

A recording of these six songs, in the order they are printed here, makes up one side of the insert disc of this issue. Jean Borgatti is presently on the faculty of Boston University, where she is teaching African Art History.

Jean Borgatti, translator

Songs Of Ritual License From Midwestern Nigeria

Translator's Introduction

The Ekperi are an Edo-speaking people living in Nigeria's Midwest State, approximately sixty miles north of Benin city.¹ According to traditional history, they migrated north from Benin early in the eighteenth century. Okpenada, one of the seventeen Ekperi villages, maintains a shrine called "Okhailo-pokhai," meaning "a warrior will not enter the house of another warrior." The name refers to the efficacy of the cult's power materials (*ikhumi*) in protecting the village from Nupe slave raiders. Although the cult originated in the late nineteenth century in response to the Nupe problem, it continues to function as a focus for village worship. The forces localized in the shrine may be activated on behalf of any individual during the weekly service. Votive offerings of white cloth, a white cock, palm wine and kola are made by successful petitioners.

The shrine is served once in four days (the traditional week) by an elderly custodial priest. He prays while pouring a libation of palm wine over a group of three stones in the shrine shelter (located at the edge of his compound), makes an offering of chalk and kola, and cult members sing a particular body of songs. When these songs were recorded, Awawo-John, sister of the current priest and cult devotee, dramatically initiated the performance by flinging herself to the ground and addressing the earth. (Songs were subsequently addressed to the tape recorder for technical reasons.) Igiepo-Aimiebo, the cult priest and senior titled elder (*okaku*) of Okpenada, followed with a song as did a second elderly titled man and cult member, Asegieme-Obemata. The songs were partially accompanied by rhythmic handclapping. A chorus, com-

prised of children and spectators, alternately joined and followed the lead singer. An attempt has been made to visualize the patterns of singing and accompaniment through using different type face, symbols, and spacing: Lead singer alone, SINGER WITH CHORUS, *chorus alone*, handclapping, time-kéeeping, and over lapping.

A note on the transcription: Mr. Barnabas Alonokua, present at the recording, transcribed the tape and assisted with the translation. He is a retired policeman, circa age 65, currently living in his natal village, Azukhala-Ekperi. The transcription utilizes accepted vernacular spellings; a phonetic transcription would differ considerably.

The songs themselves represent an occasion of ritualized verbal license in which men and women ridicule each other's genitalia and sexual habits. Normally such ridicule would be an anti-social act in the extreme, an offense against the elders, the living representatives of the ancestors, and hence against the continuity of life. In the ritual context, however, the songs provide recognition, acceptance, and release of that tension which exists between the sexes in all cultures, and so neutralize this potential threat to community stability. Similar songs are reported from other northern Edo: Among the North Ibie, they form a part of an annual community festival; among the Weppa-Wano, they are part of a coming of age festival for both sexes.

Awawo-John delivers "What Fell Down? Penis!" with the intent of penetrating masculine delusions of grandeur. Man is identified with Elo, a powerful

spirit, through the repetitive device “is supreme” (*nofigbo*) which also implies “not a woman” in this context — as it is alternatively translated. The identification is intended not only to point out man’s overweening pride but also to call down the wrath of Elo on his head for such pretentiousness. Impotence, boasts of prowess, and the transparent schemes of seduction are exposed, while the physical qualities of male genitalia are ridiculed.

Igiepo-Aimiebo replies with “What Fell Down? Vulva!”, exposing woman’s petty greed and dishonesty, for she has hidden her market earnings in her storage container rather than using them to help her husband, and “songs-of-the-mouth” are lies. An interesting contrast between the songs is found in the female plea for men to have greater insight (Let them see!) as opposed to the male response which is disciplinary (Slap her!). “Vulva is Hole” satirizes female

sexual appetite and capacity, while “When A Man Is Laughing: Haw-Haw” and “I Saw A Man Whose Penis Was Too Heavy” continue the themes of ridiculing men’s genitalia and habits. In the latter case, “penis” is rebuked for wandering away from home with the taunt: “Houserat, why do you go to the water to fish?” Finally, Awawo-John celebrates the ultimate sexual power of women, singing “When I Refuse Him.”

1. Research in Nigeria from 1971-1974 was partially funded through grants from the Museum of Cultural History, UCLA, the UCLA Patent Fund, and NDEA Title VI grants from the United States government.



left to right: Igiepo-Aimiebo, Awawo-John, Asegieme-Obemata

Eme Dhe? Eveli!

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

Hai Hai Hai Hai Hai-i-i-i HOE! HOE!
Eme dhe? EVELI!
Ebo de? ODE GBI!
Utaki nobor JOYOH!
Utolowike JOYOH!
Utolonape JOYOH!
Ene ja wo otor jelo re neo ko koli kelo le ko kpo lu-lu-lu
ULE KEA SE MO KOLI GWE
EGUWA ETUMABE JELALO!
Oyeleto JELALO!
Ojigwabo JELALO!

E-elo nofigbo Elo
 Omonogbo nofigbo
 Elo
 Nofigbo nu lai da
 Elo
 Nofigbo nu lai thai
 Elo
Oyome pia viaku Elo
IKAMATI PIA VIAKU YE KI PIA VIAKU EVIAMIGBE Elo
Oyome jogana
IKAMATI JOGANATA KIJOGANA VIAMIGBE Elo
Oyome gwepe
IKAMATI GWEPE YEKI IGWA VIEPE OVIAMIGBE ELO
E-elo nofigbo Elo
 Omonogbo nofigbo
 Elo
 Omoi thegbe nofigbo
 Elo
 Omoi kpikpia wo nofigbo
 Elo

What Fell Down? Penis!

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

Hai Hai Hai Hai Hai-i-i-i	HOE! HOE!
What fell down?	PENIS!
How did it fall?	IT FELL WITH A BANG!
The oracle	LET IT SPEAK!
Pot with noise inside	LET IT SPEAK!
Iroko tree in the compound	LET IT SPEAK!
Those who pull honey from the ground say a woman's body is sweeter than honey	
WE DO NOT EVEN BELIEVE THEY HAVE TASTED OUR BODY	
SPIRIT, EGUWA ETUMABE	LET THEM SEE!
Ridiculous men whose pubic hair	
is straight	LET THEM SEE!
Foolish men whose arms are bent	
like a monkey's	LET THEM SEE!

Elo who is supreme

Elo

The one with cudgel is not a woman

Elo

The supreme one has never fetched
water from the river

Elo

The supreme one has never fetched
firewood

Elo

He asks me to "shake my waist" a little bit Elo

BUT I CAN'T SHAKE MY WAIST A LITTLE BIT BECAUSE IT'S TOO DIFFICULT Elo

He asks me to lie on my back

BUT I CAN'T LIE ON MY BACK AND SPREAD MY LEGS BECAUSE IT'S TOO DIFFICULT Elo

So he asks me to lie on my side a little

BUT I CAN'T LIE ON MY SIDE JUST A LITTLE BECAUSE IT'S TOO DIFFICULT ELO

E-lo who is supreme

Elo

The one with cudgel is not a woman

Elo

The one with sticks on his body
is not a woman

Elo

	<u>Nomoi nagma nofigbo</u>
	<u>Elo</u>
	<u>Omoi de gbe nofigbo</u>
	<u>Elo</u>
E-elo nofigbo	ELO-O-O-O

Eme Dhe? Okoli!

Vocalist: Ogiepo, son of Aimiebo

Hai-ai-ai-ai	HOE! HOE!
Eme dhe?	
<i>Okoli!</i>	
Ebo de?	<i>Ode gbi!</i>
Utaki nobor	<i>Joyoh!</i>
Utolowike	<i>Joyoh!</i>
Uloko nape	<i>Joyoh!</i>
Ene jawo TOR JELO RE NO KEVELI OKPOLU-LU-LU	
ULE KEA SO MO EVELI GWE	
OGIU WAI OBE	
GBE OLIALO OYELETO	
GBE OLIALO OJIGWAGO	
GBE OLIALO!	

Amiemie ekauno nime	<i>Ekauno</i>
Amiemie ekauno nime	<i>Ekauno</i>
<u>Ukpade nor kptoo agha</u>	<u>EKAUNO</u>
<u>Egboje yowoh-o-o-o-o</u>	<u>EKAUNO-o-o</u>
<u>Oho koko ho-o-o</u>	<u>EKAUNO-O-O-O</u>

Ayoma owa iyagbagiela
 Ayoma owa YAGBAGIELA NA
 Utaki nobor IYAGBAGIELA NA
 Okhailopokhai YAGBAGIELA NA
 Ayoma owa yagbagiela na-a *E-e-e-e*

The one with okra is not a woman
Elo
The one with an “extra body” is
not a woman
Elo
ELO-O-O-O

E-elo who is supreme

What Fell Down? Vulva!

Vocalist: Ogiepo, son of Aimiebo

Hai-ai-ai-ai	HOE! HOE!
What fell down?	
<i>Vulva!</i>	
How did it fal?	<i>It fell with a bang!</i>
The oracle	<i>Let it speak!</i>
Pot with noise inside	<i>Let it speak!</i>
Iroko tree in the compound	<i>Let it speak!</i>

Those who pull HONEY FROM THE GROUND SAY THAT A MAN'S BODY IS SWEETER
THAN HONEY
WE DO NOT EVEN BELIEVE THEY HAVE TASTED OUR BODY
THE ONE WHOSE CLITORIS IS TOO LONG
SLAP HER, THE ONE WHOSE PUBIC HAIR IS STRAIGHT
SLAP HER, THE FOOLISH ONE WHOSE ARMS ARE BENT LIKE A MONKEY'S
SLAP HER!

Let us sing songs-of-the-mouth together	<i>Songs-of-the-mouth</i>
Let us sing songs-of-the-mouth together	<i>Songs-of-the-mouth</i>
<u>The bottom calabash in the net</u>	<u>SONGS-OF-THE-MOUTH</u>
<u>Four-score cowries inside-o</u>	<u>SONGS-OF-THE-MOUTH-o</u>
<u>Oho koko ho-o-o</u>	<u>SONGS-OF-THE-MOUTH-O-O-O</u>

No one should ask why I dance Agiela-dance
No one should ask WHY I DANCE AGIELA-DANCE
I DANCE AGIELA FOR the oracle
I DANCE AGIELA FOR Okhailopokhai
No one should ask why I dance Agiela-dance *E-e-e-e-e-e*

Esige The Nai Gwe Ye

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

Esige the nai gwe ye, oya gbele agene
Esige the nai gwe ye, oya gbele agene
Ekwo kwo me ne kho kho, nufe ne tho ya gbigene
Ekwo kwo me ne kho kho, nufe ne tho ya gbigene-e-e-e.

Repeated twice with minor variations. Chorus sings along with the vocalist in the final version.

Esagene Ogie: Gwo – Gwo

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

Esagene ogie: gwo–gwo, gwo–gwo	IVIAVE LUSHOGO SHOGO
Esagene ogie: gwo–gwo, <u>gwo–gwo</u>	<u>Iviave lushogo shogo</u>
Esagene ogie: gwo–gwo, <u>gwo–gwo</u>	<u>Iviave lushogo shogo</u>
<u>Eniviai eve lusho(lo)go sho(lo)go</u>	<u>Eniviave lushogo shogo</u>
<u>Enivia eve luna(la)gha na(la)gha</u>	<u>Eniviave lunagha nagha</u>
<u>Eniviai eve lusho(lo)go sho(lo)go</u>	<u>Eniviave lushogo shogo</u>
<u>Enivia eve luna(la)gha na(la)gha</u>	<u>Eniviave lunagha nagha</u>
<u>Enivia eve lonogbo nogbo</u>	<u>Eniviave lunogbo nogbo</u>
Esagene ogie: gwo–gwo, gwo–gwo	<i>Eniviave lushogo shogo-o-o-o-o</i>

The song is repeated twice with minor variations.

When I Refuse Him

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

When I refuse him, the man is filled with sorrow
When I refuse him, the man is filled with sorrow
When my “thing” is bright and happy like a baby chick, it drives him wild
When my “thing” is bright and happy like a baby chick, it drives him wild

Repeated twice with minor variations. Chorus sings along with the vocalist in the final version.

When A Man Is Laughing: Haw-Haw

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

When a man is laughing: haw-haw, haw haw	HIS BALLS FLOP UP AND DOWN
When a man is laughing: haw-haw, haw-haw	<u>His balls flop up and down</u>
When a man is laughing: haw-haw, haw-haw	<u>His balls flop up and down</u>
<u>His balls flop up and down</u>	<u>His balls flop up and down</u>
<u>His balls swing side to side</u>	<u>His balls swing side to side</u>
<u>His balls flop up and down</u>	<u>His balls flop up and down</u>
<u>His balls swing side to side</u>	<u>His balls swing side to side</u>
<u>His balls, they “go” fall off</u>	<u>His balls, they “go” fall off</u>
When a man is laughing: haw-haw, haw-haw	<u>His balls flop up and down-o-o-o</u>

The song is repeated twice with minor variations.

Okoli Nololo

Vocalist: Asegieme, son of Obemata

Okoli nololo	GBOLOLO
Okoli nololo	Gbololo
Akadua va du udo	Gbololo
Ada omuadowo	GBOLOLO
Aka wotha <u>ge ebe</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
<u>Omuadowo</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
<u>Okoli nololo</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
<u>Okoli nololo</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
<u>Aka dua va du udo</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
<u>Aka omuadowo</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
<u>Aka wotha ge usi</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
<u>Aka omuadowo</u>	<i>Gbololo</i>
Okoli nololo	GBOLOLO-O-O-O

Ikede Ko De Eve

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

Ikede ko de eve ogwibagio, ogwa nyi nagha-e
Ikede ko de eve ogwibagi, OGWA NYI NAGHA-E
Enaki nagha-nagho ná wa kele
ÚSOMI BÚ SO MI ÚKATHA
Énaki nagha-naghó na wa kele
ÚSOMI BÚ SO MI UKATHÁ
ÍKIDÉ KO DE EVE ÓGWIBAGIÓ, OGWA NYI NAGHA-A-A-A

Vulva Is Hole . . .

Vocalist: Asegieme, son of Obemata

Vulva is hole	DEEPER THAN A TERMITE NEST
Vulva is hole	Deeper than a termite nest
If you carried a gun	
and a stone inside	The termite nest
You could not fill	THE TERMITE NEST
If you carried a tree	
with all its <u>leaves inside</u>	<u>The termite nest</u>
<u>You could not fill</u>	<u>The termite nest</u>
<u>Vulva is hole</u>	<u>Deeper than a termite nest</u>
<u>Vulva is hole</u>	<u>Deeper than a termite nest</u>
<u>If you carried a gun</u>	
<u>and stone inside</u>	<u>The termite nest</u>
<u>You could not fill</u>	<u>The termite nest</u>
<u>If you carried a tree</u>	
<u>with branches inside</u>	<u>The termite nest</u>
<u>You could not fill</u>	<u>The termite nest</u>
Vulva is hole	DEEPER THAN A TERMITE NEST-O

I Met A Man Whose Penis Was Too Heavy

Vocalist: Awawo, wife of John

I met a man whose penis was too heavy digging ground nut ridges,
digging to cover his testicles
I met a man whose penis was too heavy digging ground nut ridges,
DIGGING TO COVER HIS TESTICLES
This is the bell we are looking for
THE HEAD OF HIS PENIS WAS BULBOUS LIKE THE CROWN OF A FULANI HAT
This is the bell we are looking for
THE HEAD OF HIS PENIS WAS BULBOUS LIKE THE CROWN OF A FULANI HAT
I MET A MAN WHOSE PENIS WAS TOO HEAVY DIGGING GROUND NUT RIDGES,
DIGGING TO COVER UP HIS TESTICLES

Eve ye no kelokun	EMU THA KE WE ESUARE
Eve ye no kelokun	EMU THA KE WE ESUARE
<u>AKAKAGHO OKATSO WO</u>	<u>NU YOMHI YOAMHE ISUE</u>
<u>AKAKAGHO OKATSO WO</u>	<u>NU YOMHI YOAMHE ISUE</u>
<u>EVE YE NO KELEKUN</u>	<u>EMU THA KE WE SUARE-E-E-E</u>

Unya munya	<i>Onyomalo</i>
Eve munya munya	<i>Onyomalo</i>
Eve nu nya kutu	<i>Onyomalo</i>
<u>Aku na ja eja moi eve bo no kpai moh</u>	<u><i>Onyomalo</i></u>
	<u>Akpu na ja eja moi</u>
<u>eve bo no kpai moh</u>	<i>Onyomalo-o-o</i>
Unya kutu	<i>Onyomalo-o-o-o</i>
Munya munya	<i>Onyomalo-o-o-o</i>

You, penis, are a houserat

WHY SHOULD YOU GO TO THE WATER
TO FISH?

You, penis, are a houserat

WHY SHOULD YOU GO TO THE WATER
TO FISH?

THE FISH WITH SPINES-THAT-STING SHOULD BITE YOU

SO THAT THE FISH-WITH-PAINFUL-BITE CAN DRINK WATER FROM YOUR NOSE

THE FISH WITH SPINES-THAT-STING SHOULD BITE YOU

SO THAT THE FISH-WITH-PAINFUL-BITE CAN DRINK WATER FROM YOUR NOSE

YOU, PENIS, ARE A HOUSERAT WHY SHOULD YOU GO TO THE WATER
TO FISH?

Terror — terror

Terror to a child's eyes

Penis, a terror to behold

Terror to a child's eyes

Penis, terror of terrors

Terror to a child's eyes

Even the waist carrying this penis

Terror to a child's eyes

Even the place

from which this penis shoots out

Terror to a child's eyes

Terror — terror

Terror to a child's eyes