

THE ÒṢOGBO CONNECTION: TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES, MODERNITY AND
WORLD VIEW OF YORUBA AMERICANS IN SHELDON, SOUTH CAROLINA AND
ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA

By

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To My Mother Frances Elizabeth Porsche
and
My daughters, Nzinga, Bababi, Abeni, and Olabisi
and
Dr. Jacqueline Peterson

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
GLOSSARY	13
ABSTRACT.....	18
CHAPTER	
1 THE RE- INVENTION OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM.....	22
Research Purpose/Objective	24
The Connector	26
The Network	30
Self as Meaning and Self as a Site for Exploration	39
Santeria in Harlem	40
First Nigerian Experience	51
Methodology and a Model for Examining Ifá/Òrisà-Voodoo/Santeria Practices and Conducting Visual Ethnographic Research	56
Ethnographic Bridges	57
Front-Door Ethnography	61
Historical Overview.....	66
2 MAGIC, IMAGINATION, AND MYTHOLOGY	72
Oyótúnjí African Village and Òrisà-Voodoo in the USA	72
Recasting Worshipping Practices	77
Growth and Conflict	81
Òrisà Conferences: Sites for the Shaping and Renewal of Collective Memory.....	83
3 CULTURAL PLURALISMS AND PARAMETERS.....	109
African Religion and the Media	109
Locating Visual Documentation.....	110
Elitism vs. Nationalism: Who Determines Traditions?	113
Three Ìyàwós Pilgrimage, Rituals, and Kismetics.....	115
A Lucumi initiation.....	131
4 SACRED MILIEUS, TIME, AND INTERVENTION	150
Spirituality vs. Religiosity	150
Òṣogbo Revisited: A Life with the Gods	159
A Life with the Gods	171
Connections	177
Diviner’s Training	180
Additional Connections	181

The King's Demise	184
Ká Wò <i>Kábiyèsí</i> : the Making of Şàngó	186
Day 1 of Şàngó Initiation.....	189
Day 2 of Şàngó Initiation.....	199
Day 3 of Şàngó Initiation.....	205
Epilogue: Archiving the Sacred through Intervention.....	254
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 263
 SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY.....	 276
 SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY	 277
 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	 281

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
1-1 Billboard advertising cell phones.....	70
1-2 Cell Tell retail outlet for cell phones and SIM cards, Òşogbo	70
1-3 Nigerian Scam letter Sample	71
2-1 The Old Oyoútúnjí African Village Roadside Sign	88
2-2 The New Oyoútúnjí African Village Roadside Sign	88
2-3 Raising Village Flag	89
2-4 Adefunmi I and Òrisàmola Awolowo in Harlem.....	90
2-5 Mama Keke, Queen Mother Moore, Efuntola, Sunta	91
2-6 Chief Òrisàmola Awolowo- the first Alagba of Oyoútúnjí African Village	92
2-7 Efuntola Adefunmi I with Staff of Authority	93
2-8 Oyoútúnjí Bàtá Drummers	94
2-9 Oyoútúnjí African Village Egúngún Seated in chairs	95
2-10 Oyoútúnjí African Village Egúngún dancing	95
2-11 Chief Alagba in front of Şàngó Temple, Oyoútúnjí African Village	96
2-12 Chief Alagba Chanting to Egúngún, Oyoútúnjí African Village	97
2-13 Oyoútúnjí Egúngún dancing	97
2-14 Oyoútúnjí African Village adherents and guests saluting Egúngúns	98
2-15 HRH Prince Adebòlu and HRG Odùfunda at Funeral Rites for Adefunmi I, Oyoútúnjí African Village	98
2-16 Oyoútúnjí African Village Òşun Temple	99
2-17 Statue representing Òşun in front of Òşun Temple, Oyoútúnjí African Village	99
2-18 Adefunmi’s casket draped with Oyoútúnjí State Flag, Oyoútúnjí African Village	100
2-19 Royal family in attendance at Funeral of Adefunmi I, Oyoútúnjí African Village	100
2-20 Offerings placed in front of HRH Adefunmi I Casket, Oyoútúnjí African Village	101

2-21	Iconography attached to Royal Mausoleum	102
2-22	Front View of Adefunmi’s Mausoleum, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	103
2-23	Òrisámola Awolowo’s Burial Site	103
2-24	HRH Adefunmi II Stands before the Kingdom at Coronation. Note the Beaded crown, Cane, and Horsetail whisk, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	104
2-25	HRH Adefunmi II with royal family, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	105
2-26	Ọba in the person of Ọbàtálá, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	105
2-27	Adefunmi II seated before his kingdom for the first time, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	106
2-28	Adefunmi II dances with villagers and guest, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	106
2-29	HRG Ìyá Ọba Odùfunda celebrates with villagers and guest at coronation, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	107
2-30	Ọgbóni Society Members, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	107
2-31	Ìyàwó Saluting ÈṢù, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	108
2-32	Oya Cult Women, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	108
3-1	Posters of Films.....	137
3-2	Kunta Kinte of Alex Haley’s Roots Film	138
3-3	Apètèbí escorting Three Ìyàwós from spiritual bath at Compound Ifálola, Archer	139
3-4	Three Ìyàwós with agogos (bells) at Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida	140
3-5	Ifáyemi preparing òrisà objects, Archer, Florida	141
3-6	Ifáyemi divining for Ìyàwó at Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida	142
3-7	Divination tray and ẹbọ tray, Archer, Florida	143
3-8	Preparing àṣé at Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida.....	144
3-9	Vessels for Òrisà objects for three Ìyàwò initiation, Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida	145
3-10	Ìyàwó ÈṢù, Oyo’ótúnjí African Village	146
3-11	Two Ọṣun and one Ṣàngó initiates from the USA in Abeokuta, Nigeria. Note Ìyàwós holding pigeons that are to be sacrificed as an offering	147

3-12	òrisà objects, Abeokuta, Nigeria	148
3-13	Bowls with òrisà objects, Abeokuta, Nigeria	148
3-14	Ọṣun Ìyàwó presenting pig's head ẹbọ to Ọgún, Abeokuta, Nigeria	149
4-1	Ifáyemi greeting guest at OAU conference	220
4-2	Signpost identifying Elebuibon Street, Ọṣogbo	221
4-3	Strolling down Elebuibon Street	221
4-5	Doorway to Elebuibon's Temple	222
4-6	Side view of Elebuibon's compound	222
4-7	Front gate to Elebuibon's compound	223
4-8	Inside wall panel at Elebuibon's compound depicting story of ancestor Timi's arrival at Ọṣogbo with elephant	223
4-9	Another inside wall panel at Elebuibon's compound depicting the same legend of Timi's arrival into Ọṣogbo with elephant	224
4-10	Ifá initiation at Elebuibon's compound.....	224
4-11	Shaving of the head before Ṣàngó initiation	225
4-12	Ade with newly made àṣé on top of his head	225
4-13	ÌyáṢàngó carrying vessel to nearby body of water for Ìyàwó's bath	226
4-14	Ìyàwó carrying vessel on return trip from body of water	226
4-15	Bàtá drummers performing and Ìyàwó dancing for Ṣàngó.....	227
4-16	Bàtá Drums used in Sangodahunsi's initiation.....	227
4-17	Sangodahunsi's head being dressed after spiritual bath	228
4-18	Herbs for washings objects and bathing Ìyàwó during initiation	228
4-19	Herbs in Mortar.....	229
4-20	Sacrificial food for Ṣàngó at Sangodahunsi's initiation, 2007	229
4-21	Èṣù shrine at Elebuibon's compound	230
4-22	Ifádapo divining for client	230

4-23	Ifádapo with his client Dola eating medicine.	231
4-24	Jójólò at chieftaincy Installation, Ifon-Òṣun	231
4-25	Òrìsànlà and Priests of Ifon-Òṣun.....	232
4-26	Drummers for Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon	232
4-27	Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon I	233
4-28	Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon II.....	233
4-29	Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon III.....	234
4-30	Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon IV	235
4-31	Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon V.....	236
4-32	Adefunmi I, Oyoótúnjí African Village.....	237
4-33	Ọba Òrìsàtoyinbo II, Ifon-Òṣun.....	237
4-34	Àtáọja, Ọba Iyiola Oyewale Matanmi III of Òṣogbo at 2007 Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival	238
4-35	Ọba Òrìsàtoyinbo receiving books for the library from Jójólò in 2007.....	239
4-36	Entranceway to Ọbafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife	240
4-37	Poster of Susanne Wenger (Adunni) located at the front entrance of her home.....	240
4-38	An example of Sacred Artists artwork forms a fence around Wenger’s home	241
4-39	Figures on fence represent the egúngún of a local prominent family.....	241
4-40	One of the New Sacred Art Artist, Buraimoh Gbadamosi. This artist created the stone sculpture that is in Wenger’s yard. His workshop and residence is adjacent Wenger’s home.	242
4-41	Sacred Artists Buraimoh Gbadamosi’s Sculpture on Front Porch of Wenger’s home....	242
4-42	Midtown in Ilé-Ife.....	243
4-43	Bell found at Òṣun Grove, Òṣogbo	243
4-44	Àràbà of Òṣogbo and his grandson.....	244
4-45	Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo	244
4-46	Ifá priests inside of Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo	245

4-47	Èṣù mound in front of Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo.....	245
4-48	Children at Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo I, 2007.....	246
4-49	Children at Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo II, 2007.....	246
4-50	Stove Used for cooking medicine.....	247
4-51	Another stove used for cooking medicine at Elebuibon’s compound.....	247
4-52	Babaláwo preparing medicine for client at Elebuibon’s compound, 2007.....	248
4-53	Client fanning the flames for charcoal stove at Elebuibon’s.....	248
4-54	Stone utensils used for pounding and grinding medicine.....	249
4-55	Herbs to be used in medicine on pounding stone.....	249
4-56	Babaláwo removing feathers from bird. The bird will be charred and used in medicine.....	250
4-57	Babaláwo Kneading herbal compound. The finished product will be added to medicine.....	250
4-58	Ọṣun Priestess dancing before procession at Ọṣun Òṣogbo Festival 2007.....	251
4-59	The votary maid carrying the sacrifice with other Ọṣun Priestesses before leaving for the river at Ọṣun Òṣogbo Festival 2007.....	251
4-60	Doyin (right) and another Ọṣun priestess at the front of procession at Ọṣun Òṣogbo Festival 2007.....	252
4-62	Ọṣun priestess dancing for the Àtáoja of Òṣogbo at Ọṣun Òṣogbo Festival 2007.....	253

GLOSSARY

Aaje	Head of all Obàtálá priests.
Àbíkú	Born to die, a child that dies and returns to the same mother.
Àbọ̀rú Àbọ̀yè	The greeting at the house of an Ifá priest: May the sacrifice be accepted.
Àdimú	Something that you hold on to.
Agbigba	Another Ifá divination system. Popular in Ekitiland
Agogo	Bell; time, clock, watch, wristwatch; hour.
Àjé	Witch, sorceress.
Ágùbònà	The one that takes you into Ifá's grove
Àláfíà	Peace, well being.
Apètèbí	The person that cured her mother's leprosy; title given to all Ifá priest's wives.
Àràbà	Spiritual Leader of babaláwos.
Ará Ọ̀run	Egúngún.
Àṣé	Command, authority, power to make things happen, for good or for bad, the inherent power that resides in all things.
Asòròdayò	Another oriki for Ọ̀rúnmila.
Àtáọ́ja	Paramount ruler of Ọ̀ṣogbo, Capital of Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria.
Àwíṣe	Traditional title, the one that speaks the àṣé.
Bàbá	Father.
Babaláwo	Ifá priest, father of secrets.
Babalóòṣà	A Yoruba male priest.
Bátá drum	The three sacred drums that are used in important ceremonies and to whom the newly initiated are presented. They are divine and belong to Sango. The music produced by this drum.
Bembe	A drum festival accompanied by singing and dancing, during which the òrìsàs incarnate in believers and dance with them.

Botanica	A store where religious items are sold. Botanicas originally were stores that specialized in herbs and natural medicines and which were opened in the United States by Puerto Ricans. Cuban exiles transformed botanicas into stores catering primarily to Santerian customers. There they sell nonconsecrated ritual objects, images, beads, and even animals for sacrificial purposes.
Candomble	Afro-Brazilian religion having Yoruba origins and focused on the worship of many of the same deities; one of the source traditions for the Afro-Brazilian religion called Umbanda.
Cowry	Seashell once used as money.
Dànsíkí	African type of shirt, usually worn by men.
Èbọ	Sacrifice, propitiation, healing to all of mankind's problems.
Egún	Ancestral spirit, from either ritual or blood families.
Egúngún	Ancestral spirit, a ghost masquerader.
Èlédà	Creator, God; the spirit of an individual that resides in the physical head.
Èlégbá	A deity in the Yoruba pantheon characterized as being mischievous.
Elerii-Ipin	The witness of fate; a praise name for Òrúnmìlá.
Èmí	Life Breath, spirit.
Èṣù	Sometimes called elegbara, the law enforcement agent.
Eshu	Same as Èṣù.
HRG	Her Royal Grace, the title of the wife of the king.
HRH	His Royal Highness, the king's title.
Ìbàdàn	Yoruba city in Oyo State, Ìbàdàn.
Ìborí	Cloth for covering the head; victory (bori: to be victorious).
I Ching	Ancient Chinese divination system.
Ifá	God of divination.
Ifon Ọṣun	The name of the town that Ọbàtálá governs as king, there are two Ifons today, one at Owo in Ondo State, Nigeria. Another is at Erin Ọṣun, near Ọṣogbo, Capital of Ọṣun State, Nigeria.

Igbó	Forest, thick forest, grove.
Ikín	A sacred palm nut.
Ikín Ifá	Ifá palm nut.
Ilé-Ife	The city of Ife in Oṣun State, Nigeria.
Ilẹ̀kẹ̀	A beaded necklace worn around the neck.
Ìpọ̀nrí	The back of your head.
Ire	Blessing.
Ìrókẹ̀	One of the Ifá paraphernalia, it is used to tap the Ifá tray during the divination process.
Ita	The ceremony when the òrisà speaks to the newly initiated adherent; a divination ceremony whose results are considered to reveal the destiny of the individual.
Ìyálòṣà	A Yoruba female priest (iyálòrìṣà, iyá oloriya).
Ìyàwó	Wife, bride, any married woman, newly initiated person.
Ìyàwó Ifá	A wife of an Ifá priest; a newly initiated person is also called Ìyàwó Ifá.
Ìyànífá	A woman who studies the art and practice of Ifá; a woman who has knowledge of Ifá.
Jójóló	Light complexioned woman.
Jùjú	Talisman or charm.
Kábíyèsí	A Yoruba salutation to a king.
Lucumi (Lukumi)	From Oluku mi, “my friend.” Now used to mean the Yoruba in the diaspora; the liturgical language used in Santeria with origins in the West African Language Yoruba; comes from the Afro-Cuban ethnic identification for people and cultural elements tracing their roots to the region in Africa where Yoruba-speaking people live or lived.
Méríndilógún	Divination with sixteen cowry shells.
Oba	King
Obátálá	A Yoruba deity celebrated in Oyoútúnjí as its patron.
Obí	Kolanut or in Santeria a coconut.

Ocha	This name is given to the religion of the Orichas or Santeria.
Odù	The information that is revealed when Ifá is consulted.
Odù Ifá	Ifá scriptures which contains 256 chapters with numerous verses. The word of God sent to Òrúnmìla.
Odùduwà	The progenitor of Yoruba people.
Ògbómòṣó	
Ògbóni	Elders that form a committee to discuss affairs of a society, sometimes called a secret society.
Ògún	God of iron, patron of all metal, iron and technology.
Ogun	Santeria spelling for Ògún.
Òjìjì	Shadow.
Ojò Ọ̀sẹ̀	The week day of Ifá.
Okara ẹ̀bọ̀	To know how to make a sacrifice.
Olodù	Those who are the priests of the King, regarded as supreme, but one proverb says that, both Elegan and Olodù belong to the same ancestor.
Olofin	Otherwise known as Odù, forbidden by a woman to see or receive as Òrìsà; otherwise known as Ajalaye, the King of Ilé-Ife.
Olókún	A deity in the Yoruba pantheon usually characterized as the god of the depths of the ocean.
Olórìṣà	Òrìsà Priest
Ọ̀lọ̀run	Owner of heaven; one of the names given to the High God who created the earth.
Olódùmàrè	Almighty God, also known as Ọ̀lọ̀run.
Omi	Water.
Omièrò	Water of remedy; a mixture of herbal preparations made for different Òrìsàs.
Oriate	The diviner who performs the ita.
Oricha	Divinity, Supernatural force. The term is derived from the Yoruban Òrìsà.
Oríkì	Praise names of ancestral lineage poetry.

Òrìsà	A Yoruba divinity or sacred object of worship.
Òrìsànlá	The same as Ọbàtálá.
Òrìsà-Voodoo	
Òrúnmila	Ancient prophet, from heaven, he knows that will be safe in their lives.
Òṣogbo	Capital city of Ọṣun State
Ọṣun	Water spirit, prominently worshipped at Ọṣogbo and many other places in Brazil, USA, and the Caribbean.
Ọṣun State	
Ọpọ̀n Ifá	Divination board used to consult Ifá.
Ọya	The wind, deified wife of Ṣàngó.
Ọyìnbó	Commonly used to mean the white man or foreigner.
Ọyótúnjì	The Yoruba town in Sheldon, South Carolina.
Pilon	The mortar of Ṣàngó that is used as a ritual stool in initiations of virtually all the òrìsàs except the Warriors, who use large stones or tree trunks.
Regla de Ocha	An Afro-Cuban religion with its primary origins in Yoruba-speaking cultures in West Africa; also called Santeria; rules of the Santeria.
Ṣàngó	The god of thunder and lightning, the perfect judge.
Santeria	An Afro-Cuban religion with its primary origins in Yoruba-speaking cultures in West Africa.
Xango	Same as Ṣàngó.
Yoruba	A linguistic and ethnic identity popularly identified as having origins in the Southwestern part of Nigeria.

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Since the 1960s African Americans, Latinos, and Caucasian Americans have been traveling abroad to Africa, South America, Haiti, and the Caribbean Islands, in search of connections to African roots. Along the way many have turned to and accepted alternative forms of religious practice. Some of these practices combine religion, politics, and nationalism. The groups and individuals that I examined in Florida, South Carolina, and in Òșogbo, represent a small sampling of such practitioners. In their search for religious, cultural, and spiritual development, the practitioners that I examined have turned to the òrìsà and Ifá worshipping traditions of Yorubaland.

This study is largely ethnographic and I situate myself as integral to the ethnography. I have been a practitioner of Yoruba Religion for nearly thirty years in the United States and have witnessed many changes in the religious and cultural practices as well as changes in the leadership. Many things have changed and information is more readily available due to internet access and a blitz of published materials produced by academics and practitioners. Some of the alterations have been the result of itinerant priests and priestesses visiting or taking up residency

in the United States and African Americans traveling to Yorubaland, Caribbean Islands, and South America, to be initiated into òrìsà societies.

My research is a study of former Oṡótúnjì residents, now residing in Alachua County, Florida, who are also practitioners that traveled to Òṡogbo, Òṡun State, in Yorubaland to be initiated into òrìsà societies and trained to work as priests and babaláwos. It is also an examination of individuals that were instrumental in the development of Oṡótúnjì Village, the Alachua County community, and what I call “The Òṡogbo Connection.” As a part of the Yoruba revitalization movement, that began in the 1960s, to reconnect African Americans to Yoruba religious and cultural practices in Yorubaland, these practitioners have rejected many of the Cuban originated Santeria/Lucumi practices and have turned to Òṡogbo for spiritual guidance and leadership. I examine the ways that these practitioners engage in Yoruba initiation rites in Oṡótúnjì Village, Alachua County, and in Òṡogbo.

My research was privileged by my thirty year membership in the Yoruba American community and my relationship with Ifáyemi Elebuibon in Òṡogbo. With my insider credentials I was able to videotape and photograph rarely documented rituals, ceremonies, sacred sites, objects, and discussions. I also uncovered several photographs during archival research and from informant’s personal collections. I have included many of the photographs within this dissertation and a video documenting my research will be available at a future date. The photographs and video are intended to provide visual content that will demonstrate what has gone on in the past 30 years as well as what is happening at present in the researched communities.

In several instances throughout my research I relinquished my role as investigator and participated in rituals and ceremonies as a practitioner. During other times the roles became so

blurred until the distinctions became unclear. So while this research is a quest into the religious practices of my community, it is at the same time a self portrait of a practitioner and proponent of Yoruba religious practices in the diaspora.

In my interest in demonstrating Yoruba initiation rites I have chosen to discuss an initiation in Alachua County of three women and my own initiation is Òṣogbo. The initiation of the three women was performed by Ifáyemi Elebuibon and his cadre of student babaláwos in Florida and my Òṣogbo initiation was conducted by members of his extended family. These initiations are not intended to be representative of all the ways that initiations are done throughout Yorubaland or the Yoruba diaspora.

The three women's initiations marked their entry into the orisa priesthood and connected each of them to Ifayemi Elebuibon's Òṣogbo community. The initiation and training that they must pursue also entitle each of them to access to priestly knowledge and insights and the authority to participate in select priestly activities. After training each of them should be able to conduct divination sessions and serve others who may be interested in orisa practices. However, many people who are initiated are not trained and do not serve or function in the priesthood.

While it is my hope that my research topic adds to the current academic discourse about Ifá/òrisà practices in the diaspora, it is also my hope that those outside of the academy will find direction and light as they embark on their own journeys towards understanding the ways of the òrisà.”

My goal in conducting and discussing my research was to add to the tremendous body of work, concerning òrisà that is currently underway. Finally, it is my hope that my observations as practitioner and scholar will provide an additional vantage point for viewing and understanding

some of the developments and connections that has taken root in orisa communities throughout the òrisà diaspora.

CHAPTER 1 THE RE- INVENTION OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM

The world outside of Africa still has to wake up to the fact that African traditional religion is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forbears of the present Africans, which is being practiced today by the majority of Africans in various forms and various shades and intensities, nakedly in most *càçés*; but also, in some cases under the veneer supplied by Westernism and Arabism; it is also a religion which is receiving a new vitality in certain areas in consequence of nationalism plus inspiration by other religions. (Idowu 1991: x)

Over the past thirty years a substantial number of scholarly, professional and middle class African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans, Cubans, Brazilians, Australians, and Venezuelans have traveled to Òşogbo, Òşun State, Nigeria, to be initiated into Ifá or Òrìsà worshipping sects by Chief Ifáyemi Elebuibon and his cadre of babaláwos (Ifá priests) and Òrìsà Priest associates . Many of these sojourners to Elebuibon's compound/temple are priests/priestesses and/or practitioners of one of the several types of diaspora òrìsà/ Ifá worshipping traditions. At the compound/temple several of his sons are babaláwos "in the making" and work with him during initiations and other cultural-religious services. His wives and daughters are also initiates and serve in various official and supportive capacities during rituals, ceremonies, and festivals.

The growing interest in Yoruba derived religious practices vis-à-vis Òrìsà-Voodoo and other traditional African derived religions in the United States reflect a trend that has been emerging since the early 1960s. This trend emerged during the wake of the political and cultural activism that was associated with the civil rights movement, the rise of Black/Cultural Nationalism, and the widespread commodification and commercialization of items/ideas that represented "black pride" or "Africaness."

While it can be said that the development of these trends were an outgrowth of the Pan-African movement of an earlier period, their proliferation and widespread acceptance did not occur until they were supported and popularized by mainstream political, economic and capital

interest. When entrepreneurs with financial interests and capital realized that substantial profits could be made through marketing ideas and *products* associated with “blackness” (cultural nationalism, black politics), black power themes became acceptable and was incorporated into popular music, films, literature, and a large mixture of commercial products. The broad appeal for the consumption of cultural knowledge and ideas was converted into schemes for *production* and promotion and quickly became viable economic resources for individual entrepreneurs, visual and performing artists, and several mainstream corporations. During this period it became fashionable to wear an Afro hairstyle or African styled clothing and sing songs that promoted pride in “blackness.” The late song writer, entrepreneur and producer, James Brown was emerging in popularity and his hit song pronouncing the words, “Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud could be heard blaring loudly from record players and juke-boxes throughout African American communities, all across the world, and in many African countries.

Although ideas about African and African American culture-production and black/cultural nationalism within the USA evolved from the bottom-up, within grassroots cultural/ political and performance groups, these ideas quickly took root and were transformed into commercial entities and products that were then mass-produced and devised to aestheticise and popularize concepts that became associated with blackness, African and African American heritage, and African derived religious practices.

Three popular West African influenced religious groups that developed in the USA during this period were the late Oseigeman Adefunmi’s òrìsà-*voodoo*, the late Nana Dinizulu’s Akan Society, and a new group, Ausar Auset Society, founded by Ra Un Nefer Amen. This group was founded in 1973 and is based in Brooklyn, New York, with chapters in several major cities in the United States as well as internationally. The organization was created to provide members a

social network through which the kimbetic spiritual way of life could be observed. The practitioners syncretize aspects of Egyptian cosmology with orisa traditions. Although members from these groups have migrated within and throughout the United States, each of the groups was founded in Harlem and Queens in New York.

As a consequence of these developments and the intermingling of group members, religious knowledge and customs that were once considered to be secret and sacred within the Ifá/òrisà-vooodoo and Santeria circles are now available to consumers who can afford the cost of conferences, the many monographs written about the subject, initiation fees, airline tickets to Nigeria or Ghana, West Africa, and/or Internet access. Cuba, Brazil, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, and Haiti are also sites that are frequented by many who are interested in gaining insight into the practices of these religious/cultural groups.

Research Purpose/Objective

This study examines current trends influencing Ifá /Òrisà-Voodoo and Santeria religious/worshipping practices in the United States from 1980 to the present. These emerging trends provide insights into how communities are developing localized histories and syncretic reconfigurations that are occurring within Yoruba cultural/religious revivalist communities. They also signal various types of culture-production, and reflect “processes of cultural change that can be observed in the present and over the very recent past” (Brandon 1993: 2). My research is principally qualitative and ethnographic. I am interested in investigating how adherents of these religious traditions are responding to processes that result from transnational movements, shifts in worshipping trends, ethos and customs, and the alteration of socio-cultural nuances within their religious practices. I am interested in how these trend and processes influence the lived experiences, (socio-economics, environmental and bodily aesthetics, movements and interactions) of Ifá /òrisà-vooodoo and Santeria practitioners from Sheldon, South Carolina and

Alachua County, Florida. Because members from these communities have family members that have moved to other locale and into what Kamari Clarke (2004:4), has termed “deterritorialized spaces,” my research will include examining cultural/religious trend shifts within newly developed communities, that trace their roots back to Oyo African Village: African Theological Archministry and have also connected with Elebuibon’s Oṣogbo community. Clarke (2004:2) writes, “Understanding the making of transnational communities involves understanding how local communities are embedded in circuits of connections. Our ability to chart communities involves our ability to understand how people’s networks are both historically shaped and institutionally legitimated and globally interconnected” (Clarke 2004:3).

Towards my interest in demonstrating the global connectedness of these communities, my research will also focus on the strategies of Chief Ifáyemi Elebuibon, a Nigerian born Yoruba Ifá priest, and his involvement in a cultural-religious movement that has captured the attention of American and international scholars and Ifá/òrìsà-vooodoo/Santeria practitioners. This new movement has as its aim the revival, reformation, and promotion of traditional Yoruba cultural-religious practices and has served to connect residents of North Central Florida with Elebuibon in Nigeria and with other adherents from the Yoruba diaspora. The study will explore the history development of Alachua County, Florida, residents and their connection to Oyo African Village in South Carolina and Elebuibon’s Oṣogbo community. It will document the rationales and circumstances under which African Americans are making pilgrimages to Oṣogbo, to be initiated into Ifá/òrìsà cultural and religious traditions and how Elebuibon’s visit to the compounds of his Florida adherents is continuously expanding his network of internationally bàṣéd priests and babaláwos. It will examine how Oṣogbo ideology and traditions are becoming conterminous with or in some instances are displacing cultural-religious views that were

formerly held by these adherents. I also examine how these transnationalists who have gained access to the Òṣogbo community are affecting Òṣogbo residents.

The Connector

In July 1998 Chief Ifáyemi visited Archer, Florida, as the guest of Bàbá Onabamiero *Ogunleye* and Botanica Ifálólá. This event was co-sponsored by Ifá' Culture Center in Meddletonville, North Carolina and Mahogany Revue Foundation, a Central Florida African American newspaper. At a naming ceremony for one of Onabamiero's daughters, Chief Ifáyemi lectured on traditional African Culture. The discussion topics ranged from rites of passage, ancestral worship, destiny, and divination. Dancing, drumming, and story telling followed the lecture.

During November 2002 Chief Ifáyemi returned to Archer as a part of his North American circuit. Onabamiero Ogunleye arranged the visit to enable family members, adherents and clients to perform specialized rituals with a more experienced babaláwo and to be a planning session for a more extensive visit to the area by Chief Ifáyemi. Ifáyemi remained in the Archer area for about five days and performed Ifá' consultations and rituals for twenty-two people, including a toddler, two teenagers, and several adolescents and adults. The population serviced was from different ethnicities, genders, and nationalities, including white and black Cubans, a Jamaican, and African Americans. Three USA based babaláwos that were initiated at Ifáyemi's Òṣogbo compound are being trained by him and assisted with the rituals.

Ifáyemi Elebuibon is without question the most popular and sought after babaláwo of this era. Chief Ifáyemi Elebuibon is an international religious-cultural broker that is involved in a number of intriguing projects. He is the Àwíṣe (chief Ifá priest) of Òṣogbo, Òṣun State, Nigeria, where he resides on a family compound with his extended family, several tenants, and a group of

worshippers. Also situated on the compound are an Ifá temple, a cultural center, and a now defunct Botanica that once specialized in religious paraphernalia and other Yoruba gift items. The gift items and botanical products are currently being marketed by Ifáyemi's third wife, Mama Lòlá at her shop in the town of Òşogbo, and are generally sold to visitors and guests.

Elebuibon practices traditional Ifá rites, such as divination, initiation, traditional medicine, and sacrifices. He negotiates his practices on multiple continents (Africa, Europe, North and South America) and in several countries (Nigeria, USA, Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela). He is a celebrated authority on Yoruba culture and traditions. His relationship with Ifá traditions in Cuba dates back to the late 1970s, when he initiated three white Cubans as babaláwos "in ceremonies unprecedented outside the African-American pipeline, in which a group of Yoruba and Cuban-American babaláwos worked together" (Brown 2003:94). Ifáyemi in a 2005 interview remembered this experience as troubling and controversial.

The controversy was largely centered on the fact that Ifáyemi initiated women into the mysteries of Ifá, including a Jewish-American by the name of Patri Dhalí, in New York (Brown 2003: 96). These views about women's engagement in Ifá traditions contrast with what is practiced in Nigeria. Susanne Wenger writes, "Women may be initiated into the cult and recite odù, but cannot perform divination for others, since they are not allowed to enter the Ifá grove, because the transcendental forces of Ifá are inseparable from oro" (Wenger 1983:76).¹ Cubans likewise held the position that women could not be initiated to Ifá. However, in September 2007, a Cuban woman was initiated to Ifá in Miami, Florida. It is speculated that several more Cuban women are in line to become Ìyànifás.

¹ Susanne Wenger was born in 1914, in Graz, Austria. Her life's work has been donated to the people of Nigeria. She was very instrumental in salvaging important òrìsà groves that were faced with destruction and deterioration. She is a priestess in the cult of Ọbàtálá and resides in Òşogbo, Ọşun State. She is known by the name Adunni Olórişà.

Ifáyemi also stated that the Cubans advised him against traveling to New York City to work with a group of black Yoruba Americans. According to Ifáyemi, the Cuban group offered him a substantial sum of money and to build him a home for his family, if he remained in Miami. He declined the offer and went to meet with his people in Harlem.

Elebuibon stated that the Cuban priests that were hosting his trip to Miami did not want him to travel to Harlem in New York City. He claimed that the priests advised him that the blacks in New York were “troublesome” and that they did not “understand the true meaning of the religion”.² However, despite those remarks, Ifáyemi did venture to Harlem and met with several African American practitioners. The remarks made by the Cuban babaláwos reflect the view that was then held by the Hispanic Santeria/Lucumi community towards Adefunmi I and a growing group of African American priests, who had determined to alter and adjust how the African gods/òrisà would be worshipped and represented.³

Elebuibon is the spiritual advisor to the National Black Theater of Harlem in New York City and Wajumbe Cultural Institution in San Francisco. His travels have taken him throughout Africa, Europe, the Far East, the United States, and South America. He is an International Scholar-in-residence at San Francisco State University. Elebuibon has established hubs throughout the USA that are connected to Yoruba religious and cultural centers in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Charlotte, New Orleans, and in Hawthorne and Archer, Florida. These hubs are centers that have been organized by his disciples; they are primarily used as spiritual and cultural sites, where Chief Ifáyemi meets with and performs Ifá divination, consultations and initiations for clients and adherents. He has initiated and trained

² Personal interview with Elebuibon, 8/3/05

³ This was the period when Adefunmi was leaving New York for Sheldon, South Carolina, to establish Oyótúnjí African Village.

several men and women from these communities, who now work with him as apprentices, as priests/priestesses, babaláwos, apètèbí, and iyànifás. These supporters sponsor and organize Elebuibon's lectures and talks around the USA, manage his itinerary and facilitate his meeting with clients. Elebuibon frequently travels from Nigeria to the USA to visit his supporters and to meet and service new clients. His associates of USA based Ifá priests collaborate with him to organize and perform rituals that promote identity and ideological transformations (rituals of change) in individual practitioners and local groups. These changes and shifts are observable in how his followers construct their ritual environments, organize and perform rituals, and in the objects they select to represent òrìsà and ancestral spirits (egún). My research documents Elebuibon's travels to the USA to initiate neophytes and as a cultural-broker and advisor.

Chief Elebuibon is a poet and founder of *Artists Magazine* (1997); he has written eight books, produced two videos, several CDs, produced and performed in a newly released docu-drama, and has a popular program (Ifá Olókun/Asòròdayò) on Nigerian National Television, Ìbàdàn. The television program presents the cosmology of Yoruba belief in Ifá and situates Ifá traditions as practical for contemporary societies. His textual and audio-visual materials are marketed to a large and growing population of priests/priestesses and worshippers throughout the diaspora. Elebuibon's written and visual materials deal primarily with Odù Ifá (Ifá narratives) and òrìsà principles and practices. He is central in the current discourses and debates about new initiatives and directions in Yoruba cultural-religious traditions. He is the current candidate in line to succeed the existing Àràbà of Òṣun State. This transition will occur at the death of the existing Àràbà.

Ifáyemi is a quiet and patient man. He is particular about his diet and acutely allergic to dust and pollen. He is always dressed in traditional Yoruba clothes and wears a hearing aid. He

speaks fluent English and over the years has acquired a remarkable understanding of the nuances of western culture. His books are written in English and are deliberately designed to appeal to an English speaking audience. He is an entrepreneur and is aware of the interests and needs of the market that he services.

The Network

Elebuibon's international network is facilitated through his use of mass media and audiovisual aids to stay in touch with his new and increasing population of subscribers. This technology includes computers for Internet/World Wide Web access and email, cell phones, fax machines, and video recording cameras and equipment that are used to create professional documentary films. Elebuibon has developed both editing and publishing connections on the East and West Coast, of the USA. Elebuibon also does telephone consultations and will consult with Ifá for clients in their absence.⁴ He generally requires that clients wire the fee prior to any work being done, the money is usually sent via Western Union. He will conduct the reading and perform the prescribed ẹbọ. His preference is to perform the work in Nigeria. If he meets with a client at one of his hubs and the ingredients for the ritual are available the services will be rendered at the client's request. If the items are not available the work will be done upon his return to Ọṣogbo.

Cell phone usage and long distance client/priest relationships have become popular and have increased Ọṣogbo's connectedness to the Yoruba diaspora. During my summer 2007 field visit to my Ọṣogbo site, I discovered that Elebuibon's family and several other priests and babaláwos employ cell phones and the Internet as a major means of staying connected with clients, friends, and family. In fact, cell phone usage is rampant throughout Nigeria, albeit the

⁴ Elebuibon constantly uses his cell phone and has two phones that are constantly ringing, with clients from as far away as Europe and throughout the USA seeking advice and/or trying to schedule a consultation.

service is generally costly, inefficient, and unreliable. At the time of my visit there were three competing internet servers, Cell Tell, MTN, and GLO (Rule Your World). Many people owned and carried with them at least two phones, so that when one network failed, they conveniently used their second phone. I was informed that some people owned as many as four phones. The alternative to carrying many phones is to have in your possession several SIM cards that can be switched out upon discovering that any given network is faulty or that credits have expired.

Cell phone stations are posted throughout Ife and Ọ̀ṣogbo and along the roadsides in smaller towns. Cell phone stations are also used for local people who don't own their personal phone or that has run out of credits; the user is simply charged for the calls at a discounted rate. Additionally, some people prefer to use this method of cell phone usage because the rates are cheaper than using a personal phone. Phone card (recharge cards) credits are similar to phone card minutes in the USA. Cell phone usage has revolutionized how local people communicate and conduct business with each other and have given priests at Elebuboin's compound greater access to a nationwide and international clientele. This new Internet and telecommunication access has changed perceptions of how ọ̀rìsà practices are to be performed and have become central venues for discussions and contestations. An unconfirmed estimate of current cell phone subscribers in Nigeria is approximately thirty million.⁵ (See figures 1-2 and 1-3).

Internet cafes and cable TV programs are also important to the Ọ̀ṣogbo community. I visited three Internet Cafés in Ọ̀ṣogbo and waited at least one hour each time I wanted to use a

⁵ This estimate of cell phone usage in Nigeria was provided during a personal interview with A. Adediran, DVC, Director of Linkages Program, and Professor of History at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile Ife, Nigeria on 7/27/07

computer, while I watched young boys hover around computers, browsing voyeuristically, staring at photos of scantily dressed young white women, sending and replying to text messages.

At one of the Internet Cafés that I frequented near Elebuibon's compound, I requested that Ifádapo (one of Elebuibon's sons) negotiate with the owner on my behalf to allow me to take photographs of the café. The owner was initially very reluctant and suspicious. He remarked about possible implications. His concerns were caused by past experiences with authorities. According to Ifádapo, his shop had been involved in some illicit activities by Yahoo-Yahoo Boys. There currently exist a group of Internet users that are referred to in Nigeria as Yahoo-Yahoo boys. They are alleged to be Internet scam artists and con men. They generally target Europeans and Americans and engage them in money schemes. These illegal acts have been termed "419" by Nigerians; they generally involve activities that usually end up with the European or American person being the victim of a scheme that required the transferal of large sums of money from their bank account. I frequently receive email inviting me to respond to some invitation to collect a large sum of money by agreeing to the terms set forth. For the past three years I have been collecting those mails and saving them for future use in an article that I intend to write. (See figure 1-3 for an example of a scam letter).

Every evening when there was not an electrical power outage, I usually had the company of several young people at Elebuboin's guest house, where I resided while doing my field work.⁶ They enjoyed popular cable broadcasted music shows, football (soccer), and movies. The favorite of most of the boys seemed to be music videos with light skinned and long haired women. Beyoncé, a very popular young female, African American singer, was by far the most

⁶ Power outages were frequent and residents generally appeared to be adapted to the routine of alternate availability times for different areas of the city. I was advised by my host that electricity was being sold to Ghana, a neighboring country.

popular. The clothing, hairstyles and imagery that are depicted in these programs are having a profound affect on the younger population of Nigeria. The affect is apparent on the campuses of Nigerian colleges and Universities and on the streets of Nigerian cities, towns, and villages. Many young women prefer to wear Western styled clothing, have extensions or wigs on their heads and manicured fingernails. Young men are beginning to wear their clothing in the “sagging” style and are beginning to refer to each other as “nigga.” Nigeria’s younger generation is being tantalized by the flashy hip-hop lifestyle and is assuming values that are misplaced, misunderstood, and lacking in contextual accuracy. Western ideals are invading villages, towns, and larger metropolitan areas via television programming and the internet. The message that is apparently not being conveyed to young Nigerians is that, African Americans are now protesting against the types of programming that are being Broadcast by networks such as Black Entertainment Television (BET), some of the same programming that these young people are now beginning to celebrate and mimic. Cable and television networks that are looking to expand their viewing audiences into the world-market are now reaching into Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Nigeria’s interest in modeling its film and television programming in the likeness of America’s motion picture industry is further evidenced by its use of the hybrid construct Nollywood, imitating USA Hollywood’s film industry icon.

These shifts reflect the power of the media to influence negative and narrowly focused imaginations. None of the programming that was being viewed reflected the current discussions that are occurring in U.S.A. African American communities that are dealing with this stereotypical and negative imagery. Additionally, this new imaging that is taking place in Nigeria and other areas on the African continent is creating an opening for the wholesale marketing of Western clothing, cosmetics, and Western ideals. One day as I was walking across campus at

Obafemi Awolowo University; I stopped and asked a group of students, why they preferred wearing Western styled clothing. The reply that I got from two of the students was that “Western clothing is more comfortable.” Imagine that, something that is foreign and genuinely uncomfortable, because it is identified as signaling popular culture, is now more comfortable than what is native. What will be the cost to the younger generation of Nigerians who seem to be so willing to throw away their cultural aesthetics? How are these shifts in self perception and the incursion of Western values affecting the socialization patterns of Nigeria’s youth? What has been the response of government to Nigeria’s generation X and hip hop culture?

George Brandon (2002: 163) writes about the employment of Internet technology by Priests and subscribers, “The orisha have colonized cyberspace.” Currently there are several hundred Internet sites that focus on various aspects of Ifá/òrìsà-vooodoo and Santeria traditions. Many of these sites represent commercial/entrepreneurial ventures that market a plethora of spiritual and secular products to an expanding multi-ethnic, multi-national, and international audience. Members from within these Internet networked religious, cultural, and/or spiritual conclaves move across groups, practice multiple and intra-religious/spiritual traditions and incorporate Eastern and/or “new-age” philosophy and ideologies into their worship practices. “There are commercial sites set- up by religious products manufacturers, book dealers and authors, and the organizational sites of Orisha associations of priest and priestesses” (Brandon 2002: 163).

Both www.youtube.com and www.myspace.com are internet sites that are frequented by visitors searching for information about Ifá/òrìsà in the USA or from other areas of the òrìsà diaspora. Visitors to these sites can view video clips of ceremonies from the USA, Nigeria, Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba. I recently visited myspace.com and viewed infomercials about Oṣṣúnjì

African Village, and Òṣogbo, Òṣun State, Nigeria. I was also able to view and listen to a newly initiated Òṣun priestess as she elucidated aspects of her initiation in Òṣogbo. The video clips provided footage of some of the ceremonial portions of the initiation of a group of African American women to the goddess Òṣun and their trip to the Òṣun grove. The Oyótúnjí Village infomercial provided the space for two of Oyótúnjí's chiefs to discuss several of Oyótúnjí's current projects and to invite support and participation from the public. Entry into cyberspace has allowed priest and practitioners to have access to an international audience of adherents, clients, and potential supporters. Viewers can also offer comments and/or participate in a network of bloggers.

Website discussions posted on òrìsà related sites frequently concern ideological and ritual matters, political issues, and private spiritual counseling sessions. Websites where identities can be masked by pseudonyms “reveal indirectly some of the fault lines and strains of the social organization of a religious transmission that was primarily an oral tradition learned by direct apprenticeship to an elder” (ibid). Clarke (2004:7-8) writes, “The key players in the proliferation of òrìsà practices in the United States sport sites that not only produce knowledge about òrìsà rules and practice, but provide services that can be procured and consumed “Any approach to understanding the globalization of Yoruba religious practices not only must recognize the various geopolitical zones of interaction within which these practices have taken shape: it must also examine new institutional mechanisms, propelled by electronic technologies, by which new forms of practices continue to change over time” (ibid).

The phenomenal increase in websites, alternative publishing houses, published writers of books about Ifá/òrìsà practices, and the referencing of òrìsà influenced concepts by popular

artists (musicians, film and visual artists) further substantiates the public's ground-swelling interest in African based religious practices.

Public and professional users of the Internet have access to the flow of information and ideas in an unprecedented way. While searching on the Internet for websites that were Ifá/òrìsà related, 639 sites with the word Ifá were found. Some of the headlines of sites that I visited featured such items as, "Ifá Divination Poetry: Excerpts of translations of odù Ifá" by Wande Abimbola; Ijo Òrúnmila: "a compendium of tales that present the spectrum of Yoruba beliefs and cosmology, with selected prayers to the Òrìsà;" "Jaap Verduin's Dutch Church of Ifá: African Traditional Church of Ifá/Òrìsà in Holland;" "The oracle of Ifá and the verdict of the court: English version of an article by Wim Haan, examining a court case in Holland around a failed attempt to deprogram practitioners from the African Ifá religion;" "Ita Ifá òrìsà: Anago is a path of Ifá/òrìsà that seeks the verified truth by the sacred odù, a path for orthodox seekers of iwa pele, most of whom are African descendants. Anago refers to those ancient Yoruba who, when removed from their homeland, steadfastly held on to traditions, customs, and ethics of their ancestors." The menu of online subjects and interests is expansive and offers a variety that includes something about Ifá/òrìsà for almost everyone.

One site that I found particularly interesting is that of the Ifá Foundation of North America. The site description states that, "IFNA integrates West African Ifá, Candomble, and Lucumi into a logical, useful religion for Westerners. The site features weekly class updates on divination and the òrìsà, òrìsà art gallery, and notification about workshop and initiations." Already prompted by my interest in looking at how Ifá/òrìsà is experiencing global expansion, I was particularly anxious about visiting this site and learning about this seeming inventive process of integrating

the many distinct aspects that I perceived as existing in the practices of the many Ifá/òrìsà derived religions.

Philip Neimark and his wife Vassa are the site's authors and the founders of Ifá Foundation of North America. Both Americans and white. Neimark is also a babaláwo, is called by the name Fagbamila, and holds the title Oluwo of Ifá. Neimark states that he discovered Ifá in 1974 (1993:3); when he was “thirty three years old, rich, and successful (4).” Neimark also states that before his conversion to Ifá/òrìsà practices, that he “had been trained in an either-or notion of reality in which (or so I thought) I could choose to be material or spiritual but not both.” After a reading from a Yoruba babaláwo in Miami, where Ifá forewarned him of impending calamities, and seeing the foretold circumstances manifested a year later, he decided to take a closer look at Ifá/Òrìsà practices. He phoned William Bascom for a further explanation about the possibilities of Ifá/Òrìsà; and was he was later initiated to Ọ̀bàtálá and then to Ifá by babaláwo Afolabi Epega from Lagos, Nigeria. Epega states the following about Neimark,

Fagbamila is a dedicated Ifá worshipper who has really experienced the way of the Òrìsà as reflected in thoughts, words, and good deeds. His Òrìsà-inspired teachings will help individuals develop self-respect and an elevation of character in the United States and other areas of the world. As a Western man he understands those areas in the ancient teachings most important to individuals with backgrounds similar to his own (Neimark 1993: xvi).

Neimark's book *The Way of the Òrìsà: Empowering Your Life Through the Ancient African Religion of Ifá* is read by Ifá/òrìsà practitioners as a primer text for understanding the potential/power in the practice of the religion; and provides for some a philosophy that incorporates methods that “by learning the instructions for accessing that energy, we can make the most dramatic changes in our lives-real, objective changes” (4). Neimark's message seems to appeal to many Americans who are engaged in “self help” and “motivational” systems of thought for personal development. Neimark calls his philosophy “American Ifá” and states that it “is the

result of twenty five years of study and examination of the ancient philosophy of the Yoruba culture of West Africa.”

In an unpublished article Robin Poynor states,

The Neimark state that they started their exploration of Yoruba religion partly out of need, partly out of curiosity, and partly out of dissatisfaction with what Western Spirituality seemed to offer. Dissatisfied with their ventures in Lucumi because of its secrecy and their objections to racial, sexual and gender discrimination they perceived in that tradition, they made a conscious effort to seek out its African roots (Poynor 2007:3).⁷

The Neimark’s currently operate the Ifá Foundation and the Ola Olu Retreat from Coastal Florida. A more comprehensive examination of his Foundation and ideas can be had through a reading of his books and visiting his Internet website. When Neimark phoned Bascom in 1974 to discuss his concern and disbelief in the reading that he had received from the babaláwo, he was surprised by Bascom’s reply, “Mr. Neimark, all I can tell you is it works” (Neimark 1993: 4). Neimark states that it was that response that “changed my life” (ibid).

This trend of Internet usage, the movement by individuals and groups to multiple worship sites, and the reconfiguration of popular religious ideas and traditional notions about African religious practices are demonstrative of contemporary and ongoing synergetic processes. Some of which have resulted in new types of intra/inter-racial, intra/inter-religious and intra/inter-communal relationships. Clarke suggests that, “What is popularly referred to as globalization of cultural production is taking place not just on the level of shifts in the political economy of state power, but also in relation to shifts in commonsense approaches to place, practice, and identity (Clarke 2004:3).

This examination and analysis of these current trends, processes, and the individuals/communities that are engaged in and affected by these developments can provide

⁷ Unpublished paper titled, *Visual Ifá in Ormond Beach, Florida*. Presented at the 14th Triennial Symposium on African Art on 9/19/2007.

additional evidence of how and why New World Yoruba religious practices continue to spread, merge with, and influence the religious ideologies and configurations of individuals and communities of Ifá/òrìsà/Santeria worshippers and practitioners throughout the African diaspora.

Self as Meaning and Self as a Site for Exploration

Although many people in the United States became aware of Candomble, Òrìsà-Voodoo, and Santeria/Lucumi through music, art, cinematic and theatrical performances, there is no formal way of being introduced to indigenous African culture. Many of the early priest/priestesses and devotees were performers and artists and received their initial exposures to African culture through their interest in artistic development. For some the theatre and performance provided the venue to locate and express an African ethos. Individual interests evolved into the formation of study and social groups where African indigenous language, drumming, dancing, and literature were principal areas of concentration that connected the cultural renaissance of the sixties and seventies with the Black Power movement and its nationalist agenda. Although the movement appeared to have had its greatest impact in the USA, it was in fact transcontinental, and reverberated throughout the African diaspora.

African-Based religion has been and continues to be a vital aspect of Black movements across the diaspora. It has remained a potent factor in the political organization of diasporic communities. The ideological dimensions of religious narratives have indeed played a motivational and inspirational role in social movements such as during the Haitian Revolution, the establishment of the African Methodist Church, Garvey's movement, the Nation of Islam, and during the Jamaican and U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

During the 1970s, the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) in Brazil took ideological cues from liberation movements in the U.S., the Caribbean Islands, Lusophone Africa, and Latin America (Pagano 2002:36). In 1974, black activists in Bahia founded Ilé-Aiye, giving priority

and attention to the importance of “cultural manifestations... in order to arrive at the political (Silva 1988: 13). As was the case with Adefunmi I and his group of artists, intellectuals, and performers in New York City and then at Oyótúnjì African Village, “Cultural performances and productions by Afro-Bahians groups, African/Afro Brazilian tradition plays a powerful role” and provide venues for group interaction (Pagano 2002: 37).

Cros Sandoval states the following about the Yoruba religion and its growth in Cuba:

The changes experienced by the Yoruban religion in Cuba enabled it not only to survive but to serve as a vehicle for the retention of aspects of Yoruban language, music, mythology, and dance within the framework of a partially retained Yoruban worldview. Its evolution also facilitated its acceptance by Afro-Cubans of non-Yoruban descent. Many of them, attracted by its richness and complexity, abandoned the practices of their forefathers and made the Yoruban religion and its practices their own.

For similar reasons the religion attracted many Cubans of non-African ancestry. Santeria provided economic, moral, and emotional nourishment by offering membership in supportive religious lineage, a sense of control through magical manipulation of supernatural forces, and the alleviation of symptoms of ill health by reassuring the afflicted through the engagement of supernatural power for healing purposes (Cros Sandoval 2007: 323).

Cros Sandoval continues:

Santeria was also able to break through social, class, and racial boundaries. It attracted a significant following and was able to influence the cosmology, worldview, and behavior of a variety of sectors of the population (ibid).⁸

Santeria in Harlem

The Harlem and South Bronx communities that I grew up in during the 1960s and 1970s always had residents from all over Latin America and the Caribbean Islands. Many of my childhood, teenage, and adult friends were Hispanic or West Indian. Because of this blend of diverse ethnic and cultural groups, I was exposed to and developed an appreciation of diaspora phenomena at a very early age. It was not uncommon for me to visit the home of one of my Latin

⁸ For a more detailed account of Cros Sandoval’s research findings and analysis regarding Santeria in Cuba and the diaspora see Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and beyond*.

friends and see candles and incense burning or to hear discussions about pan-African issues at the homes of my West Indian friends. We lived and played together; I ate food and listened to music from an assorted and kaleidoscopic menu that reflected the convergences that resulted from the mixing of the various groups. At the time, nothing struck me as strange or different. It was simply the way that things were.

During the 1970s, Latin, Calypso, and African music became very popular in the U.S.A. Musicians were breaking ethnic and cultural barriers and, concurrently R&B and Jazz music was influencing the new sounds that were being popularized. Musicians such as Mongo Santa Maria and Celia Cruz from Cuba, Bob Marley and Peter Tosh from Jamaica, Fela Ransome and Babatunde Olatunji from Nigeria, and a plethora of American born black musicians were all producing music that provided a distinct African base-line, all heavily punctuated with percussion instruments. Bob Marley's music specifically pointed to Marcus Garvey's pan-African notions and redemption for the children of the enslaved Africans. Fela, Mongo and Celia Cruz's music spoke of the Yoruba gods of Africa and provided rhythmic beats that inspired body movements that approximated African dance. It was during those historical moments in time and the atmosphere of change that was occurring as a result of the ongoing political and Cultural Revolution in urban centers that the òrìsà took center stage and became central to the movement.

These developments within my community must be set against the political climate of the era. The Black community still had not fully recovered from the loss of Minister Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Both men were assassinated and the details of their demise were questionable and largely unanswered. The Black Panther Party, which started as a community self-help effort, took up fire-arms and promoted a platform of self defense within African American communities throughout America. Angela Davis, a professor at UCLA, was tried for

allegedly purchasing the guns that were used in a foiled attempt by Jonathan Jackson to free his brother George Jackson and the Soledad brothers from Soledad Prison in California.⁹ African American, Latino, and white youth were organizing against what they viewed as injustices and hypocrisy within the American system. The organizing was at the grass-roots level and on college and university campuses across America.

The Black Panther Party took up the banner to free Angela Davis and organized a “Free Angela” campaign. The campaign added more fuel to the already agitated and aggressive counter intelligence campaign that was being organized against the Black community, especially party members. The Black Panther Party was viewed as a communist organization by the United States Government. Under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, COINTELPRO was organized, the party was infiltrated, and several false allegations were made against the party’s leadership. Several of the party’s leaders were harassed and or killed, and some were sent to prison. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seal, two of the main organizers of the party were constantly embroiled in legal battles against the United States Government. Huey Newton left the country and held out in China as a guest of Chairman Mao Se Tung for a short while. The Black Panther Party had a weekly newspaper that featured stories about what was happening in Black communities throughout America. It also listed and discussed several of the items that the Panthers were attempting to adjust and a list of demands for the U.S. Government. Through the party’s propaganda machine America’s youth were being exposed to Karl Marx’s communism and Chairman Mao’s Little Red Book, “The Communist Manifesto” and was being taught how to think critically about political issues, freedom, and justice.

⁹ See George Jackson, *Soledad Brothers: the Prison Letters of George Jackson*, 1990 and Angela Y. Davis, *If they Take You in the Morning*, 1971.

The United States Government expended great efforts and resources to shut the Panther Party and all other progressive grassroots organizations down. Since that time, several reports and commissions have exposed the general public to some degree to the government's actions. On the streets, we say that the United States government is to blame for the guns and drugs in our communities. We also say that government agents killed Huey P. Newton and were behind his alleged drug addiction. For me, the things that were happening during the early 1970s were very alarming and painful. Black and poor people stood up against a monstrous government that demonstrated grave intolerance and a willingness to commit murder to protect its interests.

In 1977, the honorable Elijah Muhammad, the leadership for the Nation of Islam, died at the age of 77. Mr. Muhammad's death posed a new set of problems for many black Americans who found strength and encouragement in the Nation's teachings. This was especially true for many African American and Hispanic youth, both male and female. The Nation of Islam, with its hard line of racial divide and its weekly publication of "Muhammad Speaks," its weekly newspaper, was a voice and a refuge for many reformed addicts, criminals, and others who felt rejected by U.S. society. Although some had left the Nation after Malcolm's assassination, many stayed in the Nation and continued to be guided by Mr. Muhammad's teachings and politics. After Mr. Muhammad's death the Nation did split, many chose to stay and follow the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan, while others chose to follow Mr. Muhammad's son Warif Dean Muhammad. This was another telling time for Black leadership in America. This was another trying time for Black youth in America. Many of my friends, who found the change in management disconcerting, took off their suits and bowties and returned to the streets, some continued to seek guidance and solace in an African identity.

My first encounter with òrìsà was in 1976. I was taken to a botanica located in the neighborhood in which I lived by a business partner. I was twenty-four years old and was in a business partnership with an African American man who was ten years older than me. Together we were building a health food store in the North Bronx in New York. The botanica was owned by a Hispanic woman and offered sundry items and statuettes used in Santeria/Lucumi ceremonies and rituals. The woman performed consultations/readings at the rear of the store for a five dollar fee. I don't recall the specific details of the reading, but I do recollect that the things that she said struck me as oddly accurate and prophetic. She used Tarot cards and possessed a sense of knowingness and authority.

Several months later, my business associate *introduced* me to another group of people who owned a botanica in Brooklyn, New York. This experience was quite different from the first in that the owners of this botanica were two black men, an African American and a Panamanian. They had just returned from a three month stay in Nigeria and were dressed in African clothing. This consultation was also performed with Tarot cards for a five dollar fee. Again, the accuracy of the remarks made about my life was stunning. It was during this reading that I was informed that the òrìsà Qbàtálá was calling my head and that I should be initiated. At the time I was not at all clear about what all of this meant, but intuitively I knew that I had embarked on a new life path. The two men and their families were associated with Oyótúnjí African Village and were planning a trip to Sheldon, South Carolina, to participate in a ÒṢun festival. My business partner and I were invited to accompany them.

At the time when I participated in these two consultations, I was a Muslim, following the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. In fact, my business partner was also a Muslim. We were both malcontents and displeasEd with the internal conflicts that had arisen within the

“Nation” since the death of Mr. Muhammad. I had been attending services and training at Mosque Number Seven in Harlem since I was about twenty years old. I had moved to Harlem when I was seven years old and was influenced by Black Nationalists and their cultural pedagogy. As a young boy, growing up in Harlem during the early sixties and seventies, I was exposed to the influences of “the intellectual and spiritual home of the African people in the Western World” (Clarke 1971: xiii). Even at such an impressionable age, I was deeply moved by the occurrences within and around my community. So despite the great chasm between what I had seen and done as a Muslim in the Nation of Islam, I was primed for my new experiences within an African centered religion. Hunt notes that the Yoruba Temple organized by Adefunmi I had a powerful effect on the Black Muslims of Harlem:

There was some contact between the Yoruba and the Black Muslims in Harlem while they were both in their developmental stage in the 1950s and early 1960s. They attended and participated in a number of rallies, and someone from the Temple attended all of Malcolm X’s rallies even after he left the Black Muslims and formed the Muslim Mosque Incorporated. After Malcolm’s break with the Muslims, a few of his followers came over to the Yoruba Temple. Few of them remained, however, because most came only to get African names, and those who were interested in the occult went to the Cubans (Hunt 1979: 31).¹⁰

Although the woman who gave me my first reading never mentioned that what she was engaged in was African influenced, she sold “Seven African Powers” candles and the Gods that she alluded to had the same names as the Gods of my *Oyótúnjì* contacts in Brooklyn. I felt as though I had made another turn in the direction that she had foretold that I should travel. I accepted the invitation to visit *Oyótúnjì*, and a few weeks later with my partner and my three year old daughter Nzinga, I drove my 1969 Peugeot station wagon to South Carolina.

The trip to South Carolina was especially good for me and my daughter. I was born in Charleston and spent the first seven years of my life there. The port city of Charleston is

¹⁰ Malcolm X’s Yoruba name was Omawale.

approximately fifty miles from Sheldon. It is the home of my maternal and paternal ancestors and is where most of my family still resides. Since leaving Charleston as a boy, I had only revisited once, when I had decided to return to New York after a stay in Jamaica by way of a train trip from Miami, Florida and Charleston. The trip to Sheldon provided me with an opportunity to return to Charleston with my daughter.

The visit to Charleston was pleasant. My family was happy to see me and Nzinga. We stayed at my grandfather's home for a day and traveled to Oyoṭúnjì the following day. By the time we arrived at the village the festival had already begun. We were greeted at the gate and a messenger was sent to inform our hosts of our arrival. Our hosts' names were Alade and Oṣunkunle. We were welcomed into the village and were given white sheets to dress ourselves in. In 1976, Oyoṭúnjì was still in its early developmental stage and village edicts demanded that everyone in the village wear African-styled clothing. So, for us to be in the village and participate in the festival it was essential that we relinquish our western attire. After changing our clothing we were ushered into a pageantry of Yoruba centered performances for the goddess Oṣun. It was a beautiful sunlit day and everyone seemed familiar. The women who were dancing for Oṣun were bare breasted, while most in attendance were dressed in bright yellow and orange Yoruba styled clothing in honor of the òrìsà of wealth, prosperity, and fertility. Somehow my subconscious took control as I joined in the dancing, instinctively moving my body to the rhythm of the drums and voices. My soul was overjoyed with this new experience, this new feeling of Africanness.

After the Bembe was over, I was introduced to members of the community and taken to the compound of Bábálòsà Òrìsàmola Awolowo. Awolowo performed my third reading and reiterated some of the same things that I had heard from the first two readings. This was more

than coincidence; a pattern was beginning to perform. Consistent in each reading was the revelation that I had to be initiated and that Ọbàtálá was claiming my head. At the time of this reading, I still was using my Muslim name, Khalid Sharif. Unlike my previous readings, Awolowo did not use Tarot cards. Instead he used sixteen cowry shells (mẹ́rínḍilógún). He concluded the reading by divining for a new Yoruba name for me. My new name became Ajani Ofunniyin. Ajani means “one who struggles for what he acquires in life” and Ofunniyin means, “one that is worthy of praise.” With my new name and new sense of being, I left Oyótúnjì committed to exploring this way of being that I had discovered. I returned to New York, shared my experiences with my wife and started giving away my entire wardrobe of Western styled clothing. Wearing *dànsíkís* (shirts) and *ṣokòtós* (pants) was a big break from the suit and bowties I had customarily worn in the Nation of Islam. My dream of becoming a Nation of Islam minister was dashed by my new interest in the Yoruba priesthood. Achieving this goal would be the focus of the next five years of my life.

In 1978 I dissolved my partnership at the health food store in the Bronx. I took my share of the inventory and equipment and relocated to Sugar Hill in Harlem. I loved Harlem. I remember my mother saying after she saw me crying when she announced that we were moving to the Bronx, that she didn't understand why I was crying because we were moving “out of that nasty basement apartment.” She was right, the basement apartment was nasty, but my love of Harlem was about something else. Something greater than my child's mind could explain. So in pursuit of my destiny, I moved my business and family back to Harlem, USA.

By this time there wasn't much of a cultural revolution going on in Harlem. 125th Street had given way to a State Office Building complex and many of Harlem's celebrated people had died and joined the ancestors. As for me, I joined the ranks of the cultural nationalists that were

continuing the struggle for justice and equality. I named my new health food store “Harlem’s New World Food Center” and dedicated it to the enrichment of the health and lives of the people in my community. In the seventies and eighties African American people living in Harlem had very little interest in health food and so my business was somewhat of a misfit. My personal interest in a healthy lifestyle was the result of my experiencing migraine headaches and ulcers in my early twenties when I was an undergraduate student at Fordham University in New York. I was living what I now consider to have been a “double consciousness” lifestyle. During the daytime, I attended my scheduled classes and excelled. At night and on the weekends; I hung out with my crew and family, who all seemed to have detested my interest in academics. Despite their spoken and unspoken sentiments, I managed to graduate in 1975 with a B.A. in Social Science, with a concentration in early childhood education. However, these conflicts, internal and external affected my health gravely. I discussed my condition with one of my African American instructors and was advised to see a man named Dr. John Moore at the “Tree of Life” bookstore on 125th Street in Harlem.

Dr. Moore suggested that I should stop eating meat and that I should drink sage tea. I followed Dr. Moore’s advice and within weeks began to notice a marked improvement in my condition. Afterwards, I began attending workshops at the “Tree of Life” and began reading profusely about herbs, diet, and wholesome alternative lifestyles. The transition from eating meat to vegetarianism was not that difficult because in the Nation of Islam I was already eating from a restricted diet. As is usually the case with me, I developed my personal interests into a bank of knowledge and conceived it as a possible tool that could be used to aid in my community’s survival.

There remained many people in Harlem that had worked with Oba Oseigeman, Adelabu Adefunmi I, during the development of the Yoruba Temple in Harlem, before he migrated

to South Carolina (see Carl Hunt, *Oyótúnjí Village: The Yoruba Movement in America* (1979), Gregory Steven, *Santeria in New York City: A Study in Cultural Resistance* , (1987) , PhD Dissertation). Some of these cultural icons supported my growth in understanding what was happening in this unfamiliar world of Yoruba/Santeria cosmology and politics. Two terrains that I quickly learned to navigate safely and with some degree of efficiency.

When I returned to New York after my first visit to Oyótúnjí Village, Alade and Oṣunkunle introduced me to the African American Yoruba community. Many of their activities had moved to Brooklyn and there was usually an initiation or Bembe happening every weekend. Although the adherents were Africa Americans, the trappings of the ceremonies/rituals were still Santeria/Lucumi influenced. Cuban priests and babaláwos were still central figures and were relied upon to conduct the most important aspects of the rituals. The drummers and musicians were mostly Cuban with a scattering of African Americans who had been taught some of the rhythms and songs at Bábátunde Olatunji's school in Harlem. Literature about the religion and culture was scarce and all of the available recordings were by Haitian and Cuban artists.

Being under the tutelage of Alade and Oṣunkunle proved to be taxing financially and chauffeuring them around to these events required a great deal of my time, time away from my business and my family. Since I was a novice and was trying to learn my way around, I was expected to meet their demands. I received from them my first spiritual bath and set of ilẹ̀kẹ̀s (beads). I recall that the rituals that they performed in my behalf were shrouded in mystery and were always costly. Some of the rituals that they performed, I have never seen done anywhere else by anyone else in all of my years of practicing Yoruba traditions.

Uncomfortable with this relationship, I began to correspond with Awolowo in South Carolina. On his visits to New York, I met with him and drove him to the places that he needed to visit. His method for transferring knowledge was more thoughtful and we were always welcomed wherever we went. I once wrote him to discuss the possibility of attending law school.

I had taken the LSAT and had applied to several schools. In his reply letter, he advised that I forego going to law school, that I would not be happy as an attorney, and that the life ahead of me was more “colorful” and “worldly.” I didn’t have a clue about what he meant, but I followed his advice and did not pursue my interest in law. I have never regretted this decision and I continue to keep a picture of Awolowo on my ancestral altar. I consider him to have been my first godfather. Although they are beginning to show signs of decay, I still maintain the Èṣù object that he presented to me nearly thirty years ago. In 2005, I was performing with Ifálola’s drum and dance troupe and Bàbá Onabamiero lent me the conga drum that was left to him by the late Òrìsàmola Awolowo. Awolowo was also a very talented artist and performed the role of the priest that circumcised Kunta Kinte and the flute player, in the televised version of Alex Haley’s Roots series.

I first met Yomi Yomi Awolowo when I was eighteen years old at a rehearsal for Chuck Davis’ Dance Company.¹¹ I was accompanying a female friend who was a member of the company. Yomi was one of the company’s principal drummers. At the time I knew nothing about the Yoruba religion and had no interaction with Yomi beyond our introduction. I met him again several years later, when I was taken to his home in 1978 by another friend, Eisha. Yomi gave me a reading and confirmed many of the things that I had heard from other priests. In one of my readings, Yomi advised me to begin collecting the things that I would need for initiation, as my time was drawing near. Again, I could not see what was coming, but as he advised, after reading the cowry shells, I began to collect the towels, clothing, and other items that were essential for initiation. Yomi was and continues to be a family centered man. He possessed many of the qualities that I aspired towards. He was a black nationalist and had a broad appreciation of

¹¹ Yomi Yomi Awolowo was not biologically related to Orisamola Awolowo. Yomi informed me in a 2005 interview that Orisamola Awolowo influenced his selection of Awolowo as his surname.

religion. He worked as a mechanical engineer for the New York City Transit authority, owned properties in the Bronx, and had an incredible work ethic. Yomi was a master builder and seemed to be able to fix anything mechanical. Unlike many of the other priests that I had encountered, he did not rely on his work as a priest for his income and was never condescending or overly demanding. He had his own life and treated others as though each had a life. There were many occasions when he would be at the homes or apartments of his godchildren, repairing their cars or something else that was in disrepair.

Yomi is a musician who has performed internationally. He learned his craft from some of the drumming legends that include, Babatunde Olatunji, Chief Bey, and Bolaji. He also plays the piano, saxophone, and flute. He is connected to òrìsà houses throughout New York and has godchildren all over the USA and in Sweden and Switzerland. At the time when I started working with Yomi he had only goddaughters. He had initiated several women and no men. I would be Yomi's first godson.

First Nigerian Experience

I traveled to Nigeria for the first time in 1979 and again in 1980 to work as a photographer with Lolafad Production Company. I met Lola in New York City in 1979. He was from Ijan, Ekiti in Southwestern Nigeria. Ekiti is in the heart of Yorubaland and at the time of my visits many people still adhered to traditional Yoruba religious/cultural practices. Lola's deceased father had been a very well known babaláwo, and Lola had considerable knowledge and understanding about the ways of the òrìsà. Lola and I were very close in age and in many ways our lives paralleled each other. So much so that his mother always said that we were twins. This notion of Lola being my twin spirit became quite interesting after I was initiated, because one of the things that the oriate (officiating priest at ita) stated to me, during the ita phase of my

initiation rituals, was that I was born a twin and that my twin was on the other side. We were both entrepreneurs and community activists, Lola in his hometown of Ijan and I in Harlem. At the time of my visit to Ijan, the town did not have an adequate sewage or sanitation system. Water for bathing, cooking, and drinking was retrieved from a local well and the homes did not have toilets. Electricity had just reached the area and was unreliable. The Nigerian government had begun to make improvements, but the process was slow. Lola was involved in several improvement projects, including completing the construction of his family's home, a project that had been started by his father before his untimely demise. Lola was extremely committed to and loved by his community. He traveled to America to earn money to support some of the developments in which he was engaged financially. To earn money he brought products from Nigeria to be marketed in the U.S.

Although the needs of my Harlem community were distinctly different, the need for improvements centered on quality of life and social/economic development was quite similar. In Harlem, I had been working on building an institution that was committed to healthy life-styles; my project was grossly underfinanced and seemingly unappreciated by the local residents. I had submitted funding proposals to banks and federal agencies, and had been denied. The denials consistently cited my lack of sufficient collateral or experience to undertake and successfully complete the project or pay back the loan. Desperate for the financial means to pursue our goals, Lola and I agreed to create a partnership, Lolafad Productions Company, committed to earning the necessary money to do our work. I was already connected to the Harlem music and art scene and had people who proved to be very interested in the merchandise that we marketed.

Some of the items that we sold were contraband that Lola bought on the Nigerian "black market" and smuggled into the country. At our first meeting, I inquired about how he was able to

get those items into the US. He explained that he used “African Science,” “jùjú”. I was familiar with the terminology jùjú; it is language that I knew from South Carolina and from my association with Santeria/Lucumi religious traditions. But the reference to these practices as a brand of African science was novel and intriguing.

Lola was fascinated by the fact that I had a Yoruba name and was interested in knowing about the òrìsà. Through my connections we quickly sold the first supply of products that he provided, so Lola returned to Nigeria to replenish our inventory. Several weeks later he returned to Harlem with a new supply of products. Once again he had successfully navigated his way through customs, undetected, with an exceptional collection of items. To my surprise and delight, he also had a round trip ticket for me to return to Nigeria with him. He stated simply that he was about to be engaged to marry and his mother wanted me to “come home for the ceremonies.” He brought African medicine for me to take that had been prepared by priests and herbalists that he claimed would give me the needed power to carry out our business. Within a few weeks we successfully sold the items that he brought with him the second time and together we boarded a Nigerian Airways flight to Lagos, Nigeria. Those were magical times, life was fast paced and the medicine made me feel invincible. In Nigeria, Lola and I traveled to several different states and cities in search of items that we could market in America. Many of our contacts worked in the “Black Market” and exuded an underworld presence; a presence that was not unfamiliar to me, having grown up in Harlem. We also were constantly meeting with babaláwos, priests, and medicine men for consultations and to provide medicine to protect our lives, while we were engaged in our risky endeavors. Understanding òrìsà and what was possible through òrìsà and traditional practices began to take on new meanings for me.

Some of these new revelations came with several ironies. For example, Lola's family was Christian and Lola's Christian name was Samuel. Although he was affectionately called Brother Lola, many greeted him as Samuel. Lola and his crew of young supporters (of which there were many) all wore Western clothing and many had Christian names. Although electricity was scarce, Lola managed to have rigged some supply of electricity and Bob Marley, Fela, Marvin Gaye, and the Commodores could be heard blasting from the large speakers that Lola had brought from Lagos to his almost inaccessible community.

We stayed in Nigeria for almost five weeks and returned to New York with a fairly nice collection of items. Many things had shifted in my mind about òrìsà and Yoruba traditional practices, in the five weeks that I had spent in Lola's world. I had seen with my own eyes that there were no obvious conflicts in practicing what is considered "traditional" Yoruba religious/cultural practices and Christianity or Islam. All of these seemingly separate ideologies appeared to coexist and feed off of each other. In my experiences in the U.S., one had to choose one over the other. The African American Yoruba communities that I had been exposed to demonstrated intolerance for other religious practices. The same could be said about my experiences with Elijah Muhammad's brand of Islam. African American Muslims, particularly those who ascribed to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, existed as a separatist organization and projected intolerance for Christianity. This projection of intolerance has changed over the years since Mr. Muhammad's death and under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan. Today it is politically incorrect to demonstrate religious or ethnic intolerance publicly.

After my first stay in Yorubaland, I returned to the U.S. and refurbished my wardrobe with blue jeans, Tee-shirts, and baseball caps. This was also the period in my life when I befriended Òrìsàtolu, the eldest of the three Ìyàwó's that I will be discussing in another chapter. When we

met, her name was Omilana (Omi) and she lived in the Bronx. At the time of our meeting, I was a street vendor selling costume jewelry, straw hats, and incense, beneath the elevated train station on White Plains Road and 224th Street in the Bronx. Soon after our meeting, she took me to a four story brownstone building on 140th Street and Convent Avenue, immediately across the street from City College in Harlem. She was an art student at City College. She created and sold jewelry and braided hair to support herself and her young son, Ade. Ade is my godson and coincidentally has the same name I have. Omi was my reference for getting the apartment. She lived on the third floor, and I lived on the first floor. By the time that I first met Omi she had already been involved with Yoruba traditions and had an Èlẹ́gbá object at her front door. She usually wore ilẹ̀kẹ̀ beads and African styled jewelry and clothing. Her patron òrìsà was Ọ̀ṣun, the sweet goddess of beauty, wealth, and majestic feminine grace. Omi exemplified these qualities and had an ancient presence. She and Ade traveled to Ọ̀ṣogbo, Nigeria, and visited the Ọ̀ṣun Grove several months before my first trip to Nigeria.

The owners of our Brownstone were an African American couple, Catherine and Charlie Simmons. The Simmons' were both from South Carolina and owned several apartment buildings in Harlem. It was known in the community that they had accumulated a portion of their wealth from the illegal “numbers” operation that they were still operating when I knew them. They also owned the three storied Brownstone building on St. Nicholas Avenue that I leà̀ṣéd for my second Health Food Store-Restaurant, Harlem's New World Food Center.

Omi was and continues to be an exceptionally talented artist. She works in several different media and was/is connected to the New York art scene. I credit her with my having so much access to visual artists, theater people, and musicians. She was well known for her celebrated parties where all types of artists would be in attendance. Just as Lola had his crew in Nigeria, I

had my crew in Harlem and Omilana was a part of that crew. The brownstone building in which we lived had a basement apartment that she and I turned into an after hour night spot, that featured up and coming musicians and poets. All of our party events were usually overflowing with artists, poets, playwrights, dancers, performers, and hip folks from all over New York City.

Methodology and a Model for Examining Ifá/Òrìsà-Voodoo/Santeria Practices and Conducting Visual Ethnographic Research

Nevertheless, we have to face the ultimate fact that the best interpreter of Africa is the African—The African with a disciplined mind and the requisite technical tools. Here, however, we are confronted with an embarrassing situation. For a very long time, as we have seen, researches into African cultures and beliefs have been by Europeans. Almost all that the outside world knew about the continent of Africa was in consequence of the writings and stories and tales by explorers, investigators, colonial government civil servants, and missionaries. During this period and even largely till now, it is the stranger who has the pride or honour of showing the African round in his own home (Idowu, 1991:98.)

In recent years researchers and scholars across disciplines have published studies examining the ritual practices and ideology of Santeria and òrìsà-vooodoo worshippers in the diaspora (Blier 1995, Brandon 1993, 2002, Clarke 1997-2004, Clark 2000, Cortez 2000, Dismantles 1994, Elebuibon 2000, Gleason 1987, Hagedorn 2001, Holloway 1990, Hunt 1979, Idowu 1991, 1994, Mason 1985, 2002, Murphy 1989, Murphy and Sandford 2001, Neimark 1994, Sangode 1996, Teish 1997, Thompson 1984, Wippler 2000). My interest in this research is to investigate and expand upon the research that was conducted by my predecessors and colleagues and to elucidate what Brandon termed, “ongoing processes of change and structuration” (Brandon 1993: 107) within the practices of adherents of òrìsà-vooodoo/santeria. “These formations points up how Santeria takes on the coloration of subcategories of ethnic groups which, in the context of ethnic, ideological, and economic competition, make decisions affecting the content of their religious ideology and practice” (107). Furthermore, “the exchange has taken place during the emergence of new ethnic identities” (ibid). These new identities include Yoruba-Americans and indigenous Yoruba. Both designations are used by blacks who

have selected to not be identified as African American. Many of these newly defined Yorubas have traveled to Nigeria and despite their not having Nigerian citizenship; they now refer to Nigeria as “home” and to Yorubaland Nigerians as family. Some have taken up residency in Nigerian communities, while others make frequent visits.

Ethnographic Bridges

The methodology for my research was largely participant-observation and included structured and semi-structured interviewing of babalàwos, priests/priestesses and adherents. I did a considerable amount of photography, audio and video recording, an extensive literature review, and an examination of archival records of meetings and consultations that were conducted by Ifá/òrìsà priests with their clients/adherents at multiple sites. The model for my methodology grew out of my interest in the pioneering research work of Zora Neale Hurston in Haiti and Jamaica during the 1930s.

In 1938 Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* was published in the United States. Hurston describes voodoo as “a religion of creation and life. It is the worship of the sun, the water and other natural forces, but the symbolism is no better understood than that of other religions and consequently is taken too literally (113).” “Tell My Horse” was the result of Hurston’s research in Jamaica and Haiti, where she examined the cultural and religious practices of the local residents. Although Hurston was an anthropologist utilizing knowledge and methodologies that she gained while attending Columbia University in New York City under the directorship of Franz Boaz, her work went unnoticed until the 1980s. Hurston’s “Tell My Horse” calls attention to some of the ways that African religion was being practiced and transformed in the diaspora by the descendants of enslaved Africans. It also provides a historical interpretation of events that shaped the development or underdevelopment

(depending on your perspective) of 2 countries that continue, to this day, to struggle with identity crisis, poverty, marginalization, and political turmoil.

I utilize Hurston's examination of life for the natives of Jamaica and Haiti as a model for my own research for several reasons. Firstly, Adefunmi I, Oyoótúnjí African Village founder and first king selected to incorporate the word voodoo and the Haitian Damballah Quedo deity as important aspects of the voodoo/òrìsà practice that he was engineering for North American practitioners. Adefunmi I visited Haiti during the 1950s and saw how voodoo functioned and the ways in which the descendants of enslaved Africans reinvented an African centered religion to meet their needs (albeit his visit was short and the conclusions that he drew were his own interpretation). It may be that Hurston's work influenced Adefunmi's decision to appropriate Haitian cultural/religious concepts during the production of Oyoótúnjí's Damballah Quedo mythology.

Secondly, Hurston's immersion into the religious practices of her Haitian subjects, her decision to be initiated into the religious mysteries that she was observing ; her deliberate attempt to reflexively examine her interpretation, inspired and mirrors my own decision to situate myself as a subject in my research and to function as evidence of my research findings. Her research methodology crystallizes what Idowu (1991:17) meant when he suggested that "religion needed to be studied from the inside and that the truth of what is being studied must be allowed to reveal itself, so that the genius of what is being practiced can be appreciated." Finally, Hurston's employment of the photographic eye to provide evidence of her research left an impressive and lasting visual record of some of the people, places, and objects that her research documented.

Although Hurston's work does not specifically identify Nigeria as the site of origin for the religious practices she studied, her consistent references to the "gods of West Africa," the linguistic similarities of the names given to the Haitian gods, and contemporary scholarship linking Haitian voodoo practices with many of the native traditions of Yorubaland, including Benin and Nigeria, strongly suggest a Nigerian/Benin origin and *òrìsà* cosmology for the Haitian voodoo practices that Hurston investigated. The parallels are sometimes striking as is evident in the description provided by Drewal of a devotee being seized by a trance, during a ceremony in the Egbado town of Igbogila,

Drewal writes,

There was a transformation of her attitude: from outgoing and playful to concentrated, serious, and inwardly focused. As if bound to the spot, she stopped moving her feet: her upper torso veered to the side; her head dropped; and her left knee quivered, causing the entire body to tremble. A priest in this state is called the "horse of the god" (*esin òrìsà*). Attendants rushed to straighten the clothes of those who became possessed, binding their waist and breasts tightly in much the same way a rider saddles a horse, pulling the straps tightly to secure the saddle in place, for the deity "mounts" (*gun*) and rides the medium. The Ogun medium became fully transformed into the deity, repeatedly licking her lips in an agitated fashion. Her upper torso dropped forward, her head fell back, and her eyes rolled upward into the sockets. Attendants quickly closed the eyelids and brought the head forward (Drewal 1992: 183).

Hurston was not the only American woman examining the impact of African religion in the diaspora during the 1930s and 1940s. Ruth Landes, conducted research in Brazil and Maya Deren in Haiti. Landes, an anthropologist, was also influenced by Franz Boas and worked with Ruth Benedict. "Her Choice of a Ph.D. dissertation topic—the social organization of the Ojibwa of northern Ontario, Canada—can be traced directly to Benedict's influence (Landes 1994: XV). Initially Landes wanted to do research on the African American population in the USA, but decided to work in Bahia, Brazil. Ruth Landes was the daughter of Russian Jewish Immigrants to the United States and was raised in Brooklyn. Her father was the cofounder of the American Clothing Workers of America. The family circle included Jewish and African American

intellects. Through her family she met W.E.B. DuBois, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Zora Neale Hurston. She developed an interest in African American culture at an early age. Landes' work investigated Candomble in Brazil and resulted in the publication of *The City of Women* in 1947. "It is a personal and descriptive account of Landes' encounters with Candomble leaders and of her own participation in and observation of cult ceremonies" (1994: XXI). Although Landes' book was controversial at the time of its 1947 publication, it has resurfaced as a model for examining Afro-Brazilian religion utilizing an "alternative framework" (XXII). In writing, *The City of Women*, Landes wrote in a style that was,

"New" and "experimental" ethnography: reflexive writing about one's subjective experience in the field of one's situated position as an author; acknowledgement of the role of friendship; the naming of friends as persons in ethnography rather than keeping them nameless informants; and attempts to reduce "othering" and objectification through the writing of multivocal ethnographies that seek to provide other people, the ethnographic subjects, textual space to represent their subjective experience in their own words and voice. (XXIV).

Ruth Landes also employed the voyeuristic eye, her photographic images, albeit they are not the focus of her book and are fixed in time, provides positive proof of some of the cultural/religious and aesthetic nuances of her researched population.

Maya Deren was born in Kiev, Ukraine in 1922. Although, not an anthropologist by profession, her work in Haiti and the resultant publication of her book, *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti* has contributed enormously to anthropological interpretations of Haitian Voodoo. Deren was an artist and filmmaker who went to Haiti "to make a film a film in which Haitian dance would be a leading theme (Deren 1953: XV).¹² However, like Hurston and Landes, she became enraptured by the mystical powers of the African gods and the ways in

¹² It is believed that Katherine Dunham's Master's thesis on Haitian dances (1936) may have influenced Deren's interest in filming dance in Haiti. Hurston's work in Haiti might have influenced Dunham's Masters Thesis. Dunham's interest in Dance in Haiti could have influenced her student Walter King (Adefunmi I)?

which the common people that she observed interacted with and were servants for those gods.

Also like Hurston and Landes, Deren had to suspend her own “professional” agenda and allow the reality of what she was experiencing in Haiti to be illuminated. Deren writes,

I had begun as an artist, as one who would manipulate the elements of reality into a work of art in the image of my creative integrity; I end by recording as humbly and accurately as I can the logics of a reality which had forced me to recognize its integrity, and to abandon my manipulations (Deren 1953: 6).

Hurston, Landes, and Deren’s research and subsequent publications were marginalized and received harsh critiques from the leading anthropologists of their era. Both Hurston and Landes were never able to gain a reputable position in the academy and Deren was never able to acquire the needed funding to complete her film documenting her experiences in Haiti. However, I have elected to invoke their work, to model their willingness to implant themselves into their research, and to fashion my own efforts in the spirit of their reflexive nature and humility in interpreting the realities of my experiences with the gods of Africa.¹³

Front-Door Ethnography

When the anthropologist arrives, the gods depart. (Haitian Proverb)

The perspective that I bring to this research is that of an insider who has been engaged in practicing Yoruba religion/culture and who has an interest in photography, film and video production for almost thirty years. I hope that my observations from within and my efforts to document ethnographic material that has remained secreted from the public will add to the growing body of knowledge about Yoruba derived religious practices in the diaspora. I also hope to provide an analysis of how cultural-religious knowledge is produced, manipulated, and

¹³ Maya Deren’s unfinished Haitian film footage (1947-55) was assembled by Teji and Cherel Ito as *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti* (1981).

circulated to meet local needs and to promote the transformation and propagation of Ifá/òrìsà and Santeria worshipping practices in a global context.

The forging of Yoruba derived ideologies and methods of practice points to what Mintz and Price (1992: xiv) termed “process in the development of African American cultures” and suggests the need to examine the “different kinds of blends and mixtures” (ibid) that are inherent in the formation of contemporary New World Yoruba cultural- religious practices. Furthermore, these “blends and mixtures” represent prevalent retentions and shifts in Yoruba / Afro-Cuban synergetic processes that continue to merge with, conflate, and impact Yoruba religious ideology. At the same time these blends and mixtures speak to the emergence of new mixtures of cultural and religious ideas. Some of these innovative mixtures incorporate knowledge that is believed to have originated at the source, Yorubaland. My research discloses that much of what the public assume is foundational and/or authentic knowledge was in fact contrived notions that evolved out of the current trends in the religious practices of some the men and women who situate themselves as priests and/or religious leaders. I believe that an examination and analysis of these processes may provide clues about various types of cultural-religious agency that is at work in the present and that affected change in the recent past. At the same time it can *teàṣé* out distinct kinds of cultural-religious overlaps that might have occurred in diasporic settlements, as enslaved Africans struggled to understand and formulate new languages, new religions, and new cultures.

Videos, photographs, and archival materials collected during my research provide additional visual, audio, and textual data and add clarity to several issues surrounding historical and contemporary Yoruba derived life-ways in the diaspora. This data is important in that it may serve to support the current initiative and move towards transparency in the religion and the

creation of teaching and learning environments. This interest is being fostered and promoted by several North American and international babaláwos and priests. The intent is to create an informed public and at the same time preserve the integrity of what are deemed sacred rites. An anticipated outcome of my research is an ethnographic video production that documents and highlights some of the current features of òrìsà/Ifá aesthetics and cultural-religious practices in Oṟótúnjí Village, North Central Florida and Òṣogbo, Nigeria. It is my hope that the completed project will be useful as instructional materials in academic settings and as a general introduction for anyone interested in Yoruba religious/cultural studies.

While the scholarship and research concerning santeria/òrìsà-voodoo/Ifá performance and ritual has been increasing over the past decade, only a few researchers are able to record rituals and processes that are deemed secret and sacred visually. This is primarily due to strict religious protocol in the Western hemisphere which forbids the uninitiated (“outsiders”) from viewing and participating in rituals that occur within “the room” or sacred spaces/groves. These rites and practices are central to understanding the processes of proliferation and transference of power (àṣé) within the communities of worshippers. Priests who participate in these ceremonies perform elaborate rituals that are representative of collective memory and institutionalized customs. Even though many of these rites have been practiced for centuries and in several locals in the New World, they are fundamentally consistent and include similar kinds of practices, nuances, and processes. At the same time, many of the rites have also been altered or adjusted to suit shifts in environment, resource availability, and the needs of the adherents.

Visual ethnography allows for an analysis of these processes and enabled me as a researcher to return to the video recorded experiences to locate nuances that may have been overlooked in the rush of fieldwork. In these instances I was able to use the recorded information

as text for my analysis and as visual corroboration/representations of my research observations. This technique is suggested by Sarah Pinks: “Appropriate application of visual images and technologies in ethnography may develop as a force that will bring new meaning(s) to ethnographic work and social science” (2001:13). In many instances this type of ethnographic research is sensitive and requires the consent and cooperation of the subject community and oftentimes community elders or leaders. Pinks write the following about her research in a Guinea Bissau community:

Since my research engaged subject matters that were sensitive to the communities that I worked with, it was critical that I gained their support. The work did not advance without their consent and participation and was essentially collaborative. Working in this manner created the environment for a less complicated documentation process that facilitated and enabled me and my research associates to “produce visual images and specific types of knowledge through technological procedures and discussions (Pinks 2001:40).

My research is also informed by the scholarship of E. Bolaji Idowu. Idowu was a Yoruba born scholar, who committed his research and teaching to informing the world about traditional Yoruba religion. In his second treatise on Yoruba religion Idowu provides what he terms rules,

In the study of religion, the second rule in the Highway Code for scholars should be openness and sympathy. Religion cannot be properly studied unless it is studied from the inside; and only those who are prepared to allow truth to reveal itself to them, and those who are prepared to enter into the feelings of the worshippers, as much as possible ‘sit where they sit’ can make any profitable study of religion. It is only in this way that the scholar can appreciate the genius of religion as known to the worshipper. Thus, each religion must be seen ‘in terms of its own perspective’; otherwise what is studied cannot be the real thing (1973: 17).

Openness and sympathy presuppose a mind which exposes itself to reality, whatever place reality may happen to have chosen as one of its earthly habitations; a mind which accepts without inhibitions the revelation in the actual situation (ibid).

My research is deeply sympathetic and engages issues that I have been involved with for the past thirty years. During this time, I have been an adherent and priest of santeria/òrisà/ Ifá traditions and have participated in many of the rituals and performances that are highlighted and discussed within the scope of this project. I have spent a considerable amount of time within the

communities and with several of the individuals that I investigated during this research. In many ways my participation has privileged me as an “insider” and has accommodated my access to important institutions, individuals, and primary research materials. It is my intention to utilize this sensitive position to explore, analyze, and document for academic and public scrutiny, ethnographic and historical evidence that may prove central to our understanding of how African descended people who live in the diaspora participate in movements that propagate identity formations, culture and knowledge production. These movements often serve as interventions and promote the preservation of ideals that are central in the lives of adherents as they struggle to practice traditions that are not popular and continue to organize forms of resistance to inequalities and neglect by state agencies.

My research sites included Alachua County, Florida and Sheldon, South Carolina, in North America and Òşogbo, Nigeria, where I worked at the temple/compound of Ifáyemi Elebuibon. During my stay in Nigeria I also conducted archival research relative to Yoruba history at the library at Òbafemi Awolowo University (OAU). I accompanied Elebuibon when he visited his affiliates at the American sites and participated in Òrisà World Conferences, where he continues to be one of the principal organizers.

Examining the processes involved in the types of initiations that I discuss was engaging, messy and unprecedented in anthropological research in the USA. The types of rituals that are performed during initiation into the priesthood are regarded by many priests as secret and sacred and are not to be observed by the uninitiated or revealed to the public. This is particularly true of priests in the Lucumi/Santeria tradition. However, because of the Internet and the considerable amount of published literature about Ifá/òrisà practices in and outside of the academy, access to and interest in information about Ifá/òrisà practices has increased and is appealing to an

international cross-section of individuals. Furthermore, itinerant babaláwos, priests, practitioners, and merchants from Yorubaland who profit considerably from the money and political currency created by an informed public provide increased access to products, information, and knowledge about “traditions” in the homeland of Yoruba culture.

Historical Overview

According to Yoruba belief, Ifá is the system of divination given to Òrúnmìlá (the deity of the oracle) by Olódùmarè (Supreme God), to serve as a method of communication between humans and Olódùmarè.

Ifá is a system of divination based on sixteen basic and 256 derivative figures (odù) obtained either by the manipulation of sixteen palm nuts (ikín), or by the toss of a chain (opele) of eight half seed shells. The worship of Ifá as the God of divination entails ceremonies, sacrifices, tabus, paraphernalia, drums, songs, praises, initiation, and other ritual elements comparable to those of other Yoruba cults. (Bascom 1991:3)

Ifá narratives are considered to be true stories that yield historical knowledge that is applicable to current situations. Ifá presumes and promotes the view that there is nothing new beneath the sky and that all significant events are the replication of past events that may be found in the babaláwo's recitation of Ifá odùs. Ifá is the system of divination of five to ten million Yoruba in Nigeria, with several millions more in neighboring countries and in the African diaspora.

The òrìsàs are the deities of the Yoruba pantheon (divinities of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, parts of Sierra Leone, and throughout the African diaspora). They are generally personified as the forces of nature (energy) and patrons of activities and occupations. According to these beliefs, Òṣun represents sweet waters, love, money, and conception; Ṣàngó represents thunder and lightning, strategy, and is the warrior; Èṣù is messenger to Olódùmarè, owner of roads and opportunities, and owner of àṣé (spiritual energy);

Yemonja/Olókun represents the ocean, motherhood, and is believed to be the provider of wealth; Obátálá represents the head, clarity, and is the arbiter of justice; Oya represents the marketplace, tornadoes, change of fortune, and is the female warrior; Ògún is the owner of all metals, he is a fierce warrior, and represents honor and integrity. There are many other òrisàs that are worshipped, but those listed above are the most prominent in the diaspora.

“Santeria has integrated the cults of the Yoruba orisha into a single comprehensive structure which has itself evolved and changed over time” (Brandon 1993: 137). Santeria/lucumi, the syncretism of Yoruba religious ideas (as practiced by enslaved Yoruba who were transported to Cuba during the Middle Passage) with Catholicism, and Kardecian spiritism came to the USA with Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants in the forties and fifties. This population of Yoruba practitioners increased during the sixties with the migration of refugees from Cuba following Castro’s revolution. In addition to this influx of òrisà-influenced immigrants into the USA, Haitian refugees then brought Voodoo, a mixture of Yoruba, Fon, and Hueda deities with Kongo gods and magic.

Santeria is the popular name associated “with the Afro-Cuban polytheistic religious tradition that, during the almost four centuries of the slave trade in Cuba, gradually developed by the nineteenth century into a series of religious practices born of mostly West African and some Spanish Catholic roots; more formally known as the Regla de Ocha (the laws of the orichas); focuses on oricha worship” (Hagedorn 2001:253). Santeria traditions “include European Christianity (in the form of Spanish folk Catholicism), traditional African religion (in the form of orisha worship as practiced by the Yoruba of Nigeria), and Kardecian spiritism, which originated in France in the nineteenth century and subsequently became fashionable in both the Caribbean and South America (Holloway 1991:120). In Cuba the religion was known in a myriad of

identities, La Regla de Ocha, La Regla Ifá, La Religion Lucumi, and La Santeria. Lucumi refers to language, culture, and religious aspects of Afro-Cuban expressive culture associated with the descendants of enslaved Yorubas. (Hagedorn 2001: 249).

David H. Brown (2003:5) provides a summary of the historical significance of Lucumi traditions and how lucumi ideas continue to affect politics and policies in the diaspora. Brown states that, “lucumi sound and motion have “recrossed” the Atlantic once again, and Santeria has been reiterated as a potent marker in transnational Black Atlantic cultural currents.”

Although there are some striking differences, Candomble groups in Bahia, Brazil (especially in the city of Salvador), Xango groups in Recife, and the Casa das Minas in Sao Luis continue to practice Yoruba/African derived religious traditions and are also looking to Yorubaland/Nigeria and to the Yoruba diaspora for a broader understanding of Yoruba cultural/religious heritage (Leacock 1975:285). Pagano (2002:13) notes “Afro - Brazilians culture is a trade mark and a source of great pride for the City of Salvador. Afro Brazilian cultural elements pervade the discourse of baianidade (Bahianness), or the hegemonic ideological discourse informed by elements of culture and personality that make up a baiano’s (Bahian’s) way of being (jeito de ser) (see Araujo Pinho 1998). Visual representations of baianidade abound in images produced by bahiatursa (the official state tourism board) as well as by the media and in artistic production.” For a more detailed treatment of Afro- Brazilian religion in Salvador see Anna Pagano’s Masters thesis, “*Religion and the politics of Racial Identity: The relationship between Candomble and the Movimento Negro in Salvador, Brazil.*” On an analogous note, Matory states the following about similarities in these distinct traditions that connect the practices of these groups with commercial networks that navigated the Atlantic diaspora,

Conventions of ritual salutation in Ocha (or Lucumi nation of Cuban “Santeria” and its diaspora) are virtually identical to those in Candomble. Moreover, these conventions in Cuban Ocha and Candomble are different in identical ways from the cognate West African practice. These are among the many similarities between Cuba and Brazil that lead me to believe that communication among Lagos, Brazil and Cuba has significantly shaped New World ritual practice in many ways from which the Oyo interior of Yorubaland was largely exempted, due to its distance from the commercial networks that continuously united Lagos, Brazil, and Cuba (Matory 2005: 27-28).

Different aspects of these diverse Yoruba influenced cultural-religious practices took root in large urban areas such as Miami, California, New York City, and proliferated throughout the USA and on to other Caribbean Islands and South America.

Over the past four decades the Yoruba religion (as it is widely known by its USA adherents) has experienced an extraordinary global rise in recognition and is undergoing a metamorphosis in the United States. Priests and religious leaders in Santeria, Candomble, and Voodoo are now seeking to detach the Yoruba religion from Catholicism and have turned to Yorubaland/ Nigeria for a renewed and refreshed understanding of Ifá/òrìsà religious practices (Neimark 1993: xii).



Figure 1-1: Billboard advertising cell phones.



Figure 1-2: Cell Tell retail outlet for cell phones and SIM cards, Òşogbo

MICROSOFT MEGA JACKPOT LOTTERY
UNITED KINGDOM. LONDON.
MICROSOFT HOUSE, LONDON.
Director: MR. Donald Newton
REF NO: M154S/WL07.

We announce the 6th lucky winners of the MICROSOFT MEGA
JACKPOT LOTTO WINNINGS PROGRAMS held on 20th OF November,2007.

Your

company or your personal e-mail address, attached to the Chip
Number:

8465207, won in the sixth lottery category 2007. Your email
address has

brought you an unexpected luck.

You are therefore been approved for lump sums pay out of
Â£5,500,000.00, FIVE MILLION, FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS. In
cash Credited to file REF NO: M154S/WL07.

Contact The claims processor who is:

Name : Mr. David Ben

E-mail : processdavidben@hotmail.com

+447011137259

NOTE : Your winnings can only be claimed through a swift bank
transfer.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

Figure 1-3: Nigerian Scam letter Sample

CHAPTER 2
MAGIC, IMAGINATION, AND MYTHOLOGY

Oyótúnjì African Village and Òrìsà-Voodoo in the USA

There is no tragedy, which has caused a deeper personal conflict in the mind and spirit of the black American than the question of his pre-American origins. Nothing fills the average American born black with more discomfort and embarrassment than a discussion about Africa. The two basic reasons for his severe attack of inferiority on these occasions is firstly his complete lack of accurate knowledge about the regions of his pre-American origin, and secondly his even greater ignorance of any of the aspects of his ancestral civilization. Thus it is unthinkable that real, honest progress and purpose can be brought into the lives of a people who have no idea or measurement to judge their progress by. Briefly stated, it is impossible to know where you are going, if you do not know where you have been, or you cannot tell whom you can become, if you do not know who you are.

For years therefore, Africa and people derived there from, have been subjected to every conceivable ridicule and humiliation. With no society to defend its culture, it is inevitable that for every person of African origin, Africa became a badge of shame. It is therefore the purpose of this booklet and the Yoruba Temple to begin the re-endowment of every African born-in-America with confidence and appreciation of his origins and culture.

Oseijiman Adefunmi Efuntola I (1962) wrote the above as the foreword to one in a series of pamphlets that was published as the Great Benin Books. This pamphlet was titled, “Tribal Origins of the African American.” The publication of pamphlets, *production* of staged performances, and the creation of sculptural works, paintings, and the development of a body of literature, all marked the development of the new Yoruba American Cultural Nationalist Movement. The leader of this movement was the late HRH Oseijiman Adefunmi Efuntola I, born Walter King. Formerly a classical ballet dancer, he was born in Detroit and performed internationally. As an art student he joined Katherine Dunham’s Tropical Dance Revue in 1950 and traveled with the troupe to Europe in the summer of the same year. At the age of thirty he traveled to Haiti and learned of the Haitian system of Vodùn worship. Upon returning to New York he organized the Order of Damballah Ancestor Priests. In 1959, Adefunmi was initiated into the worship of Ọ̀bàtálá or Òrìsànlá at age thirty-one in Matanzas, Cuba, in accordance with Santeria traditions. He became the first African American to become initiated into the Ọ̀bàtálá

priesthood by Afro-Cuban descendants of enslaved Yorubas. This trip to Matanzas was made with a Cuban-American named Christopher Olliana. Olliana introduced Waslter King to Santeria. This marked the beginning of the spread of Yoruba religion and culture among African Americans. Upon returning to the USA, they founded the Şàngó Temple in Harlem in 1959. Disenchanted with Afro-Cuban religion, Efuntole founded the Yoruba Temple in 1960 and called his religious sect Òrìṣà-Voodoo. “Orisha-Voodoo retains the Yoruba framework encapsulated in Santeria but rejects the identification of Orisha with Catholic saints and the symbolism that goes with it” (Holloway 1991:123). Orisha-Voodoo represented “a direct return to the sources of Yoruba religion” (ibid).

In the early 1970s, the group of African Americans rejected Yoruba/Catholic syncretism as an outdated “compromise to a slave religion” (Hunt 1979) and moved their Yoruba Temple away from Harlem, New York, to Sheldon, South Carolina, to build Oṡótúnjì African Village. The village was to serve “as a commune devoted to the practice and study of African religion (Holloway 1991: 123). It was also designed to be a space for the initiation and training of priests and adherents, “to establish an independent African society, and to recreate Yoruba culture within the United States” (Hunt 1979: xii). As the spiritual center for this movement, residents of Oṡótúnjì were to rebuild a new life for themselves and create a Yoruba Kingdom in South Carolina, bàşéd on Yoruba traditions, “including patterns of work, marriage, language, dress, and social organization” (ibid).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Black Americans, who had maintained a sentimental attachment to Africa wanted to gain more knowledge of their past. This thirst for knowledge had been stimulated by African independence, the ability of larger numbers of Blacks to travel to

Africa, and the showing on national television of a series of films *bàṣéd* on the best-selling book, *Roots*, by Alex Haley. (Hunt 1979: 12)

Adefunmi was installed as the King (Ọba) of Oyo, and was the first African American to be initiated to *Ifá* in 1972 during a visit to Nigeria to attend the first ọ̀rìsà conference held at Ife University (now Obafemi Awolowo University)(Hunt: xii). Films depicting the Yoruba cultural development at Oyo brought him acclaim at the conference and he became a candidate for coronation by the Ooni of Ife. On June 5th, 1981, Adefunmi I became the first non-Nigerian to be named a Baale (Chief of a town). Adefunmi and his followers have recreated in Oyo Village, with some accuracy, several aspects of Yoruba culture.

Although the Yoruba elements at Oyo reflect some aspects of Old World Yoruba culture/religion, there are a number of notable differences. Let me offer a few illustrations of the distinctions. The word Oyo mean, “Oyo again awakes” (Oyo-tun-ji) and was chosen to express Efuntole’s desire to see Yoruba culture revived and recreated in the United States. The city of Oyo is in Nigeria and is the capital of the kingdom of the same name. Oyo is said to have been the largest and most powerful Yoruba kingdom (see Johnson’s “History of the Yoruba, Clarke’s “Mapping Yoruba Networks).

An important distinction is Ọbàtálá as the Patron deity of Oyo, whereas Ẓàngó is the patron of old Oyo. Other differences that are evident in Oyo include the use of cigars and candles in ancestral rituals, and coconut instead of kola nut for divination. These ritual elements are New World/Cuban influenced and are prevalent in many Oyo ceremonies. The Damballah-wedo Temple that is located in the village derives from Haiti and ultimately from the Fon of Benin.

Hurston (1990:118) writes that,

Damballah is the highest and most powerful of all the gods”... and that, “He is the father of all that is powerful and good.. He never does “bad” work”.

Oyo hosts an annual festival dedicated to this spirit-force. The festival devises rituals and performances that are unique to Oyo and that are not known to be practiced by

adherents outside of the village. The festival involves the construction of an elaborate altar by the village's elder priests. The altar constructed during my visit to the village in 2003 consisted of a table draped with white fabric. The table top and the space surrounding the table were embellished with native/locally grown herbs and plants, African styled masks and statues (these objects were from various countries in Africa), white candles, incense, and food and beverage offerings. Hurston continues,

Around Damballah is grouped the worship of the beautiful in nature. One must offer him flowers, the best perfumes, a pair of white chickens; his "mange" sec (dry food) consisting of corn meal and an egg which must be placed on the altar on a white plate. He is offered cakes, French melons, watermelons, pineapples, rice, bananas, grapes, oranges, apples, and the like. There must be a porcelain pot with a cover on the altar, desserts and sweet liquors, and olive oil (ibid).

During the ceremony at Oyótúnjí the officiating priest received attendees at the altar according to age and rank. Members of Oyótúnjí's Ògbóni Society were received first. Priests were then received, then adherents, and finally visitors. Each was invited to kneel before the shrine, make an offering, receive the blessing of prayers from the elder priest, and prostrate before the objects that represented the spirit of Damballah-wedo. In Oyótúnjí, offering gifts to the òrisà and ancestors, and prostrating before the shrines and elders signifies the recognition of hierarchical structure and order. These types of display serve to further "authenticate" notions about traditionalism, authority, and knowledge production. Priests in Oyótúnjí are believed to be custodians of traditional Yoruba culture and have sworn allegiance to the Òba and the ideals of Oyótúnjí. Clarke notes,

In recreating Oyo in Oyótúnjí... the leadership established strategies of governance that were aligned with the prestige of the past and forms of community that were embedded in the premodern hegemony of the nation-state. As such, Oyótúnjí is hierarchically divided into various levels, ranging from a political leader, the Òba (King), to chiefs, priests, and nonpriest practitioners. The Òba, sophisticated and learned, is more commonly known by his followers, both in and outside the village, as Òba Adefunmi I, the Yoruba father of dispersed Africans. He claims a constituency of thousands of African Americans in the United States, hundreds of whom have lived and trained in Oyótúnjí (Clarke 2004: 70).

The festival that I attended was held on Halloween night, which fell on a Friday. In Haiti Damballah-wedo's day of the week is Wednesday in the afternoon and his sacrifice is a pair of white chickens, hen and cock (Hurstun 1990: 119). I call attention to this temporal alteration because it serves to signify Oḡótúnjí's time/event fluidity. Oḡótúnjí operates within its own temporal and spatial boundaries. Newcomers to the village may experience this as they sit around anxiously awaiting the start of a festival or to be serviced by a priest. The experienced observer will quickly note that when the event finally commences it will unfold in accordance with the villager's sense of time. The thing to always recollect while in Oḡótúnjí is the sign that sits on the village roadside. It reads, "You are now leaving America." This statement of detachment from America prompts a reorientation and an adjustment towards the unexpected and the unknown.

The attendance at the 2003 festival was meager and included mostly village children and about ten adults. Also attending the festival was a group of five visitors from Guinea, along with their white American chaperone. The group was visiting Oḡótúnjí as a part of a tour of the United States. According to the group's leader, the tour was sponsored by the State Department in Washington, DC. The five visitors and their chaperone were all invited to participate in the ceremony. Each visitor was called to the altar, where each presented a small white candle that was lighted on her/his behalf (the candles were provided by the officiate priest). Prayers were also sung for each visitor as she/he knelt and prostrated before the altar. The group appeared to be genuinely impressed with the ceremony and lodged at the village overnight at the compound of a senior priest.

At its inception Oḡótúnjí had over 100 residents. Over the years Oḡótúnjí's population has declined hovering around 5-9 families for the past ten years. Despite this decrease in residency,

the impact of lineage is felt throughout the òrìsà diaspora via a growing number of devotees, chiefs, and priests.

Recasting Worshipping Practices

Santeria/Lucumi practitioners that reside in large urban areas such as New York City arrange their òrìsà objects and “pots” in different spaces throughout their apartments and homes. Because urban spaces are so small and often crowded with family members who may or may not be practitioners, òrìsà are sometimes forced to take up residency in a closet or bathroom. Òrìsàs such as Èṣù and Ògún, that are known to be “outside” òrìsà, live indoors. Urban dwellers are also faced with the problem of how to get the livestock needed for their sacrifices to their homes or apartments.

Also included in this re-configuration of traditional Yoruba practices was the revival of the cult of the ancestors (egúgún society) (Brandon 1993:114). At Oyoótúnjì, temples and shrines for the òrìsà and ancestors are constructed outdoors, in various temples, in close proximity to each other. Currently there are five local ancestors (egún) that are entombed at Oyoótúnjì. These ancestors are founding members that include Adefunmi I, Òrìsàmola Awolowo, and Mama Keke (see figures 2-1, 2-2, 2-3).

These ancestors are celebrated as progenitors of African American -Yoruba traditions and are viewed as collective/common ancestors. Like the Yoruba of Nigeria, villagers in Oyoótúnjì believe that the spirit of the ancestors materializes in the egún. The egúngún (masqueraded performer) is the embodiment of the spirit of the deceased person who is believed to have returned from orun (the spirit world). The purpose of the return is primarily to visit his children. He/she is called ará òrun, which translates as citizen of heaven. As in Yorubaland, Oyoótúnjì citizens believe that,

The role of the ancestors was not to insure individual achievement and satisfaction, although they remain interested in the fate of their descendants: it was to undergird the continued existence of society and of a just social order at all levels” (Brandon: 1997).

The only individual among the entombed Oyoúnjé ancestors that resided at the village at the time of his death was the oba, Adefunmi I. The bodies of the other deceased priests were transported from different areas in the United States to the village for burial rites to be conducted according to newly formulated Oyoúnjé-Yoruba burial rites. At Oyoúnjé the egúngún society organizes these rites and egún sacraments. This society is headed by a chief and comprised of priests and priestesses as well as adherents that must undergo a formal introduction to the society and initiation. The number of such burials with their specialized rites will increase as the community’s elderly and extended members join the ancestors. These Oyoúnjé ancestors are called upon and enlivened during annual festivals/ceremonies, where egúngún masqueraders are dressed in elaborate, colorful costumes and are paraded throughout the village. New evidence suggests that Yoruba-American communities outside of Oyoúnjé are becoming more engaged in such funerary rites and/or egúngún practices (See figures 2-31 thru 2-36).

Dissimilarity worth noting is that Yoruba city/states of Nigeria were traditionally urban centers, while Oyoúnjé Village is situated in a rural setting on a ten-acre tract of land. Thompson notes, “The Yoruba are the most urban of the traditional civilizations of black Africa. Yoruba urbanism is ancient, dating back to the middle ages, when their holy city, Ilé-Ife, where the Yoruba believe the world began, was flourishing with an artistic force that later provoked the astonishment of the West” (1984:3-4). The Yoruba are a West African ethnic group, living mainly in the South western part of Nigeria, parts of the Republic of Benin, Ghana and Sierra Leone. The Yoruba people also have a long history of a high level of social organization. (Olomola Isola, Bade Ajuwon, Dayo Omotoso, editors, 2003: xviii)

Although residency at the village has declined, Oyótúnjí Village remains a repository of diápora cultural-religious knowledge that is represented in artistic monuments that stands plainly and accessible to the public. These symbolic representations speak loudly to the transfiguration of òrìsà/santeria religious practices in the United States. It is fair to say that Oyótúnjí provoked the astonishment of the West, and continues to function as a “holy city” both for its population of citizens and expatriates who return for festivals, rituals, funerals, and personal reasons.

The dichotomies that emerged during the formation of Oyótúnjí’s tenets for practicing Yoruba American cultural and religious traditions can be partly attributed to Adefunmi’s struggle to reconfigure traditional practices and disassociate himself and his followers from the Cuban Roman Catholic Church. It is important to note that Oba Adefunmi I was studying and learning to speak the Yoruba language and learning about Yoruba culture and traditions while developing the necessary understanding to perform the first village initiations, training adherents, designing and constructing the village infrastructure out of available materials, simultaneously. Ideas that were framed as tradition were in fact notions that were organized to meet conditions and circumstances that were unfamiliar and without precedent. The development of Oyótúnjí foundational precepts included initiation and funerary rites, social and economic stratifications, and iconographic and aesthetic formulations. Adefunmi’s break with Afro-Cuban practices was not without conflict, and the establishment of the new settlement in Sheldon, South Carolina, presented multiple problems for the residents of Oyótúnjí, with the neighboring residents, and with state and local government agencies. Many of these problems had to be negotiated and oftentimes resolved as they occurred. Not all of them were resolved to the satisfaction of all of the villagers, some of whom were dissatisfied with the move to South Carolina. According to Hunt,

The road that led to the final settlement at Oyótúnjí Village was strewn with many problems that ended in some successes and some failures. One of the major problems faced after the Yoruba Temple was established was whether they should remain in New York, move to the South or leave the United States. Over half of the members did not choose to establish their village in South Carolina. They originally wanted to go to Western Nigeria, and failing that, to the Caribbean or South America (Hunt 1979: 35).

African American history is replete with such examples of heroic efforts by organizations and individuals to return the descendants of enslaved Africans back to the African continent and to “free” Africa from the control of the colonial rulers. These traditions were well known in the Harlem from which Adefunmi I took his followers.

According to Oyótúnjí’s archival documents, the village “has contributed more than four hundred priests and priestesses of the òrìsà tradition to the Africa American community. It has exposed Yoruba style, custom and religion to the vast American television audience and in 1994, commenced the initiation of babaláwo at Oyótúnjí.” Yoruba culture/religion as propagated by Oba Adefunmi I was attractive to black cultural-nationalists, scholars, professionals, and artists. The collaborative skills of this group proved useful in the development of Oyótúnjí’s institutions and to the fabrication of Yoruba-like aesthetics. “As an arm of the black nationalist movement, Orisha-Voodoo differed from other black nationalist groups in that its ethos and cultural ideal derived from Yoruba religion” (Brandon 1993: 114).

Even though Adefunmi I claimed to have broken away from the conventions of Cuban Lucumi, many of the practices of Oyótúnjí Village still resembled the Lucumi way of doing things. Adefunmi also borrowed practices from Haiti, Brazil, and Old Oyo in Yorubaland. While many of Adefunmi’s adjustments to his practices were influenced by his travels to Cuba, Haiti, and Nigeria, some of his ideas were from books and articles about Yoruba people in the diaspora. This creative borrowing from numerous cultural traditions encouraged individual expressiveness

and allowed for the ever changing landscape of practices, people, and environment at Oyoṣúnjì Village.

Matory in his study of Candomble in Brazil writes the following about such borrowings,

The ongoing 19th –to 21st –century dialogue among the massive urban populations of the Atlantic perimeter has, to my mind, done as much to constitute the Africanity and the creativity of these populations as has any ancestral African or plantation culture. The social contexts of not only Candomble but also Dahomean/Beninese Vodùn, Cuban Ocha, West African and Cuba Ifá divination, Rastafarianism, North American Jazz, and black Protestantisms all over the Anglophone Americas (to name just a few famous instances of Afro-Atlantic “folk” culture) have always had important supralocal, interethnic and cross-class dimensions. In all these traditions, African-American practitioners borrowed from, studied, and communicated with Africa (and strategically manipulated Africa’s image) as they institutionalized their own African-American forms of solidarity and social hierarchy. An African-Americanist cultural history need not assume, even in the context of plantation slavery, that African-Americans lacked a means of access to Africa. And they never lacked their own strategic priorities (Matory 2005: 15-16).

Growth and Conflict

In several instances Oyoṣúnjì villagers did not agree with Adefunmi’s worldview or his methods for discipline and/or resolving village conflicts. In a few cases the disparity resulted in the opposing person being expelled from the village. This was the situation for Òrìsàmola Awolowo, who left Oyoṣúnjì after an internal conflict with Adefunmi and migrated to Gainesville, Florida.¹⁴ Awolowo’s departure was followed by an exodus of people from the village. Some of these individuals joined Awolowo in Gainesville; some traveled to Miami, Florida, Atlanta, Georgia, while others went to Los Angeles California. Clarke writes about this mass exit,

In the mid-1980s, the population of the community plummeted from two hundred to seventy, but this led to an expanding constituency of thousands of urban affiliates with growing loyalties to the community. During this period, as increasing numbers of practitioners left for better opportunities in urban America, the community laid the seed for

¹⁴ Awolowo is credited with the influx of former Oyoṣúnjì Villagers into Gainesville, Florida during the 1980s.

the spread of new institutional forms of urban Yoruba communities within a larger network of practitioners (Clarke 2004:57).

The village's impact on Yoruba American artists is noteworthy. Artists who experienced Oyoṭúnjì were able to view for themselves how art objects and Yoruba styled aesthetics were used in the worship of òrìsà. As this movement exploded, artists produced objects that were installed on their altars/shrines, used during rituals/ceremonies, adorned their bodies, displayed at galleries and museums, and sold to an expanding consumer market. This movement also influenced the wearing of West African styled attire by African Americans and others. The dānsíkí shirt became a symbol of Black Nationalist pride during this era. John Mason, a Yoruba American priest, scholar, and prolific writer, states the following about Oyoṭunji's influence on the Yoruba American art movement:

Oyoṭúnjì served as the focal point in the United States for the renaissance of traditional Yoruba art from earlier times. There was a conscious, all-out effort to remove Catholic/slave vestiges from Yoruba worship and to reclaim the best parts of an ancient and valued past in order to build a free and enlightened future. Osejeman and Babalosa Òrìsàmola Awolowo, professionally trained artists, spearheaded this art revival and were responsible for creating the vast majority of art that was created in the early days at Oyoṭúnjì. They served as inspirational models for a host of young artists who visited, studied, or lived at Oyoṭúnjì. Thousands of African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and white Americans who followed òrìsà were influenced by the art/cultural statement presented by Oyoṭúnjì (John Mason 1994: 214)

While many of the early settlers of Oyoṭúnjì Village have spread to and settled in other parts of the USA, others have traveled to Yorubaland in Nigeria to be initiated into Ifá/òrìsà cults. An increasingly popular destination for several former Oyoṭúnjì residents and other diaspora adherents is Òṣogbo, Nigeria, the city of the river goddess Òṣun and her now famous grove.¹⁵ They go there to be initiated and trained by Chief Ifáyemi Elebuibon and his associates of babaláwos and òrìsà priests/priestesses.

¹⁵ In 2006 UNESCO recognized the Òṣun Grove on the list of World Heritage sites.

Òrìsà Conferences: Sites for the Shaping and Renewal of Collective Memory

During my fourth visit to Yorubaland in the summer of 2001, I frequently visited Elebuibon's temple/compound in Òṣogbo and met several Ifá priests, òrìsà cult priests and visitors, both male and female, from the Yoruba diaspora, including the USA, Venezuela, Jamaica, Brazil, Cuba, and Australia. Most of them were in Nigeria to attend the "7th Òrìsà World Conference" that was convened at Odùduwá Hall and Conference Centre, on the campus of Awolowo Oḅafemi University (OAU) in Ilé-Ife. Chief Elebuibon served as the conference Host Committee Chairman. Six of the visitors to Elebuibon's temple/compound had made the journey to be initiated into the Ifá cult; two came to perform their annual Ifá festival and others came to participate in the wedding ceremony for Elebuibon's eldest daughter. The atmosphere at the compound was continuously and simultaneously festive and ritualistic.

Conferences such as the one held at Oḅafemi Awolowo University during the summer of 2001 are being organized by cultural-religious groups and academic departments in a number of American and international universities, and have become central venues for the examination and display of diasporic Yoruba religion-culture, Yoruba art and aesthetics, and Yoruba systems of values, ethos, customs, and traditions. Scholars and students attending these conferences include artists, art historians, museum professionals, educators, sociologists, and anthropologists. Conferees and presenters include scholars, babaláwos, priests/priestesses, adherents, and members of the general public. Most of the participants are interested in examining some aspect of Yoruba diaspora cultural-religious practices. Participants are generally multi-ethnic, multi-national, and have recently moved towards representation that is gender sensitive. They are also representative of leadership from the international òrìsà community. Many are cultural-brokers who are engaged in influencing the direction and policies of santeria/òrìsà/Ifá religious practices.

Conference sites are also spaces that facilitate the formation of new networks and the circulation of what Clarke termed, new pedagogies of Yoruba doctrine. At these sites new tenets of Yoruba religious practices are dialogued and “set the basis for the modern production of new transnational subjectivities, subjectivities that we are now only beginning to understand” (Clarke 2004:46).

Conferences provide arenas for the staging of cultural-religious and artistic performances by local and international cultural troupes and individual artists. The programs usually include video/visual presentations to support researcher’s textual documentation. These conference sites have become central spaces where transnational Yoruba identities and ideologies are negotiated, performed, and transfigured. Conferences now serve as sites where collective memory about “traditional” and New World Yoruba religious practices are being shaped and renewed (Brandon 1993: 137).

The conference theme for 2001 was “Time is Ripe, the Òrìsà Tradition in the Twenty First Century”. The organizers included The International Congress of Òrìsà Tradition and Culture and the Institute of Cultural Studies at Obafemi Awolowo University. Professor Wande Abimbola, a babaláwo and professor at Boston University Department of Religion, and former Vice Chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University, served as the International Steering Committee Chair. The conference objectives were “to celebrate the orisa traditions, culture and spiritual experience; demonstrate unity, coherence, and interconnectedness of òrìsà traditions worldwide; work on organization, propagation and re-orientation of notions about òrìsà practices; and to prepare for challenges and prospects of the òrìsà traditions in the 21st century.” Participants included devotees, practitioners, and others interested in orisa and related religious traditions from Africa and throughout the African diaspora.

According to the conference brochure, the theme of the conference was arrived at after spiritual validation and propitiatory rites by priests, priestesses, and eminent scholars in the area of African traditional religion and spirituality. Sub-themes important to the conference agenda were “trends, policy issues and strategies for orisa cultural development; ethics, principles, scripture and values of the òrìsà systems; revitalization of the source; education, training and the orisa traditions; òrìsà traditions in the world spiritual and healing practices; technological heritage of the òrìsà tradition; and youth development and gender issues in the òrìsà tradition.”

Wande Abimbola discussed aspects of these topics during his keynote address, while other dimensions were discussed during the presentation of several topical papers and planning sessions. Abimbola specifically called for the creation and development of institutions, from primary school through higher education, organized for the training of priests/priestesses, babaláwos, and iyànifás. He stated that these institutions should award diplomas and degrees that would account for the achievements, credibility, and proficiency of Ifá/òrìsà practitioners. He suggested that these institutions should be situated throughout the Yoruba diaspora.

For Abimbola and other Yoruba scholars, Ifá remains a vast cultural/religious repository of the Yoruba philosophy of life, to be drawn upon to back up interpretations of Yoruba practices and institutions. Several languages were spoken and translated at the conference including Yoruba, English, Portuguese, Spanish, and French. The opening and closing sessions took place at Ilé-Ife, while other activities were held at Oyo (the relic of Old Oyo Empire) at the Alaafin's Palace. The reception included a session with the Alaafin and Şàngó celebrations. An important feature of the conference was the annual Òşun festival held at the Òşun Grove in Òşogbo. Conferees participated in what was described in the brochure as a “Royal reception at Àtáojá's Palace.” Various òrìsà cult groups performed oriki (praise poetry), dance, egúngún masquerades,

and skits throughout the conference. The outside plaza was pregnant with local artists performing and merchants selling art, Yoruba/òrisà religious and cultural paraphernalia, clothing and books.

Ọba Adefunmi I, the king of Ọyọtúnjí African Village and an entourage of village chiefs, traveled to Nigeria to be at the conference. Ọba Adefunmi was schedule to address the conferees, but due to health problems he was transported to the Republic of Benin.

The “8th Òrisà World Conference” convened in Havana, Cuba from July 7th to 13th, 2003 and was sponsored by the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba, and the Global Yoruba Congress committee.

The 9th International Congress of Òrisà Tradition and Culture (ÒrisàWorld 2005) convened from August 1-6, 2005, at the Universidade de Estado Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The theme of the Congress was “Òrisà Religion and Culture in the 21st Century”.

ÒrisàWorld was founded in 1981 and claims to be the world’s largest organization of practitioners and scholars that research or teach topics related to òrisà tradition, religion and culture. The ÒrisàWorld charter states that “ÒrisàWorld promotes cooperation, understanding and excellence in a world where òrisà tradition and culture plays a central role in the day-to-day lives of over 100 million people”. It is estimated that ÒrisàWorld have members, individual s and institutional, from over 50 countries. The Aims and Objectives of the organization as listed in the Charter include:

- To revitalize and rejuvenate the orisa culture and all its traditions.
- To organize periodic meetings so as to evaluate, promote and encourage dialogue on various aspects of orisa tradition and culture.
- To hold regular cultural festivals.
- To issue publications on the activities of the Congress.
- To rotate the venue of meetings from one place to another so as to increaSe knowledge of cultures and to generate mutual understanding amongst members of the Congress.

- To serve as an umbrella to all other Yoruba Cultural Organizations.

The principal organizers for this conference were, Grand Patron: HRH the Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade (Olubuse II), President: Professor Wande Abimbola (Nigeria and USA), Vice-President, Africa: Chief Ifáyemi Elebuibon. In attendance at the conference were delegates for the Caribbean, Europe, North America, South America, and Trinidad and Tobago (source: <http://www.òrìsàworld.org>) (see figure 2-10).



Figure2-1: The Old Oyotúnjí African Village Roadside Sign (2004)



Figure2-2: The New Oyotúnjí African Village Roadside Sign (2007)



Figure 2-3: Raising Village Flag (2005)



Figure 2-4: Adefunmi I and Òrìsàmola Awolowo in Harlem (1969)



Figure 2-5. Mama Keke, Queen Mother Moore, Efuntola, Sunta (1982)



Figure 2-6: Chief Òrìsàmola Awolowo- the first Alagba of Oyótúnjí African Village (1976)

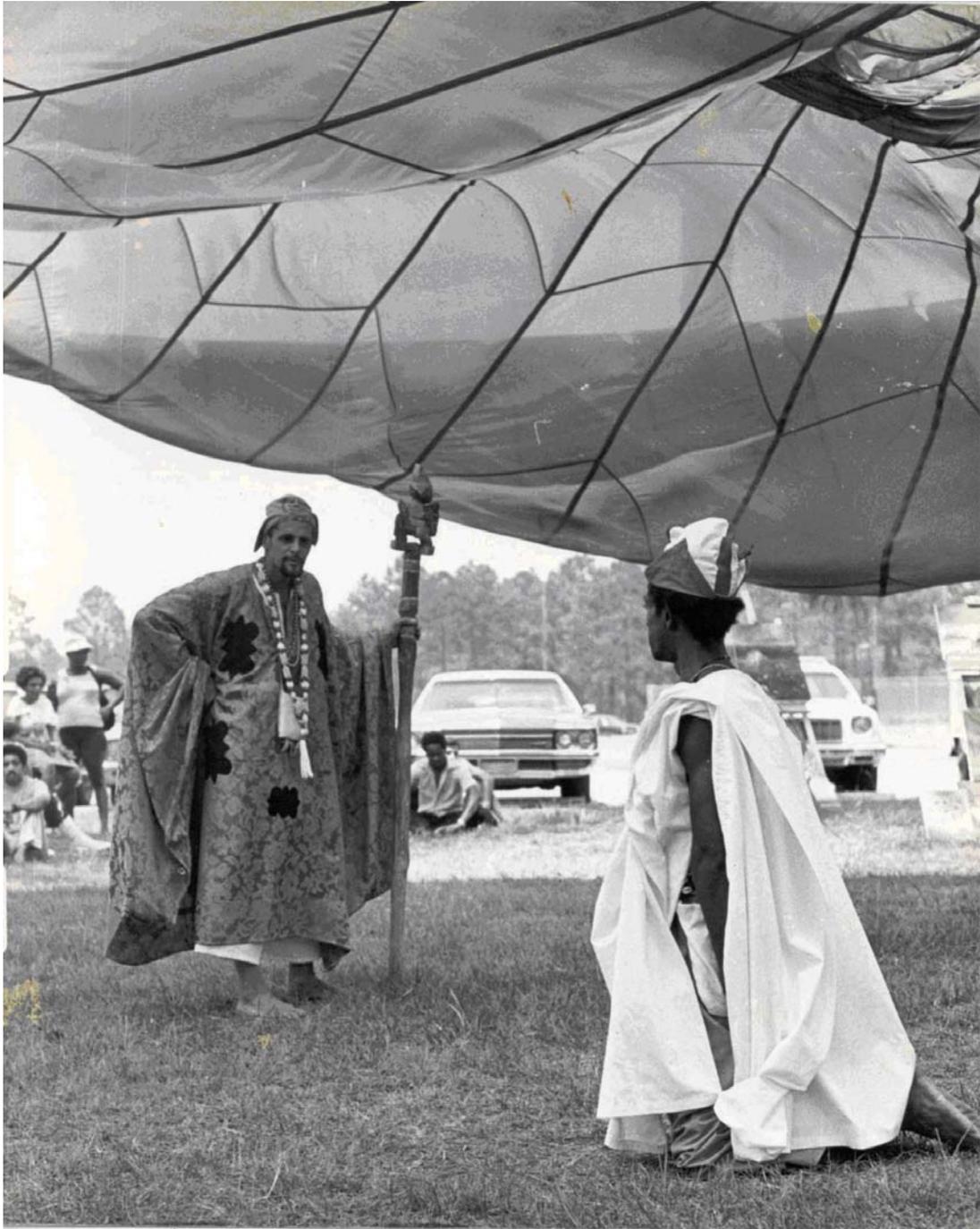


Figure 2-7: Efuntola Adefunmi I with Staff of Authority (1976)



Figure 2-8: Oyo-tunji Bata Drummers



Figure 2-9: Oyoútúnjí African Village Egúngún Seated in chairs (2005)



Figure 2-10: Oyoútúnjí African Village Egúngún dancing (2005)



Figure 2-11 Chief Alagba in front of Şàngó Temple, Oyótúnjí African Village (2005)



Figure 2-12: Chief Alagba Chanting to Egúngún, Oyoútúnjí African Village (2005)



Figure 2-13: Oyoútúnjí Egúngún dancing (2005)



Figure 2-14: Oyoṭúnjì African Village adherents and guests saluting Egúngúns (2005)



Figure 2-15: HRH Prince Aḍẹbọlu and HRG Oḍufunda at Funeral Rites for Adefunmi I, Oyoṭúnjì African Village (2005)



Figure 2-16: Oṣun Temple, Oyótúnjí African Village (2004)



Figure 2-17: Statue representing Oṣun in front of Oṣun Temple, Oyótúnjí African Village (2004)



Figure 2-18: Adefunmi's casket draped with Oyo State Flag, Oyo African Village (2005)



Figure 2-19: Royal family in attendance at Funeral of Adefunmi I, Oyo African Village (2005)



Figure 2-20: Offerings placed in front of HRH Adefunmi I Casket, Oṟótúnjí African Village (2005)



(a)



(b)



©Side view of Adefunmi's Mausoleum

Figure 2-21: Iconography attached to Royal Mausoleum (a) Royal Symbol for Reign of Adefunmi. (b) Royal Symbol on side of Mausoleum (2005)



Figure 2-22: Front View of Adefunmi's Mausoleum, Oyo-tunji African Village (2005)



Figure 2-23: Orisamola Awolowo's Burial Site (2004)



Figure2-24: HRH Adefunmi II Stands before the Kingdom at Coronation. Note the Beaded crown, Cane, and Horsetail whisk, Oyoúnjì African Village (2005)



Figure 2-25: HRH Adefunmi II with royal family, Oyo African Village (2005)



Figure 2-26: Oba in the person of Obatala, Oyo African Village (2005)



Figure 2-27: Adefunmi II seated before his kingdom for the first time, Oyo African Village (2005)



Figure 2-28: Adefunmi II dances with villagers and guest, Oyo African Village (2005)



Figure2-29: HRG Ìyá Oba Odùfunda celebrates with villagers and guest at coronation, Oyoṭúnjì African Village (2005)



Figure 2-30: Oḡbóni Society Members, Oyoṭúnjì African Village (2005)



Figure 2-31: Ìyàwó Saluting Èṣù, Oyotúnjì African Village (2005)



Figure 2-32: Oya Cult Women, Oyotúnjì African Village (2005)

CHAPTER 3 CULTURAL PLURALISMS AND PARAMETERS

African Religion and the Media

The important question of what is the indigenous religion of Africa has become an urgent one. The question expands itself to include ‘what is the nature of religion?’ and ‘of what elements is it made up?’ Experience has revealed that this is an area in which there has been much perplexity and confusion, which have resulted in the coinage of wrong descriptive nomenclatures for the religion.

The eyes of African peoples, especially African scholars, are being opened to the fact that they have a certain God-given heritage which has its own intrinsic values with which is bound the destiny of their racial soul. These values they are seeking to recover or refurbish. This is the meaning of the philosophies of identity known as ‘negritude’, ‘African personality’, etc., with their counterparts in Black Power, Black Religion, etc.

African scholars are beginning to engage themselves in serious researches into the indigenous beliefs of their peoples; African traditional religion is now a recognized course in African Universities, training colleges, and seminaries. Recently it has been listed among courses to be taught in the upper classes of secondary schools and examined for the General Certificate of Education” (Idowu 1991: x).

Although ideas about African and African American culture-production and African American-cultural nationalism within the United States evolved from the bottom-up, these ideas quickly took root and were transformed into commercial entities and products that were then mass-produced and created to aestheticise and popularize concepts that became associated with blackness, African and African American heritage, and African derived religious practices. Three popular West African influenced religious groups that emerged in the United States during the last four decades were Adefunmi’s Òrìsà-Voodoo and Oyoútúnjì African Village, Nana Dinizulu’s Akan Society. A newly formulated group founded by Ra Un Nefer Amen, Ausar Auset Society, syncretizes aspects of Egyptian cosmology with òrìsà traditions. ¹The founder of this organization is believed to have received instructions about òrìsà worship and the òrìsà

¹ For more details about Nana Dinizulu’s Akan Society and/or the Ausar Auset Society visit these websites: Ausar Auset Society, www.uaia.org/aas/aboutaas.htm, USA Akan Society, www.dinizulu.org/

cosmology from Adefunmi I, during the time in which he was establishing the ideological precepts for his group. Although members from these groups have migrated throughout the United States, each of the groups was founded in Harlem and Queens in New York. As a consequence of these developments and the intermingling of group members, religious knowledge and customs that were once considered to be secret and sacred within the Ifá/òrisà-Voodoo and Santeria circles are now available to consumers who can afford the cost of the many books written about the subject, initiation fees, airline tickets to Nigeria or Ghana, and/or Internet access. Cuba, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Haiti are also sites that are frequented by many who are interested in gaining insight into the practices of these religious/cultural groups. Although each of the above mentioned groups require initiation into its priesthood, not all of the groups designate a period of time for initiates to live as Ìyàwó or priest in training, but each group does have a proscribed training program. For example, the Akan Society requires a three year training period. This time is marked by its associated rites and ceremonies.

Locating Visual Documentation

The most informed visual documentation of these rites that I have been able to locate is a 1978 documentary film “Iawo” directed by Geraldo Sarno. The film was made in Brazil and examines the Candomble traditions of Yoruba- descended Afro-Brazilians. It shows the initiation of a group of women into a temple and provides a glimpse into the nuances of one of many local groups that practice a variation of African derived religions. The forty minute film examines the religion, its ideology and social meaning. (For a contemporary account of Candomble in Brazil see J. Lorand Matory, “Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomble”, also see, Ruth Landes, “The City of Women”).

Another informed account of the Ìyàwó experience is an Internet site titled “The Ìyàwó Experience.” At this site a newly initiated priest journals his year long tribulations, after having been crowned with Ọṣun in New York City in accordance with the Cuban Ocha traditions. This chronicle offers an example of how the Internet and its cyberspace channels are allowing onlookers to access the òrisà “experience.” (<http://www.angelfire.com/my/ÌyàwóExperience/>).

While the documentary film and the Internet journal differ in their focus and approach to discussing the experiential importance of being initiated, they demonstrate visual content that could be useful for anthropological or interdisciplinary research, observation and analysis. This content includes display of objects and paraphernalia that the initiates are made to wear and/or ingest. It also includes filmed images of rituals, ceremonies, costumes, socialization processes, and segments of ceremonial songs and dance performances.

This type of cinematic emphasis on African and African-American culture production took root with the publication and subsequent broadcasting of Alex Haley’s *Roots: Saga of an American Family* (1976) Clarke (2004:114) writes that the film “was the most significant event in the ideological transformation of black American identities in the twentieth century.” Its inclusion of members of Ọyótúnjí African Village as ritual performers during Kunta Kinte’s manhood rites of passage initiation spawned the introduction of a genre of films that highlighted rituals, language, performance, and experiences that were obviously Yoruba influenced. Since that time several independent film makers have produced documentaries and docu-dramas that have explored the historical dimensions of what Clarke termed “Ideological transformations.”²

² It is important to note that while these film makers were working with limited budgets to re-focus the emphasis placed on African religion and ideologue, Hollywood producers were continuing to release films that sensationalized and demonized African originated cultural/religious experiences. The *Serpent and the Rainbow* was a popular film during the 90s.

Two important films that were produced subsequently were *Daughters of the Dust* by Howard University trained filmmaker Julie Dash, and *Sankofa* by Haile Gerima, an Ethiopian faculty member in Howard University's film department. Both of these films demonstrate identity transformations and employ Yoruba influenced iconography, language, rituals, and performances.

In the case of *Sankofa*, Gerima selected Yoruba names for his principal characters and implanted initiation rites as essential to the process of transformation from a consciousness of servitude to one of liberation. Julie Dash's film incorporates songs and iconography that are popular in the transatlantic Yoruba diaspora. These songs and imagery serve to connect coeval knowledge with historical events and points out how movement away from the "old ways" represented a form of initiation and rites of passage into modernity and a turn away from ideas that were African originated and deemed outmoded and essentially malevolent.

The development of this genre of films occurred simultaneously in the United States, Brazil, and Cuba. Two Brazilian *bàṣéd* films that depict ideological and identity transformations are *Tenda Dos Milagres* (Tent of Miracles) by Nelson Pereira (1977) and *Quilombo* directed by Rodolfo Brandao (1991). These films focus on persecution and resistance and situate Yoruba derived practices as central to their themes. The films also highlight the concourse that exists between Catholicism and Indigenous African religion provides viewers with a sense of the internal conflicts experienced by enslaved Africans, and the complicity of the Roman Catholic Church in the slave trade. Cuban born filmmaker Gloria Rolando's *Ogunn's Eternal Presence* (1992) opens with a recounting of the pataki (myths) of the Yoruba gods Ogun and Ọṣun. The film features an interview with Lazaro, the famed Cuban singer, scenes from a toque (Yoruba ceremony) in Havana with members of the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional). The film captured the

imagination of an international audience of viewers who were able to identify with the iconographic associations made by this artist. (For a list of films see Filmography section). Other docu-dramatic films produced during this time include *Voice of the Gods*, filmed in the United States, produced by Akuaba Productions and directed by Alfred Santana (1985). This film highlights Oyóúnjí African village's foundation days and includes interviews with Adefunmi I and Nana Dinizulu, founder of the Akan temple. It also provides a glimpse into aspects of an Akan initiation ceremony. Another important film is Cuban produced, *Voices of the Orishas* (1994) directed by Alvaro Perez Betancourt. The films cast performers and narrators that include priests and adherents, who bring experiential knowledge to the narratives and performances.

These types of cinematic and Internet displays are important to transnationalist, identity, cultural, ideological and transformation theory analysis, and provide data that allow viewers to witness practices and possibly incongruities in the types of experiences, situations, and environs that are essential to the processes that initiates and adherents must undergo. Furthermore, the films and Internet sites are arenas that may provide new terrain, scope, and imagery and may prove useful in recasting how anthropological inquiry and research methodology is informed and utilized in research that examines transnationalism and popular notions about Africanisms in the diaspora. (See figures 1-1 and 1-2).

Elitism vs. Nationalism: Who Determines Traditions?

There is not a singular way of being an initiate or to practice indigenous African religions. The disparities that exist between Candomble, òrìsà-vooodoo, and Santeria/Lucumi practices and the debates about “traditions” and “authenticity” can be heard at academic conferences, viewed on Internet sites, and in the communities of worshippers and priests. For some who claim to be practitioners of “Yoruba religion,” initiation and tradition are not important. Recently I was

informed that some individuals who never were initiated, who are claiming to be priests.³

Currently several internet sites advise and inform newcomers to òrìsà practices, covering topics that include how to find a priest, how to join an òrìsà family, and how to recognize whether or not someone has the credentials or experience that they claim to have.

Why would anyone make false claims about initiation and priesthood credentials? Priests do earn an income from the services they provide to clients. These services may include initiation, divination consultations and/or making an offering or animal sacrifice to the gods or ancestors. The cost of these items may vary and can be substantial. Cost and the need to pay for these services are always points for discussion and debate by adherents and outsiders. There are no standardized fees and there have been reports of people being misled, falsely advised, or in several instances “robbed” of their money by priests and others claiming to be priests. These kinds of incidences and adverse media coverage place the religion in a negative light and create a religious milieu where practitioners are discontented and transient.

Adverse media coverage of the religion occurs in Nigeria, the cradle of Yoruba civilization, as well as in the United States. Cros Sandoval (2007:331) states the following about the media and Santeria:

Since the beginning of the Cuban Diaspora, Santeria has enjoyed as well as suffered from much media attention. In the United States, television programs, newspapers, and popular magazines have been fascinated by Santeria. The phenomenon of white santeros has been especially puzzling to the press. While reporting on Santeria in the United States and elsewhere the media have also reported on what were perceived as bizarre sacrifices of animals. With increasing appearances of sacrificed animals in rivers, by railroad tracks, at intersections, by sacred trees, and in other places in Miami and elsewhere, some alarmed residents have contacted the Humane Society. Others have called the local police to denounce the practice of Santeria. The interactions between the police and santeros have also brought frequent, though not positive, visibility to Santeria because the press has been eager to cover these esoteric practices and inform the public about them.

³ Inauthentic initiations and priests' integrity are popular discussions in the Yoruba religious community and on Internet sites. The information that I received was during a private discussion with Elebuibon in 2005.

During the course of this research project, I have heard numerous accounts from informants and friends about treatments that resulted in some form of abuse or inappropriate use of power. There were several instances in which someone was initiated to serve the wrong òrìsà and had to be initiated a second time. For those that I interviewed the experience was financially costly and psychologically debilitating. There have also been reports of suicides by priests and of priests who discarded their objects of worship. It was for these and several other reasons, that the three Ìyàwós discussed in this dissertation selected to turn to Yorubaland and the tutelage of Elebuibon.

Three Ìyàwós Pilgrimage, Rituals, and Kismetics

On Thursday evening, August 5th, 2005, three women from distinct backgrounds became three Ìyàwó. They were to remain Ìyàwó for varying lengths of time. The literal Yoruba translation for the word Ìyàwó is wife, bride, spouse or any married woman. In the context of òrìsà/Ifá practices Ìyàwó means bride of the òrìsà. Every person that is initiated into any one of the “traditional” òrìsà sects must be an Ìyàwó. This designation stands regardless of gender or age. However, new- age groups are emerging that perform initiation rites that deviate from conventional practices. The event in which these three became Ìyàwós took four days and ended on Sunday evening of the same week.

This *phàṣé* of my research examines the processes that the three Ìyàwós engaged in during their initiations and looks at ways in which their worldviews are transformed as they interact with and are instructed by their godfather, Ifáyemi Elebuibon. It also looks at how their choice to be initiated moved each of them to particular sets of actions or inaction, decisions or indecision.

My inquiry is privileged by the fact that I am an insider-participant. Being an insider I became involved in several situations where it became necessary for me to suspend my academic

focus as an objective observer-participant and immerse myself into the process, as practitioner. While it is not my intent to call into question the merits of scientific objectivity, it is my hope that this research demonstrates the importance of up-close, front-door scholarship.

Historically, scholarship and research has been the domain of financially or politically privileged academics that possessed the wherewithal to buy access to and favors from informants. Insider scholarship enables researchers who have gained capital through long years of engagement and participation in closed communities to observe, participate in, and provide analysis to subject areas that were formerly unapproachable. It also enables and cultivates a collaborative research environment in which the community being investigated is aware of the researcher's agenda and intent. It contributes to the breaking down of barriers that prevent up-close observations and in depth analysis. In the case of this particular research with my insider's passport, I was able to film and record segments of rituals that provide visual and audio evidence of ceremonies, rituals, and processes that makes possible the transformation that is experienced by new initiates, and oftentimes the silent observer. While much has been written about Ifá/òrisà-vooodoo/ Santeria/Lucumi over the past three decades, very little has been documented in the way of visual evidence of the processes surrounding initiation and/or worship. This is especially true in diaspora communities that constructed walls of secrecy when it was necessary to keep African religious practices out of the purview of plantation owners, enslavers, and law enforcers to avoid persecution and castigation.

In July 1998 Chief Ifáyemi visited Archer, Florida, as the guest of Bábá Onabamiero Ogunleye and Botanica Ifálola. This event was co-sponsored by Ifá Culture Center in Meddletonville, North Carolina, and Mahogany Revue Foundation, a Central Florida African American newspaper. At a naming ceremony for one of Onabamiero's daughters, Chief Ifáyemi

lectured on traditional African Culture. The discussion topics ranged from rites of passage, ancestral worship, destiny, and divination. Dancing, drumming and story telling followed the lecture.

During November 2002, Chief Ifáyemi returned to Archer, as a part of his United States circuit. Onabamiero Ogunleye arranged the visit to enable family members, adherents and clients to perform specialized rituals with the more experienced babaláwo and to be a planning session for a more extensive visit to the area by Chief Ifáyemi. Ifáyemi remained in the Archer area for about five days and performed Ifá consultations and rituals for twenty-two people, including a toddler, two teenagers, and several adolescents and adults. The population serviced was from different ethnicities, genders, and nationalities, including white and black Cubans, a Jamaican, and African Americans. Three U.S. based babaláwos that were initiated at Ifáyemi's Òṣogbo compound and who are being trained by him assisted with the rituals.

Elebuibon returned to Ifálola Compound in Archer and Ilé Òrìsànlá Center in Hawthorne, Florida during the summer of 2005. This visit was scheduled so that he could initiate the three women and a man. Two of the women were initiated into the Òṣun priesthood. One woman and the male were initiated to the Òrìsànlá/Òbàtálá sect. The male initiate was one of the babaláwos that had been initiated in Òṣogbo. He had been initiated and crowned with Òṣun earlier in his life. This recent initiation to Òbàtálá/Òrìsànlá was the result of an Ifá consultation. The initiate stated that he was not comfortable with the integrity of the people who did the Òṣun ceremony and that the Ifá consultation confirmed his assumption.

During this visit, Chief Ifáyemi also presented me with the object that represents orí (inner head or super-ego) and performed the annual feeding of my ikin Ifá (consecrated kola nuts) and met with several visitors who had traveled from as far away as Atlanta and New Orleans for Ifá

consultation. Two of the visitors were Babaláwos who had also been initiated in Òṣogbo by Ifáyemi. The visiting babaláwos came for consultations for themselves and each brought someone for consultation with Ifá. Both of the uninitiated visitors were male. All of the initiations, Ifá consultations, rituals and ceremonies were performed at Onabamiero's Ifálola compound.

Ifáyemi is a master teacher and brings his vast knowledge of Yoruba traditions, performance and history to his international cadre of students and clients. His pedagogy reinforces and strengthens the African Diaspora's interest in Yoruba culture and traditions. By placing emphasis on what he terms "traditional", Ifáyemi aids his students and clients in making connections with an endemic past. For many New World Africans, this past has been largely situated in slavery and the descendants of those who were enslaved have for the most part experienced an expansive void in their connection with an indigenous African-inspired ethos. At the heart of this ethos is a reverence for ancestors, biological and imagined, and a worship of a pantheon of spirit forces that resembles the life sustaining elements of the universe.

Individuals are drawn to consultations for any of a number of reasons. Some come seeking advice about health issues; others come for concerns that may involve finances, legal matters, relationships, and /or cultural/spiritual upliftment. No matter the reason or reasons for the consultation, most attendees are informed that some ritual that may include an offering or sacrifice must be performed. The oblations may be as simple as a presentation of fruits or it may involve the sacrifice of an animal. The animal is usually a fowl or a goat. For Şàngó it could be a turtle or for Ògún a dog. The formulation of the offered ingredients is determined during the consultation and are usually concocted and administered by the attendant priest or babaláwo. However, there are several publications and Internet sites that prescribe concoctives that are not

“standardized” and that can be self administered. I recently purchased a book authored by Shannon R. Turlington (2002), *“The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Voodoo”*. The author claims that the book will provide the reader with insights into “the history and mysteries of this misunderstood religion,” “ancient wisdom on the meaning of voodoo rituals,” and “expert guidance on making your own protective charms.” The book is written to appeal to a lay audience and lacks the integrity and experiential elements that are essential to building the kind of good character (iwa pele) that Ifá demands and that disciplined priests must adhere to. The formulas that are prescribed in it are generic and are of the types that appeal to a growing body of individuals and groups that look for packaged, easy to apply, solutions to their concerns. While it may be reasonable to suggest that these remedies provide emotional and psychological recourse for some subscribers, they lack the fey and potential that is inherent in the relationships that exist between adherents and priests.

Ceremonies and rituals that are performed during initiation are intended to disrupt and disorientate the initiate’s consciousness and to reinstate her/him as a newly created being. For most of the millions of priests/priestesses in the Yoruba diaspora, this disruption usually begins with an Ifá consultation with a babaláwo or a méréndilógún (sixteen cowry shells) reading with a priest. At these sessions, the person being consulted is sometimes advised that they must participate in some level of initiation.

Priests are agents of transformation. The good ones are committed to the people they serve and members of their families or house. The bad ones add stress to lives that are already stressed. I don’t personally know any of the bad ones, but I have heard many reports from informants and friends. In my almost thirty years of involvement, I have interacted with many priests from throughout the diaspora. I have had several godfathers and have engaged in several stages of

initiation. My godfathers were all cultural pedagogues, artists, entrepreneurs, deeply entrenched in the struggle to bring Yoruba cultural expressions into their families and communities.

The relationship that Ìyàwós must have with their godparent(s) and the initiation rites that they must undergo are simultaneously demonstrative of agency and acquiescence, resistance and conformity. This relationship usually begins with a consultation or reading. The instruments used to perform the reading may vary depending on whether the reader is a babaláwo (Ifá Priest) or a priest in any one of the òrìsà sects. Ifá priests use an opele chain or ikin Ifá; other priests generally use méréndilógún (sixteen cowry shells). There is no standardized cost for a reading; the fee may range from \$25.00 to \$100.00. It is usually determined by the priest that is doing the work. The time that it takes to conduct a reading also varies; it could be very brief or it could last for several hours. The cost and the time depend on the skills of the diviner and/or the relationship that exists between the diviner and the person being read. Professional diviners are oftentimes very busy and have client/priest relationships. Many priests are not diviners; some serve in other ritual or ceremonial capacities. While most initiates aspire towards the priesthood, some never serve in the body of priests. Instead they live their lives privately, serving only their òrìsà. How one should live out their lives after initiation is revealed during the ita ceremony, which is an important part of the initiation rites.

The choice to have Ifáyemi initiate the three Ìyàwós was influenced by the babaláwo/priests that were being trained by him. The two women that were given to Ọ̀ṣun had made a previous pilgrimage to Ọ̀ṣogbo and visited Ọ̀ṣun's grove, bathed in her sacred river, and propitiated her to enhance their lives. One of the two women had spent time at Ifáyemi's compound; Ifáyemi performed Ifá divination and made several sacrifices and offerings to various

òrìsà for this woman. In fact, we met Ifáyemi at the same time and performed several rites together. It was during this time that I was initiated to Ifá.

The third woman had never been to Yorubaland and had never met Ifáyemi. Her introduction to Yoruba culture and Ifáyemi was sponsored by Onabamiero Ogunleye, Ifáyemi's godson and spiritual father of Ifálola Compound in Archer. Onabamiero is also the person who directed me to see Ifáyemi during my stay in Ilé Ife, Nigeria. Like me, the three women wanted an initiation experience that was disconnected from the Cuban Lucumi rites that are practiced in the USA and at the same time, they wanted a more "authentic" Yoruba investiture.

Despite the fact that an increasing number of people are selecting to have their rites performed in Yorubaland or by a babaláwo or priest from "home", this choice does not come without controversy and concerns. Cuban styled Santeria/Lucumi rites dominate the USA òrìsà worldview. (For more on this system, see David H. Brown's, *Santeria Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*). For some African Americans the break with the Santeria/Lucumi practices began during the 1960s with Adefunmi's refusal to continue to include worship of the pantheon of Catholic saints that are associated with the Afro-Cuban practices and his establishment of temples in Harlem, New York, Oyoótúnjí African Village in Sheldon and his development of an African styled aesthetics, iconography, and use of the Yoruba language and institutions (see J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*, 2005, Kamari M. Clarke, *Mapping Yoruba Networks: Power and Agency in The Making of Transnational Communities*, 2004, David H. Brown, *Santeria Enthroned: Art, ,Ritual, and innovation in An Afro Cuban Religion*, 2003, Carl M. Hunt, *Oyoótúnjí Village: The Yoruba Movement in America*, 1979).

The controversies that existed between Adefunmi and the Cubans were many and included a threat on Adefunmi's life by Cuban priests and a disassociation from Adefunmi and his followers by Santeria/Lucumi priests and practitioners. As stated previously, Ifáyemi claimed that during his earlier affiliation with Cuban babaláwo in Miami, he was warned against going to Harlem and working with the "blacks." He also stated that he found this interdiction to be odd and offensive. At one point during our discussion he pointed to his arm and exclaimed, "The people that I was being warned against, look just like me."

For the most part, these types of rifts between Cubans (mostly white Cubans) and African American priests no longer exist. However, the contestations and disparities in practices, aesthetics, and iconography still points towards a compelling difference in worldview and relationship with Yorubaland for African-American and Cuban adherents. These differences play themselves out significantly in initiation rites, ceremonies, and cultural performances. They are also apparent in the ways that Ìyàwós are orientated and in the ways in which Ìyàwós conduct themselves during their pedagogic period.

Most of the people who are brought to the grove or "room" to receive òrìsà have no idea of what the rites will entail. This "unknowingness" is partly due to the fact that the uninitiated are forbidden to enter the sacred space and because what goes on in that space is regarded as sacred and secret. The mysteries of these traditions are the reserved privilege of only the priests and officiates that are conducting the rituals. Access to this specialized knowledge is what distinguishes priests and is in large part the reason for the aforementioned controversies and contestations and exorbitant expenditures associated with initiation.

Except for extraordinary cases, neophytes are required to pay in advance the full cost of initiation. The price usually amounts to several thousand dollars. Santeria/Lucumi initiations

might cost as much as ten thousand dollars (\$10,000). In a few exceptional cases, priests perform initiations at no cost or for whatever amount of money the initiate can afford. In some cases, remuneration is worked out in service to the community. This method of payment was popularized during the establishment of Oyoútúnjí African Village. In rare cases the òrìsà will demand that a person be initiated at no cost to the initiate.

Ifáyemi allows for some payments to be made in installments. Because he is based in Nigeria, payments are usually sent to him via Western Union money transactions. In addition to this and several other shifts in direction, Ifáyemi only gives a single òrìsà or the òrìsà that guides the head of the Ìyàwó. This is another practice that was executed by Adefunmi at Oyoútúnjí and disputed by the Cuban priests. In the Santeria/Lucumi tradition, initiates are given seven òrìsà (for more details on Santeria/Lucumi initiation customs see J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*) and are instructed to care for and serve the seven òrìsà. Adefunmi and Ifáyemi give additional òrìsà to initiates at the command of Ifá. Some òrìsà require initiates to receive more than one òrìsà to balance their lives or to aid in the work that their kismet dictates they perform.

Deference for their personal destinies and socio-cultural heritage are at the core of the three Ìyàwós' rationale for being initiated. For them initiation signifies a return to the ways of an ancestral past and a connection to Yoruba gods that are situated at the forefront of the creation of all life. Tales and allegories that allude to creation and the beginning of humankind in Ilé Ifé are woven into the odù and Ifá myths that are given to initiates and adherents during divination and more recently in the volumes of literature that have been published about Yoruba mythology. Even though many of these tales are seemingly fantastic and epigrammatic they are the substance of Yoruba cosmology, theology, and phenomena. Divination, ceremonies, and rituals provide access to an experiential understanding of this triadic composition.

During the initiation of the three Ìyàwós, I was able to participate in and observe the processes that enabled the women to gain entrance to the gateway of self discovery, personal transformation, and historical knowledge as Ifáyemi divined for each of them, while his assistants performed the requisite rituals. The three women who came to this experience were hoping for and expecting transformation. They knew coming in that they were about to see and learn some things about themselves and gain access to another level of consciousness , a sense of being present to an unraveling of innate knowledge, which is also about themselves. They came to be directed to a path that leads to a clearer understanding of some of the mysteries of the òrìsà. The hopes and expectations of these women were based on their own life experiences and observations of other people who they knew who were involved in some form of òrìsà practice.

The ritual space in which the lives of the Ìyàwós would be transformed was small, and the instruments used to perform the feat were few. The space was created by Onabamiero and approximates Ifáyemi's temple room in Òṣogbo. His family's spiritual shrines, objects for ancestral spirits, Èṣù, Ifá, and Òrìsànlá are kept in it, along with an assortment of ritual paraphernalia. He attached an adjacent room for the Ìyàwós' initiation and expanded the space to accommodate the ritual and ceremonies. It also served as a space for the Ìyàwós to sleep, meditate, and receive instructions during the four days.

This was the most important initiation that Onabamiero had hosted at his compound. It is a telling story of the growth and potential of Ifálola compound and of the vision Onabamiero and his wife Olapatun have for establishing the spiritual hub in their home. At compound Ifálola,

they have transformed a two acre area, on a seven acre tract into an enchanting and sacred space.⁴

Organizing the event took several long distance interstate phone calls to the women, their sponsors, and Ifáyemi, who was at the time, based in Los Angeles, California. Ifáyemi owns and carries with him at all times two cell phones that he uses to keep him connected to family members in several different countries and his network of priests/students, and clients. His phone is constantly busy as he negotiates consultations, arranges rituals, and settles payment arrangements. His travel and living arrangements are managed and paid for by those who commission his services. In the case of this initiation the sponsors and three Ìyàwós were responsible for paying his expenses and making all of the travel arrangements.

The three women traveled from their homes in New York, South Carolina, and Florida, to Compound Ifálola to be initiated. Although they had been communicating with each other via telephone, the meeting in Archer would be their first face to face encounter. In fact, I was the only person present who had previous experiences with the entire group of women. Ìyàwó Tolu (Òrìsàtolu – òrìsà is king) and I have been friends for almost thirty years. Her son Ade is one of my godsons; Ìyàwó Wembe (Òrìsàwembe) and I were graduate students at the University of Florida and traveled to Ilé Ife together to study the Yoruba Language at Obafermi Awolowo University (OAU). Ìyàwó Talabi (Òrìsàtalabi) and I both taught at Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, Florida. All three are professional women and are affiliated with academic institutions.

The transformation that they are seeking through initiation includes enhancements in their professional and private lives. In addition to their interests in the healing arts, these women are

⁴ see article “*The Sacred Space of Compound Ifalola and Baba Onabamiero Ogunleye*” by Robin Poyner and Ade Ofunniyin for additional information about Compound Ifalola and the Ogunleye family

cultural teachers. They have created lives for themselves that personify and display their intent on an African presence. The clothing that they wear, how they accessorize their bodies, create their living environments and express their moral and social values, speaks to their focus and commitment to personal well being and the well being of others. These ideas are at the heart of what Ifá teaches. Engagement in some form of artistic expression and/or the healing arts is a common point of interest with many of the adherents in the various communities in which I conducted my research. I will revisit the topic of art and healing more extensively later in this work.

Initiation for these women began the moment they agreed that it was time for them to receive òrìsà. Because of my long standing relationship with Ìyàwó Tolu and Ìyàwó Wembe, I was involved with helping them to work out the logistics and resolve some of the issues that determined their decisions to be initiated at this time. I had previously discussed the possibility of traveling to Òṣogbo to Ifáyemi Compound with both women. Ìyàwó Tolu and I had determined to make our journey during the summer of 2006. Ifáyemi's presence in the U.S. seemed providential and pushed everyone's initiation agenda forward.

Preparations for the three Ìyàwós involved shopping for clothing to be worn in the room and clothing to be worn during the coming out ceremony. They also had to purchase white sheets, towels, and vessels that would be used to house their òrìsà objects and contain water. All of the items had to be new, the clothing items had to be the color that corresponded with the color associated with each Ìyàwó's particular òrìsà. For example, Ìyàwó Tolu and Ìyàwó Wembe decided on two outfits, one yellow, and the other green for their coming out attire. Those colors correspond with Òṣun's colors. Since Ìyàwó Talabi's guardian òrìsà is Òrìsànlá/Òbàtálá she wore white clothing for the entire affair. All of the women wore white during the two nights that

they stayed in the room. The coming out ceremony was on the third day of the initiation. The women formed their own network and divided the tasks of locating and acquiring the various items that they were responsible for providing.

Preparations also included arranging leave time from work, making travel arrangements, and a conference call with Ifáyemi to determine which òrìsà will guide each of the Ìyàwó's fate. After getting the necessary information from the women, Ifáyemi was able to ascertain this through consulting Ifá. The women also made arrangements for the finances to cover the expense of traveling, the cost of the actual initiation, and the cost of any other services that might be required or desired and not covered in the initiation cost.

Additional services sometimes include rituals that come up during any one of the several readings that are performed during initiation or receiving multiple òrìsà. An example of this is the receipt of ikin Ifá by Ìyàwó Wembe and Ìyàwó Talabi, immediately following their initiation to Ọṣun and Ọbàtálá. Ìyàwó Wembe also wanted to receive orí but decided instead to do it at another time. It is often the case that during the ita ceremony that Ifá advises that additional work must be performed and/or additional òrìsà must be received to fortify the life of the recipient. Ifáyemi usually advises that time and long life is the favor of Ifá. The final cost paid by each Ìyàwó for the services rendered during this initiation was approximately \$5,000- \$6,000. The money was parceled out to Ifáyemi in cash during the several different phases of the ceremonies and was paid to him in cash.

The three sponsoring babaláwo were responsible for providing the animals, condiments, and several of the objects that were to be used. Although it is not nearly as difficult as in urban areas, locating and procuring animals always takes special planning. Because we had never initiated anyone at this site before, we had no real idea of the exact number of pigeons, roosters,

hens, guinea fowls, goats, and snails that would be required. The best that we could do was estimate based on previous rituals that we had performed. We knew about the items that the òrìsà that we were working with usually requested or accepted. Between the three of us we had many of the necessary things. Our approximations were inaccurate and we had to go in search of animals and items several times during the actual initiation rites. Ifáyemi was to bring the items that were unavailable locally from Nigeria.

There are certain rituals that Ifáyemi refuses to perform outside of Nigeria. His claim is that the needed ingredients are “only available in Africa” and in some instances exclusively in Nigeria. However, items that were rare and difficult to acquire are becoming increasingly available through online purchases, from itinerant vendors specializing in indigenous African products, and in specialty shops. An assortment of objects, condiments, livestock, herbs and food items are essential to the formulation of the sacred initiation rites. The inventory of four legged animals and fowls required for the rituals necessitated several trips to vendors that were as far as fifty miles away. Many of the required initiation ritual condiments are items that might be suitable for general household use and the food items may be found in the diets of people who practice indigenous religion or people from South America or the Caribbean Islands.

In the cinematic representation of Alex Haley’s *Roots* Kunta kinte was veiled by his father, led away from his family’s compound, and delivered into the care of the priests that were to perform his initiation rites. This experience mimics what initiates into the Lucumi/Santeria and Oyoúnjí’s òrìsà-voodoo must undergo. It is often the case that the new initiate is visited at their home on the scheduled evening of their designated time to “go under”. Their eyes are veiled and they are led away from their homes and taken to a river or body of water and stripped of the clothes that they were wearing. They are then bathed with soap (preferably Yoruba black soap)

and herbs (omièrò) that are selected for this ritual. This first phase of the initiation signals the Ìyàwó's departure from her former life.

The Ìyàwó is then taken to the site where the remaining segments of the ritual will occur. She/he is sequestered in a room, apart from the priests who are busy with the preparation of the formulae that are to be used during the rituals. There she/he is expected to sit quietly and await the experience.

The priests that are chosen to work initiations are usually members in the house/community of the Ìyàwó's godparent(s) and are often godchildren of the same godparent(s). Initiation rites organized by Ifáyemi and his American godchildren depart from these practices and are designed to be efficient, to meet the needs of a metropolitan, working class clientele. Attention to economy, efficiency and working class interests is a constant in Ifáyemi's pedagogy. Noting his attention to these values is important in that they are reflective of his own interest in upward mobility and his understanding of and attention to the myriad of situations from which his clients are drawn. He states that, "the ways that Santeria rituals are organized are what Africans had to do when they were in bondage." (This remark was offered to the Ìyàwós during one of the instructional segment of the initiation, in response to a question posed by one of the Ìyàwós). With belief in their impending transformation, the three Ìyàwós began their rituals a little after dusk on the determined evening. The three women gathered in Olapatun and Onabamiero's home and waited their turn to be summoned into the temple for their consultations with Ifá.

Olapatun served as the Apètèbí for the Ìyàwós for the entire event. She worked nonstop as she was responsible for food preparation for all of the òrìsà and the participants. She also

attended the needs of the women, escorted them to and from the bathroom, and sometimes accompanied them as they placed their offerings and sacrifices at the designated destinations.

Compound Ifálola is situated in a fairly secluded rural environment and proved to be an ideal site for the rituals. There are several places in the neighboring woods where the slaughtered animals and offerings can be placed. Ritual animals are not always slaughtered; Ifá sometimes decrees that they be set free. The most frequent destinations for the placement of the offerings and sacrifices during these rituals were at crossroads, at the side of roads, in the woods (Igbo), at the railroad for Ògún, and at the local cemetery for the ancestors (egúns). The Ifálola compound location was also suitable because animals that are about to be slaughtered are noisy, and goats can sometimes sound like a wailing baby. Even though animal sacrifice is no longer illegal in the State of Florida, discretion is still the rule when performing these types of cultural/religious activities.

Ìyàwó Tolu, being the eldest of the three women, was the first to come into the room for her consultation. She was senior to the other women in age and in her involvement with the religion. Ìyàwó Wembe was second in line and Ìyàwó Talabi, being the youngest, was last. The three women came to the experience with their hair in dreadlocks that had taken a number of years for each to grow.

The Ifá consultations were performed to determine what hecatombs and/or food items had to be given to the òrisàs and ancestors before the commencement of the formal initiation rites. Although the order of the readings was similar, the results were different for each Ìyàwó.

Ifáyemi recited the Ifá odù in the Yoruba language. He then interpreted the reading and the prescribed remedies into English. The Ìyàwós and sponsors only understood a small portion of what he said in his native language. The focus was on the intended results. Each of the Ìyàwós

was instructed to make her prayers to the animals and objects that were being presented. Their prayers to the Yoruba gods were in English. Some prayers were uttered and some were said in silence. Ifáyemi stated that “there is no language that òrísá does not understand.” The consultations and subsequent rituals lasted into the night and ended around midnight.

A Lucumi initiation

As ethnographer I am using my personal experiences as primary data/ and narrative material as a way of demonstrating historical connections between characters and events that were and continue to be central to the development of Yoruba American/ Santeria/Ifá worshipping communities. Catherine Russell (1999: 280) discusses autoethnography as a technique of self-representation,

The autoethnographic subject blurs the distinction between ethnographer and Other by traveling, becoming a stranger in a strange land, even if that land is a fictional space existing only in representation. As a diary of a journey, the travelogue *produces* an otherness in the interstices of the fragmented “I” of the filmic, textual self. As the memory of the trip become enmeshed with historical processes and cultural differences, the filmic image becomes the site of a complex relationship between “I” was there” and “this is how it is”.

Michael Fischer has argued that “ethnic autobiography” should be recognized as a model of postmodern ethnography. Autobiography is a technique of self-representation that is not a fixed form but is in constant flux. He describes “contemporary autobiography” as an exploration of the fragmented and dispersed identities of late twentieth-century pluralist society. In this context, ethnic autobiography is an “art of memory” that serves as protection against the homogenizing tendencies of modern industrial culture. Moreover, autobiography has become a powerful tool of cultural criticism, paralleling postmodern theories of textuality and knowledge. Fischer describes the “writing tactics” of autoethnography thus: “Contemporary ethnic autobiographies partake of the mood of metadiscourse, of drawing attention to their linguistic and fictive nature, of using the narrator as an inscribed figure within the text whose manipulation calls attention to authority structures” (276).

I argue that these accounts of my experiences and my interpretation demonstrates what Kristina Wirtz discusses in her examination of some of the ways in which Cuban Santeria practitioners from the city of Santiago de Cuba in eastern Cuba dealt with and interpreted what it

means when a “promise” is made to an òrìsà and the òrìsà seemingly respond by making possible a situation that may have appeared impossible or unattainable:

...The very idea of the “promise” as a category of religiously relevant activity circulates because practitioners persist in identifying certain of their own and others’ acts as being promises... a promise is a religious interpretation of an act that, on the surface, may not appear to be religious (or that may even have been silent and hidden until being revealed as a promise). To label something as a promise reinforces the idea of divine communication at the core of Santeria and related practices, because it is keeping one’s own end of a bargain, presumably after the divine being has kept its end too. Promises aren’t in themselves experiences, but are about narrativizing a series of experiences to become a sacred story: An intractable problem presents itself, so the victim makes a promise to an oricha. If the problem gets resolved then the promise must be fulfilled lest another, worse problem return. The promise as a genre takes on its own circulation, as something we can apply to a situation in order to construe the actors’ intentions in a religious sort of way. The promise, as a cultural act and as a meaningful interpretive category is about faith (Wirtz 2007: 204).

The conduct of the priests and the officiating babaláwo at the three Ìyàwó initiation was distinctly different from the Lucumi initiations that I have witnessed. My recollection about my own initiation is that it was a very solemn and intense situation. I was initiated in an apartment in the South Bronx in New York. Even though my godfather was an African American, most of the officiating priests were Cuban and/or Puerto Rican. As a neophyte, I was kept in a room that seemed more like a closet and separated from the priests. I was uninformed about the processes. Like the three women, I was reliant on my sponsor for an interpretation of the events. In my *càṣé* this was not forthcoming. I remember my initiation as an out of body experience. I can say the same about most of the experiences that I have had with òrìsà influenced transformations. I left my initiation with very little understanding about what had occurred. Also in my case the rituals and ceremonies were imbued with objects, fashion and accessories that are customary in Lucumi/Santeria initiation rites (for an examination of these accoutrements and rites see David H. Brown, *Santeria Enthroned*, 2005, *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, edited by Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, 2004, Migene Gonzalez-Wippler, *Santeria: The Religion* 1994,

Miguel A. De la Torre, *Santeria: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America* 2004, Miguel Barnet, *Afro-Cuban Religions* 2001).

In my own case, during my initiation, I stood at the door blindfolded, knowing that my life path had already been laid, and that initiation would be my anchor, that it would enable me to keep my promise to ÈṢù.

ÈṢù has been described as the trickster, the keeper of the crossroads, and the divine messenger. Many ascribe a malicious and devious connotation to the deeds of this Òrìsà.

Herskovitz state the following about ÈṢù,

... Eshu is also the divine enforcer, punishing those who fail to make the sacrifices prescribed by the babaláwo and rewarding those who do. When any of the deities wishes to do good for those on earth, he sends Eshu to do it for him. His role as the messenger who delivers sacrifices to Olorun and does good deeds on behalf of the other deities, and his remarkable even-handedness in his role as the divine enforcer are hardly consistent with his identification as Satan by Christians and Muslims, which can only be understood as the result of a failure to find the equivalent of the Devil in Yoruba belief (1969:79).

...Regardless of what deity they worship, everyone prays frequently to Eshu so that he will not trouble them; and everyone sacrifices to him since a bit of every sacrifice to Olorun and to the other deities is set aside for him. In addition, he has his own worshippers and priest, who are identified by a string of opaque maroon or black beads worn around the neck. Palm kernel oil, which is used to make Eshu fight is his strongest taboo, and his worshippers must not eat it, rub their bodies with it, or have it near them; and no one can whistle at his shrine. His favorite foods, which are offered to him as sacrifices, are palm oil, boiled corn and beans, male animals and fowl, palm wine and other kinds of liquor, and many other foods (ibid).

ÈṢù kept me safe and guided me back to my family at a time in my life that I was struggling to be a young entrepreneur in my Harlem community. When I was in the throws of my troubles I pleaded with ÈṢù, my ancestors and Ọbàtálá/Òrìsànlá for my safety and eventual freedom. I was granted both and I promised ÈṢù and Ọbàtálá that I would be initiated as soon as possible. I was initiated in 1981 in the house of Yomi Yomi Awolowo and was given the crown of Ọbàtálá/Òrìsànlá to wear.

In the case of the three Ìyàwós, the women were not blindfolded. Each was called to the shrine room in the order of their hierarchical position. Each was instructed to knock at the door and answer Ifáyemi's call to them. "Who are you"? "Why are you here"? Each was asked to state her name and to offer her reason for knocking at the door. Invariably, the answer is different for each of us, as is the destiny that each of us is given to serve. At the heart of each of the women's supplications and sacrifices (spiritual as well as carnal) are their faiths that the acts, which were performed in their behalf, would bring them to a new degree of consciousness and well being. Through their actions, they have gained access to a body of knowledge that was essentially unavailable to African Americans a half century ago.

Much of the information that is currently available is oftentimes only reachable through a willingness to search within the many systems of ifá/òrìsà practices; to glean from them useful insights into areas that are metaphysical in nature and are not easily understood. What do I mean by that? Firstly, let us consider the three women that were initiated at compound Ifálola. Each of the women brought with them to their initiation an individual set of opinions bàṣéd on experiences outside of the consciousness of deep-rooted African Traditional Religion. I refer to the deep-rooted-ness of the experience for the women, because for them to engage in it fully entailed a submission to unfamiliar viewpoints, customs, languages, and ethos. Their perspective and sensorial perceptions of their private worlds shifted to include influences from forces of nature (òrìsà) and ancestors. These ancestors were situated as members of their biological, as well as, their spiritual families.

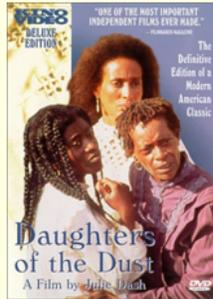
Ifá divination and their eventual initiations opened a way for the women to be in dialogue with the spirits of their ancestors. Divination and initiation also connected the women to religious/spiritual ideas that were developed over a long span of time, in multiple sites, and in

various cultural contexts. Perpetuation of the channels of communication and developing the kind of relationship that òrìsà and ancestral reverence encompasses, required that the women be open to building relationships based on exchange, supplications, and devotion. For the initiates, the notion of devotion includes service to the larger body of worshippers and continual commitment to their sponsoring priests and Elebuibon; as initiates are always forewarned against forgetting what was done for them during their initiation. Furthermore, the women are expected to symbolically return to their initiation experiences annually at their anniversary celebrations. The exchanges that occurred during their initiation rites are to be reenacted with degrees of moderation for the balance of their lives. Each of the women will have to offer to their respective òrìsà and ancestral spirits those items that were identified as preferred foods, drinks, or objects of the particular òrìsà and ancestral spirit. Additionally, each of the women was instructed to make changes in areas of their lives that would result in objective as well as metaphysical shifts in their external circumstances. I am not at liberty to discuss in more details the revelations that were made to the women. I will only state that the transformations included dietary restrictions that were associated with individual taboos; shifts in occupational and personal relationships; and adherence to coded, complex, and visceral precepts.

Several years have passed since the initiation of the three Ìyàwós at Compound Ifálola. Òrìsàtolu and Òrìsàtalabi, whose dreadlocks were cut and heads shaved, have re-grown their locked-hair and have with some challenges incorporated their new life styles into their work environments and personal relationships. Both of the women continue their work at academic institutions and are furthering their interests in spiritual and health related projects. Òrìsàwembe has decided to keep her hair cropped low and is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in history. Her research focuses on Yoruba traditional medicine and its usage in the diaspora. Òrìsàtolu's

life changes has forced her to eliminate items that she had been attached to for many years and has prompted her to be more mindful of her need for constant supplications and faith that in the end her prayers are answered. Òrisàwembe is also working on a project with her godfather, Elebuibon that seeks to create a directory of the many people that he has initiated and bring together all of his godchildren. (Figures 3-1 thru 3-7 provide a view of the three Ìyàwòs, ritual objects, and Ifáyemi performing divination at Compound Ifálola; figure 3-8 is an Ìyàwó at Oṟótúnjí African Village); and 3-9 are of Ìyàwós that were initiated in Abeokuta, Nigeria; figures 3-10 and 3-11 represent some of the objects that were given to Ìyàwós at Abeokuta; figure 3-12 Ìyàwó presenting ẹbọ at Abeokuta.

Films that influenced “ideological transformation of black American identities in the twentieth century”. (Clarke)



- *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) Julie Dash

- *Sankofa* (1994) Haile Gerima



- *Roots: Saga of an American Family* (1976) Alex Haley



Figure 3-1: Posters of Films

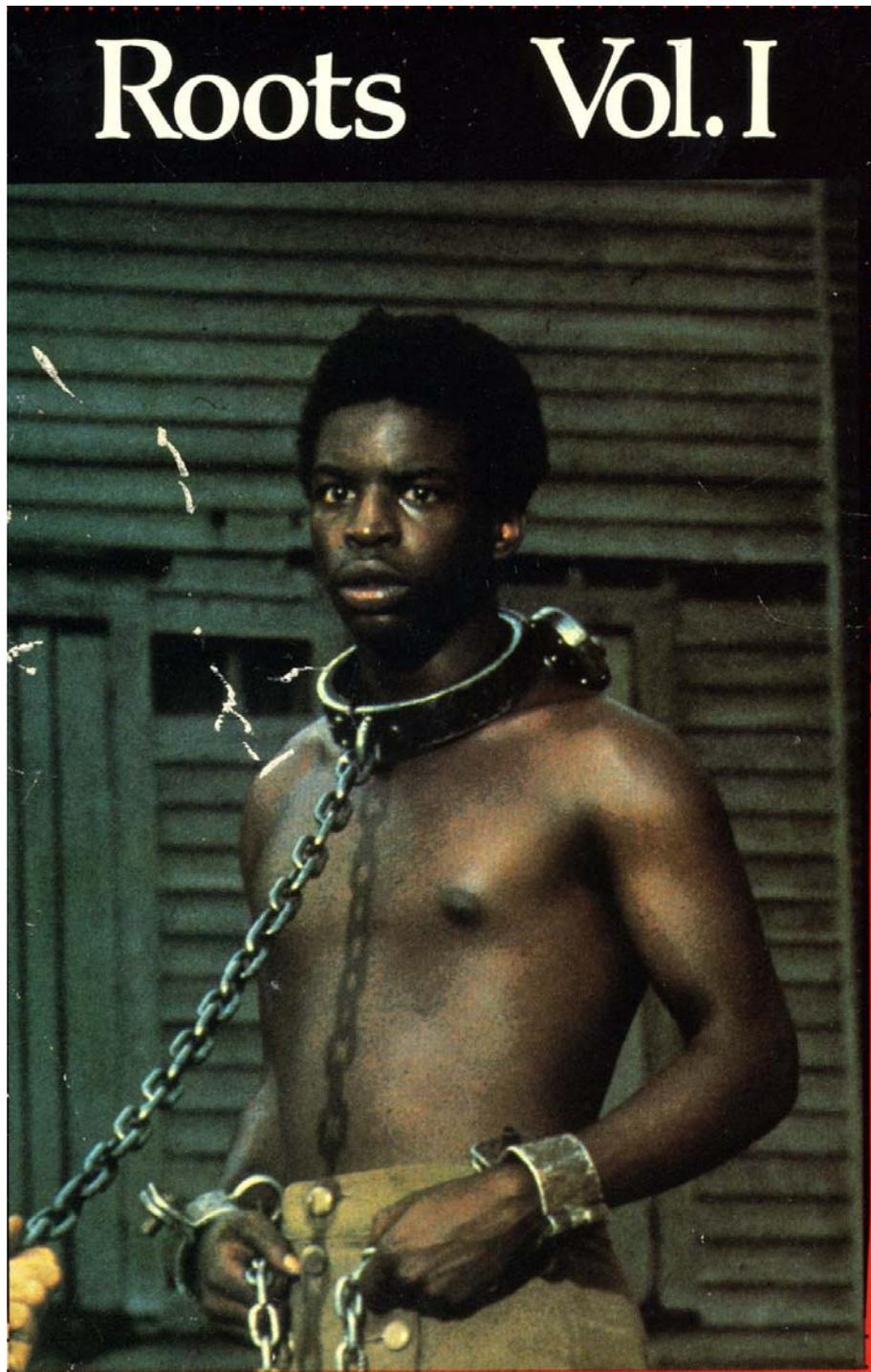


Figure 3-2: Kunta Kinte of Alex Haley's Roots Film



Figure 3-3: Apètèbí escorting Three Ìyàwós from spiritual bath at Compound Ifálola, Archer (2005)



Figure 3-4: Three Ìyàwós with agogos (bells) at Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida (2005)



Figure 3-5: Ifáyemi preparing òrìsà objects, Archer, Florida (2005)



Figure 3-6: Ifáyemi divining for Ìyàwó at Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida (2005)



Figure 3-7: Divination tray and ẹbọ tray, Archer, Florida (2005)



Figure 3-8: Preparing àsé at Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida



Figure 3-9: Vessels for Òrìsà objects for three Ìyàwò initiation, Compound Ifálola, Archer, Florida (2005)



Figure 3-10: Ìyàwó Èṣù, Oṟótúnjí African Village (2004)



Figure 3-11: Two Ọ̀ṣun and one Ẹ̀ṣàngó initiates from the USA in Abeokuta, Nigeria. Note Ìyàwós holding pigeons that are to be sacrificed as an offering (2007)



Figure 3-12: òrìsà objects, Abeokuta, Nigeria (2007)



Figure 3-13: Bowls with òrìsà objects, Abeokuta, Nigeria (2007)



Figure 3-14: Ọṣun Ìyàwó presenting pig's head ẹbọ to Ọ̀gún, Abeokuta, Nigeria (2007)

CHAPTER 4
SACRED MILIEUS, TIME, AND INTERVENTION

Spirituality vs. Religiosity

St. Theresa calls life a mansion of many rooms, with call at “the Centre”. To the Chinese the centre is Tao, to the Zen Buddhist it is Zen. To the Yoruba it is Oludumare, and the rooms as well as the entire mansion are orisha. If during one’s lifetime, one is domiciled in any or in fact several of these rooms, such does not prevent an olorisha from entering or reentering a past or future part of the house. (Susanne Wenger, 1983:23)

Pedagogy is an important and fundamental element of initiation. However, this important component is not always obvious or forthcoming. Instead, neophytes are made to believe that the essences of òrìsà life ways are experiential and personal. However, this trend is shifting and priests, practitioners, scholars, and Ifá/òrìsà officiates are calling for a more formalized method of disseminating information and of governing the practices of priests.

Many of the contested issues and concerns growing out these attempts at restructuring the religious/cultural order of Ifá/òrìsà practices stem from the fact that there is not a singular or analogous way of being an initiate or to practice indigenous African religions. Patri Dhalfá’s initiation is an example of the broadness of a participant’s interest and of Elebuibon’s willingness to intervene and structure rituals to meet her needs.

Patri Dhalfá is known in Santeria as Dhalfá Odùfora Ifátogun. She was born in the United States of Jewish parentage. She was initiated into Santeria and into the mysteries of Ọbàtálá in 1979 in New York City. In 1985 Patri Dhalfá was initiated into the mysteries of Ifá by Elebuibon. Since her initiation, several women from many states have been initiated by Elebuibon. I call attention to this because in some cases the women are not from the U.S.A. and in other instances initiates have to travel to Elebuibon’s temple in Ọṣogbo. Many of the women who he initiated are now Ìyànifá (females initiated into the mysteries of Ifá) and several have been initiated to the various other òrìsà sects. Most of the women are African American and are

from various cultural and spiritual centers in the United States. Elebuibon's politico-economic *bàṣé* in Òṣogbo is strongly tied to his supporters based in the USA. This support did not come easily and was not without challenges from within the USA Lucumi and Oyoṭúnjì African Village communities. In one incident, he was challenged because of his decision to initiate *Dhàlfá* into the mysteries of Ifá and in another he refused to listen to the Cuban community in Miami and not visit Harlem in the 1970s. In both instances he went against the Cuban Miami *bàṣéd* Lucumi community. In both instances he affronted jealously guarded policies within the USA based Santeria/Lucumi Community.

In the Postscript of his book, *Apètèbí: The wife of Òrúnmila*, Elebuibon writes,

As part of my annual spiritual work and lecture tours in the United States, I was invited by some Afro-Cuban societies in Miami, Florida. I did some lectures and performed several spiritual ceremonies. The leader of the group, Jose Miguel Gomez and Tony Cordova were very hospitable and made me very comfortable. During the lecture that I gave at the Afro Studies Department, International University, a woman came out of the audience and asked a question as to whether a woman could be a priestess of Ifá? My answer was an unequivocal YES. The response seemed to surprise a lot of people. My response was termed heresy by the Santero and Santeria present. The news appeared in the Miami Herald newspaper the following week, December 16th, 1978-both the English and Spanish editions. It was a big crisis for the religious community.

Calls were made to Nigeria to verify the accuracy of the statement. The priests and priestesses of Ifá were not satisfied because for over three hundred years, they had not allowed any woman to receive Ikin Ifá. In fact, women are forbidden to touch objects of ritual worship- presumably because of the female monthly period. I tried to explain my knowledge of Ifá and what Ifá teaches and especially how it is practiced in Nigeria, but these were unsatisfactory. This made me to understand that there are many people who do not understand the Yoruba traditional religion in depth- especially in the new world.

Another incident occurred in 1984, when a Jewish lady Dhàlfá approached me because of some problems she was having. The specific problems were more specifically stated in her published book. She was told that she needed to receive Ikin Ifá, but immediately stated that the Cuban priests or anyone in Santeria faith would not do this. I agreed to perform the ceremony in New York. She then proceeded to Puerto Rico to do an interview with a popular magazine which made my name become a household slogan. All of a sudden those who are uninformed about traditional Ifá practice and Santeria for that matter began very negative criticism of me. The few who were very deep and knowledgeable in Ifá were not around to counter those allegations (Elebuibon 1994: 81).

Elebuibon continues,

These and others motivated me in writing this book- to enlighten everyone about the role of women in Ifá traditional institution. A woman who studies and practices Ifá is called IyanIfá and the type of ceremony a woman undertakes is different from those prescribed for men. Those who must not see Odù or olofin are called ELEGAN; and those who perform Ipanadu are called *AWO OLODÙ*. Therefore, a woman is allowed as agreed by all other divinities and Òṣun to practice in all ceremonies of Orisha worship (ibid).

Although no exact figures are currently available, there are probably several hundred thousands Lucumi/Santeria worshippers in Miami, New York, California, and other urban areas within the states. Even though this is a substantial number of people, the population is not homogenous and holds no organized religious, political or economic platform. However, for many of the Cuban adherents policies and injunctions come out of Miami. Latin American priests and babaláwos, who are the repositories of òrìsà and Ifá mysteries, have been the most vociferous in confronting and condemning Elebuibon's activities in the USA. But for many, like DhaIfá, the search for a clear understanding of what it means to worship the òrìsà or gods of Africa, pointed to a trip to the source of Yoruba culture. DhaIfá Patri writes about her decision to be initiated to Ifá,

The first time I went to Nigeria, I spent three months at the University of Ilé-Ife, using a translator all the time, as I did not speak fluent Yoruba. I found that the secrecy that surrounds Santeria does not exist in Nigeria. The Yoruba are very protective of the *orisha* religion, but they do not attempt to hide it. Their greatest fear is that their natural religion may be dying due to the Christian and Muslim influence in Nigeria. At present about forty percent of Yoruba's practice Christianity, forty percent practice Islam, and the remaining twenty percent observe the Orisha Tradition. This is alarming to the elders of the natural religion.

Some of my teachers at the University asked me why I was not studying the Oddu Ifá, the oracle known in Santeria as the table of Ifá, which only babaláwos can read. I was surprised by the question and asked them if they would allow me to study the oracle. Their answer was "why not?" When I told them about the prohibition banning women from receiving Ifá in the New World, they said that no such taboo existed in Nigeria. One of the Arabas----chiefs of the major towns---told me that there was no oddu that denied women the right to Ifá. Such a prohibition, according to him, was probably started by mistake in the New World.

After speaking with several of the priests and Arabas, I made the decision to study the oracle. I found the studies so fascinating that I decided to speak to one of Nigeria's best known babaláwos, Ifáyemi Elebuibon, chief priest of Òṣogbo, and ask him if he would agree to initiate me into the mysteries of Ifá. Without hesitation, Ifáyemi agreed (Gonzales-Wippler 1994:115-116).

Margaret Drewal states the following about women's exclusion from and/or participation in Ifá rites,

Women are prohibited from entering Odù's grove, and there is a well-known story that Odù made Òrúnmìla promise to keep Odù away from other women, for she is thought to be harsh and vindictive. Not only that, but women cannot be initiated through Itefa rituals. Nor can they participate in the rituals of rebirth that takes place on the inside, even though they can interpret Ifá and in other contexts they can divine. When I asked diviners how it was possible for men to give birth without women, they quickly pointed out to me that Odù is a woman, and it is her power they were using inside the grove (Drewal 1992: 180).

Drewal continues,

Whenever women were physically excluded from ritual, men tended to appropriate female gender to construct representations of them. In Agemo, for example, it was only two male transvestite priests who were allowed to enter the main shrine in the Imosan grove. Curiously, the majority of the Agemo priests were also excluded from this shrine. Women were present symbolically in this way, if not physically. That is, female gender was present even when women were not. And indeed men believe that powerful women always gain access to men's secrets in spite of it all. Women spirits (emi) are believed capable of going where their bodies fear to tread at risk of being discovered and punished (ibid).

Monies generated from divination, rituals, and initiations in the USA fuels Elebuibon's enterprises in Nigeria. His services are highly regarded and in demand in both countries, he is self managed and itinerant, and negotiates with a vast degree of efficiency and sophistication via the cell phone or internet. The fees for his services are substantial and usually require a savings account to get together the needed fee. Although his fees are considerable, they still undercut the average cost for the same or similar services provided by the Lucumi, Oyoúnjì African Village, or Africans in the USA Yoruba based communities.

In 1975 Elebuibon was involved in another intervention to resolve a dispute within the ranks of Miami's Cuban babaláwos. Brown (2003: 93) writes,

An extraordinary and controversial set of events followed in the wake of the first Miami initiations in 1970. An insurgent group led by one of the original Miami Ifá initiates, Jose Miguel Gomez Barberas ("Miguel Batea," [Otura Adakoy]), became frustrated in its attempt to obtain an Olofin. By 1975, Gomez reported in a flurry of correspondence with sympathetic Havana colleagues, that he had waited in vain for more than two years to receive from Miguel Febles crucial Ifá goods and services: an Olofin and blessing to

proceed with Ifá initiations. Cubans know the signals their countrymen send, and Miguel Gomez knew that he had been “blocked” by Havana’s pope and his minions in the United States. Hence, in lieu of receiving Olofin any other way, Gomez pursued a lead that had been brewing in Miami Ifá circles for several years. Moreover, it was one that had already been mined successfully by African-American Yoruba who, since at least 1971, had traveled to Southwestern Nigerian for spiritual renewal.

In a ten-day trip in September 1975 to Southwestern Nigeria, Gomez secured the connection he sought in the town of *Òṣogbo*, following visits to Ife and Oyo. As Gomez reminisced in a moving and quite circumspect 1989 letter to a Havana mentoree, “With the impossibility of going to Cuba, notwithstanding my relations since my youth with Miguel Febles Padron [IBAE, R.I.P.] (a great loss)[,] and having the necessity of receiving Olofin, I directed myself to Nigeria[,] W. Africa.” In *Òṣogbo*, the great center of *ỌṢun* worship, Gomez received what was represented to him as Olofin, as well as other *òrisà* associated with *Òrúnmìla* from *babaláwo* Ifá Yemi Elebuibon (Ogbe Yono). Ifá Yemi was believed to be the *Ọba* of *Òṣogbo*, as Gomez put it “the highest Ifá official there”).

Three years later Gomez hosted Ifáyemi in Miami for forty two days. During this visit Ifáyemi utilized the Olofin that he had made in Nigeria to initiate three Cuban-American *babaláwos*. Following Ifáyemi’s visit to Miami, Gomez took three more Miami-Cubans to Nigeria to be initiated to Ifá. In total Gomez made five trips to Nigeria. According to Brown (94), these additional trips were organized by Gomez to serve “as virtual *testigos* of the initiations, as well as mementos of the unprecedented journey.”

Gomez’s African trips and his relationship with Ifá Yemi revolved not merely around the necessity of receiving Olofin outside of Havana’s legitimizing channels. Gomez had apprehended something more, and with it refigured his personal history and rewrote the history of Cuba’s Ifá transatlantic tradition in a mode that recalls Alex Haley’s *Roots*... Through the Nigerian experience, Gomez could now represent himself as “the first Cuban that made physical contact with our ancestors in Oyo, Oshogbo, Ife, Republic of Nigeria, West Africa, the Indefatigable spring of our Religious origin, where our religion is practiced”.... Drawing upon references from Ifá’s oral history, Gomez, a white working-class Cuban, connected the dots to write for himself a remarkable, seemingly predestined, Black Atlantic spiritual genealogy.

The types of objections that Ifáyemi confronted resembled the resistance that Adefunmi I faced in the 1960s as he and others opened the Shango Temple on 125th Street in Harlem:

Among their many cultural objectives was to purge what they saw as the religion’s colonialist legacy, particularly its European and Catholic elements. The community of New York Cuban Santeria priests, who were, technically, their religious elders, “objected

to the fact that [King] began wearing Yoruba clothes and refused to use Catholic saints and statues in the worship ceremonies” (Hunt 1979: 27). King explains that “numerous other Afro-Americans were entering the traditional Cuban Santo system and only timidly and surreptitiously substituting Yoruba images in place of Christian images. These for the most part avoided Yoruba attire which was angrily prohibited by their Afro-Cuban God-parents. Indeed, there was some resentment among certain white Cubans when informed that the religion was of African origin” (quoted in Gregory 1986: 63) (Brown 2003: 276).

Brown continues,

Given the spirit of militancy among many young activists of the time, nonblack Cuban priests themselves became antithetical to the emerging Yoruba movement, just as whites were deemed antithetical to the Black Power Movement, which grew out of Malcolm X’s early 1960s self-reliance and anticolonialist vision and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) Black Power platform under Stokely Carmichael as of 1966 (Van Deburg 1992: 134). According to Walter Serge King, “we had introduced racism into the religion that didn’t exist among the Cubans...and... they couldn’t understand my extremely severe attitudes at that time. So that naturally alienated a lot of them” (Quoted in Palmie 1995:79) (Brown 2003: 276-77).

It is quite possible that the Cuban priests, particularly the white Cubans did not recognize the significance of Adefunmi’s association with Malcolm X’s anticolonialist sentiments as they did not view themselves as being affected by the American history of racism and violence against blacks. Since the Cubans had succeeded in masking the religion’s African identity within the history and iconography of European and Catholic saints which had the appearance of white men and women, the civil rights struggle and the fight for racial equality in America were not banners that suited their political agendas. The reader must keep in mind that the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was at odds with the same government that permitted Cuban exiles (mostly whites) to migrate into the USA and away from Communist Cuba. Also during the 1960s and 1970s the public leadership within the Cuban Santeria Community was largely white males. It should also be noted that these new Americans came to America during the time when the United States government was expending great resources to undermine the nationalist and political agenda of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. These efforts on the part of the United States government included deflating the expansion of the newly emerging African

consciousness groups. Further research may disclose that the government played a role in the conflicts that developed between Adefunmi I and the Cuban Santos.

Furthermore, although the Cuban santos may not have been aware of the racial and gender issues that permeated American politics, they were certainly mindful of the economics and commerce associated with the commodification of religious paraphernalia and condiments. Although no exact figures are available at this time, I would venture to say that the income derived from this economy is extreme and in many instances is tax free. While it is essentially an underground economy, the income generated through religious activities in òrisà communities is another topic in need of research and analysis.

In examining the economic opportunities within the Santeria religious community Cross Sandoval (2007: 345) writes:

Santeria offers individuals a very complex dogma, an extensive set of myths, diverse religious paraphernalia, and highly structured sets of rituals, powerful music, and dramatic dances, as well as a viable road to priesthood. Moreover, Santeria offers charismatic, insightful, and ambitious individuals great economic opportunities as well as positions of prominence as ceremonial leaders and counselors. Santeros are exempt from many restraints to which professional practitioners of other religions are held, including the need for academic accreditation. Additionally their earnings are tax exempt.

Santeria has thus opened a wide avenue for upward social and economic mobility via its populist priesthood. This trend is especially meaningful for women, who are well accepted and represented in santeria's priestly class, except for the priesthood of Orunla, the oricha of divination, which is limited to male babalaos.

This unestimated income is generated trans-globally, across gender, racial and cultural contexts and in areas of the world that have historically remained marginalized and cut off from world-wide recognition and amalgamations. In the religion the Cuban Santos held claim to the "sacred" knowledge of the African Gods or the seven African powers. They also held that the source for a pedagogical return to African religion was in Cuba and with strict attention to the creeds of Santeria and Catholicism.

Both Adefunmi I and Ifáyemi represented an abrupt alteration in the way that ideas about the gods of Africa were being transmitted at a time when African Americans and pockets of Cubans were becoming engaged in developing a broader understanding of African religion. They also confronted and resisted the impulse of the Santos community to control the fate of the òrìsà religion in African-American communities. I believe that in some instances they have succeeded; ideas relative to the continent of Africa continue to be re-positioned as central to any discussion about the gods of Africa and an increasing number of African Americans are continuing to move between continents. The exact amount of money is unknown, but I believe that it is safe to say that even in the religious world the African-American dollar is considerable. The income generated from interaction and exchange between African Americans and their priest affiliates is substantial and greatly affects the personal economies of many families and communities.

I am not arguing whether or not the Struggles that Elebuibon and Adefunmi I endured with the Santos were politically or economically motivated. I believe that they were. Nor I am suggesting that the white Cuban Santos deliberately determined to resist the changes envisioned by Adefunmi I or the interventions performed by Ifáyemi in behalf of women's rights to participate in Ifá rites and his interactions with the Cuban Babaláwos. Their deliberations might have been aided by outside supporters, who recognized that they were potential allies for the cause of civil rights and power for blacks in America. Instead, I suggest that most of the events leading up to Adefunmi's insistence on change within the cultural and religious nuances of òrìsà practices of Africa –Americans and Ifáyemi's returning to America to initiate DhaIfá, despite his previous relations with the Miami Santos community regarding female initiations, were all events in the wind of òrìsà change and expansion in the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite the views expressed by Miami's Santero community, in 1978, Ernesto Pichardo, a white Cuban-born priest and one of the founders of the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye in Hialeah City, near Miami, demonstrated his interest in intervention and bridging the misunderstanding that existed between African Americans, Cubans, and the Catholic Church. He organized a three-day conference at the University of Miami. The conference was sponsored by the Florida Endowment for the Humanities." At this time, Pichardo took members of his church to *Oyótúnjí* Village for an ordination rite for its patron òrisà, Babalu Aye.

David O'Brien writes,

The Church of the Lukumi's ordination ceremony at the *Oyótúnjí* Village signified their common ground but highlighted their differences as well. Both Adefunmi and the church's founders sought to purify or reform the religion known as Santeria. Yet the ceremony performed by white Cuban immigrants was held at a place that did not honor the santos of Santeria and instead glorified the African origins of the religion. That struck some santeros as illegitimate, and it invoked racist and derogatory associations with uneducated, lower-class black practitioners in Cuba. Unquestionably, the Church of the Lukumi was on a collision course with the larger Cuban community, including many followers of Santeria.

Although Adefunmi and the Church of the Lukumi shared common ground in reclaiming the purity of the orishas, each sought a reformation leading in a different direction. Adefunmi focused on the African roots of the religion to promote black pride and self-determination, whereas, for Pichardo and the Church of the Lukumi, the orishas represented universal truths open to all initiates. In other words, both were on the fringes of Santeria, minorities within a religious minority.

In coming together, each sought legitimacy for their organization. In addition, as Pichardo explained, divinations had told them that they would be asked to perform the ceremony at the *Oyótúnjí* Village, so they never questioned doing so, in spite of Adefunmi's Black Nationalism. As it turned out, Adefunmi had been initiated in Cuba by Pichardo's spiritual godfather. They thus shared the same lineage and common ancestors (O'Brien 2004: 25).¹

Ernesto Pichardo is best known for his victory in the United States Supreme Court case, *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye V. City of Hialeah* in 1993. Pichardo and members of the Church challenged the City of Hialeah's City Council and fought against four ordinances that

¹ For a detailed look at Ernesto Pichardo and the Church of the Babalu Aye Supreme Court victory see David O'Brien, *Animal Sacrifice and Religious Freedom: Church of the Lucumi Babalu Aye V. City of Hialeah*.

targeted Santeria practitioners and outlawed the practice of animal sacrifice for religious purposes. The High Court ruled that the ordinances were discriminatory and that “the ordinances fell below that minimum standard for enforcing the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom”. The church’s struggle and victory in this *càsé* gained national attention and opened the way for òrìsà practitioners to perform religious sacrifices without the fear of persecution.

Pichardo credited the success of the Supreme Court case to òrìsà Şàngó,

On learning of the Court’s ruling, Pichardo was jubilant. “Shango”, the orisha of thunder and lightning “was on our side. We are amazed by the decision. As an immigrant, as a Cuban, I feel great honor.” At a news conference held at his home, he told reporters: “This is why we came to the United States, because we have freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The Court’s decision is of profound significance. Animal sacrifice is an integral part of our faith. It is like our holy meal. The decision means that our people will no longer feel they are outlaws because of the way that they worship.” (O’Brien 2004:143)

Douglas Laycock, the attorney that argued the case before the Supreme Court, “pointed out that the conflict boiled down to a “black-white thing,” overt discrimination against poor black Cubans who are more likely to practice Santeria than white, middle class Cubans (ibid).

During the 1970s and 1980s the face of the Santeria religion was changing. The changes were greatly influenced by Elebuibon, Adefunmi I, Pichardo, and practitioners who criss-crossed between the various paths of worship and challenged the polity within religious traditions as well as within state government. Many of the changes that have developed over the past four decades, especially the Supreme Court decision and women initiates in the Ifá cult in America, cleared the way for much of the interaction that now exists between American and Nigerian priests. Òşogbo is the recipient of much of the attention that is now being given to Yorubaland.

Òşogbo Revisited: A Life with the Gods

I returned to Òşogbo during the summer of 2007. I was fortunate enough to receive a Fulbright-Hayes GPA fellowship to study Yoruba language and culture at Obafemi Awolowo

University. Although the emphasis of this summer program was language study, I thought that this trip would be an opportune time to spend some research time at Elebuibon's family compound. I arrived in Nigeria towards the end of June and had seven weeks to spend time in language classes and conduct field research. The schedule of language classes that was presented to me was very time consuming and did not coincide with the research schedule that I had outlined. The time constraints proposed by the project director limited me to only one day out of the week to participate in my research. This seemed to me to be an unreasonable imbalance of time, especially since we had agreed in the states that I would have sufficient time to conduct field research. The director and I were not able to resolve the problem in a way that would allow me to organize my research around a schedule that would be suitable for my informant's circumstances. After several attempts to settle our differences the Program Director decided to expel me from the program and threatened to send me back to the USA. Tired from the long flight to Nigeria and the ensuing struggle to situate myself, I accepted his remarks and went about organizing my research. One week after arriving in Ilé, Ife, I left my host family's home and traveled to Òṣogbo.

Aside from my academic focus and research agenda, this trip to Nigeria was layered with two other important reasons for me to be there. Firstly, the trip was planned before I knew of the possibility of a fellowship. Jayeaola (Jójólò) her husband Tejumola (Teju) and I had planned for a summer 2007 trip to Nigeria, during our annual New Years Eve Òrìsànlá Festival at Ilé Òrìsànlá.² We were planning the trip so that Tejumola could be initiated in Ifon Orulo Kingdom, Òṣun State. According to the history of Ifon-Òṣun, as compiled by the late king of Ifon, Alayeluwa Ọba Ilufoye Olatoye *Òrìsàtoyinbo* II, JP (Olufon of Ifon-Òṣun, Òṣun State)

² Jayeaola was one of the three Iyawos discussed in the section titled, Three Iyawos. Jójólò was the name given to her when she received her chieftaincy title. At Ifon she is affectionately known as Chief Jójólò.

(kábiyèsí),

The kingdom traces its origin to the cradle of Yoruba civilization, Ilé-Ife. The progenitors of the Ifon people originally lived in Ilé-Ife. They were descendants of Ọbàtálá whose homestead was known as Ideta, one of the original aboriginal settlements which made up Ilé-Ife before the rise of Odùduwa to prominence. Ọbàtálá, who many people call Òrìsànlá, is referred to by one verse of his oriki praise-poems, as Ekun Ifon (the leopard of Ifon). He was one of the sixteen elders that accompanied Odùduwa to the world to perform the act of creation which began the foundation of Ilé-Ife out of primordial water. Other elders included Agboniregun (the founder of Ifá Oracle) and Ogun (the founder of iron-smithing) among others (ÒrìsàToyinbo II 2000:1).

Jayeola and I met the Ọba of Ifon during our trip to Nigeria in 2001. We were introduced to him by our friend and colleague at OAU, Professor Abiodùn (Biodùn).³ Biodùn Adediran was our host during that 2001 visit. He had hosted the two of us and two other women from the United States that joined us three weeks into our trip. One of the women had come to Nigeria to be initiated into the Ọbàtálá cult. I was her godfather and had discussed the possibility of this happening with her back in the USA. At the time of our first discussion I did not know Elebuibon, Ọba Òrìsàtoyinbo, or Biodùn Adediran. I simply knew that Jayeaola and I would be traveling to Nigeria for seven weeks on a FLAS fellowship. However, I had seen Elebuibon and Ọba Òrìsàtoyinbo II in a video, *Ọbàtálá in Praise*, at the compound Ifálola during one of my field visits. Soon after viewing the film, I was awarded the FLAS fellowship. At one of my visits to Compound Ifálola, I shared with Onabamiero my plans to visit Ilé-Ife, and told him that I would like to meet Ifáyemi Elebuibon, so that I might discuss my initiation into the mysteries of Ifá. Onabamiero gave me Elebuibon's contact information and suggested that I visit him when I visited Nigeria. When Jayeaola and I sat down with Biodùn to discuss our seven weeks itinerary, I mentioned to him that I would like to meet Elebuibon and that my friends would be joining me in Nigeria and that one of them wanted to be initiated. Biodùn is a Christian and scholar, his wife

³ At the time of our meeting in 2001 Professor Adediran was the Dean of the History Department at OAU.

and children are all Christians and scholars, but he has not shut himself off from the traditions of Yoruba people. He replied simply that Elebuibon was a reputable babaláwo and that he personally knew the King of Ifon Orulo. After this meeting the three of us set about planning what turned out to be a most memorable seven weeks of language and cultural studies. Within a couple of days, Biodùn arranged for us to be driven to Òṣogbo to meet Elebuibon and he took us to meet the Ọba. During the course of those seven weeks, my goddaughter received the objects of Ọbàtálá and I was initiated into the mysteries of Ifá. This leads me to the second layer of reason for this trip to Nigeria.

At the time that I was initiated into Ifá's mysteries Elebuibon informed me that I need to be initiated to Ṣàngó. This revelation took me by surprise, because almost twenty two years earlier I had been initiated into the cult of Ọbàtálá in New York. During my Ọbàtálá initiation I was informed that I would need to be initiated into Ifá's mystery later in my life but no mention was made of yet another Ṣàngó initiation.⁴ I have heard stories from other people who were initially initiated in the United States into the Lucumi system and later became disillusioned and turned to Nigeria for initiation. Many of those people said that they discarded the òrìsà objects that were given to them during their Lucumi initiation. I have not discarded any of my òrìsà. My òrìsàs are like my family. Those that were given to me by my African-American godfather (he was also initiated in the Lucumi tradition as well). I honor and attend to them in the same way that I would honor and attend to foster family members who provided for me when I had no contact with my original family. By this time in my life I had determined that I did not want a Lucumi styled Ifá initiation and that I wanted to be initiated in Nigeria. According to Elebuibon, my Ifá Odù needed the balance of Ṣàngó energy to strengthen it. As a rule, I do not question the

⁴ In Lucumi styled Ọbàtálá initiations you are given Ṣàngó along with several other òrìsàs.

wisdom of Ifá or the òrisàs. Meeting Ọba Òrìsàtoyinbo and Ifáyemi Elebuibon during that summer in 2001 was the beginning of relationships and commitments that continues into this present day. So with that bit of backdrop I return to the summer of 2007.

While I was in Òṣogbo during the summer, Elebuibon was in California. Soon after I learned about my Fellowship, I contacted him and we discussed my travel plans and research intentions. I also told him that I was planning on commencing my Ṣàngó initiation. He assured me that he would contact his people in Òṣogbo and make arrangements for my visit and initiation and to arrange for me stay at his compound.

When I discussed my trip to Nigeria with the GPA Program Director, I requested that I be housed at Biodùn's home on OAU campus. He contacted Biodùn and later informed me that my request was warmly received and accepted. So despite my problems with the program, I still had residence at OAU, and for most of my stay in Nigeria I commuted from Ilé-Ife to Òṣogbo and Ifon Ọṣun. (See figure 4-36)

The GPA Yoruba language and culture group that traveled together from the United States consisted of eleven students and the Program Director. Our scheduled day of arrival into Ilé-Ife was originally Friday. However, we missed our connecting flight. By the time we reached the campus of OAU, Jayeaola and Tejumola were already at Biodùn's home. There we discussed our trip to Ifon Ọṣun to meet with the king and present gifts that we had brought for him and members of the royal family. Most importantly, we wanted to present the books that were donated for the library and the money that we had collected for the repairs to the roof of the "Boosa" (The Ọbàtálá shrine). (See figure4-35)

Jayeaola, who is working towards a PhD. in African History, intended to collect archival data in Ìbàdàn. We knew in advance that she and Teju would commute from Ìbàdàn to Ilé-Ife to

meet with me and that together we would travel to Ifon. We also anticipated that the Ọ̀bàtàlá (Ọ̀rìsànlá) initiation would take perhaps 3-5 days. Since Ifon is only about thirty minutes from Ọ̀ṣogbo, I believed that I could be at both places when time permitted me to move from one to the other. On Monday, immediately following my Sunday arrival and after my Monday morning orientation for the Yoruba language and cultural part of this trip, we hired a car to drive us to Ifon. The king was expecting us but at the time did not know that we were in the country. Jayeola did not have any success in reaching any of the king's cell phone numbers. To everyone's delight I was able to reach him on my first try. I informed him that I had arrived safely and that we were on our way to Ifon. After years of planning and hoping it felt great to finally be back on the road that led to Ọ̀ṣogbo and Ifon. At long last I would be able to take once again take notes and video record what appeared to me as ancient and "traditional" rites. The late Ọ̀ba Ọ̀rìsàtoyinbo was a visionary. During many of our lengthy discussions he alluded to his interest in making Ifon the world center for international visitors who wanted to see the "home" of Ọ̀rìsànlá and to meet him, Ọ̀rìsànlá personified. Even though he and his family were practicing Christians, in Yorubaland traditional rulers are expected to uphold the cultural traditions and rites. They are also inclined to contribute significantly to the development and maintenance of the kingdom. His majesty had many projects and it was difficult to distinguish which were projects that were attached to the kingdom from those that were the king's private ventures.

After a long and arduous ride on Nigeria's decrepit roads, we finally arrived at Ifon. We went immediately to the palace, but were informed that the king was with guests and that he was expecting us. We did not wait long before we were ushered into the king's sitting room. As is the tradition, I removed my hat and prostrated myself before the king. Jójó̀lò knelt before the king in

the fashion that is customary for Yoruba women and Teju prostrated himself.⁵ The king invited us to be seated and Jójólò introduced her husband to His Royal Highness (HRH). Jójólò advised the king that we had some things to present to him and the kingdom. We presented our gifts and the king called in one of his servants to bring us some soft drinks and donuts. (See figure 4-35) Since I am considered to be a senior chief (my chieftaincy title name is Òrìsàlagbala), I led the discussion about Teju's intention to be initiated. The king listened patiently to all that I had to say and then he sent for the Chief Priest to come and join the discussion. After a while the chief priest left and returned about thirty minutes later with a list of items that would be needed. The list was written in Yoruba and some English. There was a naira⁶ amount attached to each item and a total amount of all of the items, including the white fabric that the Oba wanted us to purchase for his tailor to make us some clothing. We gave the king the required amount of money and agreed to return on Thursday (Òrìsànlá Day) to begin the work.⁷ HRH requested that we come and stay at the hotel on our next visit. During our 2001 visit, we were told about plans and taken to the proposed site for a new hotel. Some of the projects that are credited to his reign include: the establishment of the palm oil industry in 1991, the upgrading of the junior to senior of the secondary school in 1992, the creation of Orolu Local Government Council in 1996, the election of Ifon sons into the National Assembly in 1999, and the authoring and publishing of the book *History of Ifon Orolu Kingdom* in July 2000. In 2001, the road linking Òṣogbo, Ifon and Ogbomoso was tarred and has given impetus to the improvement of social and economic activities in the community (Olomola 2003: 180).

⁵ In the Kingdom of Ifon Jayeaola is known by her chieftancy name Jojólò.

⁶ Nigerian currency

⁷ In Yorubaland Òrìsànlá is worshipped every five days. In Ifon this is an elaborate rite that requires the king to go to the Boosa to worship. For an excellent exposé of these rites see Elebuibon's, *Obàtàlà Praises* video.

His Royal Highness made a bold move and traveled to the United States during the winter of 2001. His visit was a surprise to Jójólò and me. Although we had discussed the possibility of a visit, we did not think that it would happen so soon. It turned out that him and Efunjumoke (Efun) had secretly arranged the visit and she wrote the necessary letter of invitation.⁸ She also assisted him with the finances for his trip. The trip was quite problematic because we were not prepared for the task of hosting a Yoruba king from Yorubaland. In our experience with the king at his palace in Ifon-Ọ̀ṣun the entire kingdom was at his disposal. He usually traveled with an entourage or at the minimum several of his chiefs. On this occasion, he came to the states unaccompanied and with only an invitation from Efunjumoke. I need to state here for clarification that Efun had been installed as a chief along with Jójólò and me. It was clear to all of us that our installations as chiefs were a political and economical move on the part of king. Having international chiefs was essential to his plan to make Ifon-Ọ̀ṣun a ritual and tourist destination. We met the Ọ̀ba at Efun's place on Harbor Island in South Carolina. During that visit the Ọ̀ba traveled to Charleston, South Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, Delaware, Maryland, and New York City. All of his travel arrangements and accommodation were arranged by Efun.⁹ The visit was short circuited because the Ọ̀ba was notified that he had urgent matters to attend to back home. Some time shortly after this visit we began to hear rumors about the Ọ̀ba's declining health.

In the past when we visited the kingdom we were always received by king at the palace. There was always fanfare and greetings from the chiefs and drummers who at all times sat in the palace's courtyard. For this reason we always traveled with naira in small denominations. On this

⁸ Efunjumoke was one of the women from the USA that joined Jójólò and me in Nigeria.

⁹ I have always suspected that Efun's motive was that she wanted to be a queen and that she believed that with her money and sponsorship, she could secure that position for herself.

occasion the visit to the palace was without any of the usual array. What we did not know was that trepidation was swelling in the kingdom.¹⁰

The driver that we had hired to take us to Ifon-Ọ̀ṣun had tarried so that he could take me back to Ilé-Ife and Jójólò and Teju to Ìbàdàn. The round-trip drive was costly and cumbersome because of the unavailability and high price of black market fuel. When Jójóló and I had arrived in Nigeria in 2001, teachers were on strike and gasoline was being rationed and sold at exorbitant prices. When we arrived in 2007, civil servants were on strike for increased wages, University students had not attended classes for months, and once again, gasoline was being sold on the black market at inordinate prices. The strikes ended a few days after our arrival and university students were called back to campuses across the country. Fuel became available and the cost of traveling from Ilé-Ife to Ọ̀ṣogbo decreased.

Jójólò, Teju and I returned to Ifon on Thursday, to begin what we believed would be the start of Teju's Ọ̀bàtálá initiation ceremony. However, that was not the case. Apparently, there was a misunderstanding between what we discussed with the king and what the chief priest was preparing for Teju. The list of items that we had been given and the cost associated with the initiation were all for initiation into the ọ̀gbóni society. Jójólò and I knew about the ọ̀gbóni initiation requirement because of what we had experience from our 2001 visit. During that visit we had to undergo ọ̀gbóni initiations before we were initiated to receive the objects of Ọ̀bàtálá. At that time we were led to believe that what was being received was a "complete" Ọ̀bàtálá

¹⁰ There is not much that can be done in Nigeria without paying out some money. Conversely, there is not much that you can't get done in Nigeria if you are willing to pay out some money. The first statement is especially true if you are from the United States. Like most Third World countries, Nigerians believe that Americans are rich. Many believe that we are all white people. Despite my fairly dark complexion, because of how I spoke English and also because I am from the United States, I was considered a ọ̀yinbó (white man). However, I have been to Nigeria enough times to know how to assimilate. In the appropriate situations, I allowed someone else to be my voice and my eyes.

initiation. So, on that Thursday evening, Jójólò, Teju, and I went before the ògbóni council so that Teju could be initiated into the society. The òba explained to us that this was a good arrangement and that Jójólò and I would be benefiting from this initiation because we “did not get everything” during our 2001 initiation. This news came as a surprise. Because we had no prior experience with ògbóni initiations and because we did not know what the customary requirements were, we had no idea of what we were to receive. We operated simply out of our trust of the process and our belief that we were in the kingdom of Ọbàtálá. Teju was instructed to sit silently in his hotel room and await further instructions.

So without any knowledge of what we should expect, in the dusk of the evening as nightfall was beginning to darken the town, the chief priest led us on foot to the ògbóni shrine. When we entered the shrine, the priest went into a small room and greeted someone inside soon afterwards, we were invited to come inside and instructed to salute the woman who was seated on the floor. The king had advised us earlier to pay attention to this woman and that she was very special to him. In the candle-lit room, she appeared to be an elderly albino woman. It was quite obvious that she was esteemed. Albinos are special to Ọbàtálá.¹¹ After our brief encounter with the woman, we were escorted into a small candle-lit courtyard where other ògbóni members were beginning to assemble. All of us sat around on benches as the ògbóni members discussed in Yoruba the evening’s plans. The chief priest parceled out money to one member and he divided the money among the members present. Afterwards, Teju was draped in the white cloth that had been given to him and blindfolded. He was then led into another of the courtyard rooms to be inducted into the society. The process took about twenty minutes. Afterwards, Jójólò and I were separately taken into the room. I am not at liberty to discuss the actual ceremony. What I will say

¹¹ The Yoruba creation story relates that Ọbàtálá created human beings out of clay and that one day he was drunk on palm wine and made cripples, albinos and blind people. Since then, all handicapped people are sacred to him.

is that we were marked and made another oath of allegiance to the ọ̀gbóni of Ifon. We were advised of the ọ̀gbóni's expectations of an annual return to the community by us and the bond of secrecy that must be honored and upheld. We were also informed that we would have to pay an additional fee if we wanted to receive the ọ̀gbóni's symbolic objects. We agreed to pay the fee and were told that the items had to be prepared and that we would receive them at another time. After all of the rites and advisement were done, we followed the chief priest back to our room at Kingdom Hotel.

The following day was Ọ̀bàtálá day and we were told that we needed to be up at 5am and that a driver would pick us up to take us to the Boosa, so that we could pray to Ọ̀bàtálá. We were up and waiting, but the driver never arrived. With flashlights in hand, the three of us took to the streets of Ifon in search of the Boosa. Since we were unfamiliar with the streets of Ifon and had no real sense of direction, we wandered around until we saw familiar signposts. Finally we found the street where the Boosa was located.

We were about to walk pass the site when the chief priest stepped out from behind a wall and touched my shoulder. All the while that we were searching for the Boosa, I kept assuring Jójólò and Teju, that Ọ̀bàtálá would guide our steps. The priest was quite surprised that we were able to find our way. Soon after we were in the Boosa the driver showed up and parked in front of the Boosa's entranceway. It was still early in the morning and it was dark. The priest led us to the shrine area and lifted up the white sheet that hides the shrine from public view. He then instructed us to kneel before the altar while he prayed for us. The process took about twenty minutes. It was day-break by the time we finished. We instructed the driver to leave because we wanted to enjoy the morning walk in the Kingdom. At the time we were still operating out of our expectations that Teju would be initiated during that weekend.

Teju was not initiated to Ọbàtálá during that weekend. The misunderstanding about our expectations was never cleared up and Jójólò had research to conduct in Ìbàdàn. Jójólò divined for the situation and we were instructed to abandon our efforts and to contact Elebuibon in the USA and to try to arrange for him to come to Florida before his scheduled return trip to Nigeria, so that he could conduct Teju's initiation.

The king was sick and complaining about pain in his leg all the time we were with him. The pain and discomfort was so great for him until he sometimes could not sit up and spent an unusual amount of time indoors, with his legs propped up. Jójólò gave him some Reiki treatments and I inquired about him seeing a traditional doctor. He stated that he had traveled to Ilé-Ife to see a medical doctor. According to the king, no one could seem to identify the reason for his ailment. Although Jójólò was sympathetic to the ọba's physical condition, she was quite upset that he was not being transparent about the initiation and the money transactions. Even though the king suggested that we return again the following Tuesday on the next Ọbàtálá day, bàṣéd on her reading Jójólò wanted to abandon the plans for an Ifon initiation for Teju. Teju and I acquiesced and together we headed to Elebuibon's compound on Saturday morning. We were summoned to meet with the *Ọba* because the ọ̀gbóni objects were ready for us to collect. When we arrived at the hotel, we were introduced to another man.¹² He was supposedly the specialized preparer of the objects. We were advised that we had to pay him an additional fee, because of some special thing that he did with the objects. We paid the fee, collected our objects, and departed. We stopped at the local market in Ifon before leaving town to buy kola nuts and palm oil to take back to the USA with us. We spent a few hours in Ọ̀ṣogbo at Elebuibon's compound and then hired a car to transport us back to Ilé-Ife. While we were in Ọ̀ṣogbo, we visited an

¹² By this time the king was spending a great deal of time at the hotel.

Internet café to check our emails. Jojólò had several emails telling her that they had a problem at their home in South Carolina. When she finally was able to speak with her family by cell phone, she was told that her house had been burglarized. Disturbed by this information, she and Teju began to plan an immediate return trip to the USA. Jojólò wrapped up her research in Ìbàdàn and she and Teju returned to the states. Since I had already been expelled from the GPA program, I organized my equipment and left Ife to spend two weeks at Elebuibon's to conduct my research and to be initiated into the cult of Şàngó. I thought that afterwards, I would reschedule my return flight to the USA and return to my home in Hawthorne, so that I could be there to support Elebuibon with Teju's initiation.

My host family members were all busy with their individual lives and so I was left to plan my daily activities at OAU. Biodùn Adediran, the father of my family, was busy with all that he was required to complete before ending his second term as vice-chancellor of OAU. He worked at his office during the day, came home in the late afternoon, retired to bed early and arose late into the night to review and prepare documents. Our quality time together was usually when we went for our 5am morning walk. Mama Tunde is a school administrator and was completing the required work for acceptance into a Masters Degree program in School Administration. The five children are all scholars and engaged in various levels of academic training. They were always accommodating and attempted to make sure that I was comfortable.

A Life with the Gods

Before Jojólò and Teju left Òşogbo we visited the home of Susanne Wenger (Adunni) and met with her and Doyin, her adopted daughter. I first read about Wenger's artistic work and the New Sacred Arts shrine restoration projects that she spearheaded in Òşogbo and in neighboring

towns while scanning through a copy of her *A Life with the Gods* book.¹³ I was awestruck by the collection of artistic and sacred art pieces that were all around her home. (See figures 4-37 thru 4-41) When we met with Wenger she was already eighty five years old. Although she had some difficulty climbing the two flights of stairs that led to her living area, she still frequently made the trip downstairs to greet guests and to welcome the egúngún masqueraders that came to her home during one of my visits. Wenger is a living legend in Nigeria. She is well reputed for her involvement with traditional practitioners and the preservation of òrìsà shrines. Sangodare shared stories of her standing in front of bulldozers that were destined to mow down sacred sites. Conversely, she has withstood considerable disrepute from the Christian and Islamic communities over her many years in Nigeria. Susanne Wenger has established a reputation of being sympathetic to practitioners of traditional religion and is an initiated priestess in the cult of Obàtálá.

Susanne Wenger's engagement with traditional religious practices and politics in Òṣogbo is important to this discussion and I situate her work as a referent for several reasons. Let me begin with this email news bulletin that was published October 26, 2005, titled [indegeneòrìsà] Òṣun Grove is now a World Heritage Site:

I am pleased to inform you that the Òṣun Grove at Òṣogbo has been recognized as a UNESCO's World Heritage Site. The Òṣun Sacred Grove covers 75 hectares of secondary forest and houses the temples and shrines of many Yoruba deities. The grove is the most sacred site of the Òṣun deity and an active place of worship for Òṣun devotees, including the annual Òṣun Festival. The annual Òṣun Festival in Nigeria is the most popular indigenous religious institution in Africa drawing thousands of worshippers and devotees from all corners of the globe. In recognizing the grove for UNESCO's nomination, ICOMOS recognized that the Òṣun-Òṣogbo grove has outstanding universal value, that the grove is the largest, and one of the last surviving sacred groves in Yorubaland; that the grove and its sculptures are now a symbol of Yoruba identity to Yoruba peoples all around the world; and that the grove, as host to its annual festival, sustains the living cultural

¹³ I found *Life with the Gods* and several other books and films about Wenger and traditional African Religion in the collection of Vassa and Philip Neimark.

traditions of the Yoruba peoples. Òṣun Grove is the only World Heritage Site in Yorubaland, and one of two such sites in Nigeria.

The first archaeological excavations within the Òṣun Grove were carried out in a joint project involving Florida International University, Miami, Institute of African Studies, University of Ìbàdàn, and the National Commission for Museums and Monuments. The project was sponsored by Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and was directed by Akin Ogundiran. The research yielded interesting results. The findings are currently being analyzed. We hope the results will shed more light on the history of Òṣogbo and the cultural history of the grove.

The people of Òṣogbo under His Royal Highness, Òba Oyewale Matanmi III; the Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Culture; the Director-General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Chief Dr. Omotoso Eluyemi, and Madam Suzanne Wenger (Adunni Òṣogbo), among others, played immense roles in facilitating the listing of the site as a World Heritage Site.

This letter is sign by Akin Ogundiran as the Secretary of the Yoruba Studies Council.

Although the city of Òṣogbo is renowned for its economic activity, the Òṣun Grove and its annual festival, which brings thousands of tourists and visitors, contribute significantly to the city's economic viability. The revenue generated through the festival helps to support local businesses and vendors and has spawned the construction of several new hotels in and around Òṣogbo. The festival also has created opportunities for local groups to collaborate with corporate and government sponsors. A recent news article published in the Nigerian Tribune on September 10, 2007 notes that:

This year's Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival which ended last Friday was a colorful, impressive celebration of culture and heritage which characteristically drew thousands of people from across the globe. But as dazzling as it was, the next edition in 2008 would be bigger, better and colorful. Abiodun Odejayi, Regional Manager, South West of telecommunication company, MTN Nigeria, the major corporate sponsor of this year's festival which spent about N35 million- the company gave N10 million to the festival committees and expended N25 million on its community connect activities which involved all classes of people at the festival—was the first to insure that next year's festival would be more striking.

The article continues,

The pro-development governor of ÒṢun State and culture promoter, Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola, gave the same assurance, while the Minister of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation, Prince Adetokunbo Kayode (SAN), was emphatic that the festival would be taken to the next level next year. “Next Year, God sparing our lives, this ÒṢun ÒṢogbo festival will be bigger than this. I want to assure you that the federal government will pull its full weight in making ÒṢun ÒṢogbo Festival not only a national festival but also an international one,” Kayode declared at the grand finale of the celebration inside the ÒṢun grove on Friday.

According to the news article, Nigeria’s newly elected President Umaru Yar’Adua, pointed out the importance of ÒṢun ÒṢogbo Festival as one of Nigeria’s foremost arts and culture festivals and the significance of the grove as one of Nigeria’s world heritage sites. President Yar’Adua proclaimed, “My administration will endeavor to mainstream culture into the fabrics of national development by making it play a central role in our nation’s drive towards industrialization.” Yar’Adua applauded Susanne Wenger for “her role in drawing global attention to the ÒṢun Grove and to UNESCO for placing the grove in the list of World heritage sites.

In the course of the programme, prayers lead by the Ifá priest, Chief Ifáyemi Elebuibon, were said for the well being of the king, ÒṢogbo, ÒṢun State and Nigeria after the king’s return from the palace in the grove.¹⁴ (See figure 4-34)

Although the news article did not draw any correlations, I will make the following observations, the international attention that has been drawn to the ÒṢun ÒṢogbo festival and the emphasis that is now being given to tourism and development in ÒṢogbo and ÒṢun State is without question connected to the worldwide interest in Òrìsà culture and traditions. In addition to the plans to expand the festival, there is now in place a plan to establish the ÒṢun State University in ÒṢogbo, a private university, Fountain University, also in ÒṢogbo, and an Institute

¹⁴ Nigerian Tribune, Monday 10th September 2007.

of Black Culture and International Understanding, which will “serve as an archive of the people’s culture.” The institute will also be located in Oṣun State.

Nigeria, because of its poorly developed infra-structure and the reputation that it currently maintains as being a “lawless” society, has not been a preferred destination for tourists and international travelers. Until very recently the banking system was in shambles, some of the roads and highways are being repaved and widened, but are still very cumbersome to travel on. Currently, Nigeria does not have in place a system for credit card users to access cash or otherwise use their credit cards. Nigeria operates on a cash only economy. However, the many visitors who travel to Nigeria for spiritual and/or cultural experiences have demonstrated their willingness to be inconvenienced for the purpose of “returning” to the source of Yoruba religious and spiritual practices. Much of the credit for this growth and notoriety in Oṣogbo and Oṣun State should be given to Elebuibon and Wenger; I will also add that these recent developments are not without detractors and contestations.

While there remain practitioners of traditional religion in Nigeria, fifty percent of Nigeria’s population practice Christianity and forty percent are Muslims. Although the data suggest that only the remaining ten percent are traditionalists, large numbers of Christians and Muslims still maintain ties with traditional practitioners and oftentimes turn to the traditional priests in search of answers to troubling situations. Despite the appearance of coexistence between the Christian and Islamic communities, both groups compete for converts. Churches and mosques dominate the landscape and are the largest and best maintained facilities. Placards and signs warning against the evils of “cultism” are everywhere to be seen. Most of the films that I was able to view on television or on DVD seemed to present the same anti-cultism messages and were credited to some Christian organization. The theme that seemed to be the most ubiquitous always situated

the protagonist as someone struggling with the virtues of Christianity in opposition to traditional religion. The traditionalists are represented as evil and backward, while Christians are depicted as modern and enlightened. Traditionalists are also treated as exploiters of the ignorant and less fortunate. Television and movies that are now available on DVD have become popular means of entertainment. When there is electricity, the television is usually on.

While I was disturbed by the messages that were being broadcast about traditional religion vs. Christianity, I was equally intrigued by a comment made by Ifádapo,

If you have money, you have religion. Despite the fact that Ifá may predict long life for his worshippers, if you don't have money to buy a pigeon or a goat, you will die. Look at what those who practice Christianity and Islam have done. They take their money and build large churches and mosques, and then they have their people to bring their money to be able to worship and practice their religions. Traditionalists have not done that. They have their temples in their homes, in small rooms, usually in places where people cannot go. I want to build a big temple, where Ifá worshippers can come.¹⁵

When I first visited Wenger's home, I did not know that Elebuibon was so connected to Wenger's family or that the priest that he selected to conduct my Şàngó initiation, Sangodare, was one of Wenger's adopted sons. According to Sangodare, he and Elebuibon have been friends since boyhood. Sangodare is a priest, artist, philosopher, community activist, and a resident at Susanne Wenger's estate. Sangodare states that, he joined Susanne Wenger's family when he was still a boy in 1958. At the time of their meeting he was not in school and could not read or write. He stated that he was not allowed to attend school because of his family's religious and cultural beliefs. His family was traditionalists and school admittance was open only to families that practiced Islam or Christianity. Sangodare is a batik artist; his work has been exhibited in galleries and museums in Japan, Cuba, Brazil, Nigeria, Ghana, and in the USA. He learned his craft as an artist while attending workshops that were organized by Wenger and Bier. He has

¹⁵ Ifadapo is one of Elebuibon's sons. This comment was made during a personal interview on 7/9/07.

godchildren in Cuba and Brazil and he gives the international community of worshipper's credit for regenerating interest in the Yoruba culture and religion. He is currently working on a project to build a school that will focus on cultural and religious studies.¹⁶

Sangodare said that he was not born until his father was eighty five years old. His father was a *Ṣàngó* worshipper and because *Ṣàngó* was so pleased with his father, *Ifá* told his father that he would marry a younger woman and that she would give him a son. The son should be given the name "Sangodare" (*Ṣàngó's* gift). Because he was already an old man, the father did not believe that what *Ifá* said was possible. Through a series of unforeseen events the father was given a younger wife who bore him a male child. Sangodare considers his parturition a miracle birthing.¹⁷

Connections

The internet and cell phones kept *Jójólò*, Teju and I connected after they returned to the states. They had contacted Elebuibon. He was planning a trip to Archer, Florida to perform an initiation at *Ifálola* Compound. Onabamiero had arranged another initiation. *Bàbá Jomo's*¹⁸ son was to be initiated into the house of *Ọbàtálá*. This initiation was significant as it further strengthened the *Òṣogbo*, *Ọyótúnjí*, and Archer connections. It also provided a possible chance for us to benefit from Elebuibon's presence in Archer. If Tejumola's initiation could be scheduled around the same time, the cost of housing and transporting Elebuibon could be shared. It is significant because it signals the reunification of Onabamiero with his former godfather. This move is to Onabamiero's credit, especially if it induces other initiations and increased contact with *Òṣogbo* by a younger generation.

¹⁶ Personal interview with Sangodare 7/7/07

¹⁷ personal interview with Sangodare 7/7/07

¹⁸ *Bàbá Jomo* was one of *Ọyótúnjí's* early settlers. He was also one of Onabamiero's godfathers.

My work in Òṣogbo moved quickly and smoothly. Elebuibon had left his enchanting magic in place and everything in his world responded to my use of his name. In Elebuibon's enthralling enclave I got up each morning to the sound of children's names being called so that they would arise and fetch buckets of water for bathing and other household needs. Every morning at four o'clock, I was awakened by the call of the local Imam's inviting the faithful to Morning Prayer, blasting from some nearby loud speaker. These were quickly overshadowed by the prayers of the evangelist Christian preachers on a louder speaker. At the first sign of daylight I would look out of my bedroom window to see Yemisi ¹⁹ sweeping the upper-leveled porch and stairwell that led to her mother's apartment.²⁰ (See figures 4-2 thru 4-9)

Since Elebuibon was not going to be in Òṣogbo during my visit, I requested that his twenty year old son Yomi be my research assistant and that he help with my initiation. During my 2001 initiation into the mysteries of Ifá, Yomi functioned as my ágùbòṅà and held my hand as I entered the grove. At the time he was only thirteen years old. I remember asking Yomi, what he wanted to be when he grew up. He looked directly at me and stated, "I want to be a babaláwo, like my father." He also told me that he was going to be my teacher. I was very moved by the wisdom and self assuredness of this young boy. Yomi is now a university student and is studying history.

Four of Elebuibon's young adult children are presently attending universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Three of his sons have begun to establish themselves as babaláwos and have a small constituency of local and international clientele. However, the clients are located primarily in the United States. The split from the immediate fold of their father is not without

¹⁹ Yemisi is one of Elebuibon's daughters.

²⁰ Each of Elebuibon's wives has her individual apartments.

problems. One of the three sons expressed an interest in traveling to the states and stated that his split is an expression of his “manhood” and need for independence. Ifádapo and Niyi seem to be the most popular among the sons still in Òşogbo and had a small flow of clients during my recent stay at the family’s compound. Daily I witnessed the preparation of traditional medicine and Ifá consultations by the two young babaláwos. I also noticed how they related to their patrons. In the instances that I observed, the atmosphere was quite relaxed and all of the parties involved seemed quite engaged in the ritual process. This is nothing like the tradition in the United States, where rituals are extremely sensitive and secretive and clients are usually segregated from priests. The consumers that I observed in Òşogbo were mostly young and appeared to be contemporaries of the young babaláwos.

Elebuibon states the following about priest-client relationships,

Following the prediction, the client will go home and bring to the priest all the items prescribed by the priest. The priest would in turn perform all of the rituals. This may involve mutual participation by both the client and the priest. But spates of modernity have changed this system a little bit. What some clients usually do is to pay for all the items and instruct the priest to go ahead with the rituals. This, in part, is due to the socio-economic changes in the society and the limited horizon of some clients about their world-views. If a priest mentions a particular sacrifice, a client who has been living in an urban centre all the days of his life may not be able to identify it. Such a client would therefore prefer, in fact as a necessity, the priest to do everything for him. This shift does not necessarily affect the efficacy of the ritual (Elebuibon 200:31).

Elebuibon continues,

Another reason why some clients would like the priest to do everything on their behalf is that most of the present-day clients have embraced modern religions. In fact most of them are chieftains in these religions. They still do this traditional sacrifice when it becomes necessary but would not like it to be revealed in the open. Knowing that priests are the father of secrets; they confide in them with the expectation that they would not go round to expose them. The priest would therefore do the sacrifice on his behalf with the belief that the prayer will reach him whenever he is (ibid).

Elebuibon’s children are cosmopolitan and have benefited from their contacts with the many international visitors to their family’s compound. Like me, many of the visitors have left

behind Western styled clothing and numerous gadgets, including cell phones and cameras. Although everyone at the compound speak and understand the Yoruba language, most will conveniently switch to English to accommodate their English speaking guests. Bobola, Elebuibon's thirteen year old son is currently learning to speak and write in Portuguese and Spanish.

Diviner's Training

Prognostics and diagnosis for traditional medicine requires specialized knowledge. This knowledge is not taught in a formal school setting and is generally the result of years of preparation. In most cases amongst the Yoruba, diviners are trained privately by other diviners, and work as apprentices, for periods of three to seven years. In the case of Elebuibon's children, they have been under the tutelage of their father since very early in their lives and have actively participated in ceremonies and rituals. Training involves learning the names and signs of the divination figures, the proverbs and stories connected with them, and the practice, rites and accoutrements of divination.

Some diviners do not undergo prolonged periods of training such as those found among the Yoruba. Many outside of Yorubaland learn their trade more through practice than through formal training. Divination links together in a complicated way the spiritual and the physical worlds, thus making it a religious activity.

Diviners and herbalists/healers are oftentimes one and the same. It needs to be pointed out that African diviners and medicine men have suffered greatly from European and American writers depictions of them as "witch doctors" and that they in fact play an important role in the life of their village and community.

Elebuibon states,

A major aspect of the training of a priest is the knowledge of sacrifice that goes with every stanza of Ifá verse. Herbal medicine can only be prescribed after ẹbọ (sacrifice) has been offered. This is done to enhance and affect efficacy. Instances abound when dispensation of medicine alone without accompanying ẹbọ becomes ineffective.

A look at the process of Yoruba traditional method of healing shows a striking parallel with the western orthodox medicine in the area of diagnosis. This is before dispensation of drugs. While the western orthodox medicine would use a stethoscope an Ifá priest would use opele or ikin-Ifá, in the traditional setting. Ifá would reveal that most ailments are caused by germs and bacteria that cannot be seen with the human naked eye. Because of their invisibility and power, they are dubbed unseen spirits or Ajogun (warrior against man). However, orthodox medicine does not go to that length. They only see disease as coming from unseen bacteria and scheme a device to eliminate them without affecting the human body system (Elebuibon 2000: 32).

Finally on this topic Elebuibon states,

One very important observation is that despite the spates of modernity as reflected in new religions and orthodox medicine, Yoruba people still patronize the Ifá priest. Distensibly they might have gone to the hospital and various churches and still find that they have not been healed. Some orthodox medicine practitioners would even tell their patients point blank to go home because they could not diagnose their ailments. Then, they come to the Ifá priest and make the necessary sacrifices that would be described. This has produced success on many occasions (Elebuibon 2000: 33).

Additional Connections

Sangodare's residence at Susanne Wenger's estate was very convenient because I was able to meet with him and discuss my initiation, while at the same time, gain insight into the work and artifacts collected by Wenger. Like Elebuibon's home, Wenger's place was always busy with outsiders coming to meet her and to visit with Sangodare or Doyin. Doyin is a priestess in the Ọṣun cult and like Wenger is a prominent caretaker of the Ọṣun grove. (See figures 4-37 thru 4-41)

Doyin granted me several interviews. During one of our discussions she explained that the federal government discontinued the pension payments that were due the sacred artists and that the government wanted attendees at the grove to pay an admittance fee, "as if the grove is a tourist site. The grove is not a tourist site but instead a sacred site. Sacred artists are in opposition

to the federal government collecting an entrance fee.”²¹ On the day that we visited the Ọ̀ṣun grove, Doyin argued with the attendant about him wanting to collect a fee from us. Instead, when we were departing, I dashed him with some naira. He was in fact quite agreeable and allowed me to video tape our visit. Although, he was not a Ọ̀ṣun worshipper, he gave me some Ọ̀ṣun stones that he had collected from the river.

The visit to the grove was an astonishing experience. During my 2001 visit, I participated in the Ọ̀ṣun festival and visited the grove on two additional occasions. When I visited the grove with Doyin, she explained to me what the different objects that are displayed at the grove represented. Ọ̀ṣogbo had been experiencing a significant amount of rainfall, but on this day the sky was clear and the Ọ̀ṣun River was tranquil. Fish were swimming with very little agitation and monkeys were jumping from tree to tree. Doyin informed me that the type of monkey that lived in the grove usually travel in groups and that they are very connected to Ibeji (twins), in fact, they are referred to as Ibeji.

Ọ̀ṣun blessed me with a special bell. (See Figure. 4-43) Doyin and I were accompanied by her twelve year old son, Ojo, and Bobola, my thirteen year old assistant. Both of the boys are babaláwos. I noticed the bell sitting on a rock on the bank of the river. The two boys and I had just had our heads, faces, and feet washed by sister Doyin. As we were about to leave the area I glanced down at the rock and saw the bell. I was inspired to pick it up. As I picked it up sister Doyin stated that the bell was a gift to me from Ọ̀ṣun. Ojo exclaimed that it was a special blessing from Ọ̀ṣun and that it was a miracle. I was very appreciative of the acknowledgement from Ọ̀ṣun for my love, presence, and work in Ọ̀ṣogbo. I asked Doyin for permission to photograph the bell at the site where I found it. Doyin asked me to hand the bell over to her so

²¹ Personal interview with Doyin on 7/7/07.

that she could wash the bell in the river. She took the bell and washed it while praying to Ọṣun. Afterwards, she divined with obí and then told me that “Ọṣun genuinely wanted” me to have the bell. I gave thanks to Ọṣun and gratefully placed the bell in my shoulder bag.²²

For a few days afterwards I moved between Elebuibon’s compound and Sangodare’s and Doyin’s apartments. Getting around was fairly easy because I usually had a driver or someone from Elebuibon’s family to accompany me, especially Bobola. With Bobola I usually traveled by motor bike or taxi. Classes at the university had resumed by the time I was able to settle in Ọṣogbo for my research and initiation. So, Yomi was preparing to return to school. He could not be my assistant or be available for my initiation. Bobola came to my rescue! At thirteen years old Bobola exudes tremendous confidence and proficiencies. He without hesitation introduces himself as an artist and a Babaláwo and has already traveled to Portugal and Venezuela, hence his love for the Spanish and Portugal languages. I will add that he made these trips unescorted by any of his family members, and through contacts that he established for himself on the internet. He visited both places as a self promoted cultural teacher. He stated to me, that he was teaching them about Yoruba traditions and culture. Bobola like his father is a lover of the arts and of Yoruba culture. He is prominent among the many people that I have to thank for making my research and life experiences in Ọṣogbo meaningful and possible.

Bobola managed my affairs in areas where I was not capable. He somehow managed to find space in his busy and juvenile existence to spend a great deal of time facilitating my research. He did my money transactions, including trading my dollars for naira on the market. He was my interpreter and guide. Within a short span of time he taught himself to be a reasonably capable camera person. Several of my photographs and video recordings are credited to him. He

²² The bell now sits with my Ọṣun objects on my shrine.

did all of this and attended school all day. So at the end his school day he would rush home so that we could resume the adventure of the research and travel. On some occasions he traveled with me to Ilé-Ife and to Ifon-Ọ̀ṣun to see the king.

The King's Demise

Even though Tejumola's initiation didn't take place at Ifon-Ọ̀ṣun as we had hoped, I still had unfinished business in the kingdom. As part of our ọ̀gbóni initiation we were to be given certificates that recognized our membership in the society. My task was to get the photographs copied from my camera into passport size photos that would be placed on the certificates. At the time, it all sounded fairly simple, only not in Nigeria. Getting the photograph from my camera to my computer and modified into a passport size picture was fairly easy. Getting the photograph printed in color on the appropriate type of paper required a trip to Ilé-Ife and finding a photo studio. Fortunately for me, with the help of Nike²³, I was able to get the photographs quickly and returned to Ọ̀ṣogbo. Once that was completed, I had to take the photographs back to the king, who would in turn get them to the right person in the ọ̀gbóni. This too sounded simple, but it wasn't. The king's health was deteriorating and so things that were not urgent matters began to get less attention. By the time I was ready to leave Nigeria the certificates did not matter at all.

On the last occasion that I saw the Ọ̀ba before I departed from Nigeria, I visited him with Biodun Adediran. Kábíyèsí was not well. Frail and trembling, he told Biodun that he thought that his ailment was the result of someone working some bad medicine on him. Someone working bad medicine is a common fear in Nigeria. This belief is partly responsible for many people converting to Christianity and Islam and turning away from traditional practices. Yoruba history is replete with examples of such beliefs, and kings have suffered their demise at the

²³ Níké is one of Biodun Adediran's daughters. Her assistance and attention to my care while I was at OAU, is greatly appreciated.

hands of sorcerers since the beginning of Yoruba kingdoms. One week after I returned to the United States I received a call from Nigeria to inform me that the king had died, gone to be with his ancestors. I silently grieved his loss and was thankful that I did get to spend some time with him and benefited immeasurably from his presence in the personification of Òrìsànlá in 2001.

Legends abound in Yorubaland and the diaspora about Ṣàngó and his magical powers. Currently there is a great deal of literature on the subject of magic, witchcraft, and sorcery in Africa and the diaspora.²⁴ The most popular myth claims that, Ṣàngó is an òrìsà; but- as myth has it- was the fourth Alaafin of Oyo, which was founded by Oronmiyon, the youngest son of Odùduwà. The myth also relates that he was endowed with his magical powers by his wife Oya, who gave him magical medicine with which he produces thunder and lightning. Ṣàngó is the god of thunder and lightning, which is emitted through his mouth.

In 2001, at a farewell party that was arranged before my group's departure from Nigeria, I was able to witness and record a performance by a young Ṣàngó priest, in which he walked on burning coals, placed a flaming fire on a stick in his mouth, ate broken pieces of glass, and walked on nails that had been hammered into a piece of wood. Before this priest was able to perform any of these seemingly incredible feats he had to undergo rituals that enabled him to possess the magical "powers of Ṣàngó."²⁵ Throughout his performance he was under the careful watch of another Ṣàngó priest who was there to insure that he remained in his trance and therefore safe from harm.

²⁴ For example: E.E.Evans-Pritchard *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford 1937); E.G. Parrinder *Witchcraft* (Penguin, London 1958); J. Middleton & E.H. Winter, eds., *Witchcraft and sorcery in East Africa* (London 1963); H. Debrunner *Witchcraft in Ghana* (Kumasi 1959); G. Bloomhill *Witchcraft in Africa* (Cape town 1962); In addition to these classical writings, there now exist a plethora of anthropological and sociological works which contain sections on magic, sorcery, and witchcraft in Africa and in the African diaspora.

²⁵ The young priest was a member of one of the several groups that was contracted to perform at the farewell party which was hosted by Chief Margaret Idowu at one of her Òṣogbo estates.

According to Sangodare, “*Ẓàngó* is the greatest magician of them all.” Another example of *Ẓàngó*’s proclivity for the supernatural is discussed in his performance during the annual *Ẓàngó* Festival in the town of Ede in Southwestern Nigeria,

The principle performer must each day “carry” the God. That is to say he must fall into a self-induced state of possession, during which he will speak with the voice of *Ẓàngó*. He dances with incredible energy whilst in this state and he appears to be insensitive to pain. In Ede this state of possession is induced in the following manner. The chief performer (*Bàbá Èlẹgún*) takes a bundle of dry grass and lights it with a match. While dancing around in a circle, followed by other worshippers, he blows into the smoldering grass.

When at last the flames shoot up from the grass, a trembling runs throughout his body. His eyes widen and he begins to reel. *Ẓàngó* has mounted his head. The other worshippers support him and take him away. He then puts on a special dress, which must only be worn in a state of trance. He is now the human representation of the God when he returns dancing, he is indeed changed. He has acquired some of the God’s superhuman strength and energy. He now begins his amazing performances. A favorable feat is to push an iron rod through his tongue or drive a knife into his flesh without flinching. One performer had an iron rod as thick as a little finger pushed underneath his eyeball. Another man then beat it with a mallet. Another was shot in the mouth with a Dane gun at short range (Sangode 1996: 38-39).

While the above described situations may seem fantastic and viewed as entertainment and amusement, they are in fact performed in the context of ritualistic processes that requires the performers to be in an induced state of trance consciousness and a state of worship of the *òrisà Ẓàngó*. These types of seemingly theatrical routines by *Ẓàngó* devotees can be observed during sacred rites as well as during public performances, such as the one that I observed during my 2001 *fête* in *Òṣogbo* and during my *Ẓàngó* initiation in 2007.

Ká Wọ̀ Kábíyèsí: the Making of Ẓàngó

I left *Ilé-Ife* and arrived at *Ifáyemi*’s compound several days before my initiation. I wanted the extra time so that I could visit with the king and collect some documents from the palace in *Ifon Orulo*, interview *Doyin* and *Sangodare* at *Susanne Wenger*’s estate, and videotape *Ifáyemi*’s sons making traditional medicine. I also wanted to spend time in the City of *Òṣogbo*. This

would be my fifth initiation since my involvement with òrìsà-vooodoo, santeria, and traditional Yoruba religion.

During the first initiation I was crowned Ọ̀bàtálá and my ita odùs revealed that I was “suppose to bring an òrìsà from Nigeria” and that going to jail saved my life. “They were going to kill you.” I was also told that I would “pass to Ifá” later in life and that Ọ̀bàtálá would have to grant me permission to pass.²⁶ At the time when I was given these prognoses for my life, they had very little meaning. What seemed to matter the most was that I had fulfilled my “promise” to be initiated. ita is that time during an initiation ceremony when the attending priests display their knowledge of the odùs and stories that are relative to the letters that fall, when the cowry shells are thrown. In the case of an Ifá initiation, the officiating babaláwo will use an opele chain or Ikin Ifá (palm nuts). It is also the time when taboos and life’s uncertainties are discussed. The prognosis may include warnings about sickness or death, marriage or divorce, wealth or sudden calamity. You might also learn about your enemies. In my case, I was told a number of details that I was instructed not to share. I have been a witness to the truth of what Ifá declares.

My second, third, and fourth initiations occurred during my 2001 visit to Nigeria. First, I was initiated into the ọ̀gbóni Society and received the “hand of Ọ̀bàtálá” at Ifon Ọ̀ṣun and then I was initiated into the mysteries of Ifá at Ọ̀ṣogbo. It was during my Ifá ita session, that Ifáyemi divined that I needed to be initiated into the cult of Ẹ̀ṣàngó; that I needed Ẹ̀ṣàngó to work along with my Ifá odù. I received the same forecast when Ifáyemi gave me orí during his visit to initiate the three Ìyàwó in 2005. During my orí ita, Ifá spoke and stated again that I needed to receive Ẹ̀ṣàngó.

²⁶ Notes from my 1982 Ìyàwó note pad, as recorded by my ajubonna, Adeosun.

For thirty years I wore white clothing as often as possible and avoided wearing anything red²⁷. My head belonged to òrìsà Ọ̀bàtálá. When Yomi gave me Ọ̀bàtálá I was a very hot headed young man. My life was fast paced and I was heading towards a collision. My soul was in dire need of the calming and cooling consciousness that Ọ̀bàtálá manifested. Mò Dùpé Òrìsànlá! Mò Dùpé Yomi! Ọ̀bàtálá has given me wisdom and patience.

Ọ̀bàtálá is the òrìsà that was charged with the creation of mankind. On his way to perform the task, he stopped and socialized. He got drunk on palm wine and didn't get to the job on time. Of all of the accounts that I have read and heard about Ọ̀bàtálá, this was undoubtedly his greatest error. Eventually he sobered up, but the task of creating mankind had been accomplished by his younger brother. So he was left with the duty of creating those of mankind who were challenged to live life with deformities.

After so many years of life as an omo Ọ̀bàtálá to discover that Ẓàngó wanted his àṣé to be placed in my head, required some mental adjustments and life-style changes. Even though many of Ẓàngó's proscriptions for how I should live my life are quite different from those that were given to me by Ọ̀bàtálá, Ẓàngó still dictates that I should walk close to the line that Ọ̀bàtálá had placed before me; that I should maintain the peace and calmness that Ọ̀bàtálá had given me. Ifá promised me a re-created life and told me that my new life would be one that included the worship of Ẓàngó. This was especially odd because, I had been given the objects of Ẓàngó during my Ọ̀bàtálá initiation. However, in my initiation notebook there is a warning from Ẓàngó: "people will say they didn't make the right ocha to you" (initiated to the right òrìsà). I was not told that I needed to serve Ẓàngó or that Ẓàngó would someday be so important in my life. No

²⁷ As a follower of Ọ̀bàtálá I wore white clothing and offered only items that were near white in color. Red is associated with Ẓàngó, who is "hot" as opposed to Ọ̀bàtálá's "cool".

one ever challenged me or questioned the validity of my Ọbàtálá initiation. Ifá never suggested that I was crowned Ọbàtálá in error. I was never instructed to stop attending to or worshipping my Lucumi styled òrisàs. Anyway, to do so would be very difficult for me. I do not question their powers, nor do I understand àṢé as anything other than energy.

My Ṣàngó initiation and experiences in Òṣogbo cannot be described as a universal system for Ṣàngó initiation rituals. Sangodare suggested that there are multitude ways for worshippers to observe and practice and that performance, including songs, dances, and rituals are not homogeneous. John Mason, a USA based priest and Yoruba-American scholar describes Ṣàngó,

Ṣàngó is- Warrior king, fourth Alafin of Oyo, brilliant general, stout heart, lion in the bush, bigger than life, ardent lover, gourmet and glutton, itinerant bohemian, Jack-of- all-trades-master-of-none, he who illuminates the dark, punisher of liars and scoffers, lightning bolt hurler, owner of fire, owner of the great horse, magician, inventor, diviner, the tragic hero, the great hope (Mason 1981:69).

Mason also provides a list of Ṣàngó's favorite foods,

Ṣàngó's Favorite foods- Ram (agbo), Tortoise (ijapa), Turtle (ajapa), Rooster, Pigeons,²⁸Guinea fowl, Dry white wine, Green bananas, Red apples, Pomegranate, cornmeal mush (amala), Okra (ila), okra stew, Rice bread, Fufu, Calalu, Obe ayaba, Akara, Bread of black-peas, Okra split with epo (ibid).

Day 1 of Ṣàngó Initiation

After a long and restless night and a morning of anxious anticipation at 10:35am on Friday morning, the Ṣàngó initiation people began to arrive. Sangodare and the bàtá drummers arrived first. Soon afterwards several other priests came and began making preparations. I sat waiting quietly and patiently. Things appeared to be falling into place. However, I still needed to be certain that Bobola understood the instructions that I had given him for video recording the initiation. After all, he was only thirteen years old and this was to be an important aspect of my

²⁸ In some New World traditions, Ṣàngó does not eat pigeon.

research documentation. I was notified that we were about to begin and I could not locate Bobola. All of a sudden, I was approached by two young men, Tarobi and Bisi. They inquired about the possibility of assisting me with the photographing and video recording. They explained that they had been told by one of Ifáyemi's sons that I might need some help. They also stated that they had just graduated from a Polytechnic Institute and that they both concentrated on photography and video production. I asked them what they would charge for their services. They said that they were not interested in money; instead they were interested in gaining experience. Pressed for time as I was, I quickly showed them how to operate my equipment that included a camcorder, a digital camera, and a tape recorder. I told them that I wanted them to capture as much of the details of the initiation as they possibly could. I was confident of the cooperation of Ifáyemi's family but I was not certain about the potential reactions of the attendant priests. I completed my negotiations with Tarobi and Bisi just as I was being called into the temple.

I entered the temple and was instructed to kneel down before the young priest who had just completed laying out the assortment of herbs that would be used for the initiation. About twelve Şàngó priests and babaláwos were assembled inside and outside of the temple. The babaláwos present were mostly Ifáyemi's sons that were there to support the success of the rites. The Şàngó priests were hired by Sangodare to work at the initiation. Sangodare said that they were all from a town near Oyo.²⁹

The young priest recited a series of incantations and prayers as he threw kola nuts to determine which other condiments needed to be added to the concoction that would be made. The first kola nut pieces were discarded. Sangodare stated that they were not good. After selecting a new Kola the reading was continued. The kola was thrown many times as I remained

²⁹ Oyo is known as the center of Şàngó worship since Şàngó had been king of Oyo.

kneeling with my head bowed and my palms facing upright. Occasionally the priest touched the kola to my head. Ifádapo interpreted for me what the obí (kola nut) had disclosed, “Ifá says that your deeds are o.k.” I took this to mean that the deeds that I had done leading up to this initiation were good. The priest sprayed water and liquor on to the herbs.

At the conclusion of this phase of the process the herbs were gathered up by two of the young priests and taken outdoors where they were placed in a mortar that had been stationed at the side of the temple. Three of the priests took turns beating the herbs with two pestles. The process seemed arduous for the laboring priests; they were soon joined by some of the other priests that had been standing around. After a short while the herbs had been pounded enough and were transferred into a large clay pot. The priest then added liquor, palm oil, kola nut, honey, and other ingredients into the new vessel. All the while the young priest continued to read obí (kola nut) so that he would be assured that all of the needed ingredients had been included. In another area of the ritual space a priest was painting and preparing the clay pot that would house my Şàngó objects. Another priest was busy stringing my new necklace (ilèkès).

Afterwards, I was escorted back into the temple and instructed to sit on a straw mat that was on the floor. Sangowumi, the woman that would be my ágùbòṅà came into the temple, accompanied by three of the young male priests. The priests were playing Şàngó’s rattles. Sangowumi placed a cauldron of water on the floor and a white piece of clothe between my legs. I sat quietly with my eyes shut. The *bàtá* drummers began to play, the two elderly women priests began to sing oros (Şàngó chants). Sangowumi proceeded to shave my head and eyebrows.

The white cloth with my hair on it was removed and I was told to sit back and relax. The priests continued to shake Şàngó’s rattles, while the drummers played and the women chanted. I sat quietly for a short while and listened to singing and drumming; soon the same three young

priests appeared again, this time with a larger piece of white cloth. They folded the cloth neatly and placed it on the floor beside me. One of the priests was carrying a small straw tray with cowry shells on it. The tray was placed on the floor; two of the priests sat down beside me, one on my left and the other on my right side. They were preparing to perform the divination that is necessary to determine the flow of the initiation and the rituals/sacrifices that would be offered during the initiation. The shells were placed in my hands; I was instructed to pray. I raised my clasped hands to my mouth and prayed. After my prayer, I was told to toss the shells. On the first throw, Sangodare translated that “Ifá said that you would have a long life.” I was instructed to put some money on the mat. I placed the required money on the mat. Sangodare told me that I should pray on the money. The priest threw the shells again; he recited the odù that the shells revealed. Sangodare interpreted again, Ifá said that all the good things that you want in this life, he wants to bless you.” Sangodare continued, “Ifá says that good things will be following you this year. Ifá says that you must make a good sacrifice for your own life. Don’t make arguments; just be silent and don’t argue. Because what you say will come true; don’t make argument, just pray. This went on for quite some time; the young priest reciting odùs and Sangodare interpreting.

When he was finally finished with the reading the priest touched his head to the floor and stood to his feet. Ifádapo interpreted the final odù, “Ifá says that you need to have a dog. Once you have a dog as a pet it will be good for you. There are three blessings that will come your way. Ifá says that when the three blessings come they will stick with you; they going to stick with you. You need to do the sacrifice to bring the blessings. You need to have a dog as a pet.” Sangodare followed Ifádapo’s interpretation with some additional remarks, “If you have a dog at home, it is really good. If you don’t have it, try to fine one dog for you.” I interjected and stated

“every time I have a dog he runs away.”³⁰ Sangodare laughed and stated, “Maybe you’ll try again, and that will be a good blessing for you. Because there are three enemies that want to come to your house. They are debt, sickness, and losers. Then when they come to your house, they saw you, ah, you don’t have wife, you don’ have a building, you don’t have anything. What can I do with you”? At this point, Sangodare switched to Yoruba, to clarify a point in the odù with the other priests. They knew instantly the point that he was referencing and several replied with the same response, almost in unison. When he switched back to his English translation of the odù, he commented that he would give me the shortened interpretation. Sangodare continued, “The story belongs to that odù. That odù says a lot of things, but I will just summarize it for you. All your life you just very poor; you don’t have luck in life. All your life you just come down; things are not doing very well; things are upside down. How can I make my life come to be together? That’s when he went to Òrúnmìlá. Òrúnmìlá did divine for him; that odù comes out.” Sangodare went on to tell the story of the odù which essentially advised me to do the prescribed sacrifices and to be cautious with what I say to others, because I can make good and bad things happen with my words.

Sangodare stopped talking; the young priest that was seated to my right pushed forward, touched his head to the ground, and began reciting prayers and invocations. He then offered his interpretation of the odù. Sangodare’s translated his prayer for me, “Ifá says that you should really try to be aware of your friends; you have some friends, that are planning bad against you, but when they see you, they change minds, oh blah, blah, and you’re good, you’re this thing; they totally change things. They are enemies. It’s a bad thing in your mind. So that when they

³⁰ Sangodare, Ifadapo, Taribo, Bisi, and Bobola were all able to switch from English to Yoruba and vice versa without difficulty. All of the Oyo priests did not speak or understand any English. My comment about my poor luck with dogs was specifically directed towards Sangodare.

saw you they turned it into another thing. So really try to do the sacrifice for yourself. So that if they want to do a bad thing to you; through the sacrifice you will push all the bad things away from you. You will never get a bad thing. It's a good blessing for you.”

This process went on for a couple of hours with other priests sharing their insights about the odù. One of the elder priests warned that I should not complain. Sangodare translated, “When something is no good, just take it as it is.” I was told to sacrifice a cock for my deceased father, so that his spirit would guide my destiny, to make my life to come together. I was given the option of doing the sacrifice then or when I returned to the United States. I was warned against becoming annoyed by situations. Sangodare translated, “when you become annoyed there is no gain from it for you; just calm down. It is very, very important for you; that odù just mentioned that because your spirit is always annoyed. So then you have to calm it down. If someone tells you something, it is better to cool it down, because the blood of Şàngó is on you; and Ògún is on you. You know you could be very aggressive sometime; so but, try to cool your aggression down, because of your own life.” Sangodare explained that sometimes in our becoming annoyed with others or allowing ourselves to be annoyed, we destroy the very foundations that we are trying to lay. When all was said by the priests and Sangodare, I was instructed to dip my finger into the honey that had been poured over the Şàngó thunder stones, which were being fed and charged during the initiation. Sangodare's final words were, “It's sweet, and your life will be sweet.”

The plate containing the honey that sweetened Şàngó's stones was passed around the room and the priests took a dab on their finger tip and licked it. Next the priest cast the cowry shells to divine for the sacrifices that I needed to do. Sangodare did not provide any translation or interpretations for this segment of the divination service. At the conclusion of the divination

session, I was instructed to stand and I was escorted out of the holy place and out on to the plaza/courtyard in front of the temple.

I did not completely dismiss the anthropologist within me. I had to continue to guide Taribo and Bisi's work. It soon became apparent that I was not alone in my interest in a quality representation of the initiation and my interest in making the images/representations available for public viewing. Taribo and Bisi demonstrated their abilities to manage the equipment and their comfort with documenting cultural and sensitive material. We only had a few occasions when it became necessary for me to direct their attention to the initiators and less attention on me. My objective was to document as much of the process as was possible. There were two occasions when one of Ifáyemi's sons, Niyi, confiscated the digital camera and took several pictures, because Taribo needed to leave the room. My research and documentary team had expanded to include the priests and babaláwos, my cameramen, Taribo and Bisi, and most of Ifáyemi's family. When I saw how engaged and supportive everyone was, I was able to be more fully into my initiation; for short periods of time, I was able to suspend my consciousness.

Once we were outdoors, I was seated on what at the time appeared to be a bench covered with the straw mat from the temple (I later observed in a photograph from this event that the straw mat was placed atop an inverted mortar; Şàngó's customary throne). The bàtá drummers began beating their drums. One of the young priests was busy washing the oşe Şàngó and Şàngó statue that would go home with me. One of the two elderly women priests came outdoors and began dancing; Taribo joined in the dance. I sat on Şàngó's throne observing and holding the anthropologist at bay. Someone walked across my sight pulling the goat that was to be sacrificed.

The drummers played for awhile and the women danced. The drums stopped; the women removed their lapas (cloth that is wrapped at the waist). The women used their wraps to build a

wall that concealed the ritual of dressing and placing the àṣé in my head. This was one of the first rituals that could not be documented. I will share just a fraction of what happened behind that wall. As the women chanted ọṛọs (Ṣàngó songs) and danced for Ṣàngó, a birthing took place. My head was washed with the omièrò (herbal mixture) that had been prepared earlier. It was painted with white and red paste and fed indigenous medicines that were formulated to induce the spirit of Ṣàngó. The cone that contained the essence of Ṣàngó's àṣé was placed on top of my head. I closed my eyes so that I could absorb the experience. I lost consciousness for some moments. Ṣàngó was present and the anthropologist was subdued. But the cameras were still rolling. Taribo and Bisi were documenting those ephemeral moments. Their recordings and my memories are what I have of that experience that allows me to offer a near accurate and visual account of the materials that I discuss.

I sat there reposed for some time and then I was instructed to stand. The bàtá drummers began to beat their drums again and the women began to sing. The ẹbọ (sacrificial offering) that had been layered with various ingredients was lifted from the ground and handed to me. Sangowumi, my ágùbònà, picked up the calabash that contained the omièrò and placed it on top of her head. I was told to follow behind her. I fell in immediately behind her and the priests, friends, and family members joined the small parade behind me. We stepped outside of the iron-gate that secures Ifáyemi's compound and on to Elebuibon Street. Behind us, I heard the beating of the bàtá drums and the constant rattling of Ṣàngó's shakers. We walked a short distance and wound up at a small creek that runs behind Ifáyemi's compound.

At the creek, two of the young priests stepped forward and stepped into the creek. One of them had a small pick and he began digging a hole in the sand beneath the water. His efforts seemed futile, so one of the senior priests stepped into the water and took the tool from the

younger priest and began to search for a suitable place for the hole. After the hole was dug, the elder priest motioned for me to step forward. With assistance from two priests, I stepped into the creek. Once I was in the water, the women removed their wraps and again created a makeshift wall that concealed what was happening at this stage of the initiation ritual.

The two young priests began to cut and tear away from my body the clothing that I was wearing. I stood in the creek naked; Sangodare instructed me to bathe myself with the *omièrò* and to pray. After the bath, I was helped to get out of the water and dressed in the white fabric that had been purchased for this occasion. This particular ritual of the removal and burying of old clothing and the spiritual bath symbolize the stripping of the old personality and the birth of the new child. At this point I was an *Ìyàwó* again.

The calabash that had been carried to the creek by Sangowumi was lifted out of the stream and placed on top of my head. Again, I lost consciousness; my head began to feel as though someone or something extremely heavy had climbed on top of it. With the support of several of the priests, I was able to carry the exhausting calabash, as I stumbled and staggered back to Ifáyemi's temple. At the temple's entranceway, Sangodare without any strain removed the calabash from my head and I was lifted up off of the ground and carried in to the temple room. Once inside, I collapsed from exhaustion. Just lying there on the mat trying to collect my thoughts was all that I could do.

I was only allowed to rest for a short while before one of the young priests entered the room carrying a small calabash. He motioned for me to sit up. Taribo was in the room with the camera. In fact, Taribo, Bisi, and Niyi had recorded a great deal more of the day's events than I had imagined. The priest stood to my right side and began washing my head with a black soapy and paste like substance. He then tied an *ikoide* (African grey parrot feather) that was attached to

a white piece of thread around my head. The feather stood at the center of my forehead. Afterwards, a red piece of cloth was spread over the mat for me to sit on. The room was buzzing with conversation in Yoruba. I was very hungry and so I requested some food. My diet is generally very modest; my staple foods in Òṣogbo were fruits, rice and fish, vegetables, and toasted bread. My meals were usually small and I usually ate with Bobola; he was always glad to take whatever was left over home to share with his younger siblings. I always drank bottled water. I ate the same way in Ilé-Ife and Ifon-Òṣun. My host families and the king of Ifon were accommodating and made special efforts to provide for my diet.

After I ate, I rested for a while. Later in the afternoon, Sangodare came into the room and told me that we would be having a festival to dance for Ṣàngó, in the early evening. The day's work was not done. Festivals in celebration of the òrìsàs are important in the lives of worshippers. Sangodare stated at one point that "Yoruba people don't know birthdays in the way that Europeans know birthdays." He continued, "In Yorubaland, the day that you are initiated is your birthday. So it is on that day that initiates celebrate their anniversaries." This would be my first time to observe my anniversary with my new community.

We assembled in the plaza which is situated at the very back of Ifáyemi's compound, behind the temple. The plaza area is a 40'x40' slab of concrete, fenced in by a six feet tall cinder-block wall and surrounded by the buildings that comprise the compound. Adjacent to the plaza, is the small outdoor kitchen that also functions as the workshop where the babaláwos create and produce black soap and other traditional medicines. Adjacent to and behind the cinder-block wall and kitchen is the Igbo Ifá (Ifá grove). (See figures 4-50 thru 4-57)

The celebration lasted for several hours. Each of the priests performed their own choreographed and self-styled dance for Ṣàngó. Each responded in their own fashion to the call

of the staccato rhythms of the bàtá drums. Taribo and Bisi knew instinctively the necessity of documenting the drumming, chanting, and dancing as well as the intricate nuances of the feet movements. They had been consumed by their roles as the documenters. The photographs, audio, and video recordings that resulted from their efforts will be a lasting contribution to the study of Yoruba religious traditions in the African diaspora.

The crowd sat around drank beer, laughed and talked, as the players collected naira as a token of the crowd's approval of their performances. The evening ended as dusk began to set in with me dancing for Şàngó. The visitors and senior priests departed, while the younger priests and women that had traveled from the town near Oyo, stayed behind. I returned to the temple room, drank a cup of tea and relaxed. Taribo and Bisi returned the equipment and stated that they would come back early in the morning. I took the opportunity of the quiet time and nothing to do as a chance to view, organize, and label the day's recordings. I knew that by the time it got late the electricity might be discontinued. After working for a while, I made myself a pillow with my towel and backpack, stretched out on the mat and went into a deep sleep.

Day 2 of Şàngó Initiation

All of the priests that had stayed for the night slept on mats, chairs, and benches in the temples sitting area. Behind my closed door, I heard them talking and laughing late into the night. Sangowumi came into the temple early on the next morning. She motioned for me to get my towel and to follow her. She led me to the outdoors bathing area and assisted me with my bath. After the shower she came back into the temple and rubbed down my body with oil. She then redressed my head with the black soapy paste. I ate some breakfast and we finally got started around mid morning. After hearing the sounds of the drum beats the priests began to leave the temple building and went outdoors to the courtyard/plaza. Sangodare came into the

room and beckoned me to come outside. I stood up, wrapped myself with my soiled white sheet, covered my head, and proceeded to the courtyard. Taribo and Bisi showed up in the morning as they said that they would.

This was my second initiation in Ifáyemi's temple. Mama Lola, Ifáyemi's youngest wife, advised me that I should be spraying the people more frequently. She stated that the drummers and the women that were singing òró were complaining. I knew that it was customary to spray people with money as they performed, I was just not certain about the limits of what I could do as an Ìyàwó. Besides the money that I gave for certain rituals and sacrifices following my divination sessions, the priests looked forward to being sprayed with naira during their performances. Mama Lola sent me a message through Bobola that I should not pay out any more money, because I had paid for everything in advance. Despite her words, I was still asked to continue spraying throughout the three day initiation.

Having to dole out money constantly was troubling, because I did not have unlimited resources and was already spending beyond my budget. Also I knew that back in the United States, some of the people that had traveled to Yorubaland for initiations have begun to complain about the treatment that they received in Nigeria and by itinerant babaláwos who live in or travel to the United States to perform initiations and rituals. Some of the sentiments were expressed in a recent email that I received about two Yoruba-American priestesses, who were engaged in a heated debate over allegations of mistreatment and abuse by Yoruba Babaláwos. One of the women stated the following in her internet diatribe, "This is a sick and twisted game that is going on in the tradition, and only you can put a stop to it- We ought to send messages out this year that we are not going to take it no more, if you are going to organize conferences in Ifá/òrìsà, your agenda is to speak against the treatment that we are getting in the diaspora simply because

we have been viewed as a “cash cow” that needed to be milked and pimp by indecent elders in the name of babaláwo.

Even with the things that I observed that may require attention and adjustments, I decided to advise Tejumola that he should return to Nigeria for his 2008 initiation. The rituals and invocations to the òrìsàs that are performed in Nigeria are not what we have witnessed in the United States. The features that make the pilgrimage worthwhile are the attention to the ritual details, the availability of the required condiments and herbs, and the uplifting power of the constant chanting, drumming, and dancing for the òrìsàs by a community of priests who inherently know how to function in ritual moments. I do not make this remark to suggest that priests in the diaspora are not equipped to deliver similar kinds of services; however, I will say that priests in the United States must be more willing to submit themselves to the years of arduous training and studying that is required of initiates.

Meanwhile it seemed as though everyone was running on the same frequency as people began to arrive at about the same time. I made a mental note about this peculiarity as I thought about how the Oyoútúnjí Villagers always seemed to function according to their own clock; and about how the crowd at Oyoútúnjí always showed up at the onset of the festival. Villagers usually joked about this phenomenon and termed it “African time.”

Draped in my white cloth I walked to my designated sitting area; on top of the pilon (inverted mortar). I heard discussion in the background. The drummers assembled and began beating their drums. The women began singing Şàngó’s òròs. The priests gathered around. The same young priest that had divined with obí throughout the initiation was charged with divining for this session also, reaching into my symbolic future and rewarding and/or punishing me for some future deeds. Someone’s cell-phone continuously chimed in the background. The women

chanted and there were occasional shakes of the rattles. Sangodare came and stood by my side. Everyone that was capable was invited to approach me and spray me with money. At the same time they had a chance to hit me lightly with a switch that had been placed on the ground, near the Pilon. The beating with the switch was a symbolic whipping for any future digressions that I might perform or encounter. The beating was mostly in jest and like so many other Yoruba nuances, it was symbolic.

Sangodare placed his cupped left hand with *obí* (kola nut) and *Şàngó*'s stone inside on top of my head; he began to pray and recite invocations over my head. He placed his right hand on my head and he continued to pray. Someone gave him a rattle; he took the rattle in his right hand and began to shake it as he prayed. The crowd of priests drew closer. Another priest shook his rattle. The elder priest came nearer and placed his hand over Sangodare's hand as he prayed. I knew that my head was being blessed and empowered by those two *Şàngó* priests. I was charged and at the same time humbled. I sat quietly observing and participating in the work.

After Sangodare finished his prayer and invocations, he placed the kola nuts that he had offered to my head, on the ground in front of the divining priest. The young priest split open the bitter kola nut with his teeth and cast the pieces to the ground. The first casting indicated *okano* (victory over enemies), so I was instructed to smash the used kola nut with my feet. After the next cast, Sangodare translated the *odù* "just cool your mind;" another cast, Sangodare continued, "so that to make your mind cool down." At the next cast, Sangodare advised me about the importance of celebrating my anniversary every year; that I should "mark the day of the initiation, either you have money or you don't have money." "If you don't have money, you can find a cock, so then you sacrifice it to mark the celebration; call some people. If you have money you can buy a cow to kill or you can buy a ram; so that any kind of thing that you can do for your

own festival every year. But if you don't have money, it's not your fault and oh, where can I get the million of naira to do this; if you get only a chicken, give it to him and he will readily accept it. It is up to your own capacity to do it." At this instance Tarobi joins in and interprets, "just remember every year to do the ritual."

The young priest cast the bitter kola nut several more times and then switched to using the kola nut that divides into four pieces. It is believed that *Şàngó* prefers to take the bitter kola. I cannot say with any certainty why he switched. It was apparent to me that he was a gifted diviner and that the community of priests was comfortable with his performance. He threw the *obi* one final time and was pleased with the outcome. He lifted the *Şàngó* stone (*otá*) from the ground and placed it on top of my head. The senior priest stepped forward, and his hand replaced the hand of the younger priest. He repositioned the stone and placed it with the sharp edge facing forward at the crown of my head. The women chanted in the background. The stone was removed from my head and tied in the hem of my white cloth. The white cloth was retied around my shoulder. The priests gathered around me; the drummers changed their rhythm as Sangodare and the senior priests busied themselves on the sideline staging the final phase of the day's activities.

The senior priest sprayed my face with water from a calabash. Sangodare and the senior priest lighted a small kerosene lantern; the senior priest brought the lantern over to me and waved it beneath my nose. The group of priests was standing behind me and at both my sides with their hands on my shoulders. Next, the senior priest placed a halved calabash on the ground in front of me and then smashed it with his feet. Finally, the senior priest came over and stood at my right side with a clay pot that he inserted another object into and began making a grinding

sound. I fell over and was lifted up and carried into the temple. I was unconscious. Someone covered me with the red sheet and left me to rest and recover.

Later that afternoon we had another festival for Şàngó where the players, drummed, danced, and celebrated. The atmosphere at the plaza was relaxed and festive; the young priests and Ìyálòrìsà Sangowumi danced and showed off their fanciful feet and shoulder motions. Mama Lola and the children joined the dancers. I sat on the red clothe that had been placed on the mat outdoors at the temple's entrance. Sangodare, the remaining elder woman priest, and occasionally Sangowumi, also sat on the mat. The two women continued to chant *oros* and *oriki* from an inexhaustible repertoire of songs.

All the while these ritual activities were taking place, the sacrificed animals were being cleaned and the appropriate àşés (organs that might be used in medicine or as an offering) were being removed from the various animals and prepared, meals were cooked to keep the working priests, guests, and the family fed. Occasionally the women from the kitchen came and joined in the festivities. The evening ended early; I was escorted into the temple. Sangodare and the elder priests said good night and departed. Once inside the temple, I drank some water, ate some toast that remained from my breakfast, and went to sleep. Once again the young priests and two women slept in the temple's sitting room. The temple's bathroom was on the other side of the sitting room; so late at night when I needed to use the toilet, I would have to navigate with my flashlight, around the sleeping bodies. I was usually able to do it successfully without disturbing any of the sleepers. Before retiring for the night I checked and organized the day's recordings and made some notes. (See figures 4-25 thru 4-35)

Day 3 of Şàngó Initiation

Some priests might say that the third day is the most important day of the entire initiation ceremony. After all, it is the ita day, that time in the initiation process when the attendant priests or babaláwos reveal your life guiding odùs, taboos, and your new name. The revelations that are made at the time of an individual's ita rite influences how that person should conduct her/himself in life. While a gifted diviner would remind the supplicant of the wisdom of Ifá and the appropriate taboos and sacrifices, an inaccurate or debilitating ita divination could be a paralyzing experience.

Over time, initiates learn that the need to make sacrifices is unending. The initiate realizes that the prognosis and proscriptions that are derived through divinations are real and that they are not bound by time. Divination can and does produce cognitive changes that result in personal and group transformations. As individuals and communities connect to and gain an understanding of the “divine will” of their ancestors and òrìsà, the need for action and change becomes apparent. Sacrifice and change are usually juxtaposed as means to an end to some kind of condition and or circumstance. A critical lesson for neophytes and initiates is the one that teaches that patience and a willingness to work hard are not only virtues, but are themselves, a form of sacrifice.

By the third day almost everyone was connected to the project to document the initiation rituals and festivities. Some priests had even viewed some of the recordings. No one, excepting a couple of Ifáyemi's sons, Sangodare, and Tarobi and Bisi, articulated any interest in the outcome of the project. The priests that had slept in the sitting room began to stir at about 6:45am. Sangowumi entered the temple's shrine room and motioned for me to follow her. I wrapped the white cloth around my shoulders, grabbed my towel and went with her to take my morning bath. After the bath, I returned to the shrine room and discovered that someone had placed the red outfit that had been tailored for me on the mat. When I spoke to Ifáyemi about my initiation, he

advised me that red fabric was the only item that I needed to purchase and that someone would sew clothing for me to wear at my festival.

Again, Sangowumi came into the shrine room and rubbed the red oil over my body. Shortly afterwards, Mama Lola came into the room and swept the floor. I was excited that the rites were almost over, and so, I impulsively got dressed in the new red clothing. Sangodare came into the room and noticed that I was clothed; he told me that I should put back on the whites and that the red garment was for me to wear later in the day. Sangowumi delivered my breakfast of toast and tea. Tarobi and Bisi came into the room and Tarobi informed me that they had stayed the night at Ifáyemi's compound, because they were uncertain about the time that we would start the day's activities. I relinquished the equipment to them and told them that I was very pleased with their work and commitment.

I could hear the chirping of the early morning birds. The *bátá* drums began to play; I knew that it was time for the service to begin. One of the young priests brought in a bowl containing ritual ingredients and told me to pray over it. I knelt down and made my prayer. I was then instructed to enter the sitting room, where several priests had assembled and were now beginning to arrange some of the ritual accoutrements that would be needed for this phase of the rites. There were several plates and trays with different items on them. These were *àdimú* (offerings) for the *òrisà* and ancestors that I had to take and place in front of *ÈṢù*.³¹ Many pieces of a broken calabash were brought into the room and placed on the mat. The priest placed an assortment of the ingredients onto the calabash pieces and I was instructed to put the calabashes onto a tray. I was escorted with the tray to the *ÈṢù* shrine. *ÈṢù*'s shrine was located in an alleyway, near the kitchen/workshop and between the building in which Mama Lola's family

³¹ *ÈṢù* is the messenger god.

lived and the wall that concealed the igba Ifá (Ifá grove). ÈṢù's shrine was littered with the remains of offerings and sacrifices that had been presented by me and several of the clients that visited the young babaláwos during my stay at the compound. (See figure 4-21) There were many calabash pieces and so I made several trips to ÈṢù's sacred space. I was always accompanied by a group of priests chanting oro and shaking Ṣàngó's rattles. After each trip, I returned to the temple, touched my forehead to the mat and made the journey again. The placement of the calabash pieces took four trips to ÈṢù's shrine. The bàtá drummers continued to play as I presented the multitude of offerings/àdimú to ÈṢù, the messenger òrìsà.

At some point during the morning rituals, I gave Bobola my remaining American currency so that he could exchange it for additional naira because the rituals and sprayings of the previous days had depleted my available cash. After all of the pieces of calabash had been presented, Mama Lola instructed me to pick up the two calabashes of water that had been placed on the floor. Mama Lola stated the following, "When you are praying, you make your prayer anything you want, the bad things you don't want; you continue praying until you reach Èlégbàrà's³² place." She was not certain that I fully understood her instructions, so she pointed to one of the bowls and said, "This is the water, you will first pour the water onto ÈṢù." After hearing Mama Lola instructions, I followed one of the priests back to ÈṢù's shrine. One of the priests stood waiting at the shrine. He instructed me to pour one of the bowls of water over and around the offerings, and then to pour the second bowl over ÈṢù. When we returned to the temple's courtyard, I was instructed to dance for Ṣàngó. Once inside the temple, we entered the shrine room. Immediately a priest came into the room pulling a small goat behind him. I was instructed to make my prayer into the goat's left ear. Following my prayer, Mama Lola took a hold of the

³² Èlégbàrà is another name for ÈṢù.

goat's head and said her own prayer into its ear. I was then told to present some additional naira; I got the money from my pouch, folded it, touch it to my head, and prayed over it. Then I placed the money on the floor beside some kola nuts. Mama Lola instructed me to touch the head of the goat to my chest and groin area. The priest then split open a bitter kola nut with his mouth, washed it in the bowl of water, and touched my forehead with the Kola. As he began to pray, the young priest asked a question in Yoruba. Someone in the room responded, "Sangodahunsi." What I did not know at that time was that Sangodahunsi was the name that had been divined for me. My new name was Sangodahunsi, meaning "Ṣàngó answered my prayers." He added my name into the prayer and tossed the kola to the floor. The result was favorable. He then opened another obi with four sections, touched it to my head and threw the pieces to the ground. He grabbed the goat by its head, picked up a knife and cut the throat of the small animal, while another priest held the two rear legs. The priest holding the legs of the goat raised the hind legs higher so that the blood would pour expediently. The blood poured into a bowl that contained the cowry shells that were being consecrated to Ṣàngó. The shells would serve as Ṣàngó's voice when I needed to divine and hear from Ṣàngó. The cowry shells (*mẹ́rindilógún*) would be given to me at the completion of my ita rites, along with the other Ṣàngó objects. After the head was completely severed from the neck, Sangowumi took the head and held it with two hands for some minutes, as she and the senior female priests sung *òròs* and prayers. One of the priests entered the shrine room carrying a small serving of fufu wrapped in a banana plant leaf; he placed the fufu³³ on the floor beside the bowl that held Ṣàngó's thunderstones. The same priest that divined and cut the throat of the goat, sprinkled salt over it, and poured palm oil onto the head. Ritual ingredients were added to the fufu and palm oil was poured over it. The two

³³ Fufu is pounded yam.

priestesses continued to sing as the goat's head was passed to me and then around the room to the other priests; each of us tasted the sacrificial blood of the goat.

I was told to pick up the banana leaf that contained the fufu offering: I then followed the chanting procession back to ÈṢù's shrine. At the shrine, I touched the ẹbọ to my head and Niyi pointed to a place for me to set the immolation. Ifáyemi's wives participated in the morning's rites and shuttled to and from the temple and ÈṢù's shrine with the other priests. It was rainy season and ÒṢogbo had been experiencing a good deal of rain, but on the days of the initiation the sky remained clear and we were not bothered by rain. Although at one point during the second day there was a heavy overcast of clouds.

Back in the shrine room, the divining priest cast the kola nut to learn if Ṣàngó was pleased with the offerings. He threw the Kola to the floor, retrieved them, and threw again. On his second throw, the four pieces of Kola fell to the ground with only the white side open, indicating alafia. In the instance of divination, alafia suggests, well being. ÈṢù had delivered the offering and Ṣàngó was blessing the proceedings. The diviner was given some alligator pepper seeds; he placed the seeds into his mouth. Another priest reached down into the bowl containing the cowry shells and rearranged the shells. The diviner then spat the pepper seeds into the bowl. He was given a shot glass filled with liquor; he lifted the glass to his mouth as if to drink the potable, he spat the beverage into the bowl. I was then given the glass and told to drink the substance. Afterwards, I stood up from my knees and waited for further instructions. Mama Lola and the other priests had a brief discussion in Yoruba and the session ended.

Outdoors, the priests had put the severed body of the goat onto a fire to burn the hair from the carcass. When the goat was sufficiently charred the remaining hairs were scraped and washed off of the carcass and it was dissected and prepared for cooking; the meat would be served as

food to the community of priests and the organs would be used in the preparation of Ṣàngó's offerings.

In the meantime, I sat on the red cloth, which had been placed over the straw mat, in the temple's sitting room. The priests also sat around the room; they were conversing in Yoruba so I could not keep up with the discussion. After sitting for a short while, the bàtá drummers began to play. The lead bàtá player was a senior man; his accomplices were two teenage boys. The trio demonstrated an impressive range of skills and knowledge of Ṣàngó's rhythms. A priest folded a piece of white cloth and placed it between my outstretched legs. The youngest of all of the diviners was to have his turn at casting the shells. He bit open a bitter Kola and gave me two of the pieces in my hand; he picked up an alligator pepper pod, opened it and gave me some of the seeds. Sangodare, from his seat on the sideline, instructed me, "Eat it, don't swallow it; eat it very well, don't swallow it" Tarobi interjected, attempting to further clarify Sangodare's directives, "Don't swallow it, you will spit it out, onto the cloth." I raised the particles to my mouth and chewed for several seconds. The young priest re-positioned himself so that he sat on my left side; with the white cloth dividing us. On the cloth, were Ṣàngó's stones, kola nuts, and sixteen cowry shells, along with the two objects that are used to confirm rather the *odù is ibi* or *ire* (problematic or a blessing). The priests picked up the shells and gave them to me. He spoke in Yoruba; Tarobi translated, "spit on it and then you pray." I took the shells into my hands and sat there rubbing my hands together as I held my hands near my mouth and prayed.

By now some of the elderly priests had joined the party and were sitting around the room eating and interjecting comments in Yoruba. Another one of the young priests sat down between me and the divining priest. My ita divination session was about to begin. One of Ifáyemi's wives entered the room carrying a tray with my meal of toast. It was already past lunch time, so

Sangodare suggested that I should eat something. The rituals stopped and we enjoyed the food that was being served. Everyone else ate traditional Yoruba food. The young priests and Sangowumi sat nearest me, all eating from the same bowls.

It was apparent to me that the young priests were gaining experience and demonstrating their skills at my initiation. I had no problems with that; I understood that their being trained in this manner was part of the process. The senior priest guided and monitored their performance and took charge of the activities that required their knowledge. That is how knowledge was and continues to be transferred in this still un-literate community of itinerant priests.

After lunch, Sangodare directed me to go and change into my new clothes. When I returned dressed in my new red *Ṣókòtò* (pants), *agbada* (shirt), and *fila* (hat), I resumed my position on the mat. I was told to remove my hat. Sangodare proclaimed, “you have, you are free now; you can write what you want on it; maybe you have something to say or questions; so then you can ask it; so you’re free, so just to listen.” At that time someone’s cell phone started to ring. The ringing continued for several seconds and went unanswered. I took up my pen and book so that I could record the *ita odùs*. The initiation was essentially over; the only segment that remained was the *ita rites*. Mama Lola’s youngest son was instructed to sit at my right side. The young boy was perhaps eight years old; he was a *babaláwo*; the priests had decided that the occasion of the initiation was to be used as a training opportunity for even the youngest amongst them. So after each throw of the shells, the *ibi* and *ire* objects were tossed to the boy, to be shaken together and then separated into his left and right hands; according to which *odù* appeared from the casting of the shells, the diviner called for left hand or the right hand. I had participated in and performed cowry shell readings for countless people over the years but I

never used or seen anyone else use this third party technique. It was intriguing witnessing the young boy's interest in and engagement with the processes.

The young priest that was seated in the middle took charge of the divination. He instructed me to pick up the shells and to pray over them. When I finished praying, Sangodare told me to touch the shells to my head. After touching the shells to my head, he told me to open my hands and present the shells to the people. I motioned my cupped hands with the shells first to the left side of the room and then to the right side. The priests prayed as I passed the shells around the room. I was told to cast the shells onto the sheet. I dropped the shells and the first *odù* was *irosun*. I could not continue to write notes and keep up with all of the things that were being asked of me, so Niyi took up the pen and pad and began recording the notes for me. The priests threw the shells four more times, before Sangodare translated, “*Ẓàngó* said that you will have a blessing of money, wealth.” He threw the shells again; Sangodare translated the *odù* again, “they say that you must do a sacrifice to an *òrìsà*; we don't know which one.” At this point the two young priests seated to my left and the young *babaláwo* seated to my right were all engaged in the divination, with each assuming a different task within the process.

The young *babaláwo*'s mistakes, due to lack of experience, were gently adjusted as his mother, the *Ẓàngó* priests, and the other *babaláwos* sat watching his performance. No one demonstrated any impatience or frustration with his efforts. Occasionally, there was some laughter as he was trying so hard to get it right. After the shells had been thrown several times, Sangodare translated again, “one of your ancestors will make your wealth come and good things; you will need an *obí* (kola nut).” He repeated aloud the word *obí*, so as to confirm that his translation was not in error. He continued, “You must go and buy a big cock for *Ẓàngó*, this time you will kill it for *Ẓàngó*, immediately.” The priests threw the kola nut pieces several more times

and Sangodare continued his translation, “They asked egún two obí, they say no; four obí, they say no; then six, six obí.” I inquired, “What do I do with the obí, where do I take the obí?”

Sangodare replied, “They will do the sacrifice for you.”

The room became quiet and one of the other priests stood up and went outdoors.

Sangodare explained what was happening, “So right now they are going to make an offering to Şàngó; before you continue, they must do that.” The priests reappeared carrying a cock.

Sangodare elucidated the importance of the sacrifice and the significance of the thunderstones that I was to receive. Sangodare stated, “This one is Edo that belongs to you; that one is the real Şàngó; you can keep it anywhere, as to be safe, because you don’t want to be lost it; it’s your own blood, it’s your own eyes, it’s your own jabu; that two, that two, eh thunder bullet; so but when we send them to buy the thunder blade, the one we bought is not the real one, that you can use in support of your own; if you have money, you can buy thunderstone, put it; you can have fifteen, sixteen, no problem or two; but the two is very important for you, that you have; so when we bring it, I say no, I’m going back to buy another one in the market; I couldn’t get it; so I took my own there and then I get it; it’s not easy to get that original; so then we bought it; so when we bought it, we add it together; so if yourself you get another thunder blade, you can buy it, and add it; just like someone have a body and put a new dress, or you can have ten or fifteen type of dress on your body; but that one is real, it’s your own body, that two things; so then we take it together now; because you see that there are so many otas(stones), it is only two is your odù; if you need a supporter, that we call Apèṭèbí, they call it; it’s the supporter of the Edo; so that why we do; I’m just explaining to you; so that the container that we use now, we keep all these things in it; and then we pray for a chicken; that a good person and happiness, and good life for you in it; If you want to say your children, your wife and family, pray on it.”

The young priest that was seated to my left then passed me the chicken. I took the cock and held it to my forehead and prayed. After praying I gave the chicken back to the priest. While I prayed, I heard the sounds of Şàngó's rattles being played. Sangodare requested that I present #N400 to put with the sacrifice. I turned to Bobola and asked for the money. Sangodare explained that four was the number for my odù. I touched the money to my forehead and prayed. Afterwards, a priest touched a kola nut to my head. He split open the kola with his teeth and threw them to the floor. Sangodare began to pray aloud. The other priests responded "àşé" to his words.

The odù that the kola nut gave was opo taku, victory. The young priest lifted his left leg to smash the kola with his heels. The elder priest stopped him and told him to smash the obí with one of Şàngó's stones. At this junction another priest placed the neck of the cock between his left toes and pulled off the head. The blood from the chicken was poured over the Şàngó objects in the bowl. The priestesses began to chant and the rattles played. I was instructed to stand and taste the blood from the neck. Then I was told to put my left foot forward and blood was placed on my big toe.

Sangodare told me that I had many blessings, "not a bad thing come out of your odù." The service continued with the attending priests reciting their interpretations of the odù. Sangodare also took the time to interpret the many stories that were associated with the odù. Although the Şàngó priests from the town near Oyo did not speak or hear English, they sat patiently while Sangodare gave his interpretations.

Niyi recorded and translated the revelations of my odù as they were being talked about by the priests. The following are Niyi's translations of the itadogun:

Irosun meji, Şàngó said iré that is blessing of money. Egun ni aladimu, obi ni egun gba. You will give your ancestor a kola nut so that they can provide money for you. You will give six kola nuts to your ancestors.

Ifá said blessing, òrìsà said you will give obí to Ọṣun because of illness. Ifá said you need to make ẹbọ for your children because of death. You also need to make ẹbọ for protection for your family.

Ifá also said that if someone do a favor for you try and thank whoever do a favor for you and thank Şàngó and Ifá for anything you gain in life so that they can do another for you.

Òrìsà said he will give you good character in life; good things will always be for you in life.

Òrìsà also said that don't lie to him, you must say truth everyday of your life.

You will give two kola nuts and palm oil to your orí.

Also don't lie to your oluwo that means bàbá. Always thank your oluwo for everything he does for you.

You must put your mind on Şàngó, he said he will give you victory over your enemy and try and make oṣe for Şàngó every five-five days.

You will give offering to Ọrìsàala (Ọbàtálá) so that he can give you victory over your enemy.

Ingredients for ẹbọ: Akuko (male chicken) 2, Abodi (female chicken) 2, eiyele (pigeon) 2, obi (kola) 4, epo (palm oil) and money #N4000.

You will give two kola nuts to Ọbaluaye (Sonponna).

ẹbọ for children: 1 female chicken, 1 pigeon, money #N1, 500.

For orí: 2 Kola nut and palm oil.

Taboo for life: Don't eat toad; don't lie to Şàngó and your godfather; you must wear your red clothe on your ose day

Taboo for Şàngó: Don't take cigar; don't make love to any Şàngó devotee or Şàngó priestess; don't eat antelope; don't eat beans called ewa sese; don't eat rat called eku ago.

Again and again Sangodare related to me the importance of always thanking the òrìsà and respecting my godfather, Ifáyemi Elebuibon. With all of the serious matters surrounding the initiation behind Sangodare took the time to show off his wit by warning me against arrogant

posturing. Sangodare cautions, “If you see a car, if you see a big car, and you say, oh I must go to a place it won’t kill me, don’t do that.” “They say, if you see a big lorry, don’t close your eyes and try to jump onto it.” “If you see a long tree, very big, and you climbing it saying I’m a Şàngó priest I can go up, if you fall down you will die.” “If you see a big river and you want to walk on it, saying I have the power of Şàngó, you will drown.” All of us in the room that could hear English were greatly amused and we laughed heartily. After all of the sacrifices that were prophesied during the itadogun had been performed, I was presented with the Şàngó objects that I was to take back with me to the United States.

I knelt before the senior Şàngó priest. He held the ilèkèş over my head. He prayed to Şàngó in my behalf and then he placed the beads around my neck. He then presented me with the pot containing the Şàngó objects. He picked up the rattle and began shaking it, demonstrating how it should be done. Sangodare translated, “When you want to pray for Şàngó, you shaking it, we will teach you how to do that, that is not easy to do; it’s a kind of learning, they will taught you how to make it; so when we do it, some time maybe Şàngó will travel, when you call it down, they will answer you; when you holding it, Şàngó will accept it and hear your voice.” I took hold of the rattle and placed it on the floor beside me. The priest presented Şàngó’s oşè (axe). Sangodare interprets, this is the oşè, and it is the sign of victory, you conquer your enemy, you conquer all your people, thanks to òrìsà, all the bad things that want to attack you; that one you use to destroy your enemies. When Şàngó use that one, when a lot of enemies coming they use that thing as a power. I placed the *ose* on the floor.

Next the old man took my hands, placed them side by side and made a cup. He then placed the sixteen cowry shells in my hands. Sangodare translated, “This is your own divination; belong to Yemaha, is mother of Şàngó. So use it, when the people are using it, all the Şàngó

priests and priestesses using cowry shell; it's the property from your own mother, that is why they are using it; so when someone have difficult in your life you don't need to be go and worry and bothered, take that thing and ask, they will answer you; all good things that you mention on it, òrìsà will accept it; when something you don't know, maybe its wrong or right, then through that thing they will know; you see that thing is a branch of Ifá divination; when Òrúnmila in life marry Òṣun, they marry together and spent almost one hundred and sixty nine years, they live together since long, when Òrúnmila said I want to see, I'm going to the east of the world, he can spend thirty nine years, so when he say I want to go the west, when they go, they can stay forty years, a lot of people die, sickness, nobody can cure it. When Òrúnmila come, where is this one? He die, what is this one, he sick; Òrúnmila said how I can do that. Òrúnmila said you must know something that you can know your problems; and then in the verses of Ifá they take small small verses in it, that's why they create sixteen verses in the essays of Ifá; then they put on the cowry shells; when someone make history of the odù of cowry shell, it is really close to Ifá, but it is really short story on it, that we call it; because that Ifá have some different type element that you can take; it is to long for women; that why we make it, to let Òṣun consult; maybe problem is starting, then Yemaha the mother of Ṣàngó, they learn through Òṣun and that is why all the òrìsà people use the cowry shell; because the knowledge of Ifá is to wide and too much for the women; that is why you see all the òrìsà people and all the different òrìsà use that cowry shell; to find your own life, to looking to define; maybe you have some problem, how to tackle it, everything is there; it is a kind of learning, it's not a magic; you must plan on it.”

After that long explication Sangodare translated the elder priests prayer, with the other priests responding, àṣé. Sangodare's translation: “By the name of the òrìsà, you will know it; you will help yourself; you will help your children; you help your friend; you will help all the people

that you don't know, you will help; that is why we give you; it will never take you to prison; it will never take you into bad mood; it will take you in high position; ah you know what bàbá Şàngó, if you divine like that that everything you say will be accepted, you will know more followers, you will know more children; bad things, good things, anyone that want to attack you, Şàngó will strike it down, they will strike it down, all your life will go in good mood. That is what bàbá said." The old man said one other thing and Sangodare stated, "anything that you don't understand; when you learn it, all things will be blessed for you."

I was congratulated by everyone in the room, and then all of us went outdoors so that I could dance for Şàngó. After the dance we went back indoors and we ate from the feast of the sacrificial foods. When the feast ended the priests said farewell and departed for their homes. Three days later, I went to Sangodare's home with Tarobi and Bisi. I had with me the two kola nuts and money for the offering for Babaluaye.

Sangodare and I got into his car and drove to the home of a Babaluaye priests. Sangodare got out of the car and walked to the house. He and the priest returned shortly and we drove to the Sonponna grove. We entered the grove; the priests approached the shrine and opened a kola nut. He cast the kola and then told me to enter the shrine and pray. After I prayed, he threw the obí again; Babaluaye was pleased. We got back in the car and drove the priests to another destination; he departed and we returned to Sangodare's home. I thanked Sangodare for all of his work and prayers; I departed with Tarobi and Bisi and returned to Ifáyemi's compound.

Tarobi and Bisi are both Yoruba men, but they are not òrìsà practitioners. Bisi is from Ilé-Ife and Tarobi is from Lagos. The two men met at the polytechnic institute, where they received their training in photography and video production. Ifáyemi's compound is ostensibly a popular destination for young people who seem to enjoy the cosmopolitan and international visitors that

come to Òṣogbo to be initiated and/or trained by him. Like most of the young people that I met at Ilé- Ife and Òṣogbo, Tarobi and Bisi complained about the lack of opportunities in Nigeria and expressed interest in migrating to the USA. Ifáyemi's travels abroad, visitors to the compound, television, cell phones, and the internet has exposed these Nigerian youth to a world that appears to be accessible and loaded with prospects. In the case of Tarobi and Bisi, their interests in traditions that they had ignored heightened during their engagement with my initiation and they latched on to me for the duration of my stay in Nigeria, in anticipation, that I would be their ticket to a new life in the USA. They never did try to get money from me for the work that they performed during the initiation rites, but I decided to leave them with my cameras and a recorder, so that they could continue to document their world as they viewed it. Since my departure from Nigeria, they have documented several festivals, including the 2007 Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival, Ṣàngó Festival 2007, and the Olojo Festival 2007. They have been kind enough to send me photographs and video coverage of each of the festivals. ³⁴(See figures 4-58 thru 4-62)

³⁴ Private packages into and out of Elebuibon's compound en route to or from the USA are usually transported by visitors and international guests.



Figure 4-1: Ifáyemi greeting guest at OAU conference (2001)



Figure 4-2: Signpost identifying Elebuibon Street, Òṣogbo (2007)



Figure 4-3: Strolling down Elebuibon Street (2007)



Figure4-5: Doorway to Elebuibon's Temple (2007)



Figure 4-6: Side view of Elebuibon's compound (2007)



Figure 4-7: Front gate to Elebuibon's compound (2007)



Figure 4-8: Inside wall panel at Elebuibon's compound depicting story of ancestor Timi's arrival at Òṣogbo with elephant (2007)



Figure 4-9: Another inside wall panel at Elebuibon's compound depicting the same legend of Timi's arrival into Òṣogbo with elephant (2007)



Figure 4-10: Ifá initiation at Elebuibon's compound (2001)



Figure 4-11: Shaving of the head before Şàngó initiation (2007)



Figure 4-12: Ade with newly made àşé on top of his head (2007)



Figure 4-13: ÌyáṢàngó carrying vessel to nearby body of water for Ìyàwó's bath



Figure 4-14: Ìyàwó carrying vessel on return trip from body of water



Figure 4-15: Bata drummers performing and Iyawo dancing for Sangó



Figure 4-16: Bata Drums used in Sangodahunsi's initiation



Figure 4-17: Sangodahunsi's head being dressed after spiritual bath



Figure 4-18: Herbs for washings objects and bathing Ìyàwó during initiation



Figure: 4-19: Herbs in Mortar



Figure 4-20: Sacrificial food for Şàngó at Sangodahunsi's initiation, 2007



Figure 4-21 Èṣù shrine at Elebuibon's compound



Figure 4-22: Ifádapo divining for client



Figure 4-23: Ifádapo with his client Dola eating medicine.



Figure 4-24: Jójólò at chieftaincy Installation, Ifon-Òṣun



Figure4-25: Òrisànla and Priests of Ifon-Ọ̀ṣun



Figure 4-26: Drummers for Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon (2007)



Figure 4-27: Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon I(2007)



Figure 4-28: Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon II(2007)



Figure 4-29: Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon III(2007)



Figure 4-30: Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon IV(2007)



Figure 4-31: Egúngún Masquerade, Orolu Ifon V(2007)



Figure 4-32: Adefunmi I, Oyo African Village



Figure 4-33: Oba Oritoyinbo II, Ifon-Osun



Figure 4-34: Àtáqja, Ọba Iyiola Oyewale Matanmi III of Ọşogbo at 2007 Ọşun Ọşogbo Festival



Figure 4-35 Qba Òrìsàtoyinbo receiving books for the library from Jójólò in 2007



Figure 4-36: Entranceway to Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife



Figure 4-37: Poster of Susanne Wenger (Adunni) located at the front entrance of her home.



Figure 4-38: An example of Sacred Artists artwork forms a fence around Wenger's home



Figure 4-39: Figures on fence represent the egúngún of a local prominent family



Figure 4-40: One of the New Sacred Art Artist, Buraimoh Gbadamosi. This artist created the stone sculpture that is in Wenger's yard. His workshop and residence is adjacent Wenger's home.



Figure 4-41: Sacred Artists Buraimoh Gbadamosi's Sculpture on Front Porch of Wenger's home.



Figure 4-42: Midtown in Ilé-Ife



Figure 4-43: Bell found at Ọṣun Grove, Ọṣogbo



Figure 4-44: Àràbà of Òṣogbo and his grandson



Figure 4-45: Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo



Figure 4-46: Ifá priests inside of Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo



Figure 4-47: Èṣù mound in front of Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo



Figure 4-48: Children at Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo I, 2007



Figure 4-49: Children at Ifá Temple, Òṣogbo II, 2007



Figure 4-50: Stove Used for cooking medicine



Figure 4-51: Another stove used for cooking medicine at Elebuibon's compound



Figure 4-52: Babaláwo preparing medicine for client at Elebuibon's compound, 2007



Figure 4-53: Client fanning the flames for charcoal stove at Elebuibon's



Figure 4-54: Stone utensils used for pounding and grinding medicine



Figure 4-55: Herbs to be used in medicine on pounding stone



Figure 4-56: Babaláwo removing feathers from bird. The bird will be charred and used in medicine



Figure 4-57: Babaláwo Kneading herbal compound. The finished product will be added to medicine



Figure 4-58: Oṣun Priestess dancing before procession at Oṣun Oṣogbo Festival 2007



Figure 4-59: The votary maid carrying the sacrifice with other Oṣun Priestesses before leaving for the river at Oṣun Oṣogbo Festival 2007



Figure 4-60: Doyin (right) and another Ọ̀ṣun priestess at the front of procession at Ọ̀ṣun Ọ̀ṣogbo Festival 2007



Figure 4-61: Ọ̀ṣun priestesses leading procession at Ọ̀ṣun Ọ̀ṣogbo Festival 2007



Figure 4-62: Òṣun priestess dancing for the Àtáoja of Òṣogbo at Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival 2007

Epilogue: Archiving the Sacred through Intervention

My research for this study began long before I considered returning to graduate school in 1998 to pursue my study of Yoruba religious communities in Alachua County, Florida, Sheldon, SC in the United States. My search began in 1977 when I entered Oyótúnjí African Village in Sheldon, South Carolina, for the first time and discovered a group of villagers practicing what they described as “African religion”. African Religion, especially that which is evolving in the diaspora, is very complex, multifaceted and the ways of practicing are diverse. Because of this complexity, I have had to select, eliminate, condense, and oftentimes oversimplify in order to keep my discussion within a manageable range.

Research on the Yoruba in the diaspora is a relatively new topic of research, methodology and procedures for conducting that research are still being developed. However, in the recent years many books have been published about African descended peoples and their religious and cultural developments in the diaspora. For a broader understanding of these developments I refer anyone interested in a developing a broader understanding of the subject to my bibliography and to the Internet websites that I have listed.

I have narrowly focused my research on three specific geographic areas; North Central Florida, Sheldon, South Carolina, and Òşogbo, Òşun State, Nigeria. I have also published within my dissertation photographs and documents that were difficult to locate during my archival searches, making them available to future generations of scholars and lay researchers.

Although I entered Oyotunji Village in 1977, I was not initiated until 1982; I was initiated into the priesthood of òrìsà Ọbàtálá/Òrìsànlá. As I stated in a previous section of this work, I ran to initiation to pay my debt to Èşù for saving my life and allowing me to remain free. I will now clarify that remark and explain how my freedom was being threatened. After several successful

trips to Nigeria with Lola, our fates changed when we were arrested and taken into custody at Kennedy Airport in New York City. When I was permitted to make a phone call from the police headquarters I phoned my wife and asked her to notify Yomi that I had been arrested. According to the story, as told by my wife and Yomi, Yomi immediately went to my house and did a ritual with Èṣù. Yomi never disclosed to me the full details of the ritual, but in less than twenty four hours after our arrest, I was able to be released from jail on bond. Our arrest occurred on a Saturday morning; on Sunday I was released on bail, and was scheduled to appear in court on Monday morning for an arraignment hearing. My quick release from jail seemed to have been a startling surprise to the judge and the court officers that were trying to locate me in the holding cells for inmates. After some time a court officer came into the court and called my name. I was escorted to the bench, where the judge inquired about my release. He commented that my quick release was “quite unusual.” He did not increase my bond. I had in my possession enough money to bail Lola out.

The court did not take our passports, so a few weeks after this incident, Lola and I sold many of our acquisitions to raise enough money for him and his wife, Remi, to return to Nigeria. Lola absconded, forfeiting the bail money and leaving me to carry the case.

These events happened almost thirty years ago. I have never seen Lola again and have on many occasions wondered about his fate. I was convicted and sentenced to serve a short prison term. The road and the circumstances that lead to my conviction is another story that I resist telling at this time. I will only say that it was during these experiences that I truly got a sense of the powers of the òrìṣà and of Yomi Awolowo as a priest and a godfather. Throughout the ordeal I was constantly in contact with Yomi. Together we performed several rituals and I was given instructions about things that I had to do on my own. A Pataki that kept coming up in my

readings, stated that, “he who pays remains free.” Yomi counseled me that in the end I will be victorious and that “my tears will turn to joy.”

While I was incarcerated, I met several of my associates from the streets of Harlem, who were also serving prison sentences. I shared with them the circumstances of my conviction. Through their connections, they arranged for me to be able to spend time in the prison law library. I along with my inmate advisors reviewed case after case until we found one that essentially replicated the details of my trial. They argued with me for several hours and convinced me that the focus of the appeal had to be the misrepresentations that occurred during my trial and not the circumstances of the crime or arrest. From that prison library, I filed for an appeal of my conviction. My appeal focused on the incompetence of my attorney during my trial.

I served my prison sentence and was released to serve a two year probationary period. After my release I returned to my business at Harlem’s New World Food Center and immediately started planning for my initiation. Two years later I was initiated and two years after that, I moved my family out of New York to Charleston, South Carolina. Shortly after moving to Charleston, I was notified by the New York State Appellate Division, that the State Supreme Court agreed with the appeal and that they wanted to reopen the case. The case was reopened and the conviction was overturned. My record was expunged and I was free from the mistakes of my pre-initiation life-style.

Why do I believe that these stories are important to this work? On the surface the story of my arrest, conviction, incarceration, and subsequent exoneration of all of the criminal charges may not seem relevant to my discussion about Ifá/òrìsà and the traditions that emerged and changed over time and in multiple milieus.

Yoruba history as revealed in the many stories associated with the Ifá odùs and the Lucumi patakis is sated with stories of human triumph and failures. The great òrìsà Ọ̀bàtálá was imprisoned for a number of years for allegedly stealing Sango's horse and a downhearted, guilt-ridden Ẓàngó is believed to have committed suicide after he inadvertently burned down his palace, killing his wives, concubines, and children. Stories are at the base of the Yoruba people's struggle to survive and to define/re-define their existence. The stories that connect human beings to our beginnings (however humble or challenging) are as important as those that tell of their rise to glory and decline. My story is one that situates me and my African ancestry in the evolvement of Yoruba- history in the Americas. What do I mean by this remark? If what the Yoruba people believe about ancestral veneration and about life as being a continuum has any merit, then I am not only who I appear to be in this incarnation, but instead I am a witness to many carnations. A part of me belongs to the ancestors whose spirit I now possess (or at least some aspects of my sub-conscious are connected to that spirit).

Since we reincarnate in our own families this history should be fairly easy to trace. However, the problem for most African descended people in the New World is that their families and histories were disrupted when family members were sold into slavery and scattered. Although, this was not the case in my family. My maternal grandfather is still alive and is ninety-five years old and is the keeper of many of my family's stories. My grandfather's father died while he was very young and he was raised by his grandfather. According to my grandfather, my family broke away from the bondage of slavery a long time before the emancipation proclamation. His grandfather was an artisan (carpenter) and farmer who purchased his own freedom. My fore-parents grew up and lived in the low country of South Carolina in the city of Charleston and its surrounding islands. The island from which my grandfather came is Daniels

Island. Charleston is well known as a central port city where large numbers of enslaved Africans were disembarked and sold to the colonial plantation owners. It is also known to have been a place where miscegenation flourished and where Africanisms persisted as the enslaved people resisted the total domination of the plantation owners and the “master” class. The descendants of the formerly enslaved Africans in this area identify themselves as Gullah/geechee people. They speak a distinct dialect and have retained many West African customs.

Also, on the maternal side of my family, someone married into the Cherokee Nation and bore children that had obvious Cherokee features. My grandfather always displayed prominently in his office, pictures of his grandmother and her sister and he claims that they were both African-Cherokee. I now have copies of those pictures and for the past twenty years have included these women in my ancestral prayers.

My mother’s mother died at age twenty three. That side of my family is very light skinned and are said to be descended from the union of an African woman with a French Huguenot Caucasian male. According to my family’s story my Huguenot ancestors were two brothers that came to the New World from France to practice medicine as they were both doctors. These are the kinds of mix and blends that make up the consciousness that I have developed. These are the different ancestral roots to which I pay homage. These roots are powerful and they have been actively engaged in the affairs of my family and of my life’s work. Having knowledge and respect for my dissimilar lineages has engendered in me an appreciation for the many spiritual and cultural components that has converged over time and in different locales to make up what we now conceive as “traditional” practices. I have desisted from trying to seek out what some might consider an authentic Yoruba religious practice and have grown to understand and know that *òrìsà* is spirit/energy; *òrìsà* lives in all things animate and inanimate and will persist, flourish

and be expressed through human beings; òrìsà cannot be confounded by the limitations of human knowledge or imagination; Interaction with òrìsà, just like interaction with energy is not contingent upon race, gender and/or language. The òrìsàs are like the elements of nature that they are believed to represent; fire, water, wind, and lightning. Everything that gets in an òrìsà's path is subject to change.

It has been nearly a half century since Adefunmi I was initiated in Matanza, Cuba. His dream of an African state in the USA has not been realized, but Oyótúnjí African Village continues to flourish and attract visitors from around the globe. His Royal Highness, Oba Efuntola Osejemen Adelabu Adefunmi I, passed away on February 10th, 2005 at Oyótúnjí African Village and went home to be with his ancestors. His son, Adejuyigbe Adefunmi II, was enthroned in July 2005 and is now the reigning king. Since that time, the new Oba has made several notable improvements to Oyótúnjí's infrastructure and has been instrumental in developing a more refined website and internet presence. Some of Oyótúnjí's current programs and an historical overview can be seen at www.Oyótúnjiafricanvillage.org. Oyótúnjí can also be viewed on www.YouTube.com., where they feature a section titled, *Inside Oyótúnjí*. This program is hosted by Oyótúnjí priestess, Igberohinjade Oludoye and highlights a series of video-clips about Oyótúnjí.

Chief Ajamu of Oyótúnjí Village in a 2005 interview described Oyótúnjí as an experiment that was designed to explore the possibility of creating a community of cultural nationalists and Yoruba religious revivalists within the USA. Some former villagers and many others, who view Oyótúnjí as outsiders, provide critiques that focus on the failings of the village and the late Adefunmi I. However, as an insider and advocate for Oyótúnjí's survival and development, I support the efforts of the new administration and pray that the new king and villagers will have

continued success with the re-structuring of Oyótúnjí African Village and I will be forever grateful for the life-changing guidance that I received from the elders of Oyótúnjí during the past thirty years of my life.

I recently viewed a YouTube clip of Oba Ernesto Pichardo addressing a group at Florida International University in Miami. During his presentation he briefly discussed and defined the history of Santeria/Santero and the Yoruba religion in Cuba. He clearly distinguished the African roots of the Santeria religion. Oba Pichardo currently teaches a course at Florida International University's Biscayne Bay Campus. In a recent Miami Herald article, author Erika Beras wrote,

The controversial, charismatic and enterprising Pichardo, a Yoruba priest and the country's leading expert on Santeria, spent hours talking about the transatlantic slave trade, paraded in cultural anthropology professors and expected both Powerpoint and 12- page research papers at semester's end... The class included several religious studies majors, a Peruvian-American Broward school teacher, a 61-year-old auditor and a grandfather-grandson duo. Many of them came to get in touch with their Afro- Caribbean roots.

Four months ago he concluded FIU's first three-credit Santeria class, with a grand prediction: "You are making history here today."

"This is not some fringe movement," Pichardo told his students. "If you can get a Ph.D. in Judaism or Christianity, you should be able to take a course in Santeria."

Taught through the school's African-New World Studies Department, where Pichardo is spending the academic year as a research fellow, the class has been a success, administrators say, at semester's end in December, the students said they now know more about the history of Africa and the Americas.³⁵

During the spring of 2007 another one of Oyótúnjí's sons, who now lives in Alachua County, Florida, traveled to Oyo, Nigeria to be initiated into Ifá's cult of babaláwos/priests. During a recent visit to Oyótúnjí on New Years night (2008), I walked in on a ògbóni Society meeting where two of Oyótúnjí's babaláwos, the Oba (the Oba is also a babaláwo), and several female ògbóni members, were performing the reading of the year. I did not remain long enough

³⁵ Story by Erika Beras, Miami Herald, Posted on Friday, December 28, 2007

to hear the babaláwo's forecast, but before I left the Alagba stated that a small group from the village was leaving for Benin, West Africa in the middle of January. He inquired about Ifáyemi Elebuibon and stated that the village was considering bringing some young babaláwos over from Nigeria to assist with initiations and training at Oṡótúnjì.

In my search for the various collections of data that I examined in my research, I gave attention to materials (textual and otherwise) which supported and demonstrated connections between spirit (òrìsà/energy), woman/man, and the community. To this end, I have sought out opportunities to capture photographically and through utilizing video documentation, some of the nuances of òrìsà culture and worshipping practices, as they have been revealed to me. It is my hope that these images and my narrations have provided some insights about some of the people, issues and ideas that have been central to the re-emergence of òrìsà practices in a world that continues to be curious about and hostile towards òrìsà worshippers.

Brandon was fairly accurate in his prediction, "The orisha has colonized cyberspace" (2002:163). YouTube.com and Myspace.com has expanded to include Cinematic films and documentary videos that were created by amateur and professional film makers from Yorubaland and the Yoruba diaspora. The large repository of filmicdocumentation that has been made available for public viewing, at no cost, to the òrìsà world and general public, via the internet is remarkable. The visual contributions to the discourse about òrìsà practices documents and demonstrate clearly the diversity and propensities of multiple communities of worshippers. The visual content, coupled with the volumes of information generated on òrìsà and Yoruba specific websites have made access to an òrìsà -centric worldview possible. Anyone typing into the Google.Com search engine any of the words òrìsà, orixa, oricha, Santeria, vodun Ṣàngó will see results totaling millions of possibilities and an endless search, as new data is being entered

continuously. The òrisàs has taken up residency in cyberspace and worshippers from around the globe can now be connected.

Most of the elders that were at the forefront of the Yoruba revivalist movement in America have gone on to be with their ancestors. Their stories have become the newest of the countless Yoruba legends, but their stories remain untold. Their tales may never be recorded in our nation's history books and no wall will be erected from which our children and grandchildren can read their names and ponder their deeds. It is my hope that this study provides some evidence of the great sacrifices and wondrous works that they achieved.

So, May the gods of Yorubaland continue to free themselves from the vestiges of enslavement and colonialism and May the ancestors continue to beckon to their children for redemption and finally peace and justice. I pray that their mercy will be upon all of us. Àṣé.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ajani Ade Ofunniyin was born in Charleston South Carolina but spent his youth and young adulthood in Harlem and the Bronx, New York. He received his BA degree from Fordham University, New York, and His Masters Degree from the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. He now resides in Hawthorne, Florida. Ofunniyin began his informal study of Yoruba culture and traditions in 1977. He traveled to Southwestern, Nigeria in 1979 and 1980 to work on a documentary film about Yoruba dance and rituals. Ofunniyin was initiated into the Yoruba priesthood and crowned in the cult of *Ọbàtálá* in 1982 and returned to his hometown, Charleston, South Carolina in 1985.

Ofunniyin entered the graduate program in Anthropology at the University of Florida in 1998. He conducted research in Charleston, South Carolina and Nigeria, West Africa for his Masters Degree in Anthropology, Which he received in 2002. His thesis, “Memory and Public Space: The making of an African American Icon in Charleston, South Carolina” examines the work of master blacksmith artisan, Philip Simmons and describes the role that Mr. Simmons played in rekindling national interest in blacksmithing as an art form.

Ofunniyin entered the University of Florida’s Ph.D. Program in the Department of Anthropology in 2003, where he focused on visual anthropology. He studied video and film production, Yoruba language and culture, art history and museum science while conducting field research in Sheldon, South Carolina, Southwestern, Nigeria, and Alachua County, Florida. In 2004, Ofunniyin became a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Anthropology. He has been the recipient of several fellowships and grants, which include FLAS funding, Florida Education Fund (FEF) McKnight Doctoral Fellowship, Gwendolyn Auzenne Graduate Fellowship, and a Fulbright Hayes Summer GPA Fellowship.

Ofunniyin completed his research in 2007 and finished his dissertation in 2008. Ofunniyin passed his dissertation defense on February 11, 2008, and received his Ph.D. on May 7, 2008.