

Breaking the Culture of Mute Sensation: Female Expression of Power in Sexual Contest with Men in Yoruba Newspapers

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ABSTRACT The study examines the problem of the deviation from the Yoruba cultural norm which frowns at open discussion of sexuality, especially among women folk. It examines the extent and the manner by which women give expression to their sexual feelings and dexterity in the Yoruba newspapers. This is considered against the backdrop of sexuality as a subject of human cultural expression, and mediated sex as a display of gender contest and an expression of gender power. Specifically, the study found out that the Yoruba newspapers generously portray sexuality and that women are portrayed as having sexual hegemony, which of course deviates from the traditional image of women in the Yoruba culture. The Yoruba newspapers' portrayal of women as the dominant force in the sexual contest tends to depict the current reality of women coming up in positions of authority in the society. The position of the paper is that the portrayal of sexuality in the newspapers is an expression of gender power.

INTRODUCTION

In the Yoruba culture, and presumably in most other cultures of Africa, open discussion of sex and its sensation by women is an anathema. Whereas, men under the guise of alcohol at bars or in social gatherings, or even in any informal gathering, can indulge themselves in talks about sex, it is out-of-place to find women indulging in such talks. The society does not expect it.

When men engage in this kind of talks, they express the pleasure derived from the sexual acts, as well as extolling their prowess and dexterity in the acts. Even though women experience similar sensation, the norms of the society do not permit them to express such. The society expects them to keep mute about their own experience in such. For them, sexual pleasure has to be subdued, while expression of prowess and dexterity in such acts will be utterly preposterous.

Meanwhile, the post-modern culture has made it possible for women to express their own sensational experience in sexual acts as well as using such expressions to subvert the very patriarchy which so disadvantages them (Duggan et al. 1988). In the Yoruba society, the channel through which women have been able to give expressions to their sexual feelings and dexterity is the Yoruba language press. In certain columns that exist in the Yoruba newspapers, it seems there is a competition of sexual prowess between the male and the female as there is an evident effort to assert masculine or feminine dominance (as

the case may be) in sexual matters. Sex is seen as a source of power and an expression of gender superiority (Salawu 2006).

This paper examines the problematic of the deviation from the Yoruba cultural norm which frowns at open discussion of sexuality, especially among women folk. It examines the extent and the manner by which women give expression to their sexual feelings and dexterity in the Yoruba newspapers. This is considered against the backdrop of sexuality as a subject of human cultural expression, and mediated sex as a display of gender contest and an expression of gender power.

Gender Relations among the Yoruba

Segato (2001) identifies three models of Yoruba gender ideas. Segato refers to the models of interpretation published by Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) and Lorand Matory (1994) about the Yoruba of Nigeria, and to her own for the Yoruba religion in Brazil (1986; republished in 1989, 1995 and 2000 in Portuguese, and in 1997 in English). She notes that both Oyewumi's and Matory's models seem to agree about the existence of a Yoruba model where gender follows a radically different scheme from the West. In consonance with this, Bakare-Yusuf (2003) remarks that African scholars (Amadiume 1997; Okome 2001; and Nzegwu 2001), of late, have begun to question the explanatory power of gender in African societies. The challenge came out of the desire to produce

concepts grounded in African thought and everyday lived realities. The attempt was to shift from the dependency on European theoretical paradigms and focus on an African episteme, thereby eschewing what Yai (1999, referred to in Bakare-Yusuf 2003: 1) calls “dubious universals” and “intransitive discourses”.

The central thesis of Oyewumi (1997) is to deny that gender is a fundamental social category in all cultures. Drawing her examples from the Oyo-Yoruba in western Nigeria, Oyewumi argues that gender has not historically been an important organising principle or a first order issue. Oyewumi notes that contrary to the European worldview, the Yoruba do not use biology to explain or establish social relations, subjectivity, positioning and hierarchy. She suggests that in European culture and intellectual history, participation in the *polis* and cultural significance is determined by the meaning ascribed to the body, in contradistinction to the mind. Spelman (1989:129) notes that the oppression of women is located in “the meanings assigned to having a woman’s body by male oppressors”. Essentially, Oyewumi contests the idea that a western categorical schema for understanding society and social dynamics can simply be exported elsewhere. Instead of the visual logic informing social division and hierarchy, through structures such as gender, sexuality, race and class, Oyewumi argues that it is in fact *seniority* that orders and divides Yoruba society. Seniority refers primarily to chronological age difference. However, it also refers to an agent’s positioning within the kinship structure.

Oyewumi’s claim for the absence of gender in Yoruba culture and the centrality of seniority as an organizing principle is based on two factors: a) there is no mark of gender in the Yoruba language (whereas seniority *is* linguistically marked and is therefore an essential component of Yoruba identity); and b) Yoruba social institutions and practices do not make social distinctions in terms of anatomical difference. The point being made with the second factor is that social hierarchy is structured in terms of an insider-outsider relationship. Oyewumi (1997: 46) notes:

Although ana-females who joined the lineage as aya were at a disadvantage, other ana-females who were members of the lineage by birth suffered no such disadvantage. It would be incorrect to say, then, that anatomic females within the lineage were subordinate because they were

anatomic females. Only the in-marrying aya were seen as outsiders, and they were subordinate to oko as insiders. Oko comprised all omo-ile, both ana-males and ana-females, including children who were born before the entrance of a particular aya into the lineage. In a sense, aya lost their chronological age and entered the lineage as “new-borns”, but their ranking improved with time vis-à-vis other members of the lineage who were born after the aya entered the lineage (Oyewumi 1997:46).

Segato (2001) identifies contradiction in the submission of Oyewumi that the translation of *aya* as ‘wife’ and *oko* as ‘husband’ imposes gender and sexual constructions that are not part of the Yoruba conception. According to Segato, the contradiction is manifested when juxtaposed with another statement:

Oko and *aya* [are] owner/insider and non-owner/outsider in relation to the *ile* as a physical space and symbol of lineage. This insider-outsider relationship was ranked with the insider being the privileged senior (Oyewumi 1997: 44).

Segato (2001: 5) therefore concludes “so, clearly and undeniably, gender terms are associated with status here”. Really, I find Oyewumi’s theorisation and analysis of gender relations among the Yoruba very insincere and highly romantic. In the same vein Bakare-Yusuf (2003) notes that for Oyewumi to deny gender demarcation among the Yoruba, she refers to a pre-colonial trajectory of anatomical difference, found in its purest form amongst the Oyo-Yoruba. In this way, *okunrin* and *obinrin* are tainted with symbolic, gender-based layers of meaning only through the colonial project. She therefore assumes that the original meanings of these words lie beneath the surface of colonial misprojection and mistranslation. It may be that *okunrin* and *obinrin* appear to reveal little beyond anatomical difference; however, there is nothing in Oyewumi’s argument that can support her supposition that this has always been the case.

In terms of dynamics of power, one can readily concede that Oyewumi is right to argue that seniority is the dominant language of power in Yoruba culture. However, she is wrong to conclude that seniority is the *only* form of power relationship and that it operates outside of or in relation to other forms of hierarchy. Bakare-Yusuf (2003) reasons that in line with recent theories of power (such as in feminist and post-modern

thought), different modes of power are always working in terms of each other. No mode of power, be it gender, seniority, race or class, has the same value from context to context and from time to time. No form of power is monolithic or univocal, existing in isolation from all other modes of social structuration. Rather, each variable of power acquires its *specific* value in the context of all other variables operating in a given situation. The consensus amongst many critical thinkers and feminists today is that the boundaries between different modes of power are often irreducibly blurred. For example, class difference works only in the way it does through a specific constellation of effects that are articulated in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, geography and generation

(Bakare-Yusuf 2003: 5). He further remarks:

Oyewumi's failure to take seriously the interwoven nature of power dynamics means that she cannot account for the complexity and nuances of seniority as it actually operates in the Yoruba context. For example, she cannot discuss the fact that the ideology of seniority is very often used as a way of masking other forms of power relationship. It is in this sense that her theorisation of seniority may be seen as disturbingly naïve and politically dangerous. The vocabulary of seniority often becomes the very form in which sexual abuse, familial (especially for the *aya*/wife in a lineage) and symbolic violence is couched (Bakare-Yusuf 2003: 5).

Matory's (1994) text also testifies to the existence of a complex gender construction in the traditional Oyo Yoruba world. He refers to the complexities, which take gender schemes of Yoruba cosmology and religious practices almost to a condition of ineffability, formulating a model based on the idea of transvestitism (Segato 2001). Transvestitism is, for Matory, the main "ironic" idiom of gender structures in Yoruba society, which allows, for example, for people of same sex entering in a social relationship as *oko* and *obinrin* (with or without sexual implications). Still, the paradigmatic standing of the female body and its anatomic, postural or sartorial attributes as signifier of a feminine relational position (though a male body can enter into that position as well) reveals the existence of a gendered map for orientation. Segato notes:

While, for Matory, this map seems to be non-verbal or nominated by means of lexical categories but preferentially visual, scripted with icons,

gestures and visual marks, Oyeronke denies the importance of visuality among the Yoruba and states the dominance of the audible... In Oyeronke's model, one is left wondering about the *raison d'être* of verbal categories, statuary, carvings and genderized costume, if neither of them is meant to mean. In Matory's model, we are entitled to interrogate why the generalized practices of transvestitism if gender social hierarchies are left untouched (Segato 2001: 6).

In Matory's ethnography, we see a stable gender structure that can remain as an organizing principle of society despite the fact that its *dramatis personae* change skins, cross-dress. His is a stable, not menacing, though transformative gender relational cell. Matory shows us a world where transvestitism always leads to a hierarchical, genderised, asymmetric arrangement. Hierarchy is not the superiority of one biological sex to another but asymmetry as expressed by the relationship of genders in marriage. This typical organization is noted by Oyeronke too, but while she interprets it as the absence of gender, Matory understands it as the generalization of gender terms in the social hierarchical field (Segato: 2001).

Segato's own model is based on the Yoruba (Nago) culture in Brazil. Basically, she identifies a four-layer scheme in the gender system found in Brazil. These are: ritual roles, social roles, personality and sexual orientation. According to her, they follow independent rules and are not tied together by "a straight-jacket" as in the West. Their interplay designs mobility and open roads to androgyny. The overall gender of a person, that is, of a *child of orisa* is the outcome of a transitional situation in the complex intersection of those layers. Gender circulation is inscribed once and again in the codex (Segato 2001: 11).

Finally, she remarks:

If Oyeronke Oyewumi is the post-colonial antagonist, a nativist, someone who asserts her Old World as pure Other, Lorand Matory brings home the idea of a society where transvestitism, an apparently moral heresy for the West, can work in favor of power, order and hierarchical institutions. I myself speak on behalf of a tradition that runs besides and under the hegemonic voice of Brazilian patriarchal Catholic State and institutions as a counter-discourse, a deconstructing, undermining, humorous, ironic, uncomfortable permanent presence (Segato 2001: 12).

The position of this paper, contrary to the

idealistic presentation of Oyewumi (1997), especially, is that gender relations in Yoruba society is hegemonic to the disadvantage of the female gender. Fadipe (1970: 326) notes that “women are still treated as inferior”. However, women are also making conscious efforts to assert themselves in the society. Thus, we now find many career women and business tycoons as shining examples.

Culture of Obscenities among the Yoruba

In the Yoruba society, just like elsewhere in Africa, open mention of sex is traced back to the erotic oral poetry. This poetry is a combination of several attitudes – sometimes of celebration of love, and at other times, it is of ridicule. The lewd songs of Oke-Ibadan festival in Ibadan (a Yoruba city in Nigeria) are also very good examples. Oke-Ibadan festival is an annual festival during which there is freedom of erotic expression. The lewd songs are sung for fun-making and derision. An example of such songs is:

Oko Olopaa
Kiki beliiti; Kiki beliiti
 Policemen’s penises
 Are like belts.

The purpose of this is just to deride policemen.

Evans-Pritchard (1965:76) notes that it is not uncommon for those who live amongst primitive peoples to come across ‘obscenity’ in speech and action. According to him, this ‘obscenity’ is often not an expression by an individual uttered under great stress and condemned as bad taste, but is an expression by a group of persons and is permitted and even prescribed by society. Central to Evans-Pritchard’s argument was the insight that sanctioned obscenities made social sense by channelling repressed desire and ‘pent-up emotion’ (Evans-Pritchard 1965: 95) into harmless ‘palliatives’ (p.100) and collective activities that were generally (but not exclusively) sanctified by the ceremonial.

It has now become fashionable to locate verbal art and performance within socio-political relations of textual production exploring the poetic and strategic values, dynamic ambiguities, and complex historicity of what Barber and de Moraes Farias (1989) call *discourse and its disguises* (Apter 1998). The effect has been to destabilise conventional distinctions between oral texts and social contexts precisely because oral literatures produce such instabilities - by

remapping social categories, refashioning social identities, and by invoking rival histories and memories to shape and reorient social action. But if discourse masks and disguises, by cloaking protest and criticism in poetry and praise, it also reveals and discloses, giving active voice to hidden passions and secrets that are otherwise repressed (Apter 1998). This is what this paper presumes the female characters in the Yoruba newspapers’ prurient columns that we shall be examining attempt to achieve.

The interest in sexual matters is also noticeable in the kind of banter that people engage in, in various places. It could be among artisans while at work; at recreation centers like *ayo*-playing spots and in bars. Even in modern settings, such banter are not strange. You hear such in newsrooms, among journalists; in teaching staff rooms, among teachers; in bank offices among bank employees; and at motor-parks (Salawu 2006: 144). Fadipe (1970:319) records that although the irregular and illicit performance of the sexual act is avoided as far as possible in Yoruba society, there is no restraint on the mention of names of the private parts of human body. However, with the spread of Christianity and Islam, there has been a change. For instance, Alaba (2004) notes that verbal expressions of sexuality come, as a rule, in euphemisms.

The Ideology of Mediated Sex

The sexualisation of mass media has been said to be a universally recognized feature of contemporary capitalist culture (McNair 1996). Sex is a big business, having a number of industries hanging on it - hotels, fashion, music, media, publishing etc. Since the nineteenth century, pornography has been commodified - the commercial product of a growing industry, available to more and more people as the technology of text production developed. McNair (1996:108) noted that by the latter part of the twentieth century, pornography had become a mass-market phenomenon, consumed by millions and sustaining a multi-billion dollar global industry. Producers of pornography have been capitalizing on the humanity’s long-standing interest in the depictions of the sexually explicit, and have been commercially exploiting it. For instance, British pornography has fostered a large and profitable industry selling, according to a report in *The Guardian* (of London) of 28 November, 1994,

twenty million copies of magazines in 1993, and making for its manufacturers a profit of £52 million.

In an article entitled, 'Sexual Politics', published in London *Sunday Times* of 16 July 1995, women's magazines containing sexual matters were said to be selling with considerable success largely on the strength of their sexual content. Similarly, a publication of the United Kingdom Audit Bureau of Circulation revealed the average circulation figures for top six sex magazines for a period of five years i.e. 1989 to 1994. All the titles increased their sales with percentages ranging between 65 and 175. These increases were most strongly associated with their explicit sexual contents. The United States media is, equally, heavily sexualized (see McNair 1996, 35-38 for some details). In Nigeria, we would need the Audit Bureau of Circulation to give us circulation figures and commercial success rates of exclusive pornographic publications and those with certain degrees of sexual contents. Needless to say, the scenario painted for UK and US 'print pornography' is not different from that of 'electronic pornography'.

Apart from the economic dimension to sex, there is also the political dimension, both woven into an ideology of sex. For the Surrealists - artists involved in Surrealism as an art form - sex is a symbol, a metaphor, and anthropomorphism. Sex is equally seen as transgression, as salvation, as redemption. It is also seen as shocking, disarming, subverting and liberating the bourgeois sensibilities of the 1920s and 1930s in photographs, paintings and novels. An example of a surrealist novel is George Bataille's *Story of the Eye* which recounts in stark, guilt free prose the erotic transgressions of two French teenagers as they violate a series of moral and religious taboos.

McNair (1996) explains that surrealist artists were heavily influenced by Marquis de Sade, who in the late eighteenth century, pioneered the tradition of highbrow deviance. Sade's works, themselves, derived inspiration from *L'Ecole Des Filles*, the first acknowledged example of French pornography, which presented "a blend of philosophical and sexual subversiveness" (de Jean 1993: 116). Hunt (1993b: 330), however, noted that it was Sade who in the eighteenth century "took the politically and socially subversive possibilities of pornography to their furthest extreme".

Significantly, for Sade, the artist was permitted

to transgress sexual, and thus social, restraints on human behaviour (McNair 1996: 140). Though, the surrealist defied the bourgeois aesthetic and moral values, they were no less sexist and immersed in patriarchal ideology than other male artists of the time. Tanner (1994: 58) described them as "men who treated the women in their lives as doll-like objects born to serve their erotic fantasies, physical needs and - as models and muses- their creative genius".

The patriarchal perspective to pornography believes that "pornography is an important part of the male sexual script, which, in turn, is a vital confirmation of masculinity" (Kimmel 1990:12). Kimmel, further, believes that pornography brings the hidden, private world of male sexual pleasure into the public arena of political discourse. For Scott Macdonald, pornography enables men "to deal periodically with the cultural context which mitigates against their full acceptance of themselves as sexual beings" (Macdonald 1990: ix).

From the above, the use of mediated sex or pornography is associated with a process of socialization or integration into dominant male sex roles. From the feminist perspective, this, however, is an important reason to attack it. It is important to note that there are two feminist perspectives to pornography; one is pro-, the other is anti-. The latter is also known as the radical perspective.

The impact and influence of pro-porn feminism has been reflected in the increasing tendency of women to express their sexuality in ways, which would have been socially unacceptable prior to the sexual revolution. In a way, the movement has exposed "the ambiguous and complex relationship between sexual pleasure and danger in women's lives and in feminist theory" (Vance 1984: 3). It has also challenged anti-porn feminist assumptions about the nature of female sexuality, and made quite intelligible the notion that women can enjoy an activity defined by the former as the 'essence' of maleness. Based on these ideas, women's magazines such as *Nova* and *Cosmopolitan*, in the 1960s, began to change their content, reflecting the needs of a new generation of educated, economically independent, sexually assertive women.

Meanwhile, pro-porn feminists realize that much porn represents a danger to women, they, nevertheless, argue that "its existence serves some social functions, which benefit women"

(Duggan et al. 1988: 74). They reason that by challenging Judaeo-Christian ideals of what sex is for and how it should be organized (i.e. exclusively within marriage and monogamy), pornography subverts the very patriarchy, which so disadvantages women.

Pornography carries many messages other than woman-hating: it advocates sexual adventure, sex outside marriage, sex for no reason other than pleasure, casual sex, anonymous sex, voyeuristic sex, illegal sex, public sex. Some of these ideas appeal to women reading or seeing pornography, who may interpret some images as legitimating their own sense of sexual agency or desire to be sexually aggressive. Women's experience of pornography is not universally victimizing (Duggan et al. 1988).

Again, for Duggan and her colleagues, "women are agents, and not merely victims, who make decisions and act on them, and who desire, seek out and enjoy sexuality" (Duggan et al. 1988: 75). Ellen Willis (1984: 85) follows this line of argument:

A woman who is raped is a victim, a woman who enjoys pornography (even if that means enjoying a rape fantasy) is in a sense a rebel, insisting on an aspect of her sexuality that has been defined as a male preserve. Insofar as pornography glorifies male supremacy and sexual alienation, it is deeply reactionary. But in rejecting sexual repression and hypocrisy which have inflicted even more damage on women than on men - it expresses a radical impulse.

Importantly, Assiter and Carol (1993:16) contend that "the real threat [of porn] is in subverting the myth that women are largely asexual creatures who dislike sex".

McNair (1996: 97) discloses that for anti-porn feminists, such an optimistic perspective is wholly misplaced and naïve, deriving from a fundamental misinterpretation of the meaning of contemporary sexual culture. In anti-porn feminists' view, the pro-porn arguments represent nothing more than an attempt to win acceptance from, and incorporation into, the still dominant patriarchal culture. They contend that women who publicise the pleasure of heterosexuality are simply "internalizing their oppression" and "eroticising their subordination". Leidholdt (1990: 131) sums up anti-porn views:

The sexuality our culture offers women today through pornography is not new, not avant garde, not revolutionary. It's the same sex male

supremacy has always forced on us; being used as the instrument of someone else's sexual agency - the instrument of someone socially male. ... To speak powerfully in favour of sexual pleasure while blithely ignoring the fact that this pleasure is usually achieved through women's subordination and violation is to speak powerfully in favour of a system that keeps all women down.

Yet, again, there are the liberal and the moral conservative perspectives. The liberal perspective believes that pornography is harmless and should be more or less freely available. In western societies, moral conservatism is founded on adherence to Judaeo-Christian family values, which stress the virtues of the nuclear family, monogamous sexual relationships within marriage, and the reproductive rather than recreational functions of sexual behaviour. In essence, pornography violates these values.

Pornography has always had political and philosophical undertones. The social meanings of early pornography can be deduced from the nature of audience among which *Aretino's Postures* circulated. The images, according to McNair (1996: 43), circulated "among the relatively small male elites of political rebels and libertines". The *Postures* presented an altogether more flagrant and shocking image of human sexuality, deliberately intended to flaunt the social and sexual mores of the time. Early pornography was sexually arousing to the point of inducing masturbation, but it was also openly subversive, using sex as a satirical vehicle to attack the political establishment of early modern Europe. In France, *L'Ecole Des Filles* and works of Marquis de Sade exhibited their political character. In Restoration England too, sexually explicit novels tended to have the quality of political satire, being written and read by those who, though privileged members of the ruling elites, were influenced by the radicalizing influence of emerging materialist and bourgeois philosophies (McNair 1996).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the textual approach using the mode of semiotics for the analysis. The analysis drew attention to the ideologies of the texts, in this way presenting the texts as the site of struggles and (sexual) power contest between the male and the female. The source materials were closely read, thus leading to a practical understanding of the meanings of the text.

Yoruba Newspapers, Prurience and Gender Contest

Virtually, all Yoruba newspapers are adorned with elements of pornography, either in words or in photographs. Perhaps, the only exceptions are the *Ajoro* publications - *Ajoro* (weekly) and *Ajoro magasinni* (monthly). Even for those mentioned, one must say it with some qualification. While it is true that there are no visible columns dealing with matters of sex in the *Ajoro* publications, one finds it difficult to completely exonerate them as, for instance, a back-page advertisement in *Ajoro magasinni* of Dec. 22 2003 -Jan. 25, 2004 contains bold pictures of male and female genitals, all for the purpose of advertising some herbal medicines. To be sincere, this is nothing but pornography.

However, while *Ajoro* can be said to be shying away from pornography - after all, it has no editorial content of such - other Yoruba newspapers cannot claim innocence. The *Alaroye* publications can be credited with some innovations in the Yoruba newspapers, and of course, indigenous language newspaper industry. One of such is the introduction of sexually explicit columns, detailing vivid and arousing descriptions of erotic fantasies and sexual artistry. Of course, we remember the 1929 serialisation of *Itan Emi Segilola Eleyinju Ege, Elegberun Oko Laye in Akede Eko*. The obvious fact is that this particular story was not in any way down-to-earth like the stories we read in pornographic columns of Yoruba newspapers today. More importantly, the primary aim of *Itan Emi Segilola* was to teach morals and not to excite the libido of readers.

The defunct *Isokan* (published by Concord Press of Nigeria Limited) and *Gbohunghohun* (published by Sketch Press Limited) were not known to publish prurient stories. The *Iroyin Yoruba* (published by African Newspapers of Nigeria Plc), which was existing while *Isokan* and *Gbohunghohun*, were around, and is still existing till today was not known, until recently, for sexually explicit columns. In actual fact, *Iroyin Yoruba* is the oldest Yoruba newspaper today, having been established since 1945. *Iroyin Yoruba* did not have the kind of boldness that it has today to publish sexually explicit columns. The conjecture is that *Iroyin Yoruba* decided on sexually explicit columns to join the trail blazed by *Alaroye*. *Iroyin Yoruba* must have noticed the uninhibited publication of sexually explicit

columns in *Alaroye* titles and the perceived success being enjoyed by them.

Iroyin Yoruba's initial involvement in the 'sexmania' was rather oblique, mild and intermittent. It started by gradually injecting some lewd ideas into its 'Alapaara Ibadan' column. The 'Alapaara Ibadan' is, essentially, a socio-political commentary column. It comes in the form of dialogue between the Alapaara (comedian) and Olootu (the editor). Once in a while, the column takes time off to address the erotic. Even, with the infusion of sexually explicit columns in *Iroyin Yoruba*, 'Alapaara Ibadan' continues with its intermittent pornography. For instance, the column, in the issue of March 4-10, 2003, carries the headline, '*Eni maa ku pade eni maa pa labule Adonipa*' ('He who will die meets he who will kill in the village of sex-to-death'). The story is about a sexually insatiable woman who is detaining, for the third day running, a rather promiscuous man in a hotel room until he could satisfy her. One thing about 'Alapaara' column is that it, usually, ends on a didactic note. For instance, the two sex-machines in the above-mentioned story were arrested by the police at the instance of the hotelier. The legality or otherwise of the hotelier's and police action, notwithstanding, the point being driven at is that the conduct of the promiscuous man and woman is socially unacceptable. By and large, 'Alapaara Ibadan' is not as sexually explicit as some other columns we shall be examining in this chapter.

Perhaps, to really satisfy the erotic taste of its readers, *Iroyin Yoruba* started an exclusively pornographic column, '*Soo-mo-rue?*' supposedly written by a female, Aunti Apinke. In line with *Itan Emi Segilola in Akede Eko* (1929), there seems to be a preference for female narrators of sexual escapades in Yoruba newspapers, though they are later, and usually, complemented by another column supposedly written by a male sexual adventurer. *Alaroye* that started the current trend of sexually explicit columns started with a female column, which was later complemented with a male column in another title of its publishers (World information Agents).

Before the introduction of its male counterpart, '*Soo-mo-rue?*' was not as daring and explosive as it is now. It seems there is a competition of sexual prowess between the male and the female as there is an evident effort to assert masculine or feminine dominance (as the case may be) in sexual matters. Sex is seen as a source of power

and an expression of gender superiority. Graphically, publishers of the newspapers intend the columns to serve as responses to each other. The columns are placed on the same page one on top, one beneath. And, as if there is a deliberate arrangement between *Iroyin Yoruba* and *Alalaye*, the placement of the columns takes opposite directions in the two newspapers. That is, while *Iroyin Yoruba*'s female column comes on top, having the male counterpart beneath; in *Alalaye*, it is the other way. This seems an unconscious gender balancing.

In an issue of *Iroyin Yoruba* that has only the female column, 'Soo-mo-rue?' (March 4-10, 2003), the headline, as earlier observed, is not that daring: 'Nibudo kaadi idanimo, Bobo kan n fowo ra mi nidii,' meaning, 'At the polling station, a guy was rubbing his hand on my buttocks'. It was about the story of a man who was rubbing his hand on the narrator's buttocks while voters were on queue at a polling station.

But, when later the male column was introduced, the tempo changed. In *Iroyin Yoruba* of December 9-15, 2003, 'Soo-mo-rue?' carries the headline, 'Mo boraagi Alaaji mori roogi' ('I deal with Alhaj on the rug'). The sexual act took place on a rug and the female narrator claimed she dominated the scene. The corresponding male column, 'Baba Agbesun', has the headline 'Fatimo se tuntun' ('Fatimo does a new thing'). 'Soo-mo-rue?' of December 23-29, 2003 has the headline 'Apinke wa Jonbele relu Abuja' ('Apinke goes to Abuja to look for jonbele'). The kernel of the story is that Apinke, not yet satisfied with Alhaj in the sexual orgy, travelled to Abuja to seek out a male organ. 'Jonbele', here, stands for Yoruba slang for male organ. To impress it on us that sex, for Anti Apinke, is a competition or a battle, in portions of the story, we find the expressions like 'ere ije' (competition) and 'ija-kadi' (battle). The corresponding 'Baba Agbesun' story to the above-mentioned 'Soo-mo-rue?' story is headlined, 'Oba Ilu Oyinbo Nawo De' ('The Prince of Edinburgh routs a vagina'). The story was published around the period of the official visit of Queen Elizabeth of England and her husband, the Prince, to Nigeria. The story talks about how a nine-year old Nigerian girl satisfied the sexual need of the visiting Prince such that the Prince had to give her a gift of ten billion Naira (!) We know that this story cannot be true and it is not true. It was just done, as usual, to tickle the sexual interest of readers. As

earlier noted, no regard is given to morals in these stories. Even though, we know this is fiction, can we imagine a nine-year old girl being mentioned or involved in this kind of matter?

Initially, 'Baba Agbesun' column was being anchored by one Labanisun, definitely not the real name. Labanisun means someone who flirts about. 'Baba Agbesun', itself, means 'Father-Fucker'. Perhaps, the editor of *Iroyin Yoruba* sensed that 'Baba Agbesun' column was not biting enough in the hands of Labanisun, and thus could not match 'Soo-mo-rue?' The editor, probably, for this reason, gave the column to someone else, Okanran, meaning, The Terrible. With the coming of Okanran, the tempo of 'Baba Agbesun' became heightened. For instance, in *Iroyin Yoruba* of May 4-10, 2004 where Aunti Apinke, and Okanran wrote, Aunti Apinke ('Soo-mo-rue?') says, 'I dealt terribly with Adio and his "long staff" peels neatly'. Okanran writes a corresponding headline, 'I did two rounds on Seeke, she was crying Halleluyah'. In this Okanran's story, he was actually extolling his own sexual prowess over female partner, Seeke. In the case of Labanisun, the former handler of 'Baba Agbesun', sometimes, he praises the sexual artistry of his partners, rather than that of himself. For instance, in the story, 'Fatimo se tuntun', Labanisun writes:

As she was doing it, I was already frozen on my standing posture, I was totally overwhelmed, really I enjoyed it more than it could have been if I were the one doing it, some women just wear one out unnecessarily (*Iroyin Yoruba*, Dec.9-15, 2003, p.13).

Now, read Okanran:

This is how I continued to work her 'down-below' with great speed. After forty minutes, I ejaculated. Just as I was about discharging the fluid this time around, Seeke was just groaning as somebody about to be injected.

Suddenly, Seeke's buttocks started shaking, and she was crying uya, yee, hun-un, e-hen, yees, Halleluyah, okay! (*Iroyin Yoruba*, May 4-10, 2004, p.7).

On the same page, Aunti Apinke writes:

After I grabbed it like this, that is, his John Thomas, he was almost dead, hot water speedily came out of his eyes, I squeezed it like beans in five minutes, he was spasmodically shaking, his teeth almost fell off.

Even if Adio enjoyed me thoroughly and he pressed my breasts, I performed wonders on his 'matter', everything neatly got peeled.

The pornographic writers praise themselves with various cognomens for their sexual artistry. This is peculiar to the males. Okanran salutes himself as:

*Omo Okanran kandi abo,
Igiripa a jomo laya bi oke.*

The Son of the Terrible

Who hits the genitals of the female,

The heavily built one who is as terrifying as mountain.

Labanisun praises himself thus:

The F...ker, the son of He-who-puts-something-in-something

Similarly, Atanda in *Alalaye* and Alabi Denja in *Akede Agbaya* praise themselves. We shall come to that later. But, in response to the male praise of themselves, Aunti Apinke in *Iroyin Yoruba*, once averred:

Infact, my fans, one should, sometimes, be giving proper account of herself to men, so that they would not have too high opinion of themselves that they are the only experts in love making. When some of these men find themselves in the midst of men like them, there is no kind of name or nick-name that they don't call themselves, some may call themselves, Tiger, the Dogged fighter, some The Terrible, The Wonderful-on-the-Street, and so on... (*Iroyin Yoruba*, May 4-10, 2004, p. 7).

As a way of registering her own praise, Aunti Apinke in *Iroyin Yoruba* of Dec. 23-29, 2003, refers to herself thus: "I, the wife of young Alhaj, concubine to Bala, Roland, Ambassador, Bobo Demmy and so on".

Perhaps, the most adventurous, extraordinary and daring of the female pornographic column is "Yetunde-Oju-to-nsoro" in *Alaroye*. The character behind the column is Yetunde whose eyes, as the column indicates (Oju-to-nsoro), are sexy, inviting and captivating. The eyes send a message. Yetunde does not leave her readers in doubt that she enjoys good sex, hankers after strong and big male genitals, and needs constant 'servicing' for emotional satisfaction. A number of times, Yetunde gives her readers an impression that she is desirous of getting married. On a number of occasions, she would inform her readers that she has found a gentleman with whom she wants to settle down. Unfortunately, she, on each occasion, fails herself in this promise and optimism simply because her wild sexual adventure would not make her to fit into the mould of lifestyle she is trying to create for herself. One

of such instances was his tango with one 'Mista' (Mr.) Deinde, a gentleman (*Alaroye*, Feb.14, 2002, p. 8). At some point, Yetunde became impatient with this man because sex was not his priority in the process of courtship. So she, rhetorically, asked:

'Lojo wo ni Deinde fee gun mi labere ni kinni! O n rin mi o', meaning,

'What day will Deinde inject my matter! It is itching me o'

In *Alaroye* of November 19, 2002, page 8, Yetunde talks of her regular need for sex:

When he was telling me that he was going to fast, I didn't argue with him at all. At least, he cannot say I should hold on for 30 days without having sex, boys will be 'servicing' it for me...

She talks of the kind of man she wants:

Although, a man with big 'matter' is the one I like most. It should be big and erect every time. It should be powerfully strong.... (Alaroye, January 14,2003, p.8)

She has contempt for men without 'action' and great respect for men with great 'action'. One of Yetunde's men with great 'action' is Atila. She saluted him thus:

'Oga l' Atila, b'oba ti sina fun moto, oun kii te bureeki rara', meaning, 'Atila is a master, once he ignites a motor, he doesn't break at all. (Alaroye, Dec. 17, 2002,;p. 8).

At one time, she paused and asked:

What, really, is in Atila? He is not rich. He begs about. The only thing he knows is to have fun, to insert that 'matter' as big as a tree inside one's genitals. But, that is why I like him. Atila, the never-do-well. If he inserts the 'thing' in my genitals, it will be so tight. The crazy man, he does it with his terrible strength, the wrestler, he is never tired... (*Alaroye*, Dec. 10, 2002, p.8).

In contrast, she said this of a lawyer: *'Loya o ti i mo enitin, abe mi ti fe, "kinni" kekere o ka mi mo', meaning,* 'Lawyer has not known anything, my genitals has expanded, small "thing" does not satisfy me again' (*Alaroye*, June 8, 2004, p.8).

She sees her men as toys to be tickled. Read this, *'Nitori sukuuku, Gbenga de bu sigbe' meaning,* 'Because of sex, Gbenga bursts into tears' (*Alaroye*, Dec. 24, 2002, p.8).

At times, she sounds hysterical about her sexual experiences: *'Yee! Siifu fee se mi lese, agbalagba omoota', meaning,* 'Yee! Chief wants to wound me, rascally old man'. (*Alaroye*, November 24, 2002. p.8). Yet, at times, she is bothered about her image - what people think

and say about her – when she does anything rather shameful and untoward. In *Alaroye* of November 19, 2002, Yetunde is bothered, after tricking a staff of Chief's company into 'raping' her, about her image in case the boy's friends in the company should know about it. She had to call the boy, feigned annoyance, and warned him never to do what he 'did' again. Yetunde was also working in the company at the time.

A good number of her customers belong to the high stratum of the society. Among them you find company executives (e.g. Chief), professionals (e.g. lawyer), and political office holders (senators and governors). Auntie Apinke in *Iroyin Yoruba*, similarly, has an ambassador as a customer. The implication of this is that sexual needs cut across the various shades of human beings. In short, it is a universal experience. More significantly, however, is that when the sexual escapades being portrayed are considered, it implies that the nation's leaders (as typified in the senator, the governor and the ambassador) are frail, rotten and reckless.

Yetunde's male counterpart is found in *Akede Agbaye*, another of the titles on the stable of World Information Agents. The name of the character is Alabi Denja, with the column '*Irinkerindo Alabi Denja, oko sisi ologe*' meaning, 'The Adventures of Alabi Danger, husband to delectable ladies'. Alabi is a Casanova of sorts, reeling out lurid details of his 'sexcapades' with women and ladies of different kinds. As his name ('Danger') implies, he is, actually, dangerous for women. Typical of his likes, he extols himself of his sexual prowess. He claims that he is so good on bed that his partners usually praise-sing him during the acts. He says:

God, I just like the way they sing my cognomen, especially when I suspend their thighs in the air, and I start stroking the little thing between their *genitals*. (*Akede Agbaye*, Dec. 12, 2002, p.11).

He cited an instance when one Bimbo sang:

Alabi Denja, my husband, do it well. Alabi, the owner of the well that is fetched at dawn, you are the son of the one who washes human beings with water, Alabi, the husband of Bimbo, one who has sex before seeing the in-laws, because a stale 'matter' is usually sour. Please, do me well, if you do me well I can go four hundred rounds ... (*Akede Agbaye*, Dec. 12, 2002, p.11).

In the same piece, he also recalls the praise-singing by one Yetunde. It is not, however, clear

whether or not it is the Yetunde of *Alaroye* who is being referred to. Read the praises of Alabi in the mouth of Yetunde: Honey is usually sweet, Alabi Denja I taste you, I know your sweetness, honey is usually sweet. (*Akede Agbaye*, Dec. 12, 2002, p.11).

However, immorality has its own 'reward'. In *Akede Agbaye* of March 27, 2003, Alabi Denja discloses that he contacted gonorrhoea through his sexual intercourse with a married woman. The graphic sketch of Alabi in the column does not, in any case, portray him as somebody, responsible. He turns the front of his face-cap back; he puts on dark goggles and poses with an undignified gait. Initially, 'Yetunde Oju-to-n-soro' had no graphic sketch of the character behind it. Now, there is a graphic sketch of the lady with protruded breasts and buttocks.

Another of *Alaroye* titles that contains prurient columns is *Iri Aye Alaroye*. Initially, the only column of the sexual nature in *Iri Aye* is "*Iya Biola Oniresi Loja Osodi*", meaning, 'Biola's mother Rice Trader at Oshodi Market'. Later, the column, 'Oba Solomon' (King Solomon) was added. In 'Iya Biola', Biola's mother does not present herself as somebody promiscuous. She, rather, gossips about the sexual immoralities or weaknesses of her husband, her co-wives and her neighbours. Check her out: '*Iya Lanre ja Iya Iyabo sihooho nitori "kinni" Baba Lanre*', meaning, 'Lanre's mother tears Iyabo's mother naked because of Lanre's father's "matter"' (*Iri Aye Alaroye*, March 17, 2000). '*Ase looto l'Alaaji n ba Iya Ewe sun! Asiri ti tu o*', meaning, 'So, it is true that Alhaj is sleeping with Iya Ewe! The secret is exposed' (*Iri Aye Alaroye*, July 17, 2003). Really, Iya Biola is a gossip, but she presents herself as somebody who abhors infidelity and indecency.

On the contrary, 'Oba Solomon' (a title that has a reference to the promiscuity of the Biblical King Solomon) is prurience, par excellence. In the piece entitled, '*Ka so tododo, iyawo Ibo gbona ju iyawo Tapa lo*' ('To say the truth, the Igbo man's wife is more excellent than the Tapa man's wife', *Iri Aye Alaroye*, May 13, 2004, p.6), Oba Solomon recounts how he has been cuckolded his co-tenants. His conscience pricks him that what he is doing is not right, yet he and his partners continue to revel in their immorality. In fact, the two women know about each other's infidelity, but to them, it is fun. As expected, the column is replete with lurid details of sexual actions and passions.

In the same piece, Oba Solomon preaches immorality about four types of women good to engage with in immorality. According to him, they are the young widows, the divorced, mothers of three or four, and the barren.

Another prurient column oozing with such immoralities is *'Irinkerindo Atanda Oko Gusi Oyokan-poki-ki-i-bo-telomi-ran'* ('The adventures of Atanda husband to damsels, he who removes it from one and inserts it into another'). The column is found in *Alalaye*. In the piece entitled, 'Disenba yii maa le ku sa, awon madaamu onidiberekete-berekete fe fi yalumo-yalumo abe won te mi lorun de gongo' ('This December will be wonderful, the big-bottom madams want to thoroughly, satisfy me with their genitals', *Alalaye*, December, 17, 2003), Atanda reveals that he is having an affair with the mother of one of his friends. He has no regret about it.

Just like many of his colleagues in the pornographic writings, Atanda eulogises himself for his supposed sexual prowess:

It is only a child who does not know charm that will call it vegetables, I, myself, the powerful, he who meets him does not know him, he who knows him does not meet him, I Atanda husband to damsels I come to terrify, the fearful with something excitingly sweet in his groin, husband to the dark, husband to the fair-complexioned, I the son of the propertied, I the child whose mother backed with velvet mantle, the short man whom the Almighty commissioned with the work of the groins of damsels, the eminent servant who cares for the stubborn sexy-eyed with the white fluid in his groin I myself if a goat is lost don't trace it to me, if a cockerel is missing do not suspect me, I am not a thief of the birds but if an exquisitely beautiful, fair-complexioned girl stays out late, don't go too far, the comely is in my abode where she is under the protection of the Almighty with special prayers on the bed where she is receiving cares under the great doctor..(sic) (*Alalaye*, March 12, 2003, p.10).

Sharing the same page with *'Irinkerindo Atanda'* is *'"Mobi" omo Alatika'*. Though, Mobi is as daring and raw as Yetunde in *Alaroye*, she does not have the taste of Yetunde. Just like Yetunde, she is not easily satisfied with men. In *Alalaye* of April 21, 2004, (page 10), Mobi complains: *'Mi o laiki kinni abe buoda Lanre yen, ko kii n wole kanle simi ni furo bi mo se fee'* ('I do not like the thing in the groin of brother Lanre, it doesn't penetrate my genitals deeply as

I want'). In this piece, Mobi complains that Lanre cannot do more than five 20-minute rounds; his genital is too short that it cannot penetrate well and he does not know how to do fore-play (romance).

Mobi is also somebody who does not care about any venue for love-play. She has it in the bathroom with her landlord (*Alalaye*, March 12, 2003, p.10) with the manager, on the office table, and behind the drum at the 'car-wash' (*Alalaye*, April 21, 2004, p.10).

Another striking difference between Mobi and Yetunde is that apart from the lust for strong, long and big male genitals, she is also very crazy about money. She makes this known, for instance, in the piece, *'A ni, mi o fe roodu Alaaji labe mi mo, t'oga kositoomu ofisa yen ni mo niidi lowo yii'* ('I insist, I don't want Alhaji's rod in my genitals again, I need that of the custom officer now', *Alalaye*, Dec. 17, 2003, p.10). The reason why she condemned Alhaji is that he is not affluent.

Another Yoruba newspaper that features prurience is *Ijinle Iroyin*. A rather irregular newspaper in appearance, *Ijinle Iroyin* is resplendent with pornography, both in words and in photographs. With colourful pages and lavish display of photographs, *Ijinle* brings pornography alive. Its photographs speak porn to the words. It has a column that tells stories of sexual experiences. The column name sounds queer and unfathomable. It reads *'Ohun Ti O se Lehin Ere Ife'*, meaning, 'What You do After Love-Making'. The column has no regular page, and unlike similar columns in other Yoruba newspapers, it carries the byline, the actual names of a staff reporter of the newspaper. Again, unlike similar columns in other newspapers, stories published under the column lack in details and hysteria.

Ijinle, however, makes up for this with the use of splendid body-baring and suggestive photographs, even where they are not directly relevant. Some of the photographs expose ladies' legs, groins and upper part of breast in a way that is tantalizing. Some of them also display men and women in postures that are erotic. For evidence, check pages 8 and 9 (a centrespread), and 15 of *Ijinle*, Dec. 2 – Dec. 8; pages 5, 6, 8 and 9 (a spread) 10 and 15 of *Ijinle*, Nov. 19-25; pages 5, 7, 14 and 15 of *Ijinle*, Nov. 12 – 18. You find such photographs on different kinds of pages – fashion, sports, and entertainment.

Meanwhile, as a digression, it is noticed that

Ijinle's dateline does not give information about the year of publication. The dateline only gives information about the days and month of publication. Whether this is an oversight or not, we cannot say. And, to what end this is done, we cannot say.

More daring are photographs that appear under the column, '*Ara Mee Riri... Ara Mee Riri... Ara Mee Riri...*' ('Wonders... Wonders... Wonders...'). This column does not also have a regular page of appearance. The column in *Ijinle* of Nov. 12-18 has a picture of a female gorilla dressed in pants and brassieres that leave little to imagination. Similarly, the column in the newspaper issue of Nov. 19-25 has a picture of completely nude man with an unimaginable long penis. Again, the column of Dec. 2 – 8 carries photographs of a tree and two carrot tubers. All the pictures are pornographic, suggesting either male genital of female buttocks.

Ijinle leaves no one in doubt that it is deep in prurience. The tendency for pornography is even noticed in a photograph depicting an accident scene (*Ijinle Iroyin*, Dec. 2-8 p.6). It is also significant to point out that right from its introductory statement, *Ijinle* has announced its interest in romance and marital sexual intercourse (*Ijinle*, Nov. 12-18, p.13).

Meanwhile, apart from specific prurient columns in Yoruba newspapers that have been highlighted, the newspapers also celebrate the erotic in their news and news features. The following are some examples:

'*Eyin Obinrin E gbo Naa: T'oju Ba Pofiri, Tani Ninu Awon Gomina Wonyi Ni O Le Yan Ni Ale?*' ('Attention Women: In Secret, Who Among these Governors can You Have As Man Friends?'), *Ijinle Iroyin*, Nov.12-18, p. 1).

'*Gbegede Gbina: Osere 'Binrin Meji fe Pa Are won Nitori "Suga" Bobo*' (Trouble: Two Actresses on each other's throat because of a "Sugar" Boy', *Ijinle*, Nov.19-25, p.1)

'*Asiri tu! Ayalegbe ba Iyawo Lanloodu sere ife*' (Exposed! Tenant sleeps with Landlord's wife', *Iroyin Yoruba*, May 4-10, 2004, p.1).

'*Baale nfi abe mi run imu*' ('My husband smells my genitals', *Iroyin Yoruba*, Dec. 23-29, 2003, back page).

'*Egbon ba aburo sun doju iku*' ('Brother sleeps with his younger sister to death', *Ajoro*, March 10-16, 2003, back page).

'*Iyawo ile ge "kinni" oko e je*' ('Housewife bites her husband's "thing", *Alaroye*, Dec.31, 2002, p.2)

'*Iyawo Gbenga Adeboye so pe: Aburo oko mi fee fi tipatipa ba mi sun ni o*' ('Gbenga Adeboye's wife says: My brother-in-law wants to rape me', *Iri Aye Alaroye*, May 13, 2004).

Without doubt, prurience is a hallmark of Yoruba newspapers. A look through some recent Yoruba newspapers that are no longer in circulation would further attest to this. A good example of such was *Eleti-ofe*, obviously a borrowed name from *Eleti-ofe*, which started in 1923, but is now defunct. Significantly, the depiction of sex in Yoruba newspapers, especially the expression, by women, of sexual pleasure and claim of sexual dominance over men fall within the framework of pro-porn feminism. The influence of pro-porn feminism, perhaps, has made it possible for the female characters in the columns examined to express their sexuality in ways which would have been socially unacceptable. In a way, the columns examined have challenged the assumptions about the nature of female sexuality, and made quite intelligible the notion that women can enjoy an activity defined by the anti-porn feminists as the 'essence' of maleness.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, against the cultural norm, the female characters in the sexually explicit columns of Yoruba newspapers have been very expressive in matters of sex. This implies that the women are saying they also want to live the world of reality, and that they are capable, if not more than men, to exercise power. In the newspapers examined, they have demonstrated they have sexual prowess, and even dominance over men. The Yoruba newspapers' portrayal of women as the dominant force in the sexual contest tends to depict the current reality of women coming up in positions of authority in the society. The position of the paper is that the portrayal of sexuality in the newspapers is an expression of gender power.

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