

***Ojú l'òròṣ wà* (meaning is in the eyes): The Role of Gaze in Oríkì Performance**

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Living traditions of praise-singing are found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, bridging orality, literacy, digital media and the Internet. This paper focuses on the role of gaze in *Yorùbá* praise singing, called *oríkì*, but also draws comparisons to other cultures in Nigeria, as well as Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa. The *Yorùbá* proverb *ojù l'òròṣ wà* suggests the meaning of one's words is in the eyes. In Western music, mutual gaze between performer and audience increases appreciation by the audience (Antonietti 2009) and eye contact between performers is an important cue (Sawase 2014). In *oríkì*, gaze plays a crucial role in the persuasive powers of the praise-singer: building reputation of businesspeople or politicians, or increasing loyalty and devotion to a king or god. Mutual gaze (eye contact) between singer and addressee intensifies the experience for both, providing focus for the singer and increasing the “head-swelling” effect of the praise on the addressee (including frisson). The face-gaze (head and body direction) of the praise-singer directs the attention of those present, reinforcing the impact of the words, making the addressee the “cynosure of all eyes” (Barber 1990:201). Similar to Clayton (2008), analyses presented in this paper present a multi-dimensional coding of sound and movement.