Oshungbayi arguably gained the most prominence through this Egungun.[109] She appears to have been the only one of the three to acquire a title in Otta. Earlier, in the discussion of Oshungbayi's oriki, we mentioned that references to her and the way she produced cloth for herself and others and tied her own cloth reflected her wealth and status as the Iyalode. Traditions reveal the British colonial administration conferred that title upon her and that the king of Otta confirmed it. The circumstances surrounding the British District Officer's decision to confer a native title upon Oshungbayi are unclear. What is clear is that she was installed in the early 1920s, and that, at the some time, she acquired the appellation "Iyalode Oyinbo"—meaning the White, European, or westerner Iyalode. Like other individuals occupying the office of Iyalode, Oshungbayi more than likely played an important role in mediating local crises. One event that occurred around the time of her conferment and that she may have mediated was a protest at Otta against the taxation of women in the second decade of the twentieth century.[110]

The importance of Oshungbayi to the success of the Oya masquerade merits further consideration. By offering a new style of Egungun costume and ritual practice that complemented her and her mother's occupations as cloth sellers and her father's role as the first person to hold the Egungun chieftaincy title of Alaran, she embellished the

[109] Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 235-236. It seems that Oshungbayi is the exception in this regard. As Barber demonstrates, women who converted their economic power into social and political power were considered a threat because they could challenge men. Oshungbayi, it seems, approached the line between, on one side, being a threat and potentially an *aje* or a witch, and, on the opposing side, being a powerful woman, who through her reproductive and productive labor, built up her husband. All indications are that Oshungbayi did not cross it. We can deduce that she increased her husband's prestige by enhancing his Egungun, Oya, which became Oya Arogunmola or that is his compound, Ikotun, and also became known as Oya Ikotun.

[110] Agunwa, *First Book on Otta*, 60-70. As the history of women holding this title in other Yoruba towns indicates, their ability to resolve disputes especially as they relates to the market or relations with foreign powers inspired their communities to reward them with this office.

entertainment value of Egungun.[111] She also illustrated how local traders could market their goods and thereby contribute to the economic development of the town. More than that, she affirmed the importance of women to the perpetuation of individual Egungun masquerades and the collective Egungun society, which organized the Egungun festival and many performances on specific occasions. Also, she represents how wives enhanced the Egungun performance by performing *oriki* that legitimized the status of individual Egungun and its supporters as it highlighted various aspects of the masquerade's and its patron's persona. Some wives (and daughters) even gained a reputation as exceptional performers of the fullest versions of the *oriki* of their family, its members, and their Egungun, while others distinguished themselves as performers of the shorter versions of *oriki* from different Egungun, families, and individuals.[112] Women also often critiqued the behavior and historical claims of various individuals within their communities.[113] We can also infer that the critical roles that market women and wives played in sustaining their husband's and father's lineages were affirmed in Egungun performances, which parallels what I have discussed earlier in terms of Gelede. To overlook this detail is to omit an important aspect of Yoruba history and society.

One question that emerges is whether the Oya masquerade would have emerged or become as prominent without Oshungbayi or only through the union of Arogunmola and Moniyepe. It is conceivable that Moniyepe and Arogunmola alone could have staged a performance of Oya at Otta. The junior wife, who was the masquerade's custodian, and

[111] Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele, June 24, 2008, Otun Ward, Otta.
[112] While Barber notes this practice in Okuku, it also occurs in places like Otta, where today a group of women known as the *oje parapo* is comprised of women from different families who perform the oriki of Egungun. Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, 133-134, 312-313. Kosebinu identifies the *oje parapo* comprised of both men and women at Otta. Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*.
[113] Andrew Apter, "Discourse and its Disclosures: Yoruba Women and the Sanctity of Abuse," *Africa* 68, no. 1 (1998): 68-75.

the husband arrived with the Oya masquerade, which at its core included its sword and attire, in the form of an *egbudu* (sack). Arogunmola's father had been the carrier or masker of another Egungun, and therefore Arogunmola could have probably drawn on his father's network of drummers, praise-singers, and other supporters to host a performance for members of his compound and their associates.

However, the Oya masquerade probably would not have developed in the way that it did without Oshungbayi's support. If she had resented the presence of a second wife or even an Egungun which missionaries from the period often viewed as "women terrifiers," Oshungbayi might have chosen to decline the opportunity to support it or at worst interfered with the performance. This Egungun's growth or even its ability to take root at Otta would surely have been stunted had she opposed it. On the other hand, it is hard to argue against the idea that she made the biggest contribution to Oya and similarly derived the most benefit from it. By mobilizing her resources to enhance this masquerade, she made it a great success. Oshungbayi provided the lavish cloth that signified and served as the basis of her wealth and status her status Arogunmola's ascension. Having traveled between Oyo and Otta and conducted her trade in cloth, she probably had the most knowledge of local and regional aesthetic appetites and the largest network of supporters. At the core of her networks were market women and the Egungun society, who were needed to gather a large audience from the town. Her father was a wealthy hunter and farmer in addition to being the first *Alaran* of Otta, a high-ranking Egungun from the Ijana ward; and her mother was a wealthy cloth trader from the Isalu Oke compound in the Osi ward.[114] Thus, she was from an influential family possessing the material resources and the economic and ritual networks that would have positioned

[114] Gbamidele Ajayi, June 24, 2008, Otta.

her more than the other members of her domestic group to host an event such as the inauguration of a new Egungun performance. The material wealth she had accumulated was probably critical to their ability to provide a feast for the town and to provide Arogunmola and Moniyepe with opulent cloth to wear for the occasion.

There are other possible explanations as to how Oshungbayi became successful at exploiting the Oya masquerade to her and her family's advantage. One explanation has to do with the mythology of Oya. The Egungun performance provided the space for Oshungbayi's actions and character to become aligned with those of Oya. Among the Oyo Yoruba subgroup, who resided mostly in the Ijana ward of Otta and dominated the affairs of Egungun in the town, Oya was an *orisha* and one-time wife of Shango, the former king of Oyo. Oya also possessed a fiery persona. She has long been known as the "buffalo woman" or "warrior woman."[115] Oya represents a woman who tends to inhabit and dominate male spaces, i.e. hunting, warfare, and even masquerading.

There is also a rich corpus of other traditions that provide evidence of a more complex relationship between Egungun and women and also that might have helped Moniyepe and Oshungbayi derive some of the benefits mentioned above from their investment in Egungun. Missionaries such as Johnson recorded some of these traditions during the nineteenth century, and twentieth-century ethnographers recorded others contained within the Odu Ifa corpus and elsewhere. These traditions indicate that women have long possessed the ability to shape elements of Egungun itself and through Egungun, to influence the broader society. Scholars and practitioners refer to a number of myths which they believe address the origins and early development of Egungun and

[115] Gleason, *Oya: in Praise of the Goddess*, 130.

also speak to the relationship of Egungun and women.[116] The core elements of these myths fall into several categories, only two of which will be discussed here: men's relationship to their ancestors and men's neglect of women's power. The first category of myths signals that kings who sought to honor their ancestors chose women to be the custodians of their Egungun. This trope illuminates Yoruba beliefs concerning women's power of *aje* and the need to harness that power in support of monarchs.[117]

An underlying principle governing Yoruba cosmology, which figures in these myths, is that power is typically gendered. Such gendering does not always or absolutely dictate the actions of the sexes; men can draw upon *aje* directly, for example, but it is generally the case that men's and women's spiritual powers are channeled differently and violation of that principle is taken seriously.[118] As Peel observes, gender is inscribed onto Yoruba spirits and powers—in ways, I might add, that reveal a far more fluid idea of gender than is sometimes reflected in the literature on Egungun.[119] If a man or a male deity in the myths neglects a woman or a female deity, then the latter may disrupt the power of the former until she is honored and her contributions cease to be overlooked. It is when ancestral spirits are neglected that *aje* comes into play as an agent of misfortune.

---

[116] Beier, "The Egungun Cult," 389-391; Verger, "Grandeur et decadence," 202-205; Adedeji, "The Alarinjo Theatre," 81-92; Drewal and Drewal, "More Powerful Than Each Other," 38-39; Rowland Abiodun, "Woman in Yoruba Religious Images," *African Languages and Cultures* 2, no. 1 (1989); Wande Abimbola, "The Bag of Wisdom: Osun and the Origins of Ifa Divination," in *Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba goddess in African and the Americas*, ed. Joseph Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 142-144; Rowland Abiodun, "Hidden Power: Osun, the Seventeenth Odu," in *Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba goddess in African and the Americas*, ed. Joseph Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[117] The association of Yoruba kings with female power is expressed in the crowns of these rulers. They often include an image of a bird, a symbol of aje and an effective ruler's reliance upon the aje to have a successful reign. Interview with Eshorun of Oshogbo and Chief Adedoyin Faniyi, August 28, 2006, Ibokun Road, Oshogbo.

[118] Verger, "Grandeur et decadence," 201-205; Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, Chapter 1; Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 81-90; Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," 137-139.

[119] Peel, "Gender in Yoruba Religious Change," 139-141.

These myths create cognitive maps that people draw upon, even today, at places like Otta to explain women's status in Egungun.[120] The myths recorded by Johnson were in circulation during the time that Oya emerged at Otta, and they surely shaped Moniyepe's father's worldview when he decided to make his daughter the custodian of his Egungun.[121] These mythic traditions were likewise known to Arogunmola, informing his sense of the ways that women's participation in Egungun both sustained the masquerade and helped it flourish. Finally, such traditions may have helped inform and inspire Moniyepe and Oshungbayi to draw upon the power of the Egungun to better their individual positions and the status of their domestic group within the town.

One prominent tradition holds that a senior woman was appointed to be the custodian of the first Egungun. This tradition centers on Shango, who many Yoruba people believe was one of the earliest *Alaafin* (emperors) of the Oyo kingdom, before he died and was later revered as a god of thunder. Shango, it is said, introduced a new ancestral rite to legitimize his claim to the throne and to honor his father. The key here is the person whom Shango charged with calling out the royal masquerade from its sacred resting place, the royal mausoleum within the palace, and overseeing its worship during the annual festivals in Oyo. Shango chose the *Iyamode*, an unmarried and possibly celibate priestess, whom tradition characterizes as having been subject to frequent possessions by Shango after he ascended to the status of deity. Henceforth, *Iyamode* was thought to be his Shango's embodiment because his spirit possessed her so often.[122] The questions we might ask are: Why was a woman entrusted with the responsibility of being

[120] Andrew H. Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: the Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Chapter 1.
[121] Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*.
[122] Ibid. Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, "Notes on the King-God Shango and His Temple at Ibadan, Southern Nigeria," *Man* 46 (1946): 30.

the custodian of the royal masquerade and what do *Iyamode's* achievements imply about the relationship between Egungun and women? What kind of precedent might this tradition have set for Moniyepe and Oshungbayi?

The tradition of Shango and the *Iyamode* calls attention to the capacity of women acting as custodians of Egungun to channel or harness male power or even combine it with their own. The *Iyamode's* ritual prowess enabled her to channel or harness the spirit Shango's ancestors in the form of a royal masquerade. She thereby gained the title of Iyamode and ensured her own immortality, as subsequent generations invoked her achievement to establish a precedent for women's role in Egungun. Moniyepe and Oshungbayi followed paths similar to the Iyamode. Moniyepe became the custodian for her father's Egungun. Moniyepe must have found a measure of comfort for herself and praise in the eyes of others by preserving her ancestors' legacy through maintaining her father's Egungun.[123] Moniyepe also shaped that legacy through her role as a performer of the *oriki*, calling out the Oya masquerade and the power it possessed.[124]

While the silences in the tradition make it difficult to see what elements Moniyepe added to the Egungun, the tradition is more explicit about Oshungbayi's contributions. Oshungbayi combined male power in the Egungun masquerade with her own social and political knowledge and material resources to elevate her stakes and that of her husband and his junior wife. Like the Iyamode and Moniyepe before her, Oshungbayi used the power of her voice to call out male power and praise it, making it even more exalted. Oshungbayi acquired a non-Egungun-related title, that of "the

[123] Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival*, 25.
[124] Barber discusss how the identities of devotees and the spirits or objects of their devotion coalesce. Karin Barber, "How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes Towards The Orisa," *Africa* 51, no. 3 (1981): 724-726.

Iyalode," after having made an important contribution to the development of Egungun masquerades and chiefs in the town; this follows the patterns established by the Iyamode.

By appointing a woman to lead out and oversee his ancestral Egungun, Shango, I believe, acknowledged women's distinctive mystical power and close relationship to *aje*. His Egungun was not simply a parade, an entertainment, or a symbol. It called down and embodied spiritual power, which he needed a woman with *aje* to oversee and control.

If we think of *aje* as a life-sustaining, and not just a life-taking or destroying force, which the Iyamode harnessed to enhance the potency of Shango's Egungun, then Shango's selection of the woman has even greater significance. Shango, regarded as a medicine man and skilled mystic himself, understood the need to honor *aje* as he sought to enlarge his ritual and political power. Many other myths that mention Shango's wives reveal his reliance on them for their supernatural or ritual powers. These myths give further cause to speculate about the power that men seek to tap when they solicit women's support. Scholars have noted that kings more often bestowed the powers of their office on wives and female slaves than on male supporters and slaves, because women did not have the same opportunity as men to usurp power for themselves and overthrow the king.[125] As the next category of traditions shows, however, women had a different resource on which they could draw to threaten those who failed to acknowledge their importance.

Turning from the category of traditions involving kings who sought women as custodians of Egungun, we find another set of traditions that emphasize the importance of women to Egungun by highlighting the destructive consequences for men when they neglect women. Two popular traditions that fall into this category go as far as to

[125] Matory, *Sex and the Empire*, 9-10; Bay, *Wives of the Leopard*, 19-20.

highlight the supremacy of women's *aje* over the power of men. These traditions are located in Osa Meji and Ose Tura, both of which are chapters from the Ifa corpus. Both traditions begin with the arrival of male divinities on earth, where they began confidently to carry out their responsibilities. The lone female divinity among them, Odu in the former and Oshun in the latter, as a result of feeling excluded by the males, decided to unleash her power of *aje*— here represented as the capacity to create, sustain, or destroy all life and any human or spiritual endeavor—toward making male power ineffectual until it properly honored the female deity. Odu became the first woman to learn and practice the art of masquerading as an Egungun, which she is said to have used in an abusive manner, at least from the perspective of the men. Oshun defeated the spirits of Egungun and Odu when the male divinities sent them to overturn the chaos she had caused. The male divinities only found resolution with these powerful women and *aje* by propitiating them and agreeing to their demands to leave behind a representative in the form of a bird who would sit on the shoulder of Egungun in the case of Odu and a male child in the case of Oshun. The representative oversaw the affairs of men and ensured that women's interests were always considered.[126] In essence, the exclusion of female power aroused the negative manifestation of *aje*, while the reverse garnered the blessings of *aje*.[127]

The traditions of Osa Meji and Ose-Tura reflect a notion of how the female divinities transfer power and authority to men. This is the theme that connects the narratives of Osa Meji and Ose Tura to the history of the Egungun Oya at Otta. In all these cases, women (Odu, Oshun, Moniyepe, and Oshungbayi) transfer valuable

[126] Verger, "Grandeur et decadence," 151-153.
[127] Ibid. Abiodun, "Woman in Yoruba Religious Images," 3-7.

resources to the men (male divinities in the two Odu traditions and Arogunmola in Otta tradition). The women also leave behind a representative to ensure that the men do not subsequently neglect women. Odu's bird and Oshun's male child represent the *aje* in Osa Meji and Ose Tura respectively.

One of the verses from Oya's praise songs, which says, "honor to my *aje*-mother Osoronga," illustrates the representation of women's power in *oriki*. In addition, the *oriki* of Arogunmola's wife Oshungbayi, whose name means "Oshun takes/receives the prestige," serves as a reminder of how a deity associated with *aje* gained more recognition through the accomplishments of Oshungbayi, Oshun's embodiment, and through her relationship to the Oya masquerade. The perspective that emerges from these myths and traditions is that if properly respected, female power not only supports but is even critical to male power's ability to flourish.

The two categories of traditions noted above speak to some of the general principles underlying the relationship of Egungun to women. However, to better appreciate the significance of the Oya Egungun to the encounter between male and female power and to the implications for Egungun for women, some of the dimensions of Oya's relationship to Egungun must be examined. An analysis of some of the mythology of Oya provides clues to why it tends to be among the most senior Egungun in Yoruba towns that celebrate Oyo as Egungun's place of origin.

Myths discussing Oya reveal her importance to the origins and early development of Egungun. One popular myth portrays Oya as Shango's wife and as the mother of Egungun, literally the woman who gave birth to the first Egungun. According to this myth, Oya was initially the wife of Ogun, *orisha* of war and metal instruments. When

she proved unable to conceive a child with Ogun, she consulted a diviner to ascertain the origin of the problem and find a solution. The diviner prophesied that she would have children by another man, Shango. She then met Shango and bore nine sons, the last of whom was Egungun.[128]

Another myth portrays Oya as having acquired an Egungun cloth, thereby gaining the power and authority to perform the masquerade and become the leader of the Egungun masquerade society. According to this myth, Egungun defeated his brother Agan in a competition, and in the process he acquired the cloth named "Grant-I-may-live-long," which represented their father's legacy. Agan, in response, swore to punish anyone he saw wearing the cloth. Later, Agan saw Oya wearing the cloth and angrily attacked her. Oya successfully defended herself against Agan, a powerful deity often depicted as able to kill *aje*. Afterwards, as the myth continues, Oya aligned herself with Egungun and became the leader of the masquerade society. Henceforth, Oya was known as "Feminine-Agan-wielding-the-sword."[129]

Both myths resonate with aspects of the history of the Oya masquerade in Otta. The notion of Oya as the mother of Egungun has special resonance at Otta. As the first of the genre of *alagbada* Egungun to take root at Otta, Oya became the mother of the *alagbada* masquerades that emerged after her. In addition, the *alagbada* group and its association with the idea that possession and display of material wealth in a post-war era resonates with the myth. Oya's marriage to warfare, personified as Ogun, the *orisha* of war, proved ineffectual and fruitless. However, by leaving Ogun ("warfare") behind and embracing Shango, she gained children and an important resource, Egungun, which

[128] Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, 221.
[129] Gleason, *Oya: in Praise of the Goddess*, 74-75.

further ensured her legacy. The marriage of Oya and Shango in the myth parallels the collaboration among Arogunmola and his wives and their collective cooperation with the Oyo people in Otta's Ijana ward, the headquarters of Shango worship in the town. The second myth about Oya's conquest of Agan suggests that by defeating a violent male figure, Oya could appropriate men's power. The underlying principle in these myths is that women are not defenseless in the face of male power; in fact, women can take on male power. Also female power can operate outside of the principle of seniority, as women—in this instance Oya—can intervene in conflicts of gerontocracy and help one man defeat another.

Conclusion

Unlike the Egungun Gbodogbodo and Apaje, discussed in the previous two chapters, even after Oya became established at Otta, it does not seem to have challenged or undermined the political leadership, either symbolically or functionally. If anything, Oya and those who supported it, served, among other things, the interests of the monarchy and the two indigenous wards (Otun, the home of warrior's family, and Osi, the home of Isiyemi, the then king of Otta). Based as it was in the Otun ward, where Arogunmola's compound, was located, Oya helped support and elevate the status of all the other Egungun masquerades in that ward and the status of that ward in general, which was one of the two, it should be recalled, from which the king of Otta was selected. It thus helped maintain a balance between its power and prestige and that of the Ijana ward, which was where the Itimoko family. and the Egungun organization that they dominated, were located. Yet, at the same time, the Itimoko family and their supporters in the Ijana

ward, I posit, would have been prepared to accept, if not embrace, the Egungun Oya for reasons having to with ethnicity. One of the main factors that made Oya attractive to Arogunmola, his supporters at Otun, and also the Egungun hierarchy at Ijana was its place among the myths of the Oyo people, who regard Oya as the name of a powerful, Egungun archetypal figure and female deity (*orisha*), one of the wives of Shango and the first woman to adorn an Egungun attire. Given Oya's status among the Oyo people, I contend that Oya appealed to the Itimoko and other Oyo families at Ijana because it brought greater status to Egungun at Otta. Oya also has long been a revered figure in the myths and heritage of the Oyo people.

It also would have appealed to the town's warriors, specifically 1) those who occupied high-ranking political offices, i.e. the *Ajana* and the *Balogun* from the Ijana ward, 2) those associated with the tradition of Iganmode, the warriors said to have defended Otta in the war with Abeokuta, 1842, and 3) countless others who in the era of Abeokuta overrule left Otta for war campaigns at Abeokuta's request. It would have done so by figuring how warriors in the aftermath of that war, and restricted by the British colonial administration, could maintain and elevate their status in the newly developing political order of the broader region. Oya undoubtedly appealed to the wealthy merchants among the different wards, too. In the midst of a recession, they could only have perceived the benefits of a ritual and performance spectacle that placed such emphasis on the generous display of wealth. The Oya masquerade appealed to diverse groups within Otta—the merchants, the *Ajana* and the *Balogun* from the Ijana ward, and the warriors who fought in the Otta-Abeokuta war of 1842.

The character of the Egungun Oya drew upon many of the prevailing myths and legends, such as the legend of the warrior and the warrior Egungun, Gbodogbodo. It was imbued with qualities associated with women and Gelede, because the myths associated with its central figure, Oya, recognized and affirmed the power of aje and women's right and ability to access it to their favor. It is the multifaceted nature of the character of this Egungun that I believe was at play as this Egungun emerged at Otta. The interactions among the warrior and his two wives that led to Oya's emergence at Otta shows how it helped promote the individual and collective interests of these individuals within the town.

Conclusion

The cultural and political power of masquerade traditions among both ancient and modern Yoruba speakers is not to be underestimated. From pre-colonial times to the present, masquerades have played critical roles in the ritual, social, political, and economic systems of many communities in southwestern Nigeria, where most Yoruba people reside today. The power of this tradition lies in its ability to affirm the community's cultural and historical legacy, both in times of peace and prosperity and in times of trouble and change.

Anthropologist Insa Nolte describes Yoruba communities as "pacted," meaning that the body of traditions and rituals that weave them together are continuously expressed, modified, and renewed.[1] Masquerade performances are rituals with both fixed and improvised elements in which social and political actors enact competing visions of their communities. In times of change, these visions can be multiple, and the masquerade becomes a theater in which the community can see its inner conflicts dramatized.

This dissertation has focused on the politics of masquerades—especially the traditions of Egungun and Gelede—in southwestern Nigeria, and particularly in Otta. The emergence of Egungun in pre-imperial Oyo lent spiritual authority to the community's political elite (as explored in Chapter One). As Oyo expanded it influence under the rule of a succession of *Alaafins*, masquerades were introduced in the colonized communities in order to promote the allegiance of the local people to the central government of the *Alaafins*. Masquerades were modified as they were absorbed into the local culture of these communities (as described in Chapter Two). When the Oyo Empire

[1] Insa Nolte, *Obafemi Awolowo and the Making of Remo: The Local Politics of a Nigerian Nationalist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

collapsed after the death of *Alaafin* Abiodun in 1789, and warfare broke out throughout the provinces and power struggles within the community of Otta threatened to splinter the town, two masquerades emerged, providing opportunities for newcomers to help police and defend the town. The warrior Egungun Gbodogbodo became the chief dispenser of justice in the town, whereas the Gelede Idahomi helped defend it (as discussed in Chapter Three). In the aftermath of the Otta-Abeokuta war of 1842, a number of different masquerades emerged and declined as various constellations of political actors competed for dominance; in essence, these actors asserted their place within Otta's new political order (as shown in Chapter Four). In the latter part of the nineteenth century, masquerades at Otta helped to heal the divisions in the community and provide opportunities for ambitious men and women to enhance their status as individuals and as members of the same domestic group (as demonstrated in Chapter 5). In each era, competing visions of community have found expression in masquerades.

Otta today has several communal identities. One is its identity as an ancient, independent Awori kingdom. Another is Otta as a stronghold of powerful *aje*, spiritually potent men and women.[2] Yet another identity is that Otta is the holy land or Mecca of Egungun.[3] The multiple identities of the town are reflected and renegotiated in its masquerade traditions, especially Egungun. Masquerade performances offers a space of dialogue through which individuals and groups within Otta speak to different levels of social interactions and the conflicts that often arise. Egungun also offers a performance

[2] Babatunde Lawal, *The Gelede Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 267 n.216. Interview with Oyinade Ogunba, March 13, 2006, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye; Interview with Eshorun of Oshogbo and Chief Adedoyin Faniyi, August 28, 2006, Ibokun Road, Oshogbo; Interview with Remi Ajala, November 3, 2006, Department of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan.
[3] Deji Kosebinu et al., *Millennium Egungun Festival in Ota Awori: Special Program Brochure* (Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000).

arena, a socio-political institution, and a ritual system whereby people can contest and reconfigure power in virtually all areas of their lives. At a moment when people are struggling to meet their basic needs, the masquerade affords them a mechanism to release tensions and seek resolution.

In Otta today, the masquerade festivals often overlap with popular religious seasons, accommodating the needs of Christians and Muslims in particular. During the festival season, families and citizens residing in North America and Europe return to the community of their childhood to renew family ties or establish new ones through marriage. These are occasions when communities often experience an economic boom, as tourists also flock to witness the masquerade spectacles.

But masquerades and the masquerade societies in modern Otta continue to be deeply implicated in and to overlap with the existing ruling groups and structures of their place and time. Today, Nigeria is a republic, dominated by the People Democratic Party, the ruling political party. The executive, judicial, and legislative systems of the nation and its towns are inherited from Western governments. Yet traditional ruling structures also endure, operating alongside, apart from, or in between these structures. For example, someone who hopes to run for office may seek a chieftaincy title, if he or she does not yet have one. Many legal disputes are brought before chiefs rather than litigated in the Nigerian court system. In the case described in the Introduction, for instance, many people were upset and offended that the issue of masquerade ownership was brought into the court system for judgment.

Masquerades continue to influence and be influenced by their relation to these political and judicial structures. Aware of their power/function/prestige, politicians and

other elites often support masquerades. Many attend festival performances. They make grand entrances and exits and occupy places of prominence in the audience during performances. Some make speeches, praising the organizers and seizing the moment to call attention to themselves. A few even sponsor masquerades in their own names (e.g., Ibrahim Babangida, a former military head of state of Nigeria, whose Egungun appeared on the Egungun shrine at Otta during the 2005 Egungun festival).[4]

Egungun continues to operate alongside not only the ruling traditions and apparatus, but also the religious traditions of Christianity and Islam, as well as other indigenous traditions. Otta today is still fairly heterogeneous, as it has been influenced for at least the past one hundred and fifty years by fundamentalist Islam and evangelical Christianity. While the ideologies of Christianity and Islam have often been hostile to Yoruba masquerade traditions, decrying them as false or heathen or backward, nonetheless, masquerade performances and traditions have been able to absorb and accommodate and mediate these hostilities. Arogunmola's Egungun analyzed in Chapter Five took on an Islamic symbol of Hausa men's attire known as *agbada*. In this as in many other instances, new beliefs that might have undermined masquerades have instead been honored within them. Today, the majority of Otta's inhabitants are Muslim. In 2000 and 2004, Otta held the quintal Egungun festival, in which all the traditional masquerades, religious groups, and cults came out and asserted themselves. This spectacle did not express mere nostalgia for the old ways; it also represented an ongoing manifestation of the way conflict has been channeled community harmony has been sustained for generations in Yorubaland.

[4] Babangida also sponsored an election planning campaign meeting with food as organizers investigated his prospects for success as a presidential candidate.

A contemporary episode may serve to illustrate how the tradition of Egungun is being used today to resolve divisions within the Otta community. In 2005, police regularly harassed a number of Otta youths. During the Egungun festival, there was an attack on some police officers. The chief of police complained to the king, who took their complaint to the masquerade society. No one was formally disciplined, but the masquerade in effect allowed both sides of this dispute to air their grievances without going through the formal structure of the courts. Social pressures are contained and addressed and guided through Egungun, which, if suppressed, could surface more problematically, or if taken to court, could result in enduring hostilities?

Much more research is needed on the role and influence of masquerades in Yoruba society. I would like to suggest three avenues for future research that might illuminate further the way in which masquerades have shaped the history of Yoruba communities, towns, and larger groups.

An issue needing further study is the relationship between women and Egungun. As argued in Chapter Five, in interpreting the term *aje* to mean "witch" and in focusing on the character and behavior of one category of Egungun, those involved in executing witches and other criminals, scholars have represented the character of all Egungun across different categories as inherently antagonistic to women. However, there have long been numerous examples of women owning Egungun or asserting authority over them in their families or as high-ranking members in the Egungun masquerade society. I have even come across a contemporary case in which a woman became the *Alagbaa*, the highest-ranking Egungun chief in many towns. This enhanced status of women within

Egungun may be the result of the comparatively new influence of Muslim culture or of other social changes that have not yet been studied.

The modern Egungun in Otta seem to continue to challenge orthodox notions of women and Egungun. In Otta today, women continue to have a good deal of influence and authority within the Egungun society. Perhaps most strikingly, a woman is a chief in the Egungun society.

In addition, more research is needed to sort out the violent and nonviolent aspects of Gelede. Scholars have assumed that Gelede represents a nonviolent approach to conflict, in contrast to the more violent approach of Egungun. I believe that my discussion of nineteenth-century Gelede, which reveals the violent aspects of Gelede Idahomi, opens the possibility that Gelede might have taken on a different character at different historical moments. It would be valuable to develop a more deeply historical appreciation of this masquerade form, so that we do not continue assuming that the modern manifestation of Gelede represents an unchanging tradition.

Another facet of masquerades worth considering is the variety of Egungun within Yoruba communities. This dissertation looked closely at the transformation of Egungun at Otta under the influence of Odikaye, Aina Ege, and their sister Olafaya. The character, status, and role of the founder (or the person who brought the masquerade to a given community) may be critical to the particular character and status of a given Egungun. This suggestion raises the question of what factors have historically influenced the ranking of one Egungun chief as higher than another. For instance, at Ilaro and Otta, the *Oloponda* is head of the Egungun society. However, the *Alagbaa* is the most senior Egungun chief at Iragbiji and Ode Remo. According to Babayemi, during the reign of

Alaafin Abiodun (1770–1789), the *Alagbaa* was the ritual head of Egungun and coordinated the *Alagbaa* throughout many of Oyo's provinces, whereas the *Alapinni* was the political head.[5] What does an analysis of the status of the *Alagbaa* among the Egungun hierarchy of chiefs in Oyo's former provinces with respect to *Alagbaa* at Oyo reveal about the role of Egungun in Oyo's cultural and political colonization of its provinces?

While it is impossible, of course, to predict the future of the masquerade tradition in Nigeria, or in Otta, a number of factors indicate that this vibrant tradition will continue. One of the reasons why the tradition is likely to continue is due in part to the ways in which it has been interwoven into the economic fabric of the town. Additionally, it also has emerged as a central component of the political and religious and cultural fabric of Otta. These things, along with the continuing versatility and dynamism of the tradition, suggest that it has adapted and will continue to adapt to twenty-first century conditions. I believe the evidence from Otta suggests that the overlapping political and performance applications of the masquerade tradition indicate that it may be too important to fail.

[5] S. O. Babayemi, *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba* (Ibadan: Board Publication Ltd., 1980), 41-45.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Church Mission Society Archive: Yoruba Missions (CA2)

George, William. *CA2/041 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Gollmer, C. A. *CA2/043 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Hinderer, David. *CA2/049 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Johnson, James. *CA2/056 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birningham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Johnson, Samuel. *CA2/058 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Luke, Matthew J. *CA2/064 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Mann, Adolphus C. *CA2/066 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Maser, John A. *CA2/068/118-165 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Meakin, George. *CA2/069 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Moore, William. *CA2/070 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Muller, J. C. *CA2/072 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Olubi, David. *CA2/075 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

Phillips, Charles. *CA2/077 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

White, James. *CA2/087 Original Papers-Missionaries: Church Mission Society-Yoruba Missions*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1879.

National (Egba) Archives, Abeokuta, Nigeria

NAA. *Otta Affairs: Brief History of Otta*. Abeokuta, 1933.
NAA, Abe. Prof. 1, ABP 403. *Egba-Egbado Boundary (Ilobi-Otta Area)*, 1940.
NAA, ED 309. *Otta District Council Meetings: Minutes of Proceedings of Meetings of the Otta District Council*. Abeokuta, 1952.
NAA, ED 1146/6, J. Hinian Scott *Otta District Council Chieftaincy Committee Meetings: Minutes of the meeting held at Olota's Palace Otta on Wednesday the 10th of April*, 1935.

National Archives, Ibadan, Nigeria

NAI, Abe. Prof. 4, D33. *Abeokuta Province: A Report on the Otta District, Egba Division*, 1936.
NAI, Abe. Prof. 5, ED 491, H. Spottiswoode. *Intelligence Report on Otta District*, 1942.
NAI, Abe. Prof. 8/2, John Blair. *Intelligence Report on Abeokuta*, 1937.
NAI, CSO, 13, S2141/51, J. Hinfan Scott. *Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Olota's Palace*, 1935.
NAI, CSO 26/2, 20629, F. C. Royce. *Assessment Report of Otta District, Egba Division, Abeokuta Province*, 1928.
NAI, CSO 26/4, 30435, J. H. Ellis. *Intelligence Report on the Ilobi, Oke-Odan, and Ajilete Groups of Egbado People in the Ilaro Division, Abeokuta Province*, 1935.
NAI, Otta District Court. *Population Census, Historical Events*, 1962.
NAI, R. J. M. Curwen, 30030. *Intelligence Report on Badagri District Parts 1-3 (Awori Areas less Central Aworis in the Colony)*, 1937.

Oral Sources

Interviews

Ajayi, Gbamidele, "Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele," June 24, 2008, Otun Ward, Otta. Email.
Idowu, Jimoh Adejare, "Interview by Gbamidele Ajayi," May 30, 2005, Oyo, Oyo State. Written Transcription.
"Interview with Afolabi Oguntade," December 10, 2006, Oloolu compound, Ibadan. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Alagbaa Oyadolu," November 15, 2006, Akran Palace, Badagry, Lagos State. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Babatunde Asanbe," May 3, 2005, Otta.

"Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele," January 5, 2006, Osi ward, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele," June 24, 2006, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele," January 6, 2006, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele," May 3, 2005, Otta. Tape Recording.
"Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele," May 3, 2005, Otta. Tape Recording.
"Interview with Chief Abayomi Ojugbele and Nurudeen Ajiboga," March 4, 2006, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief Ifagbade Oduniyi and Chief Adedoyin Faniyi," November 27, 2006, Ibokun Road, Oshogbo.
"Interview with Chief J. O. Akingbola, Atokun of Otta," May 4, 2005, Otta. Tape Recording.
"Interview with Chief Keinde Odunlami," November 15, 2006, Akran Palace, Badagry, Lagos State. Ditigal Recording.
"Interview with Chief R. S O. Ojolowo," June 13, 2006, Ijana ward, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta," May 3, 2005, Itimoko compound, Ijana ward, Otta.
"Interview with Chief S. A. Asanbe, Oloponda of Otta," August 16, 2006, Otta.
"Interview with Chief S. A. Matoro, Onikosi of Otta," February 6, 2006, Osi ward, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief Wadudu Deinde," January 24, 2006, Oruba Ward, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief Wasiu Dada, the Ekiyo of Otta," May 10, 2006, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Chief Wasiu Dada, the Ekiyo of Otta," May 10, 2006, Ijesu Compound, Ijana Ward, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Eshorun of Oshogbo and Chief Adedoyin Faniyi," August 28, 2006, Ibokun Road, Oshogbo. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Oba M. A. Oyede III, Olota of Otta," May 5, 2005, Otta. Video Recording.
"Interview with Oba of Ilogbo," 2006, Palace, Ilogbo, Ogun State, Nigeria.
"Interview with Oloponda of Ilaro and M. A. B. Ajayi," November 20, 2006, Ilaro. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Oyinade Ogunba," March 13, 2006, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Prince Kunle Andrew," May 4, 2005, Otta. Tape Recording.

"Interview with Remi Ajala," November 3, 2006, Department of Archeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Salawu Abioru Olaniyan," March 12, 2006, Oruba Ward, Otta. Digital Recording.
"Interview with Wasiu Ojugbele," April 11, 2006, Osi Ward, Otta. Digital Recording.

Secondary Sources

Local Histories

Agunwa, Dada. *Iwe Itan Bi Esin Imale ti se de Ilu Otta ati Ilosiwaju ninu Esin Imale*. Translated by Gbamidele Ajayi. Otta, 1947.
———. *The First Book on Otta: In Memory of King Aina and King Oyelusi Arolagbade*. Translated by Gbamidele Ajayi. Otta, 1928.
Asalu, R. A. "The History of Otta: Ijemo-Isolosi Ruling House." In *Akinsewa ni Oba Akoko ni Otta*. Otta, 2006.
———. "The History of Otta: Ijemo-Isolosi Ruling House." In *Akinsewa ni Oba Akoko ni Otta*. Otta, 2006.
Historic Brochure for the Installation Ceremony of Chieftaincy Title to Chief Isiaka Idowu Balogun as the Balogun of Otta, Aworiland. Otta: Tin-Woo and Pat-Excel, 2005.
Kosebinu, Deji. *Alani Oyede: The People's Monarch*. Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000.
Kosebinu, Deji, Dele Adeniji, and Rasheed Ayinde. *2004 Egungun Carnival in Otta Aworiland*. Otta: Bisrak Communications, 2004.
———. *Millennium Egungun Festival in Ota Awori: Special Program Brochure*. Ota: Bisrak Communications, 2000.
———. *Odo Oje Otta: Launching and Commissioning of "Ege" Statue*. Otta: Bisrak Communications, 2000.

Unpublished Papers and Theses

Adedeji, Joel. "The Alarinjo Theatre: The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from Its Earliest Beginnings to the Present Times." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1969.
Agiri, B. A. "Development of local government in Ogbomoso 1850-1950." M.A. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1966.
———. "Kola in Western Nigeria, 1850-1950, A History of the Cultivation of Cola Nitida in Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo and Ota Areas." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972.
Agunwa, Dada. *Iwe Itan Bi Esin Imale ti se de Ilu Otta ati Ilosiwaju ninu Esin Imale*. Translated by Gbamidele Ajayi. Otta, 1947.
———. *The First Book on Otta: In Memory of King Aina and King Oyelusi Arolagbade*. Translated by Gbamidele Ajayi. Otta, 1928.

Bascom, William R. ""Secret Societies," Religious Cult-Groups and Kinship Units among the West African Yoruba: A Study of Social Organization." Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1939.
Bentor, Eli. "Aro Ikeji Festival: Toward a Historical Interpretation of a Masquerade Festival." Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 1995.
Bolaji, Emmanuel Bamidele. "The Dynamics and the Manifestations of Efe: The Satirical Poetry of the Yoruba Gelede Groups of Nigeria." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1984.
Fadipe, N. A. "Sociology of the Yoruba " Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1930.
Folayan, Kola. "Egbado and Yoruba-Aja Power Politics." M.A. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1965.
Ogunba, Oyinade. "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People: A Study of Indigenous Festivals." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1967.
Olajubu, Oludare. "Egungun Chants in Yoruba Oral Literature." M.A. Thesis, University of Lagos, 1971.
Oroge, Adeniyi. "The Institution of Slavery in Yorubaland, with Particular Refernce to the Nineteenth Century." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1971.
Poynor, Robin. "The Ancestral Arts of Owo, Nigeria." Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 1979.
Rea, William. "No Event, No History: Masquerade in Ikole." Ph.D. Thesis, University of East Anglia, 1995.
Shields, Francine. "Palm Oil and Power: Women in an Era of Economic and Social Transition in 19th century Yorubaland (South-western Nigeria)." University of Stirling, 1997.

Published Sources

Abimbola, Wande. "Ifa Divination Poems as Sources for Historical Evidence." Lagos Notes and Records 1 (1967): 17-26.
———. Ifa Divination Poetry. New York: Nok Publishers, 1977.
———. Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus. Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria, 1976.
———. Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa. [Zaria]: UNESCO, 1975.
———. "The Bag of Wisdom: Osun and the Origins of Ifa Divination." In Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba goddess in African and the Americas, edited by Joseph Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, 141-154. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
———, ed. Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama. Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975.
Abiodun, Rowland. "Hidden Power: Osun, the Seventeenth Odu." In Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba goddess in African and the

Americas, edited by Joseph Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, 10-33. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
———. "Woman in Yoruba Religious Images." African Languages and Cultures 2, no. 1 (1989): 1-18.
Ade Adefuye, Babatunde Agiri, Jide Osuntokun, ed. History of the Peoples of Lagos State. Lagos: Lantern Books, 1987.
Adedeji, Joel. "The Origin of the Yoruba Masque Theatre: The Use of Ifa Divination Corpus as Historical Evidence." African Notes 6, no. 1 (1970): 70-86.
———. "The Poetry of the Yoruba Masque Theatre." African Arts 11, no. 3 (1978): 62-64, 100.
———. "Traditional Yoruba Theatre." African Arts 3, no. 1 (1969): 60-63.
Adediran, Biodun. The Frontier States of Western Yorubaland, circa 1600-1889: State Formation and Political Growth in an Ethnic Frontier Zone. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ifra, 1994.
Adefila, J. A., and S. M. Opeola. "Supernatural and Herbal Weapons in 19th Century Yoruba Warfare." In War and peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893, edited by I. A. Akinjogbin, 219-233. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1998.
Adepegba, C. O. "Intriguing Aspects of Yoruba Egungun Masquerades." Nigeran Field 55, no. 1990 (1990): 3-2.
Aderibigbe, A. B. "Early history of Lagos to About 1850." In Lagos: The Development of an African City, edited by A. B. Aderibigbe. Lagos: Longman [Nigeria], 1975.
Adeyinka, Augustus A. "King Gezo of Dahomey, 1818-1858: A Reassessment of a West African Monarchy in the Nineteenth Century." African Studies Review 17, no. 3 (1974): 541-548.
Agiri, B. A. "The Ogboni Among the Oyo-Yoruba." Lagos Notes and Records 3, no. 2 (1972): 50-59.
Ajayi, Folabo. "Kinesics of Flight or Flight: An Analysis of Ijaye War Songs and Dance." In War and peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893, edited by Adeagbo Akinjogbin, 243-252. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998.
Ajayi, J. A. Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: the Making of a New Elite. London: Longman, 1965.
———. "The Aftermath of the Fall of Old Oyo." In History of West Africa, edited by J. A. Ajayi. London: Longman, 1987.
Ajayi, J. F. Ade, and R. A. Austen. "Hopkins on Economic Imperialism in West Africa." The Economic History Review 25, no. 2 (1972): 303-306.
Ajayi, J. F. Ade, and Robert Smith. Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.
Ajisafe, S. A. History of Abeokuta. Abeokuta: Fola Bookshops, 1924.
Akinjogbin, Adeagbo, ed. War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998.

Akinjogbin, I. A. "A Chronology of Yoruba history." Odu 2, no. 2 (1966): 81-86.
———. "The expansion of Oyo and the rise of Dahomey 1600-1800." In History of West Africa, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, 304-343. London: Longman, 1971.
———. "The Oyo Empire in the Eighteenth Century: A Re-assessment." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 3, no. 2 (1966).
———. "The Prelude to the Yoruba Civil Wars of the Nineteenth Century." Odu 2, no. 2 (1965).
Akintoye, S. A. Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893: Ibadan Epansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo. London: Longman, 1971.
Akinwumi, T. M. "The Commemorative Phenomenon of Textile use among the Yoruba." University of Ibadan, 1990.
Apter, Andrew. "Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 1950-1951." In Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa, edited by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
———. Black Critics and Kings: the Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
———. "The Embodiment of Paradox: Yoruba Kingship and Female Power " Cultural Anthropology 6, no. 2 (1991): 212-229.
Ardener, Shirley. Perceiving Women. New York: Wiley, 1975.
Aremu, P. S. O. "Between Myth and Reality: Yoruba Egungun Costumes as Commemorative Clothes." Journal of Black Studies 22, no. 1 (1991): 6-14.
———. "Egungun Masquerades as Socio-religious Manifestation." Africana Marburgensia 28, no. 1/2 (1995).
———. "Spiritual and Physical Identity of Yoruba Egungun Costumes: a General Survey." Nigeria Magazine 147 (1983).
Asiwaju, A. I. "Gelede Songs as Sources of Western Yoruba History." In Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama, edited by Wande Abimbola. Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975.
Atanda, J. A. An introduction to Yoruba history. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980.
———. The New Oyo Empire. London: Longman, 1973.
Awe, Bolanle. "Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example." Journal of African History 14, no. 1973 (1973): 65-77.
———. "Notes on Oriki and Warfare in Yorubaland." In Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama, edited by Wande Abimbola, 267-292. Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975.
———. "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oriki." Africa 44, no. 4 (1974): 331-349.

———. "The Ajele System: a study of Ibadan Imperialism in the nineteenth century." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 3, no. 1 (1964): 47-60.
———. "The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System." In Sexual stratification: a cross-cultural view, edited by Alice Schlegel, xix, 371. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.
Awolalu, J. Om o sade. "Continuity and Discontinuity in African Religion: The Yoruba Experience." Orita IX, no. 2 (1975): 3-20.
Awolalu, J. Omosade. Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites. London: Longman, 1979.
Ayandele, Emmanuel Ayankanmi. The Ijebu of Yorubaland, 1850-1950: Politics, Economy, and Society. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1992.
———. The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: a Political and Social Analysis. London: Longmans, 1966.
Babalola, Adeboye, and Olugboyega Alaba. A Dictionary of Yoruba Personal Names. Lagos: West African Book Publishers Limited, 2003.
Babatunde, Emmanuel D. "The Gelede Masked Dance and Ketu Society: The Role of the Transvestite Masquerade in Placating Powerful Women While Maintaining the Patrilineal Ideology." In West African Masks and Cultural Systems, edited by Sidney Kasfir. Tervuren: Musee royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1988.
Babayemi, S. O. Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba. Ibadan: Board Publication Ltd., 1980.
———. "Oyo Palace Organization: Past and Present." African Notes X, no. 1 (1986): 4-24.
———. The Fall and Rise of Oyo c., 1706-1905: A Study in the Traditional Culture of an African Polity. Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1980.
———. "Traditions and Functions of the Egungun Cult among the Oyo Yoruba." In The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture, edited by Nwanna Nzewunwa, 374-388. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980.
Badejo, Diedre. Osun Seegesi: the Elegant Deity of wWealth, Power, and Femininity. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1996.
Barber, Karin. "How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes Towards The Orisa." Africa 51, no. 3 (1981): 724-744.
———. I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
———. "Oriki, Women, and the Proliferation and Merging of Orisa." Africa 60, no. 3 (1990): 313-337.
Barber, Karin, and P. F. de Moraes Farias. Discourse and Its Disguises: the Interpretation of African Oral Texts. Birmingham: University of Birmingham Centre of West African Studies, 1989.

Barnes, Sandra T. Africa's Ogun: Old World and New. 2nd, expanded ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
———. "Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge." Journal of Religion in Africa 20, no. 3 (1990): 248-268.
Bascom, William R. "Social Status, Wealth, and Individual Differences among the Yoruba." American Anthropologist 53, no. 4 (1951): 490-505.
———. "The Sociological Role of the Yoruba Cult-Group." Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association 46, no. 1, Part 2 (1944): 1-75.
Bay, Edna G. Asen, Ancestors, and Vodun: Tracing Change in African art. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
———. Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998.
Beier, Ulli. "Gelede Masks." Odu: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies 6 (1958): 5-23.
———. "The Agbegijo Masquerades." Nigeria Magazine, no. 82 (1964).
———. "The Egungun Cult." Nigeria Magazine 51 (1956): 380-392.
Ben-Amos, Paul Girshick. Art, Innovation, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Benin. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
Bentor, Eli. "Spatial Continuities: Masks and Cultural Interactions between the Delta and Southeastern Nigeria." African Arts 35, no. 1 (2002).
Biobaku, S. O. "An Historical Sketch of Egba Traditional Authorities." Journal of the International African Institute 22, no. 1 (1952): 35-49.
———. Sources of Yoruba history. Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 1987.
———. The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.
Bowen, T. J. Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa, from 1849 to 1856. Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857.
Byfield, Judith A. The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.
Carroll, Father K. "Yoruba Masks: Notes on the Masks of the Northeastern Yoruba country." Odu 3 (1956): 3-15.
Chukwuma, Innocent. "The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture." Law Enforcement Review (the quarterly magazine of CLEEN) 14, no. 5 (2000).
———. "Vigilantes and Policing in Nigeria." Law Enforcement Review (the quarterly magazine of CLEEN) (2000).

Clapperton, Hugh. Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa: from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo. London: John Murray, 1829.
Clarke, William H. Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1972.
Cole, Herbert. "Art as a Verb in Iboland." African Arts 3, no. 1 (1969): 34-41.
Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa. Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
———. Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialects of Modernity on a South African Frontier. Vol. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
Cordwell, Justine M. "The Art and Aesthetics of the Yoruba." African Arts 16, no. 2 (1983): 56-59, 93-94, 100.
Delano, Chief I. O. "Proverbs, Songs, and Poems." In Sources of Yoruba history, edited by Saburi O. Biobaku, 77-86. Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press Limited, 1987.
Denzer, LaRay. "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study." The International Journal of African Historical Studies 27, no. 1 (1994): 1-39.
Drewal, Henry John. "African Art Studies Today." In African Art Studies: the State of the Discipline; Papers Presented at a Symposium Organized by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, September 16, 1987, edited by Rowland Abiodun, 29-62. Washington, D.C.: National Museum of African Art, 1990.
———. "Art and the Perception of Women in Yoruba Culture." Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines 68, no. XVII (1977): 545-567.
———. "Celebrating Water Spirits: Influence, Confluence, and Difference in Ijebu-Yoruba and Delta Masquerades." In Ways of the Rivers: Arts and Environment of the Niger Delta, edited by Martha G. Anderson and Philip M. Peek, 363. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2002.
———. "Efe: Voiced Power and Pagentry." African Arts 7, no. 2 (1974): 26-29, 58-66, 82.
———. "Efe/Gelede: the Educative Role of the Arts in Traditional Yoruba Culture." Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1973.
———. "Gelede Masquerade: Imagery and Motif." African Arts 8, no. 2 (1974): 18-19, 62-63, 94.
———. "Mami Wata Shrines: Exotica and the Construction of Self." In African Material Culture, edited by Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christraud M. Geary and Kris L. Hardin. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
———. "Ritual Performance in Africa Today." TDR 32, no. 2 (1988): 25-30.

Drewal, Henry John, and Margaret Thompson Drewal. Gelede: Art and Female Power Among the Yoruba. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.
———. "The Arts of Egungun Among Yoruba People." African Arts 11, no. 3 (1978): 18-20.
Drewal, Henry John, and John Mason. Beads, Body, and Soul: Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998.
Drewal, Henry John, John Pemberton, Rowland Abiodun, and Allen Wardwell. Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought. New York: Center for African Art in Association with H.N. Abrams, 1989.
Drewal, Margaret Thompson. "The Politics of Cultural Performance." American Anthropologist 99, no. 2 (1997): 416-417.
———. "The State of Research on Performance in Africa." African Studies Review 34, no. 3 (1991): 1-64.
———. Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
Eades, J. S. The Yoruba Today. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
Echeruo, Michael J. C. Victorian Lagos: Aspects of Nineteenth Century Lagos Life. London: MacMillain Education, 1977.
Elebuibon, Chief Priest Yemi. The Healing Power of Sacrifice. Brooklyn: Athelia Henrietta Press, Inc., 2000.
Ellis, A. B. The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, etc. Chicago: Benin Press, 1964.
Ellis, Stephen. "Liberia 1989-1994: a Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence." African Affairs 94, no. 375 (1995): 165-197.
———. The Mask of Anarchy: the Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
Fadipe, N. A. Sociology of the Yoruba. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970.
Falola, Toyin. "From Hospitality to Hostility: Ibadan and Stranger, 1830-1904." Journal of African History 26 (1985): 51-68.
———. The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900. Ibadan: University of Ife Press, 1984.
———. "The Yoruba Toll System: Its Operation and Abolition." Journal of African History 30 (1989): 69-88.
———. Yoruba Historiography. Madison: African Studies Program University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991.
Falola, Toyin, and J. F. Ade Ajayi. African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi. Harlow: Longman, 1993.
Falola, Toyin, and Dare Oguntomisin. The Military in Nineteenth Century Yoruba politics. Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1984.

———. Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001.
Farias, P. F. de Moraes, and Karin Barber. Self-assertion and brokerage: early cultural nationalism in West Africa, Birmingham University African studies series ; 2. [Birmingham, England]: Centre of West African Studies, 1990.
Faris, Stephan. "Nigeria's Vigilante Justice." (2002).
Farrow, Stephen. Faith, Fancies and Fetich, or Yoruba paganism: Being Some Account of the Religious Beliefs of the West African Negroes, Particularly of the Yoruba tribes of Southern Nigeria. New York: Macmillan, 1926.
Folayan, Kola. "Egbado to 1832: The Birth of a Dilemma." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 4, no. 1 (1967): 15-34.
———. "The Career of Thomas Tickel in the Western District of Lagos, 1854-1886." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 5, no. 1 (1969): 27-46.
Gbadamosi, T. G. O. "Odu Imale: the case of the predestined Muslims." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 8, no. 4 (1977): 77-93.
———. The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1978.
Gotrick, Kacke. Apidan Theatre and Modern Drama: a Study in a Traditional Yoruba Theatre and its Influence on Modern Drama by Yoruba Playwrights. Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1984.
Green, Cathryn L. . "Shared Masking Traditions in Northeastern Ivory Coast." African Arts 20, no. 4 (1987): 62-69, 69.
Green, Kathryn Lee. "The Foundation of Kong: A Study in Dyula and Sonongui Ethnic Identity." Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 1984.
Hallen, Barry. The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
Hallen, Barry, and J. Olubi Sodipo. Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy. Reprint, with a new foreword by W. V. O. Quine and a new afterword by Barry Hallen ed. London: Ethnographica Publishers, 1986.
Harding, Frances. "Performance as Political Action: the Use of Dramatisation in the Formulation of Tiv Ethnic and National Consciousness." In Self-assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa, edited by Karin Barber. Birmingham, England: Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990.
Hart, William A. "The "Lawyer" of Poro?: A Sixteenth-Century West African Masquerade." RES 23, no. Spring 1993 (1993): 83-95.
Hinderer, Anna Martin. Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country: Memorials of Anna Hinderer, Wife of the Rev. David Hinderer,

C.M.S. Missionary in Western Africa. London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1872.
Hopkins, A. G. "Economic Imperialism in West Africa: Lagos, 1880-1892." Economic History Review, no. 21 (1968): 580-600.
Houlberg, Marilyn. "Egungun Masquerades of the Remo Yoruba." African Arts 11, no. 3 (1978): 20-27, 100.
Hufbauer, Benjamin, and Bess Reed. "Adamma: a Contemporary Igbo Maiden Spirit." African Arts (2003).
Ibitokun, Benedict M. Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu-Yoruba Subgroup in West Africa. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1993.
Idowu, E. Bolaji. Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief. London: Longmans, 1962.
Jell-Bahlsen, Sabine. "Mammy Water: In Search of the Water Spirits in Nigeria." African Arts 27 (1994).
Johnson, Samuel. History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate. Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1921.
Kalilu, R. O. Rom. "Costumes and the Origin of Egungun." African Studies 52, no. 1 (1993): 55-69.
———. "The Role of Sculptures in Yoruba Egungun Masquerade." Journal of Black Studies 22, no. 1 (1991): 15-29.
Kasfir, Sidney L. African Art and the Colonial Encounter: Inventing a Global Commodity. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.
———. Art in History, History in Art: the Idoma Ancestral Masquerade as Historical Evidence. Boston: African Studies Center Boston University, 1985.
———. "Masquerading as a Cultural System." In West African Masks and Cultural Systems, edited by Sidney L. Kasfir, 1-15. Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1988.
———. "One Tribe, One Style? Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art." History in Africa 11 (1984): 163-193.
———, ed. West African Masks and Cultural Systems. Vol. 126. Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1988.
Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield. "Masks from the Towns of the Dead." In Igbo arts: community and cosmos, edited by Herbert M. Cole and Chike Cyril Aniakor, 163-. Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History University of California Los Angeles, 1984.
Kopytoff, Jean Herskovits. A Preface to Modern Nigeria: the "Sierra Leonians" in Yoruba, 1830-1890. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.
Kramer, Fritz. The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa. London: Verso, 1993.
Law, Robin. "A Lagoonside Port on the Eighteenth-century Slave Coast: The Early History of Badagri." Canaadian Journal of African Studies 28, no. 1 (1994): 32-59.

———. "Historiography of the Commercial Transition in Nineteenth Century West Africa." In African Historiography: Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi, edited by Toyin Falola, 1991.
———. "'Legitimate' Trade and Gender Relations in Yorubaland and Dahomey." In From Slave Trade to "Legitimate" Commerce: the Commercial Transition in Nineteenth-century West Africa, edited by Robin Law, 195-214. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
———. "The Career of Adele at Lagos and Badagry, c. 1807-1837." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria 9, no. 2 (1978): 35-59.
———. "The Constitutional Troubles of Oyo in the Eighteenth Century." Journal of African History 12, no. 1 (1971): 25-44.
———. "The Gun Communities in the Eighteenth Century." Paper presented at the 34th Annual Meeting African Studies Association of the U.S.A., St. Louis, Missouri, November 23-26, 1991.
———. The Oyo Empire, 1600 - 1836: a West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic slave trade. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
Lawal, Babatunde. "Ejiwapo: The Dialectics of Twoness in Yoruba Art and Culture." African Arts (2008): 24-38.
———. "The Living Dead: Art and Immortality Among the Yoruba of Nigeria." Africa 47, no. 1 (1977): 50-61.
Lawal, Kunle. "The Coastal Scene: the Yoruba of Lagos Society Before 1900." In Culture and Society in Yorubaland, edited by Biodun Adediran Deji Ogunremi, 79-96. Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication, 1998.
Lloyd, P. C. "Conflict Theory and Yoruba Kingdoms." In History and Social Anthropology, edited by I. M. Lewis. London: Tavistock, 1968.
———. "Sacred Kingship and Government among the Yoruba." Africa XXX, no. 3 (1960).
Losi, John B. . History of Lagos. Lagos: African Education Press, 1967.
Lucas, Jonathan O. The Religion of the Yorubas. Lagos: C. M. S. Bookshop, 1948.
Lynn, Martin. Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: the Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century. Vol. 93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
Mabogunje, Akin L., and J. D. Omer-Cooper. Owu in Yoruba History. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1971.
MacGaffey, Wyatt. Kongo Political Culture: the Conceptual Challenge of the Particular. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000.
Mann, Kristin. Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
———. Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Matory, James. Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
———. Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
Matory, James Lorand. "Government by Seduction: History and the Tropes of "Mounting" in Oyo-Yoruba Religion." In Modernity and Its Malcontents, edited by Jean and John Comaroff, 58-88. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
———. "Rival empires: Islam and the Religions of Spirit Possession among the Oyo-Yoruba." American Ethnologist 21, no. 3 (1994): 495-515.
McKenzie, P. R. Hail Orisha! A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century. New York: Brill, 1997.
McNaughton, Patrick R. "Is There History in Horizontal Masks? A Preliminary Response to the Dilemma of Form." African Arts 24, no. 2 (1991): 40-53.
Meyerowitz, Eva. L. R. "Notes on the King-God Shango and His Temple at Ibadan, Southern Nigeria." Man 46, no. 27 (1946): 25-31.
Miller, Joseph Calder. The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History. Hamden: Archon Press, 1980.
Moran, Mary. "Warriors or Soldiers: Masculinity and Ritual Transvestism in the Liberian Civil War." In Feminism, Nationalism and Militarism, edited by C.R. Sutton. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association for Feminist Anthropology, 1995.
Morton-Williams, Peter. "An Outline of the Cosmology and Cult Organization of the Oyo Yoruba." Africa XXXIV, no. 3 (1964): 243-261.
———. "The Atinga Cult among the South-Western Yoruba: a Sociological Analysis of a Witchfinding Movement." Institut Français d'Afrique Noire 18, no. 3/4 (1956): 315-334.
———. "The Egungun Society in South-western Yoruba Kingdoms." West African Institute of Social and Economic Research (1954): 90-103.
———. "The Oyo Yoruba and the Atlantic Trade." Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria III, no. I (1964).
———. "The Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo." In West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century, edited by Cyril Daryll Forde and Phyllis Mary Kaberry, 36-69. London: Oxford U.P. for the International African Institute, 1967.
———. "The Yoruba Ogbonio Cult in Oyo." Africa 30, no. 4 (1960): 362-374.
———. "Yoruba Responses to the Fear of Death." Africa 30, no. 1 (1960): 34-40.

Nadel, S. F. Nupe Religion: Traditional Beliefs and the Influence of Islam in a West African Chiefdom. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954.
Napier, A. David. Masks, Transformation, and Paradox. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
Nolte, Insa. "Chieftaincy and the State in Abacha's Nigeria: Kingship, Political Rivalry, and Competing Histories in Abeokuta during the 1990s." Africa 72, no. 3 (2002).
———. "Identity and Violence: The Politics of Youth in Ijebu-Remo, Nigeria." Journal of Modern African Studies 42, no. 1 (2004): 61.
Nunley, John W. Moving With the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
Nzewunwa, Nwanna, ed. The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980.
Obayemi, Ade. "Origins of the Masquerade: Socio-historical and Archeological Perspectives." In The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture, edited by Nwanna Nzewunwa. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980.
Ogunba, Oyinade. "Ceremonies." In Sources of Yoruba History, edited by Saburi O. Biobaku. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.
Ogundeji, Philip Adedotun. Ritual as Theatre, Theatre as Ritual: the Nigerian Example. Vol. 2. Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2000.
Ogunyemi, Wale. "Egungun Cult in Some Parts of Western Yorubaland: Origin and Functions." African Notes 21, no. 1 & 2 (1997): 95-102.
Ogunyemi, Yemi. "The Traditional Yoruba Traveling Theatre." Nigeria Magazine (1981).
Ojo, G. J. A. Yoruba Culture: a Geographical Analysis. London: University of London Press, 1966.
Ojo, J. R. "Masking Rituals as Sources of Historical Data." In The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture, edited by Nwanna Nzewunwa. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980.
Ojo, J. R. O. "Epa and Related Masquerades among the Ekiti Yoruba of Western Nigeria." M. Philosophy, University of London, 1974.
———. "Reflections of War in Some Ekiti Festivals." In War and peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893, edited by Adeagbo Akinjogbin, 443-450. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998.
———. "The Symbolism and Significance of Epa-Type Masquerade Headpieces." Man 13, no. 3 (1978): 455-470.
Olajubu, Oludare. "Composition and Performance Techniques of Iwi Egungun." In Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama, edited by Wande Abimbola, 877-933. Ile-Ife: Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Ife, 1975.
———. "Egungun Chants in Yoruba Oral Literature." M.A. Thesis, University of Lagos, 1971.

———. "The Yoruba Egungun Masquerade Cult and its Role in the Society." In The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture, edited by Nwanna Nzewunwa, 389-409. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980.
Olajubu, Oludare, and J. R. Ojo. "Some aspects of Oyo Yoruba Masquerades." Africa 47, no. 3 (1977): 253-275.
Olajubu, Oyeronke. "A Comparative Study of Women in Christianity and Yoruba Religion." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, 1995.
———. Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.
Olupona, Jacob K. African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions. New York: Crossroad, 2000.
———. African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society. New York: Paragon House, 1991.
Olupona, Jacob Obafemi K. ehinde, and Toyin Falola. Religion and Society in Nigeria: Historical and Sociological Perspectives. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1991.
Olutoye, O., and J. A. Olapade. "Implements and Tactics of War Among the Yoruba." In War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893, edited by Adeagbo Akinjogbin, 199-218. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998.
Osayin, Bode. "A Cross-road of History, Legend, and Myth: The Case of the Origin of Adamuorisa." In The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture, edited by Nwanna Nzewunwa, 410-459. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980.
Oyewumi, Oyeronke. The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
Peel, J. D. Y. "A Comparative Analysis of Ogun in Precolonial Yorubaland." In Africa's Ogun: Old World and New, edited by Sandra T. Barnes, xxi, 389. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
———. Ijeshas and Nigerians: the Incorporation of a Yoruba kingdom, 1890s-1970s. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
———. Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
Pemberton, John. "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba." African Arts XI, no. 3 (1978): 41-47.
Pemberton, John, and Funso S. Afolayan. Yoruba Sacred Kingship: "A Power Like That of the Gods". Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
Perani, Judith, and Norma Hackleman Wolff. Cloth, Dress, and Art Patronage in Africa. Oxford: Berg, 1999.
Pernet, Henry. "Masks and Women: Toward a Reappraisal." History of Religions 22, no. 1 (1982): 45-59.

Picton, John. "What's in a Mask." African Languages and Cultures 3, no. 2 (1990): 181-202.
Poynor, Robin. "Art, Innovation, and the Politics in Eighteenth-Century Benin." African Arts (2002): 7-9.
———. "The Ancestral Arts of Owo, Nigeria." Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 1979.
———. "The Egungun of Owo." African Arts 11, no. 3 (1978): 65-76, 100.
———. "The Egungun of Owo, Nigeria: styles and sources." In ASA: Waltham, 1974.
Ryder, A. F. C. Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897. Harlow: Longmans, 1969.
Salako, R. A. Ota: Biography of the Foremost Awori Town. Ota: Penink Publicity and Company, 2000.
Salako, Ruhollah Ajibola. Oba Moshood Oyede, The Olota of Ota: So Far So Good. Otta: Pennik Publicity & Co., 2004.
Sargent, R. A. "Igala Masks: Dynastic History and the Face of the Nation." In West African Masks and Cultural Systems, edited by Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, 17-44. Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1988.
Schiltz, Marc. "Egungun Masquerades in Iganna." African Arts 11, no. 3 (1978): 48-55, 100.
Simpson, George Eaton. Yoruba Religion and Medicine in Ibadan. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1980.
Smith, Daniel J. A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
Smith, Daniel J. . "Violent Vigilantism and the State in Nigeria: the Case of the Bakassi Boys " In States of Violence: Politics, Youth, and Memory in Contemporary Africa, edited by Edna G. Bay and Donald L. Donham. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.
Smith, Robert. "Event and Portent: The Fall of Old Oyo: A Problem in Historical Explanation." Africa 41, no. 3 (1971): 186-199.
———. "The Alaafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History." Journal of African History 6, no. 1 (1965): 57-77.
———. The Lagos Consulate, 1851-1861. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.
Smith, Robert S. Kingdoms of the Yoruba. London: Methuen, 1969.
Thompson, Robert Farris. African Art in Motion: Icon and Act. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974.
———. Black Gods and Kings: Yoruba art at UCLA. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976.
———. Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.

Thornton, John. Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
Thornton, John K. "Religious and Ceremonial Life in the Kongo and Mbundu Areas, 1500-1700." In Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora, edited by Linda M. Heywood, 71-90. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
Tonkin, Elizabeth. "Cunning Mysteries." In West African Masks and Cultural Systems, edited by Sidney L. Kasfir, 241-251. Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1988.
———. "Masks and Powers." Man, New Series 14, no. 2 (1979): 237-248.
Uzoigwe, Veronica. "The Masquerade." In Ibadan Mesiogo: A Celebration of a City, Its History, and People, edited by Dapo Adelugba, Remi Raji, Omowunmi Segun and Bankole Olayebi, 147-152. Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd., 2001.
Vansina, Jan. Oral Tradition: a Study in Historical Methodology. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1965.
Verger, Pierre. "Grandeur et decadence du culte de Iyami Osoronga: Ma mere la sorciere chez les Yoruba." Journal de la Societe des Africanistes 35, no. 1 (1965): 201-219.
Wambutda, D. N. "Masquerades as Depository of history: Angas of Plateau State." In The Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture, edited by Nwanna Nzewunwa. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt, 1980.
Washington, Teresa N. Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Aje in Africana Literature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
Weil, Peter. "The Masked Figure and Social Control: the Mandika Case." Africa 41, no. 4 (1971): 279-293.
———. "Womens' Masks and the Power of Gender in Mande History." African Arts 31, no. 2 (1998).
Wolff, Norma. "Egungun Costuming in Abeokuta." African Arts 15, no. 3 (1982): 66-70.