1. WHAT ARE ORIKI?

The author comes closest to defining oriki in parts of chapters 3 and 7:

[When the performer utters oriki, what she is doing is bestowing on the subject a plethora of elaborations of, and equivalents to, his own names. And the subject is visibly affected. Oriki call a subject's qualities to life, and allow them to expand. (pp. 74f) The underlying idea seems to be that a person occupies a place created by someone who went before. (p. 252) Thus the present-day individual lives in his ancestors and his ancestors live in him. (p. 254)

These descriptions do not, however, directly explain why oriki predominate in so many ritual-poetic styles. For example, Barber cites Behn (1988) for a list of "countless localised chants based on oriki of one kind or another" (fn. 5, p. 306). Her own glossary includes the following entries (pp. 336–40):

(1) alámọ  type of oriki-based chant from Òkùkù
ekún iyáwọ  brides oriki-based lament (Standard Yorùbá)
ijála  oriki-based hunters' chant
irémójé  type of oriki-based hunters' dirge
iwi  oriki-based egbágún chant
olele  type of oriki-based chant, found in Ìjesá
órisá pípé  oriki chant addressed to órisá [divinities]
rára  royal bards oriki chant
rára iyáwọ  brides lament (local name; see ekún iyáwọ)
Sángó pípé  oriki chant addressed to Sángó

Barber agrees with Olááúnjì (1984) that oriki display a maximal degree of nominalization (p. 71):

In some cases oriki go beyond the rules of ordinary grammar, and attach nominalising prefixes to whole sentences without first converting them into noun phrases.

At some length, however, she disputes Olááúnjì's view that formal “feature types” such as ọgọ 'incantation', ówé 'proverb' and oriki cross-classify with situationally based "chanting modes" such as rára, iwi and ijála (glossed above). While tacitly assuming Olááúnjì's framework at various points (e.g. p. 143 refers to "the rára iyáwọ version of the oriki"), Barber cites displays by Sángówémi, "the towns only professional performer" (p. 16) to argue that oriki is the mother of all forms (p. 85):

[Other genres provide ready-made materials which can effortlessly be incorporated into oriki chants... 'Oral tradition' appears less like a hierarchy of classified and bounded genres and more like a vast pool of textual resources into which the performer can dip at will. An oriki chant, then, is essentially incorporative; its
centreless and boundariless form makes it endlessly accommodating. Its mode is to subsist by swallowing other texts.

Why take Sàngówêmi's "extreme pole of the fluidity-fixity continuum" (p. 96) as the oríki prototype? Evidently, this choice was made early in the fieldwork process (p. 101):

During the early days of my research I found my recordings monopolised by Sàngówêmi; she was always there, always twice as vociferous as anyone else. But then a kind advisor, a babaláwo [divination priest], told me "There's too much Sàngówêmi she in your recordings. She is fluent but she is superficial. She doesn't know as much about any compound as the people of the compound itself."

Despite the warning, Barber uses "the disjunctiveness of the discourse of oríki" (p. 248) as a highly abstract theme of women in a patrilocal, patrilocal society (p. 261):

[O]ríki are above all a means of crossing boundaries and transcending divisions in the very act of affirming differences.

Yet Sàngówêmi's route to oríki mastery is quite atypical. Her mother was "a fully qualified practising babaláwo, the only female one Òkékú remembers" (p. 103). Her career took off after a 1952 audition for the District Officer, when the artist Susanne Wenger selected her to enter a divisional singing competition (p. 104). Most women follow a different, nonprofessional apprenticeship (p. 99):

In learning to perform rârâ iyáwó, young women mastered extensive passages of oríki oríké and sometimes also of personal oríki. The young wife would attend funerals and family rituals both in her parents house and in her husbands. All of these involved chants, made up chiefly of oríki oríké and personal oríki of famous ancestors.

Eventually, if the need arose, she would be able to lead the performance herself.

Put another way: Barber observed women gradually become skilled chroniclers of male emblems and biography while moving from the natal to the marital sphere. Although the "simple" (p. 87) oríki style of rârâ iyáwó describes women's experience, it is less "characteristic" than the more "full-blown" (p. 92) styles which refer to patrilineal origins (oríki oríké) and male achievements (oríki bòdôkínni).

In the Derriadean flux of literary jargon, these observations get turned on their head (p. 248):

It is the woman that makes differentiation possible and that offers the social actor alternative paths to pursue. It is the disjunctiveness of the discourse of oríki that makes it possible for them [sc. women] to assert identities and at the same time to cross boundaries between individuals and groups.

To reconcile the fragmentation of Sàngówêmi's style with prototypically male oríki content, Barber resorts to structuralist wordplay and French and Russian name-dropping (p. 286–88):

[H]orizontal difference and vertical hierarchy are simultaneously upheld (by being built into the structure of oríki as well as being explicitly stated) and ironically subverted. ... If human differences are legitimised as natural, at the same time the whole of nature is brought within the sphere of the cultural. In this moment, the text seems to contain a hidden acknowledgement that divisions, difference (and by implication, hierarchy) are not naturally given, in-born social characteristics but social products. They could therefore be changed. ... Oríki never criticise the community's orthodoxy, for as Bourdieu suggests, they cannot. But they always hold open, by the oppositions and contradictions embedded in them and deliberately held unresolved and suspended, a tiny 'loop-hole', as Bakhtin (1984b) put it: the possibility of things being otherwise.

A less acrobatic approach to oríki's literary semantics and pragmatics would be founded on well-documented indigenous concepts. Such an alternative can be briefly sketched. The term oríki is plausibly a contraction of the VP gerund orí-i-ki 'head-praising'—from the noun orí 'head' and the verb kí 'praise' linked by the nominalizing H-tone. Kí (L tone) is closely related to kí 'greet' (H tone); the minimal difference is that L-tone kí entails that the addressee is affected, while H tone kí does not. Ten or more similar pairs of verbs in Yorùbá, where the L-tone member entails an extra semantic component of affectedness, can be found in Abrahams 1958 dictionary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yorùbá</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bá</td>
<td>'meet'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dé</td>
<td>'cover'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dí</td>
<td>'block'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ló</td>
<td>'twist'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>má</td>
<td>'be clear/clean'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pé</td>
<td>'say'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sán</td>
<td>'eat without sauce'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>té</td>
<td>'spread out'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tí</td>
<td>'hit, contact'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wón</td>
<td>'be expensive'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bá</td>
<td>'hit'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dé</td>
<td>'tie up'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dí</td>
<td>'close up'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>̀ó</td>
<td>'grind'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mà</td>
<td>'know'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pè</td>
<td>'call, summon'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sàn</td>
<td>'rinse clean'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tè</td>
<td>'press down'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tì</td>
<td>'push/lean on'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wòń</td>
<td>'measure'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The head in question is not the physical cranium but the orí inú, i.e. the "inner" or spiritual head (Abídún 1990:257). The following Ifá excerpt (from Abíímbojá 1968:100, translation modified from Abíímbojá 1975:390) portrays the orí as "the individual's personal divinity":

(3) Orí, pèlé, Atéténiran, Atétégbenikòọsà.

Head, hail to you,
You who will always
quickly bless your own,
You who blesses a person
before any divinity.
Kọ sóọsà tíf dá ‘níf gbè lèyín orí ẹni. ‘No divinity blesses someone unbeknownst to their Head.’

Also pertinent are some phrases of oríkì for the Orí divinity (Abíódún 1990:264; translation modified):

(4) Orí bàbá ohún gbogbo,
Orí ni a bá kí.
Gbogbo ara kò jé ńkankan.
‘Head, master of all things,
‘Its the Head we should praise,
‘The rest of the body amounts

to nothing.’

Some observations in Barber’s book reinforce the pragmatic relevance of the ‘head-praising’ etymology. “To describe the experience [of hearing ones oríkì], people say Orí mí wú, ‘My head swelled’” (p. 75). Oríkì are chanted to reinvigorate an egúngún mask while “making a sacrifice to its head” (p. 77).

Orí ‘head’ as a constituent of the word oríkì may (modulo phonetic labialization) also underlie the general term for ‘name’— orúkọ. Notice that orúkọ can be qualified to denote birth oríkì (p. 339):

(5) orúkọ ̀bííṣọ name ‘given after the child is born’, i.e. reflecting circumstances or feelings of [the] family at [the] time of birth

orúkọ àmútọrunwà name ‘brought from heaven’, i.e. relating to birth order or manner of birth

The role of orí in the concept of oríkì may help to explain the ritual diversity of oríkì styles. Particular genres evolve and affect the distinctive orí of their addressees by means of stereotyped sound symbolism phonetic patterns which the performers themselves call ìjàdí (Iṣòlò 1975:782). Thus, Babalọ́lọ́́ remarks (1966a:23, fn. 2):

Each genre has its distinctive style of vocalization or technique of vocal performance.

... [A]n experienced listener to recitals of the various types of Yorùbá vocal art can name almost immediately, from the sound of the recital, the particular style of vocalization being employed ...

For example, Sàngó pipé (in the Òyó-Ede style) is sung with creaky larynx, glottalized consonants and halting tempo. Ìjádí (associated with Ógún) exhibits “profound” shifts among three tempi (Yàlì 1973, cited by Oyèláràn 1975:733). Ìwi is delivered either “in a high pitched voice” or in “a sepulchral or croaky voice ... the real voice of the egúngún [ancestor masks]” (Olájúbú 1975:914f). Like the rhythms of ritual dance and the gestures of spirit possession, each oríkì style mimics the divinity’s orí.

Barbers post-structuralist rhetoric mirrors Sàngówémi’s deconstructive delivery. Neither of these virtuosic performances, however, directly illuminates the main oríkì traditions in Òkúkú town, traditions which the author documents thoroughly and interprets with much skill. To these I now turn.

2. “ORIKÌ OF ORIGIN”

Oríkì orílé “affirm the distinctive attributes of the place and its people” (p. 135) from which and from whom members of a residential compound trace their earliest beginnings. Such attributes include “characteristic natural features and resources” (p. 138), as well as specific occupations, religious observances, dietary restrictions and facial markings.

What determines the transmission of oríkì orílé is not patrilineal descent—as in the segmentary model of Lloyd (1955)—but the looser, “emblematic” (p. 145) notion of legitimate inheritance. Òmọ bẹ̀ bẹ̀ the ‘freeborn’ inheritor is explicitly contrasted to iwi dì the pawn and ẹrú the slave. Thus (p. 145):

Oríkì orílé do include allusions to illustrious men and women among the ancestors of the group, but do not trace genealogies, nor do they revolve around the notion of a lineage founder.

Barber traces the focus on ancient residence—as opposed to genealogy—to “inter-urban rivalry and warfare ... [and] alliances” (p. 146) which triggered mass migrations throughout the 16th–19th centuries (cf. Johnson 1921). Despite the fact that “[t]hey are more stable than other oríkì” (p. 137), oríkì orílé contain references to the town of arrival (p. 152f).

In Òkúkú today, “the main administrative unit” (p. 155) for taxation, landholding and accession to chieftaincy titles is the domestic compound: ilé. Yet compound boundaries are ambiguous (p. 158f):

When I first arrived in Òkúkú I was told authoritatively that there were seventeen compounds in the town. ... By the time I left Òkúkú three years later I had arrived at a list of twenty-nine ilé which seemed to be generally accepted, for most purposes, as independent compounds, and a further twenty-one units which though attached to ‘host’ compounds nevertheless had varying degrees of autonomy.

Preservation of distinct oríkì orílé guards the separate identity of a dependent compound, but also disqualifies its members from lineage-based titles. In a recent case (p. 165), “newcomers ... abandoned” their ancient oríkì orílé in order to permit a successful migrants accession to de jure
leadership of the host compound. Texts reveal other such cases in "remote history" (p. 166, cf. Babalọ́pá 1966b).

Another exception to the agnatic model of ìle membership is posed by matrilocal oríkì orílẹ̀, which commemorate "far-reaching and long-maintained relationships 'on the mothers side' " (p. 170). One recent example is an annual meeting of individuals—spanning two towns, three generations and four patrilineages—who are the descendants of two sisters (p. 170f). A reason for the groups cohesiveness may be the fact that the two sisters were themselves the daughters of a famous 19th-century herbalist.

Chapter 5 concludes with a cogent analysis of some "ways ready-made lexical sets are drawn from the current literary tradition and used to build the structures typical of oríkì orílẹ̀" around an "embalmed wealth" of motifs which "appears to be imperishable" (p. 182). Such stability survives even the de-centered performance "flux" described in previous chapters.

3. "Oríkì of Big Men"

Some twenty senior, ranked political titles in Ókùkù are "owned" by specific compounds, from which potential aspirants are drawn. Traditions of itàn narrative history reveal that (p. 193):

much of the political struggle that went on in Ókùkù throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries revolved precisely around efforts by chiefs and the oba to rewrite the order [of title ranking] or resist such rewriting.

Oríkì bòròkìnì (p. 184) "were the main instrument through which reputation was publicly acknowledged and enhanced" in pursuit of these titles. Here too, gender divides (p. 186): while the accumulation of prestige was "conducted largely by men", the "agents ... of the process of aggrandisement" were—and "by and large" are—women.

Two prototypical "big men" of early 19th-century Ókùkù were Wínýòmí Enípèdè, a renowned hunter and herbalist, and Oba Adèwálé Adèóbà (who reigned c. 1830–61). The dominant images in these men's oríkì trace "a circling metaphorical path" around "a total state of sufficiency and command over their social environment, a state called ṣàlā" (p. 202f).

Starting around the 1850s, with warfare and slave-raiding on the rise, the central idioms of the texts became "personal aggression and immunity from attack" (p. 204). Oríkì of Ògè Bálògun, the town militia, portray them "not as communal champions, as Wínýòmí was, but as magnificent, frightening forces" (p. 205), represented as a horse in its aspect of "an engine of destruction, flattening the grass and churning up the dust under its mighty hooves" (p. 212). This heroic era ended in 1878 when the Ìbàdàn-Ilorin war drove the Òkùkù population to take refuge in Òkùkù.

The reconstruction of Òkùkù, beginning in 1893, coincided with the colonial cash economy and British intervention in decision-making. The door was thrown wide open to "self-made men who bypassed the chiefly hierarchy and challenged the oba's authority" (p. 222f). Òrìlẹ̀ (intrigue or plotting) was the word used most often to describe political processes" (p. 229).

In the 1920's and '30's, new opportunities in the cash cultivation of kola and palm nuts, and in the mass importation of consumer goods, were seized upon by "big women" such as Òyàntáyà, Òmọlọ́lọ́ and Òyà Rèkè. Yet, these women "had no oríkì" (p. 236). "[T]he male cycle of aggrandisement" required "a great household of wives and children" (p. 235), and a woman "who threatens to alienate her fertility to her own project of self-aggrandisement" (p. 236) was regarded as a witch.

A nationalistic class of literate "big men" came to the fore in the 1940's and '50's. With them, oríkì parameters changed from wealth and medicine to patronage and "progressive" views (p. 239). "The disappearance of the great household meant that one of the primary fields of reference in oríkì was lost" (p. 243). This change has made "the creation of new personal oríkì to commemorate the activities of new personalities in Òkùkù ... rather rare" (p. 245). Barber relates the decline of oríkì composition to a gap between the thematic content of oral traditions and new "zones of social experience" such as "the ruthless struggle for the new cocoa and oil wealth, and the alienation attendant on massive urban expansion" (p. 246). Now, "those who make 'progress' are hailed in the language of nostalgia" (p. 247).

4. Not Yet Orthography

Unfortunately, this work of solid and committed scholarship is marred by editorial conservatism. A "Note on Orthography" (p. x) states that "isolated Yoruba words are not tonemarked, because the frequency of their occurrence would cause problems for the typesetter." To a linguist, this pseudo-technical complaint begs several questions. What problems? Subdots are successfully placed throughout the book, even on "isolated" words, wherever orthographically required. The two basic tone marks of Yorùbá are not exotic; they are identical to the acute and grave accents of French. What typesetters? "Frequency" of accent placement does not inconvenience silicon chips or cathode rays. If diacritics are too expensive, why indulge the nonorthographic hâčêk some 20 times on the transliterated Russian name Vološînov (where sh would have sufficed)? Hundreds of
lines of poetry, and dozens of words in running text, are accurately and unobtrusively tonemarked in this book. Why stop at 80%? Tonemarks also appear throughout the index (except, for some reason, on personal names and the word Yorùbá itself) and in the glossary. Why not add these already extant tonemarks to the running text by means of a computerized search-and-replace function?

If university presses in Ilé-Ifé and Ibadán can achieve full tonemarking, no less should be expected from a European counterpart which boasts “[t]heoretically informed ethnographies which are sensitive to local cultural forms” as a complement to “the premier journal in the field of African Studies” (p. ii). To date, the International African Library of the London-based International African Institute includes eight titles. When will this series publish a book by an African scholar, or devise a consistent policy for African languages? The following oríkì applies (p. 102f):

Omo Awóyemi, ta ní i mọ ilé ẹni ju ẹni i lọ?
'Child of Awóyemi, who knows a persons house more than the person herself?'

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